

Joseph Kafih's three-volume edition (1972) offers parallel Arabic and Hebrew versions. Large sections of the *Mishneh Torah* as well as other writings by Maimonides are available in English translation in *The Maimonides Reader*, edited by Isadore Twersky (1972). The standard biography is Abraham Joshua Heschel's *Maimonides: A Biography* (1981). Leo Strauss's essay "The Literary Character of *The Guide for the Perplexed*," originally included in *Essays on Maimonides: An Octocentennial Volume* (ed. Salo W. Baron, 1941) and later reprinted in *Maimonides: A Collection of Critical Essays* (ed. Joseph A. Buijs, 1988), is an indispensable introduction to Maimonides' method in *The Guide*. In *Maimonides and Aquinas: A Contemporary Appraisal* (1979), Jacob Haberman documents Maimonides' contributions to medieval thought, while Susan A. Handelman, in *The Slayers of Moses: The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory* (1982), examines the relationship between early Jewish biblical hermeneutics and contemporary deconstructive literary theory. The collection of essays edited by Geoffrey H. Hartman and Sanford Budick, *Midrash and Literature* (1986), also examines the relationships between Jewish hermeneutics and literary theory. A excellent bibliography is appended to Buijs's *Maimonides* (cited above).

From The Guide of the Perplexed¹

[Introduction to the First Part]

Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk,
For unto Thee have I lifted my soul.²

Unto you, O men, I call,
And my voice is to the sons of men.³

Incline thine ear, and hear the words of the wise,
And apply thy heart unto my knowledge.⁴

The first purpose of this Treatise is to explain the meanings of certain terms occurring in books of prophecy. Some of these terms are equivocal; hence the ignorant attribute to them only one or some of the meanings in which the term in question is used. Others are derivative terms; hence they attribute to them only the original meaning from which the other meaning is derived. Others are amphibolous terms,⁵ so that at times they are believed to be univocal and at other times equivocal. It is not the purpose of this Treatise to make its totality understandable to the vulgar or to beginners in speculation, nor to teach those who have not engaged in any study other than the science of the Law—I mean the legalistic study of the Law. For the purpose of this Treatise and of all those like it is the science of Law in its true sense.⁶ Or rather its purpose is to give indications to a religious man for whom the validity of our Law has become established in his soul and has become actual in his belief—such a man being perfect in his religion and character, and

having studied the sciences of the philosophers and come to know what they signify. The human intellect having drawn him on and led him to dwell within its province, he must have felt distressed by the externals of the Law and by the meanings of the above-mentioned equivocal, derivative, or amphibolous terms, as he continued to understand them by himself or was made to understand them by others. Hence he would remain in a state of perplexity and confusion as to whether he should follow his intellect, renounce what he knew concerning the terms in question, and consequently consider that he has renounced the foundations of the Law. Or he should hold fast to his understanding of these terms and not let himself be drawn on together with his intellect, rather turning his back on it and moving away from it, while at the same time perceiving that he had brought loss to himself and harm to his religion. He would be left with those imaginary beliefs to which he owes his fear and difficulty and would not cease to suffer from heartache and great perplexity.

This Treatise also has a second purpose: namely, the explanation of very obscure parables occurring in the books of the prophets, but not explicitly identified there as such. Hence an ignorant or heedless individual might think that they possess only an external sense, but no internal one. However, even when one who truly possesses knowledge considers these parables and interprets them according to their external meaning, he too is overtaken by great perplexity. But if we explain these parables to him or if we draw his attention to their being parables, he will take the right road and be delivered from this perplexity. That is why I have called this Treatise "The Guide of the Perplexed."

I do not say that this Treatise will remove all difficulties for those who understand it. I do, however, say that it will remove most of the difficulties, and those of the greatest moment. A sensible man thus should not demand of me or hope that when we mention a subject, we shall make a complete exposition of it, or that when we engage in the explanation of the meaning of one of the parables, we shall set forth exhaustively all that is expressed in that parable. An intelligent man would be unable to do so even by speaking directly to an interlocutor. How then could he put it down in writing without becoming a butt for every ignoramus who, thinking that he has the necessary knowledge, would let fly at him the shafts of his ignorance? We have already explained in our legal compilations some general propositions concerning this subject and have drawn attention to many themes. Thus we have mentioned there that the *Account of the Beginning*⁷ is identical with natural science, and the *Account of the Chariot*⁸ with divine science; and have explained the rabbinic saying: *The Account of the Chariot ought not to be taught even to one man, except if he be wise and able to understand by himself, in which case only the chapter headings may be transmitted to him.*⁹ Hence you should not ask of me here anything beyond the chapter headings. And

1. Translated by Shlomo Pines, who occasionally supplies explanatory text in brackets.

2. Psalms 143:8.

3. Proverbs 8:4.

4. Proverbs 22:17.

5. Words understood as having sometimes one meaning and sometimes many meanings. "Equivocal": words with more than one meaning. "Derivative": words containing supplemental meanings derived from other words; words used figuratively.

6. In an earlier work, the *Mishneh Torah* (literally, "repetition of the Torah"), Maimonides collected, organized, and commented on the oral rabbinic law—called the Mishnah—that had evolved in the first centuries of the common era. In *The Guide of the Perplexed*, he turns his attention to the relationship between Jewish law and philosophy as well as to interpretive theory.

