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THE GUIDE OF THE PERPLEXED AS AN ENCODED TEXT: TOWARDS A NEW METHODOLOGY

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The Guide of the Perplexed as an Encoded Text: Towards a New Methodology

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Introduction

"God was it, or a man, who laid down to you, strangers, the principles of your legal arrangements?" asks the Athenian Stranger at the beginning of Plato's *Laws*. "God, stranger, god," answers Kleinias, the Cretan. "We Cretans call Zeus our lawgiver [...] Minos used to go every ninth year to hold converse with his father Zeus, and he was guided by his divine oracles in laying down the laws." The Athenian Stranger does not question the veracity of this myth at the beginning of the dialogue. However, some pages later, he accuse the Cretans of inventing a "story" (*mythos*) about Zeus and Ganymede in order to justify the homosexual practices existing in the Cretan society:

[It is] contrary to nature when male mates with male or female with female, and that those first guilty of such enormities were impelled by their slavery to pleasure. And we all accuse the Cretans of concocting the story about Ganymede. Because it was the belief that they derived their laws from Zeus, they added on this story about Zeus in order that they might be following his example in enjoying this pleasure as well.¹

According to Leo Strauss' suggestive interpretation, the Athenian Stranger draws a parallel between the myth of Zeus and Ganymede and the myth of Zeus' giving laws to the Cretans through Minos.² Just as the first was invented in order to justify a social practice, the second one was invented to legitimate the whole body of laws in Cretan society. Plato is indicating here – according to Strauss' interpretation – that the Athenian Stranger does not believe in the Cretan myth of law-giving, yet, nevertheless, he does not want to criticise it openly, because he thinks that such stories are necessary for the well-being of society: the multitude will not obey the laws unless they believe them to be of divine origin. Thus the Cretan myth of Zeus' giving laws to Minos is an example of the "noble lies" mentioned in the third book of the *Republic*.³

It can be doubted whether this interpretation of the text is correct. Nonetheless, it is clear that the Platonic concept of the "noble lie" found its way into medieval

¹ Plato, *Laws* 636c-d. Cf. *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. E. Hamilton and C. Huntington (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1996).

² Cf. Leo Strauss: *The Argument and the Action of Plato's Laws* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1975) 12.

³ Cf. Plato, *Republic* 414b – 415c.

Muslim philosophy. Averroes, in his commentary on the *Republic* (which survived only in a medieval Hebrew translation), writes:

But the lie (employed by) the rulers towards the masses is right and proper for them; it is like medicine for illness. Just as it is only the doctor who administers the drug, so it is the king in the exercise of rulership who employs a lie towards the masses. For lying tales [*sippurim kozvim*] are necessary for the education of the citizens. There is no lawgiver [*maniah nimus*] who does not employ fictious tales, because this is necessary for the masses if they are to attain happiness.⁴

The Hebrew expression *maniah nimus*, 'lawgiver', occurring in the quoted text is presumably the translation of Arabic $w\bar{a}di'$ *al-nawāmīs*. This phrase often means 'founder of religion' in Arabic philosophical texts.⁵ Religion was seen by some of the Arab philosophers as having been created by a Platonic philosopher king who was surrounded by vulgar people not capable of understanding philosophy at all. Consequently, the philosopher king could not refer to philosophical doctrines when he tried to establish a social and juridical system for them. Hence, he had to persuade these men to believe in some imaginative doctrine, which was false in the literal sense; nonetheless, it helped the vulgar to attain "happiness," and thus in a way it substituted for philosophy:

And after that there is a need for legislation $[w\bar{a}\underline{d}' al-naw\bar{a}m\bar{i}s]$, that is, the instruction of the multitude about the theoretical things that were discovered and concluded and justified by [philosophical] demonstrations, and, moreover, about the practical things that were discovered by the faculty of practical wisdom. And the art of legislation consists of the ability of (1) an excellent fantasy that can coerce the multitude to visualise the theoretical intelligibles, (2) of the ability of an excellent capacity for finding out what to do in the domain of political acts that serve the attainment of happiness, (3) of the ability of persuasion in the domain of the theoretical and practical things that are apt for the multitude to be instructed about them in one way or another. Now as for the persuasion: when laws are given of these two species [that is (1) theoretical, (2) practical teachings], another thing is added to them, namely, the ways through which the multitude is persuaded and instructed and socialised,⁶ and thus *the religious community* [milla] *comes into existence*, in

⁴ Tr. E. I. J. Rosenthal; see *Averroes' Commentary on Plato's Republic*, ed. and tr. E. I. J. Rosenthal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 129 (Hebrew text: p. 32). [I. xii. 5-6; ad *Republic* 389b-c.] Oliver Leaman tries to narrow down the significance of this and similar texts. See his *An Introduction to Medieval Islamic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 182-186. However, his reasoning is unconvincing.

⁵ Consequently, Plato's *Laws* was read by them as a text expounding a theory of religion which they easily adopted to Islam. See, for example, Al-Farabi, *Compendium Legum Platonis*, ed and tr. F. Gabrieli (London: Warburg Institute, 1952), 33

⁶ A verbal form of Arabic *adab*, "culture."

which the multitude is instructed and socialised and kept in everything that might lead to happiness.⁷

Al-Farabi, who was held by Maimonides to be the greatest philosopher after Aristotle, conceived religion as an attempt of the philosopher king to translate the philosophical ideas into the language of the multitude (that is, the language of imagination) which practice was necessary for the maintenance of his governance. However, Al-Farabi makes it clear that the philosopher king is not obliged to believe in the religion he himself ordains to the multitude. In *The Attainment of Happiness* (IV, 59) he writes:

Once the images representing the theoretical things demonstrated in the theoretical sciences are produced in the souls of the multitude and they are made to assent to their images, and once the practical things (together with the conditions of the possibility of their existence) take hold of their souls and dominate them so that they are unable to resolve to do anything else, then the theoretical and practical things are realised. Now these things are *philosophy* when they are in the soul of the legislator. They are *religion* when they are in the souls of the multitude. For when the legislator knows these things, they are evident to him by sure insight, whereas what is established in the souls of the multitude is through an image and a persuasive argument. Although it is the legislator who also represents these things through images, neither the images nor the persuasive arguments are intended for himself. As far as he is concerned, they are certain. He is the one who invents the images and the persuasive arguments, but not for the sake of establishing these things in his own soul as a religion for himself. No, the images and the persuasive arguments are intended for others, whereas, so far as he is concerned, these things are certain. They are a religion for others, whereas, so far as he is concerned, they are philosophy. Such, then, is true philosophy and the true philosopher.⁸

Now a basic question in Maimonidean scholarship is to what extent Maimonides was a follower of Al-Farabi.⁹ One can imagine a Straussian-Farabian Maimonides who considers the fundamental doctrines of Judaism to be Platonic "noble lies." Just as the Cretans were obliged to believe that their laws had been given by Zeus through Minos, in a similar way the Jews were persuaded that their laws had been ordained by God through Moses. This Straussian-Farabian Maimonides did not

⁷ Al-Farabi, *Alfarabi's Book of Letters (Kitāb al-<u>h</u>urūf): Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*, ed. Muhsin Mahdi (Beirut: Dar el-Mashreq Publishers, 1969), 152. (Emphasis is mine; all translations are mine unless it is indicated otherwise.)

⁸ Tr. Muhsin Mahdi; see Arthur Hyman and James J. Walsh, ed., *Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (Indianapolis: Hacket Publishing Company, 1973), 230. [Originally: *Alfarabi's Philosphy of Plato and Aristotle*, tr. Muhsin Mahdi (New York: Free Press, 1962)].

⁹ Cf. Lawrence Berman, "Maimonides, the Disciple of Alfarabi," *Israel Oriental Studies* 4 (1974): 154-178.

believe in Judaism as a revealed religion; nevertheless, he accepted it as a Platonic "noble lie" that helps "the multitude" to attain happiness. Therefore he refrained from open criticism of the foundations of religion.

If this overall interpretation of the Maimonidean *oeuvre* is correct, then we must suppose that Maimonides did not communicate his real views about religion in an open, direct way. He did not want to destroy Judaism; therefore he concealed his criticism of it from the eyes of the multitude. Thus it is possible that his major philosophical or theological work, *The Guide of the Perplexed* (hereafter *GP*) has two senses, two levels of understanding: the first, exoteric sense is intended for "the multitude" and does not attack the views of ordinary people, while the other, esoteric level is intended for those few who understand philosophy.

It is indubitable that *GP* does contain texts pointing to that direction. In *GP* III, 28 Maimonides claims that the Torah has ordained two types of propositions to be believed by the religious community: true propositions and "necessary" propositions, where "necessary" means "necessary for the welfare of society." It is clear that Maimonides does not think at all that a "necessary" proposition must be true automatically:

Among the things to which your attention ought to be directed is that you should know that in regard to the correct opinions through which the ultimate perfection may be obtained, the Law has communicated only their end and made a call to believe in them in a summary way – that is, to believe in the existence of the deity, may He be exalted, His unity, His knowledge, His power, His will, and His eternity. All these points are ultimate ends, which can be made clear in detail and through definitions only after one knows many opinions. *In the same way the Law also makes a call to adopt certain beliefs, belief in which is necessary for the sake of political welfare. Such, for instance, is our belief that He, may He be exalted, is violently angry with those who disobey Him and that is therefore necessary to fear Him and to dread Him and to take care not to disobey.¹⁰*

¹⁰ Tr. Shlomo Pines, see Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, tr. and. int. Shlomo Pines (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1963), 512. (All quotations from *GP* are from this translation.) There are two fundamental editions of the original Judeo-Arabic text: the *editio princeps* was prepared by S. Munk: *Le Guide des Égarés; traité de théologie et de philosophie par Moïse ben Maimoun dit Maïmonide*, ed. and tr. Salomon Munk (Paris: A. Franck, 1856 – 1866). This edition was revised by Y. Yoel [Joël]: *Dalālat al-hā'irīn (Sefer more nevukhim) le-rabbeinu Moshe ben Maymon* ("The Guide for the Perplexed" by our master, Moses the son of Maimon) ed. Yissachar Yoel [Joël] (Jerusalem: Defus Azriel. 1931). On the philological value of these editions, see Moshe H. Goshen-Gottstein, "Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*: Towards a Critical Edition," in *Studies in Jewish Religious and Intellectual History Presented to Alexander Altmann*, ed. Siegfried Stein and Raphael Loewe (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1979), 133-142.

The content of this passage can be schematised thus: A proposition can be characterised as (1) true or false, or (2) useful or harmful. Consequently, there are four types of propositions: 'true and useful,' 'true and harmful,' 'false and useful,' and finally, 'false and harmful.' Now the category 'false and useful' is to be identified with the "noble lies" in Plato and Averroes. The fact that the Torah contained the injunction to believe that God was capable of being angry – a proposition which Maimonides did not hold to be true – proves that the Torah *does* contain "noble lies." A philosopher may recognise this; nonetheless, he is a subject to the Law just like all the other members of the society, and therefore he is not permitted to criticise the Law openly (cf. Plato, *Laws*, 633-635).¹¹ But is he permitted to criticise them *secretly*, in an indirect way?

Leo Strauss would answer "yes" to this question. Philosophy seeks after *true* doctrines; religion strives to make people believe in *useful* doctrines. Philosophy differs from religion in its aims and methods; nonetheless, it is subject to religion. Now as far as the 'true and useful' propositions are concerned, religion and philosophy can go hand in hand. However, when 'true and harmful' and 'false and useful' statements are treated, philosophy must become *esoteric*. A philosopher will pretend that he believe in the 'false and useful' statements while he disbelieves the 'true and harmful' ideas – this is the *exoteric* part of philosophy. Nevertheless, at the same time he communicates the truth in an indirect way – this is the *esoteric* part of philosophy.

	True	False
Useful	philosophy / religion	philosophy: exoteric / religion
Harmful	philosophy: esoteric	

The distinction between exoteric and esoteric philosophy was Leo Strauss' basic idea. Strauss attempted at reinterpreting the history of pre-modern philosophy in the light of this distinction. Maimonides had a special role in his enterprise. Strauss viewed him as a paradigmatic case. The reason for that is that Maimonides explicitly speaks about the necessity of hiding the truth from the multitude in the introductory chapter of *GP*:

¹¹ Cf. Leo Strauss, *Philosophy and Law* (Philadelphia, New York, and Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1987) 61-78 and 109-110.

Hence you should not ask of me here anything beyond the *chapter headings*. And even those are not set in order or arranged in coherent fashion in this Treatise, but rather are scattered and entangled with other subjects that are to be clarified. For my purpose is that the truths be glimpsed and then again be concealed, so as not to oppose that divine purpose which one cannot possibly oppose and which has concealed from the vulgar among the people those truths especially requisite for His apprehension.¹²

In another passage he makes explicit the difference between the "external" and "internal," that is – according to Strauss' interpretation – between the "exoteric" and "esoteric" levels of meaning. Maimonides quotes *Proverbs* 25:11: "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver." As he explains, "silver" stands for the external meaning of Scripture, while "gold" stands for its internal meaning. Note the reference to the distinction between useful and true doctrines:

The parables of the prophets, peace be on them, are similar. Their external meaning contains wisdom that is useful in many respects, among which is the welfare of human societies, as is shown by the external meaning of *Proverbs* and of similar sayings. Their internal meaning, on the other hand, contains wisdom that is useful for beliefs concerned with the truth as it is.¹³

Strauss has laid down a basic methodological principle for discovering the esoteric teachings of *GP*. According to Strauss' hypothesis, the most important device used by Maimonides to conceal the esoteric doctrine is the intentional inclusion of contradictory statements in the text of *GP*. There are some sentences in the *Guide* which say (or imply) A, whereas, other sentences say (or imply) non-A. Now Maimonides could not have meant that both A and non-A were true. Therefore, according to Strauss, we must assume that either A is the true, esoteric view, and non-A is the false, exoteric one, or vice versa. Maimonides discloses the truth in one place, and conceals it in another place by denying it.

Strauss quotes as proof-text the notorious Seventh Cause from the introduction of GP. Maimonides enlists here seven possible causes that may account for a contradiction in a book. Later he notes that the contradictions to be found in GP are due to the fifth and the seventh cause. The text of the Seventh Cause reads:

The seventh cause. In speaking about very obscure matters it is necessary to conceal some parts and to disclose others. Sometimes in the case of certain dicta this necessity requires that the discussion proceed on the basis of a certain premise, whereas in another place necessity requires that the discussion

¹² *GP*, Introduction, tr. Pines, 6-7. "Chapter headings" (*rashei perakim*) is an allusion to Babylonian Talmud, *Hagiga* 11b.

¹³ Ibid., tr. Pines, 12.

proceed on the basis of another premise contradicting the first. In such cases the vulgar must in no way be aware of the contradiction; the author accordingly uses some device to conceal it by all means.¹⁴

If Strauss is right in believing that Maimonides has encoded the secret teaching of GP in the form of contradictory statements, then the basic methodological problem is to decide which of a pair of contradictory statements represents the true view of Maimonides.

In his famous "The Literary Character of the Guide of the Perplexed," Strauss formulated the answer to this question:

Returning to Maimonides' use of contradictions, one may assume that all important contradictions in the *Guide* may be reduced to the single fundamental contradiction between the true teaching, based on reason, and the untrue teaching, emanating from imagination. But whether this be the case or not, we are certainly in need of a general answer to the general question: which of the two contradictory statements is in each instance considered by Maimonides as the true statement? That answer would be *the* guide for the understanding of Maimonides' work. It is provided by his identification of the true teaching with some secret teaching. Consequently, of two contradictory statements made by him, that statement which is most secret must have been considered by him to be true. Secrecy is to a certain extent identical with rarity; what all people say all the time is the opposite of a secret. We may therefore establish the rule that of two contradicting statements in the *Guide* or in any other work of Maimonides that statement which occurs least frequently, or even which occurs only once, was considered by him to be true.¹⁵

Strauss might claim that his understanding of the Seventh Cause is not a new approach at all. In fact, some of the *medieval* Jewish commentators read *GP* in this way. For example, a late fourteenth-century commentator, Efodi (Profiat Duran) explains the meaning of the Seventh Cause thus:

Some necessity compels the author of the book to accept a premise because of the multitude whereas in another place he will accept – in harmony with the truth – another premise contradicting the first one.¹⁶

However, Strauss' interpretation has been heavily criticised by other scholars. A detailed discussion of the debate is out of the scope of the present paper; therefore only two authors will be quoted whom I found particularly interesting.

¹⁴ Tr. Pines, 18.

¹⁵ Leo Strauss, "The Literary Character of the *Guide for the Perplexed*," in *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1980 [1952]), 73.

¹⁶ See in the "Vilna edition" of Ibn Tibbon's Hebrew version of *GP*: *More ha-nevukhim* ("The Guide of the Perplexed" with four commentaries) (Vilnius: Funk, 1904) 10b-11a.

Yair Lorberbaum in a recently published article argues that Strauss has misunderstood his most important proof-text, that is, the Seventh Cause. Lorberbaum presents convincing philological arguments that the Arabic original does not mean at all that the same "necessity" that forces the author to develop his ideas on the basis of contradicting premises *is identical with* that "necessity" that urges him to conceal the truth from the multitude as well. The original Arabic text of *GP* shows that Maimonides clearly made a distinction between the verb '*yanbagi*' meaning "ought to" and the noun '*darūra*' meaning "an inevitable necessity." Now the original text contrasts *duty* with *necessity*. While it is a *duty* on the part of the author to save the must hide them from the multitude), the reason for using premises contradicting each other is an *inevitable necessity* due to the nature of philosophical speculation.¹⁷

Maimonides writes in *GP* II, 24 and many other places that human knowledge of astrophysics and metaphysics is defective, and therefore we are not able to settle solid principles and demonstrations concerning these subjects. Consequently a philosopher cannot but use *dialectical* arguments to prove his case. A dialectical argument is defined thus: if a problem occurs that cannot be decided by *demonstrative* arguments, then each of the possible answers must be elaborated. Having clarified all the consequences of each hypothesis the author may decide which of the undemonstrable hypotheses seems most probable. Maimonides attributes this definition to Alexander of Aphrodisias:

For Alexander has explained that in every case in which no demonstration is possible, the two contrary opinions with regard to the matter in question should be posited as hypotheses, and it should be seen what doubts attach to each of them: the one to which the fewer doubts attach should be believed. Alexander says that things are thus with respect to all the opinions regarding the divine that Aristotle sets forth and regarding which no demonstration is possible.¹⁸

According to Lorberbaum the plain meaning of the Seventh Cause is not that the author uses contradictory statements in order to conceal the "truth" from the multitude, but that it is the *nature* of philosophical speculation to use dialectical arguments proceeding from premises contradicting to each other. Now this

¹⁷ Yair Lorberbaum, "Ha-sibba ha-shevi'it: al ha-setirot be-'More ha-nevukhim' – iyyun mehuddash" (The "Seventh Cause:" On Contradictions in Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*) *Tarbiz* 69 (1999/2000): 211-237.

characteristic of philosophy is hardly understandable for the vulgar, and may confuse and upset them, therefore it is a *duty* on the part of the author to conceal these arguments. Contrary to what Strauss thought, the contradictions are not *devices* to conceal something, but they are the very things to be concealed.

However, the first medieval Hebrew translator of GP, Shmuel ben Yehuda ibn Tibbon rendered both Arabic phrases (*yanbagi* and <u>darūra</u>) with the same Hebrew word (*carikh*). Thus the difference of the two expressions was not reflected in that Hebrew text that was used by most of the medieval Jewish commentators. Misled by Tibbon's translation, they believed that the reason for the internal contradictions of GP was the same as the reason for the concealment of the truth from the multitude. Lorberbaum shows that Tibbon's unsatisfactory rendering of the passage affected Pines' English translation and Strauss' ideas as well.¹⁹

However, Lorberbaum does not claim that esoteric communication has no role in *GP* at all. All he is about to show is that Strauss' methodology is not supported by the text of the Seventh Cause itself.

Another critic of the Straussian interpretation, Oliver Leaman, approaches the problem from a different angle. The essence of his criticism is *not* that Strauss' method is not supported by sufficient textual evidence. According to Leaman a more serious charge can be brought against it: Strauss' ideas about discovering the "real" views of Maimonides are simply irrelevant from the point of view of the understanding the text itself. Maimonides wanted to *prove* his views, not just simply to state them, esoterically or otherwise. What matters is the argument and not the "personal view." Even if one can prove that Maimonides' "real" views or opinions differed from the ones he was actually arguing for in *GP*, that knowledge helps little in the understanding of the arguments themselves. A reader of *GP* should strive for the understanding of the arguments contained in the text. Speculations about "what Maimonides was really thinking about when he wrote the text" are irrelevant.²⁰

However, this criticism might lead us toward a reformulation of Strauss' methodology that saves the original idea to a considerable extent. The esoteric sense of *GP* should not be defined as the "true" or "real" *opinions* of Maimonides, but as

¹⁸ *GP* II, 22; tr. Pines, 320. Contrast with Aristotle, *Topics* I, 10-11. In *Millot ha-higgayon* chapter 8 Maimonides' definition is closer to the Aristotelian account.

¹⁹ Lorberbaum, "Ha-sibba ha-shevi'it...," 225.

secret *arguments* that are present in GP, although they are not formulated explicitly. After all it cannot be doubted that Maimonides explicitly claimed that *intentional inconsistencies* had been inserted into the text of GP: that is, arguments proceeding from premises contradicting each other (see the "Seventh Cause" above). Now it can be taken for granted that Maimonides was not satisfied with any inconsistent argumentation. Therefore we must assume that an inconsistent argument is meant to be exoteric by him, and that an esoteric, *consistent* argument corresponds to every inconsistent argument. The task of the interpreter is to detect the inconsistencies of the arguments presented in GP, and to find hints in the text on the basis of which the esoteric argument can be reconstructed. The rules of the methodology proposed here are the following:

(I) An argument was meant to be exoteric by Maimonides if it is (a) inconsistent, (b) there is some hint in the text that shows that Maimonides was aware of its being inconsistent.

(II) An inconsistent exoteric argumentation can be transformed into a *consistent* esoteric one.

(III) The task of the interpretation is (a) to reconstruct the arguments appearing in the text of GP, (b) to point out their inconsistencies, (c) to look for textual evidence that may hint at Maimonides' awareness of the inconsistencies, and (d) to develop a *consistent* argument that might lie behind the apparent self-contradictions.

A virtue of the proposed methodology consists in the fact that it is immune toward such type of criticism that Oliver Leaman brought against Leo Strauss. Since the target of the research is defined as the secret *arguments* of the text, Leaman's charge of irrelevancy becomes baseless.

This methodology does not contradict Lorberbaum's conclusions either. Lorberbaum's point is that what Maimonides wanted to hide is not some heretical statement (such as the eternity of the world) but the very fact that some of his arguments proceeded from premises contradicting each other, that is, they were *inconsistent*. Moreover, Lorberbaum claims that these seemingly inconsistent arguments are in fact not inconsistent, but *dialectical* in the above-defined sense.²¹ Consequently, the exoteric level of *GP* is *inconsistent*, while its esoteric level is

²⁰ See particularly his *Moses Maimonides* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990). Other important studies by Leaman: "Does the Interpretation of Islamic Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?" *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 7 (1980): 525-538, and *An Introduction to Medieval...*, 182-201.

dialectical. This recalls the second rule outlined above. If Lorberbaum is right, then this rule should be modified thus:

(II*) An *inconsistent*, exoteric argumentation can be transformed into a consistent, *dialectical* one at the esoteric level.

At the end of this paper we will see that the analysis of Maimonides' arguments for the existence of God corroborates Loberbaum's conclusions.

Another consideration in favour of the methodology proposed here is the fact that at least two important thirteenth-century Jewish commentators of *GP*, Yosef b. Shem Tov Ibn Falaqera and Yosef Kaspi, seem to have followed a similar hermeneutic method in the interpretation of Maimonides' argument for the existence of God.

Falaqera and Kaspi on Maimonides' Proof for the Existence of God

In his groundbreaking "The Secrets of the Guide to the Perplexed," Aviezer Ravitzky classified both Falaqera and Kaspi as "radical" Aristotelian interpretators of *GP*. The correctness of this classification cannot be disputed; nonetheless, in the present context it must be qualified in a certain way.²²

According to Ravitzky the basic assumption of the "radical" wing of medieval interpretators is the conviction that the secret, esoteric level of *GP* is *identical* with the Aristotelian philosophy. Consequently, the methodology practised by this group of commentators consists of reading the Aristotelian philosophy into the text of *GP* even in those cases where it can be carried out only by a rather forced interpretation. As a proof-text Ravitzky refers to a passages form Moshe Narboni's commentary that nicely demonstrates his case.²³

However, if Falaqera and Kaspi had followed the same methodology, they should have said, commenting on Maimonides' proofs for the existence of God, that these arguments must have been based solely on the premise of the eternity of the world, since that method was the standard Aristotelian way of proving the existence of God. Thus the *Guide* contained an exoteric (non-Aristotelian) method based on the premise of the creation of the world, and an esoteric (Aristotelian) method based on

²¹ Cf. Lorberbaum, "Ha-sibba ha shevi'it...," 226.

