

## Maimonides' "Thirteen Principles" Rabbi Arthur Hyman

### INTRODUCTION

"The Law"<sup>1</sup> as a whole," writes Maimonides in his *Guide of the Perplexed*,<sup>2</sup> "aims at two things: the welfare of the soul<sup>3</sup> and the welfare of the body."<sup>4</sup> The welfare of the soul, for Maimonides, consists in the development of the human intellect, the welfare of the body in the improvement of men's political relations with one another. To improve men's political relations the Law sets down norms for the regulation of human conduct; to develop man's intellect true opinions,<sup>5</sup> which are communicated to men in accordance with their different intellectual capacities.<sup>6</sup> Of the two aims of the Law, the development of the intellect through the acquisition of true opinions is the final goal, while the improvement of men's political relations serves a preparatory purpose.

In the light of the primary importance he assigns, in his *Guide*, to the acquisition of true opinions, it is not surprising that Maimonides discusses these opinions in the majority of his works. The true opinions propagated by the Law are discussed by him in his three major legal works – the *Commentary on the Mishnah*, the *Sefer ha-Mizvot*, and the *Mishneh Torah* – they provide him with some of the basic themes of his *Guide of the Perplexed*, and individual opinions form the subject matter of a number of responsa and independent treatises.

Maimonides, as is well known, presents his primary account of the basic opinions of the Law in his so-called "thirteen principles," which are set down in the *Introduction to Perek Helek* of his *Commentary on the Mishnah*.<sup>7</sup> Through this *Commentary* is an early

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<sup>1</sup> התורה: אלשריעה .

<sup>2</sup> III, 27. The remainder of this paragraph is based on the same chapter. The following texts of the *Guide of the Perplexed* (cited hereafter as the *Guide*) were used: Arabic, ed. S. Munk with additions by I. Joel (Jerusalem, 1931); Hebrew, reprint of the Warsaw text of 1872 (New York, 1946); English, translation by Shlomo Pines (Chicago, 1963).

<sup>3</sup> תקון הנפש: צלאח אלנפס

<sup>4</sup> תקון הגוף: צלאח אלבדן

<sup>5</sup> דעות אמתייות : ארא צחיחה . Cf. below, Notes 9 and 106.

<sup>6</sup> See also *Guide*, I, 31

<sup>7</sup> References to the *Introduction to Perek Helek* are to the Arabic text found in J. Holzer, *Moses Maimunis Einleitung zu Chelek* (Berlin, 1901) and the Hebrew translation of Solomon ben Joseph ibn Jacob appearing in the same work. Holzer's edition of the texts is cited hereafter as *Helek*, his Introduction and German notes as Holzer, German section. In addition the following texts were consulted: the text of the *Introduction* appearing in the standard editions of the Babylonian Talmud; the modern Hebrew translation and notes of m. Gottlieb in *Perush ha-Mishnah la-Rambam, Masseket Sanhedrin* (Hannover, 1906) (cited hereafter as Gottlieb); the text and notes in *Hakdamot le-Perush ha-Mishnah*, ed. M. D. Rabinowitz (Jerusalem, 1961) (cited hereafter as *Hakdamot*); the text of the "thirteen principles" in Isaac Abrabanel's *Rosh Amanah* (Tel Aviv, 1958). Abrabanel (*Rosh Amanah*, chap. i, p. 14) attributes to Samuel ibn

work, Maimonides states explicitly that the *Introduction* and, with it, the “thirteen principles” are the product of his mature reflection. Thus he writes in his conclusion of the *Introduction*:<sup>8</sup> “...I did not set it [the *Introduction*] down as it happened [to come to mind], but after reflection and deliberation and [after] the careful examination of true opinions as well as untrue ones...”<sup>9</sup> Moreover, it seems that Maimonides considered the “thirteen principles” definitive throughout his life. He lists them with only a slight modification in the *Mishneh Torah*,<sup>10</sup> and in his *Treatise Concerning the Resurrection of the Dead*,<sup>11</sup> a work postdating his *Guide of the Perplexed*, he indicates that he had worked out his earlier enumeration of the principles with great care and that he considered this enumeration still definitive.

That the “thirteen principles” contain the definitive statement of Maimonides' view was also the judgment of posterity. These principles became the possession of the masses by being incorporated into the liturgy as the poem “Yidgal”<sup>12</sup> and the doxology, “Ani ma amin,”<sup>13</sup> while for philosophers and theologians, they became the subject of a lively debate concerning the fundamental principles of Jewish tradition. Those who agreed with Maimonides that Jewish tradition contains distinguishable principles of belief inquired whether their number was indeed thirteen, and whether Maimonides' list was correct,<sup>14</sup> while those who disagreed with him set out to show that Jewish tradition knows

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Tibbon, the well-known translator of the *Guide*, the translation of the principles used by Arbrabanel. On stylistic grounds, M. Gottlieb (pp. 82-84) expresses the opinion that the translation used by Arbrabanel is a composite of two earlier translations, one by Samuel ibn Tibbon, the other by Judah al-Harizi. For another discussion of the Hebrew translations, see Holzer, German section, pp. 19-22. The Arabic text of the *Introduction* is also found in *Selections from the Arabic Writings of Maimonides*, ed. Israel Friedlaender, reprint of 1909 ed. (Leiden, 1951).

The most thorough analytic study of the “thirteen principles” is that of Arbrabanel in his *Rosh Amanah*, the most extensive modern study that of David Neumark in his *Toledot ha-Ikkarim be-Yisrael* (Odessa, 1919), II, 127-161. In addition, the following discussions were found to be helpful in the preparation of this paper: S. Schechter, “The Dogmas of Judaism,” *Studies in Judaism*, first series (New York, 1896), pp. 147-181; “Articles of Faith,” *JE*, II, 148-152; “Dogmen,” *EJ*, V, 1167-1175; H.A. Wolfson, *Philo* (Cambridge, Mass., 1947), I, 164-199.

Professor Saul Lieberman directed my attention to the Gottlieb translation and kindly made his copy of this rare work available to me.

<sup>8</sup> *Helek*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>9</sup> דעות ברורות אמיתיות וזלתי אמיתיות: ארא צחיחה וגיר צחיחה. Cf. above, Note 5.

<sup>10</sup> See below, Pages 131ff.

<sup>11</sup> See “Treatise Concerning the Resurrection of the Dead,” ed. J. Finkel, *PAAJR*, 9:4-6 (1939). This *Treatise* was written in 1191-92 after the completion of the *Guide*.

<sup>12</sup> *The Authorized Daily Prayerbook*, trans. S. Singer, pp. 2-3. Israel Davidson, *Ozar ha-Shirah ve-ha-Piyyut*, IV (New York, 1933), 493, lists ninety-four medieval poems which have the “thirteen principles” as their subject. Cf. A. Marx, “A List of Poems on the Articles of the Creed,” *JQR*, n.s., 9:305-336 (1918-19).

<sup>13</sup> *Daily Prayer Book*, pp. 89-90.

<sup>14</sup> For example, Hasdai Crescas in his *Or Adonai* and Joseph Albo in his *Ikkarim*. Cf. Schechter, “Dogmas.”

of no separate principles of belief, but only of the totality of the Commandments of the Law.<sup>15</sup>

It is the purpose of this paper to examine and interpret a number of Maimonidean texts devoted to an account of the fundamental principles of the Law. To that end I shall (1) analyze the *Introduction to Perek Helek*, in which the "thirteen principles" are first set down, (2) compare the *Introduction* with a number of parallel texts in Maimonides' other legal writings, and (3) compare the discussions in the legal writings with that contained in a chapter of his speculative work, the *Guide of the Perplexed*. In the fourth and final section of this paper I shall attempt to interpret the "thirteen principles" in the light of Maimonides' general views.

## I

The *Introduction to Perek Helek* takes the form of a commentary on the first mishnah of the tenth chapter of the tractate *Sanhedrin*.<sup>16</sup> This mishnah begins: "All Israelites [*kol yisrael*] have a share in the World to Come [*olam ha-ba*]<sup>17</sup> as it is said (Isaiah 60:21): 'and Thy people shall all be righteous, they shall inherit the land forever...'"<sup>18</sup> The mishnah then continues: "The following are those who have no share in the World to Come: he who says 'there is not resurrection of the dead,'<sup>19</sup> and 'the Law is not from God,'<sup>20</sup> and the *apikoros*..."<sup>21</sup>

In the tractate *Sanhedrin* this mishnah appears within a set of chapters devoted to the four kinds of capital punishment imposed upon certain criminals by Biblical and

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<sup>15</sup> See Abrabanel, *Rosh Amanah*, chaps. xxiii-xxiv. Cf. Schechter, "Dogmas."

