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NEGATIVE  
ATTRIBUTES  
IN  
MAIMONIDES

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THE NEGATIVE ATTRIBUTES OF MALMONIDES

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## PREFACE

The purpose of this paper was originally and still is now quite unpretentious. It does not aim at any revelations. Its main purpose is purely selfish: to learn something substantial about an important field of Jewish endeavor in the medieval Ages—the field of Jewish philosophy. The desire was to study the first book of the moreh Nebuchim quite carefully and with the assistance of most of the major commentators. This made it necessary to study Shem Tob, Simon Duban, Marboni and others among the ancients as well as Solomon Maimon, Funk, and David Kaufman among the moderns. But even though I had first reread a history of Greek philosophy and a history of Jewish philosophy and also a good deal of Aristotle, I found before I was half through with the main work that another important thing was lacking before I could feel satisfied with my appreciation of Maimonides. The latter stands at the end of a long line of philosophic thought and at the threshold of a new and radical departure in Gersonides, Crescas et al. I decided that it was necessary at least to gain a basic familiarity with the dominant Jewish thinkers who preceded Maimonides. With this in view I made a detailed study of Saadia, Bachya and Halevi in the particular subject with which I was concerned. The results have amply rewarded my curiosity and they have been incorporated in the second chapter of this paper. The main body follows in chapter three. Chapter one is a general background to the whole problem and contains a bird's eye view of the impressions which I acquired. Needless

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to say that Kaufman's *Attributenlehre* as well as his special study on the "Theology of Munkya" together with Munk's work of genius on the *Moreh Nebuchim* are the classical works which served me at every step. The same may be said for Guttman's book on *Sadia*. But the man whom I found most illuminating especially in regard to the issue as a whole, was Professor Harry Wolfson, whose recent book on Spinoza contains gems of incisive logic on the subject of attributes. The same may be said for the same author's essay in the *Jewish Quarterly Review* of 1916 on "Crescas on Divine Attributes." All these books were important for the logical and metaphysical consideration of the problem. A minor part of the work dealt with the religious and exegetic as well as historical aspect in the question of Scriptural anthropomorphisms and sectarian anthropomorphists. All this is introductory and explanatory to the question of why the attributes problem was such a crucial matter for medieval thinkers. Dr. Judah Kaufman's book on the first forty-nine chapters of the *Moreh Nebuchim* was especially helpful here, as was to a lesser degree Dr. Chernowitz's essay in *P'isha* entitled "אלהים אצל אפלטון".

Why did I choose the problem of attributes in preference to other primary issues of medieval philosophy? Because I had the feeling, which is now partially fortified, that a basic understanding of the *Attributenlehre* would be the most appropriate key to the understanding of the other problems in the speculation of that epoch. The proofs of God and creation, Providence, Causality, good and evil in the world, epistemology and the relation of God to man—all these and other questions are immeasurably more intelligible now as a result of an insight into the *Attributenlehre*.

Finally, I had no hesitation in copying verbatim or in paraphrasing from any of the sources mentioned in the Bibliography. The only criterion was whether it served to clarify my own mind, and whether it would serve me or anybody else who might at any time refer to this paper for a short analysis of Maimonides' doctrine of the Attributes.

The Bibliography contains only the material which I have personally used. References will be found in the notations accompanying each page, and the key to them will be found in the bibliography.

The world seems to be full of dualities, -polar manifestations of existence. Perhaps it all begins when "I", the individual person, have an awareness of myself as against an awareness of a large and complicated something outside of myself. We need <sup>not</sup> indicate any particular system of thought which exemplifies this fact since all knowledge is basically an illustration of it. Psychology, for example, investigates the reactions of the individual mind to this external universe which impinges upon it. Art attempts to reproduce the impressions which man's emotional nature has imbibed from without. Ever since civilized man has been conscious of life's dualities, his rational nature has become intrigued with the attempt to understand their relations to each other, and, if possible, to find a unifying principle which "explains" them. Philosophy has tried to get at the root of things. It wants to discover what is "real" in the whole picture.

What is the "I" and what is the "external something"? Is the "I" one unity or is it another ultimate duality, mind and body? Is the "external something" also essentially of a double nature, matter and form? Is the "I" real and the "external" an illusion? Is the reverse true? Are both elements wholly real, or both only partly real? Or perhaps the both are one complex entity which should be set up against a vastly different concept, that of God. God as against the world. Which of the two is more real? The gropings after answers to these questions constitute the subject matter of philosophy. The answers are well evidenced by such

polar terms as materialism and idealism, nominalism and realism, metaphysics and logic, substance and God, transcendentalism and immanence.

The problem of attributes which will hereafter engage our attention is intimately related with the whole rational approach of man to God and the universe over a millenium and a half. It was a focal problem in metaphysics and logic, theology and to a certain extent ethics. It would fall outside of our province to elaborate fully this last statement, but occasional references will be found quite often in the course of the paper. Has God any attributes? Are they real? Can we know them? Already in the middle of the second century before this era, Philo, the Alexandrian Jew, was concerned with the problem almost in the same way that it presented itself to Maimonides thirteen hundred years later. For a few centuries thereafter including the age of Spinoza and Descartes the quest was still strikingly similar.

In Philo the idealist and the realist and the first of notable religious philosophers, the mystic transcendence of God was a central point. God is so far beyond all finiteness that he can be defined only negatively through the denial of every empirical quality, and wholly abstractly, as an absolute Being. This absolute Being is beyond all human ideas of perfectness, even beyond virtue and wisdom.<sup>(1)</sup> How can such a God be known? How can he be related at all to the universe as man knows it? The apparently insoluble difficulty was bridged by the ingenious method of Neo-Platonism, which dissociates God completely from the world only to make a volte face

(1) H.A.P. - page 347



and catapult Him right back to our midst where ordinary religion demands him. The inner contradiction of such a system was felt to leave the thing hanging in the air, and thereafter for centuries philosophy and religion were, like Rebecca's twins, struggling valiantly in the bosoms of theologians.

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The philosophic tradition within which Maimonides wrote might very well be considered a two-fold dualism. "Not only did it posit in the world itself a duality of matter and form, but it also maintained the duality of a material, multifarious, changeable world and an immaterial, simple, immutable God who is pure form, whose essence is thought, and whose activity is thinking."<sup>(2)</sup> God was to Maimonides thought thinking itself,<sup>(3)</sup> a sort of self enclosed being without any "windows" through which the human intellect might penetrate to discover even in part the nature of this wondrous being. Such an immaterial, simple deity confounded the traditional religious tenets which postulated the doctrines of creation and providence, because it was hard to conceive any positive relation that He would have with the world of human experience, the world for which we pray. Especially did the problem increase as the result of the Neo-Platonic principle that "a simple element can produce only a simple thing."<sup>(4)</sup> How can the simple God be the cause of the complex universe, and how can man know anything about such a totally unrelated God?<sup>(5)</sup> Reduced to its more basic way of expression

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(2) rH.S. vol. 1, 79

(3) K.M.-see Davidson's notes

(4) Moreh -Book II, 22

(5) Attributenlehre--395, 396

the medieval philosophers undertook the titanic task of identifying the Aristotelian pure form, a mere logical concept, with the personal God of tradition, and to use it as a working hypothesis to explain the origin of a created world as well as its governance." (6) These were two Gods who must theoretically forever remain irreconcilable, but religion by its very nature will generally refuse to share the honors with the God of reason. Add to this the ethical problem of evil- how can God be the cause of evil which apparently exists in the world? Guided by the ethical clash as well as by the metaphysical need, the Gnostics and the Manichaeans were content to admit the existence of two Gods--the God of pure form, and the God of the sublunar world, the Demiurgos who is responsible for all evil. But monotheistic Islam and Israel as well as Christianity to a certain extent, must forever remain jealous of competition. Medieval philosophy in the guise of the Kalam and its Jewish contemporary was therefore challenged not only by agnostic philosophies, but mainly by the various religious dualisms which claimed the support alike of reason and of ethics. God's absolute unity had to be protected at all costs.

The unity of God, however, was used by them in two senses, both of which were of critical importance for the defense of a consistent monotheism. In the regular sequence of topics that prevailed in almost all philosophy books of the time, proofs of creation were offered as against the Aristotelian assumption of a primordial material substance. (7) A created world was assumed to posit a God, a creator. But how many Gods? "Unity" was here proven in a numerical

(6) P.H.S v.1, 80

(7) In mystic lore this was identified with the Biblical "chaos" or Tohu Va Vohu, for an ancient denial of which see Chagiga 12b.

sense as an assertion of monotheism. <sup>(8)</sup> In the second place unity implied absolute simplicity, or a denial of any inner plurality in the godhead. <sup>(8)</sup> This distinction in the use of the term unity may be traced to Aristotle's discussion of the various meanings of the concept "one", <sup>(9)</sup> which is repeatedly reproduced with the usual modifications and elaborations in medieval literature. Unity in the first sense is the subject of the medieval proofs of the unity of God; unity in the second sense is the principle underlying the medieval discussions of the nature of the divine essence, or what is <sup>(10)</sup> generally known as the problem of divine attributes.

Both aspects will subsequently be seen to be rather interrelated. But since in this paper we are principally concerned with the attributes, it might be valuable to trace the development of the theory of God's inner oneness. From Aristotle it passed into the center of Kalamistic and Scholastic Theology. The problem in its later form originated among the Christian Syrians, heirs of Aristotle as well as of the Neo-Platonic and Patristic belief in the Trinity. Monotheism was a fundamental dogma of the Mohammedan religion. It therefore was necessary for the rationalizing theologians to meet the Trinitarians with their own weapons, and to show that God's inner unity is logically unimpeachable. To permit the inclusion of diverse elements in God's nature would be inconsistent with the Aristotelian conception of Him as pure form. When to this Aristotelian concept Neo-Platonic elements were assimilated, the result was a view of God as completely transcendental. He was absolutely perfect in the negative sense of being above and beyond any imperfections and wants. Aristotelians argued that ~~an~~ absolute perfection must not only be self-sufficient, self-caused and eternal but must be assumed to be uniformly simple in essence.

(8) H.M. J. P.H. xliv, xlv (9) Metaph v. 6 (10) P.H. S. 113



\* Inner diversity, they said, would mean that God has component parts each one of which would be prior to Him in point of logical primacy, and that would vitiate the definition of God as uncaused cause. This argument follows from Aristotle's assertions that any thing which has parts must be logically posterior to the elements of which it is composed. God's diverse aspects, his attributes, could not therefore be coeval with Him, because as parts they would (according to Aristotle's logic) be prior to God. The Motazilite sect of the Kalam was particularly concerned with this problem, because God's simple unity seemed to be in conflict with the multiplicity of divine attributes as it is uncritically assumed in the Koran. This sect of the Kalam, the so-called Men of Unity, undertook to show that ~~at~~ the Koran's statements were metaphorical and in no way impaired God's Unity. Jewish philosophers were quick to follow up the trail.

