PERSECUTION AND THE ART OF WRITING

"That vice has often proved an emancipator of the mind, is one of the most humiliating, but, at the same time, one of the most unquestionable facts in history."

—W. E. H. Lecky

I

In a considerable number of countries which, for about a hundred years, have enjoyed a practically complete freedom of public discussion, that freedom is now suppressed and replaced by a compulsion to coordinate speech with such views as the government believes to be expedient, or holds in all seriousness. It may be worth our while to consider briefly the effect of that compulsion, or persecution, on thoughts as well as actions.1

A large section of the people, probably the great majority of the younger generation,2 accepts the government-sponsored views as true, if not at once at least after a time. How have they been convinced? And where does the time factor enter? They have not been convinced by compulsion, for compulsion does

1 Scribere est agere. See Sir William Blackstone, Commentaries, Book IV, chap. 6. Compare Machiavelli, Discorsi, III, 6 (I Classici del Giglio, pp. 424-26) and Descartes, Discours de la méthode, VI, beginning.

2 "Socrates: Do you know by what means they might be persuaded to accept this story? Glaucio: By no means, as far as they themselves are concerned, but I know how it could be done as regards their sons and their descendants and the people of a later age generally speaking. Socrates: . . . I understand, more or less, what you mean." Plato, Republic, 415 c6-d5.
not produce conviction. It merely paves the way for conviction by silencing contradiction. What is called freedom of thought in a large number of cases amounts to—and even for all practical purposes consists of—the ability to choose between two or more different views presented by the small minority of people who are public speakers or writers.\(^8\) If this choice is prevented, the only kind of intellectual independence of which many people are capable is destroyed, and that is the only freedom of thought which is of political importance. Persecution is therefore the indispensable condition for the highest efficiency of what may be called *logica equina*. According to the horse-drawn Parmenides, or to Gulliver’s Houyhnhnms, one cannot say, or one cannot reasonably say “the thing which is not”: that is, lies are inconceivable. This logic is not peculiar to horses or horse-drawn philosophers, but determines, if in a somewhat modified manner, the thought of many ordinary human beings as well. They would admit, as a matter of course, that man can lie and does lie. But they would add that lies are short-lived and cannot stand the test of repetition—let alone of constant repetition—and that therefore a statement which is constantly repeated and never contradicted must be true. Another line of argument maintains that a statement made by an ordinary fellow may be a lie, but the truth of a statement made by a responsible and respected man, and therefore particularly by a man in a highly responsible or exalted position, is morally certain. These two enthymemes lead to the conclusion that the truth of a statement which is constantly repeated by the head of the government and never contradicted is absolutely certain.

This implies that in the countries concerned all those whose thinking does not follow the rules of *logica equina*, in other words, all those capable of truly independent thinking, cannot be brought to accept the government-sponsored views. Persecution, then, cannot prevent independent thinking. It cannot prevent even the expression of independent thought. For it is as true today as it was more than two thousand years ago that it is a safe venture to tell the truth one knows to benevolent and trustworthy acquaintances, or more precisely, to reasonable friends.\(^4\)

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\(^8\) “Reason is but choosing” is the central thesis of Milton’s *Areopagitica*.

Persecution cannot prevent even public expression of the heterodox truth, for a man of independent thought can utter his views in public and remain unharmed, provided he moves with circumspection. He can even utter them in print without incurring any danger, provided he is capable of writing between the lines.

The expression "writing between the lines" indicates the subject of this article. For the influence of persecution on literature is precisely that it compels all writers who hold heterodox views to develop a peculiar technique of writing; the technique which we have in mind when speaking of writing between the lines. This expression is clearly metaphoric. Any attempt to express its meaning in unmetaphoric language would lead to the discovery of a terra incognita, a field whose very dimensions are as yet unexplored and which offers ample scope for highly intriguing and even important investigations. One may say without fear of being presently convicted of grave exaggeration that almost the only preparatory work to guide the explorer in this field is buried in the writings of the rhetoricians of antiquity.

To return to our present subject, let us look at a simple example which, I have reason to believe, is not so remote from reality as it might first seem. We can easily imagine that a historian living in a totalitarian country, a generally respected and unsuspected member of the only party in existence, might be led by his investigations to doubt the soundness of the government-sponsored interpretation of the history of religion. Nobody would prevent him from publishing a passionate attack on what he would call the liberal view. He would of course have to state the liberal view before attacking it; he would make that statement in the quiet, unspectacular and somewhat boring manner which would seem to be but natural; he would use many technical terms, give many quotations and attach undue importance to insignificant details; he would seem to forget the holy war of mankind in the petty squabbles of pedants. Only when he reached the core of the argument would he write three or four sentences in that terse and lively style which is apt to arrest the attention of young men who love to think. That central passage would state the case of the adversaries more clearly, compellingly and mercilessly than it had ever been stated in the heyday of
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Liberalism, for he would silently drop all the foolish excrescences of the liberal creed which were allowed to grow up during the time when liberalism had succeeded and therefore was approaching dormancy. His reasonable young reader would for the first time catch a glimpse of the forbidden fruit. The attack, the bulk of the work, would consist of virulent expansions of the most virulent utterances in the holy book or books of the ruling party. The intelligent young man who, being young, had until then been somehow attracted by those immoderate utterances, would now be merely disgusted and, after having tasted the forbidden fruit, even bored by them. Reading the book for the second and third time, he would detect in the very arrangement of the quotations from the authoritative books significant additions to those few terse statements which occur in the center of the rather short first part.

Persecution, then, gives rise to a peculiar technique of writing, and therewith to a peculiar type of literature, in which the truth about all crucial things is presented exclusively between the lines. That literature is addressed, not to all readers, but to trustworthy and intelligent readers only. It has all the advantages of private communication without having its greatest disadvantage—that it reaches only the writer's acquaintances. It has all the advantages of public communication without having its greatest disadvantage—capital punishment for the author. But how can a man perform the miracle of speaking in a publication to a minority, while being silent to the majority of his readers? The fact which makes this literature possible can be expressed in the axiom that thoughtless men are careless readers, and only thoughtful men are careful readers. Therefore an author who wishes to address only thoughtful men has but to write in such a way that only a very careful reader can detect the meaning of his book. But, it will be objected, there may be clever men, careful readers, who are not trustworthy, and who, after having found the author out, would denounce him to the authorities. As a matter of fact, this literature would be impossible if the Socratic dictum that virtue is knowledge, and therefore that thoughtful men as such are trustworthy and not cruel, were entirely wrong.

Another axiom, but one which is meaningful only so long as
persecution remains within the bounds of legal procedure, is that a careful writer of normal intelligence is more intelligent than the most intelligent censor, as such. For the burden of proof rests with the censor. It is he, or the public prosecutor, who must prove that the author holds or has uttered heterodox views. In order to do so he must show that certain literary deficiencies of the work are not due to chance, but that the author used a given ambiguous expression deliberately, or that he constructed a certain sentence badly on purpose. That is to say, the censor must prove not only that the author is intelligent and a good writer in general, for a man who intentionally blunders in writing must possess the art of writing, but above all that he was on the usual level of his abilities when writing the incriminating words. But how can that be proved, if even Homer nods from time to time?

II

Suppression of independent thought has occurred fairly frequently in the past. It is reasonable to assume that earlier ages produced proportionately as many men capable of independent thought as we find today, and that at least some of these men combined understanding with caution. Thus, one may wonder whether some of the greatest writers of the past have not adapted their literary technique to the requirements of persecution, by presenting their views on all the then crucial questions exclusively between the lines.

We are prevented from considering this possibility, and still more from considering the questions connected with it, by some habits produced by, or related to, a comparatively recent progress in historical research. This progress was due, at first glance to the general acceptance and occasional application of the following principles. Each period of the past, it was demanded must be understood by itself, and must not be judged by standards alien to it. Each author must, as far as possible, be interpreted by himself; no term of any consequence must be used in the interpretation of an author which cannot be literally
translated into his language, and which was not used by him or was not in fairly common use in his time. The only presentations of an author's views which can be accepted as true are those ultimately borne out by his own explicit statements. The last of these principles is decisive: it seems to exclude a priori from the sphere of human knowledge such views of earlier writers as are indicated exclusively between the lines. For if an author does not tire of asserting explicitly on every page of his book that \( a \) is \( b \), but indicates between the lines that \( a \) is not \( b \), the modern historian will still demand explicit evidence showing that the author believed \( a \) not to be \( b \). Such evidence cannot possibly be forthcoming, and the modern historian wins his argument: he can dismiss any reading between the lines as arbitrary guesswork, or, if he is lazy, he will accept it as intuitive knowledge.

The application of these principles has had important consequences. Up to a time within the memory of men still living, many people, bearing in mind famous statements of Bodin, Hobbes, Burke, Condorcet and others, believed that there is a difference in fundamental conceptions between modern political thought and the political thought of the Middle Ages and of antiquity. The present generation of scholars has been taught by one of the most famous historians of our time that "at least from the lawyers of the second century to the theorists of the French Revolution, the history of political thought is continuous, changing in form, modified in content, but still the same in its fundamental conceptions.”

5 Until the middle of the nineteenth century, Averroes was thought to have been hostile to all religion. After Renan's successful attack on what is now called a medieval legend, present-day scholars consider Averroes a loyal, and even a believing, Muslim. 6 Previous writers had believed that "the abrogation of religious and magical thought" was characteristic of the attitude of the Greek physicians. A more recent writer

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asserts that “the Hippocratic physicians . . . as scientists embraced a supernatural dogma.” Lessing, who was one of the most profound humanists of all times, with an exceedingly rare combination of scholarship, taste and philosophy, and who was convinced that there are truths which should not or cannot be pronounced, believed that “all ancient philosophers” had distinguished between their exoteric and their esoteric teaching.

After the great theologian Schleiermacher asserted, with an unusually able argument, the view that there is only one Platonic teaching, the question of the esotericism of the ancient philosophers was narrowed down, for all practical purposes, to the meaning of Aristotle’s “exoteric speeches”; and in this regard one of the greatest humanists of the present day asserts that the attribution of a secret teaching to Aristotle is “obviously a late invention originating in the spirit of Neo-Pythagoreanism.” According to Gibbon, Eusebius “indirectly confesses that he has related whatever might redound to the glory, and has suppressed all that could tend to the disgrace of religion.” According to a present-day historian, “the judgment of Gibbon, that the Ecclesiastical History was grossly unfair, is itself a prejudiced verdict.” Up to the end of the nineteenth century many philosophers and theologians believed that Hobbes was an atheist. At present many historians tacitly or explicitly reject that view; a contemporary thinker, while feeling that Hobbes was not exactly a religious man, has described in his writings the outlines of a neo-Kantian philosophy of religion. Montesquieu himself, as well as some of his contemporaries, believed that De l’esprit des lois had a good and

7 Ludwig Edelstein, “Greek Medicine in its Relation to Religion and Magic, Bulletin of the Institute of the History of Medicine, V (1937), 201 and 211.
even a wonderful plan; Laboulaye still believed that the apparent obscurity of its plan as well as its other apparent literary deficiencies were due to censorship or persecution. One of the most outstanding present-day historians of political thought, however, asserts that “there is not in truth much concatenation of subject-matter, and the amount of irrelevance is extraordinary,” and that “it cannot be said that Montesquieu’s *Spirit of the Laws* has any arrangement.”

This selection of examples, which is not wholly arbitrary, shows that the typical difference between older views and more recent views is due not entirely to progress in historical exactness, but also to a more basic change in the intellectual climate. During the last few decades the rationalist tradition, which was the common denominator of the older views, and which was still rather influential in nineteenth-century positivism, has been either still further transformed or altogether rejected by an ever-increasing number of people. Whether and to what extent this change is to be considered a progress or a decline is a question which only the philosopher can answer.

A more modest duty is imposed on the historian. He will merely, and rightly, demand that in spite of all changes which have occurred or which will occur in the intellectual climate, the tradition of historical exactness shall be continued.

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11 George H. Sabine, *A History of Political Theory* (New York, 1937), 556 and 551. Friedrich Meinecke, *Die Entstehung des Historismus* (Munich, 1936), 139 ff. and 151, footnote 1. Édouard Laboulaye, “Introduction à l’*Espirit des Lois*,” *Oeuvres complètes de Montesquieu* (Paris, 1876) vol. 3, pp. xviii ff. Laboulaye quotes in that context an important passage from d’Alembert’s “Éloge de Montesquieu.” See also Bertolini’s “Analyse raisonnée de l’*Esprit des Lois*,” *ibid.*, pp. 6, 14, 23 ff., 34 and 60 ff. The remarks of d’Alembert, Bertolini and Laboulaye are merely explanations of what Montesquieu himself indicates for example when he says in the preface: “Si l’on veut chercher le dessein de l’auteur, on ne le peut bien découvrir que dans le dessein de l’ouvrage.” (See also the end of the eleventh book and two letters from Helvétius, *ibid.*, vol. 6, pp. 314, 320). D’Alembert says: “Nous disons de l’obscurité que l’on peut se permettre dans un tel ouvrage, la même chose que du défaut d’ordre. Ce qui serait obscur pour les lecteurs vulgaires, ne l’est pas pour ceux que l’auteur a eus en vue; d’ailleurs l’obscurité volontaire n’en est pas une. M. de Montesquieu ayant à présenter quelquefois des vérités importantes, dont l’énoncé absolu et direct aurait pu blesser sans fruit, a eu la prudence de les envelopper; et, par cet innocent artifice, les a voilées à ceux à qui elles seraient nuisibles, sans qu’elles fussent perdues pour les sages.” Similarly, certain contemporaries of the “rhetor” Xenophon believed that “what is beautifully and methodically written, is not beautifully and methodically written” (*Cynegeticus*, 13. 6).
ingly, he will not accept an arbitrary standard of exactness which might exclude a priori the most important facts of the past from human knowledge, but will adapt the rules of certainty which guide his research to the nature of his subject. He will then follow such rules as these: Reading between the lines is strictly prohibited in all cases where it would be less exact than not doing so. Only such reading between the lines as starts from an exact consideration of the explicit statements of the author is legitimate. The context in which a statement occurs, and the literary character of the whole work as well as its plan, must be perfectly understood before an interpretation of the statement can reasonably claim to be adequate or even correct. One is not entitled to delete a passage, nor to emend its text, before one has fully considered all reasonable possibilities of understanding the passage as it stands—one of these possibilities being that the passage may be ironic. If a master of the art of writing commits such blunders as would shame an intelligent high school boy, it is reasonable to assume that they are intentional, especially if the author discusses, however incidentally, the possibility of intentional blunders in writing. The views of the author of a drama or dialogue must not, without previous proof, be identified with the views expressed by one or more of his characters, or with those agreed upon by all his characters or by his attractive characters. The real opinion of an author is not necessarily identical with that which he expresses in the largest number of passages. In short, exactness is not to be confused with refusal, or inability, to see the wood for the trees. The truly exact historian will reconcile himself to the fact that there is a difference between winning an argument, or proving to practically everyone that he is right, and understanding the thought of the great writers of the past.

It must, then, be considered possible that reading between the lines will not lead to complete agreement among all scholars. If this is an objection to reading between the lines as such, there is the counter-objection that neither have the methods generally used at present led to universal or even wide agreement in regard to very important points. Scholars of the last century were inclined to solve literary problems by having recourse to the
genesis of the author's work, or even of his thought. Contradictions or divergences within one book, or between two books by the same author, were supposed to prove that his thought had changed. If the contradictions exceeded a certain limit it was sometimes decided without any external evidence that one of the works must be spurious. That procedure has lately come into some disrepute, and at present many scholars are inclined to be rather more conservative about the literary tradition, and less impressed by merely internal evidence. The conflict between the traditionalists and the higher critics is, however, far from being settled. The traditionalists could show in important cases that the higher critics have not proved their hypotheses at all; but even if all the answers suggested by the higher critics should ultimately prove to be wrong, the questions which led them away from the tradition and tempted them to try a new approach often show an awareness of difficulties which do not disturb the slumber of the typical traditionalist. An adequate answer to the most serious of these questions requires methodical reflection on the literary technique of the great writers of earlier ages, because of the typical character of the literary problems involved—obscurity of the plan, contradictions within one work or between two or more works of the same author, omission of important links of the argument, and so on. Such reflection necessarily transcends the boundaries of modern aesthetics and even of traditional poetics, and will, I believe, compel students sooner or later to take into account the phenomenon of persecution. To mention something which is hardly more than another aspect of the same fact, we sometimes observe a conflict between a traditional, superficial and doxographic interpretation of some great writer of the past, and a more intelligent, deeper and monographic interpretation. They are equally exact, so far as both are borne out by explicit statements of the writer concerned. Only a few people at present, however, consider the possibility that the traditional interpretation may reflect the exoteric teaching of the author, whereas the monographic interpretation stops halfway between the exoteric and esoteric teaching of the author.

Modern historical research, which emerged at a time when
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Persecution was a matter of feeble recollection rather than of forceful experience, has counteracted or even destroyed an earlier tendency to read between the lines of the great writers, or to attach more weight to their fundamental design than to those views which they have repeated most often. Any attempt to restore the earlier approach in this age of historicism is confronted by the problem of criteria for distinguishing between legitimate and illegitimate reading between the lines. If it is true that there is a necessary correlation between persecution and writing between the lines, then there is a necessary negative criterion: that the book in question must have been composed in an era of persecution, that is, at a time when some political or other orthodoxy was enforced by law or custom. One positive criterion is this: if an able writer who has a clear mind and a perfect knowledge of the orthodox view and all its ramifications, contradicts surreptitiously and as it were in passing one of its necessary presuppositions or consequences which he explicitly recognizes and maintains everywhere else, we can reasonably suspect that he was opposed to the orthodox system as such and—we must study his whole book all over again, with much greater care and much less naïveté than ever before. In some cases, we possess even explicit evidence proving that the author has indicated his views on the most important subjects only between the lines. Such statements, however, do not usually occur in the preface or other very conspicuous place. Some of them cannot even be noticed, let alone understood, so long as we confine ourselves to the view of persecution and the attitude toward freedom of speech and candor which have become prevalent during the last three hundred years.

