In a famous passage of the *Kuzari*, Judah Halevi contrasts the God of Aristotle, who is referred to as *Elohim* and known by reason, with the God of Abraham, whose name is the Tetragrammaton and who is known by prophetic illumination. The former is the God of nature, who governs the world by a fixed order. The latter is the God of history, who is aware of all that occurs in the world and exercises personal providence that is not limited to the workings of nature. The two views of God elicit two different responses in human beings, as the Khazar king notes:

One passionately yearns for Adonai with a passion that involves both “taste” and testament, while attachment to *Elohim* is by way of speculation. The passion involving “taste” compels one to devote oneself to the love of God and be prepared to die for God’s sake. Speculation, on the other hand, makes the honor of God a necessity only as long as it entails no harm or hardship for the sake of God. Hence one may excuse Aristotle if he was lax in
the observance of the law, since he doubted whether God is cognizant of it. *(Kuzari 4.16)*

Who then is Maimonides’ God? The answer appears to be clear in light of Maimonides’ description of the commandment to sanctify God, which he presents in the *Book of Commandments* (positive commandment no. 9):

> We are commanded to publicize the true religion, with no fear of the injury inflicted by an adversary. Even if an oppressor coerces us to deny God, we should not obey him but rather surrender ourselves to death. We should not even attempt to deceive him into thinking that we deny God, though in our hearts we continue to believe in God. This is the commandment to sanctify God, which is incumbent upon all Israel; that is to say, in our love of God and belief in God’s unity we surrender ourselves to be put to death by the oppressor.

Maimonides’ description is reminiscent of that of Judah Halevi regarding the readiness on the part of one who knows the God of Abraham, the God of history, to surrender one’s life for the sake of one’s belief. This is not to deny that Maimonides’ God is also the God of Aristotle, for Abraham too knew God as *Elohim*, nor to ignore the fact that Maimonides, in many of his writings, encourages his readers

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1. All translations in this chapter are my own unless noted otherwise. For the Arabic see David Baneth (ed.), *Al-Kitāb Al-Khazari* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1977), 168-9. The notion of “taste” in reference to God is reminiscent of Sufi notions; see Diana Lobel, *Between Mysticism and Philosophy: Sufi Language of Religious Experience in Judah Halevi’s Kuzari* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000), 95-100.

2. Joseph Kafiḥ (ed. and Hebrew trans.), *Sefer Hamitzvot* (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1971), 63.

3. For the relation between Maimonides and Halevi and the likelihood that Maimonides was acquainted with the *Kuzari* see Howard Kreisel, “Judah Halevi’s Influence on Maimonides: A Preliminary Appraisal,” *Maimonidean Studies* 2 (1991): 95-121.

4. See Maimonides’ description of Abraham’s discovery of the existence of God in *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Idolatry 1.3 and contrast this description with Laws of Principles of the Torah 1.5, 7. In both passages God is known as the Aristotelian First Mover and Prime Cause of the world. Halevi accepts the philosophers’ view of God as First Cause, and he accepts as well their conception of nature, as opposed to the belief in occasionalism characterizing most of the Moslem theologians (the *mutakallimūn*); see *Kuzari* 5.20. Yet in contrast to the philosophers he believes in a deity that acts outside the boundaries of the order of nature.
to appreciate more this name of God, the aspect of divine activity that results in the order of nature. This point notwithstanding, Maimonides does not appear to abandon the conception of the personal God of Abraham that lies at the heart of Jewish tradition. In extending divine providence, God may not intervene as much in the order of nature as the masses would have it, but God is cognizant of all that occurs, rewards and punishes accordingly, and still plays an immediate role in determining at least some events of history, most notably the Giving of the Torah at Sinai—or so it appears to be the case for Maimonides.

Is it not then for the God of Abraham that Maimonides’ soul passionately yearns, just as is the case for Halevi before him?

There is, however, another way of understanding Maimonides’ approach. Perhaps he is of the opinion that Abraham’s response remains the one that is most appropriate even for the God of Aristotle. That is to say, Maimonides thinks that one should passionately yearn for Elohim, the God of nature, as a matter of “taste” and testament and not simply view Elohim as an object of cold contemplation, as opposed to Halevi’s characterization of the philosophers’ approach. The apprehension of God by way of philosophic speculation is what leads to the desire and, moreover, the internal feeling of compulsion to publicize the truth of the unity of God to all of humanity, even if it endangers oneself.

