Introduction

After the destruction of the Temple prophecy was taken from the prophets but retained by the sages, we are told in BT Baba Batra 12a. The Talmudic discussion continues by bringing the well-known dictum by Amemar: “The sage is superior to the prophet.” Left unanswered are the crucial questions raised by this dictum and by the discussion preceding it: what exactly is prophecy, what exactly is wisdom, what is the relationship between them, and by extension, what are the characteristics and task of the sage in comparison to those of the prophet?

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1 For a survey of approaches to this dictum in the history of Jewish thought, see Alon Goshen-Gottstein, “‘The Sage is Superior to the Prophet’: The Conception of Torah through the Prism of this Proverb through the Ages,” in Study and Knowledge in Jewish Thought, volume 2, ed. Howard Kreisel (Beer-Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, 2006), 37-77 (Heb.).
Maimonides does not cite Amemar’s dictum, but he addresses the questions it raises extensively in a number of his writings. Insofar as Maimonides consistently holds the view that all prophets are also sages, for wisdom is a necessary condition for prophecy, yet not all sages possess the requisite conditions to be prophets, it would appear that he rejects Amemar’s view and regards the prophet as inevitably superior to the sage. In regard to the view ascribing prophecy to non-sages prior to the destruction of the Temple, Maimonides clearly holds the opinion that there never was a period in history in which prophecy, at least true prophecy, was attained by non-sages. Yet Maimonides’ discussions suggest additional perspectives to view this issue, leading one to wonder whether in the final analysis he sees the prophet qua prophet as superior to the sage, or whether the prophet’s superiority is due solely to the fact that in addition to being a sage he possesses the further (secondary) gift of prophecy. To answer this question, one must explore Maimonides’ definition of prophecy and what he sees as the distinct attainment and task of the prophet, in contrast to his definition of wisdom and what he sees as the distinct task of the sage. As we shall see, some of Maimonides’ positions raise as many questions as they answer, leaving room for interpreting his views in far disparate ways.

2 It appears in an epistle ascribed to Maimonides and addressed to his disciple, Joseph ben Judah. While David Tzevi Baneth accepts the authenticity of this epistle, Shailat brings a number of arguments against this claim; see Isaac Shailat (ed. and Heb. trans.), Iggerot HaRambam (Jerusalem: Ma’aliyot Press, 1988), 694-695.

3 I have dealt at length with Maimonides’ approach to prophecy in my book Prophecy: The History of an Idea in Medieval Jewish Philosophy (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), 148-315. Much of my analysis in this chapter is based on what I wrote there.

4 See, for example, Guide of the Perplexed 2.32; Mishneh Torah, Laws of Principles of the Torah 7.1; Introduction to Pereq Heleq, sixth principle; Eight Chapters, 7.

5 See Guide 2.32. Maimonides notes that diviners are also at times referred to in the Bible as prophets, since the term is used equivocally. At any rate, one should not regard them as true prophets. According to Maimonides’ discussion in Guide 2.36, in the period of the Exile prophecy ceased for natural reasons, yet he subtly alludes in the Guide to the view that this phenomenon continued throughout history, though it did not produce public prophets. See Kreisel, Prophecy: The History of an Idea in Medieval Jewish Philosophy, 308-311.
It is clear from Maimonides’ writings that one type of knowledge that the prophet possesses but the sage lacks is that of divination, a gift that the prophet shares to some degree with non-prophetic diviners. Insofar as the prophet is also a sage, he shares with non-prophetic sages knowledge of the theoretical sciences—that is to say, knowledge of all the sciences culminating in metaphysics—for it is this knowledge in particular that characterizes the wise in Maimonides’ view. It is also this knowledge, as opposed to any other type of knowledge or any other trait, which constitutes the human being’s final perfection.

The main question I wish to explore in this chapter is whether Maimonides was of the opinion that the prophet qua prophet attains theoretical knowledge that the non-prophetic sage is incapable of attaining, and what is the nature of this knowledge. I would also like to view the public functions of both prophet and sage in Maimonides’ thought and how their functions are related to the types of knowledge they attain. This leads to the further question of his view of the relation of the rabbinic sage to the philosophic sage, as well as the question of the authority of the rabbinic sage in comparison to that of the prophet. Finally, I would like to show how Maimonides’ followers in Provence treated the relationship between sage and prophet in respect to their attainment of theoretical knowledge.

Maimonides’ Approach to Prophecy

Prophecy for Maimonides is a natural perfection. In the Introduction to *Pereq Ḥeleq*, sixth principle of faith, and in *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Principles of the Torah, 7.1, he defines prophecy as conjunction (ittiṣāl) of the intellect with the Active Intellect, which is attained after apprehending all that exists. In the sixth principle, he mentions also the emanation that comes from the latter intellect to the former one when

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6 For a discussion of this point, see below.

7 Maimonides maintains this position in his introduction to *Commentary on the Mishnah* and his *Eight Chapters*, reiterates it in several places in his *Mishneh Torah*, most notably in the “Laws of the Principles of the Torah,” and presents it throughout the *Guide*. For Maimonides’ discussion of different types of wisdom, with knowledge of the sciences being considered wisdom proper, see *Guide* 3.54.
it has reached this state. In *Guide* 2.36, he brings a fuller, though somewhat more cryptic, definition:

> Know that the true reality and quiddity of prophecy consist in it being an overflow overflowing from God, may He be cherished and honored, through the intermediation of the Active Intellect, toward the rational faculty in the first place and thereafter toward the imaginative faculty. This is the highest degree of man and the ultimate term of perfection that can exist for his species; and this state is the ultimate term of perfection for the imaginative faculty. (369)

Prophecy is defined here in terms of an emanation that is received by two human faculties, the rational and imaginative. Though Maimonides subsequently mentions “conjunction” in dealing with prophetic visions, he does not introduce this notion in his initial description of prophecy. In the continuation of the chapter, Maimonides sees the emanation from the Active Intellect to these two faculties as resulting in the attainment of two types of knowledge:

> Now there is no doubt that whenever, in an individual of this description, his imaginative faculty, which is as perfect as possible, acts and receives from the intellect an overflow corresponding to his speculative perfection, this individual will only apprehend divine and most extraordinary matters, will see only God and His angels, and will only be aware and achieve knowledge of matters that constitute true opinions and general directives for the well-being of men in their relations with one another. (372)

To these two types of knowledge—the apprehension of metaphysics and the principles of ideal leadership—one should add also knowledge of the future, as is clarified in the following two chapters, as well as Maimonides’ other writings. The emanation from the Active Intellect

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8 See *Guide* 2.45; see also Maimonides’ description of conjunction when speaking of the ecstatic death of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam at the end of *Guide* 3.51. Whether Maimonides thought that a form of ontological conjunction with the Active Intellect was in fact possible, and with it the attainment of immortality, has been a source of disagreement among scholars. For a discussion of this issue, see Howard Kreisel, *Maimonides’ Political Thought: Studies in Ethics, Law and the Human Ideal* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999), 136-150.

9 See, for example, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of the Principles of the Torah 10.3.
does not constitute the transmission of actual knowledge in Maimonides’ view, but it refers to a force that strengthens the functioning of these two human faculties when they are in a perfect state, thereby allowing the individual to attain knowledge in these various areas on the basis of the knowledge he already possesses.\(^\text{10}\) This point is supported by the continuation of Maimonides’ discussion, as we shall see below.

In *Guide* 2.37, Maimonides describes three types of emanation that are distinguished solely by the human faculties receiving it and not by the nature of the emanation itself:

The case in which the intellectual overflow overflows only toward the rational faculty and does not overflow at all toward the imaginative faculty—either because the scantiness of what overflows or because of some deficiency existing in the imaginative faculty in its natural disposition, a deficiency that makes it impossible for it to receive the overflow of the intellect—is characteristic of the class of men of science engaged in speculation. If, on the other hand, this overflow reaches both faculties—I mean both the rational and the imaginative—as we and others among the philosophers have explained, and if the imaginative faculty is in a state of ultimate perfection owing to its natural disposition, this is characteristic of the class of prophets. If again the overflow only reaches the imaginative faculty, the defect in the rational faculty deriving either from its original natural disposition or from insufficiency of training, this is characteristic of the class of those who govern cities, while being the legislators, the soothsayers, the augurs, and the dreamers of veridical dreams . . . . (374)

It is clear from Maimonides’ account that the superior rational faculty of both the prophet and philosopher is the one responsible for their attainment of theoretical knowledge, and the superior imaginative faculty is the one primarily responsible for the ability to govern and divine. If the prophet is a far better leader than the non-prophet in Maimonides’ thought, his advantage is undoubtedly due to his superior rational faculty. This enables the prophet to govern with the human being’s true perfection and felicity in mind, while non-prophets set as their ends false or inferior goals. The prophet’s perfect rational faculty

\(^{\text{10}}\) For more on this point, see *Prophecy: The History of an Idea in Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, 239-257.
also accords him an advantage over non-prophets in the area of divination.\textsuperscript{11} Philosophers due to their imperfect imaginative faculty lack ability in these two areas. This leaves us with the question of whether the prophet is superior to the philosopher in the area of theoretical knowledge, and if so, whether his superior imaginative faculty accords him this superiority. Complicating the picture is the fact that Moses in Maimonides’ thought achieved the highest level of theoretical knowledge, though his imaginative faculty was not involved at all in the reception of the prophetic emanation.\textsuperscript{12}

I have argued in previous studies that Maimonides in fact thought that prophets were superior to philosophers in the realm of theoretical knowledge.\textsuperscript{13} This superiority is due in large part to a superior rational faculty that possesses a greater intuitive ability to quickly frame syllogisms, grasp conclusions, and advance in theoretical knowledge, as though one learns these things instantaneously and without effort, just as the same ability when applied to particular circumstances allows one to divine the future instantaneously. As Maimonides explains in Guide 2.38 regarding this faculty:

You will find among people a man whose conjecturing and divination are very strong and habitually hit the mark. . . . The causes of this are many—they are various anterior, posterior, and present circumstances. But in virtue of the strength of this divination, the mind goes over all these premises and draws from them conclusions in the shortest time, so that it is thought to happen in no time at all. In virtue of this faculty, certain people give warnings concerning great future events. . . . Know that the true prophets indubitably grasp speculative matters; by means of his speculation alone, man is unable to grasp the causes from which what a prophet has come to know necessarily follows. This has a counterpart in their giving information regarding matters with respect to which man, using only common conjecture and divination, is unable to give information. For the very overflow that affects the imaginative faculty—with a result of rendering it perfect so that its act brings about its giving

\textsuperscript{11} I argue this point in more detail in Maimonides’ Political Thought, 83-87; see also below.

\textsuperscript{12} See Guide 2.45. For more on this issue, see below, chapter 9, 316 n. 2.

