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SELF, SOUL AND BODY  
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center of the world which is the paramount place of divine self-manifestation—is valid for Judaism as well, there is no comparably conspicuous practise in Jewish worship. The particular power of the practice in Islam seems to be due to its dramatic history where the introduction of the *qibla* (more precisely, the two *qiblas*) marked important steps in the attaining of collective identity. The gesture of the turning of one's face to God in the hope of finding His Face was first oriented towards Jerusalem, the sanctuary of the Banū Isrā'īl. Through this association, the new community entered the space of those adhering to the scriptural religions. By reverting the *qibla* to Mecca, they re-entered a space of their own memory. This was, however, not a simple return, for since the emergence of the necessity to seek God's Face not simply in an inherited place of ritual, but essentially in an imaginary space charged with scriptural memory, the rite of praying towards a *qibla* had once and for all entered into a close relation to scripture and thus to the Qur'an and its recitation.

Rippin's conclusions, it appears, should be complemented by some further observations: *Seeking the Face of God* in Islam is, it seems, not solely a matter of moral or social responsibility, but equally and perhaps even primarily, a spiritual, indeed a liturgical endeavor. Looked upon as a liturgical act, the development of its realization in time and space mirrors most significant stages in the emergence of the community. "Seeking the Face of God," then, demands both a spiritual and a physical activity: to make audible God's words through one's own voice and arranging one's body in space, in order to face the central sanctuary—God's token on earth—so as to overcome with one's soul the vast distance between man's life-long exile and the focus of his eternal longing.

## TWELFTH CENTURY CONCEPTS OF SOUL AND BODY: THE MAIMONIDEAN CONTROVERSY IN BAGHDAD

Sarah Stroumsa

Ibn Jubayr, a Spanish Muslim traveller passing through Baghdad in 1185, was not much impressed by the City of Peace (*dār al-salām*). Compared to the thriving Cairo, which he had visited less than a year earlier, he found Baghdad to be a city that, intellectually and economically, lived on its past glory. At the same time, Ibn Jubayr remarked, the people of Baghdad still considered their city to be the center of the world: "You scarce can find among them any who do not affect humility, but who yet are vain and proud. Each conceives, in belief and thought, that the whole world is but trivial in comparison with his land, and over the face of the world they find no noble place of living save their own."<sup>1</sup>

The deterioration of the status of the city as a spiritual and cultural center was still more perceptible in the Jewish community of Baghdad. Benjamin of Tudela, a Jewish traveller who visited the city only a few years earlier (around 1171), found 40,000 Jews in Baghdad with ten schools.<sup>2</sup> By the twelfth century, the renowned Jewish academic centers of Iraq, the *yeshivot*, had declined, and the incontestable political and spiritual leadership of the community was no longer in Mesopotamia. In particular, the personality of Moses Maimonides, who lived in Cairo, commanded such respect that Egypt came to overshadow the more ancient center of Iraq.

The historical situation did not allow for a quiet shift of power. The Gaon Shmuel ben Eli, head of the Academy in Baghdad, was a strong personality, who regarded Baghdad and himself as natural leaders for all Jewish communities;<sup>3</sup> and the close connections between the Jewish communities from Spain to Yemen contributed to

<sup>1</sup> *Travels of Ibn Jubayr*, ed. W. Wright, rev. M. J. De Goeje (Leyden and London, 1907) 217-218; English translation in *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr*, trans. R. J. C. Broadhurst (London, 1952) 226 ff. Cf. also A. A. Duri, "Baghdād" *EP*, I, 901.

<sup>2</sup> *Itinerary*, ed. and trans. A. Asher (New York, 1840-2) 54-56 (text), 93-105 (trans.).

<sup>3</sup> On the Gaon and on the rivalry between the two centers, see S. Asaf, "Qovez shel Iggerot Shmuel ben Eli u-vnei Doro," *Tarbiz* 1 (1930), 102-130; 2 (1931), 43-84; 3 (1932), 15-80.

the fact that any disagreement between him and Maimonides became a major public affair. The strife was not openly a political one. As Maimonides' authority became more firmly established and widespread, and as the Gaon continually tried to reassert his own authority, the discussion evolved around legal/halakhic matters, or issues of dogma. Prime among the latter was the question of the resurrection of the dead.

In an anonymous treatise, the "Book of the Meanings of the Soul" (*kitāb ma'ānī al-naṣf*), sometimes attributed to the eleventh-century Jewish author Bahya ibn Paquda, the author emphatically says that although people sometimes connect and confuse the two issues, the question of the resurrection of the dead is in no way related to the question of the soul.<sup>4</sup> But in the Maimonidean controversy the two issues became tightly connected, to the extent that rather than its usual description as a controversy over resurrection, it should more appropriately be called a controversy over the soul and its immortality.

In the following pages I shall not go over the background and development of the controversy, a reconstruction of which I intend to offer elsewhere.<sup>5</sup> Rather, I will present a static scene, using the information provided mainly by three interconnected short treatises. From these treatises and from other related texts we can learn of three Jewish personalities in the twelfth century and of their views on the soul and the body. I shall try to present their views, show the use they make of the various traditions from which they drew, and situate them in the context of the Muslim intellectual world in which they lived. For it should be said from the outset that, although the texts studied here deal with Jewish personalities and with Jewish beliefs, they reflect, *mutatis mutandis*, positions and beliefs current among Muslims (and probably also among Christians) at the same time and place.

### *The Scene and the Players*

The main sources for this study of the controversy are three treatises on the resurrection of the dead written in Judaeo-Arabic. Until recently only one of them was available to us. This text (which is

<sup>4</sup> *Kitāb ma'ānī al-naṣf*; *Buch vom Wesen der Seele*, ed. I. Goldziher (Berlin, 1907) 4:12-14.

