

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

ISAAC ARAMA'S *AQEDAT YIṢḤAQ*: EXEGETICAL CONFRONTATION,
DOMESTICATION OF PHILOSOPHY, JEWISH SUPREMACY

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVINITY SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY
RACHEL BROOKE KATZ

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

AUGUST 2025

Copyright 2025 by Rachel Brooke Katz
All rights reserved

VII. To historians who wish to relive an era, Fustel de Coulanges recommends that they blot out everything they know about the later course of history. There is no better way of characterizing the method with which historical materialism has broken. It is a process of empathy whose origin is the indolence of the heart, *acedia*, which despairs of grasping and holding the genuine historical image as it flares up briefly. Among medieval theologians it was regarded as the root causes of sadness. Flaubert, who was familiar with it, wrote: “Few will be able to guess how sad one had to be in order to resuscitate Carthage.” The nature of this sadness stands out more clearly if one asks with whom the adherents of historicism actually empathize. The answer is inevitable: with the victor.

— Walter Benjamin, *Theses on the Philosophy of History*

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	v
Part I.....	1
0. Introduction.....	2
1. Exegetical Confrontation.....	59
2. Domestication of Philosophy.....	119
3. Jewish Supremacy.....	185
4. Appendix: Catalogue of Sources.....	240
Part II.....	260
AY Gate 10: Introduction, Outline, and Translation.....	261
AY Gate 44: Introduction, Outline, and Translation.....	299
AY Gate 60: Introduction, Outline, and Translation.....	405
Bibliography.....	468

Acknowledgements

Over the course of my graduate studies and in the process of writing this dissertation, I have accrued many debts inexpressible. I can only attempt the barest justice to them with the following:

My first and last thanks and so many in between to my advisor, teacher, and most cherished mentor, Professor James T. Robinson. Professor Robinson first introduced me to the world of medieval Jewish intellectual history—to Maimonides and philosophy and scriptural exegesis—when I was a much-disenchanted undergraduate student, awakening me to the dynamism, excitement, and vibrancy of a tradition I had sorely underestimated. His scholarship and enormous erudition inspired. But even more so his wisdom and boundless generosity of spirit revived, gave life. Working with and learning from Professor Robinson over the past decade has been one of the great gifts of my life. My gratitude for his capaciousness, kindness, and unflagging support of my project as both it and I have evolved—often in unsuspecting and challenging ways—knows no bounds.

Thanks next to the other two members of my committee: Professor Caterina Rigo and Professor Julie Orlemanski, both of whom I met while in times of extremis, and each of whom has overwhelmed me with the beyond-generous, consistent, careful, and critical attention they have lavished upon my project even as I have least merited it. Professor Rigo's exacting, down-to-the-word *tiqqunim* of my translations and footnotes, peppered with reflections on the nuances of medieval philosophy, reflect the depths of her learning, which have inspired me since the first course I took with her in the earliest days of the COVID-19 pandemic. Professor Orlemanski's indefatigably keen eye for the broader theoretical contours of my project and ever-incisive critical comments for sharpening and refining my interventions have been invaluable; I am

continually reinvigorated by the examples of her intrepid scholarship, her generous and dignifying mentorship of early-career scholars, and the suffusion of both with her deep commitment to liberatory politics. Needless to say, all remaining errors and oversights are exclusively my own.

Beyond my committee, my academic and intellectual journey has been sustained by numerous mentors, teachers, colleagues, and friends. Lucy Pick and Dana Fishkin gladly merit all these titles: Over the course of now many years, they have treated me always as a peer even as I was always learning from their examples as both scholars and humans. They have generously lavished upon me academic opportunities as well as the fruits of their time, energy, and company: Our COVID-era Zoom reading group and academic travel (mis)adventures sustained me in difficult times. A fellowship at the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies gifted me with yet more mentors-cum-senior colleagues as I was beginning to embark on the dissertation project: Special thanks to Rafael Dascalu, Oded Horetzky, and Tamaś Visi for taking a chance on me and sharing your wisdom. The critical feedback of my colleagues in the Martin Marty Center Junior Fellowship cohort of 2023–2024 contributed enormously to the sharpening of my project, while the community of the Lexicon Project challenged and inspired me to think far more ambitious and complex questions, at once equipping me with the tools to do so. The Medieval Studies and Jewish Studies Workshops provided me encouraging and constructive fora to hone my works-in-progress. I am deeply grateful that my time in the History of Judaism department at the Divinity School has overlapped with both Yonatan Shemesh (on the front end) and Jesse Noily (on the back); they have each shaped my project indelibly. And I would be remiss not to mention less-strictly-academic but nevertheless absolutely necessary forms of sustenance: Reading groups with Corinna Anderson and Jason Brain, and with Samuel

Baudinette and Alexa Herlands fed the fire of my intellectual life on dark nights, while Ellen and Yehuda Cohen literally fed me for over ten years, ceaselessly opening their home and hearts to an always-hungry aspiring scholar.

Finally, thanks to those without whom this would all be unthinkable. My family, who has supported my efforts unflaggingly from the very start: Most especially, to Lovey & Zaide, for asking in earnest: “Are the Jews race or religion?;” to Jill & Jeremy, for offering the gifts of both home and space; to my parents, for believing in me unequivocally. And to my beloved friends: Ash & Jess (& now too baby Ezra) Levine, Sam Baudinette, Alexa Herlands, Daniel Jacobs, Corinna Anderson, Becca Katz. My relationships with each of you have allowed me to unfold into the person who could write (& finish!) this. I love you each. Beyond this, no more words, because for you they really do fail.

Part I

0. Introduction

0.1. Why Arama, Why Now

Fifteenth-century Spanish¹ preacher Isaac Arama occupies something of a paradoxical place in the current landscape of Jewish intellectual history. Best known as the *Ba'al ha-Aqedah*, author of the massive collection of philosophical² sermons *'Aqedat Yiṣḥaq* (The Binding of Isaac, henceforth: AY), Jewish intelligentsia across contexts have attested to Arama's import, uniformly and unceasingly, for over half a millennium:³ Just twenty-five years after the initial printing of AY in Salonika (1522), Arama's son Meir Arama famously contended that Isaac Abarbanel had drawn much of the material for his own exceptionally popular bible commentary from Arama the elder, sans adequate recognition.⁴ In the latter half of the sixteenth century AY was reprinted in Venice a total of four times (1547, 1565, 1573, 1595), twice together with Arama's commentary on the *Megillot* or scrolls.⁵ Arama's brief polemical treatise *Ḥazut Qashah* (A Grievous Vision, henceforth: HQ) was printed once as well, together with a brief commentary by Joseph b. Jacob of Padua (Sabbioneta, 1552).⁶ Meanwhile, renaissance-man Judah Moscato developed Arama's ideas and cited AY frequently in his wildly popular collection of sermons,

¹ While use of the term "Spanish" is somewhat anachronistic, referring to a nation not yet in existence, I prefer it here and throughout because of the difficulties (discussed in 0.2.1 below) with identifying Arama as either Castilian or Aragonese: Though scholars suspect his family may have hailed from Aragon, we cannot say with certainty where he was born. In any event, we know he spent most of his life between Castile and Aragon, with a formative period in Zamora, followed by an itinerant career through Castile.

² I discuss the difficulty of the term "philosophy" (and relatedly, "philosophical") in a concluding note to this introduction (see 0.5.2 below).

³ Most of the information in this paragraph is synthesized from Sara Heller-Wilensky, *R. Yiṣḥaq 'Aramah u-Mishnato ha-Filosofit* (Mosad Bialik, 1956, 2020), 34–37, 48–57, with exceptions noted.

⁴ For Meir Arama's letter, see "Mikhtav le-ha-rav R. Meir ben-ha-rav R. Yiṣḥaq 'Aramah," *ha-Maggid* 2 (1858): 99, reproduced in Heller-Wilensky, *Arama*, 52–53. For a partial English translation of this letter, see Cedric Cohen-Skalli, *Don Isaac Abravanel: An Intellectual Biography*, trans. Avi Kallenbach (Brandeis University Press, 2021): 170–172. For more on Abarbanel's debt to Arama, see Eric Lawee, *Isaac Abarbanel's Stance Toward Tradition: Defense, Dissent, and Dialogue* (SUNY Press, 2001) and Shaul Regev, "Nusah rishon shel peirush Abravanel le-sefer Devarim," *Kobez al Yad* 15 (2001): 285–380.

⁵ Heller-Wilensky, *Arama*, 31, n.44.

⁶ Heller-Wilensky, *Arama*, 29.

Nefuṣot Yehudah (Venice, 1588).⁷ A recent study suggests that among the Jewish libraries of Mantua in 1590, AY was the most popular philosophical work—exceeding not only Judah Halevi’s *Kuzari* and Joseph Albo’s *Iqqarim*, but even Maimonides’ *Guide*.⁸ Moving into the early seventeenth century, Leon Modena drew on Arama’s discussion of the classical memory palace in Venice, while Menasseh ben Israel and Joseph Solomon Delmedigo penned critiques of Arama from Amsterdam and Candia, respectively—the latter nevertheless also claiming to have written commentaries on Arama’s works and singing his praises.⁹ In the eighteenth century a Gate of AY found its way into Latin translation in the Christian theological academies of Jülich;¹⁰ AY together with the commentary on the *Megillot* and HQ were each reprinted in Frankfurt (1785 and 1792, respectively);¹¹ and Arama’s influence on generations of preachers was attested by Haim Yosef David Azulai of Jerusalem: “all the homilists of prior generations drank his faithful waters.”¹² In the latter part of the eighteenth century too, references to and elaborations of the *Ba‘al ha-Aqedah* are found littering the works of Jacob Joseph of Polonne, disciple of the Ba‘al Shem Toḇ and pioneer of Ḥasidic literature.¹³ The first half of the nineteenth century

⁷ On Moscato’s uses of Arama, see Marc Saperstein, “Moscato as Eulogizer,” in *Rabbi Judah Moscato and the Jewish Intellectual World of Mantua in the 16th–17th Centuries*, eds. Giuseppe Veltri and Gianfranco Miletto (Brill, 2012), 46 n.22; Moshe Idel, “On Kabbalah in R. Judah Moscato’s *Qol Yehudah*,” in *Rabbi Judah Moscato*, eds. Veltri and Miletto, 73 n.69; and Adam Shear, *The Kuzari and the Shaping of Jewish Identity, 1167–1900* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 117 n.132. See also the indices of sources in Judah Moscato, *Sermons: Editions and Translations*, eds. Giuseppe Veltri and Gianfranco Miletto (Brill, 2011), I: 424; II: 473; IV (2015): 380.

⁸ See Shear, *The Kuzari*, 50–51, citing Shifra Baruchson, *Sefarim ve-Korim: Tarbut ha-Qeri’ah shel Yehude Italyah be-Shilhe ha-Renesans* (Ramat-Gan, 1993) 149, 152, 156.

⁹ Menasseh ben Israel’s and Delmedigo’s critiques as well as Delmedigo’s words of praise and claims to have written a commentary are all cited by Heller-Wilensky, *Arama*, 50. While Gerrit Bos, following Morris Steinschneider, noted Modena’s mention of AY in his *Lev ha-Aryeh* in his “Jewish Traditions on Strengthening Memory and Leone Modena’s Evaluation,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 2, no.1 (1995), 54, both completely failed to recognize extent of Modena’s reliance on Arama, as I show elsewhere: Katz, “*Shema* as Memory Palace: A Medieval Hebrew Ars Memorativa,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 114, no. 3 (2024): 353–354, n.8.

¹⁰ See Heller-Wilensky, *Arama*, 36 with notes.

¹¹ Heller-Wilensky, *Arama*, 31 n.44, 29 n. 38.

¹² Heller-Wilensky, *Arama*, 49 n. 171.

¹³ Yehudah Seewald briefly discusses the relationship of several early pioneers of Hasidism to Arama in his *Ba‘al ha-Aqedah: Rabi Yiṣḥaq ‘Aramah, Ba‘al ha-Aqedat Yiṣḥaq me-hotmei tequfat ha-rishonim* (Mahadurat Elul, 2023), 551–554, but even a simple search for references to the “*ba‘al ha-‘aqedah*” in the works of Jacob b. Joseph on Sefaria yields striking results. Prior to the publication of Seewald’s book, I thought to perform the latter search

witnessed another reprinting each of AY plus the commentary on the *Megillot* (Lemberg, 1808) and HQ (Warsaw, 1841), while Ḥayyim Pollack’s 1849 commentary on the entirety of both AY and HQ prompted something of an Arama fever in the second half of the century.¹⁴ After its initial printing in Pressburg, Pollack’s commentary *Meqor Ḥayyim* (Fountain of Life) was reprinted five times in the near half-century between 1868 and 1911, twice at Lemberg (1868, 1881) and three times in Warsaw (1883, 1904, 1911).¹⁵ Between 1850 and 1889 four others composed commentaries on Arama’s works as well.¹⁶ In the twentieth century Arama was favored by both Israel Bettan, expositor of the American Reform movement and longtime Professor of Homiletics at Hebrew Union College, and Neḥama Leibowitz, revivalist and popularizer of *parshanut* in Israel.¹⁷ Finally, in the twenty-first century wide consensus around Arama and AY’s import has been affirmed and reinscribed through the emergence of digital Jewish libraries. A searchable version of AY in its near-million-word entirety not only can be found as part of both the Bar Ilan Responsa Project and the expanded online *Miqra’ot Gedolot* (Commentators Bible).¹⁸ Perhaps most strikingly, AY appears as one of only a select fourteen medieval titles included in the “Jewish Thought” section of Sefaria, a non-traditional, American-

thanks to a conversation with Rabbi Eli Brackman, who first alerted me to the frequent appearance of Arama in early Ḥasidic literature.

¹⁴ Heller-Wilsensky, *Arama*, 31 n.44, 29 n.38.

¹⁵ Heller-Wilsensky, *Arama*, 31 n.44, 29 n.38.

¹⁶ Heller-Wilsensky, *Arama*, 35–36.

¹⁷ In his study of Arama, Bettan hyperbolizes frequently, at one point even singling out AY as the most “comprehensive exposition of Jewish thought and belief” among “homiletical work[s] that ha[ve] come down to us from the middle ages” and Arama as “unquestionably the greatest exponent of traditional Judaism in the medieval pulpit” (621); also as exemplifying the “supreme pattern of traditional Judaism” (586). See Israel Bettan, “The Sermons of Isaac Arama,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 12–13 (1937–8): 583–634. Neḥama Leibowitz cites Arama frequently in her published *Studies* on the weekly parashah. See Neḥama Leibowitz, *Studies in Bereshit* (World Zionist Organization, 1981); Neḥama Leibowitz, *Studies in Shemot* (World Zionist Organization, 1981); Neḥama Leibowitz, *Studies in Bamidbar* (World Zionist Organization, 1993); Neḥama Leibowitz, *Studies in Devarim* (World Zionist Organization, 1993); Neḥama Leibowitz, *Torah Insights* (The Joint Authority for Jewish Zionist Education, 1995).

¹⁸ The Bar-Ilan Responsa Project can be found here: <https://www.responsa.co.il/default.aspx> ; *Miqra’ot Gedolot* can be found here: <https://mg.alhatorah.org/> .

based “living library of Jewish texts” with the stated goals of “democratiz[ing] knowledge” and “building the future of Jewish learning in an open and participatory way.”¹⁹ From the first quarter of the sixteenth century to the present then, from Italy and Poland to Israel and the US, evidence that Arama and his magnum opus loom large in the Jewish imaginary abounds.

Yet despite this seemingly wide and persistent consensus as to Arama and AY’s import, modern scholarship has paid them relatively little sustained attention in the past century, leaving Arama and AY at once familiar references and foreign referents. This is the quasi-paradox I referred to earlier. Arama and AY are simultaneously recognized to be canonical, and yet, barring a few significant departures, remain substantively unknown—hidden, as it were, in plain sight.²⁰ For evidence that Arama is indeed understudied, one might consider Mosad Bialik’s 2020 republication of Sara Heller-Wilensky’s 1956 Hebrew monograph on Arama.²¹ Heller-Wilensky’s monograph, which I will discuss at more length below, is very much the exception that proves the rule in terms of Arama scholarship: it is incredibly comprehensive and thorough and remains the unimpeachable foundation of Arama studies nearing three quarters of a century after its original publication. But as far as I can tell, apart from a beautiful new cover, the 2020 reprint is virtually identical to the 1956 original, the latter untouched, even lacking the customary additional introductory material. Mosad Bialik might have agreed to reissue Heller-Wilensky’s text in part then because they recognized that in the intervening decades, no studies have emerged that might be presumed to have amended it let alone to have taken its place.²² In other

¹⁹ “What is Sefaria?” Accessed at: <https://www.sefaria.org/about>.

²⁰ Though intended in a totally different context, Arama’s status as simultaneously canonical yet largely unknown brings to mind Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s observation that “the ultimate mark of power may be its invisibility.” See Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, xxiii.

²¹ I would like to thank Jim Robinson for originally suggesting that the reprint of Heller-Wilensky bespoke a certain dearth of scholarship.

²² In the front matter of Seewald’s recent monograph on Arama, the publisher Ziv Elul notes that he prompted Mosad Bialik to reissue Heller-Wilensky’s monograph after discovering that it had gone out of print in the course of his own research on Arama—hence “agreed to reissue.” See Ziv Elul, “*Petaḥ Davar*” in Seewald, *Arama*.

words, Heller-Wilensky may remain the unquestioned authority in part because up until very recently, there had been no presumptive competition. While the late twentieth century and early twenty first have witnessed some scholarship on Arama, virtually all studies following Heller-Wilensky's have been predicated on hers. Further, apart from one dissertation devoted to *Hazut Qashah*, even the most sustained studies on Arama have been article- rather than monograph-length, and by consequence have necessarily been rather restricted in scope, treating Arama's engagement with a certain theme or text rather than assessing him holistically.²³ Further still, even such article-length studies focusing predominantly or largely on Arama have been relatively few. In recent decades, Arama has appeared in scholarship mostly in mere passing, reduced to evidence of a broader trend, one example of many. Said differently, since Heller-Wilensky, Arama has rarely been an object of scholarly interest in his own right, and even more rarely been the object of extended scholarly attention.

Rarely, but not never. In 2023, only three years after Mosad Bialik's reissue and indeed in connection with it, Yehuda Seewald published the first monograph-length study of Arama since Heller-Wilensky's original. I will discuss Seewald's monograph together with Heller-Wilensky's more substantively in a later section, but what is important for our present purposes is that, together with Heller-Wilensky's, it is also an exception that proves the rule. Seewald's publisher states plainly that he undertook his research on Arama in part because he recognized the vast discrepancy between Arama's widely recognized importance (especially in the world of Ḥasidic thought), on the one hand, and the lack of scholarship on Arama, on the other.²⁴ And sweeping though Seewald's monograph is, insofar as it, like Heller-Wilensky's, is written in Hebrew, it still leaves Arama virtually inaccessible to the Anglophone world. It is not only the

²³ See 0.3.4 below.

²⁴ See Ziv Elul, "Petaḥ Davar" in Seewald, *Arama*.

case that, to many of Sefaria's near-775,000 monthly users, Arama and his ostensibly canonical AY can only be reached at a great distance—through Eliyahu Munk's highly paraphrastic and summary translation, Chaim Pearl's paean to Arama as epitome of "medieval Jewish thought," and unwittingly scattered chapter headings in so many academic articles.²⁵ More troubling is that so towering a figure as Arama is left both isolated from broader scholarly dialogues and insulated from potentially incisive scholarly critiques. To name only two examples, at present, Arama's fascination with mnemotechnics, embodiment, and prayer lie beyond the ken of Iberianists working on the same themes, while Arama's theory of Jews as separate species remain unknown to scholars concerned with the development of racial thinking in the premodern world.

*

The present dissertation has two primary and interrelated goals, both linked to the apparent discrepancy or quasi-paradox limned above—i.e., between Arama's stature on the one hand, and the relative lack of scholarship devoted to him, on the other. The first of these goals is to begin rectifying the apparent discrepancy through a project of archival recovery; i.e., to bring Arama and especially his *'Aqedat Yiṣḥaq* to the world of English-language scholarship. By introducing key dimensions of Arama's thought, presenting selections of Arama's texts in English translation for the first time, and situating these in their intellectual-historical context, this dissertation seeks first and foremost to make a canonical yet often-overlooked figure in the history of Jewish thought more widely accessible—a goal with which I now believe Arama would have

²⁵ This figure on Sefaria's monthly usership comes from Sefaria's most recent (2024) Annual Report, accessed at: <https://www.sefaria.org/annualreport>, 4. Eliyahu Munk's translation can be found in *Akeydat Yitzchak: Commentary of Rabbi Yitzchak Arama on the Torah*, 2 vols. (Urim Publications, 1986) as well as on Sefaria. For Pearl, see Chaim Pearl, *The Medieval Jewish Mind: The Religious Philosophy of Isaac Arama* (Vallentine, Mitchell & Co., 1971).

empathized.²⁶ In so doing, I hope to lay the groundwork for further studies of Arama, especially by those who have historically been barred from entering the discipline of medieval Jewish intellectual history's discouragingly high gates.²⁷

Of course, no project of archival recovery is driven by a naïve desire for filling lacunae alone. Accordingly, the second goal of this dissertation is to use Arama as a tool of intervention to point to both the most promising trends and striking limits in the current field of medieval Jewish intellectual history. While my first goal grew out of a desire to begin rectifying the apparent discrepancy limned above—i.e., between Arama's acknowledged stature on the one hand and the relative lack of scholarship devoted to him on the other—my interest gradually shifted such that I became fascinated in the logic of this apparent discrepancy or quasi-paradox and how it revealed a partial image of the field of Jewish intellectual history. I noticed that within the field, gesturing at such an apparent discrepancy is conventionally considered sufficient justification for undertaking a corresponding project of recovery. Yet I came to see this same logic as, though perhaps conventionally sufficient, deeply unsatisfactory: After all, in a field where so many once-popular texts remain largely inaccessible to potentially interested audiences or else languishing in manuscript, why choose this one? To invoke the question I have set as the title for this subsection: Why Arama, and why now? In attempting to answer this question for myself, I began to wonder: How and why had Arama come to be relatively

²⁶ See 3.2 with subsections below on Arama's commitment to mass accessibility and corresponding hostility towards intellectual elitism.

²⁷ Aaron Hughes has an illuminating discussion on the insularity and exclusivity of Jewish Studies generally in the introduction to his *The Study of Judaism: Authenticity, Identity, Scholarship* (SUNY Press, 2013), 1–9. I would add the discipline's general tendency towards insularity and exclusivity is only exacerbated in the subfield of medieval Jewish intellectual history. For on the one hand, the subfield demands as prerequisite competence in reading medieval Hebrew with its abundant references to both scripture and classical Rabbinic literature, yet on the other, even the most elite academic institutions do not have the infrastructure to support the pursuit and nurturing of such competence—leading to a situation in which competence must de facto be gained through traditional institutions of Jewish learning, which—perhaps needless to say—are not widely accessible by design.

neglected by contemporary scholars given broad consensus as to his status within the traditional world? What tendencies in scholarship and aspects of Arama's oeuvre might have clashed, disposing the latter to be dismissed or overlooked? With these questions in mind, I came to see Arama and the field as refractions of one another, Arama clarifying for me several longstanding and interconnected trends in scholarship. Arama was profoundly exegetical where scholarship broadly still preferred the synthetic, systematic, and philosophical.²⁸ Arama deployed philosophy craftily at every turn, sometimes weaponizing it, sometimes instrumentalizing it, sometimes neutralizing it, where scholarship broadly still preferred a binary of radical or conservative, pro-philosophy or anti-philosophy.²⁹ Finally, Arama deployed philosophical exegesis to develop, among other ideas, a systematic, strongly anti-intellectualist, and particularist theory of Jewish supremacy, where scholarship broadly still preferred to emphasize the universalist-cum-intellectualist dimensions of medieval Jewish thought.³⁰ Accordingly, as I work towards my first goal of recovering and expanding access to Arama by presenting him in English, the material I choose to present and aspects of his oeuvre I emphasize throughout will be informed by this second goal: using Arama to incite the field to go further in its attention to exegesis as a literary form, to the complex relations obtaining between ostensibly "anti-philosophical" thinkers and their philosophical sources, and to the long and intellectually ambitious history of theories of Jewish supremacy.

In the final section of this introduction, I will discuss exactly how my treatment of Arama is informed by the current state of the field, how I use the former to illuminate my understanding of the latter and vice versa. But before doing so, a serious laying of groundwork is in order,

²⁸ See 0.4.1 below.

²⁹ See 0.4.2 below.

³⁰ See 0.4.3 below.

indeed past due. In the foregoing I have suggested something of the long shadow cast by Arama and his collection of sermons *'Aqedat Yiṣḥaq*. But who exactly was Arama? What do we know of his life and what he wrote? How has scholarship approached him and his works, shaping our understanding thus far? In the sections that follow, I will first provide some basic biographical and bibliographical background on Arama, providing a basic outline of his life and works (0.2). Then I will turn to review the scholarly literature on Arama (0.3), paying special attention to Heller-Wilensky's and Seewald's monographs. Finally, I will conclude by discussing the approach of the present dissertation (0.4).

0.2. Basic Biographical and Bibliographical Background

0.2.1. Arama's Life

As with many figures of medieval Jewish intellectual life, our knowledge of Arama's life is scant and proceeds principally from Arama's own scattered remarks in the introductions to his various works.³¹ However, thanks especially to the recent research of Yehuda Seewald, various stops in Arama's somewhat itinerant life can now be corroborated by external documents. Arama was born circa 1420 in the Spanish Kingdoms, though we do not know exactly where. Seewald hypothesizes that Arama was likely born in Aragon rather than Castile, as Spanish Royal and State notarial documents only attest to the family name "Arama" in the regions of Aragon.³² The first place Arama himself mentions having lived is in the city of Zamora, then the affluent and

³¹ As reflected in previous scholarship: See Seewald, *Arama*, 32ff; Heller-Wilensky, *Arama*, 26–28; H. Y. Pollack, *Toledot Rabbenu Yiṣḥaq ben 'Aramah*.

³² Seewald, *Arama*, 35. Seewald hypothesizes that the Arama surname refers to the family's place of origin: either a small village called "Arama" in Gipuzkoa in the Basque country, bordering the Pyrenees; or else a small village called "Aghama" near Marrakesh. Of these two options, Seewald prefers the latter since it is known to have boasted a Jewish community—see Seewald, *Arama*, 155–6.
we know A's father and family (45) lived in Aragon

bustling center of Jewish life in the Crown of Castile.³³ According to his own account, Arama presided over a yeshivah in Zamora, though Seewald surmises that Arama and his brothers may have gone to Zamora already in their youth to receive an education there.³⁴ During his time in Zamora, Arama also married his wife Sarah and witnessed the birth of his son Meir.³⁵ External evidence attests that both Arama and his brother Jacob were in Zamora as late as 1457. The colophon of an extant manuscript dated to that year appears to have been written by Jacob, who notes that he has copied the ensuing text, Nahmanides' commentary on the Torah, while in the yeshiva of Isaac Canpanton (located in Zamora), for his brother Isaac.³⁶

At some point after 1457 and before 1480, Arama left Zamora and with it Castile for Aragon.³⁷ He lived for a time first in the community of Tarragona and then in a city which Arama specifies is nearby and calls ברִגָּה or בֶּרְגָּה. The identity of this latter city remains debated, as the two most linguistically obvious referents, Berga and Braga, are both quite far from Tarragona.³⁸ Meanwhile, Seewald takes issue with Pollack's hypothesis that the referent city is Fraga, as the latter is still a significant distance from Tarragona, and according to Seewald, is unlikely to have been signified by Arama's suggested spelling.³⁹ Precise identity of this latter city notwithstanding, Seewald surmises that Arama likely moved to these communities because community members solicited him to establish a yeshivah there.⁴⁰ Based on both Arama's remarks and scholarly understandings of fifteenth century Aragonese Jewish life, Seewald

³³ Seewald notes that local Jews had mostly made their wealth in the wine industry. He observes that the wealth of local Jews is attested by the facts that (1) on the eve of the expulsion, the city boasted three synagogues; and that (2) a few of the city's Jews are documented as having helped to fund Columbus' second voyage to the Americas. See Seewald, *Arama*, 34–36.

³⁴ Seewald, *Arama*, 34–36.

³⁵ Seewald, *Arama*, 34–36.

³⁶ Seewald, *Arama*, 44, 157.

³⁷ Seewald, *Arama*, 43–44.

³⁸ Seewald, *Arama*, 52–54.

³⁹ Seewald, *Arama*, 53.

⁴⁰ Seewald, *Arama*, 44–45.

further surmises that Arama ultimately left these communities because their economic conditions were unsustainable.⁴¹ Finally, Seewald conjectures that while in ברנא or ברנה, Arama began his correspondence with the aforementioned Isaac Abarbanel and also began writing '*Aqedat Yishaq*'.⁴²

Sometime before or by 1480, Arama departed Tarragona and ברנא or ברנה for the final Spanish city in which he would dwell prior to the expulsion, namely, Calatayud, then a center of Jewish life in Aragon. This period of Arama's life is the best documented by external evidence, thanks to the discovery of a tranche of Calatayud's notarial protocols in the 1980s.⁴³ While in Calatayud, Arama seems to have been immersed in communal life, preaching regularly and serving as a communal Rabbi.⁴⁴ Arama's time in Calatayud was also his most literarily prolific; he not only finished revising AY, but also composed his polemical treatise, *Hazut Qashah*, and his commentary on Proverbs, *Yad Abshalom*.⁴⁵ Finally, Arama's period in Calatayud was an eventful one for his family; he witnessed the marriage of his son Meir, the marriage of his daughter Na'ama, and very shortly thereafter the death of his son-in-law, to whose memory *Yad Abshalom* is dedicated.⁴⁶

Though the fate of much of the Arama family is unknown, we do know that following the expulsion, Arama and his son Meir arrived in Napoli in 1492, and that two years later, Meir would bury his father in the same city.

0.2.2. Arama's Works

⁴¹ Seewald, *Arama*, 50, 65–66.

⁴² Seewald, *Arama*, 54, 65ff.

⁴³ Seewald, *Arama*, 91–93.

⁴⁴ Seewald, *Arama*, 91–93.

⁴⁵ Seewald, *Arama*, 91–93.

⁴⁶ Seewald, *Arama*, 103–104

Turning to Arama's bibliography, there is widespread consensus that Arama authored four major works, and dispute as to his authorship of a handful of minor works. In this section I will first treat each of Arama's major works, then turn to a discussion of minor and/or disputed works.

0.2.2.1. *Aqedat Yiṣḥaq* (The Binding of Isaac)⁴⁷

The work for which Arama is best known to history, which will be the primary focus of the present dissertation, and which Arama seems to have begun first chronologically is a massive collection of philosophical sermons that he entitles '*Aqedat Yiṣḥaq* (The Binding of Isaac). In addition to a lengthy introduction and conclusion, the bulk of AY is comprised of one hundred and five philosophical sermons which Arama calls "Gates" organized loosely around the weekly *parashiyot*. Loosely, because while although the order of the Gates follows the order of the *parashiyot*, the number of Gates and volume of ink spilled over the various *parashiyot* vary wildly: while the majority of *parashiyot* are treated in only a single Gate, other *parashiyot* are treated through two, three, (or rarely) even four successive Gates.⁴⁸ At the extreme, the first eleven Gates of AY are all devoted to *parashat Bereshit* alone.

Structurally, most of the Gates of AY assume the same basic form, though there are some exceptions. As Marc Saperstein's research has shown, Arama was something of a pioneer when it came to sermon structure: While from the mid-thirteenth through the mid-fifteenth century,

⁴⁷ The following summary account draws from Seewald, *Arama*, 230, which in turn closely hews to Heller-Wilensky, *Arama*, 29–31. Throughout this dissertation, my references to *Aqedat Yiṣḥaq* (henceforth: AY) are to Ḥayyim Pollack's edition: '*Aqedat Yiṣḥaq*, ed. Ḥayyim Yosef Pollack, 5 Volumes (Pressburg: Victor Kittseer, 1849). I alternate between references general "Gates" of AY, e.g., AY Gate 63, and in some instances, to specific volume and page number, i.e., AY V: 98a.

⁴⁸ Two Gates: *Toldot* (23–24), *Vayishlach* (26–27), *Vayigash* (30–31), *Vayechi* (32–33), *Mishpatim* (46–47), *Shmini* (59–60), *Aḥarei Mot* (63–64), *Beḥuqotai* (70–71), *Matot* (84–85), *Vaethanan* (88–89), *Re'eh* (93–94), *Shofetim* (95–96), *Ve-zot ha-Berakhah* (104–105); Three Gates: *Lekh Lekha* (16–18), *Vayera* (19–21), *Bo* (36–38), *Yitro* (43–45), *Terumah* (48–50), *Ki Tisa* (52–54), *Emor* (66–68), *Beha'alotkha* (74–76), *Hukat* (79–81), *Ekev* (90–92), *Niṣavim* (99–101); Four Gates: *Noah* (12–15), *Beshalah* (39–42).

Hebrew sermons do not seem to have followed a fixed form, beginning precisely in the generation that Arama was writing, sermons seem to become quite standardized in terms of their structure.⁴⁹ What's more, while Arama's Gates in AY on the one hand exhibit many of the new formal elements that are absent from sermons of previous generations and would become characteristic of all subsequent Hebrew sermons for nearly a century, the broader two-part structure of his Gates blends an older structural model with the newer. As I described in the introduction, each Gate begins with a two-part epigraphic introduction, consisting of a verse from the *parashah*, called the *nose*, followed by a seemingly-unrelated aggadic excerpt from Rabbinic literature, called the *ma'amar*. Both of these elements, per Saperstein's analysis, are typical of the new structure of sermon that would coalesce in the decade(s) following AY.⁵⁰ Following this two-part introduction, the bulk of each Gate is divided into roughly two main parts as well, the *derishah* (inquiry) and *perishah* (explication). While the *derishah* is generally more discursive in form, focusing on the theoretical treatment of some topic or question, the *perishah* is generally more exegetical in form, developing a verse-by-verse explication of some passage from the weekly parashah (including the *nose*).⁵¹ It is precisely in this two-part structure of *derishah* and *perishah* that Arama might be seen as blending old with new: while his *perishahs* to a certain extent resemble an homily, which according to Saperstein was a more

⁴⁹ Marc Saperstein, *Jewish Preaching, 1200–1800: An Anthology* (Yale University Press, 1989), 63–66.

⁵⁰ Saperstein, *Jewish Preaching*, 66–68. Arama's frequent choice of a *ma'amar* that does not self-evidently relate to the *nose* or *parashah* at hand may be understood in light of James Robinson's observations on the function of *petihta*, originally in Rabbinic midrash and subsequently adopted and adapted by the medievals: beginning with an apparently remote verse was a way to demonstrate the homilist's erudition and mastery of scripture. See James T. Robinson, *Samuel ibn Tibbon's Commentary on Ecclesiastes* (Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 29. Arama, who certainly knew both Samuel ibn Tibbon and Jacob Anatoli, among others, may have been adapting the same idea yet again, albeit in a slightly different direction: replacing the remote scriptural verse of classical Rabbinic and earlier medieval literature with a Rabbinic dictum. More research should be done on Arama's selection of *ma'amarot*, which to the best of my knowledge by and large do not seem to have been drawn from especially popular Rabbinic materials.

⁵¹ As I will discuss in 1.1 and chapter 1 more broadly, though this division between *derishah* and *perishah* is instructive, it should not be reductive or misleading: Arama's *derishot* are full of exegesis, while his *perishot* are rife with theoretical elaborations.

dominant form from of Hebrew sermon from the thirteenth century through the late fifteenth, his *derishahs* assume the conceptual form that would become characteristic of sermons at the end of the fifteenth and throughout the sixteenth century.⁵² Towards the end of the *derishah*, Arama generally offers an exegesis of the introductory Rabbinic *ma'amar*, while he generally marks the transition from *derishah* to *perishah* by enumerating a series of exegetical questions or difficulties (*sefeqot*) concerning the *parashah*-at-hand that will guide his subsequent exegesis.⁵³

Following contemporary custom, in his introduction to AY Arama not only provides autobiographical background but also rationalizes several key features of the ensuing work:⁵⁴ he justifies having composed the work in the first place, outlines its structural form, briefly notes the method he plans to use, and gives an account of his choice of title. Taking each of these in turn, Arama justifies his composition of AY—albeit indirectly—by suggesting that it fulfills an urgent social and communal need: For he claims that he only delivered weekly sermons to the communities of Tarragona and ברגא/ברגה to meet the communities' demand.⁵⁵ Arama explains how members of these communities thirsted for Torah learning and that their appetites for

⁵² Saperstein, *Jewish Preaching*, 73–76.

⁵³ On the *sefeqot* as a broader phenomenon in fifteenth century Iberian scriptural exegesis, see Marc Saperstein, “The Method of Doubts: Problematizing of the Bible in Late Medieval Jewish Exegesis,” in *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Interpretation in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, eds. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Barry D. Walfish, and Joseph W. Goering (Oxford University Press, 2003), 133–156.

⁵⁴ More work remains to be done to understand the background of these “rationalizing” elements Arama presents in his introduction. Though there is a degree of conceptual overlap, the language he uses does *not* seem to be drawn from the Alexandrian prologue tradition originally adapted into Hebrew by Samuel ibn Tibbon, and subsequently taken up by others including Jacob Anatoli and Gersonides—on which see James T. Robinson, “Samuel ibn Tibbon’s *Commentary on Ecclesiastes* and the Philosopher’s Prooemium,” in *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, Vol. 3, eds. Isadore Twersky and Jay Harris (Harvard University Press, 2000), 83–46; Sara Klein-Braslavy, “The Alexandrian Prologue Paradigm in Gersonides’ Writings,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 95 (2005): 257–289. Steven Harvey’s recent study takes a broader view of author’s preface as literary form, but regrettably does not extend into the fifteenth century. See Steven Harvey, “The Author’s *Haqdamah* as a Literary Form,” in *Medieval Jewish Philosophy and its Literary Forms*, eds. Aaron W. Hughes and James T. Robinson (Indiana University Press, 2019), 133–160.

⁵⁵ Contra Heller-Wilensky, who suggests that the Gates of AY are based on the sermons Arama preached in the communities of Tarragona and ברגא/ברגה, Saperstein insists that while “it is inconceivable that Arama did not incorporate material from sermons into his magnum opus...he never described the book as a record of his preaching,” *Jewish Preaching*, 17–18.

superior exegetical fare were whetted through their exposure to contemporary Christian preaching. So impressed by the Christians' scientifically, philosophically, and theologically sophisticated explications of scripture, Arama suggests, community members found extant Jewish interpretations, for a variety of reasons, wanting.⁵⁶ Following good medieval convention then, Arama implies that he penned AY not out of hubris but reluctantly and only out of obligation—all while backhandedly gesturing at the insufficiency of nearly three centuries of prior Hebrew exegesis.⁵⁷ Building upon this modesty topos still further, he details his hesitations in undertaking the project, adumbrating a series of standard self-recriminations. After so justifying his composition, Arama elaborates the basic two-part formal structure of the various Gates outlined above. He remarks briefly on the method of exegesis he plans to use, and in a strikingly anti-Maimonidean⁵⁸ move, explains that he will preface the ensuing Gates with something of a thematic table of contents for easy access.⁵⁹ Finally, he turns to explaining the title he has given to the work, providing not one but four accounts corresponding to each of the four Aristotelian causes.⁶⁰ While Arama acknowledges that all accounts play on his own name,

⁵⁶Arama specifically suggests community members are unimpressed by Jewish commentaries' focus on grammatical and *peshat* interpretations. For a discussion of this passage of Arama, and its resonance(s) with both (1) critiques of Jewish commentaries voiced by Abarbanel as well as (2) contemporary Jewish praise of Christian interpretations and learning, see Eric Lawee, "Changing Jewish Attitudes Towards Christian Society: The Case of Spain in the Late Middle Ages" in *York University Centre for Jewish Studies Annual*, vol. 3 ed. Michael Brown, (2001), 6–8.

⁵⁷ See Saperstein, *Jewish Preaching*, 76–77 on the conventionality of prefacing *derush*-style sermons especially with justificatory material. Saperstein's description of beginning "the sermon itself with [an account of] reasons for the preacher to remain silent and then the stronger reasons for preaching....professions of modesty and unworthiness, praises for the virtue of silence," then moving into "a formal statement that the sermon was being delivered by permission" corresponds closely with the passage from the introduction to AY that Seewald excerpts on 230.

⁵⁸ I discuss the term "Maimonidean," which will recur frequently throughout this dissertation in section 0.5.1 below.

⁵⁹ Anti-Maimonidean in the sense of facilitating the reader's ability to access the work easily and guide his own journey, in contrast to Maimonides' deliberate attempts to make accessing the *Guide* arduous, complex, and at every step of the way necessitating Maimonides' guidance. As we will see in 3.2 and its subsections, this move is very much consonant with Arama's broader project and commitments in AY.

⁶⁰ Arama similarly prefaces his Commentary on Ecclesiastes by discussing the four Aristotelian causes of the work, perhaps inspiring Abarbanel who would do the same in his introductions to his commentaries on Joshua, Judges, and Samuel (as already noted by Eric Lawee) as well as Exodus. See Eric Lawee, "Introducing Scripture: The *Accessus Ad Auctores* in Medieval Hebrew Exegetical Literature from the 13th to 15th Centuries," in *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Interpretation in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, eds. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Barry D. Walfish, and Joseph W. Goering (Oxford University Press, 2003), esp. 165–167.

his selection of title no doubt also bespeaks the enormous theological significance he confers to the eponymous biblical episode in the life of Abraham.⁶¹

0.2.2.2. *Ḥazut Qashah* (A Grievous Vision)⁶²

Though AY was likely the first work Arama started, it was not the first he finished.⁶³ In his introduction to AY he recounts both the circumstances that incited him to compose another work, and that other work's (in his eyes) unhappy reception—that other work being a systematic polemical treatise Arama entitles, after Isa. 21:2, *Ḥazut Qashah* (A Grievous Vision).⁶⁴ HQ is divided into twelve main Gates, plus a prefatory riddle and brief conclusion. In the prefatory riddle, Arama outlines the titular vision or nightmare which the ensuing work will go on to interpret: a dream of two women and their vexed relationships to both each other and a common man. One of these women, figured as the biblical Sarah, is unable to conceive a child for her husband and so summons her maidservant to do so; when the latter is then able to conceive, she turns to scorning her mistress. As Arama subsequently develops it, the mistress and maidservant, Sarah and Reumah/Hagar, are allegorical stand-ins for Torah and Philosophy. The vision or

⁶¹ See Heller-Wilensky, *Arama*, 31. As James Diamond details, Arama conceptualizes the '*aqedah*' as the climax in Abraham's journey from reasoning philosopher to ultimately submissive to the irrationality of divine command. See James Diamond, "Isaac Arama's Nightmare: Closing the Philosophical Exegetical Chapter Maimonides Opened," *European Journal of Jewish Studies* 10 (2016): 201–222, esp. 218–19. Arama's treatment of the '*aqedah*' in HQ Gate 3 can be accessed in the English translation of Baruch Frydman-Kohl, "Ḥazut Qashah: Faith, Felicity, and Fidelity in the Thought of Yiṣḥaq Arama" (DHL Diss., Jewish Theological Seminary, 2004).

⁶² The following summary account draws from Seewald, *Arama*, 231–235, which in turn closely hews to Heller-Wilensky, *Arama*, 28–29. It also draws from Diamond, "Isaac Arama's Nightmare." Throughout this dissertation, my references to *Ḥazut Qashah* (henceforth: HQ) are to Ḥayyim Pollack's edition, appended to his five-volume edition of AY with the Megillot: *Ḥazut Qashah*, ed. Ḥayyim Yosef Pollack (Pressburg: Victor Kittseer, 1849).

⁶³ Both Heller-Wilensky and Seewald content that Arama composed HQ while in Calatayud, after composing his first draft(s) of AY (in Tarragona and Burga) but before completing final draft(s) of the same (in Calatayud). This consensus was reached on the basis of cross-references between the two works and early manuscripts of AY identified by Seewald. As for the former, while the introduction to the final version of AY discusses both the conception and reception of HQ (suggesting HQ's publication preceded Arama's composition of the introduction to AY—), as Heller-Wilensky points out, virtually every chapter of HQ cites parallels in the correct Gate/chapter of AY (suggesting a significant draft of AY existed prior to the composition of HQ).

⁶⁴ *A grievous vision is declared unto me: 'The treacherous dealer dealeth treacherously, and the spoiler spoileth. Go up, O Elam! besiege, O Media! All the sighing thereof have I made to cease.'*

riddle thus bespeaks the primary motivation and guiding theme of HQ as a whole, namely, Arama's polemic against the "philosophizers" (*mitpalsefim*), those contemporary Jewish scholars who improperly "subjugate" Torah to philosophy, attempting to harmonize them. In an argument he will reprise in AY and other works, Arama critiques these scholars for bending Torah out of shape, twisting and distorting it to support the foreign philosophical principles to which they fervently cling, despite the latter's thoroughgoing opposition to the principles organically taught by Torah itself. Interestingly, though Arama reiterates that the philosophizers' and harmonizers' distortions have weakened the faith, he does *not* see the philosophizers' actions, reprehensible though they are, as having precipitated mass conversion, as some twentieth-century scholarship might have presumed.⁶⁵ As Seewald notes, Arama actually specifies that, to the contrary, the philosophizers themselves reluctantly but obstinately cling to Judaism: though they would prefer to leave the Jewish faith entirely out of their devotion to philosophy, they persist therein because they view Christianity and Islam as even less philosophical options and hence conversion as even more intolerable.⁶⁶

Much of the material Arama focuses on in the body Gates of HQ he treats in parallel in AY. In particular, the Gates of HQ might be seen as highlighting key episodes in Arama's imagining of salvation history, which are very much constructed in opposition to Maimonides' imagining of the same. As I will discuss in a subsequent chapter, whereas for Maimonides (and the Maimonidean tradition following him—), the fall consists in man's descent from perfectly abstract and immaterial theoretical contemplation, and the arc of salvation history accordingly

⁶⁵ Most famously, in his *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, Yitzhak Baer uncritically adopted and echoed the argument expressed in some fifteenth-century texts (such as e.g., Shem Tob ibn Shem Tob's *Sefer ha-Emunot*, or the anonymous *Sefer ha-Meshiv*) that inroads made by Jewish philosophy were responsible for precipitating mass conversion; see Bernard Septimus, "Yitzhaq Arama and Aristotle's *Ethics*," in *Jews and Conversos at the Time of the Expulsion*, eds. Yom Tov Assis and Yosef Kaplan (Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 1999), 1 n.2.

⁶⁶ Seewald, *Arama*, 232.

bends towards a gradual redemption of man from his base, fallen state back to the realm of pure philosophy, for Arama, the fall consists in man's turn towards philosophical overweening; hence the arc of salvation history bends towards redeeming man from his postlapsarian addiction to philosophy and recovering his original, divine philosophical naivete.⁶⁷ Similarly, for Arama following Maimonides, the key episodes in salvation history (and hence many Gates in HQ) revolve around Abraham's development and the revelation at Sinai—though their understandings differ markedly.⁶⁸

As Heller-Wilensky and Seewald have both observed, the style Arama adopts in HQ is far more elegant and concise than that he deploys in his other works. I would further suggest that this difference in style is reflective of a corresponding difference in content: Both stylistically *and* thematically, HQ is easier to digest, more accessible, than AY and Arama's other works. Perhaps this, combined with HQ's relative brevity, is part of the reason that in the past century, scholarly portraits of Arama seem to be based disproportionately on HQ, despite the latter's comprising only a relatively small fraction of Arama's oeuvre.⁶⁹

0.2.2.3. *Commentary on the Megillot*⁷⁰

⁶⁷ See 1.2.2 and 2.3.2 below.

⁶⁸ See 1.2.2., 2.3.2, 3.2.3, 3.3.2.

⁶⁹ This is true not only of Diamond, "Isaac Arama's Nightmare," and Friedman-Kohl, "Ḥazut Qashah," but also of Charles Manekin, "Hebrew Philosophy in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries: An Overview," in *History of Jewish Philosophy*, eds. Daniel Frank and Oliver Leaman (Routledge, 1997), 292–318; Hava Tirosh-Rothschild, "Jewish Philosophy on the Eve of Modernity," in *History of Jewish Philosophy*, eds. Daniel Frank and Oliver Leaman (Routledge, 1997), 438–497; Ari Ackerman, "Jewish Philosophy and Jewish-Christian Philosophical Dialogue in Fifteenth-Century Spain," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, eds. Daniel Frank and Oliver Leaman (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 389 n.33.

⁷⁰ The following summary account draws from Seewald, *Arama*, 242–246, which in turn closely hews to Heller-Wilensky, *Arama*, 31–33. Throughout this dissertation, my references to the commentaries on the *megillot* are to those found in Ḥayyim Pollack's five-volume edition of AY: *Aqedat Yiṣḥaq*, ed. Ḥayyim Yosef Pollack, 5 Volumes (Pressburg: Victor Kittseer, 1849).

Less well-known than either AY or HQ are Arama's six biblical commentaries: one on the book of Proverbs (discussed in the next subsection) and one on each of the five Megillot (scrolls): Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther. Seewald dates Arama's commentaries on the five Megillot to the period surrounding Arama's move to Calatayud, circa 1480.⁷¹ Each of Arama's commentaries on the Megillot follows a similar structure: He introduces each commentary with a brief preface announcing the scroll's Aristotelian "final purpose" and the primary ideas in light of which the scroll will be explained. He connects Song of Song with the idea of Israel's chosenness, Ruth with reward and punishment, Lamentations with repentance, Ecclesiastes with fear, and Esther with providence. The body of each commentary consists of a systematic, line-by-line exposition. As with HQ, and perhaps because the commentaries on the Megillot were likewise composed in between editions of AY, there are many parallels between Arama's discussions in AY and his commentary on the Megillot, and in particular his commentary on Ecclesiastes.⁷² As Heller-Wilensky has noted, in both the first printed edition of the commentary on the Megillot (Riva di Trento, 1561), and in all editions since the first printing in Venice (1573), the commentary on Esther that circulated as Arama's was actually that of his son, Meir Arama.⁷³

0.2.2.4. *Yad Abshalom* (By the Hand of Solomon's Father)⁷⁴

Arama composed his commentary on Proverbs sometime during his time in Calatayud, and specifically sometime after the untimely death of his son-in-law Solomon, in honor of whom he

⁷¹ Seewald, *Arama*, 242.

⁷³ In particular, almost the entirety of AY Gate 33 seems to be drawn from the Commentary on Ecclesiastes.

⁷⁴ The following summary account draws from Seewald, *Arama*, 248–250, which in turn hews closely to Heller-Wilensky, *Arama*, 33. Throughout this dissertation, my references to the *Yad Abshalom* (henceforth: YA) is to Isaac Freiman's edition: *Yad Abshalom*, ed. Isaac Freiman (Leipzig, 1860).

claims to have titled the commentary (*Yad Abshalom* = the hand of Solomon's father). Structurally, YA resembles his commentaries on the Megillot, with an introduction followed by systematic, line-by-line exposition of each Proverb.⁷⁵ In his introduction, Arama singles out some of the main themes he will treat in the course of his commentary and links these to the main themes of Ecclesiastes. He also suggests that he composed YA (like AY) in response to the insufficiency or inadequacy of previous commentaries. In particular, he observes that while many have authored commentaries on Proverbs, their commentaries tend to be of little utility because they interpret the verses in an ad-hoc rather than unified fashion. In contrast, Arama promises to take a systematic approach to Solomon's book, recognizing Proverbs as divided into three parts, intended for four types of children—the wise son, the fool, the scoffer, and the fool of a man.⁷⁶ While the first section (Prov. 1–Prov. 9) speaks to the wise son, and its contents consist of larger units uniting many verses together under a common allegory or theme, the second section (Prov. 10–Prov. 24) is directed towards the other three children, and is formally less cohesive, each verse often representing an atomic moral or didactic principle. The final section (Prov. 25–Prov. 31) is formally a composite of the previous two sections, with an unclear addressee.

0.2.2.5. Other Works

⁷⁵ However, it contains other formal elements as well. For example, while the commentary on Proverbs 8 is framed as a dialogue between Philosophy and Torah, each personified as women, after concluding his commentary on Prov. 22:22, Arama announces that the remaining verses of the second section (i.e., Prov. 22:23–Prov. 24:34) will be presented as a series of twelve general principles or "*kelalot*." As I discuss in 2.3.3 below, throughout the commentary on Proverbs Arama also singles out several verses as the "roots" or "main principles" of the commentary as a whole. In general, YA merits more scholarly attention.

⁷⁶ I thank Professor Caterina Rigo for bringing to my attention that Arama's division of Proverbs as directed at four types of children should be understood in connection with custom of reading Proverbs on the Sabbaths between the Passover and Shavuot, the former of which is of course in turn connected with the four types of sons in the Haggadah.

In addition to the four major works listed above (AY, HQ, Commentary on the Megillot, YA), Seewald has recently addressed the status of several minor works attributed to Arama but of questionable status. He concludes that Abarbanel's suggestion (in his commentary on the *Guide*) that Arama wrote a composition against Maimonides likely refers to an earlier, independent, and less diplomatic version of either the text that came to be incorporated as Gate 8 of HQ or the text that came to be incorporated as Gate 10 of AY.⁷⁷ He concludes that a commentary on the "Blessing for the Sanctification of the Moon" (*Birkat ha-Levanah*) attributed to Arama in two manuscripts was likely a summary of AY Gate 37, composed by a rough contemporary of Arama on the basis of the aforementioned text.⁷⁸ He comes to a similar conclusion about several other brief writings attributed to Arama in manuscripts, which appear to be summaries of various Gates (or parts of Gates) in AY, often focusing on stock responses to Christian polemics. Conversely, Seewald concludes that a brief text entitled "Treatise on the Length of Exile and Coming of the Messiah" found in a single manuscript is in fact in Arama's hand (and focusing on an entirely different subject!) and was likely composed as an independent treatise before being incorporated into AY 99, 88, and HQ 12.⁷⁹ As for the longstanding scholarly question as to whether Arama composed a commentary on Aristotle's *Ethics*, Seewald rejects the standard evidence adduced. He does however suggest that, on the basis of other evidence, it is possible to conclude that Arama composed lengthy commentarial notes on the *Ethics*—though nothing akin to a systematic commentary.⁸⁰ Finally, Seewald has confirmed that, in addition to the poems scattered throughout the introductions and conclusions of Arama's printed works, Arama wrote a

⁷⁷ Seewald, *Arama*, 236–242. I address Arama's stance towards Maimonides in AY Gate 10 in my introduction to my translation of that Gate.

⁷⁸ Seewald, *Arama*, 250–253.

⁷⁹ Seewald, *Arama*, 253–254.

⁸⁰ Seewald, *Arama*, 255–261.

handful of poems (as well as letters), preserved in a manuscript belonging to some of the descendants of the Arama family in Salonika.⁸¹

0.3. Historiographical Overview

As I mentioned in the opening section of this chapter, the past century has witnessed two major monographs on Arama as well as several articles dealing with Arama to various extents.⁸² The two monographs are Sara Heller-Wilensky's 1956 *R. Yiṣḥaq Arama u-Mishnato ha-Filosofit* and Yehuda Seewald's 2023 *Ba'al ha-Aqedah*. I will begin by treating each of these two major monographs in turn, then move to discussing the ways in which scholarship has treated Arama over the past several decades more broadly. I will first discuss prevailing historiographical narratives of fifteenth century Spanish Jewish thought and speculate on why Arama has been relatively neglected in scholarship, and then I will conclude by highlighting trends and outlining aspects of Arama's oeuvre that have been subject to scholarly research.

0.3.1. Heller-Wilensky's Arama

Now already mentioned several times, the first major monograph devoted to Arama—and indeed the only scholarly monograph devoted to him for several decades—was Sara Heller-Wilensky's *R. Yiṣḥaq Arama u-Mishnato ha-Filosofit*, originally published in 1956 on the basis of her doctoral dissertation written under Harry Wolfson. Today Heller-Wilensky's *Arama* is widely

⁸¹ Seewald, *Arama*, 254.

⁸² I do not discuss either Israel Bettan's "The Sermons of Isaac Arama," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 12–13 (1937–8): 583–634 or Chaim Pearl's *The Medieval Jewish Mind: The Religious Philosophy of Isaac Arama* (Valentine, Mitchell, 1971), as in my view, the former was completely eclipsed by Heller-Wilensky's study while the latter is not engaged with the world of scholarship, but rather aims at presenting Arama as a source for contemporary Jewish theology. I also do not treat Baruch Frydman-Kohl's "Ḥazut Qashah: Faith, Felicity, Fidelity in the Thought of Yiṣḥaq Arama," (DHL diss., Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 2005) though I do make occasional reference to Frydman-Kohl's translation of the first six Gates of HQ.

recognized as a classic in the field.⁸³ Nearing seventy years after its initial publication, it remains dazzling in its simultaneous comprehensiveness and concision, presenting a holistic view of Arama's "thought" (as the Hebrew title suggests) in its intellectual-historical context. Heller-Wilensky devotes the first chapter of her work to discussing Arama's biography and bibliography, detailing the historiography on Arama, cataloguing Arama's varied Jewish and non-Jewish sources, and treating Arama's relationships to several key sources—most especially Maimonides, but also Gersonides, Crescas, and Albo. She also treats Arama's relationship to Isaac Abarbanel at length, substantiating the latter's indebtedness to the former (as alleged by Arama's son Meir Arama) on the basis of several examples. As Wolfson's influence or else the English title (*The Philosophy of Isaac Arama in the Framework of Philonic Philosophy*) might suggest,⁸⁴ Heller-Wilensky devotes the remainder of her work to synthesizing and distilling Arama's scattered remarks in order to present a systematic portrait of his "thought" or philosophical viewpoint on several predetermined doctrinal issues: the relationship between Torah and philosophy or faith and reason (chapter 2), the principles of Judaism (chapter 3), creation and cosmology (chapter 4), miracles and providence (chapter 5), the nature and immortality of the soul (chapter 6), free choice and divine knowledge (chapter 7), prophecy (chapter 8), and Torah and ethics (chapter 9).

In both its lucidity and scope, Heller-Wilensky's resulting portrait of Arama has paved the way for all subsequent scholarship—including the present dissertation—to a degree that can

⁸³ Per Eliezer Gutwirth, "Musical Lives: Late Medieval Hispano-Jewish Communities," in *Companion to Music in the Age of the Catholic Monarchs*, ed. Tessa Knighton (Brill, 2017), 584.

⁸⁴ My thanks to Professor Caterina Rigo for drawing my attention in this connection to George Vajda's opening remark in his review of Heller-Wilensky's monograph: "La précision que le titre anglaise du livre de Mme Heller-Wilensky offre en plus du titre hébreu (celui-ci veut dire simplement 'La doctrine d'Isaac Arama') marque à elle seule que le travail est profondément imprégné de l'enseignement du Professor H. A. Wolfson, maître de l'auteur." See George Vajda, *Revue des Études Juives* 15 (1956): 132.

hardly be overstated.⁸⁵ Yet at the same time, from the perspective of recent historiographical and methodological developments, it is difficult to not see how some of the features that have made Heller-Wilensky's study so important and enduring—i.e., its synthetic and a priori (i.e., Wolfsonian) approach—are quite limiting, if not unwittingly distortive. Before detailing my critiques of Heller-Wilensky's approach, however, it is important to first situate Heller-Wilensky in *her* intellectual-historical context—i.e., the landscape of midcentury Jewish Studies—lest I unwittingly impute to her as individual what is undoubtedly the work of far greater and more impersonal forces.

Heller-Wilensky's presentation of Arama must first and foremost be understood in light of the norms and imperatives of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* (Science of Judaism) movement, the nineteenth-century Prussian movement widely considered to be the origin-point of modern academic Jewish Studies.⁸⁶ Bound up in then-contemporary struggles for Jewish emancipation across Europe, expositors of *Wissenschaft* were invested in presenting an image of Judaism as Enlightened, cosmopolitan, and rational; to merit inclusion, Jews (and Jewish history) would need to be remade to meet Protestant ideals.⁸⁷ Part of this remaking meant (re-)presenting

⁸⁵ This is true of not only all the studies cited in note 69 above, but also Herbert Davidson, "Medieval Jewish Philosophy in the Sixteenth Century," in *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Bernard Dov Cooperman (Harvard University Press, 1983), 140–141 n. 24, 29, 30, 37; Colette Sirat, *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge University Press, 1985), 389–392; Menachem Kellner, *Dogma in Medieval Jewish Thought: From Maimonides to Abravanel* (The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1986); Julia Schwartzmann, "Isaac Arama and His Theory of Two Matches (Zivvugim)," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 13:1 (2006): 27–49; and even Bernard Septimus' "Yitzhaq Arama and Aristotle's *Ethics*," in *Jews and Conversos at the Time of the Expulsion*, eds. Yom Tov Assis and Yosef Kaplan (Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 1999), 1–24.

⁸⁶ For the *Wissenschaft* movement, see especially the essays in Ismar Schorsch, *From Text to Context: The Turn to History in Modern Judaism* (Brandeis University Press, 1994); and Ismar Schorsch, "Better a Scholar than a Prophet": *Studies on the Creation of Jewish Studies* (Mohr Siebeck, 2021). See also See James Diamond and Aaron Hughes, "Introduction: Encountering the Medieval in Modern Jewish Thought," in *Encountering the Medieval in Modern Jewish Thought*, eds. James A. Diamond and Aaron W. Hughes (Brill, 2012), 1–16; Aaron W. Hughes, "'Medieval' and the Politics of Nostalgia: Ideology, Scholarship, and the Creation of the Rational Jew," in *Encountering the Medieval in Modern Jewish Thought*, 17–40; Aaron W. Hughes, "Encountering Tradition: The Search for a Jewish Essence," in *The Study of Judaism*, 39–56.

⁸⁷ See above. Hughes' citation and analysis of Harry Wolfson's remarks in *The Study of Judaism*, 10, are especially illuminating.

the history of Jewish thought—and medieval Spain, Sefarad, was a favored site—as Jewish philosophy, intelligible on the same lines and categories as other world philosophies, though emphasizing the unique Jewish “contribution.”⁸⁸ This imperative to rationalize Jewish thought had countless ramifications for how scholars presented Jewish thinkers and Jewish texts, many of which, as I will discuss, endure to the present day. The two that are most salient to Heller-Wilensky’s presentation of Arama, however, can be understood as relating to form and content, respectively. In particular, *Wissenschaft*’s imperative to rationalize Judaism meant (1) that scholars tend(ed) to prefer texts that assumed the form of systematic, discursive philosophy/science to texts assuming the form of commentary, and when studying the latter, tend(ed) to discipline these into a more rational, discursive form through systematization (form). Relatedly, it also meant that (2) that scholars tend(ed) to focus on thinkers’ treatment of predetermined philosophical and theological topoi (content).

Both of these ramifications/tendencies are very much at work in and, I believe, constitute major limitations of Heller-Wilensky’s study of Arama. Taking each in turn, and beginning with the formal dimension, it seems to me that Heller-Wilensky’s synthetic/systematic presentation of Arama is limited in that it fundamentally abstracts his “ideas” from the chief literary form in which he developed them, namely, scriptural exegesis—exegetically rich and complex sermons (in the case of AY) and biblical commentary (in the case of the Commentary on the Megillot and YA). Apart from HQ, which as mentioned comprises only a very slight portion of Arama’s oeuvre, Arama *did not* write systematic philosophical or theological treatises, as did many of his peers and predecessors. He chose to develop his ideas in traditional frameworks, tethered in the first and last to classical sources—Torah and Rabbinic literature. As I will argue in a later

⁸⁸ See especially Schorsch, “The Myth of Sephardic Supremacy,” in *From Text to Context*; Hughes, “‘Medieval’ and the Politics of Nostalgia,” 29–32.

chapter, for Arama exegesis was far more than mere literary form or structure, disposable husk containing an idea. Deeply immersed in both Aristotelian metaphysics and medieval scriptural hermeneutics, Arama knew that form was inextricable from matter/content. He understood scriptural exegesis to be the primary site of ideological and cultural contestation and, beyond mere form and even method, deployed it as the core substance or matter of his most original thought. But even prior to analyzing the value Arama places on exegesis, recent methodological developments in the study of Medieval Jewish Philosophy insist that we must take Arama's choice of literary form into account in any attempt to understand him on his own terms, in his intellectual-historical context.

In recent decades, a contingent of scholars have begun to shepherd the field away from one of the longstanding and ultimately apologetic norms outlined above, namely, a tendency to denigrate commentary as an inferior literary form and discipline it into something more discursive and rational (when dignifying it with study at all).⁸⁹ In their recent volume on *Medieval Jewish Philosophy and its Literary Forms*, Aaron Hughes and James Robinson insist that rather than “make Jews rational [] to show how Jewish philosophy coincide[s] with various species of non-Jewish rationalism,” the study of Medieval Jewish Philosophy should instead take seriously “the ways in which ideas [] are presented, articulated, and developed” since in the last analysis “the only meaning that philosophy can have is through the various literary genres that provide it form.”⁹⁰ Following Hughes' and Robinson's injunction, the present study seeks to respond to Heller-Wilensky's synthetic/systematic but ultimately abstracting presentation by restoring Arama's ideas to their exegetical literary form.

⁸⁹ Scholars pioneering this shift include Sara Klein-Braslavy, Zev Harvey, Aviezer Ravitzky, James T. Robinson, and Caterina Rigo, among others. See notes 131 and 133 below.

⁹⁰ Aaron W. Hughes and James T. Robinson, “Introduction,” in *Medieval Jewish Philosophy and Its Literary Forms*, eds. Aaron W. Hughes and James T. Robinson (Indiana University Press, 2019), 1–6.

Linked to both this first/formal limitation and the intellectual-historical context of midcentury Jewish Studies that produced it is Heller-Wilensky's second/substantive limitation, namely, her presentation of Arama's thought through the lens of the a priori/predetermined topics limned above. This aspect of Heller-Wilensky's presentation can of course more directly be traced back to her advisor Harry Wolfson, one of whose major theses was that all Jewish philosophy from Philo through Spinoza is concerned with a fixed set of perennial philosophical and theological topoi.⁹¹ To merit intelligibility and inclusion as a philosopher on this construal, a figure must be principally concerned with the given set of topoi; thus to render Arama a worthy object of study is to demonstrate that he is principally concerned with the given set of topoi. The problem with this imperative is that, by predetermining what topics are important and which are by consequence not, it obviates alternative considerations of a figure's topical concerns. While no student of medieval Jewish philosophy would doubt that the issues that Heller-Wilensky, following Wolfson, singles out are important—e.g., creation, the nature and immortality of the soul, prophecy, providence, etc.—prima facie assuming their import promotes a universal and uniform view of medieval Jewish philosophy rather than allowing for organic distinctions to emerge between figures. Did certain figures or texts dwell on certain dogmatic issues more than others? Did some concern themselves with these ostensibly dogmatic issues not so much at all? Wolfson's Philonic approach, adopted by Heller-Wilensky, discourages asking let alone answering such questions.

Arama did of course treat all the dogmatic issues that Heller-Wilensky's Philonic approach insists upon. Further, Heller-Wilensky deserves additional credit for careful attention to Arama's idiosyncrasies beyond the confines imposed by the Philonic approach. To name just

⁹¹ Harry A. Wolfson, *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, 2 volumes (Harvard University Press, 1947).

three examples, in the chapter on Torah and Ethics, she discusses Arama's theory of a distinct order of Torah virtues; in the chapter on Prophecy, she briefly discusses Arama's theory of Jewish chosenness; and in the introductory chapter, she catalogues the distinctly non-philosophical and non-classical folk sources from which Arama draws several parables.⁹² But even so, her adoption of a Philonic approach ultimately forces her to assimilate Arama to a normative ideal of medieval Jewish philosopher at the expense of recognizing which themes seem to be most important to him—both those included in and those excluded by the a priori Philonic paradigm.

A final limitation of Heller-Wilensky's portrayal of Arama concerns Arama's relationship to philosophy and is in some sense an outgrowth of both the formal and substantive limitations limned above and. In particular, in attempting to systematically situate Arama within a rigid, formalistic medieval Jewish philosophy and focus on his discursive position with respect to a priori themes abstracted from their organic exegetical presentation, Heller-Wilensky unwittingly overemphasizes the anti-philosophical dimensions of Arama's oeuvre against the philosophical. More specifically, inaugurating a trend that is echoed throughout most subsequent scholarship, Heller-Wilensky suggests that Arama's polemics against philosophy, critiques of philosophers, and emphasis on the importance of subjugating philosophy to Torah are ultimately conspire to a wholesale and simplistic rejection of philosophy as such, rather than appreciating the ways that Arama is deeply steeped in philosophical texts and traditions, incorporating these into his exegesis even as he disciplines and reforms them. This comes through in myriad ways: in Heller-Wilensky's explicit introduction of Arama as arch anti-philosopher; in her recurring

⁹² For the discussion on Arama's theory of Torah virtues, see Heller-Wilensky, *Arama*, 191–205; for the discussion of Arama's theory of chosenness, see Heller-Wilensky, *Arama*, 175–6, for the catalogue of parables, see Heller-Wilensky, *Arama*, 41.

emphasis on Arama's polemic against the philosophizers especially as developed in *Hazut Qahsah*; in the centrality she assigns to Arama's "principles" of Judaism, and in her recurrent emphases on Arama's polemics against Maimonides on various issues of dogma.⁹³ Though at points Heller-Wilensky's remarks indicate that she in fact recognized the extent to which Arama was embedded within diverse philosophical traditions, the Arama that emerges from her pages ultimately seems to merit the status of medieval Jewish philosopher only to the extent that he was the medieval Jewish *anti*-philosopher par excellence.⁹⁴ Indeed, despite Heller-Wilensky's own ambivalence on the issue, it is this aspect of her portrayal of Arama—i.e., her depiction of Arama as anti-philosopher—that has gone on to have the greatest influence on virtually all subsequent Arama scholarship, such that most scholarly characterizations of Arama as anti-philosophical, anti-rational, anti-Maimonidean, and conservative have continue to be commonplace. Following Heller-Wilensky, most subsequent studies of Arama have taken his polemics against philosophy as a simplistic rejection of philosophy as such, rather than seeing the ways in which Arama very much integrates and stands within the tradition of medieval Jewish philosophy even as he critiques it.

0.3.2. Seewald's Arama

Yehuda Seewald's 2023 *Ba'al ha-Aqedah* is the first monograph-length study of Arama in Hebrew since Heller-Wilensky's. Building off Heller-Wilensky's study, Seewald's treatment of Arama also goes far beyond it, breaking new ground in every imaginable area. Because Seewald's advances in the study of Arama are so numerous, and because—owing to both its recentness and religious provenance—his study has received virtually no attention in the world

⁹³ See Heller-Wilensky, *Arama*, 16–26, 43–44, 48, 78ff.

⁹⁴ See especially Heller-Wilensky, *Arama*, 48, 58–70.

of academic Jewish Studies, I will provide a basic outline of his study, highlighting major advances along the way. Seewald's study is broken up into two main parts; the first part, which comprises the bulk of the study (pp. 3–570), is an extremely detailed intellectual biography, while the second part (pp. 571–746) consists of Seewald's extensive manuscript and editorial work on a critical edition. I will focus here on discussing the first part, which is divided into sixteen chapters, each with several subsections.

In the first lengthy chapter, Seewald fleshes out the heretofore meagre details of Arama's biography by substantiating Arama's self-described itinerary through the cities of Castile and Aragon with external evidence; providing historical, sociological, and economic background on the cities in which Arama stayed; and reconstructing the timeline of Arama's major compositions and epistolary exchanges. Moving through the remaining major episodes of Arama's life—i.e., the expulsion from Spain and move to Italy—in the second and third chapters, in the fourth chapter, Seewald gives a lengthy account of Arama's genealogical descendants up to the present day, and in the fifth chapter, he discusses the status of several minor texts attributed to Arama (in turn the basis for my discussion above). Seewald devotes the sixth and longest chapter to a discussion of main themes in Arama's thought. Here, the author's freedom from the constraints of Heller-Wilensky's a priori Philonic categories really shines through. Though like Heller-Wilensky, Seewald treats Arama's understandings of the "principles" (6.2), miracles and providence (6.6), the nature and immortality of the soul (6.8), prophecy (6.9), and knowledge and free-choice (6.10), his perspective allows him to highlight other dimensions of Arama's thought either underplayed or altogether neglected by Heller-Wilensky: e.g., Arama's construal of fear as chief virtue (6.3), preoccupation with whether the spheres have souls (6.5), theory of the "cosmic melody" (6.7), emphasis on the importance of and methods for Torah study (6.11),

explication of Ps. 67 (6.12), law of large numbers (6.13), and conceptualization of forced converts (6.14). In the following chapter seven, Seewald details and discusses several of Arama's allegories signaled but not substantively discussed by Heller-Wilensky. Chapters eight, nine, and ten are all relatively brief, dealing with Arama's relationship to (philosophical) "investigation," the formal structure of *Aqedat Yish'aq*, and Arama's Jewish sources, respectively. Chapters eleven through fourteen represent another major advance in Arama studies. In these chapters, Seewald systematically details the reception history of Arama from the first printings of AY through the present day, treating Arama's influence on the generation of the expulsion, Ashkenazi intellectuals in the early modern era, the pioneers of Hasidic literature, and even modern-day luminaries, all by individual.

As with Heller-Wilensky, it would be difficult to overstate the immensity of Seewald's contribution to the study of Arama, which is as impressive in its attention to detail as it is in the humbling breadth of its scope. And together with Heller-Wilensky's study, Seewald's will undoubtedly serve as a basis for all future studies of Arama—as it has for the present dissertation. Yet its enormous contributions notwithstanding, Seewald's study is at times limited by its tendency towards pietism. Seewald's pietistic bent is suggested superficially by his subtitling practices, which belie his assessment of a strong parallel between Arama and the biblical Abraham.⁹⁵ More substantively, Seewald's pietistic bent makes itself known through subtle interpretations, emphases, and omissions. To name just one example of each: Seewald's various accounts of how Arama came to be attributed with a composition against Maimonides all forestall the possibility that Arama ultimately ascribed a theologically radical position to

⁹⁵ See "Table of Contents," in Seewald, *Arama*, 7-3

Maimonides, in the absence of literary evidence militating as much (interpretation);⁹⁶ Seewald's thematic treatment of Arama emphasizes the latter's piety (emphases);⁹⁷ and Seewald's treatment of sources largely focuses on Arama's (native) Jewish sources as opposed to (foreign) non-Jewish sources (omission).⁹⁸

0.3.3. Arama in/and Fifteenth Century Spanish-Jewish Thought in the Contemporary Imaginary

As previously mentioned, apart from the landmark studies of Heller-Wilensky and Seewald, scholarly attention paid to Arama over the past century has with few exceptions been remarkably slim, especially given his enormous traditional stature. This can in part be explained by a conjunction of the field's roots in the *Wissenschaft* movement, as described in the previous section, and longstanding historiographical consensuses around fifteenth century Spanish Jewish thought more generally. In the early twentieth century, historians of Judaism advanced a narrative that the final century of Jewish life in Spain, from the 1391 massacres to the expulsion in 1492, was marked by unabating social, political, and intellectual decline.⁹⁹ Though in the past three decades or so, social historians especially have done much work to revise and complicate this schematic portrait, the old narrative has continued to shape the contours of medieval Jewish

⁹⁶ Seewald, *Arama*, 236–242. I address Arama's stance towards Maimonides in AY Gate 10 in my introduction to my translation of that Gate.

⁹⁷ Some of the elements of Arama's thought on which Seewald focuses are his "Definition of Pure Faith," "Principles of Faith," conceptions of "Fear as the Root of Faith and the Whole Torah," "Verity of Creation and Contingency of Ethics on Torah," "Miracles and Providence," "Quiddity and Perdurance of the Soul," "Prophecy and the Holy Spirit," "Knowledge and Free-Choice," "Torah Study and Methods for Recollection," "Relation to Forced Converts and Significance of the Exile and Troubles in Spain."

⁹⁸ Seewald, *Arama*, 461–488.

⁹⁹ To name only some of the most prominent examples, this idea is expressed in Heinrich Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden von den ältesten Zeiten bis auf die Gegenwart*, 11 vols. (1853–1876) (already in the nineteenth century); Isaac Husik, *A History of Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (Jewish Publication Society of America, 1916); Julius Guttmann, *Philosophies of Judaism: The History of Jewish Philosophy from Biblical Times to Franz Rosenzweig*, trans. David W. Silverman (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1964; original German 1916); and Yitzhak Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 2 vols. translated by Louis Schoffman (Jewish Publication Society of America, 1963; original Hebrew 1945)—this latter developed in part in reaction to Salo Baron's learned attack on the so-called "lachrymose conception" of Jewish history.

intellectual history.¹⁰⁰ Especially given the field's roots in *Wissenschaft* and the latter's investment in emphasizing both the rationalistic and "original" dimensions of medieval Jewish thought, scholars of medieval Jewish intellectual history have long passed over fifteenth century Spanish Jewish thought, dismissing it as both "conservative" and derivative as compared with the fruits of earlier centuries.¹⁰¹ Thus the two great *Wissenschaft* studies of the early twentieth century, Isaac Husik's *A History of Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (1915) and Julius Guttman's *The Philosophy of Judaism* (1933), both characterize the fifteenth century as a period of unqualified decline, linking deteriorations in Jewish political, social, and economic life to degraded intellectual output.¹⁰² Accordingly, Crescas is the last medieval thinker to be treated

¹⁰⁰ See especially Mark D. Meyerson, *A Jewish Renaissance in Fifteenth-Century Spain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

¹⁰¹ See e.g.,

"Those philosophers whom we do know, even those who themselves were criticized by conservatives, often present their position as a moderate middle ground and attack extremists (usually called *ha-mitpalsefim*) whom they reject because they misuse philosophy." —Marc Saperstein, "The Social and Cultural Context: Thirteenth to Fifteenth Centuries," in *History of Jewish Philosophy*, eds. Daniel Frank and Oliver Leaman, (Routledge, 1997), 294;

"By contrast to the naturalism of the Jewish philosophers of thirteenth-and fourteenth-century Spain, the Jewish philosophers of fifteenth-century Spain more selectively borrowed ideas from the Islamic philosophers. Only ideas that were compatible with—or even supportive of—their conservative philosophical outlook were taken on." —Ackerman, "Jewish Philosophy and Jewish-Christian Dialogue," 379

¹⁰² Despite having been penned over/nearly a century ago, the following two excerpts from Husik and Guttman encapsulate enduring scholarly consensus around fifteenth century Spanish Jewish philosophy, and I believe partially explain persistent neglect thereof:

"The rationalistic movement in medieval Jewry" finds "its decline in Spain and southern France in the fifteenth century....To complete the picture it will suffice to say that as the political and economic conditions of the Jews in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries deteriorates, and freedom and toleration were succeeded by persecution and expulsion, the Jews became more zealous for their own spiritual heritage as distinguished from foreign importations; philosophy and rationalism began to be regarded askance, particularly as experience showed that scientific training was not favorable to Jewish steadfastness and loyalty. In suffering and persecution those who stick to their posts were as a rule not the so-called enlightened who played with foreign learning, but the simple folk who believed in Torah and tradition in the good old style...The second half of the fourteenth and the fifteenth century were not favorable to philosophical studies among the Jews, and the few here and there who still show and interest...are not of any great influence on the development of Judaism." — Isaac Husik, *A History of Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, 428–9

"With Crescas the productive era of Jewish philosophy of the Middle Ages came to an end. What followed did not equal it either as continuation or counterstatement. The philosophic work of the fifteenth century was primarily an eclectic utilization of the traditional theories. The thinkers of the period differed from each other principally in the way in which they made these combinations. Among them we find extremely erudite men, as we see from the various commentaries on Maimonides and

seriously by both Husik and Guttman.¹⁰³ While Husik also pays serious attention to Albo and relegates his treatment of all other fifteenth-century thinkers to brief remarks in his conclusion (of Arama he notes only “He was also interested in Kabbalah and placed Jewish revelation above philosophy”¹⁰⁴), in his chapter on the “End and Aftereffects” of Medieval Jewish Philosophy, Guttman confers sustained attention to Simeon b. Zemach Duran and Albo as dogmatists, mentions Joseph ibn Shem Tob in passing, and proclaims Jewish philosophy in Spain to end with Abarbanel, passing over Arama entirely.¹⁰⁵

Hardly confined to early twentieth-century scholarship, the foregoing conceptualization of fifteenth-century Spanish Jewish philosophy as relatively impoverished has been echoed by scholars, both unqualifiedly and with some modifications, through the end of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. Unqualified echoes can be found in the work of Herbert Davidson and Charles Manekin. Both characterize fifteenth-century Spanish Jewish philosophy as “conservative,” Manekin explicitly connecting this conservatism “to the spiritual crisis in the Spanish-Jewish community.”¹⁰⁶ What’s more, even as both dismiss fifteenth-century Spanish Jewish thought for its relative “conservatism” (and in the case of Davidson, derivativeness) writ

Averroes. The frightful pressure under which Spanish Jewry, the foremost bearers of Jewish philosophy, lived during the fifteenth century precluded any productive or original philosophic work. To these persecutions and pressures we can at least partially attribute the more conservative bent of thought that became characteristic of the period. There was not a trace of that boldness which marked the spread of the philosophic enlightenment through the Jewish world in the period between Maimonides and Gersonides. Philosophy now displayed a definite tendency toward orthodoxy, and rejected the possibility of the more latitudinarian views of the older Jewish Aristotelians; it was marked by a fundamental change in the spiritual atmosphere in which it developed...More pressing than the philosophic justification of Judaism was the need of Jewish apologetics against Christianity, and this gave philosophic work and entirely different focus and direction.” — Julius Guttman, *Philosophies of Judaism*, 275–276

¹⁰³ Husik, *A History of Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, 406, notes: “of the post-Maimonidean philosophers Crescas is the last who contributes original views of philosophic value.”

¹⁰⁴ Husik, *A History of Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, 430.

¹⁰⁵ Guttman, *Philosophies of Judaism*, 276–291.

¹⁰⁶ Manekin, “Hebrew Philosophy in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries,” 294; Davidson, “Medieval Jewish Philosophy in the Sixteenth Century,” 108–111.

large, both—likely influenced by Heller-Wilensky’s study—still single Arama out among his peers, condemning him as the most conservative among conservatives, and hence the most deserving of contempt/dismissal. Though Manekin initially singles out Profiat Duran, Hasdai Crescas, Simeon b. Zemach Duran, Isaac Albo, Abraham Bibago, Abraham Shalom, Isaac Abarbanel and Arama as all representative of fifteenth century Spanish conservatism, he attributes only Arama with “the ultimate devaluation of rational knowledge in favor of *emunah*,” for “Arama views the latter not only as superior but as often contrary to reason.”¹⁰⁷ Similarly, contrasting him with Bibago, Manekin implicitly characterizes Arama as “stridently anti-philosophical.”¹⁰⁸ Davidson, for his part, locates Arama at the “extreme right” of his imagined spectrum.¹⁰⁹

In both Davidson and Manekin then we see the two major and interlinking tendencies that have characterized/haunted the scant scholarship on Arama after Heller-Wilensky and therein discouraged further scholarship on him: i.e., an overemphasis on Arama’s “conservatism” or “anti-philosophical” bent, coupled with a fundamental dismissal of Arama’s originality. Said differently, as scholars, following Heller-Wilensky, have construed Arama’s polemics against philosophy as tantamount to a simplistic rejection of philosophy (rather than noticing the ways in which Arama deeply, strategically, and creatively engages with philosophy even while critiquing it—), Arama has come to serve as a sort of stand-in for the worst aspects of fifteenth century Spanish-Jewish thought according to the enduring *Wissenschaft* imaginary:¹¹⁰ conservative, unoriginal, evidence of decline, and therefore unworthy of serious scholarly attention.

¹⁰⁷ Manekin, “Hebrew Philosophy in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries,” 297.

¹⁰⁸ Manekin, “Hebrew Philosophy in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries,” 298.

¹⁰⁹ Davidson, “Medieval Jewish Philosophy in the Sixteenth Century,” 108–112.

¹¹⁰ Though my general argument is that Arama has been ignored/overlooked in part because he has been presumed to represent the features of fifteenth century Spanish Jewish thought most inimical to enduring *Wissenschaft* ideals, it is worth noting that even Yitzhaq Baer and Moshe Idel, scholars whose ideals and investments in many ways directly oppose those of *Wissenschaft*, paint a similar portrait of Arama. In his *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*

These tendencies can be seen across the scholarly spectrum. Working with a more nuanced picture of fifteenth century Spanish-Jewish intellectual life than their early twentieth century predecessors, Ben Zion Netanyahu, Colette Sirat, and Hava Tirosh-Samuelson all resist collapsing the final century of Jewish life in Spain and recognize a similar distinction: namely, a revival of philosophic activity among Spanish Jews in the mid to late fifteenth century. Even so, they all similarly express ambivalence about Arama's position in this renaissance. Netanyahu, a social historian mostly interested in Marranism, maintains Arama was one of several late fifteenth century figures attempting to restore relations between "Judaism" and "Philosophy" (against midcentury figures who were unequivocally hostile), but simultaneously insists that Arama (unlike some of his peers) "violently attacked Greek thought," and viewed the contemporary "upsurge of Averroistic learning....[as] a threat to Jewish existence in Spain."¹¹¹ Above all, Netanyahu depicts Arama as a harsh critic of philosophy and its corrosive effects on Jewish communal life.¹¹² Meanwhile Sirat, an intellectual historian, paints a similar portrait of Arama as both thoroughgoing anti-philosopher and philosophically derivative: Though she concedes space to Arama in her *History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, she qualifies that even as compared with e.g., Joseph ibn Shem Tob, Arama is "of unequal philosophical interest," and later proclaims that "from the purely philosophical point of view Arama is hardly original."¹¹³ To the extent she is compelled to discuss him at all, Arama is for Sirat only a critic of philosophy: "in contrast to Abraham Shalom [], Arama does not hesitate to criticize Maimonides. For him, the superiority of religious truth over human reason is never in doubt;"

II:254, Baer praises Arama as purveyor of "spiritual transformation" and paragon of fifteenth century complainants against Averroism's corrosive effects.

¹¹¹ Ben Zion Netanyahu, *The Marranos of Spain: From the Late Fourteenth to the Early Sixteenth Century, According to Contemporary Hebrew Sources* (American Academy for Jewish Research, 1966), 135–6 n.1, n.3.

¹¹² Netanyahu, *The Marranos of Spain*, 139.

¹¹³ Sirat, *Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, 384.

and similarly, “Arama inveighs against the scholars of his time who base faith on the intellect and on human reason.”¹¹⁴ With Netanyahu and Sirat, Hava Tirosh-Samuelson not only recognizes a period of renewed “cultural rebuilding” in the 1430s, but insists more broadly on a framework of shifting emphases and a “new synthesis of faith and reason” against earlier scholarly narratives of unqualified fifteenth century intellectual decline.¹¹⁵ Even so, with the more generous perspective of a scholar specializing in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Tirosh-Rothschild still singles out Arama and Yosef Yaabetz alone for their “antiphilosophic sentiments”¹¹⁶ Finally, Mauro Zonta, whose work on Hebrew Scholasticism is single-handedly most responsible for fleshing out our understanding of this late fifteenth century philosophical upsurge, treats not only Abraham Bibago and Abraham Shalom, but also the less known figures of Baruch ibn Ya’ish and Eli Habilio extensively, while omitting Arama from the picture entirely—no doubt because Zonta is interested in the history of philosophy and science in a narrow/technical sense, and Arama’s works do not make the formal/generic cut.¹¹⁷ So much then for the image of Arama—as conservative, unoriginal—that has long prevailed in scholarship, no doubt underwriting his continued dismissal.

What is perhaps most striking is that neglect of Arama has persisted even as a flurry of recent scholarship on fifteenth century Spanish-Jewish thought has upset longstanding trends.¹¹⁸ In the past several years, a handful of scholars have not only researched thinkers writing in the generation of the Expulsion but have concentrated on these thinkers’ exegetical works specifically: Chaim Neria’s dissertation focused on Joseph b. Shem Tob’s commentary on the

¹¹⁴ Sirat, *Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, 390.

¹¹⁵ Tirosh-Rothschild, “Jewish Philosophy on the Eve of Modernity,” 441–442, 445.

¹¹⁶ Tirosh-Samuelson, “The Ultimate End of Human Life in Postexpulsion Philosophic Literature,” in *Crisis and Creativity in the Sephardic World, 1391–1648*, ed. Benjamin R. Gampel (Columbia University Press, 1997), 228.

¹¹⁷ Mauro Zonta, *Hebrew Scholasticism in the Fifteenth Century: A History and Source Book* (Springer, 2006).

¹¹⁸ I thank Professor Caterina Rigo for bringing this to my attention.

Ethics, and a subsequent study he has since published focus on the sermons of late fifteenth century Sefarad.¹¹⁹ Meanwhile, both Cedric Cohen-Skalli's and even more so David ben Zazon's studies of Isaac Abarbanel have highlighted the latter's exegetical efforts.¹²⁰ Moving earlier into the fifteenth century, Maud Kozodoy has lavished unprecedented attention on the corpus of Profiat Duran (Efodi), including the exegetical dimensions of his work, while Yosi Yisraeli has written abundantly on the exegetical nuances and complexities of Pablo de Santa Maria or Paul of Burgos.¹²¹ Yet even as these scholars' work has indicated a broader shift in the field, so towering a figure as Arama continues to be passed over.

0.3.4. Arama in Twenty and Twenty-First Century Scholarship: Assorted Themes

The scholars that have treated Arama with any degree of seriousness have thus been few and far between and have generally only concentrated on select aspects of Arama's oeuvre, presenting an ad-hoc rather than holistic picture. Seymour Feldman and Menachem Kellner have both treated isolated aspects of Arama's thought in the course of discussing of broader phenomena.

For Feldman, Arama is part of a broader fifteenth century "Crescas-Kritik"—one of several fifteenth century figures critical of Ḥasdai Crescas' determinism.¹²² Thus while Feldman presents

¹¹⁹ Chaim Neria, "'It Cannot Be Valued with the Gold of Ophir': Rabbi. Joseph b. Shem Tob's Commentary on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*: Sources and Analysis" (PhD diss., The University of Chicago, 2015); Chaim Neria, "The Sermon in Late Medieval Jewish Thought as Method for Popularizing Philosophy," in *Medieval Jewish Philosophy and its Literary Forms*, eds. Aaron W. Hughes and James T. Robinson (Indiana University Press, 2019), 288–312.

¹²⁰ Cohen-Skalli, trans. Avi Kallenbach, *Don Isaac Abravanel; David Ben-Zazon, Perplexed are They: A Journey Through Abarbanel's Exegesis of the Guide of the Perplexed* (Ben-Tzvi Institute, 2015).

¹²¹ Maud Kozodoy, *The Secret Faith of Maestre Honoratus: Profayt Duran and Jewish Identity in Late Medieval Iberia* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015); Yosi Yisraeli, "Constructing and Undermining Converso Jewishness: Profiat Duran and Pablo de Santa Maria," in *Religious Conversion: History, Experience, and Meaning*, eds. Ira Katznelson and Miri Rubin (Routledge, 2014), 185–215; Yosi Yisraeli, "A Christianized Sephardic Critique of Rashi's Peshat in Pablo de Santa Maria's Additiones," in *Medieval Exegesis and Religious Difference: Commentary, Conflict, and Community in the Premodern Mediterranean*, ed. Ryan Szpiech (Fordham University Press, 2015), 128–141.

¹²² Seymour Feldman, "A Debate Concerning Determinism in Late Medieval Jewish Philosophy," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 51 (1984): 15–54.

a compelling, synthetic account of Arama's conceptualization of "choice," and his critique of Crescas' conceptualization of the same, the rest of Arama falls to the wayside, beyond the scope of Feldman's study. Similarly, Kellner treats Arama both as an instance in the history of medieval Jewish dogmatics and as one of Gersonides' "cultured despisers."¹²³ In these contexts, Kellner presents similarly compelling, synthetic accounts of Arama's theory of the six principles of Judaism and Arama's critique of Gersonides' account of the miracle of the sun standing still at Gibeon, but again the rest of Arama lies beyond the scope of his studies.

Isolated treatments of various themes in Arama's oeuvre have appeared more recently in one study by Esperanza Alfonso and two studies by Julia Schwartzmann.¹²⁴ While both Schwartzmann and Alfonso discuss Arama's conceptualization of the *ishah zarah* (strange woman) of Proverbs, Schwartzmann also elaborates Arama's theory of *zivvugim*, or "matches." Though Schwartzmann's and Alfonso's studies are, like Feldman's and Kellner's, again limited to treatment of an isolated theme, it is worth noting that, contra Feldman's and Kellner's, they present a less abstract/synthetic picture and move towards restoring Arama to his organic form by focusing on his exegesis. Additionally, rather than focusing on strictly philosophical or theological themes of predetermined import (free will, principles, miracles), Schwartzmann's and Alfonso's studies both take as their themes subjects of seemingly unique or special import to Arama.

Highlighting even more so Arama's exegetical dimensions are three recent studies, two by James Robinson and one by James Diamond. While Robinson's studies focus on *longue durée*

¹²³ Menachem Kellner, "Gersonides and His Cultured Despisers: Arama and Abravanel," *The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 6 (1976), 269–296; Menachem Kellner, *Dogma in Medieval Jewish Thought*, 159–161.

¹²⁴ Esperanza Alfonso, "Late Medieval Readings of the Strange Woman in Proverbs," in *Medieval Exegesis and Religious Difference: Commentary, Conflict, and Community in the Premodern Mediterranean*, ed. Ryan Szpiech (Fordham University Press, 2015), 187–199; Julia Schwartzmann, "Gender Concepts of Medieval Jewish Thinkers and the Book of Proverbs," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 7, no. 3 (2000): 183–202; Julia Schwartzmann, "Isaac Arama and His Theory of Two Matches (Zivvugim)."

trends in philosophical-allegorical exegesis and are not devoted substantially to Arama, by including Arama in those studies, Robinson suggests not only that Arama must be understood, in the final analysis, as exegete, but moreover that even qua anti-philosophical reactionary, Arama is still reliant and in some way building upon the Maimonidean philosophical tradition.¹²⁵ James Diamond's study, by contrast, is wholly devoted to Arama, and in particular to developing an account of Arama's pointed anti-Maimonideanism as it emerges through his exegesis of both the Fall and Abraham narratives.¹²⁶ Though Diamond's study, like Robinson's, undoubtedly highlights Arama as exegete and might additionally be read against the grain as indicating Arama's reliance on Maimonides even as he subverts him, on the surface Diamond very much reinscribes and reiterates the standard scholarly consensus since Heller-Wilensky that Arama's polemics against philosophy are tantamount to his wholesale and simplistic rejection of philosophy and thus that Arama is anti-philosophical, anti-rational, the foil to Maimonides and medieval rationalism more broadly—that Arama stands against the tradition of medieval Jewish philosophy rather than complexly within it. This is in no small part because Diamond seems to base his analysis of Arama almost entirely off HQ to the exclusion of Arama's other works. Indeed, in this regard Diamond is, far from the exception, rather the rule; most of the aforementioned twentieth century scholarship that dismisses Arama outright as a “conservative” or anti-philosophical seems to be taking its bearings disproportionately from HQ, wherein Arama undoubtedly lambasts the “philosophizers,” and which features prominently in the early chapters of Heller-Wilensky's monograph. Though as mentioned earlier, Heller-Wilensky generally

¹²⁵ James T. Robinson, “Philosophy and Science in Medieval Jewish Commentaries on the Bible,” in *Science in Medieval Jewish Cultures*, ed. Gad Freudenthal (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 454–475; James T. Robinson, “On or Above the Ladder? Maimonidean and Anti-Maimonidean Readings of Jacob's Ladder,” in *Interpreting Maimonides: Critical Essays*, eds. Charles H. Manekin and Daniel Davies (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 85–98.

¹²⁶ Diamond, “Isaac Arama's Nightmare.”

overemphasized Arama's anti-rationalistic and anti-philosophical dimensions, construing Arama's polemics against philosophy as a total rejection of it, a few of her scattered remarks indicate that, despite her own generalizations, she may have held more ambivalent views on Arama's relationship to philosophy, recognizing the depth and complexity of Arama's relationship to Maimonides at least to some extent. In contrast, even the most attentive of subsequent studies have tended to bypass this crucial caveat—i.e., the complexity of Arama's relationship to philosophy—focused as they have been on narrower topical issues.

The one major exception in this connection is Bernard Septimus' 1980 study "Yitzhaq Arama and Aristotle's *Ethics*."¹²⁷ As the title suggests, Septimus' study is, like all the others mentioned, necessarily topical in that it is only article-length, but its topic, rather than a specific philosophical, theological, or exegetical theme, is methodological, namely, delineating Arama's complex relationship with Aristotle's *Ethics*—the text he cites most frequently after the Bible, Rabbinic literature, and Maimonides' *Guide*. By focusing on Arama's diverse uses of and relations to a single philosophical text, Septimus begins to flesh out what Heller-Wilensky alluded to, but what was ultimately overshadowed in her work, then eclipsed entirely in all subsequent scholarship: that far from simple anti-philosopher, Arama is deeply steeped in philosophical traditions and understands them, at different points, to lie in varying, complex relation to scripture. Indeed, challenging Heller-Wilensky's overemphasis on Arama's anti-rationalist or anti-philosophical dimensions, Septimus' analyses stress Arama's positive integrations of Aristotle into his understanding of the Torah's approach to law and justice, providence, human temperance, and the relationship between theoretical and practical reason. In

¹²⁷ Septimus' "Yitzhaq Arama and Aristotle's *Ethics*."

its exacting analysis and attention to the complexity of Arama's relationship with his sources, Septimus' study is exemplary.

0.4. Approach of the Present Dissertation

As mentioned in a previous section of this introduction, the present dissertation has the twin goals of (1) making Arama more accessible by presenting aspects of his thought in the English language and situating these in their-intellectual historical context, and (2) presenting Arama in such a way as to variously build upon, complicate, and challenge prevailing tendencies in the field of medieval Jewish intellectual history.¹²⁸ In connection with the second of these goals (2), I also suggested that through my studies of both Arama and the scholarly literature, my attention coalesced around three major aspects of Arama's oeuvre that might have rendered him such a resistant if not adverse object of study in a field wherein he might otherwise have been presumed to be central. Further, each of these three aspects corresponds negatively or inversely to a longstanding trend in the discipline of medieval Jewish intellectual history: I suggest that it is precisely the disjunctures between these aspects of Arama's oeuvre, on the one hand, and entrenched approaches in the field, on the other, that have contributed to the latter's prolonged relative neglect of the former. Accordingly, each of these three aspects corresponds also to a ready site of intervention: an opportunity to point to these entrenched tendencies within the field, and at once insist that the field's natural objects demand we push beyond them. The present dissertation is thus organized around these three major aspects of Arama's oeuvre, each corresponding to a hoped-for intervention in longstanding methodologies or preoccupations in

¹²⁸ See 0.1 above.

the field. Each of the three body chapters will focus on one of these major aspects/interventions, with a brief appendix condensing new information I have gathered regarding Arama's sources. In what follows, I will briefly summarize each of these three aspects and corresponding interventions.

0.4.1. Exegetical Confrontation

The first major aspect of Arama's oeuvre on which we will focus is the role he assigns to *exegesis*, and primarily scriptural exegesis. As discussed above, one of the major limitations of Heller-Wilensky's study of Arama—and indeed most subsequent studies of Arama—is its presentation of Arama as a synthetic and systematic thinker, abstracting from the exegetical literary frame in which Arama chose to develop nearly all his ideas.¹²⁹ As also suggested above, Heller-Wilensky's preference for synthetic and systematic presentation—at the expense of the exegetical—is symptomatic of much broader and longstanding tendencies which can be traced back to the field's origins in the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* movement. One of *Wissenschaft's* major goals was to construct medieval Jewish thought as a site of supreme rationalism, which, as Aaron Hughes has pointed out, was a complex process.¹³⁰ Hughes has emphasized the role played by taxonomic sub-classifications (e.g., Neoplatonic, Aristotelian) in this process, noting how classificatory schemes imported from the broader history of philosophy served at once to illustrate “filiations between Jewish and non-Jewish thought” and to ascribe moral valence to periodizations within the history of Jewish philosophy. However, he also suggests that

¹²⁹ See 0.3.1 above.

¹³⁰ See especially Diamond and Hughes, “Introduction,” 2, 4: “The desire of the early practitioners of *Wissenschaft* was not simply academic, however, but also—indeed primarily, ideological. If Jews could be shown to have a history, they could simultaneously be made to be both European and modern;” and 5: “It is within this context that the medieval arose as an omnibus if somewhat ambiguous trope to convey Judaism's rational essence.” See also Hughes' note in his essay in same volume, “‘Medieval’ and the Politics of Nostalgia,” 32: “Anything that threatened this presentation was ignored or marginalized as nonessential.”

constructing medieval Jewish philosophy as rational meant preferring not only some sub-classifications to others (e.g., Aristotelian as superior to Platonic), but also some genres to others. In particular, Hughes suggests that while in terms of literary form, both poetry and systematic, discursive treatises were preferred, commentary, by contrast, was “perceived to be lacking in originality,” if not obscurantist.¹³¹

Wissenschaft’s formal preference for poetry and systematic treatise found expression in the figures and texts elevated to the canon of medieval Jewish philosophy: Saadia’s *Book of Belief and Opinions*, Halevi’s *Kuzari*, Maimonides’ *Guide*, Gersonides’ *Wars of the Lord*, Crescas’ *Light of the Lord*, and Albo’s *Principles*. But it found expression too in the way non-conforming texts were re-presented or passed over by *Wissenschaft*’s mid- and late-twentieth century heirs. Heller-Wilensky’s disciplining Arama’s exegesis into systematic, synthetic philosophy is a clear example of this re-presentation, but so too are Herbert Davidson’s study of Abraham Shalom and indeed nearly all twentieth century studies of Maimonides with a few notable exceptions: the scholarship of Sara Klein-Braslavy, Hannah Kasher, Zev Harvey, and Aviezer Ravitzky.¹³² Entrenched disciplinary denigration of exegesis and commentary is even

¹³¹ Hughes, “‘Medieval’ and the Politics of Nostalgia,” 29–32.

¹³² See especially the studies collected in Sara Klein-Braslavy, *Maimonides as Biblical Interpreter* (Academic Studies Press, 2011); Sara Klein-Braslavy, “Vérité prophétique et vérité philosophique chez Nissim de Gérone; une interprétation du Récit de la Création et du Récit du Char,” *Revue des Études Juives* 134 (1975): 75–99; Sara Klein-Braslavy, “The Gathering at Mount Sinai in the Thought of R. Nissim ben Reuben Gerondi,” *Sinai* 80 (1977): 26–37; Hannah Kasher, “Job’s Image and Opinions in Maimonides,” *Da’at: A Journal of Jewish Philosophy and Kabbalah* 15 (1985): 81–87; Hannah Kasher, “The Meaning of Moses’ Sin in Maimonides’ Doctrine,” *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 53 (1986): 29–34; Hannah Kasher, “Joseph ibn Kaspi’s Aristotelian and Fundamentalist Interpretations of the Book of Job,” *Da’at: A Journal of Jewish Philosophy and Kabbalah* 20 (1988): 117–125; Hannah Kasher, “The Parable of the King’s Palace in the Guide of the Perplexed as a Direction to the Student,” *AJS Review* 14.2 (1989): 1–19; Hannah Kasher, “Maimonides’ Interpretations of the Story of Divine Revelation in the Cleft of the Rock,” *Da’at: A Journal of Jewish Philosophy and Kabbalah* 35 (1995): 29–66; Warren Zev Harvey, “Maimonides’ Interpretation of Genesis 3:22,” *Da’at: A Journal of Jewish Philosophy and Kabbalah* 12 (1984): 15–21; Warren Zev Harvey, “The First Commandment and the God of History: Judah Halevi and Hasdai Crescas versus Abraham ibn Ezra and Maimonides,” *Tarbiz* 57.2 (1988): 203–216; Warren Zev Harvey, “Maimonides on Job 14:20 and the Story of the Garden of Eden,” in *Between History and Literature: Studies in Honor of Isaac Barzilay*, ed. Stanley Nash (ha-Kibbutz ha-Me’uchad 1997), 143–148; Aviezer Ravitzky, “The Thought of Rabbi Zerachyah b. Isaac b. Shealtiel Hen and Maimonidean-Tibbonian Philosophy in the Thirteenth Century,” (PhD diss., Hebrew University, 1977); Aviezer Ravitzky, “Samuel ibn Tibbon and the Esoteric Character

more glaring when one considers major works of medieval Jewish philosophy systematically passed over throughout the twentieth century: It should suffice to point out that Samuel ibn Tibbon's *Commentary on Ecclesiastes* and Jacob Anatoli's *Malmad ha-Talmidim*, acknowledged by medievals themselves to have been two of the most popular and influential works of the thirteenth century, had not been treated substantially in scholarship at all until the twenty-first century.¹³³

As also suggested above, in recent decades a handful of scholars have done tremendous work to begin countering this entrenched dismissal of exegesis, recuperating it to its rightful place at the center of medieval Hebrew literature and more broadly medieval Jewish thought. The scholarship of James T. Robinson has been landmark in this regard and has been carried forth by others such as Caterina Rigo and Dana Fishkin, to name only a few examples.¹³⁴ But even with these recent advances in recognizing the inextricability of medieval Jewish philosophy from its diverse and often non-systematic literary forms, exegesis and the medieval figures who

of *The Guide of the Perplexed*,” *AJS Review* 6 (1981): 87–123; Aviezer Ravitzky, “Aristotle’s *Meteorology* and Maimonidean Exegesis of the Account of Creation,” *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 9 (1990): 225–250. My thanks to Professor Caterina Rigo for bringing this to my attention.

¹³³ See James T. Robinson, “The Ibn Tibbon Family: A Dynasty of Translators in Medieval Provence,” in *Be’erot Yitzhak: Studies in Memory of Isadore Twersky*, ed. J. Harris (Harvard University Press, 2005), 219 n.93.

¹³⁴ In addition to Robinson’s studies already cited—*Samuel ibn Tibbon’s Commentary on Ecclesiastes*, “The Philosopher’s Prooemium,” “Philosophy and Science in Medieval Jewish Commentaries on the Bible,” “On or Above the Ladder?,” and “The Ibn Tibbon Family”—see James T. Robinson, “From Digression to Compilation: Samuel ibn Tibbon and Immanuel of Rome on Genesis 1:1, 1:14, 1:20,” *Zutot: Perspectives on Jewish Culture* 4 (2006): 81–97; James T. Robinson, “Maimonides, Samuel ibn Tibbon, and the Construction of a Jewish Tradition of Philosophy,” in *Maimonides after 800 Years: Essays on Maimonides and His Influence*, ed. Jay M. Harris (Harvard University Press, 2007), 291–306; James T. Robinson, “‘We Drink Only From The Master’s Water’: Maimonides and Maimonideanism in Southern France, 1200–1306,” in *Epigonism in Jewish Culture*, eds. Shlomo Berger and Irene Zwiep, *Studia Rosenthaliana* 40 (2007–2008): 27–60; James T. Robinson, “Secondary Forms of Philosophy: On the Teaching and Transmission of Philosophy in Non-Philosophical Literary Genres,” in *Vehicles of Transmission, Translation, and Transformation in Medieval Textual Culture*, eds. Robert Wisnowsky, Faith Wallis, and Jamie Fumo (Brepols, 2012); Caterina Rigo, “Judah Romano’s Commentaries on the Bible: His Philosophical System as Contained in Them and His Sources in Jewish Thought and Christian Scholasticism,” (PhD diss., Hebrew University, 1996); Dana Fishkin, *Bridging Worlds: Poetry and Philosophy in the Works of Immanuel of Rome* (Wayne State University Press, 2023).

produced it remain something of second-class citizens within the realm medieval Jewish intellectual history, objects still deemed less worthy of serious study.

At once building off the efforts of the aforementioned scholars and recognizing the work that remains to be done in restoring exegesis as an equally-recognized genre of medieval Jewish thought and philosophy, the first chapter of my dissertation will concentrate on Arama's relationship to exegesis. I argue that far from mere literary form or method, external husk containing an idea, Arama recognized exegesis as *the* central site of cultural confrontation and accordingly incorporated exegesis into the heart of his creative work. Arama centers exegesis in a variety of ways: he makes consistent efforts to attack what he views as bad exegesis, reclaiming prooftexts wrongly coopted by the philosophic cause; he uses exegesis, especially of unpopular Rabbinic dicta, to do substantive conceptual work; and he engages deeply with both the theory and history of exegesis, the former in several reflections, and the latter as catalogue.

0.4.2. Domestication of Philosophy

As discussed above, one of the major trends in Arama scholarship over the past century has been an over-emphasis on Arama as an anti-philosopher or anti-rationalist. One consequence of enduring historiographical schematizations of fifteenth century Spanish Jewish thought as both “in decline” and “conservative,” is that with few exceptions, serious study of fifteenth century Spanish Jewish figures' specific engagements with philosophy have been dismissed out of hand. In the case of Arama, this general tendency is further exacerbated by both his dismissal as an exegetical rather than systematic thinker, and the fact that his *Hazut Qashah*, a polemic against the philosophizers, has had an outsized influence on his reception in scholarship.¹³⁵ Yet while

¹³⁵ See 0.3.1, 0.3.3, and 0.4.1 above.

Arama's polemics against philosophy have often been construed as a simplistic and outright rejection of philosophy as such, some of his closest students in the past century—first and foremost Septimus, but also more recently Robinson—have recognized that far from simple anti-philosopher, Arama's relationship with philosophical texts and figures, terminologies and traditions and ideas, is extremely rich and complex. While Arama unquestionably critiques many of the greatest medieval Jewish philosophers (Maimonides, Gersonides, Narboni) for their doctrinal positions and lambasts latter day “philosophizers” and “harmonizers” for their inappropriate subjugation of Torah to philosophy, he is equally undoubtedly steeped deeply in philosophy—and a variety thereof. Heller-Wilensky has noted that Maimonides appears on virtually every page of AY, and not at all always for the sake of critique; Septimus observes that Arama “expounds the *Ethics* lovingly;” and as mentioned above, James Robinson's and James Diamond's studies have implicitly suggested that Arama is entangled with the Maimonidean tradition of philosophical-allegorical exegesis, even as he often subverts it.¹³⁶

Building on the insights of these scholars and attempting with them to challenge and refine the discipline's entrenched tendency towards reductive, binary categorizations of “radical”/“conservative” or “moderate,” philosophical or anti-philosophical (or: “philosopher,” “Kabbalist,” “Talmudist”), the second chapter of this dissertation focuses on nuancing Arama's relationship to philosophy. Through close analysis of examples, I identify at least three major patterns in Arama's use of philosophy, each of which point to the complexity of Arama's relationship with philosophy—or rather, philosophies. Not only do I affirm that the philosophical texts and traditions, motifs and figures, with which Arama engaged were quite diverse. I show that even where Arama works to challenge and subvert various philosophical traditions, he often

¹³⁶ Heller-Wilensky, *Arama*, 43; Septimus, “Yitzhaq Arama and Aristotle's *Ethics*,” 2.

does so, following in the lineage of Ḥasdai Crescas, with recourse to the tools of philosophy itself. Turning philosophical tools on their heads and against themselves, Arama often undoes philosophical traditions from the inside out—such that if he is an anti-philosopher, he remains a thoroughly philosophical one. In still other instances, I show that Arama’s relationship with philosophical traditions is not so straightforwardly anti-philosophical at all and rather appears to run along more traditionally Maimonidean lines.

Still, I argue that, across their variations, all of Arama’s uses of philosophy might be understood as fitting under the rubric of *domesticating* philosophy. While the term domestication bespeaks a certain boundary between inside and outside, Judaism and philosophy, and so acknowledges Arama’s (and virtually all medievals’) recognition of a distinction between native and foreign, acceptable and unacceptable, it simultaneously suggests that the boundary dividing the elements in these pairs is malleable, changing: what was outside can be brought inside and made to belong there through a process of transformation; what was “philosophy” can be made Judaism through strategic refiguration and subdual. Conceptualizing Arama’s relationship to philosophy as a project of domesticating philosophy thus emphasizes the ways in which Arama often draws upon, creatively elaborates, and transforms philosophical traditions even while often employing them to ultimately “anti-philosophical” ends, neutralizing them through strategic incorporation and instrumentalization.

0.4.3. Jewish Supremacy

The third and final chapter of this dissertation will focus on a pair of twin thematic concerns that I argue lie at the center of Arama’s oeuvre: (1) concern for the masses and an accompanying critique intellectual elitism; (2) and Jews as separate species, or Jewish supremacy. As is evident

even from only the foregoing historiographical overview, throughout his oeuvre and even in AY alone Arama takes up a massive range of themes that are in no way exhausted by the twin themes I have chosen to focus on: all the classical “Philonic” doctrinal issues already treated by Heller-Wilensky, the idiosyncratic focuses within these broader issues already highlighted by Seewald, plus additional issues suggested by Arama’s exegetical preoccupations and already singled out by other scholars.¹³⁷ Yet even as these twin themes are by no means coextensive with or comprehensive of all Arama’s thematic concerns, I focus my final discussion on them because—as with my focuses in previous chapters—they simultaneously strike at something indispensable for understanding Arama and in so doing challenge a longstanding tendency in the field: namely, scholars’ tendency to emphasize the more universalistic aspects of medieval Jewish intellectual history and medieval Jewish philosophy at the expense of its more particularistic dimensions, and in particular, to eschew incipient racial thinking within medieval Jewish thought.

In my discussions above, I suggested that the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* movement’s imbrication with then-contemporary political struggles for Jewish emancipation helped produce a certain imperative to depict medieval Jewish thought as a bastion of rationalism and enlightenment; to prove Judaism’s enlightened, rational bona fides by way of medieval Sefarad.¹³⁸ Among other things, I suggested that one belated expression of this imperative could be seen in Harry Wolfson’s “Philonic” approach, subsequently adopted by Heller-Wilensky in her study of Arama: an approach which attempted to rationalize medieval Jewish thinkers by understanding them in terms of (their stances on) a fixed set of predetermined, readily-intelligible, and by-and-large “universally” interesting philosophical and theological problems.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ See 0.3.1, 0.3.2, 0.3.4 above.

¹³⁸ See notes 88 and 129 above.

¹³⁹ See note 91 above.

Yet over the intervening decades, even as Wolfson's "Philonic" approach to the study of medieval Jewish thought has fallen out of fashion; as scholars have expanded the study of medieval Jewish thought in terms of both objects of inquiry and approaches; and as the political circumstances of Jews in the West have changed drastically, scholars of medieval Jewish philosophy have continued—albeit in shifting ways—to highlight what is most rational and universal in medieval Jewish thought and to exceptionalize what is not.¹⁴⁰ This can be seen in scholars' preference for treating "radical" figures over "conservative" ones as well as in scholars' triumphalist, moralizing language around medieval Jewish "openness" and receptivity to other cultures.¹⁴¹ But it can also be seen in the way that major medieval figures and texts

¹⁴⁰ An enumeration of only the most substantial interventions might include: Gershom Scholem's critique of *Wissenschaft* and introduction of a massive corpus of Kabbalistic literature—on which see David Biale, *Gershom Scholem: Kabbalah and Counter-History* (Harvard University Press, 1982); Leo Strauss' discovery of political philosophy and esotericism—on which see e.g., Leora Batnitzky, "Leo Strauss' Disenchantment with Secular Society," *New German Critique* 94 (Winter 2005): 106–126.; Isadore Twersky's and Bernard Septimus' emphases on culture and intellectual biography—on which see Isadore Twersky, "Aspects of the Social and Cultural History of Provençal Jewry" in *Jewish Society Through the Ages*, eds. H. H. Ben-Sasson and S. Ettinger (Schocken, 1971), 185–207; Bernard Septimus, *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Translation: The Career and Controversies of Ramah* (Harvard University Press, 1982); a collective movement away from the positivistic lens of "original contributions" and toward minor figures in medieval Jewish intellectual history—Resianne Fontaine credits Colette Sirat's *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge University Press, 1985) as initiating this movement in her introduction to *A Hebrew Encyclopedia of the Thirteenth Century: Natural Philosophy in Judah ben Solomon ha-Cohen's Midrash ha-Hokhmah* (Brill, 2023), 3–4.; and a recovery of non-technical genres of Hebrew literature and literary forms, already discussed in the previous subsection.

¹⁴¹ Illustrative is scholars frequent invocation of a now-famous line from Maimonides' introduction to his *Eight Chapters*—often rendered in translation as "hear the truth whoever says it"—to suggest that in their commitment to truth or philosophy, *other* medieval Jewish thinkers espoused a sort of trans-religious openness: Hence Yehuda Halper argues that although "neither Aristotle nor Averroes is Jewish... [Abraham] Bibago would nevertheless have us turn to them for understanding true human happiness, presumably because truth does not contradict truth and we ought to receive the truth from whoever says it." Similarly, Rafael Dascal, arguing that Tanhum ha-Yerushalmi was "committe[d] to a mode of religiosity that embraces philosophical inquiry," contends "It is quite possible that Tanhum harbored a similar attitude...much in the spirit of Maimonides' exhortation to 'accept the truth from whomever states it.'" Elisha Russ-Fishbane goes a step further, taking the quote to be indicative of the "open posture of [the] leaders" of the "Judeo-Arabic integration" movement in general. "What makes this Judeo-Arabic integration historically significant," Russ-Fishbane tells us, is that "a number of [its leaders] actively promoted a model of cultural receptivity in their respective communities. Moses Maimonides, who urged Jewish readers of his ethics to 'listen to the truth from whoever utters it' and Moses ibn Ezra, who encouraged his coreligionists to read the Qur'an as a brilliant work of literature, are two outstanding examples of this open posture." Daniel Frank, Oliver Leaman, and Charles Manekin privilege the line from *Eight Chapters* as the sole one worthy (in the entirety of Jewish thought!) of elevation into the brief editors' preface of *The Jewish Philosophy Reader*. Maimonides' dictum represents not only *medieval* Jewish philosophy but rather the transhistorical, essential character of Jewish philosophy, which, we are told, is the Jewish "philosophers' openness to extra-Jewish sources as aides in understanding their own tradition." The editors suggest "we should be impressed" by this openness and revel in

known to espouse particularly particularist views on the Jews' superior metaphysical status or "chosenness"—e.g., Judah Halevi, Nahmanides, the Zohar—are separated off and siloed, treated as exceptions that prove the rule of medieval Jewish thought's fundamentally universalist core.

Scholars' drive to underscore medieval Judaism's esoteric universalism and write off blatant instances of medieval Jewish particularism is even more understandable considering another piece of scholarly history: Already in the late nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, (non-Jewish) historians of Iberia, determined to exculpate themselves of the guilt of the Inquisition, sought to blame late medieval Spanish Jews for the original fascination with lineage, blood, and race—thereby making them culprit of the crimes later brought against them.¹⁴² Accordingly, even into the late twentieth century, Jewish historians of Iberia responded by strenuously defending those medieval Jews accused of the charge.¹⁴³ Yet even as the scholarly discussion on incipient racial logics has since shifted away from a debate on "origins" among Iberianists and social historians, the scars of old accusations have seemed to persist among scholars of medieval Jewish thought, who have remained resistant to engaging the

Maimonides' own, exclaiming that the quote from *Eight Chapters* "itself is drawn from an Arab source, al-Kindi!" Similarly, Gad Freudenthal, prefacing an edited volume on *Science in Medieval Jewish Cultures*, takes Maimonides' dictum as paradigmatic of one side in a centuries-long intra-Jewish debate on "Jewish attitudes towards non-Jewish cultures." While he explicitly links the Maimonidean dictum with "openness toward the outer, gentile world and its cultures," he suggests that the alternative Jewish view "insisting on closure and isolation," "may afford some insight into the nature of religious fundamentalism." In his contribution to the *Oxford Handbook of Abrahamic Religions*, Carlos Fraenkel explicitly links the quote, with "a kind of universalism." The Maimonidean dictum is thus rendered slogan for medieval Jewish thought's ecumenism. See (in order of citation): Yehuda Halper, "Abraham Bibago on Intellectual Conjunction and Human Happiness: Faith and Metaphysics According to a 15th Century Averroist," *Quaestio* 15 (2015): 312; Raphael Dascalu, "Between Intellect and Intoxication: An Exploration of Tanḥum ha-Yerushalmi's Commentary on the Book of Jonah," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 105, no. 1 (2015): 70; Elisha Russ-Fishbane, *Judaism, Sufism, and the Pietists of Medieval Egypt: A Study of Abraham Maimonides and His Times* (Oxford University Press, 2015); Daniel H. Frank, Oliver Leaman, and Charles H. Manekin, *The Jewish Philosophy Reader* (Routledge, 2000), xi; Freudenthal, "Introduction" in *Science in Medieval Jewish Cultures*, 9; Carlos Fraenkel, "Philosophy and Theology" in *The Oxford Handbook of Abrahamic Religions*, eds. A. J. Silverstein and G. G. Stroumsa (Oxford University Press, 2015), 348. On a related critique of the concept of "Abrahamic Religions" (reinscribed by Fraenkel and others), see Aaron W. Hughes, *Abrahamic Religions: On the Uses and Abuses of History* (Oxford University Press, 2015) and literature cited therein.

¹⁴² David Nirenberg, "Mass Conversion and Genealogical Mentalities: Jews and Christians in Fifteenth Century Spain," *Past & Present* 174, no. 1 (2002): 3–41, esp. 4–6.

¹⁴³ Nirenberg, "Genealogical Mentalities," 4–6.

possibility that late medieval Spanish Jews—for all their obliquely acknowledged “conservatism”—might have had anything to say about the distinction and election, metaphysical or otherwise, of the Jews against all others.

Challenging these scholarly insistences, I show that—writing on the eve of the Inquisition—Arama forcefully and clearly articulates a theory of Jewish supremacy, theorizing the Jews as a separate and superior species. What’s more, though Arama’s most explicit remarks on how the Jews are constituted as a separate and superior species are confined to a handful of Gate in AY, they are by no means ancillary. To the contrary, Arama makes his theory of Jews as separate and superior species both conceptually and exegetically central. Exegetically, he understands God’s promise to transform the Jews into a separate and superior species—no longer subject to the definition of man as rational animal, but rather uniquely destined for immortality—as the core of the covenant and God’s revelation at Sinai. And conceptually, Arama anchors his theory of Jews as separate and superior species in his deep and abiding concern for the masses, which in turn explains his drive to critique so many central facets of the Maimonidean project, and above all its theories of human nature, immortality, and the final purpose of human existence. Against post-Maimonidean philosophy’s prioritization of a small, intellectual elite, Arama explicitly names the virtues of accessibility—ease and inclusivity—and commits to them, insisting that in order to be meaningful, the Torah must ensure that the loftiest heights of human existence are realized not only by a select few, but rather by the many. The twin axes of (1) concern for the masses and accompanying critique of intellectual elitism and (2) Jews as separate species are central, I suggest, because taken together they illuminate so many other thematic developments in Arama’s oeuvre: not only the animus behind his critiques of Maimonideanism, but also the particular contours of his alternative theological anthropology, his fixation with

imagery of God's marriage to Israel, his conceptualization of the mechanism of the commandments in general, and his original, alternative theory of the dietary laws in particular. But even beyond the explanatory power they provide, I suggest that these twin axes are important because of how they challenge the entrenched scholarly consensus on medieval Jewish philosophy's broadly universalistic character. For even though Arama is exceptional in the clarity and force with which he articulates his theory of Jews as separate species, and even though his commitment to the masses does superficially run against most medieval Jewish philosophy's thoroughgoing intellectual elitism, the building blocks and tools that he implements to develop both (1) his concern for the masses and accompanying critique of intellectual elitism and (2) his theory of Jews as separate species are immanent to the Maimonidean tradition, drawn straight out of medieval Jewish philosophy itself.

0.5. A Note on Some Key Terms

Before concluding the introduction and moving into the first chapter, two small pieces of business or "notes" remain in order: Here, I briefly address two sets of key terms already used throughout this introduction and that will recur throughout the following chapters. Then, I briefly address my approach in selecting the source material that I use and highlight throughout the following chapters.

0.5.1. "Maimonidean," "Maimonideanism"

Two terms already used in this introduction and that will recur throughout the following chapters are "Maimonidean" and relatedly, "Maimonideanism." Over the last several decades and the last several years especially, the terms "Maimonidean" and "Maimonideanism" have proliferated

enormously in scholarship.¹⁴⁴ As more and more scholars have come to recognize—following Hava Tirosh-Rothschild’s formulation—the extent to which all medieval Jewish thought “is but footnotes to Maimonides,”¹⁴⁵ scholars have identified echoes of Maimonides in thinkers, texts, and schools of thought previously defined in contradistinction to him and consequently been slapped with the badge “Maimonidean.” While this growing insight—that Maimonideanism is not easily contained by any singular but rather really plural Maimonideanisms—is a tremendous one with bearings on this dissertation, in this introduction and throughout I use “Maimonidean” and “Maimonideanism” in the more well-defined sense suggested by James T. Robinson’s scholarship; or what Robinson in one instance calls “first-order Maimonideanism.”¹⁴⁶ On this understanding, Maimonidean and Maimonideanism refer to a distinctive self-conscious intellectual tradition that flourished primarily (though not exclusively) in southern France in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and that was expressed primarily (though again not exclusively) in traditional (albeit modified) literary genres—i.e., biblical commentary, Rabbinic commentary, and sermons—through the method of philosophical-allegorical scriptural exegesis. As Robinson has shown, Maimonideans imagined themselves as attempting to finish the project that Maimonides had started in his *Guide of the Perplexed*: rereading scripture in light of contemporary—i.e., Aristotelian—science and philosophy. To do so, they drew on, imitated, and creatively elaborated methods and motifs that Maimonides had already used in the *Guide*. Most broadly and most importantly for our purposes, they virtually all accepted Maimonides’ idea that

¹⁴⁴ See the contemporaneous publication of two edited volumes: James T. Robinson, ed., *Cultures of Maimonideanism: New Approaches to the History of Jewish Thought* (Brill, 2009); Carlos Fraenkel, ed., *Traditions of Maimonideanism* (Brill, 2009).

¹⁴⁵ Tirosh-Rothschild, “Jewish Philosophy on the Eve of Modernity,” 442

¹⁴⁶ I.e., the Maimonidean tradition as treated primarily in Robinson, *Samuel ibn Tibbon’s Commentary on Ecclesiastes*; Robinson, “Construction of a Jewish Tradition of Philosophy;” Robinson, “‘We Drink Only From The Master’s Water’.” Robinson defines “first-order Maimonideanism” in his introduction to *Cultures of Maimonideanism*.

scripture is a multivalent and esoteric text: Designed to cater to multiple different types of audiences strategically and simultaneously, Torah communicates on multiple levels of meaning, revealing as it conceals, protecting the ignorant masses from potentially-destructive knowledge while indicate to a scarce intellectual elite how they might seek true perfection through knowledge of philosophy and perfection of the intellect. Though I will occasionally use “Maimonidean” to refer more broadly and simply to Maimonides himself and the idea he develops in the *Guide*, I will demarcate this occasional and exceptional usage, and otherwise use the term to denote the tradition outlined above.

0.5.2. “Philosophy” and its Others

Another term already used in this introduction and that will recur throughout this dissertation is the problematic singular “philosophy,” implicitly if not explicitly defined in contradistinction to some named or unnamed others—here, “scripture,” or “Torah,” or most problematically “Judaism.” The problems with invoking “philosophy” are multiple. To name only two of the most serious: One, to invoke “philosophy” in contradistinction to “scripture”/“Torah”/“Judaism,” is already to essentialize; to define what counts as real “philosophy” as what is not-Jewish or not-Torah and by extension more properly “Western.” Conversely, it is also simultaneously to *prima facie* understand what counts as authentic “Judaism” or “Torah” as what is other than or prior to Aristotle, certain forms of syllogism—whatever it is that “philosophy” contains. Not unrelated to this is two: Even tabling the foregoing issues of essentializing and definition via binaries, to invoke the singular “philosophy” is to hypostasize what is plural, ambiguous, and xx. Said differently, even if it is admitted that “philosophy” is defined in contradistinction to “scripture”/“Torah”/“Judaism,” “philosophy” is still an abstraction, made up of multiple texts,

figures, traditions, and concepts which do not necessarily all sit easily with one another, nor amount to some monolith when taken all together. Even in light of these issues, I have decided to use the term “philosophy” because it is the one used by both scholars of medieval Jewish intellectual history and medieval Jewish thinkers themselves—Arama included. In the second chapter of this dissertation especially, I attempt to point to and work against the limitations of the term described in the foregoing and to suggest that through Arama, we can see that the relationship between “philosophy” and “scripture”/“Torah”/“Judaism” is—far from easy binary—in need of troubling. Still, I recognize that to a certain extent, my use of the term inevitably and regrettably will reinscribe rather than troubling these issues.

0.6. A Note on the Sources of My Examples

Throughout this dissertation, the examples I discuss to illustrate my major findings on Arama will be drawn from only a very small portion of his total corpus: Primarily Gates 10, 44, and 60 of AY, and to a lesser extent Gates 4, 45, 67, 90, and the commentaries on Ecclesiastes and Proverbs (Yad Abshalom). While this choice has the admitted disadvantage of perhaps suggesting that my findings are not substantiated by a broader swath of Arama’s corpus, I have made it largely out of didactic considerations: To the end of the first goal of this dissertation discussed above, i.e., making Arama more widely accessible in English translation, I wanted a non-specialist reader to emerge from the main chapters of this dissertation able to independently read a few Gates of AY and understand them in their intellectual-historical context. With this goal in mind, I have constructed the dissertation, in a sense, backwards: In addition to each main chapter making the scholarly intervention limned above, the main chapters together also furnish the non-expert reader with examples of how to read most of the material in a few select Gates,

such that they can ideally make their way through the translations of these very same Gates in the appendix on their own, their appetite whetted for more.

1. Exegetical Confrontation

1.1. Introduction

As briefly discussed in the introduction, the first aspect of Arama's oeuvre that I will discuss and that will be the focus of the present chapter relates to recovering a formal and methodological dimension of his work, namely: his choice to develop most of his ideas through the framework of scriptural exegesis—i.e., commentary on both Torah and classical Rabbinic literature, rather than via systematic, discursive prose. While Arama was hardly novel in preferring to develop his ideas through the medium of scriptural exegesis rather than through e.g., technical scientific or philosophical treatises, this aspect of his oeuvre demands our attention because of the ways in which exegesis has historically been dismissed in scholarship on medieval Jewish intellectual history.

As also mentioned in the introduction, the field of medieval Jewish intellectual history's historical dismissal of exegesis relates to its roots in the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* movement and the latter's imbrication in then-contemporary political struggles for Jewish emancipation: To show that Jews were good enlightened subjects, deserving of emancipation, the exponents of *Wissenschaft* sought to emphasize the rationalistic aspects of Jewish intellectual history and to highlight how Jews were like—rather than unlike—their reasonable, reasoned Christian neighbors.¹ As I will discuss in subsequent chapters, this meant emphasizing certain thematic and

¹ See the scholarship by Aaron Hughes and Ismar Schorsch cited in note 86 of the introduction. In this connection, one of Harry A. Wolfson's remarks, cited by Hughes in *The Study of Judaism*, 10 is especially telling:

“For I believe, just as our pious ancestors believed, though for different reasons, that the Talmud with its literature is the most promising field of study, the most fertile field of original research and investigation. But I believe that medieval Jewish philosophy is the only branch of Jewish literature, next to the Bible, which binds us to the rest of the literary world. In it we meet on common ground with civilized Europe and with part of civilized Asia and civilized Africa. Medieval philosophy is one philosophy written in three languages, Arabic, Hebrew, and Latin, and among these Hebrew holds the central and most important position. In it we have the full efflorescence of Arabic thought and the bud of much of scholasticism.”

topical concerns within Jewish texts, but it also meant preferring some *forms* of Jewish literature over others. In particular, whereas the exponents of *Wissenschaft* seemed to prefer discursive scientific and philosophical treatises for their intelligibility, and poetry for its literary merit (and both for their universality—), they tended to view perhaps the most traditionally and distinctively Jewish genre of commentary with contempt, as derivative (unoriginal) and contrived.²

This foundational preference for systematicity and contempt for commentary has had longstanding ramifications within the field. Throughout the twentieth century, intellectual historians generally focused their efforts on works of systematic philosophy and science, or else law/halakhah, and poetry, to the exclusion of works assuming more traditional and/or idiosyncratic forms.³ Even scholars whose research centered on thinkers with a primarily exegetical corpus preferred to abstract from the literary framework of exegesis and extract the philosophical or theological content, presenting the latter synthetically and systematically.⁴ With

Medieval Jewish philosophy, simply put, was a valuable object of study precisely because of its rationalism and universalism, what it shared with the rest of the *civilized* world—and how it therefore revealed Jews to be civilized as well.

² Hughes, “‘Medieval’ and the Politics of Nostalgia,” 17, 30

³ There are of course exceptions to this rule: Earlier in the century, Wolfson’s study of Philo as well as several of Alexander Altmann’s studies, and later in the century, Steven Harvey’s and Raphael Jospe’s studies of Shem Tob Falaquera, Marc Saperstein’s study of Jedaiah ha-Penini’s commentary on the aggadah; Robert Eisen’s study on Job in medieval Jewish philosophy. Yet I do believe that these exceptions very much prove the existence of a broader rule. Consider the major monographs on medieval Jewish thinkers and translations of medieval Jewish works published in the first part of the twentieth century: Hartwig Hirschfeld’s translation of Halevi’s *Kuzari*; Henry Malter and Alexander Altmann’s studies of Saadia Gaon; Isaac Husik’s translation of Albo’s *Book of Principles*; Wolfson’s monographs on Crescas and Spinoza; Alexander Altmann’s and Samuel Miklos Stern’s study of Isaac Israeli. Then later in the twentieth century: Isadore Twersky’s studies on Rabad and Maimonides’ *Mishneh Torah*; Bernard Septimus’ study on Ramah; Seymour Feldman’s translation of *Wars of the Lord*. Even still, the focus on science in medieval Jewish thought predominates: Consider the journal *Aleph*; Steven Harvey’s edited volume on *Hebrew Encyclopedias*; Gad Freudenthal’s edited volume on *Science in Medieval Jewish Cultures*; the scholarship of Resianne Fontaine. Consider as well the academic “canon” of medieval Jewish philosophy as it emerged through scholarship of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and how this differs from the traditional “canon,” as suggested by Daniel J. Lasker, “The Canon of Medieval Jewish Philosophy: A Response to Dov Schwartz,” *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 6, no. 2 (2003): 317–328.

⁴ Besides Heller-Wilensky’s study of Arama and Wolfson’s study of Philo, consider e.g., Herbert Davidson’s study of Abraham Shalom (whose *Neveh Shalom* is largely exegetical in form); Colette Sirat, “La Pensée philosophique de Moïse ibn Tibbon,” *Revue des Études Juives* 138 (1979): 505–515; the disproportionate focus on Gersonides’ scientific works as opposed to his exegetical ones in the scholarship of Ruth Glasner, Tamar Rudavsky, Seymour Feldman, and Charles Manekin.

few exceptions,⁵ it has only been in the twenty-first century that a handful of scholars have begun to recognize and advocate for the importance of scriptural exegesis and its associated genres—biblical and rabbinic commentary and supercommentary, sermons, and commentaries on other classical works—as major sites of medieval Jewish philosophy and cultural contestation.

Though the work of several earlier scholars paved the way, efforts to recuperate exegesis to its rightful place at the center of medieval Jewish intellectual history have been spearheaded by James T. Robinson.⁶ Focusing on Samuel ibn Tibbon’s Commentary on Ecclesiastes and the tradition of Maimonideanism he inspired, Robinson illustrated how, in the thirteenth century, ibn Tibbon and his disciples transformed biblical and rabbinic exegesis into a site for popularizing and disseminating (neoplatonized Aristotelian) philosophy among Jewish communities of the Mediterranean.⁷ Following Robinson, scholars arrived at an insight parallel to the one to which ibn Tibbon led his followers; namely, that intellectual, social, and cultural contestation occurs not only in systematic philosophical and scientific treatises and legal discourse, but also—even principally—in and through scriptural commentary.⁸

⁵ See the exceptions noted in note 3 above, as well as the scholarship of Sara Klein-Braslavy, Hannah Kasher, Zev Harvey, and Aviezer Ravitzky—for details on which see note 131 of the introduction.

⁶ See the scholarship cited in note 133 of the introduction.

⁷ Robinson, *Samuel ibn Tibbon*; Robinson, “Construction of a Jewish Tradition of Philosophy;” Robinson, “‘We Drink Only from the Master’s Water.’”

