

A KABBALISTIC REINVENTION OF
MAIMONIDES' LEGAL CODE: R. ABRAHAM
ISAAC KOOK'S COMMENTARY
ON *SEFER HAMADA*

James A. Diamond*

Introduction: Retrieving Maimonides' Intellectual Mysticism

Virtually all ideological strains and genres of Jewish thought which preceded Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (d.1935) converge in the voluminous corpus of his literary legacy. The elaborate complexity of his thought reflects the dizzying biographical, and often tormented, drama of his life, originating as a talmudic prodigy (*ilui*) in Volozhin, the most prestigious of eastern European rabbinic academies, through his passionate spiritual and political advocacy of Zionism, as a local rabbinic leader of the pre-State of Israel city Jaffa, a stint as a pulpit rabbi in England, founder of his own independent political movement, and, ultimately, as the first Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Palestine. Throughout this frenetic communally-activist career, his writing in various forms rarely ceased, leaving a prodigious record of his thought driven by an irrepressible urge to disclose his most intimate reflections, no matter the consequences: "I must deliberate without any restraint, to pour onto paper without restraint all my heart's thought."¹

* Joseph & Wolf Lebovic Chair – Jewish Studies, University of Waterloo.

¹ *Shemona Kevatzim*, 2 vols. (Jerusalem, 2004), 1:295, hereinafter referred to as SK and cited by section (collection) and paragraph. This collection introduced for the first time many of R. Kook's writings as originally conceived and arranged, rather than what was previously available as collections edited by his students and son, Tzvi Yehudah Kook. For a close examination of its importance in understanding R. Kook and offering a new window into his thought, particularly in terms of chronological development, see Avinoam Rosenak, "Who's Afraid of Rav Kook's Hidden Treatises," *Tarbiz* 69:2 (2000) (Heb.) pp. 257-291 and Jonathan Garb, "Prophecy, Halakhah, and Antinomianism in the

Throughout his prolific career R. Kook, unexceptionally for any scholar steeped in rabbinic thought, engaged the seminal medieval Jewish thinker, Moses Maimonides (d. 1204),² whose own corpus, in its thoroughly systematic nature whether halakhic or philosophic, could not be more antithetical to that of R. Kook.³ Writing for Maimonides was anything but unrestrained, often couched in language of “great exactness and exceeding precision,” devised to exclude all but “the remnant whom the Lord calls.”⁴ It is this engagement, more properly termed an appropriation, which forms the focus of this study, and in particular an early methodical, though fragmentary, commentary on the *Book of Knowledge* (*Sefer HaMada*), the first section of Maimonides’ legal code, the *Mishneh Torah*.⁵ It is also the most philosophically

‘Shemonah Kevatsim’ by Rabbi Kook,” in Z. Gries et al, (eds.), *Shefa Tal: Studies in Jewish Thought and Culture Presented to Bracha Sak* (Beer Sheva: Ben Gurion University Press, 2004) pp. 267-277. Unless otherwise noted all Hebrew translations are my own.

² For a thorough and comprehensive overview of this engagement with Maimonides and the centrality of his thought for R. Kook, particularly with respect to the *Guide*, as well as secondary literature on the subject, see Uriel Barak, “The Formative Influence of the Description of the First Degree of Prophecy in the Guide on the Perception of ‘The Beginning of Redemption’ by Rabbi A.I. Kook’s Circle,” (Heb.) in A. Elqayam, D. Schwartz (eds.), *Maimonides and Mysticism: Presented to Moshe Hallamish on the Occasion of his Retirement*, *Daat* 64-66 (2009), at pp. 364-370. Most relevant to the topic herein is his note 14, pp. 365-366, regarding R. Kook’s relationship to Maimonides’ halakhic oeuvre including the *Mishneh Torah*.

³ See R. Kook’s own self appraisal as in “no sense a systematic writer,” in *Iggerot HaReiyah* (Jerusalem: Mossad Ha-Rav Kook, 1943), 2:243, as well as the testimony of his most dedicated disciple David Cohen (the “Nazir”) in his introduction to the first volume of *Orot HaQodesh*. See also Marvin Fox’s rationale for this apparent “disorder” since “the lack of system is inherent in his subject matter and in his method” in “Rav Kook: Neither Philosopher Nor Kabbalist,” in L. Kaplan, D. Shatz (eds.), *Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook and Jewish Spirituality* (NY: New York University Press, 1995) pp. 78-87, at p. 80.

⁴ *Guide of the Perplexed*, (Shlomo Pines trans., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963) I:34, p. 75 citing Joel 3:5. All references to the *Guide* will be to this edition, cited as GP. Although, as Pines notes, “systematic expositions of the Aristotelian philosophers are often dislocated and broken up ... in a word, order is turned into disorder,” (p. lvii) it is intentional and he is systematic in his disorder.

