Introduction

> "In the post-Maimonidean age all philosophical thinking is in the nature of a commentary on Maimonides whether avowedly or not."
>
> Isaac Husik, *A History of Mediaeval Jewish Philosophy*, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1941) p. 312.

MOSES MAIMONIDES: ANCHORING JEWISH INTELLECTUAL HISTORY

The eleventh to fourteenth centuries mark a watershed in the evolution of Jewish thought. The period was anything but a dark age for Judaism, with a strong intellectual tradition in every sphere of thought and practice, including the nascent Jewish mystical movement, kabbalah, and new directions in biblical exegesis, jurisprudence, and Talmudic novellae that proliferated throughout the Jewish world. And yet, despite there having been no shortage of important thinkers and personalities in this era, about whom modern scholars have produced a fertile body of literature, unquestionably the dominant figure of the age was Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, also known by his acronym, Rambam (1138–1204).

Maimonides was, on a parochial level, the most eminent authority of rabbinic law in the Jewish world, proficient in all its canonical sources, from the Hebrew Bible through the Talmud, and on to the Geonic sources. In a broader sense, he was also a master of the scientific/philosophical corpus of his day, as evidenced not only by his writings but also by his having risen to a position of official physician in the royal court in Egypt. As a result, the positions he took on matters crucial to Jewish existence and the practice of Judaism seminally influenced the evolution of Jewish thought, worship, and observance ever afterward. Without this potent combination of rabbinic expertise and philosophical acumen, Maimonides could easily have been ignored by devotees of either school and thus would not loom as large over the evolution of Jewish thought or, indeed,

even be the subject of the present study.[1] Maimonides was the quintessential *talmid hakham* (Jewish sage), proficient in all disciplines pertinent to rabbinically stipulated Jewish practice and belief.[2] Even his most fervent opponents could not shunt him aside.[3]

He augmented (or, some might say, encumbered)[4] Judaism with a new fundamental credo, which quickly became sacrosanct,[5] and he compiled the first comprehensive code of Jewish law. Though its practical authority was superseded in the sixteenth century by Joseph Karo's *Shulhan Arukh*,[6] Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*[7] nevertheless became the third prong of the Jewish academic canon, alongside the Hebrew Bible and the Talmud. Whether examined in critical academic or devotional rabbinic settings, it is arguably the most microscopically studied text in all the halls of Jewish learning to this day.[8] His philosophical magnum

[1] This rare combination of rabbinic erudition and philosophical mastery, as David Hartman and Elliott Yagod point out, is what "made him a threat in philosophy. You had to confront Maimonides' philosophic views because you could not ignore his halakhic views." See their "God, Philosophy, and Halakha in Maimonides' Approach to Judaism," in *Multiple Paths to God: Nostre Aetate Forty Years Later*, ed. J. Hogan and G. McLean (Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2005), 307–44, at 308.

[2] See *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 5:13.

[3] Again, the raging debate over Maimonidean thought that ensued for centuries, and in somewhat milder form until the present day, would never have transpired had Maimonides only authored the *Guide*. As Daniel Jeremy Silver notes in his account of the controversy, "It was not Maimonides' theological ingenuity, but his rabbinic omnicompetence and genius which made his philosophic work a *cause cèlébre*." Silver, *Maimonidean Criticism and the Maimonidean Controversy: 1180–1240* (Leiden: Brill, 1965), 20.

[4] As Menachem Kellner has argued in *Must a Jew Believe Anything?* (Oxford: Littman Library, 2010).

[5] Although, as Marc Shapiro has demonstrated, the majority of these "principles" have been subjected to critical debate by prominent halakhists ever since their inception. See his *The Limits of Orthodox Theology: Maimonides' Thirteen Principles Reappraised* (Oxford: Littman Library, 2004). However, despite this long history of scepticism toward their authoritativeness, it is still safe to characterize them as having achieved a canonical status in Judaism. See, for example, the spirited resistance to Shapiro's thesis by R. Yehuda Parnes in "Torah U-Madda and Freedom of Inquiry," *Torah U-Madda Journal* 1 (1989): 65–71.

