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FREEDOM, REPENTANCE AND HARDENING OF THE HEARTS: ALBO VS. MAIMONIDES

David Shatz

The doctrine that God hardens some agents' hearts generates philosophical perplexities. Why would God deprive someone of free will and the opportunity to repent? Or is God's interference compatible with the agent's free will and his having an opportunity to repent? In this paper, I examine how two Jewish philosophers, Moses Maimonides and Joseph Albo, handled these questions. I analyze six approaches growing out of their writings and argue that a naturalistic interpretation of hardening — as irreversible habituation — has advantages over alternative approaches. This account of hardening, however, fits best with the thesis that God does sometimes intervene to *improve* an agent's will.

When philosophers debate whether free will and moral responsibility are compatible with determinism, their discussion rivets on two kinds of challenges to free will: divine foreknowledge and scientific determinism. Although intense controversy rages over whether these factors are compatible with free will and responsibility, some version of the following thesis is nonetheless usually accepted by all sides: that, when an agent *S* interferes directly to affect agent *V*'s motivational system in a way that does not involve rational persuasion (brainwashing, hypnosis, and the like), such interference will normally preclude *V*'s freely performing and bearing responsibility for acts that the intervention caused. But traditional theism, including Judaism in particular, seems to allow that at times God does interfere directly with people's motivations. Is God's interference compatible with the agent's free will and moral responsibility? If it is not compatible, why would God deprive someone of free will and moral responsibility? Or does God not really interfere after all? In what follows, I consider these questions from the perspective of Jewish philosophy.¹

Two theological doctrines suggest— in an especially vivid way— that God interferes in people's motivational systems in a problematic fashion. One is hardening of the hearts. The other, for which Judaism has no convenient name, is what Christians call sanctification and, in the context of Jewish philosophy, I will call "betterment."²

In hardening of the hearts God makes a person will a wicked act; in "betterment," He makes the person will good acts. The showcase example of heart-hardening occurs during the Israelites' enslavement in Egypt. In three instances— the sixth, eighth and ninth of the ten plagues— we read words to the effect that "The Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and [so]



he did not let the people [of Israel] go." God also says that when Moses will *warn* the king of the impending death of the Egyptians' firstborn, He will cause Pharaoh not to listen. During the final plague, Pharaoh finally relents and releases the Israelites. But shortly after that, his heart is hardened again, and he decides to pursue the Israelites into the sea.³ Likewise, the Moabite king Sihon is "hardened" by God to be hostile to Israel in order that he be delivered into Israel's hands; later, the same kind of story is related about the army of Canaan in the time of Joshua.⁴ (Proverbs 21:1 informs us that "the heart of a king is in the Lord's hands like streams of water; He will turn it to whatever He wants."⁵) Without referring to hardening per se, the prophet Elijah insinuates that God has led the hearts of the sinning Israelites astray.⁶ But how can free will and moral responsibility for hardened acts coexist with determination of one's will by another agent? Or are we to say Pharaoh and Sihon, for example, lacked free will and incurred no moral responsibility for their hardened acts?

Similarly with sanctification or betterment: Deuteronomy 30:6 promises that God will "circumcise the hearts of you and your descendants." Ostensibly what is meant is that God will remove your inclination for evil. Again, God tells Ezekiel that He will give the people a "new heart" and "new spirit" and will remove their "heart of stone" (Ezek. 36:26). The Hebrew prayerbook includes a plea to "*compel* our evil inclination to be subjugated to You." But can sanctified ("bettered") agents be thought of as free and responsible?

At times, Jewish philosophers, fearing that hardening as ordinarily understood is incompatible with free will and moral responsibility, have gone to considerable exegetical lengths to deny that the term "hardening the heart" has anything to do with intervention in motivational systems. The phrase has been interpreted variously to connote, for example, providing respite or keeping someone alive, thereby preserving the compatibility of hardening with freedom and moral responsibility.⁷ But these expedients are necessary only if, in addition to embracing the proposition that hardening as ordinarily understood is incompatible with free will and moral responsibility, one embraces the thesis of Saadya Gaon (882-942), the father of medieval Jewish philosophy, "that the Creator. . . does not in any way interfere with the actions of men and that He does not exercise any force upon them either to obey or disobey Him."⁸ There are Jewish philosophers who do *not* endorse Saadya's no-intervention thesis, and I focus here on two of them: Moses Maimonides (1138-1204), the greatest and most authoritative of Jewish philosophers, and the later Spanish philosopher Joseph Albo (ca. 1380-1444).⁹

Each of these philosophers generates more than one approach to the problem of hardening. In all we will consider six proposals. Two are stimulated by reading Albo: separating them somewhat artificially, in a way he does not, I will call them the modest and the bold claims. Two are explicit in Maimonides: hardening as punishment by free will deprivation; and hardening as punishment by repentance deprivation. Finally, two others, while not explicit in Maimonides, grow out of certain general tendencies in his thought and are at least loosely related to some of his statements about hardening. These are: hardening as God carrying out the agent's real choic-

es; hardening as irreversible habituation. Of these six, the last differs by virtue of its understanding hardening naturalistically— God does not directly intervene in the hardened agent’s motivational makeup after all, though in some sense, as we shall see, the hardening is imputable to Him (He is the first cause, or the source of nature’s laws, including psychological ones). I will locate difficulties in the other five strategies, and the resulting conclusion that the sixth is strongest philosophically is of some significance. I will try to meet certain textual objections that can be raised to this solution, and then will connect the naturalistic approach to hardening to the question of how best to understand betterment. Throughout the paper I assume that a “solution” to the hardening and betterment problems must satisfy two criteria. It must be philosophically cogent; but it also must be compatible with, if not directly supported by, the Bible’s narrative and terminology. (Albo and Maimonides say much about hardening and little about betterment. I will follow them in this emphasis, but at a later stage we will pause to see how their claims work vis-a-vis betterment.¹⁰)

Before proceeding we should be alert to the fact that Albo’s strategy and Maimonides’ first two strategies differ in a profound and fundamental way. To put matters roughly, Maimonides, in his “explicit,” “exoteric” statements, is an “H-incompatibilist.” He thinks that, when God hardens an agent’s heart, that agent does not act freely and does not bear responsibility for his or her hardened acts. Consequently his “exoteric” approaches see the hardening as *eliminating* Pharaoh’s free will and responsibility, and his analyses labor to explain why God would do such a thing. Albo, on the other hand, is a compatibilist about hardening: he thinks that when God hardens an agent’s heart, that agent acts with freedom and responsibility. As a result, Albo views the hardening as *restoring*, not eliminating, the hardened agent’s freedom. To be sure, the contrast just set out is somewhat deceptive, since Maimonides and Albo do not conceive the *process* of hardening in the same way; Albo might think (and I believe does think) that free will and moral responsibility are incompatible with hardening as Maimonides conceives it, while Maimonides might think (though I doubt this) that free will and moral responsibility are compatible with hardening as Albo conceives it. But for all that the strategies are sharply different. By contrast, the final two solutions we will consider in connection with Maimonides (the inexplicit, esoteric ones) do not deny the compatibility of hardening and responsibility but instead affirm it.¹¹

1. The problems

Before looking at Albo and Maimonides, we need to define more precisely the problems that hardening and betterment pose. “The problem of hardening” is usually formulated as a problem of free will deprivation: If God causes Pharaoh to will an evil act, namely, keeping the Israelites enslaved, has God not deprived a human being of free will? And isn’t free will a great good? Now this particular problem depends on a judgment about the value of free will; for that reason, it emerges most forcefully in theological belief systems that explain evil in terms of a free will theodicy, in which suffering and wrongdoing are justified by the “greater good” of

free will and responsible moral choices.¹² It is not clear, however, that Jewish philosophers are wedded to a free will theodicy, and in fact, some Jewish texts suggest that free will per se is not as great a value as free will theodicies imply. For example, authoritative Jewish sources at times justify coercion, and this casts doubt on the proposition that the value of free will outweighs the disvalue of bad behavior. When the biblical God tries to secure obedience to His commands by promising rewards for compliance and threatening dire punishments for disobedience, this, too, undermines the value of free will, since it is a form of coercion. There are also doctrines in Jewish thought to the effect that having free choice is not as good a state as doing right automatically.¹³ Hence the free will deprivation problem rests on a premise about the value of free will that may not hold true in Judaism.¹⁴ It is one thing to affirm the existence of free will, another to say that God *never* exerts compulsion or influence on motivation. If it is not required of God to preserve *all* human free choices in *all* situations, the free will deprivation problem will barely get off the ground, at least when the deprivation serves a purpose.¹⁵ H-compatibilism need not be sought, nor the expedient of denying that hardening signifies divine intervention.

But the conundrum of hardening does not disappear so quickly. First of all, some philosophers, among them Saadya and Maimonides, and I suspect Albo too, have to address hardening precisely because they value free choice highly; regardless of how much value *other* sources in Judaism assign to free will, the problem of free will deprivation emerges fully and forcefully *for those philosophers*. Second, the purpose of hardening has to be spelled out even in the absence of a specific problem; there is a difference, to which I shall return, between *defending* God (by saying He didn't do anything objectionable by depriving someone of free will) and *explaining His motivations*. Third, disposing of the free will deprivation problem by altering our value judgments about free will still leaves us with three *other* difficulties:

The responsibility problem: If God causes Pharaoh to will an evil act, namely, keeping the Israelites enslaved, why should Pharaoh be held responsible for this act?

The repentance-prevention problem: If God wants sinners to repent, as Judaism preaches, why would God prevent any individual from changing his ways for the better?

The causation problem: If God causes Pharaoh to will an evil act, namely, keeping the Israelites enslaved, has God not (a) caused an evil act, (b) made a person morally worse, and (c) caused further suffering to the Israelites and Egyptians?

All of these problems are formidable even if we are not troubled by God's taking away free will. The Jewish philosophers we shall discuss are concerned with responsibility and repentance, not only free will deprivation.¹⁶ Furthermore, repentance, on many accounts, must be a free act. Even though, taken in isolation, the free will deprivation problem might be solved by demoting the value of free will, to concede that Pharaoh lacks free will is also to concede, *prima facie*, that God deprived him of the pos-

sibility for repentance. So it is not only the strong statements of Saadya and Maimonides affirming free will that create the difficulty about hardening. (With regard to betterment, the key problem is of course free will deprivation and moral responsibility; the repentance issue does not apply.)