⁵ In this enterprise R. Kook is an integral part of a vibrant engagement with Maimonides’ thought by major exponents of the Hasidic movement throughout its history. Israel Dienstag offers a survey of this engagement whose rationale, he notes, could also be apropos R. Kook’s, for “despite the consensus that

informed section of the entire work.⁶ More of an eisegetical reinforcement of his own thought than an objective commentary, R. Kook composed a philosophical exegesis that creatively reinvents Maimonidean halakhah and philosophy in an existentially kabbalistic register.⁷ In a sense, R. Kook applied the methodology he ascribed to Maimonides' appropriation of Aristotelian philosophy to his very own appropriation of Maimonidean philosophy, for "he did not follow Aristotle and his Arabic philosophical commentators blindly, but rather investigated, distinguished, and refined the matters ... and after it became clear that there was no contradiction to the fundamentals of the Torah and he was convinced by them, he did not hide the truth declaring that they were his opinions, and determined it proper to explain the written and the oral laws in light of them."⁸ R. Kook himself, as will be seen in his commentary on the *Book of Knowledge*, adopts this very same stance of intense scrutiny to reconcile Maimonides' thought with his own.⁹ Though much of the commentary relates to technical halakhic

Maimonides is a proponent of the 'mastery of the intellect' while hasidut reflects the emotional and poetic current of Judaism, there persists a spiritual proximity between them." See "The *Guide of the Perplexed* and the *Book of Knowledge* in Hasidic Literature," (Heb.) *Abraham Weiss Jubilee Volume*, (New York: Hotsa'at Va'ad Sefer ha-Yovel, 1964). All references to the Mishneh Torah are to the *Mishneh Torah*, Shabse Frankel (ed.), (Jerusalem: Hotza'at Shabse Frankel, 2000), hereinafter cited as MT.

⁶ Indeed, Shlomo Pines has argued that Maimonides' halakhic works, including the *Book of Knowledge*, are even more radical in their Aristotelian formulations than his philosophical work, the *Guide*: see S. Pines, Y. Yovel (eds.), "The Philosophical Purport of Maimonides' Halachic Works and the Purport of the *Guide of the Perplexed*", in *Maimonides and Philosophy* (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1986) pp. 1-14.

⁷ R. Kook's thought reflects virtually the entire spectrum of Jewish mysticism that preceded him. For a panoramic listing of those influences see Lawrence Fine, "R. Abraham Isaac Kook and the Jewish Mystical Tradition," in *R. Abraham Isaac Kook and Jewish Spirituality*, pp. 23-40, at p. 25. Gershom Scholem celebrated his oeuvre as "a veritable *theologia mystica* of Judaism equally distinguished by its originality and the richness of the author's mind" (see: *Major Trends of Jewish Mysticism* (NY: Schocken Bks, 1974) p. 354 note 17).

⁸ "Le'Ahduto shel HaRambam: Ma'amar Meyuhad," printed in Zev Yavetz, *Toledot Yisrael* 12:211-219; repr. in Elisha Aviner [Langauer], David Landau (eds.), *Ma'amarei HaReiyah* (Jerusalem, 1984) pp. 105-112.

⁹ Although the rabbinic world's near obsession with the study of the *Mishneh Torah* has never abated since Maimonides' time, as Alan Nadler has shown, it never showed the same love for the *Guide*. There was a revival of study of the *Guide* after a lengthy period of neglect and suppression in the latter decades of

issues, what follows will attend primarily to its non-halakhic, philosophical/ kabbalistic engagement.

R. Kook systematically appropriates Maimonidean positions only to have them transcend their own rationalist limits to a kind of meta-metaphysics.¹⁰ This study will focus on how he achieves this appropriation in his sporadic commentary on the *Mishneh Torah's* Book of Knowledge.¹¹ Though unmentioned, the *Guide of the Perplexed* looms large in R. Kook's concerted subversion of Maimonides' rationalist grounding of the commandment to know, love, and fear God, the very first commandments enumerated by Maimonides in his tabulation of the *mitzvot*, and the first to be halakhically explicated in the *Mishneh Torah*.¹² In particular, comments on halakhah

the eighteenth century: see "The Rambam Revival in Early Modern Jewish Thought: Maskilim, Mitnagdim, and Hasidim on Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*," in Jay Harris (ed.), *Maimonides After 800 Years: Essays on Maimonides and His Influence* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007) pp. 231-256. Although my study here focuses on what is another example of the long-standing exegetical tradition vis-à-vis the MT, as will become clear, the *Guide* looms prominently in the background.

¹⁰ R. Kook's exegetical approach to the *Mishneh Torah* is influenced by Habad's own unique approach to the same work. See Jacob Gottlieb's full length study, *Rationalism in Hasidic Attire: Habad's Harmonistic Approach to Maimonides* (Heb.) (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2009). The last leader of Habad, R. Menahem Mendel Schneersohn, who related to the *Mishneh Torah* "on two levels, a rationalist and a kabbalistic one," (p. 40), echoes R. Kook's approach.

