1

Knowledge and Power

> Modern man is the historical prolongation of medieval man who still survives within him. Our life is the second power of the superimposed medieval life.[1]
>
> —José Gaos

The need to live perpetually under the protection of a foreign entity has always been a characteristic of the Jewish people in the Diaspora. The life of its communities has always depended on the laws of those regimes and their territorial protection. As a consequence, the Jewish quarters have always had to rely on the law of the land and its authorities in order to survive. Lacking weapons, an army, and sovereignty, the tradition of Jewish public life intensely reveals the influences of their hosts.

However, their presence within empires and kingdoms of widely differing conditions had impregnated them with public substances that they frequently transferred to their sister communities.[2] We are dealing here with *aljamas*[3] or *calls* (communities) or, in some cases, mere Jewish neighborhoods embedded in very different cultures. This, then, was how the task of political cross-pollination began that had far-reaching consequences for the construction of Europe.

It was not unusual for those rabbis who emigrated to other lands to bring with them their customs and to sometimes show their lack of understanding toward local practices, resulting in friction with Jews in their adopted countries. This is the reason Rabbi Simon ben Zemah Duran (1361–1444)[4] gave for revoking a decision by another Spanish rabbi in Algeria: "The rabbi's inhibition is due to the fact that in Christian countries whence we hail no such custom exists, and consequently, it was difficult for the rabbi to regard as permissible a matter for which he had found no precedent."[5]

It was in the midst of this Diaspora that the life of Moses Maimonides, or Rambam (1138–1204),[6] an important thinker for southern Europe, transpired. As a prominent member of the Sephardic minority, he represents medieval thought at its highest point.[7] Nevertheless, as a teacher, Rambam had many adversaries within Judaism who considered his ideas to be extremely rationalistic. Others felt that he was a danger to the integrity of the Jewish faith and a threat to the preservation of its people.

In spite of all this, Maimonides attempted to synthesize a rich tradition of thought, while at the same time he tried to make it comprehensible to those who were living in a very different time, one of major transformations.

He did this from the standpoint of a man who was assaulted on all sides to convert. Because of the situation of the Jewish community, always in the minority, ill-adapted to, and in the midst of two great empires, Moses had the task of sustaining his identity in the face of great demands and pressure for him to convert. In this respect, it was a world not very far from our own time.

His personal life is an example of the situation in which his own coreligionists found themselves in general: always on the brink of leaving, looking for safer lands, or fleeing from persecution, and always tempted to renounce their convictions for a more profitable faith. Maimonides represented a minority that was forced to live under difficult conditions, both civil and political, and under which the easiest choice would have been to convert. Sometimes it was simply the only outlet to use in order to save one's life.

Moreover, there is an additional aspect to his work. Judaism is also vulnerable to the plague of false messiahs who appear from time to time to put an end to the long wait of its people. They bring with them the hope of redemption for Israel's woes and the promise of independence. This would be the omnipotent attainment of what, in another context, the romantics of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries would call *the final solution*.

But the essence of Judaism lies precisely in the renunciation of omnipotence, in other words, of the magical solutions to life's hardships. Therefore, in order to keep the faith alive and preserve the Jewish people, it is necessary to avoid falling into the trap of those false messiahs. Centuries before the birth of Maimonides many of those so-called messiahs had caused problems for the communities and their rabbis. Some were hotheads, others demented, and others simply opportunists. But in every one of these cases, there was always a sizeable number of Jews who were tempted to believe that freedom had come at last, that finally a political and religious leader had appeared who would deliver them from so much humiliation and so many postponements.

When these false hopes were shown to be hoaxes, the consequence was discouragement. Many young people became disoriented when faced with three disparate attractions: the country in which they had grown up and that they saw as their home, those leaders who frequently seduced them into believing in miraculous solutions, and the strict interpreters of Judaic law who, in the face of such dangers for their identity, locked themselves up tighter in their ritual orthodoxy.

Maimonides arose out of the shadows as a key figure in science, an eminent scholar and rabbi, and a famous physician. The purpose of his work was to furnish his coreligionists with a guide to cope with so much confusion. His study of the texts of the Torah and the Talmud will serve him to give an account of a tradition of thought (*halakhah*)[8] and its significance for the twelfth century. His education in al-Andalus (Córdoba and Lucena) and his knowledge, by way of his Andalusian teachers of the Greek and Judaic traditions, will prepare him for a new understanding of the city, public life, and religion. Such notables as Rabbi Isaac Alfasi, the first compiler of *halakhah* in Sepharad,[9] Rabbi Joseph Levita ibn Míguez, principal of the Academy of Lucena; Joseph ibn Zadik; and his own father, Rabbi Maimon, a judge from Córdoba, influenced his early education, in addition to the lessons of Rabbi Solomon ibn Gabirol's Platonism, Rabbi Abraham ibn Daud's Aristotelianism, and the mathematics and astronomy of Rabbi Abraham bar Hiyya of Barcelona.[10]

The European Chessboard

Greek influence can easily be seen in the Sephardic tradition. Rambam probably received it by way of Mediterranean cultural and commercial centers. The Greek schools did not die out with the Cynics, Skeptics, or Epicureans, as young Western students were traditionally taught, but rather continued their activity until the fifth century CE. Their work spread from Athens to Alexandria, one of the most brilliant cities in this tradition,[11] as well as Constantinople, the capital of Greek-speaking Europe. Thus, a figure such as Themistius, the great fourth-century teacher of Greek philosophy, was, for Maimonides, well known and esteemed, something that was unthinkable in Latin-speaking Europe. The rupture of the tradition of the Greek schools which, in the West, was the consequence of the confrontation between the two Europes—Greek and Latin—had no effect on the North African Jewish tradition. Jewish science, by way of its active community in Alexandria, cultivated that knowledge and passed it along to future generations. It is

enough to recall the extremely important figure of Philo of Alexandria (25BCE?–50CE) to understand the scope of this transmission. In like manner, the wealth of the Muslim culture and economy would take up all this knowledge and transmit it to medieval Andalusia.

