"All Israel has a Portion in the World to Come": Attempts to Create a Coherent Narrative of Reward and Punishment in Medieval Jewish Philosophy

Howard Kreisel
Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

Abstract

Various notions pertaining to future reward and punishment are mentioned in biblical and rabbinic literature – e.g., the messianic era, the World to Come, the resurrection of the dead, the Garden of Eden, Gehinom – but no attempt was ever made to create a coherent narrative from these different notions. It was left to the medieval Jewish thinkers to fill this void, basing themselves on the sources of Jewish tradition and their own philosophical views.

In this article, I explore the approaches of four medieval philosophers: Saadiah Gaon, Joseph Ibn Ẓaddik, Maimonides (1138–1204), and Ḥasdai Crescas. My primary focus will be the ultimate fate of the individual. The issue of naturalism vs. supernaturalism remains a central one in my treatment of this subject – that is to say, how God's governance of the world is to be conceived. At the same time, I will take a closer look at another major issue that has not been sufficiently emphasized in previous studies; namely, how these thinkers conceived of the nature of the individual in their approaches to one's final state. In other words, how did they think of the "I," whether in this world or the next? Their various approaches to this problem find their clearest expression in the attempts to understand the nature of the World to Come and how the cardinal rabbinic belief in the resurrection of the dead fits into the story of ultimate reward. As I will try to show, more often than not one can detect a dissonance in their approaches due to their conflicting religious and philosophical commitments, particularly due to the strong body/soul dichotomy that infiltrated medieval Jewish thought from Greek thought.

Introduction

From biblical times to the present, there have been numerous attempts to reconcile the notion of divine justice with the sufferings experienced by the young and by those who are faithful to God and

the divine commandments, or alternatively, with the success and pleasures experienced by the wicked. The solution, at least from rabbinic times, was to regard the balance of justice being restored and the final recompense being meted out as taking place in some future state – "in a world that is entirely good" and "entirely prolonged."[1] Yet aside from scattered and divergent statements as to future reward or punishment, literature from the rabbinic period presents no detailed discussion of this topic.[2] It was left to the medieval Jewish thinkers to fill this void, basing themselves on biblical verses, rabbinic sayings, and their own philosophical views.

The attempt to create a coherent narrative from these variant sources was an exceptionally challenging one. The results were more often than not problematic, either from a philosophical perspective or from a religious one.[3] Ultimately, the thinkers had to steer a course between their loyalty to the sources of Jewish tradition and to their philosophical commitment – between how far they were willing to go in interpreting the traditional sources figuratively in light of their philosophical views, in addition to the problem of reconciling seemingly conflicting views in the traditional sources themselves, and how far they felt they could stretch or modify their philosophical views to accommodate a literal belief in the teachings found in these sources.[4]

Previous studies touching upon the topic of eschatology and ultimate reward in medieval Jewish thought have tended to focus on the tension between medieval philosophical naturalistic approaches and the supernaturalistic ones that appear to underlie Jewish traditional sources. They also tend to dwell upon the final state of the nation – that is to say, the messianic era – in addition to the final state

1 See, for example, *BT Qiddushin* 39b; *BT Hullin* 142a.

2 For a study of rabbinic notions of future reward, see Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975), 1:649–90.

3 For a detailed study of medieval Jewish philosophical approaches to the subject of reward and punishment, including those of the philosophers discussed in the present article, see Dov Schwartz, *Messianism in Medieval Jewish Thought*, trans. Batya Stein (Brighton, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2017).

4 While other issues are also relevant to the narratives developed by these thinkers, such as interfaith controversies and pedagogical concerns, I will not deal with them in this study.

of the individual, and the relation between the two.[5] In this study, my primary focus will be the ultimate fate of the individual. The issue of naturalism vs. supernaturalism remains a central one in my treatment of this subject – that is to say, how God's governance of the world is to be conceived. At the same time, I will take a closer look at another major issue that has not been sufficiently emphasized in previous studies; namely, how the thinkers conceived of the nature of the individual in their approaches to one's final state. In other words, how did they think of the "I," whether in this world or the next? Did they think of one's true self as essentially a corporeal being and hence that there could be no ultimate reward without the soul being attached to the body? Or, alternately, did they think of one's true self only in terms of the soul, with the individual's soul being capable of enjoying a far better and more purified state of being when it is no longer weighed down by the body and the desires it prompts? Or did they think of the essence of the individual solely in terms of the intellect and the impersonal knowledge of eternal truths that it attains? Their various approaches to this problem find their clearest expression in the attempts to understand the nature of the World to Come and how the cardinal rabbinic belief in the resurrection of the dead[6] fits into the story of ultimate reward. More often than not, one can detect a dissonance in their approaches due to their conflicting religious and philosophical commitments. While I will offer no novel interpretations of the philosophers I will discuss, I think that a juxtaposition of their approaches to this subject will help to clarify the picture of the problems they faced in thinking of the nature of the final reward and attempting to form a cohesive image of the aspects of this reward as taught by Jewish tradition.

The present study will examine the views of four different thinkers. I will begin by dealing with the thought of Saadiah Gaon (892–942), who played a pioneering role in this issue, as he did in so many different areas. Essentially, he was the first thinker to attempt to create a coherent narrative of the various forms of reward and punishment – i.e., the messianic age, the Garden of Eden, Gehinnom,

5 See Schwartz, *Messianism in Medieval Jewish Thought*, as well as the studies mentioned in n. 44 below.

6 "These are the ones who have no portion in the World to Come: one who says that [belief in] the resurrection of the dead is not from the Torah (*Mishnah Sanhedrin* 10.1)."

the resurrection of the dead, and the World to Come. Next, I will study the approach of one of the earliest Jewish philosophers in Spain, Joseph Ibn Ẓaddik (1075–1149), who also attempted to show the relation between the different notions pertaining to this subject. I will then turn to Maimonides (1138–1204), whose approach to ultimate reward and punishment provided the starting point for the approaches of all subsequent Jewish philosophers who grappled with this subject. Finally, I will analyze the post-Maimonidean Jewish philosopher Ḥasdai Crescas (1340–1410), whose approach to this subject offers the most detailed and comprehensive critique of the philosophical view that appears to underlie Maimonides' approach.

A

Saadiah Gaon devotes three sections of his *Book of Beliefs and Opinions* to a discussion of this topic: Resurrection, Messianic Redemption, and the World to Come (sections 7 to 9). The views he presents in these sections follow his discussion of the nature of the human soul (section 6), upon which they are predicated.[7] Moreover, belief in divine justice necessitates positing belief in life after death in which one earns one's reward or punishment, as Saadiah argues in his discussion of merits and demerits in section 5.[8]

Saadiah regards the rational soul as an entity made of luminous matter, similar to but purer than that of the planets and spheres.[9] It is

[7] The Judeo-Arabic edition of the treatise (*Kitāb al-Amānāt w-al-Iʿtiqādāt*) that I utilized is that of Joseph Kafiḥ (Jerusalem: Sura, 1970), which also contains a Hebrew translation. The treatise was translated into English by Samuel Rosenblatt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948).

[8] The good experienced by the wicked and the suffering of the righteous can thereby be explained by their effect on the individual's final state. In Saadiah's view, those who are evil are often remunerated for their good deeds in this world, as the righteous are for their bad ones, with the situation being reversed in the World to Come.