2. Albo's two claims: summary

Although Maimonides lived a few centuries before Albo, I will look first at Albo's solution. Here are Albo's words:

In this way we can explain what is found in Scripture: that the Lord strengthens the hearts of evil persons, or makes them stiff-necked, and withholds from them the ways of repentance. When adversity comes upon the evildoer he becomes pious-looking and returns to the Lord from the fear of punishment. As Pharaoh stated, "The Lord is the righteous one; I and my people are the wicked ones" [Exodus 9:27] And because this [his act] is like one that is compelled rather than free, the Lord strengthens His heart. . . and therefore he says that this adversity came by accident and not because of divine providence. This is done in order to remove from his heart the softness it acquired because of the adversity, so that the person will remain in his natural state and his state of choice without anything compelling him, and then it may be determined whether his repentance was an instance of free choice. . . . The Lord leaves [the evildoer] to his free choice without any external compulsion, and he chooses a path for himself.¹⁷

We may distinguish two claims in Albo's text, which he melds into one unified strategy.¹⁸ The first claim is that had God *not* hardened Pharaoh's heart, and Pharaoh would have therefore released the Israelites due to the mounting pressure of the plagues, this would not have been a free choice on Pharaoh's part anyway and would not have constituted repentance; rather, the decision to release would then have been *coerced*. According to this claim taken by itself (i.e., without the rest of what Albo says), Pharaoh's actual act of keeping the Israelites enslaved (the "hardened" act) may be unfree due to its being caused by God's intervention, but the charge that God has "deprived" Pharaoh of free will is false, since Pharaoh is not *less free* than if God had not intervened. Also, Pharaoh would not have genuinely repented had he succumbed to the plagues' pressure.

We may call this the "modest" claim. The modest claim is content to affirm a parity between the status of Pharaoh's "hardened" act and the status of the act he would have performed had his heart not been hardened. The modest claim does not try to show, however, that the *hardened* act is free. The modest claim therefore is not a form of H-compatibilism, but rather can go along with an incompatibilist view of hardening.

However, Albo's second claim takes precisely this step: to claim that, despite its being produced by God's intervention, Pharaoh's act of keeping the Israelites enslaved is free. The key here is Albo's depiction of the "mechanics" of hardening. Albo believes that when God "hardens"

Pharaoh's heart, this means merely that he *strengthens* Pharaoh's heart, giving him the fortitude not to let the plagues automatically dictate a decision to release the Israelites. Pharaoh, in Albo's story, is— thanks to the hardening — left with a choice: whether to release the Israelites or to keep them enslaved. It is the existence of this choice that makes his act of keeping them enslaved a free act; he has open to him a genuine alternative, namely, to release them. And it is this same choice that means he has a possibility to repent. His ultimate failure to release the Israelites is free, then, because Pharaoh chooses between two alternatives and neither alternative is coerced. Albo is not a strong H-compatibilist: hardening in the straightforward sense of God imposing a motivational structure is not compatible with freedom. But Albo is an H-compatibilist in the sense that hardening *as he explains it* — the unsolicited removal by another agent of certain psychological impediments like fears and internal pressures, resulting in bad acts— is compatible with free will and moral responsibility. I shall refer to the claim that the hardened act is free and responsible as the "bold" claim.¹⁹

It might seem as if trying to combine the modest and bold claims gives the theist unnecessary work. Aren't the problems solved by using *either* claim? Is it really necessary to establish *both*? The answer is somewhat complicated. Suppose we paraphrase the modest claim as:

(M) If God had not hardened Pharaoh's heart, and Pharaoh would have released the Israelites because of the pressure of the plagues, Pharaoh's release of them would have been unfree.

Next let us paraphrase the bold claim as:

(B) By hardening Pharaoh's heart, God brought about a situation in which Pharaoh freely chose to keep the Israelites enslaved and had a chance to repent.

Now suppose a theist were to adopt (M) without (B). A critic might then respond to the theist, "but by hardening Pharaoh's heart, God brought it about that he acted unfreely anyway. So (M) does not explain *why* God hardened Pharaoh's heart. It shows only that the hardening did not 'deprive' the king of freedom (he would have acted unfreely had he released them). And it did not 'deprive' him of the possibility of repenting, since his 'repentance' would not have been real repentance anyway. (M) is a *defense* of God against the charge that he has taken away someone's free will; it is not an *explanation* of His ways." Once we supplement (M) with (B), however, a reply to this concern is at hand: we may explain that God hardened Pharaoh's heart *in order to* ensure that Pharaoh acted freely and had a chance to repent. Adding (B) to (M), in other words, provides an *explanation* and not merely a *defense*.

Similarly, suppose someone were to adopt (B) without (M). A critic might then respond to such a theist, "but hardening Pharaoh's heart was not needed in order to bring it about that Pharaoh acted freely and had a chance to repent. Had God not hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would have released the Israelites, this too would have been a free act and would have constituted

repentance. So (B) does not explain *why* God hardened Pharaoh's heart. It shows only that the hardening did not make the king act unfreely and deprive him of a chance to repent." Once we supplement (B) with (M), we may explain that God hardened Pharaoh's heart *in order to* ensure that Pharaoh acted freely and had a chance to repent, thus answering the critic.²⁰

Once a theist adopts both (B) and (M), then, he *may* claim that God hardened Pharaoh's heart precisely in order to ensure Pharaoh's free will and/or the possibility of repentance. So, conjoining (M) with (B) may be necessary if the theist wants an *explanation* of hardening and not merely a defense. And yet, it still may be unnecessary work on the theist's part, for there are other possible reasons for God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart. Several times, the Bible implies that God hardened Pharaoh's heart because by continuing the plagues God enhanced His power in the eyes of Egyptians and Israelites alike, leading them to "knowledge" of Him. To instill that knowledge, it was necessary for him to manifest His power over sea, earth, and heaven fully, and that required that the plagues run their full course.²¹ If that explanation is correct, then the theist does not need *both* (M) and (B) to construct an explanation of the hardening. On the other hand, it should be noted that some interpreters think that God meant to enhance his glory *by* Pharaoh's eventually repenting.²² Hence whether (M) and (B) are both necessary depends on how one understands the motive behind the hardening.

In sum, a theist needs only *one* of the two claims—modest or bold—to construct a *defense*; but he will have an *explanation* only if he either (a) establishes both the modest and the bold claim, or (b) if he accepts the "greater manifestation of power" account of why God hardened the heart. Unfortunately, *both* the modest and the bold claims, as we have explained them, are open to challenge.

3. Albo's modest claim: coercion and free will

Consider first the modest claim. The modest claim supposes that an act performed in the presence of coercive incentives is not free. Consider, however, the condition that traditional compatibilists (not H-compatibilists) impose on free will: an agent does as he wants and because he wants it; also, he would do otherwise if he wanted to do otherwise. Now a coerced agent does as he wants and because he wants it; also, he would do otherwise if he wanted to do otherwise. On a simple compatibilist analysis, therefore, a coerced act is free, and had Pharaoh released the Israelites, this would have counted as a free act—contrary to Albo.

To be sure, Albo need not accept the compatibilist's analysis. He might even join with those who object to compatibilism precisely because it ostensibly carries the consequence that coerced acts are free. But Bernard Williams raises the following more general argument for treating coerced acts as free:

If we are not to count as exercising freewill in cases of this kind [cases of coercion], then we never exercise it, since all choices operate in a space of alternatives constrained by the cost of various possibilities.²³

If a road you wish to take is blocked by some nonhuman danger (e.g., steadily falling rocks), and you therefore choose another road, we regard your choice as free. If a road you wish to take is blocked not by a rockslide but by a gunman who threatens to shoot you if you pass through, and as a result you must take another road, why should we treat this any differently?²⁴ So wonder Williams and others: after all, in both cases, the option of taking the other road exists, it is just too costly—it has been rendered “ineligible.”²⁵ Williams’ argument challenges Albo to differentiate cases of coercion, which he regards as unfree, from other cases in which only one option is reasonable for an agent yet the agent acts freely.²⁶ Until that is done, plainly the modest claim is not completely successful.²⁷

Even supposing that coerced acts are unfree, however, we may differentiate between *coercion*, in which a person has only one “eligible alternative” and nothing else is an “eligible alternative” for him, and *duress*, in which a person has two eligible alternatives but feels pressured by other agents into accepting one of them. Since a person has eligible alternative possibilities when acting under duress, arguably an act done out of duress is a free act even if a coerced act is not. Now according to the modest claim, had Pharaoh released the Israelites because of the plagues, this would have been an unfree act because it would have been coerced. But can it not be regarded as an act performed under duress, in the special sense of duress that I outlined? Recall that Pharaoh had showed great strength of will in not releasing the Israelites during the first five plagues, and also that in some of the later plagues, he hardens his own heart, without divine assistance.²⁸ It is hard to believe that, even though he defies intimidation on his own on both earlier and later occasions, Pharaoh *could not* have chosen to keep the Israelites enslaved after the sixth, eighth, and ninth plagues. Rather, at most we can say that he merely *would not* have so chosen if not for the hardening.²⁹ If Pharaoh had eligible alternative possibilities, as I am suggesting, then releasing the Israelites due to the plagues would have been not a coerced act but an act under duress, and Albo should regard it as free. It would have come at a cost that Pharaoh would be willing to pay, and thinks he ought to pay, to avert further devastation, even though he also recognizes reasons for keeping the Israelites as slaves.³⁰

4. Albo’s modest claim (continued): levels of repentance

Albo claims that had Pharaoh released the Israelites under pressure of the plagues, this would not have qualified as an act of repentance. But the Talmud distinguishes between repentance out of fear (*teshuvah mi-yir`ah*) and repentance out of love (*teshuvah me-ahavah*).³¹ Interpreters differ over details of this distinction, but there is general agreement that repentance out of fear is repentance due to fear of punishment, while repentance out of love is motivated by something higher, for example, a recognition of the inherent wrongness of one’s past deeds and a commitment to living rightly in the future for the right reason: love of God. Repentance out of fear is *a* level of repentance, albeit a low one. Had Pharaoh chosen to release the Israelites due to pressure of the plagues, this would have constituted a form of repentance. Albo therefore cannot claim that Pharaoh would not be

repenting *at all* were he to release the Israelites due to pressure of the plagues, but only that he would not be repenting *out of love*. It is hard to see why God must go so far as to make repentance out of love possible for Pharaoh. Albo thus seems to place excessively strict constraints on repentance, ignoring the fear\ love distinction. In fact, insofar as it is natural to assume that an act of repentance is free, the fact that the release under pressure would have constituted an act of repentance validates the earlier charge that the release under pressure would have been free rather than unfree.

Fortunately, Albo himself raises the question of why Pharaoh could not attain the level of repentance from fear by releasing the Israelites due to pressure of the plagues. He argues, by way of response, that there is a distinction between "repentance out of fear" and the situation in which Pharaoh found himself, a situation he characterizes as "*ones*" (coercion or duress). As Albo describes repentance from fear, "even in a time of respite, the fear of God is before him, and he has fear and trepidation due to anxiety over his tribulations because he believes that these all come from God as retribution and punishment [as opposed to chance]." "Repentance out of fear" is repentance due to an *abiding, stable* fear of punishment, based on a continuing recognition of God's power. So, for example, if Pharaoh were to release the Israelites out of a fear that he will be punished for his past misdeeds, and that fear were to remain with him and affect later actions, he would have achieved the level of "repentance out of fear." But that is not the situation in the Bible's narrative. In the Bible, Pharaoh is already, right now, being subjected to adversities. If he were to release the Israelites due to the pressure of the plagues, he would be like "a slave who pleads before his master while the master is beating him; when the master withdraws the rod of his anger, he will disobey as before." When Pharaoh would see a break in the plagues, he would harden his heart on his own and exit his fear-state. The person in a state of *ones* is responding to a *punishment* but not to *the one who punishes*.³² Albo regards the two types of putative "fear-repentance" as crucially different: relenting is not the same as repenting.

