

## ONE

# The Will to Illness

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RABBI MOSHE BEN MAIMON (c. 1136–38 to 1204), who was known in Latin as Moses Maimonides, is famed for his contributions on Jewish law, philosophy, and medicine. His extant legal writings include several letters, surviving portions of youthful commentaries on Talmudic tractates, a *Commentary on the Mishnah*, a list of biblical laws entitled *Book of the Commandments*, and the *Mishneh Torah*, literally “Second Law,” a codification of rabbinical law that is also called the *Code* and the *Compendium*. Maimonides’ legal writings coincided with his activities as a religious community leader, an international authority on rabbinical law, and the author of the first systematic codification of the Jewish legal tradition. His formulations of Jewish philosophy, both in the opening volumes of the *Mishneh Torah* and especially in *Guide of the Perplexed*, used medieval Aristotelianism to promote science and rationalism, shaped the course of all later Jewish philosophy, and also influenced European thinkers from Thomas Aquinas (Burrell, 1988) and Meister Eckhart to Isaac Newton (Popkin, 1988, 1990). Maimonides is also remembered for medical treatises that included important minor contributions that arose out of his private practice as a physician. This book is the first to address the comparatively little known topic of his program of psychotherapy.

*Shemoneh Perakim*, “*Eight Chapters*,” is a self-contained treatise on faculty psychology and psychotherapy that is contained within Maimonides’ multi-volume, running ad locum *Commentary on the Mishnah*. It is today discussed chiefly from perspectives in the histories of philosophy and psychology that scarcely know what to make of Maimonides’ self-presentation as a physician of the soul. He wrote:

You know that the improvement of the moral qualities is brought about by the healing of the soul and its activities. Therefore, just as the physician, who endeavors to cure the human body, must have a perfect knowledge of it in its

entirety and its individual parts, just as he must know what causes sickness that it may be avoided, and must also be acquainted with the means by which a patient may be cured, so, likewise, he who tries to cure the soul, wishing to improve the moral qualities, must have a knowledge of the soul in its totality and its parts, must know how to prevent it from becoming diseased, and how to maintain its health. (*Eight Chapters* i; p. 38)

In Maimonides' view, moral behavior, the implicit concern of his exhaustive legal writings, has its foundation in the health of the soul. Maimonides wrote: "The soul's healthful state is due to its condition, and that of its faculties, by which it constantly does what is right, and performs what is proper, while the illness of the soul is occasioned by its condition, and that of its faculties, which results in its constantly doing wrong, and performing actions that are improper" (*Eight Chapters* iii; p. 51). Because Maimonides regarded virtue as healthy and vice as an illness, he maintained that a moral educator had to be a physician of the soul, who possessed a philosophical—we might today say theoretical—understanding of the soul, its makeup, activities, and vicissitudes. Conversely, the diseases of the soul were moral in character, and people afflicted with illness of the soul were advised to seek the help of moral physicians.

Those whose souls become ill should consult the sages, the moral physicians, who will advise them against indulging in those evils which they (the morally ill) think are good, so that they may be healed by that art . . . through which the moral qualities are restored to their normal condition. (*Eight Chapters* iii; p. 52)

The location of the *Eight Chapters* within the *Commentary on the Mishnah* reflects the integral relation that Maimonides saw between psychotherapy and ethics. The *Eight Chapters* is located immediately before and serves as an introduction to Maimonides' commentary on *Pirke Avot*, "Chapter of the Fathers," the section of the Mishnah that concerns ethics.

#### ARISTOTELIAN PREMISES OF MAIMONIDES' PSYCHOLOGY

Contemporary writers on the *Eight Chapters* stress its historical position as an instance of medieval Aristotelian faculty psychology. Aristotle began with a very broad definition of soul that applied to plants, animals, and people: soul was the whole of the difference between a living being and its corpse. "Soul [is that] by which primarily we live, perceive, and think" (Aristotle, *On the Soul* 414<sup>a</sup> 12). Soul was integral to the functions of a living body and could not exist in its absence. "Soul is an actuality or account of something that possesses a potentiality of being such" (414<sup>a</sup> 28–29). Aristotle used the term "form" in reference to soul, but he did not refer to shape or image. The body's "matter is potential-

ity, form actuality" (414<sup>a</sup> 16), in the sense that a corpse has the matter but not the form of a living body. By "form" Aristotle meant something that included activity, function, and purpose. An example that he provided claimed that the form of a hand included holding, grasping, manipulating, touching, feeling pleasure, pain, heat, cold, softness, hardness, and so on. The hand of a corpse, like the hand of a statue, was a hand in name only because neither a corpse nor a statue could do what a living hand could do; it was what a hand did that constituted it as a hand, warranting its designation as a hand rather than as inert flesh, or marble, or whatever (Robinson, 1989, pp. 44, 51, 91).

Maimonides distinguished five faculties of the soul. (1) The nutritive faculty, which was common to vegetable and animal life, had the power of attracting nourishment and retaining it, along with digestion, repulsion, growth, procreation, and differentiation of the nutritive juices for sustenance from those to be expelled. (2) The sensitive faculty, which distinguished animal life, accomplished seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and touch. (3) The appetitive faculty was responsible for desiring and loathing things, leading to pursuit or flight, inclination or avoidance, anger and affection, fear and courage, cruelty and compassion, love and hate, and so on. (4) The imaginative faculty accomplished two things. The first was the retention of what had been perceived by the senses. The second activity of imagination was the construction of things themselves not directly perceived by the senses by separating and recombining the retained impressions. (5) The fifth of the soul's faculties was uniquely human. Unlike the souls of vegetation and animals, the human soul had the function of conceptualizing forms. The rational faculty, the capacity for abstract conceptual thought, was consequently the special and distinguishing faculty of human souls. Aristotle had written, "the intellect more than anything else is man" (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1178<sup>a</sup> 7–8); Maimonides echoed, "Reason, that faculty peculiar to man, enables him to understand, reflect, acquire knowledge of the sciences, and to discriminate between proper and improper actions" (*Eight Chapters* i; p. 43).