⁸ A brief list of some of the most prominent medievals who followed ibn Tibbon include: Jacob Anatoli (on which see Gadi Weber, “Studies on R. Yaaqov Anatoli’s *Malmad ha-Talmidim*,” [PhD diss., Hebrew University, 2019]); Moses ibn Tibbon (on which see Sirat, “Moïse ibn Tibbon” and Howard Kreisel, “Moses ibn Tibbon: Translator and Philosophical Exegete,” in *Judaism as Philosophy: Studies in Maimonides and the Medieval Jewish Philosophers of Provence* [Academic Studies Press, 2015]); Menachem ha-Meiri (on which see Moshe Halbertal, *Between Torah and Wisdom: Rabbi Menachem ha-Meiri and the Maimonidean Halakhists in Provence* [Magnes, 2000]); Immanuel of Rome (on which see Dana Fishkin, *Immanuel of Rome*); Levi b. Abraham (on which see “Levi ben Abraham and his Encyclopedia of Philosophy and Judaism, *Livyat Hen*,” in Kreisel, *Judaism as Philosophy*); Joseph ibn Kaspi (on which see Adrian Sackson, *Joseph ibn Kaspi: Portrait of a Hebrew Philosopher in Medieval Provence* [Brill, 2017]); Moses Narboni (on which see Yonatan Shemesh, “Averroes as Intertext: Moses Narboni’s Commentary on Maimonides’ *Guide of the Perplexed*,” [PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2021]). As for Robinson’s parallel role, consider that the vast majority of scholarship on ibn Tibbon’s follows cited in the foregoing was published after Robinson’s foundational studies cited in note 7 above.

Of course, among the medievals, ibn Tibbon and his band of merry Averroists were not the only ones wise to biblical commentary as site of intellectual and cultural contestation. Beginning in the thirteenth century, thinkers of various intellectual stripes looked to biblical and rabbinic exegesis as instruments for constructing, authorizing, and propounding their ideological frameworks. As ibn Tibbon's Maimonidean philosophical-allegorical exegesis was growing up in the works of Jacob Anatoli, Moses ibn Tibbon, and later Immanuel of Rome, Nahmanides, Ezra and Azriel of Gerona were likewise using exegesis as a tool for developing their nascent Kabbalah, as were those whose intellectual commitments were more resistant to facile classification, such as Isaac ibn Latif.⁹ Recognition of exegesis' power was not restricted to medieval content creators, either. A now well-circulated remark witnesses Menahem ha-Me'iri lamenting the inefficacy of recent bans against the study of philosophy. For young Jews, he explained, got their philosophical fix not through translations of Aristotle but rather primarily through Maimonides' *Guide*, Ibn Tibbon's *Commentary on Ecclesiastes* and *Ma'amar Yiqqawu ha-Mayim*, and Jacob Anatoli's *Malmed ha-Talmidim*.¹⁰ Already by the mid-thirteenth century, cultural critics understood that the culture they were contesting was being delivered, principally,

⁹ On Nahmanides, see Elliot R. Wolfson, "By Way of Truth: Aspects of Nahmanides' Kabbalistic Hermeneutic," *AJS Review* 14 (1989): 175–77; Isadore Twersky, ed., *Rabbi Moses Nahmanides (Ramban): Explorations in his Religious and Literary Virtuosity*, (Harvard University Press, 1983); Moshe Halbertal, *Nahmanides: Law and Mysticism*, trans. Daniel Tabak (Yale University Press, 2020); Yaakov Elman, "'It is No Empty Thing': Nahmanides and the Search for Omnisignificance," *The Torah U-Madda Journal* 4 (1993): 1–83. On Ezra of Gerona, see Seth Brody: *Rabbi Ezra ben Solomon of Gerona: Commentary on the Song of Songs and Other Kabbalistic Commentaries* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1999); Seth Brody, "Human Hands Dwell in Heavenly Heights: Worship and Mystical Experience in Thirteenth Century Kabbalah," (PhD diss., The University of Pennsylvania, 1991). On Isaac ibn Latif, see Guadalupe González Diéguez, "The Reasons for the Commandments in Isaac ibn Latif's *The Gate of Heaven* (1238)," in *Accounting for the Commandments in Medieval Judaism: Studies in Law, Philosophy, Pietism, and Kabbalah*, eds. Jeremy P. Brown and Marc Herman (Brill, 2021), 118–136; Guadalupe González Diéguez, "Isaac ibn Latif (1210–1280) Between Philosophy and Kabbalah: Timebound Wisdom" (PhD diss., New York University, 2014). The proliferation of Kabbalistic exegesis outside and alongside Maimonidean exegesis has been treated less systematically than its sibling, but can be gleaned also from Jonathan Dauber, *Knowledge of God and the Early Kabbalah* (Brill, 2012); Elliot Wolfson, "Beneath the Wings of the Great Eagle: Maimonides and the Thirteenth-Century Kabbalah," in *Moses Maimonides (1138–1204): His Religious, Scientific, and Philosophical Wirkungsgeschichte in Different Cultural Contexts*, eds. G. K. Hasselhoff and Otfried Fraisse (Ergon Verlag, 2004), 209–237.

¹⁰ Robinson, "Ibn Tibbon Family," 218–9, note 93; see also Moshe Halbertal, *Between Torah and Wisdom*.

by exegetical texts; in other words, cultural critics too identified exegesis—and by proxy scripture—as a principal site of culture war.¹¹ This, perhaps, is why Solomon ibn Adret, reluctantly roped into the early fourteenth century Maimonidean controversy and principally concerned with legal issues, undertook to write a work interpreting Rabbinic aggadot.¹² It is also perhaps why his student, Nissim of Gerona, chose to develop his ideas through a series of highly exegetical sermons.¹³

Writing at the end of the fifteenth century, Arama gives voice to a concern similar to that espoused by his forebears nearly two hundred years prior. The problem, as Arama recognized it, was not with philosophy per se, but rather with the relationships obtaining between philosophy and Torah. Specifically, the principle cultural problem lay in the way Jews had been habituated to bend scripture to philosophy; had made scripture, via exegesis, into philosophy's spineless handmaiden.¹⁴ Arama articulates this problematic through scriptural exegesis itself. In his

¹¹ Three exemplary studies illustrating this understanding in the thirteenth century are Georges Vajda, *Sefer Meshiv Devarim Nekhoḥim le-R. Yaakov ben Sheshet* (Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1968); Steven Harvey, *Falaquera's Epistle of the Debate: An Introduction to Jewish Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 1987); and Dov Schwartz, "The Debate over the Maimonidean Theory of Providence in Thirteenth-Century Jewish Philosophy," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 2, no. 2 (1995): 185–196. This understanding is expressed most forcefully however in the literature generated by the 1304–1306 Maimonidean controversy, most (but not all—) of which was collected by Abba Mari b. Joseph of Montpellier in *Sefer Minḥat Qena'ot*, now edited in the *Teshuvot ha-Rashba*, ed. Haim Z. Dimitrovsky (Jerusalem, 1990); in this connection, Abba Mari's own brief *Sefer ha-Yareah*, included in this collection, is especially illuminating. On the distinction of this controversy from the previous Maimonidean controversies see Dov Schwartz, "Changing Fronts in Controversies over Philosophy in Medieval Spain and Provence," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 7 (1997): 61–82; and on which generally see Gregg Stern, *Philosophy and Rabbinic Culture: Jewish Interpretation and Controversy in Medieval Languedoc* (Routledge, 2008).

¹² See Carmi Horowitz, "Kabbalah and Philosophy in Rashba's Commentary to the Aggadah," *Da'at* 18 (1986): 15–25; *Hidushe ha-Rashba: Perushe ha-Aggadot* (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1991).

¹³ On which see Leon Aryeh Feldman, "Studies in the Life and Times of R. Nissim b. Reuben Gerondi of Barcelona (circa 1340–1380)," (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1968); Sara Klein-Braslavy, "R. Nissim ben Reuben de Gérone devant la philosophie de son temps," (PhD diss., École Pratique des Hautes Études, 1972); Sara Klein-Braslavy, "Vérité prophétique et vérité philosophique;" Warren Zev Harvey, "Rabbi Nissim of Gerona on the Heavenly Court, Truth, and Justice," in *The Divine Courtroom in Comparative Perspective*, eds. Ari Mermelstein and Shalom E. Holtz (Brill, 2014), 69–74.

¹⁴ Arama develops these ideas throughout his oeuvre but expresses them perhaps most forcefully and succinctly in HQ Gates 8, 11, 3 and 6, and AY Gates 79, 16, 7, 25; see also Heller-Wilensky, *Arama*, 58–7; Diamond, "Isaac Arama's Nightmare."

interpretation of the relationships between Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar he expresses both his concern with the improper relationships obtaining between philosophy and Torah in his present moment, as well as his view of what the proper relationship between them should be.¹⁵ This is precisely the sense in which I suggested above and suggest throughout this chapter that Arama is participating in a sort of intergenerational “culture war” or cultural warfare: Though as I will argue in the next chapter, Arama’s relationship to philosophical traditions is quite complex, and though he remains committed to philosophy in many ways rather than simply working against it, rhetorically and exegetically, Arama often posits “philosophy” and “Torah” as opposing and antagonistic forces, whose relationship and power-dynamics require negotiating, and which inspire the allegiance of opposing “sides” of the contemporary (and historic) Jewish community.

Though Heller-Wilensky (and later Diamond) recognized the centrality of these concerns for Arama, she missed what is, in my view, one of its chief implications: Arama is not concerned only or even primarily with the straight ideational conflicts between “philosophy” and “Torah,” e.g., views on creation vs. eternity, the nature of the soul and the possibility of its immortality, prophecy, providence, etc. He is just as if not more concerned with how the interpretation of scripture is used (or: abused) to develop, legitimize, and circulate this ideational content. While throughout his oeuvre, Arama takes aim at many prevailing philosophical theories and ideas, the main object of his criticism is often the interpretation of scripture itself. He conceives his primary opponents to be not Aristotle and Averroes (whom, as we will see, he draws upon frequently—), but rather the anonymous harmonizers; those who pretend to scriptural interpretation but do so falsely, in bad faith.¹⁶ His chief concern with the interpretation and

¹⁵ See previous note.

¹⁶ For Arama’s accusations against the philosophizers for engaging in *pesharah* or harmonizing—attempts to bend scripture to philosophy—see Heller-Wilensky, *Arama*, 68ff; also HQ 8, AY Gate 4 (I: 55a), AY Gate 89 (V: 17b). Though Arama is always careful, rhetorically, to distinguish Maimonides from the harmonizers, and to defend the

distortion of scripture is reflected in other ways as well. It is echoed in his praise of contemporary Christian communities in his introduction to AY. In contrast to Jewish communities, internally divided between uninspired interpretations and profligate ones, the Christians, on Arama's view, are excellent harmonizers; their sermons attest that they relate to scripture and philosophy in proper order.¹⁷

It is reflected most significantly I suggest, in Arama's choice of exegesis as the principle literary genre for most of his oeuvre. While as mentioned in the introduction, Arama's systematic

former's honor and good intentions against the latter's distortions, he was acutely aware of Maimonides' laying the groundwork for such harmonization, especially in connection with the subjects of cosmology/cosmogony. For example, in, consider Arama's remarks from AY Gate 4, where he suggests that Maimonides' famous declaration in *Guide* II.25—that if the eternity of the world could be definitively demonstrated, scripture would have to be interpreted accordingly—constituted a “stumbling block” for the harmonizers:

“However, some of the philosophers from among our people seized fast to these distorted opinions; from the *root* of the ancient snake,¹⁶ a viper *that beareth gall* (cf Deut. 29:17) sprung forth for them [causing them] to hold fast to the belief in eternity. [Among them] there are those who express [the belief in eternity] publicly as well as those who whisper it in secret, clandestinely. Because of their subjugating the divine Torah thusly as well as in many other respects, they became brazen towards her [=Torah] and *uncovered her skirts upon her face* (cf Nahum 3:5) in such a manner as was not fitting; they trespassed her in such a manner as was not appropriate. For they sat together with the King in his house in order to capture the Queen and tempt her and compel her to chirp the opinions of the philosophers and *not to turn aside* therefrom even a hairbreadth (cf Eruvin 101a). [They did so until] their dwelling place was with those who “overcook their food” (cf e.g., Sanhedrin 103a),¹⁶ and their *hearts were fully set* (cf Qoh. 8:11) to declare that the creation mentioned in the Torah was [merely] an allegory, wherein the being of the [whole] world [was represented] by its being in parts, and its being created eternally [was represented] by its being created in time. They also overturned the words of the Sages and the Scriptures to declare that the arrangement of the prayers was fixed according to this same [allegorical] manner, [e.g.,]: “The One who Creates anew, every day, perpetually, the Work of the Beginning.”¹⁶ For the perpetuation of existents is called, in a certain respect, creation, as Scripture said: *Thou sendest forth Thy spirit, they are created; and Thou createst the face of the earth* (cf Ps. 104:30). [But] they had *as a stumbling block and a rock of offense* (cf Isa. 8:14) the words of the Master and Teacher in Part II, Chapter 25.¹⁶ For he said that if the intellect rejected [the possibility of] creation like it rejected corporeality, it would be necessary that the verses in Scripture which [apparently] testify to the creation of the world be interpreted after the manner that those which indicate to corporeality are interpreted[, i.e., allegorically]. However, because the intellect does not reject it, but rather suits it better than it suits that of eternity, it is fitting that Scripture remain according to its external meaning and form. [Indeed,] they seized this opportunity to uproot everything, and they overturned his words or interpreted them in such a way as he did not wish for them to be interpreted, just as they did with other words [of his]—may these opinions of theirs and what is similar to them be cut down and obliterated from the world.”

It is worth noting that Arama's criticism of Maimonides in this passage is reminiscent of Judah Alfakhar's in the Maimonidean Controversy of the 1230s: see *Iggeret Qena'ot, Qoḇeṣ Teshuḇot ha-Rambam ve-Iggerotav*, Leipzig 1859, fol. 1d.

¹⁷ See Lawee, “Changing Jewish Attitudes,” 6.

polemic *Hazut Qashah* has had an outsized influence on contemporary scholarship, in terms of volume it only constitutes a relatively tiny fraction of his total literary output, the vast majority of which is exegetical rather than systematic in form.¹⁸ As discussed in the introduction, besides HQ and AY, Arama penned line-by-line commentaries on all five scrolls, as well as a lengthy line-by-line commentary on the book of Proverbs, *Yad Abshalom*—all of which qua biblical commentary are manifestly exegetical in terms of form. That *Aqedat Yiṣḥaq*, Arama’s magnum opus and the centerpiece of the present study, is largely exegetical in form can be seen even from a cursory analysis. In the introduction, I mentioned that following Marc Saperstein’s analysis, Arama’s sermons can be divided into three parts:¹⁹ A two-part opening, consisting of a citation of a biblical verse from the weekly *parshah* (the *nose*) and a citation of a passage from Rabbinic literature (the *ma’amar*), followed by a two-part main body. This latter is comprised of a sustained theoretical inquiry of some topos (the *derishah*) followed by a sustained, line-by-line exegesis of some if not all of the biblical pericope in question (the *perishah*). Typically, Arama interprets the *ma’amar* towards the end of the *derishah*, then transitions into the *perishah* by enumerating a set of exegetical questions or difficulties, *sefeqot*, that will guide his subsequent interpretation.²⁰ Even on this cursory analysis then, we can venture that much of AY is exegetical, biblical exegesis shaping both the form and substance of each sermon’s *perishah*, exegesis of the Rabbinic *ma’amar* included in each sermon’s *derishah*, and the broader topos of the *derishah* minimally informed by the *perishah*’s exegesis.

But a closer look at AY reveals so much more; hardly restricted to the *perishah* and end of the *derishah*, exegesis is indeed everywhere in AY; so much so that one misses much of what

¹⁸ For evidence of HQ’s outsized influence on scholarship, see note 69 of the introduction.

¹⁹ Saperstein, *Jewish Preaching*, 66–76.

²⁰ Saperstein, “The Method of Doubts.”

Arama is doing when attempting to abstract from it. Though recent studies by James Robinson, Yehuda Seewald, and James Diamond have begun to restore Arama to his exegetical form, these contributions have been insufficient to overturn the longstanding historiographical trend, typified by Heller-Wilensky, of abstracting from the exegetical dimensions of Arama's oeuvre to present a synthetic digest of his "thought" or "philosophy."²¹ Accordingly, building on the efforts of Robinson, Seewald, and Diamond, in this chapter I will show how Arama's conceptualization of exegesis as site of contestation not only informs his choice of the broad literary form of AY, but is, moreover, central to his approach: exegetical considerations are a primary driver in Arama's choice of content, an engine of his innovation, part of his "contribution," and ultimately inextricable as a merely formal shell of his "thought."

Throughout AY, Arama uses exegesis to negotiate meaning and tradition in relation to predecessors in countless and infinitely nuanced ways, many of which resist easy classification: He cites commentators as diverse as Rashi and ibn Ezra, Nahmanides, Gersonides and the authors of Zohar;²² relies heavily, though almost never straightforwardly, upon the Maimonidean tradition of philosophical-allegorical exegesis;²³ and draws from the well of fourteenth century Neoplatonic ibn Ezra supercommentary.²⁴ He critiques earlier exegetes for departing from the *peshat* sense of scripture, yet offers in their stead interpretations that hardly conform to any classical sense of *peshat*; while his systematic enumeration of *sefeqot* or exegetical difficulties in connection with each *parshah*—which would go on to serve as the basis of Isaac Abarbanel's

²¹ See 0.3.1, 0.3.3, 0.3.4 above.

²² By my count, in AY Arama cites by name the Midrash ha-Ne'elam over 20 times, Gersonides over 30 times, Ibn Ezra over 50 times, Rashi over 160 times, and Ramban/Nahmanides nearly 200 times. For the popularity of Rashi's bible commentary in fifteenth-century Spain, see Eric Lawee, "The Reception of Rashi's *Commentary on the Torah* in Spain: The Case of Adam's Mating with the Animals," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 97, no. 1 (2007): 33–66.

²³ See 2.3 and subsections below.

²⁴ See 1.4 below and appendix.

sefeqot in his Torah commentary²⁵—illustrate how careful and exacting a reader of scripture Arama was: extraordinarily learned in the annals of prior commentaries but never easily satisfied, demanding significance for minutiae at every turn. Said differently, Arama is so complex an exegete and exegesis such a significant part of his oeuvre that an exhaustive analysis of his uses of exegesis unfortunately lies far beyond the scope of the present study. In what follows however, I am primarily concerned to highlight those aspects of Arama’s exegesis that implicitly illustrate how central he considered exegesis: how he viewed it as the primary site of cultural contestation, and that he used it not simply as a framework in which to present his (independent) ideas, but as constitutive of his ideas themselves. In a later section of this chapter, we will turn to look at some of Arama’s remarks on the *theory* of exegesis: what does Arama explicitly *say* about his approach to exegesis?²⁶ Before turning to Arama’s reflections on exegetical theory, however, we will spend the bulk of this chapter first considering Arama’s actual *practice* as exegete: What patterns can we discern in Arama’s use of exegesis, and what do these patterns of use tell us about Arama’s understanding of exegesis? I will focus on three: In the first section, I will examine Arama’s drive to *reclaim scriptural prooftexts*: his tendency to identify scriptural texts that had come to be associated with certain dominant philosophical ideas or consensuses and attempts to divorce the former from the latter through critique and reinterpretation. In the next section, I will examine Arama’s use of scripture and scriptural interpretation to develop major theoretical concepts; then I will turn to examining Arama’s emphasis on scriptural compilation.

²⁵ Though Abarbanel’s debt to Arama has already been abundantly explored by previous scholars, including Heller-Wilensky, *Arama*, 53–57; Lawee, *Isaac Abarbanel*; and Regev, “Nusah rishon,” it is additionally clear that many of Abarbanel’s formulations of *sefeqot* are taken from Arama—see my translations of Gate 10, Gate 44, and Gate 60 in Part II of this dissertation.

²⁶ See 1.5 below.

1.2. Reclaiming Prooftexts

As mentioned above, the first pattern in Arama's use of exegesis we will consider concerns his repeated efforts to *reclaim prooftexts*. By the time Arama was writing in the late fifteenth century, many verses of scripture and several Rabbinic passages had come to assume something of a standardized significance in the popular imaginary. Distinguished from the bulk of scripture still subject to infinite potential interpretations, over the course of the previous two and a half centuries these verses had been transformed into standard philosophical *prooftexts*: scriptural sources that could be adduced as unimpeachable, divine confirmation of some corresponding philosophical or scientific concept.²⁷ Most of these prooftexts had begun their careers as prooftexts in a text already mentioned in this dissertation and that will recur time and again throughout: Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*, completed in Judeo-Arabic in 1190, translated into Hebrew by Samuel ibn Tibbon in 1204, and popularized across Hebrew literature shortly thereafter. In the *Guide*, Maimonides had singled out dozens of biblical verses and Rabbinic dicta in connection with philosophical ideas—and to various ends: sometimes using the former to authorize the latter, sometimes using the latter to develop the former, still other times pointing to tensions and suggesting the limitations of harmonization.²⁸ Over the course of thirteenth century, Samuel ibn Tibbon and his followers incorporated several of these prooftexts along with their Maimonidean contexts into their own original works, helping them take on a life

²⁷ For heuristic purposes, this account is somewhat reductive: More nuanced and correct is that while some of these prooftexts were prooftexts in the simplistic sense limned above, scriptural proof for an idea, many more prooftexts were strongly associated with a more general concept or topic, but the details of their precise interpretation a site of contestation.

²⁸ Perhaps best known are Maimonides' singling out of Gen. 1–3 as “the Work of the Beginning” (Natural Science/Physics) and Isa. 6, Ezek. 1 and 10 as “the Work of the Chariot” (Divine Science/Metaphysics), though a more extensive list can be found in Robinson, ““We Drink Only From the Master’s Water,”” 29. On the Work of the Chariot, see Haim Kreisel, “From Esotericism to Science: The Account of the Chariot in Maimonidean Philosophy,” in *Cultures of Maimonideanism*, ed. Robinson, 21–56.

of their own.²⁹ Thus by the time Arama was writing, a handful of these prooftexts had effectively come to serve as stand-ins or shorthand for the now-consensus philosophical ideas that had once instilled them with new life.

One of Arama's consistent patterns throughout AY—and clear evidence that he recognized exegesis as a central site of contestation—is singling out and attempting to rehabilitate popular prooftexts whose interpretation he views to be misguided. Time and again, he spills much ink attacking the standard philosophical interpretation of specific prooftexts, in an effort to divorce the prooftexts from the philosophical ideas with which they had come to be associated.³⁰ While in many instances, Arama also attacks the substance of the associated philosophical idea, he almost never exclusively attacks the substance of the philosophical idea and is concerned to attack the interpretation of the associated verse or dictum as prooftext as well. This implies that he focuses on exegesis because he recognizes that it is not the philosophical ideas alone but rather their being tethered to a compelling reading of scripture that makes them so powerful. In three examples below, we will see how Arama is driven to reclaim prooftexts, divorcing them from the ideas with which they are associated by demolishing poor interpretations and offering alternatives.

1.2.1. Psalm 19:2–4 and the Rationality of the Spheres

One of the most simple examples of Arama attempting to reclaim a popular prooftext appears already in Gates 1 and 2 of AY. As Heller-Wilensky and Herbert Davidson have both noted, in

²⁹ Robinson, ““We Drink Only From the Master’s Water;”” Robinson, “Construction of a Jewish Tradition of Philosophy.”

³⁰ To cite only a few more examples, Arama's engages with: Ps. 104 (AY Gate 1); a dictum from Pirkei de Rabbi Eliezer, ch. 3, made famous in Guide II.26 (AY Gate 2); the tabernacle as a model of the cosmos, rendered prooftext by Gersonides (AY Gate 48).

these and other early Gates of AY, Arama appears to subscribe to the basic neoplatonized Aristotelian cosmology that had long been standard among medieval Jewish thinkers.³¹ Though individuals varied on precise details and in this Arama was no exception, with others he envisioned a First Cause/Prime Mover emanating hierarchized intelligences and corresponding celestial spheres, moving from the outermost sphere through the sphere of fixed stars and seven planets all the way down to the sublunar world, the latter comprised of the familiar four elements, and all comprised of form and matter.³² Still, despite the broad contours of his assent and despite equivocating on the issue elsewhere, Arama devotes a substantial portion of Gates 1 and 2 to arguing against one nearly-ubiquitous feature of the aforementioned standard cosmology, namely: the idea that the celestial spheres are living and rational, i.e., possessed of a soul and intellect.³³

Like countless others, the Aristotelian idea that the spheres are living and rational had entered medieval Jewish thought via Arabic philosophy many centuries prior to explain the phenomenon of celestial motion.³⁴ Though the precise arguments are quite interesting, they are not especially important for our purposes.³⁵ What is important, however, is that one of the key

³¹ Davidson, "Medieval Jewish Philosophy in the Sixteenth Century;" Heller-Wilensky, *Arama*, 97–120; many of the ideas of which are synthesized and represented in English translation in Heller-Wilensky, "Isaac Arama on the Creation and Structure of the World," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 22 (1953): 131–150.

³² This is obviously a reductive outline; the best medieval summary can be found in Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines (University of Chicago Press, 1963), I.72.

³³ Arama's critique is discussed briefly in Heller-Wilensky, *Arama*, 113–116; and Seewald, *Arama*, 283–286. Though it is not our concern presently, it is also worth noting briefly *why* Arama is invested in challenging the idea that the spheres are living and rational. Though Arama is quite interested in issues of astronomy and celestial motion in general, as far as I can tell he cares to argue against the life and rationality of the spheres for predominantly anthropological and theological reasons rather than strictly cosmological ones: namely, because he wants to restore a certain religious anthropocentrism, and assert man's supreme rank in the cosmos as against the philosophical belief (also propounded by Maimonides, *Guide* III.13) that man is *not* the purpose of the cosmos (see AY Gate 5).

³⁴ The source of the idea can be traced back to Aristotle, *De Caelo* II.12.

³⁵ For those curious, Maimonides' summary in *Guide* II.4 is actually quite straightforward and nice; an even more succinct version can be found in Harry Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle* (Harvard University Press, 1921), 77–78. As Wolfson explains in those same pages, Crescas too had critiqued Maimonides' Aristotelian argument for the spheres as living and rational, though in contrast to Arama his counter-argument was conceptual and physical rather than an exegetical. Further, the physical argument Crescas advances differs from Arama's theory of *deḥiyyah*,

conduits for disseminating this idea was Maimonides' treatment of it in his *Guide*. In *Guide* II.3–5, Maimonides had discussed whether the spheres are living and rational at length, pointing to the limits of yet ultimately defending Aristotle's arguments for celestial motion.³⁶ Crucially, in the last of these chapters (II.5), Maimonides argued that Jewish tradition and scripture support the Aristotelian view that the spheres are living and rational, strongly suggesting that in this connection too, the Bible and Rabbinic literature are compatible with Aristotelian cosmology. To facilitate this harmonization, Maimonides had wedded the idea that the spheres are living and rational to several scriptural verses, most especially Ps. 19:2 and 4: *The heavens declare* (mesapperim) *the glory of God and the firmament speaketh* (maggid) *of His handiwork...there is no speech, there are no words, neither is their voice heard*. To transform these verses into prooftexts, Maimonides interpreted them philosophically and allegorically, emphasizing that the heavens' *declaring* and the firmaments' *speaking* must refer allegorically to the spheres' intellectual conceptualization. He developed this reading by coupling together two arguments. First and more complex, he advanced an argument surrounding the concept of praise: Regardless of how one reads the details of Ps. 19:2–4, Maimonides reasoned, these verses obviously pertain to the spheres' praising God. But true praise, Maimonides insisted, consists not in external action (as other commentators had suggested), but above all in internal, intellectual conceptualization of the object of praise.³⁷ This then must be what the heavens' *declaring* and *speaking* actually refer

mentioned briefly below. Interestingly, despite his critique of Maimonides' position, elsewhere in *Light of the Lord* (i.e., IV.3=Weiss, 338), Crescas actually follows Maimonides and cites Ps. 19:2 as a prooftext for the ideas that the sphere are living and rational!

³⁶ As Michael Schwartz suggests in his translation of the *Guide* II.3, Maimonides' classification of Aristotle's theory of celestial motion as an "opinion," and "simple assertion[]" for which no demonstration has been made" became central in late 20th century debates inaugurated by Shlomo Pines' concerning the extent of Maimonides' skepticism. See Michael Schwartz, *Maimonides' Guide of the Perplexed* (Tel Aviv University Press, 2002), 269; Shlomo Pines, "The Limitations of Human Knowledge According to al-Farabi, ibn Bajja, and Maimonides," in *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, ed. Isadore Twersky (Harvard University Press, 1979), 1–82.

³⁷ The then-dominant interpretation of Ps. 19:2–4 which Maimonides is attacking and which Arama will go on to advocate for/recover is one according to which the *heavens' declaring* and *speaking* symbolize the celestial spheres'

to. In further support of this idea, Maimonides also adduced a second and simpler argument based on scriptural usage: the words *declaring* and *speaking*, he tells us, only ever appear together in scripture in reference to rational beings, ergo the spheres must be rational.

When Arama sets out to attack the idea that the spheres are living and rational in Gates 1 and 2, he not only develops a compelling, alternative theory to account for celestial motion centering on the concept of *deḥiyyah* or “pushing”—thereby obviating the conceptual need to claim that the spheres are living and rational.³⁸ Most relevant to our concerns, Arama also attacks the idea that the spheres are living and rational by debunking Maimonides’ interpretation of Ps. 19:2–4. In other words, Arama attempts to divorce the idea that the spheres are living and rational from the key scriptural verse adduced to authorize it by showing that the interpretation that rendered the verse into a proof-text is a poor one and offering an alternative interpretation in its stead.

Arama draws attention to Maimonides’ use of Ps. 19:2–4 as proof-text for the spheres’ rationality, succinctly summarizing and refuting each of the Master’s two arguments in turn. First he tears down Maimonides’ argument based on the concept of praise, lambasting it as ultimately groundless and indeed inferior to the formerly prevailing interpretation of Ps. 19:2–4 it was meant to replace. Maimonides, Arama points out, was driven to develop his reading of the verse and reject a superior interpretation on the grounds of an ultimately unfounded *assumption* about what the nature of true praise is—and isn’t. Because Maimonides “assumed” that true praise consists exclusively “in the intellectual conceptualization and representation of the one

motion, study of which (through the science of astronomy) leads the student to knowledge of God as the ultimate source of the spheres’ motion; hence “didactic motion.” This interpretation was advanced by Saadia Gaon in his *Book of Beliefs and Opinion*, by Bahya ibn Paquda in his *Duties of the Heart*, and by Abraham Ibn Ezra. See Schwartz, *Guide*, 275 n.3. This conception of “praise” is of course reminiscent with *Guide* I.50.

³⁸ Arama’s fascinating theory of *deḥiyyah*, which he elaborates with appeals to the mechanics of waterwheels, deserves more attention—I thank Professor Caterina Rigo for bringing to my attention that it bears striking resemblance to Jean Buridan’s theory of impetus

who praises” and that teaching as a form of praise is not true praise or praise in the highest sense, he was compelled to reject the formerly prevailing interpretation of the verse according to which the spheres’ *declaring* and *speaking* refer to their didactic motion—their movements which indicate to the existence of God and thereby constitute a sort of praise of Him.³⁹ What’s more, this latter interpretation was superior to Maimonides’ replacement, Arama tells us, because it accords with the *peshat* sense of the verse as confirmed by the following verse, namely, Ps. 19:5, which clearly refers to the spheres’ celestial motion: *their line is gone out through all the earth, and to the end of the world*, and so on. Maimonides’ interpretation thus commits the error of departing from the *peshat* sense of the verse unnecessarily. Here is first part of Arama’s attack, in his own words:⁴⁰

“In Part II, Chapter 5, the Master and Teacher used this verse[=i.e., Ps. 19:2] to necessitate that the celestial spheres are living and rational, after having philosophized in the previous chapter about all that the scientists say in connection with this subject. He assumed that the essence of praise and glory consists in the intellectual conceptualization and representation of the one who praises, whereas “words concerning it are meant to instruct someone else.” Thus, concerning David’s saying of the spheres *there is no speech, there are no words*, Maimonides said that David’s intention was to say that the story which *the heavens decalre*, and so on, *day unto day*, and so on, only consists in what they intellectually conceptualize of Him, not in what is deduced from their actions by someone else, the latter of which is equivalent to [mere] *speech* or *words* which *speak* the words of the heart. Rabbi Abraham Ibn Daud wrote this very thing in his book *Emunah Ramah*.

³⁹ The superiority of didactic action to both didactic speech and internal speech is a recurring theme throughout Arama’s oeuvre. For just two examples, consider first his elaboration on the Maimonidean Abraham-as-philosopher motif, wherein he distinguishes between two types of “upright guidance that proceeds from perfect ones” and ranks didactic action (“what [others] learn from the perfect in respect of their behaviors and their good and upright actions”) as superior to didactic speech “the upright words and fine morals and words of rebuke and admonition (cf m. Taanit 2:1) [that proceed] from their mouths” (AY Gate 4). A second, more wide-reaching example can be seen in Arama’s theory that the commandments inculcate ideas through actions, discussed in 3.x below, as well as Heller-Wilensky, *Arama*, 191–194.

⁴⁰ והנה הרב המורה פרק ח' חלק ב' הכריח מזה הכתוב שגרמי השמים הם חיים משכילים אחר שהתפלסוף בפרק הקודם בכל מה שדברו בו החוקרים בזה הדרוש. וזה בשהניח שעקר ההלול והשבח הוא מה שצוייר ויושכל ממנו בשכל המשבח והמהלל אמנם הדבור בו אינו אלא ההודעה וההעברה אל הזולת. וכאשר אמר בכאן אין אומר ואין דברים. אמר שכוונתו לומר שהספור שאמר עליו השמים מספרים וכו' ליום וכו' הוא לבד מה שישכילוהו ממנו לא מה שילקח אל הזולת מפעולותיהם שהוא שוה לאומר או לדברים המגידים דברים שבלב. וכזה עצמו כתב הראב"ד ז"ל בספר אמונה רבה. ואני תמה מאד מראה זאת כי יותר שהיה הפ' חריף וכבד על הלשון הנה הוא באמת בלתי מוכרח. ואין צריך לומר שאינו מוליד ההכרח שבקש ממנו כי הפשט נכר מאד שהוא מורה על ההפך. שירצה שמה שמספרים ומגידים מכבודו אין ספורם באומר דברים ובהשמעת קולות כספור המפורסם אצלינו רק בפעולותיהם הנפלאות שבהם מכירים כל באי עולם את כבודו ואת גדלו. וכמו שבאר בסמוך בכל הארץ יצא קום ובקצה תבל וכו'

I for one am astonished at this proof, for beyond being shrewd yet distortive of [scripture's] language, it is truly unnecessary...for the *peshat* sense of the verse is very well known and it instructs of precisely the opposite. For David meant that what they *declare* and *speak* of *His glory* is not a story consisting of *speech* and *words* and the *hearing of voices* like those stories which are familiar to us.⁴¹ Rather [they *decree* and *speak* of *His glory*] by way of their wonderous actions, by virtue of which everyone in the world recognizes *His glory* and greatness. As he clarified in the adjoining verse: *their line is gone out through all the earth, and to the end of the world*, and so on (cf Ps. 19:5)."

The *peshat* reading of Ps. 19:2, Arama here tells us, instructs of "precisely the opposite:" I.e., *there is no speech, there are no words, neither is their voice heard* refers to the idea that the spheres' praise consists in the didactic value of their silent, perpetual motions which indicate to onlookers the existence of a purposive Creator-God—i.e., "their wonderous actions, by virtue of which everyone in the world recognizes His glory and greatness."⁴² After attacking Maimonides' argument from the nature of praise, Arama turns to critiquing his second argument from scriptural language usage. In response to Maimonides' contention that scripture only ever uses the terms *declaring* and *speaking* together in reference to rational beings, Arama notes glibly "I have no idea what his reason for this was," retorting with a swift counterexample: Job 12:7–8 speaks of fowls *speaking* and fish *declaring*. If scripture uses these terms in reference to non-rational animals separately, Arama asks rhetorically, "what prevents scripture from using the two terms together?" In Arama's words:⁴³

⁴¹ Note Albo, *Iqqarim*, II.31:13–14

⁴² While, as noted in note 37 above, Arama's explication of Ps. 19:2 constitutes something of a recovery of the formerly-prevailing interpretation Maimonides' interpretation had challenged, advanced by Saadia, Bahya ibn Paquda, and Abraham ibn Ezra, the basic idea behind his explication—that the heavens speaking/telling the Glory of God refers to the motions of the celestial spheres' indicating to the existence of their Mover—is also resonant with Albo's gloss on the same verse in *Book of Principles* III.1, in his elaboration of *Pereq Shirah*:

כמו שאמרו שם שמים מה הם אומרים השמים מספרים כבוד אל וגו', ואומרים ואומר הנזכר שם בכל פרק שירה, לרמוז על ההוראה, כאמרם ז"ל זאת אומרת, ורוצה לומר כי מתנועת השמים יש לקחת ראיה על המצא מניע אותם בלתי מתנועע, והוא בתכלית היכולת והעצמה, שהוא מניע גופים נוראים כאלו הוא האלוה יתברך, וזהו דבר חכמת בינה כמו שנתבאר במקומו

גם מה שאמר שאין הלשון מטיל ספור והגדה יחד כי אם בבעלי השכל והרצון. לא ידעתי טעמו כי אחר שנמצא ועוף השמים ויגד לך. ויספרו ⁴³ לך דגי הים (איוב י"ב:ז). מה המונע ליתן הכתוב בזה לזה

As for what Maimonides said about the [Hebrew] language's not using the terms *declaring and speaking* together except in reference to beings endowed with intellect and volition, I have no idea what his reason for this was. For in scripture we find *and the fowls of the air; they shall speak to thee...and the fishes of the sea shall declare to thee* (Job. 12:7–8). Then what prevents scripture from using the two terms together? For most certainly, if it is justifiable to use them separately, it is justifiable to use them together.”

Arama thus not only systematically critiques both of Maimonides' arguments for reading Ps. 19:2–4 as a prooftext for the idea that the spheres are living and rational.⁴⁴ In so doing, he also advocates for an alternative, established reading of Ps. 19:2–4: that according to which the spheres' *declaring* and *speaking* refer to their didactic motion.

Lest we lose the forest for the trees however, what is most important for our present purposes is that the detail and systematicity of Arama's critique testify to his construal of scriptural exegesis as a site of contestation. Arama makes a concerted effort to refute Maimonides' reading of Ps. 19:2–4 and to offer an alternative interpretation of these verses because he believed that merely attacking the philosophical and conceptual argument underpinning the idea that the spheres are living and rational would be insufficient. He understood that to challenge ideas that had become part of the consensus among Jewish intellectuals he would need to rehabilitate and reclaim the scriptural prooftexts that had been used to support and underpin that consensus. This is why Arama made reclaiming prooftexts a central part of his project in AY.

⁴⁴ In Gate 2, after summarily restating both of these critiques, Arama seizes on the opportunity to denigrate Maimonides' exegesis once more:

“The end of the matter is that some of the Master's testimonia are not correct, while others clarify the [the theory of] pushing (*deḥiyyah*) and indeed, there is no aid [i.e., to the notion that the heavens are animate and rational] either from the Prophets or the Writings or the Sages. I do not know what he relied upon in what he wrote there, i.e.: “this is a proof taken from scripture, which only ignorant or obstinate persons would refuse to admit” (*Guide* II.5). For God knows whether [it is] for a bale, or as deceit (b.Sanhedrin 26a), or whether [it is] in accordance with truth.”

1.2.2. Rereading Onkelos

Another example of Arama's reclaiming popular prooftexts can be seen in Gate 10. As in the previous example, the prooftexts Arama sets out to reclaim here began their career as prooftexts in Maimonides' *Guide*. But in contrast to the previous example where the philosophical ideas at stake concerned issues of cosmology (whether the spheres are living and rational), here the philosophical ideas at stake instead concern issues of theology and epistemology, divine nature and divine knowledge, and specifically, whether the angels can have knowledge of good and evil.⁴⁵ Also in contrast to the previous example, in this case the prooftexts Arama is chiefly concerned with are not verses of Torah themselves (though he is concerned with these too—), but rather an early Rabbinic *interpretation* of Torah verses: specifically, the *translation* of two verses, Gen. 3:5 and Gen. 3:22, according to the canonical first century Aramaic Targum Onkelos.

Perhaps one of the most powerful constellations of ideas popularized by Maimonides' *Guide* and its avid readers was the notion that God, the angels, and man created in the image of God all possess only a very particular kind of knowledge which is of course the only kind of knowledge truly worthy of the name and truly worth of possessing: i.e., knowledge of

⁴⁵ Arama's interest in divine and angelic knowledge should be investigated against the background of two broader currents: First, a pervasive concern with issues related to divine knowledge beginning in the fourteenth century, developed most famously in the work of Gersonides (in turn critiqued by Crescas), but also apparent in the works of Moses Narboni and Arama's contemporary Abraham Bibago. Second, a near-ubiquitous Latin Scholastic concern with the question of angelic sin and its relation to angelic knowledge and free-will (*liberum arbitrium*). On the former, see Tamar Rudavsky, "Divine Omniscience and Future Contingents in Gersonides," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 21, no. 4 (1983): 513–536; Charles Manekin, "On the Limited-Omniscience Interpretation of Gersonides' Theory of Divine Knowledge," in *Perspectives on Jewish Thought and Mysticism*, eds. Alfred Ivry, Elliot Wolfson, and Allan Arkush (Harwood Academic Publishers, 1998), 135–170; Charles Manekin, "Maimonides on Divine Knowledge: Moses of Narbonne's Averroist Reading," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 76, no. 1 (2002): 51–74; Allan Lazaroff, "The Theology of Abraham Bibago: A Defense of the Divine Will, Knowledge and Providence in Fifteenth-Century Spanish-Jewish Philosophy" (PhD diss., Brandeis University, 1973), 80–103. For basic orientation to the latter, see Timothy B. Noone, "Duns Scotus on Angelic Knowledge," in *A Companion to Angels in Medieval Philosophy* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 187–221. My thanks to Caterina Rigo for bringing my attention to the Latin Scholastic context.

intelligibilia.⁴⁶ Abstract and immaterial, intelligibilia are universal, eternal, and completely unchanging, identical across contexts. In contrast, much of what is commonly understood to be knowledge does change across contexts and so does not meet the rigid criteria of intelligibilia. Most relevant to our purposes, in *Guide* I.2, Maimonides had strongly suggested that moral and political knowledge, i.e., “knowledge of good and evil,” does not belong to the domain of intelligibilia. This is key to Maimonides’ understanding of both the fall and the final purpose of human existence: While man’s true final purpose and his divine state prior to the fall is to be concerned only with intelligibilia, with knowledge of “true and false,” the fall consists in man’s descent to the realm of mere opinions; he becomes preoccupied with moral and political knowledge of “good and evil” that distracts him from realizing his true final purpose.⁴⁷

Though Maimonides did much to develop and support this complex constellation of ideas, arguably the most important move he makes is to advance very particular and historically unusual readings of Gen. 3:5 and Gen. 3:22, the relevant portions of which respectively read: *and ye shall be as elohim, knowing good and evil* (Gen. 3:5); *behold, the man has become as one of us, knowing good and evil* (Gen. 3:22). In so far as the *elohim* of Gen. 3:5 traditionally had been understood as referring to God and/or angels and Gen. 3:22 traditionally had been understood as

⁴⁶ In his commentary on Genesis 3:22, which seems to be merely a repackaging of AY Gate 10, Isaac Abarbanel explicitly frames *Guide* I.2 as having produced the consensus opinion on this issue:

“All subsequent (or: latter day) sages have followed [Maimonides’] path. That is to say, [they believe] that knowledge of good and evil is a deficiency for man, and that such knowledge does not apply to the separate intellects.”

See Isaac Abarbanel, *Perush Abarbanel ‘al ha-Torah, Vol. 1: Bereshit*, ed. Yehuda Shaviv (Jerusalem: Horeb Press, 2007), 193–195.

⁴⁷ For a close study of Maimonides’ account of the Fall in *Guide* I.2, see Lawrence V. Berman, “Maimonides on the Fall of Man,” *AJS Review* 5 (1980): 1–15. This is of course a reductive account of Maimonides’ construal of the final purpose of human existence, which continues to be debated by scholars into the modern period. See e.g., Howard Kreisel, “Imitatio Dei in Maimonides’ *Guide of the Perplexed*,” *AJS Review* 19 (1994): 169–211; 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 Prof. Emanuel Rackman*, ed. Moshe Beer (Bar Ilan University Press, 1994) 49–57; David R. Blumenthal, “Maimonides’ Intellectualist Mysticism and the Superiority of the Prophecy of Moses,” *Studies in Medieval Culture* 10 (1977): 51–68.

being spoken by God, both verses seem to suggest that God and/or the angels know good and evil—directly contradicting Maimonides’ understanding that God and the angels only possess knowledge of intelligibilia. To defend his understanding then, Maimonides offered alternative readings of both verses: In his *Eight Chapters*, he reread the phrase generally taken to mean *man has become as one of us* in Gen. 3:22 to mean *man has become unique*.⁴⁸ Much more influential, in *Guide* I.2, he suggested that the *elohim* of Gen. 3:5 refers neither to God nor to the angels, but rather to the rulers of cities, supporting this alternative reading by appealing to one of the earliest and most venerable canonical interpretations, namely, the first century Aramaic Targum Onkelos. In his translation of Gen. 3:5, Onkelos had rendered the Hebrew *elohim* as the Aramaic *rabrabya*, meaning something like “the great ones.” Perhaps preemptively defending his own highly atypical reading of *elohim* in *Guide* I.2 Maimonides leaned on Onkelos as prooftext for his prooftext, strongly implying that Onkelos had translated the word *elohim* in the way he did because he too had recognized that the *elohim* who knew good and evil could not refer to the angels.

Arama devotes virtually the entirety of AY Gate 10 to attacking the foregoing constellation of ideas Maimonides develops in *Guide* I.2, and from a variety of angles: As we will see in a later section of this chapter, he employs not one but two relatively unpopular midrashim to elaborate a tripartite theory of knowledge and articulate an alternative distinction between human and angelic knowledge.⁴⁹ As we will see in the next chapter, he draws on Aristotle’s *Ethics* and its commentary tradition to challenge the idea that moral and political knowledge or knowledge of “good and evil” is restricted to the realm of mere opinion and does

⁴⁸ See Maimonides, *Eight Chapters*, in *Ethical Writings of Maimonides*, eds. Raymond L. Weiss and Charles Butterworth (Dover Publications, 1975).

⁴⁹ See 1.3.1 below.

not belong to the realm of unchanging intelligibilia.⁵⁰ But in his multi-pronged attack, he spills the most ink attempting to reclaim Onkelos' translations of Gen. 3:5 (and Gen. 3:22) from the clutches of Maimonides' imputed interpretation. After having already launched several critiques on the conceptual apparatus underpinning the idea that the angels cannot know good and evil, Arama states in no uncertain terms that the most serious obstacle is not conceptual, but rather exegetical: the philosophizers cling fervently to the belief that the angels cannot know good and evil because of the strength of the apparent proof-text: (Maimonides' reading of) Onkelos' translations of Gen. 3:5 and Gen. 3:22. In Arama's words:⁵¹

What is most difficult about this is that it seems that the divine Onkelos, peace be upon him, agreed with them, for he translated (Onkelos Gen. 3:22): [and God said]: *behold, man has become unique; it is for him to know good and evil*; and he translated *and ye shall be as elohim knowing good and evil* (Gen. 3:5) as *ye shall be as the great ones* (Onkelos Gen. 3:5).⁵² All who hold this opinion rejoiced in his words and thought it were as if [their opinion] had been demonstrated by what [Onkelos] said.

Arama understood that Maimonides and his disciples had implicitly projected their ideas about angelic knowledge onto Onkelos' renderings of Gen. 3:5 and Gen. 3:22: Onkelos rendered these verses in the way he did, they silently reasoned, because he too believed angels cannot know good and evil.

To divorce Onkelos' translations from this implicit misinterpretation and retrieve them from their co-optation as philosophic proof-texts, Arama sets about elaborating alternative theories for why Onkelos rendered these verses in the way he did, treating his translations of

⁵⁰ See 2.1.2 below.

⁵¹ והיותר קשה בזה שנרא' שמסכים לדעתם אנקלוס האלהי ע"ה שתרגם האדם הוה יחידאי בעלמא מיני' למדע טב וביש ותרגם והייתם כאלהים יודעי טוב ורע כרברביא ושמהו בדבריו כל בעלי זה הדעת וחשבוהו כמוכרח למה שיצא מפיו

⁵² Hayyim Israeli also connects commentators' tendency to force interpretations of Gen. 3:22 from their *peshat* to Onkelos' interpretation in *Ma'amar Gan Eden*, ch. 10: "All of the great and true translators struggled greatly with the explication of this verse, such that even the Great Rabbi Moses [Maimonides], peace be upon him, in the profundity of his thoughts and wisdom, was compelled to follow the Aramaic translator and to force the verse form its *peshat*." See 4.3 above.

Gen. 3:22 and Gen. 3:5 in turn. Arama begins with Onkelos' rendering of Gen. 3:22—*behold, man has become unique; it is for him to know good and evil*—which might be taken to corroborate the idea that the angels do not know good and evil because it strategically obviates the question. To redeem Onkelos from this implicit imputation, Arama devises an alternative theory and explains that Onkelos translated the verse in this way essentially for pastoral reasons, out of concern for the masses.⁵³ Arama tells us that, like Rashi later, Onkelos recognized that the straightforward, *peshat* sense of the Hebrew verse might be confusing to a majority of people:⁵⁴

In any event, in his translation of this verse, Onkelos aimed at something that we ought to pay attention to; something other than what the commentators thought he said. I think that this is what Rashi, may his memory be blessed, aimed at. Namely, [they were concerned] that the *peshat* of the verse required some improvement, since it often posed an obstacle to the multitude.

Arama elaborates: Onkelos' interpretation was specifically designed to skirt around the Hebrew word *mimenu* and the ambiguous referent of its pronominal suffix, since either basic interpretation might sow theological misconceptions among the people. If the pronominal suffix refers to God Himself, people might take the verse to indicate that God is not one but rather many, since God is also the speaker of the verse and so speaking to Himself.⁵⁵ Alternatively, if the pronominal suffix refers others beside God, people might take the verse to indicate that others have knowledge equal to God's. Finally, in either case, people might take the verse to

⁵³ It is worth noting that Arama's vision of Onkelos as making translation decisions out of concern for the masses reflects his own commitments and vision of himself—see 3.1 and subsections below, as well as the following remark from Gate 64, in which Arama similarly suggests Onkelos made a translation choice to cater to the masses' perception that only the corporeal is real:

אמנם אנקלוס שהסב בכל מקום מלת נפש אל האיש הנה הוא דבר אל ההמון כפי הראוי להם כי הם יותר יחושו אל הגופות ואם הם החלק הפחות שבהם כמו שביארנו בתחלת השער הקודם

⁵⁴ האמנם שמה שתרגם אנקלוס בכתוב הזה כוון בו לדבר ראוי לשום אליו לב זולת מה שחשבוהו ממנו ואחשוב שאליי כוון רש"י ז"ל והוא שפשוטו של כתוב זה צריך תקון כמנהגו להרים מכשול מעיני ההמון

⁵⁵ I.e., Arama imagines that Onkelos was concerned with the possibility of the masses' construing the verse as a suggestion of divine multiplicity, most likely a thinly-veiled reference to the Trinity.

indicate that man and God are somehow equals. Onkelos thus translated the verse in the non-literal way he did, Arama insists, in order to eschew these theologically-troublesome and confusing potential interpretations:⁵⁶

For in his saying: *behold, man is become as one*, and so on (Gen. 3:22), it is inescapable that either God spoke to Himself, as in his saying, *and the Lord said in His heart* (Gen. 8:21) or else He spoke to another. If He spoke to Himself, this brings [one to the opinion of divine] multiplicity, and to imagine [His being] two or even three—heaven forbid it!⁵⁷ But if He spoke to another, it seems that God and that other with whom He spoke are equals in [their] knowledge of good and evil—but this is a despicable notion, and something impossible. There is [also] an even greater difficulty in God's saying that by doing this, man would be equal to them. [But] Onkelos corrected all this in his translation. *For the mouth of them that speak lies and utter falsehoods about this shall be stopped* (Ps. 63:12).

Having accounted for Onkelos' translation of Gen. 3:22, Arama turns next to his translation of Gen. 3:5, providing two alternative explications for his rendering of the Hebrew *elohim* as the Aramaic *rabrabya*, “the great ones.” First, Arama simply asserts that—contrary to Maimonides' claims—Onkelos used *rabrabya* as a simple and straightforward translation to signify “angels,” thereby dissolving Maimonides' and the philosophizers' implication that Onkelos deliberately eschewed attributing the angels with knowledge of good and evil.

Second, more interesting, Arama concedes to Maimonides' implicit premise—that Onkelos did use *rabrabya* to avoid the plain sense of *elohim* as “angel”—but explains that Onkelos' translation choice was motivated by entirely different reasoning: Onkelos was not concerned with the angels' knowing good and evil, but rather another aspect of epistemology, specifically, the nature of animal knowledge. Arama draws our attention to the fact that the

כי אומרו הן האדם היה כאחד וכי לא ימלט משידבר הש"י אל עצמו כאומרו ויאמר ה' אל לבו או שידבר עם זולתו ואם ידבר אל עצמו הרי הוא מביא אל הרבוי ואל הדמוי המשנים או המשלשים חלילה לנו. ואם אל זולתו כבר ירא' שהוא יתברך ואותו הזולת אשר עמו ידבר היו שוים בדיעת הטוב והרע וזה מגונ' ודבר שא"א. וקשה עוד שיאמר שיהי' האדם בזה שוה להם. והוא תקן הכל בתרגומו בזה כי יסכר פי דברי שקר ודבר כזב בדברים האלה כמו שעשו הזקנים במאמר נעשה אדם וכיוצא

⁵⁷ In his reference to God being “three,” Arama is suggesting that Onkelos translates Gen. 3:22 in the way that he did because he too was attuned to the way in which the verse might be adduced for the sake of Christian polemics, to underwrite the notion of the Trinity.

speaker of Gen. 3:5 is the snake. Onkelos knew that speech is secondary to intellectual conceptualization (i.e., you can only speak about what you can conceptualize) and that non-rational animals cannot conceptualize angels (i.e., purely immaterial and intellectual beings), thus he knew it would have been impossible for the snake to be speaking about an angel.

Onkelos' translation of *elohim* as *rabrabya* reflects his understanding of this epistemological problematic, not anything to do with angelic knowledge of good and evil.⁵⁸ It is worth citing Arama's remarks in full:⁵⁹

Or, (2) he designated this term—I mean, the great ones—to refer to something *other* than the angels. I say that in this he aimed at a more profound notion. That is: it is known that a speaker is only attributed with an utterance if he knows or recognizes some aspect of it; if he can conceptualize and imagine it in some respect... It is all the more so impossible that a non-rational animal would apprehend [an angel] or that such an apprehension would be ascribed to a [non-rational animal] in any respect.⁶⁰ Go and learn [from the case of] Balaam's ass: when she turned aside before an angel of the Lord that was standing before him with its sword drawn in its hand, she spoke, apologizing to her master, insofar as she was not accustomed to doing this. She said: *Am I not thy ass?* (Num. 22:30). Yet she did not apologize for seeing the angel of the Lord, for which she ought to have made a great apology! This is because, even if He gave her the ability to perceive [something] more terrifying than him, still, her faculty was too poor to have any sort of intellectual estimation at all. This is why she never mentions the angel of the Lord. It was for precisely this reason that Onkelos had difficulty with the serpent's saying *and ye shall be as elohim knowing good and evil* (Gen. 3:5). For it suggests that the serpent apprehended the angel's quiddity or state, and that

⁵⁸ Arama's reinterpretation of Onkelos in light of ideas about epistemology and its relation to language might be understood as a more straightforwardly Maimonidean use of philosophical exegesis, albeit one designed to indirectly undermine a consensus Maimonidean position. Here then we already have an example of Arama's "domestication of philosophy," to be discussed in the next chapter and especially in 2.2 and subsections.

⁵⁹ ואם הונח שנתיחד לו זה הלשון רצוני רברביא לכיין בו אל זולת המלאכים אומר שכוון בזה אל ענין יותר עמוק והוא שידוע שאין ליחס לשום מדבר מאמר רק מה שיש לו צד ידיעה או הכרה בו או שום ציור ודמיון יוכל לציירו ולדמותו בצד מהצדדים ואפי' חולמי החלומות לא יראו להם דברים רק שיהיה אל החולם ההוא שום השערה בהם אם במציאותם כמות שהם או ע"י ערוב או הרכבה מדברים נודעים או נכרים אצלו קצתם בקצתם. אבל מה שלא צוייר לו בשום ציור והשערה לא יתדמה אליו כלל כמו שכתב החכם בטבעיות ז"ל ואין לו שיבנה צורה מבלתי משל קודם ע"כ. ומהידוע ג"כ שהמלאך לא יושג ולא יצייר רק בציור שכלי ממש וכמ"ש אליפז התימני יעמוד ולא אכיר מראהו (איוב ד:ט"ז) כי לא ישיג בדמיונו ולא בשום כח היולאני זה המלאך המדבר בו וכ"ש שהוא נמנע בכל תנאיו שישגי אותו ה"ה הבלתי מדבר ושתיוחס השגתו אליו בשום ענין. צא ולמד מאתונו של בלעם שהרי נטתה מפני מלאך ה' הנצב לקראתו וחרבו שלופה בידו וכשדברה התנצלה מאדוניה במה שלא הורגלה לעשות כן ואמרה הלא אנכי אתונך (במדבר כ"ב:ל') ולא נתנצלה בשראתה את מלאך ה' שהיה לה התנצלות נפלא וזה שאם נתן לה כח להרגיש ענין מאיים ומבהיל יותר ממנו הנה הורע כחה משער שום השערה שכלית כלל ולזה לא הזכירה מלאך ה' בפיה. ומטעם זה עצמו הוקשה בעיני אנקלוס שיאמר הנחש והייתם כאלהים יודעי טוב ורע שיורה שהנחש היה משיג ומשער מהות המלאך או ענינו ושהוא מכיר בו שהוא יודע בין טוב לרע

⁶⁰ In his commentary on Num. 22:21, Gersonides raises the similar issue of how Balaam's ass could have seen an angel when the latter can only be seen by prophets; he however resolves the issue differently, with recourse to the idea that the entire tale of Balaam's ass occurred in a dream.

[the serpent] recognized that [the angel] *knows* the difference between *good and evil*.

To buttress his re-interpretation of Onkelos and support the idea that non-rational animals cannot conceptualize purely intellectual angels and so cannot speak of them, Arama creatively glosses the story of Balaam's ass. He explains that though the ass apologizes to Balaam for deviating from her path, she does not apologize to the angel—though the latter is surely more deserving of an apology—precisely because qua irrational animal, she cannot apprehend the angel and so cannot name it. Just as Balaam's ass could not apprehend the angel because she is a non-rational animal, so too the snake could neither apprehend angels nor discuss them, all of which, Arama implies, Onkelos knew, motivating his rendering of *elohim* as *rabrabya*.

But lest we get lost in the details of Arama's fascinating rereadings of Onkelos' translations of Gen. 3:22 and Gen. 3:5, what is most important for our purposes are the immense creative energy and careful attention to detail Arama affords to engineering these alternative accounts. As in the previous example, but even more so, both are clear testament to how seriously Arama undertook the project of recuperating and rehabilitating prooftexts—and not only biblical prooftexts—divorcing these from the popular philosophical ideas with which they had come to be associated and redeeming them for other purposes. They are, in other words, clear testament to Arama's understanding that exegesis is *the* key site of contestation—and to the defensive, exegetical lengths to which he would go to reclaim prooftexts from the distorting clutches of the philosophizers.

1.2.3. Multiplying Interpretations: Jacob's Ladder

Yet another instance of Arama's reclaiming a popular prooftext has already been singled out by James T. Robinson and revolves around another central Maimonidean exegetical motif: the story

of Jacob's ladder from Gen. 28.⁶¹ As Robinson discusses, already in the *Guide*, Maimonides had pointed to not one but two possible philosophical-allegorical readings of Jacob's ladder:

According to one reading, political-philosophical, Jacob's ladder symbolizes the ladder of knowledge that select elite individuals, philosophers and prophets, ascend before descending; acquiring knowledge themselves before they can teach that knowledge to the community.

According to a second reading, cosmological, Jacob's ladder symbolizes the entire neoplatonized Aristotelian chain of existence, reaching from the Prime Mover down to the sublunar world and through every sphere in between. Both readings, but especially the political-philosophical reading went on to become hugely popular in medieval Hebrew literature following Maimonides.

As Robinson has pointed out, Arama, for his part, attempts to reclaim Jacob's ladder not by directly attacking or critiquing the prevailing philosophical interpretations, but rather by mounting counter offensives, i.e., by advancing *several* counter-interpretations that indirectly challenge the Maimonidean reading. Robinson highlights how in AY Gate 25, which centers around *parashat va-yetze* Arama "replaces" the political-philosophical reading outlined above "with an anti-philosophical reading...by shifting emphasis from the ladder itself to God above the ladder, and from the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom to the limitations of knowledge and wisdom."⁶²

But while Arama's emphasis on the unknowability of God above the ladder in Gate 25 is part of his strategy of rehabilitate this popular proof-text, it is just that—only a part, and certainly not the whole of it. In addition to the lengthy, anti-philosophical interpretation of Jacob's ladder developed in Gate 25 and already discussed by Robinson, Arama, much like Maimonides himself, suggests multiple different interpretations of Jacob's ladder at various points throughout

⁶¹ The following based largely on Robinson, "On or Above the Ladder?."

⁶² Robinson, "On or Above the Ladder?," 96–97.

AY: While in Gates 1 and 3, Arama actually suggests that he understands the ladder along the lines of Maimonides' cosmological reading, as symbolizing the necessary causal chain of existence (as opposed to the believers in chance—), and then along ontological lines, as symbolizing the Aristotelian ten categories, in Gates 44–45, he deploys the Rabbinic gematria gloss “the ladder is Sinai” to suggest that the ladder symbolizes revelation.⁶³ Meanwhile, in Gate 48, he emphasizes that the dream of the ladder is about God's selection of Israel, while in Gate 92, he suggests that the ladder symbolizes the ladder of religious virtues!⁶⁴ In the case of Jacob's ladder then, part of Arama's strategy in reclaiming a popular proof-text with multiple valences in the Maimonidean tradition seems to be multiplying interpretations, offering multiple counter interpretations to contest or at least unsettle the philosophical tradition's numerous interpretations.

⁶³ Gate 1: אמת הקודם באמת מבוארת ליודעיה ולא נעלמה מעיני מבקשיה. הלא היא הנותנת סבה מחייבת לכל חכמה עיונית חקירת סבת דרושה. אשר לצורך זה החוקרים בעוצם השתדלות עיונם דברו בהתחלות הנמצאות הטבעיות. גם ביררו להם היות סוג הסבות המקיימות והנותנות אמות מהותם במה שיושבו לשאלת מה, וממה, וממי, ולמה. במספר הד' המפורסמות אצל הפילוסופים כי המה ראו בטוב שכלם ורוח בינתם מציאות הסבות העצמיות לנמצאות דרך סדורם והשתלשלותם ואופני מערכותם וענין התאחזם והתלכדותם סולם מוצב ארצה וראשו מגיע ומפליש גבוה מעל גבוה. המה יעלו בו מהמשלה השפלה אל התיכונה ומן התיכונה אל השלישית. עד יגיעו באמצעותו אל אמת מציאות הסבה הראשונה לכל. הנה היא מלך הכבוד. כי זה כל האדם. רצוני המוצלח. אמנם כי יפקד מציאות הסולם או שיהיה רעוע. כאשר יתקלקלו השליכות ונפלו המדרגות או נתק קשרם והתאחזם מרגליו ועד ראשו. מי יעלה בהר ה' וכו'. האינך רואה כי בדבר שאין לו סבה. כמו שהוא בעינינו האלהיים מצד מהותו ית'. או שלא נודעו סבותיהן כמו שהוא בעינינו הסגוניים או ברוב מהשמימיים. שכלם גזרו אומר שעל אלה לא תפול ידיעה אמתית ועל אלו לא כלל... ולזה הוצרכה התורה לפתוח בבראשית. להגיד ללומדיה כח מעשיו במעשה ההוא המופלא הנקרא מעשה בראשית ומספר המאמרות שבהם נברא העולם. למה שהוא כלל גדול לידיעות הסבות העצמיות לנמצאות כלן וסדר טבעיהם והשתלשלותם. עד שהיא עצמה תהיה עצם הסולם אלהית שאמרנו

שהיא מבואר וסבה ראשונה אל הגעת הצלחתם שבה יתקיים העולם בדרך מציאות הסולם ועלייתם בו כמו שאמרנו בשער הראשון. כי Gate 3: היא ההכנה והסבה העצמית לפקוח עינים עורות לדרוש ולקבל שכר. אמנם כאשר נברא על האופן הזה מקום הטבע אשר יכלולו העשר מאמרות האלו. ונתן אותו לטבע מיוחד לכל החמרים שיקבלו צורותיהם המיוחדות. כאשר יוקדמו לכל אחד ואחד סבותיהן העצמיות לפי טבעם ומזגם. כמו שחייב פרסומו מסדר המאמרות בזה אחר זה במספר הימים המור' על סדר הקדימה והאחרון הזמניים אשר היה לקצתן על קצתן בשעת בריאתן כמו שיתבאר. כבר נתן מקום להפרע מן הרשעים. שעם הרגישם זה הסדר הנפלא היותו על האופן מהשלמות שיכלולו העשרה מאמרות אשר היא הסולם המוצב לעיניהם. ולא שתו אל לבם לעלות בו לקיים בשכלם מציאות אל עליון אשר הוא עושה כל ולא קבלו עליו אלהותו בהיות פתח העיון פתוח לפניו.

For Gate 44, see my translation in Part II.

⁶⁴ Gate 92: והוא ע"ה המציא תחבולה גדולה אמשול אליה משל הלא אם יעמוד לפניך מגדל גבוה וראשו בשמים ושעריו סגורים מפה ומפה ואין פותח ויאמרו לך מהרה חושה עלה על ראשו ותשתומם כי לא תדע שום אפשרות לעלותך שמה היה שם פקח אחד ואמר אליך למה תשתומם כי לא אמרו לך לדלג בפסיע' גסה אחת אבל הרשות בידך להמציא לך המצאות קרובות או רחוקות במ תוכל לעלות אל קצהו הלא יקריב לך אפשרות העליה ותתן לבך לעשותו ואם יוסיף עוד ויראה לך סולם מוצב ארצה וראשו מגיע אל סוף קצה המגדל אשר היה נעלם ממך הנה אז תהיה העליה נקלה מאד ותשמח מאד בעצתו... אמנם כאשר יזמין לפניך סולם נכון בו תוכל לעלות ממעלה אל מעלה בנקלה הנה השאלה אינה קשה בשום צד והנה אנכי מראה לכם דרך ישר וסולם נאות בו תוכלו לעלות יפה. והנה הראשונה והעקרית ממדרגותיו היא היראה שזכר על האופן עצמו שפירשנו כאן אין היראה אין שום מקום למעשה... ולזה השליכה מהסולם הראשון היא היראה והיא נקלה עליו גם היא מחוייבת לו

1.2.4. The Sabbath's Partner

Though by no means the final example of Arama reclaiming prooftexts, the final example of Arama's reclaiming prooftexts that I will discuss here differs in an important respect from the examples we have already seen. While in the previous examples, we have focused on Arama's attempts to reclaim and rehabilitate *popular* prooftexts—i.e., in all instances, prooftexts adduced in Maimonides' *Guide*, and subsequently popularized by his followers—in this case, we will see Arama attempting to reclaim and rehabilitate a prooftext that, as far as I can tell, was by no means especially popular. While it is perhaps unsurprising that someone who chose to develop his ideas principally through the medium of exegesis would extend his concern beyond the interpretation of already-popular prooftexts, Arama's zeal to reclaim even recondite passages from what he judged to be incorrect philosophical interpretation further illustrates the extent to which he viewed exegesis as the central site of cultural contestation.

The example here comes from AY Gate 4 and revolves around the interpretation of not a verse from Torah, but rather a brief passage of Rabbinic literature from midrash Genesis Rabbah. The midrash relates an exchange between the Sabbath and God in which the Sabbath complains to God that everyone else has a mate besides her and God responds by promising that the Sabbath will have a mate in the Community of Israel:

“And the heaven was finished (Gen. 2:1). R. Shimon b. Yoḥai taught that the Sabbath said to the Holy One, Blessed be He: ‘You have given a mate unto everyone, yet unto me You have not given a mate.’ He said to her: ‘The community of Israel shall be your mate.’ When Israel stood upon Mount Sinai, He said to them: ‘Remember what I said to the Sabbath, [i.e.,] the community of Israel is your mate.’ This is why Scripture says remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy” (Gen. Rab. 11).

Arama sets this passage as the introductory *ma'amar* of Gate 4 and over the course of the Gate develops not one but two complex interpretations of it. Both revolve around the ideas that the Sabbath symbolizes passivity, and that passivity's counterpart or mate is activity: On the level of *peshat*, Arama suggests that the Sabbath and Israel are mates insofar as the passivity or cessation of activity inherent in the Sabbath commandments are perfected by being commanded of and so in a sense constituting an activity on the part of the community of Israel. On a deeper level, Arama suggests that the Sabbath and Israel are mates insofar as only the community Israel, vis-à-vis Torah, can bring the Supernal Sabbath (i.e., immortality) from passivity into *actu* by achieving eternal life in the World to Come.⁶⁵

But it is not until after elaborating both foregoing interpretations, and indeed until the very end of the Gate, that Arama indicates why he may have selected the *ma'amar* that he did to begin with. Arama was motivated to interpret this passage of midrash, he suggests, in order to rescue and rehabilitate it, to counter what he understood to be an incorrect philosophical interpretation that he encountered elsewhere. Here is what he says:⁶⁶

I have seen one who explained [this Rabbinic dictum] as a complaint of the Active Intellect due to the procession of separate intellects [preceding it], meanwhile no separate intellect emanates from it, as is the case for the prior separate intellects.⁶⁷ The reply [to this] is that the souls of the perfect ones from

⁶⁵ Arama's interpretations of this dictum prefigure three themes that we will encounter in this and the coming chapters: (1) His reading of the midrash as indicating God's selection of the community of Israel as specially destined towards immortality, via the commandments connect with Arama's theory of Jews as separate species as developed in 3.2, 3.3 and subsections; (2) His using the organic conceptual vocabulary of the midrash to develop ideas that are *not* defensible from the standpoint of Aristotelian philosophy (precisely those elaborated in (1)) connect with Arama's use of exegesis to do constructive, conceptual work s developed in 1.3 below; (3) Arama's layering over a more straightforwardly philosophical interpretation (what he deems the *peshat* interpretation) with a deeper layer of interpretation connects with his strategy of domesticating philosophy by way of incorporation and neutralization, developed in 2.2.1 below.

⁶⁶ וראיתי מי שביארו על תלונת השכל הפועל מפני שעמדה השתלשלות השכלים הנבדלים אצלו ולא הושפע ממנו נבדל כיוצא בו כנבדלים הראשונים והיתה התשובה שנפשות השלמים מכנסת ישראל יהיו בן זוגו שיושפעו ממנו ויזכו ויחיו לפניו. ובאמת מוסף על שהדרוש הזה הוא רחוק מאד מבעל זה המאמר ומהנמשכים אחר התורה והנביאים לסבות יזכרו במקומות אחרים הנה ג"כ אינו יכול להולמו בלשונו. כי לפי זה היה להתרעם על בת זוג ולא על בן זוג. גם היה לו לומר כנסת ישראל תהא בת זוגך שהמושפעים הם במדרגת הנקבה בלי ספק. ועוד מה לו לכנסת ישראל והלא לפי דעתם ממנו הושפעו כל הצורות שבאלו הנמצאות השפלות. ועוד שמאמר זכור את יום השבת לקדשו שהוא נועם מליצת ההמצאה כלה אין בו שום טעם כלל אם לא בקדש אשה לאיש. ומה שכתבנו הוא הנכון לפי האומר והנאמר והמקום שנאמר ממנו

⁶⁷ In his Torah commentary, Abarbanel seems to offer a parallel summary and critique of this philosophical reading of the dictum. See Abarbanel, *Bereshit*, 133.

the community of Israel are its mate, for they are emanated therefrom and are purified and live for its sake. In truth, in addition to the fact that this explanation is very far off from [what was meant by] the one who made this statement as well as those who follow the Torah and the prophets for reasons which shall be mentioned in other places, indeed, moreover, such an interpretation is not fitting for linguistic reasons. For according to this [explanation], the complaint should have been regarding a female mate, and not a male mate. Similarly, He ought to have said [in response] that “the community of Israel shall be your female mate,” for those things which are emanated correspond to the rank of the female, without any doubt. Furthermore, what would be the [particularity of] the community of Israel, for in their⁶⁸ opinion, all of the forms found among the lower existents are emanated from [the Active Intellect]. Further, the dictum *remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy*, which is a wonderful rhetorical device for evoking [the notion of] a bride, has no meaning at all if not in the holiness of a wife for her husband. [In contrast], what we wrote is correct in terms of [the grammatical gender of] the speaker and what was said as well as the place where it was spoken of.

Though Arama does not name the target of his critique, it seems that he likely had in mind Joseph Albo, who in his *Book of Principles* II.1 had explicated the same midrash along precisely the lines Arama suggests.⁶⁹ On this reading, the Sabbath symbolizes the Active Intellect, who complains to God because it is lacking a mate in the sense that it is the last in the chain of separate intellects such that no subsequent separate intellect proceeds from it. As in the case with most of our previous examples, Arama is not content to merely offer an alternative interpretation but rather seeks to reclaim the proof-text by waging a two-fold attack on the incorrect interpretation, on both conceptual and grammatical grounds. Conceptually, Arama counters that

⁶⁸ i.e., the philosophers’

ובעבור שכפי דרך וסדור אלו העלולים שאמרנו שיושפע מכל אחד מהם עלול אחד שהוא שכל עומד מעצמו ונפש גלגל, ומהשכל העשירי ⁶⁹ שהוא השכל הפועל לא הושפע עלול אחר שיהיה שכל עומד בעצמו, אלא נפש שקיומה בחומר כנפש הגלגל, ונשאר הוא לפי זה כנקבה שהוא מושפע ואינו משיפע, הוא שאמרו רבותינו ז”ל אמרה שבת לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא רבונו של עולם לכל נתת בן זוג ולי לא נתת בן זוג, אמר לה בתי כנסת ישראל תהא בן זוגך (בראשית רבה פרשה י”א), הנה באמרם אמרה שבת לשון נקבה יורה שרמזו על מדה שהיא מושפעת ולא משפעת והוא השכל העשירי, וקראוהו שבת לפי שחכמי הקבלה ייחסו כל יום מימי בראשית אל עלול אחד מן הז’ שכלים האחרונים, ויקראו העלולים ספירות, ויאמרו שהג’ הראשונים הם דבר רוחני ויקראו אותם אור שאינו נתפס, והז’ האחרונים ייחסו כל אחד מהם אל יום מז’ ימי בראשית, ויקראו את העשירי שבת לפי שהוא אחרון העלולים ובו שבת ההשתלשלות, ויאמרו שהשכל האחרון שהוא השכל העשירי והוא השכל הפועל והוא הספירה העשירית שקראוהו שבת, נתרעמה לפני השם למה שבת בה ההשתלשלות ולא היה לה בן זוג, כלומר נמצא אחר שיהיה שכל עומד בעצמו, וכמו שהוא בשאר השכלים, שיהיה מושפע ממנה, עד שנשארה היא כנקבה מושפעת ולא משפעת, ואמרו שהשיב השם יתברך בתי כנסת ישראל תהא בן זוגך, כלומר שהשכל הנקנה באמצעות התורה יהיה שכל נבדל עומד בעצמו קיים וימשול על כל הדברים החמריים, כמו שהיו הנביאים והחסידים מחדשים באמצעות השכל הנקנה על יד התורה אותות ומופתים, וכאלו הוא שכל נבדל עלול מן השכל הפועל או מן הספירה הנקראת שבת

the interpretation is incoherent because even if the Sabbath does indeed symbolize the Active Intellect, it is not uncoupled in the sense suggested and rather emanates the community of Israel. Grammatically, he counters that the interpretation is incompatible with the text of the midrash itself, since the Sabbath asks God for a male mate, but what is emanated always assumes the rank of female relative to the source from which it is emanated.

Yet again, as with all the previous examples, the precise details of Arama's criticisms and counter-interpretations are not especially important for our purposes. What is most important is that across Gates, time and again, we see Arama attempting to reclaim prooftexts from what he views as incorrect philosophical interpretations. Though he often focuses his efforts on especially popular prooftexts already singled out by Maimonides in the *Guide* and taken up by the Maimonidean tradition following him, he does not restrict himself to only the most popular texts: As we've seen in this last example, he spares no ink over even recondite passages of midrash that he believes have been wrongly understood. In his efforts to reclaim prooftexts, Arama employs both offensive and defensive tactics: critiquing incorrect interpretations and elaborating more compelling alternatives. In all cases though, his goal is always to divorce the scriptural text from the philosophical interpretation with which it had come to be associated. In his assiduous efforts to reclaim and rehabilitate prooftexts, Arama shows himself to consider exegesis a if not the central site of cultural and ideological contestation: Though he is invested in attacking what he views as incorrect ideas on conceptual grounds as well, it is clear that he views conceptual argument alone as insufficient. Thorough attack entails attacking the scriptural supports by which these ideas had been authorized and with which they'd come to be bound; at the heart of cultural critique lies exegetical confrontation.

1.3. Form Inseparable from Content: Exegesis Does the Work

In the previous section, we saw how one pattern in Arama's use of exegesis reveals him as engaged in a stance of exegetical confrontation. Time and again, Arama is concerned to divorce and reclaim scriptural prooftexts—often but not always popular—from the major philosophical ideas with which they had come to be associated because he understands that the ideas' dominance consists not only in their conceptual content but more importantly in their tethering to scripture via exegesis. Said differently, Arama is concerned to rehabilitate prooftexts because he understands that scripture and exegesis lie at the heart of ideological and cultural warfare. In this section, we will see Arama engage in a different pattern of exegetical usage that illustrates the same underlying conceptualization of exegesis as lying at the heart of culture war. Rather than combatting the interpretation of prooftexts that had already been (in his eyes) incorrectly interpreted, here we will see how Arama assumes a more proactive and offensive stance in using scripture and exegesis' full powers to his advantage. In particular, this section will focus on how Arama repeatedly uses creative philosophical exegesis to do constructive, conceptual work; i.e., to develop theories that popular philosophy alone could not.

Arama's use of exegesis to elaborate some of the most significant conceptual substance of AY reflects his deep understanding that—far from a mere formal vessel, husk, or container for presenting independent content or ideas—scriptural exegesis changes the philosophy it touches and not just vice versa; or to use Aristotelian language, matter is, in the final analysis, ultimately inextricable and inseparable from form. Though from certain perspectives this may seem self-evident, it is worth emphasizing Arama's use of exegesis to elaborate concepts because it serves as a corrective to the field of medieval Jewish intellectual history's longstanding tendency to overemphasize only the reverse side of the relationship between scripture and philosophy,

namely: philosophy's impact on and transformation of scripture, via exegesis. Throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty first, scholarly accounts have frequently described medieval Jewish authors as reading philosophy into scripture or harmonizing scripture to accommodate philosophy, belying their construal of a fundamentally disproportionate relationship: philosophy, hypostasized, is taken to be the dominant partner, to which scripture, also hypostasized, conforms; the former transforms the latter to both a degree and extent that does not occur reciprocally.⁷⁰ This disciplinary tendency to construe philosophy as true substance/content while reducing scripture and exegesis to mere method and/or form is undoubtedly grounded in the same *Wissenschaft*-era assimilationist imperatives—discussed in both the general introduction and the introduction to this chapter—that have often impelled the field to abstract from exegesis and synthesize it into a more distilled set of “ideas.”⁷¹

In this connection, Arama's not-dissimilar critiques of the philosophizers of his own day—i.e., for subjugating scripture to philosophy, when the opposite ought be the case—might serve as a reminder to today's scholars of medieval Jewish intellectual history to read their objects of study on the latter's own terms, as taking the power of scripture and exegesis seriously. Arama clearly did *not* conceptualize scripture as the passive partner in relation to

⁷⁰ Indeed, portrayals of medieval Jewish philosophy as consisting in the “pouring of philosophical wine into biblical bottles”—to borrow a phrase from Bernard Septimus—seems to be nearly ubiquitous. For only a few recent examples, consider Tamar Rudavsky, *Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages: Science, Rationalism, Religion* (Oxford University Press, 2018), and especially chapter 1, “What is Jewish Philosophy?,” 1–11; Howard Kreisel, “Philosophical Interpretations of the Bible,” in *Cambridge History of Jewish Philosophy: From Antiquity through the Seventeenth Century*, eds. Steven Nadler and Tamar M. Rudavsky (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 88–120; Howard Kreisel, “Popularization of Philosophy via Scriptural Exegesis and Sermons: Introduction,” in *The Popularization of Philosophy in Medieval Islam, Judaism, and Christianity*, eds. Marieke Abram, Steven Harvey, Lukas Muehlethaler, (Brepols, 2022), 269–282; Herbert Davidson, *Maimonides the Rationalist* (Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2015).

⁷¹ My thanks to Professor Julie Orlemanski for bringing to my attention that the way scholars of medieval Jewish intellectual history have implicitly conceptualized the relation of form and content in their objects of study—imagining (philosophical) content to be dominant and (exegetical or scriptural) form to be subordinate—is of course directly opposed to the relation between form and content (or rather, matter) that their objects of study adhered to themselves, as good Aristotelians: form always reigns supreme.

philosophy—and not only normatively. He knew well that scripture and exegesis could teach what philosophy, necessarily, could not and that scripture offered a distinctive substance which, via exegesis, could indelibly reshape philosophy. Though Arama was especially explicit in articulating this, in my view he was not original in using scripture and exegesis to do substantive conceptual work for him. Rather, in this regard he built on a tradition dating back at least to Maimonides. In seeing how Arama employs exegesis to do conceptual work for him then, we will not only brush against the contemporary scholarly grain, working to illustrate the bidirectionality of scripture and philosophy’s relationship and scripture’s shaping of philosophy, after Arama’s own spirit. Further, in so doing, we hope to suggest how other medieval Jewish exegetical thinkers might be studied anew as well.

1.3.1. Midrash-Cum-Epistemology, Twice

A striking example of the ways in which Arama uses exegesis—and specifically, exegesis of theretofore unpopular Rabbinic texts—to do constructive, conceptual work occurs in Gate 10, already discussed in a previous example.⁷² As mentioned there, Arama’s overarching goal in Gate 10 is to attack a constellation of ideas, principally developed in *Guide* I.2, concerning the nature of divine knowledge and angelic knowledge and whether the angels and God “know good and evil.” As also mentioned there, Arama wages his attack on this constellation of ideas from several angles; above, I discussed how one aspect of this attack entailed reclaiming key prooftexts associated with the idea that the angels cannot know good and evil, namely, Targum Onkelos’ translations of Gen. 3:22 and Gen. 3:5. Here we will see how Arama attacks the same

⁷² See 1.2.2 above.

set of ideas but more indirectly, by building an alternative conceptual apparatus—and using creative exegesis of two little-known Rabbinic texts to do so.⁷³

Among the many consensuses emerging out of *Guide* I.2 was the idea that human knowledge, on the one hand, and angelic knowledge and divine knowledge, on the other, are distinct from one another in a particular way: while man after the fall has knowledge of good and evil, the angels and God do not—the latter only know eternal and immutable intelligibilia and not mere, ephemeral opinion. But insofar as part of Arama's goal in Gate 10 is to assert, by contrast, that God and the angels *do* know good and evil, Arama moves to eviscerate the prevailing distinction between human, angelic, and divine knowledge. Accordingly, perhaps to pave the way for eviscerating this distinction, Arama devotes the beginning of Gate 10 to erecting and articulating an alternative distinction between human, angelic, and divine

⁷³ Though Arama is very much of a piece with his milieu in his extensive engagement with Rabbinic aggadah (his contemporaries, Abraham Shalom and Abraham Bibago both evinced serious interest in aggadah in their respective magna opera: while Bibago's *summa* contains aggadic exegesis in extenso, Shalom's *Neveh Shalom* assumes the form of a commentary on aggadic material from the Talmudic tractate Berakhot—), in his selection of source material, Arama seems to be something of an outlier from both his contemporaries and his predecessors. Speaking broadly, it seems to me that from the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries, across genres, aggadic exegesis tends to coalesce around a fixed selection of aggadot that fall into at least one of the following three overlapping categories: aggadot singled out by Maimonides in the *Guide*, aggadot singled out in polemics as having Christological valences, and aggadot indicating divine anthropomorphism. Further, these aggadot tend in general to have a source in the Babylonian Talmud. By contrast, though Arama does draw many of his *ma'amarot* from the Babylonian Talmud, he seems to prefer to derive his source material from *Midrash Rabbah* and *Tanhuma*. Likewise, though he does draw from the “canon” of aggadot already singled out by others, he largely forges his own path, avoiding well-tread dicta and preferring to focus on anthropological rather theological themes. Several of the aggadot Arama singles out as *ma'amarot* are also cited by Bahya ben Asher in his commentary on the Torah, though often in different contexts (*ma'amar* to Gate 10 [Bahya on Num. 19], Gate 19 [Kad ha-Qemah], Gate 33 [Bahya on Gen. 49], Gate 37 [Bahya on Ex. 12], Gate 38 [Bahya on Gen. 1:3] Gate 40 [Bahya on Ex. 5], Gates 47–48 [Kad ha-Qemah]; Gate 54 [Bahya on Ex. 25]); and a handful are cited also in Israel b. Yosef al-Naqua's *Menorat ha-Ma'or*. More research remains to be done on Arama's Rabbinic source material, but speculatively, I cannot help but wonder if he is deliberately introducing little-known Rabbinic material into the realm of philosophical-allegorical exegesis both because he sees it as containing new conceptual/theoretical possibilities, but also because—in contrast to the Bible so favored by the Maimonidean tradition—Rabbinic literature is scripture *not* shared in common with Christians, and rather that which distinguishes the Jewish scriptural inheritance as Jewish. Another area for investigation concerns the role Arama and AY may have played in the immense Sephardic thirst for aggadah that burst onto the scene within a generation of the Expulsion: in the span of only a decade (1510–1520), virtually all the major midrashic compilations as well as many minor compilations would see their first printing in Istanbul or Salonika, while in the following generations, aggadah would come to play an increasingly fixed and central role in Jewish sermons and a literary genre devoted to systematic commentary on midrash Rabbah would explode.

knowledge. To do so, he relies principally on two Rabbinic texts: first, he uses a short dictum from Tanhuma Tezaveh to develop and authorize an alternative tripartite theory of knowledge. Then, he turns to a lengthier midrash on Adam's naming of the animals from Numbers Rabbah to flesh out a novel distinction between human knowledge and angelic knowledge. Most important for our present purposes, in both cases, he uses the native categories of the Rabbinic text to introduce new theoretical possibilities. Following Arama's own logic, I will treat his work with each of these Rabbinic texts in turn.

The first text Arama turns to in constructing his alternative, tripartite theory of knowledge is a dictum from Tanhuma Tezaveh: "You will find one who is in darkness but sees one who is in light as well as one who is in light but cannot see what is in darkness. But the Holy One Blessed be He, who is Light and dwells in Light, He sees [even] that which is in darkness, as it is said: *He knoweth what is in the darkness*, and so on (cf Dan. 2:22)." To creatively interpret this dictum and develop it into a systematic epistemology, Arama draws on and fuses together a variety of sources. He begins by introducing a linguistic and conceptual distinction, perhaps dating back to Saadia Gaon, between two types of knowing: while *yedi'ah* (knowledge) is apprehension through the intellect and has as its object abstract, immaterial intelligibilia, *hakkarah* (sense-perception) is apprehension through sense-perception and has as its object particular, enmattered, individuals.⁷⁴ Arama then fleshes this distinction out with recourse to Aristotle, whom he understands to suggest that most human knowledge proceeds by way of

⁷⁴ In a now-classic passage from the Introduction (sec. V) to his *Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, Saadia following kalām convention draws a tripartite distinction between knowledge gained through sense-perception, "rational intuition," and knowledge attained through logical necessity. While the former clearly corresponds conceptually to Arama's *hakkarah*, and the latter two taken together may correspond conceptually closely enough with Arama's *yediah*, the Hebrew terminology used by Judah ibn Tibbon in his translation is at odds with Arama's. What Arama calls *hakkarah*, ibn Tibbon calls *yediat ha-nireh*; what Arama calls *yediah*, ibn Tibbon calls *madda' ha-sekheh*; finally, elsewhere in *Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, ibn Tibbon uses *koah ha-hakkarah* to refer to the faculty of reason (on a Platonic model, as distinct from appetite and anger)—in direct opposition to Arama's terminology.

hakkarah, or inductively/empirically: moving from particular, enmattered individuals eventually towards abstract, immaterial universals. Divine knowledge, by contrast, he identifies with *yedi'ah*: purely intellectual knowledge of intelligibilia first and foremost. Finally, Arama implements a few commonplace motifs of philosophical-allegorical exegesis to read the foregoing ideas back into the dictum from Tanhuma Tezaveh and emerge with a ready-made tripartite theory of knowledge. Drawing on the idea that “seeing/sight” is an equivocal term that refers not only to visual perception but also to intellectual cognition, and on the association of the binary “light/dark” with the binary “pure, immaterial intellect/turbid matter,” Arama reads the dictum as describing three classes of beings, each with distinct objects of knowledge and modes of apprehending that knowledge.⁷⁵ The “one who is in darkness but sees one who is in light” is man. He is “in darkness” because he is enmattered, yet also “sees one who is in light” because is capable of apprehending abstract intelligibilia. The “one who is in light but cannot see what is in darkness” is an angel/separate intellect. He, conversely, is “in light” because he is purely intellectual and immaterial, but he “cannot see what is in darkness” because he is incapable of perceiving enmattered particulars. Finally, “the Holy One Blessed be He” is of course God. He is “Light and dwells in Light” because He is purely intellectual and immaterial, but even so “sees that which is in darkness” because He *does* have knowledge of enmattered particulars. In Arama’s own words:⁷⁶

⁷⁵ For sight as an equivocal term, see Pines, *Guide*, I.4, I.44, I.47; for couplings of the binary light/dark with the binary form/matter, see Pines, *Guide*, Introduction.

⁷⁶ וזה בעיני מה שכוונו אותו חז"ל (תנחומא פ' תצוה) באומרם אתה מוצא מי שהוא בחשך רואה מי שהוא באור ומי שהוא באור אינו רואה מה שהוא בחשך אבל הקב"ה הוא אור ויושב באור ורואה מה שהוא בחשך שנאמר ידע מה בחשוכא כו' (דניאל ב') ... הנה שחלקו המשיגים לג' חלוקים האחד הוא השגת האדם שהוא יושב בחשך מצד חשכת חמרו והמיוחד אליו הוא ההרגש בחוש לבד ועכ"ז רואה ומשיג מה שהוא באור מההשגות השכליות הכוללות מה ששיג מהם. אמנם המלאך הוא יושב באור מצד הפשטות מחשכת החמר וממשיגיו ולזה אינו רואה ומשיג מה שהוא בחשך מאלו הדברים הפרטיים המורים עליהם אלו השמות והרשמים. אמנם הקב"ה אע"פ שהוא אורו של עולם והדברים כלם ידועים אצלו במדע כולל מושכל הנה לא נעלם ממנו דבר מכל אשר הוא בחשך ההרכבה מצד מה שהוא יוצר הכל בידיעה נפלאה

In my opinion, this is what the Sages intended in their saying:⁷⁷ “You will find one who is in darkness but sees one who is in light as well as one who is in light but cannot see what is in darkness. But the Holy One Blessed be He, who is Light and dwells in Light, He sees [even] that which is in darkness, as it is said: *He knoweth what is in the darkness*, and so on (Dan. 2:22)” (Tanhuma Tezaveh)... Thus [the Sages] divided those who apprehend into three categories: First, there is human apprehension. He dwells in darkness in respect of the darkness of his matter, and he alone possesses sense-perception. Yet he still can see what is in light, i.e., universal, intellectual apprehensions, to the extent that his intellect can grasp them. Meanwhile, the angel dwells in light in respect of his being abstracted from the darkness of matter and its concomitants. But for this reason he does not apprehend or see the aspects of particulars (indicated by these names and descriptions—) that are in darkness. Finally, the Holy One Blessed be He—even though He is the Light of the world and all things are known to Him with the most universal and intellectual knowledge—still, nothing in the darkness of composition is hidden from Him, insofar as He is the Former of all through His knowledge, the essence of which is too wondrous to know, and which causes Him to persist in a relation of infinite separation from them.

Though from the foregoing account, it might seem as though Arama is straightforwardly reading philosophy into scripture, using the Rabbinic dictum as proof-text to authorize independent philosophical ideas, the apparent simplicity of Arama’s exegesis is deceptive precisely it veils how the Rabbinic dictum does enormous conceptual work for him.⁷⁸

In particular, the structure of Arama’s carefully-selected dictum effectively obviates the need for Arama to treat the most pressing epistemological concerns of his day, enabling him to skirt intractable philosophical problematics and focus on constructing a theory of knowledge that readily conforms with the demands of traditional Rabbinic theology. Throughout medieval Hebrew literature, questions about the nature of knowledge both human and divine abounded. One popular question regarding human knowledge concerned *whether* and *how* man could ever come to know abstract universals;⁷⁹ a complimentary question regarding divine knowledge that

⁷⁷ Arama’s gloss on this dictum is later cited by Malbim in his commentary on Num. 19:1.

⁷⁸ Said differently: while in a sense Arama is doing straightforward Maimonidean philosophical-allegorical exegesis (see 2.3 and subsections), he is also strategically using the organic material provided by the Rabbinic dictum itself, coupled with philosophical-allegorical exegesis to circumvent philosophical problems.

⁷⁹ See Kalman Bland, *The Epistle on the Possibility of Conjunction with the Active Intellect* (Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992).

became popular following Gersonides concerned *whether* and *how* God could ever know enmattered particulars.⁸⁰ Far from scholastic pedantry, these questions were important because of how their answers would or would not sit with the demands of Rabbinic theology: if man cannot come to know abstract intelligibilia, he cannot attain immortality via intellectual perfection, as most medieval Jewish philosophers held; if God cannot know particulars, traditional understandings of individual providence, reward and punishment fall apart. The dictum Arama selects from Tanhuma Tezaveh, however, bypasses these problematics by simply asserting the existence of both by fiat, blithely announcing through its native conceptual categories that man *does* know abstract intelligibilia/“see what is in light” and God *does* know enmattered particulars/“see what is in darkness.” Said differently, though Arama certainly uses philosophical tools to develop his exegesis of the dictum from Tanhuma Tezaveh, the organic material of the dictum also does real, substantive work for him, declaring into existence beings who unproblematically have the objects of knowledge Arama needs them to for his alternative tripartite theory of knowledge. Philosophy does not simply transform scripture. Scripture, Arama knows best of all, contains conceptual possibilities that philosophy with the limitations of its logics cannot deign to offer.

*

Having thus established an alternative tripartite theory of knowledge through his creative exegesis of the dictum from Tanhuma Tezaveh, Arama attempts to further elaborate and refine a novel distinction between human knowledge and angelic knowledge—replacing any distinction based on differing knowledge of good and evil—through creative exegesis of another Rabbinic

⁸⁰ See Rudavsky, “Divine Omniscience;” Manekin, “On the Limited-Omniscience Interpretation.”

text, a midrash from Numbers Rabbah.⁸¹ The midrash itself purports to offer background on why God parades the animals before Adam and asks him to name them.⁸² The scene is set on the eve of the creation of man where we find God debating with the angels. The angels initially protest man's creation, appealing to his baseness; in response, God puts the angles in their place, informing them that man will, in fact, be more knowledgeable than them. God then parades the animals before man and asks him to name them, as if to prove His point; man obliges and the midrash concludes.

Arama, for his part, reads the midrash largely through the epistemological ideas he has already developed, but also takes them in a new direction. On his reading, the angels initially protest man's creation on epistemological grounds, i.e., on account of man's deficient intellectual apprehension: man is base, the angels protest, insofar as enmattered man's ability to apprehend abstract universals is severely limited. God's response to the angels is read through an epistemological lens too: God counters that while man's apprehension is indeed inferior to the angels' in the manner outlined, in another sense man can apprehend *more* than the angels can. God's parading the animals before man and asking man to name them illustrates precisely in

⁸¹ This midrash also appears in both the Zohar and Bahya b. Asher's commentary on Num. 19, though in both instances it is developed in a very different way.

⁸² The midrash as Arama cites in the *ma'amar* to Gate 10 is as follows:

"And he was wiser than kol adam (1 Kings 5:11)—than Adam. What was his wisdom? When the Holy One, Blessed be He, wanted to create man, He consulted with the ministering angels. He said to them: Let us make man in our image (Gen. 1:26). They said to Him: What is man that You are mindful of him? (Ps. 8:5). He said to them: "This man that I want to create shall have more wisdom than you." What did He do? He gathered all the cattle, wild beasts, and fowl to pass before them. He said to them, "What are the names of these?" They, however, did not know. When He created the first man, He made them pass before him. He said to him: "What are the names of these?" He said: "It is fitting to call this one an ox, this one a horse, this one a camel, this one a donkey, this one an eagle," and so on for all of them. Thus it says: and the man gave names to all cattle and to the fowl of the air, and so on (Gen. 2:20). He said to him: "And you, what is your name?" The man said to him: "Adam, because I was created out of the ground (adamah)." The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to him: "and I, what is My name?" He said to him: "My Master," He said: "why?" He said: "because you are Master over all creatures." This is [the meaning of] I am the Lord, that is My name (Isa. 42:8); this is the name which Adam gave me. It is the one I have agreed to between Me and My creatures" (Num. Rab. 19).

what sense man has more knowledge than the angels: unlike the angels, only man can have the sort of knowledge required for naming distinct subspecies of animals, i.e., for undertaking a comprehensive zoological taxonomy. Here is what Arama says on this last point:⁸³

But God spoke in man's defense. For precisely because of this, man can apprehend what the angels cannot; i.e., he can recognize the particulars of composite beings that are only distinguished through their accidents.⁸⁴ This is why man was able to distinguish the animals with individual names derived from what he perceived of the differentia distinguishing each sect, even though they all belonged to a single species. This knowledge is not ascribed to the supernal intellects, for even if they know and apprehend the general species in respect of the generality of their forms, i.e., the species of cattle or the species of beasts or the species of fowl, they do not apprehend the particulars of each class that distinguish the camel from the horse and the ass, or the lion from the wolf and the bear, or *the great vulture* from *the bearded vulture* and the *osprey* (cf Lev. 11:13), and what is similar to this. For their differentia are derived from partial notions that are dependent upon the variation in their matter and shapes—similar to the differentia between sheepdogs and hunting dogs, or the differentia between a beast of burden and a beast for riding.⁸⁵ This is his saying “It is fitting to call this one a horse, this one a camel, this one an ass, and this one an eagle.” And this is the explication of *and man gave names to all cattle*, and so on (Gen. 2:20), for these names were not universal definitions, as was said. To explicate this, scripture said: *and whatsoever the man would call every living creature*, and so on (Gen. 2:19). That is to say, all these existents that *the man would call* by these particular names already had, from the outset, the name of *living creature*, which was its universal definition, known to the angels, as we wrote in its place.

⁸³ והנה האל ית' הליץ בעדו כי גם מהצד ההוא עצמו תמצא לו השגה מה שלא תמצא להם. והוא ההכר' והשפעה בין פרטי אלו הנמצאות המורכבות הנבדלות במקריהם לבד. עד שיספיק להבדילם בשמות נרשמים פרטיים לקוחים מצד מה שירגיש בחלופיהן יבדלו בהם כל כת וכת מהם. ואם הם כאלו תחת מין א'. מה שלא תיוחס ידיעה זו אל השכלים העליונים שאם הם ידעו והשיגו המינים הכוללים מצד כוללות צורותם כמין החיה או מין הבהמה או העוף הנה לא ישיגו פרטי חלקיותם לתת הבדל בין הגמל והסוס והחמור או בין הארי והזאב והדוב או בין הנשר והפרס והעזניה וכדומה. כי הבדליהם לקוחים מעניינים חלקיים תלויים בחלוף חמריהם ותמונתם קרוב להבדל אשר בין כלבי הרועים או כלבי הציד או כהבדל אשר בין פרד המשא לפרד הרכיבה. והוא מה שאמר לזה נאה לקרות סוס ולזה גמל ולזה חמור ולזה נשר. וזהו פירוש ויקרא אדם שמות לכל הבהמה כו'. כי השמות אינם הגדרים הכוללים כמ"ש. ובפירוש אמר הכתוב וכל אשר יקרא לו האדם כו' יאמר כי אלו הנמצאים כלם אשר יקרא להם האדם אלו השמות הפרטיים כבר היה שמו מתחלה נפש חיה שהוא גדרו הכולל הידוע אצל המלאכים כמו שכתבנו במקומו.

⁸⁴ For the idea(s) that differentia are derived from accidents contingent on matter and shape, and so that a certain level of zoological taxonomy can only be pursued through sense-perception, see 4.1 above on Gersonides' SC.BA.

⁸⁵ Arama's selection of examples here—focusing on the distinctions between sheepdogs and hunting dogs, and different types of horses—should be understood against the ubiquity of both sheep-herding and obsession with horse husbandry in late fifteenth century Spain, on which see e.g., Javier Irigoyen-Garcia, “Sheep Herding and Discourses of Race,” in Javier Irigoyen-Garcia, *The Spanish Arcadia: Sheep Herding, Pastoral Discourse, and Ethnicity in Early Modern Spain* (University of Toronto Press, 2014), 35–74.

The basic idea Arama develops in this passage is that while large classes or species of animals (e.g., “cattle,” “beasts,” and “fowl”) can be distinguished from one another through knowledge of abstract universals or forms and thus can be ascertained through purely abstract, theoretical knowledge, the further distinction of subspecies *within* these various classes or species (e.g., discerning the difference between “wolf” and “bear,” or between “camel” and “horse”) can only be attained through apprehension of enmattered “particulars” and “differentia...that are dependent upon the variation in their matter and shapes.” Simply put, the material knowledge required to discern between subspecies of animals can only be acquired through sense-perception. The purely abstract, universal knowledge of the angels or separate intellects is thus inadequate to the task of a comprehensive zoological taxonomy.

This basic idea, i.e., that distinguishing between subspecies of a given animal species requires knowledge that can only be known through sense-perception, is not one entirely original to Arama. Though as far as I know, the idea was certainly not a popular one at the time of Arama’s writing, a very similar idea is expressed in Gersonides’ commentary on *Sefer Ba’alei Ḥayyim*, which Arama may well have known.⁸⁶ Thus as in the case of the dictum from Tanhuma Tezaveh (and indeed, as in countless instances throughout AY—), Arama draws on already-established philosophical ideas to develop his interpretation of the midrash from Numbers Rabbah; in a certain sense, his exegesis is undoubtedly reliant on philosophy and a reading of philosophy back into scripture.⁸⁷

Yet what is most important for our present purposes is that the primary conceptual point Arama is trying to make—namely, that there is a sense in which humans possess more

⁸⁶ See 4.1 below.

⁸⁷ Arama’s reading of the midrash from Numbers Rabbah thus in a sense constitutes yet another example of his strategic philosophical exegesis, his domestication of philosophy—see 2.3 and subsections.

knowledge than the angels—is one that he cannot make without recourse to the organic literary material of the midrash. In order to develop the idea that zoological taxonomy requires knowledge of sense-perception into a theoretical point concerning the epistemological difference between humans and angels, Arama relies on given literary elements of the midrash: God’s contention that man would have “more” knowledge than the angels; man’s naming of various animals; and so the imputed relationships between human knowledge, angelic knowledge, and zoological knowledge. Just as was the case with the dictum from Tanhuma Tezaveh then, Arama here again uses scripture to do irreplaceable and indispensable constructive theoretical work for him. While he certainly leverages philosophy to creatively read scripture, we have seen how he also repeatedly and strategically uses scripture to develop concepts that ultimately transcend the limitations of philosophy. Arama’s constructive use of exegesis in this way, i.e., to develop the conceptual apparatus of a counter-philosophy, further affirms his understanding that exegesis and scripture lie at the heart of culture war.

1.3.2. Constructing an Alternative Theological Anthropology

Another example of Arama using exegesis to do major conceptual work occurs in a Gate not previously discussed but that will be treated extensively in later chapters, namely, Gate 44. Arama is concerned with a host of interrelated topics throughout the course of this very lengthy and complex Gate, but most important for our present purposes is his concern with the possibility (or impossibility—) of immortality and how this relates to what we might call philosophical anthropology, i.e., theories of human nature. Especially from the early thirteenth century forward, medieval Jewish thinkers of diverse intellectual stripes had been preoccupied by the problem of immortality (how to prove that some part of man goes on living eternally after the

death of the body—), positioning themselves as defenders of immortality against its (usually unnamed) detractors and advancing arguments with varying levels of technical scientific and exegetical sophistication.⁸⁸ No exception to the rule, Arama too is preoccupied by the problem of immortality and positions himself as its defender against detractors, but in the opening gambits of Gate 44, he does something more, making what is perhaps one of the boldest moves in the then centuries-long debate on immortality. Rather than level some technical and nuanced critique about a particular theory of immortality, Arama argues that the possibility of immortality is fundamentally incompatible with the dominant Aristotelian philosophical anthropology shared by virtually all medieval Jews—intelligentsia and the masses alike. Conceptualizing man as rational animal, in other words, completely forecloses the possibility of immortality. To defend the possibility of immortality then, Arama must construct an alternative philosophical anthropology—or rather, an alternative theological anthropology. To do so, he turns once again to creative philosophical exegesis. Before launching into this creative exegesis, however, Arama remarks with striking clarity on what is, essentially, the main conceit of the present section: He articulates explicitly that in order to construct an alternative theological anthropology, he will need to draw on concepts inaccessible to the philosophical tradition and so proceeding from a different and indeed divine source:⁸⁹

⁸⁸ To name just a few examples, consider: Samuel ibn Tibbon's commentary on Ecclesiastes, as found in Robinson, *Samuel ibn Tibbon*; Moses Narboni's commentary on Averroes' epistle on the possibility of conjunction with the active intellect, in Bland, *The Epistle on the Possibility of Conjunction*; Gersonides, *Wars of the Lord* I.11, I.13; Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, "The Ultimate End of Human Life in Postexpulsion Philosophic Literature," in *Crisis and Creativity in the Sephardic World: 1391–1648*, ed. Benjamin R. Gampel (Columbia University Press, 1997), 223–254; Hava Tirosh-Rothschild, "Human Felicity: Fifteenth-Century Sephardic Perspectives on Happiness," in *In Iberia and Beyond: Hispanic Jews Between Cultures*, ed. Bernard Dov Cooperman (University of Delaware Press, 1998), 191–243; the articles collected in Yehuda Halper and Resianne Fontaine, eds., *The Pursuit of Happiness in Medieval Jewish Thought: Studies Dedicated to Steven Harvey* (Brepols, 2021).

⁸⁹ הנה באמת זה לא יהיה ולא יתכן להיות כי אם במציאות העצה האלהית החכמה שאמרנו אשר הודיעתנו התורה האלהית אמתת מציאותה להיותה נעלמת ממנו מדרך החקירה. והוא היות האדם הלזה בלתי נכנס ומוקף תחת הגדר ההוא הנזכר אבל יגדרהו גדר אחר מיוחד מן המיוחד בו ישתתף הזיו העליון על השלמים ממינו במקומות' במושבותם ואף כי אחרי מותם

In truth, [immortality] is impossible save through that wise, divine counsel which we spoke of, which is concealed to the way[s] of investigation, and which the divine Torah [had to] make known to us. Namely: that man is not subsumed and limited by the aforementioned definition, but rather is defined by another most special definition, whereby the supernal radiance might participate with the perfect members of the species both on earth and after death.

Rather than look to Torah or even Rabbinic literature however, Arama finds the conceptual apparatus of his new theological anthropology in a passage of Jedaiah ha-Penini's fourteenth-century philosophical poem *Behinat Olam*:⁹⁰

“O my heart, my heart! The Torah and man when united are a lamp of God upon earth /
The Torah is the flame that spreads about those who dwell in heaven /
and man in his two parts is the torch that draws down its light /
the body resembles the wick and the soul pure olive oil /
in their being adjoined together the entire house is illuminated”
and so on.

As is evident from the passage above and as Arama was well aware, the verses of the poem themselves are rife with philosophical-allegorical symbolism: the Torah and man are a lamp; the human body is a wick; the human soul is oil; the Torah is flame. And as in the examples from Tanhuma Tezaveh and Numbers Rabbah above, Arama here too turns to the tools of philosophy to further develop his reading of the material at hand. In particular, Arama advances not one but two ad-hominem philosophical attacks to bring forth his alternative theological anthropology. First, he appeals to the idea that the soul outlasts the body to critique the poem's organic symbolism: while the soul survives the body, oil is usually survived by the wick and not vice

⁹⁰ Arama draws on *BO* elsewhere in *AY*, though his use of the poem to articulate his alternative theological anthropology constitutes his most extensive and substantial recourse thereunto. That Arama draws from *BO* in this capacity is in a sense not surprising: According to Steinschneider, by the fifteenth century *BO* was one of the most commented-upon texts in all medieval Hebrew literature, among the ranks of the *Guide*, ibn Ezra's Torah commentary, Averroes' works, and al-Ghazali's *Maqāsid*. Yet it is further evidence of *BO*'s status that Arama employs it not as mere proof-text nor in a digressive context, but rather as the core and primary ground of his (divinely revealed) alternative anthropology. See Tamaš Visi, “The Early Ibn Ezra Supercommentaries: A Chapter in Medieval Jewish Intellectual History” (PhD diss., Central European University, 2006), 320 n.714.

versa; thus the poem's symbolizing soul by oil and body by wick is unfitting. Instead, Arama suggests, the body ought be symbolized by an earthenware vessel, the destruction of which is ultimately inconsequential, while the soul ought be symbolized by an illuminated lamp housed by said vessel. Second, after thus reworking the poem's symbolism, Arama appeals to the Aristotelian ontological principle that a thing cannot depend on itself for existence to illustrate that the implicit subject of the poem *cannot* be the individual man but rather must be the collective Israel.

But these recourses to philosophy notwithstanding, what is most important for our present purposes is that, as in the previous example, the key conceptual elements of the alternative theological anthropology with which Arama emerges are all underwritten by the given organic imagery of *Behinat Olam*. Arama is ultimately able to insist *that* immortality is possible for the subject of this alternative anthropology, *that* it is further possible through Torah, and *that* the subject for which immortality is possible is the collective Israel because the text's imagery *begins* with the assumption of a connection between man and Torah, visualized as fire and light. Said differently, Arama draws on the organic poetic imagery of his text to do important conceptual work for him, insofar as this given imagery legislates into existence and thereby allows him to take for granted and gloss over what might otherwise have been a philosophical problem: e.g., the mechanics of immortality and/or Torah as a unique conduit of that immortality. While philosophical questions surrounding the mechanics of God's role in nature and human nature might proliferate endlessly, the imagery of the *Behinat Olam* circumvents these with the force of simple, poetic assertion. Here again then, Arama's use of exegesis to do constructive, theoretical work illustrates plainly that he understood exegesis to be far more than mere form or method and rather saw it as constitutive to the conceptual substance of his project.

1.4. Arama as Compiler

In the previous sections, we've examined two patterns in Arama's use of exegesis that reveal how deeply he conceptualized exegesis as *the* central site of ideological contestation and culture war: In the first section, we saw how he consistently seeks to reclaim popular prooftexts from problematic philosophical interpretations with which they had come to be associated; in the second section, we saw how he strategically marshals exegesis of Rabbinic and even poetic texts to develop conceptual apparatuses that challenge the dominant philosophical consensus. In this section, we will look at yet another pattern in Arama's use of exegesis that evinces the same recognition of exegesis' deep importance. In particular, I will briefly discuss Arama's tendency throughout AY towards exegetical compilation: compiling and cataloguing multiple previous interpretations of a particular verse or verses and presenting these catalogues as a prelude to or jumping-off point for his own original interpretation of a verse. Arama's tendency towards exegetical compilation testifies to his conceptualization of exegesis as a central site of contestation insofar as it demonstrates that he viewed the history of exegesis as sufficiently worthy of collecting, synthesizing, and reproducing for posterity. Whereas even many medieval Jewish thinkers who worked in primarily exegetical literary frameworks often concealed the histories of exegesis with which they were familiar and off which they were working,⁹¹ Arama saw it fit to contextualize his interpretations as both a response to and product of that exegetical history—lending credence to the history of exegesis in future works of commentary.

Arama's tendency towards exegetical compilation can be seen across the Gates of AY and in various ways: One indirect but consistent example of this is a formal feature common to

⁹¹ Immanuel of Rome is a classic example.

virtually every Gate of AY, namely, Arama's systematic elaboration of *sefeqot* or exegetical difficulties preceding and organizing the *parashah* section of each Gate.⁹² Though Arama often refrains from citing previous commentators in his enumeration of *sefeqot*, we know that he synthesized these difficulties at least in part by cataloguing from his more successful follower Isaac Abarbanel. As has already been noted, one of the ways in which Abarbanel borrows from Arama's AY is by prefacing each *parashah*⁹³ in his Torah commentary with a set of *sefeqot*, which often consist largely (though not entirely—) of reformulations of *sefeqot* Arama had already formulated for the same *parashah*.⁹⁴ Whereas Arama keeps his *sefeqot* abstract however, Abarbanel often supplies the names of the commentators/commentaries off which they are based, belatedly revealing Arama's *sefeqot* as the product of cataloguing, a tendency to comb through, compile, and systematically index concerns that recur throughout the history of exegesis on each *parashah*.

But even beyond the *sefeqot*, Arama's explicit citations of previous commentators' exegesis are legion. To name just the most cited outside of Maimonides, Arama explicitly cites Nahmanides' commentary on the Torah nearly two hundred times, Rashi's commentary roughly one hundred and fifty times, Abraham ibn Ezra's commentaries over fifty times, and David Kimhi's commentary nearly fifteen times—all across multiple Gates and more often than not in juxtaposition with one another. Nor does Arama restrict himself to cataloguing only the most popular/canonical commentators. Through his engagements in AY, Arama also includes extensive citations from more recent and less popular commentators, treating e.g., Gersonides' commentaries on the Tabernacle and the sun standing still at Gibeon, Moses Narboni's theory of

⁹² As Saperstein notes, use of *sefeqot* was quite common in the generation of the expulsion; see Saperstein, "Method of Doubts."

⁹³ Or more accurately: subdivisions of each *parashah*.

⁹⁴ See note 26 above.

the sacrifices, Abraham Bibago's analysis of Moses' sin at Meribah, and—as we will see momentarily—relatively obscure ibn Ezra supercommentators.⁹⁵

Arama's desire to present himself as exegetical compiler and catalogueur extraordinaire comes through perhaps nowhere more clearly, however, than when he turns out to be merely borrowing his catalogue—and concealing that borrowing—from another source. In a Gate already extensively discussed in this chapter, Gate 10, Arama at one point provides one of his catalogues of exegesis, systematically highlighting the history of commentaries on Gen. 3:22:⁹⁶ He cites by name the readings of Maimonides, Samuel ibn Tibbon, David Kimḥi, Abraham ibn Ezra, an ibn Ezra supercommentator whom he calls the *Ba'al ha-Pardes*, Rashi, Naḥmanides, and concludes with a synthetic reading of the Maimonidean “philosophizers”—presenting all this compilatory work as the fruits of his own labors, the product of his abiding concern with the nature of angelic knowledge, already discussed above. Yet my identification of a heretofore unknown source reveals that many of the materials Arama compiles for this catalogue he in fact derived from elsewhere. By comparing a handful of citations that Arama attributes to the *Ba'al ha-Pardes* in both this Gate and Gate 7, I was able to identify Arama's *Ba'al ha-Pardes* as the late fourteenth-century ibn Ezra supercommentator Ḥayyim Israeli, who we know to have authored a treatise on the Garden of Eden (the ostensible source of his epithet).⁹⁷ Further investigation reveals that Arama drew from Israeli's *Ma'amar Gan Eden* more than he let on:

⁹⁵ For Arama's creative elaborations of Gersonides' explication of the Tabernacle in astronomical terms, see AY Gate 48; for his critique of Gersonides' commentary on the sun standing still at Gibeon, see AY Gate 13 and Kellner, “Gersonides' Cultured Despisers;” for his invective against Narboni's theory of sacrifice, see AY Gate 58; for his invective against Bibago's analysis of Moses' (lack of) sin, see AY Gate 80.

⁹⁶ See my translation of Gate 10 in Part II.

⁹⁷ Not much has been written on Ḥayyim Israeli and his treatise, but see Dov Schwartz, “The Quadripartite Division of the Intellect in Medieval Jewish Thought,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 84, no. 2 (1992): 227–236; Tzvi Langermann, “The Making of the Firmament: Ḥayyim Israeli, Isaac Israeli, and Maimonides,” *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 7 (1988): 461–476. The aspect of Israeli Schwartz discusses in his article is precisely that which Arama incorporates into his reading of the four rivers of Eden in AY Gate 7. For the identification, see 4.2 below.

Beyond the citations he explicitly attributes to the *Ba'al ha-Pardes*, most of what Arama presents as his own catalogue of exegesis in Gate 10 actually comes straight out of *Ma'amar Gan Eden*, chapter 10. Consider the table comparing Arama's catalogue in AY Gate 10 with Israeli's remarks in *Ma'amar Gan Eden*, chapter 10 below:

Arama, AY Gate 10	Ḥayyim Israeli, <i>Ma'amar Gan Eden</i> ⁹⁸
This is because they all spoke in a single voice, whose words, as we have seen, were compelled and oppressed to a great extent. The Master and Guide, chief of the Torah philosophers, offered a contrived explication:⁹⁹ “<i>behold the man has become unique in the world...he himself, of his own accord, knows good and evil, does whatever he wishes...since this is so, he might stretch out his hand (Gen. 3:22),</i>” and so on (Eight Chapters).¹⁰⁰ R. Samuel ibn Tibbon, his student, amended this, saying that the word <i>has become</i> in the verse has a dual grammatical function, so that its meaning is: <i>behold the man has become as one of us, and he has become capable of knowing good and evil</i>.¹⁰¹ R. David Kimḥi wrote in his collection: <i>behold the man has become as one of us</i> in respect of his intellect and his permitting himself <i>to know good and evil</i>. Ibn Ezra wrote “and the meaning of this verse is similar to <i>and ye shall be as elohim knowing good and evil</i> (Gen. 3:5). Or, perhaps [Gen. 3:22] refers to what Adam thought”—these are his words. The author of [the Book of] <i>Pardes</i> clarified them and said:¹⁰² “this Sage claimed that among the heavenly host, some knew good and some knew evil, and that this	It is written: <i>And the man shall be as one of us, knowing god and evil</i>. All of the great and true translators struggled greatly with the explication of this verse, such that even the Great Rabbi Moses [Maimonides], peace be upon him, in the profundity of his thoughts and wisdom, was compelled to follow the Aramaic translator and to force the verse from its peshat—both the peshat of its cantillation (te'amim) and the peshat of its vowelization—according to what I found in <i>Hilkhot Teshubah</i>, ch.5, of his Great Composition. He said that the explication of the verse is “the human species became singular in the world with no other species resembling it in the following quality: he himself, of his own accord, knows good and evil, and does whatever he wishes. There is no one who can prevent him from doing good or bad. Since this is so, <i>he might stretch out his hand</i>, and so on.” Thusly he spoke.... [R. ibn Ezra] said that the meaning of the verse is like the meaning of <i>and ye shall be as elohim knowing good and evil</i>, and there he said that the explication of <i>as elohim knowing good and evil</i> is as the angels. This is, in my opinion, a great secret which was concealed even from the Sages of

⁹⁸ Hebrew text following the printing of P. Perreau in *Tiferet Shevah* [Zunz Festschrift] (Berlin, 1884), 35, 39. The English translation of ibn Tibbon is from Robinson, *Samuel ibn Tibbon*, 372.

⁹⁹ It is noteworthy that despite this epithet, Arama groups Maimonides and Ibn Tibbon with David Kimḥi, Ibn Ezra, and Naḥmanides—the canonical commentators—rather than with the philosophizers of the following section, especially when the opinion he presents as typical of the latter is so clearly inspired by *Guide* I.2. In this connection, Arama's citation of Maimonides' interpretation of Gen. 3:22 from *Shemonah Peraqim*, but not his interpretation of Gen. 3:5 from *Guide* I.2 is especially interesting. While we might be inclined to write this off as attributable to Arama's recourse to Ḥayyim Israeli, who in his *Ma'amar Gan Eden* likewise only cites the gloss from *Shemonah Peraqim* and not *Guide* I.2, I suspect something more deliberate is at play, namely: that Arama is attempting to rescue Maimonides from the most provocative (indeed heretical) implications of *Guide* I.2, assigning blame only to the Master's followers.

¹⁰⁰ I use the translation of Raymond Weiss in *The Ethical Writings of Maimonides*, ed. and trans., Raymond L. Weiss and Charles Butterworth (New York: Dover Publications, 1975), 88.

¹⁰¹ I use the translation of James T. Robinson, *Samuel ibn Tibbon*, 372.

¹⁰² See 4.3 and 1.4 on Arama's debt to Ḥayyim Israeli above.

great secret that was concealed from Aristotle and his followers. This is alluded to in the word <i>cherubim</i>, for these are the angels that teach good and evil, respectively. Those who are under their governance do not have the capacity to repent, for no one can be spared from them”—thusly he spoke...None of these commentators, nor any of the others whose explications we have heard, have permitted themselves to explicate the verse according to its <i>peshat</i>.	Greece and the Philosophers... The opinion of the sage Samuel ibn Tibbon is in accordance with this verse—I mean, <i>and the man shall be ke-ehad mimenu</i>: you will find [his explication of it] in his commentary on Ecclesiastes. He thought it difficult to concede that there should be some change in the cherubs' actions concerning good and evil, since he was an Aristotelian; thus he inclined towards the opinion of the intellectual Sage [i.e., ibn Ezra] in his explication of this, and was stirred to give an explication other than that given by Maimonides or by us: He said: the word <i>has become [hayah]</i> has a dual grammatical function too, as though the verse were: <i>behold, the man has become as one of us, and he has become capable of knowing good and evil...</i>
וזה שכלם פה אחד אשר ראינו דבריהם נלחצו ונדחקו בו בשיעור מופלג. והרב המורה ראש הפלוסופים התורניים דחק ופירש ז"ל. הן האדם היה מיוחד בעולם הזה כשהוא ממנו כלומר מעצמו ומחשבתו יודע טוב ורע ועושה כל מה שהוא חפץ בין טוב ובין רע ועתה פן ישלח ידו כו'. והרב רבי שמואל ׳ן' תבון ז"ל תלמידו תקן כי מלת היה מושכת אחרת עמה ושיעורו הן האדם היה כאחד ממנו והיה לדעת טוב ורע. ור' דוד קמחי ז"ל בקונטרס שלו כתב הן האדם היה כאחד ממנו מצד שכלו והתיר עצמו לדעת טוב ורע. והראב"ע ז"ל כתב וטעם הכתוב כמו והייתם כאלהים יודעי טוב ורע או פירושו על מחשבתו אלו דבריו ובעל הפרדס ביארם ואמר כי החכם הזה יסבור שיש מצבא השמים יודעים טוב ויש יודעים רע ושזה הענין הוא סוד גדול נעלם מארסטו וסיעתו וכי אליו רמז במלת כרובים כי הם המלאכים המורים על הטוב ועל הרע ואשר הם תחת ממשלתם אין בידם לעשות תשובה כי אין מידם מציל ע"כ.... ואני בער ולא אדע משתומם ונבהל לומר מי הכניסם אל הצרה הזאת	ואפרש קודם הן האדם החמורה כתו' הן האדם היה כאחד ממנו לדעת טוב ורע, והנה כל המפרשים הגדולים האמתיים נתקשה עליהם מאד פי' הפסוק הזה עד שהרב רבי משה ע"ה עם עומק מחשבותיו וחכמתו הוצרך לנסות אחר המתרגם ארמי ולהוציא הפסוק מפשוטו ומפשט הטעמים ומפשט הניקוד כפי מה שתמצא בהלכות תשובה מחיבורו הגדול פרק חמישי באמרו כי פירוש הפסוק, הן מין זה האדם היה אחד בעולם ואין מין שני דומה לו בזה הענין שהוא מעצמו בדתו ובמחשבתו יודע טוב ורע ועושה כל מה שהוא חפץ ואין לו מי שיעכב על ידו מלעשות הטוב או הרע וכיון שכן הוא פן ישלח ידו וכ' עד כאן לשונו והנה יצטרך בפירוש הזה להפסיק בטעם במלת כאחד ושלא להיות כאחד סמוך אל ממנו וגם יצטרך לסמוך מלת ממנו אל דעת טוב ורע וכל זה הפך בעל הטעמים, וכבר באר החכם השכלי ר' אברהם אבן עזרא בפירוש התורה שלא יתכן הפירוש הזה...החכם השכלי ראב"ע ז"ל שאמר כי טעם הפסוק כטעם והייתם כאלהים יודעי טוב ורע. ולשם אמר כי פירוש כאלקים יודעי טוב ורע כמלאכים והוא לפי דעתי סוד גדול ומכוסה אפי' מחכמי יון הפילוסופים... ודעת החכם ר' שמואל אבן תבון ז"ל כפי הפסוק הזה ר"ל הן האדם כאחד ממנו תמצאנה בפירו' ספר קהלת כי לפי שהיה קשה בעינינו להודות שיוכל להיות שנוי בפעולת הכרובים לטוב או לרע מפני שהיה מכת ארסטו' נפל לבו מדעת החכם השכלי בסברא הזאת ונתעורר לפרש פי' אחר חוץ מפ' רבו הרב רבינו משה ז"ל וחוץ מפירושו. ואמ' כי מלת היה מושכת עצמה ואחרת עמה כאלו יהיה הפסוק ככה, הן האדם היה כאחד ממנו והיה לדעת טוב ורע...ואמ' כי טעם פן אולי כמו שפירש ר' דוד קמחי על דרך דוחק גדול לפשט הכתוב כי הנה הפסוק הבא אחריו...

As is apparent from the table above, much of the material that Arama includes in his catalogue of exegesis on Gen. 3:22 is already compiled by Israeli in *Ma'amar Gan Eden*, chapters 10–11:

prior to Arama, Israeli had already singled out Gen. 3:22 as a verse with which commentators' struggled exceedingly; condemned Maimonides for deviating from the *peshat* of the verse; and included Maimonides,' ibn Ezra's, and ibn Tibbon's, interpretations. In Israeli's presentation, however, these interpretations are broken up rather than presented systematically, back-to-back. Arama thus takes the materials already compiled by Israeli and presents them in catalogue form—obscuring the extent of his reliance on Israeli meanwhile.

In Arama's tendency towards compilation then, we see yet another facet of how seriously he conceptualized exegesis as a if not the crucial site of ideological contestation. For Arama, a verse's history of exegesis is worth recovering and presenting as such—so much so that he mines other texts for these and represents them as the fruit of his own labors.

1.5. Arama on Exegesis: Theory vs. Practice

I will conclude this chapter on Arama's conceptualization and approach to exegesis by turning in a slightly different direction. While all the previous sections have attempted to ascertain Arama's conceptualization of exegesis—as key site of culture war, and substantive rather than mere formal shell—by analyzing his uses and *practice* of exegesis, in this final section, we will instead consider what Arama explicitly says about exegesis, i.e., his exegetical *theory*.

Though Arama's explicit remarks on exegesis are scattered throughout AY and most often take the form of critiques of others' exegesis, his most sustained reflections on exegesis appear towards the beginning of AY Gate 7.¹⁰³ Here, Arama draws on familiar concepts and sources from the history of medieval Jewish exegesis but blends and emphasizes them in a novel way: one that both explains much of his actual exegetical practice in AY, while also still leaving

¹⁰³ See also Heller-Wilensky, *Arama*, 70–77;

much unresolved. For Arama as for virtually all medieval Jewish thinkers after Maimonides, scripture has not one layer of significance but multiple.¹⁰⁴ Perhaps unsurprisingly however, Arama chooses to elaborate this idea not through Maimonides but through a lengthy passage from the Zohar's *midrash ha-ne'elam*.¹⁰⁵ As Shimon bar Yoḥai teaches in this passage, the Torah

¹⁰⁴ The literature on this is enormous, but for one classic study, see Frank Talmage, "Apples of Gold: The Inner Meaning of Sacred Texts in Medieval Judaism," in *Jewish Spirituality*, vol. 1, ed. Arthur Green (Crossroad, 1986), 313–355.

¹⁰⁵ The passage as Arama cites it is as follows:

In Midrash Ne'elam [it is written]: "Rabbi Shim'on bar Yoḥai said: 'Woe to the person who says that Torah intended to present a mere story and ordinary words! For if so, we could compose a Torah right now with ordinary words, and more laudable than all of them. If to display matters of the world, even worldly potentates possess words more sublime. If so, let us follow them and make a Torah of them! But all the words of Torah correspond to the following pattern.

Come and see: The upper world and the lower world are evenly balanced: Israel below, supernal angels above. Of the angels it is written: *He makes his angels spirits* (Ps. 104:4). This pertains to the celestial realm. But when they descend below, although they descend, they wear the garments of this world. If they are not clothed in a garment befitting this world, they cannot endure in this world, nor can the world endure them.

If this is so with the angels, then concerning Torah—who created them and created all worlds, which exist for her sake—when she descends to this world, if she does not clothe herself in garments of this world, the world cannot endure.

So this story of Torah is a garment of Torah. Whoever thinks that the garment is the real Torah and not something else, may his spirit expire! He will have no share in the world that is coming! Therefore David said: *uncover my eyes, so I can see the wonderous of Your Torah* (Ps. 119:18)—what is beneath the garment of Torah.

Come and see: There is a garment visible to all. Those fools, when they see someone in a good-looking garment, look no further. Yet the significance of that garment is the body; the significance of the body is the soul.

Corresponding to this pattern, Torah has a body—and words of Torah called 'bodies of Torah.' This body is clothed in a garment, namely stories of the world. Fools of the world look only at that garment, the story of Torah. Those who know more do not look at the garment, but rather at the body beneath that garment. The wise—servants of the supernal King, those who stood at Mount Sinai—look only at the soul, root of all, real Torah. And in the world that is coming, they are destined to gaze upon the soul of soul of Torah.

Come and see: So too, above—there is garment, body, soul, and soul of soul. The heavens and their hosts are the garment. Assembly of Israel is the body who receives the soul, *Tiferet Yisrael*, so She is the body for the soul. The soul that we have mentioned is *Tiferet Yisrael*, who is real Torah. The soul of soul is the Holy Ancient One—and all are linked to one another.

Woe to the wicked who say that Torah is merely a story! They look at this garment and no further[...]Therefore, concerning Torah, one should look only at what is beneath the garment. So all these words and all these stories are garments."

is akin to (yet greater than) the angels: too brilliant to descend to earth in its pure, naked form, it must first assume a body and then several layers of garments before descending to earth to be consumed by men; proper understanding is to be able to discern each of the Torah's layers for what it is.

From this Zoharic passage, Arama moves in two directions, not contradictory, but in a sense in tension with one another. The idea Arama develops more forcefully—and that, as we will see in the next chapter, resonates with themes Arama returns to throughout his oeuvre—is a strong admonition against intellectual overweening when it comes to scriptural interpretation.¹⁰⁶ In particular, Arama is extremely concerned by the prospect of people becoming so enamored with the deeper scientific, philosophical, and allegorical significances of scripture that they dismiss or outright deny the verse's simple, straightforward, *peshat* sense:¹⁰⁷

When intelligent men who have the Torah of the Lord in their hearts see or hear an explication of some verse or *parshah*...and the commentator brings forth some intellectual or scientific benefit from it, which was [previously] hidden and concealed, they ought to guard themselves, lest some vain matter occur to them, causing them to doubt something that the *peshat* of the verses attest to—heaven forbid! For just as one who is familiar with the body cannot deny the existence and true reality of garments, and likewise, one who is familiar with the soul cannot deny the body—for all of these are true and apparent to the eyes; so too is the case for the secrets of the divine Torah.

Introducing an idea that he will develop elsewhere, Arama emphasizes that the key distinction between scripture and other wisdom texts is that while the latter either only have a single sense (i.e., their external sense is identical to their internal sense, they mean what they say—) or else have a significant internal sense but an external sense lacking value, Torah alone is significant at

¹⁰⁶ See 2.3.3.

¹⁰⁷ לכן אנשי לבב עם תורת יי' בלבם בראותם או בשמעם פירוש איזה פסוק או פרשה...יוציא המפרש ממנה תועלת מושכל מאיזה עיון שהיה בה נסתר ונעלם. ישמרו להם פן יעלה על לבם דבר בליעל לשום שום ספק בשום דבר ממה שיעידו עליו פשוטי הכתובים חלילה. כי כמו שהמכיר בגוף לא יוכל הכחיש מציאות הלבוש ואמתתו. והמכיר בנפש בלתי יכול ג"כ לכחש את הגוף כי כלם הם אמתיים ונראין לעינים. כן הענין בסתרי התורה האלהית

all levels, both internal and external, inner and outer.¹⁰⁸ This, on Arama's reading, is the meaning of Deut. 32:46: *Set your heart unto all the words wherewith I testify against you this day; that ye may charge your children*, and so on. With these words, Moses exhorts the Israelites (much as Arama does in his own day—) to recognize the superiority of the Torah over all other texts. It is worth quoting Arama's remarks at length:¹⁰⁹

Our Master Moses clarified this notion when he said: *Set your heart unto all the words wherewith I testify against you this day; that ye may charge your children*, and so on (cf Deut. 32:46). He meant, steel yourselves, lest the hearts of the intelligent among you be led astray so as to say: 'on account of its great rank, this Torah must have aimed at and taken as its final purpose the inner sense and secrets of the words, not their outer sense. For this is the case with the treatises of the sages of the nations, which have been composed with allegory and riddles: Only the inner sense is intended, while the outer sense contains nothing of value. [But] this is not the case in this instance[=i.e., concerning the Torah]! Rather, you ought to *set your heart unto all the words wherewith I testify against you this day*, from the stories of the creation of the world up to this point, including the commandments and the statutes which I taught you *that ye may charge your children therewith, to observe and to do them* according to their *peshat* and straightforward sense. *For it is no vain thing for you*, their outer sense, like those treatises we mentioned. Not only this, but moreover *through this thing, you shall prolong your days*, and so on (cf Deut. 32:47). The divine Torah has this wonderful superiority (*yitaron*) over every other collection of stories of sciences and politics. For some of them aim at what they say, and nothing else; while others aim at the inner sense, while the outer sense *is a vain thing* containing nothing of substance. [In contrast] both the outer and inner senses of this Torah all are truth and intended. This is a wonderful notion which is only suited to the ability of divine wisdom. Solomon composed books whose outer sense is words of instruction, and whose inner sense are words of wisdom and knowledge, as he himself said: *apples of gold in settings of silver*, and so on (Prov. 25:11), and as the Master and Guide explained. However, for the outer sense to be legends and true stories about the creation of the world or the commandments and statutes through which one lives, and for the inner sense to be wonderful notions

¹⁰⁸ Among other places, Arama develops this idea forcefully in Gate 60, in his critique of Gersonides' hygienic explication of the dietary laws; see Heller-Wilensky, *Arama*, 57, 188–193.

¹⁰⁹ וזה הענין בעצמו ביארו מרע"ה בסוף דבריו וחתימתם עד שאמר ועתה שימו לבבכם לכל הדברים אשר אנכי מעיד בכם היום אשר תצום וכו' (דברים ל"ב) ירצה השמרו לכם פן יפתה לב משכיליכם לאמר כי התורה הזאת לרוב מעלתה שמה מגמתה וכוונת תכליתה אל פנימי הדברים וסודותם לא אל חיצונם כמו שהיה הענין בקצת חבורי חכמי האומות שנעשו על דרך המשל והחידה שהמכוון מהם הוא הפנימי לבד והחיצוני הוא דבר שאין בו ממש. כי לא כן הדבר בענין הזה אבל ראוי לכם לשום לב אל כל הדברים אשר אנכי מעיד בכם היום. הן מספורי הענינים ההורים מבריות עולם עד הנה הן מהמצות והמשפטים שלמדתי אתכם אשר תצוו את בניכם לשמור לעשות אותן כפשוטן ומשמען. כי לא דבר רק הוא. החיצוני מהם. מכס, כמו החבורים ההם שזכרנו. ולא עוד אלא שבדבר הזה תאריכו ימים וכו' (שם). וזה היתרון הנפלא נמצא לתורה האלהית על כל חבור ספרי שאר החכמות והנמוסים. כי מהם שיכונו אל מה שיאמר בהם ולא על זולתו. ומהם שיכונו אל הפנימי שבהם והחיצוני הוא דבר רק שאין בו ממש. וזאת התורה החיצוני והפנימי ממנה הכל אמת ומכוון מאתה. והוא ענין נפלא לא יאות כלל אלא אל יכולת החכמה האלהית לבד. כי הנה שלמה כבר חבר ספרים שהחיצוני מהם דברי מוסר ודרך ארץ והפנימי הוא דבר חכמה ודעת כמ"ש הוא בעצמו תפוחי זהב במשכיות כסף וכו' (משלי כ"ה:י"א) וכמו שפירש הרב המורה ז"ל (בפתיחה). אמנם שיהיה החיצוני הגדות וספורים אמתיים ממה שהיה ונברא בעולם או מצות ומשפטים ויחיו בהם בעודם. והפנימי ענינים נפלאים מסודות המציאות והצלחת האדם. הוא דבר שלא נתן איפשרותו כי אם לו ית' לבדו.

concerning the secrets of existence and human felicity—this is something which is impossible save for God alone.