The distinction between these two kinds of fear-states and between their respective statuses as repentance clearly is indispensable to Albo's solution. But is the distinction convincing? It will not do to draw the distinction entirely in terms of whether the adversity is occurring at the moment of the act or is simply an anticipated adversity. It seems strange to deny that repentance that occurs while a person is suffering — a kind of foxhole repentance — can constitute repentance of some level. Talmudic discussions, furthermore, which Albo, as a tradition-bound Jewish philosopher, must respect, suggest that there are such cases.³³ What, then, is the basis for Albo's distinction? From Albo's discussion we may tease out three criteria for an act's attaining the level of repentance out of fear: (1) S satisfies a certain counterfactual condition; (2) S's act manifests some degree of freedom; (3) S acknowledges the power of God. Each of his suggestions meets with a difficulty.

Let's look first at the counterfactual condition, Albo's main criterion. Speaking of the slave who is being beaten by his master, Albo writes: "when the master removes the rod of his anger, he [the slave] will disobey

as before." But what this says is that when the duress- or coercion-inducing factor that is causing him to behave rightly is removed, he will not behave rightly. Isn't that true, though, even of Albo's other category, the person who *truly* repents "out of fear"? It is true that the latter *seems* to be in an enduring state, unlike the slave who is being beaten. Still, the duress-inducing, or partly coercive, factor that is causing him to behave well, is the belief that God would punish him if he sins. Remove that factor, and the person *ex hypothesi* (and tautologically) will behave badly again. Yet this stance qualifies as repentance out of fear.

Albo would counter that the slave lacks fear when he is not being beaten, and so this is not a case of repentance out of *abiding* fear. It is repentance out of an *episodic* fear. For the critic this is enough to constitute repentance; a repenter can backslide when the incentive is removed. For Albo, repentance out of fear must be repentance out of true fear. The repenter out of fear must be in a certain abiding cognitive and affective state. I think Albo and his critic are destined to part company on this one. But Albo needs to address some potential troubles. The Talmud refers to a type of repentance that occurs in response to afflictions (*yissurin*)—albeit it treats this as a separate category from fear-repentance. The Talmud also refers to people repenting right before death.³⁴ As well, the critic can adduce cases in which people repent because of pangs of conscience or feelings of revulsion, but not fear of God. Albo would have to discredit these as falling short of repentance out of fear; but it's counterintuitive not to think of these as a level of repentance. Some sources in Jewish tradition suggest that a person is regarded as a penitent if, when placed in circumstances similar to those in which he previously sinned, he this time does the right thing—for any reason, even powerlessness. This may sound much too lenient, but there is precedent for this perspective in Jewish law.³⁵

Albo's counterfactual criterion for separating Pharaoh's case from repentance out of fear thus generates large issues about what kinds of repentance qualify as fear-repentance. Since the resolution of these issues is too big to undertake here, we should in the interests of fairness look at his other two ways of differentiating Pharaoh's case from repentance out of fear. Neither of the other criteria is successful, I think. Consider criterion (2): that the case he labels "repentance out of fear" involves an element of freedom that would not be exemplified by Pharaoh were Pharaoh to release the Israelites due to pressure from the plagues. How shall we draw the desired distinction? The most natural avenue is to view the repenter-out-of-fear as simply being "unable to take it any more," cracking under strain and fatigue.³⁶ But one could just as well say that a person who is *threatened with* evils gives in to fear, that he caves in to a threat and "can't take" the threat any more. That is what happens in cases of coercion, which we said Albo treats as cases of unfree action. Also, as has often been noted in the literature on coercion, there is a clear sense in which a coerced agent—even one undergoing an adversity—is making a free, rational decision by giving in, the decision not to endure certain evils.³⁷ From the point of view of freedom, it isn't clear that we have a distinction between responding to anticipated evils and responding to occurrent ones.

Albo's third suggestion does not fare well either. Surely Pharaoh knows

that God is the source of the ills that are befalling him and his people.

We have, then, two criteria that do not permit Albo to exclude Pharaoh's would-be repentance from the category of acceptable repentance, and one that does exclude Pharaoh's repentance yet is best described as respectable but highly debatable (the counterfactual condition). Even with a decent criterion in hand, however, Albo's strategy of linking hardening to the notion that, were Pharaoh to release the Israelites, his repentance would not be even at the level of fear-repentance, turns out to be problematic. Note that after the tenth plague, God does not harden Pharaoh's heart, and Pharaoh releases the Israelites. Since God does not harden his heart at this point, Albo must think that Pharaoh has repented. He must regard Pharaoh's pious-sounding declaration in Exodus 9:27 and 10:16-17, which Albo cites, that "God is the righteous one, but I and my people are the wicked ones" as a sincere proclamation, reflecting some type of repentance— either repentance out of love or repentance out of fear. Otherwise why would God, on Albo's principles, allow the Israelites' release?³⁸ But no sooner has he released the Israelites than Pharaoh goes back to pursue them. And the pursuit is said by the Bible to be a result of hardening. So Albo has a problem. Pharaoh repented during plague ten, we said. Further, were Pharaoh to refrain from pursuit, as he would have done but for the hardening, it would be because of fear of future reprisal, and should qualify as repentance out of fear. Why, then, the later hardening?³⁹

It would be foolish of me to strive for knockdown arguments on each point I have made. But overall, it is difficult to defend the thesis that were Pharaoh to release the Israelites during the sixth plague this would not constitute *any* level of repentance. As long as fear-repentance has some status, it is not clear why God's hardening does not constitute a prevention of repentance. The modest claim is not convincing.

5. Albo's bold claim

We come now to the bold claim, which seeks to show that by strengthening Pharaoh's ability to resist giving in to the adversities around him, God gives Pharaoh a genuine choice whether to keep the Israelites enslaved or instead release them because of the plagues, a "more real" choice than he would have without the hardening. With the creation of real options comes the chance for real repentance. This doesn't *necessarily* mean that the hardening creates the opportunity for him to repent *out of love*; maybe the most he is capable of is repentance out of fear. But, even granting this quite unmotivated assertion, Albo can regard fear-repentance as repentance enough.⁴⁰

When God gives Pharaoh "choice," what does that mean? On the reading of Albo's intent that I favor, God restores to Pharaoh "eligible alternative possibilities." He strengthens Pharaoh's resolve to keep the Israelites enslaved; He does not make that resolve so strong that Pharaoh is *totally* unmoved by the plagues. When God removes fear from Pharaoh's heart, he has levelled the playing field: the chances of releasing the Israelites and keeping them enslaved (because he discounts the plagues as chance occurrences) are equal.⁴¹

But there is a deep concern about Albo's bold claim. When he claims that God restores Pharaoh's free choice, Albo disregards the *history* of how Pharaoh came to make that choice. Pharaoh acts as a result of God's externally manipulating his desire to keep the Israelites enslaved (by strengthening that desire and/or weakening competing ones). The king thus resembles a person who does act *A* because a hypnotist implants in him a desire to do *A*. An act performed as a result of hypnotic suggestion is widely regarded as an unfree act. Now the analogy to the hypnotized act is not exact—God is not making the desire irresistible for Pharaoh according to Albo. Also, God does not implant the desire in Pharaoh's case but only strengthens it and/or weakens opposing desires. But suppose that someone implants a less-than-irresistible suggestion in *S* to do *A*, and *S* does *A*. We might call *S*'s act unfree even though he *could* have done otherwise. And in a case where a hypnotist only strengthens or weakens certain desires, but does not implant any, some philosophers would regard the resultant act as unfree and as reflecting diminished responsibility (assuming the subject is not aware that she is hypnotized).⁴² Intuitions are not clear here, but someone brought up on charges for crimes committed under an influence that is analogous to God's interference with Pharaoh would certainly have a reasonable grounds for acquittal.⁴³ The hypnotist analogy is therefore at least *prima facie* troubling, and Maimonides and Saadya would probably both accept it as a counterexample to Albo.⁴⁴ Though free choice may require alternative possibilities, merely having alternative possibilities, on this view, is not sufficient for free choice.

For the sake of both charity and completeness, we might consider a modification of Albo's account (not put forth by him) that presents a different analysis of why God can be said to have "restored" Pharaoh's choice. By increasing the king's willpower (by weakening certain desires and/or strengthening others), God, *de facto*, is—given Pharaoh's already formed character—ensuring that he keeps the Israelites enslaved. That is, once he is hardened to the plagues, Pharaoh reverts to his previously formed personality. He has the opportunity to act in accordance with his true self. If it is countered that a decision to release the Israelites due to the plagues would be a decision in character too, since Pharaoh has a character that makes him cave in to extreme incentives at this precise level of pressure, the reply would be that releasing the Israelites would be an *akratic* act on Pharaoh's part, an act contrary to better judgment, and therefore inconsistent with his character. His character is expressed by actions in accord with best judgment. Only the decision to keep the Israelites enslaved is in character; the decision to release them is pure weakness. Furthermore, since the decision is in character, the objection based on the fact it is externally induced, as in hypnosis, loses its force.

But explaining God's "restoration" of Pharaoh's choice in this way is not helpful. The account does not explain how the hardening gives Pharaoh an opportunity to *repent*; at best it explains how the hardening gives him an opportunity to *act freely*. (Albo, recall, was exercised over the repentance problem.) And even if our interest is in restoring free will rather than restoring repentance, I have trouble with the premise that akratic acts are acts out of character. Suppose a politician gives in to temptation at consid-

erable cost to what he most values. This is akratic behavior. No one, not even the offender, thinks that giving in to appetite is worth the trouble it will cause. But isn't it precisely here that we raise the "character" issue? Isn't the politician free and responsible? One might retort that if the politician resists temptation on almost all occasions but gives in *once*, his act is out of character and not free. But why should anyone think that? And isn't the politician responsible for his act? Furthermore, is the example of the politician who succumbs once really parallel to Pharaoh's case? For one thing, in Pharaoh's case the plagues may have had a *cumulative* impact. The king's character may be such that given this particular *accumulated* temptation to release the Israelites, he would. Moreover, God has to harden Pharaoh's heart *repeatedly*. This suggests that Pharaoh would be of such a *character* as to succumb to the plagues, but for the hardening.

To sum up, Albo's modest claim depends on contestable assumptions about freedom and about the minimum level needed for repentance. His bold claim requires some controversial intuitions about the hypnotist example—intuitions that Maimonides and Saadya would think are wrong. The suggestion that these reflections encourage is that, *pace* Albo, Pharaoh should not be responsible, or should not be fully responsible, for his hardened acts.