\textsuperscript{13} See Maimonides’ Political Thought, 71-79, 292-293; Prophecy: The History of an Idea in Medieval Jewish Philosophy, 255-257.
information about what will happen and its apprehending those future events as if they were things that had been perceived by the senses and had reached the imaginative faculty from the senses—is also the overflow that renders perfect the act of the rational faculty, so that its act brings about its knowing things that are real in their existence, and it achieves this apprehension as if it had apprehended it by starting from speculative premises. . . . For the overflow of the Active Intellect goes in its true reality only to it [that is, the rational faculty], causing it to pass from potentiality to actuality. It is from the rational faculty that that overflow comes to the imaginative faculty. How then can the imaginative faculty be perfected in so great a measure as to apprehend what does not come to it from the senses, without the rational faculty being affected in a similar way so as to apprehend without having apprehended by way of premises, inference, and reflection? This is the true reality of the notion of prophecy, and these are the opinions that are peculiar to the prophetic teaching. (376-377)

The process of divination Maimonides describes appears to be a rational process. Syllogisms are rapidly formed on the basis of the individual’s knowledge. Conclusions involving the future are then drawn. Maimonides sees a similar process at work in the attainment of theoretical knowledge. The very term that Maimonides uses for “conjecture” and “intuition” in the area of divination, al-ḥads, is the term employed by Avicenna and other the Islamic philosophers for the ability possessed by certain individuals for quickly attaining intelligibles. In the part of his encyclopedia Al-Najāt devoted to an exploration of the powers of the soul, Avicenna writes regarding the prophetic faculty:

If a person can acquire knowledge from within himself, this strong capacity is called “intuition” (al-ḥads). It is so strong in certain people that they do not need great effort, or instruction and actualization, in order to make contact with the active intelligence. But the primary capacity of such a person for this is so powerful that he might also be said to possess the second capacity; indeed, it seems as though he knows everything from within himself. This is the highest degree of this capacity. In this state the material intelligence must be called “Divine Spirit.” It belongs to the genus of intellectus in habitu, but is so lofty that not all people share it. It is not unlikely, indeed, that some of these actions attributed to the “Divine Intelligence” because
of their powerful and lofty nature overflow into the imagination which symbolizes them in sense-imagery and words in the way which we have previously indicated. What proves this is the evident fact that the intelligible truths are acquired only when the middle term of a syllogism is obtained. This may be done in two ways: sometimes through intuition, which is an act of mind by which the mind itself immediately perceived the middle term. This power of intuition is quickness of apprehension. . . . It is possible that a man may find the truth within himself, and that the syllogism may be effected in his mind without any teacher. This varies both quantitatively and qualitatively. . . . Thus there might be a man whose soul has such an intense purity and is so firmly linked to the rational principles that he blazes with intuition, i.e. with the receptivity of inspiration coming from the active intelligence concerning everything. So the forms of all things contained in the active intelligence are imprinted on his soul either all at once or nearly so, not that he accepts them merely on authority but on account of their logical order which encompasses all the middle terms. . . . This is a kind of prophetic inspiration, indeed its highest form and the one most fitted to be called Divine Power; and it is the highest human faculty.  

When Maimonides writes that “premises, inference, and reflection” are not involved in the apprehension of the prophet, he should not be interpreted as maintaining that the prophet knows only conclusions without the syllogisms that underlie them, for this is not considered true knowledge at all in the philosophic tradition; rather, he has in mind Avicenna’s approach that this process happens instantaneously in the prophetic intellect.

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14 Fazlur Rahman (trans.), *Avicenna’s Psychology* (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), 35-37. For the Arabic text of the parallel discussion in Avicenna’s encyclopedia *Al-Shifā’*, see Fazlur Rahman (ed.), *Avicenna’s De Anima* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 250-252. For a discussion of *al-ḥads* in Avicenna, see Dmitri Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988), 159-176.

15 Prior to Maimonides, Judah Halevi cites this view of the prophetic intellect in *Kuzari* 5.12. Shem Tov Ibn Falaquera, one of the earliest commentators of Maimonides, indicates the relation between Maimonides’ view and that of Avicenna in his commentary on *Guide* 1.34. See his *Moreh ha-Moreh*, ed. Yair Shiffman (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 2001), 137. Maimonides mentions *al-ḥads* as a virtue of the rational faculty in *Eight Chapters* 2, indicating that he was well aware of the philosophic tradition connecting this power with the attainment of theoretical knowledge. While in the passage from the *Guide* cited above Maimonides clearly implies that a rational process is involved in divination, he may have decided
Maimonides’ view of the superiority of the prophet’s rational faculty to that of the philosopher emerges from the parable of the lightning flashes that he brings at the beginning of the *Guide*:

We are like someone in a very dark night over whom lightning flashes time and time again. Among us there is one for whom the lightning flashes time and time again, so that he is always, as it were, in unceasing light. Thus night appears to him as day. That is the degree of the great one among the prophets. . . . Among them there is one to whom the lightning flashes only once in the whole of his night. . . . There are others between whose lightning flashes there are greater or shorter intervals. Thereafter comes he who does not attain a degree in which his darkness is illumined by any lightning flash. It is illumined, however, by a polished body or something of that kind. . . . And even this small light that shines over us is not always there, but flashes and is hidden again. . . . It is in accord with these states that the degrees of the perfect vary. (7-8)

The one who can “see” the truths of metaphysics directly is the prophet. Prophecy thus is equated with a special type of intellectual illumination, by means of which the individual apprehends the highest level of reality. Different degrees of prophecy exist in accordance with the number of times the intellect experiences this type of illumination. Each “lightning flash” brings in its wake a more penetrating grasp of metaphysical reality. Moses represents the final point of the continuum of perfection. His intellect was in a state of continuous illumination. Nevertheless, he remains in some crucial sense a corporeal being. He does not see metaphysical reality in the bright light of the sun.

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not to use the term *al-ḥads* in regard to the attainment of intelligibles as well, in order not to make this point too explicit. Instead, he allows his less astute readers to draw the conclusion that this power of intuition is tied up only with the imagination, preventing them from attributing a superior rational faculty to diviners, even if only in regard to practical matters, which would blur the distinction between the three classes that Maimonides wishes to draw. The difference in his terminology from that of Avicenna thus does not reflect a different attitude; rather, it is due to the other issues that inform his discussion. For a different approach to this issue, see Amira Eran, “Intuition and Inspiration: The Causes of Jewish Thinkers’ Objection to Avicenna’s Intellectual Prophecy (*Ḥads*),” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 14 (2007): 39-71.
The next group Maimonides describes consists of those who see metaphysical reality by way of reflection. They are the philosophers. Maimonides does not explain the nature of the difference between prophets and philosophers. While in his later discussion in the *Guide* the difference between the two lies in how quickly and high one can climb in one’s attainment of discursive knowledge, the images he uses in this passage suggest that the difference does not lie so much in “what” they know, though this too enters into the picture, as in the quality or clarity of their apprehension. The prophet is able to understand metaphysical reality in a more profound, holistic manner. This point is also suggested by the other famous parable brought by Maimonides in the *Guide* (3.51), that of the king in his palace. The men of science are those who have entered the inner court of the palace, by virtue of achieving perfection in the natural things, and understanding the divine science, while the prophets are those who, “after having attained perfection in the divine science, turn wholly toward God, may He be cherished and held sublime, renounce what is other than He, and direct all their acts of their intellect toward an examination of the beings with a view to drawing from them proof with regard to Him, so as to know His governance of them in whatever way it is possible. These people are those who are present in the ruler’s council. This is the rank of the prophets” (620). The emphasis here too is on the completeness of the knowledge one attains in this stage—the ability to see the whole picture in all its details of the interrelation of all the existents with God.\(^\text{16}\)

These parables and their explanations, as well as Maimonides’ approach to Moses’ apprehension in other passages of his writings, read

\(^{16}\) Compare Maimonides’ description of the knowledge attained by Moses in the revelation at Sinai when he was on top of the mountain (in the cleft of the rock), depicted in Exodus 33-34: “This dictum—*all my goodness*—alludes to the display to him of all existing things. . . . By their display, I mean that he will apprehend their nature and the way they are mutually connected so that he will know how He governs them in general and in detail” (*Guide* 1.54: 124).
like a less mystical version of Avicenna’s account in his *Remarks and Admonitions*:17

Furthermore, if the will and spiritual exercise bring the knower to a certain limit, he will encounter pleasurable stolen looks at the light of the Truth, as if these looks are lightning that shines over the knower and then turns away from him. . . . He is then absorbed in those overwhelming moments until they overcome him even while not exercising. Thus whenever he catches a glimpse of a thing, he returns from that thing to the side of sanctity, remembering something of the latter. He is then overcome by a fainting spell. Thus he sees the Truth in everything. Perhaps on his way to this limit, his veils are lifted up from him, and he ceases to be calm. . . . After that, spiritual exercise carries him to a point at which his moment is converted into tranquility. Thus that which is stolen becomes familiar, and the lightning becomes a clear flame. He acquires a stable knowledge of the Truth, as if this knowledge is a continuous accompaniment in which he delights in the rapture of the Truth. If he turns away from this he will do so with loss and regret. . . . Perhaps up to this point, this knowledge is facilitated for him only at times. But then he moves gradually until he attains it whenever he wishes. . . . Knowledge begins by the truly adept’s separation, detachment, abandonment, and rejection—concentrating on a togetherness that is the togetherness of the attributes of the Truth, reaching the One, and then stopping.18

The focus in both Maimonides’ and Avicenna’s accounts is on the state of the *intellect*, though they resort to figurative language in attempt to depict this state. Yet the superiority of the prophet’s intellectual attainment in Maimonides’ view may also be due in part to his superior imagination, and not only to his superior rational faculty. The imaginative faculty of the prophet clearly serves as a crucial pedagogical aid in

17 For Maimonides’ immediate sources for the parable of lightning flashes, see Shlomo Pines, “The Philosophic Sources of *The Guide of the Perplexed*,” ci, found in his translation of the treatise. Pines, however, questions whether Avicenna was Maimonides’ immediate source and traces the parable to Ibn Bajja instead, whose works were well known to Maimonides; see ibid., civ-cvi. On Ibn Bajja’s approach, see Alexander Altmann, “Ibn Bajja on Man’s Ultimate Felicity,” in *Studies in Religious Philosophy and Mysticism* (London: Routledge, 1969), 73-107.

18 Shams Inati (trans.), *Ibn Sina and Mysticism—Remarks and Admonitions: Part Four* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1996), 86-88.
teaching others theoretical truths by representing them in images, but may also aid the prophet himself to grasp the truths in the realm of metaphysics in a more unified manner. Only Moses, whose initial prophecy also involved the imagination in Maimonides’ view, was able to reach the level where he could dispense with its services in his reception of the prophetic emanation and comprehend metaphysical reality as pure intellect, similar to the comprehension of the Active Intellect.

The conclusion one apparently draws from this analysis is that in any conflict between the prophet and philosopher in theoretical matters one should favor the prophet due to his superior knowledge. Yet this conclusion is far from certain, insofar as the prophet may often teach opinions that are necessary for political reasons, and not because of their theoretical truth, as Maimonides indicates in regard to the teachings of the Torah itself. Moreover, it is not at all clear that Maimonides thought that the prophet is inevitably infallible in his theoretical knowledge, a point that emerged from the discussion in the previous chapter. In short, Maimonides may well have believed that the prophet attains greater intellectual perfection than the philosopher, and a greater clarity in his understanding of metaphysics, but this does not necessitate the view that the opinions the prophet expresses should inevitably be accepted as theoretical truth. God’s creation of the world, for example, is one of the fundamental opinions that should be accepted on the basis of prophetic teachings, according to Maimonides, while at

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19 It is interesting to note that Avicenna too, in his Remarks and Admonitions, deals with the imaginative aspect of the knowledge attained by the Knower or prophet, after dealing with the intellectual aspect. He writes: “Hence, the soul is easily pulled to the higher side. If a representation of an invisible thing occurs to the soul, the imagination turns toward this representation, and receives it as well. This turning is due either to a stimulus given by this occurring thing when the imagination is quick to discern this stimulus after having rested its movement and relieved its weakness, or to the rational soul’s natural employment of the imagination, for the imagination assists the soul when such opportunities are presented” (100).