In his treatment of the commandment to love God, Maimonides writes in a previous passage in the Book of the Commandments (positive commandment no. 3):

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5 See, in particular, Guide of the Perplexed, 2.10. All English citations from this book in this volume are taken from Shlomo Pines (trans.), The Guide of the Perplexed (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963).

6 For a survey of these topics in Maimonides’ thought and the different possibilities for interpreting his approach, see Howard Kreisel, “Moses Maimonides,” in History of Jewish Philosophy, ed. Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman (London: Routledge, 1996), 245-280.

7 See Guide 2.37, where Maimonides compares the internal compulsion experienced by the prophets to call upon the nation to serve God to that experienced by the philosophers to communicate to others the truths they had learnt. In all likelihood, Maimonides was acquainted with the fact that Socrates in his passionate commitment to truth was prepared to die rather than cease his teachings.
We have explained to you that by way of contemplation one attains knowledge [of God] and finds felicity; love [of God] necessarily follows. They [the sages] have stated that this commandment [to love God] includes calling upon all humanity to worship and believe in God. That is to say, by way of analogy, when one loves someone, one glorifies and praises that person and calls upon others to befriend that person. Similarly, if you truly love God in accordance with the knowledge of God that you attain, you will undoubtedly call upon the foolish and the ignorant to discern the truth that you have discerned. . . . Just as Abraham, who loved God—as Scripture attests by [God referring to him as] Abraham, my lover [Isaiah 41:8]—by virtue of the strength of his intellectual attainment, and called upon humanity to believe in God as a result of his love for God, so one must love God till one calls upon others to [believe in] God.  

According to Maimonides, Abraham’s belief in God resulted from his philosophic speculation. In other words, Abraham apprehended the God of Aristotle and this apprehension led to his passionate love of God, described by Maimonides in this passage as well as in Mishneh Torah, Laws of Principles of the Torah 4.12, where he writes:

> When the human being contemplates these matters and knows all the existents—the angel [Separate Intellect], sphere, human being, and so on—and discerns the wisdom of God in all the existents and creatures, his love for God increases and his soul thirsts and flesh yearns to love God, blessed be He.  

Nevertheless, this alternative interpretation that one passionately loves the God of nature appears problematic. How can I yearn for a God who does not know me? Why should one be so devoted to a divine law

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8 Kafih, Sefer Hamitzvot, 59.
9 See also Mishneh Torah, Laws of Principles of the Torah 2.2; Laws of Repentance 10.6. In the Mishneh Torah, Maimonides ties the true love of God solely to the philosophic understanding of the order of existence. For a study of Maimonides’ approach to the love of God, see Howard Kreisel, Maimonides’ Political Thought (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999), 225-266. It is interesting to note that in the Guide of the Perplexed, Abraham is no longer viewed as an Aristotelian philosopher but one who proves the existence of God on the basis of the creation of the world; see Guide 2.13. In this case Maimonides adopts a more exoteric philosophic stance in his legal work than in his theological one, as some scholars have already pointed out. For a discussion of this point see Kreisel, “Moses Maimonides,” 216-223.
whose immediate author can not be God, for Aristotle’s God is incapable of such action, and who is also ignorant of my observance of the commandments, let alone of my emotional state. How could Maimonides, who dedicated all his major works to the God of Abraham by opening them with the verse in the name of God the Lord of the world [Genesis 21:33], have thought that Abraham’s God and Aristotle’s God are in fact the same? Is it not strange, if not ludicrous, to think that Maimonides the great Jewish legal scholar is in fact committed solely to the God of nature?

This fundamental problem has confronted Maimonides’ commentators from his own time to the present. Those who maintain that Maimonides’ true view essentially conforms to the world view of the medieval Aristotelian philosophers, and this is the esoteric position that he conceals in the Guide, have struggled and continue to struggle to show on the basis of his writings that he holds such a position. Most, though not all, who argued this position in the medieval world

10 God in the verse is referred to by the Tetragrammaton. In Maimonides’ interpretation, the verse refers to Abraham’s teaching others the monotheistic idea; see Mishneh Torah, Laws of Idolatry 1.3; Guide 3.29. Maimonides opens the Commentary on the Mishnah, Book of Commandments, each book of the Mishneh Torah, and each part of the Guide with this verse, not only conforming thereby with the accepted Arabic practice of dedicating religious works to the name of God but also indicating that in all these writings he is following in the footsteps of Abraham.