When Maimonides emphasized that "the human soul is one," he was rejecting the idea, favored by Platonists, that people have multiple souls. Maimonides recommended that physicians who wrote of three souls, the vegetable, animal, and human, should be reinterpreted to refer to different faculties of a soul that was single and unified (*Eight Chapters* i; pp. 37–38). The question of the soul's unity had profound implications for the practice of psychotherapy. Consider, for example, the *Spiritual Physick* of Rhazes (864–925), a Muslim physician who was widely regarded as one of the greatest medical authorities of the Middle Ages. Rhazes provided naturalistic language for the Platonic perspective whose theological expressions were normative for both Christian monasticism and Muslim Sufism. Working with a Platonic dualism of intellect and matter, Rhazes aimed at freeing "the rational and divine soul" from both "the choleric and animal [soul], and . . .

the vegetative, incremental, and appetitive soul" (Rhazes, 1950, p. 29). The rational soul's freedom was to be achieved through "the suppression of passion, the opposing of natural inclinations in most circumstances, and the gradual training of the soul to that end" (p. 22). Rhazes pursued what Christian monasticism termed *apatheia*, an emotional indifference that freed "the rational soul that is the true man" (p. 41) for a life of pure intellectualism. The reduction of the human soul to its capacity for rationality meant that all else was viewed as an impingement on the well-being of the rational soul. Emotion, desire, and passion were all counted as illness. "Of all the appetites," Rhazes considered "sexual enjoyment . . . [as] the foulest and most disreputable" (p. 41). The soul was said to be cured when efforts at self-control successfully achieved involuntary inhibition and anhedonia (lack of emotions).

In proposing asceticism as a corrective for the evil of passion, Rhazes advocated a comparatively moderate approach to Platonic psychotherapy. Other techniques that similarly aimed at reducing a human being to a purely rational soul were more extreme. Exorcism sought to expel the effects of demons who produced the evils of passion and imagination within the soul, while Platonic mystics aspired to avoid contaminants by achieving states of pure intellectualism, devoid of affect, when the soul communed or united with a pure spirituality that they attributed to God.

Aristotelians proceeded differently. Because they regarded soul as the form of the body in all of its vegetative, animal, and rational aspects, Aristotelians conceptualized the soul's health with similar complexity. Both the body and the soul's vegetative processes might be either healthy or diseased. Neither emotions, nor imagination, nor any other functions of the animal faculty was intrinsically evil; each function might be either wholesome or sick. Conversely, the purity of abstract conceptualization was no guarantee of its sanity. Making a virtue of prudence and an ideal of the golden mean, the Aristotelian perspective aspired to a healthy harmony among the soul's vegetative, animal, and rational faculties. Our modern concepts of mental integration, conflict reduction, and wholeness derive from the Aristotelian legacy.

Modern scholars have made much of medieval philosophers' routine quibbling over the details of the soul's faculties (Wolfson, 1935a). For example, Aristotle's *On the Soul* enumerated the faculties as nutritive, sensitive, motor, appetitive, and rational. Maimonides agreed with Aristotle in counting nutritive processes as a vegetative component within soul, but he followed the Muslim philosopher al-Farabi (c. 870–950) in substituting imagination where Aristotle had listed motion (*Eight Chapters* i; p. 39 n. 1). His formulation disagreed with Aristotle's statement, "the faculty of imagination is identical with that of sense-perception" (*On Dreams* 459<sup>a</sup> 15–16), and conformed instead with the formulation of the Muslim philosopher Ibn Sina (980–1037) that the common sense, which brings the five senses together in a unified perception,

is a discrete function that occurs before unified sense impressions are conveyed to the imagination (Wolfson, 1935b, p. 349).

Their differences notwithstanding, the Muslim and Jewish philosophers of the medieval Islamicate commonly understood philosophy to be transformative. Medieval philosophy was not, as philosophy is today, an exercise of logic for its own sake. Medieval philosophy continued the classical and Hellenistic project of personal transformation. Hadot (2002) explained:

Whether or not they laid claim to the Socratic heritage, all Hellenistic philosophers agreed with Socrates that human beings are plunged in misery, anguish, and evil because they exist in ignorance. Evil is to be found not within things, but in the value judgments which people bring to bear *upon* things. People can therefore be cured of their ills only if they are persuaded to change their value judgments, and in this sense all these philosophies wanted to be therapeutic. In order to change our value judgments, however, we must make a radical choice to change our entire way of thinking and way of being. This choice is the choice of philosophy, and it is thanks to it that we may obtain inner tranquillity and peace of mind. (p. 102)

Regardless of the differences among their schools, ancient, late antique, and medieval philosophers proceeded by identifying and confronting illogicality not merely in order to gain intellectual understanding of reason or truth, as is the modern practice, but specifically as a means to the further end of bringing the soul toward wholeness through its conformance with the assumed rationality of the world. Their goal was not only to think about truths, but also to know them existentially. Among contemporary practices, it is not philosophy but insight-oriented psychotherapy that continues the ancient philosophic project of identifying and resolving mental conflict through systematic talk about inconsistency and reality-testing.

#### ARISTOTELIAN FORMS

A portion of Maimonides' cure of souls—the portion that contemporary scholars appreciate best—followed the Aristotelian program. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle had recommended contemplation as the consummate activity of human beings. Having defined the rational faculty as the portion of the soul that was distinctively human, Aristotle regarded the perfection of reason during contemplative experience as the purpose and end of human existence. Because animals are logical in their pursuits of their appetites, it was not logic that made the rational faculty distinctively human. What Plato and Aristotle had considered uniquely human was the soul's capacity to entertain abstract concepts. Contemplation, the consummate activity of the rational faculty, consisted above all in the attainment of abstract concepts in moments of understanding, insight, inspiration, or intuition.

Maimonides adopted Aristotle's view in his characteristic manner as an exegete of biblical and rabbinic teachings. Maimonides cited Onqelos, who translated the Bible into Aramaic in late antiquity, as a rabbinic precedent for his own adoption of the Aristotelian distinction between matter and form. "The things that in his opinion, I mean that of *Onqelos*, can be grasped in their true reality are . . . endowed with matter and form" (*Guide* I:37; p. 86). For Maimonides, form was not a shape that can be pictured by the imagination, but an abstract concept that is conceptualized by the mind.

