

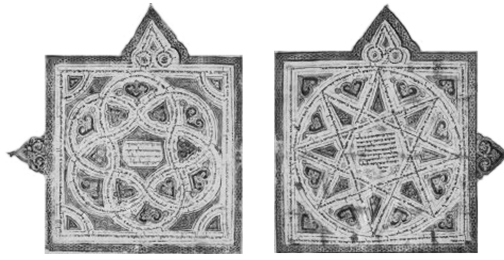
Criticism of Gersonides in Rabbi Abraham Bibago's *Path of Faith* : God's Knowledge of Particulars and Miracles

Shalom Sadik*

Abstract: This article undertakes an examination of Bibago's perspective concerning Gersonides' viewpoints pertaining to the inquiries surrounding the nature of God's Knowledge, as well as the elucidation of miracles encompassing their causation and the role they play in fostering religious faith. Within the context of these dual subjects, Bibago allocates a substantial segment of his discourse towards a comprehensive exposition of Gersonides' viewpoints, subsequently followed by a systematic refutation thereof, thereby eschewing the inclination to downplay disparities and harmonize their stances, a contrast to his approach in the analysis of Maimonides' ideas. Evidently, it shall be demonstrated that Bibago indeed assimilates certain aspects of Gersonides' stance, thereby effecting a notable deviation from the Maimonidean viewpoint. However, it remains conspicuous that Bibago consistently situates himself as an authentic exegete of Maimonides while concurrently assuming a stance in opposition to Gersonides.

Key Words : Bibago , Gersonides , Maimonides , God's Knowledge ,
Miracle

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Rabbi Abraham Bibago^① was one of the more prominent thinkers of the last generation of the flourishing Jewish community in pre-Expulsion Spain.^② In his most influential work, *Derech Emuna* (*Path of Faith*), Bibago tried to

① On Bibago see M. Steinschneider, "Abraham Bibago's Schriften," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 32 (1883): 79-96, 125-144; C. Sirat, *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 384-389; A. Lazaroff, *The Theologie of Abraham Bibago* (Alabama, 1981); A. Nuriel, *Concealed and Revealed in Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2000), 181-312 [Hebrew]. In recent years, Yehuda Halper has written an extensive collection of articles on Bibago: Y. Halper, "Philosophical Allegory in Bibago: Exegetical Duplicity for the Sake of Open Inquiry," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 21 (2014): 261-276; Y. Halper, "Bibago's Introduction to His *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*," *Zutot* 10 (2013): 1-15; Y. Halper, "Abraham Bibago on the Logic of Divine Science: *Metaphysics α* and the Legend of the Pardes," forthcoming; Y. Halper, "Abraham Bibago on Intellectual Conjunction and Human Happiness: Faith and *Metaphysics* according to a 15th-century Jewish Averroist," forthcoming in *Quaestio: Yearbook of the History of Metaphysics*; and an article on Bibago submitted to the *Encyclopedia of Renaissance Philosophy*. In these articles, Halper argues that there existed a significant gap between the opinion of Bibago in his scientific works (particularly his commentary on the *Metaphysics*) and his religious composition, *Derech Emuna* ("Path of Faith"). According to Halper, the true opinion of Bibago is to be found in his scientific works, while in *Derech Emuna*, our author reveals his spiritual position on politics, education and religion. While I agree with Halper regarding the existence of a gap between Bibago's commentary on the *Metaphysics* and *Derech Emuna*, I disagree regarding the significance of the gap. In my opinion, the fact that Bibago doesn't describe the possibility of the intellectual conjunction with the intellect in his commentary doesn't signify that according to our author this kind of conjunction is not possible, but only that this is the opinion of Aristotle (and Averroes) and may be the true limit of philosophical inquiry. Some explanations that have nothing to do with the Aristotelian text, such as his commentary on the Talmudic aggada of the Pardes, can also be explained in the commentary according to an Aristotelian-Averroistic view. In *Derech Emuna* (see the second part of this article), Bibago claims that only faith can assure a human's surviving the decomposition of the body. It is probable that in these commentaries Bibago describes the impossibility of the acquisition of survival via philosophical inquiry, and in his own book explains that religions and especially faith can respond to this failure of philosophy. Another possibility, though less probable according to my opinion, is that Bibago changed his mind between the writing of his commentary on the *Metaphysics* and *Derech Emuna*, which was probably his last work.

This debate about the interpretation of Bibago is not critical to the understanding of his relation to Gersonides in *Derech Emuna*. Moreover, according to his commentaries, Bibago disagrees with Gersonides on scientific subjects, probably because the interpretation of Bibago is more Averroistic than the interpretation of Gersonides.

② On the Jewish philosophy of this period see A. Ackerman, "Jewish Philosophy and the Jewish-Christian Philosophical Dialogue in Fifteenth-Century Spain," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, eds. D. H. Frank and O. Leaman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 371-390.

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synthesize various moderate philosophical views and traditional Jewish beliefs. In Bibago's book there are a number of important quotes from Gersonides, who is the second most quoted Jewish medieval thinker of Bibago's, after Maimonides. However, unlike with Maimonides, Bibago cites Gersonides' opinions as a foil to his own ideas.^① By contrast, Bibago always makes the effort to interpret Maimonides in a way that agrees with his own opinion.

