The Nature of Inquiry: A Common Sense Perspective

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The Nature of Inquiry: A Common Sense Perspective[1]

Rabbi Shalom Carmy

In an article in the first issue of *The Torah U-Madda Journal*, "*Torah u-Madda* and Freedom of Inquiry," Rabbi Yehuda Parnes makes no fewer than three major claims that require more careful analysis. One is a theory about the nature of what he calls *madda.* The second is a reading of Rambam in *Hil. 'Avodah Zarah* 2:2–3, the burden of which is to confine study of *divrei kefirah* (heresy) and idolatry to situations of *le-havin u-le-horot* ("understanding and decision-making"). Finally, his conclusion: "Based on all of the above, *Torah u-Madda* can only be viable if it imposes strict limits on freedom of inquiry in areas that may undermine the thirteen *'ikkarei emunah"* (principles of faith) (QED).[2]

The second issue of this journal carried a response by Lawrence Kaplan and David Berger offering an alternative reading of the Rambam, and touching indirectly on Rabbi Parnes's conclusion. They also say a great deal on behalf of a broad interpretation of *le-havin u-le-horot*, namely "[t]he possibility that grappling with a particular book or system of philosophy may lead to a revised and deeper understanding of Torah principles."[3]

My own contribution to the debate will consider all three of Rabbi Parnes's contentions. On the matter of *le-havin u-le-horot,* I am very much in sympathy with Kaplan and Berger, as my remarks in this essay should amply illustrate.

I

Rabbi Parnes asserts that liberal arts education (= *madda)* cannot permit "any constraint on honest and inquisitive searching for truth" (p. 69). This is not true. Such constraints are quite common, on both ethical and intellectual grounds.

Examples: Biological experiments in which human beings are tortured are generally prohibited, even when they promise to yield interesting scientific results. Scientists are increasingly reluctant to torment animals in the name of science. Many refuse to make use of results obtained through immoral research, such as that conducted by Nazi doctors in the concentration camps, in this respect adopting a standard more stringent than that required by halakha.[4] Many secularists (most notably in the feminist movement) would proscribe the reading of various works of pornography as inherently immoral. Others would advocate a moratorium on research dealing with racial and gender differences for reasons of social morality. Seriously entertaining false beliefs of an insidious tendency, taking them to heart, even when motivated by the "honest and inquisitive searching for truth" is, according to this view, morally wrong. Other concerns, not inherently moral in nature, would likewise stay the hand of inquiry according to most educators. Study that is likely to squander such precious resources as time, intellect, and money would be frowned upon and, beyond a certain point, effectively curtailed. When such considerations come into play, does it matter that the inquiry to be snuffed out is "honest and inquisitive searching for truth"? Surely not. No doubt there are laborers in the scientific vineyard who would try very hard to reject any, or all, of these constraints on research. For them "honest and inquisitive searching for truth" is an absolute, or almost absolute, value, which therefore cannot be overridden by any duty or competing value. It is also natural that those who love knowledge and wisdom will be averse to any limitation on inquiry, and loath to give voice to proscription even when they reluctantly recognize its appropriateness. This is especially so since suppression of free inquiry and free thought has often been employed deceitfully, to uphold the fraudulent heaven-groping facade of self-proclaimed authority, or to shelter the darting-eyed wickedness that cannot tolerate the light of day. Surely many contemporary demands to suspend critical thought on various subjects of consequence in the name of political correctness are self-important, self-serving, and redolent of intellectual and moral indolence and cowardice.

Because restraining inquiry and its free expression has gotten a bad name, scientists and humanists usually conceal the fist of authority, both moral and intellectual, in a velvet glove: Only if the deviant fails to recognize his/her insensitivity, lack of sophistication, or ignorance will the stronger medicine come into play: the control of grades, fellowships, jobs, etc. We are a civilized society: The "wrong" position on homosexuality no longer rates the stake; merely suspension without pay at CBS (with prospect of early parole if the ratings warrant).[5] But whether particular moral curbs on free inquiry and expression are justified or not, is not significant for our characterization of liberal arts education. What matters is that claims on behalf of such restrictions on "honest and inquisitive searching for truth," however skeptically scrutinized, are not dismissed out of hand, as violations of *madda*.

