

CHAPTER TWO

MAIMONIDES: *MASHAL*, *HASH'ALAH*

Unlike Ibn Ezra, Maimonides never left the Muslim domain and wrote most of his works in Arabic. For the most part, he also could ignore the challenges posed to his older Andalusian contemporary by the midrashic exegesis popular among Jews in Christian lands. Instead, the great philosopher, whose most important works were written in his mature years in Egypt, took up the more traditional issues of concern in the Judeo-Arabic tradition, especially the endeavor to reconcile Scripture with reason. His *Guide of the Perplexed* is largely devoted to the figurative interpretation of biblical passages that are problematic in this respect, an endeavor pioneered by Sa'adia and refined by his successors in al-Andalus, as we saw in the preceding chapter.¹ But to reach Sa'adia's goals, Maimonides utilizes new methodologies based on more precise linguistic concepts culled from Arabic learning, particularly the logic of al-Fārābī. Like Ibn Ezra, he avoids Sa'adia's catch-all *majāz* category; but whereas his older Andalusian contemporary replaced it with another single-category hermeneutical system, Maimonides builds a two-category system using the Arabic notions of *isti'āra* and *mathal*, rendered in Hebrew *HASH'ALAH* and *mashal*, respectively.²

¹ The influence of this tradition on Maimonides is not immediately apparent because the great philosopher generally does not cite his medieval Jewish predecessors (see introduction, n. 40). Nonetheless, Sa'adia's exegetical motives and strategies reverberate throughout the *Guide*; see Rawidowicz 1969:187, 194–230. (See Dienstag 1996a for an extensive bibliography on the relationship between Maimonides and Sa'adia.) Ibn Janah seems to have been Maimonides' usual linguistic reference (below, n. 32), and he held the commentaries of Moses Ibn Chiquitilla and Judah Ibn Bal'am in high esteem; see *Treatise on Resurrection* 329–30 (Ar.); 359–61 (Heb.). The possible influence of Moses Ibn Ezra on Maimonides is discussed below, chapter four, n. 80. On the scholarly supposition that the great philosopher knew and used Abraham Ibn Ezra's writings, see introduction, n. 41. For further discussion of Maimonides' reliance on the Andalusian exegetical tradition, see Birnbaum 1944:187–90; Twersky 1980:56–58.

² *Mashal* is the Hebrew cognate of *mathal*; *hash'alah* (metaphor; lit. borrowing) is a loan-translation of Arabic *isti'āra* (above 1.2.3). These equivalences were standard already in the medieval translation tradition. We use the Hebrew terms because they facilitate our comparisons with Abraham Ibn Ezra and Radak.

Throughout the *Guide*, Maimonides highlights the *mashal*-*hash'alah* distinction as a critical hermeneutical tool. In one passage, after discussing a number of examples of figurative readings, he directs his reader to apply his method independently:

Take . . . what I have not mentioned in the manner that I have mentioned in this chapter³ and distinguish . . . between . . . what has been said by way of *mashal* [and] what has been said by way of *hash'alah*⁴ . . . [as opposed to] what has been said literally (lit. exactly according to the first conventional meaning). (II:47:409)⁵

Since the term *isti'āra* (lit. borrowing) was used in Arabic literature to translate Greek *metaphora*, we render it (along with its Heb. equivalent *hash'alah*) “metaphor,” which conforms with Maimonides' usage.⁶ The Arabic term *mathal* is used in reference to a broader range of figurative expressions, and its cognate, *mashal*, has a long, complex history in biblical and rabbinic Hebrew.⁷ Maimonides uses it primarily to indicate what we call allegory or parable, though he also uses it to label similes and symbolic visions. My preference, therefore, is to leave the term untranslated, and where translation is necessary to do so contextually.⁸

³ Since he did not write a comprehensive biblical commentary, Maimonides uses this formula to establish a rule applicable elsewhere based on his selected examples. Compare *Guide* II:46:403–04; see also II:29:342–43.

⁴ For other references to the *mashal*-*hash'alah* distinction in the *Guide*, see I:33:70; II:47:407. Maimonides here speaks of a third category, *al-ighyā'* (lit. going to the limit; referred to by other authors in the Judeo-Arabic tradition as *taghāyī* [see Fenton 1997:334–35]), i.e., exaggeration or hyperbole (Heb. *guzma*), which he discusses at length in this chapter of the *Guide* (II:47) together with the closely related term *mubālagha* (Heb. *haftagah*). Analysis of hyperbole in Maimonides' hermeneutical system is beyond the scope of the current study, as we focus on his primary dichotomy between *mashal* and *hash'alah*, which he applies throughout the *Guide*.

⁵ References in this chapter, unless otherwise indicated, are from the *Guide* and follow S. Pines' translation with some modifications based on the original Arabic text. Where Hebrew appears in citations of the *Guide*, it reflects Maimonides' use of Hebrew (usually biblical or rabbinic quotations) within his Arabic text. (Citations of Hebrew translations of the *Guide* are identified as such specifically.) References in notes below to “Pines,” “Qāfil,” and “Schwarz” without further bibliographic information are to the notes in their respective translations of the passage from the *Guide* under discussion.

⁶ On the term *isti'āra*, see above 1.2.3, 1.2.4. Pines usually renders this term in the *Guide* more broadly as “figurative language” (though he sometimes renders it “derivative term” [introduction; 5]).

⁷ See Stern 1991:9–13; Boyarin 1995.

⁸ Pines usually renders *mathal* “parable,” but he sometimes renders it “allegory” (introduction; 13) or “image” (III:2:419); Friedlander renders *mathal* “simile”; Munk

Although *mashal* and *hash'alah* are both types of figurative language and thus have much in common, Maimonides insists on separating them. Without appreciating the importance of this distinction, some modern scholars have been unable to fully discern Maimonides' views on prophecy, Scripture and their interpretation. L. Strauss, for example, points to a supposed contradiction in Maimonides' opinions:

The assertion [by Maimonides] that Moses' prophecy was entirely independent of the imagination leads to a great difficulty if one considers the fact that it is the imagination that brings forth similes [*mshalim*] and, we may add, metaphors [*shmot mush'lim*], as well as the fact that the Torah abounds if not with similes, at any rate with metaphors.⁹

As we shall see below (2.3.2), Maimonides, in fact, distinguished between *mashal* and *hash'alah* specifically with respect to the need to activate the imagination. Once we recognize this, the problem Strauss raises can be resolved. The current chapter is devoted to defining Maimonides' *mashal-hash'alah* distinction; in chapter four we show why it is crucial for his biblical exegesis.

2.1 The Linguistic Concept of Hash'alah

Maimonides first introduces his notion of *hash'alah* when outlining the primary goal of his *Guide for the Perplexed* in the introduction to that work:

The first purpose of this Treatise is to explain the meanings of certain terms occurring in Scripture.¹⁰ Some of these terms are equivocal (Ar. *MUSHTARIKI*; Heb. *MESHUTTAFIN*; lit. shared); hence the ignorant understand them according to [only] some of the meanings in which the term in question is used. And some of them are metaphorical (Ar. *musta'ara*; Heb. *mush'alim*; lit. borrowed); hence they understand them

renders it "allegory." On the ambiguity of the term in Arabic literature, see *EL*, s.v. *Mothal*.

⁹ Strauss 1963:xxxvii. Klein-Braslavy 1987:23 (see below, p. 223) raises a similar dilemma.

