Jewish Thought

Journal of the
Goldstein-Goren International Center for Jewish Thought

Editors

Michal Bar-Asher Siegal Jonatan Meir Shalom Sadik

Haim Kreisel (editor-in-chief)

Editorial Secretary
Asher Binyamin

Volume 1
Faith and Heresy

Beer-Sheva, 2019

מחשבת ישראל

כתב־עת של המרכז הבינלאומי למחשבת ישראל ע״ש גולדשטיין־גורן

המערכת

מיכל בר-אשר סיגל יונתן מאיר שלום צדיק חיים קרייסל (עורך ראשי)

מזכיר המערכת

אשר בנימין

גיליון א

אמונה וכפירה

באר-שבע, תשע״ט

Jewish Thought is published once a year by the Goldstein-Goren International Center for Jewish Thought.

Each issue is devoted to a different topic.
Topics of the following issues are as follows:

2020: Esotericism in Jewish Thought

2021: New Trends in the Research of Jewish Thought

2022: Asceticism in Judaism and the Abrahamic Religions

Articles for the next issue should be submitted by September 30, 2019.

Manuscripts for consideration should be sent, in Hebrew or English, as MS Word files, to: asherben@bgu.ac.il

The articles should be accompanied by an English abstract.

The views and opinions expressed in the articles are those of the authors alone.

The journal is open access:
http://in.bgu.ac.il/en/humsos/goldstein-goren/Pages/Journal.aspx

The Hebrew articles were edited by Dr. David Zori and Shifra Zori.

The articles in English were edited by Dr. Julie Chajes.

Address: The Goldstein-Goren International Center for Jewish Thought, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, PO Box 653, Beer-Sheva 8410501.

© All Rights Reserved

This issue is dedicated to Prof. Daniel J. Lasker for his 70Th birthday

Table of Contents

English Section

Hebrew Section

תוכן עניינים

החלק העברי

החלק האנגלי

Foreword

It is with great pride that we present the first issue of the new annual journal, *Jewish Thought*, sponsored by the Goldstein-Goren International Center for Jewish Thought at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. As opposed to existent journals in Jewish thought, we have decided to make this one open access and hence easily available to readers the world over (paper copies will also be available for purchase for those interested). Each issue is to be devoted to a different topic and contain articles both in English and Hebrew. The topics we have chosen allow for contributions from all areas of Jewish thought. We hope in this way to combine the advantages of volumes of collected articles on a given theme with those of a journal that invites contributions from all scholars.

The twelve articles that comprise this issue reflect a diversity of topics and approaches to faith and heresy in Jewish thought, beginning from the rabbinic period and culminating in modern Jewish thought. Most were written by established scholars, while some were written by young scholars who are at the beginning of their scholarly career. All articles that were submitted underwent a rigorous selection process involving at least two reviewers. We hope our readers will find much interest not only in individual articles but also in the different perspectives, when taken together, they bring to the subject. A list of the topics for coming issues and information to where to submit articles for consideration can be found in the opening pages of the journal.

We are dedicating this inaugural issue to our colleague Prof. J. Daniel Lasker on the occasion of his seventieth birthday. Prof. Lasker has taught Jewish thought at Ben-Gurion University for close to forty years and held the Norbert Blechner chair in Jewish Values. He is a world renown

authority in medieval Jewish philosophy, Jewish-Christian polemics, and Karaite thought; a dedicated teacher and an excellent mentor to his graduate students; and an exceptionally generous colleague who has contributed so much to the development of our department. We are happy to honor him in this manner.

The editors

Back to Maimonides' Sources: The Thirteen Principles Revisited

Howard Kreisel
Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

Introduction

In his groundbreaking work, *Philosophy and Law,* first published in German in 1935, Leo Strauss (1899-1973) introduced the modern reader to the political foundations of Maimonides' thought. In the third chapter of this work, "The Philosophic Foundation of the Law: Maimonides' Doctrine of Prophecy and its Sources," Strauss underlined the formative role played by the treatises of Alfarabi (ca. 870-950) and Avicenna (980-1037) in shaping Maimonides' thought on the nature of prophecy, and by extension the political role of the prophet/philosopher.[1] Strauss's insights in this area were further developed in his later studies on Maimonides' thought, such as his article, "The Literary Character of *The Guide of the Perplexed*," first published in 1941 in the volume *Essays on Maimonides* edited by Salo Baron, and later reissued in Strauss's magisterial collection of essays, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, published in 1952.

Strauss's impact on subsequent Maimonidean scholarship can hardly be exaggerated and remains strongly felt to the present day. He is rightfully considered the modern-day father of the political-esoteric reading of Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* – that is to say, the attempt to uncover the philosophic views that Maimonides deliberately hid from the careless (mass) reader for political/religious reasons. In this area, Strauss, in a crucial sense, reintroduced in the modern period the

1 Strauss's book was translated into English by Eve Adler (Albany: S.U.N.Y. Press, 1995).

exegetical approach that was pioneered by the first Hebrew translator of the *Guide*, Samuel Ibn Tibbon (ca. 1150-1230),[2] and that was championed by many of Maimonides' Provençal and, later, Spanish disciples.[3] Yet Strauss's impact went far beyond the question of esoteric vs. exoteric readings of Maimonides' treatise. His scholarship raised the question of the very nature of this seminal treatise, and of Maimonides' lifework in general.[4]

Among the scholars strongly influenced by Strauss was Shlomo Pines (1908-1990). The collaboration between these two scholars resulted in Pines's (1963) translation of the *Guide* into English, a translation that was far more accurate (though less elegant) than the one that had been published in 1881 by Michael Friedlander (1833-1910). Pines's translation was introduced by two of the most important and influential articles on Maimonides ever written: "How to Begin to Study *The Guide of the Perplexed,*" by Strauss, and "The Philosophic Sources of *The Guide of the Perplexed*," by Pines. In a statement that just as easily could have

2 For a study of Samuel Ibn Tibbon's pioneering role in developing the esoteric reading of Maimonides' *Guide*, see, in particular, Aviezer Ravitsky, "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* (Heb.) (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2007).

3 In particular, it was championed by Joseph Ibn Kaspi and Moses Narboni, whose supercommentaries on the *Guide* are, in large part, based upon an esoteric approach to Maimonides' treatise.

4 Numerous scholars have dealt with Strauss's approach to Maimonides; see, for example, Jeffrey A. Bernstein, *Leo Strauss on the Borders of Judaism, Philosophy, and History* (Albany: S.U.N.Y. Press, 2015); Kenneth Hart Green, *Jew and Philosopher: The Return to Maimonides in the Jewish Thought of Leo Strauss* (Albany: S.U.N.Y. Press, 1993); Hillel Fradkin, "A Word Fitly Spoken: The interpretation of Maimonides and the Legacy of Leo Strauss," in David Novak (ed.), *Leo Strauss and Judaism: Jerusalem and Athens Critically Revisited* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996), pp. 55-86; Kenneth Seeskin, "Maimonides' Conception of Philosophy," in op. cit., pp. 87-110.

been written by Strauss, Pines introduced his discussion of Alfarabi by noting:

> After Aristotle, al-Fārābī is the philosopher whom, judging by the letter to Ibn Tibbon, Maimonides held in the highest esteem. In fact, the term that he applies to him may lend color to the suspicion that, as far as theoretical and political sciences were concerned, he was ready to follow al-Fārābī's lead in all points.[5]

5 Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, translated by Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. lxxviii. Pines subsequently took Maimonides' esotericism in a new direction – arguing that Maimonides did not conceal his true views for political reasons, but to hide his philosophic skepticism from the masses and philosophers alike. See, in particular, Shlomo Pines, "The Limitations of Human Knowledge according to Al-Farabi, Ibn Bajja, and Maimonides," in: Isadore Twersky (ed.), *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 82-109. The letter from Maimonides to Samuel Ibn Tibbon to which Pines refers is the one in which Maimonides includes a list of important works in philosophy to study, and which would also enable the reader (and translator) to more fully understand his treatise. From among the philosophers closer to his own period, Maimonides praises Alfarabi in particular. The Arabic original of the letter is unfortunately lost but several Hebrew versions of it exist. In all the Hebrew versions of the letter, Maimonides' extolls the "logical" writings of Alfarabi, treating them as completely accurate, "for he was a great man." In one of the versions, Alfarabi's treatise *The Principles of the Existents* is singled out for praise. In general, the Hebrew versions of the letter are problematic because, while Alfarabi wrote important works of logic, Maimonides seems to be particularly influenced by Alfarabi's non-logical works, a primary example being *The Principles of the Existents*, more commonly known as *The Political Regime*. The continuation of his letter leaves one with the distinct impression that Maimonides was not referring only, or even primarily, to Alfarabi's works on logic, but his philosophic treatises in general, particularly when subsequently in the letter Maimonides contrasts the works of Avicenna with those of Alfarabi. Whether Maimonides made specific mention of the *Principles of the Existents*, or we are dealing with an addition of a copyist, is a matter of speculation. As we shall see momentarily, Maimonides does not specifically mention this treatise in any of his works, though he does seem to have been influenced by it. For a study