Today the complete vision of those two Europes enables us to see what was hidden in the past, such as the Crusades against Byzantium or the importance of Venice as a hinge of luxury between both worlds. The commercial, fluvial, maritime, and overland routes were the fundamental arteries for the growth of European culture.

Jewish understanding of the reality of Europe enables us to understand that constant struggle between Greek and Latin Europe, in which the latter was ultimately more predatory and efficient in its expansion than the Orthodox model. This animosity between the two Europes explains why Greek culture had to find other, more circuitous ways of making inroads into the West. To a certain extent the rise of Christian scholasticism would attempt to reply to the "Greco-Arabic tidal wave"[12] that was perceived as a veritable menace. The great transfusion of Greek to Latin, already anticipated in the fourteenth century, occurred in 1453 with the fall of Constantinople to the Turks. European Greece was definitively left behind in the fifteenth century. It was time for the Renaissance to begin.

During the medieval period prior to the eleventh century, the culture inherited from the Greek schools found its way through the Mediterranean by slipping in between Christianity and Islam, the two empires of the period. The Jewish minority played an essential role in the preservation and development of European culture by serving as the transmitter of this knowledge. It performed an important function in the cross-pollination of the urban cultures of the West. Jerusalem was the symbol of this Mediterranean contribution, which, together with the Greek world, made up the foundations of our civilization. Later on, Leo Strauss would theorize about this in the twentieth century.

Curiously, Maimonides' biography moves inversely to this expansion. It goes from western Andalusia to the Middle East and the birthplace of Mediterranean civilization. Obviously it is an approximation to Jerusalem, the source of knowledge of his people. This movement is not unusual, especially within Sephardic culture. Nahmanides (1194–1270),[13] himself, another great figure in thirteenth-century Jewish thought, would end up at the age of seventy-three as a refugee in Akko and Jerusalem after his exile from Catalonia in 1267.

It is important to analyze the essential differences between the public life as practiced by Jewish tradition and that of the Christian world, or so-

called Christianity, in which Westerners do not usually include the Greek world. From a Western point of view, Orthodox culture is considered to be archaic and too hieratic.

We have seldom paid tribute to a world like Byzantium, obviously more learned and more developed commercially and culturally. We are indebted to it for introducing the fork, so we do not have to eat with our hands,[14] the habit of daily bathing, and the code of Justinian (483–565),[15] the great regulator of maritime life in the world that Byzantium contributed to the civilized world. From it would also come the tradition of noteworthy schools of philosophy that, in spite of the fact that they were no longer interesting to the West, would continue to be taught to generations of important thinkers and politicians. However, it is shocking that Western political engineering does not study the Byzantine Empire more thoroughly, if only as an example of efficiency and endurance.[16]

The rise of a tradition that extended from Alexandria, Aleppo, Tunis, Crete, Venice, Naples, Palermo, Siracusa, and Fez to Córdoba, speaks of an invaluable commercial, religious, and maritime world. This was how a great accumulation of philosophical, astronomical, mathematical, medical, botanical, and historical knowledge passed from Constantinople to Western Europe.[17]

Greek culture has come down to us in part from the Jewish circles that lived in these cities, Islamic or Christian, and continued to maintain its science and knowledge in spite of always being in danger of persecution or expulsion.

This was a minority that never had an independent political organization or an army of its own, and it always had to rely on the legal capacity and security provided by its countries of adoption. These human groups were also confronted with another danger—that of assimilation—a perennial fear of the people of Israel, established within monarchies that were very bellicose and often dogmatic. Forced to live as a minority in situations of harrowing civil clashes between Christians or headlong confrontations of mutual conquest between two religions of enormous transcendence, their mere survival was extremely difficult.

Education in Sephardic Culture

Maimonides was born in Córdoba in 1138 into a Jewish community that lived under a regime governed by changing versions of Islam, which gradually became more rigid. At the same time, his city was very close to the

border with the Christian world, which was equally belligerent. This Christian society was more backward economically and endowed with fewer comforts, and religious orthodoxy was about to impose itself on its inhabitants.

After the Almohad persecution of 1148, he had to emigrate with his family to other cities in Hispaniae. Although it is known that many Jewish families went to Saragossa, there is no record of where his family ended up. They may have gone to Almería, a prosperous city at that time. Around 1159 the family crossed over to Fez, where they resided until 1165.[18] From there, again because of religious persecution, Maimonides went to the Holy Land and finally to Egypt, where it is known that he settled down and worked for many years as a physician at the court of Saladin (Salah al-Din). He died in Fustat, a district of Cairo, in 1204.

Maimonides was always concerned that young people might become converted or *assimilated* for convenience, either because of ignorance or the need to become integrated in society. When Maimonides was thirteen he began a pilgrimage between the interstices of the two great powers, a situation that must have put him in a rather uncomfortable position. Those were influential years filled with unforgettable experiences.