<sup>16</sup> Though in our editions of the Talmud this chapter appears as the eleventh chapter of the tractate *Sanhedrin*, this is its correct position. See *Tosafot Yom Tob* on Mishnah, *Sanhedrin*, X, 1; Holzer, German section, p. 23, n. 1; The Mishnah, *Seder Nezikin*, explained by H. Albeck (Tel Aviv, 1953), p. 168; *Hakdamot*, p. 109, n. 1.

<sup>17</sup> For a ready reference to the rabbinic notion of the "the World to Come," see G. F. Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era* (Cambridge, Mass., 1927), II, 377ff.

<sup>18</sup> The righteous of the nations of the world also have a share in the World to Come. Cf. Tosefta, *Sanhedrin*, XIII, 2; BT, *Sanhedrin*, 105a; *Commentary on the Mishnah, Sanhedrin*, X, 2; *Mishneh Torah, Teshubah*, III, 5, *Melakim*, VIII, 11.

<sup>19</sup> The printed editions of the Talmud and Rashi have the reading, "The resurrection of the dead is not dead is not derived from the Law" (אין תחיית המתים מן התורה). Maimonides' text does not seem to have had the additional phrase מן התורה. Cf. *Mishneh Torah, Teshubah*, III, 6; Holzer, German section, p. 23, n. 3. For the opposite view, see Gottlieb, p. 84, bottom.

<sup>20</sup> מן השמים. Literally, "from heaven."

<sup>21</sup> In its concluding section this mishnah lists the opinions of Rabbi Akiba and Abba Saul concerning additional categories of those excluded from the World to Come. Since this concluding statement has no direct bearing on the subject of this paper it was omitted. For a discussion on the origin of this mishnah, see Louis Finkelstein, *Mavo le-Massektot Abot ve-Abot d'Rabbi Natan* (New York, 1950), pp. 212-238.

rabbinic law.<sup>22</sup> Within this legal context our mishnah comes to emphasize that, though these criminals are judged and executed by human agency, they are not deprived thereby of having a share in the World to Come. Having affirmed this presumption in its opening statement, the mishnah - in its second section - lists three exceptions to this rule.

Since the second part of this mishnah lists three beliefs the denial of which excludes someone from the World to Come, it may be asked whether the affirmation of these beliefs is required in order to have a part in it. More generally, it may be asked whether this mishnah can be used as a source for determining the fundamental beliefs of Jewish tradition. Upon the simplest interpretation the answer to these questions seems to be: no.<sup>23</sup> The mishnah, according to this interpretation, opens by affirming that all Israelites have a share in the World to Come, without specifying any conditions - be they of practice or belief - which are required for being considered an Israelite and, hence, for having a share in the World to Come. The three beliefs listed in the second section are of importance only for clarifying who will be excluded from the World to Come, but from this listing it can not be inferred that an affirmation of these beliefs is required to gain a share in it. In short, it can not be shown from our mishnah that Jewish tradition demands of its adherents the explicit affirmation of certain principles of belief.

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<sup>22</sup> Mishnah, *Sanhedrin*, VII-XI.

<sup>23</sup> See Commentary of Obadyah Bertinoro on Mishnah, *Sanhedrin*, X. 1.

According to a second interpretation, which is that accepted by Maimonides,<sup>24</sup> the enumeration of those excluded from the World to Come can be used to derive from it a list of basic principles the affirmation of which is required in order to be considered an Israelite and, hence, for having a share in the World to Come. For if the denial of certain principles, so the argument goes, excludes someone from the World to Come, the affirmation of these principles is required in order for him to have a share in it. To have a part in the World to Come requires, then, the affirmation of beliefs related to the resurrection of the dead and to the divine origin of the Law, as well as the affirmation of beliefs denied by the *apikoros*.

Having interpreted the mishnah in this manner, Maimonides could proceed to an explanation of its parts. For him this meant to explain the two basic phrases "all Israelites" (*kol yisrael*) and "the World to Come" (*olam ha-ba*), as well as certain other terms occurring in the mishnah. These exegetical requirements determined the structure of the *Introduction to Perek Helek*. Of the three sections into which this *Introduction* may be divided, the first is devoted to a discussion of the World to Come, the second to a variety of terms occurring in the mishnah (among them *apikoros*), and the third to a clarification of the phrase "all Israelites." It is in the latter section that the "thirteen principles" are set down. It should be noted, in addition, that the section devoted to the World to Come contains an excursus describing him who serves God out of love (*obed me-ahabah*).<sup>25</sup> The significance of this excursus will be seen later on.<sup>26</sup>

Of the three categories of unbelievers enumerated in the second part of our mishnah, those of the denier of the resurrection of the dead and of the denier of the divine origin of the Law are clear enough. But who is the *apikoros*?<sup>27</sup> Our mishnah does not provide a description of this term nor do other passages in the Tannaitic literature in which the *apikoros* is mentioned. It is clear that the *apikoros* is the "Epicurean," who in the rabbinic literature becomes the archetype of the "heretic," but in what the "heresy" of

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<sup>24</sup> *Helek*, pp. 29-30. For the same interpretation, see Joseph Albo, *Ikkarim*, ed. and trans. by Isaac Husik (Philadelphia, 1946), I, 10, pp. 96-100.

<sup>25</sup> *Helek*, pp. 3-7. Cf. *Commentary on Mishnah, Abot*, I, 3; *Mishneh Torah, Teshubah*, X.

<sup>26</sup> See below, Pages 125-126.

<sup>27</sup> See Samuel Krauss, *Griechische und lateinische Lehnwörter in Talmud, Midrasch und Targum*, I (Berlin, 1898), 211; II (Berlin, 1899), 107.

the *apikoros* consists is not explained in the Tannaitic sources.<sup>28</sup> The Gemara<sup>29</sup> which comments on our mishnah offers two descriptions of the term. According to the Rab and Rabbi Hanina, the *apikoros* is someone who “reviles a Sage,”<sup>30</sup> while, according to Rabbi Yohanan and Rabbi Joshua ben Levi, he is someone who “reviles his fellow before a Sage.”<sup>31</sup>

Though the reviling of a Sage or of one’s fellow before a Sage may have been principle “heresies” at the time<sup>32</sup> of the authorities who described the *apikoros* in this manner, these descriptions seem hardly adequate for determining the original meaning of this term in our mishnah. For, if the second section of this mishnah, as seems likely, is devoted to beliefs, one would expect that, just as the first two categories of those excluded from the World to Come refer to persons denying certain beliefs, so the *apikoros* is someone who denies certain beliefs, not someone committing a certain action – that of reviling. Moreover, should it be true that our mishnah is not simply a random collection of beliefs, one would expect the *apikoros* to be someone who denies some propositions about God. Reflections such as these seem to have been in Maimonides’ mind when he undertook to interpret the term *apikoros* in the *Introduction of the Perek Helek*.

In Maimonides’ writings the term *apikoros* is used in a variety of ways.<sup>33</sup> Commenting on the term in the *Introduction to Perek Helek*,<sup>34</sup> Maimonides seems to have followed the lead of the Gemara in defining the *apikoros* as someone “who makes light of and reviles the Law or the bearers of the Law.”<sup>35</sup> Apparently aware, however, of the difficulty of this interpretation, Maimonides adds as a further characteristic of the

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<sup>28</sup> Krauss, *Lehnwörter*, I, 207, writes: “...der religiöse Jude versteht unter...אפיקורוס, ‘*Etikovpos*...etwas Anderes als der Grieche und Römer...” For a discussion of Epicurus and Epicureanism in rabbinic literature, see Saul Lieberman, “How Much Greek in Jewish Palestine?” *Biblical and Other Studies*, ed. A. Altmann (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), pp. 129-130.

<sup>29</sup>BT, *Sanhedrin*, 99b.

<sup>30</sup>המבזה תלמיד חכם.

<sup>31</sup>המבזה חברו בפני תלמיד חכם.

<sup>32</sup> Third century C.E.

<sup>33</sup> To the descriptions of the *apikoros* which will be discussed presently, that in *Mishney Torah, Teshubah*, III, 8, should be added. In this passage Maimonides describes him as someone who denies prophecy, the prophecy of Moses, and Divine knowledge of human deeds. For still other uses of the term, particularly in legal contexts, see *Lehem Mishneh* on *Teshubah*, III, 8.