[9] The rationality of the soul attests to the purer nature of its matter. Only God is incorporeal in Saadiah's ontology, thus he views even the soul as a corporeal entity. However, he does not specify the precise substance from which the soul is created. He does not hold the Aristotelian theory of the "ether" from which the stars and spheres are composed, but rather the Platonic theory that they are composed of pure fire; see *Beliefs and Opinions* 1.3 (eighth theory of creation). Thus, it would appear from his juxtaposition of the soul with the spheres that the soul is composed of a finer gradation of the same substance. Yet in his

created at the moment the body is completely formed, with its seat being in the heart.[10] It is separate from the body, leaving room for the continued existence of the rational soul, not just the intellect, after the deterioration of the body. Nevertheless, the soul cannot function without the body. This view is crucial for Saadiah's understanding of the various forms of reward and punishment. All reward and punishment must involve the body and not the disembodied soul alone. Moreover, each soul, in his view, is designed to function in a particular body.[11]

The primary form of reward and punishment – namely, the World to Come – does not occur at the moment of death in Saadiah's view. Rather, it will occur at a time decreed by God. Until that time, God stores the disembodied souls, keeping those of the righteous on high and those of the wicked below. Yet prior to their storage and while the body decomposes, the souls – and here Saadiah appears to be thinking only of those of the wicked – continue to wander in this world and experience misery at what is happening to their bodies.[12] This could be construed as the first stage of punishment, since the

discussion of the soul, Saadiah explicitly dismisses the view that it is composed of either air or fire; see *Beliefs and Opinions* 6.1. Aside from the four elements, he labels the only other substance that he posits as "light" or "luminosity" (*al-nūr*), which is the purest substance created by God and characterizes the created Glory or the *Shekhinah* in Saadiah's ontology; see *Beliefs and Opinions* 2.10 (Kafiḥ, 104). It is not clear whether the angels were created from a lower gradation of this luminous substance or from a purer gradation of fire. Saadiah's juxtaposition of the angels with the spheres suggests the latter possibility; see *Beliefs and Opinions* 4.2; 6.4. This is also the view found in the *Book of Creation*, as Saadiah is well aware, as seen from his *Commentary on the Book of Creation*; see Saadiah Gaon, *Sefer Yeẓirah 'im Perush ha-Gaon Rabbenu Sa'adya b. R. Yosef Fayyumi*, ed. and trans. Joseph Kafiḥ (Jerusalem, 1972), 125. In the final analysis, it appears that Saadiah is not entirely consistent in his view of the substance of the soul and of the heavenly entities beneath the rank of the Glory.

10 *Beliefs and Opinions* 6.3. For a discussion of Saadiah's theory of the soul and his sources, see Herbert Davidson, "Saadia's List of Theories of the Soul," in *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, ed. Alexander Altmann (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 75–94.

11 Saadiah is acquainted with the view of the transmigration of human souls from one body to the next and presents a series of arguments against it; see *Beliefs and Opinions* 6.8.

12 See *BT Shabbat* 152b. Saadiah appears to be inconsistent in his view as to whether the soul is capable of feeling when it is not attached to the body. Even in this case, however, the suffering is brought about due to some connection it experiences to the decomposing body.

misery they experience is in proportion to their deserts, in his view. Saadiah cites numerous verses and alludes to a number of rabbinic dicta in support of his approach to the fate of the soul after its separation from the body.[13]

With his view of the soul and what happens to it at death established, the first type of reward that Saadiah discusses is the resurrection of the dead. Since the first section of his treatise proves God's creation of the world *ex nihilo* and the previous section establishes the continuous existence of all souls after their separation from the body, he sees no problem in accepting the belief that God can resurrect the dead, based on biblical verses and rabbinic teachings. The Deity who created the world in its entirety from nothing certainly has the power to return souls to their bodies. The main question Saadiah addresses is when this event will occur – at the time of redemption, or in the World to Come? He favors the former view, which was held by most Jews, and which he sees as more in harmony with a literal interpretation of biblical verses pertaining to the subject, citing it at length. Yet in his view, not everyone will be resurrected at the beginning of the period, but only those Jews who died virtuous or repentant. All others will be resurrected at the end of the period, and each of them will be resurrected from the very same elements from which his body was composed beforehand, a point that is important to Saadiah given his view that each soul was created to function in a specific body. Saadiah shows why there is no impossibility that this is the case, arguing that God does not employ these elements in the creation of future generations, for there is no shortage of the four basic elements from which human bodies are composed. He also addresses numerous other problems in discussing the state of the resurrected individual, such as whether he will be resurrected wearing clothes (which he answers in the affirmative) or with the same blemishes he had in his previous lifetime (which he answers in the negative). More interesting is the problem of whether the resurrected will earn a greater reward for their good conduct at the time of redemption and whether they are capable of sin. According to Saadiah, God would not have resurrected them if He had known that they would engage in sin, and they certainly will earn added reward as a result of their good conduct after their resurrection.

13 *Beliefs and Opinions* 6.7.

The period of redemption itself is the next topic that Saadiah addresses. He assures his readers that this period will definitely occur based on divine promises and even offers a calculation of when it will begin.[14] From the many verses touching upon this period, Saadiah attempts to frame a coherent narrative of how it will unfold, offering different scenarios depending upon whether Israel repents or not. It will be a period when the other nations will serve Israel, which once again will be a sovereign state in its land, and they will help to transport all Jews there. There will be no disease and infirmity in this period, only joy and gladness. People will also live much longer. The light of God's Indwelling (*Shekhinah*) will become visible and it will extend from heaven to earth, shining upon the Temple so that it can be seen from great distances. All Jews will possess the gift of prophecy. All people will believe in the unity of God, and there will be no more wars. Even the animals will be at peace with one another, as stated in Isaiah 11:69, though Saadiah leaves open the possibility that this may be a parable referring to the wicked making peace with the righteous.[15] He goes to great lengths to disprove the view of certain Jews that all the promises of redemption refer to the Second Temple period and that many of these promises were not realized due to the sins of the Jewish people at that time. In a similar vein, he attacks the Christian beliefs regarding this matter.[16]

Saadiah sees the period of redemption as an exceptional *historical* one. Nature will remain, for the most part, intact. He ignores rabbinic dictum regarding the numerous miraculous events that will characterize this period, such as how the land will produce cakes and processed wool.[17] The two most exceptional supernatural events that will occur in this period are the resurrection of the dead and the appearance of the light of the Indwelling, referred to elsewhere as the Created Glory,[18] which will now be visible to all. The appearance of this special light may well be the reason that all Israel will attain prophecy, yet another supernatural event that will occur at this point, though Saadiah does not make this point explicitly. Yet for all the

14 *Beliefs and Opinions* 8.3–4.

15 *Beliefs and Opinions* 8.8.

16 *Beliefs and Opinions* 8.7; 8.9.

17 See *BT Shabbat* 30b. In general, Saadiah makes only limited use of *midrashim* in developing his views.

18 *Beliefs and Opinions* 2.10.

miraculous events that will occur in this period, he insists that the Torah in its entirety will remain completely obligatory.

It is in his discussion of the World to Come that Saadiah presents his most novel views. After the messianic period, God will create a new world, as mentioned in Isaiah 66:22, to which He will transfer the living. At the same time, He will resurrect the rest of the dead. He will then destroy our present world. The World to Come will be characterized by its pure luminosity. While all souls will still exist together with their bodies, people will no longer engage in drinking, eating, procreating, or pursuing a livelihood. Instead, everyone will be sustained by the special light, as indicated by the rabbinic dictum: "The righteous sit with their crowns on their heads and enjoy the splendor of the Indwelling" (*BT Berakhot* 17a).[19] Since people will no longer require the amenities offered by the present earth in order to supply themselves with their material necessities, the creation of this new world is necessary as it will be more suited to their new physical state. Reward and punishment in the World to Come will be thanks to two special substances created by God, whose essence, resembling luminous fire, is analogous to that of the sun. The substance given to each of the righteous will have a special property that shines for the individual and imparts great pleasure in accordance with the level of reward merited, while that given to each of the wicked will have the property of inflicting a burning sensation upon them in proportion to their deserved punishment. These substances will also preserve their recipients in the same condition for all eternity. The state of everlasting pleasure is metaphorically called the Garden of Eden, and the state of everlasting affliction is referred to as Gehinnom.[20]

It is clear from this description that most of the commandments will no longer be relevant in the World to Come. Yet it is noteworthy that Saadiah does not absolve humanity from all commandments. Even in the World to Come, one will be obligated to serve God by acknowledging the Deity. One will also be forbidden to curse God or to describe the Deity in derogatory terms, "and similar obligations that are known by the intellect absolutely."[21] At least some of the

19 *Beliefs and Opinions* 9.4.

20 *Beliefs and Opinions* 9.5; 9.8. One could certainly ask why Saadiah did not interpret them as referring to two entirely different places in the World to Come, but he provides no explanation for this.

21 *Beliefs and Opinions* 9.10 (Kafiḥ, 284; cf. Rosenblatt, 353).

revelatory commandments will also have their counterparts in the World to Come, such as the obligation to travel to certain places at fixed times in order to worship God in the manner that the Deity will then decree. Hence, even in the World to Come, the service of God will remain the human being's prime obligation. In a crucial sense, as much as the World to Come will be radically different from this world, it will also share some fundamental features with it. It too will be a material world in which all who inhabit it possess a body. In the case of human beings in particular, there will be a strong continuity between one's life in this world and that in the next, since one essentially preserves one's previous identity.

