

The Cultures of Maimonideanism

Supplements to The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy

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The Cultures of Maimonideanism

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edited by

James T. Robinson



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PREFACE

The papers included in this volume were, with one exception, presented at the Eighth EAJIS Summer Colloquium entitled “The Cultures of Maimonideanism: New Approaches to the History of Jewish Thought,” which convened July 16–19, 2007 at Wolfson College, Oxford. The Colloquium, organized by Gad Freudenthal of CNRS and myself, was sponsored by the European Association of Jewish Studies. I wish to thank the EAJIS, along with its administrator Garth Gilmour, for assistance before and during the colloquium. I also wish to thank Michiel Klein Swormink, the Jewish Studies Editor at Brill, for accepting this volume for publication. I add a special note of gratitude to my co-organizer Gad Freudenthal—the organizer of conferences par excellence—and to the colloquium participants, who effectively transformed our inchoate ideas and aspirations into something far richer and more diverse than we could have expected. I think this is clear testimony to the richness and complexity of Maimonideanism.

* * *

In this brief preface, I would like to provide a few preliminary reflections on some of the main themes, concerns, problems, and also opportunities, that emerged during the colloquium and which are developed in the papers that follow. I will try to identify and highlight common features I find in many of the chapters, certain patterns emerging in the history of Maimonideanism. Although the chapters are organized more or less chronologically, these brief remarks will be presented synthetically, organized around four main areas: reception; accommodation; cultural mentalities—that is, the way Maimonides emerged in various contexts as cultural hero or emblematic figure; and application: the way the *Guide* was read, adapted, revived, and recreated throughout history in light of contemporary debates and ideologies, providing a “cure” for the illnesses of the time, a treatment for symptoms of intellectual malaise, a bulwark against superstition and the irrational, and—to focus on its most common use—a remedy for the perplexities of faith and reason.

Reception

It is one of many paradoxes or ironies in Jewish history that Maimonides, the elitist and pedagogical pessimist (if we accept Frank Griffel's characterization of him in Chapter 1), became the Teacher par excellence, ha-Rav ha-Moreh and Moreh Tsedeq, the inspiration of countless popular movements extending from the thirteenth century to the twentieth, from Western Europe to the Yemen, from Spain to the New World.

As described by Howard Kreisel (in Chapter 2), in some ways the emergence of a Maimonidean tradition was quite simple and straightforward, and followed naturally from the work of Maimonides himself. This, at least, was the case in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries when Maimonidean enthusiasts in Spain, Provence, and Italy devoted themselves to the translating, explaining, imitating, defending, expanding, and extending of the work of the Master, creating the material foundation for an intellectual tradition. Often this meant completing a project begun by Maimonides, such as the philosophical explication of the "work of the beginning" and "work of the chariot." It moved in more general directions as well: writing a detailed Maimonidean commentary on the Bible, a full Maimonidean explication of Rabbinic midrash and aggadah, and completing the theological system only partially constructed by the Master. It is for the latter reason that even Gersonides might be considered a true Maimonidean—following some of the suggestions by Roberto Gatti (in Chapter 5)—even though Gersonides developed a new method, worked within a different philosophical framework, and arrived at very different conclusions than his predecessor.

There were other ways to follow Maimonides, less straightforward, but no less significant; for example the rewriting of his ideas within a more traditional context, the use of his methods to achieve seemingly non-Maimonidean goals, or the defending of his positions by appealing to authorities with disparate intellectual affinities—from Saadia Gaon to Abraham Ibn Ezra to Immanuel Kant. Nor was the simple straightforward translating and publishing of Maimonides' writings distinct from contemporary philosophical and ideological debates. This is certainly the case with the seventeenth-century Latin translations of Maimonides' writings mentioned by Yaacov Dweck (in Chapter 9), or the eighteenth-century editions of the *Guide* discussed by Abraham Socher (in Chapter 10). To what extent the republication of the *Guide*,

together with commentaries by Moses Narboni and Solomon Maimon, determined the course of *Guide* scholarship in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is a fascinating subject; it highlights, among other things, the cultural power exerted by a publisher.

Accommodation

The examples discussed thus far I would consider first-order Maimonideanism, that is, the conscious and intentional creation of a tradition of philosophy and exegesis by countless and often anonymous translators, philosophers, theologians, exegetes, preachers, popular educators, propagators of wisdom and defenders of the faith. As discussed in many of the papers in this volume, there was also a second-order Maimonideanism. I refer to the way that Maimonides, through both his *Mishneh Torah* and *Guide*, forced or encouraged a completely new understanding of the canon. After Maimonides, Bible and rabbinic literature could no longer be read the same way. Earlier medieval authors, moreover, were brought into conversation with the Master, transformed into his allies and initiates.

This is certainly the case with Ibn Ezra who, as explained by Tamás Visi (in Chapter 4), was transformed into a Maimonidean commentator on the Bible. It was also the case with Judah Halevi—a more unlikely Maimonidean. As discussed by Maud Kozodoy (in Chapter 6), in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the *Kuzari* experienced something of a revival in Provence and Spain, but seems not to have offered a real living alternative to Maimonides. Unlike the nationalistic Halevi of religious Zionism (as discussed briefly by Dov Schwartz in Chapter 16) or the romantic Halevi of Rosenzweig (as mentioned by Hanoch Ben-Pazi in Chapter 14), Halevi's medieval commentators tended to transform his anti-philosophical work into a Maimonidean text: they explained it in light of the *Guide* and the works of Samuel Ibn Tibbon, Jacob Anatoli, Levi b. Abraham and others. Even Halevi's polemic against Aristotle in Book 5 was transformed into an introductory textbook on Aristotelian philosophy!

Still more complex are examples of syncretism—the mixing of Maimonides with intellectual traditions seemingly opposed, often contrary, to the spirit of the Master. Well-known is the example of Maimonides' own descendents who, by focusing on the mystical terminology of *Guide* 3:51, created a Sufi Maimonideanism, which

would become the preferred tradition of Bet ha-Rambam into the fourteenth century. The example of Kabbalah is even more interesting. Mor Altshuler's identification (in Chapter 8) of Maimonidean patterns and ideals playing out in practice with Joseph Karo is quite remarkable, and should be followed up more generally in the history of later Kabbalah and Messianism. If Jonathan Dauber is correct (see Chapter 3), we have something more than syncretism: the organic development of Kabbalah out of Maimonides, at least concerning ideas about the unity of God and divine attributes. The same might be suggested of Meister Eckhart's negative theology and other mystical developments, Jewish and Christian alike.

Mentalities

Yet to be a Maimonidean does not require that one write a commentary on the *Guide*, a philosophical explication of Bible and Midrash, or even a supercommentary on Ibn Ezra. In fact, as shown by the papers in this volume, one can join the ranks of the Maimonideans without really understanding Maimonides—or even reading him. This was already true early in the thirteenth century when Aaron b. Meshullam defended the Master as if he were no different than Saadia Gaon. It continued into the later medieval, early modern and modern periods as well, as exemplified by the popular liturgical dogmatics of Yigdal and Ani ma'amin (as discussed by Abraham Melamed in Chapter 7), the purely symbolic Maimonides of the eighteenth century, and the thoroughly “yeshivish” Maimonides of the twentieth.

I think the importance of the “cultural” or “rhetorical” Maimonides is clearly supported indirectly by the work of George Kohler and Görgo Hasselhoff (Chapters 12–13). That the *Guide* was studied seriously and philosophically beginning only in the nineteenth century I think is cogently argued. But one could add that Maimonides' work could be read philosophically in the nineteenth century only because of the cultural work done in the eighteenth and the debate and discussion surrounding the *Guide* in the nineteenth (as discussed by Michah Gottlieb in Chapter 11). The philosophical reading of the *Guide* in the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth (with the work of Strauss and Levinas, as discussed by Benjamin Wurgaft in Chapter 15) emerges after more than one hundred years of debate and discus-

sion over the contested space that was Maimonides. In other words, one might hypothesize that cultural image—as much as philosophical content—played a key role in the development of reading practices and philosophical doctrines.

Medicine for the Soul

This brings us to the fourth category: the *Guide* as cure, as a remedy of sorts, a form of therapy, which Maimonides prescribed for the illnesses of his age, the deep anxieties—as Gad Freudenthal described it in his opening remarks at the colloquium—caused by the inconsistency between religion and philosophy.

In light of the papers in this volume, I think we can say that the *Guide* is not a single cure but many different cures, a pharmacy of sorts, a pharmacopeia; it is many medicines which, when mixed properly by the skilled physician, can cure a large assortment of diseases. Maimonides himself addresses the many different ailments in his own time, including unreflective conventional practice; biblical and rabbinic literalism; the “sickness” that is Kalām; idolatry and superstition (as represented by Sabianism); anthropocentrism and materialism. In later generation the list grew longer. The Christians considered the *Guide* a cure of Jewish literalism, Leone Modena thought it a remedy for Kabbalah, while Reformers in the nineteenth century focused their attention on a pilpulistic orthodoxy that seemed a mere shell of the Bible’s authentic ethical monotheism, as already pointed to—so they claimed—by Maimonides in the *Guide* and elsewhere.

In light of the chapters in this volume one might also identify a history of reading the *Guide* that corresponds closely with various and diverse movements of renewal and reform—with small case “r.” To say it differently: everyone had their favorite chapter in the *Guide* which supported their own ideas and aspirations. To give a few examples: The Sufi descendents of Maimonides preferred *Guide* 3:51, as did Ibn Tibbon, who termed it the “noblest chapter in the noble treatise.” Ibn Tibbon’s son-in-law Jacob Anatoli was attracted mainly to *Guide* 1:31–34 and its complex discussion of education and the limitations of knowledge. The Kabbalists, as well as the modern reformers, were drawn to the chapters on divine attributes, while in the seventeenth century, among Jews and Christians alike, it was Maimonides’ historicizing account of

biblical law that was considered most important. A history of reading the *Guide*, I think, would go a long way toward mapping—or rather, indexing—a historical topography of Jewish thought.

These are just a few general categories and concerns. There are many others that will emerge in the following chapters, such as the problems of elite vs. popular culture, the close relation between tradition and censorship (on many levels), the various processes of canonization, and the complex relation between master and disciple, charismatic figure and social-religious movement. But what I hope these remarks can do, simple and schematic as they are, is provide some orienting framework for the discussion that follows—in this book, and hopefully in many future studies of and conferences devoted to this very fruitful subject of Maimonideanism.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

COUNTER-ENLIGHTENMENT IN A JEWISH KEY: ANTI-MAIMONIDEANISM IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY ORTHODOXY

Michah Gottlieb

One of the rubrics for this volume is the ways in which Maimonides served as “an encouragement for Jewish thinker(s) to accommodate secular knowledge.” This has contemporary political relevance insofar as this accommodation is “the quintessential opposite of fundamentalism.”