This article analyzes Bibago's attitude towards Gersonides with regard to the question of God's Knowledge and with regard to miracles, including how they happen and their importance in instilling faith. On these two subjects Bibago devoted a significant portion of his discussion to summarizing the opinions of Gersonides and then refuting them, rather than minimizing the differences and harmonizing their opinions, as he did when discussing the ideas of Maimonides. We will see that, in fact, Bibago adopted some of the opinion of Gersonides and thus separated himself from the opinion of Maimonides. Nevertheless, Bibago constantly positioned himself as a true interpreter of Maimonides and an opponent of Gersonides.

I. God's knowledge

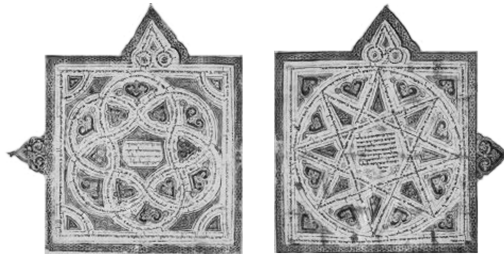
Bibago dedicated the second chapter (שער) of the first part of his book^② to the subject of God's foreknowledge.^③ In the beginning of his discussion, our author describes several mistaken opinions of non-Jewish philosophers. He starts his description with the view traditionally attributed to Epicurus^④: all events are due to happenstance, and therefore there are no rules and no possibility of knowing the future. The next non-Jewish opinion to be refuted is

① It is important to note that Bibago mentions Gersonides also in his commentary on the Aristotelian corpus (super commentary on the commentary of Averroes). For example, Bibago noted that one of the reasons he wrote his commentary on the Posterior Analytics was to correct the mistaken interpretations given by Gersonides. On this subject see M. Steinschneider, "Abraham Bibago's Schriften," 126-127; Nuriel, *Concealed and Revealed in Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, 188-189.

② *Path of Faith*, MS Constantinopol 1511, V III : r-XVI: r.

③ On this subject see Nuriel, *Concealed and Revealed in Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, 206-207. One God's attribute in general see C. Sirat, *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, 384-385.

④ Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, I, 17.



the view of the people who claim that God doesn't know anything under the sphere of the moon. According to our author, these people include believers in astrology and talismanic magic.^①

After giving his summary of the mistaken gentile opinions, Bibago begins to describe the opinions of the Torah. According to Bibago, the Torah's view is that God has foreknowledge of all events despite people's free will. The basic reason for divine foreknowledge is that knowledge is perfection, and God attains all perfections.

In the continuation of this chapter^②, Bibago summarizes the opinion of Maimonides in chapters nineteen to twenty-one of the third part of the *Guide of the Perplexed*.^③ According to our author, Maimonides correctly described the true position of the Torah: God has a different type of knowledge than people, such that things that are completely impossible for human knowledge, like foreknowledge of the contingent future or knowledge of an infinity of

① This opinion is close on certain points (apart from the handling of astrology and magic) to the second opinion of Aristotle as found in the *Guide of the Perplexed* (I, 17).

② *Path of Faith*, XI: 2- XII: 2.

③ There is an important debate in modern scholarship regarding the true opinion of Maimonides on the question of free will. For example, see S. Pines, "Abul Barkat Poetics and Metaphysics," *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 4 (1960): 120-198; A. Altmann, "Free Will and Predestination in Saadia Bahya and Maimonides," *Essays in Jewish Intellectual History* (Hanover: New Hampshire, 1981), 35-64, especially 47-54; J. Stern, "Maimonides' Conception of Freedom and the Sense of Shame," in *Freedom and Moral Responsibility: General and Jewish Perspectives*, eds. H. Manekin and M. M. Kellner (Maryland: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 217-265; M. Sokol, "Maimonides on Freedom of the Will and Moral Responsibility," *Harvard Theological Review* 91 (1998): 26-28, which asserts a deterministic opinion; J. Gellman, "Freedom and Determinism in Maimonides' Philosophy," in *Moses Maimonides and His Time*, ed. E. L. Ormsby (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1989), 141-144; S. Sadik, "Maimonides's Mechanism of Choice," *A.J.S. Review* 38 (2014): 7-8, which assert the voluntarist interpretation of Maimonides. In the Middle Ages, almost all of Maimonides interpreters think that he truly believed in free will except for one: Abner of Burgos. See Abner of Burgos, *Ofrenda de Zelos*, ed. Walter Mettman (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1990), Chapter 7, 41-43; S. Gershenzon, "The View of Maimonides as a Determinist in 'Sefer Minhat Qenaot' by Abner of Burgos," *World Congress of Jewish Studies* 9, C (1986): 93-100.

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individuals and details, are possible for divine knowledge.^① As we see in the *Guide*:

ואשר אומר אותו אני הוא, שסבת כל מה שנכשלו בו כולם, היא שומם בין ידיעתנו וידיעתו
יתעלה יחס ותעין כל כת בעניינים נמנעים בידיעתנו ותחשוב שהוא מחוייב בידיעתו.^②

What I myself say is that all these difficulties to which all of them are subject have as their cause the fact they established a relation between our knowledge and His, may He be exalted; for every sect considers the things that are impossible for our knowledge and consequently thinks that this also holds necessarily with regard to His knowledge...^③

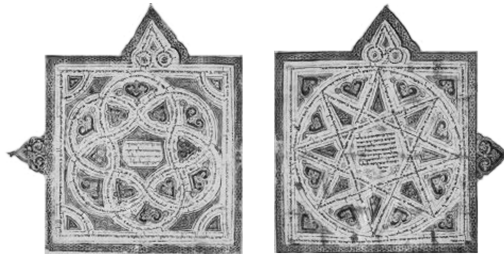
We see in this passage the well-known opinion of Maimonides on attributes and the implications for the subject of divine knowledge, to wit, all the errors of the philosophers regarding God's knowledge are due to their equivocation of human and divine knowledge. Due to this error, the philosophers cannot understand that things that are completely impossible for our knowledge, e.g. knowledge of the future without annulling free will, are quite possible for God's knowledge.

