To the memory of
my mother, Helen Kreisel
[née Saremsky]

Contents

Acknowledgements

In the past decade and a half, most of my academic activity has been devoted to producing annotated editions of important medieval Jewish philosophic treatises written in Provence that had not been published till now. On occasion I would also write articles, many of them in response to invitations to deal with a general topic in medieval Jewish philosophy for one of the more popular series of collected essays. Thus when I was approached a number of years ago by Dr. Igor Nemirovsky at the suggestion of Professor Dov Schwartz to contribute a volume of my articles to the series "Emunot: Jewish Philosophy and Kabbalah," published by the Academic Studies Press, I was at first reluctant to do so. I had no desire to present simply a compilation of articles. I preferred a book devoted to a central theme, in the model of my previous book of articles, *Maimonides' Political Thought*, and I was not sure that I could put together another book of this nature. Upon further reflection, I realized that insofar as much of my research during this period focused on Maimonides and his reception in Provence, I could in fact dedicate a book to this topic. This undertaking would

entail, however, translating and editing an extensive amount of material that I had written in Hebrew, in addition to reediting a number of articles written in English. With this in mind, I accepted Dr. Nemirovsky's proposal.

The process took far longer and it involved far more work than I originally envisioned. Seven of the eleven chapters in this volume are based on writings that appeared till now only in Hebrew. I myself translated these writings, while at the same time I revised them extensively. I rearranged some of the discussions, added or modified many points, and also attempted to eliminate much of the redundant material. Four other chapters appeared originally as English articles, to which I also introduced a fair number of revisions. In all the chapters I included cross references to other chapters in the volume. In short, I have tried to create more of a cohesive book than simply a collection of diverse articles. It is my sincere hope that for the non-Hebrew reader, this volume will help to illuminate the thought of some very interesting but lesser known Provençal Jewish thinkers with whom I have dealt previously mostly in my Hebrew writings. This volume is also intended as a contribution to the understanding of how the Provençal thinkers of the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries read Maimonides and the scope of his influence on them, as well as to how I think the modern reader should read Maimonides.

I gratefully acknowledge the Harvard Center for Jewish Studies, Brill Academic Publishers, and Yeshiva University Press for their permission to republish the following articles:

"Maimonides on Divine Religion," in *Maimonides after 800 Years: Essays on Maimonides and His Influence*, ed. Jay Harris (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 151-166.

"From Esotericism to Science: The Account of the Chariot in Maimonidean Philosophy," in *The Cultures of Maimonideanism: New Approaches to the History of Jewish Thought*, ed. James Robinson (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009), 21-56.

"Reasons for the Commandments in Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* and in Provençal Jewish Philosophy," *Maimonidean Studies* 5 (2008): 159-188.

The fourth English article that appeared previously is "Maimonides on the Eternity of the World," in *Jewish Philosophy: Perspectives and Retrospectives*, ed. Raphael Jospe and Dov Schwartz (Brighton, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2012), 157-184.

I would like to thank the staff of Academic Studies Press, most of all Ms. Sharona Vedol, her successor Dr. Meghan Vicks, and Ms. Kira Nemirovsky who accompanied the project from its inception to fruition. I would also like to acknowledge the wonderful job done by the copyeditor, Ms. Deva Jasheway. My colleagues at the Goldstein-Goren Department of Jewish Thought at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev have provided me with a stimulating academic environment that has contributed much to my research and I would like to express my gratitude to them. Lastly, I would like to thank my wife Shoshanah for her unwavering support over the years.

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Beer-Sheva, Israel

Section I

Maimonides

Maimonides' God: The God of Abraham or the God of Aristotle?

