Dear Alumni and Friends —

Opening this winter issue of Criterion is the 2004 John Nuveen Lecture by Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Mark Strand, delivered on November 4, 2004, in Swift Lecture Hall. Strand read a selection of old and new poems, which we are delighted to include here.

Following Strand’s poems is an essay by Jeremy Biles on the social and sacred meaning of monster trucks. Biles, who graduated from the Divinity School with a Ph.D. in Religion and Literature last year, is the new managing editor of Sightings, the Martin Marty Center’s twice-weekly electronic editorial, and occasional contributor to the Center’s Religion and Culture Web Forum, in which this essay originally appeared.

In the middle of the issue is a collection of tributes to Joel Kraemer, the John Henry Barrows Professor Emeritus of Jewish Studies, who retired from the Divinity School faculty on June 30, 2003, after ten years of service. The tributes were delivered at a conference entitled “The Two Gentlemen of Córdoba,” held in Swift Hall on October 27 and 28, 2004, in Kraemer’s honor. The conference title refers to two important subjects of Kraemer’s scholarship, the medieval philosophers Maimonides and Averroes. Included here are an introduction to the conference by Dean Rosengarten, a paper by Chicago Professor Ralph Lerner, and an appreciation by Ph.D. student Ellen Haskell.

Concluding this issue are retirement reflections by Sam Portaro, chaplain emeritus of Brent House, the University’s Episcopal campus ministry, delivered at a Wednesday Lunch in Swift Common Room on November 17, 2004. A longtime friend of the Divinity School, Chaplain Portaro is renowned for his erudite and witty Wednesday Lunch talks, which, over the years, have addressed such subjects as the reverent irreverence of Mark Twain and the Oscar Wilde/Lord Alfred Douglas affair.

I hope you enjoy this issue,

Jennifer Quijano Sax, Editor
## CRITERION

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Ralph Lerner is Benjamin Franklin Professor in the College and Professor in the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago.

Mark Strand is Andrew MacLeish Distinguished Service Professor of Social Thought at the University of Chicago.

Sam Portaro is Chaplain Emeritus of Brent House, the Episcopal campus ministry at the University of Chicago.
Mark Strand, former Poet Laureate of the United States, delivered the Divinity School’s John Nuveen Lecture on November 4, 2004, in Swift Lecture Hall. The lectureship, which carries the name of a Chicago businessman and philanthropist who sought to encourage the relationship between the Divinity School and the campus at large, is awarded each year to a member of the University community whose research bears on religious issues.

Born on Canada’s Prince Edward Island in 1934, Strand was raised and educated in the United States and South America. He is the author of ten books of poems, including *Blizzard of One* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), which won the Pulitzer Prize; *Dark Harbor* (1993); *The Continuous Life* (1990); *Selected Poems* (1980); *The Story of Our Lives* (1973); and *Reasons for Moving* (1968). He has also published two books of prose, several volumes of translation (of works by Rafael Alberti and Carlos Drummond de Andrade, among others), several monographs on contemporary artists, and three books for children. He has edited a number of volumes, including *The Golden Ecco Anthology* (1994); *The Best American Poetry* (1991); and *Another Republic: 17 European and South American Writers* (with Charles Simic, 1976). His honors include the Wallace Stevens, Bollingen, and Edgar Allen Poe Prizes, awards from the National Institute of Arts and Letters and the Rockefeller Foundation, three grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, as well as fellowships from the Academy of American Poets, the MacArthur Foundation, and the Ingram Merrill Foundation. In addition to having served as Poet Laureate of the United States, he is a former Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets, and currently teaches in the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago.

For his Nuveen Lecture, Strand read a selection of old and new poems. In the Question-and-Answer session following the lecture, he claimed that there was no overarching theme governing his choice of poems. “I simply wanted to put my best foot forward,” he explained. “I think poems should allow us to touch some place beyond ourselves... by enchanting, elevating, entrancing us, enlarging our sensibility, and thereby somehow increasing our responsiveness to the world.” Strand’s poems certainly accomplish that, and *Criterion* is delighted to print those he read for his Nuveen Lecture in the following pages.
Thar desert tribesman and camel at Pushkar camel fair, Pushkar, Rajasthan, India ©Alain Evrard/Getty Images
Ah, there she is, coming down the garden steps, in heels, velvet evening gown, and golden boa, blowing kisses to the trees.

2002

I am not thinking of Death, but Death is thinking of me.
He leans back in his chair, rubs his hands, strokes
His beard and says, “I am thinking of Strand, I am thinking
That one of these days I’ll be out back, swinging my scythe
Or holding my hourglass up to the moon, and Strand will appear
In a jacket and tie, and together under the boulevards’
Leafless trees we’ll stroll into the city of souls. And when
We get to the Great Piazza with its marble mansions, the crowd
That had been waiting there will welcome us with delirious cries,
And their tears, turned hard and cold as glass from having been
Held back so long, will fall, and clatter on the stones below.
O let it be soon. Let it be soon.”

Black Sea

One clear night while the others slept, I climbed
the stairs to the roof of the house and under a sky
strewn with stars I gazed at the sea, at the spread of it,
the rolling crests of it raked by the wind, becoming
like bits of lace tossed in the air. I stood in the long
whispering night, waiting for something, a sign, the approach
of a distant light, and I imagined you coming closer,
the dark waves of your hair mingling with the sea,
and the dark became desire, and desire the arriving light.
The nearness, the momentary warmth of you as I stood
on that lonely height watching the slow swells of the sea
break on the shore and turn briefly into glass and disappear . . .
Why did I believe you would come out of nowhere? Why with all
that the world offers would you come only because I was here?
Originally published in the New Yorker.

2032

It is evening in the town of X
where Death, who used to love me, sits
in a limo with a blanket spread across his thighs,
waiting for his driver to appear. His hair
is white, his eyes have gotten small, his cheeks
have lost their luster. He has not swung his scythe
in years, or touched his hourglass. He is waiting
to be driven to the Blue Hotel, the ultimate resort,
where an endless silence fills the lilac-scented air,
and marble fish swim motionless in marble seas,
and where . . . where is his driver? Ah, there she is,
coming down the garden steps, in heels, velvet evening gown,
and golden boa, blowing kisses to the trees.
Originally published in the New Yorker.

Cake

A man leaves for the next town to pick up a cake.
On the way, he gets lost in a dense woods
and the cake is never picked up. Years later,
the man appears on a beach, staring at the sea.
“I am standing on a beach,” he thinks, “and I am lost
in thought.” He does not move. The heaving sea
turns black, its waves curl and crash. “Soon
I will leave,” he continues, “soon I will go
to a nearby town to pick up a cake. I will walk
in a brown and endless woods, and far away
the heaving sea will turn to black, and the waves—
I can see them now—will curl and crash.”
Originally published in TriQuarterly.
Into the desert they went and as they went their voices rose as one above the sifting sound of windblown sand.

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### Man and Camel

On the eve of my fortieth birthday
I sat on the porch having a smoke
when out of the blue a man and a camel
happened by. Neither uttered a sound
at first, but as they drifted up the street
and out of town the two of them began to sing.
Yet what they sang is still a mystery to me—
the words were indistinct and the tune
too ornamental to recall. Into the desert
they went and as they went their voices
rose as one above the sifting sound
of windblown sand. The wonder of their singing,
its elusive blend of man and camel seemed
an ideal image for all uncommon couples.
Was this the night that I had waited for
so long? I wanted to believe it was,
but just as they were vanishing, the man
and camel ceased to sing, and galloped
back to town. They stood before my porch,
staring up at me with beady eyes, and said:
“You ruined it. You ruined it forever.”

Originally published in the *New Yorker*. 

### Mirror

A white room and a party going on
and I was standing with some friends
under a large gilt-framed mirror
that tilted slightly forward
over the fireplace.
We were drinking whiskey
and some of us, feeling no pain,
were trying to decide
what precise shade of yellow
the setting sun turned our drinks.
I closed my eyes briefly,
then looked up into the mirror:
a woman in a green dress leaned
against the far wall.
She seemed distracted,
the fingers of one hand
fidgeted with her necklace,
and she was staring into the mirror,
not at me, but past me, into a space
that might be filled by someone
yet to arrive, who at that moment
could be starting the journey
which would lead eventually to her.
Then, suddenly, my friends
said it was time to move on
to the next party.
This was years ago,
and though I have forgotten
where we went and who we all were,
I still recall that moment of looking up
and seeing the woman stare past me
into a place I could only imagine,
and each time it is with a pang,
as if just then I were stepping
from the depths of the mirror
into that white room, breathless and eager,
only to discover too late
that she is not there.

Originally published in the *New Yorker*. 

### Mother and Son

The son enters the mother’s room
and stands by the bed where the mother lies.
The son believes that she wants to tell him
what he longs to hear—that he is her boy,
always her boy. The son leans down to kiss
the mother’s lips, but her lips are cold.
The burial of feelings has begun. The son
touches the mother’s hands one last time,
then turns and sees the moon’s full face.
An ashen light falls across the floor.
If the moon could speak, what would it say?
If the moon could speak, it would say nothing.

Originally published in *Slate*. 
Those avenues of light that slid between the clouds moments ago are gone, and suddenly it is dark . . .

The Webern Variations

The sudden rush of it
pushing aside the branches,
late summer flashing towards
the image of its absence

Into the heart of nothing,
into the radiant hollows,
even the language of vanishing
leaves itself behind

Clouds, trees, houses,
in the feeling they awaken
as the dark approaches, seem
like pieces of another life

One can sift through what remains—
the dust of phrases uttered once,
the ruins of a passion—
it comes to less each time

The voice sliding down,
the voice turning round
and lengthening the thread
of sense, the thread of sound

Those avenues of light
that slid between the clouds
moments ago are gone,
and suddenly it is dark

Who will be left to stitch
and sew the shroud of song,
the houses back in place, the trees
rising from a purple shade?