The Sephardic or Hispanic world represented a substantial part of medieval Judaism. Specifically, the period between 900 and 1200 is considered to be the "Golden Age of Spanish Jewry."[19] It was this tradition that preserved elements relevant for political theory.

The first element is their view of education as an individual matter. In this sense, it does not seem probable that Maimonides intended for his works to merely regularize and systematize the knowledge of the Jewish religion. It is true that his *Mishneh Torah* made him an excellent codifier of *halakhah*,[20] that tradition of discourse and law that gives political and moral substance to the people of Israel and is the artifice of the recovery and protection of the identity of Judaism. His work, however, is not merely a compilation, but it is also a profound and learned review of its opportune meaning for the times in which he lived.

His knowledge of philosophy includes those Greek texts that he received from his teachers in Córdoba. But he also takes up the wisdom of Hebrew tradition regarding the public life of the *kehillah* or *cahal*, the *aljama,* or Jewish quarter.[21]

The world in which he was educated consisted, on the one hand, of Muslim scholars who had studied the Platonic and Aristotelian tradition and, on the other, of his Jewish teachers at Lucena who were undoubtedly familiar with these sources. Lucena had an important Jewish community,

and its intellectual activity was of the highest level. It was also the seat of the famous school founded by Rabbi Isaac Alfasi.

We should point out that if in his medical knowledge there are echoes of the Mediterranean culture of several religions, the same is true of his philosophical knowledge. This is not the case with the Roman tradition, which in any case may have reached him by way of his contacts with the Ashkenazic schools and those Christian centers in Toledo, Catalonia, and Provence.

While it is true that his works were widely read and discussed,[22] it is also true that some of his books were sometimes rejected and even burned[23] in those places where he had strong adversaries. Rambam undoubtedly had fierce enemies within the Sephardic community. His most important contender must have been Jonah Gerondi,[24] a cousin of Nahmanides, who devoted his writings to attacks on the *Guide of the Perplexed* (*Moreh Nevukim*) and was instrumental in convincing several Christian communities to burn this book. But when later on the attack extended to other important Jewish books such as the Talmud itself, Jonah Gerondi recanted and adopted a position of repentance and respect for the teacher from Córdoba that lasted for many years. In a letter to Rabbi Hillel of Verona,[25] a devotee of Maimonides, he expressed his contrition for his earlier views.

Nahmanides himself, an admirer of the Cordoban and a follower of his teachings, had expressed his confusion over the proposals put forth in the *Guide*: "We were therefore surprised by Maimonides, who detracts from the miraculous, and accentuates naturalism."[26]

In 1232, at the height of the tension, Nahmanides exhorts the rabbis of Castile and Aragon to unite in support of the cause of Solomon ben Abraham of Montpellier. This venerable and prestigious Talmud scholar had already raised his voice several years earlier against Maimonides' work, specifically his code, the *Mishneh Torah*: "I became exercised to protect Israel and its sanctities . . . when I saw that belief in bodily resurrection was being lost in this land among many of his dispersed peoples . . . even before the book which perplexes the guides (*Guide of the Perplexed*) had reached here, part of the nation had rebellious ideas about faith in the Creator."[27]

The translation of the *Guide of the Perplexed* from Arabic to Hebrew had far-reaching and prolonged repercussions. It provoked a crisis—whose echoes can still be heard even today!—in Jewish communities under Christian domination by opening the doors to the knowledge of Aristotle and Averroes (1126–1198).[28] As a consequence, a very controversial Averroist current appeared among those Jews. It sparked a fierce polemic between the

supporters of philosophy and others who were adherents of rabbinical tradition.[29] A third element in discord—the kabbalah—arose in the thirteenth century. In this sense, Gerona was an important center in the gestation of the kabbalah.[30]

Why did Maimonides present such a menace to Jewish tradition? Why was he so dangerous for the Jewish citizens of Western Europe?

Rambam wrote his *Guide* in Arabic perhaps because he feared that his work would not be properly understood. He wrote it in Arabic with Hebrew characters (*aljamiado*) and instructed his copyists to transcribe it only in those letters.[31]

It should be emphasized that Maimonides was more debated and attacked for his work in Christian Europe than in Muslim lands.[32] One of the reasons might be the different relationship between Judaism and Islam in contrast to the relationship Judaism has always had with Christianity. Contrary to the Christians, Muslims never held that the Jews had tortured and killed their founder.[33] Mohammad died of natural causes; therefore, there was no reason for "propheticide."[34] It is enough to read any reference by Maimonides to Jesus of Nazareth to understand the depth of this animosity and the difficult solution to this clash between them:

> Jesus the Nazarene, may his bones be ground to dust. He was a Jew because his mother was a Jewess although his father was a Gentile. For in accordance with the principle of our law, a child born of a Jewess although his father was a Gentile, or of a Jewess and a slave, is legitimate (Yevamot 45a). Jesus is only figuratively termed an illegitimate child. He impelled people to believe that he was a prophet sent by God to clarify perplexities in the Torah, and that he was the Messiah that was predicted by each and every seer. He interpreted the Torah and its precepts in such a fashion as to lead to their total annulment, to the abolition of all its commandments and to the violation of its prohibitions. The sages, of blessed memory, having become aware of his plans before his reputation spread among our people, meted out fitting punishment to him.[35]