After this description, Bibago begins to summarize Gersonides's criticism

① About Maimonides's opinion on divine knowledge see L. Stein, *Die Willensfreiheit und ihr Verhältniss zur Göttlichen Präscienz und Providenz bei den Jüdischen Philosophen des Mittelalters* (Berlin, 1882), 22-34; M. Schwartz, "Remarks Concerning Maimonides Conception of God's Knowledge of Particulars," in *Torah and Wisdom: Essays in Honor of Arthur Hyman*, ed. Ruth Link-Salinger (New York, 1992), 189-195; Ch. Manekin, "Maimonides on Divine Knowledge: Moses of Narbonne's Averroist Reading," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 76 (2002): 51-74; Ch. Touati, "Les deux théories de Maimonide sur la providence," in *Studies in Jewish Religious and Intellectual History*, eds. S. Stein and R. Loews (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1979), 331-343; H. Kreisel, "The Suffering of the Righteous," *Daat* 19 (1987): 25-26, note 31 [Hebrew]; R. Krygier, *A la limite de Dieu: L'énigme de l'omniscience divine et du libre arbitre humain dans la pensée juive* (Paris: Publisud, 1998), 63-135.

② *Guide of the Perplexed*, III, 20. I quote the Hebraic translation of Ibn Tibbon because his is the text that Bibago used. The Judeo-Arabic original is: *אין כל מא וקעוא פיה כלהם סכבה אן ג'עלוא בין* אן ד'לך לאזם פי עלמה ואלד' אקולה אנא, אן כל מא וקעוא פיה כלהם סכבה אן ג'עלוא בין עלמנא ועלמה תעאלי נסבה, וינט'ר כל פריק פי אמור תמתנע פי עלמנא פיט'ן (Munk edition, Paris 1856, 347).

③ *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. S. Pines (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963), 481.



of Maimonides opinion.^① It is interesting to see that the aim of this summary is not just to understand what is faulty with Gersonides' arguments, but to appreciate the true intent of Maimonides' opinion:

ולמען הבין תכלית כונת הרב המורה בזה אעיר על קצת ספקות ספק עליו הרב לוי בן גרשון ואשתדל להתירם
כפי השכל.
דרך אמונה יב: ב

In order to understand the true intention of the Rabbi *The Guide* (i.e. Maimonides) on this matter, I shall comment on some of the objections raised by Rabbi Levi ben Gershon (i.e. Gersonides), and shall endeavor to dismiss them in accordance with intellect.^②

In this text we see that Bibago claims that his aim in his long discussion (seven compact folios) of Gersonides' opinion is to understand in a better way Maimonides' opinion through the explanation and the resolution of Gersonides' criticism. We will see that the conclusion of this explanation is quite different than the aim as originally stated.

In the first part of his discussion, Bibago summarizes the four main arguments of Gersonides against the opinion of Maimonides. The first two are in the next text: ^③

① On Gersonides opinion about this subject see *Wars of the Lord*, III, the critics of Maimonides opinion come in the third chapter; Ch. Touati, *La pensée philosophique et théologique de Gersonide* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1973,) 5-53; S. Klein-Braslavy, "Determinism, Contingency, Free Choice, and Foreknowledge in Gersonides," in *Without Any Doubt: Gersonides on Method and Knowledge* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 221-296; Ch. Manekin, "Freedom Within Reason? Gersonides on Human Choice," in *Freedom and Moral Responsibility*, 165-204; T. Rudavsky, "Divine Omniscience, Contingency and Prophecy in Gersonides," in *Divine Omniscience and Omnipotence in Medieval Philosophy*, ed. T. Rudavsky (Lancaster: Springer, 1985), 161-181; T. Rudavsky, "Divine Omniscience and Future Contingents in Gersonides," *JHP* 21 (1983): 513-536; S. Feldman, *Gersonides: Judaism within the Limits of Reason* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2010), 81-103; Ch. Manekin, "On the Limited-Omniscience Interpretation of Gersonides' Theory of Divine Knowledge," in *Perspectives on Jewish Thought and Mysticism*, eds. Alfred L. Ivry, Elliot R. Wolfson and Allan Arkush (Amsterdam: Routledge, 1998), 135-170; S. Sadik, "The Psychological Process of Choice in the Thought of Gersonides," *JSIJ*, forthcoming.

② Constantinopol 1511, III: r.

③ The original critiques are in *Wars of the Lord*, III, 3 (Tel-Aviv: Tel-Aviv University Press), 303-304.