Not too late to see oneself
walk the beach at night,
how easily the sea comes in,
spreads, retreats, and disappears

How easily it breathes,
and the late-risen half-moon,
drawn out of darkness, staring down,
seems to pause above the waves

Under the moon and stars,
which are what they have always been,
what should we be but ourselves
in this light, which is no light to speak of?

What should we hear but the voice
that would be ours shaping itself,
the secret voice of being telling us
that where we disappear is where we are?

What to make of a season’s end,
the drift of cold drawn down
the hallways of the night,
the wind pushing aside the leaves?

The vision of one’s passing passes,
days flow into other days,
the voice that sews and stitches
again picks up its work

And everything turns and turns
and the unknown turns into the song
that is the known, but what in turn
becomes of the song is not for us to say.

Originally published in Final Edition.

Marsyas

Something was wrong
Screams could be heard
In the morning dark
It was cold

Screams could be heard
A storm was coming
It was cold
And the screams were piercing

A storm was coming
Someone was struggling
And the screams were piercing
Hard to imagine

Someone was struggling
So close, so close
Hard to imagine
A man was tearing open his body

So close, so close
The screams were unbearable
A man was tearing open his body
What could we do

The screams were unbearable
His flesh was in ribbons
What could we do
The rain came down

His flesh was in ribbons
And nobody spoke
The rain came down
There were flashes of lightning

And nobody spoke
Trees shook in the wind
There were flashes of lightning
Then came thunder

Originally published in the Colorado Review.
. . . Not every man knows what is waiting for him, or what he shall sing
When the ship he is on slips into darkness, there at the end.

Some Last Words

1
It is easier for a needle to pass through a camel
Than for a poor man to enter a woman of means.
Just go to the graveyard and ask around.

2
Eventually, you slip outside, letting the door
Bang shut on your latest thought. What was it anyway?
Just go to the graveyard and ask around.

3
“Negligence” is the perfume I love.
O Fedora. Fedora. If you want any,
Just go to the graveyard and ask around.

4
The bones of the buffalo, the rabbit at sunset,
The wind and its double, the tree, the town . . .
Just go to the graveyard and ask around.

5
If you think good things are on their way
And the world will improve, don’t hold your breath.
Just go to the graveyard and ask around.

6
You over there, why do you ask if this is the valley
Of limitless blue, and if we are its prisoners?
Just go to the graveyard and ask around.

7
Life is a dream that is never recalled when the sleeper awakes.
If this is beyond you, Magnificent One,
Just go to the graveyard and ask around.

Originally published in Blizzard of One (Knopf, 1998).

Elevator

1
The elevator went to the basement. The doors opened.
A man stepped in and asked if I was going up.
“I’m going down,” I said, “I won’t be going up.”

2
The elevator went to the basement. The doors opened.
A man stepped in and asked if I was going up.
“I’m going down,” I said, “I won’t be going up.”

Originally published in Meridian.

The End

Not every man knows what he shall sing at the end,
Watching the pier as the ship sails away, or what it will seem like
When he’s held by the sea’s roar, motionless, there at the end,
Or what he shall hope for once it is clear that he’ll never go back.

When the time has passed to prune the rose or caress the cat,
When the sunset torching the lawn and the full moon icing it down
No longer appear, not every man knows what he’ll discover instead.
When the weight of the past leans against nothing, and the sky
Is no more than remembered light, and the stories of cirrus
And cumulus come to a close, and all the birds are suspended in flight,
Not every man knows what is waiting for him, or what he shall sing
When the ship he is on slips into darkness, there at the end.

Sunday! Sunday! Sunday!
The Monster Trucks’ Black Sabbath

We had not yet gotten beyond the city limits of our hometown of Chicago on our way to the Sunnyview Expo Center in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, for the monster truck rally, when traffic ground to a halt. My wife, Yuki, and I found ourselves stuck in our aging Ford Escort, one car among hundreds clogging the northbound artery of Interstate 94. After maybe half an hour of stop-and-go, we came upon the ostensible culprit: a minor car wreck. But the involved vehicles had been pulled onto the shoulder; the highway was passable. It was we gapers who were causing the delay. Who can resist the spectacle of a car crash?

It was, of course, car wrecking of a sort that Yuki and I were out to see that day in the form of the Monster Jam, the traveling monster truck extravaganza featuring customized trucks on preposterously large tires. Heeding the trademark call of “Sunday! Sunday! Sunday!” millions of Americans treat their pilgrimages to mostly rural arena sites as a kind of Sabbath—a day on which they can rest, while watching the monsters play. The constituent sacramental elements of the ritual are not, of course, the wine and wafers of High Mass, but the populist victuals of beer and bratwurst, with heavy metal anthems replacing more traditional hymns.

However comical the Monster Jam may appear to those of us less implicated in its general ethos, it is a major cultural phenomenon, on par in magnitude and visual grandiosity with most any other form of entertainment spectacle, and to treat it as a joke or a disposable piece of lowbrow culture would be not only condescending, but negligent. Yet, to the best of my knowledge, ritual theorists and cultural critics have failed to scrutinize the Monster Jam. Attempting a first step toward righting this oversight, I treat the Monster Jam as a subject worthy of serious study, for it is an example of a troubling economic phenomenon underwritten by religious forces.

This essay was originally published in the Martin Marty Center’s Religion and Culture Web Forum (January 2005), http://marty-center.uchicago.edu/webforum/archive.shtml.
Such a monster has, then, really existence! I cannot doubt it, yet I am lost in surprise and admiration.

Mary Shelley

*Frankenstein*
Monster trucks, I contend, are complicit with the sinister, negative, oppositional aspect of the sacred.

There is indeed something sinister about this black Sabbath. In this paper, I will argue that the fascination that the monster trucks exert on those who behold them trades on the monsters’ association with the sinister, or “left”, aspect of the sacred, while the power of the outcome of the ritual depends in part on the embattled iconicity of the automobile and the ideology that it emblematizes. In concluding, I draw from Bruce Lincoln’s treatment of another great form of sports entertainment, professional wrestling, in arguing that the Monster Jam is an example of a ritual inversion that, “rather than producing upheaval or significant modification within a given social field help[s] to preserve the sociopolitical and economic structures intact in the face of potential challenges.”

I. The Birth of Monsters from the Spirit of Opposition

The first monster truck originated in America’s heartland. It was the invention of Bob Chandler, progenitor of the legendary Bigfoot. In 1974, Chandler—owner of the Midwest Four Wheel Drive Center in Hazelwood, Missouri, and avid tinkerer and off-road enthusiast—bought a new F-250 4x4 that “became a laboratory for parts and engineering experiments.” Oversized tires were among the first modifications. This feature combined with Chandler’s “aggressive behind-the-wheel [offroad] escapades” to earn him the nickname Bigfoot, which was subsequently transferred to his truck in 1976.

Bigfoot the truck, like its simian counterpart, achieved a mythical status. But although celebrated locally, in 1977 Chandler’s vehicle was rejected from a classic and custom car show in Las Vegas. In a conspicuous display of contestation, he parked his monstrous machine in front of the glitzy venue, where it inspired the admiration, not to mention bewilderment, of more people than did the cars in the show. In 1981, seeking to intensify the monster’s aura, Chandler set up a stunt field near his Midwest shop and drove Bigfoot over a few junked cars. The feat was captured on video and disseminated through circles of 4x4 aficionados. The video stirred up sufficient enthusiasm to turn car crushing into a popular phenomenon in the mid-1980s. Previously, this enthusiasm reached a nearly hysterical pitch when, in 1983, Chandler put on a car-crushing exhibition at the Pontiac Silver Dome in Detroit as part of a tractor and pickup show. Event promoter Bob George describes the ecstatic near-riot inspired by the sighting: Bigfoot “came out of the tunnel, crawled over four cars, and then had to be escorted off the floor because 50,000 people came over the rails to get closer.”

That monster trucks are capable of inspiring awe and inducing frenzy is indisputable; what, precisely, accounts for this awe and the religious sensibility it expresses and promotes, however, is less obvious. I submit that these trucks exploit the characteristics of the “left” sacred in order to inspire fascination in those who behold them. French sociologist Emile Durkheim famously characterized the sacred in absolute opposition to the profane. In fact, “the first possible definition of the sacred is that it is the opposite of the profane.” The sacred, the wholly other, is thus, as one commentator has put it, “the very principle of opposition, contestation, and radical difference.” Not only opposed to the profane, the sacred is opposed to itself, internally divided. According to Durkheim, the sacred is characterized by a polarity: “on the one hand, a pure, noble, elevated, life-giving form (the ‘right’ sacred); on the other, an impure, vile, degraded, and dangerous form (the ‘left’ sacred).”

Monster trucks, I contend, are complicit with the sinister, negative, oppositional aspect of the sacred, and embody the transgressive, destructive forces associated with death and the underworld. Like many other countercultural phenomena, this domain of custom culture inspires its fearful fascination through a combination of underworld associations and spectacular displays of destructive power. In particular, these trucks are the automotive embodiments of that most conspicuous form of potent alterity: sacred monstrosity.