The political foundation of Maimonides' thought, indeed of his lifework in general, was further developed by Lawrence Berman, a student of Pines. In his Hebrew-language doctoral dissertation, "Ibn Bajja and Maimonides: A Chapter in the History of Political Philosophy" (Hebrew University, 1959), Berman contrasted the two Andalusian thinkers. It should be noted that Maimonides, in his letter to Samuel Ibn Tibbon, had the highest praise also for Ibn Bajja (ca. 1085-1138), who, like Maimonides, was strongly influenced by Alfarabi's thought. On the question of the role of the philosopher in society, however, Ibn Bajja broke with his predecessor, particularly in his seminal political work, *The Governance of the Solitary*. While Alfarabi – the staunch Platonist when it came to political philosophy – essentially transformed Plato's philosopher-king into the prophetic legislator whose task it was to steer society in the direction of the pursuit of perfection, Ibn Bajja advocated that the philosopher isolate himself from society. For him, the pernicious influence of society was a consideration that far outweighed the possible positive influence the philosopher may exert on society.[6] While, on occasion, in the *Guide,* Maimonides' gave expression to Ibn Bajja's view,[7]

of the different versions of this letter see Doron Forte, "Back to the Sources: Alternative Versions of Maimonides' Letter to Samuel Ibn Tibbon and their Neglected Significance," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 23 (2016): 47-90 (particularly p. 85).

6 For an English translation of several chapters from Ibn Bajja's treatise, see Lawrence Berman's translation in Joshua Parens and Joseph C. Macfarland (eds.), *Medieval Political Philosophy: A Sourcebook*, 2nd edition (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), pp. 97-104. For a study of his political thought, see Steven Harvey, "The Place of the Philosopher in the City according to Ibn Bajja," in: Charles Butterworth (ed.), *The Political Aspects of Islamic Philosophy: Essays in Honor of Muhsin Mahdi* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 199-233.

7 See, for example, his statement in *Guide* 3.51 (p. 621): "Thus it is clear that after apprehension, total devotion to Him and the employment of intellectual thought in constantly loving Him should be aimed at. Mostly this is achieved in solitude and isolation. Hence every excellent man stays frequently in solitude and does not meet anyone unless it is necessary."

in the final analysis, he remained true to Alfarabi's vision.[8] In a subsequent article, "Maimonides, the Disciple of Alfarabi," Berman went so far as to argue that Maimonides' life work could be seen as having been inspired by Alfarabi. In Berman's summation:

> In any case, I think it is quite clear that in the *Guide* as well as the *Mishneh Torah*, Maimonides accepted the Alfarabian view of the development and functions of religion, jurisprudence and dialectical theology and their relation to philosophy and tried to apply it to the Jewish religion. In this effort Maimonides was the disciple of Alfarabi.[9]

In light of Maimonides' political thought, Berman also attempted to understand his view of the role of beliefs in Judaism, with particular attention paid to the discussion of this topic in *Guide* 3.27-28. Berman's approach laid the basis for one of the interpretations advanced for Maimonides' motivation in formulating the thirteen principles in his earlier treatise, *Commentary on the Mishnah*, as we shall see shortly.[10]

Maimonides completed his *Commentary on the Mishnah*, written in Judeo-Arabic, when he was around 30 years old, shortly after having arrived in Egypt. His list of principles was placed at the end of his introduction to the tenth chapter of Tractate Sanhedrin, *Pereq Ḥeleq*. While attempts to formulate a list of principles of Jewish belief had been made before Maimonides, he was the first Jewish legal authority to produce a list that he treated as legally binding. According to him, it had

8 See, in particular, *Guide* 1.54, 2.37, 3.54. It is interesting to note that on this issue Samuel Ibn Tibbon breaks with Maimonides and essentially adopts the position advanced by Ibn Bajja; see Aviezer Ravitzky, "The Political Role of the Philosopher: Samuel Ibn Tibbon Versus Maimonides," *Maimonidean Studies* 5 (2008): 345-374.

9 Lawrence Berman, "Maimonides, the Disciple of Alfarabi," *Israel Oriental Studies* 4 (1974): 169-170.

10 In the writing of this article I have used Isaac Shailat's Arabic edition and Hebrew translation of Maimonides' introductions to his *Commentary on the Mishnah* (Jerusalem: Ma'aliyot Press, 1992).

to be accepted *in full* for one to attain a portion in the World to Come and be considered part of the Jewish community in this world.[11] Already the Sages of the Mishnah had treated certain beliefs as mandatory, their non-acceptance leading to a branding of the individual as a heretic who losses his portion in the World to Come. A number of those beliefs open the chapter *Pereq Ḥeleq* (e.g., the belief that the Torah came from heaven and that it teaches belief in the Resurrection of the Dead). Those beliefs provided Maimonides with a convenient opportunity to expand and consolidate his list.[12] Yet, no one before Maimonides had formulated a list of such beliefs that they treated as complete and binding. Moreover, Maimonides did not simply extract his principles from rabbinic texts; in some instances there was barely any trace of them whatsoever in his sources, at least not in the manner in which they were defined by Maimonides. Maimonides' principles are as follows:

> 1) The existence of God; 2) The unity of God; 3) The incorporeality of God; 4) God is absolutely without beginning; 5) God alone is worthy of worship; 6) Prophecy; 7) The unique prophecy of Moses; 8) The Torah in its entirety is from Heaven; 9) The Torah will never be abrogated; 10) God is cognizant of the actions of human beings and is not neglectful of humanity; 11) Reward and punishment, particularly the World to Come; 12) The coming of the Messiah; 13) The Resurrection of the Dead.

11 For a comprehensive study of this topic see Menachem Kellner, *Dogma in Medieval Jewish Thought* (Oxford: The Littman Library, 1986). Kellner brings an English translation of the principles based on the translation of David R. Blumenthal on pp. 10-17.

12 This *mishnah* also includes the *apiqorus* as one who has no portion in the World to Come. This appears to refer to all those who adopt the philosophy of the Greek philosopher *Epicurus* that denies any form of divine providence. Later, in *Guide* 3.17, Maimonides adopts this usage of the term. Yet, in his commentary, he chooses to follow the talmudic definition, which treats *apiqorus* as an Aramaic term referring to anyone who denigrates the Torah or its scholars.

Each principle is accompanied by an explanation of the views it entails.

The question immediately arises as to what motivated the young Maimonides to undertake such an exceptional step, essentially attempting to transform the very nature of Judaism. In his important 1967 essay, "Maimonides' 'Thirteen Principles'," [13] Arthur Hyman (1921-2017) addressed this issue by first summarizing the views of earlier scholars. The first view, he termed the "historical interpretation." According to this view, Maimonides formulated his principles under the influence of, and as a reaction to, Christian dogma and the Islamic principles of religion. The next view Hyman examined was that of Berman, (which Hyman extended to an understanding of the thirteen principles), and that he termed "the political interpretation". Berman argued that for Maimonides, an acceptance, by the masses, of the beliefs taught by the Torah, particularly those relating to God, has no cognitive significance or intellectual value, since they could not properly grasp them. That the masses were, nevertheless, commanded to accept them was politically motivated. Hyman aptly summarized the reasons adduced by Berman for this stance of Maimonides, and which was based on the approach of Alfarabi, as follows:

> (1) A belief in God and in a certain order in the world influences people to mold their political actions in accordance with the cosmic order. Thus the city remains stable.
> (2) If the opinions of the masses are close to the opinions of the philosophers, the philosopher will find it easier to live within the state and guide it without friction.
> (3) If the opinions of the masses are close to philosophic truth, individuals of a philosophical nature will find it easier to achieve true philosophical knowledge. They can attain such knowledge without

13 This article appears in: Alexander Altmann (ed.), *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), pp. 119-144.

> having first to free themselves of the habits of faith which may oppose philosophical truths.[14]

What Berman saw as Maimonides' approach to the beliefs taught by the Torah, Hyman applied, in Berman's name, to an understanding of why Maimonides chose certain central beliefs to serve as a Jewish creed.

