

# MAIMONIDES

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God  
and the  
Universe

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Presented by Rabbi Jeff Katz

אברהם אבינו  
ה"א

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אברהם אבינו ה"א

# הלכות

## יסודי התורה

יש בכללן עשר מצות. שש מצות עשה וארבע מצות לא-תעשה. וזהו פרטן: א) לידע שיש שם אלוה. ב) שלא יעלה במחשבה שיש שם אלוה אחר זולתי ה'. ג) ליחדו. ד) לאהבו. ה) ליראה ממנו. ו) לקדש שמו. ז) שלא לחלל את שמו. ח) שלא לאבד דברים שנקרא שמו עליהם. ט) לשמע מן הנביא המדבר בשמו. י) שלא לנסותו. וביאור כל המצות האלו בפרקים אלו:

### פ ר ק ראשון

א יסוד היסודות ועמוד החכמות לידע שיש שם מצוי ראשון. והוא מציא כל נמצא. וכל הנמצאים משמים וארץ ומה שביניהם לא נמצאו אלא מאמתת המצאו:

ב ואם יעלה על הדעת שהוא אינו מצוי אין דבר אחר יכול להמצאות:

ג ואם יעלה על הדעת שאין כל הנמצאים מלבדו מצויים הוא לבדו יהיה מצוי. ולא יבטל הוא לבטולם. שכל הנמצאים צריכים לו והוא ברוך-הוא אינו צריך להם ולא לאחד מהם. לפיכך אין אמפתו כאמתת אחד מהם:

ד הוא שהנביא אומר, ויי אלהים אמת. הוא לבדו האמת ואין לאחר אמת כאמתו. והוא שהתורה אומרת, אין עוד מלבדו. כלומר אין שם מצוי אמת מלבדו כמותו:

ה המצוי הזה הוא אלהי העולם אדון כל הארץ. והוא המנהיג הגלגל בכח שאין לו קץ ותכלית. בכח שאין לו הפסק. שהגלגל סובב תמיד ואי-אפשר שיסב בלא מסבב. והוא ברוך-הוא המסבב אותו בלא יד ובלא גוף:

וידיעת דבר זה מצות עשה. שנאמר, אנכי יי אלהיך. וכל המעלה על דעתו שיש שם אלוה אחר חוץ מזה עובר בלא-תעשה. שנאמר, לא-יהיה לך אלהים

being the same. If, on the other hand, they had never heard it mentioned, and if the knowledge of it was to prove the mission of Moses, what evidence would they have that this was really the name of God? Moreover, after God had made known that name to Moses, and had told him, "Go and gather the elders of Israel, . . . and they shall hearken to thy voice" (*ib.* xvi. 18), he replied, "Behold, they will not believe me nor hearken unto my voice," although God had told him, "And they will hearken to thy voice"; whereupon God answered, "What is that in thine hand?" and he said, "A rod" (*ib.* iv. 2). In order to obviate this dilemma, you must understand what I am about to tell you. You know how widespread were in those days the opinions of the Sabeans; all men, except a few individuals, were idolaters, that is to say, they believed in spirits, in man's power to direct the influences of the heavenly bodies, and in the effect of talismans. Any one who in those days laid claim to authority, based it either, like Abraham, on the fact that, by reasoning and by proof he had been convinced of the existence of a Being who rules the whole Universe, or that some spiritual power was conferred upon him by a star, by an angel, or by a similar agency; but no one could establish his claim on prophecy, that is to say, on the fact that God had spoken to him, or had entrusted a mission to him; before the days of Moses no such assertion had ever been made. You must not be misled by the statements that God spoke to the Patriarchs, or that He had appeared to them. For you do not find any mention of a prophecy which appealed to others, or which directed them. Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob, or any other person before them did not tell the people, "God said unto me, you shall do this thing, or you shall not do that thing," or "God has sent me to you." Far from it! for God spoke to them on nothing but of what especially concerned them, i.e., He communicated to them things relating to their perfection, directed them in what they should do, and foretold them what the condition of their descendants would be; nothing beyond this. They guided their fellow-men by means of argument and instruction, as is implied, according to the interpretation generally received amongst us, in the words "and the souls that they had gotten in Haran" (Gen. xii. 5). When God appeared to our Teacher Moses, and commanded him to address the people and to bring them the message, Moses replied that he might first be asked to prove the existence of God in the Universe, and that only after doing so he would be able to announce to them that God had sent him. For all men, with few exceptions, were ignorant of the existence of God; their highest thoughts did not extend beyond the heavenly sphere, its forms or its influences. They could not yet emancipate themselves from sensation, and had not yet attained to any intellectual perfection. Then God taught Moses how to teach them, and how to establish amongst them the belief in the existence of Himself, namely, by saying *Ehyeh asher Ehyeh*, a name derived from the verb *hayah* in the sense of "existing," for the verb *hayah* denotes "to be," and in Hebrew no difference is made between the verbs "to be" and "to exist." The principal point in this phrase is that the same word which denotes "existence," is repeated as an attribute. The word *asher*, "that," corresponds to the Arabic *illadi* and *illati*, and is an incomplete noun that must be completed by another noun; it may be considered as the subject of the predicate which follows. The first noun which is to be de-

scribed is *ehyeh*; the second, by which the first is described, is likewise *ehyeh*, the identical word, as if to show that the object which is to be described and the attribute by which it is described are in this case necessarily identical. This is, therefore, the expression of the idea that God exists, but not in the ordinary sense of the term; or, in other words, He is "the existing Being which is the the existing Being," that is to say, the Being whose existence is absolute. The proof which he was to give consisted in demonstrating that there is a Being of absolute existence, that has never been and never will be without existence. This I will clearly prove (II. Introd. Prop. 20 and chap. i.).