III

The term persecution covers a variety of phenomena, ranging from the most cruel type, as exemplified by the Spanish Inquisition, to the mildest, which is social ostracism. Between these extremes are the types which are most important from the point of view of literary or intellectual history. Examples of
these are found in the Athens of the fifth and fourth centuries B.C., in some Muslim countries of the early Middle Ages, in seventeenth-century Holland and England, and in eighteenth-century France and Germany—all of them comparatively liberal periods. But a glance at the biographies of Anaxagoras, Protagoras, Socrates, Plato, Xenophon, Aristotle, Avicenna, Averroes, Maimonides, Grotius, Descartes, Hobbes, Spinoza, Locke, Bayle, Wolff, Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rousseau, Lessing and Kant, and in some cases even a glance at the title pages of their books, is sufficient to show that they witnessed or suffered, during at least part of their lifetimes, a kind of persecution which was more tangible than social ostracism. Nor should we overlook the fact, not sufficiently stressed by all authorities, that religious persecution and persecution of free inquiry are not identical. There were times and countries in which all kinds, or at least a great variety of kinds, of worship were permitted, but free inquiry was not.

What attitude people adopt toward freedom of public discussion, depends decisively on what they think about popular education and its limits. Generally speaking, premodern philosophers were more timid in this respect than modern philosophers. After about the middle of the seventeenth century an ever-increasing number of heterodox philosophers who had suffered from persecution published their books not only to communicate their thoughts but also because they desired to contribute to the abolition of persecution as such. They believed that suppression of free inquiry, and of publication of the results of free inquiry, was accidental, an outcome of the faulty construction of the body politic, and that the kingdom of general darkness could be replaced by the republic of universal light. They looked forward to a time when, as a result of the progress of popular education, practically complete freedom of speech would be...

12 In regard to Kant, whose case is in a class by itself, even a historian so little given to suspicion or any other sort of skepticism as C. E. Vaughan remarks: "We are almost led to suspect Kant of having trifled with his readers, and of nursing an esoteric sympathy with Revolution." (Studies in the History of Political Philosophy, Manchester, 1939, II, 83.)

13 See the "fragment" by H. S. Reimarus, "Von Duldung der Deisten," in Lessing's Werke (Petersen and v. Olshausen edition) XXII, 98 ff.
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possible, or—to exaggerate for purposes of clarification—to a time when no one would suffer any harm from hearing any truth. They concealed their views only far enough to protect themselves as well as possible from persecution; had they been more subtle than that, they would have defeated their purpose, which was to enlighten an ever-increasing number of people who were not potential philosophers. It is therefore comparatively easy to read between the lines of their books. The attitude of an earlier type of writers was fundamentally different. They believed that the gulf separating “the wise” and “the vulgar” was a basic fact of human nature which could not be influenced by any progress of popular education: philosophy, or science, was essentially a privilege of “the few.” They were convinced that philosophy as such was suspect to, and hated by, the majority of men. Even if they had had nothing to fear from any particular political quarter, those who started from that assumption would have been driven to the conclusion that public communication of the philosophic or scientific truth was impossible or undesirable, not only for the time being but for all times. They must conceal their opinions from all but philosophers, either by limiting themselves to oral instruction of a carefully selected group.

14 The question whether that extreme goal is attainable in any but the most halcyon conditions has been raised in our time by Archibald MacLeish in “Post-War Writers and Pre-War Readers,” Journal of Adult Education, vol. 12 (June, 1940) in the following terms: “Perhaps the luxury of the complete confession, the uttermost despair, the farthest doubt should be denied themselves by writers living in any but the most orderly and settled times. I do not know.”

15 I am thinking of Hobbes in particular, whose significance for the development outlined above can hardly be overestimated. This was clearly recognized by Tonnies, who emphasized especially these two sayings of his hero: “Paulatim eruditur vulgus” and “Philosophia ut crescat libera esse debet nec metu nec pudore coercenda.” (Tonnies, op. cit., pp. iv, 195.) Hobbes also says: “Suppression of doctrines does but unite and exasperate, that is, increase both the malice and power of them that have already believed them.” (English Works, Molesworth edition, VI, 242.) In his Of Liberty and Necessity (London 1654, 35 ff.) he writes to the Marquess of Newcastle: “I must confess, if we consider the greatest part of Mankinde, not as they should be, but as they are . . . I must, I say, confess that the dispute of this question will rather hurt than help their piety, and therefore if his Lordship [Bishop Bramhall] had not desired this answer, I should not have written it, nor do I write it but in hopes your Lordship and his, will keep it private.”

16 Cicero, Tusculanae Disputationes, II, 4. Plato, Phaedo, 64 b; Republic, 520 b2-3 and 494 a4-10.
of pupils, or by writing about the most important subject by means of "brief indication." 17

Writings are naturally accessible to all who can read. Therefore a philosopher who chose the second way could expound only such opinions as were suitable for the nonphilosophic majority: all of his writings would have to be, strictly speaking, exoteric. These opinions would not be in all respects consonant with truth. Being a philosopher, that is, hating "the lie in the soul" more than anything else, he would not deceive himself about the fact that such opinions are merely "likely tales," or "noble lies," or "probable opinions," and would leave it to his philosophic readers to disentangle the truth from its poetic or dialectic presentation. But he would defeat his purpose if he indicated clearly which of his statements expressed a noble lie, and which the still more noble truth. For philosophic readers he would do almost more than enough by drawing their attention to the fact that he did not object to telling lies which were noble, or tales which were merely similar to truth. From the point of view of the literary historian at least, there is no more noteworthy difference between the typical premodern philosopher (who is hard to distinguish from the premodern poet) and the typical modern philosopher than that of their attitudes toward "noble (or just) lies," "pious frauds," the "ductus obliquus" 18 or "economy of the truth." Every decent modern reader is bound to be shocked by the mere suggestion that a great man might have deliberately deceived the large majority of his readers. 19 And yet, as a liberal theologian once remarked, these imitators of the resourceful Odysseus were perhaps merely more sin-

17 Plato, Timaeus, 28 c3-5, and Seventh Letter, 332 d6-7, 341 c4-e3, and 344 d4-e2. That the view mentioned above is reconcilable with the democratic creed is shown most clearly by Spinoza, who was a champion not only of liberalism but also of democracy (Tractatus politicus, XI, 2, Bruder edition). See his Tractatus de intellectus emendatione, 14 and 17, as well as Tractatus theologico-politicus, V 35-39, XIV 20 and XV end.

18 Sir Thomas More, Utopia, latter part of first book.

19 A rather extensive discussion of the "magna quaestio, lategrosa, tractatio, disputatio inter doctos alternans," as Augustinus called it, is to be found in Grotius' De Jure Belli ac Pacis, III, chap. I, §7 ff., and in particular §17, 3. See also inter alia Pascal's ninth and tenth Provinciales and Jeremy Taylor, Ductor Dubitantium, Book III, chap. 2, rule 5.
cere than we when they called "lying nobly" what we would call "considering one's social responsibilities."

An exoteric book contains then two teachings: a popular teaching of an edifying character, which is in the foreground; and a philosophic teaching concerning the most important subject, which is indicated only between the lines. This is not to deny that some great writers might have stated certain important truths quite openly by using as mouthpiece some disreputable character: they would thus show how much they disapproved of pronouncing the truths in question. There would then be good reason for our finding in the greatest literature of the past so many interesting devils, madmen, beggars, sophists, drunkards, epicureans and buffoons. Those to whom such books are truly addressed are, however, neither the unphilosophic majority nor the perfect philosopher as such, but the young men who might become philosophers: the potential philosophers are to be led step by step from the popular views which are indispensable for all practical and political purposes to the truth which is merely and purely theoretical, guided by certain obtrusively enigmatic features in the presentation of the popular teaching—obscurity of the plan, contradictions, pseudonyms, inexact repetitions of earlier statements, strange expressions, etc. Such features do not disturb the slumber of those who cannot see the wood for the trees, but act as awakening stumbling blocks for those who can. All books of that kind owe their existence to the love of the mature philosopher for the puppies\(^20\) of his race, by whom he wants to be loved in turn: all exoteric books are "written speeches caused by love."

Exoteric literature presupposes that there are basic truths which would not be pronounced in public by any decent man, because they would do harm to many people who, having been hurt, would naturally be inclined to hurt in turn him who pronounces the unpleasant truths. It presupposes, in other words, that freedom of inquiry, and of publication of all results of inquiry, is not guaranteed as a basic right. This literature is then essentially related to a society which is not liberal. Thus one may very well raise the question of what use it could be in a truly liberal society. The answer is simple. In Plato's *Banquet*,

\(^{20}\) Compare Plato, *Republic*, 539 a5-d1, with *Apology of Socrates*, 25 c2-8.
Alcibiades—that outspoken son of outspoken Athens—compares Socrates and his speeches to certain sculptures which are very ugly from the outside, but within have most beautiful images of things divine. The works of the great writers of the past are very beautiful even from without. And yet their visible beauty is sheer ugliness, compared with the beauty of those hidden treasures which disclose themselves only after very long, never easy, but always pleasant work. This always difficult but always pleasant work is, I believe, what the philosophers had in mind when they recommended education. Education, they felt, is the only answer to the always pressing question, to the political question par excellence, of how to reconcile order which is not oppression with freedom which is not license.
Among the many historians who have interpreted Maimonides' teaching, or who are making efforts to interpret it, there is scarcely one who would not agree to the principle that that teaching, being essentially medieval, cannot be understood by starting from modern presuppositions. The differences of view between students of Maimonides have thus to be traced back, not necessarily to a disagreement concerning the principle itself, but rather to its different interpretation, or to a difference of attitude in its application. The present essay is based on the assumption that only through its most thoroughgoing application can we arrive at our goal, the true and exact understanding of Maimonides' teaching.¹

I. THE SUBJECT MATTER

The interpreter of the Guide for the Perplexed ought to raise, to begin with, the following question: To which science or sci-

¹ In the footnotes Roman and Arabic figures before the parentheses indicate the part and chapter of the Guide, respectively. The figures in the parentheses before the semicolon indicate the page in Munk's edition, and figures following the semicolon indicate pages and lines in Joel's edition. For the first book of the Mishneh Torah, I have used M. Hyamson's edition (New York, 1937).
ences does the subject matter of the work belong? Maimonides answers it almost at the very beginning of his work by saying that it is devoted to the true science of the law.

The true science of the law is distinguished from the science of the law in the usual sense, i.e., the *fiqh*. While the term *fiqh* naturally occurs in the *Guide* on more than one occasion, the explanation of its meaning has been reserved for almost the very end of the work. *Fiqh* is the exact determination, by way of "deduction" from the authoritative statements of the law, of those actions by means of which man's life becomes noble, and especially of the actions of worship. Its most scientific treatment would consist in a coherent and lucid codification of the law, such as achieved by Maimonides in his *Mishneh Torah*, which he calls "our great work on the *fiqh." In contradistinction to the legalistic study of the law, which is concerned with what man ought to do, the true science of the law is concerned with what man ought to think and to believe. One may say that the science of the law in general is divided into two parts: a practical part which is treated in the *Mishneh Torah*, and a theoretical part which is treated in the *Guide*. This view is confirmed by the fact that the former work deals with beliefs and opinions only insofar as they are implied in prohibitions and commands, whereas the *Guide* deals with commands and prohibitions only in order to explain their reasons.

The relation between the two parts, or kinds, of the science of the law, may be described in a somewhat different way by saying that, whereas science of the law in the usual sense is the study of the halakah, the true science of the law corresponds to the aggadah. As a matter of fact, the *Guide* is a substitute for two books, planned by Maimonides, on the nonlegal sections of the Bible and the Talmud. But, above all, its most important feature, which distinguishes it from all philosophic as well as halakic books, is also characteristic of a part of the aggadic literature.

Since Maimonides, however, uses an Islamic term to designate

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2 I, Introd. (32; 14 f., 26 f.).
3 III, 54 (132b; 467, 20-25); cf. III, 27 (59b; 371, 29); 51 (129b; 455, 21-22).
4 II, 10 (22b; 190, 14); I, Introd. (11a-b; 13, 3-5). Cf. the passages quoted in note 3.
5 I, Introd. (5b and 11b; 5, 18 ff. and 13, 12-15). Cf. I, 70 (92b; 120, 4-8); 71 (94a; 121, 25-28).
the ordinary science of the law, it may be worth while to consider what Islamic term would supply the most proper designation for that science of the law which is the subject of the Guide. Students of the fiqh deal with the actions prescribed by the law, but do not deal with the "roots of religion," i.e., they do not attempt to prove the opinions or beliefs taught by the law. There seems to be little doubt that the science dealing with those roots is identical with the true science of the law. Since the students of the roots are identified by Maimonides with the Mutakallimūn, the students of the kalām, we shall say that the true science of the law is the kalām. It is true that Maimonides vigorously attacks the kalām; yet in spite of his ruthless opposition to the assumptions and methods of the Mutakallimūn, he professes to be in perfect harmony with their intention. The intention of the science of kalām is to defend the law, especially against the opinions of philosophers. And the central section of the Guide is admittedly devoted to the defense of the principal root of the law, the belief in creation, against the contention of the philosophers that the visible world is eternal. What distinguishes Maimonides' kalām from the kalām proper is his insistence on the fundamental difference between intelligence and imagination, whereas, as he asserts, the Mutakallimūn mistake imagination for intelligence. In other words, Maimonides insists on the necessity of starting from evident presuppositions, which are in accordance with the nature of things, whereas the kalām proper starts from arbitrary presuppositions, which are chosen not because they are true but because they make it easy to prove the beliefs taught by the law. Maimonides' true science of the law and the kalām thus belong to the same genus, the specific

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6 III, 51 (123b-124a; 455, 21-23). Cf. III, 54 (132a-b; 467, 7-9) with I, Introd. (3a; 2, 12-14).

7 I, 71 (96b-97a; 125, 12). Cf. I, 73 (105b; 136, 2). Maimonides was called a ṣafa by Messer Leon; see Steinschneider, Jewish Literature, 310.

8 II, 19 (40a; 211, 24-25); I, 71 (97b; 126, 4-5). Cf. also I, 73 (111b; 143, 6).

9 Farabi, Thṣa al-ʿulūm, chap. 5. (See the Hebrew translation in Falakera's Reshit Hokmah, ed. David, 59 ff.) Farabi's discussion of the kalām, and the framework of that discussion, are of decisive importance for the understanding of the Guide. Cf. also Plato's Laws, X, 887b8 and 890d4-6. I, 71 (94b, 95a; 122, 19-22; 123, 2-3).

10 I, 71 (96a; 124, 18-19); II, 17 (37a; 207, 27-28).

difference between them being that the *kalâm* proper is imaginative, whereas that of Maimonides is an intelligent, or enlightened *kalâm*.

The tentative descriptions of the true science of the law which have been set forth thus far are useful, and even indispensable, for the purpose of counteracting certain views more commonly held of the character of the *Guide*. In order to arrive at a more definitive description of the subject matter of that work, we have to make a fresh start by reminding ourselves again of the authoritative statements with which it opens.

Maimonides states that the intention of his work is to explain the meaning of Biblical words of various kinds, as well as of Biblical parables. Such an explanation is necessary, because the external meaning of both lends itself to grave misunderstanding. Since the internal meaning, being hidden, is a secret, the explanation of each such word or parable is the revelation of a secret. The *Guide* as a whole is thus devoted to the revelation of the secrets of the Bible. Secret, however, has manifold meanings. It may refer to the secret hidden by a parable or word, but it also may mean the parable or word itself which hides a secret. With reference to the second meaning, the *Guide* may more conveniently be said to be devoted to the explanation of the secrets of the Bible. Thus the true science of the law is nothing other than the explanation of the secrets of the Bible, and in particular of the Torah.

There are as many secrets of the Torah as there are passages in it requiring explanation. Nevertheless, it is possible to enumerate at least the most momentous secret topics. According to one enumeration, these topics are: divine attributes, creation, providence, divine will and knowledge, prophecy, names of God. Another enumeration, which seems to be more lucid, presents the following order: *Ma'aseh bereshit* (the account of creation), *ma'aseh merkabah* (the account of the chariot, Ezekiel 1 and 10), prophecy, and the knowledge of God. However those two enumerations may be related to each other, it is certain that

12 I, Introd. (2b-3b, 6a, 6b-7a; 2, 6-29; 6, 12-19; 7, 10-8, 3). Cf. *ibid.* (2a, 8a; 1, 14; 9, 6).
13 See in particular III, 50 in *princ*.
14 I, 35 (42a; 54, 20-26); II, 2 (11a-b; 176, 18-23).
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ma'aseh bereshit and ma'aseh merkabah occupy the highest rank among the secrets of the Bible. Therefore, Maimonides can say that the first intention, or the chief intention of the Guide is the explanation of ma'aseh bereshit and ma'aseh merkabah. The true science of the law is concerned with the explanation of the secrets of the Bible, and especially with the explanation of ma'aseh bereshit and of ma'aseh merkabah.\textsuperscript{15}

II. A PHILOSOPHIC WORK?

The finding that the Guide is devoted to the explanation of the secret teaching of the Bible seems to be a truism. Yet it is pregnant with the consequence that the Guide is not a philosophic book.

