MAIMONIDES AND THE VISUAL IMAGE
AFTER KANT AND COHEN

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Abstract

In this paper, I attempt to consider Jewish philosophy in opposition to the anti-ocularcentrism that defined the German Jewish philosophical tradition after Kant, namely the idea that Judaism—or at least its philosophical expression in Maimonidean philosophy—is aniconic and cognitively abstract. I do so by attempting to rethink the epistemic-veridical place of the imagination and visual experience in the Guide of the Perplexed. Once the imagination has been disciplined by reason, is there any cognitive status to an image or sound that the eye or the ear perceives, and to that mental faculty that combines and recombines such impressions? Is the sight or sound of revelation a hallucination or just a mere figure of speech? Does it bear any relation to a spiritual reality external to the human mind and finite physical existence? To address these questions I explore the visual images, both iconic and aniconic-abstract, that distinguish the Guide. There is no getting past the visual imagination, although I am not sure Maimonides would have recognized it as such. Even when he leaves behind figurative visual cues such as the false image-work of the undisciplined imagination or the appearance of angels and images of God found in lower grades of prophecy, he turns to another visual register, namely the “abstract art” of pure, dazzling light. In regard to these questions, Maimonides was more Greek than German, ascribing, cautiously, penultimate cognitive status to the visual imagination.

Keywords
Maimonides; Kant; Hermann Cohen; vision; God

The visual and sonic appearance of God that is the special privilege of the prophet presents extraordinary philosophical problems to those who take Scripture seriously. Is there any cognitive status to an image or sound that the eye or the ear perceives, and to that mental faculty that combines and recombines such impressions? Does the plastic image or linguistic utterance refer to an existent, to a truth, or to a truth about an existent that is external to the image or utterance and external to the intending intellection? Or does the
image refer back only to itself and to the operation proper to it? The introduction of a metaphysical element only confounds the discussion. Is the sight or sound of revelation a hallucination or just a mere figure of speech? Does it bear any relation to a spiritual reality external to the human mind and finite physical existence? In this paper, I will explore the visual images that distinguish the Guide of the Perplexed and argue that, in regard to these questions, Maimonides, more Greek than German, ascribes (cautiously) penultimate cognitive status to the visual imagination.

To make this point, I look beyond the attention typically paid to language in scholarship on Maimonides to consider the position of visual cues in philosophical truths about God. I do so cognizant of the difference between medieval and modern physics. In the Aristotelian/Neoplatonic cosmos, emanations of form intermingle with matter. In the modern universe, a radical disconnect sunders noumenal truth from sensible phenomena. For all its rigor, Maimonidean intellection is not pure insofar as it connects intelligible form and sensible matter, and insofar as it depends upon the visual imaginary it seeks to discipline. This model of reason is one in which the imagination, including pseudo-optical experience and metaphorical allusions to the ultimate sublimation of such experience, assumes a propaedeutic role in theoretical cognition, even cognition of God, as its highest “object.”

Richard Kearney has identified four principle meanings of the term “imagination.” Defined as the human image-making capacity, imagination is characterized by the ability or tendency (1) to evoke an absent referent, without confusing the absent referent with one that is present at hand; (2) to use figures in painting, sculpture, photography so as to represent real things in an “unreal” way; (3) to project fictional, nonexistent things as in a dream or in a literary narrative; (4) or to confuse that which is real and that which is unreal.¹ All four meanings are operative in the Guide, and it is this polysemy that explains Maimonides’ ambivalence. On the negative side, the imagination leads one to posit the existence of nonreal entities and to confuse that which is real and that which is unreal. On the other hand, insofar as the imagination is perfected through reason,

it evokes the existence of God and of angels, despite their physical absence; it allows us to reflect upon real things and beings, albeit in an unreal, distorted way.

