

ON THE PLAN OF *THE GUIDE OF THE PERPLEXED*

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I BELIEVE THAT it will not be amiss if I simply present the plan of the *Guide* as it has become clear to me in the course of about twenty-five years of frequently interrupted but never abandoned study. In the following scheme Roman (and Arabic) numerals at the beginning of a line indicate the sections (and subsections) of the *Guide* while the numbers given in parentheses indicate the Parts and the chapters of the book.

A. VIEWS (I 1–III 24)

A¹. VIEWS REGARDING GOD AND THE ANGELS (I 1–III 7)

I. *Biblical terms applied to God* (I 1–70)

- (a) Terms suggesting the corporeality of God (and the angels) (I 1–49)
 - (1) The two most important passages of the Torah which seem to suggest that God is corporeal (I 1–7)
 - (2) Terms designating place, change of place, the organs of human locomotion etc. (I 8–28)
 - (3) Terms designating wrath and consuming (or taking food) which if applied to divine things refer to idolatry on the one hand and to human knowledge on the other (I 29–36)
 - (4) Terms designating parts and actions of animals (I 37–49)
- (b) Terms suggesting multiplicity in God (I 50–70)
 - (5) Given that God is absolutely one and incomparable, what is the meaning of the terms applied to God in non-figurative speech? (I 50–60)

- (6) The names of God and the utterances of God (I 61–67)
 - (7) The apparent multiplicity in God consequent upon His knowledge, His causality, and His governance (I 68–70)
- II. *Demonstrations of the existence, unity and incorporeality of God* (I 71–II 31)
- (1) Introductory (I 71–73)
 - (2) Refutation of the Kalām demonstrations (I 74–76)
 - (3) The philosophic demonstrations (II 1)
 - (4) Maimonides' demonstration (II 2)
 - (5) The angels (II 3–12)
 - (6) Creation of the world, i.e. defense of the belief in creation out of nothing against the philosophers (II 13–24)
 - (7) Creation and the Law (II 25–31)
- III. *Prophecy* (II 32–48)
- (1) Natural endowment and training the prerequisites of prophecy (II 32–34)
 - (2) The difference between the prophecy of Moses and that of the other prophets (II 35)
 - (3) The essence of prophecy (II 36–38)
 - (4) The legislative prophecy (of Moses) and the Law (II 39–40)
 - (5) Legal study of the prophecy of the prophets other than Moses (II 41–44)
 - (6) The degrees of prophecy (II 45)
 - (7) How to understand the divine and the divinely commanded actions and works as presented by the prophets (II 46–48)
- IV. *The Work of the Chariot* (III 1–7)
- A². VIEWS REGARDING BODILY BEINGS WHICH COME INTO BEING AND PERISH AND IN PARTICULAR REGARDING MAN (III 8–54)
- V. *Providence* (III 8–24)
- (1) Statement of the problem: matter is the ground of all evils and yet matter is created by the absolutely good God (III 8–14)

- (2) The nature of the impossible or the meaning of omnipotence (III 15)
 - (3) The philosophic arguments against omniscience (III 16)
 - (4) The views regarding providence (III 17–18)
 - (5) Jewish views on omniscience and Maimonides' discourse on this subject (III 19–21)
 - (6) The book of Job as the authoritative treatment of providence (III 22–23)
 - (7) The teaching of the Torah on omniscience (III 24)
- B. ACTIONS (III 25–54)
- VI. *The actions commanded by God and done by God* (III 25–50)
- (1) The rationality of God's actions in general and of His legislation in particular (III 25–26)
 - (2) The manifestly rational part of the commandments of the Torah (III 27–28)
 - (3) The rationale of the apparently irrational part of the commandments of the Torah (III 29–33)
 - (4) The inevitable limit to the rationality of the commandments of the Torah (III 34)
 - (5) Division of the commandments into classes and explanation of the usefulness of each class (III 35)
 - (6) Explanation of all or almost all commandments (III 36–49)
 - (7) The narratives in the Torah (III 50)
- VII. *Man's perfection and God's providence* (III 51–54)
- (1) True knowledge of God Himself is the prerequisite of providence (III 51–52)
 - (2) True knowledge of what constitutes the human individual himself is the prerequisite of knowledge of the workings of providence (III 53–54)

The *Guide* consists then of 7 sections or of 38 subsections. Wherever feasible, each section is divided into 7 subsections; the only section which does not permit of being divided into subsections, is divided into 7 chapters.