You can never see matter without form, or form without matter. But the human mind divides in thought an existing body into its constituents and recognises that it is made up of matter and form. . . . The forms that are devoid of body cannot be perceived with the physical eye, but only with the mind's eye; in the same way as we are conscious of the Lord of the Universe, without physical vision. (*BK, Laws on the Basic Principles of the Torah* IV:7; p. 39a)

Mathematics provided Maimonides with examples of the category of "forms that are devoid of body." He wrote: "The mathematical sciences have taught . . . that there are things that a man, if he considers them with his imagination, is unable to represent to himself in any respect . . . something that the imagination cannot imagine or apprehend and that is impossible from its point of view, can exist" (*Guide* I:73; pp. 210–211).

Consider the example of a triangle. It is possible to apprehend a triangle in the mind in a way that could never be apprehended by the senses. A triangle is a figure with three sides and three angles, each angle adjoining two sides. The form of the triangle by itself is never apprehended by the senses except with additional particularity. A sensible triangle must be one with no equal angles, with two equal angles, or with three equal angles. The triangle as such, without one of these particularities, is only apprehended by the mind, never by the senses. The *general* triangle has never been seen with the physical eyes, although we certainly can see it with the "mind's eye." The concept of color will provide a second example. Red, yellow, blue, and their many combinations are visible to the eye, but the concept of color is evident only to the mind, as an abstraction.

Commenting on the biblical teaching that human beings are made in the image of God (Gen 1:26–27), Maimonides explained the text in keeping with Aristotelian psychology. He wrote: "It is the intellect which is the human soul's specific form. And to this specific form of the soul, the Scriptural phrase 'in our image, after our likeness' alludes" (*BK, Laws Concerning the Basic Principles of the Torah* IV:8; p. 39a). According to Maimonides, when Scripture stated that human beings were made in the image of God, it alluded to the rational faculty.

Maimonides interpreted the biblical notion of the image of God in parallel. Aristotle had contended, and Maimonides agreed, that the same forms that exist in the external world of sense perception may also exist in the soul.

They reasoned that form was conceptual in its very nature. Not only is it comprehended through its abstraction from perceptible phenomena, but it is conceptual in its objective actuality. Aristotle sometimes referred to forms as “abstract objects,” meaning that they are abstractions that have objective existence because they inform objective events in the external world. Their objective existence is perhaps most easily appreciated with reference to processes. Life and death, the presence and absence of soul, are highly complex processes at work within organic chemistry. Again, the Darwinian principle of “survival of the most fit” is a process, a form, that shapes highly complex interactions among individual life forms. More generally, laws of nature are patterns of interaction among physical quiddities that arise from the intersections of their properties. The laws are not intrinsic to the properties of any individual quiddity alone. When the quiddities are in isolation, there are no interactions, no processes, and, in an empirical sense, no laws. The laws of nature describe regularities in the interactions of physical quiddities. They too are a category of forms in Aristotle’s sense of the term.

In the human mind, just as in the perceptible world, form was both passively and actively intelligent. It was passively intelligent in the sense that any piece of information embodies intelligence. However, form was also actively intelligent in the sense that form is intelligence in functional action. A form in the mind is not simply a thought. It is a thought that exerts agency. It produces thinking by making associations and constraining conclusions, feelings, and behavior to which the associations lead. A form in the mind is intelligible, but it is also an active agency, an intelligence or intellect. Small or large, a form is regularly formative—or, in contemporary jargon, performative.

Maimonides interpreted references to the formative activities of forms in commenting on the plurality of the biblical phrases “our image . . . our likeness.” Rabbinical tradition conventionally understood the plurality to refer to God and his angels.

All that the Holy God, blessed be He, created in His universe falls into three divisions. Some are creatures consisting of substance and form, continuously coming into being and decaying. Such are bodies of human creatures and other animals, plants and minerals. Others are creatures consisting of substance and form which do not . . . change, from one body to another or from one form to another, but retain their form permanently in their substance. . . . Such are the heavenly spheres and the stars placed in them. Their substance is not like other substances nor are their forms like other forms. Others again are creatures that consist of form without substance. These are the angels. For the angels are not material bodies, but only forms distinguished from each other. (*BK, Laws Concerning the Basic Principles of the Torah*, II:3; p. 35b)

Working with a conventional Aristotelian cosmology that contrasted the ethereal heavens with the sublunar world of the four elements, Maimonides

divided forms into three categories. He claimed that the Bible had discussed incorporeal forms under the term *malakhim*, "angels." "The notion of an *angel* is that of a certain act" (*Guide* II:6; p. 265). Conversely, "all forces are angels" (*Guide* II:6; p. 263). As actions, forces, or processes, the incorporeal forms are objective parts of the created universe made by God that exist objectively, independently of whether they are apprehended or not. For example, as an abstract concept, the triangle has objective characteristics. Its three angles equal the angle at any point on a straight line, and a triangle imparts these characteristics to any physical object that is triangular.

The further categories of forms were forms that were permanently united with matter in the heavens, and still others that were impermanently joined with matter on earth. Human souls were instances of the latter.

Maimonides explained the singular phrasing, "God created man in his own image (*zelem*)" (Gen 1:27) with reference to a further Aristotelian concept. No different from any other incorporeal form, the particular form that was the singular *zelem* of God was an angel. The term *zelem* has generally been translated as "image," but according to Maimonides, image, in the sense of sensory image, was precisely what *zelem* did not mean. Maimonides wrote: "People have thought that in the Hebrew language [*zelem*] denotes the shape and configuration of a thing." Doing so led to error. "This supposition led them to the pure doctrine of the corporeality of God" (*Guide* I:1; p. 21). He went on to say that "the proper term designating the form that is well known . . . the shape and configuration of a thing is *to'ar*." The word *zelem* differed. It "is applied . . . to the notion in virtue of which a thing is constituted as a substance and becomes what it is. It is the true reality of the thing in so far as the latter is that particular being" (*Guide* I:1; p. 22). In this way, Maimonides invested the word *zelem* with the technical sense that "form" had in Aristotelian philosophy. It was a formative form, an intelligible intelligence engaging in intellection.