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כי ידיעתו היא לו מעצמותו וידיעת זולתו היא עלולה מידיעתו, (ונקנית באמצעות ידיעתו) ומה שזה דרכו הנה השם נאמר בו בקודם, ובשאר העניינים אשר יאמר עליהם – הוא בלאחר.
תאמר שאנחנו חייבנו בשם ית' שהוא יודע מפני מה שנמצא בנו מהידיעה. והמשל שאנחנו, מפני מה שהשגנו מהידיעה הנמצאת בשכלנו – שהיא, ממה שהיא שלמות לשכל, אי אפשר לו מזולתה במה שהוא שכל בפועל – חייבנו בשם ית' שהוא יודע, מצד מה שהתבאר בנפשו שנושא אחד כשחויב לדבר מה מפני מציאותו לדבר אחר הוא בליט נאמר בשני הדברים בשתוף גמור.

For in God Knowledge is identical with His essence, whereas in anyone else knowledge is the effect of God's Knowledge. In such a case the term is applied to God in a prior sense and to other things in a posterior sense.

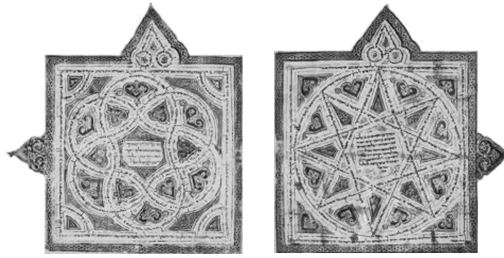
That if, we say that God knows because of the knowledge found in us. For example, since we apprehend that the knowledge belonging to our intellect is a perfection of our intellect — without which it could not be an intellect in act (i. e. perfect)— we predicate of God that He knows by virtue of the fact, which we have demonstrated concerning Him, that God (may He be blessed) is indubitably an intellect in act. It is self-evident that when a predicate is affirmed of some object because it is true of some other things, it is not predicated of both things in an absolutely equivocal sense. ①

The third argument is that if there is absolutely nothing in common between our knowledge and God's knowledge, it is completely impossible to associate negative or positive attributes to God. For example, it would be impossible to attribute to God movement (or even corporality), because its meaning with regard to God is completely different than the meaning of human movement (or corporality). ②

According to this argument, the attribute of knowledge is indeed not attributed both to us and to God in a completely equivocal way (בשיתוף גמור), but rather with a difference of prior and posterior (בקדימה ואיחור). In other

① S. Feldman translation Philadelphia 1987 Volume II : 108-109.

② On divine attributes see David Kaufmann, *Geschichte der Attributenlehre in der Jüdischen Religionsphilosophie des Mittelalters von Saadja bis Maimuni* (Gotha 1872); H. A. Wolfson, "Maimonides and Gersonides on Divine Attributes as Ambiguous Terms," in *M. M. Kaplan Jubilee Volume*, ed. M. Davis (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1953), 515-530; H. A. Wolfson, "The Aristotelian Predicables and Maimonides' Division of Attributes," in *Essays and Studies in Memory of L. R. Miller*, ed. I. Davidson (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1938), 201-234; H. A. Wolfson, "Maimonides on Negative Attributes," in *Louis Ginzberg Jubilee Volume*, eds. S. Liberman, S. Zeitlin, S. Spiegel, and A. Marx (New York, 1945), 411-446; H. A. Wolfson, "Crescas on the Problem of Divine Attributes," *JQR* 7 (1916): 1-44, 175-121.



words, divine and human attributes differ only in proportion, while having in common genus and species (ומין סוג). This conclusion is quite close to the opinion of Gersonides as we see by the end of his critiques of Maimonides' opinion:

ר"ל שהם נאמרים בשם יתברך באופן יותר שלם מהאופן אשר נאמרים בזולתו. ואחר שהתישב זה כלו מבואר מצד העיון שהידיעה תאמר בשם יתברך ובזולתו בקדימה ובאחור, לא בשתוף גמור, ושהעיון ירחיק מה שהשרישו הרב המורה ז"ל בידיעת השם לסלק מעליו טענות הפילוסופים.

(These predicates) are predicated of God (may He be blessed) implying greater perfection than when predicated of creatures. On the basis of this entire discussion, it is now evident that reasons shows that the term "knowledge" is predicated of God (may He be blessed) primarily and of creatures secondarily, not absolutely equivocally, and that the principles (of religion language) adopted by Maimonides in order to remove the objections of the philosophers concerning the problem of divine knowledge are not acceptable.^①

In this text and in the summary by Bibago we see that, according to Gersonides, there is a certain kind of common definition of human knowledge and divine knowledge, such that while there may exist some difference between the two forms of knowledge, this difference doesn't change the essence of knowledge itself.

After his review of the well-known opinions of Maimonides and Gersonides, Bibago brings his own solution for Gersonides' arguments. In his response to the second argument of Gersonides, Bibago describes the true relation between God's attributes and human attributes:

הספק הב' יותר גם כן באמרנו כי הדברים המשותפים השמות הן המה אשר הגדר להם מתחלף בהוראתם על הדברים המתחלפים ולא שתפם דבר כי אם השם לבד והאמת שזה החילוף אשר אנחנו נבחין בשמות המשותפים אמנם הוא ההבדל האחרון בהכרח ואם היה שימצא בסוג הקרוב אינו הכרח שימצא בכל סוגי הן העליונים הן הקרובים אבל הוא נמנע...

And the second objection can likewise be dismissed by saying that (regarding) those things that are equivocal, these are the very names whose definition varies in accordance with the different things to which they refer, and they (i.e. the objects with identical names) share nothing in common

^① *The War of the Lord*, trans. S. Feldman (New York: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1987), Volume II, 35.