The Maimonides who appears in this paper will have lost not all, but something of the austerity once ascribed to him by philosophers and scholars working under the influence of Kantian and neo-Kantian reason. He exhibits none of the absolutism that drives Leo Strauss’s reading, which exacerbates the difference between reason and revelation, Athens and Jerusalem, philosophy and Judaism. In more recent scholarship, Maimonides finds a place for art and refined aesthetic sensation (Bland), loose expression (Lobel, Seeskin), representation (Manekin), and imagination (Kellner, Pessin, Ravven). The continuing emphasis in Maimonides scholarship on language over against the visual image nonetheless suggests persistent entanglements in German philosophical and aesthetic paradigms. While Maimonides devotes the lion’s share of analysis in part 1 of the Guide to language and to metaphor, particularly in regard to his theory of negative attributes, his point of departure was not sound, rhythm, rhyme, and tone so much as silent, visual experience: phantasmic images of the human body at the level of sub-Mosaic prophecy, or palatial architecture and the exchange between light and dark at more recondite levels of intellectual apprehension.2

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The relatively positive status that Maimonides ascribes to the imagination and to visual experience stands in marked contrast to their more lowly epistemological position in Kant’s and Hermann Cohen’s critical idealism. In the first edition of the Critique of Pure Reason,

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Kant placed imagination alongside sensation, and reason at the root of cognition. This was in basic accord with Aristotle, who affirmed that “to the thinking soul images serve as if they were contents of perception. . . . That is why the soul never thinks without an image” (De anima 431a15). However, in the second edition of the Critique, the imagination drops out of Kant’s account of the transcendental deduction. Its role in theoretical cognition is taken up entirely by sensation and by the understanding. For his part, Cohen was more radical in stripping any sensual impression (Einfassung) of an object or imaginal representation (Vorstellung) from the activity of pure thinking. In the Logik der reinen Erkenntnis, this activity itself is its own foremost content. Pure thinking is the activity of thought that forms the stuff of thought. The generation (Erzeugung) of thought itself is the product (Erzeugnis) of pure thought.

In German Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment philosophy, the imagination assumes its proper place in aesthetics, defined by Baumgarten as the “science of sensation,” as distinct from logic, the science of cognition. Kant’s advance was to sever completely representation from ontology. In the Critique of Judgment, Kant had insisted that in making an aesthetic judgment about an object (“This is beautiful”), the subject has said nothing about the object itself. The representation and its judgment refer, not to any object external to mind, but to the subject who makes them—in particular, to the subject’s pleasure in the free, harmonious interplay between the concepts of the understanding and the imagination. To judge an object sublime is, again, to say nothing about the object, but rather about the sublimity of the subject who makes the judgment. As such, aesthetic judgment carries no relation to truth. Its subject is “indifferent” to the relation of any aesthetic representation to any point of external reference. For his part, Cohen made room for visual aesthetics in his system of philosophy while expelling it from the “Religion of Reason.” Against image worship, Cohen insisted that no relation can be conceived between any possible plastic image and divine sublimity, since the visual arts relate only to objects and God has no object-character whatsoever. The ideal art of monotheism is the lyric poetry of the psalms. Poetry couples God and man in a lively

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connection, whereas plastic art restricts itself poorly to one or the other in fixed isolation. In line with Lessing in the *Laocoon*, Cohen presumed that the superiority of poetry over the visual arts was the freedom enjoyed by the poet vis-à-vis physical reality. Unlike painting, as it was then understood, poetry is not confined to mimetic reference. The plastic arts freeze the object in space, whereas the temporal flux of poetry sets it loose.

Both Kant and Cohen were steeped in neoclassical aesthetic canons. While Kant sought to free aesthetic judgment from objectivist cognition and mimetic reference, Clement Greenberg’s remark that Kant was the first modernist goes only so far. Predisposed to line, not color, the free play of the imagination in Kant’s visual aesthetic remained enmeshed in imaginary rococo objects: linear patterns, drapery on statues, colonnades and magnificent architecture, patterns of foliage on wallpaper, designs *a la grecque*, English gardens, and Baroque furniture. For Cohen, Impressionism marked the apex of painting as the visual art best able to represent the shimmer of light—the most recondite natural object—upon material objects. But that object, *qua* object, bears no relation to God, the ultimate correlate of human reason. Cohen was unable in the *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls* to anticipate the new avant-garde, which rejected the classical division of the arts (poetry and painting) into a firm time/space axis: Cubism, Expressionism, nonmimetic and nonobjective painting—visual art without physical objects.

