

MAIMONIDES AND FRIENDSHIP*

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How does friendship enable human beings to flourish? No reader of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* can avoid this question, and Maimonides was certainly a close and dedicated reader.¹ Indeed, it may be because he relied so heavily (and so explicitly) upon Aristotle in this context that his own subtle thinking about friendship and human sociability has not yet received the attention it deserves. Aristotle provided Maimonides with a conceptual framework for systematic reflection upon human sociability, but his attempt to read biblical and rabbinic texts through this prism may also have pushed his reading of Aristotle in a broadly inclusive direction, with respect to both the range of values that inform the best possible life as well as the range of people to whom that life is—in principle—accessible.² This article should therefore be read as a corrective to the exaggerated focus on seclusion and solitary contemplation that has characterized recent scholarship on

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¹ See Lawrence V. Berman, "The Ethical Views of Maimonides within the context of Islamicate Civilization," in Joel L. Kraemer, ed., *Perspectives on Maimonides* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 13-32. Maimonides is thought to have had access to more than one translation of the *Ethics*, though he praised the one by Ibn Hunayn. Herbert A. Davidson, *Moses Maimonides: The Man and his Work* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 199 n.129.

² Steven S. Schwarzchild, "Moral Radicalism and 'Middlingness' in the Ethics of Maimonides," *Studies in Medieval Culture* 11 (1977): 65-93 has argued that the Torah's inclusive goals pushed Maimonides to break with Aristotle on key questions. That may be, but I think Schwarzchild and others have underestimated the potential for more inclusive readings of Aristotle himself that have been emphasized in recent scholarship.

<http://www.biu.ac.il/JS/JSIJ/13-2015/Seeman.pdf>

Maimonides. I will argue that friendship is crucial to his account of human flourishing and that virtue friendship in particular helps to mediate between moral and intellectual excellence or, to put this another way, between the life of the commandments and the life of the mind.

Brief Notes on Friendship in Aristotle

Aristotle devotes more space to friendship in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (Books Eight and Nine) than he does to any single moral or intellectual virtue.³ His evaluation of friendship appears, moreover, to interrupt an extended discussion of pleasure that begins in relation to virtue in Book Seven and culminates in Book Ten with the pleasure of “the best thing,” which is contemplation.⁴ “This interruption, this sequence,” notes Amelie Oksenburg Rorty, “is no accident, no haphazard reshuffling of the note-takers’ papyrus.”⁵ It is rather, a clue to the pivotal role of friendship as a gateway to the best kind of life. I will argue that Maimonides emulates Aristotle in this regard by locating friendship structurally in his *Guide of the Perplexed* at the intersection of moral or political excellence fostered by the commandments and the intellectual perfection associated with contemplative worship.⁶ Both Aristotle and Maimonides thus treat human sociality as an important object of philosophical reflection, though both men also leave readers puzzled about the precise relationship between sociality and the contemplative ideal.

“Friendship” is by all accounts too narrow a translation for Aristotle’s *philia*, which includes all kinds of sociability, from political and erotic relations to virtue (or character) friendship, but this is the translation to which most scholars writing in English have adhered and

³ The status of friendship as a virtue is of course somewhat complicated. At the beginning of Book Eight (1155a) Aristotle writes that “the next topic is friendship; for it is a virtue, or involves virtue.” Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Terence Irwin, trans., second edition (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999), 121.

⁴ *NE* 1177a-1179a.

⁵ See Amelie Oksenburg Rorty, “The Place of Contemplation in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*,” *Mind* (New Series) 87 (1978) 354; also Lorraine Smith Pangle, *Aristotle and the Philosophy of Friendship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 2.

⁶ See Maimonides’ *Guide of the Perplexed* III:49, which I discuss below. All translations unless otherwise noted refer to Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed* (translated by Shlomo Pines; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963).

it is not without merit.⁷ Like the Hebrew *haver* and Arabic *sadeeq*, both of which Maimonides used in this context, “friendship” is multivalent enough to point simultaneously towards social formations (like the family or political order) and the affective dimensions of shared life that Aristotle has in mind (good will, social solidarity and affection towards people we admire, identify with or enjoy spending time with in shared activity).⁸ Aristotle famously divides friendships into three classes grounded in utility, pleasure, and virtue, but only the latter is called “perfect friendship,” against which the others are defined. Scholars continue to debate precisely what distinguishes character or virtue friendship from the other types, but it certainly seems to have something to do with people “who love each other for themselves, cherishing each other for their characters and not for some incidental benefit they provide one another.”⁹ Moreover, some readers (including Maimonides) suggest that part of the reason good people cherish one another is that they want to help each another to develop their capacities for excellence most fully. One of the paradigmatic examples of character friendship according to Maimonides is therefore the love between a teacher and a student, to which I will return below.¹⁰

One of the difficulties faced by interpreters of Aristotle is that his normative assertions about friendship and other ethical subjects are closely bound up with his more descriptive or ethnographic claims about how people actually practice and evaluate features of their social world. These can be difficult to disentangle. Some writers imply, for example, that Aristotle’s frequent descriptions of friendship among kin

⁷ Jennifer Whiting, “The Nicomachean Account of *Philia*,” in Richard Kraut, ed., *The Blackwell Guide to Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2006), 276-7.

⁸ On the importance of the affective dimension which will also later prove crucial to Maimonides, see for example John M. Cooper, “Aristotle on the Forms of Friendship,” *Review of Metaphysics* 30 (1977): 621: “This account suggests, in fact, that the central idea contained in [friendship] is that of doing well by someone for his own sake, and of concern for *him* (and not, or not merely, out of concern for oneself).” This reading is not uncontested, but it is supported by a variety of major writers on this topic, including Pangle, *Aristotle and the Philosophy of Friendship*, 46-48; Suzanne Stern-Gillet, *Aristotle’s Philosophy of Friendship* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), 38.

⁹ Pangle, *Aristotle and the Philosophy of Friendship*, 43; see Whiting, “The Nicomachean Account of *Philia*,” 288.

¹⁰ See for example *Perush le-’Avot* 1:6. My citations of the *Commentary on the Mishnah* are based on the edition by Yitzhak Shilat, *Perush Ha-Rambam le-’Avot* (Maale Adumim: Shilat Publishers, 1998).

or family members point to a popular “ethnocentrism” that the philosopher himself was eager to critique and transcend.¹¹ More plausible to my reading (and much closer to Maimonides’ view) is that “family friendship” is an important gateway to virtue friendship because it involves the love of other people that grows from shared life and mutual self-identification.¹² This is what the anthropologist Marshall Sahlins describes (citing Aristotle) as the “mutuality of being” that centrally defines the idea of kinship cross-culturally, while the philosopher John Cropsey refers to family friendship as a “subphilosophic prefiguration of philosophic *philia*.”¹³ Whichever theoretical language one prefers, the point is that Aristotle views family members as the people towards whom one is most likely to act in ways that resemble philosophically-attuned character friendship, such as disinterestedly seeking their good. This in turn makes families into important staging grounds for ethical and philosophical practice. Indeed, friendship modeled on the love between brothers may be said to take priority over law as a goal for the *polis* according to Aristotle, inasmuch as it goes beyond the demands of justice to include care and generosity.¹⁴

Aristotle’s valorization of the family as an arena for human flourishing must also be understood as a rejection of Plato’s account of maximal utility through centralized state control over social life.¹⁵

¹¹ Whiting, “The Aristotelian Account of *Philia*,” 290.

¹² See Elizabeth Belfiore, “Family Friendship in Aristotle’s Ethics,” *Ancient Philosophy* 21 (2001): 113-132. Also see John Tutuska, “Friendship and Virtue: A Fruitful Tension in Aristotle’s Account of *Philia*,” *Journal of Value Inquiry* 44 (2010): 351-63.

¹³ See Marshall Sahlins, *What Kinship Is...and is Not* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 19-20; Don Seeman, “Kinship as Ethical Relation,” unpublished manuscript presented at “The Sacred Social: Investigations of Spiritual Kinship Among the Abrahamic Faiths,” University of Virginia (March 2014); John Cropsey, “Justice and Friendship in the *Nicomachean Ethics*,” in *Political Philosophy and the Issues of Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 269.

¹⁴ *NE* 1155a23-24. See Cooper, Aristotle on the Forms of Friendship,” 646-48. Also see Cropsey, “Justice and Friendship in the *Nicomachean Ethics*”; Robert Sokolowski, “Phenomenology of Friendship,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 55 (2002): 451-68, and Claudia Baracchi, “Politics and the Perfection of Friendship: Aristotelian Reflections,” *Universitas Philosophica* 26 (2009): 15-36.

¹⁵ Belfiore, “Family Friendship in Aristotle’s Ethics,” 115; Cropsey, “Justice and Friendship in the *Nicomachean Ethics*,” 265-67.

Indeed, Aristotle holds that humans are “coupling animals” even before they are political ones.¹⁶ He insists that the organizational principles of *polis* and household must be held distinct (i.e. the city is not simply a large household), but he also assumes that the city is built on a variety of civic and domestic relationships—such as friendship—that will hopefully continue to flourish within it.¹⁷ One difference between friendship and kinship groups, however, is that while people are typically thrust by birth into a particular family, character friendship is founded upon associations by choice among people who are committed to the good and to the possibility of shared activities—such as conversation—that express and promote human excellence.¹⁸ I will argue that Maimonides’ account of the divine commandments extends Aristotelian family friendship to the whole of the Jewish people, while simultaneously working to suffuse that friendship with virtue and love of God.