7. Literally, the *Work of the Beginning* (translator's note). That is, the Genesis story.

8. Literally, the *Work of the Chariot* (translator's note). That is, Ezekiel 1 and 10.

9. From the Babylonian Talmud, Hagigah, 11b, 13a (translator's note). The Babylonian Talmud is one of the two great Talmuds, or collections of oral law; it was compiled between the 2d and 5th centuries C.E. (the Jerusalem Talmud was compiled between 220 C.E. and the end of the 4th c.). It is divided into six Orders; each Order has a number of tractates. Hagigah is one of the tractates, which are further divided into chapters and then paragraphs. More generally, the Talmud is divided into the Mishnah, which states the law, and the Gemara, which presents the discussion of it.

even those are not set down in order or arranged in coherent fashion in this Treatise, but rather are scattered and entangled with other subjects that are to be clarified. For my purpose is that the truths be glimpsed and then again be concealed, so as not to oppose that divine purpose which one cannot possibly oppose and which has concealed from the vulgar among the people those truths especially requisite for His apprehension. As He has said: *The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him.*¹ Know that with regard to natural matters as well, it is impossible to give a clear exposition when teaching some of their principles as they are. For you know the saying of [the Sages], *may their memory be blessed: The Account of the Beginning ought not to be taught in the presence of two men.*² Now if someone explained all those matters in a book, he in effect would be *teaching* them to thousands of men. Hence these matters too occur in parables in the books of prophecy. *The Sages, may their memory be blessed*, following the trail of these books, likewise have spoken of them in riddles and parables, for there is a close connection between these matters and the divine science, and they too are secrets of that divine science.

You should not think that these great secrets are fully and completely known to anyone among us. They are not. But sometimes truth flashes out to us so that we think that it is day, and then matter and habit in their various forms conceal it so that we find ourselves again in an obscure night, almost as we were at first. We are like someone in a very dark night over whom lightning flashes time and time again. Among us there is one³ for whom the lightning flashes time and time again, so that he is always, as it were, in unceasing light. Thus night appears to him as day. That is the degree of the great one among the prophets, to whom it was said: *But as for thee, stand thou here by Me.*⁴ And of whom it was said: *that the skin of his face sent forth beams, and so on.*⁵ Among them there is one to whom the lightning flashes only once in the whole of his night; that is the rank of those of whom it is said: *they prophesied, but they did so no more.*⁶ There are others between whose lightning flashes there are greater or shorter intervals. Thereafter comes he who does not attain a degree in which his darkness is illumined by any lightning flash. It is illumined, however, by a polished body or something of that kind, stones or something else that give light in the darkness of the night. And even this small light that shines over us is not always there, but flashes and is hidden again, as if it were the *flaming sword which turned every way.*⁷ It is in accord with these states that the degrees of the perfect vary. As for those who never even once see a light, but grope about in their night, of them it is said: *They know not, neither do they understand; They go about in darkness.*⁸ The truth, in spite of the strength of its manifestation, is entirely hidden from them, as is said of them: *And now men see not the light which is bright in the skies.*⁹ They are the vulgar among the people. There is then no occasion to mention them here in this Treatise.

Know that whenever one of the perfect wishes to mention, either orally or in writing, something that he understands of these secrets, according to the degree of his perfection, he is unable to explain with complete clarity and

coherence even the portion that he has apprehended, as he could do with the other sciences whose teaching is generally recognized. Rather there will befall him when teaching another that which he had undergone when learning himself. I mean to say that the subject matter will appear, flash, and then be hidden again, as though this were the nature of this subject matter, be there much or little of it. For this reason, all the Sages possessing knowledge of God the Lord, knowers of the truth, when they aimed at teaching something of this subject matter, spoke of it only in parables and riddles. They even multiplied the parables and made them different in species and even in genus. In most cases the subject to be explained was placed in the beginning or in the middle or at the end of the parable; this happened where a parable appropriate for the intended subject from start to finish could not be found. Sometimes the subject intended to be taught to him who was to be instructed was divided—although it was one and the same subject—among many parables remote from one another. Even more obscure is the case of one and the same parable corresponding to several subjects, its beginning fitting one subject and its ending another. Sometimes the whole is a parable referring to two cognate subjects within the particular species of science in question. The situation is such that the exposition of one who wishes to teach without recourse to parables and riddles is so obscure and brief as to make obscurity and brevity serve in place of parables and riddles. The men of knowledge and the sages¹ are drawn, as it were, toward this purpose by the divine will just as they are drawn by their natural circumstances. Do you not see the following fact? God, may His mention be exalted, wished us to be perfected and the state of our societies to be improved by His laws regarding actions. Now this can come about only after the adoption of intellectual beliefs, the first of which being His apprehension, may He be exalted, according to our capacity. This, in its turn, cannot come about except through divine science, and this divine science cannot become actual except after a study of natural science. This is so since natural science borders on divine science, and its study precedes that of divine science in time as has been made clear to whoever has engaged in speculation on these matters. Hence God, may He be exalted, caused His book to open with the *Account of the Beginning*, which, as we have made clear, is natural science. And because of the greatness and importance of the subject and because our capacity falls short of apprehending the greatest of subjects as it really is, we are told about those profound matters—which divine wisdom has deemed necessary to convey to us—in parables and riddles and in very obscure words. As [the Sages], *may their memory be blessed*, have said: *It is impossible to tell mortals² of the power of the Account of the Beginning. For this reason Scripture tells you obscurely: In the beginning God created, and so on.*³ They thus have drawn your attention to the fact that the above-mentioned subjects are *obscure*. You likewise know Solomon's saying: *That which was is far off, and exceeding deep; who can find it out?*⁴ That which is said about all this is in