God thus showed Moses the proofs by which His existence would be firmly established among the wise men of His people. Therefore the explanation of the name is followed by the words, "Go, gather the elders of Israel," and by the assurance that the elders would understand what God had shown to him, and would accept it, as is stated in the words, "And they will hearken to thy voice." Then Moses replied as follows: They will accept the doctrine that God exists convinced by these intelligible proofs. But, said Moses, by what means shall I be able to show that this existing God has sent me? Thereupon God gave him the sign. We have thus shown that the question, "What is His name?" means "Who is that Being, which according to thy belief has sent thee?" The sentence, "What is his name" (instead of, Who is He), has here been used as a tribute of praise and homage, as though it had been said, Nobody can be ignorant of Thy essence and of Thy real existence; if, nevertheless, I ask what is Thy name, I mean, What idea is to be expressed by the name? (Moses considered it inappropriate to say to God that any person was ignorant of God's existence, and therefore described the Israelites as ignorant of God's name, not as ignorant of Him who was called by that name.)—The name *Jah* likewise implies eternal existence. *Shadday*, however, is derived from *day*, "enough"; comp. "for the stuff they had was sufficient" (*dayyam*, Exod. xxxvi. 7); the *shin* is equal to *asher*, "which," as in *she-kebar*, "which already" (Eccles. ii. 16). The name *Shadday*, therefore, signifies "he who is sufficient"; that is to say, He does not require any other being for effecting the existence of what He created, or its conservation: His existence is sufficient for that. In a similar manner the name *hasin* implies "strength"; comp. "he was strong (*hason*) as the oaks" (Amos ii. 9). The same is the case with "rock," which is a homonym, as we have explained (chap. xvi.). It is, therefore, clear that all these names of God are appellatives, or are applied to God by way of homonymy, like *zur* and others, the only exception being the tetragrammaton, the *Shem ha-me'orash* (the *nomen proprium* of God), which is not an appellative; it does not denote any attribute of God, nor does it imply anything except His existence. Absolute existence includes the idea of eternity, i.e., the necessity of existence. Note well the result at which we have arrived in this chapter.

## CHAPTER LXIV

KNOW that in some instances by the phrase "the name of the Lord," nothing but the name alone is to be understood; comp. "Thou shalt not take the

It is now clear that the action of bodies upon each other, according to their forms, prepares the substance for receiving the action of an incorporeal being, or Form. The existence of actions of purely incorporeal beings, in every case of change that does not originate in the mere combination of elements, is now firmly established. These actions do not depend on impact, or on a certain distance. They are termed "influence" (or "emanation"), on account of their similarity to a water-spring. The latter sends forth water in all directions, has no peculiar side for receiving or spending its contents; it springs forth on all sides, and continually waters both neighbouring and distant places. In a similar manner incorporeal beings, in receiving power and imparting it to others, are not limited to a particular side, distance, or time. They act continually; and whenever an object is sufficiently prepared, it receives the effect of that continuous action, called "influence" (or "emanation"). God being incorporeal, and everything being the work of Him as the efficient cause, we say that the Universe has been created by the Divine influence, and that all changes in the Universe emanate from Him. In the same sense we say that He caused wisdom to emanate from Him and to come upon the prophets. In all such cases we merely wish to express that an incorporeal Being, whose action we call "influence," has produced a certain effect. The term "influence" has been considered applicable to the Creator on account of the similarity between His actions and those of a spring. There is no better way of describing the action of an incorporeal being than by this analogy; and no term can be found that would accurately describe it. For it is as difficult to form an idea of that action as to form an idea of the incorporeal being itself. As we imagine only bodies or forces residing in bodies, so we only imagine actions possible when the agent is near, at a certain distance, and on a particular side. There are therefore persons who, on learning that God is incorporeal, or that He does not approach the object of His action, believe that He gives commands to angels, and that the latter carry them out by approach or direct contact, as is the case when we produce something. These persons thus imagine also the angels as bodies. Some of them, further, believe that God commands an action in words consisting, like ours, of letters and sound, and that thereby the action is done. All this is the work of the imagination, which is, in fact, identical with "evil inclination." For all our defects in speech or in character are either the direct or the indirect work of imagination. This is not the subject of the present chapter, in which we only intended to explain the term "influence" in so far as it is applied to incorporeal beings, namely, to God and to the Intelligences or angels. But the term is also applied to the forces of the spheres in their effects upon the earth; and we speak of the "influence" of the spheres, although the spheres are corporeal, and the stars, being corporeal, only act at certain distances, i.e., at a smaller or a greater distance from the centre, or at a definite distance from each other, a circumstance which led to Astrology.