Thus *madda*, as it is actually practiced, recognizes, for a variety of reasons and in a variety of circumstances, limits on freedom of inquiry. No intellectual activity can take place in isolation from the rest of our knowledge (a point that will become important to our discussion below); by the same token, no intellectual activity may be pursued in an ethical vacuum. Of course there is a difference between violating the moral and utilitarian norms incorporated in the practice of *madda* and violating the Torah's prohibitions. It is the difference between being a fool and being a sinner, between breaching a man-made rule and rebelling against a divine law. But that difference, important as it is, has nothing to do with the fact of constraint itself.

The whole idea that whoever advocates or accepts any constraint on free inquiry runs "counter to *madda* and all that it implies" (as Rabbi Parnes puts it on p. 69), and is presumably self-banished from the garden of *madda,* is so fantastic that I must pause to consider why one would entertain a conception of *madda* so remote from reality and so alien to healthy common sense. Any attempt to explain the perennial attraction of the "absolute freedom" theory of *madda* must distinguish the differing motivations of its proponents.

1. Thinkers opposed to Torah aim to exploit our healthy bias in favor of intellectual honesty either to undermine Torah or to divert our attention from the fact that *madda* does not really tender absolute and unrestricted allegiance to the unfettered search for truth. If Torah is against intellectual honesty, and *madda* is for it, then *madda* leads 1–0.

2. Those who favor Torah, but oppose *Torah u-Madda*, would like to exploit our presumed healthy bias in favor of Torah to undermine either *madda* or our healthy bias in favor of intellectual honesty. If Torah is against it, but *madda* demands it, then some of us will reject *madda.* (What about the people who draw the opposite conclusion and reject Torah? Presumably their commitment was deficient to begin with, so we needn't bother about them.)

3. Many individuals, with no polemical agenda of their own, may accept the "absolute freedom" model of *madda* simply because they have not thought through the issues on their own. As R. Bahya ibn Pakuda points out, one of the consequences of eschewing philosophical reflection is that your mind is held hostage to what other people say.[6]

4. A different account of the power exercised by the "absolute freedom" doctrine would occur to someone who has thought about the history of science and philosophy in the last several centuries. Such an individual might, at the risk of oversimplification, tell something like the following story:

Early in the modern period (the sixteenth century would not be too early), scientific inquiry was held back by certain views prevalent among the official exponents of the then-current Christian teaching. As science succeeded in pushing back the frontiers of ignorance in many areas, while religion seemed to distinguish itself primarily in the promotion of strife, many thinking (and even more non-thinking) people concluded that the teachings of biblical religion were either false, or had been falsely interpreted. In addition, many were taken by the idea, going back to Plato, that the kind of argumentation traditionally employed in mathematics is the exclusive highway to privileged truth. Since Judaism, like Christianity, with its historical and anthropological orientation, does not speak in the name of mathematical truth, it must apply for recognition to science rather than itself judge the validity of human investigations. Hence, the best thing for truth is to let science alone, and certainly not to let religious "values" (by this point "religious knowledge" had been so discredited as to become a virtual oxymoron) hold sway over intellectual endeavor.

The individual who has reflected on the matter knows that the inference of the last sentence is not conclusive. That religious authority has been abused, that even when properly exercised it is liable, occasionally, to fall into folly while fleeing from sin, does not imply that it ought never to be exercised. Observing those who fall under the three classes described above, the advocate of the last approach concludes that they have succumbed to an exaggerated account of the dichotomy between the freedom supposedly held out by *madda* and the bunker mentality ascribed to Torah. One knows that one owes one's liberation from the evil enchantment of the "absolute freedom" fantasy, at least in part, to one's understanding of the historical process whereby the spell was cast. One's own ability to embrace the Torah's limitations on free investigation is indebted to that

enhanced understanding. One suspects that, had one not worked through the epistemological trauma and scotoma of modernity, one would have ended up either rejecting Torah or working one's self into a vehement yet, at the same time, slyly vacuous exercise of piety, as one humoring a slightly deaf, and more than slightly rich, elderly relation.