[6] Joseph Karo himself considered Maimonides the most central and authoritative figure in halakhah and "aspired to become Maimonides' successor and the mediator between the medieval Mishneh Torah and his own times." See Mort Altshuler, "Rabbi Joseph Karo and Sixteenth Century Maimonidean Messianism," in *The Cultures of Maimonideanism: New Approaches to the History of Jewish Thought*, ed. James T. Robinson (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 191–210, esp. 193–97. Karo's code is also more codelike, in its lack of nonhalakhic material, than the MT, which is replete with philosophical and ideological asides, making it "as much commentary as it is code." See Isadore Twersky, "The Shulhan 'Aruk: Enduring Code of Jewish Law," *Judaism* 16 (1967): 141–58, at 153.

[7] All references to the Mishneh Torah throughout the book are to the Shabse Frankel edition (Jerusalem: Ohel Yosef, 1977–2001).

[8] One strong testament to the centrality of Maimonides' work in the world of the yeshivah is the moving reminiscence of R. Joseph Soloveitchik, a scion of the most prominent rabbinic dynasty in the modern period, regarding his father's near obsession with the Mishneh Torah with regard to Talmudic studies; see his "U-Bikkashtem mi-Sham," in *Ish ha-Halakhah: Galui ve-Nistar* (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, 1979), 230. Precisely because of its having been superseded practically, it became a focus of theoretical study. As R. Moshe Lichtenstein explains its

opus, *The Guide of the Perplexed*,[9] remains the most important and influential synthesis of science and the Jewish tradition. No serious attempt to broach this issue can do so without dialogue with that work, even today when both sides of the science-faith equation have been radically revamped or, worse, debunked.[10] Thus, every path in Jewish thought and law from the twelfth century on bears some of Maimonides' imprint. So formidable was his intellectual legacy that even the particular crystallization of kabbalah, so inimical to the general thrust of his rationalism,[11] would have been unimaginable without his work.[12] A quick glance through the index of virtually any current scholarly or rabbinic study, be it on a modern, renaissance, or medieval topic in Jewish studies, is certain to reveal multiple entries under his name.[13] His thought evoked adoption, opposition, revision, or reinvention, but never indifference.

attraction, "Suddenly, the work is perceived to be an invaluable asset to the endeavor of the beit midrash, rather than as a work of practical halakhah with occasional bearing on the purely intellectual or theoretical pursuit." See his "What Hath Brisk Wrought: The Brisker Derekh Revisited," *Torah U-Madda Journal* 9 (2000): 1–18, at 2.

[9] All references to *The Guide of the Perplexed* are to the Shlomo Pines edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), and cited throughout this book as GP or the *Guide*.

[10] For one such attempt that models itself on the Maimonidean project, see Jonathan Sacks, *The Great Partnership: Science, Religion, and the Search for Meaning* (New York: Schocken, 2011), which, in the twenty-first century, can still acknowledge the strong influence of the medieval Jewish philosophical tradition. It is difficult to find such "serious" attempts in current times, considering the abysmal deterioration in the level of discussion. If vigorous debates can persist in modern times over whether the age of the universe is short of six thousand years old, then I suspect Maimonides would be quite happy to have his name omitted from the conversation. See, for example, the pages of a blog that deals with this issue as well as others in the conflict between what is often thought to be Jewish dogma and science in http://www.rationalistjudaism.com. I base my speculative observation on a solid footing of Maimonides' own explicit assertion that the Torah must bow to scientific demonstration and not the other way around on the issue of creation. See GP, II:25, pp. 327–28. On this, Shem Tov, a major medieval commentator on the *Guide*, admits unreservedly in his understanding of Maimonides' disclosure: "And even if it destroyed the law entirely, should eternity be demonstrated, we would have interpreted the verses in accord with eternity" (MN, 51).

[11] For a full-length study of this opposition, see Menachem Kellner's *Maimonides' Confrontation with Mysticism* (Oxford: Littman Library, 2006).

