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MAHARAL'S CONCEPTION OF THE HUMAN BEING¹

Joshua L. Golding

This paper discusses Maharal's conception of the human being and its four major aspects, namely body, soul, intellect, and *tselem* (image or form). I suggest that some of his apparently inconsistent remarks concerning the human body may be reconciled by distinguishing two different senses of badness or evil. Secondly, I show that Maharal embraces what might be termed "moderate rationalism." Thirdly, I elucidate his conception of the *tselem* by discussing parallel ideas in Kabbalistic literature.

I.

The writings of Rabbi Judah Loew of Prague (c.1520-c.1609), often referred to as "Maharal" (a Hebrew acronym for "our master, the Rabbi Loew") represent a unique and creative blend of doctrines and ideas drawn from Hebrew Scripture, Talmud, and Midrash; from the Jewish philosophical tradition, typified by the work of Moses Maimonides; from Jewish reactions against Maimonides' philosophy such as that of Hasdai Crescas; and from Kabbalistic literature, especially the *Bahir*, the *Zohar*, and the work of R. Meir Ibn Gabbai (1480-c.1545). Maharal has been acknowledged as influential on later trends such as Hassidism and the thought of Rabbi Abraham I. Kook, the twentieth century spiritual and intellectual leader of Religious Zionism. In the history of Jewish thought, Maharal is an interesting and important figure, despite the fact that not much (especially in English) has been written on his work.²

One of the central topics in Maharal's writings is his conception of the human being. In this paper I shall sketch the basic outlines of Maharal's conception of the human being. This paper is by no means an attempt at a definitive description, which would require the length of a book. My focus will be on certain aspects of his account which I think are philosophically intriguing, and which bear on his conception of what is the best relationship with God for the human being. To bring out some of its unique features, I shall compare and contrast some aspects of his account with that of Moses Maimonides on the one hand, and Kabbalistic literature on the other. In the process of elucidating Maharal's view, I aim to correct what I think is a serious flaw in some recent discussions of Maharal's attitude toward one aspect of the human



being, namely, reason or rationality. I shall try to show that while some scholars have painted Maharal as something of an anti-rationalist, in fact he embraced what might be termed moderate rationalism.

Any account of the human being from a Jewish perspective must be judged on the basis of how well the account fits with traditional Jewish texts, and how well it fits with lived human reflection and experience. In this paper, I shall not aim to argue that Maharal's account of the human being is adequate in these respects. Rather, I shall aim for the more modest goal of sympathetically describing Maharal's account and emphasizing some of its unique features. A full scale evaluation of his view must be left for another occasion.

II.

Let us turn then to Maharal's conception of the human being. In many places in his writings,³ Maharal claims the human being is made up of three parts, namely, the body (*guf*), the soul (*nefesh*), and the intellect (*sekhel*). However, in at least one passage,⁴ Maharal claims there is a fourth aspect as well, namely, the image or form (*tselem*), which, as we shall see, is not reducible to any of the other three parts, and which, in some sense, transcends them. I shall consider, in turn, the body, soul, and intellect; and then turn to Maharal's conception of the image or form.

First, the body. The body is the material part of the human being.⁵ Like any matter, the human body takes up a certain amount of physical space; it comes to be and passes away. In general, matter may be ranked according to its degree of grossness or refinement; for example, the matter of the celestial spheres is purer than the matter on the earth. Light, especially from the heavenly bodies, is the purest kind of matter on earth, and it is, *qua* matter, superior to other material things.⁶ Some human beings have a more refined body than others; for example, Israelites generally have a more refined body than gentiles; Moses had a more refined body than other Israelites.⁷ Human beings have the ability to purify or refine the body through proper behavior. Indeed, Maharal claims the function of many divine commandments is to refine or purify the body.⁸ While Maharal accepts the doctrine of bodily resurrection, he apparently thinks that one's physical body does not remain in the world to come, since, he claims, that world is completely separate from matter.⁹

What does it mean to say that material bodies can be more or less gross or refined? Maharal appears to intend this literally: light from the heavens is actually less dense than that of the earth; Moses's body was actually less dense than the typical human body. Why should difference in density constitute a significant difference in value? The more dense a body is, the more it is subject to the finite limits and constrictions of space; the more something is bound by finitude, the more remote it is from God, the infinite, absolute simplicity. Light is therefore a symbol of God's revelation and presence. Of course, such ideas are not original in Maharal; they may be found in many earlier writers as well.¹⁰

What is Maharal's attitude toward the status or value of the body? Is the body basically good, bad, or neutral? In one place, Maharal has

some apparently rather negative things to say about the body:

“... the good [human] qualities are called matters of affliction, since they afflict man so that he will not follow the desire of his body, and they are called “the way of life” ... for anything which afflicts and diminishes his body will cause him to reach the “life”; for death and negation cleave to the body.”¹¹

An even harsher statement occurs in his commentary to Chapter 1 of the Talmudic tractate known as *Pirkei Avot* (*Ethics of the Fathers*):

“... the Torah is called “good” because it is completely intellectual ... for a thing which is intellectually separate from matter completely is completely good, and thus the Torah is good in particular; and the opposite of this is that a thing which is material is completely bad (*ra*)... for badness cleaves to matter....By means of the Torah a person may become intellectually separate from matter, and then he is a whole, good creature, and existence is fitting to him....”¹²

Passages such as these recur throughout Maharal’s works. However, in other places Maharal seems to express a rather positive attitude toward the body. Later in the same work,¹³ Maharal writes that despite the fact that the human is a partly physical being, he or she is superior to angels because only the human is created in the divine image or form (*tselem*). For Maharal, this “form” involves some special divine and transcendent “light” which cleaves only to the human, precisely because the human is a material being. (Later in this paper I shall discuss Maharal’s notion of the *tselem* in more detail.) In the course of his discussion Maharal explicitly takes up the question that his position here seems inconsistent with his earlier claim (quoted above) that the body is inferior to that which is not material. That is, if the body is inferior to the non-bodily, how can the human being be superior to an angel? His answer: the body itself is inferior; the *tselem* or transcendent “light” which makes the human superior to the angels is not physical. However, the fact remains that the form or image *requires* a body as a substrate. This seems to indicate a more positive attitude toward the body. Furthermore, in several places, Maharal defends at length the claim that performance of bodily commandments is necessary for achieving a “bonding” (*devekut*) with God.¹⁴

In yet another passage, Maharal disagrees with “those who say that the act of union between man and woman is shameful” and those who go so far as to say that the “sense of touch is a shame” to the human being.¹⁵ Although he does not mention him by name, the target of this criticism appears to be Maimonides, who, citing Aristotle on this subject, says exactly these things.¹⁶ Maharal claims that the sages of the Talmud did not view intercourse as despicable, except insofar as a person intentionally engages in intercourse for the sake gratifying his own desire, rather than for the sake of procreation or for the sake of some divine purpose. Maharal writes that, in and of itself, the act of intercourse is not despicable; on the contrary it is “the foundation upon which everything

is built."¹⁷ Furthermore, he writes that there is nothing despicable about the male sexual organ, except insofar as a person lusts after sexual gratification. Presumably he intends the same point about the sense of touch and the body generally. That is, in and of itself, the body is not despicable; what is despicable is using the body for the sake of gratification. While Maharal clearly derides gratification, here he appears to assert that the the body is, in and of itself, a good thing and not a bad thing.

Can these passages be reconciled with the earlier ones? Haggai Ben-Artzi has discussed this problem.¹⁸ Citing other scholars as well, Ben-Artzi has noted that passages in Maharal's writings seem to support three very different views about how man should relate to the body: 1) One should remove oneself as much as possible from the body (Asceticism). 2) One should find a balance between the spiritual and the bodily (Harmony). 3) One should sanctify the body (*kiddush ha-homer*). Ben-Artzi suggests that all three views are genuinely in Maharal; his resolution consists in the proposal that these represent three developmental stages in the human's spiritual progress.¹⁹ That is, one must first learn to be an ascetic; after one has mastered physical temptation, one may then strive to achieve a balance, and finally, one may then strive to achieve the highest goal, sanctification of the physical.

In effect, Ben-Artzi limits or qualifies the passages that seem to indicate that the body is bad, by saying that this applies only at an early stage of spiritual development. Indeed, it appears that any attempted resolution will have to qualify Maharal's statements about the badness of the body. Nevertheless, I beg to differ from Ben-Artzi's suggestion; it seems to me that for Maharal, even at the highest stage of spiritual development, in some respects a certain kind of asceticism, or denial of the body, remains applicable. But perhaps the negative passages about the body may be qualified in a different way. A distinct possibility is that, like many other philosophers and theologians before him, Maharal uses two different senses of the term bad (*ra*); the body might be inherently bad in one sense and not inherently bad in another sense.²⁰ Let us take note that Maharal accepts the notion there is some sort of equation between Goodness and Being; entities that have greater being are better than entities with lesser being.²¹ Of the three parts of man, the body is the most removed or distant from God, who is the absolutely simple being.²² Matter is finite, composite; God is not. This means that, in one sense, matter or the body is inherently "bad". On the other hand, the *intentional* turning away from God toward that which is limited, is "bad" in another sense; a sense which we might more readily designate by the term "sinful". Clearly, Maharal intends such a distinction, for he claims that aside from the fact that the body is limited and therefore in some sense "bad", there is a destructive, metaphysical force, namely Satan, which seeks to drive the human being away from God and toward death and nothingness.²³ Now the body is not, in this sense, inherently "evil", for in and of itself the body does not turn away from God. On the contrary, the body is in this sense good, for it is the necessary substrate of the human image or form, which (as we shall see later) is the highest and most noble point of contact between God and all creation. Thus,