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, members of the Jewish Enlightenment (*Maskilim*) appealed to Maimonides to justify their novel social and educational agenda. In response, Orthodox opponents penned attacks on Maimonides. I have long been interested in critics of European Enlightenment such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Johann Gottfried Herder, and Johann Georg Hamann. Exploring these Orthodox critics of Maimonides gives occasion to treat Counter-Enlightenment thought in a Jewish key.¹

For the purposes of this paper, I will focus on two Orthodox thinkers—Samuel David Luzzatto (1800–1865) and Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808–1888). While there are significant ideological differences between them, they share the conviction that participation in non-Jewish cultural and intellectual life is compatible with firm adherence to halakhah. Yet Luzzatto and Hirsch have grave doubts about the ethical trajectory of enlightened European society.² I will argue that while

¹ Shmuel Feiner suggests reading Luzzatto as a Counter-Enlightenment thinker, though he does not discuss Luzzatto’s treatment of Maimonides in detail. See Shmuel Feiner, “A Critique of Modernity: S. D. Luzzatto and the Anti-Haskalah,” in *Samuel David Luzzatto: The Bi-Centennial of his Birth*, eds. R. Bonfil, I. Gottlieb, and H. Kasher (Jerusalem, 2004), pp. 151–153.

² In accounting Luzzatto and Hirsch “Orthodox,” I follow Jacob Katz who defines “Orthodoxy” as those who “oppose . . . the relinquishing of traditional Jewish customs” in conscious “awareness of other Jews’ rejection of tradition.” See Jacob Katz, “Orthodoxy in Contemporary Perspective,” in *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, ed. Peter Medding (Jerusalem, 1986), pp. 3–4. Similarly, these thinkers would be considered “Orthodox” according to Aviezer Ravitzky’s definition of “Orthodoxy” as Jews who are skeptical

criticizing the Jewish Enlightenment (*Haskalah*) these Orthodox critics in fact identify with many of its ideals. But for them it is authentic Judaism rather than rationalism that provides the best means to actualize these ideals, hence their criticism of the “arch-rationalist” Maimonides. This shows how the dichotomy between *Haskalah* and Orthodoxy is not as great as is sometimes assumed.³

Samuel David Luzzatto was one of the most distinguished figures of nineteenth-century Italian Jewry. A man of immense learning and humanistic spirit, he corresponded with many of the leading exponents of the Science of Judaism (*Wissenschaft des Judentums*) including Marcus Jost, Abraham Geiger, and Solomon Judah Rappaport. Luzzatto wrote voluminously producing tracts on Biblical grammar, Talmudic historiography, philosophy, theology, a complete Bible commentary, as well as original poetry.

In 1838, Luzzatto penned a famous attack on Maimonides. Luzzatto’s criticisms center on Maimonides’ intellectualism and moral system, which Luzzatto takes to be at odds with authentic Judaism. Scholars have pondered why Luzzatto evinces such rancor towards Maimonides. Jay Harris seeks to anchor these criticisms in nineteenth-century intellectual life arguing that in criticizing Maimonides, Luzzatto’s real target is Kant and his nineteenth-century Jewish adherents.⁴ Harris’s arguments are, however, unconvincing.⁵ While I agree that it is fruitful to

of the modern valuing of change and progress. See Aviezer Ravitzky, “Introduction: On the Boundaries of Orthodoxy,” in *Orthodox Judaism: New Perspectives*, eds. Y. Salmon, A. Ravitzky, and Adam Ferziger (Jerusalem, 2006), pp. 1–18. For a more restrictive definition of Orthodoxy, see Moshe Samet, “The Beginnings of Orthodoxy,” *Modern Judaism* 8 (1988), pp. 249–250.

³ Feiner in particular tends to paint this dichotomy brightly. See Shmuel Feiner, “Mendelssohn and Mendelssohn’s Disciples: A Re-examination,” *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 40 (1995), pp. 135–138; idem, “Towards an Historical Definition of *Haskalah*,” in *New Perspectives on the Haskalah*, eds. S. Feiner and D. Sorkin (London, 2001), pp. 206–207, 219; idem, *The Jewish Enlightenment* (Philadelphia, 2004), p. 13 and part II generally.

⁴ See Jay Harris, “The Image of Maimonides in 19th Century Jewish Historiography,” *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 54 (1987), pp. 121–123.

⁵ In claiming that Luzzatto uses Maimonides as a proxy to attack Kant, Harris focuses on Luzzatto’s criticism of Maimonides’ supposed denial of the resurrection of the dead. In this, Harris takes Luzzatto to be criticizing Kantian ethics, which denies moral value to actions performed for eudemonistic ends. For Luzzatto supposedly equates Maimonides’ denial of resurrection with Kant’s denial of moral value to actions done with the intention of being rewarded. In the same vein, Harris points to a letter from Luzzatto to Zunz where Luzzatto notes that K-A-N-T spelled backwards yields T-N-A-K (Hebrew Bible) which Harris takes to indicate that for Luzzatto, “Kantian

seek a contemporary impetus for Luzzatto's opposition to Maimonides, one needs to explore how Maimonides was being appropriated at the time.⁶

In the late eighteenth century, Maimonides became a crucial figure for *Maskilim* seeking a reorientation of traditional Judaism. The *Maskilim* wished to acquire *Bildung* as a way of moving towards greater participation in European cultural and social life, and they were very critical of the xenophobia, superstition, and crudeness that they perceived in traditional Judaism. For the *Maskilim*, Jewish education required major overhauling stressing clarity of thought and moral refinement rather than theoretical, illogical Talmudic disputation.⁷ But they were operating against the assumed authority of Judaism, so they had to show how Judaism authorized embracing secular knowledge and culture. To this end, Maimonides became a central figure for them.

In 1763, the founder of the Berlin Haskalah, Moses Mendelssohn, published a commentary on Maimonides' *Treatise on Logic*. Mendelssohn's commentary was meant to stimulate Jewish interest in the study of logic and so broaden Jews' cultural and intellectual horizons. In the introduction to his commentary, Mendelssohn imagines a traditionalist arguing that it is improper to study Aristotelian logic. In response, Mendelssohn assures his reader that he is not, God forbid, recommending reading Aristotle the Greek, but rather understanding the teachings of "the Prince of Torah [*Sar Ha-Torah*] our master Moses bar Maimon (may

ethics and Torah ethics are exact opposites." There are several problems with Harris's arguments. First, were Kant Luzzatto's real opponent, it is not clear why Luzzatto would not criticize Kant directly. Second, attacking Maimonides to criticize Kant's non-eudaemonistic ethics does not make sense since Maimonidean ethics are themselves eudaemonistic. Third, it would be odd for Luzzatto to criticize Kant by means of Maimonides since there are many ethical assumptions that Luzzatto and Kant share against Maimonides. For example, both Luzzatto and Kant privilege moral action over philosophical speculation and have great respect for the common man who acts ethically, while Maimonides considers the theoretical life the *summum bonum*, which leads to his intellectual elitism. Finally, Harris' citation of the letter to Zunz does not support his argument, for close inspection of the letter shows that Luzzatto does not say that Kantian ethics are opposite to Torah ethics, but rather that their respective conceptions of God are opposed. See *Luzzatto's Letters* (Przemysl, 1882), vol. 8, p. 1134. Kant's God is a postulate of reason that is abstract and impersonal, while Luzzatto's God is a living being, who is sensed and with whom one establishes a personal, emotional relationship. While Luzzatto does have a real disagreement with Kant, on this issue, it is irrelevant to Luzzatto's ethical criticisms of Maimonides.

⁶ See Samuel David Luzzatto, *Peninei Shadal* (Przemysl, 1888), p. 417.

⁷ See Shmuel Feiner, *The Jewish Enlightenment*, pp. 221–242; *German-Jewish History in Modern Times*, ed. Michael Meyer (New York, 1996), pp. 355–380.

his righteous memory be for blessing) who collected and gathered food from waste and acted with this Greek as Rabbi Meir acted with Aher [i.e., Elisha ben Avuya]. He ate the fruit and discarded the rind.”⁸ The fact that Aristotelian logic is studied through Maimonides’ rendering of it, guarantees that it is kosher.

A striking example of the maskilic appropriation of Maimonides is Simon Baraz’s 1786 biography of Maimonides. Baraz’s biography is ostensibly a description of Maimonides’ life and works but its contemporary resonance is unmistakable.⁹ For Baraz, Maimonides’ first major achievement was his commentary on the Mishnah. By writing the commentary in the Arabic vernacular, presenting the Mishnah in logical fashion, and teaching purified religious concepts, love of Torah, good morals, and refined manners, Maimonides showed his commitment to popular ethical-religious education and eschewed the prevailing method of study, which was theoretical and confusing.¹⁰ Maimonides’ concern with popular education was likewise evident in his *Mishneh Torah*, which made knowledge of practical halakhah widely accessible and laid special emphasis on promoting ethical action towards Jews and Gentiles alike.¹¹ And in his *Book of Commandments*, Maimonides gave reasons for many of the commandments so that people would understand what they were observing and so practice Judaism freely.¹²

Turning to the *Guide*, Baraz has boundless admiration for Maimonides’ deep knowledge of all branches of wisdom including physics, metaphysics, law, ethics, and astronomy. Maimonides’ profound engagement with Gentile philosophers such as Aristotle, Plato, Galen, and Themistius, “distinguished him from all the other famous sages,” and in consequence, “all nations praise him as the one who rolled back

⁸ Moses Mendelssohn, *Jubiläumsausgabe*, ed. A. Altmann (Stuttgart, 1972–), vol. 14, p. 29. The reference is to the famous story of Rabbi Meir and his teacher Elisha ben Abuya. See TB Hagigah 15b. For some recent treatments of this story, see Jeffrey Rubenstein, *Talmudic Stories: Narrative Art, Composition, and Culture* (Baltimore, 1999), pp. 64–104; Alon Goshen-Gottstein, *The Amnesiac and the Sinner: The Rabbinic Invention of Elisha ben Abuya and Eleazar ben Arakh* (Stanford, 2000); Yehuda Liebes, *The Sin of Elisha: Four Entered the Orchard and the Nature of Talmudic Mysticism* (Jerusalem, 1990).

⁹ Baraz’s article originally appeared in the maskilic journal *Hame’assef* and was republished in 1824 in *Bikkurei Ha-’Itim*. Since Luzzatto was probably familiar with the version in *Bikkurei Ha-’Itim*, I cite from that version.

¹⁰ Simon Baraz, “Toledot Rabbeinu Moshe Ben Maimon,” in *Bikkurei Ha-’Itim* (Vienna, 1824), pp. 95–104.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 100–101, 111.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 103–104.

darkness before light, turned back the night and brought day.”¹³ But, notes Baraz, the Jewish world did not always appreciate Maimonides. Whether it was for his codification of halakhah, his thirteen principles of faith or his engagement with philosophy, jealous, ignorant Rabbis attacked him.¹⁴ In his great humility, Maimonides would not respond. The *Maskilim* can then take comfort that in being scorned by traditionalists they are in good company.¹⁵ Maimonides is thus presented as a model for the contemporary *Maskil*. Addressing his contemporaries, Baraz writes: “You the *Maskilim* among the nation should hang at the gates of Maimonides’ books... [and] follow his path loving truth and peace, seeking the good of all peoples Jews and Gentiles alike, and so become an ornament among the nations.”¹⁶ Following the teachings of Maimonides will make Jews worthy of respect in Gentile eyes.