II

Rambam's normative limitation of free inquiry, as understood by Rabbi Parnes, is the centerpiece of his critique. Both Rabbi Parnes and Kaplan and Berger agree that the key to a precise definition of the Rambam's proscription is to be found in the rationale by which he augments the halakha:

> Any thought which leads a human being to uproot one of the principles of the Torah, we are enjoined not to take it upon our heart, and we should not divert our minds to such, and dwell [upon it] and be drawn after the thoughts of the heart. This is because man's understanding is slight, and not all minds can attain truth thoroughly. If a man is drawn after the thoughts of his heart he may destroy the world as a result of his limited understanding. How? At times he will rove after idolatry. At times he will think about God being one: maybe it is so, maybe it isn't. What is above, what is below, what is before, what is after. And sometimes about prophecy: maybe it is true, maybe it isn't. And sometimes about the Torah: maybe it is from Heaven, maybe it is not. And he does not know the categories by which he should judge *[ha-middot she-yadin bahen]* in order to know truth thoroughly; hence he is liable to deviate into *minut.*

Rabbi Parnes examines two interpretations of the restriction: (1) Rambam only prohibited study undertaken with the purpose of forsaking Torah, thus leaving the *Torah u-Madda* advocate untouched. This is untenable, for such a prohibition would not require a rationale. Thus we are left with (2) Rambam intended to prohibit what Rabbi Parnes calls "honest and objective freedom of inquiry" (p. 70). Kaplan and Berger, for their part, emphasize Rambam's warning about the frailty of untrained human reasoning. In their opinion, Rambam prohibits individuals who are intellectually unprepared from undertaking the study of idolatrous literature and the like.

Note that the two approaches to the Rambam do not necessarily exclude each other. Rabbi Parnes may very well maintain that Rambam prohibits "honest and objective freedom of inquiry" (except in cases of *le-havin u-le-horot)* and that he also prohibits inquiry by unqualified individuals. Conversely, one might agree with Kaplan and Berger that Rambam restricted inquiry only to those who are intellectually prepared, yet also agree with Rabbi Parnes that "honest and objective freedom of inquiry" is off limits as well. The difficulty in attempting to harmonize or contrast the two approaches is that I am not quite sure what Rabbi Parnes means by "honest and objective freedom of inquiry." The precise meaning of this phrase is clearly crucial to the entire discussion, and we shall get to it in a moment. First, however, let us direct our attention to the next part of Rambam's rationale, which was not brought into the debate by any of my colleagues. Here Rambam sketches

the outstanding features of the inquirer whom we are told not to emulate. What is this intellectual up to? This is a person who, as the occasion bemuses him or her, holds some principle of faith at arm's length and speculates whether it is true or false. Yes, that person is not doing so in order to forsake Torah. Is that person then engaged in the "honest and objective freedom of inquiry" in which *madda* glories? By that person's own lights he or she is. If that person is justified in regarding his or her activity as "honest and objective freedom of inquiry," then Rambam's vignette strikingly confirms Rabbi Parnes's interpretation of the prohibition: What he infers from the existence of a rationale, I derive directly from the content of the rationale. If, however, Rambam's anti-hero cannot lay claim to the halo of "honest and objective inquiry," then Rambam is, in effect, adding a noteworthy dimension to his depiction of the unprepared person discussed by Kaplan and Berger. The unqualified person is not only one who is deficient in the tools of inquiry; he or she is also one engaged in an aimless free-floating speculation about religious matters, rather than a faith striving for greater understanding.[7]

In this connection we should also take note of Rambam's comment on *Avot* 2:14 ("know what to answer the *apikoros"):* "Even though you study the opinions of the nations to respond to them, beware that you not take to your heart any of those opinions." Is Rambam prohibiting intellectual honesty, or is he enjoining us, in the course of studying heretical views, from "taking to heart," i.e., seriously entertaining the heretical views?[8]

In any event, we cannot properly understand Rabbi Parnes's position without trying to define what he means by "honest and objective inquiry." To this task we shall now proceed.

Earlier we have seen that Rabbi Parnes means no more and no less than the ideal of "absolute freedom," when he refers to the "honest and inquisitive searching for truth," the tiniest deviation from which runs "counter to *madda* and all that it implies." In formulating his halakhic position, he introduces the term "objective" to characterize the kind of inquiry the Rambam would rule out.