Although I am focusing on hardening, we should pause to ask what the bearing of our discussion is on betterment. (The question will become important later.) If we define the problem with hardening as the withholding of repentance, then betterment poses no problem at all; or, if anything, the problem is why God doesn't better more often. But if we define the problem of hardening in terms of free will deprivation, then insofar as God intervenes in both hardening and betterment, the free will deprivation problem applies to both types of intervention. The free will deprivation problem can be answered, as I indicated, by denying that free will is so valuable, but even short of that, I would suggest that Albo's bold claim works reasonably well for betterment. In typical cases of betterment, the agent will *ask* to be bettered and to have motivational obstacles to doing the good removed. I suggest that a person who asks to be hypnotized into doing certain types of actions, and is then in fact hypnotized into doing them, is responsible for those actions. An agent bettered by God strengthening or weakening certain desires *upon the agent's request* is free and responsible.⁴⁵ So the hypnosis objection will not apply to betterment.

6. Maimonides (i): eliminating free will

Returning now to hardening, what if we just accept the hypnotist analogy, see the hardening for the manipulation that it is, deny that the hardened act is free, and give up the idea that Pharaoh was held responsible for his hardened acts and that he acted freely?⁴⁶ That is precisely Maimonides' move. I would justify the move as follows. True, God punishes Pharaoh and his people. But their eventual fate — their firstborn sons die and, later, their warriors drown at sea — suggests that it is the original crime of drowning or trying to drown male Hebrew children that meets with retribution,⁴⁷ and not necessarily *any* obstinacy shown by them or their king in

the face of the plagues. Even if we assume, plausibly, that God held Pharaoh culpable for his resistance to the earlier plagues, there is no evidence that He held Pharaoh responsible for his later, hardened acts in particular. As a result, it is defensible to hold that — in the Bible’s view— Pharaoh, as a hardened agent, did not will freely and was not held responsible. If that is right— and some biblical scholars have thought so⁴⁸— then the responsibility problem is a non-starter.

Maimonides in some places states the proposition I have just sought to motivate, that Pharaoh was not held responsible for his hardened acts. We still need, however, to grasp God’s *motive* for the hardening and the deprivation of free will. In his monumental legal code, the *Mishneh Torah*, in the section titled, *Laws of Repentance (Hilkhot Teshuvah)*,⁴⁹ Maimonides fills in this motive. He asserts that God hardens the agent’s heart as a means of *punishing* him. The agent is deprived of two great goods— (a) free will, along with (b) the potential to act rightly— and this is an evil for the hardened agent, quite apart from the augmentation of plagues. Removing free will is a perfectly just punishment for a person so depraved, an appropriate tit-for-tat. The agent hardened his own heart in the earlier plagues, contrary to God’s will, so now his heart becomes hardened by God, contrary to his own will. Further, he chose to do evil, so now his punishment (or part of it) is that he does evil. As Norman Kretzmann acutely puts it in describing a related claim made by Aquinas, hardening is not only a case of the punishment fitting the crime— rather, hardening is “a punishment that is the very sin that it punishes.”⁵⁰

This account gives rise to an interesting thought: that, paradoxically, theists who wish to preserve the value of free will do just fine if they deny that hardened agents will freely. The punishment interpretation presupposes a *high* assessment of free will; precisely because free will is a good, as is the capacity to do the right thing, being deprived of these counts as a punishment. Insofar as it recognizes the value of free will, the “punishment” solution is compatible with, indeed dovetails with, free-will theodicies.⁵¹

Unfortunately, Maimonides’ solution, as stated thus far, is incomplete. First of all, it goes no distance toward explaining God’s making an agent *better*, and in fact can be challenged by the implications that it carries for betterment. Maimonides obviously cannot say that an agent who is bettered is being punished for previous wrong choices! Even if the present choice of a right act is a welcome reward for earlier good choices, being deprived of free will is an evil. So for betterment to be explained the notion that deprivation of *free will* is a punishment has to give way to the notion that being deprived of *correct choices* is a punishment. Second, it is obvious that Maimonides’ account has not yet touched the repentance problem. To see why God would deprive Pharaoh of repentance, we need to extend Maimonides’ account.

7. Maimonides (ii): preventing repentance

Maimonides’ approach to the repentance problem is rooted in the Sages’ solution as expressed in the midrash:

'And the Lord strengthened Pharaoh's heart': Since the Holy One, Blessed Be He, saw that [Pharaoh] did not change his mind due to the first five plagues, from then on the Holy One, Blessed Be He, said: even if he wants to repent, I will strengthen his heart in order to exact all that is due from him.⁵²

Another midrashic statement articulates the *general* principle underlying Pharaoh's case:

Rabbi Phineas the priest, son of Rabbi Hama, said: . . . After the Holy One, Blessed Be He, waits for evildoers to repent and they do not, then even if they want to repent later, He takes over their heart so that they not repent.⁵³

The midrash does not itself specifically deny that Pharaoh was held responsible and was punished for his hardened acts, but Maimonides along with other medieval exegetes and philosophers do.⁵⁴ In a work called *Eight Chapters*,⁵⁵ Maimonides first states that, if Pharaoh and the Egyptians "had committed no other sin than not letting Israel go free" (due to hardening), then it would have been "an injustice" for God to punish them. (As noted earlier, Maimonides asserts that any kind of influence by another agent, other than rational instruction, takes away free will.⁵⁶) But in actuality Pharaoh and the Egyptians had earlier oppressed the Israelites—repeatedly. And "this [earlier] action was due to their choice and to the evil character of their thought; there was nothing compelling them to do it." Those acts therefore merited punishment. But "it was not possible to punish them if they repented, so they were prevented from repenting and they continued holding [Israel]."⁵⁷ Whereas in *Laws of Repentance* it appeared that the agent's *loss of free will* constitutes the punishment, in *Eight Chapters* it is the agent's undergoing plagues (or as in Sihon's case military defeat) that constitutes the punishment.⁵⁸

So: God did not punish the Egyptians *for* not repenting, since on Maimonides' premises (of H-incompatibilism), God cannot punish a person for an act that God brought about. But God can prevent a person from repenting as a means of exacting punishment for acts previously performed.⁵⁹

The differences between Maimonides' account and that of Albo are dramatic. (i) Albo sees God as trying to *preserve* Pharaoh's chances of free will and repentance; Maimonides sees God as trying to *eliminate* Pharaoh's free will and chances of repenting, on the grounds that Pharaoh does not deserve a chance to repent. (ii) Albo thinks Pharaoh is responsible for his later choices. Maimonides denies this. (iii) Albo does not think that the history of Pharaoh's choice to keep the Israelites enslaved—its origin in hardening—undermines Pharaoh's freedom and responsibility. Maimonides does; though his conception of hardening seems to be far more invasive than Albo's, he probably would think that even in Albo's scenario there is too much intervention to allow for free will.⁶⁰

There are a few difficulties in the Maimonidean approach enunciated in

Eight Chapters. First,⁶¹ the entire point of repentance would seem to be to that if a person repents, that person's punishment must be remitted. If the problem in Pharaoh's case is that God would have to withhold a just punishment, isn't that an objection to the whole notion that repentance averts punishment, that, in the words of the High Holiday liturgy, "repentance and prayer and charity avert the evil decree"? It is true that Pharaoh's crimes are unusually heinous. But other unusually heinous sinners in the Bible are not punished when they repent. Surely when God forgave the city of Nineveh, and chastised Jonah for not understanding how He could do this, God was saying that even perpetrators of heinous sins are entitled to forgiveness.⁶² If we follow Maimonides' reasoning, we would expect there to be a sliding scale by which the greater the evildoing, the more God would act to prevent repentance and the less chance there would be of God allowing repentance. But this would undercut verses that state, "Do I desire the death of the wicked, says the Lord? Is it not rather his return from his evil ways, so he will live?" (Ezekiel 18:23), and "I do not desire the death of he who dies, says the Lord God. Repent and live!" (Ibid. 18:32). Forgiving penitents is an act of divine mercy, not divine justice. Whatever philosophical problems plague the notion of remitting punishment,⁶³ a system that accepts repentance is anyway committed to declaring those problems soluble. Once that stance is taken, it is hard to accept that God will take steps to prevent repentance by certain individuals on the grounds that they don't deserve it. To quote Voltaire's alleged quip to his priest on his deathbed, when the priest assured Voltaire that all his sins would be forgiven, "Bien sur qu'il me pardonera, c'est son metier" (of course He'll forgive me— that's his job).⁶⁴

But even if it is granted that, due to the gravity of Pharaoh's sins, God should punish Pharaoh for those sins fully and should not remit the punishment on account of Pharaoh's repentance, we can formulate a second objection to Maimonides. If it's really so unjust for Pharaoh's punishment to be remitted, let it *not* be remitted. But does it follow from the need to punish Pharaoh that God should not allow Pharaoh the opportunity to repent? Isn't there value in repentance even if the penitent does not have his punishment remitted? Isn't there value in allowing his self-transformation? If it's unjust for Pharaoh to be forgiven, let God punish him for his earlier wrongs, but let Pharaoh at least improve himself while the axe falls. Let there be repentance without mitigation.

How cogent are these objections? As regards the first question, which boils down to "how is Pharaoh different from other sinners?," to some extent the critic's *modus tollens* is Maimonides' *modus ponens*: great evildoers, in *his* view, do stand less chance of repenting than others, because they stand less chance of God allowing them to repent. But there is another reply. We should remember that, according to the biblical text, God hardened Pharaoh's heart in order to display the divine power and "multiply my wonders in the Land of Egypt" (Exodus 12:9). The Bible implies several times that God hardened Pharaoh's heart because by continuing the plagues God enhanced His glory. It was necessary for him to manifest His power fully. This point encourages a *modified* punishment strategy. It may be that God does not harden the hearts of *all*

evildoers, because sometimes the harmful consequences for others will outweigh the “good” of punishment. But when God has another motive to harden— say, to multiply His wonders, or to deliver an enemy to Israel (as in Sihon’s case)— then He will do so, but only provided that the hardened agent *deserves* the hardening. To put it another way, the agent’s past wickedness is a reason for *God’s allowing Himself to harden once the hardening is necessary for other reasons*; it is not itself a reason to harden. This isn’t the plain sense of Maimonides’ words, but it accounts for what otherwise seems to be an arbitrary exception being made of Pharaoh. The explanation requires withdrawing Maimonides’ account of the later plagues as punishment for Pharaoh, and replacing it with an account of the plagues as needed to enhance God’s greatness. That Pharaoh deserves punishment should be utilized as a reply to an objection to hardening for the sake of God’s glory, not as a reason for the hardening.

Turning to the second question, of why God doesn’t punish even while accepting repentance, I suspect that the answer has to do with the fact that Pharaoh’s “repentance,” which is being prevented, would be of a low level: it is due to immediate pressure. Maimonides (contrary to Albo) may hold that this is *a* level of repentance, and furthermore that it is a level of repentance such that a person who attains that level *must* have his punishment withdrawn. Now you will ask, why should the fact the repentance is on a low level mean that the punishment must be withdrawn? Shouldn’t it be the other way around, that a low level repentance has less chance of making punishment be withdrawn?