The Jewish rejection of the Christian world (the successors of Edom or Esau) is especially virulent, since the origin of the exile of the Jewish people is attributed to it. In the words of Bahya ben Asher, a preacher, exegete, and judge of Saragossa at the end of the thirteenth and beginning

of the fourteenth centuries: "It is well known that, although we live dispersed and oppressed in their lands [both Islamic and Christian], the origin of our exile lies with Edom, *those who eat the flesh of the pig*, for he expelled us and destroyed our Temple."[36]

On the contrary, the welcome given to the Sephardim from Spain after the 1391 crisis is proof of the swift integration of the Jews into the Muslim kingdoms of North Africa. Rabbi Simon Duran speaks of the case of Algeria in his *responsa*.[37] The Sephardic emigrants arrived in a country that was "backward, underdeveloped, uncivilized,"[38] people of good feelings "that prompted its rulers to throw open the doors to the fugitives, and to afford them therein a secure asylum."[39] The same could also be said of the welcome given to the 1492 exiles in the Turkish Empire.

Maimonides' work is a contribution of the West to European culture, given that the culture of Córdoba represents the development in Arabic, Hebrew, and romance of a very advanced civilization in the sciences, philosophy, poetry, and urban culture within the territory of Hispania. It was a world in which the Jewish communities had felt themselves well integrated for centuries—Jewish settlements date from the beginning of the Christian era—and in which they collaborated actively. In reality, the level of Sephardic cultural and theological development both in Arabic and the romance languages was considered, for centuries, superior to Ashkenazic Judaism. The beliefs of the Sephardim and Ashkenazim were the same with regard to the principles of Judaism, given that both groups considered the Talmud to be their highest authority. There were, however, many differences in relation to their customs and views of everyday life: "Sephardim follow the rulings of Rabbi Joseph Caro, a Spanish Jew . . . whereas Ashkenazim adhere to the particular traditions outlined in the same work by Rabbi Moses Isserles, a Polish Jew. In general, Rabbi Caro's perspective represents a more liberal and permissive tendency than the one approved by Ashkenazi authorities such as Isserles."[40]

Jews and Christians

Historians have taught us that Sephardic culture was widespread in the Iberian Peninsula and that it continued without many problems until the conversion of the Visigoths to Christianity: "The Jewish settlement on the Iberian Peninsula was a very ancient one and in its early stages had prospered. Even after the Visigoths had established their rule over the land, the

condition of the Jewish communities remained favorable for a long time. They earned their livelihood with dignity, and they fulfilled the laws of the Torah and observed its commandments without hindrance."[41]

This situation changed with the coming of the Visigoths throughout the fifth century thanks to an agreement with the Roman province of Tarraco that would alter the situation. The Visigoths were Arian Christians who became unified with the Catholicism predominant in the Hispano-Roman world at the Councils of Toledo that culminated in 589. The situation was different from then on. Their king Reccared[42] even converted to Catholicism to encourage the alliances and bring the population together. Then the panorama changed with the entrance on stage of the Christian synods that began to promote a very restrictive legislation for the Jews.

The policy of obligatory baptism gave rise to the *anusim* (coherced)[43] or crypto-Jews who practiced their religion in secret, something that the new Spanish Inquisition would plainly label as "Judaizing" in the sixteenth century. In this climate the arrival of Islam in the Golden Age was a relief from this situation. However, by entering into the political sphere of Islam, the Spanish synagogues were able to establish contact with Babylonian Jewry and, thus, gradually assume "leadership of the majority of the world Jewish community."[44]

Sephardism evolved in the midst of the Muslim and Christian cultures. It flourished in Arabic as well as the romance languages, particularly in Castilian.[45] But in the Christian world, Jewish culture may have had a component of guilt that was lacking in its relationship with Arabic culture. This feeling of sorrowful guilt is expressed eloquently by Sem Tob ben Yishaq Ardutiel, also known as Don Santo de Carrión:[46] "Many a sword of good and fine steel comes from a torn sheath, and it is from the worm that fine silk is made . . . For being born on the thornbush, the rose is certainly not worth less, nor is good wine if taken from the lesser branch of the vine. Nor is a hawk worth less, if born in a poor nest; nor are good proverbs [of less value] if spoken by a Jew."[47]

In contrast, it is obvious that the *aljamas* in the south were living a period of great splendor, "one of the longest and most glorious chapters in Jewish history."[48] But when the Christian Reconquest became stronger as it pushed south—in 1212 the Almohads suffered a decisive defeat at Las Navas de Tolosa and Seville fell in 1248—the Jewish community living in the Muslim world would have great difficulty in transplanting itself to Christian territory. As Jonathan Ray points out: "The delicate flower of Andalusi Jewish culture could not be easily transplanted in the soil of Christian Spain. In contrast to the cosmopolitan cities and glittering courts

of the Andalusi princes, the Christian castles of the north seemed crude and uninviting, and provided little to assuage the Jew's bitterness over the fall of their illustrious communities."[49]

The Jewish lamentation for the Sepharad of the south—in this case, that of the refined poet Abraham ibn Ezra—is different from the shameful laments of their coreligionists in the Christian territories.

I weep like the ostrich[50] for Lucena.
Her remnant dwelt innocent and secure,
Unchanged for a thousand years;
Then came her day and her people were exiled and she a widow . . .