when Maharal indicates that the body is bad, he means that it is limited and finite; when he indicates that the body is not bad, he means that despite its finitude, it plays a significant role in a positive relationship between the human being and God. (Admittedly, the weakness in this solution is that nowhere, to my knowledge, does Maharal *explicitly* disambiguate two senses of the term "bad".)

II.

Next, let us turn briefly to the soul (*nefesh*). Relative to his discussion of the human body and intellect, Maharal spends little time on the soul, so I shall have relatively little to say about it here. Maharal believes that the soul is a distinct element in the human being. Certain divine commandments pertain specifically to the soul.²⁴ Drawing generously from the philosophical tradition, Maharal says that the soul is the source of motion in the body, and that it is the seat of the emotions.²⁵ Maharal also writes that the soul is a power or force in the body.²⁶ This would seem to imply that, for Maharal, the soul does not remain in existence after death in the world to come, since that world is completely separate from materiality.²⁷ So much for a brief discussion of the soul.

III.

Let us turn now to the intellect (*sekhel*). Basically, the intellect is the power to rationally comprehend ideas and doctrines, especially the Torah, which is an expression of God's intellect.²⁸ Certain commandments pertain especially to the intellect; and it is part of human completion (*hashlamah*) to exercise the intellect; study of the Torah is the main commandment which pertains to and perfects the intellect.²⁹ At least to some extent, the intellect is capable of comprehending necessity, infinity, and in some way, God himself. Relative to the soul and body, the intellect is the least subject to time, space, and contingency. Therefore, the intellect has a greater kinship with God than does the soul or body. It follows that the intellect is superior to soul or body. Maharal claims to find ample support for this claim in Talmudic passages which stress the significance of the study of Torah.³⁰ Needless to say, it is also the case that the doctrine of the superiority of the intellect has philosophical roots in Plato and Aristotle.

Clearly, one of the implications of the view that the intellect is superior to body and soul is that, for Maharal, the intellect plays an important role in one's relationship with God. Despite this, some scholars have portrayed Maharal as something of an anti-rationalist. Writing about what he refers to as the sixteenth century "conflict" between Jewish mysticism and Jewish philosophy, Andre Neher sets up an opposition between "reason" on the one hand and "mysticism" on the other.³¹ He then suggests that Maharal "sought to widen the gap between the two, so that triumphant mysticism might the more easily throw philosophy onto the rubbish heap."³² More recently, Byron Sherwin has written, "For Loew, Jewish philosophy and rationalism are useless distortions of

Judaism, unworthy of legitimacy or even toleration."³³ I shall try to show here that Neher and Sherwin have misconstrued Maharal's intentions. This task is important for this paper because it helps clarify Maharal's subtle perspective on the intellect and its proper role in one's relationship with God.

Neher bases his claim that Maharal sought to reject reason in favor of mysticism on passages in which Maharal argues against the view that God's essence is identical with his intellect, and in favor of the view that the intellect is only one of God's many attributes.³⁴ Maharal cites the *Zohar* and the Kabbalist R. Meir Ibn Gabbai in the course of supporting his view, and vehemently disputes those who would claim that the Kabbalists and the philosophers are saying the same things but in two different languages.³⁵ Indeed Maharal insists that the things being said by the Kabbalah and the philosophers are diametrically opposed.

Clearly, Maharal here disputes the view of the "philosophers", and defends the view of the Kabbalah that God's intellect is not identical with His essence. Perhaps this does represent a profound religious difference. However, it is a serious mistake to construe Maharal's argument as a broadside against "reason" and in favor of "mysticism". We must bear in mind that the term "Kabbalah" does not properly translate as "mysticism", which sometimes carries the insinuation of anti-rationalism. "Kabbalah" translates as "that which is received" or "tradition"; and it is entirely possible that "that which is received" may be rationally defensible. Indeed, Maharal defends the Kabbalistic view of the divine attributes *on rational grounds*; he argues that this view makes more sense, primarily because it is more consistent with the doctrine of the unity or simplicity of God. In other words, when Maharal says that "philosophy" and Kabbalah are diametrically opposed, he means that they are opposed *on the issue at hand*, namely the question of whether God's intellect is identical with God's attributes. When Maharal disputes the "philosophers", he does not intend to impugn rational inquiry or "reason" *per se*; rather, he means to dispute the views of a certain group of thinkers known as "philosophers". (Just as medieval writers often used the term "the philosopher" to refer specifically to Aristotle, so too the term "philosophers" here refers to a specific group of thinkers, typified by Maimonides.) No implication is intended that only "philosophers" attempt to support their views on rational grounds.³⁶