This brings me to a set of contentious problems in scholarship on Aristotle that bear directly on our topic. Does Aristotle, for example, think our fundamental efforts should be aimed primarily at our own flourishing and happiness (*eudaimonia*), “or should we have an equally fundamental concern with the *eudaimonia* of other people?”¹⁹ Moreover, should the highest form of human flourishing be identified narrowly with contemplation, or rather with a life of diverse goods (including, for example, friendship) in which contemplation plays an organizing but not exclusive role?²⁰ Or to get at this issue another way,

¹⁶ *NE* 1162a17-19; See Belfiore, “Family Friendship in Aristotle’s Ethics,” 115-118.

¹⁷ See for example Carnes Lord trans., *Aristotle’s Politics: Second Edition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 1 (Book 1: 1252a), 100 (Book IV: 3, 1289b).

¹⁸ See Belfiore, “Family Friendship in Aristotle’s Ethics,” 121.

¹⁹ See the references to this problem collected by Dennis McKerlie, “Friendship, Self-Love and Concern for Others in Aristotle’s Ethics,” *Ancient Philosophy* 11 (2011): 85-101. McKerlie takes “egoistic eudaimonism” to be the dominant, but in his view misguided, approach of the interpreters.

²⁰ There is a considerable literature on this question. For a useful summary and analysis, see for example Roopen Majithia, “On the Eudemian and Nicomachean Conceptions of *Eudaimonia*,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 79 (2005): 365-88. “The gathering consensus on the inclusive/exclusive debate regarding happiness in the *Nicomachean Ethics* seems to be that both sides of the story are partly right. For while the life of happiness (understood as the total life of an individual) is inclusive of both ethical and contemplative virtue (among other things) the central activity of happiness is exclusively contemplation.” For

is friendship really just a second-best value for those non-philosophers who cannot attain solitary contemplative excellence?²¹ This view has been attributed to some of Maimonides' most influential predecessors, including both Alfarabi and Ibn Bajja.²² And this leads directly to a third problem, which is the ultimate *telos* of those who are not likely to attain contemplative excellence in this eudemonic construct. Do "the masses" play a merely supportive role by maintaining the *polis* so that the best people can devote themselves to learning and thinking, or do they have their own independent relationship with these highest values of human life? In each case, I will try to show that Maimonides gravitated to the more inclusive position—that one must be concerned with the *eudaimonia* of others for their own sakes; that the best life is oriented to contemplation but also includes a variety of other goods and activities; and that all classes of people can aspire to the best life in ways that condition their everyday activities even though they may ultimately fall short of the contemplative ideal. One of the primary goals of the elite, according to Maimonides should actually be the training and education of the masses to reorient themselves toward these goals whenever possible.

statements of the analogous problem in the Maimonidean oeuvre, see Oliver Leaman, "Ideals, Simplicity and Ethics: A Maimonidean Approach," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 76 (2002):107-123 and Menachem Kellner, "Is Maimonides' Ideal Person Austerely Rationalist?" *op. cit.* , 125-143.

²¹ Essentially the same question can also be asked this way: "Do people who practice contemplative excellence still need friends?" See for example Zena Hitz, "Aristotle on Self-Knowledge and Friendship," *Philosopher's Imprint* 11 (2011): 1-28.

²² Carrie Peffley, "A Modified Al-Farabian Interpretation of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*," *Marginalia* 3 (2006)

[<http://www.marginalia.co.uk/journal/06illumination/peffley.php>], accessed January 2012; Yair Shiffman, "Ibn Bajja as a Source for the Commentary of Rabbi Shem Tov Falaquera to Guide of the Perplexed III:51, 54" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 60 (1991): 9. This is not at all to minimize the tension between Ibn Bajja and Alfarabi precisely with respect to the role of the philosopher in politics.

Friendship and its Pathologies in Maimonides

Many of the themes related to friendship that Maimonides later develops forcefully in the *Guide of the Perplexed* are already laid out more suggestively in his *Commentary on the Mishnah*, which he wrote while still in his twenties. In his commentary to 'Avot ("Ethics of the Fathers") chapter 1:6, Maimonides famously outlines Aristotle's three forms of friendship as the basis for his interpretation of the Mishnah's directive to "acquire for yourself a friend." Less commonly noted, however, is that Maimonides also seems to read the whole of the first chapter of this tractate as a sustained reflection on character friendship in an Aristotelian vein.²³ For Maimonides, 'Avot is primarily a guide to moral and intellectual perfection for those who aspire to be judges or scholars, so it is hardly surprising that he begins his commentary by offering a subtle philosophical frame to the well-known teaching that "the world stands upon three things: "Torah, 'avodah and gemilut hasadim" (divine revelation, sacrificial worship and acts of loving-kindness).²⁴ According to Maimonides, Torah should be glossed as "wisdom" (which includes philosophical understanding²⁵), 'avodah exemplifies the observance of the divine commandments in general, and gemilut hasadim stands broadly for moral virtue (character development)—the same triumvirate that will inform his later reading of the ideal life in his *Guide of the Perplexed*. In the remainder of his commentary on this chapter, he spells out the conditions under which these goods may be achieved, focusing especially on appropriate conditions of sociability among scholars.

Maimonides is characteristically careful here to include warnings about what can go wrong when these conditions are not met. In Mishnah 1:3, the sage Antigenos teaches that a person should not strive

²³ I would tentatively argue that the preponderance of Maimonides' comments on chapter one relate to friendship, that his comments on chapters two-four relate primarily to the definition and acquisition of moral and intellectual virtues and that the preponderance of his commentary to chapter five is devoted to an analysis of the *hasid* as an ideal type.

²⁴ *Perush Ha-Rambam le-'Avot* 1:2. On 'Avot's promotion of both moral and intellectual virtue according to Maimonides (up to and including the conditions for prophecy), see Sarah Klein-Braslavi, "Introduction" [Hebrew], in Moses Maimonides, *The Eight Chapters: The Introduction to Maimonides' Commentary on Tractate Avot* (Michael Schwartz trans.; Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2011), 10-11.

²⁵ See Isadore Twersky, *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides (Mishneh Torah)*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 395.

to “be like a servant who serves in order to receive a reward but rather like a servant who serves without seeking a reward.” This is the basis for an important Maimonidean teaching about disinterested divine service (*‘avodah lishmah*), also known as “service from love,” to which he will return elsewhere.²⁶ Here though, he focuses on the danger that insufficient attention to the quality of the relationship between student and teacher (a paradigmatic form of friendship, as he will insist in 1:6) can derail the educational process and lead to ruin:

This sage [Antigenos] had two students, Tzadok and Boethus and when they heard that he uttered this teaching [that one should serve without thought of reward], they went out from before him and said to one another: “The master has just taught explicitly that there is no reward and no punishment and no hope at all,” for they did not understand his intention, peace unto him.²⁷

The first breakdown is thus between teacher and students, followed by the error-reinforcing friendship between the students themselves. Maimonides deftly tacks onto this account a depiction of the corrupt and abusive political relations that characterize his account of sectarianism:

Then they [Zadok and Boethus] joined together and separated from the Torah. This one gathered [people] to himself in one sect and that one gathered another sect.... But they could not gather communities according to the [mistaken] faith they had received, since this bad faith [i.e. that there is no reward and punishment] separates those who have been gathered; all the less can it gather those who are separate—[so they] began to affirm that which they could not cause the masses to deny...

In the end, Maimonides continues, the heretics themselves realized that they would not be able to gather followers solely on the basis of denial, so they began cynically to affirm just enough of Israel’s

²⁶ See *Hilkhhot Teshuvah* 10. Also see *Haqdamah Le-Pereq Heleq* in Yitzhak Shilat ed., *Haqdamot Ha-Rambam La-Mishnah* (Jerusalem: Shilat Press, 1996), 132-33.

²⁷ This account of two heretics is based on a parallel passage in chapter eight of *‘Avot de-Rabi Natan*. This passage should be closely compared also with *Hilkhhot Issurei Bi’ah* 22:17 on the danger of teaching “secrets” in a group setting.

traditional faith to win popular appeal. This, Maimonides says, is the origin of the heresy that affirms scripture but denies the oral tradition. Error thus grows into disbelief, which gives rise to a manipulative social and political order. This is structurally almost identical to Maimonides' later account of how idolatry supplanted primeval monotheism, and it constitutes a reversal of the popular Arabic philosophical imagery he adopts elsewhere of the prophet-governor who enacts laws promoting the spiritual and material welfare of his people.²⁸

Yet the potential for friendship among scholars to go tragically awry only underlines the signal importance of friendship to intellectual life. Maimonides interprets the Mishnah's subsequent advice to "make one's home into a meeting place for the Sages" (*'Avot* 1:4) as a call to establish one's home as the epicenter of scholarly companionship, so that "a sage who desires to meet his friend will say, 'Let us meet at the house of so-and-so.'" Yitzhak Shilat rightly links this passage to Maimonides' treatment of the commandment to "cleave to the sages" in *Sefer Ha-Mitzvoth* and the *Code of Law*, which both emphasize the importance of establishing friendships with scholars so that one may spend time in their company. This is a far more open-ended context for ethical training than formal discipleship, since it allows even relatively unlettered people to learn from and emulate the ethical comportment of sages.²⁹

Undoubtedly the central passage linking friendship with virtue is, however, the commentary to *'Avot* 1:6 ("Acquire yourself a friend"), where Maimonides analyzes Aristotle's three typological categories of friendship—utility, pleasure and virtue friendship—at some length. Most significant for our purposes here is that he identifies the "love of a student for teacher and of a teacher for a student" as the paradigm of friendship based on virtue. "This is the friendship," he adds, "about which we are commanded."³⁰ It is clear from the context that the "command" Maimonides has in mind is the Mishnah's dictum to acquire for oneself a friend, but we will see that he may have certain biblical directives in mind as well. Elsewhere in his commentary,

²⁸ On the governor-prophet, see for instance *Guide* I:54 and *Hilkhot Melakhim* chapters 11-12. On the rise of idolatry, see *Hilkhot 'Avodat Ha-Kokhavim* chapter 1; Don Seeman, "Honoring the Divine as Virtue and Practice in Maimonides," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 16 (2008): 196-99.