I will shave my head and cry bitterly over the exiles from Seville,
Over her noble men that were slain and their sons enslaved,
Over refined daughters converted to the foreign faith.

Alas, the city of Córdoba is forsaken, her ruin as vast as the sea!
Her sages and learned men perished from hunger and thirst.
Not a single Jew was left in Jaén or Almería;
Mallorca and Malaga struggle to survive.

The Jews who remain are a beaten and bleeding wound.
For this I mourn and learn a dirge and wail with bitter lamentation;
I shout in my distress: They have vanished like water.[51]

In any case, the Christian kings favored the arrival of Jewish refugees, given that they helped these rulers in the repopulation of the newly conquered territories. The charters granted to some cities specify royal protection for the Jews who had been harassed first, by the intolerance of the Almoravids and later on, by the Almohads. This is the case of Ramón Berenguer IV in the Charter of Tortosa (1145):[52] "If more Jews come to settle, I shall give them homes to occupy and settle . . . I grant you those good laws and all customs and usages which the Jews of Barcelona enjoy."[53]

The situation changed definitively in 1391. This was "the beginning of the end of the Jewish communities in Spain." That year was marked by numerous popular uprisings against the Jews, many of whom died in the revolts. Among them was the only son of the chief rabbi of Saragossa, Hasdai ben Judah Crescas. The battle was not so much about exterminating the Jews but rather about forcing them to convert. During this same period there was an institutional schism within Christianity with two popes

claiming the throne of St. Peter in 1378. The Jewish community saw itself in serious danger of dispersion or assimilation, a situation that prompted some Jewish teachers to feel as if they were in "an obligatory war" against Christianity and write theological refutations in reply.[54] This is the case of Hasdai Crescas and his *Refutation of the Christian Dogmas*.[55]

Theory and Prophecy: Inherence and Contingence

For a student familiar with Aristotle's works it is obvious that *dialectic* and *rhetoric* are twins, inseparable parts of politics.[56] Moreover, the rhetorical heart of life incorporates both the inherent and the contingent. The teachings of the rhetoricians counted on not only the syllogism but also the *enthymeme*. It was obvious, therefore, that the dialectical process implicated both the teacher and the pupil. The idea of *isegoria*, so well understood in the Mediterranean, and the democratic rhetoric of Isocrates, Cicero, and Quintilian implied precisely that idea: that one cannot teach a subject or what one would consider to be truth without taking into account the feelings and participation of one's students. In this way, instead of the truth, the most believable or credible is established. In the Talmudic tradition of the Mediterranean, this is the very essence of daily life in the *aljama*. Even when revealed truth exists, its everyday interpretation for the life of the quarter is based on constant study and consensus. Justice is not so much an abstract expression as the honest and constant practice of good judgment.

Maimonides does not specifically pretend to conceal his work, but rather, he does not want to give something to someone who cannot share it, either because that person is not prepared or because of excess. For him, learning is not a dialectic process. It is a matter that will come to the fore centuries later, that is, if it was ever out of sight. To begin with, the dialect practiced in the Greek *poleis* had nothing to do with what the Central Europeans—and by the Ashkenazim by contact—understood as such. It arose in nineteenth-century romanticism. But neither Hegelian dialecticism, nor the Marxist variety, the School of Frankfurt, nor "the dialectic of fists and pistols" of the fascist ideologues had anything to do with what the Greek citizens understood as the dialectic that was the inseparable twin sister of rhetoric.

Of course, for the devotees of that romantic dialectic, decisively molded by the Calvinists, a certain rhetoric still exists. But for these people—and for the journalists who echo such a rhetoric—it is a matter of *ars fallendi*, of speaking for the sake of speaking or manipulating facts with words. The

rhetoric is lacking in and devoid of *inventio*. Drama has been expelled from the university by Petrus Ramus (Pierre de la Ramée, 1515–1572), and the entire space is taken over by a new dialectic, all-conquering and ubiquitous. Only a few were able to correct this serious error of perception, and among the most sublime examples of this are Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Bach's *Inventions,*[57] and the works of Giambattista Vico. The absolute domination of the Ashkenazic version in these matters established a vision that made Maimonides' political theory almost incomprehensible. In this line there are some who assimilate Maimonides and his understanding of the monarchy with John Locke.[58] It is curious to see that critics accused the teacher from Córdoba of being mysterious and slightly esoteric, while he was really being wisely prudent.

It must be recognized that Leo Strauss, with his extraordinary intuition, is one of the few who, even when he participated in this intellectual mess, with the ins and outs typical of his style, penetrated intelligently into Rambam's thought without destroying it, and even made some magnificent contributions. Initially he was responsible for having brought Maimonides to the foreground of political theory and of having rescued him in this field from unjustified oblivion.

Isadore Twersky, a great Maimonides scholar, attempts to justify him in a modern way. On the one hand, he recognizes that "discrepancy" that he has been accused of sometimes in his writings between the principles and the application of norms. On the other hand, he excuses Rambam by using German romantic explanations to exculpate him. Thus, he explains (in his literary style) "There is an unpredictable and spontaneous factor of creativity, both conscious and unconscious . . . *das unbewusste Schaffen* from which creativity stems or sometimes erupts."[59]

Strauss was more to the point when he perceived a particular enchantment in Maimonides' *Guide*. He saw that, aside from its extraordinarily well-thought-out structure, the work encourages the reader to become immersed in the pleasure of reading to the point where he will not put it down. Undoubtedly Strauss would also have found the same pleasure in *Don Quixote*, a work that exercises a similar enchantment on its reader.