In summary, Saadiah presents a fairly coherent narrative of reward and punishment based on biblical verses and rabbinic teachings. This narrative is also in complete harmony with his views regarding the soul and divine activity. For Saadiah, reward and punishment involve both the soul, which is created from a fine luminous substance and is by nature immortal, and the body, which must be re-formed from its original elements and reunited with the soul, since human life in this world and the next is dependent upon both. The individual will remain essentially the same in the World to Come, let alone after resurrection, though they will no longer be subject to the same physical cravings associated with the body. Moreover, even in the World to Come, the individual will continue to live as a social creature surrounded by the same loved ones.

Saadiah's God, at least as far as divine activity is concerned, remains very much the God of Jewish tradition despite being the philosophical incorporeal One. Reason, in Saadiah's view, proves God's creation of the entire world in all its particulars *ex nihilo*. The power and knowledge of God reflected by this act enable Saadiah to interpret many of the verses of the Bible literally with regard to the Deity's personal governance of the world and the performance of miracles, and also to view these interpretations as being at least in harmony with reason. This is certainly true of God's ability to resurrect the dead, as alluded to in a number of verses and underlined by rabbinic tradition. Saadiah shows no awareness of the challenges that Islamic Neoplatonic-Aristotelian philosophy, which had recently started to develop, poses to this picture. He views the messianic period as the first stage of reward, enjoyed by all those living in this period, as well as by the righteous Jews who die and whose souls will once again be reunited with their bodies. The second and permanent

stage is the World to Come. This is a world not yet in existence, but it will be created at the end of the messianic period. It will be a world suitable for the eternal pleasure or suffering earned by each individual in their lifetime(s) on earth. Everyone will be nourished by a special light and their bodies will be preserved by special substances. The individual will also continue to serve God by physical acts, and not with the soul alone, through all eternity.

B

The Jewish philosophers in the two centuries after Saadiah, most of whom were living in Spain, were well aware of his treatise. At the same time, they were generally heavily influenced by Neoplatonic thought,[22] which greatly affected their approach to the World to Come. Joseph Ibn Ẓaddik's treatise *Sefer 'Olam Qatan* (*The Book of the Microcosm*) provides a good example of this point.[23] Indeed, what prompted him to write his treatise, he indicates, is a question from his student regarding what the wise – i.e., philosophers – mean when they speak of "the perpetual good and the level of perfection."[24] It is thus fitting that he concludes his treatise with the topic of final reward, explicitly tying this topic to his earlier discussion of the rational soul.[25]

In keeping with Neoplatonic thought, Ibn Ẓaddik views human beings as having three souls that are bound together – a vegetative soul (possessed by all plants, animals, and human beings), an animate soul (possessed by all animals and human beings), and a rational soul (possessed by human beings alone).[26] The rational soul is neither a body nor an accident. Rather, it is a spiritual entity, which employs the body in accordance with its desire and purpose, enabling it to attain perfection and eternal felicity. It is also a potential intellect;

22 Saadiah also absorbed some Platonic and Neoplatonic influences as evidenced by his notion of a tripartite soul in *Beliefs and Opinions* 10.2.

23 See Joseph Ibn Ẓaddik, *Der Mikrokosmos des Josef Ibn Ṣadik* (*Sefer 'Olam Qatan*), ed. Saul Horovitz (Berlin: Druck von Th. Schatzky, 1903) (henceforth *Microcosm*).

24 *Microcosm*, introduction, 3.

25 *Microcosm* 4.2, 78. For an analysis of Ibn Ẓaddik's doctrine of the soul, see Saul Horovitz, *Die Psychologie bei den jüdischen Religionsphilosophen des Mittelalters von Saadia bis Maimuni*, vol. 3: *Die Psychologie der jüdischen Neuplatoniker: Josef Ibn Saddik* (Breslau: Druck von Th. Schatzky, 1906), 147–207.

26 *Microcosm* 2.1.2, 27–33; 2.2.1, 39–40.

when it is perfected, it becomes an actual intellect.[27] Following Solomon Ibn Gabirol, Ibn Ẓaddik views all existents other than the Deity as being composed of form and matter; spiritual matter in the case of the existents in the spiritual world and corporeal matter in the case of the corporeal existents.[28] He does not give a detailed account of the spiritual world, but indicates that it was created *ex nihilo* by God and that God bestows the divine light upon it unceasingly and without intermediary.[29] The "matter" of the rational soul, in his view, is the same as that of the world of the intellect – namely, pure luminosity that comes from God's power without any intermediation.[30]

Ibn Ẓaddik identifies the World to Come with the higher spiritual world.[31] This allows for a simple narrative of future reward. At the end of the treatise, after criticizing those who hold the view that ultimate reward and punishment are corporeal and involve the body in addition to the soul, Ibn Ẓaddik expands upon his view of the fate of the righteous and the wicked. A soul that has achieved wisdom in apprehending the divine unity and that has imitated God's actions through one's own good deeds will return to the spiritual world at the time of separation from the body. This soul will join the ranks of the spiritual entities.[32] It will then be illuminated by the light bestowed by God without any intermediary, thereby enjoying eternal felicity that is far superior to any corporeal pleasure. A soul that does not achieve the purpose for which it was created – namely, its purification by attaining knowledge of God and performing virtuous actions – and that pines only for the vices and pleasures of this world will retain these desires at the time of death. It will not rise to the spiritual world.

27 *Microcosm* 2.1.4–2.2.1, 34–39.

28 *Microcosm* 1.2, 9. For a study of Ibn Gabirol's thought on this issue, see Jacques Schlanger, *La philosophie de Salomon Ibn Gabirol: Étude d'un néoplatonisme* (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 216–72.

29 *Microcosm* 2.2.3, 42–43. He insists that the spiritual world was created *ex nihilo*, and subsequently rejects the notion that the world is without beginning. Nevertheless, some of his statements regarding the splendor originating from God and directly and continuously sustaining the higher world may be interpreted as alluding to the doctrine of emanation, though he does not present this doctrine explicitly.

30 *Microcosm* 2.2.1, 39.

31 *Microcosm* 4.2, 72–73.

32 *Microcosm* 4.2, 78. In the context of Judaism, this end is attained by serving God by way of the divine commandments in accordance with a true comprehension of the Deity; see *Microcosm*, Introduction, 3; 4.1, 63–70.

Rather, it will remain caught in the sphere of elemental fire, suffering without respite for eternity. While it will no longer be attached to a body, it will remain too weighed down by evil deeds to find true rest.[33]

This simple model of reward and punishment does not take into account other basic Jewish beliefs regarding reward and punishment – most notably, the resurrection of the dead and the messianic period. At this point in his discussion, Ibn Ẓaddik attempts to put all these forms of reward together, but the narrative that results is not a very clear or consistent one. He maintains that God will

> resurrect the righteous, the patriarchs, and the prophets. All those who died in Exile unifying God the Exalted will proceed to the reward of the World to Come, and afterwards will be resurrected at the time of the Messiah. They will no longer die, as the sages said: "The dead who God who will be resurrected by God in the future will not return again to dust" (*BT Sanhedrin* 92a). According to the approach of the Torah we have three stages: this world, the time of the Messiah, and the World to Come.[34]

Ibn Ẓaddik continues his discussion by indicating that in the messianic period, the resurrected will be sustained by God's special light and will not need to eat or drink. This is similar to Moses's state on Sinai. Ibn Ẓaddik appears to sense, however, that the problem with this approach is that for one who has already achieved an angelic state, resurrection appears to serve no purpose. As a partial solution to this dilemma, he again points to Moses, who despite having attained the level of the angels in his lifetime nevertheless desired to enter the Land of Israel. As for the wicked, their souls will be returned to their bodies and they will be consumed by fire and worms while still alive.

This latter narrative in which eternal reward and punishment belong to the soul and body together stands in sharp contrast to the earlier one, in which both the ultimate reward and the ultimate punishment belong to the soul alone, with the reward taking place in the spiritual world and the punishment confining the soul to the sphere of fire. To make matters even more confusing, Ibn Ẓaddik then

33 *Microcosm* 4.2, 78–79.