²² Aviezer Ravitzky, "The Secrets of the Guide to the Perplexed: Between the Thirteenth and the Twentieth Century," in *Studies in Maimonides*, ed. Isadore Twersky (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1990), 159-207.

the eternity of the world. Falaqera and Kaspi should have thought that the latter option was Maimonides' "real" method. Nevertheless, what they actually said about this topic differs from these expectations. First Maimonides' words will be quoted; after that the comments of Falaqera and Kaspi will be examined.

After analysing the arguments of the Muslim theologians (Mutakallimun) and the philosophers (that proceed respectively from the premise of the creation and the eternity of the world), in *GP* I, 71 Maimonides formulates his own argument – the "dilemma argument" – for the existence of God. This argument was read by medieval commentators as the contamination of the Kalam and the philosophical ways (or of the Platonic and Aristotelian ways.):²⁴

The world cannot but be either eternal or created in time. If it is created in time, it undoubtedly has a creator who created it in time. For it is a first intelligible that what has appeared at a certain moment in time has not created itself in time and that its creator is other than itself. Accordingly the creator who created the world in time is the deity. If, however, the world is eternal, it follows necessarily because of this and that proof that there is an existent other than all the bodies to be found in the world; an existent who is not a body and not a force in a body and who is one, permanent, and sempiternal; who has no cause and whose becoming subject to change is impossible. Accordingly he is a deity.

However, in the continuation of the passage Maimonides seems to claim that the eternity of the world must be accepted as hypotheses in order to attain a "perfect" demonstration of God's existence, unity and incorporeality:

Thus it has become manifest to you that the proofs for the existence and the oneness of the deity and of his not being a body ought to be procured from the starting point afforded by the supposition of the eternity of the world, for in this way the demonstration will be perfect, both if the world is eternal and if it is created in time. For this reason you will always find that whenever, in what I have written in the books of jurisprudence, I happen to mention the foundations and start upon establishing the existence of the deity, I establish it by discourses that adopt the way of the doctrine of the eternity of the world.

²³ Moshe Narboni, *Biur le-sefer More ha-nevukhim* (A Commentary on *GP*), ed. Jacob Goldenthal (Vienna: Um, 1853) 52a

²⁴ The first is the view of the thirteenth-century Moses of Salorno; see his commentary ad *GP* I, 71, MS Bodleiana 1261, 141a. The second is Narboni's view (ad *GP* II, 2), see *Biur*..., 27a. The significance of this difference lies in the fact that the Mutakallimun speak about a *creatio ex nihilo*, while Plato speaks about creation out of a pre-existent matter – but it is not clear at all which of these was meant by Maimonides under the heading "creation" in this argument. See Kaspi's argument *infra*. Cf. Harry A. Wolfson, "Notes on Proofs of Existence of God in Jewish Philosophy," in *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 1979), 571.

Now commenting on this passage Falaqera writes: ²⁵

But I say that one must say: "How is it possible to explain such a great thing²⁶ by such a thing,²⁷ which is dubious or rather not true at all? If the premises of the demonstration are not true, how will a true conclusion follow from them? And how will they result in a demonstration to which no doubt can be attached?" And in the *Book of Demonstration* [= *Analytica Posteriora*] it is explained that a demonstration should consist of premises that are true, general, necessary, and essential. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that these things did not escape the attention of our Master of blessed memory and all his words [were said] with "practical wisdom" [*be-haskel*].²⁸

After that Falaqera adds that the inference of God's existence from the creation of the world is not self-evident, contrary to what Maimonides stated:

And concerning what he says that it is a first intelligible that what is produced in time cannot produce itself [*ki ha-mehuddash lo yehaddesh 'acmo*]²⁹ – this should be reconsidered since [a] apparently this (principle) cannot be admitted without research, and since [b] we find that some of the ancients say that things can be produced in time out of themselves [*ha-devarim mithaddeshim me-'acmam*]. And turn your attention to what I have written in the first chapter of the second part.

According to Falaqera, Maimonides' first argument ("The world is either created or eternal..." see the first quoted passage above) is not valid, since the first alternative ("If the world was created, then it must have a Creator...") is not self-evident. Therefore we must suppose that Maimonides' real argument proceeds from the hypothesis of the eternity of the world. Now the problem is – according to Falaqera – that Maimonides himself will reject this hypothesis in *GP* II, 13-24. Maimonides will prove in II, 17-18 that the eternity of the world cannot be demonstrated. More than that, in II, 19-23 he will present a *dialectical* argument to show that the hypothesis of the creation is more probable than the hypothesis of the eternity. But in this case how can one *demonstrate* the existence, unity, and so on, of God by supposing a premise that later will turn out to be dubious or even false? Thus Falaqera detected an inconsistency in the argumentation of the *Guide*. This step corresponds to rule (I/a) of the methodology proposed above.

²⁵ Ibn Falaqera, *Sefer More ha-More* (A Guide for the Guide), ed. Mordechai L. Bisliches (Pressburg: Anton Edlen v. Schmid, 1837), 43.

²⁶ That is, the existence, unity and incorporeality of God.

²⁷ That is, the eternity of the world.

²⁸ The meaning of this phrase is not clear. It appears to me that *haskel* is intended to be a Hebrew translation of Arabic *ta'aqqul*, which was the standard translation of Greek *phronēsis* in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. If this supposition is correct, then Falaqera probably meant that Maimonides concealed the weak points of the argument for the sake of the welfare of the religious community.

²⁹ I render these Hebrew words as Pines rendered their Arabic equivalents.

Moreover, Falaqera claims that Maimonides' inconsistency must have been intentional. This corresponds to rule (I/b) above.

One might wonder whether Falaqera tried to read in a consistent argument into the text of *GP*, thus observing rule (II) of our methodology. The last sentence of his comment quoted above advises the reader to check his commentary on *GP* II, 1. Following this guideline, an interesting passage can be found, one in which, comparing the contingency-argument ("the proof from existence") with the Prime Mover-argument ("the proof from motion"), Falaqera writes:

According to my humble opinion the proof taken from the existents [that is, the contingency argument] is better [than the proof from motion], because it does not require the eternity of the motion and by that the claim that the world is eternal. This proof [that is, the proof from motion] is against the faith, and if there is a true proof that does not contradict the faith it is recommendable to choose it. Even more so, if some of the greatest philosophers considered this [the contingency argument] to be more reliable [than the proof from motion] saying that the proof taken from the motion does not convince them. Consequently, they followed another proof. And the aforementioned sage³⁰ says that the two [first] proofs are the true ones.³¹ And it cannot be doubted that it did not escape the attention of our Master of blessed memory, and for this reason he mentioned [first] the two proofs and then added a note on the "third speculation," which is taken from the existents [that is, the contingency argument]: "This is a demonstration concerning which there can be no doubt, no refutation, and no dispute, except on the part of one who is ignorant of the methods of demonstration."³² Although he said of the other speculations [proving the existence of God] in a similar way that they were all demonstrative proofs [he did not say of them "there can be no doubt, no refutation and no dispute" concerning them].³³ And indeed, no one can say that there is no doubt concerning them, because there are doubts concerning the proof taken from motion...³⁴

These passages show that Falaqera did something quite similar to the methodology proposed above. After having identified an inconsistent argument in *GP*

³⁰ That is, Averroes. Falaqera refers quite frequently to Averroes in his commentary, therefore he usually mentions him as "the aforementioned sage," *he-hakham ha-nizkar*.

³¹ That is, two versions of the proof from motion. Averroes rejected the contingency argument. See chapter 2 for details

³² Cf. GP II, 1

³³ Falaqera seems to apply one of the traditional methods of Rabbinical exegesis (*middot*), which is called *miut*. Since Maimonides says of the contingency argument that "there can be no doubt about it" while he does not say the same of the other proofs, he indicates by that the doubtfulness of all the proofs except the contingency argument. On *miut*, see Hermann L. Strack and Günter Stemberger, *Einleitung in Talmud und Midrasch* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1982), 33.

³⁴ I am not able to understand the rest of the passage. The text of the Pressburg edition seems to be corrupt. Unfortunately I could not check the critical edition prepared by Yair Shiffman, "More ha-more le-R. Shem Tov ben Yosef Falaqera" ('A Guide for the Guide by R. Shem Tov ben Yosef Falaqera) (Ph.D. diss., The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1990).

he strove to find a better, consistent argument. Thus he claims in the paragraph quoted above that the contingency argument proves God's existence, irrespective of the creation versus eternity problem. As a second step he tried to find some hints in Maimonides' text pointing to the fact that Maimonides shared Falaqera's opinion of the contingency argument. Now it has become clear that what Falaqera actually did with the text was quite similar to rule (I) and (II) proposed here. His method was much more sophisticated than a simple reading in of Aristotelian ideas into the *Guide*.

The other thirteenth-century commentator, Yosef ibn Kaspi, follows the same methodology, although he arrives at a conclusion different from Falaqera's one concerning the contingency argument. Commenting on *GP* I, 71 Kaspi writes:

[A] Indeed, the Master [Maimonides] puts the possibility of falsehood and doubtfulness on the subject of the eternity³⁵ [of the world], nonetheless he derives from it the conclusion concerning the three precious desiderata [that is, God's existence, unity, and incorporeality]. How is this? Even if it is well-known from the [art of] logic that a true conclusion may be reached through false premises, such [a proof] is not a demonstration! It is well known that a demonstration consists of premises that are true, general, necessary, and essential. Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that this thing did not escape the attention of the Master.³⁶

Kaspi follows closely Falaqera in these sentences. However, concerning the contingency argument he did not share Falaqera's opinion. Kaspi claims that the contingency argument *does* require the premise of the eternity of the world. Maimonides' reason for not mentioning this was his intention to conceal the fact that God's existence was undemonstrable without the premise of the eternity. Commenting on *GP* II, 1 Kaspi writes:

[B] **rather, its existence is necessary** [and not possible], **etc.** This does not follow necessarily from the division he set forth before [that is, the contingency argument], rather, this whole [argument] becomes necessary through the belief in the eternity [of the world].³⁷ Nevertheless, he of blessed

³⁵ Reading *ha-qadmut* instead of *ha-haqdamot* ("premises") appearing in Werbluner's edition. This reading makes better sense.

³⁶ Yosef Kaspi, *Amudei kesef u-mashkiyyot kesef: Shnei perushim al sefer ha-More la-RaMBaM z''l* (Pillars of silver and settings of silver: Two commentaries on Maimonides' *The Guide of the Perplexed*), ed. Salomo Werbluner (Frankfurt a. M.: J. F. Bach, 1848), 72.

³⁷ That is, if the eternal *existence* of the world is granted (which does not imply the eternal *motion* of the heavens), then the existence, unity and incorporeality of God can be demonstrated by the contingency argument. However, in quotation [C] (see below) Kaspi seems to claim that the belief "in the eternity" is necessary only for proving that God is not a force in a body. The contradiction can be solved if we assume that in [C] he meant the eternity of the *motion* and not just the eternity of the existence of the world (see below). Cf. the distinction between the Aristotelian and Platonic version of the eternity in *GP* II, 13.

memory [Maimonides] did not want to disclose this fact because of what he is going to say in a tricky way [*derekh tahbula*] in the second chapter.³⁸

In the second chapter, that is, *GP* II, 2 Maimonides writes (words emphasised by bold letters will be the catch-words in Kaspi's commentary):

The fifth body, namely, the sphere, cannot but be either subject to generation and corruption – in which case movement would likewise be subject to generation and corruption – or, as the adversary says, not be subject to generation and corruption. If the sphere is subject to generation and corruption, it is the deity, may His name be sublime, who brought it into existence after its having been nonexistent. This is a first intelligible, for everything that exists after having been nonexistent **must have of necessity someone who has brought into existence** – it being absurd that it should bring itself into existence. If, however, the sphere has not ceased and will not cease thus to be moved in a perpetual and eternal movement, it follows necessarily from the premises that have been set forth before that the mover that causes it to move **in this eternal movement is not a body** or a force in a body; it is in fact the deity, may His name be sublime.

This passage is a repetition of the "dilemma argument" formulated in *GP* I, 71 quoted above. However, this time Maimonides adds a note that might be understood to mean that the "third method" (that is, the contingency argument) does not require at all neither the premise of the creation nor the premise of the eternity. Probably this passage led Falaqera to believe in the superiority of the contingency argument:

Thus it has become clear to you that the existence of the deity [...] is proved by cogent and certain demonstrations, regardless of whether the world has come into being in time after having been nonexistent, or whether it has not come into being in time after having been nonexistent. Similarly, demonstrations prove that He is one and not a body, as we have set forth before. For the demonstration that He is one and not a body is valid, regardless of whether the world has come into being in time after having been nonexistent or not – as we have made clear by means of the third philosophic method and when refuting the belief in His corporeality and when establishing His oneness by means of philosophic methods.

Kaspi comments on these passages:

[C] [This is a first intelligible, for everything that exists after having been nonexistent] must have of necessity someone who has brought into existence, etc. Nevertheless, it does not follow necessarily, who was that and what was that [who brought the world into existence]. [...that the mover that causes it to move] in this eternal movement is not a body, etc. In this way His existence follows necessarily. ...be it that the world has come into being in time, etc. His being is hidden [meciuto nistam] (?). ...and not body as we have set forth before But not that He is not a force in a body. As we

³⁸ Ibid., 89.

have made clear by means of the third method, etc. because from that division [that is, the contingency argument] it follows that there is an existent that has not come into being and will not pass away, nevertheless, it does not follow necessarily from this that He is not a body let alone that He is not a force in a body. And in any case [the proposition that God] is not a force in a body will not follow necessarily unless the eternity³⁹ is supposed. Although he of blessed memory [Maimonides] alludes to this at the end of the "third method" [that is, the contingency argument], in this place he formulates his words with great care in a tricky way [*yesadder ze ha-leshon be-tahbulat melakha gedola*].⁴⁰

By the last sentence Kaspi probably meant that Maimonides did not want to disclose the fact that it was impossible to prove God's not being a force in a body, unless the eternity of the world had been accepted. That was the reason for his using a "tricky formulation," that might suggest that the contingency argument was valid irrespective of the creation versus eternity problem. Thus Kaspi, in fact, claims that Maimonides has two arguments: an exoteric one, which is not valid, and an esoteric one, which is valid, yet which, nevertheless, fails to reach all the intended conclusions. The exoteric argument can be summarised thus:

(1) The world is either eternal or has been created in time.

(2) If it is eternal, then the Aristotelian proofs (such as "the proof from motion") will demonstrate that God exists, He is one; He is neither a body nor a force in a body.

(3) If the world has been created in time, then the existence of the Creator can be inferred from the principle "nothing can generate itself."

(4) In addition to that, the contingency argument demonstrates God's unity and incorporeality even if the world has been created in time.

(5) Conclusion: God' s existence, unity, incorporeality, and His not being a force in a body is demonstrated both if the world is eternal and if it has been created.

The esoteric argument – according to Kaspi's interpretation – can be schematised thus:

³⁹ Kaspi does not make it explicit whether "eternity" refers to the eternity of the *existence* of the world, or to the eternity of the *motion* of the heavenly bodies. However, it is clear that the latter sense is to be meant. In *GP* II, 1 Maimonides' argument for God's not being a force in a body runs as follows: If God were a force in a body (that is, in one of the heavenly bodies), then God would move accidentally; now every accidental movement must stop sometimes, and hence the heavenly body in question would stop, but this will not happen, since the heavenly bodies move for ever. To sum up: Kaspi seems to imply that even if the contingency argument can prove God's existence, unity, and incorporeality by supposing the eternal *existence* of the world, it fails to prove God's not being a force in a body unless the eternal *motion* of the heaven is admitted.

⁴⁰ Kaspi, *Ammudei kesef...*, 90.

(1*) The world is either eternal or has been created in time. Now if it is eternal, there are still two alternatives: (a) the Aristotelian version of eternity and (b) the Platonic version of eternity. The Aristotelian version implies that both the existence and the *movement* of the heavenly bodies are eternal, whereas according to the Platonic version the celestial movement began a finite time ago.

(2*) If the world is eternal in the Aristotelian sense, then the proof from motion will demonstrate that God exists, He is one, and He is neither a body nor a force in a body. [C]

(3*) If the world is eternal in the Platonic sense, then the contingency argument will demonstrate the existence, unity and incorporeality of God. The contingency argument does require the eternal *existence* of the world, although it does not require the eternal *movement* of the heavenly bodies. [B, cf. footnote]

(4*) However, the contingency argument fails to show that God is not a force in a body, since this conclusion follows only from the eternal *motion* of the heavenly bodies. To prove that God is not a force in a body one must admit the eternity of the world in the Aristotelian sense. [C, cf. footnote]

(5*) If the world has been created in time, then the existence of the Creator follows (since nothing can generate itself). Nevertheless, we cannot demonstrate that He is one and He is neither a body nor a force in a body. [C]

(6*) [Conclusion from 1*-5*]: God's not being a force in a body cannot be demonstrated unless the eternity of the world is admitted in the Aristotelian sense.

(7*) But the eternity of the world in the Aristotelian sense is a doubtful or even false premise. [A]

(8*) Therefore God's not being a force in a body is not proved by demonstration.

In the present paper I will attempt to carry out a similar reconstruction of Maimonides' argument for the existence of God on the basis of the methodology outlined above. The results of the study will be similar to Kaspi's conclusion, although in the technical details it will differ to a considerable extent.

The Structure of the Paper

The first chapter will lay down the foundation of the whole work. In this chapter I will show that if the Aristotelian arguments for the eternity of the world can be refuted, then the possibility that the world has come into being in a spontaneous way without a Creator cannot be excluded. Hence, from the hypothesis of the non-eternity of the world an unexpected consequence follows, namely, that God's existence cannot be proved by demonstration. Now the possibility that the world has come into being in a spontaneous way was unacceptable for Maimonides and his contemporaries; nevertheless, it was not *unthinkable*.⁴¹ The issue is exactly this: an unacceptable theoretical possibility occurs, which nonetheless cannot be excluded. Therefore, Maimonides tried to *conceal* this consequence of his argumentation against the eternity of the world. Thus, this part of his argumentation can be identified as "esoteric."

Moreover, at the end of the first chapter I will cite decisive textual evidence that Maimonides himself was aware of the undesirable consequences of his theoretical position. In addition, I will show that Gersonides recognised the same difficulties; consequently, he used them as *objections* against the Maimonidean position. Thus, not just an esoteric argument but an *esoteric philosophical debate* will be disclosed by the means of the methodology proposed here, which is a remarkable result in itself and needs further elaboration.

Now I enumerate three possible objections against the interpretation presented in the first chapter:

(1) "Maimonides' Principle" (which will be defined in chapter one) was meant by Maimonides to be an *exoteric* doctrine. This was suggested by Leonard S. Kravitz.

(2) The contingency argument demonstrates the existence of God for Maimonides irrespective of the "eternity versus creation" problem. This was suggested by Falaqera.

(3) An improved version of "Maimonides' Principle" can avoid the undesired consequences, even if Maimonides was not aware of this fact. This was suggested by Gersonides.

The rest of the work will answer these objections respectively. In chapter two I will defend my interpretation against Kravitz's objection. In chapter three I will show that Falaqera was wrong in believing that the contingency argument could demonstrate God's existence without the hypothesis of the eternity of the world. In chapter four I will show that Gersonides' solution is not satisfactory from

⁴¹ Cf. Falaqera's commentary quoted above (page 15): "things can be produced in time out of themselves [*ha-devarim mithaddeshim me-'acmam*]."

Maimonides' point of view. Finally, in chapter five I will argue against the wide spread assumption that Maimonides' esoteric doctrine was the eternity of the world.

Chapter I

CHAPTER ONE: THE PROOF FROM CREATION

Herbert A. Davidson states on the first page of his masterful book *Proofs for Eternity*, *Creation and the Existence of God in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Philosophy* that

I employ the term *creation* to mean the thesis that the world came into existence after not having existed, not the more specific thesis that a creator brought the world into existence. Medieval thinkers who accepted the former thesis were invariably certain that the latter thesis can be inferred from it.⁴²

Davidson seems to imply that his last sentence is true of every medieval thinker, without exception. In this chapter I will try to show that this is not the case. I will try to show that it is not self-evident to infer the existence of God from the creation of the world and that Maimonides was aware of this fact. However, he refrained from an open discussion of the problem, since this idea would not have been welcomed in a religious community. This being the case, we can safely assume that this argument was a part of the secret doctrine of *The Guide of the Perplexed*.

The main idea of this chapter will be presented first in a simple and straightforward way as an introduction. A detailed elaboration of the argument follows after the introduction.

Introduction

A widespread proof for the existence of God, if it is granted that the world is not eternal, is formulated by Maimonides in the following way:

If the sphere is subject to generation and corruption, it is the deity, may His name be sublime, who brought it into existence after its having been nonexistent. This is a first intelligible, for everything that exists after having been nonexistent must have of necessity someone who has brought into existence – it being absurd that it should bring itself into existence.⁴³

The proof is based on two premises – this is clearly stated by Maimonides –: on the non-eternity of the world and on the *ex nihilo nihil fit*, "nothing comes from nothing" principle. The later is a "first intelligible," in other words a self-evident axiom in Aristotelian natural philosophy.⁴⁴

 ⁴² Herbert A. Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity, Creation and the Existence of God in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Philosophy* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 1.
⁴³ GP II, 2. tr. S. Pines, 252.

⁴⁴ On the first intelligibles cf. Maimonides, *Millot ha-higayon* 8, 1-2; and Herbert A. Davidson, "Maimonides on Metaphysical Knowledge," in *Maimonidean Studies*, 3 (1992): 87-92.

On the other hand, "nothing comes from nothing" has a crucial role in one of the Aristotelian arguments for the eternity of the world. If the "first intelligible" is accepted as a universally valid principle that works in every situation, then it is a major inconsistency to reject the Aristotelian argument for the eternity of the world. However, if the eternity of the world is accepted, then the whole enterprise of inferring the existence of God from creation becomes meaningless.

Philosophers and theologians hotly debated the problem of eternity *versus* creation in the Middle Ages. *Ex nihilo nihil fit* was a whore that slept with both parties. If you accept the *ex nihilo nihil fit* principle, then you can infer God's existence from creation – but you have to admit the eternity of the world as well. If you reject the *ex nihilo nihil fit* principle, then you can defend the possibility that the world was created in time – but you cannot infer the existence of God from creation. If you say that the principle is valid when we infer God's existence from creation but invalid when the Aristotelians are proving the eternity of the world, then your argument is not really coherent.

In *GP* II, 17 Maimonides argues that the principles of Aristotelian physics were not valid when God created the world. This applies to the principle of *ex nihilo nihil fit* as well. But if this is true, then Maimonides' argument for God's existence from creation (cited above) collapses. This is a major internal contradiction in the text of *GP*. Maimonides refrained from pointing out this difficulty in a direct, open way. However, we will see that he alluded to it quite clearly. Therefore one might consider this difficulty as a "hidden message" of the text; thus Leo Strauss' theory of the esoteric meaning of *GP* might not be totally unjustified.

The Structure of this Chapter

Maimonides' argument has some common features with Al-Ghazali's refutation of the philosophical proof for the existence of God. In fact, his argument can be read as an answer to Al-Ghazali. I do not claim that Maimonides was directly influenced by Al-Ghazali (although it is quite probable that he read *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*); nonetheless, it seems to me a useful method of interpretation to confront Maimonides with Al-Ghazali. Therefore, Al-Ghazali's presentation of the problem will be treated first. After that, I will present Maimonides' argument according to my interpretation. Thirdly, I will collate some textual evidence to prove that the discussed argument is really Maimonides' in *GP*.

Al-Ghazali on the Proofs for the Existence of God

In the fourth discussion of the *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* (The Incoherence of the Philosophers) Al-Ghazali outlines the possible theoretical positions regarding the eternity of the world and the existence of God in the following way:

We say people divide into two groups: (1) The group that follows the truth and perceived that the world is created and have known necessarily that the created does not exist by itself and hence needs a maker, their doctrine upholding [belief in] the Maker being hence comprehensible; (2) another group – namely, the materialists⁴⁵ – who perceive the world to have existed preeternally in the way that it exists [now] and have not affirmed [the existence of] the Maker. The belief [of the latter] is understandable, even though proof shows its falsity. As for the philosophers, they perceived the world to be preeternal, then, despite this, have affirmed for it a maker. This doctrine is, as it stands, contradictory.⁴⁶

Al-Ghazali's classification of beliefs can be represented in a table. There are two fundamental propositions:

(1) The world is (pre-)eternal.

