
Summary of the Guide for the Perplexed

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Overview:

1. Tanach and Midrash use metaphor.
2. We relate to God through the world.
3. The universe is orderly.
4. The intellect comprehends the truth.

These four points are the main ideas contained in the Guide for the perplexed.

1. Use of metaphor in interpretation allows for a sensible interpretation of the Bible.
2. Faith in the intellect allows us to adopt a sensible interpretation, and allows us to be confident in our understanding of how the universe operates.
3. Understanding the mechanics of the world is essential for moral and ethical intuition.
4. Because we relate to God through the universe, our understanding of the world is what enables a connection with God.

Chapter 1: Tanach and Midrash use metaphor:

1. Overview:
 - a. The Tanach employs metaphor^{1, 2} as a pedagogical tool.³
 - b. Midrashim employ metaphor.^{4, 5}
 - c. We should not believe in a literal interpretation of every story in the Bible.⁶
2. Examples:

¹ Introduction “The key to the understanding and to the full comprehension of all that the Prophets have said is found in the knowledge of the **figures** [*metaphors*], their general ideas, and the meaning of each word they contain.”

² 1:46 “That God exists was therefore shown to ordinary men **by means of similes** taken from physical bodies...because ordinary men consider only the body as fully...existing” *See context*

³ 1:70 “our Sages spoke of these subjects in **metaphors**: they are too difficult for the common understanding of the people” *see context*

⁴ 1:70 “Consider how these excellent and true ideas, comprehended only by the greatest philosophers, are found scattered in the Midrashim. When a student who disavows truth reads them, he will at first sight deride them, as being contrary to the real state of things. The cause of this is the circumstance, that **our Sages spoke of these subjects in metaphors**: they are too difficult for the common understanding of the people”

⁵ 1:46 “For that reason they employ in the Talmud and the Midrashim **phrases** similar to those contained in the prophecies”

⁶ 2:29 “**The literal meaning of the words might lead us to conceive corrupt ideas and to form false opinions about God**, or even entirely to abandon and reject the principles of our Faith. ... We must blame the practice of some ignorant preachers and expounders of the Bible, who think that wisdom consists in knowing the explanation of words”

- a. Biblical references to God being in a place, moving, changing, having any attributes, feelings, or a body are all metaphors.^{7, 8, 9, 10}
- b. The Bible refers to God doing things when they happen via people's decisions, nature, or randomness.¹¹
- c. The creation story is not chronological.^{12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17}

⁷ 1:26 “expressions, which can easily be comprehended and understood by all, are applied to the Creator.”

⁸ 1:46 “The same is the case with the information concerning the Creator given to the ordinary classes of men in all prophetic books and in the Law.” *The context is using metaphor.*

⁹ 1:55 “...it is necessary to demonstrate by proof that nothing can be predicated of God that implies any of the following four things: **corporeality, emotion or change, nonexistence**,--e.g., that something would be potential at one time and real at another--and similarity with any of His creatures.”

¹⁰ 1:59 “Other attributes, such as occur in the books of the Prophets...are either attributes of God's **actions**, or expressions implying the **negation** of the opposite.”

¹¹ 2:48 “...it makes no difference whether these causes consist in substances, physical properties, freewill, or chance.... The prophets ascribe the production directly to God...”

¹² 2:29 “**The account given in Scripture of the Creation is not, as is generally believed, intended to be in all its parts literal.** For if this were the case, wise men would not have kept its explanation secret, and our Sages would not have employed figurative speech [in treating of the Creation] in order to hide its true meaning, nor would they have objected to discuss it in the presence of the common people. **The literal meaning of the words might lead us to conceive corrupt ideas and to form false opinions about God, or even entirely to abandon and reject the principles of our Faith.**”

¹³ 2:30 “Those who have made this assertion [*that time existed before creation*] have been led to it by a saying of one of our Sages in reference to the terms “one day,” “a second day.” Taking these terms literally, the authors asked...” *Implying Maimonides does not take them literally.*

¹⁴ 2:30 “**..Time did not exist previously, but was created; for it depends on the motion of the sphere,** and the sphere has been created.” *Meaning, time cannot exist without the motion of the Sun. See Narboni there*

¹⁵ 2:30 “The phrase, “And he divided between the waters,” ... [describes] a **distinction as regards their nature or form.**”

¹⁶ Narboni on 2:30 “Everything was created together, because God is one truth, and his action is one”

¹⁷ 2:30 “The Universe was not created [*at the beginning point of*] time, since time itself formed part of the Creation.” *My translation. See Ibn Tibbon etc.*

- d. The story of Adam & Eve is figurative. ^{18, 19}
- e. Some elements of the revelation at Sinai are metaphor. ^{20, 21, 22}
- f. All references to angels are metaphors for natural laws ^{23, 24} and are seen or heard only in a vision. ²⁵

¹⁸ 1:14, Abarbanel there “כי מה שנזכר בפרשה הראשונה מבראשית עד ויכולו, נאמר על אדם הראשון כפי פשוטו ומה שנאמר אח”כ מספור גן עדן, והעצים, והנחש ואדם ובניו הוא משל לענייני האדם הראשון” or “What is said in the first chapter is about the first Adam according to the simple reading, and what is said afterwards in the story of the Garden of Eden, and the trees, and the snake and **Adam and his children is an allegory** for mankind..” *See also 3:50*

¹⁹ 2:30 “None of the things mentioned above is therefore **impossible**, because the laws of Nature were then not yet permanently fixed. There are, however, some utterances of our Sages on this subject...**The following is also a remarkable passage, most absurd in its literal sense**; but as an allegory it contains wonderful wisdom” *By stating that a literal interpretation is “not impossible” and then providing a lengthy discussion of metaphor and by calling a literal interpretation of Midrash “absurd,” the Rambam implies that he prefers a non-literal interpretation.*

²⁰ 3:9 “His revelation in a thick cloud...was intended to indicate that we cannot comprehend Him on account of the **dark body that surrounds us**...A tradition is current among our people that the day of the revelation on Mount Sinai was misty, cloudy, and a little rainy.” *The clouds and rain are metaphors.*

²¹ 1:54 “God promised to make him [Moses] comprehend **the nature of all things**, their relation to each other, and the way they are governed by God both in reference to the universe as a whole and to each creature in particular.”

²² 2:33 “they learnt the truth of the principles contained in these two commandments in the same manner as Moses, and **not through Moses**. For these two principles, the existence of God and His Unity, can be arrived at by **means of reasoning**...it is impossible for any person to expound the revelation on Mount Sinai more fully than our Sages have done, since it is one of the **secrets of the Law**.” *In 2:30, Maimonides states that whenever the true nature is secret, the simple reading is not to be followed*

²³ 1:49 “The angels are likewise **incorporeal**: they are intelligences without matter”

²⁴ 2:6 “When we assert that Scripture teaches that **God rules this world through angels**, we mean such angels as the Intelligences. But tell him that **God gave the seed a formative power which produces and shapes the limbs, and that this power is called “angel,” ... all forces that reside in a body are angels**, much more **the forces that are active in the Universe**.”

²⁵ 2:42 “We have already shown that the **appearance or speech of an angel mentioned in Scripture took place in a vision or dream**; it makes no difference whether this is expressly stated or not, as we have explained above.”

- g. All references to God speaking are metaphors for the prophet's interpretation of the vision.²⁶
- h. Stories that occur during prophesy are part of the vision.²⁷
- i. All references to permanent changes in nature, such as melting of mountains are metaphors.²⁸
- j. Excepting miracles of Moses, all public miracles are metaphors.²⁹
- k. All references to God altering the nature of Man, even temporarily, are metaphors.³⁰
- l. All miracles can be interpreted as metaphor, as long as it does not eliminate the hopes and fears of the people.³¹

²⁶ 2:44 "...the prophets sometimes prophesy in allegories; they use a term allegorically, and in the same prophecy the meaning of the allegory is given." *Only Moses could be said to speak to God, all others receive words from God as interpretation of a vision.*

²⁷ 2:46 "Whatever is said in the account of a vision, that the prophet heard, went forth, came out, said, was told, stood, sat, went up, went down, journeyed, asked, or was asked, **all is part of the prophetic vision.**"

²⁸ 2:29 "when they describe the ruin of a kingdom or the destruction of a great nation in phrases like the following:--"The stars have fallen," "The heavens are overthrown," "The sun is darkened," "The earth is waste, and trembles," and similar metaphors." *and the rest of the chapter.*

²⁹ 2:35 "**Scripture, therefore, declares that no prophet will ever, like Moses, do signs publicly** in the presence of friend and enemy, of his followers and his opponents...So also the miracle of Elijah, at Mount Carmel, was witnessed only by a few people...When I said above that the sun stood still certain hours, I explain... that day appeared to the people at Gibeon as their longest day in the summer." *This would also apply to the Flood and the Tower of Babel.*

³⁰ 3:32 "the nature of man is **never** changed by God by way of miracle"

³¹ 2:25 "**We do not reject the Eternity of the Universe, because certain passages in Scripture...**the Eternity of the Universe as taught by Aristotle, that everything in the Universe is the result of fixed laws, that Nature does not change, and that there is nothing supernatural..." *The problem with Aristotle's theory is not exegetical, but philosophical. See discussion*

Chapter 2: We relate to God through the world:

1. Transcendence of God:

- a. God is the object that does not need to be created.^{32, 33}
- b. God is not an imaginable concept.³⁴
- c. We can understand God by understanding what God cannot be.^{35, 36}
- d. The less we think we know about God, the truer our perception.³⁷
- e. God is not human.^{38, 39}

³² 2:1 “...It is therefore certain that there must be a being which has absolutely independent existence, and is the source of the existence of all things, whether transient or permanent” *Each proof implies a definition*

³³ 1:56 “a being whose existence is not due to any cause--God alone is that being”

³⁴ 1:46 “That, however, which is neither itself a body, nor a force within a body, is not existent according to man's first notions, and is above all **excluded from the range of imagination.**”

³⁵ 1:58 “every attribute predicated of God either denotes the quality of an **action**, or--when the attribute is intended to convey some idea of the Divine Being itself, and not of His actions--the **negation of the opposite.**”

³⁶ 1:58 “now that the negative attributes of God are the true attributes: they do not include any incorrect notions or any deficiency whatever in reference to God, while **positive attributes imply polytheism**”

³⁷ 1:59 “It will now be clear to you, that every time you establish by proof the negation of a thing in reference to God, you become more perfect, while with every additional positive assertion you follow your imagination and recede from the true knowledge of God. “

³⁸ 1:59 “**You must bear in mind, that by affirming anything of God, you are removed from Him in two respects;** first, whatever you affirm, is only a perfection in relation to us...” *That is, something that humans would find as “perfection” is not the case with God.*

³⁹ 1:46 “The physical organs which are attributed to God in the writings of the Prophets are either organs of locomotion, indicating life; organs of sensation, indicating perception: organs of touch, indicating action: or organs of speech, indicating the divine inspiration of the Prophets, as will be explained.”

- f. God has no attributes^{40, 41, 42} and is not in time or space.^{43, 44}
 - g. God does not change.^{45, 46}
 - h. God did not create the world for a purpose.⁴⁷
 - i. God cannot do the logically impossible.^{48, 49}
 - j. God cannot have a quality of having knowledge of the universe.⁵⁰
2. Actions of God:

⁴⁰ 1:55 “I shall explain in the next chapter **the error of those who believe that God has essential attributes**”

⁴¹ 1:56 “Thus those who believe in the presence of essential attributes in God, viz., Existence, Life, Power, Wisdom, and Will, should know that these attributes, when applied to God, have not the same meaning as when applied to us, and that the difference does not only consist in magnitude, or in the degree of perfection, stability, and durability...Consequently **God exists without possessing the attribute of existence.**” *God could only have attributes of action; in other words, positive attributes implied by our experience of its behavior.*

⁴² 1:46 “attributes are nothing but forces under a different name.”

⁴³ 1:60 “...believe that God occupies a place...” in context of describing a wrong notion.

⁴⁴ 1:52 “there is no relation between God and time or space.” See also 2:1 “the relation of time is not applicable to God”

⁴⁵ 1:55 “All kinds of non-existence must likewise be negated in reference to Him: no perfection whatever can therefore be imagined to be at one time absent from Him, and at another present in Him: for if this were the case, He would [at a certain time] only be potentially perfect.”

⁴⁶ 1:57 “...They simply signify that God is not subject to any change or innovation whatever; they do not imply that God can be described by time, or that there is any comparison between Him and any other being as regards time, and that He is called on that account “the first” and “the last.””

⁴⁷ 3:13 “Intelligent persons are much perplexed when they inquire into the purpose of the Creation. I will now show how **absurd** this question is”

⁴⁸ 3:15 “we do not ascribe to God the power of doing what is impossible.” *Logical proof is tantamount to prophesy*

⁴⁹ 1:75 “[God] cannot make a square with a diagonal equal to its sides.”

⁵⁰ 1:53 “these attributes do not refer to the essence of God, but express [*something about his creations*]”, or “שאלו התארים גם כן אינם בבחינת עצמו אבל בבחינת הברואים” See Ibn Tibbon.

- a. We can understand God through behavior⁵¹,⁵²,⁵³
- b. God uses the forces of the universe to manage the universe.⁵⁴
- c. All names of God are reference to behavior.⁵⁵
- d. God is called good⁵⁶, just⁵⁷, and wise⁵⁸ in that God created laws of nature⁵⁹ that are optimal to sustain life.
- e. Love of God is based on understanding God's actions.⁶⁰

⁵¹ 1:34 "we can only obtain a knowledge of Him through His works"

⁵² 1:54 "knowledge of the works of God is the knowledge of His attributes, by which He can be known...Although Moses was shown "all His goodness," i.e., all His works, only the thirteen middot are mentioned, because they include those acts of God which refer to the creation and the government of mankind, and to know these acts was the principal object of the prayer of Moses."

⁵³ 1:46 "...attributes are nothing but forces under a different name."

⁵⁴ 1:71 "Consider and learn how they described the relation of God to the sphere, asserting that **the latter is His instrument, by means of which He rules the universe.**"

⁵⁵ 1:61 "It is well known that all the names of God occurring in Scripture are derived from His actions, except one, namely, the Tetragrammaton, which consists of the letters yod, hé, vau and hé." *see context*

⁵⁶ 3:13 "You know our interpretation of the saying of our Sages, "Scripture speaks the same language as is spoken by man." But we call "good" that which is in accordance with the object we seek." *See context*

⁵⁷ 2:28 "The works of God being most perfect, admitting no addition or deduction, must remain the same for ever...**whatever God decrees** for those created things, and whatever He effects through them, **is perfectly just**" *See context, and 3:53*

⁵⁸ 3:32 "On considering the Divine acts, or the processes of Nature, we get an insight into the prudence and wisdom of God. " *See context, and 3:54*

⁵⁹ 1:54 "The words "all my goodness" imply that God promised to show him the whole creation"

⁶⁰ 3:28 "this love [*love of God*] is only possible when we comprehend the **real nature of things**, and understand the **divine wisdom displayed therein.**"

Chapter 3: The universe is orderly:

1. The Nature of Nature:

- a. It is fundamental to our faith that nature has not and will not change.
^{61 62 63}
- b. The laws of nature are the same everywhere. ⁶⁴
- c. Plant, animal and human life are based on the natural laws of chemistry and physics. ⁶⁵

⁶¹2:29 “His wisdom decreed that the Universe be brought into existence at a certain time, that it should not be annihilated or changed as regards any of its properties, except in some instances; some of these are known to us, whilst others belong to the future, and are therefore unknown to us. **This is our opinion and the basis of our religion.**”

⁶²2:29 “ Our Sages, however, said very strange things as regards miracles...for they say, **when God created the Universe with its present physical properties, He made it part of these properties, that they should produce certain miracles at certain times...** If this is really the meaning of the passage referred to, it... shows that **he held it to be impossible that there should be a change in the laws of Nature, or a change in the will of God [as regards the physical properties of things] after they have once been established.**”

⁶³1:67 “while on each of the six days events took place contrary to the natural laws now in operation throughout the Universe, on the seventh day the Universe was merely upheld and left in the condition in which it continues to exist.”