<sup>34</sup> *Helek*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>35</sup> מי שמפקיר ומבזה את התורה או לומדיה: אלאסתכפאף ואלתהאון באלשריע אן בחמלה אלשריע.

*apikoros* that he is someone “who does not believe in the principles of the Law.”<sup>36</sup> Yet Maimonides does not specify in this passage the principles which the *apikoros* does not believe.

In his *Guide of the Perplexed* Maimonides discusses the *apikoros* in two passages, in each of which he identifies him with someone who agrees with the opinions of Epicurus and his followers. In a chapter devoted to various cosmogonic theories,<sup>37</sup> Maimonides describes Epicurus and his followers as persons who, not knowing the existence of God, attribute changes in the world to chance and who deny that God governs and orders the world. Similarly, in an enumeration and description of various theories of providence,<sup>38</sup> Maimonides describes Epicurus as a philosopher who denies Divine providence and attributes everything to chance. In the latter passage he adds significantly: “Those in Israel who were unbelievers also professed this opinion; they are those of whom it is said (Jeremiah 5:12) ‘They have belied the Lord, and said: It is not He.’ “ From these two passages it becomes clear that in the *Guide* Maimonides identifies the *apikoros* with the Jewish follower of Epicurus whose unbelief consists in the denial of propositions about God – in particular, in the denial of Divine providence. Since in Maimonides’ enumeration of the “thirteen principles” propositions about God are the counter-part of principles denied by the *apikoros*,<sup>39</sup> it seems fair to say that the unspecified principles denied by the *apikoros* are propositions about God.

Having seen how Maimonides understood the term *apikoros*, we are now in a position to turn to the first section of the *Introduction to Perek Helek* – his account of the World to Come. Maimonides begins by examining five opinions, current among his contemporaries, concerning the World to Come. In spite of certain differences among them, the proponents of these opinions agree in that they identify the afterlife with some sort of earthly reward – be it food or drink, an easy life, being with one’s family, the attainment of one’s desires, or a mixture of these.<sup>40</sup> In contrast to the popular views, Maimonides holds that man’s ultimate happiness – that is, the World to Come – consists in the immortal existence of the human intellect apart from any body – this intellect being engaged in the contemplation of God.

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<sup>36</sup> מי שאינו מאמין ביסודי התורה: מן לא יעתקד קואעד אלשרע.

<sup>37</sup> *Guide*, II, 13, end.

<sup>38</sup> *Guide*, III, 17, first opinion. The opinion of Epicurus is also mentioned in passing in the discussion of prophecy in *Guide*, II, 32.

<sup>39</sup> See below, Page 128.

<sup>40</sup> *Helek*, pp. 1-3.

In support of his opinion Maimonides cites the saying of Rab that “in the World to Come there is not eating, no drinking, no bathing, no anointing, no cohabitation, but the righteous sit, their crowns on their heads, and enjoy the radiance of the *shekinah*.”<sup>41</sup> In his *Introduction to Perek Helek*, Maimonides comments on this rabbinic saying as follows:<sup>42</sup>

And when saying<sup>43</sup> ‘and their crowns on their heads,’ he [Rab, the author of the statement] has in mind the continuous existence of the soul<sup>44</sup> through the continuous existence of that which is known by it<sup>45</sup> and the soul’s being the same thing as that which is known by it,<sup>46</sup> as the skilled ones among the philosophers have mentioned on the basis of methods the explanation of which would be too lengthy in place. And when saying ‘and they enjoy the radiance of the *shekinah*’ he has in mind that those souls rejoice in that which they understand of the Creator... And the continuous existence of the soul – as we have explained – without end is like the continuous existence of the Creator, great be His praise, who is the cause of its [the soul’s] continuous existence in accordance with its understanding of Him, as has been explained in ‘first philosophy.’<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> BT, *Berakot*, 17a, where the text is somewhat different. Maimonides quotes Rab’s saying anonymously as חכמים ראשונים אמרו ע”ה: קאלוא ע”ה. Cf. *Teshubah*, VIII, 2, where he quotes the same saying in the name of חכמים ראשונים.

<sup>42</sup> *Helek*, pp. 13-14. Cf. *Mishneh Torah*, *Teshubah*, VIII, 2-3; *Resurrection*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>43</sup> יריד בקולה. Literally, “he intends by his saying.”

<sup>44</sup> This is Maimonides’ term for the immortality of the soul, which, according to him, is the same as immortality of the intellect. He writes in *Guide*, I, 41: “Soul [*nefesh*]... is also a term denoting the rational soul [הנפש המדברת: אלנפש אלנטקה], I mean the form of man... And it is a term denoting the thing that remains of man after death [הדבר הנשאר מן האדם אחר המות: אלשי אלבאקי מן אלמנסאן בעד אלמות].” Cf. *Mishneh Torah*, *Teshubah*, VIII, 2; *Guide*, III, 27, end (Arabic, p. 373, line 2: אלנפש אלנטקה, Hebrew p. 41b, line 8: העמדה המתמדת; III, 54 (Arabic, p. 469, line 4: [ה]קיימות הנצחי, Hebrew, p. 70b, line 4: אלבקה אלדאם).

<sup>45</sup> The Hebrew text has the additional phrase “namely, the Creator, blessed be He” (והוא הבורא יתברך).

<sup>46</sup> Arabic: וכונהא הי והו שי ואחד. The Hebrew text has: (והוא והיותה היא והוא לומר המושכל) That the intellect and the intelligible are one in the act of knowing is stated by Maimonides in *Guide*, I, 68. Cf. S. B. Scheyer, *Das psychologische System des Maimonides* (Frankfurt, 1845), pp. 72-73; and Holzer, German section, p. 30, n. 75.

<sup>47</sup> That the “future life” of the soul is studied by metaphysics is also the view of Avicenna. He writes in *Al-Shifra*, *De Anima*, ed. F. Rahman (London, 1959), V, 5, p. 238, lines 3-7: “But since our discourse in this place is only about the nature of the soul insofar as it is soul, that is, insofar as it is conjoined to this matter, it is not necessary for us to speak about the future life of the soul [*maad al-nafs*] (for we are speaking about nature) until we have passed on to the art of wisdom [metaphysics] [*al-sinaah al-hikmiyyah*], in which we shall speculate about separate [immaterial] substances.”



How did Maimonides derive this conception of human immortality, that is, of the World to Come? In spite of the rabbinic origin of the term “the World to Come” and in spite of the mishnah’s reference to a Biblical proof-text, Maimonides derived his definition from philosophical considerations alone. Man is a rational animal, his argument proceeds, whose intellect can survive death, provided it has become actualized through the acquisition of knowledge in this life. Maimonides’ references to the “skilled ones among the philosophers” as those who have developed a correct understanding of immortality and to “first philosophy” – that is, metaphysics – as the science which demonstrates the survival of the soul, provide sufficient evidence for the philosophical origin of his view. For Maimonides, we may conclude, the philosophical account of the human immortality is identical with the religious notion of the World to Come.

Having clarified his understanding of the World to Come, it remained for Maimonides to explain the phrase “all Israelites,” which occurs at the beginning of the mishnah on which he comments. His interpretation of this phrase becomes clear from a statement with which he concludes his discussion of the “thirteen principles.” Toward the end of his *Introduction to Perek Helek* Maimonides writes:<sup>48</sup> “...and when all these [thirteen] principles have become accepted by someone and his belief in them has become clear,<sup>49</sup> then he enters the community of Israel...”<sup>50</sup> This conclusion shows that, for Maimonides, the affirmation of the “thirteen principles” is a necessary, if not a sufficient, condition<sup>51</sup> for being considered an Israelite and subsequently, according to the mishnah, for having a share in the World to Come.

The principles<sup>52</sup> which, according to Maimonides, must be affirmed by every Israelite may be divided into three general classes: propositions about God, about the Law, and about reward and punishment. In selecting this threefold division Maimonides was guided by his previously mentioned interpretation of the mishnah. Propositions about God contain affirmations of principles denied by the *apikoros*, propositions about the Law correspond to the Mishnaic principle of its Divine origin, and propositions about reward and punishment are counterparts to the principle of the resurrection of the dead.

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<sup>48</sup> *Helek*, p. 29.

<sup>49</sup> Arabic: *وَصَحَّحَ الْعَقْلَ لَهَا*, Hebrew: *וְנִתְבַרְרָה אִמּוּנָתוֹ בָהֶם*. Friedlaender: *צח* – to be firm.