> "Objective freedom of inquiry": What does it mean? The concept of objectivity has, of course, a long and elusive history in the philosophical literature. It would seem safe to assume, however, that Rabbi Parnes's usage is based on ordinary language, rather than tracking the specialized meanings developed by professional philosophers over the centuries. The dictionary yields two meanings of objective that might apply to beliefs:
>
> i. belonging to the object of thought rather than the thinking subject;
> ii. free from personal feelings; unbiased.

Both definitions are confusing if they are applied to Rabbi Parnes's account of the inquiry banned by the Rambam. Atheists indeed maintain that God, prophecy, Torah, and other articles of faith are not objective truths, but productions of "the thinking subject." Believing Jews do not. We hold that the *'ikkarei emunah* pertain to reality independent of humanity, not merely to "the thinking subject." As to the second definition: believing Jews assent to these propositions because they are convinced of their "objective" truth, not because they are indulging their personal feelings or predilections. To deny, let alone prohibit objectivity, in these senses, goes against the very idea of a revealed religion. This cannot possibly be Rabbi Parnes's intent.

Despite the linguistic muddle, it would not be presumptuous to explain Rabbi Parnes's aversion to objective inquiry in the following manner: *Madda*, or more precisely the different

intellectual disciplines that constitute the liberal arts body of knowledge as it is studied in the standard modern university, depends upon some consensus about data and methodology. Each discipline and discourse, from this perspective, is treated as autonomous and sovereign within its own boundaries. Each discipline determines its own methodology and recognizes the range of data to which the appropriate methods of investigation are applied. To introduce material—data or principles of thought—from outside the discipline, violates "the very integrity of the *madda* process itself" (to borrow Rabbi Parnes's phrase earlier in his article). In less drastic language than Rabbi Parnes's, the infusion of material extraneous to the disciplinary matrix is not acceptable because it is liable to raise difficulties for the orderly, methodical pursuit of research, and impedes scientific cooperation. Hence, the individual who, seeking admission to the temple of *madda,* brings along data external to the discipline, and who ignores the gatekeeper's admonition that all beliefs must be checked in at the door; challenges the conventions; and, unless he or she succeeds in changing them, is charged with smuggling unsuitable personal predilections into the academic domain. Such stubborn insistence on one's own perception of truth could be stigmatized as lacking objectivity. Now, as it happens, the gatekeepers of *madda* do not include, among the recognized disciplines and modes of discourse, any that accept the truth of the *'ikkarei emunah.* Because the believing Jew is committed to the normative beliefs taught by the Torah, he or she cannot approach the sciences or the humanities without those beliefs, and in many areas—in the most important areas—his or her inquiry will be guided by those beliefs. Therefore, on this account, the believing Jew is incapable of objective inquiry in virtually all the areas that really count.

The view I have just described as implicit in Rabbi Parnes's analysis of *madda* is asserted quite openly by others. I suppose that this is what is meant when certain academic types, including observant Jews, solemnly intone that no believing Jew can truly qualify as a biblical "scholar" because Orthodoxy prevents one from confronting the regnant academic theories with a genuinely open mind. I am less accustomed to hearing this argument from serious philosophers, for reasons that will shortly become clear.

Granted, the account of objectivity in *madda* that we have just encountered, according to which "honest and objective freedom of inquiry" and Orthodox Jewish belief do not mix, conforms to one strand in popular usage. Yet we may cast upon it a quizzical eye. Is it indeed the case that intellectual honesty requires us to forsake all knowledge that is not certified a part of the discipline we are studying at the moment? From a common sense perspective, inquiry that systematically ignores everything else we know (including the knowledge given us through revelation), is not honest. On the contrary—it is the height of perversity!