⁶⁴1:72 “Know that **this Universe, in its entirety, is nothing else but one individual being**...Its centre is occupied by the earth, earth is surrounded by water, air encompasses the water, fire envelopes the air, and this again is enveloped by the fifth substance (quintessence). These substances form numerous spheres, one being enclosed within another so that no intermediate empty space, no vacuum, is left.” *The necessity to resort to a fifth element and no space is based on the assumption that the same laws operate in heaven and earth.*

⁶⁵2:30: “For by the motion of the spheres the elements intermix, and by light and darkness their constitution changes. The first change consists in the formation of two kinds of mist; these are the first causes of meteorological phenomena, such as rain; **they also caused the formation of minerals, plants, of animals, and at last of man**”

- d. The intellect, consciousness, and free will⁶⁶ are based on the physical matter of our body, and follow the rules of physics and biology.^{67, 68, 69}
- e. Existence is good⁷⁰ on the whole.⁷¹
- f. The laws of nature are perfect^{72, 73, 74, 75}, but a given point of the creation on its own may not be good.⁷⁶

⁶⁶ 2:48 “God that gave... freewill to the human being, and natural properties to everything” *See context, explaining that Man’s decisions can be attributed to God*

⁶⁷ 1:72 “The faculty of thinking is a force inherent in the body, and is not separated from it”

⁶⁸ 2:36 “Imagination is certainly one of the faculties of the body. “

⁶⁹ 3:17 “..The portion of the materia prima which is still more refined, and is endowed with the intellectual faculty” *A natural process whereby the intellect is generated from minerals. Maimonides agrees with this. See context.*

⁷⁰ 3:10 “ His works are all perfectly good. He only produces existence, and **all existence is good**...the true work of God is all good, since it is existence”

⁷¹ 3:12 “examining one single person...If, however, he would take into consideration the whole universe...etc” *Goodness of the world is based on broad evaluation*

⁷² 2:28 “The works of God **being most perfect**, admitting no addition or deduction, **must remain the same for ever**. It is impossible that anything should exist that could cause a change in them”

⁷³ 2:14: “The actions of God are perfect; they are in no way defective, nor do they contain anything useless or superfluous. **In similar terms Aristotle frequently praises Him, when he says that Nature is wise and does nothing in vain, but makes everything as perfect as possible.**”

⁷⁴ 2:7 “Intelligences and the spheres [which are the natural forces] always perform that which is good, they contain nothing except what is good and perfect”

⁷⁵ 3:25 “the Prophets expressed the idea that **all parts of natural products are well arranged**, in good order, connected with each other, and stand to each other in the relation of cause and effect; nothing of them is purposeless, trivial, or in vain; they are all the result of great wisdom.”

⁷⁶ 3:14 “it was exceedingly good,” it declares thereby that everything created was well fitted for its object, and would never cease to act, and never be annihilated. This is especially pointed out by the word “exceedingly”; for **sometimes a thing is temporarily good**; it serves its purpose, and then it fails and ceases to act. But as regards the Creation it is said that everything was fit for its purpose, and **able continually to act accordingly**. “

- g. The universe started as a single point, and through natural fixed law developed over time minerals, then plants, then animals, then humans.^{77 78 79 80}
 - h. The universe has three parts.⁸¹
2. Chaos:
- a. The process by which the world and the laws of nature were created was chaotic and did not follow the rules of nature.⁸²

⁷⁷ 2:30 “The true explanation of the first verse of Genesis is as follows: “In [creating] a principle God created the beings above and the things below...Consequently, **all things were created together, but were separated from each other successively.** Our Sages illustrated this by the following simile: We sow various seeds at the same time; some spring forth after one day, some after two, and some after three days, although all have been sown at the same time...For by the motion of the spheres the elements intermix, and by light and darkness their constitution changes. The first change consists in the formation of two kinds of mist; these are the first causes of meteorological phenomena, such as rain: **they also caused the formation of minerals, of plants, of animals, and at last of man.**” *Because in the Rambam’s opinion the creation did not exist over time this is describing the chronological evolution of the world according to fixed natural law.*

⁷⁸ 3:13 “When anything can only exist provided some other thing has previously existed, God has caused the latter to precede it..It is also reasonable to assume that the plants exist only for the benefit of the animals, since the latter cannot live without food.” *See context. Maimonides considers the heavenly bodies animals, in 2:5, and 1:58 “the heavens, which are living” which is why they were created on the fourth day.*

⁷⁹ 2:6 “...e.g., “Let us make man in our image”...They only show that all parts of the Universe, even the limbs of animals in their actual form, are produced through angels: for natural forces and angels are identical.” *The plural “we” is to emphasize that man was made through nature.*

⁸⁰ 3:17 “...The portion of the materia prima which is still more refined, and is endowed with the intellectual faculty” *See context.*

⁸¹ 2:11 “the whole Creation is divided into three parts, viz. (1) the pure Intelligences; (2) the bodies of the spheres endowed with permanent forms--(the forms of these bodies do not pass from one substratum to another, nor do their substrata undergo any change whatever); and (3) the transient earthly beings, all of which consist of the same substance.” *See discussion.*

⁸² 2:27 “We do not hold that the Universe came into existence...as the result of the laws of Nature.”

- b. We cannot understand why the world was created.^{83, 84, 85}
 - c. Randomness exists, but the order of nature is dominant.⁸⁶
- 3. Nature and Mitzvot:
 - a. Mitzvot perform a function.⁸⁷
 - b. The goal of mitzvot is the well-being of the mind and body.^{88, 89, 90, 91}

⁸³ 3:13 “Intelligent persons are much perplexed when they inquire into the purpose of the Creation. I will now show how absurd this question is”

⁸⁴ 2:25 “We might be asked, Why has God inspired a certain person and not another? Why has He revealed the Law to one particular nation, and at one particular time? why has He commanded this, and forbidden that? why has He shown through a prophet certain particular miracles? what is the object of these laws? and Why has He not made the commandments and the prohibitions part of our nature, if it was His object that we should live in accordance with them? **We answer to all these questions: He willed it so; or, His wisdom decided so.** Just as He created the world according to His will, at a certain time, in a certain form, and as we do not understand why His will or His wisdom decided upon that peculiar form, and upon that peculiar time, so we do not know why His will or wisdom determined any of the things mentioned in the preceding questions.” *This, despite offering functions of mitzvot. Thus, we cannot explain why God created such a context, but we can understand function within the framework of the universe.*

⁸⁵ 3:53 “On this account, the very act of the creation is an act of God's loving-kindness.” *It was not created out of any necessity. See context*

⁸⁶ 2:19 “For they do not distinguish between selection in the case of a plant to make it red and not white, or sweet and not bitter, and determination in the case of the heavens which gave them their peculiar geometrical form and did not give them a triangular or quadrilateral shape.”

⁸⁷ 3:26 “every positive or negative precept serves a useful object...“each commandment has necessarily a cause”

⁸⁸ 3:31 “the sole object of the Law is to benefit us.”

⁸⁹ 3:27 “The general object of the Law is twofold: the well-being of the soul, and the well-being of the body.... that is to say, that we do not do every one as he pleases, desires, and is able to do; but every one of us does that which **contributes towards the common welfare.** Secondly, by teaching every one of us such good morals as must produce **a good social state.** “

⁹⁰ 2:36 “His knowledge will only include that which is real knowledge, and his thought will only be directed to such general principles as would tend to improve the **social relations between man and man.**”

⁹¹ 1:42 ““life” and “good,” “death” and “evil,” are identical”

- c. The goal of mitzvot is long-term^{92, 93} general^{94, 95} well-being.^{96, 97, 98}
- d. Mitzvot do three things: impart an idea or a character trait, or improve society.⁹⁹
- e. The Torah is perfect on the whole of society.^{100, 101, 102}

⁹² 3:8 "...to seek perpetuation in accordance with the direction of their nobler part"
Perpetuation, in whatever form, is more important than temporary pleasures

⁹³ 3:13 "The ultimate purpose of the species is the perpetuation of this form" *In the case of man, the form is the intellect, so following the intellect will lead to perpetuation.*

⁹⁴ 2:45 "to **deliver a congregation** of good men from the hands of evildoers; to save one noble person, or to bring happiness to a **large number of people**...to help either a distinguished man or a whole **congregation** when oppressed...We only apply such phrases to those who have accomplished something **very good and grand**" *See discussion*

⁹⁵ 3:34 "...in Nature the various forces produce **benefits which are general**, but in some solitary cases they cause also injury. ...the object of the Law does not fully appear in every individual" *see context*

⁹⁶ Introduction "the Almighty, desiring to lead us to perfection and to improve our state of society, has revealed to us laws which are to regulate our actions."

⁹⁷ 2:36 "his thought will only be directed to such general principles as would tend to improve the social relations between man and man." *Implicitly, this is the will of God, and, by necessary extension, mitzvot*

⁹⁸ 3:26 "...they are enjoined because they are useful"

⁹⁹ 3:31 "**every one** of the six hundred and thirteen precepts serves to inculcate some truth, to remove some erroneous opinion, to establish proper relations in society, to diminish evil, to train in good manners or to warn against bad habits. All this depends on three things: **opinions, morals, and social conduct.**"

¹⁰⁰ 2:39 "The same is the case with the Law. It is clear that the Law is normal in this sense; for it contains "Just statutes and judgments" (Deut. 4:8); but **"just" is here identical with "equibalanced."**... We intend to discuss in this treatise the reasons of the commandments, and we shall then show, as far as necessary, the justice and wisdom of the Law, on account of which it is said: "The Law of God is perfect, refreshing the heart"

¹⁰¹ 3:34 "**the Law does not take into account exceptional circumstances**;...the object of the Law does not fully appear in every individual...the laws cannot like medicine vary according to the different conditions of persons and times"

¹⁰² 1:54 "by a sense of the great benefit which a large number will derive from such a sentence." *Implies that the needs of the whole dominate the needs of the individual, in Divine Providence as well. The Mitzvot mirror providence (see discussion), this would be true for the function of mitzvot as well.*

- f. Mitzvot work through natural law.^{103, 104}
- g. The Laws in the Torah work through economic principles¹⁰⁵, giving man incentive to be helpful.^{106, 107}
- h. God does not intervene miraculously in our Mitzvot performance.¹⁰⁸
- i. There cannot be a reason why God created the world requiring mitzvot performance.^{109, 110}
- j. Reward and punishment are performed by natural law.¹¹¹

¹⁰³ 3:50 “But **miracles cannot continue** and last for all generations; it is even inconceivable [that they should be permanent].” *And mitzvot are for all generations. By definition, a continuing miracle would just be natural law.*

¹⁰⁴ 3:32 “Many precepts in our Law are the result of a similar course adopted by the same Supreme Being. It is, namely, impossible to go suddenly from one extreme to the other: it is therefore according to the nature of man impossible for him suddenly to discontinue everything to which he has been accustomed.” *See context.*

¹⁰⁵ 3:41 “1. The greatness of the sin....2. The frequency of the crime...3. The amount of temptation...4. The facility of doing the thing secretly...” *These are economic principles.*

¹⁰⁶ 3:35 “for if sinners and robbers were not punished... persons scheming evil would not become rarer.”

¹⁰⁷ 3:40 “As we are strongly recommended [*Ibn Tibon*, “because of the care”] to prevent damage, we are responsible for every damage”

¹⁰⁸ 3:32 “If it were part of His will to change [at His desire] the nature of any person, the mission of prophets and the giving of the Law would have been altogether superfluous.”

¹⁰⁹ 2:25 “...what is the object of these laws? and **Why has He not made the commandments and the prohibitions part of our nature, if it was His object that we should live in accordance with them?**”

¹¹⁰ 3:13 “What is the end of serving God? He does not become more perfect if all His creatures serve Him and comprehend Him as far as possible; nor would He lose anything if nothing existed beside Him.”

¹¹¹ 3:17 “...every species has its nourishment prepared for its individual members; otherwise the species would undoubtedly have perished.” *See context describing divine providence for a species.*

Chapter 4: The intellect comprehends the truth:

1. The power of the Intellect:

- a. The Intellect can comprehend the true order of the world. ¹¹² ¹¹³
- b. Conclusions should incorporate observational data. ¹¹⁴ ¹¹⁵ ¹¹⁶ ¹¹⁷ ¹¹⁸ ¹¹⁹
¹²⁰ ¹²¹ ¹²²
[,] [,]

¹¹² 1:73 “For the intellect analyses and divides the component parts of things, it forms abstract ideas of them, **represents them in their true form** as well as in their causal relations, derives from one object **a great many facts**”

¹¹³ 1:2 “Through the intellect man distinguishes between the true and the false.”

¹¹⁴ 1:71: “the properties of things cannot adapt themselves to our opinions, but our opinions must be adapted to the existing properties.”

¹¹⁵ 1:73 “Reality is my evidence; by its guidance I examine whether a thing is necessary, possible, or impossible”

¹¹⁶ 1:73 “**All these theories are contrary to what the eye perceives**, and many inferences are drawn from the assumed existence of a vacuum, all of which are contradicted by the senses...this is stated by Galenus in his treatise on natural forces; and you know well what he says of those who will not admit the evidence of the senses.” *Implies that we should generally act in accordance with observations.*

¹¹⁷ 2:8 “**It is quite right that our Sages have abandoned their own theory**: for speculative matters every one treats according to the results of his own study, and every one accepts that which appears to him established by proof.”

¹¹⁸ 2:22 “**Only an ignorant person rejects it**, or a person with preconceived opinions of his own, which he desires to maintain and to defend, and which lead him **to ignore clear facts**.” *Implies, we should accept clear facts.*

¹¹⁹ 2:23 “...we must not consider the number of the objections, but the degree of improbability and of **deviation from real facts** [*observations. See Ibn Tibbon*]”

¹²⁰ 3:17 “Aristotle was guided by that which **appears to be the nature of things**.”

¹²¹ 3:17 “...they lead to confusion and entire nonsense, and cause us to deny reason and to contradict that which is **perceived with the senses**.”

¹²² 3:37 “the Law permits as medicine everything that has been verified by experiment” *See Context*

- c. Man succeeds according to the perfection of his intellect^{123, 124, 125, 126} insofar as it influences his behavior.¹²⁷
- d. We must follow our intellect,^{128, 129} even if it would mean leaving the Torah of Moses.¹³⁰
- e. We connect to God via our intellect.^{131, 132}

¹²³ 3:8 “The station of man varies according to the exercise of this power [*the intellect*].

¹²⁴ 3:17 “[*The intellect is*] a special property by which each individual, according to the degree of his perfection, is enabled to manage, to calculate, and to discover what is conducive both to the temporary existence of the individual and to the preservation of the species.”

¹²⁵ 3:17 “Divine Providence is related and closely connected with the intellect”

¹²⁶ 3:18 “...the result of the existing Divine influence, that reaches mankind through the human intellect, is identical with individual intellects really in existence, with which, e.g., Zeid, Amr, Kaled and Bekr, are endowed. Hence it follows...that the greater the share is which a person has obtained of this Divine influence, on account of both his physical predisposition and his training, the greater must also be the effect of Divine Providence upon him, for **the action of Divine Providence is proportional to the endowment of intellect**“

¹²⁷ 3:18 “This benefit is very great in the case of prophets, and varies according to the degree of their prophetic faculty: as **it varies in the case of pious and good men according to their piety and uprightness**. For it is the intensity of the Divine intellectual influence that has inspired the prophets, **guided the good in their actions**, and perfected the wisdom of the pious.”

¹²⁸ 2:47 “God who is most pleased with truth, and most displeased with falsehood”

¹²⁹ 2:34 “The meaning of the passage quoted above is this: God informs the Israelites that He will raise up for them a prophet, to whom an angel will appear in order to speak to him, to command him, and to exhort him; he therefore cautions them not to rebel against this angel, whose word the prophet will communicate to them.” *Israel listens to the prophet, the prophet listens to an “angel” and the “angel” of prophecy is the prophet’s intellect’s interpretation of a vision. See Abarbanel there, rejecting the notion that the Angel is the prophet.*

¹³⁰ 2:25 “ If, on the other hand, Aristotle had a proof for his theory, the whole teaching of Scripture would be rejected, and **we should be forced to other opinions**. I have thus shown that all depends on this question. Note it.”

¹³¹ 3:51 “strengthen the intellect, which is **the link** that joins you to Him.” *See 1:1*

¹³² 1:54 “The pleasure and the displeasure of God, the approach to Him and the withdrawal from Him are proportional to the amount of **man’s knowledge or ignorance**” *Friedlander’s addition is contrary to the Guide’s view on providence.*

- f. We can understand the function of mitzvot. ^{133, 134, 135}
- g. We must use our intellect to interpret the Torah correctly. ^{136, 137}
- h. Man does not sin from his intellect. ^{138, 139} Moral sense comes from the intellect. ^{140, 141}
- i. Man's animal nature bars the intellect from perfect function. ¹⁴²
- j. We do not understand the full depth of the Torah. ¹⁴³

¹³³ 3:26 "On the contrary, they hold that even **these ordinances have a cause, and are certainly intended for some use**, although it is not known to us; owing either to **the deficiency of our knowledge or the weakness of our intellect.**" *Implied had our intellect not been weak or deficient, we could understand it.*

¹³⁴ 3:31 "if no reason could be found for these statutes, if they produced no advantage and removed no evil, why then should he who believes in them and follows them be wise, reasonable, and **so excellent as to raise the admiration of all nations?**" *Implies that the function can be communicated.*

¹³⁵ 3:43 "the Law is the result of the wisdom and guidance of God, who is the author of the intellect of all rational beings."

¹³⁶ 2:47 "**Employ your reason, and you will be able to discern what is said allegorically, figuratively, or hyperbolically, and what is meant literally**, exactly according to the original meaning of the words. You will then understand all prophecies, learn and retain rational principles of faith, pleasing in the eyes of **God who is most pleased with truth**, and most displeased with falsehood; your mind and heart will not be so perplexed as to believe or accept as law what is untrue or improbable, whilst **the Law is perfectly true when properly understood.**"

¹³⁷ 3:14 "whenever the words of a person can be interpreted in such a manner that they agree with fully established facts, it is the duty of every educated and honest man to do so."