Luzzatto was attracted to Haskalah from his youth. At age fourteen he bought many of Mendelssohn’s books and translated parts of them into Italian for himself. Some teachers in his school knew Mendelssohn personally and his mentor Raphael Baruch Segré, who later became his father-in-law, was a friend of Mendelssohn’s colleague Herz Homberg.¹⁷ Luzzatto’s first book, *The Bible Interpreted (Ha-Torah Nidreshet)*, which he began when he was eighteen, was aimed at reconciling the Torah with logical principles.¹⁸ By age twenty-five, Luzzatto was a rising star among the *Maskilim*. That Luzzatto was familiar with Baraz’s appropriation of Maimonides is nearly certain. In 1824, Baraz’s article on Maimonides was reprinted in the maskilic journal *Bikkurei Ha-Itim* to which Luzzatto was a frequent contributor. Indeed, in the very next issue Luzzatto

¹³ See James Lehmann, “Maimonides, Mendelssohn, and the Me’asfim,” *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 20 (1975), pp. 95–96; Baraz, “Toledot Rabbeinu Moshe Ben Maimon,” pp. 112–113.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 107–110.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 110–111.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 114. See James Lehmann, “Maimonides, Mendelssohn, and the Me’asfim,” p. 102.

¹⁷ Rivka Horowitz, “The Models of the Religion of the Noahides and the Religion of Abraham in the Thought of Mendelssohn and Samuel David Luzzatto,” in *The Faith of Abraham*, eds. Moshe Hallamish, Hannah Kasher and Yohanan Silman (Ramat-Gan, 2002), p. 268 [Hebrew].

¹⁸ This book was never completed. The unfinished manuscript appears in Samuel David Luzzatto, *Studies in Judaism* (Warsaw, [1912]), vol. 2, pp. 51–109. For discussion, see Noah Rosenbloom, *Luzzatto’s Ethico-Psychological Interpretation of Judaism* (New York, 1965), p. 20.

published his first book of poetry, *Kīnor Na'im*, which contained an ode praising Mendelssohn.¹⁹

The reasons for Luzzatto's turning from Haskalah are complex, but we have autobiographical testimony as to how he wished to represent it. In 1836 after the death of one of his four children Luzzatto's wife became profoundly depressed. In a letter to Marcus Jost, Luzzatto describes her condition as being such that she could "neither do anything nor speak, and it is necessary to feed her like a one-year-old child."²⁰ This depression lasted six years until her death in 1842,²¹ and led Luzzatto to question the Haskalah's optimism and emphasis on autonomy, which he increasingly regarded as naïvete and arrogance.²² He first gave expression to this new attitude in the 1838 essay critical of Maimonides.²³

Luzzatto's approach to Maimonides is determined by his famous dichotomy between "Atticism" [*Atticizmus*] and "Abrahamism" or "Judaism" [*Abrahamizmus*, *Yudaizmus*].²⁴ The term "Atticism" is significant for it is remarkably close to the term "atheism." This is even more evident in the Hebrew where the difference between "Atticizmus" and Atti'izmus" turns on a single letter. For Luzzatto, there is a perennial struggle between Atticism and Judaism. Atticism is identified with the way of philosophy and is grounded in a particular axiology. Atticism is egoistic valuing the cultivation of individual intellectual perfection

¹⁹ *Bikkurei Ha-Itim* (Vienna, 1825), pp. 1–148. On Luzzatto's early attraction to Haskalah, see Shmuel Feiner, "A Critique of Modernity: S. D. Luzzatto and the Anti-Haskalah," pp. 147–150. On Luzzatto's complex relationship to Mendelssohn, see Rivka Horowitz, "Rational and Anti-Rational Motifs in the Teaching of Samuel David Luzzatto," *Eshel Be'er Sheva* 2 (1981), pp. 287–310.

²⁰ Samuel David Luzzatto, *Luzzatto's Letters*, ed. S. Graber (Cracow, 1899), p. 722.

²¹ See Shmuel Feiner, "A Critique of Modernity: S. D. Luzzatto and the Anti-Haskalah," pp. 155–156.

²² See Samuel David Luzzatto, *Studies in Judaism*, vol. 1, v–vi.

²³ But note that elsewhere, Luzzatto claims that he began to formulate critical comments on Maimonides as early as 1831. See Samuel David Luzzatto, *Peninei Shadal* (Przemyśl, 1888), p. 419.

²⁴ Luzzatto first adumbrates this distinction in an 1838 essay. See Shalom Spiegel, *Hebrew Reborn* (New York, 1930), pp. 87–89; Noah Rosenbloom, *Luzzatto's Ethico-Psychological Interpretation of Judaism*, p. 28. The distinction goes back to the second-century Church father Tertullian, but became very important in the nineteenth century. A famous discussion of it is Matthew Arnold's essay "Hellenism and Hebraism" in his 1869 *Culture and Anarchy*. On this theme in nineteenth-century British literature generally, see David Delaura, *Hebrew and Hellene in Victorian England: Newman, Arnold, and Pater* (Austin, 1969).

above all else.²⁵ It is arrogant, believing that we can perfect ourselves through our powers alone, and it is authoritarian and intolerant asserting that philosophers alone know the truth. Believing in the continual progress of civilization, the Attics reverse the Rabbinic slogan of “if our ancestors were men, we are as donkeys” to read, “our ancestors were donkeys and we are men.”²⁶

In contrast, Judaism is grounded in social responsibility and ethical action. The basis for ethics is not reason but feeling. Judaism teaches humility, encouraging one not to overly rely on one’s native physical and intellectual powers, but rather to cultivate one’s feelings of love and compassion, which become active in relation to others. Unlike Atticism which esteems cultivation of intellect as the highest good and sees morality as a way of preparing one for intellection, Judaism considers morality the highest good and knowledge, at its best, is a way of promoting moral action. The proper basis for ethics is our innate goodness, which is not acquired through civilization, but which can be corrupted through it.²⁷ The task of Judaism is not to improve our basic nature, but to recover it. Judaism accomplishes this by teaching us to humbly trust in divine providence and to obey the laws of the Torah, which aim to instill compassion and mercy.²⁸ Judaism’s emphasis on compassion is reflected in the fact that its founder was Abraham who was renowned for his acts of kindness. For this reason Luzzatto uses the terms “Judaism” and “Abrahamism” interchangeably.²⁹

²⁵ See Shalom Spiegel, *Hebrew Reborn*, pp. 87–89.

²⁶ See Samuel David Luzzatto, *Studies in Judaism*, vol. 1, pp. v–vi. The original Rabbinic statement is found at TB Shabbat 112b. The full rabbinic statement is “if our ancestors were as angels, we are as people, if our ancestors were as men, we are donkeys. And not as the donkey of Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa [which displayed intelligence] but as other donkeys.” Also see Samuel David Luzzatto, *Selected Writings*, ed. M. E. Artom, vol. 2 (Jerusalem, 1976), p. 53; Shalom Spiegel, *Hebrew Reborn*, pp. 87–89.

²⁷ See Spiegel, *Hebrew Reborn*, pp. 87–89.

²⁸ See Samuel David Luzzatto, *Studies in Judaism*, vol. 1, pp. 11–12, 15–16; idem, *Selected Writings*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem, 1976), pp. 68–70.

²⁹ See Samuel David Luzzatto, *Studies in Judaism*, vol. 1, p. 9. Luzzatto’s emphasis on Abraham as the founder of Judaism is in marked contrast to Maimonides, Spinoza, and Mendelssohn for whom the lawgiver Moses is the founder of Judaism. For discussion of Maimonides’ position, see Lawrence Kaplan, “Maimonides on the Singularity of the Jewish People,” *Da’at* 15 (1985), pp. v–xxvii; Aviezer Ravitzky, “Introduction—The Binding of Isaac and the Covenant,” in *The Faith of Abraham*, pp. 14–19 [Hebrew]. For Spinoza’s position, see Baruch Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis, 2001), ch. 5, p. 17. For Mendelssohn’s position, see Moses Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem*, trans. Allan Arkush (Hanover, 1983), pp. 89–90. According to Hasdai Crescas,

Luzzatto regards the Enlightenment as a contemporary representative of Atticism, which deepens Atticism's moral shortcomings. Like classical Atticism, the Enlightenment considers individual perfection the aim of life and sees scientific knowledge as essential to this end. But while classical Atticism sees the cultivation of intellect as an end in itself, the Enlightenment seeks to enlist reason to promote human flourishing. It does this by using reason to control nature so that we can increase our material comforts. But the Enlightenment has not kept its promise of furthering human flourishing as its rampant individualism has led to increased jealousy, more wars, and the fraying of family bonds.³⁰ Nevertheless, Atticism seeks to be an object of full devotion, alienating people from the true God of compassion and mercy. Parodying the first of the Ten Commandments, Luzzatto casts the first commandment of Atticism as: "I, Atticism took you out from the darkness of ignorance and brought you to the light of reason, the light of civilization."³¹

Despite the stark divisions between Atticism and Judaism, Luzzatto notes that for hundreds of years Judaism has had to contend with thinkers who surreptitiously sought to introduce Attic principles into Judaism. While Ashkenazic scholars such as Rashi and the Tosafists and critics of rationalism such as Yehudah Halevi heroically strove to defend authentic Judaism, Spanish scholars seduced by Arabic *Falasifa* such as Abraham ibn Ezra and Maimonides contaminated Judaism by introducing Attic principles into it, which they claimed represented authentic Judaism.³²

Luzzatto launches his 1838 attack on Maimonides with the famous salvo, "Maimonides, with all of his philosophizing, was *be-'okhreinu*

Abraham is the founder of the Jewish people, but only because Abraham was the first one to promulgate halakhah. See Hasdai Crescas, *Or Adonai*, ed. S. Fisher (Jerusalem, 1990), p. 3. For discussion of Crescas' position, see Aviezer Ravitzky, "Introduction—The Binding of Isaac and the Covenant," pp. 19–25.

³⁰ See Samuel David Luzzatto, *Studies in Judaism*, vol. 1, pp. vii, 244; idem, *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, pp. 42–49, 52–56, 61, 64.

³¹ Samuel David Luzzatto, *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, p. 52. Compare this with Feiner's citation of *Maskilim* who speak of the "temple of *Hokhmah* (wisdom)" and the "altar of Haskalah." See Shmuel Feiner, "Towards an Historical Definition of 'Haskalah,'" in *New Perspectives on the Haskalah*, p. 198. Also see Feiner's citation of S. J. Fuenn who wrote: "The Haskalah is more dear to me than all the vanities and pleasures in the world." This quote is found in *From Militant Haskalah to Conservative Maskil: A Selection of S. J. Fuenn's Writings*, ed. Shmuel Feiner (Jerusalem, 1993), p. 186.

³² See Samuel David Luzzatto, *Studies in Judaism*, vol. 1, pp. vi, 193–197; Shmuel Vargon, "The Polemic over Abraham Ibn Ezra as a Reflection of the Haskalah," in *Samuel David Luzzatto: The Bi-Centennial of His Birth*, pp. 25–54.