1. The Arabic term *al-hukama'* often designates the philosophers [translator's note].

2. Literally, flesh and blood [translator's note].

3. Cf. Midrash Shnei Ketubim, Batei Midrashoth, IV [translator's note]. Midrash: literally, "to seek out the meaning" (Hebrew); an explanation of a text from the Torah (the 5 books of Moses; more generally known as the first 5 books of the Old

Testament). The term may refer to a collection of such explanations or to a hermeneutic technique by which such explanations are produced. A midrash might explain a single word or a gap in the text. There are midrashim for every book of the Torah, and Maimonides here refers to a midrash on Genesis.

4. Ecclesiastes 7.24.

6. Numbers 11.25.

7. Genesis 3.24.

8. Psalm 82.5.

9. Job 37.21.

1. Psalm 25.14.

2. Babylonian Talmud, Hagigah, 11b.

3. Or: there are those [translator's note].

4. Deuteronomy 5.31.

5. Exodus 34.29.

equivocal terms so that the multitude might comprehend them in accord with the capacity of their understanding and the weakness of their representation, whereas the perfect man, who is already informed, will comprehend them otherwise.

We had promised in the Commentary on the *Mishnah* that we would explain strange subjects in the "Book of Prophecy" and in the "Book of Correspondence"—the latter being a book in which we promised to explain all the difficult passages in the *Midrashim*,⁵ where the external sense manifestly contradicts the truth and departs from the intelligible. They are all parables. However, when, many years ago, we began these books and composed a part of them, our beginning to explain matters in this way did not commend itself to us. For we saw that if we should adhere to parables and to concealment of what ought to be concealed, we would not be deviating from the primary purpose. We would, as it were, have replaced one individual by another of the same species. If, on the other hand, we explained what ought to be explained, it would be unsuitable for the vulgar among the people. Now it was to the vulgar that we wanted to explain the import of the *Midrashim* and the external meanings of prophecy. We also saw that if an ignoramus among the multitude of Rabbanites⁶ should engage in speculation on these *Midrashim*, he would find nothing difficult in them, inasmuch as a rash fool, devoid of any knowledge of the nature of being, does not find impossibilities hard to accept. If, however, a perfect man of virtue should engage in speculation on them, he cannot escape one of two courses: either he can take the speeches in question in their external sense and, in so doing, think ill of their author and regard him as an ignoramus—in this there is nothing that would upset the foundations of belief; or he can attribute to them an inner meaning, thereby extricating himself from his predicament and being able to think well of the author whether or not the inner meaning of the saying is clear to him. With regard to the meaning of prophecy, the exposition of its various degrees, and the elucidation of the parables occurring in the prophetic books, another manner of explanation is used in this Treatise. In view of these considerations, we have given up composing these two books in the way in which they were begun. We have confined ourselves to mentioning briefly the foundations of belief and general truths, while dropping hints that approach a clear exposition, just as we have set them forth in the great legal compilation, *Mishneh Torah*.⁷

My speech in the present Treatise is directed, as I have mentioned, to one who has philosophized and has knowledge of the true sciences, but believes at the same time in the matters pertaining to the Law and is perplexed as to their meaning because of the uncertain terms and the parables. We shall include in this Treatise some chapters in which there will be no mention of an equivocal term. Such a chapter will be preparatory for another, or it will hint at one of the meanings of an equivocal term that I might not wish to mention explicitly in that place, or it will explain one of the parables or hint

at the fact that a certain story is a parable. Such a chapter may contain strange matters regarding which the contrary of the truth sometimes is believed, either because of the equivocality of the terms or because a parable is taken for the thing being represented or vice versa.

As I have mentioned parables, we shall make the following introductory remarks: Know that the key to the understanding of all that the prophets, peace be on them, have said, and to the knowledge of its truth, is an understanding of the parables, of their import, and of the meaning of the words occurring in them. You know what God, may He be exalted, has said: *And by the ministry of the prophets have I used similitudes*.⁸ And you know that He has said: *Put forth a riddle and speak a parable*.⁹ You know too that because of the frequent use prophets make of parables, the prophet has said: *They say of me: Is he not a maker of parables?*¹ You know how Solomon began his book: *To understand a proverb, and a figure; The words of the wise, and their dark sayings*.² And it said in the *Midrash*: *To what were the words of the Torah to be compared before the advent of Solomon? To a well the waters of which are at a great depth and cool, yet no man could drink of them. Now what did one clever man do? He joined cord with cord and rope with rope and drew them up and drank. Thus did Solomon say one parable after another and speak one word after another until he understood the meaning of the words of the Torah*.³ That is literally what they say. I do not think that anyone possessing an unimpaired capacity imagines that the words of the Torah referred to here that one contrives to understand through understanding the meaning of parables are ordinances concerning the building of tabernacles, the *lulab*, and the law of four trustees.⁴ Rather what this text has in view here is, without any doubt, the understanding of obscure matters. About this it has been said: *Our Rabbis say: a man who loses a sela or a pearl in his house can find the pearl by lighting a taper worth an issar*.⁵ *In the same way this parable in itself is worth nothing, but by means of it you can understand the words of the Torah*.⁶ This too is literally what they say. Now consider the explicit affirmation of [the Sages], *may their memory be blessed*, that the internal meaning of the words of the Torah is a pearl whereas the external meaning of all parables is worth nothing, and their comparison of the concealment of a subject by its parable's external meaning to a man who let drop a pearl in his house, which was dark and full of furniture. Now this pearl is there, but he does not see it and does not know where it is. It is as though it were no longer in his possession, as it is impossible for him to derive any benefit from it until, as has been mentioned, he lights a lamp—an act to which an understanding of the meaning of the parable corresponds. The Sage has said: *A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings [maskiyoth] of silver*.⁷ Hear now an

