The Guide and its Guide: A review essay

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The Guide to the Perplexed: A New TranslationBy Lenn E. Goodman and Phillip I. Lieberman(Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2024)Lenn E. GoodmanA Guide to the Guide to the Perplexed: A Reader's Companion to Maimonides' Masterwork(Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2024)

Statue of Rambam (Rabbi Moses ben Maimon; Maimonides) in Cordoba.

To begin with the conclusion: the new and annotated translation of The Guide to the Perplexed by Lenn E. Goodman and Phillip I. Lieberman of Vanderbilt University is a masterpiece and a tour de force.[1] This book is not to be read lightly. It needs to be studied carefully, and kept as a valuable reference.

Today's reader now has a new, readable, and elegant English translation of Rambam's Guide to the Perplexed with meticulously researched notes that will prove highly useful to all readers, and will be particularly helpful to specialists, and advanced students in their research. Rambam's Guide is a classic that continues to challenge interested, and thinking people of various intellectual, religious, and cultural backgrounds. That is the greatness of Rambam, and that is the greatness of this book which makes Rambam's thought available anew.

Before dealing with the content, a word about the title of Rambam's great philosophical work. The title of the work, both in the Arabic original—Dalalat al-?a'irin—and in the Hebrew translation—Moreh ha-Nevukhim—is in the construct case, usually rendered as The Guide of the Perplexed in English.[2] The translators deliberately used the preposition "to" rather than the customary "of" in the title.

> It is often rendered *Guide of the Perplexed*, but that attempt to mimic the syntax of the Hebrew construct case ... does not roll off the tongue in English. *Guide to the Perplexed* characterizes the intended beneficiary of the work's guidance.[3]

This is the first translation of the Guide by native English speakers, both Americans. There are two prior complete English translations. The first, by Michael Friedländer, The Guide of the Perplexed of Maimonides was annotated (based on Munk's French rendition), and was originally published in three volumes in 1881.[4] It was subsequently published without the notes in one paperback volume.[5]

Relief portrait of Maimonides in the U.S. Capitol–House of Representatives chamber (among 23 portraits of "great historical lawgivers")

Chaim Rabin published a volume of selected passages in 1952[6] to which I've rarely seen reference. The complete translation with minimal notes, but important Introductions (especially "The Philosophical Sources of the Guide of the Perplexed) by Shlomo Pines in 1963—for which he received the Israel Prize in 1968—became the standard academic reference for my generation of scholars and students. However, my English-speaking students often commented that they did not understand the Pines translation (which was literal; more on this below), whereas they were able to understand more readily the Friedländer translation, however problematical it may have been from a purely scholarly point of view. (As a paperback, it was also more affordable and convenient for students in those days). Lenn Goodman

also published selections of the Guide in his 1976 volume, Rambam: Readings in the Philosophy of Moses Maimonides.[7]

In short, the new translation makes the meaning of The Guide accessible to the contemporary reader who, like Rambam's perplexed student, is interested in philosophy, but not an expert (which is why he/she is perplexed by the apparent contradictions between philosophy and science, on the one hand, and Scripture and religious tradition on the other hand). The notes provide a huge reservoir of scholarly references, comparisons, and explanations, for those interested in, and capable of further in-depth study.[8]

Unlike the Pines translation, which is literal and may follow a syntax more natural in the Arabic original and in Samuel ibn Tibbon's classic Hebrew translation, but which can be clumsy in English, Goodman and Lieberman explicitly chose to follow Rambam's advice to Samuel ibn Tibbon.[9]

Samuel had personally been approved by Rambam towards the end of his life for the translation project. Yet he didn't follow—certainly not strictly—what Rambam advised him to do in a letter in 1199, namely to express an idea clearly, and not follow the original words, and word-order literally.[10]

> I have spelled out for you the method to apply in any translation. "A word to the wise will make them yet wiser." And if you use your wisdom, my son, it will gladden my heart ... I have one rule for you to use as a working premise: The translator who aims to render each word literally and slavishly retains the word order and sentence structure of the original will have no end of trouble, and the product will be misleading and full of problems. This is not the right method. The translator should try first to grasp the sense intended and express it clearly in the new language. That cannot be done without changing the word order, substituting several words for one, or one for several, to make the idea expressed perfectly intelligible in the language of the translation. This is what ?unayn b. Is??q did with Galen' s books, as his son Is??q did with the works of Aristotle. That is why their renderings are so clear.

Rambam's autograph. Bodleian Library

Manuscript 80 (Ms. Hunt. 80).

The six Introductions to their new translation, respectively by Goodman and Lieberman are valuable, informative, and instructive guides to the *Guide* itself, and not just to the translation. In Introduction I: "The Object of the *Guide*," Goodman clearly sees Rambam as challenging us existentially not merely a historical relic of academic interest:

> Maimonides' project in the *Guide* is a vital reminder to Jewish thinkers today who fancy they can somehow sidestep like questions raised in our own far freer, more open society if they expect Judaism to survive as more than the fossil relic Arnold Toynbee imagined it to be.[11]

Similarly, in the Preface to his *Rambam: Readings in the Philosophy of Moses Maimonides* published half a century ago, Goodman wrote:[12]

> The perplexity which Maimonides wrote … the *Guide to the Perplexed* to answer is far more widespread in our days than it was in his … Maimonides clearly never contemplated the possibility that large numbers of individuals would be exposed haphazardly and superficially to a welter of theological difficulties without being afforded any means of resolving those problems.

