

READING
HEBREW SCRIPTURE
AS A
PHILOSOPHICAL
TEXT

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FOUR LECTURES

L1: *Aristotle and the Qur'an in Andalusian Islamic Thought*

L2: *Reading Hebrew Scripture as a Philosophical Text*

L3: *Augustine's Vanquishing of Christian Anti-Intellectualism*

L4: *Augustine on Mind, Human and Divine*

PLAN FOR TODAY

Reading Hebrew Scripture as a Philosophical Text

Context

- Intellectual backdrop for Averroës and Maimonides
- Aristotle

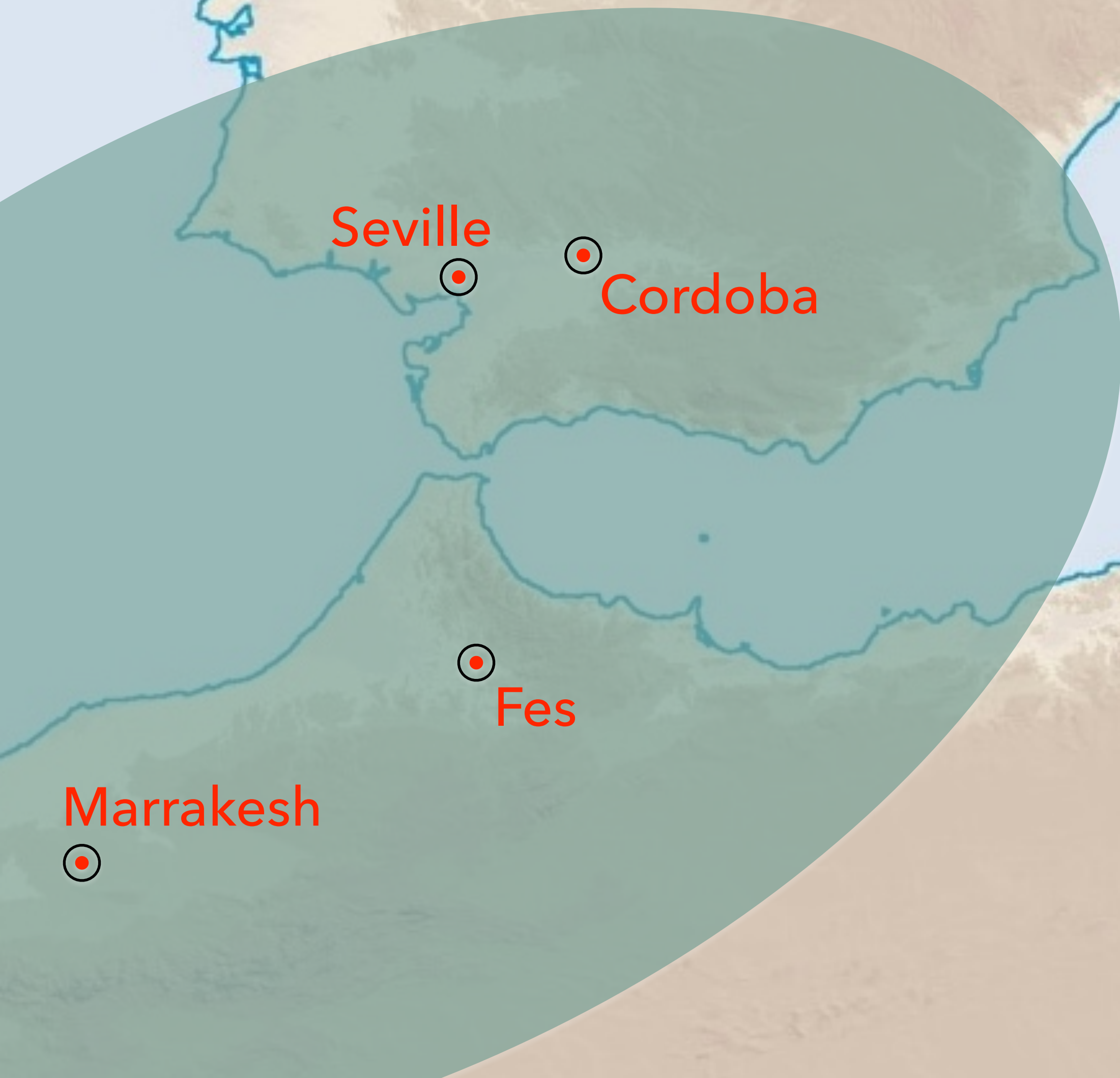
Averroës

- *The Decisive Treatise* (1179/80)