We may further appreciate Maharal's perspective on the human intellect by considering his approach toward the question of whether God's existence can be rationally demonstrated. Sherwin claims that Maharal "assumes God as the only certain existent and never conceives of demonstrating His existence".³⁷ He also claims that Maharal "viewed attempts by Jewish philosophers to demonstrate the existence of God as a needless endeavor and as a potential threat to already affirmed religious beliefs."³⁸ As evidence for his claim, Sherwin cites Maharal's critique of one of Maimonides' proofs which (on Maharal's reading) requires the assumption that the heavenly spheres are eternally in motion.³⁹ Maharal criticizes this proof on the grounds that the assumption contradicts other traditional Jewish beliefs. Sherwin infers that

Maharal found the quest for proofs of God's existence threatening to Judaism. However, Sherwin's argument is flawed; from the fact that Maharal criticizes a proof for God's existence, it does not follow that he is uninterested in finding a *good* proof. Moreover, after criticizing Maimonides' proof, Maharal proceeds not only to give a different proof for God's existence, but also to attribute that proof to the sages of the Talmud, and to claim that this proof is far superior to anything the "philosophers" have suggested!⁴⁰ Like Neher, Sherwin has misconstrued a critique of a view held by some "philosophers" as an indictment of rationality *per se*.

What was Maharal's approach toward the reasonability of accepting the doctrine of the divine revelation of the Torah? In discussing those who reject divine revelation, Maharal writes:

"There are men of analytic bent who follow their reason. They are called philosophers. They wish to enlighten themselves concerning the order and reality of things until they find truth. But they are foolish and walk in darkness. If they really had an interest in wisdom they would acknowledge revelation as their principle and would no longer grope in darkness."⁴¹

Sherwin construes this as a sort of fideistic argument that only revelation as opposed to reason can be the basis of belief. However, this is quite mistaken. In the context, this passage is an introduction by Maharal of an elaborate attempt to give rational proofs for the claim that there must be divinely revealed commandments, mainly on telological grounds that without divine revelation, the human being cannot reach true completion or perfection. Maharal aims to criticize the "philosophers" on their own grounds; thus he writes "if they really had an interest in wisdom", which is to say, "if they really thought things through well enough," they would come to the conclusion that - given certain assumptions which (he believes) both he and they accept - revelation must occur. This is not an argument for revelation and against reason; it is an introduction to an argument that there are reasonable grounds to believe in revelation. (A full account of that argument is beyond the scope of this paper.)

Perhaps a stronger case for the claim that Maharal is an anti-rationalist might have been made on the basis of his discussion of the reasons for commandments. In one place, Maharal writes that we cannot expect to understand the reasons for all the commandments, because they go beyond the human intellect.⁴² However, even here he ultimately suggests that there is a divine intelligence which dictates the commandments.⁴³ We are left with the view that even if some of the commandments don't make sense to us, they do make sense to God; otherwise God would not command them. So, according to Maharal, human reason unaided by revelation would never conceive of many of the commandments. There is a sense, then, in which Maharal believes that without revelation, human reason is too weak to know everything that is true and good. But by the same token, Maharal also believes that some of the main princi-

ples of the Torah can be rationally defended or substantiated, including the principle of revelation itself.

A brief contrast between Maharal and R. Meir Ibn Gabbai is instructive here. As we have already seen, Maharal acknowledges R. Meir as one of his sources. Now the latter argued quite vehemently against the use of unaided human intelligence in the quest to understand God.⁴⁴ R. Meir claimed that only Kabbalah, tradition, can guide one to the truth. He went so far as to reject the study of "philosophy" altogether.⁴⁵ To my knowledge, we do not find the same sort of argument in Maharal's works. Thus, it is accurate to say that Maharal is *more* of a rationalist than R. Meir.

Having said this, it is nonetheless also accurate to say that Maharal is *less* of a rationalist than Maimonides. For one thing, Maharal is less interested than Maimonides in giving proofs for God's existence. And again, Maharal does not think that God's essence is identical with his intellect, as Maimonides indicates in several places;⁴⁶ as we shall see later, Maharal also does *not* think that the human essence is identical with the human intellect. While he attaches great significance to the intellect and the intellectual pursuit of God, he characterizes the ultimate end of the human as *deveikut*, i.e., "bonding" or "cleaving" to God. This has an intellectual component, but it goes beyond the intellect as well. We may say then that Maharal embraces a form of moderate rationalism. This notion will be elaborated in the final section of this paper.