Lieberman's rich Introduction II: "Maimonides' World" is highly informative historical background. He comments:

> Maimonides' gaze in the *Guide* is focused on the Bible and its world … The *Guide* provides not an apology for rabbinic religion per se, but instead an explanation of how the Bible itself can lead the individual to knowledge of God and ultimately to human perfection.[13]

Introduction III: "The Story of the *Guide*," also by Lieberman, explains how the *Guide* was written and designed. One of the challenges of our understanding of Rambam was the theory—most clearly, but controversially put forward by Leo Strauss in his Introduction to the Pines translation and elsewhere—that Rambam wrote esoterically, and deliberately contradicted himself. The issue of contradictions continues to perplex students of the *Guide*.

Lieberman writes:[14]

> There is an early stratum of the *Guide* in Chapters 1-49 of Part I, with some subtle differences from the later material that shows development in Maimonides' own thought … such a shift in Maimonides' thought may be important for challenging the idea that Maimonides sought to bury in the *Guide* philosophical doctrines he held that could not be reconciled within the text … that is to say, some of these internal contradictions may be due to the fact that the *Guide* itself was composed over a long period, during which time Maimonides' own views changed.

That possibility can certainly not be discounted. However, in Rambam's Introduction to the *Guide*, discussing contradictions in books, such contradictions are of the second type (an author changing his, or her mind over time), and Rambam specifically denies this about his own book. According to Rambam's explicit statement, any "discrepancies" (in this translation; others have "inconsistencies," or "divergences") in the *Guide* are either of the fifth type (pedagogical), or seventh type (deliberate), and these are not "contradictions."[15] So shall we take Rambam at his

own word, or could this be a case of a pedagogical. or deliberate “discrepancy?”

Another problem with any discussion of the literary structure of the *Guide* is the chapter divisions, and supposed parallels, or inconsistencies between this and that chapter. However, as Samuel ibn Tibbon explicitly stated in his Preface to his Hebrew translation of the *Guide*, he and not Rambam numbered the book’s chapters:[16]

> I innovated a bit in this book, because I regarded the innovation as useful, namely to number the chapters in each of its parts, and to write its number at the top of each chapter. I already informed the Rabbi, the author of the book, of this, and I wrote him my questions according to the chapter numbers, to let him know the chapter about which I was asking, in order to relieve him of the trouble of searching for the place, and to make it easier for me as I went to lengths in writing the question. Similarly, it would make it easier for those studying this book and learning it wherever it might reach, to ask a companion near by or far away, to let him know the chapter about which he was asking. This was the great reason for my doing this.

Lieberman’s informative Introduction IV, “Translations, Reception, and Commentary” makes, *inter alia*, an interesting point about his and Goodman’s own translation, which is intended for the “modern reader.” In comparison with those of Friedländer, and Pines, he writes:

> The present translation … follows Maimonides’ own guidance to Ibn Tibbon in first trying to grasp the meaning of the subject and then stating the theme with perfect clarity in the other language … Ibn Tibbon and al-?arizi—or perhaps Pines and Friedländer—place the reader between Scylla and Charybdis. This translation was composed in the hopes of guiding the reader between the two safely.[17]

Goodman, in Introduction V: “This Translation,” further explains:[18]

> One outcome of the informality of Maimonides’ *risalah* is its intimate, conversational tone … As for the notion that each word in a text should be treated as a technical term and translated identically at every occurrence . . .it might be best to hear Maimonides’ advice from his 1199 letter to Ibn Tibbon on that score.

Then, in Introduction VI: “Navigation,” Goodman comments:

> Maimonides expects a serious reader to study his *Guide to the Perplexed* thoughtfully, to read it more than once, and to compare one chapter against another.[19]

The same can be said of this volume. In short, the new translation makes the meaning of *The Guide* accessible to the contemporary reader who like Rambam’s perplexed student is interested in philosophy, but may not be an expert (which is why he/she is perplexed by the apparent contradictions between philosophy and science on the one hand, and Scripture and religious tradition on the other hand). The notes provide a huge reservoir of scholarly references and explanations—some technical—for those interested in, and capable of further in-depth study.

The following chart (listing the page in each version), comparing a few selections from the Friedländer, Pines, and Goodman/Lieberman translations, may be useful to understanding how the new translation differs from its predecessors. What is immediately obvious is that Goodman and Lieberman, true to their word have followed Rambam’s advice about striving to present the

author's meaning without slavishly and literally following the original text. They freely change the word order, and eliminate excess verbiage that could obscure the meaning when a more concise expression might be clearer.

For the general reader, this approach undoubtedly makes the text more accessible, with the added value of the extensive notes by Goodman and Lieberman. For the specialist wishing to get an idea of Rambam's literal phrasing of a given passage, a comparison with the Pines translation may be advisable (perhaps also Friedländer here and there).[20] It is no disrespect to one translator if one wishes benefit from diverse understandings and insights of a such a richly multivalent text as the *Guide*, especially when researching a particular passage and its sources often in comparison with the works of other thinkers.