Towards the end of this passage Arama argues that not only is scripture in general superior to the wisdom texts of other nations, but moreover, Torah in the narrow sense, i.e., the five books of Moses, is superior to the rest of scripture. Though this claim is of course consonant with and commonplace in classical Rabbinic literature, in the way that he levels it, singling out the works of Solomon and Prov. 25:11, Arama is clearly taking aim at Maimonides and the Maimonidean tradition: As Arama alludes to, and as will be discussed at length in the next chapter, in the *Guide* Maimonides had singled out Solomon as the biblical philosopher par excellence and identified Prov. 25:11 as *the* prooftext for Solomon's strategic discovery and implementation of philosophical-allegorical esotericism.¹¹⁰ What is most important for our present purposes however is that already by the early thirteenth century, Maimonides' followers had devoted their exegetical attentions disproportionately to the works of Solomon—presumably because they understood these to be the most philosophical, the key to unlocking the secrets of Torah. By thus acknowledging Solomon's multivalent writing—even in a sense on Maimonides' own terms—yet still insisting that Solomon's powers pale in comparison to those of God Himself—Arama reasserts, contra the Maimonidean tradition, the centrality and supremacy of Torah. For after all, while the external sense of Solomon's works may indeed have didactic moral and political value (and therein be superior to the sages of the nations, the external sense of whose works have no value at all—), only God can author a *peshat* that rises to the level of true law and history, as true as its inner allegorical, cosmological and theological content: “all of this is recorded in a true script, such that the rinds and the interior do not differ in terms of their truth content at all, but

¹¹⁰ See *Guide*, Introduction; 2.3.3 below.

only in terms of revealed and concealed.” Though he does not say as much explicitly, this, Arama strongly implies, is why he has devoted *his* magnum opus to the study of Torah proper.

Arama further buttresses the idea that the inner significance(s) of Torah in no way invalidate its outer significance with recourse to both the Zoharic passage he used as *ma'amar* and a popular exegetical tenet from Nahmanides. Building off Zohar, he insists that “just as one who is familiar with the body cannot deny the existence and true reality of garments...so too for Torah,” i.e., recognition of the internal only reinforces rather than undermines significance of the external. Appealing to Nahmanides’ methods in his own Torah commentary, Arama notes that the allegorical and typological significances of Genesis and Exodus—which at once stand for the soul’s redemption and the fate of future generations—in no way negate their historicity, their simultaneously recounting the fate of the forefathers.¹¹¹ What’s more, his insistence on the importance of *peshat*—against the overzealous allegorizers of so much post-Maimonidean scriptural exegesis—explains why elsewhere throughout AY, Arama both critiques other commentators for needless departures from the *peshat* and himself goes to great lengths to elaborate the *peshat*.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Amos Funkenstein, “Nahmanides’ Symbolical Reading of History,” in *Studies in Jewish Mysticism*, ed. Joseph Dan and Frank Talmage (Association for Jewish Studies, 1982), 129–150; Marc Saperstein, “Jewish Typological Exegesis After Nahmanides,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 2 (1993): 158–170.

¹¹² What constitutes *peshat* for Arama is a topic that deserves further study. What is clear is that his *peshat* is not the terse, grammatical *peshat* of ibn Ezra and the Andalusian grammatical exegetes, but rather much more fluid and elaborate, even philosophical: often Arama incorporates elements typical of Maimonidean exegesis into what he either suggests or else explicitly deems as the *peshat* level of his interpretations—perhaps another aspect of his domestication of philosophy by incorporation and neutralization, on which see 2.3.1 below. Given Arama’s recourse to Gersonides more broadly, Amos Funkenstein’s observation that for Gersonides, “Philosophical allegory is the *peshat*” is noteworthy. See Amos Funkenstein, “Gersonides’ Biblical Commentary: Science, History and Providence,” in *Studies on Gersonides: A Fourteenth-Century Jewish Philosopher-Scientist*, ed. Gad Freudenthal (Brill, 1992), 309, as cited by Menachem Kellner, “Gersonides on the Song of Songs and the Nature of Science,” in Menachem Kellner, *Torah in the Observatory: Gersonides, Maimonides, Song of Songs* (Academic Studies Press, 2010), 159. My thanks to Oded Yisraeli for bringing this to my attention, and to Tamaś Visi for his keen observation that “*peshat* is a chimera.”

Yet for all his emphasis on the importance of *peshat* and corresponding concern with those who would abandon *peshat* in flights of allegorical, philosophical, and scientific fancy, Arama also reserves a place in his exegetical theory to defend the importance of allegorical interpretation. After launching his thinly-veiled critique of Maimonidean exegesis for its abandonment of *peshat* and partiality towards the wrong biblical books, outlined above, Arama concludes his explicit reflections on exegesis by moving in the opposite direction, insisting on the contemporary need to disclose scripture's inner/allegorical significances and turning to none other than Maimonides himself to do so. Rehearsing an historical justification developed already in the *Guide*, Arama explains that while in ancient times, it was appropriate for sages to be extremely reticent in their elaborations of scripture's inner sense, repeating only what they had learned from their masters, generations of exile had precipitated the collective loss of Jewish wisdom, such that "if a man only speaks or composes what he has heard from the mouth of his master...his soul will resemble a louse, and nothing will remain save the verses' *peshat* and the corpses of [Rabbinic] dicta."¹¹³ Still following Maimonides, Arama insists that given the present crisis, not only must Rabbinic prohibitions against disclosing scripture's secrets be ignored but moreover, elaborating these inner significances is a divine imperative per Psalm 119:126: *it is time to work for the Lord*.¹¹⁴ While in the immediate context of Gate 7 Arama summons these Maimonidean defenses of philosophical-allegorical exegesis to preface and justify his strongly allegorical exposition of the four rivers in Eden, they explain much of Arama's exegetical work throughout AY and indeed throughout his entire oeuvre, as well. As we have already seen to an extent in this chapter, and as we will see much more in the next chapter, for all Arama's lambasting the subjugation of philosophy to scripture and despite his frequent rebukes of others

¹¹³ See *Guide*, Intro, I.71.

¹¹⁴ *Guide*, Intro (Pines, 16).

for unnecessary departures from the *peshat*, Arama's exegesis is at all points absolutely saturated by philosophy—philosophical texts and terminology, philosophical figures and traditions, philosophical arguments and themes.

Arama's explicit reflections on exegetical theory thus constitute both a fitting end to the present chapter and an appropriate gateway to the next: while Arama's emphasis on the superiority and unique content of scripture generally and Torah specifically—over, above, and indeed against all other wisdom texts—points back, once more, to his understanding of the centrality of exegesis, his assertions as to the importance of *peshat* against the allegorical excess of the philosophizers, on the one hand, taken together with his thoroughly Maimonidean defense of allegorical exegesis on the other reveals his deep-seated ambivalence about the relationship between philosophy and scripture, the subject of the following chapter.

2. Domestication of Philosophy

2.1. Introduction

The second major aspect of Arama's oeuvre that we will turn our attention to and that constitutes the subject of the present chapter concerns Arama's relationship to and uses of philosophy. As we saw already in the previous chapter, which focused on Arama's uses and conceptualization of exegesis, it is virtually impossible to discuss Arama's concern for exegesis without seeing everywhere his concern for philosophy too. It is manifest in his drive to reclaim prooftexts from incorrect *philosophical* interpretations;¹ in his creative, strategic readings of Rabbinic texts through *philosophical*-allegorical exegesis;² in his mobilizing the native categories of scripture against *philosophical* concepts;³ and in his theoretical reflections, at once mobilized against *philosophical* rejections of *peshat* and simultaneously defending the continued imperative for *philosophical*-allegorical interpretation.⁴ Arama's exegesis, in other words, is at every turn saturated by—and incomprehensible save against the background of—philosophy: diverse philosophical traditions, texts, topoi, and terminology. But for all Arama's saturation in philosophy, it is equally apparent from the previous chapter that his relationship to philosophy is ambivalent or complex: while at various points he explicitly aligns himself against philosophical ideas and interpretations, and philosophers both individual and collective, he also uses the tools of philosophy for his own ends, in service of advancing his own project. Accordingly, the purpose of the present chapter is to throw into relief this complexity of Arama's relationship to philosophy by detailing and analyzing several of the major patterns in Arama's uses of philosophy throughout AY and other works.

¹ See 1.2 with subsections above.

² See 1.3.1 above.

³ See 1.3 with subsections above.

⁴ See 1.5 above.

As with the previous chapter's emphasis on Arama's conceptualization of exegesis, this chapter is concerned to highlight the complexity of Arama's relationship to philosophy precisely because of scholarship's historic tendency to flatten this relationship—both in the case of Arama specifically, but also with other figures of medieval Jewish thought more generally. Beginning with Arama specifically: As I discussed in the introduction, throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, scholars have tended to readily classify (and so dismiss) Arama as anti-philosophical or anti-rationalist at the expense of pursuing a more nuanced and holistic picture.⁵ To reprise some exempla already mentioned there, a brief survey of scholarship reveals that characterizations of Arama as anti-philosophical abound: Arama is “stridently anti-philosophical,”⁶ singled out for his “anti-philosophic sentiments”⁷ and as located at the “extreme right” on a spectrum of all medieval Jewish thinkers.⁸ He is variously charged with “inveigh[ing] against the scholars of his time who base faith on the intellect and on human reason;”⁹ “violently attacking Greek thought;”¹⁰ and “the ultimate devaluation of rational knowledge in favor of *emunah*.”¹¹ His commitment to an hypostasized scripture/faith/Judaism over and against an hypostasized philosophy is, apparently, unqualified: “Arama views [*emunah*] not only as superior but as often contrary to reason;”¹² “For him, the superiority of religious truth over human reason is never in doubt.”¹³

This scholarly tendency to overemphasize Arama's anti-philosophical dimensions can be understood in light of several, mutually reinforcing factors, as already suggested in the

⁵ See 0.3.1 and 0.3.3.

⁶ Manekin, “Hebrew Philosophy in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries,” 298.

⁷ Tirosch-Rothschild, “Ultimate End of Human Life,” 228.

⁸ Davidson, “Medieval Jewish Philosophy in the Sixteenth Century,” 108–111.

⁹ Sirat, *Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, 390.

¹⁰ Netanyahu, *The Marranos of Spain*, 135–6 n.1, n.3.

¹¹ Manekin, “Hebrew Philosophy in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries,” 297.

¹² Manekin, “Hebrew Philosophy in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries,” 297.

¹³ Sirat, *Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, 390.

introduction: For one thing, refinements in recent decades notwithstanding, entrenched historiographical narratives of the final century of Jewish life in Spain as one of inexorable decline have long driven scholars to dismiss fifteenth century Spanish-Jewish thought out of hand, preferring as object the fare of earlier and ostensibly more fruitful centuries.¹⁴ For another, and relatedly, scholars following Yitzhak Baer have long taken at face value a fifteenth century Spanish-Jewish narrative of philosophy as source of social corrosion: undermining the masses' naïve commitment to the faith in hard times, implicitly justifying conversion, and thereby facilitating the demise of the once-great Jewish community in Spain.¹⁵ Inflating this narrative to a prevailing ethos of fifteenth century Spanish-Jewish thought, scholars have persistently imagined the period as one of frightened, reactionary conservatism, and accordingly classed many of its leading luminaries as *prima facie* hostile to philosophy sans further investigation.¹⁶ Meanwhile, Heller-Wilensky's portrayal of Arama and Arama's own vitriolic rhetoric against the philosophers in HQ have only further bolstered reductive classifications of Arama as anti-philosopher. Ironically, in attempting to situate Arama neatly within the framework of a systematic medieval Jewish philosophy, Heller-Wilensky placed special emphasis on Arama's doctrinal *disagreements* with other major Jewish philosophical figures, thereby underscoring the polemical and anti-philosophical dimensions of his work.¹⁷ Relatedly, in abstracting from the exegetical dimensions of Arama's oeuvre to present a synthetic overview of his "thought," Heller-Wilensky abstracted also from the vast majority of Arama's strategic uses of philosophy, intimately bound up with and indeed inextricable from his exegesis.¹⁸ Further still, the one

¹⁴ See 0.3.3 above.

¹⁵ See 0.3.3 above.. Septimus makes this point as well in his "Yitzhak Arama and Aristotle's *Ethics*," 1n2.

¹⁶ Ari Ackerman, "Jewish Philosophy and Jewish-Christian Philosophical Dialogue;" Tamar M. Rudavsky, "The Impact of Scholasticism upon Jewish Philosophy in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, eds. D. H. Frank and O. Leaman (Cambridge, 2002), 345–70..

¹⁷ See 0.3.1 above.

¹⁸ See 0.3.1 above.

instance of Arama's exegesis that Heller-Wilensky does discuss as such and at length is his strongly polemical and allegorical reading of Sarah and Hagar as Torah and Philosophy from HQ, already mentioned in the introduction.¹⁹ In this connection and perhaps most significantly, Heller-Wilensky foregrounds her presentation of Arama as a whole with a presentation of his explicit vitriolic rhetoric against the philosophers and philosophizers.²⁰ Heller-Wilensky's depiction of Arama and broader historiographical narratives of fifteenth century Spanish Jewish intellectual life have thus reinforced each other to authorize ready, reductive classifications of Arama as anti-philosophical or anti-rationalist.

Yet while the factors outlined in the foregoing may have conspired to render Arama and his relationship to philosophy particularly vulnerable to scholarly reductivism, nuancing Arama's relationship to philosophy is important precisely because he is very much *not* the exception but rather the rule in this regard: far beyond Arama specifically, scholarship on medieval Jewish thought in general continues to exhibit a certain reductivism in its treatments of its objects' relationships to philosophy. This reductivism is most evident in scholars' persistent and near-ubiquitous classification of medieval Jewish thinkers along binary lines, as variously e.g., philosophical or anti-philosophical, conservative or radical, extreme or moderate, even "left" or "right."²¹ While these categorizations offer a certain heuristic value, they are ultimately

¹⁹ See 0.3.1 above.

²⁰ See 0.3.1 above.

²¹ In addition to the scholarship already cited in 0.3.3 above, surveying only a bit scholarship from the last quarter century, the labels "radical," and either "conservative" or "moderate" can be found a total of forty-six times in Gregg Stern's *Philosophy and Rabbinic Culture: Jewish Interpretation and Controversy in Medieval Languedoc* (Routledge, 2009); thirty-four times across the essays collected in Howard Kreisel, *Judaism as Philosophy: Studies in Maimonides and the Medieval Jewish Philosophers of Provence* (Academic Studies Press, 2015); in seven of the essays included in *Medieval Jewish Philosophy and its Literary Forms*, eds. Aaron W. Hughes and James T. Robinson (Indiana University Press, 2019): Aaron W. Hughes, "Animal Fables and Medieval Jewish Philosophy;" Raphael Dascalu, "Biblical Commentaries as a Genre of Jewish Philosophical Writing;" Igor H. de Souza, "Commentaries on *The Guide of the Perplexed*: A Brief Literary History;" Charles H. Manekin, "The Philosophical Epistle as a Genre of Medieval Jewish Philosophy;" Chaim Neria, "The Sermon in Late Medieval Jewish Thought as Method for Popularizing Philosophy;" Shira Weiss, "Theological Summas in Late Medieval Jewish Philosophy;" in four essays collected in Ofer Eilior, ed., *Gersonides' Afterlife: Studies on the Reception of Levi ben Gerson's*

obfuscatory, indicating much more about scholars' normative conceptualizations of an essentialized Judaism's relationship to its putative others than about medieval literary practices and/or ideological formations. In other words, the tendency to classify medieval Jewish thinkers along such binary lines forecloses more precise and explanatory investigations into how these thinkers actually *used* the diverse philosophical texts and traditions in which they were all steeped.

Thankfully, though commonplace, foreclosures of deeper inquiry into medieval figures' precise relationships with philosophy have not been universal: In recent years, a handful of scholars have eschewed facile labels and instead opted for more analyses.²² In the case of Arama in particular, scholars have also slowly yet increasingly come to recognize the complexity of his relationship with philosophy and accordingly made inroads at nuancing and refining our understanding of that relationship. Credit here is due first of all to Heller-Wilensky: as already mentioned in the introduction, and despite her much heavier emphases on Arama's anti-philosophical dimensions outlined in the foregoing, Heller-Wilensky does concede Arama's reliance on philosophical sources and particularly his deference towards Maimonides, whom she

Philosophical, Halakhic, and Scientific Oeuvre in the 14th Through 20th Centuries (Brill, 2020): Cedric Cohen-Skalli and Oded Horezky, "A Fifteenth-Century Reader of Gersonides: Don Isaac Abravanel, Providence, Astral Influences, Active Intellect, and Humanism," 180; Menachem Kellner, "Censoring/'Improving' Gersonides: The Case of the To'alot," 444; George Y. Kohler, "The Rediscovery of Gersonides as a Religious Philosopher by the Wissenschaft des Judentums (1860–1890)," 565; Seymour Feldman, "Gersonides and His Sephardic Critics," 150; in two essays collected in Racheli Haliva, ed., *Scepticism and Anti-Scepticism in Medieval Jewish Philosophy and Thought* (De Gruyter, 2018): David Lemler, "Post-Maimonidean Approaches to Parables and Aggadot," 118, 122, 124; and Racheli Haliva "The Origin of the World: An Anti-Sceptical Approach in Medieval Jewish Averroism," 136, 138; in two essays collected in Gad Freudenthal, ed., *Science in Medieval Jewish Cultures* (Cambridge University Press, 2011): Dov Schwartz, "Astral Magic and Specific Properties (*Segullot*) in Medieval Jewish Thought," 313–4, Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, "Kabbalah and Science in the Middle Ages: Preliminary Remarks," 503; in Hannah Kasher, "On the Book of Esther as an Allegory in the Works of Joseph ibn Kaspi: A Response to R. Eisen," *Revue des Études Juives* 161.3–4 (2002), 462 n.8.

²² Consider: Yonatan Shemesh, "Averroes as Intertext: Moses Narboni's Commentary on Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*," (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2021); Dana Fishkin, *Immanuel of Rome*; Gadi Weber, "Studies on R. Yaaqov Anatoli's *Malmed ha-Talmidim*," (PhD diss., Hebrew University, 2019; Guadalupe González Diéguez, "Isaac ibn Latīf (1210–1280) Between Philosophy and Kabbalah: Timebound Wisdom" (PhD diss., New York University, 2014).

notes Arama mentions on “virtually every page” of AY—and not solely for polemical purposes. Building off Heller-Wilensky’s insight but going much deeper, Bernard Septimus’ 1980 study “Yishaq Arama and Aristotle’s *Ethics*” is unparalleled in the nuance and depth it accords Arama’s relationship with philosophy. As its title suggests, Septimus seeks to better understand the complexities of Arama’s relationship with philosophy by investigating Arama’s manifold uses of a single text: Aristotle’s *Ethics*, which, Septimus notes, Arama cites more frequently than any other text save the Bible and Maimonides’ *Guide*, and which he “delves into [] devoutly, and expounds [] lovingly, not simply as a polemical chore or bow to convention.”²³ Through exacting analysis of several examples, Septimus compellingly illustrates that Arama’s engagement with this Aristotelian text defies any reductive classification as “anti-rationalist.” Far from adducing the *Ethics* solely for the sake of refuting it, Arama draws on the *Ethics* in novel ways and understands it at various points to lie in different, complex relations to scripture and the Rabbinic tradition. Moving in a different direction, more recent studies by James Robinson and James Diamond have suggested the complexity of Arama’s relationship to the Maimonidean tradition of philosophical-allegorical exegesis, even as both have also continued to emphasize Arama’s anti-philosophical and anti-Maimonidean aspects.²⁴ In particular, both Diamond’s study focusing on Arama’s treatment of the Fall and Abraham narratives, and Robinson’s study which deals with Arama’s treatment of Jacob’s ladder illustrate that—even as he often seeks to subvert or refute it—Arama’s exegesis frequently builds off of and remains deeply indebted to the tradition of exegesis originating in the *Guide* and developed throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries by Maimonides’ followers.

²³ Septimus’ “Yitzhaq Arama and Aristotle’s *Ethics*,” 2.

²⁴ Diamond, “Isaac Arama’s Nightmare;” Robinson, “Philosophy and Science in Medieval Jewish Commentaries on the Bible;” Robinson, “On or Above the Ladder?”

Building off the labors of Septimus, Robinson, Diamond, and others, the present chapter aims to characterize the nuances of Arama's complex relationship to philosophy through identification of patterns and close analyses of examples. Though by no means exhaustive—for Arama's uses of philosophy are in a sense as varied in quality as they are abundant in quantity—I break Arama's use of philosophy down into three major patterns, each beset by further variations and nuances: First, I discuss his strategic use(s) of classical philosophical definitions, texts, and traditions in order to attack contemporary philosophical ideas. Borrowing feminist philosopher Audre Lorde's turn of phrase, I call this Arama's use of the master's tools to dismantle the master's house. I.e., he implements the tools of philosophy to take down philosophy itself, or more specifically, he turns Aristotle (the Master of Scientists, according to medievals—) against latter-day Aristotelian consensuses. Second, I discuss Arama's relationship to a tradition now already mentioned several times throughout this dissertation, i.e., the Maimonidean tradition of philosophical-allegorical exegesis.²⁵ I show how he uses this tradition in at least two distinct ways: In some instances, he uses Maimonidean thematic topoi and equivocal terms to explicate scripture in a manner that very much appears to align with straightforward Maimonideanism; in others, he plays off and creatively subverts Maimonidean motifs and figurae while relying on them in this strategic subversion all the same. Third and finally, I show how Arama draws on an unexpected philosophical or more precisely rhetorical source—descending from the classical tradition of *ars memorativa*—to simultaneously develop his theory of the commandments (discussed more extensively in the next chapter) and claim as originally Jewish what might appear to be foreign wisdom.

²⁵ See “Key Terms” in the Introduction: 0.5.1.

While these patterns clearly challenge any reductive classification of Arama as anti-philosophical or anti-rationalist, beyond their individual specificity, they also suggest a useful lens through which we might understand Arama's uses of philosophy when taken all together, namely: *domestication* of philosophy. Etymologically, the term domestication of course evokes the notion of domicile; bringing into the home something that was, ostensibly, previously outside of it, and likely modulating that same something in such a way as to make it more suitable to the home environment. The concept of domestication is thus a fitting one to describe (and thereby unite) Arama's various uses of philosophy, and on several levels: Just as the concept of domesticating implies both the domicile and that which is outside it, so too Arama's language (with that of virtually all other medieval Jewish thinkers) belies a certain boundary delineating inside from outside, acceptable from unacceptable, Judaism from philosophy. But further, just as the concept of domesticating also implies that what lies within the domicile and what lies beyond it is not fixed and static but rather fluid, so too Arama's diverse uses of philosophy suggest that what might have appeared to belong to an external domain can be brought within and made internal. Contra scholarship's rigid binaries of philosophy/anti-philosophy, discussed above, Arama's uses of philosophy suggest that the boundary delineating philosophy from Judaism is more permeable membrane than militarized border. Finally, just as the concept of domesticating suggests that what is brought into the domicile is transformed in this movement, and more specifically, tamed to suit the needs and ends of the home, so too in Arama's various uses of philosophy we see him not only transforming those philosophical terms and texts, motifs and methods to serve alternative ends, but moreover doing so in such a way as to neutralize or neuter their formerly (to his mind) destructive potential. In all instances, Arama instrumentalizes the tools of philosophy towards his own project, thoroughly domesticating them.

2.2. Master's Tools, Master's House

As suggested in the introduction to this chapter, the first pattern in Arama's use of philosophy that I will discuss concerns his repeatedly and strategically turning the tools of philosophy against philosophy itself—or, to invert feminist poet and philosopher Audre Lorde's phrase, this section investigates Arama's many uses of the master's tools to dismantle the master's house.²⁶ The master, in Arama's case, refers to none other than the Master of Science himself, namely: Aristotle; his house, then, is the towering, multiply ramified edifice of medieval Jewish Aristotelianism as it had coalesced by the end of the fifteenth century.

In his attempts to leverage Aristotle against Aristotelianism, or Aristotelianism against itself, Arama, of course, was by no means original. In implementing the master's tools to dismantle the master's house, he was preceded by a handful of figures better known to contemporary students than Arama, and at least two of whom were well-known by Arama himself: Most influential among medieval Muslims and Jews alike was sixth century Alexandrian John Philoponus, a prolific commentator on Aristotle who deployed his intimate knowledge of the Master to critique his cosmological arguments in defense of Christian doctrine.²⁷ Philoponus' critique of the Aristotelian argument for the eternity of the world would go on to become the basis for the standard kalām critique of the same, while his alternative theory of motion would go on to inspire Jean Buridan and the anti-Aristotelian physics of the Renaissance.²⁸ Several centuries later, Sunni polymath Abu Hamid al-Ghazali took up the mantle

²⁶ Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Crossing Press, 2007), 110–114.

²⁷ For Philoponus, see Richard Sorabji, ed., *Philoponus and the Rejection of Aristotelian Science*, 2nd Edition (Institute of Classical Studies, 2010).

²⁸ For Philoponus' influence on medieval theology, see Herbert Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity, Creation, and the Existence of God in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, 1987).

of undoing Aristotelianism from the inside out in eleventh-century Baghdad.²⁹ In his aptly named *Tahafut al-Falasifa* (Incoherence of the Philosophers), al-Ghazali reveals the philosophers' incoherence by exposing holes in central claims of Aristotelian theology and metaphysics, waging his attacks largely by appealing to Aristotelian logical principles. Much closer to Arama's own context and most important for our purposes is late fourteenth/early fifteenth century Barcelonan Jew Ḥasdai Crescas.³⁰ Ostensibly paving the way for a companion work on the commandments, in his *Light of the Lord* Crescas demolishes much of the Aristotelian physics, metaphysics, and theology Maimonides had popularized in his *Guide* by wielding Aristotle against Aristotle, revealing how the Aristotelian system fails to adhere to its own prescribed limits.

Though scholars have long recognized Crescas for his original philosophical genius, and though several more recent studies have pointed to echoes of Crescas in his student Joseph Albo

²⁹ For al-Ghazali, see recently, Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology* (Oxford University Press, 2009). Steven Harvey has published a series of articles detailing the current state of research on al-Ghazali's influence on medieval Jewish thought; these are summarized nicely in his "The Changing Image of al-Ghazali in Medieval Jewish Thought," in *Islam and Rationality: The Impact of al-Ghazali: Papers Collected on His 900th Birthday*, vol. 1, ed. Georges Tamer (Brill, 2015), 288–302. Though unfortunately it is beyond the scope of the present research, more research should be done on Arama's uses of al-Ghazali. While Arama cites Kavvanot ha-Filosofim on multiple occasions, using it in the seemingly standard way that medieval Jews had been since at least the fourteenth century, as a textbook of Aristotelian natural science, much more interesting is that he explicitly appeals to the *Tahafut* on a few occasions, including in AY Gate 1, to develop an extremely central facet of his theology: Arama relies on al-Ghazali's distinction between an agent/maker as opposed to a prime mover to explain why belief in a Creator-God is a *sine qua non* for sustaining the chief theological virtue of fear. See Taneli Kukkonen, "Possible Words in the *Tahafut al-Falasifa*: al-Ghazali on Creation and Contingency," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 38 (2000): 479–502.

³⁰ For Crescas, see Harry A. Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle* (Harvard University Press, 1929); Warren Zev Harvey, "Hasdai Crescas' Critique of the Acquires Intellect," (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1973); Warren Zev Harvey, "Crescas vs. Maimonides on Knowledge and Pleasure," in *A Straight Path: Studies in Medieval Philosophy and Culture: Essays in Honor of Artur Hyman*, ed. Ruth Link-Salinger (Catholic University Press of America, 1988), 113–123; Warren Zev Harvey, *Physics and Metaphysics in Hasdai Crescas* (J. C. Gieben, 1998); Aviezer Ravitzky, *Passover Sermon of Hasdai Crescas and Studies in His Philosophic Thought* (Israel Academy of the Humanities and Sciences, 1988); Daniel Lasker, "Chasdai Crescas," in *History of Jewish Philosophy*, vol. 2, eds. Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman (Routledge), 399–414; James T. Robinson, "Hasdai Crescas and anti-Aristotelianism," in *The Cambridge Companion of Jewish Philosophy*, eds. Daniel Frank and Oliver Leaman (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 391–413. A complete English translation of Crescas' *Light of the Lord* can now be found in Roslyn Weiss, trans., *Crescas: Light of the Lord* (Oxford University Press, 2021), though the partial translations found in Wolfson's and Harvey's works are most excellent.

and a circle of lesser-known disciples, scholars have also long imagined Crescas as a thinker before his time: while his anti-Aristotelian physics (much like Philoponus') would go on to resonate with Renaissance and early modern greats such as Pico della Mirandola and Giordano Bruno, his late medieval Jewish readers were unprepared for and so ultimately unreceptive to his critiques of Aristotelianism such that he paradoxically bequeathed little legacy—or so the story goes.³¹

With the examples that follow, I show that Arama not only belongs squarely in this philosophical anti-Aristotelian lineage, but moreover, contra prevailing scholarly accounts, might be seen as a direct heir of Crescas. As we will see, throughout AY Arama time and again appeals to various aspects of the Aristotelian corpus—Aristotelian definitions and concepts, Aristotelian passages and exempla, even entire Aristotelian texts—to put the lie to prevailing ideas and consensuses among medieval Jewish Aristotelians. Like Philoponus, Ghazali, and Crescas before him, he pokes holes in and aims to tear down the system from the inside out by appealing to its unimpeachable authority.³² Further, though many of Arama's uses of the master's tools against the master's house depart from the aforementioned figures in important ways—inspired by still

³¹ For studies indicating to traces of Crescas' philosophy and critique of Aristotelianism in later fifteenth century Jewish thought, see Warren Zev Harvey, "Albo on the Reasonlessness of True Love," *Iyyun: The Jerusalem Philosophical Quarterly* (2000): 83–86; Warren Zev Harvey, "The Term Hitdabbekut in Crescas' Definition of Time," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 71.1 (1980): 44–47; Ari Ackerman, "Hasdai Crescas and His Circle on the Infinite and Expanding Torah," *Jewish Studies: An Internet Journal* 11 (2012): 1–17. The classical view that in his critique of Aristotelianism and pioneering science, Crescas was a man before his time can be found in Ravitzky's introduction, in turn summed up in elegant translation in Lasker's conclusion: "[Crescas'] teaching were formulated both too late and too early" (Ravitzky, v; Lasker, 345); they are also echoed in Shalom Sadik's more recent entry on Crescas in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Shalom Sadik, "Hasdai Crescas," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, eds., Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman (Fall 2024), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2024/entries/crescas/>. An example of this view is expressed in Seymour Feldman, "A Debate Concerning Determinism in Late Medieval Jewish Philosophy," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 51 (1984): 15–54.

³² It is worth noting that the philosophical anti-Aristotelian lineage to which Arama belongs is certainly not restricted to the figures of Philoponus, Ghazali, and Crescas. Several other Sephardic Jews including Judah Halevi (late 11th–mid-12th century), Judah ha-Cohen (13th century), Isaac ibn Latif (13th century), and Nissim of Gerona (14th century) could all be so described as well.

other sources, illustrating Arama's creativity, and assuming new shapes of textual criticism—the first example we will see below does suggest a direct line between Arama and Crescas. In using the master's tools to dismantle the master's house, Arama learned from the very best.

2.2.1. Master of Dismantling: (Learning from) Crescas' Critique of the Acquired

Intellect

The first example of Arama using the master's tools to dismantle the master's house that I will discuss comes from a Gate already discussed in one example in the previous chapter and that will be discussed much more extensively in the next chapter, namely, Gate 44. As I discussed in the example from the previous chapter, one of Arama's major concerns in Gate 44 is to show that the prevailing Aristotelian philosophical anthropology—common to both the masses and intelligentsia alike—is fundamentally incompatible with the possibility of immortality, one of the most central themes of medieval Jewish philosophical debate in the centuries following Maimonides.³³ In other words, Arama wants to show that to accept the Aristotelian definition of man as rational animal is already necessarily to believe that man must die with the death of the body and that no part of him is eternal. In the previous chapter, I noted that Arama is invested in exposing the incompatibility of the prevailing Aristotelian philosophical anthropology with the possibility of immortality in order to pave the way for constructing an alternative theological anthropology of his own, that which he develops through creative exegesis of *Behinat Olam*. And in the next chapter, I will discuss why Arama's alternative theological anthropology takes the shape it does—focused on a collective rather than individual subject and bent on the centrality of Torah to immortality.³⁴ But here I will move backwards to focus on Arama's

³³ See 1.3.2 above.

³⁴ See 3.1–2 below.

critique of the dominant Aristotelian philosophical anthropology that precedes his original elaborations. For in his preliminary attempts to show that the Aristotelian definition of man as rational animal is incompatible with the possibility of immortality, Arama draws directly from Ḥasdai Crescas' playbook in *Light of the Lord*, borrowing from, but also rephrasing and simplifying part of Crescas' so-called "critique of the acquired intellect."³⁵

To understand how Crescas' and in turn Arama's arguments constitute a use of Aristotelianism against itself, it is necessary to first understand that the target of Crescas' and Arama's arguments, i.e., the master's house in this case, was a prevailing Jewish Aristotelian theory of immortality.³⁶ Though details varied from thinker to thinker, at its most basic, most medieval Jewish Aristotelians held that immortality was possible for certain individuals through perfection of the intellect: by acquiring knowledge of abstract, immaterial, and eternal intelligibilia, a part of the human intellect would become abstract, immaterial, and eternal too; qua abstract, immaterial, and eternal, this part of man would then go on to live immortally, even after the death of the body. Crescas and later Arama both aimed to show that this theory of immortality is not viable even on its adherents own terms; i.e., on close analysis, it cannot stand up to the Aristotelians' own admitted principles.

As Zev Harvey illustrated in his study on Crescas' "critique of the acquired intellect," Crescas leveraged his attack on this Aristotelian theory of immortality from multiple angles.

³⁵ The expression "critique of the acquired intellect" comes from Warren Zev Harvey's dissertation, on which this section relies heavily.

³⁶ My summary is highly basic and abstracted; for those interested in the details of the theory of the acquired intellect as Crescas lays it out, see Harvey, "Crescas' Critique," 28–104. In advancing a critique of a strictly intellectualist theory of immortality and suggesting that intellectual perfection alone is not the final end of human existence, Arama was very much in line with broader fifteenth century Iberian trends; on which see Tirosh-Rothschild, "Human Felicity: Fifteenth-Century Sephardic Perspectives on Happiness;" Tirosh-Samuelson, "The Ultimate End of Human Life in Postexpulsion Literature;" Ruth Birnbaum, *An Exposition of Joseph ibn Shem Tov's Kevod Elohim (The Glory of God): A Fifteenth-Century Philosophical Work: On the Summum Bonum of Man and True Happiness* (Edwin Mellen, 2001). What is significant is that in advancing this critique, he follows the contours of Crescas' argument quite closely.

Most important for our purposes though is that he wages one of these attacks by creatively appealing to the Aristotelian definition of man as rational animal.³⁷ According to the Aristotelian theory of immortality, Crescas argued, the subject that becomes immortal is not really man qua rational animal at all but rather only man qua abstract, immaterial, and eternal acquired intellect. Said differently, to borrow James Robinson's formulation, Crescas suggests that, adhering to a strict Aristotelian definition of man, the Aristotelian theory of immortality actually necessitates that man become not-man.

Arama, for his part, draws on Crescas' core insight but repackages it, stripping it of Crescas' typically dense jargon into material that is much more digestible, accessible, and fit for popular consumption. Though his formulation omits much of the background on the Aristotelian theory of immortality he is attacking—presumably because he expected his audience to already be familiar with it—and though his argument follows a slightly different line of reasoning than Crescas', it is relatively straightforward to follow. In brief, Arama argues that the Aristotelian theory of immortality is incoherent because it violates the Aristotelians' own core logical and ontological axiom that a thing cannot transcend its definition (this, Arama explains, is “the definition of ‘definition’”—). Creatively building off Crescas, Arama focuses on fleshing out one specific Aristotelian definition, namely, the definition of “man.” He points out that the standard Aristotelian definition of man as “rational animal” is really a sort of shorthand; indeed, since on the Aristotelians' own understanding the genus “animal” is further subsumed under the category of material “body,” it is more precise to define man as a “rational animal body.” Having elaborated this fuller definition, Arama then can easily pivot the Aristotelians against themselves,

³⁷ The following based on Harvey, “Crescas' Critique,” 125–137, 205–217; James T. Robinson, “Philosophical Psychology, Jewish Tradition,” in *The Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy*, ed. H. Langerlund (Springer, 2010), 982–990; Robinson, “Hasdai Crescas and Anti-Aristotelianism,” 404–407.

revealing the same fundamental contradiction Crescas had but garbed in different language: The Aristotelians' theory of immortality is premised on the idea that man can become an immaterial separate intellect, i.e., *not* a body; thus their theory is premised on the idea that man can transcend his definition ("rational animal body"), which obviously contradicts the Aristotelian axiom that no being can transcend its definition! In Arama's own words:³⁸

"As for theoretical investigation, according to its assumptions, nothing is more impossible than for some existent to become another—I mean, to take on its definition. This is known from the definition of "definition" and from the equivalence of the definition and the thing defined, such that the two are interchangeable. Since the definition of man and the specific difference characterizing the species is "rational animal," it is reason that distinguishes him from all other animals belonging to his genus. This specific difference must then distinguish him all the more so from spiritual existents who do not belong to his same genus. This is because the animal of which this specific difference is predicated belongs to the category of body, i.e., body is animal's supreme genus. Accordingly, [saying "rational animal"] is really like saying "rational animal body"—which cannot apply to the body of the separate intellect. Similarly, the term "rational" [cannot apply to the separate intellect] since what is meant by this specific difference is "rational" in potentia, without a doubt.

Thus, since man and spiritual existents do not belong to a single genus and cannot be encompassed by any category—for existence is predicated of them only amphibolously—how is it possible that they should be interchangeable with one another, one assuming the definition of the other? For this is what is required when we say that man may attain divine happiness and eternal spiritual success—but it is not possible."

Again, in the scheme of Gate 44, Arama's critique of the Aristotelian theory of immortality outlined in the foregoing is part of his broader attempt to show that the dominant Aristotelian philosophical anthropology conceptualizing man as rational animal is incompatible with the possibility of immortality as such: To do so, he must put the lie to the Aristotelian defense of

³⁸ אמנם החקירה העיונית הפילוסופית למה שיודע ממנה שאין דבר יותר רחוק לפי הנחותיה כהכנס אחד מהנמצאים במקום חברו רצוני בגבולו וגדרו וזה יודע אמתתו מגדר הגדר והשוואתו לנגדר עד שיתהפכו זה על זה והנה אחר שהגדר האנושי וההבדל אשר יתקיים את מינו הוא חי מדבר והנה הדיבור הבדיל אותו מכל הבעלי חיים אשר תחת סוגו וכל שכן שהוא נבדל בזה ההבדל עצמו מהנמצאים הרוחניים שאינם מסוגו וזה כי החי הנאמר בהבדל הוא הנכנס תחת הגשם שהוא סוגו העליון ואם כן הרי הוא כאומרו גשם חי מדבר וזה לא יצדק על הגשם השכלי הנבדל גם לא במלת מדבר כיון שמובנה בהבדל הוא מדבר בכח בלי ספק; והנה אחר שהאדם והנמצא הרוחני אינם מסוג אחד גם אין מאמר שיכללם כי המציאות יאמר עליהם אך בספוק א"כ איך אפשר שיהפכו זה לזה ויכנס זה בגבול זה בגדרו כמו שיחוייב מאומרו שהאדם יאושר אושר אלהי ויוצלח בהצלחה רוחנית נצחית זה לא יתכן

immortality, and show that upon scrutiny it falls apart. What is most important for our purposes, however, is that in his efforts to expose this Aristotelian theory of immortality, he implements the tools of the Aristotelian tradition itself, and clings especially Aristotelian logic: invoking the Aristotelian definitions of “definition” and “man,” Arama instrumentalizes Aristotelian logic and philosophical anthropology against themselves towards their own undoing. Further, in thus using the master’s tools to take down the master’s house, Arama borrows and learns from another master of the same: Ḥasdai Crescas, whose transmission of Aristotelian critique was evidently not as barren as scholars have imagined.

2.2.2. Aristotle against Aristotelians: Joseph ibn Shem Tob, the Sword, and the Murderer

Another example of Arama using the master’s tools to take down the master’s house comes from a Gate we have already treated extensively in the previous chapter, namely, Gate 10.³⁹ As I discussed there, Arama’s concerns in Gate 10 revolve around a constellation of ideas growing out of *Guide* I.2 and concerning the nature of human, angelic, and divine knowledge: what kind(s) of knowledge do God and the angels possess, and what does this tell us about the kind(s) of knowledge that man made in the image of God ought to have? To recall, in *Guide* I.2, Maimonides had suggested that God, the angels, and man before the fall only possess knowledge of abstract intelligibilia—immaterial, unchanging, and eternal. By contrast, Maimonides explained man’s fallen state, his eating from the tree of knowledge of “good and evil,” as being immersed in and preoccupied by the wrong kind of knowledge. Knowledge of “good and evil,” he explained, is knowledge of mere ephemera: human conventions, political and moral

³⁹ See 1.2.2 and notes.

knowledge, knowledge that is ultimately grounded in ever-changing material reality as distinct from pure intelligibilia, and so not really true knowledge at all.⁴⁰

Perhaps Arama's most central objective in Gate 10 is to challenge this understanding of knowledge of good and evil: contra Maimonides and his followers, Arama is deeply invested in showing that knowledge of "good and evil," i.e., moral and political knowledge, does *not* belong to the realm of mere ephemera and is not knowledge of a lower sort, but rather should be classed among the highest sort of knowledge known to God and the angels. In other words, Arama wants to show that knowledge of good and evil belongs to the class of eternal, immutable intelligibilia and not the realm of fickle opinion. In a condensed passage marked by its unusual degree of rhetorical urgency, Arama suggests just why his investment should be so and in so doing posits one of the most damning critiques of the Maimonidean edifice with which I am familiar: To understand knowledge of good and evil as belonging to the realm of mere conventional ephemera is, on the Maimonideans' and Aristotelians' own admission, to proscribe God from moral and political knowledge.⁴¹ The devastating implication of this, of course, is that the Torah as traditionally imagined must fall apart: either all the apparently moral and political axia comprising the Torah are not really divine (because God cannot have moral and political knowledge), or (because God cannot have moral and political knowledge) all the apparently

⁴⁰ For *Guide* I.2, see Berman, "Maimonides on the Fall of Man." For an historical analysis of Maimonides' position, see Shlomo Pines, "Truth and Falsehood Versus Good and Evil: A Study in Jewish and General Philosophy in Connection with the Guide of the Perplexed, I, 2," in *Studies in Maimonides*, ed. Isadore Twersky (Harvard University Press, 1990), 95–157.

⁴¹ Following a precedent that dates back at least to Jacob b. Sheshet Gerondi and the 1230s Maimonidean controversy, though Arama is careful both in Gate 10 and elsewhere to draw a distinction between Maimonides and his excessive followers, on my reading in Gate 10 Arama strongly imputes Maimonides himself (as opposed to just his followers—) with the view that God does not possess moral knowledge (as a consequence of good and evil's belonging to the realm of mere opinion). Based on his commentary on Gen. 3:22, which closely follows Arama's Gate 10, Isaac Abarbanel certainly seems to have thought at much. Seewald insists that Arama only ascribes this position to the Maimonideans as distinct from the Master himself, but as far as I can tell, he does so only out of piety: i.e., out of a reluctance to ascribe Arama with having attributed an impious position to Maimonides, he pins the blame on Abarbanel instead.

moral and political axia comprising the Torah are not really moral and political at all, and as the earliest Maimonidean critics imagined, the external aspect of the commandments are reduced to empty husks, shells for abstract, scientific truths. To preserve Torah as he knows it then, i.e., Torah as God-given moral and political knowledge, Arama needs to rescue from Maimonides and his followers a particular conceptualization of knowledge of good and evil.

It is in this connection that Arama—perhaps unexpectedly—again turns to the master’s tools to dismantle the master’s house. To attack the medieval Jewish Aristotelian consensus that knowledge of good and evil, moral and political knowledge, belongs to the realm of mere convention, and show that, to the contrary, this knowledge belongs to the realm of universal intelligibilia, Arama appeals to Aristotle, weaponizing Aristotle against the Aristotelians. Specifically, Arama powerfully suggests that long before *he* was interested in persuading his opponents that moral and political knowledge is not merely conventional, none other than the Master of Scientists himself had staged a parallel debate and taken Arama’s side! Arama recalls that in one passage of his favorite Aristotelian text, i.e., *Ethics* V.9, Aristotle too had argued against unnamed opponents who—like the Aristotelians of Arama’s own day—contended that political knowledge belongs to the realm of mere ephemera.⁴² By pitting latter day Jewish Aristotelians against the infallibility of Aristotle’s own words, Arama reasons, the former will have no choice but to concede. Indeed, Arama concedes his own giddiness at having cleverly

⁴² On Arama’s relationship to the *Ethics*, see of course Septimus, “Arama and Aristotle’s *Ethics*.” It is worth noting in this connection that the *Ethics* exploded in popularity in fifteenth century Iberia among both Christians and Jews, where it was translated anew, made the subject of multiple commentaries, and incorporated into several original works, including popular sermons. On which see Chaim Neria, “The Sermon in Late Medieval Jewish Thought as Method for Popularizing Philosophy,” in *Medieval Jewish Philosophy and Its Literary Forms*, eds. Aaron W. Hughes and James T. Robinson (Indiana University Press, 2019) 301–303; Tirosh-Rothschild, “Human Felicity,” 205–212; Lawrence V. Berman, “The Latin to Hebrew Translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*,” *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 7 (1988): 147–168; A.R.D. Pagden, “The Diffusion of Aristotle’s Moral Philosophy in Spain, ca. 1400–1600,” *Traditio* 21 (1975): 287–313.

discovered a way to turn the Master's words to his own pious end of dismantling the Master's (disciples') house:⁴³

When I saw these words [i.e., of Aristotle in *Ethics* V.9], my heart rejoiced inasmuch as they are true and Torah-oriented. I accepted them and took them as a battery to topple this tower erected by his disciples—for it leaves no room for their position!

Thus armed, Arama unsheathes his weapon of choice: a paraphrastic citation of Aristotle's parallel argument from *Ethics* V.9. Aristotle's argument, as Arama presents it, is a relatively simple ad-hominem rhetorical one. Aristotle begins by conceding some ground to his opponents, admitting that they are correct in their recognition that anything pertaining to the human realm cannot possibly attain to the same consistency across all contexts that strictly natural laws can. In other words, it is indeed impossible for laws concerning humans to have the same perfectly universal identity as "the fire that burns the same way both here and in Persia." But after this concession, Aristotle fights back: While laws concerning the human realm cannot attain to the divine standard of perfect universality, still, that does not mean that all politics and morality are, as his opponents would have it, merely conventional and ephemeral (i.e., it is not the case that "all laws of civil religion are unnatural"). As proof, Arama's Aristotle points to two counterexamples, both illustrating the consistency and regularity of human-related phenomena across contexts by appealing to exceptions that prove the rule. The first example concerns the phenomenon of right-handedness; though as with all human things there are some exceptions to the general rule such that some people are ambidextrous, the exception itself proves the existence of the general rule that for the most part, people are right-handed universally and across contexts. The second example operates on a similar logic but relates to customs surrounding storage of

⁴³ ראיתים וישמח לבי למה שהם אמתים תורניים קבלתם וחשבתם סוללה להפיל המגדל הזה אשר בנו בני האדם הנמשכים אחריו כי לא נשאר להם בו פתחון פה עוד

objects. If a man asks his neighbor to store his sword, then subsequently asks his neighbor to return the sword because he needs it to murder someone, the neighbor is be obliged to deny his request and hold onto the sword. Still, this exceptional case proves the existence of the general rule obtaining universally across contexts that when one party stores an object with another and subsequently requests that the object be returned, the second party is obliged to honor the request and return the stored object. Together, Arama's Aristotle suggests, these examples illustrate that at least some human things are much more proximate to the universal and unchanging than they are to the conventional and ephemeral; moral knowledge may belong to the realm of intelligibilia rather than mere opinion after all. The table below shows Arama's paraphrase of Aristotle (left) as well as the parallel passage of *Ethics* as found in the Hebrew version Arama would have known, the 1405 translation of Meir Alguades:

Arama, AY Gate 10	Aristotle's <i>Ethics</i> , trans. Meir Alguades ⁴⁴
Aristotle, the Chief of the Philosophers, verified this in <i>Ethics</i> Treatise 5, Chapter 9: There he argued with one who contended that all laws comprising civil religion are unnatural, inasmuch as they do not have the same hold and perdurance as natural things, like the fire that burns the same way both here and in Persia, and what is similar to this. [But] he said that this is not so. For while divine things are most certainly enduring in a way that never holds for human things—since even the most enduring among [human things] changes on occasion—still, we do not for this reason say that they are absolutely unenduring. He gave an example of something that occurs very frequently in nature, like right handedness, even though it occasionally happens that a man is ambidextrous. The same applies for the fundamental and general/universal matters included in laws: They are unchanging, except rarely and by accident, as he said: “if a man gives his sword to another for safekeeping and then suddenly wishes to take it back to kill his neighbor, it is just for the other	...It seems to some that all of them are thus, i.e., unnatural, for that which is natural is unmovable and exercises its force in all places, like the fire that burns the same way both here and in Persia, while [conceptions of] justice seem to be moveable. It seems that this is not the case, for while divine things are most certainly strong and enduring, this is not the case for things among us, since even natural things change...It occurs very frequently in nature [that] men have [only one] right hand, even though it occasionally happens that a man has two right hands.

⁴⁴ Neria, “Joseph ibn Shem Tob’s Commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*,” 486–7.

man not to return it to him, even though in general one should return what has been given to him for safekeeping.” However, details vary according to the nature of the time and place, as do the measures for wine and grain: in a place where there is plenty, the measures are large, while in a place where they are precious, the measures are small—thusly the Sage spoke.	

Close comparison of Arama’s paraphrase with the Aristotelian source text Arama would have known reveals two interconnected features that are quite striking: First, only one part of Arama’s paraphrase does *not* appear to have a parallel in the Aristotelian source text, namely, the example of the murderous man and his sword; second, precisely this example is the only part of the passage that Arama presents as a direct quotation from Aristotle rather than a paraphrase or summary. Put another way, the one part of the passage that does not actually appear to come from *Ethics* V.9 is also the part that Arama is most compelled to put in Aristotle’s mouth and perhaps to assign the most importance to. What gives?

Unraveling what is going on here deepens our understanding of just how strategic Arama was in his implementation of the master’s tools to undo the master’s house. Though to the best of my knowledge, the example of the sword and the murderer (which can be traced back at least to Plato’s *Republic*⁴⁵) does not appear anywhere in Aristotle’s corpus, it does appear in Joseph ibn Shem Tob’s commentary on this same passage of the *Ethics*, which we know Arama to have used.⁴⁶ Unlike Arama though, Joseph in no way ascribes the example to Aristotle, clearly

⁴⁵ Plato, *Republic*, 331c.

⁴⁶ For the pertinent passage of Joseph ibn Shem Tob’s commentary, see 4.5 in the appendix. For Joseph ibn Shem Tob’s commentary on the *Ethics* and Arama’s use of it more generally, see Neria, “Joseph ibn Shem Tob’s Commentary on Aristotle’s *Ethics*.” The example of the sword and the madman also appears in Aquinas’ Commentary on the *Ethics*, which thanks to Neria we know Joseph to have used—thus we have here an example of the indirect transmission of Aquinas into Arama’s AY. The example also appears in the Digest of Justinian (trans. Alan Watson), volume 1, book 9, sec. 6. Many thanks to my friend Danny Jacobs for bringing this last source to my attention.

relegating it to his own commentary on Aristotle's text. While it is of course impossible to know with certainty why Arama incorporated this element of Joseph's commentary into his paraphrase in the way that he did, I suggest that Arama placed the example of the murderer and the sword in Aristotle's mouth deliberately. For absent this example, the parallel passage from *Ethics* ultimately fails to argue what Arama wants and needs it to, namely that morals and politics, i.e., paradigmatic knowledge of good and evil, belong(s) more to the realm of universal intelligibilia than ephemeral convention. Though the passage as-is does reveal Aristotle arguing against the idea that not all human-related laws are merely conventional or unnatural, boasting only the counterexample of right-handedness, it suggests that the only human-related laws that ascend beyond the realm of mere convention are strictly physical or biological ones. Said differently, the example of right-handedness does not really illustrate anything about the nature of politics and morality. To rescue them and by extension of knowledge of good and evil from the realm of mere convention, the example of the sword and the murderer, which very transparently concerns moral custom, is needed.

Here again then we see Arama using the master's tools to dismantle the master's house—and with surgical precision. To challenge a medieval Jewish Aristotelian consensus on the nature and status of moral and political knowledge, knowledge of good and evil, Arama looks to none other than Aristotle himself, and specifically, one of an Aristotle's arguments from *Ethics* V.9. By appealing to the Master's unimpeachable authority, Arama figures, his latter-day disciples will have no choice but to concede. Yet to ensure Aristotle argues exactly what Arama needs him to, Arama carefully doctors Aristotle's speech, ascribing him with reasoning found elsewhere, likely in the commentary of Joseph ibn Shem Tob. As in the previous example then, here again we see Arama drawing on the works of his predecessors to develop his critique of

Aristotelianism from the inside out. But in contrast to the previous example, and more similarly to what we will see in the next example, here the shape of Arama's critique is largely original, his predecessors providing a source of material but neither the main insights nor contours of Arama's argument.

2.2.3. What Aristotle "did not see": Samuel ibn Tibbon and the Limitations of Aristotle's

Ethics

The final example of Arama using the master's tools to take down the master's house that we will explore here—though again, by no means the final instance of such in Arama's corpus—comes from a text we have not yet discussed: Arama's commentary on Ecclesiastes. Arama's commentary on Ecclesiastes is extremely complex and covers a wide range of themes but its central preoccupation is the subject of divine providence. Creatively building off a tradition that dates back to aforementioned pioneer of Maimonideanism Samuel ibn Tibbon, Arama imagines Ecclesiastes as a dialogue between its traditional author, Solomon, and a collective of unnamed opponents on the correct theory of providence.⁴⁷ While the collective of unnamed opponents

⁴⁷ Ibn Tibbon had imagined Solomon's speech in Ecclesiastes as a sort of polemic, designed to refute the ancient skeptics who denied the possibility of immortality (see Robinson, *Samuel ibn Tibbon*, 35). Arama clearly borrows from this idea—albeit with significant modifications. While Arama too conceptualizes Ecclesiastes as Solomon's polemic against philosophical antagonists, for him, the main issue at stake is not the immortality of the soul, but rather the correct conceptualization of providence, or to use Arama's terminology, "governance" (*hanhāgāh*). Another major difference relates to polemical method: whereas ibn Tibbon's Solomon attempts to "defend the dogma of immortality" with recourse to Aristotelian dialectics, showing that his opponents' proofs are not necessary and "that immortality is not impossible,"—following Maimonides' approach to defending the dogma of creation (see Robinson, *Samuel ibn Tibbon*, 122–124, 169–170)—Arama's Solomon, by contrast, asserts his main doctrinal interventions by fiat. The similarities and strategic modifications only begin here though: Arama also borrows from ibn Tibbon his exposition of the catalogue of times in Eccl 3:1–9 in relation to ideas of celestial determinism and the extent of divine providence, although unlike ibn Tibbon, Arama reintroduces ideas relating to astrological determinism as well—perhaps as a result of the popularity of astrology in late fifteenth century Spain (compare Robinson, *Samuel ibn Tibbon*, 38 and AY V:178b–179a; on the popularity of astrology in late fifteenth century Spain, see e.g., Alan Lazaroff, "The Theology of Abraham Bibago: A Defense of the Divine Will, Knowledge, and Providence in Fifteenth-Century Spanish-Jewish Philosophy," PhD diss., Brandeis University, 11). Like ibn Tibbon, Arama also explains many verses of Ecclesiastes in relation to ideas about the proper ordering of the human soul and the governance of reason. In this connection, Arama even borrows a specific philosophical-allegorical explication from ibn Tibbon, understanding the city with few men in it as the rational soul besieged by the soul's lower faculties

essentially understand providence to consist in natural law, i.e., the regular causality inherent in the natural order, Arama's Solomon wants to advance a more robust two-fold theory of providence, in which a basic layer of providence-cum-natural law (which Arama calls "celestial governance" or *hanhagah ha-shemimit*) is supplemented by a second, higher level of "providential governance" (*hanhagah heshgeh'it*) in which God occasionally but directly intervenes in the natural order. Before Arama's Solomon goes on to advance his theory, however, he must first pave the way by striking down that of his unnamed opponents—who bear a perhaps by now not-so-striking resemblance to that of the medieval Jewish Aristotelians of Arama's own day. Yet rather than confront the Aristotelian theory of providence head-on, Arama opts to attack laterally, instead focusing his efforts on Aristotle's theory of action and the final purpose of human existence. If he can reveal the latter to be incoherent, Arama reasons, the entire Aristotelian edifice and with it the Aristotelian theory of providence will come crashing down too.

This is precisely the connection in which Arama turns once more to the master's tools to dismantle the master's house. Arama's main goal is to expose a fatal flaw in Aristotle's theory of the final purpose of human existence, and more specifically to illustrate that—Aristotelian claims to the contrary notwithstanding—Aristotle and his followers indeed have no conclusive theory of the final purpose of human existence; their search for the *summum bonum* has concluded in devastating aporia.⁴⁸ In waging this attack, Arama's weapon of choice is again Aristotle's *Ethics*. But in contrast to the previous example wherein his strategy was one of doctored citation, here

and corporeal desires (see Robinson, *Samuel ibn Tibbon*, 39–40 and AY V:182b–183a; 191b–192a); Arama also employs ibn Tibbon's poor wise child = intellect in his commentary on Proverbs, see *Yad Abshālōm*, ed. A. Fraiman (Leipzig, 1858) 72b, Kelal 1 (henceforth: YA).

⁴⁸ This should be understood in direct opposition to ibn Tibbon's project in *his* commentary on Ecclesiastes, which is to suggest that—given the possibility of immortality via intellectual perfection—the final purpose of human existence is to perfect the intellect.

his strategic move is simply close reading, fleshing out implications already latent in Aristotle's text. In particular, Arama reveals that Aristotle's theory of action already contains the kernel of its own demise and thus yields no clear answer as to the final purpose of human existence—thereby leaving Aristotle and his followers in a muck of mortal confusion.

To achieve this work of undoing, Arama proceeds primary by way of synthesis and elaboration. Building off Aristotle's scattered remarks across *Ethics* I and VI, Arama outlines a comprehensive Aristotelian theory of human action, according to which all actions can be sorted into one of four hierarchically-ranked types:⁴⁹ (1) theoretical speculation, (2) practical intellect, (3) choice, and (4) action. Each of the two intermediate types of action, Arama explains, involve both man's higher, intellectual aspect as well as his lower, material aspect. Accordingly, these types of action are realized in both the internal and external worlds, both within the individual soul and in outer, material reality. By contrast, (4) action and most importantly (1) theoretical speculation are confined to the external and internal realms respectively, the former involving only man's baser material aspect and the latter involving only his higher intellectual aspect. Having thus fleshed out what is ostensibly already implicit in the text of *Ethics* itself, Arama strikes, pointing out the weak spot he has just uncovered: the highest type of human action and obvious candidate for the final end of human existence according to Aristotle is, by Aristotle's own implicit account, ultimately unable to encompass both aspects of man and thus inadequate to the task of dignifying man qua man. In other words, insofar as theoretical speculation, the highest type of human action according to the Aristotelian theory, fails to involve man's lower, material aspect in addition to his higher, intellectual aspect, it cannot constitute the final end of

⁴⁹ The following analysis is based on AY V:176a–b.

human existence, suggesting Aristotle's search for such must prove inconclusive. Arama spells out the consequences of this in no uncertain terms:⁵⁰

... But it is necessary that you be wiser than him [=Aristotle] with respect to a wonderful notion: That is, inasmuch as he [=Aristotle] did not find any action that is realized externally while being ordered from the absolutely theoretical intellect,⁵¹ he did not see that "choice" encompasses anything other than those human actions which proceed from the practical intellect alone. And since this was the case, the root principle of those actions upon which the felicity of man is dependent was destroyed for him! For this reason, he and all those who came after him became very confused with regards to the aim and final purpose of human existence. The illustration of this profound notion is a root and principle of this noble book [=Ecclesiastes], as shall be made clear in what follows.

Albeit with recourse to more technical language, in this passage Arama restates the major contours of his argument outlined above: Aristotle's theory of human action contains the seed of its own destruction, for the highest type of human action it accounts for is not fully human at all. Only entailing man's intellectual aspect, those actions which are "ordered from the absolutely theoretical intellect," i.e., theoretical speculation, are thereby confined to the intellectual realm, and not "realized externally" in the material world. The catastrophic consequence of this, of course, is that Aristotle's theory of human action fails to yield a type of action that clearly constitutes the final end of human existence; this is why Aristotle "and all those who came after him became very confused with regards to the aim and final purpose of human existence," why "the root principle of those actions upon which the felicity of man is dependent was destroyed

⁵⁰ AY V:176a–b; though note Arama levels the same critique and recapitulates much of his argument here in AY Gate 33, where he further condemns Maimonides (in *Guide* III.27) for following in Aristotle's footsteps and implying that man's final perfection is to become intellect in actu:

אך צריך שתתחכם עליו בענין נפלא מאד. והוא כי למה שלא מצא פעל יוצא לחוץ שיהיה מסודר מהשכל העיוני המוחלט. לא ראה שתכלול הבחירה זולתי המעשים האנושיים הנמשכי מן השכל המעשי לבד. והנה עם זה תשמט ממנו עקר המעשי אשר הצלחת האדם תלויה בהם ולזה נשתבש הוא וכל הנמצאים אחריו בכוונת מציאות האדם ותכליתו. והוראת זה הדבר העצום הוא יסוד ושרש הספר הזה הנכבד כמו שיתבאר היטב במה שיבא

⁵¹ This turn of phrase, that certain actions are "ordered from the intellect" (מסודר מהשכל) is used on multiple occasions by Gersonides: see e.g., his commentaries on Deut 22:8, Song 3:9, and Song 4:11, as well as Wars of the Lord II.3, V.3.4, VI.2.10.

for him!” While he never says as much explicitly, Arama strongly suggests that simply by highlighting the null result of Aristotle’s search for the *summum bonum*, he has shattered the Aristotelian edifice wholesale.

Although to the best of my knowledge, the precise details of Arama’s attack on Aristotle’s theories of action and the final purpose of human existence here are original, it is worth noting that in forging the broader contours of his attack, he may have again taken inspiration from Samuel ibn Tibbon’s commentary on Ecclesiastes.⁵² While ibn Tibbon does not wage any similar attacks on Aristotle’s theory of the final end of human existence, nor focus on any of the same passages of the *Ethics*, he does address a much older idea that the *Ethics*, taken as a whole, is ambivalent on the final end of human existence:⁵³ while in the first nine books Aristotle seems to suggest that the end of human existence consists in the cultivation of virtue and right action, in the tenth and final book he seems to suggest that the final end of human existence consists in solitary theoretical contemplation. Though ibn Tibbon’s presentation of this ambivalence is by no means identical to the problem Arama highlights in Aristotle’s theory of action, it seems to me that it is sufficiently similar to Arama’s critique that it might have served as a source of inspiration. Most fundamentally, both identify a complexity in Aristotle’s theory

⁵² While I have yet to find a precise textual parallel for Arama’s critique of Aristotle here, this of course connects back with the example we saw already in section 2.2.1, and points to a persistent thematic concern throughout Arama’s oeuvre that we will discuss more in the following chapter and that echoes more broadly throughout fifteenth-century Iberian-Jewish thought, namely: critiques of the intellectualist conceptualization of the final end of human existence. To rehearse only a few well-known examples: In his *Kebōd Elōhīm*, Joseph ibn Shem Ṭob suggests that while Aristotelian ethics is limited to providing a path to supreme happiness in this world, Torah alone is capable of providing a path to happiness in the next. Meanwhile, both Shem Ṭob b. Joseph and Abraham Bibago evince serious concern with harmonizing the active and contemplative ends of human existence. On this aspect of Joseph ibn Shem Tov, see Tirosh-Rothschild, “Human Felicity,” 212–224; Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, *Happiness in Premodern Judaism: Virtue, Knowledge, and Well-Being* (Hebrew Union College Press, 2003), 394–439. On Shem Tov b. Joseph, see Neria, “Sermon,” 306–307. On Abraham Bibago, see Avraham Nuriel, *Concealed and Revealed in Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (Magnes Press, 2000), 232. In his *Sefer ha-Iqqarim*, Treatise 3, Ch. 1–7, Joseph Albo advances a similar idea, critiquing Jewish philosophers who construe human perfection as purely intellectual and instead contending that performance of the commandments must play a role in the same.

⁵³ The literature on this tension in the *Ethics* is extensive, but for one summary account as it relates to medieval Arabic and Jewish philosophy and literature, see Tirosh-Rothschild, “Human Felicity,” 193–197 with notes.

of the final purpose of human existence as developed in the *Ethics*, and both further locate that complexity as resulting from man's dual nature, the tension between pure intellect and material body, contemplation and action. However, foreshadowing the next section, whereas ibn Tibbon construes this complexity as an equivocality in order to underwrite a strongly intellectualist image of Solomon as esoteric philosopher, teaching two different ends of human existence to two different classes of people, Arama refashions the complexity into a problem, a foil to point to a fatal flaw in the Aristotelian system.⁵⁴

The precise relationship of Arama's critique to ibn Tibbon's earlier formulations notwithstanding, what remains most important for our present purposes is that here again, albeit in a slightly different way, we find Arama turning Aristotle against himself and taking down Aristotelianism from the inside out.⁵⁵ By appealing to the unimpeachable Aristotelian authority that is the Master himself—citations and interpretations of his works, as well as foundational principles of his thought—Arama critiques prevalent Aristotelian theories of his own day—e.g., concerning the possibility of immortality, the conventionality of moral and political law, and the final end of human existence—on grounds that his opponents are compelled to cede to. In so using the master's tools to dismantle the master's house, Arama should be situated in a cross-cultural lineage: the heir of Philoponus, al-Ghazali, and—most clearly and compellingly—Ḥasdai Crescas. Though as we saw in the first example, Arama does in at least one instance seem to borrow from Crescas' critiques quite directly, challenging longstanding ideas that Crescas' critiques did not find fertile soil among medieval Jewry, from the other examples it is also apparent that in the details of his critiques, Arama was often quite original, drawing inspiration

⁵⁴ For ibn Tibbon's exploitation of the *Ethics* equivocality in this way, see Robinson, *Samuel ibn Tibbon*, 40–41.

⁵⁵ In this example too, we also see the beginnings of Arama strategically subverting the Maimonidean figuration of Solomon-as-philosopher, to be discussed in section 2.3.2 of this chapter.

from his predecessors but developing his own arguments. Finally, before moving on to the next section, it is worth restating that all the examples discussed in this section might be understood as domestications of philosophy in the following way: In each case, we see Arama singling out some aspect of philosophy as such and transforming it, creatively developing it in such a way that it serves Arama's own purposes. These uses of philosophy then at once reinforce the boundary between internal and external, (Arama's) Judaism and philosophy, while also attesting to its porousness: Aristotle can be strategically summoned and subdued against philosophy, in service of (Arama's) Judaism.

2.3. Maimonideanism and Philosophical-Allegorical Exegesis

In the previous section, I explored one major pattern in Arama's use of philosophy, namely, his repeated use of Aristotelian texts and principles to undermine Jewish Aristotelian consensuses, i.e., his use of the master's tools to dismantle the master's house. I suggested that this pattern might be understood as domesticating philosophy in the sense that it finds Arama identifying elements that ostensibly belong to the foreign or external domain of philosophy and instrumentalizing them to advance his own project, transforming them and incorporating them into the domicile in the process. However, if we were to consider only the preceding section in isolation, we might draw several conclusions that reinscribe rather than trouble the facile heuristics outlined in the introduction to this chapter. For one thing, we might conclude that Arama was indeed precisely as anti-philosophical or anti-rationalist as intellectual history has made him out to be. For in every example discussed in the previous section, Arama ultimately does summon philosophy only for the sake of tearing what he calls "philosophy" down. For another, we might conclude that "philosophy" for Arama is roughly synonymous with Aristotle

or the Aristotelian tradition. For in every example discussed, Arama's weapon of choice is some aspect of Aristotle, whether an axiom, paraphrastic citation, or close reading. For another still, we might conclude that Arama only engages with "philosophy" on the level of abstract principles and synthetic doctrines—flying in the face of the previous chapter's emphasis on Arama's conceptualization of emphasis.

Accordingly, in this section, I will explore another pattern that nuances our understanding of Arama's domestications of philosophy by challenging the aforementioned reductions head-on: namely, his complex engagement with the Maimonidean tradition of philosophical-allegorical exegesis, discussed in the Key Terms section of the Introduction.⁵⁶ Most obviously, in contrast to the previous section, the "philosophy" which we will see Arama engaging here does not center around Aristotle but rather Maimonides and the distinctly medieval Jewish philosophical tradition growing out of his *Guide of the Perplexed*. Relatedly, also in contrast to the previous section, and building off our discussion in the previous chapter, the "philosophy" which Arama engages here does not take the narrowly philosophic form of discursive arguments, axioms, or theories but instead plays out through scriptural interpretation, assuming the form of exegesis. Finally, and again in contrast to the previous section, Arama's uses of philosophy here are neither straightforwardly nor uniformly anti-philosophical or anti-Maimonidean. Though as we will see, Arama does often draw on and play with Maimonidean motifs and methods to subvert them, in other instances he uses Maimonidean tools to develop his own original Maimonidean explications, or else to more traditionally Maimonidean ends, perhaps neutralizing Maimonideanism's potential through incorporation. Taken together, Arama's various engagements with Maimonideanism reveal his domestications of philosophy to be much more

⁵⁶ See 0.5.1 above.

complex than his uses of the master's tools to dismantle the master's house, treated in the previous section, might suggest. Yet even so, as we will see, each of Arama's three uses of Maimonideanism we will examine in this section can still be seen as attempts at domestication nonetheless.

2.3.1. The Reason for the Dietary Laws, Part I

The first example of Arama's engagement with Maimonideanism I want to discuss comes from a Gate we have not yet mentioned but that will reappear in the next chapter, i.e., Gate 60.⁵⁷ Arama dedicates this Gate—the second of two revolving around *parashat Shemini*—to treating one of the oldest themes in Jewish literature generally, and one of the most popular themes in the Maimonidean tradition specifically, namely: the reasons for the commandments (*ta'amei ha-mitzvot*) and in particular, the reasons for the dietary laws (*kashrut*).

Although, as with so many subjects, Maimonides was hardly the first Jewish thinker to devote substantial attention to the commandments, his treatment of the commandments especially as developed in the *Guide* was nothing short of revolutionary.⁵⁸ Through his discussions there (which together comprise the single longest continuous unit of the *Guide*—), he advances multiple, complex, and intertwining theories to explain both the reasons for the commandments in general, and the reason behind each commandment in particular. While treating all Maimonides' explications would necessitate a dissertation in its own right and thus

⁵⁷ See 3.x below.

⁵⁸ The literature on *ta'amei ha-mitzvot* is enormous; for a good introduction see Isaac Heinemann, *The Reasons for the Commandments in Jewish Thought: From the Bible to the Renaissance*, trans. Leonard Levin (Academic Studies Press, 2008); for Maimonides in particular see Howard Kreisel, "Reasons for the Commandments in Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* and Provencal Jewish Philosophy," in Howard Kreisel, *Judaism as Philosophy*, 361–295; Josef Stern, *Problems and Parables of Law: Maimonides and Nahmanides on Reasons for the Commandments, Ta'amei ha-Mitzvot* (SUNY Press, 1998); Hannah Kasher, "Commandments between Man and God in *The Guide of the Perplexed*," *Da'at* 12 (1984): 23–28. Though his primary focus is the *Mishneh Torah*, see too Isadore Twersky's *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides* (Yale University Press, 1982), 360–363, 405–425.

unfortunately lies beyond the scope of the present dissertation, two of Maimonides' theories for the commandments are important to understanding Arama's entanglements with Maimonideanism in this section and are thus worth singling out.⁵⁹ One of these theories is strongly historicizing and revolves around Maimonides' (re)imagining of an historical community whom he identifies as the "Sabians." This theory is central to the next example and so I will discuss it there more fully, but in brief: Maimonides suggests that taken both as a whole and individually, the commandments can be understood by contextualizing them in the historical customs of the Sabian community, in which the Israelites were immersed at the time of the giving of the Torah. Importantly, in his discussion of the dietary laws in particular, Maimonides suggests that the prohibition against boiling a kid in its mother's milk was likely devised in response to and is therefore explicable in light of Sabian customs—though he admits he has not found an authoritative source for such.

The other theory and the one that is more important for the present example understands the reasons for the commandments along more moral and asceticizing lines: To use Maimonides' own famous formulation from *Guide* III.27, the commandments are designed to improve "the welfare of the body" and "the welfare of the soul." By inculcating good habits and correct opinions, the commandments help discipline man's tempestuous and desirous matter so that his soul might be properly ordered, with reason and intellect empowered to guide his course. In *Guide* III.35, Maimonides suggests how this general explication for the commandments applies

⁵⁹ Indeed, across the *Guide* (III.35 and III.48), *Mishneh Torah* and *Eight Chapters* (ch.4), Maimonides provides no fewer than *three* different explications for the dietary laws: not only the historicizing Sabian explication and the asceticizing explication, but also a hygienic explication, according to which certain foods are prohibited because they are harmful to physical health. On the hygienic explication, see Kreisel, "The Reasons for the Commandments," 372; Hannah Kasher, "Well-Being of the Body or Welfare of the Soul: The Maimonidean Explication of the Dietary Laws," in *Moses Maimonides: Physician, Scientist, and Philosopher*, eds. Fred Rosner and Samuel S. Kottke (Jason Aronson, 1993), 127–133.

to the dietary laws in particular: the dietary laws inculcate moderation and promote asceticism by strategically targeting pleasurable foods. By regulating and sometimes prohibiting the consumption of especially pleasurable foods, the dietary laws help cultivate temperance in the face of bodily lusts and thus habituate man's matter to obeying his intellect. Perhaps most important for our present purposes, over the course of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, this moralizing/asceticizing explication for the dietary laws took on a life of its own in Maimonidean literature: To name just a few examples, Jacob Anatoli incorporates it into his popular collection of philosophical sermons, *Malmad ha-Talmidim*, Levi b. Abraham deploys it in his massive *Livyat Hen*, and Joseph ibn Kaspi appeals to it in his *Tirat Kesef*.⁶⁰

As we will see, over the course of both AY broadly and Gate 60 specifically, Arama—like Maimonides himself—offers multiple explications of the reasons for the commandments both in general and in particular—including explications that do not always sit easily with one another. One of the two main explications for the dietary laws that Arama provides in Gate 60, however, runs along seemingly straightforward Maimonidean lines, an iteration of the moralizing/asceticizing explication limned above. In no uncertain terms, Arama states that the first benefit of the dietary laws is to refine or purify, i.e., to help “man to live a life of moderation and asceticism... by restraining him from many things after which his soul lusts and to which the rest of the nations are habituated.”⁶¹

But not only does this statement clearly echo the Maimonidean theory that the dietary laws are designed to discipline man's corporeal desires. Even more interesting for our present

⁶⁰ Anatoli's use of the moral/asceticizing explication in his sermon on *Shemini* is discussed by both Weber, “Anatoli,” 246 and Martin L. Gordon, “The Rationalism of Jacob Anatoli,” (PhD diss., Yeshiva University, 1974), 315–6. Levi b. Abraham's, and ibn Kaspi's uses of the moral/asceticizing explication can be found respectively in: Howard Kreisel, ed., *Livyat Hen: The Quality of Prophecy and the Secrets of the Torah*, 355–405.

⁶¹ האחד מה שזכרוהו חכמים באומרים (ויקרא רבות פ' י"ג) לא נתנו המצוות אלא לצרף בהם הבריות והצירוף הוא שיחיה האדם חיי הזהירות והפרישות וקבלת עול מלכות שמים בצמצם עצמו בהרבה דברים שנפשו מתאוה להם ושאר האומות הם מורגלות בהם

purposes is that Arama elaborates on and develops this Maimonidean theory of the dietary laws through an original yet thoroughly Maimonidean exegesis of a Rabbinic midrash concerning the primordial Leviathan. Following Arama's summary paraphrase, the midrash relates that God originally created the Leviathan "as both male and female," only to later realize that if the male and female "coupled together, they would destroy the world." Upon realizing this, God "castrated the male and killed the female," "salt[ing the female] for the righteous in the future." Arama, for his part, interprets this midrash with recourse to classically Maimonidean philosophical-allegorical exegesis, relying on standard Maimonidean symbols and invoking familiar Maimonidean themes.

As in another example discussed in the previous chapter, Arama's derives his most basic interpretative building-block from the already-established Maimonidean philosophical-allegorical lexicon: the idea that the binary "male"/"female" allegorizes the binary "form"/"matter" or "body"/"intellect."⁶² Implementing this pair of equivocal terms, Arama creatively reads the midrash as a moral allegory for how man can attain his ultimate good only through disciplining his body to obey the dictates of his intellect—albeit not completely. God's realization that the coupling of male and female would lead to the destruction of the world Arama interprets by appealing to still another Maimonidean commonplace, this time from the realm of theodicy: i.e., a justification for the necessity of both form and matter.⁶³ The coupling of male and female leads to the destruction of the world, Arama explains, in the sense that the

⁶² The locus classicus for male/female as equivocal terms for form/matter is *Guide* I.17; its ubiquity already by the turn of the fourteenth century is attested by Abba Mari's now well-known complaint that the Jews of Langeudoc had made Abraham and Sarah into allegories for form and matter. See Abba Mari, ed. and comp., *Minhat Qena'ot*, in *Teshuvot ha-Rashba*, 2 vols., ed. H. Z. Dimitrovsky (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1990), 344; as cited by Stern, *Philosophy and Rabbinic Culture*. Arama's use of common terms in philosophical-allegorical exegesis here is similar to his deployment of the binary light/dark=form/matter to interpret the dictum from Tanhuma Tezaveh in section 1.3.1 of the previous chapter.

⁶³ On the necessity of matter, see *Guide* III.8–12, 15.

complete submission of body to intellect or matter to form, and vice versa, would effectively be tantamount to the end of man: without the body or more precisely, the “appetitive faculty,” man would not desire the food and sex he needs to sustain himself as either individual or species.

Conversely, without intellect, man would ostensibly destroy himself through a lack of prudence.

In Arama's own words:⁶⁴

This is what the Sages said, in the chapter “the one who sells a ship,” regarding the Leviathan: It was created [both] male and female, [but] He castrated the male and killed the female, and salted her for the righteous in the future (b. Baba Batra 74b). It is apparent that the notion of the Leviathan in this dictum refers to the composition of intellect and matter in the creation of man, for these are the things that were created *male and female*. For they were a chaplet of grace for (Prov. 1:9) their Former, as it was said: *male and female He created them and called their name man* (Gen. 5:2). It is possible that this is what the Psalmist intended in his saying *there is Leviathan, who Thou hast formed to sport therein* (Ps. 104:26), for this is similar. [The Sages] said that He saw that if they would have coupled, they would have destroyed the world (b. Baba Batra 74b). This is clear, for if the intellectual faculty were to couple completely so as to satisfy the lusts of the appetitive faculty, then the intellectual state would corrupt and be annihilated entirely. Likewise, if the appetitive faculty were to be completely coupled to the work of the intellect, man's corporeal, temporal state would be completely annihilated. Concerning each of these two states, His will, Blessed be He, was not realized in the creation of man, as he had been created.

Arama continues: Since both matter and form, body and intellect, are thus necessary, God resolved to merely give intellect/form the upper hand, largely conquering and subduing body/matter. Insofar as during a man's life, his body/matter resists complete conquest, it impedes his intellect/form from reaching full perfection—which notion is allegorized by God's “castrating the male.” Complementarily, insofar as man's intellect/form is able to instrumentalize

והוא מה שא"ז פרק המוכר את הספינה (ב"ב ע"ד): על לויתן שנברא זכר ונקבה שסרס את הזכר והרג הנקבה ומלחה לצדיקים לעתיד⁶⁴ לבא. כי לפי הנראה ענין לויתן במאמר זה להם הוא חבור השכל והחמר בבריאת האדם והם הנבראים זכר ונקבה כי לוית חן היו ליצורם שנאמר (בראשית ה') זכר ונקבה בראם ויקרא את שמם אדם. ואיפשר כי לזה כיון המשורר באומרו (תהלים ק"ד) לויתן זה יצרת לשחק בו כי קרוב הוא. ואמרו (ב"ב שם) שראה שאם היו נזקקין זה לזה היו מחריבין את העולם וזה מבואר שאם יזקק הכח השכלי לגמרי להשלים תאוות הכח המתעורר הנה יפסד הענין השכלי ויתבטל לגמרי. וכן אם יזקק הכח המתעורר אל עבודת השכל לגמרי יתבטל הענין הגשמי והזמני בהחלט. ובכל אחד משני אלו הענינים לא יתקיים רצונו יתברך בענין בריאת האדם על אופן בריאתו.

his body/matter, utilizing the latter only to the extent that it is useful for him, the body/matter has been discipline and subdued—which notion is allegorized by God’s “killing the female:”⁶⁵

Thus, His wisdom saw that this composition should be in a state that would sustain both of them, and through which man’s state could be perfected. This consisted in His giving the intellect the ability to conquer the appetitive faculty, as it said: *and unto thee is thy desire, but thou mayest rule over it* (Gen. 4:7), such that the intellect’s activities that are prevented on its⁶⁶ account of are not completely nullified, but rather only hindered. Moreover, [the intellectual faculty] receives assistance from [the appetitive faculty] and takes hold of some reward for conquering it. This is beauty of their expression in saying “He castrated the male and killed the female and salted her for the righteous.”... That is to say, through this composition itself, He castrated the intellect from being perfect and [from being] intellect *in actu*, as one of the separate intellects. Similarly, His conjoining of it⁶⁷ sufficed to kill the female—that is to say, to revolt against her in order to conquer and subjugate her, so that there would not remain anything that was not useful to the intellectual part...

All of this, of course, builds towards the final moral exhortation that seems to be driving Arama’s entire Maimonidean philosophical-allegorical explication. Through the midrash’s reference to “the reward for the righteous in the future”—yet another name for a theme we have now encountered multiple times in this dissertation—Arama ties the issue of the proper relationship between body and intellect, form and matter, back to the issue of immortality, and tethers both to his moralizing and asceticizing Maimonidean theory of the dietary laws. In synch with the Maimonidean tradition and moreover through it, Arama argues that purpose of and reason for the dietary laws is to habituate a proper relationship between body and intellect, matter and form, ultimately in order to attain immortality, eternal life in the world to come.

Arama thus uses the tools of Maimonidean philosophical-allegorical exegesis to creatively interpret a novel Rabbinic midrash in support of another aspect of Maimonideanism—

⁶⁵ לזה ראתה חכמתו שיהיה זה החבור בענין שיתקיימו שניהם ובמה שימצא אצלו מהם יושלם ענינו. וזה במה שנתן כח אל השכל לכבוש את הכח התאוני כמו שאמר (בראשית ד') ואלריך תשוקתו ואתה תמשול בו עד שמה שימנע בעבורו מפעולות השכל לא יהיה ביטול גמור רק עכוב לבד והנה עם זה יקבל שירות ממנו ויטול שכר על כבישתו וזהו יופי מליצתם באומרם סרס את הזכר והרג את הנקבה ומלחה לצדיקים... להגיד כי אם בחבור הזה עצמו סרס את השכל מהיותו שלם ושכל בפועל כאחד השכלים הנבדלים. הנה גם כן חבורו זה יספיק להרוג את הנקבה כלומר להתקומם עליה לכבשה ולרדתה עד שלא ישאר דבר שלא יועיל לחלק השכלי

⁶⁶ i.e., the appetitive faculty.

⁶⁷ i.e., the intellect.

i.e., a Maimonidean theory of the commandments! Elaborating original Maimonidean exegesis in service of Maimonidean explications, Arama here appears to be—far from anti-Maimonidean—simply Maimonidean all the way down! Yet for all Arama’s recourse to the Maimonidean tradition here, situating both his broader explication of the dietary laws in context reveals cracks in the Maimonidean edifice, suggesting that just beneath the surface Arama’s relationship with Maimonideanism is in fact much more complex. To name only the most pronounced example, as I mentioned earlier, Arama’s Maimonidean explication of the dietary laws is by no means his *only* explication of them. After concluding his elaboration of this Maimonidean theory, Arama turns in Gate 60 to developing another—and as far as I know completely original—explication of the dietary laws, theorizing that the dietary laws are designed to promote a material and spiritual, biological and cultural distinction between Jews and all other people. Said differently, in this second theory, Arama strongly suggests that the reason for the dietary laws is to sustain a sort of Jewish racial supremacy. Though I will reserve further discussion of this fascinating, second theory for the following chapter, what is most important for our present purposes is that Arama’s remarks suggest that, rather than alternative-but-equal explication, this second theory is in his view the deeper or true(r) explication, and the Maimonidean asceticizing/moralizing explication merely its prelude. Accordingly, Arama’s engagement with Maimonideanism here might be understood as a very different sort of domestication of philosophy than we saw in the previous section. Rather than domesticate philosophy by making it serve Arama’s anti-philosophical ends, here Arama domesticates philosophy by folding it into his own encompassing project but suggesting that the merely philosophical part is secondary and of lesser value. In other words,

Arama domesticates Maimonideanism by normalizing it, thereby neutering it of its “radical” potential.⁶⁸

2.3.2. Refiguring Figurae I: Sabians, Reimagined

A second but very different example of Arama’s complex grappling with Maimonideanism draws from several Gates across AY, none of which have been discussed. In contrast to virtually all our previous examples, however, the greater context of these Gates is not especially important for our present purposes, as the aspect of Maimonideanism Arama is engaging here is not any discursive argument or theory, but rather a Maimonidean figura or persona. Specifically, as mentioned in the previous example, this example centers around the Maimonidean figuration of the “Sabians”—and Arama’s creative, subversive refiguration of that Maimonidean figura.⁶⁹

To recall, in the previous example, I noted that in the *Guide*, Maimonides appeals to an imagined community of “Sabians” to develop one of his major theories for understanding the commandments:⁷⁰ In an historicizing move, Maimonides suggests that many individual commandments—if not the commandments as a whole—can and should be understood by contextualization; by situating them in the customs of the historical Sabian community, whose

⁶⁸ Arama’s strategy of domestication here might be understood in terms of what Tzvi Langermann has called “acceptance and devaluation” to explain Nahmanides’ relation to and use of science in his bible commentary. Against the then-reigning scholarly narrative that Nahmanides simply rejected or disregarded science, Langermann argued that Nahmanides’ attitude towards science was in fact much more nuanced and strategic. Nahmanides did not reject science; instead, he in fact accepted many basic premises of science, but incorporated it into his exegesis in such a way as to devalue it. He diminished science’s import by accepting it and yet suggesting that it is not of primary interest, and rather is always to be superseded—so too for Arama, but with Maimonidean philosophical exegesis instead of “science.” See Tzvi Langermann, “Acceptance and Devaluation: Nahmanides’ Attitude Towards Science,” *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 1 (1992): 223–245.

⁶⁹ I use scare quotes to highlight that my use of the term throughout reflects Maimonides’ *imagining* of the Sabians rather than any historical community. Already by the tenth century, the Sabians were a subject of much myth and featured in Arabic heresiographical literature; for a bibliography of modern scholarship on the Sabians of Arabic myth and more on the Sabians in Arabic Islamic and Jewish literature prior to Maimonides, see Sarah Stroumsa, *Maimonides in His World: Portrait of a Mediterranean Thinker* (Princeton University Press, 2009), 84–105.

⁷⁰ Maimonides develops his Sabian theory of the commandments primarily in *Guide* III.29, III.32, III.37, III.45–50.

culture was dominant at the time of the giving of the Torah.⁷¹ But the role Maimonides assigns to the Sabians extends far beyond even this.⁷² More than simply providing explanatory value for many of the seemingly “irrational” commandments in the Torah, it is clear from Maimonides’ remarks elsewhere in the *Guide* that he conceptualizes the Sabians as the linchpin and perennial foil around which he constructs his salvation history. The Sabians, we learn, exercised cultural dominance not only at the time of the giving of the Torah but indeed much earlier, at least as far back as the advent of Abraham.⁷³ Maimonides imagines Sabian culture as strongly anthropomorphizing and materialistic: the Sabians recognize the celestial spheres and stars as the ultimate deities and worship them with astrological and magical practices; they do not believe in what they cannot see. Accordingly, the unfolding of salvation history consists in the struggle to redeem the world from Sabian anthropomorphism and materialism through a process of gradual, philosophical enlightenment.

Maimonides singles out the advent of Abraham as the first major postlapsarian episode in this struggle: after discovering the existence of the incorporeal God, Abraham embarks on a public education project as the first philosopher of monotheism, attempting to rectify his contemporaries’ wayward convictions by means of rational argument. The next major episode Maimonides singles out is the giving of the Torah itself. God sought to further move the Israelites away from false Sabian beliefs and customs and towards recognition of the one true,

⁷¹ From the seventeenth century to the twentieth, early biblical critics, orientalists, and eventually historians of religion came to see in Maimonides’ treatment of the Sabians a predecessor of their own historical and contextual methods. See Guy G. Stroumsa, “John Spencer and the Roots of Idolatry,” *History of Religions* 41, no. 1 (2001): 14–23; Jonathan Elukin, “Maimonides and the Rise and Fall of the Sabians: Explaining Mosaic Laws and the Limits of Scholarship,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 63, no. 4 (2002): 619–637; Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), 43; Amos Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History* (University of California Press, 1993), 131–55.

⁷² Maimonides’ descriptions of Sabian belief and practice found primarily in *Guide* III.29, III.37, III.45–50, and to a lesser extent in *Guide* I.63, I.70, II.23, II.39.

⁷³ See *Guide* III.29 and I.63. Leo Strauss is responsible for popularizing this reading of the *Guide* as a work against Sabian idolatry in his “How to Begin to Study *The Guide of the Perplexed*,” in Pines, trans. *Guide*, xi–lvi.

incorporeal God. But recognizing that man can only abandon old habits and the culture in which he is steeped with great difficulty, God in His “wily graciousness” designed the Torah and its laws strategically, in such a way as to wean the Israelites’ from entrenched Sabian customs gradually.⁷⁴ The Torah’s laws would in many ways resemble and reflect familiar, habituated Sabian customs but would also contain key strategic differences, thereby facilitating the Israelites’ gradual turn away from materialism and towards the true religion of properly philosophical monotheism. Crucially—though he never says as much explicitly—Maimonides suggests that the reign of Sabianism extends not only backwards in time from the giving in Torah but reaches far forward into the future as well, extending even to Maimonides’ own day. His critiques of the Sabians as materialist, anthropomorphizing, superstitious, and idolatrous parallel his critiques of his contemporary coreligionists, the foolish masses who entertain a child’s conceptualization of God. Similarly, as others have already pointed out, Maimonides seems to imagine himself and his project in the *Guide* on parallel with the Biblical Abraham, undertaking a project of mass philosophical education, towards popular enlightenment.⁷⁵

As with so much else in the *Guide*, many aspects of Maimonides’ Sabian theory found echoes across Hebrew literature over the course of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries—in spirit if not in name. While some such as Samuel ibn Tibbon, Jacob Anatoli, Levi b. Abraham, ibn Kaspi, and Moses Narboni appealed to the historicizing aspect of Maimonides’ Sabian theory, attempting to explain details of Torah language and law with reference to the beliefs and

⁷⁴ As developed especially in *Guide* III.32. For more on Maimonides’ so-called theory of “divine accommodation,” see Stephen Benin, *The Footprints of God: Divine Accommodation in Jewish and Christian Thought* (SUNY Press, 1993).

⁷⁵ For ibn Tibbon, see Robinson, *Samuel ibn Tibbon*, 65–66, 334. For Anatoli’s recourse to the Sabians, see *Malmad ha-Talmidim* (Lyck: M’kize Nirdamim, 1866), 66a–68a, 77ab, 86b, 94ab, 114b–115a, 117ab, 119a, 121b, 123a, 140a, 146b–147a, 154b–155a, 160b–161a, 177ab, 183ab; also see Weber, “Anatoli,” 148 n.260, 151 n.273, 156, 200, 295ff, and 307 for Anatoli’s use of the Abraham-as-philosopher motif. For Levi b. Abraham, see Kreisel, “Reasons for the Commandments,” 184n9. For ibn Kaspi, see *Gevia Kesef*, 140; For Narboni, see his commentary on *Guide* III.29 in Moses of Narbonne, *Be’ur le-Sefer Moreh Nevukhim*, ed. Jacob Goldenthal, (Vienna, 1852).

practices of a reconstructed historical culture, far more adopted the broader contours of Maimonides' conceptualization of salvation history.⁷⁶ Imagining Abraham as a philosopher of monotheism and the Torah's laws designed to inculcate properly philosophical religion, Maimonideans everywhere seemed to understand their own projects too as efforts in the grand struggle against materialist ignorance and towards Aristotelian enlightenment.

Working at the end of this Maimonidean tradition, Arama, for his part, adopts Maimonides' basic structural conceptualization of the Sabians as the foil against which salvation history unfolds, but turns it on its head, completely upending it. Rather than conceptualizing salvation history as a gradual, progressive movement from materialist, pagan idolatry to enlightened, philosophical religion, Arama imagines that the dominant culture in need of correcting is a philosophically overweening one.⁷⁷ Salvation history then is a movement of reining in and restoration, from over-enlightenment to counter-enlightenment, from a neutered conceptualization of God as prime mover to an appropriate recognition of God's awesome and terrifying supernatural power. Said differently, Arama replaces Maimonides' imagining of the Sabians with a structurally-parallel imagining of historical-yet-perennial Aristotelians—only not so named.

This parallel yet inverted vision of salvation history emerges at numerous points throughout AY. It is evident in Arama's reconfiguration of the Maimonidean fall and Abraham

⁷⁶ Gersonides, for example, replaces the Sabians at the center of Maimonides' argument with a philosophical school of pre-socratic materialism. For him then, the Torah was given chiefly to remove the ideas of this prevailing materialism; to philosophically instruct the Israelites that causation can be explained by formal, efficient, and final causes in addition to the material cause. See Robert Eisen, *Gersonides on Providence, Covenant, and the Chosen People: A Study in Medieval Jewish Philosophy and Biblical Commentary* (SUNY Press, 1995), 88–89; Levi ben Gershon, *Hamishah Humshe Torah: 'im Perush Rashi Ve-'im Be'ur Rabenu Levi Ben Gershon (Ralbag)*, ed. Baruch Braner, Eli Freiman, and Karmi'el Kohen, (Ma'aliyot, 1993), 30.

⁷⁷ Connected with Arama's refiguring the Maimonidean Solomon-as-philosopher with a Solomon critical of philosophical overweening. See 2.3.3 below.

narratives, both of which are treated by James Diamond in his study on Arama.⁷⁸ Whereas Maimonides conceptualizes the fall as man's descent from pure theoretical contemplation of intelligibilia to ponderings less philosophical, as I mentioned in a previous example, Arama imagines the Fall consisting in man's turn to reliance on (Aristotelian) philosophical metaphysics over and against biblical theology.⁷⁹ For both, of course, the Fall equally sets the stage for salvation history and the shape redemption is to take, but the nature of their imagined redemptions, corresponding to their imagined falls, are inverted reflections. Likewise, whereas Maimonides imagines Abraham's primary accomplishment as discovering the one true incorporeal God against the backdrop of Sabian materialism and anthropomorphism, Arama imagines Abraham's primary accomplishment as relinquishing an overly-philosophical conceptualization of God as prime mover in fearful, pious submission God's suprarational wisdom and supernatural power.⁸⁰ While for both, the advent of Abraham is a key moment in the unfolding of salvation history, their inverse figurations of Abraham reflect inverse conceptualizations of the enemy salvation history is fighting.

Arama's play on and subversion of Maimonides' Sabian narrative comes through nowhere more clearly, however, than in his discussion of the ten commandments, and especially the latter eight, in Gate 45.⁸¹ Here, Arama introduces his treatment of the ten commandments by

⁷⁸ Diamond, "Arama's Nightmare."

⁷⁹ See 1.2.2 and 2.1.2 above.

⁸⁰ It is worth noting that Maimonides' and Arama's respective conceptualizations of Arama comport with how they self-consciously conceptualize their respective projects vis-à-vis their communities: while Maimonides saw his contemporary Jewish community as ignorant and so construes his project in the *Guide* as one of philosophical enlightenment, Arama, writing three centuries later, sees his contemporary Jewish community as oversaturated with philosophical learning, and in need of a moderating, restorative force.

⁸¹ There are parallels to AY Gate 45 in HQ Gates 2 and 5. It is worth noting that in *Guide* II.33=Pines 364 Maimonides notes that the latter eight of the ten commandments "belong to the class of generally accepted opinions and those adopted in virtue of tradition, not to the class of intellecta," implying that these latter eight may not have even been given by God. In this light, Arama's emphasizing that precisely these mundane commandments—in their mundanity—constitute the heart of divine revelation at Sinai is thrown into even sharper relief.

posing a rhetorical question: Most of the ten commandments (indeed all but the first two—) seem to concern mundane and commonsensical matters that are in no way unique to the Jewish community; why then does God assign them a special place in His giving of the Torah? Shouldn't God have commenced revelation by addressing intractable questions of metaphysics and cosmology, finally disclosing how the one gives rise to the many, how the immaterial separate intellect emanates a material celestial sphere, and how divine knowledge in its absolute simplicity comes to know ephemera? Rather than answer this question directly Arama instead redirects our focus. He instructs that what is of paramount importance is to understand why the ten commandments do *not* address such philosophical questions and instead revolve around quotidian issues—indeed, this is the secret of Sinai and that on which the entirety of felicity depends:⁸²

In truth, contemplating this is no small matter; it is fitting to pay heed to it. For in understanding it and comprehending its true reality, the secret of that event shall be well understood—as will {the excellence of} its final purpose, on which the entirety of particular Torah felicity depends.

This is where Arama's inversion of Maimonides' Sabian theory comes shining through. The reason the ten commandments do not concern theoretical and scientific issues, Arama explains, is because such would have been directly in conflict with God's primary goal at Sinai. Whereas Maimonides imagines that the historical purpose of the Torah was to facilitate collective philosophical enlightenment, i.e., "to perfect people of their privative ignorance," Arama contends that the ignorance God was seeking to combat at Sinai was ignorance of a completely different sort; not privative ignorance but the "acquired ignorance" of philosophic learning. At

⁸² והנה באמת העיון הזה אינו קטן הערך וראוי לשום אליו לב כי בהבנתו ובנפול על אמתתו יובן בטוב סוד המעמד ההוא וטוב תכליתו שהוא יחד שכל ההצלח' הפרטית התורנית תלויה בו.

the time of the giving of the Torah and indeed even earlier, Arama tells us, the dominant culture in which the Israelites had been steeped was one of rampant philosophical speculation and investigation. This philosophical culture had left the Israelites with a completely impoverished conceptualization of God; though they still conceded to His existence, they denied His power to intervene in the natural order, His knowledge of possibles, His exercise of providence, and His ability to reward and punish according to deeds. Here is what Arama says:⁸³

And this is: Upon reflection, it shall become clear that the principle of that noble and terrible event was *not* to perfect people in respect of their *privative ignorance*, [whereby] they err in their conceptualization of divine matters, [baselessly] attributing attributes, actions, and passions to Him in accordance with their imaginings, such as cannot be encompassed by the nature of divinity in accordance with subtle speculation. For confusion with respect to these notions does not cause people to fall into heresy or to take the commandments lightly.

Rather, the aim of that event was to improve their *acquired ignorance* which befell them through philosophical speculations, [viz.,] their investigation. Through the conviction of their false claims, they came to establish for the world a divinity in accordance with their will and speculation. They conceded to His existence but denied His ability to govern nature, His knowledge of possibles, His exercising providence over sects of men, and His rewarding and punishing them in accordance with their actions

In a clearly pointed jab against Maimonides and the Maimonidean tradition, Arama suggests that while an insufficiently philosophical theology does *not* pose grave consequences for religious adherence or praxis, the overly philosophical theology to which the historical Israelites subscribed absolutely does.⁸⁴ Accordingly, Arama explains that God's purpose at Sinai was to

⁸³ וזה כי בטוב ההשקפה יתבאר כי עקר המעמד הנכבד והנורא הוא לא היה ולא נברא להשלים בו האנשים מהסכלות ההעדרי הטועים בענייני האלהיים בלי טענה ביחס לו ית' כפי דמיונם תוארים ופעולות או הפעולות לא יכלום טבע האלהות כפי העיון הדק כי השבוש בכמו אלו העניינים לא יביאם לידי כפירה ולא אל הקל במצוה ממצותיו.

אמנם היתה כוונת המעמד ההוא לתקן בו הסכלות הקנייני אשר נפלו עליו מעייני הפלוסופי' בחקירת' אשר באו בחזק טענותיהם המזוייפות לקיים אלוה בעולם כפי רצונם ועיונם כי הנה הם מודים במציאותו אבל כופרים ביכולתו על ממשלת הטבע ובידיעתו באלו העניינים האפשריים ובהשגחתו על כתות האנשים והשכירו והענישו אותם על פי מעשיהם

⁸⁴ Similarly, in AY Gate 48, Arama points out that the Torah's narratives are deliberately designed to counter the *true* and *correct* ideas that (1) no benefit accrues to God from existents; (2) God is not protected by existence; and (3) God is not a force in a body precisely because the children of Israel, trapped in the snares of these beliefs attained

“repair the world” by “overturning all those corrupt opinions” and restoring, in their stead, a properly terrifying view of divine providence. This, Arama finally tells us, is precisely why most of the ten commandments are concerned with such quotidian and material matter: they help restore simple, popular belief that God is concerned with everyday human affairs. Indeed, if the ten commandments had engaged subtle issues of speculative metaphysics they would have flown in the face of rather than supported the divine purpose, making God only more obscure and incomprehensible to the masses and so corroding the foundation of popular belief. It is worth quoting Arama’s remarks at length:⁸⁵

To repair the world with divine governance, God came [down] during that terrible event. To turn us away from all those corrupt opinions, one by one, and in order to fix our belief in [the existence of] divine providence in the world, which is the foundation of all [other] beliefs and felicities....

In truth, if He had designated His speech there to be about the profound inquiries aforementioned, He would have been very far from what was intended. For everything that was related of that notion makes God remote from human intellect and makes Him terrifying, such that at the end of all knowledge, it is necessary to say that God exists but not through existence; He is something but not through quiddity; He is one but not through unity, He is eternal, but not through eternity; He knows but not through knowledge; He wills not through will...

through philosophical investigation, had come to believe in the impossibility of divine providence and so felicity. What he says in the following is really quite remarkable, and connects to the issues developed in the following chapter:

ואשר להצליח האומה הזאת אשר לקחה לו לחלתו הנה הוא יתעלה לו הפליג עמהם באלו הדברים הפילוסופיים האמתיים להרחיק השבושים והכפירות הכרוכים בעקביהם ויוצאים לצדם כמו שאמרנו אבל ויתר אותם ובטלם אצלם כדי שיוכלו כללותם להשתתף בהצלחה ההיא מבלי שום מונע כמו שכווננו לזה חז"ל באומרם (ב"ר פ"ח) נטל את האמת והשליכה לארץ. כאשר בשער מ"ג עיין עליו. והוא מה שכוונו חז"ל במאמר ההוא אשר זכרנו ראשונה הדא הוא דכתיב מים רבים וגו'. ואמרו מים רבים אלו אומות העולם כי א"ה אשר לא עמדו על הר סיני להפסיק זוהמת הכפירה מהם וחכמיהם ופילוסופיהם הם אשר השתדלו ברוב כחם וכהמות ימים ברוב מופתיהם יהמיון להפר האהבה ולבטל האהבה מבינו יתעלה לשום אחד מהנמצאים השפלים ולהתבונן במעשיהם ובענינם כלל רק שיחייב מסדור המערכות ומנהג הטבעי המחוייב מאתו בזולת רצונו המיוחדת ואמרו שאפילו התפלספו בזה תכלית התפלספות הנה הם לא יוכלו לבטל מה שנתפרסם בעולם מזאת האהבה וחבה היתרה הנודעת לאומה הזאת מכל זולתה מהאומות בתכלית ההשקפה וההשגחה בכל עניניהם ופרטיהם לעיני כל העולם והנה לתקן עולם במלכות שדי בא האלהים במעמד הנורא ההוא ולהפנות מפנינו כל אלו הדעות הנפסדות אחד לאחד כדי לקבוע אמונת ⁸⁵ ההשגחה האלהית בעולם אשר היא יסוד כל האמונות והצלחות... והנה באמת אם ה' מיחד שם הדבור עמהם בדרושי' ההם העמוקי' אשר אמרנו ראשונה הנה היה מפליג ומרחיק הכוונה מאד כי כל מה שיוספר מהענין ההוא הוא מפליג אותו יתב' מן הדעת האנושי ומבהיל אותו עד שבסוף הידיעה כלה צריך שנאמר שהוא ית' נמצא ולא במציאות מה ולא במהות אחד ולא באחדות קדמון ולא בקדמות יודע ולא בדעת רוצה ולא ברצון... לזה היה מחכמתו יתעלה לדבר אליהם במעמד ההוא המאמרים המיוחדים והמסוגלים להשקיט יראתם ופחדתם ולוותר אצלם כל דקדוקי הפילוסופיות העמוק ההוא הנמצא בין חכמי האומות ולתאר העניינים העיוניים ההם בדעות צודקות ואמונות אמיתיות עם הצנע לכת גם אליהם

For this reason, God was wise to speak these special and particular dicta/utterances to them at that event, to quiet their fear and trembling; in order that they renounce all the subtleties of that profound philosophy that existed among the sages of the nations, and in order to [instead] describe those theoretical matters with correct opinions and true beliefs together with *modesty before their God* (Micah 6:8).

God's goal at Sinai and with the ten commandments, Arama tells us in no uncertain terms, was nothing less than facilitating the Israelites' collective *renunciation* of speculative philosophy and reinstitution of a certain pre-philosophical—or post-philosophical—naivety. Arama's imagining of salvation history as progressive culture corrective is thus at once deeply indebted to and yet a powerful inversion of Maimonides' Sabian narrative: structurally parallel, a but a precise reversal in terms of content. By retaining Maimonides' structure of the Sabians-as-foil yet effectively replacing Maimonides' pre-philosophical and materialist Sabians with Maimonidean Aristotelians only not so named, Arama domesticates philosophy in a sense quite different from the previous example, but much more familiar to that elaborated in the previous section, where we discussed Arama's use of the master's tools to dismantle the master's house. Only here, the master is the not the Master of Science, but the Master and Guide. Coopting a Maimonidean motif and turning it on its head to ultimately anti-Maimonidean ends, Arama domesticates philosophy by making a Maimonidean motif his own.

2.3.3. Refiguring Figurae II: Arama's Solomon

The final example of Arama's complex grappling with Maimonideanism that I will discuss is similar to the previous example in that it too revolves around Arama's refiguration of a figure central to the Maimonidean imaginary: Not the Sabians, but rather the biblical King Solomon. As in the previous example, Arama's Solomon presents something of a inverted reflection of the Maimonidean Solomon: While the latter is imagined as biblical philosopher par excellence, the

Torah's answer to the great philosophers of classical antiquity, Arama's Solomon emerges as strongly pietistic: teaching belief in the dogma of creation and preaching against the excesses of philosophy. However, whereas in the previous example, Arama's domesticated Maimonideanism proceeded through a fairly simple process of inversion—Arama adopted Maimonides' basic structural narrative of the Sabians as perennial foil of salvation history, while replacing Maimonides' conceptualization of materialist Sabian culture with an overly-philosophical Aristotelian one—here Arama's primary technique of domestication proceeds differently. In particular, as we will see, Arama develops his pietistic vision of Solomon as teacher of creation and preacher against philosophy by pursuing to their logical conclusion ideas already contained in the Maimonidean tradition itself.

Though Jews across the Mediterranean world had made much of Solomon and his famed wisdom since at least the late antique period—ascribing him with powers ranging from pharmacological and astrological knowledge to exorcism, magic, and ornithomancy—perhaps no one did more to transform Solomon's image than Maimonides and his translator and expositor, Samuel ibn Tibbon.⁸⁶ Building off the former's scattered remarks in the *Guide*, in his Commentary on Ecclesiastes ibn Tibbon developed a powerful reading of Solomon as biblical

⁸⁶ The literature on conceptualizations of Solomon developed by Jews (and Christians) in the Late Antique world is vast; for a survey see Pablo A. Torijano, *Solomon the Esoteric King: From King To Magus* (Brill, 2002). For developments of the Solomon-as-magician motif, see Gilad Sasson, "In the footsteps of the tradition regarding Solomon the Magician," *Jewish Studies: An Internet Journal* 6 (2007): 37–53; and Pablo A. Torijano, "Solomon and Magic," in *The Figure of Solomon in Jewish, Christian and Tradition: King, Sage and Architect*, ed. Joseph Verheyden (Brill, 2013), 107–125; for Solomon's powers of ornithomancy, see Abraham O. Shemesh, "'And God gave Solomon wisdom': Proficiency in ornithomancy," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 74, no. 1 (2018): 1–9. Moving into the medieval period, for the tenth century Karaites of Jerusalem, Solomon became a teacher of piety, prayer, and asceticism, preaching submission in this world and reward in the next, while for Abraham ibn Ezra, Solomon was a devoted student of astrology. On the Karaite conceptualization, see James T. Robinson, *Asceticism, Eschatology, Opposition to Philosophy: The Arabic Translation and Commentary of Salmon ben Yeroham on Qohelet* (Brill, 2012); on ibn Ezra, see Mariano Gómez Aranda, "The Meaning of Qohelet According to Ibn Ezra's Scientific Explanations," *Aleph* 6 (2006): 339–370. For the Maimonidean and Tibbonian Solomon, see Sara Klein-Braslavy, "King Solomon and Metaphysical Esotericism According to Maimonides," in *Maimonidean Studies*, Volume 1, ed. Arthur Hyman (KTAV Publishing House, 1990), 57–86; Robinson, *Samuel ibn Tibbon*.

philosopher par excellence that would be influential for years to come: Perhaps the first to discover scripture's esoteric mode of speaking philosophically and allegorically, ibn Tibbon imagined Solomon as standing at the head of a great chain of tradition, passing down the keys to unlock scripture's inner meaning across the generations.⁸⁷ Nor was this all; in addition to master of philosophical-allegorical esotericism, ibn Tibbon envisioned Solomon as a master of Aristotelian syllogism and staunch defender of the possibility of immortality via perfection of the intellect.⁸⁸ Over the course of the thirteenth and fourteenth century, this Maimonidean image of Solomon was echoed by ibn Tibbon's son-in-law Jacob Anatoli and son Moses ibn Tibbon, and inflected in different ways by Gersonides and Joseph ibn Kaspi.⁸⁹ Later, the Solomon-as-philosopher motif was taken in still other directions by Yohannan Alemanno and Judah Messer Leon. Whereas Alemanno conceived of Solomon as Renaissance polymath par excellence, Leon conceived of Solomon as an orator superior to Cicero.⁹⁰

As mentioned in the introduction, Arama wrote commentaries on all three works traditionally attributed to Solomon: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs. Across all these works, but especially in the commentaries on Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, Arama develops an image of Solomon that contrasts sharply with the Maimonidean image of Solomon as philosopher limned above. Already in an example from in the previous section, I discussed how

⁸⁷ For ibn Tibbon's conceptualization of Solomon as participating in an esoteric philosophical chain-of-tradition, see Robinson, *Samuel ibn Tibbon*, 30–31, 60–62.

⁸⁸ Robinson, *Samuel ibn Tibbon*, 41–45.

⁸⁹ For Anatoli's conceptualization of Solomon, see Jacob Anatoli, *Mamad ha-Talmidim*, Introduction. For Moses ibn Tibbon's, see Moses ibn Tibbon, *Commentary on Song of Songs*, ed. L. Silberman (Lyck: Mekize Nirdamim, 1874) and Howard Kreisel, "Moses ibn Tibbon: Translator and Philosophical Exegete" in Kreisel, *Judaism as Philosophy*. For Gersonides, see Klein-Braslavy, "Dialectic in Gersonides' Commentary on Proverbs;" Menachem Kellner, "Moshe ibn Tibbon and Gersonides on Song of Songs" in Menachem Kellner, *Torah in the Observatory: Gersonides, Maimonides, Song of Songs* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2010), 255–282; and Gersonides' extraordinary preface to his commentary on Ecclesiastes.

⁹⁰ For Alemanno, see Arthur Lesley, "The Song of Solomon's Ascents by Yohannan Alemanno: Love and Human Perfection According to a Jewish Colleague of Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola," (PhD diss., UC Berkeley, 1976). For Judah Leon, see Isaac Rabinowitz, ed. and trans., *The Book of the Honeycomb's Flow: Sepher Nopheth Šufim by Judah Messer Leon* (Cornell University Press, 1983).

in his commentary on Ecclesiastes, Arama depicts Solomon as challenging the Aristotelian theory of providence-as-natural law with a more robust two-fold theory of providence entailing direct divine intervention into the natural order; relatedly, I also discussed how Arama's Solomon commences his attack on this Aristotelian theory of providence by pointing to the limitations of the Aristotelian theory of the final end of human existence.⁹¹ But these pietistic and anti-philosophical moves are only the beginning. As mentioned above, whereas in his commentary on Ecclesiastes, ibn Tibbon's Solomon had strongly suggested that the possibility of immortality and so the final purpose of human existence consist in the perfection of the individual acquired intellect, Arama's Solomon directly counters that intellectual perfection cannot constitute the final end of human existence, which, he insists, must instead consist in obedience of the Torah commandments. Relatedly, whereas Arama conceptualized the penultimate verse of Ecclesiastes—*fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole of man*—as Solomon's most important teaching in and indeed the final purpose of the book of Ecclesiastes as a whole, ibn Tibbon had suggested that this same verse was in fact not written by Solomon at all but rather a later editorial addition on the part of Hezekiah and his men, who included it for apologetic purposes.⁹² Similarly, whereas ibn Tibbon had dismissed Prov. 1:7—

⁹¹ See 2.2.3 above.

⁹² As is well-known, the final verses of Ecclesiastes have played an important role in both interpretations of the scroll as a whole and adjudications of its traditional author since at least the late antique period, with the Rabbis famously contending that they decided not to suppress Ecclesiastes from the canon since its “its end,” like its beginning, constituted “words of Torah” (see b. Shabbat 30b). Ibn Tibbon clearly recognized the same apologetic force of Ecclesiastes' concluding verses as the Rabbis did, but perhaps wrote them off as an editorial addition to defend his image of Solomon from smacking too much of pietism. See Robinson, *Samuel ibn Tibbon*, 35–36, 180, 599, 604–605. Ibn Tibbon also allows for the possibility that these verses were indeed authored by Solomon, but as part of the latter's esoteric enterprises: Solomon wrote these verses as a sort of exoteric political precaution, meant to protect both author and undiscerning readers alike. Arama, for his part, rehabilitates the final verses of Ecclesiastes from the apologetic oblivion into which ibn Tibbon cast them. In his original preface to the commentary on Ecclesiastes, Arama introduces the scroll by explaining it in terms of its four Aristotelian causes—material, formal, efficient, and final—and identifies the latter with Eccl. 12:13. See AY V: 170a–b. He also singles out the final verses of Ecclesiastes as central to both Solomon's teaching and his own in his introduction to his commentary on Proverbs, *Yad Abshālōm*. See YA 2a–b.

fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge—as another apologia of sorts, Solomon’s superficial, pietistic concession to the “fools” in the second half of the verse who wrongly despise pursuit of theoretical knowledge, Arama singles this same verse out as one of a few key “roots” or “main principles” in the book of Proverbs, touchstones to which he repeatedly returns throughout his commentary.⁹³

It is through his commentaries on several of these key, “root” verses in Proverbs that Arama’s image of Solomon as at once inverted reflection of the Maimonidean Solomon and also an expression of Maimonidean themes comes through most clearly. In particular, through his commentaries on Prov. 1:7, Prov. 3:5–7, and Prov. 3:19, Arama develops his understanding of Solomon as having two primary, interrelated teachings: Arama’s Solomon both (1) exhorts pious acceptance of the dogma of creation, and (2) preaches against over-reliance on philosophy and its corrupting force on this dogma.⁹⁴ Arama develops the idea that Solomon teaches acceptance of the dogma of creation principally through his exegesis of Prov. 1:7 and Prov. 3:19: The identification implicit in Prov. 1:7’s declaration that *fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge*, Arama suggests, is in fact an assertion that pious acceptance of the dogma of creation is the *sine qua non* of fear: for only belief in the Creator God necessitates belief in all the other

⁹³ For ibn Tibbon, see Robinson, *Samuel ibn Tibbon*, 17, 228. For Arama, see YA 6a–7a.

⁹⁴ See also YA 71b–72a (Arama’s preface to the *kelālīm*), 74a–b (*kelāl* 5), 79a–b (*kelāl* 10). Arama’s preaching against overreliance on philosophy also emerges powerfully in both his commentary on Prov. 8 and in his lengthy digression on the *kelalot* of Proverbs, and specifically Kelal 5. As for the former, Arama imagines that Prov. 8 constitutes a sort of disputation between Philosophy and Torah, both personified as women, attempting to win over the male reader. Arama’s Solomon portrays Philosophy as a sort of harlot, attempting to seduce her victims by means of deception. Philosophy ensnares her prey by variously suggesting that traditional learning is useless, appealing to philosophy’s exclusivity, and discussing the benefits/utilities of the philosophical curriculum. Arama depicts Solomon as harping especially on the deceptive quality of logic, the entry-point into the philosophical curriculum, since it quickly transforms its students into sophists—boastful and perceived as wise, even if they are otherwise devoid of learning. As for the latter, while Arama’s *kelalot* in general seem to contain basic ethical advice—e.g., be wary of anger, be wary of striving to acquire wealth, be wary of allowing the rational soul to become enslaved to the desires of the body—Arama devotes the fifth *kelal* to a diatribe against giving oneself over completely to philosophy, in which he associates philosophy not only with the strange woman, but with an “evil and dangerous....feast of the soul.”

divine attributes necessary to belief in reward and punishment, which is in turn the sole grounds for the supreme theological virtue of fear.⁹⁵ Meanwhile, Prov. 3:19 echoes and reinforces the importance of the dogma of creation. Its qualification that *The Lord by wisdom founded the earth...* teaches that God created the world by way of intelligence and will against philosophical claims of a universe emanated by necessity.⁹⁶ Importantly, here Arama readily concedes that the dogma of creation is precisely that: a dogma that cannot be demonstrated philosophically (“for no speculation suffices to clarify this demonstratively”) and instead must be taught by Torah itself.

Building off both these, Arama develops the idea that Solomon preaches against over-reliance on philosophy principally through his exegesis of Prov. 3:5–7—where he also connects Solomon’s polemic against over-reliance on philosophy with his exhorting belief in the dogma of creation.⁹⁷ Prov. 3:5’s injunction to *trust in the Lord*, Arama tells us, is to be read in unison with

⁹⁵ See YA 6a–7a:

“And he said: *Fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge*. We already wrote in the introduction that without this root, there is no entry-point into any type of instruction or traditional study. Also [we said that] *fear of the Lord* is nothing other than *knowledge*, for God created the world through His absolute will after it was not, just as the divine Torah establishes in its beginning. For without this [principle] it is not conceptualized that God knows and exercises providence and rewards and punishes with absolute power. This knowledge compels one to believe in His existence and to fear Him and to be wary of His wrath and anger, lest He destroy the world or a part of it on account of those who transgress against His will...”

⁹⁶ See YA 13a–b:

“*The Lord by wisdom founded the earth*, and so on, *by His knowledge*, and so on (Prov 3:19–20). See that the root-principle of the aforementioned knowledge is that all species of study suckle from the splendor of its glory, and that is that you should know and believe that *the Lord by wisdom founded the earth*, not by way of necessity as the strange, disputing woman says. Also *by understanding He established the heavens*, and this is what the divine Torah sets forth in its beginning [with its statement] *berēshīt*, and so on, inasmuch as no speculation suffices to clarify this demonstratively...”

⁹⁷ See YA 12a:

“*Trust in the Lord*, and so on (Prov 3:5). This is a major root/principle concerning two ways in which one should not rely upon himself: (1) neither concerning what he has attained of science through his speculation; (2) nor concerning what he has attained in terms of temporal/worldly good by way of his strength....He elaborated, warning strongly against this and said: *be not wise in thine own eyes*, and so on (Prov 3:7). He said: in order that one should not transgress the Lord by being *wise* in his speculations and thinking that anything other than what his own wisdom has determined is false, as the philosophers think, who were *wise in their own eyes*, and the fear of the Lord was not with them, as we set forth. But *therefore my son, now hearken to my voice* (Gen

Prov. 3:7's injunction to *be not wise in thine own eyes*. Together, both are meant to counsel intellectual humility and instill the idea that man should not limit his knowledge to what he can attain through independent, rational speculation. "One should not transgress the Lord by being *wise in* his speculations and thinking that anything other than what his own wisdom has determined is false;" for this, Arama chides, is what "the philosophers think, who were *wise in their own eyes*, and the *fear of the Lord* was not with them." After admonishing those who might be inclined to rely exclusively upon their independent philosophical attainments for knowledge/belief, Arama connects this admonition back to his interpretation of Prov. 1:7 and "*fear of the Lord....is impossible without prior beliefs*," closing the circle and suggesting why Solomon's twin teachings of belief in creation and preaching against the excesses of philosophy really do go hand-in-hand: As I mentioned earlier, Arama readily admits that creation is not subject to philosophical demonstration, and instead must taught by Torah itself. To make room for Torah's continued authority then, Arama's Solomon must counsel epistemological humility and deference to tradition to those who would otherwise spurn it. Philosophy and its methods, Arama's Solomon tells us, cannot have the final word on truth.

It is self-evident that Arama's pietistic image of Solomon as teacher of creation and preacher against the excesses of philosophy, limned in the foregoing, stands in stark contrast to the Maimonidean image of Solomon as philosopher. What is much less apparent and more striking however, are the ways in which Arama develops even (t)his strong inverse image of the Maimonidean Solomon by relying on Maimonidean ideas and pursuing these to their logical conclusions, and so through a process of domestication. Indeed, both core teachings that Arama

27:43) *fear the Lord* as I admonished you with his saying *fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge* (Prov 1:7), which is impossible without prior beliefs; and in addition to this, *remove yourself from the evil* that exists with them both for the soul and the flesh."

ascribes to his Solomon as well as the relation between them—i.e., acceptance of the dogma of creation, and vigilance against the excesses of philosophy—have roots in the *Guide* itself. As is well-known, one of Maimonides' most central thematic preoccupations in the *Guide* concerns whether the world was created or is eternal—an issue which remained vexing, Maimonides stated in no uncertain terms, precisely because neither alternative could be proved demonstrably with recourse only to apodictic syllogism.⁹⁸ Though Maimonides' equivocations on the issue of creation versus eternity are notoriously legion, inspiring debates on the Master's true position from at least the thirteenth century to the present day, what is most important for our present purposes is that at several points throughout the *Guide*, Maimonides expressly states that in the absence of a definitive demonstration to the contrary, Jews should opt to believe in creation because it is theologically advantageous, yielding a more traditionally desirable conceptualization of God—even as many have suggested these are only a form of lip-service.⁹⁹ Relatedly, another theme that Maimonides treats at several points throughout the *Guide* is the issue of the limitations of knowledge: what sorts of knowledge lie beyond the ken of apodictic demonstration, and what is the appropriate disposition, moral and intellectual, to assume in light of these limitations? At certain junctures, Maimonides suggests that, confronted with the limitations of knowledge on some subject, one must learn to occupy an uncomfortable no man's land of doubt, resisting his various desires to definitively incline in either direction on an issue

⁹⁸ See *Guide* I.71.

⁹⁹ Articulated perhaps most forcefully in *Guide* II.25, but also in the Introduction. Scholarship on Maimonides' "true position" on creation vs. eternity is abundant; for only a brief entrée into the question consider the trifecta of essays: Lawrence Kaplan, "Maimonides on the Miraculous Element in Prophecy," *Harvard Theological Review* 70 (1977): 233–256; Herbert Davidson, "Maimonides' Secret Position on Creation," in *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, ed. Isadore Twersky (Harvard University Press, 1979), 16–40; Warren Zev Harvey, "A Third Approach to Maimonides' Cosmogony-Prophetology Puzzle," *Harvard Theological Review* 74 (1981): 287–301.

that cannot be demonstrated.¹⁰⁰ At others, however, he suggests that course may be too difficult to for most to endure, such that the proper response to the limitations of knowledge is for one to adopt an intellectual humility that inclines him to defer to tradition.¹⁰¹

In developing his Maimonidean Solomon as biblical philosopher par excellence, ibn Tibbon doggedly pursued the first of these Maimonidean approaches on the limitations of knowledge: Just as Maimonides' philosophically endured doubt on the issue of creation versus eternity, presenting compelling arguments for the non-necessity of eternity and the possibility of creation, but ultimately deferring to the impossibility of definitive demonstration in either direction, ibn Tibbon's Solomon philosophically endured a parallel doubt on the issue of the possibility of immortality, presenting compelling arguments for the non-necessity of mortality and the possibility of immortality, but ultimately deferring to the impossibility of definitive demonstration in either direction.¹⁰² Yet in presenting his Solomon as preacher of dogma of creation and preacher against the excesses of philosophy, Arama follows a Maimonidean course as well, only pursuing the second Maimonidean approach on the limitations of knowledge to its logical conclusion: the limitation of philosophy and reason point not, in the final analysis, to the importance of learned skepticism, but rather to the importance of the supra-rational authority of tradition—and the pious disposition of fear that guards against one's abandonment of it in favor of a brash self-reliance. As I will suggest in the next chapter, Arama's pursuit of this second Maimonidean approach on the limitations of knowledge as against ibn Tibbon's pursuit of the first may have much to do with the respective subjects with which they were concerned: while

¹⁰⁰ See *Guide* I.31–34 and Shlomo Pines' classic essay, "The Limitations of Human Knowledge According to Al-Farabi, ibn Bajja, and Maimonides," in *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, ed. Isadore Twersky (Harvard University Press, 1979), 1–82.

¹⁰¹ See *Guide*, Introduction.

¹⁰² Robinson, *Samuel ibn Tibbon*, 122–124.

ibn Tibbon was very much a philosopher's philosopher, concerned primarily with teaching the intellectual elite, Arama, as we will see, was concerned above all with the fate of the Jewish masses neglected if not spurned by Maimonideanism; i.e., those for whom enduring eternal doubt may have been too great a burden to bear.¹⁰³ Yet what is most important for our present purposes is that, for as much as Arama's pietistic image of Solomon appears to be an inverted image of the Maimonidean Solomon as philosopher, if not a subversion of it, it too is grounded in ideas traceable back to the *Guide* and so an expression of Maimonidean logics. In developing his image of Solomon as preacher of creation and against the excesses of philosophy, Arama's domesticates Maimonideanism by culling Maimonidean wheat from Maimonidean chaff, as it were; separating out Maimonidean ideas that are useful to him while dispensing with others, sharpening, strengthening, and transforming the character of the former in the process.

2.4. Creative Elaborations

In the foregoing sections of this chapter, we have extensively explored two patterns in Arama's domestication of philosophy. In the first section, we saw how Arama often uses the Master's tools to take down the Master's house, turning Aristotle against Aristotelianism through strategic use of citations, axioms, and textual criticism. And in the second section, we saw how Arama variously attempts to domesticate the Maimonidean tradition of philosophical-allegorical exegesis, sometimes incorporating and even elaborating Maimonidean themes only to neutralize them, other times flipping Maimonidean images on their heads to anti-Maimonidean ends, and still others subversively refiguring Maimonidean images through extension of Maimonidean

¹⁰³ See 3.2 with subsections below as well 2.3.2 above, in connection with Arama's argument that privative ignorance does not negatively impact religious praxis, rather only the acquired ignorance of philosophic learning does so.

logics. Yet even as this second section expanded on the first in several ways—suggesting that Arama’s strategies of domestication are multiple and that these domestications play out as often over the field of exegesis as they do over the field of discursive argument—still, they have left our appreciation of the range of the “philosophy” that Arama’s domesticates wanting. For as suggested by examples throughout both this chapter and the previous, far from limited to Aristotle or the Maimonidean tradition, the diversity of philosophical materials with which Arama engages throughout AY is nothing short of staggering. Already we have seen him draw from Gersonides’ supercommentary on the *Book of Animals* and Joseph ibn Shem Tob’s commentary on the *Ethics*; from Crescas’ *Light of the Lord* and Albo’s *Book of Principles*; from Yedaiah ha-Penini’s *Behinat Olam* and Hayyim Israeli’s treatise on the Garden of Eden.¹⁰⁴ And beyond this, there are the still many other philosophical sources already singled out by previous scholars: Abraham Bibago’s *Derekh Emunah* and Moses Narboni’s commentary on the *Guide*; not only al-Ghazali’s summa of Avicennan philosophy (*Kavvanot ha-Filosofim* / *Maqasid al-Falasifah*) and his critique of it (*Happalat ha-Happalah* / *Tahafut al-Falasifah*), but also his Sufi moral manual (*Moznei Zedeq* / *Mizan al-Amal*), from which Arama draws a parable on the pure soul; not only Joseph ibn Shem Tob’s aforementioned commentary on the *Ethics*, but as we will see, also his Hebrew preaching manual or ars praedicandi, *Ein ha-Qore*—to name only a few.¹⁰⁵ Unfortunately, the range of Arama’s philosophical sources, not to mention the range of his engagements with these various sources, lies far beyond the scope of the present dissertation. However, to close out our treatment of Arama’s domestications of philosophy, I will look at one

¹⁰⁴ For Gersonides’ SC.BA, see 1.3.1 above and 4.1 below. For Joseph’s commentary on the *Ethics*, see 2.2.2 above. For Crescas’ *Light of the Lord*, see 2.2.1 above. For Albo’s *Book of Principles*, see 1.2.4 above. For Israeli’s *Ma’amar Gan Eden*, see 1.4 above.

¹⁰⁵ For Arama’s use of Bibago’s *Derekh Emunah*, see AY Gate 80; he cites Narboni’s commentary on the *Guide* in AY Gates 13, 15, 29, 54, 57, and 76—his critique in Gate 57 is particularly vicious.

final example of Arama's domestication of an only very recently identified philosophical source relating to the classical tradition of *ars memorativa*: mnemotechnics and specifically, memory palaces. Though qua lone example, it is difficult to contend that Arama's engagement with the tradition of *ars memorativa* is representative per se, it is suggestive of another broader pattern in his domestication of philosophy that we will not explore further, but that does connect back to the previous section on Arama's relation to Maimonideanism. As we will see in the following, Arama domesticates philosophy in much the same way that Maimonides had nearly three centuries prior: coupling a myth about the ancient possession and loss of Jewish wisdom with creative scriptural exegesis to suggest that philosophy and science appearing to belong to other traditions was in fact originally Jewish all along.

2.4.1. *Shema* as Memory Palace¹⁰⁶

This final example of Arama's domesticating philosophy comes from a Gate not yet mentioned and entirely neglected in scholarship until only very recently, i.e., Gate 90. In contrast to the other Gates we've discussed thus far wherein Arama is largely concerned with themes well-trod throughout medieval Hebrew literature—cosmology and epistemology; the possibility of immortality, the final purpose of human existence, and the philosophical anthropology that undergirds these; the reasons for the commandments and the arc of salvation history; theories of exegesis and the character of biblical personae—here Arama's main thematic focus is a subject that was quite popular in the medieval Christian world and appears in classical Rabbinic literature, but as far as I know, was not treated substantially in post-classical Hebrew literature until the early seventeenth century, over a century after Arama's death, namely: mnemonic

¹⁰⁶ I develop some of the ideas discussed in this section at greater length in my article "*Shema* as Memory Palace: A Medieval Hebrew *Ars Memorativa*," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 114.3 (2024): 351–374.

devices and techniques of memory.¹⁰⁷ After situating his interest in mnemotechnics in broader questions of divine justice and suggesting why mnemonic devices should be useful at all, Arama gives an account of one specific kind of memory device which he calls the *taḥbulat ha-zikaron* and which he attributes to “the sages of the nations.” From his description of its basic function, recourse to technical terms, and other aspects of his account, it is clear that the device he has in mind is the classical memory palace first elaborated by Roman rhetoricians and subsequently developed by monastic communities for purposes of meditation and prayer. Yet Arama does not confine himself to simply describing this *taḥbulat ha-zikaron*; in a remarkable domesticating move borrowed straight out of the *Guide*, Arama suggests that the “nations’” memory palace in fact has Jewish origins. The memory palace described does not originate with Cicero but rather was in the first instance bequeathed directly by God to the Israelites in the form of the central prayer of Jewish liturgy, the *ve-ahavta* portion of the *shema*. Through creative exegesis, Arama goes on to show how the *ve-ahavta* is in fact the original memory palace, designed to help the

¹⁰⁷ For memory in medieval Christendom, see Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 1990); Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400–1200* (Cambridge University Press, 1998); Mary Carruthers and Jan M. Ziolkowski, eds., *The Medieval Craft of Memory: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002); Francis A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966); Paolo Rossi, *Logic and the Art of Memory: The Quest for a Universal Language*, trans. S. Clucas (University of Chicago Press, 2000). Scholarly consensus seems to be that the only discussion evincing medieval Jewish interest in mnemonics is Profiat Duran’s, in an appendix to his *Ma’aseh Efod*, on which see Irene E. Zwiep, “Jewish Scholars and Christian Traditions in Late Medieval Catalonia: Profiat Duran and the Art of Memory,” in *Hebrew Scholarship in the Medieval World*, ed. N. de Lange (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 224–39; Maud Kozodoy, *The Secret Faith of Maestre Honoratus: Profiat Duran and Jewish Identity in Late Medieval Iberia* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 71. Duran however does not describe the classical locative memory palace. Apart from Duran, Jewish interest in mnemonics is reflected in Leon Modena’s *Lev ha-Aryeh*, on which see Gerrit Bos, “Jewish Traditions on Strengthening Memory and Leone Modena’s Evaluation,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 2, no. 1 (1995): 39–58; and more recently, Kalman Bland, “A Jewish Theory of Jewish Visual Culture: Leon Modena’s Concepts of Image and Their Effect on Locative Memory,” *Ars Judaica* 5, no. 1 (2009): 59–66. Recently, James W. Nelson Novoa discovered a brief Sephardic memory treatise written in Castilian dating to 1457–77. That text evinces clear knowledge of classical *ars memorativa*, suggesting Arama may have been writing in the wake of an emerging trend; see James Nelson Novoa, “A Sephardic Art of Memory,” in *Ars Reminiscendi: Mind and Memory in Renaissance Culture*, ed. D. Beecher and G. Williams (Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2009), 90. See my “*Shema* as Memory Palace” for a fuller discussion on the seeming relative disinterest in memory in medieval Hebrew philosophy.

Israelites store and recollect all the commandments! In what follows, I will walk through the major elements of Arama's account of the memory palace limned above, taking each in turn: his grounding of his discussion of mnemonics in questions of divine justice; his preliminary attribution of the *tahbulat ha-zikaron* to the "sages of the nations" and description of its basic mechanism; and finally, his arguments to suggest that the nations' memory palace is indeed originally Jewish. In connection with the latter and in conclusion, I will highlight how we can see Arama domesticating philosophy by implementing to a two-part strategy already developed in the *Guide*. By coupling a mythologized history with scriptural creative exegesis, Arama appropriates the nations' memory palace then flips the narrative, erasing the trail behind him: What appears to be the foreign wisdom of the mnemotechnics is native, and has been since Sinai.