What was the "form" of God? For Aristotle, form as such, the totality of all forms in the universe, comprised *nous*, "Intellect" or "Mind." Our modern concept of natural law, a single, self-consistent set of rational concepts that are everywhere at work in the cosmos, is an impoverished derivative of Aristotle's concept. *Nous* consisted of objectively existing, abstractly conceivable, natural processes, as distinct from the laws that people formulate in order to describe the processes and their functions. In addition, Aristotle included within the scope of knowledge or science not only mathematics, physics, astronomy, and biology, but also metaphysics, ethics, psychology, and the social and political sciences. *Nous* referred to the rationality, coherence, or intelligibility of all that exists and occurs. The soul's rational faculty reflected *nous*. Aristotle likened the rational faculty to sealing wax on which a signet ring impressed its shape. *Nous* was an active source of forms, an Agent or Active Intellect as the medieval Aristotelians called it. The human soul, by

contrast, was a passive intellect that was capable of receiving forms. For Maimonides, Active Intellect was the *zelem*, created by God, that the rational faculty has a capacity to know.

This Aristotelian approach to epistemology was an instance of philosophic realism. The objects in the world, the products of God's creation, exist. They are real and not illusory. Some people may understand them rightly and others wrongly, but they are objectively real in both events. Reality includes both material and nonmaterial things. As an example of nonmaterial things, consider the essential feature of philosophy: the recognition that meaning is, in and of itself, real. This is the meaning of Brentano's immanent object of thought. This is the meaning of Aristotle's God thinking Himself, or Parmenides' to think is to be, or Sextus Empiricus indicating the meaning of a word as a third thing, the *lekton*, "saying," after the word itself and the sensory thing referred to by the word. It is also Plato's distinction between the sensory and nonsensory apprehension, that which is apprehended in the latter's being real. It is the thing that becomes evident in mathematics when the enterprise is that of finding the theorem implicit in the axiom. Materialism affirms, however, that there is nothing outside of the material, the material that impinges on the senses. Idealism affirms the opposite extreme—that there is nothing outside of the ideal. All that exists is apprehended by the mind, including the apparent apprehension of things by the senses. Idealism consequently holds that the ideals exist whether or not a human mind exists to think them. Realism, the position common to Aristotle and Maimonides, holds that both matter and meaning exist.

Realism is obliged to acknowledge both the objective reality of things that are knowable and the subjective nature of knowing them. Maimonides discussed the problem explicitly in his *Commentary on the Mishnah*, when he pondered the relationships among knowledge, reasons, and intelligence. He began the passage by treating knowledge as objective and reasons, by which he meant motives, as subjective. Presently, however, knowledge and reasons dissolved into each other.

The knowledge which comes to us and which we acquire in turn lets us understand the reasons to which it leads, if the whole idea is analysed in detail and understood, or we can understand the separate reasons in their essence without applying them as knowledge. But the reasons themselves constitute essentially items of knowledge. This understanding is called intelligence, and it constitutes knowledge in itself, while knowledge is a medium for intelligence in that it makes it possible for us to understand whatever we do understand. It is like saying that if we do not understand the reason, we have no real knowledge, while, if we have no knowledge, we do not understand the reason, because we understand it only based on our knowledge. To understand this idea is very difficult. (*Commentary on Aboth* III:20; p. 105)

Maimonides was grappling here with the problem of the subjectivity and objectivity of knowledge. He defined reasons as subjective, and knowledge as objective. Knowledge leads to reasons, and reasons cannot be understood in the absence of knowledge. However, people may have reasons without being able to conceptualize the knowledge that the reasons presuppose, and knowledge cannot be known in the absence of reasons. Knowledge, insofar as we can know it, is mediated by reasons. Accordingly, knowledge, like reason, is subjective; reasons are “essentially items of knowledge.” Forced in this way to concede that knowledge is inalienably subjective, Maimonides nevertheless maintained a realist position in philosophy. He postulated that “intelligence” “constitutes knowledge in itself” and exists objectively. Subjective as knowledge may be, the rational faculty attained objectivity when it considered, for example, arithmeticals, geometricals, scientific laws, and so forth.

In Maimonides' view, it was only because intelligence existed objectively in the world that people were able to understand it. In this sense, the intelligence in the world might be said to overflow into the intelligence of the person who understands it. As Maimonides explained: “*In Thy light do we see light* [Ps 36:10] has the . . . meaning . . . that through the overflow of the intellect that has overflowed from Thee, we intellectually cognize, and consequently we receive correct guidance, we draw inferences, and we apprehend the intellect” (*Guide* II:12; p. 280). For a person to apprehend an intellect subjectively is for that person to acquire the objectively existing intellect as a subjective intellect.

The conjunction of the subjectivity of the soul with the objectivity of knowledge is intrinsically mystical and was understood as such by the Aristotelian tradition. Aristotle had maintained that the process of thinking and the content of what is thought are two aspects of a single phenomenon. “In the case of objects which involve no matter, what thinks and what is thought are identical; for speculative knowledge and its object are identical” (*On the Soul* 430<sup>a</sup> 3–5). Maimonides added that the distinction between the intellectual subject and the intellectual object exists only as long as the subject is only potentially intellectual. The distinction vanishes when the intellect is actualized because the intellectual object then exists within the intellectualizing subject and is part of it.