But the influence of <sup>Christianity</sup> ~~Catholicism~~ complicated the issues further. Husik quotes Elias of Nisbis as a typical example of what the Christian schoolmen were saying. "As the essence of God cannot receive accidents, his life and his wisdom cannot be accidents. But whatever is not accident is either substance or person. Hence as the essence of the Creator and His Life and His wisdom are not three substances or three accidents, it is proved that they are three persons." (11)

We shall outline the development of the attribute doctrine among Jewish philosophers in the second chapter. Especially in the case of Saadia we shall see how he considered the unity of God in both of its ramified aspects in polemics directed specifically at both the dualists and the trinitarians. (12)

We have been mentioning the word "attributes" without thus far defining it strictly and indicating its specific connotations before Maimonides as well as for him proper. Aristotle's logic separates the permanent properties of being from its incidental adjectives. His metaphysical position was that everything which exists, in the realm of physics as well as in discourse, can be classified under ten groupings or categories. These are substance, quality, quantity, relation, etc. Indeed the first genus of substance was far from self-explanatory for under it were eventually subsumed a variety of fundamental concepts such as matter and form, potentiality and actuality. In any case, the categories idea passed through a radical metamorphosis during the millenium after their author's death, and theorists began to set apart the first genus of substance as against all nine others. Indeed this division is already foreshadowed in Aristotle himself. Substance was that basic Being which existed in itself. Accidents are those things which exist in other things. (13)

Stated differently, the medieval philosophers largely discarded Aristotle's procedure and began by an outright division of all Being into that which is in itself and that which is in a subject, i. e. substance and accident. (14) Ibn Daud says: "Things which exist are divided first into substance and accident." Substance does not actually exist empirically without the simultaneous presence of specific accidents. Substance is therefore the subject or essence of Being. What then is an attribute? Is it a synonym for accident or is it an element of substance, part of the definition of essence? Its very definition was bitterly contested

(13) Micro I, 2

(14) Em. Ram I, 1

because on it depended one's position on whether God has any attributes, and on that in turn depended the defense of scriptural allusions to God. If an attribute is essential to the description of essence, then every essence as such will be defined in terms of "essential attributes." Is God, therefore, also to be credited with "essential attributes" since no one would deny that He is pre-eminently an essence? The Mutekallimun, generally, and especially the sect known as the Sifatiya, would answer all these questions affirmatively. Maimonides, on the other hand, feels that the word attribute is interchangeable with such terms as accident, quality or mode. Most of his predecessors as well as his successors insisted on the real distinction between essential attributes and accidental qualities. Spinoza's definition establishes a world of difference between an "attribute" and a "mode".<sup>(15)</sup> The discussion is only outwardly scholastic since in reality it is highly related to the whole controversy which engaged later philosophers (especially the British empiricists) on the differences between "primary qualities" and "secondary qualities". Medieval thinkers developed these metaphysical distinctions incidental to their search for God's attributes. The relation of God to attributes was an indication of the relation of God to substance, or the relation of God to the world.

Alfarabi already speaks of God as "necessary existence" in contradistinction to our experiential world which is "contingent" or possible existence. *Avicenna* developed this concept more fully.

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(15) Ethics 1, 1

God is self-sufficient existence, He whose entire essence is existence. He is pre-eminently "that which exists in itself"--which we recognize as the accepted definition of substance. Is God "substance" therefore, and must He like all substance be the logical subject of predicates? Gersonides explicitly states that God is (16) "substance" though he hastens to add that He should be distinguished from empirical substance. (17) Maimonides' God is not related to substance because He does not "exist" in any definitive sense of the term. God is a Ding-an-sich which is transcendently beyond and prior to any affections or qualities. He is the causative principle of existence, but this statement does not give us any insight <sup>into</sup> what He is, any more than an incidental action of a person could offer any enlightenment about the nature of that person. God is undefinable and logically unknowable and hence can have no attributes. Definition must according to Aristotelian logic consist of the higher genus of the subject plus its specific difference. Neither one of these two elements can appertain to God. Thus Maimonides says: "An object is described by its definition, as for example, man is described as a being which lives and has reason. All <sup>that this</sup> agree type or description cannot be given to God, for there are no (18) previous causes to His existence by which He can be defined, and on that account it is a well known principle, accepted by all philosophers who are precise in their statements, that no definition (19) can be given of God.

To be true to traditional religion therefore God could not be analagous to substance any more than He can be the bearer of any "accidents." We shall see in the next chapter how Saadia in fact

(16) Milhamot V, 3

(19) Moreh 1, 52

(17) One's understanding of these two "substances" and their relation to each other will determine whether he is a pantheist or a rational theist.

(18) The elements of a definition are logically prior to the defined thing, hence Aristotle calls them causes--Categories 12, 14b.



reviews all the ten categories and shows how each and every one is inapplicable to God. God of Creation and Providence is indefeasible and ineluctable. Hence the tendency of medieval philosophy up to Maimonides was to invest him of more and more attributes until in the Moreh Nebuchim He is stripped completely and irretrievably. All Scriptural allusions to the contrary are explained away as mere metaphors. So important is this latter view that Maimonides spends half of the first book, the beginning of his philosophic system, in a detailed analysis of these metaphors. (20)

the divine essence is absolutely simple and all implications of plurality must be removed. (21) Especially three such inner pluralities are considered. Firstly, absolute simplicity denies the existence in God of accidental qualities. Being absolutely incorporeal He can have no accidental qualities. The bulk of tradition as well as actual scriptural references emphasized the spirituality of God. Identifying Him with the pure form of Aristotle made the position even more certain. God has no qualities because there are always adjectives of body. Maimonides is very clear on this point: "He is not a magnitude that any quality resulting from quantity as such could be possessed by Him. He is not affected by any external influences and therefore does not possess any quality resulting from emotion. He is not subject to physical conditions, and therefore does not possess strength or similar qualities. He is not an animate Being that He should have a certain disposition of the soul, or acquire certain properties as meekness, modesty, etc., or be in a state to which animate beings as such are subject as e.g., health or illness. Hence it follows that no attribute coming under the category of quality can be

(20) Moreh I, 1-49

(21) For much of the following material see Ph. 3.112-158

(22)  
 predicated of God." Thus the first implication of simplicity is to distinguish physically between God and other Being.

The second aspect of divine simplicity is to deny the metaphysical or logical distinction of genus and species in God's essence; or what we have thus far called "essential attributes" as distinguished from "accidental attributes." The logical concepts of species and genus are inapplicable to God, who is not only sui generis but is beyond and different than the realm to which logic applies. Maimonides says: "The object is described by its definition (genus and species)." (23) When we say of man that he lives and has reason, we imply that both life and reason are prior to man who merely partakes of them. "This description cannot be given to God for there are no previous causes to His essence, by which He might be defined." Attributes that fully define God are thus impossible. But even a partial definition is impossible because "if we were to speak of a portion of His essence we should consider His essence to be a compound." (24)

The two implications of ineffable simplicity which we have thus far seen are (a) the physical distinction between God and other Being (b) the metaphysical and logical distinction between God and other Being, in that he cannot be defined. The third inference which medieval philosophers drew from divine simplicity dealt with essence and existence in God and other Being, and was developed most elaborately in the Thomian school. Essence and existence are seen as distinct elements in the case of all Being but not in God. Empirical things exist not because there is something in their nature which requires existence. The fact that a thing "is" is only an accident and is quite independent of its substance or definition. Another way

(22) Moreh 1, 52

(23) Moreh 1, 52

(24) ibid

in which medievalists expressed this idea is that with the exception of God no thing is the cause of its own existence, but is rather caused by an external agent. God's essence however is identical with existence (hence both terms have different connotations in His case, different and unknowable). Contingency implies both imperfection and plurality since essence and existence are then two discreet elements. Says Maimonides: "It is known that existence is an accident appertaining to all things, and therefore an element superadded to their essence. This must evidently be the case as regards everything the existence of which is due to some cause; its existence is an element superadded to its essence. But as regards a Being whose existence is not due to any cause--God alone is that being, for His existence, as we have said, is absolute. Existence and essence are perfectly identical. He is not a substance to which existence is joined as an accident, as an additional element". (25) God is "necessary existence". All else is "contingent." (26)

The simplicity of God was a doctrine to which all the medieval philosophers subscribed but very few had the full courage of this logical conviction. The triple connotation of simplicity would remove all personality from God and would challenge religion at the very heart. Maimonides was one of the few men who pushed the argument relentlessly to its extreme. Other men wanted to keep God within human reach.

(25) Moreh I, 57

(26) It is interesting to recall the mistake of Solomon ben Maimon who insisted in his autobiography (Bk. I) that Maimonides' metaphysics was identical to Spinoza's. Spinoza's God is also necessary existence. Maimon forgot momentarily that Spinoza's God is identical with the Universe or Substance. Maimonides maintains the absolute dichotomy of the two, so much so that he often outrages religious sensibilities when he states that God cannot even be related to the world.

They wanted a personal God rather than one "as impassive as a mathematical point and as indifferent as a metaphysical absolute." The God of religion is the acme of perfection, and must therefore somehow be possessed of power and will and all those other adjectives without which perfection was inconceivable. A typical expression for the position is expressed in the Epistola--35 "that everything which includes necessary existence can itself have no imperfections, but must express pure perfection." (27)

Thus while on the one hand God must be absolutely simple and unqualifiable, on the other hand He must possess all those qualities which make for personality. How these two can be reconciled is the crux of the medieval problem of attributes. The Motekallemun tried to pull the rope from both ends, to deny attributes in God yet affirm His possession of the various functions which imply. (28)

The general position of the Kalam can be summarized thus: Is God Existent, Omnipotent and Omniscient, or in other words, does He have life, power and knowledge? If I say yes, then are these the same with God's existence or different? If different they would be eternal like God, since they were always with him. We would then have many eternal Beings, and hence polytheism of one sort or another. (29) If they are not different from God's essence, then they involve inner plurality instead of the required strict unity. The answer given is that God has no attributes, but performs all the various functions. "He is omniscient but not through knowledge as His attribute; He is omnipotent but not through power as his attribute; He exists but not through life as an attribute". (30) He is absolutely one and all these attributes are

(27) Ph. S. 8-117

(28) H. M. J. Ph. - XXIII

(29) Positive attributes in God imply polytheism--Moreh I, 58

(30) Moreh I, 53



in respect to Him identical with each other and with the Divine essence. The position is akin to Trinitarianism with its dogma that God is "three in one." While the more orthodox Arabs attacked this Motalites position on the ground that it is too radical, Maimonides rebukes them severely for juxtaposing two contradictory views without an honest resolution of the problem. (31) As he says, "they do not admit the term "compound" but yet do not reject the idea of a compound." (32) This was, however, one attempted solution--that all the attributes of God are really one attribute, and whatever differences there may appear to exist between them they do not affect the nature of God. Saadia's position is generally considered to approximate this, but we shall see that he seems at times to approach that of the later Maimonides. The other prevailing attempt at solution was to say that the regular relationship between essence and attributes does not obtain in the case of God, because His essence is different in kind to all other essences. (33) When to this is added the unknowable character of this essence we have Maimonides' position and, to a substantial degree, Bachya's.

What was meant by God's incomparable essence? We saw above that it referred to His necessary existence, or to the identity between His essence and existence. This should be clarified further because it meant one thing in the case of Arab and Jewish philosophers and quite another for the Latin scholastics whose tradition is preserved in Descartes. For the former necessary existence was a negative concept out of which arise the eternity, unity, simplicity and eventually the inscrutableness of God--an uncaused Being, who is not composed (34) and not similar to anything we know. All this reasoning is negative.

(31) Moreh I, 71

(32) Moreh I, 53

(33) Gersonides was specially emphatic in denying the validity of this view. Aristotle's opinion is in doubt with support for both sides.

(34) This negative aspect will be elaborated in chapter two and will be specifically treated in chapter three in relation to Maimonides doctrine of negative attributes.