[12] See, for example, Elliot Wolfson, "Beneath the Wings of the Great Eagle: Maimonides and Thirteenth-Century Kabbalah," in *Moses Maimonides (1138–1204) – His Religious, Scientific, and Philosophical Wirkungsgeschichte in Different Cultural Contexts*, ed. G. K. Hasselhoff and Otfried Fraisse (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2004), 209–37. Wolfson states categorically that the entire spiritual/intellectual landscape of the "masters of Jewish esoteric lore were incubated in the shadows of the great eagle" (210).

[13] Although Maimonides occupies the very apex of what has become the canon of medieval Jewish thought, the modern engagement with him and that canon is based on a modern "construction" of it, as Aaron W. Hughes astutely argues involved translating an amorphous "past" into a detailed and scientifically constructed "history." See "'Medieval' and the Politics of Nostalgia: Ideology, Scholarship, and the Creation of the Rational Jew," in *Encountering the Medieval in Modern Jewish Thought*, ed. James A. Diamond and Aaron W. Hughes (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 17–40.

MAIMONIDES: FULCRUM OF JEWISH INTELLECTUAL HISTORY

Because Maimonides set the agenda in one way or another for virtually all of Jewish thought since the Middle Ages, a study of the explicit and implicit Maimonidean threads that course their way through various historical periods and thinkers serves to illuminate certain aspects of the different strands of that thought which might otherwise go undetected. This study focuses on an ongoing, uniquely Jewish hermeneutic of writing, engaged with the intellectual and textual legacy of the Jewish tradition that extends well beyond Moses Maimonides and his twelfth–thirteenth-century world. There is one dimension of this legacy that can be regarded as a sustained dialogue with Maimonides, regardless of the social, cultural, and intellectual transformations inevitably wrought by time. In fact, much of Jewish intellectual history can be viewed as a series of engagements, disengagements, and reengagements with him, fueled by the kind of writing Maimonides himself practiced, thereby establishing the very lines of discourse that target or conjure up his thought.

In the text-centered culture of Judaism and Jewish thought, interpretation is, as Moshe Halbertal concludes, "the dominant mode of intellectual creativity."[14] As such, the numerous examples of Maimonidean engagements in this book collectively amount to an argument in favor of elevating the Maimonidean oeuvre to canonical status alongside the Hebrew Bible, the Talmud, and subsequently the Zohar. The distinction Halbertal draws between *central* texts that are influential in shaping thought and *formative* texts "in which progress in the field is made through interpretation of the text itself"[15] is also instructive in how precisely to classify the Maimonidean textual legacy in terms of Judaism's curricular canon. In light of the extent to which this book places post-Maimonidean thought in dialogue with that legacy, Maimonides' Guide and Code can safely be subsumed within the formative category.

This study gives voice to that dialogue in a panoply of intellectual languages and across historically delineated periods. The dialogue may stretch between people as varied as a rabbinic rationalist such as Maimonides, living in Islamic-dominated Egypt; an adversarial rabbinic mystical exegete such as Nahmanides (thirteenth century) in Christian-dominated Spain; the fiercely antagonistic fifteenth-century kabbalistic encyclopedist Meir ibn Gabbai; and an admiring twentieth-century Eastern European mystic, Zionist, and political activist such as Abraham Isaac Kook, who reinvented Maimonides; but all are firmly entrenched within a well-established rabbinic tradition. Even Spinoza, Judaism's arch-heretic and free-thinking iconoclast, who broke with the Jewish tradition altogether in seventeenth-century Holland, could not sever his ties to his inherited religion without refuting the Maimonidean biblical hermeneutic.

[14] *People of the Book: Canon, Meaning, and Authority* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 92.
[15] Ibid., 94.