The simple statement of the plan of the *Guide* suffices to show that the book is sealed with many seals. At the end of its Introduction Maimonides describes the preceding passage as follows: "It is a key permitting one to enter places the gates to which were locked. When those gates are opened and those places are entered, the souls will find rest therein, the eyes will be delighted, and the bodies will be eased of their toil and of their labor." The *Guide* as a whole is not merely a key to a forest but itself a forest, an enchanted forest, and hence also an enchanting forest: it is a delight for the eyes. For the tree of life is a delight for the eyes.

The enchanting character of the *Guide* does not appear immediately. At first glance the book merely appears to be strange and, in particular, to lack order and consistency. But the progress in its understanding is a progress in becoming enchanted by it. Enchanting understanding is perhaps the highest form of edification. One begins to understand the *Guide* once one sees that it is not a philosophic book — a book written by a philosopher for philosophers — but a Jewish book: a book written by a Jew for Jews. Its first premise is the old Jewish premise that being a Jew and being a philosopher are two incompatible things. Philosophers are men who try to give an account of the whole by starting from what is always accessible to man as man; Maimonides starts from the acceptance of the Torah. A Jew may make use of philosophy and Maimonides makes the most ample use of it; but as a Jew he gives his assent where as a philosopher he would suspend his assent (cf. II 16).

In accordance with this, the *Guide* is devoted to the Torah or more precisely to the true science of the Torah, of the Law. Its first purpose is to explain Biblical terms and its second purpose is to explain Biblical similes. The *Guide* is then devoted above all to Biblical exegesis, although to Biblical exegesis of a particular kind. That kind of exegesis is required because many Biblical terms and all Biblical similes have an apparent or outer and a hidden or inner meaning: the gravest errors as well as the most tormenting perplexities arise from men's understanding the Bible always according to its apparent or literal meaning. The *Guide* is then devoted

to "the difficulties of the Law" or to "the secrets of the Law." The most important of those secrets are the Work of the Beginning (the beginning of the Bible) and the Work of the Chariot (Ezekiel I and 10). The *Guide* is then devoted primarily and chiefly to the explanation of the Work of the Beginning and the Work of the Chariot.

Yet the Law whose secrets Maimonides intends to explain, forbids that they be explained in public, or to the public; they may only be explained in private and only to such individuals as possess both theoretical and political wisdom as well as the capacity of both understanding and using allusive speech; for only "the chapter headings" of the secret teaching may be transmitted even to those who belong to the natural elite. Since every explanation given in writing, at any rate in a book, is a public explanation, Maimonides seems to be compelled by his intention to transgress the Law. There were other cases in which he was under such a compulsion. The Law also forbids one to study the books of idolaters on idolatry, for the first intention of the Law as a whole is to destroy every vestige of idolatry; and yet Maimonides, as he openly admits and even emphasizes, has studied all the available idolatrous books of this kind with the utmost thoroughness. Nor is this all. He goes so far as to encourage the reader of the *Guide* to study those books by himself (III 29–30, 32 and 37; *M.T.*, H. 'Abodah zara II 2 and III 2). The Law also forbids one to speculate about the date of the coming of the Messiah, and yet Maimonides presents such a speculation or at least its equivalent in order to comfort his contemporaries (*Epistle to Yemen*, 62, 16 ff. and 80, 17 ff., Halkin; cf. Halkin's Introduction pp. XII–XIII; *M.T.*, H. Melakim XII 2). Above all, the Law forbids one to seek for the grounds of the commandments, and yet Maimonides devotes almost twenty-six chapters of the *Guide* to such seeking (III 26; cf. II 25). All these irregularities have one and the same justification: Maimonides transgresses the Law "for the sake of heaven," i.e. in order to uphold or to fulfill the Law (I Introd. and III Introd.). Still, in the most important case he does not strictly speaking transgress the Law, for his written explanation of the secrets of the Law is

not a public but a secret explanation. The secrecy is achieved in three ways. Firstly, every word of the *Guide* is chosen with exceeding care; since very few men are able or willing to read with exceeding care, most men will fail to perceive the secret teaching. Secondly, Maimonides deliberately contradicts himself, and if a man declares both that *a* is *b* and that *a* is not *b*, he cannot be said to declare anything. Lastly, the "chapter headings" of the secret teaching are not presented in an orderly fashion but are scattered throughout the book. This permits us to understand why the plan of the *Guide* is so obscure. Maimonides succeeds in obscuring the plan immediately by failing to divide the book explicitly in sections and subsections or by dividing it explicitly only into three Parts and each Part into chapters without supplying the Parts and the chapters with headings indicating the subject matter of the Parts or of the chapters.