¹¹ All citations will be to the edition "Orot HaRambam" in Jacob Filber (ed.), *Le-Orot: 'Iyunim be-mishnat Rabenu Avraham Yitsḥak ha-Kohen Kūk*, (Jerusalem: ha-Makhon le-Heker Mishnat ha-Re'iyah, 1995) pp. 161-233, hereinafter referred to as OR. It was also reprinted in Moshe Zuriel (ed.), *Otzrot HaReiyah*, 5 volumes, 2d ed. (Rishon Le-Zion: Yeshivat Ha-Hesder Rishon Le-Zion, 2001) pp. 9-68. Yehuda Mirsky dates this composition to some time shortly after 1903 and R. Kook's first arrival in Palestine: see his "Rav Kook and Maimonides: A New Look," (Heb) in B. Schwartz, A. Melamed, A. Shemesh (eds.), *Iggud: Selected Essays in Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 2008) vol. 1, pp. 397-405, at p. 399, note 9.

¹² R. Kook considered the MT and GP to be cut from the same cloth, and in an essay on Maimonides written shortly before his death ("HaMaor HaEhad," in *Maamarei HaReiyah* (Jerusalem, 1984) pp. 115-117), he aggressively criticized those who distinguish between the two. As Dov Schwartz concludes in his close analysis of R. Kook's defense of Maimonides against his contemporary detractors, "Kook drew no distinction between Maimonides in the *Mishneh Torah* and Maimonides in the *Guide*": see "Maimonides in Religious-Zionist Philosophy: Unity vs. Duality," in James T. Robinson (ed.), *The Cultures of Maimonideanism* (Leiden: Brill, 2009) p. 395.

that share a metaphorical image or proof-text with the *Guide*, when examined closely, target both the *Mishneh Torah* and the *Guide* to construct a new intellectualist halakhic mysticism.¹³ My use of the term “subversion” is not meant to imply that R. Kook intentionally distorted a text into conveying a meaning he knew it in fact not to convey, contrary to the author's intention. He believed that the *patent* sense of many Maimonidean texts offends their *real*, authorially-intended sense, and therefore required conscious subversion so that the genuine sense would emerge seamlessly for his readers. One of R. Kook's exegetical assumptions in reading Maimonides is that which was fundamental to rabbinic exegesis of scripture, what James Kugel has described as the “omniscience” of the text. R. Kook adopted that same hyper-literal approach attributed to rabbinic midrash which considers “that the slightest details of the biblical text have a meaning that is both comprehensible and significant ... put there to reach something new and important, and it is capable of being discovered by careful analysis.”¹⁴

The Finite Torah of the *Mishneh Torah*: A Confidence in Achievement

R. Kook initiates his commentary with the epigraphic verse Maimonides cites to launch his introduction to the MT, *then I will not be ashamed when I look at all Your commandments* (Ps. 119:6), which immediately provides the rationale for the purported comprehensiveness of the MT, as its very title suggests, which had provoked so much criticism in the past.¹⁵ R. Kook postulates a finite and an infinite dimension to the Torah: the student must avoid stultifying shame and humility in approaching the former dimension;

¹³ If David Blumenthal is correct in his interpretation of Maimonides' thought as leading to an intellectual mysticism, then R. Kook's commentary may in fact be more properly classified as a re-appropriation than as a “reinvention”. For Blumenthal's most recent formulation of this position, see “Maimonides' Philosophical Mysticism,” in A. Elqayam, D. Schwartz (eds.), *Maimonides and Mysticism, Daat* 64-66 (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2009) pp. v-xxv and the comprehensive bibliography, xxii-xxv.

¹⁴ *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981) pp. 103-104.

¹⁵ For the history of the charge against Maimonides that he intended his MT to do away with the need for the Talmud see Isadore Twersky, “R. Joseph Ashkenazi and Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*,” (Heb.) in S. Lieberman (ed.), *Salo Baron Jubilee Volume* (Jerusalem: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1975) pp. 183-194.

while the latter demands their adoption to an extreme degree. Though limitless in its scope, “there is a manner in which we can complete the entire Torah, and that is the definitive laws (*pisqei hahalakhot*) on which conduct depends.”¹⁶ Excessive humility holds the student back when he seeks to attain what is achievable in Torah,¹⁷ whereas its ethical posture is appropriate with respect to its limitless speculative and meta-halakhic facets, which ultimately elude the human intellect.¹⁸ Thus Ps. 119:6 denies that shame is appropriate in seeking proficiency in *all Your commandments*, or the attainable normative/ halakhic aspect of Torah.¹⁹ What is pertinent to this study is that R. Kook accepts Nahmanides’ explication of Exod. 24:11, *and they saw God and they ate and they drank*, a reference to the prophetic vision of the *nobles of Israel* at the foot of Mount Sinai, to corroborate the notion of a finite Torah that can be mastered in its entirety. For Nahmanides the verse indicates a celebration of the Torah’s reception akin to the rabbinic advice that whenever one completes a unit of Torah study, that accomplishment merits a banquet in its celebration.²⁰ The inference of course is that there is something in Torah that can be completed. However, its striking contrast with Maimonides’ own extremely

¹⁶ OR, p. 161.

¹⁷ See for example SK 1:894: “There is more to fear from lowliness than from exaltedness.” See also 2:322; 6:242, where extreme humility prevents the righteous from fulfilling their mission and improving the world.