¹⁰ Lit. the books of prophecy. A reference to all of Scripture, not only the section referred to as *Nevi'im*, as opposed to *Torah* and *Ketuvim*; see Klein-Braslavy 1996:41; Harvey 1996:54. Compare Ibn Ezra's use of the term מִשְׁתָּרִיק as a reference to all biblical authors (e.g., long comm. on Ex 11:5); see also Simon 1993b:305. There are times, however, that Maimonides seems to speak specifically about a style of the literary prophets; see, e.g., below nn. 63, 111.

as well according to the first meaning from which they were derived (Ar. *ustū'rat*; Heb. *hush'alu*; lit. borrowed).¹¹

To understand the linguistic terminology in this passage, it is helpful to turn to the *Treatise on Logic*, a work that relies heavily on al-Fārābī and is thought to have been written by Maimonides in his youth.¹²

2.1.1 Equivocal and Metaphorical Terms: The Treatise on Logic

Chapter thirteen of the *Treatise* discusses how words acquire their meanings.¹³ Arabic tradition refers to nouns and verbs collectively as *ismā* (sing. *ism*), i.e., "names." An *ism* is a linguistic sign that designates a thing or action, the *mussamā* ("that which is named"), in a relation called *tasmiya* ("giving a name").¹⁴ The simple case of *tasmiya* involves a word with one meaning.¹⁵ By contrast, a word with more than one meaning is an *ism al-mushtarik* (Heb. *shem meshuttaf*), an "equivocal" (lit. shared) term, i.e., a name shared by different meanings, of which six sub-types are listed in the *Treatise*. A word shared coincidentally by two independent meanings is *AL-ISM AL-MAHD AL-ISHTIRAK*; (Heb. *HA-SHEM HA-MESHUTTAFA HA-GAMUR*), "the absolutely equivocal term":

¹¹ Maimonides here also lists another type, "amphibolous terms" (Ar. *mushakkika*; Heb. *mesuppaqim*), on which, see Wolfson 1938. But this is a minor category in the *Guide*; see below, n. 27.

¹² See Hyman 1991:177. The traditional attribution is challenged by Davidson 2001:118–25. It is beyond the scope of this study to decide this matter, but we should note that the parallels discussed in this chapter between the *Treatise* and *Guide* with respect to linguistic terminology are unmistakable and suggest common authorship. At the very least, our study shows that Maimonides was intimately familiar with the Farabian definitions presented in the *Treatise*.

¹³ On the linguistic concepts in this chapter, see Hyman 1991; Rosenberg 1978.

¹⁴ These Arabic terms were used occasionally by Ibn Janāḥ and Moses Ibn Ezra; see chapter one, n. 198. One might render *tasmiya* "denomination" and compare *ism* and *mussamā* with Latin *nomen* and *nominatum*; see Versteegh 1977:154–59. As Versteegh observes, Arabic linguists were not careful in their phraseology to distinguish between the meaning (sense) of a word and its referent, i.e., the extra-mental entity to which it refers (on this distinction, see introduction, p. 29; see, e.g., below, n. 16. Nonetheless, Zwier (1997:94–97) shows that this linguistic tradition related signification to meaning (sense) rather than reference. We therefore usually speak of the *mussamā* as a meaning rather than "a thing named." On the medieval concept of denotation and its relation to sense and reference, see Eco 1989.

¹⁵ The basic case is that of terms that are "distinct" (*mutabayyina*), i.e., that name a thing with only one name. By contrast, "synonymous" (*murādīfa*) terms are different names for the same thing; see Hyman 1991:177–78.

a term said of (*maqūl*) two things (*dhatain*),¹⁶ between which there is nothing in common to account for their common name, like the term 'ayn said of (*maqūl*) an eye and a spring of water.¹⁷

When applying the concept of absolute equivocaliity in the *Guide*, Maimonides explains that the two things "have in common only the name and nothing else" (I:56;131).¹⁸

Metaphor, *al-ism al-musta'ār* (Heb. *ha-shem ha-mush'al*), "the borrowed name," is another sub-type of equivocal term, defined as

a term that refers to (*dāllan*) a certain thing (*dhat*) in the original coinage of the language;¹⁹ and it properly denotes (lit. is fixed on) that thing. Next,²⁰ another thing is at times designated (*yusamma*; lit. named) by it; but it does not properly denote (lit. is not fixed permanently on) that second thing. For example, the term *asad* (lion) is normally posited of (lit. fixed on) one of the animal species, but a courageous man may be designated (*yusamma*) by it; and similarly, people calling (*tasritahum*) a generous man *baḥr* (the sea).²¹ Terms like these are frequently used among poets.²²

¹⁶ Lit. essences; see Versteegh 1977:158; Steiner 1998:254. Elsewhere (see, e.g., below, p. 110), Maimonides speaks of different meanings (*ma'ānīn*) that share a single term. Following Arabic linguistics (above, n. 14), he does not use special terminology to distinguish between meaning (*ma'na*) and extra-mental entities (*dhat ash-shay* [= the essence of a thing]); the language refers to. Later Hebrew logicians distinguish between 'myan (= Ar. *ma'na*) and *davar* (= *shay*); see Rosenberg 1978:111.

¹⁷ Arabic text in *Treatise*, Efros ed., 1966:35-36 (Hebrew section). Compare al-Fārābī's definition in *Mantiqiyāt al-Fārābī* I:91-92 (Arabic); Zimmermann (English trans.) 1981:228-29. Steiner 1998:233n observes that the example is questionable, since the usage of 'ayn to denote a spring is probably derived from the first meaning, an eye.

¹⁸ See below, p. 114. This observation appears another two times in the *Guide*; see III:20:483, III:23:496. Modern linguists define this phenomenon as homonymy (Steiner 1998:257).

¹⁹ Ar. *asl waq' al-luḡha*. The Arabic root *wq'* in relation to language is used to indicate creation ("coining") of words, either "naturally" or by "convention"; see Dotan 1996:237-49. Maimonides (*Guide* II:30) cites Gen 2:20 to support the latter view.

²⁰ Ar. *thumma* is rendered by medieval Hebrew translators אַחֲרַיִם (= later), indicating diachronic development. By itself, . . . כִּשְׁמִי (as opposed to the more forceful אַחֲרַיִם כִּשְׁמִי [= afterwards], see below, p. 110), in contrast with אַחֲרַיִם אֶלֶּלֶה may simply indicate logical, rather than chronological ordering. Compare Judah ha-Levi's distinction between אֶלֶּלֶה אֶלֶּלֶה and אֶלֶּלֶה אֶלֶּלֶה in *Kuzari* 2:80 (Baneth ed., 84-85; my thanks to Prof. Hagai Ben Shammai for this reference); see also Blanc 1979:157. But Maimonides' analysis of *hash'alah*, especially in the *Guide* (see below, n. 44), makes it clear that he does present a diachronic model.

²¹ Note the term *tasmīya*. Compare *Guide* I:30:64, "their frequently calling (הַמְשַׁלִּים) knowledge 'water'."

²² Arabic text in *Treatise*, Efros ed. 1966:37 (Hebrew section). Compare al-Fārābī's definition in *Mantiqiyāt al-Fārābī* I:91 (Ar.); Zimmermann 1981:227 (Eng.).

Metaphor is presented here as "name transfer" or "word borrowing," i.e., the term *x*, which normally means *x*, was lent to ("borrowed for") meaning *y*. As we have already seen (above, 1.2.3), the notion of *isti'āra* as name transfer was not uncommon in the fields of hermeneutics and linguistics; but here we can see its presentation in the field of logic, a completely separate branch of learning in the Muslim intellectual milieu.²³ Closely following al-Fārābī, the Aristotelian master of logic, the *Treatise* places metaphor within the rubric of equivocaliity.²⁴ What makes this sub-type of equivocal term unique is the fact that it has only one proper meaning, assigned in the "original coinage of the language." From this we can infer that the two meanings of the absolutely equivocal term co-existed at that original state²⁵ and would thus require separate dictionary entries. This leaves the metaphorical term with a single dictionary definition, upon which the "temporary" usage is based. The term "lion," for example, is "borrowed" temporarily to mean a courageous man; but this ad hoc usage—based on a perceived similarity between the man and a lion²⁶—does not achieve the status of a dictionary definition, i.e., "it is not fixed permanently on that second entity." This temporariness makes metaphor conjure up an image (e.g., of a lion or the sea), which explains its appeal to poets.