Herein lies the relevance to Maimonides, whose thought does not conform to this strict separation. Lobel makes the case that Maimonides was prepared, even forced to use loose expression (*tasāmul*) in order to direct cognition to the intelligible reality of God. He did so heuristically, under the firm control of reason, lest he end up saying absolutely nothing about God. Maimonides could consider

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accounts of prophetic vision in the same light as prophetic dicta regarding the “appearance” of God because, unlike Lessing and Cohen, he drew no axiological distinction between sound and sight, no radical disjoint between word and image. Sound, sight, and smell are grouped together because they maintain a more discrete distance from their object; touch and taste are held in special contempt since their apprehension of a thing requires proximate contact (Guide 1:47, 2:36). Indeed, this more relaxed approach to sight allowed Maimonides to imagine even the most recondite, intellectual apprehension of God according to a nonmimetic, visual register.

According to Ravven, the role of imagination and of the body in non-Mosaic prophecy represents the core esoteric teaching in the Guide that Maimonides obscures in his main exoteric work, the Mishneh Torah.9 While this thesis brings the body and the imagination deep into the core of Maimonidean rationalism, the effect is to draw that philosophy into too close a proximity to kalamic theology. Unmediated by reason, the direct sequence from sensation to imagination wreaks intellectual havoc. Indeed, José Faur reminds his readers that reason is the first faculty called upon to process sensation. It thus precedes and disciplines the imagination. Viewed this way, reason, not imagination, constitutes the true middle figure. Without the intermediary activity of reason, the combination of sense and imagination distorts our image of the real world. However, as Faur notes, “Imagination can be creative and valuable after reason has accurately decoded and processed the data provided by the senses.”10

The main locus in the Guide for the blistering critique of imagination is in part 1, most notably in chapters 2–5. Maimonides asserts that Adam in the image of God was made perfect by the overflow of divine intellect, by the ability to distinguish truth from falsehood. The inclination towards the desire of imagination and the pleasure of corporeal sense wrested this perfection from him. “Reflect on the dictum, ‘And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew...

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9 According to Kreisel, the appearance of imagination in Maimonides’ legal writings is meant to uphold the distinctiveness of Mosaic prophecy. He finds “this shift in focus” to imagination in part 2 “surprising.” Howard Kreisel, Prophecy: The History of an Idea in Medieval Jewish Philosophy (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), 241–2.

they were naked’” (Guide 1:2).\footnote{All quotations of the Guide are reproduced from The Guide of the Perplexed, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963).} As read by Maimonides, the text refers to mental vision. Maimonides therefore proceeds in the very next chapter to interpret the Hebrew words for “figure” and “shape.” As he reads Scripture, the word “figure” carries three possible meanings, corresponding to sense, imagination, and reason:

1. the form of a thing external to mind as apprehended by the senses;
2. the imaginary form of an individual object existing in the imagination after the object is no longer manifest to the senses (i.e., a phantasm of the imagination); or
3. a true notion grasped by the intellect. (Guide 1:3)

In the context of this three-point division, a significant omission occurs in the next chapter, where the reader learns that “sight” can refer to either sensation or intellection, namely:

(a) sensible sight; or
(b) intellectual apprehension. (Guide 1:4)

In accord with Ravven’s thesis, no mention is made of imagination in reference to sight. At this early stage in the itinerary, it simply drops out of view. The student learns logic in order to improve character and to kill desire and imagination. Returning to Scripture, Maimonides warns that the elders at Sinai were overhasty when they claimed to see God and a sapphire pavement under his feet (Guide 1:5).

What appears, however, to be an absolute judgment against imagination and imaginary phantasm begins to slip already in part 1. Regarding angels, Maimonides asserts that what appears to be their fixed corporeal shape is only to be perceived in a vision of prophecy. “It is very difficult…to apprehend that which is pure of matter,” especially for those people who “[tend] toward imaginative apprehension alone. For such a one everything that is imagined exists or can exist.” The problem here is not imagination per se. Maimonides concedes that the imagination can guide the mind to the existence of angels, to their being alive and perfect, although not to their essence (Guide 1:49). Rather than reflecting a final position regarding the relationship between imagination and cognition, the critique of the imagination in part 1 of the Guide is polemical in purpose, meant
to staunch the influence of kalamic theology. This first part of the text meant to safeguard reason from imagination concludes fittingly with a prolonged polemic against the Mutakalites, for whom everything that can be imagined is intellectually admissible. Whereas imagination compounds and combines things, regardless of any correspondence to an actual existent, reason distinguishes between part and whole, true and false, essence and accident (Guide 1:73). Once this distinction has been drawn, the critique of imagination in part 1 of the Guide clears the way for a more sober employment of imagination in the discussion of creation and non-Mosaic prophecy in part 2.