20 See below, chapter 9, 323-324.

21 See Guide 3.28.

22 See above, chapter 7, 249-250.

23 See Guide 2.23. Interestingly, in Guide 2.13, Maimonides indicates that Abraham was led to this belief by speculation (and not prophecy). The depiction of Abraham
the same time there are good reasons to interpret him as regarding this as a necessary belief, rather than a true one, as we have seen above in chapter three. Furthermore, given the nature of prophetic speech, the views of the philosophers remain the key for understanding the theoretical ideas the prophets convey.

The Public Roles of the Prophet and the Sage in Maimonides’ Thought and Their Legal Authority

The superiority of the prophet over the philosopher in theoretical matters, over the non-prophetic leader in governance, and over the diviner in foretelling the future certainly qualifies him as the philosopher-king par excellence. The image of the prophet in the Guide is in fact that of the ideal leader, though the role of transmitter of a divine law is expressly limited to Moses. When one turns, however, to Maimonides’ legal writings, his position on the public role of the prophet is more complex and not without dissonance. In these writings, the prophet’s role does not appear to be at all commensurate with his attainment.

A striking example of this dissonance can be found in Mishneh Torah, Laws of the Principles of the Torah. In chapters 7-10, Maimonides deals with the issues of the nature of prophecy, Mosaic prophecy, the verification of prophecy, and the authority of the prophet. He begins his account by stressing the exceptional wisdom of the prophet, his moral traits, his complete knowledge of the natural sciences and metaphysics (or pardes in accordance with Maimonides’ definition of this term in the first four chapters of this section), and his complete single-minded devotion solely to the apprehension of these matters. These qualifications result in his conjunction with the Active Intellect and becoming in essence a “different person”—a reference to his attainment of the immortal acquired intellect (7.1). Maimonides’ depiction

is an anti-Aristotelian philosopher stands in contrast to Maimonides’ previous depiction of Abraham in the Mishneh Torah as a philosopher who proved the existence of God on the basis of the Aristotelian notion of the eternity of the world.

24 See Guide 2.39-40.
25 See my Maimonides’ Political Thought, 137-139. For an analysis of Maimonides’ discussion of prophecy in the “Laws of the Principles of the Torah,” see Prophecy:
of prophecy in this context is completely in terms of its intellectual dimension. He goes on to maintain that there are different levels of prophecy, just as in the case of wisdom (7.2), refers to the imaginative dimension of prophecy, insofar as it takes place in a vision (7.3), lists the differences between normative prophecy and Mosaic prophecy (7.6), and indicates that prophecy may be either of a private nature (that is, meant only for the recipient), or public (that is, involving a mission to others). In the latter case, the task of the prophets are to teach others wisdom, inform them what they should do and prevent them from practicing evil (7.7)—appropriate tasks, given the prophet’s own qualifications and attainment. Maimonides in this manner distinguishes between the phenomenon of prophecy and the prophetic mission, which is integral to only some prophecies.26

Maimonides’ approach to the verification of prophecy follows from the nature of prophecy and the prophet’s qualifications. Individuals lacking sterling moral characteristics and perfect wisdom (which primarily denotes knowledge of all the natural sciences and metaphysics), cannot be prophets. The claim to prophecy on the part of anyone of this description thus is automatically dismissed (7.7). It is only at the final stage that the prophet is asked to produce a sign—not necessarily a miracle, but the accurate foretelling of future events in all their details without error (10.1-2). Implicit in this test is the view that since divination is one of the components of prophecy, the lack of this ability indicates that one is not a true prophet.

Till this point, Maimonides’ approach is consistent from a rational perspective. Yet the continuation of his discussion is surprising, for Maimonides not only sees divination as a component of prophecy; he treats it as the primary one, at least of public prophecy: “The prophet does not arise for us except to inform us of future events in the world” (10.3). One would have expected Maimonides to elaborate upon the other tasks that he ascribed to the prophet earlier in his discussion that is to say, as a teacher of wisdom and a guide to the proper course of

26 On Maimonides’ naturalistic approach to the prophetic mission, see Prophecy: The History of an Idea in Medieval Jewish Philosophy, 251-253.
public action—which follow from the prophet’s exceptional intellectual accomplishments and leadership abilities.\(^{27}\) Instead, he transforms the prophet \textit{qua} prophet essentially into a glorified diviner.

The aim of Maimonides’ approach appears to be a minimization of the public role of the prophet at the same time that he maximizes the nature of his attainment. The prophet is the one who achieves ultimate human perfection and an immortal intellect, yet he is not granted all the authority that his achievement appears to warrant. Maimonides is adamant on the point that prophecy does not involve adding laws to the Torah or annuling them, changing their details, or even deciding questions of law on the basis of revelation (9.1, 4). In short, the authority of the prophet extends only to matters that the Law does not command or prohibit, such as waging or not waging war, building or not building a wall, etc. (9.2). It is easy to see how these matters are tied up with the ability of the prophet to predict the future. The question that this view raises is why the prophet does not have authority in the other areas that are tied up with his superior intellect, such as determining laws or commanding the theoretical truths that are to be held by the nation in addition to those decreed by Moses.

The reason Maimonides argues for the eternal uniqueness of Mosaic Law, and hence the inability of the prophet to make any changes in it whatsoever, can easily be traced in large measure to his desire to erect a strong bulwark against the annulment of the Law by those he considers to be false prophets, such as the founders of the other religions. Even recognizing \textit{permanent} minor changes in Mosaic Law can open the door to its complete abrogation.\(^{28}\) Yet the prophet \textit{qua} prophet would

\(^{27}\) Both these roles are stressed in Maimonides’ discussion of prophecy in the \textit{Guide}, though he does not contradict there what he had written in the \textit{Mishneh Torah}.

\(^{28}\) See, for example, what Maimonides says regarding the issue of changes in the Law in \textit{Guide} 3.34. Not all of Maimonides’ predecessors agreed with the view that prophets after Moses lacked all legislative authority. For more on the issues discussed here and the relevant bibliography, see Howard Kreisel, “Maimonides’ Political Philosophy,” in \textit{Cambridge Companion to Moses Maimonides}, ed. Kenneth Seeskin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 193-220; idem, “Prophetic Authority in the Philosophy of Spinoza and in Medieval Jewish Philosophy,” in \textit{Spiritual Authority: Struggles over Cultural Power in Jewish Thought}, ed. Howard Kreisel, Boaz Huss, and Uri Ehrlich (Beer-Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the
appear to be the jurist *par excellence*, so it is perplexing why Maimonides is insistent on barring him even from this role.²⁹ It may be countered that he denies him this role as a prophet, but not as a sage, for the prophet is also a sage. While this is certainly the case, the point remains that Maimonides insists that the prophet has no advantage over non-prophetic sages in deciding laws, despite his evident advantages over them. Consider, for example, Maimonides’ extreme formulations of this position in the introduction to his *Commentary on the Mishnah*:

> Know that prophecy does not apply to speculations concerning the [legal] commentary on the Law, and the derivation of “branches” by way of the thirteen principles [of legal hermeneutics]. What Joshua and Pinchas achieved by way of speculation and [legal] syllogism is precisely what Rabina and R. Ashi achieved.³⁰

> If a thousand prophets, all like Elijah and Elisha, interpret [the law] according to a certain interpretation and a thousand and one sages offer an opposing interpretation, ‘one must follow the majority. The law is in accordance with the words of the thousand and one sages, not the thousand great prophets.³¹

Given Maimonides’ approach to prophecy, it is hard to argue that he is simply favoring intellect over revelation in this case. No one is better suited *intellectually* to decide cases of law than the prophet, so why should his *prophetic* insight of the ideal decision to be made in any given matter not be favored over the one who lacks this attainment? Why should we only accord the prophet this authority when it comes to political decisions, due primarily to his superior divinatory ability,

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²⁹ It should be noted that the prophet *qua* prophet shares some of the same areas of legal authority as the sages—the ability to institute legal enactments for the public as well as to *temporarily* suspend Mosaic commandments. Maimonides does not break with his rabbinic sources on this point, but clearly is more interested in this context to stress the limits of prophetic authority rather than its prerogatives.

³⁰ See Isaac Shailat (ed. and Heb. trans.), *Haqdamot HaRambam la-Mishnah* (Jerusalem: Ma’aliyot, 1992), 29 (Arabic, 329).

³¹ Ibid., 36 (Arabic, 335).
and not accord him a similar authority in purely legal matters due to
his superior intellectual ability to guide society to the most appropriate
path? Is not the prophet the individual who best understands the aims
of the divine Lawgiver and can best determine the most appropriate
legal rulings in light of the particular historical circumstances of his
period? This is precisely the model advanced by Alfarabi, which had
such a strong impact on Maimonides’ thought and to an important
degree even his own legal activity.32

Moreover, Maimonides appears to maintain the position that just
as there is an ideal law which finds its expression in the Torah of Moses,
there are also ideal legal rulings. Evidence for this view can be found in
his explanation of the reason for the controversies among the Sages,
which he brings in the introduction to his *Commentary on the Mishnah*:

> Regarding their saying: “When the students of Shammai and Hillel
grew more numerous and did not attend to them [their masters] in an
adequate manner, the controversies in Israel grew more numerous”
[BT Sanhedrin 88b], this matter is exceptionally clear. When two
individuals are equal in discernment, speculation, and knowledge of
the principles from which one deduces [legal opinions], no disagree-
ment at all will arise between them in their logical deductions, and if
it arises, it will be rare. One finds this in the case of Shammai and
Hillel, who disagreed only on a few legal rulings. This is due to the
fact that the logical deductions of each of them in all [legal] matters
that are attained by logical deduction were close to one another.
Similarly, the principles that were transmitted to one were the same
as the principles transmitted to the other. However, when the dili-
gence of their students declined and their [power of] logical deduction
weakened in comparison to that of Hillel and Shammai, their
masters, disagreements arose among them in many matters upon
which they speculated. The logical deductions of each of them were
commensurate with one’s intellect and the principles one held. One
should not blame them for this. We do not demand of two sages who
argue that they argue with the intellect of Joshua and Pinchas. Simi-
larly, we cast no doubts regarding the matter on which they disagreed,
insofar as they were not like Shammai and Hillel, or those greater
than them, for God did not command us thus in the service of Him.33

32 See *Maimonides’ Political Thought*, 16-27.
33 That is to say, we do not question the final decision of the sages who disagreed with
one another and who were inferior to their masters, for God did not command us
Rather, He obligated us to heed the sages of any given generation, as it is said: *To the judge that will be in those days and you shall inquire* etc. [Deuteronomy 17:9]. This is the manner in which controversies arose, not that they were mistaken in the traditions they received, one receiving a true one and the other a false.\(^\text{34}\)

According to Maimonides’ approach, a less than perfect wisdom is what brings to weak logical reasoning and controversies in matters of law. From this one can infer that one of perfect wisdom can deduce the ideal legal rulings.

While the principles to which Maimonides refers may be thought of only as formal legal ones, such as R. Ishmael’s thirteen principles by which the Torah is expounded—and hence deriving the ideal ruling is based purely on formal legal reasoning—there is good reason to posit that Maimonides has additional principles in mind, such as the final ends of the Law. In other words, metal-legal principles are crucial in deducing the best legal ruling in a given situation. This approach fits in nicely with the Platonic model of the philosopher-king who creates an ideal society by means of the laws he lays down and the opinions that he teaches. Alfarabi, building upon this model, posited successive (or simultaneous) ideal legislations laid down on the basis of the revelation (*waḥy*) attained by different supreme lawgivers, each law framed in accordance with the circumstances of one’s period and one’s society. Those rulers who were not on the level of the supreme lawgivers, insofar as they did not possess all the requisite qualifications to attain revelation, were to lead society on the basis of the older ideal legislation.\(^\text{35}\) How they were to do so can be discerned from Alfarabi’s discussion of jurisprudence and theology in his *Enumeration of the Sciences*:

Jurisprudence (*fiqh*) is the art that enables man to infer the determination of whatever was not explicitly specified by the Lawgiver, on the basis of such things as were explicitly specified and determined to heed only the decisions of the great sages and not the lesser ones.