To be sure, there are situations in which we legitimately, for a variety of reasons, set aside knowledge that we rely upon in other areas of life. A geometry student who is asked whether a triangle with sides 13, 12, and 5 inches in length is a right-angled triangle forgets that he has measured the angle (and pretends he has not peeked at the answer in the back of the book). Instead she appeals to Pythagoras's Theorem. Why? Because the geometric method is constituted by a specific kind of reasoning, one that excludes measurement and/or looking at the back of the book. In real life, when laying bricks, for example, there is no objection to achieving a right angle by measurement, using a plumb line, or, if that is one's pleasure, by consulting "the back of a book." Similarly, the halakhic jurist must set aside the evidence of Moshe and Aharon because, as brothers, their testimony is not valid, without doubting in the least the truth of their assertions. The American juror, likewise, is occasionally instructed to erase certain information from his judicial consciousness not because it is false, but for reasons of legal propriety (e.g., the evidence was illegally obtained). As to the subject of the present discussion, an eminent school of *Rishonim,* including Saadia, R. Bahya ibn Pakuda, and Rambam, deemed it worthwhile to discover what religious knowledge can be obtained without recourse to the data of revelation. They were convinced that this study would deepen one's understanding of the principles to which we, as

religious Jews, are committed.

In view of the frequent successes achieved by this method of isolating a discipline or discourse from its context in the real world, it is not surprising that many modern thinkers sought to establish all inquiry on the model of self-contained enterprises like mathematics. When we add modern people's recurrent longing for self-guaranteed certainty, for intellectual self-sufficiency, for the God's-eye perspective that the contemporary philosopher Thomas Nagel has called "the view from nowhere,"[9] we can even understand how certain thought-intoxicated philosophers like Hegel aspired, incredibly, arrogantly, and influentially, to a total system of knowledge that would refer only to itself. But the advantages accruing from the occasional narrowing of our intellectual focus hardly justify the implausible theory that "honest and objective inquiry" is predicated upon the deliberate and systematic suppression of all knowledge not mandated by the discipline constituted in terms of that narrow focus. Only in the psychiatric ward (and in mathematics, which is not "about" the real world) is ratiocination extolled that proceeds without regard for reality.

Nonetheless, the rationalist project of knowledge without presuppositions, or knowledge based upon foundations entirely transparent to thought, has enjoyed a long run in our culture. It would be important, but beyond the scope of this discussion, to examine the major manifestations of this tendency in modern thought. These include currents otherwise antagonistic to each other, like Cartesian rationalism, Hume's phenomenalism (which supplements the ideas of logic with the impressions of sense experience), and Hegel's circular epistemology. The common denominator of all these movements is the assumption that the human cognitive venture can, and should, be conducted independent of what we know, or think we know, outside of the "integrity of the *madda* process."

The inspiring rationalist project has not gone unchallenged. Real men and women lead a real existence before, and apart from, their official intellectual identities. They can neither undertake knowing, nor make sense of their knowledge, or even endeavor to revise their errors, save by placing their thinking in the context of their lives. Our language, our habits of thought, our assumptions, and so forth, are not discovered by us. Instead we find ourselves given to them, to the residue of tradition and the common stock of human experience. Last but not least, believers in revealed religion, including those who have stood at Sinai, know the absolute autonomy of "the *madda* process" to be a dangerous illusion. These data of lived human experience did not go unnoticed by masters of philosophical thought. To begin with, some of the most prominent exponents of a narrow epistemology took their skepticism with a grain of salt. Hume cheerfully admitted that his laborious attempts to establish, through rational ingenuity, the reality of the experienced world, had little bearing on the way he lived: "I dine, I play a game of backgammon, I converse with my friends; and when after three or four hours' amusement, I would return to these speculations, they appear so cold and strained, and ridiculous, that I cannot find in my heart to enter into them any further."[10] Of greater consequence to us: Each great rationalistic philosophy was met by the passionate critique of a great adversary. Thus, Descartes was countered by Pascal; Hume had his Newman; Hegel provoked Kierkegaard. While philosophy is hardly a monolithic discipline, it may safely be said that contemporary philosophers are more interested in overcoming the legacy of absolute autonomy, in its various incarnations, than in perpetuating it.

No reasonable person has ever appropriated, in real life, the peculiar doctrine that sequesters *madda* from our everyday knowledge (including that derived from Torah). Why then is it still taken for granted among writers on religion? Current philosophy is not at fault. Surely the Torah does not impose upon us allegiance to deficient, outdated views. Only nescience of the history of modern thought can shackle us to a conception that exaggerates unnecessarily the tensions between Torah and *hokhmah*, and that ends up by subtly promoting, however inadvertently, the misunderstanding that the fundamental principles of Judaism are, God forbid, projections of the human mind.