¹⁸ Lack of humility and acknowledgment of intellectual inadequacy when engaged with this dimension of Torah is tantamount to idolatry. See SK 1:636, 886. As Daniel Frank has argued, Maimonides’ extreme position on humility is a reaction to Aristotle’s positive view of pride. On this issue R. Kook would be closer to the Aristotelian position: see Daniel H. Frank, “Humility as a Virtue: A Maimonidean Critique of Aristotle’s Ethics,” in Eric L. Ormsby (ed.), *Moses Maimonides and His Time* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1989) pp. 89-99.

¹⁹ R. Kook’s valuation of halakhah cannot be overestimated, and this “pride” encouraged in the pursuit of the finite Torah motivated R. Kook to exert much of his effort during his later tenure in Jerusalem to a halakhic project titled *Halakhah Berurah* that parallels Maimonides’ MT, but for precisely opposing ends. His goal was to annotate the Talmud with all its pertinent references in post-talmudic halakhic literature. Rather than divorcing practical halakhah from its Talmudic origins as Maimonides intended, R. Kook hoped to reverse that trend and remarry halakhah to Talmud, “creating a more profound identification between the [halakhic] investigator and the talmudic corpus that must be mastered”: see Avinoam Rosenak’s discussion in *The Prophetic Halakha: R. A.I.H. Kook’s Philosophy of Halakha*, (Heb.) (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2007) pp. 404-405.

²⁰ *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 1:9; *Kohelet Rabbah* 1:1.

negative view of this biblical passage, a view that could not have escaped R. Kook's attention, invites further consideration of R. Kook's methodology in explicating Maimonides' project.

Maimonides considers the nobles' vision to be a corrupt, anthropomorphic apprehension of God, as indicated both by its strongly physical description and by the festive gastronomic celebration following it, which, consistent with their corporeal apprehension, "inclined toward things of the body."²¹ What led to the nobles' deficient vision, according to Maimonides, was precisely that sense of confidence, which R. Kook encourages in the pursuit of that which is attainable in Torah. In stark contrast to Moses' act of supreme humility in covering his face at the burning bush, a gesture of intellectual restraint for the sake of gradual progress toward levels of knowledge for which he was not yet prepared, the nobles "were overhasty, rushing forward before they reached perfection."²² R. Kook's reference to this very same event as a successful religious enterprise, combined with Nahmanides' reading of it as such, functions as a critique of Maimonides' philosophical project at the same time as it commends his halakhic one. In Maimonides' account, while the goal of both Moses and the nobles is attainable, reaching it or failing to do so depends upon the propriety of their efforts. For R. Kook, since the knowledge sought consists of physics and metaphysics, or what are termed in the rabbinic tradition the Accounts of the Beginning and the Chariot – the stated concerns of the *Guide* – the very assumption that this knowledge can be attained determines the ultimate failure to do so, regardless of method. For Maimonides, philosophical knowledge of God is distinct from jurisprudential knowledge of His norms because of their respective truth values and difficulty of apprehension. R. Kook's displacement of the nobles' vision onto halakhah both locates its proper domain in law rather than philosophical speculation, and registers approval of Maimonides' self-declared exhaustive codification of Jewish law.²³

²¹ GP I:5, p. 30. On this see S. Klein-Braslavy, *King Solomon and the Philosophical Esotericism in the Thought of Maimonides* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1996) pp. 142-145, and Shaul Regev, "The Vision of the Nobles of Israel in Jewish Philosophy of the Middle Ages," (Heb.) *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 4 (1984/5) pp. 281-302.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ R. Kook's favorable view of the "nobles" has its medieval precedents especially in Isaac Abarbanel's extended defense of their vision. In fact they may have shared the very same motivation. As Eric Lawee has argued, Abarbanel's

Since the notion of humility lies at the core of Maimonides' contrast between Moses' apprehension and that of the nobles, it is also radically transformed by R. Kook's explication here. R. Kook draws a distinction between negative and positive humility in the pursuit of knowledge.²⁴ The aspect of the Torah that can be mastered cultivates a constructive self-confidence which encourages learning and study because it contemplates an attainable goal for, "since there is a way to attain some aspect of completion within the perfection of the Torah, although partial and minute in relation to its vastness, this principle fortifies human nature so that it can resist excessive shame."²⁵ Conscious of Maimonides' onerous intellectual demands which restrict its Torah curriculum of physics and metaphysics to only the most trained and sophisticated of minds, R. Kook carves out a space for those who cannot possibly meet these requirements. That space, R. Kook claims, is created by the *Mishneh Torah*, whose goal is to convey one dimension of the Torah in its entirety. What Maimonides conceives of as a pragmatic concession to human psychology and emotions in that it "settles the human psyche," R. Kook transforms into a pedagogical stimulus which invites rather than excludes participants in the venture of studying Torah. R. Kook then channels that inclusiveness back into the fear of God, which, as strictly construed by Maimonides, also restricts its fulfillment to only the very few, since it reflects mastery of philosophic and scientific knowledge of the world. As he concludes,

defense is intended as an endorsement of the superiority of prophecy over philosophy, and the nobles as prophets, imperfect as they were, "must be viewed as superior to their post-biblical, non-prophetic critics." See *Isaac Abarbanel's Stance Toward Tradition: Defense, Dissent, and Dialogue* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2001) pp. 62-76, at p. 73.