2.1.2 Application in the Guide

Another four types of equivocaliity are listed in the *Treatise*, but the two discussed above illuminate the "first purpose" of the *Guide*.²⁷

²³ See Versteegh 1977:120-27; Kraemer 1986:140-50.

²⁴ As noted in the introduction (above, p. 21), al-Fārābī draws upon Aristotle for his conception of metaphor; see also Cohen 2000a:4-5, 10-11.

²⁵ This inference corresponds to al-Fārābī's explicit statement in his definition of *ishtirāk* (above, n. 17): *wa-l-ism al-adhī yuqālu bi-shirāk huwa al-adhī yuqālu min awwal mā wuq'ā 'ala umūr kathīra* ("a term used equivocally is that which is said of many things from the first coinage [of the language]").

²⁶ The *Treatise* does not explicitly stipulate similarity as a condition for metaphor (though al-Fārābī does), but it can be inferred by contrast with the absolutely equivocal term, in which the two meanings "share nothing in common to account for their common name." Compare this with the definition of *al-ism al-maqūl* in the *Treatise* (below, p. 110).

²⁷ The other four sub-types are: univocal terms (*al-mutaḥāṭṭ'a*), amphibolous terms (*al-mushakkika*), terms used in general and particular (*mā yuqāl bi-'umūm wa-khuṣūṣ*) and transferred terms (*al-manqūla*); see studies cited in n. 13. Three of these categories are mentioned in the *Guide*. Occasionally Maimonides addresses the possibility that

Readers of Scripture mistakenly understand (1) “equivocal [terms] (*meshuttafim*) . . . according to [only] some of the meanings in which the term . . . is used” and (2) “metaphorical [terms] (*mush'alim*) . . . according to the first meaning from which they were derived.” In speaking here of “equivocal terms,” he means absolute equivocality (as defined in the *Treatise*), since this category is juxtaposed with another type of equivocality, namely metaphor. Both create a similar problem: the latter are misunderstood because of a naive application of their original meaning, the former out of ignorance that other meanings exist. To alleviate these problems, Maimonides composed the so-called “lexicographic chapters”²⁸ of the *Guide*, which form a dictionary that highlights the lesser known usages of equivocal terms and the derived usages of metaphorical terms.

Drawing upon the Hebrew linguistic tradition and the Farabian categories in the *Treatise*, Maimonides engages in philology to further his philosophical agenda, especially the need to explain away biblical anthropomorphic depictions of God. An illustrative example is the chapter on the term כנף (lit. wing):

כנף is an equivocal term, with most of its equivocality due to metaphorical usage.²⁹ Its first meaning (or: coinage) is *a wing of the living things that fly*. Thus: “Any winged fowl that flieth in the heaven” (Deut 4:17). Subsequently it was used metaphorically to denote (*utūfira li-*; Heb. *hush'al le-*; lit. borrowed for) (1) *the extremities and corners of garments*. Thus: “upon the four *corners* (כנפיה) of thy covering” (Deut 22:12). Next it was used metaphorically to denote (2) *the farthest ends and extremities of the habitable parts of the earth*. . . . Thus: “that it may take hold of the *ends* (כנפיה) of the earth” (Job 38:13), “from the *ends* (כנף) of the earth, we have heard songs.” (Isa 24:16). (I:43:93)

In the introduction to the *Guide*, Maimonides distinguishes between “equivocal” (i.e., absolutely equivocal) and “metaphorical” terms. But

a biblical term is “amphibolous”; see above, n. 11 and *Guide* I:1:22, I:3:27. In I:56:131, he contrasts “amphibolous,” “univocal” and “equivocal” terms; see Wolfson 1938 and below, p. 114. He mentions “terms used in a general and particular sense” in II:30:350 (see chapter four, n. 132). While he never mentions “transferred terms” explicitly, the *manqūl* concept does seem to have influenced his notion of metaphor; see below, 2.1.3.

²⁸ See Strauss 1963:xxiv–xxv; Klein-Braslavy 1987:52.

²⁹ *Istī'āra* (lit. borrowing; Heb. השאלה). Whenever the English term “metaphor” appears in my translation, it reflects this Arabic term.

here he uses the label “equivocal term” in the general sense (of which there are six sub-types), as he goes on to specify that “its equivocality is due to metaphorical usage.” Maimonides then explains in Farabian terms how this metaphorical usage is produced: Scripture “lends” the term כנף to meanings other than its original one. The hierarchy here of a “first coinage” and derived meanings for which the term in question is borrowed metaphorically, follows the Farabian scheme of *hash'alah* in the *Treatise*. This format reflects a typical pattern in the lexicographic chapters of the *Guide*,³⁰ and would seem to accurately reflect Maimonides' conception of metaphor in that work.

Maimonides' philological analysis in his entry on the term כנף is taken from Ibn Janah (*Roots*, s.v. כנף), though he adjusted the terminology according to his Farabian model.³¹ Maimonides' silent use of Ibn Janah is not unusual;³² he probably deemed explicit attribution unnecessary for this basic analysis. Yet he goes on to cite a novel interpretation offered by the great linguist, for which he cannot deny him credit:

³⁰ For other cases that manifest this structure, see e.g., I:6:31 (אשה and איש are two terms, the original coinage of which is *a human male* and *a human female*. Then they were borrowed for *male* and *female* of other living creatures); I:10:35–36 (יד and ידד are two terms, their coinage in the Hebrew language is *descent* and *ascent*. . . then these two terms were borrowed for *sublimity* and *greatness* [for their opposite]); I:21:47–48 (עבר—its first meaning is the sense of *passage*. . . Then the term was borrowed for *the propagation of sounds in the air*); I:22:52 (בא in the Hebrew language was assigned to *the coming* of a living being. . . And this term was borrowed for *the coming about* of something that is not corporeal”).

³¹ Ibn Janah's entry on the root כנף reads:

“Every winged creature” (Prov 1:17), “the wings of a dove” (Ps 68:14, [the meaning] is known. “The כנפיה [lit. wings of] thy covering” (Deut 22:12)—the edges of your clothing; “on the fringes of the כנף” (Num 15:38); by way of analogy to a wing. And it is said by way of *ittisā'* [semantic expansion] and *majāz*: “he shall not uncover the כנף of his father” (Deut 23:1), “for you have come to seek shelter under כנפיו [lit. His wings]” (Ruth 2:12)—to be protected in his shadow. “From the כנף of the earth” (Isa 24:16), “that it may take hold of the כנפיה [lit. wings of] the earth” (Job 38:13)—its edges and extremities. . . .

Whereas Maimonides employs the concepts of *ishtī'āk* and *istī'āra*, Ibn Janah uses the terms *majāz* and *ittisā'*, which had been used by Sa'adia and were common within the field of Arabic linguistics (see above, p. 64). Ibn Janah's expertise was in Arabic grammar (see Becker 1996, 1998). Maimonides, who was trained in logic (see Stern 1989:139–41), would have considered al-Fārābī's categories superior to Ibn Janah's grammatical ones.

³² See Birnbaum 1944:187–89; Klein-Braslavy 1987:55.