Basing his position on philosophical speculation and Scripture, Maimonides identifies eleven degrees of prophecy. These consist mainly of dreams and visions, in which the prophet claims to hear or to see parables, men, and angels (Guide 2:45). And while Maimonides claims that it is improbable that God can be seen or heard in a vision (as opposed to a dream?), he provides for that very possibility earlier in the text, when the reader is led to consider the combination of perfected imagination and reason in low-grade prophecy. The greatest and noblest action of the imagination takes place when the senses are at rest and an overflow from the Active Intellect spreads first to reason and then to the imagination. “The imaginative faculty achieves so great a perfection of action that it sees the thing as if it were outside, and that the thing whose origin is due to it appears to have come to it by the way of external sensation.” In veridical dreams and prophetic vision, the prophet will now “see only God and His angels, and will only be aware and achieve knowledge of matters that constitute true opinions and general directives for the well-being of men in their relations with one another” (Guide 2:36). The image of God or of an angel does not “represent” sense experience, because the shape of the image is refracted through the filtering media of the prophet’s own physical and mental disposition. But the original impulse that triggers the image is external to the apprehending mind. The imagination acts like a screen upon which overflow from the Active Intellect is received and from which an image will be projected back onto the faculty of common sense, as if into the external visual field.12

12 Maimonides himself does not use the term “common sense.” It belongs to the psychology of Avicenna and is understood to be that first internal sense that receives
In part 2 of the Guide, Maimonides does not confine accounts of prophetic vision to mere poetic license. In this he was hardly unique; his account of prophetic vision draws heavily from al-Fārābī’s Mabādī’ ārā’ āhl al-madīna al-fadila (View of the Citizens of the Best State). As Richard Walzer comments: “No late Greek, nor early Muslim—apart from a few exceptions—appears to have doubted that some kind of intuitive divination is an innate capacity of extraordinary human minds.” According to al-Fārābī, the Active Intellect will sometimes provide the imagination with intelligibles, whose proper locus is theoretical reason, and sometimes with sensibles, whose locus is practical reason. The imagination will then imitate intelligibles with sensibles; or it will represent sensibles as they are, or imitate them with other sensibles. These events occur in sleep and, more rarely, in waking life. When the imagination is extremely powerful, sensibles that reach imagination from outside do not overpower it. Nor is the imagination forced to work in the service of reason. This state of waking life is akin to sleep. These objects of representation are impressed on the faculty of common sense, affecting the faculty of sight. Impressions appear in the air, which are then impressed upon the faculty of sight, and that impression is reflected back to common sense and to the imagination. “And since all these states are continuous, the objects of that kind which the Active Intellect has supplied become visible to that man.” “He sees wonderful things which can in no way whatever be found among other existents.”

The position of Aristotle regarding reference and the visual imagination is more skeptical than that of al-Fārābī, who maintains that the seer projects the mental image out into the air, and even more skeptical than that of Maimonides, who makes no such claim. According to Aristotle, dreamers and diurnal seers only believe that they see and hear. “Even when awake [one] believes himself to see, sense impression and conveys it to the imagination. Its appearance in Maimonides is inferred by Harry Austryn Wolfson, “Maimonides on the Internal Senses,” in Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion, vol. 1, ed. Isadore Twersky and George H. Williams (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 348–9.


14 For more on the difference between Maimonides and al-Fārābī, see Kreisel, Prophecy. Maimonides does not mention practical reason. In contrast, al-Fārābī limits the role of reason in prophecy, placing the entire focus on imagination. Maimonides’ theory of prophecy is thus more restricted insofar as Maimonides limits prophecy to those whose theoretical reason, not just their practical reason, is perfect (Kreisel, Prophecy, 245–246).
or hear, or otherwise perceive; just as it is from a belief that the organ of sight is being stimulated, though in reality not so stimulated, that we sometimes erroneously declare ourselves to see” (De somniis 461b). The same caution informs the discussion of oneiromancy. Dreams that seem to foretell future events occur to “garrulous and excitable” types of people; and they occur only at night. That certain dreams come true reflects only coincidence and luck, akin to a gambler’s winning streak. Their only “divine” aspect is nature, since nature is divinely planned, though they are not themselves divine (De divinatione per somnum 463b–464a). For Aristotle, these images are pure hallucinations, whereas for Maimonides the prophet’s vision reflects the truth of an internal sensation, despite the false belief regarding the referent’s external locus.