Maimonides

- *Guide of the Perplexed* (1190)

Almohads in 12th Century al-Andalus



Seville

Cordoba

Fes

Marrakesh

AVERROËS (IBN RUSHD)

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH



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- 1126-1198
- Cordoba (Marrakesh [1153-69, 1182-95], Seville [1169-82])
- Jurist, Philosopher/Scientist, Physician
- Aristotelian commentator - "The Commentator" (Aristotle = "The Philosopher")
- Connection between Scripture and Philosophy
 - Three related treatises (*Decisive Treatise*, *Epistle Dedicatory*, *Exposition of Religious Arguments*) - 1179/80
 - *Incoherence of the Incoherence* (refutation of al-Ghazali's *Incoherence of the Philosophers*) - 1195

MAIMONIDES (MOSES BEN MAIMON)

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

- 1138 (Cordoba) -1204 (Fustat [Old Cairo], Egypt)
- Jurist, Philosopher/Scientist, Physician
- *Commentary on the Mishnah* (Fes, 1166-1168)
- *Mishneh Torah* (1177)
- *Guide of the Perplexed* (1190)



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ARISTOTLE

ARISTOTLE (D. 322 BCE) – IN A NUTSHELL

WORKS

Logic [philosophy's tool, method]

- [1] *Categories*, [2] *On Interpretation*, [3/4] *Analytics (Prior & Posterior)*, [5] *Topics*, [6] *Sophistical Refutations*, [7/8] *Rhetoric*, *Poetics*

Natural Philosophy

- *Physics*, *On Generation & Corruption*, *On the Heavens*, etc.

Metaphysics (divine science)

Ethics/Politics

ARISTOTLE

LOGIC – BUILDING BLOCKS

Categories – Individual substances and their properties

- Socrates, human being, being pale, weighing 150 lbs, being Xanthippe's husband, walking
- 10 categories: **substance** and 9 categories of "**accidents**"

On Interpretation – Propositions (affirmations & negations, true or false)

- Socrates **is** pale
- Socrates **is not** sun-tanned

ARISTOTLE

LOGIC – REASONING

Analytics (Prior & Posterior) – formal reasoning

- Syllogism – the basic unit of reasoning
- **Demonstration** – a special type of syllogism
- Necessity (Cannot be otherwise)

Topics – dialectical reasoning (not necessary but “probable”)

Sophistical Refutations – fallacious reasoning

[**Rhetoric, Poetics** – persuasion (by means other than reasoning)]

ARISTOTLE

DEMONSTRATION

Particular kind of **reasoning** – syllogistic with specific characteristics

- Premises are true, necessary, immediate, primary, better known, causal (explanatory)
- Premises provide impeccable support for the conclusion

Particular kind of **result** – “scientific” knowledge of the conclusion (demonstrative knowledge)

- **Certainty** – the conclusion **cannot be false**
- **Deep explanation** – the premises show **why the conclusion must be true**

Particular kind of **system** – “science” (**demonstrative science**)

- Body of knowledge (theoretical system) that describes the structure of reality and explains its features in terms of its most fundamental principles

ARISTOTLE

DEMONSTRATIVE SCIENCES

Demonstration is the philosophical tool *par excellence*

- Applied to phenomena in the natural world yields a demonstrative **science** = **natural philosophy**
- Applied to higher phenomena yields a demonstrative **science** = **metaphysics (divine science)**

ISLAM AND JUDAISM ENCOUNTER PHILOSOPHY IN AL-ANDALUS

Islam/Judaism

1. God has a body
2. The world had a beginning in time (has existed for a finite length of time)
3. *Scripture says as much

Philosophy

- 1*. God (the first principle of all things) is an incorporeal intellect
- 2*. The world is eternal (has always existed, for an infinite length of time)
- 3*. *Philosophical arguments show as much

WHAT TO DO?

