

Al-Harizi's Translation of *Guide of the Perplexed* 2.25 and the Philosophical Implications for the Question of Creation

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Abstract: This article focuses on the various translations of an important chapter regarding the question of creation in Maimonides's Guide 2.25. I will try to explain the differences between the original Judeo-Arabic text and the R. Ibn Tibbon translation on the one hand, and the Al-Harizi translation and the Latin translation on the other hand, and account for some of the differences of interpretation. The first part of the article will describe the original meaning of the chapter and the internal tension between the different arguments that Maimonides explores. These internal tensions and contradictions can be interpreted as an indication that Maimonides was hiding his true esoteric eternalist opinion. In the second part of the article, I will analyze Al-Harizi's translation and show that he made the text more coherent and more supportive of the creationist interpretation of Maimonides.

I Introduction

From medieval times until today, one of the major questions of the interpretation of Maimonides's *Guide of the Perplexed* is the question of God's creation of the universe.¹ This is a very important question because the answer impacts on a number of major topics within Maimonides's philosophy, such as divine providence, miracles, and the relation between revelation and philosophy. Moreover, scholarly analysis of the development of Maimonides's opinions through his different writings and, in particular, the correct way to read the *Guide of the Perplexed* depend on whether Maimonides's true opinion is that of creation *ex nihilo* or one of the variants of the opinion that espouses the eternity of the universe. Without going deep into this question, we can summarize by explaining that in the literal meaning of the *Guide*, Maimonides devoted Part 2, Chapters 14–31 to arguments against the Aristotelian proof for eternity and in favor of the possibility and probability of creation. However, close to half of both his medieval and modern readers

¹ On the medieval debate on this question, see for example the different commentaries of R. Josef Ibn Kaspi and R. Moses of Narbonne (supporters of the eternity of the world) and R. Isaac Abrabanel (supporter of the creation). For a summary of this debate in the medieval period and in modern research see Lemler (2015). There is also a very good bibliography (for research before 1994) by Dienstag (1994), 247–267.

conclude that creation is only the exoteric position of Maimonides, and that the careful reader can see that his esoteric opinion actually favors eternity.²

For the medieval readers of Maimonides, this debate exists exclusively for the readers of the Hebrew translation by R. Samuel ibn Tibbon³ or the Judeo-Arabic original.⁴ By contrast, none of the medieval readers of the Latin translation⁵ or its source, namely the Hebrew translation by Al-Harizi, even supposed that it is possible to interpret Maimonides as a proponent of eternity. Indeed, one of the most prominent utilizations of Maimonides by Christian scholastics is as one of the main defenders of the belief in creation *ex nihilo*.

In this article I will try to explain that the differences between the original Judeo-Arabic text and the R. Ibn Tibbon translation on the one hand, versus the Al-Harizi translation and the Latin translation on the other hand, account for some of these disagreements of interpretation.⁶ This article focuses on the various translations of a very important chapter for the question of creation: *Guide* 2.25.⁷ The first part of the article will describe the original meaning of the chapter and the internal tension between the different arguments that Maimonides explores in the chapter.⁸ These internal tensions and contradictions can be interpreted as an indication that Maimonides was hiding his true esoteric eternalist opinion. In the second part of the article, I will analyze Al-Harizi's translation and show that he made the text of this chapter more coherent and more supportive of the creationist interpretation of Maimonides.

² On the question of an esoteric vs. exoteric reading of Maimonides, there is ample scholarly literature, for example: Strauss (1952), 38–94; Fox (1990), 67–90; Hyman (1998), 19–29; Davis (2011). Davidson (2005), 387–402; Klein-Braslavy (1996); Schwartz (2001), 68–111; Lorberbaum (2002), 95–134; Kreisel (2008), 487–507.

³ On the personal opinion of R. Ibn Tibbon on this question and the influence of his opinions see Fraenkel (2007); Fraenkel (2009).

On the translation project of Ibn Tibbon's family see Harvey (2003); on the different medieval translations of the *Guide* and their differences see Shiffman (1999).

⁴ On the case of a reader of the Judeo-Arabic original who adheres to the eternity opinion see Sadik (forthcoming).

⁵ On the Latin translation of the *Guide* see Schwartz (2019). Schwartz provides a very good summary of the extant research on the author of the translation, and then ventures an argument in favor of the translation having been done in Paris by a Jewish apostate. On this translation see also Di (2016). She argues in favor of a Spanish translation. Scheindlin (2019); Rigo (2019), 81–139. On the influence of Maimonides on Latin medieval philosophy see for example Hasselhoff (2004); Dahan (2004); Schwartz (2002); Wohlman (1988). This book deals mainly with questions related to the creation of the world.

⁶ On other changes in the Al-Harizi translation compared to the original or to the R. Ibn Tibbon translation see Sadik (2016). I do not argue that the textual changes between Al-Harizi and the original are the only reason for the differences in readings. Maimonides's significance and the tradition of esotericism constitute noteworthy elements of consideration. However, in this article I will focus on the textual changes that are not sufficiently taken into consideration by the scholarly community.