11 For a discussion of the esoteric interpretation of Maimonides through the ages, see in particular Aviezer Ravitzky, “The Secrets of the Guide of the Perplexed: Between the Thirteenth and the Twentieth Centuries,” in Studies in Maimonides, ed. Isadore Twersky (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 159-207. It is not my contention that all those through the ages who interpreted Maimonides as holding an esoteric opinion on a given issue were of the view that he agreed completely with the Aristotelian world view. Rather, my claim is that those who adopted such an interpretation generally attempted to show Maimonides’ agreement with the philosophical approach on the issue in question. There are certainly differences of opinion among the commentators on what issues Maimonides concealed his true opinion, let alone whether he held esoteric opinions at all. I am also not claiming that the only reason for Maimonides’ esotericism was to hide his agreement with Aristotelian philosophy because of the dangers of the views advanced by Aristotle and his medieval Islamic followers to the naïve faith of the masses, though I am of the opinion that this was his primary motivation. Moreover, this was the reason advanced by those of Maimonides’ medieval followers who interpreted him as holding esoteric positions. For a different approach to the reasons for Maimonides’ esotericism see, for example, Yair Loberbaum, “On Contradictions, Rationality,
did so not in order to criticize Maimonides, but because they themselves felt it as the true view of God and God’s relation to the world. The early interpreters of the Guide in Provence, beginning with Samuel Ibn Tibbon and his followers, developed the esoteric approach to Maimonides’ magnum opus and saw themselves not only as his interpreters but also his true disciples, even if they did not agree with him on all issues. The problem they faced was how to bridge between belief in the Torah and all that this entails and belief in a deity whose relation to the world is that which Aristotle posited.

Let us return for a moment to Judah Halevi, the Jewish thinker who has gone down in history as the great antagonist of Aristotelian philosophy, the Jewish counterpart to the great Islamic thinker Al-Ghazali. Halevi is well aware that if his criticism of the philosophers is correct, one would expect them to practice all forms of moral and religious debauchery. If God is not aware of human actions, all moral restraints on human behavior are removed. Yet as the king of the Khazars points out:

I see you criticizing the philosophers by attributing to them that of which the contrary is known. Of a person who lives in seclusion and divorces himself from the pleasures of the world, we say he is engaged

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12 For Samuel Ibn Tibbon’s importance for the subsequent esoteric interpretation of Maimonides see, in particular, Aviezer Ravitzky, “Samuel Ibn Tibbon and the Esoteric Character of the Guide of the Perplexed,” AJS Review 6 (1981): 87-123. See also Carlos Fraenkel, From Maimonides to Samuel Ibn Tibbon: The Transformation of Dalālat al-Hā’irīm into the Moreh Nevukhim, (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2007) (Heb.).

13 This is not the place to deal with the question of the extent to which Halevi is influenced by the very philosophy which he purportedly rejects. In a number of articles I attempted to show the decisive influence exerted by Aristotelian philosophy on Halevi’s thought; see, for example, Howard Kreisel, “Judah Halevi’s Kuzari: Between the God of Abraham and the God of Aristotle,” in Joodse filosoef tussen rede en traditie, ed. Reinier Munk and F. J. Hoogewould (Kampen: Kok, 1993), 24-34. On the relation between Halevi and Al-Ghazali see David Baneth, “R. Judah Halevi and Al-Gazali,” Keneset 7 (1942): 311-329 (Heb.). For the reception of Halevi through the ages see Adam Shear, The Kuzari and the Shaping of Jewish Identity: 1167-1900 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
in philosophy and shares the views of the philosophers. You, on the other hand, deny them every good action. (Kuzari 4.18)

Halevi’s response to this criticism is worthy of note:

What I told you is the foundation of their belief, namely, that the highest human happiness lies in the knowledge of the speculative sciences. By grasping the forms of the existents by the *hylic* intellect and becoming an intellect in *actu*, and then an acquired intellect close to the rank of the Active Intellect, one no longer experiences death. This, however, can only be obtained by devoting one’s life to study and continuous contemplation, which is incompatible with worldly pursuits. For this reason, the philosophers divorced themselves from the pursuit of wealth, glory, corporeal pleasures, and children, in order not to be distracted in their studies. As soon as one has become learned in accordance with the final goal of the sought-after knowledge, the individual is no longer scrupulous in his actions. The philosophers do not practice humility for the sake of reward, nor do they think that if they steal or murder they will be punished. They command the good and prohibit evil in the best and most excellent manner, in order to resemble the Creator who arranged everything perfectly. They have devised social laws without binding force, and which are conditional and may be overridden in times of need. The religious law, however, is not so except in its social parts, and the law itself sets down those which permit exceptions and those which do not. (Kuzari 4.19)