8. Hosea 12.10.

9. Ezekiel 17.2.

1. Proverbs 1.6.

2. Proverbs 1.6. Proverbs is one of the books of the Bible traditionally ascribed to Solomon.

3. Cf. *Midrash* on the Song of Songs, 1.1 [translator's note].

4. Maimonides, contrasting those parts of the Torah that can be taken as parables with those that are completely straightforward (not in need of special interpretation), gives three examples of straightforward ordinances, "Tabernacle"; a suk-

lah or building constructed during the holiday of Sukkoth, which occurs after the High Holy Days

and commemorates the Jews' wandering in the desert. "Lulab"; a wand of sorts, fashioned of palm leaves, willow, and myrtle and waved in four directions during the holiday of Sukkoth. "The law of the four trustees": the four categories of legal guardian over someone else's property, which include the unpaid guardian, the borrower, the paid guardian, and the hirer.

5. A coin; ninety-six issar were worth a sela. "A sela"; a silver coin [translator's note].

6. Cf. *Midrash* on the Song of Songs, 1.1 [translator's note].

7. Proverbs 25.11.

alism. Though their philosophical thinking was not as sophisticated as Maimonides' use of Aristotle, they paved the way for him and other Jewish philosophers.

7. Maimonides' massive compilation of Jewish rabbinic law, written a decade before *The Guide of the Perplexed*.

5. Maimonides uses here and subsequently the term *drashoth* [translator's note]. The Hebrew term (singular *derash* or *derasha*) refers to the meanings derived from the original text by means of a variety of rabbinic techniques.

6. Tenth-century teachers who began to use philosophy to supplement the written Torah and the oral Torah (Talmud) as a defense against ration-

elucidation of the thought that he has set forth. The term *maskiyoth* denotes filigree traceries; I mean to say traceries in which there are apertures with very small eyelets, like the handiwork of silversmiths. They are so called because a glance penetrates through them; for in the [Aramaic] *translation* of the Bible the Hebrew term *va-yashqeph*—meaning, he glanced—is translated *va-istekhe*.⁸ The Sage accordingly said that a saying uttered with a view to two meanings is like an apple of gold overlaid with silver filigree-work having very small holes. Now see how marvellously this dictum describes a well-constructed parable. For he says that in a saying that has two meanings—he means an external and an internal one—the external meaning ought to be as beautiful as silver, while its internal meaning ought to be more beautiful than the external one, the former being in comparison to the latter as gold is to silver. Its external meaning also ought to contain in it something that indicates to someone considering it what is to be found in its internal meaning, as happens in the case of an apple of gold overlaid with silver filigree-work having very small holes. When looked at from a distance or with imperfect attention, it is deemed to be an apple of silver; but when a keensighted observer looks at it with full attention, its interior becomes clear to him and he knows that it is of gold. The parables of the prophets, peace be on them, are similar. Their external meaning contains wisdom that is useful in many respects, among which is the welfare of human societies, as is shown by the external meaning of *Proverbs* and of similar sayings. Their internal meaning, on the other hand, contains wisdom that is useful for beliefs concerned with the truth as it is.

Know that the prophetic parables are of two kinds. In some of these parables each word has a meaning, while in others the parable as a whole indicates the whole of the intended meaning. In such a parable very many words are to be found, not every one of which adds something to the intended meaning. They serve rather to embellish the parable and to render it more coherent or to conceal further the intended meaning; hence the speech proceeds in such a way as to accord with everything required by the parable's external meaning. Understand this well.

An example of the first kind of prophetic parable is the following text: *And behold a ladder set up on the earth, and so on.*⁹ In this text, the word *ladder* indicates one subject; the words *set up on the earth* indicate a second subject; the words *and the top of it reached to heaven* indicate a third subject; the words *and behold the angels of God* indicate a fourth subject; the word *ascending* indicates a fifth subject; the words *and descending* indicate a sixth subject; and the words *And behold the Lord stood above it* indicate a seventh subject. Thus every word occurring in this parable refers to an additional subject in the complex of subjects represented by the parable as a whole.