¹³⁸ 3:8 "Man's shortcomings and sins are **all** due to the substance of the body...man sins **only** by his animal nature"

¹³⁹ 3:17 "I do not consider it proper to blame the followers of any of the [last named] three theories on Providence, for they have been driven to accept them by weighty considerations." *He defends the theories based on the origin of the error, not on consonance with Torah. Observations of an orderly world reject the theory of chaos, so that is not an error of the intellect.*

¹⁴⁰ 1:2 "... which is not endowed with intellect, reason, or [*and therefore the*] power of distinguishing between good and evil" *See Ibn Tibbon and Schwartz*

¹⁴¹ 3:11 "If men possessed wisdom...they would not cause any injury to themselves or to others: for the knowledge of truth removes hatred and quarrels, and prevents mutual injuries."

¹⁴² 3:9 "**The corporeal element in man** is a large screen and partition that **prevents him** from perfectly perceiving abstract ideals"

¹⁴³ 3:49 "as we are able to comprehend some of His wonderful works in the organs of living beings and the motions of the spheres, so **we understand also the equity of**

- k. The “Da’at” in the “Tree of Knowledge” refers to esthetic¹⁴⁴ awareness not intellectual knowledge.^{145 146}
- 2. Prophecy:
 - a. Logical proof is as reliable as prophecy.¹⁴⁷
 - b. Prophecy works through intellect and imagination.¹⁴⁸
 - c. Except for that of Moses, prophecy works through the laws of nature¹⁴⁹ and the physical matter of the mind.¹⁵⁰
 - d. Something can be judged as prophecy based on whether it is good for society.^{151 152}

some of His laws; that which is unknown to us of both of them is far more than that which is known to us”

¹⁴⁴ 1:2, Explained by Soloveitchik in *Worship of the Heart*, p. 46-48 & *Emergence of Ethical Man*, p. 115. *Esthetic sensibilities are a System 1 function.*

¹⁴⁵ 1:2 Abarbanel explaining 1:2 “...for we only have the analytic intellect, and the practical intellect, and “true” and “false” are determined by the analytic one, “pleasant” and disgusting” are determined by the practical one”” *The analytic intellect and practical intellect refer to System 1 and System 2.*

¹⁴⁶ 1:2 Shem Tov explaining 1:2 “Man has two types of perception: The sensitive and fantastical sense that is bodily, and the intellectual, whereby he is similar to God” *The sensitive and fantastical perception refers to System 1 and intellectual perception System 2.*

¹⁴⁷ 2:33 “i.e., they learnt the truth of the principles contained in these two commandments in the same manner as Moses, and not through Moses. For these two principles, the existence of God and His Unity, can be arrived at by means of reasoning, and **whatever can be established by proof is known by the prophet in the same way as by any other person; he has no advantage in this respect.**” *See also 1:37, which describes this prophecy as “face to face.” and 1:21*

¹⁴⁸ 2:36 “Prophecy is, in truth and reality, an emanation sent forth by the Divine Being through the medium of the Active Intellect, in the first instance to man's rational faculty, and then to his imaginative faculty”

¹⁴⁹ 2:34 “all prophets except Moses receive the prophecy through an angel” *Rambam explains that Angels are natural law. Also, the un-repeatable nature of Moses’ prophecy is based on it being miraculous, see 2:35.*

¹⁵⁰ 2:36 “Faculties of the body are, as you know, at one time weak, wearied, and corrupted, at others in a healthy state. Imagination is certainly one of the faculties of the body.”

¹⁵¹ 1:54 “The governor of a country, if he is a prophet, should...” *see context*

¹⁵² 2:40 “...this education comes from God; **these laws are divine.**” *See discussion and Ibn Tibbon there*

- e. The “spirit of God” is an inspiration to do good for society. ¹⁵³
- f. A “Holy Spirit” is induction or intellectual inspiration. ¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ 2:45 “The first degree of prophecy consists in the divine assistance which is given to a person, and induces and encourages him to do something good and grand, e.g., to **deliver a congregation of good men from the hands of evildoers; to save one noble person, or to bring happiness to a large number of people**; he finds in himself the cause that moves and urges him to this deed. This degree of divine influence is called “the spirit of the Lord”

¹⁵⁴ 2:45 “A person feels as if something came upon him, and as if he had received a new power that encourages him to speak. He treats of science, or composes hymns, exhorts his fellow-men, discusses political and theological problems; all this he does while awake, and in the full possession of his senses. Such a person is said to speak by the holy spirit.”

Discussion

The Intellect can comprehend the true order of the world.

The Guide's system can be derived from this proposition in the following way.

1. Man's intellect helps him make predictions.
2. The intellect can understand order.
3. Our observation is that the universe has order.
4. Understanding the order of the universe and acting in a way that aims for long-run success consonant to that understanding leads to long-run success.
5. Long-run success implies God's will.
6. We relate to God via the universe.
7. We can understand our interaction with God by understanding the order of the universe.

The “Da’at” in the “Tree of Knowledge” refers to esthetic awareness not intellectual knowledge.

In 1:2, the Rambam expresses the idea that the Etz HaDaat represents system 1¹⁵⁵, the mental faculty in charge of aesthetics and feelings. From this perspective, “Da’at Tov V’Ra” means “awareness of pleasant and ugly.”

This is implied in the original Arabic, where the Rambam uses the hebrew “tov v’ra” when quoting the verse, the Arabic “alkir” and “alshar” when talking about ethical good and evil¹⁵⁶, but Arabic “kabich” and “hasan” when explaining mefursamot^{157,158},

¹⁵⁵ See Behavioral Economics books *Thinking Fast & Slow* by Daniel Kahneman and *Nudge* by Richard Thaler for context.

¹⁵⁶ 1:2, in the original: “קאל אלמערתרץ' יבדו מן ט'אהר אלנץ אן אלקצד אלאול באלאנסאן אן יכון: “כסאיר אלחיואן לא עקל לה ולא פכרה ולא יפרק בין אלכ'יר ואלשר”

¹⁵⁷ 1:2, in the original: “אמא אלקביח ואלחסן פהו פי אלמשהוראת לא פי אלמעקולאת”

¹⁵⁸ See note 15 in Michael Schwartz's translation to Guide 1:2, which corresponds exactly with this contention.

implying that “kabich” and “hasan” are not ethical good and evil. This is how the Abarbanel¹⁵⁹, Narboni¹⁶⁰, Shem Tov¹⁶¹, Avraham Avulafia¹⁶² and Givat Hamoreh learn the chapter.

This is consonant with the Rambam’s perspective on the intellect in the Guide, particularly in 3:8¹⁶³ and 3:11. In the Guide, the intellect is the analytic faculty in man.¹⁶⁴ The intellect is how Man emulates and connects with God¹⁶⁵, develops a sense of morality,¹⁶⁶ and how Man succeeds.¹⁶⁷ The Guide states that all of the mitzvot stem from an understanding of the world¹⁶⁸ and all mitzvot have rational basis.¹⁶⁹ This

¹⁵⁹ Abarbanel on Guide 1:2 “השקר ואמת יוחסו” והשקר מעשי, ושכל עיוני ושכל מעשי, or “...for we only have the analytic intellect, and the practical intellect, and “true” and “false” are determined by the analytic one, “pleasant” and disgusting” are determined by the practical one”

¹⁶⁰ Narboni on 2:30, on the story of Adam and Eve

¹⁶¹ Shem Tov on Guide 1:2 “הרי יתבאר שלאדם ב' מיני השגות, השגה חושיית ודמיונית שאלו כלם” or “השגות גשמיות, והשגה שכלית אשר בה ידמה האדם לאל יתברך” or “Man has two types of perception: The sensitive and fantastical sense that is bodily, and the intellectual, whereby he is similar to God”

¹⁶² Sitrei Torah “The Secret of Eden and its Trees” : “מוסיף האחד חכמה והאחד” : “מוסיף האחד תאוה”. See also Chayei Nefesh, in Yom Moed.

¹⁶³ 3:8 “Thus the knowledge of God, the formation of ideas, the mastery of desire and passion, the distinction between that which is to be chosen and that which is to be rejected, all these man owes to his form [*the intellect*]... Intelligent persons must, as much as possible...etc”

¹⁶⁴ 1:73 “For the intellect analyses and divides the component parts of things, it forms abstract ideas of them, represents them in their true form as well as in their causal relations, derives from one object a great many facts”

¹⁶⁵ 3:51 “strengthen the intellect, which is the link that joins you to Him.” See 1:1

¹⁶⁶ 3:11 “If men possessed wisdom...they would not cause any injury to themselves or to others: for the knowledge of truth removes hatred and quarrels, and prevents mutual injuries.”

¹⁶⁷ 3:8 “The station of man varies according to the exercise of this power [*the intellect*]”

¹⁶⁸ 1:54 “The **pleasure and the displeasure of God**, the approach to Him and the withdrawal from Him are proportional to the **amount of man's knowledge** or ignorance concerning the Creator...God promised to make him **comprehend the nature of all things**”

¹⁶⁹ 3:26 “On the contrary, they hold that even these ordinances have a cause, and are certainly intended for some use, although it is not known to us; owing either to the deficiency of our knowledge or the weakness of our intellect.” Implied had our intellect not been weak or deficient, we could understand it.

approach is consonant with the Rambam's take on the story in 2:30, where he connects the Etz HaDaat with the Satan, and yetzer hara.

This is in line with the opinion in the Gemara¹⁷⁰ and Zohar¹⁷¹ that the fruit of the Etz HaDaat is grapes¹⁷², because they cause mourning or regret. Alcohol weakens the intellect. This is also the opinion reflected in the Zohar, that the Etz HaDaat parallels instability,¹⁷³ evil,¹⁷⁴ folly,¹⁷⁵ and pleasure.¹⁷⁶, ¹⁷⁷ This is also how Rav Soloveitchik explains the chapter in Worship of the Heart¹⁷⁸, Confrontation¹⁷⁹, and Emergence of Ethical Man¹⁸⁰. This is also exactly how Seforno, a student of the Guide, explains the story.¹⁸¹

Why would anyone explain the chapter differently?

What led Freidlander to translate “mefursamot” as ethical good and evil is a later part of the Moreh, in 2:33, where the Rambam explains that the first two commandments were intellectual (muskalot) but the following eight were “mefursamot.” It is

¹⁷⁰ Sanhedrin 70b

¹⁷¹ Zohar 2:144a “תנינן, אילנא דחב ביה אדם קדמא, ענבין הו”

¹⁷² The Zohar interprets the view that it is wheat as also referring to the evil urge, in Zohar 3:189a, by swapping a tet for a tav, meaning that the connection between wheat and the Etz HaDa'at is when we make that swap.

¹⁷³ Zohar 1.221a, 1.27a, 3:107a “ואתו לאתדבקא באתר דמשתני ומתהפה מגוונא לגוונא”

¹⁷⁴ Zohar 1:14a “אלא אילנא דדעת טוב ורע אתער ההוא סטרא אחרא”

¹⁷⁵ Zohar 2:193b “הוה סליק וקאים בחכמה דנהירו עלאה, ולא הוה מתפרש מאילנא עד לא חטא אדם, הוה סליק וקאים בחכמה דנהירו עלאה, ולא הוה מתפרש מאילנא דחיי”

¹⁷⁶ Zohar Chadash Balak 103 “כל אינון סטרי דאתאחדון באילנא תתאה, יתעברון ויתעדון מניה. “כדין ויאמר האדם זאת הפעם. דא זמנא דעדונין וענוגין”

¹⁷⁷ Zohar 2:258b

¹⁷⁸ Worship of the Heart, Chapter The human condition and prayer “Maimonides does not discriminate between theoretical truth and falsity and moral right and wrong, as many historians have erroneously assumed...Instead he set up an opposition between the cognitive-ethical truth and falsity, on the one hand, and propriety and impropriety, what is pleasing or displeasing in an aesthetic sense, on the other hand.”

¹⁷⁹ Confrontation, footnote 2 “..Paradisiacal man, violating the divine commandment by eating from the tree of knowledge, suspended the ethical and replaced it with the aesthetic experience.”

¹⁸⁰ Emergence of Ethical Man, page 116-118 “there is also the clear possibility of translating tov va-ra as beautiful and ugly”

¹⁸¹ Shlomo Aviner's commentary concurs here, and goes into some detail.

impossible to denigrate eight of the ten commandments as purely esthetic, and must refer to something ethical. Freidlander incorrectly applied “mefursamot” describing the solution to the “mefursamot” describing the problem. Note that later on, in 3:37, Ibn Tibbon and Kapach use the word “mefursamot” to describe the common erroneous beliefs and habits of pagan cultures.

Rav Soloveitchik,¹⁸² in the notes to the Moreh, also misinterprets this part, which is why Rav Soloveitchik grappled for so long without presenting a good answer. There is no question that the notes for the Worship of the Heart and Emergence of Ethical Man were written later, because they present a much more compelling interpretation.

The correct interpretation here is that the latter eight commandments rectify problems that humans have, and are not objective logical necessities. That is, the commandments are intellectual solutions to problems that arrive from the imagination, or system 1, referred to as the Etz HaDaat. This is supported by the Guide in 3:8, where the Rambam says that the whole point of mitzvot is to subdue desires. This is alluded to in the clothing that Adam & Eve make for themselves. See Seforno there, who explains that before eating from the tree, nakedness was not a problem. After they ate, it presented a problem, and the intellect drove Adam to solve it by wearing clothes.

The Gemara¹⁸³, in suggesting that the Etz HaDaat is figs and wheat imply that the tree is more than just the yetzer hara. However, the tree is not just knowledge, it represents the idea of the torah either educating the system 1, or even using the system 1’s weakness for our own good. An example of this is the chagorot, belts made of fig leaves¹⁸⁴, which represent rules of modesty and tzitzit, in the Zohar¹⁸⁵. This perspective on the Torah, as not being purely intellectual theory, but catering to the animal element of our mind is what the Rambam means later on. All law and din is there to redirect selfishness toward helpful behavior. The Zohar frames it as handling the evil instinct.

¹⁸² Lectures on the Guide for the Perplexed, Chapter 3,b, page 121. Later, in Chapter 7, part A, we can see Rav Soloveitchik identifying with Hermann Cohen in finding the denigration of an “ethical norm” problematic, and suggests that there are two types of ethical norms: social, and theoretical. The Rav’s later realization that social ethics are essentially esthetics is a better formulation.

¹⁸³ Sanhedrin 70b

¹⁸⁴ See Zohar 3:189a “וְעַל דָּא שְׁלִימוֹ דְּאֵילָנָא חֲטָה אִיהוּ וְאֵילָנָא דְּחֲטָא בֵּיהּ אָדָם הָרָאשׁוֹן חֲטָה הָהּ”
When the System 1 is perfected, it is called wheat.

¹⁸⁵ Zohar 1:128b “וְכַסְיָא דִּילֵהּוֹן כְּנָפֵי צִיצִית”

¹⁸⁶ Jewish rituals, in the Rambam's framework, are symbolic and serve to create an esthetic sensual reality that affects our system 1. This is exactly how Seforno, a student of the Guide for the Perplexed, explains the story.¹⁸⁷

In 2:25, the Rambam sheds more light on his perspective. He mentions that we cannot know why God created the necessity for various mitzvot. In the Rambam's framework, most mitzvot are not logical necessities, but are instead responses to our deficiencies. Those deficiencies are not logical necessities, but just are generated through "chidush haOlam" chaotic creation of the world. This is what makes them "mefursamot" instead of "muskalot." The first two commandments are logical necessities that can be proven. The others are a response to our condition. See 3:31, where the Rambam gives three categories for the function of all mitzvot.

Given the question that's asked in 1:2, we know the emphasis of the Rambam's answer in 1:2.

The Guide interprets "elohim" to mean human judges. This implies that the skills to lead come from the Etz HaDaat. This is the advice of the snake, who was lying. The truth is that eating from the Etz HaDaat does not actually lead to successful leadership, but that leadership is best driven from the intellect.

¹⁸⁶ 3:126a "וְאֵלֶּנָּה דְּטוֹב וְרַע, דְּאִיהוּ אִיסוּר וְהִיתָר טוּמְאַה וְטָהָרָה, לֹא שְׁלֻטָּא עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל יְתִיר, ... דְּלִית' תִּמְנָן לֹא קִשְׁיָא מִסְטָרָא דְרַע, וְלֹא מִחְלוקָת מְרוּם הַטּוּמְאַה."

¹⁸⁷ Genesis 3:7 "ידעו כי ערומים הם ידעו שראוי לכסות מקום הערוה בהיות מעתה רוב פעולתו מכוונת" "לתענוג מאוס ומזי It was desire and esthetic sense that came from the tree, not the realization of the necessity to clothe.

We must follow our intellect¹⁸⁸

There are three lines of reasoning that we can follow to derive that the Guide holds that we must follow the intellect.

This is a *sevara*, which means it's true independent of source. We know this because in 2:25, the Rambam says that had Aristotle proved the eternity of the universe, we would seek other philosophies. In addition, the Rambam views following the intellect as core to Judaism.

As for a source in the Torah, the closest thing to it would be the verse the Rambam mentions in 2:34, regarding listening to a prophet. There, a prophet is called a “malach”, messenger or Angel, because the prophet is inspired by the intellect¹⁸⁹, which, as described in 2:6, is referred to as a “malach” or angel. We can apply a kal-va-chomer to derive that a person must listen to his own intellect. If a person must listen to a prophet because the prophet is enlightened by the intellect, all the more so a person must follow his own intellect. This is why the verse uses only the term “malach” or Angel, which ambiguously refers to both the prophet and the intellect.