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except their name only. But the truth is that this variation (of meaning) that we observe in equivocal terms is in fact (based on) an absolutely necessary difference, for if it would exist in a closely related genus, it wouldn't necessarily exist in all its genus, (in) either the lofty or the closer ones, but this is impossible...^①

In this passage we see that Bibago explained the meaning of equivocality of terms (שיתוף השם) and that these names are not just homonyms. Moreover, it is impossible that they are totally different in all their classifications, but they have some kind of common classification. In the continuation of this passage, Bibago describes the common usage of the word “man” for both a real live person and a sculpture of a person. The two differ with regard to the majority of classes (e.g. life or intellect), which are not common to both sculpture and real people. However, there are some genres that are common to the two (e.g. corporality and external human features).

By the end of his explanation, our author explains the meaning of this distinction with regard to the relationship between God and human knowledge:

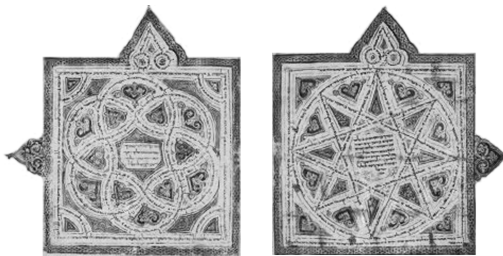
דרך אמונה יג: א
כן בנדון שלפנינו הידיעה האלוהית והאנושית אינו מחוייב שיתחלפו אלא בהבדל האחרון ובסוג הקרוב.
אמנם בסוג העליון אינו מחוייב שיתחלפו ולזה שם הידיעה תתחלף באדם ובש"י כי באדם הוא קנין בשכל
ובש"י אינו קנין בשכל כי אין לו ית' קנינים נקנים בשכלו כי יחייב ריבוי אמנם יסכימו בסוג עליון זה
מחוייב והוא שהידיעה בכלם היא השגת האמת...

So it is in our discussion: Divine knowledge and human knowledge need not differ except regarding their final differentiation and in the closely related genus. However, it is not necessary that they differ in the highest genus. So for this reason the name “knowledge” differs between God and man, because in man, (knowledge) is an acquisition in the intellect, while in God it is not an acquisition in the intellect because he has no acquisitions that are acquired by His intellect, for this would require multiplicity. However, this is necessarily that they (divine and human knowledge) are in accord regarding the highest genus and this is because knowledge for everyone is apprehension of the truth...^②

Here Bibago explains that divine knowledge has something in common

① Constantinople 1511, XIII: r

② Ibid.



with the human form of knowledge. God cannot have intellectual acquisition of knowledge like people, because this kind of acquisition leads to multiplicity. However, both types of knowledge have something in common: the apprehending of truth. In the continuation of his discussion, Bibago explain this definition of the relationship between divine and human knowledge, and resolves the other argument of Gersonides against the opinion of Maimonides by the use of this definition.

It is interesting to compare the true use of Gersonides in Bibago's discussion of divine knowledge with his declared use of Gersonides before the summary of his opinion. Despite his claim that his aim in quoting Gersonides is to better understand Maimonides' opinion, in truth the view of Bibago stands rather between the views of his two predecessors. Nothing in Bibago's summary of Maimonides' opinions can lead to his final interpretation without Gersonides' argument. After the exposition of his own position, Bibago does not try to then convince the reader of the real opinion of Maimonides.

One can take the above observation a step further: It is also possible to interpret the opinion of Bibago as actually being closer to the opinion of Gersonides than to the opinion of Maimonides. According to Maimonides, there is absolutely no relation between human and divine knowledge. By contrast, according to Gersonides, there absolutely *is* a relation, with the relation being a question of having more or less of the same knowledge. According to Bibago, there exists between the two forms of knowledge a degree of relation, though decidedly less than that of Gersonides. If we describe mathematically this relation, then according to Maimonides the relation between human and God knowledge is completely zero; according to Gersonides it is x ; and according to Bibago it is $0.5x$. Thus, from one point of view, Bibago stands halfway between his two predecessors, but from another point of view, Bibago is much closer to Gersonides, for the degree of difference between completely zero and something is infinite, whereas the degree of difference between x and $0.5x$ is only 2.

Bibago used the classic scholastic mode of exposition (as did Rabbi Hasdai Crescas and Gersonides himself). He expounds on two different opinions, and then constructs his own opinion between them. It is also very probable that Bibago developed his own philosophical definition of God's attributes in trying

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to answer Gersonides' criticism of Maimonides. However, in contrast to this scholastic mode of exposition, it is important for Bibago both to see himself, and to expose himself to his reader, as a true interpreter of Maimonides and as an opponent of Gersonides.