To review the last stage of our discussion: Rabbi Parnes is correct to point out that a program of free inquiry cannot be deemed kosher merely because the inquirer is not seeking to forsake Torah. A believing Jew cannot engage in the "objective" investigation of religious truth, if objectivity is defined as a stance of absolute neutrality. As we have seen, such a vantage point is phenomenologically impossible; the reasons that have led many people to take it seriously are philosophically misguided. Because we are accustomed to regard "honest and objective freedom of inquiry" as something good, there are individuals who automatically identify *Torah ve-Hokhmah* with "honest and objective freedom of inquiry," without feeling the need to inquire carefully into the accurate meaning of the phrase. Because, as we have seen, the concept of objectivity engenders linguistic muddle, such individuals are likely to admire and emulate precisely the kind of aimless and foundationless rumination the Rambam takes pains to alert us against. For such individuals, Rabbi Parnes's entire attempt to raise the question comes as quite a surprise; and not a minute too soon, if you ask me.

III

Many factors go into the formulation and execution of an educational program for the individual, for groups of individuals, for the community as a whole. One factor, not the least important, is the place, if any, to be accorded to studies that introduce thoughts of *kefirah.* Kaplan and Berger offer impressive illustrations of the manner in which these studies have enriched some of the most profound and most enduring works of Torah, as was freely acknowledged by masters like the Rambam and *maran ha-Rav* Joseph B. Soloveitchik. Many lesser individuals can attest to the value of their liberal arts studies for the attainment of greater insight into Torah. We would also do well to recognize the need for broad knowledge and understanding of human culture in the service of our love for other Jews and even for humankind.[11]

Furthermore, we must never overlook the fact that, as participants in the modern world, we are affected by it, be it consciously or unwittingly. Our brief excursion into the history of ideas highlighted the powerful attraction of the illusion that humans can take up an observation post above, and independent of, their prior experiences and beliefs. We ought not to indulge our absent-mindedness to the point where we forget that this applies to us too. There is no "view from nowhere." Yet God has granted us free will. We need not remain captives of the unpropitious spiritual climate in which we find ourselves implicated; but, in order to free ourselves, we must shrewdly map out the terrain from which, and over which, we intend to make our escape. In other words, in order to undertake the slow, unending task of reviewing, revising, and elevating our thoughts and feelings, we must know whence we come and where we are to make our way. As Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein has observed, the *apikoros* (heretic), whom we are instructed to rebut, as often as not, is the "*apikoros* within."[12]

In the light of these considerations and others, we approach Rabbi Parnes's final assertion: "*Torah u-Madda* can only be viable if it imposes strict limits on freedom of inquiry...."At first blush this statement is nothing but an obvious corollary of our entire discussion. A careful reading, however, reveals one word that invites additional analysis: the adjective *strict*. If Rabbi Parnes is using the word for emphasis, there is nothing more to discuss with respect to this particular point. It is possible, though, to give the adjective a more ambitious sense. Adopting this interpretation, Rabbi Parnes's text would advocate the devising of a rigid, clear-cut index of studies permitted and studies forbidden, a kind of *Kitzur Shulhan Arukh* of *Torah u-Madda*.

The formulation of a fixed, mechanical liberal arts canon is one way to settle the problem of halakhic constraints on general studies. In individual cases it may indeed be the best solution. As a sweeping disposition of a central intellectual dimension of our spiritual lives, however, it is the wrong approach. The complexity of the issues involved, both for the individual and for Jewish and American society as a whole, defy the imposition of black and white dicta. The inner life may draw sustenance from wise guidance; it requires, as we have seen, a measure of halakhic constraint and humility. But it is the glory of God that each individual's inner life presents a portrait of abilities, inclinations and needs that can never be replicated. "Each individual possesses something unique, rare, which is unknown to others; each individual has a unique message to communicate, a special color to add to the communal spectrum."[13] Hence, the inner life, whether it is manifested in the intellectual adventure, in our relations to our fellow human beings, or in the lonely encounter with God, cannot be completely comprehended and controlled from the outside.