Halevi’s description of the philosophers’ approach is designed to impress upon the reader the view that they do not see in morality a binding obligation governing one’s behavior, but rather a useful suggestion of how one is to behave. Yet this conclusion is problematic in light of Halevi’s own words. He is aware of the fact that the world view of the philosophers demands one to lead a completely moral life. Though they may regard it as a means to intellectual perfection, they view it as a *necessary* means. Moreover, for the medieval Aristotelian

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14 Leo Strauss devoted an important article to examining and defending Halevi’s philosophical critique of the philosophers’ position on this issue; see Leo Strauss, “The Law of Reason in the Kuzari,” *PAAJR* 13 (1943): 47-96. See also Howard Kreisel, “Judah Halevi and the Problem of Philosophical Ethics, in Between Religion and Ethics*, ed. Avi Sagi and Daniel Statman (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 1993), 171-183 (Heb.).
philosophers who were strongly influenced by Neoplatonic thought, the moral life is not solely a means to perfection but an aspect of perfection. It provides the foundation for a life of imitatio Dei—an another point Halevi mentions in this context. At the beginning of his treatise, Halevi ascribes to the philosopher the view that one who attains intellectual perfection always performs the most noble actions, as if his soul is governed by the Active Intellect. In light of these positions, one may question how compelling is Halevi’s criticism of the philosophers that they do not fear God for the sake of reward or think that stealing or murdering will merit punishment. While they may not live moral lives for the sake of reward or punishment on the part of a personal deity who is watching everything they do, they do so because of the inherent worth of this mode of life. In short, even Halevi concedes that the morality preached and practiced by the philosophers is integrally related to their world view. The God of Aristotle provides the foundation not only for the physical order of the world but also for the moral one. In light of this point, we may well ask whether the intrinsic value of morality does not provide a more solid basis for its binding nature than any external rewards and punishments that result from its practice or non-practice. Moreover, Halevi indicates at the beginning of his treatise that the philosophers see their lifestyle, which combines strict morality with intensive contemplation, as inevitably resulting in the highest form of human happiness, one that is divine in nature as well as eternal.

Halevi’s essentially laudatory characterization of the philosophers’ approach, even if unintended, is certainly justified in light of the medieval Aristotelian tradition. Aristotle himself appears to hold a natural

15 For different models of imitatio Dei in medieval philosophy, see Lawrence Berman, “The Political Interpretation of the Maxim: The Purpose of Philosophy is the Imitation of God,” Studia Islamica 15 (1961): 53-61.
16 Kuzari 1.1.
17 It should be added that Halevi is disingenuous when he indicates that the philosophers after attaining their goal can permit themselves immoral actions when convenient. He himself notes when presenting their thought at the beginning of the treatise that after attaining perfection the person naturally performs only the noblest actions, as if he is guided completely by the supernal intellect.
law theory, though he does not regard even those moral propositions acknowledged by rational individuals as having the same level of certainty as those belonging to the theoretical sciences, which are known either intuitively by the intellect or by demonstrative proof. 18 Ideally, natural law, which does not vary in time or place, serves as the universal framework for all conventional laws. 19 In general, Aristotle’s conception of morality is strongly related to his conception of nature. As is the case with all species, human beings too strive to survive and to continue to propagate their species. In addition, they desire to achieve happiness. They are by nature social animals, requiring society to satisfy their material needs as well as the psychological need for companionship. This goal requires a government that organizes their dealings with each other and insures that they do not harm one another. In short, some level of morality is required of human beings by nature. This morality may be viewed as “utilitarian,” but the goal it serves is one embedded in the nature of humanity. The higher goal of humanity is to attain human perfection and the felicity attending this state, and for Aristotle this lies in the perfection of the theoretical intellect. This ultimate goal is not given to human choice, though one may choose to pursue it or not, and few are naturally equipped to do so; nonetheless, it is a goal embedded in the natural order of the world. Achieving moral character traits is a necessary condition for attaining this goal. This at least appears to be the implicit message emerging from his *Nicomachean Ethics*, which concludes with a discussion of the perfection of the intellect. 20 This view was made explicit by the medieval Aristotelian philosophers, in particular Alfarabi. 21