In a famous passage of the *Kuzari*, Judah Halevi contrasts the God of Aristotle, who is referred to as *Elohim* and known by reason, with the God of Abraham, whose name is the Tetragrammaton and who is known by prophetic illumination. The former is the God of nature, who governs the world by a fixed order. The latter is the God of history, who is aware of all that occurs in the world and exercises personal providence that is not limited to the workings of nature. The two views of God elicit two different responses in human beings, as the Khazar king notes:

> One passionately yearns for Adonai with a passion that involves both "taste" and testament, while attachment to *Elohim* is by way of speculation. The passion involving "taste" compels one to devote oneself to the love of God and be prepared to die for God's sake. Speculation, on the other hand, makes the honor of God a necessity only as long as it entails no harm or hardship for the sake of God. Hence one may excuse Aristotle if he was lax in

> the observance of the law, since he doubted whether God is cognizant of it. (*Kuzari* 4.16)[1]

Who then is Maimonides' God? The answer appears to be clear in light of Maimonides' description of the commandment to sanctify God, which he presents in the *Book of Commandments* (positive commandment no. 9):

> We are commanded to publicize the true religion, with no fear of the injury inflicted by an adversary. Even if an oppressor coerces us to deny God, we should not obey him but rather surrender ourselves to death. We should not even attempt to deceive him into thinking that we deny God, though in our hearts we continue to believe in God. This is the commandment to sanctify God, which is incumbent upon all Israel; that is to say, in our love of God and belief in God's unity we surrender ourselves to be put to death by the oppressor.[2]

Maimonides' description is reminiscent of that of Judah Halevi regarding the readiness on the part of one who knows the God of Abraham, the God of history, to surrender one's life for the sake of one's belief.[3] This is not to deny that Maimonides' God is also the God of Aristotle, for Abraham too knew God as *Elohim*,[4] nor to ignore the fact that Maimonides, in many of his writings, encourages his readers

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1 All translations in this chapter are my own unless noted otherwise. For the Arabic see David Baneth (ed.), *Al-Kitāb Al-Khazarī* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1977), 168-9. The notion of "taste" in reference to God is reminiscent of Sufi notions; see Diana Lobel, *Between Mysticism and Philosophy: Sufi Language of Religious Experience in Judah Halevi's Kuzari* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000), 95-100.

2 Joseph Kafiḥ (ed. and Hebrew trans.), *Sefer Hamitzvot* (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1971), 63.

3 For the relation between Maimonides and Halevi and the likelihood that Maimonides was acquainted with the *Kuzari* see Howard Kreisel, "Judah Halevi's Influence on Maimonides: A Preliminary Appraisal," *Maimonidean Studies* 2 (1991): 95-121.

4 See Maimonides' description of Abraham's discovery of the existence of God in *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Idolatry 1.3 and contrast this description with Laws of Principles of the Torah 1.5, 7. In both passages God is known as the Aristotelian First Mover and Prime Cause of the world. Halevi accepts the philosophers' view of God as First Cause, and he accepts as well their conception of nature, as opposed to the belief in occasionalism characterizing most of the Moslem theologians (the *mutakallimūn*); see *Kuzari* 5.20. Yet in contrast to the philosophers he believes in a deity that acts outside the boundaries of the order of nature.

to appreciate more this name of God, the aspect of divine activity that results in the order of nature.[5] This point notwithstanding, Maimonides does not appear to abandon the conception of the personal God of Abraham that lies at the heart of Jewish tradition. In extending divine providence, God may not intervene as much in the order of nature as the masses would have it, but God is cognizant of all that occurs, rewards and punishes accordingly, and still plays an immediate role in determining at least some events of history, most notably the Giving of the Torah at Sinai—or so it appears to be the case for Maimonides.[6] Is it not then for the God of Abraham that Maimonides' soul passionately yearns, just as is the case for Halevi before him?

There is, however, another way of understanding Maimonides' approach. Perhaps he is of the opinion that Abraham's response remains the one that is most appropriate even for the God of Aristotle. That is to say, Maimonides thinks that one should passionately yearn for *Elohim*, the God of nature, as a matter of "taste" and testament and not simply view *Elohim* as an object of cold contemplation, as opposed to Halevi's characterization of the philosophers' approach. The apprehension of God by way of philosophic speculation is what leads to the desire and, moreover, the internal feeling of compulsion to publicize the truth of the unity of God to all of humanity, even if it endangers oneself.[7] In his treatment of the commandment to love God, Maimonides writes in a previous passage in the *Book of the Commandments* (positive commandment no. 3):

5 See, in particular, *Guide of the Perplexed*, 2.10. All English citations from this book in this volume are taken from Shlomo Pines (trans.), *The Guide of the Perplexed* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963).