⁷ There is also a different translation of some of the chapters on the creation, especially chapter 2.21. For a summary of the different explanations of this subject see Lemler (2015).

⁸ We will see that the difference between the translations is in the first half of the chapter. We will quote the first half of the chapter and discuss the entire chapter, because it is important to see that Al-Harizi makes the chapter more coherent than in the original Judeo-Arabic and R. Ibn-Tibbon's translation.

2 *Guide* 2.25.

The 25th chapter of Part 2 of the *Guide* is a key chapter that summarizes the opinion of Maimonides on creation. In this chapter, Maimonides explores the different reasons that convince him to hold a creationist opinion. However, some of the major medieval and modern commentators have shown that Maimonides inserted several internal contradictions into the chapter,⁹ the aim of which were to suggest to the careful reader of the *Guide* that Maimonides does not truly agree with his exoteric position (creation), and actually adheres to an esoteric and quite opposite opinion (i.e., eternity).

In order to substantiate this alternative and arguably radical understanding of Maimonides, we need to carefully review both the original text as well as departures from the original that crept into the editions by translators who would seem to have had an agenda underlying the decisions they made while translating the more difficult phrases and passages in Maimonides. It should be noted here that in order to make this paper widely accessible, the closest, most literal English translation available—that of Shlomo Pines (1963)—will be used in lieu of the actual original Judeo-Arabic text of *Guide* 2.25, which for those with a background in Judeo-Arabic is provided in the appendix, alongside the non-English translations under discussion. It should also be noted that several relatively minor revisions have been incorporated into the English translation to ensure maximum fidelity to the Judeo-Arabic.

I.¹⁰ Know that our shunning the affirmation of the eternity of the world is not due to a text figuring in the Torah according to which the world has been created.¹¹ For the texts indicating that the world has been created¹² are not more numerous than those indicating that the deity is a body. Nor are the gates of figurative interpretation shut in our faces or impossible of access to us regarding the subject of the creation of the world.¹³ For we could interpret them as figurative, as we have done when denying His corporality. Perhaps this would even be much easier to do: we should be very well able to give a figurative interpretation of those texts and to affirm as true the eternity of the world, just as we have given a figurative interpretation of those other texts and have denied that He, may He be exalted, is a body.

II. Two causes are responsible for our not doing this and¹⁴ believing it. One of them is as follows. That the deity is not a body has been demonstrated; from this it

⁹ The internal contradictions are essentially at the beginning of the chapter. Another argument of these commentators is that the end of the chapter contradicts other part of the *Guide* and the other philosophical writings of Maimonides.

¹⁰ The Roman numeral here is my addition. The use of this additional enumeration will help us in the further explanation of the text. I also use these Roman numerals in the table in the appendix.

¹¹ In Pines's translation, instead of "created" he has "produced in time". However, the Judeo-Arabic does not mention time at all, but only creation מַחְדִּיתָא. On this point the translation of Michael Friedlaender is superior.

¹² See note II.

¹³ See above.

¹⁴ "or" in Pines translation, אוּלַּי in the original.

follows necessarily that everything that in its external meaning disagrees with this demonstration must be interpreted figuratively, for it is known that such texts are of necessity fit for figurative interpretation. However, the eternity of the world has not been demonstrated. Consequently in this case the text ought not to be rejected and figuratively interpreted in order to make prevail an opinion whose contrary can be made to prevail by means of various sorts of argument. This is one cause.

III. The second cause is as follows. Our belief that the deity is not a body destroys for us none of the foundations of the Law and does not give the lie to the claims of any prophet. The only objection to it is constituted by the fact that the ignorant think that this belief is contrary to the text; yet it is not contrary to it, as we have explained, but is intended by the text.¹⁵ On the other hand, the belief in eternity the way Aristotle sees it – that is, the belief according to which the world exists in virtue of necessity, that no nature changes at all, and that the customary course of events cannot be modified with regard to anything – destroys the Law in its principle, necessarily gives the lie to every miracle, and reduces to inanity all the hopes and threats that the Law has held out, unless – by God! – one interprets the miracles figuratively also, as was done by the Islamic esotericists;¹⁶ this, however, would result in some sort of crazy imaginings.

In the continuation of the chapter, Maimonides assumed that if the belief in creation accords with the opinion of Plato, i.e., creation from an eternal prime matter, that all the principles of the Torah will become admissible. However, we do not have to interpret the Bible according to this opinion because it has not been demonstrated. Maimonides also explains that the belief in creation resolves a lot of questions regarding the Law, such as: Why did God give prophetic revelation to a specific prophet? Why did God give the Law to this specific nation? Why did He legislate at this particular time? Why did God give this specific commandment? And what is God's aim in giving the Law? Maimonides argues that if the world is created not by necessity, we can answer that we cannot understand God's will and wisdom. We cannot understand how and why He created the world at this specific time and also cannot understand the other questions. We can only say that God's wisdom and will are superior to our understanding. Maimonides asserts that any explanations that rely on a rejection of creation inherently destroy the simple meaning of many basic scriptural passages, rendering the Law irrelevant.