The fact that we are inclined to call it a philosophic book is derived from the circumstance that we use the word “philosophy” in a rather broad sense. We commonly do not hesitate, for example, to count the Greek Sophists among the philosophers and we even speak of philosophies underlying mass movements. The present usage may be traced back to the separation of philosophy from science—a separation which has taken place during the modern centuries. For Maimonides, who knew nothing of “systems of philosophy” and consequently nothing of the emancipation of sober science from those lofty systems, philosophy has a much narrower, or a much more exact meaning than it has at the present time. It is not an exaggeration to say that for him philosophy is practically identical with the teaching as well as the methods of Aristotle, “the prince of the philosophers,” and of the Aristotelians.\textsuperscript{16} And he is an adversary of philosophy thus understood.

\textsuperscript{15} II, 29 (65b; 243, 17-19); III, Introd. (2a; 297, 5-7). Cf. the distinction between fiqh and secrets of the Torah in I, 71 (93b; 121, 20-22) with the distinction between fiqh and the true science of the law at the beginning of the work. For an interpretation, see A. Altmann, “Das Verhältnis Maimunis zur jüdischen Mystik,” Monatschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums, LXX (1936), 305-30. \textsuperscript{16} I, 5 in princ.; II, 23 (512; 225, 4). I. Heinemann goes too far, however, in stating (Die Lehre von der Zweckbestimmung des Menschen im griechisch-römischen Altertum und im jüdischen Mittelalter [Breslau, 1926], 99, n. 1) that “Falsāsīf heisst nicht Philosoph, sondern steht für Aristoteles oder Aristoteliker.” Cf. I, 17, 71 (94b; 122, 26-28); II, 21 (47b; 220, 20); III, 16 (312; 334, 22-24), where falsafa or falsafā other than Aristotelian are mentioned.
understood. It is against the opinions of "the philosophers"\textsuperscript{17} that he defends the Jewish creed. And what he opposes to the wrong opinions of \textit{the} philosophers is not a true philosophy, and in particular not a religious philosophy, or a philosophy of religion, but "our opinion, i.e., the opinion of our law," or the opinion of "us, the community of the adherents of the law," or the opinion of the "followers of the law of our teacher Moses."\textsuperscript{18} He obviously assumes that the philosophers form a group\textsuperscript{19} distinguished from the group of adherents of the law and that both groups are mutually exclusive. Since he himself is an adherent of the law, he cannot possibly be a philosopher, and consequently a book of his in which he explains his views concerning all important topics cannot possibly be a philosophic book. This is not to deny that he acknowledges, and even stresses, the accordance which exists between the philosophers and the adherents of the law in every respect except as regards the question (which, however, is the decisive question) of the creation of the world. For certainly such an accordance between two groups proves their nonidentity.

There is, perhaps, no greater service that the historian can render to the philosopher of our time than to supply the latter with the materials necessary for the reconstruction of an adequate terminology. Consequently, the historian is likely to deprive himself of the greatest benefit which he can grant both to others and to himself, if he is ashamed to be a micrologist. We shall, then, not hesitate to refrain from calling the \textit{Guide} a philosophic book. To justify fully our procedure we only have to consider Maimonides' division of philosophy. According to him, philosophy consists of two parts, theoretical philosophy and practical philosophy; theoretical philosophy in its turn is subdivided into mathematics, physics, and metaphysics; and practical philosophy consists of ethics, economics, "government of the

\textsuperscript{17} Cf., for instance, III, 16 \textit{in princ.}

\textsuperscript{18} Cf., for instance, II, 21 (47a; 220, 17 f.); II, 26 (56a; 230, 30); III, 17 (34b; 388, 21), 21 (44b; 351, 17-18).

\textsuperscript{19} That kind of group, one individual case of which is the group of the philosophers, is called by Maimonides \textit{ומיהל} or \textit{ומיהל} (Ibn Tibbon: \textit{אף}. The Greek equivalent is \textit{apleus}; cf. G. Bergsträsser, \textit{Hunain ibn Ishag über die syrischen und arabischen Galen-Uebersetzungen}, Leipzig, 1925, p. 3 of the Arabic text); cf. II, 15 (33a; 203, 17 f.); III, 20 (42a; 348, 16).
city," and "government of the great nation or of the nations." It is obvious that the Guide is not a work on mathematics or economics; and there is practically complete agreement among the students of Maimonides that it is not devoted to political science of either kind. Nor is it an ethical treatise, since Maimonides expressly excludes ethical topics from the Guide. The only sciences, then, to which that work could possibly be devoted are physics and metaphysics, which occupy the highest rank among the sciences.

This view seems to be confirmed by Maimonides’ professions (1) that the chief intention of the Guide is to explain ma’aseh bereshit and ma’aseh merkabah, and (2) that ma’aseh bereshit is identical with physics, and ma’aseh merkabah with metaphysics. For these two statements seem to lead to the inference that the chief intention of the Guide is to treat of physics and metaphysics. This inference is contradicted, however, by another express statement of Maimonides, according to which all physics and an unlimited number of metaphysical topics are excluded from the Guide. He mentions in this connection particularly the doctrine of separate intelligences. Thus the only philosophic subject treated, as such, in the Guide seems to be the doctrine of God. But Maimonides excludes further all subjects proved, or otherwise satisfactorily treated by the philosophers and leaves no doubt that the philosophers succeeded in proving the existence of God as well as his unity and incorporeity. In accordance with this, Maimonides clearly states that these three doctrines do not belong to the secrets of the Torah, and hence neither to ma’aseh bereshit nor to

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21 III, 8 in fine. Cf. I, Introd. (11a-b; 13, 3-5).
22 III, 51 (124a; 456, 1-4).
23 I, Intro. (5b; 3, 8-9). Cf. n. 15.
24 II, 2 (11a-12a; 176, 3-27). Cf. also I, 71 (57b; 126, 13-15). As regards the philosophic doctrine of the sublunary world, cf. II, 22 (49b-50a; 225, 15-17); for that of the soul, cf. I, 68 in prin.
25 Notice the identification of ma’aseh merkabah, or metaphysics, with the doctrine of God in I, 34 (40b; 52, 24-25).
26 I, 71 (46b; 124, 29-125, 6); II, 2 (11a-12a; 176, 3-27). Cf. II, 33 (75a; 256, 21-25).
27 I, 35.
ma'aseh merkabah, the principal subjects of the Guide. Thus we are led to the conclusion that no philosophic topic of any kind is, as such, the subject matter of the Guide.

We are then confronted with the perplexing contradiction that Maimonides, on the one hand, identifies the main subjects of the Guide with physics and metaphysics, the most exalted topics of philosophy, while on the other hand he excludes from the field of his investigation every subject satisfactorily treated by the philosophers. To solve that contradiction one might suggest that the Guide is devoted to the discussion of such "physical" and "metaphysical" topics as are not satisfactorily treated by the philosophers. This would amount to saying that the subjects of the Guide are "physics" and "metaphysics," in so far as these transcend philosophy, and consequently that the Guide is not a philosophic book.

Yet the objection may be raised that this suggestion disregards Maimonides' explicit and unqualified identification of ma'aseh bereshit with physics and of ma'aseh merkabah with metaphysics. If we assume for the time being that this objection is sound, we seem to have no choice but to admit that the question of the subject matter of the Guide does not allow of any answer whatsoever. But, as a matter of fact, the very obviousness of the only possible answer⁰ is the reason why that answer could escape our notice. The apparently contradictory facts that (1) the subject matter of the Guide are ma'aseh bereshit and ma'aseh merkabah, and that (2) Maimonides, in spite of his identifying ma'aseh bereshit with physics and ma'aseh merkabah with metaphysics, excludes physics and metaphysics from the Guide, may be reconciled by the formula that the intention of the Guide is to prove the identity, which to begin with was asserted only, of ma'aseh bereshit with physics and of ma'aseh merkabah with metaphysics. Physics and metaphysics are indeed philosophic disciplines, and a book devoted to them is indeed a philosophic book. But Maimonides does not intend to treat physics and metaphysics; his intention is to show that the teaching of these philosophic disciplines, which is presupposed, is identical with the

⁰ That is to say, the only answer which could be given if the suggestion made in the foregoing paragraph is ruled out. Cf., however, pp. 56 ff., below.
The demonstration of such identity is no longer the duty of the philosopher, but is incumbent upon the student of the true science of the law. The Guide is then under no circumstances a philosophic book.

As a corollary we have to add that the Guide cannot be called a theological work, for Maimonides does not know of theology as a discipline distinct from metaphysics. Nor is it a book of religion, for he expressly excludes religious, together with ethical topics from the subject matter of his work. Until we shall have rediscovered a body of terms which are flexible enough to fit Maimonides' thought, the safest course will be to limit the description of the Guide to the statement that it is a book devoted to the explanation of the secret teaching of the Bible.

III. THE CONFLICT BETWEEN LAW AND NECESSITY

When Maimonides embarked upon the explanation of the secrets of the Torah, he was confronted with the apparently overwhelming difficulty created by the "legal prohibition" against explaining those secrets. The very same law, the secrets of which Maimonides attempted to explain, forbids their explanation. According to the ordinance of the talmudic sages, ma'aseh merkahah ought not to be taught even to one man, except if he be wise and able to understand by himself, and even to such a one only the "chapter headings" may be transmitted. As regards the other secrets of the Bible, their revelation to many people met with scarcely less definite disapproval in the Talmud. Explaining secrets in a book is tantamount to transmitting those secrets to thousands of men. Consequently, the talmudic prohibition mentioned implies the prohibition against writing a book devoted to their explanation.

This prohibition was accepted by Maimonides not only as

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29 As regards the identification of the teaching of revelation with the teaching of reason in medieval Jewish philosophy, cf. Julius Guttmann, Die Philosophie des Judentums (Munich, 1933), 71 f.
30 Cf. also above p. 39 (and n. 5), and below pp. 54 (and n. 60), 57 (and n. 64).
31 III, 8 in fine.
32 III, Introd. (2a and b; 297, 16 and 25).
33 I, Introd. (3b-4a; 3, 9-19); 33 (36a; 48, 19-21); 34 (40b; 52, 24-53,3); III, Introd.
34 I, Introd. (4a; 3, 19-20); III, Introd. (2a; 297, 15-16).
Literary Character of the Guide for the Perplexed

legally binding, but also as evidently wise; it was in full accord-
ance with his own considered judgment that oral teaching in
general is superior to teaching by writing. This view may be
traced back to an old philosophic tradition.85 The works of
Aristotle, which were known to Maimonides, are “acroamatic”
and not “exoteric,” and his method of expounding things be-
trays more often than not its provenance from Platonic or So-
cratic dialectics. Even the classical statement about the danger
inherent in all writing may have been known to Maimonides,
for the famous doctrine of Plato’s Phaedrus had been summar-
ized by Fārābī in his treatise on Plato’s philosophy.86 Be this as it
may, not the ambiguous advice of the philosophers but the un-
equivocal command of the law was of primary importance to
Maimonides.87

If a book devoted to the explanation of the secrets of the Bible
is prohibited by law, how then can the Guide, being the work of
an observant Jew, be a book? It is noteworthy that Maimonides
himself in the Guide never calls it a book, but consistently refers
to it as a maqdâla (ma’amar).38 Maqdâla (just as ma’amar) has
several meanings. It may mean a treatise; it is used in that sense
when Maimonides speaks, for instance, of the Treatise on Gov-
ernment by Alexander of Aphrodisias. But it may also mean—
and this is its original connotation—a speech. Maimonides, by
refraining from calling the Guide a book and by calling it a
maqdâla, hints at the essentially oral character of its teaching.
Since, in a book such as the Guide, hints are more important
than explicit statements, Maimonides’ contentions concerning
the superiority of oral teaching very probably have to be taken
quite literally.

If the Guide is, in a sense, not a book at all, if it is merely a
substitute for conversations or speeches, then it cannot be read

85 I, 71 (93b; 121, 14-24); III, Introd. (2b; 297, 25-26). Cf. I, 17 and Introd. (4a;
3, 19-20).
86 Cf. Falakera’s Hebrew translation of Fārābī’s treatise in Reshit hokmah, ed.
David, p. 75 bottom.
87 The inferiority of writing is also indicated by the designation of those
Biblical works which had not been composed by prophets proper as “writings.”
Cf. II, 45 (94a, 95b; 283, 1-5; 284, 21-285, 3).
88 This fact is pointed out by Abravanel in his Ma’amar kašer bebi’ur sod
ha-moreh. Ibn Tibbon, in his preface to his translation of the Guide, calls it
המסר הנכבר והוה אמפר מורה נוכים.
in the way we may read, for instance, Ibn Sina's Al-Shifa' or Thomas Aquinas's *Summa theologiae*. To begin with, we may assume rather that the proper way of studying it is somehow similar to the way in which traditional Judaism studies the law.\(^9\) This would mean that if we wish to know what Maimonides thinks, say, about the prophecy of Moses, it would not be sufficient to look up that chapter of his work which is explicitly devoted to that subject, and in which we might find perfectly clear and apparently final statements about it; nor would it be sufficient to contrast the latter with divergent statements unexpectedly occurring in other chapters. We would also have to take into account analogous "decisions" given by Maimonides with regard to entirely different "cases," and to make ourselves familiar with the general rules of analogy which obtain in oral discussions of that kind. Producing a clear statement of the author, in the case of a book like the *Guide*, is tantamount to raising a question; his answer can be ascertained only by a lengthy discussion, the result of which may again be open, and intended to be open, to new "difficulties." If it is true that the *Mishneh Torah* is but the greatest post-talmudic contribution to the oral discussions of the halakah, then it may be asserted with equal right that Maimonides, while writing the *Guide*, continued the aggadic discussions of the Talmud. And just as the *Mishneh Torah*, far from terminating the halakic discussions, actually served as a new starting point for them, in the same way the *Guide*, far from offering a final interpretation of the secret teaching of the Bible,\(^4\) may actually have been an attempt to revive the oral discussion thereof by raising difficulties which intentionally were left unsolved.

But although the method employed by Maimonides in the *Guide* may come as near as is humanly possible to the method of oral teaching, the *Guide* does not for that reason cease to be a book. Consequently the very existence of the *Guide* implies a conscious transgression of an unambiguous prohibition. It seems that Maimonides for a while intended to steer a middle course

\(^9\) Cf. H. A. Wolfson, *Creceas' Critique of Aristotle* (Cambridge, 1929), 22 ff. Maimonides indicates the similarity between the prohibition against writing down the oral law and that against writing down the secret teaching of the law; see I, 71 *in princ.*

\(^4\) Cf., for instance, III, Introd. (2b; 298, 1-2); I, 21 (26b; 34, 10-12).
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between oral and confidential teaching, which is permitted, and teaching in writing, which is forbidden. That kind of writing which comes nearest to confidential conversation is private correspondence with a close friend. As a matter of fact, the Guide is written in the form of letters addressed to a friend and favorite pupil, Joseph.\textsuperscript{41} By addressing his book to one man, Maimonides made sure that he did not transgress the prohibition against explaining \textit{ma'aseh merkabah} to more than one man. Moreover, in the \textit{Epistula dedicatoria} addressed to Joseph, he mentions, as it were in passing and quite unintentionally, that Joseph possessed all the qualities required of a student of the secret lore and explains the necessity of written communication by his pupil's departure.\textsuperscript{42} This justification would have held good if Maimonides had refrained from making public these private "letters to a friend." In spite of this inconsistency and in spite of his evident determination to write the Guide even if he had never met Joseph, or if Joseph had never left him,\textsuperscript{43} it would be a mistake to assume that the dedicatory epistle is wholly ironical. For we need only ask ourselves: what was the ultimate reason for Joseph's premature departure, and we are going over from the sphere of private and playful things to the sphere of public and serious matters. Joseph's departure, we may say, was the consequence of his being a Jew in the Diaspora. Not a private need but only an urgent necessity of nation-wide bearing can have driven Maimonides to transgressing an explicit prohibition. Only the necessity of saving the law can have caused him to break the law.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{41} Cf. in particular II, 24.

\textsuperscript{42} These observations on the \textit{Ep. ded.} cannot furnish a sufficient interpretation of that remarkable piece of literature, but deal merely with its more superficial meaning. Maimonides mentions Joseph's poems in order to show that the latter possessed the indispensable ability of expressing himself beautifully; cf. I, 34 (41a; 53, 14) with I, Introd. (7a-b; 8, 7-8). As regards the other qualities of Joseph, see Shem Tob's commentary on the \textit{Ep. ded.}

\textsuperscript{43} It is controversial whether Maimonides finished the \textit{Guide} before he made the acquaintance of Joseph or thereafter. According to Z. Diesendruck, "On the Date of the Completion of the Moreh Nebukim," \textit{Hebrew Union College Annual}, XII-XIII, 496, the \textit{Guide} was finished in 1185, i.e., at about the time when Joseph's sojourn with Maimonides began. Even if the \textit{Guide} was not finished before the year 1190, which is the latest possible date (see \textit{ibid.}, pp. 461, 470), it certainly had been conceived and partly elaborated before Joseph's arrival.