Hyman himself, it should be noted, dismissed any polemical motivation underlying the formulation of the thirteen principles, thereby ruling out the first view, which he traced to Solomon Schechter (1847-1915) and David Neumark (1866-1924). He also provided a critique of the interpretation he ascribed to Berman, because he saw it as failing to adequately explain the philosophical dimension of Maimonides' formulation of some of the principles, particularly those involving the nature of God. Hyman himself favored a third view, namely, the "metaphysical interpretation", which he traced to Julius Guttmann (1880-1950). In this view, the inculcation of true metaphysical opinions makes possible even in the case of the masses the immortality of their intellects, and this immortality Maimonides equated with life in the World to Come.

In his in-depth study of the history of dogma in Jewish thought, Menachem Kellner discusses in greater detail the interpretations presented by Hyman. He agrees only in part with Hyman's dismissal of the polemical interpretation, for he sees a definite Islamic influence on Maimonides' decision to treat certain beliefs as dogmas.[15] On the other

14 Ibid., p. 137. See Berman, "Ibn Bajjah and Maimonides," pp. 137-138 (English summary, pp. xvii-xviii).

15 *Dogma in Medieval Jewish Thought*, pp. 35-36, 45-46, 231n.132, 235nn.176-177. Pines, it should be noted, accords far more importance to this factor. In his view, Maimonides' role model in his decision to formulate principles of faith – which include belief in the absolute unity of God – were the fanatical Almohades, who conquered Andalusia in Maimonides' youth and were the cause of so much suffering experienced by Andalusian Jewry, including Maimonides and his family. The Almohades had promulgated a similar belief which they obligated their subjects

hand, he does not see this approach as providing us with the primary reason for Maimonides' innovation. Hyman's own metaphysical interpretation is dismissed by Kellner as false. Kellner correctly argues, following Berman, that acquiescence to metaphysical principles without grasping them conceptually by way of rational proofs has no intrinsic intellectual value for Maimonides.[16] Implicit in this argument is the view that, in Maimonides' thought, mere acceptance of true scientific opinions is insufficient in itself for the actualization of the potential intellect.[17] Hence, it is hard to see how this acquiescence can bring about the immortality of the completely actualized intellect, which Maimonides equates with the World to Come.[18] Finally, Kellner finds Berman's political interpretation (as applied to the list of principles by Hyman) inadequate for a number of reasons, though he does not dismiss it out of hand.[19] Instead, he offers an explanation that attempts to link, in various ways, the relation between correct opinions and the Torah, at least with respect to the first five principles, which focus on the nature of God. Kellner summarizes his own view as follows:

to accept. See Shlomo Pines, "Lecture on Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* (Heb.)," *Iyyun* 47 (1998): 115-128 (the article was prepared from Pines's manuscript by Sarah Stroumsa and Warren Z. Harvey). Kellner, too, notes a possible influence on Maimonides by the Almohades in this matter; see *Dogma in Medieval Jewish Thought*, 223n.27.

16 Ibid., p. 37.

17 For a study of Maimonides' approach to the human intellect and its Arabic philosophic sources, see, in particular, Herbert Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna and Averroes on the Intellect* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 200-203.

18 It is not my intention here to delve into the problem of whether Maimonides in the *Guide* hints at a denial of human immortality altogether, a view expounded by Pines in his article, "The Limitations of Human Knowledge according to Al-Farabi, Ibn Bajja, and Maimonides" (above, n. 5). For a discussion of this issue, see Howard Kreisel, *Maimonides' Political Thought* (Albany: S.U.N.Y. Press, 1999), pp. 141-150.

19 *Dogma in Medieval Jewish Thought*, pp. 36-37.

> I contend that Maimonides posited his principles because he thought that the masses ought not to be permitted to persist in false beliefs, especially false beliefs concerning God. Maimonides held this position for a number of reasons. First, the Torah as a whole sought to inculcate true doctrines; in laying such doctrines down for the masses Maimonides was furthering the aims of the Torah. Second, that the Torah inculcates true doctrines is a mark of its divinity; in laying down his principles as 'foundations of the Torah' Maimonides emphasized its divine character. Third, Maimonides held that perfected halakhic observance depends upon the holding of true doctrines about God since holding false doctrines about God is idolatry; thus it is impossible to observe the halakhah, Maimonides held, without accepting the first five principles at least. I think that it is fair to restate this point in stronger terms; one who conscientiously observes the halakhah while believing in the corporeality of God is, in effect, performing idolatry. Such a person is literally worshipping 'a strange God'.[20]

Kellner's explanation is not without major problems, even if we confine his explanation to the first five principles. Maimonides indeed maintains that the aim of the Torah is to instill true doctrines, but the Torah itself never brings any organized list of such doctrines. It does not appear to be overly concerned with inculcating among its adherents any particular conception of God's nature, except that there is one true deity. It does not even explicitly mention some of the principles in Maimonides' list, such as the incorporeality of God.

The second reason Kellner gives for Maimonides' positing of the principles is also one that Maimonides himself maintains in *Guide* 2.40 (cf. 3.27), but which finds no explicit support in the Torah itself. The most obvious reason the Torah should be considered divine (based on the Torah's own account as well as the approach to Torah in Jewish

20 Ibid., p. 41.

tradition) is not that it teaches true doctrines but that it was given directly by God to Moses (as formulated by Maimonides in principle number eight). That being the case, one then has to look to sources outside the Torah, and indeed the Jewish legal tradition in general, to try to understand why Maimonides adopted this unusual position pertaining to the Torah's divinity.

The third reason Kellner brings is, in part, circular as well as highly problematic. It is circular because one can certainly not observe Jewish law properly, in Maimonides' view, without accepting the principles regarding God. This is because knowledge of God's existence and unity are treated by Maimonides not only as principles of Judaism but as Torah *commandments*. Yet, this legal determination, advanced by Maimonides in the opening section of his *Mishneh Torah,* is a pioneering move on his part, with little Jewish legal precedent.[21] Moreover, these commandments involve no actions, according to Maimonides, but are fulfilled purely by one's intellect (namely, by the truths that one grasps conceptually). Thus, one cannot say that they are necessary in order to observe halakhic practice, if practice signifies the realm of physical activity (such as the prohibitions regarding idolatry).

In this case, too, one needs to ask what drove Maimonides to adopt this exceptional stance. Again, the answer would appear to lie primarily in Maimonides' philosophic sources, given the dearth of explicit Jewish legal sources that support this view.[22] It should also be noted that nowhere does Maimonides maintain that anyone who worships God with the thought that God is corporeal is *legally* guilty of idolatry and can

21 Maimonides himself appeals to a homiletical (*aggadic*) statement in BT Maqqot 24a as his source. See his *Book of Commandments*, positive commandment no. 1. His most conspicuous legal precedent is from the Geonic period, namely Ḥefeṣ ben Yaṣliaḥ's *Book of Precepts*. See Kreisel, *Maimonides' Political Thought*, p. 198.

22 That Maimonides' was in fact influenced by Alfarabi in treating certain philosophical views as fundamental religious obligations I shall attempt to show below.

be prosecuted for this grievous sin which, in principle at least, carries the death penalty. Maimonides certainly makes the claim that such person does not fulfill the commandment to hold a true conception of God and thus is a heretic. That this person does not truly worship God from a philosophical perspective is also the case, but this is a different issue. Maimonides himself is well aware that this is the case with the vast majority of Jews from the time of the giving of the Torah to his own day, insofar as they believe in a corporeal deity. It is this situation, in particular, that Maimonides seeks to change, at least in regard to publicly held beliefs.[23] Furthermore, even in regard to idolatry it would appear that, for Maimonides, its eradication is considered necessary in order to promote the true conception of the One God, and not the other way around.[24] Hence, Kellner appears to be guilty of treating as an end (halakhic practices) what Maimonides regards as a means, and treating as a means what Maimonides regards as the end (the true conception of God).

Until now, I have briefly pointed out the inadequacy of Kellner's explanation for Maimonides' positing of the metaphysical principles dealing with the Deity. His exposition certainly cannot account for all

23 See Kreisel, *Maimonides' Political Thought*, pp. 189-223. In order to advance this agenda, Maimonides adopts an exceptionally radical position in *Guide* 1.36. There, he treats those who believe that God is corporeal as "more blameworthy" than idolaters who worship intermediaries. The corporealists essentially worship something that does not exist, and not the Deity. Those who worship intermediaries at least worship something that exists. Yet, in this passage, Maimonides is certainly not writing from a legal perspective but a theological one.