[*ve-hineh ha-rambam 'im kol hitpalsefuto hayah be-'okhreinu*].³³ It is worth taking a few moments to consider the term *be-'okhreinu*. In the biblical context the root 'ayin-kaf-reish refers to causing distress or trouble, and is twice used in the construction, "trouble-maker for Israel" (*'okher yisrael*).³⁴ The Midrashic compilation *Sekhel Tov*, however, brings a number of other interpretations of the term. These include one who causes "confusion which disturbs peace and brings conflict"; one who "clouds clear water"; and one who covertly "makes things rot" as when "a person thinks that his food is giving off a good smell [*menodef reah na'im*] but then checks it to find that it is in fact rotted [*mevo'ash*]." The midrash then applies this usage to the example of where "a person imagines that his friend is trustworthy but then finds out that he has, in fact, betrayed him [*nimtza' she-bagad bo*]."³⁵

This last interpretation is especially significant for Luzzatto's approach to Maimonides. For given Maimonides' great authority among traditional Jews, the fact that he sought to introduce Attic ideas into Judaism makes him one of Judaism's most dangerous threats. While Maimonides' intentions may have been good, his acceptance of Attic intellectualism renders his philosophy functionally atheistic thereby undermining the true essence of Judaism, which is universal ethics.³⁶ Linking Maimonides with atheism seems extreme, if not absurd. It begins to make sense when one appreciates that for Luzzatto true religion does not merely involve belief in God *per se*, but rather belief in a God who rewards and punishes. Reward and punishment are central to religion since without belief in reward and punishment people lack the necessary incentive for acting morally.³⁷ Two presuppositions for belief in reward and punishment are divine providence and immortality of the soul. Maimonides' intellectualism, however, leads him to reinterpret these ideas to the point of denying them.

For Maimonides, the intellectual part of the soul is a potentiality, which is only actualized when a person acquires knowledge.³⁸ The

³³ See Samuel David Luzzatto, *Studies in Judaism*, vol. 1, p. 164.

³⁴ I Kgs 18:17; I Chron 2:7.

³⁵ See Midrash Sekhel Tov to Genesis 34, section 30.

³⁶ See Samuel David Luzzatto, *Peninei Shadal*, p. 416.

³⁷ Samuel David Luzzatto, *Studies in Judaism*, vol. 1, pp. 21, 32.

³⁸ See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. S. Pines (Chicago, 1963), 1:70, pp. 173–174.

intellect is, however, the only part of the soul which survives death.³⁹ The implication then is that only philosophers survive death while non-philosophers are simply annihilated. As such, there is no otherworldly punishment for evildoers.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the immortality of the soul, which is limited to the small intellectual elite, is very thin as Maimonides' conception of immortality is not personal, but rather involves the conjoining of whatever knowledge one has acquired with the active intellect.⁴¹ Immortality thus involves neither memory of one's life nor persistence of one's personality and there seems to be no necessary connection between this immortality and ethics as a person who perfects his intellect will achieve immortality even if he lives a selfish, immoral life, while the person who acts ethically but does not perfect his intellect will be annihilated.⁴² For Luzzatto, a much more adequate notion of immortality is resurrection of the dead which is available to all as a reward for moral obedience. But following Maimonides' early critics, Luzzatto claims that Maimonides covertly denies this popular, unphilosophical doctrine.⁴³

Maimonides' intellectualism likewise leads him to deny divine providence. Famously, he writes that providence is dependent on the degree to which one has perfected one's intellect.⁴⁴ Luzzatto interprets this to mean that for Maimonides God helps those who help themselves by acquiring wisdom. In other words, the wise who know how to look after themselves will generally prosper while fools who act without foresight are more likely to suffer.⁴⁵ In this way, however, the moral efficacy of the belief in divine providence has been eliminated for there is no natural connection between acting ethically and prospering as nice guys often finish last.⁴⁶ Maimonides who values knowledge above all else disdains the belief in corporeal descriptions of God.⁴⁷ But, asks Luzzatto, what is

³⁹ See *Guide* 3:27, p. 511; *Mishneh Torah*, "Laws of the Foundations of the Torah," 4:8–9; "Laws of Repentance," 8:2–3.

⁴⁰ See for example, Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, "Laws of Repentance," 8:5.

⁴¹ This is a controversial issue in Maimonides' interpretation, but Maimonides does seem to hint that this is his view. See *Guide* 1:74, p. 221, and Pines' note 11 ad loc.

⁴² See *Guide* 3:27, p. 511.

⁴³ Samuel David Luzzatto, *Studies in Judaism*, vol. 1, pp. 165–168.

⁴⁴ See *Guide* 3:18, p. 474.

⁴⁵ For a similar recent interpretation of Maimonides, see Alvin Reines, "Maimonides' Concepts of Providence and Theodicy," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 43 (1972), pp. 169–206.

⁴⁶ Samuel David Luzzatto, *Studies in Judaism*, vol. 1, p. 243.

⁴⁷ See *Guide* 1:36, pp. 82–85.

so terrible about these beliefs if believing that God watches all with his eyes and writes everything in a book encourages one to act ethically?⁴⁸ Indeed, if you needed help whom would you turn to, a simple Jew who believes that God watches over all his actions or a philosopher who seeks intellectual perfection alone?⁴⁹

Luzzatto not only criticizes Maimonides' intellectualism for undermining ethical motivation, he likewise charges this intellectualism with being authoritarian and intolerant. Maimonides' authoritarianism is expressed in the fact that he is so certain of Aristotelian philosophy that he has the audacity to codify elements of it as halakhah.⁵⁰ In addition, Maimonides takes the unprecedented step, not found in the Talmud or in the writings of the Geonim, of stipulating thirteen principles of faith that all Jews must believe.⁵¹ In enumerating principles of belief Maimonides was led astray by his commitment to Atticism, which considers intellectual belief supremely important. In contrast, the Talmudic Rabbis would judge a person by how ethically they acted, not by what exact beliefs they held.⁵²

Maimonides' intolerance is reflected in the disdain with which he regards non-philosophers. Luzzatto cites a statement from the commentary to the Mishnah where Maimonides writes that one who does not perfect his intellect is not truly a human being.⁵³ But from disdain to hatred is a small step, for Maimonides writes that a Jew without proper belief, i.e., who does not believe what Maimonides considers to be the basic principles of Judaism, is not an Israelite, but a heretic whom it is a commandment to hate and kill.⁵⁴ Maimonides' intellectualism likewise leads him to adopt hateful attitudes towards Gentiles. As Maimonides considers intellectual virtue to be the true mark of a human being, he concludes that Gentiles who generally hold incorrect religious beliefs need not be treated as human beings.⁵⁵ This is expressed in his *Mishneh*

⁴⁸ Samuel David Luzzatto, *Studies in Judaism*, vol. 1, p. 243.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 244; Samuel David Luzzatto, *Peninei Shadal*, p. 416.

⁵⁰ See, for example, Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, "Laws of the Foundations of the Torah," chs. 1–4.

⁵¹ See Maimonides, *Commentary to the Mishnah*, introduction to Sanhedrin chapter 10.

⁵² Samuel David Luzzatto, *Studies in Judaism*, vol. 1, p. 168.

⁵³ Maimonides, *Commentary to the Mishnah*, Baba Qama, 4:3.

⁵⁴ Samuel David Luzzatto, *Studies in Judaism*, vol. 1, pp. 165–166; *idem*, *Peninei Shadal*, p. 416, 440. See Maimonides, *Commentary to the Mishnah*, introduction to Sanhedrin chapter 10; *Mishneh Torah*, "Laws of Idolaters," 2:8–9; "Laws of Rebels," 3:1; "Laws of Murder," 4:14–15.

⁵⁵ Samuel David Luzzatto, *Peninei Shadal*, p. 416.

Torah where Maimonides rules that one is not permitted to save a dying Gentile.⁵⁶ Maimonides thus gives ammunition to Gentiles who wish to justify ill treatment to Jews since they can point to the great authority Maimonides as proof of Jewish hatred towards them.⁵⁷ Indeed, it was reading Maimonides that convinced the seventeenth-century Dutch Orientalist Costantin Van Oppyck that Jews regarded Gentiles as animals.⁵⁸ So, following Maimonides' path will not, as Baraz had claimed, lead a Jew to be considered as "an ornament among the Gentiles," but just the opposite. If a Jew wishes to be well-regarded by his Gentiles peers, he should remain committed to authentic Judaism, which judges people on the basis of the morality of their actions, rather than on the truth of their religious beliefs.⁵⁹

From these criticisms of Maimonides, we see that even after his disenchantment with Haskalah, Luzzatto remained committed to Enlightenment ideals such as tolerance, justice, universal brotherhood, and respect for the common man. Indeed, in his 1848 essay, "The Essence of Judaism," he thanked God that these ideals "were becoming increasingly widespread" in European society. But, for Luzzatto, it is traditional Judaism with its emphasis on compassion and its relative indifference to religious belief that best promotes these ideals, not maskilic rationalism.⁶⁰

Another prominent attack on Maimonides occurs in the founding work of German Neo-Orthodoxy, Samson Raphael Hirsch's *Nineteen Letters* (1836). Like Luzzatto, Hirsch's attitude to Maimonides is conditioned by how Maimonides was appropriated by contemporary Jewish thinkers. But while Luzzatto criticizes the attempt to use Maimonides to sanction the moderate maskilic thesis, i.e., combining urbane, bourgeois civility with adherence to Jewish law, Hirsch is concerned with the appropriation of Maimonides to justify the radical maskilic attempt to reform Jewish law or discard it completely.⁶¹

⁵⁶ See Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, "Laws of Murder," 4:16, 2:10; "Laws of Theft and Lost Objects," 11:4.

⁵⁷ Samuel David Luzzatto, *Studies in Judaism*, vol. 1, pp. 165–166.

⁵⁸ See Samuel David Luzzatto, *Selected Writings*, vol. 1, p. 130, n. 39. The basis for this was Maimonides, *Commentary to the Mishnah*, Baba Qama, 4:3.

⁵⁹ Samuel David Luzzatto, *Studies in Judaism*, vol. 1, p. 168.

⁶⁰ See Samuel David Luzzatto, *Selected Writings*, vol. 1, p. 46.

⁶¹ Note that in the *Nineteen Letters*, the Rabbi's perplexed interlocutor does not advocate religious reform, which he regards as "producing an arbitrary patchwork

Hirsch was born to an enlightened, halakhically observant family.⁶² His paternal grandfather knew Mendelssohn personally and his uncle Moses was known as the “Moses Mendelssohn of Hamburg.”⁶³ But as Michael Meyer has noted, “by the second decade of the nineteenth century, a portion of Hamburg Jewry had become highly secularized,” and in 1818 the first Reform Temple was dedicated there.⁶⁴ The Hamburg Temple provoked controversy and Hirsch, who was ten years old at the time, observed the controversies between the reformers and the traditionalists as his own family unsuccessfully sought to stem the tide of religious reform.⁶⁵ Witnessing these controversies, Hirsch decided to devote his life to defending traditional Judaism.⁶⁶ But Hirsch remained committed to his family’s ideal of combining *Bildung* with strict adherence to halakhah. For Hirsch, however, the moderate Haskalah had not shown the proper way to accomplish this synthesis. By appealing to Maimonides to justify their agenda, the moderate *Maskilim* had paved the way for radical *Haskalah*.

Although Hirsch does not explicitly name radical *Maskilim* who invoke Maimonides, Solomon Maimon (1754–1800) is the most famous example of this tendency.

Born Solomon ben Joshua, Maimon adopted his surname out of reverence for Maimonides. Central for Maimon is his acceptance of Maimonides’ notion that intellectual perfection constitutes the highest human good. This intellectualism becomes the key to Maimon’s justify-

(*willkürliches Stückkram*),” but rather discarding Judaism entirely. See Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe Über Judenthum* (Altona, 1836), p. 4; *Nineteen Letters*, ed. Joseph Elias (New York, 1995), Letter 1, p. 6. In Letter 17, however, Hirsch engages Reform in detail. In general, I follow Elias’s translation, but I frequently adjust it as it contains numerous errors.