²⁴ See also R. Kook's discussion of the need for self-confidence in *Musar Avikha* (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1971) pp. 61-67, and Yehuda Mirsky's analysis of its place in perfecting oneself, which "requires a complex balancing act between recognition of one's ontological emptiness and a commitment to develop oneself. It can only proceed via careful introspection and the exercise of the mind," in his *An Intellectual and Spiritual Biography of Rabbi Avraham Yitzhaq Ha-Cohen Kook from 1865 to 1904* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University, 2007) pp. 201-205, at p. 204.

²⁵ OR, p. 162. R. Kook elsewhere also tempers Maimonides' extreme position on humility and pride by narrowing the kind of pride Maimonides absolutely abhors to that "which has no ingredient of humility at all." When that pride is informed by humility, however, it is a positive trait. See Moshe Zuriel (ed.), *Otzerot HaReiyah* (Rishon Le-Zion: Yeshivat Ha-Hesder RishonLe-Zion, 2001), vol. 2, p. 824.

“only when man is not ashamed can he aspire to acquire the type of shame that constitutes true fear of God.”²⁶ The fear of God, which Maimonides posited as a consequence of systematic philosophical contemplation, becomes, in R. Kook's hands, confidence in the ability to master the halakhic dimension of Torah.

This multifaceted conception of a finite and infinite Torah manifests itself in Maimonides' pedagogical program for children outlined in the *Laws Concerning the Study of Torah* which advises “instructing little by little, a few verses at a time, until the age of six or seven.”²⁷ R. Kook contrasts this sporadic nature of early childhood pedagogy, unwed to any textual sequence, with a more orderly curriculum for mature students tied to the final version of the masoretic canon. These two types of curricula parallel the two sides of the talmudic debate concerning the mode of the original transmission of the Torah: the early childhood method corresponds to the view that the Torah was transmitted gradually, “scroll by scroll”, over a long time, and the adult one, to the view that it was transmitted in its entirety all at once.²⁸ Counter-intuitively, though consistently, R. Kook considers the disorder of the former more sublime than the order of the latter. Thus, “for infants at the beginning one ascends with what supersedes order ... and inculcates in them the transcendent aspect, and afterwards one proceeds to teach them in an orderly fashion.”²⁹ Here R. Kook dislodges the scientifically programmatic development toward the highest truths of the Torah usually associated with Maimonides³⁰ by reversing its direction.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ MT, *Talmud Torah*, 1:6.

²⁸ OR, p. 174 referring to *bGittin*, 60a.

²⁹ This is consistent with R. Kook's general appreciation for the purity of childhood thought that must be preserved throughout life as one matures (SK 2:358, 359); the innocence of children reflects an essence that can guide one's life “more than any thought we imagine to be sublime” (1:351); only that Torah digested in infancy has the purity to defeat evil (3:265).

³⁰ See for example Maimonides' description of the qualities of Joseph, the addressee of the GP, who had mastered astronomy and mathematics prior to being taught “divine matters”, and Maimonides' persistent appeal to “approach matters in an orderly manner” (p. 4). See also GP I:34, p. 75 for the necessary prerequisites to “achieve human perfection” which consist of logic, mathematics, natural science, and ultimately divine science reserved for “a few solitary individuals” and to be “hidden from the beginner” (p. 79). The reason for this rigorous curriculum is, as Alfred Ivry points out (“Strategies of Interpretation in Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*”, *Jewish History*, Vol. 6, No. 1/2 (*The Frank*

In R. Kook's writings logic, order, and linear thinking, however necessary, might actually be an obstacle and distance one from the Torah's essence. Elsewhere he privileges a more naive mode of thought as the key to that essence, a kind of reasoning that is dominant in the pristine, untainted, and innocent soul of children for "in truth it is not science and broad knowledge that perfects us, but rather the purity of childhood."³¹ While Maimonides' rigorous pedagogical curriculum is structured to evolve from the crude and elementary grasp associated with children to the advanced sophistication of adulthood, R. Kook envisions movement that ultimately retraces its steps to recapture the "disorder" of childhood and leads to a more transcendent Torah. With this comment R. Kook praises, as he does in numerous passages throughout his corpus, a virtue of childhood, in whose soul alone pulsates the "strongest and clearest essence of the ideal of existence."³² In contrast, Maimonides would normally dismiss the intellectual qualities of childhood as vulgar and infantile. R. Kook's distinction between childhood and adult Torah informs his conception of the ultimate educational goal (anticipated by Maimonides) of an exclusive focus on *pardes*, or natural and divine science. That pristine disordered Torah, inculcated at a young age, must be restored in order to extract "the good and the light that inhabit [Torah] in purity and strength," transcending the written and oral Torah. The basic, simplistic thoughts that Maimonides seeks to supplant are revitalized by R. Kook as "illuminating our way more than those thoughts we imagine are lofty and sublime."³³

Master Copy and Tribal Editions: The Multiple Truths of Torah

In tracing the line of transmission from Sinai onwards, Maimonides naturally begins with the written Torah, which was transcribed entirely by Moses, after which "each tribe was given a copy and one copy was placed in the Ark as a witness." For Maimonides, the scroll in the Ark serves as a "witness" in the sense of a master copy to which all others can be compared for their accuracy and veracity. A witness testifies to

Talmage Memorial Volume, 1992), pp. 113-130, at p. 122, the need "of all the Josephs of this world ... to realize that the Bible is a sophisticated philosophical text."