²⁹ See *Sefer HaMitzvoth* positive commandment number six and *Hilkhot De'ot* 6:1-2.

³⁰ *Perush Ha-Rambam le-'Avot* 1:6 (p. 9).

Maimonides comments that the requirement of sacred sociability is precisely why the Mishnah sometimes refers to sages as *haverim* (“friends” or “associates”). They are “true friends”—the Aristotelian reverberations are not incidental—since their friendship is for the sake of heaven.”³¹ Similarly, in his commentary to *’Avot* 5:15, Maimonides describes the love between the biblical heroes David and Jonathan as disinterested love (i.e. “love which is not dependent on anything”) because it is rooted in the apprehension of divine matters.³²

One natural point of connection between Aristotle’s *Ethics* and the first chapter of *’Avot* is the importance both texts attribute to speech in the maintenance and cultivation of *philia*. Human beings exercise friendship of the best kind, notes Aristotle, through the faculty of rational conversation and not just by grazing side by side like cattle.³³ The Mishnah admonishes against bad neighbors (1:7) and friendship with unlawful people (1:10) but also warns judges to take care with their words lest they teach the witnesses how to lie (1: 9). Sages (1:11) are instructed to avoid any speech that would “desecrate the name of heaven” and are advised (1:14) to “speak little and do much.” Finally, in the penultimate Mishnah of this chapter (1:16), sages are encouraged to cultivate silence, since “everyone who multiplies words multiplies sin.” On this passage, Maimonides somewhat paradoxically offers his longest and most detailed comment of the whole chapter, an ethical division of speech into five categories based on the acquisition of virtue.³⁴ “Beloved” speech (the fourth category) includes speech in praise of virtue or virtuous people, which corresponds to the character friendship he has already described. The Mishnah’s focus on correct speech in this chapter thus allows Maimonides to pull the reader’s attention away from Aristotle’s utility and pleasure friendships and towards the virtue friendship that constitutes his primary concern. Having already shown how incautious speech among teachers can

³¹ Cited by Shilat, *Perush Ha-Rambam Le-’Avot*, p. 9. See Maimonides’ commentary to Mishnah *Demai* 2:3, translated by Joseph David Kafih, *Mishnah ’Im Perush Rabenu Moshe ben Maimon* Vol. I (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1995), 83 as well as the commentary to *Mishnah Berakhot* 4:7. For reverberations of this teaching in Maimonides’ later *Code of Jewish Law*, see Dov Septimus, “*Mivneh ve-Ti’un Ba-Sefer Ha-Madda’*,” in Aviezer Ravitzky ed., *Ha-Rambam: Shamranut, Mekoriyut, Mahapkhanut* Vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Merkaz Shazar, 2008), 236.

³² Shilat, *Perush Ha-Rambam Le-’Avot*, p. 107.

³³ *NE* 1095b20-1.

³⁴ *Perush Ha-Rambam le-’Avot* 1:16 (pp. 18-21).

generate heresy and sectarianism (the opposite of true *philia*), Maimonides concludes the chapter by discussing the contribution of speech to true friendship.

This network of associations between speech, friendship and virtue also allows Maimonides to signal a theme that will prove much more central to his later treatment of friendship in the *Guide*, namely sexuality and relations between men and women. The same Mishnah in *'Avot* (1:5) that encourages men to treat the poor as their own householders also warns sternly against “multiplying conversation with a woman.” This might have been read as a euphemism for sexual misconduct or as a warning against speech that could lead to such misconduct, but Maimonides locates it firmly within the context of moral education to which he thinks the chapter as a whole is devoted:

It is known that conversation with women is mostly about matters pertaining to intercourse, therefore [the sage] said that multiplying conversation with them is prohibited because through this he will cause himself harm, which is to say: *he will establish in his soul an inferior character trait*, which is the increase of lust [emphasis added].

Maimonides' reading is premised on the fact that since the Mishnah refers even to speech in the context of marriage (a requirement of Jewish law and a form of pleasure friendship according to Maimonides), it cannot be bad conduct against which this Mishnah warns, but rather habituation to a negative character trait (lust).³⁵ Here as later in the *Guide*, Maimonides warns against the undue pull of sensuality that unreflective friendships might engender.

Aristotle describes friendship as a settled disposition or *hexis* rather than a passion or temporary state of emotional arousal, and this is crucial to its positive philosophical evaluation.³⁶ But the centrality of speech to the meaning and conduct of human sociability also points to a set of vulnerabilities with which Maimonides is deeply concerned. The case of Zadok and Boethus shows how easily even the best forms of speech may be corrupted through misunderstanding and cupidity. As material beings, humans are in any case precluded from perfect understanding of divine matters which cannot be fully expressed in

³⁵ On the obligation of men to marry, see *Hilkhot 'Ishut* 1:2.

³⁶ *NE* VIII 1157b29-31.

language.³⁷ Yet the Mishnah's concern with excessive speech between men—and especially between men and women—propels corporeality to the very center of Maimonides' account. In his later discussion of friendship in the *Guide* (III:49), Maimonides will probe the delicate tension between the Torah's desire to promote stable family structures and the potentially volatile consequences of human sexuality, but here it is the precarious nature of speech itself that seems to be at issue. Speech is after all a bodily activity that may contribute to concupiscence, but it also has the unique capacity to express and develop our rational faculties through learning and conversation. Speech thus points, as it were, both forward and back to the different aspects of our human condition, and this potential instability or "doubleness" also characterizes friendship as a whole in a variety of significant ways.

Virtue Friendship and the Law

Throughout his legal writings, Maimonides portrays virtue friendship as a transitional mechanism for human moral and intellectual development. He codifies the obligation to "cleave to the sages" in *Sefer Ha-Mitzvot*, for example, as the obligation to "draw close to the sages and to associate with them, to be always in their company and to dwell with them in every manner of drawing close, in eating and drinking and in buying and selling, so that through this we will come to approximate their actions and to know true opinions through their words, as [God] may He be blessed has said, 'And to Him [i.e. God] you shall cleave.'"³⁸ A variety of different relationships that might otherwise have been glossed as friendships of utility or of pleasure have thus been marshalled in the interests of virtue friendship between ordinary people and scholars, which is described as the fulfillment of a biblical mandate to "cleave to the Lord." Another way of saying this

³⁷ *Hilkhot Yesodei HaTorah* 1:10.

³⁸ *Sefer Ha-Mitzvot l'ha-Rambam: Makor Ve-Targum* (Yosef Kafih editor; Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1971), p. 61, Positive Commandment 6. It is worth noting that in his commentary on 'Avot 2:9, Maimonides discusses one of the possible limitations of even this form of friendship: that over-familiarity with the sages will "turn their love [for you] to hate so that you do not receive from them the benefit for which you hope." In befriending the sages, Maimonides warns, it is best to let the sages determine the scope and limits of the relationship.

might be that Maimonides ethicizes friendships of pleasure and utility as a means of lifting them towards the virtue friendship ideal:³⁹

They [the sages] have already taught the obligation to marry the daughter of a scholar and to marry one's daughter to a scholar, to benefit a scholar and to do business with [a scholar] from that which is written, 'to Him you shall cleave.' They said: "and is it possible to cleave to the *Shechinah* [divine presence]? It has already been written, 'The Lord your God is a consuming fire!' Rather, this means that anyone who marries the daughter of a scholar etc. [is as if he is cleaving to the *Shechinah*]."40

The emphasis here is not on the material benefit such relationships may confer upon the sage (Maimonides famously denounces scholars who accept charitable support), but on the ethical and intellectual benefits that ordinary people might acquire through close association with sages. It also should come as no surprise to anyone possessing even a glancing familiarity with the anthropology of kinship, furthermore, that friendships between men are here transacted through an exchange of women in marriage—though here the exchange itself is dedicated to an ostensibly ethical and philosophical *telos*.⁴¹

Unlike *'Avot*, which was written, according to Maimonides, for a judicial and intellectual elite, *Sefer Ha-Mitzvoth* describes the legal obligations to which all Israelites are subject. That may well be why Maimonides focuses here on the non-verbal and non-discursive ways in which a person can join the community of sages in pleasant and useful sociability—eating, drinking, doing business together and establishing bonds of kinship. Most people lack the refinement and philosophical training to “cleave to the *Shechinah*” through direct approximation of divine attributes that Maimonides will discuss at length in *Guide* I:54, but they can still improve their moral and intellectual condition by cleaving in friendship to the sages who have already learned to approximate those attributes. This is one way in

³⁹ Thus, in his commentary to *'Avot* 1:7, “do not befriend a wicked person,” Maimonides adds: “in any kind of friendship, so that you will not learn from his ways.”

⁴⁰ *Sefer Ha-Mitzvoth*, Positive Commandment 6.

