Conclusion

Nahmanides between Ashkenaz and Andalusia

In the 1230s, a raging controversy broke out in Provence over the writings of Maimonides. One central party to this conflict was a first cousin of Nahmanides, R. Jonah Gerondi, who together with his teacher R. Solomon of Montpellier and his colleague R. David b. Saul formed the so-called "anti-Maimunist" camp in Montpellier. After R. Solomon launched his campaign against the ideas of Maimonides, Maimonideans in Provence, the "Maimunists," rallied and vigorously counterattacked. Under siege from all quarters, R. Solomon sent R. Jonah northward to recruit reinforcements from the Torah scholars of northern France, apparently in the hopes that bringing them into the fray would level the playing field. R. Jonah, who had studied under Tosafists in Évreux, naturally was considered the best candidate for this mission. The northern French scholars did not fully grasp the cultural milieu in which Maimonides had been active nor did they appreciate his monumental contributions, so they did not accord him the kind of respect that even his opponents in Provence, Aragon, and Castile had shown him. They answered R. Solomon's plea for assistance with perhaps even greater fervor than he had expected. After investigating the matter, they placed the *Guide of the Perplexed* and the first book of the *Mishneh Torah*, the philosophy-laden *Sefer ha-Madda'*, under a ban, apparently even ordering that copies of these works be burnt or buried. What particularly fueled their rage were the allegorical readings and naturalistic tendencies of the *Guide*, as well as Maimonides' assertion in his "Laws of Repentance" that anthropomorphists are heretics.

Sefer ha-Madda' includes far more extreme philosophical positions than the ruling which excludes from the Jewish collective those who conceive of God as having some kind of body and denies them entry into the World to Come. For the anti-Maimunists, however, this law was more than enough—Maimonides was writing off an enormous number of righteous, God-fearing Jews! They would fight such a verdict at all costs. His ruling was a personal affront to the world of pious individuals who took pains to observe every jot and tittle of the law, yet did not spend time contemplating metaphysical issues of this nature. In fact, had someone thought to ask, they probably would have responded to questions about God with a variety of anthropomorphic notions. This ideal type of unquestioning faith and boundless self-sacrifice were the hallmarks of Ashkenazic religiosity, and Maimonides' harsh condemnation was interpreted as seeking to rid the world of it. One can also certainly posit, as Gershom Scholem did, that beyond coming to the defense of the simple Jew's way of life, the anti-Maimunists were trying to uphold the fundamentally anthropomorphic conceptions held by some elite Ashkenazic Jews and the mystical anthropomorphism of the kabbalists.[1] Had Maimonides' theological positions and intolerance been expressed only in works of religious thought or philosophy, perhaps the anti-Maimunists would have passed them over in silence, but their inclusion in such a widely available and well-thumbed halakhic code was correctly perceived as a power grab by Maimonides, who was installing himself as the final authority on matters of theology and turning his considered opinion into incontestable, binding doctrine.

Maimunists responded in kind with an excommunication of their own, singling out R. Solomon and his disciples, and they sent one of the most distinguished representatives of Provençal Maimonidean culture, R. David Kimhi (Radak), to obtain the backing of Spanish communities, which were seen as natural allies in the fight for Maimonides' Andalusian culture. The Maimunists hoped that the endorsement of those communities would counterbalance the

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[1] See Gershom Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, ed. R.J. Zwi Werblowsky and trans. Allan Arkush (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 403-410.

opposition from Provence and northern France, but they were disappointed. Radak met only partial success in Spain, because the culture of central and northeastern Iberia had undergone a profound change at the beginning of the thirteenth century. In Toledo, R. Meir Abulafia and R. Judah Alfakar openly refused to support the excommunication of the anti-Maimunists.

This controversy, whose chronology has been carefully chronicled by various historians, quickly escalated from an ideological debate to a fierce conflict that left deep scars in the memory of its participants and witnesses.[2] In the conflict, open season was declared on one individual, against whom any means of attack was on the table—R. Jonah. His Maimunist adversaries tried to remove him from the picture through character assassination. They revived an old claim that one of his ancestors had a halakhically invalid marriage, making him a bastard. Since Nahmanides was his first cousin, this genealogical stain spread to him as well, and some of the most rancorous letters that he sent to Provence addressed the Torah leaders there, demanding that they retract the blot smeared on his family and remove those responsible for it from their midst.[3] From a passage in one of the letters, which he wrote to the central rabbinic figure in Provence, R. Meshullam b. Moses, author of *Sefer ha-Hashlamah*, it sounds as if he too was a candidate for excommunication due to his kabbalistic opinions. One can perhaps find direct evidence of this in one of the letters sent by Maimunists in Béziers, in which they explicitly attacked R. Jonah and mentioned the illicit relationship in his bloodline. In the very same letter, the Maimunists roundly condemned the kabbalistic tendencies of R. Jonah's unnamed associate:

> One is called an educator but is an unbeliever,/ of God he has no fear./ Each day he seeks out Sandalfon, Dalfon, Hasadon,/ and Beelzebub, god of Ekron./ He compounds his guilt and transgression/ by offering to Nergal, Ashimah**,** Adrammelech and Anammelech supplication/ with fear and trepidation./[4]

This scathing equation of kabbalists with idolaters might have been directed at Nahamnides.[5] In Nahmanides' letter to R. Meshullam b. Moses, which might have been a response to the letter sent from Béziers or some other letter, Nahmanides summoned his Provençal adversaries to court, where he would be vindicated for his kabbalistic theology:

> Let us figure out, between us, what is good, and whether we adhere to the faith of our forefathers./ And whoever lifts his eyes to the azure/ and perhaps does not become lost in deep contemplation/ of the Wheel, Sphere, and Chariots through intellection,/ maybe he turns his thought/ to the paths hewn by the flame of God,/ before the land [=of Israel], other lands, and heaven were wrought/—will you sell them to the slaughter for your rash,/ to suck out the marrow and consume the flesh,/ until your words bring them to their knees,/ stretched out for correction on your pillory?/[6]

Nahmanides made sure not to aim his barbs directly at the leading Torah scholars of Provence, because he did not want to make new enemies. He called for them to rein in those rogue

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[2] The most exhaustively detailed account of the polemic and its consequences can be found in Azriel Shohat, "Concerning the First Controversy on the Writings of Maimonides," *Zion* 36 (1971): 27-60 (Heb.). For a bibliography of earlier attempts to reconstruct and interpret the polemic, see ibid., 27nn2-3.

