Monotheism Revisited: Islamic Monotheism in Dialogue with Moses ben Maimon (Maimonides, 1135-1204)

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Abstract: The dialogue with Maimonides will differentiate the picture of God's oneness and of God's involvement in creation—Divinity's *being* and *doing*. In this way key concepts of Maimonides can also retrospectively function as an eye opener for what has begun long before Maimonides, i.e., as post-exile genuine Jewish theology with its specific interpretation of scripture and its openness to mystical speculation (kabbalah). In the end it will also become plausible that Christian theological thinking in the name of trinity owes much to Judaism and can never be understood without it – in the same way as Judaism cannot come to grips with its own history without taking into account Christian theology.

Keywords: monotheism, Islam, Maimonides, dialogue, binity, trinity

Introduction

> We cannot conceive the 'being eternally three' of the divine being in any other way than the following: either we put the emphasis on God´s unity [at the expense of his being three]

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> or on his being three [at the expense of his unity]... i.e., our theological speech will always remain inadequate.
> (*Friedrich Schleiermacher, On Divine Trinity*)

Monotheism is a subject that is actually fiercely debated. Under the impact of recent political developments in the Middle East, in particular the creation of the Islamic Khalifat, and even more so because of worldwide terrorism claiming for itself this adjective "Islamic", the bulk of monotheism studies focus on monotheism and violence.[1] However, while studies of this kind often inform us successfully about the different forms of violence, for which monotheism seems to be responsible, the question about the true nature of monotheism, amazingly enough, remains often untouched – namely, has there ever been in the history of religions such a thing like monotheism, not as project or aim but as grounded practised reality? The fact that there is often talk about the three "abrahamitic" religions, lumping together Judaism, Christianity and Islam does not help either, since this construct, often fruit of political calculation, rather obscures the reality "on the ground" than elucidates it.[2]

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[1] See J. Schnorks, *Das ate Testament und die Gewalt. Studien zur göttlichen und menschlichen Gewalt in alttestamentlichen Texten und ihren Rezeptionen*, Neukirchen-Vlyn 2014 (Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament 136); J.-H. Tück (ed)., *Monotheismus unter Gewaltverdacht. Zum Gespäch mit Jan Assmann*, (Freiburg, Basel, Wien 2015), and in the same volume *Ambivalenzen und Konflikte des monotheistischen Offenbarungsglaubens*, 246-268; Th. Mooren, *War and Peace in Monotheistic Religions* (Delhi 2008) and idem, *Making the Earth a Human Dwelling Place. Essays in the Philosophy and Anthropology of Culture and Religion* (Würzburg, Altenberge 2000), 304-307 and numerous others.

[2] For the "abrahamitic" religions see f. ex. Th. Mooren, "Unity in Diversity. The "Prophets" Muhammad, Abraham, and Jesus and the

Facing this situation, and Islam generally being believed to be the strictest monotheism of the three "abrahamitic" ones, it seems best to begin our revisiting monotheism with a presentation of Islamic monotheistic thought—thanks to an investigation into the work of the Mu´tazilite Qā*d*ī ´Abd al-Jabbār (died 1025), more precisely into his Shar*h* al-us*u*l al-khamsa (The Explanation of the Five Principles[3] = Shar*h*). The Mu´tazilites go back to Was*i*l ibn ´A*t*ā`(699-748/9), who separated himself from his teacher *H*as*a*n al-Bas*r*ī[4] because of a disagreement on the fate of the grave sinner (fāsiq). For Was*i*l he was neither faithful nor totally unfaithful, but living in between these two stages (fī manzilatin baina manzilatain).

The Mu´tazilites are known for their fight in favour of God´s unity (taw*h*īd) and God´s justice (´adl). To keep both together seems almost impossible, in particular regarding the theodicy problem. Evil seems more easily explainable on the basis of two gods, one good one, one bad, than by maintaining that there is only one sole responsible. Related to this question is the problem of "qadar", "free will" (literally: the human being having its own "quantity" of power at its disposal), equally fiercely debated,[5] since the whole reflection on good and evil demands at least on the human side a minimum of free will which renders human responsibility, and thus God's just punishment, possible. The oneness of God was also

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Islamo-Christian Dialogue," *MST Review* 6 (2004): 73-113.

[3] Based upon a script by Sheshdiv, Mānkadīm and ed. Cairo 1965 by A.K. ´Uthmān.

[4] Thus the name of the group from the verb "to separate" (i´tazala)

[5] See too J. van Ess, *Anfänge muslimischer Theologie. Zwei anti-qadaritische Traktate aus dem ersten Jahrhundert der Higra* (Beirut and Wiesbaden 1977), 109, 110, 183, 235, 243/4; Th. Mooren, *Es gibt keinen Gott - ausser Gott. Der Islam in der Welt der Religionen* 130/1 (Würzburg, Altenberge 1996), in part. note 354.

seriously threatened, in the eyes of the Mu´tazilites, by the people's belief in the eternity of the Qur´ān, that is that it has never been created in time (and naturally will never perish). Yet, this makes the Qur´ān effectively, as the Mu´tazilites saw it, a second God beside Allah![6]

If this is the general picture of the theological situation[7], in our present investigation I will concentrate on the study of God's unity (taw*h*īd).[8] The Qā*d*ī´s text on taw*h*īd is very concise and is called not for nothing a "Mu´tazilite ´aqīda", a catechism working by questions and answers. The hope is that the directness

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[6] Behind this we can detect the problem, how to distinguish God's attributes from his essence, a central problem of Islamic theology. See R. Caspar, *A historical introduction to Islamic theology. Muhammad and the classical period* (Rome 1998) ["Studi arabo-islamici del Pisai" no. 11], 154. By the way, the example of the Qur'ān, whether it is created or not, tells us something about the impossibility, even in the realm of Islam, about "true", "strict" monotheism "on the ground". On duality within moneity see also, following J. Baudrillard, my reflection on the twin towers in New York and the 9/11 event. (Th. Mooren, "New York—Ground Zero 2001," *MST Review* 14 (2012): 183-188.

[7] See also T. Nagel, *Geschichte der islamischen Theologie. Von Mohammed bis zur Gegenwart* (München 1994), 43-49, 101-117; D. Gimaret, *Théories de l´acte humain en théologie musulmane* (Paris 1980); J. van Ess, *Die Erkenntnislehre des ´Adudaddin al-Ici. Übersetzung und Kommentar des ersten Buches seiner Mawāqif* (Wiesbaden 1966), 13-23 and the same: Anfänge...; R. Caspar, *Traité de Théologie Musulmane I., Histoire de pensée religieuse Musulmane* (Rome 1987), 145-172; and the same: A Historical Introduction.., 154-196, in part. 180; H. Laoust, *Les Schismes dans l´Islam. Introduction à une étude la religion musulmane* (Paris 1965), 101-114.

[8] My study is based upon excerpts of the Shar*h*, as edited by the Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabi e Islamici, in its "Etudes Arabes", dossiers, Nr. 65, Rome 1983-2, under the title: *la passion del´unicité*: pp. 6/7 Arabic text, and pp. 8-10 introduction into ´Abd al-Jabbār´s work followed by a French translation. [My own English translation is based upon this Roman text].

and transparency of the text guides us without detour into what I would call the heart of the monotheist mentality, into the heart of the kalām, i.e., Islamic theological scholasticism and its logic.[9]

After having studied what the kalām has to say about God's unity, we are ready to dialogue with one of the greatest philosopher-theologians of Jewish history, Maimonides, who has still much in common with the kalām but also, clearly as a philosopher of his time, takes his distance, in particular regarding the *method* of Islamic scholastics. The dialogue with Maimonides will differentiate the picture of God's oneness and of God's involvement into creation. In this way key concepts of Maimonides can also retrospectively function as an eye opener for what has begun long before Maimonides, i.e., as post exile genuine Jewish theology with its specific interpretation of scripture and its openness to mystical speculation (kabbalah). In the end it will also become plausible that Christian theological thinking in the name of trinity owes much to Judaism and can never be understood without it – in the same way as Judaism cannot come to grips with its own history without taking into account Christian theology.

I. The kalām and God's unity – lā thānī lahu: there is no second to Him[10]

1. God alone is creator and eternal

"When you are asked: 'What about monotheism (taw*h*īd)?'– here is the answer: 'Monotheism is the

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[9] "Kalām" means the "word", and the scholastic theologians were thus called "those who talk" (mutakallimūn).

[10] La passion de l´unicité, 6; cf. ibid., 8/9 – The transcription of Arabic terms has been simplified. Emphatic letters are rendered by italics.

science about something that God possesses alone, i.e., something regarding those attributes that no human being[11] shares with Him. It means we know, when it comes to the world, that there is a maker (*s*āni´), who made it; that He [God the maker] is someone that [really and fully] exists (maujūd), in such a way, that He has never stopped to exist and will never stop in the future[12]; someone who is [truly] eternal.[13] Death (fanā´) has no right upon him.[14] We, however, enter into existence out of non-existence,[15] neither are we eternal.[16]"

Commentary[17]

The structural construction of the opening of the ´aqīda, the creed, is impressive. We have, on top, the triple affirmation of God as maker, as existent, and as eternal. This is exemplified by three negations: did not stop (1), will never stop (2) – as negative explanation of what it means for God to exist (maujūd) – and that death will never hit him (3) as explanation of what it means to be "subsistent", ever lasting and eternal.

Yet, when it comes to the human being, there too we have a triple affirmation: "one of us" [versus God] (1). Existence out of nothingness (2), and being submitted to death (3). In this way, "existence out of nothingness" is exactly the opposite to God's way of existence. Yes, the "one of us" shares with God the attribute of maujūd, but only *after* (ba´da) having emerged out of the realm of

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[11] "a*h*adun min ma*h*lūqīna".

[12] "lam yazal...lā yazālu".

[13] "bāqin"; "subsistent".

[14] "lā yajūzu ´alaihi": "is not allowed...".

[15] "ba´da al-´adam", "after the state of ´nothingness`"

[16] "Death has a right upon us."

[17] The division in chapters and the commentaries of the chapters of the shar*h* are by ThM.

´adam, the "nothingness". This in turn means, with regard to death, which, indeed, is "allowed" upon us, that it is part of our lot. Obviously, "nothingness" is not to be understood here in a modern totally nihilistic sense, but rather as a "positive", but not yet qualified "Urgrund" or "Ungrund" of all Being (like an idealistic philosopher, Schelling, would call it).