This question can be answered by noting that Maimonides thinks, in general, that being motivated by anticipations of reward and punishment reflects a low level of religious understanding. In the last chapter of the section of his *Mishneh Torah* legal code called *Laws of Repentance* (and elsewhere), he posits an ideal of “worship of God out of love,” in which one’s worship is not motivated by any concern other than the intrinsic rightness or wrongness of what one is doing. The entire *content* of repentance out of fear is exhausted by expiation, by the withdrawing of punishment. A person on a higher level will not be concerned with punishment. So, paradoxically, a person on lower level of repentance must have his sins forgiven and punishment withheld, because expiation is the only purpose that lower level repentance could serve for him when there is no deep change in the person’s orientation toward God.⁶⁵

Even accepting this somewhat forced answer to the second objection, a third objection arises. Maimonides makes it seem as if God cannot inflict a just punishment on Pharaoh if he repents. But could He not just *reduce* the punishment in the light of repentance? If so, it could turn out that the result even of mitigating the sentence is a punishment as harsh in its effect as a nonmitigated sentence. Imagine someone sentenced to three hundred years in prison for multiple crimes whose sentence is reduced to 200 years for good behavior! Mitigating Pharaoh’s punishment might still result in him being drowned at sea. And such mitigation is consistent with the demands of lower level repentance.⁶⁶

8. God and responsibility for one's character

The "Maimonidean" solutions we have explored to this point surface explicitly in Maimonides' treatment of hardening; that is, he openly relates hardening to the inappropriateness of God remitting Pharaoh's punishment. The next two solutions that I will assess— the final two we will consider— are not explicitly formulated by him, but instead are variations on themes that are found in Maimonides' writings. These solutions, I concede, do not sit easily with the explicit Maimonidean treatments of hardening in terms of remitting punishment, but it is a commonplace among interpreters of Maimonides that his explicit, "exoteric" statements are not always a reliable guide to his "esoteric" meaning and deepest intent.⁶⁷ Also, the solutions to follow are at least loosely connected to Maimonidean teachings, and can be ascribed to him by what philosophers call the Principle of (Interpretive) Charity. It is beside my main point to *argue* that Maimonides actually intends these solutions, but I do believe he may, and they must be considered regardless.

The basic perspective of these final two solutions derives from the Bible and Talmud. In Psalms 81:11-12, we read: "But my people would not listen to me; Israel would not submit to me. So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts to follow their own devices." What is being asserted here is that God allows people to follow their own choices, without divine interference, even when their choices are wrong. The Talmud goes further when it teaches: "In the way a person wants to go, we take him" (*Makkot* 10b). And on *Sabbath* 104a, Rabbi Simon ben Lakish (known as Resh Lakish) states that "when one comes to be declared impure, we give him an opening [to impurity]; when one comes to be purified, we assist him."⁶⁸ Extended to God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart, these ideas suggest that hardening is God's way of respecting Pharaoh's own choices, of allowing him to follow in his chosen path while imposing upon him (contrary to the earlier suggestions) full responsibility for those hardened acts. The purpose is not to give people their previously incurred just deserts— as in *Eight Chapters*— but to preserve the human being's control over his or her own destiny.

We considered a similar bold response in connection with Albo, and the problem I would pose for the present version of the "responsibility for choice" reply is similar to the difficulty we raised in that earlier context. Without God's hardening, Pharaoh would *not* have chosen to keep the Israelites enslaved. God can't say to Pharaoh, "you have to live with the results of your choices," because Pharaoh can turn around and say, "granted my previous choices were bad, *my* choice *now* wouldn't have been to keep them as slaves— that's your doing." The strategy of ascribing responsibility to Pharaoh for his "hardened" choices, if it is adopted at all, has to be implemented along very different lines.⁶⁹

9. A naturalist account of hardening

The distinguished biblical scholar Umberto Cassuto (1883-1951) explains the expression "God hardened Pharaoh's heart" as follows:

In early Hebrew diction, it is customary to attribute every phenomenon to the direct action of God. . . . Every happening has a number of causes, and these causes, in turn, have other causes, and so on *ad infinitum*; according to the Israelite conception, the cause of all causes was the will of God, the Creator and Ruler of the world. Now the philosopher examines the long and complex chain of causation, whereas the ordinary person jumps instantly from the last effect to the first cause, and attributes the former directly to God. This, now, is how the Torah, which employs human idioms, expresses itself. Consequently the expression ‘but I will harden his heart’ is, in the final analysis, the same as if it were worded: but his heart will be hard.⁷⁰

For Cassuto, “God hardens people’s hearts” is shorthand for “people’s hearts sometimes become hard.” Once hardening is read naturalistically, with no implication of divine intervention, the standard problems about deprivation of free will, prevention of repentance, and assignment of responsibility become non-starters. Hardening, on this view, is not a form of direct divine action.

Cassuto’s position is not as clear as we might like it to be. If God is the first cause, does that mean that He initiates a causal sequence that leads to Pharaoh’s heart becoming hard? If so, a hardened heart is still a manipulated heart. Cassuto may mean that God is the author of nature. If so, Cassuto’s naturalist reading of the Bible’s language is strikingly like an assertion made explicitly by Maimonides in his philosophic *magnum opus*, *Guide of the Perplexed*. There Maimonides endorses a general thesis that when Scripture attributes actions to God it is speaking of natural processes and not direct interventions.⁷¹ He could thus consider divine hardening to be a natural process—indeed would have to, at least at the esoteric level of the *Guide*.

But the naturalist account, as we have stated it, suffers from an obvious weakness. According to the account, Pharaoh’s earlier “self-hardenings” and God’s later “other”-hardenings seem to refer to the same type of event, a self-hardening. Why then does the Bible use differing expressions for what is allegedly the same type of event? Cassuto replies that “they can be interchanged because their essential meaning is identical.”⁷² But why would the Bible vary its language at all? Why wouldn’t “the ordinary person” of whom Cassuto speaks ascribe *all* the hardenings to God?⁷³

There is a version of the naturalist account that can meet this objection. It is offered by an eminent present-day biblical scholar, Nachum Sarna:

This [‘God hardened Pharaoh’s heart’] is the biblical way of asserting that the king’s intransigence has by then become habitual and irreversible; his character has become his destiny. He is deprived of the possibility of relenting and is irresistibly impelled to his self-wrought doom.⁷⁴

Sarna’s view, as I want to reconstruct it here, interprets “God hardened Pharaoh’s heart” as follows (the wording is mine):

In the natural order of things a person sometimes will make choices that later on cause him to disregard incentives against making that sort of choice and that deprive him of the possibility of deciding otherwise. Pharaoh's choice not to release the Israelites in the face of plague six was due to earlier choices Pharaoh had made, choices that caused him to disregard incentives for releasing them and that rendered unavoidable the choice he in fact made, viz., to keep them enslaved.

As in Cassuto's solution, the question of how God could hold Pharaoh responsible is now a non-starter. Aristotle held that a person is responsible for his or her character if the person's earlier choices led up to that character. If we apply an Aristotelian conception of responsibility for character to Pharaoh's case, then Pharaoh bears responsibility for hardened acts.⁷⁵ Bad people are held responsible for unavoidable bad acts when their previous choices produced those later unavoidable acts. The approach just sketched is in flat opposition to Maimonides' idea in *Eight Chapters* that Pharaoh was not punished for his hardened acts. On the contrary: the "hardened" agent bears responsibility. But, again, naturalism may be his esoteric teaching.⁷⁶

With Sarna's approach in hand, let us return to the problem that confronted Cassuto's: why does the Bible vary its language? The answer to this question is that Pharaoh's "self-hardenings" in plagues 1-5 were not wholly determined by previous choices he had made. *Those* choices were reversible in the sense that he could choose differently. But from plagues six and onward Pharaoh had no choice anymore—hence the shift in the Bible's language. Adapting a remark made by Harry Wolfson, we may say: God gives every human being the power to sin or not sin (i. e., free will), but He does not give every human being the power to repent or not repent.⁷⁷

A challenge to the new version of naturalism may be marshalled from the Bible's description of plague seven—where Pharaoh hardens his *own* heart. If "God's hardened Pharaoh's heart" (plague six) is really another way of saying that Pharaoh's previous choices have caused him to keep the Israelites enslaved, that his path has become irreversible, and that his character has become his destiny, why would Pharaoh in plague seven be said to harden his own heart, implying (on the present theory) that his path of plague six was not irreversible after all?

The naturalist's answer to this, I suggest, is that although Pharaoh's choices in plagues 1-5 made it inevitable that he chose to keep the Israelites in plague six, it does not follow that his choice in plague seven is also due to his choices in plagues 1-5. Perhaps the incentives in plague seven to release the Israelites were greater than those in plague six, and even a person for whom the choice in plague six was inevitable could have acted otherwise in plague seven. No matter how bad a person's character has become, there are circumstances in which that character does not by itself dictate a bad choice. If we assume further that, in other plagues in which *God* hardened Pharaoh's heart, Pharaoh's obstinacy was a result only of his previous choices and that there was no significant change in the power of

the incentives produced by the new plague, we can explain the variations in the Bible's language.

Another objection to the naturalistic account is that it renders Maimonides' *question*—how God could harden Pharaoh's heart—a non-starter. But in the first place, this is not an objection to the account itself, but only to an attribution of the account to Maimonides. Furthermore, the question is *not* a non-starter from a naturalist standpoint. Maimonides' earlier claim in chapter five of *Laws of Repentance* was that a human being always has free choice; it is therefore entirely appropriate for him to ask why human beings, in the course of nature, occasionally lose free choice and the power to repent—why did God set up nature this way?

The naturalist account, in Sarna's version, has withstood our objections thus far. But another problem has to be faced. As we have seen, the Bible attributes a *motive* to God for the hardening, namely, God must manifest his full power. But according to the naturalist account, what does it mean to ascribe a motive to God? Aren't Pharaoh's "divinely hardened" acts explicable without reference to a motive God has for the hardening? And how does a divine motive fit in with the account?⁷⁸

I suggest that God's "motive" may be fit into the account if we return to the full statement in the Talmud we quoted earlier: "when one comes to be declared impure, we give him an opening [to impurity]; *when one comes to be purified, we assist him.*" Suppose that, although God does not directly intervene in any person's motivational system to produce *sinful* decisions, (a) He does directly intervene to produce *good* decisions when He sees that a person is trying to repent and (b) He does this even if the person is trying to repent only because he harbors fear. It follows that if Pharaoh wanted to release the Israelites—for whatever reason, even fear—then God *ordinarily* would assist him in repenting (by, say, intervening to stifle any inclination to slip back into doing the wrong thing). But suppose further that God on occasion chooses to withhold assistance because He wants to realize certain goals, the attainment of which are more valuable to him than the sinner's repenting. In other words, suppose we say that God sometimes withholds a kind of assistance He would normally provide. Then we can say of Pharaoh something similar to what is said by Wolfson, paraphrasing Abraham ibn Daud (ca. 1110-1180): "God did not think of him [Pharaoh] as meriting His auxiliary grace in assisting him to turn away from his free choice of his evil conduct."⁷⁹ Departing from Wolfson, I am suggesting that God's withholding motivational assistance is a function not only of Pharaoh's merit but also a function of God's having the motive of manifesting His power so as to make himself known to the Egyptians and Israelites. The withheld-assistance view treats hardening as a nonmiraculous natural process, the way things go when there's no divine intervention; only betterment is explained supernaturally. And hardening is basically the withholding of assistance. The theory of hardening needs to be accompanied by a particular account of betterment.⁸⁰

I have suggested that Sarna's version of the naturalist account of hardening can meet the textual objections we have raised, but that, for the account to explain the Bible's reference to God's motive, it needs to combine a naturalistic view of the process of hardening with a supernatural

account of the process of betterment. Notice, however, that our explanation suggests that Pharaoh would have qualified for divine assistance were it not for God's desire to manifest His power. Can this be? Typically, betterment involves a person soliciting God's help. Pharaoh did not solicit God's help in repenting. So why would God have helped him were it not for God's desire to manifest His power?