To be sure, these trucks partake of a host of monstrous attributes. Standing about twelve feet high and fitted with “grotesquely oversized tires,” the eight-ton beasts count gigantism as the most patent of their monstrous features. Their 2,000 horsepower engines emit a deafening noise—every bit a monster’s roar. But the awe-inspiring enormity of spatial and sonic volume is not alone responsible for their tremendous sinister force. In addition to egregious size, the trucks, like other monsters, embody contradiction. For example, the mingling of life and death, animate and inanimate, so often
The importance of the monster trucks’ voracity for automobiles is not to be underestimated . . .

associated with monsters is evident in the trucks’ combination of mechanical and biological attributes; the customized metal and fiberglass bodies frequently exhibit 3-D fangs, horns, arms, eyes, and other creaturely features. Moreover, the non-factory bodylines, individually modified skins, and hand-carved tires endow the trucks with an air of uniqueness; each thus displays that monstrous attribute of singularity.

The trucks’ exploitation of the forces of the “left” sacred is further underwritten by their association with the destructive forces of nature, from natural catastrophes to predatory beasts; with frenzy, panic, and rampage; and with the chthonic powers of death and the underworld. Consider, in this regard, the names of just a few monster trucks: Aftershock, Beast, Brothers of Destruction, Carolina Crusher, Cyclone, Destroyer, Devil’s Dodge, Extreme Overkill, Gator, Godzilla, Grave Digger, King Krunch, Madusa [sic], Megasaurus, Monster Patrol, Nitemare, Predator, Thunder Beast, Tornado, The Undertaker, and Wild Thang. The alliance of monster trucks and the underworld is made graphically explicit in a comic-style narrative from the pages of my Monster Jam program. It depicts the conjuring of the “spirit of Grim,” a skeletal but muscular super-demon who propels the popular monster truck Grave Digger to ever greater degrees of frenzy, and who, having accomplished his demolishing mission, repairs to the underworld, “ready to return when the need for destruction arises once again.”

The trucks additionally feature the threatening maw often associated with monsters, reconfigured in their crushing or consuming tires, which are sometimes explicitly incorporated into the overall truck design to correspond to teeth. This attribute has its corollary in the monster trucks’ cannibalistic hunger to devour other automobiles. Indeed, Predator’s driver, Allen Pezo, claims that his truck “prey[s] on cars.”

The importance of the monster trucks’ voracity for automobiles is not to be underestimated; an analysis of the symbolic significance of the consumption of cars is, I will show, crucial to understanding the ritual efficacy of the Monster Jam. It is thus to the place of the automobile in the American imagination that I now turn.

II. Auto-da-fé: The Car as Icon

The dream of automobility that found its realization in the production and distribution of the car is part and parcel of the American Dream on the whole. The freely roving person behind the wheel might be considered the horizontal counterpart of vertical or upward mobility within a free market economy. Indeed, the car is the “ultimate realization of individual affirmation.” The sense of freedom and individuality, economic and otherwise, afforded by, and emblematized in, the image of the driver on the open road has rendered the car an icon—an icon of the American Dream, the dream of “success through individual talent [and] effort” as expressed in the rewards of independence, personal freedom.

However, the almost religious zeal with which cars have been embraced in America has not, in fact, culminated in the triumph of individualism. On the contrary, “mass car ownership heralded the beginning of consumer capitalism”—and what the automobile heralded at its advent has also become its destiny: The car is no longer only an icon of American individualism, but simultaneously an icon of American mass consumerism and the triumph of corporate capitalism.

To be sure, the icon of the automobile retains an aura. The peculiar seductiveness of cars is at once double and
the irony inherent in the mass-production of machines of automobility finds its most poignant expression in the traffic jam.

other to the aura of the monster truck. It is a seduction predicated on the allure of mass-produced objects, and underwritten by the exhilaration of consumption itself. The fetishization of commodities is thus epitomized in the automobile, which, however, far from assuring a mobilizing individualism, is the embodiment of the age of mass production, with its attendant impediments and de-individualizing effects. For example, the irony inherent in the mass-production of machines of automobility finds its most poignant expression in the traffic jam. A parody of the assembly line, the traffic jam is a phenomenon that dramatically displays the diminution of individuality and the arresting of mobility, forward or upward.

III. From Traffic Jam to Monster Jam: Hyperbolic Consumption

One commentator has suggested that “all motorists who’ve ever been stuck in gridlock traffic [respond] with primordial emotion” to the sight of a monster truck climbing over a row of cars, crushing them under its hungry, colossal tires. I would go so far as to suggest that the Monster Jam is staged as the antithesis of the traffic jam. If the car has become the icon of mass consumerism and its de-individualizing effects, the monster truck—originally the customized, singular, unique creation of individual labor—is the expression of a kind of rage against the machines that embody consumerist culture in late capitalist society. They are the mutated, altered, and, indeed, monstrous others of the industrially produced automobiles in which they have their origins, and from which they deviate.

In fact, the monster trucks might be said to apotheosize road rage—that violent expression of opposition to the frustrating, de-individualizing effects of a road glutted with traffic—while the trucks’ ritualized auto destructions afford a cathartic “visual pleasure . . . associated with humanity’s most atavistic traits and rudimentary instincts.” But the exuberantly sensational and gratifying images of this mechanical mayhem are by no means the straightforward expressions of wish fulfillment, nor do they simply represent a revolutionary reclamation of individualism and freedom in confrontation with the homogenizing effects of capitalism and mass consumerism. On the contrary, I will argue that the spectacle of the Monster Jam dramatizes an inversion that ultimately “preserve[s] . . . sociopolitical and economic structures intact,” with corporate America left standing as the beneficiary of the ritually affirmed status quo.

To understand the power of this ritual inversion, one must note the social context in which it occurs. What Jim Freedman argues in regard to professional wrestling is all the more true of the Monster Jam: “What is most fundamentally at issue . . . is the nature of modern capitalism and the fabled ‘American Dream’ of success through individual talent [and] effort.” In regard to the Monster Jam, it is important to recall that the American Dream is ambivalently iconized in the form of the automobile, that symbol of individual success, on one hand, as well as the de-individualizing effects of the successful capitalist system that was to provide the conditions for the individual’s flourishing.

With this in mind, I want to suggest that the sinister fascination that the Monster Jam exerts on its predominantly lower-class audience “devolves in part on “its ability to present a convincing picture of the contradictions between the . . . ideology of upward mobility within a free market economy and lived experience,” where mobility is frustrated and individuality is absorbed into all the impotent anonymity and homogeneity of a traffic jam.” The ritual of the Monster Jam capitalizes “on the audience’s ambivalence vis-à-vis the automobile through a three-act challenge to, and concomitant reaffirmation of, capitalist ideology.

The first act of the Monster Jam rally consists of competitive races between pairs of monster trucks over a looping semicircular course with impediments that include rows of junked cars. The cars’ homogeneity is underscored by the fact that they are all uniformly painted in coats of flat primary colors; the indistinguishability of one car from another also highlights the custom singularity of the monsters that devour them. In an iconoclastic rage, the monster trucks variously trample, crush, or overlap the anonymous cars, those icons of freedom and individuality that have come to emblematize mass production. Here, then, is the initial challenge to the dominant ideology. But this routine simultaneously heralds the triumphant reinstatement of an American economic
in this autocannibalistic display, the massive monster embodies the very thing it was to consume: mass consumption itself.

ideal: individual talent and effort, embodied in the custom vehicles, are the inevitable victors of a ritual of competitive consumerism; far from corroding or opposing the system, they here dramatically comply with its conditions.

This critique and reaffirmation of mass production and its concomitant, mass consumerism, achieves preposterous grandiloquence in the second act of the Monster Jam. Lumbaring to the center of the arena is a “transformer,” an earth-moving machine outfitted as a fire-breathing, car-eating monster. Raising up its victim with powerful claws, the Robosaurus scorches the automobile before crushing it between mechanical mandibles, making carnage of the car. The singular monster devours and destroys the anonymous automobile: thus the second challenge. However, in this autocannibalistic display, the massive monster embodies the very thing it was to consume: mass consumption itself. In a moment of conspicuous, indeed hyperbolic, consumption, the transformer violently literalizes consumerism by devouring the automobile—a spectacular, fascinating reaffirmation of capitalist ideology.

In the third act, the monster trucks participate in a freestyle competition in which each machine is given the opportunity to display as much creative destruction as possible, crushing and jumping cars, letting their engines roar, and spinning donuts that stir up thick nimbuses of dust. It is in this third act that the trucks’ drivers, attempting to whip the crowd into a frenzy with risky stunts, are most likely to lose control of their vehicles. On the night that I attended the Monster Jam, a truck called Destroyer fulfilled the destiny implied in its name. Using junked cars as a ramp, Destroyer attempted to ride out a wheelie, before tipping over and crashing. This was clearly the highlight of the evening. With the crash of the monster, a staple of any Monster Jam rally, the audience goes wild. In fact, the ideal outcome of the freestyle competition, from the fans’ perspective, is a crash. For this reason: What we fans love most is to see a monster work itself into such a frenzy of destruction that it actually exhausts itself, destroys itself. In this instance, Destroyer’s frenzy of destruction extended beyond the cars to the very agent of destruction; the automobile-destroying Destroyer proved also to be autodestructive. But Destroyer’s crash marks the third reaffirmation of capitalism — this one with Aristotelian overtones, for the crash is also the death of the monster, and has all the cathartic moment of a tragedy. This catharsis has a rhetorical, persuasive effect: in stirring up excessive emotions of rebellion and opposition — those emotions most likely to corrode the prevailing ideology — it also rids the audience of those emotions. It thus effects a rewarding, gratifying release of potentially dangerous sentiments. To the cheers of fans, the destruction of the destroying machine spectacularly glorifies the risk-taking individual even as he stumbles and crashes, again and again.