An example of the second kind of prophetic parable is the following text: *For at the window of my house I looked forth through my lattice; And I beheld among the thoughtless ones, I discerned among the youths, A young man void of understanding, Passing through the street near her corner, And he went the way to her house; In the twilight, in the evening of the day, In the blackness*

8. A verbal form deriving from the same root as the word *maskiyoth*. Genesis 26.8 [translator's note].

9. Genesis 28.12–13. After the word *earth*, the

*of night and the darkness. And, behold, there met him a woman With the attire of a harlot, and wily of heart. She is riotous and rebellious, and so on.*¹ Now she is in the streets, now in the broad places, and so on.² So she caught him, and so on.³ Sacrifices of peace-offerings were due from me, and so on.⁴ Therefore came I forth to meet thee, and so on.⁵ I have decked with the coverlets, and so on.⁶ I have perfumed my bed, and so on.⁷ Come, let us take our fill of love, and so on.⁸ For my husband is not at home, and so on.⁹ The bag of money, and so on.¹ With her much fair speech she causeth him to yield. With the blandishment of her lips she enticeth him away.² The outcome of all this is a warning against the pursuit of bodily pleasures and desires. Accordingly he [Solomon] likens matter, which is the cause of all these bodily pleasures, to a *harlot* who is also a *married woman*. In fact his entire book is based on this allegory. And we shall explain in various chapters of this Treatise his wisdom in likening matter to a *married harlot*, and we shall explain how he concluded this book of his with a eulogy of the *woman* who is not a *harlot* but confines herself to attending to the welfare of her household and husband. For all the hindrances keeping man from his ultimate perfection, every deficiency affecting him and every disobedience, come to him from his matter alone, as we shall explain in this Treatise. This is the proposition that can be understood from this parable as a whole. I mean that man should not follow his bestial nature; I mean his matter, for the proximate matter of man is identical with the proximate matter of the other living beings. And as I have explained this to you and disclosed the secret of this parable, you should not hope [to find some signification corresponding to every subject occurring in the parable]³ so that you could say: what can be submitted for the words, *Sacrifices of peace-offerings were due from me; this day have I paid my vows*? What subject is indicated by the words, *I have decked my couch with coverlets*? And what subject is added to this general proposition by the words, *For my husband is not at home*? The same holds good for the other details in this chapter. For all of them only figure in the consistent development of the parable's external meaning, the circumstances described in it being of a kind typical for adulterers. Also the spoken words and other such details are of a kind typical of words spoken among adulterers. Understand this well from what I have said for it is a great and important principle with regard to matters that I wish to explain.

When, therefore, you find that in some chapter of this Treatise I have explained the meaning of a parable and have drawn your attention to the general proposition signified by it, you should not inquire into all the details occurring in the parable, nor should you wish to find significations corre-

1. The omitted words are: *her feet abide not in her house* [translator's note].
2. The omitted words are: *and lieth in wait at every corner* [translator's note].
3. The omitted words are: *and kissed him, and with impudent face she said unto him* [translator's note].
4. The omitted words are: *this day have I paid my vows* [translator's note].
5. The omitted words are: *diligently to seek thy face, and I have found thee* [translator's note].
6. The omitted words are: *my bed, with striped cloths of the yarn of Egypt* [translator's note].
7. The omitted words are: *with myrrh, aloes and cinnamon* [translator's note].

8. The omitted words are: *until the morning; let us solace ourselves with loves* [translator's note].
9. The omitted words are: *he is gone a long journey* [translator's note].

1. The omitted words are: *he has taken with him, and will come home at the full moon* [translator's note].

2. *Proverbs* 7.6–21.

3. The words enclosed in brackets appear in Ibn Tibbon's Hebrew translation, but not in the printed Arabic text. There is little doubt that in this case Ibn Tibbon's text is more correct [translator's note].

sponding to them. For doing so would lead you into one of two ways: either into turning aside from the parable's intended subject, or into assuming an obligation to interpret things not susceptible of interpretation and that have not been inserted with a view to interpretation. The assumption of such an obligation would result in extravagant fantasies such as are entertained and written about in our time by most of the sects of the world, since each of these sects desires to find certain significations for words whose author in no wise had in mind the significations wished by them. Your purpose, rather, should always be to know, regarding most parables, the whole that was intended to be known. In some matters it will suffice you to gather from my remarks that a given story is a parable, even if we explain nothing more; for once you know it is a parable, it will immediately become clear to you what it is a parable of. My remarking that it is a parable will be like someone's removing a screen from between the eye and a visible thing.

INSTRUCTION WITH RESPECT TO THIS TREATISE

If you wish to grasp the totality of what this Treatise contains, so that nothing of it will escape you, then you must connect its chapters one with another; and when reading a given chapter, your intention must be not only to understand the totality of the subject of that chapter, but also to grasp each word that occurs in it in the course of the speech, even if that word does not belong to the intention of the chapter. For the diction of this Treatise has not been chosen at haphazard, but with great exactness and exceeding precision, and with care to avoid failing to explain any obscure point. And nothing has been mentioned out of its place, save with a view to explaining some matter in its proper place. You therefore should not let your fantasies elaborate on what is said here, for that would hurt me and be of no use to yourself. You ought rather to learn everything that ought to be learned and constantly study this Treatise. For it then will elucidate for you most of the obscurities of the Law that appear as difficult to every intelligent man. I adjure—by God, may He be exalted!—every reader of this Treatise of mine not to comment upon a single word of it and not to explain to another anything in it save that which has been explained and commented upon in the words of the famous Sages of our Law who preceded me. But whatever he understands from this Treatise of those things that have not been said by any of our famous Sages other than myself should not be explained to another; nor should he hasten to refute me, for that which he understood me to say might be contrary to my intention. He thus would harm me in return for my having wanted to benefit him and would *repay evil for good*.⁴ All into whose hands it falls should consider it well; and if it slakes his thirst, though it be on only one point from among the many that are obscure, he should thank God and be content with what he has understood. If, on the other hand, he finds nothing in this Treatise that might be of use to him in any respect, he should think of it as not having been composed at all. If anything in it, according to his way of thinking, appears to be in some way harmful, he should interpret it, even if in a farfetched way, in order to *pass a favorable judgment*.⁵ For as we are enjoined to act in this way toward our vulgar ones, all the more should