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\(^\text{34}\) *Haqdamot HaRambam la-Mishnah*, 41 (Arabic, 339-340).
\(^\text{35}\) See Alfarabi, *The Political Regime*, trans. Fauzi Najjar, in *Medieval Political Philosophy*, ed. Ralph Lerner and Muhsin Mahdi (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), 37.
by him; and to strive to infer correctly by taking into account the Lawgiver’s purpose with the religion he had legislated for the nation to which he gave that religion. Now every religion comprises certain opinions and certain actions. Examples of the opinions are those legislated about God (praise be to Him) and His attributes, about the world, and so forth. Examples of the actions are those by which God (the Mighty and Majestic) is magnified, and the actions by means of which transactions are conducted in the cities. For this reason, the science of jurisprudence has two parts, one part dealing with the opinions and another dealing with the actions.

The art of dialectical theology (kalām) is a positive disposition that enables man to argue in the defense of the specific opinions and actions stated by the founder of the religion, and against everything that opposes these opinions and actions. This art is also divided into two parts; one part deals with the opinions, and another deals with the actions. It is different from jurisprudence. For the jurist takes the opinions and the actions stated explicitly by the founder of the religion and, using them as axioms, he infers the things that follow from them as consequences. The dialectical theologian, on the other hand, defends the things that the jurist uses as axioms, without inferring other things from them. If it should happen that a certain man possesses the ability to do both, then he is both a jurist and a dialectical theologian. He defends the axioms in his capacity as a dialectical theologian, and he infers from them in his capacity as a jurist.\(^{36}\)

According to Alfarabi’s approach, the task of those who are not supreme lawgivers is to defend the opinions of the ideal law against those who reject them, and to interpret the law in a manner appropriate to situations not explicitly addressed by it. As in the case of Maimonides, one may argue that Alfarabi too sees the jurists as interpreting the ideal law solely on the basis of the established formal rules. Yet Alfarabi explicitly states that the jurists take “into account the Lawgiver’s purpose with the religion he had legislated,” thereby implying that they act also in accordance with the spirit of the ideal law in order that it achieves the purpose for which it was promulgated.

Maimonides, who rejected the possibility of any ideal legislation other than Mosaic Law, regarded the Sages of the Talmud, at least the most important of them, as jurists-theologians who were steeped in

\(^{36}\) Alfarabi, The Enumeration of the Sciences, trans. Fauzi Najjar, in Medieval Political Philosophy, 27.
philosophy. They were able to interpret the Torah, both the actions it
commands and the opinions it imparts, in accordance with its final
purpose—the welfare of the soul (that is to say, intellect), and the
welfare of the body (that is, the body politic)—and in a manner most
appropriate for the social circumstances of their period. The ideal
rulings are those that best accomplish this task while still conforming to
the formal principles of legal reasoning. In essence, ideal legal rulings
are the ones that the Lawgiver would have ruled if confronted with a
similar situation. Maimonides appears to have viewed his own task in
this light, both as a public educator and as a legal authority.37

Hence Maimonides’ preference for the decision of a thousand and
one non-prophetic sages over that of a thousand prophets is due to the
importance he attaches to the formal rules of adjudication in cases of
disagreements, even if the price to be paid is a non-ideal decision. He
saw it as crucial to keep revelation completely out of the process, and
insist in no uncertain terms that even those attaining revelation should
be granted no formal advantage over those who had not, in order to
prevent those claiming revelation from being in a position to under-
mine the legal process. It would appear that his very real fear of false
prophets and the havoc they cause played a major consideration in this
approach. Better to preserve the normative legal process of decision
making, even if it results in this case in inferior decisions, than to leave
the process exposed to such a danger. Prophets can still function as
sages and make their impact on the interpretation of the Law felt in
that manner. Even in the areas related to determining laws in which
Maimonides concedes that they enjoy prerogatives as prophets—i.e.,
issuing legal enactments or temporarily suspending commandments—
their prerogatives do not exceed those enjoyed by the rabbinic Sages.
Maimonides seeks to insure that the Law will not be annulled by any
authority, whether human or those claiming divine. There was and will
always be only one inviolable Divine Law, Maimonides insists, and that
is the Law of Moses.

37 See Warren Z. Harvey, “Political Philosophy and Halakhah in Maimonides,” Iyyun
29 (1980): 198-212 (Heb.).
The historical picture that Maimonides paints in support of this view is one in which even the classical prophets acted as sages in the interpretation of Law. Their exceptional intellectual ability found its expression in enabling them to assume the position of heading the high rabbinical court. In the introduction to *Mishneh Torah* Maimonides indicates that the biblical prophets received and passed on the Oral Law to the next generation not as individuals but as heads of a rabbinical court. Moreover, Maimonides hints that in the Talmudic period there were Sages who attained prophetic status but continued to function as normative rabbinic authorities. The most outstanding example of this trend is R. Judah the Prince, the leader of rabbinic Judaism toward the end of the second century and the compiler of the Mishnah, to whom Maimonides ascribes all the qualifications for prophecy and who served as Maimonides’ model for his own activity.\(^{38}\)

In my discussion till this point, I have used the term “sage” in what appears to be an equivocal manner. The notion of “sage” in reference to the interpretation of the Law denotes a person whose expertise is Jewish law, whereas the true “sage” in Maimonides’ thought is the one who has attained complete knowledge of the sciences culminating in metaphysics—that is to say, the true philosopher. The question immediately arises as to the relation he sees between these two kinds of sages. Indeed, when Maimonides himself speaks of “sage” (ḥakham) and “wisdom” (ḥokhmah), whether he is speaking of the legal sage and legal knowledge or the philosophical sage and philosophical knowledge must be inferred from the context. At times it appears that he even plays on this ambiguity. He certainly depicts as the ideal situation one in which the same individual combines both types of knowledge. This is true for him of the biblical prophets and the greatest Sages of the Talmud. Maimonides even posits that one should only appoint to the court jurisprudents who are exceptional not only in their knowledge of the Torah but also of “profuse intellect” (ba’alei de’ah merubah), and who have knowledge of the sciences (*Mishneh Torah*, Laws of the Sanhedrin 2.1). He may be hinting by his use of the term “profuse intellect”

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38 See *Prophecy: The History of an Idea in Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, 167, 311.
that ideally the jurisprudents should also have knowledge of metaphysics. At any rate, it is clear from the parable of the king in the palace in *Guide* 3.51 that those who enter the palace are not simply great jurisprudents but those who have also mastered the sciences, or what Maimonides terms in the introduction to his treatise, “the science (‘ilm) of the Law in its true sense” (5). Maimonides is well aware of the great gap between the ideal he posits and the current situation, as attested by his criticism of the philosophic ignorance exhibited by most of the rabbinic authorities of his period.\footnote{See for example what Maimonides writes in *Guide* 2.6 against contemporary rabbinic scholars, or the biting criticism in his *Treatise on Resurrection* of the lack of true philosophic knowledge exhibited by the Babylonian Gaon, Samuel ben Ali.} It is this gap that he hopes to at least narrow by way of his compositions.

In the final analysis, the gap between prophet and rabbinic sage in the area of legal knowledge does not exist at all for Maimonides, the prophet simply being a superior sage, while the gap between the prophet and the philosophic sage, which appears to exist, is nevertheless a vague one at best. Revelation is not a supernatural phenomenon for Maimonides. Hence even if he thought that there was a categorical difference between the type of theoretical knowledge attained by the prophet and the discursive knowledge of the philosopher, as I have argued, Maimonides still saw this knowledge as one the prophet attained in a natural manner by virtue of his qualifications and philosophic studies. The prophet is a superior type of philosopher who can glimpse metaphysical reality in a far more unified and penetrating manner as a result of his experience of revelation. It is this attainment more than any other that characterizes his perfection. Hence in the *Guide* the public prophet is depicted as serving also as a public philosopher. Yet his audience does not consist of elite students who can be taught theoretical truths in a rigorous philosophic manner. Rather it consists of the entire nation, which must be taught by way of images and rhetorical arguments, given the limits of their understanding. For the non-prophet, philosophy essentially still remains the only key one possesses to interpret the theoretical views underlying the prophetic images and speech.
Sage and Prophet in Provençal Jewish Philosophy

The issue of the legal authority of the prophet was of far less interest to the Jewish philosophers of Provence than the issue of the nature of prophecy. Maimonides’ approach to prophecy as an emanation from the Active Intellect to the perfect rational and imaginative faculties was widely accepted by them, and generally served as the starting point for their own comments on the subject. For example, Samuel Ibn Tibbon in his *Ma’amar Yiqqavu ha-Mayyim* and Jacob Anatoli in his book of philosophical sermons, *Malmad ba-Talmidim*, assume that their readers are familiar with Maimonides’ *Guide*, and his views on revelation underlie their usage of the term “prophecy” (*nevu’ah*) without further elaboration. Only on occasion do they refer explicitly to Maimonides’ discussion. 40 Levi ben Avraham’s extensive treatment of prophecy in *Livyat Ḥen* is based primarily on Maimonides’ approach and is essentially an elaboration upon it. 41 Nissim of Marseille in his *Ma‘aseh Nissim* also deals with this subject in accordance with Maimonides’ thought, 42 as does Joseph Ibn Kaspi in a number of his writings. 43 From among the Provençal Jewish philosophers, Gersonides alone analyzes prophecy in an independent manner, though he shares with Maimonides many of his basic views on the subject. 44 As we shall see shortly, the thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century translations of

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40 See, for example, Samuel Ibn Tibbon, *Ma’amar Yiqqavu ha-Mayyim*, ed. Mordechai Bisliches (Pressburg: Anton Edlen v. Schmid, 1837), chap. 19, 119; Jacob Anatoli, *Malmad ba-Talmidim*, ed. L. Silberman (Lyck: Mekize Nirdamim, 1866), 35b.

41 For a study of this treatise, see above, chapter 5. Levi devotes three chapters to discussing this phenomenon, as well as comparing the prophet to the diviner and the philosopher. See Levi ben Avraham, *Livyat Ḥen: The Quality of Prophecy and the Secrets of the Torah*, ed. Howard Kreisel (Beer-Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2007), chaps. 3-5, 115-185 (Heb.). He also has much to say on this topic in many other discussions throughout his treatise.

42 See above, chapter 6, 187-190.

43 For a discussion of Ibn Kaspi’s approach to prophecy, see Barry Mesch, *Studies in Joseph Ibn Caspi* (Leiden: Brill, 1975).