And this, finally, is the task of the Monster Jam: to dramatize the myth of the American Dream, affirming its truth even in the face of challenge, and in so doing, to “re persuade the audience of the dominant ideology’s enduring validity, their own contradictory experiences notwithstanding.” Indeed, it is the owner of the Monster Jam, the multimedia conglomerate Clear Channel Entertainment, headquartered in San Antonio, Texas, that cultivates and capitalizes on the enthralment with death, destruction, and the “left” sacred in order to maintain the frenetic commerce of promotional culture. While the monster trucks were born from the spirit of opposition, they are now the pawns of economic competition. Their sinister forces have been usurped and packaged, co-opted and sold in the form of tickets, T-shirts, toys, magazines, caps, pennants, and programs, all of which proclaim that the real winner of the Monster Jam’s competitive ritual is corporate America — for capitalism is always at work, even and especially on the Sabbath.

At the conclusion of the rally, as the monsters exited the twilit arena, Yuki and I joined the gathering masses in the parking lot, where we were all immediately caught up in a line of cars waiting to exit the Expo grounds. The nighttime ride back to Chicago was long but lit up. At one point, we glimpsed a group of squad cars, blue and red lights flashing. The accident must have just happened: a car on the shoulder of an otherwise empty road, its entire body consumed in flames.

Endnotes continue on page 32
A Tribute to Joel Kraemer

Joel L. Kraemer, the John Henry Barrows Professor Emeritus of Jewish Studies, retired from the University of Chicago faculty on June 30, 2003, after ten years of service. Kraemer received his B.A. from Rutgers University in 1954, his M.H.L. from the Jewish Theological Seminary in 1959, and his Ph.D. from Yale University in 1967. He taught at both J.T.S. and Yale before moving to Israel in 1971 to serve on the faculty of Tel Aviv University, where he chaired the Islamic Studies program. He joined the University of Chicago’s faculty formally in 1994.

Kraemer’s scholarship and teaching have done much to enhance our understanding of how the heritage of classical antiquity (Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, etc.) was assimilated in medieval Islamic civilization by Christians, Jews, and Muslims, members of monotheistic faiths based on revelation. He has made signal contributions to our understanding of a moment when Athens and Jerusalem truly did meet, as exemplified in such books as Philosophy in the Renaissance of Islam (1986); Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam (1992); and his forthcoming More Precious Than Rubies: Women’s Letters from the Cairo Geniza and A Life of Maimonides.

On October 27 and 28, 2004, a conference was held to honor Kraemer’s work. Entitled “The Two Gentlemen of Córdoba,” it focused on the medieval philosophers Averroes and Maimonides, contemporaries who represent a medieval enlightenment. Each was a jurist, physician, scientist, and philosopher. And each was translated into Latin and had a significant impact on Scholastic thought (Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas in particular). Averroes was certainly the greatest of the medieval Muslim thinkers, as Maimonides was the greatest of the Jewish thinkers. They had much in common beyond the similarity of their vitae.

Conference participants grappled with a variety of ideas in their papers: Alfred Ivry of New York University examined “Conjunction and Conformity in Averroes’ and Maimonides’ Philosophies”; Barry Kogan of Hebrew Union College investigated “Averroes and Maimonides on Divine Immanence and Transcendence”; Divinity School Professor Emeritus Bernard McGinn looked at “Maimonides and Gabirol among the Scholastics”; Tzvi Lagermann of Bar Ilan University...
Top left: The Swift-Bond Cloister; top right: Joel Kraemer; bottom (left to right): Michael Fishbane, Menachem Brinner, Joel Kraemer, Paul Mendes-Flohr.
Through his teaching and scholarship he has also introduced a crucial era of Islamic thought and culture to this assembly . . .

discussed “Two Toxicologists from Córdoba”; Ralph Lerner of the University of Chicago’s Committee on Social Thought considered “The Philosopher as Legislator”; and Divinity School Professor Paul Mendes-Flohr wrestled with “Philosophy of Religion or Philosophy of Law?: A Twentieth-Century Maimonidean Controversy.”

To conclude the conference, a reception was held in Swift Common Room, at which Dean Rosengarten presented the retiree with a gift of thanks, and Professor Paul Mendes-Flohr and Ph.D. student Ellen Haskell made toasts in his honor. Criterion is pleased to print here a selection of the papers and tributes delivered at the conference.

In Gratitude

Richard A. Rosengarten

Welcome to this conference in honor of our teacher and colleague Joel Kraemer. I want especially to welcome Joel’s wife, Aviva, to this occasion, and also guests of the Divinity School who have traveled from far and wide to be here.

Our program these next two days is simple but heartfelt. We want to express our gratitude and appreciation to Joel for his scholarship and teaching, with which we in Swift Hall have been privileged to enjoy a direct association since 1994. (The appreciation clearly extends further back in time, but the association dates to just ten years ago.)

It is important to note that Joel was the second in a series of three faculty appointments with which the Divinity School has established a program in the history of Judaism, beginning with Michael Fishbane’s 1989 appointment as Nathan Cummings Professor and culminating, after Joel’s appointment, with the appointment of Paul Mendes-Flohr in 1996. Joel’s teaching and research have helped to provide an exceptional foundation to the Divinity School’s serious commitment to the study of Judaica for which we are immensely grateful. For both the material that Joel introduced into our conversation about religion, and for the standards his teaching and scholarship have set for our common work, the faculty and students of this institution will always be deeply grateful.

It is also important to note that Joel’s work extends well beyond this important formal contribution. Through his teaching and scholarship he has also introduced a crucial era of Islamic thought and culture to this assembly, and he has done it in ways that are marked by an ideal combination of authority and generosity of engagement. He is vitally interested in the connection between his own work and the human adventure with ideas. His intellect is generous, and many of us have found in Joel a wonderful conversation partner and a helpful sounding board for our own endeavors.

In sum, this community has many reasons to express to you, Joel, our very profound gratitude.
The exalted character of Holy Writ should preclude unqualified individuals from indulging their interpretive fancies.

This is hardly surprising given the parallels in these two thinkers’ situations. Each lives and acts within a communal world defined by its sacred text. In coming to terms with that ineluctable presence, each is obliged to confront anew the problem of how best to read that text. Each understands the search for meaning to be ultimately a quest to establish a writer’s or speaker’s intention. Needless to say, the stakes are raised very high when the text and its author or speaker are invested with divinity. The exalted character of Holy Writ should preclude unqualified individuals from indulging their interpretive fancies. Yet such individuals feel free to do just that, and the consequent instability and uncertainty afflicting their communities prompt these two philosophers to intervene. They offer their publics a corrective lesson in the form of a philosophically informed commentary on a sacred text. It is noteworthy that while engaging in interpretation, each also effectually legislates on behalf of his special cause.
Only by stepping outside the Islamic milieu and reflecting upon the works of the Ancients can one then be positioned to fulfill the Law's command.
The Law accomplishes its great end by using language that bears both an apparent sense and an inner sense.

it is at odds with the conclusions of demonstrative reasoning (7.21–8.1). His argument’s point of departure has been inverted. Now it is the sacred text that has to be interpreted to conform to the findings of philosophic investigation. Some of Averroes’ readers may find this line of argument paradoxical, even an inducement to puzzle out its unsettling implication. The recommended activity of unearthing the Law’s inner meaning through true interpretation may be but an optional way of acquiring knowledge of the whole of existence. Those few readers are left to draw their own quiet conclusions about how best to conduct their philosophical pursuits.4

Averroes stresses the universality of the Koran’s message. As the tradition has it, the Prophet was sent to “the Red and the Black.” Now since the Law aims to address all people, it has to take account of their different natures. Each must be spoken to according to that person’s abilities and acquired capacities. Each will be brought to assent to the Law’s message if it is couched for him or her in fitting language and at the appropriate level. A rhetorical presentation will be intelligible and persuasive to most, a dialectical argument to some, and a demonstration to but a few. It follows that it is precisely because the Law intends to teach everyone that it cannot be presumed to speak in only one voice. Rather, it has to contain all kinds of methods for bringing about assent and all kinds of methods for forming a concept (19.17–18). The Law accomplishes its great end by using language that bears both an apparent sense and an inner sense. The former conveys images of its truths. Addressed to mankind at large, these representations must be taken at face value by anyone belonging to the subdemonstrative classes. The inner sense, on the other hand, conveys the Law’s true meanings, but these reveal themselves only to members of the demonstrative class. Herein lies the beautiful artfulness of the Law.

Yet for all the privileges Averroes accords the demonstrative class, he takes pains to limit his claims on its behalf. The promotion of demonstrative science is only a secondary intention of the Law. Its primary intention is to take care ānāya—19.21) of the greater number, the subphilosophic multitude.1 Toward them the Lawgiver acts as a physician of the soul, preserving and restoring health by instilling pious assent (22.8–13; 23.5–8). At the same time, the Lawgiver has not neglected to alert (tanbih—8.12; 19.21) the select few—

“those adept in demonstration,” “those adept in the truth” (25.16–17). He has signaled them that there is more to the scriptural text than meets the untrained eye. This invitation to dig and discover the true interpretation embedded in the Law’s images and words is conveyed with exquisite reserve and discrimination to a class that is itself expected to display reserve and discrimination.