IV.

Let us turn, finally, to the human "image" or "form" (*tselem*).⁴⁷ To repeat, in many places Maharal states that the human has three parts. But he makes clear in one passage that the *tselem* is a fourth aspect. I believe the explanation of this has to do with the fact that the *tselem* is not a "part" of the human being in the same sense as are the body, soul and intellect. Rather the *tselem* is the form (*tsurah*) of the human being, the most basic aspect of human identity.⁴⁸ Thus, when Maharal intends to speak of the "parts" of the human being, he will often neglect to mention the *tselem*, precisely because it is not a "part" in the same sense as the others. In any case, the *tselem* is emphatically not the intellect.⁴⁹ Maharal sharply disagrees with Maimonides on this point. In the same vein, as we saw earlier, Maharal disagrees with Maimonides' claim in the *Guide* that God's essence is identical with His Intellect. For Maharal, God's intellect is one among many of the manifestations or ways in which God reveals himself to the world. It is no accident that Maharal's disagreement with Maimonides concerns both human and divine nature. Again, it may legitimately be said that Maharal is less of a rationalist than Maimonides. However, it does not follow that Maharal denigrates the intellect, nor that he supposes that the human intellect is weak or ineffectual. Of course, he believes the human intellect is limited and finite, but so does Maimonides.

Aside from speaking of the *tselem* as the *tsurah* or "form" of the human being, Maharal also speaks of the *tselem* as a "transcendent light"

(or *nivdal*) which, of all creation including angels and animals, only the human being possesses.⁵⁰ It is of course not a physical light; Maharal makes clear that the term "light" is a way of talking about a spiritual, or non-material aspect of human identity. In virtue of the *tselem*, the human is capable of a unique relationship with God. Maharal further claims that this *tselem* is possessable to a greater or lesser degree; that is, it can be virtually lost and then regained depending on one's behavior. In particular, the Patriarchs and, in general, the descendants of Israel maintain the *tselem*; whereas the gentiles, in general, possess it to a lesser degree.⁵¹ Maharal relates this notion to several Talmudic parables or *midrashim*.⁵² It is said that the souls of the righteous are directly *underneath* the divine "throne of glory". It is also said that the form of Jacob the Patriarch's face cleaves to the throne. Interpreting these parables, Maharal says that the nearness and kinship to the "throne of glory" signifies a nearness and kinship to the divine being, and a particular suitability to receive revelation and to achieve *devekut* or cleaving to God. The *tselem* constitutes the human being's most fundamental connection with God; the full realization of that connection is *devekut*. The *tselem* is the holiest and most noble aspect of the human being, and it signifies the potential for a place in the world to come. It is because of the *tselem* that the human being is the focal point of all creation, and in virtue of the *tselem*, the human being is at least capable of reaching a more elevated status than the angels. Again, this is a point of difference between Maharal and Maimonides, for latter seems to think that the angels of glory are superior to humans, and utterly rejects the notion that man is the focal point of creation.⁵³

According to Maharal, it is in virtue of possessing the *tselem* that the human being has free choice.⁵⁴ Thus the human being is similar to God in a unique way; just as God is the King over all, the human is the king (by God's wish) over the globe. Angels do not possess free choice; this is another point of difference with Maimonides and agreement with R. Meir.⁵⁵ However, I think it would be a mistake to say that, for Maharal, the *tselem* just is the capacity for free choice.⁵⁶ Rather, it seems that the *tselem* remains fundamentally irreducible and indefinable. Although he does not explicitly say so, Maharal's conception of the *tselem* and its relation to the three parts of the human being parallels the Kabbalistic conception of the infinite divine essence (the *eyn sof*) and its relation to the divine attributes (*sefirot*).⁵⁷ This conception is described, for example, in the work of R. Meir Ibn Gabbai, based on the *Bahir* and the *Zohar*.⁵⁸ That is, we have the following analogy: The human *tselem* stands to the body, soul, and intellect, as the infinite, ineffable divine essence stands to the divine attributes. So, just as God is not *essentially* an intellectual being, nor a merciful being, nor a just being, nor, for that matter, a being who rules with free choice, so too the human is not *essentially* an intellectual being, nor an emotional being, nor a physical being, nor, for that matter, a being who acts with free choice. The *tselem* of the human, like the essence of God, is fundamentally indefinable.