As to our assertion that Scripture applies the notion of "influence" to God, compare "They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters" (Jer. ii. 13), i.e., the Divine influence that gives life or existence, for the two are undoubtedly identical. Further, "For with Thee is the fountain of life" (Ps. xxxvi. 10), i.e., the Divine influence that gives existence. The

concluding words of this verse, "in Thy light we see light," express exactly what we said, namely, that by the influence of the intellect which emanates from God we become wise, by it we are guided and enabled to comprehend the Active Intellect. Note this.

CHAPTER XIII

AMONG those who believe in the existence of God, there are found three different theories as regards the question whether the Universe is eternal or not.

First Theory.—Those who follow the Law of Moses, our Teacher, hold that the whole Universe, i.e., everything except God, has been brought by Him into existence out of non-existence. In the beginning God alone existed, and nothing else; neither angels, nor spheres, nor the things that are contained within the spheres existed. He then produced from nothing all existing things such as they are, by His will and desire. Even time itself is among the things created; for time depends on motion, i.e., on an accident in things which move, and the things upon whose motion time depends are themselves created beings, which have passed from non-existence into existence. We say that God *existed* before the creation of the Universe, although the verb *existed* appears to imply the notion of time; we also believe that He existed an infinite space of time before the Universe was created; but in these cases we do not mean time in its true sense. We only use the term to signify something analogous or similar to time. For time is undoubtedly an accident, and, according to our opinion, one of the created accidents, like blackness and whiteness; it is not a quality, but an accident connected with motion. This must be clear to all who understand what Aristotle has said on time and its real existence.

The following remark does not form an essential part of our present research; it will nevertheless be found useful in the course of this discussion. Many scholars do not know what time really is, and men like Galen were so perplexed about it that they asked whether time has a real existence or not; the reason for this uncertainty is to be found in the circumstance that time is an accident of an accident. Accidents which are directly connected with material bodies, e.g., colour and taste, are easily understood, and correct notions are formed of them. There are, however, accidents which are connected with other accidents, e.g., the splendour of colour, or the inclination and the curvature of a line; of these it is very difficult to form a correct notion, especially when the accident which forms the substratum for the other accident is not constant but variable. Both difficulties are present in the notion of time: it is an accident of motion, which is itself an accident of a moving object; besides, it is not a fixed property; on the contrary, its true and essential condition is, not to remain in the same state for two consecutive moments. This is the source of ignorance about the nature of time.

We consider time a thing created; it comes into existence in the same manner as other accidents, and the substances which form the substratum for the accidents. For this reason, viz., because time belongs to the things created, it cannot be said that God produced the Universe *in the beginning*.

Consider this well ; for he who does not understand it is unable to refute forcible objections raised against the theory of *Creatio ex nihilo*. If you admit the existence of time before the Creation, you will be compelled to accept the theory of the Eternity of the Universe. For time is an accident and requires a substratum. You will therefore have to assume that something [beside God] existed before this Universe was created, an assumption which it is our duty to oppose.

This is the first theory, and it is undoubtedly a fundamental principle of the Law of our teacher Moses ; it is next in importance to the principle of God's unity. Do not follow any other theory. Abraham, our father, was the first that taught it, after he had established it by philosophical research. He proclaimed, therefore, " the name of the Lord the God of the Universe " (Gen. xxi. 33) ; and he had previously expressed this theory in the words, " The Possessor of heaven and earth " (*ibid.* xiv. 22).

*"Plato"*  
*CO-exist. y primor-dial matter*  
Second Theory. The theory of all philosophers whose opinions and works are known to us is this : It is impossible to assume that God produced anything from nothing, or that He reduces anything to nothing ; that is to say, it is impossible that an object consisting of matter and form should be produced when that matter is absolutely absent, or that it should be destroyed in such a manner that that matter be absolutely no longer in existence. To say of God that He can produce a thing from nothing or reduce a thing to nothing is, according to the opinion of these philosophers, the same as if we were to say that He could cause one substance to have at the same time two opposite properties, or produce another being like Himself, or change Himself into a body, or produce a square the diagonal of which be equal to its side, or similar impossibilities. The philosophers thus believe that it is no defect in the Supreme Being that He does not produce impossibilities, for the nature of that which is impossible is constant—it does not depend on the action of an agent, and for this reason it cannot be changed. Similarly there is, according to them, no defect in the greatness of God, when He is unable to produce a thing from nothing, because they consider this as one of the impossibilities. They therefore assume that a certain substance has co-existed with God from eternity in such a manner that neither God existed without that substance nor the latter without God. But they do not hold that the existence of that substance equals in rank that of God ; for God is the cause of that existence, and the substance is in the same relation to God as the clay is to the potter, or the iron to the smith ; God can do with it what He pleases ; at one time He forms of it heaven and earth, at another time He forms some other thing. Those who hold this view also assume that the heavens are transient, that they came into existence, though not from nothing, and may cease to exist, although they cannot be reduced to nothing. They are transient in the same manner as the individuals among living beings which are produced from some existing substance, and are again reduced to some substance that remains in existence. The process of genesis and destruction is, in the case of the heavens, the same as in that of earthly beings.

