Fourth: While, for Aristotle, man, through actualizing his intel­lect and becoming thought thinking thought, participates in God’s thought, he is not aware of his merger with God. This participation in God’s thought does not involve any receptive moment on man’s part. For Maimonides, by contrast, man is aware of his participation in God’s thought. That is, this participation does involve a receptive moment. Man’s awareness of divine inspiration is clear and distinct.

This receptivity follows from the previous point that the Prophet­ic-Ecstatic experience is visionary in nature. Sensuousness is by its na­ture receptive. I receive, but don’t produce. For modern philosophers, following Kant, coherent sense perception must involve a moment of spontaneity. Thus, for Kant, all knowledge begins with spontaneity.

This was not Maimonides’ view. To the contrary, sense percep­tion lacks any spontaneity. Sense perception is receptive. The sensible elements of experience are givens. I find color in the world; I did not put it in the world. Sense perception and apprehension receive what the outer world offers them. I am affected by the impression the outer world makes upon me. By contrast, both abstraction and fundamental postulates (muskalim rishonim) are spontaneous acts. They introduce into the manifold of the “given” new elements, like causality. Thus, cognition involves a two-stage process: (1) receptivity; and (2) spontaneity.

For Aristotle, the process stops here. We start with receptivity, which is primitive, and conclude with thinking, which is a creative act.

For Maimonides, however, there are three stages: (1) receptivity; (2) thinking, which is an act of spontaneity; and (3) receptivity again, but this time, not of sensuous data, but of revealed truth.

The prophetic moment is “Va-yareini A-donai,” “And the Lord showed me.” The prophetic datum is a given, not a spontaneous act. The spontaneity characterizing the second stage becomes the medium for God’s bestowing upon the prophet His grace and light in the third stage. Note Maimonides’ citation of the verse, “In Your light do we see light” (Ps. 36:10) both at the end of the Guide 2:12 and towards the beginning of Guide 3:52. This moment of illumination is what is meant by revelation.

While this moment of illumination, of prophetic knowledge, is not spontaneously achieved, but comes about through an act of revelation, it is not a moment of pure grace either. God bestows His grace and light only upon those who have dedicated themselves to striving to reach this third stage. In this respect this third stage, while character­ized by receptivity, may paradoxically be viewed as an attainment on the part of the prophet.