(2) The world has a Maker.

SIGN	VIEW	ADHERENTS	VALUE
(A)	rejects (1) accepts (2)	believers	consistent, true
(B)	accepts (1) rejects (2)	materialists	consistent, false
(C)	accepts both (1) and (2)	philosophers	inconsistent, false
(D)*	[rejects both (1) and (2)]	[?]	[?]

Al-Ghazali's point is that the philosophers' view regarding the existence of God is not just false, but inconsistent as well, so it is another instance of the "incoherence of the philosophers." However, what he attempts to show in fact is not that (1) and (2) cannot be true at the same time, but that one cannot prove (2) if (1) is accepted. We have to reformulate the two propositions to understand the point of Al-Ghazali's critic of the "philosophers."

⁴⁵ *al-dahrīya* from Arabic *dahr* "eternity, fate," so the expression means "the followers of the eternity" or "followers of the fate." It was used to denote Epicurus and his followers. Cf. Hasdai Crescas, *Sefer or ha-shem* (The light of God) (Vienna: Adalbert della Torre, 1859) 12b [I, 1, 26.].

⁴⁶ Tr. M. E. Marmura; see Al-Ghazali, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, tr. Michael E. Marmura (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1997), 79.

As for the eternity of the world, the real problem for Al-Ghazali was that proposition (1) excluded the possibility that God was prior to the world in time. As for the existence of God, the real issue was not simply to prove that there was a First Cause but to prove that the First Cause was not a part of the universe or the universe itself.⁴⁷ Al-Ghazali had in mind a simple and effective demonstration. First we reformulate the propositions:

 $(1)^*$ God is prior to the world in time

(2)* God is not identical [a] with a part of the world, [b] with the world as a whole

(3)* Everything except God was created out of nothing.

If (1)* and (3)* are accepted as premises then (2)* can be demonstrated using the Aristotelian syllogism traditionally called *Cesare*:⁴⁸

No part of the universe existed before the creation [cf. $(3)^*$].

God existed before the creation [cf. (1)*]

No part of the universe is God[(2)*a]

The universe as a whole did not exist before the creation.

God existed before the creation [cf. (1)*]

God is not the universe as a whole [(2)*b]

The problem with the philosophers' view (C) is that accepting (1) implies rejecting (1)*, therefore, the philosophers cannot prove (2)* in the above outlined way. Moreover, Al-Ghazali argues, they cannot prove (2)* in any other way. The bare existence of the first cause can be inferred from a set of premises containing (1) but (2)* cannot be proved without accepting \sim (1), that is, the negation of the pre-eternity of the world. To sum up, Al-Ghazali's attack against the philosophers consists of proving that

^{* [}Not discussed by Al-Ghazali]

⁴⁷ That is the meaning of the phrase that God is a \dot{sani} "maker, craftsman." Just as a craftsman who produces a waterpipe is neither a part of the waterpipe nor the whole of the waterpipe but absolutely "transcendent" towards it, in the same way God is transcendent towards the world.

⁴⁸ According to Avicenna, propositions with individual subjects should be treated as universal propositions (thus "God existed before the creation" is equivalent to "Everything that is God existed before creation"). This rule is observed in the reconstruction. Cf. Marvin Fox, *Interpreting Maimonides* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 89.

if $\{p \& q \&...\} = /=> ~(1)$, then $\{(1)\& p \& q \&...\} = /=> (2)*$

How to prove this statement? Let us suppose that all the philosophical demonstrations of God's existence rest on the premise of the impossibility of an infinite chain of causes. On the other hand, the eternity of the world can be maintained only if an infinite amount of time is possible. Now, if we can show that accepting the impossibility of an infinite chain of causes implies the impossibility of infinite time, and, on the other hand, the possibility of infinite time implies the possibility of an infinite chain of causes, then we have succeed in pointing out a serious inconsistency in the philosophers' argument. You have to accept the finitude of the time of the world, that is, the creation of the world, if you would like to prove the existence of God. In fact, Al-Ghazali seems to follow this strategy.

Now let us turn to the actual text. Al-Ghazali presents the philosophers' argument thus:⁴⁹

The world (with its existents) either has a cause or does not have a cause. If it has a cause, then [the question arises]: "Does this cause have a cause or is it without a cause?" [If it has a cause,] the same [question] applies to the cause of cause. This would either regress infinitely, which would be impossible, or terminate with a limit. The later, then is a first cause that has no cause for its existence. We call this the First Principle.⁵⁰

After that, Al-Ghazali quotes a demonstration of the impossibility of the infinite chain of causes:

The conclusive demonstration for the impossibility of infinite causes is to say: each one of the individual causes is either in itself possible or necessary. If [it is] necessary, then it would not need a cause. If [it is] possible, then the whole is characterized with possibility. Every possible needs a cause additional to itself. The whole, then, needs an extraneous cause. ⁵¹

This argument is not quite clear at first sight. Therefore we attempt to reconstruct it in a more detailed way. We are in need of two definitions that are supplied by Al-Ghazali in a non-quoted part of the text:

(def1) A possible being is a being that cannot exist without a cause.

(def2) A necessary being is a being that exists without a cause.

⁴⁹ Tr. Marmura; Al-Ghazali, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, 80.

⁵⁰ The argument continues with the exclusion of the alternative that the world has no cause. Additional arguments can prove that the First Principle must not contain any multiplicity. Since the world constitutes a multiplicity it cannot be a First Principle. Al-Ghazali rejects this argument and refers the reader to the fifth discussion (pp. 86-87) where he refutes it.

⁵¹ Tr. Marmura; *Ibid.*, 82.

Four additional premises are needed, but not formulated by Al-Ghazali at all:

(prem1) Nothing can be the cause of itself.

(prem2) One thing can have only one immediate cause.

(prem3) The immediate cause of the immediate cause of a thing is its remote cause. One thing can have many remote causes, in a linear causal sequence.

(prem4) Everything is either a possible or a necessary being.

The argument runs as follows: In any chain of causes either there is a necessary being or not. If there is a necessary being, then it has no cause at all (cf. def2); therefore this necessary being will be the first cause in the chain. Hence, it cannot be infinite. Now let us consider the second alternative. Suppose that all the members of the chain are possible beings and the chain itself is infinite. An infinite chain of causes can have no first cause. However, we will show that this chain of possible beings has a first cause. Therefore an infinite chain of causes is not possible.

(4) There is an infinite chain of causes in which every member has a cause. [This is the hypothesis to be refuted]

(5) Every member of this chain is a possible being [cf. (def1), (def2) and (prem4)].

(6) Therefore the whole chain is a possible being.

(7) But a possible being cannot exist without a cause [cf. (def1)].

(8) Therefore the whole chain needs an extra cause [cf. (6) and (7)].

(9) This extra cause is the cause of all the members of the chain [cf. (8)].

(10) But everything can have only one immediate cause [cf. (prem2)].

(11) Therefore the extra cause must be the immediate cause of one member of the chain and the remote cause of all the other members [cf. (10), (prem1) and (prem3)].

(12) Therefore the extra cause is in fact the first cause of the whole chain [cf.(11)].

(13) Therefore the supposedly infinite chain of causes has a first cause; *quod erat demonstrandum*.

Al-Ghazali refutes this argument in the following way:

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We say: The expressions "the possible" and "the necessary" are vague expressions, unless by "the necessary" is intended that whose existence has no

cause and by "possible" that whose existence has a cause. If this, then, is what intended, let us then turn again to this expression. We will thus say: "Each one [of the causes] is possible in the sense that it has a cause additional to itself, and the whole is not possible [but necessary] in the sense that it does not have a cause additional to itself, extraneous to it." If by the expression "the possible" is intended other than what we intended, this would be incomprehensible.⁵²

After that he continues:

If it is said, "This leads to [the consequence] that the necessary existent would have [its] subsistence through [things] possible of existence, which is impossible" we say: If you intended by "the necessary" and the "possible" what we have mentioned, then this is the very thing we are after. We do not admit that it is impossible. It is similar to one's saying, "It is impossible for the pre-eternal to have its subsistence in temporal events," when time, according to them, is eternal and the individual celestial movements are temporal events, having beginnings, whereas [their] totality has no beginning. Hence, that which has no beginning has been rendered subsistent by those things that have beginnings, and what is true of the totality. Similarly, it can be said about each individual unit that it has a cause, but it is not said that the totality has a cause. Not everything that is true of the individual units is true of the totality.⁵³

Finally Al-Ghazali concludes:

Hence, it has become evident that whoever allows the possibility of events that have no beginning – namely, the forms of the four elements and of [all] the things that undergo change – is unable to deny causes that are infinite. From this it comes about that they have no way of reaching [the point] of affirming the First Principle, for this [very] difficulty.⁵⁴

It is clear enough from the quoted text that Al-Ghazali's counter-argument focuses on step (5) and (6), *i.e.* every member of the chain is a possible being, therefore the whole chain is a possible being. An additional premise is needed for this step according to which

(14) If a property is true of every member of a chain then it is true of the chain as a whole as well.⁵⁵

But past time of the world can be considered as a chain that has properties similar to the chain of the causes (a strictly linear order; cf. premises 1-2-3 above).

⁵² *Ibid.*, 82-83.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ This premise can be considered as an instance of 'composition fallacy.'

The members of this chain are the periods of the movement of the celestial bodies. However, all of these periods are finite – characterised by finitude. Therefore, if we accept (14), we can prove that the past time is also characterised by finitude and thus finite in this sense, that is, that the world is not pre-eternal!

On the other hand, if we reject (14) we cannot prove that an infinite chain of causes is impossible. In this case the existence of a God (*i.e.* a necessary being) still can be inferred (the chain as a whole will be the necessary being), but we cannot prove that God is not identical with the universe as a whole. Thus, Al-Ghazali showed that one cannot prove (2)* without rejecting (1).

Maimonides' Answer

Maimonides' answer to this argument can be characterised by the Platonic saying "to pay them (the opponents) back in kind with interest."⁵⁶ He did not show that Al-Ghazali was wrong in his attack against the "philosophers." However, from the text of *GP* we can infer an argument according to which the adherents of (A), that is, the "believers," have to face difficulties similar to the ones belonging to the "philosophers" (C). He is about to show that:

if $\{p \& q \&...\} = = (1)$, then $\{\sim(1) \& p \& q \&...\} = = (2)$

If this is true, then the "value" of (A) in our table is not "consistent, true" but "incoherent" in the sense that one cannot prove both propositions. (This does not exclude the possibility that both \sim (1) and (2) cannot be true at the same time.) Moreover, that means that (D) is not absurd at all. We will see that Maimonides had an argument according to which the impossibility of (D) cannot be demonstrated.

But how to prove the above formulated proposition? A possible way is to show that there is a (p) proposition of which it is true that

(i) if
$$\{\sim(1) \& p \& q \& ... \} \Rightarrow (2)$$
 then $\{\sim(1) \& p \& q \& ... \} \Rightarrow (1)$

and

(ii) if $\{\sim(1)\&(\sim p)\&q\&\ldots\} = = > (1)$ then $\{\sim(1)\&(\sim p)\&q\&\ldots\} = = > (2)$

and

(iii) proposition (ii) remains true even if all the true propositions that may affect the argument⁵⁷ are included in $\{\sim(1) \& (\sim p) \& q \& ...\}$.

⁵⁶ Cf. Plato, Parmenides, 128d.

⁵⁷ That is, the true propositions of physics and metaphysics. This expression is intended to exclude those propositions that do not belong to physics or metaphysics, while they may be true, and God's

Perhaps some explanation is needed to make this point clearer. Let us suppose that there is a proposition (p) that meets all the three requirements (i-ii-iii). Now proposition (p) is either true or not. If it is true, then (2) can be inferred from a set of premises containing both \sim (1) and (p) only if (1) can be inferred from the same set of premises. This is the meaning of (i).

Moreover, it is trivial that \sim (1) can be inferred from the same set of premises (since it is one of the premises), therefore, if (i) is true, then both (1) and \sim (1) follow from the same premises. Now if a proposition and its negation follow from the same set of premises, then the set of premises is not consistent. Hence, our result is that the premises needed to prove (2) are inconsistent so any argument proceeding from these statements cannot be accepted as valid.

On the other hand, if (p) is not true, and a set of premises containing both \sim (1) and (\sim p) does not imply (1) – that is, they are consistent – then (2) cannot be inferred from them. That is the meaning of (ii).

However, it must be noted that (ii) is not an effective method to show the nonprovability of (2), since it has not been excluded yet that if another (q) proposition is added to the set of the premises then (2) follows from it without the premises' being inconsistent. In this case there may well be a proposition (p) of which both (i) and (ii) is true, and nonetheless, (2) can be demonstrated. Therefore another requirement must be pointed out: (ii) must be true even if all the true propositions are added to the set of premises.

Hence, if there is a proposition (p) that meets all the three requirements, then whether (p) is true or not, God's existence cannot be proved from any sets of premises containing the non-eternity of the world. Thus the "debt" is paid back to Al-Ghazali "with interest."

I will try to show that the Aristotelian principle, "first intelligible" *ex nihilo nihil fit* is in fact this proposition (p) in Maimonides' hypothetical "answer" to Al-Ghazali's argument. As for part (i), I do not have decisive textual evidence that Maimonides was aware of the fact that this kind of reasoning is possible, but I will argue that it is a strong hypothesis that he was. As for part (ii), I will cite decisive textual evident that Maimonides knew very well that if (p) was rejected then (2) could not be demonstrated. As for part (iii), we will see that Maimonides forcibly argued

existence can be inferred from them, in other words, propositions such as prophetic sayings, supra-

that no inference could be drawn from the world's present state to its creation. Not just *ex nihilo nihil fit* but all the first principles lose their demonstrative force. This means that even if all the physical principles are included in the set of premises, (2) does not follow. Thus requirement (iii) is met.

First Part of the Argument (i)

The proof for the existence of God, if it is granted that the world is not pre-eternal, runs as follows. If the world is not pre-eternal, then it has a beginning in time. That means that the world must have been generated some time ago. But every generation is preceded by something, because nothing can be generated from nothing (*ex nihilo nihil fit*). Therefore, the world is preceded by something. And this something is God (may His name be sublime!).⁵⁸

The weak point of the argument is the last step. How do we know that "this something is God (may His name be sublime!)"? Why is this not matter and form, as the standard theory of generation would require?⁵⁹ Aristotelian physics had a definite theory of the nature of what must precede every generation. And this theory was used to refute the creation of the world in time. We will see that our argument for the existence of God is probably identical with the first steps of a widespread argument for the eternity of the world!

First a closer examination of the principle *ex nihilo nihil fit* is needed. In *Metaphysics* III, 4, 999b5-8 Aristotle presents the principle "nothing comes from nothing" thus:

But if there is nothing eternal, then there can be no becoming: for there must be something which undergoes the process of becoming, that is, that from which things come to be; and the last member of this series must be non-generated [*kai touton to eskhaton ageneton*],⁶⁰ for the series must start with something, since nothing can come from nothing.⁶¹

Alexander of Aphrodisias in his commentary elaborated the argument in this way:⁶² The main aim of this passage is to prove that if nothing is eternal, then no generation is possible. Now every generation must be preceded by two things: a

rational revelations, and so on.

⁵⁸ Cf. the quotation from *GP* II, 2 in the introductory part of this chapter.

⁵⁹ Cf. Aristotle, De Generatione II, 1, 329a24-26; Physics I, 7-9.

⁶⁰ Alexander of Aphrodisias understood this expression in a different way (see below).

⁶¹ Tr. Richard Hope, see Aristotle, *Metaphysics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), 51.

⁶² Alexandri Aphrodisiensis In Aristotelis Metaphysica Commentaria, Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca ed. Michael Hayduck, vol. 1 (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1891), 212-213.

substrate that will become the generated thing, and a cause that will change the substrate into the generated thing. For example, if a man is generated, then we need both a matter that will be transformed into the man, and another man that will cause the transformation. Now let us examine the substrate. If it is generated, then another substrate is needed. Suppose that we have arrived at an ultimate substrate (*eskhaton hypokeimenon*). This we call "first matter" (prote hyle). Thus the question is whether the first matter is generated or not.

If it is generated, then it is generated either from nothing or from something.⁶³ But from nothing it cannot be generated, because

...it is a common opinion [*koinē doxa*] of the ones who speculate on nature [*tōn peri physeōs eipontōn ti*] that nothing is generated out of nothing, and it is obviously absurd and impossible to say that something is generated thus.⁶⁴

On the other hand it cannot be generated out of another substrate either, because it would imply an infinite series of causes and substrates:

... but nor can it be that one is the cause of the other and one is the substrate of the other infinitely in a straight line as he [Aristotle] showed it in the "lesser Alpha."⁶⁵

It is clear now that according to Alexander's interpretation of *ex nihilo nihil fit* the "eternal" that must precede every generation is, first of all, the "ultimate substrate," that is, the first matter (and not God!). However, he adds that by using the plural form *touton* in the expression *kai touton to eskhaton ageneton* ("and the last of these is eternal") Aristotle's intention was to express the point that not just matter but the generated things must be eternal in a sense as well, since generation in nature requires, besides matter, the actual existence of a thing belonging to the same species as the thing to be generated:

It is possible that by *kai tout* $\bar{o}n$ he means not just the matter from which it is generated but the generated thing [*ginomenon*] as well. In the domain of naturally generated things it seems that similar is generated by similar. For man begets man; therefore, if a man is generated, there must be a man who makes and begets him. Therefore it is necessary that through these a maker should exist eternally [*anagkaion de kai epi tout* $\bar{o}n$ *einai poiētikon aidion*] and this is what he intended to say (besides what he has said about the matter) that the generated thing should exist eternally as well [*kai to ginomenon aidion einai dei*].⁶⁶

⁶³ Compare with Aristotle, *Physics* I, 8. 191a25-33.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 213.

⁶⁵ The reference is to *Metaphysics* II, 2, 994a-b.

⁶⁶ Alexander of Aphrodisias, In Metaphysicam, 213.
To sum up, according to Alexander *ex nihilo nihil fit* means that every generation is preceded by [a] matter and [b] an active cause, and both of them must be eternal in a sense.

Alexander's commentaries on Aristotle were studied and considered to be authoritative by Maimonides, as we know from one of his letters to Shmuel ben Yehuda ibn Tibbon (who translated the *Guide* from Arabic into Hebrew):

The works of Aristotle are the roots and foundations of all works on the sciences. But they cannot be understood except with the help of commentaries, those of Alexander of Aphrodisias, those of Themistius, and those of Averroes.⁶⁷

Moreover, the influence of Alexander's interpretation of *ex nihilo nihil fit* can be traced in a passage of GP where Maimonides actually expounds an argument in favour of the eternity of the world:

Before the world came into being, its production in time must have been either possible or necessary or impossible. Now if it was necessary, the world could not have been nonexistent. If its production in time was impossible, it could not be true that it ever would exist. And if it was possible, what was the substratum for this possibility? For there indubitably must be an existent thing that is the substratum of this possibility and in virtue of which it is said of the thing that it is possible. This is a very powerful method for establishing the eternity of the world. ⁶⁸

The influence of Alexander can be detected in the way Maimonides refutes a

possible counter-argument in the continuation of the text:

However, an intelligent man from among the later Mutakallimūn thought that he had solved the difficulty. He said: Possibility resides in the agent and not in the thing that is the object of the action. This, however, is no reply, for there are two possibilities. For with respect to everything produced in time, the possibility of its being produced precedes in time the thing itself. And similarly in the agent that produced it, there is the possibility to produce that which it has produced before it has done so. These are indubitably two possibilities: a possibility in the matter to become that particular thing, and a possibility in the agent to produce that particular thing.⁶⁹

This quotation shows that Maimonides shared Alexander's view that according to Aristotelian physics every generation must be preceded by [a] matter [b]

⁶⁷ Cf. Alexander Marx, "Texts by and about Maimonides," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 25 (1934): 378.

⁶⁸ *GP* II, 14 tr. Pines, 287.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

an active cause.⁷⁰ Moreover, he refused the reduction of the principle to [b] offered by a Muslim theologian as a solution to the problem of the eternity. This kind of reworking first principles is not a legitimate answer to philosophical and theological problems according to Maimonides. If you accept *ex nihilo nihil fit*, you have to accept it with all its consequences, even if you do not like all of them.

Now let us turn back to the proof for the existence of God on the basis of the non-eternity of the world. The argument can be reconstructed in the following way:

(15) The world is not pre-eternal. $[\sim(1)]$

(16) The world was generated some time ago [(15)]

(17) Every generation is preceded by [a] matter and [b] an active cause. [This is the "first intelligible" *ex nihilo nihil fit.*]

(18) Therefore the world is preceded by [a] matter and [b] an active cause. [(16) and (17)]

(19) At least one thing besides God existed before the generation of the world. [Cf. (18); God cannot be both matter and active cause, due to His unity rather than multiplicity: see (2)*.]

Now if we add a premise that would be accepted by virtually every monotheist theologian, ⁷¹ we get a nice indirect demonstration of the eternity of the world:

(20) All the beings except God can be called "world." [additional premise]

(21) The world existed before the generation of the world. [(19) and (20)]

(22) But this is clearly absurd; therefore, we have to reject (15).

I did not find the argument in this form in any sources.⁷² However, a widespread $proof^{73}$ for the eternity of the world based on the eternity of the first

⁷⁰ That the principle *ex nihilo nihil fit* is really at sake when Maimonides is speaking about the argument "from the possibility" is shown by the words of his refutation of the argument in *GP* II, 17: "We shall make a similar assertion with regard to the possibility that must of necessity precede everything that is generated. For this is necessary in regard to this being that is stabilized – *in this being everything that is generated is generated from some being*." (Emphasis mine; tr. Pines, 297)

⁷¹ If you do not accept this premise, then you cannot exclude the possibility of other divine beings besides God.

 $^{^{72}}$ However, Gersonides in *Milhamot ha-shem* VI, 1, 17 presents an argument that deduces – if I understand correctly this rather difficult text – the pre-eternity of the world from the pre-eternity of the matter, since matter cannot exists without form, and if you resists to call this pre-existent mixture of

matter seems to imply steps (19-22) as well. This proof consists of proving the eternity of first matter by *ex nihilo nihil fit*, and having done that, it is taken for granted that the eternity *of the world* is demonstrated.⁷⁴ Therefore it is not an anachronistic hypothesis that the kind of reasoning elaborated above (15-22) was implicitly included by Maimonides and his contemporaries as an inference from the eternity of the first matter to the eternity of the world.

If this hypothesis is right, then the well-known and wide spread "argument from the first matter" – based on the premise *ex nihilo nihil fit* – was meant to be an *indirect* demonstration of the eternity of the world.⁷⁵ But if this is true then the first two steps must have been:

- (23) The world was generated. [supposition to be refuted]
- (24) Every generation must be preceded by something. ["first intelligible"]

That means that this indirect demonstration of the eternity of the world is based on the same premises as the inference of God's existence from the creation of the world! Hence, the two arguments are bound together: if you wish to accept the second, you cannot reject the first. If God exists then the world must be eternal.

I cannot prove by decisive textual evidence that Maimonides was aware of this striking parallel or in fact identity of the two arguments. However, it has been shown in this section that none of his statements exclude this possibility. Perhaps it is not useless to summarise the textual evidence at the end of this section:

According to Maimonides if you accept *ex nihilo nihil fit*, you have to accept all of its consequences (cf. the rejection of the Mutakallim in *GP* II, 14 (3) quoted on page 35). It is clearly indicated in *GP* II, 17 that *ex nihilo nihil fit* has a crucial role in

matter and form "world," then you have to call it "god." See Levi ben Gerson, *Milchamot Ha-schem: Die Kämpfe Gottes* (Leipzig: Carl B. Lorck, 1866), 362.

⁷³ Cf. Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity, Creation...*, 13-16.

⁷⁴ Maimonides presents the argument thus: "He [Aristotle] asserts that the first matter, which is common to the four elements, is not subject to generation and passing-away. For if the first matter were subject to generation, it would have to have a matter out of which it would be generated. And it is necessarily would follow that the generated matter would have to be endowed with form, for the latter is the true reality of generation. But we have assumed that the matter in question was a matter not endowed with form. Now such matter necessarily must not be generated from some thing. It is consequently eternal and not liable to be destroyed. *These considerations too render obligatory the eternity of this world*." (*GP* II, 14; tr. Pines, 286; emphasis mine.) Maimonides do not tell us how to infer from the pre-existence of the first matter the eternity of the world.

⁷⁵ Davidson has come to the same conclusion through a totally different reasoning. Cf. *Proofs for Eternity, Creation...*, 12-13.