6 For a survey of these topics in Maimonides' thought and the different possibilities for interpreting his approach, see Howard Kreisel, "Moses Maimonides," in *History of Jewish Philosophy*, ed. Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman (London: Routledge, 1996), 245-280.

7 See *Guide* 2.37, where Maimonides compares the internal compulsion experienced by the prophets to call upon the nation to serve God to that experienced by the philosophers to communicate to others the truths they had learnt. In all likelihood, Maimonides was acquainted with the fact that Socrates in his passionate commitment to truth was prepared to die rather than cease his teachings.

> We have explained to you that by way of contemplation one attains knowledge [of God] and finds felicity; love [of God] necessarily follows. They [the sages] have stated that this commandment [to love God] includes calling upon all humanity to worship and believe in God. That is to say, by way of analogy, when one loves someone, one glorifies and praises that person and calls upon others to befriend that person. Similarly, if you truly love God in accordance with the knowledge of God that you attain, you will undoubtedly call upon the foolish and the ignorant to discern the truth that you have discerned. . . . Just as Abraham, who loved God—as Scripture attests by [God referring to him as] *Abraham, my lover* [Isaiah 41:8]—by virtue of the strength of his intellectual attainment, and called upon humanity to believe in God as a result of his love for God, so one must love God till one calls upon others to [believe in] God.[8]

According to Maimonides, Abraham's belief in God resulted from his philosophic speculation. In other words, Abraham apprehended the God of Aristotle and this apprehension led to his passionate love of God, described by Maimonides in this passage as well as in *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Principles of the Torah 4.12, where he writes:

> When the human being contemplates these matters and knows all the existents—the angel [Separate Intellect], sphere, human being, and so on—and discerns the wisdom of God in all the existents and creatures, his love for God increases and his soul thirsts and flesh yearns to love God, blessed be He.[9]

Nevertheless, this alternative interpretation that one passionately loves the God of nature appears problematic. How can I yearn for a God who does not know *me*? Why should one be so devoted to a divine law

8 Kafiḥ, *Sefer Hamitzvot*, 59.

9 See also *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Principles of the Torah 2.2; Laws of Repentance 10.6. In the *Mishneh Torah*, Maimonides ties the true love of God solely to the philosophic understanding of the order of existence. For a study of Maimonides' approach to the love of God, see Howard Kreisel, *Maimonides' Political Thought* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999), 225-266. It is interesting to note that in the *Guide of the Perplexed*, Abraham is no longer viewed as an Aristotelian philosopher but one who proves the existence of God on the basis of the creation of the world; see *Guide* 2.13. In this case Maimonides adopts a more exoteric philosophic stance in his legal work than in his theological one, as some scholars have already pointed out. For a discussion of this point see Kreisel, "Moses Maimonides," 216-223.

whose immediate author can not be God, for Aristotle's God is incapable of such action, and who is also ignorant of my observance of the commandments, let alone of my emotional state. How could Maimonides, who dedicated all his major works to the God of Abraham by opening them with the verse *in the name of God the Lord of the world* [Genesis 21:33],[10] have thought that Abraham's God and Aristotle's God are in fact the same? Is it not strange, if not ludicrous, to think that Maimonides the great Jewish legal scholar is in fact committed solely to the God of nature?

This fundamental problem has confronted Maimonides' commentators from his own time to the present. Those who maintain that Maimonides' true view essentially conforms to the world view of the medieval Aristotelian philosophers, and this is the esoteric position that he conceals in the *Guide*, have struggled and continue to struggle to show on the basis of his writings that he holds such a position.[11] Most, though not all, who argued this position in the medieval world

10 God in the verse is referred to by the Tetragrammaton. In Maimonides' interpretation, the verse refers to Abraham's teaching others the monotheistic idea; see *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Idolatry 1.3; *Guide* 3.29. Maimonides opens the *Commentary on the Mishnah*, *Book of Commandments*, each book of the *Mishneh Torah*, and each part of the *Guide* with this verse, not only conforming thereby with the accepted Arabic practice of dedicating religious works to the name of God but also indicating that in all these writings he is following in the footsteps of Abraham.