Ibn Janah says³³ that the term also occurs with the meaning of (3) *concealing* (or *guarding*),³⁴ akin to the Arabic, in which one may say, "*kanafu* something," meaning: *I have concealed it*. He accordingly interprets the verse, "Yet shall not thy teacher כִּנֵּף" (Isa 30:20), as meaning: thy enlightener³⁵ shall not be *concealed* and *hidden away* from thee. And this is a nice explanation. And from this, in my opinion, [we can explain that] "he shall not uncover the כִּנֵּף of his father" (Deut 23:1) [means]: he shall not uncover of his father *that which is concealed*. Similarly, "Spread כִּנֵּף over thy handmaid" (Ruth 3:9) its meaning, in my opinion is: spread your *protection* over your handmaid. (Ibid.)

Of the three metaphorical senses, Maimonides chooses the last to achieve his philosophical goal:

In my opinion, it is in this sense that כִּנֵּף is metaphorically said of³⁶ the Creator. . . . Accordingly, the interpretation of . . . "you have come to seek shelter under כִּנֵּפוֹ (lit. His wings)" (Ruth 2:12) should be: thou art come to be sheltered under *His protection*. (Ibid.)

This is the type of verse that motivated Maimonides to compose the lexicographic section of the *Guide*. Taking כִּנֵּף literally, a reader might infer from Ruth 2:12 that God has wings, a error avoided by his observation that protection is the sense of כִּנֵּף applicable to God. The interpretive process we have just seen characterizes Maimonides'

³³ This definition appears later in the entry cited above (n. 31). As Qāfī here notes, this the only explicit citation of Ibn Janah in the *Guide*. He conjectures that Maimonides cited his great linguistic predecessor by name because of the play on the Arabic word *janāh* (wing). But for that effect, Ibn Janah could have been cited earlier in the chapter. It seems to me, instead, that Maimonides felt a need to cite his linguistic source by name for this novel interpretation.

³⁴ The Arabic root *str*, as observed by Schwarz (rote in his translation here), has two senses, just like its Hebrew cognate כִּסֶּה.

³⁵ Schwarz suggests that Maimonides (like Ibn Janah) takes מִדְרִיךְ (normally rendered "thy teacher"), in the verse cited to mean *rain*.

³⁶ Lit. "a wing is borrowed for the Creator." Taken at face value, this formula implies imaginary ascription, the model of metaphor adopted by Moses Ibn Ezra (above, 1.2.4). But it is more likely that Maimonides uses this phraseology here in a sense that conforms with his Farabian model of metaphor, since he provides a literal equivalent for the metaphorical term. In other words, this formula is shorthand for: "with respect to the Creator, the term wing is used metaphorically in the sense of ['borrowed for'] concealment," much as Maimonides states explicitly in I:39:89, "and according to this [metaphorical] meaning [the term לֵב] is borrowed for God in every place." A similar shorthand is implied in the following examples: I:21:48 ("the term [עֵצ] is also borrowed for one who has been caused to miss an objective"); I:22:52 ("[בֶּטֶן] is . . . borrowed for certain privations"); I:25:55 ("[שִׁבְעָן] is borrowed for God"). Elsewhere in the *Guide*, however, Maimonides seems to actually adopt the imaginary ascription model; see I:46-47 (below, 4.2.2; II:47.

project in all of the lexicographic chapters of the *Guide*: he takes a term that properly denotes a physical thing or action and shows how it is used metaphorically in a non-physical sense, especially in the context of God.³⁷

Having identified the basic pattern of the lexicographic chapters, we must now scrutinize the philological strategy Maimonides employs to reach his exegetical goals. It is noteworthy that he takes the time to list the first two metaphorical meanings of כִּנֵּף even though he does not use them in his philosophical exegesis. Elsewhere Maimonides insists that the *Guide* "is not a treatise on language" (I:10; 35) and does not contain gratuitous linguistic analysis, which implies that all of the metaphorical senses of כִּנֵּף he lists must somehow serve his philosophical agenda. It would appear that this enumeration helps to clarify precisely how the great philosopher chose which metaphorical sense to apply to God. When כִּנֵּף means *the edge of a garment* or *remote places*, the literal sense *wing* remains discernable. For example, one could reasonably reproduce the BH idiom in Isa 24:16 by rendering it literally, "... the wings of the earth." But this does not work with the Arabic verb *kanafa*, which means only *to conceal* and is not used in any sense related to a wing.³⁸ Even if it was once derived from the literal sense of the noun (*wing*), that sense is no longer active.³⁹ Hence, לֹא יִכְנֶף מִדְרִיךְ (Isa 30:20) must be rendered "your teacher shall not be *concealed*." This would explain why Maimonides "held his fire" in this entry before citing a philosophically sensitive verse: when used in the third sense, כִּנֵּף does not evoke an image of God's wing.⁴⁰

³⁷ For other examples of a term denoting a physical thing or action that Maimonides explains in a non-physical sense, see I:7 (לֵד), I:16 (צִדֵּי), I:24 (הִלָּךְ) and below, n. 43.

³⁸ Arabic dictionaries render *kanafa* simply *to conceal* or *protect*. On the other hand, *wing* is given as one sense of the noun *kanaf*.

³⁹ Compare the word "surface," which may have once meant *on the face* (using the French prefix *sur* [= on]), but does not evoke the notion of a face in current usage. These are examples of semantic change that result from metaphor; see Anttila 1972:133-53.

⁴⁰ Maimonides' use of philological analysis to serve his philosophical aims becomes clearer by comparison with Ibn Janah (above, n. 31), who renders לְחֵצֵי הַחַיִּים כִּנֵּפוֹ (Ruth 2:12) "to be protected in His shadow," but derives this from כִּנֵּף in the sense of *the edges of your clothing* *the edge of a garment*, which he attributes to "its similarity to a wing." This usage creates an image of a wing and thus can be translated literally, as many English translations do. Only later in the entry, when faced with Isa 30:20, does Ibn Janah mention the Arabic cognate *kanafa*. But Maimonides seizes upon that cognate to neutralize the image of God's "wing" in Ruth 2:12. Just as we have shown in the case of כִּנֵּף, Harvey 1988a:6-12 observes how

Maimonides' analysis of the term פָּנִים (lit. face) likewise highlights his tendency to cite metaphorical usages that no longer activate the original literal sense. As with the term נֶכֶד, he classifies פָּנִים as an equivocal term and then specifies that "its equivocality is mostly due to its metaphorical usage." Of particular interest are three such usages. Apart from its original literal sense, פָּנִים

is (1) a word (*ism*) for the *presence and station of an individual*. Thus, "he settled on פָּנָה (lit. the face of) all of his brethren" (Gen 25:18), "and on פָּנָה (lit. the face of) all the people I will be glorified" (Lev 10:3) meaning, *in their presence*. . . . (2) פָּנִים is also an adverb of place that is rendered in Arabic by the words "in front of thee"⁴¹ or "in thy presence". . . . (3) פָּנִים is also an adverb of time, having the meaning *before* or *ancient*. Thus: "פָּנִים in Israel" (Ruth 4:7) [meaning *in ancient Israel*], "לפָּנֶיךָ Thou didst lay the foundation" (Ps 102:26) [meaning *of old*].⁴² (I:37;83–84).

These usages have become part of the normal BH lexicon and have been so well integrated that they cannot reasonably be translated literally and must be rendered contextually. In hearing the expression "לפָּנֶיךָ in Israel," for example, a Hebrew speaker would not think for a moment about a face. The payoff of this linguistic observation is that Maimonides can easily "interpret away" verses like "Abraham was still standing לפני (lit. in the face of) God" (Gen 18:22), which simply means, in God's *presence* and in no way implies that He has a face. In fact, a reader should not think—even momentarily—about God's "face" when reading Gen 18:22 any more than in Ruth 4:7.