Aristotle's proving of the eternity of the first matter and the world (cf. note 70). Moreover, it was also a well-known fact in his age (cf. note 73). Maimonides explicitly stated that *ex nihilo nihil fit* is the additional premise needed to prove God's existence from the creation of the world (cf. *GP* II, 2; cited *supra*) Thus, all the elements needed to prove (i) are present in the text of *GP*.

Second Part of the Argument: (ii) and (iii)

Since the principle *ex nihilo nihil fit* had a crucial role in one of the proofs for the eternity of the world (and moreover, it was a well-known fact in the Middle Ages), several Christian and Muslim theologians decided to give up the universal validity of this "first intelligible." We have already seen the example of a certain Mutakallim (Muslim theologian) quoted by Maimonides, who wanted to limit the validity of *ex nihilo nihil fit* to the active cause. We have seen that Maimonides refused this solution. A more profound way of reasoning for the limitations of *ex nihilo nihil fit* was developed by John Philoponus.

Simplicius reports in his commentary on Aristotle's *Physics* that Philoponus in his work against Proclus denied the universal validity of *ex nihilo nihil fit*. He argued that the principle was valid in the domain of nature, while the creation of the world had been not a natural but a divine act:

First of all, he [Philoponus] says, even if nature brings forth the things that are created by her [*ta hyp' autēs dēmiourgoumena*] out of the existing things [*ex ontōn*] – since she possesses both her substance and her power [*energeia*] in a substrate and she is not able to exist nor to act [*energein*] outside this [substrate] –, it is not necessary that God (who possesses both his substance and his power independently of any existing thing) should create out of the existing things [*ex ontōn dēmiourgein*] as well. [...] Hence, it is not necessary that if the things generated by nature [*ta ginomena hypo physeōs*] are being generated out of existing things [*ex ontōn ginetai*], then even the things generated directly⁷⁶ by God should be generated out of existing things.⁷⁷

The argument is clear enough: creation is not a natural generation and *ex nihilo nihil fit* applies only to natural generations. Therefore the eternity of the first matter cannot be demonstrated by *ex nihilo nihil fit*.

⁷⁶ Philoponus probably refers to the notion that even things generated by nature are in fact generated by God, nature being just an intermediary between God and the things. However, creation of the world was not realised through intermediaries but a direct action on the part of God.

⁷⁷ Simplicii In Aristotelis Physicorum Libros Quattuor Posteriores Commentaria, Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca, ed. Hermann Diels, vol. 10 (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1895) 1141.

This idea found its way into the literature of Muslim theologians.⁷⁸ Maimonides was probably acquainted with it as well, since echoes of it can be discerned in *GP* II, 17. However, what we find in Maimonides is a much more elaborated and developed argument that cannot be considered simply as an adaptation of Philoponus' or one of the Kalam writers' thought.

"Maimonides' Principle"

I would venture the conjecture that Al-Ghazali's argument against the philosophers' proof for the existence of God (cited above) might have had a decisive influence on the formation of Maimonides' view concerning the validity of Aristotelian principles at the time of the creation. Both Maimonides and Al-Ghazali point out a "composition fallacy" in the argument of their opponents. Al-Ghazali formulated clearly the principle that

(14)* It is not necessary that everything that is true of the individual units is true of the totality. (*wa-laisa kullu ma śadaqa 'ala l-ā<u>h</u>ādi yalzamu an yaśduqu 'ala l-majmū'i*)⁷⁹

Using this principle, Maimonides could develop a more systematic and conceptualised way of limiting the validity of Aristotelian premises. The term "generation" was always applied by Aristotle and his followers to generation of individual things within the universe, that is, to the parts of the world. Therefore on the basis of $(14)^*$ we can say

(25) It is not necessary that the principles that are true of the generations of the parts of the world are true of the generation of the world itself as well.

However, this formulation is not as precise as it should be. The phrase "the generations of the parts of the world" can be understood as a reference to the difference between the creation of the world *ab origine* and to the creation of the different parts of the world. This is contrary to our original intention, which was to

⁷⁸ Davidson refers to 'Abd al-Jabbār, Juwaynī and Jābir ibn <u>H</u>ayyan (who lived before Maimonides), cf. *Proofs for Eternity, Creation...*, 30.

contrast the "normal," natural process of generation with the creation of the world, and not the creation of the parts with the creation of the whole. Therefore (25) must be modified:

(25)* It is not necessary that the principles that are true of the generations of the parts of the world *after the world has been created* are true of the generation of the world itself.

This idea seems to be at work when he is refuting the Aristotelian proofs from matter and movement. Here we can see clearly that the distinction between "generation of the part" and "generation of the whole" is really important:

He [Aristotle] said that the first matter is subject to neither generation nor passing away and began to draw inferences in favor of this thesis from the things subject to generation and passing away and to make it clear that it was impossible that the first matter was generated. And this is correct. For we do not maintain that that the first matter is generated as man is generated from the seed or that it passes away as passes away into dust. But we maintain that God has brought it into existence from nothing and that after being brought into existence, it was as it is now – I mean [...] it is not subject to generation as are the things generated from it, nor to passing-away as are the things that pass away into it, but is created from nothing. [...] We likewise say the same thing of motion. For he has inferred from the nature of motion that motion is not subject to generation and passing-away. And this is correct. For we maintain that after motion has come into existence with the nature characteristic of it when it has become stable, one cannot imagine that it should come to being as a whole, as partial motions come into being and perish.⁸⁰

However, at the beginning of the chapter he introduces the principle in a more generalised form, in which the distinction between part and whole is not present any longer:

(26) It is not necessary that the principles that are true of any thing *after* its generation are true of it *during* its generation.

The reason for this change of formulation is that the generalised version works even in the domain of nature, and it can be proved by induction. Now if regarding

⁷⁹ Cf. *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, 83; quoted above. Marmura's translation: "Not everything that is true of the individual units is true of the totality."

⁸⁰ GP II, 17; tr. Pines, 297.

natural generation, you cannot draw any inference from the final state of the generated thing to the process of generation, how more it must be true of creation that is not a natural process at all! This is Maimonides' point in the first part of *GP* II, 17:

In the case of everything produced in time, which is generated after not having existed – even in those cases in which the matter of the thing was already existent and in the course of the production of the thing had merely put off one and put on another form – the nature of that particular thing after it has been produced in time, has attained its final state, and achieved stability, is different from its nature when it is being generated and is beginning to pass from potentiality to actuality.⁸¹

This principle has been labelled "Maimonides' Principle" by Oliver Leaman, and this phrase will be adopted in this paper as well as a *terminus technicus* signifying the argument of *GP* II, 17. Leaman writes:

Maimonides appreciates that he cannot just apply the notion of creation *ex nihilo* to an Aristotelian model of the world, so he constructs a principle (which will be called 'Maimonides' Principle') that will allow him to be an Aristotelian at the sublunar level and a believer in God at the supralunar level. The Principle is 'No inference can be drawn in any respect from the nature of a thing after it has been generated, has attained its final state, and has achieved stability in its most perfect state, to the state of that thing while it moved toward being generated... nor... to its state before it begins to move thus' (*GP* II, 17; 295).⁸²

The most remarkable feature of his argument is that he systematically separates the realm of creation from the realm of nature. No necessary inference is possible from the one to the other. He implies that since our knowledge is based on the present nature of the world, we know nothing of the creation of the world. (Or, to put it in a more precise way, all we know about creation is known through revelation and not through science.) That this consideration applies to *ex nihilo nihil fit* as well is clearly indicated in the following passage:

We shall make a similar assertion with regard to the possibility that must of necessity precede everything that is generated. For this is necessary in regard to this being that is stabilized – *in this being*⁸³ *everything that is generated is generated from some being*. But in the case of a thing created from nothing,

⁸¹ Tr. Pines, 294. In the continuation of the text Maimonides argues for his principle by induction, examples taken from biology. After that he relates a kind of Robinson Crusoe-story (being very popular in contemporary Arabic literature) about a boy who has been brought up on an unpopulated island by his father and has never seen any woman and pregnancy. When he is informed by his father about the multiplication of the human species, he rejects the concept of pregnancy by correct proofs. This story is meant as a parable about Aristotle's proofs against creation.

⁸² Leaman, Moses Maimonides, 68.

⁸³ "in this being" (fi hādā l-maujūd) means "in the present state of the world."

neither the senses nor the intellect point to something that must be preceded by its possibility.⁸⁴

Now let us quote once more Maimonides' argument for the existence of God from the premise of non-eternity:

If the sphere is subject to generation and corruption, it is the deity, may His name be sublime, who brought it into existence after its having been nonexistent. This is a first intelligible, for everything that exists after having been nonexistent must have of necessity someone who has brought into existence – it being absurd that it should bring itself into existence. ⁸⁵

Why is it of necessity, one might ask, that there must have been someone who brought the world into existence? Yes, it is absurd "that it should bring itself into existence," if we accept the first intelligible *ex nihilo nihil fit*. But the validity of this principle does not transcend the domain of the present "stable" nature of the world. Therefore it loses its demonstrative force if we apply it to the creation of the world – that was Maimonides' point in *GP* II, 17. There is no way out of this difficulty. The only sound conclusion can be drawn is that the existence of God cannot be inferred "of necessity" from the creation of the world. "Maimonides' Principle" has destroyed the proof for the existence of God.

And this conclusion – although not stated explicitly – is hinted at quite clearly by Maimonides himself. At the end of chapter 17 of the second part of GPMaimonides presents an imagined dialogue between an Aristotelian philosopher and a Jew. The former is arguing for the eternity of the world, the latter for creation:

However, should Aristotle, I mean to say he who adopts his opinion, argue against us by saying: If the existent $[h\bar{a}\underline{d}\bar{a}\ l-mauj\bar{u}d]^{86}$ provides no indication for us,⁸⁷ how do you know that it is generated and that *there has existed another nature that has generated it* – we should say: This is not obligatory for us in view of what we wish to maintain. For at present we do not wish to establish as true that the world is created in time. But what we wish to establish is the possibility of its being created in time.⁸⁸

"Aristotle" asks two questions: (a) How can you prove that the world has been created if no inference can be drawn from the present state of the world? (b) How can

⁸⁴ Ibid., 297. Emphasis is mine.

⁸⁵ cf. note 43.

⁸⁶ Or "this being," *i.e.* the present state of the world, cf. note 83.

⁸⁷ Or "prove nothing to us" (*lā yadullunā*); the verb used is from the same stem as the noun *dalīl*, a technical term for demonstration, cf. Arthur Hyman, "Demonstrative, Dialectical and Sophistical Arguments in the Philosophy of Moses Maimonides," in *Moses Maimonides and His Time*, ed. Eric L. Ormsby (Washington, D. C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1990), 42.

⁸⁸ Tr. Sh. Pines (p. 298); emphasis is mine.

you prove the existence of God if no inference can be drawn from the present state of the world? Maimonides' answer to question (a) is that we cannot prove that the world has been created, but this is not our purpose at all. Our purpose is simply to show that it is not impossible that the world has been created. Now what his answer was to question (b) is not stated in the text. But we can have little doubt that the implied answer follows the same pattern as the answer to question (a), that is, "we cannot prove that God exists; all we can prove is that it is not impossible that He (may His name be sublime!) exists."

The text quoted above from GP clearly testifies that Maimonides recognised the problem and that he did not wish to state his answer in clear terms. This textual evidence is enough to show that (ii) is present in the text of GP.⁸⁹ Moreover it also proves that (D)⁹⁰ was not considered by Maimonides to be a sheer absurdity.

To put it in a formal way, his argument can be outlined thus:

(26) It is not necessary that the principles that are true of any thing *after* its generation are true of it *during* its generation. [This is "Maimonides' Principle" proved by induction.]

(27) It is not necessary that the principles that are true of the world, as we know it today were true during its creation. [from (26)]

(28) The conclusion of any argument based on principles mentioned in (27) is not necessarily true if it concerns the period before the world has achieved its final form.

(29) But any proof for the existence of God based on the premise of the non-eternity of the world and other physical or metaphysical statements (that is, statements that are true of the world as we know it today) belongs to the type of arguments mentioned in (28).

(30) Therefore no proof for the existence of God based on the premise of the noneternity of the world and other premises that are true of this world is valid of necessity.

The problem caused by *ex nihilo nihil fit* in the demonstration of God's existence was partly recognised by a thirteenth-century commentator, Yosef ben

⁸⁹ As for (iii), we have already seen that "Maimonides' Principle" applies to all propositions that are based on our experience of this world, that is, virtually all metaphysical and physical statements. ⁹⁰ "The world is not pre-eternal and there is no God;" cf. page 25.

Shem Tov ibn Falaqera, as well. Commenting on Maimonides' proof for the existence of God he notes:⁹¹

And what he [Maimonides] says that it is a first intelligible [muskal rishon] that what is produced in time cannot produce itself [ki ha-mehuddash lo yehaddesh 'acmo]⁹² – this should be reconsidered since [a] apparently this (principle) cannot be admitted without research, and since [b] we find that some of the ancients say that things can be produced in time out of themselves [ha-devarim mithaddeshim me-'acmam].

Falaqera clearly rejects Maimonides' claim that *ex nihilo nihil fit* is a self-evident principle ("first intelligible") that may be known without any further research, and that is corroborated by the consensus of everybody. Therefore, Falaqera indicates, something is wrong with Maimonides' argument. However, he did not develop this point further.

Nevertheless, the fact that "Maimonides' Principle" destroys his argument for the existence of God from the premise of the creation was not left unnoticed by medieval scholars. Gersonides (Rabbi Levi ben Gershon, or RaLBaG, 1288-1344) argued for a *limited* acceptance of the Principle. According to him, there must be some invariable metaphysical principles to which the Principle does not apply. One of them is *ex nihilo nihil fit*. Consequently, Gersonides gave up creation *ex nihilo* (since it was untenable due to the invariability of *ex nihilo nihil fit*), and developed a doctrine of creation out of pre-existent matter (see chapter four for details). In his polemics against Maimonides he referred to the fact that the unqualified acceptance of the Principle resulted in undesired theological consequences:

Moreover, if this Principle [*haqdama*] is accepted in its universal form, then it will not allow us to investigate into the [process of the] generation of this existent [*ha-nimca*], and thus it will destroy our investigation pertaining to what is *after* its generation. But in this case we are not benefited at all from the supposition that the world was created in time [*mehuddash*], because we are not able to prove those beliefs for the sake of which it was necessary to believe that the world was created in time; as the Rav More [Maimonides] himself has mentioned, namely, that the demonstrations are [based solely on principles that are valid] after the world has come into being.⁹³ Now if [the principles that are valid] after the world has come into being are solely due to

⁹¹ Ibn Falaqera, *Sefer More ha-More* (A Guide for the Guide) (Pressburg: Anton Edlen v. Schmid, 1837), 43.

⁹² I render these Hebrew words as Pines rendered their Arabic equivalents.

⁹³ The reference is probably to *GP* I, 71: "there is no possible inference proving His existence, may He be exalted, except those deriving from this existent [$h\bar{a}d\bar{a}$ l-mauj $\bar{u}d$]" (tr. Pines, 183; Munk, 88a; Joel, 126)

the nature of this existent [*teva ha-meciut*] – as it appears from this Principle – then there is no proof which will lead to those beliefs to be demonstrated.⁹⁴

Gersonides carefully avoids the explanation of what are these "beliefs to be demonstrated." However, we can have little doubt that he alludes to the existence, unity, and incorporeality of God. His argument is clear in spite of his difficult way of expression. If there is absolutely no inference from the present state of the universe to its creation since all the principles are due to the present state of the world ("this existent," "the nature of this existent"), then God's existence cannot be inferred from the creation of the world either, and thus we cannot prove that there was a God at the time of the creation.

If this interpretation is correct, then a reconstruction of a concealed *philosophical debate* between Maimonides and Gersonides has been carried out here. The methodology proposed in the introduction has helped us in unveiling an interesting and important philosophical discourse that has been apparently unnoticed by modern scholars. Thus, Oliver Leaman's charge that the searching for an esoteric meaning in *GP* is not interesting from a philosophical point of view is answered in the proper way.

Conclusion

In the text of *GP* an argument is implied according to which the existence of God cannot be demonstrated if the world is not pre-eternal. However, Maimonides clearly refrained from expressing this idea in an open way. On the other hand, he hinted at it quite clearly. Therefore, this idea can be considered as a part of the secret teaching of Maimonides.

If an opponent objects that my reconstruction of Maimonides' argument is highly hypothetical and it is nothing more than reading some modern ideas into a medieval text, I could answer him or her in the following way. The structure of Maimonides' hidden argument according to our reconstruction is strictly parallel with Al-Ghazali's *explicit* argument. Therefore, the structure of the argument is not guilty of being anachronistic, since it is attested from the beginning of the twelfth century. As for the propositions that are contained in the argument, they are all based on

⁹⁴ Gersonides, *Milhamot ha-shem*, 367 [VI, 1, 17]. Some comments on the translation: [we-]la-ze in the first sentence seems to be the Hebrew equivalent of Arabic *li-hādā* meaning "therefore, for this

explicit statements of Maimonides, except (19-22). Therefore part (i) of our reconstruction is hypothetical, although not anachronistic as it was shown in the proper place. As for part (ii) and (iii) of our reconstruction textual evidence (*GP* II, 17) clearly indicates that our interpretation is right.

Moreover, the basic idea of our interpretation was formulated by Gersonides as an objection against the unlimited acceptance of "Maimonides' Principle." Thus a medieval authority attests the main point of the reconstruction proposed here. At the same time, the methodology outlined in the introduction has opened the way to the discovery of a "secret" philosophical discourse or debate that *did* take place between Maimonides and Gersonides, although it was not expressed in an open way.

reason." The idiom *we-ze she-* in the middle of the passage is probably meant to be the equivalent of Arabic *wa-<u>d</u>ālika anna* "that is to say, namely."

Chapter II The Validity of "Maimonides' Principle"

A serious objection can be raised against the argument of the previous chapter. Our interpretation was based on the conviction that "Maimonides' Principle"* has a central and indispensable role in the argument of *GP*. However, this statement has been heavily criticised by Leonard S. Kravitz, in his recent book *The Hidden Doctrine of Maimonides' Guide for the Perplexed*. Kravitz is of the opinion that the argument of *GP* II, 17 based on "Maimonides' Principle" was not meant by its author to be a valid refutation of the Aristotelian arguments against the eternity of the world. On the contrary, he states, Maimonides did accept the eternity of the world; moreover, the eternity of the world was *the* cornerstone of his hidden doctrine. Consequently, all the texts in *GP* that seem to deny or argue against the eternity of the world should be considered as representing "exoteric doctrine," a "compromise towards orthodoxy" or even a Platonic "noble lie." Moreover, "Maimonides' Principle" is in contradiction with some basic principles laid down in *GP*. Therefore, it cannot be accepted as a valid philosophical argument.

In this chapter I will try to defend my interpretation outlined in the previous chapter against this type of criticism, and try to show that the Principle is a valid philosophical argument, and Maimonides had no reason to think of it otherwise. Thus Kravitz's interpretation is untenable. In the fifth chapter I will challenge the widely accepted assumption that Maimonides' esoteric doctrine was the eternity of the world.

Kravitz's Interpretation

Kravitz's reasoning can be outlined in the following way: (1) According to *GP*, there is a huge difference between the Kalam-type of arguments and the philosophical arguments. (2) Maimonides considered all Kalam-type arguments to be invalid. (3) The argument against eternity based on "Maimonides' Principle" in fact belongs to the Kalam-group. (4) Therefore, Maimonides could not consider it to be a valid argument.

^{* &}quot;Maimonides' Principle": This term was coined by Oliver Leaman. The principle that no inference should be drawn from the present, stabilised nature of the world to the time of its creation is meant by that. A detailed discussion of the Principle is to be found in the previous chapter.

Now let us examine Kravitz's reasoning step by step. First Kravitz rephrases Maimonides' criticism of Muslim theology, that is, Kalam:

These Kalam thinkers do not follow the world as it is; for them it provides no evidence. [...] More than that: imagination lies at the core of Kalam thinking, for the Mutakallimun hold to the notion of admissibility. Whatever can be imagined is for them possible. But imagination, as Maimonides prolixedly proclaims, is no measure of truth. Unlike the intellect which man shares with the Divine, imagination is that which he shares with the beast.⁹⁵

The notion of "admissibility" $(tajw\bar{i}z)^{96}$ is the key-term of the Kalam school. Maimonides describes the most characteristic feature of the Mutakallimun's way of reasoning in the following way:

This is the main proposition of the science of kalam. Listen to its meaning. They are of the opinion that everything that may be imagined is an admissible notion for the intellect. For instance, it is admissible from the point of view of intellect that it should come about that the sphere of the earth should turn into a heaven endowed with circular motion and that the heaven should turn into the sphere of the earth.⁹⁷

It must be noted that the term 'imagination' is not used by the Mutakallimun themselves as a criterion for deciding what is possible and what is not. The Mutakallimun claim that it is reason (*`aql*) what they regard to be the criterion. However, Maimonides – following Al-Farabi – comments that what the Mutakallimun call 'reason' is in fact imagination.⁹⁸ Moreover, Maimonides points out, there is no consensus between the Mutakallimun about the precise borderlines of admissibility, although most of them agree that logical impossibilities are not "admissible."

Now, since everything is possible that is imaginable – according to Maimonides' reconstruction of the doctrine – there is no principle except Divine Will that could decide which possibility is to be realised and which is not. There are no laws in nature: every single event is preceded by a single, individual decision of God. What might appear to us to be natural laws are in fact "habits," that is, the habits of God Himself.

⁹⁵ Leonard S. Kravitz, *The Hidden Doctrine of Maimonides' Guide for the Perplexed* (Lewiston, N. Y.: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1988) 51-52.

⁹⁶ On the sources of Maimonides' presentation of this doctrine, see the following: Harry A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1976), 434-444; Harry Blumberg, "Ha-RaMBaM al mussag '*al-tajwīz*' be-shittatam shel ha-mutakallimun" (Maimonides on the Kalam Doctrine of *Tajwīz*), *Tarbiz* 39 (1970): 268-276.

⁹⁷ GP I, 73 (10) Tr. Pines, 206; Munk, 112b, Joel, 144.

⁹⁸ Cf. Alfarabi's Philosophische Abhandlungen, tr. Fr. Dietrici (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1892), 63-64.

For they say of the existent things (...) that their being as they are is merely in virtue of the continuance of a habit. In the same way it is the habit of a sultan not to pass through the market places of the city except on horseback, and he has never been seen doing it in way other than this. However, it is not held impossible by the intellect that he should walk on foot in the city; rather it is undoubtly possible, and this is admissible that this should occur. They say that the fact that earth moves toward the center and fire upwards or the fact that fire burns and water cools is in a similar way due to the continuance of a habit.⁹⁹

However, as Maimonides notes, the philosophers are not satisfied with this theory of possibility:

Yet the philosophers say that when you [i.e. the Mutakallimun] call a thing "impossible," it is because it cannot be imagined, and when you call a thing "possible," it is because it can be imagined. Thus what is possible according to you is possible only from the point of view of the imagination and not from that of the intellect.

Now, imagination according to the philosophers is not a reliable witness for the determination of the circles of "possible" and "impossible." Imagination is, in fact, contrary to the intellect; hence, it should be avoided in theoretical discussions:

[...] you already know that imagination exists in most living beings. [...] Accordingly, man is not distinguished by having imagination; and the act of imagination is not the act of intellect but rather its contrary.

On the other hand, a philosophical argument is characterised by its total independence of the imagination. "Possibility" is an *intellectual* concept in the vocabulary of the philosophers; the domain of genuine possibilities is much narrower than the domain of the imaginative possibilities.

However, an important question arises at this point. What are the criteria by means of which one can distinguish the intellectual and imaginative possibilities? How to make a distinction between intellect and imagination? If someone answers that the difference is intuitive, the question arises: "And what is the nature of this intuition? Is it intellectual or imaginative? It is a tautology to say that a concept is intellectual, if and only if an intellectual intuition renders it intellectual!" Hence, it appears that a third thing is needed, not identical with either imagination or intellect to solve the problem. As we will see latter, Kravitz fails to understand the significance of this question.

Maimonides introduces a version of the "principle of plenitude"¹⁰⁰ as a solution to this problem. The "third thing" is reality itself. An intellectual concept becomes intellectual by the fact that there is something in reality that corresponds to it, while this is not the case with imagination. Reality testifies – as he expresses himself – in a specific way, which possibilities are genuine and which are not. Every genuine possibility must be realised sometimes, in some ways. A possibility that is never realised is not a genuine possibility at all, but is merely an imaginative one. Thus, *al-wujūd*, or $h\bar{a}d\bar{a}$ *l-maujūd*, that is, "reality," "that-which-exists," or "the existent" is the criterion that determines the genuineness of a possibility.