11 For a discussion of the esoteric interpretation of Maimonides through the ages, see in particular Aviezer Ravitzky, "The Secrets of the *Guide of the Perplexed*: Between the Thirteenth and the Twentieth Centuries," in *Studies in Maimonides*, ed. Isadore Twersky (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 159-207. It is not my contention that all those through the ages who interpreted Maimonides as holding an esoteric opinion on a given issue were of the view that he agreed completely with the Aristotelian world view. Rather, my claim is that those who adopted such an interpretation generally attempted to show Maimonides' agreement with the philosophical approach on the issue in question. There are certainly differences of opinion among the commentators on what issues Maimonides concealed his true opinion, let alone whether he held esoteric opinions at all. I am also not claiming that the only reason for Maimonides' esotericism was to hide his agreement with Aristotelian philosophy because of the dangers of the views advanced by Aristotle and his medieval Islamic followers to the naïve faith of the masses, though I am of the opinion that this was his primary motivation. Moreover, this was the reason advanced by those of Maimonides' medieval followers who interpreted him as holding esoteric positions. For a different approach to the reasons for Maimonides' esotericism see, for example, Yair Loberbaum, "On Contradictions, Rationality,

did so not in order to criticize Maimonides, but because they themselves felt it as the true view of God and God's relation to the world. The early interpreters of the *Guide* in Provence, beginning with Samuel Ibn Tibbon and his followers, developed the esoteric approach to Maimonides' magnum opus and saw themselves not only as his interpreters but also his true disciples, even if they did not agree with him on all issues.[12] The problem they faced was how to bridge between belief in the Torah and all that this entails and belief in a deity whose relation to the world is that which Aristotle posited.

Let us return for a moment to Judah Halevi, the Jewish thinker who has gone down in history as the great antagonist of Aristotelian philosophy, the Jewish counterpart to the great Islamic thinker Al-Ghazali.[13] Halevi is well aware that if his criticism of the philosophers is correct, one would expect them to practice all forms of moral and religious debauchery. If God is not aware of human actions, all moral restraints on human behavior are removed. Yet as the king of the Khazars points out:

> I see you criticizing the philosophers by attributing to them that of which the contrary is known. Of a person who lives in seclusion and divorces himself from the pleasures of the world, we say he is engaged

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Dialectics and Esotericism in Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*," *Metaphysics* 55 (2002): 711-750. For a further discussion of this issue see below, chapters 2 and 7.

12 For Samuel Ibn Tibbon's importance for the subsequent esoteric interpretation of Maimonides see, in particular, Aviezer Ravitzky, "Samuel Ibn Tibbon and the Esoteric Character of the *Guide of the Perplexed*," *AJS Review* 6 (1981): 87-123. See also Carlos Fraenkel, *From Maimonides to Samuel Ibn Tibbon: The Transformation of Dalālat al-Hā'irīm into the Moreh Nevukhim*, (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2007) (Heb.).

13 This is not the place to deal with the question of the extent to which Halevi is influenced by the very philosophy which he purportedly rejects. In a number of articles I attempted to show the decisive influence exerted by Aristotelian philosophy on Halevi's thought; see, for example, Howard Kreisel, "Judah Halevi's *Kuzari*: Between the God of Abraham and the God of Aristotle," in *Joodse filosofie tussen rede en traditie*, ed. Reinier Munk and F. J. Hoogewould (Kampen: Kok, 1993), 24-34. On the relation between Halevi and Al-Ghazali see David Baneth, "R. Judah Halevi and Al-Gazali," *Keneset* 7 (1942): 311-329 (Heb.). For the reception of Halevi through the ages see Adam Shear, *The Kuzari and the Shaping of Jewish Identity: 1167-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