⁴¹ See for example Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971).

which Maimonides insists that the mostly non-philosophical lives of ordinary people can be oriented towards philosophical ends.⁴²

Avraham Feintuch has called attention to the puzzling fact that Maimonides lists the commandment of “cleaving to the sages” at the beginning of *Sefer HaMitzvoth* in juxtaposition to a group of commandments that are all otherwise related to the acquisition of true beliefs and contemplative worship.⁴³ This obligation is only preceded, in fact, by the commandments to acknowledge God’s existence and unity, to love and fear God and to serve God through prayer. The obligation to go into business with sages or to marry their daughters would not seem to belong at all in this company except that, as Feintuch notes, these are in fact treated as instantiations of the obligation to “cleave to God” since they promote the emulation of moral virtue and acceptance of true opinions. The careful architecture of *Sefer HaMitzvoth* thus puts friendship with sages on the very cusp of the relation between virtue friendship and more quotidian varieties of human association. Much more than Aristotle, Maimonides views virtue friendship as a means of transitioning whole classes of people towards more complete religious and intellectual lives.

Feintuch also notes perceptively in this context that Maimonides’ later discussion of friendship in his “Laws of Character Traits” shares this liminal or doubling quality in yet another way. Maimonides’ discussion of friendship in that section of his *Code of Jewish Law* seems at first to address only moral but not intellectual virtue. He describes the importance of emulating the *behavior* of the sages, in other words, but says nothing about emulating their philosophical practice or beliefs. Probably this has to do with the structure of the *Code* and with the decision to locate “cleaving to sages” in the Laws of Character Traits (*De’ot*) rather than Fundamental Principles (*Yesodei Ha-Torah*). Yet Feintuch notes that Maimonides’ chapter heading nonetheless glosses the obligation to cleave to the sages as “the obligation to cleave to those that know Him [i.e. God],” which points beyond the knowledge of the law towards broader philosophical accomplishment.⁴⁴ Virtue friendship

⁴² On emulating the divine, see also Maimonides’ brief summary in *Sefer Ha-Mitzvoth*, positive commandment number 8.

⁴³ Abraham Feintuch, *Perush Pikudei Yisharim ‘al Sefer Ha-Mitzvoth*, Volume I (Jerusalem: Maaliyot Press, 2000), pp. 136-7.

⁴⁴ See *Hilkhot Yesodei Ha-Torah* 4:13, *Hilkhot Teshuvah* 10:1-2, and especially the parable of the palace in *Guide* III:51. Also consider the distinction between positive commandment number three (“to love God”) and number eleven (“to study the wisdom of the Torah”), which I have analyzed in Don Seeman,

with the sages therefore expresses itself in at least two different, but related, registers simultaneously: it is expressed through a broad array of associations, including marriage and business partnerships whose purpose is the inculcation of good character traits and true beliefs, but it also implicitly beckons all those who are capable of doing so to become active disciples in the quest for knowledge of God. As one eighteenth-century commentator elegantly summarized, “anyone who wishes to achieve the true good mentioned by Maimonides should befriend the sages in order to learn from their straight ways...until the doors of his heart open and the light of intellect [’or *ha-sekhel*] enters his heart...”⁴⁵

Here too, however, Maimonides shows great sensitivity to the potential problems and pitfalls that characterize human sociability. Though he affirms Aristotle’s dictum that man is a political animal and that no one would choose to live without friends,⁴⁶ Maimonides also insists that a person must work to find primarily virtuous people with whom to associate:

The nature of man is to be drawn in his traits and actions after friends and associates and to act in the manner customary to his community, therefore a person must associate with the righteous and dwell near the sages in order to learn from them and distance oneself from the wicked who walk in darkness so as not to learn their ways....⁴⁷

If one cannot find virtuous people in one’s own country, one must relocate. Maimonides insists, moreover, that “if all the countries that one knows and whose report he has heard customarily act in a way that is not good, as in our own times, or if he cannot travel...because of conscription or because of illness, he should dwell alone by himself, as it is said, ‘sit alone and be silent.’”⁴⁸ It is important to note that

“Reasons for the Commandments as Contemplative Practice in Maimonides,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 103 (2013): 298-327.

⁴⁵ R. Ezekiel Feivel (1755-1833) also begins his commentary on this passage (*Mussar Ha-Sekhel Lashon Ha-Zahav*, ad loc.) with a long citation from Maimonides’ commentary on *’Avot* culminating in a description of virtue friendship. On the interplay of halakhic and philosophical themes in *Hilkhot De’ot* 6, see also Septimus, “*Mivneh ve-Ti’un Ba-Sefer Ha-Madda*,” 229-30.

⁴⁶ See *NE* 1155a4-6; *Guide* II:40, III:37, 49.

⁴⁷ *Hilkhot De’ot* 6:1.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

Maimonides frames seclusion here, following Ibn Bajja, as a response to exigent circumstance rather than a self-evident virtue.⁴⁹ Associations must be chosen with care precisely because of their power to propel people towards (or away from) the great purposes of human life.⁵⁰

Indeed, the sixth and seventh chapters of *Hilkhot De'ot* seem devoted in their entirety to an elaboration of virtue friendship as a matter of Jewish law. Bernard Septimus has shown that Maimonides frequently begins legal discussions with a philosophically-attuned depiction of the human setting against whose background a given set of laws may be understood.⁵¹ Here, after reminding readers about the ethical influence of friends and associates in terms derived from Aristotle (6:1), Maimonides repeats almost verbatim the obligation to “cleave to the sages” that he articulated in *Sefer Ha-Mitzvoth* (6:2). He then moves quickly through the obligation to love one’s fellow Jews (6:3), to love converts (6:4), and to refrain from hating a fellow Jew (6:5).⁵² The relationship between these commandments and virtue friendship is then reinforced (6: 6-9) by reference to the obligation of rebuke. A Jew who witnesses another Jew sinning or “going down a path that is not good,” is obligated to “return him to the good and to inform him that he is

⁴⁹ On Ibn Bajja’s strong influence over this passage, see Steven Harvey, “The Place of the Philosopher in the City According to Ibn Bajja,” in Charles E. Butterworth ed., *The Political Aspects of Islamic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 231. More recently, Septimus, “*Mivneh Ve-Ti'un*,” 229 nn.29-30, has argued that this passage is also indebted to Alfarabi. The fourth chapter of Maimonides’ earlier *Shemonah Peraqim* contains a parallel formulation. On seclusion as palliative in Ibn Bajja, also see Josef Puig Montada, “Philosophy in Andalusia: Ibn Bajja and Ibn Tufayl,” in Pater Adamson and Richard C. Taylor eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 164.

⁵⁰ In his introduction to *Pereq Heleq* (Shilat, *Haqdamot*, 139), Maimonides writes that the righteous long for the coming of the messiah primarily so that they can live in a “society of virtue and good governance” that will allow individuals to attain to the knowledge of God. Compare *Hilkhot Melakhim* chapter 12.

⁵¹ Bernard Septimus, “Literary Structure and Ethical Theory,” in Jay Harris ed., *Maimonides after 800 Years: Essays on Maimonides and his Influence* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 307-25.

⁵² It is worth noting that in the commandment to love fellow Jews, Maimonides mentions the obligation to speak in their praise, which is also a constituent of character friendship described in *'Avot* 1:6.

sinning against himself through his bad acts, as it is written, ‘you shall surely rebuke your neighbor.’”⁵³

Chapter Seven of the “Laws of Character Traits” continues this theme through an extended discussion of the laws relating to prohibited forms of speech such as slander and gossip (7: 1-6)—his focus on speech here should be compared with that in the first chapter of *’Avot*—leading seamlessly to the prohibition against taking vengeance or bearing a grudge against one’s fellow (7: 7-8). Maimonides concludes by noting that lack of such grudge-bearing is “the appropriate character trait to make possible the settlement of the world and the interaction of people one with another.” Correct sociability is, in other words, the theme of this whole section of laws. Every Israelite is meant in principle to serve as character friend to every other, loving but also rebuking. Or perhaps a better way of saying this would be that Maimonides, like Aristotle, thinks that there is a potentially complex and mutually reinforcing relationship between virtue and family friendship, though for Maimonides the divine commandments serve to push family friendship in the direction of virtue friendship on a larger scale than anything Aristotle envisions.⁵⁴

Indeed, while these laws apply in the first instance to fellow Israelites, Maimonides appears to extend the obligations of friendship on his own authority to include also the “resident aliens” who observe the Noahide laws, as all will do in messianic times.⁵⁵ In a related context, he also goes out of his way at least twice in the *Code* to include Gentiles in the goals of contemplative worship.⁵⁶ Though the relationship between friendship and the *summum bonum* will prove far

⁵³ Leviticus 18:19. The Hebrew word for neighbor may of course also be translated here as friend or associate.

⁵⁴ See NE 1162a9-27; Whiting, *The Nicomachean Account of Philia*, p. 290.

⁵⁵ *Hilkhot Melakhim* 10:12: “And so it seems to me that we behave towards the resident aliens (*gerei toshav*) with politeness and acts of kindness as we do with an Israelite, for we are commanded to sustain them....”

⁵⁶ See *Hilkhot Shemittah Va-Yovel* 13:13: “Not only the tribe of Levi but every single individual from all those who come into the world, whose spirit moves him...to stand before the Lord to serve Him and to worship Him and to know the Lord...behold he will be sanctified to the utmost holiness....” The better manuscripts of *Hilkhot Melakhim* 12:5, meanwhile, make it clear that non-Jews are also included in the eschatological promise of a world in which “knowledge of God will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.” See Yitzhak Shilat ed., *Sefer Shotfim: Rambam Meduyak* (Maale Adumim: Shilat Publishing, 2006), 213 n.4; also Schwarzchild, “Moral Radicalism and ‘Middlingness’ in the Ethics of Maimonides,” 79.

more explicit in the *Guide* than it is in the *Code of Jewish Law* in other words, it is actually in the *Code* that the universal sweep of Maimonides' ultimate vision for humankind has been most clearly articulated.