[3] See the letters in *KR*, 1:353-364.

[4] See Bernard Septimus, "Communal Struggle in Barcelona during the Maimonidean Controversy," *Tarbiz* 42 (1973): 392-393 (Heb.).

[5] Ibid.

[6] *KR*, 1:363.

elements whom he refers to as "juveniles," who controlled the tone, pace, and direction of the polemic. Yet, in the continuation he also lodged a complaint against the Provençal leadership as abetting, even if only indirectly, his persecutors: "But you lend a hand to those who transgress through heresy and denigration,/ such that whoever expounds any *haggadah* is delivered into their hand for obliteration./"[7] The persecution of those who "expound any *haggadah*" seems to refer to thinkers like the Geronese kabbalists, who produced aggadic commentaries that interpreted Aggadah as the symbolic key for kabbalistic notions.[8] R. Meshullam's response to Nahmanides is not extant, but it seems that in the wake of the Maimonidean controversy he supported his nephew R. Meir b. Simeon ha-Me'ili, who banned and burned kabbalistic writings. It would be fascinating to know how he responded to Nahmanides, who had turned to him, among others, to defend him against his anti-kabbalist persecutors.

Nahmanides was sucked into this whirlpool of personal attacks against his will, but his greatest contribution came from his deliberate intervention. For the duration of the controversy, Nahmanides was only in his thirties, but still he played a unique, influential role in its development. Two of his letters illustrate his heavyweight status despite his relatively young age. These letters were addressed to the leading lights of the Jewish world: one was sent to the communities of Aragon, Navarre, and Castile, and the other to the Torah scholars of northern France. The two letters were addressed to utterly different Jewish communities, to the external forces that each of the two Provençal factions were trying to win over to their own side—the French on the one hand and the Spaniards on the other. Nahmanides employed the same strategy in both letters, which reflects his attempt to prevent a local conflict from engulfing and polarizing the entire Jewish world and rending it apart from within. In his letter to Aragon, Castile, and Catalonia, he urged the Spanish communities to refuse to support the ban on the anti-Maimunists; in his letter to the French rabbis, he worked to repeal their ban on Maimonides' writings. From a Maimunist sent from Lunel, one can sense the weight Nahmanides' letter had in the ultimate decision by the rabbis to retract their ban:

> And when they [=the rabbis of northern France] saw our correspondence,/ the letters of most of our populace,/ and the letter of the great, pious sage who is faithful to the Holy One,/ R. Moses b. Nahman,/ they were ashamed of their actions/ and regretted their excommunications./[9]

Nahmanides exerted comparable influence, though with opposite consequences, in thwarting Radak's mission to the Spanish communities, from which Radak had hoped to extract a ban on the anti-Maimunists in Provence.[10]

As the polemic grew more extreme, each side dug in and doubled down. Nahmanides stood out as the only figure who tried to offer a way out, a solution that would reduce the inflammation surrounding the controversy and shrink it back down to a legitimate, internal debate, thereby preventing it from blowing up into a violent, world-wide conflict with Jewish authorities issuing international excommunications. Of the key personalities in the controversy, Nahmanides also was the only one who held considerable sway in both camps. All of this is a testament to his political savvy and outstanding leadership, which were already in evidence at his young age. Moreover, his unique approach and his ability to maintain an impressive level of

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[7] Ibid.

[8] See Scholem, *Origins*, 410n106.

[9] Joseph Shatzmiller, "Towards a Picture of the First Maimonidean Controversy," *Zion* 34 (1969): 142 (Heb.).

[10] See Shohat, "Controversy," 42.

discourse with both sides afford us insight into his cultural worldview, which was formed along the seam dividing Andalusia from Ashkenaz.

Nahmanides' letter to the Spanish communities is relatively brief and does not reveal his fundamental positions. He calls on these communities not to trust the delegates from Provence, whom he describes in condemnatory terms:

> For already I have seen/ concerning this matter people leading others into sin./ They are coming our way with open-and-shut narratives in their hands,/ winning hearts and prejudicing minds./[11]

According to Nahmanides' account, which may be true, R. Solomon did not pursue a ban on Maimonides' writings but warned people about certain ideas contained therein. The blame for that ban fell squarely on the shoulders of the French rabbis:

> And even if the rabbis of northern France, whose Talmudic waters we drink, said that the sun in its zenith/ ought to be concealed in its sheath,/ and ordered that the lustrous moon be occulted/ and the stars beclouded,/ the rabbi [=R. Solomon] who makes his case before you is guilty of no sin, because he was having a civil disagreement with his fellow.[12]

The addressees had no reason to excommunicate R. Solomon, and certainly not before giving him a fair hearing in person. He had legitimate grounds for his dispute:

> the rabbi [=R. Solomon] who makes his case before you is guilty of no sin, because he was having a civil disagreement with his fellow; whereas the other party, who is given to exaggerating,/ well the racket he makes is quite revealing./[13]

Nahmanides traced the rapid deterioration in civility, which culminated in bans and counter-bans, to the harsh response of the French rabbis. He therefore devoted most of his attention to them, sending them a long epistle with the aim of procuring an annulment of the ban on the *Guide* and *Sefer ha-Madda'.* This letter included, among other things, high praise for Maimonides and his work, which is why it presents a real challenge for getting a good grasp of Nahmanides' attitude towards Maimonides and Andalusian culture in general. Scholars who have analyzed Nahmanides' attitude have split into two camps. The first camp reads the letter as a calculated political move intended to calm things down and let cooler heads prevail. It does not reflect the positions Nahmanides truly held, which these scholars believe were thoroughly anti-Maimonidean. The second camp views the letter as Nahmanides' true sentiments towards Maimonides, and is indicative of his generally positive appraisal of Andalusian Judaism. They see evidence of this in other areas of his thought, such as his attitude towards Aggadah in his *Commentary on the Torah*, and his willingness to include the comments of R. Abraham Ibn Ezra

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[11] *KR*, 1:332.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

and ideas of Maimonides in his own commentary.[14] Understanding this letter in light of Nahmanides' other writings is crucial for figuring out where to locate Nahmanides culturally. These two readings of Nahmanides, in my opinion, do not capture his complexity or align with his self-perception. As such, we ought to carefully analyze his letter to northern France in order to appreciate properly his presentation of Maimonides, the significance of his proposal for resolving or at least reducing the conflict, and how both of these fit into the larger context of his thought and other writings.