The intellect in actu is nothing but that which has been intellectually cognized and made abstract, that thing being the intellectually cognizing subject, is also indubitably identical with the intellect realized in actu. For in the case of every intellect, its act is identical in essence; for intellect in actu is not one thing and its act another thing; for the true reality and quiddity of the intellect is apprehension . . . the act of the intellect, which is its apprehension, is the true reality and the essence of the intellect. (*Guide* I:68; p. 163)

For Aristotelians, rationality was potential—unformulated, unthought, unconscious—until the process of philosophizing actualized rationality in

consciousness. Rationality is a knowledge about things that has only potential existence until it is actualized through its mental construction. Neoplatonists instead maintained that rationality exists objectively in a discrete realm of existence, a world of ideas, and is accessed through its perception—implicitly, through its extrasensory perception by the rational human soul. For example, Plato famously maintained that the idea of a circle exists eternally and is perceived in the moment of its apprehension, but an Aristotelian would contend that in seeing any round object, our intellects have the potential to abstract the concept of a circle, even if no true or perfect circle exists anywhere. The distinction between extrasensory perception, on the one hand, and an exercise of logical abstraction, on the other, committed Neoplatonists to metaphysics and Aristotelians to psychology. The Aristotelian understanding of the unity or identity of the subjective and objective nevertheless remained intrinsically mystical. Interestingly, the inalienable paradoxicality of philosophic realism is integral to the British psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott's (1971) discussions of "transitional phenomena" that are midway between subjective and objective, can neither be proved nor refuted, and are best handled playfully (see also Pruyser, 1983).

#### ACTUALIZATION

Robinson (1989, p. 105) remarked that "Aristotle's human Psychology . . . is a *self-actualizing* Psychology, though more rigorous and reasoned than the latter-day 'humanistic' versions." It was simultaneously a depth psychology, in that Aristotle's concept of intellect, the potential that was optimally to be actualized, was implicitly a concept of the unconscious (Brentano, 1977).

For Maimonides, the Active Intellect—the Arabic term *'aql* translated Greek *nous*—was the particular incorporeal form that causes the potentiality of the rational faculty to turn into actuality. The Active Intellect causes potential to become actual both in the mind and in nature.

The Active Intellect[s] . . . existence is indicated by the facts that our intellects pass from potentiality to actuality and that the forms of the existents that are subject to generation and corruption are actualized after they have been in their matter only in potentia. Now everything that passes from potentiality to actuality must have necessarily something that causes it to pass and that is outside it. And this cause must belong to the species of that which it causes to pass from potentiality to actuality. (*Guide* II:4; p. 257)

In Maimonides' view, the Active Intellect causes ideas that do not exist within the human mind, whose existence is only potential, to become actual by existing within a person's rational faculty. "That which brings intellect into existence is an intellect, namely, the Active Intellect" (*Guide* II:4; p. 258). Maimonides understood the Active Intellect as a *process* that is to be distinguished

from the material forms of the ideas whose existence it causes. "The Active Intellect . . . is separate from matter; and . . . it acts at a certain time and does not act at another time" (*Guide* II:18; p. 299).

Maimonides followed Aristotle in treating intellect not only as the unique possession but also as the primary purpose of the human being. The major project of human life was precisely the cultivation of the rational faculty in order to actualize its potential. Aristotle wrote: "That which is best and most pleasant for each creature is that which is proper to the nature of each; accordingly the life of the intellect is the best and pleasantest life for man" (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1178<sup>a</sup> 5–7).

In Maimonides' view, life has two goals: "a first perfection, which is the perfection of the body, and an ultimate perfection, which is the perfection of the soul" (*Guide* III:27; p. 511). Because the capacity for knowledge is inborn, knowledge always exists in potentiality. The ultimate perfection and major project of life is the fulfillment of one's rational nature through the actualization of its potential—a project that Maimonides regarded as an obligation. Maimonides wrote that "being a rational animal is the essence and true reality of man. . . . A man . . . should take as his end that which is the end of man qua man: namely, solely the mental representation of the intelligibles" (*Guide* I:51; p. 113; III:8; p. 432).

Because the intrinsic nature of the human being is to be a rational animal, possessing intellect, the perfection of a human being qua human being is to be perfectly rational, that is, to be rational in actuality and not only in potential.

The true human perfection . . . consists in the acquisition of the rational virtues—I refer to the conception of intelligibles, which teach true opinions concerning the divine things. This is in true reality the ultimate end; this is what gives the individual true perfection, a perfection belonging to him alone; and it gives him permanent perdurance; through it man is man. (*Guide* III:54; p. 635)

Maimonides' phrasing should not be taken in a Platonic sense, as advocating a pure intellectualism that was devoid of emotion. Although Maimonides advocated the intellectual life as a religious devotion, he made explicit reference to its ecstasy. He repeatedly stated that *hesheq*, "passionate love," and *simchah*, "bliss," attended the consummation of human life in the worship of God (Blumenthal, 1988, pp. 4–5). In this assertion, Maimonides echoed Aristotle's claim that *eudaimonia*, "bliss," "felicity," or "happiness," arises out of goodness and is the most desirable form of life (Robinson, 1989, pp. 97–101).

#### AL-FARABI'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

The classical understanding of philosophy as a transformative or therapeutic endeavor, that reconciled the soul with objectively existing ideas (*logoi*) or mind

(*nous*) in evidence throughout nature, has left its stamp on Jewish, Christian, and Muslim practices of mysticism. It was, however, only a first step in the history of psychotherapy. The function of psychology in Aristotelian philosophy underwent important changes at the hands of both al-Farabi and Maimonides. Aristotle had offered a pedagogical psychology. He endeavored to understand the soul with the goal of knowing how to design a curriculum that would cultivate ethics; he sought ethics, in both the individual and the state, as the means to *eudaimonia* (Robinson, 1989). Believing that “moral excellence comes about as a result of habit” (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1103<sup>a</sup> 16–17), Aristotle wrote about the pedagogical cultivation of good moral habits.

Moral excellence is concerned with pleasures and pains: it is on account of pleasure that we do bad things, and on account of pain that we abstain from noble ones. Hence we ought to have been brought up in a particular way from our very youth, as Plato says, so as both to delight in and to be pained by the things that we ought; for this is the right education. (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1104<sup>b</sup> 9–13)

Aristotle discussed good habits and the excellence or perfection that was to be obtained through knowledge, but he wrote not a word about the correction of bad habits. His oversight was consistent with Socrates’ simplistic claim that vice is always a product of ignorance. If education to truth was all that needed to be done, the contemplative actualization of reason was a complete program of transformation.