GUIDE	**Friedländer** (Note: page numbers are in the three volumes, originally separate, then published together in one volume by Hebrew Publishing Company, New York).	**Pines**	**Goodman/Lieberman**
I: Intro-duction	My primary object in this work is to explain certain words occurring in the prophetic books. Of these some are homonyms, and of their several meanings the ignorant choose the wrong ones; other terms which are employed in a figurative sense are erroneously taken by such persons in their primary signification. There are also hybrid terms, denoting things which are the same from one point of view and different from another. (4-6)	The first purpose of this Treatise is to explain the meaning of certain terms occurring in the books of prophecy. Some of these terms are equivocal; hence the ignorant attribute to them only one or some of the meanings. Others are derivative terms; hence they attribute to them only the original meaning from which the other meaning is derived… Others are amphibolous terms, so that at times they are believed to be univocal and at other times equivocal. (5)	The first aim of this work is to clarify the meaning of certain terms in Scripture. Some of these have multiple senses, but the ignorant take them only in certain of those senses: Although some are figurative, they take them only in the sense underlying the figure. Others are ambiguous, to be taken now at face value, now metaphorically. (5)
I: Intro-duction	Inconsistencies in the writings of true philosophers are traceable to the fifth cause. Contradictions occurring in most other works, and in any commentaries not previously mentioned are due to the sixth	As for the divergences occurring in the books of the philosophers, or rather of those who know the truth, they are due to the fifth cause. On the other hand, the contradictions occurring in most of the books of authors and	Discrepancies in the works of philosophers—true philosophers, that is—stem from the fifth cause. Those in the works of most authors and commentators besides those already mentioned arise from

	cause. Many examples of this class of contradictions are found in the Midrash and the Agada; hence the saying, “We must not raise questions concerning the contradictions in the Agada.” You may also notice in them contradictions due to the seventh cause. Any inconsistency discovered in the present work will be found to arise in consequence of the fifth cause or the seventh. Notice this, consider its truth, and remember it well, less you misunderstand some of the chapters in this book. (26-27)	commentators other than those we have mentioned are due to the sixth cause. Likewise in the *Midrashim* and the *Haggadah* there is to be found great contradiction due to this cause. That is why the Sages have said: *No questions should be asked about difficulties in the Haggadah*. There are also to be found therein contradictions due to the seventh cause. Divergences that are to be found in this Treatise are due to the fight cause and the seventh. Know this, grasp its true meaning, and remember it very well so as not to become perplexed by some of its chapters. (19-20)	the sixth cause. In aggadah and midrash, too, deep contradictions reflect this cause. That is why they say one must not be too strict with Aggadah. But it also contains contradictions resulting from the seventh cause. The discrepancies in the present work reflect the fifth and seventh causes. If you see this and bear it very much in mind, you will not be perplexed by certain of its chapters. (18)
I:1	The term ???, on the other hand, signifies the specific form, *viz*. that which constitutes the essence of a thing, whereby the thing is what it is; the reality of a thing in so far as it is that particular being. In man the “form” is that constituent which gives him human perception, and on account of this intellectual perception the term ??? is employed in the phrase ???? ????? ??? ???? “ In the form of God He created him.” (29-30)	The term *image*, on the other hand, is applied to the natural form, I mean to the notion in virtue of which a thing is constituted as a substance and becomes what it is. It is the true reality of the thing in so far as the latter is that particular being. In man that notion is that form which human apprehension derives. It is on account of this intellectual apprehension that it is said of man: *In the image of God created He him*. (22)	But *tselem* is said of the natural form that gives reality to a thing and makes it what it is, its essence as that thing. In the human case, this is the seat of our consciousness, the rational intellect, in virtue of which it is said of man, *In the image of God created He him*. (20)
I:2	The intellect which was granted to man as the highest endowment, was bestowed on him before his disobedience. With reference to this	For the intellect that God made overflow unto man and that is the latter’s ultimate perfection, was	Reason, shed by God on man by emanation, is indeed our highest attainment. But this Adam had before he disobeyed. That is why