\textsuperscript{44} I, Introd. (gb; 10, 28-29) in the interpretation of Fürstenthal and Munk.
The necessity of taking such an extraordinary measure was a consequence of the long duration of the Diaspora. The secrets of the Torah, "the fountainhead of ancient Greek, and, consequently, also of Arabian wisdom," had been handed down from time immemorial by oral tradition. Even when the oral law, which likewise ought not to have been written down, was finally compiled in written form, the talmudic sages wisely insisted on the secret teaching being transmitted to posterity only by word of mouth from one scholar to another. Their command was obeyed; there is not a single book extant which contains the secret teaching in whole or in part. What had come down to Maimonides were only slight intimations and allusions in Talmud and Midrash. However, continuity of oral tradition presupposes a certain normality of political conditions. That is why the secrets of the Torah were perfectly understood only as long as Israel lived in its own country in freedom, not subjugated by the ignorant nations of the world. Particularly happy was the period when the supreme political authority rested in the hands of King Solomon who had an almost complete understanding of the secret reasons of the commandments. After Solomon, wisdom and political power were no longer united; decline and finally loss of freedom followed. When the nation was led into captivity, it sustained further loss in the perfect knowledge of the secrets. Whereas Isaiah's contemporaries understood his brief hints, the contemporaries of Ezekiel required many more details in order to grasp the sacred doctrine. The decline of knowledge became even more marked with the discontinuation of prophecy itself. Still more disastrous was the victory of the Romans, since the new Diaspora was to last so much longer than the first. As time went on, the external con-

45 Baron, *Outlook*, 105, with reference to I, 71 in *princ*. Cf. also II, 11 (24a-b; 192, 17-29).
46 I, Introd. (gb; 10, 26-27); 71 (95b-94a; 121, 9-26) [the words *tanihadtx yasira wa-ishdarat* recall the title of Ibn Sina's book *Ishadrat wa-tanbihat*; cf. also II, 29 (46a; 244, 8)]; III, Introd. (2a-b; 297, 15-20). Maimonides here tacitly denies any authenticity or value to books such as the *Sefer ha-Yesirah* or *She'er ha-komah*; cf. Baron, *Outlook*, 89.
47 I, 71 (93b; 121, 10-11).
49 III, 6 (gb; 307, 12-15); II, 32 (72b; 254, 23-24), 36 (80a; 263, 19-26).
50 Cf. I, 71 (93b; 121, 10). Cf. also M.T., Introd.
ditions for oral communication of the secrets of the Torah became increasingly precarious. The moment seemed imminent when it would become altogether impossible. Confronted with that prospect, Maimonides decided to write down the secret teaching.

The question naturally arises as to how Maimonides came into its possession. Once, in suggesting a date for the coming of the Messiah (in Iggeret Teiman), he refers to a tradition, obviously oral, which he had received from his father, who in turn had received it from his father and grandfather, and which in that way went back to the very beginning of the Diaspora. If we were to generalize from this remark, we would have to assume that he owed his entire knowledge of the secrets of the Torah to an uninterrupted oral tradition going back to the time of the second temple. We would then not only have to accept the legend of his conversion to the Kabbalah in his old age, but we would be forced to admit that he was a Kabbalist throughout his mature life, since the content of the Guide would be nothing but a secret teaching based on (oral) tradition. Indeed, as it seems that there had existed no Kabbalah, strictly speaking, before the completion of the Guide, one might suggest that Maimonides was the first Kabbalist.

Such venturesome hypotheses are, however, ruled out by his express statements. He not only disclaims the privilege of having had a special revelation about the hidden meaning of ma'aseh merkabah, but also disavows his indebtedness to any (human) teacher for his knowledge of the secret doctrine. He apparently believed that the oral tradition of the secret teaching had been interrupted long before his time. That is also why he could not find any traces of a genuine Jewish secret tradition in the Gaonic literature, whereas he claims to have found such traces in the Talmud and in the Midrash. Neither was he able to detect any remnant of the holy doctrine still living in the nation. He was, then, not the last heir of an age-old tradition, but rather its first

52 III, Introd. (2b; 297, 27-28). Cf., however, III, 22 (46a; 353, 21-22). Cf. also the allusion to a spurious "mystical" tradition in I, 62 (80b; 104, 26).
53 I, 71 (94a; 121, 25-122, 3); III, Introd. (ab; 297, 17-18).
rediscoverer after it had been lost for a long time. He rediscovered the secret teaching by following the indications which are met with in the Bible and in the words of the sages but also by making use of speculative premises. Since the Bible and the Talmud had been studied no less thoroughly by his predecessors than by him, his rediscovery must have been due to a particularly deep understanding of the "speculative premises," i.e., of philosophy. He did not feel conscious of thereby introducing a foreign element into Judaism, for long before his time the "Andalusian" Jews had accepted the teachings of the philosophers as far as these were consonant with the basis of the Torah. Philosophic teachings thus belonged, in a sense, to the tradition of Maimonides' family. Perhaps he even believed that the resurgence of philosophic studies in the Middle Ages more or less coincided with the disappearance of the secret teaching of Judaism and that thus the chain of tradition never was interrupted. After all, the defensible part of the philosophic teaching appeared to him as but a last residue of Israel's own lost inheritance.

The philosophic tradition of enlightened Andalusia thus gave Maimonides the first impulse to search the Bible for its secrets. Owing to his exertions during the greater part of his life, he succeeded in detecting a great many of them. At the same time he clearly realized that his achievement was not likely to be repeated by many others, if by any. For the age of philosophy in Muslim countries was drawing to its close. Fearing, therefore, that the precious doctrine might again be lost for centuries, he decided to commit it to writing, notwithstanding the talmudic prohibition. But he did not act imprudently. He insisted on taking a middle course between impossible obedience and flagrant transgression. He thought it his duty to give such a written explanation of the Biblical secrets as would meet all the conditions required from an oral explanation. In other words, he had to become a master of the art of revealing by not revealing and of not revealing by revealing.

54 III, Introd. (2b; 297, 28-29).
55 I, 71 (94a; 122, 9-10).
57 Cf. III, Introd. (3a; 298, 8-9).
The law requires that only the “chapter headings” be transmitted. Maimonides decided to abide by that precept. But the law goes further: it requires that even those “chapter headings” be not transmitted even to one, except he be wise and able to understand by himself. As long as the secret teaching was transmitted by oral instruction, that requirement was easily complied with: if the teacher had not known the pupil for a long time beforehand, as probably was almost always the case, he could test the pupil’s intellectual capacities by having a talk with him on indifferent subjects before he started to explain to him some of the secrets of the Bible. But how can the author of a book examine his readers, by far the greater part of whom may not yet be born when the book is published? Or does there exist some sort of examination by proxy which would allow the author to prevent incompetent readers not only from understanding his book—this does not require any human effort—but even from finding out the very formulation of the “chapter headings”? To see that such a device does exist, we have only to remind ourselves of how a superior man proceeds if he wishes to impart a truth, which he thinks not to be fit for everybody’s use, to another man who may or may not be able to become reconciled to it. He will give him a hint by casting some doubt on a remote and apparently insignificant consequence or premise of the accepted opinion. If the listener understands the hint, the teacher may explain his doubts more fully and thus gradually lead him to a view which is of necessity nearer the truth (since it presupposes a certain reflection) than is the current opinion. But how does he proceed, if the pupil fails to understand the hint? He will simply stop. This does not mean that he will stop talking. On the contrary, since by suddenly becoming silent he would only perplex the pupil without being of any help to him, he will continue talking by giving the first, rather revealing sentence a more conventional meaning and thus gradually lead him back to the safe region of accepted views. Now this method of stopping can be practiced in writing as well as in speech, the only difference being that the writer must stop in any case, since certainly the majority of readers must be prevented from finding out the “chapter headings.” That is to say, the writer has to interrupt his short hints by long stretches of silence, i.e., of
insignificant talk. But a good author will never submit to the ordeal of indulging in insignificant talk. Consequently, after having given a hint which refers to a certain chapter of the secret teaching, he will write some sentences which at first glance seem to be conventional, but which on closer examination prove to contain a new hint, referring to another chapter of the secret teaching. By thus proceeding, he will prevent the secret teaching being prematurely perceived and therefore inadequately understood; even those readers who not only noticed but even understood the first hint and might understand further hints directly connected with it, would experience considerable difficulty even in suspecting the second hint, which refers to a different section of the argument. It is hardly necessary to add that there are as many groups of hints as there are chapters, or subdivisions of chapters, of the secret teaching, and that in consequence an ingenious author has at his disposal almost infinite possibilities of alternatively using hints of different groups.

We are now in a position to appreciate the bearing of the following statement of Maimonides: "You will not demand from me here [in the Guide] anything except chapter headings; and even those headings are, in this treatise, not arranged according to their intrinsic order or according to any sequence whatsoever, but they are scattered and intermingled with other subjects, the explanation of which is intended." It is true Maimonides makes this statement with regard to his explanation of ma'aseh merkabah only. But there can be no doubt that he has followed the same method in his explanation of ma'aseh bereshit and, indeed, of all the secrets of the Torah. It is for this reason that the whole work has to be read with particular care, with a care, that is, which would not be required for the understanding of a scientific book. Since the whole teaching characteristic of the Guide is of a secret nature, we are not surprised to observe Maimonides entreating the reader in the most emphatic manner not to explain any part of it to others, unless the particular doctrine had already been clearly elucidated by famous teachers of the

55 I, Introd. (3b; 3, 11-14).
55 II, 29 (46a; 244, 10 f.). Cf. I, Introd. (3b-4b; 3, 17-4, 22), 17, 35 (42a; 54, 20-28).
See also III, 41 (88b; 409, 16).
56 I, Introd. (8b; 9, 26-10, 2), ibid. (3b; 3, 11-14); ibid. (4b; 4, 12-15).
The Guide is devoted to the explanation of an esoteric doctrine. But this explanation is itself of an esoteric character. The Guide is, then, devoted to the esoteric explanation of an esoteric doctrine. Consequently it is a book with seven seals. How can we unseal it?

IV. A MORAL DILEMMA

No historian who has a sense of decency and therefore a sense of respect for a superior man such as Maimonides will disregard light-heartedly the latter's emphatic entreaty not to explain the secret teaching of the Guide. It may fairly be said that an interpreter who does not feel pangs of conscience when attempting to explain that secret teaching and perhaps when perceiving for the first time its existence and bearing lacks that closeness to the subject which is indispensable for the true understanding of any book. Thus the question of adequate interpretation of the Guide is primarily a moral question.

We are, however, entitled to object to raising that moral question because the historical situation in which we find ourselves is fundamentally different from that of the twelfth century, and therefore we ought to be justified in not taking too personally, so to speak, Maimonides' will. It is true, at first glance, that objection seems to beg the question: it is based on the assumption that it is possible to have a sufficient knowledge of the historical situation of the twelfth century without having a true and adequate knowledge of the secret teaching of Maimonides. Yet, if one looks more closely, one sees that by the historical situation no historian understands the secret thoughts of an individual, but rather the obvious facts or opinions which, being common to a period, give that period its specific coloring. We happen to be excellently informed by competent historians about the opinions prevalent in the twelfth century, and each of us can see that they are fundamentally different from those prevalent in our time. Public opinion was then ruled by the belief in the revealed character of the Torah or the existence of

61 I, Introd. (9a; 10, 4-8).
an eternal and unchangeable law, whereas public opinion today is ruled by historic consciousness. Maimonides himself justified his transgression of the talmudic injunction against writing on the esoteric teaching of the Bible by the necessity of saving the law. In the same way we may justify our disregard of Maimonides' entreaty not to explain the esoteric teaching of the Guide by appealing to the requirements of historic research. For both the history of Judaism and the history of medieval philosophy remain deplorably incomplete, as long as the secret teaching of Maimonides has not been brought to light. The force of this argument will become even stronger if we take into consideration that basic condition of historic research, namely, freedom of thought. Freedom of thought, too, seems to be incomplete as long as we recognize the validity of any prohibition to explain any teaching whatsoever. Freedom of thought being menaced in our time more than for several centuries, we have not only the right but even the duty to explain the teaching of Maimonides, in order to contribute to a better understanding of what freedom of thought means, i.e., what attitude it presupposes and what sacrifices it requires.

The position of Maimonides' interpreter is, then, to some extent, identical with that of Maimonides himself. Both are confronted with a prohibition against explaining a secret teaching and with the necessity of explaining it. Consequently, one might think it advisable for the interpreter to imitate Maimonides also with regard to the solution of the dilemma, i.e., to steer a middle course between impossible obedience and flagrant transgression by attempting an esoteric interpretation of the esoteric teaching of the Guide. Since the Guide contains an esoteric interpretation of an esoteric teaching, an adequate interpretation of the Guide would thus have to take the form of an esoteric interpretation of an esoteric interpretation of an esoteric teaching.

This suggestion may sound paradoxical and even ridiculous. Yet it would not have appeared absurd to such a competent reader of the Guide as Joseph ibn Kaspi, who did write an esoteric commentary on it. Above all, an esoteric interpretation of the Guide seems to be not only advisable, but even necessary.

When Maimonides, through his work, exposed the secret teaching of the Bible to a larger number of men, some of whom
might not be as obedient to the talmudic ordinance nor as wise as he was, he did not rely entirely on those readers' compliance with the law or with his own emphatic entreaty. For the explanation of secrets is, as he asserts, not only forbidden by law, but also impossible by nature: the very nature of the secrets prevents their being divulged. We are then confronted with a third meaning of the word "secret": secret may mean not only the Biblical word or parable which has an inner meaning, and the hidden meaning itself, but also, and perhaps primarily, the thing to which that hidden meaning refers. The things spoken of by the prophets are secret, since they are not constantly accessible, as are the things described by the ordinary sciences, but only during more or less short and rare intervals of spiritual daylight which interrupt an almost continuous spiritual darkness; indeed they are accessible not to natural reason, but only to prophetic vision. Consequently, ordinary language is utterly insufficient for their description; the only possible way of describing them is by parabolic and enigmatic speech. Even the interpretation of prophetic teaching cannot but be parabolic and enigmatic, which is equally true of the interpretation of such an interpretation, since both the secondary and the primary interpretation deal with the same secret subject matter. Hence the interpretation of the Guide cannot be given in ordinary language, but only in parabolic and enigmatic speech. That is why, according to Maimonides, the student of those secrets is required not only to be of mature age, to have a sagacious and subtle mind, to possess perfect command of the art of political government and the speculative sciences, and to be able to understand

63 "Secrets of the being and secrets of the Torah," II, 26 (56b; 232, 5). For the distinction between various meanings of "secret," cf. Bacon, Advancement of Learning, ed. G. W. Kitchin, 205.
64 I, Introd. (4b; 4, 15). This passage implies a fundamental distinction between esoteric and exoteric sciences. As regards such distinctions, cf. I. Goldziher, Kitāb ma'dni al-nafs (Berlin, 1907), pp. 28*-31.* According to a usual distinction, "the exterior science" (al-ilm al-barrānī) is identical with Aristotelian philosophy and also with the Kalām; "the interior philosophy" (al-falsafa al-dīhāl or al-falsafa al-hāṣā), treated by the muḥakḥikūn, deals with "the secrets of nature." The teaching of esoteric science is the knowledge al-maḏnūn bihi. Cf. I, 17 in princ., 35 (41b: 54, 4. 71 (93b: 121, 20).
the allusive speech of others, but also to be capable of present-
ing things allusively himself.\textsuperscript{66}

If each student actually had to meet all these conditions, we
should have to admit at once, i.e., before any serious attempt has
been made to elucidate the esoteric teaching of the \textit{Guide}, that
the interpretation of that work is wholly impossible for the mod-
ern historian. The very intention of interpreting the \textit{Guide}
would imply an unbearable degree of presumption on the part
of the would-be interpreter; for he would implicitly claim to be
endowed with all the qualities of a Platonic philosopher-king.
Yet, while a modest man, confronted with the requirements
which we have indicated, will be inclined to give up the attempt
to understand the whole \textit{Guide}, he may hope to make some con-
tribution to its understanding by becoming a subservient part of
the community of scholars who devote themselves to the inter-
pretation of the \textit{Guide}. If that book cannot be understood by the
exertions of one man, it may be understood by the collaboration
of many, in particular of Arabists, Judaists, and students of the
history of philosophy. It is true that when speaking of the con-
ditions to be fulfilled by students of the secret teaching, Mai-
monides does not mention disciplines such as those just allude-
to; as a matter of fact, he thought very slightly of history in
general.\textsuperscript{67} But in all justice it may be said that he did not know
and could not know history in the modern sense of the word
a discipline which, in a sense, provides the synthesis, indispensa-
ble for the adequate understanding of the secret doctrine, o
philosophy and politics. Yet, however greatly we may think o
the qualities of the modern historian, he certainly is neither pe:
se able to understand esoteric texts nor is he an esoteric writer
Indeed the rise of modern historic consciousness came simulta-
neously with the interruption of the tradition of esotericism
Hence all present-day students of Maimonides necessarily lacl
the specific training required for understanding, to say nothin;
of writing, an esoteric book or commentary. Is, then, an inter-
pretation of the \textit{Guide} altogether impossible under the presen
circumstances?

Let us examine somewhat more closely the basic assumptio!

\textsuperscript{66} I, 34 (41a; 53, 12-19), 33 (37b; 48, 22-25).
\textsuperscript{67} Cf. Baron, \textit{Outlook}, 3-4.
underlying the conclusion at which we have just arrived, or rather upon which we have just come to grief. Maimonides, it is true, states in unambiguous terms that direct and plain communication of the secrets of the things, or of the secrets of the Torah, is impossible by nature. But he also asserts in no less unambiguous terms that such a communication is forbidden by law. Now a rational law does not forbid things which are impossible in themselves and which therefore are not subject to human deliberation or action; and the Torah is the rational law par excellence. Consequently the two statements appear to be contradictory. Since we are not yet in a position to decide which of them is to be discarded as merely exoteric, it will be wise to leave the question open for the time being and not to go beyond briefly discussing the possibilities of an answer. There are three possible solutions: (1) Maimonides may actually have believed in the unavoidable necessity of speaking enigmatically of secrets; (2) he may have conceded the possibility of plainly discussing them; (3) he may have approved some unknown intermediary position. There is, then, certainly a prima facie probability in the ratio of two to three that the first solution, which is wholly incompatible with our desire to understand the Guide, has to be ruled out. But even if the first solution had to be ultimately accepted, we need not be altogether despondent, since we may very well reject that view as erroneous. Esotericism, one might say, is based on the assumption that there is a rigid division of mankind into an inspired or intelligent minority and an uninspired or foolish majority. But are there no transitions of various kinds between the two groups? Has not each man been given freedom of will, so that he may become wise or foolish according to his exertions? However important may be the natural faculty of understanding, is not the use of this faculty or, in other words, method, equally important? And method, almost by its very definition, bridges the gulf which separates the two unequal groups. Indeed, the methods of modern historical research, which have proved to be sufficient for the deciphering of hieroglyphs and cuneiforms, ought certainly to be sufficient also for the deciphering of a book such as the Guide, to which access

69 M.T. Teshubah 5, 2.
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could be had in an excellent translation into a modern language. Our problem reduces itself, therefore, to detecting the specific method which will enable us to decipher the Guide. What are, then, the general rules and the most important special rules according to which this book is to be read?