The smoothest reply to this question would be that an agent's asking God for assistance is not a necessary condition of God's assisting that person. Although God would not have helped Pharaoh for the reason that Pharaoh would have solicited His help, God would have had another reason to help the king. What is that reason? Simply that the Israelites were suffering. In other words, were it not for the motive of manifesting His greatness so as to impart knowledge of Himself, God would have bettered Pharaoh, for the sake of the Israelites, even if Pharaoh were not to solicit His assistance in repenting.

Inevitably the question arises whether the supernaturalist account of betterment can explain why bettered agents are "responsible" for, i. e. given credit for, their bettered acts, or whether such an account must, instead, deny that hardened agents bear such responsibility. Earlier we said that whereas Albo's "bold" attempt to explain hardening failed, an analogous approach to betterment, in which betterment is God's removing motivational impediments to doing good *upon solicitation by the agent*, followed by the agent's choosing the good, would not fall foul of the hypnotist objection that troubled the bold account of hardening. Hence, supernaturally bettered agents bear responsibility for their "bettered" acts in those cases when the agent asks to be bettered. In cases in which no request is made by the agent, the agent may not bear responsibility. So, for example, if God were to help Pharaoh repent when Pharaoh does not ask for His help (for example, if He were to help him repent only because the Israelites were suffering), Pharaoh may not receive credit for this "repentance." So, some bettered agents (those who ask for betterment) are responsible for, i.e. get moral credit for, "bettered" acts; other bettered agents (those who are bettered for other reasons) are not thus responsible. The text does not state any of this, but it stands to reason.

At this point, a final issue must be broached. Can Maimonides accept the supernatural account of betterment that we presented as a companion to the naturalist view of hardening? Jerome Gellman has cited textual evidence that Maimonides understood betterment in a naturalist fashion.⁸¹ Gellman does not suggest that something like the hypnotist analogy troubled Maimonides in the case of betterment. Nor does he argue merely from the linguistic assertion by Maimonides that "God does X" is to be read naturalistically. Instead Gellman argues that naturalism about betterment coheres with Maimonides' religious sensibilities, in particular his notion that human beings are "radically responsible" for their destinies. On Gellman's reading, Maimonides, for various theological reasons, wanted to affirm human independence and strength, the capacity of human beings to transform themselves on their own; and he wanted to place responsibility for destiny squarely in human hands.⁸² As a great twentieth-century explainer of Maimonides put it, "in this task [repentance], man must rely upon

himself; no one can help him. He is his own creator and innovator. He is his own redeemer...⁸³ (Pelagianism is no heresy in Judaism.)

But if the argument I gave earlier is correct, then the naturalist view of hardening that best explains the biblical references to God's having a motive is one that is accompanied by a *supernatural* approach to betterment—a theory on which, while transformation of personality for the better originates in self, it is completed by God. It is questionable whether Maimonides can embrace this resolution given his religious sensibilities as explained by Gellman. Hence, at the bottom line, the acceptability of the “withheld assistance” account of hardening depends on one's religious sensibilities concerning the extent to which human beings control their character. Some will read Maimonides in a less naturalistic way than Gellman, while others, endorsing Gellman's interpretation, will view our proposed solution as decidedly non-Maimonidean. At the same time, it is hard to see what alternative account would meet both philosophical and exegetical desiderata. What emerges in any event from any sort of naturalist understanding of hardening or betterment is that keeping God to at least some extent out of human choice has certain theological advantages.⁸⁴

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NOTES

1. William Alston, among others, suggests that Christianity requires the idea that God is active at least in positive personal transformation — a comment which suggests that Christian thinkers who believe in free will are obliged to develop some version of a compatibility thesis. See Alston, “The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit,” in *Philosophy and the Christian Faith*, edited by Thomas V. Morris (Notre Dame, Ind., 1988), 121-50, esp. pp. 124-25. An extreme version of the compatibility of human freedom with God's activities is found in Jonathan Edwards' writings. See *Freedom of the Will*, ed. Paul Ramsey (Yale U. Press, 1957).

2. That God intervenes in motivational systems is also suggested by the doctrine that God has a plan for history. For a fuller statement of this difficulty and a discussion of the narrative of Joseph and his brothers in its light, see Shalom Carmy and David Shatz, “The Bible As a Source for Philosophical Reflection,” in *The Routledge History of Jewish Philosophy*, ed. Daniel Frank and Oliver Leaman (London, 1996), 13-37, at pp. 25-29.

3. Relevant references include Exodus 4:21, 7:3, 9:12, 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17, and arguably 14:5, 18.

4. Deut. 2:30; Joshua 11:20.

5. Cf. Paul's statement: “God hardens whom He will” (Romans 9:18).

6. 1 Kings 18:37.

7. Saadya Gaon, in his *Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, trans. Samuel Rosenblatt (New Haven, Ct.: Yale University Press, 1948), IV, ch. 6, p. 199, interprets “strengthened (or hardened) his heart” to mean that he kept Pharaoh alive; Isaac Arama (see note 61), that he gave Pharaoh respite between plagues.

8. Saadya Gaon, p. 188. Hardening is among eight scriptural challenges that Saadya considers to his views on free will; see pp. 196-294.

9. Maimonides declares that “no one forces a person or decrees upon him

or draws him to one of the two paths; rather he inclines on his own and from his own knowledge to one of the two paths." See *Mishneh Torah, Book of Knowledge, Laws of Repentance*, 5:2. For a translation, see Moses Hyamson's edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962). Maimonides' statement, like Saadya's, suggests an incompatibility between divine intervention and free will/responsibility; we shall see later whether he truly holds this view. But Maimonides, unlike Saaadya, does not hold that God never intervenes in motivational systems.

10. For surveys of other approaches to hardening in Jewish sources, see Harry Austryn Wolfson, *Repercussions of the Kalam in Jewish Philosophy* (Harvard University Press, 1979), 200-214; Nechama Leibowitz, *Studies in Shemot [Exodus]*, translated and adapted by Aryeh Newman (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, 1976), 149-60; Yehuda Nachshoni, *Studies in the Weekly Parasha* (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 1988), 361-67.

11. Elsewhere I have considered and argued against a contemporary solution to these puzzles of hardening and sanctification, one that recruits Harry Frankfurt's "hierarchical" account of freedom to show that hardened agents have free will. This strategy is a version of the compatibility thesis we may call "H-compatibilism" — that hardening is compatible with free will and moral responsibility. See my "Hierarchical Theories of Freedom and the Hardening of Hearts", *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* XXI, ed. H. Wettstein, et. al. (U. of Notre Dame, in press). In that paper I discuss Eleonore Stump's stimulating article, "Sanctification, Hardening of the Heart, and Frankfurt's Concept of Free Will," *The Journal of Philosophy* 85, 8 (August 1988):395-420, repr. in *Perspectives on Moral Responsibility*, edited John Martin Fischer and Mark Ravizza (Ithaca, N. Y., 1993). Other contemporary contributions to the topics of hardening and sanctification include Norman Kretzmann, "God among the Causes of Moral Evil: Hardening of Hearts and Spiritual Blinding," *Philosophical Topics* 16,2 (Fall 1988): 189-214; Alston, "The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit."

12. Likewise, the free will deprivation problem becomes acute if one explains divine hiddenness in a particular way. Suppose that, when asked, "why does a good God not provide sufficient, incontrovertible evidence for His existence?" a theist answers that were God to reveal himself fully and evidently, people would no longer believe in him *freely* but would rather be *coerced* into believing. Here again a theist would be assigning a high value to free will. For a defense of this sort, see Michael Murray, "Coercion and the Hiddenness of God," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 30(1993):27-38. For criticisms of theistic responses to the problem of hiddenness, see Robert McKim, "the Hiddenness of God," *Religious Studies* 26(1990): 141-61 and J. L. Schellenberg, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

13. See Moses Nahmanides' commentary to Gen. 2:9 and Deut 30:6. Nahmanides' position assumes that freedom requires alternative possibilities. For a treatment of "automatic goodness" that does not assume this and therefore regards right acts as free even in the absence of alternative possibilities, see Eleonore Stump, "Intellect, Will, and the Principle of Alternate Possibilities," in *Perspectives on Moral Responsibility*, ed. Fischer and Ravizza, 237-62. Cf. my "Irresistible Goodness and Alternative Possibilities," in *Freedom and Moral Responsibility: General and Jewish Perspectives*, edited by Charles Manekin and Menachem Kellner (Baltimore, Md., 1997), 33-73.

14. For some problems in the free will theodist's evaluations, see Robert Merrihew Adams, "Theodicy and Divine Intervention," in *The God Who Acts*, ed. Thomas F. Tracy (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 31-40.

15. Gersonides, in fact, suggests that although God wants to preserve the free choice of ordinary human beings, God controls *kings'* hearts because of the impact a wicked king can have on the social order and the course of history. See Gersonides' commentary to Proverbs 21:1. In his commentary to Exodus 7:3, he applies this general notion to Pharaoh's case.

16. I set the causation problem aside; the philosophers I discuss have little to say about it. Aquinas is concerned with causation, however. See Kretzmann, "God Among the Causes of Evil." Aquinas's discussion appears in *Summa Theologica* I-II, Q. 79.

17. Joseph Albo, *The Book of Roots*, IV:25, my translation. There is a bilingual edition of this work by Isaac Huzik (Philadelphia, 1929).

18. The "modest" claim I outline is not as explicit in Albo as in Ovadyah Seforno's and Nahmanides's commentaries to Ex. 7:3. However, I take the liberty of expounding Albo in light of those more elaborate statements asserting the modest claim. A reader who is troubled by this procedure is welcome to substitute Seforno for Albo.

19. Of course different theorists will flesh out the bold claim differently, depending on their favored accounts of free will, but I will stick with Albo's conception of free will as involving alternative possibilities. See n. 40 below.