I will argue that in his very rejection of Maimonides, he actually resorts to this hermeneutic, if only to overcome his primary Jewish intellectual predecessor and foil. All these theologians, philosophers, and exegetes share a strategic obsession to weave that tradition, be it biblical, Talmudic, or midrashic, into their own textual presentations, which cut across different cultural and intellectual milieus. The other compulsion they share is a passionate, never staid, engagement with Maimonides, either assaulting, adopting, or adapting his philosophical and jurisprudential thought. This ongoing enterprise is critical to any appreciation of the broader scope of Jewish law, philosophy, and their unique hermeneutic. In a sense, Maimonides emerges as a fulcrum for Jewish law and civilization in all its genres – legal, rabbinic, philosophical, and mystical. Often, even when Maimonides is not explicitly mentioned, it is clear from a cited verse or rabbinic adage that a later thinker has contemplated Maimonides' interpretation, whether as endorsement and incorporation of its Maimonidean sense, or to carve out new space for an opposing idea.

In this way, Jewish jurisprudential and intellectual history can be traced in terms of its engagements and reengagements with Maimonides' thought in all its manifestations. Along the way, the boundaries between what are often regarded in Jewish studies as rigid disciplines of law, rabbinics, philosophy, and mysticism become increasingly blurred. Whether halakhist/lawyers, philosophers, biblical exegetes, or mystics, the canonical thinkers examined here share a common discourse consisting of what I would characterize as midrashic thinking – a mode unique to their rabbinic antecedents. I discuss the term "midrash" in Chapter 1 and what that means in a Maimonidean context, but let it suffice here to adopt James Kugel's general definition of the term, which is equally applicable to post-Maimonides struggles with the Maimonidean corpus. Kugel brings out the nuance of the meaning of the term as follows: "The Hebrew word *midrash* might best be translated as 'research,' a translation that incorporates the word's root meaning of 'search out, inquire,' and perhaps as well suggests that the results of that research are almost by definition recherché, that is, not obvious, out of the way, sometimes far-fetched."[16] Much of Jewish thought can then, from a certain angle, be said to engage Maimonidean thought in this double entendre sense of the word – inquiring into Maimonides and then refining it in order to break away from it or to break it away from its medieval context to adapt to a new age or theology.

Much as the Hebrew Bible provided the staple for rabbinic creativity, Maimonides' reappropriation of a biblical verse or rabbinic adage leaves a new textual legacy for the ongoing development of Jewish thought. Although critical of Maimonides' theory of midrash, it is no wonder that the most eminent modern scholar of midrash, Isaak Heinemann, launches his pioneering study, *The Ways of*

[16] "Two Introductions to Midrash," in *Midrash and Literature*, ed. Geoffrey H. Hartman and Sanford Budick (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), 77–103, at 91.

the Aggadah (*Darkhe HaAggadah*),[17] with it. A prominent critic of Heinemann's own theory of midrash opens his study as well with a discussion of Maimonides, boldly claiming, "It would be no exaggeration to say that Maimonides occupies a place in a specific Jewish literary history and theory analogous to that of Aristotle in the discourse of European literature."[18] Perhaps the strength of Maimonides' musings *about* midrash reflects his expertise as a practitioner *of* midrash himself, thereby informing the way in which subsequent critics and admirers engaged his own work. As such, my study here subscribes to the characterization of the last quote, subject to a slight amendment, replacing Maimonides' theoretical importance with that of his posing a midrashic point to the counterpoint of Jewish thought that succeeded him.

Never again, for instance, can the biblical apothegm *A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in silver filigree* (Prov. 25:11) be cited without Maimonides' hermeneutical use of it as a metaphor for the multilayered messaging of biblical writing hovering somewhere in the background, if not the foreground. Its connotations of the external silver, the internal gold, the size of the filigree's apertures that allow the internal meaning to peek through the external filter, and the intellectual distance between the reader and the text, all continue to inhere in any post-Maimonidean referencing of it. A particular deference or nod to tradition might in fact consist of a discourse with a verse's Maimonidean overlay. As such, it could be examined in its role as a new intertext for later thinkers in the sense that a text is "ultimately dialogical in that it cannot but record the traces of its contentions and doubling of earlier discourses."[19] I revisit this verse and its imagery in the conclusion of this book, but for now I turn to a brief example of this discourse centering on this image as a sampling of what lies ahead.