One of the major arguments of the supporters of an esoteric interpretation of Maimonides as a secret follower of eternity is that Maimonides himself answered all these

¹⁵ Maimonides devoted the majority of the first part of the Guide to interpreting biblical texts for which the literal meaning renders God corporeal. On the style of Maimonides's biblical interpretation see M. Z. Cohen (2011).

¹⁶ In the original translation, Pines chose the translation of 'internalist' to reflect the original Arabic sense of interpreting the inner, esoteric meaning of the sacred text. However, this literal translation can lead to some confusion given that the same term is used to describe a perspective in psychology that attributes human motivation to internal rather than external factors. To avoid this confusion, I have modified the translation to 'esotericists'.

questions in a naturalistic way in the continuation of the *Guide* and in his legal writings.¹⁷ According to these commentators, Maimonides preferred to offer exoterically a clear support for the external meaning of the Law because of the political and pedagogical importance of this meaning. However, the esoteric meaning of the *Guide*, and Maimonides other writings, is completely naturalist.

We can summarize the arguments of Maimonides in the beginning of the chapter in three different passages (numbered I-III):

I. Maimonides asserts that his opposition to the opinion of eternity is not at all due to the explicit texts in the Bible that indeed contradict the notion of an eternally existing universe. This rather surprising position is forced by his sense of intellectual honesty: As one with a keen capacity to interpret the biblical text figuratively when the needs of philosophy warrant such an interpretation, with the prime example being that of the biblical text's ostensible support for God's corporality—a notion that even the most literal of sages nevertheless rejected outright.¹⁸ Maimonides strengthens this observation by pointing out that the passages (probably in the hundreds) whose literal meaning attributes corporeality to God are at least as common as those that speak of creation *ex nihilo*. Thus one could legitimately reject the creation of the universe, at least as easily as the corporeality of God is rejected.

II. Maimonides said that there are two reasons for the differences between figurative interpretations of God's corporality as opposed to the belief in the eternity of the world.

The first reason is that the non-corporality of God is demonstrable, while the eternity of the world is not demonstrable. A demonstrative proof¹⁹ is completely true and certain. In the case of a demonstration, the biblical text must be interpreted according to the demonstrated truth. By contrast, in the case of a dialectical proof, the truth is not one hundred percent certain, but only more or less probable. In these cases we do not have to interpret the literal meaning of the biblical text according to such less-than-certain opinions. We can justifiably continue to adhere to the literal meaning of the text.²⁰

¹⁷ For example, the explanation of giving prophecy to a specific prophet is explained in *Guide* 2.32–40. On this subject see Kreisel (2001), 148–315. The reason of giving the Law to a specific nation is explained in Law of Idolatry I. On this subject see Kellner (1991). On the specific commandments and the aim of the Law see *Guide* 3.26–49. For this kind of esoteric reading see the commentaries of R. Moses of Narbonne and R. Josef Ibn Kaspi on chapter 2.25.

¹⁸ Maimonides explains that Moses has to describe God as a corporal entity because of the low level of understanding of the people of Israel when they came out of Egypt (Law of the foundation of the Torah I: 26).

¹⁹ These differences come from Aristotle Topics I. Maimonides exposes these differences in his Treaty of Logic chapter 8. On the relation of Maimonides to dialectic see Sadik (2021).

²⁰ Maimonides dedicated *Guide* 2.13–31 to arguing that Aristotle failed in demonstrating the eternity of the world, and that the opinion of creation is more plausible. In 2.23 Maimonides specifically explains how people should relate to cases of two (or more) non-demonstrated contrary opinions. In the beginning of the chapter, he explains how to determine the objectively superior of the two plausible opinions. Maimonides cautions against being influenced by education and preconceived notions in favor of deciding based solely on determining which opinion is better supported by scientific and logical arguments. However, at the end of the chapter, Maimonides explains that regarding the question of eternity vs. creation, we must concede to the authority of the Bible if the argument boils down to Aristotle's Sabeian stories versus those of Moses and

III. The second reason is that belief in God's incorporeality does not at all undermine the foundations of the Torah. Only the ignorant are bothered by the abandonment of the literal, corporal sense of the relevant biblical texts. By contrast, belief in the Aristotelian cosmology, which posits the eternity and immutability of the universe and its laws, indeed destroys the principles and foundations of the Torah inasmuch as such constraints essentially force God to act only by necessity while rendering true miracles impossible. Only one particular type of Islamic philosophers interpreted their sacred text like in this fashion, and Maimonides judged their conclusions to be delusional.