Nahmanides' first argument against the conduct of the French rabbis does not relate to the object of their criticism, Maimonides, but rather to the means. He asserts that any ban is futile because you cannot budge a venerated colossus, which is what Maimonides was in southwestern Europe. Maimonides' admirers in those parts would never stand for such an affront and would reflexively react by producing their own decrees of excommunication—better not to open that pandora's box at all, Nahmanides says. In his own words:

> When these communities hear this anathema pronounced, they will shrug off their fears/ and show no respect for Torah leaders;/ they will plot to defy the rabbis of France./ Each will come to his fellow's assistance/ to gird loins and summon courage on behalf of the words of the great Master [=Maimonides], encouraging those who learn his works, "Stay strong!/ Flash [with insight] like lightning!"/ in order to provide succor, so that they devote even more time to their contemplation/ and carry on with great determination./ The Torah will become like two,/ and all of Israel will bifurcate, too.[15]/

Although Nahmanides had been speaking explicitly about the communities of Yemen immediately prior to this quote, communities in which they held Maimonides in the highest esteem and even inserted his name into the kaddish prayer, this reaction was not limited by any means to those communities alone. If the ban were to be extended to the communities of Catalonia, they would meet resistance, even though these communities unreservedly supported R. Solomon. They too were in awe of Maimonides, even if they did not agree with everything he said or wrote:

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[14] Various scholars have tried to figure where to situate Nahmanides culturally with respect to Andalusia and Ashkenaz. Bernard Septimus has stressed Nahmanides' affinity to Andalusia; see, at length, his "Open Rebuke and Concealed Love: Nahmanides and the Andalusian Tradition," in *Rabbi Moses Nahmanides and his Literary Virtuosity*, ed. Isadore Twersky (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 11-34. For an extensive bibliography of those who have considered Nahmanides to be a pure anti-rationalist, see ibid., 14n12, and David Berger, "How Did Nahmanides Propose to Resolve the Maimonidean Controversy," in *Me'ah She'arim: Studies in Medieval Jewish Spiritual Life in Memory of Isadore Twersky*, eds. Ezra Fleischer et al. (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2001), 137n3 (Heb.). Other viewpoints emphasize the influence of the Andalusian philosophical tradition on Nahmanides; see Berger, ibid., 137n4. One important aspect of this debate concerns Nahmanides' attitude towards Aggadah. Nahmanides famously proclaimed during the disputation in Barcelona that Talmudic Aggadah is not binding. Like our letter here, context raises the possibility that this was not Nahmanides' true opinion and that ulterior motives were at play. Scholars debated this extensively, some attributing it to the circumstances of the disputation and others to the Geonic-Andalusian tradition that did not consider Aggadah canonical. For a recent discussion of the issue, see Shalom Yahalom, "The Barcelona Disputation and the Status of Aggadah in Nahmanides' Teachings," *Zion* 69 (2004): 25-43 (Heb.), and see the extensive bibliography on the various positions in notes 5-9.

[15] *KR*, 1:341.

> Take note: in our communities we accord much respect to the great Master [=Maimonides] and are greatly indignant on his behalf, for the honor of his Torah, piety,/ dignity, and majesty—/ not because we are of two minds/ and have lost our way, straying from the path of our fine Rabbis/ for the philosophical vanities of the gentiles./[16]

Even if the Barcelonans might have thought about enforcing the ban on the *Guide*, they would never have done the same concerning *Sefer ha-Madda'*:

> Even if they might consider part of your decree, and as a result quarantine the *Guide of the Perplexed*/ and seal the lips of those who would speak about what is in its text,/ because their mind is like the needle's eye and they cannot follow his train of thought nor his ways can they fathom,/ what would they say about *Sefer ha-Madda'*, divinely inspired writing that they copy verbatim./[17]

According to Nahmanides, the disconnect between the Jewish cultures of northern France and Spain led the French rabbis to underestimate the legend that Maimonides was outside of Franco-Germany. Unaware of this, they produced their hasty ban. But more than that, the cultural gap meant that they misperceived who Maimonides was and what he was all about. Nahmanides tried to address this by placing Maimonides' works back into their original cultural context:

> Even if you [=the northern French rabbis] have been raised in the bosom of faith,/ rooted in the courtyards of tradition, robust and full of youth,/ how can you not look beyond your horizons?/ For he fortified the hopeless and those enslaved by their passions!/ He sated them with our faith and quenched their thirsty souls with our traditions,/ instead of the Greek nonsense with which they had stuffed themselves, feeding their bellies terrible notions/ […] Did he trouble himself for you, Geonim of the Talmud? He was practically forced, against his will,/ to construct a literary haven for those in Greek philosophy's thrall,/ far away from Aristotle and Galen—have you heard what they had to say,/ have their proofs led you astray?/[18]

In this passage, Nahmanides justifies Maimonides' involvement in Aristotelian philosophy and other non-Jewish disciplines. They did not exert a profound influence on him, nor did he feel a deep affinity for them; he merely used whatever tools were necessary to save spiritual lives. The French rabbis cannot possibly understand the crisis experienced by these individuals because they are out of reach of Greek-Arabic philosophy, and without seeing the disease of the spirit, they cannot truly appreciate the cure that is Maimonides' work. In this account, Nahmanides reads Maimonides very moderately. Maimonides' great achievement was not the integration of Aristotelian philosophy into Judaism, but the defense of the latter from the former. As he puts it:

> he is a shield from the arrowhead/ of the Greeks who promulgate falsehood;/ he hoists up those drowning in their [=the Greeks'] flooded well, mired in their mud./[19]

This partial reading of Maimonides' engagement with philosophy is not a Nahmanidean invention. Regarding the mother of all questions raised by Aristotelian philosophy, whether the world is eternal or *de novo*, Maimonides in his *Guide* did systematically defend the belief in God's creation of the world *de novo*. If this presentation means that Nahmanides viewed Maimonides as a kindred spirit, we should ask: which Maimonides? Maimonides famously left

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[16] Ibid., 1:343.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid., 1:339.

[19] Ibid., 1:340.

himself and his writings open to a multitude of interpretations, and Nahmanides specifically chose the more conservative one, which his philosophical interpreters, such as Samuel Ibn Tibbon, would have undoubtedly rejected.