Arama introduces his unusual interest in mnemonics by grounding it in a more familiar and traditionally legible concern of fifteenth century Hebrew literature: i.e., questions concerning divine justice and its relation to free choice and determinism.¹⁰⁸ How is it just, Arama asks, that on several occasions in the Torah God commands man to remember things, when according to popular scientific theories, the quality of a man's memory is grounded in biological and material factors that lie beyond his control?¹⁰⁹ But no sooner than posing this problem, Arama immediately dissolves it, exposing it as merely apparent: There is in truth no issue of divine

¹⁰⁸ In addition to Gersonides and Crescas already mentioned, determinism/free choice was central to apostate Abner of Burgos' *Minḥat Qena'ot* as well as in the writings of his former student, Isaac Polqar, and preoccupied both Moses Narboni and Joseph ibn Shem Tob in his commentary on the *Ethics*. See: Feldman, "A Debate Concerning Determinism;" Shalom Sadik, "Abner of Burgos", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, (Winter 2014 Edition), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/abner-burgos/>; Racheli Haliva, "Isaac Polqar — A Jewish Philosopher or a Philosopher and a Jew? A Study of the Relationship Between Philosophy and Religion in Isaac Polqar's 'Ezer ha-Dat and Teshuvat Apikoros,'" (PhD diss., McGill University, 2015); Shemesh, "Moses Narboni;" Neria, "Joseph ibn Shem Tob's Commentary on Aristotle's *Ethics*." On the issue of free choice and determinism in medieval Jewish thought more generally, see Arthur Hyman, "Aspects of the Medieval Jewish and Islamic Discussion of 'Free Choice'", in *Human Freedom and Moral Responsibility: General and Jewish Perspectives*, eds. Charles Manekin and Menachem Kellner (University Press of Maryland, 1997), 133–152; Alexander Altmann, "The Religion of the Thinkers: Free Will and Predestination in Saadia, Bahya, and Maimonides," in *Religion in a Religious Age*, ed. S. D. Goitein (Association for Jewish Studies, 1974), 25–33.

¹⁰⁹ The following account based on AY V: 21b–29a.

justice at stake in God's commanding man to remember things, since contrary to popular assumption, man's capacity for memory *is* within his power to control. Though to some extent determined by forces beyond him, in the final analysis it is up to man's free choice whether he will aid and supplement his natural capacity for memory, however limited, with tricks and devices designed to compensate for his deficiencies. But this in turn raises the question: what "devices" for supplementing memory does Arama have in mind? It is in this connection that he introduces the memory palace known to the "sages of the nations":¹¹⁰

We have found something like this among the sages of the nations, who developed a device that they advertised as improving the power of recollection and perfecting its deficiencies. The device they developed works by way of the imaginative faculty, employing it to imitate and conceptualize familiar signs and places in which one can deposit the notions desired, either according to some relation or likeness that obtains between that particular notion and that place, or else according to the time in which it was deposited. Subsequently, when he brings the familiar signs and places to his recollection, he shall recollect and recall the notions desired together with them, without a doubt.

The sage already wrote about this in the section on the natural sciences:¹¹¹ "[I]t is the nature of imitations and images that when your intellect is divided to correspond to the parts of a thing, e.g., a tree with branches, if the intellect orders one of the things in stages, it will imitate the rest of the ranks too, and will thereby recollect that which he forgot, and so on." Thus, he clarified that the device suffices not only to recollect things, but by way of dividing and ordering them.

¹¹⁰ AY V: 22b–23:

כמו שנמצא לחכמים מחכמי האומות המציאו תחבולה שפרסמו אותה להטיב כח הזכור ולהשלים חסרוננו והתחבולה אשר המציאוה בזה היא לחקות ולצייר בכח המדמה סימנים ידועים ומקומות מורגלים בהם יפקידו הענינים הנרצים לפי יחס או דמיון שיהיה לדבר המיוחד באותו מקום או זמן אשר נפקד אתו ואחרי כן בהעלות לפניו זכרון הסמנים והמקומות אשר הם קרובים אליו מאד יזכרו ויפקדו עמכם הדברים ההם הנרצים בלי ספק.

וכבר כתב החכם על זה בטבעיות ז"ל ומטבע החקויים והדמות עד שכאשר חלק שכלך אל חלקי הדבר חקוהו אילן בעל הענפים ואם שדר השכל דבר על מדרגות חקוהו במעלות והשלבים ובו יזכור מה ששכח וגו'. הנה ביאר שתספיק התחבולה לא לזכור הדברים לבד אבל דרך חלוקן וסדרן

¹¹¹ "The sage" Arama is referring to here is al-Ghazali, and the "section on the Natural Sciences" to a section of the latter's *Maqāsid al-Falāsifah* as popularized in Hebrew translation. The text Arama attributes to al-Ghazali corresponds verbatim with the anonymous Hebrew translation known as *Kavanot ha-filosofim* that circulated with Moses Narboni's commentary: see Russian State Library, Moscow, MS Guenzberg 92, fol. 95b. In his "Jewish Traditions on Strengthening Memory and Leone Modena's Evaluation," Gerrit Bos failed to recognize that Leon Modena excerpted this entire passage from Arama and mistook the references to the "sage" and "the section on the Natural Sciences" as referring to Aristotle and the *Parva naturalia*, respectively.

Though I have not found a direct source for Arama's account in the first paragraph of the passage above, the mnemonic device he describes is clearly a variant of the memory palace elaborated in pseudo-Cicero's *Rhetorica ad Herennium* and developed by monastic scholars. Most important is his description of the mechanism of the memory device as locative: according to Arama, the device works by imagining signs or places and depositing the thing to be recollected with/in those signs/images/places. Since the latter are easier to recollect, when one recollects them, one will also be able to recollect the desired notion on command. Though the memory palaces of the ancient world are diverse and often more detailed, they operate according to this same basic principle.¹¹² Nor is that all. Arama's account of the memory palace features other elements typical of classical *ars memorativa*. His discussion on whether memory is in a person's control, limned above, is an iteration of a standard introductory topos in memory treatises that addresses the distinction between natural and artificial memory.¹¹³ Though Arama does not use the language of artifice, the effect of his account is the same: he sets up the possibility of a mnemonic device by subverting the idea that memory is completely determined by nature and introducing the idea that memory can be improved through artifice. Other correspondences between Arama's account and classical accounts of the memory arts appear later. At one point, when describing the ideal memory device, Arama insists that it¹¹⁴

[sh]ould suffice to greatly improve the faculty of recollection in recollecting a number of things according to their order and number and in any way that you can think of—whether switching [some with others], or skipping [some], in whatever order you should wish. [With this invention, it is also possible] to recollect something by recollecting its number, or [to recollect] its number together with it, and [to recollect] anything that you should wish without error.

¹¹² See Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, 89–93; Nelson Novoa, “A Sephardic Art of Memory,” 91–94.

¹¹³ See Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, 88; Nelson Novoa, “A Sephardic Art of Memory,” 93.

¹¹⁴ AY V: 23a:

ותספיק להיטיב מאד הכח הזכרני להזכיר כמה דברים על סדרן ומספרן בכל הצדדים אשר תחשוב אם בחלופן אם בדלוגן על אי זה סדר שתרצה גם יזכר הדבר בזכור מספרו או מספרו עמו ובכל ענין שתרצה מבלי שום טעות

Arama stipulates that a good memory device enables one to recollect “in any way you can think of [...] in whatever order you should wish” rather than remember by rote. This too is a common feature of *ars memorativa* treatises: a standard distinguishing memory-by-rote from true recollection, through which one can recollect things in any way or order desired.¹¹⁵

After having thus introduced the nations’ memory device, Arama devotes much of the remainder of his discussion in Gate 90 to the project of domestication. Arama inaugurates his series of naturalizing moves by projecting knowledge of the nations’ memory device back into Jewish history and so rewriting the history of (Jewish) technology. Long before the nations’ spoke of the memory palace, Arama suggests, the Rabbis of late antiquity, and still earlier, the biblical prophets knew of the memory palace too: Evidence for Rabbinic knowledge of mnemotechnics, Arama tells us, can be found in b.Menahot where the Rabbis reading of Num 15.39 as an injunction to “see this commandment and remember another commandment that is contingent on it” attests to their understanding of how mnemonic devices work.¹¹⁶ Evidence for prophetic knowledge of mnemotechnics, in turn, can be found in the Rabbis’ assertion that

¹¹⁵ Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, 22–23, 40, 113. What’s more, in his descriptions of the memory device, Arama employs several technical terms that seem to mirror Latin terminology for theorizing memory. He asserts that memory devices work through a process of “division” (*derekh ḥiluqan*, ‘*al derekh ha-ḥiluq*), corresponding to the Latin *divisio*. As Carruthers has shown, *divisio* refers to a process common to major mnemonic techniques—namely, dividing the material to be remembered into smaller units for memorization and subsequent recollection, on which see Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, 106. Late medieval *artes praedicandi*, or preaching manuals, especially stress the importance of *divisio* in memorizing sermons, on which see idem., 109. Closely coupled with *hiluk/divisio* in Arama’s lexicon are the terms *seder* and *roshem*. The former corresponds with the notion of *ordo*, or “order,” the idea that after the material to be remembered is divided, it has to be arranged in some order (sometimes corresponding with numbers or the alphabet) in order to be accessed later; see Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, 8–9, 88, 100–103, 183, 202, 399. What Arama has in mind by the latter term, *roshem*, is more difficult to pin down. Based on his usage—coupling *roshem* with *ḥiluq* as mnemonic techniques and suggesting both are carried out by the imaginative and cogitative faculties—it seems reasonable to conjecture that he may have had in mind *images*, or the forming and placing of mental images.

¹¹⁶ AY V, 23a–b:

“No secret was hidden from our divine sages, for they preceded the sages of the nations in this matter, as it was taught in Menahot: ‘That you may look upon it and remember them,’ and so on [Num 15.39]—see this commandment and remember another commandment that is contingent on it. And which is that? It is the recitation of the Shema. As we learned: From when may one recite the Shema in the morning? From when one can distinguish between sky-blue and white. And it is taught elsewhere: that you may look upon it and remember—see this commandment and remember another commandment that is adjacent to it.”

various prophets attempted to encapsulate all the commandments in a few, brief principles: Clearly, the prophets were attempting to transform a handful of easy-to-remember commandments into a sort of locus or sign for recollecting other commandments. But lest one protest that Jewish knowledge of memory devices can be traced back only to the prophets, Arama pushes still further back into history, even transcending. The memory device, he explains, is literally of divine origin, bequeathed to the Israelites by God Himself:¹¹⁷

My heart spoke to me and said that the root of this noble thing was established by Moses, master of prophets, from the mouth of the mighty one. He put it in our mouths in order that we would remember all the commandments of the Lord that are incumbent upon us and be able to review them in our thoughts daily, forever, with minimal difficulty and burden. This consisted in his establishing that we should recite a small passage two or three times each day, forever, in order that it become fluent [even] in the mouths of sucklings and babes. Its words and chapter headings are most beneficial.

Arama's "small passage" recited "two or three times each day" that is supposed to function as a sort of memory palace for "remember[ing] all of the commandments [...] [and] review[ing] them in our thoughts daily" is of course a reference to the *shema*—the best-known prayer in Jewish liturgy. Thus the *shema*, Arama suggests, is the original, divine memory palace.¹¹⁸ Though he does not elaborate exactly how he envisions the mnemonic technique playing out, Arama seems to imagine that the words of the prayer (which are themselves "fixed in our hearts") are meant to serve as the signs/images/loci with which the commandments—the things to be remembered—are stored or deposited. And indeed, he goes on to bear out this idea through creative exegesis: Arama parses the *ve-ahavta* phrase by phrase, singling out keywords in each phrase and showing

¹¹⁷ AY V, 24a:

והנה לבי אומר לי כי עקר זה הענין הנכבד השרישו משה רבן של נביאים מפי הגבורה ושמו בפינו למען זכור את כל מצות יי' המוטלות עלינו ונוכל להעבירם בכל יום תמיד על רעיונינו במעט מהקושי והטורח. והוא במה שסדר לפנינו לקרוא פרש' קטנה בכל יום תמיד פעמים שלש כדי שתהא שגורה בפי עוללים ויונקים יועילו מאד דבריה וראשי פרקיה

¹¹⁸ Arama repeats this idea later in the *perishah* section of the Gate, see AY V, 26b:

Moses, the master of prophets, further intended that all the commandments of the Torah be recollected and performed by way of this tiny pericope, insofar as all its words are allusions and signs found and fixed in our hearts so that we can remember [all the commandments] by way of them [i.e., these words] if the one recollecting desires.

how those keywords are associatively linked with (and so constitute reasonable signs/loci for) certain classes of commandments. To name just one example, glossing the phrase *and teach them unto thy children*, Arama singles out *children* as a keyword and explains that it is to be associated with a class of commandments related to children:¹¹⁹

and teach them unto thy children [...] allude[s] to all the commandments that are contingent upon children, i.e., the commandments related to betrothal and the marriage-canopy, as well as all laws relating to marriage-contracts and circumcision and redemption of the firstborn and inheritances and the things concomitant with it.

And so on. In this way, Arama shows that the words of the *ve-ahavta* function as signs/loci with which various classes of commandments are to be deposited, transforming the prayer into a sort of memory palace for recollecting the commandments in the process.¹²⁰

In the next chapter I will suggest how—far from incidental or eclectic—Arama’s preoccupations with memory and the commandments reflected in the foregoing fit squarely into a constellation of themes lying at the center of his oeuvre. And in a separate study I show how Arama’s discussion and adaptation of the classical *ars memorativa* is remarkable from the perspective of Jewish intellectual history: Though earlier fifteenth century figures such as Ḥasdai Crescas and Profiat Duran had also taken an interest in memory, as far as I know Arama’s is one of the earliest discussions of the memory palace in Hebrew.¹²¹ Yet what remains most important about Arama’s transformation of the *shema* into memory palace for the purposes of the present chapter is how it further expands and nuances our understanding of his domestications of philosophy. Most obviously, this example expands our understanding of the “philosophy” Arama domesticates—extending this to include also philosophy from the Latin Christian world. Though

¹¹⁹ AY V, 27a:

ושננתם לבניך... וירמוז גם כן אל כל המצות התלויות בבנים ושם מצות קדושין וחופה וכל דיני כתובות ומצות מילה ומשפט הבכורה בפדיון גם בנחלה וכל דיני ירושות ונחלות והדברים הנלוים אליהם

¹²⁰ For more examples, see my “*Shema* as Memory Palace.”

¹²¹ Katz, “*Shema* as Memory Palace.”

scholars have long speculated on the relationship between later medieval Spanish-Jewish philosophy and contemporary Christian philosophy, and though several strides have been made in recent decades, examples of Jewish texts—and especially texts that are not narrowly “scientific”—borrowing ideas that can be traced back to non-Jewish contexts remain relatively scant.¹²² While our inability to identify the exact source of Arama’s description of the nations’ memory palace impedes a strong contribution in this direction, Arama’s recourse to classical ideas that were in any event not popular in Hebrew literature and therefore likely encountered through Christian contexts both corroborates longstanding scholarly speculations about late medieval Jewish dependence on Christian thought, and bespeaks the diversity of philosophies Arama saw as fitting source material.

But still this is not all; Arama’s adaptation of the classical memory palace nuances and expands our understanding of the varieties of “domestication” in which Arama was engaged as well. As I suggested above, the various strategies of domestication Arama employs here—rewriting history, suggesting that philosophical knowledge contemporarily attributed to the nations has a concealed Jewish origin, and creatively interpreting scripture to underwrite that historical revisionism—all come straight out of Maimonides’ playbook. Towards the end of the first part of the *Guide*, Maimonides had offered a powerful revisionist history of his own:¹²³

¹²² See Mauro Zonta, “Latin Scholastic Influences on Late Medieval Hebrew Physics: The State of the Art,” in *Science in Medieval Jewish Cultures*, ed. Gad Freudenthal (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 207–216; Ruth Glasner, “The Evolution of the Genre of the Philosophical-Scientific Commentary: Hebrew supercommentaries on Aristotle’s *Physics*,” in *Science in Medieval Jewish Cultures*, 182–206; Neria, “Joseph ibn Shem Tob’s Commentary on Aristotle’s *Ethics*,” Tirosh-Rothschild, “Human Felicity,” Charles H. Manekin, “Scholastic Logic and the Jews,” *Bulletin de Philosophie Médiévale* 41 (1999); Daniel J. Lasker, “The Impact of Christianity on Late Iberian Jewish Philosophy,” in *In Iberia and Beyond: Hispanic Jews Between Cultures*, ed. Bernard Dov Cooperman (University of Delaware Press, 1998), 175–90; Tamar M. Rudavsky, “The Impact of Scholasticism upon Jewish Philosophy in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, eds. D. H. Frank and O. Leaman (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 345–70; Ari Ackerman, “Jewish Philosophy and the Jewish-Christian Philosophical Dialogue in Fifteenth Century Spain,” in *Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, 371–90.

¹²³ See *Guide* I.71.

Contemporary Jewish ignorance was not constitutive, Maimonides suggested, but rather circumstantial, a product of the Jews' historical and material conditions suffering in lengthy exile. All the scientific knowledge that contemporary Jews encountered in foreign books had once upon a time, first and foremost been a Jewish proprium. Only over the years, the Jews' suffering continual conquest caused them to lose hold of the stores of knowledge that were originally and so rightfully theirs. Though Maimonides explicitly framed this revisionist history as an apologetic one, a defense for contemporary Jews' relative philosophic and scientific ignorance, it also served a second apologetic function, namely, to justify Maimonides' broader project of reading scripture through the lens of Aristotelian philosophy in the *Guide*.

Maimonides' revisionist history cast his philosophical-allegorical exegesis in a new light: If so-called Aristotelian philosophy was in truth and originally crypto-Jewish philosophy only by another name, Maimonides was not reading philosophy into scripture but rather out of it, not engaged in a radical project of distortion or even harmonization, but a fundamentally conservative one of restoration and recovery. Moving in the other direction, Maimonides' creative, philosophical-allegorical exegesis served to authenticate and reciprocally underwrite his revisionist history in turn, confirming that apparently foreign science and philosophy was in fact familiar, canonical, even divine. Revisionist history and creative exegesis thus mutually underwrite each other and together facilitate the naturalization and domestication of putatively foreign or external knowledge. Arama clearly applied these exact same insights in his adaptation of the *shema*-as-memory palace, domesticating the classical *ars memorativa* in the exact same way.

3. Jewish Supremacy

3.1. Introduction

The third and final aspect of Arama's oeuvre to which we will turn our attention is a constellation of themes that can be coordinated around two primary and interlinking axes: concern for the masses and Jewish supremacy. Across the examples we've discussed in the previous two chapters, time and again we've encountered Arama contesting various aspects of the Maimonidean or Jewish Aristotelian consensus: its theories of human nature, purpose, and perfection; its theories of providence and immortality; its theories of action and commandment. Though given our focuses in those chapters, we've attended primarily to the superficial details of Arama's engagements with these themes—i.e., his concern for exegesis and subversion of philosophical sources—at play in all these engagements is also a powerful, subterranean current, uniting and lending coherence to Arama's seemingly disparate attacks: a critique of intellectual elitism.

Scholars have long been aware of the irony that, for all of the Maimonidean tradition's embrace of esotericism and the need to keep some truths secret, it is quite open in its expressions of intellectual elitism:¹ not only in the intellectually elitist content of its theories, but also at the basic level of rhetoric, in its frequent denigration of and open scorn for the ignorant masses.²

¹ Focused discussions of elitism as an omnipresent backdrop to Maimonides' *Guide* and the Maimonidean tradition more generally have unfortunately been scant. Some classical studies not explicitly on this subject but closely related to it are Leo Strauss, "Some Remarks on the Political Science of Maimonides and al-Farabi," trans. Robert Bartlett, *Interpretation* 18 (1990): 3–30. Leo Strauss, "The Literary Character of *The Guide of the Perplexed*," in idem., *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (University of Chicago Press, 1952); Lawrence Berman, "Maimonides, the Disciple of al-Farabi," *Israel Oriental Studies* 4 (1974): 154–178. More recently, Igor H. de Souza has focused on elitism as a major topos in Moses Narboni's commentary to *The Guide*, see Igor H. de Souza, *Rewriting Maimonides: Early Commentaries on the Guide of the Perplexed* (De Gruyter, 2018); Adrian Sackson has briefly discussed the centrality of the elite to Joseph ibn Kaspi's thought, on which see Adrian Sackson, *Joseph ibn Kaspi: Portrait of a Hebrew Philosopher in Medieval Provence* (Brill, 2017), 75–76; while Gad Freudenthal has examined the scientific theories underpinning Maimonidean elitism in his "The Biological Foundations of Intellectual Elitism: Maimonides vs. al-Farabi," in *Maimonidean Studies*, vol.5, eds. Arthur Hyman and Alfred Ivry (Yeshiva University Press, 2008): 293–323.

² To cite only a few choice examples from the *Guide*:

Virtually all of Arama's challenges to the Maimonidean tradition are animated by an animus against precisely this: the exclusivism and elitism so evident in the Maimonidean project. In opposition, Arama explicitly and consistently articulates both his and scripture's supreme concern for and commitment to the common people, in all their profound limitations, over and against the intellectual elite. Critiquing a tradition that would find in the Rabbinic dictum "the Torah speaks in the language of man" a tone of divine condescension, Arama insists that it must instead reflect profound divine grace and compassion.

To this end, Arama constructs a robust and comprehensive counter-theory, meeting Maimonidean intellectual elitism with concern for the limited masses point for point: Revelation and its theories of human nature, perfection, action, commandment, and immortality are all designed not principally for the philosophic few, but rather for the many; the Torah is God's gift to elevate the everyman not merely to the level of correct-but-still-ultimately-impoverished beliefs and actions but rather to the highest heights of human existence. To be a meaningful tool of immortality, Arama insists in no uncertain terms, the Torah must make immortality readily and easily accessible to all—but not all without qualification. For in the process of developing alternative theories that extend the loftiest possibilities of human existence beyond the intellectual elite and to the common man, Arama forecloses these same possibilities from all that

III.18=Pines, 475: "As for the ignorant and disobedient, their state is despicable proportionately to the lack of this overflow, and they have been relegated to the rank of the individuals of all other species of animals: *He is like the beasts that speak not* (Ps. 49:13, 21). For this reason, it is a light thing to kill them, and has been even enjoined because of its utility."

III.8=Pines, 432–3: "This is like the case of a man with whom the ruler had become very angry; he ordered him accordingly, with a view to humiliating him, to transport dung from one place to another....[In contrast to a free man] a slave, however, would rejoice in this and would not consider that he had been subjected to great hardship. He would throw himself with his whole body into this dung and filth, soil his face and hands, and carry the dung in public, laughing the while and rejoicing and clapping his hands. The state of various classes of people if similar...[For] those who are separated from God by a veil, being the multitude and the ignorant...they refrain from all thought and perception about any intelligible thing and take as their end the sense that is our greatest shame, I mean, the sense of touch. Accordingly they have no thought and no perception except only in relation to eating and copulation, as has been stated clearly with regard to these wretched people wholly given over to eating, drinking, and copulating."

do not or cannot adhere to the commandments—not only in soul and intellect but also in body, not only spiritually but also materially, observing them to the letter. To cater to and assure the elevation of the everyman, Arama architects a theory of Jews as separate and superior species, a medieval theory of Jewish supremacy, replacing one exclusion with another.

In this way, Arama's concern for the masses and his critique of intellectual elitism, on the one hand, and his theory of Jews as separate species, on the other, not only mutually underwrite each other, but together constitute the ideological heart of Arama's positions on so many more familiar topical issues extending across AY and his other works. To name only a few of the examples that we have already seen, the twin axes of (1) concern for the masses and accompanying critique of intellectual elitism and (2) Jews as separate species help explain the shape of Arama's alternative theological anthropology;³ his drive to critique the ideas that immortality and the final purpose of human existence consist in intellectual perfection;⁴ his elevation of Eccl. 12:13 to the core of Solomon's teaching;⁵ and his insistence on the mundane and non-philosophical character of the commandments.⁶ As we will see later in this chapter, these twin axes also explain his theory of the mechanism of the commandments, i.e., how the commandments function in general,⁷ which in turn connects back to his interest in mnemonics and theory of *shema* as memory palace, discussed in the previous chapter;⁸ they explain too his original, alternative theory of the dietary laws;⁹ and his preoccupation with imagery of God's marriage to the community of Israel. Yet for all these twin axes' explanatory power, Arama's explicit discussion of them is admittedly limited: most of his direct remarks are found in Gates

³ See 1.3.2 above.

⁴ See 2.2.1; 2.2.3 above.

⁵ See 2.3.3 above.

⁶ See 2.3.2 above.

⁷ See 3.4.1 below.

⁸ See 2.4.1 above.

⁹ See 3.4.2 below.

we have already (indeed, strategically) encountered in previous chapters: Gate 60, Gate 45, and most of all Gate 44. How then is it justified to devote our sole, sustained treatment of themes to these twin axes when they can hardly claim to be comprehensive or representative?

I have chosen to focus on these twin axes not only because they lie at the ideological heart of Arama's concerns and thereby have great explanatory power, but because—as in both previous chapters—they productively challenge entrenched tendencies and preoccupations in the field of medieval Jewish intellectual history. In previous chapters, I have discussed how medieval Jewish intellectual history's origins in the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* movement and the latter's imbrication in nineteenth century political struggles for Jewish emancipation have had enduring effects on the shape of the field. There, I suggested that extra-academic imperatives to present Jews as good, enlightened citizens informed how early *Wissenschaft* scholars reconstructed medieval Jewish thought and history, emphasizing especially its rationalistic dimensions. That the *Wissenschaft* scholars' resulting image of medieval Judaism was a carefully curated one, selectively pruned and architected to conform to contemporary bourgeois ideals was pointed out most famously already in the early twentieth century by Gershom Scholem.¹⁰ By recovering Kabbalah and other traditions of medieval Jewish mysticism, Scholem powerfully critiqued *Wissenschaft*'s attempt to sanitize medieval Jewish thought and paved the way for generations of future scholars to tease out further complications.

Yet despite the enormous literature on Kabbalah that has proliferated in the intervening decades, and despite a more recent increase in scholarship on medieval Jewish magic and astrology, scholars of medieval Jewish philosophy have by and large remained invested in recovering and highlighting the more rationalistic and enlightened dimensions of their sources at

¹⁰ See Gershom Scholem, "Reflections on Modern Jewish Studies," and David Biale, *Gershom Scholem: Kabbalah and Counter-History*, second edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

the expense of more illiberal aspects.¹¹ This can be seen most clearly in modern scholars' preference for treating figures who are perceived as more "radical" or, to invoke Davidson's spectrum, on the "left," as against "conservative" figures on the "right."¹² While scholars continue to lavish attention on not only major figures such as Joseph ibn Kaspi, Gersonides, and Moses Narboni, but also lesser-known figures such as Judah ha-Kohen, Jacob Anatoli, Shem Tov Falaquera, Immanuel of Rome, Levi b. Abraham, and Nissim of Marseilles, their more "conservative" but equally if not more popular contemporaries are passed over, especially outside the world of Hebrew scholarship: figures such as Jacob b. Sheshet, Solomon ibn Adret, Yom Tov Ishbili, and Nissim of Gerona.¹³ Meanwhile "conservative" figures of medieval Jewish philosophy who are simply too monumental to be ignored—Judah Halevi, Nahmanides, and Hasdai Crescas—have often been siloed, presented as exceptions that prove the rule that rationalism and even a certain liberalism constitute the dominant current if not the core of medieval Jewish thought.

But individual figures are not the only casualties of the enduring scholarly tendency to emphasize medieval Jewish philosophy's more enlightened and proto-liberal dimensions. This

¹¹ Leo Strauss' influential reading of the *Guide* as an esoteric and intellectually elitist text did of course underscore the *Guide*'s illiberalism, but interestingly, most subsequent scholarship in medieval Jewish intellectual history have used the intellectually elitist dimensions of medieval Jewish thought to underwrite—not anti-modern illiberalism as Strauss did—but rather an intellectualist universalism. This comes through most clearly in the scholarship of Menachem Kellner, though it is evident elsewhere as well. See Menachem Kellner, *We Are Not Alone: A Maimonidean Theology of the Other* (Academic Studies Press, 2022); Menachem Kellner and David Gillis, *Maimonides the Universalist: The Ethical Horizons of the Mishneh Torah* (Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2020); Menachem Kellner, *Science in the Bet Midrash: Studies in Maimonides* (Academic Studies Press, 2009).

¹² See 0.3.3 above.

¹³ Consider the following recent studies on "radical" thinkers, as against the absence of comparative studies on so-called "conservatives" or "moderates:" Dana Fishkin, *Bridging Worlds: Poetry and Philosophy in the Works of Immanuel of Rome* (Wayne State University Press, 2023); Yonatan Shemesh, "Averroes as Intertext: Moses Narboni's Commentary on Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*," (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2021); Gadi Weber, "Studies on R. Yaaqov Anatoli's *Malmad ha-Talmidim*" (PhD diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2019); Howard Kreisel, *Judaism as Philosophy: Studies in Maimonides and the Medieval Jewish Philosophers of Provence* (Academic Studies Press, 2015); Ruth Glasner, *Gersonides: A Portrait of a Fourteenth-Century Philosopher-Scientist* (Oxford University Press, 2015); Adrian Sackson, *Joseph ibn Kaspi*.

tendency is also expressed in a related preoccupation with certain themes and topics at the expense of others. In this connection, one theme that has received strikingly little scholarly attention in recent years, especially given concurrent shifts in the fields of both Jewish Studies and Medieval Studies, is that of Jewish “chosenness,” exceptionalism, or particularism—all closely bound up with ideas of Jewish race.¹⁴ While a handful of figures and texts have long been known to clearly espouse notions of Israel’s unique and superior metaphysical status among the nations—not incidentally, figures by and large reflected in the list of siloed arch-conservative others limned above—these discussions have been tacitly exceptionalized by scholars on a similar logic. Isolated as aberrations, Halevi’s *amr illahi* and Nahmanides’ and the Zohar’s identifications of Israel with part of the Godhead serve to reify rather than trouble the idea that medieval Jewish philosophy broadly either does not have a substantial conceptualization of

¹⁴ Evidence of a growing focus on race in both Medieval Studies and Jewish Studies is enormous. For the former, consider only Geraldine Heng’s landmark *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge University Press, 2018); Sara Ahmed, “Race as Sedimented History,” *postmedieval* 6.1 (2015): 94–97; Benjamin Braude, “The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (1997): 103–142; Rachel Schine, *Black Knights: Arabic Epic and the Making of Medieval Race* (University of Chicago Press, 2024). For the latter, consider: Paul E. Nahme, *Ghost People: Race, Religion, and the Affective Sources of Jewish Identity* (Oxford University Press, 2024); Alan Verskin, *Diary of a Black Jewish Messiah: The Sixteenth-Century Journey of David Reubeni through Africa, the Middle East, and Europe* (Stanford University Press, 2023). Exceptions to the broader trend of scholarly neglect can be found in the work of Hartley Lachter, and earlier, Eleazar Gutwirth. For Lachter, see Hartley Lachter, “Israel as a Holy People in Medieval Kabbalah,” in *Holiness in Jewish Thought*, ed. Alan L. Mittleman (Oxford University Press, 2018), 137–158; Hartley Lachter, “Universal Singularities: Elliot R. Wolfson on Jewish Ethnocentrism,” in *New Paths: A Festschrift in Honor of Professor Elliot Wolfson*, eds. Glenn Dynner, Susannah Heschel, and Shaul Magid. (Purdue University Press, 2024), 345–360. Lachter’s introduction to the first of these articles highlights the stakes of why a return to questions of Jewish supremacy in medieval thought is paramount. For Gutwirth, see Eleazar Gutwirth, “Contempt for the Lower Orders in XVth Century Hispano-Jewish Thought,” *Miscelánea de Estudios Árabes y Hebraicos*, 30 (1981): 83–98; Eleazar Gutwirth, “Lineage in Fifteenth Century Hispano-Jewish Thought,” *Miscelánea de Estudios Árabes y Hebraicos* 34 (1985). In both articles, Gutwirth posits strong conceptualizations of hierarchy *internal* to the Spanish Jewish community. In the latter, Gutwirth suggests that many of Arama’s contemporaries had a well-defined and positive conceptualization of *yihus* or lineage as linked to blood. Though more research needs to be carried out, I cannot help but wonder whether Arama articulates his very different theory of Jews as separate species—not divided internally by lineage, but rather collective in their species-supremacy above all other humans—against this background; in an effort to consolidate “Jews” against intra-communal divisions.

Jewish particularism, or else, behind several veils, ultimately espouses a certain intellectualist universalism.

Scholars' reticence to engage medieval Jewish theories of Jewish particularism and exceptionalism—if not their strong suggestions that medieval Jewish philosophy esoterically conceals a sort of universalism—is understandable not only in light of *Wissenschaft's* historic investments in recovering/constructing an enlightened medieval Judaism. It must also be understood in light of another scholarly debate—with roots in the late nineteenth century and engaging scholars over a century later—surrounding the “origins” of the Sephardic and Spanish preoccupation with lineage.¹⁵ Was it originally the Sephardim who were obsessed by issues of lineage, or was it the Spaniards? Far from dispassionate historicist investigation, David Nirenberg explains that this debate was “among the most polemical issues in the scholarly literature on Spanish and Sephardic identity” because ascribing origins was a means of assigning and exculpating blame:¹⁶ “If the Jews gave birth to ‘racism’ and the spirit of exclusion according to birth, then is there not a certain exculpatory irony in the fact that their own monstrous children turned so violently against them?”¹⁷ Accordingly, in the mid twentieth century, a range of Jewish social historians “strenuously argued” against Spanish historians that the origins of racial thinking lay not with the medieval Sephardim but rather with the Spanish Christians—in some cases even defending the former of wrongful charges.¹⁸ Though the shape of scholarly questions

¹⁵ The following discussion is based off of David Nirenberg, “Mass Conversion and Genealogical Mentalities: Jews and Christians in Fifteenth-Century Spain,” *Past & Present* 174 (2002): 3–41.

¹⁶ Nirenberg, “Genealogical Mentalities,” 4.

¹⁷ Nirenberg, “Genealogical Mentalities,” 5.

¹⁸ Nirenberg, “Genealogical Mentalities,” 5. Notably, Gutwirth opens his study on “Lineage” by citing one salvo in this heated debate, in which H. H. Ben-Sasson marshalled none other than Arama to defend the openness of Expulsion-era Spanish Judaism against the contentions of Americo Castro. Ben-Sasson’s reading of the passage of Arama—which he uses to advance the idea that Arama “places no importance on the concept of ‘purity of blood’ for [he] is prepared to accept anyone who comes with a pure heart and is willing to fulfill the commandments and the Law of the Torah”—is a shockingly strained one. For in my view, in the relevant passage, Arama makes precisely the opposite point, i.e., that Jewishness is essential, immutable, and *not* contingent on more fickle matters of faith.

and concerns has since evolved far beyond the debate on “origins,” in no small part thanks to Nirenberg’s scholarship, in the intervening decades Iberianists have continued to think about the varieties of racial thinking produced in late medieval Spain. Yet while a handful of these have focused on converso identities and while an even smaller handful of these have focused on Hebrew and/or Jewish sources, in general it is as though scholars of medieval Jewish thought have written off the possibility of medieval Jewish racial thinking and particularism out of hand—as either the business of another discipline, or the vexing ghost of a bygone argument.

While I certainly have no interest in reviving old “moralizing logic[s]” of origins and blame, I believe that the silence that has come to take their place in medieval Jewish intellectual history—a silence that exceptionalizes figures like Halevi and would *prima facie* exculpate most medieval Jewish figures from forms of racial thinking, thereby underwriting a quietly triumphalist narrative of medieval Jewish thought as “open,” liberal before its time—is problematic in its own right and in need in troubling. This is precisely why I have devoted this chapter to engaging Arama’s theories of Jews as separate species and concern for the collective; to take a first step at reviving this issue as one worthy of scholarly attention. What’s more, closer examination of Arama’s theories of Jews as separate species and concern for the collective only further highlight that questions concerning medieval Jewish exceptionalism and particularism are worthy of scholarly attention. For as we will see, though Arama is especially clear and forceful in articulating his theory of Jews as separate species and in elaborating it throughout other aspects of his oeuvre, in an important sense his theory is not at all exceptional. Rather—building on the insights of the previous two chapters—we will see that virtually all the building blocks for Arama’s ostensibly anti-Maimonidean theories are drawn straight out of the heart of the

See H. H. Ben-Sasson, “The Generation of the Spanish Exiles on its Fate,” *Zion* 26 (1961), 36–37, citing AY Gates 97 and 98.

medieval Jewish philosophical tradition itself: the conceptual vocabulary and moral arguments underpinning his concern for the masses/anti-elitism, as well as the conceptual vocabulary, and moral and biological arguments underpinning his theory of Jews as separate species.¹⁹ Said differently, Arama's forceful critique of (Maimonidean) intellectual elitism and even more so, his complementary, robust theory of Jewish particularism and supremacy are constructed from materials immanent to Maimonideanism and Jewish Aristotelianism.

In contrast to the previous two chapters, wherein my concern was to illustrate discrete patterns in Arama's relations to and uses of sources, in this chapter my goal is much more expository: simply to unfold and present the multiple and multiply ramifying elements of Arama's twin axes of (1) concern for the masses and accompanying critique of intellectual elitism and (2) Jews as separate species. Accordingly, the arguments of this chapter will proceed more narratively and cumulatively, through analyses of the key component parts of Arama's commitment to the collective and theory of Jews as separate species, and how these are both reflected and underwritten by his theory of the commandments. Throughout, I will pay particular attention to how Arama mobilizes the patterns identified in the previous two chapters to construct these putatively anti-Maimonidean theories through creative recourse to Maimonidean tools, offering an immanent critique.

3.2. Good Intentions: Concern for the Collective, Critique of Intellectual Elitism

I begin with the theme of concern for the collective and critique of intellectual elitism, one that will be striking to most modern students of medieval Jewish thought. Thanks to the work of Leo Strauss and his emphasis on reading Maimonides' *Guide* as an esoteric text, over the past several

¹⁹ See 3.2.2, 3.3.2 and subsections, and 3.4.2 below.

decades students of the *Guide* and medieval Jewish thought have been especially attuned to questions surrounding audience:²⁰ who is the *Guide* really written for, who does it only seem to be written for, and how do the answers to these respective questions as well as the distinction between them inform interpretation, what the text of the *Guide* means at various levels? Following Strauss, the scholarly consensus has been that the *Guide* is written for the elite philosophical few first and foremost—Maimonides’ scattered suggestions to the contrary a mere bow to the imperatives of esotericism.²¹ Towards the end of the *Guide*, Maimonides takes up the issue of elite individual’s relationship to the community, and at least on the surface claims that the community and *not* the lone individual always takes priority in connection with the Torah and commandments.²² Yet so much else of what Maimonides does in the *Guide* points in the opposite direction, at least begging the question: his alternative conceptualization of providence is highly individualistic; his reimagining of salvation history, already discussed in previous chapters, assigns priority to select great men rather than collectives; formally, he presents the *Guide* in the framework of an epistolary correspondence to an addressee that is quite learned if not intellectually gifted; rhetorically, he never tires of appealing to select individuals who distinguish themselves from the masses, the latter of whom he speaks of only with contempt; relatedly, his framework of scriptural esotericism reserves the best and most refined truth only for individuals, the vulgar collective condemned to crass administration.²³

²⁰ Strauss, “The Literary Character of *The Guide of the Perplexed*,” Strauss, “How to Begin to Study *The Guide of the Perplexed*.”

²¹ See e.g., Warren Zev Harvey, “How to Begin to Study Strauss’ ‘How to Begin to Study the *Guide of the Perplexed*,” in *Interpreting Maimonides: Critical Essays*, eds. Charles H. Manekin and Daniel Davies (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 228–246; Warren Zev Harvey, “How Leo Strauss Paralyzed the Study of the *Guide of the Perplexed* in the Twentieth Century,” *Iyyun* 50 (2001): 387–396.

²² See *Guide* III.34 and *Guide* III.51 in connection with 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 Prof. Emanuel Rackman*, ed. Moshe Beer (Bar-Ilan University Press, 1994), 49–57.

²³ For Maimonides’ conceptualization of providence, see Charles M. Raffel, “Providence as Consequent Upon the Intellect: Maimonides’ Theory of Providence,” *AJS Review*, 12.1 (1987): 25–71; for his reimagining of salvation

While Maimonides' seeming preference for the elite individual is tempered by occasional equivocation and contradiction, his followers showed even less reticence. Samuel ibn Tibbon developed a strongly intellectualist and so individualistic theory of immortality that left no room for the masses, while his son Moses ibn Tibbon made that same individualistic conceptualization of immortality the bedrock of his interpretation of Song of Songs, casting its traditional subject as God's love affair with the collective Israel far aside.²⁴ In their respective remarks on Song of Songs, Immanuel of Rome, Joseph ibn Kaspi, and Gersonides all follow Moses ibn Tibbon's basic suit.²⁵ Indeed, intellectual elitism was something of a consensus in post-Maimonidean medieval Hebrew literature, reflected in a broad and diverse range of works from Abraham Abulafia's *Or ha-Sekhel* to Moses Narboni's commentary on Hayy ibn Yaqzan.²⁶

Though it is beyond the scope of the present research to speculate on the historical audiences of Arama's sermons, and though given both the style and substance of AY, it is difficult to imagine that Arama had a particularly expansive conceptualization of its intended audience, still, in terms of ideas and ideology, one of Arama's primary concerns throughout AY is to replace medieval Jewish thought's overemphasis on the elite individual with a preeminent concern for the collective—the uneducated masses, women and children. Said differently, at least in theory, Arama's commitment is resoundingly to the many over the one. This

history, see 2.3.2 above; for the epistolary framework of the *Guide* and its imagined addressee, see *Guide*, Epistle Dedicatory and Strauss, "How to Begin to Study *The Guide of the Perplexed*." For Maimonides' contempt for the masses, see the examples cited in note 2 above.

²⁴ On Moses ibn Tibbon's commentary, see Menachem Kellner, "Communication or Lack Thereof Among 13th-14th Century Provençal Jewish Philosophers: Moses ibn Tibbon and Gersonides on Song of Songs," in *Communication in the Jewish Diaspora*, ed. S. Menache, (Leiden: Brill, 1996): 227–55.

²⁵ For Gersonides, see Menachem Kellner, "Gersonides on the Song of Songs and the Nature of Science," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 4 (1994): 1–21.

²⁶ For Abulafia, see Moshe Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia* (SUNY Press, 1988); Narboni on Hayy, see Shemesh, "Moses Narboni's Commentary on Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*," 67–68. It is worth noting that in fourteenth and fifteenth century Spain, the consensus of intellectual elitism was not without countercurrents however: Beyond Crescas, discussed in the last chapter, one might consider Joseph Albo's *Book of Principles*, the works of Joseph ibn Shem Tob, and an emerging body of *derashot* literature.

commitment to the collective is laced throughout his oeuvre and plays out on several different levels: On the formal level, it is reflected in his choice of the popular sermon as literary framework, in his eschewal of esotericism, in his frequent recourse to imaginative midrashim and parables, and in his focus on interpreting popular prayers.²⁷ On the level of dogma, it is reflected in his (re-)conceptualizations of providence and immortality, the latter of which we will discuss further shortly. But most important for our present purposes and as suggested in the introduction to this chapter, Arama's commitment to the collective underpins a constellation of themes that lie at the center of his oeuvre: it drives his thoroughgoing critique of intellectual elitism, his emphasis on the primacy of material, bodily action in the commandments, and ultimately his theory of Jewish supremacy—how the Jews come to be constituted as a separate and superior species of human through adherence to the commandments.

Though we might be inclined to view Arama's care for the collective and corresponding critiques of elitism sympathetically from a certain contemporary perspective—Arama for the 99%—it is crucial to emphasize that the collective for which he is concerned is not the universal human collective, but rather a very particular one: namely, the community of Israel, the community of Jews. For in his efforts to include those disenfranchised by Maimonidean intellectual elitism into his vision of the fully human, Arama creates another exclusion, condemning all who do not observe the Torah's commandments to the peripheries of the divine image. Arama's expanding the object of his care beyond the elite comes at a cost.

In later sections of this chapter, I will turn to focusing on the reverberations of Arama's emphasis on the collective in his articulation of a theory of Jewish supremacy and

²⁷ In his Introduction to AY, Arama specifies that he has written the work for the benefit of people who are in some way limited in their capacity. In addition to Arama's frequent recourse to imaginative midrashim for his *ma'amarot*, Heller-Wilensky, *Arama*, 41 catalogues his use of parables.

conceptualization of the commandments and their mechanics.²⁸ But first, in this section, I will focus on Arama's concern for the collective itself—his express formulations, their historical sources, and their varied resonances.

3.2.1. *Qalut* and *Kelalut* I: Naming the Virtues of Accessibility

Though as I suggested above and as we will see throughout this chapter, Arama's concern for the collective reverberates in varied ways throughout his oeuvre, his most express articulations are found in a Gate we've already touched on in examples in both previous chapters, namely, Gate 44: In the previous chapter examining domestication(s) of philosophy, we encountered Arama drawing inspiration from Ḥasdai Crescas to attack the Jewish Aristotelian theory of immortality from the inside out, arguing that the theory falls apart on the philosophers' own technical terms.²⁹ And in the chapter examining exegetical confrontations, we saw Arama creatively drawing on the imagery of fourteenth-century philosophical poem *Behinat Olam* to elaborate an alternative, theological anthropology, replacing the dominant Aristotelian philosophical anthropology defining man as rational animal.³⁰ There I noted that much of Arama's creative exegesis of *Behinat Olam* served to elaborate key conceptual distinctions, and in particular, to flesh out the idea that according to Arama's alternative theological anthropology, the subject of immortality is *not* the individual man, as Aristotelian philosophical anthropology envisions, but rather the collective of Israel—for which Arama uses the term *kelalut*.³¹

²⁸ See 3.3 and 3.4, both with subsections, below.

²⁹ See 2.2.1 above.

³⁰ See 1.3.2 above.

³¹ See my translation of Gate 44 in Part II, sec. [13]: "Rather, everything he said in connection with this allegory should be understood as pertaining to the entirety (*kelalut*) of the chosen nation, people of the Torah and commandment."

Later in Gate 44, after having both advanced his technical critique of the philosophical theory of immortality and outlined his alternative, collective theological anthropology, Arama fleshes out the connection between the two, suggesting that they are animated by one and the same force: his deep concern for the collective, and evaluation of any theories that fail it as inadequate. Arama gives voice to these concerns in formulating another, different critique of the philosophical theory of immortality. But this time, rather than exposing the theory's technical incoherence and non-viability, he attacks with a passionate appeal to moral and political principles. The philosophical theory of immortality, Arama now says, is not viable because it fails to meet four criteria. Immortality³² must not only be (1) *possible* to attain, but further, it must be (2) relatively easy to attain (“proximate”), (3) attainable by most rather than few (*kolel*), and (4) a status difficult to lose once attained. If a theory of immortality fails to meet these criteria, Arama further tells us, it is effectively tantamount to denying the possibility of immortality altogether. In other words, with (2) and (3) especially, Arama insists that immortality must not only be technically possible; for it to be meaningfully possible it must also be *inclusive* and *accessible*, i.e., attainable by most people, and with relative ease, for the most part. Here is what Arama says:³³

“Now that (1) the possibility of conjunction and participation with the uppermost by way of the divine Torah was made clear in Part I, as was mentioned, it remains to investigate and know the force and nature of this possibility. I mean, (2) whether it is a proximate possibility or whether it is only remotely [possible]. For if it is only remotely possible, it is nearly impossible. And (3) if it is a proximate possibility but is not inclusive (*kolel*), and rather reserved for a select elite, then its benefit is small. “For the sons of the most high, they are few” (b. Sanh. 97b). Again, (4) if it is proximate and easily acquired, but is also easily

³² Arama prefers the standard synonyms “conjunction” and “participation.”

³³ אחר שנתבאר בחלק הא' אפשרות הדבקות והשתוף... יש עוד לחקור ולדעת כח זה האפשרות וענינו רצוני אם הוא אפשר קרוב או רחוק. לפי שאם היה אפשר רחוק הנה הוא קרוב לגמנע. גם אם היה אפשר קרוב ובלתי כולל רק אל יחידי הסגולה לבד הנה יהיה התועלת מועט לראות כי בני עליה הנם מעטים. וגם אם היה קרוב ונוח לקנותו אמנם היה ג"כ קרוב ונוח לאבדו הנה יהיה קל ההסרה: וכל אחד מאלו העניינים הוא מה שיחליש מציאות זה השותף או שיישבנו כאלו אינו

lost, then it is easily removed. Each of these either weakens the participation or makes it as if it did not exist at all.”

That Arama is here critiquing the same philosophical conceptualization of immortality we saw him critiquing earlier is clear from his allusion to b. Sanh. 97b: “for one sees that the sons of the most high, they are few.” Samuel ibn Tibbon—who was in turn developing Maimonides’ suggestions in the *Guide*—had used this same Rabbinic phrase to signify the scarcity of the intellectual elite who are able to perfect their intellects and attain immortality.³⁴ But whereas ibn Tibbon and others had glorified both the difficulty of attaining the intellectual perfection prerequisite to immortality and the consequent rarity of attaining immortality, Arama condemns these same features as vices and names their opposites as virtues. A robust conceptualization of immortality, Arama insists, must rather be both easy to attain (*qalut*) and attainable for the masses (*kolel*, *kelalut*). The term he uses to denote attainability for the masses, *kolel*, is closely connected with the term he used earlier when declaring that the subject of his alternative theological anthropology is not the individual but rather the collective, the *kelalut*, of Israel. The connection is not incidental: for Arama, an immortality that is restricted to “select, elite individuals” is not a meaningful one, at best of little benefit, at worst, “as if it did not exist at all.” Arama thus gives explicit name to the virtues of accessibility—ease and inclusivity, *qalut* and *kelalut*—suggesting it is his concern for the welfare of the masses that has motivated both his critique(s) of the philosophical theory of immortality and his construction of an alternative, theological anthropology.

3.2.2. *Qalut* and *Kelalut* II: Virtues of Accessibility in Context

³⁴ Robinson, *Samuel ibn Tibbon*, 53–54; *Guide* I.34 (Pines, 73).

While we might be tempted to read Arama's concern for mass welfare here as resonant with contemporary values, his insistence upon “ease” (*qalut*) and “inclusivity” (*kelalut*) very much emerges out of a fifteenth-century Iberian context. Indeed, Joseph b. Shem Tob ibn Shem Tob—whose commentary on *Ethics* we saw Arama drawing on in the previous chapter—singles out these same two virtues in a very similar manner in his Hebrew preaching manual *Ein ha-Qore*, the first Hebrew ars praedicandi.³⁵

Discussing life in the world to come, Joseph b. Shem Tov posed a question about the relationships between intellectual achievement, immortality, and the commandments: If intellectual attainment is sufficient to bring about a certain degree of felicity,³⁶ Joseph wondered, why was it necessary for God to give the commandments at all? To furnish an answer, Joseph devotes a lengthy discussion to recounting the uses or benefits (*to 'aliyot*) of the commandments, singling out four. Most interesting for our purposes are three and four, which Joseph treats at greater length than one and two,³⁷ namely: (3) the commandments make it such that felicity can be realized with *ease* (*qalut*),³⁸ and (4) the commandments make it such that felicity is *inclusive of the multitude* (*kolelut*).³⁹ These latter two reasons for the commandments that Joseph gives are, of course, nearly identical to two of the requirements Arama stipulated for a meaningful conceptualization of immortality above.

³⁵ On *Ein ha-Qore*, see Neria, “The Sermon in Late Medieval Jewish Thought,” and Saperstein, *Jewish Preaching*, 169–179. The following analysis is based off *Ein ha-Qore* as found in Jewish Theological Seminary, Ms. 10759. NLI no. F 4580; fol. 76–78. The relationship between Arama’s sermons and Joseph’s *Ein ha-Qore* deserves further study.

³⁶ A close relative of immortality.

³⁷ The first two purposes are (1) that the delight and perfection the commandments acquire for the soul is greater, truer, and more sublime than that acquired by intellectual perfection and (2) that the commandments do, in fact, acquire one happiness in this life also. The first of these is the Thomistic principle for which Joseph is best known to the history of Jewish thought, i.e., intellectual perfection constitutes the highest level of perfection attainable by man alone and happiness in this world, but it is still inferior to that ultimate, higher perfection which constitutes eternal felicity.

³⁸ התכלית השלישי הוא מציאות ההצלחה בקלות

³⁹ כוללות ההצלחה האנושית להמון רב

But not only does Joseph employ nearly identical language to Arama, suggesting that felicity ought to be both easily and widely accessible. Like Arama, he also develops his insistence on “ease” and “inclusivity” out of a critique of the philosophic theory of immortality/felicity as precisely the opposite: i.e., difficult and exclusive, only attainable for a select few individuals. Joseph reasons that even if it is possible to attain immortality according to the philosophers’ theory, it must also be extremely difficult to attain, since even Averroes, one of the greatest philosophers of all time and second only to Aristotle, conceded as much. He decries the idea that felicity might only be attained through intellectual perfection on account of the latter’s exclusivity, claiming it “is impossible for the majority of men to attain, even if other men strive to the utmost of their abilities;” it may only be attained by “*one of a city or two of a family* (Jer. 3:14).”⁴⁰ Going farther still, Joseph explains that such an elitist and exclusive conceptualization of ultimate felicity is not merely unjust; moreover, it runs contrary to a teleological conceptualization of nature:⁴¹

“If there does not exist any other felicity in this apart from that human, intellectual felicity, the majority of the human species will exist in such a manner that they do not reach their felicity that is unique to them qua men — and this is lie! For nature, through God’s providence, strives to rightly guide all natural things in such a manner that they will acquire that thing which is unique to them—and which is necessary and beneficial—with most marvelous ease... Given all this, will it not strive to rightly guide the most precious among those species which are subject to generation and corruption, i.e., man? You shall see that nature has already acted in a manner opposite/contrary to this!”

⁴⁰ See *Guide* I.34 (Pines, 75) for Maimonides’ not-dissimilar appeal to this same turn of phrase from Jer. 3:14 in his discussion on “the causes that prevent the commencement of instruction with divine science, the indication of things that ought to be indicated, and the presentation of this to the multitude” in his broader treatment of the limitations of knowledge.

⁴¹ ואם לא היה בכאן הצלחה אחרת זולתי ההצלחה האנושית השכלית היה רוב מן האדם נמצא בזולת הצלחתו המיוחד ומן השקר שישתדל הטבע בהשגחת הש"י להיטיב הדברים הטבעיים כולם באופן יקנו הדבר המיוחד להם וההכרחי והמועיל בקלות נפלא... ולא ישתדל עם זה להיטיב המין היותר נבחר מהמינים ההווים והנפסדים אשר הוא האדם. ואתה תראה הטבע כבר פעל הפך זה

Joseph's basic argument here is that the final purpose of human existence cannot be intellectual felicity *because* such a telos is elitist: because such a telos is only realizable by a select few, it contradicts God's providential design of nature, which requires that a majority of any species will attain the telos unique to it. This argument hearkens back to Arama's remark, seen in the passage above, that a conjunction that is not easily attainable for the multitude is as good as no conjunction at all, further suggesting Arama may have been drawing upon Joseph. Yet Joseph's argument also resonates with aspects of Ḥasdai Crescas' critique of the acquired intellect, already mentioned in the previous chapter.⁴² As Zev Harvey points out, one way to gloss Crescas' argument outlined in the last chapter is by focusing on its "teleological" aspects: When Crescas suggests that the philosophers' theory of immortality requires man to become a separate intellect, he is in effect suggesting that the philosophers implicitly conceptualize man qua man as not having a telos (since his telos is to become something else—), violating the Aristotelian principle that every species has a telos.⁴³

Though Joseph's argument takes a slightly different direction, I cannot but wonder if he drew from Crescas, and Arama in turn drew from both Crescas and him. Like both Joseph and Arama later, Crescas also suggested a connection between his critique of the philosophical theory of immortality and his commitment to inclusivity and accessibility, the welfare of the masses. In a brief section at the end of *Light of the Lord*, Crescas takes up the question of whether a child who dies while still too young to have performed the commandments merits entry into the World to Come, i.e., immortality.⁴⁴ As if to lower the barriers of entry as far as possible, Crescas answers that the young child can attain requisite merit simply by echoing

⁴² See 2.2.1 above with notes.

⁴³ Harvey, "Crescas' Critique," 129–130.

⁴⁴ See Ḥasdai Crescas, *Light of the Lord*, trans. Roslyn Weiss, IV.13; cited in Robinson, "Ḥasdai Crescas and Anti-Aristotelianism."

“amen,” a feat attainable by nearly all. Arama’s commitment to mass welfare in his emphasis on the virtues of accessibility, *qalut* and *kolelut*, are thus not at all sui generis but rather grounded in a well-developed fifteenth century tradition of anti-elitism running at least from Crescas through Joseph ben Shem Tob.⁴⁵ What’s more, both Crescas and Joseph understand the commitment to mass welfare as intimately bound up with the structure of the commandments—as against the inherent individualism and elitism of intellectual perfection and the pursuit thereof. As we will see, Arama too conceptualizes the concern for mass welfare and the commandments as closely and deeply linked. In the next section, I will focus on Arama’s complex conceptualization of the commandments and how they function to guarantee mass welfare for a specific collective—i.e., the community of Israel. But before doing so, I want to turn to a few of the other ways in which Arama clearly expresses that concern for the masses—over and against the individual—lies at the center of his oeuvre.

3.2.3. Divine Accommodation

Already we have seen Arama’s concern for the collective emerge in several places: It is expressed most clearly in his insistence of the virtues of ease and inclusivity, *qalut* and *kolelut*, in enumerating the requirements for a robust theory of immortality. It is reflected in his conceptualizing the subject of his alternative theological anthropology as not the typical individual but rather the collective, the *kelalut*, of Israel. It is reflected similarly in his commentary on Song of Songs, which he reads as treating the relationship between not the individual and the Active Intellect, in line with post-Maimonidean trends, but rather the

⁴⁵ See too Yoel Marciano, “The Rise of Non-Elitist Religious Literature in Late Medieval Spain and Its Reflection in *Menorat ha-Maor* of Rabbi Isaac Aboab,” *Sefarad* 79, no. 2 (2019): 411–445.

community of Israel and God, in line with classical Rabbinic readings.⁴⁶ But that is not all.

Arama gives voice to his concern for the collective in still other ways.⁴⁷ One site where it comes through quite clearly is in his adaptation of the classical theological notion of divine accommodation.⁴⁸

In the previous chapter, I mentioned divine accommodation in connection with Maimonides' historicizing, Sabian account of the commandments.⁴⁹ According to Maimonides, God recognized that it would be extremely difficult for the Israelites to shake the Sabian culture and habits in which they were so deeply entrenched overnight. In His "wily graciousness," He thus designed the Torah's laws in such a way as to compassionately and strategically *accommodate* the Israelites' current conditions and humanly shortcomings; still with the goal of eventually moving them away from their accustomed Sabian habits and beliefs, but weaning them away slowly, gently—meeting them, so to speak, where they were.

Much as he did with the Maimonidean notion of limitations of knowledge also seen in the previous chapter, Arama adopts this Maimonidean notion of divine accommodation and pursues it to its logical if not anti-Maimonidean conclusion, placing the idea of divine accommodation front and center in his account of the giving of the Torah at Sinai. Like Maimonides, Arama prefaces his discussion of divine accommodation by hearkening back to the extent of human frailty, appealing to well-trod motifs of how man is perennially dogged by his lustful corporeal impulses. But rather than turn from man's sinful nature towards exhortations for the individual's

⁴⁶ On Arama's interpretation of the Song, see Maud Kozodoy, "Messianic Interpretations of the Song of Songs in Late-Medieval Iberia," in *The Hebrew Bible in Fifteenth Century Spain*, eds. Jonathan Decter and Arturo Prats (Brill, 2012), 117–147.

⁴⁷ See for example Heller-Wilensky's discussion of Arama's parable of the tower/alternative reading of Jacob's ladder in Heller-Wilensky, *Arama*, 194.

⁴⁸ On divine accommodation, see Stephen Benin, *The Footprints of God: Divine Accommodation in Jewish and Christian Thought* (SUNY Press, 1993).

⁴⁹ See 2.3.2 above.

overcoming via ascetic regimes of self-improvement, as would many of Maimonides' followers, Arama turns instead towards God's "cunning wisdom." To ensure that immortality would meet the criteria limned above—i.e., easily attainable and inclusive, accessible—Arama insists that God painstakingly architected not only the Torah's laws, but also both the moments prior to revelation and the moment of revelation itself to ensure that the Israelites' conditions would render them maximally receptive to Torah. Once again deploying creative scriptural exegesis to his thematic ends, Arama reads Ex. 19:1–9 as relating God's various, strategic optimizations.⁵⁰ Prior to the moment of revelation, Ex. 19:1, for example, bespeaks God's selection of the ideal time and place for revelation, while Ex. 19:3 bespeaks His selection of Moses as the ideal intermediary. Ex. 19:9 bespeaks how, at the moment of revelation itself, God sought to increase the Israelites' receptivity to revelation by inducing "something terrifying and astonishing"—and this through the deployment of physically fearsome signs: "a show of divine voices and great lightening and a *thick cloud* and the mighty sound of the ram's horn, and the divine commandments in fiery flames."⁵¹

On one level, Arama's reading is striking in how clearly it seems to repudiate the Maimonidean will to not only divine incorporeality, but divine distance more generally.⁵² God, Arama insists, is very much involved with the event of revelation, down to the most mundane, grossly corporeal details. But what is more striking is not Arama's insistence on divine intervention per se, so much as his implicit insistence that such intervention is required by divine compassion, or more accurately, divine insight into the collective psyche. Where Arama

⁵⁰ See my translation of Gate 44, Part II, secs. [8]–[12] below.

⁵¹ Gate 44, Part II, sec. [13].

⁵² On promulgating divine incorporeality as one of the major motives of the *Guide*, see *Guide*, Introduction, Shlomo Pines, "Translator's Introduction," xciv–xcviii; Shlomo Pines, "The Philosophical Purport of Maimonides' Halachic Works and the Purport of the *Guide of the Perplexed*," in *Maimonides and Philosophy*, eds. S. Pines and Y. Yovel (Martinus Nijhoff, 1986), 1–14; and Strauss, "How to Begin to Study the *Guide of the Perplexed*."

comments on God's intervention into particular circumstances, his glosses are often psychological. Recalling the examples just given, Arama explains that God determined "the most suitable time possible for them to enter beneath the wings of the Shekhinah....[for] prior to this, they were still weary and exhausted from the oppression of slavery."⁵³ He explains the apparent redundancy of Ex. 19:2, which mentions Sinai just after it had been mentioned in the previous verse, in psychological terms as well: God mentions Sinai again in Ex. 19:2 strategically, juxtaposed with mention of Refidim, in order to instill wonder, "inasmuch as one who moves from a place of extreme wickedness to a place of extreme goodness will be impressed upon even more strongly and wondrously than he would were he to have come to an intermediate [place]."⁵⁴ At the moment of revelation, Arama explains that God worked the grossly corporeal "terrible wonders" that He did "to breach their hearts of stone and soften their limbs of copper and iron."⁵⁵ Nor is that all. Arama reads God's intervention into other moments of biblical history in terms of His insight into and attendance towards the collective psyche as well. To name just one example, divine insight into the collective psyche plays a major role in Arama's interpretation of the seemingly parallel events at both Rephidim (Ex. 17) and Meribah (Num. 20):⁵⁶ In both instances, Arama explains, God effects a miracle of Moses drawing water from the rock in order to dissuade the Israelites of their belief that Moses is a false prophet. In the case of Refidim, he elaborates, the generation of who left Egypt was particularly disposed to believe Moses a false prophet because of their exposure to an Egyptian culture rife with magic; thus disposed, God

⁵³ הלא תראה ראשונה שכיון הזמן הנכון והזכיר כוונתו אותו באומרו ביום הזה באו מדבר סיני שירצה בזמן הזה לומר שהוא היה הזמן היותר נאות שאפשר לבא בו תחת כנפי השכינה והוא שיהיה כמשלש חדשים לצאתם מהגלות המר שהוא אשר היה עדין עול השעבוד על חלקת צוארם ולפי שהנעתק מהמקום הרע המוחלט ויבא על הטוב המוחלט יקבל מזה רושם יותר נפלא וחזק מאשר יבא אל האמצעי לזה חזר ואמר ויסעו מרפידים ויבואו מדבר סיני כי זה מה שראוי שיאמר

⁵⁴ ולזה ראה שיהיה המעמד ההוא הנורא על צד החרדה וההשתוממות הנפלא מהזהירות בנקיות וקדושה והזהרה בכבוד ובמורא והראות קולות אלהים וברקים רב וענן כבד וקול שופר חזק מאוד ודברות אלהים בלהבות אש אשר אלו הם חרדות נפלאות עשאים האלהים לפוצץ במ לבות האבן ולהמוח שם כל גיד נחשת וברזל

⁵⁶ The following based on AY Gate 80, in AY IV: 82b–94a.

anticipated that the Israelites would be inclined to interpret their arrival in a naturally inhospitable environment in accordance with their preexisting suspicions (i.e., as evidence of Moses' lack of legitimacy) and so effected the miracle accordingly. At Meribah, Arama explains, a new collective crisis of confidence in Moses had emerged, since the generation who had left Egypt and witnessed the miracle at Refidim had now passed away. Only because God knew this new generation would be more difficult to persuade, accustomed as they were to witnessing other miracles in the desert, He modified the miracle to be performed for them slightly, making it more wondrous still: This is why at Meribah God commands Moses to draw water forth from the rock by merely speaking to it, without striking it. Lest we get lost in the details however, what is most important for our present purposes is that throughout AY and in Gate 44 especially, we see Arama drawing on the Maimonidean theme of divine accommodation and extending and expanding it—developing it to an extreme out of a profound concern for the collective.

So much for how God takes pains to ensure that immortality is easily accessible to the multitude both prior to and at the moment of revelation itself, carefully determining and modulating the circumstances of the event in attunement with the collective psyche, to ensure the masses' maximal receptivity. The primary way in which God ensures an easily attainable, inclusive, accessible immortality however is in His careful guidance of the Israelites in the eternity *following* revelation—i.e., in His careful design of the Torah, and particularly the commandments. In Arama's own words:⁵⁷

ואולם מה שנתחכם להם במה שיבא ואחרי כן בתקון ענינים בעניני השתוף והקירוב והכללות והקיים שזכרנו ראשון' שהוא עקר שכל⁵⁷ השתוף הזה הנזכר תלוי בו. הוא במה שהפליא גם כן עצה ותושיה לשום עמודיו ואדניו יתדותיו ומיתריו כלם ענינים ומעשים רצוני מצות ומניעות בכל דברי התורה הזאת. כי על זה האופן לא לבד ימצא זה השתוף. אבל יהיה מציאותו קרוב ונח לקנות. גם יתפשט לכללם, ולא עוד אלא שתהיה קשה הסרתו כי הם ארבעה ענינים עצומים בהגעת הכוונ' על צד היותר טוב שאפשר כמו שאמרנו

[Now consider] how He was wise concerning what was to come thereafter; i.e., how He would attend to the conditions of their participation, its possibility, universality, and endurance—for as we mentioned at the beginning, this is the principle upon which the entirety of the aforementioned participation depends. He did this by giving them wondrous counsel and wisdom, namely, to erect pillars and foundations, pegs and fastens, all of which are notions and actions—I mean, the commandments and prohibitions contained in all the words of this Torah. In this way, participation would not only exist; moreover, its existence would be proximate and easy to acquire; also, it would be extended to the whole multitude of them. Further still, it would be difficult to remove it, for these are four profound principles for attaining one's aim in the best way possible, as we said.

The commandments, Arama tells us in no uncertain terms, are what ensure that the highest heights of existence, participation with the immortal divine, are easily accessible for the everyman, indeed, “extended to the whole multitude of them.” Said differently, the commandments are the supreme expression of divine commitment to and prioritization of the masses. How exactly this all works in practice though—how the commandments function as a vehicle of immortality for the masses—will be the subject of the following two sections.

3.3. Covenant, Commandment, Jews as Separate Species

To understand exactly how Arama theorizes the commandments functioning as a vehicle of immortality for the masses, it will be helpful to provide some background on the primary theories of commandment Arama was working against: by now unsurprisingly, those of the Maimonidean tradition. As students of medieval Jewish thought know well, Arama, Joseph ibn Shem Tob, and Crescas were hardly original in theorizing an intimate connection between the commandments, on the one hand, and immortality, on the other. Though to the best of my knowledge, Maimonides never links the commandments with immortality explicitly, he had set the stage for others to do so with one of his major theories of commandment already discussed in

an example from the previous chapter:⁵⁸ that according to which the commandments are designed to improve the welfare of the body and the welfare of the soul, the latter prior in importance and the former prerequisite, or prior in time. Beginning in the thirteenth century, Maimonides' readers fleshed out this theory in two major ways to link the commandments with intellectual perfection and thereby immortality.⁵⁹ While sometimes thinkers conceptualized the commandments as serving primarily to inculcate the ethical virtues that were prerequisite to intellectual virtues, at others they conceptualized the commandments as inculcating intellectual virtues more directly, and conceived various commandments as symbolizing and so teaching universal philosophical and scientific truths. Though both these visions understand the commandments as a path to immortality, what is most important for our purposes is that they do so by instrumentalizing the commandments towards the still exclusive and elitist end of intellectual perfection.⁶⁰ While the latter vision suggests the commandments are only useful insofar as they inculcate difficult and so remote scientific and philosophical ideas, the former relegates the commandments' benefit to a mere preparatory stage, progress in which remains hard to achieve.

Arama develops his theory of the commandments against—and very much in reaction to—this background. As we have already briefly seen, Arama too centers the commandments in his theory of immortality; the commandments are not only the path to eternal life, but, with the

⁵⁸ See 2.3.1 above and *Guide* III.27.

⁵⁹ Kreisel, "Reasons for the Commandments;" Gordon, "Rationalism of Jacob Anatoli;" Heinemann, *The Reasons for the Commandments*.

⁶⁰ Critiques of Maimonidean theories of the commandments as instrumentalizing had been advanced already in the thirteenth century Maimonidean controversies, though in these cases the theories were critiques not for their elitism but for leading to weak practice. See Daniel J. Silver, *Maimonidean Criticism and the Maimonidean Controversy: 1180–1240* (Brill, 1965); Georges Vajda, *Sefer Meshiv Devarim Nekhoḥim le-R. Yaakov ben Sheshet* (Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1968); Stern, *Philosophy and Rabbinic Culture*; Bernard Septimus, *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition: The Career and Controversies of Ramah* (Harvard University Press, 1982).

concluding verses of Ecclesiastes, “the whole of man”—the final purpose of human existence.⁶¹

And as we both have seen and will see more fully later on, Arama too has an instrumentalist view of the commandments, even understanding certain commandments as serving to inculcate certain ideas. But against the broad contours of the Maimonidean tradition, Arama insists that the primary importance and mechanism of the commandments consists not in any intellectual or symbolic aspect, but rather in the commandments being based in material bodily action. It is precisely because the commandments are grounded in mundane, material actions, Arama tells us, that they are an accessible path to immortality. By speaking not to what is most lofty and rare but rather to what is most base and so most common in man, the commandments reflect God’s (and so Arama’s) persistent concern for the collective, H/his critique of intellectual elitism.

Arama’s emphasis on the material aspect of the commandments, on the commandments as actions, not only serves to expand immortality to the common masses beyond a narrow confine of intellectual elites, however. Rather, as I suggested above, Arama’s theory of the commandments functions to exclude as it includes, replacing one elite with another. To see this, we will have to return once more to the Maimonidean background against which Arama is working: Though as discussed above, Maimonidean theories of the commandments were intellectually elitist in that they ultimately instrumentalized the commandments to the end of intellectual perfection, in another sense, by devaluing the commandments’ material and bodily aspects, this same instrumentalization left an opening. For if the commandments serve only to inculcate the universal ethical virtues prerequisite to intellectual perfection or else the universal philosophical and scientific ideas constitutive of intellectual perfection itself, then actual, embodied performance of the commandments’ actions may, in the final analysis be immaterial,

⁶¹ See 2.2.3 and 2.3.3 above.

leaving the possibility of immortality accessible to the intellectually perfect who for various reasons do not or cannot perform the commandments. This is precisely the sense in which Maimonideanism has been understood as thinly veiling an esoteric universalism, suggested in the introduction of this chapter. By making the ultimately decisive criterion intellectual perfection, i.e., the acquisition of abstract, universal intelligibilia, Maimonidean theories may have foreclosed immortality from the ignorant masses, but they *prima facie* did not restrict access thereunto on the basis of actually performing the commandments, leaving immortality and the highest heights of human existence theoretically open to the intelligentsia across presumed traditional boundaries of religion or *ethnos*—an intellectual elite, but a cross-cultural and open one.

It is clear why Arama, writing in late fifteenth century Spain, might have been particularly sensitized to—and concerned about—the implications of the Maimonidean theories of commandment outlined above. For in their implicit devaluation of the performance of the commandments as such, the foregoing theories might have been taken to authorize the choices of the growing masses of conversos. Jews converting to Christianity under pressure of the Inquisition might lean on such theories to assuage themselves that perhaps performance of the commandments was not so important after all, if only they could independently attain the universal ethical virtues or universal scientific ideas the commandments were supposed to instill.

Though Arama never voices such concerns expressly, the theory of the commandments he develops seems to be directed not only at including the ignorant masses, but also at addressing precisely this. In emphasizing the material action of the commandments, Arama not only makes immortality easily accessible to the ignorant masses; he also bars from its gates those who do not or cannot perform the commandments—i.e., he restricts access only to the community of

practicing Jews. This is the shadow aspect of Arama's commitment to the masses, the exclusion created by his inclusion; as he dismantles the hierarchy of the intellectual elite above the ignorant masses, he replaces it with another one, i.e., the hierarchy of Jews above all others. This much Arama does theorize explicitly: On his reading, the essence of God's covenant with the Israelites at Sinai consists in His rendering them a separate and superior species of human through their performance of the commandments. Arama's concern for the collective, his emphasis on the material, action-based aspects of the commandments, and his theorization of the Jews as a separate and superior species thus all go hand-in-hand, mutually reinforcing and underwriting one another.

In what follows, I will treat various aspects of these mutually ramifying concerns in turn. In the first part of this section, I will focus on Arama's emphasis on the commandments as action, and how he develops this conceptualization out of his concern for the collective. Then in the second part of this section, I will turn to Arama's conceptualization of the covenant as consisting in God's promise to make the Israelites a separate and superior species through their adherence to the commandments. In a separate and final section, I will conclude by turning to Arama's conceptualization of the commandments' mechanics, i.e., how exactly the commandments effect the Jews' transformation into a separate and superior species.

3.3.1. Commandments as Action

As we saw above, Arama suggests that the ultimate expression of God's concern for the masses consists in His gift of the commandments. By making the commandments the vehicle to immortality, God ensures that immortality is both easily attainable and inclusive of the multitude, i.e., widely accessible. Though as we also saw above, theorizing the commandments

as a vehicle of immortality does not necessarily mean theorizing the commandments as a vehicle of immortality for the masses; the Maimonidean tradition and its imaginings of the commandments as a path to immortality via intellectual perfection stand as evidence to the contrary. Knowing this, Arama qualifies his earlier suggestion and develops his theory of the commandments in response. Against Maimonidean theories which often emphasize the commandments' philosophical and scientific symbolism, Arama insists that the commandments are first and foremost defined by their difference from and contrast to the realm of intellectual pursuits—i.e., by their consisting in actions. It is precisely the commandments' consisting in actions that makes them easy and inclusive of the multitude, and so a truly accessible path to immortality. This is how Arama glosses God's famed promise to the Israelites in Deut. 30:11–14: *lo niflet mimekha; it is not too hard for thee*. Arama explains how God ensures that immortality is widely and easily accessible by structuring the commandments to be primarily grounded in action as opposed to intellection.⁶² Whereas intellectual pursuits are inherently difficult and further often presuppose special circumstances “which all do not have in common,” action is “something in which all participate.” Here is what Arama says:⁶³

“As for proximity and facility (*qalut*), he explicated this in saying: *for this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not too hard for thee, neither is it far off*, and He concluded, *but the word is very proximate unto thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it* (Deut. 30:11–14). He clarified that all this proximity was on account of everything's being dependent upon action, which would not be the case if it were by way of wisdom and speculation only.

⁶² Arama's understanding of “action,” especially in relation to intellection, should be understood in light of his discussion of the four types of human action in his commentary on Ecclesiastes, as discussed in 2.2.3 above; while “theoretical speculation” and “practical intellect”—both varieties of intellection—are of course also types of action in the broader sense, by “action” here Arama means to signify the two lower types of action, “choice” and “action” which are grounded in man's material body and realizable in the external world.

⁶³ אמנם הקירוב והקלות בו גם כן פירשו באומרו (דברים ל') כי המצוה הזאת אשר אנכי מצוך היום לא נפלאה היא ממך ולא רחוקה היא וחזתם כי קרוב אליך הדבר מאד בפיו ובלבבך לעשותו. ביאר היטב כי כל הקירוב ההוא היה מצד שהכל תלוי במעשה מה שלא יהיה כן אם יהיה בדרך תושית העיון לבד. אמנם כללותם. כי הוא מבואר שהמעשה הוא דבר משותף לכל מהעיון אם לקושי השכל ואם לצורך התנאים המיוחדים אשר לא ישתתפו הכל בהם ולזה אחז"ל (ברכות נ"ז.) אפי' ריקנין שבך מלאים מצות כרמון. וזה שהמצות באות וחלות בדברים אשר יפול עליהם החלק החמרי ובכל מיני צורכיו ולא יכלו להמלט מהם

As for their universality, it is clear that action is much more common to all than speculation, whether on account of its intellectual difficulty or its requiring that certain special conditions [be met] which all do not have in common. For this reason the Sages said: “Even the most ignorant among you are full of commandments like a pomegranate!” (b.Berakhot 57a). This is because the commandments pertain to things that relate to man’s material part and all manner of his needs, such that it is impossible to escape from them.”

The commandments and “theoretical speculation,” Arama suggests, constitute a sort of binary. The latter is difficult and rare, the former easy, common. Through his gloss of the dictum from b.Berakhot, “Even the most ignorant among you are full of commandments like a pomegranate!,” he develops the binary still further: while the realm of speculation is exclusive because it pertains to what is most rarefied in man—i.e., his rational, immaterial, higher parts, the commandments are accessible to the masses, inclusive of even the ignorant precisely because they speak to what is most base in man—his material, corporeal nature, and concomitant animalistic “needs.” What makes the commandments accessible, Arama thus emphasizes, is precisely their mundanity. Arama’s abiding concern for the collective is reflected above all in this: His insistence that the commandments must primarily be preoccupied with action over intellection, with the mundane and material and bodily, over elite abstractions of form. To bring man beyond animal, God first and foremost must tend to the animal within him. In a continuation of the passage above, Arama states this more or less explicitly. He identifies the divine righteousness of Ps. 36:7 with God’s having established the path to immortality (“our preservation”) “in something within us that is common to both man and beast”:⁶⁴

⁶⁴ ובמדרש (רבה פ' כי תצא) כי לוית חן הם לראשך (משלי א':ט') א"ר פנחס ב"ר חמא כל מקום שתלך המצוה מלווה אותך... הנה שכיוונו אל תועלת הקירוב והכללות אשר מצד המעשה שכיוון הש"י בהם כאדם המזמין לבנו אהובו מזונותיו בכל מקום אשר ידיו ממשמשות בהם כי על כל פנים יגיעו אליהם כל עיפי וכל כושל במ. והנה לזה באה ההוראה מהמשורר צדקתך כהררי אל משפטיך תהום רבה וגו' (תהילים ל"ו:ז). ירצה כי היתה צדקתו עמנו מפורסמת כהררי אל ומדת משפטו כבושה ונסתרת בתהום רבה מצד שאדם ובהמה תושיע ה' ירצה במה ששמת תשועתנו בדבר המשותף בנו לאדם ובהמה והוא החלק החומרי ופעולותיו מה שלא היה כן אם היתה תלוי בדבר המיוחד לאדם שהוא החלק השכלי העיוני כי לא ישתתפו בו רק מעט מזער. והוא מה שהורה עליו אדון הנביאים בסוף דבריו באומרו (דברים ל"ג:כ"ט) אשריך ישראל מי כמוך עם נושע וגו'. והכוונה שאין כמוהו עם שנושע כלו בכללו והיא מבואר

In the Midrash: “*For they are a chaplet of grace about thy head* (Prov. 1:9). R. Pinhas said to R. Hama: Wherever you go, the commandments accompany you”... We aimed [to illustrate] how, in designing the commandments as actions, God intended to procure the benefits of both proximity and universality. This is like a man who invites his beloved son [to eat] whatever of his food he encounters. In this way, no matter what, the tired and failing shall reach them. This is why the Psalmist taught: *Thy righteousness is like the mighty mountains, Thy judgements are like the great deep*, and so on (Ps. 36:7). He meant: His *righteousness* with us is well-known like the *mountains* of God, while the attribute of His *judgement* is covered and hidden in the *great deep* in so far as *man and beast Thou preservest o Lord* (ibidem). He meant, insofar as You place our preservation in something within us that is common to both man and beast—i.e., the material part and its activities—such as would not be the case if it were to depend on something unique to man—i.e., the intellectual and theoretical part, for this is only common to a scant few. This is what the Master of Prophets indicated at the end of his speech, in his saying: *happy art thou, o Israel, who is like unto thee? A people saved*, and so on (Deut. 33:29). The aim is that there is none like unto Israel in that all of them are saved in general, and this is clear.

Arama draws on a midrash that imagines God’s gift of the commandments on analogy to a father who invites his beloved child to partake of whatever is in his reach. By designing the path to immortality to be contingent on bodily action rather than abstract intellection, God ensures that immortality is not reserved for “a scant few,” but rather extends to include “even the tired and failing.”

But Arama’s concluding these celebrations of divine compassion for the marginal with a gloss of Deut. 33:29 is telling, belying the shadow aspect of his commitment to the masses. By insisting that it is not the commandments as vehicles of abstract intelligibilia but rather the material performance of the commandments as mundane actions that paves the path to immortality, Arama opens the door to the “ignoramus” so spurned by the Maimonidean tradition only to shut it on another. Arama’s conceptualization of immortality and attendant theory of the commandments ensures the eternal felicity of *Israel*, according to Deut. 33:29, not only *a people saved*, but also uniquely so—hence the rhetorical *who is like unto thee?* Simultaneously proscribed from the realm of the *happy*, of course, are all who do not belong to

the collective Israel, who do not perform the action of the commandments. The verse thus bespeaks the new exclusion created by dismantling the old: through the commandments *Israel* is saved in general, Arama insists, the tired and failing too. But Israel only. Arama thus displaces the Maimonideans' universally open intellectual elite with a populist yet closed elite of Jews.

3.3.2. Core of Covenant: Jews as Separate Species

Arama explicitly develops this counterpart of his retheorization of the commandments—that the Jews are a people set above and apart, uniquely saved—in his treatment of God's covenant with the Israelites at Sinai. According to Arama, the essence of the covenant consists in God's promise to constitute the Israelites as separate and superior species, distinct from all other peoples, through their adherence to the commandments. Conversely, the Israelites are a worthy recipient and able to fulfill their end of the covenant precisely in their recognition that the mechanism of the commandments prioritizes material, bodily action over intellection. The doing must necessarily precede understanding—both because such an ordering is inclusive of the ignorant and because the understanding sought is contrary to philosophical reason. In His gift of the commandments, God grants all Israel—but only Israel—an easy and accessible path to immortality, grounded in the performance of material actions. The material, bodily performance of these actions, in turn, transform the Jews into precisely the collective subject of Arama's earlier alternative theological anthropology. No longer among the ranks of mere men, rational animals doomed to perish with the death of the body, the mechanism of the commandments reconstitute the Jews as the “animals who reason with a divine reason, and live”—i.e., gain access to immortality. Arama develops these ideas especially through his creative exegesis of two key verses, Ex. 19:5 and Ex. 19:8, respectively, God's promise to make the Israelites His *am*

segullah, and the Israelites promise to *na‘aseh ve-nishma*’. In what follows, I will examine these in turn.

3.3.2.1. ‘*Am Segullah*

Arama introduces his theory of Jews as separate and superior species through creative philosophical exegesis of Ex. 19:5: *now therefore, if ye will hearken unto My voice indeed and keep My covenant, then ye shall be Mine own special property (segullah) from among all peoples, for all the earth is Mine*. In particular, he develops his theory by playing on the contemporary multivalence of the key term *segullah*. Early biblical commentators generally seem to have understood the term *segullah* in Ex. 19:5 and parallel verses in light of its appearance in Eccl. 2, simply as designating “treasure”—God claims the Israelites to be His “treasure” from among all peoples.⁶⁵ In the thirteenth century however, *segullah* came to take on a host of other significations as it became the standard term for translating the Arabic *khāṣṣah*—itself a multivalent term in the world of Arabic literature.⁶⁶ Rendering *khāṣṣah*, *segullah* assumed a social significance distinguishing the elite from the masses, as in *al-khāṣṣah wa-l-amma*. Moving into the fourteenth century, *segullah* also assumed what we might call an “occult” or “magical” significance.⁶⁷ Particularly in astral-magical and pharmacological literature, the concept of *segullah* was used to explain experiential phenomena whose mechanisms of operation were unknown or otherwise resistant to explication by normal natural science. In this sense,

⁶⁵ See Rashi’s and ibn Ezra’s commentaries, as well as, interestingly, Jacob Anatoli’s in his concluding gloss in his sermon for *Yom Matan Torah*. Anatoli does not utilize the logical significance of *segullah* here, despite being the one to popularize it in his translations of Averroes’ middle commentaries on the organon.

⁶⁶ Judah ibn Tibbon renders *khāṣṣah* as *segulah* both throughout his translation of the *Kuzari* and in his translation of Saadia’s *Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, himself following Saadia’s translation of *segullah* as *khāṣṣah* in his *Tafsīr* following Saadia. See James T. Robinson, XXX, for this same pattern.

⁶⁷ The occult significance of *segullot* has been studied especially by Dov Schwartz, “Astral Magic and Specific Properties (*Segullot*) in Medieval Jewish Thought,” 301–319.

segullah was used to explain e.g., the magnet's property of attracting iron, or the efficacy of certain talismans for healing. Probably the most common sense *segullah* assumed, however, and certainly the most important for our purposes, was the Aristotelian logical and taxonomical one. Thanks in no small part to Samuel ibn Tibbon, who included *segullah* in his lexicon of Hebrew philosophical terms that circulated with his translation of the *Guide*, *segullah* became the standard term for designating the Aristotelian concept of "property," i.e., a quality that is shared by all members of a species and is unique to that species but is *not* that species' essence.⁶⁸ A classic example is that the property of man is laughter: though laughter is not entailed in the definition of man as rational animal, all men have the capacity to laugh and nothing that is not man has the capacity to laugh—laughter is thus the property, or *segullah*, unique to man.

In what is as far as I can tell an original move, Arama performs a bit of creative philosophical exegesis and reads this Aristotelian logical and taxonomical sense of *segullah* back into the biblical text.⁶⁹ He interprets God's promise to make the Israelites His *segullah* from among all peoples as a promise to literally constitute them as a separate and superior species. Possessed of a different *segullah* (characteristic property) and specific difference, God will distinguish the Israelites from, and render them superior to all other men, in the same way that men as a species are superior to all other animals. Here is what Arama says:⁷⁰

⁶⁸ See Samuel ibn Tibbon, *Perush ha-Millot ha-Zarot in Moreh ha-Nevukhim*, ed. Y. Even-Shemuel (Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1987); Jacob Anatoli, trans. *Averroes' Middle Commentary on Porphyry's Isagoge and Aristotle's Categories*, ed. Herbert Davidson (Medieval Academy of America, 1969).

⁶⁹ Arama's creative reading of Ex. 19:5 was undoubtedly inspired by Joseph Albo's gloss of the same in his *Iqqarim* III.37: Here, Albo suggests that the *segullah* designating Israel's singularity in Ex. 19:5 be read *on analogy* to the Aristotelian taxonomical and logical sense of *segullah*: Just as *segullah* in the Aristotelian taxonomical and logical sense is a property that is inextricably bound up with a species yet is inexplicable in terms of its quantity or quality, so too for Israel's special belovedness in God's eyes, inexplicable in terms of quantity or quality—in Zev Harvey's words a "reasonless" love; see Albo, *Iqqarim*, III.37 and Warren Zev Harvey, "Albo on the Reasonlessness of True Love," *Iyyun: The Jerusalem Philosophical Quarterly* 49 (2000): 83–86.

⁷⁰ וסגלה על קצת כמו שנמצא כן לכללם על שאר הב"ח תמצא מבואר בתורה האלהית נאמר ועתה אם שמוע תשמעו בקולי ושמרתם את בריתי והייתם לי סגלה מכל העמים כי לי כל הארץ... ואמר כי בשני העניינים האלו תתוחד סגולתם מכל שאר העניינים וכמו שאמר במקום אחר (דברים כ"ו) וה' האמירך היום להיות לו לעם סגולה. וכבר נודע כי קבול החכמה והשלמות יקרא סגלה בם כי זה הכח האלהי ימצא לעם הקדוש הזה לבדו ולכלו כמ"ש ואתם תהיה לי ממלכת כהנים וגוי קדוש כעיר שכלה כהנים. הנה ביאר שהם מיוחדים בסגלה מכל העמים. אמנם

Inasmuch as in this respect men differ from one another, on account of some having a distinction (or: specific difference) and special property (*segullah*) over others (just as all men possess a distinction and superiority over other animals—), it is stated clearly in the divine Torah: *now therefore, if ye will hearken unto My voice indeed and keep My covenant, then ye shall be Mine own special property (segullah) from among all peoples, for all the earth is Mine* (Ex. 19:5)... He said that through these, they are singled out from all others by their *special property (segullah)*, as he said elsewhere: *and the Lord hath avouched thee this day to be His own special property* ('am *segullah*) (Deut. 26:18). It is already known that they are called *special property (segullah)* because of their receiving wisdom and perfection, since this divine power is both unique to this holy people and common to all of them, as it was said: *and ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation* (Ex. 19:6), like a city in which all are priests. Thus He clarified that they are distinguished from all other peoples by a *special property*. As for their particular specific difference, it was said elsewhere: *and I have set you apart from the peoples, that ye should be Mine* (Lev. 20:26). Their being His and being called by His name because of their studying this divine Torah and fulfilling its commandments constitutes a most special specific difference. This distinguishes them and sets them apart from the quiddity of all [other] peoples, so that the species difference which is predicated of all [people] only applies to you with regards to the genus. Our Fathers aimed at these two lofty notions whereby they are separated from the rest of the species. They plumbed the depth of the divine intention of the saying: *we shall do and we shall hearken* (Ex. 19:5)...

Throughout this passage, Arama reiterates time and again, in technical, philosophical language that the Israelites are rendered a separate species: Just as all men “possess a distinction and superiority over other animals,” so too the Israelites “are singled out from all others by their *special property*,” “they are distinguished from all other peoples by a *special property*” and a “particular specific difference” that “distinguishes them and sets them apart from the quiddity of all [other] peoples, so that the species difference which is predicated of all of [people] only applies to you with regards to the genus.” Again, Israel is “separated from the rest of the species.” He also reaffirms the connection(s) obtaining between this notion of Jews as separate

על ההבדל המיוחד נאמר במקום אחר (ויקרא כ') ואבדיל אתכם מן העמים להיות לי וזה כי היותם לו יתעלה וההקרא בשמו ע"י למוד זאת התורה האלהי וקיום מצותיה הוא הבדל מיוחד מן המיוחד המפריד ומחלק אתכם ממהות כל העמים עד שכבר יהיה ההבדל המיני הנאמר על כללותם אצלכם במדרגת הסוג לבד. ועתה ראה כי למה שכוונו אבותינו אל שני העניינים האלה המעולים אשר בהם נפרדו מכללות המין כאשר ירדו לסוף הכוונה האלהית כשאמרו (שמות כ"ד) נעשה ונשמע

species, on the one hand, and the commandments, on the other. The Israelites are rendered a separate species through the mechanism of the commandments, through the acquisition of a certain kind of knowledge and the performance of action, through “hearkening” and “keeping.”

Here we begin to see methodological and thematic elements previously discussed finally coming together. Methodologically, we see Arama developing these core themes through a combination of creative exegesis, as discussed in chapter 1, and domestication of philosophy, the subject of chapter 2: Arama advances his distinctly non- if not anti-Aristotelian theory of the separateness and supremacy of the Jewish people by strategically coopting the familiar language of Aristotelian taxonomy and fusing it with biblical texts through creative exegesis. What’s more, he develops this theory in his efforts to extend the Maimonidean theme of divine accommodation to its logical conclusion: concern for the masses. Thematically, we see how Arama’s commitment to the collective underwrites a new hierarchy, one guaranteeing the entire Jewish collective, all Israel, a place over and above all other peoples. Having previously shown that the dominant, Aristotelian philosophical anthropology is incompatible with the possibility of immortality—i.e., that immortality is impossible for man defined as rational animal—Arama finally clarifies that the subject of his alternative, theological anthropology, with full access to immortality is only a select community. Far from peripheral, the fact of this alternative, theological anthropology constitutes the core of God’s revelation to Israel at Sinai: He reveals that, through the commandments, the Jews are made “superior over all other people,” even “at the rank of the ministering angels;” they are “distinguished from the group of rational animals in their quiddity such that this definition of the species could not apply to them as it applied to the human species in general.” Arama elaborates:⁷¹

הנה ששמעו והשכילו מענין העלות מעלותם מכלל האנשים ולשומם בהבדל וסגולה במעלת מלאכי השרת... והוא הדבר המעולה אשר
הרגישו הם באמותו היום ההוא הנכבד והנורא אשר הגיע אליהם כשאמרו (דברים ה') היום הזה ראינו כי ידבר האלהים את האדם וחי ירצה

Thus, they hearkened and intellectually apprehended their superiority over all other people and God's conferring upon them a specific difference and special property at the rank of the ministering angels... They perceived the true reality of this sublime thing on that terrible and holy day, as was said: *we have seen this day that God doth speak with man, and he liveth* (Deut. 5:20). He meant: that they were already distinguished from the group of rational animals in their quiddity such that this definition of the species could not apply to them as it applied to the human species in general. Rather, the reason that could be predicated of their animality was divine reason, for it is this that is added to the animal in [terms of] definition. I mean: the man who is rational with a divine reason and *liveth*, that is to say, who lives by reasoning with divine reason. This is the man of whom it is said: *let us make man in our image and according to our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl*, and so on (Gen. 1:26), and as the Sages said: "you are called man, but the nations are not called man" (b. Baba Metzia 114b). As he said: one should not say of [man] that he is mortal, rational animal, but rather that he [is the animal] that reasons with divine reason and lives.⁷²

The heart of revelation, Arama reiterates, consists in none other than God's promise to rend the Israelites—and the Israelites alone—immortal; no longer among the ranks of mortal man, but instead kin with the divine. In this connection, Arama's reading of Gen. 1:26 through the dictum from b. Baba Mezia is particularly instructive. In the *Guide*, Maimonides had suggested that man created in the divine image and likeness is man to the extent that he realizes his telos qua rational

שכבר היו נבדלים מכלל החי המדבר במהותם עד שלא יתכן שישולח עליהם זה הגדר המיני כמו שישולח על המין האנושי בכלל. אבל שהדבור אשר ינשא על החיות בהם הוא דבור אלהי כי הוא אשר יצורף אל החי בגדרו, רצוני כי האדם הוא מדבר דבור אלהי וחי כלומר חי בדבור דבור אלהי וזהו האדם שנאמר עליו (בראשית א') נעשה אדם בצלמנו כדמותנו, ורדו בדגת הים ובעוף וגו' וכמו שאז"ל (ב"מ קי"ד:) אדם אתם ואין העכ"ם קרוין אדם וכמו שאמר שלא יאמר עליו חי מדבר מת רק מדבר דבור אלהי וחי

⁷² In her chapter on Arama's conceptualization of prophecy, Heller-Wilensky discusses the idea that through Torah and performance of the commandments, man passes over from the definition of rational animal to the prophetic-angelic rank of "the animal who reasons with a divine reason and lives," drawing on some but crucially not all (or most) of the material from Gate 44 cited above. In her exposition, it is clear that Heller-Wilensky is at pains to attempt to distinguish Arama's implicit theory of Jewish supremacy from Halevi's by emphasizing that according to the former, in contrast to the latter, distinction/supremacy is ultimately grounded in "human choice" (rather than determined and innate) and "divine righteousness," and therefore the path to prophecy is fundamentally open, the "possibility of this perfection...comprises all species." See Heller-Wilensky, *Arama*, 175ff. In his reception history of the *Kuzari*, Adam Shear suggests that the particularist/Jewish supremacist reading of the *Kuzari* does not begin to exercise influence until the generation *after* the expulsion and echoes Heller-Wilensky in exonerating Arama: "It appears that Arama tended to take the *Kuzari*'s views and make them more compatible with the moderate Maimonidean tradition. Although he stressed the election of Israel, Arama tended to see chosenness in more universalistic terms than the nationalist view of Halevi. For Arama, Israel's election consisted in the Torah being a good tool for attaining divine wisdom." See Shear, *The Kuzari*, 90, 112.

animal.⁷³ Said differently, man is truly man to the extent that he is governed by pure, immaterial intelligence and reason. One implication of this conceptualization of course is what we have already discussed above: a certain openness or universalism; theoretically, any kind of person can become the “man” of Gen. 1:26, so long as they perfect their intellect.⁷⁴ On Arama’s reading, in contrast, the “man” of Gen. 1:26 is restrictive—it is man “who reasons with a divine reason,” i.e., man who obeys Torah. Lest Arama leave any doubt about the identity of this man, he specifies: “you are called man, but the nations are not called man.” While it is manifestly unjust to reserve full humanity for the intelligentsia, it is wholly kosher to reserve it for God’s chosen nation.

3.3.2.2. *Na‘aseh ve-Nishma*‘

The covenant, of course, is two-sided. God promises to constitute the Israelites as a separate and superior species through their adherence to the commandments, but the Israelites must show themselves to be a worthy partner. Arama simultaneously reveals the Israelites to be such a worthy partner and further develops his theory of the commandments through creative exegesis of another famous and closely related verse: the Israelites repeated refrain of *na‘aseh ve-nishma*‘—we shall do and we shall hearken. Through his interpretation of this refrain, Arama strongly suggests that the Israelites are a worthy partner in the covenant for two interrelated reasons. The Israelites, he suggests, understand both (1) the mechanism of the commandments outlined above, and specifically, that the commandments are primarily grounded in material actions, which in turn inculcate certain ideas/understandings; and (2) that the commandments must be grounded in material actions in order to be widely accessible.

⁷³ See *Guide* I.1–4.

⁷⁴ See Harvey, “Crescas’ Critique,” 205–217.

To develop this reading, Arama draws on two Rabbinic passages, both of which gloss the same refrain as Israel having “accorded precedence to *we shall do (na‘aseh)* over *we shall hearken (nishma)*.” Arama homes in on the potential meanings of this and offers two. The first meaning ultimately pertains to the mechanism of the commandments, i.e., how the commandments work: To begin with, since the Israelites said that their *doing* would precede their *hearkening*, they could not have meant *hearkening* in the literal sense of auditory hearing or listening, since such must necessarily precede rather than follow any promise to obey. They thus must have meant *hearkening* in the abstract/metaphorical sense of intellection or understanding. It follows then that in saying that their *doing* would precede their *hearkening*, the Israelites must have further understood how the commandments function: they must be obeyed as material actions, first and foremost, and it is only in performing these material actions, in the *doing*, that a new intellectual understanding or *hearkening* follows, i.e., action not only chronologically precedes, but causally inculcates/facilitates understanding. It is precisely their acceptance of the commandments’ mechanism, Arama further suggests, that makes the Israelites a worthy partner in covenant. The Israelites’ understanding *that* understanding must follow rather than precede doing, i.e., their willingness to suspend understanding, belies at once their kinship with the angels and distinction from other men. Here is what Arama says:⁷⁵

In Tractate Shabbat the Sages said: “When Israel accorded precedence to *we shall do* over *we shall hearken*, a divine voice emerged and said to them: Who revealed to my children this secret that the ministering angels use? As it is

⁷⁵ אמרו חכמינו ז"ל במסכת (שבת פ"ח.) בשעה שהקדימו ישראל נעשה לנשמע יצאה בת קול ואמר מי גלה רזי לבני אדם לשון שמלאכי השרת משתמשים בו שנאמר (תהלים ק"ו) ברכו ה' מלאכיו גבורי כח עושי דברו לשמוע בקול דברו עושים ברישא והדר לשמוע. והכוונה שאם היה דעתם במאמר נשמע לשמיעת האוזן לבד הנה באמת היה להם לומר נשמע ונעשה שקדימות האוזן היא הכרחית למעשה והמעשה הוא מעולה ממנה והוא תכליתה. אמנם כשהקדימו נעשה לנשמע על כרחנו היה כוונתם אל שמיעת הלב וההשכל הבא אחר המעשה והנמשך ממנו כמו שהוא הענין ג"כ בקניני המעלות האנושיות. וכמו שאמרו (קידושין מ'): שהתלמוד מביא לידי מעשה כאשר יתבאר יפה על זה הכתוב עצמו שער מ"ו ב"ה. ולזה יצאת בת קול ואמר מי גלה רזי לבני אדם לשון שמלאכי השרת משתמשים בו וזה שבהם לא נאמר לשון שמיעה רק על ההשכל דכתיב עושי דברו לשמוע בקול דברו. והראי' ההכרחית כי נאמר עושי ברישא והדר לשמוע ואם על שמיעת האוזן היה אומר לשמוע ברישא והדר עושים כמו שאמרנו הנה ששמעו והשכילו מענין העלות מעלותם מכלל האנשים ולשומם בהבדל וסגולה במעלת מלאכי השרת

written *bless the Lord, ye angels of His, ye mighty in strength, that fulfil His word, hearkening unto the voice of His word* (Ps. 103:20). At first, they *fulfill*, and afterwards they *hearken*” (b. Shabbat 88a). The intention is this: If by *we shall hearken* they meant to reference auditory hearing, they would have said *we shall hearken and we shall do*, since auditory hearing necessarily precedes action, which is superior to it and its final purpose. But since *we shall do* precedes *we shall hearken*, the latter must refer to the hearing of the heart and intellect that succeeds action and proceeds therefrom. This is similar to the acquisition of human virtues, as was said: “for study leads to action” (b. Qiddushin 40b)—which dictum shall be finely explicated in connection with the aforementioned verse in the Gate 47, with the help of God.⁷⁶ This is why “a divine voice emerged and said to them: Who revealed to my children this secret that the ministering angels use?” For the word “hearing” is only ever used in connection with them in the sense of intellection, as it is written: *that fulfil His word, hearkening unto the voice of His word* (Ps. 103:20). What necessitates this is “at first, they fulfill, and afterwards they hearken.” For if they meant to refer to auditory hearing, they would have said “at first they hearken, afterwards, they fulfill,” as we said. Thus, they hearkened and intellectually apprehended their superiority over all other people and God’s conferring upon them a specific difference and special property at the rank of the ministering angels.

But the Israelites’ comprehension and acceptance of the mechanism of the commandments are not all that make them a fitting partner in covenant. The Israelites are worthy, Arama suggests, because they understand that the commandments must be grounded in material actions in order to be widely accessible. A second possible meaning of the Israelites having “accorded precedence to *we shall do* (*na‘aseh*) over *we shall hearken* (*nishma*)” might refer to the fact that, following the order of the biblical text, the Israelites make the promise *we shall do* several times before finally adding thereto the promise *we shall hearken*. Arama elaborates: the Israelites were initially reticent to promise *hearkening* and instead only promised to *do* (*na‘aseh*) out of *their* concern for the collective (mirroring both God’s and Arama’s own). The Israelites recognized that the material action or doing of the commandments were widely accessible to all, but delayed

⁷⁶ Arama’s main focus in AY Gate 47 is on the relationship(s) between study and action, and which, per the famous Rabbinic dictum in b.Qiddushin 40b is greater.

agreeing to *hearken* until they understood that such would be inculcated through the already-accessible *doing*:⁷⁷

“When Israel accorded precedence to *we shall do* over *we shall hear*, sixty thousand ministering angels came,” and so on. He meant: Israel was scrupulous. For in their first utterance, they only said: *all that the Lord hath spoken we shall do* (cf Ex. 19:8)—and they did not say “*and then we shall listen*” until the third time, as it was said: *and he took the book of the covenant and read in the hearing of the people, and they said ‘all that the Lord hath spoken we shall do and we shall hear’* (Ex. 24:7). From this it was apparent that they were most scrupulous and attentive to this matter. Initially, it seemed that they only accepted the action, on account of their seeing that it was an easier thing and common to all. However, when they contemplated further, they later said *we shall do and we shall hear*. For they saw that the nature of Torah action is to draw one to intellection and contemplation of the Torah, as shall be made clear there, with the help of God.

Building off all the above, Arama insists that it is *because* the collective Israel agrees to prioritize the action of the commandments—to ensure that the *na’aseh* precedes the supra-rational, divine *nishma* it inculcates—that they receive the core of the Sinaitic revelation, namely, the supra-rational *nishma* that they have been set apart from other men and for immortality:⁷⁸

They recognized that they had already attained this state in according precedence to *we shall do* over *we shall hearken*—for this is what constitutes their participation with the upper beings and their distinction from the lower beings.

Arama thus develops his theories of the commandments as action and Jews as separate species in tandem, both growing out of his concern for the collective and commitment to mass accessibility. Further, he develops his theories through approaches we have discussed in the previous chapters.

בשעה שהקדימו ישראל נעשה לנשמע מיד באו ששים רבוא וכו'. רצה כי ממה שדקדקו ישראל בשקדימו במענה הראשון לומר כל אשר דבר ה' נעשה לבד ולא אמרו אז ונשמע עד הפעם השלישית שנאמר (שמות כ"ד:ז) ויקח ספר הברית ויקרא באזני העם ויאמרו כל אשר דבר ה' נעשה ונשמע יראה שדקדקו היטב בענין הזה. ולכאורה קבלו עליהם המעשה לבד לראותם הוא ענין יותר נקל ומשותף עד שהתבוננו עוד בינה בענין אחר כך ואמרו נעשה ונשמע כל מה שראו שהמעשה התוריי מטבעו לבוא לידי השכל ועיון בו כמו שיתבאר שם ב"ה.

שכבר הכירו שהשיגו אותו הענין שקבלו עליהם בהקדימת נעשה לנשמע אשר בו נעשה השתוף בעליונים וההפרדה מהתחתונים⁷⁸

He centers scripture and exegesis to do major conceptual work for him, to elaborate ideas that the philosophical tradition could not, but he also strategically domesticates philosophy: creatively reading the Aristotelian concept of *segullah* back into the biblical text to develop a theory of Jews as separate species and grounding this theory in a commitment to the collective, in turn reflecting an extension and expansion of the Maimonidean logic of divine accommodation. Yet while it is clear from the foregoing *that* Arama's theories of the commandments and Jews as separate species go hand-in-hand, the actual mechanism or mechanics of *how* this works, *how* the commandments transform the Jews into an *am segullah* remains unclear. Accordingly, in this next and final section, we will conclude our discussion by focusing on Arama's visions of how the commandments *function*.

3.4. Commandment Mechanics

Though Arama gives primary expression to his commitment to the masses and theory of Jews as separate species—virtually all the material presented in the foregoing—in Gate 44, he develops his theory of how the commandments function to produce and sustain the Jews as separate species in scattered marks across AY. In this brief final section, I will attempt to piece together these scattered remarks, focusing first on Arama's theory of the commandments as actions generally, then turning to Arama's alternative, original theory of the dietary laws in particular—already mentioned in a previous chapter. Through these discussions, I will not only illuminate how Arama's vision of the commandments' mechanism undergirds his theory of Jews as separate species. What's more, by showing that Arama's broader theory of the commandments works in concert with his theory of Jews as separate species, I will show that the latter together

with Arama's concern for the collective inspiring it are—far from passing or peripheral idiosyncrasy—central to his oeuvre.

3.4.1. Commandments as *tahbulot*, Commandments and principles

In Arama's interpretations of God's exchange with the Israelites at Sinai discussed above, we saw that God promises to transform the Jews into a separate and superior species—the animal that reasons with a divine reason and lives—in part because they recognize that in order for that transformation to be easily accessible to the masses, it must be facilitated primarily by action; i.e., mundane, material actions easily doable by all must precede any transformations in intellection that rend the masses of Jews into animals of divine reason. Arama fleshes these ideas out further in Gates 51 and 67 of AY, where he suggests exactly how he envisions the commandments in general function to transform the Jews into a separate and superior species by inculcating the ideas that are the stuff of divine reason. Arama's basic theory, simple enough, envisions many commandments functioning on analogy to the memory palace described in the final example from the previous chapter.⁷⁹ The mundane, material actions entailed in many commandments serve as “devices” with which associated beliefs or ideas are deposited or tethered or otherwise bound up.⁸⁰ Over time, repetitive, bodily performance of these action-aspects of the commandment cause adherents to recall or invoke the associated beliefs so much

⁷⁹ See 2.4.1 above.

⁸⁰ AY V: 23b:

“In every instance that the Torah commands something to be recollected, it does so in conjunction with a particular action with which the recollection can be deposited so that it can be recollected together with it [. . .] Recollection is only commanded in conjunction with some action that is subject to free choice, the former being bound to the latter and following from it [. . .] It is only commanded in conjunction with something that is completely in man's dispensation and power, i.e., that can [legitimately] be obligated of him. For when one rules over the cause of a thing, one already rules over the thing itself, without a doubt.”

that they become a sort of second nature.⁸¹ Action-based commandments thus serve as a tool for habituating adherents to a unique—and uniquely divine, so uniquely redemptive—set of associated beliefs, eventually transforming adherents’ inner, ideological makeup.

Arama elaborates this theory in connection with what he identifies as the six core “roots” or “cornerstones” of Torah: belief in creation; belief in God’s power to intervene in the laws of nature; belief in prophecy and that the Torah was given from heaven; belief in divine providence; belief in repentance; and belief in the World to Come, i.e., belief in immortality. As both Heller-Wilensky and Kellner have already highlighted, these “root” beliefs are, crucially, *not* coextensive either with the beliefs prerequisite to believing in the Torah, nor coextensive with the beliefs taught by Torah—both of which are far greater.⁸² Rather, Arama singles out only these six beliefs because he identifies them as those which are *unique* to Torah: not shared in common with either other religions or the philosophers.⁸³ In other words, these are the beliefs that distinguish adherents to Torah from everyone else—the beliefs constitutive of divine reason, possession of which rends Jews into a separate and superior species. Not only because these beliefs are above natural human reason, but more importantly because he insists that beliefs and ideas can never be mandated as such out of care for the masses, as we saw above, Arama explains that the Torah was designed to inculcate these “root” beliefs by coupling each with a

⁸¹ See Heller-Wilensky, *Arama*, 192ff.

⁸² See Heller-Wilensky, *Arama*, 78–96; Kellner, *Dogma*, 159–161.

⁸³ Consider Arama’s remarks at the beginning of AY Gate 67, Chapter 2:

אחר שהנחנו ראשונה שהיה סדר המועדים הלזה ספר זכרונות הרשום בכתב מפורש למען דעת כל עמי הארץ הפנות השרשיות באשר הם בעלי תורת מרע"ה חוייב שיונחו פרקיו בשרשים והפנות המיוחדות אליה לא בזולתם ואם היו לה הכרחיות. וזה שלא כל מה שלא יצוייר מציאות תורת אלהית זולתו הוא עקר מיוחד אליה שא"כ יהיה מציאות הטבע והיות האדם שכלי או בעל בחירה עקרים לה כיון שא"א לשום תורה זולתם. אמנם כיון שהדברים האלה הם משותפים לבעלי תורה ולזולתם מבעלי העיון ושאר האמונות הנה אינם ראויים שיושמו עקרים מיוחדים לה. ומזה הטעם הוא מבואר ג"כ כי מציאות השם ואחדותו ובלתי היותו גשם וכח בו אף ע"פ שתניחם התורה ותזהיר עליהם מאד כזהיר על הרציחה וניאוף וזולתם הנה אינם עקרים מיוחדים לה כי כל חכמי הפילוסופים חייבו אמתם במופתים מוחלטים עם שלא הודו בתורה האלהית. ומראוי שהתורה האלהית הזאת והעקרים המיוחדים אליה יתהפכו יחד כהתהפך הגדר בנגדר עד שנאמר שכל בעל תורה האלהית יאמין אותם וכל מי שיאמיןם הוא בעל תורה אלהית

holiday, in turn associated with set of action-based commandments. By repeatedly performing the mundane, material action-based commandments associated with the holiday—accessible to all—the associated root belief would follow. The commandments thus not only serve to transform the inner nature of all adherents by inculcating this set of beliefs through easily accessible actions; they also serve to distinguish adherents, observant and practicing Jews, from all others through this transformation, by instilling beliefs that cannot be attained otherwise. Here is what Arama says about this in connection with the first two “roots”—belief in creation and belief in God’s power to intervene in the laws of nature, bound up with the Sabbath and Passover, respectively:⁸⁴

It is the Torah’s custom that, whenever it commands something unnatural to be recollected, it does so in conjunction with a commandment to perform some action with which the recollection might be bound up—and thus arise in connection with that action. This is the case, for example, with [recollecting] the Creation, which is deposited with the weekly observance of the Sabbath—“for anyone included in observing is included in remembering.” It is also the case for [recollecting] intervention in nature through the holiday of Passover in the month of Abib, as it is said *keep the month of Abib, for you went out from Egypt therein* (Ex. 13)...See that He gave us a correct and upright path, whereby man can prevail over his natural capacities, bringing them to into the transmission of the covenant! ...The aim is that the Torah rightly guides and leads one to the final end sought, in its giving man the aforementioned device, through which we learn to make learned notions into habitual or natural actions.

From the passage above, it is evident that Arama envisions action-based commandments functioning on analogy to the memory device discussed in the previous chapter, for he uses much of the same language. “The commandments to perform [] action” are “devices,” with which “recollections” are “bound up” or “deposited,” though the “devices” and “recollections” are here

⁸⁴ מנהג התורה האלהית בכל מה שהטילה מצוות הזכרון בכל אלו הדברים הלימודיים כי הנה היא לא צותה בדבר של זכירה שלא צותה לעשות מעשה בו תקשר הזכירה ההיא ותתחייב לעלות לפניו דבקה עם המעשה כמו שהיה הענין בחדוש העולם שהפקידו אצל שמירת השבת יום אחד בשבוע כי כל מי שישנו בשמיר' ישנו בזכירה (ברכות כ'): והקדע הטבע ע"י חג הפסח בחדש האביב כמ"ש (שמות י"ג) שמור את חדש האביב כי בו יצאת ממצרים... ראה כי נתן לפנינו דרך נכון וישר בו יגבר אדם על כחותיו הטבעיות להכניסם במסירת הברית... והכוונה שהיא תישיר אל הכרת התכלית הטוב ותוליכהו אצלו. וזה מה שהיא נותנת לפניו התחבולה ההיא שזכרנו אשר בה נלמוד לעשות מהענינים הלימודיים פעולות מדותיות או טבעיות

differently specified: not the *shema* as memory palace for various classes of other commandments, but rather the commandments associated with observance of the Sabbath and Passover, bound up with beliefs in creation and God’s power to intervene in the laws of nature. Perhaps most importantly, just as in the example of the memory palace we saw Arama—following classical and Christian convention—arguing that mnemotechnics are a sort of artifice that can transform a person’s natural capacity for memory, here too, Arama suggests that the action-based commandments in general are a sort of divine artifice for transforming adherent’s nature more broadly, by which “man can prevail over his natural capacities, *bringing them into the covenant*.” Through habituation, practice of the commandments instills a set of divine beliefs that set adherents apart. This gift of holidays as devices, mundane, material commandments as tools for inculcating distinguishing beliefs, is how Arama elsewhere understands divine chosenness; God’s choice and election of the people Israel. Prefacing his most extensive discussion of the six “roots” of Torah, Arama interprets a passage from the *qiddush* prayer as signifying that Israel’s chosenness and belovedness are reflected most of all in God’s gift of the holidays to the Israelites *because* these benefit the masses—even “the women and children.”⁸⁵

“They repeated this at the end, saying: “For You chose us and sanctified us from among all the nations; You bequeathed unto us all the festivals of Your Holiness in joy and rejoicing.” This testifies that all these languages of love were singled out for us, and that of all of them, the strongest was that He drew us near to His service, giving us the holidays which benefit the masses—the women and children, who do not know how to seek them from the Torah scroll, as was mentioned. [He did this] in order to make them known to them through their enduring customs, through these holidays and their mentioning of them, which would not cease with their children, as was said: “these are the festivals of the

⁸⁵ ואלו הלשונות חזרו בסוף ואמרו כי בנו בחרת ואותנו קדשת מכל העמים ומועדי קדשך בשמחה ובששון הנחלתנו יעיד כי כל אלו הלשונות של חבה נזדווגו אלינו ובכלן יותר חזק מהם קרבנו לעבודתו לתת לנו סדר המועדים המועילים לכל ההמון הנשים והטף אשר לא ידעו לדרוש אותם מעל ספר התורה כנזכר שידעו אותם מתוך מנהגם המתקיים בידם מתוך אלו המועדים וזכרם לא יסוף מזרעם וכמש"ה אלה מועדי ה' מקראי קדש וגו'. כי מי פתי אשר יושאל אליו למה אתה שובת ביום השביעי ואינך עוסק בו אפי' בצורך אוכל נפש עד שאתה צריך להכין מהיום הששי ולהטמין חמין מבעוד יום שלא ישיבך כי ששת ימים עשה ה' וגו' והרי הוא מעיד בחידוש העולם ולמד אותו משביתת השבת

Lord, holy happenings, and so on.” For who is so foolish that when he is asked: “why do you cease/desist on the seventh day, not engaging in work even to satisfy the needs of the body, so that you must prepare on the preceding day, grinding your grain a day prior?” he will not reply: “for in six days the Lord made, and so on” and indeed—this testifies to His creation of the world and teaches him of His desisting on the Sabbath.”

Here, Arama connects his envisioned mechanism of the commandments with both concern for the collective and Jews as separate species, bringing all the ideas developed in this chapter full circle. The gift of the holidays and the material “customs” and commanded actions associated with them are the extreme expression of divine love for Israel—and only Israel—because they inculcate the beliefs constitutive of divine reason even to fools; this is the sense in which God “sanctified us from all the nations.”

3.4.2. The Reason for the Dietary Laws, Part II

So much for Arama’s theory of how action-based commandments, and particularly those associated with certain holidays, function as “devices” for inculcating unique, supra-rational beliefs, transforming adherents’ inner nature. However, this theory is not the only one Arama advances to elaborate his theory of how the commandments work to constitute the Jews as separate and superior species. For our final discussion, we will turn back to a Gate already discussed in the previous chapter, and a theory already alluded to there, namely: Arama’s second, alternative, and as far as I know original explication of the dietary laws, developed in Gate 60. As discussed in the previous chapter, Arama’s main focus in this Gate is to elaborate the reason(s) for the dietary laws, and to this end, he devotes a significant portion of the Gate to treating what he identifies as the “first reason”—a basically Maimonidean theory that the dietary laws serve an asceticizing function, to help discipline the body to the intellect or soul and instill a

rightful obedience of form to matter.⁸⁶ Yet as I also mentioned there, Arama also seems to suggest that this Maimonidean, asceticizing theory of the dietary laws is really only a preliminary or more superficial explication of the dietary laws, the deeper or truer reason for which consists in what he identifies as the “second reason.” According to this latter, as Arama explains it, the dietary laws serve to help produce and reproduce a distinct and superior biological, moral, and spiritual disposition within those who observe them. Said differently, according to this second reason, the dietary laws materially ensure that the Israelites are constituted as separate and superior species—constituting the perfect complement and development of Arama’s theories of Jews as separate species and commandments, limned above.

To develop his theory of how the dietary laws work to constitute the Jews as separate and superior species, Arama draws from both his beloved Aristotle’s *Ethics* and the well-known theory of climes, once more creatively deploying standard philosophical ideas and texts to profoundly anti-philosophical ends.⁸⁷ From the former, he borrows the idea that action and so character is consequent upon affections of pleasure and pain. From the latter, he borrows the idea that dispositions are consequent upon the elemental principles in a person’s environment when they are born and as they are raised. To these two premises, Arama adds the idea that pleasure and pain are consequent upon dispositions, stringing together a sort of implicit syllogism: Since character is consequent upon affections of pleasure and pain; since pleasure and pain are in turn consequent upon dispositions; and since dispositions are in turn consequent upon environmental

⁸⁶ See 2.2.1.

⁸⁷ For background on the theory of climes in medieval Jewish thought, see Alexander Altmann’s classic, “Judah Halevi’s Theory of Climes,” trans. Lenn J. Schram, *Aleph* 5 (2005): 215–246; Abraham Melamed, “The Greek Theory of Climate in Medieval Jewish Thought: Absorption, Influence, and Application,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Identity and the Environment in the Classical and Medieval Worlds*, eds. Rebecca Futo Kennedy and Molly Jones-Lewis (Routledge, 2016), 114–130; Resianne Fontaine, “Between Scorching Heat and Freezing Cold: Medieval Jewish Authors on the Inhabited and Uninhabited Parts of the Earth,” *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 10 (2000): 101–137.

factors—not least of which is the food that literally comes to reconstitute the body through the process of digestion—it follows that character is consequent upon food; i.e., you are what you eat. This is precisely why God prescribed the dietary laws. With the dietary laws, God aims to shape the Israelites' material dispositions, in turn shaping their experience of the affections of pain and pleasure, in turn shaping their opinions and actions, and so their characters. Arama summarizes this idea as follows:⁸⁸

In any case, it has been made clear what we aimed at concerning [how] the affections of man [are derived] from the things upon which he is raised [and these influence] his desires and opinions, such that nourishment is a major principle [constituting] the quality of men. Thus, even in the intermediate climes it is clear that those who perpetually habituate themselves to base habits and coarse, disgusting foods, as well as other loathsome behaviors, these generate natures and dispositions similar to their own and they give birth *in their image and likeness* to children who are base in their souls and [who have] strange and corrupt desires which prevent them from entering the community of the Lord forever. It was for this reason that God, Exalted be He, [gave what He did] unto the individuals of the chosen nation: to move them from the habits which they shared in common with the rest of the peoples in all their conditions and foods and drinks and the rest of life's necessities, so that they would be distinguished.... For just as they are distinguished in [terms of] their nourishment, so too they are distinguished in their opinions and their actions, as scripture said: *ye are the children of the Lord your God, ye shall not cut yourselves*, and so on (Deut. 14:1). The aim [in this] was to make it known to them that they had already been moved in their nature very far from [the rest of the species of] man, and that they were already beloved as children of God, such that they ought not be terrified... like the rest of the nations, as it said: *for thou art a holy people unto the Lord thy God and the Lord hath chosen thee* (Deut. 14:2)...

⁸⁸ ומכל מקום נתבאר מה שכווננו אליו מהתפעלות האדם מהדברים אשר גדל עליהם אל תאותיו ואל דעותיו עד שהיו המזונות עקר גדול באיכות האנשים עד שאף באקלימים האמצעיים הוא מבואר שהמרגילים עצמם תמיד על המנהגים הפחותים והמאכלים הגסים והמשוקצים ויתר ההרגלים המאוסים שיתהוו להם טבעים ומזגים כיוצא בהם ויולידו בדמותם וצלמם ילדי פחיתות בנפשותיהם ותאוות זרות ונפסדות ירחיקו אותם מבוא בקהל ה' עד עולם לזה מה שהיה מאת האל יתעלה אל אישי האומה הנבחרת להעתיקם מהמנהגים המשותפים אל יתר העמים בכל עניניהם ובמאכלם ובמשקיהן ויתר צרכי חייהם עד יהיו נבדלים מהם... כי כמו שהם נבדלים במזונותיהם כך הם נבדלים בדעותיהם ובמעשיהם כמו שאמר הכתוב (דברים י"ד) בנים אתם ליי' אלהיכם לא תתגודדו וגו'. והכוונה להודיע להם שכבר הועתקו בטבעם הרחק מאד מאדם. ושכבר הם חביבים כבני אלהים עד שאין להם להחרד... כיתר האומות וכמ"ש (שם) כי עם קדוש אתה ליי' אלהיך ובך בחר וגו'

In this passage, Arama states in no uncertain terms that God gives the dietary laws in order to set the Jews as a species apart: “to move them from the habits they shared in common with the rest of the peoples;” “so that they would be distinguished;” “for just as they are distinguished in [terms of] their nourishment, so too are they distinguished in their opinions and their actions;” most strongly “the aim [in this] was to make it known to them that they had already been moved in their nature very far from [the rest of the species of] man.” But in addition to this, here we also find what are perhaps the strongest indicators of *how* or in what way Arama envisions the Jews as separate and superior species. In particular, through this second, alternative theory of the dietary laws, Arama makes it clear that the dietary laws work to reconstitute the Jews as separate and superior species by fusing material elements with moral and spiritual ones, the biological with the cultural. Though Arama eventually goes on to reject theories of the dietary laws as having only material repercussions, his theory elaborated above also implicitly challenges his earlier, Maimonidean, asceticizing explication that the dietary laws are merely instruments of moral or spiritual reform. Indeed, Arama insists that the dietary laws are so materially transformative as to be heritable; hence his remark that “those who perpetually habituate themselves to base habits and coarse, disgusting foods, as well as other loathsome behaviors [] generate natures and dispositions similar to their own and they give birth *in their image and likeness* to children who are base in their souls and [who have] strange and corrupt desires which prevent them from entering the community of the Lord forever.” This is why Arama needs both the theory of climes *and* Aristotle: While Aristotle enables him to say that the dietary laws effect a spiritual and not merely material transformation (by transforming affections of pleasure and pain, the dietary laws transform actions and character⁸⁹), the theory of climes enables him to

⁸⁹ Arama undoubtedly understands this Aristotelian possibility for transformation in light of the Aristotelian theory of habit, well-developed in the *Ethics*.

restrict this spiritual transformation and elevation to a particular community on the basis of biology (affections of pleasure and pain can only be transformed through a transformation of disposition, in turn requiring a transformation in ancestral diet). Following David Nirenberg, this fusion of the biological with the cultural, the spiritual with the material, is why I suggested in the introduction to this chapter that we might understand Arama's theory of Jews as separate species as a theory of race.⁹⁰ For with this second explication of the dietary laws, Arama makes it quite clear that the Jews are distinguished not only through their divine reason, but through the bodily changes that necessarily precede and inculcate it. Further, bodily observance of the commandments is the *sine qua non* for effecting these bodily changes—at once guaranteeing separation and distinction for even the children and fools who can easily adhere and barring it from conversos who do not.

Before concluding a few final remarks on Arama's second explication of the dietary laws are in order. Though Arama's second explication of the dietary laws as producing and reproducing the Jews as separate-and-superior species, biologically and culturally, may seem to fly in the face of the universalist spirit of so much medieval Jewish philosophy—at least as its been imagined by contemporary scholars—it is worth reiterating again that the materials Arama uses to craft this explication are very much drawn from the heart of medieval Jewish philosophy: Aristotle was of course ubiquitous in medieval Jewish thought, and the *Ethics* in fifteenth century Spain in particular. The theory of climes, meanwhile, was not only used by Judah Halevi to develop his theory of prophecy but was also invoked by Maimonides at key points in the

⁹⁰ David Nirenberg, "Was there race before modernity? The example of 'Jewish' blood in late medieval Spain," in *The Origins of Racism in the West*, eds. M. Eliav-Feldon, B. Isaac, J. Ziegler (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 232–264. See in particular Nirenberg's remark on 235: "all [racisms] claim a congruence of 'cultural' categories with 'natural' ones;" and his proposal on 239 that we might "treat race as but one chapter in the long history of the conviction that culture is produced and reproduced in the same way as the species procreates itself." Arama's theory of Jews as separate species, especially as articulated in his alternative theory of the dietary laws, seems to align with this latter definition of 'race' perfectly.

Guide as well, and went on subsequently to lead a vibrant afterlife in medieval Jewish texts across genres, from encyclopediae to sermons to bible commentaries.⁹¹ Taken together with the other philosophical resources we have already seen Arama use to cobble together his theory of Jews as separate species—i.e., the Maimonidean logic of divine accommodation and the Aristotelian logical sense of *segullah*—it is clear that, far from standing as an external aberrant to medieval Jewish philosophy, Arama’s theory of Jews as separate species, of Jewish supremacy is built from elements immanent to it.

Yet these elements of medieval Jewish philosophy were likely not the sole building blocks Arama used to construct his theory of Jews as separate species, and in particular, his second explication of the dietary laws. Likely informing the latter was also a more contemporary and distinctly Iberian current: namely, fifteenth century Iberian theories surrounding the relation between food, blood, and psychobiological superiority. In several recent studies, Ana M. Gomez-Bravo has shown that a number of late fifteenth century Iberian texts attempted to construct systematic differences between classes of people—laypeople from noblemen, but also Jews from Christians—by arguing that the different foods consumed by these different classes of people differently constituted their blood, yielding meaningful differences in their spiritual and moral dispositions that were grounded in biology.⁹² Unsurprisingly, these arguments were often used

⁹¹ For Halevi, see Altmann, “Judah Halevi’s Theory of Climes;” for Maimonides, see *Guide* III.29, III.51, and Freudenthal, “The Biological Foundations.” For the theory of climes in medieval Hebrew encyclopedias of science—including Judah ha-Kohen’s *Midrash Hokhmah*, Shem Tov Falaquera’s *De’ot ha-Filosofim*, and Gershom b. Solomon’s *Sha’ar ha-Shamayim*—see Fontaine, “Between Scorching Heat and Freezing Cold,” 112–137. Jacob Anatoli briefly discusses the theory of climes in e.g., his sermon for Shavu’ot, as does ibn Shu’eib in his sermon on *ha’azinu*. Bahya ben Asher mentions the theory of climes in a number of places throughout his Torah commentary, one example is cited by Melamed, 124.

⁹² Ana M. Gómez-Bravo, “Food, Blood, and a Jewish Raza in Fifteenth-Century Spain,” in *Food, Texts, and Cultures in Latin America and Spain*, eds. Rafael Climent-Espino and Ana M. Gómez-Bravo (Vanderbilt University Press, 2020), 39–75; Ana M. Gómez-Bravo, “Establishing Biological Superiority: Food and Nobility in the Fifteenth Century,” *La corónica: A Journal of Medieval Hispanic Languages, Literatures, and Cultures* 49, no. 3 (2021): 51–84.

against Jews, and even more so Conversos: to insist that Jews' generational and habitual consumption of particularly dirty or disgusting foods rendered their blood and character irreparably and immutably base—and in such a way that even conversion could not expunge. While we cannot know with certainty, if Arama did indeed have these ideas in view in formulating his second explication of the dietary laws, we would here encounter perhaps his ultimate act of domestication and subversion: repurposing anti-Jewish theories about the relationship between food, blood, and superiority into pro-Jewish ones; turning the weapons of the Inquisition to develop a counter theory of Jewish racial supremacy.

3.5. Conclusion

Where have we been? In many respects, the Isaac Arama who falls out of the foregoing pages might very much be who a contemporary student of medieval Jewish philosophy and thought, equipped with already-existing scholarship, would have expected him to be: A preacher whose magnum opus is a massive collection of sermons, it is hardly surprising that Arama is serious about exegesis, using it not only as the formal cast for most of his oeuvre, but also as the substantial, conceptual core through which he elaborates many of his key ideas (chapter 1). Steeped in a longstanding, multidimensional, and dynamic medieval Jewish culture of Hebrew science and philosophy, it is also hardly surprising that Arama creatively incorporates philosophical tools and texts, methods and arguments into his work at every turn, even as he often rails against “the philosophizers” (chapter 2). And deemed “anti-philosophical” and “conservative,” writing in the midst of Inquisition, on the eve of the expulsion, it is not surprising that Arama takes refuge in classical Rabbinic mythology of Israel's chosenness and special relationship with God amongst the nations (chapter 3). Yet even if at the level of these

broadest contours, the Arama we have encountered does not altogether surprise, the depth, intricacy, and acuity of his engagements—with exegesis, philosophy, and most especially, the constellation of themes surrounding the twin axes of commitment to the masses and Jews as separate species—ought to rouse us: Not only to the unplumbed richness of his oeuvre for further study in general, but to the importance of further recovering Arama and figures like him at this historical moment in particular.

In my general Introduction as well as in the introductions to each chapter, I suggested how focusing on Arama's exegesis, domestications of philosophy, and the twin themes of commitment to the masses and Jews as separate species each interrupt a certain prevailing tendency in the field of medieval Jewish intellectual history. But beyond these individual interventions or even their sum, what I have tried to suggest is that—when taken on his own terms (i.e., as exegete) and read closely in connection with his diverse philosophical sources—Arama and his AY very much fly in the face of how scholars have long tried to imagine medieval Jewish philosophy, if not medieval Jewish thought writ large. Given Arama's methods of exegesis, textual authorities, and thematic preoccupations—and following Profiat Duran's tripartite classification in *Ma'aseh Efod*, to which contemporary scholarship has eerily hewed—scholars cannot, so to speak, write Arama off as either a Kabbalist or Talmudist, leaving him to be classed among the Philosophers. Yet Arama poses a serious problem for scholars of medieval Jewish philosophy: Not because of his express polemics against the philosophizers, in which scholars have taken comfort, but rather because his strongly particularistic theory of Jews as separate species, growing out of an anti-elitist commitment to the masses, is cobbled together from none other than the bona fide well of medieval Jewish philosophy itself: Maimonideanism, Aristotelianism, and philosophical-allegorical exegesis. Recognizing how Arama weaves his

theory of Jews as separate species from the warp of creative exegesis and woof of domesticated philosophy is to recognize that the putatively “conservative” strain of late medieval Spanish-Jewish thought that he is taken to represent is *neither* a simplistic reaction to nor evidence of the decay of medieval Jewish philosophy’s implicitly “progressive” essence, but rather another organic expression of it. In other words, recognizing at once the centrality of Arama’s theory of Jews as separate species and the extent to which he belongs to the tradition(s) of medieval Jewish philosophy is to put the lie to the fantasy of the latter as essentially “progressive,” universalistic, Enlightened, or perhaps even proto-liberal; it is to admit that expressions of Jewish supremacy cannot be consigned away to the mythical imagery of Kabbalah and mysticism, but also flower from the seeds of medieval Jewish rationalism. With the circumstances of both Jewish Studies in the academy and Jews throughout the world so drastically different today than in the era of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* movement, it is well past time that scholars of medieval Jewish philosophy move beyond an apologetic stance and curating an image of our object that soothes us. Articulating a robust theory of Jewish supremacy in the well-trod font of medieval Jewish philosophy, Arama opens the door, inviting us to take up a more critical study of those aspects of medieval Jewish philosophy that rightfully trouble us.

4. Appendix: Catalogue of Sources

With limited exception (4.1 and 4.3), this appendix does not present new material but rather aims to condense in one place discoveries made with regards to Arama's source material, already discussed in examples scattered throughout the dissertation. In three instances, the source I discuss has already been identified as a source for Arama generally, and so my contribution is limited to elaborating a specific textual connection. This is the case as regards Albo's *Book of Principles*, Crescas' *Light of the Lord*, and ibn Shem Tob's *Commentary on the Ethics*. In the remaining three instances, the sources I discuss have not previously been identified as such in scholarship to the best of my knowledge. This is the case as regards Gersonides' *Supercommentary on the Book of Principles*, Hayyim Israeli's *Ma'amar Gan Eden*, and ibn Shem Tob's *Ein ha-Qore*. I have ordered these sources according to the order in which we encountered them in the preceding chapters.

4.1. Gersonides, *Sefer Ba'alei Hayyim*

Though both the Aristotelian corpus and Gersonides' works have long been known to number among Arama's sources such that the following finding is not particularly unexpected, I suggest that we can further specify one of Arama's sources as Gersonides' so-called *Commentary on the Book of Animals* (henceforth: SC.BA)—really a supercommentary on (the Hebrew translation of) Averroes' commentary on the Book of Animals.¹ Though Arama does not cite from SC.BA

¹ Heller-Wilensky notes Arama's frequent recourse to Gersonides' bible commentary and catalogues many of Arama's explicit citations of *Wars of the Lord* in Heller-Wilensky, *Arama*, 41 and 42 n.128. She notes his knowledge of the Aristotelian corpus on Heller-Wilensky, *Arama*, 37–38, but does not mention his knowledge of zoological works. For background on zoology in medieval Jewish thought, see Mauro Zonta, "The Zoological Writings in the Hebrew Tradition: The Hebrew Approach to Aristotle's Zoological Writings and to Their Ancient and Medieval Commentators in the Middle Ages," in *Aristotle's Animals in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, eds. C. Steel, G. Guldentops, and P. Beullens (Leuven, 1999), 44–68; Mauro Zonta, *La filosofia antica*, 195–6; Mauro Zonta, "Ibn al-Tayyib Zoologist and Hunayn Ibn Ishaq's Revision of Aristotle's *De animalibus*: New Evidence from the Hebrew Tradition," *Aram* 3 (1991): 235–47.

directly, there are two interrelated pieces of evidence for this, both drawn from the early parts of Gate 10.