2.1.3 The "Transferred Term" (al-Isim al-Manqūl)

The examples we have seen, which show that Maimonides cites metaphorical usages that have become part of the normal BH lexicon, actually typify the lexicographic chapters.⁴³ On this basis, we

Maimonides (*Guide* I:1, on the term עָלָם) cites seemingly gratuitous examples that actually further his theological agenda.

⁴¹ The Arabic phrase is also metaphorical: "between your hands."

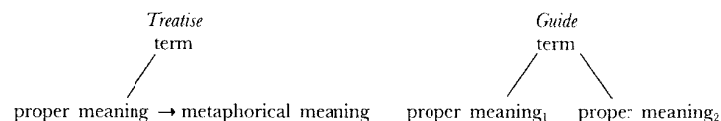
⁴² This analysis is also found in Ibn Janah without any label indicating metaphorical usage. He evidently considered these usages to be standard in BH.

⁴³ We can make a similar observation about other entries, as well; see, e.g., I:4 (עָלָם); I:6 (אֵשׁ וְאֵשׁ); I:7 (יָלַד); I:8 (מִסְקִים); I:10 (עָלָה); I:11 (עָלָה); I:12 (עָלָה); I:23 (עָלָה). In all of these chapters, Maimonides cites "metaphorical" usages standard in BH, which are cited, e.g., in BDB without the label "figurative."

must re-evaluate the comparison between the definition of *hash'alah* in the *Treatise* and its application in the *Guide*. While metaphor is portrayed in both the *Guide* and *Treatise* as a "borrowed" usage based on the original literal meaning, the nature of that borrowing differs. In the *Treatise*, *hash'alah* is a "temporary" usage that must always be derived anew from the original literal sense. But the *Guide* features a dictionary of *hash'alah* usages that have become standard, a generalization we can extrapolate from a comment Maimonides makes explicitly in one example:

This [metaphorical] use became so frequent in the [Hebrew] language and so widespread that *it has become as if it were the original coinage*.⁴⁴ (I:30;64)⁴⁵

We can illustrate the difference between the two models of metaphor in a diagram:



In the *Treatise*, a *shem mush'al* has a single proper meaning, i.e., its dictionary definition, which, in some contexts, is inappropriate and must be replaced by a metaphorical meaning. But since that meaning does not become standard, the next time the term appears, one must again first attempt to apply the dictionary definition.⁴⁶ But in the *Guide*, Maimonides presents metaphorical meanings that have

⁴⁴ Ar. *كأنه لم يسمع من قبل*. This Arabic formula expresses diachronic development; see Blanc 1979:161–62.

⁴⁵ This appears in Maimonides' analysis of BH אָכַל (lit. to eat) used in the sense of *learning*, e.g., in Isa 55:2, "Hearken diligently to me and אָכַל (lit. eat) that which is good." This usage seems better suited for the model of metaphor in the *Treatise*; its characterization as just another dictionary definition of the root אָכַל shows the extent to which he went to apply a different model in the *Guide*. Although this observation could be made (more convincingly, in fact) about many other cases of *hash'alah* in the *Guide*, Maimonides spells it out here in particular because he wishes to point out that this metaphorical usage has generated others; see below, 3.4.1.

⁴⁶ Compare Rashi's rule, "The interpreter must adjust the [meaning of] the language according to the context" (comm. on Ex 14:31), described as "meaning minimalism" by Steiner 1998:238–50.

become equal in status to the original literal one and can thus be applied directly in certain contexts. Rather than beginning with the literal sense and adjusting it where required by the context, the reader must initially choose between proper meaning₁ and proper meaning₂.

Whereas *al-ism al-musta'ār* in the *Treatise* is a vital or "live" metaphor, in the *Guide* this technical term means *dead metaphor*, i.e., a metaphor used so often that it is not perceived as such and thus functions as a literal expression.⁴⁷ Such a model is, in fact, defined in chapter thirteen of the *Treatise* as the sixth type of equivocal term, *AL-ISM AL-MANQŪL* (Heb: *HA-SHEM HA-NE'ETAQ*; lit. a transferred term):

a term, of which the original designation in the original coinage of the language is to indicate (*li-yadullū*) a particular meaning (*ma'na*). Next, it was later (*ba'da dhalikā*)⁴⁸ transferred, and some other meaning is designated (*yusamma*) by it, either because of some resemblance between the two meanings, or without resemblance. And that word properly denotes (lit. is permanently fixed on) both equally: the one from which it was transferred and the one to which it was transferred.⁴⁹

Although this type of term originally had only one meaning, it now is "fixed on both [meanings] equally," in contrast to the *ism al-musta'ār*, which "is not fixed permanently on" the metaphorical sense (above, p. 102). The derived sense of an *ism al-manqūl* is independent of the original one and should thus be indicated separately in the dictionary.⁵⁰ This type of "metaphor" is illustrated in the *Treatise* by Arabic grammatical terms such as *nash* (accusative; lit. to raise) and *wazn* (nominal form; lit. weight), which, when used in their technical sense, no longer depend on their original literal sense. This matches metaphor as presented in the *Guide*, since the metaphorical senses Maimonides cites are indeed "fixed equally on both" the original literal sense and the derived senses.

⁴⁷ See above, p. 24.

⁴⁸ This indicates a diachronic development; see above, n. 20.

⁴⁹ Arabic text in *Treatise*, Efros ed., 1966:37 (Hebrew section). Compare with al-Fārābī's definition in *Mantiqiyāt al-Fārābī* I:91–92 (Ar.); Zimmermann 1981:227–28 (Eng.). *Manqūl* is actually a more literal translation of Greek *metaphora* (= moving beyond; transfer) than *isti'āra*, the standard Arabic term for metaphor. See Zimmermann 1981:227n.

⁵⁰ Unlike *al-ism al-musta'ār* (above, n. 26), in the case of *al-ism al-manqūl* there need not be any similarity between the original and derived senses. The latter therefore must be listed independently in the dictionary because the reader cannot derive it by analogy with the former.

As presented in the *Treatise*, *al-ism al-musta'ār* creatively conjures up imagery and is the stuff of poetry, whereas *al-ism al-manqūl* is normal, non-poetic speech. Al-Fārābī explains that *manqūl* ("transference") is a process by which existing words are used in new ways in order to fill gaps in the lexicon, for example, by scientists who wish to speak about newly discovered things and concepts.⁵¹ When seeking a term for metaphor in the *Guide*, Maimonides felt compelled to use the standard Arabic term *isti'āra*, but was thinking about *manqūl*, a model that allowed him to compose a dictionary of derived usages. By instructing the reader to simply plug in the non-physical meanings of the terms in his dictionary, he undercuts the anthropomorphic imagery that the biblical depictions of God might otherwise evoke.

We have shown that the label *isti'āra* in the *Guide* often reflects the notion of *manqūl* in the *Treatise*, but the question arises: Is this a coincidental overlap of categories, or does Maimonides actually intend to present *isti'āra* in the *Guide* according to the definition of *manqūl* in the *Treatise*? Based on the preponderance of evidence in the *Guide*,⁵² I believe we can conclude that the latter reflects his thinking.⁵³ In other words, *isti'āra* in the *Guide* means *dead metaphor*, period.⁵⁴

⁵¹ *Mantiqiyāt al-Fārābī* I:91–92 (Ar.); Zimmermann 1981:228, 231 (Eng.; compare chapter one, n. 233).

⁵² I acknowledge the difficulty of devising an absolute rule that will cover every passage in Maimonides' *Guide*, a complex work, apparently written in stages (Kasher 1992/3), with built-in contradictions (introduction: 17–20). The best an interpreter can do is identify a general pattern that reflects the majority of examples, while noting (and, if possible, accounting for) the exceptions; see following note.