When **Scripture says P** and **Philosophy shows P*** (where P* is incompatible with P)

- Radical options
 - Accept **P**; reject **P*** (radical right)
 - Accept **P***; reject **P** (radical left)
 - ~~Reject both **P** and **P***~~ (skeptics)
 - ~~Accept both **P** and **P***~~ (lunatics)
- Rejecting **P** outright – unthinkable (if you're a believer)
- Rejecting **P*** outright – complications (if you're a thinker)

THE ARISTOTELIANS

AVERROËS & MAIMONIDES

Three commitments

1. To (Aristotelian) philosophical method and results (can't reject P^*)
 - Philosophical method uncovers and establishes truths about reality (divine and otherwise)
2. To the truth of religion (can't reject P)
 - The Qur'an (Torah) expresses the words of God revealed to and reported by the Prophet(s)
3. To the "unity" of truth (can't have both P and P^*)
 - There's just one reality (divine and otherwise) and just one set of truths describing it (if P and P^* are incompatible, then at most one of them is T)

THE ARISTOTELIANS' GAMBIT – PART 1

THE NEED FOR INTERPRETATION

When **Scripture says "P"** (e.g., "God has a body")

- **Apparent** (exoteric, surface) meaning: **P** (God has a body)
- **Hidden** (esoteric, deep) meaning: **Q** ([some other proposition, tbd])
- The apparent meaning may be **false**
- If the apparent meaning is false, there's a **true hidden meaning**

THE ARISTOTELIANS' GAMBIT – PART 2

THE KEY TO INTERPRETATION

(Aristotelian) philosophy

- Shows when an apparent meaning is false
- Is necessary for uncovering the hidden meaning that is true

(Limits on the powers of philosophy)

AVERROËS: *THE DECISIVE TREATISE*

THE DECISIVE TREATISE

DETERMINING THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE LAW AND WISDOM

- 'Decisive' = 'rendering a decision about' (as a judge *decides* a case)
- The case
 - What is the connection between the Law and wisdom?
 - What's the Law's view of wisdom?
- **Law**: Islamic Scripture = Qur'an and Hadith (Traditions)
- **Wisdom**: (Greek *sophia*) = deep understanding of reality; **philosophy**

DECISIVE TREATISE

CONTEXT

- Hostility to ancient wisdom: presumption that wisdom has no connection with (or is antithetical to) Scripture
- Juridical framework

“[T]he goal of this statement is for us to investigate, from the perspective of Law-based reflection, whether reflection upon philosophy and the sciences of logic is [a] permitted, [b] prohibited, or [c] commanded – and this as [c1] a recommendation or as [c2] an obligation – by the Law.” (tr. Butterworth §1, H 6-9)

DECISIVE TREATISE

AVERROËS' DECISION – STAGE 1: SUMMARY DECISION

1. From the standpoint of the Law, reflection on philosophy and logic is **commanded** – as **an obligation**
 - **Philosophy** – “So we say: the activity of philosophy is nothing more than **reflection upon existing things and consideration of them** insofar as they are an indication of the Artisan – I mean insofar as they are artifacts” (B§2, H12-14)
 - The **Law commands** the sort of consideration which is the activity which is philosophy
 - “the Law calls for **consideration of existing things by means of the intellect** and for pursuing cognizance of them by means of it” (B§2, H20-21)

DECISIVE TREATISE

BIG PICTURE IN THE BACKGROUND

The two purposes of the Scriptures

- **Theoretical**: knowledge of God and creation (existing things)
- **Practical**: right action and character

Knowledge of God is happiness

“We, the Muslim community, believe that this divine Law of ours is true and is the one alerting to and calling for **this happiness** – which is **cognizance of God (Mighty and Magnificent) and of His creation** – therefore, that is determined for every Muslim in accordance with the method of assent his temperament and nature require.” (B§11, H96-100)

DECISIVE TREATISE

STAGES 2 & 3: REASONING ➡ SYLLOGISTIC ➡ DEMONSTRATION

2. The Law makes it obligatory to undertake the consideration of existing things by **intellectual reasoning**

“**Consideration** is nothing more than inferring and drawing out the unknown from the known; and this is **sylogistic reasoning** or by means of syllogistic reasoning” (B§3, H30-32)

3. The Law makes it obligatory to undertake the consideration of existing things by **demonstration**

“This manner of reflection the Law calls for and urges is the **most complete kind of reflection** by means of the **most complete kind of sylogistic reasoning** and is the one called ‘**demonstration.**’” (B§3, H34-36)