The key term, when it comes to "one of us", i.e., to humankind, is "after" (ba´da)! Single mindedly, the term ba´da breaks open God's quiet eternity, by throwing the human being into the realm of history, i.e., temporality and contingency, cutting off the "one of us" away from Being into the constituency of *Da-Sein*, "being there", if we may use Heideggerian terminology. Being "after" puts the "one of us" under the wing of history, of *creature* in front of the creator. Everything else that follows, what we can still *say about God* – and this is what "attribute" (*s*ifat) means – has to be read in the light of this fundamental fracture within Being, will necessarily take the form of analogy (qiyās): that is what God possesses in full, in His own right and forever, the human being has it only in a limited, "borrowed," way.

2. God alone is almighty and omniscient

"Know that God is almighty (qādir). He has never stopped to be almighty nor will He ever do so. In other words: weakness (´ajzu) has no grasp upon him. Furthermore God is knowing (´ā1im). He never stopped knowing nor will He ever do so. This ignorance (jahl) has no grasp upon him. More precisely; He really knows everything:[18] that what is and what will be; and with regard to that what is not yet, what is still in the

[18] "bi-lashyā´i kullahā".

making, He knows how it would look like, if it would have been already realized.[19]

Commentary

The *scientia Dei* extends itself over the existing things, the present tense and the future. "Future" in the case of God means two things: shapes of things that can be guessed, like the form of a flower, while I only know the seed. Yet God's future knowledge, unlike ours, also embraces even shapes of things that cannot be deduced from already existing visible models, things that are still totally hidden in the realm of mere potentiality, in the realm of ´adam.

3. God is alive

"Also know that God is alive (*h*ayyun) in such a way that He was always alive and never stops being so – neither harm (al-āfāt) nor pain (al-ālāmu) can hit him."

Commentary

"Alive" is not the same as "to exist", nor does it simply mean to be "immortal". Rather, being alive, especially in the case of God, touches the *quality* of life, the "good form" of life, not necessarily the length of it. – Maybe we can point within this context to examples of peoples/beings in diverse folktales and mythologies, who "qualify" for eternal life, a life without death, but would find this condition totally painful and frustrating, so painful that they wish to die. Like the heroes of late antiquity Glaukos, who became immortal. Glaukus found out that immortality in itself is no good fortune at all – he throws himself into the ocean and becomes a demon. Another example: The cook of Alexander the

[19] "Wa mā lā yakūnu lau kāna kaifa kāna yakūnu".

Great discovers by chance the fountain of immortality, the same fountain Alexander was not able to find. He becomes so angry that his cook and not he himself has become immortal, that he tries to kill his servant by all possible means, but without success since his cook has become immortal. Finally the cook is chained to a huge block of bronze and thrown into the deepest spot of the ocean.[20]

4. God is all-seeing

"Know that God sees the visible (rā´in lil-mur´ayāt), perceives the perceivable (mudrik lil-mudrakāt) and is not in need (lā ya*h*tāju) of any sense organ (*h*āsat) nor instrument (ālat)."

5. God is self-sufficient

"And know that God is self-sufficient (ghanyyun), has never stopped to be so and will never stop to be self-sufficient. Any kind of need (*h*ajat) will never hit him."

Commentary

This attribute is fundamental. Maybe on the speculative-theological level of monotheistic thought even the most "successful"![21]

6. God– the anti-body

"Know that God is not similar to anything that has a

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[20] See L. Greisiger, *Messias - Endkaiser - Antichrist. Politische Apokalyptik unter Juden und Christen des Nahen Ostens am Vorabend der arabischen Eroberung* (Wiesbaden 2014), 188-190.

[21] See f.ex. Th. Mooren, "Monothéisme coranique et anthropologie," *Anthropos* 76 (1981): 543-545.

body [or shape or form].[22] He is not concerned by what is characteristic for the movement of bodies: rising (*s*u´*ū*d) and falling (hub- ū*t*); does not know the change of place (tanaqqul), neither any form of alteration (taghyīr), fixation (tarkīb) or development (ta*s*wīr). He does not need neither the absence of (certain) limbs (al-jāriha) nor the presence of (certain) organs (a´*d*ā´) [like sex organs]. Also know that in God there is nothing similar to accidents (a´rā*d*) characteristic of movement (*h*arakā t) and repose (sukūn); to colors (al-alwān), flavours (al-*t*u´ūm) or smells (al-rawā´i*h*)."

Commentary

All this is basically the result, on the side of God, of the absence of what we have discussed under the term of "ba´da" (after), the immersion into becoming and decaying, birth and death.

7. God - the One

"Know that God is ONE (wā*h*id) in all eternity (fīl-qidam) and from the very beginning (al-awwalīya); there is no second to Him (al-thānī lahu) and that everything else – apart from him (kull mā sawāhu) – is "created" (mu*h*dath[23]), made (maf´ūl), in need of someone or

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[22] "Lā yushbihu al-ajsān".

[23] The terminology used by our author belongs to the belief system of the Mu´tazila school. Instead of the Verb "khalaqa", to create, the Verb "*h*adatha" (in its IV. form), to bring forward, is used. Albeit both could be rendered by "to create", to "bring forward" might suggest a more limited participation of God in the act of creation. He only "pushes into" being what is already well determined as to its constitutive qualities, f.ex. to be "good" or "bad", for which God is *not* responsible. These precautions are taken because of the theodicy problem. – For more details see Gimaret, Théories de l´acte humain..., 3-60, 241-304, 334-360; van Ess, Anfänge..., 110, 109, 241, 243/4; Caspar, A Historical Introduction..., 180; Mooren, Es gibt

something (mu*h*tāj), "directed" (mudabbar; determined from the outside), possessed (mamlūk) and dominated (marbūb; by outside forces).

If you have learnt all this, then you are an expert in the question of taw*h*īd!"

Commentary

Here, the ´aqīda finally arrives at its dogmatic peak – the declaration of unity. However, the "unity" that has been proven until now bears more the character of "uniqueness" than with *numerical* unity, i.e., we are dealing with an ample description of what God is not – not "one of us", a human being. Hence He possesses in fullness all the "good" attributes like seeing, knowing, being alive etc., which we only carry with us in a limited way, limited by death, sickness and all kinds of weaknesses.

However, the question that arises now is: does the uniqueness, once duly established, also imply a *numerical* uniqueness. In other words, is it possible or even thinkable, that the being that is creator and dominator of everything *shares* this "unique" status with someone else? Since until now the case has not been made that such a sharing (of power, life and total being) has to be excluded. It has only been supposed; rejected, on the level of God, as something unthinkable, logically impossible or otherwise totally impracticable. Yet before that *proof* of the impossibility of the existence of a thānī, a second beside the One God, has not been delivered, monotheism, as Islam understands it, is not yet secured. Thus we have to attack exactly this proof (dalīl) thanks to the text that follows.

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keinen Gott..., 130/1, in part. note 354.

II. Probing the taw*h*īd[24]

1. The second as co-sharer?

"Question: ´What is the proof (dalīl) regarding the statement that God is one and that there is no second with him?` Answer: ´If there would be a second with him, this one would also be eternal (qadīm); more precisely, he would necessarily be eternal *like* him (the first one), [i.e., out of himself], since being eternal means to be eternal "out of oneself" (li-nafsihi), and he would also be powerful (qādir) "out of himself."`

commentary

A new perspective is introduced here. Certain attributes belong to God simply because He is God. Who says "God", says also at the same token attributes like being eternal or being powerful. They come with God's essence (dhāt) – li-nafsihi, out of God's own "deep individuality", so to speak. And the first of these attributes is to be eternal (qadīm). The one who shares in eternity with someone, "automatically" also shares in all the other attributes of the essence, like power, etc. These hypothetical "eternals" would end up to be equal to each other. This excludes any possibility of ranking among them, that one is dominating the other. Each eternal one is strictly "autonomous". However this would lead to the following dilemma:

2. Proof *ad absurdum*

In case we have two powerful beings, powerful out of their own (li-anfusuhumā; because of their essence) what could happen is that one of the two would want to

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[24] La passion de l'unicité, 7, cf. ibid., 9/10.

move a body, while the other wants to keep it immobile. Now it makes sense to imagine three possibilities: Be it that the two wills have their way (realize themselves simultaneously) – but that is absurd (mu*h*āl), because of the inherent contradiction of both of them (lita*d*ā dihuma). Or, be it that both don't get their way – which is also absurd, hence that would lead to the inefficacy (al-*d*urf) of both of them. However, in God there is no place for such inefficacy. Remains that only one will of the two (murādāhumā) gets its way. But this would entail that this one (alone) is powerful, while the other is weak, lacking efficacy. However, what is weak cannot be eternal nor can it be God. In this way it is proven (*t*abata), that God is one. This comes down to what God himself declares in Sūra 21, 22: 'Had there been therein (in the heavens and the earth) Gods (alihah) besides Allah both [the Co-God and God himself] would be ruined (lafasadatā)'.[25]"

commentary

The logical proof presented by the kalām, the Islamic scholastic theology, is remarkable. It is not lacking astuteness. Since it makes perfect good sense, *as long as* we are dealing with the human reality and above all under the assumption that everything resides in the original fact that will A is opposite to will B. This, indeed, can only lead to a power struggle (and the loser will not be a God) or will have to end in draw where both Gods disqualify themselves. However, what is not taken into account is the possibility that at the very beginning there exists a situation where both wills (Gods) want exactly the same!

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[25] Transl. Qur´ān King Fahd. (Qur´an: *The Noble Qur´an*. English Translation of the meanings and commentary, King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Qur´an.)

Now, this may be, indeed, a situation that on the human level might never occur. Or, precisely *only* in the state of perfect mutual love! And is this not exactly the situation John's gospel is struggling with, while trying to describe the relationship between God as Father and this famous "second one", His son? Truly, even here, the original situation, the relationship between Father and Son, seems to play exactly into the hands of Islamic theology, since the kinship terminology as such does *not* indicate or suggest a perfect coincidence between Father and Son. On the contrary, it indicates one being superior, the other inferior *"by birth"*, *ex officio,* in all eternity. However, would perfect love not have the capacity to make both equal and to avoid the creation of winners and losers? In other words, one would have *to change the pattern* in order to take the relationship *out of the context of a mere power play!* The pattern of mere power, however, is the pattern that guides the discourse on the "second God" in Islamic theology. It is *the* permanent underlying pattern that keeps Islamic monotheism together.[26] It enables Islamic theology to demonstrate, successfully from its viewpoint, the inherent weakness, if not absurdity of the rival theologies, that threaten, at its highpoint of formulation, Islamic orthodoxy – and the state, the political powers, behind it.