⁵³ Does Maimonides in the *Guide* ever cite and analyze a case of *isti'āra* according to the *Treatise* definition? I can point to only one such example: in analyzing the root *הכח* (I:70;171–73), the author of the *Guide* specifies that the reader should think about its literal sense when it is used metaphorically. (My thanks to Dr. Robert Eisen for bringing this example to my attention.) But that example is truly exceptional (and occurs outside of the main lexicographic section [I:1–49], which was probably written as a separate unit [see chapter four, n. 117]). Otherwise, when Maimonides wishes to highlight the literal sense of a metaphorical usage, he calls it a *mashal*, not *hash'alah* (see below, 22.3). We should note that he argues that the metaphorical (*hash'alah*) use of the root *הכח* in the sense of *acquiring knowledge* has achieved a status comparable to the original coinage (above, p. 109), despite the fact that it seems to be an active metaphorical usage better analyzed according to the "temporary" model of *isti'āra* in the *Treatise*. In Maimonides' defense, one could deflect this critique by pointing to the lack of definitive criteria for identifying dead metaphors in B.H. a language now far removed from its living context (see introduction, n. 79). But the fact that he even applies the *manqūl* model where it seems so tenuous betrays his strong preference for viewing biblical metaphors as dead metaphors.

⁵⁴ There are, however, different levels of dead metaphor. In some cases, the orig-

Apart from the overall tone set by his dictionary-style analysis, this conclusion is supported by three other features of Maimonides' study of biblical metaphor in the *Guide*, to which we now turn: (a) his interchangeable use of the terms *shem meshuttaf* and *shem mush'al*, (b) his two-language analogy, and (c) his theory of translation for *shemot mush'alim*.

2.1.4 "Equivocality" Reconsidered

Armed with the *manqūl* model, we must re-evaluate the relationship between "equivocality" and metaphor in the *Guide*. In his introduction (above, p. 99), Maimonides contrasts "equivocal" and "metaphorical terms," suggesting that he uses the former in the sense of "absolutely equivocal" as defined in the *Treatise*. But in the body of the work, the label "equivocal" (*meshuttaf*) includes metaphorical usages. In fact, with only a few exceptions, whenever Maimonides uses the term "equivocal" in the *Guide*, it seems, he actually has the label "metaphorical" (*mush'al*) in mind.⁵⁵ This divergence from the

inal literal sense is still apparent, for example, the expressions cited in connection with the word עֵינַי in *Guide* I:37 (above). This certainly applies to the metaphorical usage of the root עֵינַי in the sense of *study* (see preceding note). In such cases, the reader or listener must choose between two alternative dictionary definitions: the literal and metaphorical ones. But some usages derived metaphorically have "covered their tracks" more fully, and the original literal sense is no longer apparent, as we noted with respect to the verb כָּנַף, as analyzed in *Guide* I:43 on Ibn Janah's authority (above). There is no Hebrew (or Arabic) verb associated with the sense of *a wing*; the reader or listener looking up this word in a dictionary will find only the sense of *concealment*. On the other hand, in the other examples of the metaphorical use of this root, e.g., כַּנְפֵי הָאֲדָמָה, the original literal sense (*the wings of the earth*) is still evident, though it is inactive, since, according to Maimonides, the correctly applicable dictionary definition of כָּנַף here is *the remote parts*. See introduction, n. 80.

⁵⁵ Maimonides often introduces a term as "equivocal" and immediately specifies that "its equivocality is mostly due to its metaphorical usage"; see discussion of כָּנַף and פָּנִים above and n. 66 below. But elsewhere he labels a term "equivocal" and only later reveals that the non-physical senses are the product of *hash'alah*; see, e.g., I:39:88–89 (לֵב); I:65:158–59 (דָּבָר); I:70:171 (רֵיב); and n. 68 below. Furthermore, a comparison of similar usages in different chapters suggests that even terms labeled only as "equivocal" are actually used metaphorically. Compare, for example, I:28:59 (עֵינַי) with the entries on כָּנַף and פָּנִים; compare I:11:37 (שִׁכְחָה) with I:12:38 (עֵינַי) and I:13:39 (קִימָה); see also I:15:40 (נֶצַח); I:19:45 (מֵלָא). These comparisons strengthen the claim made by Nuriel (1982:99–100) that the term *shittuf* in the *Guide*—unless specified as *shittuf gamur*—is little more than a synonym for *hash'alah*. The fact that Maimonides generally cites only *hash'alah* in opposition to *mashal* (see above, n. 4), further suggests that *shittuf* is actually a very minor category in relation to *hash'alah* in his exegetical system.

careful distinctions in the *Treatise* becomes especially evident in his analysis of the BH term עֵינַי (lit. eye) in the *Guide*:

עֵינַי is an equivocal term. It is the word for *a spring of water*. . . . It is also the word for *the seeing eye*. . . . It is further the word for *providence* (or: *watchfulness*). Thus, Scripture says with regard to Jeremiah: "Take him and have עֵינָיו (lit. thine eyes) on him" (Jer 39:12), the meaning of which is: *direct thy watchfulness to him*.⁵⁶ (I:44:95).

The Arabic term *'ayn* (cognate of Hebrew עֵינַי) was actually cited as the paradigm of absolute equivocality in the *Treatise* (above, 2.1.1), and two of its meanings listed there are noted here in the *Guide*, namely *spring* and *eye*. The classification of *'ayn* as absolutely equivocal implies that its meanings are unrelated and reflect the "original coinage of the language," at which point they were assigned coincidentally to the same word. But the usage of the term עֵינַי to denote *watchfulness*, listed here in the *Guide*, is clearly derived from the sense of *an eye*. Yet Maimonides does not label this third usage as *hash'alah* until he points out its theological usefulness:

It is according to this metaphorical sense (= *isti'āra*; Heb. *hash'alah*) that it is said of God in every place: "עֵינָיו (lit. mine eyes) and לִבִּי (lit. my heart) shall be there perpetually" (I Kgs 9:3), [meaning] *My providence and My will*, as we have set forth before (I:39). "עֵינָיו (lit. the eyes of) the Lord thy God are always upon it [the land of Israel]" (Deut 11:12), [meaning] *His providence is upon it*; "עֵינָיו (lit. the eyes of) the Lord that run to and fro" (Zech 4:10), [meaning] *His providence extends also to everything that is on earth*. (Ib.d.)

This is another example of a word for a physical entity that acquired a non-physical meaning, which must be applied when said of God. But by initially presenting *watchfulness* together with the independent meanings, *spring* and *eye*, Maimonides creates the impression that it, too, is an independent meaning.⁵⁷ In other words, by using the label

⁵⁶ Maimonides' analysis in this entry of the *Guide* is independent of Ibn Janah. The first two meanings of Arabic *'ayn* are observed by al-Fārābī (see reference in n. 17). The sense of "providence" (not listed in Ibn Janah's *Roots*) may be taken from Sa'adia; see *Beliefs and Opinions* 2:10; see also Steiner 1998:219.

⁵⁷ This impression seems to have misled as great a Maimonidean scholar as Qaṣṣī, who comments in the note on his translation of this passage of the *Guide*: Our Rabbi had to put [the sense of] *a spring of water* first in order to negate what people think, i.e., that the primary sense is *the seeing eye*. He indicates [instead] that it does not have a primary sense and borrowed senses [*hash'alah*], but rather is a [completely] equivocal term (*shem meshuttaf*).

shittuf instead of *hash'alah*, he hides the derivation of the non-physical sense from the physical one, implying that שׁוּט is simply a term with many meanings that "have in common only the name and nothing else" (above, p. 102).