gift the Bible states that "man was created in the form and likeness of God." On account of this gift of intellect man was addressed by God and received His commandments … Through the intellect man distinguishes between the true and the false. This faculty Adam possessed perfectly and completely. The right and wrong are terms employed in the science of apparent truths* (morals), not in that of necessary truths, as, *e.g.*, it is not correct to say, in reference to the proposition "the heavens are spherical," it is "right" or to declare the assertion that "the earth is flat" to be "wrong"; but we say of one it is true, of the other it is false … Thus it is the function of the intellect to discriminate between the true and the false—a distinction which is applicable to all objects of intellectual perception. When Adam was yet in a state of innocence … he was not at all able to follow or to understand those principles of apparent truths … After man's disobedience, however, when he began to give way to desires which had their source in his imagination and in the gratification of his bodily appetites, … he was punished by the loss of part of this intellectual faculty … But he received a new faculty whereby that which Adam had been provided before he disobeyed. It was because of this that it was said of him that he was created "in the image of God and in His likeness." It was likewise on account of it that he was addressed by God and given commandments … Through the intellect one distinguishes between truth and falsehood, and that was found in [Adam] in its perfection and integrity. Fine and bad, on the other hand, belong to the things generally accepted as known,* not to those cognized by the intellect. For one does not say: it is fine that heaven is spherical, and it is bad that the earth is flat; rather one says true and false … Now man in virtue of his intellect knows truth from falsehood; and this holds good for all intelligible things. Accordingly, when man was in his most perfect and excellent state … he had no faculty that was engaged in any way in the consideration of generally accepted things, and he did not apprehend them … However, when he disobeyed and inclined toward his desires of the imagination and the pleasures of his corporeal senses … he was punished by being deprived of that intellectual apprehension … becoming endowed with he was said to be in God's *image* and *likeness*—and why he could be addressed and given duties … Reason discerns true from false. Adam had it fully and flawlessly. But fair and foul are matters not of reason but of repute. We do not say that it is fine that the heavens are spherical, or foul that the earth is flat, but that this is true and that is false … By our reason we distinguish *true* from *false* with any rational question. So man, at the peak of perfection, his innate rational gifts intact, was such … He had no faculty as to conventions and no notion of such things … But once he disobeyed, following the passions stirred by his fancies and the pleasures of his bodily senses … he was punished by being stripped of that rational awareness. He broke the command given in virtue of his reason and took on a sense of convention, mired in judgments of fair and foul.

[NOTES (selected): The image of God is human reason … Adam was created perfect … In their first rude sense of propriety, Adam and Eva model the suborning of moral judgment by bias. Reason can discern moral truths, and there are indeed facts about values … But appetite, passion, and

	he found things wrong which previously he had not regarded as wrong. *[NOTE: ???????? has the same two significations as the Greek *endoxon* and the English "apparent," *viz.,* 1. clear, well-known; 2. (opposed to positively true), probable, generally believed to be true.] (36-37)	the faculty of apprehending generally accepted things, he became absorbed in judging things to be bad or fine. *[NOTE: the Arabic term *al-mashhurat*, which is used as a translation of the Greek *endoxa*.] (24-25)	conventions, led by imagination, may skew our judgments. The Eden story dramatizes a critical human failing latent in our subjecthood. We succumb to subjectivity, displacing moral truths with *mashhurat*—conventions, matters of repute.] (23-24)
I:57			
	On the attributes; remarks more recondite than the preceding. It is known that existence is an accident appertaining to all things and therefore an element superadded to their essence. This must evidently be the case as regards everything the existence of which is due to some cause; its existence is an element superadded to its essence. But as regards a being whose existence is not due to any cause—God alone is that being, for His existence, as we have said, is absolute—existence and essence are perfectly identical. (203-204) *** Then God taught to Moses how to teach them, and how to establish amongst them the belief in the existence of Himself, namely by saying ???? ??? ???? (*Ehyeh asher Ehyeh*), a name derived from the verb ??? in the	On the attributes; more obscure than what preceded. It is known that existence is an accident attaching to what exists. This is clear and necessary with regard to everything the existence of which has a cause. Hence its existence is something that is superadded to its quiddity. As for that which has no cause for its existence, there is only God, may He be magnified and glorified, who is like that. For this is the meaning of our saying about Him, may He be exalted, that His existence is necessary. Accordingly, His existence is identical with His essence and his true reality, and His essence is His existence. (132) *** Accordingly God made known to [Moses] the knowledge that he was to convey to them and through which they would acquire a true	On attributes, deeper than the last. Existence is known to be an accident of what exists. So it is distinct from the essence of a thing. This is obviously necessary for anything whose existence has a cause: its existence is distinct from its essence. But in a being that has no cause—God alone, for that is what we mean by calling Him necessarily existent—existence is His essence. His Identity and essence are His existence. (102) *** So God taught Moses what he would need to impart to convince them that God exists: *I AM THAT I AM*. This name derives from the verb to be (*h-y-h*), to exist. For *hayah* signifies existence … clearly conveying the idea that He exists but not by way of existence … thee Real that is real, the Necessarily Existent. This is what the proof

	sense of “existing,” for ??? denotes “to be” … This is, therefore, the expression of the idea that God exists, but not in the ordinary sense of the term; or, in other words, His is “the existing Being which is the existing Being,” that is to say, whose existence is absolute. The proof which he was to give consisted in demonstrating that there is a Being of absolute existence, that has never been and never will be without existence. (239)	notion of the existence of God, this knowledge being: *I am that I am*. This is a name deriving from the verb *to be [hayah]*, which signifies existence … This makes it clear that He is existent not through existence … the existent that is the existent, or the necessarily existent. This is what demonstration necessarily leads to: namely, to the view that there is a necessarily existent thing that has never ben, or ever will be, nonexistent. (154-155)	inevitably comes down to: There is a Necessary Being, one that cannot fail to exist and never will. (118-119)
I:68	You are acquainted with the well-known principle of the philosophers that God is the *intellectus*, the *ens intelligens*, and the *ens intelligible*. These three things in God are one and the same, and do not in any way constitute a plurality. (252-253)	You already know that the following dictum of the philosophers with reference to God, may He be exalted, is generally admitted: the dictum being that He is the intellect as well as the intellectually cognizing subject and the intellectually cognized object, and that those three notions form in Him, may He be exalted, one single notion in which there is no multiplicity. (163)	You know the Philosophers’ famous dictum that God is Thought, Thinker, and the Act of Thinking, the three being alike and undifferentiated in Him. (125)
II:12	It is now clear that the action of bodies upon each other according to their forms, prepares the substance for receiving the action of an incorporeal being, or Form. The existence of actions of purely incorporeal beings, in every case of change that does not originate in the mere combination of elements, is now firmly established. These actions do not depend	Accordingly it has become clear that the action of bodies upon one another, in respect of their forms, necessitates the preparation of the various kinds of matter with a view to the reception of the act of that which is not a body, these acts being the forms. Considering that the effects produced by the separate intellect are clear and manifest in	The action of bodies on one another through their forms, then, is to predispose the matter to the nonphysical influences of the forms. And since the influences of this incorporeal Intellect are plain and manifest in the world, in all that is new and does not result from the mere mingling of bodies, we know that the action of this cause cannot be by contact or at some