<sup>5</sup> See Stroumsa, "Répétition Superflue." (An appendix to this article provides complete bibliographical information about the works frequently cited herein.)

chronologically the last among the three) is Maimonides' *Treatise on the Resurrection of the Dead* (hereafter cited as MTR).<sup>6</sup>

The second text (chronologically the first) is a *Treatise on the Resurrection of the Dead* written by the Gaon Shmuel ben Eli; Maimonides mentions it in his own work bearing the same name.<sup>7</sup> From Maimonides' words one gets the impression that the publication of the Gaon's treatise was the direct and immediate cause that forced him to write and state (or re-state) his views on the matter, and it was thus seen by practically all the scholars who studied the controversy.<sup>8</sup> The Gaon's *Treatise on Resurrection* was subsequently presumed lost and, indeed, its Arabic original is still not extant as a separate text. An almost complete Hebrew translation of this Treatise, however, has recently been discovered by Tzvi Langermann.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to this Hebrew translation, extensive quotations from the Arabic text of the Gaon's *Treatise* are preserved in a refutation of this work. This refutation, entitled *The Silencing Epistle* (*Risālat al-iskāt*), was written by Maimonides' favorite student, Yosef ben Shimeon, for whom Maimonides had written the *Guide of the Perplexed*. Yosef wrote his *Epistle* as a retort to the Gaon's *Treatise*, and sent it to Maimonides.<sup>10</sup>

Of these three texts, only Maimonides' *Treatise* has been edited and analyzed.<sup>11</sup> Since, however, it has been studied until now without

<sup>6</sup> See J. Finkel, *Ma'amar tehiyyat ha-metim: Maimonides' Treatise on Resurrection* [*maqāla fi tehiyyat ha-metim*] (New York, 1939); I. Shilat, *Iggeret ha-Rambam* (Jerusalem, 1987) I, pp. 315-376. References to MTR in the following pages are to Finkel's edition.

<sup>7</sup> MTR, p. 324.

<sup>8</sup> E.g., Lerner, "Maimonides' Treatise," p. 145; Hartmann, *Crisis and Leadership*, p. 204.

<sup>9</sup> See Y. Tzvi Langermann, "A New Anthology of Medieval Jewish Philosophy," *Qiryat Sefer* 64 (1992): 1427-1432 (Hebrew). I wish to thank Tzvi Langermann for drawing my attention to this manuscript. In the manuscript, the text of the Gaon's *Treatise on Resurrection* (hereafter cited as GTR) is interrupted, and the manuscript continues with the (acephalos) text of Maimonides' *Epistle to Yemen*. Nevertheless, a comparison with the citations from GTR in SE (see next note) indicates that the extant part includes almost the whole text of GTR.

<sup>10</sup> On the *Silencing Epistle* (hereafter cited as SE), see Harkavy, "Fragment"; Stroumsa, "Abū al-Barakāt"; Baneth, "Yosef bn. Shimeon," pp. 16-17, n. 35; Yosef ben Shimeon, *Iggeret Ha-hashtaga 'al odot tehiyyat ha-metim* (*risālat al-iskāt fi hashr al-amwāl*), ed., with an annotated Hebrew translation, S. Stroumsa, forthcoming to be published by the Ben Zvi Institute, Jerusalem.

<sup>11</sup> See n. 6 and n. 10 above. References to SE are to the JTSA manuscript, ENA 1732. (No. 28709 in the Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts at the Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem). An edition of the Gaon's *Treatise on Resurrection* is being prepared by Tzvi Langermann. References to GTR are to the Moscow State Library Ms. 209 (No. 52178 in the Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts at the Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem).

the two other treatises, to which it reacts, I believe that it has not been properly understood. I suspect that Maimonides had no knowledge of the Gaon's Treatise except through the quotations in the *Silencing Epistle*, and that it is because of Yosef ben Shimeon, rather than because of the Gaon and his *Treatise*, that Maimonides decided to write his *Treatise on Resurrection*.<sup>12</sup> This new identification of the addressee of Maimonides' *Treatise* has bearings on the interpretation of its content. Although I will not be able to develop this point fully here, I hope that the following pages will provide an example of its implications.

While all three treatises can be dated to about 1191, the *Silencing Epistle* contains references to public disputations between the Gaon and Yosef ben Shimeon that may go back a few years earlier. After reporting on one such disputation, the author of *The Silencing Epistle* says about the Gaon:

I left him defeated, with no appropriate answer [to my attacks],<sup>13</sup> after having heard from him such answers that no person with solid knowledge would present. About people presenting such answers one should say: "May the Merciful God preserve us from such knowledge." I then travelled from Baghdad to the West, and returned. Then I travelled from Baghdad to the East and returned. This last return was a long time after our meeting, and (upon returning) I found that he had composed his above-mentioned treatise, and that he had written in it the same opinions that he had expressed during the disputation. I marvelled at the obstinacy of this person, who holds on to his beliefs even though their falsehood was made clear to him.<sup>14</sup>

Such references to the disputations add another dimension to the discussion. While the tone in the treatises of both Maimonides and the Gaon is usually restrained, the atmosphere in the disputations was apparently much less so. The reports about the disputations also connect the intellectual philosophical debate to the beliefs that were probably held by wider circles of people in Baghdad.

<sup>12</sup> For a full discussion of this point, see Stroumsa, "Répétition Superflue."

<sup>13</sup> "Munqāṭ'ān 'an al-jawāb." On the *inqilā'*, see, for instance, Qirqisānī, *Anwār*, pp. 484-486; G. Vajda, "Études sur Qirqisānī V: Les règles de la controverse dialectique," *Revue des Études Juives* 122 (1963): 34-37.

<sup>14</sup> SE, fol. 10a; Harkavi, "Fragment," p. 182.

### *Positions on the Soul*

In what follows I shall try to present the three positions on the soul, in the chronological order of the three treatises.

### *Shmuel ben Eli's view*

According to the Gaon, "The Jewish people agree on the belief in the survival of the soul after the body's death. Both the elite and the common people also agree that when the soul is separated from the body, it is transferred to either happiness or misery."<sup>15</sup> The Gaon does not tell us what the soul is; instead, he sets out to prove that the philosophers are in disagreement concerning the soul. Some say that the soul is one of the body's faculties: as such, it is just an accident that will pass away with the body in which it resides. Others say that the soul is a mixture of the essential elements of the body. Some physicians say that the soul is but a combination of the body's humors that will also pass away when the body dies. Still others regard the soul as derived from the mixing of the inhaled air with the body's natural heat and vapors. And some say that a person's soul is only his blood.

This list can be traced ultimately to Aristotle's list in the *De Anima*,<sup>16</sup> but in the form presented by the Gaon it is clearly derived mainly from *al-Kitāb al-Mu'tabar* of the Baghdadian Jewish philosopher Hibat-Allāh Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī (d. 1164),<sup>17</sup> with the additional influence of Saadia's list in his *Book of Beliefs and Opinions*.<sup>18</sup> Shmuel ben Eli does not, however, mention any specific source, and he presents these opinions simply as the opinions of "the rationalists" (*ba'alei ha-sekhele*).

He then continues to cite the opinions of philosophers (*hakamei ha-*

<sup>15</sup> GTR, fol. 64a-64b.

<sup>16</sup> *De An.* 404a-405b.