It proves nothing positive and was therefore never used as a proof for the existence of God. The Latin schoolmen did use the idea that essence involves existence to prove His actual existence and His "reality". (in the nominalist-realist dispute),

It is in order now to analyze this problem logically and to find its origin. Let us follow Wolfson's conjecture. <sup>(35)</sup> The problem of essence and existence concerns itself with the meaning of logical propositions such as "A is existent," where existence is the predicate of a given subject. Aristotelian logic held that every proper judgment must be synthetic, where the predicate must be a universal term belonging to one of five classes. "It must be the genus of a subject, its species, a specific difference, a property or an accident". <sup>(36)</sup> The first three were called by medievals "essential attributes," while the last two were "accidents" or "accidental attributes". All five predicates are universal terms in Aristotle and are not identical with the essence of the subject. "Essential attributes are the elements of which the essence of the subject is constituted or to which they belong. Though they are not different from the subject they are not co-extensive with it." For instance in the statement 'man is a rational animal', neither rational nor animal is fully co-extensive with man, since animal includes a wider area than man, and rationality is less than a full representation of man. Accidental qualities, on the other hand, are external to the essence and something added to it, as when color, size or age are predicated of man. Perfect identity cannot be properly expressed as a logical relationship, for it is mere verbal repetition. A is A

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(35) Ph. S. 122-125

(36) An explanation of these terms will follow later. It may be found in J.Q.R. 1916 pages 10-17.

(37)  
is condemned by medieval logicians as mere tautology. What kind of predicate is the term existent in the sentence "Ruben is existent"? It is not identical with the essence of the subject for it would be tantamount to saying "Reuben is Reuben". It is not an essential attribute for it expresses neither the genus, species, nor yet the specific difference of the subject. It must therefore be an accident superadded to the essence of a thing.

what this means in plain language is this:- defining a thing or telling what it is does not prove the existence of a thing. I may define or describe a purely fictitious person. Words and not things would in this case be the subject of discourse. "If a thing actually does exist, it only happens to exist just as it only happens to be white or black, large or small." Avicenna and Maimonides understood Aristotle in this way. Averroes, however, interpreted him quite differently. (38) He maintains that the above would only illustrate nominal definitions, but in real definitions existence is implied. Averroes has no need therefore to discuss existence and essence in God, since the two are always identical. Maimonides, however, like Avicenna, must be faced with the question whether God's existence is an accidental quality, as all other existence is. The answer is no, because in his case we don't know what existence or essence mean anyway, hence the two are undoubtedly really identical, and God's simplicity is unimpaired. It is in this sense that Maimonides says boldly 'God does not exist', this is what Jewish philosophers from Saadia to Maimonides have in mind by the "necessary existence" of God. The negative aspect of the whole idea becomes evident when we remember that the argument rests on

(37) Moreh, 51--an exception to this rule permits the use of an apparent tautology for the sake of emphasis, in such a sentence as "The one who is sitting is Reuben"--quoted from Alfarabi in J. Q. K.

(38) Munk vl, 231ff.

the assertion that we may know absolutely nothing affirmatively about God. From it we derive the further negative beliefs that He is uncaused, unchangeable and undiversified, etc.

"There is no possibility of obtaining a knowledge of God's essence.... The only thing man can apprehend is the fact that He "exists".<sup>(39)</sup> "Concerning God man has no right to ask except the question as to whether He exists."<sup>(40)</sup> But we have noted above that the Bible does frequently describe God by various modifications and relations. We have also alluded to the common practice of interpreting these metaphorically. The statement of the rabbis to this effect invariably is that the Torah spoke according to the language of men." This human medium is very faulty and could never hope to cope with the exalted concepts of Godhood. Saadia, as we shall see makes this a crucial point in his argument for simplicity when he claims that the concept of Creator is really simple and uniform but through human linguistic limitations we express it variously as omnipotent, omniscient and existent. Bachya, Halevi and Maimonides all attached at least some importance to this excuse for the anthropomorphisms of the Bible and of common speech. Language is in general misleading. Says Maimonides "for speech fails us very greatly in every language"<sup>(42)</sup> in these deeper questions. Dr. Judah Kaufman goes so far as to suggest that the idea of "negative attributes" means in one sense the use of words completely emptied of their accepted meanings and used homonymously merely to deny their opposites.<sup>(43)</sup>

Crude anthropomorphisms are easily explained away as even Onkelas the proselyte had demonstrated, but a more subtle humanization

(39) Moreh I, 59 (43) Rambam's Moreh: XXXIX  
(40) Hob. Ma-Leb I, 4  
(41) see chap. 2  
(42) Moreh I, 57

אם מלה א  
תבאר בבואנו אלסור אה מושגו הלא יאמר אלו מדברים דין  
הכל זאת דמיון אריות אה המלים הכל תכנן הדין, יאמר "אמר  
אמר בניסוס קרן בלאן ואלאואתן וכן קבלת דת, דבא אה, אה  
המבנים של היתארים בלאיך



is left to plague us. The hand and eye of God may mean His creative faculty and His providence. But do not these latter terms impute to him certain relations to worldly beings? And are not these relations aspects of Him whom we have named "the Unknowable?" Obviously this would be an inconsistency. The same issue is involved in such adjectives and nouns as Lord, Master, Almighty, Merciful, Loving, etc. Perhaps these are so called "external relations" which do not involve any aspect inhering in God as distinguished from color and size which do inhere in a subject as accidental qualities. Many philosophers admitted these external relations saying that they are entirely apart from God's essence or from our knowledge of Him. Even Ibn Daud who seems to have come very close to Maimonides' position saw no harm in letting them go unchallenged. (44) But the Moreh Nebuchim emphatically rules that these are as sacrilegious as the rest. What then is left to do with these "divine attributes?" (45) They are names given by man to God's works and actions. They tell us no more about their agent than a nail driven into a piece of wood tells us about the character of the hammer wielder. This viewpoint is seen in the treatment received by God's names. Even Judah Halevi goes along on this point: "All names of God save the Tetragrammaton are predicates and attributive descriptions derived from the way His creatures are affected by His decrees and measures." (46) Maimonides also writes that they are attributes of action.: "It is well known that all the names of God occurring in Scriptures are derived from His actions except one, the Tetragrammaton. (47) The latter name, incidentally, is the Shem-ha-Meforash whose purpose is to indicate that God's essence is incomparable to any other essence.

(44) Em. Ram. II, 3

(45) Moreh I, 58

(46) Kuzari II, 2

(47) Moreh I, 61

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## RECAPITULATION

To Maimonides the only positive attributes of God are those of action. Instead of stating bluntly, "God did thus and so," we imply exactly that, by subjectively alluding to His works in terms of human impressions and human discourse. Accidental qualities are denied by all. Attributes of external relations are permitted by all of his predecessors, but probably only because they understood them in the same sense as Maimonides' attributes of action. (48)

Negative attributes are similarly not a bone of contention. Maimonides' contribution in respect to these was probably only in the direction of greater clarity and organization. The real gravamen of the dispute concerns the so-called essential attributes. By these were meant those elements which constitute the essence of a subject or which are related to the essence of a subject as the genus and species are related to the object defined. Not that anyone imagined the divine essence to consist of genus and species. The question is only whether God's attributes have the same relation to His essence as the parts of a definition have to the objects defined. If they have--would that contravene the principle of God's simplicity? We are dealing here with the nature of genus and species, or with universals. If universals have real existence, then genus and species must be granted reality, and God's attributes cannot be related to Him in the same sense. It would posit plurality in every essence and similarly in God. If, however, universals are mere names and definitions are merely nominal, then the essence of the subject defined is really simple. "It is, however, (48) Ph.S. 143, 144

not a conflict between Platonism and Aristotelianism." (49) Platonic realism (50) had no followers among the classical Jewish philosophers. The latter are all Aristotelians and their position on attributes reflects their interpretation of Aristotle's universals. were the latter only words, thoroughly subjective? Maimonides who rejects essential attributes, maintains that "while they denote the essence of the object and do not add anything extraneous to it, still they imply that the essence is composed as it were of genus and species." These universal terms of the definition are discreet elements and are logical causes to the existence of the individual essence. Platonic realism is thereby rejected and he agrees that "species have no existence except <sup>in</sup> man's own mind." (51) But he is neither a nominalist nor a conceptualist. Nominalism must be rejected as inconsistent with the entire trend of his argument, for if universals were mere words, definitions would be purely nominal, and he could not reject essential attributes on the ground that there are no previous causes to His existence by which he could be defined. if universals are mere words what is the need to maintain that no definition can be given of God? A definition which tells us nothing about the real essence of the subject would, in other words, be quite harmless. conceptualism (52) is scornfully rejected since it is to himself-contradictory. (53) "Such universals are neither existent nor non-existent."

"Maimonides believed that universals have both real and ideal existence. They exist in the mind but the mind does not invent them out of nothing. The mind discovers them in the many individuals.

(49) Ph. 3 149

(50) The doctrine that ideas or universals are metaphysically real: in fact they are the only true reality as opposed to empirical objects which are illusory.

(51) Moreh II, 18

(52) The compromise solution that universals have ideal without real existence.

(53) Moreh I, 52

Prior to the rise of individual beings the universals exist in the mind of God as independent entities and they remain as such even when they enter upon plurality in material form, though their presence is not discernible except by mental activity." <sup>(54)</sup> This means that genus and species do have some kind of objective existence. Essential attributes which have a similar relation to the subject therefore imply some kind of plurality in the essence of the subject defined. "This plurality to be sure would be only mentally discernible, but still it would be inconsistent with the conception of absolute simplicity," (and must therefore be inapplicable to God.) This may be called an objective interpretation of essential attributes.

The subjectivist view was that the mind not only discovers the essential attributes but actually invents them. They cannot by any stretch of the imagination imply plurality in the actual Being of God and hence they are perfectly admissible. This position is probably implicit in the arguments of many pre-Maimonidean philosophers as it is explicit in such successors as Crescas and Crescas. In Arab philosophy Averroes is the leading proponent of the subjective view of attributes whereas Avicenna is the chief supporter of the objective outlook. The Motekallimun's position was less defined because earlier, and their systems were considerably confused on this point. Saadia derives his system from the latter though we shall presently see that there are distinct germs of Maimonidean views. Bachya was brief but rather clear and a good precursor to Maimonides. Halevi treated the matter very lightly but we shall see that he too did not want to invest the deity with positive attributes, and he too distinctly suggests instead negative attributes and attributes of action.