The first piece of evidence relates to the midrash from Number's Rabbah on Adam's naming of the animals, already discussed in 1.3.1. As we saw there, Arama interprets this midrash chiefly in light of the idea that the study of zoology or zoological taxonomy requires knowledge attained through sense-perception—an idea that, to the best of my knowledge, was not popular in contemporary Hebrew philosophical literature. Though he does not use the same language, Gersonides develops an extremely similar set of ideas in SCBA: Distinguishing between subspecies of a given animal species requires knowledge of accidental (i.e., non-essential) attributes which can only be known through sense-perception. Consequently, embarking on the project of zoological taxonomy sans sense-perception is liable to end in failure to discern between the subspecies of a given species and result in using the general species name equivocally and improperly, i.e., to describe the various subspecies falling within it. Here is what Gersonides says, next to the relevant passage of Arama:

Gersonides, SC.BA ²	Arama, Gate 10
Similarly, it is impossible to undertake a division according to the accidental concomitants that exist in the species of animals qua animals (whether shared in common or unique/particular—) save through the estimation of sense-perception. For these accidents either follow from the animals' forms or from their matter—and how is it possible to know them save through perceiving those species through sense-perception?!	For precisely because of this, man can apprehend what the angels cannot; i.e., he can recognize the particulars of composite beings that are only distinguished through their accidents. This is why man was able to distinguish the animals with individual names derived from what he perceived of the differentia distinguishing each sect, even though they all belonged to a single species. This knowledge is not ascribed to the supernal intellects, for even if they know and apprehend the general species in respect of the generality of their forms, i.e., the species of cattle or the

² The Hebrew text is based on Gersonides, *Supercommentary on Averroes' Middle Commentary on the Book of Animals*, in Bibliotheque Nationale de France, Ms. hebr. 966. NLI no. F 32612 fol. 8a. In my translation I consulted that of Ahuva Gaziel, who translates this same passage in her article "Questions of Methodology in Aristotle's Zoology: A Medieval Perspective," *Journal of the History of Biology* 45 (2012): 329–352, see 337.

	species of beasts or the species of fowl, they do not apprehend the particulars of each class that distinguish the camel from the horse and the ass, or the lion from the wolf and the bear...
וג"כ אי אפשר החלוקה במשיגים המקריים המשותפים והמיוחדים הנמצאים במיני הב"ח כמו שהם ב"ח אם לא בהשערות החוש כי אלו המקרים אם שיהיו נמשכים לצורות הב"ח או לחומריהם ואין דרך ידיעת אלו מזולת הרגשת המינים ההם.	מהצד ההוא עצמו תמצא לו השגה מה שלא תמצא להם. והוא ההכר' והשפעה בין פרטי אלו הנמצאות המורכבות הנבדלות במקריהם לבד. עד שיספיק להבדילים בשמות נרשמים פרטיים לקוחים מצד מה שירגיש בחלופיהן יבדלו בהם כל כת וכת מהם. ואם הם כאלו תחת מין א'. מה שלא תיוחס ידיעה זו אל השכלים העליונים שאם הם ידעו והשיגו המינים הכוללים מצד כוללות צורותם כמין החיה או מין הבהמה או העוף הנה לא ישיגו פרטי חלקיותם לתת הבדל בין הגמל והסוס והחמור או בין הארי והזאב והדוב...

Though Gersonides uses more technical language, what he describes finds echo in the parallel passage from Arama: Both note that beyond a certain level, distinctions between species of animals rely on “accidents” (as opposed to essences), and that this is why discerning between species requires sense-perception.

The second piece of evidence to support this conjecture comes from slightly earlier in Gate 10. One of the many building blocks Arama summons to begin constructing his tripartite epistemology and the idea just discussed—i.e., that zoological taxonomy requires knowledge acquired through sense-perception—is a paraphrastic summary of a passage that he attributes to Aristotle’s *Physics* describing the method of study in the natural sciences. Here is what Arama says:³

The Scientist clarified this in the beginning of the *Physics*. He said that in the study of natural existents, it is good and fitting to proceed from common things to parts (184a24)

וזה דבר שביארו החוקר בתחלת ספר השמע כי כשאמר שהטוב והנאות שילך בלמוד בנמצאות הטבעיות מן הדברים הכוללים אל החלקיים ³ אמר שם ז"ל. ואמנם היה זה לפי שהדברים היותר כוללים ידועים אצלנו מן המיוחדים כמו שהמורכבים יותר ידועים אצלנו מן הפשוטים. והכוונה לו שעם שכבר הקדים לומר שבדרך המופתים ילך מהמתאחר אל הקודם עכ"ז בסדר הלמוד הנה הוא יתחיל מן הכוללים הקודמים אצל הטבע ויותר ידועים אצל השכל וילך מהם אל המיוחדים לפי שזה הוא ממש ההליך מן הידוע אל הנעלם כי יש לנו להקדים בלמוד הענינים הכוללים הידועים תחלה אצל השכל אל המיוחדים המתאחרים אליו. כמו שבעמידה על המופתים הנעשים בדרך החקיר' נלך מהמורכב המתאחר אשר הוא ידוע ונכר אצלנו בחוש אל הקודם הפשוט הנודע בסוף אצל השכל. כי המורכב הכללי הנמצא חוץ לנפש הוא באמת ידוע אצל החוש מפשוטיו. כמו שהשמות הנפרדים המורים על האדם והסוס דרך משל הם ידועים יותר מהגדרים המורים על חלקי כל אחד מהם וקבוצם יחד. וזהו תוכן כוונתו שם. והנה אם כן הנמצא כל אשר יהיה יותר כולל יהיה יותר נודע אצל השכל וכל אשר יהיה יותר מיוחד ורמוז אליו יהיה יותר מורגש בחוש.

because common things are more known to us than particulars, just as composites are more known to us than simples. His aim was that even though he had already established that in [the realm of] demonstrations/syllogisms, it is fitting to proceed from the posterior (or: consequent) to the prior (or: antecedent), according to the order of study, one should begin with common things that are prior by nature and more known to the intellect, and proceed from these to particulars—for both of these are cases of proceeding from what is known to what is unknown. In study, general notions which are first known to the intellect ought to precede those particulars that are posterior for it, just as in contemplating demonstrations, we should proceed from the composite posterior (or: consequent), which is recognizable to us by way of our senses, to the simple prior (or: antecedent), which is ultimately known by the intellect. For the general composite which exists outside the soul is better known to our sense-perception than the abstract simples, just as the names indicating man and horse are better known than the definitions indicating their parts, let alone the collection of their parts. This is the substance of his aim there. *If this is the case, the more universal some existent is, the more known it will be to [our] intellect, while the more particular something is, the more perceived it will be by [our] senses* (emphasis mine).

While a comparison of this summary paraphrase with the texts the Short and Middle

Commentaries on the Physics that would have been known to Arama reflect a basically faithful if not rearranged and synthetic account, what stands out is Arama's concluding gloss on the paraphrase, italicized for emphasis at the end of the passage above.⁴ According to Arama's gloss, the citation from Physics implies a certain distinction between the kinds of objects best known to the intellect and those best known to the senses: In particular, the more general/universal (*kollel*) something is, the better known to intellect, and the more individual/specific something is (*meyuhad*), the more subject to sense perception (in Arama's own words: "the more universal some existent is, the more known it will be to our intellect, while the more particular something is, the more perceived it will be by our senses"). What is strange here lies in the latter part of this formulation, and the identification of what is more individual/specific (*meyuhad*) with what is most subject to sense-perception. For while throughout the summary paraphrase from Physics,

⁴ There are in fact a few other complex and subtle distinctions between Arama's paraphrastic summary and the Middle Commentary in the Hebrew translation of Kalonymus b. Kalonymus, which I discuss in the notes to my translation in Part II below.

Aristotle repeatedly claims that natural science begins with objects of sense-perception, he also repeatedly suggests that the object of sense-perception and the proper beginning of natural science is *the opposite* of what is *meyuhad*, namely, *ha-kollel*; time and again, he insists that knowledge in natural sciences consists in a movement from the *kollel* to the *meyuhad*, from the more general to more particular. In the version of the Middle Commentary likely known to Arama, Averroes even hammers this point home with an example, explaining that young children think that every woman is their mother and every man their father. So whereas Arama's faithful summary paraphrase of Aristotle suggests that in the journey of apprehension through sense-perception, the *meyuhad* is the destination, Arama's concluding gloss on that very same summary paraphrase asserts precisely the opposite: i.e., that sense-perception and the *meyuhad* are coupled, the latter the most proper object of the former. How is it then that Arama glosses the paraphrase in this way, contending that the passage implies that the more *meyuhad* something is, the more known it is to sense perception?

Here is where we return to Gersonides' SCBA. In the passage of SCBA cited just above, Gersonides draws a similar connection to the one Arama does, coupling the *meyuhad* with sense-perception and suggesting the former is the object of the latter. What's more, in the immediate continuation of this passage, Gersonides goes on to draw a distinction between the method of study in the natural sciences and that in mathematics, a close parallel to precisely the same passage of *Physics* Arama had paraphrased! Here is the full passage from Gersonides' SC.BA:⁵

⁵ Again, based on MS Paris — Bibliothèque Nationale heb. 966, fol. 8a:

וג"כ אי אפשר החלוקה במשיגים המקריים המשותפים והמיוחדים הנמצאים במיני הב"ח כמו שהם ב"ח אם לא בהשענות החוש כי אלו המקרים אם שיהיו נמשכים לצורות הב"ח או לחומריהם ואין דרך ידיעת אלו מזולת הרגשת המינים ההם. והסבה בקצור דרך החלוקה משתעמוד על המינים האחרונים מהב"ח והיותר מסופקת בחכמת ההנדסה והמספר לפי שבאלו החכמות היה הקודם במציאות קודם אצלינו בידיעה ולא יראה ג"כ בגדרי אלו החכמות החומר ולזה לא יצטרך בעל זאת החכמה אל החוש וזה מבואר מאד אולם בזאת החכמה ר"ל חכמת הטבע היו הענינים הקודמים בידיעה אצלינו מאוחרים במציאות והם הענינים המורגשים המורכבים מן הפשוטים הקודמים במציאות. והמתאחרים אצלינו בידיעה הם הצורות אשר יעמידו מין מין ממיני ב"ח ולזה מי שלא ראה מין ממיני ב"ח ולא הרגיש אותו לא יגיע לו האמת במציאותו ולא יצייר מהותו. והנה יקרה לפעמי' דרך החלוקה בענינים הטבעיים שתוף שם הסוג

Similarly, it is impossible to undertake a division according to the accidental concomitants that exist in animals qua animals (whether shared in common or unique/particular—) save through the estimation of sense-perception. For these accidents either follow from the animals' forms or from their matter—and how is it possible to know them save through perceiving those species through sense-perception?!

The reason [for this], in brief, pertains to the method of division: For when you consider more subsequent species of animals and even the most dubious [among them] in the sciences of geometry and arithmetic—inasmuch as in these sciences, what is prior in existence is also prior in our knowledge, and it is further the case that matter is not taken into consideration in the definitions of these sciences—for this reason, sense-perception is not necessary for one undertaking this science, and this is very clear. However, in *this* science, I mean, natural science, the things which are prior in our knowledge are posterior in existence, and these are the things that are subject to sense-perception, combined from those simples which are prior in existence. [Meanwhile] those things which are posterior in our knowledge are the forms that establish each and every species of animal. For his reason, whoever does not *see* some species of animal and does not perceive it with his senses will not attain the truth of its existence and will not be able to conceptualize its quiddity. Thus it sometimes happens, [when employing the method of] division with respect to natural things, that a genus is used equivocally....

As is apparent, Gersonides recapitulates many of the same basic ideas found in the passage from *Physics* Arama was glossing: whereas in mathematics what is prior in our knowledge is also prior in existence, in natural science what is prior in our knowledge is posterior in existence; in natural science, what is prior in our knowledge is what is subject to sense-perception, whereas what is posterior in our knowledge are simples or abstracts, whose composites are more familiar to us. Crucially though, while Gersonides' reformulation has retained many of the binaries found in the passage from *Physics*—mathematics vs. natural science, prior vs. posterior, our knowledge vs. existence, composites vs. simples—he has completely dispensed with Aristotle's binary of *kollel/meyuhad*. This is perhaps what enables him to bring these Aristotelian ideas in support of his opening claim, that knowledge of the accidental concomitants existing in animals, including those that are *meyuhad*, are inextricable from sense-perception. While Gersonides' contention here is admittedly not identical with Arama's claim that the *meyuhad* is the most proper object of sense-perception, it seems likely to me that Gersonides' connection of the *meyuhad* to sense-

perception, and further connection of this pair to the main ideas developed in the passage from *Physics* are what enabled Arama's unexpected reading of the same.

4.2. Isaac Albo, *Book of Principles*

Isaac Albo's *Book of Principles* has long been known to number among Arama's sources.⁶ Here I merely suggest one instance in which Arama may have had Albo in mind without citing him, as is often his custom elsewhere. This example comes from Gate 4, where towards the end of the Gate Arama suggests that he likely selected the *ma'amar* that he did for the Gate at least in part for the purpose of refuting what he perceived as an incorrect interpretation of the *ma'amar* that he had encountered elsewhere. The *ma'amar* in question is a Rabbinic dictum from Gen. Rab. 11 that relates an exchange between the Sabbath and God, where the Sabbath complains to God for lacking a mate, and God responds by promising the Sabbath that the community of Israel will be her mate. More important for our purposes than the Rabbinic dictum itself though is Arama's account of the interpretation he critiques. Here is what Arama says:⁷

I have seen one who explained [this Rabbinic dictum] as a complaint of the Active Intellect due to the procession of separate intellects [preceding it], meanwhile no separate intellect emanates from it, as is the case for the prior separate intellects. The reply [to this] is that the souls of the perfect ones from the community of Israel are its mate, for they are emanated therefrom and are come to merit and live for its sake.

As is apparent from this passage, Arama describes the target interpretation as one which understands the Sabbath as symbolizing the Active Intellect. Accordingly, the Sabbath's/Active Intellect's complaint is that it alone among the separate intellects has no subsequent separate intellect emanating from it. Finally, God's reply is that the individual souls of the perfect are the

⁶ Heller-Wilensky, *Arama*, 42 n.132 notes explicit citations.

⁷ וראיתי מי שביארו על תלונת השכל הפועל מפני שעמדה השתלשלות השכלים הנבדלים אצלו ולא הושפע ממנו נבדל כיוצא בו כנבדלים הראשונים והיתה התשובה שנפשות השלמים מכנסת ישראל יהיו בן זוגו שיושפעו ממנו ויזכו ויחיו לפניו

Active Intellect's mate. Though Arama does not name the target of his critique ("I have seen one"), the details limned above match point-for-point with the details of Isaac Albo's interpretation of the same Rabbinic dictum in his *Book of Principles* II.11. Here is what Albo says:⁸⁹

It will be seen that according to the order of the causal chain just described, every one of the caused intellects produces an effect, which is an intellect existing independently, and the soul of a sphere, while the tenth, the Active Intellect, does not produce an intellect existing independently, but only a soul which resides in matter, like the soul of a sphere, and thus is in the position of a female, receiving influence, but not exerting any. This is the meaning of the statement of the Rabbis, "The Sabbath said to the Lord, blessed be He, 'O Master of the world, to every one Thou hast given a mate, but to me Thou hast not given a mate.' God replied, 'My daughter, the congregation of Israel shall be thy mate'." The word Sabbath, which is feminine, alludes to the quality of being passive and not active, which is that of the tenth intellect.

Not only does Albo, like the target of Arama's critique, read the Sabbath as Active Intellect, complaining about its lack of emanating a subsequent separate intellect. What's more, Albo's insistence that the Sabbath is feminine also corresponds with a detail of Arama's critique: For Arama insists that even if the (incorrect) reading of Sabbath as Active Intellect were to be retained, the Sabbath/Active Intellect should be gendered as male and inquiring after a female mate, since whatever is a source of emanation is gendered as male relative to what it emanates.¹⁰

4.3. Ḥayyim Israeli, *Ma'amar Gan Eden*

⁸ The following is Isaac Husik's translation.

⁹ ובעבור שכפי דרך וסדור אלו העלולים שאמרנו שיושפע מכל אחד מהם עלול אחד שהוא שכל עומד מעצמו ונפש גלגל, ומהשכל העשירי שהוא השכל הפועל לא הושפע עלול אחר שיהיה שכל עומד בעצמו, אלא נפש שקיומה בחומר כנפש הגלגל, ונשאר הוא לפי זה כנקבה שהוא מושפע ואינו משפיע, הוא שאמרו רבותינו ז"ל אמרה שבת לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא רבונו של עולם לכל נתת בן זוג ולי לא נתת בן זוג, אמר לה בתי כנסת ישראל תהא בן זוגך (בראשית רבה פרשה י"א), הנה באמרם אמרה שבת לשון נקבה יורה שרמזו על מדה שהיא מושפעת ולא משפעת והוא השכל העשירי

¹⁰ The passage continues:

"For according to this [explanation], the complaint should have been regarding a female mate, and not a male mate. Similarly, He ought to have said [in response] that "the community of Israel shall be your female mate," for those things which are emanated correspond to the rank of the female, without any doubt."

On four occasions (once in Gate 7, once in Gate 9, and twice in Gate 10—), Arama explicitly cites a figure whom he calls the *Ba'al ha-Pardes*, and whom to the best of my knowledge has not previously been identified. Through a comparison, it is evident that Arama's *Ba'al ha-Pardes* is none other than fourteenth-century Ibn Ezra supercommentator Ḥayyim Israeli.¹¹ In all instances, the text of Israeli's from which Arama cites and the ostensible source of Arama's epithet for him is a brief treatise addressing questions related to the Garden of Eden (*pardes*), now known as *Ma'amar Gan Eden*.¹² The tables below present Arama's citations and their parallel sources in *Ma'amar Gan Eden* for easy comparison:

Arama, AY, Gate 7	Hayyim Israeli, <i>Ma'amar Gan Eden</i> , Ch. 8 ¹³
The <i>Ba'al ha-Pardes</i> wrote [this] in the name of R. Abraham ibn Ezra, may his memory be blessed, in order to explicate the latter. He said: Eden is the supernal intellect, and the four rivers are the active intellect together with the three intellects instilled in man. The first is potentia sans actu/an agent. The second is realized in actu, and it is called partial. The third is that which is called "the all that is conjoined with the all." For the four of them flow from the supernal Eden, He called the active intellect Pishon, i.e., the moving one, inasmuch as what moves is the cause of what is moved. [He] also [called it this because] the emanation that flows upon the three species of intellect found in the human species <i>are fruitful and multiply</i> therefrom, these [intellects] corresponding to the three remaining rivers.	The hidden supernal intellect is stream, that through its emanation, has four branches: The name of the first part is Pishon, and this is the Active Intellect that is beneath the sphere of the moon. See with the eye of your intellect how scripture called it Pishon, i.e., the moving one, inasmuch as what moves is the cause of what is moved. Or perhaps scripture called it Pishon inasmuch as the three intellects found in the human species <i>fructed and multiplied</i> and were emanated from it—corresponding to the three rivers that remain of the four in the garden. The first intellect of these three is that which proceeds and is emanated from the Active Intellect and does not rise above: i.e., the one which intellects in actu and not in potentia
והנה בעל הפרדס כתב בשם הראב"ע ז"ל וכמבאר אותו שהעדן הוא השכל העליון וד' נהרות הם השכל הפועל עם הג' שכלים אשר הניחום באדם. הראשון הכה בלי מפעל. והב' היוצא אל הפועל והוא הנקרא חלק. והג' הוא הנקרא כל הדבק בכל כי ארבעתן הושפעו מהעדן העליון. ושקרא אל השכל הפועל פישון הוא הסובב לפי שהסובב הוא סבת הדבר המסובב וגם שממנו פרה ורבה השפע על שלשת מיני	והנה השכל העליון הנעול נחל לד' ראשים בהשפעו שם החלק הראשון פישון הוא השכל הפועל אשר תחת גלגל הירח וראה בעין שכלך איך קראו הכתוב פישון הוא הסובב לפי שהסובב הוא סבת הדבר המסובב ואולי קראו פישון לפי שממנה פרה ורבה. ושופע שלשת מיני השכלים הנמצאים במין האדם שהם כנגד שלשה הנהרות הנשארים מהד' המצמחים את הגן...והנה

¹¹ Not much has been written about Hayyim Israeli, though aspects of his cosmological exegesis as developed in *Ma'amar Gan Eden* (one of which is actually recycled by Arama in AY Gate 7—) have been briefly discussed in Tzvi Langerman, "The Making of the Firmament: R. Hayyim Israeli, R. Isaac Israeli, and Maimonides," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 7 (1988): 461–476; and Dov Schwartz, "The Quadripartite Division of the Intellect in Medieval Jewish Thought," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 84.2 (1993): 227–236.

¹² *Ma'amar Gan Eden* was printed by P. Perreau in *Tiferet Shevah* [Zunz Festschrift] (Berlin, 1884). My Hebrew follows that printing.

¹³ *Ma'amar Gan Eden*, 32.

השכל הראשון מהשלשה הוא שיוצא ונשפע מהשכל הפועל ולא עלה למעלה וזהו המשכיל בפועל ולא בכח	השכלים הנמצאים במין האדם שהן כנגד שלשה הנהרות הנשואים. עד כאן

Arama, AY, Gate 9	Hayyim Israeli, <i>Ma'amar Gan Eden</i> , Ch. 9 ¹⁴
I saw that the <i>Ba'al ha-Pardes</i> wrote [the following] to explicate something R. ibn Ezra, may his memory be blessed, said. Here is what he says: “Indeed, <i>garments of skins</i> (Gen. 3:21) alludes to man’s being destroyed from the Garden of Eden. This is why, immediately after his saying ‘what is the secret of the Garden of Eden?’, the Sage[=ibn Ezra] said: ‘ <i>garments of skins</i> ’—for they are opposites.” This is what he said.	Indeed, <i>garments of skins</i> (Gen. 3:21) alludes to man’s being destroyed from the Garden of Eden. This is why, immediately after his saying “what is the secret of the Garden of Eden?,” the Sage[=ibn Ezra] said: “ <i>garments of skins</i> ”—for they are opposites.
ראיתי לבעל הפרדס שכתב כמבאר דבר הראב"ע ז"ל זה לשוננו. והנה יהיה רמז כתנות עור אבדן האדם מגן עדן ולפיכך זכר החכם תכף אמרו ומה סוד גן עדן וכתנות עור כי זה הפך זה עכ"ל	והנה יהיה רמז כתנות עור אבדן האדם מגן עדן ולפיכך רמז החכם תכף אמרו ומה סוד גן עדן וכתנות עור כי זה הפך זה

Arama, AY, Gate 10	Hayyim Israeli, <i>Ma'amar Gan Eden</i> , Ch. 10 ¹⁵
Ibn Ezra wrote “and the meaning of this verse is similar to <i>and ye shall be as elohim knowing good and evil</i> (Gen. 3:5). Or, perhaps [Gen. 3:22] refers to what Adam thought”—these are his words. The author of [the Book of] <i>Pardes</i> clarified them and said: ¹⁶ “this Sage claimed that among the heavenly host, some knew good and some knew evil, and that this great secret that was concealed from Aristotle and his followers. This is alluded to in the word <i>cherubim</i> , for these are the angels that teach good and evil, respectively. Those who are under their governance do not have the capacity to repent, for no one can be spared from them”—thusly he spoke.	We cannot escape from it being the case that the <i>peshat</i> of this verse is according to what the intellectual Sage R. Abraham ibn Ezra, may his memory be blessed, alluded, for he said that “the meaning of the verse is similar to the meaning of <i>and ye shall be as elohim, knowing good and evil</i> ,” and there he said that “the explication of <i>as elohim, knowing good and evil</i> is as the angels.” In my view, this is a great secret, which was concealed even from the Sages of Greece, the Philosophers, for according to the true belief of [our] Sages, may their memory be blessed, among the host of the heaven, there are <i>those who know good</i> and <i>those who know evil</i> ...He would be as all the rest under the rule of the <i>cherubs</i> , which indicate to <i>good and evil</i> , and as is the case for whoever is under the rule of the <i>cherubs</i> , does not have the power to repent—to kill the snake, speaking allegorically—he cannot be saved therefrom.
והראב"ע ז"ל כתב וטעם הכתוב כמו והייתם כאלהים יודעי טוב ורע או פירושו על מחשבתו אלו דבריו ובעל הפרדס ביארם ואמר כי החכם הזה יסבור שיש מצבא השמים יודעים טוב ויש יודעים רע ושה הענין הוא סוד גדול נעלם מארסטו וסיעתו וכי אליו רמז במלת כרובים כי הם המלאכים המורים	לא נוכל לברוח מלהיות פשוט הפסוק הזה כפי מה שרמז בו החכם השכלי הראב"ע ז"ל שאמר כי טעם הפסוק כטעם והייתם כאלהים יודעי טוב ורע ולשם אמר כי פירוש כאלקים יודעי טוב ורע כמלאכים והוא לפי דעתי סוד גדול ומכוסה אפילו מחכמי יון הפילוסופים כי לפי אמונת האמת חכמים ז"ל

¹⁴ *Ma'amar Gan Eden*, 33.

¹⁵ *Ma'amar Gan Eden*, 36, 37.

¹⁶ See 4.3 and 1.4 on Arama’s debt to Hayyim Israeli above.

על הטוב ועל הרע ואשר הם תחת ממשלתם אין בידם לעשות תשובה כי אין מידם מציל ע"כ	יש מצבא השמים יודעים טוב ויש יודעים רע...היה כשאר הממשלת תחת ממשלת הכרובים המורים על הטוב והרע, והנה כשתהיה ההוראה על מי שהוא תחת ממשלת הכרובים שלא הספיקו בידו לעשות תשובה להרוג את הנחש על דרך משל לא יוכל להנצל מזה

Arama, AY, Gate 10	Hayyim Israeli, <i>Ma'amar Gan Eden</i> , Ch. 11 ¹⁷
The author of [the Book of] Pardes adopted this explanation of the flaming sword. He wrote: "Between those such as us who dwell in the northern climes and the equator, there is a place where the habitable zone ceases at a declination of twenty-four degrees. This is because the sun is perpetually delayed in its motion from this point until it reaches a declination of twenty degrees—corresponding to the constellations of Gemini and Cancer, respectively—burning up everything beneath it. Thus it is impossible for any creature to go there. According to the hidden meaning, the hidden angels are in charge of this flame which turns." All of these are his words.	We can explain the flaming sword which is the flame of the sun that burns along the habitable zone beneath the equator, which extends from those such as us who dwell in the climes that are north of the equator—and among these are the land of Israel—and the region that is beneath the equator. For from place whose declination is twenty-four degrees to the place whose declination is twenty degrees, the sun passes directly over them perpetually, in its being delayed between the constellations of Gemini and Cancer, such that it burns the feet of those who walk there, like a fire. Thus there is no settlement there, and in many places neither can water be found. For this reason, men from the northern climes never travel to the zone beneath the equator...
ובעל הפרדס אחז בלהט החרב זה הפירוש וכתב בין השוכנים באקלים הצפוניים כמונו היום ובין קו משוה היום מפסיק המקום אשר רחבו כ"ד מעלות כי כשהשמש במקום ההוא עד שיגיע אל רוחב כ' מעלות שהם מזלות תאומים וסרטן יהיה השמש מתעכב לשם תמיד ושורף כנגד ראשם ולסבה זו אין יכולת לשום בריה לעבור לשם. ולפי הנסתר כי המלאכים הנסתרים הם בעלי הלהט הזה המתהפכת. כל אלו דבריו	נוכל לפרש להט החרב שהוא להט השמש ששורף דרך המקום שתחת משוה היום בינינו אנחנו היום הדרים באיקלימים הצפוניים שממשה היום ובכללם ארץ ישראל ובין המדור שתחת משוה היום כי כמקום שרחבו כ"ד מעלות עד המקום אשר רחבו כ' מעלות יהיה השמש עובר על נכח ראשם תמיד בהיותו בשני מזלות העיכוב והם תאומים וסרטן עד ישורף רגלי ההולכים באותה הדרך כאשר ואין שם יישוב ולא ימצא שם מים בהרבה מסעות ולפי' לא תמצא אדם מאנשי האיקלימים הצפוניים שעבר מעולם על המקום אשר תחת משוה היום...

As is apparent from these tables, much of what Arama attributes to the *Ba'al ha-Pardes* comes either word-for-word or with slight reorganization and paraphrase from *Ma'amar Gan Eden*. But even beyond these explicit citations, Arama draws more from *Ma'amar Gan Eden* than he lets on. As we discussed, the first part of Arama's catalogue of interpretations of Gen. 3:22 in Gate 10—i.e., his citations of Maimonides from *Mishneh Torah*, of Samuel ibn Tibbon, and of David Kimhi, as well as his analysis that all these commentators failed to interpret the verse in

¹⁷ *Ma'amar Gan Eden*, 39

accordance with its *peshat* sense—also seem to be lifted, nearly verbatim, from Hayyim Israeli’s formulations in *Ma’amar Gan Eden*.¹⁸

These findings suggest both (1) that Arama may have drawn from Israeli’s *Ma’amar Gan Eden* elsewhere, without citation; and (2) that Israeli if not *Ma’amar Gan Eden* may have been relatively well-known in late fifteenth-century Iberia—hence Arama’s casual use of epithet and appeal to Israeli as source of authority on Ibn Ezra interpretation.

4.4. Ḥasdai Crescas, *Light of the Lord*

Like Albo’s *Book of Principles*, Crescas’ *Light of the Lord* has long been known to number among Arama’s sources, hence my contribution here is limited to elaborating a specific, uncited textual connection:¹⁹ As discussed,²⁰ Arama seems to draw from part of Crescas’ so-called critique of the active intellect in formulating his own critiques of the dominant philosophical theory of immortality through intellectual perfection. However, Arama does not cite Crescas verbatim. Rather, the spirit of Arama’s argument seems to be drawn from what Zev Harvey identifies as Crescas’ “first critique according to philosophical speculation.” This critique, in Harvey’s translation, is as follows:²¹

“According to these opinions, the purpose of the Law for man would be for something other than of his species.

For according to these opinions, the surviving acquired intellect is incorporeal and not commingled with him; and therefore it is not his form. Nor is it an accident conjoined to him, since it has been posited as incorporeal and as becoming constituted as a substance out of intelligibilia.

Again, the corruption of a man may be conceived without its corruption, as, in fact, is supposed in regard to its survival after death. And that whose corruption is possible without the corruption of a certain thing, and which is not commingled with it, is necessarily a different individual from a thing, and is disjoined from it, is not its form.

¹⁸ See 1.4 above.

¹⁹ Heller-Wilensky, *Arama*, 42 n.131 notes explicit citations.

²⁰ Principally in 2.2.1, but also briefly in 3.2.2.

²¹ *Light* II.6.1, in the translation of Zev Harvey, “Crescas’ Critique,” 125–6.

Moreover, the passing away of the incorporeal substance [sc. The acquired intellect] may surely be conceived without the passing away of the man.

Now, once it has been demonstrated that [the acquired intellect] is not his form, it is *ipso facto* demonstrated that the purpose of the Law—i.e., to bring about the survival of this intellect—for man, is something other than him!

That furthermore it is for something other than of his species is easily demonstrated from the nature of each one. For man by his nature moves towards corruption, and the eternal existence of an individual man is impossible. But the acquired intellect is, qua individual, posited to be eternal by nature, and impossible of corruption, owing to its very essence; and whatever has such characteristics differs specifically [from man].”

Though Crescas’ language is quite dense and technical, relying on the Aristotelian understanding that the form of a thing is inseparable from that thing, as Harvey points out, the ideational thrust of Crescas’ critique can actually be simplified: Crescas’ basic critique is that according to the philosophic theory of immortality, the subject that becomes immortal is not man defined as rational animal, but rather (on this definition of man) not-man, a separate intellect. This simplified critique is very similar to one Arama advances in Gate 44:²²

As for theoretical investigation, according to its assumptions, nothing is more impossible than for some existent to become another—I mean, to take on its definition. This is known from the definition of “definition” and from the equivalence of the definition and the thing defined, such that the two are interchangeable. Since the definition of man and the specific difference characterizing the species is “rational animal,” it is reason that distinguishes him from all other animals belonging to his genus. This specific difference must then distinguish him all the more so from spiritual existents who do not belong to his same genus. This is because the animal of which this specific difference is predicated belongs to the category of body, i.e., body is animal’s supreme genus. Accordingly, [saying “rational animal”] is really like saying “rational animal body”—which cannot apply to the body of the separate intellect. Similarly, the term “rational” [cannot apply to the separate intellect] since what is meant by this specific difference is “rational” in potentia, without a doubt.

Thus, since man and spiritual existents do not belong to a single genus and cannot be encompassed by any category—for existence is predicated of them only

²² אמנם החקירה העיונית הפילוסופית למה שיודע ממנה שאין דבר יותר רחוק לפי הנחותיה כהכנס אחד מהנמצאים במקום חברו רצוני בגבולו וגדרו וזה יודע אמתו מגדר הגדר והשוואתו לנגדר עד שיתהפכו זה על זה והנה אחר שהגדר האנושי וההבדל אשר יתקיים את מינו הוא חי מדבר והנה הדיבור הבדיל אותו מכל הבעלי חיים אשר תחת סוגו וכל שכן שהוא נבדל בזה ההבדל עצמו מהנמצאים הרוחניים שאינם מסוגו וזה כי החי הנאמר בהבדל הוא הנכנס תחת הגשם שהוא סוגו העליון ואם כן הרי הוא כאומרו גשם חי מדבר וזה לא יצדק על הגשם השכלי הנבדל גם לא במלת מדבר כיון שמובנה בהבדל הוא מדבר בכח בלי ספק: והנה אחר שהאדם והנמצא הרוחני אינם מסוג אחד גם אין מאמר שיכללם כי המציאות יאמר עליהם אך בספוק א"כ איך אפשר שיהפכו זה לזה ויכנס זה בגבול זה בגדרו כמו שיחוייב מאומרנו שהאדם יאושר אושר אלהי ויוצלה בהצלחה רוחנית נצחית זה לא יתכן.

amphibolously—how is it possible that they should be interchangeable with one another, one assuming the definition of the other? For this is what is required when we say that man may attain divine happiness and eternal spiritual success—but it is not possible.

Though Arama uses different language, the basic ideational content of his argument is virtually identical to Crescas', for it too hinges on the insight that the subject of immortality according to the philosophical theory is not man qua rational animal but rather requires man to become something other than man so defined.

As I suggested,²³ Arama's debt to Crescas here is significant primarily because it challenges longstanding scholarly consensus that Crescas' critiques of Aristotelianism—brilliant as they were—did not find much resonance among late medieval Jews.

4.5. Joseph ibn Shem Tob, *Commentary on Ethics*

As with the previous example of Crescas and the earlier example of Albo, Joseph ibn Shem Tob's *Commentary on Ethics* is already known to number among Arama's sources, as elaborated most recently Chaim Neria in his dissertation on Joseph's *Commentary*. My finding merely elaborates a specific textual connection in one instance where Arama may have borrowed from Joseph ibn Shem Tob's commentary without citation, namely in his paraphrastic summary of *Ethics* V.9 in Gate 10. As I discussed,²⁴ nearly all of Arama's paraphrastic summary of *Ethics* V.9 exists in parallel in the text of the *Ethics* Arama would have used—Meir Alguades' 1405 translation—save for the one piece of text that Arama suggests is a direct citation of Aristotle: namely, his example of the murderer and the sword. In my previous discussion, I suggested that Arama likely encountered this example of the murderer and the sword—which to the best of my

²³ See 2.2.1 and 2.1 above.

²⁴ See 2.2.2 above.

knowledge, appears nowhere in the Aristotelian corpus—in Joseph's *Commentary*, where he mentions it in his gloss of precisely the same passage of *Ethics* (V.9) Arama was summarizing.

Here is the relevant passage from Joseph's commentary:²⁵

He said: By nature the right hand is stronger yet it is possible that man should come to be ambidextrous. He meant that natural things occur for the most part, and if they change, it is only rarely. This is the like the right hand, which is by nature stronger than the left, and thus due to natural equality, it happens that [people] are equally [right-handed] for the most part, and this changes only rarely, like returning an object that was stored for safekeeping and returning a lost object and what is similar to these, for they are the same [in all places] by nature and for the most part, and even though it is possible for them to change in some individual cases and circumstances, this occurs only rarely, and for this reason, all of the nations agree with regards to them....He said: Of things just and lawful, each is related as the universal to its particulars; for the things that are done are many, but of them each is one, since it is universal. He meant, with respect to those things that are the same [in all places] and those which are conventional, I mean, each of them is like the universal as it relates to the parts that comprise it, for the things that are done are many and varied, such that while they all have a single order that encompasses all of them, there will come a time when it is fitting to make determinations....Also, everyone agrees that it is fitting to return an object stored for safekeeping, but if the thing stored is this sword of so-and-so, and he now wishes to retrieve it in order to kill his neighbor, either in secret or out in the open, it is not fitting to return it to him! This is the character of agreement/convention in natural and conventional justice, and this differences and distinctions between them, and how they are to be recognized. This speech is clear to the utmost.

In this passage, Joseph ibn Shem Tob first invokes the general rule of returning objects stored for safekeeping to elaborate Aristotle's example of another general rule—right handedness—that seems to obtain everywhere, across contexts, for the most part. Then he invokes the example of the sword and the murderer—which he may have in turn been

²⁵ MS Saint Petersburg 379, IMHM F 35022, 165–6:

ואמ' הימין בטבע הוא חזק ואם יקרה שיהיה אדם ימיני בשני צדדיו יר' הדברים הטבעיים כבר יקרה היותם על הרוב ואם ישתנו הוא על המעט כמו הימין שהוא בטבע יותר חזק מהשמאל וכן יקרה לשוה הטבעי שהוא ברוב וישתנה על המעט כמו השבת הפקדון והשבת גמול והשבת אבדה ודומיהם שהם שוים בטבע ועל הרוב ואם כבר איפשר שישתנו באישים מה ובענינים מה אבל הוא על המעט ולכן יסכימו עליהם כל האומות... ואמרו אמנם הצדקות והדברים אשר בדת כל א' מהם הוא כמו הכללים אל הפרטים כי הדברים הנפעלים הם רבים אבל בכל א' מאלה יש א' הוא א' כולל יר' אצל הדברים השווים והדברים אשר בנמוס הנה ר"ל א' מהם הוא כמו הכולל אל החלקיים הנכנס תחתו כי הדברים הנפעלים הם רבים מתחלפים שעם שיש לכלם סדר א' כולל כלם כבר יבא זמן שראוי להחליטו... וגם הכל יודו שראוי להחזיר הפקדון אבל אם הפקיד זה חרב ביד זה וירצה עתה לקחת[ו] להרוג רעהו בסתר או בגלוי אין ראוי להשיבו אליו. הנה זהו אופן [ה?] סכמת היושר הטבעי והנמוסי ושנויים והבדלם ואופן הכרתם והם מאמרים בתכלית הגלוי

drawing from Aquinas' commentary on the *Ethics*—as a sort of exception that proves the rules. Arama, for his part, uses the (counter)example of the sword and the madman in the exact same way(s): to flesh out the example of right-handedness, as another law whose general universality and regularity is attested by the rare exception. The one crucial difference in Arama's use—i.e., his deliberate and strategic placing of this example in Aristotle's mouth, to elevate it for the purposes of his own argument—suggests only that Arama's borrowings from Joseph's commentary may not always be so straightforward.²⁶

4.6. Joseph ibn Shem Tob, '*Ein ha-Qore*

A text it is unsurprising that Arama draws from, but that to the best of my knowledge has not yet been demonstrated to be among Arama's sources is another work by Joseph ibn Shem Tob, namely, his '*Ein ha-Qore*, the first Hebrew ars praedicandi or preaching manual. Though fuller research may well yield more, in at least one crucial instance, Arama borrows key conceptual terminology from Joseph: i.e., the language of *qalut* and *kolelut*, ease and accessibility. Arama thus draws from Joseph the core vocabulary for his virtues of accessibility, which he uses to articulate and elaborate his commitment to the collective, and the idea that God and the Torah's vision of immortality must be one that is readily accessible to the masses. As I suggested earlier, Arama draws from Joseph as well the connection between these virtues and the commandments.²⁷ In the context of '*Ein ha-Qore*, Joseph names *qalut* and *kolelut* in explaining what benefits the commandments offer that a strictly intellectualist conceptualization of immortality do not. In this connection Joseph enumerates four reasons or final purposes in giving

²⁶ See 2.2.2 above.

²⁷ See 3.2.2 above.

the commandments. Here are the relevant excerpts of reasons three and four, which are worth quoting at length:²⁸

The third benefit is that the existence of felicity [becomes] easy (*qalut*). The clarification of this is: You already know what the philosophers have said regarding human perfection, namely, that it occurs through the apprehension of intelligibles. [However] they vary greatly on this, and what arises from the consensus of many of the wise, such as ibn Rushd, is that perfection is contingent upon the apprehension of the Active Intellect, [even though] some of the philosophers have determined that this apprehension is impossible. Among their number is Abunaṣr (Alfarabi), who said, concerning the human intellect's apprehension of the Active Intellect, that it is like an old wives' tale. Accordingly, he determined that the human intellect is subject to generation and corruption...

Thus consider some of what I have mentioned to you. In general I shall say that ibn Rushd is second [only] to Aristotle in terms of human knowledge, and yet even so, *he* says that the attainment of human perfection and ultimate felicity are things whose existence are very difficult. Consider the conditions which he stipulated for the

²⁸ Joseph b. Shem-Tob Ibn Shem-Tob, 'Ein ha-Qore, Jewish Theological Seminary, Ms. 10759. NLI no. F 4580. 74bff

התכלית השלישי הוא מציאות ההצלחה בקלות וביאור זה כבר ידעת מה שאמרו הפילוסופים בהשגת השלמות האנושי כי הוא בהשכלת המושכלות ויתחלפו בזה התחלפות רב והמגיע מהסכמת רוב פקחים כמו נ' רשד האחרון כי שלמות תלוי בהשכלת שכל הפועל וקצת הפילוסופים שמו זאת ההשכלה נמנעת מכללה אבונצ'ר עד שאמ' בזה הלשון המאמ' בהשכלת השכל האנושי לשכל הפועל הוא דומה להבלי הטפלות בהיותם בבית אבל ולכן גזר אומר כי השכל האנושי הווה ונפסד... ומשם תראה קצת מה שזכרתי לך ובדרך כלל אני אומ' כי נ' רשד זה | הוא משנה לארסטו בחכמה האנושית ועם כל זה שמעת אותו אומ' כי השגת השלמות האנושי וההצלחה האחרונה הוא קשה המציאות מאד ואתה עיין בתנאים אשר הניח להשגתה ומהם תבין זה והדברים האלה לא ישרו בעיני קצת ממשכילי אומתינו מכללה החכם ר' לוי נ' גרשום יכפרהו האל והוא אמ' במאמ' הראשון מספרו אשר קראו ספר מלחמו י' כי השגת השכל הפועל הוא נמנע וכי בהשגת מושכל אחד אפי' ממושכלי ההגדה יגיע ההשגרות והעונג לנפש ואתה ראה מה שיש בדעת הזה מהגנות ובכלל כבר העיר י' את רוח האחרונים מחכמי אומתינו וביארו הביטולים המתחייבים לאלו הדעות מצד התורה ומצד העיון ואתה תראה מאמר מסודר ונכון בזה הדרוש בספר אור י' אשר חבר הרב ר' חסדאי ז"ל והנה איך שיהיה הוא מבואר שאפי' שגניח כי בשלמות הכח הדברי במושכלות הוא השלמו' הזה הנה הוא קשה המציאות מאד ולא יגיע לאדם זולתי אחר טורח ועמל רב כל ימי חייו כמו שאמ' נ' רשד. ורצה הנה לזכות את ישראל ונתן להם זאת התורה התמימה באופן יקנו ההצלחה בעשיית מצותיה והרחקת אזהרותיה בקלות נפלא' כמו שאתה רואה כי אפי' במצוה אחת מהן יזכה האדם לחיי העולם הבא ולזה תמצא מפורש על יד הרמב"ם ז"ל אשר חבר ספר המורה וכת' בסוף פי' למשנת מסכ' מכות זה לשונו משרשי התורה ועקריה כי העושה מצוה אחת כתקנה ולתכליתה האמיתית ולא לדבר אחר יש לו חלק לעולם הבא אלה הם תורף דבריו... ונשוב למה שהיינו בו ונאמ' כי כאשר התבאר מליאות אלא שזה הספק יותר [75b] וזאת ההצלחה בקלות נפלא ואפי' בעשיית מצוה אחת הנה ימשך ספק לזאת ההנחה כי יהיו ריבוי המצות לבטלה במה שאמרנו במאמ' המחשבי כי ההצלחה הזאת על מדרגות רבות ולכן היו ריבוי המצות להשגת ריבוי המדרגות וזה נכון במקום הזה.

התכלית הרביעי' כוללות ההצלחה האנושית להמון רב וביאורו כי ההצלחה הנמצאת לאדם מצד שכלו ומחקריו ומעשיו האנושיים אי אפשר שתכלול עם רב להיות אין כל איש מוכן אל החכמה אבל כבר ימצאו הנה מושכלות רבות אי אפשר הגעתם אל רוב האנשים ואפי' שישתדלו אחדים תכלית ההשתדלות וזה מבואר למי העמיק בחכמו' העיוניות ובשרשיהם ביאור אמיתי ואם היה מגיע לזה השלמות אדם היה אחד מעיר ושנים ממשפחה וזה מבואר בנסיון מזה הזמן הארוך אשר הועתקו אלינו קורותיו כי עם היות בכל דור ודור אנשים רבים משתדלים בקנין המעלות לא יצא מהם איש מפורסם בחכמה ובשלמות זולתי מעטי המספר מאד ועוד כי היה האדם בטבע דורש ומבקש הדברים ההכרחיים למציאותו ולכן חייב שיהיו רוב אנשי המדינה משתדלים באומניות להכרח מציאות להתמדת חיינו ולכן היו רוב האדם בלתי משתדלים בחכמות וכ"ש הנשים ובעלי הכפרים ועובדי האדמה והם רוב האדם ואם לא היה כבאן הצלחה אחרת זולתי ההצלחה האנושית השכלית היה רוב מן האדם נמצא בזולת הצלחתו המיוחד ומן השקר שישתדל הטבע בהשגחת הש"י להישייר הדברים הטבעיים כולם באופן יקנו הדבר המיוחד להם וההכרחי והמועיל בקלות נפלא לפי מה שהוא מבואר למי שנתעסק בחכמת הנמצאות ולא ישתדל עם זה להישייר המין היותר נבחר מהמינים ההווים והנפסדים אשר הוא האדם. ואתה תראה הטבע כבר פעל הפך זה ר"ל כי כל מה שהיה הדבר יותר נכבד ויותר חשוב הקפיד הטבע עליו והשגיח על ענייניו השגחה יותר נפלאה ממה שהשגיח בדבר אשר הוא למטה ממנו במדרגה וכבוד וזה מבואר למי שידע חכמת הניצוח והשתכל בחכמת הטבעיות והאלהיות ולכן חייבה החכמה האלהית להשפיע מטובה | על המין האנושי במציאות זאת התורה הנפלאה באופן יקנו' השלמות הכפרים והנשים והטפשים איש איש לפי מדרגתו בעשיית מצותיה עד שהיו מצות תלויות בעובדי האדמה בזריעה בנטיעה בפאה ולקט ושכחה מעשר ותרומה ובכורים וכן ביתר הדברים כולם כע שאי אפשר שימצא איש שיתעסק בדבר מה שלא יעשה פועל יקנה בט שלמות והצלחה לנפשו אם ירצה.

attainment thereof, and from these you shall understand this. These things did not seem right in the eyes of some of the intelligent among our nation, among whom was Levi b. Gerson (Gersonides), may God forgive him. He said in the first treatise of his book which he called the *Wars of the Lord* that apprehension of the Active Intellect is impossible, but that in apprehending a single intelligible, even something from the realm of geometry, man shall attain perdurance and delight for his soul. Now see how despicable this opinion is! In general, the Lord has already aroused the spirit of the last wise men from among our nation who clarified the vanities that are necessitated by these opinions in respect of [both] the Torah and theoretical speculation! You shall find a treatise which is well-organized and correct on this inquiry in the *Light of the Lord*, which was composed by R. Hasdai (Crescas), may his memory be a blessing.

As for how this can be the case, it is clear that even if we assume that the perfection of the rational faculty through intelligibles is [precisely] this perfection, indeed, its existence is [still] very difficult, and man can only attain it after great burden and labor all the days of his life, as ibn Rushd said. [God] thus wished to make Israel meritorious, [so] He gave them this perfect Torah in such a manner that they would acquire felicity through the doing of its commandments, and keeping away [according to] its warnings, with a marvelous ease (*qalut*), as you can see. For even through a single of these commandments, man can merit the World to Come.

For this reason, you will find it explicitly elaborated by Maimonides, who composed the *Guide*, and wrote at the end of his commentary on the Mishnah, in masekhet Makkot: “it is one of the roots of the Torah and the principles thereof that whoever does [even] a single commandment as it has been set forth and according to the true final end thereof, and not for the sake of anything else, he has a portion in the World to Come.” This is the basic essence of what he said...

Now let us resume our discussion and say that when it becomes clear that this felicity can be fulfilled with wondrous ease, even through the doing of a single commandment, a doubt follows from this assumption, because [then] the multiplicity of the commandments would [seem to] be in vain. However, this doubt applies more to what we said in the treatise concerning theoretical [perfection], for that felicity has multiple ranks, and similarly the multiplicity of the commandments is according to the attainment of multiple ranks [of perfection], and this is correct for our purpose.

The fourth purpose is the inclusivity (*kolelut*) of human felicity for a great multitude. The clarification of this is that as for the felicity which exists for man in respect of his intellect and his human investigations and actions, it is impossible that it should encompass/include a great nation, on account of that not every individual will be disposed towards knowledge. Rather, there already exist many intelligibles which it is impossible for the majority of men to attain, even if some strive to the utmost of their abilities. This is clear to whoever engages in the theoretical sciences and its roots. Even if one were to attain this perfection, it would [only] be one of a city or two of a family. This is clear from empirical experience, from this long time in which many things have occurred to us. For even though there have been, in each and every generation, many men who have strived to acquire [these] supernal ranks, only the most meager few of them have become individuals who are renowned for their wisdom and perfection.

Also, man by nature seeks those things which are necessary for his existence, and for this reason, it follows necessarily that most individuals in a city will exert themselves in [the various] arts, out of the requirement for existence, to sustain our livelihood. For this reason, most men will not exert themselves in the sciences, and this is all the more so true of women and the people who live in the villages and those who work the land, and

these are the majority of men! If there does not exist any other felicity in this apart from that human, intellectual felicity, the majority of the human species will exist in such a manner that they do not reach their felicity that is unique to them qua men — and this is lie! For nature, through God's providence, strives to rightly guide all natural things in such a manner that they will acquire that thing which is unique to them—and which is necessary and beneficial—with most marvelous ease, according to what is clear to whoever engages in the study of existents. Given all this, will it not strive to rightly guide the most precious among those species which are subject to generation and corruption, i.e., man?

You shall see that nature has already acted in a manner opposite/contrary to this! I mean, that the more noble and precious something is, the more nature will take care of it and exercise providence over its affairs, [and] with a providence more wonderful than that with which it exercises over things which are beneath it in rank [of existence] and honor. This is clear to whoever knows the art of dialectic and whoever studies the natural and divine science. For this reason, divine wisdom compelled that this marvelous Torah emanate, from its goodness, upon the human species in such a manner that the people of the village and woman and fools would all acquire perfection [thereby]—each and every individual according to his rank in performing the commandments. Thusly, many of the commandments were [made to be] dependent upon those who work the land, i.e., with regards to sowing and planting and the corners and collecting and offering and tithing and offering of first fruits, and so too for all of the other things, such that it is impossible that there should be any individual that, whatever he is engaged in, he should not be doing some activity through which he can acquire perfection and felicity for himself, if he desires.

As is clear from this lengthy excerpt from *'Ein ha-Qore*, Joseph not only furnishes

Arama with the conceptual vocabulary of *qalut* and *kolelut*, ease and inclusivity, that the latter would make central in articulating his commitment to the masses. Joseph here also articulates so many of the ideas that Arama would use to elaborate this thematic:

conceptualizing the commandments and theoretical speculation as a sort of binary, and emphasizing the difficulty of the latter; emphasizing the importance of success for the majority, and non-elites in particular: i.e., women, fools, agricultural workers; appealing to divine justice and compassion; emphasizing the commandments' reflection of divine compassion in their tethering to mundane actions; taking Crescas' critique of the acquired intellect as a polestar. Perhaps most interestingly, it is clear from this passage that Joseph attempts to salvage Maimonides by emphasizing his bonds not with the proponents of intellectual perfection but rather with Crescas, and the idea that correct performance of

only a single commandment is sufficiently redemptive. While this passage in general certainly suggests that the relationship between Arama and Joseph—and Arama's debt to Joseph—merits further research and exploration, I suspect that Joseph's attempt to subtly redeem Maimonides here may have been particularly influential for Arama.

Part II

Introduction to Gate 10

AY Gate 10 is the second-to-last of eleven Gates devoted to *Bereshit*, and the last devoted to material in the first three chapters of Genesis. Like many of the other Gates devoted to *Bereshit*, it ostensibly revolves around only a handful of verses: Gen. 3:22–24. Also like many of the other Gates devoted to *Bereshit*, it departs from the ideal/standard form of Gates in AY in some of its structural aspects: Though it adheres to the basic structure of a two-part opening, followed by *derishah* and *perishah*, the explication of the *ma'amar* does not occur at the end of the *derishah* section but rather in the middle, and there is no section devoted to enumerating the *sefeqot* in the pericope (perhaps because it is too small).

A cursory glance at the outline below might give the impression that the variety of themes commanding Arama's attention across the relatively brief Gate 10 is quite unwieldy: What have the angels' inability to undertake a complete zoological taxonomy to do with the universality (or lack thereof—) of moral and political laws, and what have either of these to do with Onkelos' concerns about potential Christian interpretations of Gen. 3:22? As I have tried to signal in some of my earlier discussions (1.2.2 and 2.2.2), in my view Gate 10 cannot be understood save against the background of *Guide* I.2, in which Maimonides develops his understanding of the Fall narrative. Most importantly for our purposes, here Maimonides suggests that prelapsarian man, the angels, and God do not possess moral knowledge, or knowledge of good and evil, immersion in which characterizes the condition only of postlapsarian man. Indeed, knowledge of good and evil, Maimonides suggests, is a hindrance to man's realization of his true final purpose, which is to be immersed in knowledge of intelligibilia—the pure, immaterial, eternal, and unchanging knowledge that is shared by God and the angels.

The seemingly disparate themes Arama treats in Gate 10 are lent coherence and unity when understood as constituting a comprehensive response to *Guide* I.2, and the twin consensus it helped produce: i.e., that knowledge of good and evil belongs strictly to the realm of convention rather than unchanging intelligibilia and that consequently the angels do not have knowledge of good and evil. Arama critiques these ideas most directly in the center of the Gate ([8]–[16]). He uses Aristotle to argue that many things that are not conventional belong to the realm of knowledge of good and evil ([14]) and that knowledge of good and evil is thus not easily divisible from knowledge of true and false ([15]). But much of what Arama is doing in the rest of the Gate is bound up in the enterprise of *Guide* I.2 critique as well. Arama devotes a substantial part of Gate 10 to attacking Maimonides' primary exegetical support in *Guide* I.2, namely, Onkelos' translations of Gen. 3:5 and Gen. 3:22. Onkelos had translated *elohim* in Gen. 3:5 as “the great ones,” and Maimonides had adduced this as support for his understanding that the *elohim* who have knowledge of good and evil are not angels but rather rulers of cities, implicitly retrojecting his understanding that angels do not have knowledge of good and evil back onto Onkelos. Arama works to redeem Onkelos from complicity in Maimonides' interpretation by theorizing alternative rationales as to why Onkelos made the translation choices he did ([17]–[19]). The beginning of Gate 10 fits into the overarching project of *Guide* I.2 critique as well: A fundamental implication of *Guide* I.2 is that while humans have knowledge of good and evil, angels do not. Arama's claim that angels also have knowledge of good and evil thus obviously obliterates *Guide* I.2's distinction between human and angelic knowledge. Accordingly, it seems to me that much of the beginning of Gate 10 can be understood as Arama's attempt to articulate an alternative distinction between human and angelic knowledge,

thereby justifying his obliteration of *Guide* I.2's distinction ([3]–[7]). Arama develops a tripartite theory of knowledge ([3]–[6]) and homes in on the difference between human and angelic knowledge ([7]) to preserve a distinction between the two even as he insists that the distinction does not lie in the angels' lack of knowledge of good and evil. Even the concluding exegetical sections of Gate 10 in which Arama develops his interpretation of Gen. 3:22–24 ([20]–[28]) connect back to the project of *Guide* I.2 critique. For Arama's interpretation of these verses rehearse his reconceptualization of the whole fall narrative in light of that critique. In this light, it seems clear that *Guide* I.2 constitutes an organizing principle of Gate 10, if the latter is not perhaps best understood as a project of *Guide* interpretation or commentary, and specifically, as a sustained critique of *Guide* I.2.

But if this is the case, why does Arama never mention *Guide* I.2 in the course of the Gate? And why is he so invested in critiquing this chapter of the *Guide* in the first place? As my juxtaposition perhaps suggests, I believe the answers to these two questions are interrelated; to begin venturing those answers, it will be instructive to turn to the limited but powerful reception history of this Gate. Though Gate 10 has largely been ignored by modern scholarship (Heller-Wilensky only cites in twice, both times in passing—), Seewald briefly treats Gate 10 in his discussion of whether Arama composed a treatise against Maimonides, as suggested by Isaac Abarbanel in his commentary on *Guide* I.2. The relevant passage of Abarbanel, cited by Seewald (237), is as follows:

“There is a difficulty concerning what I have heard people say about the Sage R. Isaac Arama and what he alighted upon, namely, he declared that the Master[=Maimonides] claimed that the Torah is not from heaven, inasmuch as he explained that scripture's saying *and ye shall be as elohim, knowing good and evil* does not apply to the angels, for he[=Arama] showed that Maimonides' opinion was that the angels do not know opinions concerning good and evil. And if this is the case, then God, Blessed be He, too cannot know them, and it follows from this that He did not give the practical commandments, whose root is good and evil, and if this is the case then the Torah is not from heaven! He[=Arama] built a tower whose head was in the heavens concerning all this in his book that he composed against Maimonides.”

Given Abarbanel's claims about the substance of Arama's claims against Maimonides, Seewald, following editor of Abarbanel's commentary Moshe Landau, raises the possibility that the polemical treatise might have been AY Gate 10, but then quickly dismisses it. He insists that in Gate 10, Arama only ever ascribes such a heretical view to the philosophizers, and not to Maimonides himself, and generally seems intent on defending Arama from having so blasphemed Maimonides.

Abarbanel, of course, takes us to the heart of Arama's concern in Gate 10, and with the twin opinions that knowledge of good and evil belongs strictly to the realm of convention rather than unchanging intelligibilia and that consequently the angels do not have knowledge of good and evil. If the angels cannot know good and evil on these grounds, neither can God, in turn implying that either He cannot have given the commandments—entirely grounded on moral knowledge of good and evil—or else that the commandments are, in the last analysis, not really moral at all; only husks for purely logical truths. In either case, the Torah as Arama would have it falls apart. Arama

expresses these ideas himself, in an uncharacteristically condensed fashion, in sec. [11] below. This is, at any rate, why Arama is invested in so thoroughly critiquing *Guide* I.2. Even if, as Seewald suggests, Arama ultimately does not ascribe these opinions to Maimonides himself, and only to his philosophizing followers, he surely recognizes that *Guide* I.2 was their source; as Abarbanel notes in his commentary to Gen. 3:22: “all other sages have followed in his footsteps.”

I however am wont to think that pace Seewald, Abarbanel was correct to understand Arama as ascribing these heretical beliefs to Maimonides too. In deference to the Master and Guide, he may have cited Maimonides’ gloss of Gen. 3:5 in *Shemonah Peraqim* rather than his gloss of Gen. 3:22 in *Guide* I.2; he may have grouped Maimonides with other canonical commentators rather than the philosophizers at whom he spews so much venom (see sec. [9]–[10]); and he may have avoided citing *Guide* I.2 explicitly altogether, but I believe these gestures were precisely that: strategic gestures of polite deference. Arama’s omissions are glaring, especially when he so clearly structures Gate 10 as a critique of *Guide* I.2. In my view, he was far too great and thoughtful a stylist to not have known this.

Outline of Gate 10

I. Opening Matter

[1]–[2] *Petihta*

- [1] *nose*: Gen. 3:22
- [2] *ma’amar*: Midrash on Adam’s naming of the animals from Num. Rab. 19

II. Derishah

[3]–[7] Arama establishes his tripartite division of knowledge, emphasizing alternative distinction between human and angelic knowledge.

- [3] Distinction between *yediah* and *hakkarah*; the former is intellectual knowledge and the latter apprehension gained through sense-perception. These two types of knowledge have different objects: *yediah* has as its object universal essences and quiddities, *hakkarah* has as its object material particulars.
- [4] Patchwork citation attributed to Aristotle’s *Physics* describing method of study in the natural sciences.
- [5] Gloss on citation from *Physics*, implying the more general/universal (*kollel*) something is, the better known to intellect, and the more individual/specific something is (*meyuhad*), the more subject to sense perception. Formulation of tripartite division of knowledge: Human knowledge begins in sense-perception and has material particulars as its proper object, though it is possible for humans to ascend from this knowledge to knowledge of abstract universals. God’s knowledge is intellectual and is of universal essences first and foremost, but because His knowledge is creative it extends to material particulars as well. Angelic knowledge is intellectual knowledge but does not encompass particulars known to sense perception.

- [6] Explication of Rabbinic dictum from Tanhuma Tezaveh in light of tripartite division/reinforcement of tripartite division using Rabbinic dictum as prooftext. Critique of unnamed exegete of same Rabbinic dictum who explicated the dictum similarly but only partially.
- [7] Explication of *ma'amar* in light of tripartite division/reinforcement of tripartite division using *ma'amar* as prooftext, with emphasis on distinction between human knowledge and angelic knowledge. While humans have the potential to know universals, angels/separate intellects are unable to know material particulars. This is illustrated by the fact that men have taxonomical zoological knowledge that the angels do not; only man can name the animals.

[8]–[12] Introducing the problem: Do the angels know good and evil?

- [8] Enumeration of types of knowledge predicated of humans that are intellectually apprehended and not perceived by the senses, knowledge of good and evil foremost among them. First formulation of the problem: If good and evil are intellectually apprehended, why do so many avoid ascribing knowledge of good and evil to the separate intellects/angels?
- [9] Catalogue of interpretations of Gen. 3:5 and Gen. 3:22 suggesting that separate intellects do not know good and evil: Maimonides, Samuel ibn Tibbon, David Kimḥi, Abraham ibn Ezra, the *Ba'al ha-Pardes* (Ḥayyim Israeli), Rashi, Nahmanides.
- [10] Summary presentation of why the (unnamed) “philosophizers” assert that separate intellects have no knowledge of good and evil. While the intellects only apprehend what is eternal and necessary, the terms good and bad/evil only apply to things subject to change, i.e., what is conventional.
- [11] The heart of the issue: If it would be a deficiency to ascribe knowledge of good and evil to the separate intellects, it would be a deficiency to ascribe such knowledge to God, implying that God’s knowledge as expressed in the Torah and commandments could not pertain to good and evil, only true and false, causing the Torah to collapse.

[12]–[16] Philosophical offense: Good and evil are subject to intellectual apprehension

- [12] Singling out Onkelos’ interpretations of Gen. 3:5 and 3:22 as problematic prooftexts that the philosophizers have used to corroborate their assertions that separate intellects do not know good and evil.
- [13] Turn to attacking the philosophizers’ opinion: Even if some of the things called “good” and “bad” are contingent and subject to change, for the most part, what is deemed “good” and “bad” is eternal and unchanging across contexts (and therefore, meets the criteria of an intelligible).
- [14] Implication that good and evil are subject to intellectual apprehension because they are unchanging universals by appealing to Aristotle. In *Ethics* V.9, Aristotle already argued against the idea that “laws enacted by civil religion” are unnatural and purely conventional. Example of the murderer and the sword.
- [15] Implication that good and evil are subject to intellectual apprehension because they overlap with true and false by appealing to Aristotle. In *Ethics* VI.1, Aristotle claims that the true is deemed good and the false deemed bad; then so too the good must be true and the bad false; just as logical judgements have a moral valence, so too moral judgements have logical valence.

- [16] Transitional paragraph. Another argument for why the philosophizers deviate from the *peshat* and refuse to ascribe knowledge of good and evil to God and the angels, and rhetorical defense that the latter do indeed possess such knowledge. Another alternative distinction between humans and angels: The difference between the two is not that the latter lacks knowledge of good and evil, but rather that only man has choice and the ability to be evil.

[17]–[19] Exegetical defense: Alternative explication of Onkelos’ translations of Gen. 3:5 and Gen. 3:22

- [17] Defending Onkelos on Gen. 3:22: Onkelos translated Gen. 3:22 in the way he did for theological and pastoral reasons, connected not with divine knowledge of good and evil but with Gen. 3:22’s potential implications of divine multiplicity or likeness to creatures.
- [18] Defending Onkelos’ on Gen. 3:5, Alternative I: By *rabrabya*, Onkelos actually meant to signify angels.
- [19] Defending Onkelos’ on Gen. 3:5, Alternative II: By *rabrabya*, Onkelos indeed meant to eschew translating angels, but for a different epistemological reason: The problem is not that angels cannot know good and evil, it is that the speaker of Gen. 3:5, the serpent, qua animal or appetitive faculty, cannot conceptualize a purely intellectual angel and so cannot speak of one.

III. Perishah

[20]–[24] Preliminary interpretations of Gen. 3:22–24

- [20] Literal existence of the Garden on earth; defending Nahmanides’ claims that the tree of life confers extremely long life or immortality with appeals to contemporary, scientific searches for the fountain of Youth; Arama’s first gloss of Gen. 3:22–24.
- [21] Two Rabbinic glosses of Gen. 3:22 from a Gen. Rab. 21: R. Papus explains according to its *peshat*, because contra Onkelos he has no theological concerns with a simple rendering of the verse; Akiba explains as man’s departure from his prelapsarian state of perfection and ability to make only good choices.
- [22] Harmonizing Akiba’s explication of Gen. 3:22 with Ps. 82:6–7; another possible gloss of Gen. 3:22 that honors the philosophizers’ opinion that the angels do not know good and evil.
- [23] Gersonides’ explication of Gen. 3:23–34 and Arama’s critique: If postlapsarian man cannot attain the intelligibilia needed for eternal life, why did God need to expel him from Eden?
- [24] Harmonizing Rashi’s and the *Ba’al ha-Pardes*’ interpretations of Gen. 3:24; paraphrastic citation of the *Ba’al ha-Pardes*’ explication of the flaming sword in terms of the sun’s motion and habitable climes.

[25]–[28] Final interpretation of Gen. 3:22–24

- [25] Arama suggests that Gen. 3:22–24 is meant to recap the entire Garden of Eden and Fall narrative; that Gen. 3:22 refers to man’s prelapsarian state, in which he, God, and the angels all shared intellectual knowledge of good and evil; that prelapsarian man was immortal; that the path back into the Garden and eternal life requires both man’s bodily and intellectual aspects through adherence to the commandments, via Eccl. 12:13.

- [26] Suggests Gen. 3:23 and man's expulsion from the Garden should be read in terms of the limitations of knowledge, and specifically both the loftiness/difficulty of what man would need to apprehend to attain eternal life and his limitations in apprehension.
- [27] Suggests the sword of Gen. 3:24 should also be read in terms of the limitations of knowledge, and specifically the deterioration of man's intellect in intellectual overreaching.
- [28] Eternal life and the possibility of immortality are remote because of the foregoing; Torah—the garments of skin—is the sole path to redemption.

AY Gate 10*

In which we shall speak of the different [types of] knowledge, and which knowledge should be ascribed to the Lord,¹ which to the angels, and which to men. [We shall also discuss] whether the angels know *good and evil*, and the cherubim and the *flaming sword*.²

[1] *And the Lord God said: The man is become as one of us*, and so on (Gen. 3:22).³

[2] In the midrash:⁴ “*And he was wiser than kol adam*”⁵ (1 Kings 5:11)—than Adam. What was his wisdom? When the Holy One, Blessed be He, wanted to create man, He consulted with the ministering angels. He said to them: *Let us make man in our image* (Gen. 1:26). They said to

* The following is based on the Hebrew text found in AY I: 96a–101a.

¹ Though both fourteenth- and fifteenth-century thinkers whom Arama knew well were preoccupied by questions concerning divine knowledge, the questions concerning divine knowledge that preoccupy Arama here are markedly different. While his predecessors such as Gersonides, Abner of Burgos, Moses Narboni, and Hasdai Crescas were interested in the relationship between God’s knowledge of a certain kind of particular (“contingents” or “possible”) and human free choice or will (which themes Arama treats in AY Gates 19, 21, 28), and while his contemporaries such as Abraham Bibago and Shem Tob b. Joseph were interested in divine knowledge as it relates to providence, a major concern of fifteenth-century Spanish *derashot* in general (which themes Arama treats in AY Gates 54, 56, 68, 70), Arama’s interest in divine and angelic knowledge of morality—at least on the surface—seems to bear greater resemblance to scholastic concerns. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I.54.5, I.55.2., I.57.1–2. For divine knowledge in fourteenth century Jewish thought, see the scholarship cited in chapter 1, note 45 and chapter 2, note 104 above. For Bibago, Shalom, and trends in fifteenth century sermons respectively, see Lazaroff, “The Theology of Abraham Bibago,” 80–124; Herbert Davidson, *The Philosophy of Abraham Shalom: A Fifteenth Century Exposition and Defense of Maimonides* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), 66; and Marc Saperstein, *Your Voice Like a Ram’s Horn: Themes and Texts in Traditional Jewish Preaching* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1996).

² The *cherubim* and *flaming sword* are both singled out for special focus by Hayyim Israeli in his *Ma’amar Gan Eden*, ch. 10–11.

³ Perhaps following Arama, Isaac Abarbanel also takes Gen. 3:22–24 to be a single textual unit. See *Perush Abarbanel ‘al ha-Torah, Vol. 1: Bereshit*, 193ff. N.b. Here and throughout, citations of scripture are with reference to the JPS 1918 English translation, italicized for clarity.

⁴ Versions of this midrash are found Num. Rab. 19; Midrash Tehilim 8:2; Pesikta Rabbati 14:1; Midrash Tanhuma Hūqqat 6:1; Qohelet Rabbah 7:23:1; Pesikta de Rav Kahana 4:3; Yalkut Shimoni on Nah 639:2. Versions also appear in the Zohar and in Bahya b. Asher’s commentary on Num. 19:2, though both develop it in a completely different way than Arama. N.b. Here and throughout citations of Midrash Rabbah are with reference to the translation and edition by H. Freedman and M. Simon.

⁵ I retain the Hebrew here, though awkward, to highlight the problem the Rabbis were concerned with, namely: whether the *adam* referred to in 1 King 5:11 is man in the general species sense, or rather a proper name, referring to the first man, Adam.

Him: *What is man that You are mindful of him?* (Ps. 8:5). He said to them: “This man that I want to create shall have more wisdom than you.” What did He do? He gathered all the cattle, wild beasts, and fowl to pass before them. He said to them, “What are the names of these?” They, however, did not know. When He created the first man, He made them pass before him. He said to him: “What are the names of these?” He said: “It is fitting to call this one an ox, this one a horse, this one a camel, this one a donkey, this one an eagle,” and so on for all of them. Thus it says: *and the man gave names to all cattle and to the fowl of the air*, and so on (Gen. 2:20). He said to him: “And you, what is your name?” The man said to him: “Adam, because I was created out of the ground (*adamah*).” The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to him: “and I, what is My name?” He said to him: “My Master,” He said: “why?” He said: “because you are Master over all creatures.” This is [the meaning of] *I am the Lord, that is My name* (Isa. 42:8); this is the name which Adam gave me. It is the one I have agreed to between Me and My creatures” (Num. Rab. 19).

[3] In the previous Gates, it was made clear that man is the coupling together of the two extreme existents comprising creation.⁶ Accordingly, he can apprehend things in two ways, either by way of knowledge (*yediah*) or by way of sense-perception (*hakkarah*).⁷ Knowledge is apprehended intellectually through our higher extreme, i.e., intellect, while recognition is perceived through

⁶ I.e., form and matter. Arama discusses the creation and nature of man especially in Gates 6, 8, and 9.

⁷ While Arama may owe his distinction between apprehension via knowledge and apprehension via sense-perception to Saadia, there are complications: While in his *Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, Saadia draws a tripartite distinction between knowledge gained through sense-perception, “rational intuition,” and knowledge attained through logical necessity—the former clearly corresponding conceptually to Arama’s *hakkarah*, and the latter two perhaps corresponding with Arama’s *yediah*—the Hebrew terminology used by Judah ibn Tibbon in his translation is at odds with Arama’s. What Arama calls *hakkarah*, ibn Tibbon calls *yediat ha-nireh*; what Arama calls *yediah*, ibn Tibbon calls *madda’ ha-sekkel*; finally, elsewhere in *Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, ibn Tibbon uses *koah ha-hakkarah* to refer to the faculty of reason (on a Platonic model, as distinct from appetite and anger)—in direct opposition to Arama’s terminology.

our lower extreme, i.e., the senses. What we apprehend intellectually is not what we perceive through our senses, and vice versa. For sense perception is of individual things, such as this particular land and that particular man,⁸ which are perceived in respect of their accidents and recognized through their descriptions. Meanwhile, intellectual apprehension is of e.g., the nature of the earth or the universal man that exists in the soul—i.e., it is knowledge of a thing’s essence and quiddity, which is to say, the definition of a thing in terms of its species. The intellect does not perceive the particulars distinguishing some particular man from another, just as sense-perception does not know universal, essential notions.

[4] The Scientist clarified this in the beginning of the *Physics*.⁹ He said that in the study of natural existents, it is good and fitting to proceed from common things to parts (184a24) because common things are more known to us than particulars, just as composites are more known to us than simples.¹⁰ His aim was that even though he had already established that in [the realm of] demonstrations/syllogisms,¹¹ it is fitting to proceed from the posterior (or: consequent) to the prior (or: antecedent), according to the order of study, one should begin with common things that are prior by nature and more known to the intellect, and proceed from these to particulars—for both of these are cases of proceeding from what is known to what is unknown. In study, general

⁸ The examples “this particular land” and “that particular living being” are found in Qalonymus’ translation of Averroes’ Middle Commentary on the Physics, Ch. 2, on which see note below.

⁹ The following paragraph largely seems to be a paraphrastic summary of Ch. 2–3 of Averroes’ Middle Commentary on the Physics, in the Hebrew translation of Qalonymus b. Qalonymus, which can be found in Steven Harvey, “Averroes on the Principles of Nature: The Middle Commentary on Aristotle’s Physics I-II,” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1977), 180–182. I consulted Harvey’s English translation on 243–6 in developing my own.

¹⁰ Averroes glosses this idea in his Epitome of the Physics as follows: “The common is always more known to us than the particular because the sensations which are generated and the images are at first not separated and distinguished.” This English translation is taken from Harvey, “Averroes on the Principles of Nature,” 404, translating the Hebrew of Moses ibn Tibbon.

¹¹ N.b., while Arama contrasts physics/natural science with demonstrations/syllogisms, the Middle Commentary contrasts physics/natural science with mathematics. See Harvey, “Averroes on the Principles of Nature,” 180, 244.

notions which are first known to the intellect ought to precede those particulars that are posterior for it, just as in contemplating demonstrations, we should proceed from the composite posterior (or: consequent), which is recognizable to us by way of our senses, to the simple prior (or: antecedent), which is ultimately known by the intellect. For the general composite which exists outside the soul is better known to our sense-perception than the abstract simples, just as the names indicating man and horse are better known than the definitions indicating their parts, let alone the collection of their parts. This is the substance of his aim there.

[5] If this is the case, the more universal some existent is, the more known it will be to [our] intellect, while the more particular something is, the more perceived it will be by [our] senses. It follows from this that human apprehension is first and foremost of enmattered existents subject to sense-perception, and from there ascends to knowledge of universals existing in the intellect, such as God. Meanwhile, God's intellectual apprehension is first and foremost of those universal existents that are known in and of themselves, from whence it follows necessarily that He recognizes and knows [their] particulars—which He knows with a superior, wondrous knowledge, unknown to us. However, knowledge absolutely necessitates that since His intellectual apprehension of them constitutes the essence/substance of their existence, nothing related to matter and its craftwork confounds the Former. As it is said: *He that forms the hearts of them all* (Ps. 33:15), and as the Psalmist said: *He that formed the eye*, and so on (Ps. 94:9), which shall be made clear in the portion on the red heifer in Gate 79, with the help of God.¹² This

¹² Arama likely has in mind the following passage from AY Gate 79, in which he explains the seeming corporealism of Ps. 94:9 with reference to God's necessary intellectual apprehension of the properties of hearing, sight, etc., in the most perfect manner possible:

והנה כאשר היה הוא יתע' הפועל בעצם כל הדברים היוצאים אל המציאות היתה טענת המשורר חזקה מאד במה שאמר הנוטע און הלא ישמע אם יוצר עין הלא יביט (תלים צ"ד) כי הוא לא אמר שיחוייב שתהיה לו און כזו החמרית ועין כזו המוגשמת כי תכונת האון והעין ושאר האיברים היותם על האופן ההוא הכל הוא מהדברים אשר במקרה בדברים ההם ומהכנת החמר' אל ענין ואופן יקבלו צורת שלימותם אבל אמר שסגולת השמיעה וענינה חוייבה שתהיה מושכלת אצלו יתע' ראשונה וכן סגולת הראייה וכן כל כיוצא בזה. ולזה אמר הנוטע און וממציאה

is [the meaning of] R. Abraham ibn Ezra's statement that "the All knows the whole by way of the whole, and not by way of the part."¹³ In my view, his aim is that [God's way of knowing] is the opposite of man's, for whereas man comes to know the whole by way of knowing the part, God knows the whole by way of the whole.¹⁴ [Moreover] it seems that He also knows the parts by way of His knowing the whole, and this shall be clarified in its place, with the help of God. As for the separate intellects, whose *dwelling is not with flesh* (Dan. 2:11), they apprehend what is known to the intellect and both the essences and substances of existents insofar as these are universals that can be intellectually apprehended, whether genera or species. However, it is not in their nature to recognize particulars apprehended by sense-perception, i.e., hylic beings, through their accidents and descriptions.

[6] If this is the case, we are dealing with three types of apprehensions. There is He Who knows universals first and foremost; and for this reason, particulars are not concealed from Him—this is God. There is he who perceives particulars through sense-perception first and foremost, from whence he proceeds to apprehend what he will of universals—this is man. And there is he who intellectually apprehends universals but does not perceive particulars through the senses—these

באותו תוכן הראוי והנאות נגמור בו קבלת החוש הזה וגם היוצר העין על האופן הנאות שבו יושלם הראות חוייב שבו ימצאו השלמיות ההם מושכלות ראשונה

¹³ See ibn Ezra's commentary on Gen. 18:21:

כי האמת שהכל ידע כל חלק, על דרך כל, ולא על דרך חלק. והעד כי זה הפירוש הוא האמת ואם הוא סוד גדול שאמר אברהם, האף תספה According to Norman Strickman, this remark of ibn Ezra's generated much controversy: See Norman Strickman, "Ibn Ezra: 'The All Knows Every Part Via The All'," *Hakirah: The Flatbush Journal of Jewish Law and Thought* 30 (2021): 237–258. Perhaps most important given Arama's reliance on him is that the quote is cited by Gersonides in *Wars of the Lord* III.6.

¹⁴ In passing here we see Arama too joining in the enterprise of ibn Ezra supercommentary, on which see Tamaš Visi, "The Early Ibn Ezra Supercommentaries: A Chapter in Medieval Jewish Intellectual History," (PhD diss., Central European University, 2006); idem., "Ibn Ezra: A Maimonidean Authority: The Evidence of the Early ibn Ezra Supercommentaries," in *Cultures of Maimonideanism*, ed. James T. Robinson (Brill, 2009), 89–131; Dov Schwartz, *Old Wine in New Bottles: The Philosophy of a Fourteenth-Century Jewish Neoplatonic Circle* (Jerusalem, 1996); Howard Kreisel, *Five Early Commentators on R. Abraham Ibn Ezra: The Earliest Supercommentaries on Ibn Ezra's Torah Commentary* (Ben Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2017).

are the angels. In my opinion, this is what the Sages intended in their saying:¹⁵ “You will find one who is in darkness but sees one who is in light as well as one who is in light but cannot see what is in darkness. But the Holy One Blessed be He, who is Light and dwells in Light, He sees [even] that which is in darkness, as it is said: *He knoweth what is in the darkness*, and so on (Dan. 2:22)” (Tanhuma Tezaveh). This, in addition to what shall be clarified regarding the *peshat* [of this verse] in Gate 29, with the help of God.¹⁶ Thus [the Sages] divided those who apprehend into three categories: First, there is human apprehension. He dwells in darkness in respect of the darkness of his matter, and he alone possesses sense-perception. Yet he still can see what is in light, i.e., universal, intellectual apprehensions, to the extent that his intellect can grasp them. Meanwhile, the angel dwells in light in respect of his being abstracted from the darkness of matter and its concomitants. But for this reason he does not apprehend or see the aspects of particulars (indicated by these names and descriptions—) that are in darkness. Finally, the Holy One Blessed be He—even though He is the Light of the world and all things are known to Him with the most universal and intellectual knowledge—still, nothing in the darkness of composition is hidden from Him, insofar as He is the Former of all through His knowledge, the essence of which is too wonderous to know, and which causes Him to persist in a relation of infinite separation from them. We heard of one who explained this¹⁷ by saying that man, who intellectually apprehends the light of existents by verifying their definitions, does so *through* his being in the darkness of matter, i.e., through recognizing them via sense-perceptions first. But this is not so for the Holy One Blessed be He; for their existence in matter proceeds from His

¹⁵ Arama's gloss on this dictum is later cited by Malbim in his commentary on Num. 19:1.

¹⁶ At the beginning of Gate 29, Arama provides an alternative explication of the dictum, distinguishing between the physical criteria required for objects to be visible to humans, and the lack of criteria for those same objects to be apprehended by God.

¹⁷ I was unfortunately unable to identify Arama's referent here.

first intellectually apprehending them, as we said. While the idea behind this explication is undoubtedly true, it is incompatible with the language of the dictum. For why would it mention “one who is in light but cannot see what is in darkness”?¹⁸ Rather, what I wrote is both correct according to language and true in connection with the inquiry that I was explaining.¹⁹ Further, it is verified by the Torah in general. How wonderous is the Sage’s dictum concerning this: *for Thou, even Thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men* (1 Kings 8:39). And the Prophet said: *the heart is deceitful above all things and it is exceeding weak—who can know it? I the Lord search the heart*, and so on (Jer. 17:9–10). This indicates that there is none like Him among all the supernal existents who apprehend these particular things, and this shall be mentioned further in Gate 14, with the help of God.²⁰

[7] From all we have said, it follows necessarily that the more something is recognizable and perceptible as an individual, the more that thing is particularly suited to the apprehension of man. [Similarly] the more something is apprehensible as a universal existing in the intellect, the more it is suited to [the apprehension of] the separate intellect. However, these two differ from each

¹⁸ Arama’s point here is that on the interpretation just suggested, only two of three categories implicit in the Rabbinic dictum are explained, leaving the dictum’s inclusion of the category “one who is in light but cannot see what is in darkness” to appear superfluous/extraneous. Arama’s exegetical insistence on ensuring maximal meaning or extricating significance from every part of the dictum should be understood against the background of late fifteenth-century Spanish imperatives towards “omnificance,” on which see Eric Lawee, “The Omnificance Imperative in Rashi Supercommentary in Late Medieval Spain,” *Hispania Judaica Bulletin* 10 (2014): 169–192; Yaakov Elman, “‘It is no empty thing:’ Nahmanides and the Search for Omnificance,” *The Torah U-Madda Journal* 4 (1993): 1–83.

¹⁹ Arama’s remark that his interpretation is “correct according to language” is reminiscent of how he buttresses his counter-interpretations elsewhere, e.g., in his counter-interpretation of Ps. 19:2, discussed in 1.2.1 above.

²⁰ Arama likely has in mind the following passage from AY Gate 14, which glosses the same verses:

ירצה כי כאשר היה נגלה האדם ענין אחד ונסתרו דבר אחר אין מי שידע זה וזולתו והוא מה שידע שלא שכחו שמו בלבנו עם היות שבנגלה פירשנו כפינו לאל זר וכמ"ש לא נסוג אחור לבנו כו' (שם) שהכוונה עם שנטתה אשורנו מני ארחך בפועל. ושלמה ביאר זה בתכלית הביאור כשאמר בתפלתו ונתת לאיש ככל דרכיו אשר תדע את לבבו כי אתה ידעת לבדך את לב כל בני האדם (מלכים א' ח':ל"ט) והנה להיות ההנהגה ההשגחיית נמשכת אל הכרה זו בלי ספק יוחדה לו יתברך גם כן כמי שהוא מבואר בכל מקום כמו שבאלו המקומות כלל שני הענינים יחד אני ה' חוקר לב כו' לתת לאיש כדרכיו כו' ונתת לאיש ככל דרכיו אשר תדע את לבבו.

other in that man *has access* to the knowable universals (Zech. 3:7) to the extent that his intellect can grasp them. In contrast, the separate intellects have no access to those particulars that are perceptible to the senses. This is the aim of that dictum we mentioned, which says that man has greater knowledge than the angels. For the angels made claims against man in saying *what is man*, and so on (Ps. 8:5). That is, insofar as he is a *man*—[i.e.,] the son of man and *of woman born* (Job 15:14), founded in this base matter—it is necessary that his apprehension be deficient on account of its weakness in apprehending those things that are known in themselves, i.e., universals—for as we said, these are foreign to him by nature. But God spoke in man’s defense. For precisely because of this, man can apprehend what the angels cannot; i.e., he can recognize the particulars of composite beings that are only distinguished through their accidents.²¹ This is why man was able to distinguish the animals with individual names derived from what he perceived of the differentia distinguishing each sect, even though they all belonged to a single species. This knowledge is not ascribed to the supernal intellects, for even if they know and apprehend the general species in respect of the generality of their forms, i.e., the species of cattle or the species of beasts or the species of fowl, they do not apprehend the particulars of each class that distinguish the camel from the horse and the ass, or the lion from the wolf and the bear, or *the great vulture* from *the bearded vulture* and the *osprey* (cf Lev. 11:13), and what is similar to this. For their differentia are derived from partial notions that are dependent upon the variation in their matter and shapes—similar to the differentia between sheepdogs and hunting dogs, or the differentia between a beast of burden and a beast for riding.²² This is his saying “It is fitting to

²¹ For the idea(s) that differentia are derived from accidents contingent on matter and shape, and so that a certain level of zoological taxonomy can only be pursued through sense-perception, see 4.1 above on Gersonides’ SC.BA.

²² Arama’s selection of examples here—focusing on the distinctions between sheepdogs and hunting dogs, and different types of horses—should be understood against the ubiquity of both sheep-herding and obsession with horse husbandry in late fifteenth century Spain, on which see e.g., Javier Irigoyen-Garcia, “Sheep Herding and Discourses of Race,” in idem., *The Spanish Arcadia: Sheep Herding, Pastoral Discourse, and Ethnicity in Early Modern Spain* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 35–74.

call this one a horse, this one a camel, this one an ass, and this one an eagle.” And this is the explication of *and man gave names to all cattle*, and so on (Gen. 2:20), for these names were not universal definitions, as was said. To explicate this, scripture said: *and whatsoever the man would call every living creature*, and so on (Gen. 2:19). That is to say, all these existents that *the man would call* by these particular names already had, from the outset, the name of *living creature*, which was its universal definition, known to the angels, as we wrote in its place.²³ They clarified this matter completely in His saying: “And you, what is your name?” Adam said to him: “Adam, because I was created out of the ground (*adamah*).” He referred [to himself] with a name indicating not to the quiddity nor definition of man, but rather to some partial description, derived from something other than his quiddity. This is precisely what he said: “My Master...because you are Master over all creatures.” This [name] does not derive from the essence of the Noble and Terrible Name but rather from some notion external to it, since these intellectual notions exist first and foremost with the angels.²⁴ This is what the Holy One Blessed be He clarified in His saying: “this is the name which Adam gave me. It is the one I have agreed to between Me and My creatures.” He meant that this is the name that Adam derived from the relation that God has to His creatures; not that this is [His] essential name. The Master and Guide already wrote about this name, concerning precisely this notion in Part I, Ch. 60.²⁵ Contemplate

²³ See Arama’s third *safeq* and answer in AY Gate 8:

ומה טעם וכל אשר יקרא לו האדם נפש חיה הוא שמו כי נפש חיה הוא השם הכולל לכלן ויספיק לכל שם זה לבד ומאי קאמר ויקרא האדם שמות?

...והנה להורות זה הצורך הנפלא סמך וייצר יי' אלהים מן האדמה כל חית השדה וכו' עד ולאדם לא מצא כו' יאמר כי כל מה שנברא מן האדמה בלי נפחת נשמת חיים שהם המינים הבלתי מדברים כלם הביאן אל האדם שיתבונן בהם בחכמתו ויעיין בטבעיהם ומהותם כדי שיגבילם בגדריהם לקרא בשמותם עלי אדמה. וכל אשר יקרא לו האדם נפש חיה הוא שמו. והכוונה שכל אלו הב"ח כבר נקרא שמם הסוגיי משעת היצירה שנאמר תוצא הארץ נפש חיה אבל הובאו לו שיקרא להם השמות המיוחדים והמבדילים אותם עדר עדר לבדו כלומר גמל סוס חמור. שור או כשב או עז וכדומה.

²⁴ Maimonides makes this same point in *Guide* I.61; see note below.

²⁵ In *Guide* I.61, Maimonides distinguishes the unutterable tetragrammaton—YHVH—from all other names of God; whereas all other names are derived from some action, the tetragrammaton alone “is originated without any derivation” and therefore “gives a clear, unequivocal indication of His essence.” Importantly, Maimonides distinguishes even between YHVH and the name of God—*Adonai*—typically uttered to render it: even the name

His saying “This man that I want to create shall have more wisdom than you.” He did not say superior wisdom or more lofty wisdom or greater wisdom. In this respect, He likened him to a wise farmer or *Joseb-Basshebeth, a Takhkemonite* (2 Sam. 23:8).²⁶ For inasmuch as he knows how to set a goad and direct a furrow or distinguish between the taste of beans and lentils, it is said that he knows much more than all the others in his clan—such knowledge as all the rest do not possess. But in truth, all this amounts to more in quantity, not more in quality. This is self-evident.

[8] Now that this has been established, let us turn to some general terms that are predicated of the human species [and that] are conceptualized in the soul—I mean, intellectually apprehended and not perceived with the senses. Some examples are rank and wisdom and honor and other things that the wise know by way of definitions. These notions are also intellectually apprehended by the separate intellects, who apprehend them in their quiddities, without a doubt. The good and pleasant are both known to the wise as well, who define them as that which is desired by all. When the good is intellectually apprehended, it follows necessarily that evil, which is that detested by all, is too—for knowledge of contraries/opposites is one.²⁷ The Torah also illustrates this in a number of places: e.g., *the tree of knowledge of good and evil* (Gen. 2:9); *as elohim knowing good and evil* (Gen. 3:5); *behold, the man has become as one of us, to know good and evil* (Gen. 3:22); *as an angel of God...to know good and evil* (2 Sam. 14:17). If this is the case, why should we not ascribe knowledge of good and evil to the separate intellects? For it seems all

Adonai “is derived from a term signifying lordship,” even though “it is the most particularized of the commonly known names of God.” See Pines, *Guide*, 147.

²⁶ Arama may have had in mind Gersonides’ gloss on this name in his bible commentary:

יושב בשבת תחכמוני: ידמה שזה היה לשבח עדינו העצמי וכן היה הענין בשאר התארים שזכר לו בזה המקום ואחשב שנקרא יושב בשבת תחכמוני כי מרוב אהבתו החכמה היה שובת מכל מלאכה אחרת ומתעסק תמיד בקנין החכמה.

²⁷ Also in AY Gate 8:

כי ידיעת ההפכים אחד

the sages avoided ascribing this to them as though they were avoiding some grave danger. This is because they all spoke in a single voice, whose words, as we have seen, were compelled and oppressed to a great extent.

[9] The Master and Guide, Chief of the Torah philosophers, offered a contrived explication:²⁸ “*behold the man has become* unique in the world...he himself, of his own accord, knows good and evil, does whatever he wishes...since this is so, he might stretch out his hand (Gen. 3:22),” and so on (Eight Chapters).²⁹ R. Samuel ibn Tibbon, his student, amended this, saying that the word *has become* in the verse has a dual grammatical function, so that its meaning is: *behold the man has become as one of us, and he has become capable of knowing good and evil*.³⁰ David Kimḥi wrote in his collection: *behold the man has become as one of us* in respect of his intellect and his permitting himself *to know good and evil*. Ibn Ezra wrote “and the meaning of this verse is similar to *and ye shall be as elohim knowing good and evil* (Gen. 3:5). Or, perhaps [Gen. 3:22] refers to what Adam thought”—these are his words. The author of [the Book of] Pardes clarified them and said:³¹ “this Sage claimed that among the heavenly host, some knew good and some knew evil, and that this great secret that was concealed from Aristotle and his followers. This is alluded to in the word *cherubim*, for these are the angels that teach good and evil, respectively.

²⁸ It is noteworthy that despite this epithet, Arama groups Maimonides and Ibn Tibbon with David Kimḥi, Ibn Ezra, and Naḥmanides—the canonical commentators—rather than with the philosophizers of the following section, especially when the opinion he presents as typical of the latter is so clearly inspired by *Guide* I.2. In this connection, Arama’s citation of Maimonides’ interpretation of Gen. 3:22 from *Shemonah Peraqim*, but not his interpretation of Gen. 3:5 from *Guide* I.2 is especially interesting. While we might be inclined to write this off as attributable to Arama’s recourse to Ḥayyim Israeli, who in his *Ma’amar Gan Eden* likewise only cites the gloss from *Shemonah Peraqim* and not *Guide* I.2, I suspect something more deliberate is at play, namely: that Arama is attempting to rescue Maimonides from the most provocative (indeed heretical) implications of *Guide* I.2, assigning blame only to the Master’s followers.

²⁹ I use the translation of Raymond Weiss in *The Ethical Writings of Maimonides*, ed. and trans., Raymond L. Weiss and Charles Butterworth (New York: Dover Publications, 1975), 88.

³⁰ I use the translation of James T. Robinson, *Samuel ibn Tibbon*, 372.

³¹ See 4.3 and 1.4 on Arama’s debt to Ḥayyim Israeli above.

Those who are under their governance do not have the capacity to repent, for no one can be spared from them”—thusly he spoke. Rashi’s explication is more suitable; he said:³² “he is unique among the sublunar beings, just as I am unique among the supernal beings, and what is his uniqueness? To know good and evil.” Meanwhile, Nahmanides skipped over these verses, save to affirm that knowledge of good and evil is a divine attribute, as was made clear in Gate 7. None of these commentators, nor any of the others whose explications we have heard, have permitted themselves to explicate the verse according to its *peshat*.³³ *But I am brutish and ignorant* (Ps. 73:22); shocked and astonished so as to say: who compelled them to this grave circumstance?

[10] Yet what is most difficult in my opinion is what I have seen from the philosophizers among them.³⁴ Their investigation moved them to this. For they say that the angels can only contemplate what falls under the category of truth and falsehood, i.e., intellectual apprehension of eternal and necessary things—for they apprehend these things insofar as they apprehend themselves. However, the separate intellects cannot contemplate what is good and evil, inasmuch as these apply to possible and changing things. This is [also] the nature of the pleasant and the unpleasant, for the principles of contemplating these things and the demonstrations relating to them are derived from the realm of what is well-known and habitual. They have no enduring principle or persistent nature, but rather differ/change and disintegrate according to differences/changes in habits, so that what is pleasant for some is unpleasant for others, and vice

³² I use the translation of A. M. Silberman, who notes that Rashi’s gloss is derived Targum Jonathan, and Gen. Rab. 21:5.

³³ Arama’s remark that none of the commentators have adhered to the *peshat* of the verse parallels a remark of Ḥayyim Israeli in *Ma’amar Gan Eden*; on which see 4.3 above. His critique here also echoes his critique at many other points throughout AY that another commentators’ interpretation fails to adhere to the *peshat*.

³⁴ In his commentary on Gen. 3:22, Abarbanel ascribes the following reasoning first and foremost to Maimonides in *Guide* I.2, then notes that “all other sages have followed in his footsteps,” see *Perush Abarbanel ‘al ha-Torah*, 193.

versa. For this reason, they said that it would be a great deficiency to ascribe apprehension of such things to the separate intellects. It is for this reason that they [misled us], distorting scripture wherever it testified to the opposite of this claim.

[11] I do not know how they refused to ascribe this to the angels, claiming it would be a sort of deficiency, since we are required to concede that God Himself encompasses this, without a doubt, even as we believe that God and His knowledge are one thing, unchanging and unvarying at all times and places. For if one were to conceptualize such a change, the pillars of faith would be weakened and the principles of the Torah would perish *and quake* (Job 9:6).³⁵ For most of its commandments and testimonies and statutes revolve around the axes of good and evil, as it is said: *do what is right and good* (Deut. 6:18); and it said: *love your neighbor as yourself*, and so on (Lev. 19:18)—this is a major principle of the Torah, and the rest is its interpretation (b.Shabbat 31a). All these entail upright guidance, [i.e.,] in its saying: *depart from evil and do good* (Ps. 34:15),³⁶ and in the Torah's dictum: *see, I have set before thee this day*, and so on (Deut. 30:15)—and this is very, very clear. Thus if they concede to God's knowledge and contemplation of such things as these, which cannot be denied, how do they say that this apprehension is a sort of deficiency when ascribed to the angels, inasmuch as it is among the universal notions known to the soul, as we clarified?

³⁵ For Arama, the Torah cannot ultimately contain only logical knowledge, since this would render the Torah ultimately identical to other forms of knowledge and rob the Torah of its uniqueness. See his critique of the hygienic explication of the commandments in my translation of Gate 60 below.

³⁶ This verse is also cited by Joseph ibn Shem Tob in his commentary on *Ethics* V.9 as found in The National Library of Russia, Ms. EVR I 379, NLI no. F 35022 168b, on which see 4.4 above.

[12] I have posed this question to some of the sages of our generation who accept this notion as a first principle, and they have not replied to me. What is most difficult about this is that it seems that the divine Onkelos, peace be upon him, agreed with them, for he translated (Onkelos Gen. 3:22): [and God said]: *behold, man has become unique; it is for him to know good and evil*; and he translated *and ye shall be as elohim knowing good and evil* (Gen. 3:5) as *ye shall be as the great ones* (Onkelos Gen. 3:5).³⁷ All who hold this opinion rejoiced in his words and thought it were as if [their opinion] had been demonstrated by what [Onkelos] said. However, in my view, the grave difficulty that we mentioned overrides all of them. Further, even if this is what he said, it does not have to be thus understood. Perhaps we should take refuge in what they said of the Aramaic language, namely, that on account of its deficiency, the ministering angels do not recognize it (b.Shabbat 12b). Even so, God knows and recognizes it. In *parashat* Tzav, in Gate 58, with the help of God, their aim shall be clarified in that the two things are not similar, for *what has the straw to do with the grain?* (Jer. 23:28).³⁸

[13] Further, I see their words as a great tower whose foundation shall crumble in the dust and fall in a strong wind. For even if we concede that some of the notions falling under this sort of knowledge do not have any enduring nature or eternal principle that applies in all times and

³⁷ Hayyim Israeli also connects commentators' tendency to force interpretations of Gen. 3:22 from their *peshat* to Onkelos' interpretation in *Ma'amar Gan Eden*, ch. 10: "All of the great and true translators struggled greatly with the explication of this verse, such that even the Great Rabbi Moses [Maimonides], peace be upon him, in the profundity of his thoughts and wisdom, was compelled to follow the Aramaic translator and to force the verse form its *peshat*." See 4.3 above.

³⁸ Arama dedicates a substantial portion of AY Gate 58 to discussing the Rabbinic dictum that the angels do not know Aramaic—there he explains that the statement is not intended literally ("far be it from the Sages' intention that the angels did not understand the Aramaic language or any other, for they are first in all sciences"), but rather that the Sages intended it as an exhortation to people to pray in the language of Torah rather than in any vernacular. The phrase that I have translated as "the two things are not similar"—(אין הנדון דומה לנדבר)—is a variation on a Rabbinic turn of phrase (e.g., b.Pesahim 15a), though it is unclear to me what the exact referent is. Given his explanation of the dictum concerning the angels' knowledge of Aramaic in AY Gate 58, Arama may mean this ironically: on his own interpretation, dictum would *not* offer true refuge from Onkelos' interpretation.

places sans any division or change, still, we cannot deny that most of the principles and foundations thereof are eternal and enduring, entirely unchanging. This is the case for [e.g.,] honoring one's father and mother, and respecting the old, and doing justice and righteousness, and all similar political principles. There is no variation between peoples, nations, or tongues regarding proper and improper behavior around murder, theft, adultery and what is similar—and this is [true of] most of the things encompassed by good and evil. Though there are less serious things that do not have the same degree of perdurance and instead vary according to the customs of [various] cities and climes—for example, here they cover their heads out of humility and modesty, whereas elsewhere this seems brazen; or perhaps they cover their mouths to prevent licentiousness, or what is similar to this—still, [the principle remains] without a doubt, for concede to the attribute[s] of humility and modesty and attempt to sustain them, each according to his custom.

[14] Aristotle, the Chief of the Philosophers, verified this in *Ethics* Treatise 5, Chapter 9:³⁹ There he argued with one who contended that all laws comprising civil religion are unnatural, inasmuch as they do not have the same hold and perdurance as natural things, like the fire that burns the same way both here and in Persia, and what is similar to this. [But] he said that this is not so. For while divine things are most certainly enduring in a way that never holds for human things—since even the most enduring among [human things] changes on occasion—still, we do not for this reason say that they are absolutely unenduring. He gave an example of something that occurs very frequently in nature, like right handedness, even though it occasionally happens

³⁹ This passage is a relatively faithful paraphrastic summary of the text of Aristotle's *Ethics* that would have been known to Arama, i.e., Meir Alguades' 1405 Hebrew translation, albeit with some key differences, clearly read through Joseph ibn Shem Tob's commentary. See 4.4 above.

that a man is ambidextrous. The same applies for the fundamental and general/universal matters included in laws: They are unchanging, except rarely and by accident, as he said:⁴⁰ “if a man gives his sword to another for safekeeping and then suddenly wishes to take it back to kill his neighbor, it is just for the other man not to return it to him, even though in general one should return what has been given to him for safekeeping.” However, details vary according to the nature of the time and place, as do the measures for wine and grain: in a place where there is plenty, the measures are large, while in a place where they are precious, the measures are small—thusly the Sage spoke.

[15] When I saw these words, my heart rejoiced inasmuch as they are true and Torah-oriented. I accepted them and took them as a battery to topple this tower erected by his disciples—for it leaves no room for their position! This is why most of the principles for political governance were established as divine commandments. Thus it is all the more fitting to say that judgements of truth and falsehood apply in some way to good and bad (in general), just as [judgements of] good and bad apply to truth and falsehood. That is, when it is said that conducting oneself according to the “upright path” laid down by some religion “is an honor to the person adopting it, and honor [accrues] to him from others” (m.Abod 2:1), it should be said that this judgement is true. And if it is said that transgressing these and breaching the Torah and covenant is pleasant, it should be said that this [judgement] is false. This is similar to how, with regard to the theoretical faculty, correct affirmations and negations are [considered] good, while incorrect [affirmations

⁴⁰ As discussed in 2.2.2 and 4.4 above, to the best of my knowledge this example—the lone one that Arama suggests is a verbatim quotation of Aristotle—in fact does not occur anywhere in the Aristotelian corpus. It does, however, appear in both Joseph ibn Shem Tob’s and Thomas Aquinas’ commentaries on the relevant passage of the *Ethics*, and can be traced back to Plato’s *Republic*.

and negations] are [considered] bad.⁴¹ All of this was clarified to the utmost in the Metaphysics and in Treatise 6, Chapter 1 of the aforementioned book[=Ethics], so that he concluded by saying:⁴² “As for that good and bad which is proper to the theoretical and practical intellect, these are truth and falsehood, for these are operative in everything intellectual. However, as for that [part of intellect which is] practical and intellectual, [for it, what is good is] truth in agreement with upright desire”—thusly he spoke.

[16] Because these things are self-evident, it seems that they⁴³ were only compelled to deviate from this understanding—as well as from the *peshat* sense of the verses—on account of their having seen that God forbade man from eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil; [accordingly] they determined that this knowledge [i.e., of good and evil] was bad for [sublunar] creatures, and all the more so bad for supernal beings. They thus strove to distance this [knowledge of good and evil] from God, may He be exalted, and from his angels, just as they strove to remove corporeality and what is similar in every instance. [But this] is a very weak reason to undermine a number of structures. For we have already explained very well that knowing the good and recognizing the difference between good and evil is necessary to live,

⁴¹ Though Arama buttresses the idea that truth is good and falsehood is bad with a citation from Aristotle, this idea is expressed in an perhaps even more similar manner by Saadia, in his well-known discussion of the “roots of knowledge” in the Introduction to his *Book of Beliefs and Opinions*. Here Saadia explains the idea of intuitive knowledge (an elaboration of the kalāmic concept of *fitra*) with recourse to the single example that while “truth is good, falsehood is loathsome” (in ibn Tibbon’s translation: הצדק טוב והכזב מגונה). See Alexander Altmann’s remark that for Saadia, “the moral judgment ‘truth is good and untruth blameworthy’ [is] of same primacy and immediacy as the axioms of logic,” in “Saadya’s Conception of Law” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 28.2 (1944), 323. In a lengthy digression on *Guide* I.2 in his commentary on Gen. 3:22, in which he draws from AY Gate 10 extensively, Isaac Abarbanel parrots and elaborates this same idea: “Rather good and bad are categories encompassing both true and false, and pleasant and loathsome. For the good is the true, without a doubt, while falsehood is bad.” See *Perush Abarbanel ‘al ha-Torah*, 195.

⁴² The parallel passage of *Ethics* in Meir Alguades’ translation can be found in Neria, “Joseph ibn Shem Tob’s Commentary on Aristotle’s *Ethics*,” 494–495. Abarbanel too follows Arama in citing this passage of Aristotle as proof for the idea that the truth is good and falsehood is bad; see *Perush Abarbanel ‘al ha-Torah*, 195:

ובספר המידות כתב אריסטו'י שהטוב והרע ממנו בשכל המעשי וממנו בעיוני שהוא האמת והשקר. וכן הוא האמת

⁴³ I.e., the philosophizing interpreters.

without a doubt!⁴⁴ This is why God placed [the tree of knowledge of good and evil] right next to the tree of life! Corruption and evil only result from delivering that knowledge from the admonitions bound up with it.⁴⁵ Nothing evil descends from above, and heaven forbid that something that is a virtue for the Creator be considered a deficiency for His creations! Thus, the distinction between man and the angels is not that only man has knowledge of good and evil while angels do not have knowledge or understanding of these. Rather, [they are distinguished] in that only man is possessed of choice and the ability to fall under either of these categories; his perfection consists in his being good while his deficiency consists in his being bad. [In contrast], it is not possible for angels to be anything other than good, as the Master and Guide said in Part II, Chapter 7, and as we wrote of most excellently in another chapter, in Gate 8.⁴⁶ The same applies in their respective relations to subject to [judgements of] true and false: It is necessary that angels apprehend that the opposite of what they intelligize is falsehood; however, it is not in their nature to know falsehood or to acquire [falsehood] through an intelligible in the same way that they [acquire] truth, [though] this is possible for man.

⁴⁴ See AY Gate 7:

וכבר חוברו לחכמי האומות אשר לא זרח שמשו עליהם ספרים הרבה אין קץ הביאם הטבע להשלים צרכם זה בכל כחם ראה אלהים והצמיח אצל עץ החיים אשר זכר עץ הדעת טוב ורע הורה כי מסגולת זה העץ הוא כי בשמוש בו ובמראהו ובריחו ומגעו ואולי בטעימה ממנו לבד כמו שיבא בשער הזה נקנה לאדם רוח דעת טוב ורע בכל אלו הענינים כי הידיעה הזאת לא תשתלם כי אם בידיעת שניהם הטוב והרע להדבק בו והרע למאוס אותו ובדעת יודעו שניהם ולא באופן אחר... והנה היה עץ הדעת אצל עץ החיים להישיירו אל מה שראוי ממנו להגיע אל החיים האמתיים שהוא הטוב לא שישתקע בו ויחשב לו לתכלית כי הוא הרע והנאסר עליו כאשר יתבאר

⁴⁵ As Heller-Wilensky, *Arama*, 75, summarizing parts of AY Gate 7 explains: Arama understands the tree of knowledge of good and evil as allegorizing philosophic metaphysics/speculative theology and the tree of life as allegorizing divine science/prophecy. While the former is necessary (as suggested in the passage excerpted in the previous note) especially for the nations who did not receive the Torah, but also for man in general, to determine how to lead a good life on earth, it becomes a source of corruption and evil when it is taken to be the final end of human existence, rather than studied temperately, moderated by and ultimately subjected to the insights of divine science/prophecy.

⁴⁶ Arama develops these ideas in AY Gate 8, Part III, in connection with his theory on the distinction between choice and will, e.g.,:

כי הנה המלאכים ונפשות השמים לא יתוארו באפשרות על מעשיהם אבל מתוארים בשהם פועלים בבחירה תמידית לעשות רצון קוניהם מבלי שיהיה להם אפשרות לצאת מבחירתם זו לעולם כי על זה יאמר להם (סנהדרין מ"ב.) פועלי אמת שפעולתם אמת. ואולם היה זה ההבדל בין הבחירה המלאכית אל הבחירה האנושית כי הנה המלאכים לא נבראו לקבל שכר או הפסד כי מיום שנבראו הנה שכרם אתם ופעולתם לפניהם בהיותם משרתים מתמידים את פני האדון ה' כאשר גזרה חכמתו הנשגבה

[17] This is what occurred to me in this investigation, and I have fixed [many] pegs [relating to it]. For I found no respite amongst all that our ancestors have said about it, though I am suspect of whether I fully comprehended their intentions. In any event, in his translation of this verse, Onkelos aimed at something that we ought to pay attention to; something other than what the commentators thought he said. I think that this is what Rashi, may his memory be blessed, aimed at. Namely, [they were concerned] that the *peshat* of the verse required some improvement, since it often posed an obstacle to the multitude. For in his saying: *behold, man is become as one*, and so on (Gen. 3:22), it is inescapable that either God spoke to Himself, as in his saying, *and the Lord said in His heart* (Gen. 8:21) or else He spoke to another. If He spoke to Himself, this brings [one to the opinion of divine] multiplicity, and to imagine [His being] two or even three—heaven forbid it!⁴⁷ But if He spoke to another, it seems that God and that other with whom He spoke are equals in [their] knowledge of good and evil—but this is a despicable notion, and something impossible. There is [also] an even greater difficulty in God’s saying that by doing this, man would be equal to them. [But] Onkelos corrected all this in his translation. *For the mouth of them that speak lies and utter falsehoods about this shall be stopped* (Ps. 63:12). This is similar to how the elders altered the dictum *let us make man* (b.Megillah 9a).⁴⁸ Onkelos was not concerned about this [verse] just as he was not concerned about the other [verses] that concerned

⁴⁷ In his reference to God being “three,” Arama is suggesting that Onkelos translates Gen. 3:22 in the way that he did because he too was attuned to the way in which the verse might be adduced for the sake of Christian polemics, to underwrite the notion of the Trinity.

⁴⁸ The gemara relates a story in which King Ptolemy summons seventy-two elders from among the Sages of Israel, and isolates each in a separate room, asking each to produce a copy of the Torah. Miraculously, all of the elders produce the exact same text, bearing the exact same two modifications from the original Torah: they all modify the word ordering of the first verse of the Torah, and they all modify Gen. 1:26 so that God is speaking in the singular and removing pronominal suffixes such that God cannot be anthropomorphized. Arama’s point here is that, just as the elders in the dictum rewrite Gen. 1:26 so that it doesn’t suggest divine multiplicity, so too Onkelos, who translates Gen. 3:22 in the way that he does so as to eschew suggestions of divine multiplicity.

[the Rabbis], inasmuch as [in Onkelos' time] the shame that had been laid to them was not [yet] as well known.⁴⁹ Further, scripture contains its own proximate rebuttal to the multitude in its saying *and elohim created*, and so on, as we wrote in Gate 8.⁵⁰ [However] He was cautious of this popular issue in his translation of *the tree of knowledge of good and evil*, as I wrote in Gate 7.⁵¹

[18] As for his translating *and ye shall be as elohim* (Gen. 3:5) as *ye shall be as the great ones* (Onkelos Gen. 3:5), I think that this means one of two things: Either (1) he uses this term [i.e., the great ones] to refer to the angels, and this is correct according to what we have found, for he translated *like seeing the face of elohim* (Gen. 33:10), as *like seeing the face of the great ones*, and it is known that he was referring to the angels of whom it was said: *and angels of God encountered him* (Gen. 32:2). The reason he translated *for I have seen elohim, face to face* (Gen. 32:31) as *for I have seen angels of the Lord* is that in that instance, he saw it fit to translate *elohim* as the Noble Name and thought the word “angel” insufficient to render *elohim*, which is

⁴⁹ Arama here is anticipating a counter-argument: If Onkelos translated Gen. 3:22 in the way he did to fend off issues of divine multiplicity, why did he retain the plural form in his translation of Gen. 1:26, the verse that so troubled the Rabbis? By way of response/defense, Arama makes an interesting historical claim: When Onkelos was penning his translation, Gen. 1:26 and other verses that concerned the Rabbis had not yet become known for their potential Christian polemical valences. This of course still undercuts the force of Arama's own argument for Onkelos' reading of Gen. 3:22, but perhaps less so.

⁵⁰ In AY Gate 8, Arama cites a midrash from Gen. Rab. 8, which posits that wherever scripture might appear to contain an opening for a heretic's argument, it contains the rebuttal to that argument nearby, a prime example of this being Gen. 1:26–27: While the first-person plurals of Gen. 1:26 might suggest divine multiplicity, the singular verb of Gen. 1:27 immediately following contradicts any notion of divine multiplicity. Perhaps aware of the weakness of his historical apologia for why Onkelos does not translate Gen. 1:26 so as to eschew divine multiplicity (see previous note), Arama now suggests Onkelos retains the plurals of Gen. 1:26 because he recognized that Gen. 1:27 already contained a rebuttal.

⁵¹ In AY Gate 7, Arama notes that Onkelos translates the first reference to the *tree of knowledge of good and evil* in Gen. 2:9 as “the tree, whose fruit, if eaten, gives knowledge of good and evil” again out of concern for the multitude's misunderstanding, and specifically, to prevent the masses from thinking that the tree itself is possessed of a soul and has knowledge of good and evil:

ומה שתרגם אנקלוס דאכלין פירוהי חכמין וכו'. לא כוון להכחיש זה רק תקן להמון שלא יחשבו שהעץ ההוא היה בעל נפש יודע טוב ורע

in the plural to refer to angels.⁵² For up to that point, [Jacob] had only seen one, which he had called by the name of the place Peniel (Gen. 32:32). There is no need to say that one can't translate the word *elohim* as referring to a single angel, for he did not try to do so.

[19] Or, (2) he designated this term—I mean, the great ones—to refer to something *other* than the angels. I say that in this he aimed at a more profound notion. That is: it is known that a speaker is only attributed with an utterance if he knows or recognizes some aspect of it; if he can conceptualize and imagine it in some respect. For even dreamers do not envision things unless they have some estimation of them—whether of their existence as they actually are or else by way of some mixture or composition of [other] things known and familiar to them. One cannot imagine what one cannot conceptualize in any manner at all. As the Sage wrote in the section on the natural sciences: “and it is impossible to construct an image without first having an example”—thusly he spoke.⁵³ It is also known that an angel cannot be apprehended or conceptualized save through a purely intellectual conceptualization, as Eliphaz the Temanite said: *it stood still, but I could not recognize the appearance thereof* (Job 4:16), for he could not apprehend the angel about whom he was speaking, neither through his imagination nor through any other hylic faculty. It is all the more so impossible that a non-rational animal would apprehend [an angel] or that such an apprehension would be ascribed to a [non-rational animal]

⁵² Arama is here again anticipating a counter-argument: He has just argued that Onkelos uses *rabrabya* (“the great ones”) to refer to angels. But if this is the case, Onkelos translation of Gen. 32:31 might be adduced as counterargument: Onkelos *actually* uses the term angels (*malakhaya*) in his trans. of Gen. 32:31; if he actually uses it here, why doesn't he use it elsewhere? Although Arama's answer is not completely clear to me, he seems to suggest that Onkelos uses the term *malakhaya* in Gen. 32:31 to again signal a different referent, not the angels simply but the angels in conjunction with the tetrammaton.

⁵³ “The Sage” here is al-Ghazali; the text he is citing the Hebrew translation of al-Ghazali's primer of Avicennan philosophy, *Maqāsid al-Falasifa*, Kavanot ha-Filosofim.

in any respect.⁵⁴ Go and learn [from the case of] Balaam's ass: when she turned aside before an angel of the Lord that was standing before him with its sword drawn in its hand, she spoke, apologizing to her master, insofar as she was not accustomed to doing this. She said: *Am I not thy ass?* (Num. 22:30). Yet she did not apologize for seeing the angel of the Lord, for which she ought to have made a great apology! This is because, even if He gave her the ability to perceive [something] more terrifying than him, still, her faculty was too poor to have any sort of intellectual estimation at all. This is why she never mentions the angel of the Lord. It was for precisely this reason that Onkelos had difficulty with the serpent's saying *and ye shall be as elohim knowing good and evil* (Gen. 3:5). For it suggests that the serpent apprehended the angel's quiddity or state, and that [the serpent] recognized that [the angel] *knows* the difference between *good and evil*. Further, if the serpent is understood according to the first coupling, as was explained in the previous Gate, this is not possible for him.⁵⁵ For an angel can only be apprehended through the prophetic apprehension of a prophet, or else through the intellectual estimation of a purely intellectual being. Do not take issue with the serpent's saying *yea, hath elohim said* (Gen. 3:1) [and] *for elohim doth know* (Gen. 3:5), for these statements merely follow those of the original speaker,⁵⁶ inasmuch as the woman had said that God forbade them from eating from the tree. This is similar to what the Lord said of Balaak (Num. 23), and scripture's saying *and the Lord God said unto the serpent* (Gen. 3:14); and its saying *and the Lord God spoke unto the fish* (Jonah 2:11). This refers to the submission implanted in him from that point

⁵⁴ In his commentary on Num. 22:21, Gersonides raises the similar issue of how Balaam's ass could have seen an angel when the latter can only be seen by prophets; he however resolves the issue differently, with recourse to the idea that the entire tale of Balaam's ass occurred in a dream.

⁵⁵ In AY Gate 9, Arama suggests that the serpent allegorizes the appetitive faculty, present in the first "coupling" between man's form (male) and matter (female). The appetitive faculty cannot apprehend an angel/pure intellect.

⁵⁶ Arama again is anticipating a counter-argument: The serpent's other utterances of *elohim* at e.g., Gen. 3:1 and Gen. 3:5 do not contradict the idea that Arama has just used to develop his alternative reading of Onkelos' translation of Gen. 3:22 (according to which the serpent does not apprehend the angels—) because in these instances, the serpent is only another who can apprehend the angels: God.

forward, as we explained. Whatever the case may be in these matters, Onkelos certainly did not aim at that which would uproot the roots of religion and belief, heaven forbid!

[20] Now that we have discussed these matters and the truth of them, we shall proceed to treating the aim of these verses, as we set out to initially: [i.e.,] explicating the meaning of the dictum *The man is become*, and so on (Gen. 3:22); and the meaning of man's expulsion from the Garden of Eden, and the significance of the cherubim and the flaming sword that turned, for it is fitting to establish the meaning of these. Following faithful witnesses, we already wrote⁵⁷ that this noble place—i.e., *the garden of Eden*, and *the tree of life* and *the tree of knowledge* and the rest of the trees which were *good to eat and pleasant to behold*, as well as the *four rivers*—none of these were mentioned in the Torah by way of allegory or figure alone. Rather, they all actually exist, without a doubt.⁵⁸ *The rivers have lifted up their voices, roaring* (Ps. 93:3) to awaken [people] to the true reality of this in all corners of the earth. There should be no doubt that on account of its excellent constitution and balanced nature, *the tree of life* has the property that all who eat of it either substantially lengthen their life or live forever, as Nahmanides wrote.⁵⁹ And how should

⁵⁷ Arama develops all these ideas in AY Gate 7; see also 1.5 above.

⁵⁸ Hayyim Israeli devotes ch.4 of *Ma'amar Gan Eden* to a fascinating discussion of the terrestrial Garden of Eden, at one point claiming that he must expound its properties at length since “those who are wise in their own eyes believe that it is not possible for [the Garden] to exist on earth, and make claims against our Sages, may their memory be blessed.” Following ibn Ezra and others, he contends that the terrestrial Garden is located in the equatorial zone, but offers wonderful elaborations, citing from Avicenna's *Shifa* on meteorology to defend the idyllic clime, and explaining that tree of knowledge of good and evil and tree of life respectively grow fruits with strong aphrodisiac properties (which Israeli likens to bananas!) and the ability to sharpen man's intellect and desire for learning. See *Ma'amar Gan Eden*, 24–26. In *Ma'amar Gan Eden* ch.5, Israeli deals with Averroes' challenges to Avicenna's claims adduced for support in the previous chapter. Ideas about the nature of the terrestrial Garden became enormously popular in the decades following Arama, on which see Andrew D. Berns, “The Place of Paradise in Renaissance Jewish Thought,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 75.3 (2014): 351–371.

⁵⁹ Nahmanides gloss on the first mention of the tree in Gen. 2:9—(ועץ החיים: אילן פריו נותן באוכליו חיים ארוכים)—is quite brief, though his closely related idea that the natural state of man was originally to live forever or else for an extremely long time, and that this changed only because of the fall such that lifespans declined over time, generated enormous attention in the medieval period, and was taken up by e.g., Yom Tov Ishbili in his *Sefer ha-Zikkaron*. See Moshe Halbertal, *Nahmanides: Law and Mysticism*, trans., Daniel Tabak (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 104–108; James A. Diamond, “R. Yom Tov ben Abraham Ishbili (13th–14th Centuries): Pushing Back the Assault,” in idem., *Maimonides and the Shaping of the Jewish Canon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 94.

this be too wonderous for us?! Do you not see the natural scientists in every generation who try with all their might to bring forth water from the flinty rock (Deut. 8:15) and from trees and stones and grasses? They say that (if they are able to do so—) those will be waters of life; they will bathe therein and be restored to youth!⁶⁰ Not only do they not doubt this, but they undertake to sustain it in all their speculations. Then who will not believe that the garden *planted by the Lord* contains a *tree of life* that can do this very thing, whether by nature or by some property, so that man can receive its benefits when he behaves as is fitting by using the *tree of knowledge* next to it in the way we explained.⁶¹ Once man was corrupted by eating it and was no longer fit to eat from the *tree of life*, God, as it were, repeated the snake's statement *for elohim doth know that in the day ye eat thereof*, and so on (Gen. 3:5), and, as it were, spoke with those same *divine ones*, saying: *the man is become*, and so on (Gen. 3:22). Prior to eating from *the tree of knowledge*, it was possible for man to know good and evil and choose good, like one of the heavenly host. Then it was fitting for him to reach out and take also from *the tree of life* and eat and live forever—for these things are very close, even adjoined to one another, as was proved there. But now that he has already eaten of it and become immersed in conventional notions to a far greater extent than intended, it is not fitting for him to use it or benefit from it. I am concerned *lest he put forth his hand* to what is not permitted to him on account of his [lack of] merit and *take also from the tree of life*, since it is right there, and *eat and live forever*, regardless of whether he is innocent or guilty. For this reason, it was fitting to cast him out of the Garden of Eden so that the only ones who attain that *life* are those not immersed in eating from the *tree of*

⁶⁰ It is unclear who exactly Arama has in mind here, though he seems to be speaking about both ongoing and contemporary scientific efforts to discover a fountain of youth.

⁶¹ For Arama, the correct way to partake of the tree of knowledge(=philosophical metaphysics) is moderately, subordinated to the tree of life(=prophecy/divine science); through a correct partaking, which was the state of prelapsarian man, man can live eternally; see AY Gates 7, 8; Heller-Wilensky, *Arama*, 75–76, note 44 above.

knowledge like him. This is why the Lord *cast him out from the garden of Eden to work the land from whence he was taken, because he rejected knowledge* (Hos. 6:4). He was also beset by other vanities too, insofar as he was [now] encumbered by having to seek temporal things to satisfy his need to eat and restore his soul, as well as other necessities.

[21] In the midrash [it says]: “*The man is become ke-ehad mimenu* (Gen. 3:22).⁶² R. Papus elaborated: *as one of the ministering angels*. R. Akiba said to him: Enough, Papus! [Papus] said to [Akiba]: How then do you explain *the man is become ke-ehad mimenu*? [Akiba] said to [Papus]: He laid out two paths before him, one of life and one of death, and he selected another path for himself” (Gen. Rab. 21). Now see: Inasmuch as R. Papus did not have the same concern as Onkelos—[namely,] of grouping the angels and God together—he explained the verse according to its *peshat*.⁶³ But R. Akiba was scrupulous in this regard and said ‘Enough, Papus!’ I.e., it is not fitting to speak about such things in public, as one might with a private individual. He thought *mimenu* should be taken to refer to the perfection of man’s recognition and his perdurance through good choices; thus *the man is become ke-ehad mimenu* would refer to the man who has left and taken another path for himself.⁶⁴ This is the general principle that we spoke of.

⁶² I retain the Hebrew here to illustrate that the interpretation of this phrase is at stake in the debate between Papus and Akiba.

⁶³ Arama suggests Akiba and Papus are divided on whether potential implications of divine multiplicity are a concern in interpreting the verse; Papus is unconcerned, whereas Akiba, like Onkelos in sec. [15] above, is.

⁶⁴ Arama glosses Papus as reading *ke-ehad mimenu* in the sense that man has become distinct and separate from the angels in the Fall by departing from the possibility of partaking of the Tree of Life, which he reads in concert with his own understanding that the Fall consists in departure from the possibility of partaking of the Tree of Life through overreliance on philosophical metaphysics.

[22] This explication is what the Psalmist testified to in his saying *I said, ye are elohim and all of you sons of the most high, nevertheless, ye shall die like men*, and so on (Ps. 82:6–7). Every man can cause his soul to live *while his heart is hot* (Deut. 19:6) in his precious *garments of skins* which God made for them (Gen. 3:21) to forgive their sin and pardon their iniquity, as we explained in the previous Gate.⁶⁵ According to the opinion of the commentators, it seems possible that the explication of *the man is become as one mimenu* is as a remark of astonishment: [i.e.,] that the intention in making man *in our image and likeness* would have been for him to know good and evil only, for this was certainly not the intention at the outset.⁶⁶ After he turned towards that knowledge and chose it as his final purpose, it was fitting to take him out of the Garden of Eden in order that he would not *put forth his hand and eat and live forever*. If he had not eaten it, he would have used both,⁶⁷ the one only for knowledge and the other for eating. But after he ate what was forbidden to him, he was forbidden from what had been permitted to him. This is a pleasing explanation, which accords with their opinion that knowledge of good and evil do not pertain to the angels.

⁶⁵ In AY Gate 9, Arama following a Rabbinic tradition explains that the *garments of skin* are the garments of the light of Torah; the idea here being that by choosing to adhere to Torah in the course of his life, man has the opportunity to correct his fallen state of over-immersion in philosophical metaphysics and instead submit to a proper ordering, subjugating philosophical learning to Torah and divine theology.

⁶⁶ Arama may have in mind here the following remark of Gersonides on Gen. 3:22, another part of which he cites in sec. [22] below:

כבר התרעם ה' על האדם מצד מה שפָּרָה בו, ואמר: הנה האדם היה כאחד ממנו — רוצה לומר שניתן לו כלי ישתמש בו במושכלות באופן מתיחס להשגת העליונים — וכבר נשתמש בו בהשגת הטוב והרע. וכאילו אמר: האם שמתי האדם בזה האופן הנכבד מהבריאה, שישתתף בה לעליונים, כדי שישתמש בהשגת הטוב והרע?

As Gersonides narrates it, Gen. 3:22 is God's outraged and astonished reflection that He gave man the tools to be like the divine (reading *hayah ke-ehad mimenu*—was as one of us) in knowing the intelligibilia, but that he became separate/distinct (reading *hayah ke-ehad mimenu*—is become distinct from us) in using those tools to immerse in opinions of good and evil.

⁶⁷ I.e., both trees.

[23] I found that Gersonides wrote something similar to this, however, he concluded his explication by saying:⁶⁸ “I told him to guard it and he transgressed against My aim. If there is some hope that he should *put forth his hand and take from the tree of life* together with this apprehension he is using *and take from it and eat forever*, which was the final purpose that had been intended for him, [know that] this is impossible. For his apprehension of good and evil prevents him from striving for this as long as he persists in using it. Because this is the case, his striving for intellectual perfection—which was intended for him at the outset, as was set forth—remains futile. Thus the Lord *cast him out of the Garden of Eden to work the land from whence he was taken* (Gen. 3:23), so that he would strive to attain therefrom, i.e., from sense-perception, all of the sense-perceptions necessary for him to attain intelligibilia.” Thusly he spoke. But if it is as he said, why did He expel him from the Garden of Eden to work the land? Rather, he ought to have let him remain, for this would either benefit him, or if not, at least it would do no harm.⁶⁹

[24] *And he placed at the east of the garden of Eden the cherubim and the flaming sword*, and so on (Gen. 3:24). It seems that Rashi’s understanding of the cherubim is in concert with what we alluded to concerning the author of [the Book of] Pardes’ explication of *and man is become*. For he wrote [that the cherubim were] “angels of destruction” and that *the flaming sword* “had a

⁶⁸ Arama’s citation of Gersonides on Gen. 3:22–23 is nearly verbatim; below is the continuation of the passage from Gersonides cited in the previous note:

ועתה שפך והחטיא כוונתו, האם יש תוחלת שישלח ידו ולקח גם מעץ החיים — עם זאת ההשגה שישתמש בה — ואכל וחי לעולם — שהוא התכלית המכוון בו? זה בלתי אפשר! שהשגתו בטוב והרע תמנעהו מהשתדל בזה כל מה שיתמיד להשתמש בה! ובהיות הענין כן, הנה לשוא ישאר בהשתדלות השלמת השכל אשר הושם בו מתחילת הענין כמו שקדם, לזה שלחו ה' יתעלה מגן עדן לעבוד האדמה אשר לוקח משם, עד שישתדל שיגיעו לו ממנה מן החוש כל המוחשות הצריכות לו בהגעת המושכלות

⁶⁹ Arama’s critique of Gersonides is conceptual: Gersonides has argued that God expelled man from the Garden because, in his postlapsarian state of immersion in opinions of good and evil, he is incapable of properly focusing on intelligibilia—and thus gaining eternal life. But Arama counters that if man’s postlapsarian state of immersion in opinions indeed renders it *impossible* that he should properly focus on intelligibilia, then his remaining in the Garden and near the Tree of Life should make no difference.

blade to frighten him from reentering.”⁷⁰ Abraham ibn Ezra wrote that [the cherubim were] “angels in the well-known sense” and their sword “had a blade and two edges.” The commentators⁷¹ who say that this⁷² refers to the sun do not speak truth. The author of [the Book of] *Pardes* adopted this explanation of the flaming sword. He wrote:⁷³ “Between those such as us who dwell in the northern climes and the equator, there is a place where the habitable zone ceases at a declination of twenty-four degrees. This is because the sun is perpetually delayed in its motion from this point until it reaches a declination of twenty degrees—corresponding to the constellations of Gemini and Cancer, respectively—burning up everything beneath it. Thus it is impossible for any creature to go there. According to the hidden meaning, the hidden angels are in charge of this flame which turns.” All of these are his words.

[25] However, what seems more correct to me according to the subject matter and the preciousness and perfection of the notion under discussion is that in these three verses,⁷⁴ scripture repeated itself, allegorically including everything that God had intended in creating man; [namely,] conferring his quiddity, and the extent and rank of man’s apprehension—which lies somewhere between deficiency and apprehending things for the most part—and the reasons for all this. For this, perhaps, is how this wondrous matter ought to conclude, since it will serve as a most beneficial/useful indication, stirring and arousing all possessed of intellect to control themselves, overcoming and prevailing upon their opponents. That is, until they are prepared and

⁷⁰ In sec. [9] above, Arama suggests that according to the *Ba’al ha-Pardes* (who is in turn glossing ibn Ezra), the significance of Gen. 3:22 is that some of the angels know and teach good, while others know and teach evil, and that both types of angels are alluded to by the word *cherubim*. Presumably, Arama takes Rashi’s claim that the *cherubim* signify angels of destruction to be in harmony with the *Ba’al ha-Pardes*’ claim that some of the *cherubim* are angels who know and teach evil.

⁷¹ I was unfortunately unable to determine who Arama has in mind here.

⁷² I.e., the flaming sword.

⁷³ See 4.3 above.

⁷⁴ I.e., Gen. 3:22–24.

have established some perdurance for their souls in the land of life. This is why He said *behold, the man was intellectual as one of us, knowing good and evil*.⁷⁵ If he eats from the tree of life, it will be on account of his nature that he *lives* eternally—for there is no new creation here, as was said “if I create him out of the supernal beings, he shall live and not die” (Gen. Rab. 8).⁷⁶ It was counselled that He should *expel* him from the realm of *the tree of life* so that he would persist in these two states: being intelligent, on the one hand, and a worker of the land, on the other.⁷⁷

[Thus things would proceed] according to his choice, for “if he lives then he shall die, and if he dies then he shall live” (Yalkut Shimoni Remez 14), *for this is the whole of man* (Eccl. 12:13).⁷⁸ This is the meaning of *it is not good for man to be alone*, as we explained there.⁷⁹

[26] *Therefore the Lord sent him forth from the garden of Eden* (Gen. 3:23) is similar to *for God did send me before you to preserve life* (Gen. 45:5) [and] *who sent thee this day*, and so on (1 Sam. 25:32). For God *changed the face of the matter* (2 Sam. 14:20) in that His wisdom saw it would be impossible for man to exist in any other way. This is also similar to *and Moses sent them according to the commandment of the Lord* (Num. 13:3). This is why things were as they were, in terms of man’s being, for the most part, expelled from Eden. This is [the meaning of] the dictum: *therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother* (Gen. 2:24), as we explained

⁷⁵ Building on his arguments in secs. [11]–[19] above, Arama suggests that Gen. 3:22 is God’s summary assertion that prior to the Fall, man shared in common with Him and the angels knowledge of good and evil as intelligibilia. This interpretation is echoed by Abarbanel, *Perush Abarbanel ‘al ha-Torah*, 195.

⁷⁶ Consonant with what we will see in Gate 44 below, eternal life is prelapsarian man’s nature, which he shares in common with the divine.

⁷⁷ Again as we will see developed in Gate 44 below, the only way for man to return to access to the Tree of Life—prophecy and divine science—is through adherence to the commandments, which is first and foremost material and bodily, and only subsequently intellectual. See also 3.3 and subsections above.

⁷⁸ Both the Rabbinic dictum and the verse from Eccl. are touchstones recurring throughout Arama’s oeuvre; for the former see also AY Gates 3, 4, 8, 60 (below), 66, 73, 101; for the latter, see AY Gate 33, as well as his commentaries on both Eccl. and Proverbs (YA); also 2.3.3 above.

⁷⁹ See AY Gate 8.

there.⁸⁰ He described his expulsion from Eden in terms of the two attributes characterizing it, that the Sages speak of frequently.⁸¹ The first is the loftiness and rank of the intellectual investigations whereby man can realize perfection—for these are wondrous and remote from him by nature. The second is his frailty and the weakness of his apprehension in respect of itself, insofar as it is a hylic faculty. What’s more, he is further apprehended by great obstacles (which he desires) on account of his being immersed in popular matters. This is the necessary result of his eating from that tree and accordingly being deficient in the two respects that the Psalmist intended in his saying: *such knowledge is too wonderful for me*, and so on (Ps. 139:6).⁸² He meant: either in respect of his own capacity [such knowledge] is too wonderful, or else in respect of the knowledge itself, *I cannot attain unto it* (ibidem).

[27] This is [the meaning of] his most accessible allegory: *and He placed prior to the garden of Eden the cherubim*, and so on (Gen. 3:24). Speaking of the rank and loftiness of the intelligibilia, He said that *He* had already *placed* and established them *prior*, that is to say, from the time of Formation. [He did this] so that, for the partial Garden to conjoin with the universal Eden, it would be necessary for man to apprehend the supernal intelligibilia, such as those divine, spiritual existents called *cherubim* or angels or electra, the intellectual apprehension of which is

⁸⁰ Ibidem.