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[26]And equally *keeps together* with the additional support of "predestination" or anti-qadar theology the society, i.e. *keeps the people submitted*. See v. Ess´s remarks, Anfänge..., 183, 235, 241 on the "ideology of domination" (*Herrschaftsideologie*) embraced by the Umayyads, the first great dyansty in Islam (ruled from Mu´āwyya [661-680] until al- Walīd II [743-744]). See too Mooren, Es gibt keinen Gott.., 130-132.

3. Rivals defeated

"And in this way the theory of the Dualists (qaul al-thanawīya[27]) becomes untenable according to which (there exist the two:) light (nūr) and darkness (*z*ulma), both being eternal. Furthermore, our proof that bodies are created and that therefore a creator is needed also smashes (yab*t*ulu) their belief system. Equally annihilated is the Christian doctrine (qaul) according to which there exist three "persons" (uqnūm[28]) in God: the Father, the Son and the "Saint Esprit" (rūh al- quds).[29] Hence we have explained that God is One (wā*h*id) and that it is absurd for someone who is One in reality (fīl-*h*aqīqati) to be in reality also "threefold" (thalāta).

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[27] Manicheans, Mazdeans.

[28] "uqnūm", from the Syriac qnômā is a key term in Nestorian theology: two kyanê, two qnômê in one par*s*ôpa. Kyānā indicates the "physis", the "general nature"; that there *is* something, some being that then gets differentiated or concretized in qnômā, a "person", in the most basic sense, i.e., enabling me to distinguish Paul from Peter. There does not exist any equivalent to qnômā in Greek or Latin, although some see in qnômā what the Greeks call "ousia". Hence also qnômā cannot be divided and is permanent. Others propose to let qnômā untranslated. In any case it should not be translated by "hypostase" in the way Chalcedon uses this term. Thus "person" should be used very carefully and not be confounded with our modern subjectivity or autonomous individuality. – For the Syrian-Nestorian background and the meaning of qnômā see C.-St. Popa, *Gīwargīs I. (660-680). Ostsyrische Christologie in frühislamischer Zeit* (Wiesbaden 2016), 116-138, in part. 136, and 116, note 247.

[29] For Islam and the Trinity see too Mooren, The Trinity...78-107.

III. A world with new borders

1. The shock of philosophy

Our excursion into the arguments of the kalām on taw*h*īd has demonstrated how ready-witted Islamic orthodoxy is when it comes to defend the faith in the One God. We can feel something like a raw power that runs through the arguments these early theologians have forged – a made body needs a maker, two wills will run in opposite directions, what is one cannot be three and so forth. They are experts in naming and analyzing the attributes (sifat) of the One who like a most sophisticated overseer holds the reins of the world in his hands, as creator and final judge – and yet, apart from the voice of the Prophets – remains hidden in his essence (dhāt). Or more precisely, the voice of the Prophets combined with the unique tool the human being possesses: its reason (na*z*r).

Yet, reason is also a double-edged sword. The moment theological reason embraces fully the non-Islamic intellectual heritage of late Antiquity by entering the treasure house of classical Greek philosophy,[30] the relationship to the One is also profoundly altered. New models of understanding the world emerge and put the ancient ways of understanding into question. New world views are elaborated thanks to the way of thinking that is spellbound by such intellectual giants like Plato and Aristotle. Now wonder, that the truth of scripture is seriously shaken. Dogmas concerning creation, the status of the world and the immortality of the individual

[30] See Th. Mooren, *Falsafa (philosophy) in Islam*, in Th. Mooren, *"I do not adore what you adore!" Theology and Philosophy in Islam* (Delhi 2001), 157-205.

soul, the relationship between the One and the Many[31] – everything is up for reinterpretation, reformulation or even refutation. The biblical image of the One God seems to melt away in front of an "unmoved mover". "Being" is submitted to potential and act and creation understood as emanation (fai*d*). The whole religious and cultural tradition is scrutinized again – a mighty irreversible process that will produce at its peak giants like Avicenna (Ibn Sina) [980-1037) and Averroes (Ibn Rushd) [1126-1198][32]; in sum "philosophy", under which name this new way of thinking and investigating is known, for its glory and threat at the same time!

It is a fascinating world that is spread out before our mind, but again – what about the truth of scripture, Qur´ān and Torah or Gospel? What about those who get lost in this new world, risking to abandon their faith? In this situation, strong souls are needed, strong in faith and reason; souls who have the courage to learn the language of philosophy without betraying the words of the age-old traditional creed, the belief in One God.[33] It

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[31] See Th. Mooren, *The One, the Many and the Case of Mysticism: Ibn Arabi´s union of Being and the Mysticism of the Upanishads. Reflection on the Dynamics of Theological Imagination*, in: Mooren, *"I do not adore..."*, 206-253.

[32] These two philosophical giants also stand for the two main-receptions of classical philosophy, namely Plato and Neoplatonism on the one side (see Avicenna), and Aristotle and the peripatetic school on the other (see Averroes). See too Musall, Schwartz, in: W. von Abel, I. Levkovich, F. Musall, (transl.), F. Musall and Y. Schwartz (Introd.), *Moses Maimonides. Wegweiser für die Verwirrten. Eine Textauswahl zur Schöpfungsfrage, Arabisch/ Hebräisch/ Deutsch* (Freiburg, Basel, Wien 2009), 22; J. Sourdel and D. Sourdel, *Dictionnaire historique de l´Islam*, Paris [PUF] 1996; ed. "Quadrige" 2004, 118-120; furthermore, A. Badawi, *Averroes (Ibn Rushd)*, Paris 1998 (Études de Philosophie Médievale, LXBis); M.-Th. D´Alverny, *Avicenne en Occident*, Paris 1993 (Études de Philosophie Médievale, LXXI).

[33] Obviously for each religion the challenge is different. As for

is here that Maimonides (Moses ben Maimon, 1135-1204) enters the scene.

2. The emergence of a Great Master

Maimonides was born in Cordoba (Spain), where his father was a famous judge at the rabbinic college. 1148 the family was forced to flee "one step ahead of the rise to power of the fanatical Almohade Dynasty."[34] After years of errantry through Spain and Morocco (Fez), during which Maimonides and his family were forced to convert to Islam[35], they landed in Egypt, at Fostat, near Cairo. There Maimonides became later the spiritual chief of the Jewish community. He also acted as a court physician of the great Muslim leader Saladin.[36]

Julius Guttmann in his monumental opus on Jewish philosophy observes that the "theist Aristotelism" of

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the Christians I only want to say this with regard to their trinitarian speculations, namely that the Syrian Christians did not live any more "at the door of the Jews, like poor relations not on speaking terms" to adapt a statement from R. Murray´s "Symbols of Church and Kingdom. A study in Early Syriac Tradition" and quoted by P. Brown in his *The Body and Society. Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York 2008 [1988]), 88, note 18. Rather, a close relative to Jewish monotheism is the emerging Muslim theology. It is too close for comfort, one could say...

[34] G. Robinson, *Essential Judaism. A Complete Guide To Beliefs, Customs, and Rituals* (New York 2000), 415.

[35] In order to survive! See Robinson, 415, but rejected as "peu probable" by Guttmann. (See J. Guttmann, *Histoire des philosophies juives. De l´époque biblique à Franz Rosenzweig*, (Paris [Gallimard] 1994), 197; which is a translation of J. Guttmann, *Philosophy of Judaism* (Holt, Reinhart and Winston 1964) which follows Guttmann's Hebrew edition, which is based in turn upon Guttmann's original German work: Die Philosophie des Judentums in Einzeldarstellungen, Abt. I: Das Weltbild der Primitiven und die Philosophie des Morgenlandes, vol. 3 (Ernst Reinhart, München 1933). I follow the French edition. English transl. by Th. Mooren.

[36] Cf. Robinson, 415.

Maimonides "has determined the place of the biblical creator God inside the frame of the philosophic cosmology" which amounts to a realization of a true "metaphysical synthesis between biblical religion and Aristotelism."[37] Obviously, Maimonides has had his predecessors.[38] In fact, his strength does not lie so much in the invention of new ideas, but in the exceptional quality of his synthesis.[39] So much so that the late Middle Ages honored him as the "Great Master, the one who had established scientifically the Jewish religion."[40]

This is valid on the practical-pastoral as much as on the dogmatic-speculative level. Suffice to turn toward one of his great halakhic (moral, pastoral) writings like the "Commentary on the Mishna," written when he was still a young man. Therein he lays down the 13 truths which define, according to him, each Jew.[41] Going

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[37] Guttmann, 232.

[38] "In his interpretation of the aristotelian system he follows the Muslim Aristotelians, al-Farabi and Avicenna. In his criticism of Aristotelism he was preceded by Ghazali and Judah Halevi. In his biblical exegesis and even his philosophical doctrines he is indebted in many points to preceding Jewish rationalists." (Guttmann, 196).

[39] Cf. Guttmann, 196.

[40] Guttmann, 232; cf. too H. Bresc, *Frédéric II et les juifs*, in: P. Salmona and J. Sibon (eds), *Saint Louis et les juifs. Politique et idéologie sous le règne de Louis IX* (Paris 2015), 144,150; see too E. Hoffman (ed)., *The Wisdom of Maimonides. The Life and Writings of the Jewish Sage* (Boston, London 2008), 157. – Still Cusanus "for his own understanding of God's mystery" referred among others "to Rabbi Moyses [Maimonides]... With the help of Rabbi Moyses he explained one aspect of God's action as creator." (G.K. Hasselhoff, *The Image of Judaism in Nicolas of Cusa´s Writings*, in: Glei, G. K., [ed.], *Medievalia et Humanistica, Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Culture*, No. 40 [Lanham, etc., 2015], 32).

[41] 1. truth: Existence of God. 2. His unity. 3. His incorporeity. 4. His eternity. 5. The proper liturgy concerning the One God. 6. The existence of prophecy. 7. The superiority of Moses over all other prophets. 8. The divine origin of the Torah delivered by Moses. 9. The eternal validity of the Torah. 10. God knows all actions of the

through the list we find that besides God and Torah – and the Messiah to come – the figure of the Prophet is of paramount importance for Maimonides. He sees the role of Moses in the light of the Muslim-Aristotelic interpretation of the nature of prophecy, which insists on the Prophet as legislator and politician.[42] This is good pansemitic tradition. Even on the speculative-cognitive level the Prophet is not, as one might have expected, inferior to the philosopher, because the Prophet's knowledge "reaches out to intuitive heights that go well beyond the borders of discursive comprehension."[43]

Yet, even greater in fame and impact on his time (including our own) than Maimonides' "practical" skill commenting the Mishna for example, is this other opus magnum of the Cordoban Jew: "*The Guide for the Perplexed*".[44] Yet even here, one can feel the "pastoral zeal" of the great philosopher, since his work is directed toward those who have troubles to harmonize – lest to accept – Aristotelic truth with biblical truth. The Guide for the perplexed, the lost and confused ones, "Dalālat al-*H*ā´irīn"[45] was written in Fostat between 1180 and

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human being. 11. He rewards and punishes us according to our actions. 12. God will send a Messiah. 13. God will rise the dead. (See Guttmann, 227/8; Robinson, 416/7). – Regarding the controversy around the last item (the resurrection) between Maimondides and his critics, like Rabbi Samuel b. Eli, Baghdad, head of the Torah academy, see Hoffman 26/7.