24 This point emerges from his discussion of the origins of idolatry at the beginning of "Laws of Idolatry," as well as his discussion of idolatry in *Guide* 3.29. Kellner is certainly correct in maintaining that one who prays to a corporeal deity is not really praying to God, and, from this perspective, is not fulfilling the commandment, at least in spirit. Yet, ultimately, the commandment relating to prayer itself, in Maimonides' view, is a means to reinforce one's belief in God. Hence, for Maimonides, the highest form of prayer is not its legal form, but pure contemplation of metaphysical truths, as Maimonides hints in *Guide* 3.32 and 3.51.

the remaining principles, particularly if there is reason to believe that Maimonides does not regard all of them as literally true.[25] Thus, we are forced to look for the meta-legal foundation that underlies Maimonides' approach to his principles, one that can best be found in Maimonides' philosophic sources, as Berman has accurately pointed out in regard to Maimonides' approach to religious beliefs.

In this article, I will add further support to Berman's approach in understanding Maimonides' principles, as well as take a closer look at the influence of Alfarabi's thought on Maimonides in this matter. It should be stressed that Berman's approach, as well as that of Alfarabi, is not purely political, that is to say, the goal is not obedience to the state alone. Rather, there is a strong pedagogical element underlying the laws and beliefs promulgated by the *ideal state*, with the goal being the perfection of the citizens, both morally and intellectually. It is this model that very much appeals to Maimonides in his attempt to understand the Torah and to further these ends in his capacity as a legal authority in his own period.

A

Before examining Alfarabi's possible influence on Maimonides' decision to formulate principles defining Jewish belief and to posit their acceptance as mandatory for attaining reward in the next world and being considered a member of the Jewish community in this one, it is best to begin by ascertaining what writings of Alfarabi Maimonides knew at the time of his composition of the *Commentary on the Mishnah*. Maimonides does not mention any specific works of any of the philosophers in his commentary. He does, however, at times refer to "the philosophers" collectively, most notably in the general introduction to the commentary, later on in the introduction to *Pereq Ḥeleq*, and, finally, in the introduction to Tractate Avot, an introduction that he named

25 See below, note 47.

Eight Chapters. What is particularly noteworthy with regard to these references is that they never come in order to negate the views of the philosophers, but always to demonstrate his (and Judaism's) agreement with these views.[26] This is certainly an unusual move in a commentary on the central text of the Jewish Oral Law, a text in which philosophic ideas appear to play no role. Maimonides is aware that, in his own period, many look at philosophy as a form of heresy and regard the views of Aristotle and his followers as antithetical to Judaism. For this reason, in the introduction to *Eight Chapters,* he excuses himself from not mentioning explicitly the philosophic sources underlying his views in this work – and which Maimonides ascribes also to the Sages – and simply admonishes the reader: "Know the truth from whoever utters it." It would appear that one of the unstated purposes of the commentary is to revise the manner in which the "philosophers" are regarded by traditionally minded Jews. Rather than treating their views, particularly those of Aristotle and his followers, as anathema to Judaism, they may be regarded as being in harmony with it on a number of fundamental points. Moreover, the careful reader of the commentary is led to the conclusion that a study of philosophy is mandatory for a true understanding of the words of the prophets and the homilies of the rabbinic sages. In other words, the study of philosophy is treated by Maimonides as a religious obligation. Not without irony, in the *Commentary on the Mishnah,* this point perhaps receives its boldest expression in Maimonides' formulation of the thirteen principles, as we shall see below.

For all of Maimonides' attempts to incorporate philosophical ideas into his commentary, it is still hard to determine what treatises he had read prior to writing the commentary. While the *Guide* cites numerous

26 It is true that in chapter one of *Eight Chapters,* he speaks of a fundamental mistake regarding the human soul made by many of the philosophers. His reference, however, is not to Aristotle and other leading Aristotelian philosophers, insofar as his approach there is based on the Aristotelian conception of the soul.

philosophers and their works, and Maimonides' subsequent epistle to the translator of the *Guide,* Samuel Ibn Tibbon, presents a recommended bibliography of philosophic treatises, it is problematic to assume that Maimonides had already read all these works in this earlier period, at least not without further support for this supposition.[27] When it comes to Alfarabi, the picture is even more problematic. In the *Guide,* Maimonides cites four works of Alfarabi: *On the Intellect; On the Variable Substances; Commentary on the Physics;* and *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*.[28] The last three works are lost, and only the final one is directly concerned with political-ethical thought. In one version of his subsequent letter to Ibn Tibbon, Maimonides singles out Alfarabi's *Principles of the Existents*, more commonly known as *The Political Regime*.

27 The philosophers cited in *The Guide* are carefully analyzed by Shlomo Pines in his introductory essay to his translation. Herbert Davidson has already explored the question of the extent of Maimonides'' philosophic knowledge at the time of the writing of the *Commentary* and subsequent *Mishnah Torah*; see his *Moses Maimonides: The Man and His Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 90-98. Davidson's conclusion is significant: "By the age of forty he was thus familiar with the contours of medieval Arabic Aristotelian philosophy, he had studied other sciences, and he was well-versed in mathematics and astronomy. But, nothing that has been said demonstrates extensive philosophic study or any direct knowledge of Aristotle. He could have learned everything encountered so far from introductory handbooks of philosophy coming out of the Arabic Aristotelian school (p. 98)." Furthermore, Davidson calls into question whether Maimonides wrote one of the most popular of these handbooks, namely the *Treatise on Logic*; see Davidson, "The Authenticity of Works attributed to Maimonides," in Ezra Fleischer et al. (eds.), *Me'ah She'arim: Studies in Medieval Jewish Spiritual Life* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2001), pp. 118-125. While I am inclined to agree with Davidson regarding Maimonides' authorship of this treatise, it should be noted that the question of its authorship remains an open one. Certainly, if Maimonides did write it (and he purportedly wrote it at an early age) he must have possessed a comprehensive grasp of Aristotelian logic at least. Yet, even if he did not, he appears to have possessed far more philosophical knowledge already at an early age than Davidson suggests, as I shall try to show below.

28 See Pines, "The Philosophic Sources of *The Guide of the Perplexed*," p. lxxix.

While the book is mostly concerned with political thought, and only at the beginning focuses on metaphysics, surprisingly, Maimonides appears to treat it as an exceptional work of "logic."[29] Since we cannot be sure that the singling out of this book was in the original version of the letter, it is difficult to ascertain the impact of this particular treatise on Maimonides' thought. This is particularly the case when we realize that similar treatises by Alfarabi, such as *The Opinions of the Inhabitants of the Virtuous City*, and which, as we will see, Maimonides draws on, are nowhere mentioned explicitly by him. Even if we assume that Maimonides himself singles out Alfarabi's *Principles of the Existents* by name, the question remains whether this work, or any other of Alfarabi's works, was known to Maimonides at the time of his writing of the *Commentary*.

What then can be learned from Maimonides' references to the "philosophers" in his *Commentary on the Mishnah*? It has already been shown that the one philosophic work that Maimonides undoubtedly read, and which has a huge impact on his thought, is Alfarabi's *Aphorisms of the Statesman.* While this work is not mentioned explicitly by Maimonides in his subsequent writings, in his *Eight Chapters,* he not only presents many of its ideas, but goes so far as to copy numerous sentences from it word for word.[30] Thus, when Maimonides speaks of "knowing the truth from the one who utters it," he definitely has Alfarabi, in addition to Aristotle, in mind. While we may speculate on his knowledge of other Alfarabian works at this point in his life, at least we can be certain that he is completely familiar with and deeply influenced by this particular work.

29 See above, note 5.

30 See Herbert Davidson, "Maimonides' *Shemonah Peraqim* and Alfarabi's *Fuṣūl al-Madani*," *PAAJR* 31 (1963): 116-133; Jeffrey Macy, "A Study in Medieval Jewish and Arabic Political Philosophy: Maimonides' *Shemonah Peraqim* and Alfarabi's *Fuṣūl al-Madani*," Ph.D. thesis (Hebrew University, 1982).