Once we recognize that *hash'alah* in the *Guide* follows the *manqūl* model as defined in the *Treatise*, this conclusion becomes quite reasonable. Diachronically, *al-ism al-manqūl* (the transferred term) resembles *al-ism al-musta'ar* (the borrowed term), because both originally had only one meaning and only acquired their second meanings at a later point. But synchronically, *al-ism al-manqūl* is equivalent to *al-ism al-mahd al-ishtirāk* (the completely equivocal term; as al-Fārābī notes explicitly),⁵⁸ because in the current state of the language there is no active link between their different meanings.

It is hardly coincidental that Maimonides would be inclined to favor viewing depictions of God as being made up of absolutely equivocal terms. In a section of the *Guide* devoted to a philosophical—rather than exegetical—account of God,⁵⁹ he insists that terms denoting divine attributes such as existence, knowledge, power, will and life are "absolutely equivocal, so that their meaning when they are predicated of Him is in no way like their meaning in other applications" (I:56;131). He rejects the alternative proposed by other philosophers that such terms are amphibolous⁶⁰ because that strategy would imply a similarity between God and man which he deems erroneous.⁶¹ For Maimonides, "these attributions"—when said of God and when said of human beings—"have in common only the name and nothing else" (ibid.). Given this inclination, one can understand his reluctance to highlight the imaginative comparisons evoked by biblical references to God's "face," "eyes," and even "wings."⁶² Instead,

⁵⁸ *Mantiqiyāt al-Fārābī* I:92 (Ar.); Zimmermann 1981:228–29 (Eng.).

⁵⁹ On this distinction, see Hyman 1991:182–83.

⁶⁰ I.e., "predicated of two things between which there is a likeness in respect to some notion, which is an accident attached to both of them . . ." (ibid.); see above, n. 11. Compare I:8;33, where Maimonides argues that the term מָקוֹם (lit. place) is said of God metaphorically rather than literally "to signify the rank of his existence, may He be exalted; there being nothing like or similar to that existence, as shall be demonstrated."

⁶¹ On this philosophical debate, see Wolfson 1953.

⁶² I state this as a psychological rather than logical link because one could theoretically distinguish between the issues involved. It is possible to read biblical depictions of God according to the notion of *hash'alah* defined in the *Treatise* and view

he argues that these BH terms are used in a completely unrelated sense when said of God.

Elsewhere in the *Guide*, Maimonides devises a striking analogy that makes this very point. In II:29 he notes the tendency of the literary prophets to employ metaphors (*hash'alot*) and other types of picturesque language, a style that would confuse readers who fail to recognize it as a rhetorical device. To illustrate this confusion, he describes how a Jew and Arab might mis-communicate because of a coincidental phonetic similarity between a word in Hebrew and a different word in Arabic. Normally, the two speakers know that they cannot communicate, but

if an Arab hears a Hebrew man saying אָבָה [= he desires], the Arab will think that he speaks of an individual who was reluctant with regard to some matter and refused [*aba*] it. However, the Hebrew only wished to convey that the individual was pleased with the matter and wished it. This is similar to what happens to the multitude with regard to the speech of the prophets.⁶³ (II:29;336)

When a reader takes a *shem mush'al* appearing in prophetic literature literally, it is as though he were using an Arabic dictionary to understand the Hebrew text. This analogy implies that prophetic utterances require a special dictionary distinct from that of the normal BH lexicon. Although Maimonides exaggerates here for dramatic effect, the point he wishes to make is clear: a literal understanding is not merely incomplete, it is absolutely incorrect. The connection between the literal and metaphorical senses of a given *shem mush'al* is analogous to the relation between Hebrew אָבָה and Arabic *aba*, i.e., they "have in common only the name and nothing else."

2.1.5 Translating Hash'alah

Translation is an excellent test for distinguishing between Maimonides' two models of metaphor. *Al-ism al-manqūl*, when used in its derived sense, would have to be translated contextually rather than according

them as poetic portrayals, while still maintaining that a philosophical account of God in literal language (see Hyman 1991:183) can include only absolutely equivocal terms.

⁶³ Here Maimonides may be speaking specifically about prophetic literature, as the examples he cited in this chapter are all from the *Nevi'im* section of the Bible (as opposed to *Torah* and *Ketuvim*; see above, n. 10).

to its original literal sense. The examples cited in the *Treatise*, technical Arabic grammatical terms such as *naṣḥ* (accusative; lit. to raise) and *wazn* (nominal form; lit. weight), offer abundant evidence for this, since their literal translation would be misleading. By contrast, *isti'āra* as defined in the *Treatise* is best translated literally to allow the metaphorical sense to be freshly processed in the target language, just as in the original one.⁶⁴ Although Maimonides was not a biblical translator, one can extrapolate a translation theory from his evaluation of the Aramaic Targumim, an authority he invokes for his philosophical exegesis.⁶⁵ Not surprisingly, the translation theory he advocates for *hash'alah* in the *Guide* reflects the *maqūl* model, not *isti'āra* as defined in the *Treatise*.

To begin with, Maimonides speaks approvingly of Onkelos' translations of terms used metaphorically. For example:

Whenever the notion of "hearing" is attributed to God, may He be exalted, you will find that Onkelos the Proselyte avoids it and interpreted its meaning to be that *the matter in question reached Him*, may He be exalted, or that *He apprehended it*. Or if it occurs with regard to prayer, he interprets its meaning to be that *He accepted it*. . . . Thus, when interpreting the words, "the Lord שָׁמַע (lit. heard)," he always says, "*It was heard before the Lord*." And with regard to prayer, "I will surely אֶשְׁמַע (lit. hear) his prayer" (Ex 22:22), he translates, "I will surely *accept* [his prayer]." This is consistent in his interpretation, and he does not deviate from this usage in any place. (I:48;106)

This can be considered an application of Maimonides' view that the BH verb שָׁמַע (lit. to hear) must be taken metaphorically when God is its subject.⁶⁶

Even more revealing is his discussion of Onkelos' apparent failure to follow his own rule. BH רָאָה (lit. to see), according to Maimonides, "is used metaphorically (*hush'al le-*)⁶⁷ to mean *the grasp of the intellect*" (I:4;27). He thus questions why Onkelos sometimes translates the phrase וַיִּרְאֵהוּ (lit. the Lord saw) literally as וַיִּהְיֶה, which

⁶⁴ The eleventh-century Arab literary critic al-Jurjānī likewise noted that these two models of *isti'āra* require distinct translation strategies; see Abu Deeb 1979:200–01.

⁶⁵ See Klein 1982:24–28. Siding with Nahmariides, though, Klein questions Maimonides' interpretation of the motives of the Targum.

⁶⁶ I:45:96. Although Maimonides classifies this term as "equivocal," it seems fair to say that "its equivocality is mostly due to its metaphorical usage," as he comments explicitly on the terms כָּנַף and פִּיִּים.

⁶⁷ On this formula, see above, p. 104 and n. 30.

is inappropriate for God. To account for this problematic case, he explains:

His translating וַיִּהְיֶה is clear proof that the word הָיָה (lit. to see) is equivocal (*meshuttaf*)⁶⁸ in the Aramaic language, inasmuch as it indicates both the meaning of *an apprehension of the intellect* and that of *an apprehension of the senses*. (I:48;106)

Here Maimonides hints at a secondary rule: a literal translation is appropriate where the target language shares the metaphorical usage of the original one.⁶⁹ But this strengthens the primary rule: if the target language does not share that usage, the translator, faced with mutually exclusive literal and contextual renderings, must choose the latter and disregard the literal sense.⁷⁰

Maimonides' theory of translation invites a literary observation about Scripture's use of metaphorical language where an alternative literal formulation is available.⁷¹ Although this observation is implicit throughout his treatment of *hash'alah* in the *Guide*, he articulates it directly in one example, in commenting on the description of the two tablets containing the Ten Commandments as being "written by אֶצְבַּע אֱלֹהִים" (lit. the finger of God; Ex 31:18). This passage is especially interesting because Maimonides uses Hebrew expressions in his Arabic text to explore alternatives that Scripture could have used to convey the meaning of the expression אֶצְבַּע אֱלֹהִים.