Al-Farabi, whom Islamicate philosophers called the “Second Master” after Aristotle, integrated Aristotle’s psychology of ethics within his own program of political science. In his *Fusul al-Madani*, “Aphorisms of the Statesman,” al-Farabi revived Plato’s concept of the philosopher king and made metaphoric use of Plato’s concept of the physician of the soul (Davidson, 1963). Al-Farabi (1961) wrote: “He who treats souls is the statesman, who is also called the king” (p. 27). In this treatise, the soul’s health and illness were metaphors that concerned good and evil. “The health of the soul is that its states and the states of its parts are those by which it always does good and noble deeds and fair actions. Its sickness is that its states and the states of its parts are those by which it always does wicked and evil deeds and ugly actions” (p. 27). Psychology was an applied science. A king was obliged to know psychology, “but it is requisite for him to know about the soul only as much as he needs in his art” (p. 28).

Although al-Farabi’s political theory was Platonic, his account of the soul belonged to the Aristotelian tradition. He divided the soul into five parts: the nutritive, sensory, imaginative, appetitive, and rational faculties (al-Farabi, 1961, p. 29). He attributed different virtues to rational and appetitive faculties. Rational virtues included “wisdom, intellect, cleverness, readiness of wit, excellence of understanding.” The appetitive faculty was instead concerned

with ethical virtues, "such as temperance, bravery, generosity, justice" (p. 31). Both virtues and their corresponding vices were inculcated through habit. "The ethical virtues and vices result and are established in the soul, simply by repeating the actions which proceed from a particular disposition many times over a certain period and becoming accustomed thereto" (p. 31). In some cases a natural disposition toward a virtue or vice might be completely replaced by habit; in other cases only partially; yet in still other cases not at all. They may nevertheless "be opposed by resisting and restraining the soul from their actions and by contending and striving" (p. 33). Virtue was the condition of happiness. "Happiness is an end such that it is attained by virtuous actions, as knowledge results from learning and study, and the arts result from learning them and persevering in their actions" (p. 61).

Also Aristotelian was al-Farabi's (1961) doctrine of the mean. "Actions which are good deeds are the moderate, mean actions between two extremes, both of which are bad, the one excess and the other defect. And similarly the virtues, for they are mean states and qualities of the soul between two other states, both of which are vices, the one excessive and the other defective" (p. 34). Good and evil vary with circumstances. "Just as the mean in foods and medicines is a mean and moderate for most men most of the time, is sometimes moderate for one group to the exclusion of another at a particular time, and sometimes moderate for individual bodies at individual times, long or short, similarly the mean and moderate in actions is sometimes moderate for all or most men most or all of the time, sometimes moderate for one group to the exclusion of another at a particular time and sometimes moderate for a man at one time and not at another" (p. 36).

From these premises al-Farabi derived the conclusion that authoritarian government accomplishes a healing of souls.

He who brings out and produces the mean and moderate of whatever kind in foods and medicines in the doctor. The art by which he brings it out is medicine. He who produces the mean and moderate in morals and actions is the ruler of the city and the king. The art by which he brings it out is the political art and the kingly craft. (al-Farabi, 1961, p. 36)

Al-Farabi advised that kings aim at the common good without troubling over the personal health of individuals who are incapable of virtue.

It is not the business of the ideal governor and the first chief to perfect the virtues of one the nature and substance of whose soul are such that it does not receive the virtues. His end is simply to bring souls like these as far as possible for them, and to a point of virtue consistent with the advantage of the people of that city, just as it is not the duty of the ideal doctor to bring the bodies whose condition is as we have described to the most perfect grades and highest levels of health. It is his business merely to bring them, as regards

health, as far as possible with their nature and substance, and consistent with the actions of the soul. For the body is for the sake of the soul and the soul for the sake of the last perfection, viz. happiness, which is virtue, hence the soul is for the sake of wisdom and virtue. (al-Farabi, 1961, pp.75–76)

From these foundations in Aristotelian pedagogy and al-Farabi's political ideology, Maimonides fashioned a psychotherapy.

### MAIMONIDES' BEHAVIORAL THERAPY

Maimonides' *Eight Chapters* embraced al-Farabi's concept of healing souls by correcting evil habits (Davidson, 2005, pp. 93, 155), but he systematically ignored al-Farabi's political concerns (Davidson, 1963, p. 42). For Maimonides, the cure of souls was not a metaphor that pertained to ethics, but a concept that pertained literally to a medical undertaking. Maimonides advised that when the "soul becomes diseased . . . it is proper . . . to resort to a cure" (*Eight Chapters* iv; p. 58). The cure aimed at undoing or reversing the extremism of the vice in order that the educational process might be able to take effect. The practitioners of the cure of souls were not statesmen but Torah sages. "The wise who are physicians of the soul" prescribe emotional correctives that are appropriate to an individual's moral disposition. They "heal their maladies by instructing them in the dispositions which they should acquire till they are restored to the right path" (*BK, Laws Relating to Moral Dispositions and to Ethical Conduct* II:1; p. 48a).

In other respects, Maimonides followed the views of Aristotle and al-Farabi. Maimonides adhered to the Aristotelian principle of the mean or middle way: "It is man's duty to aim at performing acts that observe the proper mean" (*Eight Chapters* iv; p. 66). "The right way is the mean in each group of dispositions" (*BK, Laws Relating to Moral Dispositions and to Ethical Conduct* I:4; p. 47b). Maimonides followed both Aristotle and al-Farabi when he wrote:

Virtues are psychic conditions and dispositions which are mid-way between two reprehensible extremes, one of which is characterized by exaggeration, the other by deficiency. To illustrate, abstemiousness is a disposition which adopts a mid-course between inordinate passion and total insensibility to pleasure. . . . The psychic dispositions, from which these two extremes, inordinate passion and insensibility, result—the one being an exaggeration, the other a deficiency—are alike classed among moral imperfections.

Likewise . . . Gentleness is the mean between irascibility and insensibility to shame and disgrace; and modest, between impudence and shamefacedness. . . . So it is with the other qualities. (*Eight Chapters* iv; pp. 55–57)

Maimonides similarly followed both Aristotle and al-Farabi in treating moral education as a matter of behavior.