⁶² Hirsch described his family as “enlightened and religious” (*erleuchtet religiös*). See Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe Über Judenthum*, p. 5; *Nineteen Letters*, Letter 2, p. 13.

⁶³ See Noah Rosenbloom, *Tradition in an Age of Reform* (Philadelphia, 1976), pp. 44–53.

⁶⁴ Michael Meyer, *Response to Modernity* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 53–55.

⁶⁵ See Robert Liberles, *Religious Conflict in Social Context* (Westport, Conn., 1985), pp. 115–116; “Samson Raphael Hirsch. Ein Lebensbild,” in *Samson Raphael Hirsch-Jubiläum-Nummer der Israelit* (Frankfurt, 1908), p. 6. On the Hamburg Temple and the ensuing controversy, see Michael Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, pp. 55–61.

⁶⁶ See Samson Raphael Hirsch, “Ein Lebensbild,” in *Samson Raphael Hirsch-Jubiläum-Nummer der Israelit*, pp. 5–17; Robert Liberles, “Champion of Orthodoxy,” *AJS Review* 6 (1981), pp. 44–46. Liberles (*ibid.*, p. 54) questions the accuracy of Hirsch’s portrayal of the defeat of the traditionalists. See also *idem*, *Religious Conflict in Social Context* (Westport, Conn., 1985), pp. 115–116.

ing his rejection of halakhah. An example of this is Maimon's account of a conversation he had with the friend of his youth, Moses Lapidot.⁶⁷ Through the course of their conversations, Lapidot and Maimon gradually became religious skeptics and their halakhic observance lapsed. One day, while passing outside the local synagogue at the time of prayer they began to discuss the fact that they no longer prayed. While Lapidot exhibited feelings of guilt, Maimon was guiltless. Appealing to Maimonides, Maimon noted that the aim of human life is knowledge of God and the imitation of His actions.⁶⁸ As prayer is merely an expression of our knowledge of divine perfections,⁶⁹ it is intended for the common man who cannot attain this knowledge himself and is accommodated to his primitive understanding of God. Maimon concludes: "As we see into the end of prayer and can attain to this end directly [i.e., through our independent philosophical speculation], we can dispense with prayer altogether as something superfluous."⁷⁰ Maimon likewise appeals to Maimonides' instrumentalist approach to halakhah to mock many parts of the Talmud. For if, as Maimonides claimed, halakhah is a means to facilitate philosophical contemplation,⁷¹ the irrational, tortured study of Talmud, which often centers on practically irrelevant laws such as laws of the Temple service is a massive waste of time. Maimon laments the memory of "the best days of our lives when the powers are in full vigor being spent in the soul-deadening [*geisttötende*] business of studying Talmud."⁷² And he scoffs at many of the practical details of halakhah such as the fact that killing a louse on the Sabbath is permitted, while killing a flea is a mortal sin.⁷³

⁶⁷ *Salomon Maimons Lebensgeschichte*, ed. Zwi Batscha (Frankfurt am Main, 1995), p. 163; *Solomon Maimon: an Autobiography*, ed. Moses Hadas (New York, 1947), p. 227.

⁶⁸ For example, see Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, "Laws of the Foundations of the Torah," 1:1, 2:1–2; "Laws of Character Traits," 1:6; *Guide* 3:54, pp. 637–638.

⁶⁹ See *Guide* 3:32, pp. 526–527; 3:35, p. 537; 3:44, p. 574.

⁷⁰ *Salomon Maimons Lebensgeschichte*, p. 93; *Solomon Maimon: an Autobiography*, p. 147. For discussion of the centrality of Maimonides' notion of intellectual perfection for Maimon, see Abe Socher, *The Radical Enlightenment of Solomon Maimon* (Stanford, 2007), pp. 82–84, 127–142.

⁷¹ See *Guide* 3:27, pp. 510–512.

⁷² *Salomon Maimons Lebensgeschichte*, pp. 222–223; *Solomon Maimon: an Autobiography*, pp. 159–160.

⁷³ See TB Shabbat 107b; *Salomon Maimons Lebensgeschichte*, p. 29; *Solomon Maimon: an Autobiography*, p. 28.

While for Maimon casting off the ceremonies meant abandoning Judaism,⁷⁴ by the first decade of the nineteenth century, it became clear that there was another option, namely reforming Judaism. The first religious reforms were relatively minor, but gradually became much more radical as the Reformers gained confidence.⁷⁵ In 1833, the Reform scholar Michael Creizenach published the first volume of his legal compendium *Schulchan Arukh, a Comprehensive Presentation of Jewish Law*. Creizenach's work aims to explain halakhah to the non-Talmudically trained student in order to help him distinguish between the spirit of law and its formal details.⁷⁶ In this way, the student can learn to discern which laws are truly "religious provisions" (*Religionsvorschriften*) and which are merely the product of social circumstances and so can be modified or discarded.⁷⁷ While Creizenach does not specifically invoke Maimonides, as seen from Maimon, distinguishing the true purpose of the law from its practical details is a Maimonidean theme.⁷⁸ Hirsch was certainly familiar with Creizenach as he visited Creizenach before enrolling at the University of Bonn in 1830.⁷⁹ Indeed, it was at Creizenach's house that Hirsch first met Abraham Geiger, the major

⁷⁴ This was likewise the assumption for Mendelssohn's student David Friedländer. In his 1799 *Open Letter* to Provost Teller proposing conversion to Unitarian Christianity, Friedländer ridicules hairsplitting Talmud study and criticizes halakhic observance as "works of righteousness... empty trivialities, and castigation of the body." After mounting these criticisms, Friedländer considers the possibility of reforming Judaism, but ultimately rejects this option as impractical since it would involve creating "a middle thing between Jews and Christians that would be regarded as a sect that, isolated and without following, would have great difficulty existing and prospering." So like Maimon, Friedländer ends up equating Judaism with strict observance of halakhah, which in the *Open Letter* he rejects. See David Friedländer, *A Debate on Jewish Emancipation and Christian Theology in Old Berlin*, eds. Richard Crouter and Julie Klassen (Indianapolis, 2004), pp. 41–78. After his abortive attempt to convert to Christianity Friedländer did, however, turn to reforming Judaism. See Michael Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, pp. 44–45.

⁷⁵ See Robert Liberles, *Religious Conflict in Social Context*, pp. 23–65; Michael Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, pp. 28–142.

⁷⁶ See Michael Creizenach, *Schulchan Arukh* (Frankfurt, 1833), vol. 1, p. vii.

⁷⁷ See Michael Creizenach, *Schulchan Arukh*, vol. 1, pp. x, xiii–xiv.

⁷⁸ For discussion, see Robert Liberles, "Champion of Orthodoxy," pp. 47–48. Of course this theme likewise occurs in the Pauline distinction between the spirit of the law and the letter of the law. But for a Jewish thinker Maimonides would have been the natural source. For a famous discussion of the distinction between spirit and letter, see Erich Auerbach, "Figura," in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*, trans. Ralph Mannheim (Minneapolis, 1984), pp. 11–78.

⁷⁹ Liberles claims that Hirsch's *Horeb* (completed 1835, published 1838) was deeply influenced by Creizenach's *Schulchan Arukh*. See Liberles, "Champion of Orthodoxy," pp. 47–49. In his 1838 *Naftulei Naftali: First Communications from Naphtali's Exchange of Letters*, Hirsch explicitly criticizes Creizenach's approach to Jewish Law. See Isidor

Reform theoretician who was at first Hirsch's close friend and later his intractable opponent.⁸⁰

Like Luzzatto, Hirsch's critique of Haskalah is informed by a typological contrast between Greek and Jewish thought. In an 1856 essay devoted to an analysis of Chanukah Hirsch describes Hellenism and Judaism as "two principles, two conceptions of life (*zweier Lebensanschauungen*), two civilizing powers (*zweier Bildungsmächte*) which, up to the present time have been striving for mastery of the world."⁸¹ Unlike Luzzatto, however, Hirsch is not uniformly critical of Greek ideals. Hirsch follows Biblical tradition in identifying Hellenism and Judaism with two sons of Noah, Japheth and Shem.⁸² Central for his understanding of the relationship between Hellenism and Judaism is Genesis 9:27: "Yaft elohim l'yefet v'yishkon b'oholei shem vihi khena'an eved lamo" ("May God enlarge Japheth and let him dwell in the tents of Shem, and let Canaan be a slave to them"—JPS translation). In his Pentateuch translation, Hirsch translates the verse as follows: "Gemüther öffnet Gott dem Japheth wohnt jedoch in Hütten Schem's; möge Kanaan ihnen Knecht werden" ("God opens minds to Japheth, however, [Japheth] dwells in Shem's tents that Canaan may become their servant").⁸³ Expanding on a Midrash, which claims that Jewish proselytes will come from Japheth,⁸⁴ Hirsch interprets the verse to mean that Japheth will first spiritually conquer the world, thereby preparing the way for Shem who will spiritually conquer Japheth.⁸⁵

According to Genesis, Noah had three sons—Japheth, Ham, and Shem.⁸⁶ For Hirsch, each exemplifies a human capacity. Japheth

Grunfeld, "S. R. Hirsch the Man and His Mission," in *Judaism Eternal* (London, 1956), vol. 1, p. xxxvii.

⁸⁰ See Isaac Heinemann, "Samson Raphael Hirsch: The Formative Years of the Leader of Modern Orthodoxy," *Historia Judaica* XIII (1951), p. 33.

⁸¹ See Hirsch, "Kislev: Der Hellenismus und das Judentum," *Jeshurun* III (1856–1857), p. 111; *Judaism Eternal*, vol. II, p. 187. I have altered Grunfeld's translation at some places.

⁸² See Genesis 10:2 where 'Yavan' (generally translated as 'Greece') is identified as a descendent of Japheth and Genesis 10:23 where the "Hebrew children" (*benei 'ever*) are identified as children of Shem. See Hirsch, "Kislev: Der Hellenismus und das Judentum," p. 112; *Judaism Eternal*, p. 188; idem, *Der Pentateuch, übersezt und erläutert*, erster teil, Gen 9:27 (Frankfurt, 1867), pp. 179–180.

⁸³ Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Der Pentateuch, übersezt und erläutert*, erster teil, Gen 9:27, p. 179.

⁸⁴ See Midrash Rabbah 38:8. Compare Targum Jonathan to Gen 9:27.

⁸⁵ See Hirsch, "Kislev: Der Hellenismus und das Judentum," p. 112; *Judaism Eternal*, p. 189.