DECISIVE TREATISE

STAGE 4: LOGIC & ANCIENT WISDOM

4. The Law makes it obligatory to undertake reflection on:

- **Logic** (B§4, H37-51)

“the one who has faith in the Law and follows its command to reflect upon existing things perhaps comes under the obligation to set out, before reflecting, to become cognizant of these things whose status with respect to reflection is that of **tools to work.**” (B§4, H:48-51)

- **Ancients** on logic (B§§6-7, H58-68)
- **Existing things** (B§§8-9, H69-83)
- **Ancients** on existing things (B§10, H84-92)

Doing so is neither **heretical innovation** nor **unthinking allegiance** (H52-56, 66-68, 81-83)

DECISIVE TREATISE

OBLIGATIONS QUALIFIED

Law makes it obligatory, **for those who are able**, to reflect on existing things using **demonstrative methods**

- Only **philosophers** – those suited for and trained in (Aristotelian) philosophy – are able to do it

For others there are less robust methods for “reflecting on” (acquiring knowledge) of God and creatures

DECISIVE TREATISE

SCRIPTURE: ACCOMMODATED TO DIFFERENT KINDS OF PEOPLE

"[The divine Law] is determined for every Muslim in accordance with the **method of assent** his temperament and nature require.

That is because people's natures vary in excellence with respect to assent. Thus, some assent by means of **demonstration**; some assent by means of **dialectical statements** in the same way the one adhering to demonstration assents by means of demonstration, there being nothing greater in their natures; and some assent by means of **rhetorical statements**, just as the one adhering to demonstration assents by means of demonstrative statements.

That is because, when this divine Law of ours called to people by means of these three methods, assent to it was extended to every human being" (B§11, H99-108)

DECISIVE TREATISE

UNITY OF TRUTH

“Since this Law is true and calls to the reflection leading to cognizance of the truth, we, the Muslim community, know firmly that demonstrative reflection does not lead to differing with what is set down in the Law. For truth does not oppose truth; rather, it agrees with and bears witness to it.”

(B§12, H110-13)

DECISIVE TREATISE

SCRIPTURE: THE NEED FOR SCRIPTURAL INTERPRETATION

"If [what demonstration says about some existing thing] is different [from what Scripture says], that is where an interpretation is pursued. The meaning of interpretation is: drawing out the figurative significance of an utterance from its true significance without violating the custom of the Arabic language with respect to figurative speech in doing so." (B§13, H121-24)

DECISIVE TREATISE

SCRIPTURE: APPARENT & INNER MEANINGS

“The reason an apparent and an inner sense are set down in the Law is the difference in people’s innate dispositions and the variance in their innate capacities for assent. The reason contradictory apparent senses are set down in it is to alert “those well grounded in science” to the interpretation that reconciles them. . . .” (B§14, H133-36)

DECISIVE TREATISE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Law

- Makes Philosophy (demonstrative investigation) obligatory (for some)
- Provides remedial means (for everyone else) in the form of apparent meanings accessible to those capable of:
 - merely rhetorically based assent
 - dialectically based assent
- Gives way, when its apparent meanings conflict with philosophical truth, by yielding inner meanings to "those well grounded in [demonstrative] science"

MAIMONIDES: *GUIDE OF THE PERPLEXED*

MAIMONIDES

GUIDE OF THE PERPLEXED

Shift of context – but only slightly

- Rooted in al-Andalus but leaves as a young man
- Eventually settles in Cairo; *Guide* - 1190
- Judaism but in dialogue with Islam

In many ways, Maimonides and Averroës are alike

- Believers
- Jurists, physicians (philosophers in the broad sense)
- Aristotelians – common intellectual background and viewpoint

GUIDE OF THE PERPLEXED

PURPOSE

The science of Law in its true sense (H23-4)

“Or rather its purpose is to give indications to a religious man . . .” (H24 ff.)

- Believer
- Devout
- Intelligent
- Philosophically minded and systematically trained
- Perplexed (H32-40; cf. Rabbi Joseph “and those like him” in *Epistle Dedicatory*)
 - Distressed by the externals of the Law
 - Follow intellect and renounce the foundations of the Law?
 - Hold fast to his understanding of the Law and turn his back on his intellect?