Examining the claims above, we can see that there are some apparent contradictions between the first two passages when compared to the third passage (and indeed the remaining half of 2.25 not being examined in this paper). According to passages I and II, Maimonides rejects eternity because there are no demonstrated proofs for this opinion. According to this argument, in the case of a demonstrated proof for eternity being discovered, Maimonides would then be able to interpret the Bible in a way that accords with eternity. According to this argument, even if eternity is true, the Torah continues to be true and therefore should be interpreted according to the demonstrated truth (eternity).

By contrast, according to III (and the remainder of the chapter) the reason for the rejection of eternity is that eternity goes against the Torah's principles and foundations. According to this argument, the foundations of the Torah are by definition correct, with no recourse for philosophical proof, such that if any of the foundations of the Bible should be proven false, the whole religion is ipso facto negated or, at the very least, reduced to foolishness like the interpretations of the Muslim esoterics.²¹

The two reasons for rejecting eternity come from completely different opinions regarding the relation between philosophy and revealed religion. According to the first reason, the truth of religion is dependent on having a sufficient philosophical demonstration. According to the second, the truth of religion exists unto itself, and can be either in accordance or in opposition to philosophical demonstration. These internal contradictions, according to the supporters of eternity, are planted in the text in order to suggest the existence of an esoteric level of meaning (i.e., eternity) to the careful reader who notices these kinds of contradictions between the philosophical consequences of the different reasons.

Now we will see how the translation of Al-Harizi and the Latin version of his translation alter passages I and II, and make them accord with passage III. By contrast, R. Ibn Tibbon translated the entire chapter according to the philosophical meaning of the

Abraham. The contradiction between the affirmation of objectivity and rejection of learned assumptions throughout the chapter and the acceptance of biblical authority at the chapter's conclusion is an example of an internal contradiction in the *Guide*. According to the supporters of eternity, the careful reader must acknowledge this contradiction and understand that Maimonides is opening up the possibility of an esoteric opinion (eternity of the universe) which differs from the literal meaning of the *Guide* on this point.

²¹ The fact that Maimonides does not give any explanation of the problem with these Muslim esotericisms and only calls them crazy, can also be interpreted as a suggestion that the only argument against them is rhetorical and not actually Maimonides's true position vis a vis their non-literal view of miracles.

original Judeo-Arabic (see the table in the appendix comparing the original text with the various medieval translations).

3 The Al-Harizi translation

I. דע כי לא נברח מהאמין בקדמות העולם בעבור מה שמצאנו בתורה כי העולם הוא נברא כי אין הפסוקים אשר יורו על בריאת העולם וחידושו יותר מן הפסוקים אשר יורו כי יש לבורא גוף. ואין שערי הסברה גם כן נעולים בפנינו ולא מנועים ממנו בענין חידוש העולם, אבל היינו יכולים לסבור בו כמו מעשינו בהרחקת הגשמות, ואולי זה יותר נקל, והיינו יכולים יכולת גמורה לפרש אלה הפסוקים ולקיים אמנות קדמות העולם, כמו שפרשנו הפסוקים והרחקנו היות הבורא גוף.²²

This passage is in principle very close to the original. There is one difference that may seem small, but actually carries some significance, and this is in the translation of the word²³ תאויל, which is ‘figurative interpretation’ in the earlier cited English translation of Pines,²⁴ and פרוש in the Hebrew translation of R. Ibn Tibbon).²⁵ But Al-Harizi here translates this word twice (emphasized in the text) using words from the root ס-ב-ר, which has more of a sense of logical inference or opinion than figurative interpretation.²⁶ The significance of this difference lies in the fact that while in the original Judeo-Arabic and Ibn-Tibbon’s translation, these phrases speak solely of the possibility of interpretation of the Bible according to eternity, by contrast, in the translation of Al-Harizi, the possibility of choosing creation over eternity is reopened. Specifically, the sentence דע כי לא נברח מהאמין בקדמות העולם בענין חידוש העולם can be translated: “Likewise, nor are the gates of opinion-forming²⁷ locked before us or inaccessible to us regarding the subject of the creation of the universe.” This statement can reasonably be interpreted as saying that it is scientific and philosophical assertions that should be open to reassessment, and not clear assertions found in the bible. Thus, it would seem that for

²² Al-Harizi translation, p. 494 [emphases added]. I will use the (problematic) edition of the translation by Shayer (Jerusalem 1953). I also compare the edition with the manuscript PARIS BN 682. On the textual problems of Al-Harizi transmission see Rigo (2019), 85–92. The medieval Latin translation is as follows:

Scito quod non fugimus credere antiquitatem mundi propter illa que reperimus in lege scilicet quod mundus est creatus. Versus etenim qui demonstrant creationem mundi et eius novitatem non sunt plures illis versibus qui demonstrant quod Creator est corporeus neque porte opinionis sunt clause coram nobis nec a nobis prohibite in ratione antiquitatis mundi sed possemus arbitrari aliquid in hoc sicut fecimus in remotione corporeitatis a Creatore et forte levius esset istud. Habemus etiam potentiam magnam ad exponendum versus istos et ad confirmandam credulitatem in antiquitate mundi sicut exposuimus alios versus et removimus a Creatore corporeitatem.