³¹ SK 7:205.

³² SK 6:284. See also 2:358, 359; 3:265; 7:15.

³³ SK 1:351.

an objective truth that is empirically verifiable and irrefutable.³⁴ R. Kook, in his commentary on the *Mishneh Torah*, views the copy in the ark and the individual scrolls distributed to each tribe as paradigmatic of a plurality of individuated expressions of a single truth that underlies all existence. There are a multiplicity of approaches in Torah, which vary “according to the logic of each sage, dependant on temperament, and nature, and other factors,” reflected in the copies each tribe possessed. However the image of the one copy in the Ark captures the converse notion of uniformity, where “*these and these are the words of the living God* and all is encompassed by the Torah of Moses.”³⁵

Once again R. Kook transforms what is at the very core of the Maimonidean project, both in philosophy and jurisprudence, into one closer to his own modern notion of Torah and, synonymously, of truth. Rather than each Torah being an exact replica of the master copy residing in the Ark, conforming to Maimonides' notion of one absolute truth, R. Kook perceives truth in subjectivity, as the copies tailored to accommodate the respective spirits of each tribe indicate.³⁶ For Maimonides, although the language of the Torah is drafted to communicate different messages, those differences are marked by hierarchical levels that direct one toward an ultimate truth but are not full expressions of it. The primitive form of the Torah, considered by Maimonides as the meaning of the Talmudic dictum, *Torah speaks in the language of the sons of man*, is a concession to the unsophisticated intellects of a mass audience, and not as a valid articulation of the subjective nature of truth. R. Kook injects harmony, and therefore greater accessibility, into the origins of Judaism, whereas Maimonides probably would have conceived them in the opposite way as the master copy's, or universal truth's, highly restricted accessibility, enclosed in the Ark, available to Moses alone, and subsequently in its permanent

³⁴ Cf., for example, the reason Mosaic prophecy is unimpeachable: not because of the miracles Moses performed, “but because our eyes saw and our ears heard just as he heard” (MT, *Yesodei HaTorah* 8:3).

³⁵ OR, p. 163.

³⁶ R. Kook's “pluralism” has been the subject of much discussion but it is clear that his tolerance and pluralism did not stem from what we usually associate with liberal democratic principles. It was a result of his metaphysical world view that perceived difference only from a human perspective, but a “monolithic undefined unity, with no distinction between disparate entities” from God's perspective: see Tamar Ross, “Between Metaphysical and Liberal Pluralism: A Reappraisal of R. A.I. Kook's Espousal of Tradition,” *AJS Review* 21:1 (1996) pp. 61-110, at p. 89, and Benjamin Ish-Shalom, “Tolerance and its Theoretical Basis in the Teachings of Rabbi Kook,” *Da'at* 20 (1988) pp. 151-168.

place in the Temple, known solely to the High Priest. R. Kook brings the *Mishneh Torah* in line with his unified *weltanschauung*, which favors opposition and diversity over uniformity. As he asserts elsewhere, godliness inheres “within divisions and disagreements, not essential opposites and disharmonies, but rather *these and these are the words of the living God*” where even subjectivity “can apprehend the essence that unites and perfects all.”³⁷

Drawing Down God’s *Hesed*: Reattributing Maimonides’ Attributeless God

R. Kook continues his reinvention of Maimonides, immediately after the introduction to his *Mishneh Torah* commentary, with the epigraphic verse that opens the Book of Knowledge, *Draw down your hesed on those who know you and your tzedakah on the upright of heart* (Ps. 36:11).³⁸ For R. Kook, the pairing of *hesed* with knowledge and *tzedakah* with the heart suggests divine reciprocity between two different facets of a human being: the intellectual and the emotional/psychological. Crucial to note here is what I believe to be R. Kook’s subversion of Maimonides’ own definitions of divine “grace” and “righteousness”, infusing them with a relational dimension conspicuously lacking in their original formulation. When descriptive

³⁷ SK 1:498. Though R. Kook endorses the maxim that “[t]he Torah speaks in the language of the sons of man,” his understanding of it as a rationale for the use of anthropomorphic images in the Bible is, as Lawrence Kaplan argues, critically different from the way in which Maimonides understands that very same rationale. Rather than a pragmatic pedagogical tool which must be overcome to attain the truths to which crude corporealism points, R. Kook considers it an essential “symbol” that “constitutes an ineluctable, inescapable, and permanent necessity when speaking of God”: see “Rav Kook and the Philosophical Tradition” in *R. Abraham Isaac Kook and Jewish Spirituality*, above, note 3, pp. 41-77, at p. 48.