<sup>17</sup> *Mu'tabar*, II 355-356. See also the Gaon's explicit reference to the passage in the *De Anima*, and the somewhat veiled reference to its interpretation by Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī (whom the Gaon calls "one of the philosophers") in GTR, fol. 72b:17 ff.

<sup>18</sup> For example, the last opinion quoted by the Gaon (that the soul is the person's blood) is followed by an exegetical discussion that is clearly dependent on Saadia's list in the sixth chapter of his *Kitāb al-amānāt wa'l-iḥqāqāt*. On the doxologies that were the source for such lists, see H. Davidson, "Saadia's List of Theories of the Soul," in A. Altmann, ed., *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies* (Cambridge, MA, 1967) pp. 75-94.



*filosofim*): They agree that the soul is an immaterial substance, but they disagree concerning its origin, its cause, and its immortality. In his exposition of these opinions, he again uses material found in Abū al-Barakāt's *al-Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*. Abū al-Barakāt was an Aristotelian philosopher who in many respects followed Avicenna, but also developed his own ideas. Concerning the soul, he has an interesting and rather original theory; for him, the soul's awareness of itself is the definitive proof that the soul is independent of the body and will not perish with it.<sup>19</sup> But when Shmuel ben Eli uses material found in *al-Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*, he does not reveal his source, and is in fact totally uninterested in Abū al-Barakāt or in his ideas. *Al-Kitāb al-Mu'tabar* enables the Gaon to summarize the ideas of the philosophers, and provides him with formulations that will demonstrate his familiarity with the philosophers' jargon.<sup>20</sup>

The conclusion the Gaon draws from his presentation is that we must not turn to the philosophers in our quest for the truth concerning the soul, since they are not reliable:

Concerning the survival of the souls after their separation from the body, we must thus turn to the consensus of the nation, the tradition transmitted from the prophets, and the proofs found in the texts transmitted by revelation from the Almighty, the Wise ... who will keep in life whomever He wishes and annihilate whomever He wishes. We must not turn to what the philosophers say, since they have no decisive proof for their claims.<sup>21</sup>

Having shown that he is well read and that the philosophical jargon does not intimidate him, the Gaon thus rejects philosophy as a useful way to know anything about the soul. The only trustworthy source is the tradition.

Indeed, most of the arguments which the Gaon then produces relate to the Jewish tradition in its widest sense, beginning with the Bible, through the Talmud and Gaonic exegesis, to the practices of contemporaneous Jews in Baghdad. From the host of arguments he marshals, one can get a clear picture of his image of the soul after death.

Like the philosophers, he agrees that beyond death the soul is not attached to the body. Nevertheless, it is obvious that in many respects

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Pines, "La conscience de soi," esp. pp. 217-218.

<sup>20</sup> Maimonides was apparently sensitive to the Gaon's unphilosophical reading of this philosophical book, see n. 29 below.

<sup>21</sup> GTR, fol. 65b.

he pictures this separate, non-corporeal soul as a copy of the living person. It performs similar acts, it suffers and rejoices in the same way, it confronts similar obstacles. For example, Shmuel ben Eli discusses at length the biblical story of the witch of Ein Dor who, at King Saul's request, conjured up the dead prophet Samuel. The Gaon rejects the opinion that the witch deceived Saul, and that she did not really hear the prophet Samuel at all. He also rejects the notion that God performed a miracle, bringing Samuel back to life. According to him, the witch really summoned the soul of the dead Samuel, exactly as the scriptural text says: "We say that the verse: 'Samuel said to Saul' means that Samuel's soul talked to Saul, according to the literal meaning (*zāhir*) of the Bible, as the prophet wrote down according to God's speech. One is not permitted to interpret it."<sup>22</sup>

In fact, not only does Shmuel ben Eli see no difficulty in accepting the text literally, he also does not seem to think that there was anything extraordinary in the witch's performance. In his view, it is quite usual for souls to converse with each other or with the living. In this context, he cites a story from Rabbinic tradition, according to which a certain righteous person who went out one night to the graveyard overheard the talk of two souls (*shtei ruhot* or *shtei neshamot*).<sup>23</sup> One soul invited the other to join it, and the other complained that it could not. "How can I move," it said, "when I am buried (bundled up) in a mat made of reeds." For the Gaon, this story provides the proof that souls can talk, even though they have no body, and thus lack the corporeal tools of speech.<sup>24</sup>

In the Bible, Samuel not only talks, but he is also seen by the witch. This also presents no difficulty for the Gaon, who says that what the witch saw was not the person Samuel, but his image, like the reflection one sees in the mirror. When Yosef ben Shimeon objects that images reflected in a mirror appear inverted, the Gaon remains unperturbed. The spirits of the dead, he tells his opponent, also appear inverted, as reflections of the soul. He says:

<sup>22</sup> GTR, fol. 67b:17-18.

<sup>23</sup> Literally: "two spirits." Shmuel ben Eli does not seem to distinguish between *nefesh*, *ru'ah*, and *neshama*. On the use of these terms in Rabbinic literature, see Nisan Rubin, "From Monism to Dualism: The Body-Soul Relationship in Rabbinic Perception," *Da'at* 23 (1989): 38-40 (Hebrew).

<sup>24</sup> GTR, fol. 67b.

The image that appears in the *mandal* is such a reflection<sup>25</sup> of the soul. This has been repeatedly certified in our days, by people who perform this technique. It is also established in the Talmud when the sages say: "It [i.e., the spirit or soul] can be conjured up on weekdays, but will not be conjured up on the Sabbath."<sup>26</sup>

The Gaon refers here to techniques of necromancy that are mentioned in the Talmud,<sup>27</sup> and identifies them with *mandal*, a technique practiced in the Middle East to this day. According to this technique, the medium—usually a very young boy—is asked to look into a smooth surface (a mirror, or some liquid in a bowl) and conjure up the spirit of the dead, which speaks to him by signs or gestures.<sup>28</sup> In the Gaon's written treatise, the *mandal* appears only in the cryptic reference cited above. But in the public disputations with Maimonides' student, which are recorded in *The Silencing Epistle*, the Gaon discussed this technique in more detail. Yosef ben Shimeon records the following dialogue:

I said: And whatever tells you that the *mandal* is a real thing, and that images which the beholder can see do appear in it?

He said: The oft-repeated experience, and the testimony of those who practice it.

I said: Is there anyone in our days who can do that?

He said: Yes indeed, there are such people in our place, in Baghdad.<sup>29</sup>

I said: Well then, I will give such a person twice his price, if he can show me the truth of what he claims, and prove to me what I deny.