Nahmanides' moderate and conservative interpretation of Maimonides comes into much sharper relief elsewhere in the letter, when he tries to defuse the arguments of the French rabbis one by one. The French listed the notable absence of Gehenna from Maimonides' entire theory of divine retribution as one of the reasons for banning *Sefer ha-Madda'*. In his "Laws of Repentance," Maimonides asserts that the ultimate punishment of the soul is being annihilated: "the ultimate form of retribution is that the soul is excised and obliterated."[20] Although he goes into great detail about the World to Come and its spirituality, the details of punishment in Gehenna are noticeably missing. In his letter, Nahmanides brings proof from Rabbinic literature that the soul of the wicked is obliterated, in which case annihilation genuinely is the worst form of divine retribution. Maimonides does not even mention Gehenna, but Nahmanides brings proof that Maimonides believes in its existence from a single word: "they judge (*danin*) him according to his sins and he has a portion in the World to Come."[21] If we take Nahmanides' word for it, Maimonides did not mention Gehenna outright and certainly did not go into any detail about it, but he did leave detectable traces of his belief in its existence. If the word *danin* can encompass the entire process of postmortem retribution, surely there is room to squeeze Gehenna into it too. The problem with this is not that it is farfetched, but that Maimonides had a deliberate reason for omitting Gehenna. Maimonides identified the immortality of the soul with the eternality of the knowledge a person acquires during their lifetime, so whoever fails to achieve intellectual perfection fades into nothingness. As a naturalistic philosopher, Maimonides had no use for Gehenna except as a metaphor for this total obliteration. Beside this more radical reading, Maimonides left open the possibility of being read more moderately and traditionally, but the opening in this case is about as big as the eyelet of a needle. This ambiguity works to Maimonides' benefit, as Nahmanides noticed the opening here, however small it may be, and used it to portray him as a moderate thinker who was faithful to tradition.

Whether Nahmanides truly believed what he wrote about Maimonides' intention is not all that important, although the fact that he presents a similar reading in his *Torat ha-Adam*, a work not intended to calm tensions and restore peace, seems to indicate that he did.[22] Whatever the case may be, Nahmanides defended and showed true admiration for a figure who entered the dangerous waters of philosophy to rescue the floundering. Due to Nahmanides' moderate view of him, Maimonides is sometimes a source of inspiration and at other times a worthy, legitimate

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[20] "Law of Repentance," 8:5.

[21] Ibid., 3:5.

[22] Nahmanides defends Maimonides' conception of Hell there, where it does not appear tied to any polemic. Moreover, the discussion there is not apologetic, given that he includes criticisms of Maimonides that are not mentioned in the epistle: "Although the Master [=Maimonides] did not sufficiently explain that this annihilation takes place through punishment and suffering, there is proof in his words to judge him favorably. He wrote in one chapter of the aforementioned book: 'All of the wicked whose iniquities are greater [than their merits], they judge them according to their sins and they have a portion in the World to Come, for all Israel has a portion in the World to Come…' […] If there is no place of punishment and suffering for the soul, then what is the judgment by which the wicked person is judged according to his wickedness and has a portion in the World to Come in the end?" (*THA*, *KR*, 2:291-292). In the continuation of the piece, Nahmanides has an additional discussion about Maimonides' treatment of Gehenna in his *Commentary on the Mishnah*, in the introduction to chapter *Helek*, which he leaves out of his letter.

opponent. For this reason, in his Torah commentary and discourses Nahmanides deflects his attacks on philosophy away from Maimonides and onto the gentile philosophers, even when he knows that Maimonides voiced the very same opinions. One example that stands out appears in his harsh attack on those who deny the existence of demons:

> This can be known about spirits through the science of necromancy, and it also can be known about the Intellects through the Torah's hints, for those who understand their secret—but I cannot explain. We need to muzzle the mouths of the natural philosophizers who are drawn after the Greek, who denied [the existence of] everything that he could not apprehend with his senses, and had the gall to suspect—he and his wicked students—anything that he could not apprehend with his reason of being untrue.[23]

Maimonides and Nahmanides also sharply disagreed about a number of fundamental issues, such as the nature of prophecy and the reasons for the commandments. In all of them, Nahmanides was careful to distinguish ad rem attacks on Maimonides' positions from ad hominem ones on the illustrious man himself, and did not engage in the latter. He saved his vitriol, delivered in a personal tone, for the philosophers.[24] In his letter, after he clarifies where Gehenna appears in *Sefer ha-Madda'*, Nahmanides clearly evinces the direct link between his moderate reading of Maimonides and his admiration of him:

> This is our clear opinion about the words in this book./ Therefore, we treat it preciously/ and have committed it to memory;/ unlike you, we have not rejected it utterly./[25]

Those who read the letter as a calculated political act, and so as not representative of Nahmanides' real opinions, seem to me to be mistaken, especially when one reads it in light of his attitude towards Maimonides in the rest of his writings. The strategy he employed in the controversy by appealing to both sides to deescalate, in order to put a stop to the mutually assured excommunication and downgrade the feud from a regional conflict with sectarian potential to an internal debate, was not a local, tactical position he took to restore peaceful—or at least tolerant—relations and keep the divided house standing. This position is consistent with his general worldview and his broader methodology within his commentaries on the Talmud and the Torah. Part of what makes Nahmanides' *Commentary on the Torah* unique is his synoptic view of the Jewish world with all of its diversity, and the way he forms his own opinion by sifting and sorting through these riches. Nahmanides, as quite a few scholars have shown, drew a lot on Ibn Ezra and Maimonides, those exemplars of Andalusian culture, who served as a dependable font of inspiration for his commentary. At the same time, he engaged in constant conversation with Rashi's Torah commentary and the entire world it represents. He described Rashi's place in his commentary as follows:

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[23] *PHT*, Lev 16:8.

[24] He writes in *Torat Ha-Shem Temimah*: "From here you see the cruelty and obstinacy of the arch-philosopher, may his name be erased" (*DTHT*, 40 [=*KR*, 1:147]), and in his *Discourse on Ecclesiastes*: "this heresy spread among the Greeks due to this question. They said that the Creator does not know particulars, and they make repulsive arguments—because intentions reflect a lack in the one having them and so constitute something additional, as is known from the book of the chief rebel, may his and his adherents' names be erased" (*DDK*, *KR*, 1:194). Since the moderate Maimonides cannot maintain such opinions, he cannot be attacked for them, which is not the case with denying demons' existence.