³⁸ R. Kook’s explication of this verse and the verse which leads off the introduction to the MT already adumbrates the contemporary scholar Marvin Fox’s cautionary advice to all readers of the *Guide* never to ignore those verses that lead off the various sections of the *Guide* applies equally to the MT. Fox demands that they “should not be thought of as mere adornments with no substantive significance, but should be studied with care to see what message the author is conveying to his readers. One might say that this is the first test of the competence of the readers. Readers who ignore these verses or fail to investigate the implications fully have already shown insufficient sensitivity to the text.” See *Interpreting Maimonides: Studies in Methodology, Metaphysics and Moral Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990) p. 154.

of God, who possesses no attributes, these are attributes of action or of those aspects of His creation that would elicit such characterizations, had they been examples of human behavior. If *hesed*, according to Maimonides, is the conferring of an unwarranted benefit on a beneficiary who has no claim to it, then divine *hesed* is to be taken in that sense “because He has brought the all into being.”³⁹ Concomitantly, *tzedakah* is the fulfillment of a moral duty such as “remedying the injuries of all those who are injured” rather than discharging a formal legal duty such as paying wages owed to an employee. Divine *tzedakah* then is a description in human terms of what we see operative in the world, “because of His mercy toward the weak – I refer to the governance of the living beings by means of its forces.”⁴⁰ In relation to divine omnipotence, all living beings are considered “weak”. God’s creation of all living things includes endowing them with all those natural biological mechanisms (“forces”) necessary to sustain themselves. From a divine perspective, the two ethical terms of generosity simply refer to the establishment of nature: in the case of *hesed* – its inception, and in that of *tzedakah* – its perpetuation. *Imitatio dei* charges human beings with the duty of assimilating the traits they perceive to be inherent in nature in their ethics.⁴¹ Knowledge, as codified in the first two sections of the *Mishneh Torah*, undergirds ethics, as the title *Deot* of the section, usually rendered as *Ethical Traits*, would suggest.⁴² Thus the verse that launches these sections is

³⁹ GP III:53, p. 632.

⁴⁰ Ibid. For an extended discussion of the meaning of *tzedeq* which demonstrates its thorough intellectualization in the thought of Maimonides, see my “Forging a New Righteous Nation: Maimonides’ Midrashic Interweave of Verse and Text,” in Elliot Wolfson, Aaron Hughes (eds.), *New Directions in Jewish Philosophy* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010), at pp. 293-300, where I conclude that “*tzedeq* is no longer a legal or ethical mode of conduct, but it is a posture vis-à-vis one’s own intellect.” This highlights its contrast with R. Kook’s view that follows herein.

⁴¹ What this means for Maimonides is that while men normally exhibit moral behavior emotively, God’s actions strictly accord with what reason dictates is appropriate. Genuine *imitatio dei*, then, is, as Herbert Davidson has so ably argued, to act morally but dispassionately. See his “The Middle Way in Maimonides’ Ethics”, *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 54 (1987) pp. 31-72.

⁴² On the use of the term *deot* by Maimonides for ethical traits (rather than a more likely term such as *middot*) see R. Weiss (“Language and Ethics: Reflections on Maimonides’ Ethics,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 9 [1917] pp. 425-433, at p. 430), who attributes the choice to that which

transformed from supplication for divine beneficence, which is unaffected by human behavior, to a petition for success in the juridical effort to inculcate these ethics in Maimonides' audience.

R. Kook understood that Maimonides, by refusing to attribute human qualities to God, shifted the onus to mankind, in a sense replacing God by man with respect to the ethical aspects of the world. In contrast to Maimonides, he imbues the world with *hesed* and *tzedakah*, thus restoring them to the province of God as their endower. *Hesed*, for him, is not unwarranted but unneeded. In the enigmatic language of Kabbalah, as opposed to the rigorous terms of philosophy, it perfects the already perfect, taking it to even greater heights of perfection, while *tzedakah* redresses the deficient, succors the needy. The first half of the verse involves such a *hesed* "without which there is also perfection; however the light of *hesed* elevates the one who knows God to a higher and more sublime level." The second half invokes a *tzedakah* that "compensates for deficiency ... for those upright of heart to incorporate through knowledge the practical and ethical within it."⁴³ Once man naturally perfects his knowledge of God, another realm of existence is unleashed from which the "light of *hesed*" shines, illuminating a route toward an even more extended perfection. R. Kook's interpretation of this verse introduces another reality at the point at which Maimonides' human one would normally end. The borders of the world pertinent to man within Maimonides' framework are configured by the intellectual capacity of the mind, while for R. Kook, that limit marks the entryway to a further God-suffused reality depicted figuratively as an emanative light that envelops all. R. Kook's exegesis raises the stakes of the MT project from its purported exclusive concern with law and practice