⁸¹ Arama’s identification of precisely these two attributes—(1) the loftiness or difficulty of the subjects, knowledge of which would constitute man’s perfection, and (2) the limitation of man’s apprehension or intellect—as characterizing man’s expulsion from Eden (i.e., preventing his attainment of eternal life) is another striking example of his domestication of philosophy, for these are precisely the first two “causes that prevent the commencement of instruction with divine science” as identified by Maimonides in *Guide* I.34. Though Arama appears to straightforwardly borrow Maimonides’ causes, however, their significance is entirely different against the background of Arama’s understanding of the Fall and human perfection: the only way to remedy these limitations or attributes of expulsion is by finally conceding to the limitation of philosophy itself and submitting to the necessity of knowledge through revelation. See also Gate 44, Part III, sec. [] below.

⁸² Arama’s understanding of the inaccessibility of philosophic knowledge as compared with the accessibility of Torah knowledge can be seen by comparing his use of this verse with his use of Deut. 30:11–14 in Gate 44 below, on which also see 3.3.1 above.

extremely difficult on account of their loftiness. Speaking of man's limitations with respect to himself, He said *and the blades of the sword which turned every way*. This is because the rock of the mighty *sword* and its *blades*, which he'd been given for sharpening and strengthening true statements in investigations, were already *turning every way* due to the weakness of its bronze, swinging about and destroying the very same. This is precisely what necessarily befalls the hylic intellect when it is separated from its perfection: *it turns every way* on account of its imagined wants, so that even when it does resume speculating, its [former] sharpness and precision has turned to coarseness and stupidity, and it is unable to analyze and discern true and false intelligibles, [even] as regards minor things, let alone difficult and divine matters. What happens to it is like what happens to one who wants to cut a marble pillar with a *sword* of tin or lead; its *blade turns every way* and it cannot cut.⁸³ Perhaps this is what the Master and Guide, may his memory be blessed, intended by what he wrote in the Introduction: "And even this small light that shines over us is not always there, but flashes and is hidden again as if it were the *flaming sword which turned every way*," however it may be.

[28] This is how the path to *the tree of life* remains very guarded. For these are the primary and essential causes that the sons of man do not attain true life after eating from *the tree of knowledge of good and evil*. [That is,] apart from a few *sons of the most high*, who are fit to garb themselves in those garments of light—*the garments of triumph and robe of victory* (Isa. 61:10)

⁸³ Arama's analogy here—of the blade that becomes dull by attempting to cut what is beyond its ability—is again reminiscent of Maimonides' discussion of the limitations of knowledge, and in particular his analogy of the eye that grows tired by straining to see what is beyond its ability in *Guide* I.32. Arama borrows Maimonides' conceptualization of the intellect destroying itself through overreaching, but as with his other borrowing from the limitations of knowledge chapters, discussed in note 81 above, the significance changes against the background of Arama's understanding of the Fall and perfection: the intellect's destroying itself only occurs because it has been "separated from its perfection"—i.e., proper reliance on the Torah's divine science.

that glorify bride and bridegroom and sustain them according to their perfection.⁸⁴ These are the ones who are separate themselves from external things and realize themselves through intelligibilia to enter paradise, which is the Eden mentioned here. No harm can come to them. Rather, they enter in peace and leave in peace,⁸⁵ and all of them are righteous with the Lord. This is sufficient for what we have intended in this Gate.

⁸⁴ Another inversion or domestication: For Arama, *the sons of the most high* are not those who perfect their intellects through acquisition of intelligibilia, but those who assume the garb of Torah; see Gate 44, Part II, sec. [2] below.

⁸⁵ See b.Hagigah 14b; *Guide* I.32.

Introduction to Gate 44

AY Gate 44 is the second of three Gates devoted to *parashat Yitro*, covering Ex. 19 in its entirety. Divided into three parts, it is also one of the lengthiest Gates in AY. Like many of the other lengthy multi-part Gates, there is only one *nose* for the entire Gate, appearing at the beginning of Part I. There are two sections of *sefeqot* and correspondingly what might be conceptualized as two *perishahs* across the three Gates: the first set occurring in Part II, and the second much more substantial set occurring in Part III, though Arama's framing of it suggests that he conceptualizes the *perishah* at the end of Part III as the true *perishah*, for which the entirety of Parts I and II, and the first half of Part III all constitute interlinking *derishahs*. While Parts I and II each open with their own *ma'amar*, and after the ideal Gate structure, conclude with exegesis of their respective *ma'amar*, Part III opens with a scholastic quaestio. Across the three Parts of the Gate, certain verses from the pericope wind up being glossed or explicated several times, both in the final *perishah* section but also before, with the various explications not necessarily sitting in easy harmony with one another.

From a cursory consideration of the outline below it is clear that the sprawling discussions of Gate 44 are held together by that most standard topos of medieval Jewish thought and philosophy, namely, the possibility and nature of immortal life after death, and how the commandments are bound up in this enterprise. Yet precisely because of its vastness and sprawl, and because of the ways in which Arama has historically been read—abstracting his “thought” from his exegesis and disciplining that thought into familiar theological silos (see 1.3 and subsections above)—I suggest that a more productive understanding of Gate 44 can be had by reading against the grain: As in my reading of Gate 10, where I suggested that the Gate as a whole could best be understood in light of the conflict it stages between Arama and the Maimonidean tradition, so too in Gate 44. While in Gate 10, Arama saw the Maimonidean insistence on a God devoid of moral knowledge as necessarily precipitating the Torah's collapse, here Arama is likewise animated by the threats of Maimonidean ideology, but the threats are different. Not the collapse of Torah demanded by a certain divine epistemology, but instead deeply social concerns: Arama rails against the Maimonidean theory of immortality (according to which immortality is attained through man's realization of his form, intellectual perfection) and related Maimonidean conceptualization of the commandments (as facilitating man's realization of his intellectual perfection) because, he tells us in no uncertain terms, they are wildly, unfathomably exclusive, simply nonviable for the mass of Israelites (II.[2]–[3]). Said differently, if in Gate 10 Arama's creativity is animated by a sense that Maimonidean ideology renders the Torah incoherent, in Gate 44 Arama is spurred by a certainty that Maimonidean ideology puts the lie to divine justice, reserving salvation only for the rare few.

From this kernel of indignation, astonishingly forceful critiques of Maimonidean ideology and powerful subversions of Maimonidean techniques—both in service of immense theoretical and exegetical originality—flow: Though since at least the thirteenth century, medieval Jewish thinkers of varying intellectual stripes had cast the unnamed “philosophers” and “masses” alike as opponents of immortality (and cast themselves, of course, as staunch defenders—), and though as discussed earlier, Arama draws on Ḥasdai Crescas' critique of the acquired intellect to elaborate his critique of the philosophic theory of immortality (see 2.2.1 above), he is—as far as I know—the first to suggest that the philosophers and the masses, regardless of their claims, do not believe in the possibility of immortality for the same reason: though they use different language and advance different arguments, it is because of their shared

underlying Aristotelian philosophical anthropology, their common conception of man as rational animal, Arama tells us, that the philosophers and masses alike hold that man must die with the death of the body (I.[3]–[7]). In showing that the dominant Aristotelian philosophical anthropology is fundamentally incompatible with the possibility of immortality, Arama not only extends Crescas’ argument, carrying his legacy forward, he also paves the way to elaborate a completely new conceptualization of human nature, his original, suprarational alternative theological anthropology—at once only knowable and realizable through Torah, and through divine intervention into the human realm (I.[8]–[16]). Then, to ensure that this alternative theological anthropology, this new man capable of immortality, is one accessible to the collective, to the non-elite masses, Arama wields Maimonidean techniques and motifs craftily, turning standard Maimonidean conclusions on their head: Though he retains a conceptualization of an intellectual elite among the masses at Sinai (I.[15]–[16]), addressed differently by God (III.[25]–[27]), possessed of a different understanding of the covenant (III.[28]–[31]), and responsible for a certain degree of leadership in the community (I.[15]–[18]), they are deliberately deprioritized: excluded in their specificity from the revelation of the ten commandments (III.27), and not the focal point of the theory of the commandments as a whole, which are designed to focus on the mundane, the bodily, the material and everyday (II.[15]–[19]). That the commandments prioritize the masses over the individual is an idea of course already found in the *Guide*, but Arama pursues it, vigorously, to the profoundly non-Maimonidean conclusions that the Israelites merit to enter the covenant precisely because they prioritize the commandments as action over the commandments’ intellectual aspect (I.[19], II.[20]–[22]), and that to the extent that the commandments do inculcate ideas, they are often anti-rational ones. Arama’s vigorous pursuit of Maimonidean logics to non-Maimonidean conclusions is apparent too in his elaborations of how divine accommodation is expressed in the lead-up to and especially at the moment of revelation of Sinai: In a profoundly anti-Maimonidean move, Arama reads much of Ex. 19 as God’s direct intervention into the natural order to make Himself known through materiality and corporeality. In his *perishah*, Arama details how God takes into careful consideration the time, place, and other material details of when best to make His presentation of the covenant (II.[4]–[14]); leans into precisely the materiality of the thunder and lightening at Sinai as crucial to God’s intervention (III.[35]–[38]); and speaks unqualifiedly about God’s exchange with Moses (III.[46]–[47])—not to mention appeals repeatedly to Rabbinic imagery of Sinai as a moment of God’s taking Israel as bride.

The most striking use of Maimonidean technique to elaborate a strikingly non-Maimonidean theory is of course in Arama’s creative reading of the Aristotelian philosophical valence of *segullah* back into the biblical text, such that Ex. 19:5 becomes God’s promise to transform the collective Israel into a separate and superior species of human, as men are to other animals (I.[17]–[24]): indeed precisely that lone species of human which has access to immortality, having transcended the definition of man as rational animal and become the animal that “reasons with a divine reason” imagined in Arama’s alternative theological anthropology. As suggested above, and as discussed much more fully in Part I of the dissertation, Arama’s theory of Jews as separate species grows out of his commitment, in a word, to social justice (see 3.1 and 3.2, with subsections, above): out of his concern for the wellbeing of the collective and concomitant anti-elitism. As we learned from his attacks on Maimonideanism in Gate 10, Arama’s is a deeply moral God. Here in Gate 44, we see that divine morality on full display in all His incisive insight into the collective psyche and manipulations of Torah and nature to

accommodate it, but also manifest in its profound limitations: restricted to love of only a single community, Israel who has been chosen.

Outline of Gate 44

Part I

I. Opening Matter

[1]–[2] *Petihta*

- [1] *nose*: Ex. 19:1
- [2] *ma'amar*: Midrash on the king who forbid his Roman servants from going to Syria and vice versa

II. Derishah

[3]–[7] Arama establishes that the consensus philosophical anthropology, shared by masses and philosophers, is incompatible with belief in the possibility of immortality

- [3] Contention that the masses and the philosophers share in the belief that immortality (“divine happiness and the supreme good”) are effectively impossible based on the common underpinnings of their conceptualization of man. Foreshadowing that given the incompatibility of this consensus philosophical anthropology with the possibility of immortality, the latter will require divine intervention in the form of “a great divine device.”
- [4] Summary presentation of why the masses’ (“popular opinion”) conceptualization of man is incompatible with the possibility of immortality, via exegesis of Eccl. 3:18–19. The masses’ contend that man’s commonality with animals is ultimately determinative, and that in the final analysis man must die with the death of the body.
- [5]–[6] Illustration that the philosophers too do not believe in the possibility of immortality, against their own claims: The philosophers’ theory of immortality ultimately breaks down on the philosophers’ own terms, and is fundamentally incompatible with their definition of man as rational animal.
- [7] Conclusion that the philosophers’ and the masses indeed agree on the impossibility of immortality given their common conceptualization of man as rational animal (even if the latter use different terms); Ps. 37:10 as reflecting David’s understanding of this, i.e., that the dominant philosophical anthropology is incompatible with the possibility of immortality.

[8]–[16] Developing an alternative theological anthropology compatible with immortality

- [8]–[9] Prelude: Rhetorical, scriptural appeals for the possibility of immortality: It is unfathomable that there should be no alternative to the state limned above and captured by Eccl. 3:20’s *all return to dust*; Gen. 1:26 as indicating possibility of redemption/immortality; Torah and divine intervention as necessary to offer alternative

anthropology whereby “man is not subsumed and limited” by definition of man as rational animal.

- [10] Textual basis for an alternative theological anthropology, Part I: *Behinat Olam* 15:1–5.
- [11] Critical philosophical exegesis of *BO* 15:1–5, Part I: Through recourse to basic philosophical concepts, Arama reveals the organic allegory provided by *BO* 15:1–5 to be flawed and so begins revising it. Though the text itself suggests a wick allegorizes the human body and olive oil allegorizes the soul, Arama points out that while wick outlasts oil, the case is the opposite for their allegorical referents, since soul outlasts body. Arama posits alternatively: body=vessel holding lamp; soul=lit wick, connected to the supernal world and thereby sustaining lamp’s light; Torah study and commandments=oil. Crucially, even as Arama revises allegorical elements and referents, he retains and relies on the text’s organic conceptual assertions of a link between the supernal and sublunar worlds via the human soul and Torah.
- [12] Critical philosophical exegesis of *BO* 15:1–5, Part II: Arama adduces further philosophical argumentation to reveal the incoherence of—and so explode, and revise—the philosophical allegory of the text: If light is necessary to sustain the lamp’s use of oil, but oil is necessary produce light, the lamp/light is dependent upon itself for existence, an Aristotelian ontological/metaphysical impossibility.
- [13] Elaboration of Alternative Theological Anthropology, Part I: Problems with *BO*’s native philosophical allegory limned in previous sections are dissolved if its subject is conceptualized not as the individual man, but rather as the entire collective Israel (*kelal*), the elite individuals among which help to draw down and disseminate the light of the Torah’s guidance. This is the collective subject of Arama’s alternative theological anthropology, for whom immortality is possible.
- [14] Elaboration of Alternative Theological Anthropology, Part II: Arama details the role of elites in his alternative theological anthropology by imagining them as a *menorah*, via exegesis of Zech. 4:2–6.
- [15]–[16] Elaboration of Alternative Theological Anthropology, Part III: Arama affirms the necessity of Torah study and performance of the commandments (=“oil”) to the possibility of immortality in his alternative theological anthropology (thereby pointing back to his constructive conceptual use of the *BO*’s native categories). Singles out Ps. 103:20 as key verse for how that immortality is realized, i.e., through a combination of action and a qualified form of intellection, in the first instance appropriate to the angels, and thereafter appropriate to the elite and the masses.

[17]–[24] Reimagining the essence of covenant: God’s promise to constitute the Jews as separate and superior species, the subject of alternative theological anthropology limned above and so uniquely destined for immortality

- [17] The Torah’s aim is to bring “the whole nation” to achieve the dictates of Ps. 103:20, i.e., correct action and qualified intellection, and thereby eternal felicity
- [18] God’s promise to make the Israelites a *segullah* at Ex. 19:5 is His promise to literally constitute them as a separate and superior species of human—distinct from all others, just as human are from animals—by means of the commandments, adherence to which brings about immortality. This is the essence of the covenant at Sinai.

- [19] Harmonization of the Israelites' promise to *na'aseh ve-nishma* with Ps. 103:20; explication of a dictum from b. Shabbat 88a dealing with the significance of the Israelites' having "accorded precedence" to *na'aseh* over *nishma*.
- [20] Israel's recognition at Sinai that they have been transformed into separate and superior species, the subject of Arama's alternative theological anthropology, uniquely destined for immortality.
- [21]–[24] Scriptural and Rabbinic prooftexts for Jews as separate species: [21] aggadah on Rava's interaction with a heretic from b. Shabbat 88b; [22] midrash on Israel's beings saved from the angel of death in Num. Rab. 16; [23] creative exegesis of Ps. 68:18–21 as prooftext for notion that Israel is saved from the angel of death; [24] David's being saved from Absalom (2. Sam 14) and Ps. 3 as further prooftexts for this notion.

[25]–[36] Addressing difficulties: Arama's alternative theological anthropology and with it conceptualization of immortality, Jews as uniquely destined for it, all contingent on the possibility of intermingling between the upper and lower worlds—but is such really possible?

- [25] Arama opens with insistence that the *ma'amar* should be understood in light of the ideas developed in the foregoing derishah, and specifically that "all divine individuals participate with the supernal beings in the ranks of their propheet, which transcends the usual definition of the human." Enumerates three difficulties that must be addressed before this can be seen.
- [26] Resolution of the first difficulty, which concerns an apparent contradiction between one set of scriptural claims (including the *ma'amar* and Ps. 115:6) that suggest that when God created the world, the divine and human realms were entirely separate, and another set of scriptural claims that when God created the world, He sought intermingling between the divine and human realms. Arama resolves the apparent contradiction by explaining that the two sets of scriptural claims refer to two different states/periods in salvation history: though God created the world in accordance with the latter statements, to have a dwelling on earth, Adam's sin immediately after the creation caused a separation and divine retreat, corresponding to the former statements.
- [27] Schematic elaboration of the early stages of salvation history—from the advent of Abraham to revelation at Sinai—as attempts to inaugurate the participation between the sublunar and supernal realms God intended at the outset of creation but that was severed in the Fall; attempts at reconnection/participation are initially only for elite individuals, but with revelation at Sinai they are expanded to the multitude. Resolution of second difficulty: the *ma'amar* deliberately suppresses a biblical verse that indicates Moses ascended first to serve a didactic function, namely to teach that what is unique about the Sinaitic moment is precisely this spread of participation from individuals to the collective.
- [28] Exegesis of the *ma'amar* in light of the ideas limned above.
- [29]–[30] Adjudicating *midrashim* in which the Rabbis pose conflicting ideas about whether the creation of the Tabernacle and Sinai inaugurated completely new relations between the sublunar and supernal realms (the latter represented by Shekhinah) or rather restored relations of old.
- [31] Citation from *Guide* III.52 suggesting Maimonides as prooftext for the notion that the supernal realm is intermingled with the sublunar.

- [32]–[36] Significance of the Rabbinic assertion that “the Shekhinah never descends and the perfect never ascend more than ten” in terms of various ranks of prophecy, imagined as mediated by more/less mirrors or veils; supremacy of Mosaic prophecy.

Part II

I. Opening Matter

[1] *ma’amar*: Midrash on the two crowns attached to the Israelites by the ministering angels, corresponding to *na’aseh* and *nishma*, from b.Shabbat 88a

II. Derishah

[2]–[3] Criteria for a robust conceptualization of immortality

- [2] Four criteria: (1) Possibility (already established in Part I); (2) ease/proximity; (3) inclusivity; (4) difficulty of losing once acquired. Implicit critique of the philosophical theory of immortality through intellectual perfection as failing to meet these criteria, especially (2) and (3).
- [3] Insistence on the necessity of these criteria for a robust conceptualization of immortality’s possibility, with special attention to the Israelites’ degraded nature after leaving Egypt.

[4]–[19] How divine wisdom ensures four criteria enumerated above are met

- [4] God ensures the four criteria enumerated above are met by doing “three extraordinary things,” temporally organized: one prior to revelation at Sinai, one at the moment of revelation at Sinai, one after revelation at Sinai. Enumeration of four difficulties/*sefeqot* concerning Ex. 19:1–6, the explanation of which relate to the extraordinary thing God did prior to revelation.
- [5]–[6] Enumeration of six circumstantial aspects that should be considered before making a substantial request of someone, related to how the request should be made—with biblical prooftexts: (1) time, (2) place, (3) intermediary, (4) word order, (5) possibility of the thing sought, (6) suitability of the thing sought, developing each through scriptural prooftexts.
- [7]–[12] Divine intervention cum accommodation *prior* to the event: Showing divine wisdom considers each of the six circumstantial aspects enumerated in sec. [5] above and in this way prepares the Israelites to be maximally receptive to the commandments prior to the event of revelation at Sinai, all through exegesis of Ex. 19:1–8. Resolution of the four *sefeqot* enumerated in sec. [4] above.
- [13]–[14] Divine intervention cum accommodation *during* the event: Material pyrotechnics described in Ex. 19:9 as well as Deut. 5:20–23 reflect God’s intentionally designing the moment of revelation to be awesome in a way that would further prepare the Israelites to be maximally receptive, “breach[ing] their hearts of stone and soften[ing] their limbs of copper and iron.” Gloss of Ps. 68:8–11 as prooftext for idea that God accommodates Israelites by preparing circumstances of Sinai such that they are maximally receptive to revelation.

- [15]–[19] Divine accommodation *after* the event: Designing the commandments as path to immortality in such a way that they meet the four criteria enumerated in sec. [2] above by emphasizing their groundedness in mundane, material, bodily action, rather than rarefied intellection.

[20]–[22] Explication of the *ma'amar* in light of ideas limned above, and especially that the Israelites are worthy of entering the covenant precisely because their insistence on the priority of *na'aseh* over *nishma* reflects their recognition that the commandments as grounded in mundane, bodily action are more accessible to and inclusive of the masses, and therefore must precede and be a tool of inculcation of any theoretical/speculative ideas.

Part III

I. Derishah

[1] Quaestio and statements of theses pro and contra. Now that commandments-as-action have been established as path to immortality, the question of intention in performing the commandments remains: in performing the commandments “what should people aim at to attain their final purpose”? Thesis pro: To realize the *telos* of the commandments, adherents must intend only to fulfill the divine will. Thesis contra: To realize the *telos* of the commandments, adherents need not intend only to fulfill the divine will, and are they permitted to aim at some benefit.

[2]–[6] Defense of theses pro and contra, respectively.

- [2] Theoretical/conceptual defense of thesis pro with recourse to Aristotelian idea that “the most noble activities must have the most sublime final purpose....and this is God, and nothing besides;” and the idea that imagining the final end of the commandments as having some human benefit will render service of God secondary because ordered by it, in violation of the principle “that God is the supreme final purpose unto which all final purposes must turn”
- [3] Defense of thesis pro with recourse to Rabbinic dicta including m. Abot 1:3, m. Abot 4:2 and a dictum from Sifrei on parashat Ekeb
- [4] Theoretical/conceptual defense of thesis contra with recourse to the principle that in the natural world, all beings are simultaneously “created for final purposes greater and loftier than them,” yet filled with “natural desire and longing....to benefit himself;” as well as the psychological principle that man will relate to any action unaccompanied by a concomitant expectation of benefit “weakly”
- [5]–[6] Scriptural defenses of thesis contra, first with recourse to the negative example of Onan [5]; then more generally in scriptural testimony that the Israelites are permitted to expect a reward from both the commandments in general and in particular [6]

[7]–[9] Two possibilities for reconciling the apparent contradiction between theses pro and contra.

- [8] Possible resolution I: Rabbinic defense of the thesis pro is a result of the Rabbis’ inappropriately following Aristotle in developing that conceptualization of good and

choiceworthy as that which always has its end in itself and so conflating the model of the commandments with a philosophical understanding of ethical virtues.

- [9] Possible resolution II: Rabbinic defense of the thesis *pro* arises from an improper separation/distinction; i.e., thinking that divine service and the reward accruing to the servant are separate things, when really “service and reward are two in name but one in essence.”

[10]–[11]: Distinction between the words *pras* and *sakhar*.

- [10] Preliminary rereading of m. Abot 1:3 in light of possible resolution II, limned in sec. [9] above: Arama posits that *pras* is “what a man hopes for in exchange for his service, as compensation for what the giver has received.” While man should not perform the commandments in exchange for a *compensatory* prize, implicitly he suggests it is permitted to perform the commandments in exchange for a reward given out of divine generosity. Arama develops his interpretation in part by contrast to Maimonides, who in contrast understands *pras* as signifying “benefits (*gemul*) granted by someone who does not gain from the recipient, but [rather] does it by way of kindness and grace” and accordingly construes m. Abot 1:3 as prohibiting aiming at even this sort of reward in performing the commandments.
- [11] Arama defends his reading of m. Abot 1:3 and critiques Maimonides with recourse to its intentionally *not* using the term *sakhar*, which he illustrates through a series of Rabbinic citations can signify the same thing as *pras* but can also uniquely signify the non-transactional sense of reward.

[12]–[19]: Questions on the mechanisms of the commandments’ delivery of reward

- [12] Provisional resolution of initial quaestio in terms of thesis *contra*: in performing the commandments it is permitted to aim at “that good attained for the felicity of souls.” Having provisionally resolved quaestio, issue concerning how commandments deliver this reward is raised. Assertion that commandments’ reward cannot be delivered through some natural causal mechanism or else through an unknown but determinative property, both of which would impinge upon divine will. Reading of dictum from b. Pesahim 8a as specifically worded to instruct against the philosophical notion that intellectual attainment and study brings about the reward of felicity through natural causal chain.
- [13] An opposing but equally incorrect conceptualization of mechanism of reward, namely, that it is contingent on divine will alone, such that the commandments are rendered superfluous.
- [14] Resolution of difficulty posed in sec. [13]: per arguments advanced in Parts I and II, the “divine commandments were given to Israel in order that all of them would participate in the divine good in the two respects that we spoke of, whether for some external benefit in this temporal life, or else for some spiritual benefit, which is the felicity of the eternal World.”
- [15]–[17] Return to initial quaestio and positing of revised, harmonizing solutions: [15] Intending to fulfill the divine will in performing the commandments is precisely what allows one to realize one’s material and spiritual benefit, again in connection with key verse Ps. 103:20, [16] as well as Deut. 10:12–13; [17] another possible way to reconcile, via Deut. 5:25, is to conceptualize fulfillment of the divine will as a first purpose, and attainment of one’s felicities as a final purpose.

- [18]–[19] Final resolution of initial quaestio and gloss of m. Abot 1:3 in connection with several Rabbinic dicta

II. Perishah

[20]–[21] Enumeration of *sefeqot*, in two parts

- [20] Reiterating four *sefeqot* mentioned in Part II, sec. [4].
- [21] Conclusion that previous resolution of those *sefeqot* in Part II was sufficient; enumeration of thirteen additional *sefeqot*.

[22]–[47]

- [22] Gloss of Ex. 19:1–3 referring back to earlier explication of the same verses in Part II: the idiosyncrasies of each verse bespeak that God took into consideration the time, place, intermediary, order of words, and both possibility and appropriateness of the thing sought in asking the Israelites to join the covenant at Sinai; i.e., He carefully architected the circumstances prior to revelation to ensure the Israelites' maximal receptivity. Here Arama also raises the question, via a midrash, of why in Ex. 19:x, Arama uses the word *say* in conjunction with the *house of Jacob* and *tell* in conjunction with *the children of Israel*.
- [23] Gloss of Ex. 19:4 with recourse to divine insight into the collective psyche: God only reminds the Israelites of a very small portion of the deeds He has worked for them, sensitive to the fact that beneficiaries do not enjoy hearing of the ways in which they have been the recipient of someone else's generosity (with recourse to Ethics IX.8); the verse's expression *how I bore you on eagles' wings* might refer to both God's bringing the Israelites to perfection at Sinai swiftly, bypassing the ordinary preparatory requirements, and a constellation.
- [24] Gloss of Ex. 19:5 in light of foregoing *derishah*: The if-then structure of Ex. 19:5 does not imply that God is obligated to reward the Israelites in any way based on their entering the covenant and adherence to the commandments; rather His offering of a reward is an act of divine compassion and grace. Arama notes that in contrast to at Marah (Ex. 15), here God emphasizes the rewards He promises to the Israelites rather than the commandments to which they are obligated, while previously He had done the reverse.
- [25] Focus on the term *segullah*, now offering a much more mundane interpretation, though one that still harmonizes with that offered previously: the Israelites are God's treasure from among all the nations, from whom He delivers them. Condensed repetition of early salvation history, beginning with Abraham's worthiness, and through the deliverance from Egypt, up to the moment of revelation, where God promises to end the Israelites' period of trial and deliver them unto a supernal governance. Arama suggests that while God's reference to *a kingdom of priests and a holy nation* is meant to indicate only the elite individuals among Israel, His reference to Israel as a *segullah* is to the collective, as against all other peoples. With this Arama resolves the first and second difficulties posed in sec. [21]-(1), [21]-(2): What is the meaning of *segullah*? And why are the two ascriptions to the Israelites in Ex. 19:5–6 separated? Arama suggests that the two ascriptions are separated to emphasize that they are directed at different populations: while *ye shall be for Me a segullah* refers to the way in which all Israel is made distinct

and superior to all other peoples; *ye shall be a kingdom of priests* refers to the elite among Israel.

- [26] Glossing Ex. 19:3's seeming parallelism in stating *thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob and tell the children of Israel*; the two addressees implied by the verse and two distinct verbs used for speaking/relating bespeak that there are indeed two different audiences for God's speech, as suggested in sec. [25] above, namely, the masses and the elite, with the former signified by *the house of Jacob* and the latter signified by *the children of Israel*; while the former see in the covenant God's promise to facilitate their living the earthly lives in the best way possible as compared with other nations, the latter can appreciate the true depth of God's promise to bring them to spiritual perfection.
- [27] Arama resolves the third difficulty, [21]–(3): Why are *the elders* and *the children of Israel* not mentioned again in Ex. 19 after Ex. 19:7, and relatedly, why is the only referent from Ex. 19:8 through the end of ten commandments in the following chapter the '*am*'? Arama explicates this in connection with his resolution of the first and second difficulties, discussed in the foregoing sections with reference to the idea of esotericism: Because at Sinai God "was greatly concerned with the multitude," the contents of revelation from Ex. 19:7 through the end of the ten commandments are only addressed to the entirety of people, and *not* in any way to the elite alone (indicated by both *the elders*, and *the children of Israel*). Philosophical-allegorical reading of Ex. Rab. 28 and in turn both *the house of Jacob* and *children of Israel* of Ex. 19:3, linking back to earlier gloss in sec. [26]: the former signifies female = matter, while the latter signifies male = intellect.
- [28]–[29] Glossing Ex. 19:7 through a midrash from b. Shabbat 88a: Drawing on ideas developed in Parts I and II, Arama explicates that because Moses took care to repeat God's words in an exact way, and the latter had already taken care to design the words in conjunction with other circumstances in such a way that the Israelites would be maximally receptive to them, the Israelites, seeing they would be made into a separate and superior species through acceptance of the covenant—and in this alone spared from the mortality of all other men—accept the covenant "with a perfect will;" yet reiterating idea that the elite and masses accept the covenant with different understandings of their reward, the latter concentrated on temporal reward and the former on eternal.
- [30]–[31] The importance of *na'aseh* preceding *nishma*, in concert with previous interpretations; the necessity of both material, practical activity and intellectual, theoretical activity in realizing man's final purpose, but emphasis on the former because it is what is common to the masses as well; the former as inculcating the latter.
- [32]–[34] Harmonizing Ex. 19:8 and 19:9 and resolution of the fifth difficulty, [21]–(5): Arama explains that the reason scripture says *and Moses reported* (va-yashev) (Ex. 19:8) and almost immediately thereafter *and Moses told* (va-yagged) (Ex. 19:9) is to indicate to different stages in Moses' comprehension of the Israelites words: initially he only understands that they've accepted God's words; but subsequently he understands their intention; [33] Arama presents Gersonides' attempted resolution of the same difficulty, only to argue against it and [34] affirm his own via creative interpretation of midrash from Song of Songs Rabbah.
- [35]–[38] Exegesis of God's promise in Ex. 19:9: God recognizes the importance of the collective of Israelites themselves receiving revelation directly, even as they are by themselves insufficiently prepared and such unmediated revelation is unsustainable for them; accordingly He sends *lightening and thunder* to signify to them that their access to

revelation will be mediated and not because of God's miserliness but rather because of their imperfection, but He will also ensure *that the people may hear the voice of His work* meaning He would confer unto them a brief flash of necessary intelligibility so that they would know that God was indeed speaking with Moses and concede to the necessity of Moses as intermediary. In the course of this exegesis, Arama also resolves the ninth and fourth difficulties, i.e., [21]-(9) and [21]-(4). In connection with the former, Arama explains that even though we might expect God's words to be accompanied by stillness and silence, *the lightening and thunder* inspires in the people a terror that helps them recognize that any limitation in their prophecy was because of their own incapacity and not because of God's miserliness as suggested above; in connection with the latter, Arama explains that the two-seemingly causally connected statements in Ex. 19:9—(1) *that the people may hear when I speak with thee* (2) *and may also believe thee forever*, are broken up by *ve-gam* (and also because they correspond to two separate conclusions that the people ought to draw from the thunder and lightening, to some extent in tension with one another: while (1) is meant to allow the people to momentarily intelligize that God is indeed communicating with Moses; (2) is meant to teach the people that qua collective they are not capable of sustaining prophecy, and so must rely on a prophet in the future.

- [39] Gloss of Ex. 19:10, as God's commanding Moses to admonish the Israelites to commence a regime of asceticism and spiritual purification in preparation for revelation, even as He has facilitated most of their improbably readiness and bypassing of usual preparations.
- [40] Gloss of Ex. 19:11 with appeals to *Ethics* IX.11 and *Guide* III.33, on Torah as setting bounds to the people in the sense of moderating and regulating corporeal appetites by imposing a degree of purifying asceticism; resolution of sixth difficulty, [21]-(6) scripture definitely ought not have better referred to setting bounds to the mountain.
- [41] Gloss of Ex. 19:13 and resolution of the seventh difficulty, [21]-(7): Arama explains that it is counterintuitively the ram's horn's *continuing* (rather than its cessation) that indicates that the Israelites are permitted to ascend the mountain by qualifying the sense in which the Israelites are permitted to ascend the mountain: Pace the Rabbis and with readers' expectations, the ram's horn's *continuation* is indeed not an indication of the removal of the Shekhinah's presence and so that the Israelites are permitted to ascend the mountain simply; rather, because they are still so severely prohibited from ascending the mountain, they are permitted to ascend in order to stone another who has ascended and cannot be stoned from outside the mountain.
- [42] Gloss of Ex. 19:14–15 and resolution of the eighth difficulty, [21]-(8): Arama explains away the apparent contradiction between God's command in Ex. 19:10 to *sanctify them today and tomorrow* and Moses' injunction in Ex. 19:15 to *be ready against the third day* with recourse to the idea that while Moses included the day that God gave the commandment to *sanctify them today and tomorrow*, God did not include that day; the "today" to which He was referring began that evening.
- [43] Gloss of Ex. 19:16–18 and resolution of the tenth difficulty, [21]-(10): Arama explains that *trembling* is mentioned in both Ex. 19:16 and Ex. 19:18 in connection with his explication of the ninth difficulty, [21]-(9) addressed in sec. [36] above, suggesting that the two *tremblings* are indicative of the two obstacles to the peoples' apprehension: both the limitation of those apprehending and the difficulty of the thing apprehended:

while the *trembling* of Ex. 19:16 refers to the former” the *trembling* of Ex. 19:18 refers to the latter.

- [44] Gloss of Ex. 19:19 and resolution of the eleventh difficulty, [21]-(11): Arama suggests that the *voice of the horn's waxing louder* and *Moses' speech* are connected in this verse because the former indicates the people's gradual comprehension, whereby they come to apprehend *Moses' speech* and that it is indeed God speaking to Moses.
- [45] Arama cites Saadia's gloss of Ex. 19:21–24 in the name of ibn Ezra, as well as mentions ibn Ezra's criticism of Saadia's gloss, pointing out the commonalities between ibn Ezra's reading of God's exchange with Moses at Ex. 19:21–24 and Rashi's understanding of the same.
- [46]–[47] Arama's gloss of Ex. 19:21–25 and resolution of the twelfth and thirteenth difficulties, [21]-(12), [21]-(13), via a midrash from Exodus Rabbah: On Arama's reading, though Moses does indeed protest God's initial request that he descend the mountain prior to God's commencing the speech of the ten commandments—and this in order that the people not be confused that the speech was indeed coming from God—God never capitulates to Moses' protestation, only Moses thinks so. Rather, God modifies His command to Moses on purpose to achieve the same ultimate end but distracting Moses with a different goal: By commanding Moses to bring Aaron up to ascend the mountain, Moses, delighted at the prospect of bringing Aaron up as well, has to descend the mountain and strategically timed in such a way that God could begin delivering His speech before Moses' and Aaron's re-ascent—exactly as He had intended. Arama finds inspiration and confirmation for this reading in a midrash from Ex. Rab. 28, which he cites in the concluding sec. of the *perishah*.

AY Gate 44*

It is divided into three parts.¹

Part I

Clarifying that both the sublunar and supernal must participate in human felicity.²

[1] *In the third month after the children of Israel were gone forth*, and so on (Ex. 19:1).³

[2] In the Midrash:⁴ *It is written whatsoever the Lord pleased, that hath He done in heaven and in earth* (Ps. 135:6). This may be understood by means of an allegory: A king decreed that his Roman subjects could not travel to Syria and his Syrian subjects could not travel to Rome. Some time later the king wanted to marry a woman from Syria so he nullified the decree. He said “from now on, Romans may travel to Syria and Syrians may travel to Rome, and I shall be the first.” So was the case when the Holy One, Blessed be He, created His world. Initially He said: *the heavens are the heavens of the Lord; and the earth hath He given to the children of men* (Ps.

* The following is based on the Hebrew text found in AY II: 92b–107a (Part I: 92b–97b; Part II: 97b–100b; Part III: 100b–107a).

¹ Though Gate 44 is not the longest Gate of AY, it is among them. Other lengthy Gates divided into multiple parts include: Gate 3, Gate 67.

² “Felicity” is one of many terms Arama and others use to refer to the concept of the immortality of the soul/intellect, a major topos of Hebrew philosophical literature since the early 13th century. While superficially, Arama’s defense of immortality and claim that immortality requires the participation of the supernal aligns with both theological dogma and the proclamations of most medieval Jewish thinkers, his angle on the issue as developed in Part I of this Gate is, as far as I can tell, quite novel. Contra many of his forebears who were interested in exploring the possibility and technical mechanics of immortality, Arama begins by assuming the possibility of immortality, and is instead interested in showing why the consensus Aristotelian philosophical anthropology cannot support that possibility.

³ The *nose* to Gate 45 is Ex. 20:1, suggesting that the entirety of the three-part Gate 44 is devoted to Ex. 19:1–25. Parts II and III of Gate 44 do not include their own *nose*, so that this verse, Ex. 19:1, serves as the *nose* for the whole Gate.

⁴ The passage Arama takes for the *ma’amar* here appears in Yalkut Shimoni, but as far as I can tell it does not otherwise seem to have been common in contemporary literature.

115:16). But when He wanted to give the Torah to His people Israel, He said: “from now on, those below shall rise above, and those above shall descend below, and I shall be the first to descend,” as it is written: *and the Lord came down upon mount Sinai* (Ex. 19:20). Later He said unto Moses: *come up unto the Lord, thou and Aaron and Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel*’ (Ex. 24:1). That is, *whatsoever the Lord pleased, that hath He done in heaven and in earth*.

[3] Divine happiness and the supreme good⁵ are nearly impossible for the human species due to the latter’s nature and temperament. Thus a great divine device⁶ was needed to prepare humanity so that it might be worthy of attaining these. Popular opinion and theoretical investigation concur on the first of these points.⁷

[4] Popular opinion is related by King Solomon, speaking in the name of the masses:⁸ *I spoke in my heart of the speech of the sons of men that God may sift them, and that they may see that they themselves are but as beasts. For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even the one thing befalleth them; as the one dieth, so dieth the other, yea, they have all one breath, and* so on (Eccl. 3:18–19). He meant that he *spoke in his heart of the speech of the sons of man*—that

⁵ *ha-osher ha-elohi, ha-tov ha-elyon*; two more synonyms for immortality.

⁶ *tahbulah gedolah elohit*. Arama does not return to the term *tahbulah* in this Gate, but elsewhere in AY he develops a robust theory of *tahbulot*: in Gate 51, Arama explains how the physical actions associated with various commandments serve as a *tahbulah* for more abstract commandments, such as those exhorting one to remember or to fear (see 3.4.1 above); and relatedly, in Gate 90, he elaborates on his theory of the *ve-ahavta* prayer as the original *tahbulat ha-zikaron*, on which the nations’ classical memory palace was modelled (see 2.4.1 above). The *tahbulah gedolah elohit* Arama has in mind here is likely either the commandments or the Torah more generally.

⁷ According to Arama, both the masses and the philosophers agree that immortality/felicity is *impossible* because of their shared conceptualization of human nature. Though earlier thinkers had cast both the philosophers and the masses as critics of immortality, as far as I know Arama is the first to suggest that they are critics for the same reason, because of their shared Aristotelian philosophical anthropology.

⁸ Arama’s reading of Eccl. 3:18–20 as Solomon speaking in the name of the masses, i.e., relating popular opinion, bears resonances with both ibn Kaspi’s and Gersonides’ commentaries on these passages, and is echoed closely in Arama’s own commentary on Eccl.

is to say, the multitude and their popular opinion concerning this subject. That is that *they may see that they themselves are but as beasts*. I mean, they hold fast to this even though God distinguished them significantly from the animals. They support their opinion in seeing that *that which befalleth the sons of men and that which befalleth beasts are one* when it comes to life. I mean, as pertains to food and drink and some [other] necessities. Further, *even the one thing befalleth them; as the one dieth, so dieth the other*, which is to say, in their death they are not distinct. Thus they determined that they have one spirit, and that humans are in no way superior to their genus, which is animal, *for all is vanity*. This is because everything returns to its primary genus, i.e., earthly body. This is his saying: *all go unto one place; all are of the dust and all return to dust* (Eccl. 3:20).

[5] As for theoretical investigation,⁹ according to its assumptions, nothing is more impossible than for some existent to become another—I mean, to take on its definition. This is known from the definition of “definition” and from the equivalence of the definition and the thing defined, such that the two are interchangeable. Since the definition of man and the specific difference characterizing the species is “rational animal,” it is reason that distinguishes him from all other animals belonging to his genus. This specific difference must then distinguish him all the more so from spiritual existents who do not belong to his same genus. This is because the animal of

⁹ Arama’s argument as to why immortality is impossible from the standpoint of “theoretical investigation” is drawn from (though not identical to) one of Ḥasdai Crescas’ so-called “critiques of the acquired intellect” developed in his *Light of the Lord*. See 2.2.1 and 4.4 above. Arama’s argument here may seem terse because of the background information he omits with which he likely assumes his medieval reader to be familiar: The target of Crescas’ critique, caricatured here, is a reductive synthesis of the regnant philosophical view that immortality is attained through the perfection of the individual acquired intellect; what is immortal in man, then, is this abstract, separate intellect left behind after his body perishes. Against this background and riffing off of Crescas, Arama argues that, despite their claims to the contrary, the philosophers’ must reject the possibility of immortality since their conceptualization of immortality on their own terms. For on the philosophers’ view, immortality entails man transcending his definition of rational animal (“rational animal body”) and becoming something else entirely, thereby violating one of the core tenants of Aristotelian logic and taxonomy.

which this specific difference is predicated belongs to the category of body, i.e., body is animal's supreme genus. Accordingly, [saying "rational animal"] is really like saying "rational animal body"—which cannot apply to the body of the separate intellect. Similarly, the term "rational" [cannot apply to the separate intellect] since what is meant by this specific difference is "rational" in potentia, without a doubt.

[6] Thus, since man and spiritual existents do not belong to a single genus and cannot be encompassed by any category—for existence is predicated of them only amphibolously—how is it possible that they should be interchangeable with one another, one assuming the definition of the other? For this is what is required when we say that man may attain divine happiness and eternal spiritual success—but it is not possible. Solomon explained this also, but attributed it to himself and the philosophers in his saying: *then I saw that wisdom excelleth*, and so on, *the wise man, his eyes are in his head*, and so on, *then I said in my heart, 'as it happeneth to the fool, so will it happen even to me*, and so on, *for of the wise man, there is no remembrance*, and so on (Eccl. 2:13–16). This teaches that in all his theoretical investigations into the superiority of wisdom over ignorance—which is undoubtedly what makes man superior to beasts—[this wisdom] was insufficient to elevate man to the rank of the separate intellect.¹⁰ This is because it is a force in a body, which must perish together with the body, as we've said.

[7] Thus the two sects¹¹ agree and accept that the eventual destruction of their souls is bound up in the definition and specific difference [of man], as was assumed. At first it seems that their

¹⁰ Arama here suggests that early in Ecclesiastes, Solomon illustrates that pursuit of theoretical speculation is insufficient to attain immortality; see 2.2.3 and 2.3.3 above.

¹¹ I.e., the masses and the philosophers.

judgement stands (cf j.Sanhedrin 4:5:2). For if their nature and specific difference revolts against them, what can they do to perdure and escape, who will save them? Concerning this, the Psalmist said *and yet a little while, and the wicked is no more; yea thou shalt contemplate his place, and he is not* (Ps. 37:10). He meant that, from the perspective of the wicked's activities,¹² it is necessary that he be destroyed in but *a little while*. And that if *you should contemplate his place*—which is his particular station according to his definition and the nature of his species, as we said—most certainly, *he is not*. For *all goes unto one place* (Eccl. 3:20), and whom should one trust?

[8] Yet if this whole nation goes to its place, *there is no peace, saith my God* (Isa. 57:21). For inasmuch as *its end shall come to destruction* (Num. 24:20) and *its hope shall be the drooping of the soul* (Job 11:20), what peace shall it have? For this reason, David, peace be upon him, prayed: *my soul cleaveth unto dust, make Thou me to love according to thy word/commandment* (Ps. 119:25). He meant, since according to the consensus of the masses and theoretical investigation, it is man's nature and definition *that my soul cleaveth unto dust*—[as] in his *saying all are of the dust and all return to dust* (Eccl. 3:20)—*quicken Thou me according to Thy good word* (Ps. 119:25): *let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness* (Gen. 1:26). For it is through this word/thing that man might be separated from his *cleaving to dust* and ascend to that spiritual cleaving whereby he shall be *in the image of living God*.¹³

¹² This phrase should be understood in light of ideas Arama develops in both his commentary on Ecclesiastes and in Gate 33: that there are four types of human activity, those proceeding from (1) the theoretical intellect, (2) the practical intellect, (3) choice, and (4) action and that on the Aristotelian worldview, none of them causes soul to perdure; see 2.2.3 and note 10 above.

¹³ Having demonstrated the incompatibility between Aristotelian philosophical anthropology and the possibility of immortality, Arama embarks on finding the latter elsewhere.

[9] In truth, this is impossible save through that wise, divine counsel which we spoke of, which is concealed to the way[s] of investigation, and which the divine Torah [had to] make known to us.¹⁴ Namely: that man is not subsumed and limited by the aforementioned definition, but rather is defined by another most special definition, whereby the supernal radiance might participate with the perfect members¹⁵ of the species both on earth and after death.¹⁶

* * *

[10] This relates to how man's shape was realized according to the form of a *menorah* or torch (*avoqah*).¹⁷ [The latter] are designed to move light into dark places when the wick, which is able to receive light, is lit—[and this] by way of oil and wax or what is similar. This is what the poet intended in his saying (Beḥinat Olam 15:1–5):¹⁸

“O my heart, my heart! The Torah and man when united are a lamp of God upon earth /
The Torah is the flame that spreads about those who dwell in heaven /
and man in his two parts is the torch that draws down its light /
the body resembles the wick and the soul pure olive oil /
in their being adjoined together the entire house is illuminated”

¹⁴ The idea that the Torah discloses truths inaccessible through independent philosophic speculation occurs frequently (and famously) in Arama's corpus; see e.g., AY Gates 21, 18; AY Gate 25; AY Gate 33; YA on Prov. 3:11 and 3:19 (discussed in 2.3.3 above).

¹⁵ Who Arama has in mind with his reference to “the perfect” here is unclear. In both later sections of Part I and throughout Part II, Arama insists that for immortality to be meaningful, it cannot be the exclusive proprium of the intellectual elite and instead must be easily and widely accessible to the masses—suggesting that the referent of “the perfect” here may be the collective of Jews as against the rest of the human species. However, in moments throughout Part I and at the end of Part III, in the *perishah*/exegetical section, Arama seems to resume a more classic Maimonidean distinction between intellectual elite and masses.

¹⁶ According to Arama, one of the Torah's key revelations and the key revelation at Sinai is that of an alternative, theological anthropology according to which immortality is possible—this, in contrast to the regnant Aristotelian philosophical anthropology, according to which immortality is impossible. Thus does Arama lay the groundwork to develop the alternative theological anthropology, to which he will devote the next several sections; see 1.3.2 above.

¹⁷ See 1.3.2 above.

¹⁸ According to Steinschneider, Jedaiah ha-Penini's 14th c. philosophical poem *Beḥinat Olam* (henceforth: BO) was apparently quite popular in the 15th century, ranking alongside the *Guide*, ibn Ezra's Torah commentary, Averroes' works, and al-Ghazali's *Maqāsid*. See Tamaš Visi, “The Early Ibn Ezra Supercommentaries: A Chapter in Medieval Jewish Intellectual History” (PhD diss., Central European University, 2006), 320 n.714. Still, Arama's use of it here—as the basis for his divinely-revealed theological anthropology—is quite striking.

and so on.

[11] Though praise is due to him for giving us this allegory, in truth, the allegory is the opposite of what is allegorized!¹⁹ For in the allegory the wick persists while the oil dissipates, but what is allegorized is opposite! Further, the main thing that clings to the light of Torah is in the soul (*neshamah*), which is the oil. I say it is more fitting to allegorize the body to an earthen or glass vessel in which the lamp stands: for it too is of dust, and it is not a grave thing if it breaks. The soul (*neshamah*) is like a lit wick. For it is the thread of compassion which extends unto [man] from on high. It sustains the lamp and receives the light that emanates from above, just as the wick receives the flashes of light that shine through it, as we wrote in connection with *and breathed into his nostrils the neshamah of life*.²⁰ Meanwhile, the oil that sustains and strengthens the light is the study of Torah and the commandment, for this is the pure olive oil that illuminates the Ner Tamid.

[12] Yet there remains something to contemplate, namely:²¹ if we assume it is impossible to perpetuate the wick's light save by oil, and if it becomes clear that the oil cannot exist save through the light (e.g., because it is someplace dark, or because a torch is needed for the oil to

¹⁹ Though Arama ultimately retains BO's imagery of man (or: the subject of immortality) as menorah/lamp and Torah as an indispensable part of that immortality, he first subjects the poem's philosophical allegory to several critiques in order to transform it. The first critique, advanced in this paragraph, is that the allegory corresponds poorly to what it ostensibly allegorizes. Through this critique, Arama can venture alternative referents.

²⁰ See AY Gate 8 where Arama defines the *neshamah* (as opposed to *nefesh*) as the "divine intellect which gives man the knowledge and counsel to choose the good":

ואח"כ נפה בו נשמת חיים הוא השכל האלהי הנותן בו עצה ודעת לבחור בטוב ובו נעשה חפשי מפחיתות זה החמר והכרעתו

²¹ In the second critique, Arama explodes the allegory with appeal to an axiom of Aristotelian philosophy: a thing cannot be dependent upon itself for existence. Though it is hardly a centerpiece of this Gate, here we have yet another clear example of Arama's domestication of philosophy: He creatively employs philosophical reasoning and a philosophical premise to strategically undermine what he views as an ineffectual philosophical-allegorical exegesis, thereby paving the ground for a new one.

work—), then the lamp will be dependent upon itself, and it will have to exist prior to existing, so that it will not exist at all! Similarly, it is clear that it is impossible that this pure oil which allegorizes the divine Torah should exist for us or be moved toward us save by way of the supernal light that emanates from God. If this is the case, the matter is circular: it depends upon itself and it cannot exist!

[13] Rather, everything he said in connection with this allegory should be understood as pertaining to the entirety of the chosen nation,²² people of the Torah and commandment. As for the elite individuals, the seers and prophets who spoke with the holy spirit:²³ it was by way of them, peace be upon them, that the divine Torah was given and the light of its guidance was disseminated. Thus, they are like a sort of pure supernal *menorah*, drawing down the pure light from the supernal, divine source from which the Torah itself emanates. Just like a *menorah*, they transmit its guiding light and emanation, illuminating the faces of the world with their divine guidance.

[14] This was alluded to when God spoke to Zerubabel b. She’altiel of *menorahs: a menorah all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and its seven lamps thereupon*, and so on, *and two olive trees beside it*, and so on (Zech. 4:2–3). This teaches that the emanation emanated upon the pure *menorah*—the latter of which allegorizes the perfect man—comes from the seven supernal

²² Here Arama introduces one of the major themes of both subsequent sections of Part I and Part II: the entirety (*kelalut*) of the chosen nation. It seems to me that this is precisely why he exploded the philosophical allegory in the previous section, i.e., in order to transform the subject of the allegory from the individual to the collective

²³ This conceptualization of the elite’s role and of the relationship between the elite and the masses (within the collective of Israel) is echoed in the *perishah* in Part III.

lamps, which in turn draw from the two olive trees²⁴—all of it emanating from the word of the Lord and His absolute will, as was said: *this is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel son of She'altiel, saying: not by might and not by power, but by My spirit, saith the Lord* (Zech. 4:6). Even so, the perfect ones had already reached the rank of pure oil designated for a lamp so that the divine oil would cleave to them through them; by their light, they would see light.²⁵ We have now spoken of the true reality of this allegory sufficiently for our [future] purposes.

[15] However, there failed not aught of any of the good words (cf Josh. 21:43) which the Poet spoke in his saying (Behinat Olam 15:5–6):

“in their being adjoined together the entire house is illuminated /

the treasures of general governance are revealed to your eyes and expressed to you are the stored up secrets of works through which you shall glory.”

For without that pure oil, it²⁶ would be impossible in all respects, as shall be mentioned. But if the lamp exists and in the two states mentioned,²⁷ we shall be wedded to the world of angels, and they²⁸ shall be pleased in our being as one nation in perfecting our souls through them, as they are [already] perfect and eternal. This is what the Psalmist described: *bless the Lord, ye angels of His, ye mighty in strength, that fulfil His word*, and so on (Ps. 103:20).²⁹ What is meant is that

²⁴ Arama never tells us what he has in mind by the seven supernal lamps and two olive trees, though he may have in mind the separate intellects or spheres, which he allegorically appeals to throughout AY despite his critique that the spheres are not living and rational and that their motion is rather natural (on which see 1.2.1 above).

²⁵ The referents of the pronouns here unclear, but it seems to me that Arama is here discussing the relation between the perfect and the collective Israel: “so that the divine oil would cleave to [the collective Israel] through [the perfect]; by [the perfect’s] light, [the collective] would see light.”

²⁶ I.e., felicity/immortality.

²⁷ I.e., the perfect man drawing down from the seven supernal lamps, which in turn draw down from the two olive trees; see sec. [14] above.

²⁸ Either the perfect among the nation or the angels; unclear.

²⁹ Arama first introduces Ps. 103:20, a key verse of Part I and throughout Gate 44. Primarily, he takes the verse to symbolize the two ways in which the angels/separate intellects model perfection, i.e., through action/governance (*fulfilling His word*) and intellection/contemplation (*hearkening unto the voice of His word*); but importantly, in the following secs., he suggests the verse also describes the perfect among Israel ([16]) and the collective Israel in toto

they are perfect insofar as *they fulfil His word*, doing everything that the Creator charges them with. Their deeds throughout all the worlds are perfection, *there is nothing perverse or crooked in them* (Prov. 8:8). This corresponds to his saying “and expressed to you are the stored up secrets of works through which you shall glory.” Yet they do this *hearkening unto the voice of His word* (Ps. 103:20). This second thing is even loftier than the first; namely, their transmitting the emanation and guidance of God’s word—the Prime Cause—to all existents beneath them in rank. This consists in their intelligizing His universal governance and knowing what it is possible to intelligize thereby [for/of] separate intellects such as them.

[16] These two things are particular, in the first instance, to the separate intellects. Thus the perfect on earth who perfect themselves in this way are called holy, as though they are one of them.³⁰ This is what the angel said to the High Priest Joshua: *thus saith the Lord...: if thou wilt walk in My ways, and if thou wilt keep My charge, and wilt also judge My house, and wilt also keep My courtyards, then I will give thee to be have free access*³¹ *among these that stand by* (Zech. 3:7). He said *if thou wilt walk in My ways* in reference to all the virtues that are needed to eschew evil and do good. He said *if thou wilt also judge My house, and wilt also keep My courtyards* in reference to apprehending His universal governance and the relations obtaining between the chain of existents to the extent possible. For it is this supernal knowledge that rules and judges in the house of His holiness and glory, which is the upper world. Meanwhile, *keeping the courtyards* concerns the middle and lower worlds—the former is the *courtyard* of the house,

([19]ff), following the angels’ model and therein realizing their perfection. The action-intellection pair is ubiquitous in Hebrew philosophical literature, as is Arama’s claim here that for the perfect, intellection is superior to action.

³⁰ I.e., one of the angels.

³¹ The phrase translated as “free access” here is the Hebrew nominative *מהלכים*, which Arama plays on in sec. [29] below.

and the latter is *the courtyard of the courtyard*. He said *then I will give thee free access among these that stand by* because these apprehensions are something you³² share in common.

[17] There is no doubt that the divine Torah's aim—in all its words and guidance—is to instill these two things so that the whole nation will be rightly guided. Thus they shall be like the ministering angels, *the mighty in strength, that fulfil His word* (Ps. 103:20) by doing good in this temporal life; *hearkening unto the voice of His word* by aiming at intellectual and spiritual secrets and guiding existence in light of this apprehension.³³ Thus *they fulfill* the divine will, bringing them eternal felicity among *those that stand by*, as was said: *for our good always, that He might preserve us alive, as it is at this day* (Deut. 6:24), as the Master and Guide explained.³⁴

[18] Inasmuch as in this respect men differ from one another, on account of some having a distinction (or: specific difference) and special property (*segullah*)³⁵ over others (just as all men possess a distinction and superiority over other animals—), it is stated clearly in the divine Torah: *now therefore, if ye will hearken unto My voice indeed and keep My covenant, then ye shall be Mine own special property (segullah) from among all peoples, for all the earth is Mine* (Ex. 19:5). He clarified both aforementioned aspects. For in saying *if ye will hearken unto My voice*, He meant *hearkening unto the voice of His word*; while in saying *and keep My covenant*

³² I.e., perfect men and separate intellects.

³³ Cf Robinson, *Samuel ibn Tibbon*, 336–7.

³⁴ Maimonides cites Deut. 6:24 twice in the *Guide*—once in III.27 and once in III.31. Both key chapters in Maimonides' treatment of *ta'amei ha-mišvot* and the purpose of the law as a whole, Maimonides uses the verse as a touchstone for the notion that the law is designed with human benefit in mind, especially as against the idea that the law may have no reason at all. Arama explores the tension between conceptualizing the law as having a human benefit or being solely for the purpose of divine worship in Part III.

³⁵ The terms Arama uses here, *hevdel* (distinction or specific difference) and *segullah* (special property or characteristic), are key terms of Aristotelian taxonomy, though the latter was also widely used to refer to occult properties in medical and astral-magical contexts, i.e., empirically-observable properties inexplicable through ordinary science. For Arama's use of *segullah* to develop his theory of Jews as separate species, see 3.3.2.1 above.

He meant to signify the realm of actions, whereby *they fulfil His word*. He said that through these, they are singled out from all others by their *special property* (segullah), as he said elsewhere: *and the Lord hath avouched thee this day to be His own special property* ('am segullah) (Deut. 26:18).³⁶ It is already known that they are called *special property* (segullah) because of their receiving wisdom and perfection, since this divine power is both unique to this holy people and common to all of them, as it was said: *and ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation* (Ex. 19:6), like a city in which all are priests.³⁷ Thus He clarified that they are distinguished from all other peoples by a *special property*. As for their particular specific difference, it was said elsewhere: *and I have set you apart from the peoples, that ye should be Mine* (Lev. 20:26). Their being His and being called by His name because of their studying this divine Torah and fulfilling its commandments constitutes a most special specific difference. This distinguishes them and sets them apart from the quiddity of all [other] peoples, so that the species difference which is predicated of all [people] only applies to you with regards to the genus.

[19] Our Fathers aimed at these two lofty notions whereby they³⁸ are separated from the rest of the species. They plumbed the depth of the divine intention of the saying: *we shall do and we shall hearken* (Ex. 19:5). Their intention in *we shall hearken* was in reference to His saying *if ye will hearken unto My voice*; and their intention in *we shall do* was in reference to His saying *and*

³⁶ The referent of the subject pronoun here might be either the perfect or the collective Israel, though given Arama's emphasis on the importance of the collective in his theological anthropology limned above, in the following sentence (both unique to this holy people and common to all of them), and in Part II especially, it seems to me the referent here is likely again to the collective. By following the guidance of the perfect and adhering to the Torah's actions and intellections, the Israelites come to have a *segullah* or special property that distinguishes them from all other humans just as humans are distinguished from non-human animals; in other words, through obedience to Torah the Jews are rendered into a separate and superior species.

³⁷ This gloss of Ex. 19:6 is in tension with the interpretation Arama offers in the *perishah* section; see Part III below.

³⁸ The Israelites.

keep my covenant, on account of their *fulfil[ling] His word; hearkening unto the voice of His word* (Ps. 103:20), as was mentioned.³⁹ In Tractate Shabbat the Sages said: “When Israel accorded precedence to *we shall do* over *we shall hearken*, a divine voice emerged and said to them: Who revealed to my children this secret that the ministering angels use? As it is written *bless the Lord, ye angels of His, ye mighty in strength, that fulfil His word, hearkening unto the voice of His word* (Ps. 103:20). At first, they *fulfill*, and afterwards they *hearken*” (b. Shabbat 88a). The intention is this: If by *we shall hearken* they meant to reference auditory hearing, they would have said *we shall hearken and we shall do*, since auditory hearing necessarily precedes action, which is superior to it and its final purpose. But since *we shall do* precedes *we shall hearken*, the latter must refer to the hearing of the heart and intellect that succeeds action and proceeds therefrom. This is similar to the acquisition of human virtues, as was said: “for study leads to action” (b. Qiddushin 40b)—which dictum shall be finely explicated in connection with the aforementioned verse in the Gate 47, with the help of God.⁴⁰ This is why “a divine voice emerged and said to them: Who revealed to my children this secret that the ministering angels use?” For the word “hearing” is only ever used in connection with them in the sense of intellection, as it is written: *that fulfil His word, hearkening unto the voice of His word* (Ps. 103:20). What necessitates this is “at first, they fulfill, and afterwards they hearken.” For if they meant to refer to auditory hearing, they would have said “at first they hearken, afterwards, they fulfill,” as we said. Thus, they hearkened and intellectually apprehended their superiority over all other people and God’s conferring upon them a specific difference and special property at the rank of the ministering angels. And they knew and accepted, word by word.

³⁹ For Arama’s understanding of *na’aseh ve-nishma* as developed in this sec., see 3.3.2.2 above.

⁴⁰ Arama’s main focus in AY Gate 47 is on the relationship(s) between study and action, and which, per the famous Rabbinic dictum in b.Qiddushin 40b is greater.

[20] They perceived the true reality of this sublime thing on that terrible and holy day, as was said: *we have seen this day that God doth speak with man, and he liveth* (Deut. 5:20). He meant: that they were already distinguished from the group of rational animals in their quiddity such that this definition of the species could not apply to them as it applied to the human species in general. Rather, the reason that could be predicated of their animality was divine reason, for it is this that is added to the animal in [terms of] definition. I mean: the man who is rational with a divine reason and *liveth*, that is to say, who lives by reasoning with divine reason. This is the man of whom it is said: *let us make man in our image and according to our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl*, and so on (Gen. 1:26), and as the Sages said: “you are called man, but the nations are not called man” (b. Baba Metzia 114b). As he⁴¹ said: one should not say of [man] that he is mortal, rational animal, but rather that he [is the animal] that reasons with divine reason and lives.

[21] This is a sublime, divine notion which teaches of the greatness of their perfection. They recognized that they had already attained this state in according precedence to *we shall do over we shall hearken*—for this is what constitutes their participation with the upper beings and their distinction from the lower beings.⁴² Fools of the nations do not pay attention to this wonderful aim. Thus the Sages reprimanded them: “A heretic saw that Rava was immersed in halakhah and his fingers were beneath his leg and he was squeezing them, and his fingers were spurting blood.

⁴¹ I was unable to identify the referent here.

⁴² The Israelites’ distinction from and superiority to all other peoples, Arama suggests, is reflected in their understanding that obedience to Torah action must precede rather than follow right understanding; action as a tool or means for inculcating correct opinions is a recurring theme throughout Arama’s oeuvre, developed especially in Gates 51 and 67; again see 3.3.2.2 above.

The heretic said to him: [You] impulsive people, who accorded precedence to your mouths over your ears. You still bear your impulsiveness. You should listen first. If you are capable, accept; and if not, do not accept. Rava said to him: Of we who proceed wholeheartedly, it is written: *the integrity of the upright shall guide them*, while of those who walk in deceit, it is written *and the perverseness of the faithless shall destroy them* (Prov. 11:3)” (b.Shabbat 88b). The heretic, in his foolishness, was confused; for he thought [we shall hearken] referred to auditory hearing, insisting it must take precedence. But Rava shut him up, replying in the language of scripture. For the wicked shall not comprehend the profound depths of their thoughts; and their foolishness shall destroy them and rob them of their good intentions. Meanwhile *the intelligent shall understand* (Dan. 12:10) and their perfection shall spare them rebuke, for it shall guide them to their full intentions, elevating them to a rank superior to all peoples and unto the rank of the angels, who are spared from all the afflictions of hyle and its travails.

[22] In the midrash: “Come and see that when the children of Israel said *we shall do and we shall hearken*, the Holy One Blessed be He summoned the angel of death and said to him: The entire world is in your dispensation, save this community which I have chosen,” and so on, unto “freedom from the angel of death; freedom from the empires; freedom from the punishments for their sins regarding the spies, he said: *but you have spurned all my plan* (Prov. 1:25); I said: *you are as elohim, yet you shall die as men*, and so on (Ps. 82:6)” (Num. Rab. 16). Now see: he said that with *we shall do and we shall hearken*, they merited to be as *elohim*, and this is that very participation which we spoke of.⁴³ As for how this is reconciled with the counsel of the spies, it

⁴³ The Israelites merit immortality through their conceding that obedience to the commandments, to Torah action, must precede intellection; this ideal echoed also in Arama’s conceptualization of Abraham and his virtue in the *aqedah* narrative; see AY Gates 21, 18; Heller-Wilensky, *Arama*, 66–67, Diamond, “Isaac Arama’s Nightmare.”

shall be made clear in its place, in Gate 77, with the help of God.⁴⁴ Now see: *the Lord hath created a new thing in the earth* (Jer. 31:21) which neither you nor the two sects mentioned at the beginning⁴⁵ had ever known (Deut. 8:3). This was by way of that good oil descending in accordance with the virtues of the divine Torah, and by way of its rightly guiding the perfect souls that hold fast to it. This completes the divine participation that saves them from the total death decreed for them.

[23] This notion is precisely what is intended by the Psalm that relates the wonders that occurred with the Giving of the Torah: *the chariots of God are myriads; even thousands upon thousands, and so on, thou hast ascended on high; Thou hast captured captivity, and so on, blessed be the Lord, day by day He beareth our burden, even the God who is our salvation, God is unto us a God of deliverances; and unto God the Lord belong the issues of death* (Ps. 68:18–21).

Mentioning the day that the great and terrible God came upon His people in the myriads of holiness, he said: *thou hast ascended on high, and so on, and that that captivity He captured from the supernal world was a great gift[] among man* (Ps. 68:19). Through these, the *rebellious* also are able to *dwell with the Lord God* (idem)—he meant, those who stray from the path and are far from dwelling with the uppermost. Therefore we must *bless the Lord, day by day* (Ps. 68:19–20) and petition Him to bear these gifts for us and confer upon us these deeds, for *they are our*

⁴⁴ See the following passage of AY Gate 77, in which Arama, linking back to the midrash from Num. Rab. 16 cited in the previous sec., explains that the spies rejection of the land of Israel is tantamount to the expulsion from Eden, i.e., eternal life:

במדרש (במדבר רבה פר' י"ו) אתה מוצא שכשאמרו ישראל כלא שר דבר ה' נעשה ונשמע (שמות כ"ד:י') מה עשה הקב"ה הביא מלאך המות לפניו ואמר לו כל העולם ברשותך חוץ מן האומה הזאת שבחרתי לי וכו'. וכשקלקלו בעצת המרגלי' אמר להם הקב"ה ותפרעו כל עצתי (משלי א':כ"ה) אני אמרתי אלהים אתם וגו'. אכן כאדם תמותון וגו' (תהלים פ"ב). ועתה ראה כי אומרם נעשה ונשמע הוציאם ממיתת הטבע אשר ע"י שלוח החיים. אמנם קלקול עצת המרגלים החזירם לקלקולם. כי באמת ישיבת הארץ לענין הגבלת החיים כשישבת גן עדן כי שם נאמר כל עץ נחמד למראה וטוב למאכל (ברא' ב') כמו שכתבנו שם בתחלת שער י"ב הנזכר וגירושם ממנה כגירושו ממנו בלי ספק כמו שנתבאר זה המאמר על זאת הכוונה אצל ספור הנחש בשער ה' שזכרנו בתחלה. ולזה עלה חמת ה' לאין מרפא כי במואסם בארץ חמדה מאסו בעקרי התורה ונתיאשו מהשלמות האמתי הדבק עמהם שהוא נצחיות העולם הבא והתישו כח הגבורה האלהית מהפיל גוים רבים ועצומים תחתם

⁴⁵ I.e., the philosophers and the masses.

salvation, selah (Ps. 68:21). At the end of his explication he said: *God is unto us a God of deliverances*, and so on (Ps. 68:21). He meant: God is our strength and has the power to obtain for us deliverance from the natural death decreed for us, placing our souls in life, and this is clear.

[24] The holy spirit alluded to this debate in relating what befell David, which is similar. I mean, both individual speculators and the masses decreed that he was bound for total destruction, sans any savior.⁴⁶ But the Lord's eyes were upon him and *he devised means that he should not be banished* (2 Sam. 14:14). This is [referred to] in a *psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son*—indeed, it is precisely why a psalm was sought! In my opinion, there are three verses that allude to this. The first is: *many there are that say of my soul: there is no salvation*, and so on (Ps. 3:3). The second is: *with my voice I call unto the Lord, and He answereth me out of His holy mountain, selah* (Ps. 3:5). For the holy mountain is Sinai, where it was said that Moses spoke and God answered with a voice. The third is his conclusion: *salvation belongeth unto the Lord; Thy blessing be upon Thy people, selah* (Ps. 3:9). This verse does not seem to fit according to its *peshat* sense.⁴⁷ However, it fits very well [if it is taken to refer to] the Torah in precisely the same manner that he said: *the Lord will give strength unto His people, the Lord will bless His people with peace* (Ps. 29:11). Then since *at the mouth of three witnesses a matter shall be established* (Deut. 19:15),⁴⁸ the rest of the Psalm must be understood in connection with this notion. It is in respect of this aforementioned participation that all divine individuals participate

⁴⁶ Arama suggests that the narrative arc of David vis-à-vis Absalom's rebellion in 2 Sam. recapitulates if not also allegorizes that of the Israelites and their collective destiny: While both David and Israel (like all other men) initially appear bound for destruction, both are surprisingly redeemed, the latter through the gift of Torah at Sinai.

⁴⁸ I.e., the readings of Ps. 3:3, Ps. 3:5, and Ps. 3:9 just elaborated.

with the supernal beings in the ranks of their prophecy, which transcends the usual definition of the human. There they *have free access*, some ranking higher than others, each according to what he is. In regards to this it was said: *then I will give thee free access among these that stand by* (Zech. 3:7).

[25] Now see that this notion, in all its dimensions, is what the Sages aimed at in their dictum that we mentioned at the beginning—once we pay attention to three subtle points.⁴⁹

(1) First⁵⁰ is its saying that in the beginning, when the Holy One Blessed be He created His world, He said: *the heavens are the heavens of the Lord*, and so on (Ps. 115:16). For did it not say the opposite of this elsewhere?: “When the Holy One, Blessed be He, created the world, He desired that He should have a dwelling in the lower world just as He had one in the upper world,” and so on, and we already explicated this at the beginning of the book⁵¹ in Gate 34.

(2) The second⁵² concerns His saying: “and I shall be the first to descend,” as it is written: *and the Lord came down upon mount Sinai* (Ex. 19:20); and afterwards, *unto Moses He said: ‘come up unto the Lord’* (Ex. 24:1). For in the parashah, does it not first say: *and Moses went up unto God* (Ex. 19:3), only after which it says: *and the Lord came down upon mount Sinai* (Ex. 19:20)?

⁴⁹ Arama raises three potential difficulties, which he will resolve in the following sections.

⁵⁰ Arama points to an apparent contradiction: While the *ma’amar* and Ps. 115:6 suggest that when God created the world, the divine and human realms were entirely separate, other Rabbinic dicta suggest that when God created the world, He sought intermingling between the divine and human realms.

⁵¹ of Exodus.

⁵² Another apparent contradiction: While the *ma’amar* casts God as descending prior to Moses’ ascending, the order of the verses in the parashah suggests the opposite, namely that Moses’ ascent preceded God’s descent.

(3) The third⁵³ is more difficult than the previous two: In the gemara, our Sages said: “It is taught [in a baraita] that R. Yossi said: The Shekhinah never descended below, and Moses and Elijah never ascended on high, as it is stated: *the heavens are the heavens of the Lord, and the earth He gave to the children of man* (Ps. 115:16). Did the Shekhinah never descend below? For isn’t it written: *and the Lord came down upon Mount Sinai* (Ps. 19:20). [This was] ten above. But isn’t it written: *and on that day His feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives* (Zech. 14:4). [This too was] ten above. And did Moses and Elijah never ascend on high? Isn’t it written: *and Moses went up to God* (Ex. 19:3). [This was] beneath ten. But isn’t it written: *and Elijah ascended by whirlwind heavenward* (2 Kings 2:11). [This too was] beneath ten. But isn’t it written: *He grasps the face of the throne and spreads His cloud upon him* (Job 26:9)? R. Tanhum said: This teaches that the Almighty spread the radiance of the Shekhinah and of His clouds upon Him....The throne was extended for him and he grasped it” (b.Sukkah 5b).

[26] Given all the aforementioned, it seems that the decree stands and *the heavens are still the heavens of the Lord*, and that it is not nullified for great nor small such that they should *have free access*, save beneath ten, which is undoubtedly the boundary of the upper world. However, when one comprehends the encompassing Torah participation that we spoke of together with what necessarily connects to it, all becomes clear.⁵⁴ That is: It was explicated that the world was

⁵³ The third difficulty is an apparent conceptual contradiction between the *ma'amar* and another Rabbinic dictum; while the *ma'amar* suggests intermingling between the divine and human realms, the dictum systematically suggests that the possibility of intermingling is limited, and specifically, that a separation of at least “ten” always remains between the divine and human realms.

⁵⁴ Arama resolves the first difficulty: the conflicting statements about whether God dwells only in heaven or also dwells on earth refer to two different states/periods: though God created the world in accordance with the latter statements, to have a dwelling on earth, Adam’s sin immediately after the creation caused a separation and divine retreat, corresponding to the former statements; this connects back with Arama’s understanding of the Fall, alluded to in the final secs. of his Gate 10, above.

undoubtedly created through this participation, in connection with the dictum *let us make man in our image, according to our likeness* (Gen. 1:26). This is what the Sages said: that He desired that He should have a dwelling in the lower world. We already explained that the definition of man is the animal who is rational with divine reason. But man's sin shut him up, separating him. That separation persisted for generations, so that the Shekhinah was exiled to the seven firmaments.⁵⁵ When the dictum says that in the beginning, when the Holy One Blessed be He created His world, He said: *the heavens are the heavens of the Lord*, and so on (Ps. 115:16) it is referring to these generations. That is to say, this happened right after He created the world, since Adam sinned immediately. This is how *bereshit bara elohim*, and so on, *the earth was tohu va-bohu*, and so on, was explicated by the commentators: in the beginning of the creation of *the heavens and the earth*, *the earth was tohu va-bohu*, and so on.⁵⁶ The Sages' allegory clearly attests to this: For of course, in respect of themselves, the Syrians and the Romans are able to come and go amongst each other [as they please], and it was only because of the decree laid upon them [that they were forbidden from so doing]. So too for these existents: participation was in their nature from the outset of their creation, only it was withdrawn on account of a decree.

[27] Until the advent of our father Abraham, who began to nullify it.⁵⁷⁵⁸ Participation then commenced. The seven forefathers extended it,⁵⁹ corresponding to the seven generations that

⁵⁵ The seven firmaments likely connect back to the seven lamps/intellec/spheres, see sec. [14] above.

⁵⁶ The commentators Arama has in mind are likely Rashi and ibn Ezra, according to whose explications *bereshit* refers neither to what preceded creation nor to the moment of creation, but sets the stage *in media res*, assuming the founding moment of creation has already elapsed.

⁵⁷ For Arama, salvation history is a restoration of the prelapsarian connection between the divine and human realms, which takes place at first only for select individuals, then is extended to the masses through Sinai; see 2.3.2 and 0.2.2.2 above.

⁵⁸ I.e., the decree.

⁵⁹ I.e., the participation reinaugurated by Abraham.

banished it, which notion we explained well in Gate 34 aforementioned.⁶⁰ Yet that participation did not extend to their seed in general until the advent of Moses, the Master of Prophets. He extended it universally—not only to individuals but rather to this whole people, so that they would ascend through that participation. It is for this reason that the dictum does not teach *and Moses went up unto God* (Ex. 19:3)—for they meant to indicate to the universal participation, not individual participation, the latter of which had already been inaugurated by the forefathers.⁶¹ Rather, they said that it was because of Moses’ merit, who ascended to God, that He extended this participation and what happened did; namely, that they were made into a species fit for this most noble coupling, i.e., the Giving of the Torah.

[28] This is what the Sages were referring to allegorically when they spoke of the King wanting to marry a woman from Syria. For Israel’s taking upon itself that day to love the Lord and walk in all His ways and cleave to Him is similar to a bride taking it upon herself to worship her groom and love him and be singularly united to him. This is why He said “and I shall be the first to descend,” for it is impossible in any other way. That is, since the Giving of the Torah was necessary to bring this participation—akin to the aforementioned pure olive oil—into existence, it was necessary that God’s descent to the mountain precede and that their ascension follow thereafter. This is why scripture said: *and unto Moses He said: ‘come up unto the Lord, thou and Aaron and Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel’* (Ex. 24:1). That is to say, now there are many of you with God, each man able to ascend according to his rank and stature, such

⁶⁰ In AY Gate 34, Arama provides a detailed recounting of salvation history from the time of the Fall through the narratives of Genesis and Exodus.

⁶¹ Resolution of the second difficulty: the *ma’amar* prefers an order of biblical verses that suggest God is initiating connection, rather than Moses, in order to teach that what is unique about the Sinaitic moment is the spread of participation from individuals to the collective. The *ma’amar* thus temporarily suppresses the verse that indicates Moses ascended first to serve a didactic function, namely, that the participation about to be inaugurated is not just for Moses but for all.

that they *have free access among those that stand by*, as was mentioned.⁶² For the decree had been nullified, and the state of affairs was restored in accordance with the primary intention. Namely, the lower ones could ascend and the upper ones descend on that very same ladder that our father Jacob saw in a vision of prophecy, as He said: *and behold, the angels of God ascending and descending on it* (Gen. 28:12). And how wondrous was the Sages' saying: "According to Gematria, this ladder (s/l/m = 130) is Sinai (s/y/n/y = 130)" (Gen. Rab. 68) and we already mentioned *a whisper of this* (Job 4:12) in Gate 25.⁶³

[29] In the Midrash on Parashat Naso:⁶⁴ "*And it came to pass, on the day that Moses finished, and so on* (Num. 7:1). Rav said: Something that had not occurred from the creation of the world up until that moment happened on that day. From the creation of the world up until that moment, the Shekhinah had not dwelled in the lower world, that is until the Tabernacle was erected. This is why it says *and it came to pass*; *and it came to pass* refers to something new (cf Tahnuma Naso 16). R. Shimon b. Yoḥai said it refers to something that had ceased and has been restored to its previous state. For at the outset of creation, the Shekhinah dwelled in the lower world, as it

⁶² See sec. [17] above.

⁶³ In AY Gate 25, devoted to various explications of Jacob's ladder, Arama glosses the dictum from Gen. Rab. 68 which claims (according to gematria) that the "ladder is Sinai" and links it back to Gate 44:

הנה אמרו שנגל' אליו שם ענין מעמד הר סיני הצודק בכל חלקי הספור כמו שזכר לפי שהמעמד ההוא לפי האמת כך הי' הענין בו לכל המזדמנים שם. ואמרו עוד (שמות רבה פי"ב) ששם בטלה הגזירה ונתן רשות לעלות תחתונים למעל' ולרדת עליונים למטה מה שלא הי' נוהג כן ראשונה וגם שם נתבאר' העליה והיריד' על הדרך שאמרנו שנאמר תחלה ומשה עלה אל האלהים ואח"כ וירד משה מן ההר אל העם כמו שיתבאר כלו שם במקומו שער מ"ד ב"ה

⁶⁴ With the citation of this midrash Arama begins his treatment of the third difficulty, which will continue through the end of sec. [35] below. To begin with, Arama uses Rav and Shimon bar Yoḥai to ventriloquize a debate on the state of God's relationship with the lower world—via the *Shekhinah*—after construction of the Tabernacle as compared with His historical relationship. While Rav suggests that the phrase *vayehi* (and it came to pass) signifies that construction of the Tabernacle precipitates an entirely new state of God's relationship with the lower world, Shimon bar Yoḥai understands it as signifying a restoration of a once-proximate relationship destroyed by Adam's sin, supporting his interpretation with a Rabbinic gloss connecting Song 5:1 and Gen. 3:7. Rav, Arama suggests, then parries Shimon bar Yoḥai's counter-arguments with a counter-argument of his own, focusing on the meaning of Gen. 3:7 and in particular its use of the word *mithalekh* as opposed to *mahalakh*.

is said: *they heard the voice of the Lord God desiring to walk (mithalekh)*⁶⁵ *in the garden toward the spirit/wind of the day* (Gen. 3:7). Then when the Shekhinah withdrew on account of Adam's sinning, it did not descend again until the Tabernacle was erected. This is why it says *and it came to pass*; *and it came to pass* refers to something that ceased a long time ago and has been restored to its previous state. This is his saying: *I am come into the garden, my sister, my bride* (Song 5:1). Further, in connection with Nahshon's sacrifice, R. Samuel said of R. Yossi (Num. Rab. 13:2): It does not say *I am come into a garden*, but rather *I am come into my garden*, to the place that was my foundation from the outset, as it is said: *they heard the voice of the Lord God mithalekh in the garden toward the spirit/wind of the day* (Gen. 3:7). It also says, both there and in Yelammedenu: R. Samuel b. Nahman said: "When the Holy One, Blessed be He created the world, He desired to have a dwelling in the lower world," and so on, as was mentioned. However, Rav claimed that *they heard the voice of the Lord God*, and so on, does not refer to the Shekhinah's having returned to the lower world, but rather [only] to the momentary disclosure of the Shekhinah and shards of prophecy, as was the case for the rest of the forefathers. Likewise, the word *mithalekh* indicates to a desire to walk rather than walking itself; for the one who is *mithalekh* is not the one who has *free access (mahalakh)*, and this hints at what is to come.⁶⁶

[30] It is apparent that all the other Sages understood the phrase *mithalekh in the garden* according to its *peshat* sense; i.e., they understood it to mean the Shekhinah really was dwelling

⁶⁵ *Mithalekh* is ordinarily understood as walking, but because at the end of this sec. Arama plays on the distinction between *mithalekh* and another form of the same root—i.e., that which appears in Zech. 3:7 throughout this Gate, *mahalakh*—I retain the Hebrew.

⁶⁶ In AY Gate 100, Arama recasts the narrative(s) of God's relationship with the lower world, salvation history, and the final purpose of human existence all in terms of the root *h/l/kh*; man's being uniquely able among lower beings to *h/l/kh* among supernal, eternal beings. In that narrative, he also emphasizes the decisiveness of Sinai in terms of the movement of individuals to the collective, and specifically, making *h/l/kh* available not only to the chosen few forefathers, but to the many through Torah.

there, only there was an interruption. This is his saying: *I am come into my original garden*. The Rabbis explained: the *vav* in *vayehi* (*and it came to pass*) signifies an addendum to the original state, that is to say, that this already was the case and now it is restored to being so. The decision is thus according to the majority; everything necessitates that what is being referred to is a case of completion. Do not say: see this new thing, for not everything is new. In truth:⁶⁷ this was the original intention in creating man *in the image of God*. However, at the outset, there did not exist pure oil sufficient to the wick, to draw down the divine light in order that many would participate as is the case now.⁶⁸ On account of its diffusion, it is necessary that nowhere amongst us be free of the Shekhinah. How greatly did the Sages emphasize this participation in saying: “One who walks with an upright posture pushes away the feet of the Shekhinah” (b.Berakhot 43b)—the meaning being that such a one rejects this participation or does not perceive it.

[31] More precious than pearls are the words of the Master and Teacher is Part III, Ch. 52, which begin:⁶⁹ “Man does not sit, move, and occupy himself when he is alone in his house, as he sits, moves, and occupies himself when he is in the presence of a great king; nor does he speak and rejoice while he is with his family and relatives as he speaks in the king’s council. Therefore he who chooses to achieve human perfection and to be in true reality a man of God must give heed and know that the great king who always accompanies him and cleaves to him is greater than any

⁶⁷ After having presented Rav’s position—that the creation of the Tabernacle inaugurated a completely new state of proximity between God and the lower world, and that the Shekhinah had not truly dwelled in the world before—first and thoroughly, in good scholastic fashion, Arama here suggests that the correct interpretation, coinciding with the *peshat*, is that represented by Shimon bar Yohai in the previous sec.: namely, that the construction of the Tabernacle reinaugurates a thoroughgoing divine participation with the world, via *Shekhinah*, that was God’s original intention in creating man.

⁶⁸ See sec. [10]–[11] above.

⁶⁹ Arama’s citation of *Guide* III.52 here is quite extraordinary; as far as I can tell, he is using the citation here at least in part to support the idea developed in the previous sec. and also supported by the proof-text from b.Berakhot 43b, namely, suggesting that Maimonides too believed in the Shekhinah’s diffusion in the lower world, as evidenced by his instructions on how man is to comport himself in the king’s house.

human king. Even if the latter be David and Solomon. This king who cleaves to him and accompanies him is the intellect that overflows towards us,” and so on. The one who hears shall hearken to all the words of this chapter. For in truth, He alone suffices to instill those who love Him with the fear and purity and holiness that is fitting, according to this divine participation. This is all the more so the case when we speak of the path of the Torah and its languages, for that great King is the King of Kings, the Holy One Blessed be He.

[32] As for their saying that the Shekhinah never descends and the perfect never ascend more than ten cubits, this is the boundary of those who have *free access* (mahelkhim), and the perfect have permission to *mithalekh*.⁷⁰ For it is known that the Supernal Glory, who we mean when we say Blessed be He, is above the ten intellects, as indicated by the height of the ark and the ark-cover (Sukkah 4b). All of these tens refer to differences and stages in apprehension of the prophets and visionaries and those who spoke with the holy spirit—each man according to his rank.⁷¹ These are called lights or mirrors.⁷² Some see through one, some see through two, and some see through more. The more mirrors one passes through, the more his rank increases, illuminated by the Glory Above; conversely, the more one falls short of them, the more obscure things are for him. This is why Elihu, rebuking Job for this limitedness of his apprehension, said:

⁷⁰ Arama here does two things: First, he continues to parry Rav’s counter-claim from sec. [29] above, ultimately in defense of the understanding that Gen. 3:7 attests to the *Shekhinah*’s formerly full diffusion in the lower world. Contra Rav’s claim that the use of *mithalekh* in Gen. 3:7 indicates to some degree of restriction of divine diffusion—God’s desire to walk in the Garden rather than His actually walking—Arama suggests that the relationship between *mahalakh* and *mithalekh* is actually the reverse; the former indicating to a degree of restriction relative to the latter, which indicates to the perfect’s relationship to the divine as opposed to the imperfect’s. Second, he begins more properly resolving the third difficulty by focusing on the meaning of the “ten” that apparently separate the divine and lower realms.

⁷¹ Cf *Guide* II.45, where Maimonides outlines eleven degrees of prophecy, though suggests that the prophecy of Moses is beyond all those. Arama seems to suggest that there are ten degrees of prophecy, each corresponding with an intellect.

⁷² The language as prophecy as a seeing through mirrors is of course already Rabbinic in origin, but used also by Maimonides in the conceptualization of prophecy he develops in *Shemonah Peraqim*, ch. 7; while the language of light hearkens back to the conceptualization he develops in the Introduction to the *Guide*.

why hast thou striven against Him, and so on, for God speaketh in one way, yea in two, though man perceive it not, in a dream, in a vision of the night, and so on (Job 33:13–15). He said that their apprehensions in prophecy are limited. A man may only apprehend one stage, *but two he perceives not at all* (Job 33:14), and he explicated these in the following verse.⁷³ The intention is: One who is deficient in his apprehensions ought not make any claims against the Supreme.

[33] There are also prophets whose apprehension extends through four or five ranks, or more. The Sages said that Ezekiel prophesied through nine mirrors (Lev. Rab. 1), as it was said: *and the appearance of the vision which I saw was like the vision that I saw when I came to destroy the city; and the visions were like the visions that I saw by the river Chebar; and I fell on my face* (Ezek. 43:3). What is intended is that he prophesied through the first, while nine mirrors [still] lay between, separating him from the supernal divine light which was above the tenth. This was in the devastation of Exile, when he was outside the Holy Land. But even for the prophets who prophesy through many mirrors there remain many barriers through which they must prophecy—that is to say, beyond them—like one who looks through many speculums. For this reason the Sages said: “All the prophets looked through a mirror which was not illuminated” (Yebamot 49b), inasmuch as [even] for the most exalted among them there remained at least one, if not more barriers between them.

[34] Save for Moses, the Master of Prophets, whose apprehension extended through all ten mirrors, and for whom there remained only a single barrier. For this reason it was said that *the*

⁷³ Arama is likely referring to the following verse of Job, i.e., Job 33:15, here: *In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed*—understanding the elements listed in this verse to be different media/modes through which men receive prophecies.

Lord knew him face to face (Deut. 34:10), and: *with him do I speak mouth to mouth, even manifestly* (*be-mar'eh*) and so on (Num. 12:8). His saying manifestly (*be-mar'eh*) is to say that Moses did not apprehend through a mirror (i.e., *mar'ah* with a *qamaz*), i.e., through the mirrors of all the prophets, of whom it was said: *if there be a prophet among you, I the Lord to make Myself known unto him through a mirror* (*ba-mar'ah*) (Num. 12:6). Four conditions of looking into the mirror—all of which were mirrors not illuminated—were clarified there, as we shall explain in its proper place, in Gate 76, with the help of God.⁷⁴ Rather, Moses apprehended through an actual mirror, i.e., a mirror that is illuminated on account of its proximity to the supernal light, as we said. The Master and Guide wrote about all of this in the seventh chapter of his preface to Abot. He said that the barriers corresponded to deficiencies in virtue. Thus he said: “These virtues and others like them are the veils of the prophets, peace be upon them. Thus, whoever has two or three virtues not in the mean, as we explained in the fourth chapter, is said to see God from behind two or three veils. Do not fail to know that the defectiveness inherent in some virtues diminishes the degree of prophecy,” and so on.⁷⁵ According to this, the number of their virtues that lay at the mean ought to have corresponded to the number of ranks through

⁷⁴ In AY Gate 76, Arama lists four “great deficiencies” plaguing all prophecies through mirrors—in relation to which the prophecy of Moses is of course perfect. Here are some excerpts of the passage he likely has in mind; the ellipses represent lengthy passages in which Arama cites examples of each deficiency, which I have omitted for the sake of (relative) brevity:

המסתכל איזה דבר במראה מהמראות יש בראיתו ארבע חסרונות גדולות אשר לפיהן ישאר הרואה חסר וקצר בהשגת עניני המובט ההוא. ולפי עניני סדר ארבע ענינים נפלאים שהם כנגדם בנבואתו של משה בשלימות השגתו. חסרון האחד הוא שהמסתכל במראה לא יוכל לראות בה כי אם אשר יתראה נכחה אמנם מה שיכנס או יסתר תחת או אחר שום מסך מבדיל לא יראהו וכן יקרה לנביאים באספקלריא שלהם שישגו בה חיצוני הדברים ופנימיותם ונסתרים היו נעלמים מהם... החסרון השני הוא שהמסתכל בצורה אשר במראה מצד שאין מבוא לחוש השמע בהכרתה הנה הוא לא יוכל לשמוע דבר ממה שידבר הנראה במראה ההיא ולא יבין ממנו רק מעט שיכיר מתוך התמונות הנראות שם לעיניו ואם יראה שום אדם יכיר דבר מתוך סימניו ורמיזותיו ותואר פניו ותנועת שפתיו אבל לא הכרה שלימה מאחר שאינו שומע דבריו... החסרון השלישי והוא היותר מיוחד להסתכלות המראה וזה שמסתכל בה אינו רואה הצורה המבוקשת עצמה אבל דמות דיוקנה שלה המחוקק בה ודוגמת זה ישיג לנביאים והוא הדבר המיוחד באספקלריא שלהם שאפילו הדברים המושגים להם הרבה מהם אינם מושגים רק במשלים וחדיות אשר יתחקו בהם הענינים בנבואה במראה... החסרון הרביעי והוא גם כן מהיותר מיוחדים אל המראה הנזכרת והוא שהמסתכל בה הוצרך להפוך פני הבטתו אל מקום מקביל אל התמונה הנרצית שאם היא מזרחית יצטרך להפוך פניו אל המערב וכבר מראה ערפו אל הדבר הנרצה ופניו אל מקבילו. ולזה יתחלפו הענינים הנראים בו שכל הדברים שתראה ימיניים הם שמאליים והשמאליים הם ימיניים וכדומה לזה ודוגמתו בנביאים מתוך שאינם רואים בתמונה עצמה רק במראה יצטרכו בשירצו להשיג השגותם הרוחניות להפוך פניהם תחלה אל הפך מזה ומזה למה שיצטרכו להכין חומרם ראשונה להיטיב לבם אם על ידי מאכל ומשקה

⁷⁵ See Maimonides, *Eight Chapters*, in *Ethical Writings of Maimonides*, trans. and ed. Raymond L. Weiss and Charles Butterworth (New York: Dover Publications, 1975), 82.

which their prophecy extended in accordance with the Sages' dictum. However, it seems that there is no such rhyme or reason. For some, deficiency inhibits them, with many barriers separating them, while for others this is not so. Yet all of them are encompassed by these ten mentioned by the Sages, may their memory be Blessed, the divine Glory being above all of them.

[35] In any case, according to the foregoing, the Sages said that even though it was mentioned that God descended, as it is written: *and the Lord came down upon mount Sinai* (Ex. 19:20), and what is similar to this, still the Shekhinah never descended from the rank of its holiness. It was always above the ten, and from there that the divine emanation emanated upon this world, which is lower than all. All of this occurred through the intermediation of the ten intermediaries separating us from Him. And He gave the prophets and visionaries to walk among them, as we said. This is the aim of the saying: *and I will speak to thee from above the ark-cover from between the two cherubim* (Ex. 25:22). He meant, in my being above the ark-cover which is above the ten, and in your being between the two cherubim. That is to say, you shall have intellectual *free access among those that stand by* which are a sign of the world of the angels, as shall be made clear in its place, in Gate 48, with the help of God.⁷⁶ Even if it is related that some of them ascended unto the Lord or unto the heavens, which is the absolute uppermost, they never ascended above the ten. Rather, their diffusion through the ten varied, as we said, such that the greatest among them and even our Master Moses did not pass through all ten. Since Moses'

⁷⁶ In AY Gate 48, Arama, playing off Gersonides, explicates the significance of the Tabernacle and all its components cosmologically and astronomically. Here he likely has in mind this passage, in which he glosses the same dictum from b.Sukkah 5a and explicitly (in tension with his explication of Ps. 19:2, discussed in 1.2.1 above!) claims that God makes the angels into spirits that sustain and give life to the celestial spheres, and that these angels/separate intellects are the "ten" below which the Shekhinah never descends, but that the prophets are among those who have free access among them, apprehending them to various degrees:

והוא מה שביאר בסוף באומרו והקמות את המשכן כמשפטו אשר הראית בהר. כי בהר י"י ומקום קדשו יראה כי הוא יתעלה עושה מלאכיו רוחות בהם יחיו אלו הגרמים השמימיים ויעמידם לעד לעולם. ולזה אמר עשר אמות ארך הקרש וגו' כי הוא ממש מה שאמרו (סוכה ה'). לעולם לא ירדה שכינה למטה מעשרה והעשרה הוא מספר עולם השכליים שהנביאים יש להם מהלכים ביניהם כמו שביארנו בשער מ"ד.

apprehension was above all of them, as is made clear in *I will make all My goodness pass before thee*, and so on, they said, “the throne was extended for him down to ten, and he grasped it” (b. Sukkah 5a). He meant that Moses’ apprehension was sufficiently more expansive than that of all the other prophets so as to distinguish his prophecy from theirs significantly.

[36] Thus this dictum⁷⁷ has been clarified in harmony with the first dictum we were explicating, so that the true reality of what we intended in this noble and necessary inquiry is attested unequivocally. Namely: According to the testimony of the Torah, man participates with the uppermost, and the death that is bound up with life only befalls him on account of divine reason not being added to him, as we said. Conversely, if he observes that rule, what we said at the beginning will not pertain to him. Consider his place and see that this is not so: for undoubtedly, his place is the place of great ones. How beautiful and good is man, for even if all the winds in the world blow upon him, they cannot move him out of his place, as they said of his opposite: “when the wind comes, it uproots him,” and so on (m.Abod 3:17). Concerning this the Sage said: *if the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee, leave not thy place; for gentleness allayeth great offences* (Eccl. 10:4). He meant, *if the spirit of the impulse that rules most men rises up against thee*, causing you to destroy yourself and pushing you out of *your* lofty *place*, take strength in yourself and your unique stature; *do not leave* (Eccl. 10:4) on account of weakness in this matter. I mean: do not wittingly withdraw yourself from the *sons of the most high*, for if you do, it will be counted as a great sin against you, for the fear of participation will not be on your face. The end of the matter is that it is incumbent upon man to preserve his station and not destroy the place of his station, and *every perfect man shall go to his place* (Ex. 18:23). It is wondrous that

⁷⁷ I.e., the baraita mentioned in [25]–(3); i.e., Arama has resolved the third difficulty.

even concerning God, may He be exalted, Who is elevated far above all these relations, scripture speaks of this very relation. That is, when unsuitable things are brought forth before Him, things that do not befit His goodness, it is said, using a gross extension of metaphor: *for behold, the Lord cometh forth out of His place* (Isa. 26:21), that is to say, *out of His* habit and custom. This explication is most correct, lacking nothing, as the Master and Guide said in Part I, Chapter 33. But the perpetual glory that is proper to Him from His holy ministers near to Him is: *blessed be the glory of the Lord from His place* (Ezek. 3:12). This suffices for what we have intended in this part.

Part II

Clarifying how it is possible for this participation to exist by way of the divine commandments.

[1] In the Midrash: “R. Simai said: When Israel accorded precedence to *we shall do* over *we shall hear*, sixty thousand ministering angels came and tied crowns to each and every member of Israel, one corresponding to *we shall do* and one corresponding to *we shall hear*. When the people sinned with the calf, one hundred twenty thousand angels of destruction descended and removed them, as it is said: *and the children of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments* (Ex. 33:6). R. Yohanan said: Moses merited all [of these crowns] and took them, as it was said: *and Moses would take the tent* (Ex. 33:8). R. Simon said: In the future, the Holy One Blessed be He shall return them to Israel, as it is said: *and the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come singing unto Zion and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads* (Isa. 35:10)” (b.Shabbat 88a).

[2] Now⁷⁸ that (1) the possibility of conjunction and participation with the uppermost by way of the divine Torah was made clear in Part I, as was mentioned, it remains to investigate and know the force and nature of this possibility. I mean, (2) whether it is a proximate possibility or whether it is only remotely [possible]. For if it is only remotely possible, it is nearly impossible. And (3) if it is a proximate possibility but is not inclusive (*kolel*), and rather reserved for a select elite, then its benefit is small. “For the sons of the most high, they are few” (b. Sanh. 97b). Again, (4) if it is proximate and easily acquired, but is also easily lost, then it is easily removed. Each of these either weakens the participation or makes it as if it did not exist at all.

[3] That these four things make participation more remote as opposed to more possible is very clear.⁷⁹ For by nature, man’s soul desires freedom and free reign to pursue his wicked impulses and all manner of worldly pleasures, which distance him from participation and proximity to the greatest extent possible. This is all the more so the case for this nation, immediately after leaving Egypt: For a long time, they were habituated amongst the most corrupt community on earth,⁸⁰ as the Torah was subsequently compelled to say: *after the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt, shall ye not do*, and so on (Lev. 18:3). Thus it was undoubtedly necessary that all these

⁷⁸ In stipulating the following four criteria for a robust conceptualization of immortality, Arama gives name to the virtues of accessibility: ease (*qalut*) and inclusivity (*kelallut*); on which see 3.2.1 above. That his conceptualization is explicitly formed in opposition to the dominant intellectualist conceptualization is already clear from his reference to b.Sanh. 97b: “for the sons of the most high, they are few.” In his commentary on Ecclesiastes, Samuel ibn Tibbon had used this same Rabbinic phrase to signify the scarcity of the intellectual elite who are able to perfect their intellects and attain immortality. In contrast, already in Gate 10, secs. [22], [28], Arama develops *the sons of the most high* in a different way; by returning it to its root in Ps.82:6, he suggests *the sons of the most high* are not those who perfect their intellects through acquisition of intelligibilia, but those who assume the garb of Torah.

⁷⁹ The four: the possibility of participation; its proximity; its inclusivity/universality; whether it is removed with difficulty.

⁸⁰ Arama’s claim that in Egypt the Israelites “were habituated amongst the most corrupt community on earth” should be understood in light of his refashioning of the Sabian narrative, on which see 2.3.2 above.

foreign ideas be expunged from among them, though they would continue to persist in the state natural to man.

[4] So divine wisdom was cunning with regards to all this and did three extraordinary things:⁸¹

One prior to the event; one at the time of the event; and one after the event. The first is that divine wisdom took care to exercise vigilance in all those aspects where it was most needed in difficult circumstances such as these—and this in order to perfectly fulfill His will. This is clear from the opening of the story of this event.⁸² We have been stirred to examine a few of its particular details.

(1) His saying: *on that very day, they entered the wilderness of Sinai* (Ex. 19:1). For he already said: *on the third new moon after the Israelites had gone forth* (ibidem), the meaning of which is the beginning of the third month, without a doubt.⁸³

(2) Since it was known that they came to Sinai from Refidim, why did He repeat this, saying: *having journeyed from Refidim, they entered the wilderness of Sinai* (Ex. 19:2)?⁸⁴

⁸¹ Though Arama's language differs from Samuel ibn Tibbon's Hebrew rendering of Maimonides (Arama: הערימה; ibn Tibbon: תחכמו של האלוה וחכמתו), the basic idea Arama develops here—divine wisdom in strategically and comprehensively designing the laws to meet the Israelites where they are—is reminiscent of Maimonides' theory of divine accommodation as developed in *Guide* III.32, on which see 3.2.3 above. However, Arama's theory is also an expansion of Maimonides': whereas the latter only saw divine cunning in the structure of the laws themselves, here Arama elaborates how that divine cunning is further reflected in God's interventions both prior to and at the moment of delivering the laws, i.e., architecting the moment of revelation for maximal receptivity.

⁸² Arama elaborates God's exercises of divine wisdom and cunning prior to the event through his explication of the four difficulties enumerated below, through the end of sec. [12].

⁸³ The first difficulty Arama points to is a case of apparent repetition: Ex. 19:1 seems to say the same thing twice, since according to Arama, *the third new moon after the Israelites had gone forth* is *that very day, they entered the wilderness of Sinai*.

⁸⁴ The second difficulty also relates to a case of apparent repetition: It is already known that the Israelites came to Sinai from Refidim, so why is a repetition of this made at Ex. 19:2? In his commentary on Ex. 19, Abarbanel paraphrases this same question as his third difficulty, though he only attributes it to Rashi and Nahmanides. See *Perush Abarbanel 'al ha-Torah, Vol. 2: Shemot*, ed. Yehuda Shaviv (Jerusalem: Horeb Press, 2007), 271.

- (3) His saying: *and Moses went up to God and the Lord called to him from the mountain* (Ex. 19:3). It should have said: *and He called unto Moses and he went up to Him*, and so on, for it seems that Moses was at a higher rank than He who called him.⁸⁵
- (4) Concerning the great fastidiousness surrounding the order of the words. For at the beginning He wrote: *Thus shall you say to the house of Jacob and declare to the children of Israel* (Ex. 19:3), and at the end: *These are the words that you shall speak to the children of Israel* (Ex. 19:6). It seems that He did not give them permission to change them at all (cf Mekhilta parashat Matan Torah ch.2).⁸⁶

[5] An intelligent man who asks another for something great and difficult will be given the following counsel:⁸⁷ He must prepare his central request by first taking into account six circumstantial aspects, namely: 1. time; 2. place; 3. intermediary; 4. the order of words; 5. the possibility of the thing sought; 6. suitability of the thing sought.

- (1) Time. This is clear from what the Sage said: *to everything there is a time, there is a season to every purpose* (Eccl. 3:1). The Sages said: “nor strive to seek him in the hour of his disgrace; and do not try to appease your friend during the hour of his anger; nor comfort him at the hour while his dead still lies before him” (m.Abod 4:18). The Prophet boasted, saying: *The Lord God hath given me the tongue of them that are taught, that I should know how to sustain with words him that is weary* (Isa. 50:4). For he was referring to *them that are taught* at the most appropriate times for teaching. Also that God on high awoke him each morning to

⁸⁵ The third difficulty Arama points to relates to issue of hierarchy and priority: The ordering of clauses in Ex. 19:3 makes it seem like Moses’ ascending the mountain precedes God’s calling him, though given God’s supremacy, His invitation should have come first. Abarbanel repeats this question as his fourth difficulty: see *Perush Abarbanel: Shemot*, 271.

⁸⁶ The fourth difficulty Arama points to concerns why God was so concerned with Moses’ repetition of His exact words, repeating an injunction concerning this at both Ex. 19:3 and Ex. 19:6.

⁸⁷ Arama develops similar ideas at the beginning of AY Gate 45 as well.

receive this teaching, since this is the time most fitting for this, as it is said: *I will awake the dawn* (Ps. 57:9).

- (2) Place. There is no doubt that place can very much contribute to the satisfaction of God's will, whether the place be a house of prayer or a graveyard. For all of these break a man's heart and soften him. This can also apply in a place of great ones; as was the case when our father Abraham sought something from Ephron and he fulfilled his request, as it is said: *in the presence of the sons of my people give I it thee* (Gen. 23:11). One hardly need say that this also applies in a place with special rank, as is the Land of Israel in comparison with all other places, and the Temple is the most special of all.
- (3) Intermediary. The intermediary should be suitable, either in respect of the one who is asked or in respect of the one asking, or else in respect of the thing sought. Go and learn what the Holy One Blessed be He sought: *a man after His own heart* (1 Sam. 13:14) in all things to deliver Israel from Egypt, as was made well clear in Gate 34.⁸⁸ Study it.
- (4) The order of words: Scripture said: *the lips of the righteous know what is acceptable* (Prov. 10:32), and the Sages praised David for this, for his saying *who can discern his errors?* And so on, unto *let the words of my mouth*, and so on (Ps. 19:13–15). Intelligent men consider this to be a great thing. But the ignorant are not cautious and are ensnared by traps. When Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, sought counsel from the great speaker among the elders who had served his father, he retained his good sense. For he inquired after not only the substance of the matter, but also the quality of the response and how he should order his words. Thus

⁸⁸ In AY Gate 34, Arama discusses at length why God selected Moses to redeem and lead the Israelites in terms of 1 Sam. 13:14, and the importance of choosing a messenger and intermediary who is *after [God's] own heart* to carry out His will on earth. There he proceeds in part by contrast, and summoning the counter-example of Saul and God's will in the battle with Amalek. Failure ensued because God's intention—that the war be one of complete cruelty and unmitigated destruction—was not reflected in Saul's nature, who ultimately capitulated to the masses' desire to exercise some kindness.

scripture said: *and king Rehoboam took counsel with the elders*, and so on, *how do you counsel me to return answer to this people?* (1 Kings 12:6). He meant both the substance of the counsel and the order of the words, for he knew that the occasion required such. In accordance with rightful conduct, the elders only gave him the substance of the counsel and relied on him to order the words. Thus they only said to him: *if thou wilt be a servant unto this people this day*, and so on (cf 1 Kings 12:7). This in contrast to when he took counsel with the young men. He did not offer them this respect and only said *what do you counsel me that we may return answer to this people, who have spoken unto me, saying: make the yoke*, and so on (1 Kings 12:8). I.e., he only sought counsel from them so that he could return answer to them. But they insisted that he order his words, neither adding nor diminishing, as it was said: *and the young men that were grown up with him spoke unto him saying: thus shalt thou say unto this people*, and so on, *thus shalt thou speak unto them: my little finger is thicker than my father's loins and now whereas my father did burden you with a heavy yoke*, and so on (1 Kings 12:10–11). There is no doubt that if he had replied to them in a soft voice or with sweet words, as the elders said—*and speak good words to them* (cf 1 Kings 12:7)—they would not have scorned him to the extent they did. In any case, it is clear that *death and life are in the power of the tongue* (Prov. 18:21), as it is said: *a soft tongue breaketh the bone* (Prov. 25:15).

- (5) It is necessary that the thing sought be possible: Do you not see Elijah's—may his memory be blessed—reply: *thou hast asked a hard thing* (2 Kings 2:10)?! Thus Bathsheba said to Solomon: *I will ask one small petition of thee, deny me not* (1 Kings 2:20). This teaches that one who asks ought to ask for something that is easily accomplished.

(6) Fittingness of the thing sought. This is also clear. For even if something is possible or easily accomplished by the one asked, if it is not fitting of his honor/glory, he will not do it. Do you not see Solomon's reply to that very same small petition which his mother made of him? He said: *and why dost thou ask, and so on, ask for him the kingdom also, for he is mine elder brother* (1 Kings 2:22). Thus his mother saw that it was not a small ask, and she did not continue pleading for it. So too for Naboth the Jezreelite: Ahab asked for his vineyard with pleasing words and mentioned the benefits, as he said: *give me thy vineyard that I may have it for a garden of herbs because it is near unto my house; and I will give thee for it a better vineyard than it, or, if it seem good to thee, I will give thee the worth of it in money* (1 Kings 21:1). The aim being Ahab would give Naboth what he thought to be a suitable price to trade the vineyard for an even better vineyard, such that Naboth would benefit twofold. Yet even despite all this, Naboth did not accept the offer for the reason he clarified in his saying: *the Lord forbid it me that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee* (1 Kings 21:3). For in their opinion, it was a major dishonor to destroy the inheritance of ones fathers, and thus this was not done in Israel.

[6] These six are the principle aspects that it is fitting for everyone of knowledge to consider in seeking something significant from another. Queen Esther considered all of them when she petitioned on behalf of her people. Do you not see that she specified the time in her saying: *and I will do tomorrow as the king hath said* (Esth. 5:8). The place would be in her house, where there would be no accuser. The intermediary would be the banquet. The order of words, which was superior, was: *let my soul/life be given me at my petition*, and so on (Esth. 7:3). The possibility

and fittingness of the thing sought [was indicated in] *for we are sold*, and so on (Esth. 7:4), all of which I explicated in the commentary on that scroll.

[7] Divine wisdom considered all of these here, in first introducing his beloved son to this great and terrible education.⁸⁹ Do you not see that first of all, He aimed at the correct time, mentioning this in His saying: *on the day they came into the wilderness of Sinai* (Ex. 19:1)? He meant at that time, that is to say, that that was the most suitable time possible for them to enter beneath the wings of the Shekhinah. It would have been about three months since they were gone forth out of that bitter exile wherein they had had the yoke of slavery upon them. Although they had experienced many miracles prior to this, they were still weary and exhausted from the oppression of slavery, as the Sages said: “This is similar to a king whose son was sick. After he got well, he said: I do not want to go to school until another three months have passed.” It was in accordance with this determined period of time that He said at the outset: *when thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain* (Ex. 3:12).⁹⁰

[8] As for His saying *they came into the wilderness of Sinai* (cf Ex. 19:1), He meant to signify the selection of the place. For God desired to dwell in this mountain, and it is elsewhere referred to as the mountain of God: e.g., *and met him in the mountain of God* (Ex. 4:27); *and came to the mountain of God, unto Horeb* (Ex. 3:1). This is where the felicitous cave was located, of which it was said: *that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock* (Ex. 33:22). This is where Moses our Master,

⁸⁹ Arama now turns to explicating the four difficulties enumerated in sec. [4] above with recourse to the six considerations of the wise in making requests of others enumerated in sec. [6]: In seeking a covenant with the Israelites and their reception of Torah at Sinai, He takes into account the time, place, intermediary, word order, and both possibility and suitability of the thing sought.

⁹⁰ Resolution of difficulty [4]-(1); the apparent redundancy in Ex. 19:1 is God's singling out this period of time—three months—as the most suitable one for asking something difficult of Israel, sufficient time having elapsed since the Israelites were released from the yoke of slavery.

peace be upon him, sat on three occasions for forty days and forty nights sans food or drink (Deut. 9). This was also where Elijah's cave, peace be upon him, was located, of which it was said: *and he went in the strength of that meal forty days and forty night unto Horeb the mountain of God and he came thither unto a cave*, and so on (1 Kings 19:8–9). It was more fitting for the spirit of grace and intellect to emanate upon the dwellers of this mountain than anywhere else. Now inasmuch as one who moves from a place of extreme wickedness to a place of extreme goodness will be impressed upon even more strongly and wondrously than he would were he to have come to an intermediate [place], he repeated: *and when they were departed from Refidim and were come to the wilderness of Sinai* (Ex. 19:2).⁹¹ For it was fitting to say this in respect of the place. He also said: *and there Israel encamped before the mountain* (idem) since the east of the mountain was the most correct place for this, and this is the side that is called the face in every respect.

[9] Concerning the intermediary, he said: *and Moses went up to God* (Ex. 19:3). This is to say, there was no intermediary in the world like unto Moses for doing things at that divine rank. For, as both his initial and subsequent actions illustrate, he had already ascended to the rank of divinity independently through his ethical and intellectual virtues. This is why God called unto him from the mountain at this time to be an intermediary for that great and terrible deed.

⁹¹ Resolution of difficulty [4]-(2): the departure from Refidim is reiterated to remind the Israelites that they have come from an extremely terrible place, so as to augment effect of the greatness/excellence of the place they are now in; this too is one of God's tactics for making them more receptive to difficult ask.

[10] Concerning the aim and order of the words, He said both at the beginning and the end: *thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob*, and so on (Ex. 19:3). *As for these words which you shall speak* (Ex. 19:6), be cautious so as to neither add to nor diminish nor alter them.⁹²

[11] As for the content of the words, which encompass both the possibility of the thing sought and its great benefit, He said: *ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians*, and so on, *now therefore, if ye will hearken unto My voice indeed and keep My covenant, then ye shall be as Mine own treasure*, and so on, *and ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests*, and so on (Ex. 19:4–6). As for the aim of the words and how they should be fittingly understood according to their time and place, this shall become clear when we attend to the story as a whole, with the help of God.⁹³

[12] Now it is apparent that the arrangement of all these circumstances contributed to the furthering of God's aim and counsel. For in Moses' immediately speaking to them at the Lord's command, the entire people replied: *all that the Lord hath spoken we shall do* (Ex. 19:8). Scripture expresses this well: *and Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and set before them all these words which the Lord commanded him, and all the people answered together, and said: all that the Lord hath spoken we shall do* (Ex. 19:7–8). That is to say, even though Moses was more fastidious in his mission to the elders of the people, for the majority of them were not pleased with him, even so, because of the substance of his mission and his

⁹² Resolution of difficulty [4]-(3): God exhorts Moses' fastidiousness with word order because how a difficult ask is expressed is a key component in the success of that ask.

⁹³ In Part III, below.

arranging all the aforementioned aspects, *all the people together* arose and accepted it upon themselves *to keep and do*. This was all because God was wise with them prior to the event.⁹⁴

[13] As for how He worked wonders with them at the time of the event,⁹⁵ this is very clear from His saying: *lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and may also believe thee forever* (cf Ex. 19:9). Thus He ensured that that awesome event had something terrifying and astonishing about it: by exhorting purity and holiness and honor and fear; and by making a show of divine voices and great lightening and a *thick cloud* and the mighty sound of the ram's horn, and the divine commandments in fiery flames. God worked all these terrible wonders to breach their hearts of stone and soften their limbs of copper and iron. They⁹⁶ already clarified this in their saying: *behold, the Lord our God hath shown us His glory and His greatness, and we have heard His voice out of the midst of the fire; we have seen this day that God doth speak with man and he liveth. Now therefore, why should we die? For this great fire will consume us, and so on, for who is there of all flesh that hath heard the voice of God, and so on, go thou near and hear, and so on* (Deut. 5:20–23). Thus, the divine aim was wondrously attained: they turned their shoulders and hearts towards hearkening and service, as it was said: *and we heard it and we did it* (Deut. 5:23). The remaining intentions in these words shall be clarified in the explication of the story, with the help of God.⁹⁷ For now, the only aim is to mention the special property of that event in general. For His aim was to prepare the hearts of

⁹⁴ Here Arama suggests that the Israelites' agreeing to God's covenant in Ex. 19:7–8 is a reflection of the success of His preparations, carefully arranging all six circumstances enumerates in sec. [5] above in relation to the revelation at Sinai.

⁹⁵ Having concluded his treatment of God's exercise of divine cunning prior to the moment of revelation (in terms of the six circumstantial preparations, elaborated through exegesis of Ex. 19:1–8), Arama now turns to explicating God's exercise of divine cunning at the actual moment of revelation; see sec. [4] above.

⁹⁶ The Israelites.

⁹⁷ See Part III, sec. [38] below.

the people, who were distant, and to draw them near to their perfection through new activities and notions which had never been created in the whole earth, among all peoples.

[14] This is what the Psalmist meant in his saying: *o God, when Thou wentest forth before Thy people, when Thou didst march through the wilderness, selah; the earth trembled, the heavens also dropped at the presence of God, even yon Sinai trembled, and so on, a bounteous rain didst Thou pour down, o God, and so on, Thy flock settled therein, and so on* (Ps. 68:8–11).⁹⁸ He said that His *going forth before His people* at that noble and terrible event and preparing His march there in the land of the *wilderness* to work those great and terrible deeds—such as *causing the earth to tremble and the heavens to drop rain*; things that were new and terrible—all of this was to prepare that people to receive that activity that was fitting for them and their felicity. This is like one who prepares exhausted land that has not been worked for some time; it requires much effort for it to yield and fruit. For this reason, it said: *a bounteous rain didst Thou pour down, o God, when Thine inheritance was weary, Thou didst confirm it* (Ps. 68:10). He meant that all these things were like a *bounteous rain* which *Thou didst pour down upon Thine inheritance which was weary*: you caused to be felicitous, bearing leaf and fruit. He explicated the allegory said: *Thy flock settled therein, and so on*. The aim of this is that your people settled in that land that trembled, and those marvels were meant to *prepare, in Thy goodness, for the poor*, to draw him closer to you, *o God*. This is sufficient for our purposes concerning what happened at that noble event, at the time of its actual happening.

⁹⁸ In Part I, sec [23] above, Arama explicates several lines from the same Psalm.

[15] Turning to how He was wise concerning what was to come thereafter; i.e., how He would attend to the conditions of their participation, its possibility, universality, and endurance—for as we mentioned at the beginning, this is the principle upon which the entirety of the aforementioned participation depends.⁹⁹ He did this by giving them wondrous counsel and wisdom, namely, to erect pillars and foundations, pegs and fastens, all of which are notions and actions—I mean, the commandments and prohibitions contained in all the words of this Torah. In this way, participation would not only exist; moreover, its existence would be proximate and easy to acquire; also, it would be extended to the whole multitude of them. Further still, it would be difficult to remove it, for these are four profound principles for attaining one’s aim in the best way possible, as we said.

[16] Concerning participation: This was made clear in Part I, and the Holy One Himself explicated it in connection with the commandments, saying: *ye shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy* (Lev. 19:3), and as He said here: *now therefore, if ye will hearken unto My voice, and so on, and ye shall be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation* (Ex. 19:5–6). This is the bulk of participation, as established. As for proximity and facility (*qalut*), he explicated this in saying: *for this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not too hard for thee, neither is it far off*, and He concluded, *but the word is very proximate unto thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it* (Deut. 30:11–14). He clarified that all this proximity was on account of everything’s being dependent upon action, which would not be the case if it were by way of wisdom and speculation only. As for their universality, it is clear that action is much more

⁹⁹ Having concluded his treatment of God’s exercise of divine cunning at the moment of revelation through exegesis of Ex. 19:9 in conjunction with Deut. 5:20–23, Arama now turns to explicating God’s exercise of divine cunning after the moment of revelation, by designing the Torah in such a way that immortality will be accessible to the masses in accordance with the conditions stipulated in sec. [2] above.

common to all than speculation, whether on account of its intellectual difficulty or its requiring that certain special conditions [be met] which all do not have in common. For this reason the Sages said: “Even the most ignorant among you are full of commandments like a pomegranate!” (b.Berakhot 57a). This is because the commandments pertain to things that relate to man’s material part and all manner of his needs, such that it is impossible to escape from them.¹⁰⁰

[17] In the Midrash: “*For they are a chaplet of grace about thy head* (Prov. 1:9). R. Pinhas said to R. Hama: Wherever you go, the commandments accompany you. From where? As it is said: *when thou buildest a new house, then thou shalt make a parapet for thy roof*, and so on (Deut. 22:8). When you make a door, the commandments accompany you, as it is said: *and ye shall write them on the doorposts*, and so on (Deut. 6). When you wear new garments, the commandments accompany you, as it is written: *thou shalt not wear a mingled stuff* (Deut. 22:11); when you go to shave, the commandments accompany you: *ye shall not round the corners*, and so on (Lev. 19:27). When you go to the field, the commandments accompany you: *thou shalt not plow with an ox and an ass together* (Deut. 22:10), [or when you go] to seed: *thou shalt not sow thy vineyard with two kinds of seed* (Deut. 22:9), [and when you go] to harvest: *when thou reapest*, and so on (Deut. 24:19). The Holy One Blessed be He said: Even if you do nothing save walking on the road, the commandments accompany you, as it is said: *if a bird’s nest chance to be before thee in the road*, and so on (Deut. 22:6)” (Deut. Rab. 6:3)

¹⁰⁰ See 3.3.1 on Arama’s insistence that immortality via the commandments meet the four criteria stipulated in sec. [2] above because he conceptualizes the commandments as grounded in mundane, material action as opposed to intellection.

[18] We aimed [to illustrate] how, in designing the commandments as actions, God intended to procure the benefits of both proximity and universality. This is like a man who invites his beloved son [to eat] whatever of his food he encounters. In this way, no matter what, the tired and failing shall reach them. This is why the Psalmist taught: *Thy righteousness is like the mighty mountains, Thy judgements are like the great deep*, and so on (Ps. 36:7). He meant: His *righteousness* with us is well-known like the *mountains* of God, while the attribute of His *judgement* is covered and hidden in the *great deep* in so far as *man and beast Thou preservest o Lord* (ibidem). He meant, insofar as You place our preservation in something within us that is common to both man and beast—i.e., the material part and its activities—such as would not be the case if it¹⁰¹ were to depend on something unique to man—i.e., the intellectual and theoretical part, for this is only common to a scant few. This is what the Master of Prophets indicated at the end of his speech, in his saying: *happy art thou, o Israel, who is like unto thee? A people saved*, and so on (Deut. 33:29). The aim is that there is none like unto Israel in that all of them are saved in general, and this is clear.

[19] As for the difficulty of removing it, this undoubtedly follows necessarily from what was already set forth. *For the threefold chord is not easily broken* (Eccl. 4:12) in this way since it has already transformed into second nature, which can only be removed with difficulty.¹⁰² Concerning this scripture said: *and as for Me, this is My covenant with them, saith the Lord*, and so on, *they shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and forever* (Isa. 59:21). He said that

¹⁰¹ I.e., our preservation, immortality, felicity.

¹⁰² This connects to Arama's discussion early in AY Gate 51, where he classifies all human activities as either natural, habituated, or learned, and focuses on the commandments' role in transforming certain activities and dispositions into second nature, in connection with Aristotle's *Ethics*.

He made a covenant [regarding] the divine commandments in the manner aforementioned, to *not depart* from them for generations. This bespeaks the Torah's eternity and God's conjunction with this people *from henceforth and forever*.

[20] In that noble dictum mentioned at the beginning, R. Simai aimed at precisely these four things,¹⁰³ which were essential to sustaining this community's perfection once they entered neath the wings of the Shekhinah, for the reasons mentioned. He said: "When Israel accorded precedence to *we shall do* over *we shall hear*, sixty thousand ministering angels came," and so on. He meant: Israel was scrupulous. For in their first utterance, they only said: *all that the Lord hath spoken we shall do* (cf Ex. 19:8)—and they did not say "*and then we shall listen*" until the third time, as it was said: *and he took the book of the covenant and read in the hearing of the people, and they said 'all that the Lord hath spoken we shall do and we shall hear'* (Ex. 24:7). From this it was apparent that they were most scrupulous and attentive to this matter.¹⁰⁴ Initially, it seemed that they only accepted the action, on account of their seeing that it was an easier thing and common to all. However, when they contemplated further, they later said *we shall do and we shall hear*. For they saw that the nature of Torah action is to draw one to intellection and contemplation of the Torah, as shall be made clear there, with the help of God.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Again, the four conditions of immortality stipulated in sec. [2] above: possibility, ease/proximity, universality, difficulty of removal.

¹⁰⁴ I.e., Arama suggests that the Israelites themselves were concerned that immortality should meet the four criteria stipulated above; see 3.3.2.2 on Arama's understanding of *na'aseh ve-nishma* developed here.

¹⁰⁵ Arama likely has in mind AY Gate 47, which explicates the famous Rabbinic dictum in b.Qiddushin 40b on whether (Torah) study or action is greater.

[21] The four benefits we mentioned proceeded from this.¹⁰⁶ Concerning the first, namely, the substance of divine participation, it is what he mentioned, [namely]: the tying of those divine crowns to the Israelites. These sustain and strengthen that participation, similar to tying letters [with crowns] which he spoke of elsewhere (b.Shabbat 89a), as shall be made clear in Gate 74, with the help of God.¹⁰⁷ As for their saying that there were two crowns for each and every one of them, by this they meant to refer to the second benefit, namely, the manner of apprehending notions, one through the other, and the proximity/ease of this. In his saying that those who crowned them were sixty thousand, they meant that none among them were left devoid or wanting of this perfection. In their saying that when they sinned, twice as many angels of destruction removed them, they taught that this perfection, when attained in this manner, is only removed with difficulty. That is, if this perfection were only in the theoretical part, the corruption of the imagination would suffice to remove this power from them. However, since action is a component, that perfection could only be removed if the appetitive faculty was also weakened, for the appetitive faculty is the mover of actions. For this reason, he said that two angels of destruction were required to remove them, for it is not their custom to be rescued therefrom except through [both of these], one after another, and by way of various removals.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ I.e., the Israelites recognizing that action precedes and leads to intellection; again see sec. 3.3.2.2 above.

¹⁰⁷ The midrash Arama refers to is the now-famous passage in which Moses encounters God tying crowns to letters, and Moses and God have an exchange, ending with God's remark that "you should have assisted Me." In AY Gate 74, Arama offers a stunning interpretation of the midrash, in which part of God's gift in the moment of revelation is delivering the Israelites from the philosophic belief that their actions are ultimately powerless to organize the causal chain of existents governing the universe, and instead apprising them of the importance of their contribution in joining the divine covenant.

¹⁰⁸ The idea Arama elaborates here—that the immortality conferred through the commandments satisfies the criterion of being difficult to remove because the commandments' action is bound up with the appetitive faculty—is one further expressed in his alternative theory of the dietary laws, developed in AY Gate 60 below and explicated in 3.4.2 above; it connects as well with the idea that the commandments transform man's nature, elaborated in AY Gate 51 as well as AY Gate 74.

[22] Although they were removed for a time, a crown still remains for all of them, or for the perfect individuals among them, for some of them are like unto Moses. Furthermore, it must return eventually, for it is such a great thing, as it is said: *and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads* (Isa. 51:11). In the Midrash: “This is like a king who said to his servant: ‘guard these two goblets for me.’ He said to him: ‘be careful with them.’ When the servant was entering the palace, there was a calf at the palace entrance. It gored the servant, and one of them broke. The servant trembled before the king. The king said to him: ‘why are you trembling?’ He said: ‘a calf gored me and I broke one of the goblets.’ The king said to him: ‘if so, be careful with the second.’” (Ex. Rab. 27). Similarly, the Holy One Blessed be He said: you crafted two goblets at Sinai—*we shall do and we shall hear*. You broke *we shall do* when you made the golden calf; now be careful to heed *we shall hear*, as it is written: *incline your ear and come unto Me; hear and your soul shall live* (Isa. 55:3). This is why they said that it was difficult to remove on account of their having two crowns. Even though they transgress in their action—for many war against him, like sloth and miserliness and lust and what is similar to these—even so, in their companion’s remaining all shall be restored, such as is not the case if one sins in respect of his theoretical speculation or opinions. In regards to this, [Solomon] said: *none that go unto her return*, and so on (Prov. 2:19). And Elisha Aher demonstrates this (b.Hagigah 15a). Thus it is clear that in His mercy, He guided them along paths through which all would ascend from the lowliness of their station to the heights of the uppermost, sans stumbling, to prevail. This is what we intended for this part.

Part III

Clarifying in what manner and in what sense these commandments procure spiritual felicity.

[1] [It remains] to clarify how this divine participation is attained from the commandments, and what people should aim at to attain their final purpose.¹⁰⁹ That is, whether it is necessary for one fulfilling a commandment to aim exclusively at *hearkening to the voice of His word*, such that he is not permitted to consider any other benefit. Or, whether he is permitted to aim at some personal benefit and spiritual felicity in fulfillment. For if he imagines that no such benefit follows therefrom, his resolve will weaken.

[2] Intellect requires the first alternative in two respects.¹¹⁰ First, the most noble activities must have the most sublime final purpose, as was made clear in the introduction to this book. Then since we aver that the Torah commandments, which are ordered by the order of God on high,¹¹¹ are the most sublime activities possible, it follows that their final purpose must be the most sublime of final purposes—and this is God, and nothing besides. Second, if any sort of human benefit is taken to be the final purpose of divine service in the Torah commandments, then serving God will be among the things that are ordered for the sake of some purpose or benefit, the latter of which will be taken to be superior to Him. But this is the opposite of what intellect

¹⁰⁹ The main theme of the *derishah* in Part III concerns the proper intention to be had in performing the commandments. To explore this theme, Arama gives the *derishah* of Part III the cast of a scholastic disputation, with sec. [1] consisting of the quaestio (what should people aim at to attain their final purpose?) and theses pro and contra (it is necessary to aim only at fulfilling the divine will in performing the commandments; it is not). Several other Gates in AY assume this form, e.g., AY Gate 80.

¹¹⁰ Secs. [2]–[3] are Arama's defense of the thesis pro: it is necessary to aim only at fulfilling the divine will in performing the commandments. As with elsewhere, he defends the thesis he will ultimately reject (in this case the thesis pro) first.

¹¹¹ Arama's repeated reference to the commandments being ordered (*mesudar*) by God throughout this Part hearken back to the section of his commentary on Ecclesiastes discussed in 2.2.3 above and the philosophers' failure to discover the final purpose of human existence: the commandments, Arama says there, are the only sort of human activity at one ordered by the absolutely theoretical intellect (God), yet also realized in the external, material world—in contrast to the philosophers' theoretical speculation which is completely divorced from the external realm and so fails to express man's nature as a body/animal.

necessitates, i.e., that God is the supreme final purpose unto which all final purposes must turn, from the first of them to the last. As He said by way of the prophet: *I am the first, and I am the last* (Isa. 44:6). These two aspects necessitate that in fulfilling the Torah commandments, one not consider anything other than the service of the Commander, who is the Cause of Causes.

[3] Among the dicta of the Sages that support this opinion is the teaching of Antigonus: “Do not be like the servants who serve the master in the expectation of receiving a prize, rather be,” and so on (m.Abot 1:3). There are some who explain the dictum of Ben Azzai in this way: “For the reward for performing a commandment is another commandment,” (m.Abot 4:2)—that is to say, that the commandments are recollected and performed for their own sakes, not for the sake of something else, just as God exists in the way that He exists not on account of any other cause/reason. What illustrates this is their profound teaching in the Sifrei (*parashat Equeb*): “Lest one say: I want to learn Torah in order that I should become rich; in order that I should be called Master; in order that I should have a portion in the World to Come; the Torah teaches: ‘do not do it out of love, save out of love for God,’” and similarly he said “for His commandments, and not for the reward of His commandments.” How greatly did Maimonides, may his memory be blessed, grasp these statements at the end of his Book of Science!¹¹² He was very quick to seize this opinion and to expunge all others besides it, as is known from there.

[4] Intellect similarly requires the second,¹¹³ contradictory alternative in two different respects.

First, in respect of the natural desire and longing existing in every sublunar being, from the

¹¹² Arama refers to Maimonides’ discussion of these same classical Rabbinic dicta in *Hilkhot Teshubah* 10:4–5; see Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah: Book of Knowledge*, ed. and trans., M Hyamson (Jerusalem: Feldheim Publishers).

¹¹³ Here Arama begins his defense of the thesis contra: it is not necessary to aim only at fulfilling the divine will in performing the commandments; moreover, aiming at some human benefit is necessary.

lowest ephemera, i.e., whether one is among the species of plants or the animals that reproduce in families. For all of them are created for final purposes that are greater and loftier than them, as in *who causeth the grass to spring up for the cattle and herb for the service of man* (Ps. 104:14). He meant that the final purpose of the vegetative faculty found in plants is the *cattle*, for plants exist for cattle to eat.¹¹⁴ And according to the Creator, the final purpose of the cattle's desire for that nourishment is *for the service of the man* using him to *bring forth bread out of the earth* (ibidem). In any case, each and every one of them longs and naturally desires to benefit himself, whether qua individual or qua species. Then how should it be possible for human desire to be devoid of such? The second is in respect of the weakness and negligence that must attain any action from which one does not expect any benefit for himself. For man will not believe that his felicity might be destroyed by abstaining from things that don't benefit him, since such things are very difficult.¹¹⁵

[5] The affair of Onan testifies to this. That is, he was only punished for having done something to *spill seed*, as it was said: *what he did was displeasing to the Lord* (Gen. 38:10), however he did not transgress in what he did not do.¹¹⁶ Similarly, the Sages seized Antigonus for the

¹¹⁴ Compare Judah Halevi's gloss of this verse in Kuzari 5:10, with reference to the benefits (*toalot*) of man and his seed (here in the translation of Judah ibn Tibbon):

ואחר נצטק אל "תדשא הארץ" באמרו: "משקה הרים מעליותיו" – כגוי ל"ואד יעלה מן הארץ" לתועלות אדם ותרעו כמו שאמר: "מצמים הציר לבהמה" – שלא יבזי הציר, כי הוא מתועלות בהמות הישוב; בקר נצאן וסוסים וחמורים וחולתם; כנה בעדם ב'עבדת האדם', רצונו לומר: עבודת האדמה לעבד בהם, ויוציא לב הצמח לעצמו, באשר אמר: "להוציא לחם מן הארץ", דומה לאמרו: "הנה נתתי לכם את כל-עשב זרע נרע", רצונו לומר: שהלב לאדם והקלפות לשאר החיים, כמו שאמר: "ולכל-חית הארץ ולכל-עוף השמים"

¹¹⁵ Arama discusses similar ideas in his Introduction to AY, with reference to his contemporaries' failure to strive for eternal life because they don't believe in its possibility.

¹¹⁶ In AY Gate 28, Arama explains that Onan was punished for having engaged in his forbidden sexual relations with his brother's wife outside of the commandment, but not for having failed to engage in providing her with a child according to the Levirate law. However, Arama further explains there that Onan did err in believing that the commandment of being fruitful and multiply would not apply in the case of a Levirate marriage, since the resulting child would not accrue to his name (but rather his brother's). Onan's thought process—albeit incorrect on Arama's judgement—is a testament to the point he has just made: people do not believe that abstaining from laws that do not benefit them (in Onan's case, procreating but in his brother's name—) will cause them harm.

aforementioned statement. They said it is either permitted to serve in the expectation of receiving a prize or that the contrary should not be publicized. These two claims permit one to aim at some benefit for himself in the commandments. What establishes this opinion firmly is what the Sages said in Tractate [Pesahim 8a]: “But wasn’t it taught: One who says: [I am contributing] this sela to charity so that my son will live or so that I will have a portion in the World to Come is truly righteous.” This completely rejects what was said in Sifrei,¹¹⁷ instead permitting man to aim at some benefit for himself, whether temporal or spiritual.