Fortunately contemporary theory does understand the meaning of rhetoric as it was understood by the Sephardic teachers, more refined and cultured than the Germanicized and Latinized Ashkenazim, and has reopened the case for its study. Now we have begun to address the problem of teaching political science with the complexity that the subject demands, instead of relying on the omnipotence of the dialectic teacher who sometimes plans his class as if his pupils were merely complements to his teaching.

The very fact that the *Guide of the Perplexed* is designed *to teach one on one* is something that makes us think even more about the work. This procedure would culminate in the nonidentification of knowledge with power. As Maimonides reflects, God (omnipotence) knows his being as it is for, in him, knowledge, power, and being are fused into one: "For our knowledge and ourselves are separate."[60] Thus the insistence of Maimonides on teaching being directed to wakefulness as well as lethargy and that learning takes place especially through dreams at night. He insists on this from the point of view of a physician who spent hours attending to his patients in practice, and with great fervor, he reclaims the importance of the body and the practical. This should make us think: "While it is a duty to study by day and by night, most of one's knowledge is acquired at night . . . [W]hosoever occupies himself with the study of the Torah by night—a mark of spiritual grace distinguishes him by day . . . A house wherein the words of the Torah are not heard at night will be consumed by fire . . . 'A fire not blown by man shall consume him'" (Job 20:26).[61]

Dream and prophecy are inextricably intertwined. As Rambam explains, "no prophecy and no prophetic revelations come in any other way except *in a dream* or *in a vision* and through the agency of an angel."[62]

These prophecies come in a state of extreme agitation and terror. They appear as a vision and afterwards, as Daniel, himself[63]—the exile from Judah—tells us, the prophet was exhausted, weak, and fell into a deep sleep with his face to the ground:[64] "In a state such as this the senses too cease to function, and the overflow in question comes to the rational faculty and overflows from it to the imaginative faculty so that the latter becomes perfect and performs its function."[65] Thanks to this vision, in which "deep and secret things" hidden in the dark are revealed to Daniel, the prophet can interpret the king's "dreams and the visions of [his] head" so that he may "know the thoughts of [his] heart."[66]

On the other hand, there are "fantasms of the imagination" that present themselves during our sleep and go beyond the simple psychic representation of external objects by the senses and can exist in the imagination "after the object of which it is the form is no longer manifest to the senses."[67]

In view of the way Maimonides sees the life of the mind and the importance he gives to wakefulness and lethargy, we can draw the conclusion that the only thinker of Ashkenazic origin who links up with Maimonides is, astonishingly, Sigmund Freud.[68] His genius coincides with the teacher from Córdoba, not only in his fundamental view of the world, which is evident, but also in the importance he gives to lethargy and to the opening up of the individual's being to a complexity that is inexhaustible in the executive

power of a person, the "red memory,"[69] and the will that sometimes becomes atrophied and empties out the rest of the *self* or *oneself*. Freud's demand that dreams be taken into account as material for knowledge and as an essential cognitive source, the dismantling of the executive power of the individual, and the recovery of the *infantes*, in the rhetorical meaning of the word, were all concepts familiar to the Sephardic tradition and understood as well by the rhetoricians of Mediterranean humanism.

The learning process cannot be one-sided, nor is it the outcome of a critical dialectic confrontation (*disputatio*) of clashing swords. Freud culminated his brilliant finding with a discovery that Leo Strauss was also aware of: the principle of identity does not function inside the human brain, in its inner world. Maimonides, too, was aware of this, and therein lies his splendor. Time and space do not exist in dreams, in the enchanted world of the *Guide of the Perplexed*,[70] or in the enchantment of *Don Quixote*, the greatest and most healing book in this tradition of political theory. Perhaps this is a well-known perception in Jewish tradition. For this reason, in a dream it is possible to be in two places at once, and things can appear for which no words can be found in the dictionary. In view of this complexity, the Sephardic teachers knew they could not rely on programmed knowledge, directed by a know-it-all decisive executive, to draw up guidelines and protocols for the sake of functionality and order.

For this same reason, in the *medina* (city), which, for the republicans of the classical world, would always be written man *in extenso*, not all its problems could be solved with such a decisive reliance on the executive, whether it was the Gentile power of the crown or the laws of the land that the *aljamas* found in the states where they settled.[71]

The Law of the Kingdom Is the Law

According to medieval documents, the *aljama* was the legal institution that brought the Jews together in the great medieval cities under Muslim domination. In smaller cities, however, the minorities were insufficient to make up a legal organism that could serve a variety of functions. In other places they had different names. Thus, in Catalonia they were known as *calls* (perhaps from the Hebrew *cahal*) and in other territories of the kingdoms of Aragon and Castile they were called *juderías* (Jewish quarters).

The Aragonese *aljamas* were made up of both the Jewish inhabitants and their institutions. In general they enjoyed a considerable degree of autonomy.[72] They occupied their own sections of town that could even be

separate from the rest of the inhabitants. The Moriscos (converted Muslims) also lived in separate sections of the cities in Christian territories, and in keeping with the policies of repopulation, the Christians themselves were grouped in parishes around their churches.