44 For a study of Gersonides’ approach to prophecy, see *Prophecy: The History of an Idea in Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, 316-424. For divination and prophecy in Gersonides’ thought, see Sara Klein-Braslavy, *Without Any Doubt: Gersonides on Method and Knowledge* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 221-323.
Arabic philosophical treatises into Hebrew played an important role in molding the views of the Jewish philosophers on this issue.\textsuperscript{45}

The question upon which I would like to focus here is whether these philosophers regarded the prophet as superior to the sage in theoretical matters, and if so, what is the nature of his superiority. All accorded the prophet the ability to divine the future, an ability the philosopher lacked, and saw in this ability an expression of divine providence. All of them also accepted Maimonides’ position that the prophets were outstanding philosophers,\textsuperscript{46} for complete knowledge of the sciences was a necessary condition for attaining prophecy, or in light of Avicenna’s approach, they regarded the intuitive ability to attain this knowledge instantaneously towards the beginning of one’s studies as characterizing the rational faculty of the prophet. Yet when it came to the problem of whether prophecy brought with it theoretical knowledge that could not be attained by the philosopher, they tended to be equivocal in their approaches, even while urging their readers to accept the doctrines of the prophets when they run counter to those of the philosophers. Their stances on this question are tied to several cardinal issues: 1) Is it possible to conjoin with the Active Intellect—an issue upon which the philosophers themselves disagreed (both in regard to this possibility and just as important, about the nature of conjunction)—and attain by way of emanation theoretical knowledge that is beyond the scope of what can be obtained by normal discursive reasoning? 2) Is this state to be regarded as a distinctly prophetic one, or can philosophers who are not prophets also attain it? 3) Even if ontological conjunction with the Active Intellect is not conceived as possible, is prophecy nevertheless to be characterized by the attainment of a level of theoretical knowledge by means of an emanation from the Active Intellect that philosophers are incapable of attaining, and if so, what is the nature of this knowledge? 4) To what extent did the Jewish philosophers commenting on this topic incorporate into their treatises esoteric doctrines that run counter to their explicit statements favoring

\textsuperscript{45} On these translations, see above, chapter 4, 81, 85-89.

\textsuperscript{46} Like Maimonides, they also regarded the most important Sages of the Talmud as steeped in scientific and philosophic wisdom.
prophetic doctrines over philosophic ones? In addition, the leadership role of the prophet, which distracted him from contemplation, raised the issue of whether this figure should indeed be considered superior to the sage who devotes himself entirely to contemplation, given the fact that the perfection of the intellect is true human perfection.

The possibility of the human intellect’s conjunction (devequt) with the Active Intellect was accepted by Samuel Ibn Tibbon. Ibn Tibbon was familiar with Islamic philosophic approaches to this subject, having translated into Hebrew three short treatises by Averroes and his son ‘Abdallāh on conjunction, which he attached to his Commentary on Ecclesiastes. He refers to this state in his Commentary on Ecclesiastes and in his Ma’amar Yiqqavu ha-Mayyim, sees in the comprehension of all the sciences culminating in knowledge of God a necessary condition for its attainment, and connects it with the achievement of immortality. Yet he does not enter into a discussion concerning the precise nature of the knowledge attained in this state, nor does he identify it with prophecy, but with ultimate wisdom. The latter point suggests that non-prophets are also in principle able to attain this state in his view, and the distinction between prophecy and philosophy is limited to the ability to divine. This point is reinforced by the fact that he hints in Ma’amar Yiqqavu ha-Mayyim that the prophet may even err in matters pertaining to theoretical wisdom, as we have seen in the previous chapter. It is true that in a number of passages of his commentary he cautions the reader to favor prophetic tradition over philosophic

47 These treatises were edited by J. Hercz, Drei Abhandlungen über die Conjuction des seperaten Intellects mit dem Menschen von Averroes (Vater und Sohn), aus dem Arabischen übersetzt von Samuel Ibn Tibbon (Berlin: H. G. Hermann, 1869). For a study of Averroes’ theory of the intellect and conjunction, as well as the theories of his predecessors, see in particular Herbert Davidson, Alfarabi, Avicenna and Averroes on the Intellect (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). Ibn Tibbon’s commentary was edited by James T. Robinson, who also translated much of it into English, in his doctoral dissertation, “Samuel Ibn Tibbon’s Commentary on Ecclesiastes” (PhD thesis, Harvard University, 2002). The English translation of the commentary was subsequently published by him as Samuel Ibn Tibbon’s Commentary on Ecclesiastes: The Book of the Soul of Man (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007).
48 See “Samuel Ibn Tibbon’s Commentary on Ecclesiastes,” on Ecclesiastes 3:19, 694-695; Ma’amar Yiqqavu ha-Mayyim, chap. 14, 98.
49 See above, chapter 7, 249-250.
views, but he identifies this tradition with the “good,” that is moral virtue, hinting thereby that they should be accepted not because of their truth but because of their salubrious influence on the religious community.\footnote{50}{See, for example, \textit{Commentary on Ecclesiastes}, Ecclesiastes 2:13, 626-627 (English, 348-349). See also Robinson’s comments on this issue on 111.}

Samuel’s son, Moses Ibn Tibbon, in his commentary on \textit{Song of Songs} interprets the entire book as an allegory concerning the state of conjunction.\footnote{51}{See Moses Ibn Tibbon, \textit{Commentary on Song of Songs}, ed. L. Silberman (Lyck: Mekize Nirdamim, 1874), 8-13 (Heb.).} He also refers to this state in several passages in his \textit{Sefer Pe’ab}.\footnote{52}{See \textit{The Writings of R. Moshe Ibn Tibbon}, ed. Howard Kreisel, Colette Sirat, and Avraham Israel (Beer-Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2010), 116, 123, 195, 213 (Heb.).} Yet like his father, he does not discuss the precise type of knowledge attained in this state, nor does he define this state as prophecy. He does, however, accord a fundamental advantage to the prophet over the philosopher regarding theoretical matters in a different passage of the latter treatise. In his explication of a \textit{midrash} appearing in \textit{Yalqut Shimoni} Exodus, 406, dealing with Moses’ sojourn on top of Mount Sinai for forty days and nights, he writes as follows:

\begin{quote}
In saying: “When He would teach him [Moses] Scripture”—they meant that he [Moses] would apprehend by prophecy or by the Holy Spirit intelligibles and the knowledge that precedes them that are not known by logical reasoning, and this is the divine knowledge and spiritual knowledge—”then he would know that it is day.” And when he would apprehend something by way of demonstration, and draw conclusions by the combination of two premises that are known in that they are first intelligibles, or in a different way, or he would expound them by one of the thirteen principles by means of which the Torah is expounded, and this is human knowledge, “he would know that it is night.”\footnote{53}{Ibid., 103.}
\end{quote}

In his depiction of prophecy in this passage, Moses Ibn Tibbon clearly has Maimonides’ discussion in \textit{Guide} 2.38 in mind. While Maimonides, however, may be interpreted as referring to knowledge that in principle is attained by way of demonstration and that the prophet attains
instantaneously, Moses Ibn Tibbon sees this prophetically attained knowledge as consisting of matters that are essentially closed to demonstration. It is interesting to note how he in this passage also blurs the distinction between the rabbinic sage and the philosopher insofar as both attain their conclusions by the use of logic, while Moses was able to attain the ultimate knowledge in both areas by divine illumination.

Positing the ability of the prophet to attain knowledge not known by demonstration appears to entail the view that prophetic doctrines should be favored over those of the philosophers when there is a conflict between them and the philosophic doctrines lack demonstrative proof. Yet as we have already seen in the case of Maimonides in regard to the doctrine of creation, while he appears to draw this conclusion, it is far from certain that he actually did. The reason for favoring a certain view—or the reason ascribed to the prophets themselves for teaching a certain view—may be due to political considerations rather than theoretical philosophic ones, as Samuel Ibn Tibbon’s comments in his Commentary on Ecclesiastes indicate almost explicitly. In the case of Moses Ibn Tibbon, it is difficult to reach a definitive conclusion regarding his stance on this issue based on his surviving writings. On the surface, he appears to accept the truth of prophetic doctrines over philosophic when he writes in Sefer Pe’ah: “The commandment of the Sabbath [comes] to verify the creation of the world as received in tradition against the view of the philosophers.” Yet the very next sentence may be interpreted as subtly negating this view: “The masses too reject the existence of anything that has no beginning or end.” Creation thus may be seen as a crucial doctrine for the limited understanding of the masses, and not because it is true.

A similar dilemma confronts the interpreter of Moses Ibn Tibbon’s uncle (and brother-in-law), Jacob Anatoli (a student of Samuel Ibn Tibbon and both his brother-in-law and son-in-law). Anatoli writes in Malmad ha-Talmidim:

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54 The Writings of R. Moshe Ibn Tibbon, 118.
55 Anatoli was the brother of Samuel Ibn Tibbon’s wife, and he went on to marry his niece.
This part teaches knowledge of the truth, and this is what is intended by the term “Torah.” The loftiest of this part is what is taught by way of prophetic tradition regarding the existence of the world and the manner of its coming into being and the other true stories concerning it. Due to the importance of this matter, the Torah began with a definitive tradition, not with a philosophic teaching, so that a youth belonging to the Torah community attains knowledge based on tradition regarding the truth of the existence of the world that an old person from among the sages of philosophy cannot attain by way of his studies. . . . Consequently, a member of the religious community should believe with an enduring faith in everything that comes from the Torah, much more than in the things that are known by way of logical reasoning. In this way he will stand firm against those who dispute him by way of logical reasoning, and he will maintain that so it was taught by prophecy. And even though this is not a philosophic teaching that one can investigate and refine from it the truth, it was refined by prophecy, as the Sage [Solomon] said regarding this matter: The word of God is refined, He is a shield to all who trust in Him [Proverbs 30:5].

Despite this position that accords a clear advantage to prophetic tradition over philosophic investigation, it is not clear that Anatoli actually believes that the Torah reveals theoretical truths that are not known by way of philosophy. Some of the remarks scattered throughout his treatise can be interpreted as suggesting that he may have held an esoteric view on this matter, and that he thought, like Samuel Ibn Tibbon, that the Torah taught these doctrines for political reasons.

The dictum “the sage is superior to the prophet” (BT Baba Batra 12a) is brought by Anatoli in one of his sermons. Following Maimonides, he does not accord superiority to the sages who are not prophets over the prophets who are necessarily also sages. Since this dictum appears to imply that there can be prophets who are not also sages, he strove to interpret its intent differently in order to avoid this conclusion:

56 Malmad ha-Talmidim, 1b. See also 31b, 32b; there too he indicates that some of the Torah’s secrets—such as creation, reward and punishment, and the resurrection of the dead—cannot be known by way of philosophy.

57 See Israel Ben-Simon, “The Philosophical and Allegorical Teachings of Rabbi Jacob Anatoli and His Influence on Jewish Though and Allegory in Provence in the 13th-14th Centuries” (PhD thesis, University of Haifa, 2012), 4-72 (Heb.).
Since wisdom is the cause of prophecy, they said: “The sage is superior to the prophet.” That is to say, wisdom in itself, from the perspective of its essence, is greater than prophecy in itself, in accordance with what the sages said that the cause is greater than the effect. This is something of which there is no doubt. They did not intend [to say] by this dictum that there may be a prophet who is not also a sage.  

Anatoli sees wisdom as the main prerequisite for prophecy and superior to any other advantage accorded by prophecy. This interpretation, however, does not directly address the issue of whether the prophet has any advantage over the philosopher in theoretical matters, or if his advantage lies solely in the other areas of knowledge that characterize prophecy, most notably divination. Hence Anatoli’s stance on this crucial issue remains an open question dependent upon the problem of whether he designed his sermons to contain an esoteric level.