Know . . . that these moral excellences or defects cannot be acquired, or implanted in the soul, except by means of the frequent repetition of acts resulting from these qualities, which, practised during a long period of time, accustoms us to them. If these acts performed are good ones, then we shall have gained a virtue; but if they are bad, we shall have acquired a vice. (*Eight Chapters* iv; p. 58)

Davidson (1963, p. 41) noted that Maimonides failed to cite Aristotle on ethics, as though he had neither a translation nor a summary of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and instead depended on al-Farabi's account of Aristotle's views. Maimonides agreed with al-Farabi in recognizing that the premises of Aristotelian pedagogy required modification before they could be applied to the correction of established vices. Moral virtues can be cultivated in the young through education, as Aristotle had taught, but habituation in virtuous conduct does not suffice to correct a prior habituation in vice. Al-Farabi urged the legislation and enforcement of the mean, and he advised statesmen to be content with the public good. Maimonides was instead concerned with the cure of individuals. Working differently with the Aristotelian concept of the mean, Maimonides' cure of vice aimed at restoring the mean through behavior that was equal but opposite to the illness.

If one is irascible, he is directed to govern himself that even if he is assaulted or reviled, he should not feel affronted. And in this course he is to persevere for a long time till the choleric temperament has been eradicated. If one is arrogant, he should accustom himself to endure much contumely, sit below every one, and wear old and ragged garments that bring the wearer into contempt, and so forth, till arrogance is eradicated from his heart and he has regained the middle path, which is the right way. And when he has returned to this path, he should walk in it the rest of his days. On similar lines, he should treat all his dispositions. If, in any of them, he is at one extreme, he should move to the opposite extreme, and keep to it for a long time till he has regained the right path which is the normal mean in every class of dispositions. (*BK, Laws Relating to Moral Dispositions and to Ethical Conduct* II:2; p. 48b)

The technique that Maimonides described in Aristotelian terms is today called desensitization in the context of cognitive-behavioral therapy (Wolpe, 1958, pp. 139–165). Like Maimonides' program, the modern technique has its basis in learning theory and is useful in reducing the severity of symptoms of anxiety. Although it neither ends the anxiety nor addresses its sources, it increases the effectiveness of defenses against anxiety and can sometimes make crippling anxiety manageable. Unlike modern cognitive-behavioral therapy, Maimonides' technique also included the converse of desensitization. For example, Maimonides recommended generosity in order to desensitize an

avaricious person, but he also recommended frugality in order to inculcate sensitivity in a squanderer (*Eight Chapters* iv; pp. 58–59).

Maimonides remarked that inordinate passion was more easily cured than insensibility to pleasure. “It is easier for a man of profuse habits to moderate them to generosity, than it is for a miser to become generous” (*Eight Chapters* iv; p. 60). His observation that the depraved are more easily brought to repentance than the overly scrupulous is often corroborated in psychotherapy today. Noting the same phenomenon, the psychoanalyst Ella Freeman Sharpe (1930) explained: “The so-called normal person has often a longer and stubborn task before him in reaching the deepest levels of the mind.”

### SIN CAUSES IGNORANCE

Moral behaviorism was only the beginning of Maimonides’ cure of souls. He also offered an original theory of mental illness that he developed by applying Aristotelian categories to the understanding of selected biblical and rabbinical passages. Maimonides began with Socrates’ theory that all wrongdoing was a product of ignorance. Ignorance produced profound error in understanding the condition of human beings and the world in which human beings exist. Error in understanding, leading to error in conduct, was the vehicle of all evil. Maimonides wrote:

These great evils that come about between the human individuals who inflict them upon one another . . . derive from ignorance. Just as a blind man, because of the absence of sight, does not cease stumbling, being wounded, and also wounding others, because he has no one to guide him on the way [so does] every individual according to his ignorance [do] to himself and to others great evils. . . . If there were knowledge . . . they would refrain from doing any harm to themselves and to others. For through cognition of the truth, enmity and hatred are removed and the inflicting of harm by people on one another is abolished. (*Guide* III:11, 440–441)

Because Maimonides defined evildoing as counterproductive behavior, his use of the language of ethics formulated the same phenomena that Freud articulated by reference to self-sabotage. As well, Maimonides’ phrase, “doing . . . harm to themselves and to others,” reflected his view that the welfare of the individual coincides with the welfare of the group. Maimonides believed that it is in the objective nature of reality that doing harm to others coincides with doing harm to oneself, and that sin against others is always also a sin against oneself. He also believed that it is in the objective nature of reality that benefit to oneself coincides with benefit toward others, that it is possible to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev 19:18) and not possible to do otherwise. To love only oneself or to love only others are both impossible (Fromm, 1939), both forms of ignorance, both damaging, and both sin. Maimonides’ phrasing used

ethical discourse in order to express an insight into human nature to which clinical experience has brought psychoanalysis. Masochistic self-damage and sadistic harm to others never occur separately, but always occur in tandem, whether simultaneously or serially.

Socrates' attribution of wrongdoing to ignorance led Plato and Aristotle to formulate psychologies of pedagogy. If the soul needed nothing more than to know the good in order to choose to do it, then the soul had only to be taught. Aristotle had been aware, however, that Socrates' attribution of evil to ignorance was simplistic. Aristotle recognized that doing harm involuntarily, as, for example, through ignorance, was no vice. To constitute evildoing, harm had to be willful. "Not only are the vices of the soul voluntary, but those of the body also" (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1114<sup>a</sup> 22–24). Aristotle never reconciled his ethical voluntarism with the naturalism that otherwise informed his philosophical thinking. In the end, he could not sustain his own belief in will and instead followed his predecessors in promoting a deterministic model of wrongdoing. Aristotle wrote of *akrasia*, "weakness of will," by which a person might voluntarily corrupt knowledge and become ignorant. *Akrasia* might be produced through distraction, error in logic, or physical incapacitation by sleep, diseases, or conflicting desires (Robinson, 1989, pp. 105–109).