In practice, the Jewish communities or quarters were made up of autonomous corporations with their own norms in religious, legal, administrative, and economic matters similar to those of medieval cities, whose institutions they often imitated: "According to privileges granted by the Aragonese monarchs, the *aljamas* arbitrated within their jurisdictions disputes for insults and civil suits, levied fines and excommunicated the guilty, and had the authority to expel them from the community and the city. Some *aljamas* could also impose the death penalty or sanction informers *(mosrim* or *malsvinim*) in their midst who denounced their members to the Christian authorities, thus putting in serious danger the existence of entire communities."[73]

In contrast to the Moriscos, the Jewish inhabitants did not have the status of "conquered on the battlefield," which was to their advantage. Their communities usually accepted royal authority and with it the obligation to be loyal subjects and pay their taxes. In the special case of Aragon, James I frequently offered the Jewish communities in conquered territories the same favorable status as the Jews of Barcelona.

The Jewish communities varied in size and were governed by an executive council of secretaries or deputies who attended to the daily needs of the population. Moreover, an assembly of all the adult men of the quarter could be convened to ratify a statute or an especially important decision.[74] If the volume of work required it, there were more officials in charge of economic, religious, legal, or administrative matters of lesser importance. The religious leaders were a rabbi-judge (*dayyan*) and in some cases, assistant rabbis with special functions for specific cases.[75] The inhabitants of the neighborhood were normally grouped around their synagogue, although sometimes the increase in population obliged them to spread out to another part of the city. Within the quarter there were usually a butcher shop, oven, market, tavern, hospice, and ritual bath, and outside the quarter, a cemetery.[76] And naturally, they had their own judges: "The *mucaddemim* also exercized penal jurisdiction; they were responsible, in the name of the *aljama*, for the religious and moral conduct of each of its members, and especially vigilant in persecuting informers. In addition to the *mucaddemim*, the Aragonese and Valencian *aljamas* also had a *bet-din*, a court composed of two or three judges who had the authority to act in lesser trials and conduct interrogations by order of the *mucaddemim*, and impose fines. These special judges were called *berorim*."[77]

As the Christian conquest advanced, royal laws began to take precedence in the Jewish quarters over the laws of Israel, that is, the Torah and the Talmud. This is what Ashkenazic philosophy brought to Barcelona and Castile in the extraordinary figures of Solomon ibn Adret (1235–1310) and Asher ben Yehiel (1250–1327) in Toledo. Little by little good judgment became blurred as the central focus of public life. In the *aljamas* of Sepharad, however, public life was understood as an everyday reality in which, thanks to good judgment, contingencies were taken into account in order to resolve daily problems. Thus, offenses, tensions, conflicts, fears and malaise, superstitions and unfounded terrors were worked out through a close-knit web of good judgment, which had been preserved through a long tradition of discourse (*halakhah*) and legal rulings. *Halakhah* is based on the laws of Israel, but it is the result of the consensus between different interpretations and applications. Decisions were always made with its support by taking into account the contingency of emotions, specific interests, and public conditions at that particular moment.

But that was not the line that would win out. Throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries Ashkenazic public philosophy gradually became more firmly rooted in the peninsula, perhaps because of its ability to respond to more immediate political interests. The fact is that, with it, the way was laid for a Jewish society that would become much more assimilated into Christian society.

The Disputation of Barcelona held in July 1263 marked a turning point in this history. It was a public event that came to signify "the setting for the new situation of Judaism in the heart of Christianity."[78]

In this confrontation there appeared the new spirit of the orders born to preach as a form of conquest of souls and territories. Raimundo de Penyafort (1175–1275), who became a Dominican friar in 1221 and was chosen general of the Order of Preachers in 1237, was present at the Disputation. He had been the pope's confessor since 1230, an influential post from which he resigned in 1240 to return to Aragon and devote his life to preaching in the heart of the communities of infidels, mainly the Jews. Penyafort stands in contrast to that other great figure of Christian apologetics, Raimundo Lulio or Llull (1232–1316), who was also a preacher, of aristocratic origin, and a Franciscan terciary. He tended to look for the coincidences between Christianity and other beliefs in order to open the doors to those who wished to be assimilated. To a certain extent, Llull tried to be an advocate for the infidels. Both Penyafort and Llull were preachers and missionaries on the Catalan frontier, and they are examples of the two opposing methods of Christian apologetics in the thirteenth century. Both of these great figures had access to and influence on the king of Aragon.[79]

The relationship between Christians and Jews never recovered from the blow dealt by the Disputation of Barcelona, an event that motivated the expulsion of Nahmanides, by then an old man. Until then, the Jew had been a useful *servus regis* to society and, as such, well regarded by the Crown. But after the royal decrees of September 1263 and the papal bull of Clement IV from Viterbo, Jewish residents began to undergo constant surveillance and humiliation. As a consequence of the Disputation they were forced to open their homes to the Jewish apostate Paulo Christiani—personally assigned by the pope—and his Dominican companions. Jews everywhere, no matter what their status, were to comply "with humility, reverence, and without slander or subterfuge." They were to show the visitors all the books in their possession so that they could expurgate and cleanse their collections. The cost of these visits was to be paid for by the Jews themselves, although the expense could be deducted from the tribute they owed to the king.[80]

This process of militarization of consciences started off very forcefully, culminating in the sixteenth century in the deformation of and subsequent emptying out of rhetoric. Thus, rhetorical *inventio* passed over into the realm of dialectic in a pedagogical transformation carried out by the Calvinist Ramus. All this would have a lasting effect on the public life of Europe.