An elaborated exposition of the notion of possibility and the "principle of plenitude" can be found in Maimonides' letter to Shmuel ben Yehuda ibn Tibbon:

When a species is said to be possible, it is necessary that it exists in reality in certain individuals of this species, for if it never existed in any individual, it would be impossible for the species, and what right would one have for saying that it is possible? If, for example, we say that writing is a thing possible for the human race, it is necessary then that there are people who write at a certain time, for if one believed that there is never any man who writes, that would be saying that writing is impossible for the human race. It is not the same when possibility is applied to individuals, for if we say that it is possible that this child writes or does not write, it does not follow from this possibility that the child must necessarily write at one particular moment. Therefore, the claim that a species is possible is not, strictly speaking, to place the species in the category of possibility, but rather to claim that it is in some ways necessary.¹⁰¹

This notion of possibility can be paralleled by one of Peter Abaelard's formulations:

Quod enim in uno particularium videmus contingere, id in omnibus eiusdem speciei individuis posse contingere credimus; potentiam enim et impotentiam secundum naturam accipimus, ut id tantum quisque possit succipere quod eius natura permittit, idque non possit succipere quod eius natura expellit. Cum

¹⁰⁰ This term was coined by Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936), 52. However, his original idea was heavily criticised by Jaakko Hintikka, "Gaps in the Great Chain of Being: An Exercise in the Methodology of the History of Ideas," in *Reforging the Great Chain of Being*, ed. Simo Knuuttila (Dordrecht, etc.: D. Reidel, 1981), 1-18. Hintikka transformed the original idea to a considerable extent in his *Time and Necessity: Studies in Aristotle's Theory of Modality* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973). Hintikka's interpretation has been extended by Simo Knuuttila to the medieval philosophers as well, see his "Time and Modality in Scholasticism," in *Reforging the Great Chain of Being...*, 163-257, and his *Modalities in Medieval Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1993).

¹⁰¹ As quoted by Oliver Leaman, *Moses Maimonides* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 58. The restriction of the principle of plenitude is at least partly due to an attempt to avoid the deterministic consequences of the principle, see Charles H. Manekin, "Problems of Plenitude in Maimonides and Gersonides," in *A Straight Path: Studies in Medieval Philosophy and Culture, Essays in Honor of Arthur Hyman* (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1988), 183-194.

autem omnia eiusdem speciei particularia eiusdem sint naturae – unde etiam dicitur ipsa species tota individuorum substantia esse –, idem omnia recipere potentia sunt et impotentia.¹⁰²

However, it must be noticed that there is a slight difference between the two approaches. Abaelard's formulation does not imply that it is *necessary* that all the possibilities of the species will be realised sooner or later by at least one individual. Abaelard only *permits* the inference from the realised possibilities of one individual to the unrealised possibilities of another of the same species. On the other hand, Maimonides emphasises that the individuals must realise all the possibilities of the species. In his vision possibility is not a purely logical concept but an active force inherent in the nature of the things that strives for realisation. He probably learnt this lesson from Al-Farabi (see below). His formula of "reality defines (testifies) the possibilities admissible to the intellect" is only intelligible against the background of this branch of Aristotelian tradition.

However, in *GP* I, 73 Maimonides notes that the separation of imaginative notion of possibility held by the Mutakallimun from the intellectual concept held by the philosophers might be a much more difficult problem than it appears at first sight:

Consider, thou who art engaged in speculation, and perceive that a method of profound speculation has arisen. For with regard to particular mental representations, one individual claims that they are intellectual representations, whereas another affirms that they are imaginative representations. We wish consequently to find something that would enable us to distinguish the things cognized intellectually from those imagined.

In the continuation of the text, Maimonides makes it clear that the principle of plenitude is the criterion for the philosophers. Nonetheless, the Mutakallimun do have an answer to that point:

For if the philosopher says, as he does: That which exists $[al-wuj\bar{u}d]$ is my witness and by means of it we discern the necessary, the possible, and the impossible; the adherent of the Law says to him: The dispute between us is with regard to this point. For we claim that that which exists $[h\bar{a}\underline{d}\bar{a}\ l-mauj\bar{u}d]$ was made in virtue of will and was not a necessary consequence. Now if it was made in this fashion, it is admissible that it should be made in a different way, unless intellectual representation decides, as you think it decides, that something different from what exists at present is not admissible.

¹⁰² Peter Abaelard, *Dialectica*, ed. L. M. De Rijk (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1956), 385; as quoted by Knuuttila, "Time and Modality...," 182.

Finally, Maimonides notes that this is not the whole story, and the problem of imaginative versus intellectual possibilities will reoccur in *GP*. The importance of this notice will become clear later:

This is the chapter of admissibility. And about that I have something to say, which you will learn in various passages of this Treatise. It is not something one hastens to reject in its entirety with nonchalance.¹⁰³

Now "Maimonides' Principle" can be reformulated thus:

(MP): It is *possible* that the principles governing the generation of the world are totally different from the principles governing the world after it has reached its stable nature.¹⁰⁴

Now the question might be asked: "What is the meaning of the word 'possible' in (MP)? Does it refer to imaginative or intellectual possibility?"

Maimonides would probably answer that this possibility is not a "natural" possibility. As Simo Knuuttila understands it, the argument of II, 17 is about the establishment of "supra-natural" possibilities that transcend the laws of nature as we know them. Knuuttila's interpretation implies that the principle of plenitude is applicable only to the natural possibilities but not to the supra-natural possibilities. However, if this interpretation is correct, then "Maimonides' Principle" is vulnerable to the objection that the "supra-natural" possibilities are in fact imaginative possibilities that should be disregarded in philosophical discourse. This fact may call for a criterion different from the principle of plenitude for distinguishing the imaginative possibilities from the intellectual ones.¹⁰⁵

Returning to Kravitz's argument, he claims that the argument of *GP* II, 17, belongs to the Kalam-type of arguments, since it is not based on "that which exists," but on an imaginative possibility, which is not "witnessed" by reality. This statement seems to be justified. In *GP* II, 17 Maimonides attempts to show that "the existent $[h\bar{a}\underline{d}\bar{a}\ l-mauj\bar{u}d]$ provides no indication for us" regarding the problem of the eternity *versus* creation of the world.¹⁰⁶ The usage of the very expression $h\bar{a}\underline{d}\bar{a}\ l-mauj\bar{u}d$ indicates a close relationship between the two passages (that is, II, 17 and I, 73, cited above). Moreover, it cannot be doubted that the point of the argument is that the

¹⁰³ GP I, 73 (10) Tr. Pines, 211-2; Munk, 115b-116a; Joel, 147-8.

 $^{^{104}}$ NB. in *GP* II, 17 Maimonides does not prove that it is *necessary* that the principles of creation are different from the presently valid principles. All his arguments are about to show that this possibility cannot be excluded.

¹⁰⁵ See Knuuttila, "Time and Modality...," 199-204, and 207-208.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. GP II, 17, Pines, 298; Munk, 37a; Joel, 207.

present state of the world, "that which exists," is not an absolutely reliable "witness" regarding the creation of the world. Thus, "Maimonides' Principle" shares this important characteristic with the Kalam-arguments.

This observation has been already suggested – though not explicitly stated – by one of the first commentators of the *Guide*, Moses Salerno, in the thirteenth century. In his commentary, or rather paraphrase, of *GP* II, 17 Moses Salerno writes:

And indeed, these arguments necessarily concern only those who claim that this nature...[gives an indication of its having been created in time. I have already made it known to you that I do not claim this.]

I[n other] w[ords:] our present arguments are not refuted by Aristotle as the arguments of those are refuted, who bring forth proof [for the creation] from the nature of reality about which we do not disagree [with Aristotle] as it was mentioned before. 107

This statement clearly implies that "Maimonides' Principle" is *not* "a proof from the nature of reality (*reaya mi-teva ha-meciut*, a Hebrew circumlocution for "that which exists"). And we know that the Mutakallimun were those who disregarded the nature of reality in their arguments, and this is the very reason for Maimonides' rejection of them. Maimonides accepted Themistius' formulation according to which "that which exists does not conform to the various opinions, but rather the correct opinions conform to that which exist."¹⁰⁸ Moses Salerno seems to imply that the Principle does not meet this requirement. In the continuation of the quotation the commentator calls the Principle an "admissible argument" (*te'ana efsarit*):¹⁰⁹

And when the admissibility [or possibility] of the argument has been established by our hands, that is, that our argument is admissible, I mean, that the creation of the world is admissible and not impossible, we shall go back and we shall make prevail the opinion asserting creation over the opinion asserting eternity.¹¹⁰

To sum up: "Maimonides' Principle" contains, in fact, a Kalam-type of possibility. It is based on imagination, not on the intellect But if this is so, then the whole criticism of Kalam elaborated by Maimonides in *GP* I, 71-74 does apply to "Maimonides' Principle" as well. Thus, the argument of II, 17 cannot be regarded as a

¹⁰⁷ Moshe mi-Salerno, Biur al More ha-nevukhim, MS Bodl. 1261. 231b.

¹⁰⁸ GP I, 71, tr. Pines, 179; Munk, 95b; Joel, 123.

¹⁰⁹ On the synonymy of *efsharut* and *haavara* (the latter is the "official" Hebrew translation of *tajwīz*), see Shmuel b. Yehuda Ibn Tibbon, *Perush ha-millim ha-zarot*, ed. Yehuda Even-Shmuel [Kaufmann], in *Doctor Perplexorum (Guide of the Perplexed) by Rabbi Moses Ben Maimun* (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1946), 37 [s. v. "*efshar*"].

valid philosophical argument. More than that, we have to suppose that Maimonides was aware of this fact; therefore he must not have meant the argument of GP II, 17 to be a serious objection against the eternity of the world. This is the essence of Kravitz's reasoning.

Refutation of Kravitz's Argument

Kravitz's interpretation is based on the premise that the philosophical notion of possibility can be easily distinguished from the imaginative possibilities used by the Mutakallimun, since the former is always attested by "that which exists," that is, by the principle of plenitude. In this section I will show that there are philosophical arguments (or at least claimed to be "philosophical" by Maimonides in *GP*) that are unintelligible without a concept of possibilities which are not "attested" by the principle of plenitude. If this is so, then the difference between the philosophical and Kalam notions of possibilities is not so self-evident as it might have appeared in the previous section. Moreover, I will quote a highly informative passage from *GP* that shows that Maimonides recognised the problem. If this is so, then "Maimonides' Principle" cannot be disqualified simply because of its using a concept of possibility devoid of the principle of plenitude. Kravitz has disregarded an important philosophical problem and an important passage of the *Guide*.

First we will carry out a closer analysis of the concept of possibility as it was understood in medieval Arabic philosophy.

Some Background: Al-Farabi on the Principle of Plenitude

A better understanding of the meaning and significance of the principle of plenitude in medieval Arabic philosophy can be achieved from a reading of a passage from Al-Farabi's *Aphorisms of the Statesman*. This work was quoted by Yosef ben Yehuda ibn Shimon, the most beloved disciple of Maimonides; therefore we can take it as certain that Maimonides himself also read it.¹¹¹ There is no need for special emphasis on the significance of Al-Farabian texts and ideas for Maimonidean studies. Al-Farabi was the greatest authority after Aristotle for Maimonides, as is clear from one of his letters

¹¹⁰ Moshe mi-Salerno, *Biur al More ha-nevukhim*, MS Bodl. 1261. 231b.

¹¹¹ Cf. Moritz Steinschneider, *Al-Farabi* (St. Petersburg: Kaiserliche Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1869) 70.

to Yehuda ben Shmuel Ibn Tibbon.¹¹² Al-Farabi's works are indispensable sources for understanding the intellectual background of Maimonides' thought.

The relevant passage of the text – the sixty-seventh "aphorism" of the Statesman – reads as follows:

If a thing has a lack, it is a defect in its existence. If in its existence it needs anything else, it is also a defect in existence. Everything which has a like in its species is defective in existence, since that is only possible in what does not have sufficiency for it to exist in its species alone and in what is insufficient for that existence to be completed by it alone, so that only a portion of that existence is completed by it and there is not sufficiency in it for a universal to be completed by it, as is the case with man. For, since it is impossible for the existence of man to be realised by any individual, there is need for more than one at one time. So then whatever contains sufficiency for completing a thing, has no need of a second in the case of that thing, and if a thing has sufficiency for the completion of its existence, quiddity and essence, it is impossible that there should be anything else of its species, and if that were the like of its action, nothing else would share its action.¹¹³

Although D. M. Dunlop's rendering of the Arabic original is correct and satisfactory, I think, the point of the argument becomes clearer if the key part of the text is paraphrased in the following way:

Everything which has a like in its species is defective in existence, since that is only possible in the case of those beings that do not have sufficient power for existing alone in their species. For these beings cannot realise completely [the possibilities of their species] alone, but just a part of it, since these [individuals] have no sufficient power to realise a universal completely. An example for that is man. For it is impossible for any individual man to realise [all the possibilities inherent in] the essence of man; therefore more than one individual man is needed [for the realisation of all the possibilities of the species] at the same time.

On the other hand, those things that have sufficient power for realising [their essences] completely, do not need a second [in their species, but they realise all the possibilities of their species alone]. Therefore it is impossible for these species to have more than one member.

The argument can be outlined in the following way:

(1) It is necessary that all the possibilities of a species be realised at the same

time.

(2) What is not necessary is superfluous. What is superfluous does not occur.

(3) There are two types of species. The first type has contradictory possibilities, which cannot be realised by the same individual at the same time. The

¹¹² Cf. Alexander Marx, "Texts by and about Maimonides," 378-380.

second type has no contradictory possibilities, thus they can be realised by the same individual at the same time.

(4) Therefore, it is necessary that the species belonging to the first type have many members realising *together* all the possibilities of the species at the same time. However, it is not necessary that the species of the second type have more than one member. Therefore, these species *cannot* have more than one member (cf. 2).

This reasoning has two obscure points. The first is the exact meaning and the limits of the principle "what is not necessary is superfluous." This premise is not made explicit by Al-Farabi at all, although it is quite clear that a version of it is needed for the last step of the argument.

The second dim point is the exact meaning and role of the phrase "at the same time." Al-Farabi was probably of the opinion that the heavenly bodies belong to the second type of species. For example, the Sun is the only member of the species "sun." However, it is possible for the Sun to be in several places in the sky, while it is *impossible* for it to be in *all* the possible places *at the same time*. On the other hand, the requirement that all possibilities must be realised *at the same time* is crucial for the argument, since without this how could we exclude the case of a single, everlasting man realising all the contradictory possibilities of humankind *alone*, one after the other?

Al-Farabi would probably answer these questions in the following way: The individuals belonging to the first type of species have two special possibilities, that is, generation and corruption. These possibilities must be realised. Moreover, the duration of their existence may vary from individual to individual. It is possible for man to live for 100 years or for 99 years, and so on. One everlasting man cannot realise all these possibilities. On the other hand, for the members of the second type, generation and corruption are not possible. Therefore those possibilities of theirs that cannot occur at the same time can be realised one after the other by one individual alone. Hence, these species do not need a multiplicity of individuals.

Thus an improved version of the argument would abandon the requirement "at the same time," and introduce the distinction between corruptible beings and eternal beings instead.

¹¹³ Al-Farabi, *Fusūl al-Madanī. Aphorisms of the Statesman*, ed. and tr. D. M. Dunlop (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 59 [Arabic text: p. 147.]

Our investigation into Al-Farabi's thought results in a twofold version of the principle of plenitude. "To realise all the possibilities" is not the same enterprise for the species of corruptible beings and for the species of eternal beings. We can summarise the matter in this way:

First Al-Farabian Principle: An eternal individual substance realises all the possibilities of its species.

Second Al-Farabian Principle: A non-eternal individual substance does not realise all the possibilities of its species. However, the non-realised possibilities are realised by other non-eternal individual substances that are in the same species.

After this preparation we will attempt at showing that both Avicenna and Averroes used and was aware of a type of genuine possibilities that *violated* the principle of plenitude. The "philosophers" *did* speak of some possibilities that are never to be realised. The rule of the principle of plenitude was not absolute. This statement will be the key for the refutation of Kravitz's argument.

Counterfactual Possibilities in Avicenna and Averroes

In the twelfth book of *Metaphysics* Aristotle argues for the existence of a Prime Mover that is responsible for the eternal circular movement of the heavenly bodies. A crucial step in this argument is to prove that the Prime Mover is actuality in an absolute sense without any kind of potentiality:

But if there is something which is capable of moving things or acting on them, but not actually doing so, there will not be movement; for that which has a capacity need not exercise it. Nothing, then, is gained, even if we suppose eternal substances, as the believers in the Forms do, unless there is to be in them some principle which can cause movement; and even this is not enough, nor is an other substance besides the Forms is enough; for if it does not act, there will be no movement. Further, even if it acts, this will be not enough, if its substance is potentiality; for there will be no eternal movement; for that which is potentially may possibly not be. There must, then, be such a principle, whose very substance is actuality.¹¹⁴

If we approach this text from the perspective of medieval Arabic philosophy, then the argument can be outlined in the following way: Five premises are needed:

(1) An eternal individual substance realises all its possibilities. That means the following: if S is an eternal individual substance, and the sentence "it is possible that

¹¹⁴ Metaphysics A. 6. 1071b12-20; translated by W. D. Ross and J. Barnes.

S is **P**["] is true, then the sentence "**S** is **P**["] must be true at a certain moment. (Cf. Al-Farabi's First Principle)

(2) The Prime Mover is an eternal individual substance. (Self-evident)

(3) The Prime Mover is responsible for the motion of the heavenly bodies. That is: the heavenly bodies do not move unless the Prime Mover moves them. (*ex hypothesi*)

(4) If **S** has the "capacity" or "potentially" of **P**, then *both* the sentences "it is possible that **S** is **P**" and "it is possible that **S** is *not* **P**" are true. (Self-evident)

(5) The movement of the heavenly bodies is eternal. (Proved in *Physics*)

From these premises the following statements can be deduced:

(6) If the Prime Mover has the *potentiality* of moving (and not moving) the heavenly bodies, then the sentence "it is *possible* that the Prime Mover does *not* move the heavenly bodies" is true. (Cf. 4)

(7) If it is *possible* that the Prime Mover does not move the heavenly bodies, then at a certain moment it *does not* move the heavenly bodies. (Cf. 1, 2, and 6).

(8) However, at this moment the motion of the heavenly bodies stops. (Cf. 3 and 7)

(9) But this is impossible, since the heavenly bodies are in motion for ever. (Cf. 5)

(10) Therefore, the Prime Mover has no potentiality of moving (and not moving) the heavenly bodies. His nature is pure actuality in this respect.¹¹⁵

This reconstruction can be corroborated by Averroes' interpretation of the Aristotelian text. However, in the last paragraph to be quoted, Averroes transforms the argument and through this transformation a weak point of the proof will be disclosed. Let us first quote Averroes' text (*Long Commentary on Metaphysics, Book Lam, com. 30.*):

¹¹⁵ One might ask: How is it possible that the Prime Mover *actually* does something without having the *potentiality* or capacity of doing that? This problem is discussed by Aristotle in the continuation of the text (1071b22-1072a4) concluding with the remark: "To suppose potentiality prior to actuality, then, is in a sense right, and in a sense not; and we have specified these senses."

Since this motion¹¹⁶ is eternal, and all the motions have a mover (as you have understood in the natural sciences), therefore, it is necessary that this motion has a mover, which is actual in absolute sense without being polluted by any potentiality. Indeed, it may not happen in any moment that this [mover] is a mover *in potentia*, because, if the mover or actualiser substance were not actual in an absolute sense, but it were polluted by potentiality, then there would be a moment at which no moving would come from this [mover].

And after that he [Aristotle] refers to this, saying:

"And this is to say that it would be possible, if it were potential in any sense, that it does not actualise"¹¹⁷

And he means by this:

And this is to say that if all the movers were polluted by potentiality in their substances, then it would be possible in a moment that [they] do not move [anything], since what causes motion through being moved by another mover must have something that promotes it from potentiality to actuality, and then it would be possible for this [second] mover not to settle it [*var*.: not to move it, *scil*. the first mover]¹¹⁸

The last paragraph perhaps needs some explanation. First of all an additional premise is required:

(11) If **S** has the potentiality of **P**, then **S** cannot be **P** unless there is an **X** (not identical with **S**) that actualises the potentiality. (Self-evident)

The conversion of this statement will play an important role in our argument:

(11)* If **S** is actually **P** without any potentiality in this respect, then there is no reason to suppose any additional causes for **S**'s being **P**.

In the last quoted paragraph Averroes probably means the following: Suppose that the Prime Mover's substance is "polluted" with the potentiality of moving (and not moving) of the heavenly bodies. In this case we have to suppose that there is an additional mover of the Prime Mover (a Prime Prime Mover, so to say) that actualises the Prime Mover's potentiality of moving the heavenly bodies (cf. 11). Thus the Prime Mover will move the heavenly bodies "through being moved by another mover." Now, if the mover of the Prime Mover (the Prime Prime Mover) is polluted by potentiality as well (since "all the movers are polluted with potentiality"), then it does not move the Prime Mover at a certain moment. At this moment the Prime Mover itself does not move the heavenly bodies either, and thus the heavenly bodies

¹¹⁶ I.e. the motion of the heavenly bodies.

¹¹⁷ Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* Λ . 6. 1071b13-14: *endekhtai gar to dynamin ekhon mē energein*. According to Ross' translation, "for that which has a capacity need not exercise it."

¹¹⁸ Averroes, *Tafsir Ma Ba'd At-Tabia*, ed. Maurice Bouyges, vol. 3 (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1948), 1565-1566. The variant reading referred to in square brackets is based on a medieval Hebrew translation (Paris, Bibl. Nat. MS Hebr. 887 [Or. 114]).

stop, which is impossible. Therefore, there most be an ultimate mover whose nature is totally devoid of potentiality.

One might add that there is no need for supposing a Prime Prime Mover, since "that which exists" does not attest the possibility of the Prime Mover's not moving of the heavenly bodies. Since the motion of the heaven is eternal (cf. premise 5), the possibility that the Prime Mover does not exercise its moving activity is never realised. Thus, according to the principle of plenitude (cf. premise 1), this possibility is not a possibility at all. Moreover, since (a) every *potentiality* is convertible to a sentence beginning with "it is possible..." (cf. premise 4), and (b) *it is not possible* that the Prime Mover does not move the heaven, therefore there is no reason for supposing a *potentiality* of not moving in the nature of the Prime Mover. If this is the case, then the Prime Mover does not need any additional mover to actualise its potentiality. (cf. 11*) Therefore there is no need for supposing the existence of the Prime Mover.

Now, one might ask Averroes the following question: *Is it possible that the motion of the heavenly bodies stops at a certain moment?* If the answer is "yes," then the principle of plenitude is violated, since this possibility is never realised (cf. premise 1 and 5). If the answer is "no," then we must say that the heavenly bodies have no potentiality of not moving; their nature is totally devoid of potentiality in this respect (cf. 4. and the argument about the Prime Prime Mover in the previous paragraph). But in this case there is no reason for supposing the existence of the Prime Mover that actualises their possibility of moving! (Cf. 11*)¹¹⁹

It is not satisfactory to answer that the heavenly bodies need a mover since "all the motions need a mover as you have understood in the science of physics." The point of Aristotle's argument in *Physics* excluding the possibility of self-movers is that a self-mover would be self-contradictory, since nothing can be actual and potential at the same time in the same respect (cf. *Physics* VIII, 5. 257b). However, if the heavenly bodies have no potentiality of not moving, since their nature is absolutely actual in this respect, then this self-contradiction will not arise. They can be described as "unmoved movers," since there is no reason for their movement

¹¹⁹ Cf. Al-Ghazali, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, 147-151 [Fourteenth Discussion]; and Harry A. Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1929), 273 and 535-537.

except their own nature (nothing moves them), just as - in Aristotle's account - the Prime Mover has no other cause of its moving activity except its own nature.

This problem was at least partly recognised by Avicenna. In fact, it was the reason for his rejection of the proof for the existence of God from motion and it might have been a major factor in his elaborating another argument, that is, the contingency argument. Commenting on *Metaphysics* Λ . 7. 1072b3 Avicenna criticises Abu Bishr Matta, a member of the tenth-century Baghdadian school:

Some, failing to distinguish between 'conditionally necessary' and 'strictly necessary' have mistaken the necessity here at issue for an intrinsic necessity [...] Now I ask Abu Bishr: on the assumption that it is of necessity that things are as they are, what part is there for the first cause to play in relation to them? He answers [to maintain them in] perpetual motion. But that is absurd. The part played by the First is that it is on its account that there is necessity, with no necessity accruing to anything else on account of itself. A sign of the folly of that [Baghdadian] position is that it makes necessity intrinsic to things, perpetuity extrinsic: that intrinsic necessity of theirs is not supposed to entail perpetuity; perpetuity is to be furnished from outside. But if perpetuity is bestowed on motion, does that not also make it necessary? If it were necessary by itself, would not that make it independent of its mover?¹²⁰

The Baghdadians were of the opinion that the world exists of necessity without any external cause. Thus, the only reason for our supposing a first cause is the perpetual motion of the heavenly bodies. The point of Avicenna's objection is that if we allow that the heavenly bodies can *exist* without any external cause, then it is no great matter to admit that they can move forever without any external cause. To show this the argument must be reconstructed thus:

(12) What is necessary, exists / happens without any cause. [The main premise of the Baghdadian school to be refuted by Avicenna.]