Friendship as “the Greatest Purpose of the Law”

Maimonides' most extended and philosophically explicit teaching on friendship is found in *Guide of the Perplexed* III: 49. This chapter, near the end of the *Guide*, describes the reasons for the commandments relating to marriage and sexuality, but it also serves as a transitional chapter between reasons for the commandments in general and the discussion of contemplative devotion and *imitatio Dei* with which the *Guide* concludes. Maimonides opens by bringing Aristotelian friendship to bear on the meaning of biblical kinship rules:

I say then: It is well known that friends are something that is necessary for man throughout his whole life. Aristotle has already set this forth in the ninth book of the “Ethics.”⁵⁷ For in a state of health and happiness a man takes pleasure in their [i.e. friend's] familiar relationship with him; in adversity he has recourse to them; and in his old age when his body is grown weak he seeks their help. The same things may be found to a much greater extent in the relationship with one's children and also in the relationship with one's relatives. For fraternal sentiments and mutual love and mutual help can be found in their perfect form only among those who are related by ancestry. *Accordingly a single tribe that is united through a common ancestor—even if he is remote—because of this, love one another, help one another, and have pity on one another, and the attainment of these things is the greatest purpose of the Law.*⁵⁸

Maimonides' identification of friendship—mutual help, love and pity—as the greatest of the Law's purposes confirms his earlier comments on the subject in the *Guide* as well as the *Code of Jewish*

⁵⁷ Pines (*Guide*, p. 601) has already noted that standard chapter divisions today locate the passage Maimonides cites here from the *Nicomachean Ethics* in Book Eight.

⁵⁸ *Guide* III: 49 (p. 601-2). Emphasis added.

Law.⁵⁹ But his new emphasis here on kinship—family friendship—yields an explanatory framework for an additional broad category of divine commandments related to laws of descent and sexuality.

Maimonides begins by invoking the Torah's prohibition of "harlotry" (which here stands for prostitution as well as promiscuity) as a reflection of the signal importance that divine wisdom attributes to establishing clear lines of descent so that people will know their fathers and patrilineal kin. He also describes the violence and social disorder that are said to accompany sexual jealousy among men where no such law is in place. But an additional reason for the prohibition of harlotry is to reduce and constrain sexual desire itself by reducing men's sexual exposure to the "variety of forms" represented by different women. These twin goals—the ordering of society in a manner conducive to friendship and the restraint of sexual passion—may seem unrelated, but we have already seen that Maimonides links them in his commentary on the Mishnah, which undoubtedly served as a template for this chapter.⁶⁰ The primary difference between *Guide* III: 49 and the *Commentary on 'Avot* in this regard is that the *Guide* paints a much larger canvas in its attempt to explain the sweep of divine wisdom embodied by the commandments.

Maimonides believed that the constraint of sexual passion was a requisite for the full development of intellectual capacities, and this helps to explain why the Torah's sexual prohibitions focus on those relatives who are typically near to hand:

As for the prohibitions against illicit unions, all of them are directed to making sexual intercourse rarer and to instilling disgust for it so that it should be sought only very seldom... All illicit unions with females have one thing in common: namely, that in the majority of cases these females are constantly in the company of the male in his house and that they are easy of access for him and can be easily controlled by him....⁶¹

This blunt analysis of the sexual license implied by the patriarchal household then gives way to an apparent digression in which

⁵⁹ See *Guide* III: 39. Also *Hilkhot Hannukah* 4:14: "Great is peace, for the whole Torah was given only to make peace in the world, as it is written..."

⁶⁰ In *Guide* III: 35, p. 537, Maimonides explicitly refers readers back to his commentary on *'Avot* for an explanation of the role of the commandments in reducing lust for food and sex.

⁶¹ *Guide* III: 49, p. 606.

Maimonides describes Torah study as the true antidote to sensual excess, though I will argue that there is in fact no digression here at all:

The *Sages, may their memory be blessed*, say in their precepts, which perfect the virtuous: *My son, if this abominable one [the sexual urge] affects you, drag him to the house of study. If he is of iron, he will melt. If he is of stone, he will break into pieces. For it is said: Is not my word like as fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?*⁶² He [the author of this rabbinic teaching] says to his son with a view to giving him a rule of conduct: If you feel sexual excitement and suffer because of it, go to the house of study, read, take part in discussions, put questions and be asked in your turn, for then this suffering will indubitably pass away.⁶³

Attentive readers will note that the passage Maimonides cites here is taken from a Talmudic discussion of themes that all emerge in the course of this chapter of the *Guide*: marriage as a guard against “thoughts of sin,” the importance of friendship among scholars, and the obligation of a father to circumcise his son.⁶⁴

Aristotle’s emphasis on conversation as a defining practice of human friendship also lies close to the surface here and indeed, Maimonides now immediately invokes Aristotle’s warning that the sense of touch should be considered “a disgrace...which leads us to give preference to eating and sexual intercourse” over rational activities.⁶⁵ It is not just study that is invoked here as an antidote to overpowering desire however but rather the give and take of rational discourse within a community of scholars. The sexual prohibitions and the study of Torah both invoke friendship for Maimonides, just as both serve to minimize or constrain the unruly passions that stand in the way of the contemplative worship to which he will turn in the *Guide*’s remaining chapters.

I have argued that Maimonides’ decision to concentrate his analysis of friendship in *Guide* III: 49 effectively emulates Aristotle’s decision

⁶² Babylonian Talmud *Kiddushin* 30b, citing Jeremiah 23:29.

⁶³ *Guide* III:49, p. 608. Italics from the original represent citations from Hebrew or Aramaic.

⁶⁴ See *Kiddushin* 29b-30b.

⁶⁵ *Guide* III:49, p. 606, citing *NE* III:10.111 8b2 ff and *Rhetoric* I. 11.1370a18 ff. Also see *Guide* II:36. On conversation as the paradigm of human friendship, see *NE* 1095b20-1.

to discuss friendship in the transition between his long discourse on virtue and the so-called “hymn to contemplation” with which the *Nicomachean Ethics* concludes. Thus, *Guide* III: 25-49 is devoted to an account of the divine wisdom exemplified by the divine commandments and the virtue they teach, while chapters III: 51-54 entail a hymn to contemplation no less enthusiastic than Aristotle’s, putting III: 49 precisely at the pivot between sociopolitical order (virtue) and intellectual perfection.⁶⁶ Yeshayahu Leibowitz once expressed puzzlement that Maimonides chose to invoke Aristotle in this chapter rather than relying on rabbinic teachings about the importance of friendship.⁶⁷ But there is nothing puzzling here at all: aphoristic rabbinic dicta like “friendship or death” that Leibowitz cites simply cannot replace Aristotle’s comprehensive theory of human sociability. Maimonides needs Aristotle both for the detailed taxonomy of friendship he provides and for the literary-conceptual structure of his argument, which shows friendship straddling two different (but closely interrelated) domains of human excellence: moral as well as theoretical.

On Circumcision: the Contemplative Cut

Much has been made of the fact that Maimonides saves his discussion of circumcision for the “friendship chapter” of *Guide* III: 49, where he groups it together with the laws of marriage and kinship rather than with the laws of daily devotion—such as prayer or affixing a *mezuzah*—with which he grouped it in his earlier *Code of Jewish Law*.⁶⁸ That this constitutes a shift in emphasis rather than a change of heart is borne out, however, by the fact that he also lists circumcision together with the laws of marriage in *Sefer Ha-Mitzvot*, which was composed as an introduction to the *Code*.⁶⁹ Maimonides does not make such taxonomic

⁶⁶ It is reasonable to view chapter III:50 essentially as a continuation of III:49 since it continues Maimonides’ argument about the importance of establishing clear genealogies and also links the discussion of biblical narrative to the question of reasons for the commandments. See Seeman, “Reasons for the Commandments as Contemplative Practice in Maimonides,” 323 n.101.

⁶⁷ Yeshayahu Leibowitz, *Sihot ‘al Pirkei Ta‘amei Ha-Mitzvot mitokh “Moreh Nevuchim” La-Rambam* (Israel: 2003), 624, 657-58.

⁶⁸ *Hilkhot Milah* is the concluding section of *Sefer Ahavah*, the second book of Maimonides’ *Code*, which is otherwise entirely devoted to daily ritual and liturgy.

⁶⁹ Feintuch, *Pikudei Yesharim*, p. 493 notes that circumcision (positive commandment 215) is listed in a group of commandments (positive commandments 212-223) that all relate to the laws of marriage and are almost

choices lightly: here they point to the fact that circumcision plays an important role in at least two different conceptual schemas; one related to sociability and kinship, the other to everyday devotional practice.

All of the commandments treated in the second book of the *Code* (which concludes with circumcision) provide opportunities for ongoing reflection upon broad conceptual themes such as the oneness and unity of God. Against the popular view of the *mezuzah* as a kind of talisman, for example, Maimonides writes: “And every time a person enters and leaves [the home], he will be confronted by the unity of the name of the Holy One, Blessed be He and will remember his love and awaken from his slumber and his distraction by the vanities of the world.”⁷⁰ In this literary-conceptual environment, the sign of the covenant impressed upon a man’s flesh may be considered broadly analogous to the sign of the covenant bolted to the doorpost of his house: both are practices that are meant to bring God to mind. This theme is by no means absent from Maimonides’ treatment of circumcision in *Guide* III:49, though there it is more muted as the social dimension of circumcision related to kinship takes precedence.