A Vigilant Society

At the end of the thirteen century Jewish philosophy would go far beyond Maimonides' expression in his Code that "the person who spies on his neighbor breaks a prohibition."[81] From this time on, its philosophy would become assimilated to the vision that was more in tune with a Christian world that was advancing, unstoppable and definitively in Western Europe. In this sense, Maimonides represents an important obstacle in the progress of the *vigilant society*. This vision, however, with due respect for the gigantic stature of Maimonides, is truly incomprehensible. From Christian Catalonia the king does not look upon Maimonides as someone nearby, and in one royal decree, he is mentioned as Moses "the Egyptian" or "Maimonides of Cairo." In other words, he is an outsider.[82]

Curiously enough, the apostate Paolo Christiani refers to him with praise during the Disputation. Although Rambam is admired as a teacher within the Jewish communities of the kingdom of Aragon, he is regarded with suspicion because his position is uncomfortable for those who are in favor of a greater adaptation to the Christian view of the public. Submission to Christian laws required many changes within the Jewish communities

such as the rejection of polygamy, the acceptance of the death penalty, the recognition of Christian notaries, and a new understanding of public life. Even in the fourteenth century this is apparent in Ibn Adret, who accepts allegiance to the prince or the homeland in a way that Maimonides would never have accepted. The elimination of the public philosophy of the southern teachers, headed by the great Maimonides, signifies not only progress in the modernization of Judaism, in the interpretation of some present-day scholars. That idea is anachronistic here. What happens is that a transmutation of public life is building up that leans toward the executive, with the consequent deterioration of good judgment. Democratic aspects will slowly fall, only to survive, as will also happen later on to rhetoric, in a few sublime European literary creations such as *Hamlet* and *Don Quixote*.

In this way we arrive at the *barbarism*[83] of some present-day critics who interpret Rambam from a dialectical mentality borrowed from nineteenth-century Christian romanticism. It is an error made even by eminent Jewish scholars educated in German academic romanticism or American Calvinist positivism who do not know how to interpret this wise contribution to European culture that is exceptional for the West.

Some will understand him through his Aristotelianism,[84] influenced by Averroes, which supposedly led Rambam toward that badly matched duality of philosophy and theology; others will explain him as an avant-garde dialectical universalistic theologian, who is unbearable in times of scepticism like our own. Some have unashamedly dared to label the teacher from Córdoba as the author of a political model that "appears to violate the most basic human rights, as is true of all theocratic models."[85]

On the other hand, Leo Strauss would be an admirable example of that Ashkenazic interpretation of Maimonides that lacked a rhetorical or Mediterranean humanistic education. Nevertheless, thanks to his extraordinary intuition and interpretive brilliance, Strauss was capable of learning a great deal from the Cordoban. At times he adopts an excessively prosecutorial tone in speaking of the person he considers to be his teacher. But at least he allows himself to approach with genuine interest such an exceptional work as the *Guide of the Perplexed* and to read it from the point of view of its *"enchantment"* and without confusing the rhetorical enchantment with romantic intoxication. Unfortunately this is not the case with certain followers of Strauss, who try to imitate an almost inimitable teacher and fall into the arrogant simplification of things.

Maimonides understood that the law of the land is the law of the Jews, but he understood it in the Talmudic sense that the Jews should be loyal and constructive to the power that gives them asylum. This does not

mean, however, that they must identify patriotically with those new entities that emerge such as the Prince, the Gentile king, or a homeland to which one must surrender enthusiastically, even at the cost of going against the law of Israel, which is divine law.

On the other hand, he knows that if man is very keen on learning, he also frequently looks for the easiest road. He often wants to find the immediate solution to problems without taking into account the effort which it entails: "For man has in his nature a desire to seek the ends; and he often finds preliminaries tedious and refuses to engage in them."[86]

Another danger lies in the teaching of improper material, not because it contains hidden dangers, but because the teacher's attitude might hide a high degree of omnipotence. One should not use illustrations or arguments where it is not possible to do so. Not everyone can teach everything, nor even learn everything. More than an elitist mistrust, we find a serious concern for the truth.

Two ideas are intertwined in this vision: (1) a horizontal understanding of existence, in which the flow of life is like a melody in which time lets us enjoy the melodic richness of public life, and (2) the transcendence of a harmonic reading of society in which several voices are superimposed simultaneously. Harmony implies the timeless understanding of public life in which several voices and meanings not only live together in a single instant, but they change shape, activate and reactivate, and glorify each other. In other words, the sum of various voices and sounds exalts a new musicality between them, creating, in turn, a reality encouraged by that harmony.

This view of the public sector allows for a complexity of thought that could hardly be expressed from the viewpoint of the agora, the corporeal setting of life, with its constant movement in time and space.

With the comprehension of life *ex-auditu*, there arises the possibility of contact not only with sounds and words but also with silence. "One should always cultivate the habit of silence . . . 'A fence to wisdom is silence.'"[87] Just as in a musical score the notation marks the silences (rests) with its exact measurement, in this tradition, silence appears as the root of public agreement.

Curiously, this concept already existed in Greek and Roman rhetorical tradition,[88] but it was gradually replaced in Latin Europe by a life of presences. After this, the logos was understood as a world of signs and public appearance as the visual perception of reality. This reality was composed of men in action, occupied with their things and interests (*inter homines esse*).

Maimonides concedes a great deal of importance to withdrawing from worldly things. But this does not mean that he recommends isolation or