(13) What cannot possibly be otherwise is necessary. (Self-evident)

(14) The heavenly bodies exist forever, and move forever. (Proved in Physics)

(15) It is not possible that the heavenly bodies do not exist and do not move. (Cf. First Al-Farabian Principle and 14)

(16) It is necessary that the heavenly bodies exist and move. (Cf. 13 and 15.)

(17) The heavenly bodies (a) exist and (b) move without any cause. (Cf. 12 and 16.)

¹²⁰ Avicenna, *Kitāb al-Insāf* in *Aristū 'ind al-Arab*, ed. A. Badawi (Cairo: n. p., 1948), 25, as quoted by Richard Sorabji, *Matter, Space, and Motion*. (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988), 263.

Now the Baghdadians accept (17a), that is, the heaven exists without any cause, while they reject (17b), that is, the heaven moves without any cause. Thus they suppose the existence of the Prime Mover that gives account of the motion of the heaven.

However, as Avicenna points out, this is a major inconsistency. If you accept (17a), then you have to accept (17b) as well. The only way to avoid this conclusion is to reject (12) saying:

(12)* It is possible that something is necessary but cannot exist without a cause.

Thus, Avicenna introduced the distinction between "necessity on account of itself" and "necessity on account of something other" into philosophy. The First Cause is the only being that is necessary on account of itself. Nothing can exists independently of the First Cause:

Nothing exists of necessity when considered in isolation from the First. Indeed, if the tie to the First could be broken, everything would reduce to nothing. In respect of itself, everything is vain and perishes, except the face of the First Truth. (Cf. Koran 28:8)¹²¹

Thus the argument for the existence of God will show that not just the motion but the very existence of the heaven cannot be explained without a First Cause. Avicenna has succeeded in transforming the original Aristotelian argument to a considerable extant.

Averroes rejected Avicenna's proof, because the distinction of the two types of necessity *violates the principle of plenitude*. If the heaven has the potentiality of non-being *and* the heaven is eternal, then there is a possibility that will never be realised, that is, the non-being of the heaven. If Avicenna were right, then the heaven would be an eternal contingent being. Now, a *locus classicus* for the principle of plenitude is *De Caelo* I, 12, where Aristotle proves that it is inconceivable to suppose an eternal contingent being.¹²² Averroes refers to this text:

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² If an eternal being has the possibility of destruction, then this possibility would never be realised; therefore, there is no eternal contingent being.

Now in the proposition here assumed, according to which the power of any body is finite, it can be doubted whether it applies to the celestial body or not. If it does, then the power of the celestial body will be finite, but what has finite power is destructible...

This first question at least is very difficult and full of snags. And Alexander answers in some of his treatises, and says that the celestial body receives eternity from its mover, who is not enmattered.

But this would make it something that can be destroyed, yet never will be destroyed. This is Plato's opinion too, that is, that there is something eternal which can be destroyed. But Aristotle proved at the end of the first book of the *de Caelo et Mundo* that there could not be anything eternal that contained a potentiality for destruction.

• • •

Now Avicenna heard these words of Aristotle after already hearing the words of Alexander, and he thought there were two ways of being necessary, that is, necessary in dependence on another while merely possible of itself, and necessary of itself – necessary through another like the heaven, necessary of itself like the movers of the heaven.¹²³

However, Averroes had to admit that even if the existence of the heavenly bodies was not "necessary through another," the *perpetual motion* of them *was* necessary through another. This statement implies that the cessation of the heavenly motion is *a possibility that will never be realised*:

Therefore it is not correct to say that there is something contingent by itself and eternal and necessary by something else as Ibn Sina says that the necessary is partly necessary by itself and partly necessary by something else, except for the motion of the heaven only. It is not possible that there should be something contingent by its essence but necessary on account of something else, because the same thing cannot have a contingent existence on account of its essence and receive a necessary existence from something else, namely the mover; if motion is eternal, it must be so on account of an immovable mover, either by essence or by accident, so that motion possesses permanence on account of something else, but substance on account of itself. Therefore there cannot be a substance contingent by itself but necessary by something else, but this is possible in the case of motion.¹²⁴

This passage shows that Averroes accepts that

(12a) What is necessary, exists without any cause.

Thus he differs from Avicenna in this respect, but as for the second part of (12) he agrees with Avicenna and disagrees with the Baghdadians:

(12b)* It is possible that something occurs necessarily but not without cause.

¹²³ Averroes, *Long in Phys.* VIII, comm. 79, translated from Latin of the Juntine ed. 1562-1574, vol. 4, p. 426v, a, H – 427r, a, B, as quoted by Sorabji, *Matter, Space and Motion...*, 266-267.

¹²⁴ Averroes, *Long in Meta*. Lam, com. 41, 1631-32, as quoted by Sorabji, *Matter, Space and Motion...*, 268-269.

Therefore the motion of the heavenly bodies may be necessary and caused at the same time. Hence, the answer to our first question ("is it *possible* that the heavenly bodies stop?") must be "no."

Nonetheless, Averroes' argument is only intelligible if we suppose that the heavenly bodies *would stop* if they were not moved by the Prime Mover. The hypothesis of the Prime Mover is needed to rule out this possibility. Therefore it must be admitted that it is *possible* in a sense that the heavenly bodies stop (even if this possibility will never be realised). This supposition is vital for the argument; without it, the existence of the Prime Mover cannot be inferred.

To sum up, both Averroes and Avicenna had to accept a type of possibilities that are never realised. These possibilities can be called "counterfactual possibilities,"¹²⁵ since they can be expressed through counterfactual conditionals, such as the following:

(18) If there were no Prime Mover, the motion of the heavenly bodies would stop.

(19) If the First Cause did not exist, the world would not exist.

Hence, the following two sentences containing the phrase "it is possible that..." may be true, even if the possibility they refer to will never be realised.

 (18^*) It is possible that the motion of the heavenly bodies stops.

(19*) It is possible that the world does not exist.

We have seen that the notion of counterfactual possibilities is indispensable for two most important *philosophical* proofs for the existence of God: the proof from motion (Averroes), and the contingency argument (Avicenna). Therefore the concept of counterfactual possibility is in fact a *philosophical* concept in the sense that it has a quite important role in the arguments of that branch of intellectual tradition that is called by us (and by Maimonides as well) philosophy.

Three notions of possibility

Our investigation started with the contrast between the "philosophical" and "Kalam" concepts of possibility. Now it has turned out that the philosophers use at least two concepts of possibility: one observes the principle of plenitude, while the other does not. So we have all together three notions of possibility:

¹²⁵ As for parallels in Latin tradition, see Knuutilla, "Time and Modality...," 186-187 and 231.

(i) The Kalam-concept: everything that can be imagined is possible. What cannot be imagined is not possible.

(ii) The philosophical concept: what is attested by "reality," "the existent," or "that which exists," in the sense of the principle of plenitude, is possible. What is never realised in any sense is not possible.

(iii) Counterfactual possibility: A state of affairs that would be realised if some actual state of affairs did not hinder its actualisation.

Now it is clear that (ii) is not identical either with (i) or with (iii), since (ii) observes the principle of plenitude, while the other two do not. But are (i) and (iii) identical or not? What is the difference between them? What are the criteria by means of which one can decide whether a possibility belongs to (i) or (iii) if not the principle of plenitude? One can say that (i) refers to imaginative representations, (iii) to intellectual ones. But how can we decide of a representation whether it is imaginative or intellectual? Now we can recall Maimonides' comment on this subject.

For with regard to particular mental representations, one individual claims that they are intellectual representations, whereas another affirms that they are imaginative representations. We wish consequently to find something that would enable us to distinguish the things cognized intellectually from those imagined.

And Maimonides adds:

And about that I have something to say, which you will learn in various passages of this Treatise. It is not something one hastens to reject in its entirety with nonchalance.¹²⁶

This promise is fulfilled in the third part of the *Guide*. In the fifteenth chapter Maimonides makes a very important comment on this matter, one that seems to be ignored by Kravitz:

Would that I knew whether this gate is open and licit, so that everyone can claim and assert with regard to any notion whatever that he conceives: This is possible; whereas someone else says: No this is impossible because of the nature of the matter. Or is there something that shuts and blocks this gate so that a man can assert decisively that such and such a thing is impossible because of its nature? Should this be verified and examined with the help of the imaginative faculty or with the intellect? And by what can one differentiate between that which is imagined and that which is cognized by the intellect? For an individual sometimes disagrees with someone else or with himself with regard to a thing that in his opinion is possible, so that he asserts that by its nature it is possible; whereas the objector says: This assertion that it is

¹²⁶ GP I, 73 (10), tr. Pines, 211-2; Munk, 115b-116a; Joel, 147-8.

possible is the work of the imagination and not due to consideration by the intellect. Is there accordingly something that permits differentiation between the imaginative faculty and the intellect? And is that thing something altogether outside both the intellect and the imagination, or is it by the intellect itself that one distinguishes between that which is cognized by the intellect and that which is imagined? All these are points for investigation, which may lead very far. However, this is not the object of this chapter.¹²⁷

This passage suggests that Maimonides has no answer to these questions. The principle of plenitude – which was his answer in GP I, 73 – is not mentioned at all. The reason for that might well have been that Maimonides was aware of the importance of the "counterfactual" notion of possibility in the arguments for the existence of God (see previous section).¹²⁸

Now if there are no reliable criteria for distinguishing imaginative possibilities from intellectual possibilities, then Maimonides own criticism of Kalam presented in GP I, 71-74 is undermined. The refutation of the theories of the Mutakallimun might be a much more difficult task than Maimonides wished to admit in the first part of the Guide.

Moreover, even if Maimonides rejects most of the Kalam, this does not mean that all Kalam-styled arguments are wrong *per definitionem*.¹²⁹ This applies to "Maimonides' Principle" as well. The fact that it is based on a possibility that is not "attested" by the principle of plenitude ("that which exists") does not mean that it cannot be a philosophical argument at all. It is philosophical to the same extent as Avicenna's contingency argument or Averroes' version of the proof from motion. Therefore Kravitz's interpretation must be rejected as false in both its premises and its conclusion.

However, an even more important conclusion can be drawn from this analysis. If "Maimonides' Principle" is based on an imaginative representation, then it must be rejected as false. If it is based on an intellectual representation, then it must be accepted as true. Now the problem is that we do not possess any criterion to distinguish between imaginative and intellectual concepts. Hence, we cannot say for sure whether "Maimonides' Principle" is true or false.

¹²⁷ GP III, 15, tr. Pines, 460-461.

¹²⁸ Cf. Knuuttila, "Time and Modality...," 207.
¹²⁹ Cf. the discussion in Warren Z. Harvey, "Why Maimonides was not a *Mutakallim*," in *Perspectives* on Maimonides, ed. Joel L. Kraemer (London: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilisation, 1996), 105-114.

Now according to a passage in *GP* II, 22 quoted in the introduction, if a proposition cannot be verified or falsified by demonstrative arguments, then one must develop a *dialectical* argument. First the hypothesis that the Principle is true should be examined with all its consequences. After that the other alternative, namely, that he Principle is false, should be supposed and all its possible consequences should be analysed. Finally, one should compare the doubts attached to both alternatives and decide which of them is more probable.

Perhaps here lies one of the great secrets of the *Guide*. If "Maimonides' Principle" is not true, then the Aristotelian arguments for the eternity of the world are valid. Consequently, as a part of the dialectical argument this alternative must be fully elaborated. However, the other alternative, namely, that the Principle is true, must be fully elaborated as well. Thus Maimonides is forced to develop two parallel doctrines based on two contradictory premises. This recalls the text of the Seventh Cause:

Sometimes in the case of certain dicta this necessity requires that the discussion proceed on the basis of a certain premise, whereas in another place necessity requires that the discussion proceed on the basis of another premise contradicting the first one. In such cases the vulgar must in no way be aware of the contradiction; the author accordingly uses some device to conceal it by all means.¹³⁰

Now if this applies to the present problem, then Maimonides must "use some devices to conceal" the fundamental difference between the two parallel doctrines "by all means." And he has a very good reason for that. To understand this point we have to summarise in advance the most important results of Maimonides.

If the Principle is true, then creation, miracles and the superiority of Mosaic prophecy (and hence, the superiority of Judaism) are all probable (although not demonstrated) doctrines.¹³¹ However, the existence, unity and, incorporeality of God cannot be demonstrated (see chapter one). If the Principle is not true (and hence, the eternity of the world is demonstrated), then God's existence, unity and, incorporeality are demonstrated truth. Even the possibility of prophetic revelation can be defended.¹³² However, the possibility of miracles, the superiority of Mosaic prophecy, and thus the superiority of Judaism will not be tenable.

Therefore Maimonides supposes the premise of the eternity when he is about to prove the unity and incorporeality of God, whereas he supposes the premise of the

¹³⁰ Tr. Pines, 18.

¹³¹ Cf. GP II, 25.

creation when he establishes the possibility of miracles and Mosaic prophecy. This is a major inconsistency of course, and Maimonides was aware of this fact. However, in accordance with the Seventh Cause he did everything to hide this fact from the multitude. Hence, this argument can be regarded as "exoteric." Consequently, – in accordance with our methodological rules – we must suppose that a consistent, dialectical argument is to be found in the *Guide* as a corresponding "esoteric" argument. We will return to this topic in the conclusion.

¹³² Cf. GP II, 32.

Chapter III

On the Contingency Argument

The reconstruction of the three types of possibilities carried out in the previous chapter leads us toward a better understanding of Maimonides' version of Avicenna's argument for the existence of God, that is, the contingency argument. We have seen in chapter one that Al-Ghazali made an objection against this argument that could turn out to be fatal. This objection can be summarised thus:

We say: The expressions "the possible" and "the necessary" are vague expressions, unless by "the necessary" is intended that whose existence has no cause and by "possible" that whose existence has a cause. If this, then, is what intended, let us then turn again to this expression. We will thus say: "Each one [of the causes] is possible in the sense that it has a cause additional to itself, and the whole is not possible [but necessary] in the sense that it does not have a cause additional to itself, extraneous to it." If by the expression "the possible" is intended other than what we intended, this would be incomprehensible.¹³³

Al-Ghazali's solution is based on the definitions of the terms "the possible" and "the necessary" respectively as "that which needs a cause for its existence" and "that which does not need a cause for its existence." These definitions allow Al-Ghazali to show that Avicenna fails to exclude the possibility that the world as a whole is a necessary being without any external cause. Thus, Avicenna's argument does not show the existence of God.

Maimonides – in the spirit of Avicenna – would answer that objection by arguing that Al-Ghazali misunderstood the concepts of possibility and necessity. Something can be necessary even if it has a cause. To have or not to have a cause is not the fundamental difference between possible (that is, contingent) and necessary beings. The true difference is rather that

(1) A necessary being cannot not exist in the sense of possibility (ii) defined in the previous chapter, that is, the possibility characterised by the principle of plenitude

(2) A possible (contingent) being is capable of both existence and nonexistence in the sense of possibility (ii).

Now we have seen in the previous chapter that according to the standard Aristotelian theory it was inconceivable that an eternal being should have the possibility of non-being (cf. the first Al-Farabian principle in the previous chapter and the reference to *De Caelo* I, 12.). Therefore if anything has the capacity of both existence and non-existence, it must come to be at some time and perish at some time.¹³⁴ Thus, (2) can be modified as follows:

(2)* A possible (contingent) being is generated and perishes.

Moreover, following Avicenna's line of thought, we can split the set of the necessary beings into two subsets:

(3) "Necessary on account of another" is a being that does NOT have the capacity of non-existence in the sense of possibility (ii), but HAS the capacity of non-existence in the sense of possibility (iii) defined in the previous chapter. That means that if another being had not caused its existence, it would have not existed. Therefore these necessary beings do need a cause for their existence.

(4) "Necessary on account of itself" is that necessary being that does not have the capacity of non-existence even in the sense of possibility (iii). This being needs no cause for existence.

However, the meaning of the last definition must be specified further. Possibility (iii) means the concept of counterfactual possibilities. Now it is selfevident that "if **X** does not exist, then **X** does not exist" is a true proposition, even if **X** actually exists. Thus – one could object – there is no being that could be necessary on account of itself. Therefore we have to modify the definition:

(4)* **X** is 'necessary on account of itself', if and only if there is no **Y** not identical with **X** of which it is true that 'if **Y** does not exist than **X** does not exist'.

With the help of these definitions the door is opened for a reformulation of the Avicennian argument in such a form that Al-Ghazali's objection will no longer be fatal to it.

If Al-Ghazali says that every component of the world is a possible (contingent) being, whereas the world itself as a whole is a necessary being, we answer: "Every contingent being must cease to exist at some time. Thus all the parts of the world will cease to exist at some time. But the whole cannot exist if its parts no

¹³³ Al-Ghazali, The Incoherence of the Philosophers, 82.

¹³⁴ However, one might ask, what if something is generated but not destructible? Or destructible but not generated? We will treat this problem in chapter four.
longer exist. Therefore the world as a whole will not exist at some time. But if this is so, then the world as a whole is a contingent being, contrary to what Al-Ghazali said."

Now the objection can be raised that it is possible for every part of the world to perish at some time, while the world as a whole does not cease to exist, because there are new things constantly coming into being that will substitute the destroyed parts.¹³⁵ Maimonides, I think, would answer this argument with the point that in this case there must be some substrate and source for the continuous generation of the new things (for example, "prime matter" is a good candidate for that), and this substrate must be eternal while it cannot be identical with the world as a whole. If this is so, then there is a part of the world that is neither generated nor destroyed, so it is a necessary existent. But Al-Ghazali's original hypothesis was that all the parts of the world were contingent beings. Thus the objection is answered.¹³⁶

So far we has proved that the world was not capable of existing forever without some necessary beings not identical with it. However, it is important to see that this version of the contingency argument cannot be used for the showing of the existence of God unless we accept Aristotle's thesis of the eternity of the world. If the world is *not* eternal, then we cannot take it as certain that there will not be a time at which everything perishes. In this case no one is able to rule out the possibility that every being is a contingent being (and thus, there is no God). On the other hand, if the eternity of the world is granted, then the argument outlined above is a nice indirect demonstration of the existence of some eternal, that is, necessary being. To prove the correctness of this interpretation I will quote Maimonides' text first:

A third philosophic speculation about this subject is taken over from Aristotle's argumentation, even though he sets it forth with a view to another purpose. This is how the argument is ordered. There is no doubt that there are existent things. These are the existent things that are apprehended by the senses. Now there are only three possible alternatives, this being a necessary division: namely, either no existents are subject to generation and corruption, or all of them are subject to generation and corruption, or some of them are subject to generation and corruption whereas others are not. Now the first alternative is clearly absurd, for we perceive many existents that are subject to generation and corruption.

¹³⁵ This objection (known today as the charge of "the quantifier-shift fallacy") has already been raised by Hasdai Crescas, *Sefer or ha-shem*, 24b [I, 2, 17].

¹³⁶ Cf. Efodi's commentary ad *GP* II, 1; see *More ha-nevukhim...*, II, 15a. Nonetheless, Anthony Kenny argues that this solution is still unsatisfactory, since it is also guilty of the "quantifier-shift fallacy"; see his *The Five Ways: St. Thomas Aquinas' Proofs of God's Existence* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), 63-65. However, this problem is not relevant in the present context.

The relevant part of the argument comes now:

The second alternative is likewise absurd, the explanation of this being as follows: if every existent falls under generation and corruption, then all the existents and every one of them have a possibility of undergoing corruption. Now it is indubitable, as you know, that what is possible with regard to a species must necessarily come about. Thus it follows necessarily that they, I mean all existents, will necessarily undergo corruption. Now if all of them have undergone corruption, it would be impossible that anything exists, for there would remain no one who would bring anything into existence. Hence it follows necessarily that there would be no existent things at all. Now we perceive things that are existent. In fact we ourselves are existent. Hence it follows necessarily, according to this speculation that if there are, as we perceive, existent subject to generation and corruption. Now in this existent that is not subject to generation and corruption. Now in this existent that is not subject to generation and corruption.

The argument contains no explicit reference to the eternity of the world. However, the following reconstruction shows that it presupposes the eternity of the world:

(prem1) If every being undergoes corruption, then all the beings must undergo corruption within a finite time.¹³⁸

(prem2) Past time is infinite.

(prem3) Nothing comes from nothing.

(prem4) Something exists presently.

(prem5) A being that never undergoes corruption is a necessary being.

Argument: Suppose that every being undergoes corruption. In this case all the beings must undergo corruption within a finite time (prem1). Now since past time is infinite (prem2), it must have happened in the past. That means that there was a time in the past when nothing had remained in existence. Now since nothing comes from nothing (prem3), no new beings could emerge after that. Consequently nothing exists presently. But something exists presently (prem4), therefore the first supposition was wrong. Therefore there must be a being that never undergoes corruption, that is, a necessary being (prem5).

It is clear that the argument is not valid without (prem2), that is, the infinity of past time. However, since Maimonides shared the standard Aristotelian theory of time according to which time was an accident of the motion of the heavenly bodies, the

¹³⁷ GP II, 1, tr. Pines, 247.

second premise (prem2) must have implied for him the pre-eternity of the heavenly bodies. In addition, it was an evidency in the age that the eternity of the heaven implies the eternity of the world as well.¹³⁹ Hence, Maimonides' version of the contingency argument presupposes the eternity of the world.

This has been clearly seen by both medieval and modern scholars. In the introduction of the present paper Yosef Ibn Kaspi has been cited as an example. Another medieval commantator Efodi shared his opinion. Commenting on the contingency argument he writes:

And if you object that all of them will perish in the future, [the answer is] that it cannot happen, since this [argument] has been laid down according to the hypothesis of eternity; consequently, if an infinity of time has already passed, and they did not perish, then they will not perish any more in the future. And what he [Maimonides] said in chapter 20 that this demonstration had not been built on the basis of eternity, that was due to the Seventh Cause.¹⁴⁰

It is not clear to me to which sentence of chapter 20 Efodi alludes. However, it is certain, that Efodi, just like Kaspi, viewed Maimonides' silence about the premise of eternity in the contingency argument as a conscious act.

As for the modern interpretators, two example will suffice. William Lane

Craig in his The Cosmological Argument from Plato to Leibniz writes:

Maimonides must be assuming in the third proof [that is, the contingency argument] that time is infinite, just as he did in the first proof.¹⁴¹

Similarly, Herbert A. Davidson commenting on the contingency argument notes:

Maimonides, as will be recalled, assumes the eternity of the world only for the sake of argument¹⁴²

Thus it has become manifest that Falaqera's interpretation outlined in the introduction of this paper was wrong. Maimonides' version of the contingency argument is not valid without the premise of the eternity of the world.

¹³⁸ This premise contains the quantifier-shift fallacy; cf. the discussion in Kenny, *The Five Ways*, 56-65.

¹³⁹ See Gersonides, *Milhamot ha-shem* VI, 1, 5 for an explicit formulation of that.

¹⁴⁰ Efodi ad *GP* II, 1; see *More ha-nevukhim*... II, 15a. As for Efodi's understanding of the Seventh Cause, see introduction.

¹⁴¹ William L. Craig, *The Cosmological Argument from Plato to Leibniz* (London: Macmillan, 1980), 144.

¹⁴² Herbert A. Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity...*, 381. One might add that the same was observed regarding Aquinas' version of the argument as well. See Patterson Brown, "St. Thomas' Doctrine of Necessary Being," in *Aquinas: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Anthony Kenny (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), 171.

At the same time it must be noticed that since the contingency argument rests on the premise of the eternity of the world, the argument of GP II, 17 based on "Maimonides' Principle" is a fatal objection against it. "Maimonides' Principle" blocked the way of any demonstration of the eternity of the world, and, in addition to that, blocked the way of the demonstration of God's existence from the non-eternity of the world, since it disqualified the principle *ex nihilo nihil fit*. If "Maimonides' Principle" is accepted, then the possibility that the world came into being in a spontaneous way without any creator cannot be excluded. We have seen in chapter one that both Maimonides and Gersonides were aware of this fact. Accordingly, a hypothetical objection against the contingency argument that may have come to the mind of Maimonides and Gersonides can be formulated thus:

[A] (prem2), that is, 'Past time is infinite' is not a demonstrated truth, but a hypothesis, moreover, it is probably a false hypothesis.

[B] Consequently, the whole argument does not meet the requirements of a demonstration laid down by Aristotle in the first book of *Analytica Posteriora*. Hence, it is not a demonstration.