In a somewhat paradoxical fashion, Maharal claims that although the *tselem* itself is not a physical entity, it can subsist only in something that

is material. That is, the *tselem* requires a body. Again, this is similar to the Kabbalistic notion that in order to be made manifest, the Infinite divine essence requires a medium, namely, the ten divine attributes (*sefirot*). Moreover, Maharal says that certain particular aspects of the human body are expressive of the *tselem*. These include, the human face and the erect posture of the human being.⁵⁹ Maharal claims that these aspects of the human body notably represent, in the first case, the spiritual “light” or special relationship between God and the human, and, in the second case, the human’s capacity for dominion or rulership over the globe, paralleling God’s dominion over the universe. In any case, while these aspects of the human body represent the *tselem*, the *tselem* is not reducible to them. This fits with the Kabbalistic notion that while the infinite divine essence is represented by, but not reducible to, the ten divine attributes, these attributes make up the image of a “Primal Man”, which is in turn symbolically represented by the human physique.⁶⁰

Maharal claims that just as the body is necessary as a substrate of the *tselem*, so too the Torah, which is in reality a metaphysical entity, requires a material substrate, i.e., the physical human being who fulfills the word of the Torah.

“...The Torah, which is a transcendent intellect, requires a material substrate; and just as the image of God which is found in man and not angels requires a material receptor, so is it necessary for anything which is completely transcendent to have a receptor that is material.”⁶¹

We may ask, why is it necessary for the *tselem* to have a “material receptor”? Maharal’s answer lies in passages such as this one:

“...God is absolutely simple; therefore he chose lowly ones who are simple and have no high rank ... and therefore this [unique] connection must be only with man who is flesh and blood”⁶²

The basic point seems to be that it is *because* the simplicity of God is absolute that it can best be made manifest within something that is most inferior, i.e., finite, physical reality. Similarly, in another passage, Maharal writes that the fact that God is the ultimate agent and cause of the universe is best made manifest not by the adoration of God by angels, but rather by the worship (*avodah*) of God by physical human beings, precisely because the physical human being is at the *lowest* level of the chain of agency and causation in the universe.⁶³ A full discussion of these claims would require an analysis of Maharal’s metaphysics, which I will not undertake here. For the present purpose, it must suffice to say that while Maharal identifies the *tselem* as the most elevated and transcendent aspect of the human being, he also claims that the *tselem* requires a physical, finite body in order to subsist.⁶⁴

In summation of this paper, Maharal’s view of the human being is a blend of ideas drawn from the Scriptural, Talmudic, philosophical, and Kabbalistic traditions. According to Maharal, rationality, emotion, and physicality are all significant parts of the human being; each of these

parts has an important role to play in human and Jewish life. Yet, beyond these three parts, there is the *tselem*, which is the most fundamental, yet indefinable, aspect of human identity. While intellect, soul, and body must all play a role in one's relationship with God, it is ultimately by virtue of the ineffable *tselem* that the human may develop a relationship or kinship with the ineffable divine essence of God.

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NOTES

1. This paper is a revision of an oral presentation at a meeting of the Academy of Jewish Philosophy in 1994. Thanks are due to members of the Academy and Eleonore Stump for comments and suggestions. Thanks are also due to Anne-Marie Karpinsky for helping me understand Andre Neher's work in French.

2. The most recent full length work appears to be Byron Sherwin's book *Mystical Theology and Social Dissent: The Life and Works of Judah Loew of Prague* (London: Associated University Presses, 1982); Andre Neher's major (French) book on the Maharal, *Le Puits de l'Exil* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1966) has not been translated, but his work on David Gans, which also discusses Maharal, has been translated as *Jewish Thought and the Scientific Revolution in the Sixteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986). See also Marvin Fox, "The Moral Philosophy of Maharal" in *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, edited by D. Cooperman (Cambridge: Harvard University Center for Jewish Studies, 1983).

3. Sherwin (*Mystical Theology*, p. 217, n.27) lists, among others, the following citations: *Derekh Ha-Hayyim*, pp. 79; *Netivot Olam* vol.1:p. 12; vol.II: pp.43,233,239; *Tiferet Yisrael*, p. 8, p. 164. See also *Derekh Ha-Hayyim*, p. 188; *Gevurot Ha-Shem*, p.155. (All references to the works of the Maharal in this paper are to the Hebrew edition printed in Jerusalem, 1971.) It should also be noted that there are some passages where Maharal seems to collapse the distinction between *nefesh* and *sekhel*, as in *Gevurot Ha-Shem* p. 307; *Be'er Ha-Golah*, p. 108. See also *Tiferet Yisrael*, p.8, where Maharal speaks of the *nefesh sikhli*. In such contexts, apparently Maharal uses the term *nefesh* in a broader sense, i.e., to connote the non-bodily dimension of the human, which may include the *sekhel*. Similarly, Maharal occasionally uses the term *neshamah* in such a broad sense (*Tiferet Yisrael*, p. 16). Finally, Maharal also claims that the soul (*nefesh*) itself has three parts (*Drush Le-Shabbat Ha-Gadol*, p.224). This is a subtlety I shall not address in this paper.