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18 See Aristotle, *Topics* 1, 10, 104a. Moral propositions are dialectical rather than demonstrative in character.
19 See Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1, 13, 1373b.
20 While Aristotle himself draws no direct link between moral virtue and intellectual perfection, his choice to conclude a treatise on ethics by focusing on the latter suggests such a link in his thought. See Marvin Fox, “The Doctrine of the Mean in Aristotle and Maimonides: A Comparative Study,” *Interpreting Maimonides: Studies in Methodology, Metaphysics, and Moral Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 100-109.
21 In many of his writings, Alfarabi sees the role of the ideal polity as advancing true happiness, which he equates with intellectual perfection, by instilling in its
While the dictates of morality are not known by theoretical reason but by practical reason—which is the faculty that explores how to best achieve a given end—these dictates are not viewed as a matter of purely subjective judgment. One simply cannot achieve final perfection while retaining character traits that reflect the victory of corporeal passions over reason. One prone to anger or constantly preoccupied with one’s physical appetites cannot achieve the equanimity of the soul that is demanded for the attainment of ultimate perfection, despite the fact that one may still be very smart and learn a great deal of science. For the Aristotelian philosopher, nature is not value-free, but values, if not also specific moral dictates, are an integral part of the order of the world. To live a truly human, that is to say divine, life, one must devote oneself to a life of intellect and the moral virtues that enable one to live such a life. Moreover, the ultimate reward, the felicity of the intellect contemplating the eternal truths, is also built into the order of existence. The masses may not fully appreciate this fact and may need to be inculcated to believe in a personal God in order to prevent them from always capitulating to their corporeal desires and from living as animals. Myths that support the law and are a mode for communicating fundamental truths in a figurative manner must be devised for their benefit, a point made by Plato in his Republic, and greatly appreciated by the medieval philosophers, as Halevi’s “philosopher” indicates at the beginning of the Kuzari. The true philosopher, however, understands that virtue, intellectual and moral, is in fact its own reward.

Thus the medieval Jewish philosopher who favors the God of Aristotle does not in the process undermine morality or reject the notion of eternal felicity that is inherently connected with the type of life one lives. This philosopher does not cease to yearn for God and to live a life that can be considered truly divine—not simply as a matter of existential choice but also philosophic necessity. The problem with which the Jewish Aristotelian philosopher must grapple is why Judaism? How does Judaism fit into this picture? If God is not the immediate author of Jewish law, then what advantage does Judaism hold over the other members moral virtue and inculcating true opinions. This view was to exercise a decisive influence on Maimonides’ approach.
religions or over other legislations, and why should one continue to observe its dictates?

Maimonides’ answer according to the esotericist interpretation is that Moses attained the highest level of intellectual illumination possible for human beings, thereby enabling him to formulate the optimal law for a political polity, one that best directs society to the pursuit of perfection. Only such a law deserves to be labeled “divine.” This interpretation, I would like to stress, is not found only among Maimonides’ modern interpreters but is alluded to previously by some medieval ones. Nissim of Marseille comes close to making this view explicit, as we shall see.\(^{22}\) The ceremonial commandments, according to this view, are crucial for the Law’s pedagogical role, particularly in constantly reinforcing belief in one God and reminding the community of other speculative truths, a point that Maimonides himself repeatedly states in his discussion of the reasons for the commandments.\(^{23}\) The wedding of Aristotle and Judaism is not without many difficult problems, some of them seemingly insurmountable, even when viewed in its medieval context. The crucial point is that medieval Aristotelianism shared enough in common with revelatory religion to make such a reinterpretation of Judaism conceivable. The medieval Aristotelian view that there is only one God who remains unceasingly both the First Mover of all that changes and the First Cause of all that exists and is also the Supreme Intellect, the notion of a completely ordered world in which nothing in vain occurs in nature, Plato’s philosopher-king turned into Alfarabi’s prophet-legislator, with revelation being treated as a natural phenomenon involving the illumination of the perfect intellect, the notion of virtuous existence, both morally and intellectually, that brings with it the greatest felicity and is the goal of life, the notion of \textit{imitatio Dei}, and the philosophic view of religion as presenting these truths in imaginative form as suited for society at large were seen as providing the philosophic foundation for a true understanding of the sacred texts of Judaism—both the speculative teachings these texts contain and the purpose of the commandments they enjoin. Jewish

\(^{22}\) See below, chapter 6, 171-173. This issue will be explored further in chapter 9.