[25] *KR*, 1:345.

> To illuminate my way I will use the lights of the pure candelabrum,/ the commentaries of our master Solomon—the magnificent garland and glorious diadem—/ crowned with Scripture, Mishnah, and Talmud,/ he gets the first word./ I ponder his every comment,/ with which I am besotted./[26]

Nahmanides' tangled relationship with Ashkenaz and Andalusia is also conspicuous in his halakhic writings. On the one hand, his adherence to the *Halakhot* of R. Isaac Alfasi (Rif) makes his rulings characteristically Spanish, but, on the other hand, his defenses of Rif often employ the analytical toolkit and study methods developed in northern and southern France.[27]

All that said, the attempt to situate Nahmanides and his worldview along the cultural interface between Ashkenaz and Andalusia is based only on the exoteric elements of his oeuvre, and perforce cannot be the whole truth. In the esoteric layer of Nahmanides' Torah commentary, what he terms the "way of truth," he indirectly traces the outlines of supernal gestures and movements and speaks a language that would have equally baffled Ibn Ezra and Maimonides, Rashi and the Tosafists. The worldview glimpsed in Nahmanides' allusions has nothing in common with the secret doctrines of the other medieval esotericists, like Ibn Ezra and Maimonides. In addition, the vibrant pluralism of the exoteric layer shifts into a flat monotone in the esoteric. The kabbalistic pieces in his commentary that are supposed to reveal some of the "way of truth" also differ in their manner of writing. Unlike in his exoteric writings, here Nahmanides does not relate to the positions of any other kabbalists, such as R. Isaac the Blind or his Geronese disciples. In these pieces, Nahmanides doffs his thinking cap and does not engage in debate or discussion; he acts as a pure conduit for kabbalistic traditions, even if he only transmits them through allusion. There is an immense gap between what he writes openly and what he alludes to secretly, which is one of the reasons he uses the esoteric medium. When we peel back the exoteric and peer into his esoteric world, which is where the roots of his thought lie, we find that the categories of Ashkenaz and Andalusia fall miserably short, because this kind of thought is neither here nor there—it demands wholly new categories.

Nahmanides' letter to the rabbis of northern France exposes this divergence between the revealed and concealed in his thought. Recall that Maimonides was attacked for his forceful rejection of any notion of God that smacks of anthropomorphism, and Nahmanides gave a long, detailed defense of his position. Unlike his approach to the issue of Gehenna, here Nahmanides did not try to read Maimonides differently; instead, he laid out the long tradition of anti-anthropomorphic positions taken by the luminaries of the Jewish people, including R. Eleazar b. R. Judah, a respected figure in the Ashkenazic world. Perhaps the French rabbis, like R. Moses Taku, were accustomed to reading Aggadah literally and assessed Maimonides' rejection of anthropomorphism as undermining the entire authority of Aggadah, which would explain why they reacted so strongly.[28] Nahmanides is interested in presenting this position as that held by an insignificant minority:

> I have heard others say that you criticize *Sefer ha-Madda'* for saying that there is no form or figure on high. Why have our masters found fault with him for this matter, when every Gaon in his composition, and every early scholar of Babylonia and Spain in his liturgical poetry,/ have considered anyone deviating from this guilty of idiocy?/[29]

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[26] *PHT*, introductory poem.

[27] See above, ch. 2.

[28] See Joseph Dan, introduction to *Ketav Tamim* (Jerusalem: Merkaz Dinur, 1984), 15-20 (Heb.).

[29] *KR*, 1:345.

After he has demonstrated unequivocally that a long, unbroken chain of the greatest Torah sages have rejected anthropomorphism, Nahmanides alludes to the fact that on the esoteric level, there is an idea of the divine form:

> the Cause of causes,/ more blessed than all blessings and praises,/ cannot be described through a body or figure or confined to spaces:/ How can he be depicted in spatial dimensions,/ when he cannot be encompassed by Heaven and the Heaven of Heavens?/ Although [in] some of the homilies pure,/ through rocks burst forth rivers (cf. Job 28:10),/ which have boughs and offshoots,/ producing fruit and fruit of fruits./ When their secret is analyzed,/ those who know it are gratified./[30]

Nahmanides, as we know, conceived of the lower seven *sefirot* as configured in the form of the human body, and in prophetic revelation *Shekhinah* takes on human form as well.[31] He does not agree with the de-anthropomorphists that all anthropomorphism must be rejected, but he also does not accept the literality of all anthropomorphic *aggadot*. These few lines in the letter are written carefully and precisely—the "Cause of causes" is *Ein-Sof*, which indeed has no shape or form, but as for the aspects of God depicted in the *aggadot*: "through rocks burst forth rivers." Nahmanides' sophisticated theology does not result from taking all *aggadot* literally, as the French believed, but from interpreting them symbolically and joining them with sefirotic theosophy. Nahmanides does not spell out, or even hint, to the nature of the concealed meaning of midrashic anthropomorphism. To let on any more would have been to sink his own attempt to create a consensus on the issue of anthropomorphism.

When Nahmanides faced the escalating crisis before him, he used the duality of the exoteric and esoteric to solve it. Exoterically, he tried to create as broad a consensus as possible, which would include tolerance for divergent opinions. He then plunged the disagreement deep down into the realm of the esoteric secret, thereby preserving coexistence within the community. So long as each party considered its own position to be the secret of the Torah, a proliferation of opposing exoteric opinions became tolerable. Nahmanides tried to make the shared space of Jewish society livable so that everyone could get along, with each side respecting the other's privacy, or, in this case, secrecy. In the very same community, and even the very same synagogue, two people might be living and praying side by side while harboring completely antithetical, firmly held beliefs. This tolerance was facilitated by, among other things, the structure of the secret. One group can believe that what it knows is superior to what everyone else knows, and so they preserve it as a secret. Another group may deem that knowledge to be nonsense, or even heresy, which, if it cannot be eradicated, is best kept under wraps. In order to strike a delicate balance within the Jewish world, whose internal unity was collapsing and which was accelerating towards internecine war, Nahmanides tried to preserve pluralism on the surface and move the discord underground. The displacement of the esoteric stratum was not absolute, however, because Nahmanides mentioned the existence of an esoteric doctrine known only to a closed circle. He did this to preserve the primacy of kabbalah as the secret tradition of the Torah, but because it was not exposed to the public, it could not weaken the exoteric consensus. In this way, his approach to the conflict matches the two-tiered structure of his *Commentary on the Torah*. In the exoteric, Nahmanides has open discussions that draw upon the entire range of Jewish medieval interpretation and thought; in the esoteric,

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[30] *KR*, 1:346.