## CHAPTER TWO

## 1. A PREVIEW

The three precursors of Maimonides whom we shall treat here are Saadiah, Bachya [and Halevi.] In the chief works of the three the problem of attributes dominates. Saadiah's book is arranged on the Mutazilite model and therefore its main divisions are of unity and of justice. We shall soon see that the question of unity was the central problem of the Attributenlehre. Bachya's book has only one chapter which is purely philosophical and that is called the "Gate of Unity". As for Halevi, the following quotation from Neumark though <sup>too</sup> extreme is perhaps worthy of mention. "The central problem of the book is that of attributes."<sup>(1)</sup>

The whole controversy over attributes centers about the "oneness of God". This takes its beginnings from Aristotle whose one God is the uncaused cause. Does he differ in kind from all other being or merely in degree? He is the formal and final cause of the universe. Is His form radically different in essence from all other forms which help matter to realize itself in the world? Divine Unity and Uniqueness, or rather the ineffable character of God's oneness, takes the centre of the stage from the time of the Neo-Platonists <sup>and</sup> especially the Neo-Pythagorians. Philo, Plotinus and Origen ~~and~~ vie with each other in removing God further and further from the domain of rational man. Having finally succeeded in establishing his utter transcendence by means of Aristotelian logic and Pythagorean mysticism, they found it necessary to reverse their steps ~~and~~ somehow bring God again into the picture. Emphasis on such doctrines as the emanation and the logos <sup>was</sup> ~~were~~ generally the means

(1) Essays in Jewish Philosophy--Pg. 247

adopted to preserve God's unity <sup>by</sup> re-establishing this contact. In Spanish-Jewish philosophy ibn-Gab<sup>ir</sup> exemplifies this approach. In him the synthesis of Greek philosophy and oriental religion reached its apex. For him especially, as well as in a measure for all of medieval philosophy--the latter was the hand-maiden of religion. But logicians began to grow tired of such fantastic theories. They tried frankly to solve the problem of how God can be both imminent and transcendent at the same time without resort to systems of angelologies or fantastic groups of intermediaries. The honesty of the gnostics on the one hand in saying that the two gods cannot be made into one was matched by a contrary honesty on the part of Jewish philosophers who declared that logically we may only say of God that He is. What He is or how, is clearly beyond our power of conception and hence, all scriptural passages notwithstanding, Nobody may presume to say that He is more than one.

Among the essential attributes discussed by the pre-Maimonidean Jewish philosophers are Unity, Existence, eternity, incorporeality, Life, Power, Wisdom and <sup>Incomparableness, uniqueness</sup> ~~single~~ singularity (Unvergleichbarkeit). No matter how they were explained each succeeding philosopher expressly stated that our reason teaches us only that He is. No description or quality, whether you call it an essential attribute or a relational attribute or anything else, may presume to tell us anything positive about God. Whatever else we say of God, we are in the last analysis reduced to a peak either of his actions, or of our feelings with regard to these actions. Differently put, we are on safe rational ground only when we say one of two things--(1) That God is the ultimate cause of so and so, and that as the uncaused cause he is thereby ipso facto different from all the objects of human

experience--(2) that to us these phenomena of which He is the cause suggest certain ideas with regard to Him, but these are really invalid objectively when we recall His utter [Unvergleichbarkeit].

These ideas are the common property of Saadia, Bachya, Halevi and Maimonides. <sup>Practically</sup> Every idea which is expressed in the moreh Nebuchim on the subject is not only variously present in Bachya and Halevi, but is quite distinctly foreshadowed by Saadia.

### B.

#### Saadia

"The most important part of his system philosophically is that which deals with creation and the attributes of God." <sup>(2)</sup> Other topics are treated less thoroughly or almost as pure dogma. Having proved creation ex nihilo, Saadia sets out to analyze the concept of God, i.e. to see what the rational being may legitimately assert about the essence and characteristics of God. He finds it necessary firstly to discuss epistemology or the source and process of man's knowing.

Man's knowledge does not rest entirely on an empirical basis, but depends also upon the natural ideas which are innate in our reason as well as upon the inferences drawn from both. The lowest kind of knowledge is that gained directly by the senses, for it is a faculty which is shared by the other animals. Man's unique capacity lies in the other two channels of learning. He makes generalizations upon generalizations becoming more subtle as the abstraction becomes more universal. The supreme abstractions are the ten categories of Aristotle, which Saadia seems to arrange in a scale of abstraction--one above the other. <sup>(3)</sup> The validity and reality of each successive universal concept is proportionate to

(2) H.M. Ph. 46

(3) Emmenoth--Prolegomena Book II

its distance from sense perception. But ultimately human reason reaches a point beyond which it cannot aspire. <sup>Man's</sup> His power of thinking must be limited, because it is a faculty within his limited body.

Man's finite reason is therefore absolutely incapable of knowing the infinite. <sup>(4)</sup> He cannot comprehend God, <sup>(5)</sup> the supreme abstraction.

We shall see how Saadya reviews the ten categories of Aristotle and shows how they are all as one totally inapplicable to God. To express it differently, <sup>it</sup> does not stand in any logical relationship with man. This is quite clearly an indication of that extreme position, rather anomalous from the religious point of view, which Maimonides expressed ever so much more boldly, namely, that there is no relation between God and the world. <sup>(6)</sup>

There can be no knowledge of ~~subtle~~ things (עניני קצרים) except through these abstractions. In true Aristotelian vein Saadya refers to them definitely as the causes of the phenomena in question. <sup>(7)</sup>

(4) Neumark disputes this interpretation of the passage in question. See "Essays in Jewish Philosophy" -- Pages 205-208.

(5) *אין אדם יכול להכיר את המציאות כפי שהיא באמת, אלא רק דרך המושגים והמציאות כפי שהיא באדם.*

(6) Moreh-153 Maimonides' denial of all relation is after all also a stripping of one logical category after another, although in his case he restricts himself to an analysis of "attributes".

(7) He makes recurrent use of the phrase *המציאות כפי שהיא באדם*.

In the hierarchy of universals the highest ones are the direct causes of those immediately below. Our mind can only follow up to a certain point. The uninitiated object to such a conceptual view of being because it is too abstruse. They are psychologically prepared to admit only tangible causes, things which they can perceive with their senses. Especially is this true of the *פ'א'ל'א'ן* who demand a corporeal God with all the accoutrements and attributes. They fear that in severing God completely from any sense perceptions we are removing all traces of genuineness from His being. But no. "I shall prove to them that God's extreme subt<sup>l</sup>ity is in itself the best verification of His reality. Our rational conception of Him as more abstract than any known phenomenon is per se the highest substantiation of His existence. (8) It must be remembered that this is not Saadya's complete proof of God's existence. Chapter one proved it kalamistically by first "proving" the fact of creation. What Saadya does here, in chapter two, is to defend the statement of God's existence even while asserting that He is otherwise unknowable.

Incorporeality is proven also in chapter one. Here again it is dealt with briefly, though incorporeality is never considered by him an essential attribute. The general argument is that God is the cause of all corporeal existence. The empirical world--all body--is composed and finite, hence caused. The cause of it all is that which is neither composed, nor finite--the simple eternal uncaused cause.

An incorporeal being cannot be subject to modifications of substance, such as motion and rest, anger or favor. To deny His corporeality, yet speak of these accidents in relation to Him, is to hypocritically retain the idea while merely changing the words. This

(8) *וְכִי יִשְׁאַל אִישׁ מִכֶּם וְיֹאמַר לָמָּה זֶה עָשִׂיתָ וְיֹאמַרְתָּ אֵלָיו כִּי אֵלֹהִים אֲנִי וְיִשְׁאַלְתָּ אֵלָיו לָמָּה זֶה עָשִׂיתָ וְיֹאמַרְתָּ אֵלָיו כִּי אֵלֹהִים אֲנִי וְיִשְׁאַלְתָּ אֵלָיו לָמָּה זֶה עָשִׂיתָ וְיֹאמַרְתָּ אֵלָיו כִּי אֵלֹהִים אֲנִי*  
Neumark's position that man can comprehend God finds supports in such statements. But all other commentators would say that we



type of reproach is a stock argument of medieval thinkers and is used repeatedly by Maimonides in deprecating the sophistic methods of the Kalam.

Through prophetic revelation we have learned of God's essential attributes: Unity, Life, Power, Wisdom, Incomparability. Unity is proved directly in three ways: a) we have proven that all body is composite and God is the cause of all body. No accidents of body appertain to God. But plurality partakes of the accident of quantity. Hence like all accident it is predicable of body but not of God. "It follows that He is one because any addition to one would make Him subject to the modification of bodies."<sup>(9)</sup>

It can be seen that essentially this unity is a negative concept meaning only to deny plurality. Actually neither plurality nor even unity can be predicated of God in any acceptable sense, since they belong to the category of quantity. Kaufman says, "Das Er Einer sei kann nur als formelle oder negative Bestimmung gelten was sich auch von den Unvergleichbarkeit behaupten lässt, nur das diese, da sie auch jede nähere Bestimmung des göttlichen Wesens als unvergleichlich hinstellt, doch auch, wie Schleiermacher sich ausdrückt, als 'Mass und Beschaffenheit der wirksamen Eigenschaften' angesehen werden kann."<sup>(10)</sup> Both Unity and Incomparability are thus not

really qualities of God but rather attributes of the other three attributes. Saadya quite definitely makes Life, Power and Wisdom the attributes of God. Incomparability is assumed, neither discussed nor analyzed. Unity is also not analyzed as a concept <sup>into</sup> due to its various types. All the arguments for Unity aim only to prove that God is not more than one. If he had developed the thought further, Saadya would

(8) (continued) know nothing of what God is--only that he is.

(9) Emmunoth Chap. 2 Hereafter all quotations from the Emmunoth should be taken as referring to this chapter unless otherwise indicated.

(10) Attributenlehre pg. 16, 17.

have combined these arguments with his own statement that God is not subject to number. Add also His Unvergleichbarkeit and we have the elements of Saadya's negative attributes. Unity would then mean non-plurality, yet at the same time something indefensible to the human mind and not at all analogous to any rational concept of Unity. The same ideas utilized in an analysis of his remaining three Attributes would have resulted substantially in Maimonides' position. It is at any rate implicit in the Chapter.

In Chapter one of this paper, we spoke of two types of Unity-- external and internal. Saadya is concerned with both, as apologetics against the Dualists and the Trinitarians respectively. Against his dualistic adversaries, heirs of the gnostics who posited two gods, Saadya gives six proofs that God is not more than one. (notice the negative phrasing of the argument). The three direct proofs are: a) that plurality is an accident of body b) that there is no reason for arbitrarily stopping at two or three Gods, since c) creation is proven sufficiently by the assumption of one God. Any greater number is arbitrary. (11)

The three indirect arguments are well summarized in Husik. It is interesting to note with Kaufman that the direct arguments are those condemned by Maimonides in his strictures against the Kalam, though (12) (13) (14) Guttman interprets them otherwise and differs with Kaufman's view.

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(11) Saadya combines b) and c)

(12) H.M.J. Ph. 32, Emunoth 11, 2

(13) Moreh I, 75, 76. Attributenlehre 20, 21

(14) Saadya's Religious Philosophy 95, 96





Similarly Marmouides says in Moreh II, 1.



but we are forced to use three words because of our linguistic shortcomings.

Now this sounds rather unconvincing and typically scholastic. But in view of other statements in the book I suspect that Saadya had something more valid in mind. Saadya has shown that man's reason fails to grasp abstractions above a certain level of subtlety. God is the most subtle <sup>subtlety</sup> ~~subtle~~, hence most ineluctable being. His ~~subtlety~~ <sup>subtlety</sup> is proof positive of His reality, but our failure to grasp such abstraction obviously makes it impossible for us to characterize Him verbally. His essence is extreme simplicity, the cause of all being, which we indicate by the word "creator". But this word cannot pretend to tell us anything about the essence of God. Since language is the outer expression of thought, a restricted and inaccurate thought will be reflected in the inaccuracy of linguistic expression. In the case at hand, a "description" of God can only be subjectively expressed in terms of his actions or effects. Creation as such--the unique act of God--must forever remain unintelligible, but from its synonyma "maker" (Saadya calls God "maker" --homonymously) we expect that God must have been able to "make" and must have known how to "make". What these words mean to Saadya, he does not definitely say, but I think that his position on Unity and Unvergleichbarkeit should be indicative. \*

Creator is a subjective description for the logical relation between God and Universe. Creation is an effect of God, not a part of His essence. "Maker" does not indicate any addition to His essence; it implies merely that there is something made or done. The three attributes, by the same passage, indicate only the same thing. The three so-called essential attributes therefore turn out to be no different than Maimonides' attributes of action. Even if we should argue that

\* Just as Bachyn omits consideration of such specific terms used in relation to God. He relies on the understanding of his general position to cast light on these terms.