On the cognitive status of dreams and divination, Maimonides and al-Fārābī come closer to the view of Plato when, despite his own rough treatment of the imagination in the Republic, he concedes at least this. Plato observes how the power of the rational and gentle part of human consciousness ebbs in sleep, giving way to dangerous, lawless desire, untrammeled in its dream state. The imagination entertains incest, sexual license, and murder. But for those who temper their appetites through the use of reason, “you know that it is then that he best grasps the truth and that the visions that appear in his dreams are least lawless” (572a, 571d). In the myth of human origins presented in the Timaeus, Plato describes how thought redeems the basest seat of human appetite in conjunction with the imagination. Thoughts sent down from the mind are impressed upon the liver, which is like a mirror that receives impressions and returns visible images; the liver itself is kept free of impurities by the spleen, which functions like a dustcloth. The portion of the soul that inhabits the area around the liver is made gracious and practices dream divination at night. He who has his wits about him will ponder the pronouncements produced in states of divination or possession and analyze all the visions he has seen (71d).

16 On dreams, divination, and the daimonion, see Mark L. McPheran, The Religion of Socrates (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 175–85, 195. McPheran argues that Socrates combines “extrarational indicators” (177) with elenctic testing. Dreams provide a minimal “kernel of assured truth” that requires rigorous rational investigation.
To be sure, the image apprehended by the prophet requires reason, i.e., the proper care of a good dustcloth. The image is distorted by the prophet’s own physical and mental constitution. It says nothing real about the referent, nothing real about the divine quiddity or the Active Intellect. It provides no determinate information, no mimetic capacity, no direct connection by which the sensible sign can be said to mirror the intelligible signified. But the gap is not absolute, insofar as the relation between sensation and intelligible truth is mediated by the imagination. As Lenn Goodman argues in relation to Maimonides, the appearance of the image cannot be dismissed as mere psychic projection. A loose relation is established between sign (the mental image of God) and signified (the overflow from the Active Intelligence). The visual image reflects an embodied trace, an imaginal record or recording of the impact made upon the perfected imagination by the Active Intellect. Although the visions enjoyed by all the other prophets pale in comparison to the prophecy of Moses (as per b. Yebamot 49b), our text suggests that they enjoy at least a penultimate cognitive status that is foreign to the far more radical disconnect between image and referent pressed in modern times by Kant and Cohen.

This penultimate significance ascribed by Maimonides to object-like vision is carried over into the metaphorical structure applied to more recondite intellectual apprehension. Towards the end of his excursus on negative theology in part 1 of the *Guide*, Maimonides  

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18 Against the Kantian interpretation of Maimonides, see Manekin, “Belief, Certainty, and Divine Attributes,” 132–41. According to Manekin, Maimonides affirmed “indemonstrable propositions that may be believed with near-certainty because they are ‘nearly demonstrable’ ” (139).
explains how the consummate apprehension of Moses and Solomon—prophecy and philosophy, respectively—differs from the less extraordinary apprehension enjoyed by their students. The philosopher and prophet come closer and closer to a more adequate apprehension of God with every negation of positive attribution, the less and less they liken God to any composite thing. But since negation does not provide any knowledge of the true reality of a thing, they confirm that none but God can apprehend what he is. “We are dazzled by His beauty, and He is hidden from us because of the intensity with which He becomes manifest, just as the sun is hidden to eyes that are too weak to apprehend it.” The most apt phrase is “Silence is praise to you” (Ps 65:2). Maimonides concludes, “Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still. Selah” (Guide 1:59, citing Ps 4:5). In bed, in a dark room, silence is the aural component of sensation and reason as they shut down. God’s beauty is compared, not to intense sound, but to bright light before it is hidden away. Nonrepresentational in character, the image allows for no object, neither physical nor imaginal, and yet for all that, it remains indubitably ocular in origin. It is the mind’s eye, not ear, that is “dazzled” by God’s beauty.