34 *Microcosm* 4.2, 80.

states that those who have not died before the messianic period will then die and "be conveyed to enduring reward and ever-existent pleasantness. They will all be conveyed to the World to Come, to the eternal good."[35] There, they will enjoy the splendor of the Indwelling, without food, drink, or procreation.

In summary, in attempting to be faithful to both his Jewish sources and his Neoplatonic worldview, Ibn Ẓaddik creates a very confusing and inconsistent narrative. His Neoplatonic philosophy leads him to see ultimate reward and punishment as occurring immediately at death – namely, when the soul departs from the body and joins the spiritual world. This appears to make any subsequent reward and punishment involving the soul and body together superfluous. Yet the Jewish belief in bodily resurrection and the messianic period to which it is generally connected posits a future reward that is corporeal in nature. Ibn Ẓaddik attempts to spiritualize the messianic period as much as possible and to somehow reintroduce the World to Come as the final stage, at least for some. At the same time, he upholds the traditional Jewish view that the resurrected will live forever along with their bodies. His philosophy provides us with a good example of how difficult it is to be loyal both to a literal acceptance of the traditional Jewish statements regarding final reward and to the Neoplatonic view of the return of the purified soul to its source in the upper world, where it will continue to exist through eternity. With the attainment of this state, identified as the World to Come, there appears to be no room for any subsequent form of reward.

C

In the introduction to *Pereq Ḥeleq* (*Sanhedrin*, chapter 10) in his *Commentary on the Mishnah*, Maimonides opens his discussion by outlining different views held by his coreligionists regarding the hoped-for future reward for living a life of fulfilling the commandments, all of which are based on biblical and rabbinic texts: 1) One will find one's reward in the Garden of Eden, where the righteous will enjoy every material benefit without exertion on their part. Gehinnom is the place of punishment, where the bodies of the

[35] *Microcosm* 4.2, 81.

wicked will be burned and they will suffer every form of affliction. 2) The messianic era is the future reward. In this period, all people will be like kings, their bodies will be strengthened, and they will inhabit the land forever. The Messiah himself will live forever. Numerous other miracles will also take place in this period, such as the earth producing woven clothes and cooked bread. The punishment of the wicked will lie in their not being alive to enjoy the benefits of this period. 3) The resurrection of the dead is the reward, when a person will return to his family and relatives. He will eat and drink and not die again. Punishment will lie in not being resurrected. 4) Reward lies in the well-being of the body and the fulfillment of one's universal hopes in this world, such as enjoying the benefits of the land, fortune and progeny, a long and healthy life, security, the establishment of an independent monarchy, and the defeat of the nation's enemies. One's punishment lies in experiencing the opposite of this state. The fifth and final view presented by Maimonides, which he treats as being held by most Jews, is a combination of all the ones stated above: "They say that the Messiah will come, resurrect the dead, who will enter the Garden of Eden, eat and drink there, and remain in good health for as long as heaven is above the earth."[36]

In presenting the different views of reward and punishment held by his coreligionists, Maimonides focuses solely on the individual's bodily state and on all the goods and pleasures accompanying it. Moreover, he deliberately omits the notion of the World to Come, despite the fact that it is with this notion that the first *mishnah* in *Pereq Ḥeleq* opens. His omission suggests that in his view, his coreligionists make no distinction between the World to Come and the messianic era, rabbinic statements to the contrary notwithstanding.[37] This in turn serves to underline the sharp distinction he draws between the two notions in the continuation of his discussion. Though there is

[36] For Maimonides' introduction to *Pereq Ḥeleq*, I have used Moses Maimonides, *Haqdamot ha-Rambam la-Mishnah*, ed. Isaac Shailat (Jerusalem: Maaliyot Press, 1992), 361 (Hebrew translation, 130) (henceforth *Haqdamot*). All translations in the article are my own unless noted otherwise. For an English translation of this introduction, see J. Abelson, "Maimonides on the Jewish Creed," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 19 (1906): 24–58. This introduction was subsequently retranslated by Arnold J. Wolf. It appears in Isadore Twersky, ed., *A Maimonides Reader* (Springfield, NJ: Behrman House, 1972), 401–8.

[37] *BT Sanhedrin* 91b.

evidence to suggest that he was aware of Saadiah's approach to the subject, he ignores this approach completely in his own treatment of it.[38]

Maimonides' primary purpose in the introduction is to advance the view of what he regards as the individual's true ultimate state – the eternal felicity of the rational soul, or specifically, as he will hint in different passages, the immortality of the incorporeal acquired intellect in its apprehension of God to the extent of its ability. This is how he goes on to interpret the rabbinic dictum, "In the World to Come there is no eating or drinking, no bathing or smearing oneself with oils, and no sexual intercourse, but the righteous sit with their crowns on their heads and enjoy the splendor of the Indwelling (*Shekhinah*)" (*BT Berakhot* 17a):

> The expression "their crowns on their heads" refers to the continuous existence of the soul by means of the continuous existence of what it knows, the two of them being one. This is mentioned by the adept of the philosophers in a manner whose explanation would be too lengthy to bring here. The expression "enjoy the splendor of the Indwelling" refers to the fact that this soul will take pleasure in what it knows of the Creator, just as the Holy Creatures and the other orders of angels take pleasure in what they grasp of God's existence. The good and the final end lie in reaching this elite company and attaining this level. The continuous existence of the soul throughout eternity, as we stated, is comparable to the continuous existence of the Creator, which is the reason for

[38] In his subsequent *Epistle to Yemen*, he explicitly cites from Saadiah's *Book of Beliefs and Opinions*; see *Crisis and Leadership: Epistles of Maimonides*, ed. and trans. by Abraham Halkin and discussed by David Hartman (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1985), 114–16. Maimonides also overlooks at least one of the more recent notions of reward and punishment mentioned (and rejected) by Saadiah that would only later become popular in kabbalistic thought – namely, the transmigration of the soul. Since this notion was not mentioned in any of Maimonides' rabbinic sources and he clearly could not accept it due to his philosophical views of the nature of the human soul, he could easily omit any reference to it. As for the approaches of some of his other Jewish philosophical predecessors, he may well have been aware of at least some of them. One can even discern passages in his writings where he may have been directly reacting to some of these views, while in other passages, he may even have been borrowing from them.

> the soul's continuous existence by its apprehension of God, as explained in the first philosophy.[39]

Maimonides treats the notion of the World to Come being a reference to the eternal existence of the incorporeal intellect as one that is no longer known to the Jews, since the rabbinic sages presented it in allegorical terms due to the limited understanding of the masses. The vast majority of Jews, unaware of this fact, interpret their statements on the subject in a literal manner.[40] They see ultimate reward and punishment in entirely corporeal terms, not realizing that the greatest pleasure is the one that is completely spiritual – that is to say, intellectual – in nature, as Maimonides will go on to argue at length in the continuation of his discussion.

Much of Maimonides' introduction reflects his attempt to reorient his coreligionists' ways of thought from a focus on the corporeal to a focus on the incorporeal in thinking about one's ultimate end and aspiring to attain it. This is analogous to his teachings regarding the Deity being completely incorporeal rather than corporeal. Not only is incorporeal existence real – despite the fact that we tend to think that only what is corporeal exists, for only this can be sensed or imagined[41] – but it is on a much high level of the chain of being than corporeal existence. The true goal of humanity is to achieve a permanent state of incorporeal being, accompanied by eternal spiritual/intellectual felicity.

In the fifth view he presents, Maimonides essentially sketches a narrative of the various stages of reward and punishment. It is not clear what source he used for this narrative, if any. It may simply be the case that since most Jews are loyal to biblical and rabbinic views, and all the notions found in the first four views have sources in traditional literature, Maimonides himself tried to piece together the various notions in a coherent manner. Since he was not committed to this narrative, he certainly had no interest in addressing the multiple

39 *Haqdamot*, 366 (Hebrew, 136).

40 Maimonides devotes a section of his introduction to the interpretation of rabbinic midrash and how very few interpreters understand that many of the *midrashim* were meant to be interpreted allegorically.

41 Maimonides presents this position in several of his writings. See in particular his *Treatise on Resurrection*, in Halkin and Hartman, *Crises and Leadership: Epistles of Maimonides*, 215.

questions that it raises.[42] For Maimonides, ultimate reward and punishment will occur immediately on the individual's death – with the punishment apparently lying in the corruption of those soul that do not achieve the state of eternal intellection, as we shall see – and not on some unknown future date.