(Special thanks to Diana Di Segni of the University of Cologne, who so generously provided me an unpublished version of her critical edition of the medieval Latin translation of the *Guide*.)

²³ On the meaning of תאויל and its translation see Cohen (2011), especially pp. 455–481.

²⁴ In the second quotation of it תאויל is translated only as “interpreted”, and not as “figurative interpretation” like the first instance of תאויל.

²⁵ The second תאויל is translated as לפרשם and the third as לפרש.

²⁶ לסבור and סברה. The third and fourth time this root occur in this passage נתאויל and תאוילא, Al-Harizi translate it as לפרש and שפרשנו. These last translations are similar to the translation of R. Ibn Tibbon.

²⁷ I have chosen this as the translation of סברה out of a desire to stay close to the Latin translation *opinionis* found throughout the chapter for words with the root ס-ב-ר, and despite their being arguably more elegant translations, such as ‘conjecture’ or ‘logic’.

al-Harizi, the evolution of philosophical opinions does not evolve from the literal sense of creation to the esoteric possibility of eternity, but from the traditional Aristotelian scientific opinion of eternity to a new scientific opinion of creation.

The possibility of interpreting the biblical text according to eternity exists also in Al-Harizi's translation in the last sentence of the passage, in this case because the translation of the words נתואל and תאולנא as לפרש and שפרשנו matches the translation by R. Ibn Tibbon.²⁸ It is important to emphasize that Al-Harizi decided to use two different translations of the word תאויל in the same passage. In this chapter he translated תאויל five times as סברה and four times as פירוש. It is possible to argue that Al-Harizi changed the translation only for esthetic purposes. However, the fact that he chose to use each of these Hebrew words in a way that makes the passage more traditional and cancelled the possibility of esoteric-naturalist interpretation, most probably demonstrates his own understanding of Maimonides.²⁹

The Latin translation of the first תאויל: “neque porte opinionis sunt clause coram nobis nec a nobis prohibite in ratione antiquitatis mundi” is exactly the same as the Hebrew of Al-Harizi. This phrase shows the possibility of changing one's philosophical opinion from creation to eternity. The second תאויל (לסבור in the translation of Al-Harizi) is translated in Latin as “arbitrari”. The meaning of the phrase is that the interpreter can decide in favor of creation like the decision in favor of the incorporeality of God.³⁰

We can summarize that the first passage in the original and in R. Ibn Tibbon's translation speaks only of the possibility of interpreting the Bible according to eternity. By contrast, the translation of Al-Harizi and its Latin translation speak of this possibility and of the possibility of changing the scientific or philosophical opinion from eternity to creation.

This tendency towards changes will be considerably more blatant in the next passage of Al-Harizi's translation:

II. ואולם מנעונו מעשות זאת ומהאמין בו שתי סיבות. האחת מהם – כי הבורא אינו גוף ובא על זה מופת, ויתחייב על כל פנים, לסבור כל מה שהוא פשוטו הפך המופת בסברה נכונה, ולדעת כי יש לו פרוש על כל פנים. וקדמות העולם לא בא עליו מופת, ועל כן אין ראוי לדחות הפסוקים ולסבור בהם כדי להכריע דעת אשר אפשר להכריע הפכה במיני ההכרעות וזאת סיבה אחת.³¹

The major difference between the translation of Al-Harizi and the original (and R. Ibn Tibbon's translation) is in the second sentence לסבור כל מה שהוא פשוטו, From this it follows necessarily that we must always think

²⁸ The phrase אבל היינו יכולים לסבור בו כמו מעשינו בהרחקת הגשמות can be interpreted as the possibility of thinking against corporality. The meaning of this phrase will be that we can have philosophical or scientific opinion that are in accord with the truth like the opinion of the non-corporality of God.

²⁹ In another article I analyzed all Al-Harizi translations of תאויל and maintain that he chooses between סברה (64 times) and פירוש (19 times) also for philosophical reasons.

³⁰ This meaning is very close to the meaning of the parallel phrase in the Hebrew of Al-Harizi.

³¹ Al-Harizi translation, pp. 494–495.