GUIDE OF THE PERPLEXED

PERPLEXITY

Two sources of perplexity in the Law

- Certain terms (H22-3)
- Parables and riddles (mysteries and secrets) (H41 ff.)

Guides' remedies

- Explain the terms
- Distinguish the external from the internal meaning of the parables, etc.
- Thereby make it possible BOTH to "follow intellect" AND "hold fast to an understanding of Law" – to reconcile or harmonize philosophy and religious belief

SCIENCE OF THE LAW

The **science** of the Law in its **true sense**

FOUNDATIONS OF THE LAW

Existence

Creator (first cause)

Unity

Incorporeality

(H137-40)

REDISCOVERY OF THE SCIENCE OF THE LAW

GUIDE PT. I, CH. 71

History of the science of the Law

- Ancient sciences ("great roots of knowledge") lost to Judaism over time (50 ff.)
- Doctrine of God's unity (and what depends on it) scantily preserved in two Jewish groups
 - Gaonim & Qaraites: inherited from Islamic theologians (66-70)
 - Andalusian Jews: follow the philosophers, agree with us (71-4)
- Bad guys – Kalam and the theologians of Islam (75-117)
 - Constructed arguments designed to reach a **predetermined** result
 - Arguments are not cogent **demonstrations**

MUTAKALLIMUN ON CREATION IN TIME

Philosophers: **the world is eternal**

- Eternal = has always existed, had no beginning, has a past that is infinitely long
- World's existence is a **ray** with a end point at the present time that extends infinitely (with no end point) in the direction of the past

Mutakallimun: **the world is created in time**

- In time = had a beginning, has a past that is finite in length
- World's existence is a finite **line segment** with one end point at the present time and the other at the point in the past at which the world began to exist

The **Question**: **Is the world eternal or created in time?**

MAIMONIDES ON THE MUTAKALLIMUN

Mutakallimun (252-71)

1. Non-Aristotelian natural philosophy (100-04)



→ 2. World is created in time (104-06)



3. God exists (and is one, incorporeal) (106-09)

Maimonides

- (1) is false and cooked up for the occasion (84-96)
- Inference from (1) to (2) is non-demonstrative, open to doubt (119-25)
- (2) is true (141-2)
- ★ (2) is indemonstrable * (128-32)
- Inference from (2) to (3) is necessary but non-demonstrative (since 2 is unproven)

MAIMONIDES' STRATEGY

Two problems: (A) Eternity of the world, (B) Securing the existence, unity, incorporeality of God ("three great and sublime problems")

Two-stage strategy (137-49)

B. Demonstrate God's existence, unity, incorporeality **assuming the world's eternity**

1. ~~Non~~-Aristotelian natural philosophy



➔ 2. **World is eternal / ~~World is created in time~~**



3. **God exists (and is one, incorporeal)**

A. Return to argue (as far as one can) for the world's creation in time

MAIMONIDES' DEMONSTRATION THAT GOD EXISTS

A. **EITHER** the world is created in time **OR** the world is eternal (155-64)

B. **The world is created in time** (156-60)



God exists (is one, incorporeal)

C. **The world is eternal** (160-64)



God exists (is one, incorporeal)

D. **God exists (is one, incorporeal)**

SECURING THE THREE ROOTS OF THE FAITH

"[T]hrough this method . . . the demonstration becomes valid and perfect certainty is obtained with regard to those three things: I mean the existence of the deity, His oneness, and His not being a body – and all this without making a judgment upon the world's being eternal or created in time." (143-6)

"I reach the goal that every Mutakallim desires, without abolishing the nature of existence and without disagreeing with Aristotle with regard to any point he has demonstrated." (185-87)

RETURNING TO THE QUESTION OF THE WORLD'S ETERNITY

Two problems: (A) Eternity of the world, (B) Securing the existence, unity, incorporeality of God ("three great and sublime problems")

A. Return to argue (as far as one can) for the world's creation in time

1. ~~Non-Aristotelian~~ natural philosophy



→ 2. World is eternal / ~~World is created in time~~



3. God exists (and is one, incorporeal)

MAIMONIDES' THREE BIG "RESULTS"

- The world's creation in time **cannot** be demonstrated
- The world's eternity **has not** been demonstrated
- Demonstration of God's existence given either alternative