\(^{23}\) See, for example, \textit{Guide} 3.28.
virtue, in the fields of speculation and morality, could be viewed as the best expression of philosophic virtue; Moses the lawgiver could be seen as representing the epitome of human perfection.

The subsequent undermining of Aristotle’s physical and metaphysical view of the world also undermined the philosophic foundations for moral virtue that characterize medieval Aristotelian philosophy. Baruch Spinoza thought that he could build a firmer philosophical foundation for morality on the basis of his philosophic system as developed in the *Ethics*. His view of morality in a crucial sense suggests a desire to hold onto this area of medieval Aristotelianism, while throwing out the rest of the system. He certainly shares with the medieval Aristotelians the notion that human perfection and the road to it is built into the order of the world. Spinoza’s God of nature, no less that Aristotle’s God of nature, despite their fundamental differences, mandates moral virtue, and one may say also rewards it, even if in both these conceptions God is certainly not the personal deity of revelatory religion and has no intimate knowledge of virtuous individuals except in the most metaphorical of senses.

With Spinoza, the medieval esoteric interpretation of Maimonides, the interpretation that I consider the true interpretation of his thought, would appear to become basically obsolete from a philosophic perspective. Once Aristotelianism is no longer regarded as true, any interpretation of Judaism along these lines must also be regarded as false. With Maimonides’ explicit agreement with Aristotle on so many fundamental points of his philosophy, and his interpretation of the Bible accordingly, the letter of his doctrine could no longer be accepted except by those who refused to recognize that the world has moved on. One may still try to keep the spirit of Maimonides alive by reinterpreting Judaism, if not also Maimonides himself, along new philosophic lines that are regarded as true. Spinoza tried to forestall any attempt to turn Maimonides into a Spinozist by adamantly rejecting the interpretation of Judaism along any philosophic lines. In other words, Spinoza sets out to destroy not only Aristotelianism but also any partnership between philosophy and revelatory religion that is the basis
for even the less radical interpretations of Maimonides’ philosophy.\textsuperscript{24} While in the medieval world one could be an Aristotelian philosopher while remaining committed to Jewish law and lore, in a manner that goes a long way in solving the conceptual contradiction that at first glance characterizes these two stances, one could certainly not be a dedicated Spinozist and remain committed to Jewish law and to the truth of Jewish lore. One could choose one or the other (or neither), but not both.

There were a good number of attempts after Spinoza to see Judaism as the highest expression of philosophic religion, attempts that were in tune with the contemporary philosophic climate. In many cases, these thinkers viewed Maimonides at least as a role model, if not also as providing specific ideas they regarded as still relevant.\textsuperscript{25} Yet it is clear that the modern day academic interpreters of Maimonides’ thought, who treat him as a closet Aristotelian (or even as a thinker who seeks to develop a philosophy that completely rejects Aristotle on certain fundamental issues while accepting him on others), can themselves no longer return to the world view of their medieval counterparts. One can no longer root one’s own understanding of Judaism in Aristotle’s teachings in light of the dramatic changes in science and philosophy that have taken place since medieval times. Today’s God of nature may be incapable of demonstratively refuting the God of revelation, but neither can such a deity provide any foundation for revelatory religion. We are witness to endless present-day attempts to show the harmony between science and religion on some of the big questions, particularly creation, but mostly as part of an apologetic program to make room for the

\textsuperscript{24} See in particular Leo Strauss’s characterization of Spinoza’s approach to religion and his scathing critique of Spinoza on this cardinal issue in his \textit{Spinoza’s Critique of Religion} (New York: Schocken Books, 1965).

\textsuperscript{25} For example, thinkers as diverse as Moses Mendelssohn, Hermann Cohen, Leo Strauss, Joseph Soloveitchik, and Yeshayahu Leibowitz. Interestingly, some other philosophers found in Judah Halevi an even more profound source of inspiration, Franz Rosenzweig being one example. Maimonides proved to exert a particularly strong impact upon the early German Reform movement, which tended to reinterpret both him and Judaism along Kantian lines. See George Y. Kohler, \textit{Reading Maimonides’ Philosophy in 19th Century Germany: The Guide to Religious Reform} (Dordrecht: Springer, 2012).
personal God of religion. Can one still move from science to morality or to Jewish law if one is committed to the impersonal God of nature, as the medieval Aristotelians were capable of doing? Can such a deity still invoke in us a passionate yearning, as it still was capable of doing even for Spinoza? Moreover, most of great modern existential philosophers, from Nietzsche onwards, premise their philosophies on the absence of God and the human being’s complete autonomy in creating values (and not just discovering them), as opposed to the teachings of their great philosophical predecessors. Given this situation, how can we preserve the legacy of Maimonides even in spirit in today’s world? What does it mean to preserve the spirit of Maimonides’ philosophy?