The plan of the *Guide* is not entirely obscure. No one can reasonably doubt for instance that II 32–48, III 1–7 and III 25–50 form sections. The plan is most obscure at the beginning and it becomes clearer as one proceeds; generally speaking it is clearer in the second half (II 13–end) than in the first half. The *Guide* is then not entirely devoted to secretly transmitting chapter headings of the secret teaching. This does not mean that the book is not in its entirety devoted to the true science of the Law. It means that the true science of the Law is partly public. This is not surprising, for the teaching of the Law itself is of necessity partly public. According to one statement, the core of the public teaching consists of the assertions that God is one, that He alone is to be worshipped, that He is incorporeal, that He is incomparable to any of His creatures and that He suffers from no defect and no passion (I 35). From other statements it would appear that the acceptance of the Law on every level of comprehension presupposes belief in God, in angels and in prophecy (III 45) or that the basic beliefs are those in God's unity and in Creation (II 13). In brief, one may say that the public teaching of the Law insofar as it refers to beliefs or to "views," can be reduced to the 13 "roots" (or dogmas) which Maimonides had put together in his *Commentary on the*

Mishna. That part of the true science of the Law which is devoted to the public teaching of the Law or which is itself public, has the task of demonstrating the roots to the extent to which this is possible or of establishing the roots by means of speculation (III 51 and 54). Being speculative, that part of the true science of the Law is not exegetic; it is not necessarily in need of support by Biblical or Talmudic texts (cf. II 45 beginning). Accordingly, about 20 per cent of the chapters of the *Guide* contain no Biblical quotations and about 9 per cent of them contain no Hebrew or Aramaic expressions whatever. It is not very difficult to see (especially on the basis of III 7 end, 23 and 28) that the *Guide* as devoted to speculation on the roots of the Law or to the public teaching consists of sections II–III and V–VI as indicated in our scheme and that the sequence of these sections is rational; but one cannot understand in this manner why the book is divided into 3 Parts nor what sections I, IV and VII and most, not to say all, subsections mean. The teaching of the *Guide* is then neither entirely public or speculative nor is it entirely secret or exegetic. For this reason the plan of the *Guide* is neither entirely obscure nor entirely clear.

Yet the *Guide* is a single whole. What then is the bond uniting its exegetic and its speculative element? One might imagine that, while speculation demonstrates the roots of the Law, exegesis proves that those roots as demonstrated by speculation are in fact taught by the Law. But in that case the *Guide* would open with chapters devoted to speculation and the opposite is manifestly true. In addition, if the exegesis dealt with the same subject matter as that speculation which demonstrates the public teaching par excellence, namely, the roots of the Law, there would be no reason why the exegesis should be secret. Maimonides does say that the Work of the Beginning is the same as natural science and the Work of the Chariot is the same as divine science (i.e. the science of the incorporeal beings or of God and the angels). This might lead one to think that the public teaching is identical with what the philosophers teach while the secret teaching makes one understand the identity of the teaching of the philosophers with the secret teaching of the Law. One can safely say that this thought

proves to be untenable on almost every level of one's comprehending the *Guide*: the non-identity of the teaching of the philosophers as a whole and the 13 roots of the Law as a whole is the first word and the last word of Maimonides. What he means by identifying the core of philosophy (natural science and divine science) with the highest secrets of the Law (the Work of the Beginning and the Work of the Chariot) and therewith by somehow identifying the subject matter of speculation with the subject matter of exegesis may be said to be the secret par excellence of the *Guide*.