[C] Now if you try to improve the argument by saying "if the past time is not infinite, then there was creation, and from this premise God's existence can be demonstrated," then the problem is that another premise, namely, *ex nihilo nihil fit* is needed. But in *GP* II, 17 Maimonides has shown that *ex nihilo nihil fit* cannot be used in any demonstration concerning the generation of the world. (See chapter one for details.)

I do not have any decisive textual evidence of the occurrence of this objection in this form. Nonetheless, the fact that two medieval commentators of *GP*, Kaspi and Efodi, both considered the premise of the eternity indispensable for the argument, and both of them were of the opinion that Maimonides consciously concealed this fact from the readers might indicate that they considered this premise to be the weak point of the argument

Now let us turn back to the debate with Al-Ghazali. We succeeded in proving the existence of at least one necessary being if it is granted that the world is eternal. Now this necessary being may be necessary on account of another necessary being. Thus it needs a cause. But the cause may be necessary on account of another as well, so it will need another cause, and so on *ad infinitum*. This infinite series of causes as a whole might be regarded as necessary on account of itself without any individual cause being a final cause. Thus our argument fails to show the existence of God. Al-Ghazali writes:

Each one [of the causes] is possible in the sense that it has a cause additional to itself, and the whole is not possible [but necessary] in the sense that it does not have a cause additional to itself, extraneous to it.

However, this objection can be refuted thanks to definition $(4)^*$ outlined above. Al-Ghazali has to accept that none of the members of this infinite series of causes is identical with the series itself as a whole. Moreover, it is self-evident that the whole cannot exist without its parts. Now let **S** stand for the whole infinite series of causes and **C1**, **C2**, **C3**... for the individual causes. It is clear that the proposition

(5) If either C1 or C2 or C3... were not existing, then S would not exist either.

is true. Therefore **S** does not belong to the "necessary on account of itself" subset (cf. 4*). Thus it is proved that if every member of the series belongs to subset (3) (that is, "necessary on account of another") then the series as a whole will belong to subset (3) as well. Consequently, the series as a whole is in need of a cause.

This reasoning shows that even if we suppose an infinite number of infinite series built up of "necessary on account of another" causes, the totality of these beings still cannot exist without a cause. Therefore it is inevitable to suppose an ultimate cause for all the beings necessary on account of itself.

Herbert A. Davidson attributes the differences between Avicenna's proof and Maimonides' adaptation of it to the ignorance of the original version of the argument on the part of Maimonides.¹⁴³ This may be true, nonetheless, in this chapter we have seen that Maimonides may well have good reasons to transform Avicenna's argument in order that it become defendable against the criticism of Al-Ghazali. However, the most important conclusion of this chapter is that the transformed version of the contingency argument – elaborated by Maimonides – clearly requires the premise of the eternity of the world. Hence, Falaqera's interpretation outlined in the introduction should be rejected.

¹⁴³ Cf. Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity*..., 383.

Chapter IV

Gersonides' Adaptation of "Maimonides' Principle": An Escape Route?

Oliver Leaman stated that the argument of GP II, 17 – which he called "Maimonides' Principle" – had a central role in the metaphysics of the Guide. Now we are able not just to assent to his observation but to apprehend the nature of the problem Maimonides had to face while he was elaborating his system of arguments.

If the Principle is invalid, then the eternity of the world is a proven fact. In this case the existence of God can be demonstrated by the "philosophical" arguments alone; the two most important of which are the "proof from motion" and the "proof from existence," that is, the contingency argument (see chapter 2 and 3). Even the possibility of prophetic revelation and divine providence can be defended maintaining the eternity of the world. However, the uniqueness of Mosaic revelation – a notion fundamental to Jewish apologetics – is not defendable without the creation of the world.

Now if the argument in *GP* II, 17 based on "Maimonides' Principle" is valid, then the creation of the world is a possible notion. Moreover, Maimonides has dialectical and rhetorical arguments showing that the hypothesis of the creation is more probable than the thesis of the eternity. In addition, the notion of the creation is supported by divine revelation as well; therefore, we must assume that the creation of the world is the *true* doctrine.

In that way, Maimonides succeeds in showing that the uniqueness of Mosaic revelation is not impossible altogether. However, he has to pay a high price for this success. All the "philosophical" demonstrations of the existence of God – resting on the premise of the eternity of the world – must be sacrificed. These demonstrations are not to be held valid any more, since a valid proof cannot proceed from a false premise. (And this applies even to the contingency argument *pace* Falaqera. See previous chapter.)

Therefore, the proof for God's existence must proceed from the premise of the non-eternity of the world. But it cannot. As we have seen in chapter one, the very Principle of Maimonides that has made the non-eternity of the world possible makes the inference of God's the existence from the non-eternity of the world impossible. Although God's existence is not impossible if the world is not pre-eternal, nevertheless, it cannot be demonstrated. The possibility that the world came into

being without any cause cannot be excluded. That was clearly seen by Falaqera and probably by Gersonides as well (see chapter one).

According to our working hypothesis (see Introduction), inconsistency is the mark of the *exoteric* level of *GP*. We must assume that Maimonides could not have been satisfied with a system of arguments that was inconsistent. Following our guidelines laid down in the Introduction, we have to ask for a hidden *consistent* argument.

A possible escape route was suggested by Gersonides. In his adaptation of "Maimonides' Principle," we can see an attempt at creating a consistent argument out of the heritage of Maimonidean theology. Gersonides' solution is original and thought-provoking, therefore it must not be neglected. In this chapter we will consider his argument for the existence of God and the creation of the world, which can be read as a reformulation of Maimonides' argument, or even as a key for the right interpretation (that is, consistent interpretation) of the *GP*. However, at the end of the chapter, it will be seen that Gersonides' solution fails to cope with all the problems and rather turns out to be a dead end. Thus, Maimonides' not considering this possibility will become intelligible.

Gersonides' Solution

Gersonides limits the applicability of "Maimonides' Principle." He makes a distinction between those Aristotelian principles that are due to the present state of the world and those that are due to the "nature of existence itself." One might incline to call the former "physical principles," the latter "metaphysical principles." Now according to Gersonides "physical principles" are within the domain of application of "Maimonides' Principle" – therefore we cannot be sure that they were valid at the time of the creation of the world – whereas "metaphysical principles" are *outside* the domain of applicability of the Principle. These principles are due to the nature of existence itself; therefore any kind of being in any situation must observe them. Gersonides shows by this reasoning that there is a set of Aristotelian principles that were certainly valid even during the creation of the world.¹⁴⁴

The question might be asked what the criteria of distinguishing the two types of principles are. There is no answer for that in Gersonides' work, but we might

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Gersonides, *Milhamot ha-shem*, 304 and 365-367 [VI, 1, 4 and VI, 1, 17].

suppose – as Herbert A. Davidson did – that Gersonides meant the distinction to be dependent on intuition.¹⁴⁵

The next step of Gersonides' reasoning consists of affirming that the principle *ex nihilo nihil fit* belongs to the "metaphysical principles." Thus, it was valid even at the creation of the universe. Two important consequences follows from this:

(A) It is justified to use the principle *ex nihilo nihil fit* as a premise in the inference of God's existence from creation. Thus, the main problem presented in chapter one of the present work is solved: we can really prove the existence of God from the hypothesis of the creation of the world.

(B) The traditional Jewish notion of *creatio ex nihilo* is untenable. Not just an active cause (God), but a passive substrate of potentiality (a primordial matter) must have preceded the creation. (Cf. the discussion of this problem in chapter one) However, Gersonides is willing to accept this compromise towards Aristotle, and he has good reason for that. To understand the consequences of this theoretical position, we have to turn back to *GP* II, 13.

In this chapter, Maimonides enumerates three "opinions" about the origin of the world:

(α) "The first opinion, which is the opinion of all who believe in the Law of *Moses our Master*, peace be on him, is that the world as a whole – I mean to say, every existent other than God, may He be exalted – was brought into existence by God after having been purely and absolutely non-existent."¹⁴⁶ The world was created out of nothing, a finite amount of time ago.

(β) The second opinion is attributed to Plato and his followers. According to them God created the universe a finite amount of time ago out of a pre-existent matter. God is bestowed with free will according to this opinion in choosing the appropriate time for creation and in designing the universe.

 (γ) The third opinion is attributed to Aristotle and his followers. According to them generation and destruction is impossible for the world; therefore, the generation of the world in any sense is out of the domain of divine omnipotence. The world exists co-eternally with God. Moreover, the structure of the universe is determined by necessity, so there is no room for divine free will at all.

¹⁴⁵ Davidson, Proofs for Eternity..., 33.

¹⁴⁶ *GP* II, 13

Later Maimonides comments that although Aristotle's position (γ) undermines the foundations of Judaism by denying God's choice in creation, the Platonic doctrine (β) is not altogether hostile toward Jewish theology. Plato's opinion is not identical with *creatio ex nihilo*; nonetheless, it is not in contradiction with the concept of divine free will, and if divine free will is maintained, then the fundamental doctrines of Jewish religion, such as the uniqueness of Mosaic revelation and the perfection and exclusivity of Torah are defendable. Maimonides writes:

Know that with a belief in the creation of the world in time, all the miracles become possible and the Law becomes possible, and all questions that may be asked on this subject vanish. Thus it might be said: Why did God give prophetic revelation to this one and not to that? Why did God give this Law to this particular nation, and why did He not legislate to others? [...] If, however, someone says that the world is as it is in virtue of necessity, it would be a necessary obligation to ask those questions; and there would be no way out of them [...] For if creation in time were demonstrated – if only as Plato understands creation – all the overhasty claims made to us on this point by the philosophers would become void. In the same way, if the philosophers would succeed in demonstrating eternity as Aristotle understands it, the Law as a whole would become void, and a shift to other opinions would take place. I have thus explained to you that everything is bound up with this problem.¹⁴⁷

In another place in the same chapter we read:

If, however, one believed in eternity according to the second opinion we have explained – which is the opinion of Plato – according to which the heavens too are subject to generation and corruption, this opinion would not destroy the foundations of the Law and would be followed not by the lie being given to miracles, but by their becoming admissible. It would also be possible to interpret figuratively the texts in accordance with this opinion. And many obscure passages can be found in the text of the *Torah* and others with which this opinion could be connected or rather by means of which it could be proved. However, no necessity could impel us to do this unless these opinions were demonstrated.¹⁴⁸

Gersonides did exactly what Maimonides suggested in this passage. The universal validity of *ex nihilo nihil fit* results in rejecting (α) as impossible but maintaining (β) and (γ) both as possible. Now if (γ) is true, then God' s existence is provable through the Aristotelian proofs enlisted in *GP* II, 1. If (β) is true, then God's existence is provable as well, since *ex nihilo nihil fit* may be used as a premise. So God's existence is a proven fact in any case. Now (γ) undermines the fundamental doctrines of Judaism, while (β) does not. Therefore Gersonides accepts (β), that is, the

¹⁴⁷ GP II, 25, tr. Pines, 329-330.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, tr. Pines, 328-329.

Platonic view of the creation (out of pre-existing matter, by divine free will).¹⁴⁹ The only problem left to solve is that (β) was definitely not the prevalent Jewish understanding of the first two chapters of the Bible in Gersonides' time. Consequently, he reinterpreted the Biblical key texts of creation showing that such terms as *tohu* and *bohu* and *tehom* were not referring to "nothing," but to a pre-existent matter.¹⁵⁰

To sum up: Gersonides' limitation of the validity of "Maimonides' Principle" was a clever move, which enabled him to *demonstrate* the existence of God from the premise of the creation (in sense β) and to maintain at the same time the basic doctrines of Jewish religion (divine free will, the uniqueness and exclusivity of Mosaic revelation).

There is only one further question to be answered: Why has this solution not been elaborated already by Maimonides?

Refutation of Gersonides' Solution

To answer this question first GP I, 69 should be quoted:

The philosophers, as you know, designate God, may He be exalted, as the first cause and the first ground. On the other hand, those who are generally known as Mutakallimun avoid these designations very deliberately and designate Him as the maker $[f\bar{a}'il]$ and think that there is a great difference between our saying cause and ground and our saying maker. [...] Now one of the opinions of the philosophers, an opinion with which I do not disagree, is that God, may He be held precious and magnified, is the efficient cause, that He is the form, and that He is the end. Thus it is for this reason that they say that He, may He be exalted, is a cause and a ground, in order to comprise these three causes – that is, the fact that God is the efficient cause $[f\bar{a}'il]$ of the world, its form, and its end.¹⁵¹

After this introduction, Maimonides proceeds to clarify in what sense God is said to be the formal cause of the world. He concludes that this means simply that the proposition 'If there were no God, the world would not exist in the form we know it' is true (cf. the concept of counterfactual possibilities in chapters two and three):

For the universe exists in virtue of the existence of the Creator, and the latter continually endows it with permanence [...] Accordingly if the nonexistence of the Creator were supposed, all that exists would likewise be nonexistent [...] In this respect it is said of Him that He is the ultimate form and the form

¹⁴⁹ Moreover, he believed that he could prove it; see *Milhamot ha-shem*, VI, 1, 5-16.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Jacob J. Staub, *The Creation of the World according to Gersonides* (Chicago: Scholars Press, 1982).

¹⁵¹ Tr. Pines, 166.

of forms; that is, He is that upon which the existence and stability of every form in the world ultimately reposes and by which they are constituted, just as the things endowed with forms are constituted by their forms.¹⁵²

At the end of the chapter, Maimonides adds a remark that is very interesting in $\int C dt = \frac{1}{2} dt = \frac{1}{2} dt$

terms of Gersonides' point of view:

Know, however, that in some people from among the Mutakallimun engaged in speculation, ignorance and presumption reached such a degree that finally they said that if the nonexistence of the Creator were assumed, the nonexistence of the thing that the Creator has brought into existence – they mean the world – would not follow necessarily. For it does not necessarily follow that that which has been effected passes away when the maker $[f\bar{a}'il]$ has passed away after having effected it. Now that which they have mentioned would be correct if He were only the maker $[f\bar{a}'il]$ and if the thing that He effected had no need of Him for its permanence to be lasting, as in the case of the carpenter upon whose death the chest does not pass away for he does not continually endow it with permanence. [...] This is the measure of the vain imagining necessitated by the opinion that He is only a maker $[f\bar{a}'il]$ and not an end or a form.¹⁵³

The point of the argument is clear. It is not enough to prove that God is the maker (or efficient cause, $f\bar{a}$ 'il) of the world; we have to prove that He is the formal cause of the universe as well. If we fail to do so, the possibility that the Maker has perished after the creation of the world cannot be excluded. Now any Maker of the world cannot be called 'God' in the proper sense, if He is not eternal. Thus Gersonides' argument is *incomplete*; it has not shown yet that the Maker of the world is its formal cause as well (in the sense defined above).

We have seen in the previous chapters that there were two fundamental arguments proving that God is the formal cause¹⁵⁴ of the universe: "the proof from motion" and "the proof from existence." Maimonides presents them in *GP* II, 1. The first can be briefly summarised thus:

(1) If there were no Prime Mover, then the heavenly bodies would not move with a perpetual motion.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² Tr. Pines, 169.

¹⁵³ Tr. Pines, 170-171.

¹⁵⁴ 'Formal cause,' in the above defined sense, that is, if God were not continuously existing, then the world could not exist, or, at least, would exist in a totally different way. This statement is not proved from the argument from creation, even if we accept *ex nihilo nihil fit*.

¹⁵⁵ This proposition is proved by the principle 'no finite body can contain infinite power'. This principle has a crucial rule in establishing the counterfactual conditional "if there were no God, then the world would not exist in the way we know it," which is the sense of the statement 'God is the formal cause of the universe.' See Herbert A. Davidson, "The Principle That a Finite Body Can Contain Only

(2) Nevertheless, the heavenly bodies move with a perpetual motion.

(3) Therefore, there must be a Prime Mover co-eternal with the world.

The "proof from the existence" can be summarised thus:

(4) If there were no existent necessary on account of itself, then there would be no necessary existents at all.

(5) If there were no any necessary existents, then only contingent beings would exist.

(6) If only contingent beings were in existence, then all the beings would perish at some time.¹⁵⁶

(7) But this does not happen, since the world is eternal.

(8) Therefore, there must be an existent necessary on account of itself.¹⁵⁷ [Cf.(4) and (7)]

Now it is clear that both of the arguments assume the premise of the eternity of the world (as is clearly indicated by Maimonides himself in the text of *GP*) in the Aristotelian sense (γ).¹⁵⁸ Therefore we cannot but conclude that God's being the formal cause of the universe (in the sense defined above) cannot be proved unless the premise of the eternity of the world is accepted in the Aristotelian sense. Gersonides' argument is able to prove that there is a Maker who is the efficient cause of the universe, nevertheless, it cannot prove that the Maker is the *formal* cause of the world as well in the above defined sense. Hence, Gersonides cannot exclude the possibility

Finite Power," in *Studies in Jewish Religious and Intellectual History Presented to Alexander Altmann*, ed. Siegfried Stein and Raphael Loewe (Alabama: Alabama University Press, 1979), 75-92.

¹⁵⁶ This proposition is either proved by the principle of plenitude (see chapter three) or by the principle 'no finite body can contain infinite power' if it is granted that there is a 'power of existence' in the beings, and the world is a finite body. Cf. Sorabji, *Matter, Space and Motion*, 249-285; Shlomo Pines, "A Tenth Century Philosophical Correspondence," in *The Collected Works of Shlomo Pines* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1997), 114-118.

¹⁵⁷ Hence, if there were no God, the world would not exist. This is the meaning of God's being the formal cause of the universe as Maimonides noted above.

¹⁵⁸ As for the "proof from motion" this is self-evident, since according to the Platonic view the motion of the heavenly bodies are not eternal *a parte ante*. Consequently the argument 'finite bodies contain only finite power for motion, therefore a finite body could not move for an infinity of time, unless a Mover provides it with moving capacity from outside' is not applicable to the heavenly bodies. But in the case of the "proof from existence" one might wonder whether the pre-existent, eternal matter is a satisfactory instance of the description 'the world is eternal' of (7). If it is, then the "proof from existence" might be valid even in the case of (β). However, this is not the case. If (γ) is not accepted, the principle of plenitude is violated, thus (6) cannot be proved. That can be showed in the following way. Suppose that (β) is true. Now it is not clear whether there was time before creation (so the preexistent matter is eternal *a parte ante*) or not. In the first case *there was* a possibility (namely the creation of the world) that was not realised for an infinity of time. Therefore the principle of plenitude is not valid, so it cannot exclude the possibility that something is eternal and contingent at the same time. On the other hand, if there was no time before creation, then the past is finite, so we cannot take for granted that the 'everything perishes' event will not occur in the future.

that the Maker has perished after His finishing the creation of the world. Thus, Gersonides' argument is unsatisfactory.

However a hypothetical answer can be figured out to save the argument. Gersonides may say that the acceptance of *ex nihilo nihil fit* is enough for proving the eternity of the Maker as well. Suppose that the Maker of the world has perished some time ago. Now every destructible thing is generated; therefore, if the Maker has perished, he was generated at some time. But nothing comes from nothing (*ex nihilo nihil fit*), so the Maker must have been made by another Maker. Now if we suppose that this second maker perishes as well, the same argument applies. Nevertheless, this chain of Makers cannot go on *ad infinitum*. Therefore there must be an ultimate Maker who is neither generated nor destructible.¹⁵⁹

However this hypothetical answer of Gersonides is not acceptable for Maimonides. The weak point is that it rests on three additional premises besides the principle *ex nihilo nihil fit*:

(9) An infinite chain of makers is not possible.

(10) What is destructible must have been generated.

(11) What is not generated cannot be destroyed.

Gersonides should prove that (9), (10), and (11) are also "metaphysical principles" (in the sense defined in the previous section), so "Maimonides' Principle" does not apply to them. And this is exactly the point where the greatest disadvantage of Gersonides' solution is disclosed. There is a passage in *GP* that clearly implies that "Maimonides' Principle" *does* apply to (10) and (11).

In *GP* II, 14 Maimonides summarises the Aristotelian proofs for the eternity of the world:

A third method of his: He asserts that the matter of the heaven as a whole has no contraries, for circular motion has no contrary, as has been made clear; and there are contraries only in rectilinear motion, as has been demonstrated. He asserts further that in everything that passes away, the cause of its passing away consists in there being contraries in it. Accordingly, as there are no contraries in the sphere, it is not subject to passing away. Now what is not subject to passing away is likewise not subject to generation. He thus stated several propositions in an absolute manner and explained them. These

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* I, 15: "Ostendit etiam Aristoteles ex sempiternitate temporis sempiternitatem motus; ex quo iterum ostendit sempiternitatem substantiae moventis. Prima autem substantia movens Deus etiam est; igitur sempiternus. *Negata enim sempiternitate temporis et motus, adhuc remanet ratio ad sempiternitatem substantiae; nam, si motus incepit, oportet quod ab aliquo movente inceperint, ab aliquo agente incepit. Et sic vel in infinitum ibitur, vel devenietur ad aliquid quod non incepit."* (Emphasis is mine.)

propositions are: (a) Everything that is subject to generation is subject to passing away. (b) Everything that is subject to passing away is subject to generation. (c) Everything that has not been generated will not pass away. (d) Everything that will not pass away has not been generated. This too is a method that renders obligatory the eternity of the world, which he wishes to establish.¹⁶⁰

Aristotle in *De Caelo* I, 12 proves the propositions enlisted in the quoted text. From his argumentation, it is quite clear that these propositions are closely linked to each other. If we consider one of them to be a "metaphysical principle" to which "Maimonides' Principle" does not apply, then there is no reason for supposing that the other ones are just "physical principles." Now if all of them are "metaphysical principles," then the eternity of the world in the Aristotelian sense (γ) is a proven fact. Thus Gersonides' enterprise of demonstrating God's existence based on Plato's opinion (β) becomes meaningless. On the other hand, if they are considered to be "physical principles," then "Maimonides' Principle" *does* apply to them, and therefore it is not allowed to refer to them in any argument that concerns those things that are outside the universe known to us in any sense.

Moreover, Maimonides subscribed to the doctrine that the world would not be destroyed, even if it was generated.¹⁶¹ Thus, he certainly thought that the argument of *GP* II, 17 did apply to these Aristotelian propositions. This was clearly seen by Moses of Salerno, a thirteenth-century commentator, who has already been cited in chapter 2. Commenting on "Maimonides' Principle" (*GP* II, 17) he writes that because of the Principle:

It is not a necessary consequence upon us [to accept the propositions] of Aristotle which they laid down as premises that (a^*) everything that has been generated is going to pass away, (b^*) and everything that has not been generated will not pass away (c^*) and everything that will not pass away, has not been generated; and the eternity of the world is a necessary consequence from this [*i. e.* from the last one (c^*)].¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ Tr. Pines, 286-287.

¹⁶¹ Gersonides agreed with Maimonides that the heaven was indestructible, see *Milhamot ha-shem* VI, 1, 16. Moreover, human soul is another instance for an existent that is generated but not destructable, see *Milhamot ha-shem* VI, 1, 3. According to Averroes' report Al-Farabi argued *against* the immortality of human soul saying that since it is generated, it must pass away. Even if this is just an alleged argument read into Al-Farabi's texts – as Davidson claims – by some of his followers, it shows that the principle 'whatever is generated, must pass away' was used as an objection against traditional religious beliefs. Cf. Herbert A. Davidson, *Al-Farabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 70-73.

¹⁶² MS Bodl. 1261. fol. 230b [ad GP II, 17].

The statement (b*) in Moses of Salerno's list is clearly the same as (11) in Gersonides' supposed argument for the eternity of the Maker. Therefore, Gersonides' supposed argument cannot exclude the possibility that a non-generated Maker perishes after finishing his creating activity, since one of its premises is disqualified by "Maimonides' Principle."

To sum up: Gersonides succeeded in developing an argument that infers the existence of a Maker from the creation of the world in the Platonic sense (β) – without violating the doctrine of divine freedom. However, it fails to show that the Maker is the formal cause of the universe as well, without which the eternity of the Maker cannot be proved. Thus, the attempt at showing the eternity of God without using the premise of the eternity of the world has turned out to be unsuccessful.