[42] Cf. Guttmann, 228.

[43] Guttmann, 219. – See too within this frame Maimonides´ statement about the *authenticity* of a prophet, i.e., that he had "to validate only his identity as a prophet and not the content of his prophecy" (letter to Hasdai Ha- Levi; quoted Hoffman, 74.

[44] See f. ex. G. Dahan, *L´étude chrétienne de la Bible au temps de Louis IX*, in: Salmona and Sibon (eds), 103; M. Kriegel, *Le procès et le brulement du Talmud*, in: Salmona and Sibon (eds), 108; Hoffman, 156/7.

[45] Hebrew: Moreh nabukhim.

1190/91.[46] It envisages readers who are on the one side deeply rooted within the Jewish tradition, but on the other also equipped with a certain philosophical knowledge, with the great scientific questions of their time.[47]

Being a guide in a world of such fundamental contradictions Maimonides has to offer a theory of language – the allegorical reading of anthropomorphic passages in the Bible; a theory of the attributes – what can we say about God and how do we have to say it; and above all: how do we have to understand that God is creator?[48] This leads us to the center of the dispute with Aristotle, for whom the world is eternal. However, a philosophical, i.e., scientific answer regarding this question is, according to Maimonides, not possible.[49] The question then becomes: how much of Aristotelism can be saved, so to speak, in the light of a re-defined role of the creator (and of the relationship between creator and creature) – re-defined with regard to the creation model proposed by the classical kalām – without, however, accepting the conclusion that the world "emanates" *necessarily* from God? Hence for a faithful Jew God's *freedom* in the act of creation has to be respected at all costs![50]

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[46] Cf. Musall and Schwartz in Maimonides, 21.

[47] Cf. Musall and Schwartz in Maimonides, 23; cf. too Dahan, 102/103.

[48] Cf. too Robinson, 418.

[49] Cf. Musall and Schwartz in Maimonides, 25.

[50] For Maimonides the central question is not "whether the world is eternal or has a beginning in time, but whether it emanates *necessarily* from God or is freely created by Him."(Guttmann. 211; italics by ThM). And: to explain the eternal process, that is the world, with the help of God, as being conceived as "an eternal activity of a divine will" is just an effort of disguising what is fundamentally and fatally opposed to one another: "a necessary consequence and a free creation". (Guttmann, 211).

IV. The Guide for the Perplexed

1. Preliminary questions: knowledge of God and knowledge of the world

The following examples from the "Dalālat al-*H*ā´irīn"[51] do not pretend to deal exhaustively with all the problems of Maimonides' philosophical and theological thoughts. Rather I will concentrate on the problem of creation and how this affects monotheism, the belief in the One God of the Bible. Yet before we throw ourselves into the discussion of this matter – an enterprise that necessarily implies the use of language – we better listen to some caution uttered by Maimonides with regard to any language that pretends to deliver knowledge about God.[52] There is only one way knowledge about God can be expressed: "in parables and riddles".[53]

Despite this limitation, however, knowledge of God is the first foundation that has to be laid out[54], which really means that *metaphysics* is the true pathway to

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[51] I follow the Arabic-Hebrew-German "Dalālat" in Herder´s library of the philosophy of the Midle Ages, vol. 19 (=Maimonides). The choice of texts presented and translated by von Abel, Levkovich and Musall, with an introduction by Musall and Schwartz, comprises several chapters of book I and II of the "Dalālat" all dealing with the problem of creation. – For the list of editions and translations of the "Dalālat" see Mamonides, 310.

[52]This warning is also in line with Maimonides' general warning against proofs that are taken as convincing only because they are "written in books". (See Hoffman, 61).

[53] "bil-amthāl wal-alghāz" (62/22). (The first number always denotes pages of the Arabic version of the "Dalālat" [vowels of the text put by ThM] or the German text [all English translations of this text by ThM], the second number the numeration of chapters according to the Herder edition).

[54] "ūlahā idrāka ta´āla" (62/24).

the knowledge of God.[55] Yet, metaphysics is truly "meta" (ba´da) - physics (al-*t*abī´a)[56], that is, those who want to practise it, have to study first the physis, i.e., "nature" and *then* what comes after it.

In sum, this already presents a program that shows how seriously one has to take the role of "nature" (physis) in any study of post-nature (metaphysics). Yet, part of an approach, which takes "nature" seriously, is certainly the study of *causality*, i.e., the role it plays within the realm of the concept of *creation*.

2. Creation and causality

Approaching this question Maimonides tells us that there is a difference in the understanding of "cause" among philosophers and theologians. The philosophers (al-falāsifa) call God the venerable one (ta´āla), the first cause (al-´illa al-ūla) and the first "foundation" (sabab al-awwal), while the mutakallimūn, the theologians, avoid this terminology (ismyyat) as much as they can (jiddan). In their eyes God can only be called the "maker" (al-fā´il).[57]

The reasoning of the theologians makes sense, if we accept that a "´illa" cannot be separated from what is caused by it, that every "´illa" shows up simultaneously with its result and vice versa.[58] Applied to the world it

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[55] "lā ya*sahh*u dhalika illā bil-´ilm al-ilāhī" (62/24).

[56] "wa lā ya*hs*ulu dhalika ´ílm al-ilāhī illā ba´da al-´ilmi a*t-t*abī´i" (62/24).

[57] See 72-75/39.

[58] "´illa lazima wujūd al-ma´lūl" (74/40). – When it comes to the kind of cause "´illa" represents, we have to think about the relationship between for example blackness and being black, or darkness and being dark, kindness and being kind, etc. For everything that can function as an attribute (adjective) there exists a noun that plays the role of a mere *logical* cause – the link between blackness and black being purely logical in nature. It is a mind

would mean an eternal and necessary *coexistence* of the world as caused with God as cause![59] In other words, God would not have any choice with regard to the existence of the world,[60] no choice to be or not to be with the world or the world with Him.

Now we can understand why the theologians insist on the use of the term "maker" (fā´il). Hence the talk about a "maker" does not imply that, what he or she has made, relates to the "maker" by virtue of necessity, co-constituity or co-existence. Rather, the "maker" usually precedes the made object or action (to make it).[61] That is, there is a moment where the "maker" is still "alone" while the object (or action) is not yet existing. To apply this to the world and its relationship with the "maker" obviously makes better sense than the reality suggested by the "´illa", if – and that is the condition, my purpose is to defend the freedom of the "maker".[62]

Furthermore, according to Maimonides there are some theologians that have the audacity to deduce from the fact that the maker and the made object are separated even something, what we could call in modern terminology a "God-is-dead-theology"! Meaning: if we

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construct, a fact of grammar, i.e., nothing that could be destroyed by "outside" intervention. The link between blackness and black is absolutely necessary. The same reasoning, however, cannot by applied to the concept of "sabab" which rather indicates an *instrumental* cause, Such a cause cannot create the kind of necessary link a "´illa" is creating.

[59] "yu´addi liqidami al-´ālami wa an al-´ālam laha ´alā jihati l-lazūmi" (74/40).

[60] Cf. too 240, 241/278.

[61] "lianna al-fā´íl qad yataqaddamu fi´lahu" (74/40).

[62] However, even in this kind of reasoning Maimonides discovers a failure: to suggest that the "maker" *always* has to precede the action or the object made comes down, in his eyes, to a non-distinction between what is potential and what is actual: "lā yaf´uqu baina mā bil-qūwati wa baina mā bil-fi´li" (74/40; see too 238 and 239/276).

really believe in this separated-ness between maker and object made, are we not entitled also to believe, that if the maker disappears, the object made might *not* disappear with him or her, but rather *continue* to exist? In other words: God might be dead but the world still continues![63]

3. The world is not a piece of furniture and God no carpenter!

A disappearing creator who leaves his creation alone, forgotten, but still alive in a certain sense, albeit rather erring alone in the vast universe like a rudderless boat, is certainly a logical possibility of the kind of tawhīd (monotheism) the theologians have developed.[64] They were driven by the fear that in any other creation paradigm God will lose his power and the world, being there by necessity, become a kind of "second god" beside the creator. Thus the preference among the theologians for what we could call the "carpenter model" of creation, where the world rather looks like a piece of furniture. Such a one has no autonomy, does not exist by ontological necessity, and might easily survive its maker, since, once made, the piece of furniture is no longer dependent upon the maker, whose job was to make it but *not* to keep it *alive*![65]

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[63] "lau quddara ´adam al-bārā lamā lazima ´adam hadha al-shay´ī alladhi awjada al-bārā ya´nī al-ālam" (74/41).

[64] For Sloterdijk in his "After God", this is not only a possibility but the birth certificate of modernity itself. (See P. Sloterdijk, *Nach Gott* [Frankfurt/M 2017], 27).

[65] That The furniture might need repairing is not part of the paradigm. Rather, the paradigm insists on the fact that the piece of furniture, let´s say a coffer, does not need ongoing intervention by the maker: "idha māta al-najjār laysa tafsidu alkhizāna idh wa laysa yumaddahā baqā´an": "if the carpenter dies the coffer does not die,

Not so in the case of the world! Contrary to the coffer that does not need the carpenter for survival, the world *does need* God by way of "creatio continua" – God is "always actually acting"[66] – hence God is scope or objective and form of the world: "ghayat wa *s*ūrat min al-wahmi", form and "picture of imagination".[67] This totally changes the nature of the relationship creator-creature. What defines this relationship now is the fact, that it is based upon *caring*![68]

To come to this conclusion, however, one has to have the courage to look upon the world with a regard different from the outlook of the theologians. As the statement about God being scope and form of the world already suggests, it is philosophy that fuels the new regard on the world. Hence philosophy, as we have seen above, embraces not only metaphysics but should be based on solid knowledge about the physis also, the new paradigm of caring results from a new look upon *nature*; from a renewed respect for nature and the way things happen in the realm of creation (nature laws).