	on impact, or on a certain distance. They are termed “influence” (or “emanation”) on account of their similarity with a water-spring. The latter sends forth water in all directions, has no peculiar side for receiving or spending its contents; it springs forth on all sides, and continually waters both neighboring and distant places. (59)	that which exists—being everything that is produced anew, but does not result solely from the mixture of elements itself—it is necessarily known that this agent does not act either through immediate contact or at some particular distance, for it is not a body. Hence the action of the separate intellect is always designated as an overflow, being likened to a source of water that overflows in all directions and does not have one particular direction from which it draws while giving its bounty to others. For it springs forth from all directions and constantly irrigates all the directions, nearby and afar. (279)	definite distance, since it is not a body. Its nonphysical action, then, is always called the flow of emanation, likening it to a spring that flows in all directions and is drawn from no one quarter but everywhere, ever gushing forth and watering all things near and far. (211-212)
II:37	It is necessary to consider the nature of the divine influence, which enables us to think, and gives us the various degrees of intelligence. For this influence may reach a person only in a small measure, and in exactly the same proportion would then be his intellectual condition, whilst it may reach another person in such a measure that, in addition to his own perfection, he can be the means of perfection for others … In some cases the influence of the [Active] Intellect reaches only the logical and not the imaginative faculty … This is the condition of wise men or	It is fitting that your attention be aroused to the nature of that which exists in the divine overflow coming toward us, through which we have intellectual cognition and through which there is a difference of rank between our intellects. For sometimes something comes from it to a certain individual, the measure of that something being such that it renders him perfect, but has no other effect. Sometimes, on the other hand, the measure of what comes to the individual overflows from rendering him perfect toward rendering others perfect … Some of them	Nature is such, you should realize, that the divine emanation reaching us enables us to think, some better than others. For it may flow more fully to one person than another. To one it may suffice for his enlightenment alone. But elsewhere, it might spill over beyond what that person’s perfection requires and promote that of others. Some grow enlightened enough to govern … If, for want of fullness in the flow or for lack of native imagination, this intellectual emanation reaches only the intellect, leaving the imagination untouched and without spillover from the mind, this is the

	philosophers (179)	achieve perfection to an extent that enables them to govern others … After this, you should know that the case in which the intellectual overflow overflows only toward the rational faculty and does not overflow at all toward the imaginative faculty … is characteristic of the class of men of science engaged in speculation. (373-374)	plane of scholars. (297-298)
III:54	The ancient and the modern philosophers have shown that man can acquire four kinds of perfection. The first kind, the lowest, in the acquisition of which people spend their days, is perfection as regards property … The second kind is more closely related to man's body than the first. It includes the perfection of the shape, constitution, and form of man's body … The third kind of perfection is more closely connected with man himself than the second perfection. It includes moral perfection; the highest degree of excellency in man's character … The fourth kind of perfection is the true perfection of man; the possession of the highest intellectual faculties; the possession of such notions which lead to true metaphysical opinions as regards God. With this perfection man has obtained his final object; it gives him true human perfection; it remains to him alone; it gives him immortality, and on its	The ancient and the modern philosophers have made it clear that the perfections to be found in man consist of four species. The first and the most defective, but with a view to which the people of the earth spend their lives, is the perfection of possessions … The second species has a greater connection than the first with the individual's self, being the perfection of the bodily constitution and shape … The third species is a perfection that to a greater extent than the second species subsists in the individual's self. This is the perfection of the moral virtues … The fourth species is the true human perfection; it consists in the acquisition of the rational virtues—I refer to the conception of intelligibles, which teach true opinions concerning the divine things. This is in true reality the ultimate end; this is what gives the individual true perfection, a perfection belonging to him alone;	Philosophers ancient and modern distinguish four sorts of human attainment. The first and least of them, to which most people on earth devote their lives, is material … The second sort of attainment, closer to the self, is bodily health and fitness … The third type graces one personally more than the second. This attainment is moral, perfecting the virtues of character in oneself … The fourth kind is the truly human attainment, winning the intellectual virtues, the conceptual thinking that yields sound views of divinity. That is our highest goal; truly perfecting the self, an attainment indeed one's own, winning immortality by fulfilling in oneself what makes a human *human* … The human attainment rightly gloried in, clearly, is to reach, so far as one can, an awareness of God and His care for His creatures, giving them being and ruling them as He does. One who wins such awareness will ever show grace,