⁸⁶ See Gen 6:10.

exemplifies mind (*Gemüth*), Ham exemplifies sensuality (*Sinnlichkeit*), and Shem exemplifies spirit (*Geist*). While Hirsch acknowledges that each of these three capacities exist in every nation and in every individual, he thinks that each son represents a civilization in which one of the capacities is dominant.⁸⁷ Hirsch notes that Noah curses Ham's son Canaan with slavery.⁸⁸ Ham/Canaan represent "primitive" civilizations in which most people live slavish existences. This slavishness is a function of the fact that one who prizes sensual gratification above all else is always dependent on the external means needed to satisfy these desires.⁸⁹ Furthermore, by seeing well being as dependent on forces of nature beyond their control, people come to be oppressed by violent emotions, especially fear.⁹⁰ Unscrupulous leaders then teach the people that these forces of nature are divine and that the only way to prosper is to curry favor with these angry and cruel deities. This requires bringing sacrifices to priests and recognizing the political authority of kings who are the gods' earthly deputies, if not gods incarnate. In these ways, man is always "taught to look outwards" and his individual personality is reduced to "complete insignificance."⁹¹

Hellenism, which swept across the ancient world, sought to redeem humanity by stressing the value of the individual. For Hirsch, mind (*Gemüth*) is an intermediate capacity between spirit and sensuality, which includes both aesthetic appreciation and intellect. Hellenism, which values mind above all else, teaches self-respect and self-confidence by upholding individual aesthetic and intellectual perfection as ideals.⁹² Appreciation of the beautiful tames the passions by actively weaving them into a refined harmony, and striving for intellectual perfection frees

⁸⁷ Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Der Pentateuch, überseft und erläutert*, erster teil, Gen 9:27, pp. 179–180.

⁸⁸ See *ibid.*, p. 179. And see Gen 9:25–27.

⁸⁹ See *ibid.*, p. 178.

⁹⁰ Hirsch links the name "Ham" etymologically to the Hebrew root H-M-M, which means restive movement (*unruhige Bewegung*), and so Ham means excited sensuality, which cannot govern itself and is incapable of freedom (*der Freiheit unfähig*). See Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Der Pentateuch, überseft und erläutert*, erster teil, Gen 9:25, 26, pp. 178–179. Also see Hirsch's more complicated etymology at Gen 6:10 where he suggests that Ham's sensuality can, however, be harnessed for good (*ibid.*, p. 130).

⁹¹ See Hirsch, "Kislev: Der Hellenismus und das Judenthum," pp. 112–113; *Judaism Eternal*, p. 189. Compare Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, introduction.

⁹² In his Biblical commentary, Hirsch gives priority to the aesthetic dimension of Japheth, which he links to the Hebrew root Y-P-Th meaning "beauty." See Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Der Pentateuch, überseft und erläutert*, erster teil, Gen 6:10, pp. 130–131.

man by making his autonomous reason the ground of his convictions and the basis for how he lives his life.⁹³ In consequence, under Greek influence man became increasingly “incapable of bowing slavishly to his equals who claim to be godlike.”⁹⁴ Man came to appreciate his own worth and so seek his “inalienable claim to recognition of equality.” In this way, Hellenism became the “nurse of justice and liberty [*Pflegemutter des Rechts und der Freiheit*].”⁹⁵

But while Hellenism constitutes a major triumph for humanity, it is liable to degenerate into “error and servitude” for three reasons. First, while Hellenism stimulates the individual to seek truth intellectually, the finite human intellect is unable to attain certainty due to the gap between mind and external reality.⁹⁶ The intellectual search for truth then inevitably results in fruitless, paralyzing skepticism. Indeed, the culmination of Hellenism’s striving for intellectual certainty is German Idealism, which claims that the mind “creates, reveals and dispenses truth.”⁹⁷ But for Hirsch this is a desperate ploy, a slim substitute for true certainty.⁹⁸ Second, by upholding the egoistic ideal of pleasure through its valuing of aesthetic perfection, Hellenism fails to provide an adequate means for elevating man above his brutish nature. For just below the “polished exterior of a refined culture there remains sybaritic pleasure-seeking and brutish animal-like sensuality” ready to erupt into violence and subjugation at any moment.⁹⁹ Hellenism’s inability to fully sublimate anarchic, brutal sensuality derives from its failure to enlist the senses for a unified purpose. Since aesthetic elation is fleeting, it is only in “rare moments, life’s festive hours . . . [that] man rises above himself and forgets the drabness of reality . . . For the

⁹³ See *ibid.*, p. 178.

⁹⁴ See Hirsch, “Kislev: Der Hellenismus und das Judenthum,” pp. 113–114; *Judaism Eternal*, pp. 189–190.

⁹⁵ See Hirsch, “Kislev: Der Hellenismus und das Judenthum,” p. 116; *Judaism Eternal*, p. 192.

⁹⁶ See Hirsch, “Kislev: Der Hellenismus und das Judenthum,” p. 115; *Judaism Eternal*, p. 191; *Neunzehn Briefe Über Judenthum*, p. 6; *Nineteen Letters*, Letter 2, p. 14. Hirsch’s arguments against the possibility of knowledge of the external world are meager.

⁹⁷ See Hirsch, “Kislev: Der Hellenismus und das Judenthum,” p. 115; *Judaism Eternal*, p. 191.

⁹⁸ See Hirsch, “Kislev: Der Hellenismus und das Judenthum,” pp. 115–116; *Judaism Eternal*, p. 191. Of course this is a very simplistic view of German Idealism. Compare Frederick Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism: 1781–1801* (Cambridge, Mass., 2003).

⁹⁹ See Hirsch, “Kislev: Der Hellenismus und das Judenthum,” p. 116; *Judaism Eternal*, p. 191.

rest [of the time] one's personality and reality remains enslaved [*verfallen*] by the misery and wretchedness of an empty and meaningless [*bedeutungslosen*] existence."¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, as the ideal of perfection is individual, Hellenism is incapable of providing a coherent way of life for the family and society as a whole and so ends up alienating the individual from those around him.¹⁰¹ Finally, Hellenistic individualism renders ethics problematic. Hellenistic ethics are grounded in the worth of the individual—since I have value and wished to be treated as such, I accord others respect. But given that human value is dependent on man's ability to achieve aesthetic and intellectual perfection, which so few are capable of achieving, it is not surprising that the Greeks did not extend equality and justice to all, but reserved it for the elite. Indeed, Hirsch notes that in ancient Attica, "the finest state in the Hellenic civilization," there were only 130,000 free men as opposed to 400,000 slaves. The cultured classes were quite willing to tolerate tyranny and violence as long as their own rights were respected.¹⁰²

For Hirsch, Judaism, which is represented by Shem, completes Hellenism's drive to restore human dignity. It accomplishes this by enthroning spirit over both mind and sensuality.¹⁰³ The enthronement of spirit does not, however, stifle the mind and the passions, but liberates them.¹⁰⁴ Hirsch notes that the one area where human intellect most nearly attains certainty is modern science. But science is implicitly dependent on Judaism's idea of the world as the creation of an all-wise, all-powerful God inasmuch as it assumes purposefulness and rational order in every part of nature. As Hirsch puts it, "every new discovery made even by an atheist scientist, is, nevertheless, a homage to the God

¹⁰⁰ See Hirsch, "Kislev: Der Hellenismus und das Judentum," p. 115; *Judaism Eternal*, p. 192.

¹⁰¹ See Hirsch, "Kislev: Der Hellenismus und das Judentum," p. 117; *Judaism Eternal*, p. 193.

¹⁰² See Hirsch, "Kislev: Der Hellenismus und das Judentum," p. 117; *Judaism Eternal*, pp. 192–193.

¹⁰³ Christianity plays an interesting role mediating between Judaism and Hellenism. Following Judah Halevi and Maimonides, Hirsch sees Christianity as introducing Jewish ideas to the pagan world, albeit in a "mutilated (*verstümmelt*)" form. In this way, Christianity helps further pave the way for the acceptance of Jewish ideals. See Hirsch, "Kislev: Der Hellenismus und das Judentum," pp. 119–124; *Judaism Eternal*, pp. 195–199.

¹⁰⁴ Hirsch links "Shem" with the Hebrew root Sh-M, which means "name (*Name*)" or the "concept of an object (*Begriff des Objects*)."¹⁰⁴ This refers to Shem's ability to order things according to their proper "spiritual place (*geistigen Raum*)."¹⁰⁴ See Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Der Pentateuch, übersezt und erläutert*, erster teil, Gen 6:10, p. 130.

of Shem whom the narrow-minded scientist sneeringly repudiates.”¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, by making the good consequent on a single obligation, to obey the laws of the Torah, Judaism endows life with a unity of purpose. This then redeems sensuality and intellect, by enlisting them for a higher purpose.¹⁰⁶ By trusting in the authority of the Torah a person is spared endless speculation into truth and so is freed to actively pursue the actualization of God’s law on earth, which aims to create a harmonious family and society. Finally, Judaism’s idea of an omniscient, omnipotent, good Creator founds a truly universal moral code. For according to the Torah, *all* human beings are descended from Adam and Eve who were created in the divine image and so all people have equal intrinsic worth. That the Torah’s universal morality contrasts sharply with Hellenistic ethics is clear insofar as the Torah commands people to act justly towards every human being and to show special compassion for the most needy—the downtrodden, the poor, the weak, and the unfortunate.¹⁰⁷ In a word, by tying “all individual and social life to . . . the one conception of God . . . all contradictions vanish in life that is one and indivisible just as God is one and indivisible.”¹⁰⁸ So Judaism provides an antidote to the alienating, oppressive tendencies of Hellenism.

Hirsch notes that the struggle between Hellenism and Judaism has not passed as “these two tendencies are *again today* struggling for mastery in the Jewish world” (emphasis mine).¹⁰⁹ In his criticism of Haskalah

¹⁰⁵ See Hirsch, “Kislev: Der Hellenismus und das Judentum,” p. 118; *Judaism Eternal*, pp. 194. Kant makes a similar point. See Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Leipzig, 1790), Section 68, pp. 381–384.

¹⁰⁶ See Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Der Pentateuch, überseht und erläutert*, erster teil, Gen 6:10, p. 131.

¹⁰⁷ See Hirsch, “Kislev: Der Hellenismus und das Judentum,” p. 119; *Judaism Eternal*, p. 195.

¹⁰⁸ See Hirsch, “Kislev: Der Hellenismus und das Judentum,” pp. 123–124; *Judaism Eternal*, pp. 198–199.

¹⁰⁹ See Hirsch, “Kislev: Der Hellenismus und das Judentum,” p. 111; *Judaism Eternal*, p. 187. While Luzzatto sees the esteeming of power, pleasure, and wealth as an adaptation of Atticism’s emphasis on perfection, Hirsch identifies this as a separate phenomenon, which he calls “Rome.” For Hirsch, while Hellenism and Judaism can collaborate, Rome and Judaism are completely opposed. As he puts it, “It is not Hellas that Judaism has to fear, but Rome. It is not the Hellenic spirit (*der hellenische Geist*) that caused the downfall of all that is sacred to Judaism, but the Roman sense (*Sinn*) and Roman tendencies . . . Not Hellenic idealism, but Roman materialism is what we have to fear.” See Samson Raphael Hirsch, “Teweth: Das Judentum und Rom,” *Jeschurun* IV (1856–1857), pp. 165–172; *Judaism Eternal*, pp. 202–209. It is significant that Hirsch sees contemporary Judaism as vacillating between Hellenism and Juda-

in the *Nineteen Letters*, Hirsch makes clear that the linchpin of *Haskalah* is its accepting the Hellenic view that individual perfection constitutes the purpose of human existence. In making this claim, however, Judaism comes to be measured by its ability to contribute to this end and so can be judged inadequate.¹¹⁰ In upholding individual perfection as the highest ideal in *Judaism*, the *Maskilim* sought a justification for this in Jewish sources, which they found in Maimonides.¹¹¹ So, for Hirsch, confronting *Haskalah* requires confronting Maimonides.¹¹²

Hirsch's approach to Maimonides is not uniformly negative. He notes that in Maimonides' day Judaism was in a sorry state. Because of petulant disputes between the Geonim, Judaism was atrophying into a religion of stale practice. Seeking spiritual sustenance, Jewish youths turned outside of Judaism, to the burgeoning Greek philosophy of the Arab schools. But embracing Greek philosophy, necessarily created problems as the Greek views of God and the purpose of human existence clashed with those taught in the Bible. Maimonides inserted himself into this conflict seeking a synthesis between Judaism and Greek philosophy.¹¹³ To his merit, Maimonides firmly upheld the authority of halakhah. Indeed, "the preservation of practical Judaism

ism, not between Rome and Judaism. This explains the positive value that he finds in *Haskalah* and Reform.