4. Psalm 38:20.

5. Cf. Mishnah, Aboth, I 6 [translator's note].

Aboth, meaning literally "Father," is a tractate of the Mishnah.

this be so with respect to our erudite ones and Sages of our Law who are trying to help us to the truth as they apprehend it. I know that, among men generally, every beginner will derive benefit from some of the chapters of this Treatise, though he lacks even an inkling of what is involved in speculation. A perfect man, on the other hand, devoted to Law and, as I have mentioned, perplexed, will benefit from all its chapters. How greatly will he rejoice in them and how pleasant will it be to hear them! But those who are confused and whose brains have been polluted by false opinions and misleading ways deemed by them to be true sciences, and who hold themselves to be men of speculation without having any knowledge of anything that can truly be called science,⁶ those will flee from many of its chapters. Indeed, these chapters will be very difficult for them to bear because they cannot apprehend their meaning and also because they would be led to recognize the falseness of the counterfeit money in their hands—their treasure and fortune held ready for future calamities. God, may He be exalted, knows that I have never ceased to be exceedingly apprehensive about setting down those things that I wish to set down in this Treatise. For they are concealed things; none of them has been set down in any book—written in the religious community⁷ in these times of *Exile*—the books composed in these times being in our hands. How then can I now innovate and set them down? However, I have relied on two premises, the one being [the Sages'] saying in a similar case, *It is time to do something for the Lord, and so on*;⁸ the second being their saying, *Let all thy acts be for the sake of Heaven*.⁹ Upon these two premises have I relied when setting down what I have composed in some of the chapters of this Treatise.

To sum up: I am the man who when the concern pressed him and his way was straitened and he could find no other device by which to teach a demonstrated truth other than by giving satisfaction to a single virtuous man while displeasing ten thousand ignoramuses—I am he who prefers to address that single man by himself, and I do not heed the blame of those many creatures. For I claim to liberate that virtuous one from that into which he has sunk, and I shall guide him in his perplexity until he becomes perfect and he finds rest.

INTRODUCTION

One of seven causes should account for the contradictory or contrary statements to be found in any book or compilation.

The first cause. The author has collected the remarks of various people with differing opinions, but has omitted citing his authorities and has not attributed each remark to the one who said it. Contradictory or contrary statements can be found in such compilations because one of the two propositions is the opinion of one individual while the other proposition is the opinion of another individual.

6. In this phrase the same Arabic term is translated by two words: "knowledge" and "science" [translator's note].

7. Meaning the Jewish community [translator's note].

8. The verse continues as follows: *for they have infringed Thy Law*. Psalms 119:126; cf. Babylonian Talmud, Berakhoth, 63 [translator's note]. Berakhoth: a tractate of the Talmud.
9. Mishnah, Aboth, II 17.

the second cause. The author of a particular book has adopted a certain opinion that he later rejects; both his original and later statements are retained in the book.

The third cause. Not all the statements in question are to be taken in their external sense; some are to be taken in their external sense, while some others are parables and hence have an inner content. Alternatively, two apparently contradictory propositions may both be parables and when taken in their external sense may contradict, or be contrary to, one another.

The fourth cause. There is a proviso that, because of a certain necessity, has not been explicitly stated in its proper place; or the two subjects may differ, but one of them has not been explained in its proper place, so that a contradiction appears to have been said, whereas there is no contradiction.

The fifth cause arises from the necessity of teaching and making someone understand. For there may be a certain obscure matter that is difficult to conceive. One has to mention it or to take it as a premise in explaining something that is easy to conceive and that by rights ought to be taught before the former, since one always begins with what is easier. The teacher, accordingly, will have to be lax and, using any means that occur to him or gross speculation, will try to make that first matter somehow understood. He will not undertake to state the matter as it truly is in exact terms, but rather will leave it so in accord with the listener's imagination that the latter will understand only what he now wants him to understand. Afterwards, in the appropriate place, that obscure matter is stated in exact terms and explained as it truly is.

The sixth cause. The contradiction is concealed and becomes evident only after many premises. The greater the number of premises needed to make the contradiction evident, the more concealed it is. It thus may escape the author, who thinks there is no contradiction between his two original propositions. But if each proposition is considered separately—a true premise being joined to it and the necessary conclusion drawn—and this is done to every conclusion—a true premise being joined to it and the necessary conclusion drawn—after many syllogisms the outcome of the matter will be that the two final conclusions are contradictory or contrary to each other. That is the kind of thing that escapes the attention of scholars who write books. If, however, the two original propositions are evidently contradictory, but the author has simply forgotten the first when writing down the second in another part of his compilation, this is a very great weakness, and that man should not be reckoned among those whose speeches deserve consideration.

The seventh cause. In speaking about very obscure matters it is necessary to conceal some parts and to disclose others. Sometimes in the case of certain dicta this necessity requires that the discussion proceed on the basis of a certain premise, whereas in another place necessity requires that the discussion proceed on the basis of another premise contradicting the first one. In such cases the vulgar must in no way be aware of the contradiction; the author accordingly uses some device to conceal it by all means.