Let us then retrace our steps. The *Guide* contains a public teaching and a secret teaching. The public teaching is addressed to every Jew including the vulgar; the secret teaching is addressed to the elite. The secret teaching is of no use to the vulgar and the elite does not need the *Guide* for being appraised of the public teaching. To the extent to which the *Guide* is a whole, or one work, it is not addressed to the vulgar nor to the elite. To whom then is it addressed? How legitimate and important this question is appears from Maimonides' remark that the chief purpose of the *Guide* is to explain as far as possible the Work of the Beginning and the Work of the Chariot "with a view to him for whom (the book) has been composed" (III beginning). Maimonides answers our question both explicitly and implicitly. He answers it explicitly in two ways: he says on the one hand that the *Guide* is addressed to believing Jews who are perfect in their religion and in their character, have studied the sciences of the philosophers and are perplexed by the literal meaning of the Law; he says on the other hand that the book is addressed to such perfect human beings as are Law-students and perplexed. He answers our question more simply by dedicating the book to his disciple Joseph and by stating that it has been composed for Joseph and his like. Joseph had come to him "from the ends of the earth" and had studied under him for a while; the interruption of the oral instruction through Joseph's departure which "God had decreed," induced Maimonides to write the *Guide* for Joseph and his like. In the Epistle dedicatory addressed to Joseph, Maimonides extolls Joseph's virtues and indicates his limitation. Joseph had a pas-

sionate desire for things speculative and especially for mathematics. When he studied astronomy, mathematics and logic under Maimonides, the teacher saw that Joseph had an excellent mind and a quick grasp; he thought him therefore fit to have revealed to him allusively the secrets of the books of the prophets and he began to make such revelations. This stimulated Joseph's interest in things divine as well as in an appraisal of the Kalām; his desire for knowledge about these subjects became so great that Maimonides was compelled to warn him unceasingly to proceed in an orderly manner. It appears that Joseph was inclined to proceed impatiently or unmethodically in his study and that this defect had not been cured when he left Maimonides. The most important consequence of Joseph's defect is the fact, brought out by Maimonides' silence, that Joseph turned to divine science without having studied natural science under Maimonides or before, although natural science necessarily precedes divine science in the order of study.

The impression derived from the Epistle dedicatory is confirmed by the book itself. Maimonides frequently addresses the reader by using expressions like "know" or "you know already;" expressions of the latter kind indicate what the typical addressee knows and expressions of the former kind indicate what he does not know. One thus learns that Joseph has some knowledge of both the content and the character of divine science. He knows for example that divine science in contradistinction to mathematics and medicine requires an extreme of rectitude and moral perfection, and in particular of humility, but he apparently does not yet know how ascetic Judaism is in matters of sex (I 34, III 52). He had learned from Maimonides' "speech" that the orthodox "views" do not last in a man if he does not confirm them by the corresponding "actions" (II 31). It goes without saying that while his knowledge of the Jewish sources is extensive it is not comparable in extent and thoroughness to Maimonides' (II 26, 33). At the beginning of the book he does not know that both according to the Jewish view and according to demonstration angels have no bodies (I 43, 49) and he certainly does not know strictly speaking

that God has no body (I 9). In this respect as well as in other respects his understanding necessarily progresses while he advances in his study of the *Guide* (cf. I 65 beginning). As for natural science, he has studied astronomy but is not aware of the conflict between the astronomical principles and the principles of natural science (II 24), because he has not studied natural science. He knows a number of things which are made clear in natural science but this does not mean that he knows them through having studied natural science (cf. I 17, 28; III 10). From the 91st chapter (II 15) it appears that while he knows Aristotle's *Topics* and Farabi's commentary on that work, he does not know the *Physics* and *On the Heaven* (cf. II 8). Nor will he acquire the science of nature as he acquires the science of God and the angels while he advances in the study of the *Guide*. For the *Guide* which is addressed to a reader not conversant with natural science, does not itself transmit natural science (II 2). The following remark occurring in the 26th chapter is particularly revealing: "It has been demonstrated that everything moved undoubtedly possesses a magnitude and is divisible; and it will be demonstrated that God possesses no magnitude and hence possesses no motion." What "has been demonstrated" has been demonstrated in the *Physics* and is simply presupposed in the *Guide*; what "will be demonstrated" belongs to divine science and not to natural science; but that which "will be demonstrated" is built on what "has been demonstrated." The student of the *Guide* acquires knowledge of divine science but not of natural science. The author of the *Guide* in contradistinction to its addressee is thoroughly versed in natural science. Still, the addressee needs some awareness of the whole in order to be able to ascend from the whole to God, for there is no way to knowledge of God except through such ascent (I 71 toward the end); he acquires that awareness through a report of some kind (I 70) which Maimonides has inserted into the *Guide*. That report is characterized by the fact that it does not contain a single mention of philosophy in general and of natural science in particular. The serious student cannot rest satisfied with that report; he must turn from that report to natural science itself which supplies the demonstration of what