[according to] the [Bible's] literal sense, [even if it is] the opposite of the demonstrated truth [attained] via correct thinking.³²

In the original Judeo-Arabic (and R. Ibn Tibbon translation) the meaning of this sentence is that we must interpret the biblical text according to a philosophical or scientific demonstration in all cases. The demonstration is totally true and the biblical text is subject to diverse interpretations. For this reason, we must interpret the text according to the demonstration. By contrast, the translation of Al-Harizi says the contrary. Al-Harizi wrote that in all cases, even in the case of a demonstrated truth, we must go after the literal meaning of the biblical text.³³ This modification transforms completely the meaning of the first reason. According to the original text by Maimonides, the difference is that God's incorporeality is demonstrated while eternity is not. In the Al-Harizi translation, the cause of the difference is that the literal interpretation of the Bible affirms creation and not divine corporeality. Al-Harizi also wrote that eternity is not demonstrated, but in his translation it is not the main point of the passage because of the sentence that explains that in all cases we have to accept the textual sense of the Bible, even against a demonstrated truth.

The Latin translation follows the text of Al-Harizi very closely apart from one sentence after the major transformation of Passage II by Al-Harizi. We can see in this table the difference between Al-Harizi and the Latin translation of his Hebrew text:

Latin

et ut sciamus quod indigent expositione
omnibus modis.

Al-Harizi

ולדעת כי יש לו פרוש על כל פנים.

In the text of Al-Harizi this sentence is very close to the original (and R. Ibn Tibbon's translation). However, the meaning of the sentence is very different due to the modification which we will now explicate. In the original, the meaning is that we can interpret the biblical text according to demonstrated truths. In the text of Al-Harizi, the interpretation (פירוש) is not of the biblical text but of the demonstrated truth. We are essentially forced to interpret the demonstrated truth differently because we have committed ourselves to believing in the literal meaning of scripture.

³² The parenthetical additions are my own and have been added to make the somewhat unclear Hebrew original more coherent.

³³ This translation can create some problems with the rest of the chapter because it is clear also in Al-Harizi's translation that Maimonides interprets the Bible against God's corporeality. The probable answer of Al-Harizi will be that the literal sense of the Bible does not actually include God's corporeality. Al-Harizi would probably identify the literal sense (פשט) of the Bible with the fundamentals of the Torah mentioned in the next two passages.

The words בטברה נכונה "according to the correct opinion/logic" can be interpreted in two different ways that do not influence the general meaning of the chapter: 1. The correct opinion describes the opinion of the people: We have to think true and accepted ideas found in the literal sense against philosophical demonstration. 2. The correct opinion describes philosophical demonstration: We have to accept the literal sense of the Bible even against a good and perfect philosophical demonstration which is based on current logic (but which is really just an opinion).

The Latin translation goes deeper in the same direction and adds that interpretation is needed—that we need to interpret the demonstrated truth according to the biblical text.³⁴

We can summarize this important modification: In the original text of Maimonides, biblical scripture has to be interpreted according to every belief that is backed by a philosophical demonstration. In Al-Harizi's translation, we must continue to believe in the literal meaning of the Bible even against a demonstrated truth. Moreover, in the Latin text, if the ostensibly demonstrated truth negates the plain meaning (planum/פשוט) of the Bible, we must interpret the demonstrated truth according to the literal meaning of the Bible.³⁵

Al-Harizi's translation of the third passage is very close to the original (or R. Ibn Tibbon's translation) inasmuch as the minor differences³⁶ do not involve philosophical variations. In fact, we can assert that the modification in the two first passages was done to ensure that these passages are in consonance with the third passage (and the end of the chapter).

4 Conclusion

The differences found in several phrases translated by Al-Harizi at the beginning of his translation of chapter 2.25 have some important philosophical implications. In the original (and R. Ibn Tibbon's Hebrew translation), Maimonides asserts that there are two reasons for his rejection of Aristotle's opinion on eternity: 1. Aristotle did not properly demonstrate his opinions; and 2. The belief in eternity goes against the principles of the Torah. These two different arguments can contradict one another in the case of a proper demonstration of the eternity of the universe. In addition, both arguments come from completely different approaches to Torah and philosophy. This contradiction can be interpreted as an indication of an esoteric meaning of Maimonide's text. By contrast, Al-Harizi's translation, and its Latin version, made some major alternations to the text in order to create agreement between the two first passages and the continuation of the chapter. According to this understanding, the fact that Aristotle failed to demonstrate eternity becomes less important in the whole argument because in any case the obligation

³⁴ In the original this word is תאוילא. The major difference between the different translations in this chapter come mainly from the different translation of the words from the root תאויל in the original.

³⁵ Another minor change between Al-Harizi and his Latin translation is the moving of the words סברה נכונה "opinione recta" to the beginning of the sentence. In the Latin text these words describe the true opinion of the people that continue to believe in the textual sense of the bible against the demonstration. We see before that it is also a possible understanding of Al-Harizi. The other possibility is that these words describe the demonstration (a good demonstration). The Latin translation cancel this last possibility by placing these word in the beginning of the sentence. This cancelation is necessary because the definition of the demonstration that go against the biblical text is incorrect.