<sup>50</sup> The Arabic text (like the Hebrew) reads *בְּכֻלּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל*. This is an obvious allusion to the term *כל ישראל* with which the mishnah begins.

<sup>51</sup> The good life, according to Maimonides, also requires moral perfection (see, for example, above, Page 120). However, since he limits himself to principles of belief in the *Introduction to Perek Helek*, there exists no need for him to discuss the moral prerequisites of the good life.

<sup>52</sup> For a review and critique of various interpretations of Maimonides’ use of the term “principle,” see Abrabanel, *Rosh Amanah*, chaps ii and vi.

The section containing statements about God<sup>53</sup> consists of the following five principles: first, the existence of God; second, the unity of God; third, the incorporeality of God; fourth, the eternity of God, and a fifth principle, the content of which is not completely clear. Maimonides begins the statement of his principle by affirming that God is to be worshiped and concludes with the prohibition of idol worship. Though most interpreters take this principle to state that God is to be worshiped, the conclusion “and this fifth principle is the prohibition of idolatry”<sup>54</sup> makes it seem correct that the prohibition of the worship of beings other than God is its subject.<sup>55</sup>

The second group of principles – that dealing with the Law-<sup>56</sup> consists of the following four propositions:<sup>57</sup> sixth, the existence of prophecy; seventh, the prophecy of Moses and its superiority to that of the other prophets; eighth, the divine origin of the Law, written as well as oral; ninth, the eternity of the Law.<sup>58</sup>

The third class of principles – that dealing with reward and punishment-<sup>59</sup> contains the following four propositions: tenth, God’s knowledge of human deeds; eleventh, reward and punishment; twelfth, the days of the Messiah; thirteenth, the resurrection of the dead.

An explanation of Maimonides’ ”thirteen principles” permits the following observations. (1) Each principle is composed of an expression or phrase setting down the principle and explanatory comments of various length.<sup>60</sup> These comments vary from a

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<sup>53</sup> *Helek*, pp. 20-23.

<sup>54</sup> אלילים וזה היסוד החמישי הוא שהזהיר על עבודת ויהוה אלקאעדה אלכאמסה פי אלנהי ען עבודה זרה. Cf. Gottlieb, pp. 94-95.

<sup>55</sup> This interpretation is supported by the parallelism between Maimonides’ enumeration of beings whose worship is prohibited which is set down in the present passage and that which is set down in *Hilkot Abodah Zarah*, II, 1. See below, Note 78. Cf. *Mishneh Torah, Teshubah*, III, 7, and *Guide*, I, 35.

<sup>56</sup> *Helek*, pp. 23-27.

<sup>57</sup> The numbering of the principles is that of Maimonides.

<sup>58</sup> Arabic: אלנסך. The ninth principle denies the abrogation of the Mosaic Law. The Arabic term נסך has two meanings: abrogation (Hebrew: בטול), and transmission (Hebrew: העתק). The Hebrew translator mistakenly took the Arabic term in its second sense. Cf. Holzer, German section, p. 40, n. 190; Gottlieb, pp. 52, 99, n. 77; Neumark, *Toledot*, II, p. 129.

<sup>59</sup> *Helek*, pp. 27-29.

<sup>60</sup> Gottlieb goes too far in adding an expression to those principles (5, 10, 11) which, in fact, begin with a descriptive phrase. Gottlieb’s additions are: p. 50, [מששתתף אחר בכבודו היסוד החמישי [רוממותו]; p. 52, [שכרם וענשם] היסוד האחד עשר, p. 53, [היסוד העשירי [השגחת הבורא בתחוננים].

full discussion of four differences between the prophecy of Moses and that of other prophets to the brief phrase “and we have already explained it,” referring for the explanation of the principle of the resurrection of the dead to an earlier passage in the *Introduction* in which this principle is discussed.<sup>61</sup> (2) The explanation of each principle is philosophically rather complex. To know, for instance, that God’s unity differs from the unity of genus, species, aggregate, and magnitude,<sup>62</sup> or to know that in prophecy an emanation proceeds from the Active Intellect to the human intellect<sup>63</sup> requires at least a rudimentary philosophical sophistication of the reader. (3) In the text contained in our editions of the Talmud, as well as in the “Ani ma-amin” of the liturgy, the term “to believe” and its derivatives occur with great frequency.<sup>64</sup> By contrast, these cognitive terms are almost completely lacking in the Arabic original. In this text the “thirteen principles” are set down didactically as declarative statements with hardly any reference to their cognitive status. The term “to believe” and its derivatives are mentioned only in connection with four principles: the prophecy of Moses (principle 7), the Divine origin of the Law (principle 8), the days of the Messiah (principle 12), and the resurrection of the dead (principle 13).<sup>65</sup> (4) The language of the principles suggests that they have a certain internal structure. One gains the impression that certain principles are independent, others derivative. For example, of the five principles concerning God, three – His existence, His unity, and the prohibition of idol worship – appear to be independent principles, while two – God’s incorporeality and His eternity – seems to be derivatives of the principle of Divine unity.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> This reference is found in *Helek*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>62</sup> Second principle.

<sup>63</sup> Sixth principle.

<sup>64</sup> In the version contained in the editions of the Talmud the term “to believe” and its derivatives occur at the beginning of principles 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 12. In the “Ani ma-amin” each principle begins with the phrase “I believe with perfect faith that...”

<sup>65</sup> See Neumark, *Toledot*, II, 151.

<sup>66</sup> That the third and fourth principles are derivatives of the second is indicated by their beginning. The third principle begins: “...the denial of corporeality of Him, and it is that this unitary being [האחד: אלו אחד] is not a body nor a power in a body...” The fourth principle begins: “...eternity, and this is that this unitary being [האחד: אלו אחד] who has been described is eternal in an absolute sense...”

The three principles dealing with the Law of Moses depend on the principles of prophecy, though they are not derived from this principle as are the third and fourth principle from the principle of Divine unity. The principles devoted to reward and punishment do not seem to have any particular internal structure.

## II

Having set down the “thirteen principles in the *Introduction to Perek Helek*, Maimonides discusses them once again in his two other legal works, the *Sefer ha-Mizvot* and the *Mishneh Torah*. But, whereas in the former work Maimonides is interested primarily in the enumeration of these principles and the explanation of their content, he discusses them in the latter works to investigate their legal backgrounds: that is to say, Maimonides inquires how the principles are related to the commandments and prohibitions of Biblical Law.

The discussion in the *Sefer ha-Mizvot*<sup>67</sup> is brief. Maimonides composed this work as a preliminary study for his *Mishneh Torah*. Since the *Mishneh Torah* was to be a compendium of the totality of Biblical law and its interpretation, he had to establish first which were the six hundred and thirteen Biblical commandments and prohibitions of which Jewish tradition spoke, but which it had neglected to list in definitive fashion.<sup>68</sup> To find a method for determining which laws are Biblically commanded and to formulate the content of each law became Maimonides’ twofold task in the *Sefer ha-Mizvot*.

In accordance with the purpose of the work, Maimonides discusses in the *Sefer ha-Mizvot* only those principles which, in his view, are explicitly commanded or prohibited by the Bible. Of the “thirteen principles” only three can be classified in this manner with certainty, but it seems safe to add a fourth principle to this list.

Of the principles concerning God, that affirming His existence (principle 1) appears in the *Sefer ha-Mizvot* as the first of the positive commandments,<sup>69</sup> that affirming His unity (principle 2) as the second of the positive commandments.<sup>70</sup> As in the *Introduction to Perek Helek*, the first of the Ten Commandments<sup>71</sup> is offered as the Biblical text requiring the affirmation of God’s existence, the verse “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One”<sup>72</sup> as the text requiring the affirmation of the unity of God.

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<sup>67</sup> References to the *Sefer ha-Mizvot* are to the Hebrew translation of that work edited by Chaim Heller (Jerusalem-New York, 1936).

<sup>68</sup> *Sefer ha-Mizvot*, Introduction, p. 4.

<sup>69</sup> *Sefer ha-Mizvot*, p. 35.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> Exodus 20:2.

<sup>72</sup> Deuteronomy 6:4.