At the end of his discussion of the nature of the World to Come, and prior to his enumeration of the thirteen principles of faith, Maimonides completes his approach to reward and punishment by presenting his own interpretation of the various biblical and rabbinic notions he mentioned at the beginning of the introduction. His approach to these notions is predicated upon his view that the purpose of human existence is to attain intellectual and ethical perfection, as he already clarified in his general introduction to the *Commentary on the Mishnah*,[43] and that this is the end to which the Torah's commandments lead. The goods promised in the here and now to those fulfilling the commandments should primarily be regarded as a means of increasing one's knowledge of God unencumbered by all the physical hindrances that impede intellection – hunger, disease, war, and so forth – thereby enabling one to dedicate oneself more intensively to the goal of attaining the World to Come.

Maimonides treats the Garden of Eden as a fertile land on earth whose location God will reveal to human beings in the future, so that they may take pleasure living there. This land may also contain plants with special beneficial properties. Uncharacteristically, Maimonides does not take a stand as to the significance of Gehinnom, aside from indicating that it refers to the suffering that will afflict the evil and that the nature of this suffering is subject to controversy in the Talmud. One can ascertain from his description that in opposition to the Garden of Eden and the popular view of Gehinnom presented at the beginning of the introduction, he does not regard Gehinnom as a place at all, but rather as a metaphor.

[42] For example, what is the relationship of the fourth view, which deals with the rewards in this world in a naturalistic matter, to the second view, which deals with the messianic period, a period distinguished by numerous miraculous events? Moreover, the messianic period is characterized by the Jews' return to the Land of Israel, so how exactly does the Garden of Eden fit into this story?

[43] See *Haqdamot*, 353–54 (Hebrew, 56–58).

More cryptic is Maimonides' view of the resurrection of the dead. He labels this belief a principle of the Torah and indeed terminates his list of thirteen principles with it, insisting that anyone who does not believe it is not to be reckoned as a member of the Jewish community. As in the case of all principles, a person denying resurrection is labeled a heretic and is excluded from the World to Come. However, resurrection, in Maimonides' view, is reserved for the righteous alone. The wicked will not be resurrected. Moreover, he has nothing to say about when resurrection is to occur and what the fate of the resurrected will be.

Turning to the Messiah and the messianic period, Maimonides focuses on eliminating the overt miracles that characterize some of the rabbinic descriptions of it. According to him, in this period, the Kingdom of Israel will be re-established, wisdom will flourish, wars will cease, and people will live longer since they will be free from adversity and distress. Yet the natural order will not change in any way. The miracles mentioned by the sages should be interpreted figuratively as indicating the ease in which people will earn their livelihood and attain the necessary material goods. The Messiah too will not live forever and will be succeeded by his descendants, though his kingdom may well continue to flourish for thousands of years due to the excellence of its government. The significance of this period, however, does not lie in the materialistic benefits that humanity will receive, as they are solely a means of achieving the true end. All those living in this period will find the ideal physical, social, and pedagogical conditions for attaining the World to Come.[44]

In the presentation of his own view, Maimonides rejects the popular narrative he had ascribed to most Jews and returns to deal with its component parts. For him, all forms of promised material benefits, whether they be in the here and now for observing the commandments or in the messianic period, only serve as a means of pursuing true eternal felicity that belongs to the intellect alone. He

[44] *Haqdamot*, 366–68 (Hebrew, 137–39). For a discussion of Maimonides' approach to the messianic period, see in particular Aviezer Ravitzky, "'To the Utmost of Human Capacity': Maimonides on the Days of the Messiah," in *Perspectives on Maimonides: Philosophical and Historical Studies*, ed. Joel F. Kraemer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 221–56; Kenneth Seeskin, *Jewish Messianic Thoughts in an Age of Despair* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 27–50; Menachem Kellner and David Gillis, *Maimonides the Universalist: The Ethical Horizons of the Mishnah Torah* (London: Liverpool University Press, 2020), 277–301.

appears to regard the Garden of Eden as ancillary to this story. It is not clear from his discussion when this place on earth, in accordance with a literal interpretation of the biblical story, will be discovered or who will move there.[45] When and where the evil ones will experience Gehinnom is even less clear, given the fact that Maimonides does not treat it as a place at all. Moreover, in discussing the resurrection of the dead, he implies that the wicked completely perish at death. This suggests that he may not have believed that the wicked will suffer after they die. Their "affliction" will lie in their extinction, like his earlier definition of the ultimate punishment, *karet* (being cut off).[46] His discussion also contains no hint of any temporary purgatory, where the souls of the wicked, along with others, may be purified by the suffering they experience for their sins.

More problematic is Maimonides' approach to the cardinal Jewish belief in the resurrection of the dead, as his readers already discerned in his lifetime. This led to controversies regarding this belief, with Maimonides feeling compelled to write an independent treatise on the subject.[47] If the messianic period is not characterized by any miracles and nature does not change in any way, when is the resurrection of the dead supposed to take place? Moreover, if the righteous already enjoy the ultimate reward, which is the eternal felicity of the intellect, at their death, what type of reward is it to be returned to their bodies? Rather than a reward, this would appear to be a punishment in the context of Maimonides' thought. Further

[45] It is interesting to note that here, Maimonides does not hint towards a figurative interpretation of the Garden of Eden as he will do later on in *Guide* 1:2. In the introduction to *Mishnah Avot* (*Eight Chapters*), chapter 8, in his *Commentary on the Mishnah*, he does offer a figurative interpretation of part of this biblical story.

[46] See *Haqdamot*, 366 (Hebrew, 136–37).

[47] For an English translation of the *Treatise on Resurrection*, see Halkin and Hartman, *Crisis and Leadership*, 21133. A good, if dated summary of the conflict can be found in Joseph Sarachek, *Faith and Reason: The Conflict over the Rationalism of Maimonides* (Williamsport, PA: Bayard Press, 1935), 39–65. Since then, more studies on the subject have been published, along with a number of important documents that shed added light on it. Of particular interest is the treatise on this issue penned by Maimonides's disciple to whom he dedicated the *Guide*, Joseph Ibn Shim'on. The Judeo-Arabic original and the medieval Hebrew translation were edited by Sarah Stroumsa, *On the Beginnings of the Maimonidean Controversy in the East: Yosef Ibn Shim'on's Silencing Epistle Concerning the Resurrection of the Dead* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Makhon Ben-Zvi, 1999).

aggravating this problem is Maimonides' view of the human soul, which he develops in a subsequent section of his *Commentary on the Mishnah*; namely, the introduction to *Mishnah Avot* entitled *Eight Chapters*. His discussion there, and also in subsequent writings, strongly implies that there is no continuation of the human soul after its separation from the body and that only the acquired intellect continues to exist[48] – a point to which he appears to allude in the present discussion as well. This is how one should interpret Maimonides' citation of rabbinic dictum in his discussion of resurrection – "The evil even in their lifetime are called 'dead,' and the righteous even in death are called 'living'" (*BT Berakhot* 18a)[49] – with the "righteous" denoting those who attain intellectual perfection rather than only moral perfection. The resurrection of the dead thus signifies the eternal existence of the acquired intellect after death. Hence, it is not only the souls of the wicked that perish at death, but rather all souls. Maimonides' complete failure to address any of these glaring issues in his discussion of resurrection is certainly perplexing, and it appears to hint at an esoteric view on the subject.[50]

[48] For a discussion of the acquired intellect in the context of Maimonides's thought and his sources, see, in particular, Alexander Altmann, "Maimonides on the Intellect and the Scope of Metaphysics," in Altmann, *Von der mittelarlichen zur modern Aufklärung* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1987), 77–84; see also Howard Kreisel, *Maimonides' Political Thought* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1999), 137ff.

[49] Maimonides, *Haqdamot,* 367 (Hebrew, 138).