An equivocal attitude on this issue can also be detected in Levi ben Avraham’s Livyat Hen. Levi too brings the rabbinic dictum of the superiority of the sage over the prophet and offers a variety of interpretations. In one of them he treats “prophet” as referring not to the true prophets, but to those individuals possessing only a perfect imagination and the power of divination. These individuals at times are also loosely termed “prophets,” as Maimonides indicates in Guide 2.32. The philosopher is clearly superior to such an individual. More important for our discussion are two other interpretations Levi brings:

Insofar as wisdom is the cause of prophecy and prior to it, and is an enduring perfection that adheres [in the individual] and grows stronger in old age, they said: “The sage is superior to the prophet”—that is, to the prophet who is not as great a sage as he is, though he too is a sage and prophesies due to his preparedness and the excellence of his physical temperament. There is no doubt, as emerges from the statements of the Sages, that many of the sages apprehended

58 Malmad ha-Talmidim, 151a.
59 See also ibid., 77a, where Anatoli sees prophecy as following in the wake of the apprehension of the Active Intellect and the attainment of final perfection. He does not indicate in this context, however, what prophecy adds to this perfection in regard to theoretical knowledge.
more than many of the prophets did. . . . It is possible that they said: “The sage is superior to the prophet,” because the sage-prophet, insofar as he leads the nation, must possess a practical intellect and must exert himself in the use of the faculty of imagination. Moreover, most of his discourse concerns practical, pedestrian, accidental matters, which appear to him by way of the imagination. The perfect sage who is not a prophet, however, can deal exclusively with theoretical matters, without having to arouse the imagination and involve the practical intellect. Furthermore, most of his discourse deals with theoretical, necessary, divine matters. It is possible that he could become a prophet if he would prepare himself accordingly. Instead, he [prefers to] devote his time to perfecting his soul by continuously learning the different types of wisdom. This is similar to what is said of R. Hanina ben Dosa, that his prayers were more readily accepted because he put all his efforts in this matter. R. Yoḥanan ben Zakai said: “R. Hanina is like a slave before the king, while I am like a minister before the king” [BT Berakhot 34b].

In his first interpretation, Levi essentially denies that the prophet has any advantage over the sage in theoretical matters, going so far as to maintain explicitly that there were sages who in their apprehension of theoretical matters were greater than many of the prophets, R. Yoḥanan ben Zakai and R. Akiva being two examples that Levi had in mind based on the stories the Talmud relates about them in the second chapter of BT Ḥagigah. Levi also points out that prophecy is attained by the individual intermittently, while wisdom adheres in him permanently, growing even stronger in his old age—a point noted by Maimonides in *Guide* 3.51, where he speaks of conjunction being attained precisely in this period of life, when the bodily faculties grow weaker. Maimonides’ comments imply the view that prophecy, being dependent upon one’s bodily faculties, does not appear at all in one’s old age, while one can grow even wiser in one’s knowledge of the theoretical sciences in this period. Levi himself goes on to note this point explicitly in the continuation of his remarks, thereby distinguishing the phenomenon of prophecy from the attainment of theoretical knowledge.

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60 *Livyat Ḥen: The Quality of Prophecy and the Secrets of the Torah*, 120-122.
61 See also *Guide* 1.54.
The second interpretation Levi brings is even more noteworthy. It not only ascribes to some of the sages greater theoretical knowledge than that possessed by some of the prophets, but regards the figure of the sage as superior to that of the prophet. The prophet *qua* prophet devotes most of his efforts to political activity (including divination), which in Levi’s view acts as a stumbling block to increasing one’s true perfection, that of the theoretical intellect. In other words, due to his uninterrupted studies, the sage *qua* sage can go much further in his attainment of theoretical knowledge than the prophet, hence it is preferable to remain a sage and not strive for prophecy. On this point, Levi calls into question the model of final perfection posited by Maimonides, whose practical component consists of political leadership.62

Levi was hardly the first among the Provençal Jewish philosophers to challenge Maimonides on this point. He follows in the footsteps of Samuel Ibn Tibbon, who voices a not so subtle criticism of Maimonides’ view.63 After apologizing in advance for taking issue with Maimonides, Ibn Tibbon writes as follows in his *Commentary on Ecclesiastes* on the verse *I sleep but my heart is awake* (Song of Songs 5:2):

> Even though he [Maimonides], of blessed memory, said that this matter applies only to the Master of the Prophets and to the patriarchs, peace be upon them, and that none like them can be found, it is true that none are like them in being asleep while their hearts are awake. For all of them directed their efforts to matters that were not necessary in order to sustain their bodies, and by this they compromised the perfection of that union [with God or the Active Intellect] mentioned in that chapter [*Guide* 3.51]. Every effort that results in compromising the strength of that union is [termed] “sleep” or something similar to sleep. Despite this, their hearts were awake—that is to say, their thought remained in that union. Was not the Master of Prophets absorbed in the toil of leading a nation. . . . This resulted in his being distracted in his contemplation, his thoughts disturbed, and their clarity sullied.64 The patriarchs too exerted efforts in [tending] their flocks, in [attaining] honor and so forth, and in

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62 For a discussion of Maimonides’ model of final perfection and the various scholarly approaches to this topic, see *Maimonides’ Political Thought*, 125-158.
63 See Aviezer Ravitzky, “The Political Role of the Philosopher: Samuel Ibn Tibbon Versus Maimonides,” *Maimonidean Studies* 5 (2008): 345-374.
64 Maimonides too suggests this point at the end of *Guide* 2.36.
wandering from place to place because of the needs of their flocks. Some also had many wives and children. In all of them there is to be found a deficiency from this perspective. . . . What could have been said of Moses . . . if he had not spent his time in leading a nation and adjudicating their disputes, but had isolated himself in contemplation and in strengthening the conjunction with the “lover”? The same is true of the patriarchs and those who are like them. . . . In conclusion, there is a great difference between one who sleeps and whose heart is awake and one who is completely awake.65

In a similar manner, Samuel Ibn Tibbon takes issue with Maimonides’ interpretation at the very end of the Guide of Jeremiah 9:22-23, in which Maimonides indicates that God delights in the exercise of loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth, and not solely in the knowledge of Him—that is to say, the ultimate perfection of the philosopher lies in engaging in political leadership. To Ibn Tibbon, as he clarifies in the introduction to his translation of Maimonides’ Commentary on Mishnah Avot, God’s delight refers to understanding and knowing me, and not to the other three terms, for it is solely theoretical knowledge that is the ultimate end of humanity.66 From this perspective, it is clear that while Ibn Tibbon does not bring the dictum that the sage is superior to the prophet, he, like Levi after him, is certainly of the opinion that this is the case. Political leadership, rather than being viewed as complementing final human perfection—which lies in the perfection of the theoretical intellect—and adding to it by serving as a form of imitatio Dei, is seen as inevitably detracting from it.67

In his discussion of prophecy, Levi does not deal with the notion of conjunction with the Active Intellect. This subject is mentioned in passing in several passages of his treatise, and is tied to the attainment

65 Commentary on Ecclesiastes, 668-669; see Ravitzky, “The Political Role of the Philosopher,” 351.
66 See Menachem Kellner, “Maimonides and Samuel Ibn Tibbon on Jeremiah 9:22-23 and Human Perfection,” in Studies in Halakha and Jewish Thought Presented to Rabbi Menachem Emanuel Rackman, ed. Moshe Beer (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1994), 49-57. See also Abraham Melamed, Philosopher-King in Medieval and Renaissance Jewish Political Thought (Albany: SUNY Press, 2003), 53-54; Ravitzky, “The Political Role of the Philosopher,” 359-366.
67 For a discussion of this issue in Maimonides’ thought, see Maimonides’ Political Thought, 125-158.
of a perfect intellect—the acquired intellect—and immortality, but not with prophecy *per se.* 68 Levi almost definitely dealt with this notion in detail in the lost fourth treatise of his encyclopedia—a treatise devoted to the natural sciences, including the nature of the human soul and intellect. This point can be seen from his encyclopedic poem, *Batei ha-Nefesh ve-ha-Leḥashim*, where he devotes a section of it to the human intellect and to conjunction. 69 From these sources one sees clearly that Levi did not view conjunction as a distinctly prophetic attainment. This reinforces the conclusion that he accorded no advantage to the prophet over the sage in theoretical matters.

Yet there is another side to Levi’s thought, which opposes this picture. In a chapter devoted to the issue of the difference between prophetic and philosophic knowledge, Levi maintains that while most of prophecy is concerned with future events, it also deals with theoretical matters. Basing himself on Maimonides, he writes:

> At times, prophecy perfects the knowledge of the prophet and instructs him in theoretical matters, as the Master (Maimonides) indicated, on the condition that he already is a sage, as stated above. For he who possesses a pure, refined soul, and whose intellect always concentrates on the intelligibles, and who habituates his intellect to be *in actu*—the Separate Intellect will emanate upon him true theoretical matters that are more exalted than the matters that are in the nature of a person to apprehend. By focusing [his thought] on God and conjoining with Him, God will direct him and inform him of things related to what he already knows, and more often, that which his heart craves to know. It is more probable for this to occur in a vision than in a dream. . . . 70 There is no doubt that the Torah informed us of many things that are at the pinnacle of what the intellects of the most adept philosophers reached at the end of their

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68 See, for example, *Livyat Ḥen: The Quality of Prophecy and the Secrets of the Torah*, 50; see also *Livyat Ḥen: The Secrets of the Faith and the Gate of the Haggadah*, ed. Howard Kreisel (Beer-Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2014), 10, 46, 137, 144, 148 (Heb.).

69 This section of the poem has been edited by Dov Schwartz, together with the commentary of Prat Maimon (Solomon ben Menaḥem), “The Commentary of R. Solomon ben Menahem to ‘Batei ha-Nefesh ve-ha-Leḥashim’ on the Subject of the Intellect,” *Kobez al Yad* 13[23] (1996): 299-330 (Heb.).

70 See *Guide* 2.45, where Maimonides writes that visions of prophecy deal only with theoretical matters.
speculation and investigation. Furthermore, some of the secrets were made known by way of prophecy to some of the prophets, and they attained what was not in the power of the philosophers to attain by way of logical reasoning. The Master indicated that prophecy is greater than [logical] proof, and the point to which prophecy reaches, proof does not reach... What is known by prophecy has an utmost limit which cannot be surpassed, since the apprehension of the human intellect cannot surpass the apprehension of its origin. Moreover, many matters about which the prophet had no previous knowledge at all, he would not apprehend by way of prophecy.

Levi appears to agree that the prophet indeed can attain theoretical knowledge that surpasses what can be known by philosophy, though not what is beyond the limits of the human intellect as such to apprehend. He even agrees that some of this knowledge will appear to the prophet in a vision—that is to say, as presented by the imagination as a result of the emanation from on high while the prophet is awake. Levi’s proviso in this case is similar to the one pertaining to knowledge of the future; the prophet receives knowledge on subjects upon which he focuses his attention and about which he has previous knowledge. This serves to “particularize” the emanation from the Active Intellect that reaches the rational and imaginative faculties, thereby enabling the individual to apprehend new matters—some of which he would not have been able to apprehend otherwise—based on the knowledge that was already in his possession and he was thinking about.

In the continuation of his discussion, Levi further elaborates upon the distinction between the prophetic and non-prophetic intellect, drawing upon sources in Arabic philosophy that existed in Hebrew translation:

71 Levi is referring here to what was written in an epistle to Ḥasdai Halevi by a student of Maimonides in Maimonides’ name; see Iggerot HaRambam, 678-679. The authenticity of this epistle is still being debated by scholars.
72 The origin of the human intellect is the Active Intellect. The sentence can mean either that the human intellect cannot know more than what the Active Intellect knows, or that it cannot get beyond the level of apprehending the Active Intellect. In Aristotelian philosophy, both meanings are similar given the principle of the identity between the intellect of the knower and the object of one’s knowledge.
73 Livyat Ḥen: The Quality of Prophecy and the Secrets of the Torah, 168-170.
Averroes writes in the treatise *Moznei ha-‘Iyyunim* that the prophet, in his being a perfect creation, does not need to attain the intelligibles and sciences by way of logical syllogisms and preliminary knowledge, but finds the intelligible matters as though they were inscribed in his soul, and a slight allusion and effort is sufficient [to attain them], just as the angels do not require them [logical syllogisms and preliminary knowledge]. The explanation of this is that the knowledge of the angels is an ordered, natural self-knowledge, in which the knowledge of the effects from their causes is apparent from the outset, and the effects that are necessitated from their effects as well, and everything that is apt to follow from them. This is a simple knowledge that includes all that is below it, which is always apparent to them [the angels] from the outset, as in the case of the first intelligibles by us. They know the last by virtue of the first that includes it, not in the inverse manner as is the case by us.