Al-Farabi (1961) did not significantly advance the problem. He explicitly associated virtue with knowledge when he suggested that "a deed is only right and a virtue when a man rightly knows the virtues which are thought to be virtues" (p. 72). The phrasing implies ethical voluntarism. Unless virtue involves knowing choice, what does it matter whether a virtue is or is not known to be a virtue? Al-Farabi did not develop the implication.

Maimonides unequivocally challenged determinism in the contexts of both astrology (*Eight Chapters* viii; pp. 86–87) and Aristotle's deification of nature (*Guide* II:25; p. 328). Maimonides maintained that freedom of will is consistent with the lawfulness of nature.

When [the Rabbis] said that man rises and sits down in accordance with the will of God, their meaning was that, when man was first created, his nature was so determined that rising up and sitting down were to be optional to him; [not] that God wills at any special moment that man should or should not get up. . . . Just as God willed that man should . . . have fingers, likewise did He will that man should move or rest of his own accord. (*Eight Chapters* viii; p. 91)

Maimonides insisted, moreover, that a theory of ethics must include the doctrine of freedom of will. Unless will is free, doing benefit and doing harm can have no ethical qualities. If all actions are caused in a rigidly determined way, all actions are compelled, and individual responsibility does not exist. Unless alternative actions are possible, benefits and harms cannot be good and evil, nor their performance virtues and vices; God would be doing injustice in rewarding good and punishing evil.

Maimonides appreciated that a theory of mental illness—defined in terms of counterproductive behavior—must take serious account of the freedom of will. He allowed a place to conventional moral education when he stated that ignorance that arises through inadequate education has its remedy in learning. He drew attention, however, to the problem of ignorance that arises through the will to do wrong. Temporary corruptions of knowledge may result, as Aristotle maintained, in weakness of will, but it is also the case that a strong will may freely commit sin. Maimonides allowed that sin is not possible without self-deception, the willful choice to believe that an evil is not punished but is instead rewarded. However, Maimonides did not limit himself to cases of *akrasia* when, for one reason or another, people contrive to behave as though they were ignorant of what they very well know. He also addressed the further circumstance that once a person willfully becomes ignorant, the person may no longer be in a position to reconsider. The person may then no longer have the knowledge that is needed to choose the good and must instead persist in the sin. In these cases, ignorance is an inhibition that is *consequent* of sin. Maimonides explained:

God has, moreover, expressly stated through Isaiah that He punishes some transgressors by making it impossible for them to repent, which He does by the suspension of their free will. . . . Upon this principle also are based the words of Elijah (peace be unto him!) who, when speaking of the unbelievers of his time, said of them, “Thou hast turned their hearts back,” which means that, as they have sinned of their own accord, their punishment from Thee is that Thou hast turned their hearts away from repentance, by not permitting them to exercise free will, and thus have a desire to forsake that sin, in consequence of which they persevere in their unbelief. (*Eight Chapters* viii; p. 97)

Maimonides here broke with the philosophic tradition of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and their medieval continuators that made ignorance responsible for wrongdoing. Citing the Bible, Maimonides argued that the true relationship is the converse. Ignorance makes harmful action possible, but harm is not evil unless will is involved. Willful, knowing choice of sin produces ignorance through the psychological process of denial, a voluntary refusal to believe what one knows. Denial, an emotional disconnection or dissociation of knowledge and its affirmation, is integral to wrongdoing. Once denial has been instituted, it may become habitual and automatic. Denial, originally instituted willfully, may develop into an automatic and involuntary inhibition (Hartmann, 1958). The habit is then so complete that it may not be possible to recover the knowledge that was denied.

Because Maimonides’ psychology started with a serious taking account of the normalcy of voluntary control over conduct, he could also conceptualize illnesses that involve losses of normal volition. Maimonides formulated his understanding of the topic in commentary on the biblical verse, “Then the

Lord said to Moses, 'Go to Pharaoh; for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his officials, in order that I may show these signs of mine among them'" (Ex 10:1; see also Ex 10:20, 11:10). Maimonides explained:

God at times punishes man by withholding repentance from him, thus not allowing him free will as regards repentance, for God (blessed be He) knows the sinners, and His wisdom and equity mete out their punishment. . . . Just as some of man's undertakings, which ordinarily are subject to his own free will, are frustrated by way of punishment, as for instance a man's hand being prevented from working so that he can do nothing with it, as was the case of Jereboam, the son of Nebat, or a man's eyes from seeing, as happened to the Sodomites who had assembled about Lot, likewise does God withhold man's ability to use his free will in regard to repentance, so that it never at all occurs to him to repent, and he thus finally perishes in his wickedness. (*Eight Chapters*, viii; pp. 95–96).

Commenting on the biblical text, Maimonides came to the point of discussing what we are accustomed after Freud to call neurosis. Jereboam suffered what we describe as "hysterical paralysis" and the Sodomites were afflicted with "hysterical blindness." The concepts of neurosis and fixation presuppose the concept of freedom of will and are logically dependent on it. Ignorance can explain inability, but neurosis involves a loss of voluntary function.

In all, Maimonides resolved the inconsistency in Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy between ignorance and moral responsibility for evil by developing a sophisticated argument about voluntary ignorance. He briefly mentioned the logical alternative, that genuine ignorance is morally innocent, but, from his standpoint as a moralist, it was nevertheless problematic. Scientific psychiatry had its basis, however, in the separation of moral and medical concerns, beginning in the sixteenth century when witches ceased to be regarded as evil servants of Satan and instead came to be regarded as sufferers of mental disorders (Zilboorg & Henry, 1941). When Renaissance concepts of nature led to the widespread rejection of the demonic theory of disease, the way was opened for the understanding of mental illness as a morally neutral, medical concern. Much of Freud's thinking consisted precisely of pursuing the paradigm of morally innocent suffering as far as he could take it. We may nevertheless value Maimonides' contribution on the moral aspects of therapy as an important, early, and still partly unsurpassed observation of a discrete clinical syndrome: willful denial that leads to neurotic symptoms.

#### REPENTANCE

Because Maimonides interpolated the Jewish doctrine of free will within Aristotelian psychology, citing biblical and rabbinical sources in support of his teaching, he was able to conceptualize *teshuvah*, "repentance," as a kind of