[31] In the letter, he upholds the de-anthropomorphist position using the doctrine of the Glory espoused by R. Saadia Gaon and the German Pietists, but in his *Commentary on the Torah* he rejects the theory entirely. In his theosophy, the Glory is a revelation of *Shekhinah*, which is part of the essence of the Godhead and not some intermediate entity.

he presents a single approach that is worlds apart from the ideas and authorities he converses with in the exoteric discourse.

This idea of using esotericism to enable the coexistence of radically different and even contradictory opinions finds expression in one aspect of the compact Nahmanides tried to get the rabbis of northern France and their opponents to sign. He suggested that those who mock the *aggadot* be excommunicated, and the ban on Maimonides' books be lifted. In addition, although the *Guide* did not need to be buried or forbidden from study, Nahmanides proposed that public study and instruction of it be banned:

> and as for those who learn the *Guide of the Perplexed* in groups,/ place your fearsome hand to their lips,/ because the great Master, its author, ordered: "Do you not explain it and do not publish it." He also said as much at the beginning of his book: "I abjure by God every reader of this book not to explicate even one word of it, and not to explain to someone else anything except what is clear and explicit in the words of famous Torah sages who have preceded me. But to teach that which none of our Geonim said—do not teach that to anyone else." This is a quote of the Master's words.[32]

The prohibition against group study of the *Guide* fits the esotericism Nahmanides used for his kabbalah, and he brings support for it from Maimonides' own esotericism. Nahmanides applied similar restrictions to his own esoteric tradition, incorporating into the introduction to his *Commentary on the Torah* an oath and prohibition governing any attempt to explicate and explain the kabbalistic hints that stud his commentary. Nahmanides did not think it necessary to to conceal the *Guide* because it contains the Torah's secrets, philosophy being the privileged secret doctrine of Judaism; we know that for Nahmanides the Torah's secrets are the kabbalistic "way of truth" and not philosophy. Rather, Nahmanides wanted to remove it from the public forum, pushing it out of view and into the esoteric periphery. This solution would be better received than the heavy-handed ban on or destruction of Maimonides' works, because Maimonides, who himself viewed the *Guide* as an exposition of the Account of the Chariot and Account of Creation, wanted it kept secret, and Nahmanides himself imposed esoteric restrictions on his kabbalistic traditions.[33] The secret thus constitutes a duality: on the one hand, it is the profoundest, preserved, and privileged aspect of tradition; on the other hand, its concealment pushes it into the shadows so as to reduce its effects on the external, revealed aspect of tradition. This duality lies at the base of Nahmanides' attempt to stop the cultural conflict before him.

Nahmanides perceived that one of the most significant factors leading to the outbreak of this culture war was a breakdown in esoteric discipline, particularly in the wake of the translation and explanation of the *Guide*. From R. Isaac the Blind's letter to Nahmanides and R. Jonah, we learned that a similar crisis ensued when R. Isaac's Geronese disciples, Rabbis Ezra and Azriel, spread kabbalistic ideas.[34] In southern France, kabbalistic works condemned as heretical were buried and burned, to the extent that kabbalah was driven out of the Midi entirely. Nahmanides

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[32] *KR*, 1:349. Regarding the agreement Nahmanides strove to achieve, see Berger, "Nahmanides," 135-146.

[33] R. Solomon Ibn Adret (Rashba), Nahmanides' disciple, took a similar approach in the controversy over the study of philosophy that erupted at the beginning of the fourteenth century. Rashba's approach was also linked to the duality of the esoteric medium, as I have tried to show elsewhere. See Moshe Halbertal, *Concealment and Revelation: Esotericism in Jewish Thought and Its Philosophical Implications*, trans. Jackie Feldman (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), 120-134.

[34] See ch. 8, sec. I.

tried to put out the flames by trying to restore the firm boundaries of concealment. Both philosophical and kabbalistic writings needed to be kept under lock and key, and not only to protect their writers from the fury of the establishment and society, as Leo Strauss thought. Esotericism enables the maintenance of communal unity, even when community members possess mutually exclusive esoteric doctrines that their fellows would judge heretical.

In the exoteric layer of Nahmanides' religious thought, halakhah, and Torah commentary, one could characterize him as the first European Jew. His *Commentary on the Torah* is an all-inclusive discourse dictated by intimate familiarity with and basic tolerance for all forms of contemporary Jewish culture, from Andalusia to Ashkenaz. In his halakhic works, his methodology draws from R. Abraham b. David (Ra'avad) of southern France and R. Jacob b. Meir (Rabbeinu Tam) of northern France, yet his actual halakhic positions are characteristically Spanish. Still, his historical perspective is that of the Franco-German—he sees the central historical drama as unfolding between Christians and Jews.[35] His role in the Maimonidean controversy also displays this uniquely synoptic view of the Jewish world. He was the only participant who tried to build bridges between the Maimunists and the French Tosafists, and his exclusive cultural situation enabled him to simultaneously address both warring factions, and to great effect. His kabbalistic positions, on the other hand, do not admit variety and cannot be plotted on a graph where Ashkenaz and Andalusia are the only two variables. His kabbalistic thought, one could say, is equidistantly remote from both.