Already in *Guide* III:33, near the beginning of his long discourse on reasons for the commandments, Maimonides argued that the commandments as a whole are devoted both to the reduction of sensuality and to the fostering of amicable sociability among humans. As an illustration of such sociability he surprisingly cites Deuteronomy 10:16: “Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiff-necked,” which reads at first like a call for obedience to God rather than human friendship. The biblical passage goes on, however, to remind Israel that God loves the stranger and executes the judgment of widows and orphans, a none-too-subtle reminder of their own responsibilities to do the same. Circumcision of the heart figures, then, as an impressive metaphor of covenantal sociability—universal family friendship— which is precisely the way Maimonides will frame literal circumcision of boys later in III:49 when he returns to this theme.

Given the overall structure of the *Guide*, one might have expected Maimonides to conclude his long discussion of reasons for the commandments with an analysis of practices that have an explicitly contemplative theme such as prayer or study of Torah, to which he will

all treated in the section of the *Code* known as *Sefer Nashim*—the same class of commandments treated in *Guide* III:49.

⁷⁰ *Hilkhot Tefillin U-Mezuzah Ve-Sefer Torah* 6:13. He frames the commandment of *tefillin* similarly in chapter 4:25. See Kellner, *Maimonides on Human Perfection*, 2.

indeed return in III:51 as exemplars of contemplative discipline. Dwelling on these in III:49 would not, however, have allowed him to focus clearly on the transition between sociopolitical virtue and contemplative practice mediated by virtue friendship, which is his real theme.⁷¹ Circumcision precisely fits this bill, and Maimonides is at such pains to emphasize its doubling character that he advances two separate reasons for its legislation. Having already introduced the idea that the sexual prohibitions serve to reduce and constrain desire, Maimonides now continues in this vein by suggesting that circumcision will also serve to diminish “violent concupiscence and lust beyond what are needed.”⁷² He calls this “the most important reason for circumcision.”

Yet despite the avowed importance of this rationale, he quickly tacks back to the theme of friendship and social solidarity with which he began the chapter as a whole:

According to me, circumcision has another very important motive, namely, that all people professing this opinion—that is, all who believe in the unity of God—should have a bodily sign uniting them so that one who does not belong to them should not be able to claim to be one of them, while being a stranger. For he would do this in order to profit by them or to deceive the people who profess this religion. Now a man does not perform this act upon himself or upon a son of his unless it be in consequence of a genuine belief. For it is not like an incision in the leg or a burn in the arm, but is a very, very hard thing. It is also well known what degree of mutual love and mutual help exists between people who all bear the same sign, which forms for them a sort of covenant and alliance.⁷³

Josef Stern has noted that the love of parents, which is based in the imagination, is here held in contrast to the love engendered by circumcision, which has its basis in the intellect (through shared belief

⁷¹ It is remarkable that the *Code of Law*, like the *Guide*, also concludes with a transition from political to intellectual perfection in *Hilkhot Melakhim* 12.

⁷² L. E. Goodman [*God of Abraham* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 233-35] appears to dismiss Maimonides’ physiological claim but nevertheless builds a moral argument for circumcision on expanded Maimonidean grounds.

⁷³ *Guide* III:49, p. 610.

in the unity of God).⁷⁴ But the relationship between circumcision and friendship is actually even more complicated than this, because circumcision is related both to character friendship (associated with common values) and family friendship (associated with descent from a common ancestor and a shared bodily sign). All three of these significations—the alliance of common ancestry, the restraint of sexual appetites, and the covenant of divine unity—are traced by Maimonides back to the biblical patriarch Abraham, in whom each of these lines converge.

Abraham is not just the founder of the Israelite nation for Maimonides but also the father of proselytes and the purveyor of true philosophical religion.⁷⁵ Abraham's love of God is grounded in clear apprehension of divine wisdom, and his passion to share that love propels him to become a universal teacher.⁷⁶ In *Guide* II:39, Maimonides explained that Abraham made a point of appealing to the philosophical denial of paganism *rather than prophetic revelation* when he taught the male members of his own household to circumcise, so it is ultimately not surprising that he would also emphasize in III:49 that circumcision is, among other things, an important gateway to rational belief and practice:

Circumcision is a covenant made by Abraham our Father with a view to belief in the unity of God. Thus everyone who is circumcised joins Abraham's covenant. This covenant imposes the obligation to believe in the unity of God: *To be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee* [Genesis 17:7]. This is also a strong reason, as strong as the first, which may be adduced to account for circumcision; perhaps it is even stronger than the first.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Josef Stern, *Problems and Parables of Law* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 98.

⁷⁵ See for example *Guide* II:39, where Maimonides asserts specifically that Abraham taught his household to circumcise on the basis of philosophical argument rather than divine command. Also see Maimonides' letter to Obadiah the proselyte, in Yitzhak Shilat editor, *'Iggerot Ha-Rambam* (third edition: Jerusalem, Shilat Publishers), 233-35.

⁷⁶ See *Guide* II:39; *Sefer Ha-Mitzvoth*, Positive Commandment Three; *Hilkhot 'Avodat Ha-Kochavim* chapter 1 and Seeman, "Reasons for the Commandments as Contemplative Practice in Maimonides."

⁷⁷ *Guide* III:49, p. 610.

Stern argues that Maimonides' two reasons for circumcision constitute a kind of "parable" with an "external" meaning (the usefulness of circumcision for fostering a divine community) and an "internal" one (the weakening of sexual desire to allow for actualization of the intellect).⁷⁸ Yet I would suggest that neither of these reasons is portrayed by Maimonides as being any more "internal" than the other, since both friendship and the constraint of desire are shown to be necessary precursors to intellectual perfection, just as we have seen with respect to the whole class of sexual prohibitions in this chapter.

While Stern is undoubtedly right to call attention to the unusual doubling of reasons for this commandment, a possibly simpler reading is that this relates to the doubling significance of friendship I have already described: pointing back towards the perfection of the social order described over the whole previous section as well as forward to the perfection of the soul that is the subject of the chapters to come. The "true alternative to a life governed by impulses of matter," Stern himself notes, "is not a life of ascetic denial but one directed at the love characteristic of friendship," and mediated, I would add, by a whole class of divine commandments exemplified by circumcision.⁷⁹ If there is indeed a parabolic meaning here, in other words, I would suggest that the "inner meaning" of the parable relates both to the role of circumcision in promoting *philia* and to its role in damping down "violent concupiscence," both of which are closely related to human philosophical attainment.

Or perhaps there is no parable at all, but rather a perfectly explicit reflection of the tension that has also been noted by modern readers between Aristotle's character and family friendships.⁸⁰ Abraham's covenant marks the genesis of a family which became a nation, but as the possibility of religious conversion (and exclusion for heresy, in Maimonides' view) demonstrates, kinship itself is conditioned on an ethical or covenantal orientation that can sometimes trump mere genealogy.⁸¹ The reason that circumcision is such a decisive practice for Maimonides is precisely that it constitutes a ritual framework in which all of these themes come together. By joining all Israelite men under Abraham's covenant, moreover, it also gives the lie to the

⁷⁸ Stern, *Problems and Parables of Law*, 104-5.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁸⁰ See Belfiore, "Family Friendship in Aristotle's Ethics."

⁸¹ See the letter to Obadiah the proselyte, *Iggerot Ha-Rambam*, 233-35 and my forthcoming essay, "Kinship as Ethical Relation." Also see *Hilkhot Milah* 3:8, *Teshuvah* 3:14 and comments by Shilat, *Perush Ha-Rambam Le-'Avot*, 42-43.

narrowly exclusive reading of virtue friendship which would portray it as uniquely of interest to the intellectual elite.

Conclusion: On the Governance of the Solitary

This article has made a sustained case for the importance of friendship to Maimonides' legal and philosophical writings and for its role in the mediation between moral and intellectual virtue. It is undeniable that friendship serves at the very least a preparatory role for people who aspire to the best life according to Maimonides. The concluding chapters of the *Guide*, however, are heavily devoted to individual contemplative devotion, and it is here that the impression of a mostly solitary ideal has been asserted by various commentators. I do not wish to deny that relative seclusion is, indeed, a recurrent theme in Maimonides' phenomenology of human perfection, but I do wish to deny that this philosophical ideal precludes friendship or that Maimonides thinks moral and intellectual perfection can dispense with ongoing cultivation of human sociability.

In his commentary to 'Avot 3:5, Maimonides rejects any seclusion from society which is *not* for the sake of increasing virtue and knowledge, thus implicitly affirming the possibility of seclusion for these purposes. Yet elsewhere in the *Commentary on the Mishnah* and in the *Code of Jewish Law*, we have already seen that Maimonides follows his philosophical predecessors in prescribing seclusion primarily as a palliative measure for those who cannot find their way to a virtuous city.⁸² Several other passages in the *Code* that have sometimes been cited as evidence for the necessity of seclusion may actually be better read simply as calls for contemplative focus and avoidance of mundane entanglements. At the end of the "Laws of the Sabbatical and Jubilee Years," for example, Maimonides praises those individuals "whose spirit moves them... to separate themselves to stand before God to serve him."⁸³ But rather than reclusive ascetics, he likens them to the biblical Levites, whose role according to Maimonides is to "teach [God's] straight paths [a nod to philosophically-oriented moral training] and righteous statutes to the many."⁸⁴ Even those who aspire to prophesy (*benei ha-nevi'im*) do so in groups, according to Maimonides, while those who actually achieve prophecy (with the

⁸² See note 50, above.