V. SECRETS AND CONTRADICTIONS

The clue to the true understanding of the Guide is provided by the very feature of that book which, at first glance, seems to make it for all modern generations a book sealed with seven seals. I am referring to the fact that it is devoted to the esoteric explanation of an esoteric text. For it is merely a popular fallacy to assume that such an explanation is an esoteric work of the second power, or at least twice as esoteric, and consequently twice as difficult to understand as is the esoteric text itself. Actually, any explanation, however esoteric, of a text is intended to be helpful for its understanding; and, provided the author is not a man of exceptional inability, the explanation is bound to be helpful. Now, if by the help of Maimonides, we understand the esoteric teaching of the Bible, we understand at the same time the esoteric teaching of the Guide, since Maimonides must have accepted the esoteric teaching of the law as the true teaching. Or, to put it somewhat differently, we may say that, thanks to Maimonides, the secret teaching is accessible to us in two different versions: in the original Biblical version, and in the derivative version of the Guide. Each version by itself might be wholly incomprehensible; but we may become able to decipher both by using the light which one sheds on the other. Our position resembles then that of an archeologist confronted with an inscription in an unknown language, who subsequently discovers another inscription reproducing the translation of that text into another unknown language. It matters little whether or not we accept Maimonides’ two assumptions, rejected by modern criticism, that the Bible is an esoteric text, and that its esoteric teaching is closely akin to that of Aristotle. As far as Maimonides is concerned, the Bible is an esoteric book, and even the most perfect esoteric book ever written. Consequently, when setting out to write an esoteric book himself, he had no choice but to take the
Bible as his model. That is to say, he wrote the *Guide* according to the rules which he was wont to follow in reading the Bible. Therefore, if we wish to understand the *Guide*, we must read it according to the rules which Maimonides applies in that work to the explanation of the Bible.

How did Maimonides read the Bible, or rather the Torah? He read it as the work of a single author, that author being not so much Moses as God himself. Consequently, the Torah was for him the most perfect book ever written as regards both content and form. In particular, he did not believe (as we are told to believe by modern Biblical criticism) that its formal deficiencies—for instance, the abrupt changes of subject matter, or repetitions with greater or slighter variations—were due to its having been compiled by unknown redactors from divergent sources. These deficiencies were for him purposeful irregularities, intended to hide and betray a deeper order, a deep, nay, divine meaning. It was precisely this intentional disorder which he took as his model when writing the *Guide*. Or, if we accept the thesis of modern Biblical criticism, we have to say that he took as his model a book which unintentionally lacks order and that by so doing he wrote a book which intentionally lacks order. At any rate the *Guide* certainly and admittedly is a book which intentionally lacks order. The “chapter headings” of the secret teaching which it transmits “are not arranged according to their intrinsic order or according to any sequence whatsoever, but they are scattered and intermingled with other subjects.”

Instances of apparently bad composition are so numerous in the *Guide* and so familiar to its students that we need not mention here more than one example. Maimonides interrupts his explanation of Biblical expressions attributing to God place, local movement, and so on (I, 8-26) by an exposition of the meaning of *man* (I, 14) and by a discussion of the necessity of teaching *ma’aseh bereshit* esoterically (I, 17), just as the Bible itself interrupts the story of Joseph by inserting into it the story of Judah and Tamar. Consequently, whenever we are confronted in the *Guide* with an abrupt change of subject matter, we have to follow the same rule of interpretation which Maimonides was wont to follow whenever he had to face a similar apparent

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70 I, Introd. (3b; 3, 11-14).
deficiency of the Bible: we have to find out, by guessing, the hidden reason of the apparent deficiency. For it is precisely that hidden reason, accessible only to guesswork, which furnishes a link between the scattered “chapter headings,” if not a “chapter heading” itself. Certainly the chains of reasoning connecting the scattered “chapter headings,” and possibly even some “chapter headings” themselves, are not stated within the chapters, but are written with invisible ink in the empty spaces between the chapters, between the sentences, or between the parts of the Guide.

Another kind of irregularity occurs, for example, in his explanation of the various groups of Biblical commandments (III, 36-49). At the beginning of each chapter reference is made to the book or books of the Mishneh Torah in which the laws under review had been codified. Maimonides deviates from that rule in the case of one chapter only (Chapter 41). That this is not a matter of chance can easily be seen from the context. There he points out with unusual clarity the difference between the text of the Biblical commands and their traditional interpretation; his intention is, as he expressly states, to explain the “texts,” and not the fiqh. The Mishneh Torah is devoted to the fiqh. Consequently, it would have been most misleading if he had referred, at the beginning of that chapter, to the corresponding “book” of the Mishneh Torah, i.e., to the “Book of Judges.” It may be added in passing that a full discussion of this irregularity, which space does not here permit, would help explain the scarcely less perplexing difficulty of the inclusion in the “Book of Judges” of the laws concerning mourning.

As a last instance of those devices, which may be called intentional perplexities, suggested to Maimonides by his model, we may mention here repetitions of the same subject with apparently no, or only insignificant variations. He observes that Ezekiel had twice the same vision of the celestial chariot, the most secret subject, and that both visions, in their turn, were but repetitions of the corresponding vision of Isaiah. Hardly less important was for him the realization that in the Book of Job all interlocutors apparently repeat continually one another’s

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71 III, 41 (88b; 409, 15-16).
72 III, 3 in princ., 6.
statements; in particular Elihu, supposedly superior in wisdom to Job, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, does not seem to add anything of weight to what the others had said before him. Maimonides naturally asserts that these repetitions are apparent rather than real, and that closer examination will reveal that the opinions of Job, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, as well as Elihu, differ materially from one another, and that the report of Ezekiel’s second vision makes important additions to that of the first. This method of repeating the same thing with apparently insignificant, but actually highly important variations was extremely helpful for Maimonides’ purposes. An outstanding example may be found in his repeating in the Guide, with certain variations, the division of the Biblical laws into 14 groups, an arrangement which had determined the whole plan of the Mishneh Torah. He thus created the impression of merely repeating the division made in the code, whereas actually the two divisions greatly differ from each other. As further obvious examples of the application of the same method, one may cite the differences between the arrangement of the 248 affirmative precepts in the enumeration at the beginning of Mishneh Torah (or in Sefer ha-misvot) on the one hand, and that in the body of that code on the other; the differences between the enumeration of the 5 opinions concerning providence in the Guide, III, 17, on the one hand, and that in the same work, III, 23, on the other; and the differences between the enumeration of the 3 opinions concerning creation in the Guide, II, 13, on the one hand, and that in the same work, II, 32, on the other. In all these cases Maimonides apparently merely repeats himself by speaking twice of the same number, but actually he introduces in the repetitions new points of view which had not even been hinted at in the first statements. His aim in so doing is clearly revealed by his explanation of the method employed by the first 4 interlocutors in the Book of Job

73 III, 23 (50a; 359, 4-9 and 14-15). Cf. also III, 24 (52b; 362, 22-23).
74 III, 23 (50a; 359, 9-15); 1 (3a; 298, 23-24). 2 (6b and 7a; 303, 5, 19; 304, 4-5). Cf. M.T. Introd., 186th and 187th prohibition.
75 Cf. also the fourteen principles in S.M.
76 Notice also the three opinions on providence indicated in III, 17 (37b; 342, 20 f.), as well as the two opinions indicated in III, 21 (45b; 351, 17-18).
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(Job, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar): "Each one of them repeats the subject of which the other had spoken . . . in order to hide the subject peculiar to the opinion of each, so that it should appear to the vulgar that the opinion of all of them is one opinion generally agreed upon." That is to say, the purpose of repeating conventional statements is to hide the disclosure, in the repetition, of unconventional views. What matters is, then, not the conventional view, constantly repeated, which may or may not be true, but the slight additions to, or omissions from the conventional view which occur in the repetition and which transmit "chapter headings" of the secret and true teaching. This is what Maimonides rather clearly intimates by saying that closer examination of Elihu's repetitious speech brings to light "the additional subject which he introduced, and this subject was the intention." The question as to whether and to what extent Maimonides has generally employed this method of making hardly discernible additions to the "first statement" par excellence, i.e., to the Biblical text itself, must remain unanswered in the present discussion.

Since these rules of interpretation seem to confer excessive importance on every word used by Maimonides, we must have recourse again to our initial assumption that the Guide is an imitation of the Bible, and in particular of the Torah. Maimonides read the Torah as a book, every word of which was of divine origin and, consequently, of the greatest importance. How conscientiously he strove to detect the full significance of each Biblical term, however indifferent it might seem to be in its context, is known to every reader of the Guide, the first intention of which was to explain certain groups of Biblical words. He

77 III, 23 (50a; 359, 11-14).
78 III, 23 (50a; 359, 9-10).
79 Cf. III, Introd. (2b-3a; 298, 3-9). The method of "repetition" was certainly not invented by Maimonides; it was applied before him on a large scale by Fārābī, who "repeated" the same teaching by making additions to it or omissions from it, in Al-siydsāt al-madaniyya, in Al-madīna al-fādīla, and in Al-milla al-fādīla. And let us not forget Plato who (to mention only two examples) "repeated" the teachings of the Republic in the Laws, and in the Apology "reiterated" the defense of Socrates as well as the charge brought against him three times.
80 M.T. Teshubah 3, 17.
81 I, Introd. (2b; 2, 6 ff.).
expressly applied the same principle of reading, or writing, to his own work:

if you wish to grasp the totality of what this treatise contains, so that nothing of it will escape you, then you must connect its chapters one with another; and when reading a given chapter, your intention must be not only to understand the totality of the subject of that chapter, but also to grasp each word which occurs in it in the course of the speech, even if that word does not belong to the intention of the chapter. For the diction of this treatise has not been chosen by haphazard, but with great exactness and exceeding precision.

Maimonides naturally read the Torah as a book which is in no way frivolous. Since he considered histories and poems to be frivolous writings, he was compelled to conceive of the Biblical stories as of "secrets of the Torah." As he had such a contempt for stories, it is most unlikely that the few stories which he inserted into the Guide have to be accepted at their face value: some necessity must have driven him to tell those stories in order to instill either some true opinion or some good moral habit into the minds of his readers. In one case he tells us the story of how, "many years ago," a scientist had put to him a certain question, and how he had answered it. Since the Guide is written "with great exactness and exceeding precision," it is safe to say that the framework of the story conveys some teaching which is not transmitted by the content of the discussion with the scientist. We find in the Guide more stories of things which happened "many years ago," such as the history of the science of kalām and the story of the two books which Maimonides had begun to write on the parables of the prophets and of the Midrashim. We do not hesitate to call also the "dedicatory

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82 That is to say, you must do with the chapters of the Guide what Solomon did with the words and parables of the Bible; just as Solomon found out the secret teaching of the Bible by connecting word with word, and parable with parable, in the same way we may find out the secret teaching of the Guide by connecting chapter with chapter, and, indeed, secret word with secret word. Cf. I, Introd. (6b; 6, 26-7, 2).
83 Cf. I, Introd. (8b; 9, 26-30).
84 I, 2 (13b; 16, 9-11); III, 50. Cf. Baron, Outlook, 8, n. 4.
85 Cf. III, 50 (120a; 451, 1-3).
86 I, 2.
87 I, 71. I, Introd. (5b; 5, 17 ff.); III, 19 (40a; 346, 3 ff.). Cf. III, 32 (70a-b; 385, 13-20).
epistle” a story, i.e., to assume that it, too, is one of the “secrets” of the Guide. Quotations from Maimonides’ Commentary on the Mishnah and his code, indeed all quotations in the Guide, belong to the same class of hints.

After these preliminary remarks, we must try to place the method of reading the Guide on a firmer basis. In order to arrive at rules which would relieve us of the burdensome necessity of guessing Maimonides’ secret thoughts, we must make a fresh start by discussing more exactly the relation between the model, the Bible, and its imitation or repetition, the Guide. What is the literary genus including the Bible and the Guide, and what is the specific difference giving the Guide its peculiar character?

Both the Bible, as Maimonides was wont to understand it, and the Guide are esoteric books. To cite but one other assertion of the author, his intention in writing the Guide was that the truths should flash up and then disappear again.\(^8^8\) The purpose of the Guide is, then, not only to reveal the truth, but also to hide it. Or, to express the same thing in terms of quantity, a considerable number of statements are made in order to hide the truth rather than to teach it.

But what is the difference between the esoteric method of the Bible and that of the Guide? The authors of the Bible chose, in order to reveal the truth by not revealing it, and not to reveal it by revealing it, the use of words of certain kinds and of parables and enigmas.\(^8^9\) Parables seem to be the more important vehicle, for Maimonides speaks of them much more fully than he does of the kinds of words in question.\(^9^0\) Thus the suspicion arises that the species of esoteric books to which the Bible belongs is parabolic literature. That suspicion leads us to raise the question whether parables and enigmas are indispensable for esoteric teaching. As a matter of fact, that question is raised by Maimonides himself. After asserting that nobody is capable of completely explaining the secrets and that therefore every teacher speaks of them by using parables and enigmas, he goes on to say that, if someone wishes to teach the secrets without

\(^8^8\) I, Introd. (3b; 3, 14).

\(^8^9\) I, Introd. (5a; 5, 11 and 16).

\(^9^0\) Cf. the index to Munk’s Guide, s.vv. “allégories” and “noms.”
using parables and enigmas, he cannot help substituting for
them obscurity and briefness of speech. This remark may refer
to an extreme case which is not likely to occur, but it also may
suggest a possible innovation. Whether or not that case is likely
and whether Maimonides is willing to make the innovation,
the substitution indicated by him is certainly possible. Thus his
remark implies the admission that there exists a species of un-
parabolic esoteric literature and, consequently, that the species
of esoteric books to which the Bible belongs may rightly be
described as parabolic literature.

The question of how to avoid parables and enigmas when
speaking of the secrets is taken up again by Maimonides a little
further on in the general introduction to his work, in his dis-
cussion of the explanation of parables. He discusses that ques-
tion by telling us a story. He narrates that once upon a time he
had intended to write two books in order to explain the parables
of the Bible and those of the Midrashim, but that when attempt-
ing to write these books he was faced by a dilemma. Either he
could give the explanation in the form of parables, which pro-
cedure would merely exchange one individual for another of
the same species, or he could explain the parables in unpara-
bolic speech, in which case the explanation would not be suit-
able for the vulgar. Since the explanations given in the Guide
are not addressed to the vulgar, but to scholars, we may ex-
pect from the outset that they would be of an unparabolic
character. Moreover, we know from Maimonides' earlier state-
ment that parabolic and enigmatic representation of the secret
teaching can be avoided: it can be replaced by obscurity and
briefness of speech, i.e., by ways of expression which are suitable
exclusively to scholars who, besides, are able to understand of
themselves. Above all, in the case of an explanation of parabolic
texts, it is not only possible, but even necessary to avoid parabolic
speech: a parabolic explanation would be open to the objection,
so aptly made by Maimonides himself, that it merely replaces
one individual by another individual of the same species, or,

91 I, Introd. (4b-5a; 4, 11-13, 17-19, 26-28).
92 I, Introd. (9b; 10, 24-28).
93 Cf. I, Introd. (5b; 5, 18-25) with ibid. (3a and 4b; 2, 11 ff. and 4, 8-12).
in other words, that it is no explanation at all. What is then, the
species of speech, different from that of parabolic speech, the
use of which Maimonides had to learn after he had decided to
write the Guide instead of the two popular books? What is the
species, of which all expositions of the truth, given in the Guide,
are individuals? To answer this question, we must first raise the
more general question as to what is the genus which includes
the species, hitherto unknown, of the expositions of the truth
characteristic of the Guide, as well as of the species of parabolic
expositions? The answer to this question, which no careful stu­
dent of the Guide can help raising, is given by Maimonides in
the last section of the general introduction to his work, where
he quite abruptly and unexpectedly introduces a new subject:
the various reasons for contradictions occurring in various kinds
of books. We already know the hidden motive underlying this
sudden change of subject matter; that hidden motive is the
somewhat disguised question of the method characteristic of the
Guide or, to speak more generally and vaguely, the question of
the genus including the esoteric methods of both the Bible and
the Guide. To the latter question, Maimonides gives here the
rather undisguised answer that the genus looked for is contra­
dictory speech. To the former question, he answers with equal
clarity that the contradictions met with in the Guide are to be
traced back to two reasons: to the requirements of teaching ob­
scure matters, i.e., of making them understood, and to the re­
quirements of speaking, or writing, of such matters. The contra­
dictions caused by the former are bound to be known to the
teacher (provided he did not make them deliberately), and they
escape the pupil until he has reached an advanced stage of
training; that is to say, they certainly escape the vulgar. But as
regards the contradictions caused by the latter requirements,
they always are deliberately made, and the author must take
the utmost care to hide them completely from the vulgar. 94
Those disclosures of Maimonides enable us to describe the form
of the esoteric teaching of the Guide: Maimonides teaches the
truth not by inventing parables (or by using contradictions be­
tween parabolic statements), but by using conscious and inten-

94 I, Introd. (10a, 10b, 11b; 11, 19-26 and 12, 7-12 and 13, 13-15).
tional contradictions, hidden from the vulgar, between unparabolic and unenigmatic statements.95

From this result the inference must be drawn that no interpreter of the Guide is entitled to attempt a "personal" explanation of its contradictions. For example, he must not try to trace them back to the fact, or assumption, that the two traditions which Maimonides intended to reconcile, i.e., the Biblical tradition and the philosophic tradition, are actually irreconcilable; or, more philosophically but scarcely more adequately, to explain them by assuming that Maimonides was on the track of philosophic problems transcending the horizon of the philosophic tradition, but was unable to free himself sufficiently from its shackles. Such attempts would serve a useful purpose if meant to explain highly complicated and artificial reconciliations of contradictions. They are both erroneous and superfluous if they are destined to explain contradictions which, if unintentional, would betray not the failure of a superior intellect in the face of problems either insoluble or very difficult to solve, but rather scandalous incompetence.96 All these attempts would tacitly or expressly presuppose that the contradictions had escaped Maimonides' notice, an assumption which is refuted by his unequivocal statements. Therefore, until the contrary has been proved, it must be maintained that he was fully aware of every contradiction in the Guide, at the very time of writing the contradictory sentences. And if the objection is made that we ought to allow for the possibility that unconscious and unintentional contradictions have crept into the Guide, since philosophers hardly inferior to Maimonides have been found guilty of such contradictions, we answer by referring to Maimonides' emphatic declaration concerning the extreme care with which he had written every single word of his book and by asking the objectors to produce similar declarations from those books of other philosophers which they may have in mind. Therefore the duty of the interpreter is not to explain the contradictions, but to find out in each case which of the two statements was con-

95 Cf. I, Introd. (10a; 11, 13-16). Cf. the somewhat different interpretation followed by Altmann, op. cit., 310 f.
96 Cf. I, Introd. (10b; 12, 4-7).
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considered by Maimonides to be true and which he merely used as a means of hiding the truth.