The dissimilarity between the revealed and concealed in Nahmanides' oeuvre can be characterized by a recurring phenomenon we have encountered in the chapters dealing with the various elements of his thought. The more we dig deeper into the esoteric layer of his thought and expose the kabbalistic thinking underlying his positions, the more the personal dimensions of the Godhead grow fainter and dissolve, revealing a causal system with its own internal dynamic. Revelation does not occur—and so the Torah was not given—at the behest of the divine Sovereign; revelation is the manifestation of the multifaceted divine essence. Creation *ex nihilo* is a process of emanation from the divine Naught, which, under the influence of Neoplatonism, is depicted as a gradual transition of thickening and differentiation that ultimately returns back to its source, only to be repeated again because the process has no beginning or end. The divine Will does not reflect a voluntary determination but the inner essence of the divine movement, of its respiration. One would have thought that the miraculous is where the sovereign will of God is most clearly at work, that a miracle involves God purposefully interceding and breaking the causal chain. In Nahmanides' kabbalistic doctrine, the manifest and hidden miracles mark different aspects within the divine being, each of which operates according to the rules of its own position. History is not a stage on which God reveals His sovereignty and interacts with man as a personal God. The "Days of the World" are the fixed, cyclical movement in which the Godhead is trapped, at the heart of which is a great cosmic rift that stitches itself back together over eons of time. The Torah in its present form is but one revelation of this cyclical movement, which provides man—who gained free will through the Fall—the causal capacity to help bring the divine configuration back together, however partially. When the Godhead returns to actual, complete unity, human will as separate from divine will cease, and so the Era of the Torah with its commandments and laws will come to an end. The anomic foundations underlying this conception stand in considerable tension with Nahmanides' standing as the greatest halakhist of the thirteenth century.

This synthesized conclusion, which emerges from systematically exposing the components of Nahmanides' esoteric thought, requires a reevaluation of how Nahmanides conceived of kabbalah itself. Gershom Scholem described kabbalah in general as the return of

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[35] See above, ch. 6, sec. V.

the myth, long repressed by biblical and Talmudic tradition, to the heart of Judaism.[36] Other scholars, in disagreement with Scholem, accepted the definition of kabbalah as myth but discovered elements in medieval kabbalah that appear to develop earlier mythic components of Jewish tradition found in Scripture and Talmud, which Scholem and other scholars had ignored. According to them, if we take a second, closer look at Rabbinic literature, which previously had seemed naturally anti-mythic, we can make out the roots of kabbalistic myths.[37] The use of this category of myth to explain kabbalah raises a difficulty, because myth itself is an obscure category given an abundance of diverse and contradictory definitions. Under which sense of myth can Nahmanides' kabbalah be properly termed a revival of Jewish myth?

One notion of myth does not define it in terms of a particular worldview but in terms of the internal, spiritual impulse that gives rise to it. Myth, in this sense, springs from the earliest, primordial elements of the human soul; its source resides in the creative, unconstrained poetic imagination. Myth is alive and gushes forth, it is magnificent and intense. Philosophy as a reflective activity sterilizes and imprisons this imaginative, living power in a discursive cast. Myth is a creative force, a sacred story about gods that is concrete rather than abstract, narrative rather than nomos.[38] When one overlays this description on the history of kabbalah it aligns nicely with the poetic outpourings of the *Zohar*, but it does not match Nahmanides' kabbalistic writings in the slightest. Nahmanides' carefully calibrated allusions are inserted into a very coherent and consistent framework that lacks any poetic creativity or narrativity.[39]

The second sense of myth, which Yehezkel Kaufmann espoused, does not describe it as a concrete story as opposed to abstract logic, but views it as reflecting a particular conception of the gods that opposes any monotheistic belief system. As such, myth subjects a god or gods to some primordial law, and so in mythological stories the gods endure processes of life and death. The monotheistic belief of Scripture, according to Kaufmann, liberates the deity from the shackles of these causal laws and establishes Him as a personality with a will of His own—an absolute Sovereign. This distinction between myth and monotheism is also supposed to account for the difference between pagan ritual and the rites of Scripture. Pagan ritual is at base magical because it acts on those causal factors to which a god is subject. Scriptural ritual, by comparison, is established by the sovereign command of God, and the meaning of its fulfillment is obedience to God's will. Pagan prophecy is a technique of knowing the future and the fate that governs god and man alike; biblical prophecy is a message from God revealing His will to man. From Kaufmann's perspective, one can certainly characterize Nahmanides' kabbalah as

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[36] Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, rev. ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 1961), ch. 1.

[37] See above, ch. 7, note 3.

[38] This depiction of myth is widespread in the theoretical literature; see, e.g., Paul Ricouer, *The Symbolism of Evil* (1967), 5. This definition of myth as a productive tool for analyzing the history of Jewish myth has been adopted by a number of scholars, including Moshe Idel and Yehudah Liebes. See Moshe Idel, "Leviathan and Its Consort: From Talmudic to Kabbalistic Myth," in *Myth in Judaism*, eds. Moshe Idel and Ithamar Gruenwald (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 2004), 149-150 (Heb.), and Yehudah Liebes, "*De Natura Dei*: On the Development of the Jewish Myth," in *Studies in Jewish Myth and Messianism*, trans. Batya Stein (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 2.

[39] For example, in Nahmanides' kabbalah the midrashic story about the diminution of the Moon goes from being a tale of anthropomorphized celestial bodies to an intra-divine dynamic involving various divine potencies, in which their hyper-differentiation led to a change in the divine structure. See above, ch. 3, sec. VII.

mythic. In his theurgic conception of the commandments as fulfilling a divine need, his cyclical paradigm of history, and his conception of revelation as revealing God's essence, we watch as God the Sovereign and His voluntarism recede. But if one continues to follow Kaufmann, it turns out that philosophy, too, is mythic because it removes the sovereign will from God.[40] Kaufmann viewed Aristotelian and Neoplatonic ideas of the Godhead, especially Spinozan ones, as the apex of myth, because these streams conceived of God as part of the natural system of laws and not as an actor distinct from this system.

Characterizing the difference between the exoteric and esoteric aspects of Nahmanides' thought based on the presence or absence of myth does not do justice to Nahmanides' kabbalah. According to the first definition of myth as the primal expression of the religious imagination through concrete narrative, Nahmanides kabbalah certainly does not fit. It is conservative, terse, and sparing in its mythological elements; at most one could say that it systematically crystallizes the living system of mythical symbols that preceded it.[41] If we take the second definition of myth as a worldview in which gods are subject to a particular system of rules, then Nahmanides' kabbalah is in fact mythical, but in this sense Nahmanides' kabbalistic myth would be indistinguishable from medieval Jewish philosophy.