This great Farabian motif appears more than once in Averroes’ other writings. His paraphrase of Plato’s Republic details the devices to which the teaching philosopher has to resort in order to effect even a modest degree of popular enlightenment.5 Likewise, the theme of the reticent philosopher is raised briefly at the end of the Incoherence of the Incoherence, where Averroes sketches the public face that philosophy must present to a world that neither trusts nor understands it.7 Here in the Decisive Treatise, however, Averroes lays bare an exegetical tactic that would create a preserve for the learned while keeping all others from trespassing where they do not belong and can do themselves no good. What purport to be alternative interpretations of a Koranic verse are in truth little short of legislative enactments by this philosopher-jurist-exegete.4 Averroes cites an ambiguous verse no fewer than four times in an effort to account for seemingly contradictory statements in scripture. But in the process of doing so, he succeeds in highlighting his own ambiguous and contradictory presentation. As it stands, this verse (37) invites an interpreter or editor to supply some punctuation:

He it is who has sent down to you the Book, containing certain verses clear and definite—they are the essence of the Book—and others ambiguous. Now those in whose hearts is mischief go after the ambiguous passages, seeking discord and seeking to interpret them. But no one knows their interpretation except God and those who are well grounded in science they say, “We believe in it, it is all from the Lord; but only men of intelligence give heed.”8

In two of his citations of this verse, Averroes inserts a full stop so that the sentence reads: “But no one knows their interpretation except God and those well grounded in science” (8.13–14; 10.6–9). This version of the text assures members of the demonstrative class that it suffices for the great mass of believers to
learn to keep away from scriptural obscurities. They have no cause to preoccupy themselves with what is none of their business; this is the domain of men of intelligence. Most people are best left undisturbed at the level of figures of speech and symbols. Secure in their faulty understandings, let them continue to enjoy untroubled sleep, however inferior their assent is to that of the learned. Yet Averroes does not leave it at this bold act of circumscribing popular exegesis. He also offers a cautious alternative interpretation, one that acknowledges publicly that finite human intelligence necessarily must falter in the presence of the infinite. Thus in his two other citations of this verse, he punctuates as follows: “But no one knows their interpretation except God” (16.12–13; 21.16–19). By putting the period after the word “God,” the learned assure the subdemonstrative classes that we are all in the dark and that only God knows how scripture’s abstruse or ambiguous language ought to be interpreted.

We are obliged to wonder at Averroes’ equivocation. Can both of these readings be equally serviceable? Yes, if we think of the Decisive Treatise as addressing two audiences and as having a distinct message for each. If its author’s intent is to help abate public agitation over religious doctrine, then enlisting his cautious gloss on verse 3:7 serves him well. The last thing the multitude of believers needs is the welter of confusion generated by contending allegorical interpretations, whether promoted by rogue philosophers or by intemperate dialectical theologians. On the other hand, if the author’s intent is to shore up with scriptural authority the exposed and vulnerable position of those who would philosophize in his religious community, then his bold gloss on verse 3:7 also serves him well. Given the diverse ends in view, both readings are necessary. For all his concern that philosophers find a secure space in the House of Islam where they can follow their pursuit, Averroes is no less concerned that popular beliefs not be undercut by those who have nothing better to supply in their place (21.20–23.4). I conclude that Averroes’ philosophical politics might well be characterized as bold in thought and moderate in practice. As such, it exhibits traits of the highest kind of statesmanship.

LIKE AVERROES, Maimonides laments and disdains the uninformed, irresponsible talk among his coreligionists as partisans rummage about in Holy Writ searching for proof texts. A disregard for context might be prompted by ignorance or haughtiness, but in either case will likely lead to absurdities and gross misunderstandings. Again and again Maimonides insists that one take due note of the setting in which a statement appears with a view to perceiving better its intended meaning. Never is this disciplined reading more indispensable than when confronting the Law of God and attempting to discern the divine Legislator’s intention. Failing that, readers might be perplexed and misled by the external resemblances of two allegedly divine Laws. The one commands and prohibits, promises and threatens, just as does the other. Impressed by these similarities, such readers might succumb to the argument that the more recent Law completes, perfects, and supplants the earlier one. They would be unable to extricate themselves from their confusion of mind unless and until they come to grasp that “our Law” has an inner meaning. Someone who understood that inner meaning “would recognize that the entire wisdom of the true divine Law is in its inner [or esoteric] meaning.” Access to the divine intent is thus predicated on an understanding of the ways of divine speech.

Maimonides draws his readers’ attention to the challenge of addressing members of a heterogeneous audience with divergent possibilities. Precisely because scripture’s reports of God’s speech are directed to both the many and the elite, each according to their distinct capacities, a univocal reading of its words necessarily misses the point. Thus Maimonides has to insist on the twofold perfection to which the Law calls and directs its adherents. One is the inculcation of those ethical virtues requisite for leading a fitting human life in this world. The other is the inculcation of the rational virtues through which an individual might apprehend the intelligibles as much as is humanly possible. To be sure, these two aims differ in nobility and urgency. Maimonides makes this abundantly clear in his classic account in the Guide of the Perplexed, part 3, chapter 27. If his readers keep that distinction constantly in mind, they will be spared the blunders and confusions that beset the common people and
most people fail both to discern scripture's use of parabolic language and to evaluate it properly.

even some purported members of the elite. The uninstructed, however, remain ignorant of the Law's distinct aims and its consequent need to display different faces in public and in private. As a result, most people fail both to discern scripture's use of parabolic language and to evaluate it properly. That failure in turn redoubles their perplexity—both about the Law's language and about the message it means to convey (1.Introd. [2b–3b/5–6]).

To start to emerge from this impasse, one must go back to the beginning. First, one must develop the healthy habit of being attentive to the context in which a statement appears. If people are baffled or misled by prophetic pronouncements, it is for want of understanding the kind of speech characteristic of each. Every prophet makes his own distinctive use of parable, metaphor, hyperbole, and other forms of figurative speech; and these in turn need to be recognized and then correctly understood. Here, then, is the context—a lengthy examination of Isaiah's manner of speaking, taken as a case in point—into which Maimonides inserts a silent quotation. They are, strange to say, the words of Koran 59:2, those very words Averroes cites in the opening pages of the Decisive Treatise: “Consider, you who are able to see.”

When we look more closely at what Maimonides says we ought to “consider,” we find him once again crafting different recommendations for different audiences. And since we would expect the object of our preoccupation to manifest itself in our adopting a certain way of life, we are prepared to see Maimonides recommending different ways of life as well. Needless to say, his understanding of human nature rules out the possibility that one size can fit all.

The alternatives are encapsulated—for believers, at least—in Maimonides' very brief discussion of the positive commandment that we love God. We fulfill that, he says, by “considering” divine commandments, exhortations, and works. Each of these objects of contemplation leads to a recognition of the Creator. With that recognition, we can move on to achieve some comprehension of Him, and that in turn leads to our coming to love Him. But as the objects of consideration might be thought of as being of unequal rank, so too are the degrees of perfection that their devotees might achieve. It is significant, I suspect, that the consideration of “works” in Maimonides' triad does not appear in our text of the rabbinic source he cites in the Book of Commandments. Similarly, when addressing correspondents who wonder whether there is any utility in studying astronomy, Maimonides cites an otherwise unknown dictum of Rabbi Meir to the effect that one ought to “contemplate His works, for thus you recognize Him who spoke and the world came into being.” Maimonides also directs his correspondents' attention to the beginning of “our great compilation,” where they will find an explication of these roots. And indeed the Mishneh Torah does not disappoint expectations.

The sheer scale of that vast work permits Maimonides an amplitude that he does not ordinarily grant himself. In “Laws Concerning Character Traits,” he discusses the ways in which one might govern one's life and addresses in turn the wise man, the disciples of the wise, and man simply. To the latter, he has a message as apparently simple as it is daunting: Cleave to Him! But what can this mean? Is it even conceivable as a positive commandment? By recurring to the Talmudic sage's glosses on this biblical command, Maimonides is able to specify an object for everyone to “consider.” Learn from the actions and words of the wise men and their disciples by associating with them and bonding with them in every aspect of ordinary life. Thus understood, this injunction is within the reach of many.

But what of those thoughtful individuals to whom Maimonides (along with Averroes) addresses the call, “Consider, you who are able to see”? Maimonides' own injunction to them is more challenging by far than that prescribed for ordinary folk. “Man needs to direct every single one of his deeds solely toward attaining knowledge of the Name, blessed be He” (De'oth, 3:2/49b; Weiss, 34). Here, in a centrally situated discussion of how to conduct one’s life according to the mean, Maimonides points to an all-absorbing life devoted to theoria. This interpretation reaffirms the peak of human achievement held forth in his Eight Chapters. There he prescribes subordinating all the powers of one's soul to thought, focusing on a single goal: “the perception of God (may He be glorified and magnified), I mean, knowledge of Him, in so far as that lies within man's power.”
One can hardly fault Maimonides for failing to hold high the love the Torah so exalts.

and strengthens one’s body, a man positions his upright soul to come to know the Lord (De’oth, 3.350a; Weiss, 35). Or as expressed somewhat differently in the Guide: It is with a view to that intellectual apprehension of the deity, of the angels, and of His other works that you should arrange and direct all your actions, impulses, and thoughts. This is what is required of man. It is your abiding business to take as your very own end that which is the end of man qua man.

The confluence of these discrete but related themes occurs in Maimonides’ invocation in the Guide of Deuteronomy 6:5, where the faithful are enjoined, in stunningly summary fashion, “to love the Lord.” Maimonides explains: This tersest of commandments encapsulates all the correct opinions promoted by the Law through which an individual might attain his ultimate perfection. Oddly enough, regarding these matters of the highest possible human importance, the divine Legislator apparently is content to give only the barest indication. It takes a Maimonides (or someone instructed by a Maimonides) to develop in detail the implied correct opinions—and, at that, “only after one knows many opinions” (3.28 [60b–61a/512]). Alternatively stated, only a reader trained in attending to the ways in which the Law needs to be read will grasp the opinions taught by the Law and come at last to apprehend God’s being as He is in truth. The knowledge conveyed by these opinions leads to that very love to which the Law both summons and commands. Speaking directly to his addressee, Maimonides says, “You know to what extent the Torah lays stress upon love” (3.52 [130b/650]).