In the *Sefer ha-Mizvot* the principle of God's existence has as its correlative the prohibition against affirming the existence of other gods. This correlative principle, which appears as the first of the negative commandments, has as its Biblical source the second of the Ten Commandments.<sup>73</sup> Of the remaining principles concerning God, the prohibition against worshipping other gods (principle 5) is the only other one considered as Biblically commanded. It is listed in the *Sefer ha-Mizvot* as the tenth of the negative commandments.<sup>74</sup>

To these principles which are listed as Biblical commandments or prohibitions in the *Sefer ha-Mizvot*, the principle of prophecy (principle 6) may be added. For though this principle is not explicitly set down as Biblically commanded, it is a prerequisite for the Biblical command to obey any prophet whom God may send (Deut. 18:15). In the *Sefer ha-Mizvot* this is the one hundred and seventy-second of the positive commandments.<sup>75</sup>

From the brief discussion of the principles appropriate to the *Sefer ha-Mizvot*, Maimonides proceeds once again to a full discussion of all thirteen in the *Mishneh Torah*.<sup>76</sup> In this work the principles appear twice. They are listed in summary fashion in *Hilkot Teshubah*, III, 6-8, and they are discussed at length in a variety of *halkot* dispersed through *Hilkot Yesodei ha-Torah*, *Teshubah*, and *Abodah Zarah*.

The summary listing in *Hilkot Teshubah*, III, 6-8, is almost identical with that in the *Introduction to Perek Helek*. Citing the original mishnah on which his discussion of the "thirteen principles" is based, Maimonides begins: "The following are those who have no share in the World to Come," proceeding in the *halakot* mentioned to list thirteen principles, the denial of which excludes one from the World to Come. Though the arrangement of the thirteen principles in *Hilkot Teshubah* differs from that in the *Introduction to Perek Helek*,<sup>77</sup> the two listings differ basically in only one respect. The

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<sup>73</sup> It is rather striking that there is no reference to the second of the Ten Commandments in the enumeration of the principles in the *Introduction to Perek Helek*, inasmuch as Maimonides mentions the first two of the Ten Commandments together in his other writings. Cf. also *Mishneh Torah*, *Yesodei ha-Torah*, I, 6; *Guide*, II, 33. It is to be noted that the prohibition against affirming the existence of other gods differs from the prohibition against worshipping them (principle 5).

<sup>74</sup> *Sefer ha-Mizvot*, pp. 98-100.

<sup>75</sup> *Sefer ha-Mizvot*, p. 78. For a cogent remark concerning the position of this commandment in Maimonides' enumeration, see Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Glencoe, 1952), p. 91, n. 156.

<sup>76</sup> In addition to the Warsaw edition, Moses Hyamson's edition of *Sefer ha-Madda* (Jerusalem, 1962) was consulted.

<sup>77</sup> The present listing of the principles forms part of an enumeration of twenty-four categories of those who have no share in the World to Come. This more elaborate enumeration – as Hyamson points out in a note – seems to have been influenced by the statement in *Tosefta*, *Sanhedrin*, XIII, 5. This source probably determined Maimonides' rearrangement of the principles.

belief in the divine origin of the Law (principle 8), which in the *Introduction* is set down as one principle referring both to the written and the oral Law, is divided in *Hilkot Teshubah* into two separate principles – one affirming the Divine origin of the written Law, the other affirming the Divine origin of the oral Law. To retain thirteen as the number of the principles, Maimonides omits the principle of reward and punishment (principle 11) from the enumeration of *Hilkot Teshubah*. However, if this modification does not indicate a fundamental revision of his views, since the principle of the Divine knowledge of human deed (principle 10), which he retains, is a kind of equivalent to the omitted principle.

In the other account in the *Mishneh Torah* Maimonides returns to a full discussion of the principles. Of the five principles concerning God, the first four are discussed at length in the first chapter of *Hilkot Yeshodei ha-Torah*. As in the *Sefer ha-Mizvot*, the principles of God's existence (principle 1) and His unity (principle 2) are listed as direct Biblical commandments and the same Scriptural verses are offered as their basis. In addition, again as in the *Sefer ha-Mizvot*, the prohibition against having other gods is considered as a correlative to the belief in God's existence. The principles of the incorporeality of God (principle 3) and His eternity (principle 4), which are not listed in the *Sefer ha-Mizvot*, appear in the *Mishneh Torah* as derivatives of the principle of Divine unity. God's eternity, it should be noted, receives bare mention. The prohibition against worshipping other beings (principle 5) finds its parallel in the first halakah of the second chapter of *Hilkot Abodah Zarah*.<sup>78</sup>

The second group of principles, that dealing with the origin of the Law and with its nature, is discussed in chapters seven through nine of *Hilkot Yesodei ha-Torah*. Of these principles only the belief in prophecy (principle 6) can possibly be considered as Biblically commanded. As in the *Sefer ha-Mizvot*, its Biblical root is the commandment to obey any prophet whom God may send. In the *Mishneh Torah* the other principles referring to the Law – the prophecy of Moses (principle 7), the Divine origin of the Law (principle 8) and its eternity (principle 9) – are considered as principles which are subsidiary to that of prophecy but not derived from it directly. The similarity between the discussion in the *Mishneh Torah* and that in the *Introduction to Perek Helek* is illustrated once again by the fact that the four differences between the prophecy of Moses and that of other prophets are repeated in the *Mishneh Torah*.<sup>79</sup>

The principles concerning reward and punishment are discussed in *Hilkot Teshubah*, chapters seven through nine. In these chapters Maimonides speaks of God's knowledge of human acts (principle 10), reward and punishment (principle 11), and the

<sup>78</sup> See above, Note 55. The parallel passages read:

*Helek*, pp. 22-23: ... שהוא יתברך הוא ראוי לעבדו ... ולא יעשו כזה למי שהוא תחתיו במציאות

... מן המלאכים (והכוכבים) והגלגלים והיסודות ומה שהורכב מהם ...

*Mishneh Torah, Abodah Zarah*, II, 1: עקר הצווי בעבודה זרה שלא לעבוד אחד מכל הברואים לא

מלאך ולא גלגל ולא כוכב ולא אחד מארבע היסודות ולא אחד מכל הנבראים מהם...

<sup>79</sup> *Yesodei ha-Torah*, VII, 6.

days of the Messiah (principle 12). In addition, a full discussion of the World to Come is included in this section.<sup>80</sup> It should be noted that, though Scriptural verses are cited in support of all these principles, none is considered as Biblically commanded. The principle of the resurrection of the dead (principle 13) is missing from this discussion. Because of the omission some of Maimonides' contemporaries (as well as later scholars) questioned Maimonides' belief in this principle. Aware, however, of the furor caused by this omission, Maimonides, in his later years, wrote the *Treatise Concerning the Resurrection of the Dead*<sup>81</sup> to fill this gap. This *Treatise*, it is permissible to state, can be considered as a kind of appendix to the *Mishneh Torah*, designed to complete the full discussion of the "thirteen principles."

An analysis of the discussion of the principles in the *Sefer ha-Mizvot* and in the *Mishneh Torah* yields these additional observations. (1) The "thirteen principles" set down first in the *Introduction to Perek Helek* are retained with barely a modification in the *Mishneh Torah*. This shows Maimonides' commitment to his original listing. (2) The use of cognitive terms becomes somewhat more frequent in the *Sefer ha-Mizvot* and in the *Mishneh Torah*. Thus, in the former work, the existence of God and His unity are described as Biblical commandments the "belief" in which is required by the Law.<sup>82</sup> Similarly, in the *Mishneh Torah*, God's existence and the existence of prophecy are listed as principles which are "to be known."<sup>83</sup> If, as the editor of the Hebrew text of the *Sefer ha-Mizvot* suggests,<sup>84</sup> the term "to believe" used in this work has the same meaning as the term "to know" in the *Mishneh Torah*, it would follow that the Law, according to Maimonides' interpretation, requires that at least some of the principles *be known*. (3) The legal structure of the principles is clarified in these works. Of the "thirteen principles," three – the existence of God, His unity, and the prohibition against worshipping other beings – are considered as direct commandments of the Bible. To this list, as has been seen, the principle of prophecy may be added. Two principles concerning God – His incorporeality and eternity – and three principles related to prophecy – the prophecy of Moses, the Divine origin of the Law, and its eternity – are considered as derivatives of Biblical commandments or as dependent on them. The four principles

<sup>80</sup> Cf. *Mishneh Torah, Teshubah*, VIII.

<sup>81</sup> *Resurrection*, pp. 10-15.

<sup>82</sup> *Sefer ha-Mizvot*, p. 35:

מצוה א' היא הצווי אשר צונו להאמין (נ"א: בהאמנת, באמונת) האלהות והוא שנאמין שיש שם עלה וסבה הוא פועל לכל הנמצאות...  
מצוה ב' היא הצווי שצונו באמונת היחוד והוא שנאמין כי פועל המציאות וסבתו הראשונה אחד...