Maimonides has raised the question whether contradictions caused by the requirements of speaking, or writing, of obscure matters are also to be found in the Bible: he demands that this question be very carefully studied. In fact, it reveals itself as being the decisive question, once one has looked beneath the surface of the teaching of the Guide. Since he does not answer it explicitly, it must here be left open. Neither can we discuss here the related questions as to whether the Maimonidean method of teaching the truth was influenced by a philosophic tradition; whether it is characteristic of a particular kind of philosophic literature; and whether, in accordance with the terminology of the philosophic tradition, the Guide ought not to be described rather as an exoteric work. If this description should ultimately prove correct, the meaning of the term “addition” would have to undergo a profound change: it would not mean the decisively important secret teaching which is added to the conventional view, but rather the imaginative representation which is added to the undisguised truth.

Since the contradictions in the Guide are concealed, we must briefly consider at least some of the ways of hiding contradictions. (1) The most obvious method is to speak of the same subject in a contradictory manner on pages far apart from each other. The symbol of this method is: \( a = b \) (page 15) — \( a \neq b \) (page 379). Considering, however, the carelessness with which we usually read, one may reduce the distance between the pages to any positive number. (2) A variation of this method is to make one of the two contradictory statements in passing, as it were. A good example is Maimonides’ incidental denial of the obligatory character of the entire sacrificial legislation. (3) A third method is to contradict the first statement not directly, but by contra-

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97 I, Introd. (11 b; 13, 6-8).

98 For the two meanings of addition, cf. I, Introd. (7a-b; 8, 6, 15), on the one hand, and ibid. (8a; 9, 8), on the other. Cf. also in the Treatise on Resurrection the beginning of the treatise proper. The importance of the term “addition,” for instance, for the doctrine of attributes may be indicated here in passing.

99 III, 46 (102a-b; 427, 14-16). Cf. Munk, Guide, III, 364, n. 5. An allusion to this statement is implied in Joseph ibn Kaspi’s commentaries on Deut. 17:14 f. and 1 Sam. 8:6.
dicting its implications. The symbol of this method is: \( a = b - b = c - [a = c] - a \neq c - [a \neq b] \), the brackets indicating propositions which are not to be pronounced. It may be illustrated by the contradiction between the statements that “one of the main subjects of the Guide is ma'aseh bereshit” and that “ma'aseh bereshit is physics” on the one hand, and that “physics is not a subject of the Guide” on the other; or by the contradiction between the contentions that “explanation of the secrets is impossible by nature” and that “explanation of the secrets is forbidden by the law.” (4) Another method is to contradict the first statement not directly, but by seemingly repeating it while actually adding to it, or omitting from it, an apparently negligible expression. The symbol of that method is: \( a = b - [b = \beta + \varepsilon] - a = \beta - [a \neq b] \). (5) Another method is to introduce between the two contradictory statements an intermediary assertion, which, by itself not contradictory to the first statement, becomes contradictory to it by the addition, or the omission, of an apparently negligible expression; the contradictory statement creeps in as a repetition of the intermediary statement. The symbol of this method is: \( a = b - a \neq \beta - [b = \beta + \varepsilon] - a \neq b \). (6) To use ambiguous words. The symbol is: 
\[
\begin{align*}
  a = c &- [c \neq b < a = b]. \\
\end{align*}
\]

For example, the sentence, “a certain statement is an addition,” may mean a true addition to an untruth, or an untrue addition to the truth.

While on the subject of ambiguous words, we may indicate their great importance for the reader of the Guide. According to Maimonides, the Bible teaches the truth by using certain kinds of words, as well as by parables. While excluding the latter from his own work, he nowhere indicates his intention of avoiding the former, and in particular ambiguous words. The expression “ambiguous word” is itself ambiguous. Used as a technical term, it means a word which is applied to “two objects between which there is a similarity with regard to some thing which is accidental to both and which does not constitute the essence of either of them.”100

In another less technical, but scarcely less
important sense, it means "a word fitly spoken" (Proverbs 25:11). For, according to Maimonides, this Biblical expression describes "a speech spoken according to its two faces," or "a speech which has two faces, i.e., which has an exterior and an inner" face; an exterior useful, for instance, for the proper condition of human societies, and an inner useful for the knowledge of the truth.\textsuperscript{101} An ambiguous speech in the second sense would, then, be a speech with one face toward the vulgar, and with another face toward the man who understands by himself. Not only speeches, or sentences, but also words with two faces were indispensable to Maimonides, when he attempted to reveal the truth to the latter while hiding it from the former. For a secret is much less perfectly concealed by a sentence than by a word, since a word is much smaller in extent, and consequently \textit{ceteris paribus} a much better hiding place than a whole sentence. This is especially true of common words, placed unobtrusively within an unobtrusive sentence. It is just such common words of hidden ambiguity which Maimonides has primarily in mind when he asks the reader to pay very close attention to every word which he happens (or rather seems to happen) to use; and when he emphatically entreats him not to explain anything in the \textit{Guide}, not even a single word, unless it expressed something which had already been accepted and openly taught by earlier Jewish authorities.\textsuperscript{102} Evidently the explanation of a single word cannot be so grave a matter unless that word is filled with high explosive which can destroy all beliefs not firmly grounded in reason; i.e., unless its actual and hidden meaning lends to some important statement a sense totally different from, or even diametrically opposed to the sense which it would have, if this particular word were to be accepted in its apparent or conventional meaning. Is such a word not to be called an ambiguous word, "a word fitly spoken"? Apart from all general considerations, one may cite a number of individual examples of ambiguous terms intentionally used by Maimonides. Such terms are: "the wise" or "the

\textsuperscript{101} I, Introd. (6b-7a; 7, 15-8, 9). The fact that the whole passage (6a-8b; 6, 19-9, 25), which apparently deals with parables only, actually has still another meaning, is indicated by the seeming clumsiness with which the apparent subject is introduced.

\textsuperscript{102} I, Introd. (9a; 10, 4-7).
Returning to Maimonides' use of contradictions, one may assume that all important contradictions in the Guide may be reduced to the single fundamental contradiction between the true teaching, based on reason, and the untrue teaching, emanating from imagination. But whether this be the case or not, we are certainly in need of a general answer to the general question: which of the two contradictory statements is in each instance considered by Maimonides as the true statement? That answer would be the guide for the understanding of Maimonides' work. It is provided by his identification of the true teaching with some secret teaching. Consequently, of two contradictory statements made by him, that statement which is most secret must have been considered by him to be true. Secrecy is to a certain extent identical with rarity; what all people say all the time is the opposite of a secret. We may therefore establish the rule that of two contradictory statements in the Guide or in any other work of Maimonides that statement which occurs least frequently, or even which occurs only once, was considered by him to be true. He himself alludes to this rule in his Treatise on Resurrection, the most authentic commentary on the Guide, when he stresses the fact that resurrection, though a basic principle of the law, is contradicted by many scriptural passages, and asserted only in two verses of the Book of Daniel. He almost pronounces that rule by declaring, in the treatise mentioned, that the truth of a statement is not increased by repetition nor is it diminished by the author's failure to repeat it: "you know that the mention of the basic principle of unity, i.e., His word 'The Lord is one,' is not repeated in the Torah."

To sum up: Maimonides teaches the truth not plainly, but secretly; i.e., he reveals the truth to those learned men who are able to understand by themselves and at the same time he hides it from the vulgar. There probably is no better way of hiding the truth than to contradict it. Consequently, Maimonides

103 Cf., for instance, I, Introd. (gb; 10, 21); III, 15 (28b; 331, 27-29).
makes contradictory statements about all important subjects; he reveals the truth by stating it, and hides it by contradicting it. Now the truth must be stated in a more hidden way than it is contradicted, or else it would become accessible to the vulgar; and those who are able to understand by themselves are in a position to find out the concealed statement of the truth. That is why Maimonides repeats as frequently as possible the conventional views which are suitable to, or accepted by the vulgar, but pronounces as rarely as possible contradictory unconventional views. Now a statement contradictory to another statement is, in a sense, its repetition, agreeing with it in almost every respect and differing only by some addition or omission. Therefore we are able to recognize the contradiction only by a very close scrutiny of every single word, however small, in the two statements.

Contradictions are the axis of the Guide. They show in the most convincing manner that the actual teaching of that book is sealed and at the same time reveal the way of unsealing it. While the other devices used by Maimonides compel the reader to guess the true teaching, the contradictions offer him the true teaching quite openly in either of the two contradictory statements. Moreover, while the other devices do not by themselves force readers to look beneath the surface—for instance, an inappropriate expression or a clumsy transition, if noticed at all, may be considered to be merely an inappropriate expression or a clumsy transition, and not a stumbling block—the contradictions, once they are discovered, compel them to take pains to find out the actual teaching. To discover the contradictions or to find out which contradictory statement is considered by Maimonides to be true, we sometimes need the help of hints. Recognizing the meaning of hints requires a higher degree of understanding by oneself than does the recognition of an obvious contradiction. Hints are supplied by the application of the other Maimonidean devices.

To make our enumeration of those devices somewhat more complete, and not to mention intentional sophisms and ironical remarks, we shall first briefly clarify our foregoing remark on Maimonides' extensive use of words of certain kinds. We may call those words secret words. His secret terminology requires a
special study, based upon a complete index of words which have, or may have, secret meaning. These words are partly ambiguous, as in the instances mentioned above, and partly unambiguous, such as ḏāmiyyūn, fiqh, dunyā. In the second place we may mention various kinds of apostrophes to the reader and mottoes prefixed to the whole work or to individual parts. Another device consists in silence, i.e., the omission of something which only the learned, or the learned who are able to understand of themselves, would miss. Let us take the following example. Maimonides quotes in the Guide four times, if I am not mistaken, expressly as an utterance of Aristotle, and with express or tacit approval, the statement that the sense of touch is a disgrace to us. Such fourfold repetition of an express quotation in a book so carefully worded as the Guide proves that the quotation is something like a leitmotif. Now, that quotation is incomplete. Maimonides omits two words which profoundly alter its meaning. Aristotle says: δὲξειν ἄυ ὅκαλος (ἡ ᴫφη) ἐπονεῖδστος ἑλα. Maimonides omits, then, those two words which characterize the utterance as an ἐνδοκο. Readers of the Guide, cognizant of the teachings of the “prince of philosophers,” naturally noticed the omission and realized that the passages into which the quotation is inserted are of a merely popular, or exoteric character. If one examines the four quotations more closely, one notices that while in the second and third citation Maimonides mentions the name of Aristotle, but not the work from which it is taken, he expressly cites the Ethics in the first passage, thus intimating that its source is a book based mainly on ἐνδοκα. In the last quotation Maimonides adds the remark that the quotation is literal, but two or three lines further on, while speaking of the same subject, he refers to the Ethics and the Rhetoric, i.e., to books devoted to the analysis of ἐνδοκα. There can be no doubt that Maimonides was fully aware of the fact that his citation from Aristotle actually reflected popular rather than philosophic opinion. It is still less doubtful

104 II, 36 (79a; 262, 11-12); 40 (86b; 272, 4-5); III, 8 (12b; 311, 9-10); 49 (117a; 447, 1-2). Cf. also III, 8 (143; 313, 18-19).

105 Eth. Nic. 1118b2. I am naturally following that interpretation of the passage cited, on which is based the Arabic translation as quoted by Maimonides. Cf. Averroes ad loc.: “et iustum est nos opinari a nobis [sic] quod sensus iste opprobriosus est nobis.” Cf. De anima, 421a 19-26.
that Maimonides, while agreeing with the complete statement of Aristotle, viz., that the sense of touch is popularly considered disgraceful, by no means believed in the soundness of this popular judgment. As a matter of fact, he contradicted it quite openly by denying any difference in dignity between the senses and by ascribing to the imagination of the vulgar the distinction between senses which are supposed to be perfections and those believed to be imperfections. The reader of the Guide, familiar with the main controversial topics of the Middle Ages, will at once realize the bearing of Maimonides' misquotation: the statement of Aristotle, as cited by Maimonides, would afford an excellent justification of ascetic morality—for what Maimonides would call "exaggeration"—and in particular for an ascetic attitude toward sexuality. And the reader who looks up the passages in question in the Guide will notice that one of these misquotations is inserted into what Munk calls the "définition générale de la prophétie." Another characteristic omission is Maimonides' failure to mention the immortality of the soul or the resurrection of the body, when he attempts explicitly to answer the question of Divine Providence. He begins his discussion (III, 16-24) by reproducing the philosophic argument against individual providence, mainly based on the observation that the virtuous are stricken with misery, while the wicked enjoy apparent happiness. It is therefore all the more perplexing that he pays no attention to what Leibniz has called "le remède [qui] est tout prêt dans l'autre vie." Neither does he mention that remedy in his express recapitulation of the view of Providence characteristic of the literal sense of the Torah. On the other hand, he elsewhere explains in the same context the "good at thy latter end" alluded to in Deuteronomy

106 I, 47, 46 (51b-52a; 68, 16-21); 2 (14a; 16, 22-17, 3).
107 Cf., in this connection, III, 8 (14a-b; 313, 22-314, 14).
108 This is not to deny that Maimonides mentions here the "other world," in connection with such views of Providence as he rejects or the truth of which he neither discusses nor asserts. The phrase in III, 22 (46a; 354, 3-4), "the thing which remains of man after death," is naturally noncommittal with respect to the immortality of the individual soul. Cf. I, 74 (121b; 155, 9-10).
109 Théodicée, §17.
110 III, 17 (34b-37b; 338, 21-343, 5).
8:16 as the fortitude acquired by the privations from which Israel had suffered while wandering through the desert.\footnote{III, 24 (52b-53a; 362, 10-363, 4). Cf. M.T. Teshubah 8, 1-2.}

The fourth and last kind of hints to be indicated here are the rashei perakim. This expression, which we have hitherto rendered as “chapter headings,” may also mean “beginnings of chapters.” In some cases, indeed, Maimonides gives us important hints by the initial word or words of a chapter. The opening word of the section devoted to the rational explanation of Biblical commandments (III, 25-49) is the noun, al-af’al (“the actions”). The af’al, synonymously used with amal, constitute the second half of the law, the first half consisting of drat\footnote{Cf. in particular III, 52 (130b; 464, 26-465, 5) with Farabi, Thṣā al-‘ulām, chap. 5 (or the Hebrew translation by Falakera, in Reshit ḥokmah, ed. by David, p. 59). For the two Arabic words for “actions,” cf., for instance, III 25 (57a: 368, 8 and 10).} (“opinions”). Thus this opening gives us a hint that all the preceding chapters of the Guide (I-III, 24) are devoted to the “opinions,” as distinguished from “actions,” which are taught or prescribed by the law. The initial words in the first chapter (III, 8) devoted to theodicy, or the question of providence, is the expression “All bodies which come into existence and perish.” These words indicate that this whole group of chapters (III, 8-24) deals exclusively with bodies which come into existence and perish, and not with bodies or souls which do not come into existence or perish. That this guess is correct is shown by other remarks of Maimonides.\footnote{III, 23 (50b-51a; 360, 1-14); 54 (135a; 470, 21-26).} From this opening, moreover, we must draw the inference that all preceding chapters (I, 1-III, 7) are devoted to things which do not come into existence and perish, and in particular to souls or intelligences which do not come into existence and perish, i.e., to ma’aseh merkabah. This inference is confirmed by Maimonides’ statement, made at the end of Book III, Chapter 7, that all the preceding chapters are indispensable for the right understanding of ma’aseh merkabah, whereas in the following chapters not a word will be said, either explicitly or allusively, about that most exalted topic. Equally important are the beginnings of Book III, Chapter 24, which opens with the ambiguous word ‘amr, which may mean “thing”
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as well as "command,"\textsuperscript{114} and the beginning of the very first chapter of the whole work.