The Rambam identifies messages of the intellect with those coming directly from

¹⁸⁸ In 1:73, the Rambam gives a definition of sorts of the intellect, “For the intellect analyses and divides the component parts of things, it forms abstract ideas of them, represents them in their true form as well as in their causal relations, derives from one object a great many facts, which--for the intellect--totally differ from each other, just as two human individuals appear different to the imagination: it distinguishes that which is the property of the genus from that which is peculiar to the individual,--and no proof is correct, unless founded on the former; the intellect further determines whether certain qualities of a thing are essential or non-essential.”

¹⁸⁹ See Ephodi on 2:34. The angel refers to one of the processes that is involved in prophecy as detailed by the Rambam in 2:36. In 2:38, the Rambam describes the dominance of the intellect in forming the crux of the message of the prophecy, “the same agent that causes the perfection of the imaginative faculty and that enables the prophet thereby to foretell a future event...this agent perfects the prophet’s mind, and influences it in such a manner that he conceives ideas which are confirmed by reality...” This agent cannot be the imaginative faculty, as the agent perfects the imaginative faculty. Rather, the agent must be the intellect. Thus, the angel of the prophet must be the intellect.

God. In 1:37, the Rambam says “In the same sense the word is used in the following passage, "And the Lord spake unto Moses face to face," i.e., both being present, without any intervening medium between them...and also "The Lord talked with you face to face" (Deut. 5:4); instead of which we read more plainly in another place, "Ye heard the voice of the words, but saw no similitude: only ye heard a voice" (ib. 4:12).” Friedlander mistranslates “intermediary” as “similitude.” Because Israel prophesied via their intellect, per the Rambam’s opinion in 2:29, and the intellect interacts directly with God, their prophecy is considered “face to face” on the same level as Moses. Thus, even if Moses’ prophecy was directly to the intellect, without any imagination, it would still be considered direct and “face to “face.”

Note the Rambam’s insistence in 2:34 that all prophets used an angel except for Moses, while in 2:6 points out that angel as opposed to cherub is a reference for the imagination, and Moses heard prophecy from between the cherubs. “The intelligent reader will find here a clear statement that man's imaginative faculty is also called "angel," and that "cherub" is used for man's intellectual faculty.”

In 2:45, the vision of an angel is one step before God. The Rambam’s levels follow a chain of command: God tells the angel, which, as an intellect, is like a man, which gives a voice, which generates a vision. This vision is then interpreted by the prophet, using his intellect, as relating a message, spoken by an intelligent being, which is a messenger of God (angel) which ultimately expresses the will of God. Given that the angel is above a “man” and the symbolism of “man” in prophecy is consistently given by the Rambam as referring to the intellect, such as by Cherubs, “face of a man” , and even hands of man in the Merkava, the angel would be a source of intelligence.

This identification of insights of the intellects with messages from God are mirrored in Rav Soloveitchik’s work.¹⁹⁰

As the Rambam describes in the 3rd part, our intellect can be untrained or misled, due to its material origins. As a result, any intelligent person uses information from all sources when making decisions, including tradition, memes, and other people, when it comes to figuring out what practices lead to success.

¹⁹⁰ Abraham’s Journey Page 40 “the intuitive insights and sudden flashes of his mind were the words the Almighty addresses to the prophets”

Why Knowledge of Nature is Important

Knowledge of the natural order is important for three reasons:

1. To function and succeed practically.
2. To understand how mitzvot work.
3. To appreciate God's creation.

The Rambam remarks in the Guide that use of the intellect is what leads people to success. This happens by understanding how the world works and operating in consonance.

The Rambam sees all mitzvot, or commandments, operating to improve society through the natural order of the cosmos. Thus, we cannot have any intuition regarding the function or meaning of mitzvot without a good grasp of how nature works. Psychology, sociology, economics, and biology are essential.

The Guide sees God's wisdom and justice as expressed in the purposefulness and optimization of the natural order. Thus, without understanding this careful balance and how it operates, we cannot understand the Wisdom and Justice of God. This is why the Rambam states in Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah, that we learn to love God by understanding nature.

How prophecy works

Prophecy works in three steps. First, the prophet must have a perfected body, intellect and imagination.¹⁹¹ Second, the prophet's intellect interacts with his imagination to give rise to a vision or dream. This process would not be too different from the process involved in an analogue computer, whereby mechanical processes can be exploited to determine things.¹⁹² Third, this vision is interpreted by the prophet using his intellect and verifies that the meaning of the vision is true.¹⁹³ This would be similar to verifying the integrity of a private key. Although it is difficult to discover a private key, it is simple to verify its integrity once you have it.

¹⁹¹ 2:38 “It is through the intellect that the influence reaches the imaginative faculty.”

¹⁹² 2:38 “The true prophets undoubtedly conceive ideas that result from premisses which human reason could not comprehend by itself”

¹⁹³ 2:38 “he conceives ideas which are confirmed by reality”

In this way, prophecy can work without miracles to discover ideas that were not possible to discover by logical derivation before the vision.

Something can be judged as prophecy based on whether it is good for society

See Kapach. Ibn Tibbon¹⁹⁴ in 2:40 roughly translates to:

“When you find a law that its intention and the exclusive intention of the law-giver (who estimated the behavior of the nation) is the order of the nation and its various needs, and to rid cruelty and violence from it, but did not in any way examine any sort of analysis or provide guidance to educate and the law gives no evidence that the law was informed by any proof of efficacy or analysis of causes, and the sole exclusive intention was to organize people’s affairs in some way, than even if in the estimation of the leader there is some measure of success from the law, you can be sure that this law is human in origin and those who make such laws have good imaginations only.”

Laws that aim to benefit society but don’t teach some truth are usually dysfunctional. Included in this category are laws imposing false beliefs under the guise of maintaining order. Because they are based on people believing a lie, the government typically has to expend tremendous effort maintaining the lie, and this usually comes at the expense of the general public. Thus, these laws, in total, do not improve the quality of life for the public, but do for the governing class. This is why we see such laws predominantly in poor dictatorships.

The above explains how the Guide can state that such laws originate from the imaginative faculty and not the intellect. These laws are not based on data and do not work for the long-run well-being of the society. Otherwise, the Guide would be implying that the methods whereby to correctly govern society originate from the imaginative faculty, something that is implied from an incorrect reading of the story of the Etz HaDa’at. However, this reading would not be consonant with the Guide’s general denigration of the imagination as the source of fantasy and desire and venerating the intellect as the source of good governance and morality.

¹⁹⁴ For this principle, Friedlander’s translation is skewed by his misunderstanding of 2:1 and the general relationship between the intellect and morality, so please refer to other translations.

The difference between the two types of law is not in one being pedagogical and one being purely functional, but that one formulates the law using careful analysis and the other is purely based on fantasy and imagination. An ideal law uses analysis in finding an optimal economic balance that is impossible to arrive at via the imagination alone. Because optimal law is based on analysis and truth, people that consider the law well are able to learn how the world works from the law. This is how the law becomes pedagogic.

This is what the Guide refers to when it talks about Angels here, as Angels are a metaphor for natural forces.

The paragraph in 2:40 is talking about laws that the law-creator claims to have originated in prophecy. If we include “holy spirit” in the category of prophecy here, we include laws that aim to improve society and teach a truth, even when not originating from prophets, as in 2:45. This would enable us to explain how rabbinic decrees do not originate from prophets and are also not plagiarized.

Providence, Mitzvot, Good and Evil, and Prophecy

The philosophy of providence, mitzvot, and good and evil must be consonant. The will of God is intuited from what is rewarding. Thus, if good is the will of God, then this must be consonant with providence. Mitzvot, defined as actions that conform to the will of God, must therefore have the function of producing good and thereby working with the mechanics of providence to lead to some reward. This consonance is true irrespective of what the theory of mitzvot is.¹⁹⁵

We see the Rabmam utilizing this triple identity in 3:17, when describing pain to animals. The lack of providence for animals corresponds to not having a mitzvah prohibiting harming animals, and this is not a violation of the justice of God. Although

¹⁹⁵ For example, if one assumes that the reward for Mitzvot is only in a separate world, like Heaven, they will also figure that providence does not work completely in this world and wellbeing in this world is not important, while wellbeing in heaven is “good.”

Similarly, if one assumes that the way providence works is that in the long-run, God will ensure the well-being of those in this world, then our philosophy of providence is that God rewards good behavior but only in the long-run. Also, the function of mitzvot is to contribute to the long-run wellbeing of the world.

the Rambam does not bring the example, the commandment given to Noah to save the species of animals also conforms to this identity.

We can clarify what the Guide holds by applying what it says on providence, mitzvot and good and evil where he may be ambiguous on one of those. For example, if mitzvot operate on the societal level and are perfect only on the whole and not on the individual level, then providence regarding compliance on those mitzvot also operate on a societal level. If mitzvot function through natural law, then so does providence. If providence does not rely on the afterlife the realization of divine justice, then the mitzvot do not function on the afterlife. Similarly, if good and evil are defined in terms of life and death, then we can also figure that the function of mitzvot is to promote life, and that providence rewards the promotion of life. If providence rewards a refined intellect, we must figure that a refined intellect leads to more good and that mitzvot work to promote a refined intellect.

Similarly, we can learn from the Rambam's limitation of the scope of prophecy in 2:45 that the definition of Good and Evil and providence are similarly defined. The Rambam in 2:45 emphasizes that the spirit of God refers to an impulse "to deliver a congregation of good men from the hands of evildoers; to save one noble person, or to bring happiness to a large number of people...to help either a distinguished man or a whole congregation when oppressed... We only apply such phrases to those who have accomplished something very good and grand" This implies that the larger community has inherent "Good" and the impulse to help them is an expression of God's will. Given this is an expression of God's will, and God's will is always carried out, this must be aligned with providence. Given the function of mitzvot is to augment good in this world, the function of mitzvot must conform similarly.

Job

The answer given to Job by God follows what the Guide mentions in 3:12 that the good of the world is revealed when one evaluates things broadly, rather than on the basis of each individual. This is consonant with what the Guide says about the laws of nature being always good, as is written "Tov M'od" or "very good"¹⁹⁶ in the end of the

¹⁹⁶ 3:10 "Thus Scripture says, "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good" (Gen. 1:31). And that which God made for a certain thing is necessary or [at least] very useful for the existence of that thing. Thus food is necessary for the existence of living beings: the possession of eyes is very useful to

Genesis. That is, God operates the world algorithmically¹⁹⁷ through the laws of nature, and the laws of nature are perfect when evaluated broadly. Sensations of pain and pleasure are optimized for the survival of the human species, but not for the maximum success of the individual. This also explains why the Guide says the author of Job hid elements of the book, and why the Guide itself does not clarify the ultimate answer.¹⁹⁸

The description of God and Satan earlier on must be from the perspective of the imagination of Job, rather than an accurate portrayal of the truth. Job's assumption is that God has equal goals of pain and pleasure. Satan represents the concept of randomness, which the Guide admits. The other angels represent consistent laws of nature.

1. Elifaz says that Job deserved all that happened to him due to something that happened in the past that Job doesn't know about. This is similar to the Kabbalistic philosophy of Gilgul mentioned in the Bahir to answer this question.
2. Bildad says that Job will be rewarded in the future for his pain. This is similar to the philosophy of Olam Haba as a place of reward for pain.
3. Tzofar says that there is no function¹⁹⁹ of God's actions.
4. Elihu emphasizes that providence is a function of the intellect, and had Job had a perfect intellect he would understand why this happened and would

man during his life, although food only serves to sustain living beings a certain time, and the senses are only intended to procure to animals the advantages of sensation. The philosophers likewise assume that in Nature there is nothing in vain, so that everything that is not the product of human industry serves a certain purpose, which may be known or unknown to us. “

¹⁹⁷ 3:22 “An artisan makes a box in which weights move with the running of the water, and thus indicate how many hours have passed of the day and of the night. The whole quantity of the water that is to run out, the different ways in which it runs, every thread that is drawn, and every little ball that descends—all this is fully perceived by him who makes the clock; and his knowledge is not the result of observing the movements as they are actually going on; but, on the contrary, the movements are produced in accordance with his knowledge.”

¹⁹⁸ 3:23 “The purpose of this repetition is to conceal the opinion peculiar to each speaker, and to make all appear in the eyes of the ordinary reader to utter one and the same view, although in reality this is not the case”

¹⁹⁹ This is what the Guide refers to as “will” as opposed to “wisdom.” The only difference between the two is that there is a function to what is done in “wisdom” but not with what is done with “will.”

have been able to avoid the misery in the first place. This follows the Guide's perspective on Providence. See 3:51.

These are rejected by the Guide as incomplete answers to the problem of misery. However, elements of all of these answers are present in Maimonides' writings, in particular the Laws of Repentance.

Reward and punishment are performed by natural law.

In the Rambam's perspective, a mitzvah performs something that's good in God's perspective. What we view as good in God's perspective must be substantiated by our observations of what nature itself sustains and protects.²⁰⁰ The providence of God works through nature, so that which nature preserves is under the providence of God. We observe that nature preserves entire species but does not grant eternal life to individuals. Thus, we cannot say that God cares for individual animals, but, by setting the laws of nature, God cares for the web of life and ecological balance that we observe. Aristotle was not aware of species coming in and out of existence.

In correspondence, in 3:17, the Rambam notes that giving pain to animals is not because there is something inherently evil with giving pain to animals, but because of the psychological impact on humans.

The Rambam, in 3:17, 3:18 details two types of Hashgacha, providence. One applies to all species, and is implemented through natural law. The other, which applies to man only, is a function of his intellect. It is not so much that God rewards him for his intellect, but that God guides him through his intellect, so that he can better his life by using his intellect.²⁰¹ This is Aristotle's perspective, with the caveats that the Rambam describes. Decisions a person makes through use of his intellect or by ignoring his intellect, engender results that are in line with providence. Given that the human intellect conforms to natural law, it follows that hashgacha or providence is a function of natural law. We observe that nature preserves and protects humans much more than animals as a function of their use of the intellect to develop liberating technologies and memes. We also observe a wide variation among outcomes for people based on

²⁰⁰ In 2:30, The Rambam equates "Good" "Tov" with "permanent", see 1:54 too.

²⁰¹ See Shem Tov on 3:17, which emphasizes the "sechel poel" and actions.

their behavior and decisions that we do not observe in the wild.

For this approach to correspond with our observations and mathematical realities, we'd propose that the Rambam would say there is a two-dimensional continuum, where both dimensions of individual behavior, and social context interact to protect the person. The behavior and perfection of the society a person is a part of will help just as an individual's perfection. To have exceptional protection from God, one needs to have exceptional intellect and behavior. But, if a person is part of a just society, he doesn't need exceptional behavior. In summary, the Guide would hold that outcomes are a function of nature, nurture, skill and luck. Nurture is basically the perfection of the mind, and skill is the use of the intellect. Nature is hashgacha of the species, and luck is just that.

Rav Shmuel ben Tibon, quoted in Narboni's commentary to 3:51²⁰², explains providence and the notion that the forefathers and Moses were so connected with their minds that nothing could hurt them. Ben Tibon explains that this works via nature, that when a person is brilliant, they will avoid putting themselves in situations of danger to begin with.

See 2:45 and our discussion above on the link between prophecy and providence.

Mitzvot perform a function

The Guide asserts in 3:31 that all mitzvot must have a function that is communicable and understandable and enviable. The discussion in 3:26 regarding the role of details in mitzvot appears to contradict 3:31.

We can resolve the inconsistency by saying that the Rambam differentiates between mitzvot that function physically, such as making a fence around one's roof, and those that operate either symbolically, that are the result of practical limitations that prevent people from realizing an ideal, or enabling coordination by mandating an arbitrary standard.

Similarly, we can resolve the problem in 3:41, that the Rambam claims to only be

²⁰² Narboni, 3:51 “כי אחר שהשגחה היא כפי השכל שכלו יגלה לו כל מה שהוא גלוי לבעל שכל ולא ישים עצמו במקום סכנה ואפי' באפשר רחוק וישמור מן המקרים ומלכת מלחמה ומכל מה שיוכל להגיעו נזק ממנו”

explaining the text, but not the Rabbinic interpretation, as also explaining why the Torah opts to describe things the way it does. In the Rambam's eye, we can learn about the function of financial payment from the way such a payment is described in the Torah.

The notion that all mitzvot must operate physically would imply that there are many unobserved physical dynamics that connect things like sacrifices to physical outcomes such as rain. Because they are unobserved, we would not be able to have any intuition about how mitzvot operate. This precludes understanding mitzvot in the same way that thinking there is no rationale behind mitzvot. This would lead to the conclusion that the intellect is not useful in understanding mitzvot, which the Rambam rejects.

Mitzvot, in the Guide's perspective, do not include all behavior that could possibly be good or evil. Rather, mitzvot serve as a salve to remedy common problems people have with practically living in accordance with a perfect mind.

The goal of mitzvot is the well-being of the mind and body

Even the most abstract articles of faith are mandated because of the impact they have on the wellbeing of civilization. In 3:31, the Guide asserts that all mitzvot have a purpose which is understandable, communicable, and enviable.