³⁶ One of these differences is that the original תתאויל (תאויל in R. Ibn Tibbon translation) is translated by Al-Harizi as two words of the same root: יסברו סברות. The Latin translation translate these two words in the two ways that we see before to translate the Hebrew words of the root סבר: "excogitaverunt opinions". I think that this change has no philosophical implication.

to continue to believe according to the literal interpretation of the biblical text remains firm, even in the face of erstwhile philosophical demonstrations to the contrary.

These changes made by Al-Harizi is probably one of the reasons that the Hebraic readers of Al-Harizi and its Latin version do not see any possibility of interpreting Maimonides as a supporter of eternity. These readers also understand Maimonides as a provider of rational proofs to support the literal meaning of the Bible, which he accepted as true, even without rational proof. These kinds of differences have to be remembered by the researchers of the medieval period and should convince them to analyze the beliefs of medieval authors via the texts they actually used, and not through the technically superior, but often less historically adequate modern editions of these works.

Appendix: Comparison of the different translations and the original

Latin translation	Al-Harizi	R. Samuel Ibn Tibbon	Original Judeo-Arabic
I. Scito quod non fugimus credere antiquitatem mundi propter illa que reperimus in lege scilicet quod mundus est creatus. Versus etenim qui demonstrant creationem mundi et eius novitatem non sunt plures illis versibus qui demonstrant quod Creator est corporeus neque porteur opinionis sunt clause coram nobis nec a nobis prohibite in ratione antiquitatis mundi sed possemus arbitrari aliquid in hoc sicut fecimus in remotione corporeitatis a Creatore et forte levius esset istud. Habemus etiam potentiam magnam ad exponendum versus istos et ad confirmandam credulitatem in antiquitate mundi sicut exposuimus alios versus et removimus a Creatore corporeitatem.	דע כי לא נברח מהאמין בקדמות העולם בעבור מה שמצאנו בתורה כי העולם הוא נברא כי אין הפסוקים אשר יורו על בריאת העולם וחידושו יותר מן הפסוקים אשר יורו כי שי לבורא גוף. ואין שערי הסברה גם כן נעולים בפנינו ולא מנועים ממנו בענין חידוש העולם, אבל היינו יכולים לסבור בו כמו מעשינו בהרחקת הגשמות, ואולי זה יותר נקל, והיינו יכולים יכולת גמורה לפרש אלה הפסוקים ולקיים אמונת קדמות העולם, כמו שפרשנו הפסוקים והרחקנו היות הבורא גוף	דע כי אין בריחתנו מן המאמר בקדמות העולם מפני הכתובים אשר באו בתורה בהיות העולם מחודש - כי אין הכתובים המורים על חידוש העולם יותר מן הכתובים המורים על היות האלוה גשם; ולא שערי הפרוש סתומים בפנינו ולא נמנעים לנו בענין חידוש העולם אבל היה אפשר לנו לפרשם כמו שעשינו בהרחקת הגשמות; ואולי זה היה יותר קל הרבה והיינו יכולים יותר לפרש הפסוקים ההם ולהעמיד קדמות העולם כמו שפרשנו הכתובים והרחקנו היותו ית' גשם	אעלם, אן ליס הרבנא מן אלקול בקדם אלעאלם מן אג'ל אלנץ אלד'י ג'א פי אלתורה בכון אלעאלם מחדת'א, לאן ליסת אלנצוץ אלת'י תדל עלי מחדת' אלעאלם באכת'ר מן אלנצוץ אלת'י תדל עלי כון אלאלאה ג'סמא, ולא אבואב אלתאויל איצ'א מסודה פי וג'והנא ולא ממתנעה עלינא פי אמר חדות' אלעאלם, בל כאן ימכנא תאויל ד'לך כמא פעלנא פי נפי אלתג'סים, ולעל הדיא כאן אסהל בכת'ר, וכנא קאדרין אעט'ס קדרה אן נתאויל תלך אלנצוץ ונת'בת קדם אלעאלם כמא תאויל אלנצוץ ונפינא כונה תעאלי ג'סמא

II. Sed due cause prohibuerunt nos facere istud et credere hoc. Quarum una est quod Creator non est corpus et hoc demonstratum est. Et sequitur de necessitate ut cogitemus cogitatione et opinione recta super omnibus quorum planum est contrarium predictae demonstrationi et ut sciamus quod indigent expositione omnibus modis.

Super antiquitate vero mundi non fuit inventa demonstratio et idcirco non est necesse ut versus in quibus de hoc fit mentio trahantur ad illam opinionem nec arbitrarii in illis preponderationem opinionis cuius contrariam possibile est preponderare illi per modos preponderationis et hec est una causa

III. Causa vero secunda est quia cum crediderimus quod Creator non est corpus, ista fides

ואולם מנעונו מעשות זאת ומהאמין בו שתי סיבות. האחת מהם – כי הבורא אינו גוף ובא על זה מופת, ויתחייב על כל פנים, לסבור כל מה שהוא פשוטו הפך המופת בסברה נכונה, ולדעת כי יש לו פרוש על כל פנים. וקדמות העולם לא בא עליו מופת, ועל כן אין ראוי לדחות הפסוקים ולסבור בהם כדי להכריע דעת אשר אפשר להכריע הפכה במיני ההכרעות וזאת סיבה אחת.