Saadya implies attributes of relation (objectionable only to Maimonides) i.e. cause and effect, it must be apparent that even Maimonides' attributes of action impute to God the principle of causation. Actually attributes of relation meant to those who spoke of them expressly (18) precisely what attributes of action meant to Maimonides. (19)

Those who protest against the limitation of attributes to the three we have mentioned run counter to the dictates of reason. The source of their mistake is to be sought firstly in the comparison of God to man and secondly in the too literal interpretation of scriptural and discursive references to God. This criticism applies to the pre-Mutazilite tendencies of the Kalam which included also the attributes of Will, Hearing, Vision, Speech, Glory, Generosity, Strength, and Nobility. But even the Mutazilites who posited only Life, Power and Wisdom were not profound enough with respect to the latter. Gattaman emphasizes that Saadya's view marks a real advance over that of the Mutazilites. While the assumption of God's Unity over and above the multiple attributes was a basic feature of their theology yet Saadya's contribution was that there is only one concept--and that the three so-called attributes are merely a reflection of the insufficiency of language. (20) Kaufman expresses the thought more boldly: (21)

"Es ergiebt sich aus bereits aus der bisherigen Darstellung, dass es nach der Ansicht des Saadia eigentlich gar kein Attribut geben könne, dass wir streng genommen Gott beilegen könnten." (22)

We may speak only of God's existence (AK). Even this is a metaphor (homonym, Maimonides would say) in the light of Saadia's principle of the complete lack of analogy between creator and created.

(18) Halevi and Ibn Daud

(19) see above page 26 for Wolfson's opinion to this effect (note 46 ibid)

(20) Religiousphilosophie 93 . see above page 24

(21) attributenlehre 30

(22) Traces of these ideas can be seen amongst certain Mutazilites such as Abu-L-Hasails. They too talk of negative and relative attributes, but they involve themselves in the absurdities of the Ash'ariya that God knows with a knowledge which is not different from His essence. See attributenlehre 30-37 for the extent to which Saadya may have been indebted to the Mutazilites.

Complete simplicity is now thoroughly sustained and Sadya is now ready to dispute with the Trinitarians. One cannot create, they say, unless he be wise and living. Wisdom and life seem to be outside of God's essence. Hence, either they must consent to call Him corporeal, a thing which they all refuse to do, or else their position will be self-contradictory.

*Handwritten note:* "The Trinitarians are like one who defines fire by its attributes, (the parts of the definition are the attributes) yet disclaims any reference to fire. Discreet attributes would corporalize God and like all bodies, He would be caused. But we have proven that God is uncaused."

Any inner diversity is tantamount to corporification. These Trinitarians are like one who defines fire by its attributes, (the parts of the definition are the attributes) yet disclaims any reference to fire. Discreet attributes would corporalize God and like all bodies, He would be caused. But we have proven that God is uncaused.

Besides they do not properly understand what constitutes proof. In man we say that his life and his knowledge are not identical with his essence, because we see that sometimes he is with them, sometimes without. Life and knowledge are contingent in man. Nothing in his essence implies necessary existence. In a sense, therefore, the so-called essential attributes of man are really accidental, and in that sense added to his essence. But this is not so with God. Strictly speaking, God does not even have life, for that would be a trait added to his essence and anything in which life is a distinguishable aspect must be caused. God is plainly indefeasible.

Scripturally and logically, the limitations of the attributists and pluralists wrongly find sustenance in the anthropomorphic expressions.

(a) Ennuoth 2,5

(b) Religionsphilosophie 105: "Ausserdem beruht aber diese ganze Theorie auf der völlig unhaltbaren Voraussetzung, dass die für menschliche Verhältnisse zulässigen Annahmen ohne Weiteres auch auf Gott übertragen werden dürften."



These are either metaphors (משפטים) or figures of speech (מכאול). Their purpose is to facilitate flexibility of speech. Two exegetical rules are characteristic of Saadya. Construct cases such as 'the word of God', 'the image of', or 'the hand of', are either expressions of Divine action or indications of superlative adjectival phrases. 'The word of God' and 'the spirit of God' mean the words which God put into the mouths of the prophets. Ten distinct types of nouns and verbs are mentioned to show man's manner of describing certain effects of God. Eye and seeing mean Providence; mouth and speaking mean revelation and rules of conduct. The will of God is implied by such words as the "word of God." (Ps 33/5) which Christians interpret as the logos. God created the world with His will, but that only signifies that creation was neither accidental nor necessary. Will is therefore also a negative attribute, whose only positive value is as an attribute of action.

Metaphors which come under the first rule of interpretation tell us nothing of God's essence, and are used only according to the rule *פירוש יצחק בן ישראל*. If we were exact in our speech we would have to abandon all descriptive terms and say only that "He is." (26) The second type of figure of speech shows our respect for a thing by attributing to it sublime importance. Thus, the image of (27) God means the highest earthly form.

Saadya's attributenlehre is now nearing completion. He has freed God from all corporeal modifications; he has purged His Unity from all appearances of plurality and composition; he has fought the doctrines of Dualism and Trinitarianism; he has established God as the

(25) Attributenlehre 47ff 86: "Der Ausdruck *הַיְהוָה* könnte auch durch Freiheiten, die die Sprache sich erlaubt widergegeben werden."

(26)

(27)

*Handwritten notes in Hebrew:*  
 "הַיְהוָה" הוא שם נרמז, וכל המושגים האחרים הם רק כלי לביטוי השלמות האלוהית.  
 "הַיְהוָה" הוא שם נרמז, וכל המושגים האחרים הם רק כלי לביטוי השלמות האלוהית.  
 "הַיְהוָה" הוא שם נרמז, וכל המושגים האחרים הם רק כלי לביטוי השלמות האלוהית.

most subtle of essences. (23) But God is not merely the most <sup>subtle</sup> subtle entity. That might imply a difference only in degree whereas we have seen Him to be inscrutably different in kind. There is no analogy to God either in logic or in metaphysics. To prove this conviction Saadya reviews Aristotle's ten categories and shows how one and all are wholly inapplicable to God. We shall not review them here, but a few of the views are worth recalling for our purposes:

1) God is not anyone of the ten substances. Hence he is not substance.

3) Number and relation are inapplicable.

4) All ethical attributes such as love, mercy are included in the category of quality and they may not be predicated of God.

The category of action must be more fully discussed here.

(28) notice the influence of the atomic theory in this terminology and the idea that all being is composed of atoms of different degrees of refinement. Perhaps this is an example of language survival rather than continuation of the idea. Chapter eight which deals with the soul and with the world is an illustration of the survival of the idea itself.

Attributes of action may not literally refer to God. The category of action in rational discourse signifies an agent who works on an object in a definite place and time. But God cannot be subject to this concept of action. When we say that a certain Biblical phrase speaks of His actions, we mean merely that in some manner unknown to us God was the cause of a given effect. Only in this negative sense do we imply attributes of action to God. We distinguish between His and our actions by saying that He creates merely with His will, yet will itself implies nothing affirmatively excepting this same fact of causality. "God made," or "God's will" therefore mean 1) that He is the causative principle 2) any attempts at explanation involve comparison to events in our experience, and in view of God's "Unvergleichbarkeit" must be utterly inadequate.

God 'remembered' or 'was merciful' are similarly merely attributes of action whose ultimate implication is that God is the cause of an effect in question, but we express this in various ways which are wholly subjective in us and invalid in God.

Kaufman and Guttman interpret this as a sharp distinction between essential attributes and attributes of action.<sup>31</sup> Saadya makes no further statement on this point except to send the reader to his commentary on Exodus for further reference. Yet Kaufman rightly remarks that the distinction is only formal and is insignificant since Saadya's system radically denies all positive divine attributes.

It will be seen in our discussion of Bachya and of Maimonides that the denial of attributes ultimately concerned itself with two

(29) Attributenlehre 68, 69 ff 127

(30) Theol. des Saadya's 124 ff.

(31) op. cit. 68--Bei der auffassung von den Göttlichen Eigenschaften die Saadya lehrt, laugnete er doch im grunde alle attribute.

\* Notice in our treatment of Bodhya that the latter is generally subjected with leaving the first distinctly to make the second division, no parenthesis in "misunderstandings".

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things: a) the maintenance of a strict logical and metaphysical simplicity in God b) the denial of all similarity between God and other being. It all led to talk of God's Negative Attributes and Dynamic attributes (attributes of action). Saadya does not mention the word negative, though his system similarly narrows down to these two things. (3) We shall see that this view was the common property of Arab and Christian theologians ever since Philo and Origenes. We shall observe the development in Jewish philosophers.

Saadya is not consistent in his view on the attributes of action with reference to God. The end of his chapter denies the validity of the ten categories with reference to God. The category of action is definitely included, yet his discussions of the moral characteristics of God as well as his views on God 'the Creator' are manifestly conceptions of God as the source of actions. It is only fair to add that even Maimonides position on this issue was similarly contradictory. Crescas is quick to note it. Maimonides too first rules out similarity yet later permits attributes of action--a view which involves the same contradiction (as we shall later note). (32)

The discussion of Aristotle's categories in relation to God made clear that we cannot get any enlightenment on that subject through the senses. Then how do we know of God's Being? Revelation is the answer previously given. Here the answer is either intuition or innate idea. Just as we know good and bad, or just as we understand that a thing cannot be and not be at the same time even though we observe neither of these by the senses, so we do know of God's being.

Thus we give Saadya credit for having in embryo the attributes system of his followers. Further developments are in the direction of more explicitness, greater completeness and more systematic analysis. (33)

(32) see Wolfson in J.Q.R 1916 pages 15, 16

(33) the word "negative attribute" is nowhere mentioned in Saadya.



We have seen that Saadya's theology implied both the negative view of attributes as well as the validity of positive attributes of action. The former was especially helpful in maintaining the absolute Unity of God; the latter re-affirms the dynamic quality of the deity. Together they spell monotheism and ethics, or ethical monotheism. What was implicit in Saadya became (for the first time in Jewish philosophy) explicit in Bachya. Neither concept was new. "Negative and dynamic interpretations of divine attributes had been the common stock-in-trade of Arabic and Jewish philosophers ever since Philo."<sup>(34)</sup>

(35)

Let us follow Kaufman to get a brief resume of this position historically. We will then analyze it logically and metaphysically. With these two as a background we shall be the better able to judge the presentation of Bachya in detail.

Maimonides theory of attributes was typical rather than original. The difference was a matter of emphasis, but also of comprehensiveness and keener analysis. His point of emphasis was the absolute inscrutableness of God. But the proposition had already been enunciated by Neoplatonists and repeated by the church fathers<sup>(36)</sup> and subsequently by Arab philosophers that we may only know what God is not. Specifically the doctrine of negative attributes is already known to Al-Kināfi among the Arabs, and in Jewish philosophy David al Munkammaz (Saadya's predecessor) already mentions it explicitly, and erroneously ascribes its origin to Aristotle.<sup>(37)</sup> But in Jewish philosophy it first attained prominence in Bachya..... seit Bachya Ibn

(34) Crescas on divine attributes--Wolfson p. 24

(35) Attributenlehre 481 etc

(36) see Munk 239 ff. for references to Plotinus and to Aquinas embracing a period of a whole millenium in Catholic thinking.