[50] To be sure, most readers of Maimonides, from medieval times to the present day, accept his belief in the literal resurrection of the dead – i.e., the return of the soul to the body – at face value. This is not true, however, of most academic students of his thought. I favor the interpretation that even his *Treatise on Resurrection* is to be read in an esoteric manner. In this work, Maimonides provides his readers with a number of hints that he does not interpret resurrection in a literal manner. Not only does he continuously stress the World to Come as the ultimate reward, but he is also interested in debunking a literal interpretation of most of the verses used to prove resurrection. At the end, he is left with two verses that "prove" resurrection (Daniel 12:2; 12:13), verses that could also easily be interpreted in a figurative manner, though Maimonides, in a not very convincing manner, argues against such an interpretation. He establishes an integral link between belief in resurrection and belief in miracles, but his true stance regarding miracles is also a controversial issue; see above, n. 21. It should also be noted that in this treatise too, Maimonides does not present a narrative tying together the various forms of reward and explaining them, despite the fact that the literal belief in resurrection for the souls who have already merited the World to Come

In summary, there is only one true reward for Maimonides, the World to Come – that is, that attainment of the immortal acquired intellect that enjoys everlasting felicity in its continuous contemplation of God. It is also a state in which it is no longer the "I" as one thinks of oneself that continues to exist – no memories, feelings, desires, or anything else that characterizes our individuality and that is linked to our bodily state. For Maimonides, the true "I" is completely confined to knowledge of what is eternal and unchanging, culminating in the apprehension of God to the extent of the intellect's capability. This state is essentially a natural consequence of the apprehension of God achieved in one's lifetime, an apprehension that requires one to acquire the moral virtues in order to obtain it. All other forms of reward are not really rewards at all, but serve as aids in attaining this state. The only true punishment is in not attaining the World to Come, with the soul ceasing to exist at death.[51] Much of Maimonides' approach to reward and punishment appears to be based upon Aristotelian philosophical naturalism, which lies at the basis of his Jewish theological thought in general. This interpretation gains support from his subsequent writings, particularly the *Guide of the Perplexed*. Even in the passage from the introduction to *Pereq Ḥeleq* cited above, his references to the "adept of the philosophers" and "first philosophy" – that is, Aristotelian metaphysics – certainly show how his view of the World to Come conforms to the prevalent view of the medieval Aristotelian philosophers, particularly Alfarabi's earlier

certainly calls for such a narrative. For the argument that Maimonides did not accept a literal belief in resurrection, see, for example, Robert Kirschner, "Maimonides' Fiction of Resurrection," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 52 (1982): 163–93. Subsequent thinkers who accepted Maimonides's belief in resurrection, such as Ḥasdai Crescas, attempted to complete his unstated view on the matter and to create a coherent narrative in his name, as we shall see below.

51 Gehinnom certainly has no place at all in Maimonides's scheme, for the human soul as such, according to most of the Aristotelian philosophers, has no continuation after death. Maimonides is willing to accept the Torah literally when it refers to a place called the Garden of Eden, though in this case too, he could just as easily have reverted to a figurative interpretation. At the same time, he accords the Garden very little significance in regard to future reward, nor does he see it as a miraculous place, but rather as one containing plants possessing exceptional properties.

position regarding the immortality of the intellect,[52] and how he interprets the dictum of the sages regarding the World to Come accordingly. His overt rejection of miracles in discussing the messianic age reflects the philosophical view of the inviolability of nature, a point that appears to characterize his approach to miracles in general.[53] Certainly, what many had already construed in medieval times, and continue to construe – his *Treatise on Resurrection* notwithstanding – as hints to a figurative interpretation of the resurrection of the dead, equating it with the World to Come, supports the view that the God of Maimonides, like the God of Aristotle, operates solely within the order of nature, of which God is the First Cause.

In a crucial sense, Maimonides creates a simple narrative of reward and punishment, parts of it exoteric and parts of it esoteric, in which all supernatural elements are eliminated, and he interprets

[52] For Alfarabi's approaches to the intellect and its immortality, see Herbert A. Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna and Averroes on Intellect* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 44–73. Shlomo Pines presented the position that Maimonides ultimately adopted a skeptical position regarding the possibility of any metaphysical knowledge and that he accepted Alfarabi's later position denying any possibility for human immortality; see Pines, "The Limitations of Human Knowledge according to Al-Farabi, Ibn Bajja, and Maimonides," in *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, vol. 1, ed. Isadore Twersky (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 82–109. For an in-depth study of the skeptical approach in the interpretation of Maimonides's philosophy, see Josef Stern, *The Matter and Form of Maimonides'* Guide (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013). A number of studies have been devoted to a rejection of Pines's interpretation, most notable among them Altmann, "Maimonides on the Intellect," 60–129; and Herbert A. Davidson, "Maimonides on Metaphysical Knowledge," *Maimonidean Studies* 3 (1992): 49–103. Both these scholars have interpreted Maimonides as positing a lower level of knowledge, based on Avicenna's view of conjunction with the Active Intellect, than I have presented in this article based on Alfarabi's earlier views.

[53] In his various writings, including the *Guide of the Perplexed*, Maimonides upholds a belief in miracles, though he attempts to minimize their occurrence. For an argument that Maimonides held an esoteric doctrine on this subject and that he did not see miracles as immediate acts of God, but rather as ones that could be understood in a natural manner, see Howard Kreisel, "Miracles in Medieval Jewish Philosophy," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 75 (1984): 106–14. For other approaches to Maimonides' view of miracles, see, for example, Hannah Kasher, "Biblical Miracles and the Universality of Natural Laws: Maimonides' Three Methods of Harmonization," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 8 (1998): 25–52; Y. Tzvi. Langermann, "Maimonides and Miracles: The Growth of a (Dis)Belief," *Jewish History* 18 (2004): 147–72.

biblical passages and the teachings of the rabbinic sages accordingly. The messianic period is characterized by the optimum natural conditions for attaining the eternal pleasure experienced by the intellect in its continuous contemplation of God and the divine governance of the order of existents, which is the primary reason why one should long for its coming. In the meantime, each individual must strive to attain this goal in the prevailing conditions in which they find themselves. Even in the time of redemption, the Torah will continue to provide the best social path for achieving perfection and will remain forever binding upon the Jewish people. Maimonides would go on to repeat this narrative in his subsequent writings.[54]

D

The most detailed philosophical discussion of human perfection and final reward in medieval Jewish philosophy is found in Ḥasdai Crescas's treatise *Light of the Lord*.[55] In this treatise, Crecas offers a philosophical critique of Aristotelian philosophy and a philosophical defense of many of the core tenets of Judaism. One of its central topics is the final end of human beings. On this matter, as well as on many others, Crescas wrestles with Maimonides' attitude. As we shall see, he is much closer to Naḥmanides's approach to reward and punishment after a person's death, as is developed at great length in the latter's *Sha'ar Ha-Gemul* (*The Gate of Recompense*).[56] Yet ultimately, Crescas's approach is characterized by a similar dissonance to the one encountered in Ibn Ẓadik's thought in his attempt to understand the place of the resurrection of the dead in reference to one's final reward. This reward is primarily conceived in terms of the eternal felicity of the disembodied soul.

[54] See, for example, "Laws of Repentance," 9:1–2; "Laws of Kings and their Wars," 12:1–5.

[55] Ḥasdai Crescas, *Sefer Or Hashem*, ed. Shlomo Fischer (Jerusalem: Sifrei Ramot, 1990); Crescas, *Light of the Lord*, trans. Roslyn Weiss (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). For a comprehensive study of Crescas's thought, see Warren Zev Harvey, *Rabbi Ḥisdai Crescas* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar, 2010).

[56] This composition is part of a larger treatise, *Torat ha-Adam*; see Moses Naḥmanides, *Kitvei Rabbenu Moshe ben Naḥman*, ed. C.B. Chavel, vol. 2 (Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 1964), 264–311. Chavel also translated this composition into English and it appears in his *Ramban: Writings & Discourses*, vol. 2 (New York: Shilo Publishing House, 1978).