20. I leave out further complications caused by God's knowing in advance that Pharaoh won't repent anyway even if given the opportunity.

21. See Ex. 7:3, 10:1, 11:9. Seforno incorporates these references into his interpretation. But cf. Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki, 1040-1105) to 7:3, for a different view of the relationship between hardening and manifestation of power. On the theme of "knowledge of God," see, e. g., Ex. 5:2, 6:7, 7:5, 7:17, 8:6, 8:18, 9:14, 9:29, 10:2, 11:7, 14:4, 14:18. The theme continues throughout the Israelites' sojourns after the Exodus.

22. See, e. g., Seforno to Ex. 7:3.

23. Williams, *How Free Does the Will Need to Be?* (Lindley lecture, U. of Kansas, 1986), p. 2. See also Harry Frankfurt, "Coercion and Moral Responsibility," in *The Importance of What We Care About: Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), 80-94, at pp. 44-46; Michael J. Murray and David Dudrick, "Are Coerced Acts Free?," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 32(1995):109-24.

24. The example is adapted from Frankfurt, "Coercion and Moral Responsibility," 44-46.

25. I borrow this term from Murray and Dudrick, "Are Coerced Acts Free?"

26. I examine this problem for libertarians in "Irresistible Goodness and Alternative Possibilities."

27. In truth, libertarians confront a stronger challenge: they owe us an account of *why* agents are said to be free even when natural contingencies have left them with but one reasonable course. For one libertarian strategy, see my "Irresistible Goodness and Alternative Possibilities." Cf. Peter van Inwagen, "When Is the Will Free?" *Philosophical Perspectives* 3, ed. James E. Tomberlin (Tascadero, California: Ridgeview, 1989), 399-422.

28. It is unlikely that God's hardening caused the later self-hardening to take place, since God's hardening has to be repeated later.

29. This is the kind of counterfactual involved in the debate over middle knowledge, that is, the debate whether God has knowledge of counterfactuals whose truth depends on human free choice. See Robert M. Adams, "Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil," in his *The Virtue of Faith and Other Essays* (New York, 1987), 77-93.

30. Later I will raise the possibility that Pharaoh's previous acts are what

hardened him, an interpretation that forces me to regard Pharaoh's case not as one involving alternative possibilities. But Albo isn't saying that the previous acts hardened him.

31. See Babylonian Talmud, *Yoma* 86b.

32. This formulation is suggested by Nachshoni, p. 367.

33. See, e.g. *Berakhot* 5a.

34. Babylonian Talmud, *Yoma* 86a.

35. For an exploration of these varied cases, see the discourses of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik that are collected in *Soloveitchik on Repentance*, adapted by Pinchas H. Peli, (Paulist Press, 1984), *passim.*; a good place to focus on is 146-53. Cf. Norvin Richards, "Forgiveness," *Ethics* 99, 1 (October 1988): 77-97, pp. 87-92. The definition of repentance in terms of not repeating the act when placed in similar circumstances is found in the Talmud, *Yoma* 86b; the example of the powerless individual is found in Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Laws of Repentance* 2:1. Of some importance are textual variants of the Talmud that affect whether the criterion of not repeating the act applies to one who does not repeat it in one subsequent opportunity (Maimonides) or instead only to one who does not repeat it in three subsequent opportunities (as other variants suggest). I admit that Albo may not accept these other analyses, and further realize that Pharaoh may not satisfy such internal conditions as resolving not to repeat the sin. But it is still clear that Albo's formulation is problematic. (Eleonore Stump pointed out to me difficulties in the category of repentance due to powerlessness, but I will set these aside since the other cases provide sufficient trouble for Albo.)

36. The fatigue factor is central in Stump's analysis of hardening cases in "Sanctification. . .".

37. Cf. Alan Wertheimer, *Coercion* (Princeton University Press, 1987), part two.

38. It may be replied that Pharaoh has not repented, but by this time God has manifested His power and so the slaves can be released. But what becomes of Albo's concern with ensuring Pharaoh's repentance? And in any case, the later hardening at sea (to be discussed in a moment) makes sense only if Pharaoh fears future reprisal.

39. I admit that the later hardening leading to pursuit seems to be part of a continuing plan on God's part to get the Egyptians to "know" Him; verses 14:4, 18 suggest this. But Pharaoh still seems to have attained a level of repentance out of fear even in the absence of this full knowledge.

40. Albo's apparent assumption that freedom requires alternative possibilities has come under repeated attacks in recent years. The seminal argument against alternative possibilities is Harry Frankfurt's "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility." That paper, plus a variety of responses to it, may be found in *Moral Responsibility*, edited by John Martin Fischer (Ithaca: Cornell U. Press, 1986), Pt. II. For additional discussion see *Perspectives on Moral Responsibility*, edited by Fischer and Ravizza, pt. 3. It is true that these attacks have usually assailed the claim that alternative possibilities are necessary for freedom, not the claim that voluntariness plus alternative possibilities is sufficient for freedom. However, once the necessity claim is dropped, it will be more natural to hold, in developing the bold claim, that Pharaoh's freedom consists in his satisfying certain conditions that will create free will even when there are no alternative possibilities. That is the essence of the hierarchical strategy I referred to earlier and have assessed elsewhere. Having said that, I still would like to cast Albo's bold solution in terms of alternative possibilities. In addition, I will use the alternative possibilities account in my discussion of the Maimonidean strategies.

41. One may object as follows— a poor objection, I think, but instructive. “Suppose Pharaoh were to deliberate between releasing the Israelites and keeping them enslaved and then were to decide to release them. The decision to release would still be, in Albo’s phrase, ‘like one that is compelled rather than voluntary.’ Pharaoh would have released them only to prevent another agent (God) from inflicting harm on him and his people. And compliance with a threat is unfree compliance. For a person to do *A* freely, the person must be able not merely to do otherwise, but to do otherwise freely. Since if Pharaoh were to ‘do otherwise’ and release the slaves, he would not ‘do otherwise’ freely, therefore he does not freely keep them enslaved either.”

This objection is doubly flawed. First, as we said earlier, acts performed under duress may be free rather than unfree. Now it is not in Albo’s interest to pursue this response; to develop his modest claim he needed to declare that acts under duress are unfree. A better response for Albo, therefore, is to deny that for *S* to do *A* freely, *S* must be able not merely to do otherwise, but to do otherwise without duress. There is merit in this denial. (The issue of whether the alternative possibilities must be free actions is discussed by John Martin Fischer, *The Metaphysics of Free Will: An Essay on Control* [Blackwell, 1994], 140-47.) In fact a case can be made that any time a person has two eligible alternatives and selects one, the person acts freely— even when the selected alternative, taken by itself, is a *coerced* act. Suppose mugger *A* approaches Smith and threatens him, “rob the Chase bank or I’ll kill you.” Mugger *B* approaches Smith and threatens the very opposite: “if you rob the Chase bank like mugger *A* said, then I’ll kill you.” Smith has two alternatives open here— obey *A* or obey *B*— and when he chooses to comply with mugger *A* and not mugger *B* or mugger *B* and not mugger *A*, he is making a free choice. A fortiori, if Pharaoh opts to release the Israelites due to duress, Pharaoh acts freely, so long as another option is eligible.

42. The problem posed by hypnotists is not confined to cases in which the suggestion planted renders a particular outcome at least probable. The excuse is effective as long as a causal connection can be established.

43. At the end of “Hierarchical Theories of Freedom and the Hardening of Hearts,” however, I suggest that hierarchical theories confront a more troubling form of this objection than Albo does.

44. This discussion cannot be complete without at least a reference to the fact that Maimonides, in another context, sides with Albo! Jewish law requires that in order for a writ of divorce (*get*) to be valid, a husband must voluntarily consent to divorce his wife. However, in cases where the sages regarded the divorce as mandatory, the husband may be compelled by a court to grant the *get*. “But,” Maimonides queries, “why is the divorce not invalidated” if it is compelled? His answer basically, is that the husband’s deeper will is to obey the law, which requires him to issue the divorce, but “his evil inclination overcame him.” The court pressure removes the “alien” desire not to divorce her. See *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Divorce, 2:20. Maimonides’ reasoning resembles closely the reasoning of those who champion “positive liberty,” though it isn’t clear whether he is asserting that *all* Israelites “really” want to obey the law. One could argue that the fact the agent is here being made to act rightly is relevant to the status of the resulting act as free; but in what follows I argue that betterment is different from hardening only if the person being bettered solicits the other agent’s intervention, which is not the case in the passage at hand. So there is a tension between the position I think Maimonides would take vis-à-vis Albo’s bold claim and the position he takes in the divorce passage, and I do not know how to resolve it.

45. I argue for this more fully in “Hierarchical Theories of Freedom and

the Hardening of Hearts.”

46. Saying S wasn't responsible generally entails saying he didn't act freely. There are exceptions, e. g., negligence, but none that operate in this context.

47. See *Exodus* 1. The Bible does not explicitly say that the king's order to drown males (1:22) was carried out, but commentators frequently claim it was, even though the midwives had refused to cooperate with a previous decree to kill newborn males. That the baby Moses had to be hidden (chapter 2) suggests what one would infer anyway, to wit, that male Hebrew infants were in danger after Pharaoh issued a decree to drown them.

48. See Umberto Cassuto's remarks in *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1967), 57. Cassuto notes that not only in Pharaoh's case but in Sihon's as well, God is not said to hold hardened agents responsible for their hardened acts.

49. *Mishneh Torah: Book of Knowledge: Laws of Repentance*, chapter 6.

50. Kretzmann, "God Among the Causes of Evil," 205.

51. To be sure, in one respect the punishment approach runs contrary to free will theodicies: the punishment solution allows that evils may occur even when free will is not preserved. They occur because (a) God's manifesting His greatness and inculcating knowledge of Himself is of prime importance; (b) God holds people responsible for their previous choices. He allows suffering to result from the punishment that he imposes when he deprives a wicked agent of the great good known as free will.

52. *Midrash Rabbah*, Exodus, 11:6. An English edition of *Midrash Rabbah* was produced under the editorship of H. Freedman and M. Simon (London: Soncino, 1977).

53. *Ibid.*, 11:1. See also 5:7.

54. In addition to Maimonides, see Nahmanides' commentary to Ex. 7:3; also Rabbi David Kimchi's (Radak's) comments to Joshua 11:20, 1 Samuel 2:25, 1 Kings 18:37, Isaiah 6:9, and Ezekiel 14:9. Also see Metzudot David to Ezekiel 1:9 and 36:26, Proverbs 14:30, and Nehemiah 13:26.

55. *Eight Chapters* is part of Maimonides' commentary to the Mishnah—specifically, it is his introduction to his commentary on the tractate *Avot*, or *Ethics of the Fathers*. I summarize here chapter eight. Quotations are from the English translation in *Ethical Writings of Maimonides*, edited by Raymond L. Weiss and Charles Butterworth (New York, 1975), 89-94.

