

PROPHECY

THE BIRTH OF JEWISH PHILOSOPHY

1. *Kuzari*, Part I

Sage: If we find a man who walks into the fire without hurt, or abstains from food for some time without starving, on whose face a light shines which the eyes cannot bear, who is never ill, nor ages, until having reached his life's natural end, who dies spontaneously just as a man retires to his couch to sleep on an appointed day and hour, equipped with the knowledge of what is hidden as to past and future: is such a degree not visibly distinguished from the ordinary human degree?

Al-Khazari: This is, indeed, the divine and seraphic degree, if it exists at all. It belongs to the province of *'amr ilahi*, but not to that of the intellectual, human, or natural world.

Sage: These are some of the characteristics of the undoubted prophets through whom God made Himself manifest, and who also made known that there is a God who guides them as He wishes, according to their obedience or disobedience. He revealed to those prophets that which was hidden, and taught them how the world was created.

2. *Kuzari*, Part I

Al-Khazari: Those, however, who become Jews do not take equal rank with born Israelites, who are specially privileged to attain to prophecy, whilst the former can only achieve something by learning from them, and can only become pious and learned, but never prophets.

3. Maimonides, *Guide*, Part II, Chapter 32

The first opinion – that of the multitude of those among the Pagans who considered prophecy as true and also believed by some of the common people professing our Law – is that God ... chooses whom He wishes from among men, turns him into a prophet, and sends him with a mission...

The second opinion is that of the philosophers. It affirms that prophecy is a certain perfection in the nature of man. This perfection is not achieved in any individual from among men except after training that makes that which exists in the potentiality of the species pass into actuality, provided an obstacle due to temperament or to some external causes do not hinder this... According to this opinion it is not possible that an ignoramus should turn into a prophet; not can a man not be a prophet on a certain evening and be a prophet on the following morning, as though he had made some find. This are rather as follows: When, in the case of a superior individual, who is perfect with respect to his rational and moral qualities, his imaginative faculty is in its most perfect state and when he has been prepared in the way that you will hear, he will necessarily become a prophet, inasmuch as this is a perfection that belongs to us by nature...

The third opinion is our Law and the foundation of our doctrine. It is identical with the philosophic opinion except in one thing. For we believe that it may happen that one who is fit for prophecy and prepared for it should not become a prophet, namely on account of the divine will.

4. Maimonides, *Guide*, Part II, Chapter 48

It is very clear that everything that is produced in time must necessarily have a proximate cause which has produced it. In its turn that cause has a cause and so forth till finally one comes to the First Cause of all things, I mean God’s will and free choice. For this reason all those intermediate causes are sometimes omitted in the dicta of the prophets, and an individual act produced in time is ascribed to God, it being said that He, may He be exalted, has done it. All this is known. We and other men from among those who study true reality have spoken about it, and this is the opinion of all the people adhering to our Law.

5. Maimonides, *Guide*, Instruction with Respect to this Treatise

The diction of this Treatise has not been chosen at haphazard, but with great exactness and exceeding precision.

6. Maimonides, *Guide*, Part II, Chapter 32

The opinions of people concerning prophecy are like their opinions concerning the eternity of the world or its creation in time. I mean by this that just as the people to whose mind the existence of the deity is firmly established, have, as we set forth, three opinions concerning the eternity of the world or its creation in time, so there are also three opinions concerning prophecy.

	Creation	Prophecy
1	Creation <i>ex nihilo</i> (“All who believe in the Law of Moses our Master”)	Prophecy as a supernatural gift (“The multitude of those among the Pagans ... and some of the common people professing our law”)
2	Creation out of pre-existent matter (“All the philosophers of whom we have heard reports,” “the belief of Plato”)	Prophecy as natural perfection (“that of the philosophers”)
3	Eternity (Aristotle)	Prophecy as natural perfection with God’s veto (“our Law”)