One can hardly fault Maimonides for failing to hold high the love the Torah so exalts. Students of what he calls the legalistic study of the Law might well be surprised by his prescription for achieving that love. His emphatic message in the “Book of Knowledge” comes down to this: Live, above all else, a life of theoria. This highly assertive and conspicuous injunction is one of those notable moments in his writings when Maimonides abstracts from considerations of family and community, even from the performance of deeds as such, when recommending a way of life for others to follow. He urges, rather, a single-minded preoccupation with acquiring the kind of knowledge by which one might come to know God. The would-be lover’s focused devotion to understanding the sciences will point him to an understanding of the Maker. He must guide himself with an awareness of the following divine calculus: “According to the knowledge will be the love—if little, little; if much, much.” It is at this point, at the very end of the “Book of Knowledge,” that Maimonides explicitly refers the aspirant back to the opening of his book (Teshubah, 10.10–11/934).

Those four initial chapters contain Maimonides’ thumbnail sketch of divine science and natural science—that is, metaphysics and physics. In gaining that knowledge, the lovesick seeker gains an avenue to fulfill his yearning. Yet gratification is not instantaneous; if anything, the intensity of his desire will increase. The more the aspirant for perfection studies God’s wondrous great works and reflects upon the infinite wisdom implicit in all that handiwork, the greater will be his yearning and the nearer will he draw to the object of his desire (Yesodei ha-Torah, 2.2/33b; 4.12/39b; English: Empire, 144, 152). The impression, overall, is that this immersion in the study of physics and metaphysics is a prescription for a solitary’s way of life, or at least for a man who is not encumbered by any hostages to fortune. Yet even in his more moderate formulation of a work-and-study program for an artisan who is encumbered and who has to earn a living to support his dependents, even there Maimonides makes it possible for the studier to aim high. He creates space for the esoteric studies called “Pardes” and subsumes all that under the rubric “talmud.” It is fair to say that Maimonides’ Mishneh Torah not only reconceptualizes the tradition’s curriculum of study but also proposes itself as the indispensable replacement for a significant part of that legacy.

It is startling to see with what address and boldness Maimonides employs his acknowledged mastery as a jurist and exegete to legitimize philosophical studies by those Jews who are capable of such. The Mishneh Torah carves out a space for pursuing those concerns within the broad framework of the Law’s commanded and prohibited actions. The Guide of the Perplexed, in turn, fills that space so memorably and impressively as to eclipse the effort of any precedent, rival, or successor. But for all Maimonides’ solicitude for the rare individual—that one man in ten thousand whom alone, he says, he in truth cares to satisfy (1.Introd. [9b/16])—he also has a message for a broader population of his misguided
coreligionists. This message urges the misguided to arm themselves with reason and not fall victim to the delusions and distractions fostered by unreason. Thus Maimonides confronts their unthinking fatalistic belief in the powers of judicial astrology by commanding his brethren, “out of my knowledge,” to move with determination into dangerous but stirring territory.

Hew down the tree and cut off its branches, and so on [Dan. 4:11]. Plant in its stead the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and eat of its goodness and its fruit, and put forth your hands and take also from the tree of life. The Holy One (blessed be He) will absolve us and will absolve you for plucking off its fruit and for eating our fill of its goodness until we live forever.\footnote{4}\footnote{11}

Maimonides cites no authority for this remarkable rhetorical flight—other than his own knowledge. In urging his fellows to seek to realize their highest potentiality, he transforms the Bible’s primal act of disobedience into a case of doing one’s duty to oneself. The philosopher’s love of God demands no less.

It is enough for him that he makes it possible for a patient and careful reader to make that choice on his own. Yet for all these and other differences that might be explored, there remains the two thinkers’ shared commitment. Each, working within the context of his religious community, labors to legitimize philosophizing while simultaneously using the teachings of philosophy to challenge certain prevalent and even cherished popular beliefs most hostile to thoughtful questioning. This effort—at once tedious, risky, and indispensable—might be thought of as an instance of \textit{imitatio dei}, as an expression of those great men’s aspiration to cleave to God by coming to love, to know, Him.\footnote{25} But their labors might no less be thought of as another striking instance of a phenomenon to which Leo Strauss drew attention more than fifty years ago. In a volume of essays he rather playfully characterized as contributions toward a future sociology of philosophy, Strauss raised anew “the possibility that all philosophers form a class by themselves.” More radically and without demurrer, he reported the message of Farabi’s \textit{Plato} that philosophers “defended the interests of philosophy and of nothing else. In doing this, they believed indeed that they were defending the highest interests of mankind.”\footnote{26} A year later, Strauss, speaking in his own name, expanded on this notion. He declined to contest the Marxist or crypto-Marxist impulse to search for a thinker’s particular class bias as a necessary step in identifying what may lie behind a particular political doctrine. But, he wrote, “it suffices to demand that the class to which the thinker in question belongs be correctly identified.” Strauss insisted in no uncertain terms that “there is a class interest of philosophers qua philosophers.” Almost paradoxically, he limned the \textit{class} interest as the selfish interest of the \textit{solitary}, the \textit{mutawahhid}. “Philosophers as philosophers do not go with their families. The selfish or class interest of the philosophers consists in being left alone, in being allowed to live the life of the blessed on earth by devoting themselves to investigation of the most important subjects.”\footnote{27}

It is not far-fetched to view Averroes’ and Maimonides’ efforts in this light. Nor is it far-fetched to understand their activity as being legislative in the highest sense. We do well to begin by taking up Montesquieu’s hint in the \textit{Spirit of Laws}. In his little chapter titled “Of Legislators” (bk. 29, chap. 19), he concludes as a matter of fact that legislators...
always indulge and express their “passions and prejudices” through their very acts of legislating. Remarkably, all the examples of legislators whom Montesquieu adduces in support of that assertion are philosophers. Can Averroes and Maimonides justly be included in that cohort? How would one weigh their self-serving, as against their philanthropic, intentions? In what sense can their activities be properly characterized as legislative? Since the furthest thing from their minds would have been to proclaim themselves discoverers of new worlds to conquer, any intimations of profound change, let alone originality, had to remain heavily veiled. Yet these were two individuals with radically independent minds.

There are many grounds for asserting that the aspirations of Averroes and Maimonides were high—very high—and that they took in view generations yet unborn. These two preeminent sons of Córdoba did not need a Nietzsche to rouse them to assume their highest potentialities as philosophers. But they could claim no mandate from above. Their intervention steered clear of trying to remake the world or, alternatively, of rendering philosophy toothless and tame. Looking at their world from a distance but with piercing eyes, they saw thoughtfulness and genuine greatness everywhere besieged. If it was not theirs to make a fresh start, neither was it beyond their ambition to bend their community’s regnant religion to further their project of cultivation and education. Each took care, indeed, to cast that project as no less than the great aim of his particular religious community’s divine law. In threading their way through difficult, dangerous times, both Averroes and Maimonides found counsel and understanding in the prophetology of their “second master,” Farabi. He had frankly acknowledged that the virtuous regime established by the prophet-philosopher-ruler who founded a religious community could not remain frozen in time. Circumstances must and do alter. The very hopes fostered by the religion’s yearning for perfection create their own destabilizing and self-consuming changes. The question necessarily arises for believers: What would the original supreme ruler-founder have done in response to these newly arising conditions? Farabi taught that rare, qualified successors—the embodiments of living wisdom—would see and seize this opportunity. One might, if so inclined, view this intervention by the philosopher as the fulfillment of a duty. But it is no belittling of either an Averroes or a Maimonides solemnly to concede that for each it was as much a duty to oneself as to others.

So tentative a conclusion leaves one wanting more, but I see no way of establishing how each of these great figures viewed his own philosophizing in his heart of hearts. Least likely is that these two men were driven by a spirit of pious kalām to so accommodate their sacred text as to make it appear less oblivious of pagan philosophy’s unsettling challenges. We are left to wonder whether they were open to the temptation stressed by the moderns: the temptation to effect their particular wills—their passions and prejudices, so to speak—in order to reconstitute society according to their lights. Swayed by the powerful earlier example of a prophet delivering and legislating a universal message, might they tacitly have claimed as much for their latter-day philosophy? In such a case, guiding a few selected disciples (if that can be called “ruling”) would seem modest indeed. More probable is that these philosophers took to heart the example and fate of Socrates. They had occasion to ponder how the peculiar immoderation fostered by their own communities threatened to expunge even the recollection of philosophizing as a noble human activity. There was in truth no desert island to which to retreat. By pressing in countless ways for a more moderate way of life for all, these philosophers were working for a world made safer for those few who could do no other than philosophize. At bottom, it hardly mattered that the great mass of people failed to see that the highest interests of mankind were implicated in the defense of the interests of philosophy. As philosophic legislators, these rare individuals needed general public acquiescence, not acclaim. Whatever reward they sought for themselves still lay elsewhere.
... when I try to picture Maimonides, I find it impossible not to see in him a distinct resemblance to Joel Kraemer.

**Tribute**

Ellen Haskell

When I first arrived at the Divinity School, Joel Kraemer represented to me the quintessential scholar. With an astonishingly broad range of knowledge and an unfailing gentlemanly demeanor, he seemed the ideal academic. As I began to study with him, I realized that he is certainly this, and also much more.