The contradictions that are to be found in the *Mishnah* and the *Baraitoth*¹ are due to the first cause. Thus you will find that they constantly ask: Does not the beginning [of the passage] constitute an objection against its end? In such cases the answer is: The beginning is the opinion of a certain rabbi and the end that of another rabbi. You likewise will find that they say: Rabbi [Judah ha-Nasi]² agreed with the opinion of a certain rabbi in this one matter and therefore cited it anonymously. In that other matter he agreed with the opinion of that other rabbi and therefore cited it anonymously. You often will find them also saying: Who is the author of this anonymous passage? Such and such rabbi. Who is the author of that passage of the *Mishnah*? Such and such rabbi. Such cases are innumerable. The contradictions or divergences to be found in the *Talmud* are due to the first cause and to the second. Thus you find them constantly saying: In this matter he agreed with this rabbi and in that with another rabbi. They likewise say: He agreed with him on one point and disagreed on another. They also say: [The two statements are made by] two Amora'im³ who disagree as to the opinion of a certain rabbi. All contradictions of this kind are due to the first cause. Contradictions due to the second cause are referred to when they say: Rab abandoned this opinion. Raba⁴ abandoned that opinion. In such cases an inquiry is made as to which of the two statements is the later one. This is similar to their saying: In the first recension [of the *Talmud*] by Rabbi Ashi,⁵ he said one thing, and in the second another. That some passages in every prophetic book, when taken in their external sense, appear to contradict or to be contrary to one another is due to the third cause and to the fourth. And it was with this in view that this entire introduction was written. You already know how often [the Sages], may their memory be blessed, say: One verse says this and another verse says that. They straightway establish that there is an apparent contradiction. Thereupon they explain that a proviso is lacking in the statement of the subject or that the two texts have different subjects. Thus, they say: Solomon, it is not enough for you that your words contradict those of your father? They also contradict themselves, and so on.⁶ Cases of this are frequent in the sayings of the Sages, may their memory be blessed; however, most of the prophetic statements they refer to concern commandments or precepts regarding conduct. We, on the other hand, propose to draw attention to verses that are apparently contradictory with regard to opinions and beliefs. Part of this will be explained in some of the chapters of this Treatise, for this subject too belongs to the mysteries of the *Torah*. Whether contradictions due to the seventh cause are to be found in the books of the prophets is a matter for speculative study and investigation. Statements about this should not be a matter of conjecture. As for the divergences occurring in the books of the philosophers, or rather of those who know the truth, they are due to the fifth cause. On the other hand, the contradictions occurring in most of the books of authors and

1. A collection of extraneous rabbinic statements collected after the *Mishnah* but never incorporated into the *Talmud*.

2. Judah the Prince or Patriarch (135–ca. 220 C.E.), rabbi responsible for codifying the *Mishnah* out of the collected oral tradition, ca. 200 C.E.

3. Literally, "sayers" (Hebrew); rabbinic teachers whose opinions are preserved in the *Talmud*. They lived from the 3d to the 5th century C.E. in both Palestine and Babylonia.

4. Possibly Raba Bar Joseph bar Hama (299–352 C.E.), although the context suggests Maimonides

may simply be referring by way of example to any rabbi or teacher. Rabi, honorific given to Abba bar Avu (3d c.), a student of Judah ha-Nasi who founded a yeshiva (school) at Sura. That he is simply called Rabi (or rabbi) reflects his status.

5. Babylonian teacher who died early in the 5th century C.E. He was head of the yeshiva at Sura and famous for his reading of the whole *Talmud* during two months of the year.

6. Babylonian *Talmud*, Shabbath, 30a [translators' note]. Shabbath: a tractate of the *Talmud*.

commentators other than those we have mentioned are due to the sixth cause. Likewise in the *Midrashim* and the *Haggadah*,⁷ there is to be found great contradiction due to this cause. That is why the Sages have said: No questions should be asked about difficulties in the *Haggadah*. There are also to be found therein contradictions due to the seventh cause. Divergences that are to be found in this Treatise are due to the fifth cause and the seventh. Know this, grasp its true meaning, and remember it very well so as not to become perplexed by some of its chapters.

And after these introductory remarks, I shall begin to mention the terms whose true meaning, as intended in every passage according to its context, must be indicated. This, then, will be a key permitting one to enter places the gates to which were locked. And when these gates are opened and these places are entered into, the souls will find rest therein, the eyes will be delighted, and the bodies will be eased of their toil and of their labor.

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7. Theological speculation, general ethical teachings that have not attained the status of law (*halachah*); parables, maxims, legends, and folklore.

GEOFFREY OF VINSAU

ca. 1200

Geoffrey of Vinsauf is perhaps most familiar to students of English literature through the work of the poet Geoffrey Chaucer. In his *Nun's Priest's Tale*, Chaucer parodies Geoffrey of Vinsauf's lament on the death of Richard I in *Poetria Nova*: "O dear sovereign master, Geoffrey, you who movingly elegized the death of noble King Richard and when he was slain by the arrow, would that I had your art and skill to rail at Friday as you did." Chaucer's mock praise suggests that even in the fourteenth century, Geoffrey of Vinsauf's best-known work, *Poetria Nova* (ca. 1200, *New Poetics*), had a reputation for stylistic extravagance. That Chaucer could so casually refer to it also suggests its popularity. Throughout the late Middle Ages, the *Poetria* was a widely read treatise on poetry; almost 200 extant manuscript copies, as well as a number of elaborate commentaries written between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, attest to its considerable influence on Latin and vernacular literature.