The followers of this theory are divided into different schools, whose opinions and principles it is useless to discuss here ; but what I have mentioned is common to all of them. Plato holds the same opinion. Aristotle says in

his *Physics*, that according to Plato the heavens are transient. This view is also stated in Plato's *Timæus*. His opinion, however, does not agree with our belief ; only superficial and careless persons wrongly assume that Plato has the same belief as we have. For whilst we hold that the heavens have been created from absolutely nothing, Plato believes that they have been formed out of something.—This is the second theory. *"Ans to the"*

Third Theory.—viz., that of Aristotle, his followers, and commentators. Aristotle maintains, like the adherents of the second theory, that a corporeal object cannot be produced without a corporeal substance. He goes, however, farther, and contends that the heavens are indestructible. For he holds that the Universe in its totality has never been different, nor will it ever change : the heavens, which form the permanent element in the Universe, and are not subject to genesis and destruction, have always been so ; time and motion are eternal, permanent, and have neither beginning nor end ; the sublunary world, which includes the transient elements, has always been the same, because the *materia prima* is itself eternal, and merely combines successively with different forms ; when one form is removed, another is assumed. This whole arrangement, therefore, both above and here below, is never disturbed or interrupted, and nothing is produced contrary to the laws or the ordinary course of Nature. He further says—though not in the same terms—that he considers it impossible for God to change His will or conceive a new desire ; that God produced this Universe in its totality by His will, but not from nothing. Aristotle finds it as impossible to assume that God changes His will or conceives a new desire, as to believe that He is non-existing, or that His essence is changeable. Hence it follows that this Universe has always been the same in the past, and will be the same eternally.

This is a full account of the opinions of those who consider that the existence of God, the First Cause of the Universe, has been established by proof. But it would be quite useless to mention the opinions of those who do not recognize the existence of God, but believe that the existing state of things is the result of accidental combination and separation of the elements, and that the Universe has no Ruler or Governor. Such is the theory of Epicurus and his school, and similar philosophers, as stated by Alexander [Aphrodisiensis] ; it would be superfluous to repeat their views, since the existence of God has been demonstrated whilst their theory is built upon a basis proved to be untenable. It is likewise useless to prove the correctness of the followers of the second theory in asserting that the heavens are transient, because they at the same time believe in the Eternity of the Universe, and so long as this theory is adopted, it makes no difference to us whether it is believed that the heavens are transient, and that only their substance is eternal, or the heavens are held to be indestructible, in accordance with the view of Aristotle. All who follow the Law of Moses, our Teacher, and Abraham, our Father, and all who adopt similar theories, assume that nothing is eternal except God, and that the theory of *Creatio ex nihilo* includes nothing that is impossible, whilst some thinkers even regard it as an established truth.

After having described the different theories, I will now proceed to show how Aristotle proved his theory, and what induced him to adopt it.

## CHAPTER XIX

It has been shown that according to Aristotle, and according to all that defend his theory, the Universe is inseparable from God; He is the cause, and the Universe the effect; and this effect is a necessary one; and as it cannot be explained why or how God exists in this particular manner, namely, being One and incorporeal, so it cannot be asked concerning the whole Universe why or how it exists in this particular way. For it is necessary that the whole, the cause as well as the effect, exist in this particular manner, it is impossible for them not to exist, or to be different from what they actually are. This leads to the conclusion that the nature of everything remains constant, that nothing changes its nature in any way, and that such a change is impossible in any existing thing. It would also follow that the Universe is not the result of design, choice, and desire; for if this were the case, they would have been non-existing before the design had been conceived.

We, however, hold that all things in the Universe are the result of design, and not merely of necessity; He who designed them may change them when He changes His design. But not every design is subject to change; for there are things which are impossible, and their nature cannot be altered, as will be explained. Here, in this chapter, I merely wish to show by arguments almost as forcible as real proofs, that the Universe gives evidence of design; but I will not fall into the error in which the Mutakallemim have so much distinguished themselves, namely, of ignoring the existing nature of things or assuming the existence of atoms, or the successive creation of accidents, or any of their propositions which I have tried to explain, and which are intended to establish the principle of Divine selection. You must not, however, think that they understood the principle in the same sense as we do, although they undoubtedly aimed at the same thing, and mentioned the same things which we also will mention, when they treated of Divine Selection. For they do not distinguish between selection in the case of a plant to make it red and not white, or sweet and not bitter, and determination in the case of the heavens which gave them their peculiar geometrical form and did not give them a triangular or quadrilateral shape. The Mutakallemim established the principle of determination by means of their propositions, which have been enumerated above (Part I., chap. lxxiii.). I will establish this principle only as far as necessary, and only by philosophical propositions based on the nature of things. But before I begin my argument, I will state the following facts: Matter is common to things different from each other; there must be either one external cause which endows this matter partly with one property, partly with another, or there must be as many different causes as there are different forms of the matter common to all things. This is admitted by those who assume the Eternity of the Universe. After having premised this proposition, I will proceed with the discussion of our theme from an Aristotelian point of view, in form of a dialogue.

*We.*—You have proved that all things in the sublunary world have one common substance; why then do the species of things vary? why are the *individuals* in each species different from each other?