Necessity has led us to make such incoherent and fragmentary remarks about Maimonides' methods of presenting the truth that it will not be amiss if we conclude this chapter with a simile which may drive home its main content to those readers who are more interested in the literary than in the philosophic question. There are books the sentences of which resemble highways, or even motor roads. But there are also books the sentences of which resemble rather winding paths which lead along precipices concealed by thickets and sometimes even along well-hidden and spacious caves. These depths and caves are not noticed by the busy workmen hurrying to their fields, but they gradually become known and familiar to the leisured and attentive wayfarer. For is not every sentence rich in potential recesses? May not every noun be explained by a relative clause which may profoundly affect the meaning of the principal sentence and which, even if omitted by a careful writer, will be read by the careful reader?\textsuperscript{115} Cannot miracles be wrought by such little words as "almost,"\textsuperscript{116} "perhaps," "seemingly"? May not a statement assume a different shade of meaning by being cast in the form of a conditional sentence? And is it not possible to hide the conditional nature of such a sentence by turning it into a very long sentence and, in particular, by inserting into it a parenthesis of some length? It is to a conditional sentence of this kind that Maimonides confides his general definition of prophecy.\textsuperscript{117}

VI. THE GUIDE AND THE CODE

As we have seen, the Guide is devoted to the true science of the law, as distinguished from the science of the law in the usual sense, the fiqh. It remains to be considered whether, according to Maimonides, the two kinds, or parts, of the science of the law

\textsuperscript{114} Cf. III, 24 (54a; 364, 16 and 20 f.).
\textsuperscript{115} Cf. in this connection I, 21 (26a; 33, 11-17), 27 vers. fin.
\textsuperscript{116} Cf. III, 19 (39a; 345, 6).
are of equal dignity or whether one of them is superior to the other.

Several arguments tend to show that Maimonides attached a higher importance to the *fiqh*, or to use the Hebrew term, to the *talmud*,118 than he did to the subject of the *Guide*: (1) He calls his talmudic code "our great work," whereas he describes the *Guide* as "my treatise." (2) The former exercised a great influence on traditional Judaism, in which respect the *Guide*, already two or three centuries after its publication far surpassed by the *Zohar*119 in deep and popular appeal, cannot possibly compete. (3) Even under the profoundly changed circumstances of the present time, the *Mishneh Torah* is able to elicit strong and deep emotions in modern readers, whereas the *Guide* is of hardly any interest to people who do not happen to be historians. (4) Whereas the subject matter of the *Mishneh Torah* is easily ascertainable, the question of the field to which the subjects of the *Guide* belong is highly perplexing; it is not a philosophic nor a theological work, nor a book of religion.120 (5) The code is styled a "repetition of the Torah," whereas the "treatise" is a mere "guide for the perplexed." (6) The *fiqh*’s precedence to the subject matter of the *Guide* (the *ma’aseh bereshit* and *ma’aseh merkabah*) is expressly stated by Maimonides when he says, as it were in defense of the *talmud* against the sages of the Talmud, that "although those things [the explanation of the precepts of the Torah] were called by the sages a small thing—for the sages have said 'a great thing is *ma’aseh merkabah*, and a small thing is the discussion of Abbaye and Raba’—yet they ought to have precedence."121 (7) Having gone so far, one might be tempted to go even farther and assert that the subject of the *Guide* is subservient to and implied in the *talmud*. For Maimonides explicitly says that *pardes* (i.e., *ma’aseh merkabah* and *ma’aseh bereshit*) is included in the *talmud*.122 This argument might be reinforced by (8) a hint which, as such, in a book such as the *Guide*, is incomparably more significant than an

118 Cf. III, 54 (182b; 467, 19-22) with M.T. Talmud torah 1, 11.
120 See above, p. 46.
121 M. T. Yesodei ha-torah, 4, 13.
122 M. T. Talmud torah, 1, 12.
explicit statement. Maimonides explains the true science of the law at the very beginning of his work, whereas he explains the meaning of *fiqh* in the very last chapter. To understand this hint, we must make use of another hint contained in the "chapter headings" of the first and the last chapters. The first chapter begins with the word "Image," while the last chapter opens with the term "Wisdom." This indicates that readers of the *Guide* are to be led from "Image," the sphere of imagination, to "Wisdom," the realm of intelligence: the way which readers of the *Guide* go is an ascent from the lower to the higher, indeed, from the lowest to the highest knowledge. Now the last of the themes treated in the *Guide* is law proper, i.e., the commands and prohibitions of the Torah, and not *ma'aseh bereshit* and *ma'aseh merkabah*, which are dealt with in the preceding sections. Consequently, the precepts of the law, far from being "a small thing," are actually the highest subject, indeed, the end and purpose of the true science of the law. (9) This conclusion is confirmed by an express statement by Maimonides, which establishes the following ascending order of dignity: (a) knowledge of the truth, based on tradition only; (b) such knowledge, based on demonstration; (c) *fiqh*.\(^{123}\) (10) This hierarchy is also in accordance with the saying of the sages that not study, but action is most important, and it is actions which are determined by the *fiqh*. That hierarchy is imitated by the whole plan of the *Guide*, inasmuch as Maimonides assigns the explanation of the laws to the last group of chapters of that work, and as he explains the meaning of *fiqh* in the last chapter of it: the end is the best.

We have marshaled here all the evidence in favor of the view that Maimonides attached greater importance to the *Mishneh Torah* than to the *Guide*, and hope not to have missed a single argument which has been or could plausibly be adduced in its support. Impressive as they may seem at first sight, however, these arguments possess no validity whatsoever. The second and third arguments are wholly immaterial, for they do not reflect Maimonides' own conviction, but deal exclusively with what other people thought, or think of the matter. Neither can the fourth argument claim serious consideration, for it, too, is neither based on a Maimonidean statement, nor does, in itself,
the perplexing nature of the subject matter of a book necessarily
prove its lower rank; the example of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*
might be to the point. We shall, then, turn to the remaining
seven arguments which are at least apparently based on explicit
or implicit statements of Maimonides.

The inference drawn from the description of the *Mishneh
Torah* as “our great work” and of the *Guide* as “my treatise” is
of little weight. For it is based on a hint, and no evidence has
thus far been forthcoming to prove the fact that, or to show the
reason why, Maimonides was prevented from stating quite
openly that the halakah is of higher dignity than the subject of
the *Guide*. The description of the *Mishneh Torah* as a “great”
work may very well refer to its length rather than to its dignity,
for it is quite natural that a code should be lengthier than the
discussion of “roots.” Or are we to believe that Maimonides
attached a higher value to the “great book” of the Sabean
Iṣḥāq “on the laws of the Sabean and the details of their reli-
gion and their feasts and their sacrifices and their prayers and
the other subjects of their religion” than he did to the “book”
of the same unknown author “on the defence of the religion of
the Sabean?” Moreover, it is doubtful whether Maimonides
actually called the *Guide* a “treatise,” rather than a “speech,”
and whether he called the *Mishneh Torah* a “work.” “Work”
would be a synonym for “book.” While Maimonides, for the
most part, uses the two terms interchangeably, yet in one in-
stance at least he hints at a distinction between *kitāb* (sefer,
“book”) and *taʾlif* (hībbur, usually translated by “work”). He
does this when speaking of the contradictions which are to be
found “in any book or in any *taʾlif.*” Abravanel, in his com-
mentary on this passage, suggests that Maimonides means by
“books” the books par excellence, i.e., the Bible, while he means
by *tawālīf* (or, rather, hībburīm) the talmudic and philosophic
literature. However grateful we ought to be to Abravanel for his
indicating the problem, we certainly cannot accept his solution.
For in the same section of the *Guide* Maimonides mentions also

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125 See Louis Ginzberg's note s.v. *hibbur*, in his appendix to I. Efros's *Philoso-
126 I, Introd. (gb; 11, 7-8).
the "books" of the philosophers. On the other hand, two lines below this distinction, Maimonides applies the word ta'li! to such works as the Mishnah, the Baraitot, and the Gemara. We shall then suggest that by occasionally distinguishing between "books" and tawālif, Maimonides intended to point out once for all the distinction between such writings as the Bible and the works of philosophers on the one hand, and other literature, as exemplified by the talmudic compilation on the other hand. In fact, "compilation" would be a more literal translation of ta'li! or hibbur than is "work" or "book." We know from the example of maqāla that Maimonides, when using a word emphatically, uses it in its original sense, which, as such, is often more hidden, rather than in its derivative and more conventional meaning. Thus we ought to render ta'li! or hibbur, when emphatically used by Maimonides, by "compilation," rather than by "work." Since he doubtless uses it emphatically when he regularly calls the Mishneh Torah a ta'li! or a hibbur, we ought to substitute the translation "our great compilation," for the usual translation "our great work." Maimonides does not, then, distinguish between the Guide and the Mishneh Torah as between a treatise and a sublime work, but rather as between a confidential communication and an extensive compilation.

It is likewise but a popular fallacy to assume that Maimonides attributes a higher dignity to the Mishneh Torah than to the Guide, because he calls the former "our great composition,"

127 I, Introd. (11b; 13, 8). Abravanel's comment may have been suggested by a mistake of Ibn Tibbon (or of a copyist or printer), since we find, in our editions of Ibn Tibbon's translation, the words "the books of the philosophers" rendered by "the words of the philosophers." But it is also possible that that suggestion was caused by I, 8 (18b; 22, 26-27), where a distinction is drawn between the "books" of the prophets and the tawālif (or hibburim) of the "men of science."

128 Cf. I, Introd. (10a, 11, 19) with ibid. (10b-11a; 12, 12-19).

129 The correctness of this translation becomes fully apparent when one examines the way in which Maimonides employs, in his introduction to M. T., the terms היסוס and היסוס as against היסוס and היסוס. The M. T. is a היסוס, because he has composed it היסוס דרכי השכובה המוסברת מלכ אל הגוברים וגו (i.e., from the talmudic and gaonic literatures). Cf. Teshubah 4, 7 (86b 11 Hyamson). For the original meaning of היסוס, see also Yesodei ha-torah, 1, 11; 3, 7. L. Blau's suggestion (in MbM, II, 395 f.) that hibbur corresponds to summa, as distinguished from commentatio, is ruled out by the fact that both M. T. and C. M. are called by Maimonides hibburim (or tawālif). See, for example, I, 71 (93b; 121, 19).
whereas he calls the latter "my treatise." For the plural is not necessarily a *pluralis majestatis*. The significance of the singular and the plural in Maimonidean usage comes out most clearly in the discussion of Providence. There, he distinguishes, with an unequivocalness which could hardly be surpassed, between "our opinion" and "my opinion." He introduces "what I believe" as one interpretation of "our opinion, i.e., the opinion of our law," and contrasts it with the interpretation accepted by "the general run of our scholars." Somewhat later he distinguishes the opinion of "our religious community" about divine knowledge from "my discourse" upon that subject.\textsuperscript{130} Even more explicitly he demarcates "what we say, viz., we, the community of the adherents of the law" and "our belief" from the opinion of the philosophers and "what I say." Finally, he distinguishes between "the opinion of our law," which he had identified before with "our opinion," and the correct, or "my" opinion.\textsuperscript{131} One may explain this distinction in the following way: "our opinion" is based on the literal sense of the Bible, whereas "my opinion" is in accordance with the intention of the Bible, i.e., with its hidden or secret meaning. For "my opinion" brings into harmony the intelligible view with the literal sense of the Bible.\textsuperscript{132} "My opinion" is distinguished from "our opinion" by including some additional idea which reveals itself only after a careful examination and which alone really matters. "Our opinion," on the other hand, is the opinion to which all consent and which all repeat and which does not contain any idea peculiar to any individual, and especially not to "my opinion."\textsuperscript{133} Although the identity of the correct opinion with "my opinion" is yet to be proved, and although in the present stage of research it would be rash to exclude the possibility that "my opinion," too, is an exoteric opinion, it is most important in the present connection to realize that the distinction between "our opinion" and "my opinion" is characteristic not only of Maimonides' discussion of Providence, but also of the whole *Guide*. This is, indeed, the considered view of a medieval commentator, who sees in the distinc-\textsuperscript{130} III, 17 (34b; 338, 21-24). Cf. *ibid.* (35b; 340, 10 ff.). III, 18 in fine. 
\textsuperscript{131} III, 20 (41a-42a; 347, 21-348, 16); 23 (49b; 358, 26-359, 1).
\textsuperscript{132} III, 17 (34b-35b; 338, 22; 339, 16; 340, 13 ff.). Cf. *ibid.* (37b; 342, 26-27).
\textsuperscript{133} Cf. III, 23 (50a; 359, 4-15).
tion here made between the opinion of "the general run of our scholars" and "my opinion" merely the application of a general principle which Maimonides pronounces at the beginning of his book by quoting Proverbs 22:17. He understands this verse to signify "Bow down thine ear, and hearken to the words of the sages, but apply thine heart unto mine opinion." This verse, then, establishes from the outset the principle of the Guide to reveal "my opinion" as an "addition" to "our opinion." Therefore the work is called "my speech." This conclusion is confirmed, rather than refuted by Maimonides' immediately preceding quotation from Proverbs 8:4, "Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of man," which, in Maimonides' interpretation, means to say that his call is addressed to the few elect individuals partaking of the angelic nature, while his articulate speech is addressed to the vulgar. For, as has been shown, "my speech" is far from being identical with "my articulate speech"; "my speech" or perhaps "my opinion" is much more likely to be identical with "my call." Thus, we repeat, the Guide is "my speech" revealing "my opinion," as distinguished from "our opinion," expressed in "our compilation," the Mishneh Torah, where generally speaking, Maimonides appears as the mouthpiece of the Jewish community or of the Jewish tradition. Since Maimonides doubtless subordinated his own views to those of the Jewish tradition, one may object, his hint of calling the Guide "my" book and the Mishneh Torah "our" book would still prove that he attached a higher dignity to the latter work. We must therefore discuss the remaining six arguments.

The fifth argument is based on the hints supplied by the titles of the two books; a "repetition of the Torah" must be of a much higher order than a mere "guide for the perplexed." We shall not raise the objection that the former title ought not to be translated by "repetition of the Torah," but rather by "the second [book] after the Torah." It is true that the latter trans-
lation is based on the only explicit statement by which Maimonides justifies the title of his code. But a book which is second to another book and which restates its only authentic interpretation may also rightly be called a repetition thereof. The Mishneh Torah certainly is a repetition of the oral law, which, according to Maimonides, is the only authentic interpretation of the (written) Torah. It is hardly necessary to add that the allusion to Deuteronomy, is anything but unintentional. It should not be forgotten, however, that, some time before Maimonides, Abraham bar Hiyya had drawn the inference from the traditional designation of the fifth book of Moses as “Mishneh Torah” that a distinction is to be made between the Torah, i.e., the second, third, and fourth books of Moses, and the Mishneh Torah, i.e., the fifth book. According to Abraham, who, as it were, anticipated the most important result of modern Biblical criticism, the Torah regulates the “order of service” (i.e., of worship) to be followed by the “holy congregation,” which cares little for earthly things and in particular not for national defense. This “order of service” is the rule of life which Israel followed while wandering through the desert, when it was protected in a miraculous way against any external menace, and which is also to be followed by Israel whenever it lives in exile and, unable to defend itself against its enemies, must place its reliance exclusively upon God’s mercy. The Mishneh Torah, on the other hand, adds to the “order of service,” which it presupposes or repeats, “the order of service to the kingdom”; it is addressed to the “just kingdom,” a community undetached from earthly things and concerned about national defense. Mainly devoted to matters of jurisdiction, especially in agricultural life, and to laws concerning kings and wars, it establishes a rule of life which Israel followed as long as it lived in its

137 See Blau, MbM, II, 338. From this fact, pointed out by him, Blau draws the inference that “das Wesen des Buches ist im Worte Mishneh Torah ausgedrückt,” viz., it is not expressed by the words Mishneh Torah. And he adds in italics: “Der Name Mischne Torah findet sich tatsächlich kein zweitesmal bei Maimuni.” If this remark were correct, it certainly would deserve to be italicized, since it would show that Maimonides attached an extremely high and secret importance to the name Mishneh Torah. But as a matter of fact, that name occurs, I believe, ten times in the Guide.

