

Addenda following the workshop discussion

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Addendum 1

In his insightful response to my presentation, Professor Hisao Takagi of Meiji Gakuin University observed that most standard interpretations of the *Guide of the Perplexed* presume that the “perplexity” mentioned in its title refers to that caused by a conflict between Jewish religious teachings and Aristotelian philosophy, that is, between Jerusalem and Athens; and he generously said that my approach is “fresh” and arouses “a strong sense of awakening.” He then asked whether I think that it might still be true that the central perplexity discussed in the *Guide* is that caused by the conflict of Revelation and Reason.

I think that the deepest and most recalcitrant perplexities discussed in the *Guide*, including the “true perplexity” of II, 24, do not primarily concern the conflict between Revelation and Reason. However, it is also true that Maimonides is very much concerned in the *Guide* with liberating the student from certain perplexities caused by the apparent conflict between Scripture and Reason. Whereas Maimonides does not consider himself able to resolve the most profound perplexities, like the “true perplexity” of II, 24, he is confident of his ability to resolve those perplexities caused by the apparent conflict between Scripture and Reason.

Addendum 2

In the discussion following my presentation, Professor Junya Shinohe of Doshisha University suggested an alternative interpretation of the word “*hā’irīn*” in Maimonides’ title. It perhaps should not be translated as “perplexed,” he said, but as “those who go astray.” He cited the opening *sūra* of the Qurān: “Guide us [*ihdinā*] on the straight path... not that of those who go astray [*al-dāllīn*]” (1:5–7).

Maimonides, he argued, may have had these Qurānic verses in mind.¹⁾

His book, he continued, provides a guidance for those who have gone astray (*hā’irīn*) from the straight path, and its title might be translated, “The Guide for Those Who Go Astray.” Professor Shinohe’s thoughtful interpretation is similar to that adopted by Salomon Munk in the title of his magisterial French translation: *Le Guide des égarés*.²⁾

There are two problems with Prof. Shinohe’s suggestion. The first is that Maimonides’ title has

the word “*hā’irīn*,” not “*dāllīn*.”³⁾ The second is that the suggested interpretation seems to be contradicted by the explanation of the title given by Maimonides in his Introduction to the *Guide*, which, as we have seen, refers clearly to the *perplexity* caused by an apparent conflict between Scripture and Reason;⁴⁾ and also seems to be contradicted by his discussion of the “true *hayra*” in *Guide*, II, 24, which, as we have seen, refers clearly to the *perplexity* caused by an apparent conflict between physics and astronomy.

In favor of Prof. Shinohe’s suggestion, one may cite the explicit words of Maimonides in the aforementioned passage in the Introduction to the *Guide* in which he explains the meaning of the title: “But if we explain these parables to him or if we draw his attention to their being parables, he will take the right path [*ihtadā*] and be delivered from this perplexity. This is why I have called this treatise, *Dalālat al-Hā’irīn*.” The word translated here as “he will take the right path” (*ihtadā*) is derived from the same root (*hdy*) as the verb “Guide us” (*ihdinā*) in the Qurānic text quoted above, “Guide us on the straight path.” In further support of Prof. Shinohe’s suggestion, one may cite the two little Hebrew poems with which Maimonides opens and closes the *Guide*: “My knowledge goes forth to point out the straight way, To pave its road. / Lo, everyone who goes astray [*to’eh*] in the field of Torah, Come and follow its path...”⁵⁾ “God is very near to everyone who calls... / He is found by every seeker... If he marches toward Him and goes not astray [*ve-lo’yit’eh*].”⁶⁾ These two little poems indicate that Maimonides’ book is a Guide for those who have gone astray or who might go astray.

Moreover, there is independent—although conjectural—evidence that Maimonides was interested in the opening *sūra* of the Qurān. The *sūra* begins with the words: “In the name [*bism*] of God... Lord of the worlds [*al-‘ālamīn*]” (Qurān 1:1–2). These words open Maimonides’ *Treatise on the Art Logic*, according to the superior Ankara manuscript.⁷⁾ They seem to be an analogue of the Abrahamic call, “In the name [*be-shem*] of the Lord, God of the world [*‘olam*]” (Genesis 21:33), with which Maimonides opens all six Orders of his *Commentary on the Mishnah*, his *Book of the Commandments*, all fourteen Books of his *Mishneh Torah*, and all three Parts of his *Guide*. The Abrahamic call is quoted several times in the *Guide*.⁸⁾

It is plausible that the word “*hā’irīn*” in Maimonides’ title should be understood as an amphibolous term that means both “those who are in a state of perplexity or *aporía*” and “those who go astray.”⁹⁾ In other words, it sometimes refers to individuals who *cannot move* because they have reached an impasse, and other times it refers to individuals who *move* off the straight path.

Notes

- 1) On Maimonides' use of Qurānic quotations, see my "Averroes and Maimonides on the Obligation of Philosophic Contemplation (*i'tibār*)," *Tarbiz* 58 (1989), 75–83 [Hebrew].
- 2) Paris: Franck, 1856–1866. Pines expressed reservations about Munk's title. See his "Quelques réflexions sur Maïmonide," preface to Maïmonide, *Le Livre de la connaissance*, (trans. V. Nikiprowetzky & A. Zaoui ; Paris: PUF, 1961), 1: "Le Guide des Égarés. Ou plus correctement: *Le Guide de ceux qui son dans la perplexité* ou encore *Le Guide des désorientés*."
- 3) Cf. the use of "*ḥayrān*" in Qurān 6:71. In this verse, the word seems to mean "perplexed," but is used with reference to those who "go astray" from the straight path (note the use of "*al-dāllīn*" in 6:77).
- 4) This is also a problem for Munk, and in his translation of the critical passage in Maimonides' Introduction, he has resource to a paraphrase: "le guide de ceux qui sont indécis ou égarés" (*Guide des égarés*, I, p. 8; see also, II, pp. 379–380).
- 5) *Guide*, p. 2 (Arabic, p. 0). I have corrected an error in the Pines translation. The masculine adjective "*yashar*" (straight) modifies the noun "*derekh*" (way), even though this noun is parsed as feminine in the pronominal suffix of "*mashlah*" (its road) and in three other words ("*ma'agalah*," "*bah*," and "*lah*"). See Jeremiah 31:8(9); cf. Proverbs 14:12; 16:25.
- 6) *Guide*, p. 638 (Arabic, p. 471).
- 7) I. Efros, "Maimonides' Arabic Treatise on Logic," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 34 (1966), 9.
- 8) *Guide*, I, preface, p. 3; II, preface, p. 235; II, 13, p. 282; II, 30, p. 358; III, preface, p. 415; III, 29, p. 516 (Arabic, pp. 1, 165, 197, 251, 297, 376). Cf. *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot 'Abodah Zarah 1:3. The use of Genesis 21:33 as an invocation is found in the *Epistle of Consolation* by Maimonides' father, Maimon; and also in some works by Maimonides' son, Abraham. See Joel Kraemer, *Maimonides* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 499, n. 6. Cf. Steven Harvey, "Maimonides and the Art of Writing Introductions," *Maimonidean Studies* 5 (2008), 86-88.
- 9) This seems to be the opinion of Munk; see above, n. 2. It seems also to be that of Kraemer; see *Maimonides*, p. 369: "The words *ḥayra* and *tahayyur* often render the Greek *aporía* ... [T]he word *ḥayra* has to do with ... go[ing] astray ... The ... reader ... has come to an impasse and needs to be shown the way."