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world-based

is possible, and that every difficulty in this question is removed. We might be asked, Why has God inspired a certain person and not another? why has He revealed the Law to one particular nation, and at one particular time? why has He commanded this, and forbidden that? why has He shown through a prophet certain particular miracles? what is the object of these laws? and why has He not made the commandments and the prohibitions part of our nature, if it was His object that we should live in accordance with them? We answer to all these questions: He willed it so; or, His wisdom decided so. Just as He created the world according to His will, at a certain time, in a certain form, and as we do not understand why His will or His wisdom decided upon that peculiar form, and upon that peculiar time, so we do not know why His will or wisdom determined any of the things mentioned in the preceding questions. But if we assume that the Universe has the present form as the result of fixed laws, there is occasion for the above questions; and these could only be answered in an objectionable way, implying denial and rejection of the Biblical texts, the correctness of which no intelligent person doubts. Owing to the absence of all proof, we reject the theory of the Eternity of the Universe; and it is for this very reason that the noblest minds spent and will spend their days in research. For if the Creation had been demonstrated by proof, even if only according to the Platonic hypothesis, all arguments of the philosophers against us would be of no avail. If, on the other hand, Aristotle had a proof for his theory, the whole teaching of Scripture would be rejected, and we should be forced to other opinions. I have thus shown that all depends on this question. Note it.

## CHAPTER XXVI

IN the famous chapters known as the Chapters of Rabbi Eliezer, I find R. Eliezer the Great saying something more extraordinary than I have ever seen in the utterances of any believer in the Law of Moses. I mean the following passage: "Whence were the heavens created? He took part of the light of His garment, stretched it like a cloth, and thus the heavens were extending continually, as it is said: He covereth Himself with light as with a garment, He stretcheth the heavens like a curtain" (Ps. civ. 2). "Whence was the earth created? He took of the snow under the throne of glory, and threw it; according to the words: He saith to the snow, Be thou earth" (Job xxxvii. 6). These are the words given there; and I, in my surprise, ask, What was the belief of this sage? did he think that nothing can be produced from nothing, and that a substance must have existed of which the things were formed? and did he for this reason ask whence were the heavens and the earth created? What has he gained by the answer? We might ask him, Whence was the light of His garment created? or the snow under the throne of His glory? or the throne of glory itself? If the terms "the light of His garment" and "the throne of glory" mean something eternal, they must be rejected; the words would imply an admission of the Eternity of the Universe, though only in the form taught by Plato. The creation of the throne of glory is mentioned by our Sages, though in a strange way; for they say that it has been created before the creation of the Universe. Scripture, however, does not mention the creation of the throne, except in

religion. The opinion of Aristotle is that the Universe, being permanent and indestructible, is also eternal and without beginning. We have already shown that this theory is based on the hypothesis that the Universe is the necessary result of causal relation, and that this hypothesis includes a certain amount of blasphemy. Having come thus far we will make in the next chapter a few remarks on passages in the first chapters of Genesis. For the primary object in this treatise has been to expound as much as possible of the Scriptural account of the Creation (*ma'aseh bereshit*), and the description of the heavenly chariot (*ma'aseh mercabah*). But let us premise two general observations.

First, the account given in Scripture of the Creation is not, as is generally believed, intended to be in all its parts literal. For if this were the case, wise men would not have kept its explanation secret, and our Sages would not have employed figurative speech [in treating of the Creation] in order to hide its true meaning, nor would they have objected to discuss it in the presence of the common people. The literal meaning of the words might lead us to conceive corrupt ideas and to form false opinions about God, or even entirely to abandon and reject the principles of our Faith. It is therefore right to abstain and refrain from examining this subject superficially and unscientifically. We must blame the practice of some ignorant preachers and expounders of the Bible, who think that wisdom consists in knowing the explanation of words, and that greater perfection is attained by employing more words and longer speech. It is, however, right that we should examine the Scriptural texts by the intellect, after having acquired a knowledge of demonstrative science, and of the true hidden meaning of prophecies. But if one has obtained some knowledge in this matter he must not preach on it, as I stated in my Commentary on the Mishnah (*Hagigah*, ii. 7), and our Sages said distinctly: From the beginning of the book to this place—after the account of the sixth day of the Creation—it is “the glory of God to conceal a thing” (*Prov. xxv. 2*).

We have thus clearly stated our opinion. It is, however, part of the Divine plan that every one who has obtained some perfection transmit it to some other persons, as will be shown in the chapter on Prophecy. It is, therefore, impossible for a scholar to possess knowledge of these problems, whether it be through his own researches or through his master's teaching, without communicating part of that knowledge to others; it cannot be done in clear words; it must be done sparingly by way of hints. We find in the words of some of our Sages numerous hints and notes of this kind, but mixed up with the words of others and with other subjects. In treating of these mysteries, as a rule, I quote as much as contains the principal idea, and leave the rest for those who are worthy of it.