(37) later we shall see how Bachya repeats this error.



Paluda kehrt dieser, Gedanke immer wieder, Salomon Ibn Gabirol vergisst ihn nicht in seinen religiösen gerängen, Jehuda Halevi und Joseph Ibn-Zaddik begründen und vertiefen ihn, Abraham Ibn David setzt ihn an die Spitze seiner attributenlehre, aber zu unnachsichtigen Durchführung hat ihn erst Maimonides bringen unternommen."

Munk asserts that it was ascribed to Aristotle very early but that no traces can be found in him. The *Metaphysics* do refer to the "Prime Mover" in negative terms such as 'immovable', 'other than the sensibles', 'indivisible', etc. But Aristotle never does explicitly exclude the use of positive descriptions. (38)

Now exactly what do negative attributes mean in logical discourse and in metaphysics? (39) There is a logical difference between the proposition "God is not many" and the proposition "God is not-many." When the medievalist says "God is one", taking the statement negatively, he does not mean "God is not many". He means "God is not-many. Aristotle distinguishes "between a proposition wherein the negative participle modifies the copula, and that wherein it modifies the subject or the predicate. The former is a negative proposition, the latter is an affirmative proposition with an indefinite subject or predicate, as the case may be. A negative proposition expresses the privation of the subject of one of two alternative qualities, thus always implying its possession of the other; an affirmative proposition with an indefinite predicate expresses the exclusion of the subject of a certain class of qualities which are irrelevant to its nature." Thus the proposition "God is not many" would logically indicate that He is one in some determinate sense. Contrariwise, the

(38) *ibid*

(39) see Wolfson's *Crescas on Divine Attributes* for substantiation and for factual references p. 20-22

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proposition "God is not-many" states that God is not plural, without thereby implying that He is One. Its intent would then only be to assert that the category of quantity is totally inapplicable to the nature of the subject, God. Wolfson continues: The latter kind of proposition is said to express what Kant would call an infinite or limiting judgment as distinguished from a negative judgment. So in Kant "the soul is not-mortal" is to be distinguished from the proposition "the soul is not mortal". "Negative attribute" is apparently used by <sup>the</sup> more precise medievalists in the sense of the Aristotelian indefinite predicate. That this is the sense of Maimonides is clear from the following passage.: "Even the negative attributes must not be found and applied to God, except in the way in which, as you know, sometimes an attribute is negativized with reference to a thing, although that attribute can naturally never be applied to it in the same sense; as, e. g. we say "The wall is not seeing" (Moreh 1, 58). It is quite evident that we never say the "wall is not seeing", except in the sense of the wall is not-seeing."

It is thus evident that there are two types of negative propositions. 1) that which denies a specific quality and therefore implicitly asserts its opposite 2) that which denies a specific quality, asserting that the whole category is irrelevant to the subject. These have been referred to as "partial negation" in the former case, or "absolute negation" in the latter sense. In our analysis of Saadya there is obviously nothing to indicate which type of negative he had in mind (he doesn't mention the term "negative-attribute"), even if we thought that he knew of the difference. Subsequently we shall see where Bachya and Halevi stood in this issue.

Metaphysically the negative attribute involved a particular conception of being. Following Aristotle being was conceived as consisting of matter and form or potentiality and actuality. A specific object was conceived as having a specific form realized in its <sup>(40)</sup> matter, its substratum. But Aristotle taught that no object of our experience is static. All being is in a constant state of flux; it is always changing. Hence all particular beings are continuously moving from one form to another. A being has not only a specific form but it is simultaneously invested with a definite potentiality to take on the next specific form. This specific potentiality is called *Shin* <sup>7987</sup>

Thus all transient existence is composed of three elements 1) material substratum which is pure potentiality or <sup>40</sup> 2) a specific form which is superimposed upon matter and which limits it and makes it a particular ontological being. This is <sup>2</sup> 3) a specific possibility, a disposition to assume another form. This is the <sup>(40)</sup> cause. This latter cause <sup>(41)</sup> "is not a mere passivity on the part of matter but some disposition or tendency, a material cause" "To Aristotle--in contradistinction to Plato matter is not mere non-being" <sup>(42)</sup>

but *"dynameis"*, a possibility and a capacity of being formed, some sort of hunger for a definite form, so that matter attains a degree of reality and may therefore be a principle of being. This capacity is isolated and added as a separate principle of being. Efras thinks in Maimonides it is only logical but others disagree and insist that it has distinct ontological reality. For the Motekallimun as well as for most pre-Maimonidean thinkers it is undoubtedly ontologically real.

(40) the three elements are called causes in Moreh 1/17 or

(41) Efras--Phil. terms in Moreh-II

(42) *ibid* 53

Now this <sup>שאלה ראשונה</sup>, this disposition is otherwise called a particular privation, i.e., a privation of a particular form. We may therefore say metaphysically that being was (to the medievalists) substance consisting of positive attributes or qualities (species and genus) and negative attributes (specific dispositions to taken on new forms). The negative attributes are always present in every specific being. No transient being could therefore be viewed as complete, since it was always "moving" (changing) to realize its successive potentialities. God, who <sup>is</sup> incorporeal and of whom we may only say that He is, does not have any <sup>שאלה ראשונה</sup>, any privation or imperfection. Not being subject to change or to qualities, essential or accidental, we must dissociate from Him all positive qualities as well privations. Notice that these privations which were as universal to transient beings as positive properties, were often labeled negative qualities or negative attributes. These latter should be identified with the partial negations of which we spoke above. Thus Maimonides, for example, speaks of removing all positive attributes from God, but he also talks of negating all privations with respect to Him<sup>m</sup>. This latter is called <sup>שאלה ראשונה</sup>.

Metaphysically the doctrine of negative attributes seems to have this double sense. Firstly, it negates all privation or imperfection from God, which in effect means that it carries Him beyond the realm of becoming or causation. It expresses this by saying God is not non-seeing or non-one. But secondly far from imputing to God the positive qualities, human perfections, it negates these and urges the absolute negation of all knowable attributes. What this absolute negative implies we saw above.



Simply speaking, the doctrine of negative attributes is tantamount to a confession of our ignorance of the divine essence. But it does at the same time faithfully assert that there are some unknowable qualities which are one with His essence. These we cannot hope to know because our knowledge is all of the conditional, the caused world. God is not non-Being and He is not Being, because both being and non-being are mundane expressions. He is 'not-Being the inscrutable source of Being.' This concept is very much like Plato's  $\mu\eta\delta\epsilon\iota\varsigma$ . As we negate one quality after another with respect to God we learn nothing of His essence, but by homonymous use of current terms such as life, existence, oneness, we do rise in our knowledge of what God is not. Wisdom consists in the piling up these negations, these admissions of ignorance from ever increasing aspects. We are reminded here of Nicholas Cusanus' similar appraisal of human achievements in the realm of ultimates, where the highest goal of the thinker is to reach the stage of "learned ignorance," *docta ignorantia*.

All this is necessary to a proper appraisal of Bachya because so much of it is to be found in his first chapter. But there is another aspect of the attributes problem which is important, that which concerns itself with ethics, Bachya's special preoccupation. We speak of God's infinite love as well as His infinite power, but there would be no evil or pain if God's ability to do good were infinite. As it is, it seemed that either His goodness is limited or His power, if not both. This is the dilemma of the religious absolutist. It has led in recent times that men like William James and Dean R<sup>of</sup>chdall view Him as finite in power. Along with the influence of Greek philosophy on monotheistic religion, this dilemma was perhaps a major stimulus to the evolution of the attributes--theologies.



Gnostics and dualists boldly admitted two powers. Monotheists of all ages have naturally fought them. But absolutists from Saadya to Maimonides throw up their hands and admit intellectual defeat. Our mind does not go that far. For similar positions in more modern theology we bring quotations from Lewis Richard Farnall. Calvin says: "the procedure of Divine justice is too high to be scanned by human measure or comprehended by the feebleness of human intellect." Lotze: "Let us say that where there is an irreconcilable contradiction between the omnipotence and the goodness of God, our finite wisdom has come to the end of its tether, and that we do not understand the solution which we yet believe in. "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him is the highest religious expression for this self-abnegation of the intellect." It should be noted however that for medieval Arab and Jewish philosophers and for most Christian thinkers of the same period, this "abnegation of the intellect" did not absolve human beings from the obligation of learning and thinking. There was an intellectual love of God which seemed to be a goal and a sine qua non of true religion. In some this intellectual love was accompanied by a deep mystic reverence for the ineffableness of this transcendental God. The latter emotion seemed to express faith that in some unintelligible way God was nevertheless immanent.

The negative view of God as the absolute but unknowable source of life, did nevertheless assert one all pervasive positive fact. The God who is transcendental in the sense of necessary existence as against conditional being, is somehow the real cause of all being, is somehow the real cause of all being. God is the unifying principle of existence in a constantly changing world. God is the teleological cause

(13) Attributes of God--see pages 247-280

cause of being and therefore the source of life and ethics. This is the essential bond which the doctrine of negative attributes creates between the God of Philosophy and the God of Ethics. Bachya therefore introduces his ethical treatise with the gate of Unity, the

For him Yichud consists of the rational insight into God's ineffability, always accompanied by a fervent emotional sense of agreement. Heart and mind are as one in conceiving God's transcendence. But this latter conception arises out of the insignificance of man and his limitations as compared to the deity, and therefore finds expression in an ecstatic if not ecstatic love of God. Notice however that the mind must play its part in the well-balanced. We must aim to understand all that human reason is capable of. Then the real job of proper living begins, i.e., serving God with all one's faculties.

We continue our analysis of Bachya. Philosophy and Ethics are interdependent. Again this is a neoplatonic attitude which was typical of all medieval philosophy. Not only were the Arab "Pure Brethren" greatly influenced by it, but even men like Avicenna and Maimonides. Kaufman tries to prove that Bachya was not directly indebted to the Pure Brethren. Others dispute this view. Regardless of that, Bachya's position is ethics-monotheism.

The soul was thought to be derived from the divine essence. It might comprehend the supernatural if unfettered by the chains of the body. Body was derived from the material principle and like its source was deemed to be the root of evil. It limits the attempt of the soul to grasp the absolute. Hence the goal of the religious as well as the rational man was identical, namely to redeem the soul from

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of God to them.

Relative oneness will be contrasted to absolute oneness. Ibn Zaddik follows this lead when he repeats this Hebrew dictum. He uses the word *Yehi* taken in the sense of Bachya's *Yehi* in the same sense as Maimonides' *Yehi*. Thus whetherness or sheer existence is the highest conception which reason can aspire to.

Bachya now proceeds to prove creation and the existence of a creator. His arguments don't follow the model of the Kalam, but they are subject to the same criticism which the latter received at the hands of Maimonides. (47) They had all proved creation but had failed to show creation *ex nihilo*; for their arguments did not preclude the existence of a primordial matter out of which God fashioned the world. (48) Saadya had on the other hand specifically recognized this need.