account he is called man … The perfection, in which man can truly glory, is attained by him when he has acquired—as far as this is possible for man—the knowledge of God, the knowledge of His providence, and of the manner in which it influences His creatures in their production and continued existence. Having acquired this knowledge he will then be determined always to seek loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness, and thus to imitate the ways of God. We have explained this many times in this treatise. (300-305)	and it gives him permanent perdurance; through it man is man … It is clear that the perfection of man that may truly be glorified in is the one acquired by him who has achieved, in a measure corresponding to his capacity, apprehension of Him, may He be exalted, and who knows His providence extending over His creatures as manifested in the act of bringing them into being, and in their governance as it is. The way of life of such an individual, after he has achieved this apprehension, will always have in view *loving-kindness*, *righteousness*, and *judgment*, through assimilation to His actions, just as we have explained several times in this Treatise. 634-638)	justice, and righteousness in life, emulating God's acts, as I have explained more than once in this work. (530-534)

Lenn Goodman's companion volume, *A Guide to the Guide to the Perplexed: A Reader's Companion to Maimonides' Masterpiece* (known in short as "G2G"),[21] is deliberately written in a readable—albeit elegant—style. It is rich in detail, providing not only useful historical, and interesting background information, but also emphasizing Rambam's continuing challenges to thinking people today.

Chapter I, "Setting the Scene" surveys Rambam's background, including Arabic translations of Greek philosophy, science, and medicine, and traces his early biography in Spain and Morocco. In Chapter II, "Learning," Goodman typically goes beyond mere information of Rambam's thought in comparison with, and contrast to various philosophical and theological views, and uses Rambam as a jumping-off point for us as well.[22]

> It's all too easy to confuse critical thinking with skepticism and take negativity for skepticism's yield, rather than suspension of judgment and a call for deeper inquiry. Too often overlooked is the home truth that the highest criticism is self-criticism. One might deny either side of a disjunction. So doubt has an affirmative as well as negative face. Maimonides' stance … was not to try to suspend all beliefs that can be doubted, as Descartes would one day propose in his effort to give inquiry a fresh start, but to weigh the problems clinging to all sides of a seeming dilemma—of creation, say, or the suffering of innocents—and then choose the view least burdened with difficulties … Conviction still needs arguments—but to urge one to keep listening and searching.

Continuing through Chapter III: “Cairo,” to Chapter IV: “A New Life” leading up to Rambam’s death in 1204, Goodman writes:[23]

> Maimonides was buried initially in Fustat, but his wish … was to be buried in Tiberias, and tradition has it that he was. A dignified modern monument marks the site. His works are his true monument.[24]

A personal note: when I first visited Tiberias as a student at the Hebrew University following the Six Day War in 1967, the centuries-old cemetery—including Rambam’s grave (at least according to tradition)—was simple without any marble markers or structures. Its simplicity was its elegance. In recent years, a rather fancy structure has been erected over the site with expensive marble, an embroidered velvet cloth over the grave, and wooden seats and tables for those who wish to pray, or study. Only at most a few of Rambam’s books of *halakhah* may be found on the bookshelves, but not his *Guide to the Perplexed*! As I used to tell my students: Whoever has studied the *Guide* would not pray at Rambam’s grave, and those who pray at his grave have not read the *Guide*.

Chapter V: “Believing” takes on the problem of Rambam’s views on bodily resurrection (*te?iyat ha-metim*), which is listed as the 13th of his famous “Thirteen Principles,” (or “Thirteen Foundations”) in his commentary to the Mishnah, Sanhedrin Ch. 10 (called *Pereq ?eleq*, “the chapter of the portion [in the world to come]). Goodman forthrightly comments:[25] “Textually and contextually, it is clear that Maimonides disowns bodily resurrection.” Or, as Daniel Jeremy Silver put it, “Maimonides affirmed even as he squirmed.”[26] It’s a complex problem, given Rambam’s need to respond to harsh criticism in his “Treatise on Resurrection,” and Goodman—once again typically—expands the question to a discussion of “beliefs necessary for social order” (as opposed to “true opinions”) for the masses,[27] in comparison with Rambam’s Andalusian contemporary Ibn Rushd (Averroes).

Goodman also makes the interesting observation here about the “Thirteen Principles” that “the universalism of Maimonides’ listing makes it a doxastic counterpart to the seven Noa?ide commandments” required for “a portion in the world to come” (*?eleq la-`olam ha-ba*).[28]

Chapter VI: “Defining Issues” presents a beautifully written discussion of problems that Rambam faced (as do we) of “the cognitive dissonance between received tradition and what reason may seem to teach.”[29] “Faith subverts itself when in turns to credulity.”[30]

In Chapter VII: Problematics” Goodman moves to more purely philosophical problems including the distinction between natural and logical necessity, and what one can predicate of God.[31] Goodman’s excellent and eloquent interpretation of Rambam’s treatment of the Garden of Eden story in *Guide* 1:2 makes the story not a record of an event, but of the human condition (although this is not to be confused with the notion of “original sin”). As for Rambam’s differentiating judgments of “true/false” from “good/bad,” (or desirable/undesirable) Goodman rejects the view of Pines as he puts it that reduces moral judgment to mere convention.[32]

> If there is moral knowledge, then its purview is of moral facts … Reason, God’s image within us, accesses truths—including moral truths … What Maimonides sees in the Torah’s story of the Garden is not a fall from reason and fact to mere value judgment, but our all-too human penchant to let personal (or social) preferences, masquerading as moral truths, take God-given reason’s place.