⁸³ *Hilkhot Shemitah Va-Yovel* 13: 13

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 13:12. *Hilkhot Teshuvah* 10:6, similarly, calls for single-minded devotion to the knowledge of God but does not explicitly call for social seclusion.

important exception of Moses) return to their lives as husbands and householders whenever prophecy is not actively upon them.⁸⁵ Moshe Idel has argued convincingly that the one passage in the *Code* that seems unambiguously to call for withdrawal from society (*hitbodedut*) as a precondition for prophecy actually refers not primarily to social seclusion but to a specialized practice of concentration that was well-known to medieval authors before and after Maimonides.⁸⁶

This is especially significant because concentration upon God is also the subject of *Guide* III:51, where Maimonides does explicitly raise the topic of at least partial seclusion from other people:

Thus it is clear that after apprehension, total devotion to Him and the employment of intellectual thought in constantly loving Him should be aimed at. Mostly this is achieved in solitude and isolation. Hence every excellent man stays frequently in solitude and does not meet anyone unless it is necessary.⁸⁷

Both modern and classical commentators have noted the influence of Ibn Bajja's "Governance of the Solitary" on III:51 as a whole and on this passage in particular, which amounts, at the very least, to a shift in emphasis from Maimonides' driving concern with the ideal of political governance in previous chapters.⁸⁸ But does this emphasis on solitary concentration really preclude friendship?

Despite his emphasis on exclusive focus upon God during times of divine service in III:51, Maimonides also insists that more than

⁸⁵ *Hilkhot Yesodei Ha-Torah* 7: 4, 6.

⁸⁶ See *Hilkhot Yesodei Ha-Torah* 7:4 and Moshe Idel, "Hitbodedut as Concentration in Jewish Philosophy" [Heb.], *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 7 (1988): 39-60; Howard Kreisel, "Individual Perfection vs. Communal Welfare and the Problem of Contradictions in Maimonides' Approach to Ethics," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 58 (1992): 117 n.22. Also see the eighteenth-century commentary *Ma'aseh Rokeah* to *Teshuvah* 10:6.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 621.

⁸⁸ See for example Shem Tov ben Yosef Ibn Falaquera, *Moreh Ha-Moreh* (Pressburg: 1837), 132-38; Shlomo Pines, "Translator's Introduction," *Guide* (Vol. I) p. 57; Harry Blumberg, "Al-Farabi, Ibn Bajja and Maimonides on the Governance of the Solitary: Sources and Influences," (Heb.) *Sinai* 78 (1976): 135-45; Ralph Lerner, "Maimonides' Governance of the Solitary," in Joel L. Kraemer ed., *Perspectives on Maimonides: Philosophical and Historical Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 33-46; Shiffman, "Ibn Bajja as a Source for Rabbi Shem-Tov Ibn Falquera's Commentary," 233.

adequate time will be left for mundane activities such as seeing to the needs of one's household or caring for one's children. Though the life of the contemplative adept will no doubt be simpler than that of an average person because of his reduced attachment to material goods and prioritizing of contemplative practice, the fact that Maimonides expects him to continue household maintenance should be carefully noted. Such activities presumably require friendships of utility and pleasure even according to those who identify the contemplative ideal of III: 51—rather than the emulation of God in III:54—with the *Guide's* final position on human perfection.⁸⁹ And if friendships of utility can be maintained, it would be odd to suggest without compelling reason that virtue friendship alone fails to survive this quest for intellectual perfection.⁹⁰ Given a life from which most distractions have been eliminated, might it not make more sense—and accord better with Maimonides' own activities—to assume that significant periods of solitude might also be compatible with strong friendships linking one to teachers, peers and most especially students? Such friendships might be even more precious to such a person precisely because of their significance and relative rarity. This may have been the position of Ibn Bajja, upon whom Maimonides relies, and it certainly seems to be the view expressed by Shem Tov Ibn Falaquera, the thirteenth-century

⁸⁹ See for example David Shatz, "Worship, Corporeality and Human Perfection: A Reading of the *Guide of the Perplexed* III:51-54," in *Jewish Thought in Dialogue: Collected Essays*, D. Shatz ed., (Boston, 2009); this position was also taken by some important early readers of the *Guide*: see Menachem Kellner, "Maimonides and Samuel Ibn Tibbon on Jeremiah 9:22-23 and Human Perfection," in M. Beer editor, *Studies in Halakha and Jewish Thought Presented to Prof. Menachem Emmanuel Rackman on his 80th Birthday* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1994), 49-57.

⁹⁰ In his *Haqdamah La-Mishnah* [Shilat, *Haqdamot*, 59-60], similarly, Maimonides describes the vital need that men of wisdom continue to have for society and companionship, which cannot be reduced to their utilitarian need for services that the masses can provide. Shlomo Pines, in his introduction to the *Guide*, lxxxvii, assumes a reading of Aristotle in which the philosopher has outgrown the need even for intellectual companionship and assumes that there is a "break" between Aristotle's account of virtue and his account of the theoretical life, but offers no evidence that this reading, which is disputed by various modern readers of Aristotle, was necessarily shared by Maimonides. On the possible difficulty faced by the most perfect individuals in finding or maintaining adequate friendships according to Aristotle, see Cropsey, "Justice and Friendship in the *Nicomachean Ethics*," 266-67.

commentator on the *Guide* who is among the most forceful expositors of the “governance of the solitary” reading.⁹¹

It is striking that precisely in his reading of *Guide* III: 51’s call for contemplative solitude, Falaquera calls attention to Aristotle’s three forms of friendship and cites the teaching of the Mishnah—“Acquire for yourself a friend”—with which this essay began. While Falaquera clearly holds that a person who seeks contemplative perfection must minimize interaction with the multitude, he also follows Ibn Bajja himself in insisting that the governance of the solitary includes friendships with “men of science,” since Aristotle “has said that man needs a friend as he needs the other goods, since two who join together are stronger in understanding and intellect and governance.”⁹² To be sure, Falaquera also takes pains to emphasize (in a way Maimonides does not) that such friendships may be realistically limited to but a single individual—for did not the rabbis already teach, “acquire for yourself a [single] friend”?—but his decision to place this discussion at the heart of his commentary on the single chapter most clearly devoted to contemplative solitude in Maimonides’ whole corpus should give pause to readers who too casually dismiss friendship from the concluding chapters of the *Guide*. Though Falaquera does not say so, I would also add that virtue friendship should be considered a form of intellectual (or at least mixed intellectual and emotional) pleasure,

⁹¹ On the view of Ibn Bajja, see Harvey, “The Place of the Philosopher in the City According to Ibn Bajja,” and Mashhad Al-Allaf, *The Essential Ideas of Islamic Philosophy* (Edwin Mellen Press, 2006), 270-74; Blumberg, “Al-Farabi, Ibn Bajja and Maimonides on the Governance of the Solitary,” 141. On Falaquera, see Shiffman, “Ibn Bajja as a Source for Rabbi Shem-Tov Ibn Falaquera’s Commentary,” and Raphael Jospe, *Torah and Sophia: The Life and Thought of Shem Tov Ibn Falaquera* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1988), 133-36.

⁹² Ibn Falaquera, *Moreh Ha-Moreh*, 136. Shiffman (“Ibn Bajja as a Source for Rabbi Shem Tov Ibn Falaquera’s Commentary,” 233) argues that Falaquera moderates Ibn Bajja by treating solitude as a contingent response to historical circumstance rather than an absolute philosophical value. It seems to me however that Falaquera’s reading hews relatively closely to Ibn Bajja, who also describes the need for solitude as “unnatural” and insists that the “solitary” man should seek friendships with those who share his philosophical goals. See Joshua Parens and Joseph C. Macfarland, *Medieval Political Philosophy: A Sourcebook* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), 104; Mashhad Al-Allaf, *The Essential Ideas of Islamic Philosophy* (Edwin Mellen Press, 2006), 270-74.

which cannot be confused with the distractions of buying and selling or eating and cohabiting that Maimonides so caustically dismisses.⁹³

One final objection to my view must be mentioned here, though I have plans to address it more fully in another context. In *Guide* I:54, Maimonides argued that judges and prophets should be ruled by reason rather than passion. Some readers have argued that this represents a call to extirpate all human emotion, including subjective states like goodwill and generosity upon which *philia*—friendship—depends.⁹⁴ Then, in *Guide* III:51, Maimonides adds that a few individuals, such as Abraham and Moses, were even able to engage in social and political life without being distracted from contemplation of God. Does this imply that the prophets are only approximating—but not really participating in—human sociability? Josef Stern goes so far as to deny that Maimonides’ ideal human is subject to any moral psychology at all and to question whether such a person should be considered fully human.⁹⁵ It may well be that there are a small number of individuals according to Maimonides (of all the biblical prophets he names only Moses and the three patriarchs) who have wholly outgrown the need—or capacity—for friendship of any kind, but I think there are good reasons to call this view into question.

First, I do not believe that Stern’s reading adequately distinguishes between the passions, which are said by Maimonides to interfere with intellectual perfection, and the settled dispositions such as goodwill and friendship, which are among its necessary preconditions. Though Maimonides calls on human beings in *Guide* I:54 and elsewhere to calm the stormy passions in other words, I believe a close reading will show that this does not amount to a rejection of all affect, let alone those associated with friendship.⁹⁶ It is true that God is without human

⁹³ Maimonides cites Aristotle’s distinction between purely sensual pleasures that are disgraceful and other mixed sensual and intellectual pleasures in *Guide* II:36, p. 371.