JEWISH THOUGHT AS CREATIVE CORRECTION: AN INTERTEXTUAL EXAMPLE

There is also a form of anxiety that both links and propels the various strands of Jewish thought presented in this book and that helps account for a critical dimension of its creativity in advancing Jewish thought. For the purposes of my study, I note Harold Bloom, whose seminal insights into the vitality of poetry and prose are also applicable to Jewish thought. What Bloom originally proposed regarding the writing of poetry and the poet's relationship to his or her precursors is, I propose, similarly apt with regard to the thinkers discussed in this book and their relationship with Maimonides' thought. Here is how Bloom understands the creative force of much of Western poetry composed over the last few centuries:

[17] Isaak Heinemann, *The Ways of the Aggadah (Darkhe HaAggadah)* (Heb.) (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1970).
[18] Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 1.
[19] Ibid., 14.

Poetic Influence – when it involves two strong, authentic poets – always proceeds by a misreading of the prior poet, an act of creative correction that is actually and necessarily a misinterpretation. The history of fruitful poetic influence, which is to say the main traditions of Western poetry since the Renaissance, is a history of anxiety and self-saving caricature of distortion, of perverse, willful revisionism without which modern poetry as such could not exist.[20]

As one proceeds along this study of various Jewish thinkers – rationalist or kabbalist, medieval or modern – this "central principle" of Bloom's sweeping consolidation of all good poetry under one primary rubric of "misreading," "correction," "misinterpretation," and "revisionism" begins to crystallize as a formative principle of post-Maimonidean Jewish thought as well. By transposing some of the terms in Bloom's assertion, the following can be stated with equal force:

Jewish philosophical, jurisprudential, and theological influence – when it involves a strong, authentic thinker – often proceeds by a misreading of Maimonides, an act of creative correction that is actually and necessarily a misinterpretation. A good part of the history of fruitful Jewish philosophical and theological influence, since the Middle Ages, is a history of anxiety and self-saving caricature of distortion, of perverse, willful revisionism of Maimonidean thought, without which modern Jewish thought as such could not exist.

As an illustration of a post-Maimonidean adaptation, intertextuality, and creative correction, the Zohar, the canonical "bible" of kabbalah (a work that deserves individual treatment within the theme of this book, but that merits a book-length study of its own), offers what I believe are many instances of this Maimonidean intertextuality. The following is but one adaptation of this same biblical adage – apples of gold in silver filigree – that bears these "traces," thereby entering into dialogue with its Maimonidean precursor. As the Zohar enriches the list of precious metals, stones, and materials out of which the desert Tabernacle is to be constructed with theosophic symbolism, it hierarchizes the gold, silver, and copper inaugurating that list in terms of divine components:

For surely gold is ascension beyond all – yet, gold in a concealed manner, and this is supernal gold, seventh of all those kinds of gold. This is gold shining, dazzling the eyes . . . Silver – below, mystery of the right arm, for the supernal head is gold . . . When silver is perfected, it is included in gold, and this is the mystery of apples of gold in settings of silver. Thus silver turns into gold, and then its place is perfected. So there are seven kinds of gold.[21]

[20] Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 30.

[21] Zohar, 2:148a, as translated by Daniel C. Matt in *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition*, vol. 5 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 344–45.
אבל זהב בחדוה איהו ובסליקו דדחילו דחדוה קיימא ובאתערותא דחדוה, וכסף לתתא רוא דרועא ימינא דהא רישא עלאה זהב איהו דכתיב (דניאל ב) אנת הוא רישא דדהבא, (שם) חדוהי ודרעוהי די כסף לתתא, (נ"א ואימתי אישתלים כסף כד אתכליל וכו') וכד אשתלים כסף כדין אתכליל בזהב ורזא דא (משלי כה) תפוחי זהב במשכיות כסף אשתכח דכסף, אתהדר לזהב וכדין אשתלים אתריה (נ"א אלים אריה), ועל דא ז' זיני, זהב אינון