II. Miracles and faith

We find a similar use of Gersonides in Bibago's discussion of miracles. Bibago devotes the second chapter of the third part of the *Path of Faith*^① to this subject. In the first paragraph of his discussion, Bibago mentions that one of his reasons for dealing with this subject is that those who came before him did not set down principles for understanding this important subject. Bibago gives two examples of those who came before him: Maimonides, whose treatment of this subject is not clear enough in his opinion, and Gersonides, whose discussion of this subject at the end of his *Wars of the Lord* is clear but incomplete (בלתי שלם).^②

In the first part of his discussion^③, Bibago divides miracles into three different kinds. The first is a נס or a regular "miracle" which God performs with the intermediation of an angel. The second is an effect of the Active Intellect called alternatively אות (sign) or מופת (sign of proof)^④. God performs this kind of miracle through the intermediation of a prophet.^⑤ The third kind of miracle, called a פלא (wonder) is done directly by God without any kind of intermediary. In this part of the chapter, Bibago doesn't mention

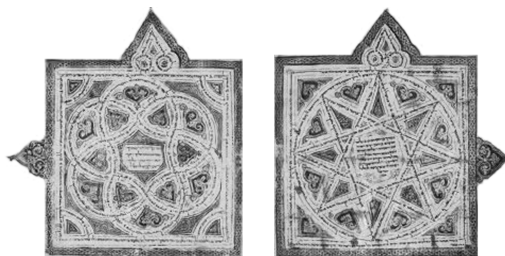
① *Path of Faith*, Constantinopol 1511, LXXIX: r-LXXXVI: r. On this subject see Nuriel, *Concealed and Revealed in Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, 225-229; C. Sirat, *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, 385-386.

② On Gersonide's opinion on miracles see Sarah Klein-Breslavi, "Gersonides' Use of Aristotle's *Meteorology* in his Accounts of Some Biblical Miracles," *Alph-Historical Studies in Science & Judaism*, 10 (2010): 241-313.

③ Especially LXXXIV: 1.

④ Bibago does distinguish between אות and מופת, but in terms of their source they are equivalent. It should be noted that מופת is generally translated as "sign" or "wonder". However, "sign of proof" preserves the distinction from אות and פלא, and perhaps better captures the sense of the original Hebrew in the contexts in which מופת appears in the Bible.

⑤ On prophecy see Nuriel, *Concealed and Revealed in Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, 243-247.



Gersonides' opinion. However, we can see an important influence of Gersonides' treatment of the subject, especially in the two first kinds of miracles. According to Gersonides^① the Active Intellect and the prophets (or the sages)^② are active in the performance of a miracle, but it is completely impossible for God to do a miracle through a change of His will, as can be seen from this passage from *Wars of the Lord* (VI, 2, 10):

ועוד שאם הנחנו השם יתברך פועל הנפלאות, היה מחויב אם שיתחדש לו רצון וידיעה כשירצה לחדש המופת אשר יחדשהו, ואם שיהיה חידוש זה המופת בזה העת אשר יחדש בו מוגבל ומסודר מרצונו הקדום. והנה המאמר כשיתחדש לו רצון וידיעה הוא בתכלית הבטול.

Hence, if God is alleged to be the agent of miracles, it would follow either that both will and knowledge would be generated in Him when He wants to generate the miracle that He performs; or that the generation of this miracle at the particular moment when it occurred was determined and ordered by His eternal will. The claim that will and knowledge can be generated in God is absurd.^③

In the second part of the chapter, Bibago deals with the goal of the third kind of miracle, done directly by God Himself. According to Bibago, the aim of this kind of miracle is to bring people towards perfect faith. As we can see by the name of his book, faith is very important to our author. Faith is in some respect higher than the capacity of the human rational sense, and by believing in the divinity of the Torah, one feels both inspired and compelled to fulfill the commandments, thereby allowing the observant believer to attain life after death, this being the ultimate goal of faith. It is in this context that Bibago understands the crucial significance of God's performing miracles without any intermediary, for it is only the power of miracle-nurtured faith - and not the weaker transformative capacity of human reason - that can induce a person to keep the commandments as perfectly as possible.

This theory of Bibago is very different than the opinion of Maimonides on some major points. For example, Maimonides does not accept any kind of belief that is superior to human reason, and he outright denigrates the opinion

① Gersonides deal with this subject especially in *Wars of the Lord*, VI, II, 9-12.

② *Wars of the Lord*, VI, II, 11.

③ *Wars of the Lord*, VI, II, 10: 478-479.

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that miracles are meant to bring people to belief.

In the beginning of the eighth chapter of the laws of the foundations of the Torah (הלכות יסודי התורה) of the Mishne Torah, Maimonides explains that any believer whose belief is based on miracles has a shortcoming in his faith (יש בליבו דופי) inasmuch as there is a possibility that a charlatan (or a sorcerer) could do the same:

הלכות יסודי התורה פרק ח הלכה א
משה רבנו--לא האמינו בו ישראל, מפני האותות שעשה: שהמאמין על פי האותות--יש בליבו דופי,
שאפשר שייעשה האות בלאט וכישוף. אלא כל האותות שעשה במדבר, לפי הצורך עשאן--לא להביא
ראיה על הנבואה: צרך להשקיע את המצריים, קרע את הים והצלילם בו.