Much hostility to *Torah ve-Hokhmah* is accompanied by a tendency to downplay the uniqueness of human inwardness. Many opponents of *Torah ve-Hokhmah* also seem to be under the impression that doubt can be avoided if we just avoid thinking about questions of theology. This presumes that not thinking is the same as not being affected. R. Bahya b. Asher the Kabbalist, like R. Bahya ibn Pakuda the proponent of philosophy, disagrees. He states, in his *Commentary to Avot* (2:14): "Know what to answer the *apikoros:* [Traditional] faith should not suffice for you until you have faith through knowledge and wisdom. For one who has faith through tradition is likely to listen to the deniers."

Contemporary contemners of secular education boast of having constructed, in this age of rapid communications, compulsory education, mass media, etc., a more tightly insulated air bubble than was available to fourteenth-century Kabbalists! If the R. Bahyas are right, and their opponents are wrong, we have even more reason to be skeptical of static, mechanical limitations on the individual's intellectual destiny within the boundaries of Torah.

The reality and authority of inwardness, as it affects our confrontation with outlooks inimical to Torah, was clearly identified by Rambam. The Mishnah "Know what to answer the *apikoros"* is immediately succeeded by the dictum "Know before whom you labor." Commenting on the connection between the two statements, Rambam explains: "Beware that you not take to your heart any of those opinions. And know that the One before Whom you labor knows what is hidden in your heart. This is why he says: Know before Whom you labor, meaning that he should lead his heart to the divine faith."

Here I shall also appeal to *ma'aseh Rav.* As Kaplan and Berger have noted, Rav Soloveitchik openly exhibited his mastery of the philosophical and theological classics of the Greek and Christian traditions. Though aware that not everyone was up to the experience, he had no inhibitions about recommending broad intellectual exposure and in speaking of his enthusiasm for such congenial thinkers as Kierkegaard, Scheler, and Karl Barth. On several occasions I presented to the Rav the difficulties that troubled some of our students confronting the challenge of the liberal arts curriculum, specifically their fear that the humanities include books by objectionable authors whose works it was wrong to read. Each time I entreated the Rav for hard and fast guidelines that I could share with students, he resisted the suggestion, recommending instead that I exercise my own judgment. Moreover, he scoffed at the notion that going to college, or what to study there, can be decided "like a question in *Yoreh De'ah,"* with the mechanical straightforwardness suitable to "the kashrut of fish."

I was privileged to benefit from the Rav's guidance. Others, no doubt, will recollect similar conversations with him.

IV

In the course of their demonstration that Rambam's objections to the wrong kind of inquiry should not be viewed as a rejection of intellectual aspiration, Kaplan and Berger quote from the *Guide* I:32:

> The intention of these texts set down by the prophets and the Sages is not, however, wholly to close the gate of speculation and to deprive the intellect of the apprehension of things that it is possible to apprehend—as is thought by the ignorant and neglectful, who are pleased to regard their own deficiency and stupidity as perfection and wisdom, and the perfection and the knowledge of others as a deficiency and defection from Law, and who thus "regard darkness as light and light as darkness" (Isa. 5:20).

The specter of an unspoken fear has haunted many readers of Rabbi Parnes's essay. Has the position staked out by Rabbi Parnes given aid and comfort to proponents of spiritual and intellectual mediocrity who would palm off their indolence as piety, and are "pleased to regard their own deficiency and stupidity as perfection and wisdom, and the perfection and the knowledge of others as a deficiency and defection from Torah"? Quite possibly. Yet, in the free marketplace of ideas, the harm may well be outweighed by the benefits conferred upon followers of *Torah ve-Hokhmah.* By virtue of the care and precision of his essay, Rabbi Parnes has set a standard of earnest civility often absent from this kind of interchange. For that reason I, and those who think like me, are no less grateful to him than we are to the cogent and spirited rejoinder by Kaplan and Berger.

The debate over the Rambam has helped to unmask and clear away certain persistent and popular misconceptions about the character and purpose of serious intellectual activity. And precisely because I, and those who think like me, do not believe in the wisdom of rigid formulas in this area, it is good that we are recalled, from time to time, to the intellectual challenge of self-examination, that we remember, as the Mishnah instructs us, before Whom we labor.