[6] How could this not be the case?! Verily, the Torah itself concurs in many instances, never ceasing to declare that this is permissible for the commandments both in general and in particular. For example: *and thou shalt keep His statutes and His commandments which I command thee this day that it may go well with thee and with thy children after thee and that thou mayest prolong thy days* (Deut. 4:40); *that it may be well with thee and that thou mayest prolong thy days* (Deut. 22:7); *that thy days may be long and that it may go well with thee* (Deut. 5:15), and similarly in many places too numerous to count, some of which shall be mentioned in what is to come. What’s more, the Holy One Blessed be He explicated as much Himself in His saying: *or that they had such a heart as this always to fear Me and keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children after them* (Deut. 5:25). Similarly, Moses said: *and now Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee but to fear*, and so on, *and he concluded by saying for thy good* (Deut. 10:12–13). If the Holy One Blessed be He desired that our aim in serving Him with His Torah be for our benefit and pleasure, how should we stand [against this] and claim that if we aim at what their Establisher and Arranger aimed at, the whole

¹¹⁷ I.e., the passage from Sifrei *parashat Ekeb* quoted in sec. [3] above.

deed will be invalidated! This is only possible if it is permitted. It is necessary to believe that we shall attain to merit and goodness in exchange for these Torah actions, to the extent that we have fulfilled them for the sake of this, without a doubt. This is what the Sages agreed to in their saying: “The Holy One Blessed be He sought to confer merit upon Israel; therefore, He increased for them Torah and commandments, as it is said: *it pleased the Lord*, and so on (Isa. 42:21)” (b.Makkot 23b). Similar was David’s statement: *moreover by them is Thy servant warned; in keeping of them there is great reward* (Ps. 19:12), as shall be mentioned in Gate 49.¹¹⁸

[7] Since these two paths are *both alike good* (Eccl. 11:6) according to the path of speculation and according to the dicta of the Sages, yet they contradict each other,¹¹⁹ we must strive to reconcile them with one another, and both of them with the truth. This way, the true meaning of *we shall do and we shall hear* shall be clarified in connection with *fulfil[ling] His word, hearkening unto the voice of His word* (Ps. 103:20), as was set forth,¹²⁰ and we shall have fulfilled our obligation in this marvelous *derush*. Now I see two possibilities for this.¹²¹

[8] The first is that the Sages spoke about the divine commandments in the same way that the political philosophers spoke about ethical virtues. Their view follows that expressed by Aristotle in the Ethics, Treatise 10, Chapter 9: “By choiceworthy in themselves are meant those from which nothing is sought beyond the activity; and of this kind,” and so on. Just as Aristotle

¹¹⁸ In AY Gate 49, Arama, now imagining the Torah and its commandments as a *menorah*, discusses the Israelites’ special spiritual felicity attained through observance of the *huqqim* in terms of Ps. 19:12:

ולזה אמר על זה הקנה השלישי מהמנורה הנחמדים מזהב ומפז רב וגו' גם עבדיך נזהר בהם בשמרם עקב רב. לומר כי החקים בייחוד וכל שאר המצוות הם ענינם נחמדים מאד מצד מה ששיגו עושיהן בהם מיד התועלת והערבות המגיעים מזהב ומפז ומהדבש ונופת צופים. אמנם גם עבדיך נזהר בהם בשמרם עקב רב שהוא ההצלחה הנפשית המכוונת מהן

¹¹⁹ והנה הם סותרים זה לזה ומקבילים

¹²⁰ In Part I, esp. sec. [19], [15]–[17] above.

¹²¹ Arama proposes two resolutions to the contradictory and apparently equally-defensible theses pro and contra, both of which put the lie to the thesis pro.

defined praiseworthiness for these activities thus, the Sages thought the same applied to the divine commandments.¹²² But heaven forbid that we think this way! For the philosophers thought that the only benefit of virtuous activity was its being virtuous! This is why they took virtue to be an end in itself, rather than to something else. However, we believe that the Torah commandments attest to spiritual reward and that the happiness for which our souls are destined is not attained through virtuous action but is rather something else, far more wondrous than this, even the end of all virtues. Because of this, see that the divine commandments guide us to attain that end which is our good, as we said.¹²³

[9] The second is that this investigation has led us to conclude that the divine service rendered in these commandments is something other than the reward that accrues to the one fulfilling them.¹²⁴ This is similar to the service rendered unto earthly kings; one wonders whether the service is intended in itself or whether it is intended for the benefit of the servant. But this is not the case in any respect. Rather: service and reward are two in name but one in essence. This is why the prophet said to Rehoboam: *that they may know My service and the service of the kingdoms of the countries* (2 Chron. 12:8). He meant that serving God is a benefit to the servant and a benefit to the One served. As he said: *if thou hast sinned, what doest thou against Him*, and so on, *if thou be righteous, what givest thou Him?* (Job 35:6–7). He meant that even if you

¹²² Arama's first resolution of the contradiction suggests that the Rabbinic defense of the thesis pro, based on the conceptualization that what is good/choiceworthy must always have its end in itself, is in fact a result of the Rabbis' inappropriately following Aristotle in developing that conceptualization of good and choiceworthy, and so conflating the model of the commandments with a philosophical understanding of ethical virtues.

¹²³ Arama's distinction of the end of all virtues and the end of the divine commandments as spiritual reward is reminiscent of the distinction for which Joseph ibn Shem Tob is famous in his *Kebod Elohim*, on which see Hava Tirosch-Samuelson, *Happiness in Premodern Judaism* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 2003).

¹²⁴ Arama's second resolution of the contradiction suggests that the Rabbinic defense of the thesis pro arises from an improper separation/distinction; i.e., thinking that divine service and reward accruing to servant are separate things, when really "service and reward are two in name but one in essence."

increase or diminish the power of the Mighty One on High, as the Sages said: “When you do the will of the Place, you increase [His] power,” and so on (cf Lam. Rab. 1), by way of truth, there is nothing that can increase or diminish anything in respect to Him; rather the change [both] proceeds from you and accrues to you, whether it is good or bad, it is you who receive them, as shall be made clear in Gate 81, with the help of God. However, the divine commandments were given to the Lord’s people, by way of mercy and compassion, to rightly guide them in sublime actions, that they might thereby satisfy God’s will, meriting the benefit of the two species of life that we spoke of. Not through some law of exchange or substitution, as is the case for the service of kings. Rather, the most perfect service according to Him consists only in what is good for each person, himself; and this is only called “service” by way of compassion and love. This is similar to what a man receives from the service of his son, who agrees to heed his instruction, *to walk in the way of good men* (Prov. 2:20) *that it may go well for him* (Deut. 12:25), that he might be given a reward for this.

[10] In my opinion, this is why Sage Antigonus was careful in saying: “Do not be like the servants who serve the master in the expectation of receiving a prize (*pras*), rather be,” and so on (m. Abot 1:3). For in my opinion, the word “prize” (*pras*) is what a man hopes for in exchange for his service, as compensation for what the giver has received, as they said: He took a prize from him and left. Thus of a people who is conquered in war, it is asked: what will they give to the king who captures them in exchange for their lives, to redeem their souls?! And it is said: *and he smote Moab and measured them with the line, making them to lie down on the ground, and he measured two lines to put to death, and one full line to keep alive; and the Moabites became servants to David and brought presents* (2 Sam. 8:2). Jonathan ben Uzziel translated this

as “they took their prize (*pras*).” Similarly, Onkelos translated *according to your valuation of souls* (Lev. 27:2) as *be-pursan*, i.e., the redemption-price to redeem a soul. How far this translation was from what Maimonides, may his memory be blessed, wrote in his commentary on Abot:¹²⁵ “prize (*pras*) is what one calls a benefit (*gemul*) granted by someone who does not gain from the recipient, but [rather] does it by way of kindness and grace”?!¹²⁶ This is what he said. How fitting is what we wrote of the word prize (*pras*), i.e., that it is something given in exchange. This is why Antigonus spoke thus. For when divine service is given in this way, I mean, in the expectation of receiving a prize, it is implicit that through that service, God has received something from you for which a prize should be given in exchange. Thus you relate to Him as do those exchanging in a business transaction. In the latter case, the ranks of the parties involved are equal, and neither party benefits the other in such a way that he must be honored or feared or submitted to, for each party is equally in need of the other. Instead, be like servants who serve not to receive this sort of prize—I mean, as a reward for the benefit that you rendered unto Him in service to Him. Instead, hope that in your labors you receive a reward by way of His compassion and grace, for He has willed your wellbeing and pleasure with a perfect will, even though no benefit accrues to Him thereby. In this way, fear of heaven shall be upon you and you shall be wary before Him, inasmuch as He does not benefit you out of His own need at all. And you shall strive always to be correct before Him, to satisfy His will.

¹²⁵ See Maimonides’ commentary on m. Abot 1:3:

פרס יקרא הגמול אשר יגמל האדם ממי שאין לו טובה עליו אבל יעשה זה על דרך החסד והתנינה

¹²⁶ I.e., Maimonides’ conceptualization of *pras* as “a benefit (*gemul*) granted by someone who does not gain from the recipient” is precisely the opposite of Arama’s, the latter buttressed by Targum Jonathan’s rendering of 2 Sam. 8:2 and Onkelos’ rendering of Lev. 27:2. Consequently, Maimonides’ reading of Abot 1:3 is directly opposed to Arama’s—whereas Arama suggests Antigonus only enjoins against serving God for the sake of a compensatory prize of exchange, but implicitly permits serving God in hopes of a reward given out of compassion, Maimonides understands Antigonus as enjoining explicitly against the latter as well; see note 131 below.

[11] Although the word reward (*sakhar*) is [sometimes] used to refer to the notion signified by the word prize (*pras*), as in: *for I surely have rewarded thee with my son's mandrakes* (Gen. 30:16); *for the reward of a hireling* (Deut. 15:18); *in the same day thou shalt give him his reward* (Deut. 24:15), and many besides these—it is known that it also can signify a bounty given independent of any exchange of goods, as in: *For your activity shall be rewarded* (2 Chron. 15:7); or as the Sages said: “a sinner is rewarded” (b.Abodah Zara 2b); “he is diligent and rewarded” (b.Hullin 82a); “he is close to a reward” (b.Baba Mezia 64b); “and he is far from reward” (b.Baba Mezia 70a), for the aim in all of these is the opposite of corruption. [Whenever the Sages mean to signify this notion,] this is the only term they employ: “the reward of a commandment is a commandment” (m.Abot 4:2); “there is no reward for commandments in this world” (b.Hullin 142a); “today is the time to do them, but today is not the time to receive reward” (b.Aboah Zarah 3a); “the grant of reward unto the righteous” (m.Abot 2:16); “and the laborers are indolent and the reward is great” (m.Abot 2:15). They never used the word prize (*pras*) in this connection, as would be necessary according to the explication of the Master, may his memory be blessed, who went on to say there¹²⁷ that the word reward (*sakhar*) is only used in reference to legal compensation. This Sage¹²⁸ used the word prize (*pras*) here¹²⁹ to teach something specific, as we said.¹³⁰ It is possible that his particular use of language here confused his students Zadok and Boethus, for they did not comprehend his intention and took him to mean there was no reward, and they apostatized.¹³¹

¹²⁷ I.e., the continuation of Maimonides' commentary on Abot 1:3:

זהו ההפרש אשר בין פרס לשכר כי השכר הוא שינתן בדין

¹²⁸ I.e., Antigonus.

¹²⁹ I.e., in Abot 1:3.

¹³⁰ Arama suggests Antigonus only enjoins against serving God for the sake of a compensatory prize of exchange, but implicitly permits serving God in hopes of a reward given out of compassion, contra Maimonides.

¹³¹ Arama here refers to the story from Abot de Rabi Natan 5:2, reprised by Maimonides in his commentary on Abot 1:3 and elsewhere, that two of Antigonus' students misconstrued the meaning of his dicta, originating two heretical

[12] In truth, all those who in performing the commandments aim at that good attained for the felicity of souls—they *shall be named the priests of the Lord; men shall call them ministers of our God* (Isa. 51:6). As for how the felicitous attains this reward by way of these commandments, speculation is great.¹³² That is, if it is said that this good reward is attained through the commandments either by nature or through some property,¹³³ as some think, this bears a trace of heresy. For it is similar to what the philosophers said about how all things are attained through the necessity of their causes, by way of compulsion, without their being any regard to the will of One who Wills or the commands of the Commander at all.¹³⁴ Or it is like a branch of idolatry; like those who would do illogical things for the sake of attaining some benefit or felicity, as the Master and Guide, may his memory be a blessing, wrote of the Sabians.¹³⁵ The divine Torah was designed to expunge this and the like. In all cases, it strives to rid us of these idolatrous actions and rightly guide us, that our actions might be directed toward the will of the Lord, always. This is the noble notion which was spoken of in Sifrei, as we mentioned above¹³⁶: “in order that I should have a portion in the World to Come, but the Torah teaches,” and so on. However, when we carefully contemplate their wondrous dictum, it does not say—[lest you say] ‘I shall wear tefillin,’ or ‘I shall do charity,’ or ‘I shall perform any other commandment,’ as he

sects: The Sadducees and the Boethusians, according to the Rabbinic Sages, and the Karaites according to Maimonides.

¹³² Having concluded his discussion on what sorts of intentions are permissible in performing the commandments, Arama now moves the discussion to the mechanism by which reward is attained in performance of the commandments, rejecting both the philosophical implication that the rewards attained through the commandments are attained naturalistically, through a chain of causal necessity, as well as the astral-magical implication that the commandments deliver rewards by way of *segullot*.

¹³³ Here Arama uses *segullah* in the non-Aristotelian, occult and astral-magical sense; see sec. 3.3.2.1 above.

¹³⁴ This connects to AY Gate 1, where Arama discusses al-Ghazali’s distinction between an agent/maker as opposed to a prime mover, and with him insists that conceptualizing God as the former is indispensable for sustaining the chief theological virtue of fear, as well as several dogma.

¹³⁵ See *Guide* III.29–30 and Sarah Stroumsa, “‘Ravings’: Maimonides’ Concept of Pseudo-Science,” *Aleph* 1 (2001): 141–163.

¹³⁶ I.e., the passage from Sifrei *parashat Ekeb* quoted in sec. [3] above.

said there, “ ‘I give charity to the poor so that...’ ” and so on (cf Pesahim 8a)—rather, it says: “[lest you say] ‘I study Torah,’ ” and so on.¹³⁷ That is, they aimed to deliver people from their imagined, popular opinion that spiritual felicity and the perdurance of the soul follows necessarily from striving to theoretically apprehend intelligibilia, irregardless of whether the one apprehending is fit and pleasing before his God or *a hard man and an evildoer* (1 Sam. 25:3). For [they think that] this property is bound up with the quantity and quality of apprehended intelligibilia, and not at all with the will of the Creator, may He be exalted, rewarding those deeds that please Him. Inasmuch as the Torah, both in generals and particulars, rejects this corrupt opinion, as we said¹³⁸ and as shall become further clear, [Sifrei] said that it is unnecessary to say that man ought not study Torah to attain wealth or honor, [i.e.,] in the way that one might take nourishment and medicines to attain strength and health, the latter being benefits that attain through nature or some property. However, even if his aim is to study, so that through that theoretical contemplation he will necessarily attain life in the World to Come, as the philosophers thought—[even this] is prohibited. Rather, his aim in studying should be to love the Lord and satisfy His will, as shall be mentioned.

[13] The proposition that reward is attained through the commandments by either nature or some property has thus been undermined. But if we should say that that reward is attained through God’s will and that those activities[=i.e., the commandments, studying] are not essential, then we

¹³⁷ Arama’s point here is that the Sifrei’s enjoins specifically against saying that “I study Torah...in order to merit the World to Come,” rather than against saying one engages in other commandments to merit the same, because the Rabbis were especially concerned with pretention that study and intellectual activity would (necessarily, through a causal chain) bring about some benefit. In this sense, Arama reads the Rabbis as working against the same overly-philosophical culture that God was at the time of the giving of the Torah; i.e., a culture that sees only necessary causality and not the possibility of divine intervention into the natural order, and that understands intellectual perfection as the path to immortality; see 2.3.2 and 2.2.1 above.

¹³⁸ I.e., in both Parts I and II of this Gate.

have returned to the position of the people who are not of religion.¹³⁹ For they said that aiming at heaven alone is sufficient and that all other actions are futile and vain. This justifies the question of the wicked son, who said: “what is this service for you?”

[14] However, from what was set forth in the two [previous] parts of [this] Gate, it was made very clear that both cases can be reconciled. That is, the divine commandments were given to Israel in order that all of them would participate in the divine good in the two respects that we spoke of, whether for some external benefit in this temporal life, or else for some spiritual benefit, which is the felicity of the eternal World. The Psalmist spoke in reference to both of these. In reference to the former he said: *more to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also*, and so on (Ps. 19:11). In reference to the latter: *Thy servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward* (Ps. 19:12), as we said at the beginning. Just as the first benefit is attained on account of how desirable that action is, in its external aspect, so too the spiritual benefit is attained on account of the soundness of the accompanying thought—the latter of which results from the action’s being divine, and the intention being to fulfill God’s will. As they said: “*a sweet savour—gratifying to Me, in that I spoke and My will was done*” (Sifrei

¹³⁹ Having established that the reward of the commandments is attained through the divine will and not as a product of either necessary causality or *segullot*, Arama deals with a potential issue of the opposite extreme; namely, the belief that divine will is so radically divorced from action in the world that the latter and so the commandments are entirely irrelevant. The imagined target of Arama’s attack is unclear to me: does he mean people who he views as lacking any religion (*dat*), or only his religion? Either way, his understanding should be understood in connection with his earlier gloss of the wicked son’s remarks in AY Gate 38, where he explains that the appropriate response to the wicked son’s remarks highlights the connection between the commandments and the theological ideas they inculcate, in turn implicitly tethered to divine reward:

ומכאן אחז"ל רשע מה הוא אומר מה העבודה הזאת לכם וגו'. כי ראו שהכתוב ייחדו מכל הבנים בלשון עירעור וקנטור ולזה הוא מבואר כי אומרו מה העבודה הזאת לכם וגו' הוא כאומרו מה לכם ולעבודה הזאת וגו' כלומר מה בצע כי נעבוד אלהים והוא ערעור על התכלית ולזה ייחד הכתיב תשובתו ואמרם זבח פסח הוא לה' אשר פסח וגו'. כי בזה נתברר אצלנו תכלית האמות מציאותו ויכלתו והשגחתו מה בצע כי נעבוד אלהים והוא ערעור על התכלית

Bamidbar 143). For this is the nourishment that must be taken by every soul, to perdure forever before the Lord, as we wrote in the *parashah* on the manna in Gate 41.¹⁴⁰

[15] In this way, those who do the commandments are like the ministering angels that *fulfil His word, hearkening unto the voice of His word* (Ps. 103:20).¹⁴¹ The angels choose the path of their perfection, i.e., their good, thereby satisfying the will of their Maker. He created them to serve Him in this way, and this is the final purpose that is fitting for them. Meanwhile, we satisfy our own will by perfecting ourselves in this way through right guidance. Both for our benefit and in order that He sustain us, through His will, to the same degree as them, eternally and forever before Him—this is the final purpose for us, as we wrote.¹⁴² It is then clear that it is fitting for man to attain the aim of the commandments he performs by intending to fulfill God’s commandment and satisfy His will. For in satisfying it, he will attain the benefits hoped for in both worlds, by His will. Thus if another asks him: “what are these services to you,” his reply shall be: “for thusly His kingdom is established forever, exalted be His name, and we are not permitted to desist from His commandments!” And when another asks: “And what will happen if you perform this service?” He shall reply: “[I do so] in order to know with perfect knowledge and to believe with perfect faith that what the Lord desires is fear and trembling at His command; in order that He benefit him in this world and cause him to perdure for life in the World to Come.” And heaven forbend that God’s glory be diminished in the final purpose of all this being human felicity! Rather, it redounds to His exaltedness that all felicities sought from

¹⁴⁰ Arama discusses the nourishment of man’s intellectual faculty at length in AY Gate 41, but here he may have in mind the following:

אמנם המזון המיוחד אל החלק השכלי הנפרד הוא כל מוצא פי ה' מהמצות התלויות בו ומההערות הנלמדות ממנו שעליהם חיו יחיה

¹⁴¹ See Part I, sec. [19], [15]–[17] above.

¹⁴² Ibidem; also see Arama’s gloss of Eccl. 12:13, discussed in 2.2.3 and 2.3.3 above.

religion are contingent upon His will and service of Him. This is what it is fitting to take from this.

[16] This is what was clarified to the utmost extent in all the Torah's words concerning this subject, or [at least] the majority of them, and when you contemplate them, *not one word hath failed* (1 Kings 8:56). Do you not see his saying: *and now Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all His ways*, and so on, *to keep for thy good the commandments of the Lord and His statutes, which I command thee this day?* (Deut. 10:12–13). He clarified that God, may He be exalted, asked man to aim, in his service, first and foremost at serving Him and fearing Him and fulfilling His will—and that the aim in fulfilling His will should be that he attain some good thereby. This is why these two notions are always mentioned in connection with one another. So too in the reply to the wise son: “The Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, *for our good always*,” and so on (Deut. 6:24).

[17] This is why He made divine fear a mean between the action and its final purposes.¹⁴³ In the ten commandments: *honor thy father and thy mother as the Lord thy God commanded thee; that thy days may be long and that it may go well with thee* (Deut. 5:15). The Holy One Blessed be He explicated this, as it is said: *o that they had such a heart as this always, to fear Me and keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them, and with their children*, and so on (Deut. 5:25). He mentioned two purposes in connection with all of them: The first purpose, which is

¹⁴³ Unfortunately, Arama's meaning here is not entirely clear to me, though it should be understood in conjunction with his emphasis on Eccl. 12:13, and both his and his Solomon's emphasis on fear as the chief theological virtue, on which see 2.3.3 above, as well as AY Gate 92. In general, the centrality of fear in Arama's oeuvre—which he emphasizes far more than love—deserves further research.

fulfilling the commandment and fear; and the final purpose, which is the attainment of one's felicities. This is verified to the utmost by what our Master Moses, peace be upon him, said after mentioning the ten commandments in Deuteronomy: *now this is the commandment, the statutes, and the ordinances which the Lord your God commanded to teach you, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go over to possess it—that thou mightest fear the Lord thy God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments, which I command thee, thou, and thy son, and thy son's son, all the days of thy life; and that thy days might be prolonged* (Deut. 6:1–2). He said the first reason for performing the commandments was in order that *thou mightest fear the Lord thy God*, and so on, and that the reason for all is that *thy days might be prolonged*. This is very clear. Without this aim¹⁴⁴ it would be impossible to fulfill them, for fear is not the reward of action, but rather its cause.

[18] Now we have established what we wanted to, namely, that we are permitted to perform all the Torah's actions not in order to win a prize (*pras*) but in order that, on account of them, we will attain the reward of spiritual felicity. This is what the Sages' said: "*to love the Lord your God—do not do them save out of love*" (Sifrei Debarim 48:12). That is to say, do not perform them in order that something might attain to you by nature or necessity, but rather out of the Commander's love and perfect will. As for his saying "in His commandments and not in the reward for His commandments" (b.Abodah Zarah 19a), he only meant [the reward] in this world, as they explained: "there is no reward for commandments in this world" (b.Hullin 142a); and they also said: "today is the time to do them, but today is not the time to receive reward" (b.Abodah Zarah 3a). It is possible that what Antigonus meant is that one's aim in service should

¹⁴⁴ I.e., the aim of prolonging days.

not be to receive a reward in such a way that if he does not receive that reward immediately, he gives up. Rather, *resign thyself unto the Lord and wait patiently for Him* (Ps. 37:7). This is what they said: “R. Elazar says in the first chapter of Avodah Zarah: In His commandments and not in the reward for His commandments.” This is what we learned in [Antigonus’] saying: Do not be like the servants who serve the master on the condition of receiving a reward,” and so on (cf b.Abodah Zarah 19a). This intention is also correct.

[19] In any case, from what we have said, the force of the Sage’s dictum has become clear: “Greater is one who is commanded and performs it than one who is not commanded and performs it” (b.Qiddushin 31a). For only the one who performs it in respect of being commanded shall attain its final purpose. It is possible that this is the aim of “the reward of a commandment is a commandment.” That is to say, that the reward of a commandment comes in respect of its being a commandment, and not in any other respect. However, I have another noble explication for this, which I shall mention in the *parashah* on Ki Teze, in Gate 97, with the help of God.¹⁴⁵ With this, all of the verses and dicta that pertain to notions such as these have been finely clarified, and the upright intellect concurs in all respects. For when service is understood in this way, the final purpose of these Torah commandments shall be the most lofty among human purposes, as was mentioned. From now on, no one shall say that service is for the sake of this felicity and is subservient to it, since it has been clarified that service is nothing other than the servant’s attainment of this felicity in any respect. With this, we have reached what we intended in connection with this noble and terrible event, which includes the divine commandment [and]

¹⁴⁵ In AY Gate 97, Arama suggests the meaning of m. Abot 4:2 relates to the importance of early actions in the formation of habits: obedience to the commandments initially makes it easier to continue obeying commandments, and so too for transgressions.

participation between the upper and lower beings, and the cause for the diffusion of that participation amongst the entirety of that chosen nation, and their holding fast to it, since their felicity is contingent upon the performance of the Torah commandments. Additionally, it was made clear that the aim of these¹⁴⁶ is that through them, the Israelites become them *that fulfil His word, hearkening unto the voice of His word*, as they said, *we shall do and we shall hear*. All of these notions have been mentioned in these three parts.

[20] Now that all this has been settled, let us proceed to the explication of the words of this awesome story, mentioning some of the difficulties befalling it first. We already mentioned four of them at the beginning of the second part:¹⁴⁷

- (1) The repetition in *the same day came they into the wilderness of Sinai* (Ex. 19:1).
- (2) The repetition in *and when they were departed from Rephidim, and were come into the wilderness* (Ex. 19:2).
- (3) Concerning the verse: *and Moses ascended unto God before and the Lord called unto him* (Ex. 19:3).
- (4) Concerning the fastidious attention to ordering the words at the beginning and end.

[21] What we have already written about these is suitable to our purposes.¹⁴⁸ Now let us turn to mentioning the rest of the difficulties, in order:

¹⁴⁶ I.e., the commandments.

¹⁴⁷ Having concluded all three *derishot*, Arama now finally turns to an enumeration of *sefeqot*, beginning with a reprise of the *sefeqot* already discussed in Part II, sec. [4]: (1)–(4).

¹⁴⁸ Arama refers the reader to his explication of the *sefeqot* enumerated above, in Part II, secs. [5]–[12] above.

- (1) Concerning His saying:¹⁴⁹ *and ye shall be for Me a segullah*, and so on, *and ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests* (Ex. 19:5–6). He ought to have included these in a single expression, saying: *and ye shall be for Me a segullah from among all peoples and a kingdom of priests and a holy nation*. Why then did He divide them? And what is the meaning of this *segullah*?
- (2) Concerning His saying at the beginning:¹⁵⁰ *Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel* (Ex. 19:3), but at the end saying: *these are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel* (Ex. 19:6). Why does He not mention the house of Jacob [in the latter instance]?
- (3) Its saying:¹⁵¹ *and he called for the elders of the people, and set before them*, and so on (Ex. 19:7), when later it says *and all the people answered* (Ex. 19:8). Why are these elders not mentioned again? Further, throughout the entire parashah, no one is mentioned besides the *people* save in the first two instances.
- (4) Concerning His saying:¹⁵² *that the people may hear when I speak with thee and also believe thee for ever* (Ex. 19:9). He ought to have said and *believe thee for ever*, for the speech being in this way is a requirement for belief.

¹⁴⁹ First difficulty: Arama enquires why the two ascriptions to the Israelites in Ex. 19:5–6 are separated, and after the meaning of the term *segullah*.

¹⁵⁰ Second difficulty: Despite the seeming parallels of Ex. 19:3 and Ex. 19:6, why does only the former and not the latter mention *the house of Jacob*. Abarbanel reprises this question in his biblical commentary; see *Perush Abarbanel: Shemot*, 271, question 4.

¹⁵¹ Third difficulty: There seems to be a discrepancy between Moses' addressee in Ex. 19:7 (which includes *the elders*) and the lack of the elders' being mentioned in Ex. 19:8, or indeed anywhere else throughout the parashah. Abarbanel reprises this question in his biblical commentary; see *Perush Abarbanel: Shemot*, 271, question 5.

¹⁵² Fourth difficulty: Arama points out that the point of God's speech being audible to the people is ostensibly in order that it facilitate their belief in Moses' prophecy, but the biblical text's use of the word *and also* (ve-gam) in Ex. 19:9 suggests that God's speech being audible to the people and the people's believing in Moses' prophecy are separate.

- (5) Concerning its saying:¹⁵³ *And Moses told the words of the people unto the Lord* (Ex. 19:9) after its having already been said *and Moses reported*, and so on (Ex. 19:8). What is the significance of the two different terms employed here, i.e., *telling* vs. *reporting*?
- (6) Concerning His saying:¹⁵⁴ *and thou shalt set bounds unto the people*, and so on (Ex. 19:12), which according to the explication of Rashi, may his memory be blessed, means “set boundaries for them,” and so on.¹⁵⁵ Would it not have been more fitting for Him to say *and thou shalt set bounds unto the mountain*? Some have erred in confusing the two.
- (7) Concerning his saying:¹⁵⁶ *when the ram’s horn continues, they shall come up to the mount* (Ex. 19:13). For continuing is the opposite of cessation, and according to what they said, it is a sign of cessation. But if this is the case, their ascending was permitted prior to the cessation, and there would be no reason for such permission.
- (8) Concerning his saying:¹⁵⁷ *Be ready against the third day*, and so on (Ex. 19:15). This does not concur with what God said, namely: *and sanctify them today and tomorrow* (Ex. 19:10). [The Sages] have already said that Moses added an additional day of his own accord.

¹⁵³ Fifth difficulty: Apparent repetition in Ex. 19:8 and Ex. 19:9—what is the distinction between the Hebrew verbs used (*vayashev* vs. *vayagged*). Abarbanel reprises this question in his biblical commentary; see *Perush Abarbanel: Shemot*, 272, question 7.

¹⁵⁴ Sixth difficulty: Scripture’s language in Ex. 19:12 is confusing: is it not Mount Sinai, and not the people, to which Moses must apply boundaries?

¹⁵⁵ Rashi’s commentary on Ex. 19:12 is as follows:

והגבולת. קבע להם תחומין לסימן, שלא יקרבו מן הגבול והלצה. לאמר. הגבול אומר להם השקרו מעלות מכאן ולהלצה, ואם הנהיגם על כך:

¹⁵⁶ Seventh difficulty: The ram’s horn’s *continuing* (rather than its cessation) as indication that the Israelites are permitted to ascend the mountain is counterintuitive; shouldn’t its *cessation* indicate the cessation of the Shekhinah’s presence and so that it is permissible for the Israelites to ascend?

¹⁵⁷ Eighth difficulty: There is an apparent contradiction between God’s command in Ex. 19:10 to *sanctify them today and tomorrow* and Moses’ injunction in Ex. 19:15 to *be ready against the third day*. In this connection, Arama refers to the Rabbis’ noticing of this same apparent discrepancy in b.Shabbat 87a, in which they remark that Moses “added one day of his own accord.”

- (9) Concerning its saying:¹⁵⁸ *and there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud*, and so on (Ex. 19:16). Is the typical custom for showing respect not stillness and silence, *for the Lord was not in an earthquake; the Lord was not in a fire* (1 Kings 19:11–12). This is all the more so the case since the intention was that the people should listen, but *thunders and lightnings* cause great tremblings and disturbance, such that they would not be able to take in what they were gathered for! Moreover, the words of the Sages are heard in calm.
- (10) Its saying¹⁵⁹ first *and there were thunders and lightnings*, and so on, up to *and all the people that were in the camp trembled* (Ex. 19:16), and afterwards saying: *now Mount Sinai was altogether on smoke*, and so on, up to *and the whole mount trembled greatly* (Ex. 19:18). What is the meaning of these two tremblings? And why are they divided up?
- (11) Concerning its saying:¹⁶⁰ *and when the voice of the horn waxed louder and louder, Moses spoke*, and so on (Ex. 19:19). What is the meaning of the voice of the horn in connection with Moses' speech? It also says: *and God answered him by a voice* (ibidem). What is the meaning of this voice? Rashi's explication is well known.¹⁶¹
- (12) Concerning God's saying to Moses:¹⁶² *Go down, charge the people* (Ex. 19:21), and his response: *The people cannot*, and so on (Ex. 19:23). He repeated this, saying: *Go, get thee down and thou shalt come up, thou and Aaron with thee*, and so on (Ex. 19:24). Is Moses a counsellor and God, Blessed be He, a man to reconsider?

¹⁵⁸ Ninth difficulty: Do the conditions of *thunder, lightning*, etc., described in Ex. 19:16 not directly oppose the idea that listening respectfully should be done in stillness and silence? Abarbanel reprises this question in his biblical commentary; see *Perush Abarbanel: Shemot*, 272, question 9.

¹⁵⁹ Tenth difficulty: Why is *trembling* mentioned twice, separately, once at Ex. 19:16 and Ex. 19:18?

¹⁶⁰ Eleventh difficulty: What is the relationship between *the horn's sounding* and *Moses' speech*, described together in Ex. 19:19?

¹⁶¹ Rashi reads the *bet* in *be-kol* not as meaning “with a voice” but rather as meaning “concerning the voice,” i.e., about the voice or in regards to the voice.

¹⁶² Twelfth difficulty: Moses' and God's exchange in Ex. 19:21–24 might suggest that Moses knows more than or is playing advisor to God, as he appears to challenge God's initial request, upon which God appears to modify His request.

(13) After He *said Go, get thee down and thou shalt come up, thou and Aaron with thee*, and so on (Ex. 19:24) why did He not wait for them both to ascend?¹⁶³ Rather it says *so Moses went down unto the people* (Ex. 19:25) *and he spoke to the people, and God spoke all these words saying* (Ex. 20:20).

Now that we have mentioned these difficulties, let us proceed to their explication.

[22] *In the third month*, and so on (Ex. 19:1). In the second part of the Gate, we already explained that what was intended here are the six circumstances that require careful arrangement when requesting things such as these;¹⁶⁴ i.e., time, place, intermediary, order of words, possibility of the thing sought, appropriateness of the thing sought.¹⁶⁵ The first verse speaks of the appropriateness of the time. The second of the appropriateness of the place. The third of the intermediary, and the care taken in ordering the words in his saying: *thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob and tell the children of Israel*. The Sages said: “Why did he use the word ‘say’ in connection with *the house of Jacob*, and ‘tell’ in connection with *the children of Israel*? They said that *the house of Jacob* refers to the women,” and so on (Mekhilta Matan Torah 2). The aim of this shall become clear in what follows.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ Thirteenth difficulty: if God commands Moses to return and ascend with Aaron in Ex. 19:24, wouldn’t this imply that He intended to wait for their return to commence His speech? But Ex. 19:25 and Ex. 20:1 suggest otherwise.

¹⁶⁴ Arama refers to his discussion in Part II, secs. [5]–[6], that when requesting something difficult from another, an intelligent man will take into account several circumstantial factors to deliver his request under optimal conditions.

¹⁶⁵ This and the following few lines are an extremely condensed summary of Part II, [7]–[10] and reiterate the resolution to the difficulties enumerated in Part III, [20]: (1)–(4). N.b. How in Part II, [5]–[6], Arama speaks of six elements to be considered in making a substantial request, whereas here he has boiled the six down to four.

¹⁶⁶ See secs. [26]–[27], [32] below.

[23] *Ye have seen what I did*, and so on (Ex. 19:4). It does not please man to hear of the benefits he has received from another, for it recalls to him his humility and servitude. The Sage spoke about this in Ethics, Treatise 9, Chapter 8 in connection with the multitude. He said that this is the reason that benefactors love their beneficiaries more than beneficiaries love their benefactors. This is why God abbreviated the story of the benefits He worked for them, mentioning them only in a general way in saying *ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians and how I bore you*, and so on (ibidem).¹⁶⁷ That is to say, He took them from the utmost extreme of evil and delivered them to the utmost extreme of good, and in the most pleasing way possible, which is *on eagles' wings*. I think that by this He was alluding to the *voices/thunderings* that would reach them at this event, bringing them to their perfection even absent their already having the prerequisites which ordinarily must be attained a long time prior. Instead, it happened suddenly for them, as the eagle flies.¹⁶⁸ Further, *eagles' wings* are the *eagles* of the heavens known to those possessed of forms; their diurnal motion moves them in concert with the whole multitude of stars, making a complete motion every day.¹⁶⁹ It is possible that Jeremiah spoke about them in his lamentation: *our pursuers were swifter than the eagles of the heaven* (Lam. 4:19). He meant, they lay in wait for us in the wilderness. For from the time of the wilderness, of which it is said: *and I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto Myself* (Ex. 19:4), *they lie in wait for their own blood* (Prov. 1:18), for they knew when they slept and when they woke.

¹⁶⁷ Another instance of Arama interpreting scripture in terms of divine insight into the collective psyche; see my discussion of Arama's interpretation of the events at Rephidim and Meribah in 3.2.3 above.

¹⁶⁸ See Gersonides' gloss:

כאילו נשאתי אתכם על כנפי נשרים שהם מהירי העופפות

¹⁶⁹ Arama may have in mind here the constellation *Aquila*.

[24] Now therefore, *if ye will hearken unto My voice indeed*, and so on (Ex. 19:5). He meant, although you are obligated to fulfill My commandment on account of what I have already done for you absent any further recompense, I do not desire this.¹⁷⁰ Rather, *if ye will hearken unto My voice indeed and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a segullah for Me*, and so on (ibidem). He spoke only briefly in mentioning the commandments, summing them up in general. But he went on at length in elaborating their reward, for now He came upon them with words of grace and compassion. This in contrast to what had occurred at Marah, of which it was said: *there He made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there He proved them*, and He said: *‘if thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God and wilt do that which is right in His eyes and wilt give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes’*, and so on (Ex. 15:25–26). There He mentioned actions at great length and their reward at a minimum, as was made well clear.¹⁷¹

[25] As for the meaning of this *segullah*,¹⁷² it is very rhetorical, namely, to teach that if they would now accept the yoke of the kingdom, their trial would be complete and He would bring them from among all other nations into His treasure chest. He would do this without protest or dispute from the princes of the world;¹⁷³ i.e., without their¹⁷⁴ saying that the Israelites fell under their domain for generations, from the time of Terah, and who would deliver them now?! This is why He said that He is like a king who gave his servants a city or place or inheritance wherein

¹⁷⁰ Arama thus glosses God's promises to Israel in Ex. 19:5 in terms of the theory of reward detailed in secs. [10]–[18] above, as gifts of God's generosity and compassion.

¹⁷¹ See Arama's enumeration of the tenth *sa'eq* in AY Gate 40:

אומרו אם שמוע תשמע לקול ה' אלהיך והישר בעיניו תעשה וגו' כל המחלה וגו' כי הרבה עליהם מעשים והמעט להם את השכר הפך ממה שראוי לעשות בתחלה וכ"ש בהיות נפש העם מרה

¹⁷² Resolution of the second difficulty enumerated in [21]–(1) above: What is the meaning of *segullah*? Note Arama here reverts to much more simplistic peshat explication than the Aristotelian conceptualization he develops in Parts I and II.

¹⁷³ Lit. “the princes amongst whom God divided governance of the world;” Arama is careful in his formulation to reflect the idea that governance always belongs to God and is only allotted to earthly rulers.

¹⁷⁴ I.e., the princes.

some time later, silver or gold was found. It is well-known that, according to royal law, [the precious metal] belongs to the king. For he only gave his servants those fruits of the land that are regular and visible, while all hidden wealth still belongs to him. So too from the beginning;¹⁷⁵ our fathers were idolaters and fell under the domain of strange gods, as we said. However, when the righteousness of our father Abraham was aroused from the east, it was as though something more precious than gold and fine gold had been found, something that previously had been hidden. He set down a law and statute for him, trying him to purify him and to determine whether he was perfect; whether, like gold, he would emerge refined from the crucible of iron, as was said: *and broughtest him forth out of Ur of the Chaldees and gavest him the name of Abraham and foundest his heart faithful before Thee* (Neh. 9:7–8). He went on to test him ten times (m.Abot 5). There was much dross to be found, for Ishmael and the sons of Keturah were many. Isaac was singular, which is why He said: *Take now thy son, thine singular son* (Gen. 22:2); with Isaac, the dross began to diminish, bit by bit. Jacob's bed was perfect, but their nature was still not ready until they went down to Egypt and became a nation. The Lord delivered them from there and brought them to this noble and terrible place to *try them* this day, to know how they would answer Him. In this, their trial would be complete, He would take them out from the governance of all supernal princes, freeing them unto their portion, and giving them to be His treasured nation (*am segullato*). This is why He said: *if ye will hearken unto My voice indeed, and so on, then ye shall be for Me a segullah among all the peoples, and I have the power to do this for the governance of all the earth is Mine* (Ex. 19:5), and the hidden treasures found therein are the *segullot* of the king, without a doubt. It is correct to ask what the meaning of this *segullah* is, *for all the earth is Mine* in general, but you alone, *ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests*

¹⁷⁵ Here Arama commences another recounting of salvation history; see Part I, sec. [27] above.

and a holy nation, and this how you will know your *segullah*. In saying *a kingdom of priests and a holy nation*, He included all matters relating to asceticism and purity that pertain only to select individuals and those who aspire to be like them, just as He used the word *segullah* to include the thing that was shared in common by all. It is possible that he divided up these statements according to the two groups for which they are intended in order to both emphasize their aim and improve their rhetorical form.¹⁷⁶

[26] That is, His saying *thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob and tell the children of Israel* is intended to signify that He is arranging two different types of speech.¹⁷⁷ One is directed towards the entirety of the people, i.e., *the house of Jacob*, and this is His saying at the beginning: *ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagles' wings*. For the multitude would be greatly appeased by His having delivered them from corporeal servitude to total freedom. From their perspective, this connects to His saying: *if ye will hearken*, and so on, *then ye shall be for Me a segullah from among all peoples*. That is to say, although you are still a *people*, *ye shall be for Me a segullah among all the peoples* in His giving them good laws and fitting statutes. For through these, they will live their temporal lives in the most suitable and successful manner possible as compared with all the other nations on earth. As for the select individuals who are designated by the name *Israel*, He said: *and ye shall be a kingdom of priests*, and so on, which refers to the life of asceticism and spiritual perfection, that is to say, and your

¹⁷⁶ Resolution of the first difficulty enumerated in [21]-(1) above: Why are the two ascriptions to the Israelites in Ex. 19:5–6 separated? Arama here suggests that the two ascriptions are separated to emphasize that they are directed at different populations: while *ye shall be for Me a segullah* refers to the way in which all Israel is made distinct and superior to all other peoples; *ye shall be a kingdom of priests* refers to the elite among Israel.

¹⁷⁷ Building on his resolution of the first difficulty and Maimonidean principles of esotericism, Arama here suggests that God's speech to Moses which the latter in turn directs to Israelites, is in fact pitched at two levels simultaneously: to the entirety of Israel and to the elite only. That it is pitched at two levels indicated by the two referents in Ex. 19:3 (in turn transitioning us to the resolution of the second difficulty—): *house of Jacob* = everyone; children of Israel = elite only.

substance, *ye shall be for Me*, and so on. He connected this with His saying at the end: *these are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel* (Ex. 19:6). That is to say, this final notion is what He sought to tell him and all who are called by the name *Israel* alone from the beginning, for it is for them that this is fitting. As it was said later: *speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel and say unto them: ye shall be holy*, and so on (Lev. 19:2).

[27] In connection with this noble notion, you will find that “people” (*am*) is the only word used throughout this entire story, up until after the ten commandments, as it is said: *thus thou shalt say unto the children of Israel: ye yourselves have seen*, and so on (Ex. 20:18).¹⁷⁸ This is adjoined to *now these are the ordinances*, and so on (Ex. 21:1). The Sages said: “This was spoken before them, and not before the ignorant” (Gittin 88). The reason for this is that at the noble event, He was greatly concerned with the multitude—as shall be mentioned in our commentary, and as shall also be made clear in connection with *and ye shall be holy* in Gate 65, with the help of God.¹⁷⁹ This explication is very suitable, both conceptually and as regards the flow of the verses. It is an example of what was said to him at the beginning: *thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel: I am hath sent me unto you* (Ex. 3:14); *gather the elders of Israel*, and so on (Ex. 3:16), as

¹⁷⁸ Resolution of the third difficulty, [21]-(3): why *the elders* and *the children of Israel* are not mentioned again after Ex. 19:7, and the only referent from Ex. 19:8 through the end of ten commandments in the following chapter is the ‘*am*. Arama explicates this in connection with his resolution of the first and second difficulties, discussed in the foregoing sections with reference to the idea of esotericism: Because at Sinai God “was greatly concerned with the multitude,” the contents of revelation from Ex. 19:7 through the end of the ten commandments are only addressed to the entirety of people, and *not* in any way to the elite alone (indicated by both *the elders*, and *the children of Israel*). This whole section of course relies on very classical straightforward Maimonidean philosophical-allegorical reading of man/form, woman/matter, which A also uses to read a Rabbinic dictum in e.g., Gate 60. for him though the

¹⁷⁹ See Arama’s remarks in AY Gate 65, where he reiterates the idea that the events at Sinai and the ten commandments were focused on the multitude, and that the order in which the commandments were given there reflects God’s concern for the masses:

והנה להיות המעמד הנכבד והנורא אשר בהר סיני מכוון אל כלל העם כמו שנאמר שם (שמות י”ט:ט’) הנה אנכי בא אליך בעב הענן בעבור ישמע העם כי העם שם מיוחד לכלל ההמון ובשם ההוא נשתמש בכל הפרשה כלה זולתי פעם אחת כמו שנתבאר שם. לזה סדר דבריו עמהם על האופן המיוחד להם התחיל (שם כ’) אנכי ה’ וגומר. לא יהיה לך אלהים אחרים וגו’ ואח”כ לא תשא ואחר כך זכור את יום השבת כי כל זה מה שיורה על מציאות המצוה והשגחתו ויכלתו לצוות ולהשכיר ולהעניש ואחר התחיל במצות כבד את אביך וגומר.

was made clear there.¹⁸⁰ In the Midrash: “*unto the house of Jacob*—this refers to the women. And why unto the women first? Because they were more zealous for the commandments,” and so on. “R. Tahlifa said: The Holy One, Blessed be He said: When I created the world, the only one I commanded from the outset was Adam. Then I commanded Eve and corrupted the world. Now, if I don’t command women first, they will nullify the Torah; thus: *thus shalt thou say unto the house of Jacob*” (Ex. Rab. 28). Clearly, it is strange to say that he spoke with the women first; also because it is not mentioned that *we shall do*. But it seems that their intention was to [signify] the various ranks among the people,¹⁸¹ as we said. For the only thing He said to man was: *but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it*, and so on (Gen. 2:17) and this refers to the asceticism that is particular to the intellectual part only. This is why He did not persist in this,¹⁸² since it was necessary that improvement to the material part precede it—this is the correct meaning.¹⁸³ It is also possible that he spoke to [the women] first to set forth for them all the things they would need to prepare [their] matter, which is female, and dispose it towards acceptance. This way, the intellectual faculty would proceed towards its perfection sans protest. This all has one meaning. In any case, He ensured that the words indicated to the possibility of the thing sought; the ease of doing it; and its great benefit for both the entirety and the individual, each according to his desire.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁰ In AY Gate 35, Arama repeatedly glosses *the elders of Israel* in Ex. 3:16 as the wise, who were predisposed to accept Moses’ theological teachings.

¹⁸¹ Arama elliptically suggests a Maimonidean philosophical-allegorical reading of Ex. Rab. 28 and in turn *the house of Jacob* of Ex. 19:3: *the house of Jacob* signifies female = matter, and in turn the portion of the population more governed by the material part, i.e., the masses.

¹⁸² I.e., giving commands to “man” = the intellectual part = the elite = *children of Israel* = *elders*, etc.

¹⁸³ This connects back with the Israelites recognition that action precedes and leads to intellection; on which see Part II, sec. [21] and 3.3.2.2 above.

¹⁸⁴ Arama uses much of the language here that he did stipulating his four requirements for immortality in Part II, sec. [2] above.

[28] *And Moses came unto the elders of the people, and set before them these words* (Ex. 19:7).

It seems that he set them before them like a table laid-out; that is to say, the words themselves, exactly as they were placed in his mouth, sans addition or subtraction. Even though he intended this to be for the elders, *all the people were together* (Ex. 19:8). They were joined through that speech, and through the six circumstances that He had set forth prior,¹⁸⁵ such that their only answer was to concede and say *all that the Lord hath spoken, we will do* (Ex. 19:8). In the aggadah: “R. Avdimi bar Hama said: Why is it written, *and they stood at the lowermost part of the mount* (Ex. 19:17)? To teach that the Holy One, Blessed be He, overturned the mountain like a tub, and said to them: If you accept the Torah, it will be to your good, and if not, there will be your burial” (b.Shabbat 88a). The Sages intended to signify the deep necessity and intellectual compulsion there, due to the strength of those circumstances which He had taken care to establish—which were so fitting to bring about their consent—and due to the strength of those words He set before them in saying: *ye yourselves have seen that I have talked with you from the heaven*, and so on (Ex. 20:18); *now therefore, if ye will hearken*, and so on (Ex. 19:5); *then ye shall be a segullah for Me from among all peoples* (idem); *and ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation* (Ex. 19:6). He made known to them that their distinction from all peoples and their *segullah* and specific difference consisted in this, as we explained well in the first part of this Gate.¹⁸⁶ This is why He motivated them with poetic speech and sweet words, as though “he overturned the mountain like a tub” upon them, saying, “if you accept the Torah, it will be to your good,” for you shall merit to be distinguished and a select, elite treasure apart from all peoples, living a sweet life in this world and persisting also, with blessings, in the eternal world. But if not, you shall die like man and “there will be your burial,” and there shall be

¹⁸⁵ Again, see Part II, secs. [5]–[12] above.

¹⁸⁶ See Part I, secs. [18]–[21] above.

no perdurance nor hope for you after your burial. This is why they showed favor and accepted it with a perfect will.

[29] But this perspective is unique to the *sons of the most high*, i.e., those who are oriented towards the spiritual perfection hoped-for after death more so than towards temporal felicities.¹⁸⁷ Thus the Sages said there: “Rav Aha bar Yaakov said: From here, there is a substantial caveat to Torah” (b. Shabbat 88a). This refers to the multitude; for they conceded to what they did not know, and agreed to what they did not recognize, and there is no greater wrong or oppression than this. The answer is: Even if this was the case, they ordained and took upon them in the days of Mordechai, as it was said: “*they ordained and took upon them* (Esther 9:27)—they ordained what they had already taken upon themselves” (b. Shabbat 88a). The intention is that they were obligated to fulfill it not only for the sake of spiritual felicity, but also for the sake of temporal life, which they would only know by living in accordance with the Torah—and God would protect those who had made a covenant with Him from all evil and harm. As an example of this, scripture indicated to how God saved them in the days of Mordechai and Esther, when it was decreed *to destroy to slay and to cause to perish all Jews, both young and old, little children and women in one day* (Esther 3:13), and so on, were it not for the Lord’s having been with us. It is from this perspective that all were obligated to accept that which they had begun to fulfill, whether they were compelled in respect of that temporal good common to and shared by all, or

¹⁸⁷ Arama suggests that the Israelites’ response *all that the Lord hath spoken, we will do* in Ex. 19:8 is likewise complex: though it is uttered by *all the people together*, the elite and the masses mean different things in their agreement, only the former understanding that God has promised them eternal life, and the latter accepting obedience but sans full understanding, understanding only His promise of temporal (rather than eternal) benefits. For Arama’s understanding of the *sons of the most high*, See AY Gate 10, secs. [22], [28]; Part II, sec. [2], both above.

with respect to that good which is specially designated and longed for by select individuals. This is why all the people answered *all that the Lord hath spoken we shall do* (Ex. 19:8).

[30] One ought pay attention that their saying *we shall do* by itself preceded their saying *we shall do and we shall hear*, which they only said afterwards, on the third occasion.¹⁸⁸ This indicates to their perfection; and their careful consideration in employing proper speech; and their answers having been proper. That is, they saw and understood that each man's perfection would be in accordance with his activity and not in accordance with his idleness, as the Sage explained by way of *signs and demonstrations* in Ethics; which I shall mention in connection with some verses in Gate 55, with the help of God.¹⁸⁹ This is why at that event, they conceded to the action first of all, saying: *all that the Lord hath spoken we shall do* (Ex. 19:8). This was a perfect utterance; for they did not accept upon themselves any action, but rather that their action would be that particular to the perfect man, which is the activity of the soul in accord with its rank/virtue. This is what they intended in their saying *all that the Lord hath spoken*, for that special action which *the Lord hath spoken* or would speak, fulfilled with the counsel and accord of the rational soul—this is precisely the action that was intended at the time of creation, in His saying: *and put him in the Garden of Eden to serve it and to keep it* (Gen. 2:15). He meant, *to serve and to keep* watch over the soul which was mentioned first in the story, in his saying: *and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life* (Gen. 2:7), which is a correct explication, as we wrote there.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁸ See Part I, secs. [19]–[21], Part II, sec. [20], and 3.3.2.2 above.

¹⁸⁹ Arama cites from *Ethics* I.5 on this point at the very beginning of AY Gate 55.

¹⁹⁰ Arama almost certainly has in mind AY Gate 6, which treats his theory of the soul extensively and for which Gen. 2:7 serves as the *nose*. See Heller-Wilensky, *Arama*, 137–148.

[31] However, they also recognized and knew that the soul's activity is comprised of both practical and intellectual/theoretical activity—and that the latter is unique to the separate intellects and those divine men who remove themselves from the ranks of most men, and who are very few. Then since the aim of that event was for the good and perfection of the entirety of them through this divine participation, as we explained in the second part of the this Gate, their wisdom allowed them to reply and say *all that the Lord hath spoken we shall do*.¹⁹¹ That is to say, they accepted to undertake the activity of the soul according to its practical virtue/rank, which all were able to undertake. This is the meaning of *and all the people answered together*, for it was possible for all of them to be equal in this. This is precisely what was mentioned after the ten commandments: *and Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice, and said: 'all the words which the Lord hath spoken will we do'* (Ex. 24:3). Only in the third instance did they mention that perfection that is unique to the elite individuals, and which is attained by way of their *hearing and investigating* (cf Eccl. 12:11) the divine Torah, its meanings and secrets—for this is most certainly the activity of the soul in accordance with its theoretical virtue/rank. This is why it was said there: *and he took the book of the covenant and read in the hearing of the people and they said: all that the Lord hath spoken we shall do and we shall hear* (Ex. 24:7). The activity [of the soul] according to its practical rank/virtue was encompassed by the word[s] *we shall do*, while that according to the theoretical rank/virtue was encompassed by the word[s] *we shall hear*—for the former is undoubtedly a preparation and path towards the latter.¹⁹² This concludes what the Sages said there: “This is the language that the ministering angels use: fulfilling first, and only

¹⁹¹ Here again, Arama reprises the idea that the Israelites' give precedence to *doing* over *hearkening* because of their recognition of the accessibility and ease of material, bodily action over intellection. See Part II, sec. [2] above.

¹⁹² See Part I, sec. [19] and AY Gate 47.

afterwards hearkening,” as we wrote at the beginning. This is what they meant when they said that He spoke with the women first; for they replied *we shall do* first, corresponding to the material part, on account of which it was said: *ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians* (Ex. 19:4), as was mentioned. And only afterwards they said *and we shall hear* corresponding to the intellectual part, on account of which it was said: *now therefore, if ye will hearken unto my voice indeed*, and so on (Ex. 19:5), as we wrote above or nearby. In Gate 47, with the help of God, we shall further clarify the noble significance of the variation in utterances; its being said *we shall do* on one occasion; *we shall do and we shall hear* on another occasion; and *we have heard and we have done* on a third occasion—this in addition to what we have already written.

[32] Moses had still not reached the end of their aim in saying *all that the Lord hath spoken we shall do*, for at the beginning he only considered that they had accepted upon themselves all that H/he had spoken unto them. This is why it did not say *and Moses told (h/g/d)*; for the word “telling” entails all the words and their meanings.¹⁹³ Instead, it said *and Moses reported* (Ex. 19:8), the meaning of which encompasses repeating the words themselves, without considering/contemplating their intention. When God, may He be exalted, said to him: *lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee and may also believe thee for ever* (Ex. 19:9), he understood that He had not said this for no reason, but rather because He knew that they wanted to hear words from His mouth. Thus he was stirred to plumb the depths of their aim and he assessed that in their saying *all that the Lord hath spoken we shall do*, they meant that *all* that it is clear to us *that the Lord hath spoken, we shall do*, as He said *if ye*

¹⁹³ Resolution of the fifth difficulty, [21]-(5) enumerated above: the reason scripture first says *and Moses reported* and later *and Moses told* is meant to indicate to different stages in the Moses’ comprehension of the Israelites words: initially he only understands that they’ve accepted God’s words; but subsequently he understands their intention.

will hearken unto My voice indeed, and so on (Ex. 19:5). This is why scripture repeated itself and said: *and Moses told the words of the people unto the Lord* (Ex. 19:9)—that is to say, now I know what they intended by their words, for this is what they meant when they *said all that the Lord hath spoken we shall do*. Up until that moment, he had merely *reported* what they said without hearing/understanding it, but now he *told* their true word. This is precisely what the Sages said: “A reply to this statement I have heard from them: We want to see our King.”¹⁹⁴ That is to say, enough of this word You have spoken; their reply is: “We want,” and so on. In truth, their aim was most perfect, and according to the tradition, this is the subject of the *saying kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for thy love is sweeter than wine* (Song 1:2) (Midrash Hāzīt Song 1). To extend the matter after this telling, it was said to him: *go unto the people and sanctify them today and tomorrow and let them wash their garments* (Ex. 19:10), for they will be unable to hear as they want to in any other way. This explication is the most correct of all that I have seen.

[33] To harmonize these two verses,¹⁹⁵ Gersonides, may his memory be blessed, made the issue a matter of prophecy in accordance with his view.¹⁹⁶ He said that a prophet does not receive emanations of prophecy from God regarding any which thing but only concerning those things

¹⁹⁴ Cited also by Rashi in his commentary on Ex. 19:9.

¹⁹⁵ i.e., The apparent repetition of Moses' relating the people's words to God in Ex. 19:8 (*va-yashev*) and Ex. 19:9 (*va-yagged*), what Arama identifies as the fifth difficulty.

¹⁹⁶ See Gersonides' commentary on Ex. 19:7:

ראוי שתדע כי הידיעות הם כולם אצל ה' יתעלה, והוא ישפיע לנביא אחת מהם זולת האחרות מצד הנביא — כי מצד ה' יתעלה כבר ישפיעם לו כולם יחד, אם היה אפשר זה במקבל — ואולם תתיחד ההודעה בקצת הענינים מקצת, מצד מה שתשוטט בו מחשבת הנביא, כמו שביארנו בשני מספר מלחמות ה'. ולזה מפני שהיה ייחוד ההודעה מצד הנביא, היה ראוי שיגיד הנביא מה ששוטטה מחשבתו בו; וזה כולו במראה הנבואה, כי יִקְרָא לנביא ענין הגעת הנבואה לו כאילו ישאל ויענה, וזה אמנם יהיה באמצעות הדמיון. וכבר תעמוד על אמיתת זה מההשפעה אשר תהיה בחלומות הצודקים, כי כבר תִּמְצָא בזה האופן פעמים רבות. והנה מה שאמרו ישראל **כל אשר דבר ה' נעשה** היה אפשר שיוכן על שני פנים האחד שיהיה להם אות כי ה' יתעלה מדבר עמו אלו הדברים אשר יצוה אותם עליהם, ויהיה הרצון באומרו **כל אשר דבר ה' נעשה** כל אשר דבר ה' לך נעשה, אבל רצוננו שיתברר לנו שדיבר ה' לך והאופן השני הוא שיהיה הדיבור דיבור ה' יתעלה, לא דיבור משה; וזה, כי אף על פי שיתברר להם שה' יתעלה מדבר עמו, הנה לא יתברר להם שיהיה הדיבור אשר ידבר להם משה הוא הדיבור אשר דיבר אליו ה' יתעלה. והנה לא היו ישראל סכלים שירצו שידבר להם ה' יתעלה בעצמו, כי זה היה בלתי אפשר להם, אבל רצו שיתחדש על דרך מופת מה' יתעלה מה שיוודיע להם רצון ה' יתעלה מזולת שישמעו זה מפי משה, כמו שהכירו ענין מצות שבת מפני המן קודם שישמעו זה מפי משה. והנה השיב משה את דברי העם אל ה', והבין אותם משה אז לפי האופן הראשון — רוצה לומר שהם רצו שיהיה להם אות יעיד להם כי ה' יתעלה מדבר עמו, ואז יעשו כל אשר ידבר עמו ה'.

that his thought dwells on. Now the dictum *all that the Lord hath spoken we shall do* has two possible meanings:¹⁹⁷ One is that [they wanted] it to be verified for them that the Lord hath spoken to him through some sign or symbol. The second is that [they wanted] it to be verified for them that what was spoken to them in the name of the Lord was precisely what the Lord hath spoken, without a doubt. Because Moses initially understood them to have meant the first of these, this is what scripture intended in saying:¹⁹⁸ *and Moses reported the words of the people unto the Lord* (Ex. 19:8); and it was for this reason that he was given a reply connected with what he had understood them to mean:¹⁹⁹ *lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, as they listen*. But afterwards, when he contemplated their words more, he understood the second intention, in regards to which it was said: *and Moses told the words of the people unto*, and so on. The second reply corresponded to this; and He said: *go unto the people and sanctify them, for he meant that they wanted to hearken to the voice of His words, and it was fitting that they be sanctified*. This is the entire meaning of his²⁰⁰ words,

¹⁹⁷ According to Gersonides, there were two ways Moses might have interpreted the Israelites' desire as expressed in Ex. 19:8: The first is that the Israelites were seeking verification by some sign or symbol that God was indeed communicating to Moses, even as they wished that God should communicate with them directly; the second is that the Israelites were seeking verification that the things Moses was communicating to them were indeed God's words, even though they already believed that God was indeed communicating to Moses generally.

¹⁹⁸ Arama continues to summarize Gersonides' commentary, according to which Moses' response to God in the second clause of Ex. 19:8 (*va-yashev*) suggests that he[=Moses] understood the Israelites' desire expressed in the first clause of the same verse to be in accordance with the first of the two possibilities enumerated in the note above, i.e., that the Israelites were seeking verification by some sign or symbol that God was indeed communicating to Moses the things that the latter was commanding of the Israelites.

¹⁹⁹ See the continuation of Gersonides' commentary, on Ex. 19:9:

ובאתהו התשובה מה' יתעלה לפי מה שהבין אותו משה מדבריהם, לסיבה שזכרנו במה שקדם, ואמר אליו **הנה אנכי בא אליך בעב הענן** בעבור יראה העם בדברי עמך וגם כך יאמינו תמיד במה שתדבר אליהם בשמי, אחר שכבר יתפרסם להם היותי מדבר עמך... וכאשר שמע משה זה המאמר מה' יתעלה, שב להתבונן במה שאמרוהו ישראל, וידע שהם כיונו בזה שיהיה המדבר להם ה' יתעלה, לא משה; והנה הגיד משה את דברי העם אל ה' לפי זאת הכוונה השנית

As Arama's summary suggests, Gersonides explains that God's response to *come unto thee in a thick cloud* is indicative of His response to Moses' initial explication of the Israelites words in Ex. 19:8, as elaborated in the previous note. However, Moses subsequently revises his understanding of the Israelites' intention in Ex. 19:8 to be in accordance with the second alternative discussed in note 199 above—i.e., the Israelites were seeking verification that the things Moses was communicating to them were indeed God's words, even though they already believed that God was indeed communicating to Moses generally—and communicates this revised understanding also to God, now in Ex. 19:9 (*va-yagged*).

²⁰⁰ I.e., Gersonides'.

though he went on at great length—for he thought this would be of great benefit to the secrets of prophecy. But we see that he extended various prophetic notions in accordance with what he imagined was necessary to reconcile the verses with the true reality of existence. For who would hear in this way? If Moses were confused in his imagination and did not comprehend what they said, who would thwart the spirit of the Lord, replying to Him in a state of ignorance!²⁰¹ Heaven forbid that one should speak to the Lord in this way, which would be a stuttering and mocking for even one of the minor prophets, and all the more so for the Master of them all, peace be upon him! What I wrote however is most correct. For the word of the Lord came to Him to make known to him that which had not occurred to his heart, even though he was wise and understood its meaning.²⁰²

[34] I also found in Midrash Hazit: This is similar to a king who sought to take a wife, well-born and of distinguished lineage. He sent a messenger to her, who spoke to her. She said: ‘I am not worthy to be even his maidservant; however I wish to hear it from his mouth.’ When that messenger returned to the king his face was glad, but his conversation was not comprehensible to the king. The king, who was clever, said: From the fact that his face is glad, apparently she accepted, but his conversation is not comprehensible to me, so apparently she said: I want to hear it from his mouth. So too, Israel is the well-born woman, the messenger is Moses, the king is the Holy One, Blessed be He. At that moment, *and Moses reported the words of the people unto the Lord* (Ex. 19:8). Why then does it say *and Moses told*, and so on (Ex. 19:9)? Because it is said: *Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear* (ibidem); Moses said to Him:

²⁰¹ Arama takes issue with Gersonides’ interpretation because it imputes confusion to Moses; but cf AY Gate 80.

²⁰² On Arama’s reading in sec. [32] above, God precipitates Moses’ deeper understanding of the peoples’ meaning, though Moses’ understanding is never confused or incorrect to begin with, only partial.

‘This is what they demanded ’(Song Rab. 1:2:3). Now see with your own eyes how greatly he clarified this matter, as I wrote. For Moses’ face, peace be upon him, was glad in relating the first answer—like one who understood that they had accepted it upon themselves unconditionally. But his conversation was not comprehensible, which is to say, that he still had not understood the full intent of their aim. But the King was clever, and understood from these two that they wanted to hear it from his mouth; thus he said: *lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud*, and so on; the messenger thus understood too and said: ‘this is what they demanded.’ Not a one of our words here has failed. Moreover, our explication has brought us to the full extent of the Sages’ aim in this noble dictum, which has been understood by no one else.

[35] Now that this has been settled, let us return to the primary intention of the verse, His saying: *Lo, I come unto thee*, and so on. What is meant by this is: Inasmuch as prophecy is the root and foundation of the divine Torah, if prophecy is rejected then the entirety of the Torah—both in general and its details—shall fall. Now when one attains the verification of something by himself, it is stronger than if he were to attain the verification through something or someone else. This is why the divine Compassion and Will saw that the entire people should merit to participate/share in receiving the yoke of the divine Torah at that noble and awesome event, and at the rank of prophecy. Thus all would be equal in their verification of Him/it, without having to weigh any doubts.

[36] But it is rare and extraordinary that a great and abundant nation should be perpetually ready for prophecy, and all the more so that all of them should alike be prophets. Rather, what is possible by nature is that there should exist one individual, or a few in a generation, as it is said:

a prophet will the Lord thy God raise up unto thee from the midst of thee...unto him shall ye hearken (Deut. 18:15). The intention is that they would know and recognize that the reason for its being this way, namely few, is due to their deficiency and lack of preparation, and not at all due to God's inability or miserliness in benefiting those who are good and fitting. They would come to know this through the great fear and trembling that would necessarily befall them at that event from the *lightening and thunder*—i.e., that this was on account of their being imperfect, in respect of themselves, for that intellectual apprehension.²⁰³ This was apparent from the prophets of troubled times, from their fear and trembling, as was clear from Ezekiel and Daniel; for in exile, their apprehensions were each according to his rank. This is all the more so necessary for the whole great community; that they abstain from material things and separate from what is perceptible in order that that wonderous vision be impressed upon their souls. For in this way, that event would be most awesome for them, and they would not be burdened by the possibility of whether they could persist therein.

[37] Scripture clarified these intentions in this dictum. It said: *Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud* in reference to the great fear and terror—for a *thick cloud* is the absolute darkness from which the *thunder and lightening* proceeded, as it was said: *there were thunders and lightenings and a thick cloud upon the mount* (Ex. 19:16), and it was said: *out of the midst of the fire of the cloud and of the thick darkness* (Deut. 5:18). He said that He displayed these things for them in this way so that they would draw two conclusions from them. The first is that *the people may*

²⁰³ Resolution of the ninth difficulty, [21]-(9); even though we might expect God's words to be accompanied by stillness and silence, *the lightening and thunder* induces in the people a terror that helps them recognize that any limitation in their prophecy was because of their own incapacity and not because of God's miserliness. Here again we see a clear example of major theme Arama returns to and develops elsewhere in oeuvre, namely, idea that fear instills properly pious intellectual disposition; see AY Gates 1, 92.

hear the voice of His word (Ex. 19:9), as he said: *all that the Lord hath spoken* (Ex. 19:8), as we explained,²⁰⁴ and this is His saying *that the people may hear when I speak with thee* (Ex. 19:9). The intention is that the people would hear and intelligize the significance of *My speaking with thee*, for this would only occur if they attained the rank of the speech itself, and heard the words spoken there. The second is that from that prophecy and what was to follow, they would hear and be instructed of their deficiency and lack of preparation, which made it such that the whole nation of the Lord could not be prophets.²⁰⁵ Thus they would be obligated to rely upon a single prophet in each generation. He said: *and may also believe thee forever* (Ex. 19:9), so that they do not transgress against the Lord any more. We wish to see our King, *but they shall rely upon you or upon a prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee* (Deut. 18:18). And scripture testified that the word of the Lord would not be in vain for them if they did all that the Lord wished in this connection. This is what he said at the end: *and all the people perceived the thunderings and the lightnings and the voice of the horn, and so on, and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood far off* (Ex. 20:14). Verily, that event was most terrible for them, on account of which they said: *speak thou with us and we shall hear* (Ex. 20:15).

[38] In regard to the first of these things, He said: *that the people may hear when I speak with thee and may also believe thee for ever* (Ex. 19:9). It also said: *but let not God speak with us, lest*

²⁰⁴ See secs. [32], [34]–[35] above, in which God's reply that *I come unto thee in a thick cloud* signifies God's knowledge (initially not fully recognized by Moses) that the people wish to hear from God directly.

²⁰⁵ Here Arama resolves the fourth difficulty, [21]–(4): The point of God's speech being audible to the people is ostensibly in order that it facilitate their belief in Moses' prophecy, but the biblical text's use of the word *and also* (ve-gam) in Ex. 19:9 suggests that God's speech being audible to the people and the people's believing in Moses' prophecy are separate. Arama suggests that the two seemingly-connected statements in Ex. 19:9 are broken up because they correspond to two separate conclusions that the people ought to draw from the thunder and lightning, to some extent in tension with one another: (1) *that the people may hear when I speak with thee* is meant to allow the people to momentarily intelligize that God is indeed communicating with Moses; while (2) *and may also believe thee forever* is meant to teach the people that qua collective they are not capable of sustaining prophecy, and so must rely on a prophet in the future.

we die (Ex. 19:15). They conceded to believe in a prophet who was more prepared than them; for now they saw and understood that it was not possible for them to persist in that speech without perishing. This is precisely what is mentioned in the repetition of the Torah: *and ye said: behold the Lord our God hath shown us His glory and His greatness, and so on, we have seen this day that God doth speak with man, and he liveth* (Deut. 5:20). For they already believed in the existence of prophecy, as He said, *that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and he said, now therefore why should we die? for this great fire will consume us, if we hear the voice of the Lord our God any more, and so on, for who is there of all flesh, and so on, go thou near and hear, and so on* (Deut. 5:21–23). They conceded that there was none among them, and that it was not possible that among those *of all flesh* any had the power to endure at such an event. Thus, he would *draw near* alone, as would those prophets who followed after him, they would hear from his mouth and they would do. The Lord responded to these aims in saying: *I have heard the voice of the words of this people, which they have spoken unto thee; they have well said all that they have spoken* (Deut. 5:24).

[39] *And the Lord said unto Moses: ‘Go unto the people and sanctify them today’* (Ex. 19:10); admonish them of the invitation to corporeal asceticism and the washing of clothes and purification of virtues, all of which ought to precede their coming to the hands of the holy spirit, even though it is by God’s will that they are attaining to this in a short period of time, as He alluded to them in His saying: *I bore you on eagles’ winds and brought you unto Myself* (Ex. 19:4), as we said.²⁰⁶ This is his saying: *and be ready against the third day* (Ex. 19:10), for on the third day the Lord shall descend before the eyes of all the people, as He sought from you.

²⁰⁶ See Arama’s gloss of this verse in sec. [23] above.

[40] *And thou shalt set bounds unto the people* (Ex. 19:11).²⁰⁷ All the commentators' explications of this verse were contrived, such that one of them even said that the word *people* is used in place of the word *mountain*.²⁰⁸ But when you pay attention to what the Sage wrote in *Ethics*, Treatise 9, Chapter 11,²⁰⁹ you will know that everything that is contained in that book has the sole purpose of *setting bounds to people*, guiding them in that bound life which is sought by virtuous men. This is precisely the aim of the Torah and its commandments, through which they are bound and sustained according to the proper boundary, and which they shall not transgress—as the Master and Guide wrote in Part III, Chapter 33.²¹⁰ This is the meaning of the dictum *and thou shalt set bounds unto the people*, without a doubt. For the admonition *take heed to yourselves that ye go not up into the mount, or touch the border of it; whosoever toucheth*, and so on (Ex. 19:12)—whether it applies to that present moment or is meant to indicate to the entirety of the Torah that was given on that mountain—this is none other than the setting of a boundary unto the people.²¹¹

²⁰⁷ Arama's resolution of the sixth difficulty, [21]-(6), i.e., shouldn't Ex. 19:12 read; *and thou shalt set bounds unto the mountain*?

²⁰⁸ Arama may have in mind ibn Ezra:

והגבלת. תשים גבול בהר מסביב לעם...ואם אמר הגבל את ההר שוה הוא

²⁰⁹ See the following excerpts from *Ethics* IX.11 in the translation Arama would have had: (Meir Alguades', in Neria, "Joseph ibn Shem Tob's Commentary on the *Ethics*," 545):

אמנם לחיות הוא מהדברים אשר הם טובים כפי עצמם ומהנים והוא מוגבל ומבואר כי המוגבל אמנם הוא מאשר הוא טוב בטבע...אין ראוי לקחת חיים רעים או נפסדים ולא אשר הם בעצב כי אשר הם כן בלתי מוגבלים

²¹⁰ In *Guide* III.33, Maimonides theorizes on how the Torah commandments facilitate a certain degree of purifying asceticism, restraint from corporeal lusts and desires: "To the totality of the purposes of the perfect Law there belong the abandonment, depreciation, and restraint of desires in so far as possible, so that these should be satisfied only in so far as this is necessary." In this connection Maimonides also elaborates on the importance of internal purification of the soul and actions preceding external purification, such that the latter is an expression of the former: "cleaning garments, washing the body, and removal of dirt also constitute one of the purposes of this Law. But this comes after purification of the actions and the purification of the heart from polluting opinions and polluting moral qualities." Arama is clearly reading Ex. 19:10 (glossed at the top of this section) and 12 in light of these ideas.

²¹¹ Resolution of the sixth difficulty, [21]-(6): Arama insists emphatically that scripture definitely ought not have better referred to setting bounds to the mountain (rather than the people).

[41] *No hand shall touch him*, and so on, *when the ram's horn continues*, and so on (Ex. 19:13). According to what the Sages said, anything that is forbidden by a quorum vote requires another quorum vote to permit it. It seems that he ought to have spoken of the ram's horn's cessation, since they said that its²¹² continuation is a sign of its²¹³ having ceased. And if this is the case, the verse is meant to indicate a permission when it continues, but this would be strange, as we wrote in the section on difficulties.²¹⁴ Thus it seems that the peshat is according to the commandment of the bet din:²¹⁵ For if any man or woman ascends the mountain, *or touch the border of it*, no one should touch or seize him to bring him to the bet din, lest they too transgress by ascending or touching it. For he who ascends or touches *shall surely be stoned or shot from outside* the mountain. He also meant that this is how calamity occurs suddenly. This is his saying: *whether it be beast or man, it shall not live* at all. If he flees into the mountain in such a way that it is not possible to stone him from their place or shoot him with arrows, then even when *the ram's horn continues* they should ascend the mountain to stone him. This is after the manner of scripture's saying: *and if a man come presumptuously*, and so on, *thou shalt take him from Mine altar, that he may die* (Ex. 21:14). This reveals Onkelos' aim, in saying: "when the horn is sounded with a long blast, they will be permitted to go up on the mountain." All of this is meant to emphasize the threat and prohibition against going there. For if they knew it was permissible to put to death one who went there, who would think to do it?

²¹² The ram's horn.

²¹³ The Shekhinah's presence.

²¹⁴ Arama refers to the seventh difficulty, [21]-(7): The ram's horn's *continuing* (rather than its cessation) as indication that the Israelites are permitted to ascend the mountain is counterintuitive; shouldn't its *cessation* indicate the cessation of the Shekhinah's presence and so that it is permissible for the Israelites to ascend?

²¹⁵ Arama resolves the seventh difficulty with recourse to the dictum of the Sages to which he has just referred: The ram's horn's *continuation* is not an indication of the removal of the Shekhinah's presence and so that the Israelites are permitted to ascend the mountain simply; rather, because they are still so severely prohibited from ascending the mountain, they are permitted to ascend in order to stone another who has ascended and cannot be stoned from outside the mountain: "If he flees into the mountain in such a way that it is not possible to stone him from their place or shoot him with arrows, then even when *the ram's horn continues* they should ascend the mountain to stone him."

[42] *And Moses went down, and so on, and he said unto the people: be ready against the third day, and so on* (Ex. 19:14–15). The peshat of this is precisely what God, Blessed be He, said to him: *sanctify them today and tomorrow*, and so on (Ex. 19:10), since it is understood that today and tomorrow are equal, as the Sages said: “just as tomorrow includes the night preceding it too, so too today includes the night preceding it too” (b.Shabbat 87a).²¹⁶ The meaning of the verse is thus *and sanctify them* on the first full day *and tomorrow, for on the third day* from the first day, *the Lord will come down* (Ex. 19:10–11), not from the day of His commanding it. This is precisely what He said here: *and be ready against the third day*, for He counted the day of the command itself.

[43] *And it came to pass on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and so on, and all the people trembled, and so on, unto and the whole mount quaked greatly* (Ex. 19:16–18). It is clear that there are two types of obstacles to apprehensions such as these. An obstacle might arise in the limitation of those apprehending, or else due to the rank of the thing apprehended. Both of these were alluded to here.²¹⁷ As for the sadness and difficulty

²¹⁶ Arama resolves the eighth difficulty, [21]-(8) on the apparent contradiction between God’s command in Ex. 19:10 to *sanctify them today and tomorrow* and Moses’ injunction in Ex. 19:15 to *be ready against the third day*; Arama explains away the apparent contradiction with recourse to the idea that while Moses included the day that God gave the commandment to *sanctify them today and tomorrow*, God did not include that day; the “today” to which He was referring began that evening.

²¹⁷ Resolution of the tenth difficulty, [21]-(10): Why is *trembling* mentioned in both Ex. 19:16 and Ex. 19:18? Building off his explication of the ninth difficulty, [21]-(9) addressed in sec. [36] above, Arama suggests that the *tremblings* are indicative of the peoples’ limitations in apprehension; accordingly, the apparent repetition of *trembling* in Ex. 19:16 and Ex. 19:18 is to indicate to that there are two obstacles to the peoples’ apprehension: both the limitation of those apprehending and the difficulty of the thing apprehended: while the *trembling* of Ex. 19:16 refers to the former, i.e., “tremblings befell the people on account of their limitation and insufficient preparation,” the *trembling* of Ex. 19:18 refers to the latter, i.e., “they were attained by the difficulty that results from the rank of the thing apprehended and His loftiness.” These two obstacles—(1) the limitation of man’s apprehension or intellect and (2) the loftiness or difficulty of the subjects—are precisely the first two “causes that prevent the commencement of instruction with divine science” as identified by Maimonides in *Guide* I.34. Arama identifies these same attributes as characterizing man’s expulsion from Eden in Gate 10, sec. [26] above; see notes 81 and 83 there.

that attained them on their own account, it said: *And it came to pass on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of a horn exceeding loud, and all the people that were in the camp trembled.* He said that all the aforementioned travails and tremblings befell the people on account of their limitation and insufficient preparation. This is his saying *and all the people that were in the camp trembled.* Afterwards, he said: *and Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet God,* for they had already moved from their extremely low position and come *to meet God. But they stood at the nether part of the mountain* (Ex. 19:17), and there they were attained by the difficulty that results from the rank of the thing apprehended and His loftiness. Concerning this it said: *now Mount Sinai was altogether on smoke because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly.* Here, initially it was the people who quaked, then it was the mount that quaked, the mount of the Lord, also. See how he attributed most of the obstacles relating to the people to sense-perceptibles connected with the faculty of hearing, i.e., the shooting of hard and severe rains. But obstacles relating to the mountain, he attributed to sense-perceptibles connected with the faculty of sight, which are more subtle and abstract.²¹⁸ This is a most wondrous notion, for the former relate to things that can be perceived, while the latter relate to intelligibilia.

[44] *And when the voice of the horn waxed louder and louder* (Ex. 19:19). The *voice of the horn* was among the aforementioned perceptibles connected with the quaking of the people, as was said there: *and the voice of the horn exceeding loud* (idem). That is to say, although there were *thunderings and lightning* and *a very thick cloud* that indicated to their limitation insofar as they

²¹⁸ For the idea that sight is a superior mode of perception to hearing and of the senses most appropriately associated with God, see already *Guide* I.47.

were voices, they did not indicate anything comprehensible. Yet *the voice of the horn*, which voice does indicate something comprehensible, *waxed louder and louder*, and this is meant to refer to their beginning to apprehend, as was mentioned.²¹⁹ For this reason he said afterwards: *and the voice of the horn waxed louder and louder* (Ex. 19:19) in that comprehensible manner, so that, through their apprehension, they attained intellectual apprehension and were able to hear *that Moses spoke and God answered him by a voice* (ibidem). The meaning of this is that all Israel heard the voice in His speaking with him, conversing in question and answer. Thus it was verified that the voice through which they would subsequently hear the commandments—regarding which it was said: *the Lord spoke with you face to face* (Deut. 5:4), as shall be mentioned in its place²²⁰—was indeed the voice of the Lord Himself speaking with Moses, face to face. As he said to them: *now therefore, if ye will hearken unto My voice indeed* (Ex. 19:5), and they were scrupulous [in replying] *all that the Lord hath spoken, we shall do*, as we said.²²¹ This was precisely what testified *that the people may hear when I speak with thee* (Ex. 19:9); for one of the things that was spoken before them was that *the Lord called him to the top of the mount, and Moses went up* (Ex. 19:20).

[45] *And the Lord said unto Moses: Go down, charge the people, lest they break through unto the Lord to gaze, and many of them perish* (Ex. 19:21). He meant that that day, they ascended to a rank of prophecy, and it was not possible that many of them should fall, for *none shall be*

²¹⁹ Resolution to the eleventh difficulty, [21]–(11), i.e., What is the relationship between *the horn's sounding* and *Moses' speech*, described together in Ex. 19:19? Arama suggests that the voice of the horn's waxing louder and Moses' speech are related in that the former indicates the people's gradual comprehension, whereby they come to apprehend *Moses' speech* and that it is indeed God speaking to Moses.

²²⁰ Arama dwells on the meaning of God's having *spoken with you face to face* at length in AY Gate 89, but one of his most succinct statements there is as follows:

אמנם העשרת הדברים בכלל נאמר בהם פנים בפנים דבר יי' עמכם בהר מתוך האש שהיה הדבור בכלם בא להם כדבר איש עם הנמצא בפניו ואומר לו עשה כך או לא תעשה כך

²²¹ See Part II, sec. [20] above.

weary nor stumble among them (Isa. 5:27). And Moses said: *the people cannot* (Ex. 19:23). Ibn Ezra, may his memory be blessed, wrote in the name of Saadia, may his memory be blessed: “For many days I despaired over [the meaning of] this verse, until I came across a book dealing with the customs of the Persian kings in which it is stated that a king’s messenger does not have permission to tell the king that he has accomplished his mission until the king commands him to do another task.”²²² He criticized him strongly.²²³ *Go, get thee down, and thou shalt come up, thou and Aaron with thee* (Ex. 19:24). His²²⁴ opinion very much accords with what Rashi, may his memory be blessed, wrote, [namely,] that he thought they did not need to be warned again, since the Holy One Blessed be He had already warned them; he said that He would admonish them again at the time of the act (cf Rashi on Ex. 19:24).

[46] Inasmuch as Moses’ ascent to the top of the mountain is conjoined with the utter darkness God made, it seems that it was the will of God, Exalted is He, that at the time of the commandments, he be closer to the boundary of the elders and the people, in order that they not think that it was he who was speaking. This was also in order that they could see him and speak with him in the moment of their sorrow, as they said to him at the end: *speak thou with us and we will hear*, and so on (Ex. 20:15). This is why God, Blessed be He, said to him that he should go

²²² Here I use H. Norman Strickman and Arthur M. Silver’s translation of ibn Ezra, in *Ibn Ezra’s Commentary on the Pentateuch: Shemot* (New York: Menorah Publishing, 1996). As Strickman and Silver’s annotations suggest, according to ibn Ezra, Saadia finally comes to understand Moses’ relating to God that *the people cannot*, etc in Ex. 19:23—which appears to be merely a repetition of Ex. 19:12—as Moses telling God that he has successfully related the message God previously assigned him, after He assigned him a new task in Ex. 19:21.

²²³ After summarizing Saadia’s reading of God’s exchange with Moses at Ex. 19:21–24, Ibn Ezra criticizes it, positing his own alternative interpretation. In his view, Moses repeats *The people cannot come up* (in Ex. 19:21, after having already warned them in verse 12—) as a query, confirming with God that he should indeed warn the people a second time, after having already warned them.

²²⁴ I.e., Ibn Ezra’s reading of God’s exchange with Moses at Ex. 19:21–24, summarized in the previous note, is like Rashi’s; both Rashi and ibn Ezra suggest the exchange is precipitated by Moses’ failure to realize that the Israelites need to be warned again.

and testify further to the people—by way of an ethical device. When Moses became afraid that the speech would commence immediately upon his leaving, he rejected the command in his saying: *the people cannot come up*, and so on (Ex. 19:23).²²⁵ Perhaps he was righteous in God’s eyes, and he understood [God’s] reply as [him] having satisfied His will, and Him permitting Him to stay there. And when He made a true claim on him and repeated Himself and said: *go get thee down, and thou shalt come up, thou and Aaron with thee*, and so on (Ex. 19:24), he rejoiced at the ascent of Aaron and went forth and did not suffice to return to his initial place until the speech commenced.²²⁶ This is its having been said: *so Moses went down unto the people and God spoke*, and so on (Ex. 19:25–20:1).

[47] I searched in the Midrash and found the following: “Rabbi Levi said: This is similar to a king who sought to issue a proclamation without the input of his chief official. He said to him: ‘Do such and such.’ He said to him: ‘It is already done.’ He then said to him: ‘Go and summon so-and-so the adviser and let him come with you.’ When he went, the king did what he sought to do. So too, the Holy One Blessed be He sought to give the Ten Commandments. Moses was standing to His side and He said to him: *go down, charge the people* (Ex. 19:21). He said to Him: *the people cannot* (Ex. 19:23). He said to him again: *go, get thee down, and thou shalt come up, thou and Aaron with thee* (Ex. 19:24) until Moses went before the Holy One Blessed be He, as it

²²⁶ Arama resolves the twelfth and thirteenth difficulties [21]-(12), [21]-(13) in his retelling of Ex. 19:21–25, for which he finds inspiration and confirmation in the midrash cited in the following sec. [47]: Though according to Arama, Moses does indeed protest God’s initial request that he descend the mountain prior to God’s commencing the speech of the ten commandments—and this in order that the people not be confused that the speech was indeed coming from God—God never capitulates to Moses’ protestation, only Moses thinks so. Rather, God modifies His command to Moses on purpose to achieve the same ultimate end but distracting Moses with a different goal: By commanding Moses to bring Aaron up to ascend the mountain, Moses, delighted at the prospect of bringing Aaron up as well, has to descend the mountain and strategically timed in such a way that God could begin delivering His speech before Moses’ and Aaron’s re-ascent—exactly as He had intended.

is said: *so Moses went down*, and so on (Ex. 19:25), and immediately God spoke all these words, and so on (Ex. 20:1)” (Ex. Rab. 28). How excellently do the words of this Midrash help establish the peshat of the verses in illustrating how great the perfect man’s desire is to make H/his rank great, and how abundant his piety is in postponing it for a true thing and a righteous response, as is fitting. As they said: “Let the honour of your student be as dear to you as your own” (m. Abot 4:12). This is most verified from his saying: *and unto Moses He said: come up unto the Lord, thou*, and so on (Ex. 24:1), which is mentioned at the conclusion of these things, as shall be clarified there with the help of God. This is the extent of what we have wished to explain in this part of the story.

Introduction to Gate 60

AY Gate 60 is the second of two Gates dealing with *parashat Shemini*, and is devoted to covering the entirety of Leviticus 11. Formally, it deviates from the standard/ideal Gate structure in that after the standard opening matter, it seems to be nearly all *derishah*: The final section of the Gate is a highly elliptical summary gloss of Lev. 11 that hardly does more than hastily organize the verses of the chapter by classifying them into categories of prohibitions. There are no *sefeqot* and the turn to this elliptical gloss feels abrupt, unrelated to what came before it; one cannot but have the impression that Arama wrote it almost as an afterthought, or out of a sense of obligation to conclude with exegetical remarks on the *parashah*, though in truth he had been carried away by other things. This is not to say that the extremely lengthy *derishah* is strictly conceptual; to the contrary it is rife with exegetical digressions. In the course of the *derishah*, Arama has two lengthy exegetical digressions, in which he offers sustained, verse-by-verse interpretations of Psalm 103:1–22 and Isa. 65:1–18, respectively. At other points in the *derishah*, he also illustrates his ideas with recourse to substantial exegesis, including interpretation of a series of opening verses in Ecclesiastes (1:4–8) and interpretation of series of verses from Esther. He also, of course, engages in a lengthy and substantial exegesis of the *ma'amar*, a complex midrash from Song of Songs Rabbah, as well as dapples in interpretation of key texts from Mishnah: the opening lines of both Pirkei Abot (m. Abot 1:1) and Pereq Heleq (m. Sanhedrin 10:1).

From a glance at the outline below, it is perhaps apparent that AY Gate 60 is the most conceptually and thematically unified of the Gates we have seen thus far: All its discussions can rather readily be connected back to theme of God's special relationship with Israel. The Gate's ostensibly central focus on the reasons for the dietary laws—among the *huqqim* or so-called “irrational” or “hortative” commandments that distinguish Israel from the nations—becomes, on both interpretations, an expression of God's special care and concern for the Israelites. On the weaker, philosophical interpretation, the dietary laws are a mechanism of God's facilitating the Israelites' purification and asceticism, preparing them for eternal life ([12]–[17]); on the second interpretation, they are imagined as a sort of divine breastmilk, the specially-prepared formula of God as the Israelites' “master nursemaid,” tending to them in their youth to ensure that they are distinguished from and superior to all other nations in their constitution ([18]–[27]). Arama's exegetical digression on Psalm 103 is evidence of this ([28]–[35]). Though throughout the medieval period Psalm 103 and even more so Psalm 104 had been taken as evidence of God's truly universal generosity in the creation of all existents, Arama inverts this theme, instead drawing out how the dietary laws and Torah express God's special generosity to the Israelites in particular. The opening discussions that precede Arama's central explication of the dietary laws ([3]–[11]), as well as the discussion of *Pereq Heleq* that immediately follows his exegesis of Psalm 103 ([36]–[41]), can both be seen as buttresses of a sort for these central discussions (of the reasons for the dietary laws and interpretation of Psalm 103) that speak directly to God's favoritism of Israel. Albeit each in a different way, both the opening discussion and the discussion of *Pereq Heleq* attempt to justify God's special relationship with Israel as compatible with divine justice and goodness; no doubt anticipating tensions: While the opening discussions set out to prove the counterintuitive notion that “the Torah is the best species of guidance *because of its universality*” (emphasis my own), gliding slyly from the manifest good of what is truly universal to the severely limited universality of Torah, the discussion of the opening mishnah from *Pereq Heleq* threatens to confront the seeming insult to divine justice—that all

Israel, righteous and wicked alike, should have an equal share in the world to come—head on, only to slide through the problem with a facile trick of logic, that “‘Israel’ and ‘righteous’ are subject and predicate terms that can be transposed.” Arama’s final sustained discussion ([42]–[46]) is of course an expression of the theme of God’s special relationship with Israel too: Despite Israel’s long suffering in exile, and the nations’ relative wellbeing, Arama carefully reads Isa. 65 as God’s promise that fortunes will ultimately be reversed: while Israel is being punished for its sins, because it desired as much now, it is truly the nations’ whose actions are displeasing to God, and who will be punished both for oppressing Israel and failing to follow their light to true worship of God, all while the Israelites rejoice.

Both thematically and exegetically, we find in AY Gate 60 echoes of other aspects in Arama’s oeuvre we have already encountered. Exegetically, we encounter here a handful of key verses and parts of verses that Gates 10 and 44 have already taught us are significant: *ye mighty in strength that fulfill His word, hearkening unto the voice of His word* from Ps. 103:20—a shorthand for angelic and so ideal action which is importantly *not* restricted to intellection; those who are *given free access among them that stand by* from Zech. 3:7—a shorthand for intellectual perception of the angels or separate intellects; the notion of Israel as God’s *segullah* from Ex. 19:5—a shorthand for God’s transformation of the Jews into separate species via the commandments; the Rabbinic phrase “if he lives then he shall die, and if he dies then he shall live”—a shorthand for the importance of asceticism in achieving immortality. Exegetically too, and perhaps more so than in the Gates we have already encountered, we see Arama both recycling and repurposing interpretations he has already developed as well as building new interpretations off of interpretations he has already developed: examples of the former are his uses of Eccl. 1:4–9 to buttress his discussion of the theory of climes ([20]) and of Esth. 2:13–18 to buttress his discussion of the fates of the ascetic and licentious soul ([17]); examples of the latter are his allusions to his interpretations of Nadab and Abihu’s sin in Gate 59 and the sin of the golden calf in Gate 53 to develop his interpretation of the *ma’amar* and in particular R. Meir’s statement ([36]).

This last phenomenon especially—building new interpretations off interpretations he has already developed—point to the importance of reading Arama through Arama; really, in order to read just one sermon, we need all of them. The importance of reading Arama through Arama becomes even more clear when we consider how the themes developed in this Gate ramify with those developed in the Gates we have already seen. Not only in the beginning sections of this Gate where he foregrounds the issue explicitly, but also throughout Arama emphasizes time and again the virtue of universality (*k/l/l*) and its expression in God’s generosity with the *kelal* of Israel; as in Gate 44 earlier, in so many words, Arama here tells us that a rigorous commitment to universality and equality for those in a single collective ([39]) is as good as it gets—hence not only the biologically and spiritually transformative dietary laws, but also God’s protocols for land distribution and against enslaving other Israelites ([10]). Beyond the major twin axes of concern for the collective and Jews as separate species, however, in this Gate too we see Arama’s appeal to the different methods and objects of human versus angelic knowledge ([34]–[35]), as in Gate 10; his glorification of the commandments as such ([16]), as in Gate 44, Part II, and Eccl. 12:13; his recourse to the idea that sin is precipitated by not just any theological confusion—but specifically that arising from philosophical consensus ([36]), as in Gate 45; and his appeal to the axiom that the Torah’s knowledge must be unique, irreducible to that contained in philosophy, science, or anywhere else for that matter ([22]), as in Gate 10. Through these echoes and resonances, a clearer image of Arama’s primary thematic concerns begins to emerge,

even as they are given shape by heretofore unseen, if not much expected, preoccupations too: an interest in both the theory of climes ([19]) and the Book of Isaiah ([42]–[46]), both of which help Arama navigate issues in his contemporary landscape; also, astronomy, which Arama uses not only here ([31]–[33]) but in many other points throughout AY to craftily resolve a difficult exegetical puzzle.

For all Arama’s explicit citation or and/or recourse to Maimonides, Maimonideanism, and other philosophers in this Gate—Aristotle’s *Ethics* in both the opening discussion ([3]) and in formulating his alternative theory of the dietary laws ([18]); the theory of climes in developing the latter (ibidem); Maimonideanism of course in his first asceticizing explication of the dietary laws ([12]–[14], [16]–[17]) as well as in his interpretation of Isa. 40:27–31 ([9]); Maimonides himself in citations of the *Guide* ([16], [36], [39]); al-Ghazali’s *Maqāsid/Kavvanot* in defense of divine generosity expressed in existence as-it-is ([8])—Gate 60 strikes me as somehow reflecting Arama’s confrontation with philosophy least of the Gates we have engaged with extensively, and perhaps reflecting his successful domestication of philosophy most. With none of the systematic polemics of Gate 10, vitriolic attacks of Gate 44, or detailed counter-interpretations of either, Gate 60 seems to speak less directly to Maimonideanism, and instead to be in conversation with the rest of AY and Arama’s oeuvre more broadly; having already developed a framework of key texts and themes in previous Gates, one is left with the feeling that Arama here hits the ground running, associating and synthesizing frictionlessly.

Outline of Gate 60

I. Opening Matter

[1]–[2] *Petihta*

- [1] *nose*: Lev. 11:2
- [2] *ma’amar*: Midrash glossing Song of Songs 2:4—*He hath brought me to the house of wine and His banner over me is love*—from Song of Songs Rabbah

II. Derishah

[3]–[4] Proposition that because “the good is better and more praiseworthy in its being more encompassing and universal,” the Torah is the best species of divine guidance because of its universality/encompassingness.

- [3] Statement of proposition and defense, qualification of premise: Proof-text from Aristotle’s *Ethics*; qualification that universality by itself does not make good, but rather makes better that which is already good in itself.
- [4] Elaborating the consequent—that Torah is the most universal and so best species of guidance—by a comparison of God to the givers of other species of guidance, i.e., earthly kings: God is better than earthly kings, because while the latter are limited in how generous they can be and how universally they can extend the gifts of their goodness, this is not the case for God.

[5]–[11] Defending divine omnipotence and generosity—the conclusion of sec. [4]—from detractors: Arguments for and against the poverty of creation; divine generosity particularly as applies to Israel.

- [5] The ignorant detractors' rhetorical attack on the argument for unlimited divine generosity, implied by sec. [4]: If divine power and generosity were truly unlimited, why are some aspects of creation lesser than others, e.g., why are all beings not beings of the most lofty sort? Does the existence of lesser creatures not suggest either that divine power is limited, or else that divine power is unlimited, but divine generosity is limited? Ascription of these attacks to the believers in chance. Brief counterargument: Some existents are lesser than others because of the nature of their matter.
- [6] Another counterargument: Perfection itself requires diversity in existents, with some existents lesser than others.
- [7] Another form of the attack from sec. [5]: God's failure to make man such that he did not sin is indicative of either a lack of divine omnipotence or lack of divine generosity. Counterargument: the ability to sin is constitutive of human nature; to create man such that he would be an angel is impossible.
- [8] More counterarguments, philosophical and scriptural: Appeal to *Kavvanot ha-Filosofim* as dismissing as senseless attacks that ask why creation was not made otherwise than it was; Isa. 40:27–31 as scriptural prooftext rebuking such attacks and attesting to divine generosity.
- [9] Argument in favor of divine generosity in the earliest stages of creation via exegesis of Isa. 40:29: God's gift of privation to hyle, which enables the latter to receive a succession of forms and thence to become existents, is evidence of His extending benefits universally to all but with particular attention to the faint at the level of cosmogony and ontology.
- [10] Conclusion of defense of God's generosity to all existents; turn to focus on God's generosity towards the entirety (*kelal*) of the "chosen nation," with attention to worldly/temporal goods; God's gifts of land, stipulations on the selling of land, and prohibitions against enslaving other Israelites as indicative of divine intent for equal distribution, "in order that all receive good from Him in equal portion;" while earlier, Arama had explained that on a societal level, it is materially impossible to satisfy everyone's needs and wants and to make all of ruling class, Arama now concedes that God confers these special benefits universally upon the nation Israel, bequeathing unto them the promised land and making them an elite class among the nations.
- [11] Divine generosity towards Israel in spiritual terms: Torah actions and opinions as designed to transform the nature of *all* Israelites such that they are "as a different species, unto themselves." Particular expression of this in the dietary laws, which can be understood in two ways.

[12]–[17] Reason for the dietary laws I: Asceticizing restraint of corporeal desire

- [12] Reason for the commandments in general and thus dietary laws in particular is for the purposes of purification and inculcating asceticism; disciplining the corporeal desires of the body to man's intellectual and spiritual parts in order to facilitate eternal life in the World to Come
- [13] Maimonidean exegesis of Rabbinic dictum on the male and female Leviathan from b. Baba Batra in light of the foregoing: male and female Leviathan respectively allegorize form/intellect and matter/appetitive faculty; in order for man to exist as a composite of both whereby he might achieve his perfection, the two must exist in state of tension with

one another, but female=matter/appetitive faculty is ideally subjugated to and in service of male=form/intellect

- [14] Continuation of above: various names for the eternal reward that comes to those who successfully subjugate their corporeal desires in the temporal world
- [15] King David as exemplar of disciplining excessive corporeal desire and receiving reward accordingly
- [16] Insistence on the superiority of obedience and continence, i.e., successfully overcoming and restraining certain appetites, than simply not having those appetites at all: Arama treats Rabbinic idea that abstaining from what the Torah prohibits simply because one does not desire what the Torah prohibits is inferior to abstaining in the face of desire for such, because commanded; the latter is the source of reward.
- [17] Exegesis of Esther 2:13–18 as allegory for fates of licentious and properly ascetic souls in the World to Come: Other maidens referred to in these verses allegorize souls that are insufficiently disciplined and succumb to their worldly desires and thus are forbidden from entering World to Come; Esther, allegorizing the properly disciplined soul, is conversely favored by the King and given to enter His house and feast as symbol of the disciplined soul's rewards in the World to Come, accrued through abstention in this life

[18]–[21] Reasons for the dietary laws II: Climes, the biology of morals, producing superior Israelites

- [18] Second reason for the dietary laws as functioning to do the “work of a master nursemaid,” transforming the Israelites moral actions by transforming their dispositions, through careful manipulation of their biology via diet. Implicit stringing together of Aristotelian premise that actions are contingent on pleasures and pains (via *Ethics* VI.3); premise that pleasures and pains contingent on disposition (via Proverbs); and climatological premise that disposition is contingent on food to suggest that moral behaviors and actions are determined by diet.
- [19] Elaborating on the theory of climes as evidence: superiority and success of Shem's descendants due to their location in the intermediate and most moderate climes and location of Israel there; despicable/inhuman characteristics of those who live in the extreme climes. Variation between peoples corresponds directly to the variation in climes between them; accordingly, there is little variation amongst people in a single clime because their natures are determined by the same clime and basic conditions of existence.
- [20] Explication of Eccl. 1:4–9 as Solomon's insight into above, i.e., the lack of variation amongst people in a given clime due to climatological determinism: i.e., the clime's basic conditions identically determining the basic natures and so fates of all people in that clime
- [21] Explicit summary of implicit syllogism from sec. [18], with conclusion: “affections of man [are derived] from the things upon which he is raised [and these influence] his desires and opinions, such that nourishment is a major principle [constituting] the quality of men.” Since diet is determinative of moral character, God gives the Israelites dietary prohibitions in order to transform their natures and moral character in such a way as to separate and distinguish them from all other peoples and indeed form the species of man in general.

[22]–[27] Reasons for the dietary laws II, Elaborations: Prohibited foods and the sickness of the soul

- [22] Nuancing and qualifying the above: It might be argued and some have argued that prohibited foods are prohibited because they are physically harmful. Arama contests on two grounds: (1) This argument degrades Torah, because it suggests its knowledge is reducible to mere scientific or medical knowledge existing outside of it, whereas Torah's knowledge is essentially unique to it; (2) This argument is empirically false, for the physical health of the gentiles who do not adhere to the dietary laws is evidently not adversely effected
- [23] Prohibited foods are prohibited because of their precipitating sickness of the soul, intellectual confusion, "perverted desires," and generally "a spirit of impurity." This is why Lev. 11 "refers to prohibited and permissible foods by the names *impure* and *pure*."
- [24] Midrash from Lev. Rab. 13 as proof-text for the above: Just as a physician is permissive with an ill patient whom he knows is doomed to die, but insists on prescriptions for an ill patient whom he knows has the capacity to live, so too for God in his dealings with the other nations and the Israelites: He prescribed the dietary laws specifically for Israel because He knew that they alone had the potential to live eternally in adhering to them.
- [25]–[26] Elaborating the impurities precipitated/signified by various prohibited animals. Per a midrash from Lev. Rab. 13, prohibited animals may signify various nations and in turn the deficiencies in their climatologically-determined constitutions; alternatively prohibited animals' physical characteristics may serve as functional testimony and therefore symbol of negative moral attributes (e.g., sharp claws as evidence and so symbol of doing violence with the hands).
- [27] Conclusion of foregoing: Torah forbids prohibited animals "to teach of their natures and those like them among the species of man that this is a profound deficiency that defiles the soul, both from within and without." Divine guidance of the dietary laws thus facilitates the perfection of the entire Israelite people, by making it unlikely and much more difficulty for them to be attained by sin.

[28]–[35] Excursus: Exegesis of Psalm 103 in light of foregoing, as evidence of God's generosity with all Israel, via the dietary laws.

- [28]–[29] Gloss of Ps. 103:1–6 focusing on the benefits God provides to all Israelites through the dietary laws, with extensive recourse to nursemaid imagery. The dietary laws function to preserve the soul from "all damages that may be incurred by way of nourishment" in general, including corrupt theological opinions and deferring overmuch to the evil impulse in particular.
- [30] Gloss of Ps. 103:7–11 focusing on God's compassion towards the Israelites in not requiring the Israelites according to the extent of their transgressions.
- [31]–[33] Gloss of Ps. 103:12 with recourse to celestial motion: Given both that the celestial spheres' diurnal motion commences in the east and tends westward, and that the transgressions mentioned in the second clause of the verse are more fittingly associated with darkness and thus the direction of sunset, initially it might seem that the cardinal directions in the first clause of Ps. 103:12 ought to be reversed, reading *as the west is distant from the east*. However, David ordered the cardinal directions in the way he did to emphasize two subtle facets distinguishing eastward celestial motion from westward

celestial motion, namely, that the former is slower than the latter, and that the celestial bodies exhibit more variation among each other in the duration and speed of their eastward motion. These two distinguishing features of eastward motion captured in the first clause of the verse as written (*as the east is distant from the west*) in turn shed light on how God's benefit to the Israelites in the second clause of the verse serves to distinguish them from the nations: like the planets moving eastward, thanks to Torah, the Israelites' movement towards transgression is both collectively slower, and varied among individuals, in contrast to the gentile nations who all come to transgression quickly.

- [34] Gloss of Ps. 103:13–18 suggesting that God's chief compassion with the Israelites is to enable them the possibility of eternal life, escaping the fate to which the human species in general is doomed, by keeping the commandments. These enable their adherents "to intellectually apprehend all the world...and the rank of His heavenly host."
- [35] Gloss of Ps. 103:19–22 focusing on the distinctions between the angels/separate intellects, the heavenly host/celestial spheres, and sublunar beings in both their modes and objects of knowledge and as executors of the divine will.

[36]–[41] Exegesis of *ma'amar* via Pereq Heleq; in what sense do "all Israel have a portion in the world to Come"?; recapitulation of God's gift at Sinai

- [36] Preliminary readings of R. Meir's and R. Judah's statements in the *ma'amar* from Song of Songs Rabbah. According to R. Meir, Song 2:4—*He hath brought me to the house of wine*—is effectively Israel's attempt to cast blame for the sin of the golden calf back onto God for the state of human nature: The sin of the calf is precipitated by confused theological opinions (*the house of wine*), which is in turn precipitated by the evil impulse, necessarily conjoined with man in his being a composite of matter/woman. R. Judah then offers a counterinterpretation of Song 2:4, attempting to read it in a way that casts Israel in a more positive light. On his reading, *the house of wine* signifies not distorted opinions but rather Sinai, and the Torah's gift of a certain form of wisdom that when taken in moderation is extremely beneficial and lifegiving. R. Judah's glossing *the house of wine* as "a great cellar of wine" is taken to signify Sinai's inclusivity and accessibility, in attempting to extend benefits to all through Torah and the commandments.
- [37] Rejecting two possible interpretations of m. Sanhedrin 10:1 "All Israel have a portion in the World to Come:" It is neither the case that (1) all Israel have a portion in the World to Come regardless of whether they are wicked or righteous; nor that (2) whoever is called Israel is definitionally/necessarily righteous, thus meriting a portion in the World to Come.
- [38] Correct interpretation of "All Israel have a portion in the World to Come:" "the only ones who are called "Israel" in truth are those who are righteous... since all Israel is required to be righteous according to the behavior required by the Torah." Connection of the notion that all who are truly called Israel are righteous to the notion of *segullah* as developed in earlier reading of Ex. 19:5; the inheritance of immortality belongs to those transformed through adherence to the commandments.
- [39] Gloss of Isa. 60:21—*thy people also shall all be righteous*—in light of the foregoing and idea that all participate equally in the transformative action of Torah commandments and customs even as they do not participate equally in its theoretical and speculative aspects. While the latter are reserved for the select few, even the masses of people, qua

the *congregation of Jacob* (Deut. 33:4) have an indisputable claim to its *inheritance*, which enables them to proceed towards their perfection with ease and proximity—i.e., precisely the virtues of accessibility treated in AY Gate 44. This is the meaning of R. Judah's dictum in the *ma'amar*: "He brought me to a great cellar of wine, that is, Sinai."

- [40]–[41] Alternative explication of "He brought me to a great cellar of wine, that is, Sinai" as referring to the chain of tradition of elite individuals described in m. Abot 1:1 [40]; challenging the dominant interpretation of m. Abot 1:1, according to which the second sentence "they said three things" is the first teaching of Abot proper rather than part of the chain of tradition; Arama argues that it is instead part of the chain of tradition, and a description of why the Men of the Great Assembly in particular as well as the Rabbinic Sages in general deserved to be a part of that chain of tradition, and so part of what brought Israel to the great proverbial cellar that is Sinai.

[42]–[46] Contesting the empirical counterargument against chosenness: On Israel's historical and current suffering and the nations' apparent success

- [42] Isa. 66:17— *those that eat swine's flesh and the detestable thing and the mouse shall be consumed together, saith the Lord*—as crystallizing a problem: In light of all the ideas developed in the foregoing, Israel should be successful while the nations that do not adhere to the commandments and are not transformed thereby should not meet with success, but the empirical case seems to be the opposite: the latter are successful in this world, while the Jews have suffered both historically and in the contemporary moment in long exile. Introduction of Isa. 63 as scriptural text staging and treating this problem.
- [43]–[46] Resolution of this problem through exegesis of select verses of Isa. 65.
 - [43] Reading Isa. 65:1 against the grain: In contrast to standard interpretations, which read this verse as God's speech to wayward Israel, Arama reads as directed towards other (truly idolatrous) nations, divided into three classes: those who believe that everything in the world is determined by God's pre-eternal will and that human striving is in vain, among whom Arama classes "most of the sects of the Ishmaelites;" the idolaters who believe that all can be manipulated through striving and correct celestial worship; and those who correctly believe in divine providence according to human action, but call God by an improper name.
 - [44] Compilation of verses from Deut. 31, 32 as prooftexts that God indeed despises the behaviors of the nations despite appearances to the contrary; focus on Isa. 65:6–7 as sort of couplet: while Isa. 65:6 refers to God's promise to eventually punish the nations especially for their oppression of Israel, which precipitates the Israelites' own sins; Isa. 65:7 constitutes God's promise to first punish Israel for their sins: This explains the historical phenomenon of Israel's worldly suffering in exile as being only the first part in an eschatological chronology, which will eventually proceed to the nations' suffering and punishment.
 - [45] Isa. 65:8 as God's promise to not destroy the nations completely because Israel—worthy of being preserved—is among them, yet "in the end, all that will remain from among the nations is that which was necessary for the Israelite community;" the generalized retributions promised to the nations in Isa. 65:11–12 are enumerated in Isa. 34

- [46] Isa. 65:12 as explication for exile: God's having dispersed the Israelites among the nations initially in part so that Israel would be a light unto the nations, with the latter adopting the Israelites' ways and so proper worship of God; because the nations spurned this offering, Isa. 65:13–16 promises the ultimate reversal of the Israelites' and nations' fortunes at the end of time: while the former have suffered and the latter lived well, the latter will now suffer, and the former be rewarded. Challenging the standard interpretation of Isa. 65:1—and much of the chapter as directed against Israel—in passing

III. Perishah

[47] Elliptical, summary gloss of Lev. 11, highlighting the general categories of God's prohibitions in the chapter and emphasizing the idea that the prohibitions are made because the things prohibited bring impurity to the soul, rather than harm the body.

AY Gate 60*

Clarifying the benefits of the prohibitions [against certain] foods, and whether this is for the sake of improving the nature of the Israelite community, or whether it is to inaugurate for it a life of asceticism. Also clarifying the meal of the Leviathan.

[1] *These are the living things which ye may eat among all the beasts*, and so on (Lev. 11:2).

[2] In Midrash Ḥazit:¹ *He hath brought me to the house of wine and His banner over me is love* (Song 2:4). R. Meir and R. Judah gave different explanations of this. R. Meir said: The community of Israel said: ‘The evil inclination obtained mastery over me, and I said [to the calf]: *This is thy god, O Israel* (cf Ex. 32:4). When wine goes into a man it confuses his mind.’ R. Judah said to him: Enough R. Meir; we only expound Song of Songs in such a way as to praise Israel. What then is meant by *he hath brought me to the house of wine*? The community of Israel said: ‘The Holy One, Blessed be He, brought me to a great cellar of wine, that is, Sinai. There He gave me banners of Torah and commandments and good deeds and in love I accepted them, as it says *and His banner over me is love*.

[3] If the good is better and more praiseworthy in its being more encompassing and universal,² then it follows necessarily that the guidance of the divine religion is the best and more

* The following translation based on AY III: 29b–38b.

¹ Maurice Simon trans. (Soncino, 1983), 102ff with minor changes.

² The term I am translating as “encompassing and universal” is *kolel*—related of course to the key term *kelalut* in Gate 44, Parts I and II, discussed in 3.2.2 above. Both Arama’s use of the term *kolel* here as well as his gloss of this line of the *Ethics* seems to be drawn from Joseph ibn Shem Tob’s commentary, which I cite from Chaim Neria’s edition in Neria, “Joseph ibn Shem Tob’s Commentary,” 603. Following Neria, the text of the *Ethics* itself is bolded to distinguish it from Joseph’s commentary. It is worth noting Arama’s citation of the *Ethics* that follows is verbatim:

ואם הדבר הוא אחד לאיש אחד ולמדינה אחת יותר גדול ויותר שלם הוא אשר הוא להטבת מדינה אחת והשגחתה ואם הנאהב הוא למדינה אחת יותר טוב הוא אשר הוא לכל העם ולכל המדינות. ירצה, ואם הטוב אשר ייחד אדם אחד יאמר עליו טוב, כמו שיאמר טוב אשר

praiseworthy among [species of] guidance. The antecedent are the words of the Scientist in the first chapter of the *Ethics*. He said: “If a single thing is beloved by [both] a single man and a single state, it is greater and more perfect in being for the benefit and providence of the state. And if it is beloved [by] a single state, even better is that which [is beloved] the entire people and every state”—thusly he spoke. [Now] inasmuch as a thing is not said to be good in respect of its universality [only]—for if this were the case, things common to the multitude would be better than those which are unique to outstanding individuals (*yehidei segullot*) and prophets, the opposite of which has already been made clear in the beginning of the Book of Exodus, in Gate 34³—for this reason, the Sage said that when a single thing is in itself [beloved] by a single man or a single state, it is greater and more beloved when its benefit is distributed.⁴ Since this notion is clear in itself, he⁵ drew the conclusion that political science, which studies the good of states in general, is the most fitting [science] for studying the human good. For in combining the good together with universality,⁶ it is a perfect and complete good. Because this attribute is the most praiseworthy, the Holy Spirit described God, Blessed be He, by saying: *the Lord is good to all*, and so on (Ps. 145:9). That is, even the greatest among earthly kings are incapable of being *good to all* the children of his kingdom. For even though all are fitting to receive his beneficence⁷ in respect of their preparation, there is not enough wealth or sustenance to make every man whole

יִיחַד מְדִינָה אַחַת וְזֶה בִּשְׁנֵינִיחַ שְׁזֶה הַטּוֹב הָאֲנוּשִׁי אִיפְשָׁר שִׁמְצָא לְאִישׁ יִיחִידִי כְּמוֹ שֶׁנִּמְצָא לְאֲנוּשֵׁי הַמְּדִינָה הֵנָּה עִם כָּל זֶה יִהְיֶה יוֹתֵר גָּדוֹל וְיוֹתֵר שְׁלֵם וְיוֹתֵר מַעֲוֵלָה כִּאֲשֶׁר יִכְלֹל כָּל בְּעָלֵי הַמְּדִינָה. כִּי הַטּוֹב כְּשֶׁנִּבְחָן בּוֹ מִצַּד שֶׁהוּא סָבָה תְּכֵלִיתִיית. כָּל מֶה שִׁיגְדֵל מַעֲלָתוֹ יִתְפַּשֵּׁט לְזוּלָתוֹ כִּי כָּל מֶה שֶׁתִּתְרַחֵב הַסָּבָה וְתִכְלֹל מְסֻבָּבִים תִּהְיֶה יוֹתֵר מַעֲוֵלָה וּמְשֻׁבָּחָת. וְלִזֶּה הִיא הַטּוֹב הַזֶּה כִּאֲשֶׁר יִתְפַּשֵּׁט לְאֲנוּשֵׁי הַמְּדִינָה וְתִהְיֶה לְהַשְׁגַּחַת מְדִינָה אַחַת יוֹתֵר שְׁלֵם וְיוֹתֵר מַעֲוֵלָה מִשִּׁיָּהִי בְּאִישׁ אֶחָד. אִף שֶׁהוֹנֵחַ שֶׁכֵּבֵר אִיפְשָׁר שִׁמְצָא בְּאִישׁ אֶחָד וְאֵם הִיא נֶאֱהָב וּמַעֲוֵלָה מְאֹד כִּאֲשֶׁר יִתְפַּשֵּׁט עַל מְדִינָה אַחַת כָּל שָׁכֵן שִׁיָּהִי יוֹתֵר מַעֲוֵלָה וְיוֹתֵר שְׁלֵם אֲשֶׁר הוּא לְכָל הָעָם וּלְכָל הַמְּדִינֹת.

³ In a lengthy discussion of salvation history in AY Gate 34, Arama discusses the importance of the forefathers' and especially Moses' outstanding and exceptional qualities—against the destructive masses—in facilitating the return of God's presence into the world.

⁴ Arama's point here is simply that universality/inclusivity by itself does not make something good; rather, universality/inclusivity makes better a thing which is already good in its own right, by itself.

⁵ I.e., Aristotle.

⁶ Again, *kelalut*.

⁷ The same term I have been translating as good, *tov*—I will use “good” and “beneficence” interchangeably throughout.

and meet his needs completely—and all the more so [there is not enough] to make him wealthy and great as he might wish.

[4] The second⁸ is that it is not the nature of greatness and dominion that it should be distributed to all people, as Saul said: *Hear now, sons of my right hand, will the son of Jesse give all of you fields and vineyards, will he make you all captains of thousands and captains of hundreds?* (1 Sam. 22:7). Regarding the first [of these statements, i.e., *give all of you fields and vineyards*], he said that it is not possible to give all an inheritance, for the earth cannot bear it. Regarding the second [i.e., *will he make you all captains of thousands, etc.*], he said that this is impossible, for if all were heads, they would lack bodies and the rest of the limbs.⁹ Similarly, if all were *captains*, what would constitute the *thousands* and the *hundreds*? However, God is good and a Benefactor to all¹⁰ [with] that good which is emanated from Him, and is none among the existents lacks. From the horns of the antelope to the eggs of lice, [there is none] who does not receive from Him the most perfect and upright good that is fitting and proper to him.

⁸ I.e., that it follows necessarily that the guidance of the divine religion is the best and more praiseworthy among [species of] guidance; the idea being that because “greatness and authority cannot be equally distributed among all people” simply, as Arama will explain in this section, the best case scenario is that it can be equally distributed among all people of a given nation: namely, Israel via the Torah. This idea chimes well with the notion of Jews as separate species and Israel as *segullah*, developed principally in Gate 44 above, but also touched on in sec. [38] below, and discussed in 3.3.2 above.

⁹ Here Arama seems to be working with an understanding of “the body politic,” a well-trod subject in contemporary Christian political theology, but to the best of my knowledge not yet studied in depth in medieval Jewish literature. One of Arama’s contemporaries, Abraham Shalom, expresses a similarly nascent conception of the city-as-body in an excerpt cited and translated by Abraham Melamed, *The Philosopher-King in Medieval and Renaissance Jewish Political Thought* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2012), 133. For the classic treatment in late medieval Christian political theology, see Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016; originally published 1957).

¹⁰ Arama here seamlessly incorporates a divine epithet from the Birkat haMazon; throughout AY, he is partial to glossing fragments of the liturgy when possible. See my discussion of his treatment of the *ve-ahavta* in 2.4.1 above, as well as his gloss of the *qiddush* prayer in 3.4.2.

[5] It is not as many of the ignorant used to say, with the smoke of the foolish rising up to their nostrils, proclaiming in their ignorance: “Why did the Creator not make the ant into a camel or a horse, and the horse into a man, and the garment into a firmament?” and other things similar to this. And they said: ‘There is no escape [from the following dilemma]: Either He was able to [make things differently] but did not want to, in which case [He has] the attribute of miserliness. Or else He wanted [to make things differently] and was not able to, in which case He was limited in His ability.’ In order to be saved from both of these [alternatives], they saw to cast themselves *into the nethermost pit* (Ps. 55:24, m. Abot 5:19) and determined that this is not the case,¹¹ but rather, things exist [as they do] by accident, and every one received of the good what befell it by chance, without this being due to the knowledge of a governor and something perfect, as is thought.¹² But Wisdom retorts [with] her reply, which prevails over their ignorance: For indeed, God, Exalted be He, made everything with His wondrous wisdom and profound might, and there is nothing which prevents Him from doing anything, whether great or small. If some existents are more deficient than others, this is due to the nature of that substrate, for which it was impossible to receive a loftier form. [Even for] the most deficient among them, its existence is still better than its non-existence/privation, all of which the Philosopher wrote about in the fifth treatise on the divine sciences.¹³ He concluded his words on this subject and said that “the

¹¹ I.e., it is not the case that “there is none among the existents....that does not receive from Him the most perfect good and guidance that is fitting and proper to it.”

¹² Arama is deeply concerned with the “believers in chance” throughout his oeuvre, but especially in the early Gates of AY, e.g., AY Gates 1 and 3. In these Gates, Arama effectively concedes that to the extent that he does accept Aristotelian natural philosophy and causality, it is because the latter is superior to—and a bulwark against—the vanities of the believers in chance; in this sense, he construes belief in Aristotelian natural philosophy and causality as a rung on the ladder towards correct theological belief, though still quite far from it. Abraham Bibago, Arama’s contemporary, also expresses concern with the believers in chance throughout his *Derekh Emunah*.

¹³ The Philosopher, ironically enough, is al-Ghazali; the treatise on the divine sciences a section of his summa of Avicennan philosophy *Kavvanot ha-Filosofim/Maqāsid al-Falāsīfah*.

fly is much better than the [mere] matter of the fly if it were left as such, and indeed were it [left as] such, it would not be an existent.”

[6] This is the clear truth in respect of the nature of material things, and this apart from what the perfection of things and the need for their proper existence necessitates. Is it not apparent that man is an uneven body composed of several upper, intermediary, and lower limbs, ordered from head to toe, and is it [not] known that some of these are more noble and lofty than others?! *Will thou yet say* (Ezek. 28:9): ‘Why is the foot not a head, the spleen not a brain, and the kidney not a heart?’ Or ‘Why is the hair not an eye, the fingernail not a tongue?’ and other things similar to these deceptions. For it is clear that *the Lord is a God of knowledge* (1 Sam. 2:3); He made man with wisdom and created him with all the limbs necessary for his use, in the most fitting manner possible. That matter did not receive the form of hair because it was not within the Creator’s power to make an eye or an ear out of it, for “an eye that sees and an ear that hears” (m. Abot 2:1)—the Lord made both of these. Rather, [it received the form of hair] because of the need for hair itself, which is fitting for man’s likeness and image, and that matter already received the utmost limit of what it was possible for it to receive in terms of perfection, just as was received by the matter out of which an eye or a heart is made. The Creator’s power is not diminished on account of not making a heart or a brain out of the matter of hair, just as it is not diminished on account of the flea’s not being a philosopher or a prophet.

[7] Of this [same] species of deception is what many have said [regarding] whether it was possible for the Creator to make man such that he did not sin. [They reason that] either He was not able to [create man such that he did not sin], in which case He is limited in His ability, or else

He was able to but did not want to, in which case He is stingy (b.Arakhin 16a). The first reply [to this]—for *yea, she returneth answer to them* (Judg. 5:29)—is that God, Exalted is He, is able to make creatures that do not sin, for He made the angels and the spheres, *He set their soul in life* (Ps. 66:9). However, it is impossible that man should have been an angel, for his nature and quiddity are such that it is possible for him to sin, as was made clear in my discussion of his creation, [in] Gate 3, Category 8, and Gate 8.¹⁴ It is also not possible for man's matter to receive the form of an angel, just as a grasshopper's matter cannot receive [the form] to become a star. If one should insist, saying: 'What prevents His [making it] that a man should become a star or an angel?', we shall insist *with the crooked* (Ps. 18:27) and say: 'What prevents the floor of a house from being its roof or its north [from being] its south or its west [from being] its east? Just as it is not possible for one of its corners to be any of the other corners for the sake of the building's perfection and interior form, so too it is not possible for man to be anything other than man among the rest of the existents, and so too for everything else.'

[8] The Sage already said there¹⁵ that the meaning of this question and those like it is like who asks if it would be fitting for fire to have been created in such a way that it would not be fire, and Saturn in such a way that it would not be Saturn—all of these are clear errors and deceptions, over which only youths and the boors among the people stumble. Regarding these the prophet said: *why sayest thou, O Jacob*, and so on, *hast thou not known, hast thou not heard*, and so on, *He giveth potential to the faint*, and so on, *even the youths shall faint*, and so on, *but they that*

¹⁴ In his discussion of Gen. 1:26 in Gate 3, Category 8, Arama emphasizes that crucial in God's creation of man was creating him in such a way as to encompass and so unite both sublunar and supernal beings; because of this combination of elements, Arama explains, man's fate after death is uniquely determined by his choice in managing his matter in life, according to the Rabbinic principle "if he lives, he shall die, and if he dies, he shall live;" in this sense, the ability to sin is constitutive of man's nature.

¹⁵I.e., al-Ghazali in the divine science section of *Kavvanot ha-Filosofim*.

wait for the Lord shall renew, and so on (Isa. 40:27–31). He meant: *why sayest thou, O Jacob*—given your being a man of knowledge and all the more so *Israel*—that *you speakest* such deceptions as these, such that because of them you decreed that your *way is hidden from* God (Isa. 40:27)?!¹⁶ That is, in order to escape from the error of this difficulty you set forth, you say that ‘All of this is hidden from Him, and all the more so *passed over from* Him are matters of *justice*, whether between two men or between Him and us.’ *Hast thou not known* independently, *hast thou not heard* from the received tradition, that He is the *Creator* of the world, from which it follows necessarily that He is *the Creator of the extremes of the earth*, and these are the greatest among existents and the smallest of them, for they are the *extremes* of creation. The most base thing’s not receiving the form of the noble is not, in truth, [due to] any limitation in Him, for *He fainteth not*, neither is it any miserliness, for He is not a man, concerned only with what he *labors* over and what *wearies* him, as it is said: *Thou hast pity on the gourd for which thou hast not labored, neither madest it grow* (Jonah 4:10), *and strangers shall not drink thy wine, for which thou was wearied* (Isa. 62:8). Indeed, He, Blessed be He, *is neither weary* (Isa. 40:28), so why should He withhold good from those to whom it belongs? Nor is this [due to] any limitation of knowledge, for *His discernment is past searching out* (ibidem).

[9] However, what is true concerning this question¹⁷ is that *He giveth potential to the faint*, he meant that *He giveth* to whatever is *faint* to receive forms, just as He gives to hyle that deficient *potential* which it has, as he said of it¹⁸ that it is something intermediate between privation and

¹⁶ I.e., some conclude from God’s not making all beings into the most lofty sort of beings that He does not have knowledge of particulars.

¹⁷ I.e., the question posed in sec. [7] above: why did God not make man such that he did not sin, or more generally, why did He not make lesser species into more superior species?

¹⁸ I.e., hyle.

what is *in actu*, and *potential* attaches to it [in order] that it receive forms in succession. He said: *and to him that hath no might, He increaseth strength* (Isa. 40:29), that is to say, that even *to this one that hath no might*—for its existence is weak—*He increaseth strength*, inasmuch as it is the *strongest/most essential* (*‘azmi*)¹⁹ thing that is possible for it to be. In this, His wisdom and greatness are recognized by all possessed of intellect; and this only leads astray the foolish, those who are youthful in knowledge and devoid of intellect. This is [the meaning of] his saying: *even the youths shall be faint and be weary and the young men shall utterly fall* (Isa. 40:30), however, *they that wait for the Lord shall renew*, and so on (Isa. 40:31). In the beginning of Gate 3, we explained these verses in terms of a suitable meaning, different from this;²⁰ grasp from both of these that each of them is good in itself, and [that they are] proximate in meaning.

[10] In any case, what we intended [in terms] of His being the *Good* and the Benefactor *to all* of His creations has become clear, *and His tender mercies are over all His works* (Ps. 145:9). No individual is lacking such that he has not received good from Him to the utmost extent possible, such as is impossible for a king of flesh and blood, as we said. On account of this—together with its not being in man’s nature that he should not lack anything, nor that he should not sin, as was set forth—[on account of all this,] indeed *He has not left off His kindness* and His truth from the

¹⁹ Arama is here playing on the shared root of the words for *strength* (*‘ozmah*) in Isa. 40:29 and essence/essential (*‘azmi*).

²⁰ In AY Gate 3, Arama explicates Isa. 40:27–31 with respect to the processes and components of the early stages of creation as well, appealing to notions of hyle, prime matter, and form, but the details of his explication are different: though his gloss of Isa. 40:28 there is nearly identical, there he suggests that the *potential* God gives to hyle is not the *potential* to receive forms simply, but rather the *potential* to receive the specific “first elemental form,” which in turn has the ability to be attained by other forms. Building on this, there he reads *to him that hath no might He increaseth strength*, not as God’s conferring to even hyle the utmost possible, but instead referring to the elements, which once combined together with the celestial spheres can finally generate other existents, in contrast to the “first elemental form” which is still too weak to generate existents:

ואמר נותן ליעף כח וכו' וקרא להיולי יעף למה שהוא חלוש המציאות מאד כיון שהוא לא נמצא לא בכח ולא בפועל. ואמר שהוא יתברך נותן בו הכח לקבל הצורה הראשונה היסודית והוא התהלת ההכנה. שעליה אמר הפילוסוף ישיגהו הכח לקבל הצורות. והצורה היסודית הזאת עם שכבר יש לה מציאות וממש בעצמו עדיין לא תתחזק להרבות ההויות ממנה. עד שיתרכבו היסודות אלו באלו ויתהוו מהם אלו הנמצאות הרביות. ועל זה אמר (שם) ולאין אונים עצמה ירבה. ירצה על ידי תנועת הגרמים השמימיים

chosen nation, from benefitting them in their entirety²¹ in such a way that all shall receive good from Him, Exalted be He, none is *faint* and none shall *fall* among them. Do you not see that among temporal goods, He has graced them perfectly in accordance with their needs and even more in His preparing for them that good and spacious land mentioned throughout the entire Torah? Through this, He *gave to all of them*, to each individual *fields and vineyards* (1 Sam. 22:7). He was attentive to this in His saying: *but the land shall be divided by lot* (Num. 26:55) and He commanded that they should not *sell* their inheritance *in perpetuity* (Lev. 25:23) inasmuch as no individual among them lacked what was sufficient to sustain him, as He said explicitly: *a land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack anything in it* (Deut. 8:9). Also, He *shall make all of them captains of thousands and captains of hundreds* (1 Sam. 22:7), as it was said: *and ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation* (Ex. 19:6). He had already been attentive that *they shall not be sold as bondmen* (Lev. 25:42), and commanded that they make their bondmen from among the rest of the nations, *but over your brethren the children of Israel, they shall not rule* (Lev. 25:46) [such that] the seller himself is punished. All of this is in order that all receive good from Him in equal portion, such as is not possible for kings of flesh and blood, as was mentioned.

[11] Through the perfection of their soul, His light and truth shall not darken from them, as is made clear from the verification of what follows, insofar as His wisdom, Exalted be He, saw that the divine Torah, which He set forth for them, should include encompassing/inclusive and useful notions known to Him, whether to instill true opinions or to improve their actions and customs as pertains to their foods and drinks and dress and their methods of generation and reproduction and

²¹ *Bi-kelalam*.

their manners of living, their resting and rising in all of their [various] states—all to a wondrous extent. This suffices to guide the lot of them²² from birth and the womb and pregnancy, from the basest bit of universal matter unto another nature, special and elevated, as though they are a different species unto themselves. This shall be apparent from the part of the *parashah* that we are explicating and those parts adjoined to it, in which He admonishes on the distinction between pure and impure foods from *among every living thing of all flesh* (Gen. 6:19). [He also admonishes on the difference] between valid and invalid among pure things, and on the rest of what is impure and pure among carcasses and insects and everything else that men come into contact with such that they render him impure, the speech concerning which shall be completed in the following *parashahs*. For all of this shall be extremely useful in two respects.

[12] The first is what the Sages mentioned in their saying: “Were the commandments not given so that man might not be purified by them?” (Gen. Rab. 44:1). Purification is that man might live a life of moderation and asceticism and accepting the yoke of the kingdom of heaven by restraining himself from many things that his soul lusts after and which the rest of the nations are habituated to, either on account of a commandment or a divine impediment. These are truly those who live by choice, of whom [the Sages] said:²³ “if he lives then he shall die, and if he dies then he shall live” (Yalkut Shimoni Remez 14). For it follows necessarily that whatever of that stuff²⁴ man left off in terms of delights and pleasures in this world out of hope for future, spiritual

²² *Bi-kelalam*.

²³ This is one of Arama’s favored phrases to which he returns throughout AY, seemingly always as a shorthand for man’s ability to choose to obey the commandments and thereby habituate himself to a degree of asceticism (i.e., the death of the body in temporal life to facilitate life in the world to come) or alternatively to choose the pursuit of lusts and corporeality in disobedience and thereby lose the opportunity for eternal life. See e.g., note 13 above (in reference to AY Gate 3, Category 8), as well as AY Gates 4, 10 (sec. [25] in translation above), 41, 52, 59, 65, 73, 101.

²⁴ i.e., food and drink.

pleasure, he takes hold of in the eternal world. This is similar to what the Sage said: *whoso keepeth the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof* (Prov. 27:18). For the *one who keepeth* his mouth from the delight of the nectar of *the fig tree* and its honey—and this is another designation for the pleasures of food and other dainties, as the Sages said: “The tree from which the first man ate was a fig tree” (b. Berakhot 40a)—he *shall eat the fruit thereof* in the World to Come, unlike he who eats unripe fruit. For just as he does not castrate himself of his lusts in the present, the punishment designated according to the Torah shall attain him and there shall remain no reward for him in the World to Come, as the Sage said: *the fear of the wicked shall come upon him and the lust of the righteous shall be granted* (Prov. 10:24). For the *wicked* who satisfies his lust with pleasure, it is fitting for him to *fear* that the evil designated for that sin shall cleave to him, for it *shall come upon him* without a doubt. However, as for *the lust of the righteous* who castrates his corporeal lust on account of his lust for spiritual pleasure in the World to Come, this *shall be granted* to satisfy his soul there. Or, [perhaps] it says that *the wicked shall fear* for the punishment for his sin, while for the *righteous* it is the opposite: *he lusts* that the reward for his righteousness should arrive, and indeed both of these *shall come*, for *the fear of the wicked shall come*, and *the lust of the righteous shall be granted*, and *all shall go unto one state* (Eccl. 3:20).