והסיבה השנייה – כי כשנאמין כי אין לבורא גוף ולא יהרוס דבר מעיקר התורה ולא יכזב דבר כל נביא, ואין

ואמנם הביאונו שלא לעשות זה ושלא נאמינהו – שתי סיבות. האחת מהם – שהיות האלוה בלתי גוף התבאר במופת ויתחייב בהכרח שיפורש כל מה שיחלוק על פשוטו המופת ויודע שיש לו פרוש בהכרח; וקדמות העולם לא התבאר במופת ואין צריך שיודחו הכתובים ויפורשו מפני הכרעת דעת שאפשר להכריע סותרו בפנים מן ההכרעות; וזה – סיבה אחת.

והסיבה השנית – כי האמיננו שהאלוה בלתי גשם לא יסתור לנו דבר מיסודי התורה ולא יכזיב מאמר כל

ואנמא ג'עלנא לא נפעל ד'לך ולא נעתקדה סבבאן, אחדהמא אן כון אלאלאה ליס בג'סם תברהן, פילזם באלצ'רורה או יתאול כל מא יכ'אלף ט'אהרה אלברהאן ויעלם אן לה תאולא צ'רורה, וקדם אלעאלם לם יתברהן, פלא ינבגי אן תדפע אלנצוץ ותתאול מן אג'ל תרג'יח ראי ימכן אן ירג'ח נקיצה בצ'רוב מן אלתרג'יחאת, פהד'א סבב ואחד.

ואלסבב אלתי'אני אן אעתקאדנא אן אלאלאה ליס בג'סם לא יחד לנא שיא מן קואעד אלשריעה ולא

non destruit aliquam de principalitatibus legis neque contradicit verbis alicuius prophete nec est in hoc aliquod inconveniens nisi quia dicunt insipientes quod est contrarium Scripture. Sed non est ita. Immo est conveniens Scripture sicut ostendimus. Credulitas autem antiquitatis mundi secundum sententiam Aristotelis que est per viam necessitatis et quod eius natura non mutatur omnino, nec aliquid recedit a consuetudine sua. Ista inquam opinio destruit fundamenta legis et negat omnia signa et miracula et contradicit eis et tollit omnia, que promisit lex vel a quibus prohibuit, nisi forte excogitaverunt opiniones super signis et mirabilibus sicut fecerunt quidam de sapientibus Mauro-rum et tunc pervenietur ad aliquam stultam viam.

בו אלא מה שיחיבוהו הסכלים כי הוא הפך הכתוב – ואינו הפכו, אבל, הוא כפי הכתוב! אך אמונת קדמות העולם על הדעת אשר יראה אריסטו כי הוא על צד חיוב ולא ישתנה טבעו כלל ולא יצא דבר ממנהגו – הוא הורס יסודי התורה ומכחיש ומכזב לכל הנסים והנפלאות, ומבטל לכל מה שהבטיחה התורה בו או שהפחידה ממנו – ל**בד אם יסברו סברות** על הנסים והנפלאות כמו שעשו אנשי הסתר מחכמי הישמעאלים – ויהיה אז יוצא לדרך מדרכי השיגעון.

נביא ואין בו אלא מה שיחשבו הפתאים שבזה כנגד הכתוב – ואינו כנגדו כמו שבארנו אבל הוא כונת הכתוב! אבל אמונת הקדמות על הצד אשר יראה אותו אריסטו שהוא על צד החיוב ולא ישתנה טבע כלל ולא יצא דבר חוץ ממנהגו – הנה היא סותרת הדת מעיקרה ומכזבת לכל אות בהכרח ומבטלת כל מה שתייחל בו התורה או תפחיד ממנו – האלוקים אלא יפורשו האותות גם כן כמו שעשו בעלי התוך מן הישמעאלים ויצאו בזה למין מן ההזיה.

יכדיב דעוי כל נבי, וליס פיה אלא מא יזעם אלג'האל אן פי ד'לך כ'לאף אלנץ, וליס הו כ'לאפה כמא בינא, בל הו קצד אלנץ פאמא אעתקאד אלקדם עלי אלוג'ה אלד'י יראה ארסטו אנה עלי ג'ה'ה' אללזום ולא תתגיר טביעה אצלא ולא יכ'רג' שי ען מעתאדה פאנה האד ללשריעה באצלהא, ומכד'ב לכל מעג'ז צ'רורה, ותעטיל כל מא רג'ת בה אלשריעה או כ'זפת מנה. אלהם אלא אן תתאול אלמעג'זאת איצ'א כמא פעל אהל אלבאטן מן אלאסלאם, פיכ'רג' פי ד'לך לצ'רב מן אלהד'יאן.

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