I venture to suggest that Maimonides remembered Abraham bar Hiyya's interpretation when he selected the name *Mishneh Torah* for his code, which contained not only the laws of exile but also those of the land; and that a certain reason, implied in Abraham's interpretation, led Maimonides to conclude his code so impressively with the laws regarding kings and their wars. In translating the title by "repetition of the Torah," we are also mindful of the peculiar significance with which the word *repetition* is used by Maimonides. But does the fact that the *Mishneh Torah* is a repetition of the Torah entitle us to assume that Maimonides judged that work, or its subject, to be more important than the *Guide* or its subject? “Repetition of the Torah” is an ambiguous expression: it may mean a repetition, reproducing the Torah in accordance with its external proportions, or one reproducing it with regard to the hidden and true proportions of its various subjects. There can be no doubt that the code reproduces the Torah according to its external proportions only. For the Torah consists of true “opinions” and of “actions,” and whereas the “actions” are determined by it in great detail and with extreme precision, the true “opinions” are indicated only in bare outline. This proportion was preserved intact by the Talmud, since the sages of the Talmud spoke for the most part of precepts and manners, and not of opinions and beliefs. In exactly the same way, the *Mishneh Torah* deals in the most detailed fashion with “actions,” but speaks of the basic truths only briefly and allusively (though by allusions approximating clear pronouncements) and by haphazard. The *Guide*, on the other hand, is devoted mainly, if not exclusively, to “opinions,” as distinguished from “actions.” Now “opinions” are as much superior in dignity to “actions” as is the perfection of the soul to that of the body. Therefore, the highest aim of the Torah is the regulation of our opinions, to which the order, prescribed by the Torah, of our actions is subservient. Thus the true proportions of the subjects of the Torah are imitated not by the

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139 Hegyon ha-nefesh, ed. by Freimann, pp. 38a-39b.
140 III, 27 (59b and 60a; 371, 29 f.; 372, 9 f.); 28 (60b-61a; 373, 7-17); I, Introd. (11a-b; 15, 2-3).
141 I, Introd. (9b and 6a; 3, 7; 6, 8-9); I, 71 (97a; 125, 14).
142 III, 27.
Mishneh Torah, which is devoted to the science of the law in its usual sense, but by the Guide, which is devoted to the true science of the law. We conclude, then, that whereas the Mishneh Torah is the "repetition of the Torah" simpliciter the Guide is the "repetition of the Torah" par excellence. Should the objection be raised that the title of the Guide does not indicate its being a repetition of the Torah, we need only refer to the affinity between guide and guidance (torah). The Guide is a repetition or imitation of the Torah particularly suitable to "perplexed" people, while the Mishneh Torah is such a repetition addressed primarily to people who are not "perplexed."

The sixth argument, referring to the explicit statement of Maimonides concerning the precedence of the fiqh, ignores his failure to contradict the talmudic saying that "the discussion of Abbaye and Raba is a small thing" as compared with ma'aseh merkabah. He merely explains that saying by adding to it the remark that knowledge of the precepts ought to precede concern with the secret topics. For knowledge of the precepts is indispensable for their execution, and their execution is indispensable for one's composure of mind, as well as for the establishment of peace and order; these, in turn, are indispensable for acquiring "the life of the coming world" or for acquiring true opinions.

That is to say, knowledge of the precepts is merely a means to an end, which, in its turn, is only a means to another, the ultimate end, i.e., to the understanding of ma'aseh bereshit and ma'aseh

143 An allusion to that relation may be found in the fact that the M. T. consists of 14 (= 2 x 7) books, and that the precepts of the law are divided in the Guide, too, into 14 groups, whereas the explanation of the highest secret of the Torah, i.e., of ma'aseh merkabah, is given in 7 chapters of the Guide. Compare also the 49 (= 7 x 7) chapters which lead up from "Image" to "Angels," i.e., to a subject which is second to one subject only; and the 70 (= 10 x 7) chapters which lead up from "Image" to rakab, i.e., to the grammatical root of merkabah. To understand the number 70, one has to bear in mind that the word adamiyyun occurs, if I am not mistaken, 10 times in the Guide, and that the Torah speaks according to the language of benei adam. The word adam is explained in the fourteenth chapter of the Guide; the number of the chapter explaining the various meanings of man is the same as the number of books of the M. T. or of parts of the law. See also above, n. 137.

144 Compare the explanation of torah as hiddya in III, 13 (253a; 327, 10 f.); I, 2 (13b; 16, 9) with the synonymous use of hada and dalla in II, 12 (26b; 195, 27).

145 M. T. Yesodei ha-torah, 4, 13. Cf. M. T. Teshubah 8, 5-6, 14; M. N. III, 27 (59b; 371, 25-28).
merkabah. Knowledge of the precepts precedes, then, knowledge of the secrets, as the means precedes the end. Maimonides adds yet another reason: the precepts can be known to everybody, to young and old, to unintelligent as well as intelligent, whereas the secret teaching, which is clear and manifest to the “men of speculation” only, was not fully grasped even by some of the greatest sages of the Talmud.146 We conclude, therefore, that the precedence attributed by Maimonides to knowledge of the precepts is merely a priority in time, and not at all a superior dignity.

The seventh argument is based on Maimonides’ statement that ma'aseh bereshit and ma'aseh merkabah belong to the talmud. Maimonides makes this statement in connection with his division of the study of the Torah into three parts: the study of the written Torah, that of the oral Torah, and the Talmud. The study of the prophetic writings and hagiographa belongs to that of the written Torah; the study of explanations thereof is part of the oral Torah; and the study of secret subjects is included in the talmud.147 In order to understand this statement correctly, we must first bear in mind that talmud may be used ambiguously for a certain group of writings (the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds), as well as for a peculiar kind of study. In the former sense, the statement that secret topics belong to the talmud, and not to the written or oral Torah, would mean that they are to be found in the Talmud rather than in the Bible,148 but it would have no bearing upon the subordination of the secret teaching to the fiqh. If we take talmud, as we probably should, in its second meaning, it would indeed seem at first sight that Maimonides subordinates the study of the secret topics to the fiqh, just as he certainly subordinates the study of the prophetic writings and the hagiographa to that of the Pentateuch. But what does he actually say? Starting from the implicit assumption that all studies which are of any value are comprised within the study of the Torah, he raises the question: to which part of that

146 III, Introd. (2a; 297, 6-8, 9-10). Cf. also I, 17. M. T. Yesodei ha-torah 4, 13.
147 M. T. Talmud torah, 1, 12.
148 Cf. I, 71 (93b and 94a; 121, 11 f., 25 f.) and the parallel passage in III, Introd. (2b; 297, 17 f.).
study does the study of that “great thing” (i.e., of the secret teaching) belong? And he answers: since the secret topics are the most difficult topics,\textsuperscript{149} their study must belong to the most advanced part of the all-comprising study of the Torah, i.e., to the \textit{talmud}. He does not preclude the possibility that this most advanced study be subdivided into two distinct parts, the \textit{fiqh} and the true science of the law.\textsuperscript{150} In fact, he alludes to this possibility when he says that men, after having reached a more advanced stage of wisdom, ought to devote their time almost exclusively to the \textit{talmud}, according to the level of their intelligence.

The tenth argument is based on the saying of R. Simeon ben Gamaliel that not study, but action is most important, and on the assumption that Maimonides must have accepted this saying in its apparent meaning. But, according to his explanation,\textsuperscript{151} it merely refers to speeches about laws and virtues and merely demands that man’s actions be in accordance with his speeches expressing obedient and virtuous thoughts. Otherwise, he expressly recognizes in the \textit{Mishneh Torah} that study of the Torah is superior in dignity to all other actions.\textsuperscript{152} Above all, in the last chapter of the \textit{Guide} he asserts that most precepts of the law are merely a means for the acquisition of moral virtue, which, in turn, is merely a means subservient to the true end, namely, speculative virtue, or the true knowledge of things divine.\textsuperscript{153}

In the light of this Maimonidean assertion and of the place where it is found, the eighth argument cannot possibly be sound. If, indeed, the first “chapter heading” of the \textit{Guide}, “Image,” were contrasted with a last “chapter heading,” “Wisdom,” we certainly would have to conclude that all readers of the \textit{Guide} are meant to ascend from the lowest to the highest knowledge. But, as it happens, the last “chapter heading” is not “Wisdom,” but “The word wisdom.” Now “The word wisdom” is not necessarily superior to “Image,” as is shown by the fact, constantly present in Maimonides’ mind, that many learned people living

\textsuperscript{149} M. T. Yesodei ha-torah 2, 12; 4, 11, 13.
\textsuperscript{150} I, Introd. (3a; 2, 12-14); III, 54 (132a-b; 467, 2-22).
\textsuperscript{151} C. M. on Abot, I, 17.
\textsuperscript{152} M. T. Talmud torah, 1, 3; 3, 3-5.
\textsuperscript{153} III, 54 (133b-134b; 468, 22-470, 11).
in a world of imaginary and imaginative ideas call their possession and use of these ideas "wisdom" or "speculation." On the other hand, "wisdom," if rightly understood, indicates something absolutely superior to "image"; a man who understands the word wisdom according to its true meaning has overcome, or is on the way to overcoming, his imaginary views. The equivocal last "chapter heading," when contrasted with the unequivocal first "chapter heading," indicates the ambiguity inherent in the reading of the Guide. Its reader may ascend from imaginary views to true wisdom, but he also may not leave the world of imagination for a single moment, so that he finally arrives at the mere word "wisdom," which is but a shadow or image of wisdom itself. But let us apply to such readers the Maimonidean dictum that there is no reason for mentioning them in this place in this treatise. Let us think of that reader only to whom the Guide is addressed and who, after having undergone training by the Guide, will certainly have substituted intelligent views for imaginary ones. For such a reader the study of the Guide is an ascent from the lowest to the highest knowledge. This is only tantamount to saying that by understanding the last chapter, or the last group of chapters, he will have attained to a knowledge more complete than that which he had acquired before reading these chapters. But it obviously does not of necessity indicate the superior dignity of the subjects treated in the last group of chapters.

In order to grasp the principle underlying the arrangement of the various subjects in the Guide, we must remind ourselves of its original purpose to repeat the Torah with regard to the hidden proportions of its subjects. The Torah having been given to man by an intermediary prophet, we may be permitted for a little while to replace Torah by prophecy. Maimonides asserts that the prophet's ascent to the highest knowledge is followed by his descent to the "people of the earth," i.e., to their government and instruction. The prophet is, then, a man who not only has attained the greatest knowledge, indeed a degree of knowledge which is not attained by mere philosophers, but who

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154 I, Introd. (4b; 4, 11-12).
155 I, 15 (22b; 28, 4-7). Cf. Plato, Republic, VII, 519c8-520a4 (also 514a, 517d5).
is able also to perform the highest political functions. A similar combination of theoretical and political excellence is required for the understanding of the secret teaching of the prophets. Since the Guide is devoted to the interpretation of that secret teaching, Maimonides will also have imitated, in some manner or other, the way of the prophets. To be sure, the prophet is enabled to perform his political function of governing the "people of the earth" and of teaching them by the power of his imagination, i.e., by his capacity of representing the truth to the vulgar by means of images or parables, as Maimonides clearly intimates in the general definition of prophecy and in the chapter following it. He himself, however, attempts to replace the parables by another method of representing the truth. Yet the fundamental similarity between the prophet, the bringer of the secret teaching, and the interpreter of the secret teaching remains unaltered by that change in the method. Therefore, we are from the outset entitled to expect that the sequence of topics in the Guide would imitate the way of the prophets, which is ascent, followed by descent. This expectation is proved to be correct by the actual structure of the Guide. Maimonides, or his reader, gradually and slowly climbs up from the depth of "image" to ma'aseh merkabah, the highest subject, which is fully treated in Book III, Chapters 1-7 only. At the end of this exposition, Maimonides declares that he will say no more about that subject. Accordingly, he begins the next

156 That Maimonides conceived of the prophets as statesmen is shown also by the main division of the affirmative precepts in S. M. (or in the enumeration of the 613 commandments at the beginning of M. T.). There he lists first the precepts regulating the relations between man and God, and then those which order the relations among men. (See the remarks of Peritz in MbM, I, 445 ff.). The second class of these precepts (Nos. 172-248) opens with the commandments regarding the prophet, the king, and the high court; the prophet evidently is the head of the political organization. Cf. II, 40 (85b-86a; 270, 24-27). The question of the relation between king and priest is touched upon in III, 45 (98b; 422, 9-13). How far Maimonides accepted the teaching of the Faldsifa, according to which a "priestly city" is one of the bad regimes, must here remain an open question. See Ibn Ba'ga, k. tadbir al-mutawahhid, chap. 1, in the Hebrew extraction by Moses Narboni, ed. by D. Herzog, p. 8; and Averroes, Paraphrasis in Rempubl. Plat., tr. 3, in Opp. Aristotelis (Venice 1550), III, 187c19-24.

157 See above, p. 57 f.
158 See also Falakera, Reshit hokmah, ed. David, p. 30.
chapter with the heading, "All bodies which come into existence and perish." Finally, he descends one more step, from "opinion" to "actions." The same prophetic way of ascent, followed by descent, is evidently used as a model in his recommended order of studies for unprophetic men, referred to in the ninth argument, namely, (1) knowledge of the truth, based on tradition only; (2) such knowledge based on demonstration; (3) fiqh. For the demonstrative knowledge of truth is the highest degree attainable to unprophetic men.158

To sum up, according to Maimonides the Mishneh Torah is devoted to fiqh, the essence of which is to deal with actions; while the Guide deals with the secrets of the Torah, i.e., primarily opinions or beliefs, which it treats demonstratively, or at least as demonstratively as possible. Demonstrated opinions or beliefs are, according to Maimonides, absolutely superior in dignity to good actions or to their exact determination. In other words, the chief subject of the Guide is ma'aseh merkabah, which is "a great thing," while the chief subject of the Mishneh Torah is the precepts, which are "a small thing." Consequently, the subject of the Guide is, according to Maimonides, absolutely superior in dignity to the subject of the Mishneh Torah. Since the dignity of a book, caeteris paribus, corresponds to the dignity of its subject, and since, as is shown by a comparison of Maimonides' own introductory remarks to the two books, he wrote the Guide with no less skill and care than his code, we must conclude that he considered the Guide as absolutely superior in dignity.

This conclusion, based on the general principle underlying his entire work and nowhere contradicted by him, that knowledge of the truth is absolutely superior in dignity to any action, is reinforced by some further statements or hints. We have started from the distinction made by him at the very beginning of the Guide between the true science of the law and the fiqh: the former deals chiefly with the secrets of the Bible or, more generally, with opinions and beliefs both secret and public;160 in other words, it demonstrates the beliefs taught by the law. Maimonides repeats this distinction in the last chapter, in a

160 Cf., for example, I, 1 (12a; 14, 14), 18 (24a; 39, 7) with I, 35.
somewhat modified manner; he there distinguishes three sciences: the science of the Torah, wisdom, and *fiqh*. The science of the law, or the science of the Torah, does not demonstrate the basic principles taught by the law, since the law itself does not demonstrate them. The *fiqh*, which at the beginning of the *Guide* had been identified with the science of the law, is now clearly distinguished from it or from the science of the Torah, as well as from wisdom. Wisdom is the demonstration of the opinions taught by the law. Now the *Guide* is devoted to such demonstration; hence the true science of the law, mentioned at the beginning as the subject of the work, is identical with wisdom, as distinguished from both the science of the law and from the *fiqh*. Maimonides repeats, then, the distinction between the true science of the law and the science of the law; yet he no longer calls the former a science of the law, but wisdom, and no longer identifies the (ordinary) science of the law (or of the Torah) with the *fiqh*. The relation of wisdom to the *fiqh* is explained by a simile: the students of the *fiqh*, arriving at the divine palace, merely walk around it, whereas only speculation on the “roots,” i.e., demonstration of the basic truths taught by the law, leads one unto the presence of God.

Though Maimonides discloses his view at the end of his work only, he does not fail to give hints of it on previous suitable occasions. When he tells the story of his abandoned plan to write two books on the parables of the prophets and the Midrashim, he states that he had intended those books for the vulgar, but later realized that such an explanation would neither be suitable for, nor fill a need felt by the vulgar. That is why he has limited himself to that brief and allusive discussion of the basic truths of the law, which is to be found in his code. In the *Guide*, however, he goes on to say, he addresses himself to a man who has studied philosophy and who, while believing in the teachings of

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161 III, 54 (132b; 467, 18-20).
162 III, 54 (132a-b; 467, 2-9, 13-14).
163 III, 54 (132a-b; 467, 18-23 and 7 and 13-14). Cf. III, 41 (88b; 409, 15-16); M. T. Talmud torah, 1, 11-12.
164 III, 51 (123b-124a; 455, 21-28). In his commentary on this chapter, Shem Tob relates that “many talmudic scholars have asserted that Maimonides had not written this chapter, and that, if he did write it, it ought to be suppressed, or rather, it would deserve to be burned.”
the law, is perplexed in regard to them. Those sentences, enigmatic and elusive as they are, show clearly that the Guide was not addressed to the vulgar, nor the Mishneh Torah to the perplexed. Are we, then, to believe that the latter was written for students of philosophy who had not become perplexed as regards the teachings of the law? Hardly, since Maimonides does not tire of repeating that the code is devoted to the fiqh and consequently is addressed to students of fiqh, who may or may not be familiar with philosophy. This is also shown by his failure to discuss in the Mishneh Torah the basic truths of the law, according to his primary and main intention and only, as it were, incidentally or haphazardly. Evidently the Mishneh Torah was written also for people who had not studied philosophy at all and therefore were not perplexed; in other words, it was addressed to "all men." This is quite clearly the meaning of the following passage in the Guide: "I have already explained to all men the four differences by which the prophecy of our teacher Moses is distinguished from the prophecy of the other prophets, and I have proved it and made it manifest in the Commentary on the Mishna and in the Mishneh Torah." The meaning of "all men" (al-nás kāffa) is incidentally explained in connection with a synonymous phrase (ḡamī‘ al-nás): "all men, i.e., the vulgar." This allusion to the exoteric character of the code and the commentary naturally has to be taken into account, not only in the interpretation of these two works but also for the adequate understanding of all quotations from them in the Guide.

We conclude: The Mishneh Torah is primarily addressed to the general run of men, while the Guide is addressed to the small number of people who are able to understand by themselves.

165 I, Introd. (5b-6a; 5, 18-6, 11).
166 I, Introd. (3a; 2, 13-16); 71 (97a; 125, 23-24).
168 II, 35 in princ.; III, 22 (45b; 353, 10). Cf. also M. T., Introd., 4b, 4-19 (Hyamson), and Kōbes, II, 15b.