Myth may serve as a useful lens through which to organize and define the basic developments and tensions of medieval Jewish thought, but in the same way that the Ashkenaz-Andalusia binary is inadequate for Nahmanides' kabbalah, so is myth. The accepted dichotomy for portraying the great divide between medieval Jewish philosophers and kabbalists is that of mythos versus logos, rationalism against anti-rationalism, intuitive, poetic, mythmakers unable to sympathize with reflective, discursive logicians and vice versa. This is too neat and depthless; our quest to grasp, deeply, developments within medieval Judaism, and especially those pertaining to Nahmanides, cannot end here. A different way of looking at matters is to posit that medieval Jewish thinkers were torn between two fundamentally contrasting ways of perceiving everything.

The first way is the legacy of Scriptural and midrashic Jewish tradition, in which all of existence, history, Nature, and revelation reflect a set of interpersonal relationships between man and God. Man reads the signs of this personal God in his life and fate. He understands his relationship with God in the context of the hierarchical, interpersonal relationships between subject and King, son and Father, wife and Husband, accused and Judge. The depth and complexity of the religious posture flows from, among other things, this concentration of multiple roles upon a single personality, from the transition from one role to another in different contexts, and sometimes from the overturning of the hierarchy. The second way is to view Nature and its causality as a fundamental category of explanation. While the interpersonal model provides motives and explanations as the main way of making sense of the world, the second offers causes and laws as its basic interpretive category. We should not look to myth's resurgence to explain the difference between Nahmanides' exoteric and esoteric thought, but to the search for a causal mechanism, to his replacement of a divine personality with a divine entity. Kabbalah and philosophy differ essentially in so many ways, but they both share a perspective of tremendous importance: the supremacy of "Nature" as a primary category of looking at everything.

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[40] Kaufmann defines his view of myth in Yehezkel Kaufmann, *Toledot ha-Emunah ha-Yisre'elit mi-Yemei Kedem 'Ad Sof Bayit Sheni* (Tel-Aviv: Mosad Bialik 'al yedei Devir, 1947), 2:221-254.

[41] Yehudah Liebes, who considers mythos, in contrast to logos, as a "sacred story," points to the "crystallization of myth" in the writings of some kabbalists, which he attributes to the influence of philosophy, among other things; see Liebes, "*De Natura Dei*," 3-4.

The religious act that arguably most embodies this significant shift is prayer. At root, prayer is an act of appeasement and persuasion that is wholly constructed on the interpersonal relationship between man and God. The servant comes to appease his Master, the son ingratiates himself with his Father. In the Middle Ages, prayer as an expression of this relationship begins to fade and it morphs into something new: for kabbalists it becomes a cosmic, causal act performed with specific intentions, and for philosophers it represents a period of philosophical contemplation or meditation.

It may be true that Nahmanides' view of "Nature" is much more dynamic and organic than the logical, rigid one of the philosophers, but both replace the anthropomorphic personality with a causal system. Likewise, Nahmanides and other kabbalists conceive of man and his place in the hierarchy of the universe in an utterly different manner from philosophers, but still man acts through the basic categories of causality.

This causal mania was shared by all esoteric Jewish traditions of the Middle Ages. Despite their vastly divergent and even incompatible secret doctrines, all felt ill at ease with the traditional worldview of Scripture and Rabbinic literature. Astrology, philosophy, and kabbalah each confronted the anthropomorphism of Scripture and *Midrash*. Ibn Ezra emphasized hermetical-astrological elements of a causal character; Maimonides utilized the Aristotelian conception of Nature, creating a constant tension between wisdom and will; Nahmanides presented an organic, multifaceted Godhead whose equilibrium depends causally on human theurgic activity. Each school of thought conceived of the causal mechanism in its own way, but all ultimately projected a divine personality onto the exterior while keeping a causal system hidden behind the curtain of esotericism on the interior. If the struggle between Athens and Jerusalem can be expressed in terms of the struggle between wisdom and will, then the influence of Athens penetrated deeply into kabbalah, because the kabbalists internalized the natural worldview as the basic picture of the world.

In Nahmanides' causal view of the world, religious life is not intended to rehabilitate and restore the religious interpersonal relationship from a place of estrangement, rejection, or concealment to one of love and presence. Man is caught in the cyclical rise and fall of the divine tide. But even before the end of the world, at which time it will be redeemed from death, law, and blind causality, it is within man's power, by nullifying his will and cleaving to the divine, to rise above the inert chain of being to the very breath of the Godhead itself. In this way man sheds his thickened, differentiated existence and becomes a refined being of light which is sustained by *Shekhinah* itself, and through his spiritual sight he can peer into the inner structure of all existence. During this period between sin and redemption man can do more than reach a mystical space of symbolic transparency, he can observe the commandments and be a partner in fulfilling the divine desire, which is a need that arises necessarily from the Godhead's very essence. Man serves to instantiate the divine movement itself, which at the same time yearns to retreat within and above and, paradoxically, to spread its presence throughout all reality.

The Geronese kabbalists of Nahmanides' time, Rabbis Ezra, Azriel, and Jacob b. Sheshet, expended their energies on kabbalah alone. Nahmanides, on the other hand, left a rich, brilliant legacy of work in the revealed aspect of Jewish tradition. He was, without a doubt, both the greatest halakhist and the greatest biblical exegete of the thirteenth century, and generations of Torah scholars and Bible commentators would draw from, rely on, and be excited and inspired by his writings. For the Geronese kabbalists, the tension between the revealed and concealed meant that there was an irreconcilable discrepancy between what they believed—and alluded to in writing—and the face they showed the outside world. For Nahmanides, this tension did not create a wall between him and those around him; it sundered his heart and soul into two. The "way of truth" that Nahmanides championed is not some profound addition to the exoteric philological-contextual and homiletic modes of interpretation. It often does not sit well or

is visibly at odds with the revealed dimension of his world. The fact that he encompassed them all within his personality presumably put him under tremendous intellectual stress and generated unusually strong cognitive dissonance. It seems that Nahmanides dealt with this tension by anchoring the esoteric aspect of his worldview in Sinai and treating it as a tradition beyond question—one could not add to or take anything away from it. If Nahmanides had believed in kabbalah as open knowledge that is subject to speculation, innovation, and creativity, it is highly doubtful if everything else could have held together. The multifaceted nature of his exoteric output, be it in his Torah commentary or Talmudic novellae, forms an impressively rich mosaic of erudition and creativity. When we add the esoteric layer to the mix, Nahmanides emerges not only as a man of prodigious creativity and breathtaking range, but also as a paradoxical personality, whose esoteric thought contributed greatly to a sweeping transformation that Jewish tradition underwent in the Middle Ages.