As a scholar who has engaged many years in trying to understand Maimonides in his historical context, to capture the letter of his thought, to hear him as a medieval Jew might have, and, dare I say, should have heard him, I have trouble answering this question. I am looking for a Maimonides who has little if anything to teach contemporary Jews, certainly those who wish to live both in the world of traditional Judaism and remain intellectually honest in the face of scientific and philosophic developments. In many ways I feel more comfortable in the world of medieval Jewish Aristotelianism, to follow in the footsteps of Samuel Ibn Tibbon and Nissim of Marseille in how they understood the “Great Eagle” and developed their own thought accordingly, than in the world of modern thought. It is ironic, an irony that has existed with us from time immemorial, that those who have tried to keep Maimonides’ legacy alive are those who have not interpreted him in the most accurate manner from a historical perspective, but have tried to translate the goals of his thought, as they understood them, for their contemporaries along the lines of the philosophy of their own time, even if their own philosophies would have left Maimonides himself greatly perplexed. These are the thinkers who have developed philosophical foundations for traditional Judaism that are in tune with their age and are not fundamentally apologetic in nature.

Yet perhaps I am being overly critical of the relevance of the academic study of Maimonides in today’s world. The focal problem in the interpretation of Maimonides’ philosophy remains for us today the
same one that confronted the medieval scholars: can one remain committed to Jewish law and lore and still accept a world view that denies the personal willful activity of the Deity? Can one be a loyal member of the religious community, yet see in the stories of the Torah the reflection of philosophical and scientific truths in imaginative form? Because of the continuous importance of this topic, we do not tire in returning again and again to the arguments that were offered in the Middle Ages regarding the true views of Maimonides—one of Judaism’s foremost legal authorities of all time—on the profound theological problems with which he deals. We continue to debate the issue of his esotericism, for at the heart of this issue lie the limits of the reformulation of Judaism as philosophy. If we can show that Maimonides went much further in his understanding of Judaism than simply locating it between Athens (Greek Philosophy) and Jerusalem (traditional Jewish beliefs), as emerges from an exoteric reading of his philosophy and which in itself is a radical approach, but he saw the way to the heavenly Jerusalem—the proper way to understand Jewish teachings and attain knowledge of the ultimate truths and perfection—as necessarily passing through Athens, with Jewish law serving as the ultimate practical expression of philosophical ideas, then the modern reader can gain an important perspective in appreciating today’s philosophic reformulations of Jewish belief, no matter how radical they appear to “orthodox” thinking Jews. Furthermore, the scholar can show that this issue and the controversy it raises is hardly new; rather it is characteristic of much of medieval Jewish thought, particularly in Provence, which gave birth to the most incisive esotericist readers of Maimonides’ philosophy as well as to the controversies their readings incurred. In short, it is a traditional conflict for how to view Judaism, even if on one side of the divide stands only a very small group, as Maimonides himself characterizes the Jewish philosophically minded elite. While it is not my purpose in this volume to build upon the legacy of Maimonides and his disciples in Provence, but to try to understand their legacy better, this understanding is of more than just “historical” interest in today’s efforts to develop Jewish thought within the traditional world.
So what is Maimonides’ legacy? Certainly his fundamental teaching to his coreligionists is that the study of philosophy is both a religious obligation and the most noble of human activities, but one that must be rooted in Jewish law and lore and should be accompanied by a strong social component—guiding others to pursue the truth to the degree they are capable and to live just lives. This teaching remains as relevant today as in Maimonides’ time. The philosophy most in keeping with his legacy is one that weds an unwavering commitment to Jewish tradition with an unwavering commitment to intellectual integrity in its interpretation of Judaism, one that carefully considers, builds upon, and challenges that which contemporary science and philosophy teach, and at the same time reflects a deep sense of social responsibility. This may no longer lead us to the God of Abraham or to the God of Aristotle, but it does lead us to the God of Maimonides.