The (Nation of) Israel did not have faith in Moses, our teacher, because of the signs that he performed, for one whose belief is based on signs, (it shows that) he has a flaw in his faith (lit. "heart"), because it is possible to perform a sign through magic or sorcery. Rather, all the signs performed by Moses in the desert he did out of necessity, and not as a proof of his prophecy. (For example,) he needed to drown the Egyptians, so he split the sea and sank them in it. ^①

By contrast, Gersonides mentions that bringing people to faith is one of the major aims of a miracle:

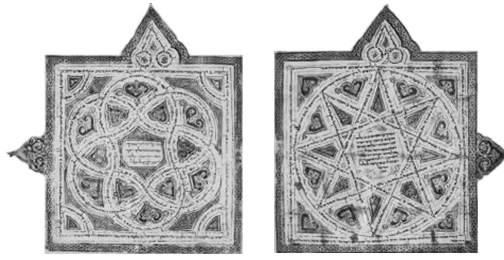
וגם כן הנה כאשר חפשונו בכל הנפלאות, מצאנו כלם על צד ההטבה והחנינה וההשגחה, וזה אם להקנות
אמונה טובה, אם להקנות טוב גופי, אם להציל מהרע, וזה אם מרע נפשי אם מרע גופי.
מלחמות ה' VI,2,10

Moreover, an inductive analysis of miracles shows that all of them are expressions of beneficence, grace, and providence - either for the purpose of bringing about right belief, material benefits, or salvation from evil, whether spiritual or material. ^②

We see that in this passage Gersonides mentions that spreading of the faith is one of the major aims of miracles. The opinion of Bibago on this subject is therefore closer to the position of Gersonides than to the opinion of Maimonides.

^① Based on the translation by Eliyahu Touger, Onlinetranslation: https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/682956/jewish/Mishneh-Torah-Rambam.htm.

^② *The Wars of the Lord*, VI, II, 9: 472.



Strangely, Bibago doesn't mention the well-known opinion of Maimonides. He prefers to criticize another opinion mentioned by Gersonides^① that miracles are done to benefit important people or a community:

כי התכלית אשר להם הוא יותר שלם ונעלה מכלל חלקי המציאות המשתנה ובוזה טעה החכם ר' לוי בן גרשון שתכלית הפלא הוא להציל אדם חשוב או קהל חשוב הצלה גופיית או נפשית כי הצלת איש מה חשוב הוא דבר מעט השלימות בערך השינוי אשר יתחדש במעשה בראשית.
דרך אמונה פד: ב

Because the purpose (of wonders) is more perfect and lofty than the sum of the parts of changing existence. And in this the scholar Gersonides erred (when he claimed) that the purpose of a wonder is to save some important person or some important community physically or spiritually. For the saving of some important person is a matter of minor significance (lit. “perfection”) compared to the change which would be made in the work of Creation.^②

In the continuation of the passage, Bibago also censured Gersonides for not differentiating between a miracle (נס) and a wonder (פלא), which Bibago saw as being on different levels. A miracle is the work of the prophets and, inasmuch as a prophet's connection to the Active Intellect is entirely natural, a miracle performed by a prophet doesn't require special divine intervention with the laws of nature. As a result, a נס is a kind of inferior miracle which, as per its inferior status, can be done for inferior purposes, e.g. in order to benefit certain important people or a certain community. In contrast, a changing of the natural order by God has to be for a more significant goal, a goal more significant than all the things of this world. According to Bibago, the only goal with enough significance to require this change of creation is instilling

① Probably based on *Wars of the Lord*, IV, 6.

② Constantinopoli 1511, LXXXIV: v.

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transformative belief. Faith^① which manifests as performance of commandments gives to the believer an infinite existence after the decomposition of the body. Granting this kind of continuity of life is more significant than any change to parts of natural existence, and indeed the granting of eternal life is what can legitimize the need to change nature. It is only for such a lofty purpose that a פלא would be performed.

In the continuation of this chapter^②, Bibago again condemned the position of Gersonides for his affirmation that a wonder (פלא) is also a product of the Active Intellect rather than the direct work of God.

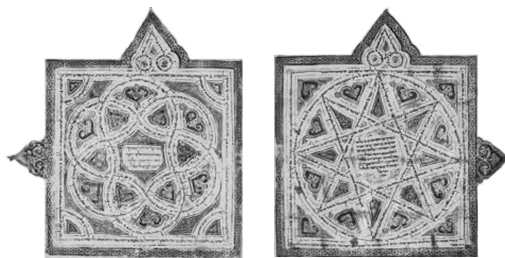
We can summarize by saying that in his discussion of miracles, Bibago builds a very different theory than that of Maimonides and Gersonides concerning the importance of miracles and the direct action of God in one certain kind of miracles (i. e. wonders). However, in the beginning of this chapter he prefers to directly condemn Gersonides and only says that the treatment given by Maimonides is not clear enough. In the continuation of the chapter, Bibago accepts certain principles of Gersonides, especially with regard to the role of the Active Intellect in regular miracles and the possibility that the aim of a miracle is to propagate belief. However, he never mentions his debt to Gersonides^③, and even criticized some points where Gersonides actually agrees with Maimonides. On these subjects, especially with regard to the direct action of God in a wonder, instead of criticizing Maimonides, Bibago prefers not to mention Maimonides, and only to censure Gersonides openly.

Almost all other mentions of Gersonides' opinions in *Path of Faith* are

① On the importance of faith see Nuriel, *Concealed and Revealed in Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, 271-276; C. Sirat, *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, 388-389; Y. Halper, "Philosophical Allegory in Bibago: Exegetical Duplicity for the Sake of Open Inquiry" and Abraham Bibago on Intellectual Conjunction and Human Happiness: Faith and Metaphysics according to a 15th-Century Jewish Averroist," forthcoming in *Quaestio: Yearbook of the History of Metaphysics*. My explanation differs from the explanation of Nuriel and Halper regarding the accent on the supra-rational status of faith. On the importance of faith in the thought of the Jewish philosophers of the 15th century see A. Ackerman, "Jewish Philosophy and the Jewish-Christian Philosophical Dialogue in Fifteenth-Century Spain," 377-378.