. . . Let us return to the words of Averroes who said that the perfect prophet, like the angels, knows the sciences by way of a few allusions without the need for syllogisms. For just as there is found among human beings a specimen of the utmost deficiency, close to the beasts, so it is necessary that there be found a perfect specimen, close to the level of the angels. . . . For the person who attained some knowledge and is of refined matter and pure intellect, it is possible that he [mentally] isolates himself and extracts himself from his matter and receive the emanation of the Separate Intellect. It is said in the *Book of Circles*: “God, may He be blessed, perfected this creation at the beginning of its creation in order to lead the world by means of him, and to perfect deficient human beings by laying down religions, laws, admonitions, and promises of reward, and to relate matters that the philosophical soul is incapable of knowing. To the philosophic soul He granted the investigation of generalities alone. For this reason Plato said: ‘We are incapable of understanding what was given in the Laws by the prophets; we understand just a little and are ignorant of a lot.’”74 For this reason the Torah is called “prophetic wisdom” or “divine wisdom,” and theoretical science is called “human wisdom.”75

The treatise *Moznei ha-‘Iyyunim* cited by Levi in this passage is an Arabic Neoplatonic treatise that was translated into Hebrew by Jacob ben Makhir, a contemporary of Levi and a member of the Tibbonid

74 Al-Batalyawsi, *Ha-‘Agulot Ha-Ra‘ayoniyot*, ed. David Kaufmann (Budapest, 1880), 16-17. The citation from Plato is based on the *Apology*, 20d-e.
75 Livyat Hen: The Quality of Prophecy and the Secrets of the Torah, 171-172.
family. The treatise was generally ascribed either to Al-Ghazali or Averroes, though the latter definitely was not the author and it is highly doubtful that the former was. Levi follows in the footsteps of Moses Ibn Tibbon, who had also ascribed the treatise to Averroes. This treatise draws heavily from Al-Batalyawsi’s *Book of Circles* (translated by Moses Ibn Tibbon and also cited in this passage by Levi), copying parts of it word for word. Al-Batalyawsi’s treatise, in turn, appears to be greatly influenced by Avicenna, as well as by other Islamic philosophers and by the Brethren of Purity. The author of *Moznei ha-‘Iyyunim* repeats the categorical distinction drawn by Al-Batalyawsi between the philosophic soul and the prophetic. It is not only the ability to lay down laws and doctrines for the masses that distinguishes the two souls, but also the far greater intuitive ability of the prophet to attain intelligibles, reflective of Avicenna’s approach, as well as the ability to reach a higher level of theoretical knowledge. Levi points out that in the normal discursive manner in which human beings attain knowledge, the causes are known by an investigation of the effects. The prophet, however, reaches a level of knowledge similar to that of the Active Intellect in which he knows the cause of existence as a simple, all-inclusive intelligible, through which all the effects are thereby known.

76 The treatise has survived in manuscript. Chapters 10-12 have been published by Leopold Dukes in *Otzar Nehmad* 2 (1857): 196-198. Levi’s paraphrase from this work appears in chap. 11, 198.

77 For a study of this issue, see Benjamin Abrahamov, “The Sources of Mozné Ha-‘Iyyunim,” *Daat* 34 (1995): 83-86 (Heb.).

78 See Zevi Diesendruck, “Samuel and Moses Ibn Tibbon on Maimonides’ Theory of Providence,” *HUCA* 11 (1936): 364.

79 For a study of Al-Batalyawsi’s thought, his sources, and his influence on Jewish thinkers, see Ayala Eliyahu, “Ibn al-Sid al-Batalyawsi and his Place in Medieval Muslim and Jewish Thought” (PhD thesis, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2010) (Heb.).

80 See *Moznei ha-‘Iyyunim*, 196-198; *Ha-‘Agulot Ha-Ra’ayoniyot*, 12-17.

81 Ibn Falaquera, a contemporary of Levi who probably was born and lived in Spain (though he may have lived in Southern France), adopts a similar approach in his commentary on the *Guide*, *Moreh ha-Moreh*. He posits the possibility of conjunction with the Active Intellect and a distinct level of theoretical knowledge attained in this state. Moreover, he sees this state as characterizing the prophets, though some of the sages also reached it. The prophet learns, by means of the “divine
In addition to a higher level of knowledge of existence that characterizes the apprehension of the prophets, Levi also posits their attainment of doctrines that cannot be attained by the philosopher. The creation of the world is a prime example of this category, as Levi’s subsequent discussion clarifies. In his case too, we are left with the dilemma that if he holds an esoteric view on the subject, particularly in light of his conflicting stance regarding prophetic knowledge versus philosophic knowledge in theoretical matters. The issue is not an easy one to decide, since Levi appears to be genuinely committed to the truth of the doctrine of creation, and not only its necessity for political purposes.

While Levi appears to equivocate on the issue of the superiority of the prophet over the philosopher in his theoretical knowledge, Ibn Kaspi’s position is less ambiguous. He clearly favors the prophet, arguing that his main advantage lies in his knowledge of metaphysics that surpasses that of the philosopher, and not in his knowledge of the future. Following Ibn Falaquera’s commentary on Guide 1.34, he approvingly cites Avicenna’s view of the intuitive power of the prophetic intellect that allows him to conjoin with the Active Intellect and attain all intelligibles without effort and without the years of study that Maimonides posits as necessary for perfection. Moreover, he sees knowledge” attained in this state, the secrets of divine governance in a manner that is closed to philosophic speculation. Ibn Falaquera approvingly cites Avicenna’s view regarding the prophetic intellect. See Moreh ha-Moreh, introduction, 116-117; 1.1, 121-122; 1.34, 137; 3.54, 328; appendix, chap. 1, 333-336. Isaac Albalag, another contemporary of Levi who probably lived in Spain (Catalonia), also stresses the distinct level of theoretical knowledge attained by the prophet. Like Levi, he sees discursive knowledge as involving the investigation of the effects in order to apprehend the causes, while the prophet, like the Separate Intellects, knows the intelligibles in inverse order—i.e., by knowledge of the causes it knows all the effects. See Isaac Albalag, Sefer Tiqqun ha-De’ot, ed. Georges Vajda (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of the Sciences, 1973), 67, 82.

82 Liviyat Ḥen: The Secrets of the Faith and the Gate of the Haggadah, 65-79. For a discussion of this issue, see my introduction to this volume, 32-37.
83 See Maskiyyot Kesef, ed. Solomon Werblunger (Frankfurt A.M., 1848), 2.8, 94; 2.36, 115; ‘Amudei Kesef, ed. Solomon Werblunger (Frankfurt A.M., 1848), 3.51, 143; Shulḥan Kesef, ed. Hannah Kasher (Jerusalem: Ben-Zevi Institute, 1996), 172; Tirat Kesef, in Mishneh Kesef, vol. 1, ed. Isaac Last (Pressburg, 1905), 88.
84 See ‘Amudei Kesef 1.34, 44; see also Shulḥan Kesef, 172.
Averroes agreeing to the superiority of prophetic knowledge over philosophic, a point to which I shall return below. Yet on the issue of creation, Ibn Kaspi’s position is not without problems. While in a number of passages he indicates that this doctrine should be favored since prophecy is superior to philosophy, he is inclined to interpret Maimonides as favoring the eternity of the world and understanding the Torah accordingly. This does not necessarily entail the conclusion, however, that Ibn Kaspi was not committed to the position of the superiority of the theoretical knowledge of the prophet over that of the philosopher; he undoubtedly agreed that the prophets made use of esotericism in conveying some of their views and this may be the case here too. Moreover, he is reluctant to ascribe errors to the prophets in theoretical matters, such as in the case of Ezekiel, who apparently believed that the heavenly bodies emit sounds—a view based on the mistaken belief that the stars are in motion and not the spheres to which they are attached—and he struggles mightily with this issue.

Nissim of Marseille, a contemporary of Ibn Kaspi, adopts a contrary stance on this issue. He accepts the notion that intellectual perfection is a necessary condition for prophecy, but does not grant the prophet any advantage over the philosopher in theoretical matters. The superiority of the prophet over the philosopher is limited to the ability to foretell the future, a view that echoes that of Samuel Ibn Tibbon. Nissim is even prepared to argue against Maimonides, who it appears to him adopts the opposite conclusion:

Maimonides already wrote in chapter thirty-eight of the second part [of the Guide] as follows: “Know that the true prophets indubitably grasp speculative matters; by means of his speculation alone, man is
unable to grasp the causes from which what a prophet has come to know necessarily follows.” Thus according to the opinion of the Master, the purpose of prophecy is not only to complete the preservation of the body, that is, to preserve it from afflictions, but also to complete the theoretical rational part [of the soul] by doctrines whose premises necessitating their truth the person has no way of acquiring, as though prophecy involves the perfection of the body and the soul. Yet in my opinion, the doctrines and knowledge that are in the power of a person to grasp by way of speculation and logic cannot in anyway reach a person in a vision or a dream of prophecy. If there were a way for this to happen, logical investigation and knowledge of it would be superfluous. For what can be [attained] without toil and investigation and without means, the means and the investigation of it would be for naught. The long path would be in vain, insofar as there is a different path that is better and shorter than it.\textsuperscript{89}

Nissim’s argument regarding the non-superiority of the prophet in theoretical matters since it is impossible to attain this type of knowledge without possessing the requisite preliminary knowledge, is similar to Averroes’ argument in \textit{Epitome of Parva Naturalia} (translated by Moses Ibn Tibbon in 1254) and even closer to his argument in \textit{Long Commentary on the Metaphysics} (translated by Kalonymos ben Kalonymos ca. 1315).\textsuperscript{90} In the former work, Averroes writes:

In general, the acquisition of any of the concepts of the theoretical sciences in this manner [by way of veridical dreams] would be accidental and rare. It is therefore impossible that a theoretical art be fully acquired by a person, by God, unless a person assumes that we have here a species of man that can comprehend the theoretical sciences without training. Now this species, if it indeed existed, would be called “man” only equivocally, but actually it would be closer to angels than to man. Now it will be seen from that which I shall say below that this is impossible.\textsuperscript{91}

\textsuperscript{89} \textit{Ma’aseh Nissim}, 166.

\textsuperscript{90} Nissim does not cite explicitly from either commentary but there is reason to believe that he was acquainted with both of them.