Bachya's treatment of creation is much less comprehensive than Saadya's. Possibly he could rely on the ample discussion of his predecessor. But in the question of the unity of God, Bachya is more elaborate and offers a greater variety of arguments. More than anyone before him he takes pains to differentiate sharply between God's unity and all other types. Bachya has seven proofs that there is not more than one God. This deals with the external unity as against the internal unity which is more specifically the discussion of attributes. (a) The latter phase being our primary concern here, we shall touch upon these seven arguments only briefly.

1) The causes are fewer than the effects, the causes of the causes until there is one uncaused cause as previously indicated. Specifically, the number of individuals is infinite, the genus still less,

(47) Moreh I, 74

(48) Emunoth I chapter 3

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until we get the highest three genus <sup>etc.</sup> matter, form and motion. The cause of these must be less--ultimately one, namely the will of God. It is interesting to notice a glaring contradiction between the Hebrew proposition just quoted and the following one in chapter 5.

באמת שיש אלהים אחד ואלהים אחד ואלהים אחד ואלהים אחד ואלהים אחד  
כי הויה בראשית מן האלוהים אחד ואלהים אחד ואלהים אחד ואלהים אחד  
אלהים בראשית ואלהים אחד ואלהים אחד ואלהים אחד ואלהים אחד ואלהים אחד

This contradiction does not disqualify the argument however, since Bachya might just as well have begun with a finite number of individuals and then have a lesser number of species. He would then be in agreement with Aristotle, Maimonides, etc.

2) The ~~inherent~~ unity of the world indicates a unitary principle at the base.

3) Creation has proved a creator, but he who posits more than one must bear the burden of giving ample evidences.

4) Dualism would lead to absurd conclusions. If the two Gods were of identical essence we have only the original Unity. If their essences are different, they are distinct, limited and hence composite.

5) Euclid defines unity as that in virtue of which we call a thing one. Thus 'unity' <sup>is</sup> precedes the unitary thing by nature just as heat precedes the ~~unitary~~ <sup>hot</sup> thing by nature, just as heat precedes the hot object. Plurality is the sum of ones, hence plurality cannot be prior to unity from which it proceeds. Husik very aptly shows that this is a strictly neoplatonic argument based upon the idealism of Plato. According to this "whatever reality or attributes particular things in our world of sense possess, they owe to the real and eternal types of these realities and attributed in a higher and intelligible (using the word in contradistinction to sensible) world in which they participate." Essences are hypostatized into eternal and aend ideas; abstract qualities and quantities are hypostatized. A thing is existent and one and good because it participates in Existence, Unity and Goodness.



6) Plurality is an attribute of substance. But neither substance nor attribute (accident) can pertain to God. Thus plurality cannot pertain to him. But since there is no medium between plurality and oneness, God must be one. Notice that Bachya here has fallen <sup>into</sup> the same trap as Saadya, whereas Maimonides states boldly that God is subject neither to plurality nor to unity. The motive behind this proof is probably to indicate that plurality involves corporeality. (50)

7) More than one creator might involve them in disputes and might create disharmony in the world. Besides each would be limited in his power and scope.

Thus for the arguments are Kalamistic with a few additional Neoplatonic. There is not any decided advance over Saadya. Most are mere re-statements except for the few Neoplatonic additions.

But what does it mean to say God is one? In answering this <sup>there</sup> is a real advance over Saadya in analysis of the oneness of God as against that of human experience. (51)

We differentiate between accidental unity and substantial unity.

(49) H.M.J.Ph. 90

(50) Theol. des Bachya 59 ff 2

(51) Kaufman calls attention to the peculiar fact that none of the great pre-Maimonidean philosophers actually made such a sharp and essential division between these two types of unity. Aristotle speaks of original and derivative types of unity, but judging by his examples they would all come under what Bachya calls the accidental unity. At one point Aristotle compares four types of unity as against the concept of one, but this pure concept of oneness is nevertheless the one used as a basis of measurement. Avicenna extended the purity of the oneness-concept, but he too never called it by any such name as substantial unity. Ibn Daud spoke of mathematical unity as inferior to some more sublime concept of oneness, yet he didn't make use of the Bachyan term. Kaufman thinks that Bachya must have derived his idea from Neoplatonic sources. He quotes Iamblichus on Pythagoras as follows: "Die Einheit wird eingetheilt in die Einheit dem Wesen nach und in die Einheit dem Accidens nach. Die Einheit dem Wesen nach nun gehört nur dem Schöpfer des Alls an, von welchem die Einheiten in der Zahl und dem Gezahlten ausgehen"-----Theologie des Bachyas 62ff

Accidental unity is again subdivided: a) the unity of a class, a genus, a species, or an individual, in all of which the multiplicity is quite visible. The class and genus and species contain many individuals; the individual contains many distinct parts. Unity is here accidental, because these things are one in a sense, but many in as true a sense. b) accidental Unity whose multiplicity is not noticed immediately, or not as readily visible to the eye. For example, a body of water is homogeneous and every part is like the other. <sup>(52)</sup> But this too is multiple in essence because it is composed of matter and form, substance and accident. It is because of this composition that all objects of our experience are subject to genesis and decay, composition and division, union and separation, motion and change. Anything which is thus subject to plurality and change is therefore only accidentally one.

Substantial Unity similarly has two subgroupings-- a) The ideal one. This is the mathematical one which is a creature of our mind. It is the unit of numbers. It is mental because it is not perceived by the senses. It is abstracted by the mind from the numbered objects of our experience. It is not real. It is only the symbol of a beginning which has no other before it. b) The real and actual one. This is a being which does not change or multiply, which cannot be described by any corporeal attributes <sup>(53)</sup> which is not subject to generation, decay or limitations, which does not move, which is totally dissimilar to anything else. In every respect it is one and is the cause of all multiplicity. Notice here the Neopythagorean influences, for numbers were seen to be the ultimate realities, but the number 'one' was the original source from which all other numbers issued. The "Pure One" is therefore not only a mathematical point but is the most real thing in existence and the cause

(52) the example is not found in Bachya. It is taken from H.M.J.Ph. 92  
 (53) see Klotzkins dictionary for ~~and~~ in sense of similar

of all other being, -transient or composed beings being identified with plural numbers. Whether or not Bachya believed these mystical ideas of numerology I don't know; but his language is at any rate a distinct survival.

בידו של כל פנים אחד ואחד ומה שיש לו חזקתו, כי האחרון יצא חסיד  
ועל אהבה האמת המלה הזאת - כי כל מה שיש לו חזקה ותכלית מן הדברים  
שבתם הבורח והמפחד אליו --- ומה שאמרתי, ובטעמי כנצל האחרון

Change is inapplicable to the true One, because the thing is different before and after the change and thus involves plurality. So also resemblance is an accident in the similar things and accidents inhering in a thing already constitute a plurality. 'Pure One' can therefore not be similar to anything. But is not oneness an accident of the true one? Not at all; it merely has a Negative significance and implies the denial of multiplicity. <sup>אין אחד</sup> ~~אין אחד~~ The fact is that the true one can only be described by negation of multiplicity. <sup>"אין אחד"</sup>

Kaufman aptly remarks that essentially Bachya's proof of the existence of a real one is of the same type as Maimonides' proof of a necessary existence (54). The latter argues that the presence of accidental existence in all transient beings indicates the logical priority of a necessary existent principle. The latter has metaphysical reality and makes possible the being of accidental existences. Bachya notes the presence of all sorts of pluralities <sup>in the world</sup> and declares as a necessary postulate the real existence of a substantial Unity. Now take this latter postulate as one proposition and recall the proven proposition that God is One. How can we prove the identity between the two, namely, the oneness of God and the pure substantial One?

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There are two such proofs: 1) every composed being is made up of parts, hence of plurality. But the very fact of composition is the relationship which inheres between all the parts. That single relationship is what we call the unity of composition. Plurality and Unity are

(page 93) We follow Kaufman's exposition which is more appealing than Husik's full treatment.

thus the two component principles of every composed thing. Since all phenomena in the visible world are composite these two principle must adhere to them. But what is the cause of the two. It is not plurality, since unity is always antecedent to it, just as number is antecedent to its root, one. There must be one ultimate cause as it was indicated in the proofs for the existence of God. (Aristotle's proof that there cannot be an infinite regress of causes). Furthermore since a thing cannot be its own cause, the chain of unities and pluralities cannot begin with a unity and plurality. Unity itself remains as a cause. Unity is therefore the ultimate cause of the two numerical principles as well as of the two primary substances matter and form (as it has previously been proven).<sup>(56)</sup> But since God was proven to be identical with the one cause of matter and form, he must ipso facto be identical with that Pure One who is the cause of mathematical unity and plurality, i. e. of number.

2) Whatever inheres in one thing as an accident must inhere in something else as an essential reality. Thus heat is merely an accidental attribute of water, but is essential in fire. It is the substance of fire. Moreover an attribute which is contained in a being accidentally must have derived that attribute from the source wherein that attribute is essential. Thus the heat of hot water must have been derived from the heat of fire. Analogously, since unity is an accident of all creation, and whatever unity exists in the universe must have been received from the primary oneness of the cause.<sup>(57)</sup> But God is the cause of creation, hence he is the absolute unity.

The following sentences are typical of Bachya's deep analysis of the concept of unity as well as of the mystic reverence which he feels for this most abstract and negative concept of oneness:

(56) Gabirol had identified matter with plurality and form with unity.  
 (57) It is worth noting that we are here again dealing with Plato's doctrine of ideas, though it has its modifications in the school of the Arab "Pure Brethren".



(6) ואם יאמר על כל אחד מהם / הסוברים והמאמינים והעצמים והמקרים  
 ובעצמים האלו והעצמים הכוחיים וכל מה שיש לו חלק  
 אחד ואיחוסים אלו ענין האחדות, לא יאמר לו אחד אלא על דרך השגחה  
 שהוא כולל דברים ופירוש אחד מדרך פשוטם ובהם כדומה דרך א  
 ותואר זה בעצמו, מפני שמקבל דברו ושלנו והמאמר והמחשבה והחכמה  
 והכריזת והרעפת והחכמה והתעלה והמאמר והכח והכח והכח  
 ולפי המקרים המיוחדים והכוללים

How extreme is his position in comparison with Ibn Sabirol for example who identified form with oneness. No universal classification, no genus, species or individual, no number or substance (not even heavenly substances)--partake of the absolute Unity, for they all either contain plurality or are subject to multiplication. Essentially the whole idea was apparently present among the Pythagoreans whose expression in *Schahrastani* Kaufman quotes. We repeat it to indicate how great was Bachya's debt to ancient thinkers, even though Kaufman be right in alleging that no Arab or Jewish philosopher reached his profundity in the analysis and hypostatizing of oneness.

"Die Einheit wird eingetheilt in die Einheit dem Wesen nach und in die dem accidens nach; die Einheit dem Wesen nach gehört nur dem Schöpfer des Alls an, von welchem die Einheiten in der Zahl und dem Gezählten (58) ausgehen."

But just as Plotinus and Proclus saw the implications of this Absolute Unity of God, exactly so Bachya's God must forever remain unknowable. Since there is no relation between absolute Being and transient or accidental being, and since our experience is all of this relative being, our means of knowing are all relative and can find no positive approach to the knowledge of God. God's distance from human reason is therefore so infinite that only the mystic can hope to re-establish communion. Kaufman indicates specifically why Bachya could not have

(58) Theologie des Bachya 68ff 2



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derived this extreme position from either the preceding Jewish philosophers or the Arabic Peripatetics. It is only the Neoplatonists by whom Bachya could have been thus influenced. (59) From our study of Saadya we have seen that Saadya denied the applicability of plurality to God, implicitly maintained that the Unity of God is to be viewed negatively and that the whole category of number does not pertain to God. But most of this is implicit. Whatever is expressly stated is only barely developed. But nowhere can we find <sup>in Saadya</sup> the sublimation of a transcendental one and its identification with the godhead.