The theologians however do not listen to nature in this way. To break the rules of reason (´aql) does not seem to be a problem for them.[69] Hence Maimonides' sharp criticism of the mutakallimūn: "They all have for

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hence the carpenter does not keep it alive!" (74/42); meaning: it is not his business to do so!

[66] "lam yazal fā´ilan" (238/277).

[67] 74/42.

[68] "al-´ālam laysa huwa lāziman ´anhu ta´āla luz´ūm al-ma´lūl li´illati" (240/278): "The world does not depend upon God in the way the result [what is caused] depends on the ´´illa`", that form of logical cause we have discussed above. Rather, between world and God, creator and creation a bridge is now built by "caring" whose nature will be discussed below. See too Maimonides 236, 238, 242, 244/276-282.

[69] Cf. 84/19. In classic Islamic theology nature laws are only God's customs (´adat). God almighty could easily change them!

basic premise *not* to take into account what reality (al-wujūd, the world, the way it really is), teaches them."[70] To be sure, what the theologians discover this way might not necessarily be wrong. They might even arrive at conclusions similar to the ones proposed by the philosophers. But their *method*, nonetheless, will remain forever wrong. They do not follow this basic conviction of our Cordoban philosopher: "I do not contradict the nature of Being. I do not treat with disdain the world of the senses!"[71]

Now, looking carefully at nature and trusting his senses, what does Maimonides see, what does he learn?

4. The body of the universe

The first thing to know is that for Maimonides the universe is one big individual (sha*ḥ*s wā*ḥ*id), the same way Zayd or Umar are individuals. The individual called "universe" is made of a "kura al-falak al-aq*ṣ*a", a celestial outer sphere plus everything what is in it.[72] The sphere is composed of celestial bodies and of the four elements (earth, water, air, fire). In the midst there is the earth. Water surrounds (mu*ḥīṭ*) the earth, air the water and the fire the air. The universe (the world) is a composite structure full of parts exactly as the composite structure of the bodies of Zayd and Umar is full of parts.[73]

We recognize the worldview of classic Antiquity. This is still the case when the celestial bodies are said to move in circles (mustadīrat), that they are alive (*ḥ*ayyat), possess a soul (nafs) that keeps them moving

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[70] "an lā i´tibār bimā ´alayhi al-wujūd" (84/59).

[71] "wa lā ukhālifu *ṭ*abī´a al-wujūd wa lā iltaj´ limakābaratil-ma*ḥ*sūsāt" (92/74)

[72] "bikulli mā fīhā" (96/78).

[73] Cf. 96/78.

(bihā tata*h*arraku).[74] The idea of movement leads directly to the most important part of the edifice: the *heart* (qalb). First, let's say, in the world body as in the human body, there exist superior (ra´īsat) and inferior (a´*d*ā´) parts. As for the human body the heart is the superior part and as such it is in permanent movement (muta*h*arrakun dā´iman). It is the principle (mabda´) of all movement that can be found in the body.[75] The consequence is obvious: without heart – death, annihilation takes place! The same is true on the level of the universe.

Also the universe has a heart positioned in the superior parts, the superior celestial sphere (al-falak). It is this sphere that plays the role of the heart, performing on the universal level exactly the same task the human heart is exercising in the human body: being the centre of the movement. Thanks to its own power it makes all the other parts of the universe move![76] Consequently: like the individual would die and all its movements and forces would stop, if the heart – and be it only for a single moment – would interrupt its activity, the same thing would occur, if the celestial spheres would come to a standstill! This would mean the annihilation of the whole world and the end of everything upon it (cf. 105/90).[77]

As long as our heart is still beating, we are alive in the same way as the universe is still alive as long as the celestial spheres are beating. This is so, because the

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[74] Cf. 100/85.

[75] See 102/88.

[76] "al-mudabbiru lisa´iri ajzā´i al-´ālami bi*h*arakatihi" (102 and 104/88).

[77] "wa kamā annahu lau sakana al-qalb tarfa ´aynin māta al-sha*hs* wa ba*t*alat kullu *h*arakātuhu wa kull qūwā´u kadhalika lau sakanat al-aflāku kāna dhalika maut al-´ālami bijumlatihi wa butlā n kulli mā fīhi" (104/90).

beating *animates*, i.e., moves the anthropo-cosmic players – all of them – in one direction only: the direction of *solidarity* and *mutual caring*. We are dealing with an interdependency of all elements in place. In the body as in the universe nothing exists for itself alone: "it is impossible that parts of the world could exist independently from one another", thus "that fire would exist without earth, earth without sky or sky without earth." (107/92).[78]

Behind this – manifested through the process of heartbeat – resides the all important reality of a force (qūwa) – the true agent of solidarity! (Cf. 106/93). This force unites and penetrates, administers everything and provides for every organ "what is necessary in order to secure a healthy state for itself" (107/93).[79] It also belongs to this "healthy state" that qūwa, the force in question, is equally able to defend the individual against all harm. (Cf. 107/93). The physicians (al-a*t*ibbā´) too have noticed the existence of this force that organizes the body of the living being[80] – and not only that! The perhaps most remarkable result of this whole line of thinking resides in the fact that this force is called by the experts "nature" (*t*abī´a).[81] This it is "nature" which holds the universe together, "nature" that keeps us alive; in sum, "nature" that *cares* for us![82] Thus saving

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[78] "lā yumkin an tūjida ajz´ al-ā´lami ba´*d*ahā dūna ba´*d*i... *h*attā tujada nār dūna ar*d* aw ar*d* dūna samā´ auw samā´ dūna ar*d*" (106/92).

[79] "qūwat mā tarbu*t*u a´*d*ā´hu ba´*d*ahā biba´*d*i wa tudabbiruhā wa tu´*t*ī kulli ´a*d*wi mā yanbighi an ya*h*rusa ´alayhi *s*alā*h*iyatahu" (106/93).

[80] "mudabbaratun libadani al-*h*ayawāni" (106/93).

[81] Cf. 106 and 107/93.

[82] For Maimonides on "nature" see too "fayulzimu *d*arūratan an ya´tabia hadhā l-maujūd ´alā mā huwa ´alayhi wa tatakhidha l-muqqadamāt mimmā yushāhidu min *t*abī´atihi. falidhalika yulzimu an ta´rifa *s*ūratahu wa *t*abī´atahu al-mushāhadati" (94/76): "It is

us it is the key for the "creatio continua", a creation model that distinguishes God's creative power from the brute power of the carpenter, of the proverbial "maker".

Nature's caring power is all the more indispensable for the micro cosmos (´ālam *s*aghīr[83]), which the human being indeed is, since it is impossible for any human being to survive *alone*, on its own! Living alone, "in a unorganized state of being" (qad ´adama l-tadbīra), like a wild animal (kalbahā´imi), the human being would immediately encounter death (litalafi liwaqtihi).[84] For that reason the humans live in a community (ijtimār), under a leader and unifier[85] with the explicit scope to help one another.[86] Follows a description that shows, how the human being thanks to its reason (al-qūwa al-nā*t*iqa) is capable to face all kind of adversities and to fulfill all kind of necessities.[87] Maimonides calls the nā*t*iq power, this power of reason that dwells in every human being, the most important (ashraf) power of all, albeit it is invisible (khafīya).[88]

In addition, we can find an equivalency between the way things are organized in the human being and in the universe at large (al-wujūd). In the same way as

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necessary to consider this world the way it is and to grasp the premises of what you see (with your own eyes) regarding its nature. Thus it is indispensable to know form and nature of what you see." (95/76). – See furthermore 146/142: "idh al-barāhīn...inamā tu´khadhu min *t*abī´ati l-wujūdi al-mustaqarati al-mushāhadati al-mudrakati bi-l-*h*awāssi wa ´aqli": "Demonstrative proofs... are only taken from the nature of Being (what really there is). A nature that is solid, experienced and grasped with all the senses (the five senses) and (the power of) reason." (147/142).

[83] See 112/101.

[84] See 114/102.

[85] "man yasūsuhum wa yajmi´uhum" (114(102).

[86] "liya´āwina ba´*d*ahum ba´*d*ā" (114/102).

[87] Cf. 114-117/102.

[88] Cf. 116/102.

everything in the human being is submitted to the reasonable power "thanks to which the humans think, calculate and act" and which "governs all the members of the body"[89] – according to the same scheme things happen in the universe. Within the "wujūd", the universe too, there exists this "something" (amr), that animates (al-mudabbar) the totality of all what there is, namely by putting into motion (al-mu*h*arriku) the heart of the universe itself, this "first and principle organ"[90] that thanks to its motion power has the vocation to administer everything. Should this "something" perish, the whole universe would perish, the celestial spheres and all its parts.[91]

At this point Maimonides even feels to have the right to declare: this "something" is God![92] A God, however, within a context different from the world of the carpenter, since this time his creation activity is inseparable from his *permanent guiding* (wa tadbīruhu) and *caring* power (wa ´ināyatuhu). They accompany (*sa*h*a*ba), as Maimomides puts it, the whole universe, albeit the nature (kunh) and the true character (*h*aqīqa) of this companionship (i*st*i*h*āb), i.e., how it really functions, is hidden before our eyes.[93] Therefore the human capacity to understand this falls short (maqa*s*iratun). The reason for this resides in the specific way God exercises his being the *"h*ayāt al-´ālam", the life of the world.[94] Hence God is *not* in the world like for example "the capacity to speak is *in* the human being's

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[89] Cf. 115/102.

[90] "´u*d*wūhu al-ra´īs al-ūla" (116/103).

[91] For this whole paragraph see 116/103.

[92] "wa dhalika l-amr huwa aliha ta´āla" (116/103).

[93] Cf. 118/107.

[94] Maimonides calls God here with the words of the Bible, Dan 12, 17. (116/103).

body and cannot be separated from it".[95] Meaning, God is not a force that can be fixed within the body of the world, but is separated from all its parts.[96] Yet, in spite of this separation, that constitutes the factor of divine transcendency, God takes care of everything. We have "proofs regarding the influence of His guidance and His caring exercise in each part of the world, including the smallest part, no matter how insignificant or despised it might be."[97] Maimonides interprets this fact as a manifestation of God's perfection (kamāl) that simply is overwhelming us (abharanā)[98].