¹¹⁰ See Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe Über Judenthum*, pp. 5–9; *Nineteen Letters*, Letter 2, pp. 13–16.

¹¹¹ Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe Über Judenthum*, pp. 93–96; *Nineteen Letters*, Letter 18, pp. 269–272.

¹¹² While in the *Nineteen Letters*, Hirsch is willing to harshly criticize Maimonides, some twenty years later he shifts strategy and uses Maimonides' teachings to criticize Reform's break with strict halakhic observance. Thus in his 1854 article, "Judaism Allied to Progress," Hirsch extensively quotes from the *Mishneh Torah* to show that Maimonides held that anyone seeking to annul the authority of halakhah was a heretic. Apparently seeking to avoid criticizing Maimonides, towards the end of the piece Hirsch reverts to an old apologetic trope of distinguishing between Maimonides himself and the misuse of his teachings, writing: "True Maimonides' *Guide* was burnt. But he would have been the first to consign it to flames had he been alive to see the manner in which it has been and still is being used today." See Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Judaism Eternal*, part II, pp. 239–244. Also, in two other essays from 1854, Hirsch attacks attempts to reform Jewish law without mentioning Maimonides. See the essays "Der Jude und Seine Zeit," *Jeschurun* I (1854–1855), pp. 14–25; *Judaism Eternal*, part II, pp. 213–223; "Die jüdischen Ceremonialgesetze," *Jeschurun* II (1854–1855), pp. 70–78; *Judaism Eternal*, part II, pp. 245–252. Why eighteen years after publishing the *Neunzehn Briefe*, Hirsch avoids criticizing Maimonides is an important question that I hope to investigate on another occasion.

¹¹³ Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe Über Judenthum*, pp. 87–90; *Nineteen Letters*, Letter 18, pp. 264–266.

until the present day” is due to Maimonides’ codification of Jewish law in his *Mishneh Torah*.¹¹⁴ But Maimonides’ method of reconciling Judaism with Greek philosophy was inadequate as his approach involved accepting Greek philosophical ideas and then showing how the Bible could be interpreted to reflect these doctrines. While Maimonides used this approach to defend Judaism, he ended up undermining it. For by accepting the Hellenic notion that intellectual perfection constitutes the highest good, he was forced to interpret all halakhah as a means to this end, and so, halakhah could be discarded if one could achieve intellectual perfection by other means.¹¹⁵ This conclusion was reinforced by the fact that Maimonides only offered reasons for the laws in general and not for their details.¹¹⁶ For example, if as Maimonides had claimed the purpose of the Sabbath was to rest from the toil of the week and remember that the world was created, why observe all the prohibitions down to the writing of two letters? Wasn’t this just “spiritless cruelty [*geistlose Quälerei*].”¹¹⁷ Similarly, Maimonides only gave explanations for the laws written in the Bible (the so-called written Torah) not for laws contained in the Talmud (the so-called oral Torah).¹¹⁸ As such, the Talmud with its pages and pages of subtle dialectic came to seem like “nitpicking subtleties [*milbenklaubende Spißfündigkeiten*].”¹¹⁹

For Hirsch, Maimonides was too quick to accept the Hellenistic view of intellectual perfection as ultimate aim of life, which in Maimonides’ day had already been challenged by Jewish thinkers such as Judah Halevi.¹²⁰ Once, however, Kant has made clear the severe impediments

¹¹⁴ Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe Über Judenthum*, p. 89; *Nineteen Letters*, Letter 18, p. 265.

¹¹⁵ It was only a latter-day Moses, Moses Mendelssohn, who included aesthetic perfection as an ideal as well. See Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe Über Judenthum*, p. 93; *Nineteen Letters*, ed. Joseph Elias (New York, 1995), Letter 18, p. 269. On the importance of aesthetic perfection for Mendelssohn, see Moses Mendelssohn, *Gesammelte Schriften Jubiläumsausgabe*, eds. E. Mittwoch, I. Elbogen, and J. Guttmann (1929–), vol. 3.1, pp. 266–267; vol. 3.2, pp. 66, 69–70; vol. 6.1, pp. 113–119.

¹¹⁶ Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe Über Judenthum*, p. 95; *Nineteen Letters*, Letter 18, p. 271; Maimonides, *Guide* 3:26, p. 509.

¹¹⁷ Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe Über Judenthum*, p. 94; *Nineteen Letters*, Letter 18, p. 270. See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed* 2:43.

¹¹⁸ *Guide* 3:41, p. 558.

¹¹⁹ Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe Über Judenthum*, p. 94; *Nineteen Letters*, Letter 18, p. 270.

¹²⁰ The fact that Hirsch’s *Nineteen Letters* is modeled on Halevi’s *Kuzari* reflects an affinity that is more than stylistic. On the attraction to Halevi among many nineteenth-century Jewish thinkers seeking an alternative to Haskalah, see Eliczer Schweid, “Halevi and Maimonides as Representatives of Romantic versus Rationalistic Conceptions of

to knowing metaphysical truth, Maimonides' notion that intellectual perfection constitutes the highest good is completely untenable.¹²¹ More generally, Hirsch attacks the idea of grounding ethical authority in self-perfection. For if acting unethically is merely sinning against oneself, what can one answer a person who is willing to forego his own perfection?¹²²

Hirsch also criticizes Maimonides for accommodating Judaism to Greek moral and philosophical ideals on historical grounds. Employing the rhetoric of the burgeoning historical sciences, Hirsch argues that since Judaism is "an historical phenomenon" (*ein geschichtliche Erscheinung*) understanding it requires that the Torah be studied on its own terms, as it appears in its "destiny and teachings" (*nach Geschick und Lehre*).¹²³ The foundational document of Judaism is the Torah so the Torah must be the first object of study. To understand the Torah historically, one must read it as it was originally intended. This requires setting aside our prejudices about it and approaching the Torah as if we have never encountered it before. To this point, Hirsch's method sounds very much like the historical-critical method. But unlike the historical critics for whom original intent is known through contextualization, philological analysis, and textual history, Hirsch argues that these tools occlude rather than reveal original intent. The Torah was intended as a guide to living for all future generations. For this reason, one can only grasp its original intent if one reads it as if one is personally addressed by it.¹²⁴ So one must read the Bible with an open, receptive heart and mind before one "may cast stones on it" (*den Stein darauf werfen*).¹²⁵

Judaism," in *Kabbala und Romantik*, eds. Eveline Goodman-Thau, Gerd Mattenklot and Christoph Schulte (Tübingen, 1994), pp. 279–292.

¹²¹ See Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe Über Judenthum*, p. 6; *Nineteen Letters*, Letter 2, p. 14. Compare Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*, in *The Basic Political Writings* (Indianapolis, 1986), part II, p. 11.

¹²² Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe Über Judenthum*, p. 6; *Nineteen Letters*, Letter 2, p. 14.

¹²³ Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe Über Judenthum*, p. 7; *Nineteen Letters*, Letter 2, p. 15. The Elias edition mistranslates this as "history and teachings" misreading "*Geschichte*" for "*Geschick*."

¹²⁴ Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe Über Judenthum*, pp. 7–8; *Nineteen Letters*, Letter 2, pp. 15–16.

¹²⁵ Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe Über Judenthum*, p. 8; *Nineteen Letters*, Letter 2, p. 16.

Taking a page from Spinoza, Hirsch argues that the method for studying the Torah must be like the method used to study nature.¹²⁶ Briefly, for Spinoza the study of nature requires beginning with an *a priori* understanding of universal laws of nature, which control our interpretation of any empirical data that we observe. In the same way, understanding Scripture requires assuming that Scripture is a product of the natural world, and so subject to the universal laws which govern it. This involves reading the Bible not as a product of timeless supernatural revelation, but rather as an historical work specific to a certain time and place. As the Bible was written in social and political circumstances very different than the present, the historical approach opens a rift between the present reader and the Bible thereby creating the likelihood that many of the Bible's laws and teachings may need to be updated or rejected.¹²⁷

For Hirsch, a scientific study of nature seeks to explain empirical data by hypothesizing, *a posteriori*, laws which govern the facts that we observe. If, however, the data does not conform to these laws then one must revise one's understanding of these laws—one must never adjust the data to fit one's hypotheses. In the same way, the proper study of the Bible involves seeking reasons for the Bible's laws and teachings through careful investigation of the Torah itself. But if a particular law or teaching does not conform to one's understanding of the reasons for it, the law in question cannot be rejected. Rather, one must revise one's understanding of the reasons for it.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ See Baruch Spinoza, *Spinoza Opera*, ed. C. Gebhardt, vol. III (Heidelberg, 1925), p. 98.

¹²⁷ For more detailed discussion of the analogy, see Michah Gottlieb, "Spinoza's Method(s) of Biblical Interpretation Reconsidered," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 14 (2007), pp. 294–301.

¹²⁸ See Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe Über Judenthum*, p. 93, n. 3; *Nineteen Letters*, Letter 18, pp. 271–272, note d. Hirsch's analogy between the study of nature and the study of the Bible raises serious questions. First, while Hirsch abjures an approach to the Bible, which involves historical contextualization, Hirsch recognizes that certain halakhot such as the Temple laws are specific to a particular historical context and hence are no longer practiced. Hirsch would say that this is not because these laws are longer valid, but rather because the Temple no longer stands. Once the Temple will be rebuilt the laws will again be practiced. But why couldn't one claim that other ritual laws such as the dietary laws are inseparable from life in the land of Israel and so lose their applicability once the Jews no longer live in this land? Indeed, this had been suggested not only by Spinoza, but by the medieval Rabbinic authority Nachmanides basing himself on a midrash. For Nachmanides, the only reason Jews must continue to practice halakhah outside the land of Israel is for educational purposes, i.e., so that they will remember how to practice halakhah once they return from

Proper study of the Torah shows that its values are diametrically opposed to the anthropocentric egoism of the Enlightenment. Genesis teaches that the world is the creation of a unique, just, loving God. God sets laws for all beings, which puts them in harmony with one another. God likewise gives human beings laws whose observance promotes the harmonious order of nature. But there is a difference between human beings and everything else. For while all beings other than man follow their laws of necessity, man has the freedom to obey or disobey.¹²⁹ The Torah teaches that man has not been put on earth for his own pleasure. Rather, he was created in order to take responsibility for other beings, human, animal, and plant alike. In a word, the world does not exist for the sake of man, man exists for the sake of the world. His purpose is to imitate God by acting with justice and love. If man obeys the universal moral laws given by God, he brings harmony to nature.¹³⁰ But if he arrogantly disobeys these laws instead seeking egoistic pleasure, then he brings destruction and suffering.¹³¹ While all human beings are given basic ethical commands, God chose the Jews, a small, weak people to educate the world that the purpose of life is humble reliance on God, rather than the arrogant seeking of power. The Jews exemplify humble obedience to God by observing the 613 commandments that God revealed to them on Mount Sinai.¹³²

Hirsch's criticism of the radical Jewish followers of Maimonides is of a piece with those eighteenth- and nineteenth-century critics of the Enlightenment who chided Enlightenment thinkers for using reason to judge tradition. For Hirsch, the Maimonidean-Maskilic approach to

the exile. See Nachmanides, Commentary to Leviticus 18:25; Sifre Ekev, 43. Second, Hirsch's analogy between the study of Torah and the study of nature seems to involve a confusion between facts and laws. According to Hirsch, science seeks laws, which are principles explaining the operation of the facts of nature. But Hirsch accounts the laws of the Torah themselves as facts, whose purposes are its principles. Science, however, assumes that nature does not operate with intentions and hence does not seek purposes of nature.