He said: But the spirit will appear only to young boys, who have not yet reached puberty.

<sup>25</sup> Arabic: *Namūdḥaj*, literally "model." This term establishes a close relation between the soul and its imprint or reproduction in the *mandal*, and accords it an existence that is somewhat more "real" than the word "reflection" denotes. I am indebted to Sara Sviri for the clarification of this term.

<sup>26</sup> GTR, fol. 67b:27-68b:1; quoted by Maimonides' student in SE, fol. 13a.

<sup>27</sup> SE, fol. 14a; cf. BT *Sanhedrin* 65b.

<sup>28</sup> See E. W. Lane, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (London, 1876; New York, 1973) pp. 268-275; Alexander Fodor, "Arabic Bowl Divination and the Greek Magical Papyri," in A. Fodor and A. Shvitzel, eds., *Proceedings of the Colloquium on Popular Customs and the Monotheistic Religions in the Middle East and North Africa*, 19-25th September 1993, *The Arabist* 9-10 (Budapest, 1994): 73-101, esp. 89-93. I am indebted to Simon Hopkins for these references.

<sup>29</sup> Arabic: *'indana fi Baghdād*. It is probably this sentence that Maimonides mimics sarcastically when he says that the Gaon cited the *Mu'tabar*, which was written "*'indahum fi Baghdād*." The sarcasm does not necessarily reflect Maimonides' reservations regarding Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī, but rather his contempt of the provinciality of the Gaon and his pretensions to read philosophy while following his superstitions. On Maimonides' references to the *Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*, see Stroumsa, "Abū al-Barakāt."

I said: This is because of the paucity of their (i. e. the boys') understanding and the weakness of their ability to conceptualize! ... What (else) can be the reason for the fact that these images appear only to young boys, and not to anybody else?

He said: The fact is that there are so many stories told about children and that we have seen them informing us of things hidden and knowing secret matters. Because of these facts we believe in what is said, that the images do appear to little boys, and that by signs which the images give the children know what the souls tell them.

The dialogue ends with the exasperated Yosef ben Shimeon leaving the scene of the debate, and it is this exchange that triggered the exclamation cited above ("May the merciful God preserve us from such knowledge").

Nevertheless, the Gaon was not easily shaken, certainly not by the fact that his thinking was unacceptable to his opponent. In his view, the immortal soul, placed in a body that perishes temporarily, must be resurrected so that the soul of the righteous will not suffer, and the soul of the wicked be duly punished. He identifies the retribution in the world to come with the resurrection of the dead.<sup>30</sup> In this context he cites the talmudic parable according to which the soul and body are like the blind man who carries the lame on his shoulders when they go out stealing. When caught, each of them denies his responsibility, pointing to his inability to act individually. The wise judge then puts the lame again on the blind man's shoulders, and punishes them as one unit.<sup>31</sup> The Gaon has a clear image of the self, of the person. The person is at first the soul and body, then, for a while, the soul with only a memory of the body,<sup>32</sup> and then again soul and body. In sum, the person is that which is placed in the body (*inna al-insān - al-mutajassid*).

<sup>30</sup> "... And since [the retribution] is not in this world, it must be in the next, after the soul separates from the body and after its future return to the body" (GTR, fol. 66b:2-4); "... and we affirm that [the expression] 'the world to come' indicates the creation of a new world, when the souls that have been separated from the bodies will return to them" (GTR, fol. 68a:27-28).

<sup>31</sup> GTR, fol. 71b:27-72a:6. Cf. BT, *Sanhedrin* 91a; *Vayiqra Rabba* 4, §5; *Midrash Tanḥuma—Vayiqra*. On the use of this parable by the *Iḥwān al-ṣafā*, who took it from an Indian source, see Henry Malter, "Personifications of Soul and Body: A Study in Judaeo-Arabic Literature," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* II (1912): 454-456.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. GTR, fol. 68a:10-13, where the Gaon cites Job 14:21 to prove that the soul of the wicked "watches from above the body from which it was separated, and agonizes over the sufferings of the body and its own sufferings of the separation."

*Yosef ben Shimeon's View*

The genre of *The Silencing Epistle* dictates its presentation. As is common in refutations, *The Silencing Epistle* is built around the text it aims to disprove. Yosef ben Shimeon cites a few lines from the Gaon's *Treatise*, then refutes the cited argument. He is thus obliged to follow the Gaon's argumentation, correcting him, trying to reason with him or show him the absurdity of his view, scoffing at him or simply, as in the dialogue cited above, slamming the door behind him. As a result, we find Yosef pulled into discussions where, whatever the subject, he comes out sounding pedantic and defensive. Rather than presenting a coherent theory of the soul, he has to respond to the Gaon's arguments.

Thus, since the Gaon began with Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī's *al-Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*, Yosef ben Shimeon must first respond to the philosophical argument. He identifies the text, then endeavors to demonstrate that the Gaon did not understand it. The disagreement between the philosophers concerning the soul, he says, occurred only before Aristotle introduced some order into logic. There was no disagreement among Aristotle's followers, and even if there were, this would not prove that none of the philosophers' opinions is correct, as the Gaon argues. It would only show that they are not all correct at the same time.

Yosef ben Shimeon also rejects the claim that the philosophers have no decisive proof concerning the immortality of the soul. On the contrary, he says: "The Philosophers have demonstrated that the soul must be immortal, and that its annihilation is inconceivable." Aristotle demonstrated that if there is an act that is specific to the soul, it will not perish with the body.<sup>33</sup> The soul is a simple, non-composite entity. It has one specific, characteristic act, which is intellection. The intellectual act of the soul is done by the soul itself, without any intermediate tool. The soul thus intellects itself, and is aware of its own intellection. The simplicity of the soul entails its immortality. Only composite beings can have both actual existence and the potentiality of their perishing. But in simple entities like the soul, the actuality of existence precludes the potentiality of perishing.

In other instances, Yosef ben Shimeon also responds to the exegetical and talmudic arguments of the Gaon, making use of either

<sup>33</sup> Cf. *De An.* 403a 3-5.

theological or linguistic arguments. For example, in the case of the witch of Ein Dor, he argues that the witch could not possibly make Samuel's spirit talk. Souls have no bodies and thus no bodily organs without which speech cannot be produced.