> in philosophy and shares the views of the philosophers. You, on the other hand, deny them every good action. (*Kuzari* 4.18)

Halevi's response to this criticism is worthy of note:

> What I told you is the foundation of their belief, namely, that the highest human happiness lies in the knowledge of the speculative sciences. By grasping the forms of the existents by the *hylic* intellect and becoming an intellect *in actu*, and then an acquired intellect close to the rank of the Active Intellect, one no longer experiences death. This, however, can only be obtained by devoting one's life to study and continuous contemplation, which is incompatible with worldly pursuits. For this reason, the philosophers divorced themselves from the pursuit of wealth, glory, corporeal pleasures, and children, in order not to be distracted in their studies. As soon as one has become learned in accordance with the final goal of the sought-after knowledge, the individual is no longer scrupulous in his actions. The philosophers do not practice humility for the sake of reward, nor do they think that if they steal or murder they will be punished. They command the good and prohibit evil in the best and most excellent manner, in order to resemble the Creator who arranged everything perfectly. They have devised social laws without binding force, and which are conditional and may be overridden in times of need. The religious law, however, is not so except in its social parts, and the law itself sets down those which permit exceptions and those which do not. (*Kuzari* 4.19)

Halevi's description of the philosophers' approach is designed to impress upon the reader the view that they do not see in morality a binding obligation governing one's behavior, but rather a useful suggestion of how one is to behave.[14] Yet this conclusion is problematic in light of Halevi's own words. He is aware of the fact that the world view of the philosophers demands one to lead a completely moral life. Though they may regard it as a means to intellectual perfection, they view it as a *necessary* means. Moreover, for the medieval Aristotelian

14 Leo Strauss devoted an important article to examining and defending Halevi's philosophical critique of the philosophers' position on this issue; see Leo Strauss, "The Law of Reason in the *Kuzari*," *PAAJR* 13 (1943): 47-96. See also Howard Kreisel, "Judah Halevi and the Problem of Philosophical Ethics, in *Between Religion and Ethics*, ed. Avi Sagi and Daniel Statman (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 1993), 171-183 (Heb.).

philosophers who were strongly influenced by Neoplatonic thought, the moral life is not solely a *means* to perfection but an *aspect* of perfection. It provides the foundation for a life of *imitatio Dei*[15]—another point Halevi mentions in this context. At the beginning of his treatise, Halevi ascribes to the philosopher the view that one who attains intellectual perfection always performs the most noble actions, as if his soul is governed by the Active Intellect.[16] In light of these positions, one may question how compelling is Halevi's criticism of the philosophers that they do not fear God for the sake of reward or think that stealing or murdering will merit punishment. While they may not live moral lives for the sake of reward or punishment on the part of a personal deity who is watching everything they do, they do so because of the inherent worth of this mode of life. In short, even Halevi concedes that the morality preached and practiced by the philosophers is integrally related to their world view. The God of Aristotle provides the foundation not only for the physical order of the world but also for the moral one. In light of this point, we may well ask whether the intrinsic value of morality does not provide a more solid basis for its binding nature than any external rewards and punishments that result from its practice or non-practice. Moreover, Halevi indicates at the beginning of his treatise that the philosophers see their lifestyle, which combines strict morality with intensive contemplation, as inevitably resulting in the highest form of human happiness, one that is divine in nature as well as eternal.[17]

Halevi's essentially laudatory characterization of the philosophers' approach, even if unintended, is certainly justified in light of the medieval Aristotelian tradition. Aristotle himself appears to hold a natural

15 For different models of *imitatio Dei* in medieval philosophy, see Lawrence Berman, "The Political Interpretation of the Maxim: The Purpose of Philosophy is the Imitation of God," *Studia Islamica* 15 (1961): 53-61.

16 *Kuzari* 1.1.

17 It should be added that Halevi is disingenuous when he indicates that the philosophers after attaining their goal can permit themselves immoral actions when convenient. He himself notes when presenting their thought at the beginning of the treatise that after attaining perfection the person naturally performs only the noblest actions, as if he is guided completely by the supernal intellect.