Crescas's approach to ultimate felicity finds its most detailed and poignant expression in the second section of the treatise, in his discussion of the sixth of the foundational beliefs without which there cannot be the belief that the Torah is from Heaven – namely, that the divine law has a purpose. In his view, this purpose is to bring its adherents to true human perfection. Reaching this state brings in its wake ultimate felicity. According to Crescas, the human soul, which is the "form" or essence of human beings, is a spiritual substance that is predisposed to receive knowledge, but that in itself does not possess knowledge *in actu*. By defining the soul as a "form," while the body is "matter," Crescas follows the view of Aristotle and his followers. Yet as is the case with all entities composed of form or matter, this view entails the corruption of the individual on the separation of the soul from the body at death. Form does not exist independently of matter, thereby precluding the immortality of the soul. Crescas's solution, reminiscent of Ibn Daud's position with which he was familiar,[57] is to treat the rational soul not only as a "form," but also as a "substance" (*'eẓem*), leaving open the possibility of its independent existence from the body. At the same time, he is exceptionally critical of the Aristotelian view that only the acquired intellect attained as a result of intellection is immortal, and he devotes a lengthy discussion to refuting this view. For Crescas, only by positing the continued existence of the rational soul *per se* do we have a basis for the possibility of the experience of eternal felicity, an experience that cannot be accounted for by the existence of the theoretical intellect alone. Intellection may lead to pleasure, but it is not the faculty that is directly responsible for the experience of it. Pleasure lies in the satisfaction of the will in its attainment of the object of desire. Moreover, Crescas maintains that human perfection and ultimate felicity lie in the love of God rather than in pure intellection alone. This love results from both knowledge and action.[58]

[57] For a discussion of Ibn Daud's view of the rational soul and his proofs of its incorporeality and immortality, see T.A.M Fontaine, *In Defense of Judaism: Abraham Ibn Daud* (Assen and Maastricht: Van Gorcum, 1990), 49–82. Crescas mentions Ibn Daud in *Light of the Lord* 1, introduction.

[58] *Light of the Lord* 2.6.1. For a study contrasting Crescas's approach to pleasure and that of Maimonides, see Warren Zev Harvey, "Crescas versus Maimonides on Knowledge and Pleasure," in *A Straight Path: Studies on Medieval Philosophy and Culture: Essays in Honor of Arthur Hyman*, ed. Ruth Link-Salinger et al. (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press, 1987), 113–23. The problem

With the stage being set for the continuous existence of the soul after its separation from the body, Crescas is in a position to try to put together the various traditional notions of reward and punishment. This he does in the third section of his treatise, in his discussion of various beliefs mandated by the divine law. He begins by reiterating and expanding upon the belief in the immortality of the rational soul.[59] Next, he turns to the various forms of reward and punishment, beginning with the physical forms that occur in the here and now followed by the spiritual forms experienced immediately after death. Based on rabbinic sayings, Crescas describes the reward of the soul as the felicity it attains after its departure from the body in its greater apprehension of God and its continuous and eternal cleaving to the *Shekhinah* (Indwelling), the highest level of spiritual being. This is what is meant by the rabbinic notion of enjoying the splendor of the Indwelling. The level of felicity achieved varies from soul to soul in proportion to the love of God it attained while attached to the body. The punishment of the wicked lies in the great sorrow that the soul suffers, surrounded, as it were, by darkness, which the sages figuratively describe as the suffering of burning in Gehinnom. The punishment of each soul also varies, with some suffering this punishment for a limited period, having been cleansed in this manner from their sins,[60] while other souls may deteriorate completely.

Having described what appears to be the ultimate reward and punishment on the death of the individual, which involves the soul alone, Crescas is faced with the difficult challenge of finding a place for the resurrection of the dead in this narrative. In attempting to remain faithful to the Jewish tradition as well as to reconcile conflicting rabbinic views on the subject, he modifies what appears to be his initial stance as to what the World to Come is and what should

remains regarding those who die young and who have not had a chance to pursue this goal. In other words, while the human soul may be eternal in principle, Crescas agrees that it still requires some activation of its rational power in order to merit eternal felicity. In his view, the rabbinic sages, in their saying, "When do the young merit the life of the World to Come? When they know o say 'amen'," are thereby hinting to the minimum cognizance required to attain this state. Crescas locates this statement in *Midrash Tanḥuma*, but it has come down to us in *Yalqut Shim'oni Isaiah*, 247. Subsequently, Crescas treats circumcision too as a sufficient condition for the attainment of immortality; see *Light of the Lord* 3.2.3.8

59 *Light of the Lord* 3.1.2.

60 *Light of the Lord* 3.1.3.1.

be considered the ultimate and eternal reward. Crescas contrasts the views of Maimonides and Naḥmanides, who, like Crescas, wrestled mightily with Maimonides' approach in his discussion of this subject. Against the interpretation that I offered above, Crescas, following Naḥmanides, interprets Maimonides' belief in resurrection to be a literal one. Nor does he attribute to him the view that the acquired intellect alone is immortal – the Aristotelian view he negated in the previous section of the treatise. Rather, in Crescas's opinion, Maimonides too believed that the rational soul attains immortality, and experiences felicity in the afterlife with its departure from the body. The problem then becomes what the purpose of resurrection is if this is the case. Crescas, again following Naḥmanides, ascribes to Maimonides the unstated view that resurrection enables the souls of the righteous to return to the physical world and advance in their apprehension. They thereby achieve a greater level of felicity when they return to the World to Come after departing from their bodies for a second time.[61] Crescas points out that as opposed to Maimonides, Naḥmanides sees the World to Come as referring to a future state not yet in existence – namely, the period after the resurrection.[62] The resurrected will not die again, but will live forever in their bodies, though they will have no need of food and drink.[63] In a crucial sense, this view, as Naḥmanides explicitly notes, is close to that of Saadiah.[64] It is these two conceptions of the World to Come that Crescas must mitigate.

Resurrection, in Crescas's view, is the ultimate miracle that will come about at Elijah's hands in the midst of the messianic period, not at the beginning of it. By means of this miracle, the human species will reach its final end, since it will silence all doubts regarding belief in God.[65] This miracle, however, will not involve all those who have died.

61 See *Sha'ar Ha-Gemul*, 309–10. This view also presupposes that for Maimonides, there can be no advancement of knowledge with the separation of the soul from the body. This was in fact Gersonides's position with regard to the eternal human intellect, with which Crescas was familiar.

62 In Naḥmanides's view, the "place" of the soul immediately after death is what the sages refer to as the Garden of Eden, not the World to Come, and he criticizes Maimonides on this point; see *Sha'ar Ha-Gemul,* 306.

63 *Light of the Lord* 3.1.4.1.

64 *Sha'ar Ha-Gemul*, 311. Naḥmanides does not cite Saadiah's treatment of this subject in *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, but rather his *Commentary on Daniel*.

65 *Light of the Lord* 3.1.4.2.

Based on rabbinic tradition, Crescas confines resurrection to the Jewish people, and among them, only to the completely righteous and the completely wicked. The resurrected will experience eternal bliss or suffering in accordance with their deserts, as taught in Daniel 12:2. In this manner, divine justice will be manifest to all the living. Crescas sees no problem in the all-powerful God restoring the soul to the body formed from the same composition of elements to which it was attached before.[66] As opposed to Nahmanides, he prefers the interpretation that the World to Come refers both to the state of the soul after its departure from the body and to the state of those who are resurrected. In this manner, he resolves what he sees as conflicting statements in rabbinic tradition regarding this notion.[67] While those resurrected will live forever in this state – no longer eating, drinking, or having intercourse, but still worshipping God and keeping the Torah – those living at the time of the resurrection will live regular physical lives and die. Due to the impact of resurrection on their beliefs and practices, however, they will all assuredly earn "a portion in the World to Come."[68]

The problems that emerge from Crecas's approach are evident. In his initial treatment of ultimate felicity, the disembodied soul is said to exist forever in this state. This felicity is treated as being far superior to any felicity experienced while still living in the body. Yet in Crescas's treatment of resurrection, it is precisely the most righteous – namely, those who attain the highest level of felicity – who will take part in this miracle and continue to live forever in a bodily state.[69] As for the most wicked individuals, in Crescas's initial treatment of their punishment after death, their souls will apparently completely deteriorate due to the suffering they experience. In his discussion of resurrection, on the other hand, Crescas sees them being resurrected and experiencing eternal suffering in their bodily state.

66 *Light of the Lord* 3.1.4.4.

67 *Light of the Lord* 3.1.4.4. Crescas tries to show, however, that Naḥmanides's interpretation that the World to Come refers only to the period following resurrection is also possible.

68 *Light of the Lord* 3.1.4.4.

69 Crescas does not address the philosophical problem of how it is that a body composed of the basic elements does not undergo corruption, but presumably he sees this as part of the miracle.