In this context Yosef also touches upon the much-debated question of God's speech, and whether or not it is produced by sounds and words. The theological problem is the following: God's revelation is perceived by the prophets as His speaking to them, and it is thus described in the scriptures. In our normal usage, speech requires a body to produce it. The individual revelations to the prophets appeared at specific moments in history, and are thus associated with temporality. But God, being eternal and absolutely One, can have no temporal or corporeal attribute associated with Him. In Muslim *Kalām* this became a central theological issue. It divided the believers between those who insisted that everything but God is created in time, and thus claimed that "God's speech is created"; and those who stressed the fact that the Koran is the speech of the eternal God, and thus came eventually to the formula that "God's speech is eternal, un-created."<sup>34</sup> Yosef ben Shimeon does not really want to go into the intricacies of this problem. He only responds to the argument of the Gaon, that if God can talk without a body, so can the souls. In his response, he offers a distinction between two possible positions. All the theologians of our nation, he says, agree that God's speech is a sounded speech that is created in time. Those non-Jewish theologians who hold that God's speech is eternal, deny that it is a sounded speech. In either opinion, he claims, the notion of a sounded speech that is created in time but is not produced by a body, is unacceptable.<sup>35</sup>

Prior to this dry physiological analysis, Yosef adduces a more emotional argument:

<sup>34</sup> On the question of God's speech, see G. Vajda, "La parole créée de Dieu d'après le théologien karaïte Yūsuf al-Baṣīr," *Studia Islamica* 38 (1974): 59-76 (reprinted in Georges Vajda, ed. and trans., *Al-Kitāb al-Muḥtawī de Yūsuf al-Baṣīr*, ed. David R. Blumenthal (Leiden, 1985), pp. 151-168); Ibn Furak, *Miḡarrad maqālāt al-Ash'arī*, ed. D. Gimaret (Beirut, 1986) 59-60; Al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn wa-ihṭilāf al-muṣallīn*, ed. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd (Cairo, 1950), I, p. 247; II, p. 247. And see Wilferd Madelung, "The Origins of the Controversy concerning the Creation of the Koran," in *Orientalia Hispanica*, I (Leiden, 1974) pp. 504-525.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. SE, fol. 13a: *Jamī' al-mutakallimīn min millatīnā yaqūlūna inna kalām allāh ta'ālā ḥarf wa-ṣawt maḥlūq; ... wa-'lladhīna ya'taqidūna min ghayri millatīnā anna al-kalām qadīm qā'im bi-dhāt al-rabb lā yaj'alūhu ḥarf wa-ṣawt ..., bal al-ijmā' qad waqa'a anna al-kalām bi'l-ḥarf wa'l-ṣawt lā yaqūmu bi-dhātihī.*



Were it possible for spirits to speak and to converse with whomever they wish and whenever they wish, then the spirits would surely converse with their living relatives. For many of the dead die experiencing the utmost longing, sadness, and suffering because of their separation from those they leave behind. Were it possible for them to converse with them afterward, this would have offered great comfort and solace to both the living and the dead. Then the spirits who love the suffering living people, who grieve over the separation from the dead when they depart, would comfort them and talk to them. But we see nothing of this happening.<sup>36</sup>

He also responds seriously to the story about the two souls, which the Gaon had cited. In *The Silencing Epistle* Yosef first mentions that, during the disputation itself, he had argued that the story can be explained on the assumption that the event was only a dream accorded to this particular night-wanderer because he was a righteous person. He then adds:

Later, however, I found an argument that proves this interpretation, and that had not occurred to me during the disputation. This is a proof deduced from the story itself, [which demonstrates] that it was indeed [only] a dream. For in the story one soul says to the other: "I cannot come out, for I am buried in a mat made of reeds." Yet it is not the soul which is buried in a mat of reeds; the one buried in a mat of reeds is the body alone!

This interpretation, presented so triumphantly, allows Yosef to reject the Gaon's argument without either denying the talmudic story or questioning the relevance of such stories. Yosef takes up the Gaon's arguments one by one, and responds to all of them with equal seriousness. Only the dispute concerning the *mandal* drives him to leave furiously, and even then, only after he is convinced of having won the debate.

#### Maimonides' view

Maimonides' view of the soul draws on the Arabic philosophical tradition. It is thus an admixture of various (sometimes contradictory) elements from Plato, Aristotle, and the Neoplatonic tradition. According to Maimonides, "... the body as a whole is only the tool for the soul, by which the soul carries out all its acts."<sup>37</sup> He also says that

<sup>36</sup> SE, fol. 10b.

<sup>37</sup> MTR, p. 7; see also p. 16: "The body is only the combination of tools for the acts of the soul."

the soul is the perfection of the body. It has various faculties, which take care of the various functions of the human body. The highest faculty of the soul is rationality which, when given the proper priority, allows the human being to reach the purpose of his existence.<sup>38</sup> The rational faculty's role is to contemplate, and the highest and most fitting objects of its contemplation are the Separate Intellects. When the human soul has contemplated, intellected, and internalized the form of these highest objects, it acquires a degree of intellection that allows it to have an intellectual existence, independent of the body. This intellectual part (called the Actual Intellect), and it alone, conjoins with the Active Intellect, the lowest of the Separate Intellects, and thus gains immortality.

The highest human aspiration is thus, in Maimonides' view, to reach an intellectual, incorporeal existence. The body, the tool that allowed the human intellect to reach this stage, perishes at death, together with the lower faculties of the soul. But this annihilation is meaningless: it does not cause the philosopher great sorrow, nor does the promise of the miraculous resurrection of the body cause him great happiness. As Maimonides already said in his youthful composition, the *Commentary on the Mishnah*, the person who realized this highest intellectual stage is like the king who achieved the aspired kingdom. To suggest to the accomplished philosopher that he should regain the body from which he was delivered, is like proposing to the king that he abandon his kingdom and go back to the streets to play with the ball he had loved as a child.<sup>39</sup>

This intellectual approach has, of course, distinct ascetic overtones. As Maimonides repeatedly says in the *Guide*, the body and all its needs are base and at times even shameful.<sup>40</sup> The philosopher is compelled to make use of the body, but he does so as sparsely as he can, and he certainly has no emotional attachment to it. His real joy is the joy of the intellect. That which is called "soul" is thus regarded in different ways, depending on whether what is meant are the facul-

<sup>38</sup> In Maimonides' view, although women are not totally excluded from the contemplative endeavor, they are by nature at a marked disadvantage in this respect. See, for instance, his (rather typical) expressions below, ns. 51 and 57. In this context, therefore, we may be permitted to call "the human being"—"man."

<sup>39</sup> Maimonides, *Commentary on Heleq*, p. 204. In MTR Maimonides refers the reader explicitly to this Commentary, as well as to other parts of his *Commentary on the Mishnah*. See, for instance, MTR, pp. 4-5.