<sup>83</sup> *Mishneh Torah, Yesodei ha-Torah*, I, 1:

יסוד היסודות ועמוד החכמות לידע שיש שם מצוי ראשון... וידעת דבר זה מצות עשה...  
*Mishneh Torah, Yesodei ha-Torah*, VII, 1:  
מיסוד הדת לידע שהאל מנבא את בני אדם...

<sup>84</sup> *Sefer ha-Mizvot*, p. 25, n.1.

concerning reward and punishment are considered as independent of any Biblical law, though Biblical verses are cited in their support.

### III

Maimonides discusses the principles once again in chapter thirty-five of the first part of his *Guide of the Perplexed*. This chapter forms the conclusion of a section in which Maimonides discusses the study of metaphysics,<sup>85</sup> showing, as part of his discussion, the dangers and difficulties encountered in teaching metaphysics to the masses. Yet in this chapter Maimonides emphasizes that, in spite of the dangers and difficulties, some metaphysical propositions must be communicated to the masses in a literal fashion. The primary proposition of this sort is that of the incorporeality of God. Maimonides writes:

For just as it is fitting<sup>86</sup> to bring children up in the belief and to proclaim to the multitude that God, may He be magnified and honored, is one and that none but He ought to be worshiped, so it is fitting that they should be made to accept on traditional authority the belief that God is not a body and that there is no likeness in any respect whatever between Him and the things created by Him...

A study of this chapter discloses further that to the principles that God is one and incorporeal and that no other being should be worshipped, principles which must be affirmed in a literal manner by masses and philosophers alike, there should be added His existence and eternity. Beyond that Maimonides considers it an obligation to present these principles to the masses in as philosophic a manner as possible.<sup>87</sup>

In contrast to those principles which are to be made intelligible to all, Maimonides lists in our chapter principles which he describes as “the hidden teachings of the Law” (*sitrei torah*) or its “secrets” (*al-sodot*).<sup>88</sup> Their correct meaning is to be communicated only to those chosen few who possess the right kind of intellectual ability and training. Of the “thirteen principles,” prophecy, Divine knowledge, and providence are listed as “secrets of the Law” in the present chapter.<sup>89</sup> Five of the “thirteen principles” – the prophecy of Moses, the Divine origin of the Law, its eternity, the days of the Messiah, and the resurrection of the dead – are not mentioned in this chapter at all. These same five

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<sup>85</sup> *Guide*, I, 31-35, esp. 33-34.

<sup>86</sup> Arabic: *ينبغي*; Hebrew: *צריך*.

<sup>87</sup> *Guide*, I, 35, second part of the chapter. Cf. Isaak Heinemann, “Maimuni und die arabischen Einheitslehrer,” *MGWJ*, 79: 102-148 (1935), esp. pp. 126-142.

<sup>88</sup> The Hebrew terms *סתרי תורה* and *אלסודות* appear in the Arabic text.

<sup>89</sup> In addition, the following topics are listed as “secrets of the Law”: Divine attributes, creation, God’s governance of the world, His will, His knowledge, and His names.



principles are either completely missing from the *Guide*, or, if they are discussed, they are discussed only in an incidental fashion.<sup>90</sup>

This chapter of the *Guide* provides another classification of the “thirteen principles.” According to this classification, the principles may be divided into three kinds: (1) those principles (the five concerning God) which are to be accepted literally by masses and philosophers alike; (2) those described as “secrets of the Law” (prophecy, Divine knowledge, and providence), which, lending themselves to philosophic interpretation, are to be understood in one way by the masses, in another by the philosophers, and (3) those principles (prophecy of Moses, Divine origin of the Law, its eternity, the days of the Messia, and the resurrection of the dead) which, nonphilosophic in their nature, lie outside the strict subject matter of the *Guide*.

#### IV

Scholars have suggested three theories concerning the nature and function of the “thirteen principles.” The first of these may be described as their historical interpretation. Among others, Schechter<sup>91</sup> and Neumark<sup>92</sup> defended it. According to this interpretation, Maimonides set down his principles under the influence and, possibly, pressure of his times. Maimonides noted that Muslims had a confession of faith and Christians dogmas. In order to show that Judaism was not inferior to the other religions and in order to polemicize against them, Maimonides composed his list of principles as a kind of Jewish catechism or doxology. Now, it can not be denied that the affirmation of such principles as the supremacy of the prophecy of Moses and the eternity of the Law had certain urgency in Maimonides’ times in the face of Christian and Muslim claims that their revelations had superseded that of Moses.<sup>93</sup> But a careful study of the passages analyzed discloses no evidence that the “thirteen principles” were formulated primarily because of the influence of the times or for polemical reasons. Students of Maimonides are well aware of his general lack of interest in historic matters<sup>94</sup> and of the scant mention that Christianity and Islam receive in his speculative writings.<sup>95</sup> The historical interpretation, it seems, can safely be ruled out.

A second interpretation of the principles has come to the fore in recent years. It may be characterized as their political interpretation. Though scholars favoring this view

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<sup>90</sup> Cf. Neumark, *Toledot*, II, pp. 131-132.

<sup>91</sup> Schechter, “Dogmas,” pp. 176-179.

<sup>92</sup> Neumark, *Toledot*, II, p. 130 bottom. Among the late medieval philosophers, Abrabanel already gave a “historical” explanation of the principles. He writes in *Rosh Amanah*, chap. xxiii, pp. 136-137, that Maimonides in setting down his principles imitated the methods of Gentile scholars.

<sup>93</sup> See *Mishneh Torah, Hilkot Teshubah*, III, 8. (See text in Hyamson ed.)

<sup>94</sup> For a discussion of Maimonides’ interest in history, see S. W. Baron, “The Historical Outlook of Maimonides,” *PAAJR*, 6:5-113 (1934-35), esp. 7-12.

<sup>95</sup> In all the texts discussed in this paper Christians and Muslims are mentioned only in that cited in Note 93, above.

have not yet provided us with a detailed analysis of the principles, the trend of this interpretation is clear enough. In a dissertation entitled *Ibn Bajjah and Maimonides*<sup>96</sup> Professor Lawrence Berman takes occasion to discuss some of these principles, among them those describing God. Commenting in this connection on Maimonides' demand that even the masses must be taught correct opinions about God, in particular that He is incorporeal, Professor Berman states that there is no cognitive significance in this demand. According to him, the knowledge required by Maimonides of the masses possesses no intrinsic intellectual value.<sup>97</sup> Professor Berman suggests three reasons for Maimonides' demand that even the masses must be taught an enlightened concept of God, and all these reasons are political. For (1) a belief in God and in a certain order in the world influences people to mold their political actions in accordance with the cosmic order. Thus the city (state) remains stable. (2) If the opinions of the masses are close to the opinions of the philosophers, the philosopher will find it easier to live within the state and guide it without friction. (3) If the opinions of the masses are close to philosophic truth, individual of a philosophical nature will find it easier to achieve true philosophical knowledge. They can attain such knowledge without having first to free themselves of the habits of faith which may oppose philosophical truths.<sup>98</sup>

It is the merit of this interpretation to have called attention to the political dimension of Maimonides' principles, but, to my mind, it has gone too far in making all of them political. It is well known that Maimonides' contemporary Averroes was of the opinion that it was dangerous to require of the masses philosophically correct notions about God.<sup>99</sup> When, then Maimonides demands that even the masses must be taught correct opinions about God, in particular His incorporeality, it seems that he moves away from the realm of political expediency. The purely political interpretation of the "thirteen principles" seems to neglect their metaphysical dimension.

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<sup>96</sup> L. V. Berman, "Ibn Bajjah and Maimonides" (unpub. Diss., Hebrew University, May 1959-mimeographed), *passim*. Cf. S. Pines' "Translator's Introduction" to his translation of the *Guide*, pp. cxviii ff.

<sup>97</sup> Berman, chap iii, esp. pp. 139-144. Berman's thesis emerges from the following passage (p. 140, lines 19-23):  
 אם כן הדעות האמתיות שיש להמון אינן יכולות להשתייך לסוג השלמות העליונה אלא לסוג השלמויות האחרות.  
 הסוג היחידי של השלמויות המתאים לעוה"ה הוא השלמות השלישית, כלומר שלמות המדות הנתפסות  
 מבחינה מדינית. ולכן הדעות ההמוניות כלן הן צורך מדיני.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. xvii-xviii; pp. 137-138. This is Berman's interpretation of al-Farabi's views, but he goes on to argue that Maimonides' position is close to that of al-Farabi.