Secondly, the prophets employ homonymous terms and use words which are not meant to be understood in their ordinary signification, but are only used because of some other meaning which they admit, e.g., “a rod of an almond-tree (*shaked*),” because of the words which follow, “for I will hasten (*shaked*)” (*Jer. i. 11, 12*), as will be shown in the chapter on Prophecy. According to the same principle Ezekiel in the account of the Divine Chariot employs, as we have stated the term *hashmal* (*Ezek. i. 4*); also *regel egel* (*v. 7*), *nehoshet kalal* (*v. 7*), and similar terms; Zechariah (*vi. 1*) likewise



his *Physics*, that according to Plato the heavens are transient. This view is also stated in Plato's *Timæus*. His opinion, however, does not agree with our belief; only superficial and careless persons wrongly assume that Plato has the same belief as we have. For whilst we hold that the heavens have been created from absolutely nothing, Plato believes that they have been formed out of something.—This is the second theory.

*Third Theory.*—viz., that of Aristotle, his followers, and commentators. Aristotle maintains, like the adherents of the second theory, that a corporeal object cannot be produced without a corporeal substance. He goes, however, farther, and contends that the heavens are indestructible. For he holds that the Universe in its totality has never been different, nor will it ever change: the heavens, which form the permanent element in the Universe, and are not subject to genesis and destruction, have always been so; time and motion are eternal, permanent, and have neither beginning nor end; the sublunary world, which includes the transient elements, has always been the same, because the *materia prima* is itself eternal, and merely combines successively with different forms; when one form is removed, another is assumed. This whole arrangement, therefore, both above and here below, is never disturbed or interrupted, and nothing is produced contrary to the laws or the ordinary course of Nature. He further says—though not in the same terms—that he considers it impossible for God to change His will or conceive a new desire; that God produced this Universe in its totality by His will, but not from nothing. Aristotle finds it as impossible to assume that God changes His will or conceives a new desire, as to believe that He is non-existing, or that His essence is changeable. Hence it follows that this Universe has always been the same in the past, and will be the same eternally.

This is a full account of the opinions of those who consider that the existence of God, the First Cause of the Universe, has been established by proof. But it would be quite useless to mention the opinions of those who do not recognize the existence of God, but believe that the existing state of things is the result of accidental combination and separation of the elements, and that the Universe has no Ruler or Governor. Such is the theory of Epicurus and his school, and similar philosophers, as stated by Alexander [Aphrodisiensis]; it would be superfluous to repeat their views, since the existence of God has been demonstrated whilst their theory is built upon a basis proved to be untenable. It is likewise useless to prove the correctness of the followers of the second theory in asserting that the heavens are transient, because they at the same time believe in the Eternity of the Universe, and so long as this theory is adopted, it makes no difference to us whether it is believed that the heavens are transient, and that only their substance is eternal, or the heavens are held to be indestructible, in accordance with the view of Aristotle. All who follow the Law of Moses, our Teacher, and Abraham, our Father, and all who adopt similar theories, assume that nothing is eternal except God, and that the theory of *Creatio ex nihilo* includes nothing that is impossible, whilst some thinkers even regard it as an established truth.

After having described the different theories, I will now proceed to show how Aristotle proved his theory, and what induced him to adopt it.

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and I have not heard, nor do I know that any of these theories have been established by proof.

## CHAPTER XXV

WE do not reject the Eternity of the Universe, because certain passages in Scripture confirm the Creation; for such passages are not more numerous than those in which God is represented as a corporeal being; nor is it impossible or difficult to find for them a suitable interpretation. We might have explained them in the same manner as we did in respect to the Incorporeality of God. We should perhaps have had an easier task in showing that the Scriptural passages referred to are in harmony with the theory of the Eternity of the Universe if we accepted the latter, than we had in explaining the anthropomorphisms in the Bible when we rejected the idea that God is corporeal. For two reasons, however, we have not done so, and have not accepted the Eternity of the Universe. First, the Incorporeality of God has been demonstrated by proof; those passages in the Bible, which in their literal sense contain statements that can be refuted by proof, must and can be interpreted otherwise. But the Eternity of the Universe has not been proved; a mere argument in favour of a certain theory is not sufficient reason for rejecting the literal meaning of a Biblical text, and explaining it figuratively, when the opposite theory can be supported by an equally good argument.

Secondly, our belief in the Incorporeality of God is not contrary to any of the fundamental principles of our religion; it is not contrary to the words of any prophet. Only ignorant people believe that it is contrary to the teaching of Scripture; but we have shown that this is not the case; on the contrary, Scripture teaches the Incorporeality of God. If we were to accept the Eternity of the Universe as taught by Aristotle, that everything in the Universe is the result of fixed laws, that Nature does not change, and that there is nothing supernatural, we should necessarily be in opposition to the foundation of our religion, we should disbelieve all miracles and signs, and certainly reject all hopes and fears derived from Scripture, unless the miracles are also explained figuratively. The Allegorists amongst the Mohammedans have done this, and have thereby arrived at absurd conclusions. If, however, we accepted the Eternity of the Universe in accordance with the second of the theories which we have expounded above (ch. xxiii.), and assumed, with Plato, that the heavens are likewise transient, we should not be in opposition to the fundamental principles of our religion; this theory would not imply the rejection of miracles, but, on the contrary, would admit them as possible. The Scriptural text might have been explained accordingly, and many expressions might have been found in the Bible and in other writings that would confirm and support this theory. But there is no necessity for this expedient, so long as the theory has not been proved. As there is no proof sufficient to convince us, this theory need not be taken into consideration, nor the other one; we take the text of the Bible literally, and say that it teaches us a truth which we cannot prove; and the miracles are evidence for the correctness of our view.