Chapter VIII: “Esoteric Style,” and Chapter IX: “Not Philosophy” take on, and I think effectively

refute the dogmatic and unwarranted theory of Leo Strauss that Maimonides, “as an adherent of the Law … cannot possibly be a philosopher, and consequently a book of his in which he explains his views … cannot possibly be a philosophic book,”[33] and cannot deal with metaphysics.

To the contrary:

> Consider its account of Moses’ theophany at the burning bush, where God calls himself I AM and charges him to tell Israel’s elders that His name is I AM THAT I AM. There is no more metaphysical sentence than that in the Torah—and no more metaphysical reading of it than Maimonides proposed.[34]

Continuing his opposition to what Strauss proposed, in Ch. 10: “Breadcrumbs” Goodman asks why, if Strauss is correct did Rambam spend years on his (Arabic) Commentary to the Mishnah and (Hebrew) encyclopedic Code calling the torah “the best law?”

Finally, in his Conclusion: “The *Guide* Today,” Goodman shares with us his own *ani ma’amin* (credo), based on what he learns from Rambam.

> The laws of nature still reveal evidence of wisdom in the workings of the cosmos. And the conatus of things, their drive for persistence and expression, reveals an insistent searching for perfection … A revised Aristotelian/Spinozistic teleology and a new Maimonidean theism could join hands.[35]

In an earlier passage, Goodman had already stated the case for Rambam’s continued significance and relevance:[36]

> The crisis was acute in Maimonides’ time, like its counterpart today … Aristotelianism, owners of the most cogent system of reasoning and science known in Maimonides’ day, called creation demonstrably untrue. Muslims, whose hands held both the sword of state and the purse of high office, denied that Moses was God’s consummate prophet. Christians had long dismissed Jewish ritual laws as onerous and otiose. Biblical miracles, to the scientifically informed, seemed arbitrary and unaccountable disruptions of the natural order. So the seas were no less choppy then than now. Nature is where we live, even if heaven funds our interpretation and illuminates our hopes. But it is at the interface of heaven and earth that Maimonides finds the questions that give pause to a religious reader who has studied the sciences and philosophy.

As mentioned above, in Goodman’s presentation of Rambam, the “Great Eagle” (*Ha-Nesher Ha-Gadol*, as Rambam is called), the study of his *Guide* is not merely of historical and disinterested academic interest. With all the differences in in our accumulated scientific knowledge over the more than 800 years since the *Guide* was written, it is of existential value in guiding us with a method—how to think, and perhaps even how to believe.

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[1] Due disclosure. Shlomo Pines was my teacher at Hebrew University for a number of years when I was an undergraduate and then graduate student, and subsequently for some years in weekly study sessions at the Jewish National Library, together with a number of other young university lecturers. Lenn Goodman has been a colleague and friend going back more than four decades.
[2] Similarly, the annotated French translation by Salomon Munk (Paris, 1856-1866) is titled *Le Guide des Égarés*.
[3] Goodman, Introduction VI, p. lxxvi.