Chapter V

The Creation of the World as an Esoteric Doctrine

A widely accepted notion among Maimonides scholars is that the esoteric doctrine of Maimonides concerning the origin of the universe was the eternity of the world, if anything. For example, Sarah Klein-Braslavy writes:

If Maimonides had been of the opinion that the world was created, he would have said it [...] explicitly and unequivocally, for the opinion of creation is the view acceptable to the vulgar man.¹⁶³

W. Z. Harvey assents to this view, saying

If Maimonides' ambiguities were intended to conceal something from the vulgar, it surely was not the doctrine of the creation of the world after absolute nonexistence!¹⁶⁴

However, the investigation carried out in the previous pages enables us to challenge this widespread opinion. We have seen in chapter one that an unlimited acceptance of "Maimonides' Principle" had the result that God's existence did not follow from the non-eternity of the world. We have seen in chapter four that even if the existence of God were inferred from the creation with a *limited* acceptance of "Maimonides' Principle," the *eternity* of God could not be proved unless the eternity of the world was used as a premise. On the other hand, we have seen in chapter two and three that both the existence and the eternity of God were provable from the premise of the eternity of the world. Therefore the conclusion must be drawn that the eternity of the acceptance of the non-eternity has some unexpected consequences (such as the non-demonstrability of God's existence), which are difficult to cope with.

This approach is corroborated by the text of *GP* as well. In I, 71 Maimonides writes:

The world cannot but be either eternal or created in time. If it is created in time, it undoubtedly has a creator who created it in time. For it is a first intelligible that what has appeared at a certain moment in time has not created itself in time and that its creator is other than itself. Accordingly, the creator who created the world in time is the deity. If, however, the world is eternal, it

¹⁶³ Sarah Klein-Braslavy, *Perush ha-RaMBaM le-sippur beriat ha-olam* (Maimonides' interpretation of the creation-story) (Jerusalem: Ha-hevra le-heqer ha-miqra be-Yisrael, 1978), 256.

¹⁶⁴ Warren Z. Harvey, "A Third Approach to Maimonides' Cosmogony-Prophetology Puzzle," in *Maimonides. A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Joseph A. Buijs (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 86. Cf. the long debate about the "true position" of Maimonides regarding the origin of the world and prophetology: Abraham Nuriel, "Hiddush ha-olam o qadmuto

follows necessarily because of this and that proof that there is an existent other than all the bodies to be found in the world; an existent who is not a body and not a force in a body and who is one, permanent, and sempiternal; who has no cause and whose becoming subject to change is impossible. Accordingly he is a deity. *Thus it has become manifest to you that the proofs for the existence and the oneness of the deity and of His not being a body ought to be produced from the starting point afforded by the supposition of the eternity of the world, for in this way the demonstration will be perfect, both if the world is eternal and if it is created in time.¹⁶⁵*

Maimonides seems to state here that although the existence of God can be inferred from the creation of the world, His oneness and incorporeality cannot be proved unless the eternity of the world is accepted. And this statement is justified in the sense that all the proofs presented by Maimonides for God's oneness and incorporeality are based on the assertion that God is eternal.¹⁶⁶ Now, as we have seen in the previous chapter, this assertion cannot be demonstrated unless the eternity of the world is accepted. Maimonides continues:

For this reason you will always find that whenever, in what I have written in the books of jurisprudence, I happen to mention the foundations and start upon establishing the existence of the deity, I establish it by discourses that adopt the way of the doctrine of the eternity of the world. The reason is not that I believe in the eternity of the world, but that I wish to establish in our belief the existence of God, may He be exalted, through a demonstrative method as to which there is no disagreement in any respect.

Maimonides clearly states that in a popular discourse ("books of jurisprudence") he does not wish to infer the existence of God from the hypothesis of creation, but from the hypothesis of the eternity of the world. The reason for that is the fact that the "philosophical" demonstration (based on the hypothesis of eternity) is clear and straightforward (and thus it meets the needs of the multitude), whereas the argument from the creation is full of dubious points and difficult problems. Therefore Maimonides is silent about the problem of how to prove the existence, oneness, and

al-pi ha-RaMBaM" (Creation versus eternity of the world according to Maimonides), *Tarbiz* 33 (1964): 372-387; Lawrence Kaplan, "Maimonides on the Miraculous Element in Prophecy," *Harvard Theological Review* 70 (1977): 233-256; Herbert A. Davidson, "Maimonides' Secret Position on Creation," in *Studies in Medieval Jewish History...*, 16-40; William Dunphy, "Maimonides' Not-So-Secret Position on Creation," in *Moses Maimonides and His Time*, ed. Eric L. Ornsby (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1989), 151-172. A recently published contribution: Tamar M. Rudavsky, *Time Matters: Time Creation and Cosmology in Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (Albany: The State University of New York Press, 2000), 30-38 and 51-57. One might note that the endless debate about Maimonides' "true position" on the origin of the world has detracted the attention of the scholars from the more important issue: the inconsistency of his proofs for the existence of God. ¹⁶⁵ Tr. Pines, 181-182; emphasis is mine.

so on, of God, if the world is not eternal, in his books written for the widest audience ("the multitude"). He argues for God's existence from the premise of the eternity of the world, although he does everything to conceal this fact from the multitude.

In the great book of jurisprudence, the *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* I, 4-5 Maimonides proves the existence of God through the tacit supposition of the perpetual motion of the heavenly bodies, which implies the eternity of the world. He briefly recapitulises the principle that 'no finite body can contain infinite power", and adds that all the bodies are finite. After that he infers the existence of an incorporeal mover with infinite power from the fact that the heavenly bodies are moving forever:

And our God, blessed be His name, since his power is infinite and unceasing – for the Sphere (of the universe) is continually revolving [*she-ha-galgal sovev tamid*] – His power is not a power in a physical body. [...] This being is the God of the universe, the Lord of the whole earth. And He leads the spheres with an infinite, unlimited, and uninterrupted power, *since the sphere is always revolving* [*she-ha-galgal sovev tamid*] and it is impossible that it should revolve without a cause that makes it revolving.¹⁶⁷

If we are looking for a Platonic "noble lie" in the *oeuvre* of Maimonides, to what else should we point, if not to the tacit assumption of the eternity of the world in the *Mishneh Torah*, a popular, *exoteric* work, and its denial in *GP*, an esoteric work?!¹⁶⁸ But that means that *the "noble lie" is the eternity of the world*!

To answer Klein-Braslavy's and Harvey's point, it can be said that what Maimonides really wanted to hide from the "vulgar people" was not simply the eternity of the world, but the fact that God's existence cannot be proved except by supposing the eternity of the world, *which is itself undemonstrable*. The core of the

¹⁶⁷ Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah: The Book of Knowledge*, ed. and tr. Moses Hyamson (Jerusalem and New York: Feldheim Publishers, 1981), 34b.

¹⁶⁸ The fact that the *Mishneh Torah* is more "philosophical" than the *Guide* itself has been recognised already by Leo Strauss, see his "Notes on Maimonides' Book of Knowledge," in *Studies in Mysticism and Religion Presented to Gershom G. Scholem*, ed. E. E. Urbach, et al. (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967), 269. It is often used as an objection against the possibility of esoteric interpretation itself, see *e. g.* Idit Dobbs-Weinstein, *Maimonides and St. Thomas on the Limits of Reason* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 18. Shlomo Pines tried to solve the problem by supposing that a "critical" change happened in Maimonides' thought between the *Mishneh Torah* and the *Guide*. While he was writing the former, he was a "dogmatic" Aristotelian, whereas by the time of the composition of *GP* he had become a "critical" Aristotelian. Consequently the *Mishneh Torah* appears to be "more Arsitotelian" than *GP*. Pines fails to consider the simpler solution: "dogmatic" Aristotelianism is the *exoteric* doctrine, whereas "critical" Aristotelianism is the *esoteric* doctrine. See his "The Philosophic Purport of Maimonides' Halakhic Works and the Purport of *The Guide of the Perplexed*," in *The Collected Works of Shlomo Pines* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1997), 463-476.

secret doctrine was neither the creation nor the eternity of the world itself but *some* consequences of the hypothesis of the creation of the world.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this work, a methodological principle was laid down according to which the exoteric level of *GP* should be defined as a group of inconsistent arguments proceeding from premises contradicting each other. Moreover, if there is textual evidence that proves that Maimonides was aware of the fact that his discussion rests on premises contradicting each other, then we can safely assume that this inconsistent argumentation was really *meant* by him to be exoteric.

At the same time, a "rule of transformation" was declared as a working hypothesis. This can be formulated as follows: An *inconsistent* argumentation on the exoteric level of *GP* is probably transformable into a *dialectical* argumentation on the esoteric level of Maimonides' work. The "secret doctrine" to be hidden from "the vulgar people" consists of the fact that (a) the *exoteric* doctrine is *inconsistent*, so *it cannot be true* and (b) the true, consistent doctrine is *dialectical*, that is, it proceeds from premises of which reason cannot make the final decision whether they are true or not by demonstrative arguments, and therefore the author elaborates both alternatives and tries to figure out what the consequences of each possibility are.

The reason for hiding this process from the eyes of the multitude is the intention on the part of the author not to upset the vulgar man by the fact that the fundamental doctrines of Judaism might rest on dubious ground. *The possibility of having doubts is the secret itself.* On the other hand, the reason for disclosing these doubts before the few "intelligent" readers is the fact that the truth cannot be hidden from them anyway (they will recognise the inconsistency of the exoteric doctrine), and therefore the author must lead them to a keen understanding of the nature and the precise extension of doubts, and by this he must show them that in spite of the uncertainties persisting in metaphysical questions there is no reason to abolish the principles of Rabbinical Judaism. Thus he can save them from open heresy.

In accordance with these methodological principles, on the previous pages we tried to reconstruct the logical structure of some of the metaphysical arguments in GP, and discover implicit inconsistencies in them. The results of the research can be summarised thus: The major inconsistency in the metaphysics of the GP is caused by the argument of II, 17 ("Maimonides' Principle"). This argument makes the creation of the world a possible notion – but at the same time, it makes the inference of God's existence from the non-eternity of the world impossible. Consequently, God's

existence cannot be proved unless the eternity of the world is accepted according to the Aristotelian version. However, if the eternity of the world is accepted, then the uniqueness of Mosaic revelation – a fundamental doctrine of Judaism – is untenable. Therefore Maimonides must proceed according to the hypothesis of the eternity when he is talking about the existence of God, whereas he must suppose the creation of the world when he is speaking about the superiority of Mosaic revelation and religion. However, he tries to hide this fact by saying emphatically in several places of *GP* that God's existence, unity, and incorporeality can be proved even from the premise of creation. This can be represented in a table ('possible' implies 'not demonstrated,' 'impossible' implies 'refuted'):

	Eternity	Creation: exoteric	Creation: esoteric
God's existence	Demonstrated	Demonstrated	Possible
God's eternity	Demonstrated	Demonstrated	Possible
God's unity and incorporeality	Demonstrated	Demonstrated	Possible
prophetic revelation	Possible	Possible	Possible
miracles	Impossible	Possible	Possible
uniqueness of Mosaic prophecy	Impossible	Possible	Possible
superiority of Judaism	Impossible	Possible	Possible

Now we brought sufficient textual evidence in chapter one that Maimonides was aware of the fact that God's existence did not follow from the creation of the world – even if he stated the opposite explicitly in several places of the *GP*. Therefore – in accordance with our methodological rules – we may safely assume that this *inconsistent* argumentation was meant by him to be *exoteric*. However, it is probably not useless to summarise the textual evidence once more, and to examine at the same time Maimonides' techniques of hiding this inconsistency.

Techniques of Hiding the Truth

Maimonides did almost everything to hide the major inconsistency of the exoteric argumentation. His basic device was the arrangement of the material. He discusses the

proofs for the existence of God in GP I, 71 – II, 2, while he introduces "Maimonides' Principle" destroying the proofs for God's existence only in GP II, 17. In the first chapter dealing with the existence of God (that is, I, 71) he writes:

The world cannot but be either eternal or created in time. If it is created in time, it undoubtedly has a creator who created it in time. For it is a first intelligible that what has appeared at a certain moment in time has not created itself in time and that its creator is other than itself. Accordingly the creator who created the world in time is the deity. If, however, the world is eternal, it follows necessarily because of this and that proof that there is an existent other than all the bodies to be found in the world; an existent who is not a body and not a force in a body and who is one, permanent, and sempiternal; who has no cause and whose becoming subject to change is impossible. Accordingly he is a deity.

This statement is repeated in the concluding chapter of this section (that is, II,

2):

The fifth body, namely, the sphere, cannot but be either subject to generation and corruption - in which case movement would likewise be subject to generation and corruption - or, as the adversary says, not be subject to generation and corruption. If the sphere is subject to generation and corruption, it is the deity, may His name be sublime, who brought it into existence after its having been non-existent. This is a first intelligible, for everything that exists after having been non-existent must have of necessity someone who has brought into existence – it being absurd that it should bring itself into existence. If, however, the sphere has not ceased and will not cease thus to be moved in a perpetual and eternal movement, it follows necessarily from the premises that have been set forth before that the mover that causes it to move in this eternal movement is not a body or a force in a body; it is in fact the deity, may His name be sublime. Thus it has become clear to you that the existence of the deity [...] is proved by cogent and certain demonstrations, regardless of whether the world has come into being in time after having been non-existent, or whether it has not come into being in time after having been non-existent.

At this point of the discussion in *GP*, this dilemma argument really seems to be irrefutable. There are two exhaustive alternatives: the world is either (pre-) eternal or not. If it is eternal, the Aristotelian proofs will work. If it is not, the Kalam argument will work. God's existence is proved in both cases.

However, in *GP* II, 17 Maimonides clearly hints that his Principle destroys this argument retrospectively. If the Principle is right, then the dilemma argument does not work, because one of the alternatives (the creation of the world) does not lead to the existence of God:

However, should Aristotle, I mean to say he who adopts his opinion, argue against us by saying: If this existent provides no indication for us, how do you

know that it is generated **and that there has existed another nature that has generated it** – we should say: This is not obligatory for us in view of what we wish to maintain. For at present we do not wish to establish as true that the world is created in time. But what we wish to establish is the possibility of its being created in time.

It is not stated explicitly in the text what Maimonides would answer for the second question ("how do you infer the existence of God from the creation of the world?" see the emphasised part); nonetheless, it cannot be doubted that the answer must be the same as for the first question: "We do not wish to prove the existence of God; we are only about to prove the *possibility* of the existence of God." That means that God's existence – just like the creation of the world – cannot be proved. The two doctrines share the same epistemological status. (See the detailed discussion in chapter one.)

Now even if the reader realises this problem, Maimonides still has a second "line of defence" to make the reader believe that God's existence is provable irrespective of the problem of the eternity of the world. In *GP* II, 2 Maimonides writes:

For the demonstration that He is one and not a body is valid, regardless of whether the world has come into being in time after having been non-existent or not – as we have made clear by means of the third philosophic method.

The "third philosophic method" is probably to be identified with Maimonides' version of the contingency argument, "the proof from existence," discussed in *GP* II, 1. This argument proves God's existence, unity, and incorporeality. And the text of the argument contains no explicit reference to the eternity of the world. This may have lead the thirteenth-century commentator, Yosef ibn Falaqera, to believe that "the proof from the existence" was Maimonides' real argument for God, since it is valid irrespective of the creation versus eternity problem (in spite of the fact that Maimonides' remark quoted above does not refer explicitly to the demonstration of the *existence* of God). However, as we have seen in chapter three, Falaqera was wrong. Maimonides' version of the contingency argument collapses without the premise of the eternity of the world, as had been already seen by another thirteenth-century commentator, Yosef ibn Kaspi. Moreover, Maimonides himself states that at the end of the "philosophical" demonstrations in *GP* II, 1:

All these are demonstrative methods of proving the existence of one deity, who is neither a body nor a force in a body, *while believing at the same time in the eternity of the world*.

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It is quite clear from the context that this sentence refers to the "third method" (the contingency argument) as well. Maimonides knew very well that "the third philosophical method" was based on the hypothesis of the eternity of the world.

The Dialectical Argument

So far, the identification of the exoteric argument (its being inconsistent and its being meant to be exoteric) has been carried out. Now our task is - according to the methodology – to reconstruct the consistent, exoteric argument.

This argument has turned out to be dialectical (see chapter two). The fundamental problem is that there are no solid criteria by means of which intellectual and imaginative representations could be differentiated. Therefore we cannot decide the question whether "Maimonides' Principle" (*GP* II, 17) rests on an imaginative or on an intellectual representation. In the first case, the Principle is invalid. If so, then the Aristotelian arguments for the eternity of the world (in the strongest sense, see γ in chapter four) are valid. In the second case, the Principle is valid. If so, then the creation of the world out of nothing (in the strongest sense, see α in chapter four) is possible. As a consequence, the fundamental tenets of Jewish faith become defensible (which is not the case if the world is eternal). These are the most important consequences of the two alternatives.

This can be represented in a table again; ('possible' implies 'not demonstrated,' 'impossible' implies 'refuted'):

	Principle: No	Principle: Yes
Eternity of the world	Demonstrated	Possible
Creation of the world	Impossible	Possible
God's existence	Demonstrated	Possible
God's unity	Demonstrated	Possible
God's incorpreality	Demonstrated	Possible
Miracles	Impossible	Possible
Uniqueness of Mosaic prophecy	Impossible	Possible
Superiority of Judaism	Impossible	Possible

To sum up: Maimonides' esoteric argument shows that the philosophers cannot *demonstrate* that the basic doctrines of Judaism are false, because they cannot *demonstrate* that "Maimonides' Principle" is false. However, the other option is not demonstrated as well, and even if it were demonstrated, it would show only the possibility of the truth of Judaism. Therefore, Judaism cannot be accepted only because of philosophical speculation, although it cannot be refuted because of philosophical speculation as well.

Some Reflections on Secondary Literature

In 1979 Shlomo Pines published a paper entitled "The Limitations of Human Knowledge according to Al-Farabi, Ibn Bajja, and Maimonides," in which he argued for an *epistemological* criterion for dividing Maimonides' esoteric teachings from the exoteric ones. Pines' Maimonides did not believe that human knowledge can extend to the things above the sphere of the Moon; therefore, Pines argues, any doctrines relating to the objects above the sphere of the Moon must be viewed as exoteric:

[...] it provides [...] a criterion which might permit us to distinguish in the philosophy of Maimonides the conceptions that conform to this epistemology and can therefore be regarded as having been reached through the application of a critical method, from those that may be termed "metaphysical" [...] forming a part of a philosophical theology.¹⁶⁹

Pines argues that the proofs for the existence of God belong to this "philosophical theology" or "metaphysics," and therefore Maimonides must have considered them to be invalid. Pines quotes *GP* II, 24 as a proof-text (in his own translation):

For it is impossible for us to accede to the points starting from which conclusion may be drawn about the heavens; for the latter are too far away from us and too high in place and in rank. And even the general conclusion that may be drawn from them, namely, that they prove the existence of their Mover, is a matter the knowledge of which cannot be reached by human intellects.

Pines' thesis was heavily criticised by Alexander Altmann and Herbert A. Davidson. Altmann argues that Maimonides *did* prove the existence, unity, and corporeality of God, and therefore these "metaphysical" propositions must have been

¹⁶⁹ Shlomo Pines, "The Limitations of Human Knowledge according to Al-Farabi, ibn Bajja, and Maimonides," in, *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, ed. Isadore Twersky (Cambridge, Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 1979), 93. As far as I understand, he uses the term "philosophical theology" as a euphemism for the Platonic "noble lie."

regarded by him as a part of legitimate human knowledge. Moreover, Pines' prooftext can be translated in another way as well:

Even though we are said to be incapable of ever knowing the essence of God and the separate intelligences, the firmly upheld availability of demonstrative proofs for the existence, unity, and incorporeality of God and for the existence and incorporeality of the intelligences is sufficient to establish the scientific status of metaphysics in the view of Maimonides . [...] The passage in II 24 (327) which may seem to imply that proving the existence of God as First Mover is beyond the power of human intellect admits of being read in the opposite sense. For Maimonides the existence, unity and incorporeality of God constitute the *terra firma* of Divine science.¹⁷⁰

Altmann's view was backed by Herbert A. Davidson. He provided an alternative translation of the debated passage in *GP* II, 24. According to him the text reads as follows:

The cause [i. e. the logical principles] from which proofs can be drawn up [*asbāb al-istidlāl*] regarding the [nature of the] heavens are beyond our gasp. They [i. e. the heavens] are at a distance from us and exalted in place and in rank – the general [enterprise of] drawing up a proof from them consisting [solely] in this, that they show us [or prove to us] their mover – indeed they [i. e. the heavens] are something to the knowledge of which human minds cannot attain.¹⁷¹

Both Altmann and Davidson seem to take it for granted that Maimonides' demonstration of God's existence, and so on, is a valid argument – or at least Maimonides thought so.¹⁷² Therefore, they think that to refute the interpretation of Pines it is enough to show by philological arguments that his rendering of the quoted passage is incorrect. Moreover, even Pines does not seem to deny that the logical structure of the argument is correct. Maimonides' reason for the (esoteric) refusal of the demonstration according to Pines' interpretation is due to the fact that its first part (the Aristotelian proofs from the hypothesis of eternity) is based on premises pertaining to the spheres above the Moon.

However, if our interpretation presented in this paper is correct, then the logical structure itself renders the argument invalid. If the principle *ex nihilo nihil fit* is not accepted as a premise, then God's existence cannot be deduced from the non-

¹⁷⁰ Alexander Altmann, "Maimonides on the Intellect and the Scope of Metaphysics," in *Von der mittelalterlichen zur modernen Aufklärung* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1987), 116-117.

¹⁷¹ Herbert A. Davidson, "Maimonides on Metaphysical Knowledge," *Maimonidean Studies* 3 (1992/1993), 103.

¹⁷² By Maimonides' demonstration or argument in the singular they probably mean the dilemma argument ("the world is either eternal or created, etc.). See the section "Techniques of Hiding the Truth" above. However, neither Altmann nor Davidson carries out an analysis of the argument.

eternity of the world. If *ex nihilo nihil fit* is accepted, then the eternity of the world follows with all its consequences that Maimonides did not wish to permit. More than that, we have proved that Maimonides was aware of this fact. Thus Pines seems to be justified in saying that Maimonides did not consider the existence of God to be provable, although from this it does not follow that Pines' overall interpretation of "the limitations of human knowledge according to Maimonides," and his methodology for discerning the esoteric level of *GP* is correct.

However, I do not wish to enter into the debate between Altmann, Davidson and Pines in this place any further. My conclusions are rather in accordance with the approach proposed recently by Yair Lorberbaum.¹⁷³ He writes:

According to the reading [of the Seventh Cause] proposed here, the real motive for the socio-political concealment [of the truth from the multitude] was the necessity of hiding the dialectical, non-apodictic nature of metaphysical speculation from the multitude. The multitude is, so to say, tied to dogmas, which philosophical speculation should not question. According to the present approach, Maimonides' words concerning the Seventh Cause are referring to the fact that the concealment [of the truth] from the multitude is due to the dialectical element present in astrophysical and philosophical speculations and it is not connected at all to heterodox doctrines, such as the claim that the world is eternal.¹⁷⁴

This paper can be read as a corroboration of Lorberbaum's interpretation. The secret message of the *GP* was not simply the stating of some heterodox doctrines, but the fact that the exoteric arguments proving the dogmas of Judaism were inconsistent, while the consistent, esoteric argument was dialectical. Therefore, philosophical speculation could not dismiss all the doubts concerning the foundations of Jewish religion.

Finally, I would like to quote a beautiful text from a ninth-century Muslim author, Al-Jāhī<u>z</u>. He is probably speaking of his master, Abu Is<u>h</u>āq Ibrahim an-Na<u>zz</u>ām (d. 840-850), who adopted an attitude of doubt towards theological problems. He clearly states that this attitude does not fit the multitude but the elite; therefore – he suggests – it should be a kind of esoteric tradition. It is possible that Maimonides was an adherent of this tradition:

The common people have fewer doubts than the elite, because they have no hesitation with regard to believing something to be true (or false), and they do

¹⁷³ Yair Lorberbaum: "Ha-sibba ha-sheviit: al ha-setirot be-'More ha-nevukhim' – iyyun mehuddash" (The Seventh Cause: On Contradictions in Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*), *Tarbiz* 69 (2000): 211-237.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid*. 226.

not doubt themselves. They see no other choice except absolutely believing something to be true or absolutely believing something to be false. They exclude the third possibility, that of doubt, which comprises the various degrees of doubt, according to the presence or absence of suspicion with regard to reasons for (taking or not taking a doubting attitude) and according to the various measure of likelihood. A man with some experience in speculative thought heard scholars approve of some doubt. He extended this (attitude) to everything and finally assumed that the truth or untruth of every thing is knowable (not absolutely but) only according to a varying measure of likelihood. This man died, leaving no offspring nor anyone following his method. If I mentioned his name in this connection, I would do no wrong. But presently I do not like to mention with praise someone who partook in the dignity of *kalām* and shared with the others the name *mutakallim*, especially one who held the opinion of the precedence of *istitā* 'ah.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁵ Quoted by Franz Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant: The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam* (Leiden: Brill: 1970), 305. *Isti<u>t</u>ā ah* means "capacity of life." In the early period of Muslim theology this term was connected with such hotly debated issues as human free will and divine omnipotence.

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