4. See *Derekh Ha-Hayyim*, pp. 141-147; see also pp. 163 and 189, where the *tselem* as a fourth aspect is hinted at, although not explicitly mentioned.

5. For Maharal's discussion of matter in general, see *Gevurot Ha-Shem* pp. 29ff.

6. In some cases, Maharal goes so far as to state that light is not material at all. See *Nezah Yisrael* p. 101, *Netivot Olam*, vol. II, p. 136.

7. *Gevurot Ha-Shem* p. 29ff.; on Moses, see *idem*, p. 78. See also note 48 below.

8. *Tiferet Yisrael*, p. 31.

9. Compare *Tiferet Yisrael*, chapters 57 -59 with R. Meir Ibn-Gabai's *Avodat Ha-Kodesh*, II: 25,26, 43. On this point, it appears Maharal agrees with Moses Maimonides and sharply disagrees with R. Meir Ibn Gabbai.

10. Saadia Gaon, *Emunot ve-Deot* III:10; IX:8.

11. Introduction to *Derekh Ha-Hayyim*, p. 8. Unless otherwise indicated,

all translations in this paper are mine.

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.
13. *Derekh Ha-Hayyim*, pp.234 ff.
14. For example, see *Tiferet Yisrael*, chapters 9, 59.
15. *Be'er Ha-Golah*, pp. 93-94.
16. *Guide to the Perplexed*, III:8.
17. *Be'er Ha-Golah*, p. 93.
18. Haggai Ben-Artzi, *Ha-Yahas bein Homer ve-Ruah be-Netivot Olam shel ha-Maharal*, in *Da'at*, 1987:vol. 18; pp. 45-53.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
20. Cf. Maimonides' discussion of badness or evil in *Guide*, III:10.
21. See *Gevurot Ha-Shem*, chs. 4, 17; *Tiferet Yisrael* ch. 12; *Netivot Olam* vol.II:p.124. On the doctrine that being and goodness are connected, see *Being and Goodness*, edited by Scott MacDonald (Cornell, 1991); on the notion of the hierarchy of being, consult "Metaphysical Foundations of the Hierarchy of Being According to Some Late-Medieval and Renaissance Philosophers," by Edward Mahoney, in *Philosophies of Existence*, edited by Morewedge (New York, 1982).
22. *Netivot Olam* vol. II: p. 2.
23. See *Netivot Olam* vol. II:p.126; *Tiferet Yisrael* pp.148-149.
24. *Drush le-Shabbat Tshuvah*, p. 78.
25. See *Ibid.*; *Gevurot Ha-Shem*, p.166; *Tiferet Yisrael*, p.8.
26. *Tiferet Yisrael*, p.110.
27. See *Tiferet Yisrael* 57-59.
28. *Tiferet Yisrael*, ch. 4
29. *Tiferet Yisrael*, ch. 16.
30. *Tiferet Yisrael*, ch. 13, pp. 45-46.
31. See *Jewish Thought and the Scientific Revolution in the Sixteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 28-29
32. *Ibid.*, p.29.
33. Sherwin, *Mystical Theology*, p.60.
34. *Derekh Ha-Hayyim* p. 234.
35. As Neher remarks in *Jewish Thought and the Scientific Revolution* (p.32 and pp.34-36), here Maharal targets for criticism his contemporary R. Moshe Isserlis.
36. In his article, *Hokhmat ha-Sod u-Filosofia be-Mishnato shel ha-Maharal mi-Prag* (in *Hitgalut, Emunah, Tevunah*, Halamish and Schwarcz eds., Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 1976) Binyamin Gross starts by following Neher in seeing the Maharal as an antagonist of "reason" and a proponent of "mysticism". From what I have already said, it should be clear that I object to this way of framing the Maharal's position; he is an antagonist of a *certain view* held by the philosophers and a proponent of a *certain view* held by the Kabbalists. Nevertheless, I have no disagreement with the bulk the article, in which Gross discusses Maharal's theoretical motivations for disputing the view of the philosophers on the nature of the divine attributes.
37. *Mystical Theology*, p. 56.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
39. Maharal writes:

"Behold, Maimonides built the foundation of his demonstration upon the assumption of eternal motion. But this is in opposition to the faith. We do not assent to this assumption. Since we cannot assent to the assumption, the entire demonstration collapses."