Monotheism is important because it engenders practices that work. This is implied from Rambam's explanation that idolatry is bad because it leads to practices that do not work²⁰³. This implies that monotheism's importance lies in enabling inquiry and development on the premise of universal consistent law. Consider the following, in 1:72: "This mode of considering the universe is, as will be explained, indispensable, that is to say, it is very useful for demonstrating the unity of God; it also helps to elucidate the principle that He who is One has created only one being." To the Guide, the notion of one coherent universe is identified with the experience of one God.

This explains the passage in 1:76 "observe how they rushed, as it were, from the ashes into the fire, this is because they denied the nature of existence, misrepresented the properties of heaven and earth..." Translation from Ibn Tibbon. This statement explains what the Rambam found so troubling about the Mutakallim. The whole point

²⁰³ 3:49 "...practices which are useless, and merely a waste of time in vain and purposeless things. Those principles have turned the mind of the people away from intellectual research and useful actions."

of monotheism is faith in one cosmic order. Because a “God” “El” refers to a power, monotheism is synonymous with a single cosmic law. Rejecting an understandable, consistent cosmic order, while keeping faith in a creator is worse than adopting faith in a single cosmic order and rejecting creation of the world. It is by name monotheism, but in practice no better than idolatry. Thus, even faith in a creator, when detached from its function is problematic.

In a similar vein, belief in the creation of the world is subordinate to belief in miracles as implied in 2:25. In 1:71, the Guide rejects the notion that God’s existence is dependent on the existence of miracles or the creation of the world. Belief in miracles is only important because it impacts the fears and aspirations of the people, which in turn impacts their behavior.

This functional approach to dogma corresponds with the Guide’s use of metaphor.

Even though the Rambam believes that the goal of the Torah cannot be limited to temporal pleasures, and that the benefits in the afterlife are greater than those in this world, Mitzvot, as described by the Rambam, don’t directly build the afterlife, but instead set the stage to enable individual to pursue it.

Afterlife

The Rambam did not view the function of any mitzvah as mere preparation for an afterlife. The Rambam, in the Guide, does not use the afterlife to explain providence or divine Justice.

The Guide, in 3:17 rejects the opinion that God performs actions in this world that serve no other purpose besides boosting reward in another world. The Guide, in 3:17 also rejects the opinion that God tests man, putting him in uncomfortable situations to test his loyalty and earn reward. The Guide, in 3:26 rejects the idea that there could be a mitzvah without a purpose. The Guide also mentions that the intellect is a “nivdal” or separate²⁰⁴, and as such has no material and does not exist in space or time. The Guide limits this afterlife to the intellect, meaning that it cannot serve as a place of reward for non-intellectual mitzvot.

²⁰⁴ 1:72 “But the intelligence of the spheres, purely spiritual beings, as well as man’s absolute and acquired intellect, are subjects of deep study and research” Ibn Tibbon “ענין שכלי הגלגלים ומציאות השכלים הנפרדים וציור השכל הנקנה אשר הוא נפרד”

The Guide is insistent that the intellect has a supreme practical function in terms of enabling man to succeed.^{205, 206} In 3:28, he describes how required articles of faith are necessary for society to function. Thus, Guide does not need to resort to an afterlife to describe the function of mitzvot that perfect the intellect.

Given that the Guide promotes non-literal interpretation of the Tanach, and statements of Chazal, we can propose that the Guide itself uses metaphor. Note Narboni's remark in his commentary on 2:30, that the Guide refers to eternal success through the expression "permanent life." See also Yerushalmi Shekalim "Did David imagine that he would live and endure forever?!"²⁰⁷

The mind, consciousness, soul, are based on the physical matter of our body, and follow the rules of physics and biology.

The Rambam describes animals as having imagination in 1:72, free will in 3:17, and feelings of pain in 3:48. Thus, the sensation of experience, or consciousness, belongs to the imaginative faculty. The Rambam in 1:72 describes the intellectual capability of man, called the "koach medaber", as part of the human body. He also states there "it is impossible that any of the members of a human body should exist by themselves, not connected with the body, and at the same time should actually be organic parts of that body"

²⁰⁵ 1:72 "For this reason man has been endowed with intellectual faculties, which enable him to think, consider, and act, and by various labours to prepare and procure for himself food, dwelling and clothing, and to control every organ of his body, causing both the principal and the secondary organs to perform their respective functions."

²⁰⁶ 3:17 "[The intellect is] a special property by which each individual, according to the degree of his perfection, is enabled to manage, to calculate, and to discover what is conducive both to the temporary existence of the individual and to the preservation of the species."

²⁰⁷ Jerusalem Talmud Shekalim 2:5 "אָלָא כִּי וְכִי שְׂמִיָּהּ חַי וְקַיִם לְעוֹלָמִים. אֵלֶּא כִּי אָמַר דָּוִד לִפְנֵי הַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא. רַבּוֹנוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם. אֵיזְכָּה שְׂמִיָּהּ דְּבָרֵי נִצְמָרִין בְּבִתִּי כְּנִסְיוֹת וּבְבִתִּי מִדְּרָשׁוֹת."

In 3:17, the Rambam describes the intellect as being developed from minerals via natural processes. In 1:72 he describes the intellect as being driven by the spheres, in the same manner as everything else.

However, the Rambam asserts, in 1:72, that the “acquired intellect” is separate from the body. This would equate to the “form of God” as, according to 1:7, Cain and Abel did not have this because they were not educated. This is also the part of the body that remains after a person dies. The Rambam gives no indication that this part of the body is supernatural in any sense, and also expresses in 1:72 his own uncertainty regarding what or where it exists. It is not clear that the “acquired intellect” is a bodily faculty in the Rambam’s eye. Note the wording in 1:71: “is from without, brought into contact with the body”. The “acquired intellect” refers to pure information acquired by the person.

Given the connection between the human intellect and the Separate Intelligences, we can suppose that the Rambam viewed learned truths as connecting a person’s physical mind to the laws running the universe. When the human brain learns fundamental truths of how the world operates, it attaches itself to and becomes identified with the Separate Intelligences that run the universe. In this sense, this part of the person lives for eternity, just as the Separate Intelligences run the universe eternally. We see this expressed in the Talmud’s “These and these are the words of the Living God.” Also, see Tanya, which describes this unity.²⁰⁸ This is implied in Hilchot Teshuva 8:2²⁰⁹ and 8:3 where the Rambam connects the concepts of the afterlife and knowledge that is acquired, in distinction to anything dependent on the body.

The Metaphor of the City

In chapter 3:51, the Rambam presents a metaphor of the city. This is the explanation.

1. Conversation with the king is prophecy or intellectual enlightenment.
2. The palace itself is the world of thought. It is like the Garden of Eden, the place of the separate intelligences.
3. Those away from the palace are those who don’t understand that there is great potential for those who behave and learn properly.
4. Those with the backs toward the king’s palace are people of other religions. They have received some wisdom in their religions, but they face the wrong

²⁰⁸ Tanya, Chapter 5 “והוא יחוד נפלא שאין יחוד כמוהו ולא כערכו נמצא כלל בגשמיות”

²⁰⁹ Hilchot Tesvhuva 8:2 “כך עטרה שאמרו חכמים כאן היא הידיעה.”

way because their religion drives them toward folly and fantasy rather than bringing them closer to the truth. The more religious they become, the further they stray from the palace.

5. The “multitude that observe the divine commandments” are those who have the ideal, but don’t understand how divinity is connected to reason and truth. Thus, they want to go to the palace, but fail to arrive.
6. Those who arrive at the palace but don’t go in are people that have knowledge of the law, but fail to see the reason and logic behind it. Thus, they never enter although they could have. As long as a person has not completed studies of science, they cannot enter because they will not be able to understand the depth and logic behind the Torah.
7. Those that enter the palace do so through understanding the reason and depth behind the commandments. Of course there are many levels, as there are many independent ways and levels of understanding. A person cannot understand the economic function of mitzvot without understanding economics. Similarly, a person cannot understand the psychological or sociological function of mitzvot without understanding those as well.
8. Proofs are reflections of a deep understanding of a thing. Thus, when a person can prove something, they must understand its essential nature. A person that believes something but can’t prove it, knows it with his imagination, not with his intellect.
9. Knowledge of God means knowledge of God’s universe: how it works, where it is going, and how we should behave in it. Torah, that is, the 613 commandments are a subset of divine knowledge that focus on handling mankind’s deficiencies stemming from passions and imagination. The commandments are the cornerstone of society, and they reflect the nature of the cosmos, but they are not, of themselves, a complete understanding of the universe. See 3:54, where the Guide describes how Torah is called wisdom.

Fourth Part

The Rambam did not know that species come in and out of existence.²¹⁰ Similarly, he did not know about societal progress that does not revert.²¹¹ The notion that

²¹⁰ 3:17 “the immortality and constancy of the species”

²¹¹ See his explanation that societies are primarily agricultural, and that he’s not bothered that pagan cultures have been gone for 2,000 years, in 3:49.

technological change occurs regularly was not current until the 19th century.²¹² This is why he finds the rationale for mitzvot sufficient even when dependent on a primarily agricultural economy, and is only bothered a little by the extinction of pagan cultures.

This implies that the rationale for mitzvot must be discoverable to accommodate changes in humanity.

The Universe has Three Parts

2:11 "the whole Creation is divided into three parts, viz. (1) the pure Intelligences; (2) the bodies of the spheres endowed with permanent forms--(the forms of these bodies do not pass from one substratum to another, nor do their substrata undergo any change whatever); and (3) the transient earthly beings, all of which consist of the same substance."

The Rambam included this in his Laws of the Foundations of the Torah because his organization of the universe describes how we relate to God through the universe. In the Rambam's perspective the three levels are as below.

The Separate Intelligences:

The existence of this place is extrapolated from the human intellect. By "intellect" the Greeks did not mean literal intellect, but that it functions similarly to the way the intellect functions in humans in that it causes action by thought.²¹³

In the Torah, this area is referred to as the "shmei hashamayim" or the "Heaven of Heavens", the Face of God, and the waters above the firmament. This area is symbolized in the Temple as the Holy of Holies^{214, 215}, and the place of the throne in the vision of Ezekiel.

²¹² When Frankenstein was written.

²¹³ 3:13 "The existence of such a final cause in the various parts of Nature has compelled philosophers to assume the existence of a primal cause apart from Nature; it is called by Aristotle the intellectual or divine cause, and this cause creates one thing for the purpose of another."

²¹⁴ Compare Seforno's commentary on Exodus 25:20 and the rest of the description of the Tabernacle, as well as use of Cherub in 2:6, 3:45, and Numbers 7:89

²¹⁵ Zohar 2:231b: "משכנא כל עובדוי אינון כגוונא דלעילא כגוונא דעלמא תתאה וכגוונא דעלמא" "עילאה"

In this domain are the laws of nature transcendent of time and space. These never change, are eternal, intelligent, in that they engender order and life. In other literature, these are the “Seraphim”²¹⁶ which are snake²¹⁷ angels. In the Guide, they are called “Cherubs”²¹⁸ In Lurianic Kabbalah, this domain is called “briya”²¹⁹ creation and in the Sefer Yetzira, it is referred to as “Olam” meaning “hidden”²²⁰.

The “active intellect.”²²¹ is the causal-bridge between the Intelligences and the Spheres.

The Spheres:

The existence of this place is based on observations of stars and extrapolating from the bond in people between the mind and the body, which is called “spirit” or “ruach.”

In the Torah, this area is referred to as the “rakiya” or firmament. The Rambam interprets the “Brickwork of sapphire” as referring to this area. This area is symbolized in the Temple as the Holy, the place of the Menorah and the Table, and is the place where the angels sing in the vision of Ezekiel.

In this domain are the forces of nature that change but are eternal. This parallels the “chayot” or animal angels, which are the spheres and control the planets and constellations which are referred to as “animals” in the Zohar. This is the world of “Yetzira, and in the Sefer Yetzira, it is called “shana” meaning “change.”

The Material:

These are forces and things in our world that come into and out of existence. These are the “ofanim.”²²² In Kabbalah, this domain is called “Asiya” and in the Sefer Yetzira it

²¹⁶ Biurei HaZohar of the 2nd Chabad Rebbe, Beshalach 39d

²¹⁷ Zohar Chadash Chukat 9 “עֲשֵׂה לָךְ שֵׁרָף, כְּמָה דְּאַתָּה אֹמֵר (ישעיהו ו':ב') שֵׁרָפִים עֹמְדִים.”

²¹⁸ 2:6

²¹⁹ Biurei HaZohar of the 2nd Chabad Rebbe, Beshalach 40c

²²⁰ Commentary of the Vilna Gaon on Sefer Yetzira 3:1

²²¹ Note that the Rambam in 1:73 identifies the heart with the imagination, not the intellect, and in 1:72 says that the outer sphere is similar to the heart

²²² See 3:2. The Ophan is “in the Adama” and refers to the material shared by various materials and chemical forms associated with the changes observed in this world.

is called “Nefesh” as this world is anthropocentric. This area is symbolized in the Temple as the courtyard, and the ancients viewed it as paralleling the body.²²³

In the Rambam’s worldview, the angelic order lends the world structure, law, and consistency. It is specifically through this world and order that we relate to God. The world is good and the laws of the world are good, and we experience God through every element of the world. This is in opposition to the theological perspective that holds that we must transcend the natural order in order to develop spiritually or that miracles or other worlds are necessary for divine judgment.

In Kabbalistic thought, there is a fourth world, called Atzilut. The Rambam does not talk about this as a world, because it is actually different ways of thinking about God. The Rambam fully appreciates the different ways that we relate to God in a way that parallels the Kabbalistic Sefirot of Atzilut. Notably, 3:53, 1:69, and 2:12. Note also 1:46, that attributes of God really describe “forces.”

An overview of the different types of angels or forces on each part is implied in the Guide’s description of three types of objects: things that come in and out of existence, things that change, and things that cause other things to change.²²⁴

The universe started as a single point, and through natural fixed law developed over time minerals, then plants, then animals, then humans.

Maimonides states this with no fanfare in 2:30. Belief in spontaneous generation was current at the time of Maimonides, so this was considered part of the normal function of the planet. Mundane origins for man didn’t present a problem to the Guide, because

²²³ Given the Sefer Yetzira’s association with the stars with the Menorah and Table, as well as with parts of the face and body, respectively, it may be the that the heavens replicated the body, as it is permanent, and the courtyard those parts of the body that are not permanent, such as our actions or clothes. Alternatively, the association with the face and body may be that they are the drivers of the “face and body” of the observable world.

²²⁴ 2:Introduction, part 14. “For genesis and corruption are preceded by transformation, which, in its turn, is preceded by the approach of the transforming agent to the object which is to be transformed.”

what makes man distinct, in the Guide, isn't Man's origin or anything supernatural. It is the intellect that perceives the true order of the universe.

God did not create the world for a purpose.

Thus, the existence of God does not answer questions of the ultimate meaning of life and the universe. Rather, the existence of God, in the Guide, is primarily about embracing the unified function and order of the universe, and not really much about the origin or purpose of it.

God cannot do the logically impossible.

God cannot have attributes, and so the notion that God can do anything can only be understood as an attribute of action, describing the behavior of the universe. This means that we never observe anything that is logically impossible. If what we imagine as God is actually bound by logic, this means that logic itself is God. This is what the Rambam means when he describes this as not limiting the "hand of God" in 3:16.

This double negative is similar to what the Rambams says about God's existence. In 1:58 "when we say of this being [*God*], that it exists, we mean that its non-existence is impossible." That is, while God cannot have an attribute of existence, it is impossible for God not to exist in some way, given that we experience creation. Similarly, regarding the famous "rock that God cannot move" question, this approach would have us positing that while God cannot have an attribute that grants the ability to create things that cannot be moved, we also believe that God cannot be restricted by anything. God cannot have an attribute that bounds God to logic, but it is impossible for God to do the impossible, by identity. Identities are not provable but are axiomatic. Another way of putting this is: If God can do it, it's possible.

The rules of a system cannot be used to prove the integrity of that system.²²⁵ For example, the laws of mathematics can't be used to prove the veracity of mathematics. Similarly, logic cannot be used to prove the universality of logic itself. Thus, the Rambam does not attempt to prove this idea, rather it is accepted as axiomatic, much like the fundamental axioms of mathematics.

²²⁵ Gödel's incompleteness theorems.

To have any rational, understandable, reliable, or predictable relationship with God, we must presume some sort of system that would help define that relationship. So this concept is not just a theoretical curiosity. Rather, the basis of Science, mathematics and logic as understanding the real truth of the universe hinges on this question. Just as the axioms of mathematics and science are determined based on their utility, so too with axioms pertaining to logic and cosmology.

In 1:75, we have: “we do not say that God is imperfect because He cannot transform Himself into a body, or cannot create another being like Himself, or make a square whose diagonal should be equal to one of its sides.”

Logical proof is considered equal to direct prophecy.²²⁶ Thus, intuition about what is possible can determine the will and actions of God. This notion could not be accurate if God could do the impossible.

We can understand God through behavior.

The negative attributes’ main purpose is to redirect our focus in understanding God to thinking about God’s actions which are our observations of the behavior of the world.

Understanding of God has three steps. First a person learns about God via metaphors. Later a person learns gradually that God cannot have any positive attributes. Third, a person interprets all the descriptions of God as descriptions of behavior rather than describing God directly.

Without the third step, the negative attributes fail to yield a satisfying way to relate or think about God or yield any positive practical results. Without the second step, we would not know to redirect our focus from positive attributes to attributes of action. Thus, both steps are necessary.