[13] This is what the Sages said, in the chapter “the one who sells a ship,” regarding the Leviathan: It was created [both] male and female, [but] He castrated the male and killed the female, and salted her for the righteous in the future (b. Baba Batra 74b). It is apparent that the notion of the Leviathan in this dictum refers to the composition of intellect and matter in the creation of man, for these are the things that were created *male and female*. For they were a

*chaplet of grace*²⁵ for (Prov. 1:9) their Former, as it was said: *male and female He created them and called their name man* (Gen. 5:2). It is possible that this is what the Psalmist intended in his saying *there is Leviathan, who Thou hast formed to sport therein* (Ps. 104:26), for this is similar. [The Sages] said that He saw that if they would have coupled, they would have destroyed the world (b. Baba Batra 74b). This is clear, for if the intellectual faculty were to couple completely so as to satisfy the lusts of the appetitive faculty, then the intellectual state would corrupt and be annihilated entirely. Likewise, if the appetitive faculty were to be completely coupled to the work of the intellect, man's corporeal, temporal state would be completely annihilated. Concerning each of these two states, His will, Blessed be He, was not realized in the creation of man, as he had been created. Thus, His wisdom saw that this composition should be in a state that would sustain both of them, and through which man's state could be perfected. This consisted in His giving the intellect the ability to conquer the appetitive faculty, as it said: *and unto thee is thy desire, but thou mayest rule over it* (Gen. 4:7), such that the intellect's activities that are prevented on its²⁶ account of are not completely nullified, but rather only hindered. Moreover, [the intellectual faculty] receives assistance from [the appetitive faculty] and takes hold of some reward for conquering it. This is beauty of their expression in saying "He castrated the male and killed the female and salted her for the righteous."

[14] So too for what they said there regarding *the beasts on the thousand hills* (Ps. 50:1), which were created male and female, and He castrated the male and cooled the female (b. Baba Batra 74b), for these things are very proximate and as one. That is to say, through this composition

²⁵ Here Arama plays on the similarity of the Hebrew expression here translated as "chaplet of grace"—*livyat hen*—to the Hebrew word for Leviathan.

²⁶ i.e., the appetitive faculty.

itself, He castrated the intellect from being perfect and [from being] intellect *in actu*, as one of the separate intellects. Similarly, His conjoining of it²⁷ sufficed to kill the female—that is to say, to revolt against her in order to conquer and subjugate her, so that there would not remain anything that was not useful to the intellectual part, as the Psalmist said: *my heart is wounded within me* (Ps. 109:22). Or else [this composition was sufficient] to cool her, where cooling was sufficient. This conquest and subjugation is what is preserved for the righteous in the future, *an everlasting covenant of salt* (Num. 18:19) which shall never corrupt, that is *whoso keepeth the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof* (Prov. 27:18). And this is precisely what [the Sages] said about “the wine that has been preserved in its grapes” (b. Berakhot 34b). For “wine” is also a designation for species of delights and luxuries. This is why Aaron was given the commandment: *drink no wine nor strong drink*, and so on (Lev. 10:9), and the Sages said: whoever wishes to remove himself from transgression, should renounce wine (cf b. Sotah 2a), which subject shall be well-treated in the section on the Nazirite, in Gate 73, with the help of God.²⁸ The Sages also said that Adam sinned by a grape-vine (b. Berakhot 40a). Accordingly, they said that wine and all man’s lusts are preserved for the righteous in their grapes, for they restrain themselves and renounce it such that it does not enter their mouths in this world. This was hidden up for them from the six days of creation, inasmuch as in the hour of creation, this was the aim in [creating] the human species, as it is said: *and conquer it* (Gen. 1:28)—and this conquest is realized by the righteous. In this way, it is reasonable that the meaning of the feast and the *sukkah* and the

²⁷ i.e., the intellect.

²⁸ In AY Gate 73, developing similar ideas, Arama explains that to prepare prudently for life in the World to Come (as the farmer does for the harvest), it is advisable to renounce wine because of wine’s property of strengthening the appetitive faculty and disposing one to relate to his corporeality and lusts excessively. Arama probably has in mind this passage:

ולזה הית' העצה היעוצה שלא יעבור העת ההיא מבלי שיכין בה הצורך ההכרחי אליו לתקון נפשו אבל שמיד יפרוש עצמו מן היין כי אחר שרא' הנזק ההוא מתגבורת כחות התאוה וסייעתם הנה ראוי לשית אל לבו ולקחת מוסר להזיר עצמו מן היין ודוגמתו ולהתרחק מכל הדברים המותרים להעמיד עצמו על הכרחי כדי להתיש ולהחליש כח הצורך שלא יקום במשפטו ולא ירשיע בהשפטו כי הפורש עצמו מן היין ההוה יזכה אל היין המשומר בענביו בסעודת לויתן אשר כתבנו באיסור המאכלות שער ס' עיין עליו

castration and the rest of the things that they mentioned in tractate Pesahim²⁹ be explained in reference to the Leviathan.

[15] What was said of King David there³⁰ accords with this: [i.e.,] that he made blessings of sacrifice more than any of the other forefathers or prophets. This is because none among them was by nature as consumed with immoral desires³¹ as him. And if he touched it with his small finger, would he not leave ten handbreadths on account of his fear of the kingdom of heaven?! For this reason, he had a great portion in that same feast, for it had been preserved for him until that time, as it says: *say ye of the righteous that it shall be well with him, for they shall eat the fruit of their doings* (Isa. 3:10). We already explained the meaning of that feast and its blessing in the *parashah* on manna, in Gate 41.³²

[16] In any case, we learn how much it benefits man to live a life of restraint and measure in which he is cautious with respect to the commandment; whereas he who is cautious concerning

²⁹ See b.Pesahim 119.

³⁰ Ibidem.

³¹ להוט בבלמוס של עבירה. A very close approximation of this Rabbinic phrase can be found in Midrash Tanhuma on Vayera 12.

³² Here is the passage from AY Gate 41 Arama likely has in mind, where he understands the feast as consisting in the abstract nourishment particular to the perfect intellect, and glosses Isa. 3:10 in connection with Prov. 12:14 and Ps. 128 as referring to men who only feed this nourishment to their souls and accordingly perform actions that are pleasing to God:

אמנם סעודת השלחן השני הנה הוא המזון הפשוט המיוחד אל השכל השלם ההוא אם מענינים מחשביים מכוונים בסעודה הראשונה אשר עליהם הוא מיסב אצלה כי עליהם אמר החכם (משלי כ"ג:א'-ב') כי תשב ללחום את מושל בין תבין את אשר לפניך ושמת סכין בלועיך אם בעל נפש אתה כי היא סעודת מצוה שמיסב בה תלמיד חכם כמו שכתבנו אצל מאמר יעקב אבינו לא מת שער ל"ב. ואם מפעולות אחרות רצויות ושלמות הנעשות בכח האכילה ההיא כי היא ודאי המזון המיוחד אשר יעשה לכל נפש שעליהם אמר הכתוב (ישעיה ג') אמרו צדיק כי טוב כי פרי מעלליהם יאכלו (משלי י"ב:י"ד) מפרי איש ישבע טוב. ורבים כמו אלה מעידים שהספוק הנאות והמיוחד אל החלק השכלי הוא פרי מעללי ידיו. וכבר חשבו שהוא משל ואינו רק דברים כהווייתן. ועל המיוחד לנפשו זה המין מהמזון אמר המשורר אשרי כל ירא ה' ההולך בדרכיו יגיע כפיך כי תאכל אשריך וטוב לך (תהלים קכ"ח) לומר שהמעשים הנאותים והרצויים בהליכת הדרכים הישרים דרכי ה' הוא המזון המיוחד לכל מאושר ובהם הוא ניזון ונשאר לעד. וכמה הפליגו חז"ל (ברכות ה'). לומר אשריך בע"ה וטוב לך לע"הב. כי באמת כאשר תיזון נפשו מיגיע כפיו על האופן שאמרנו הנה בהכרח יהיה מזון גופו גם כן משוער על הדרך הנזכר ויהיה לפי זה מאושר בעולם הזה שלא יהיה טרוד אחר השגת המאכלות הגסות ולא יצטרך עליהם לבריות וטוב לו לעולם הבא שכלו טוב מצד מה שנהנה ואוכל מיגיע כפיו כאשר הונח. והנה באמת על פי הדברים האלה תודע מעלת פרשת המן

what is impossible for him transgresses His word. Concerning this the Sages said: “Lest man should say, I do not desire the flesh of a pig nor to wear mixed garments, and so on...rather, [say] I do desire it, but what can I do? My Father in Heaven has decreed against it” (Sifra on Lev. 20:26). There is no reason that man’s soul, in encountering the hortative commandments, should seek to distance itself therefrom as prohibited—as is the case with conventionally loathsome activities, of which scripture said: *the soul of the wicked desireth evil* (Prov. 21:10), and *to do justly is joy to the righteous* (Prov. 21:15), as the Master and Guide wrote in Part III, Chapter 48.³³ For this reason, if man distances himself from prohibitions of this kind by virtue of his own soul or due to his nature, then if he is punished, he shall surely not be punished for doing these [prohibited things], however, neither shall he receive any reward for [abstaining from] them on account of his accepting thereby the yoke of the Torah and commandment. For this reason, [the Sages’] counsel was very sound, in order that from these commandments there should flow unto man that profound benefit: that which includes the entirety³⁴ of the nation from the outset of creation, in order that the fear of heaven be upon them in all of their actions.

[17] How greatly was this noble notion investigated in what was related of Queen Esther’s glory from among all the women?! Of all of them it was said: *when the maiden came unto the king, whatsoever she desired was given her to go with her*, and so on (Esth. 2:13). However, of [Esther] it was said: *now when the turn of Esther, the daughter of Abihail the uncle of*

³³ I have been unable to puzzle through Arama’s reference to *Guide* III.48 here—though this is the chapter of the *Guide* in which Maimonides details the dietary laws, he provides hygienic rationales of precisely the sort that Arama later challenges and does not engage with any ideas relating to the Rabbinic notion that obedience is greater than virtue that Arama treats here; a more fitting reference to Maimonides would seem to be *Eight Chapters*, Chapter 6, where Maimonides not only treats this notion expressly, but moreover cites precisely the same two verses, Prov. 21:10 and Prov. 21:15, to juxtapose Solomon and the philosophers’ position on the superiority of virtue against that of the Rabbis, on the superiority of obedience/continence.

³⁴ *yikhelol kelalut ha-’umah*

Mordechai, and so on, *she required nothing but what Hegai the king's eunuch, the keeper of women, appointed*, and so on. *And Esther obtained favour in the sight of all men that looked upon her, and Esther was taken unto the house of the king*, and so on (Esth. 2:15–16). [This story] relates what occurred in the events at that time, but it also alludes to what shall occur to souls who do as they are supposed to in the World to Come.³⁵ That is, every individual who is drawn to *observe faithfully* (Deut. 28:1) all that his basest faculties counsel, satisfying his worldly desires—his soul is prevented from resting in the World to Come, as was said of those maidens who did similarly:³⁶ *in the evening she went and on the morrow she returned to the house of the women*, and so on (Esth. 2:14). [It was in regard to] precisely this that it was said: *and the souls of thine enemies, them shall he sling out as from the hollow of a sling* (1 Sam. 25:29). However, as for he who is drawn after the counsel of the intellect and dispatches the reins of modesty and asceticism before him in order that he not do anything pleasurable save for what is commanded or permitted by the Torah and that religion given by the King of the world, this is the soul of which it is said: *so Esther was taken into the house of his kingdom* (Esth. 2:16) and she did not leave it, as it is said: *yet the soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God* (1 Sam. 25:29). So too for what it said: *and the king loved Esther above all the women and she obtained grace and favor*, and so on, *so that he set the crown of kingdom upon her head and made her queen* (Esth. 2:17), and as the Sages said: “the righteous sit with their crowns upon their heads, enjoying the splendor of the Shekhinah” (b. Berakhot 17a). Again, similarly it was said: *then the king made a great feast unto all his princes and servants, even*

³⁵ Arama's insistence that Esther be read at both the literal-historical level and as an allegory for the fate of the soul accords neatly with his express theory of scriptural interpretation articulated in AY Gate 7, in which *peshat* is an indispensable foundation but ideally coupled together with more philosophical levels, on which see 1.5 above and note 100 there. In this section, Arama clearly reads Esther as the moderate soul, and the other maidens as overly consumed by and indulgent of their corporeal desires.

³⁶ Arama's remarks from his citation of Esth. 2:14 through his mention of the female Leviathan following his gloss of Esth. 2:18 are cited nearly verbatim in Moses Isserles' commentary on Esther 2:14–18.

Esther's feast (Esth. 2:18). And this is the feast mentioned above, wherein *he gave gifts, according to the bounty of the king* (Esth. 2:18) from the salted female Leviathan and the preserved wine, as we said.³⁷ All of this is a very noble matter that accords with what we intended in this first benefit, setting boundaries to *living beings* with regards to foods.

[18] As for what this is with respect to the second benefit, it is the method of work of a master nursemaid. When the nursemaid rears the suckling child, raising him and habituating him from the outset of his suckling to fine and pure nourishment, [she does this] in order to improve his nature and purify his temperamental disposition from [those of] other men, and to bring him to pure knowledge and good character, so that he will choose what is good and disdain what is evil in the most perfect manner possible. This is what is sought in doing this, without a doubt. That is because it has already been made clear in natural science that man's taking pleasure in things by his nature and disposition, or [conversely,] his being grieved by them, are profound causes towards which men move in all their actions concerning practical things. As the Sage wrote in Treatise 6, Chapter 3, of the Ethics:³⁸ "it is not every thought that pleasant and painful objects destroy," and so on, "rather they only destroy thoughts pertaining to what is to be done, for the principle [causes] of things done consist in that for the sake of which they are done." The Torah concurs very much with this notion, as we wrote in the beginning of Gate 55.³⁹ There is no doubt

³⁷ i.e., in secs. [13]–[14] above.

³⁸ As elsewhere Arama cites the text of the Ethics as would have been known to him, in Meir Alguades' translation, verbatim; see Neria, "Joseph ibn Shem Tob's Commentary," 497. N.b. that on note 335 on that page, Neria has already noted Arama's debt here.

³⁹ This is likely the passage of AY Gate 55 Arama has in mind, where he cites the same passage from Ethics VI.3: על ראשונה מהם והיא הכנעת הטבע והבאת המזג ורוע התכונות אל הישר ואל הנקיות האלדי אמר דרך אמונה בחרתי משפטיך שויתי והכונה כי עם היות שבעון חולל ומחומר רעוע קורץ המחייב הנטייה הטבעית אל קצת התאוות והתכונות הפחותות אשר מזה תמשך לו הנטיה גם כאן בדברים הנפעלים מן הדרך הישר אל העקום. כמה שכתב החכם פרק ג' מהמאמר הששי מספר המדות זה לשונו. אמנם הדבר המהנה והמעציב לא ישחיתו כל מחשבה ולא יהפכו אותה כמו אשר למשולש אם שלש זוויותיו שוות לשתי נצבות או לא אבל ישחיתו המחשבה אשר היא אצל הנפעלים כי אמנם התחלות הנפעלים בעבורם הם נפעלים עד כאן. ובעבור שדבריו אלה הן שרירין וקיימין אסרה התורה קבלת השוחד ופסלה הדיינים האוהבים והשונאים ואפילו הם צדיקים גמורים

that just as pleasure and pain depend upon temperamental disposition—as the Sage said: *the wicked are estranged from the womb, the speakers of lies go astray as soon as they are born* (Ps. 58:4), *the soul of the wicked desireth evil* (Prov. 21:10), and on the contrary, *to do justly is joy to the righteous* (Prov. 21:15), and what is similar to this—so too, temperamental disposition and nature themselves depend upon the elemental principles of man and the things upon which he is raised and from which he is nourished from the beginning [of his life]. Thus it is apparent that those who are raised upon moderate things have moderate opinions, as is the case for those who dwell in the intermediate climes.

[19] This is where the people of Shem are raised.⁴⁰ From time immemorial, they have been inventors of great crafts and translators of sciences and arrangers of manners through which they live the highest [manner of] human life. The Land of Israel is the gazelle among all lands in this regard, as the Sages said: “the air of the Land of Israel” makes one wise (b. Baba Batra 158b).⁴¹ Meanwhile, those who dwell at the extremes [of the earth] deviate from this [perfection] according to the degree that they are [situated] in the [geographic] extreme, such that there are some with a completely inverted image and appearance. We need not even speak of their customs and foods and drinks and garments and the rest of their conditions. Among them are some who eat the flesh of their own sons and daughters just as one eats a gazelle or a deer. And there are some who resemble beasts, *their young ones shall lie down together* (Isa. 11:7). There are some who, like the cow, eat straw and do not cover the flesh of their nakedness and [engage

⁴⁰ This section and the following constitute Arama’s meditation on the theory of climes; for the history of Shem and Noah’s other sons in the reception history of the theory of climes, see Benjamin Braude, “The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 54.1 (1997): 103–142.

⁴¹ See the essays collected in Moshe Hallamish and Aviezer Ravitzky, eds., *The Land of Israel in Medieval Jewish Thought* (Ben Zvi Institute, 1991).

in other] grotesque [customs]. There are many such as these who differ from one another according to their places and settlements. Moreover, the pronounced variations between them correspond to the variations in the natures of [their] lands and the temperamental composition of the fruits and other foods from which they are generated. The people from a single clime or region—it is not necessary to say from a single *land*—do not vary from one another in their opinions and their conditions to any significant degree, insofar as they are comprised by a single existence.

[20] For this reason—after setting down his name, and his master’s name, and the name of his city—it was necessary for Solomon in the Book of Ecclesiastes to say: *one generation passeth away and another generation cometh, and the land abideth forever, the sun also ariseth*, and so on (Eccl. 1:4–5), *the wind goeth toward the south*, and so on, *all the rivers run into the sea*, and so on, *all things toil to weariness*, and so on, *that which hath been is that which shall be and that which hath been done is that which shall be done, and there is nothing new under the sun* (Eccl. 1:6–9). That is to say, given that the nature of the elements—from which the nourishment whereby men live and come to have their dispositions is generated—is such that they always have a single unchanging state, as he clarified regarding each one of them, he was certain that that decree which he decreed for all things of the world—[namely,] that they are *vanity* for the reasons he had mentioned—would not vary with respect to any change in people or in respect of some variation in their nature.⁴² For they do not differ in their opinions and time shall not change them [in such a way as] to change decrees such as these, [nor] to convert them from good to evil

⁴² The basic idea behind Arama’s explication of the opening verses of Ecclesiastes here is that because climate is largely determinative of human nature, what is true of and for people in a given clime at one time will likely be true for others in that clime, at other times, including their desires, actions, and (in)ability to achieve the final end of human existence, understood as perfection of the intellect.

nor [from] evil to good, *for that which hath been is that which shall be*, and so on, *is there a thing whereof it shall be said*, and so on (Eccl. 1:9–10). For this reason, he resumed thereafter and affirmed his first statement in his saying: *I Qoheleth have been king in Jerusalem, and I applied my heart to seek and to search out*, and so on (Eccl. 1:12–13). All of this is made wonderfully clear in my commentary on that scroll, and this suffices here as an allusion.⁴³

[21] In any case, it has been made clear what we aimed at concerning [how] the affections of man [are derived] from the things upon which he is raised [and these influence] his desires and opinions, such that nourishment is a major principle [constituting] the quality of men. Thus, even in the intermediate climes it is clear that those who perpetually habituate themselves to base habits and coarse, disgusting foods, as well as other loathsome behaviors, these generate natures and dispositions similar to their own and they give birth *in their image and likeness* to children who are base in their souls and [who have] strange and corrupt desires which prevent them from entering the community of the Lord forever. It was for this reason that God, Exalted be He, [gave what He did] unto the individuals of the chosen nation: to move them from the habits which they shared in common with the rest of the peoples in all their conditions and foods and drinks and the rest of life's necessities, so that they would be distinguished,⁴⁴ just as the Perizite villager is distinguished from the prince who eats at his⁴⁵ table *from a portion of the king's food and of the wine which he drank* (Dan. 1:5). For just as they are distinguished in [terms of] their nourishment, so too they are distinguished in their opinions and their actions, as scripture said: *ye are the children of the Lord your God, ye shall not cut yourselves*, and so on (Deut. 14:1). The

⁴³ In his commentary on Ecclesiastes, Arama interprets these verses in a virtually identical fashion, even appealing to the same passage from *Ethics* VI.3 cited in sec. [18] above, and glossing it in the same way.

⁴⁴ *hevdel*

⁴⁵ I.e., the king's.

aim [in this] was to make it known to them that they had already been moved in their nature very far from [the rest of the species of] man,⁴⁶ and that they were already beloved as children of God, such that they ought not be terrified of their limbs corrupting from their flesh like the rest of the nations, as it said: *for thou art a holy people unto the Lord thy God and the Lord hath chosen thee* (Deut. 14:2). There he appended to this *thou shalt not eat any abominable thing, these are the beasts which ye may eat*, and so on (Deut. 14:3–4), *nevertheless, these ye shall not eat*, and so on (Deut. 14:7). See that in this *parashah*, this subject matter proceeds in a similar way.⁴⁷ For He said first: *let not the hair of your heads go loose, neither rend your clothes, that ye die not*, and so on (Lev. 10:6). When he finished with that subject, He added: *speak unto the children of Israel: these are the living things which ye may eat*, and so on (Lev. 11:2), *nevertheless, these shall ye not eat* (Lev. 11:4). This is the correct and fitting order to keep for children who eat at the table of their great and holy father, may they be exalted.

[22] It is fitting that we know that these foods were not prohibited in connection with the body's health and sickness, as some have written.⁴⁸ Heaven forbid! For if this were the case, the rank of the divine Torah would be diminished thereby, due to its [merely] being of the rank of some minor treatise among the books of medicine, which are brief in words and [limited] in their meanings. This is abhorrent, apart from that it is already possible to improve them⁴⁹ with various types of soaked things and compounds through which that injurious force is negated, just as they

⁴⁶ See 3.3.2 and Gate 44 above.

⁴⁷ Arama's point here is that Deut. 14 and Lev. 10–11 have parallel structures thematically: both begin with commandments on how the Israelites are to deal with their body generally, before turning to a focus on the dietary laws, both of which subjects are meant to regulate the Israelites to maintain their special status.

⁴⁸ Hygienic explications of the commandments were extremely popular in medieval Hebrew literature, with two of the best known being accounts being that of Maimonides in *Guide* III.48 and Gersonides in his commentary on *parashat Shemini*. See also Heller-Wilensky, *Arama*, 56–57 on a parallel passage in Abarbanel's commentary on the Torah.

⁴⁹ I.e., sicknesses of the body.

negate the force of the poisons from which all medicaments are made. If this were the case, the prohibition would not stand and the Torah would be made into a lampoon, as we shall speak of further in connection with the red heifer, in Gate 79, with the help of God.⁵⁰ Further, as for the gentile nations who do not keep from eating the flesh of swine and all other impure beasts and birds and fish, we see that they live in health *and none is weary nor stumbles among them* (Isa. 5:27) because of this.

[23] Rather, the things that were prohibited for them⁵¹ were so in connection with the sicknesses and health of the soul. For they are *abominable* and repulsive and harmful to the rational soul and they beget difficulty of comprehension⁵² and an evil disposition and perverted desires. From these, a spirit of impurity is generated, which defiles opinions and actions and expels the spirit of purity and holiness, which David sought in his petition: *take not thy holy spirit from me* (Ps. 51:13) and he said: *create me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me* (Ps. 51:2). This is the meaning of *that ye should be defiled thereby* (Lev. 11:43), for difficulty of comprehension and impurity follow upon one another, as shall be made clear at the end of the Gate from the verses themselves, with the help of God.⁵³ This is why the Torah refers to prohibited and permissible foods by the names *impure* and *pure*: this is *impure unto you* from

⁵⁰ Here is the parallel passage of AY Gate 79 Arama likely has in mind, in which he uses nearly-identical language to make the same argument:

וכן הענין באיסור המאכלות שאם יחשבו שנאסרו בתורה מצד היזקם אל הבריאות הגופי או מצד לחותם או קרירותם יבשותם וארסיותם הנה כבר ימצאו עלה לבטולם אל האנשים אשר לא יזיקום לפי טבעם או שיאכלום ע"י התקונים וההרכבות והתבלין אשר בהם יבטלו כח ההיזק הנמצא בפשוטיהם כמו שהוא הענין בכל התרופות שהם סם המות לבריאם ורפואות לחולים וגם על ידי ההרכבות והתקונים וכזה הענין יקרה בכל מצות התורה עד אשר לא ישאר בה דבר עומד על עומדו. אמנם הענין השני מההירס' הוא מה שתמעט בעיני הכל צורת התורה האלהית להיותה במדרגת חבר קטן חסר וקצר מאד מספרי הנהגת האדם אשר במדות או בעניני הרפואות היותר קצרים וזה מגונה מאד

⁵¹ I.e., the Israelites

⁵² ואטימות; In his *Book of Principles* 3.15, Joseph Albo similarly suggests that this state is produced by eating the "flesh of some animals":

עוד יוליד אכילת בשר קצת הבעלי חיים עובי ועכירות ואטימות בנפש. כמו שבאר הכתוב זה כשאסר לישראל קצת בעלי חיים, אמר בסוף ולא תשקצו את נפשותיכם וגו', ולא תטמאו בהם ונטמאם במ חסר אל"ף להורות על שהם מולידים עובי ואטימות בלב

⁵³ See sec. [47] below.

among the *impure beasts* (Lev. 11:2ff); and *all winged swarming things* (Lev. 11:20) are *impure unto you*; and *of all pure birds*, and so on (Deut. 14:11); from among the pure beasts; *that ye may distinguish between pure and impure* (Lev. 10:10). [These words were used] to teach that the reason for prohibiting these was due to the spirit of impurity, the spirit of evil and harlotry, which attaches to all who eat them. [In contrast,] one who *keeps* himself should distance himself from them, just as he would be cautious of lethal things.

[24] This is the meaning of what the [Sages] said in Midrash (Lev. Rab. 13): “Rabbi Tanḥum bar Ḥanilai said: This may be compared with the case of a physician who went to visit two sick persons, one of whom had the capacity to live, and one of whom did not have the capacity. To the one who had the capacity to live, he said: ‘This you may eat, that you may not eat.’ To the one who did not have the capacity, he said: ‘Give him whatever he asks.’ Thus of the nations of the world who are not destined for life in the World to Come, it is written: *as the green herb I have given you all* (Gen. 9:3); But to Israel, who is destined for life in the World to Come, it is written: *these are the beasts which ye may eat* (Deut. 14:2), *nevertheless of these ye shall not eat of them* (Deut. 14:4).” Is it not written: *every word of God is tried* (Prov. 30:5)?! Thus, it is beautifully clear that the aim [of these commandments] is not directed towards life in this world, for both these and these⁵⁴ are living. Rather, the aim is the life and health of the soul, for he who has a portion in the life of the World to Come is suited to a different nature than that which suits he who does not have a portion in life.

⁵⁴ I.e., Israel and all other peoples, the latter of whom do not adhere to the dietary laws; see the end of sec. [22] above.

[25] Now, in accordance with what we have said, we shall learn some of the reasons behind the signs of purity and impurity in *beasts* and *living beings* from what the Sages explained, [namely,] that they are signs of kingdoms and their variations from one another: “The camel (Lev. 11:4)—this is Babylon, as it said: *that repayeth thee* (gemul) *as thou hast dealt with* (gamal) *us* (Ps. 137:8).⁵⁵ The hyrax (Lev. 11:5)—this is Media, for it gloried the Holy One, Blessed be He, as it is said: *Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, all the kingdoms of the earth hath the Lord given me* (Ezra 1:2). The hare (Lev. 11:6)—this is Greece, for *she raiseth with the throat*, and this is Alexander, who, whenever he saw Simon the Righteous, would say ‘Blessed be the Lord, God of Simon the Just.’” (Lev. Rab. 13). Do you not see that whether the Sages came to this from the details of the verses or from Moses’ mention of them in the Mishneh Torah—[i.e.,] three referred to in one verse (Deut. 14:7) and the *swine* referred to in a second, which indicates to his having a lengthier life than all the rest—that they clarified that they arrived at this in respect of the signs of their attributes?! For they said that cloven hooves is a sign of holiness, which is why the swine boasts of it, and that chewing the cud is a sign of giving praise and glory.⁵⁶

[26] In accordance with this indication, one ought to say that inasmuch as man’s perfection is in *the threefold cord* (Eccl. 4:12) which Moses mentioned in his saying: *in thy mouth and in thy heart that thou mayest do it* (Deut. 30:14)—*For the Lord alone looketh on the heart, while man looketh on the outward appearance* (1 Sam. 16:7), [i.e.,] at that which is *in the mouth* and in *action*—so too is this the case for animals. Among them, there are some who do evil by the *work*

⁵⁵ Thieving daughter of Babylon, happy is he who exacts retribution for what you did to us [*gemulekh shegamalta lanu*].

⁵⁶ The connection between chewing the cud and giving praise and glory relies on both phrases’ use of the common verb *’l/h* in the hifil form, which literally translates as “to raise” or “to elevate” but is awkward in rendering either of the expressions in which it is used here.

of their hands, for which reason they have strong claws for striking and tearing, as well as teeth, which they use as swords and carving knives for tearing up and grinding. And there are some who do not chew their cud, which is a sign of their being constantly ravenous, and never satisfied by the nourishment already in their intestines. There is no doubt that nourishment derived from them begets what is similar to them in terms of these two deficiencies: [i.e.,] (1) *children who deal corruptly* (Isa. 1:4) with giant fingernails [who] steal and are violent by nature. They sharpen their teeth to bite and injure, as the Sage said: *there is a generation whose teeth are swords and their great teeth as knives* (Prov. 30:14). And Micah the Prophet said: *those that cry 'peace' when their teeth have anything to bite, and whoso putteth not into their mouths, they even prepare war against him* (Micah 3:5). There are also (2) *the sons of base men who know not the Lord* (1 Sam 2:12) in their mouths and tongues to praise all that weaned them, *like a weaned child with his mother* (Ps. 131:2): Rather, they eat dainties and are satisfied, but do not bless He who feeds them and do not exalt and praise Him, as it said: *and thou shalt eat and be satisfied and bless the Lord thy God* (Deut. 8:10). These are the fraudulent, those who take pleasure in the world without [offering] any blessing.

[27] This is the reason that the Torah forbid them: [i.e.,] to teach of their natures and those like them among the species of man that this is a profound deficiency that defiles the soul, both from within and without. And it permitted us those which have cloven hooves and chew the cud in order that we distance ourselves from evil and harmful activities, as well as in order that we be *knowers of the Lord* and raise *twenty gerahs*⁵⁷ of the shekel (Ezek. 45:12) from the shekels of exaltation and praise to the One who graces us with all that we require in terms of good things,

⁵⁷ Again, the expression for “to raise” uses the same verb referred to in the previous note, ‘/l/h in the hifil form, hence its symbolic allegiance with chewing or literally “raising” the cud.

and in order that we muzzle our mouths from speaking any evil. It is possible that in the signs [designating pure and impure among] the birds and fish, there is a reason similar to this.

However, because the Sages did not speak of these in this way, we shall not search for them and we shall rely upon the faith of the Holy One, Blessed be He. With this, that good with which the Lord benefitted us has already become clear, in His bringing the entirety of us⁵⁸ by way of this guidance to the most encompassing/inclusive perfection, through which it is possible for all its people to merit Him. In any case, it suffices to distinguish us from all the nations who are all marked for quick corruption. For the people of this nation, it is impossible that they should all fall upon corruption; and even those who do fall or are likely to fall, only do so with difficulty, through extenuations of time and circumstance.

[28] It seems to me that the glory it is fitting to give Him, Exalted be He, for this special state is that to which the Psalmist devoted a special Psalm, as is apparent when it is explained well.⁵⁹ He said: *Of David. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless His holy name* (Ps. 103:1). He related the blessing to the Noble Name itself in connection with the *soul*, and to the *holy name* in connection with *all that is within*, similar to his saying: *my mouth shall speak the praise of the Lord and let all flesh bless His holy name forever* (Ps. 145:21). He mentioned the *blessing of what is within* to say that he arranged the glorification on account of the excellent nourishment which He prepared for him and brought into his intestines, for it is *the bread of the mighty* (Ps. 78:25) and the nourishment of the Torah and commandment. This is why he said:

⁵⁸ *kelaluteinu*

⁵⁹ N.b. Arama's choice to explicate Psalm 103 with recourse to strongly particularistic notions of Jewish supremacy may well be polemical given that throughout the medieval period, the Psalm (together with Ps. 104) was a particularly popular locus for philosophical-cosmological commentaries along more universalistic lines, though this requires further research.

bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits, and so on (Ps. 103:2). For it is not fitting to forget *His benefits* with which He weaned [us], *like a weaned child with his mother, my soul is with me like a weaned child* (Ps. 131:2), as in the soul's being preserved from all damages that may be incurred by way of nourishment, as we said, for it is endangered by these without a doubt. How wonderful is what the Sages said of this: "What is meant by *and forget not all His benefits* (Ps. 103:2)? God placed her breasts in the place of understanding; R. Abbahu said: So that [the nursling] would not look upon nakedness; R. Yehuda said: so that the child would not nurse from a place of uncleanness" (b.Berakhot 10a).⁶⁰ It is clear that the types of nourishment that are valid according to the divine Torah are the "breasts in the place of understanding," through which man is preserved from "looking upon nakedness," which is the error of theological opinions. For idolatry is designated everywhere as adultery and other corrupt activities, which are "the place of uncleanness." As for how this notion can be understood as applying to the entirety of the divine Torah, of which the Sage said: *her breasts satisfy thee at all times* (Prov. 5:19), we have already written about this in Gate 6, i.e., the Gate of the Soul, as well as in Gate 46.⁶¹ Inasmuch as this notion does not concern the health of bodies but rather the health of souls, as we said, he said: *who forgiveth all thine iniquity, who healeth all thine diseases, who redeemeth thy life from the pit, who encompasseth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies* (Ps. 103:3–4). That is to say, this governance is sufficient to *heal all diseases* of souls until *He redeemeth them from the pit* (Job 33:30), and not only this, but moreover for them

⁶⁰ N.b. attributions to Rabbinic authorities do not match with received version.

⁶¹ Arama likely has in mind the following passage from AY Gate 6:

אלא שהיא מבואר שהוא משל מפורסם מאד אל למוד התורה האלהית כמ"ש החכם אילת אהבים ויעלת חן דדיה וכו' (משלי ה':י"ט). ואמר שנסתכל בדדי התורה האלהית היא האם האמתית כמ"ש (שם ב'). כי אם לבינה תקרא [ברכות נ"ז.] ונסתכל בהם ובתועלותיהם וראה שכבר יתחיל להתעצם בלמודה כמזון הזה שיתעצם בו הגזון ואמר שירה ואמר ברכי נפשי את ה' ואל תשכחי וכו' והוא מה שפירשו בתכלית הביאור כשאמר מאי היא שעשה לה דדים במקום בינה. והוא מה שיתעצם האדם בה בדעות אמתיות ותכונות ישרות כי זה כל האדם. וכמו שביארו החכמים ההם. זה אומר כדי שלא יסתכל בערוה והוא כנוי אל הדעות המקולקלות באלהות כי ע"א מכונה לניאוף בכל מקום. וזה אומר שלא יינק ממקום הטנופת והוא ענין המעשים הפחותים. אשר בשתים אלו יבדלו המתעצמים בנפשם מהבלתי מתעצמים בלי ספק

to merit life in the World to Come, where “the righteous sit with their crowns upon their heads, enjoying the splendor of the Shekhinah” (b. Berakhot 17a).

[29] After he mentioned this notion generally, he explained it and said: *who satisfieth thine old age with good things so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle*, and so on (Ps. 103:5). That is, He distinguished them and separated them from every impure and loathsome and abominable thing that defiles the soul, and *He satisfied* [them] with the finest of all the *good* and healthy food which is fed to every soul. This is a profound cause, for after the body has perished and its faculties ceased, the *youth* of the gentle soul *is renewed like the eagle*, which is the opposite of what he said: *those who eat swine’s flesh and the abominable thing and the mouse shall be consumed together, saith the Lord* (Isa. 66:17). *The Lord executeth righteousness and acts of justice for all that are oppressed* (Ps. 103:6). He said that *He executeth righteousness* with all who nurse at the breasts of the Torah and are weaned from its milk, saving them from the hand of those who *oppress* them. And there is no *oppressor* greater than man’s soul being delivered over to the *evil impulse of a man’s heart* (Gen. 8:21) and there being nothing to save him therefrom.

[30] After he spoke of this notion in particular, he moved to discussing the divine Torah and its commandments in general, for this is the bread which the Lord gave to His chosen people to eat, and upon which life depends. He said: *He made known His ways unto Moses, His doings unto the children of Israel* (Ps. 103:7). That is, as for the corporeal nourishment which He mentioned first,⁶² it is this which suits one whose soul is nourished by that divine, spiritual nourishment.

⁶² I.e., in Ps. 103:1.

The verse includes the Torah and the commandments and the *ways* [as all among] the righteous ways of the Lord through which He deals with them, as he said: *the Lord is full of compassion and gracious, slow to anger*, and so on (Ps. 103:8), which are according to the order of the thirteen attributes. *He made it known* to them also that *He will not always contend* (Ps. 103:9), even if they transgress His commandments, *neither will He keep His anger forever* with them, for He is *compassionate and gracious* and *repents evil* (Jer. 26:19). For if this were not the case, the harm that would have already befallen them according to the Torah—on account of their transgressing its commandments and thus being obliged to their designated punishments—would be greater than the benefit and reward that they would attain from it! He said that this notion, [i.e.,] His *passing by* [iniquities] (Mic. 7:18) in accordance with His attributes, was already made clear to them through experience, and this is *He hath not done with us according to our sins, nor requited us according to our iniquities* (Ps. 103:10). In my eyes, this verse is not repetitive in its meaning, but rather employs excellent rhetoric in saying that *He hath done with us* initially *not according to our sins* for which we are guilty today, for from ancient times *He hath done with us* many goodnoses, though we requited Him with evils. Also, *He hath not requited us according to these iniquities of ours* afterwards. That is to say, even though we did not *requite* Him for the good which *He hath done with us*, even still *He did not requite us* according to the wickedness of our deeds, for *unto Thee, O Lord, belongeth righteousness, but unto us confusion of face* (Dan. 9:7). Similarly, we see that *for as the height of the heaven above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him* (Ps. 103:11). What would have been fitting is for him to have said: *so high is His mercy*, as he said: *for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher*, and so on (Isa. 55:9). However, his aim was to say that just as it is only said that the *heaven is high above the earth*, that is to say, more than the earth, by way of metaphor—

inasmuch as the *heavens* are the absolute uppermost and the *earth* is the absolute bottommost, and it is not said of them that the one is higher or lower than the other—similarly, it is said [only] by way of metaphor that *so great is the mercy of the Lord toward them that fear Him*. The meaning of this is that *He hath done* more with them than what He was obligated to do for them, for by way of truth, everything is *mercy* from Him, and nothing whatsoever is obligatory. This is similar to what he said and explained afterwards: *as for man, his days are as grass*, and so on, *but the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting unto everlasting* (Ps. 103:15–17), and this explanation is the aim of his saying *so are My ways higher than your ways*, and so on (Isa. 55:9). In this way, *then I saw that there is more profit in wisdom than ignorance, like the profit in light over darkness* (Eccl. 2:13) shall become exceeding clear. The aim is not [to refer to] the *profit* of less and more, but rather [to] the distinction between acquisition and privation, which was already made clear at the outset of Gate 29.⁶³

[31] *As the east is distant from the west, so has He distanced our transgressions from us* (Ps. 103:12). He said that the divine guidance is sufficient to *distance* us from grave sins—and these are the rebellious ones—as *the east is distant from the west*, which is double the *height of the heavens above the earth*. That is to say, if He was beneficent such that *His mercy is so great toward those that fear Him as the height of the heaven above the earth*, then the benefit He

⁶³ Though not developing the exact same ideas explicitly, the following is the passage of AY Gate 29 Arama likely has in mind, where he cites the same verse of Eccl. 2:13 in the context of a broader discussion about the acquisitions necessary for certain activities:

ואולם לפי שהשכל ההיולאני הוא על הדמיון הנזכר עצמו כי הוא בתחלה משולל מהמושכלות וע"י כן ישיגם כמו שנתבאר בספר הנזכר הנה היה לו אור החכמ' כאור החמה להוציא כחו אל הפועל במדרגת האור אל המובט וכמו שכתב הרב המור' פרק י"א חלק ג'. וכן אמר החכם (קהלת ב') וראיתי אני כי יש יתרון לחכמה מן הסכלות כיתרון האור מן החשך. וביאר הענין באומרו החכם עיניו בראשו והסכיל בחשך הולך. ירצה כי החכם אף על פי שיהי' סומא מעיניו הנה עיניו האמתיים הם בהשכל אשר בראשו. לחזית הדבר המושג משרשי החכמ' המוקדמים אליו. אמנם הסכיל עינים לו ולא ירא' שום מושכל כי כשאינו יודע הוא בחשך על דרך האמת. ולהיות התור' האלהית מסגלת לזה משאר החכמות אמר החכם כי נר מצוה ותור' אור (משלי ו') ירצה שכל מצוה ומצוה אל השכל היא כנר אצל העין להישיירו להוציא פעולותיו בעיונים ודרושים חלקיים אמנם התור' בכלל היא אור כולל להשלים אותו בכללות

intended in *His distancing* the lot of us from natural *transgressions* is double the measure of that! This is the character and measure of that benefit which we spoke about first, which we attain through this guidance.⁶⁴ I gave my heart unto scrutinizing this verse in detail, for its meaning seemed weak, and eventually it brought me to a wonderous that sustains this aim. Being precise, it seems that he should have said *as the west is distant from the east*, for two reasons.⁶⁵ The first is that the eastern point is the first [point] *from* which the first motion towards *the west* begins, and it would have been fitting that *the west* be described by its distance *from the east*, since all things [are described in terms of] that towards which they go [then] unto that from which they came; [thus] not *the east* in [terms] of its *distance from the west*, since this [describes] the distance between that from which it came unto that towards which it goes. The second is that *transgressions* are more fittingly related to *the west* than *the east*, as he said: *the way of the wicked is as darkness*, and so on (Prov. 4:19), *but the path of the righteous is as light of the dawn* (Prov. 4:18).

[32] However, it is apparent that in the excellence of his intellect, the Psalmist saw that there was some aspect on account of which it was more [fitting] to say *the east is distant from the west* than *the west is distant from the east*. And this is: it is known that the *distance* between two places is measured by the time it takes for something in motion to move from the one place to the other, as it is said: *it is eleven days journey from Horeb* (Deut. 1:2) and a *journey of three days in the wilderness* (Ex. 19:22). Because of this, one is obliged to say *the distance of the west from the east* is only twelve hours, for this is how long it takes for the hosts of the heavens and their

⁶⁴ I.e., the first benefit of the dietary laws, discussed in secs. [12]–[17] above.

⁶⁵ I.e., the order of east and west in the verse should have been reversed, on account of both (1) the westward diurnal motion; (2) that the “transgression” referred to in the second clause of the verse, qua a sort of darkness, should be associated with the direction of sunset, i.e., the west.

soldiers to move from the eastern point to the western one opposite it by way of the diurnal motion, and nothing moves from *the east* to *the west* in a time longer than this. However, the *distance* which is towards *the east* from *the west* is measured by the motions of the spheres which move *from the west* towards *the east*, and these are the whole host of the heavens in general: the sphere of the Zodiac and the planets, all of which have motions that are slower. The fastest among them is the sphere of the moon, which takes approximately a month to arrive to *east* from *west*. As for Venus, Mercury, and the Sun, that same motion takes a whole year for them; for their motions are very similar to each other with few variations. For Mars [this motion] takes two and a half years, while Jupiter takes twelve years and Saturn takes thirty years. As for the sphere of the Zodiac, some say that its complete motion takes thirty-six thousand years, while others say it is not within its nature to ever complete a full motion. From this, the motion *from the west* towards the *east* differs in two ways from the motion *from the east* towards the *west*. The first consists in the variations between the bodies in motion: i.e., in the first instance [i.e., westward motion], all the host of the heaven and its soldiers move together, and all cease [moving] in a single instant at the western point, such as is not the case for the rest of the motions [i.e., eastward motions]. Rather, each one [of the bodies in eastward motion] arrives at the eastern point by itself, and when the time of each arrives in which it has completed a full rotation, one has taken a day and another a year, and still another one hundred years. The second [difference] is the delay of the [eastward] motion and its slowness, as compared with the diurnal [westward] motion.

[33] It is from this perspective that he was deliberate in saying, contrary to what we might expect, *as the east is distant from the west*, for what occurs to [celestial] bodies moving thusly

[i.e., eastward] is similar to what occurs to us in the *distancing of our transgressions*. That is, if the guidance of our Torah's light did not suffice to prevent us from sin completely in every instance, in any case, we have still attained an extraordinary benefit from it and have been greatly distinguished thereby from among all the nations, as is the eastward motion from the westward. That is, all the gentiles who did not hearken to [the Torah's] teaching and did not see its glory, all of them shall come as one and settle into the utter blackness in but an instant, none *shall remain or escape* (Josh. 8:22) like the multitude of the heavens which settle in the *west*. However, as for us, the tribe of Israel, here we are today like the multitude of the stars which move *from the west* towards *the east*, for our procession towards *transgression* is naught if not greatly delayed, as is the motion of those [eastward-moving] spheres. From this it follows that we likewise vary from one another in our attaining it: There are some who are slower, and others who are slower than these, and some even slower still, such that you will find one who has never attained to sin ever, and this is a wondrous thing, just as among the spheres there is only one [which never attains the eastern point], and even this is only according to the opinion of some.

[34] The Psalmist spoke of this wondrous benefit using excellent rhetoric and it is very much in accord with his aim in this. He provided a reason for all that he mentioned of this guidance and said: *like as a father hath compassion upon his children, so hath the Lord compassion upon them that fear Him, for He knoweth our impulse*, and so on (Ps. 103:13–14). For *the father* strives with all his might to prepare a straight path before his son, by which he might enter into the community of knowledge and *fear of the Lord*. This is all the more so the case if he knows him⁶⁶ to have a poor natural disposition for this, since [then] that striving will be necessary. This is

⁶⁶ I.e., if the father knows the son.

how God, Blessed be He, was in relation to us and our circumstances, inasmuch as *He knoweth* the evil of *our impulse* in respect of our substance and from the initial roots of our formation. [It is] such that in respect of our nature, *as for man, his days are as grass*, and so on, *for the wind passeth over it, and it is gone* (Ps. 103:15–16); and he said: *and the place thereof knoweth him no more* (Ps. 103:16), for after his death, *the place thereof knoweth him no more* as it did during his life.⁶⁷ This is because as long he lives, the outer limits of the air serve as boundaries for him, encompassing him, as he said: *it turns, it turns, the wind goeth about* (Eccl. 1:6). However, after he dies, the outer limits of the dust serve as boundaries for him. *But the mercy of the Lord is from world unto world*, and so on (Ps. 103:17). He meant: However, this *mercy* which we have from Him suffices to cause our souls to perdure *from* the end of this *world unto* the beginning of the *World to Come*, for the end of this is contained in the principle of that. As scripture said: *the righteous shall flourish like the palm tree*, and so on (Ps. 92:13). He meant that just as *the palm tree flourishes* in bringing forth its fruit seventy years after its planting, the *flourishing* of the *world of the righteous* is similar, [occurring] in general seventy years after the days of this *world*, as he said: *the days of our years are seventy years* (Ps. 90:10). However, this [next world] shall be *for such as keep His covenant and to those that remember His precepts* which He commanded us in this Torah *to do* (Ps. 103:18). For thusly this guidance will be beneficial by *providing* the human species to be among those who have *free access* (Zech. 3:7)⁶⁸ to intellectually apprehend all the worlds and to attain the height of the Creator's great splendor as well as the dwelling-place of His angels and the rank of the host of His heavens.

⁶⁷ Compare Arama's discussions on how according to consensus philosophical Aristotelian anthropology, i.e., the conception of man as rational animal, is necessarily incompatible with belief in the possibility of immortality in Gate 44, Part I, secs. [3]–[7].

⁶⁸ See Gate 44, secs. [16], [24], [28]–[29], [35] for Arama's references to those who have *free access* (mahelkhim).

[35] It is not necessary to say [that man will also apprehend] *all His works* in the world subject to generation and corruption to a sufficient degree, as this is counted among the praises and blessings due to Him, Exalted by He, for everything. For it is an honor and glory to Him, in its relation to that for which greatness and glory are [truly] due to the supernal beings. [And this is the case] inasmuch as it is necessary that one's intellectual apprehension extend from this most lowly existent through everything above it until it reaches the First Cause, Exalted be He.⁶⁹

However, as for supernal beings, it is not necessary that their intellectual apprehension extend to that which is below them.⁷⁰ To recount all this, he said: *The Lord hath established His throne in the heavens*, and so on, *bless the Lord, ye angels of His*, and so on, *bless the Lord, all ye His hosts*, and so on, *bless the Lord, all ye His works*, and so on (Ps. 103:19–22). He said that God and His court—that is, the world of the *angels*—*hath established His throne in the heavens*—and the *heavens* are the world of the spheres, and this is as he said: *the heaven is My throne* (Isa. 66:1). From there, *His kingdom ruleth over all* (Ps. 103:19), even over this lower world, for he included the three worlds. As for the *angels*, in all their speculation they only gaze at their First Cause, who is above them. For this reason, corresponding to them, he said: *bless the Lord, ye angels of His, ye mighty in strength that do His word*, and so on (Ps. 103:20).⁷¹ That is to say, even in the activities of the *mighty* among them, [i.e.,] in moving the celestial bodies, they only aim at *hearkening to the voice of His word*. As for the *host of the Heaven*, their gaze must be towards the *angels* above them, [from which] their speculation shall pass on to apprehend that what they do through the power of those who move them they only do to *do His will*, Exalted be He. Thus, corresponding to them he said: *bless the Lord, all ye His hosts, ye ministers of His that*

⁶⁹ Compare Arama's remarks on the mode of human vs. angelic apprehension in Gate 10, secs. [5]–[7]/

⁷⁰ Ibidem.

⁷¹ Compare Arama's interpretation of this key verse in Gate 44, Part I, secs. [15]–[17], [19]; and Part III, secs. [15]–[17].

do His will (Ps. 103:21). They do not *do His word*, like the first,⁷² but rather they *do His will*, which reaches them by way of those intermediaries. As for the lowly beings, they are those whose speculation and gazing extends through all the worlds. For they sense the world of elements to which they are most proximate by way of their sense-perception, and they recognize and know the wondrous aspects of their [own] composition as well as the generation of all existents that [exist] together with them on their [side of the] divide. [They also recognize and know] the existence of heavenly bodies which are above them and which move them, though not of their⁷³ [own] knowledge or intention. [They recognize and know too] the grandeur of the great captains⁷⁴ who move these⁷⁵ through the dictum of the Creator, Exalted be He, who is above all of them. Regarding these he said: *bless the Lord, all ye His works, in all places*, and so on (Ps. 103:22). For these are the ones who contemplate *all of the dominions*, of which he said: *and His kingdom ruleth over all* (Ps. 103:19). And according as they are able, they apprehend an apprehension that compels them to bless this felicity, for which reason he concluded with *bless the Lord, O my soul*. The psalm that follows this⁷⁶ testifies clearly that [David] gave Him blessings and praise of the species and in the order that we spoke of, [i.e.,] with respect to how He ordered all existents, from the smallest to the greatest among them. This suffices for the purpose we established initially, [i.e.,] that if the universal good is better and more praiseworthy, [then] the divine Torah is the most praiseworthy among all types of]guidance, inasmuch as it is clear that its aim is that its guidance be the most universal possible, whether according to nature or according to study.

⁷² i.e., the angels

⁷³ i.e., the celestial spheres'

⁷⁴ i.e., the angels

⁷⁵ i.e., the celestial spheres

⁷⁶ i.e., Psalm 104

[36] This is what the Sages aimed at in their saying that we mentioned at the outset, “*He hath brought me to the house of wine*. R. Meir said: The community of Israel said: ‘The evil inclination obtained mastery over me like wine, and I said [to the calf]: *This is thy god, O Israel* (Ex. 32:4). When wine goes into a man it confuses his mind.’” Here, R. Meir relates *the house of wine* to the confounding of opinion, [which emerges] from error of the intellect in regards to theological speculations.⁷⁷ An example [of this] is what the Sages said: “they entered [the Tent of Meeting] drunk with wine” (Lev. Rab. 12:1), as we wrote in the previous Gate.⁷⁸ For that confounding drunkenness *brought them* to love the worship of one form of *His banner*, as it is said: *and they four had the face of an ox on the left side* (Ezek. 1:10). They already elaborated on this⁷⁹ in [connection with] the verse *I have surely seen* (Ex. 3:7, Ex. Rab. 3:2), which is in the *parashah* on the [golden] calf (Gate 53).⁸⁰ Its meaning is that the congregation of Israel was

⁷⁷ Though he never says as much explicitly, only suggesting later in passing that “pure wisdom was likened to wine [consumed] wisely,” it seems clear that throughout this section, Arama understands wine as an allegorical referent for philosophical metaphysics: Reading through the other Gates (59, 53) where he develops his discussions on the sins of Nadab and Abihu and Israel with the golden calf, Arama understands both sets of sins as caused not by just any sort of theological error, but specifically the theological errors precipitated by overreliance on philosophical metaphysics. This gels not only with his conceptualization that theological misconceptions precipitated by philosophical overweening are problematic for praxis, as discussed in 2.3.2 above, but also with the apologia he attributes to Israel in the name of R. Meir, since he understands the Fall too as a descent into philosophical overweening. It gels too with his gloss of R. Judah’s dictum, since it is precisely the moderation of Torah and its divine metaphysics that allows philosophy’s benefits to shine forth in tempering it.

⁷⁸ In AY Gate 59, Arama suggests that the Rabbis attempted to explain Nadab and Abihu’s transgression narrated at the beginning of Lev. 10 with recourse to the four Aristotelian causes: In this connection, the Rabbis’ declaration that “they entered drunk with wine” signifies the formal cause of Nadab and Abihu’s transgression, namely, their suffering from intellectual error in matters of theology, delusive opinions concerning the true reality of God’s existence or the nature of His providence or power, etc. For Arama’s understanding that only Here are excerpts of the relevant passage from AY Gate 59, in which Arama uses the same language to describe “intellectual error” and the “confusion of opinion:”

אמנם השתדלו לדבר על הסבות ההנה אשר הביאים אליו וסתמו הדברים עליהם כדרך בכל כיוצא בזה ואמר שאי אפשר שלא קדמו הד' סוגי סבות הנמצאות בכל הפעולות הראשונה שבוש השכל ובלבול הדעת באלהות אמרו היוכל או הישגיח לשלח מלפניו האש הזאת על דרך הרצון המוחלט מבלי שיחייבהו ההקש הטבעי או לא וזהו שבוש וחסרון בהם מצד הכח השכלי שבהם שהוא צורתם... והנה בבחינת הסבה הצורית אמר שתויי יין נכנסו והוא ודאי ערבוב השכל בדעות האלהיות והפקפוק באמיתת מציאותו או בהשגחתו או ביכלתו וזולת זה

⁷⁹ i.e., Ezek. 1:10

⁸⁰ In AY Gate 53, Arama explicates the Israelites’ sin of the golden calf through creative exegesis of a midrash from Exodus Rabbah, in which the Rabbis connect precisely the scriptural verses cited here, linking Ex. 3:7 to Ezek. 1:10. According to Arama, the Rabbis understand the Israelites’ sin as deriving from their bad theology, and specifically

apologizing⁸¹ for that sin, [as proceeding] from the evil of its impulse, as it is said:⁸² *The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat, or the serpent beguiled me*, and so on (Gen. 3:12–13). However, inasmuch as he sinned himself,⁸³ *Hold thy peace, for one must not mention it* (Amos 6:10), such that his apology constituted a second sin for him, as we wrote there (i.e., in Gate 9):⁸⁴ “R. Judah said to him: Enough of that, Meir; we do not expound the Song of Songs except for the praise of Israel. What then is meant by *he hath brought me to the house of wine*? The community of Israel said: ‘The Holy One, Blessed be He, brought me to a great cellar of wine, that is, Sinai. There He gave me banners of Torah and commandments and good deeds and in great love I accepted them.’” He related *the house of wine* to what the Torah said: *come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled* (Prov. 9:5), and in this book itself⁸⁵ [it says]: *for thy love is better than wine* (Song 1:2); *we will find thy love more fragrant than wine* (Song 1:4); *and the roof of thy mouth like the best wine* (Song 7:10); *I have drunk my wine with my milk* (Song 5:1). For just as unmeasured wine brings one to many great harms—which the Sage mentioned at the end of Proverbs⁸⁶ and which the Sages expounded in the midrash in the section “*drink no wine or strong drink*” (Lev. 10:9, Lev. Rab. 12), it is unnecessary to say that [wine] that is mixed and measured is not harmful: Rather, it is very beneficial for strengthening the nutritive faculty and improving digestion and *causing his*

from their attributing governance of the world *entirely* to the celestial spheres rather than to the guidance and governance of the Torah.

⁸¹ Apologizing in the sense of apologia, i.e., explaining in an attempt to justify.

⁸² Arama suggests that R. Meir’s gloss of Song 2:4 at the beginning of the *ma’amar* is Israel’s impoverished apologia for the golden calf episode: The Israelites attempt to pin the errant theological opinions that precipitated their sin back onto man’s original coupling with “woman”/the evil impulse, i.e., matter and its concomitants, which precipitated his descent into philosophical overweening, though this is of course tantamount to blaming human nature and in turn God Himself.

⁸³ The Israelites’ apologia is not only immediately met with a challenge, as man (or intellect)’s composition with matter/the evil impulse does not exonerate him, but Arama suggests, it itself counts as an additional sin against him.

⁸⁴

⁸⁵ I.e., Song of Songs.

⁸⁶ See Prov. 31:4–7.

heart to rejoice and making the face brighter, as the physicians have written. Scripture says: *and wine causeth the heart of man to rejoice, making the face brighter than oil and bread*, and so on (Ps. 104:15). He meant that while *bread* is the main source of man's nourishment and the *stayer* of his *heart*, *wine* multiplies these benefits and is even more exalted, since it makes the heart wise and sharpens the intellect, as they said: "wine and spices rendered me wise" (b. Horayot 13b). This is why pure wisdom was likened to wine [consumed] wisely. However, he said, "a great cellar of wine—this is Sinai" to allude to the benefit of universality,⁸⁷ about which we spoke.⁸⁸ For just as wine sold in a cellar store is accessible⁸⁹ to all who enter—for by way of an announcement all are given permission to come and buy and drink and that none will stay them—so too was the case at the event of Mount Sinai, where He, Blessed be He announced: *come, eat of My bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled* (Prov. 9:5). Indeed, the place was announced and known and chosen such that all would enter and receive the benefit drinking by virtue of what they were given there,⁹⁰ [i.e.,] the banners of Torah and the commandments, the aim of which is to improve their nature and disposition in general; to move them from the baseness of matter and wickedness of nature in which the *impulse* of man is imprinted at the beginning of his formation, until they become *children taught of the Lord* (Isa. 54:13) and great ones at His table, as one of the sons of God. For thus, they will no longer have to make that apologia of which R. Meir spoke: 'The evil inclination obtained mastery over me,' and as the Sages said: "When Israel stood at Mount Sinai, their contamination ceased" from them (b. Yebamot 103b).

⁸⁷ *kelalut*

⁸⁸ See sec. [3] of this Gate, but also sec. [3] of Gate 44, Part II, and 3.2.1 above.

⁸⁹ *kolel*

⁹⁰ See Gate 44, Part II, secs. [5]–[12] on God's selection of the circumstances prior to the moment of revelation at Sinai so as to facilitate the Israelites' maximal receptivity.

[37] On account of this universal remedy, the Sages words at the beginning of Pereq Heleq were most correct: “All Israel have a portion in the world to come, as it is said: *thy people also shall be righteous* (Isa. 60:21), and so on” (m.Sanhedrin 10:1). First, we ought to scrutinize the Tanna’s aim in this statement. For if he intended to say that every individual of Israel—[e.g.,] one who is wise, one who is wicked, and one who does not know⁹¹—all as one have a portion in the World to Come, then this, in truth, is a great injustice, whether considered with respect to these individuals vis-à-vis each other, or with respect to the nation [as a whole] vis-à-vis other nations.⁹² “And is there favoritism here” (b. Megillah 12a) [such that] in the seed of Israel’s being His servant, all merit life in the World to Come, *so that the righteous should be as the wicked? heaven forbid this for Him!* (Gen. 18:25). [Alternatively] If he intended to say that as for all who are called by the name Israel, it is certain that he shall be righteous, and from this it follows that he shall have a portion in the World to Come, this is not possible: Existence rejects it, since there indeed exist heretics among them—among the great and the mediocre and the imbeciles [all alike]. But the Sages [themselves] rejected these two [possible] intentions when they enumerated there “and these are the ones who do not have a portion in the World to Come,” and so on (m. Sanhedrin 10:1), and all these are from among the children of Israel.

⁹¹ Here Arama is using the Haggadah’s language in its account of the four sons; n.b., these recur throughout his oeuvre, especially in his commentary on Proverbs, Yad Abshalom.

⁹² This sentence and the following clearly pose an internal challenge to Arama’s theory of Jews as separate species as I have given an account of it in the third chapter of this dissertation, for here he explicitly articulates and condemns the divine injustice of elevating the entirety of one nation, righteous and wicked included, above all others; he seems to resolve this difficulty easily in the section that follows though, by contenting himself with the elevation of one nation above all the rest so long as he can imagine all its adherents are righteous, and so justly deserving of their superiority—and this through their adherence to Torah.

[38] Rather, his true aim and original insight in this dictum is that the only ones who are called “Israel” in truth are those who are righteous, for “Israel” and “righteous” are subject and predicate terms that can be transposed. [This is the case] since all Israel is required to be righteous according to the behavior required by the Torah, as we said. And if this is the case, every person who is righteous in truth is Israel. From this, one can similarly transpose “son of Israel” and “son of the World to Come,” for every son of Israel is a son of the World to Come, and everyone who is a son of the World to Come is a son of Israel. This is similar to the notion of the property (*segullah*), [i.e.,] that every man laughs and everyone who laughs is a man, and this is the dictum: *then ye shall be Mine own segullah from among all the peoples, and ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation* (Ex. 19:5–6).⁹³ For the notion of the *segullah* that is conjoined to the *people of Israel* whom He mentioned by this name in his saying *thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob and tell the children of Israel* (Ex. 19:3) is that they would become *a kingdom of priests and a holy nation*. This is in truth the inheritance of those who worship the Lord and their righteousness for the World to Come, without a doubt. However, as for the people who are not willing to *hearken* to the words of the Torah and the commandments and do not behave themselves accordingly to receive its benefits in improving their nature and opinions, they are not Israel save in name alone, when terms are used imprecisely. Thus, in his saying: “all Israel have a portion in the World to Come” the Israel [referred to] is the Israel that is reared upon that guidance, for like it its actions are upright.

[39] This is why the prophet said: *thy people also shall all be righteous* (Isa. 60:21), for it is a condition that the *people* who dwell within this congregation *all be righteous*, as it was written:

⁹³ See Gate 44, Part I, sec. [18], Part III, sec. [26], and 3.3.2.1 above.

the remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity nor speak lies, and so on (Zeph. 3:13). For all of them together shall participate in their education according to the divine Torah and the doing of its commandments and all its customs in common, even if they do not participate in common in its⁹⁴ matters of theoretical investigation and its sciences, [in] providing reasons for its words and plumbing the depths its secrets, for this was only bequeathed to select individuals among them.⁹⁵ Our Master Moses clarified this notion in his saying: *Moses commanded us a Torah, an inheritance of the congregation of Jacob* (Deut. 33:4). That is, he taught that the [select] remnants among them should say: *Moses commanded us a Torah*, for the name “Torah”⁹⁶ indicates to the theoretical part [of Torah] which illuminates the rational faculty. This is similar to what the Master and Guide wrote in the preface, this is what he said:⁹⁷ “the purpose of this treatise and all those like it is the science of the Torah in its true sense.” It is incumbent upon these⁹⁸ to illuminate the words of the Torah so that that name accords with it [as] a perfect instruction, as the Sage said: *and the Torah is light* (Prov. 6:23). As for *the congregation of Jacob*, it is said that it shall have an *inheritance* in the Torah. When one who *inherits* wealth is asked from whence he came to merit it, he shuts up their arguments in saying: “I know nothing of its causes or transmutations, I have only *inherited* it”—and this claim prevails over all appeals/objections. As the [Sages] taught in the chapter on possessing houses: “one who comes based on inheritance does not need a claim” (b. Baba Batra 41a). So too it is fitting for all the congregation of Israel who do not plunge into the depths of secrets that they [nonetheless] have a claim of *inheritance* of estate, and they thereby merit [the Torah] for themselves so that none

⁹⁴ i.e., the Torah’s.

⁹⁵ Compare Gate 44, Part II secs. [15]–[18] for Arama’s conceptualization of the Torah’s actions as shared in common; Part I secs. [13]–[17] for the role Arama assigns to the elite.

⁹⁶ Here Arama plays on the common Hebrew root in the word for “Torah” and the word for “instruction” or “teaching.”

⁹⁷ See Pines, *Guide*, Introduction, 5.

⁹⁸ i.e., select individuals.

may dispossess them of it.⁹⁹ In addition to this, it¹⁰⁰ is a partial *inheritance* in [its contributing] to ease (*qalut*) and proximity such that they can proceed thereby towards their perfection, which would be very difficult and remote by way of theoretical speculation, just as it is very difficult and remote to erect a large house from dust, or a fortress from trash.¹⁰¹ [By contrast,] when a man *inherits* it, everything is prepared for him sans any exertion or effort, as he said: *great and goodly cities, which thou didst not build, and houses full of all good things which thou didst not fill, and cisterns hewn out, which thou didst not hew, vineyards and olive trees, which thou didst not plant, and thou shalt eat and be satisfied* (Deut. 6:10–11). So too for the Torah: everything is prepared for him like a set table *full of fatness* (Job 36:16) in all places.¹⁰² This is the meaning of *thy people also shall all be righteous* (Isa. 60:21) and it is a perfect proof that “all Israel have a portion in the World to Come.” That is, if it is assumed that the righteous have a portion in the World to Come, and to this is adjoined a second premise that this *people shall all be righteous*, it follows necessarily that *all* have a portion in the World to Come. He said: *the branch of My planting, the work of My hands, wherein I glory* (Isa. 60:21) to indicate to the condition that we spoke of concerning this decree, [namely,] that the name “Israel” refers to one who is called this in truth. That is to say, concerning those in whom *the work of His hands* does not *glory*, he is not of His *planting* nor *the branch of His roots*, without a doubt. This is the general principle of what R. Judah meant in his saying: “He brought me to a great cellar of wine, that is, Sinai”—and this is most specifically fit for our purpose.

⁹⁹ i.e., the Torah.

¹⁰⁰ i.e., the Torah.

¹⁰¹ Compare Gate 44, Part II, secs. [2]–[3], [15]–[19] on the ease of the commandments’ facilitating immortality as against immortality via intellectual perfection.

¹⁰² Compare the imagery of Gate 44, Part II, sec. [18].

[40] It is possible that in his saying “a great cellar of wine, that is, Sinai,” he intended [to refer to] the perfect individuals who enter into the chain of tradition, from Moses the Master of all, unto the Men of the Great Assembly (m. Abot 1:1), and from there on and so forth, as the Sages enumerated at the beginning of the tractate Abot: “Moses received the Torah at Sinai and transmitted it to Joshua, Joshua to the elders, the elders to the prophets, the prophets to the Men of the Great Assembly.” Just as this cellar of *spiced wine* (Song 8:2) is never empty of people entering and exiting, so too for the reception of the divine Torah: For Moses was the first to enter into the cellar and receive the Torah from Sinai; that is to say, from that famed day when he stood there before the Lord at Sinai, and similarly *and higher than Agag*, and so on (Num. 24:7), as shall be mentioned in its place.¹⁰³ Before he exited, Joshua entered, and before his sun set, the sun of the elders rose, whose days long exceeded his. They were more important than the prophets who succeeded them, and for this reason they were called “elders” simply, just as Moses and Joshua were called by their names on account of their greatness, like the sun and the moon amongst the rest of the stars/planets. Accordingly, they said: “The face of Moses is as the face of the sun, the face of Joshua is as the face of the moon. The elders of the generation said: Woe for this embarrassment” (b. Baba Batra 75a), as was made well clear in connection with *but his minister Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man* (Ex. 33:11) in Gate 54.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ See AY Gate 82.

¹⁰⁴ In AY Gate 54, Arama elaborates on this Rabbinic dictum likening Moses and Joshua to the sun and moon with reference to their greatness and uniqueness among the prophets (as the sun and moon are in comparison with the other planets): While Moses (like the sun) is clearly greatest of all, Joshua is a more faithful servant of Moses than all the other elders of his generation (as the moon is to the sun, more closely tethered to its orbit—), and it is for this reason that Joshua merits a certain compensatory reward (*pras*) from Moses as the moon is illuminated by the sun’s light. That reward is that like Moses (and the sun), Joshua (and the moon) is known by his given name only, and not in conjunction with the title of “prophet” like the rest of the prophets (e.g., “the prophet Isaiah,” “the prophet Jeremiah,”) and the other planets (the “planet of Saturn,” “the planet of Mars”). Arama elaborates to say that “some of the elders in that generation”—i.e., the generation of Joshua—“merited a degree of this relation, in that on account of their greatness they were not called “prophets,” but rather “elders,” a [simple] description of them in general....inasmuch as the spirit of Moses emanated upon them, and they participated together with him in his rank.”

[41] With the exiting of the elders, the prophets entered, until the Word reached the Men of the Great Assembly, who in truth established a great cellar and “raised many students, to make a fence around the Torah” (m. Abot 1:1) through which they sustained the world (m. Abot 1:2) from the sealing of prophecy and thence onwards. In my opinion, this explicates their saying “they said three things” (m. Abot 1:1); that is to say, they were called the Men of the Great Assembly on account of these three things. I mean that in order to “make a fence,” which is the main principle, it was fitting for them to “be moderate in [the application of] law” and conventions, as well as “to raise many students” in their conventions to remove every uncertainty and subversion from them. This dictum is not the beginning of the tractate as some say,¹⁰⁵ for if this were the case, they ought to have said first that the world stood upon justice, and only afterwards: “be moderate in [the application of] law,” which is justice as it applies to Torah, [and all this] before they said “raise many students,” and so on.¹⁰⁶ However, “Simon the Righteous, who was one of the last of the Men of the Great Assembly” was the author of that first dictum in the tractate, “and he used to say: the world stands upon three things: the Torah, the temple service, and the practice of acts of piety” (m. Abot 1:2).¹⁰⁷ This dictum is worthy to be spoken at the beginning of the chapter and tractate. [As for] Antigonus and Yose ben Yoezer and Yose ben

¹⁰⁵ Arama here reads the second statement of m. Abot 1:1, the first after the chain of tradition, against the grain: Rather than constituting Abot’s first prescriptive teaching to its readers, the “three things” the Men of the Great Assembly “said” are really a descriptive account of three things they did, and the reason they are lauded as “Men of the Great Assembly.” First and foremost, they attempted to buttress and create a bulwark (i.e., “make a fence”) around Torah by adding laws; in service of this primary goal, they also exercised a certain moderation in establishing conventions and cultivated students and followers. The “some” who read this statement in the standard way include e.g., both Maimonides and Jonah Gerondi.

¹⁰⁶ Arama’s argument against the standard interpretation—i.e., that the second statement of m. Abot 1:1 is the beginning of the tractate’s prescriptive teaching to readers—is that if this statement were intended as a prescription for readers, another statement which appears later in the tractate should have conceptually preceded it: The idea that one must be “moderate in [the application of] law” (m. Abot 1:1) is conceptually secondary to the idea that “the world stands upon justice” (m. Abot 1.18), such that the standard interpretation would require a different ordering of the *mishnayot*.

¹⁰⁷ Building on his non-standard interpretation, the first proper dictum of m. Abot 1 is m. Abot. 1:2.

Yochanan and those who succeeded them, each of them seized upon a principle from among [these] three mentioned initially and explicated it; and the explication of this statement shall be mentioned in Gate 63, with the help of God.¹⁰⁸ Inasmuch as it was the main concern of the Men of the Great Assembly to make a fence around the Torah with all their discussions of prohibitions and impurities which restrained and limited men even more than the Torah had—to sustain them according to the Toah’s words in order that they not transgress at all—[R. Judah’s] saying “He brought me to a great cellar of wine, that is, Sinai” should also apply to them.¹⁰⁹ For there “they gave us banners of Torah and commandments” which serve as a fence, as well as decrees and ordinances concerning each and every matter, of which the speaker said “this is Sinai” and the contemplation of uprightness and truth. “And in superabundant love, we accepted them,¹¹⁰” as the words of the Torah themselves or even more so, as the Sages said: “What is the meaning of *for your love is better than wine* (Song 1:2)? The congregation of Israel said: The statements of Your beloved ones are more pleasant to me than the wine of Torah itself” (b. Avodah Zarah 35a). The principle that emerges is that the aim of everything is to improve the entirety of us¹¹¹ [endowing us] with a good nature and sound disposition by way of these customs that enable us to receive every perfection, which is impossible without this. It is not necessary to say [this is for] the final perfection of the soul, for the primary perfection of the

¹⁰⁸ In AY Gate 63, Arama develops a lengthy and extraordinary interpretation of the “three things on which the world stands” in m. Abot 1:2 in connection with three types of action in which man engages, each corresponding to a different part of man’s soul, which in turn corresponds with one of the three worlds or parts of the world: “Torah” corresponds to the intellectual faculty and the supernal world, “service” corresponds to the part of man’s soul that is in motion but directed towards higher things and the world of celestial spheres, and “acts of charity” corresponds to the part of man’s soul that is in motion but directed towards that which is necessary to sustain his material life on earth and the sublunar world.

¹⁰⁹ i.e., the Men of the Great Assembly.

¹¹⁰ i.e., Rabbinic ordinances

¹¹¹ *kelaleinu*

body too cannot be realized in any manner in individuals with poor dispositions and distorted natures, who corrupt every society and destroy all civilization.

[42] This is similar to what the prophet said explicitly: of *those that eat swine's flesh and the detestable thing and the mouse shall be consumed together, saith the Lord* (Isa. 66:17). For it is as though required by nature that the lot of them shall be ruined and their state shall be destroyed, and *together* they all shall perish. Now empirical evidence supports the contrary of this, since it is apparent that the nations, and those accustomed to recklessness in terms of eating all that the Torah prohibits as abominable and impure, dwell in peace and quiet and security. Meanwhile, such is not the case for us, who are vigilant in abstaining from these [prohibited foods], yet have been attained by many evils and sorrows as well as expelled from our land, and the *land of our sojournings* (Gen. 37:1) does not bear us in all our settlements; and He has revealed His face to them as though they are His people and inheritance, the keepers of His covenant. The prophet Isaiah devoted a complaint and lament to this in the *parashah: O Lord, why dost Thou make us to err from Thy ways, and hardenest our heart from Thy fear?* and so on (Isa. 63:17), as is readily apparent with [even] little speculation.

[43] The reply,¹¹² which indicates and makes known in what respect they¹¹³ attained good, even though they were not fitting to receive it, rests upon these [verses]. He said: *I gave access to them that asked not for Me, I was at hand to them that sought Me not; I said 'behold Me, behold Me,' to a nation that was not called by My name* (Isa. 65:1). See how he mentioned three notions

¹¹² i.e., to the aforementioned paradox: Israel's temporal suffering and other nations' seeming to have gained God's favor in worldly success.

¹¹³ i.e., the nations.

which designate the sects of the nations, each according to its state. That is, the nations of whom this complaint is justified exist in one of three states: The first are those who believe that all things which befall people, whether good or bad, are decreed for them by the heavens at the time of their generation or [even] beforehand. There is no room to deviate from what is decreed, whether right or left, and these people consider one who asks something of God to be an ignoramus and fool, for it is not in His nature to do anything, neither great nor small, apart from what is in accordance with His pre-eternal will. Most of the sects of the Ishmaelites today have this opinion according to one who understands this notion of theirs. The second are those who think the opposite of these, and claim that everything [occurs] according to one's striving for it and knowing [how] to seek it through the power of celestial worship, whereby they worship the sun and moon and stars/planets and other *foreign gods of the land* (Deut. 31:16). These are the sects of idolaters who have existed from time immemorial, through the early days of our exile and also afterwards, though they are near entirely eviscerated from those lands today, apart from their remaining in remote islands. The third are those who admit that God, Blessed be He, exercises providence in the world and that [the] good and evil befalling them daily comes from Him, according as His wills, in accordance with their actions. However, they err in His name, designate Him by a different name by which He is not accustomed to being called, as is known [to be the case] from among the sects of Christians today. The respect in which these are all equal is that they are not the children of the Lord's covenant and good is not emanated unto them by way of providence on account of their merit and they do not seek it from Him in any respect. Regarding this first type among them, he said: *I gave access to them that asked not*, for they *did not ask* anything of the Lord or any other god, since they claim that *they cannot profit nor deliver* (1 Sam. 12:21). As for the second type, he said: *I was at hand to them that sought Me not*, for

they sought, however, not from *Me*, but rather from *foreign gods*. Regarding the third type, *I said* ‘*behold Me, behold Me*’ unto a nation that was not called by *My name* for [this nation] calls to God, but not by His proper *name*, well-known from the words of the Torah and the prophets; rather, they designate Him by a new name which is not written.

[44] He said that we shall answer them: [Concerning] His having extended His hands to them and shown them His face and all such behaviors, he said: *these are a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all day* (Isa. 65:5). And if he should wonder, *wait for it still* (Hab. 2:3), for *behold, written before Me is this vengeance* in My Torah, in the song *Ha’azinu* where I commanded: *now therefore, write ye this song for you and teach thou it the children of Israel and put it in their mouths* (Deut. 31:19), and there it was said: *for they are a nation void of council*, and so on (Deut. 32:28), *for their vine is the vine of Sodom* (Deut. 32:32), up to His saying: *Is this not laid up in store with Me, sealed up in My treasures; vengeance is Mine and recompense, against the time when their foot shall slip* (Deut. 32:34–35). Inasmuch as *it is written and sealed upon Me, I will not keep silence, except I have requited, yea, I will requite into their bosom* (Isa. 65:6). He meant, the aim on My part is to *requite* them with the recompense for My people who forgot Me insofar as they were oppressed by them in a difficult time.¹¹⁴ And inasmuch as My people desire their iniquity, *I will requite their bosom*, and he clarified this to the utmost in his saying: *your own iniquities and the iniquities of your fathers together, saith the Lord, that have offered upon the mountains, and blasphemed Me upon the hills, therefore will I first measure their wage into*

¹¹⁴ The basic idea in Arama’s reading of Isa. 65:6–7 here is that while Isa. 65:6 refers to God’s promise to eventually punish the nations especially for their oppression of Israel, which precipitates the Israelites’ own sins; Isa. 65:7 constitutes God’s promise to first punish Israel for their sins: This explains the historical phenomenon of Israel’s worldly suffering in exile as being only the first part in an eschatological chronology, which will eventually proceed to the nations’ suffering and punishment.

their bosom (Isa. 65:7). He meant that because the *fathers have offered upon the mountains* and because *they have blasphemed Me upon the hills*, this is why all this time has been prolonged for them, so that the sinners shall *first* receive the punishment fitting for them according to their *measure*.

[45] However, *thus saith the Lord: as when wine is found in the cluster one sayeth 'destroy it not for a blessing is in it' so will I do for My servants' sakes, that I may not destroy all* (Isa. 65:8).

He meant, in the end, the Torah's governance will benefit the Israelite community such that they shall be *as wine in the cluster* among all the nations. For although *wine* is the main principle and the *cluster*, is but secondary to and more plentiful than it, the speaker said of [the latter]: *destroy it not* on account of the *blessing* of the wine which *is in it*. Similarly, in the end, all that will remain from among the nations is that which was necessary for the Israelite community, and this is what he said: *that I may not destroy all*. This similar to his saying: *and kings shall be thy foster fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers*, and so on (Isa. 49:23), and to what was mentioned elsewhere, [namely,] that they shall be *plowmen* (Isa. 61:5) and *husbandmen* (Jer. 52:16) and *workers of their land* (Isa. 30:24). To encompass all of these, he turned and said: *but ye that forsake the Lord, that forget My holy mountain, that prepare a table for Fortune, and that offer mingled wine in full measure unto destiny, I will destine you to the sword, and ye shall all bow down to the slaughter, because when I called*, and so on (Isa. 65:11–12), and this is precisely what he said: *come near, ye nations, to hear*, and so on (Isa. 34:1). *For my sword hath drunk its fill in heaven; behold, it shall come down upon Edom, and upon the people of My ban to judgement; the sword of the Lord is filled with blood, it is made fat with fatness, with the blood of lambs and goats, with the fat of the kidneys of rams, for the Lord hath a sacrifice in Bozrah*

and a great slaughter in the land of Edom, and the wild oxen shall come down, and so on, for the Lord hath a day of vengeance, a year of recompense for the controversy of Zion (Isa. 34:5–8).

Those *recompenses* are what he mentioned here¹¹⁵ in his explication of his saying: *I will requite unto their bosom* (Isa. 65:6) and all his words are in agreement.

[46] He said: *because when I called ye did not answer, when I spoke, ye did not hear, but ye did that which was evil in Mine eyes, and in that which I delighted not*, and so on (Isa. 65:12). What had scattered Israel in their midst and caused them to be oppressed by them was a profound *call*: that they ought to recognize them and know their customs and the ways of their Torah, and that they should desire and receive it, such that Israel would be but a remnant among the nations who all called in the name of the Lord. Yet they saw and did not put it to their hearts, even though *I spoke* by way of the prophets of all that would befall them and of what would be their end. They conceded by the words of their actions, but they *did not hear*, for they heeded scripture as they pleased, and they *did evil* in their worship and *chose that wherein He delighted not* and things that He did not want, as is known to all from them and their words. He thus added to this and said: *therefore, thus saith the Lord God: Behold, My servants shall eat, but ye shall be hungry, behold, My servants shall drink, but ye shall be thirsty, behold, My servants shall rejoice but ye shall be ashamed* (Isa. 65:13). He meant: *behold*, up until now, you have *eaten* and *drank* all that your soul has desired in *rejoicing* and the pleasure of your hearts, while *My servants* have not been permitted to *eat* save according to the Torah, *in weight and in measure* (Lev. 19:35)—and you, how small [has your portion been] in concern and hardship? However, from here on out, the method shall be reversed, for *behold, My servants shall eat and drink* in the *rejoicing* of their

¹¹⁵ i.e., in Isa. 65, fleshing out God's promises to *requite* in Isa. 65 by linking them to God's elaboration of punishments in Isa. 34.

hearts, and *ye shall be hungry and be thirsty in shame*, and furthermore, *ye shall cry and wail for sorrow of heart and vexation of spirit*, while *My servants shall sing for joy of heart*, and *ye shall leave your name for a curse unto Mine elect*: ‘*So may the Lord God slay thee,*’ but *He shall call His servants by another name*, for *he who blesseth himself in the earth*, and so on (Isa. 65:14–16). *For behold I create new heavens*, and so on (Isa. 65:17). All of this shall be equal, as he said at the end of the prophecy: *Thus saith the Lord: Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river*, and so on, *as one whom his mother comforteth*, and so on, *and when ye see this your heart shall rejoice*, for *behold, the Lord will come in fire*, and so on, *for by fire will the Lord contend*, and *by His sword with all flesh*, and *the slain of the Lord shall be many, they that sanctify themselves and purify themselves to go unto the gardens*, and so on, until *they shall be consumed together*, *saith the Lord, for I know their works and their thoughts*, and so on (Isa. 65:12–18), *for as the new heavens*, and so on (Isa. 65:22), up until the end. This seems to me to be the explication of this portion, for the words of the commentators, may their memory be blessed, do not suit it, even though the Master and Guide agrees with them!¹¹⁶ In Part II, Chapter 29, he said: “Then he sets forth how we have deserved the great misfortunes that have befallen us, because of our having received a call to truth and having not responded; he says: *I offered myself to be sought of them that did not ask*, and so on,”—thusly he spoke.¹¹⁷ What we have explained is the correct [interpretation] of that verse and all those that follow it, and it is very fitting for this subject which is particular to this part, according to what we aimed at.

¹¹⁶ In contrast to his own explication in sec. [43] above, where he reads Isa. 65:1 as God’s rebuke to three sects of the nations, Rashi, ibn Ezra, David Kimhi and Maimonides all read the verse as God’s rebuke to the children of Israel.

¹¹⁷ See Pines, *Guide* II.29, 341–2.

[47] The order of the speech concerning these notions is [ordered] in this way: That is, the speech first treats the signs of *living things* and *beasts*, since these are the animals possessed of the most perfect formation. Afterwards,¹¹⁸ [it treats] that which is comparatively more deficient in its formation, i.e., the *fish* that are created in the water. And afterwards¹¹⁹ [it treats] the *fowl* that are composites of the two states, as the Sages said: “they were created from the mud” (b. Hullin 27b). For all of them, He distinguished between those which are to be eaten and those which are not to be eaten. Afterwards,¹²⁰ He spoke of the laws relating to the impurities of *carcasses* of impure things, the first type of which defile man and his *clothing*. Afterwards, He spoke of impurities caused by *swarming things*, which species has no aspect of purity and so may not be eaten at all, as it said: *and these are they which are impure unto you among the swarming things that swarm upon the earth: the weasel, and the mouse*, and so on (Lev. 11:29). In addition, [He spoke of how they cause] impurity to all *vessels* and *foods* that touch them (Lev. 11:32–35), as well as how vessels might become impure through water coming into contact with them. Afterwards,¹²¹ He spoke of the impurity caused by the *carcasses* of pure things, and He likened their *carcasses* to the eating *every swarming thing that swarmeth and whatsoever goeth upon the belly*, and so on (Lev. 11:40–42). Regarding all of these, He said: *them ye shall not eat for they are a detestable thing. Ye shall not make yourselves detestable with any swarming thing that swarmeth, neither shall ye make yourselves impure with them, that ye should be defiled thereby* (Lev. 11:42–3). [He said all this] in order to establish what we mentioned initially, [i.e.,] that the reason for all these prohibited foods is not because they cause any harm to bodies, but

¹¹⁸ i.e., Lev. 11:9–12.

¹¹⁹ i.e., Lev. 11:13–19.

¹²⁰ i.e., Lev. 11:24ff.

¹²¹ i.e., Lev. 11:39ff.

rather because they defile and are an abomination to souls:¹²² They confound the intellectual faculty and give birth to errors of opinions and rabid, strange, animalistic lusts that destroy them and lay to waste the purpose of their creation. Know that there are other creatures that are well-known to cause harm, such as the viper, and all manner of snakes and serpents, and the scorpion, and so too for lethal plants. They were not mentioned here [precisely] because they give the impression that they are cause [bodily] harm, inasmuch as it is known to Him, Exalted be He, that their impurity is not particularly grave in terms of their harming souls, the healing of which was His aim in all this. He concluded this whole matter with His saying: *I am the Lord your God, sanctify yourselves, therefore, and be ye holy, for I am holy, neither shall ye make yourselves impure with any manner of swarming thing*, and so on (Lev. 11:44). That is to say, intellect necessitates that it be fitting for you *to sanctify yourselves from every swarming thing that swarmeth* and from all other base things, inasmuch as your eyes see that *I am holy* (Lev. 11:45) and I participate together with you in your governance and exercise providence over your affairs, as is made apparent from what [even] all the simple folk saw, namely, *that I am the Lord that brought you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God; ye shall therefore be holy, for I am holy* (Lev. 11:45). For perdurance together is impossible without this. He clarifies the main principle encompassed by this portion in His saying *this is the law of the beast and of the fowl and of every living creature that moveth in the waters and of every creature that swarmeth upon the earth* (Lev. 11:46) in two notions: The first is in order to distinguish among these, i.e., between the pure and the impure among them when they are dead. The second is in order to distinguish between what is pure and impure to eat. And this is what we intended for this Gate.

¹²² See secs. [23]–[27], [36] above.

Selected Bibliography

Primary Sources

- Abravanel, Issac. *Perush 'al ha-Torah, Commentaries on the Torah*. Horeb, 1999.
- Albo, Joseph. *Sefer ha-Iqqarim* ("Book of Principles"). Edited and translated by Isaac Husik. Jewish Publication Society of America, 1930.
- Anatoli, Jacob. *Malmad ha-Talmidim*. Edited by L. Silberman. Mekize Nirdamim, 1866.
- Arama, Isaac. *'Aqedat Yiṣḥaq*. Edited by Ḥayyim Yosef Pollack. 5 Volumes. Pressburg: Victor Kittseer, 1849.
- Arama, Isaac. *Commentary on Esther*. In *'Aqedat Yiṣḥaq*, Volume 2. Edited by Ḥayyim Yosef Pollack. Pressburg: Victor Kittseer, 1849.
- Arama, Isaac. *Commentary on Ecclesiastes*. In *'Aqedat Yiṣḥaq*, Volume 2. Edited by Ḥayyim Yosef Pollack. Pressburg: Victor Kittseer, 1849.
- Arama, Isaac. *Ḥazut Qashah*. Edited by Ḥayyim Yosef Pollack. Pressburg: Victor Kittseer, 1849.
- Arama, Isaac. *Yad Abshalom*. Edited by Isaac Freiman. Leipzig, 1860.
- Arama, Isaac. *Akeydat Yitzchak: Commentary of Rabbi Yitzchak Arama on the Torah*, 2 volumes. Translated by Eliyahu Munk. Urim Publications, 1986.
- Arama, Meir. "Mikhtav le-ha-rav R. Meir ben-ha-rav R. Yiṣḥaq 'Aramah." Edited by Ḥaim Pollack. *Ha-Maggid* 2 (1858): 99.
- Aristotle. *Physics*. Edited and translated by P. H. Wicksteed and F. M. Cornford. 2 Volumes. Harvard University Press, 1980, 1995.
- Aristotle. *History of Animals, Books I–VI*. Edited and translated by A. L. Peck. Harvard University Press, 1965.
- Aristotle. *History of Animals, Books VII–X*. Edited and translated by D. M. Balme. Harvard University Press, 1991.
- Aristotle. *Parts of Animals*. Edited and translated by A. L. Peck. Harvard University Press, 1968.
- Aristotle. *Generation of Animals*. Edited and translated by A. L. Peck. Harvard University Press, 1943.
- Aristotle. *Parva naturalia*. Edited and translated by W. S. Hett. Harvard University Press, 1986.

- Aristotle. *The Metaphysics*. Edited and translated by H. Tredennick. 2 Volumes. Harvard University Press, 1975.
- Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Edited and translated by H. Rackham. Harvard University Press, 1994.
- Aristotle. "Preliminary Edition of Rabbi Don Meir Alguades' Latin to Hebrew Translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*." Hebrew translation by Meir Alguades. Edited by Chaim Neria. In Chaim Neria, "'It Cannot Be Valued with the Gold of Ophir': Rabbi. Joseph b. Shem Tob's Commentary on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*: Sources and Analysis." PhD diss., The University of Chicago, 2015.
- Averroes. Middle Commentary on Porphyry's *Isagogue* and Aristotle's *Categories*. Hebrew translation by Jacob Anatoli. Edited and translated by Herbert Davidson. Medieval Academy of America, 1969.
- Averroes. Epitome of Aristotle's *Parva Naturalia*. Hebrew translation by Moses ibn Tibbon. Edited by Harry Blumberg. Medieval Academy of America, 1954.
- Averroes. Epitome of Aristotle's *Parva Naturalia*. Translated by Harry Blumberg. Medieval Academy of America, 1961.
- Averroes. Middle Commentary on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Hebrew translation by Samuel b. Judah of Marseilles. Edited and translated by Lawrence V. Berman. Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 2000.
- Ben Asher, Bahya. *Commentary on the Torah*. Edited by Charles Ber Chavel. Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1994.
- Bibago, Abraham. *Derekh Emunah*. Edited by Chava Fraenkel-Goldschmidt. Mosad Bialik, 1978.
- Crescas, Ḥasdai. *Or Hashem*. Edited by S. Fisher. Itri Edition, 1990.
- Crescas, Ḥasdai. *Light of the Lord*. Translated by Roslyn Weiss. Oxford University Press, 2021.
- Gerondi, Nissim ben Reuben. *Derashot ha-Ran*. Edited by Leon A. Feldman. Shalem, 1974.
- Gersonides. *Supercommentary on Averroes' Middle Commentary on the Book of Animals*. In Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. hebr. 966. NLI no. F 32612.
- Gersonides. *Sefer Milḥamot Ha-Shem* (The Wars of the Lord). Berlin: 1923.
- Gersonides. *The Wars of the Lord*. Translated by Seymour Feldman.

- Gersonides. *Commentary on the Torah*. Edited by Baruch Braner and Eli Freiman. Maaliyot, 1993.
- Gersonides. *Commentary on Song of Songs*. Edited by Menachem Kellner. Bar Ilan University Press, 2000.
- Gersonides. *Commentary on Song of Songs*. Translated by Menachem Kellner. Yale University Press, 2008.
- al-Ghazālī, Abū Hāmid Muhammad. *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*. Edited and translated by Michael E. Marmura. Brigham Young University Press, 1997.
- al-Ghazālī, Abū Hāmid Muhammad. *Kavvanot ha-Filosofim*. In *Bibliothèque Nationale de France*, Ms. hebr. 908. NLI no. F 26863. With the commentary of Moses Narboni.
- Ibn Adret, Solomon b. Abraham. *Teshubot ha-Rashba*. Edited by H. Dimitrovsky. Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1990.
- Ibn Ezra, Abraham. *Commentary on the Torah*. In *Miqra'ot Gedolot ha-Keter*.
- Ibn Shem-Ṭob, Joseph b. Shem-Ṭob. *Ein ha-Qore*. In *Jewish Theological Seminary*, Ms. 10759. NLI no. F 4580.
- Ibn Shem-Ṭob, Joseph b. Shem-Ṭob. *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I. Edited by Chaim Neria. In Chaim Neria, “‘It Cannot Be Valued with the Gold of Ophir’: Rabbi. Joseph b. Shem Tob’s Commentary on Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*: Sources and Analysis.” PhD diss., The University of Chicago, 2015.
- Ibn Shem-Ṭob, Joseph b. Shem-Ṭob. *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*. In *The National Library of Russia*, Ms. EVR I 379. NLI no. F 35022
- Ibn Tibbon, Samuel. *Perush ha-Millot ha-Zarot*. Edited by Y. Even-Shemuel. In *Moreh ha-Nevukhim*. Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1987.
- Ibn Tibbon, Samuel. *Sefer Nefesh ha-Adam: Samuel ibn Tibbon’s Commentary on Ecclesiastes*. Edited by James T. Robinson. World Union of Jewish Studies,
- Ibn Tibbon, Samuel. *Samuel ibn Tibbon’s Commentary on Ecclesiastes*. Translated by James T. Robinson. Mohr Siebeck, 2007.
- Israeli, Hayyim. *Ma’amar Gan Eden*. Printed by P. Perreau in *Tiferet Shevah* [Zunz Festschrift]. Berlin, 1884.
- Jacob b. Sheshet. *Sefer Meshiv Devarim Nekhoḥim le-R. Yaakov ben Sheshet*. Edited by Georges Vajda. Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1968.

- Levi b. Abraham. *Livyat Hen: The Quality of Prophecy and the Secrets of the Torah*. Edited by Howard Kreisel. Ben Gurion University Press, 2007.
- Levi b. Abraham. *Livyat Hen: The Work of the Chariot*. Edited by Howard Kreisel. World Union of Jewish Studies, 2013.
- Maimonides, Moses. *Commentary on the Mishnah*. Edited and translated by Yosef Qafih. Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1963–68.
- Maimonides, Moses. *Commentary on Abot*. Hebrew translation by Samuel ibn Tibbon. Edited by M. Rabinowitc. Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1961.
- Maimonides, Moses. *The Commentary to Mishnah Aboth*. Translated by A. David. Bloch Publishing Company, 1968.
- Maimonides, Moses. *The Eight Chapters of Maimonides on Ethics (Shemonah Peraḳim): A Psychological and Ethical Treatise*. Edited and translated by Joseph I. Gorfinkle. Columbia University Press, 1912.
- Maimonides, Moses. *Ethical Writings of Maimonides*. Edited by Raymond L. Weiss with Charles E. Butterworth. Dover Publications, 1975.
- Maimonides, Moses. *Haqdamot ha-Rambam la-Mishnah*. Edited by Yitzhaq Shailat. Shailat Publishing, 1997.
- Maimonides, Moses. *Moreh ha-Nevukhim*. Translated by Samuel ibn Tibbon. Edited by Y. Even-Shemuel. Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1987.
- Maimonides, Moses. *The Guide of the Perplexed*. Translated by Shlomo Pines. 2 volumes. University of Chicago Press, 1963.
- Maimonides, Moses. *Moreh Nevukhim*. Translated by Michael Schwartz. Tel Aviv University Press, 2002.
- Messer Leon, Judah. *The Book of the Honeycomb's Flow: Sepher Nopheth Šufim by Judah Messer Leon*. Edited and translated by Isaac Rabinowitz. Cornell University Press, 1983.
- Moscato, Judah. *Sermons: Editions and Translations*, Volumes I and II. Edited by Giuseppe Veltri and Gianfranco Miletto. Brill, 2011.
- Moscato, Judah. *Sermons: Editions and Translations*, Volume IV. Edited by Giuseppe Veltri and Gianfranco Miletto. Brill, 2015.
- Nahmanides, Moses. *Peirushei ha-Torah*. Edited by Charles Ber Chavel. 2 volumes. Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1965.

- Nahmanides, Moses. *Commentary on the Torah*. Translated by Charles Ber Chavel. 5 volumes. Shilo Publishing House, 1971–1973.
- Nahmanides, Moses. *Kitvei Rabbeinu Mosheh ben Nahman*. Edited by Charles Ber Chavel. 2 volumes. Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1963.
- Nahmanides, Moses. *Writings of the Rambam*. Translated by Charles Ber Chavel. 2 Volumes. Shilo Publishing House, 2009.
- Narboni, Moses. *Epistle on the Possibility of Conjunction with the Active Intellect by Ibn Rushd with the Commentary of Moses Narboni*. Edited and translated by Kalman P. Bland. Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992.
- Narboni, Moses. *Commentary on the Guide of the Perplexes*. Edited by Jacob Goldenthal. Vienna, 1852. Reprinted in *Sheloshah qadmone Mefarshe ha-Moreh*. Jerusalem, 1961.
- Saadia Gaon. *Book of Beliefs and Opinions*. Hebrew translation by Judah ibn Tibbon. 1885.
- Saadia Gaon. *Book of Beliefs and Opinions*. Translated by Samuel Rosenblatt. Yale University Press, 1948.
- Saadia Gaon. *Commentary on Exodus*. Edited and translated by Y. Ratzaby, 1998.
- Shalom, Abraham. *Neveh Shalom*. Venice, 1574.
- Solomon b. Isaac, Rashi. *Commentary on the Torah*. In *Miqra'ot Gedolot ha-Keter*.

Secondary Sources

- Ackerman, Ari. “Jewish Philosophy and Jewish-Christian Philosophical Dialogue in Fifteenth-Century Spain.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, edited by Daniel Frank and Oliver Leaman. Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Ackerman, Ari. “Hasdai Crescas and His Circle on the Infinite and Expanding Torah.” *Jewish Studies: An Internet Journal* 11 (2012): 1–17.
- Alfonso, Esperanza. “Late Medieval Readings of the Strange Woman in Proverbs.” In *Medieval Exegesis and Religious Difference: Commentary, Conflict, and Community in the Premodern Mediterranean*, edited by Ryan Szpiech. Fordham University Press, 2015.
- Altman, Alexander. “Ars Rhetorica as Reflected in Some Jewish Figures of the Italian Renaissance.” In *Essays in Jewish Intellectual History*. University Press of New England, 1981.

- Altmann, Alexander. "Judah Halevi's Theory of Climes." Translated by Lenn J. Schram. *Aleph* 5 (2005): 215–246.
- Baer, Yitzhak. *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*. 2 Volumes. Translated by Louis Schoffman. The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1961.
- Ben-Sasson, Haim Hillel. "The Generation of the Spanish Exiles on its Fate." *Zion* 26 (1961): 23–64.
- Benin, Stephen. *The Footprints of God: Divine Accommodation in Jewish and Christian Thought*. SUNY Press, 1993.
- Berman, Lawrence V. "Maimonides, the Disciple of al-Farabi." *Israel Oriental Studies* 4 (1974): 154–178.
- Berman, Lawrence V. "Maimonides on the Fall of Man." *AJS Review* 5 (1980): 1–15.
- Berman, Lawrence V. "The Latin to Hebrew Translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*." *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 7 (1988): 147–168.
- Bettan, Israel. "The Sermons of Isaac Arama." *Hebrew Union College Annual* 12–13 (1937–8): 583–634.
- Birnbaum, Ruth. *An Exposition of Joseph ibn Shem Tov's Kevod Elohim (The Glory of God): A Fifteenth-Century Philosophical Work: On the Summum Bonum of Man and True Happiness*. Edwin Mellen, 2001.
- Bland, Kalman. "A Jewish Theory of Jewish Visual Culture: Leon Modena's Concepts of Image and Their Effect on Locative Memory." *Ars Judaica* 5, no. 1 (2009): 59–66.
- Bos, Gerrit. "Jewish Traditions on Strengthening Memory and Leone Modena's Evaluation." *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 2, no.1 (1995): 39–58.
- Braude, Benjamin. "The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (1997): 103–142.
- Carruthers, Mary. *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*. Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Carruthers, Mary. *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400–1200*. Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Carruthers, Mary and Jan M. Ziolkowski, eds. *The Medieval Craft of Memory: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002.

- Cohen-Skalli, Cedric. *Don Isaac Abravanel: An Intellectual Biography*. Translated by Avi Kallenbach. Brandeis University Press, 2021.
- Cohen-Skalli, Cedric and Oded Horezky. "A Fifteenth-Century Reader of Gersonides: Don Isaac Abravanel, Providence, Astral Influences, Active Intellect, and Humanism." In *Gersonides' Afterlife: Studies on the Reception of Levi ben Gerson's Philosophical, Halakhic, and Scientific Oeuvre in the 14th Through 20th Centuries*, edited by Ofer Elior. Brill, 2020.
- Dascalu, Raphael. "Biblical Commentaries as a Genre of Jewish Philosophical Writing." In *Medieval Jewish Philosophy and its Literary Forms*, edited by Aaron W. Hughes and James T. Robinson. Indiana University Press, 2019.
- Davidson, Herbert A. *The Philosophy of Abraham Shalom: A Fifteenth-Century Exposition and Defense of Maimonides*. University of California Press, 1964.
- Davidson, Herbert A. "Maimonides' Secret Position on Creation." In *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, edited by Isadore Twersky. Harvard University Press, 1979.
- Davidson, Herbert A. *Proofs for Eternity, Creation, and the Existence of God in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Philosophy*. Oxford University Press, 1987.
- Davidson, Herbert A. "Medieval Jewish Philosophy in the Sixteenth Century." In *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, edited by Bernard Dov Cooperman. Harvard University Press, 1983.
- de Souza, Igor H. *Rewriting Maimonides: Early Commentaries on the Guide of the Perplexed*. De Gruyter, 2018.
- de Souza, Igor H. "Commentaries on *The Guide of the Perplexed*: A Brief Literary History." In *Medieval Jewish Philosophy and its Literary Forms*, edited by Aaron W. Hughes and James T. Robinson. Indiana University Press, 2019.
- Diamond, James. "Isaac Arama's Nightmare: Closing the Philosophical Exegetical Chapter Maimonides Opened." *European Journal of Jewish Studies* 10 (2016): 201–222.
- Diamond, James and Aaron Hughes. "Introduction: Encountering the Medieval in Modern Jewish Thought." In *Encountering the Medieval in Modern Jewish Thought*, edited by James A. Diamond and Aaron W. Hughes. Brill, 2012.
- Douglas, Mary. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966.
- Eisen, Robert. *Gersonides on Providence, Covenant, and the Chosen People: A Study in Medieval Jewish Philosophy and Biblical Commentary*. SUNY Press, 1995.

- Elman, Yaakov. “‘It is No Empty Thing:’ Nahmanides and the Search for Omnisignificance.” *The Torah U-Madda Journal* 4 (1993): 1–83.
- Elukin, Jonathan. “Maimonides and the Rise and Fall of the Sabians: Explaining Mosaic Laws and the Limits of Scholarship.” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 63, no. 4 (2002): 619–637.
- Feldman, Leon Aryeh. “Studies in the Life and Times of R. Nissim b. Reuben Gerondi of Barcelona (circa 1340–1380).” PhD diss., Columbia University, 1968.
- Feldman, Seymour. “A Debate Concerning Determinism in Late Medieval Jewish Philosophy.” *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 51 (1984): 15–54.
- Fishman, Dana. *Bridging Worlds: Poetry and Philosophy in the Works of Immanuel of Rome*. Wayne State University Press, 2023.
- Fontaine, Resianne. “Between Scorching Heat and Freezing Cold: Medieval Jewish Authors on the Inhabited and Uninhabited Parts of the Earth.” *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 10, vol. 1 (2000): 101–137.
- Fontaine, Resianne. *A Hebrew Encyclopedia of the Thirteenth Century: Natural Philosophy in Judah ben Solomon ha-Cohen’s Midrash ha-Hokhmah*. Brill, 2023.
- Fraenkel, Carlos, ed. *Traditions of Maimonideanism*. Brill, 2009.
- Freudenthal, Gad. “The Biological Foundations of Intellectual Elitism: Maimonides vs. al-Farabi.” In *Maimonidean Studies*, Volume 5, edited by Arthur Hyman and Alfred Ivry. Yeshiva University Press, 2008.
- Freudenthal, Gad, ed. *Science in Medieval Jewish Cultures*. Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- Frydman-Kohl, Baruch. “Ḥazut Qashah: Faith, Felicity, and Fidelity in the Thought of Yiṣḥaq Arama.” DHL Diss., Jewish Theological Seminary, 2004.
- Funkenstein, Amos. “Nahmanides’ Symbolical Reading of History.” In *Studies in Jewish Mysticism*, edited by Joseph Dan and Frank Talmage. Association for Jewish Studies, 1982.
- Funkenstein, Amos. “Gersonides’ Biblical Commentary: Science, History and Providence.” In *Studies on Gersonides: A Fourteenth-Century Jewish Philosopher-Scientist*, edited by Gad Freudenthal. Brill, 1992.
- Funkenstein, Amos. *Perceptions of Jewish History*. University of California Press, 1993.
- Gaziel, Ahuva. “Questions of Methodology in Aristotle’s Zoology: A Medieval Perspective.” *Journal of the History of Biology* 45 (2012): 329–352.

- Gómez-Bravo, Ana M. "Food, Blood, and a Jewish Raza in Fifteenth-Century Spain." In *Food, Texts, and Cultures in Latin America and Spain*, edited by Rafael Climent-Espino and Ana M. Gómez-Bravo. Vanderbilt University Press, 2020.
- Gómez-Bravo, Ana M. "Establishing Biological Superiority: Food and Nobility in the Fifteenth Century." *La corónica: A Journal of Medieval Hispanic Languages, Literatures, and Cultures* 49, no. 3 (2021): 51–84.
- González Diéguez, Guadalupe. "Isaac ibn Laṭīf (1210–1280) Between Philosophy and Kabbalah: Timebound Wisdom." PhD diss., New York University, 2014.
- González Diéguez, Guadalupe. "The Reasons for the Commandments in Isaac ibn Laṭīf's *The Gate of Heaven* (1238)." In *Accounting for the Commandments in Medieval Judaism: Studies in Law, Philosophy, Pietism, and Kabbalah*, edited by Jeremy P. Brown and Marc Herman. Brill, 2021.
- Gordon, Martin L. "The Rationalism of Jacob Anatoli." PhD diss., Yeshiva University, 1974.
- Grant, Edward. *Planets, Stars, and Orbs: The Medieval Cosmos, 1200–1687*. Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Guttmann, Julius. *Philosophies of Judaism: The History of Jewish Philosophy from Biblical Times to Franz Rosenzweig*. Translated by David W. Silverman. Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1964.
- Gutwirth, Eleazar. "Contempt for the Lower Orders in XVth Century Hispano-Jewish Thought." *Miscelánea de Estudios Árabes y Hebraicos*, 30 (1981): 83–98.
- Gutwirth, Eleazar. "Lineage in Fifteenth Century Hispano-Jewish Thought." *Miscelánea de Estudios Árabes y Hebraicos* 34 (1985).
- Halbertal, Moshe. *Between Torah and Wisdom: Rabbi Menachem ha-Meiri and the Maimonidean Halakhists in Provence*. Magnes, 2000.
- Halbertal, Moshe. *Nahmanides: Law and Mysticism*. Translated by Daniel Tabak. Yale University Press, 2020.
- Halper, Yehuda. "Philosophical Allegory in Bibago: Exegetical Duplicity for the Sake of Open Inquiry." *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 21, no. 3 (2014): 261–276.
- Harvey, Steven. *Falaquera's Epistle of the Debate: An Introduction to Jewish Philosophy*. Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- Harvey, Steven, ed. *The Medieval Hebrew Encyclopedias of Science and Philosophy*. Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000.

- Harvey, Steven. "The Author's *Haqdamah* as a Literary Form." In *Medieval Jewish Philosophy and its Literary Forms*, edited by Aaron W. Hughes and James T. Robinson. Indiana University Press, 2019.
- Harvey, Warren Zev. "Hasdai Crescas' Critique of the Acquires Intellect." PhD diss., Columbia University, 1973.
- Harvey, Warren Zev. "The Term Hitdabbekut in Crescas' Definition of Time." *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 71.1 (1980): 44–47.
- Harvey, Warren Zev. "A Third Approach to Maimonides' Cosmogony-Prophetology Puzzle." *Harvard Theological Review* 74 (1981): 287–301.
- Harvey, Warren Zev. "Maimonides' Interpretation of Genesis 3:22." *Da'at: A Journal of Jewish Philosophy and Kabbalah* 12 (1984): 15–21.
- Harvey, Warren Zev. "The First Commandment and the God of History: Judah Halevi and Hasdai Crescas versus Abraham ibn Ezra and Maimonides." *Tarbiz* 57.2 (1988): 203–216.
- Harvey, Warren Zev. "Crescas vs. Maimonides on Knowledge and Pleasure." In *A Straight Path: Studies in Medieval Philosophy and Culture: Essays in Honor of Artur Hyman*, edited by Ruth Link-Salinger. Catholic University Press of America, 1988.
- Harvey, Warren Zev. "Maimonides on Job 14:20 and the Story of the Garden of Eden." In *Between History and Literature: Studies in Honor of Isaac Barzilay*, edited by Stanley Nash. ha-Kibbutz ha-Me'uchad, 1997.
- Harvey, Warren Zev. *Physics and Metaphysics in Hasdai Crescas*. J. C. Gieben, 1998.
- Harvey, Warren Zev. "Albo on the Reasonlessness of True Love." *Iyyun: The Jerusalem Philosophical Quarterly* (2000): 83–86.
- Harvey, Warren Zev. "How Leo Strauss Paralyzed the Study of the *Guide of the Perplexed* in the Twentieth Century." *Iyyun* 50 (2001): 387–396.
- Harvey, Warren Zev. "How to Begin to Study Strauss' 'How to Begin to Study the *Guide of the Perplexed*.'" In *Interpreting Maimonides: Critical Essays*, edited by Charles H. Manekin and Daniel Davies. Cambridge University Press, 2018.
- Heinemann, Isaac. *The Reasons for the Commandments in Jewish Thought: From the Bible to the Renaissance*. Translated by Leonard Levin. Academic Studies Press, 2008.
- Heller-Wilensky, Sara. "Isaac Arama on the Creation and Structure of the World." *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 22 (1953): 131–150.

- Heller-Wilensky, Sara. R. *Yiṣḥaq 'Aramah u-Mishnato ha-Filosofit*. Mosad Bialik, 1956, 2020.
- Heng, Geraldine. *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*. Cambridge University Press, 2018.
- Horowitz, Carmi. “Kabbalah and Philosophy in Rashba’s Commentary to the Aggada.” *Da’at* 18 (1986): 15–25.
- Hughes, Aaron W. “‘Medieval’ and the Politics of Nostalgia: Ideology, Scholarship, and the Creation of the Rational Jew.” In *Encountering the Medieval in Modern Jewish Thought*, edited by James A. Diamond and Aaron W. Hughes. Brill, 2012.
- Hughes, Aaron W. *The Study of Judaism: Authenticity, Identity, Scholarship*. SUNY Press, 2013.
- Hughes, Aaron W. *Abrahamic Religions: On the Uses and Abuses of History*. Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Hughes, Aaron W. and James T. Robinson. “Introduction.” In *Medieval Jewish Philosophy and Its Literary Forms*, edited by Aaron W. Hughes and James T. Robinson. Indiana University Press, 2019.
- Husik, Isaac. *A History of Medieval Jewish Philosophy*. Jewish Publication Society of America, 1916.
- Hyman, Arthur. “Aspects of the Medieval Jewish and Islamic Discussion of ‘Free Choice.’” In *Human Freedom and Moral Responsibility: General and Jewish Perspectives*, edited by Charles Manekin and Menachem Kellner. University Press of Maryland, 1997.
- Kaplan, Lawrence. “Maimonides on the Miraculous Element in Prophecy.” *Harvard Theological Review* 70 (1977): 233–256.
- Kasher, Hannah. “Commandments between Man and God in *The Guide of the Perplexed*.” *Da’at* 12 (1984): 23–28.
- Kasher, Hannah. “Well-Being of the Body or Welfare of the Soul: The Maimonidean Explication of the Dietary Laws.” In *Moses Maimonides: Physician, Scientist, and Philosopher*, edited by Fred Rosner and Samuel S. Kottke. Jason Aronson, 1993.
- Katz, Rachel. “*Shema* as Memory Palace: A Medieval Hebrew Ars Memorativa.” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 114, no. 3 (2024): 351–374.
- Kellner, Menachem. “Gersonides and His Cultured Despisers: Arama and Abravanel.” *The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 6 (1976): 269–296.

- Kellner, Menachem. *Dogma in Medieval Jewish Thought: From Maimonides to Abravanel*. The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1986.
- Kellner, Menachem. "Maimonides and Samuel ibn Tibbon on Jeremiah 9:22–23 and Human Perfection." In *Studies in Halakha and Jewish Thought Presented to Rabbi Prof. Emanuel Rackman*, edited by Moshe Beer. Bar Ilan University Press, 1994.
- Kellner, Menachem. *Science in the Bet Midrash: Studies in Maimonides*. Academic Studies Press, 2009.
- Kellner, Menachem. *Torah in the Observatory: Gersonides, Maimonides, Song of Songs*. Academic Studies Press, 2010.
- Kellner, Menachem. "Censoring/'Improving' Gersonides: The Case of the To'alot." In *Gersonides' Afterlife: Studies on the Reception of Levi ben Gerson's Philosophical, Halakhic, and Scientific Oeuvre in the 14th Through 20th Centuries*, edited by Ofer Elior. Brill, 2020.
- Kellner, Menachem and David Gillis. *Maimonides the Universalist: The Ethical Horizons of the Mishneh Torah*. Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2020.
- Klein-Braslavy, Sara. "Vérité prophétique et vérité philosophique chez Nissim de Gérone; une interprétation du Récit de la Création et du Récit du Char." *Revue des Études Juives* 134 (1975): 75–99.
- Klein-Braslavy, Sara. "The Gathering at Mount Sinai in the Thought of R. Nissim ben Reuben Gerondi." *Sinai* 80 (1977): 26–37.
- Klein-Braslavy, Sara. "King Solomon and Metaphysical Esotericism According to Maimonides." In *Maimonidean Studies*, Volume 1, edited by Arthur Hyman. KTAV Publishing House, 1990.
- Klein-Braslavy, Sara. "The Alexandrian Prologue Paradigm in Gersonides' Writings." *Jewish Quarterly Review* 95 (2005): 257–289.
- Klein-Braslavy, Sara. *Maimonides as Biblical Interpreter*. Academic Studies Press, 2011.
- Kozodoy, Maud. "Messianic Interpretations of the Song of Songs in Late-Medieval Iberia." In *The Hebrew Bible in Fifteenth Century Spain*, edited by Jonathan Decter and Arturo Prats. Brill, 2012.
- Kozodoy, Maud. *The Secret Faith of Maestre Honoratus: Profayt Duran and Jewish Identity in Late Medieval Iberia*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015.
- Kraemer, Joel. "Naturalism and Universalism in Maimonides' Political and Religious Thought." In *Me'ah She'arim: Studies in Medieval Jewish Spiritual Life in Memory of Isadore*

- Twersky, edited by Ezra Fleischer, Gerald Blidstein, Carmi Horowitz, and Bernard Septimus. Magness Press, 2001.
- Kreisel, Howard. "Imitatio Dei in Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*." *AJS Review* 19 (1994): 169–211.
- Kreisel, Howard. *Judaism as Philosophy: Studies in Maimonides and the Medieval Jewish Philosophers of Provence*. Academic Studies Press, 2015.
- Kreisel, Howard. "Popularization of Philosophy via Scriptural Exegesis and Sermons: Introduction." In *The Popularization of Philosophy in Medieval Islam, Judaism, and Christianity*, edited by Marieke Abram, Steven Harvey, Lukas Muehlethaler. Brepols, 2022.
- Lachter, Hartley. "Israel as a Holy People in Medieval Kabbalah." In *Holiness in Jewish Thought*, edited by Alan L. Mittleman. Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Lachter, Hartley. "Universal Singularities: Elliot R. Wolfson on Jewish Ethnocentrism." In *New Paths: A Festschrift in Honor of Professor Elliot Wolfson*, edited by Glenn Dynner, Susannah Heschel, and Shaul Magid. Purdue University Press, 2024.
- Langermann, Tzvi. "The Making of the Firmament: Ḥayyim Israeli, Isaac Israeli, and Maimonides." *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 7 (1988): 461–476.
- Langermann, Tzvi. "Acceptance and Devaluation: Nahmanides' Attitude Towards Science." *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 1, no. 2 (1992): 223–245.
- Lasker, Daniel J. "Averroistic Trends in Jewish-Christian Polemics in the Late Middle Ages." *Speculum* 55 (1980): 294–304.
- Lasker, Daniel J. "The Impact of Christianity on Late Iberian Jewish Philosophy." In *In Iberia and Beyond: Hispanic Jews Between Cultures*, edited by Bernard Dov Cooperman. University of Delaware Press, 1998.
- Lasker, Daniel J. "The Canon of Medieval Jewish Philosophy: A Response to Dov Schwartz." *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 6, no. 2 (2003): 317–328.
- Lasker, Daniel J. *Jewish Philosophical Polemics against Christianity in the Middle Ages*. 2nd edition. Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2007.
- Lawee, Eric. *Isaac Abarbanel's Stance Toward Tradition: Defense, Dissent, and Dialogue*. SUNY Press, 2001.
- Lawee, Eric. "Changing Jewish Attitudes Towards Christian Society: The Case of Spain in the Late Middle Ages." In *York University Centre for Jewish Studies Annual*, Volume 3, edited by Michael Brown. 2001.

- Lawee, Eric. "Introducing Scripture: The *Accessus Ad Auctores* in Medieval Hebrew Exegetical Literature from the 13th to 15th Centuries." In *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Interpretation in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Barry D. Walfish, and Joseph W. Goering. Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Lawee, Eric. "The Reception of Rashi's *Commentary on the Torah* in Spain: The Case of Adam's Mating with the Animals." *Jewish Quarterly Review* 97 no. 1 (2007): 33–66.
- Lazaroff, Allan. "The Theology of Abraham Bibago: A Defense of the Divine Will, Knowledge and Providence in Fifteenth-Century Spanish-Jewish Philosophy." PhD diss., Brandeis University, 1973.
- Lesley, Arthur. "The Song of Solomon's Ascents by Yohanan Alemanno: Love and Human Perfection According to a Jewish Colleague of Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola." PhD diss., UC Berkeley, 1976.
- Lorde, Audre. "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House." In *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* by Audre Lorde. Crossing Press, 1984, 2007.
- Manekin, Charles. "Hebrew Philosophy in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries: An Overview." In *History of Jewish Philosophy*, edited by Daniel Frank and Oliver Leaman. Routledge, 1997.
- Manekin, Charles. "On the Limited-Omniscience Interpretation of Gersonides' Theory of Divine Knowledge." In *Perspectives on Jewish Thought and Mysticism*, edited by Alfred Ivry, Elliot Wolfson, and Allan Arkush. Harwood Academic Publishers, 1998.
- Marciano, Yoel. "The Rise of Non-Elitist Religious Literature in Late Medieval Spain and Its Reflection in *Menorat ha-Maor* of Rabbi Isaac Aboab." *Sefarad* 79, no. 2 (2019): 411–445.
- Melamed, Abraham. "Philosophical Commentaries on Jeremiah 9:22–23 in Medieval and Renaissance Jewish Thought." *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 4 (1985): 31–82.
- Melamed, Abraham. *The Image of the Black in Jewish Culture: A History of the Other*. Translated by Betty Sigler Rozen. Routledge, 2003.
- Melamed, Abraham. *The Philosopher-King in Medieval and Renaissance Jewish Political Thought*. SUNY Press, 2003.
- Melamed, Abraham. "The Greek Theory of Climate in Medieval Jewish Thought: Absorption, Influence, and Application." In *The Routledge Handbook of Identity and the Environment in the Classical and Medieval Worlds*, edited by Rebecca Futo Kennedy and Molly Jones-Lewis. Routledge, 2016.

- Neria, Chaim. “‘It Cannot Be Valued with the Gold of Ophir’: Rabbi. Joseph b. Shem Tob’s Commentary on Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*: Sources and Analysis.” PhD diss., The University of Chicago, 2015.
- Neria, Chaim. “The Sermon in Late Medieval Jewish Thought as Method for Popularizing Philosophy.” In *Medieval Jewish Philosophy and its Literary Forms*, edited by Aaron W. Hughes and James T. Robinson. Indiana University Press, 2019.
- Netanyahu, Benzion. *The Marranos of Spain: From the Late Fourteenth to the Early Sixteenth Century, According to Contemporary Hebrew Sources*. American Academy for Jewish Research, 1966.
- Nirenberg, David. “Mass Conversion and Genealogical Mentalities: Jews and Christians in Fifteenth Century Spain.” *Past & Present* 174, no. 1 (2002): 3–41.
- Nirenberg, David. “Was there race before modernity? The example of ‘Jewish’ blood in late medieval Spain.” In *The Origins of Racism in the West*, edited by Miriam Eliav-Feldon, Benjamin Isaac, Joseph Ziegler. Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Novoa, James Nelson. “A Sephardic Art of Memory.” In *Ars Reminiscendi: Mind and Memory in Renaissance Culture*, edited by Donald Beecher and Grant Williams. Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2009.
- Nuriel, Avraham. *Concealed and Revealed in Medieval Jewish Philosophy*. Magnes Press, 2000.
- Pagden, Anthony R. D. “The Diffusion of Aristotle’s Moral Philosophy in Spain, ca. 1400–1600.” *Traditio* 21 (1975): 287–313.
- Pearl, Chaim. *The Medieval Jewish Mind: The Religious Philosophy of Isaac Arama*. Vallentine, Mitchell & Co., 1971.
- Pines, Shlomo. “The Limitations of Human Knowledge According to al-Farabi, ibn Bajja, and Maimonides.” In *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, edited by Isadore Twersky. Harvard University Press, 1979.
- Pines, Shlomo. “Truth and Falsehood Versus Good and Evil: A Study in Jewish and General Philosophy in Connection with the Guide of the Perplexed, I, 2.” In *Studies in Maimonides*, edited by Isadore Twersky. Harvard University Press, 1990.
- Raffel, Charles M. “Providence as Consequent upon the Intellect: Maimonides’ Theory of Providence.” *AJS Review* 12 (1987): 25–71.
- Ravitzky, Aviezer. “Samuel ibn Tibbon and the Esoteric Character of *The Guide of the Perplexed*.” *AJS Review* 6 (1981): 87–123.

- Ravitzky, Aviezer. *Passover Sermon of Ḥasdai Crescas and Studies in His Philosophic Thought*. Israel Academy of the Humanities and Sciences, 1988.
- Ravitzky, Aviezer. "The Secrets of the *Guide of the Perplexed*: Between the Thirteenth and Twentieth Centuries." In *Studies in Maimonides*, edited by Isadore Twersky. Harvard University Press, 1990.
- Regev, Shaul. "Nusah rishon shel peirush Abravanel le-sefer Devarim." *Kobes al Yad* 15 (2001): 285–380.
- Rigo, Caterina. "Judah Romano's Commentaries on the Bible: His Philosophical System as Contained in Them and His Sources in Jewish Thought and Christian Scholasticism." PhD diss., The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1996.
- Robinson, James T. "Samuel ibn Tibbon's *Commentary on Ecclesiastes* and the Philosopher's Prooemium." In *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, Volume 3, edited by Isadore Twersky and Jay Harris. Harvard University Press, 2000.
- Robinson, James T. "The Ibn Tibbon Family: A Dynasty of Translators in Medieval Provence." In *Be'erot Yitzhak: Studies in Memory of Isadore Twersky*, edited by Jay Harris. Harvard University Press, 2005.
- Robinson, James T. "From Digression to Compilation: Samuel ibn Tibbon and Immanuel of Rome on Genesis 1:1, 1:14, 1:20," *Zutot: Perspectives on Jewish Culture* 4 (2006): 81–97.
- Robinson, James T. "Hasdai Crescas and anti-Aristotelianism," in *The Cambridge Companion of Jewish Philosophy*, edited by Daniel Frank and Oliver Leaman. Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Robinson, James T. *Samuel ibn Tibbon's Commentary on Ecclesiastes*. Mohr Siebeck, 2007.
- Robinson, James T. "Maimonides, Samuel ibn Tibbon, and the Construction of a Jewish Tradition of Philosophy." In *Maimonides after 800 Years: Essays on Maimonides and His Influence*, edited by Jay M. Harris. Harvard University Press, 2007.
- Robinson, James T. "'We Drink Only From The Master's Water': Maimonides and Maimonideanism in Southern France, 1200–1306." In *Epigonism in Jewish Culture*, edited by Shlomo Berger and Irene Zwiep, *Studia Rosenthaliana* 40 (2007–2008): 27–60.
- Robinson, James T., ed. *Cultures of Maimonideanism: New Approaches to the History of Jewish Thought*. Brill, 2009.
- Robinson, James T. "Philosophical Psychology, Jewish Tradition." In *The Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy*, edited by H. Langerlund. Springer, 2010.

- Robinson, James T. "Philosophy and Science in Medieval Jewish Commentaries on the Bible." In *Science in Medieval Jewish Cultures*, edited by Gad Freudenthal. Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- Robinson, James T. "Secondary Forms of Philosophy: On the Teaching and Transmission of Philosophy in Non-Philosophical Literary Genres." In *Vehicles of Transmission, Translation, and Transformation in Medieval Textual Culture*, edited by Robert Wisnovsky, Faith Wallis, and Jamie Fumo. Brepols, 2012.
- Robinson, James T. "On or Above the Ladder? Maimonidean and Anti-Maimonidean Readings of Jacob's Ladder." In *Interpreting Maimonides: Critical Essays*, edited by Charles H. Manekin and Daniel Davies. Cambridge University Press, 2019.
- Robinson, James T. "Lexicons and Lexicography in Medieval Jewish Philosophy." In *Medieval Jewish Philosophy and Its Literary Forms*, edited by Aaron W. Hughes and James T. Robinson. Indiana University Press, 2019.
- Rudavsky, Tamar. "Divine Omniscience and Future Contingents in Gersonides." *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 21, no. 4 (1983): 513–536.
- Rudavsky, Tamar M. "The Impact of Scholasticism upon Jewish Philosophy in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries." In *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, edited by Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman. Cambridge, 2002.
- Rudavsky, Tamar. *Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages: Science, Rationalism, Religion*. Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Sackson, Adrian. *Joseph ibn Kaspi: Portrait of a Hebrew Philosopher in Medieval Provence*. Brill, 2017.
- Saperstein, Marc. *Jewish Preaching, 1200–1800: An Anthology*. Yale University Press, 1989.
- Saperstein, Marc. "Jewish Typological Exegesis After Nahmanides." *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 2 (1993): 158–170.
- Saperstein, Marc. "The Social and Cultural Context: Thirteenth to Fifteenth Centuries." In *History of Jewish Philosophy*, edited by Daniel Frank and Oliver Leaman. Routledge, 1997.
- Saperstein, Marc. "The Method of Doubts: Problematizing of the Bible in Late Medieval Jewish Exegesis." In *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Interpretation in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Barry D. Walfish, and Joseph W. Goering. Oxford University Press, 2003.

- Saperstein, Marc. "Moscato as Eulogizer." In *Rabbi Judah Moscato and the Jewish Intellectual World of Mantua in the 16th–17th Centuries*, edited by Giuseppe Veltri and Gianfranco Miletto. Brill, 2012.
- Scholem, Gershom. "Reflections on Modern Jewish Studies." In *On the Possibility of Jewish Mysticism in Our Time & Other Essays*, edited by Avraham Shapira. Jewish Publication Society, 1997.
- Schorsch, Ismar. *From Text to Context: The Turn to History in Modern Judaism*. Brandeis University Press, 1994.
- Schorsch, Ismar. *'Better a Scholar than a Prophet': Studies on the Creation of Jewish Studies*. Mohr Siebeck, 2021.
- Schwartz, Dov. "The Quadripartite Division of the Intellect in Medieval Jewish Thought." *Jewish Quarterly Review* 84, no. 2 (1992): 227–236.
- Schwartz, Dov. "The Debate over the Maimonidean Theory of Providence in Thirteenth-Century Jewish Philosophy." *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 2, no. 2 (1995): 185–196.
- Schwartz, Dov. "Changing Fronts in Controversies over Philosophy in Medieval Spain and Provence." *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 7 (1997): 61–82.
- Schwartz, Dov. "Astral Magic and Specific Properties (*Segullot*) in Medieval Jewish Thought." In *Science in Medieval Jewish Cultures*, edited by Gad Freudenthal. Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- Schwartzmann, Julia. "Gender Concepts of Medieval Jewish Thinkers and the Book of Proverbs." *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 7, no. 3 (2000): 183–202.
- Schwartzmann, Julia. "Isaac Arama and His Theory of Two Matches (*Zivvugim*)." *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 13:1 (2006): 27–49.
- Seewald, Yehudah. *Ba'al ha-Aqedah: Rabi Yiṣḥaq 'Aramah, Ba'al ha-Aqedat Yiṣḥaq me-hotmei tequfat ha-rishonim*. Mahadurat Elul, 2023.
- Septimus, Bernard. *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Translation: The Career and Controversies of Ramah*. Harvard University Press, 1982.
- Septimus, Bernard. "Yitzhaq Arama and Aristotle's *Ethics*." In *Jews and Conversos at the Time of the Expulsion*, edited by Yom Tov Assis and Yosef Kaplan. Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 1999.
- Shear, Adam. *The Kuzari and the Shaping of Jewish Identity, 1167–1900*. Cambridge University Press, 2008.

- Shemesh, Yonatan. "Averroes as Intertext: Moses Narboni's Commentary on Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*." PhD diss., The University of Chicago, 2021.
- Sirat, Colette. *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages*. Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- Sirat, Colette. "Studia Philosophy as Scribal Centers in Fifteenth-Century Iberia." In *The Late Medieval Hebrew Book in the Western Mediterranean: Hebrew Manuscripts and Incunabula in Context*, edited by Javier Del Barco. Brill, 2015.
- Sirat, Colette, and Marc Geoffroy. "The Modena Manuscript and the Teaching of Philosophy in Fourteenth and Fifteenth Century Spain." In *Study and Knowledge in Jewish thought*, edited by Howard Kreisel. Ben-Gurion University Press, 2006.
- Sorabji, Richard, ed. *Philoponus and the Rejection of Aristotelian Science*, 2nd Edition. Institute of Classical Studies, 2010.
- Steinschneider, Morris. *Die hebräischen Übersetzungen des Mittelalters und die Juden als Dolmetscher*. Berlin, 1893.
- Stern, Gregg. *Philosophy and Rabbinic Culture: Jewish Interpretation and Controversy in Medieval Languedoc*. Routledge, 2008.
- Stern, Gregg. "Philosophy in Southern France: Controversy over Philosophic Study and the Influence of Averroes upon Jewish Thought." In *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, edited by Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman. Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Stern, Josef. *Problems and Parables of Law: Maimonides and Nahmanides on Reasons for the Commandments, Ta'amei ha-Mitzvot*. SUNY Press, 1998.
- Strauss, Leo. "The Literary Character of *The Guide of the Perplexed*." In *Essays on Maimonides*, edited by Salo W. Baron. Columbia University Press, 1941. Reprinted in Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*. The Free Press, 1992.
- Strauss, Leo. "How to Begin to Study *The Guide of the Perplexed*." In Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, translated by Shlomo Pines. University of Chicago Press, 1963.
- Stroumsa, Guy G. "John Spencer and the Roots of Idolatry." *History of Religions* 41, no. 1 (2001): 14–23.
- Stroumsa, Sarah. *Maimonides in His World: Portrait of a Mediterranean Thinker*. Princeton University Press, 2009.
- Talmage, Frank. "Apples of Gold: The Inner Meaning of Sacred Texts in Medieval Judaism." In *Jewish Spirituality*, Volume 1, edited by Arthur Green. Crossroad, 1986.

- Tirosh-Rothschild, Hava. "Jewish Philosophy on the Eve of Modernity." In *History of Jewish Philosophy*, edited by Daniel Frank and Oliver Leaman. Routledge, 1997.
- Tirosh-Rothschild, Hava. "Human Felicity: Fifteenth-Century Sephardic Perspectives on Happiness." In *In Iberia and Beyond: Hispanic Jews Between Cultures*, edited by Bernard Dov Cooperman. University of Delaware Press, 1998.
- Tirosh-Samuelson, Hava. "The Ultimate End of Human Life in Postexpulsion Philosophic Literature." In *Crisis and Creativity in the Sephardic World, 1391–1648*, edited by Benjamin R. Gampel. Columbia University Press, 1997.
- Tirosh-Samuelson, Hava. "Philosophy and Kabbalah: 1200–1600." In *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, edited by Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman. Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Tirosh-Samuelson, Hava. *Happiness in Premodern Judaism: Virtue, Knowledge, and Well-Being*. Hebrew Union College Press, 2003.
- Twersky, Isadore. *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides*. Yale University Press, 1982.
- Twersky, Isadore. ed. *Rabbi Moses Nahmanides (Ramban): Explorations in his Religious and Literary Virtuosity*. Harvard University Press, 1983.
- Visi, Tamaś. "The Early Ibn Ezra Supercommentaries: A Chapter in Medieval Jewish Intellectual History." PhD diss., Central European University, 2006.
- Visi, Tamaś. "Remembering and Forgetting: Moses Maimonides, Moses Narboni, and Eliezer Eilburg on the Biblical Past." In *The Making of Memory in the Middle Ages*, edited by Lucie Doležalová. Brill, 2019.
- Weber, Gadi. "Studies on R. Yaaqov Anatoli's *Mamad ha-Talmidim*." PhD diss., The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2019.
- Wolfson, Elliot R. "By Way of Truth: Aspects of Nahmanides' Kabbalistic Hermeneutic." *AJS Review* 14 (1989): 175–77.
- Wolfson, Elliot R. "Beneath the Wings of the Great Eagle: Maimonides and the Thirteenth-Century Kabbalah." In *Moses Maimonides (1138–1204): His Religious, Scientific, and Philosophical Wirkungsgeschichte in Different Cultural Contexts*, edited by George K. Hasselhoff and Otfried Fraisse. Ergon Verlag, 2004.
- Wolfson, Harry A. *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle*. Harvard University Press, 1921.

- Wolfson, Harry A. *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, 2 volumes. Harvard University Press, 1947.
- Yisraeli, Yosi. “Constructing and Undermining Converso Jewishness: Profiat Duran and Pablo de Santa Maria.” In *Religious Conversion: History, Experience, and Meaning*, edited by Ira Katznelson and Miri Rubin. Routledge, 2014.
- Yisraeli, Yosi. “A Christianized Sephardic Critique of Rashi’s Peshat in Pablo de Santa Maria’s Additiones.” In *Medieval Exegesis and Religious Difference: Commentary, Conflict, and Community in the Premodern Mediterranean*, edited by Ryan Szpiech. Fordham University Press, 2015.
- Zonta, Mauro. “Ibn al-Tayyib Zoologist and Hunayn Ibn Ishaq’s Revision of Aristotle’s *De animalibus*: New Evidence from the Hebrew Tradition.” *Aram* 3 (1991): 235–47.
- Zonta, Mauro. *La filosofia antica nel Medioevo ebraico*. Paideia, 1996.
- Zonta, Mauro. “The Zoological Writings in the Hebrew Tradition: The Hebrew Approach to Aristotle’s Zoological Writings and to Their Ancient and Medieval Commentators in the Middle Ages.” In *Aristotle’s Animals in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, edited by Carlos Steel, Guy Guldentops, and Pieter Beullens. Leuven, 1999.
- Zonta, Mauro. *Hebrew Scholasticism in the Fifteenth Century: A History and Source Book*. Springer, 2006.
- Zwiep, Irene E. “Jewish Scholars and Christian Traditions in Late Medieval Catalonia: Profiat Duran and the Art of Memory.” In *Hebrew Scholarship in the Medieval World*, edited by Nicholas de Lange. Cambridge University Press, 2001.