5. Final outlook: Maimonides on creation versus eternity of the world

The purpose of the previous paragraph was to demonstrate the specific nature of God's creation activity. The God Maimonides talks about does not always speak the same language as the one spoken by the early thinkers of Islamic monotheism. Developed on the basis of the classical model of celestial spheres governing the universe a spiritual solidarity ("guidance") and an intensive way of caring emerge with Maimonides as the cornerstone of God's creative activity.[99]

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[95] "hadha l-qūwat al-nāṭiqa hiya qūwa fī jismi wa ghairi mufā raqatun lahu" (118/107).

[96] "wa alahu ta´āla laysa huwa qūwa fī jismi al-´lami bal mufā raqun li jamī´i ajzā´i al-´ālami" (118/107).

[97] "wa l-burhān yaqūmu ´alā wujūd athāri tadbīrihi wa ´inā yatihi fī kulli juz´i min ajzā´ihi wa lau diqqun wa haqūra" (120/107).

[98] Cf. 120/107.

[99] However, as always when speaking about God, this also has to be put through the raster of analogy (qiyās). It means that in spite of obvious similarities, we should not forget about the difference between God's caring on the cosmic level and caring among humans on their level. Human caring usually is reciprocal, where one person

However, despite the differences between theologians and philosophers, due to the fact that the theologians don't use the correct method of nature observation, certain arguments advanced by the mutakallimūn are nevertheless also useful for philosophers like Maimonides. Arguments, for example, in favour of the idea that the world is a "*h*āditha", i.e., *not* without a beginning, but due to God's "outside" intervention, a "new creation" at a certain point in time.

The idea of such an outside intervention could, indeed, be sustained by the fact that also in our life as individuals we experience "new beginnings". For example, when we proceed from one life stage to the next, this is in fact is best explained as God's work, who pushes the human being forward ("wa naqalahu min *h*ā li ilā *h*ali"[100]). Equally unexplained, if divine intervention is denied, would remain the long lists of genealogies. We would then deal with long lines of descent that go endlessly ("wa lā nihāyat lahu") back into the past – which makes no sense.[101] The question of origin comes also up with regard to Adam. Who created First Man? Was it dust? Then where does dust come from? From water? And what is the origin of water? Fire, and so on. Hence, without divine intervention we

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becomes the usufructuary of another. Not so on God's side. The flux of life always goes in one direction, from God to the world and its creatures. (See 117/104). Another difference is mentioned by Maimonmides regarding the position of the commanding center piece, the heart. The human heart is put into the center, *surrounded* by all the subordinated organs protecting it. In the universe, however, the "noble" (ashraf) part covers the less noble parts and thus is protected against outside influences. (See 118/105). A third difference has already been mentioned, namely that the ruling life force of the universe is not *in* the body as it is the case with humans, but is bodyless, albeit it "accompanies" the bodies. (119/107).

[100] See 128/119.

[101] Cf. 128 and 129/120.

are confronted with an endless *regressus ad infinitum*, which is absurd ("yamarru ilā lā nihāyat wa huwa ma*h*ā ll"[102]).

Another vast field where God's intervention might be proven, is the whole problem of accidents (´ara*d*; pl.´arā*d*) versus substance (jawhar; pl. jawāhir), i.e., that the world is *composed* of both of them.[103] What is composed, however, is not eternal. It is in need of someone "who either puts together, what is put together or separates, what is separated."[104]

From here the way is not far from this other big question, known under the term takhs*īs*, i.e., specification. In a universe where everything is differentiated from its neighbour, someone has to exist "who makes choices, is in possession of the freedom of his will and who finally has wanted one of two legitimate possibilities."[105]

These are some of the arguments that, for mutakallimūn as for philosophers, might have some weight, in a pre-Kantian universe, as "proof" for the intervention of a "supreme being". In any way, Maimonides is of the opinon that, if you want to sustain that the world has been created, is a *h*āditha" and not eternal, one should go by the proof of the "mukha*sis"*,

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[102] Cf. 128 and 130/121.

[103] "al-´ālam kulluha murakkabu min jawhar wa ´ara*d*" (130/124).

[104] "liman yajma´u al-mujtama´a minhā wa liman yafruqu al-muftaraqa minhā" (130/122). – However, many problems still remain debated. For example, are only the accidents new, while substances may remain? (For details see131, 133,135/124-127). Yet, the biggest problem stems from Aristotle himself, who denies that the circular movement of the spheres is accidental in nature. For him it neither has a begin nor an end (al-*h*arakat al-dūrīya ghairu kā´inatin wa lā fāsidatin" (132/126).

[105] "dalīl ´alā mukha*sis* mukhtār arāda a*h*ada hudhaini al-jā ´izaini" (134/129).

specifier, or by the proof that a *regressus ad infinitum* is not possible or by both arguments.[106]

However, as useful as this kind of thinking might be for theology and piety, Maimonides envisages all this with the eyes of a philosopher. He is imbued with the knowledge about the relationship between *potentia* and *actus,* potentiality and actuality: "everything that goes from potentia to actus is by necessity propelled to do so by someting outside of itself."[107] Thus, every actus is there by necessity thanks to an "outside" agent.

This has consequences for the image of God as creator, hence the mutakallimūn suppose "that the maker always precedes the effect in time".[108] This is due to the fact that on the human level, what pushes us into action, is the experience of a *need* (´adam). Feeling the need transforms a human being into a potential actor (al-fā´il bil-qūwwati), who enters the reign of actuality only the moment it has fulfilled that need, i.e., has realized something (lama al-fā´il kharaja ilā fi´li).[109]

However the situation is totally different, when we talk about God. Since preceding the effect in time on the human level is the result of a need, we see immediately that this cannot be the case for God. "He knows no need – since potentiality never applies to Him". Rather, He is the one who is always "actual" (fā´il).[110] Consequently for both, man and God, the model "from potentiality to actuality" applies, but in a different way, because of a

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[106] "*d*arūratun min isti´māli ahadā hataini al-muqqadataini aw kullatīhuma" ("necessity of using one of he arguments or both of them" (142/137).

[107] "kullu mā yakhriju min al-qūwwati ilā l-fi´l fa mukhrijuhu ghairihi wa huwa khārij ´anhu *d*arūratun" (154/1629.

[108] "yataqaddamu al-fā´il ´alā fi´lihi bi-l-zamān" (238/276).

[109] Cf. 238/276.

[110] "amā al-ilahu ta´āla alladhi lā ´adamu fīhi wa lā shay´un bil-qūwwati a*s*lan famā yataqaddamu fir´lahu bal lam yazal fā´ilan" (238/277).

fundamental difference in their "essence" (dhāt), their deepest level of Being.[111] However, what also becomes immediately plain is the fact, that God's being always active (lam yazal fā´ilan [238/277]) considerably re-enforces the previous observations regarding the "creatio continua", the strength and the specificity about God's *caring* for his creation. And with that, what we have to understand by "monotheism", also *fundamentally changes its face*.[112]

If there is a problem regarding the enthusiasm of Maimonides for the potentia-actus scheme, it resides in the fact that one could argue, that the world was always with God since there was never a time a *specific* need would have pushed Him to act. That Maimonides saw this problem is proven by the chapter 30 of the second Book of the "Guide for the Perplexed", where he goes into an in-depth exegesis of the first verse of the Genesis "In the beginning God created..." (276/319ff). To reproduce this exegesis would go beyond the scope of our own investigation. I only want to mention here, that Maimondes sustains with force, that God "has created the world out of nothing, without a temporal beginning", and "even more than that: also the time itself is created by Him, since time depends on the movement of the sphere (al-falak) and the sphere (itself) has been created."[113]

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[111] "Kamā dhātihi mubāyinatu lidhātinā" (238/277).

[112] That does not mean that the Qur´ān never talks about God's caring for His creation. But it does so in a sporadic, *not systematic* way, surrounded by many other topics which seem equally, if not more important. At any rate the Holy Book is not a treaty in systematic theology, but functions more like a quarry providing the material for many possible theologies.

[113] "an Allahu auwjada al-´ālam lā min shay´in fī ghairi mabda´i zamānī bal al-zamān mahlūq idh huwa tāba´a ta*h*arrukāt al-falaki wa al-falak mahlūq" (280/323).

Finally, it seems to me, that the most appropriated way to take leave from Maimoides and his "Guide" consists in quoting the general statement by the great Cordoban thinker about his fundamental relationship with the great Aristotle:

> Everything that Aristotle affirms regarding the situation that exists below the sphere of the moon is without any doubt true!... On the other side, anything what Aristotle affirms regarding the sphere of the moon itself and regarding what lies above it – with some exceptions – resembles guesswork (shibhu) and speculation (*h*adsu).[114]

V. The mystery of "binity"

1. The drama of the "second"

In his ground-breaking study, "Two Gods in Heaven: The Image of God in Antic Judaism," Peter Schäfer resumes for a larger public his lifelong studies regarding the "second" in heaven beside Yahve. We are dealing in fact with an investigation into the matter of Jewish monotheism. The result of Schäfer's investigation is breathtaking: there has been no Jewish monotheism: "That what we are accustomed today to call monotheism, is nothing else than an ideal, again and again searched for, but rarely realized."[115] How difficult it is for the Yahve of the Exodus and Conquest stories up to the destruction of the First Temple to keep

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[114] "Kullu mā qālahu Aris*t*ū fī jamī´I al-maujūdi alladhi min ladun falaki al-qamari ilā markaz al-ar*d*i huwa *sahīh*... amā jami´u mā yatakallamu fīhi Aris*t*ū min falaki al-qamari limā fauqihi fakulluhu shibhu *h*adsu wa takhmīn illā ba´da ashā´i" (250/289).

[115] P. Schäfer, *Zwei Götter im Himmel. Gottesvorstellungen in der jüdischen Antike* (München 2017), 151. (All transl. of Schäfer´s works by ThM).

his position as the one and only God probably does not come as a surprise.[116] However, that "also regarding the period of post biblical Judaism up to late Antiquity the idea of a unique God is only an ideal" (a "Wunschbild"), the product of wishful thinking not only "on the part of the antic authors, but also of modern investigation" – but an ideal that "does not stand an unbiased test" – this might come as a shock![117] The shock might be softened if we consider the fact that what we call today monotheism, viewed as norm in the matter of religious classification, is a product of the XIX century under "the influence of Protestant Christianity."[118] Within this context Schäfer is of the opinion that only Islam among the three 'Abrahamic' religions, comes closest to the norm as the "most uncompromising form of monotheism".[119]

Speaking of "two gods" in Judaism is not the same as embracing something like Iranian dualism. The *binity* (not to confound with trinity!), as Schäfer coins it, we find in Judaism, shows us two "gods", indeed, but they don't fight each other. Rather, they are ruling side by side and in peace.