The focus on God’s just guidance and wisdom as expressed in the constant and omnipresent laws of nature is how the immediate connection with God is imagined in the Rambam’s system. This is the basis of the Comment in 3:28 “And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might” (ibid. 6:5), what stress is laid on this commandment to love God. We have already shown in the Mishneh-torah (Yes. ha-torah 2:2) that this love is only possible when we

²²⁶ Compare 2:29 with 1:37 and 1:21, on the nature of the first two commandments.

comprehend the real nature of things, and understand the divine wisdom displayed therein.”

There is a unity between the knowledge of God, and knowledge of the laws whereby God runs the world. This is how providence is linked to the perfection of the intellect.

Knowledge of God

When the Guide talks about the knowledge of God (that is, things that God knows), the Guide is talking about an attribute of action. As an attribute of action, the knowledge of God is a property of God’s action. See 3:19-3:21. Thus, 68, which talks about the equivalence between knowledge and the knower, is really talking about the unknown faculty that results in the order of the universe.

In 3:19: “His eternal knowledge, which has established their actual properties, and made part of them purely spiritual, another part material and constant as regards its individual members, a third part material and changeable as regards the individual beings according to eternal and constant laws.”

This is how the Guide explains the “soul” of the spheres, in 2:4²²⁷, which is limited to function.

In 3:21: “Suppose a thing is produced in accordance with the knowledge of the producer, the producer was then guided by his knowledge in the act of producing the thing. Other people, however, who examine this work and acquire a knowledge of the whole of it, depend for that knowledge on the work itself.”

This is similar to a computer program for a game. Although the configuration of what is happening in the game changes, perhaps with some randomness and some input from the player, the software driving the outcome and giving the game a sense of intelligence does not change. The water clock example the Rambam brings is the same metaphor.

²²⁷ 2:4 “at first thought they may find it unintelligible or even objectionable; because they wrongly assume that when we ascribe a soul to the heavenly spheres we mean something like the soul of man, or that of an ass, or ox. We merely intend to say that the locomotion of the sphere undoubtedly leads us to assume some inherent principle by which it moves”

All miracles can be interpreted as metaphor, as long as it does not eliminate the hopes and fears of the people.

This follows from Ibn Tibbon and Schwartz's translation of 2:25.²²⁸ Additionally, see the Shem Tov there, which takes this approach.

Aristotle held that the world doesn't change permanently. There is no technological progress, no permanent redemption or slavery, no permanent improvement of the human condition, no punishment for evil behavior or reward for good behavior. See 3:15-3:18 for more detail on Aristotle's view of providence. Those beliefs are what the Rambam refers to in 2:25 as uprooting the entirety of the Torah, because they would affect people's behavior.

When the Rambam talks of miracles being necessary, it is in the sense of “pele” meaning proof²²⁹, and “nes” meaning sign, as in 3:25. From this perspective, miracles are things that inform people and help the world develop.²³⁰ This concept of the world

²²⁸ Ibn Tibbon translates “ואין צריך שיודחו הכתובים” or “There is no necessity to reject the literal interpretation of a text.” From this translation, the flow of the chapter is clear. The Rambam starts suggesting that the text of Genesis may be read as metaphor, and that this is a valid method of interpretation. The first reason the Rambam gives for why we reject this reading is that we are not forced to adopt it, because it is not proven. That is why the Rambam follows with the second line of reasoning, that it uproots the essence of the goal of the Torah.

The translations of Kapach, Gershuni and Fiedlander lead to a nonsensical reading that contradicts the statement in this chapter that the problem with Eternity of the Universe is not exegetical.

The sentence “, unless the miracles are also explained figuratively.” in Friedlander was added by Friedlander, and does not appear in Ibn Tibon.

²²⁹ In Ibn Tibbon's lexicon. Pele means to express.

²³⁰ In the eyes of the Guide, it would be impossible for a prophet to perform or predict a true violation of the natural order. The reason is simple. Prophecy works through the intellect, and the intellect can only understand and predict based on the information given it. So no prophet could predict a true exception to the natural order. Rather, all

continually learning from new information is essential to the concept of a continual evolution of society that forms the crux of the Torah's mission. This perspective is reflected in Rav Soloveitchik's writings.²³¹

This approach makes sense of the Guide's suggestion in 3:50 that the genealogy in the Bible is to support the theory of creation. That the world has a chronology and development rejects the notion of eternity of the universe.

Conversely, the expectation of future miracles, as violations of natural law, cannot form the basis of Israel's fear and hope, because the Rambam holds that providence is based on natural law. Additionally, in Yesodei HaTorah 10:1²³², the Rambam rejects the necessity of violations of the natural order for prophesy.

Belief in miracles themselves independent of the lessons learned from them could not be insisted upon by the Rambam. By construction, there would be no purpose for those mitzvot, and the Rambam holds that all mitzvot have a purpose. In the Rambam's framework, belief in a miraculous origin of the mitzvot is not necessary for observance because all mitzvot have an understandable function.²³³

The Rambam does not believe that the "signs" and "pele" or "nes" of a prophet need to violate natural law.²³⁴ The Rambam states in the Mishneh Torah that we do not base our faith on miracles, and that all the miracles mentioned in the Tanach were not

miracles are embedded into the nature of the world, and are realized based on certain conditions. When a prophet understands those conditions, he can predict a miracle.

²³¹ Emergence of Ethical Man, p 187-188 "Miracle is simply a natural event which causes a **historical metamorphosis**. Whenever history is transfigured under the impact of cosmic dynamics, we encounter a miracle."

²³² Yesodei HaTorah 10:1 "Any prophet who arises and tells us that God has sent him **does not have to perform wonders** like those performed by Moses, our teacher, or like the wonders of Elijah or Elisha, **which alter the natural order.**"

²³³ See 1:66. There, the Guide says that "written by the finger of God" is referring to a natural process. See Shem Tov and Makbili's note there. Given that the Guide presents the ten things created before the Sabbath as including all exceptions to nature, this may mean that the Guide preferred to interpret all miracles as occurring by way of nature.

²³⁴ Yesodei Torah 10:1 "Every prophet who will arise among us and say that he is the messenger of God, is not obliged to deliver a token like unto one of the tokens of Moses our Master, or Elijah, or Elisha, wherein there is a change in the natural laws of the universe. "

performed to develop faith. Thus, faith in the history of miracles cannot be a necessary component of Judaism.

Throughout the first part, the Rambam is careful to frame non-literal interpretations as “homonyms” not as “metaphor”, so in the Rambam’s framework, metaphor is essentially a literal interpretation. The Rambam states in 2:47 that “Employ your reason, and you will be able to discern what is said allegorically, figuratively, or hyperbolically, and what is meant literally.”

Creation is not Chronological

The Guide presents the following understanding of the creation story, based on 2:30, the preceding chapters, and 1:67.

1. The six days of creation are unique in that they describe the creation of the laws by which the universe operates.
 - a. By construction, this creation is purely chaotic and not based on the laws that were created.
 - b. This creation occurred transcendent of time, because time is a creation
2. After creation, these laws never change, even for miracles
 - a. The sabbath is a metaphor for the way the laws of the universe implements the will of its creator without new intervention by its creator.
3. The universe evolved over time through natural law
 - a. After time starts after the six days, the universe evolved through the process dictated by natural law from a single point.
 - b. This point split in a fractal-like way. Splitting from a single point, to the four elements, dividing into the three parts of the universe, then into land and sea. The material evolved into plants, the plants into animals, and animals into humans.
 - c. Planets are considered like animals because they have properties of perpetual movement.
4. The story of Adam & Eve is a metaphor for mankind’s nature, potential, and problems.

Some elements of the revelation at Sinai are metaphor.

The Rambam takes many of the descriptions of physical phenomena at Sinai as metaphor for the intellect and learning.

In 1:3 “The words "And the similitude of the Lord shall he behold" (Num. 12:8) therefore mean "he shall comprehend the true essence of the Lord."” Compare the similar use in 1:5, regarding Moses at the bush.

In 1:5, “But "the nobles of the Children of Israel" were impetuous, and allowed their thoughts to go unrestrained: what they perceived was but imperfect. Therefore it is said of them, "And they saw the God of Israel, and there was under his feet," etc. (Exod. 24:10); and not merely, "and they saw the God of Israel"; the purpose of the whole passage is to criticize their act of seeing and not to describe it. They are blamed for the nature of their perception, which was to a certain extent corporeal--a result which necessarily followed, from the fact that they ventured too far before being perfectly prepared. They deserved to perish, but at the intercession of Moses this fate was averted by God for the time. They were afterwards burnt at Taberah, except Nadab and Abihu, who were burnt in the Tabernacle of the congregation, according to what is stated by authentic tradition. (Midr. Rabba ad locum.)”

In 1:8: “you must understand that the word makom has the same signification in the passage "Behold, a place (makom) is with me" (Exod. 33:26), viz., a certain degree of contemplation and intellectual intuition (not of ocular inspection), in addition to its literal meaning "a place," viz., the mountain which was pointed out to Moses for seclusion and for the attainment of perfection.” Here, Makom must imply the intellect, which connects man to God.

In 1:10: “When, on the other hand, it says, "And Moses went up unto God" (Exod. 19:3), it must be taken in the third signification of these verbs, in addition to its literal meaning that Moses also ascended to the top of the mount, upon which a certain material light (the manifestation of God's glory) was visible; but we must not imagine that the Supreme Being occupies a place to which we can ascend, or from which we can descend. He is far from what the ignorant imagine.” Here the Rambam does not tell us what this means, because it is part of Sitrei Torah. Given everything else the

Rambam says, this would be a metaphor for the ascent of the mind of Moses to perceive the complete nature of Hashem, as the Rambam implies in 1:3.

In 1:13 The Rambam interprets Moshe's physical position as meaning that Moshe will be a teacher to b'nei Israel, not physically in between HaShem and Israel. Similarly, note that chazal interpret Moshe's standing with HaShem as meaning a constant state of prophecy.

In 1:15, 1:16, 1:18 The Rambam explains "Makom" "tzur" and "nigash" all referring to intellectual accomplishments.

In 1:21: "avor" is an expression of revelation.

In 1:28 "What they (the nobles of the children of Israel) perceived was therefore the materia prima, whose relation to God is distinctly mentioned, because it is the source of those of his creatures which are subject to genesis and destruction, and has been created by him. This subject also will be treated later on more fully." Friedlander's translation here is deficient, so check it out in the Kapach. In either case, this is a description of their understanding and perception.

In 1:54 "God promised to make him comprehend the nature of all things, their relation to each other, and the way they are governed by God both in reference to the universe as a whole and to each creature in particular. This knowledge is referred to when we are told of Moses," he is firmly established in all mine house" (Num. 12:7); that is, "his knowledge of all the creatures in My universe is correct and firmly established"; for false opinions are not firmly established."

In 1:66 "Similarly we explain, "And the writing was the writing of God" (Exod. 32:16); the relation in which the writing stood to God has already been defined in the words "written with the finger of God" (ib. 31:18), and the meaning of this phrase is the same as that of "the work of thy fingers" (Ps. 8:4). this being said of the heavens; of the latter it has been stated distinctly that they were made by a word; comp. "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made" (ib. 33:6). "

In 2:33: "they learnt the truth of the principles contained in these two commandments in the same manner as Moses, and not through Moses. "

"Note it, and remember it, for it is impossible for any person to expound the revelation

on Mount Sinai more fully than our Sages have done, since it is one of the secrets of the Law. It is very difficult to have a true conception of the events, for there has never been before, nor will there ever be again, anything like it. Note it.”

In 3:9 “His revelation in a thick cloud did not take place without any purpose, it was intended to indicate that we cannot comprehend Him on account of the dark body that surrounds us. It does not surround God, because He is incorporeal. A tradition is current among our people that the day of the revelation on Mount Sinai was misty, cloudy, and a little rainy.”

In 3:51: “One of these has attained so much knowledge, and has concentrated his thoughts to such an extent in the idea of God, that it could be said of him, “And he was with the Lord forty days,” etc. (Exod. 34:28); during that holy communion he could ask Him, answer Him, speak to Him, and be addressed by Him, enjoying beatitude in that which he had obtained to such a degree that “he did neither eat bread nor drink water” (ibid.); his intellectual energy was so predominant that all coarser functions of the body, especially those connected with the sense of touch, were in abeyance”

In 3:51 “we have attained not only the height of ordinary prophets, but of Moses, our Teacher, of whom Scripture relates: “And Moses alone shall come near before the Lord” (ibid. 34:28); “But as for thee, stand thou here by me””

Some of the main lessons of the account at Sinai are:

1. The Law comes from God.
 - a. God commands the law.
 - b. The law expresses the will of God
 - c. “Will of God” is a metaphor for things aligned with long-run success.
 - d. Our understanding of how the law works is subordinate to knowing that it does work.
 - e. The laws of nature are not subject to the will of man.
 - f. Optimal law is not an arbitrary social construct.
2. We learn from our ancestors.
 - a. The success of ancestors testifies to the veracity of their traditions.
 - b. Learning from others is the easiest path to knowledge.
 - c. The necessity to keep the law is based on fundamental human needs.
3. We receive the law via the intellect

- a. The intellect is how we receive knowledge of God, which equates to knowledge of the universe.
- b. Knowledge of the universe enables optimal behavior and policy.
- c. Optimal policy yields better outcomes.

Helpful Details

Similarities between the Zohar and Guide for the Perplexed

The below ideas mark similarities between some ideas in the Guide and those in the Zohar. Because the Zohar is poetic, the similarity depends on the interpretation of the Zohar, and thus is also an implicit commentary on the Zohar. The Rambam does the same sort of thing a few times in the Guide, bringing a source from the Talmud or Midrash when its connection is based on an interpretation, so it would be appropriate to follow in kind. While I cite the exact words in the sources, most of the time the significance of those words can only really be understood when looking at the context of that sentence.

1. Employs metaphor for reading the Bible^{235, 236} and denigration of literal interpretation^{237, 238, 239, 240, 241}
 - a. The “place with me” on Sinai is a metaphor.²⁴²
 - b. Angels don’t have bodies^{243, 244}
 - c. The history of mankind does not follow from a literal reading²⁴⁵

²³⁵ Zohar 1:137b “תא תזי, דא סטרא דרוכב נחש”

²³⁶ Zohar 1:59b “נח איש צדיק. הכי הוא ודאי בגוונא דלעילא”

²³⁷ Zohar 3:149b “לא אתי לאחזאה על ההוא ספור, אלא לאחזאה מלין עלאין, ורזין עלאין...ספור”
“דאורייתא, לבושא דאורייתא”

²³⁸ Zohar 3:27b “אנינו פשטי דאורייתא דאינון קעצים יבשים. ורזי אורייתא אינון קעצים לחים”

²³⁹ Zohar 3:149b: “מאי אכפת לו, אי שרי בהאי, או בהאי”

²⁴⁰ Zohar 2:217b “האי קרא מאן דחמי ולא אסתפל ביה, כמה דלא טעים תבשילא דמי”

²⁴¹ Zohar 3:152a “ר”ש אמר, ווי להווא ב”נ דאמר, דהא אורייתא אתא לאחזאה ספורין בעלמא”

²⁴² Zohar 2:207a “הנה מקום אתי, מקום אתי, ודאי דא איהו מקום טמיר וגניז”

²⁴³ Zohar 2:19b “וכי תרב שלופה היתה ביד המלאך”

²⁴⁴ Zohar 1:144a: “דמלאכי שליחי דקודשא בריה הוא, כד אינון נחתין להאי עלמא גלימין, ואתגלימו”
“ומתלבשין בגופא בגוונא דהאי עלמא”

²⁴⁵ Zohar 3:10a “אלא, אדם לא אשתכח אלא בהאי עלמא עלאה מפלהו...אלא מהאדם של הארץ...”