Accepting the Creation, we find that miracles are possible, that Revelation

of famous scholars. They reject the words of the prophets, because the latter do not employ any scientific method by which only a few persons would be instructed who are intellectually well prepared, but simply communicate the truth as received by Divine inspiration.

In the chapters which follow we will expound the theory of the Creation in accordance with the teaching of Scripture.

## CHAPTER XVI

IN this chapter I will first expound my view on this question, and then support it by argument—not by such arguments as those of the Mutakallemim, who believe that they have proved the *Creatio ex nihilo*. I will not deceive myself, and consider dialectical methods as proofs; and the fact that a certain proposition has been proved by a dialectical argument will never induce me to accept that proposition, but, on the contrary, will weaken my faith in it, and cause me to doubt it. For when we understand the fallacy of a proof, our faith in the proposition itself is shaken. It is therefore better that a proposition which cannot be demonstrated be received as an axiom, or that one of the two opposite solutions of the problem be accepted on authority. The methods by which the Mutakallemim proved the *Creatio ex nihilo* have already been described by me, and I have exposed their weak points. As to the proofs of Aristotle and his followers for the Eternity of the Universe, they are, according to my opinion, not conclusive; they are open to strong objections, as will be explained. I intend to show that the theory of the Creation, as taught in Scripture, contains nothing that is impossible; and that all those philosophical arguments which seem to disprove our view contain weak points which make them inconclusive, and render the attacks on our view untenable. Since I am convinced of the correctness of my method, and consider either of the two theories—viz., the Eternity of the Universe, and the Creation—as admissible, I accept the latter on the authority of Prophecy, which can teach things beyond the reach of philosophical speculation. For the belief in prophecy is, as will be shown in the course of this treatise, consistent even with the belief in the Eternity of the Universe. When I have established the admissibility of our theory, I will, by philosophical reasoning, show that our theory of the Creation is more acceptable than that of the Eternity of the Universe; and although our theory includes points open to criticism, I will show that there are much stronger reasons for the rejection of the theory of our opponents.

I will now proceed to expound the method by which the proofs given for the Eternity of the Universe can be refuted.

## CHAPTER XVII

EVERYTHING produced comes into existence from non-existence; even when the substance of a thing has been in existence, and has only changed its form, the thing itself, which has gone through the process of genesis and development, and has arrived at its final state, has now different properties from those which it possessed at the commencement of the transition from potentiality to reality, or before that time. Take, e.g., the human ovum as

and I have not heard, nor do I know that any of these theories have been established by proof.

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Accepting the Creation, we find that miracles are possible, that Revelation

the only member of its species, and does not depend on any cause whatever ; this being has therefore nothing in common with other beings.

*Fourth Argument.*—This is likewise a well-known philosophical argument. We constantly see things passing from a state of potentiality to that of actuality, but in every such case there is for that transition of a thing an agent separate from it (Prop. XVIII.). It is likewise clear that the agent has also passed from potentiality to actuality. It has at first been potential, because it could not be actual, owing to some obstacle contained in itself, or on account of the absence of a certain relation between itself and the object of its action ; it became an actual agent as soon as that relation was present. Whichever cause be assumed, an agent is again necessary to remove the obstacle or to create the relation. The same can be argued respecting this last-mentioned agent that creates the relation or removes the obstacle. This series of causes cannot go on *ad infinitum* ; we must at last arrive at a cause of the transition of an object from the state of potentiality to that of actuality, which is constant, and admits of no potentiality whatever. In the essence of this cause nothing exists potentially, for if its essence included any possibility of existence it would not exist at all (Prop. XXIII.) ; it cannot be corporeal, but it must be spiritual (Prop. XXIV.) ; and the immaterial being that includes no possibility whatever, but exists actually by its own essence, is God. Since He is incorporeal, as has been demonstrated, it follows that He is One (Prop. XVI.).

Even if we were to admit the Eternity of the Universe, we could by any of these methods prove the existence of God ; that He is One and incorporeal, and that He does not reside as a force in a corporeal object.

The following is likewise a correct method to prove the Incorporeality and the Unity of God : If there were two Gods, they would necessarily have one element in common by virtue of which they were Gods, and another element by which they were distinguished from each other and existed as two Gods ; the distinguishing element would either be in both different from the property common to both—in that case both of them would consist of different elements, and neither of them would be the First Cause, or have absolutely independent existence ; but their existence would depend on certain causes (Prop. XIX.)—or the distinguishing element would only in one of them be different from the element common to both : then that being could not have absolute independence.