the report merely asserts. Maimonides cannot but leave it to his reader whether he will turn to genuine speculation or whether he will be satisfied with accepting the report on the authority of Maimonides and with building on that report theological conclusions. The addressee of the *Guide* is a man regarding whom it is still undecided whether he will become a genuine man of speculation or whether he will remain a follower of authority, if of Maimonides' authority (cf. I 72 end). He stands on the point of the road where speculation branches off from acceptance of authority.

Why did Maimonides choose an addressee of this description? What is the virtue of not being trained in natural science? We learn from the 17th chapter that natural science was treated as a secret doctrine already by the pagan philosophers "upon whom the charge of corruption would not be laid if they exposed natural science clearly:" all the more is the community of the Law-adherents obliged to treat natural science as a secret science. The reason why natural science is dangerous and is kept secret "with all kinds of artifices" is not that it undermines the Law — only the ignorant believe that (I 33) and Maimonides' whole life as well as the life of his successors refutes this suspicion. Yet it is also true that natural science has this corrupting effect on all men who are not perfect (cf. I 62). For natural science surely affects the understanding of the meaning of the Law, of the grounds on which it is to be obeyed and of the weight which is to be attached to its different parts. In a word, natural science upsets habits. By addressing a reader who is not conversant with natural science, Maimonides is compelled to proceed in a manner which does not upset habits or does so to the smallest possible degree. He acts as a moderate or conservative man.

But we must not forget that the *Guide* is written also for atypical addressees. In the first place, certain chapters of the *Guide* are explicitly said to be useful also for those who are beginners simply. Since the whole book is somehow accessible to the vulgar, it must have been written in such a way as not to be harmful to the vulgar (I Introd.; III 29). Besides, the book is also meant to be useful to such men of great intelligence as have been trained

fully in all philosophic sciences and as are not in the habit of bowing to any authority — in other words, to men not inferior to Maimonides in their critical faculty. This kind of reader will be unable to bow to Maimonides' authority; he will examine all his assertions, speculative or exegetic, with all reasonable severity; and he will derive great pleasure from all chapters of the *Guide* (I Introd.; I 55, 68 end, 73, tenth premise).

How much Maimonides' choice of his typical addressee affects the plan of his book, the judicious reader will see by glancing at our scheme. It suffices to mention the fact that no section or subsection of the *Guide* is devoted to the bodies which do not come into being and perish (cf. III 8 beginning and I 11), i.e., to the heavenly bodies which according to Maimonides possess life and knowledge, or to "the holy bodies" to use the bold expression used by him in his *Code* (*M.T.*, H. Yesode ha-torah IV 12). In other words, no section or subsection of the *Guide* is devoted to the Work of the Beginning in the manner in which a section is devoted to the Work of the Chariot. It is more important to see that Maimonides' choice of his typical addressee is the key to the whole plan of the *Guide*, to the apparent lack of order or to the obscurity of the plan. The plan of the *Guide* appears to be obscure only as long as one does not consider for what kind of reader the book is written or as long as one seeks for an order agreeing with the essential order of subject matter. We recall the order of the sciences: logic precedes mathematics, mathematics precedes natural science, and natural science precedes divine science; and we recall that while Joseph was sufficiently trained in logic and mathematics, he is supposed to be introduced into divine science without having been trained properly in natural science. Maimonides must therefore seek for a substitute for natural science. He finds that substitute in the traditional Jewish beliefs and ultimately in the Biblical texts correctly interpreted: the immediate preparation for divine science in the *Guide* is exegetic rather than speculative. Furthermore, Maimonides wishes to proceed in a manner which changes habits to the smallest possible degree. He himself tells us which habit is in particular need of being changed. After having reported