Having dealt thus with unity, Bachya obviously has simultaneously established the non-corporeality of God, whereas Saadya who followed the model of the Kalam found it necessary to prove non-corporeality at this point.

Now since we apprehend and know things by means of their qualities, how can we aspire to know anything of this abstract and transcendental one? To answer this our author enters upon the specific discussion of divine attributes. The Pythagoreans were said to believe that every creature recognizes God according to the divine effects which are manifest in him. Every being attributes his own characteristics to God and visualizes Him in his own image, believing that these personal attributes of his must be the result of God's actions. Bachya also maintains that from God's effects we make inferences about His actions, and we ascribe attributes to God from our human point of view corresponding to our conception of these effects.

Actually, all divine attributes are either essential or active.\* Essential attributes are permanent aspects of God which always were and always will be part of Him, independent of creation, and which are therefore peculiar to Him. These are Existence, Unity and Eternality, all of which have been foreseen above. These do not teach us anything valid about,

(59) Theol des Bachyas 70 ff 1,2,3.  
Bachya is the first to have made this distinction which is so thoroughly important for Maimonides' views on attributes, the first rather to expressly develop it in Jewish Philosophy.  
See page 63 of this paper

God's essence, but since they do not imply any action on the part of God they must be considered apart from all others which are merely attributes of action. But what do these three signify? They simply deny their opposites, and not asserting anything affirmative they do not violate the concept of Unity. They are negations and as Ibn Daud says:

אפי' נאמר אלהים אחד

Existence denies the non-existence of God, but we thereby learn nothing of the essence of God. Kaufman says that these essential qualities should be viewed as predicates rather than attributes. The difference, I take it, is that a predicate is only a logically discreet entity <sup>in this sense</sup> but ~~without~~ real separate being. The attributes merely deny that there is plurality or change in God. A basic understanding of them would at any rate see that they are really one concept since any one immediately involves the other two. It is only the weakness of our powers of expression which prevent us from stating the three aspects in one word. This is a typical argument of which we have seen Saadya made much, and even Maimonides includes it. The second justification for the use of these essential attributes is likewise implied by Saadya, <sup>(60)</sup> and carried over explicitly by Halevi and Maimonides. That is their negative meaning. The fact that He is incomparable makes it incumbent upon us that we attempt to know only what He is not.

(60) In our discussion on Saadya's three attributes of God, we indicated that attempts to combine Pure Unity with various attributes which seemed necessary to God's perfection often led to extremely questionable mental gymnastics. See Kaufman illuminating and rather complete treatment of this in Theol. des Bachya 74, 75. Especially true Kaufman's suggestion that Saadya's Life, Power and Knowledge are far from actually being one concept. They are quite distinct logically. For Saadya these essential attributes, supposedly one in nature, were partly active attributes. The difference between active and essential attributes is thus quite clearly ~~lost~~ in Saadya. Existence, One and Eternity may more readily seem to be one concept and quite devoid of any action associations. Even these three attributes, it seems to me, are logically discreet, yet if we start with the concept of Bachya's abstract one we may obviously see why the other two are metaphysically identical with it.

Yet is not the negative explanation enough, and does not the argument from the insufficiency of our language appear superfluous. Not at all.

Kaufman aptly remarks that after all a negative attribute is not entirely meaningless and empty. Ultimately positive attributes must lie at the basis of our negative expressions. Our discussion of the negative attributes before the analysis of Bachya clearly indicated this. Actually the two Bachyan arguments are one, and we shall show that in the Moreh they are treated as one. The argument would be: firstly that essential attributes are negations of privations, but they do indicate the presence of attributes in God which are to us unknowable. If we had the power of reason to understand absolute being and if our language were able to express manifestations of such being, one idea and one concept would cover the essence of God. Qualities which are basically discreet in any conditional existence, may have their unknowable counterparts in necessary existence in such manner that the essential simplicity remains intact. We must always keep in mind the total dissimilarity of God and creatures (61) and all the rest naturally follows.

We have seen earlier in this chapter the view of negative attributes was common among Arab and Jewish philosophers. It was implied in all those who expressly stated that we may strictly speaking, know only that God exists. Saadya and Al-Mokannez were among the latter.

We may also speak of divine attributes of actions. These have specific reference to the relation between God and creation. The distinction between essential and active attributes was emphasized by Maimonides, but it is (62) already present in an Arab catechism of the year 800, and is lightly mentioned by Saadya as we have noted (The difference between

.....). Halevi also speaks of the ..... Now Kaufman claims that all these predecessors of Bachya used it mainly to explain the emotional

.....  
(61) on God's dissimilarity see Saadya above. Bachya erroneously ascribes to Aristotle the statement that negative attributes are true of God.  
(62) Theol. des Bachya 78ff2





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In spiritual things such as the essence of God or of soul, or of the reward and punishment of man, the Bible does offer the discriminating reader many adequate insights. Bachya brings many Biblical passages containing such concealed insights. Some passages definitely indicate that God is an incomparable entity and that His essence may not be ~~fathomed~~. (63) Through revelation, however, all classes of people are equally aware that God exists. The chosen few know the thoughts about God's essence. The latter understand the anthropomorphisms as such. They realize that such words as loving, merciful, noble are always addressed to the name of God, rather than to His essence. In the Bible the name of God always accompanies these terms of praise. Thus they are subjective, because we can't reasonably use any such terms of God's essence. Sandya had explained these same words as deficient and subjective because language expresses phenomena within the human grasp of experience, and is therefore totally inadequate to describe a being outside of our ken.

Since we cannot learn of God by observation or by direct use of the physical faculties we gain our information in a twofold manner. 1) by the inferences we draw from his effects, that is from the world of which he is the cause. But since these effects of his manifest themselves in numerous ways, we are compelled to use numerous terms to describe this causative relation of God to the world. These are our attributes of action. But even the essential attributes which we do not know and to which we only refer negatively, are in a sense inferences which we draw from our observations in the world. Worldly attributes cannot be part of Him, but in our negative use of essential attributes we express the faith that there is in Him something vaguely reminiscent of the former. 2) we learn of God through tradition. Both channels of knowledge are therefore the revelation of God, the ~~first~~ <sup>first</sup> in nature and the second in human ~~-----~~ (63) Most of the verses adduced are replicas of those found in Sandya.



This emphasis on revelation and tradition, though interestingly tied with reason, is at times indicative of the view which Halevi later espoused--the historical view of Jewish theology. We quote Bachya in this matter.

וְלֹא מִכְּהִלָּתוֹ אֶלֶּכָּי יִשְׁכַּח: כִּי אֵלֵינוּ אֱמוּנָה, אֵלֵינוּ אֱמוּנָה, אֵלֵינוּ אֱמוּנָה. וְלֹא מִכְּהִלָּתוֹ אֶלֶּכָּי יִשְׁכַּח: כִּי אֵלֵינוּ אֱמוּנָה, אֵלֵינוּ אֱמוּנָה, אֵלֵינוּ אֱמוּנָה. וְלֹא מִכְּהִלָּתוֹ אֶלֶּכָּי יִשְׁכַּח: כִּי אֵלֵינוּ אֱמוּנָה, אֵלֵינוּ אֱמוּנָה, אֵלֵינוּ אֱמוּנָה.

Words of praise really detract from the ineluctable glory of God as even the Rabbis of the Talmud were well aware. Bachya shows this by quoting from *Brachot* (65) a story which Maimonides later used to the same effect.

"A certain person officiated in services in the presence of Rabbi Haminah. He said "God, the great, The valiant, the tremendous, the powerful, the strong, the mighty". Rabbi Haninah said to him, Have you exhausted all the praises of your Lord? We would not even have used the epithets "God the great, the valiant and the tremendous had not Moses use them, and had not the men of the great Synagogue established them as a form of prayer. The point is illustrated by a parable. A king possessed millions of gold coins, and yet was once praised as the owner of millions of silver coins. Was this not derogation instead of praise? The Bible expresses this by saying. Utter silence is the highest praise of Thee. (66)

"Thus your object" says Bachya "Must be to know the reality of God by virtue of his actions and deeds, but not as regards his essence". He is near and most immanent from the point of view of his actions, but unspeakable distant as regards any attempt to imagine the nature of his essence. He quotes a philosopher saying:

"כִּי אֵלֵינוּ אֱמוּנָה, אֵלֵינוּ אֱמוּנָה, אֵלֵינוּ אֱמוּנָה. וְלֹא מִכְּהִלָּתוֹ אֶלֶּכָּי יִשְׁכַּח: כִּי אֵלֵינוּ אֱמוּנָה, אֵלֵינוּ אֱמוּנָה, אֵלֵינוּ אֱמוּנָה. וְלֹא מִכְּהִלָּתוֹ אֶלֶּכָּי יִשְׁכַּח: כִּי אֵלֵינוּ אֱמוּנָה, אֵלֵינוּ אֱמוּנָה, אֵלֵינוּ אֱמוּנָה."

Thus Bachya ridicules such questions as 'what is God', 'how is He', 'where is He', etc. All these appertain to created beings but are entirely devoid of meaning with regard to the creator. We may compare this with Sadya's (and al-Muhammed's) injunction against inquiry (66) *Talmud 33a* (66) *Brachot 65a*

about the quiddity of God.

Bachya's "Duties of the Heart" which had as its raison d'être the religious energizing of his people seemed to be accomplishing the reverse, since the vision of God seems to dwindle away into nothingness. Bachya valiantly tries to show that His existence is more certain than anything in creation even though we are not privileged to know more of His nature. No one doubts the soul's existence, yet we know little more of it, other than existence. (68) Furthermore, just as our five physical senses can perceive only specific types of phenomena, so our specific soul faculties are respectively limited to specific spheres of knowledge beyond which they will only vainly seek to know. Our mind also has its specific channels of comprehension: the axioms<sup>etc</sup> way and the syllogistic way. But each avenue is restricted to its proper sphere of knowledge. God<sup>is</sup> as far removed from the powers of our reason, as vision is removed from the sense of taste. Furthermore each specific faculty is finite even in its own sphere and if it attempts to comprehend that which is too distant from it, its conclusions will be worthless. Thus our mind has the power to deduce from God's effects the fact of His existence. Any attempt to go beyond that is foredoomed to failure.

tence. Any attempt to go beyond that is foredoomed to failure.  
 "ואם יחליטו אלהים אחרת צדק כבודו או אצילותו תהיה מציאותו נדבית קטן  
 אבר ממצאיו, ומכאן נשפוטו בדרך שחילולו... כי כל המה דמה במה שחילולו  
 הוא דנין נולדו"

If we seek to know more than is legitimate even the fact of existence will be blurred.

The purpose of our terms of praise for Him is merely to strengthen ~~our~~ ethical and religious lives. We need to extol God. Objectively there is nothing in it.

(67)see above page

(67) see above page  
(68) Saadya treats this in Emunoth II, 9. Ibn Daud in Em. Ramah and Me-  
imonides in I, 59. See Theol. des Bachya 89