Notes

[1] This article expands part of a letter (dated February 27, 1990) responding to a request from Mr. David Debow. For some additional material on issues not treated here in detail, e.g., the

scope of *le-havin u-le-horot*, certain practical aspects of *Torah ve-Hokhmah* education and questions pertinent to individual decisions, let me heartily recommend Dr. Norman Lamm's *Torah Umadda* (Northvale, N.J.; 1990); "Faith and Doubt" (in *Faith and Doubt* [New York; 1986)); various essays by my teacher Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, including "A Consideration of General Studies from a Torah Point of View," *Gesher* I, 11 (reprinted in *Torah U'Mada Reader*, ed. S. Carmy, Yeshiva University Community Services Division; on the title of this essay, see Jacob J. Schacter, "Torah u-Madda Revisited," *The Torah u-Madda Journal* I (1989):22, n. 49); "Tovah Hokhmah 'im Nahalah" (in *Mamlekhet Kohanim* [Jerusalem, 1988)); his contribution to the volume on Jewish approaches to general culture to be edited by Dr. Jacob J. Schacter; and some of my own writings, such as "Why I Read Philosophy, etc.," *Commentator* 1982 (reprinted in *Torah U'Mada Reader),* and "To Get the Better of Words: An Apology for Yir'at Shamayim in Academic Jewish Studies" *(The Torah u-Madda Journal* 2 [1990):7–24). Indeed, my present remarks should be read in the context of the last article.

[2] *The Torah u-Madda Journal* 1 (1989): 68–71; for the closing quote, see p. 71.

[3] "Of Freedom of Inquiry in the Rambam and Today," *The Torah u-Madda Journal* 2 (1990): 37–50. The citation is on p. 46.

[4] The position cited is that of Rabbi J. David Bleich, "Benefitting from Unethical Research," *Tradition* 24:4 (1989): 81–83.

[5] The reference is to the Andy Rooney affair, which was much in the news when these remarks were first written.

[6] See *Hovot ha-Levavot* 1:2.

[7] Cf. *Guide* 1:2, where Rambam chooses, at the beginning of the book, to undermine the questioner by insinuating that his involvement in philosophical speculation is frivolous.

[8] Note the same phrase in *Hil. 'Avodah Zarah.* Another pertinent Maimonidean text is *Perush ha-Mishnah, Pesahim,* end of ch. 4: "The author of *[Sefer Refuot]* wrote it as a scientific exercise *['al derekh ha-Hokhmah],* not that any person should do an act based on it, and this is permitted There are things that God proscribed, but it is permitted to study them and understand."

[9] The phrase is borrowed from Nagel's book with that title (Oxford, 1986).

[10] *Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. Selby-Bigge (Oxford, 1896), Book I, Part IV, section 7, p. 269.

[11] See R. Abraham Yitzhak HaKohen Kook, *Musar Avikha* (Jerusalem, 1985), 58 (par. 10): "The highest state of love of creatures *(ahavat ha-beriyot)* should be allotted to the love of mankind, and it must extend to all mankind, despite all variations of opinions, religions and faiths, and despite all distinctions of race and climate. It is right to get to the bottom of the views of the different peoples and groups, to learn, as much as possible, their characters and qualities, in order to know how to base love of humanity on foundations that approach action. For only upon a soul rich in love for creatures

and love of man can the love of the nation raise itself up in its full nobility and in its spiritual and practical greatness. The narrowness that causes one to see whatever is outside the border of the special nation, even outside the border of Israel, as ugly and defiled *(tamei),* is a terrible darkness that brings general destruction upon all the building of spiritual good, for the light of which every refined soul hopes." The precision of R. Kook's formulation should give pause to those who dismiss his non-halakhic writings as rhapsody. See also *Orot ha-Kodesh* (Jerusalem, 1990), IV, 405.

[12] See his "A Consideration of General Studies," cited above, n. 1.

[13] R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "The Community," *Tradition* 17:2 (Spring, 1978): 10. See also *Sanhedrin* 38a and *Bamidbar Rabbah* 21.