the opinion of a pagan philosopher on the obstacles to speculation, he adds the remark that there exists now an obstacle which the ancient philosopher had not mentioned because it did not exist in his society: the habit of relying on revered "texts," i.e. on their literal meaning (I 31). It is for this reason that he opens his book with the explanation of Biblical terms, i.e. with showing that their true meaning is not always their literal meaning. He cures the vicious habit in question by having recourse to another habit of his addressee. The addressee was accustomed not only to accept the literally understood Biblical text as true but also in many cases to understand Biblical texts according to traditional interpretations which differed considerably from the literal meaning. Being accustomed to listen to authoritative interpretations of Biblical texts, he is prepared to listen to Maimonides' interpretations as authoritative interpretations. The explanation of Biblical terms which is given by Maimonides authoritatively, is in the circumstances the natural substitute for natural science.

But which Biblical terms deserve primary consideration? In other words, what is the initial theme of the *Guide*? The choice of the initial theme is dictated by the right answer to the question as to which theme is the most urgent for the typical addressee and at the same time the least upsetting to him. The first theme of the *Guide* is God's incorporeality. God's incorporeality is the third of the three most fundamental truths, the preceding ones being the existence of God and His unity. The existence of God and His unity were admitted as unquestionable by all Jews; all Jews as Jews know that God exists and that He is one, and they know this through the Biblical revelation or the Biblical miracles. One can say that because belief in the Biblical revelation precedes speculation, and the discovery of the true meaning of revelation is the task of exegesis, exegesis precedes speculation. But as regards God's incorporeality there existed a certain confusion. The Biblical texts suggest that God is corporeal and the interpretation of these texts is not a very easy task (II 25, 31, III 28). God's incorporeality is indeed a demonstrable truth but, to say nothing of others, the addressee of the *Guide* does not come into the possession of the

demonstration until he has advanced into the Second Part (cf. I 1, 9, 18). The necessity to refute "corporealism" (the belief that God is corporeal) does not merely arise from the fact that corporealism is demonstrably untrue: corporealism is dangerous because it endangers the belief shared by all Jews in God's unity (I 35). On the other hand, by teaching that God is incorporeal, one does not do more than to give expression to what the Talmudic Sages believed (I 46). However, the Jewish authority who had given the most consistent and the most popularly effective expression to the belief in God's incorporeality, was Onkelos the Stranger, for the primary preoccupation of his translation of the Torah into Aramaic which Joseph knew as a matter of course, was precisely to dispose of the corporealistic suggestions of the original (I 21, 27, 28, 36 end). Maimonides' innovation is then limited to his deviation from Onkelos' procedure: he does explicitly what Onkelos did implicitly; whereas Onkelos tacitly substituted non-corporealistic terms for the corporealistic terms occurring in the original, Maimonides explicitly discusses each of the terms in question by itself in an order which has no correspondence to the accidental sequence of their occurrence in the Bible. As a consequence, the discussion of corporealism in the *Guide* consists chiefly of a discussion of the various Biblical terms suggesting corporealism, and vice versa the chief subject of what Maimonides declares to be the primary purpose of the *Guide*, namely, the explanation of Biblical terms, is the explanation of Biblical terms suggesting corporealism. This is not surprising. There are no Biblical terms which suggest that God is not one whereas there are many Biblical terms which suggest that God is corporeal: the apparent difficulty created by the plural *Elohim* can be disposed of by a single sentence or by a single reference to Onkelos (I 2).

The chief reason however why it is so urgent to establish the belief in God's incorporeality is supplied by the fact that that belief is destructive of idolatry. It was of course universally known that idolatry is a very grave sin, nay, that the Law has so to speak no other purpose than to destroy idolatry (I 35, III 29 end). But this evil can be completely eradicated only if everyone is brought to

know that God has no visible shape whatever or that He is incorporeal. Only if God is incorporeal is it absurd to make images of God and to worship such images. Only under this condition can it become manifest to everyone that the only image of God is man, living and thinking man, and that man acts as the image of God only through worshipping the invisible or hidden God alone. Not idolatry but the belief in God's corporeality is a fundamental sin. Hence, the sin of idolatry is less grave than that of believing in God's being corporeal (I 36). This being the case, it becomes indispensable that God's incorporeality be believed in by everyone regardless of whether he knows by demonstration that God is incorporeal or not; as regards the majority of men it is sufficient and necessary that they believe in this truth on the basis of authority or tradition, i.e. on a basis which the first subsections of the *Guide* are meant to supply. The teaching of God's incorporeality by means of authoritative exegesis, i.e. the most public teaching of God's incorporeality, is indispensable for destroying the last relics of paganism: the immediate source of paganism is less the ignorance of God's unity than the ignorance of His radical incorporeality (cf. I 36 with *M.T.*, H. 'Aboda zara I 1).

