For systematic reasons, one ought to start the discussion of theology with proofs for the existence of God. In the Introduction to Part II of the Guide, Maimonides presented a summary of propositions in Aristotelian physics that he regarded as physical truths that were demonstrated with certitude both empirically and logically. On its basis he offered four proofs for the existence of God. If we compare this approach to that of R. Saadia Gaon, the theological problem latent in it stands out at once. We recall that R. Saadia Gaon first demonstrated that the world was created ex nihilo, then drew from this the necessary conclusion that the world has a Creator. By contrast, Maimonides sought to prove God’s existence on the basis of the empirical fact that there is a world governed by physical regularity. But was this world indeed created ex nihilo as R. Saadia determined? Maimonides avoids this question before he has demonstrated God’s existence, and bases himself on the doctrines of physics that had brought Aristotle and his students to the opposite conclusion, that the world is primordial and not created ex nihilo, for being cannot proceed from non-being. Thus the original matter (prima materia = hyle) had prior existence, and the eternal God has imprinted forms on it through infinite time without beginning or end.

What explains this choice? Maimonides explains that the proofs of the Mutakallimun (including R. Saadia) for the creation of the world ex nihilo are indecisive. In his view there are no decisive proofs either for the Kalamic doctrine of the world’s creation or for the Aristotelian doctrine of the world’s eternity. Therefore if one wants to certify the most important truth—that God exists—one should base oneself on absolutely certain assumptions. Aristotelian physics was absolutely certain in his view, as well as according to the independent secret philosophical doctrine of the Mosaic Torah, inasmuch as Maimonides identified Aristotelian physics with the secret Doctrine of Creation (Ma’aseh Bereshit), which in his view had been transmitted from the patriarchs and from Moses to the succeeding generations.

In connection with Maimonidean theology, we should emphasize that Aristotelian physics was not only the foundation of his proofs of
God’s existence, but of his discussion of God’s nature. In Aristotelian epistemology, knowledge of an object is based on knowledge of its existential causes. Thus Maimonides made Aristotelian physics a necessary precondition for understanding the Torah’s theology.

The Four Principal Proofs for God’s Existence

We shall not give a detailed exposition of Aristotle’s physics here. This prevents us from giving a thorough analysis of Maimonides’s proofs. We shall content ourselves with presenting their logical flow.

The first proof is based on two physical principles:

1. Every effect (“movement”) has a cause (“mover”).
2. The chain of causes and movers must be finite, because there can be potential infinity but not actual infinity. (Theoretically one can count \textit{ad infinitum}, but it is impossible for one to have actually counted an infinite number of items, or for an infinite number of items to coexist.)

It follows from these two assumptions that of the hierarchy of moved and moving entities that we perceive, there must be one mover that is not itself moved, i.e., a mover whose movement is not caused by any other entity, but which moves another without itself being moved. This “unmoved Mover” is God.

This was not enough for Maimonides. In his view, the “unmoved mover” must exist transcendent to all “moved movers.” The fundamental quality of this Primal Cause must be essentially different from that of all who receive movement from Him. His relation to the world cannot be compared to that of a captain who stands on his ship and moves with it, or to the soul’s relation to the body. God as “unmoved Mover” is absolutely transcendent to the world. His existence is in no way dependent on that of any outside entity. This emphasis distinguishes Maimonides’s outlook from Aristotle’s. This is the essential difference between transcendent monotheism and pagan henotheism.

In the same context, Maimonides proceeds to demonstrate that the unmoved mover cannot be a body or a power in a body. (If God is the cause of movement and there is no prior cause, He must be incorporeal, for corporeal beings cause movement by virtue of an external factor.) Furthermore, the unmoved mover is non-composite and indivisible, therefore He is a simple unity not situated in space or