Yet, there is also good reason to suppose that Maimonides is already familiar with other treatises by Alfarabi, such as *Principles of the Existents* and/or *The Virtuous City*. Maimonides' summary of metaphysics and astral physics in chapters two and three of the first section of the *Mishneh Torah*, "Laws of Principles of the Torah" (written shortly after the completion of the *Commentary on the Mishnah*) reads as a good summary of Alfarabi's philosophic views in the *Virtuous City*.[31] Alfarabi's approach to revelation in *Principles of the Existents,* as resulting from the conjunction with the Active Intellect, most probably is the source of Maimonides' approach to prophecy, both in the sixth principle of Judaism, in the *Commentary,* and in the seventh chapter of "Laws of Principles of the Torah". The role of the imagination in prophecy, as presented by Maimonides in the seventh principle as well as in "Laws of Principles of the Torah" appears to be primarily based on Alfarabi's discussion of prophecy in *The Virtuous City*.[32]

In his commentary on *Pereq Ḥeleq*, Maimonides mentions two fundamental Aristotelian ideas that he explicitly accepts: the final perfection of human beings, i.e., the perfection of the intellect in its grasp of metaphysics, and the identity of the thinker and the object of thought. Both of these ideas, however, are very well known and do not, in themselves, indicate a profound knowledge of the Aristotelian view of the soul or of Aristotle's metaphysics. Perhaps Maimonides' most

31 Richard Walzer, *Al-Farabi on the Perfect State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 88-105.

32 See Jeffrey Macy, "Prophecy in al-Farabi and Maimonides: The Imaginative and Rational Faculties," in: Shlomo Pines and Yirmiyahu Yovel (eds.), *Maimonides and Philosophy* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1986), pp. 185-201. See also Howard Kreisel, *Prophecy: The History of an Idea in Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (Dordrecht : Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), pp. 169-177, 241-246. Yet, even in regard to these ideas, one may still argue that Maimonides had no need to read any of Alfarabi's works in order to become acquainted with them, given their popularity in intellectual circles. Judah Halevi, for example, brings some of these ideas in the first treatise of the *Kuzari*, without appearing to have read any of Alfarabi's treatises.

important reference to philosophic literature is one in which the "philosophers" are not mentioned explicitly. In his discussion of the seventh principle (the uniqueness of Mosaic prophecy) Maimonides writes that in order to understand it fully, one must elaborate on the existence of the angels (i.e., the Separate Intellects), the distinction between their ranks and that of God, the soul and its faculties, and the images the prophets attribute to God and to the angels. He goes on to indicate that he has started a book on prophecy that deals, at least in part, with these subjects, and plans to write other works dealing with them in depth. This clearly suggests that at the time of his writing of the *Commentary*, Maimonides has attained more than a passing knowledge of these philosophic subjects, though it is certainly not clear which treatises serve as his sources. His more-than-passing knowledge of the human soul is reflected in his discussion of the powers of the soul in the first of the *Eight Chapters.*

The proposition that Maimonides began his study of philosophy at an early date is further supported by a passage that appears in *Guide* 2.9. He indicates there that he read astronomical texts under the guidance of one of the pupils of "the excellent philosopher Abū Bakr Ibn Ṣa'igh,"[33] a reference to the Andalusian philosopher Ibn Bajja. In all probability, this study took place in Maimonides' youth (either while still in Spain or during his sojourn in Fez), before the writing of the *Commentary on the Mishnah*. Moreover, it is more than likely that Maimonides' studies with the pupil of this famous philosopher were not limited to astronomical texts but included also philosophical ones.

Yet, in the final analysis, while we can be quite sure that, at the time of the writing of the *Commentary on the Mishnah,* Maimonides was acquainted with a range of ideas that can be traced to Aristotle or his followers, and some ideas that can be traced more directly to Alfarabi, the only work that we can say with complete confidence that he read carefully is the *Aphorisms*.

33 Pines translation, p. 268.

B

So, what did Maimonides find in his reading of Alfarabi, particularly the *Aphorisms*, that may have influenced him to compose the thirteen principles? In one of the aphorisms, Alfarabi writes regarding the city governed by the ideal ruler as follows:

> In this city, love [*maḥabba*] first comes about for the sake of sharing in virtue, and that is connected with sharing in opinions and actions. The opinions they [the citizens] ought to share in are about three things: the beginning, the end, and what is between the two. Agreement of opinion about the beginning is agreement of their opinions about God, may He be exalted, about the spiritual beings, and about the devout who are the standard; how the world and its parts began; how human beings began to come about; then the ranks of the parts of the world, the link of some to others, and their level with respect to God – may He be exalted – and to the spiritual beings; then the level of human beings with respect to God and to the spiritual beings. So this is the beginning. The end is happiness. What is between the two is the actions through which happiness is gained.
>
> When the opinions of the inhabitants of the city are in agreement about these things and that is then perfected by the actions through which happiness is gained for some with others, that is necessarily followed by the love of some for others.[34]

Several points are striking about Maimonides' list of principles when seen in light of Alfarabi's discussion. Perhaps the most striking is that the opinions which all members of the state are required to share, according to Alfarabi, concern three subjects: the beginning (God and the structure of the world); the end (happiness); and what is "between the two" (the actions that bring about happiness). It would appear that Maimonides

34 Charles E. Butterworth (trans.), *Selected Aphorisms*, in: *Al-Fārābī: The Political Writings* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), p. 40, aphorism 61.

formulates his own principles in conformity with these three subjects: God, revelation, and final reward. Maimonides' list of principles was later reduced to three by Joseph Albo (1380-1444), following Shimon be Ẓemaḥ Duran (1361-1444), precisely along these lines.[35] Both of them appear to have been influenced by Averroes (1126-1198), Maimonides' contemporary, who, in his *Decisive Treatise,* formulates these three principles as incumbent upon everybody.[36] Maimonides does not appear to have been aware of Averroes' treatise – certainly not at the time of his writing the *Commentary on the Mishnah* – but Averroes was certainly acquainted with Alfarabi's works, and his political philosophy appears to be strongly influenced by Alfarabi's approach.[37] While it is true that Alfarabi does not explicitly mention revelation in the context of his list, his view that everyone should be inculcated with the belief that the actions that are commanded by the lawgiver bring about happiness can easily lead to the view that people should be convinced that these are the actions that are prescribed by God by way of revelation.[38]

35 See Kellner, *Dogma in Medieval Jewish Thought*, pp. 24-27.

36 See Julius Guttmann, *Religion and Knowledge: Essays and Lectures* (Heb.) (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1979), pp. 170-176; and see Averroes, *Decisive Treatise and Epistle Dedicatory*, Charles E. Butterworth (trans.) (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2001), p. 18.

37 See in particular Averroes' discussion of the intention of the Law, *op. cit.*, p. 23. Compare with Alfarabi's discussion in *Book of Religion*, in: Butterworth, *Al-Fārābī: The Political Writings*, pp. 93-102.

38 In *Selected Aphorisms*, aphorism 94 (p. 63) Alfarabi deals with the distinction between the philosopher who determines the proper practice on the basis of his theoretical knowledge and the one who attains revelation without theoretical knowledge. The first is far superior to the second, in his view. He concludes his discussion, however, by contrasting the one who attains revelation (who is perfect in theoretical knowledge) with the one who attains revelation (without being perfect in theoretical knowledge). This distinction underlies Maimonides' discussion of prophets vs. non-prophetic legislators in *Guide* 2.37. In the *Political Regime* Alfarabi's ideal legislator is also said to attain revelation based on his conjunction with the Active Intellect. Alfarabi certainly does not believe that God is the

What reinforces the notion that in formulating his principles, Maimonides was particularly influenced by the passage from the *Aphorisms* cited above, is the manner in which Maimonides concludes his discussion of his principles:

> When all these principles are perfectly understood and believed in by a person, he enters the community of Israel and one is obligated to love and pity him and to act towards him in all ways in which the Creator has commanded that one should act towards his brother with love [*maḥabba*] and fraternity.[39]

One may well expect Maimonides to conclude his discussion by reiterating that any final reward will be lost if the principles are rejected. What greater incentive does one require for accepting them in *toto*, or

immediate source of any laws. Yet he does appear to think of the ideal law (he never refers to this law as "divine," in all likelihood for political-religious reasons) as resulting from one of two processes. Either the ideal lawgiver, as a result of attaining conjunction and perfect theoretical knowledge, consciously deliberates upon the laws leading society to true happiness, or the laws are "revealed" to him while in the state of conjunction, that is to say, they are the product of his intellect while in this state. This idea appears to underlie a passage in *Book of Religion*, where Alfarabi writes: "Now the craft of the virtuous first ruler is kingly and joined with revelation from God. Indeed, he determines the actions and opinions in the virtuous religion by means of revelation (*waḥy*). This occurs in one or both of two ways: one is that they are all revealed to him as determined; the second is that he determines them by means of the faculty he acquires from revelation and from the Revealer, may He be exalted, so that the stipulations with which he determines the virtuous opinions and actions are disclosed to him by means of it. Or some come about in the first way and some in the second way. It has already been explained in theoretical science how the revelation of God, may He be exalted, to the human being receiving the revelation comes about and how the faculty acquired from revelation and from the Revealer occurs in a human being (*Al-Fārābī: The Political Writings*, p. 94)." Alfarabi's statement: "they are all revealed to him as determined" does not signify that God is the immediate author of the particular laws. Rather, the mind of the individual determines the laws while in the state of conjunction.