<sup>99</sup> Averroes, *Kitab Fasl al-Maqal*, ed. G. F. Hourani (Leiden, 1959), pp. 24-25. For a note on a difficult passage in this text, see N. Golb's edition of the Hebrew translation of the work in *PAAJR*, 26:47 (1957), n. 3. English translation: *Averroes on the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy*, trans. G. F. Hourani (London, 1961), pp. 59-60, and p. 105, n. 135. Note the reference to al-Farabi appearing in the latter note. Cf. commentaries of Falakera, Ibn Kaspi, and Narboni on *Guide*, I, 35.

The interpretation followed in this paper takes the metaphysical character of at least some of the principles seriously and, for that reason, it may be called their metaphysical interpretation. This interpretation was proposed by Julius Guttman in his history of Jewish philosophy,<sup>100</sup> but Guttman did not develop it in any detail.

Our interpretation begins with a question that many of the commentators have raised: how did Maimonides derive his “thirteen principles” and why did he list these and no other?<sup>101</sup> The answer to this question becomes clear once it is recalled that in the *Commentary on the Mishnah* Maimonides serves primarily as a commentator on a given work, not as an independent author presenting his own views. Thus the general framework of his enumeration is determined by the three categories of beliefs (or more correctly unbeliefs) which he finds in the second section of the mishnah on which he comments. Beyond that, Maimonides derives the specific principles contained within each section by examining carefully the teachings of the Bible concerning these matters. It can then be said that the “thirteen principles” contain Maimonides’ account of basic Jewish beliefs *set down according to the structure of the mishnah on which he comments*.<sup>102</sup>

The principles omitted from the list in the *Introduction to Perek Helek* but discussed by him in other works provide further evidence that the structure of the mishnah on which he comments determined by Maimonides’ enumeration. Thus, in *Hilkot Teshubah*, Maimonides, in language reminiscent of his discussion of the existence of God, describes the principle of human freedom as one of the “pillars of the Law,”<sup>103</sup> and in the *Guide* the creation of the world is said to be a principle second only to that of the unity of God.<sup>104</sup> Had it been Maimonides’ purpose to present an exhaustive enumeration of the principles of Jewish belief, there would have existed no reason for omitting these two principles from the list. Even more striking is Maimonides’ omission of the World to Come from the “thirteen principles.” But the World to Come, as has been seen, appears as a separate term in the mishnah and hence, Maimonides devotes a separate section of the *Introduction* to it.<sup>105</sup>

In discussing the purpose of the “thirteen principles” it should be recalled that Maimonides followed the philosophical tradition of his day in distinguishing sharply

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<sup>100</sup> Julius Guttman, *Philosophies of Judaism* (New York, 1964), pp. 178-179 (German: pp. 201-203; Hebrew: pp. 165-166).

<sup>101</sup> Cf. Abrabanel, *Rosh Amanah*, *passim*.

<sup>102</sup> This was already seen by Abrabanel, who writes (*Rosh Amanah*, chap. vi, p. 40): “...but it was his (Maimonides’) intention to explain that mishnah which states, ‘All Israelites have a share in the World to Come.’” Cf. *Resurrection*, p. 4 (Arabic: lines 8-10; Hebrew: lines 7-8).

<sup>103</sup> *Mishneh Torah, Teshubah*, V, 3:

ועיקר זה [הבחירה] עיקר גדול הוא והוא עמוד התורה והמצוה...

<sup>104</sup> *Guide*, II, 13:

והוא יסוד תודת משה רבנו בלי: והו קאערה שריעה משה רבנו ע"אס בלא שך והי תאניה קאעדה אלתוחד ספק, והוא שנית ליסוד היה

<sup>105</sup> It is to be noted that in *Hilkot Teshubah*, VIII, where no such methodological consideration exists, the World to Come forms a part of the discussion of reward and punishment.

between an elite which possesses intellectual ability and training and the masses, who function primarily through their imagination. In our context this distinction comes to the fore in a chapter of the *Guide* in which Maimonides discusses the categories into which the opinions of the Law may be divided. In chapter twenty-eight of the third part – a chapter which follows that with which this paper started – Maimonides divides the opinions of the Law into two kinds: true opinions,<sup>106</sup> and opinions necessary for the well-being of the state.<sup>107</sup> As examples of true opinions he lists a number of attributes describing God,<sup>108</sup> as an example of necessary opinions the proposition that God becomes angry with those who disobey His will. The true opinions of the Law have as their purpose to impart correct knowledge concerning God to the intellectual elite and the masses alike. The necessary opinions have as their purpose to move the masses to obey the Divine Law.

In an essay appearing in an earlier volume of the *Texts and Studies*<sup>109</sup> I had occasion to show that Maimonides' division of the opinions of the Law into true and necessary ones is based on the medieval distinction between apodictic and persuasive propositions. Apodictic propositions have as their purpose to convey certain truths, persuasive propositions to induce certain actions. Persuasive propositions, I showed, may be true in some respect, false in another. Persuasive propositions are important for philosophers for the truth that can be discovered by correct interpretation, while, for the masses, they are important for the actions they induce.

This twofold division was sufficient for the *Guide*, since in his work Maimonides primarily discusses topics which lend themselves to philosophical clarification. However, for a study which includes his legal writings, the category of historical propositions must be added to this classification.<sup>110</sup> It is true that such historical events as the revelation at Sinai may hold slight interest for the philosopher, but for the student of the Law they are of great importance.

With this classification in mind, it can be said that the first group of the “thirteen principles,” that containing propositions about God, is speculative in intent. Addresses to philosophers and masses alike, these principles have as their function to convey true knowledge about God. This knowledge, to be sure, is set down only in the form of final conclusions and philosophers can find demonstrations for its truth,<sup>111</sup> but the masses, no less than the philosophers, are expected to know the content of these propositions.

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<sup>106</sup> הדעות האמתיות: אלארא אלצחיהה. Cf. above, Note 5.

<sup>107</sup> אמונות שאמונתם הכרחית בתקון: אעתקאדאת מא אעתקדהא צרורי פי צלאח אלאחואל אלמדניה עניני המדינה.

<sup>108</sup> In this chapter Maimonides lists the following Divine attributes: existence, unity, knowledge, power, will, eternity, and incorporeality.

<sup>109</sup> “Spinoza's Dogmas of Universal Faith in the Light of their Medieval Background,” *Biblical and Other Studies*, ed. A. Altmann (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), pp. 188-190.

<sup>110</sup> Cf. Neumark, *Toledot*, II, 151ff.

<sup>111</sup> *Guide*, III, 28

That Maimonides considers these propositions as speculative can be argued first from the language in which they are set down. In the *Introduction to Perek Helek* all five propositions are set down didactically without any reference to their cognitive status. This suggests that the principles are to be known rather than to be believed.<sup>112</sup> According to the *Sefer ha-Mitzvot*, to be sure, propositions about God must be “believed,” but it appears that in this work “to believe” is equivalent to “to know.” In the *Mishneh Torah* Maimonides states explicitly that the first commandment is to *know* that a first being exists.

Further evidence for the speculative nature of the principles concerning God is provided by chapter thirty-five of the first part of the *Guide* on which we commented. If it were the function of these principles to motivate human action, Maimonides’ insistence that the masses must be taught the incorporeality of God is difficult to understand. To move the masses to obedience it would have been sufficient to teach them that God exists, is one, eternal and solely to be worshipped. Maimonides’ contemporary, Averroes, who was more concerned with the political implications of beliefs concerning God, proscribed the teaching of His incorporeality to the masses.<sup>113</sup>

Moreover, Maimonides’ division of the opinions of the Law into those which are true and those which are necessary indicates that the five propositions about God are speculative in intent. For, were they meant only to persuade men to obey the Law, no distinction between true and necessary opinions would have to be made.