Briefly, much of the kabbalistic tradition conceives of the Torah itself as, in Gershom Scholem's graphic description, a "living organism" that is "animated by a secret life which streams and pulsates below the crust of its literal meaning."[22] As well as narrating human events and promulgating law, the Torah is in some sense an autobiography of its divine author. Though an intricate web of kabbalistic ciphers, suffice it for our purposes to state that rather than interpretive layers of meaning, the "secret" of this particular verse's imagery is how the gold and silver and spectrum of colors associated with them relate to the complex inner mechanics of the divine godhead. They capture not only an anatomical hierarchy but also the notion of the perfecting of the lower silver by its envelopment in the higher gold of God's sefirotic alignment and composition. I believe that no complete understanding of the Zoharic sense of this verse can be gleaned without appreciating its role as a Maimonidean intertext. The Zohar's incorporation of it then becomes a conscious usurpation of its Maimonidean traces of a hierarchical hermeneutical model, while raising the stakes of what in all likelihood it views as a trivialization of the biblical message by replacing mere interpretation with ontology. At the same time, it does not vacate its Maimonidean connotations entirely, but retrofits the verse with a new application of them, such as Maimonides' assertion that a biblical passage's "external meaning ought to contain in it something that indicates to someone considering it what is to be found in its internal meaning" (GP, 12). Although the external meaning bears some allusion to the internal, Maimonides clearly distinguishes between knowledge that is useful for "the welfare of human societies" in the former and that "concerned with the truth as it is" in the latter – in other words, between practical and theoretical wisdom. In its transformation of the bible from a text to be read and interpreted to an architectural drawing of God, the Zohar amalgamates what Maimonides has bifurcated. Whereas people graduate from lower to higher knowledge in the self-perfecting process that includes mining a text for meaning, the kabbalistic transition from silver to gold entails a perfection of God, which is ultimately realized in a paradoxical unity of composite parts that are really one part, and a silver that is really gold. The Zohar's appropriation of the apples-of-gold metaphor consciously dismantles its Maimonidean construction and rebuilds on its skeletal remains.

This Zoharic passage displays all the elements Harold Bloom noted of "misreading" and "creative correction" necessary to boldly move Jewish thought forward while at the same time looking backward apprehensively. Though espousing entirely different theologies, both Maimonides and the authors of the Zohar are "strong and authentic" Jewish thinkers, thus fulfilling the first of Bloom's prerequisites. In this instance, Maimonides' exegetical appropriation of the biblical phrase "apples of gold in silver filigree" overwhelms its meaning to the point of displacing any other approach to the Jewish canon that is not philosophical. The Zohar is unwilling to enslave itself to the past, but yet is unable to liberate

[22] Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), p.14.

itself from the hold of the Jewish canon, which now includes Maimonides. In order to chart its new direction, the Zohar creatively corrects all the facets of Maimonides' exegesis that impede its own daring movement in an entirely different direction. It replaces a calibrated hermeneutic preciousness with a holistic one that ensures the preservation of both a higher and lower, rather than leaving it far more prone to discarding the lower in favor of the higher. But what it also does is transform what Maimonides understood as a proverb clearly delineating two layers of meaning in biblical parables into a "mystery" (*raza*). In other words, for Maimonides the biblical maxim simply instructs one in how to read the Bible, and points to the fact that there is an esoteric level to its meaning, but the maxim itself is not esoteric. The Zohar "corrects" instruction to "mystery"; that is, the maxim provides a window into the deepest ontological truth of all Being. The Zohar goes much further, however, and "misinterprets its parent," in the words of Bloom,[23] by turning a Maimonidean analogy between two levels of understanding corresponding to silver and gold in terms of their value into a description of Being where, in its perfected state, there are no distinctions and "there are seven kinds of gold." While Maimonides maintains an internal and external layer of meaning corresponding to the two precious metals, the Zohar fuses the two into a restorative state signified by the silver, or lower dimensions of God, being enveloped in the gold, or upper aspect of God, achieving divine harmony.