In the classroom, Professor Kraemer exercises the extraordinary ability to convey the texture of a time. He brings to life the people behind the texts and allows his students to get a sense of authors like Moses Maimonides and Yehuda Halevi as living, breathing human beings who inscribed their personalities on their works. Even now, long since finishing my course work, the minute details of these writers’ lives catch me at odd moments, lending me an occasional flash of insight and a feeling of personal connection. In fact, when I try to picture Maimonides, I find it impossible not to see in him a distinct resemblance to Joel Kraemer.

Of course, beyond embodying the personalities within the texts, Professor Kraemer is a remarkable guide through the intricacies of medieval philosophy. One of the earliest lessons I learned from him was Maimonides’ exposition on Proverbs 25:11: “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver.” Professor Kraemer teaches us to approach not only the sacred text but also the texts of the philosophers closely and delicately enough so that we can peer though the filigree settings of words to appreciate that the work we hold in our hands is truly of gold.

Outside the classroom, I always looked forward to office hours with Professor Kraemer. This was especially so during my qualifying examinations, when his personality as a compassionate intellectual was invariably reassuring. Professor Kraemer has always been generously welcoming to students, bringing many of us into his own home for study sessions. Genuinely interested in our personalities and backgrounds, as well as our ideas, his individual attention to students and their work is legendary within the Divinity School. I remember an office visit in which, after a long conversation about *The Guide of the Perplexed*, we made a satisfying digression into the origins of my surname. He asked me where my family was from and told me (much to my surprise) that our name was fairly common in the Middle East, albeit in a different form. Joel Kraemer is a professor who is truly interested not only in teaching students but also in learning about them. His respect for students, his willingness to engage with individual interests, and his knowledgeable presentation in the lecture hall make him a wonderful professor to work with and an entirely supportive presence at the University of Chicago.

Professor Kraemer possesses still other remarkable attributes. He is the most technologically comfortable professor I have encountered at the Divinity School, and he was generous enough to take the time to coach me out of my own technophobia. He can also be disarmingly funny. Once, when I was charging around the Divinity School on whatever task I was wrapped up in at the time, he paused in the hall and told me I looked “very aerodynamic.” The humor of this passing comment jarred me from my self-absorption and lifted my spirits immensely. When I speak to other students of Professor Kraemer, they all have similar stories about him taking time from his day to be helpful, thoughtful, and attentive.

I would like, on behalf of all of Joel Kraemer’s students, to thank him for facilitating our intellectual development and our joy in learning and for enriching our lives.
A Long Obedience
in the Same Direction

Mark Twain noted that accumulated human experience and its product, common wisdom, teach that one should not pick up a cat by its tail. But, Twain insisted, if a person is intent upon doing so, we should not object: it is not easy to be eccentric.

My mother was the daughter of red-clay North Carolina farmers descended from stubborn Swiss peasants who escaped poverty in 1740 by shipping out to America and hanging with those Czech Anabaptists who built their Moravian settlement in Salem, North Carolina. My father was the son of Sicilian immigrants, raised Roman Catholic in the disparate cultures of Malvagna, in the province of Messina—a scrappy little village clinging to life on Sicily’s volcanic substrate—and Erhenfeld, a miserable company-owned coal-mining town in the southwestern hills of Pennsylvania.

My parents met at the Harvard Bar & Grill in Washington, D.C., in 1946. My father was a Navy radioman and my mother was one of the many clerical workers of the Post Office Department. They married. Twice. First in a Catholic ceremony and then, a short time later, in a Protestant one—partly because of my mother’s reluctance to sign her unborn children’s souls away to Rome and perhaps to sacramentalize my father’s spiritual reorientation. Their shared commitment to Methodism is still in evidence at Shady Grove Church, the congregation in which my two brothers, two sisters, and I were reared, and where three of my siblings and their progeny are still significantly involved, and in whose churchyard my mother was laid to rest two years ago among a crop of granite slabs that reads to me like a genealogical Stonehenge. We shared a bountiful life in the home they made for us just up the road from my maternal grandparents, in a house erected on two acres previously tenanted by rows of tobacco.

I grew up in the 1950s in that family and culture, while a larger world gradually came into focus on a black-and-white television screen. I gained social consciousness only a few miles from the infamous Woolworth’s lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina, where black and white came into sharper relief. By the 1960s, the NBC peacock filled the TV screen with rainbow hues just in time to bring the bloody images of racial and foreign war into the dorm lounge at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where, after three and half years of lurking in a pew at the Episcopal Chapel of the Cross, I found myself in early 1970 in the rector’s office professing some vague curiosity about priesthood. By the time the dogwoods and azaleas in the

Chaplain Portaro delivered these remarks on November 17, 2004, at a Wednesday Lunch in Swift Common Room.
I arrived at the University of Chicago in midsummer of 1982 to a house of horrors.

campus arboretum were next in bloom, I was confirmed. A few short months later, in the high season of ragweed and goldenrod, I began seminary in Alexandria, Virginia. By the end of seminary, I knew I was gay. The cat finally had a name. And Mark Twain was right: it’s not easy to be eccentric.

I have long ceased carrying the cat by the tail. But old habits die hard. While the cat got some relief, I’d been too habituated to eccentricity to give it up entirely. So I continued to careen down the road of unconventionality, deferring ordination long enough to make a detour into retail management, then back to a priesthood that moved swiftly from a brief sojourn in parish work to the marginal life of campus ministry, where I have spent the last twenty-eight years of my life—twenty-two of them on this campus.

I arrived at the University of Chicago in midsummer of 1982 to a house of horrors. Dean Rosengarten and Professor Mitchell will no doubt recall, and I’ll leave it to them to recount, the state of dereliction. Sadly, the ministry itself was even more ramshackle. I had left Williamsburg, Virginia, with its vibrant hive of student creativity and activity, and the weekly experience of worshipping with and preaching to as many as a thousand congregants each Sunday in one of the most beautiful settings imaginable. I celebrated my first Eucharist at Brent House in a cramped sun-room chapel filled with the dusty detritus of pre-Vatican II castoffs. There were either three of us or six of us present, depending on how many of Jimmy’s multiple personalities one wanted to count. Bishop Montgomery and I quietly agreed we’d give it three years and then determine whether to keep at it or nail the doors shut.

That I now count all this a happy memory says much about the mystery of vocation—or the ravages of age on the mental faculties. But as in so many happy marriages, I look back at the years of deprivation and hardship with joy for the journey. God knows, and so do I, what we’ve endured and what we’ve accomplished, and for it all, I am grateful and I believe God is, too. But I am especially thankful that here I found and have enjoyed the company of a host of wonderful people who obviously shared my predilection to carry the cat by the tail.

In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Friedrich Nietzsche wrote: “The essential thing ‘in heaven and earth’ is . . . that there should be long obedience in the same direction. Thereby results, and has always resulted in the long run, something which has made life worth living.” It was from this source that Eugene Peterson, some twenty years ago, took the title for his book, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society*. I encountered that lineage, duly credited, in an essay Craig Dykstra wrote for the periodic newsletter that issues from his office in the religion division at the Lilly Endowment:

What a long obedience in the same direction requires is a lodestar by which our course is measured, so that we may tack and adjust when circumstances require it and yet not be lost. As Peterson puts the matter, we require “an organizing center for our lives and a goal that would demand our all and our best.” For Peterson and for me, “the Christian faith is the discovery of that center in the righteous God. Christian discipleship is a decision to walk in his ways, steadily and firmly, and then finding that the way integrates all our interests, passions and gifts, our human needs and our eternal aspirations. It is the way of life we were created for.”

It seems an apt title for my remarks today, which I intend not as a summation but rather as a reflection upon my own walk at a junction in the path, a pause where the road diverges. It is especially appropriate for one attempting to describe the shape of a life and ministry in which the central theme has been vocation. After the Bible, the most consulted theological resource in my library is the dictionary, where I found that the word *obey* is derived from the French, made by joining the prefix *ob-*, meaning “toward,” to the verb *oedire*, which is akin to the Latin *audire* (from which we get the word *audible*), meaning “to hear.” It’s a perfect word to describe the response to vocation. Neither vocation nor obedience demands language; indeed, they seem to defy any attempt at literal expression. They both imply, at least for me, an act more postural than verbal. My own sense of divine vocation is a leaning of God in my direction, and of obedience as my leaning in God’s direction—an image instantiated in colleagues leaning in close collaboration, in friends leaning in close conspiracy to share a particularly scurrilous joke or salacious bit of gossip, or even in lovers leaning into a kiss.
My ministry, as I have come to understand it, has been dedicated to finding sufficient grace in God and courage in myself to put away the map and simply take up the walk . . .

In that sense, a “long obedience in the same direction” is less a matter of intentional design than the practice of a singular fidelity. This, too, I find in perfect harmony with the essential principle of our faith that just as we pledge to keep ourselves only to one partner in earthly intimacy, we are adjured to keep ourselves faithful to one God. And as anyone who has ever pledged fidelity to another living being will attest, a long obedience in the same direction can still be a wild ride.

My coming to priestly ministry in the Episcopal Church and to campus ministry, especially in Chicago, is part of a vast and happy mystery with no intentional design but with singular fidelity to the notion that wherever I was going, I was going there with God. Mind you, this trip has not followed the kind of script written and dramatized by Cecil B. DeMille and Charlton Heston, or more recently by Mel Gibson and James Caviezel. Neither so literal nor so intense, more often than not this companionship has most resembled that of Lucy and Ethel, which is to say that, like the best relationships, it has been a happy blend of spontaneous adventure, emotional intensity, and profound presence.