This is Sherwin's translation of a passage in chapter 2 of *Netiv ha-Shalom* (in

Netivot Olam, vol. I p. 224).

40. Maharal's text continues:

"But the the proof of the Rabbis of blessed memory ... is not from this angle, but from the angle of the motion itself, for it is impossible that this motion should be from the essence of the sphere, for the sphere is not completely in act for only God is in pure act and so God is the true agent .. of the motion....The motion [of the spheres] is from God, and thus it is apparent that they are caused and not divine. And this proof is more compelling than anything which the philosophers have said...."

This translation is mine (*Netivot Olam*, vol. I p. 224). See also chapter 6 of *Netiv Ha-Zedakah* (*Netivot Olam*, vol. I p. 181) for another, briefer, proof of God's existence. Incidentally, I do not here pass judgment on Maharal's critique of Maimonides, nor on Maharal's proofs of God existence. My concern here is Maharal's view on the efficacy of reason and its role in the human being's relationship with God.

41. *Mystical Theology*, pp. 60-61; Sherwin's translation from a passage in *Tiferet Yisrael*, p. 50.

42. *Tiferet Yisrael*, p. 29.

43. *Tiferet Yisrael*, p. 31.

44. *Avodat Ha-Kodesh*, III:15.

45. *Avodat Ha-Kodesh*, III:16.

46. See *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot Yesoday Ha-Torah* 2:10; *Guide to the Perplexed* I:68. Scholars have debated whether this position is consistent with the belief in a personal deity. For a recent discussion of this issue, see Menachem Kellner, *Maimonides on Human Perfection* (Atlanta: Scholars press, 1990), especially ch. 7.

47. The main discussion is in *Derekh Ha-Hayyim*, pp. 141-147. On Maharal's notion of the *tselem*, see Yoram Jacobson's very thorough article, "Tselem Elohim u-Ma'amado ke-Makor Ra'ato shel Adam lefi ha-Maharal mi-Prag", in *Da'at*, 1987:19, pp. 103-136.

48. *Gevurot Ha-Shem*, p. 311; *Netivot Olam*, vol. II. p. 53.

49. The clearest statement of this is in *Derekh Ha-Hayyim*, p. 142. Compare *Tiferet Yisrael*, ch. 24; *Gevurot Ha-Shem*, ch. 67. On p. 169 of *Gevurot Ha-Shem*, Maharal writes that the "main part of the human (*ikkar ha-adam*) is the *sekhel*"; but in that context, where Maharal compares the hand-phyllacteries (*tefillin shel yad*) to the head-phyllacteries (*tefillin shel rosh*), we may interpret this statement in a relative sense, that is, *relative to the body*, the *sekhel* is the more essential part of the human.

50. *Derekh Ha-Hayyim*, p. 143; *Netivot Olam*, vol. II. p. 53.

51. *Derekh Ha-Hayyim*, p.146. Incidentally, it should be noted that, for Maharal, the possession of the *tselem* (or any other superior quality) by Israelites cannot be a genetic matter, since Judaism accepts converts. Indeed, the patriarch Abraham was a convert.

52. *Tiferet Yisrael*, p. 73.

53. See *Guide*, III:12-13.

54. *Derekh Ha-Hayyim*, pp.147-148.

55. *Guide*, II:7; *Avodat Ha-Kodesh*, III:7.

56. Sherwin seems to suggest this in *Mystical Theology*, p. 118.

57. Incidentally, despite the legend of the Maharal's creation of a "golem" or robot, there appears to be little resemblance between Maharal's notion of the *tselem* and occultic notions of *tselem* as an "astral body", found in some Kabbalistic literature, including parts of the *Zohar*. For a discussion

of this approach to the *tselem*, see Gershom Scholem, *Pirkei Yesod be-Havanat ha-Kabbalah u-Semaleha* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1980), ch. 10.

58. *Avodat Ha-Kodesh*, I:17,18.

59. *Derekh Ha-Hayyim*, pp. 142-143; *Netivot Olam*, vol. II. p. 53.

Kabbalah also teaches that specific human limbs correspond to specific divine attributes (*sefirot*).

60. See G. Scholem, *Kabbalah* (New York:Dorset Press, 1974), p. 153.

61. *Tiferet Yisrael*, p.75.

62. *Nezah Yisrael*, p. 75.

63. *Netivot Olam*, *Netiv Ha-Anavah*, ch. 1; *Gevurot Ha-Shem*, ch. 67.

64. One problem which remains is whether it is consistent for Maharal to hold that the *tselem* may exist in the next world, despite his position that the next world is completely separate from matter (see reference above, n.26).