However, it is supposed that one of the two, normally the older one, functions as the first with a higher rank. It is out of generosity that the first one offers the second, normally younger one, a place in heaven beside himself. The divinity of the second one

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[116] See Ashera in Juda 1 Kings 15, 13; Israel 1 Kings 16, 32f ; 2Kings 10, 18-20; Jerusalem, 2 Kings, 21,3-7; Schäfer, Zwei Götter.., 9.

[117] Schäfer, Zwei Götter..., 151. See too ibid., 20: "The hard core of my affirmation is nothing less than that the idea of a victorious monotheism cannot be sustained. And this is valid for post-exile Judaism since Daniel and even more so for the post- neo-testamentarian Judaism."

[118] Ibid., 151/2.

[119] Ibid., 152.

knows many different formulas. "A clear definition of a Second God in the full meaning of the word is avoided."[120] The relationship of the second to the first can be coined as *Son of God*, *Son of the Most High*, or *Metatron*.[121] Finally, we encounter the second also as the 'small' or the 'young' god.[122] Schäfer speaks with caution of a "semi-divine figure beside the creator God."[123] However, so Schäfer, the caution exercised on the terminological level should not obscure the fact that what was sought for, is "the greatest possible closeness of this second divine figure to the Highest God. The need for a second God makes no doubt."[124]

To exemplify this need for the time from the "Second Temple" onward, up to the Rabbinic Judaism and the early Jewish mysticism, is the whole purpose of Schäfer's "Two Gods in Heaven." In other words, we are dealing with the moment from the return from the Babylonian Exile and the reconstruction of the Temple (first destroyed in 586 BC) around 515 BC until the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in 70 AD.[125] The end of this period leads to the temple-less period of Rabbinic Judaism (until the conquest of Palestine by the Arabs, first half of the VII century) and the early Jewish mysticism with its "Hekhalot" literature.[126]

Schäfer begins with the discussion of the *Son of Man* in the vision of Daniel: "As I watched, in the night

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[120] Schäfer, Zwei Götter..., 152.

[121] For this term see below, note 143.

[122] For the whole see Schäfer, Zwei Götter..., 152.

[123] Ibid.

[124] Ibid.

[125] For details see ibid., 23/4.

[126] See ibid., 23/4, 77/8. - See also ibid., 18: *Hekhalot* means "halls" or "palaces" that the Jewish mystic has to pass through during his heavenly voyage toward God's throne (merkavah).

visions, I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient one and was present before him." (Dan 7, 13).[127] What we have here is not yet a second God, but, according to Schäfer, in all probability a very high ranking angel. It cannot be excluded that it is Michael. This figure, nevertheless, can be seen as the point of origin "for all succeeding binitarian figures, whose high- and end peak will be Metatron".[128]

Typical binitarian potential can also be found in the speculation around the personified *Wisdom*, as in the proverbs of Solomon or Ecclesiasticus.[129] Another stone in the theological mosaic of binity is the divinized man in the *"Self-Boasting Hymn"* of Qumran (second half of the first century): "Nobody comes to me since I have taken a seat on a heavenly throne"[130]. Qumran also offers us another text of binitarian tendency, the *Daniel Apocryphon* (last third of first century BC).[131] Here we are confronted with a figure called "Son of God" (bar de -

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[127] See Schäfer, Zwei Götter..., 25-30; A.J.B. Higgins, *Menschensohn-Studien* (Franz Delitzsch-Vorlesungen) (Stuttgart, etc., 1961), 15/6; see furthermore R.A. Horsley, *Revolt of the Scribes. Resistance and Apocalyptic Origins* (Minneapolis 2010), 82-104.

[128] Ibid., 30

[129] Prov. 8,30 "I was beside him like a child and was daily his delight". For he translation of amon (master worker) as "child" see Schäfer, Zwei Götter..., 32. For Ecclesiasticus see for example Si, 24, 3-6. For Wisdom and Torah see Schäfer, Zwei Götter..., 36-39 plus the Midrash to Gen 1,1. - For Wisdom and Jewish Mysticism (Kabbalah) see also G. Scholem, *Kabbalah* (New York 1987 [Jerusalem 1974]), 9/10.

[130] V. 6 of the Text (Schäfer, Zwei Götter..., 40); see by the same 40-44. - For the connection between gods and their throne see already C. Clemen, *Die Reste der primitiven Religion im ältesten Christentum* (Gießen 1916), 36/7. - The self-boasting of the author of the Qumran text does not exclude that he shares characteristics with the *ebed Yahve* (cf. Schäfer, Zwei Götter..., 42/3).

[131] See Schäfer, Zwei Götter..., 45-51.

´el) or "Son of the Most High" (bar ´eljon). Is this finally the same "Son of Man" as in Dan 7? In any case we have to look for an "eschatological saviour figure like Melchisedek, Michael, and the Prince of Light in the writings of Qumran".[132] And clearly, "Melchisedek is the second God (Elohim) beside the Highest God (El)."[133] In this position he is El's "agent and executive force".[134] Again we have closeness and difference between these two figures. For Schäfer the importance of a text like the Daniel Apocryphon lies in the fact that we are dealing here with a Son-of-Man-like figure, which, however, goes far beyond the text of Daniel. The saviour-hero in the Daniel Apocryphon is "Son of God", Son of the Most High", higher than the highest angel – but his final victory, in his fight for God's people, even this saving hero can only win with the help of the "Great God".[135]

A similar figure of a man being as close to God as the saviour of the Daniel Apocryphon is Enoch, in particular the Enoch of the *Ethiopian Book of Enoch* (at the turning from the first century BC to the first century AD). This text presents us with a "messianic saviour figure which is called – via Daniel 7 – 'Son of Man' or the 'Chosen One'. Again the connection with Daniel cannot be denied."[136] Furthermore – we clearly assist at "the transformation of the man Enoch into a heavenly being."[137]

From Enoch we are led to the "Son-of-Man-Messiah" in pseudo epigraphic 4 Ezra (circa 100 AD). In this text the Messiah clearly receives the title "Son of God": "The

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[132] Schäfer, Zwei Götter..., 47.

[133] Ibid.

[134] Ibid.

[135] Cf. ibid., 51.

[136] Ibid., 52. See too idem. 52-65.

[137] Ibid., 57.

Messiah in 4 Ezras is really a Son of God, a younger God beside his father, the elder God." [138] No wonder that Christian readers were able to see in this "Son-of-God-Messiah... without difficulties their own Messiah Jesus Christ."[139]

2. A problem of salvation history

The few examples we have seen already suffice to make us understand, that we are dealing here with a fund of a particular kind of images and speculations. They are ready to be exploited by rabbis and mystics of Judaism *as much as* by Christian thinkers to construct their respective theologies.[140] How this often dramatic interplay between Jewish and Christian theologies unfolded in the run of history is the theme of the rest of Schäfer's "Two Gods in Heaven".[141]

Now, the reason why I introduce Schäfer´s research on binity into my own investigation becomes clear, when we ask the question concerning the final motivation for Jewish thinkers to take the risk, so to speak, to infringe upon traditional, self-understood monotheism via the introduction of a co-divinity: by projecting a younger God into the realm of the elder one, the well-established ruler of the world, or by putting David on a throne opposite to the great God.[142] Furthermore, why could

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[138] Schäfer, Zwei Götter..., 65.

[139] Ibid.

[140] Higgins, 50, for example, points out that "the core of the christology of the primitive community was Son-of-Man-christology".

[141] See for this also the previous books by Schäfer: P. Schäfer, *Jesus im Talmud* (Tübingen 2007), and also: *Die Geburt des Judentums aus dem Geist des Christentums. Fünf Vorlesungen zur Entstehung des rabbinischen Judentums* (Tübingen 2010).

[142] See for this the David Apocalypse, a text, so Schäfer, at the end of the Hekhalot tradition (Jewish mystical writing), discussed in "Zwei Götter...", 98-105.

Enoch finally *mutate* into the figure of the highest angel *Metatron*[143] and from there into "full divinization"[144]? My thesis is, if we find the answer to this question, we have also found the bridge to Maimomides' theo-philosophical investigation into the creator God centuries later!

For this we have to keep in mind that the most outstanding result of the approach by the author of the "Guide for the Perplexed" points toward the creator's permanent and uninterrupted *caring* for his creation. His unique power, the proof of being the One God, resides exactly in this capacity to be creator in permanent connectivity with creation, and not in the "brachial" force of a one-time power stroke that produces objects in the way the capitalist system spills out commodities.[145] Yes, the creator, the heart, the heavenly sphere etc., are the "boss", are superior to the rest; but they are not eager to "prove" this superiority via a tyrannic drive toward annihilation of their

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[143] For the complexe figure of *Metatron* himself – the highest angel and clearly later on a second God see Schäfer, Die Geburt..., 97-132. - For Metatron, the "angel of the divine Face" and the identification Enoch-Metatron see too Idel, 85-88; see too ibid., 113: "Theophoric names are more evident in rabbinic literature than in the earlier forms of Jewish writings. Rabbinic literature capitalized on the biblical verse from Exod. 23, 21 and claimed that the name of the angel is Metatron, and that ´his name is like the name of his master`." See too by the same author: *Ben: Sonship and Jewish Mysticism* (London 2007), 139, 145, 279, etc. - For Metatron as "central cosmic force" in Jewish theosophy see also Scholem, 56; see too below note 146.

[144] Cf. Schäfer, Zwei Götter..., 112. See too ibid., 119-149. - We are dealing here with the 3. Book of Enoch, which is "probably the youngest writing of a group called Hekhalot literature [Jewish mystical writing] " (idem, 112). Its final redaction is now believed to have taken place in Babylonia between 600 and 900 (cf. ibid., 112).

[145] It is true that for some philosophers there might be a danger of down playing the gap between creator and creature in the name of "emanation" (al-fai*d*) for example. See Mooren, Falsafa.., 184-189.

creature.[146] In fact I propose to see in God's creational activity a manifestation of his *mercy*, which obviously is not free from punitive wrath. Nevertheless it puts creation solidly into the orbit of *salvation history*, of the "He saw what He had made and it was very good" of Gen 1, 31.[147]

The next step has to consist in investigating whether yes or no, what animates and characterizes the actions and the nature of the figure of the "Second God", be it the younger one, the Son or Metatron, can be understood as representing actions of God's mercy, mercy involved in salvation history. Going carefully through the relevant texts and what we have seen so far, it can, indeed, be shown that as for the great binitarian heros like Daniel, Enoch and so forth their guiding force is liberation from misery and oppression,[148] albeit the context is also one of divine wrath and punishment.[149] However, it is punishment of

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[146] See for this in particular Maimomodes´ argument that we cannot deduce from the fact that God creates something, that he also necessarily has to end the existence of this creation ("an yufsida dhalika l-maujūd; 268/311; cf. too 269/310 and 311).