*Another proof of the Unity of God.*—It has been demonstrated by proof that the whole existing world is one organic body, all parts of which are connected together ; also, that the influences of the spheres above pervade the earthly substance and prepare it for its forms. Hence it is impossible to assume that one deity be engaged in forming one part, and another deity in forming another part of that organic body of which all parts are closely connected together. A duality could only be imagined in this way, either that at one time the one deity is active, the other at another time, or that both act simultaneously, nothing being done except by both together. The first alternative is certainly absurd for many reasons ; if at the time the one deity be active the other *could* also be active, there is no reason why the one deity should then act and the other not ; if, on the other hand, it be impossible for the one deity to act when the other is at work, there must be

some other cause [besides these deities] which [at a certain time] enables the one to act and disables the other. [Such difference would not be caused by time], since time is without change, and the object of the action likewise remains one and the same organic whole. Besides, if two deities existed in this way, both would be subject to the relations of time, since their actions would depend on time; they would also in the moment of acting pass from potentiality to actuality, and require an agent for such transition; their essence would besides include possibility [of existence]. It is equally absurd to assume that both together produce everything in existence, and that neither of them does anything alone; for when a number of forces must be united for a certain result, none of these forces acts of its own accord, and none is by itself the immediate cause of that result, but their union is the immediate cause. It has, furthermore, been proved that the action of the absolute cannot be due to an [external] cause. The union is also an act which presupposes a cause effecting that union, and if that cause be one, it is undoubtedly God; but if it also consists of a number of separate forces, a cause is required for the combination of these forces, as in the first case. Finally, one simple being must be arrived at, that is the cause of the existence of the Universe, which is one whole; it would make no difference whether we assumed that the First Cause had produced the Universe by *creatio ex nihilo*, or whether the Universe co-existed with the First Cause. It is thus clear how we can prove the Unity of God from the fact that this Universe is one whole.

*Another argument concerning the Incorporeality of God.*—Every corporeal object is composed of matter and form (Prop. XXII.); every compound of these two elements requires an agent for effecting their combination. Besides, it is evident that a body is divisible and has dimensions; a body is thus undoubtedly subject to accidents. Consequently nothing corporeal can be a unity, either because everything corporeal is divisible or because it is a compound; that is to say, it can logically be analysed into two elements; because a body can only be said to be a certain body when the distinguishing element is added to the corporeal substratum, and must therefore include two elements; but it has been proved that the Absolute admits of no dualism whatever.

Now that we have discussed these proofs, we will expound our own method in accordance with our promise.

## CHAPTER II

THE fifth essence, i.e., the heavenly spheres, must either be transient, and in this case motion would likewise be temporary, or, as our opponent assumes, it must be eternal. If the spheres are transient, then God is their Creator; for if anything comes into existence after a period of non-existence, it is self-evident that an agent exists which has effected this result. It would be absurd to contend that the thing itself effected it. If, on the other hand, the heavenly spheres be eternal, with a regular perpetual motion, the cause of this perpetual motion, according to the Propositions enumerated in the Introduction, must be something that is neither a body, nor a force residing in a body, and that is God, praised be His name! We have thus shown that

whether we believe in the *Creatio ex Nihilo*, or in the Eternity of the Universe, we can prove by demonstrative arguments the existence of God, i.e., an absolute Being, whose existence cannot be attributed to any cause, or admit in itself any potentiality. The theory that God is One and Incorporeal has likewise been established by proof without any reference to the theory of the Creation or the Eternity of the Universe. This has been explained by us in the third philosophical argument [in support of the Existence of God], and also in our subsequent description of the methods of the philosophers in proving the Incorporeality and the Unity of God.

We deem it now convenient to continue with the theory of the philosophers, and to give their proofs for the existence of Intelligences. We will then show that their theory in this regard is in harmony with the teaching of Scripture concerning the existence of angels. After the full treatment of this subject we shall return to our task and discuss the theory of *creatio ex nihilo*. For the best arguments in favour of this theory cannot be fully comprehended unless the theory of the existence of Intelligences be well understood, and also the method which I adopt in proving their existence. We must, however, first give the following note, which will introduce you into the secrets of this whole subject, both of that which we have already given and of what will yet be given.

*Note.*—It was not my intention when writing this treatise to expound natural science or discuss metaphysical systems; it was not my object to prove truths which have already been demonstrated, or describe the number and the properties of the spheres: for the books written on these subjects serve their purpose, and if in some points they are not satisfactory, I do not think that what I could say would be better than what has already been explained by others. But my intention was, as has been stated in the Introduction, to expound Biblical passages which have been impugned, and to elucidate their hidden and true sense, which is above the comprehension of the multitude. When you therefore notice that I prove the existence and number of Intelligences or the number of the spheres, with the causes of their motion, or discuss the true relation of matter and form, the meaning of Divine manifestation, or similar subjects, you must not think that I intend merely to establish a certain philosophical proposition; for these subjects have been discussed in many books, and most of them have been demonstrated by proof. I only desire to mention that which might, when well understood, serve as a means of removing some of the doubts concerning anything taught in Scripture; and indeed many difficulties will disappear when that which I am about to explain is taken into consideration. From the Introduction to this treatise you may learn that its principal object is to expound, as far as can be done, the account of the Creation (Gen. i.-iii.), and of the Divine Chariot (Ezek. i.), and to answer questions raised in respect to Prophecy and to the knowledge of God. You will sometimes notice that I am rather explicit on truths already ascertained; some of them Natural Philosophy has established as facts; others Metaphysics has either fully demonstrated, or at least shown to be worthy of belief; others Mathematics have made plain. But you will invariably find that my exposition includes the key for the understanding of some allegorical passage of Holy Writ and its esoteric interpretation, and that I have mentioned, explained, and demonstrated the subject only because it