See context

- d. The universe came from a single point^{246, 247} at a single point in time.
248, 249, 250, 251
- e. The Six days of creation were not chronological.²⁵²
- f. The upper and lower waters were not divided on the second day.²⁵³
2. Employs metaphor for interpretation of Rabbinic statements^{254, 255, 256}
3. Emphasis on transcendence of God²⁵⁷
 - a. We relate to and know God only through God's actions.^{258, 259}
 - b. God has no attributes.²⁶⁰
 - c. The "form" and "likeness" of God is not referring to Man's physical body, but refers to the driver of his growth²⁶¹ and behavior²⁶² and intellect.²⁶³
 - d. Name of God is used to describe things done by other things^{264, 265}
4. Emphasis on a cosmic system of agents that God uses to direct the world²⁶⁶

²⁴⁶ Zohar 3:10b "על י' קיימי בלהו. מניה אתבניאו ואשתלשלו. דכתיב, **כָּלֵם בְּחֻמָּה עֲשִׂיתָ**"

²⁴⁷ Zohar Chadash 90a "ראשית דא נקודה עילאה"

²⁴⁸ Zohar 3:9b "**בְּשֵׁמֶתָא** דְּבָרָא קוּדְשָׁא בְּרִיךְ הוּא עֲלֵמָא"

²⁴⁹ Zohar 3:43a "וְזָרַע לֹון **בְּזִמְנָא חָדָא**, וּלְבָתֵּר נִפְקִי כָּל חַד וְחַד בְּלַחֲדוּי"

²⁵⁰ Zohar 3:204a "אפיק ברא וברתא **ברגעא חדא**, ועל דא שמים וארץ **ברגעא חדא** אתבראו כחדא"

²⁵¹ Zohar Chadash 233 "בְּרַגַע אֶחָד נִבְרָאוּ, בְּשַׁעָה אֶחָת נִבְרָאוּ, וּבַיּוֹם אֶחָד נִבְרָאוּ"

²⁵² Zohar 3.298b "מאן ימות עולם? אינון שיתא יומין, דעבד קודשא בריהוּא הוּא עֲלֵמָא בְּהוּ... בינו שנות" *Implying the six days are not history.*

²⁵³ Zohar 3:5a "בְּגִין דְּזַמְיָנִין לֵאחֲפָרְשָׁא"

²⁵⁴ Zohar 3:216a "דְּהִכִּי אֲרַח דְּמֶאֱרִי רִזִּין, אֲמַרִין מְרַגְלִית לְתַלְמִידֵיהוֹן" *See context*

²⁵⁵ Zohar 1:140b "עוד אֲמַר רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻעַ, הָאֵי מְהִימֻתָּא דְּאֲמְרוּ רַבְּנֵי לְרוּקָא דְּעֲלֵמָא"

²⁵⁶ Zohar 2:174a "מַה יִּרְעוּ בְּחַיִּים, אִף הוּא בְּחַיִּים"

²⁵⁷ Zohar 1:103b "כִּף קוּדְשָׁא בְּרִיךְ הוּא אֲתִידַע וְלֹא אֲתִידַע בְּגִין דְּאִיהוּ נִשְׁמָתָא לְנִשְׁמָתָא רוּחָא לְרוּחָא"
 "גְּנִיז וְטָמִיר מִכֵּלָּא, אֲכַל בְּאֲנוּן שְׁעָרִים דְּאֲנוּן פִּתְחוּ לְנִשְׁמָתָא אֲתִידַע קוּדְשָׁא בְּרִיךְ הוּא

²⁵⁸ Zohar 1:103b "דְּהָא נִשְׁמָתָא דְּבִר נֵשׁ לֹא אִיהוּ מֵאן דִּיכִיל לְמַנְדַּע לָהּ, אֲלֵא בְּגִין אֲלִין שִׁיפִין דְּגוּפָא"
 "...וְאֲנוּן יִרְגִּין **דְּעֲבָדִין אוֹמְנוּתָא** דְּנִשְׁמָתָא בְּגִין כִּף אֲתִידַע וְלֹא אֲתִידַע. כִּף קוּדְשָׁא בְּרִיךְ הוּא

²⁵⁹ Zohar 3:257b "וּבְגִין דָּא, **כָּל שְׁמֵהוּן**, אֲנוּן כְּנוּיִין דִּילֵיהּ. עַל שֵׁם **עוֹבְדִין** דִּילֵיהּ"

²⁶⁰ Zohar 2:42b "ווי ליה מאן דישוה ליה לשום מדה"

²⁶¹ Zohar 3:104b: "בְּהִוָּא אֲלֵם **אֲתֵרֵבִי**, בְּהִוָּא אֲלֵם **אֲזִיל**"

²⁶² Zohar 3:43a "בְּהִוָּא **צוּלְמָא אֲזִיל** בְּהִי עֲלֵמָא"

²⁶³ Zohar Chadash 90b "**בְּדַעְתָּא וְסוּכְלָתָנוּ**, וְלִנְטָלָא בְּמַטְלָנוּ, וְלִמְהִיב מְזוּנָא וְתוּקָפָא לְאַחֲרָא. וְדָא"
 "אִיהִי **בְּצִלְמָנוּ בְּדַמוּתָנוּ**"

²⁶⁴ Zohar 3:9b "אֲפִילוּ חַד שְׁלִיחָא, לְזַמְיָן אֲתִקְרִי בְּשֵׁמָא דְּמִלְכָּא"

²⁶⁵ Zohar Chadash Bereshit 9b "שְׁמוֹ הַגָּדוֹל שֶׁהוּא יְהוָה, כִּי זֶהוּ שְׁמוֹ מִמֶּשׁ. אֲכַל שֵׁם אֱלֹהִים, מִשְׁתָּר"
 "הוּא עַל יֵתֵר הַנִּבְרָאִים

²⁶⁶ Tikuney Zohar 17a "וְקָרִינוּ לֹון עֶשֶׂר סְפִירוֹ, **לֵאנְהִגָּא בְּהוּן עֲלָמִין** סְתִימִין דְּלֵא אֲתַגְלִיין, וְעֲלָמִין"
 "דְּאֲתַגְלִיין"

- a. Nature is perfect.²⁶⁷
 - b. Nature never changes^{268, 269}
 - c. Interpretation of the planets and constellations as having a major role in Jewish thought and life²⁷⁰
 - d. The universe is composed of concentric spheres²⁷¹
 - e. The universe is divided into three parts^{272, 273, 274}
 - f. Knowledge of the world and the body are essential to understand the depths of the Torah²⁷⁵
5. Emphasis on understandable nature of the Mitzvot²⁷⁶
 - a. “Tzedek” is balancing multiple needs²⁷⁷
 - b. Emphasis on the rewards of observance in this world^{278, 279}
 6. Veneration of the intellect^{280, 281} and a denigration of the heart²⁸²
 - a. Adam’s intellect was perfect and complete before the sin^{283, 284, 285}
 - b. The Etz HaDa’at is connected with pleasures, not knowledge²⁸⁶

²⁶⁷ Zohar 3:239a “ואיהו ממש אתתקן כדקא יאות, ולא אצטרף לאוספא ולאגרעא מניה”

²⁶⁸ Zohar 1:140b “ארחיה וטבעיה דעלמא לא אשתני”

²⁶⁹ Zohar 2:199a “וכן בכל עובדא ועובדא דאתחדש בעלמא, קודשא בריך הוא פקיד ההוא עובדא”
 “מיומא דאתברי עלמא”

²⁷⁰ Zohar 2:171b “בכל ככביא ומזלי דרקיעין בלהו, אתמנון נגידין ופקידין לשמשא עלמא”

²⁷¹ Zohar 3:9b “בלהו רקיעין, אליו על אליו בגלדי בצלים”

²⁷² Zohar 3:191a “תלת עלמין, אינון לקבליהו תלת קדושות”

²⁷³ Zohar 2:192b “בתלת עלמין אתתקף בקריאה ביצירה בעשיה”

²⁷⁴ Zohar 1:62a “תלת קטרי דרוחא אילין ושטאן ואתפלילן בתלת עלמין”

²⁷⁵ Zohar Chadash 86b “חכמתא דאצטרף ליה לבר נש... וחד, למנדע ליה לגופיה, ולאשתמודע מאן”
 “איהו... ולמנדע עלמא דאיהו ביה”

²⁷⁶ Zohar 1:95a “ואתגלית בהו יו”ד רשימא קדישא את קנימא שלים”

²⁷⁷ Zohar 3:199b “מאני צדק, בלא וותרנו להאי סטרא ולהאי סטרא”

²⁷⁸ Zohar 2:74b “מאריהון אשנח בגיניהון לאושבא להו, דאנח קמיהו פתגמי אורייתא”

²⁷⁹ Zohar 2:199b “אורייתא איהי ארפא דחיי בהאי עלמא”

²⁸⁰ Zohar 111a “אמר רבי יהודה שלש הנהגות יש באדם, הנהגת השכל והחכמה וזו היא”
 “כח הנשמה הקדושה”

²⁸¹ Zohar 183b “חכמי עדיפי מנביאים”

²⁸² Zohar 1.221b “ודאי כדן אתהפך לביהו”

²⁸³ Zohar 1:52a, Zohar 2:193b : “עד לא חטא אדם, הוה סליק וקאים בתקמה דנהירו עלאה”

²⁸⁴ Zohar 1:52b “ועד לא חטאו הוה שמעין קלא מלעילא והוה ידעי חכמתא עלאה”

²⁸⁵ Zohar 3:117b “והנה מסתכל בתקמתא, לעילא ותתא. כיון דסרח, אתמעטו פרצופין, ותחכמתא”
 “אסתלקת מניה, ולא הוה מסתכל אלא במלי דגופיה”

²⁸⁶ Zohar 2:258b “דחמאן כמה ענוגין ותיאובותין, דגופא אתהני ואתעניג מניהו, וטענין אבתריהו”

- c. Logical derivation is of equal value of the prophecy of Moses²⁸⁷
 - d. Tzelem, “form” of Man, is the intellect²⁸⁸ that drives his behavior²⁸⁹. “d’mut” or likeness of man is his intellect²⁹⁰
 - e. Greek philosophy is close to Jewish philosophy²⁹¹
 - f. The dark clouds in prophecy are a metaphor for evil²⁹²
 - g. The afterlife is a function of knowledge²⁹³
7. Providence is only associated with good.^{294, 295}
- a. Providence is less on individuals.²⁹⁶

Supporting Talmudic Statements

The below statements support the philosophy contained in the Guide

Shabbat 77b: ²⁹⁷ “Why is the camel’s tail short? Because it eats thorns. He asked: Why is the ox’s tail long? Because it lives in a swamp and must fend off mosquitoes.” This implies that the features of animals are optimized for their survival.

Megillah 17b: ²⁹⁸ “And why did they establish the blessing of Repentance after that of Understanding? Because the verse continues “And his heart will understand, and he will return, and be healed” This supports the Guide’s contention that observance of Torah is based on the intellect.

²⁸⁷ Zohar 3:28a “ואליהו הוא יהיה לי לפה, ייתי לתקנא כל אליו ספקות, ולפרקא לון ביהוה זמנא, זאת תורת העולה, ברמא, דהות מהדקא שפלה בגלותא, סליקת על כל דרגין דלעילא... פה אל פה אדבר”
 “בו ומראה ולא בחידות. במראה: כגוונא דכלה דאתפשטת מלבושקה, ומתייחדת עם בעלה בקירוב בשר”
See context.

²⁸⁸ Zohar 3:208a “בצלמא דידן, דיהא חכמתא דיליה, עלאה מחמתכון”

²⁸⁹ Zohar 3:43a “בהוה צולמא אזיל בהאי עלמא”

²⁹⁰ Zohar 2:217b “לאכללא אינון דיוקניו דמלין דחכמתא”

²⁹¹ Zohar 2:237a “אשר אין בה מום, דא מלכות נון” *See commentaries there*

²⁹² Zohar Chadash 42b “הא איהו רזא דארבע מלכוון, דסחרן כולא”

²⁹³ Zohar Chadash 86b “כל מאן דאזיל ללהוה עלמא בלא ידיעה, אפילו אית ביה עובדין טבין סגיאין, מפקין ליה מכל תרעי דהוה עלמא”

²⁹⁴ Zohar 3:129b “כלא הוא ימינא. לא הוי שמאלא”

²⁹⁵ Zohar 3:205a “וכי יי ממות, והא שמא דא סמא דחיינ איהו לכלא”

²⁹⁶ Zohar 2:33b “האי בדינא דיחיד, אבל בדינא דעלמא, כתיב, וירד יי לראות”

²⁹⁷ Shabbat 77b מאי טעמא גמלא זוטא גנובתיה? משום דאכל כסי. מאי טעמא תורא אריקא גנובתיה? “משום דדייר באגמי, ובדי לכרכושי בקי”

²⁹⁸ Megilla 17b: “ומה ראו לומר תשובה אחר בינה — דכתיב: “ולקבו יבין ושב ורפא לו”

Bava Batra 25b: ²⁹⁹ “Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said a person should always tilt south, because a person becomes wealthy through wisdom.” This supports the Guide’s proposition that the intellect drives success in this world. This, despite what we have in Rosh Hashanah 16b. ³⁰⁰

Tzura / Form

The Rabmam’s use of “tzura” or “form” as referring to the “tzelem” or image of God in 1:1 is not referring to a physical form. The Guide sheds light on what it means by “tzura” in 1:73 when it presents the rejected view of the Mutakallimin: “There does not exist a form which, as you believe, modifies the substance, and thus causes substances to be different from each other: this difference is exclusively effected by the accidents.”

This implies that the “tzura” form is the cause of observable behavior of a substance. So while the underlying matter of gold and iron might be the same, there is some “tzura” that causes each to change under various circumstances differently. So, with an animal, the “tzura” refers not to its physical form on the macro scale, but the elements of the animal that drive its growth and behavior. When the intellect drives a person’s behavior, their “tzura” is the intellect.

In 2:12, this interpretation makes the chapter eminently sensible. “There are, however, changes which are not connected with the combination of the elements, but concern only the forms of the things; they require likewise an efficient cause: there must exist a force that produces the various forms. This cause is incorporeal, for that which produces form must itself be abstract form, as has been shown in its proper place.”

What the chapter is saying is that drivers of behavior in matter are, essentially, natural law embedded in nature. Natural law being the Separate Intellect, and the Form being the drivers of behavior specific to that object.

See Ibn Tibbon’s definition.

²⁹⁹ Bava Batra 25b “רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻעַ בֶּן לֵוִי אָמַר: לְעוֹלָם יִדְרִים, שְׁמִתוֹד שְׁמִתְחַכֵּם מִתְעַשֵּׂר – שְׁנָאֲמַר: “אֲרֹד יָמִים בְּיָמֶינָהּ, בְּשִׂמְלָהּ עֲשֵׂר וְכָבוֹד”

³⁰⁰ Rosh Hashana 16b “כָּל מְזוֹנוֹתָיו שֶׁל אָדָם קְצוּבִים לוֹ מֵרֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה וְעַד יוֹם הַכְּפוּרִים”

Mikrim / Accidents

The word “accident” in Friedlander’s and others translation, used to translate “mikrim” means properties of an object that are not determined by its “form” or the fundamental nature of the object. For example, the “form” of gold will determine its color, melting point, density, conductivity and other properties. These properties will not change as long as the substance is gold. However, the location, shape, or trajectory of the object may vary independently of the “form.” These properties are referred to as “accidents” or mikrim. While mikri normally refers to random events, here it refers to something not determined by the form. This is similar to the English use of the word “random” in “random access memory.”

Sechel / Intellect

Sometimes causes are referred to as “Sechel” or intellect. This is clearest the introduction to pard 2, where we find “The existence of an infinite number of **causes** and effects is impossible, even if these were not magnitudes: if, e.g., one **Intelligence** were the **cause** of a second, the second the **cause** of a third, the third the cause of a fourth, and so on, the series could not be continued ad infinitum.”

The ancients viewed the intellect as the unobservable cause of human behavior. Natural forces function in a similar way, so they are called “Intelligences” but a modern reader would call them “forces.” Indeed, angels in the Guide are referred to as natural forces and intelligences. See Ibn Tibbon’s definition.

The Rambam rejects the notion that the Spheres or intelligences have intellects or a “soul” similar to that of ours or animals in 2:4, referring the reader to the observed behavior of the spheres.

The Brain as the seat of the intellect

In 2:36 “The substance of the brain must from the very beginning be in the most perfect condition as regards purity of matter, composition of its different parts, size and position: no part of his body must suffer from ill-health”

3:23: “The nerves are the organs of sensation and motion...these nerves originate in the brain.”

3:46 “wine supports best the vital faculty, whose centre is the heart: music is most agreeable to the psychic faculty, the source of which is in the brain.”

The Rambam knew that the brain, not the heart, was the seat of the intellect, and therefore is essential for prophecy. In addition, he was aware that the brain controlled sensation and locomotion.

Logic in the Guide

Occam’s Razor

The Guide notes that a simple explanation is preferable to a complicated one. This implicitly endorses Occam’s Razor, and may explain why the Rambam’s books on law are generally simpler and more sensible than alternative approaches to interpreting the Talmud.

2:11 “He will, besides, endeavour to find such an hypothesis which would require the least complicated motion and the least number of spheres”

Bayesian Thinking

2:23 “In comparing the objections raised against one theory with those raised against the opposite theory, in order to decide in favour of the least objectionable, we must not consider the number of the objections, but the degree of improbability and of deviation from real facts[*this is the likelihood function*] [pointed out by the objections]; for one objection may sometimes have more weight than a thousand others. But the comparison cannot be trustworthy unless the two theories be considered with the same interest, and if you are predisposed in favour of one of them,” [*This is the prior*]

Will vs. Wisdom

Something done with “wisdom” has a function beyond the thing itself. Something done with “will” alone has no designed function. This is the difference between the

two, as implied in 3:26, and contextually in other places. In 3:26 “...the actions of God are the result of His wisdom, or only of His will without being intended for any purpose whatever” The perfect function of nature and the functional design of animal bodies indicates wisdom. The random order of stars indicates will.

Order of the Guide

Understanding the order of the Guide is subordinate to understanding the text of the Guide. It was not written so that everything needed to understand a chapter is contained in the preceding chapters. Rather, the proper understanding comes from integrating ideas dispersed through the work.

Commentaries on the Guide

Read the old commentaries on the Guide: Narboni, Abarbanel, Shem Tov, Efodi, and Kreskas. Often neglected, these commentaries present an authentic interpretation of the cosmology of the time, and are bolder in their willingness to interpret the Guide as distinct from philosophies of religion that are less intellectual and scientific.