[147] Salvation history here not understood in the Augustinian sense of original sinfulness, but rather in the sense of keeping the world going in a healthy, sustainable way even after "paradise lost", in a way like Gen 3, 21 "and God made garments of skin for the man and his wife and clothed them."

[148] See Schäfer, Zwei Götter..., 43; see too Horsley, Revolt, 107-121 and by the same author: *Jesus and the Powers: Conflict, Covenant and the Hope of the Poor* (Minneapolis 2011), 29-41.

[149] For our purpose, salvation history and Judaism, Idel´s reference in his "Messianic Mystics" to Metatron is of fundamental importance: "In earlier Jewish texts the angel Metatron was conceived of as having a redeeming function. Some of these views are related to the redemptive role of God´s leading angel, who possessed the divine name, in Exodus 23, 20-21 or the expression the ´redemptive angel` in Genesis 48, 16 or Isaiah 63, 9... The later Jewish eschatologies resorted to the redemptive role of these angelic powers in order to build up their own vision of the end." (M. Idel,

the sinners and the unjust, of kings and powerful people, who now have to bow down in front of the "Son of Man" (1 Hen 62, 2-9)[150] or of the "filius" who annihilates the pagans through "the law that resembles fire" (4 Ezra 13, 13, 27/8).[151]

That salvation – and this is just another name for God's mercy or caring – is at stake can also convincingly be demonstrated by the fact, that the two thrones in heaven, one for the old, one for the young God, also stand for the two divine attributes: the punishing power of God's justice on one side and God's mercy on the other.[152] Indeed, the whole dynamics of binitarian theology is nurtured by nothing less than the dispute between these two "thrones", these two divine attributes. And it is mercy, and with mercy *Israel*, that wins.[153] The Babylonian Talmud too delivers a hint in this direction, hence therein we find the discussion of the question, whether God prays or not. The answer is, so the Talmudic tradition, yes, which begs the question: to whom is He praying? Answer: *to Himself*! Thus, binity is reconverted here into an internal conflict within God Himself, God begging himself, when it comes to saving Israel, to let mercy "roll over" all the other attributes.[154]

Messianic Mystics [New Haven, London 1998], 85).

[150] See Schäfer, Zwei Götter..., 54/5.

[151] See ibid., 62/3.

[152] See ibid., 91/2. - Kabbalistic speculation has it that *evil* originates, when justice and love fall apart, are separated from one another. Cf. Scholem, 123.

[153] Much later, in Islamic theosophy this dramatic "struggle" between mercy and wrath, affirming that mercy prevails over wrath, is taken over and intensively developed by Ibn ´Arabi. See Mooren, The One, the Many and the Case of mysticism..., 234/5.

[154] See Schäfer, Zwei Götter..., 136/7. (The text of God praying to Himself is of the first half of the third century). However, the fact that the two Gods are here the two sides of God´s unique heart, also

All this shows us that there exists, indeed, a "Son of God"- theology independently from Christian borrowing, i.e., thanks to a genuine Jewish tradition, as authentic expression of Jewish salvation history![155] And it is this fact that enables us to build the bridge between authentic Jewish theology of the past and Maimonides' approach to the creator God centuries later in his "Guide for the Perplexed". What Maimonides has to say sounds like a remote, but nevertheless vital echo to positions taken in the past in the name of salvation history. An echo, however, formulated with the tools and in the spirit of a new age, one dominated by the influence of Aristotle and other like-minded thinkers.[156]

Finally, what does all this mean for the theme "monotheism revisited"? In my opinion it indicates above all one thing. While the arguments of the classical Islamic kalām all appear logically correct, responding to certain mere rational criteria, as we could see in the first part of our investigation, in such a way that Schäfer could call Islamic monotheism "the most uncompromising form of monotheism"[157] – for Judaism and later on Christianity any kind of mere numerical discourse is *defeated* by the living shock or experience of *real salvation history*. This shock was (and still is) so great, that the numerically assumed oneness of God had to retreat into theological and pastoral "Zweitrangigkeit", that is a second rank position.

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shows that in spite of the successes Metatron and other binitarian heros could secure in some influential rabbinic circles – some rabbis also worked hard to rein in binity as much as they could. For details see Schäfer, Zwei Götter..., 57, 93-98, 142-149.

[155] See also Idel, Ben: Sonship..., 111/2, 595-616; Schäfer, Zwei Götter..., 18, 151-156.

[156] Not for nothing there exists a link between philosophy and early Jewish mysticism and finally the kabbalistic speculation. See for this too Scholem, 2, 22/3, 52, 160.

[157] Schäfer, Zwei Götter..., 152.

In other words, what was and still is needed is a new language, the language of "myth", no longer the language of mere *counting* numbers, too obvious at the service of an unforgiving power play![158] Maimonides takes refuge in the "myth" of the cosmic spheres, of physical and metaphysical entities, cosmic in nature, that *care for one another*. While the rabbis before him did not find any better method in confronting the burning problem of an all powerful God, who is also caring for his people, than the method of personifying God's mercy thanks to a *successful line of salvation history heroes*. The message of salvation *had to be* personified, since it could not (and cannot) be simply deduced, but has to be *told* – which is the proper of a "myth". Again logic reminds us that one is not two or three, but here we are dealing with something different, larger than logic: the irruption of contingency, i.e, history into the daily life. Life that becomes salvation history. Here the numbers game is overruled by God's caring, merciful *action*.

A final thought on trinity

> Contrary to the logic of non-contradiction, [practised] by the philosophers, the myth puts forward a kind of logic one could call a logic of ambiguity and equivocalness... of [simultaneously] yes and no. (*J.-P. Vernant, Myth and Society [Mythe et société]*)

The following reflection regarding "trinity" refers to my paper "The Trinity in the Eyes of Islamic

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158 The term "myth" is not used here in the sense of "falsehood", wild "invention" and so forth. Rather "myth" denotes here a "truth" that can only be told, a discourse which situates itself on a *trans-logical* level in order to express, often by means of personification, the deeper complexity of life itself; a complexity that the *surface*-logic of daily life is not able to grasp.

Theology."[159] Within the present context I will only demonstrate, how trinitarian theology quasi-organically takes over key developments of binitarian theology. Indeed, on a structural level, the same arguments regarding binity also work against trinity.[160] The same number counting, number oriented "rational" logic at the service of an all-powerful One, which we could find in the kalām against the "second" God, is also used against trinity. For example, if two wills cannot be bent together into one – this well known argument is still used to refute the two-nature-teaching of the Nestorians with regard to God and the Messiah[161] – how much of *equality* can be expected in the case of three, not only regarding the will but, in a broader sense, with regard to the question of "intelligence" (fī l-´aqli)? None! We end up in a contradiction (tanāqud) as soon as we are assuming three *equally* "intelligent" Gods.[162]

In fact, everything is getting worse, because of the Christians' "inner drive" to multiply everything. More precisely, they give "independent" life and substance to the attributes of God's essence (dhāt). They separate

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[159] In: Mooren, " I do not adore, what you adore!"..., 78-107, based upon Shar*h*, 291-198. See too my "Es gibt keinen Gott außer Gott..., 135-147.

[160] See too Y.D. Nevo, *Towards a Prehistory of Islam*, in: Ibn Warraq, (ed., transl.), *What the Koran really says. Language, Text, and Commentary* (Amherst, New York 2002), 131-167, and idem (together with J. Koren), *Crossroads to Islam. The origins of the Arab Religion and the Arab State* (Amherst, New York 2003), 361-425, in part. 412-415; B. Lewis, *The Middle East, A brief history of the last 2,000 years* (New York 1995), 68-70; G. Fowden, *Empire to Commomwealth. Consequences of monotheism in late antiquity* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1993), 142, 159. Nevertheless, as Fowden, 152-160, also shows, Islam, in spite of its anti-trinitarism, was capable of absorbing Christianity on the political level under the label of "monotheism".

[161] See Mooren, The Trinity..., 99.

[162] Cf. ibid., 88/9.

them "artificially" from that essence, like calling them for example "Father", "Son" or "spirit" and allow them, so to speak, to "float" outside of that same essence.[163] Thus the "persons" of the trinity are nothing else than those loose attributes that have fallen out of God's essence. And why should that apply only to three attributes? Why not also to five, six ten or more? There is no logical reason to stop at three![164] Yet, whatever the number, it is all wrong thinking in the eyes of Muslim theologians, since God's essence is not "multiplied"[165], it cannot be "fractioned" or "partitioned"[166] But that is what Christians do when they say "three". They fraction God into three portions, so when Christians say, that he is one in three persons, they are formulating a contradiction. Three can never be one and one never be three.[167] It is the same as one would say: "A thing is at the same time existent and non existent; eternal and subject to time (mu*h*dath)"[168]

What is at stake here is obvious: Islamic kalām looks like stone walling God into the impeccable logic of the number One – while binity and trinity, both in their own way, break this oneness, this numerical fortress open. They "sacrifice" this kind of logic under the "pressure" of *experienced salvation* history,[169] that is the

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[163] Like astronauts float around the space ship, to use a modern simile.

[164] Reasons for stopping at three have to do with the "psychology of numbers": with "three" you have said all what is there to be said, and above all the number depends on the *oikonomia* of salvation! See the discussion in Mooren, Trinity..., 91/2.

[165] lā tuta´addadu; Mooren, The trinity..., 91.

[166] See tajazza´a: to cut into slices; ba´a*d*a V., to be divided, divisible; Mooren, The Trinity..., 85.

[167] See Mooren, The Trinity..., 86.

[168] See ibid.

[169] For the nature of the non-contradictory "logic" as opposed to the primary *intimacy* of the life of the divine persons see also

experience of the *effective caring* of a living God. His mercy "rolls over" righteousness and number counting "logic" in the name of an eternal "Logos", who becomes flesh from birth to death. This is, indeed, a "myth" that can and needs to be *told*!

Sloterdijk, 163. Cf. too D.-R. Dufour, *Les mystères de la trinité* (Paris 1990), 181,188-190 (and many other instances) in his study on the "mysteries of trinity". Because of trinity´s tension with non-contradictory forms of logic and reasoning, a tension proper to what we call *myth* (see ibid., 149, 181), the Christian trinity, this "masterpiece" of *salvation* (cf. ibid., 213), looks indeed, from the outside, "extremely embarrassing". (ibid., 213).