39 See Kellner, *Dogma in Medieval Jewish Thought*, p. 16.

what better reason could Maimonides have for formulating them in the first place? Yet Maimonides instead concludes by stressing the connection between the principles and the communal bond, specifically mutual love between the members of the polity.[40] This is precisely the notion presented by Alfarabi in introducing the importance of the principles, as seen above. The political ramification of an acceptance of the principles, as presented by Maimonides, is therefore a clear echo of Alfarabi's approach. In my view, Maimonides' conclusion here is not simply an afterthought, adding to the all-important metaphysical dimension of the principles also a political dimension. Rather, it reveals the primary motivation underlying Maimonides' list.

The relation between the thirteen principles and the commandments contained in "Laws of Principles of the Torah," which opens the *Mishneh Torah,* sheds further light on this matter. The first four chapters in Maimonides' legal *magnum opus* contain five commandments all dealing with knowledge of God: to know the existence of God, not to believe in the existence of any other deity; to unify God in one's thought, to love God, and to be in awe of God. The last two commandments are treated by Maimonides as the necessary consequences of attaining knowledge of all the existents, their relation to God, and their interrelation, that is to say, the natural sciences and metaphysics, which he equates with the "Account of the Beginning" and the "Account of the Chariot" ("Laws of Principles of the Torah" 2.11, 4.10).[41] Moreover, these commandments can only be fulfilled by grasping these subjects, for one does not truly love what one does not know, because, in that case, one only loves a

40 Love of fellow Jews is treated Maimonides as a Torah commandment in *Mishneh Torah*, "Laws of Character Traits." Hence it could be argued that Maimonides is simply defining those to whom this commandment is applied (or not applied). However, the linking of love with maintaining certain beliefs is not found there, although it characterizes Maimonides' Alfarabian source.

41 In rabbinic tradition, these are the most profound subjects of the Bible that only the greatest sages may be taught. See, for example, B.T. Hagigah 11b and follows.

figment of one's own imagination. In chapters 2-4 of this section, Maimonides gives a detailed outline of this knowledge. His conclusion of these commandments is particularly significant. He writes:

> The matters of these four chapters regarding [the fulfilment of] these five commandments are what the early Sages called *pardes* [lit. orchard], as they had stated: "Four entered *pardes* (B.T. Hagigah 14b)." Despite the fact that [these four] were the great ones of Israel and great sages – not all of them possessed the power to know and comprehend all these things completely. I say that it is not fitting to roam in *pardes* unless one's belly is filled with bread and meat. "Bread and meat" consist of knowledge of the permitted and forbidden and so forth pertaining to the other commandments. Despite the fact that these things were called by the Sages "a small thing," for the Sages stated: "'A great thing' – the Account of the Chariot; 'a small thing' – the [legal] disputes between Abbaye and Rabba (B.T. Sukkah 28a)," still it is appropriate to practice them first, for they put the mind of the individual to rest from the outset. Moreover, they are the great good bequeathed by God for the inhabitation of this world, in order to gain the life of the World to Come. All individuals may know them [all the other commandments]: old and young, man and woman, a person of broad heart [i.e., intellect] and one of narrow heart ("Laws of Foundations of the Torah" 4.13).

In his novel interpretation of *pardes,* Maimonides treats it not as a metaphor for a heavenly place (as was common among Jewish scholars before him), but as a metaphor for the Aristotelian theoretical sciences.[42] His radical (mis)interpretation of the talmudic statement in B.T. Sukkah is just as striking, if not even more so. While the Sages are clearly

42 For a study of the Account of the Chariot in Maimonides' thought, as well as that of his predecessors and followers, see Howard Kreisel, *Philosophy as Religion: Studies in Maimonides and the Medieval Jewish Philosophers of Provence* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2015), pp. 209-269.

contrasting the relative value of knowledge of the "Account of the Chariot" (primarily an understanding of the opening chapter of Ezekiel) and knowledge of the details of the legal *argumentation* between Abbaye and Rabba, Maimonides interprets them as contrasting the relative value of knowledge of the theoretical sciences (and, by inference, the five commandments which mandate Jews to grasp these sciences) and knowledge of all the other commandments and fulfillment of them. It is the theoretical intellect alone that is directly involved in the fulfillment of the first five commandments – i.e., they involve no actions or restraint, only pure knowledge. Meanwhile, all the other commandments involve actions (or, at times, emotions). Maimonides is essentially saying that all the commandments of Torah, with the exception of the first five, serve as means for fulfilling the first five, either by contributing to the proper state of mind necessary to embarking on learning the theoretical sciences, or by creating a harmonious society that creates the social-material conditions that allow for in-depth study. Maimonides subsequently makes this point more explicitly in *Guide* 3.27.[43]

The first three commandments in "Laws of Principles of the Torah" correspond to Maimonides' first four principles, but the next two commandments, love and awe, introduce subjects not found in his principles, for they involve a detailed scientific knowledge of the world. Maimonides is essentially appropriating all the other subjects mentioned by Alfarabi in the list of topics that belong to the "beginning," and which should be taught to all the inhabitants of the state – i.e., "the spiritual beings [...] how the world and its parts began, how human beings began to come about, the ranks of the parts of the world, the link of some to others, and their level with respect to God and to the spiritual beings, then the level of human beings with respect to God and to the spiritual beings." It would appear that Maimonides saw that the principles in the *Commentary on the Mishnah* lacked a summary of all the theoretical

43 For a study of this issue see Kreisel, *Maimonides' Political Thought*, pp. 189-223.

knowledge that should be taught in the state according to Alfarabi, and that he corrected this lacuna in the "Laws of Principles of the Torah" by attaching this knowledge to the commandments to love and be in awe of God.[44] His conclusion to chapter four shows that the *proper* fulfillment of these commandments is the final end of the Torah, and, in fact, of human existence. That is to say, attaining by one's intellect the knowledge that fulfills these commandments is the final end, and as Maimonides briefly indicates, leads to the immortality of the intellect:

> Therefore, when the body decomposes insofar as it is composed of the elements, and the rational soul (*neshamah*) vanishes, for it is found with the body and requires the body for all its activities, this form [the form of the soul = the acquired intellect] does not become extinct, for it does not require the rational soul for its activities. Rather, it knows and grasps the intellects that are separate from bodies [= the Separate Intellects], and knows the Creator of all, and remains for all eternity ("Laws of Principles of the Torah" 4.9)

All other commandments, as we have seen, are treated as means. Thus, Maimonides here strongly distinguishes the attainment of theoretical knowledge from all other activities commanded by the Torah. Absent from these four chapters is any clear allusion to principles number 5 to 13 (the principle that God alone is to be worshipped is the basis of the later section, "Laws of Idolatry"). Hence, one may conclude that the true beliefs taught by the Torah (the "welfare of the soul" in Maimonides'

44 For a study of the relation between "Laws of Principles of the Torah," and Alfarabi's thought, see Joel Kraemer, "Alfarabi's *Opinions of the Virtuous City* and Maimonides' *Foundations of the Law*," in: Joshua Blau (ed.), *Studia Orientalia: Memoriae D.H. Baneth Dedicata* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1979), pp. 107-153. For a study of love and fear in Maimonides' thought, see Kreisel, *Maimonides' Political* Thought, pp. 225-266; see also Daniel Lasker, "Love of God and Knowledge of God in Maimonides' Philosophy," in: Jacqueline Hamesse and O. Weijers (eds.), *Écriture et réécriture des textes philosophiques médiévaux: Volume d'hommage à Colette Sirat* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2006), pp. 329-345.

parlance in *Guide* 3.27) and which lead directly to the perfection of the intellect, are the subject of these chapters and of the first four principles, while all the other principles are concerned with the beliefs that are necessary to the religious-social order.[45]

This certainly does not lead to the conclusion that all the other principles are false, for this is clearly not the case, even from a purely philosophical point of view. Revelation and the World to Come as defined by Maimonides (conjunction with the Active Intellect and the immortality of the intellect), are regarded as true also in his philosophic sources, and, in some sense, are even implied in Maimonides' discussion of humanity in his summary of the natural science pertaining to the sublunary world in chapter 4 of "Laws of Principles of the Torah."[46] Other principles may not be accepted by the philosophers – such as the unique nature of Mosaic prophecy or the coming of the messianic king – but neither are they philosophically disproven by them. Others are rejected by them outright when understood literally – Torah from Heaven, God's knowledge of individuals and providence over them, and the resurrection of the dead – but Maimonides may be interpreted as

45 Significantly, in "Laws of Principles of the Torah" Maimonides formulates the knowledge contained in these principles in a succinct *philosophic* manner and not in a metaphorical one. Alfarabi, in a number of his writings, indicates that images should be employed in conveying this knowledge, as befitting society at large. Furthermore, the images should be chosen in keeping with the particular cultural climate of that society. In the *Guide,* Maimonides makes a similar point regarding the manner in which the Torah inculcates true beliefs: "… some of them are set forth in parables, for it is not within the nature of the common multitude that its capacity should suffice for apprehending the subject matter as it is (*Guide* 3.27, p. 510)." On possible reasons why Maimonides, as against Alfarabi (and the Torah itself, in Maimonides' view), decided to teach these truths in a philosophic manner (that was hardly suitable for many of his coreligionists), see Kreisel, *Maimonides' Political Thought*, chapter 6.