He thereby presents a problematic picture of final reward and punishment, in his attempt to be loyal to rabbinic tradition. He suggests a partial response to this problem when he points out the great merit of being part of this awesome miracle and its significance for others, and not only the resurrected. Yet this hardly solves the fundamental problem that according to Crescas's own description, the felicity of the disembodied soul is far greater than any felicity experienced by the embodied soul and that in this state, the soul is closer to the spirituality (and incorporeality) of the divine world.

Conclusion

The attempts to create a consistent narrative of reward and punishment in medieval Jewish philosophy revolve around two poles – biblical verses and rabbinic statements on one side and philosophical notions on the other. Saadiah Gaon, in a pioneering endeavor, developed an essentially consistent picture of reward and punishment. His is a picture that incorporates a number of philosophical conceptions, but for the most part, it is based on making sense of the various biblical and rabbinic teachings regarding this subject. Saadiah attempts to avoid figurative interpretations as much as possible, which is true of his philosophy in general, and mostly resorts to them in cases in which there is an inconsistency between biblical verses or between verses and rabbinic tradition. In Saadiah's narrative, the soul is a separate entity, which can exist, but cannot function without a body. The World to Come is a world yet to be created, following the messianic period, in which human beings will live forever with their souls attached to their bodies. Saadiah sees no difficulty for God, who created the world *ex nihilo*, to reunite the soul with the body in the future while it continues to exist in an inanimate state in the interim. While his view of the soul is primarily based on the philosophical literature with which he was acquainted, his narrative of future reward and punishment is almost entirely based on traditional sources. His philosophical view is also similar to the traditional view in that it sees the individual after their resurrection and subsequent transfer to the World to Come as maintaining the personality developed during their first life. In short, for Saadiah, human life, whether in this world or the next, lies in the union of body and soul.

Given the centrality of the idea of the purification of the soul and its ascent to its true home immediately after its separation from the body in Neoplatonic philosophy, it is clear that Jewish Neoplatonic thinkers could not accept Saadiah's picture, certainly not *in toto*. While this fundamental Neoplatonic notion preserves the idea of the existence of the soul after death, it stands in sharp conflict with traditional Jewish beliefs. Once one has immediately earned one's ultimate reward, which involves the soul alone, released from all bodily constraints, any subsequent form of reward would appear to be superfluous, if not worse. Ibn Ẓaddik attempts to create a coherent narrative that maintains the Neoplatonic idea of the immediate fate of the wise and righteous soul after death on one hand and the traditional belief in the resurrection of the dead in the messianic period on the other, but he essentially fails in this endeavor.

In the interpretation of Maimonides to which I subscribe, I see him as being loyal to philosophical notions of the ultimate human state and as esoterically alluding to figurative interpretations of the forms of reward and punishment in the Jewish tradition that are incompatible with these notions – particularly the resurrection of the dead. Following Aristotle and his followers, Maimonides also cannot accept the existence of the soul after death and its experience of pain and sorrow. Only the perfect intellect merits a form of immortality and ultimate felicity. His is a straightforward and consistent picture that sees the expression of God's governance solely in terms of the natural order. It is an exceptionally elitist picture, which holds no real hope for the vast majority of human beings, at least in terms of future reward. Maimonides understands that much of this picture cannot be presented exoterically due to the harmful effects it might have on the commitment of the vast majority of Jews to Jewish belief and, by extension, practice. Yet even for many of the intellectual elite, this picture of ultimate reward is hardly appealing. It posits as the ultimate state one in which there is no individuality; the "I" disappears to be replaced by the impersonal knowledge characterizing the theoretical intellect.[70] Basic Jewish beliefs regarding reward and punishment that Maimonides can interpret as

[70] The impersonality of the eternal human intellect is even more true in Maimonides' thought if he accepted Ibn Bajja's view that the individual intellect does not survive, but becomes one with the transcendent intellect. See his remark on the subject in *Guide of the Perplexed* 1.74 (seventh method).

being consistent with the order of nature, such as the messianic period and the Garden of Eden, are accepted, while the supernatural elements that characterize them are eliminated, and at the same time their significance for the individual is lessened. In short, Maimonides remains true to his intellect's judgment in its understanding of the human being's perfection and ultimate fate, and he interprets the sayings of the rabbinic sages accordingly.

Maimonides, who favors the Aristotelian view that only the pure actualized intellect, and not the rational soul, survives, certainly cannot accept Ibn Ẓaddik's picture,[71] let alone Saadiah's. Yet he shares with Ibn Ẓaddik, and against Saadiah, the view that the World to Come is not a world that is to be created, but rather that it is one that exists in the here and now. It is the world of incorporeal existents, which the perfect human intellect joins at the moment of death and the final separation from the body. Future Jewish thinkers who grappled with this subject were hard pressed to ignore Maimonides' conception of the World to Come, despite the difficulties it poses to the role of resurrection or the messianic period when thinking about the final reward.

Crescas, following Naḥmanides, attempted to surmount the difficulties of creating a narrative that was faithful to Jewish tradition, yet still in harmony with rational thought. He offers a philosophical critique of the Aristotelian view that pure intellect alone survives and attempts to provide a firm philosophical basis for the notion that the human soul is immortal. This enables him, as in the cases of Saadiah and Ibn Zadik, to paint a picture of ultimate and permanent felicity in which the personality of the individual, at least to some extent, is also maintained in the afterlife.[72] He also interprets Maimonides along

[71] Maimonides may not have been aware of Ibn Zaddik's view, but he was certainly aware of a similar view held by Avicenna. See Pines's remarks on the issue of individual immortality in Maimonides' thought in the introduction to his translation of the *Guide*, "The Philosophic Sources of *The Guide of the Perplexed*," in Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 1:ciii–civ.

[72] In *Light of the Lord* 3.2.3.7, Crescas is critical of the belief in the transmigration of the soul on philosophical grounds, though it had become an accepted kabbalistic belief by his time. He argues that this belief entails that a baby is born with a potential intellect while it simultaneously possesses an actual intellect from its previous lifetime. It may be that the individuality that the soul attains when attached to a particular body, and the view of resurrection as its reattachment to that body, also played a role in his thinking.

similar lines. Yet due to the conflict between his philosophical thought and his loyalty to rabbinic tradition, Crescas, like Ibn Ẓadik before him, presents an inconsistent position on the question of whether ultimate eternal felicity is experienced by the disembodied soul or the embodied one. While his philosophical thought clearly favored the former, his loyalty to tradition led him to prefer the latter. In his final picture, it is precisely those who reach the highest level of love of God in their lifetime, and the highest level of felicity with the departure of their souls from their bodies, who will permanently return to their bodies at the time of resurrection. In the context of his philosophical views, they would thereby appear to be transferred to a permanently inferior state on becoming reattached to their bodies, though they will no longer experience basic physical needs.

As we have seen, the story of medieval Jewish philosophical attempts to create a coherent narrative of ultimate reward and punishment is a story of how philosophers read Scripture and interpreted rabbinic teachings in light of philosophical conceptions – what they were prepared to accept literally, and what they believed should be interpreted figuratively. At the same time, it is a story of how a literal reading of Scripture and rabbinic sayings led them to at times modify or even abandon some of their philosophical views. Finally, it is also a story of how we think of the "I," whether in this world or the next. Do we think of ourselves as essentially corporeal beings, as Saadiah did, and thus we cannot imagine true reward and punishment not involving our rational souls being attached to bodies, capable of at least some forms of physical activity and still possessing attachments to other corporeal beings? Or do we think of our true selves, our very essence as human beings, solely in terms of the universal and impersonal knowledge we have attained of eternal truths, as did Maimonides following the Aristotelian tradition? Or do we think of our true selves only in terms of our rational soul – though not only its intellectual apprehension of eternal truths, but also its emotions and desires – with the soul of the individual now capable of enjoying a far better, more purified state of being when it is no longer weighed down by the body, as Ibn Ẓaddik and Crescas did? Yet it is precisely this view that also led to the dissonance in their thought when attempting to create a narrative of final reward and punishment based on a literal interpretation of biblical and rabbinic views on the subject. With the strong soul/body distinction that Greek philosophy left in Jewish thought in general from the Middle Ages till

the present, accompanied by its marked tendency to deprecate the body and all things material, this dissonance characterizes many subsequent thinkers as well. This, however, is a subject for a future study.