My ministry, as I have come to understand it, has been dedicated to finding sufficient grace in God and courage in myself to put away the map and simply take up the walk—oh yes, and occasionally to put down the cat—and, whenever and wherever I might, to assist others in doing the same. It is, as our own ancestral texts attest, the work of a lifetime. But, then again, what the hell do ancestors know? Each of us must come to this wisdom—which the world counts as craziness—by the same age-old road of human experience. That, too, seems part of the divine design. God seems to love the chase and courtship as much as the hearth.

My being up here today is occasioned by what our culture calls “retirement.” Call it what you will, I’m still leaning toward my beloved. In recent years my life has filled with twice as many opportunities and half as much time to meet them. Fortunate enough to have been called by God to a communion with a magnificent pension plan, and not being Martin Marty, I determined that my beloved is urging me to come away to new adventures. So I comply. And I rejoice that the door of Brent House, which might once have been nailed shut, I now hold open to receive Stacy Alan. As we say down where I came from, “she’s good people.”

Mark Twain, who was the subject of my first trip to this lectern, was born under Haley’s comet. As he neared death, the comet’s return was anticipated. Twain remarked, “the Almighty has no doubt decreed, ‘Here are these two indefinable freaks. They came in together. They must go out together.’” At his death, the comet blazed in the skies, the oracle fulfilled. So I invoke Twain’s name and spirit here, and take my leave of you with some sense of literary symmetry. And I do so with his sage admonition in mind: that it is a terrible death to be talked to death.

There is, however, one thing remaining. For if this is, indeed, to be my last word to a people and place so dear to me, I leave you my most profound and heartfelt thanks.

And your cats, too. X

Endnote

DAVID CARRASCO, Ph.D. 1977, was awarded the Mexican Order of the Aztec Eagle, the highest honor Mexico gives to noncitizens for their contributions to understanding Mexican history and culture. Carrasco is editor in chief of the three-volume Oxford Encyclopedia of Mesoamerican Cultures, which was chosen by the New York Public Library as Best of Reference Publication for 2002.

DENNIS CASTILLO, M.A. 1982, Ph.D. 1990, was promoted to full professor of Church history in the Department of Historical Studies at Christ the King Seminary in East Aurora, New York, an interdiocesan graduate school of theology and pastoral ministry sponsored by the Catholic Diocese of Buffalo.

RICHARD A. GARDNER, M.A. 1975, Ph.D. 1988, was elected dean of the Faculty of Comparative Culture at Sophia University, Tokyo, where he served as professor of religion for many years. The faculty gives instruction in English to a large number of international students.


FRANCISCO FORREST MARTIN, M.A. 1984, coauthored International Human Rights and Humanitarian Law (Cambridge University Press, 2005), with S. Schnably, R. Wilson, J. Simon, and M. Tushnet. He is teaching currently at the University of Miami School of Law and St. Thomas University School of Law.

THOMAS C. BERG, M.A. 1992, professor of law at the University of St. Thomas School of Law, Minneapolis, and codirector of that institution’s Terrence J. Murphy Institute for Catholic Thought, Law, and Public Policy, received the 2004 Alpha Sigma Nu Book Award from the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities for his book Religion and the Constitution (Aspen Publishers, 2002), coauthored with Michael McConnell and John Garvey. He also published the second edition of The State and Religion in a Nutshell (West Group, 2004), an entry in one of the leading series of books on subject areas of law.

MARK MATTES, Ph.D. 1995, chair of the Departments of Philosophy and Religion at Grand View College in Des Moines, Iowa, authored *The Role of Justification in Contemporary Theology* (Eerdmans, 2004), which examines views of salvation in five leading contemporary Protestant theologians.

REV. L. BRUCE MILLER, Ph.D. 1984, after serving as a minister in the United Church of Canada for twenty-seven years, was elected to the legislative assembly of the province of Alberta. As one of the seventeen liberal MLAs, Miller serves as a member of the opposition, as the justice critic.

DONALD W. MUSSER, Ph.D. 1981, professor of religion at Stetson University in DeLand, Florida, has recently been appointed to an endowed chair at that institution.

ROBERT PAUL ROTH, Ph.D. 1947, is professor emeritus at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. He was dean of Northwestern Lutheran Seminary and then director of graduate studies at Luther Seminary, when the two schools merged. Two of Roth’s books are being republished this spring by Wipf and Stock Publishers (Eugene, Oregon): *Story and Reality,* originally published in 1973 by Eerdmans and reviewed that year in *Newsweek,* and *The Theater of God,* originally published in 1985 by Fortress Press.

JEANETTE REEDY SOLANO, M.A. 1990, Ph.D. 1999, associate professor at California State University, Fullerton, was selected as one of the fifty outstanding teachers of introductory theology and religion courses in the United States by the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion and the University of Notre Dame. She also recently produced a DVD documentary, *Transnational Savior: A Salvadoran Jesus Reunites with His People in the U.S.*

**LOSSES**

LANGDON GILKEY, Shailer Mathews Professor Emeritus in the Divinity School and one of the most influential American Christian theologians of the twentieth century, died of meningitis on Friday, November 19, 2004, in Charlottesville, Virginia. He was 85. A memorial service was held to honor Gilkey’s life and work in Bond Chapel on February 12, 2005. Tributes from this service will be printed in an upcoming issue of *Criterion.*

LEONARD SCOTT, M.A. 1966, religious and psychological counselor at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, is reported to have passed away.

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Endnotes

1. My title is drawn from the headline of a hoax perpetrated by *Weekly World News*, which treats “Jesus the Monster Truck.”

2. The Sabbath, of course, is not always a Sunday; Yuki and I witnessed the ritual on a Saturday.


5. Ibid., 21.

6. Ibid., 22.


9. Ibid., xxiii. Irwin here quotes Roger Caillois on Durkheim in *Man and the Sacred*.


11. Morr and Brubaker, 29.


14. See Lincoln, 158, for the relations between the American Dream, upward mobility, and professional wrestling.


16. Lincoln, 158.

17. Sargeant, 312.


20. Morr and Brubaker, 22.

21. Sargeant is speaking here of the prurient sensibility evoked by the crash images in Driver’s Ed films of the ’50s and ’60s.


23. As Lincoln summarizes Freedman’s argument, 157, 158. Freedman includes virtue, along with talent and effort, in his account of the American Dream of success.

24. In regard to the claim that the Monster Jam’s audience is predominantly lower-class: anecdotal evidence will have to suffice here for what empirical data would, I am confident, confirm. I have tried contacting Clear Channel Entertainment, owner of Monster Jam, in order to obtain numbers, but my messages have gone unanswered.

25. I am following, by way of an analogy with professional wrestling, Lincoln’s summary of Freedman’s thesis. Freedman, Lincoln claims, “argued that the fascination wrestling exerts on its predominantly lower-class audience derives from its ability” (158) to offer an account of the disconnect between upward mobility and real life.

26. I choose this word deliberately.

27. The course also features mud pits that might be said to act as hyperbolic potholes.

28. Lincoln, 158. Lincoln claims that this affirmation of the American Dream is the “task that wrestling undertakes—and it is hardly alone in this.” The purpose of this paper has been to show that the Monster Jam, like wrestling, undertakes just this task.
Endnotes


4. It is striking that Averroes extends this scholarly freedom of interpretation to encompass one of the principal roots of the Law. A man of the demonstrative class may engage freely in private interpretation of the promised life in the hereafter (however understood), provided only that he not lead others to deny its existence (16.19–17.1; 17.7–9). In the introduction to his translation of this text, Hourani sees clearly the chasm that this line of argument opens for philosophizing in Islam, but draws back from the precipice (Hourani, Harmony, 25–26).


8. “... although Averroes appears in the Decisive Treatise to perform the more limited function of a judge or jurist who merely draws inferences from the divine law, in fact, he interprets the divine law in a manner that takes into account the new conditions and the intention of the divine lawgiver, which is more appropriate as a function of a legislator or a successor of the divine lawgiver” (Mahdi, “Remarks,” 308 n. 16).

9. Hourani, Harmony, 97 n. 87.


11. See, for example, his strictures against “such rubbish and such perverse imaginings” as make one both laugh and weep (Maimonides, Guide, 1.59 [74a–b/141]). Parenthetical citations are to the work’s part and chapter numbers; the page number in the Munk edition of the Judeo-Arabic text and the corresponding page number in the Pines translation follow in parentheses.


13. Epistle to Yemen (Halkin, 16)—Arabic: Letters, 87; English: Empire, 105.


16. It suffices to point to the Guide, 2.36 (79b/172).


18. Query no. 32, in “Responsa to the disciples of Rabbi Ephraim of Tyre,” in Shalit, Letters, 1:208, 216–217—in the plain, succinct language of the Guide, 3.28 (61a/512–513): “We have already explained in Mishneh Torah that this love becomes valid only through the apprehension of the whole of being as it is and through the consideration of His wisdom as it is manifested in it. We have also mentioned there the fact that the Sages, may their memory be blessed, call attention to this notion.”

19. “If it were possible for us to put all of the jurisprudence of the Law in one chapter we would not put it in two chapters” (Treatise on Resurrection [Finkel, 24–26]—Arabic: Letters, 332; English: Empire, 169).


Endnotes continue on page 34

21. Eight Chapters, chap. 5, title and beginning. An English translation is in Weiss, Ethical Writings, 75.


23. Talmud Torah, 1.11–12/38a. See the translation and analysis in Lerner, Empire, 38–41.


25. See Lerner, Empire, 76.

26. Leo Strauss, Persecution and the Art of Writing (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1952), 7–8, 17–18.


28. See Friedrich Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, Aphorisms 61, 211, 212; and Muhsin S. Mahdi, Alfarabi and the Foundation of Islamic Political Philosophy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 136–139, 166–168.

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