46 See "Laws of Principles of the Torah" 4.9 quoted above.

hinting that these principles should not be understood literally.[47] Still, principles relating to the acceptance of the activities creating the most conducive social environment and psychological state for pursuing human felicity (revelation of the Torah and its immutability) and popular incentives to practice them (all the principles relating to reward), may be conceived as necessary beliefs for society, whether they are literally true or false, rather than true beliefs which point to the philosophic knowledge wherein lies human perfection. Significantly, Maimonides includes all the principles relating to revelation and the Torah in the last four chapters of "Laws of Principles of the Torah," attaching them to the commandments to heed the words of the prophet who speaks in the name of God, and, after he has been proven to be a true prophet, not to continue to test him. Yet the fact remains that Maimonides had already drawn a sharp distinction between the first four chapters of this section and the commandments they contain, and the rest of the *Mishneh Torah*.

Maimonides returns to list the beliefs contained in the thirteen principles in the last section of the first book of the *Mishneh Torah*, the *Book of Knowledge*, in the section entitled, "Laws of Repentance." There, he lists all those who have no portion in the World to Come. Thirteen of the categories of people who have no portion in the World to Come refer to those holding certain false beliefs, while he adds eleven categories that refer to those who have performed certain types of vile actions.[48] At least two points are noteworthy about the list of beliefs: First, Maimonides does not include belief in final retribution (the World to Come), but

47 Already during his lifetime, Maimonides was accused by critics in the East and in the West of rejecting a literal belief in the resurrection of the dead. This prompted Maimonides to compose his *Treatise on Resurrection*. Still, there are good reasons to maintain that his critics were correct in their interpretation of his stance. See Robert Krischner, "Maimonides' Fiction of Resurrection," *HUCA* 52 (1982): 163-193.

48 On Maimonides' possible sources for this list, see Adiel Kadari, *Studies in Repentance: Law, Philosophy and Educational Thought in Maimonides' Hilkhot Teshuvah* (Heb.) (Beer-Sheva: Ben-Gurion University, 2010), pp. 100-108.

rather divides belief in the divine origin of the Torah into two beliefs: belief in the divine origin of each letter of the written Torah and belief in the Oral Torah. Second, Maimonides opens the list with the same five principles that headed his thirteen principles and designates anyone who denies any one of them a "*min*" (heretic), while choosing different designations for those rejecting the other principles. With regard to the first point, Kellner has convincingly argued that Maimonides wanted to stress the importance of belief in the Oral Torah, so he included it here as a separate principle for polemical reasons (against the Karaites who had a strong presence in Egypt but whose influence was less pronounced in Spain and North Africa). At the same time, Maimonides still wanted to preserve the number thirteen in the list of fundamental beliefs.[49] Indeed, in his desire to maintain the same number of principles, Maimonides may have found belief in final retribution (the World to Come) the easiest to disregard (despite the fact that this principle alone refers to the end of humanity, in Maimonides' view, as well as also being philosophically true). The reason for this is that the centrality of this principle is already assumed by Maimonides' list. That is to say, one must believe in the World to Come in order to accept Maimonides' list of those who have no portion in the World to Come in the first place. As for the second point, here too we see that Maimonides wanted to maintain a clear distinction between those principles that involved metaphysical truths (with the addition of the fifth principle which was the most important safeguard to the acceptance of these truths), and all the other principles. Certainly, there is no compelling reason, based on Maimonides' sources, or even his other writings, to designate those who

49 *Dogma in Medieval Jewish Thought*, pp. 23-24. For Maimonides and the Karaites, see, for example, Daniel Lasker, "The Influence of Karaism on Maimonides (Heb.)," *Sefunot* 20 (1991): 145-161

rejected these beliefs as "*min*."[50] This distinction between different beliefs is less pronounced in the *Commentary on the Mishnah,* where Maimonides suggests some internal division between them only by means of the manner in which he orders them. It is far more pronounced in the opening section, "Laws of Principles of the Torah," as we have seen. The basis for this distinction is made more explicit in the *Guide*, particularly 3.27-28.

Conclusion

The distinction between theoretical and practical philosophy, that is to say, between knowledge of the theoretical sciences and the knowledge that leads to the molding of ethical individuals and to social harmony – as well as a society that creates the ideal environment for the pursuit of intellectual perfection – is presented by Alfarabi in a number of his writings, such as *The Enumeration of the Sciences*, and the *Book of Religion*. Maimonides' division of the *Mishneh Torah* into two parts – the first comprising of the four chapters, and the second, all the rest – reflects this division. The two types of belief that the Law teaches according to Maimonides' discussion in 3.28, i.e., true and necessary, also reflect this division. They are clearly related to his distinction between the two aims of the divine law, "the welfare of the soul" and "the welfare of the body," discussed by him in the previous chapter. While Maimonides' example of a belief that is necessary for political welfare – God is violently angry with those who disobey Him – is also a false belief when understood literally, he may have thought that even certain true beliefs are to be inculcated primarily for the purpose of political welfare. They simply do not directly promote intellectual perfection, but the wellbeing of the society dedicated to this end.

50 For a study of Maimonides' use of this term, see Hannah Kasher, *Heretics in Maimonides' Teaching* (Heb.) (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House, 2011), pp. 44-66.

Certainly, Maimonides' thirteen principles can be seen along similar lines. The principles that are true and deal with ultimate ends are those concerning God, and are found at the beginning of the list. The principles of prophecy and the World to Come, *as they are formulated by Maimonides*, in a crucial sense belong to both categories – theoretical knowledge and political welfare – although their main function appears to be in promoting the latter. Yet, even the principles relating to God do not in themselves provide the requisite knowledge for achieving perfection but serve as pedagogic guides in the attainment of this knowledge. In other words, they are formulated from a social-political perspective. In the *Mishneh Torah* Maimonides goes much further in underlining the pedagogic role of the Law for the attainment of the perfection of the intellect.

It is the political-pedagogical interpretation – which is in accordance with Alfarabi's view of the ideal state and the manner in which it helps bring about individual perfection – that best explains Maimonides' motivation in formulating a list of thirteen principles and "legalizing" it as Judaism's official dogma. His creation of a list of principles is thus not so much intended to define Judaism more in terms of beliefs and less in terms of actions, though it certainly does this. Beliefs, though they concern the noblest part of the human soul (i.e., the rational faculty)[51] are in themselves only a means by which the ideal state educates its citizens and strengthens their commitment to its laws and the *ultimate goal of these laws*. Hence, Maimonides' list of principles is ultimately designed to directly and indirectly promote what he regards as the ultimate end of Judaism, which is the ultimate end of the human species, namely, the perfection of the intellect. Each person is to pursue this perfection in accordance with his/her capacity, though only the elite few have the ability to attain it. Maimonides, the Jewish disciple of Alfarabi, seeks to direct the entire edifice of Jewish tradition, its commandments and teachings, to the pursuit of this goal. This task did not require any

51 See, in particular, Maimonides' discussion in *Guide* 3.8.

changes to the edifice itself, but it demanded certain critical and, essentially, radical additions to its foundation. The thirteen principles and "Laws of Principles of the Torah" are the most important two.

Appendix

In chapter fourteen of his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) sets out to "enumerate the dogmas of the universal faith." Spinoza takes it for granted that there simply cannot be religion without dogma. Furthermore, for all his attempts to limit the authority of religion and combat its intrusiveness in social life, he still sees a positive role for it, even within his contemporary society.[52] Religion does not teach philosophic truths in his view, but it is still important for insuring public morality. Consequently, Spinoza compiles a list of dogmas that, for him, should characterize a universal religion that is in harmony with Scripture. While Maimonides' political approach to dogma is implicit, in accordance with the interpretation I have championed in this article, in Spinoza, the political approach to dogma is presented explicitly. Nevertheless, the approaches of Maimonides and Spinoza are fundamentally different not only in form (esoteric vs. exoteric) but in substance. Maimonides argues it is the purpose of divine religion to steer its adherents towards knowledge of truth, particularly regarding the nature of God – that is to say, it has a crucial pedagogical role to play. For Spinoza, the goal of religion is solely obedience, in order to insure the practice of justice and charity. In other words, for Maimonides, divine religion is concerned both with the welfare of the soul (true beliefs) and the welfare of the body politic (morality). For Spinoza, the goal of religion is solely the latter, and its dogmas are formulated accordingly. As Spinoza writes:

52 See Baruch Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, Samuel Shirley (trans.) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991), pp. 220-227.