While most medieval literary criticism is concerned with the proper reading either of the ancient poets (see, for instance, Bernardus Silvestris and GIOVANNI BOCCACCIO) or of the Bible (see AUGUSTINE and THOMAS AQUINAS), Geoffrey's textbook for working poets is keenly interested in modernity and innovation. Not that he rejects the authority of tradition: indeed, his own treatise is explicitly modeled on HORACE's *Ars Poetica* (see above). But just as his "new" poetics reconceives and revises Horatian poetics, so aspiring poets, he maintains, best imitate tradition when they renew and refresh it. The rich texture of Geoffrey's citations calls to mind the later poststructuralist notion of intertextuality—the interanimation within a text of citations, references, echoes, and cultural languages—as described by contemporary theorists like ROLAND BARTHES. Written in Latin poetic verse that illustrates the principles Geoffrey is setting forth, *Poetria Nova* exhibits a Barthesian pleasure in the display of language for its own sake.

Geoffrey of Vinsauf was a poet and a teacher of rhetoric who lived in the last decades of the twelfth and the beginning of the thirteenth centuries. Few details of his life survive; even the dates of his birth and death are unrecorded. The manuscripts of the *Poetria Nova* attribute it to a "Galfridus Anglicus" (Geoffrey the Englishman) who studied in Paris and taught in "Hamton" (probably Northampton) and who, on at least one occasion, accompanied a mission to Rome in the service of either King Richard (reigned 1189–99) or King John (reigned 1199–1216) of England. Geoffrey seems in every way the product of the Anglo-Norman culture into which he was born, a hybrid of the English-French cultural exchange facilitated by the Norman conquest of England nearly a century earlier. Traditional, but less trustworthy, accounts of his life place his birth in Normandy, France, and his early education at St. Frideswide, Oxford. He is supposed to have returned to the Continent for further university study, first in Paris and later in Italy. A quarrel with a friend named Robert may have earned him the displeasure of a Bishop Adam so that he was forced to appeal to the archbishop of Canterbury for protection. The intercession of the archbishop enabled him to return to England as a tutor. His designation "Vinsauf" in English, or "de Vinsalvo" in Latin, comes from a treatise attributed to him on the keeping of wine. Topical references in the *Poetria Nova*—including a dedication to Innocent III (whose papacy extended from 1198 to 1216), allusions to the death of Richard I (1199), and a reference to Pope Innocent III's interdict on England (1208–13)—not only help date the poem and its revisions fairly precisely to the first decades of the thirteenth century, but provide a historical context for Geoffrey's life as well. He was writing during a period of renewed interest in literature at the Continental cathedral schools and was a contemporary of important members of the influential School of Chartres, especially Bernardus Silvestris and John of Salisbury, sharing important literary concerns with them.

Geoffrey is best known for *Poetria Nova*, but at least three other works have been securely attributed to him. *Documentum de Modo et Arte Dicendi et Versificandi* (*Instruction in the Method and Art of Speaking and Versifying*) is a long prose treatise on rhetoric and poetics, written earlier than the *Poetria Nova* but covering much the same material. While the *Poetria Nova* is a treatise and poem intended specifically for aspiring poets, the *Documentum* consists primarily of rhetorical exercises in essay writing and poetry. *Summa de Coloribus Rhetoricis* (*A Summary of the Colors of Rhetoric*) is a briefer work, primarily on figures of speech. The "Causa Magistri Gaufredi Vinsauf" ("The Apology of Master Geoffrey of Vinsauf") is one of a number of short poems of topical and political interest attributed to Geoffrey.

The title of Geoffrey's most popular book suggestively indicates the author's relation to tradition and innovation. *Poetria Nova* refers to the medieval traditions of rhetoric and of poetics. By the late twelfth century, Cicero's rhetorical treatise *De Inventione* (ca. 85 B.C.E., *On Invention*) had been added to the rhetoric curriculum of the schools, joining the standard rhetorical text, the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (ca. 86–82 B.C.E., *Rhetoric Addressed to C. Herennius*), which had been falsely attributed to Cicero. *De Inventione* was called the "old rhetoric" (*rhetorica vetus*) and the *Ad Herennium* the "new rhetoric" (*rhetorica nova*). Horace's *Ars Poetica*, known as the *Poetria*, was the standard treatise on poetics. Geoffrey's *Poetria Nova* thus announces itself as a work rooted in the tradition of Horace, but carrying Horatian poetics forward in the same way that the *Ad Herennium* carries forward Cicero's *De Inventione*. Despite this gesture toward Horace, the *Poetria Nova* contains not a single citation from Horace, and its examples of figurative language are not culled from classical authors; rather, they are entirely invented by Geoffrey, a mark of his commitment to innovation and to a rethinking of traditional poetics. Unlike his predecessors, Geoffrey is less interested in carefully defining poetic techniques than in creatively illustrating them.

Though Geoffrey recognizes natural ability (*ingenium*) as a prerequisite for the poet, he is concerned in the *Poetria Nova* with the practical aspects of the poet's