The dictum, "written by אֶצְבַּע אֱלֹהִים" is equivalent to its saying כִּדְבַר אֱלֹהִים (lit. by the word of God).⁷² And the expression כִּדְבַר אֱלֹהִים would, if Scripture had used it, be equivalent to כְּחֹפֶץ אֱלֹהִים (written by the will of God).⁷³ (I:66;160)

Seen from the perspective of the *Treatise* definition, the expression אֶצְבַּע אֱלֹהִים, which conjures up a picturesque image of God's

⁶⁸ Since he classifies רָאָה as a *shem mush'al* in *Guide* I:4, it seems that here he means equivocal in the general sense, which includes metaphor.

⁶⁹ Maimonides therefore goes on to question why וַיִּרְאֵהוּ is rendered וַיִּהְיֶה by Onkelos in other cases.

⁷⁰ Maimonides (I:27;58) thus questions Onkelos' literal translation (אֲנִי אֵרָאֶה עִמָּךְ) of "I will descend with thee . . ." (Gen 46:3), said by God, in which the term "descend" (יָרַד) is used metaphorically.

⁷¹ Moses Ibn Ezra addressed this type of situation and argued that the metaphorical formulation is preferable because of its literary elegance; see chapter one, p. 83.

⁷² Maimonides (I:66;161) argues that this would be the natural translation of this phrase and is surprised that it does not appear in Onkelos.

⁷³ The coinage כְּחֹפֶץ אֱלֹהִים may be based on Isa 53:10; see also 1 Sam 15:22.

handiwork,⁷⁴ has special poetic features that the other expressions lack. But in the *Guide*, Maimonides dismisses that quality and focuses only on its derived, non-physical sense, which leads him to argue that Scripture could just as well have employed the less poetic expressions and conveyed the same meaning.⁷⁵

2.2 The Literary Concept of Mashal

After presenting the analysis of equivocal and metaphorical terms as his “first purpose” in the *Guide*, Maimonides goes on to say:

This treatise also has a second purpose, namely the explanation of very obscure *mesalim* occurring in Scripture⁷⁶ . . . an ignorant or heedless individual might think that they are said only according to their obvious meaning (Ar. *zāhir*) and there is no deeper meaning (Ar. *bāṭin*) to them. (Introduction; 5)

Unlike the terms *hash'alah* and *shittuf*, which are taken entirely from Arabic sources, the great philosopher's analysis of *mashal* draws heavily upon its usage in Scripture and rabbinic literature,⁷⁷ though he borrows Arabic terminology to describe its workings.

2.2.1 Allegory, Symbolism and Simile

Whereas Maimonides applies the label *hash'alah* to a single metaphorical term (a *shem mush'al*) in a larger linguistic context, a *mashal* is normally a self-contained literary unit, a fictional allegorical tale or account (sometimes called a parable).⁷⁸ Unlike simple fiction, a *mashal*

⁷⁴ Compare Ps 8:4, “the skies, the work of your fingers (מַעֲשֵׂי אֶצְבְּעֶיךָ) . . .” Not surprisingly, Sa'adia in his *Tafsir* avoids translating the grossly anthropomorphic term אֶצְבְּעֶיךָ.

⁷⁵ For other examples in which Maimonides asserts that equivalence of the metaphorical expression and its literal paraphrase (using the formula “it is as if it said”), see I:6:31 (“אִשׁ וְאִשָּׁה”—it is as if it said “she and her husband”; Hebrew text and paraphrase); I:17:44 (“תִּקְרֶינִי אֵל”—it is as if it says “let me know”; Hebrew text and Arabic paraphrase).

⁷⁶ Lit. the books of prophecy; see above, n. 10.

⁷⁷ The rabbinic *mashal* genre is the subject of a dedicated study by Stern (1991). As Boyarin (1987) demonstrates, Maimonides' view that the concept of *mashal* is critical for understanding Scripture can be traced to rabbinic tradition.

⁷⁸ The use of the term *mashal* to connote fiction can be traced to rabbinic literature; see, e.g., ET *Baba Bathra* 15a (cited below); Loewe 1964:173–75.

represents a factual state of affairs. This is expressed using the Arabic terms *zāhir* (external, obvious meaning), i.e., the fictional account, and *bāṭin* (inner, hidden meaning), the facts or ideas it symbolizes.⁷⁹ The classic example of a *mashal* cited in rabbinic literature (BT *Baba Bathra* 15a) is the “poor man's lamb” parable devised by Nathan the prophet (II Sam 12:1–4) to illustrate to King David the moral repugnance of his actions with Bathsheba. Maimonides follows an opinion cited in the same talmudic text that the book of Job, likewise, is a *mashal*. He thus takes the tale of this righteous man's suffering and subsequent discussions with his friends to be a fiction employed by Scripture to convey various philosophical views about the problem of evil. The “second purpose” of the *Guide* implies that full comprehension of this biblical book requires more than merely understanding the literal tale (*zāhir*); one must also explain its inner meaning (*bāṭin*), i.e., the philosophical views that it contains, an exegetical enterprise to which Maimonides devotes *Guide* III:22–23 (see below, 4.1.2).⁸⁰

Maimonides also uses the term *mashal* in reference to similes⁸¹ and

⁷⁹ Compare Moses Ibn Ezra's comment regarding *mashal* and *hiddah*: לְהַאֲרִיךְ בְּמַשָּׁל וּבְחִידָה כִּי בִּמְשָׁל מֵיִן לִפְשָׁא דְּחִידָה הִיא אֲלֵלָא אֲדָרָא נִדְבָה פִּי בִּמְשָׁלָהּ לֹא פִּי טְהוּרָה (Mishnah Commentary, introduction to *Pereq Heleq* [= *Sanhedrin* X], Qāfih ed., 202). On the Hebrew equivalents used to translate *zāhir* and *bāṭin*, see above, 1.1.4 and below, 3.2.1.

⁸⁰ In the *Guide*, Maimonides interprets biblical and rabbinic *mesalim* and even devises his own (on which, see Stern 1991:224–27). In interpreting rabbinic *mesalim* (see, e.g., I:59:142, II:30:353, III:6:427), Maimonides may be fulfilling an early promise to compose the “Book of Correspondence” on this subject (introduction; 9; see also Klein-Braslavy 1987:17–18; Kasher 1992/3:122–29). Of particular interest is Maimonides' interpretation of a rabbinic *mashal* that he cites to explain the workings of the biblical *mashal* genre (below, p. 122). That example illustrates how Maimonides reads Scripture in light of rabbinic tradition (see chapter four, n. 1). Perhaps the best known of Maimonides' original *mesalim* is the “palace *mashal*,” in which the intricate labyrinth of a palace in al-Andalus represents various levels of spiritual proximity to God (see below, n. 130). For other *mesalim* devised by Maimonides, see e.g., I:33:71, I:46:97.

⁸¹ We already noted this application by Abraham Ibn Ezra (above 1.2.2). The structure of a simile is different from that of an allegory. In an allegory, the topic or “thing represented” is hidden and therefore merits the label *bāṭin*. But in a simile, the topic is mentioned explicitly alongside the image; Maimonides therefore does not use the *zāhir-bāṭin* dichotomy in analyzing similes. He does explain, however, how the image resembles—and thus illuminates—the topic (see I:1:23). He comments, e.g., on Ezek 1:14, “the living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning”:

... their motion consisted in running and retracting their way. And he made it clear in a *mashal*, saying, “as the appearance of a flash of lightning” . . .