The Mishneh Torah & The Guide

All four basic concepts in the Guide can be found implicitly in the Mishneh Torah. The importance of interpretation of the Bible with metaphor is found in Yesodei HaTorah, 1:9³⁰¹ and 2:4. The Transcendence of God is in Yesodei HaTorah 1:8, and implicit mention of attributes of action in the last sentence in 1:10 and 2:2. The order of creation is emphasized in chapters 2 and 3, which describe in detail how God runs the world. The primacy of the intellect is implied in Hilchot Deot, where proper behavior is linked to being a Chacham in 1:4, and in Hilchot Teshuva, where wisdom is consistently coupled with virtue and good behavior, and Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah where prophecy is connected with the intellect. The Mishneh Torah’s system does not use miracles or Olam Haba to answer key questions of faith or providence, recommend following the heart or rejecting reason in favor of faith, or talk about a direct relationship with God.

³⁰¹ Yesodei HaTorah, 1:9 “‘all [such expressions] are metaphoric imagery.” Yesodei HaTorah, 2:4 “All these are prophetic visions and parables” Thus, a literal interpretation is a violation of Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah.

Discrepancies between the Guide for the Perplexed and the Mishneh Torah should generally be resolved by interpretation of the Mishneh Torah with use of metaphor. We can see that the Rambam uses terms and expressions that he later rejects. For example, in Yesodei HaTorah 5:4 The Rambam states about an evil person “and will descend to the lowest levels of Gehinnom.” Yet, later in Hilchot Teshuva 8:5, the Rambam notes that descriptions of Gehinnom are metaphors for being cut off.³⁰² An exception to the above rule may be in 3:51, where Hilchot Deot 3:1 presents a clearer and more practical interpretation of “knowing God” in our actions than parts of 3:51.

A Brief Commentary on Hilchot Yesodei Hatorah:

1. 1:1: This is the definition of God.
 - a. Note the absence of creation. We are not required to know it, especially because we can’t prove it.³⁰³ But faith in ongoing maintenance is required.
 - b. Know: because it can be proved. The english “faith” does not appropriately translate into “emuna”
 - c. This echoes the first verse in the Torah, which defines God as the creator of haven and hearth
 - d. It doesn’t matter what this thing is, a person has fulfilled his mitzvah if he knows it exists. Even if he thinks it’s “pure chaos” or whatever his imagination posits.
 - e. This is the foundation of wisdom, because it implies a universal natural law. This is the foundation of science.
2. 1:2: This is the proof of God’s existence in a sentence. In the Guide, the Rambam states that all Israel knew the proof of God’s existence. Thus, such a proof must be incredibly simple.
3. 1:6: The Rambam refers to God as a “davar” a “thing”, not a person. He states in 2:10 that God has no life or knowledge like we have.
4. 1:10, 2:1: The Rambam refers to the “essence” or “atzmut” of God as “Amitato” and the Sechel Nivdal, the separate intelligences by clothes that are distinct from observed behavior. The Rambam leaves out discussion

³⁰² Hilchot Teshuva 8:5 “All the synonyms for nullification and destruction are used to refer to it for it is the [ultimate] nullification after which there is no renewal and the [ultimate] loss which can never be recovered.”

³⁰³ See Kapach’s note in the Rambam’s commentary on the Mishnah, on the fourth Yesod. There, the Rambam says he skirts the issue of creation because he wanted a clear proof for God’s existence.

attributes of action until the second chapter, where an emotional relationship with God is discussed. Negative attributes are good to redirect the mind from the imagined truth. Attributes of action are what lead to an understood relationship with the creator.

5. 2:3: The Rambam emphasizes the division of the world into three, as described in the Guide. Note how the creation of the world in six days, and mention of miracles is missing. Angels are the forces that drive the planets. Note how the hierarchy of angels excludes the “separate intelligences” as they are in the same place as the Throne of Glory.
6. Chapters 3 & 4: God runs the world through natural laws and systems that are fixed. The sun and moon move approximately one degree per day relative to the fixed stars. Axial precession moves approximately one degree in 70 years. Thus, the Mishneh Torah has one of the best estimations for Axial precession at its time. The descriptions of the stars and angels knowing the world and knowing God is a metaphor for their incorporation of information of all things in their behavior and their perfect performance.
7. 4:13: The Rambam notes that the details of halacha are “The great good that the Holy One influenced to settle this world, so that we can inherit Olam Haba.” This echoes the Rambam’s contention in 3:27 that the point of mitzvot in the first order is the improvement of quality of life in this world. The description of Ma’aseh Bereshit as a higher level echoes the parable of the city in 3:51, where natural law enables a deeper entrance into the Chambers of the King than the Torah itself.
8. Chapter 4: The “neshama” is the physical capability of Man to learn. The “Tzura” that lives eternally are the things that a person has learned. Because they are true understandings of how the world works, they are knowledge of God. Note in Hilchot Teshuva, the Rambam connects knowledge of things to the element of a person that lives eternally. Because the Rambam holds that there is a unity between the knower, the knowledge and the known, this knowing truths makes a person unified with them. Because the knowledge is effectively knowing God by attributes of action, it is considered coming from and ultimately unified with God. The place of Olam Haba would, therefore, be in the Separate Intelligences, which includes all universal truths.
9. Chapter 5: Kiddush Hashem. The reason for Kiddush Hashem is:
 - a. We need to be dedicated to things beyond ourselves, and advertise it. This is a fundamental concept of Judaism, as the Evil Son fails to get it. Israel is identified with the name of God.

- b. There is also a strategy here, whereby Jews are less likely to be abused when they group together.
 - c. The leniency in the case of Shimon BenBichri implies we can violate the 3 Sins for the larger community, which is the same permit given to Esther to go into Achashverosh's room willingly, as described in Tractate Megillah, and Yael and the daughters of Lot were permitted as well, as in Nazir 23b. The Rambam may permit a person to volunteer him or herself in such cases, and Esther may again exemplify, granted that there be no repeated game or royal decree.
- 10. Chapter 6: Kiddush Hashem.
 - a. The reason it's in Yesodei HaTorah: Respecting the Name reinforces the idea that people need to know about, love, and respect God itself. This concept is so fundamental that it belongs in Yesodei HaTorah.
- 11. Chapters 7-9: Prophecy is the intellectual interpretation of a dream or vision. Because no violation of natural law must be used, we do not need faith in Chidush HaOlam to have faith in prophecy. Rather, the concept of Chidush HaOlam is the evolution and permanent progression of history.
- 12. Chapter 10: Eternity of the Torah.
 - a. Just as the laws of nature never change, the Torah never changes. The will of God is a metaphor for behaviors that lead to success, and those behaviors are, in large part, a function of the laws of nature, the will of God cannot change any more than the laws of nature themselves. What holds nature consistent is transcendent of it, and, therefore, transcendent of time, so nature itself can never change. Thus, there is a connection between the covenant between heaven and earth, and the covenant between God and the righteous. See the Zohar in the beginning of Noach.
 - b. Moshe is the conduit of this will. As implied in the Guide, there is a secret regarding the prophecy of Moshe and the revelation at Sinai. Consider the many Zohars that describe Moshe in fantastic terms. And consider the statement that the Neshamot of all the tzadikim learning Torah have part from the Neshama of Moshe.

A Brief Commentary on Hilchot Deot:

- 1. Deot refers to behaviors, not feelings.
- 2. The goal of optimal behavior is long run broad success.

- a. 1:4 “Sages instructed man to evaluate his traits, to calculate them and to direct them along the middle path, so that he will be sound of body.”
 - b. 1:7 “One who follows this path brings benefit and blessing to himself”
3. Chapter 1: The actions of God, the laws of nature, are perfectly balanced for the development of life. Just as we see the wisdom of God through the perfect balance of creation that is optimized for life, so too, a person is considered wise when his actions are optimally balanced for life.
4. Just as Deot has a clear function, which is for the benefit of general welfare, so too all mitzvot promote general welfare. The reason Deot is after Yesodei HaTorah is because they are the general guidance for behavior that the rest of the mitzvot help with. Similar to how the Yesodei HaTorah are the general guidelines for what to think, Hilchot Deot are guidelines on what to do.
5. 2:1: The notion that people with self-destructive behaviors are sick and need to defer to other people to fix them is a fundamental concept in the Torah. The economic incentives given to people to avoid theft essentially fixes people who would be inclined to steal. Additionally, the ritual mitzvot that teaches people the proper path performs the same function.
6. Deot creates a framework for psychological improvement. First, a framework for optimal behavior must be developed and completely accepted. Second, misalignment between feelings, actions, and the ideal are identified. Third, the person must seek out those who can advise him on actions that are not objectively optimal, but will help the patient gain alignment. Fourth, the patient practices the behaviors and builds emotional and habitual resilience. After this process is complete, reflection on the past will lead to regret and the person can then work on Teshuva to minimize the impact of past behavior.
7. 3:1: The prohibition of rejecting pleasures from this world is limited to limiting pleasures for the sake of heaven. In other words, a person is forbidden to refuse pleasures because they think that enjoyment itself is bad, would reduce their lot in the world to come, or is hated by God. There are other reasons to reduce consumption and pleasure in this world, but that is not one of them. A person’s religious life must be sustainable emotionally and physically.
8. 7:7 See the end of the Halacha: “And this is the correct disposition that allows that civilization be possible through it and commerce of people, one with the other.” The Rambam sees the purpose of good deot, or midot, ethical

behavior, as serving the economic prosperity and practical peace of the society. Rather than being inherently good or self-destructive, as in other philosophies, the Rambam sees ethical behavior as serving a practical good. This conforms with the view expressed in the Guide that the goal of mitzvot is economic.

A Brief Commentary on Hilchot Teshuva:

1. Kapara, atonement is about muting the negative repercussions of sin. The reason why this removes punishment is because punishment is an effect of sin.
2. The process of how to stop sinning isn't discussed in Hilchot Teshuva, because this is already discussed in Hilchot Deot 2:2. Thus, Hilchot Teshuva focuses not in improving behavior, but minimizing the negative impact of what one has already done.
3. Hilchot Teshuva follows a progression from a technical approach to Judaism, where teshuva is a verbal act to avoid punishment, to describing worship out of pure love. This follows the path of teshuva. One should first go to the right path out of fear of punishment or self destruction. Then, a person should aim to purify their mind, so they are motivated by a broad mindset.
4. 1:2 Symbolic mitzvot can be atoned for when a person accomplishes the same learning. Punishment on the courts indicates the influence of that sin on others, because the function of punishment is to deter others. Karet, being cut off from the nation, is a social punishment, and also indicates influence on others. Thus, there is a connection between the effect on society and difficulty of attaining atonement.
5. 1:3 As described by Rav Soloveitchik, Tahara, purity is the removal of the effects of the sin from their internal world. As seen in Deot and the Guide, sin can be habit forming. The cleansing of the mind is referred to as being "before God."
6. 1:4 There is a connection between kiddush hashem, sanctification of the name, and death. In Yesodei HaTorah, we see that when someone dies rather than sin, this can be a kiddush hashem. Here, we see that only death can atone for a chillul hashem, desecration of the name. If we posit that the point of dying is to highlight an ontic unity between us and the broader universe, and the concept of chilul hashem is that it advertises a division, then as long as the person lives an independent life, they continue the message of their desecration. Thus, only death, which removes their independence, can atone.

7. 2:1: This paragraph contradicts 1:3, because 1:3 does not present any conditions beyond his mindset. Teshuva is about covering the effects of sin, and this can happen to various degrees. If a person regrets, then there is part of them that is clear of the effects of sin. If a person doesn't repeat, then the memory of the sin is not dominating their behavior anymore. At this point, they are pure of sin. However, they still have not prevented the sin from affecting others, from affecting their body, or have made whole past effects.
8. 2:2: Teshuva happens because of learning. He must learn how the sin damages himself, until he stops, doesn't want to continue, and even regrets it because of an understanding of the costs.
9. 2:5: Publishing return from interpersonal sins brings peace, because he is advertising peaceful intentions. If a person sins to God and survives, this advertises a gap in divine justice.
10. 2:8: The word "aval" here means "it is true" such as in אָבֹלִי אֲשַׁמֵּיךְ | אֲנִי חָנוּךְ and as many times in the tosefta.
11. 2:11: Ten Men represent all of Israel, because they are able to bring the entire world to teshuva, just as the spies changed the minds of Israel overnight. Because the individual is "gathered unto his nations" the only way to halt the impact of his sin is to pay it to the nation of Israel.
12. 3:1: Note how cities and countries are judged in groups. This corresponds with the Guide's supposition in 3:48 and elsewhere that Ir Nidachat is judged based on the city, not on the individual level. This also corresponds with the Rambam's implicit explanation of Job and hashgacha.
13. 3:1-5: While the Rambam describes judgment as made on Rosh HaShana, and the first two sins being forgiven, this perspective is not the one the Rambam advises we keep in mind. Although they are true, keeping that in mind will not optimize behavior.
14. 3:8: In the Guide, Epicurios is associated with belief in a chaotic world. If the world is chaotic, there can be no reward or punishment for good or bad behavior. This is what the Rambam means by "the Creator is not aware of the deeds of men." God's "awareness" is a metaphor for purposeful action. Similarly, if the world is chaotic, we cannot know the way of God, which eliminates the possibility for prophecy. Moses is singled out because of the secrets connected with Torat Moshe.
15. 3:6-14: How can a person forfeit his portion in the world to come by failure in something not included in the 613 mitzvot? According to the Rambam, the mitzvot have a function. Someone who takes actions to disturb the function

of mitzvot will lose his portion even if his actions are not included precisely in the listed mitzvot.

16. 3:6-14: Note here how most, if not all, of these things harm society. This is consonant with the Rambam's position that the first goal of mitzvot is the perfection of society. Note also, that if ruining the culture of torah destroys one's portion in the world to come, that implies that the center of earning a portion of Olam Haba is positive impact on the society.
17. 5: Compare the Rambam's descriptions here with his descriptions in the Guide on providence and divine knowledge, particularly paying attention to 3:21. The Rambam's answer here would be that the world is run algorithmically, with freedom of action for people. Because God's knowledge of the world is an attribute of action, God's knowledge of the universe is limited to the way God runs the world, which is to the algorithmic rules, or "tzurot" or forms.
18. 8:1 Why is Olam Haba, the world to come, discussed here and not in Yesodei Torah? Because the difference that atonement makes is in Olam Haba. Despite the commentaries' objections, Rambam does not believe in "Gehinnom" as a place where souls are punished. We see this also in 8:5, where the Rambam interprets various worlds for Gehinnom as metaphor. In the 10th chapter, the Rambam does not mention the threat of Gehinnom as a way to motivate children and the ignorant.
19. 8:3 Only the pure information in our minds lives forever. This is the "acquired intellect." Our intellectual faculty does not live forever. The truth is eternal and ubiquitous, by learning it, we attach ourselves to it. If we imagine that pleasure we experience stems from grasping a kernel of eternity, then the pleasure of living eternally and ubiquitously must be so much greater. This raises a question of how admission to Olam Haba can be a holistic decision based on the sum total of a man's actions in this world, as Maimonides implies elsewhere.
20. If Olam Haba is the place of the intellect, it is a question as to how a person can be granted entry to this place based on virtuous behavior, as the Rambam states.
21. 8:3 Olam Haba is greater than anything in this world, yet the path to it is by improving this world.
22. 9:2 The function of mitzvot within nature is implied in Hilchot Teshuva that in the days of the Messiah, nature will not change. Thus, observance of the commandments cannot be dysfunctional in any way that would require a miracle.

23. The Rambam gives two places to visualize the earning of rewards. First, Olam Haba, which is non-physical but personal and relatively selfish. The second, Moshiach, is physical, but shared by the entire Jewish nation. Each visualization has its advantages, and disadvantages. Yet, in the 10th chapter, the Rambam will reject both of these goals of Mitzvah performance as less than ideal in favor of doing good out of “love.”
24. 10:1 In Rav Soloveitchik’s philosophy, and in Tanya, love is based on identification as an ontic unity. In other words, when we view ourselves as one with the creator, and the universe in entirety. When one experiences this perspective, he will be drawn to keep mitzvot out of pure intention. Identity with the broader community in a way that drives intrinsically motivated behavior is observable in many forms, not least soldiers who are willing to risk their lives for their country.
25. 10:2 What does it mean “to do truth?” The truth here is what the Rambam talks about in Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah 1:4, that only God is “emet.” There it means that only God exists inherently and infinitely. Thus, taking a note from the first chapter of Hilchot Deot, where the Rambam establishes that walking in the way of God is pursuing a path that leads to permanence, doing truth means walking this path that leads to establishment of permanent life and good.
26. 10:4 The use of the expression “רֵז וְזֶה” or “this secret”, is an allusion to the only time this phrase is used in the Talmud. The statement in Tractate Shabbat 88a³⁰⁴, that by accepting the Torah before Israel knew its contents, Israel was implementing a secret. Israel was unaware not only of the requirements of the Torah, but also the rewards, and thus, this acceptance was out of love.

³⁰⁴ Talmud Bavli Shabbat 88a “אמר רבי אלעזר: בשעה שקדמו ישראל לנעשה 'רֵז וְזֶה' 'נשקע' יצתה” “אמר רבי אלעזר: בשעה שקדמו ישראל לנעשה 'רֵז וְזֶה' 'נשקע' יצתה” “אמר רבי אלעזר: בשעה שקדמו ישראל לנעשה 'רֵז וְזֶה' 'נשקע' יצתה”

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