[4] New York: Hebrew Publication Society, 1953
[5] New York: Dover Publications, 1956.
[6] Chaim Rabin, *Maimonides: The Guide of the Perplexed* (London: East and West Library, 1952).
[7] Rambam: Readings in the Philosophy of Moses Maimonides, in the "Jewish Heritage Classics" of the B'nai B'rith Commission on Adult Jewish Education (New York: Viking Press, 1976.
[8] However, whereas the text is accessible to the contemporary reader who is educated, but not necessarily a specialist, the notes are scholarly and sometimes technical, and the average reader, or undergraduate student may not always understand them readily. For example: In Part I:46, on p. 74, note 197, we find: "We know the effects of God's governance. We have no access to His ipseity." The term "ipseity" cannot be found in the Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, although it is found in the *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* not found in many homes, but presumably still available in libraries. (The *Wiktionary*, often referred to by a generation which doesn't like using books, and resorts to a computer-click, has "selfhood; individual identity," which won't prove helpful here). On the other hand, in *Guide* I:52, p. 87 where Rambam says "A definition may be predicated of a subject, as a man is called the rational animal. Such predicates, signifying the essence, or 'whatness' of a thing …" the authors add note 237: "Aristotle defines *ousia*, essence as the 'what it is for a thing to be.' In an important sense then the essence (or form) of a thing is what it is, its substance, what makes it what it is." The term "essence" for the Arabic *mahiyah* and Hebrew: *mahut* (in note 237) is far more readily understood by the modern reader than is "ipseity" (in note 197). Or if one wishes to avoid the term "essence," one could translate the Arabic and Hebrew literally as "whatness" as does Israel Efros, explaining "that by virtue of which a thing is what it is." (*Philosophical Terms in the Moreh Nebukim* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1924), pp. 68-69.
[9] A street in Jerusalem, near my home, named after Judah, Samuel, and Moses ibn Tibbon, three generations of philosophers and translators from Arabic to Hebrew in 12-13th century France.
[10] "Letter to Samuel ibn Tibbon Concerning the Translation of the *Guide*" in In *Iggerot Ha-Rambam* ("Letters and Essays of Moses Maimonides"), Hebrew translation from Arabic by Isaac Shailat (Maaleh Adumim: Maaliyot Press, 5748/1988). Vol. 2, Page 532; English translation by Goodman, "Introduction V: This Translation," pp. lxxiv-lxxv.
[11] Goodman, Introduction I, p. xviii.
[12] Goodman, *Rambam:* Readings in the Philosophy of Moses Maimonides, pp. ix-x.
[13] Lieberman, Introduction II, p. xxxv.
[14] Lieberman, Introduction III, p. xli.
[15] In Rambam's own words in this translation:
Discrepancies in the works of philosophers—true philosophers, that is—stem from the fifth cause … Those in the works of most authors and commentators besides those already mentioned arise from the sixth cause. In aggadah and midrash, too, deep contradictions reflect this cause. That is why they say one must not be too strict with Aggadah. But it also contains contradictions resulting from the seventh cause. The discrepancies in the present work reflect the fifth and seventh causes. If you see this and bear it very much in mind, you will not be perplexed by certain of its chapters. (p. 18)
See the discussion of this issue in my *Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2009), pp. 424-427, and in Marvin Fox, "Maimonides' Method of Contradictions: A New View" in his *Interpreting Maimonides: Studies in Methodology, Metaphysics and Moral Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 67-90.
[16] My translation. See my "The Garden of Eden: On the Chapter Divisions and Literary Structure of the *Guide of the Perplexed*" in my *Jewish Philosophy: Foundations and Extensions: Volume Two* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2008), pp. 65-78. The quote is on p. 67. Lieberman in note 104 refers to this.
[17] Lieberman, Introduction IV, p. lx.
[18] Goodman, Introduction V, pp. lxxiv-lxxv.
[19] Goodman, Introduction VI, p. lxxvi.
[20] Similarly, Hebrew readers today have a choice of the medieval translations of Samuel ibn Tibbon, Judah al-?arizi, and Shem Tov ibn Falaquera's translation of those passages on which he commented in his *Moreh Ha-Moreh* ("*Guide to the Guide*"), and contemporary Herew translations of the *Guide* by Yosef Kafi?, Michael Schwarz, Hillel Gershuni, and Yehuda ibn Shmuel's revision of Ibn Tibbon.
[21] The title "*Guide to the Guide*" is an English equivalent of one of the first commentaries on Rambam's book, *Moreh Ha-Moreh* by Shem Tov ibn Falaquera in the 13th century. Falaquera's commentary includes his own translation from the Arabic original of passages he discusses, often in comparison with passages from Arab philosophers, and includes his corrections of errors he found in Samuel ibn Tibbon's translation (which he regarded as far more reliable than the looser, and more literary translation by Judah al-?arizi). On Falaquera and his commentary, see *my Torah and Sophia: The Life and Thought of Shem Tov ibn Falaquera* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press,1988) and the complete annotated and critical edition of *Moreh Ha-Moreh* by Yair Shiffman (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Students, 2001).
[22] Goodman, *A Guide to the Guide to the Perplexed*, p. 39.
[23] Goodman, *ibid*, p. 71.
[24] Goodman, in note 13 (p. 226) cites Rambam's *Mishneh Torah* (Code), Laws of Mourning 4:4 (based on Jerusalem Talmud Sheqalim 2:2) that the true tombstone of the righteous should not be a grave marker, but their deeds.
[25] Goodman, *ibid*, p. 78.
[26] Daniel Jeremy Silver, *Maimonidean Criticism and the Maimonidean Controversy* 1180-1240 (Leiden: Brill, 1965), p. 116.
[27] Cf. *Guide* 3:28. These beliefs must be affirmed for the welfare of the state/society in contrast with "true (or: correct) beliefs," which lead to ultimate human perfection.
[28] Goodman, *op. cit*., p. 78.
[29]] Goodman, *ibid*, p. 105.
[30] Goodman, *ibid*, p. 195.
[31] Goodman, *ibid*, p. 129 raises the question of how to read some of Rambam's inconsistent, or apparently inconsistent views. Referring to the "lexicon" of anthropomorphic terms in the first part of the *Guide*, Goodman suggests that the "lexicon … prepares us for the apophasis to come." Like the term "ipseity" discussed above (note 8), the technical term "apophasis" is not likely to be understood by non-specialist readers, certainly not by undergraduate students who could benefit greatly from this book. The term is not found in *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary,* nor even in *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, although it is found in the *Oxford English Dictionary* and in the *Random House Dictionary of the English Language: Second Edition Unabridged*.
[32] Goodman, *ibid*, p. 136.
[33] Goodman, *ibid*, p. 175.
[34] Goodman, *ibid*, p. 181. The discussion of the burning bush story is found in *Guide* 1:63.
[35] Goodman, *ibid*, pp. 210-211.
[36] Goodman, *ibid*, p. 114.

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