<sup>40</sup> See, for instance, *Guide*, III, 8 (*Dalalat al-ha'ir*, esp. 311, 313-314); and see also *Commentary on Avot*, 389-390.



ties relating to the bodily functions, or the faculty that prepares the way for pure intellection. In general, the soul is not seen as the purest, highest part of human existence. Maimonides says:

Know, that this one soul, the description of whose faculties or parts we have given above, is like matter, and the intellect is its form. If the soul does not achieve its form, then the preparation which it had to receive this form is in vain, and it is as if its existence was futile. This is why it was said [Prov. 19:2]: "A soul with no knowledge is no good," that is to say, the existence of the soul which did not achieve its form, but which is "a soul with no knowledge," is not "good."<sup>41</sup>

The highest part of the soul, which may achieve immortality, is the Intellect; that is how Maimonides describes immortality in the *Guide*. In the *Treatise on Resurrection*, he usually speaks in the religious language of "the immortality of the soul," but even in this treatise he says on one occasion: "The people who have merited afterlife are separate souls, I mean intellects."<sup>42</sup>

In another place in the *Treatise on Resurrection* Maimonides says, criticizing the Gaon:

Another amazing thing I noticed is that the Intellect is not mentioned by this Gaon. I thus do not know whether according to his philosophy the soul and the intellect are identical, or whether perhaps the soul is immortal, while the intellect perishes. Or perhaps it is the intellect which is immortal and the soul perishes, that soul which he [i.e., the Gaon] had said the philosophers do not know, and that one of their opinions concerning it identifies with blood. Or perhaps according to him the intellect is an accident, as the *mutakallimūn*, whom he considers to be the wise philosophers, think.<sup>43</sup>

This sarcastic remark highlights Maimonides' view concerning the relative importance of soul and intellect. In his view, in no circumstances can immortality become an attribute of the body. And, to the extent that we are entitled to speak of the immortality of the soul and to aspire for it, we must add preliminary qualifications that will properly stress the special role of the intellect.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>41</sup> *Commentary on Avot*, p. 376.

<sup>42</sup> MTR, p. 8: *Wa-inna bnei ha-'olam ha-ba anfus muṣṭarīqa a-nī 'uqūlan*.

<sup>43</sup> MTR, p. 14.

<sup>44</sup> Pines suspected that Maimonides may have been skeptical even concerning the possibility of intellectual immortality. See below, n. 56.

### *The Debate in Context*

I have cited only a few examples of the arguments produced by the three participants in the controversy. This material, however, is enough to distinguish their positions concerning the soul and the body. In the remaining part of this paper, I shall try to locate the three positions in the intellectual context of their time and place.

On the contemporaneous Muslim intellectual scene, we can distinguish three groups whose positions appear relevant to our case: The philosophers (or, to be more precise, the *falāsifa*, i.e., the Aristotelian philosophers),<sup>45</sup> the traditionalists, and the theologians.<sup>46</sup> Although Jewish intellectuals, obviously, did not have to identify with any Muslim school of thought, they were nonetheless closely influenced by these schools.

1. Although Shmuel ben Eli did not regard himself as a philosopher, he had aspirations to be as well versed in philosophy as they were. He presents himself as a person who, being equally at ease in the writings of the philosophers and in Rabbinic literature, can criticize the position of the philosophers and present in its stead the authoritative, intelligent Jewish position on the soul and its modes.

We have seen that the Gaon distinguishes between the elite (*al-hāṣṣa*), and the common people or masses (*al-'āmma* or *al-jumhūr*).<sup>47</sup> He undoubtedly considers himself to be part of the elite; at the same time, he insists that his views are in accord with the wide consensus of the Jewish people. In other words, he believes that his views would also be acceptable to the common people.

This same distinction is used by Maimonides in his *Treatise on Resurrection*, where he hints clearly that, whereas he himself belongs to the elite, the Gaon does not.<sup>48</sup> In the Introduction to his *Commentary on Pereq Heleq*, Maimonides offers a typology of readers of talmudic

<sup>45</sup> For a detailed analysis of the *falāsifa*'s views on this matter, see Herbert A. Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect: Their Cosmologies, Theories of the Active Intellect, and Theories of Human Intellect* (New York and Oxford, 1992), esp. pp. 197-278; and see Stroumsa, "Paradise," esp. pp. 6-9.

<sup>46</sup> For a typology of Muslim positions concerning the soul, see M.E. Marmura, "Soul: Islamic Concepts," in M. Eliade, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York and London, 1987), vol. 13, 460-465. Marmura distinguishes four main types of concepts of the soul: the three mentioned here, and the concept of the soul reflected in mystical thought.

<sup>47</sup> See above, n. 15.

<sup>48</sup> MTR, p. 22.

*midrashim* and, in this context, describes three categories of people. The common people respect the Sages, and therefore they accept the *midrashim* literally and believe in them wholeheartedly. The pseudo-scientists have no respect for the Sages, they too understand the *midrashim* literally, but they reject them scornfully. Only the true philosophers, who respect the Sages, also know that the Sages were careful not to divulge their knowledge to the ignorant masses. The true philosopher alone understands that the *midrashim* must be interpreted to reveal their hidden, higher truth.

According to Maimonides, the first of these three categories, the common people, also include "the preachers who explain to the masses what they themselves do not understand, those who preach in front of people about tractate *Berakhot* and tractate *Heleq* and take them literally, word for word."<sup>49</sup> We can see that Shmuel ben Eli would clearly fall, in Maimonides' view, in this first category. Indeed, years later, in his correspondence with Yosef ben Shimeon, Maimonides said so explicitly:

As to the affair of the *Treatise*, I am amazed that you, my child, should send it to me to show me the paucity of his [i.e., the Gaon's] knowledge. What did you think, that he, or [even] people better than he [in this school], know anything? At best, he is like any preacher, confused like the others. God knows that I wonder how he can say such stupidities, which are both ridiculous and shameful. As to the "eloquence" of this poor person, had he been satisfied with adducing arguments from "the hundred blessings," or from the blessing that should be said by a person who passes by Jewish graves, it would have been better for him, than to speak as a theologian (*yatakallamu*) about the soul and the opinions of the philosophers.<sup>50</sup>

For Maimonides, the Gaon is a typical Jewish preacher (*darshan*), and in his own *Treatise on Resurrection* he rebukes him scornfully for having made literal use of talmudic stories, "like women who, in the house of mourners, preach to each other."<sup>51</sup>

One must note, however, that when the Gaon does not cite the original Jewish texts, he speaks in Arabic, and his terminology as well as his arguments and his whole attitude have close parallels in the writings of Muslim contemporaries. The insistence on the literal meaning of the text (*zāhir*), the refusal to accept non-literal interpreta-

tions (*ta'wīl*) and the demand to rely on the tested tradition rather than on flimsy reason, were developed into a coherent, firm position by Muslim orthodoxy—both the traditionalists, and the theologians who adopted Ash'arite *kalām*. Among Muslim orthodox theologians there are variations and differences of shades in this matter: A Hanbalite theologian like Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya is more of a literalist, while Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī is subtler, and plays the game of the philosophers before rejecting it. The Gaon sounds at times like the one, at times like the other. When he toys with citations from *al-Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*, he sounds like al-Ghazālī in the *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, but when he moves on to the Talmud, he sounds more like Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, or perhaps like al-Ghazālī in his *al-Iqtisād fī al-i'tiqād*.