⁹⁴ The extirpation of human affect view has been put forward perhaps most influentially by Herbert A. Davidson, “The Middle Way in Maimonides’ Ethics,” *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 54 (1987): 31-72 and is repeated by numerous others. For a strong recent statement of this position, see for example Josef Stern, *The Matter and Form of Maimonides’ Guide* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).

⁹⁵ Stern, *The Matter and Form of Maimonides Guide*, 348.

⁹⁶ This is a technical subject in Aristotelian (and Greco-Islamic) psychology that will require separate treatment. See L. A. Kosman, “Being Properly Affected: Virtues and Feelings in Aristotle’s Ethics,” in Nancy Sherman ed.,

characteristics according to Maimonides, but the principle of divine emulation cannot extend to the extirpation of human character traits any more than it could the elimination of hands and feet in emulation of God's incorporeal nature; it refers rather to the attainment of a balanced character in which neither appetites nor passions rule.⁹⁷

This principle applies, moreover, not just to the masses but even to the most perfect of human beings, like Moses, "master of all prophets," who had to guard constantly, according to *Guide* II:36, against anger and sadness that could—and did—disturb the balanced virtue that allowed him to prophesy.⁹⁸ Maimonides states this even more clearly in his *Commentary on the Mishnah*, where he writes that Moses continued eagerly to perform the divine commandments throughout his life so that he might continue to cultivate the balanced virtue towards which the life of the commandments is aimed.⁹⁹ It seems to me axiomatic that where there is room for ongoing cultivation of moral virtue, with its habituation of affect and attention to subjective states like sadness or anger, so there is room (and need) for virtue friendship as well. There is no compelling evidence that Maimonides rejected this position in any of his later works.¹⁰⁰

The *Guide of the Perplexed* concludes in III: 54 with a call to emulate divine attributes by exercising "loving-kindness, righteousness and

Aristotle's Ethics: Critical Essays (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1991), 261-75.

⁹⁷ See Kellner, *Maimonides on Human Perfection*, 43. The association of balanced affect with *imitatio Dei* is among the themes I am developing at greater length for an article on Maimonides' theory of emotions. For now, see *Shemonah Peraqim* chapters 4 and 7, *Sefer Ha-Mitzvoth*, Positive Commandment 8 and *Hilkhot De'ot* 1:6. Maimonides' son R. Abraham also insists in a letter that this was his father's position; see Don Seeman, "Honoring the Divine as Virtue and Practice in Maimonides," 231-2; and in a more cautious vein, Septimus, "Literary Structure and Ethical Theory," 310 n.9.

⁹⁸ *Guide* II:36, p. 372-73; also see Shilat, *Haqdamot Ha-Rambam Le-Mishnah*, 240 (*Shemoneh Peraqim* chapter 4): "You know that the master of the early and later [prophets], Moses our Master...his sin was that he inclined to one of the extremes among the virtues...when he inclined towards anger in saying 'Listen to me you rebels!' (Numbers 20:10)."

⁹⁹ Shilat, *Perush Ha-Rambam Le-'Avot*, 62-3.

¹⁰⁰ Bernard Septimus, "Literary Structure and Ethical Theory," 311 n.13, offers the following sage advice with which I am completely in accord: "If an earlier articulation [in Maimonides] is clear and a later one merely murky, we should interpret the latter in light of the former, rather than discover a new, undocumented position."

judgment in the earth.”¹⁰¹ While Maimonides provides little detail as to what this might entail practically, there is also no obvious reason to exclude any of the practices he has elsewhere associated with *imitatio Dei* or with the activities of great sages and prophets: governance, lawmaking, performance of the commandments, acts of loving-kindness and—significantly—teaching, which Maimonides identified early in his career with the paradigm of virtue friendship.¹⁰² This is not to deny that prophetic beneficence may well outstrip Aristotelian *philia* in some crucial respects—the prophet, according to Maimonides, may be compelled by the overflow of divine beneficence to seek the perfection (through teaching and preaching) even of those who would seek his physical harm.¹⁰³ But this is quite different from asserting that everyday human goodwill has been wholly evacuated from this kind of life. Certainly where some minimal degree of reciprocity and goodwill is in evidence, we should have no hesitation in referring to this as friendship in Aristotelian-Maimonidean terms.

Whatever he may ultimately have thought about biblical Moses or Abraham, Maimonides did use friendship to frame his own activities as a teacher and guide. When Joseph Ibn Jabbar of Bagdad referred to himself in a letter as an ignoramus (Heb. *‘am-haaretz*) because he could only read Maimonides’ Arabic writings but not his Hebrew works, Maimonides protested that he should rather consider himself a student and friend. “What you must first know,” he wrote, “. . . is that you are no *‘am haaretz* but our disciple and our beloved [*talmidana wa-habibana*],

¹⁰¹ *Guide* III:54, p. 637.

¹⁰² See for example *Hilkhot De ‘ot* 1: 6-7, *Hilkhot ‘Avodat Kokhavim* 1:3; *Hilkhot Teshuvah* 10:2; *Guide* I:54, II:37-40. See also Leaman, “Ideals, Simplicity and Ethics.” On the importance of political and legislative activity to divine emulation, see Lawrence V. Berman, “The Political Interpretation of the Maxim: The Purpose of Philosophy is the Imitation of God,” *Studia Islamica* 15 (1961): 53-61; David Novak, “Jurisprudence,” in Kenneth Seeskin ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Maimonides* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 212-34. On the performance of the commandments, see Kellner, *Maimonides on Human Perfection*. I would add however that Maimonides also calls attention to the possibility of emulating God by going *beyond* the letter of the law—see *Hilkhot ‘Avadim* 9:8; Seeman, “Honoring the Divine as Virtue and Practice in Maimonides,” 231-2. Rather than debate which is the true *imitatio Dei*, it seems reasonable to suppose that emulation of divine attributes might involve a variety of different kinds of activities that all express balanced virtue and contribute to a divine *telos*. See Septimus, “Literary Structure and Ethical Theory,” 310 n.9.

¹⁰³ See *Guide* II:37, p. 375; Lerner, “Maimonides’ Governance of the Solitary,” 45-6.

and that anyone who cleaves to the quest for learning, be it only one verse or one precept... the intent is for understanding, in any language it may be.”¹⁰⁴ At the close of the *Guide* similarly, Maimonides appends a postscript to another Joseph—this time Joseph ben Judah—to whose perplexity the *Guide* as a whole had been dedicated:

This is what I thought fit that we should set down in this treatise; it is a part of what I consider very useful to those like you. I hope for you that through sufficient reflection you will grasp all the intentions I have included therein, with the help of God, may He be exalted; and that He will grant us *and all Israel, being friends* [Heb., *haverim*], that which he has promised us: *Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf 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. Amen.*¹⁰⁵

Is it too much to suggest that Maimonides here frames the *Guide* itself as an act of virtue friendship *par excellence*?

The phrase *kol yisrael haverim*, “all Israel, being friends,” is undoubtedly an allusion to the Talmudic ruling that all Jews are treated as *haverim* on festivals, meaning that even commoners enjoy a legal presumption of ritual purity while the festival lasts.¹⁰⁶ Remember however that Maimonides also argued that sages are called *haverim* because they are virtue friends to one another.¹⁰⁷ Here as elsewhere, context makes it clear that Maimonides’ reference to ritual purification carries an intimation of religious and philosophical enlightenment.¹⁰⁸ The implication of “all Israel being friends” is therefore that even

¹⁰⁴ Shilat, *Iggerot Ha-Rambam*, Volume 1, p. 408.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 638. I have emended Pines’ translation of the Hebrew *haverim* as “fellows” to read “friends” for the sake of clarity, and because this is Maimonides’ own translation of the Aristotelian term. For an account of the meaning of “light” in this postscript and in the *Guide* as a whole, see Zachary J. Braiterman, “Maimonides and the Visual Image after Kant and Cohen,” *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 20 (2012): 217-30.

¹⁰⁶ *Hilkhot Mitamei Mishkav U-Moshav* 11:9, based on *Talmud Yerushalmi Hagigah* 3:6. See *Moreh Ha-Nevuchim*, Michael Schwartz trans. (Tel-Aviv: Tel-Aviv University Press, 2002), 676 n.53.

¹⁰⁷ See note 32, above.

¹⁰⁸ See for example *Hilkhot Mikva’ot* 11:12. Also Stern, *The Matter and Form of Maimonides*, 352.

though the *Guide* has been written for Joseph, that solitary man of virtue for whom Maimonides has written that he would be willing to risk the wrath of a thousand ignoramuses, he still has his eyes on a much larger prize: the incremental enlightenment of the nation as a whole.¹⁰⁹ This is the reason for all of the Torah's commandments related to friendship and it is also the burden shouldered by Maimonides himself as an indefatigable teacher of the broad public as well as the intellectual elite.¹¹⁰ This friendship is part of what it must mean, according to Maimonides, to exercise "loving-kindness, righteousness and judgment in the earth."

¹⁰⁹ *Guide* (Vol. I), p. 16.

¹¹⁰ Maimonides concern for public scholarship directed towards "the masses" has also been described by Aviezer Ravitzky, "Maimonides: Esotericism and Educational Philosophy," in Seeskin, *The Cambridge Companion to Maimonides*, 290-314; Lerner, "Maimonides' Governance of the Solitary," 35, 46. On Maimonides as a passionate and sophisticated public teacher, see Ralph Lerner, *Maimonides' Empire of Light: Popular Enlightenment in an Age of Belief* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).