Maimonides' hermeneutical "apples of gold" strategy of reading both the Bible and the rabbis raised the specter of their redundancy once their philosophical kernel was retrieved. Thus, what empowered the text and the reader with the interpretive latitude to survive the challenges posed by historical evolution, as well as philosophical and scientific progress, also endangered its authority and integrity. At the heart of the appropriations and engagements with Maimonides is this danger, which can be viewed as an interpretive irritant inspiring the recasting and reconfiguring of new apples of gold. Once catalyzed by this irritant, the creative potential of these engagements was further enhanced by Maimonides' adaptation of the gold/silver methodology into his own work. Maimonides modeled his own esotericism, which intentionally concealed the true meaning of his writing, "speculatively" on the prophetic books and categorically on the midrashic tradition.[24] In this sense Maimonides crafted his own treatise as another work of apples of gold in silver filigree that divulges one meaning to the "vulgar," while conveying a more profound one to those who are religious, halakhically committed, philosophically astute, intellectually honest, and, most importantly, existentially troubled by the tension between all these

[23] Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 96.

[24] See his definition of the seventh type of contradiction on p. 18 of the GP, whose appearance in "the books of the prophets is a matter for speculative study and investigation," while its use in the midrashim and haggadah is explicitly acknowledged on pp. 19–20.

different dimensions of their spiritual and rational constitution.[25] The hermeneutical proverb that might better capture many of those who succeeded Maimonides and wished to preserve the integrity of all the Torah's layers of meaning would be a combination of Proverbs 25:11 and Haggai 2:8, "Silver is Mine and gold is Mine, says the Lord of Hosts" (לי הכסף ולי הזהב נאם ה). All levels of meaning can legitimately lay claim to divine provenance and none can be dispensed with.[26]

This same dialogical relationship with Maimonides pertains to those thinkers previously mentioned, as well as to the modern-period neo-Kantian Jewish philosopher Hermann Cohen, the medieval R. Yom Tov ben Abraham Ishbili, ensconced within the Nahmanidean camp, and the cosmopolitan Portuguese/Spanish/Italian exegete Isaac Abarbanel toward the close of the Middle Ages. Each of them warrants, and is granted, a separate chapter in this study. Clearly, however, there could have been many others deserving of attention. My choice of thinkers examined in this volume was dictated by a combination of factors. Among them is, first, a lacuna in the scholarship with respect to their work altogether, as in the case of R. Yom Tov ben Abraham Ishbili, Meir ibn Gabbai, and R. Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin. The second factor is the dearth of studies on their engagements with Maimonidean thought in general, which pertains to those just mentioned as well as R. Kook and Isaac Abarbanel. Third, they present particularly good illustrations of engagements with Maimonides in the particular "Jewish" way that I develop as primary. Fourth is their variegated representation of Jewish thought, both historically and ideologically, spanning from the medieval to the modern periods and including kabbalists, talmudists, philosophers, and those who might be ordinarily characterized as secular thinkers, as in the case of Spinoza.

This book also focuses on modes of writing and literary presentation which respond to a crucial question that lies at the core of this study: What precisely is the "Jewishness" that unites all these thinkers despite the wide, often radical, disparity between their theologies and philosophies? Some might point to halakha and normative practice as that dimension which Jewishly unites such adversarial thinkers as kabbalists and rationalists, who maintain profoundly irreconcilable conceptions of a deity. My study locates the Jewishness of their writing in its midrashic contours. Significantly, this study does not just contemplate a theoretical stance but presents many concrete examples of this reading put into

[25] See the description of Joseph, the addressee of the *Guide* on pp. 3–4, and the intended audience on p. 5.

[26] See, for example, Abarbanel's comments on Genesis 2, discussed in Chapter 5, which explicitly claims to adopt Maimonides' sense of the apples-of-gold analogy, but in order to assert precisely the point of the external meaning representing the truth and reality:

וזהו היתרון הנפלא הנמצא לתורת האלהים על כל חבורי החכמות והנמוסי' כי יש בהם שיכוונו לנגלה ואין בהם רמז למדע אחר ומהם שיכוונו אל האמת הפנימי והיה הפשט החצוני דבר רק ואין בו ממש. וזאת התורה אשר שם משה אינה כן אבל החיצוני ממנה הוא האמתי וכמו שהיה והנרמז היא חכמה עליונה וכבר זכר הרב המורה זה בהקדמת ספרו והביא על זה מאמר שלמה תפוחי זהב במשכיות כסף דבר דבור על אפניו.