> Finally, it follows that faith requires no so much true dogmas as pious dogmas, that is, such as move the heart to obedience; and this is so even if many of those beliefs contain not a shadow of truth, provided that he who adheres to them knows not that they are false. If he knew that they are false, he would necessarily be a rebel, for how could it be that one who seeks to love justice and obey God should worship as divine what he knows to be alien to the divine nature? […] Each man's faith, then, is to be regarded as pious or impious not in respect of its truth or falsity, but as it is conducive to obedience or obstinacy […] A catholic faith should therefore contain only those dogmas which obedience to God absolutely demands, and without which such obedience is absolutely impossible.[53]

Spinoza lists seven such beliefs:

> 1) God (the Supreme Being) exists and is the exemplar of true life;
> 2) God is one alone;
> 3) God has dominion over all things, all are required to obey God absolutely;
> 4) Worship of God and obedience consists solely in justice and charity or love towards one's neighbor;
> 6) All who obey God by following this way of life, and only those, are saved;
> 7) God forgives repentant sinners.[54]

Spinoza insists that it does not matter how these dogmas are interpreted, as long as they insure obedience. In short, dogma is to have no legal standing whatsoever, its role is purely pedagogical. Anyone who lives a moral life, *ipso facto* is considered to have accepted these dogmas, in Spinoza's view, while those who do not lead such a life have not. What is important is the type of life one leads, not the beliefs underlying it. Significantly, Spinoza still leaves open the possibility of interpreting these

53 Ibid., pp. 223-224.

54 Ibid., pp. 224-225.

dogmas in a philosophic manner, that is to say, in accordance with truth: "Every man is duty bound to adapt these religious dogmas to his own understanding and interpret them for himself in whatever way makes him feel that he can the more readily accept them with full confidence and conviction."[55] Hence, while one should separate religion from philosophy and ascribe different roles to both, according to Spinoza, this does not prevent one from interpreting the principles of religion philosophically for oneself. Spinoza's approach thus allows for much theological diversity while still maintaining not only common practice but certain beliefs that support this practice, even if Spinoza was against any policy of coercion in their acceptance.

Maimonides' view of divine religion is certainly dissimilar to Spinoza's. With good reason, Spinoza saw himself primarily as an anti-Maimonidean in his attempt to separate religion from philosophy. Yet, perhaps Spinoza's approach is the best way to treat Maimonides' dogma in the contemporary Jewish world, given how much the scientific-philosophic world view that underlies many of Maimonides' principles (particularly those relating to God), and which they are designed to promote, has changed.[56] Is not the (almost) universal acceptance of Maimonides' dogma in the Orthodox Jewish world basically a result of force of habit? That is to say, it is the result of the inculcation of these beliefs as dogmas in Jewish education over a long period of time.[57] Just as

55 Ibid., p. 225.

56 Menachem Kellner, in his *Must a Jew Believe Anything* (London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1999), has sought to counter what he regards as the negative influence of Maimonides' dogma on contemporary Orthodox Judaism, by arguing that the formulation of a fixed dogma is essentially a Maimonidean invention. Judaism, at its root, is a religion based on faith *in* God and acceptance of the commandments, but not the acceptance of a particular theology. His book calls for a more theologically open Orthodox Judaism, essentially reflecting a return to its biblical and rabbinic sources. In a sense, his argument (and understanding of Scripture) shares a fundamental similarity with that of Spinoza.

57 For a study of the acceptance of Maimonides' principles, and, more particularly, the opposition to them in modern Orthodoxy, see Marc B. Shapiro, *The Limits of*

Maimonides chose to break the habitual thinking of the Jews, particularly in regard to the Deity,[58] by introducing his principles, perhaps the time has come within the Orthodox Jewish world to break this habitual thought by eliminating them as a "central pillar of Judaism." In other words, is a dogma defining Jewish faith still necessary or even desirable for Jewish Orthodoxy?

In some ways, our world still bears certain fundamental similarities to the world of Maimonides. The contemporary world still sees beliefs as a defining – if not *the* defining – characteristic of religion. Beliefs have always played a crucial role not only in supporting certain practices but also in determining membership. Already in rabbinic times, Jews were taught not only practices but certain binding fundamental beliefs whose denial was said to condemn the individual to a loss of any final reward and effectively place him outside of the "camp." Moreover, given the fact that Maimonides' principles have become hallowed by time and have undeniably become a pillar of Judaism in the eyes of many, it would appear that any attempt to undermine them directly at the same time undermines commitment to traditional Judaism and to Jewish practice, as well as to group solidarity within the Orthodox world, at least in part.

I do not think there is any simple answer to the question of the role played by Maimonides' dogma in defining contemporary Jewish

Orthodox Theology (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004). Yet, what is significant about Orthodoxy in the modern world, as Shapiro himself notes, is the extent to which Maimonides' principles are accepted as "Judaism's official dogma." The nay-sayers, even in regard to any particular principle, are far outnumbered by those who accept them.

58 Maimonides himself speaks of the relation between habitual thought and error in *Guide* 1.31: "However in our times there is a fourth cause [of disagreement] […] It is habit and upbringing. For a man has in his nature a love of, and inclination for, that to which he is habituated […] In a similar way, man has a love for, and the wish to defend, opinions to which he is habituated and in which he has been brought up and has a feeling of repulsion for opinions other than those. For this reason also man is blind to the apprehension of the true realities and inclines toward the things to which he is habituated" (Pines, p. 67).

Orthodoxy.[59] It appears to me that a defined and agreed upon set of beliefs, which, in effect, Maimonides successfully provided, still serves an important social function in supporting what is thought of as traditional Judaism, irrespective of whether all these beliefs are literally true or not. It would appear, then, that the best course to take is to preserve Maimonides' list, but, at the same time, to make it less dogmatic, that is, there should be less concern with heresy and more concern with practice. This is essentially the course that Spinoza outlined – namely, anchoring religion in a non-dogmatic dogma.

Yet, perhaps this is not merely a desirable goal for today, but, in a crucial sense, has long been the case. In looking over the history of Jewish theology from the time of Maimonides' introduction of the thirteen principles to the present, one is struck by the fact of how small a role they have played in the development of Jewish theology. While (almost) everyone in the traditional world accepts Maimonides' list of beliefs (though not always as fundamental principles), most Jewish theologies effectively ignore them. One looks in vain for any central role these principles might play either in shaping kabbalistic thought and its offshoots (such as hassidic thought or the mystical theology of Rav Kook) or in shaping modern Orthodox rational theologies (such as that of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch [1808-1888] or of Rabbi Joseph Dov Soloveitchik [1903-1993]). The principles have also played almost no role in the development of the Jewish legal tradition. Codifications of Jewish law subsequent to Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*, such as the *Shulkhan Arukh*, have nothing to say about them, given the orientation of these codes to Jewish *praxis*. The problem of Jewish heresy most often raises its head among Jewish legal authorities when any of these principles is rejected outright, for such rejection is generally (and often correctly) seen as an attempt to undermine the binding nature of Jewish law.

59 It is interesting to note that the English term "orthodox" literally applies to beliefs (*doxa*), while the Hebrew term *dati* applies primarily to legal practices.

So, perhaps the best course is to stay the course. These principles should still be taught for the positive role they have in bolstering commitment to Jewish law and providing a common bond of belief among those devoted to its practice. Religious Jews should continue to accept them by one form of interpretation or another, which enables one to see them at least as figuratively, if not literally true, while avoiding openly rejecting any of them explicitly. At the same time, theological beliefs within the traditional world should remain unrestricted by the literal acceptance of them, and open to new and varied ways of understanding God, revelation, and eschatology, just as Maimonides attempted to introduce his novel ways of understanding these subjects when he formulated his thirteen principles in the first place.

Abstract

Over the years, scholars have offered various explanations for Maimonides' decision to compose his thirteen principles of Jewish belief and to treat them as incumbent upon every Jew to accept in order to be considered part of the Jewish community and to earn a portion in the World to Come. In this article, I lend further support to Lawrence Berman's suggestion that political-pedagogical considerations were the dominant factor in Maimonides' thought and that he was influenced primarily by the political philosophy of Alfarabi. After showing why the other explanations—metaphysical, polemical and legal—were at best secondary considerations for Maimonides, I analyze a passage in Alfarabi's *Aphorisms of the Statesman*, a treatise well known by Maimonides at the time of his formulation of the principles, which I argue holds the key to understanding Maimonides' decision. I also discuss the question of the extent of Maimonides' philosophic knowledge in this earlier period of his life. I conclude the article with some observations about the relevance of Maimonides' list of principles in the contemporary period.