It is necessary that we should understand the character of the reasoning which Maimonides uses in determining the initial theme of the *Guide*. We limit ourselves to a consideration of the second point. While the belief in Unity leads immediately to the rejection of the worship of "other gods" but not to the rejection of the worship of images of the one God, the belief in Incorporeality leads immediately only to the rejection of the worship of images or of other bodies but not to the rejection of the worship of other gods: all gods may be incorporeal. Only if the belief in God's incorporeality is based on the belief in His unity as Maimonides' argument indeed assumes, does the belief in God's incorporeality appear to be the necessary and sufficient ground for rejecting "forbidden worship" in every form, i.e. the worship of other gods as well as the worship of both natural things and artificial things. This would mean that the prohibition against idolatry in the widest sense is as much a dictate of reason as the belief in God's unity

and incorporeality. Yet Maimonides indicates that only the theoretical truths pronounced in the Decalogue (God's existence and His unity), in contradistinction to the rest of the Decalogue, are rational. This is in agreement with his denying the existence of rational commandments or prohibitions as such (II 33; cf. I 54, II 31 beginning, III 28; *Eight Chapters* VI). Given the fact that Aristotle believed in God's unity and incorporeality and yet was an idolator (I 71, III 29), Maimonides' admiration for him would be incomprehensible if the rejection of idolatry were the simple consequence of that belief. According to Maimonides, the Law agrees with Aristotle in holding that the heavenly bodies are endowed with life and intelligence and that they are superior to man in dignity; one could say that he agrees with Aristotle in implying that those holy bodies deserve more than man to be called images of God. But unlike the philosophers he does not go so far as to call those bodies "divine bodies" (II 4-6; cf. Letter to Ibn Tibbon). The true ground of the rejection of "forbidden worship" is the belief in creation out of nothing which implies that creation is an absolutely free act of God or that God alone is the complete good which is in no way increased by creation. But creation is, according to Maimonides, not demonstrable, whereas God's unity and incorporeality are demonstrable. The reasoning underlying the determination of the initial theme of the *Guide* can then be described as follows: it conceals the difference of cognitive status between the belief in God's unity and incorporeality on the one hand and the belief in creation on the other; it is in accordance with the opinion of the Kalām. In accordance with this, Maimonides brings his disagreement with the Kalām into the open only after he has concluded his thematic discussion of God's incorporeality; in that discussion he does not even mention the Kalām.

It is necessary that we should understand as clearly as possible the situation in which Maimonides and his addressee find themselves at the beginning of the book, if not throughout the book. Maimonides knows that God is incorporeal; he knows this by a demonstration which is at least partly based on natural science. The addressee does not know that God is incorporeal; nor does

he learn it yet from Maimonides: he accepts the fact that God's incorporeality is demonstrated on Maimonides' authority. Both Maimonides and the addressee know that the Law is a source of knowledge of God: only the Law can establish God's incorporeality for the addressee in a manner which does not depend on Maimonides' authority. But both know that the literal meaning of the Law is not always its true meaning and that the literal meaning is certainly not the true meaning when it contradicts reason, for otherwise the Law could not be "your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations" (Deuteronomy 4:6). Both know in other words that exegesis does not simply precede speculation. Yet only Maimonides knows that the corporealistic expressions of the Law are against reason and must therefore be taken as figurative. The addressee does not know and cannot know that Maimonides' figurative interpretations of those expressions are true: Maimonides does not adduce arguments based on grammar. The addressee accepts Maimonides' interpretations just as he is in the habit of accepting the Aramaic translations as correct translations or interpretations. Maimonides enters the ranks of the traditional Jewish authorities: he simply tells the addressee what to believe as regards the meaning of the Biblical terms. Maimonides introduces Reason in the guise of Authority. He takes on the garb of authority. He tells the addressee to believe in God's incorporeality because, as he tells him, contrary to appearance, the Law does not teach corporeality, because, as he tells him, corporeality is a demonstrably wrong belief.