The comparison of the Gaon with Muslim orthodox theologians points to the Muslim influence on him, and also indicates that what Maimonides regards as the confused presentation of a simpleton may, in fact, represent a coherent stand. The literalist, the traditionalist, may try his hand at formulating his thought in the terms used by contemporary philosophers. But what really determines his position concerning such crucial issues as life, death, and the hereafter is his own religious tradition. He applies to this tradition an intellectual effort as serious as that of the philosophers, and seeks to build with it a consistent, coherent system.

2. If the Gaon moves comfortably between the theologians and literalist orthodoxy, Yosef ben Shimeon finds himself in an awkward position between the theologians and the philosophers. Theoretically, his position should be, and is, that of his revered teacher Maimonides, i.e., that of the *falāsifa*. He does state this position when he gets a chance, but more often than not he follows the course dictated by the Gaon.

Thus, instead of disregarding the *midrashim* of *Berakhot*, or brushing them aside as fit for women and children, as Maimonides does, Yosef ben Shimeon gets entangled in attempts to interpret them. This is probably first and foremost the result of his own respect for Rabbinic tradition. Maimonides himself, as we have seen above, says that Rabbinic *midrashim* include deep truth and must be interpreted accordingly. But whereas Maimonides chooses the *midrashim* he wants to interpret, Yosef must adhere to the choice of the Gaon in his treatise. Plodding from one such *midrash* to the other, he gets drawn into the Gaon's logic.

<sup>49</sup> Maimonides, *Commentary on Heleq*, p. 201.

<sup>50</sup> See I. Shilat, *Iggerot ha-Rambam* (Jerusalem, 1987) I, pp. 297-298.

<sup>51</sup> MTR, p. 12.

Another reason for this entanglement may be the fact that Yosef ben Shimeon's psychology is, perhaps, closer to the Gaon's than he would have liked to admit. It is noteworthy that, like the Gaon, Yosef ben Shimeon uses the terms "soul" and "spirit" interchangeably. As we have seen above, in the discussion of the witch of Ein Dor, he rejects the notion that the spirits of the dead can talk. In this context, he mentions not only the sadness of the bereft living, but also the sorrow of the dead.<sup>52</sup> It is, of course, possible that he means mainly the sorrow of the dying, but it is more likely, to my mind, that this phrase betrays his empathy with the departed soul. It seems that, intuitively, Yosef ben Shimeon regards also the soul of the dead as an individual who regrets the departure from his loved ones.

This interpretation is corroborated by Yosef ben Shimeon's response to the Gaon's philosophical arguments. When he sets out to prove the immortality of the soul from its simplicity, he copies it verbatim from Avicenna's *Book on the Modes of the Soul*.<sup>53</sup> According to Avicenna, although individuality is a corporeal quality, when a soul enters a body it also acquires some individual character. The individuality that the soul acquired during its sojourn in the body, remains with it after the annihilation of the body. Although Yosef ben Shimeon does not discuss this question specifically, it is quite possible that this part of Avicenna's psychology was also to his liking.

A somewhat humorous illustration of Yosef ben Shimeon's ambiguous position can be found in the entry about him in Ibn al-Qifti's biographical encyclopedia of physicians. Ibn al-Qifti was a close friend of his, and the two had made an agreement: If the soul is immortal in a way that allows it to apprehend the state of beings exterior to itself, then the first of the two to die would communicate with the other and tell him about his lot after death.<sup>54</sup> And indeed, after Yosef's death, he appeared in Ibn al-Qifti's dream, dressed in white, and informed him that after leaving this world, the soul joins the universal whole, whereas the body remains attached to the

<sup>52</sup> See above, n. 36.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Avicenna, *Les Etats de l'Âme- Ahwāl al-nafs, Risāla fī al-nafs wa-baqā'ihā wa-shaqā'ihā*, ed. Ahmad Fu'ad al-Ahwānī (Cairo, 1952), pp. 127-128. See also Avicenna's *De Anima* (Arabic text), *Being the Psychological Part of Kitāb al-Shifā'*, ed. F. Rahman (London, 1959), pp. 216-217, and the discussion of this text in Pines, "La conscience de soi," pp. 194-216; Stroumsa, "Paradise," pp. 17-18, esp. p. 17.

<sup>54</sup> *In kāna li'l-nafs baqā' ta'qilu bihā hāl al-mawjūdāt min hārij ba'd al-mawt*, Ibn al-Qifti, *Ta'riḥ al-ḥukamā'*, ed. J. Lippert (Leipzig, 1903), pp. 393-394.

earth.<sup>55</sup> To be sure, such an agreement is a *topos* in medieval literature, and Yosef ben Shimeon cannot be held responsible for Ibn al-Qifti's dreams. Nevertheless, both the agreement and the content of the dream seem to correspond to the position of Yosef ben Shimeon as it emerges from *The Silencing Epistle*. Although his opinions are those of the philosophers, he seems to yearn for a more personal immortality. The soul may join the universal whole, but it still finds a way to get in touch with its loved ones.

3. Of the three persons involved in the debate, Maimonides is the only one who fits exactly into one of the three Muslim groups—philosophers, traditionalists, and theologians. He cares little for the body, whose only reason for existing is to provide a tool for the soul. He also cares little for the soul as the vital principle of the body. Although he repeatedly uses the term "the immortality of the soul" (*baqā' al-nafs*), his aspirations focus on the immortality of the intellect. In the philosophers' language, this is referred to as the conjunction (*ittiṣāl*) of the human being with the Active Intellect. The individual, the person as a combination of body and soul, has no place in this blissful existence, for the conjunction annihilates the individuality of those who reach it. Maimonides here shares the views of Muslim philosophers, such as al-Fārābī.