The association made by Maimonides between the apprehension of divine beauty and dazzling light is here in keeping with Aristotle’s account of active intelligence. Explaining the difference between the passive aspect of mind and active mind, Aristotle stated that the former is “what it is by virtue of becoming all things,” while the latter “is what it is by virtue of making all things: this is a sort of positive state like light; for in a sense light makes potential colors into actual colors. Mind in this sense of it is separable, impassible, unmixed, since it is in its essential nature activity (for always the active is superior to the passive factor, the originating force to the matter which it forms)” (De anima 430a10). Metaphorically, recourse is made to the finest, most rared form of aesthetic sensation in order to expound upon the process of efficient intellection. Standing in for the Active Intellect and divine presence, this purity of light enjoys no color or other object-character; just as light illuminates the color of a sensual object, the Active Intellect is the efficient cause that brings out that object’s potential intelligibility.

The image of dazzling light and the intimacy of dark silence in our passage from Maimonides extends into the parable of the palace near the end of the Guide (3:51). Its “architecture” can be compared
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to an ocular device used to set apart and shut out physical light as the philosopher proceeds deeper and deeper into the truth about God. As an image, the situation of the palace within the city reflects a movement from (1) savage superstition (outside the city); to (2) kallamic theology (inside the city but with back turned against the palace); (3) the untutored faith of the ignorant (inside the city but unable to find the palace); (4) Talmud as well as logic and math (just outside the palace gate but unable to enter); (5) natural science (inside the antechambers of the palace); and (6) divine science-prophecy (into the inner court). It is a path in the opposite direction of the one taken by the Platonic philosopher, who leaves the cave in order to apprehend truth, the bright sun outside. To pursue the parable: For Maimonides, the philosopher-prophet enters into the most interior recess of the palace. His object is not just to enter into it by means of apprehension, but then “to make another effort,” to be with God, to see God in his palace, to hear his speech, and to speak with him. The true worship that follows apprehension is devoted to God alone and to no other object. It consists solely of “intellectual thought in constantly loving God,” a state stripped of imagination, achieved only by Moses. The prophet leaves the outer chambers of sensation and imagination for a dark room filled with bright light.

This is the unique contribution of late-twentieth-century art and aesthetic theory to reading Maimonides. Visually there is no radical discontinuity between the luminous figuration of an angel or God that appears outside the chamber and the brilliance of pure intellectual illumination that appears inside. In the first case, the light of intellectual apprehension reflects off an imaginal object, an intentional object of prophetic vision, as if it were projected out into the visual field. (Aaron Hughes refers to the “diaphanous image” created as the intelligible form of Beauty shines through sensory re-presentation.19) In the latter case, that very same light has become its own separate object as form draws apart from matter, especially at the moment of death. As in a canvas by Mark Rothko, the imageless image of recondite knowledge reflects nothing real apart from its own luminosity, no real thing and no real light. The dazzle of divine beauty annihilates any object-attribute as light annihilates light.

The image is foreign to Lessing, Kant, and Cohen, for whom the visual arts were always object-related. For Maimonides, light is a sensible index to intelligible reality, pure light reflecting off no composite object, real or imaginal.\textsuperscript{20}

As a literary unit, the *Guide* is bookended by the tension between light and darkness. In the introduction to part 1, mental life is compared to “someone in a very dark night over whom lightning flashes time and time again. Among us there is one for whom the lightning flashes time and time again, so that he is always, as it were, in unceasing light. Thus night appears to him as day.” And at the very conclusion of the text, Maimonides alludes once again to the same tension between light and dark. The last scriptural passage cited in the *Guide* immediately precedes the concluding epigraph. It comes not from the Torah, but from the prophecy of Isaiah: “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined” (Isa 9:1). The difference between the physical world (this dark world), the image (intermittent flash), and intelligible truth (the great light) is maintained. But a loose relationship links an imperfect mental image to truth about God and angels. The penultimate philosophical status ascribed to the visual image and metaphor depends upon a highly graded system of emanations that sustains a distinct but not insurmountable gap between sensibility and intelligibility.