Maimonides’ insistence that Divine incorporeality must be taught to all helps to clarify further the purpose of the first five principles. Maimonides himself states that the unity of God can only be correctly understood if it is known that God is incorporeal.<sup>114</sup> But further reflection shows that of the five principles concerning God, that of Divine corporeality is the only one which guarantees *conceptual* knowledge of Him for all. For the masses might well affirm that God exists, is one, eternal, and solely to be worshipped and yet picture Him through categories of the imagination. But once God is to be known as incorporeal, this knowledge can only be conceptual.<sup>115</sup>

Once it has been seen that it is the function of the first five principles to convey correct conceptual knowledge about God, their purpose becomes clear. It is to make immortality possible for all. Maimonides, it will be recalled, identifies the World to Come with the philosophical notion of the incorporeal existence of the human intellect, which takes place only when this intellect becomes actualized through the understanding

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<sup>112</sup> In his listing of the “thirteen principles” Maimonides sets down some of them didactically, while he affirms of others that they are to be “believed” (see above, Page 129). It appears to be the purpose of this linguistic usage to distinguish between those principles which are philosophical or subject to philosophical interpretation and those which contain historical statements. This seems to be a rather special use of the term “to believe,” since generally Maimonides does not use the term in this restricted sense. See his definition of “belief” in *Guide*, I, 50, beginning.

<sup>113</sup> Cf. above, Note 97

<sup>114</sup> *Guide*, I, 35.

<sup>115</sup> This observation, together with the observation that immortality depends on the acquisition of conceptual knowledge (see next paragraph), explains Maimonides’ stringency in excluding someone who affirms the corporeality of God from the World to Come. Cf. *Helek*, pp. 21-22, together with p. 29; *Mishneh Torah*, *Teshubah*, III, 7.

of true opinions, primarily those about God. The Law, then, by commanding that all Israelites, the masses no less than the intellectual elite, must know certain true propositions about God, provides the possibility of immortality for all.<sup>116</sup> The first five principles make it possible for Maimonides to embrace a philosophical understanding of human immortality without restricting immortality to a small philosophical elite.

Maimonides' second group of principles is meant to guarantee the validity of the Law, for man's well-being in this world and his immortality in the next require, according to Maimonides, a Divine Law. Left to themselves, few men could discover the required truths concerning God,<sup>117</sup> nor could men agree on the norms required for human conduct.<sup>118</sup>

The propositions about the Law are divisible into two kinds: the principle of prophecy and the principles describing the Law of Moses. For Maimonides, the prophet plays a twofold role. He is a philosopher and legislator in one.<sup>119</sup> As philosopher, the prophet understands truths that the unaided human intellect is unable to discover,<sup>120</sup> while as legislator he brings the Divine Law.<sup>121</sup> Though Maimonides in his "thirteen principles" describes prophecy in general terms, the context suggests that he has primarily legislative prophecy in mind.<sup>122</sup>

With the principle of prophecy the intellectual elite and the masses begin to diverge in their understanding of Maimonides' principles and their interpretation. While both accept the principle of prophecy as a requisite guaranteeing the existence of the Law, for the philosopher this principle is also one of the "secrets of the Law." Besides being interested in the legislative function of prophecy, the philosopher inquires into its nature and into the psychological processes productive of it.

Sufficient to guarantee the existence of a Divine Law, the principle of prophecy is not sufficient to guarantee the existence of a particular historical law. For this, historical principles are required. Thus, to guarantee the validity of the Law of Moses and to argue for its supremacy is the purpose of the remaining three principles devoted to the Law.

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<sup>116</sup> Cf. *Helek*, p. 29. Arabic: *فכן בהא סעידא* Hebrew: *הצלה בהם* (לכן דע אותם) והצלה בהם. Gottlieb, p. 53, translates the Arabic phrase: [ואתה עמוד עליהן] והיה בהן לבן ישע [לעולם הבא]. See also, Gottlieb, p. 88, n. 21. Abrabanel, *Rosh Amanah*, chap. vi, p. 39, writes: "...and it is as if he [Maimonides] had said that thee principles are those upon which there is based and established the inheriting of the spiritual World to Come for everyone who is called by the name 'Israelite'... And without these beliefs and principles a man can not inherit the World to Come." Cf. also "Spinoza's Dogmas," pp. 188-189.

<sup>117</sup> *Guide*, I, 34, Cf. Harry A. Wolfson, "The Double Faith Theory in Clement...", *JQR*, 32, 229-230, 240-243, 249-250, 261-262 (1942-43).

<sup>118</sup> *Guide*, II, 40.

<sup>119</sup> See Leo Strauss, *Philosophie und Gesetz* (Berlin, 1935), pp. 87-122.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 76-79, esp. p. 78; pp. 92, 93-96.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 108-122.

<sup>122</sup> The validation of the Law is the main topic of the section. It should be noted, however, that the description of prophecy can also be applied to the cognitive aspects of prophecy and that the cognitive aspect of Moses' prophecy is emphasized by Maimonides.

Maimonides, as an adherent of the Law, accepts these principles on historical grounds, though, as philosopher, he finds little in them that lends itself to philosophical explication.

That Maimonides distinguishes between the principle of prophecy and the principles guaranteeing the Law of Moses is indicated by his use of language in the “thirteen principles.” The principle of prophecy is set down didactically, without any reference to its cognitive status, while the prophecy of Moses and the Divine origin of the Law are said to be principles which are “to be believed.” Moreover, this distinction is indicated in the *Sefer ha-Mizvot* and in the *Mishneh Torah*, where the principle of prophecy is the only one that can possibly be considered as a direct commandment of the Bible.<sup>123</sup> Again, the prophecy of Moses, the Divine origin of the Law, and its eternity are discussed only incidentally in the *Guide of the Perplexed*, while a complete section of the work is devoted to the nature and psychology of prophecy.<sup>124</sup>

Having listed the principles which guarantee the existence of Divine law in general and Law of Moses in particular, Maimonides turns, in the third section, to principles required for instilling obedience to the Law. In the understanding and interpretation of this group of principles the difference between the intellectual elite and the masses is most marked. The intellectual elite obeys the Law because he understands that to obey the Law is good, while the masses obey because of the fear of punishment or the expectation of reward.<sup>125</sup>

As has been noted earlier,<sup>126</sup> Maimonides’ discussions of the World to Come contains an excursus describing him who worships God out of love (*obed me-ahabah*). To worship God without the expectation of reward is, for Maimonides, the highest form of worship, yet at the same time he is aware that such unselfish service can be expected only of the few. For that reason the majority of men to whom the Law is addressed require principles promising reward or threatening punishment, for it is only under these conditions that they will obey the Law. However, the third group of Maimonides’ principles is not without importance for the intellectual elite, since philosophically gifted men will accept these principles for the truths they teach and the historical statements they contain.

Like the principles relating to the Law, those concerning reward and punishment are divisible into two sections. The first of these consists of the principles of God’s knowledge of human deeds and reward and punishment. Though Maimonides lists these two principles among the “thirteen” in the *Introduction to Perek Helek*, it seems that in his later works his interest shifts to their more general equivalents, Divine knowledge and Divine providence. This shift seems already to be indicated in the omission of reward and

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<sup>123</sup> There appears to be a gradation of the principles based on their relation to Biblical commandments. See above, Page 134.

<sup>124</sup> The major portion of *Guide*, II, 32-48, is devoted to an analysis of the nature and processes of prophecy. *Guide*, II, 35, discusses the prophecy of Moses, II, 32, the assembly at Sinai; II, 39, the eternity of the Law.

<sup>125</sup> *Guide*, III, 28.

<sup>126</sup> See above, Pages 125-126.

punishment from the listing in *Mishneh Torah, Hilkot Teshubah*, III, 8 and it becomes still clearer in *Guide*, I, 35, where of the principles referring to reward and punishment only Divine knowledge and providence are listed among the “secrets of the Law.”<sup>127</sup>

The second section of the principles dealing with reward and punishment is once again devoted to historical propositions: namely, the days of the Messiah and the resurrection of the dead. For Maimonides, the coming of the Messiah initiates a period of peace in this world and no miraculous occurrences are expected by him.<sup>128</sup> In view of this, the days of the Messiah still fit into Maimonides’ general scheme. By contrast, the resurrection of the dead is somewhat more difficult to harmonize with his general views. Maimonides himself writes in the *Treatise Concerning the Resurrection of the Dead*<sup>129</sup> that he accepts the principle of traditional authority alone and that it is a miracle like other miracles recorded in the Law. It seems that Maimonides, in spite of the generally rationalistic character of his views, accepts the principle of resurrection as a believing Jew, just as he accepts some of the Biblical miracles in a literal fashion.

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<sup>127</sup> For Maimonides’ discussion of Divine providence and knowledge, see *Guide*, III, 17-21.

<sup>128</sup> See *Helek*, pp. 16-18; *Mishneh Torah, Teshubah*, IX, 2; *Melakim*, XI; *Resurrection*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>129</sup> *Resurrection*, p. 25.