\textsuperscript{91} Averroes, \textit{Epitome of Parva Naturalia}, trans. Harry Blumberg (Cambridge, MA: The Medieval Academy of America, 1961), 52. \textit{Moreh ba-Moreh} 1.34, 136-137; see the references brought by the editor Yair Shiffman in his notes.
Averroes continues by arguing against the possibility of attaining knowledge without training, insofar as training would then not be a necessary cause for its acquisition, while in his view it undoubtedly is. He further argues that if theoretical knowledge were to come in visions to one who had undergone no logical training, such knowledge would be superfluous and of inferior nature given their imaginative form. In the Long Commentary on the Metaphysics, his argument against attaining knowledge without training is that if one were able to attain knowledge without premises, the premises would be for naught, which is comparable to the case of being able to walk without feet, thereby making the feet superfluous, and “nature negates this.” Here too Averroes concludes that people who can attain the intelligibles without training are “more appropriately considered to be angels rather than men,” a possibility that he dismisses.92

Averroes was well aware of Avicenna’s view on the prophetic intellect, and cites it in Incoherence of the Incoherence, but does not critique it there.93 Ibn Falaquera, who had a thorough knowledge of Arabic, cites Averroes’ view from the Long Commentary on the Metaphysics in Moreb ha-Moreb, in which he denies the possibility of attaining all the intelligibles at once, and juxtaposes this view with that of Avicenna.94 Yet even leaving aside Moznei ha-‘Iyyunim, Averroes’s comments regarding the existence of an angelic type of person received contradictory interpretations on the part of the Jewish philosophers, not all of them seeing him as completely dismissing the possibility of such an individual. Ibn Kaspi, for example, draws upon Ibn Falaquera’s commentary on Guide 1.34, as I indicated above. He copies Ibn Falaquera’s citation from Avicenna, but in the case of Averroes he introduces a number of noteworthy changes. He ascribes the view regarding an angelic species of human beings to Aristotle, mentions

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92 My summary is based on the citation brought by Ibn Falaquera in Moreb ha-Moreb; see the previous note.
93 Averroes in Incoherence of the Incoherence brings Al-Ghazali’s description of this view in The Incoherence of the Philosophers, without disagreeing with it; see Averroes, Incoherence of the Incoherence (Tabâfut al-Tabâfut), trans. Simon Van Den Bergh (London: Luzac and Company, 1954), Natural Sciences, 313.
94 See Moreb ha-Moreb 1.34, 137. Yair Shiffman cites the references in his notes.
Parva Naturalia as the source of the view, and presents it as a possibility accepted by Averroes (Aristotle) rather than negated by him. He interprets Maimonides accordingly. The necessity of long years of learning in order to master metaphysics as posited by Maimonides, Ibn Kaspi treats as characterizing all those who do not possess this special type of intellect. Moreover, even Ibn Falaquera ascribes to Averroes the view that the prophet reaches knowledge that completes the knowledge attained by the intellect and which cannot be known by it, a view based on Averroes’ comments in Incoherence of the Incoherence.

Nissim was aware of Avicenna’s view regarding the prophetic intellect from Levi’s Livyat Hen. He copies from Levi’s paraphrase of Moznei ba-‘Iyyunim, and even approvingly brings the quote ascribed to Plato regarding human inability to understand what is given in prophetic knowledge. He sees in this view the key to understanding the unique prophecy of Moses. Following Maimonides, he regards Mosaic prophecy as purely intellectual, without the mediation of the imagination. Moses alone was able to attain the form of pure intellect and learn the intelligibles with little effort. Yet even in this case, Nissim appears to regard Moses as receiving prophecy at the culmination of a long process of learning, though his superior intellect enabled him to grasp intelligibles with great ease. Moreover, the doctrines taught by Moses and whose contraries cannot be demonstrated by the philosophers, such as creation, served an important political function in his view, but they are not literally true, as we have seen above.

Moses’ advantage over all other prophets and philosophers in regard to theoretical knowledge thus does not appear to be a categorical one according to Nissim; his advantage lies primarily in his ability to lay down an ideal law.

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95 See ‘Amudei Kesef 1.34, 44; see also Menorat Kesef, 93.
96 See Moreh ha-Moreh 2.23, 283; Averroes, Incoherence of the Incoherence, III, 152 (see also I, 56; XVI, 307). Ibn Kaspi cites Averroes’ comment in ‘Amudei Kesef 3.13, 125. Averroes also presents in this treatise the view that every prophet is a sage (Natural Sciences, IV, 359-360). Yet it appears that Averroes adopts this position as a pious fraud. In Incoherence, VI, 218, he essentially rejects the view that the inner sense of revealed religion expresses truths barred from speculation.
97 Ma‘aseh Nissim, 175. See also below, chapter 11, 398.
98 For a discussion of Mosaic prophecy, see the next chapter.
99 See chapter 6, 180.
Gersonides, a contemporary of Nissim, adopts a similar position, and goes to great lengths in defending it from a philosophic perspective. The prophet is an exceptional philosopher in his view. He also has an intuitive rational ability to attain intelligibles more quickly than the average philosopher and thereby attain prophecy. Thus he may be capable of grasping certain intelligibles by way of logical reasoning that the philosophers who are not prophets fail to grasp. Yet Avicenna’s notion of the special intuitive property of the prophetic intellect that enables him to attain all intelligibles instantaneously without effort has no place in Gersonides’ thought. Nor is there any categorical difference in his view between prophet and philosopher in their theoretical knowledge. Prophecy does not bestow upon the prophet a superior type of knowledge of God and the world. Furthermore, in the introduction to his treatise *The Wars of the Lord*, Gersonides defends his tackling of very difficult theoretical issues that have not been adequately solved philosophically till now, at least not in his eyes, by arguing that a person may well be capable of grasping matters that eluded earlier sages, clearly implying that they eluded the prophets as well.  

Gersonides denies the possibility for any human being, even a prophet, to grasp the Active Intellect. The gap between the knowledge possessed by the Active Intellect and the knowledge that it is within the ability of even the perfect human being to attain can never be bridged. Human knowledge by nature will always be incomplete. No one, for example, can grasp all the details of the manner in which the heavenly bodies influence the earth—a knowledge that exists in the Active Intellect as a complete unity.  

Gersonides does not deny the view that a certain level of unity characterizes human apprehension too, since the intelligibles exist in a hierarchical order, with the higher level ones encompassing the lower. The more profound the intelligible that a person apprehends, the broader and more unified the knowledge of the intelligibles leading to its apprehension. By climbing the ladder

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100 See Levi ben Gershom, *The Wars of the Lord*, trans. Seymour Feldman (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1984), vol. 1, 93-97.
101 See *The Wars of the Lord* 1.6; *Commentary to I Kings* 8 (lesson 18).
102 See *The Wars of the Lord* 1.13.
of knowledge, the individual continuously comes closer the unity of knowledge possessed by the Active Intellect, though he can never reach it. Though Gersonides describes the higher levels of human apprehension by the term “conjunction” (devequt), he does not wish to denote by this usage an actual ontological union with the Active Intellect. Rather, conjunction signifies the stage at which a person attains a special type of providence.\textsuperscript{103} While even philosophers who accepted the possibility of some form of union with the Active Intellect generally did not see this union as complete, but with some gap between the two remaining,\textsuperscript{104} Gersonides is far more interested in stressing the insurmountability of this gap.\textsuperscript{105}

The prophet then is essentially a superior philosopher in Gersonides’ thought, with his substantive advantage over the philosopher lying in the field of divination. There is, however, one slight advantage that Gersonides is prepared to grant the prophet qua prophet that belongs to the area of theoretical knowledge. Occasionally the prophet is able to attain an intelligible while asleep, which appears to him in imaginative form, due to the power of his rational and imaginative faculties. In this way, Gersonides explains the prophetic visions concerning theoretical matters. Yet even in this case the prophet only completes the last step in the reasoning process, having possessed beforehand all the necessary premises.\textsuperscript{106} Moreover, if the prophet believes in a false premise, as was the case of Ezekiel, then there will be an error in his vision as well.\textsuperscript{107}

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid. 4.6; \textit{Commentary on Job} 34. See Seymour Feldman, “Gersonides on the Possibility of Conjunction with the Agent Intellect,” \textit{AJS Review} 3 (1978): 99-120.

\textsuperscript{104} Ibn Kaspi, for example, maintains that Moses conjoined with the Active Intellect but nonetheless was not equal to it in his intellection; see \textit{Amudei Kesef} 2.4, 91; \textit{Maskiyyot Kesef} 1.36, 50.

\textsuperscript{105} In the case of Moses, Gersonides posits a level of intellection that comes close to that of the Active Intellect, though even in this case he explicitly denies Moses’ ability to apprehend the Separate Intellects; see his \textit{Commentary on Exodus} 33:19-23; \textit{Commentary on Numbers} 12:8.

\textsuperscript{106} See \textit{The Wars of the Lord} 2.4; 2.6; \textit{Commentary on I Kings} 11 (lesson 3); Alexander Altmann, “Gersonides’ Commentary on Averroes’ Epitome of \textit{Parva Naturalia},” in \textit{American Academy for Jewish Research Jubilee Volume}, ed. Salo Baron and Isaac Barzilay (New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1980), 24.

\textsuperscript{107} See \textit{Commentary on Genesis} 15:4; \textit{Commentary on Job} 39.
After Gersonides, the discussion of this issue continues, mostly on the part of Spanish Jewish philosophers; Spain replaced Southern France as the center of Jewish philosophy by the middle of the fourteenth century. Even Moses Narboni, who has much to say regarding the relation between prophet and philosopher, and even more on the subject of conjunction, wrote all his works in Spain. Yet until one reaches the great Spanish Jewish philosopher Ḥasdai Crescas toward the end of the fourteenth century, it is hard to discern any new dimensions that are introduced into these discussions. Following Maimonides, all the Jewish philosophers discussed in this chapter, as well as their Spanish counterparts, viewed normative prophecy as a natural phenomenon. Consequently, the questions they addressed essentially focus on the types of theoretical knowledge that can be attained naturally, the characteristics of the perfect intellect that attains them, and whether the intellect undergoes a type of transformation at the culmination of the process. For those who posited a higher-level knowledge and saw it as characterizing prophecy, this “divine knowledge,” like “human knowledge,” is essentially a different superior category of natural knowledge, which is not to be distinguished by its agent but by its features, though some of the Jewish philosophers sought to obfuscate this point to some degree. While they all counseled accepting the views of the prophets over those of the philosophers when there was a conflict between them, it appears that many of the Jewish philosophers were apt to regard these views as ones that are

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108 Narboni discusses these issues in a number of works, particularly *Commentary on Averroes’ Epistle on the Possibility of Conjunction*, ed. and trans. Kalman P. Bland (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1982); *Be’ur le-Sefer Moreh Nevukhim*, ed. Jacob Goldenthal (Vienna: n.p., 1852); *Ma’amor bi-Sblemut ha-Nefesh*, ed. Alfred L. Ivry (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences, 1977); *Commentary on Ibn Tufayl’s Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*. For studies of Narboni’s approach to human perfect and conjunction, see Alfred L. Ivry, “Moses of Narbonne’s Treatise on the Perfection of the Soul: A Methodological and Conceptual Analysis,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 57 (1967): 271-297; Gitit Holzman, “Seclusion, Knowledge and Conjunction in the Thought of R. Moshe Narboni,” *Kabbalah* 7 (2002): 111-173 (Heb.).

109 Crescas completed his magnum opus, *The Light of the Lord*, at the beginning of the fifteenth century, around 1410.
necessary for political-religious reasons rather than as theoretical truths. Hence even those who were convinced of the superiority of prophetic knowledge over that of the philosophers did not necessarily favor all prophetic doctrines as literally understood. Moreover, some even entertained the possibility that the prophets at times err in scientific matters. The approaches of the Jewish philosophers certainly varied, as we have seen, yet in the final analysis they shared the same basic assumption regarding the origin of prophecy, and they rooted their views in the same set of sources. With Crescas, the philosophic picture changes dramatically and is rooted more firmly in fundamental religious tenets. While he does not entirely abandon the naturalistic approach of the philosophers and employs it as the starting point for his own thought, he nonetheless sees God as the immediate agent of the content of the prophetic message, even though it most often reaches the prophet through an intermediary. The superiority of the prophet over the philosopher in their knowledge in fact reflects the superiority of the knowledge communicated by God to knowledge that is known by natural means. This, however, is a different story.\textsuperscript{110}

\textsuperscript{110} For a discussion of Crescas’ theory of prophecy, see \textit{Prophecy: The History of an Idea in Medieval Jewish Philosophy}, 425-485.