¹²⁹ Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe Über Judenthum*, pp. 9–22; *Nineteen Letters*, Letters 3–4, pp. 27–34, 55–60.

¹³⁰ Hirsch identifies the universal moral laws given to all mankind with the so-called seven “Noachide” laws found in Rabbinic literature. See Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe Über Judenthum*, p. 25, n. 3; *Nineteen Letters*, Letter 5, p. 77, note c. For Hirsch these laws instantiate principles of justice, but not loving-kindness.

¹³¹ Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe Über Judenthum*, pp. 22–28; *Nineteen Letters*, Letter 5, pp. 75–80.

¹³² Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe Über Judenthum*, pp. 35–37, 37–41; *Nineteen Letters*, Letter 7, pp. 105–107, Letter, 8, pp. 113–117.

Judaism fails to understand Jewish tradition properly because it seeks to interpret it in light of its philosophical commitments (especially the commitment to the supreme value of egoistic happiness), which are alien to Judaism. This epistemological failure is rooted in a moral shortcoming—the arrogant trust in the power of human reason. To gain a proper understanding of tradition, one must possess the moral trait of humility, i.e., the willingness to let oneself be instructed by the tradition. While *Maskilim* judge halakhah by how it fits into their lives, “the proper approach” is to judge one’s life by how it fits into the halakhic system.¹³³

But for Hirsch, just as Hellenism serves the cause of Judaism, so the contemporary Jewish representatives of Hellenism help promote authentic Judaism in two ways. First, an impetus for Reform’s abandoning Jewish ritual is that it considers this necessary for Jewish emancipation. Reformers’ discarding of much of halakhah is a response to anti-Semites who claim that Jews are not eligible for citizenship because their ritual observances separate them from their Gentile neighbors and alienate their loyalty to the state.¹³⁴ In opposing these anti-Semites, Hirsch recognizes the good intentions of many Reformers as political emancipation with its “proper regard for justice” is a major step forward in humanity’s fulfilling its divine mandate.¹³⁵ But abandoning halakhah for the sake of emancipation loses sight of the true value of emancipation, which is to help Jews fulfill their task of educating humanity to obey the ethical divine will. For Hirsch, the economic and social opportunities afforded by emancipation are only valuable insofar as they help Jews become “respected, influential models of righteousness,” which occurs when Jews use economic prosperity to obey God’s will through

¹³³ See Isaak Heinemann, “Introduction” to *Nineteen Letters* (Jerusalem, 1965), p. 10.

¹³⁴ Hirsch, *Judaism Eternal*, vol. II, pp. 224–225. For an example of the claim that observance of Jewish law makes emancipation impossible, see Johann David Michaelis’ 1782 response to Dohm reprinted in *The Jew in the Modern World*, eds. Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz (Oxford, 1995), pp. 42–43. For discussion of eighteenth-century debates over Jewish emancipation, see Robert Liberles, “From *Tolerantion* to *Verbesserung*: German and English Debates on the Jews in the Eighteenth Century,” *Central European History* 22 (1989), pp. 3–30.

¹³⁵ See Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe Über Judenthum*, p. 81; *Nineteen Letters*, Letter 16, p. 226: “I bless Emancipation when I see that nowadays no ideological principle, not even one born of delusion (*wahngeborenes*), stands in its way and its only opponents are narrow-minded greed and degrading selfishness. I rejoice when I perceive proper regard for justice—for the human right to be accepted as a man among men (*Mensch unter Menschen zu seyn*)...”

the practice of halakhah rather than using this prosperity for egoistic satisfaction.¹³⁶ Since Jews' obedience to halakhah encourages Gentiles to fulfill their true vocation, not only does halakhic observance not alienate Jews' loyalty to their fellow citizens, it is the greatest expression of this loyalty. For all the good intentions of the Reformers, they too often lose sight of the true purpose of emancipation seeing it as a means to selfish pleasure alone.¹³⁷

Second, Hirsch lauds the Reformers as "having the best intentions for the welfare of their brethren" at heart in condemning much of contemporary Jewish practice and education.¹³⁸ Reformers correctly observe that traditional Judaism has all too often become "the mechanical practice of parents' customs" with the Bible and Talmud taught in such a way as to be "little understood and little digested."¹³⁹ In light of this, Hirsch himself adopts the slogan of reform, calling for "work[ing] with all our might, with all the resources of goodness and nobility to reach this ideal [i.e., reform]."¹⁴⁰ But for Hirsch, reforming Judaism does not involve discarding or altering halakhic practice to make Judaism more meaningful, but rather revitalizing Judaism by paying "renewed attention to Judaism, intellectually comprehended." This requires revamping Jewish education to stress a more sophisticated, intelligent understanding of Judaism and showing the connections between Judaism and the nobler

¹³⁶ Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe Über Judenthum*, pp. 78–82; *Nineteen Letters*, Letter 16, pp. 223–227.

¹³⁷ See Hirsch, *Judaism Eternal*, vol. II, pp. 213–223. Hirsch offers a biting criticism of the Reform claim that "participation in modern civilization with its improved means of communication and transportation" requires loosening Sabbath observance, noting that the Reformers likewise permit smoking on the Sabbath thereby violating the explicit Biblical prohibition of lighting a fire on the Sabbath (cf. Exod 35:3). Hirsch remarks ironically, "[apparently] the smoldering of tobacco leaf is also part of civilization!" See Hirsch, *Judaism Eternal*, vol. II, p. 233. On a pragmatic level, Hirsch criticizes the political stupidity of seeking to trade Jewish ritual observance for political emancipation. Gentiles have much greater respect for Jews who conscientiously observe their ancestral religion than for those ready to discard it for economic and social opportunities. See "Judaism Allied to Progress," in *Judaism Eternal*, pp. 236, 238. Indeed in 1782, Michaelis wrote: "When I see a Jew eating pork, in order no doubt, to offend his religion, then I find it impossible to rely on his word, since I cannot understand his heart." See "Arguments against Dohm (1782)," in *The Jew in the Modern World*, p. 42; Hirsch, *Religion Allied to Progress*, p. 224.

¹³⁸ See Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe Über Judenthum*, pp. 1–3; *Nineteen Letters*, Letter 1, pp. 3–4.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ See Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe Über Judenthum*, pp. 83–86; *Nineteen Letters*, Letter 17, pp. 241–242.

parts of European culture.¹⁴¹ Hirsch's first two works *The Nineteen Letters* (1836) and *Horeb* (1838) are first forays in this direction.

So like Luzzatto Hirsch accepts the enlightened/maskilic ideals of tolerance and universal justice and thinks that Haskalah is in danger of compromising these ideals. Luzzatto and Hirsch agree that it is traditional Judaism rather than Haskalah that truly promotes Haskalah's ideals by stressing obedience to the divine, ethical will embodied in the Torah rather than the cultivation of individual perfection. So the way to save the Haskalah is by returning to authentic Judaism. But while Luzzatto's approach to Haskalah is uniformly negative, Hirsch has a more dialectical view of the relationship between Haskalah and Judaism, praising the fundamental impulse of Haskalah as noble and seeing its critique of contemporary Judaism as a means for promoting a deeper understanding of Judaism that will help Judaism fulfill its true mandate.

At the beginning of this paper, I noted that "Maimonideanism" has been taken to reflect the accommodation of Judaism to secular knowledge, which is the quintessential opposite of fundamentalism. This opposition between Maimonideanism and fundamentalism is morally charged for it implies that accommodating religious knowledge to secular knowledge implies an open-minded, tolerant, universalism while rejecting this accommodation implies a close-minded, intolerant, particularism. Luzzatto and Hirsch call this moral equation into question, considering unaccommodated, "authentic" Judaism the best means to promote the maskilic ideals of tolerance, justice, and intellectual freedom. Indeed, in criticizing the authority of Maimonides, questioning whether Judaism and rationalism are compatible, and questioning whether rationalism can ground ethics, Hirsch and Luzzatto show much greater intellectual independence than their maskilic counterparts.

Scholars have noted how deeply Luzzatto and Hirsch's notions of authentic Judaism are indebted to non-Jewish philosophical discourse. Luzzatto's emphasis on compassion and pity as the defining features of Judaism draws on Rousseau and the German Romantics.¹⁴² Hirsch's

¹⁴¹ On Hirsch's approach to Jewish education, see his essays in *Judaism Eternal*, part I, pp. 155–252.

¹⁴² On Luzzatto's debt to Rousseau, see Joseph Klausner, *History of Modern Hebrew Literature*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem, 1952), pp. 11–15. On his relation to Romanticism, see P. Lahover, *First and Last* (Jerusalem, 1951), pp. 47–53; Ron Margolin, "The Role of

rejection of reason to judge the contents of Judaism draws on Schleiermacher and German Historicism, while his notion of retrieving a pure national tradition that provides a refuge from the ills of modernity reflects the discourse of the German Romantics, especially Herder.¹⁴³ The fact that these opponents of Maimonides draw on non-Jewish thinkers in sketching their conceptions of authentic Judaism shows how, like Maimonideanism, anti-Maimonideanism accommodates Judaism to secular knowledge, though this accommodation is often overtly denied. So insofar as “Maimonideanism” represents introducing a questioning spirit into Judaism and accommodating Judaism to secular knowledge, Luzzatto and Hirsch may be more worthy of the title “Maimonidean” than many of the *Maskilim*.

Hemlah (Compassion) in Luzzatto’s Thought,” in *Samuel David Luzzatto: The Bi-Centennial of his Birth*, eds. R. Bonfil, I. Gottlieb, and H. Kasher (Jerusalem, 2004), pp. 132–133; Isaac Heinemann, *The Reasons for the Commandments in Jewish Thought* (Jerusalem, 1942), vol. 2, pp. 66, 90.

¹⁴³ See Benjamin Ish-Shalom, “On Knowledge and Spiritual Perfection—The Critique of Modernity and Post-Modernity of Rabbi Soloveitchik and Neo-Orthodox Thought,” in *Faith in Changing Times*, ed. Avi Sagi (Jerusalem, 1996), p. 361; Noah Rosenbloom, *Tradition in an Age of Reform*, pp. 23, 152–153. Rosenbloom similarly notes Hegel’s extensive influence on Hirsch. See *ibid.*, pp. 26–36, 155–178, 292–295, 295–314.