There are indications that, at times, al-Fārābī and Maimonides doubted that it was possible for human beings to achieve this conjunction.<sup>56</sup> In this context, it is interesting to note Maimonides' reference to the "old wives tales" (*ḥurāfāt al-'ajā'iz*) that fill the heads of people who have pretensions to be the wise of Israel (a clear reference to the Gaon).<sup>57</sup> This is the exact expression that, according to Ibn Tufayl, was used by al-Fārābī in his lost commentary on the *Nichomachean Ethics*, where he denied the immortality of the soul.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, even if Maimonides and al-Fārābī doubted at times the possibility of intellectual conjunction, they still regarded this stage as the goal to which the philosopher must aspire.

<sup>55</sup> *Al-kullī laḥiqa bi'l-kull wa-baqiya al-juz' fī'l-juz'*, *ibid.*, p. 394.

<sup>56</sup> Sh. Pines, "The Limitations of Human Knowledge According to Al-Farabi, Ibn Bajja, and Maimonides," in Isadore Twersky, ed., *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature* (Cambridge, MA, 1979), pp. 82-109; but see Stroumsa, "Paradise," pp. 14-15.

<sup>57</sup> MTR, p. 3.

<sup>58</sup> Ibn Tufayl, *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān*, ed. Fārūq Sa'd (Beirut, *Dār al-āfāq al-Jadida*, 1980), p. 112.



As to his disciple's use of Avicenna, Maimonides clearly did not appreciate it. In his *Treatise on Resurrection* Maimonides counts Avicenna's *risālat al-ma'ād* as one of the two supposedly philosophical books cited by the Gaon. Maimonides remarks that this is not a purely philosophical book.<sup>59</sup> By this, he probably means to stress that the book was written with an eye to the needs of the masses, and not only for the trained philosopher. Although Maimonides attacks the Gaon, it seems that here, as in many other instances in the treatise, his remark is meant for his disciple.

The same may be said about Maimonides' sour remark concerning the Gaon's confusion of soul and intellect, and his sarcastic reference to the *mutakallimūn*.<sup>60</sup> Not only the Gaon, but Maimonides' own disciple as well, speaks too much of the soul and too little of the intellect. More than once in *The Silencing Epistle*, as Yosef ben Shimeon was trying to navigate his way between tradition and philosophy, he was getting dangerously close to the *kalām*. Maimonides' *Guide*, addressed explicitly to Yosef ben Shimeon, was written for exactly this kind of person: one who is perplexed because of the seemingly contradictory messages of Jewish tradition and philosophy, a person who is unsure as to the value of the *kalām*'s arguments.<sup>61</sup> *The Silencing Epistle* shows us that several years after the completion of the *Guide*, Yosef ben Shimeon was still perplexed, at least concerning the soul and its states. Maimonides' *Treatise on Resurrection* testifies to his awareness of this continuing perplexity, as well as to his bitter disappointment.<sup>62</sup>

It has been argued that Maimonides' bitter tone in the *Treatise on Resurrection* results from his resentment at having to retract his opinions.<sup>63</sup> On closer examination, however, it becomes obvious that he retracts nothing. Whereas, at first sight, Yosef ben Shimeon seems to present a more "philosophic" and less traditional position than the *Treatise on Resurrection*, in fact the opposite is true. Ben Shimeon's *Silencing Epistle* is written in an emotional outburst, and is a one-dimensional composition; it says exactly what it purports to be saying. Maimonides' *Treatise on Resurrection*, on the other hand, reiterates the

<sup>59</sup> MTR, p. 13.

<sup>60</sup> Above, n. 43.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. *Guide*, Dedicatory Epistle and Introduction (*Dalālat al-hā'irīn*, pp. 1-11).

<sup>62</sup> The uncommonly frustrated and bitter tone of MTR has already been noted by scholars. See, for instance, Hartmann, "Crisis and Leadership," pp. 248 and 263.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 246-247.

opinions of the *Guide* and is written in the same esoteric manner. Leo Strauss has argued that the *Treatise on Resurrection* is "the most authentic commentary on the *Guide*,"<sup>64</sup> and, indeed, there are many parallels between the two works.<sup>65</sup> It is in this sense that one must understand Maimonides' remark that the *Treatise on Resurrection* is only a superfluous repetition. Only a careful reading, that takes into account Maimonides' other writings as well as the other components of the debate, allows us to see his real intentions. While seeming to defend himself against the communal uproar orchestrated by the Gaon, Maimonides continues his preferred role: that of the teacher who, while watching over the well-being of the multitudes, caters for the few. His *Treatise on Resurrection*, which poses as a discussion of the body's fate, endeavors in fact to restate the supremacy of the soul, i.e., the intellect.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago and London: 1952 [rep. 1988]), p. 73.

<sup>65</sup> Both works treat similar subjects (such as the historical analysis concerning the Sabaeans, and the didactic intentions of God as expressed in history) and use similar techniques, in particular, the combination of exegetical and philosophical material.

<sup>66</sup> I wish to express my gratitude to Moshe Halbertal and Guy Stroumsa, who read a draft of this paper and offered many valuable remarks.



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## PERSONA AND SELF IN STOIC PHILOSOPHY\*

Hubert Cancik

### *Limiting the Field*

*Persona* and self, πρόσωπον and ἐαυτό, are not established, basic terms in Stoic philosophy. The *persona*, the mask or role, and the self (*sum, se, ipse*) do not emerge from religious experience, but rather grow out of biology and psychology, with borrowings from theatre and jurisprudence. I shall concentrate solely upon Stoic philosophy, and, even more specifically, on Roman Stoicism. My focus is ancient "anthropology." I would like to explore the borderline between religion and philosophy in Roman antiquity, and find the check-points where one may safely pass from one to the other.

Body and soul are main actors in Greek and Roman religion. The bodies of the gods, shaped like men and women but having special blood, eating and drinking special food, are certainly an intriguing topic. At religious festivals, dancing and gymnastics were on the program. The cults of images, or of the dead, or practices of divine *furor* (θεῖα μανία) produced rich experiences of body and soul.

In Greece and Rome, however, religion was but one segment of culture. Body, soul, and self therefore became topics in medicine as well as in biology, law, philosophy, and even grammar. These terms and concepts were not designated as central themes and developed as such within religion in the strict sense. Nor were they elaborated in a (non-philosophical) theology. For instance, theatre and masks were, to a limited degree, connected with cult, and with performances during religious festivals. Discourse about *personae*, masks, however, was not held in religion, but in the context of Stoic ethic.

Let us turn, then, to our first text.

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