56. It has been debated whether Maimonides is a compatibilist regarding scientific determinism. See Alexander Altmann, "Free Will and Predestination in Saadia, Bahya, and Maimonides," repr. in Altmann, *Essays in Jewish Intellectual History* (Hanover, New Hampshire: New England University Press, 1981), 35-63; Shlomo Pines, "Notes on Maimonides' Views Concerning Free Will," Excursus to "Studies in Abul-Barakat al-Baghdadi's Poetics and Metaphysics," *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 6(1960): 195-98; Jerome Gellman, "Freedom and Determinism in Maimonides' Philosophy," in *Maimonides and His Time*, ed. Eric Ormsby (Washington, D. C.: Catholic University Press, 1989); and, most recently, Josef Stern, "Maimonides' Compatibilist Conceptions of Freedom and the Sense of Shame," in Manekin and Kellner, pp. 217-66.

57. This translation is from Weiss and Butterworth, 90.

58. I may be overstating the differences between *Eight Chapters* and *Laws of Repentance*: Maimonides may not really have something different in mind. But for analytical purposes it is worth treating the ideas of free will as punishment and repentance as punishment separately.

59. For discussion of the related but distinct view held by Aquinas, see Kretzmann, "God Among the Causes of Evil," 198ff. See also Murray, "Coercion and the Hiddenness of God," pp. 35-37. Maimonides extends his

explanation to cover Sihon's punishment as well. As proof of his approach, he cites God's statement to Isaiah:

Make the heart of this people fat, make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and [thus] will return [repent] and be healed. (Is. 6:10).

60. There is another difference between Albo and Maimonides, relating to the purpose of the plagues. Maimonides seems to consider the later plagues to be punishments for earlier misdeeds. He admits that we do not know why God elects to punish Pharaoh in one particular way, viz., by preventing him from repenting, rather than in some other way. This is simply the punishment that God thought was most fitting and just. For Albo, all the later plagues are attempts to give him an opportunity to repent properly (by seeing God's power).

61. The objection sketched in this paragraph is developed by Isaac Arama (1420-94) in his commentary *Akedat Yitzhak*, Exodus, ch. 36. An English adaptation of this chapter, omitting some details of Arama's critique of Maimonides, is found in Elijah Munk, *Aqaydat Yitzchaq* (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 1986), 347-60.

62. Arama also instances Ahab and Menashe (I Kings 16, 21; II Kings 21; II Chronicles 33).

63. For a study that incorporates much of the relevant literature, see, Joram Haber, *Forgiveness* (Savage, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1991).

64. Quoted by Carl Reinhold Brakenhielm, *Forgiveness*, trans. Thor Hall (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1987), p. 11. Maimonides cannot handle this problem by modifying the nature of God's hardening so that it leaves Pharaoh some *small* room to repent. The plain sense of Maimonides' words is that it is unjust for Pharaoh to have his punishment mitigated, and so God must leave *no* possibility open to him to repent. Maimonides does recognize a difference between sins that make repentance hard and sins that cause repentance to be prevented altogether; and at one point he implies that no sins are in the second category (See Laws of Repentance, 4:6) But his language vis-a-vis Pharaoh suggests that notwithstanding those statements, Pharaoh *is* in that second category—he applies to Pharaoh's case the very term that he uses to describe the second category, viz., "monein et ha-teshuvah," "they prevent repentance." Clearly Maimonides must deny that the verses in Ezekiel are absolute, and with that he faces the charge that Pharaoh should be no different from any other prospective penitent. There are midrashic passages to the effect that God does not "call" to all people to repent (i. e., does not encourage everyone), but that is different from saying that God does not *allow* certain people to repent.

65. Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik stresses this distinction in his discourses on repentance. See *Soloveitchik on Repentance, passim*.

66. The notion that the more one sins the more God will prevent him from repenting also undermines an idea that Maimonides advances in the *Guide of the Perplexed*, to wit, that belief in repentance has social utility. In a section outlining the purposes of the Torah's multifarious commandments, he places repentance into a class which he describes as "the opinions without the belief in which the existence of individuals professing a Law cannot be well ordered."

For an individual cannot but sin and err, either through ignorance—by professing an opinion or a moral quality that is not preferable in truth— or else because he is overcome by desire or anger. If then the individual believed that this fracture can never be remedied, he would

persist in his error and sometimes perhaps disobey even more because of the fact that no stratagem remains at his disposal. If, however, he believes in repentance, he can correct himself and return to a better and more perfect state than the one he was in before he sinned. (*Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines [U. of Chicago, 1963], pt. III, ch. 36, p. 540.)

Imagine now the impact on sinners of the knowledge that some fractures cannot be remedied! Perhaps a Maimonidean can turn the tables, answering that such knowledge would be useful since it would deter heinous crimes.

67. Furthermore, it is not unusual for Maimonides to present multiple, conflicting solutions in different works, so that a reading of the *Laws of Repentance* which, say, conflicts with what he says in *Eight Chapters*, might nonetheless be correct. The readings I propose now, however, conflict even with a previous reading I gave for *Laws of Repentance*, chapter 6. They have nonetheless been adopted by some interpreters.

68. Resh Lakish proffers this as an interpretation of Proverbs 3:34. His statement is also found in *Exodus Rabbah*, 13:3.

69. The hierarchical strategy I discuss in "Hierarchical Theories of Freedom and the Hardening of Hearts" is a variation of the strategy just considered. My reservations about it are expressed there.

70. Cassuto, 56; cf. Leibowitz, 149-60.

71. *Guide of the Perplexed* II:48; see the edition translated by Shlomo Pines (Chicago, 1963), p. 410. It may surprise readers to learn that according to a common scholarly opinion, Maimonides is a thoroughgoing naturalist, and not merely a naturalist about hardening. On this interpretation, his treatments of prophecy, providence, and even miracles have a naturalistic character. For discussion and references to the scholarly literature, see Jerome I. Gellman, "Radical Responsibility in Maimonides' Thought," in *The Thought of Moses Maimonides*, ed. I. Robinson, L. Kaplan, and J. Bauer (Lewiston, N. Y.: Edwin Mellen, 1991), 249-65; and my "Divine Intervention and Religious Sensibilities," in *Divine Intervention and Miracles in Jewish Theology*, ed. Dan Cohn-Sherbok (Lewiston, N. Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1996), 153-94.

The passage in *Guide of the Perplexed* II:48, no less than Cassuto's statement, is actually ambiguous as to the sense in which God is the remote cause: did He just design nature, or does He directly initiate particular causal sequences? The "naturalist" reading assumes the former.

72. Cassuto, 56.

73. See also Leibowitz, 149-60.

74. Nachum Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), p. 23. Any naturalist reading of "God hardened" no doubt will strike some readers as strained; but the expertise, literary sensitivity and eminence of Cassuto and Sarna, as well as of Leibowitz (who also reads hardening as a natural process, despite her criticisms of Cassuto), lead me to defer to their understanding of the biblical locution.

75. *Nicomachean Ethics*, III:5 (1114a). I have argued elsewhere that although agents bear responsibility for acts done because of characters they formed, such agents do not necessarily act freely. See "Irresistible Goodness and Alternative Possibilities." My argument there is that we must distinguish between the previous acts and the present one. For example, an addict acts unfreely now when he takes drugs even if there were previous moments at which he took drugs freely and those earlier choices shaped his present will. So it may be preferable to hold that Pharaoh is responsible for his later acts even though he does not perform them freely; and the naturalist position can and maybe should maintain as much— adding, however, that, if Pharaoh lost his

free will, that loss is his own responsibility.

76. Maimonides also puts forward a naturalist interpretation of most of the twenty-four categories of people for whom repentance is difficult or withheld; see chapter 4 of *Laws of Repentance*. In the Talmud, Ben Azzai points out that people become drawn into patterns of behavior: "a good deed leads to another good deed, a transgression to another transgression" (*Avot* 4:2). While his statement can be read supernaturalistically to mean that *God* provides further opportunities for good or bad deeds based on a person's earlier choices, Ben Azzai might be referring to the power of habit.

77. Wolfson, *Repercussions*, 210-11.

78. Sarna writes on p. 36, in his comment to Ex. 7:3: "I utilize his stubbornness in order to demonstrate my active presence." This of course is not the same as saying that God *makes* Pharaoh stubborn in order to demonstrate His power. The account I suggest is designed to explain in what sense God "makes" Pharaoh stubborn for the sake of multiplying His wonders. Cf. Sarna's comment to Exodus 10:1 (p. 48), where again he does not interpret God's words to imply that multiplication of wonders is the motive for hardening: "To the Egyptians, the multiplication of these `signs' enhances the evidence pointing to God's power."

79. Wolfson, *Repercussions*, 208. See Abraham Ibn Daud, *Emunah Ramah (The Exalted Faith)* II:6:2. See also Aquinas's discussion in *Summa Theologica* IaIIae, Q79, a. 4.

80. See also Leibowitz, Aquinas.

81. See Gellman, "Radical Responsibility." Maimonides' view is a bit confusing as to whether betterment is parallel to naturalistic hardening. When David prayed, "Uphold me with a willing spirit" (Psalms 51:4), he meant, "let not my sins prevent me from repenting. Instead the choice may be in my hands so that I may return, understand, and know, the way of truth. And so for all similar verses." David is not asking that God interfere with his soul, but only, in Gellman's words, that "his past sins not be allowed to prevent his own initiation of turning in the direction of God." But this construal of David's words invites the question of why David's past sins would stand in the way if he is really like a hardened agent. On the contrary his past right choices should deterministically produce future right choices, just as a hardened agent's past choices determine his present ones. Gellman's reference to "David's own initiation" suggests something other than a right choice produced by past right ones. (See Gellman, "Radical Responsibility," 252-54; the quote about King David's request is his translation of *Laws of Repentance* 6:4. Cf. Saadya Gaon, p. 202.)

Eleonore Stump pointed out to me that if God directly assists people not to sin, this would make the problem of evil look even more difficult. That is another reason to construe betterment naturalistically, I think.

82. For a similar account of Maimonides' religious sensibility, see David Hartman, *Maimonides: Torah and Philosophic Quest* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1976).

83. Soloveitchik, as adapted by Peli in *Soloveitchik on Repentance*, 182. See also Howard I. Levine, "The Experience of Repentance: The Views of Maimonides and William James," *Tradition* 1, 1 (Fall 1958):40-63. It is easy to see that a naturalist account of betterment accords nicely with a naturalist analysis of hardening. For if there is no divine assistance in the process of betterment, then psychological regularities and habit reign fully over the human personality. If so, then not everyone can repent after all: some people are too far gone to "return" even if they would want to. Belief in repentance must not encourage the false hope that change for the better is always possible, because

that attitude can produce moral laxity, the unacceptable attitude that the Talmud calls "I will sin and then I will repent" (Mishnah *Yoma* 8:9).

84. I thank Eleonore Stump for her thorough comments on the penultimate draft of this paper, and also David Widerker for commenting incisively on much of the material when it was in another form.