② *Path of Faith*, LXXXV: 2.

③ On this subject his relation to Gersonides is similar to Crescas's relation to Gersonides. On this topic see Ch. Touati, "Hasday Crescas et le problème de la science divine," *REJ* 142 (1983): 73-89.



negative. For example, in the sixth chapter of the second part of his book^①(the chapter that has to do with the interpretation of Moses's sin) as well as in the fifth chapter of the third part, Bibago emphasizes that Moses reached maximum human capacity in all realms. As a part of this discussion, Bibago also compares Moses and the Messiah, and criticized Gersonides for affirming (in his commentary to the Torah)^② that the superiority of Moses was limited to the miracles he performed, which would mean that in other matters, and in particular in terms of wisdom, any person could potentially be Moses's superior.^③ On this subject Bibago maintains the opinion of Maimonides.

Conclusion

We can summarize our discussion regarding the place of Gersonides in Bibago's *Path of Faith* by comparing the roles assigned to Maimonides and Gersonides, the only two major Jewish philosophers that Bibago deals with at length.^④

Bibago makes every effort to position himself as a true interpreter of Maimonides and Maimonides as orthodox Jewish believer. For example, he interprets the well-known opinion of Maimonides on the possibility of acquiring life after death of the body only in the merit of scientific knowledge, in a very

① *Path of Faith*, LXVI: 1.

② Gersonides, *Commentary on Deuteronomy* (Jerusalem, 2000), XXXIV: 10.

③ Another example: His critique of the opinion of Gersonides about the creation of the world; *Path of Faith*, near the end of the book, 101: 2.

④ On the relation of Bibago to Maimonides see also A. Ackerman, "Jewish Philosophy and the Jewish-Christian Philosophical Dialogue in Fifteenth-Century Spain," 379-384 (especially 383). Ackermann also mention the critics of Gersonides' opinion on God's knowledge by the Jewish philosophers of 15 th-century Spain.

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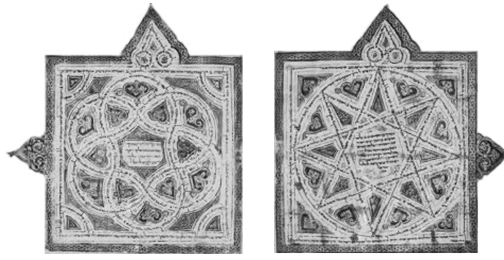
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conservative way.^① According to our author, the true meaning of this opinion is that following God's commandments proves that a person has acquired sufficient spiritual knowledge to attain this level of scientific knowledge. This interpretation transforms the arguably iconoclastic view of Maimonides into a more traditional one. All Jews that follow God's commandments have a part in Paradise. A non-Jew or a Jew who is a non-believer cannot access Paradise because they lack knowledge of the correct opinion regarding the nature of God and other metaphysical opinions that can only be acquired by a miracle or divine revelation. The role of Maimonides in Bibago's book is the role of the "good Jewish philosopher"; a philosopher who uses gentile philosophy to better understand Jewish belief, but by no means a Jewish philosopher who goes beyond this limited usage of philosophy in order to interpret the beliefs of Judaism according to the errant opinions of the gentile philosophers.

The role of Gersonides, in contrast, is the role of the "bad Jewish philosopher". In Bibago's book, Gersonides only appears to be criticized for his mistaken positions, which go against the true meaning of the Torah. Gersonides' misunderstanding of his own Jewish tradition, argues Bibago, comes from his extreme philosophical views. As we mentioned above, his misunderstanding of the difference between divine and human logic led to his misunderstanding of God's knowledge, while his misunderstanding of God's ability to change the laws of nature led to his misunderstanding of God's

① *Path of Faith*, especially XXXXVI: 2- LX:1. On the scholars debate regarding the opinion of Maimonides on this topic sees S. Pines, "The Limitations of Human Knowledge According to al-Farabi, Ibn Bajja and Maimonides," in *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, ed. I. Twersky (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press), 82-109; S. Pines, "Les limites de la métaphysique selon al-Farabi, Ibn Bajja et Maimonides: sources et antitheses de ces doctrines chez Alexandre d'Aprodisse et Themistius," *Miscellanea Mediaevalia* 13 (1981): 211-225; Versus A. Altmann, "Maimonides on the Intellect and the Scope of Metaphysics," in *Von der mittelalterlichen zur modern Aufklärung* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1987), 60-129; H. A. Davidson, "Maimonides on Metaphysical Knowledge," *Maimonides studies* 3 (1992): 49-103; Z. Harvey, "Maimonides on Human Perfection, Awe, and Politics," in *The Thought of Maimonides Philosophical and Legal Studies*, ed. I. Robinson (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 1-15.



miracles.^①

It is interesting to see that Bibago in fact adopted some of Gersonides' opinions, such that Gersonides can be described without a doubt as one of the major Jewish philosophers to have influenced Bibago. But in the rhetoric of his book, Bibago decided to give to him the negative role of the Jewish philosopher influenced too much by gentile philosophy.

^① I agree with Nuriel (*Concealed and Revealed in Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, 263) and Halper ("Abraham Bibago on the Logic of Divine Science; Metaphysics α and the Legend of the Pardes," 4), that Bibago sees himself as a student of Maimonides and wants to respond to the critique of Maimonides by Gersonides. But as opposed to Nuriel, I see also some important influence of Gersonides on Bibago.