distinguishes man from brute – his intellectual form. Maimonides thereby "intellectualizes the character traits by calling them *deot*. He also stresses the effect of moral conduct upon the mind by treating character traits as *deot*." Leo Strauss translates *deot* as "ethics" ("Notes on Maimonides' Book of Knowledge", in E.E. Urbach, R.J. Zwi Werblowsky and Ch. Wirszubski (eds.), *Studies in Mysticism and Religion Presented to G. Scholem* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1967) pp. 269-283, at p. 270), while S. Schwarzschild prefers "morals" ("Moral Radicalism and Middlingness in the Ethics of Maimonides", in M. Kellner (ed.), *The Pursuit of the Ideal* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990) pp. 37-160, at p. 143). For the most detailed and comprehensive examination of the term *deot* as an ethical disposition see Bernard Septimus, "What Did Maimonides Mean by *Madda*?" in Ezra Fleischer et al (eds.), *Me'ah She'arim: Studies in Medieval Jewish Spiritual Life in Memory of Isadore Twersky* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2001), at pp. 96-102.

⁴³ OR, p. 170.

generally, and the natural science and metaphysics of *Yesodei HaTorah* particularly, to one of kabbalistic metaphysics. It views the “drawing down of *hesed*” as far more than a mere incorporation of an ethical trait extrapolated from the workings of nature: it is one which draws down another reality that supersedes mundane perfection. In that drawing down there is a reflexive ascent to the purest origins of the world of emanation (*atzilut*) where all is good.⁴⁴ As R. Kook states elsewhere in explicating this same verse, “the *hesed* which we aspire to draw down by way of knowledge is knowledge of the name of God that transcends the supernal value of the *hesed* of *elohim*, which glimmers from the shade of the supernal wings, and the drawing down of the *hesed* is the elemental *hesed*, that is drawn to those who know God.”⁴⁵

Reversing the Priorities of Love and Fear of God

For Maimonides, knowledge achieves intellectual enlightenment and thereby enhances knowledge of God, while for R. Kook it transcends its own rational limits to tap into a divine realm from which it “draws”.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ In the kabbalistic tradition with which R. Kook was working, this world (*atzilut*) is the highest of all worlds, “conceived as being substantially identical with the divinity and the En Sof”: see Scholem, *Major Trends*, above, n. 7, at p. 272. R. Kook follows suit, viewing it as the location where the “uppermost emanation is purely good” (SK 1:547).

⁴⁵ *Olat Reiyah* (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1963) vol. 2, p. 21. According to R. Kook, this is a return of the material world to its pure origins, a reversal of the progressive devolution from light to matter along a route from nature back to *atzilut*. See for example SK 1:547.

⁴⁶ R. Kook is another exemplar in a long line of kabbalists who consider philosophical thought limited in the ultimate truths it can access. See for example the studies of Aviezer Ravitzky, “Samuel ibn Tibbon and the Esoteric Character of the Guide of the Perplexed,” *AJS Review* 6 (1981) pp. 87-123, and Moshe Idel, “*Sitrei Arayot* in Maimonides' Thought,” in *Maimonides and Philosophy*, above, n. 6, pp. 79-91. As Elliot Wolfson has demonstrated, one of the pioneers of this school who also engaged Maimonides was Abraham Abulafia, whose own mode of transmitting mystical gnosis derives from “a complex synthesis of the Maimonidean perspective and the acceptance of an oral tradition that transcends philosophical orientation”: see *Abraham Abulafia-Kabbalist and Prophet: Hermeneutics, Theosophy, and Theurgy* (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2000) pp. 77-78. R. Kook's own hermeneutical engagement with Maimonides has medieval roots. For a different Hasidic hermeneutic which views the *Guide* and the *Zohar* as sharing a common esoteric tradition, see Shaul Magid's detailed treatment of the Izbica and Radzin tradition of appropriating Maimonides' *Guide* in *Hasidism on the Margin: Reconciliation, Antinomianism, and Messianism in*

Thus, it channels a *hesed* whose essence is that it is unwarranted, and it also transforms another facet of the noetically developed relationship with God that Maimonides posits. For him, whatever aspect of the divine is gained by knowledge is a natural consequence of it and therefore warranted by it, “for providence is consequent upon intellect and attached to it.”⁴⁷ Setting aside the possibility of divine intervention that might interrupt the prophetic process, Maimonides concurs with the philosophical position that once his rational, imaginative and moral qualities are perfected, a man “will necessarily become a prophet, inasmuch as this is a perfection that belongs to us by nature.”⁴⁸ Since R. Kook’s notion of knowledge allows for transcending the boundaries of reason, its objectives are not subject to any rules or mechanisms that automatically dictate their realization once certain levels of knowledge have been achieved, as they are in Maimonides’ thought. That is why R. Kook reverses the priorities that Maimonides had set for love and fear of God when defining them halakhically. Love results from “comprehending [God’s] actions and magnificent creations and perceiving from them an inestimable and infinite wisdom.” Fear then follows this understanding, when one “immediately retreats and is frightened and aware of one’s minute, lowly, and dark creatureliness that persists in weak and superficial knowledge compared to the Perfection of all knowledge.”⁴⁹ R. Kook transforms what appears to be a reflex of the ultimate goal of love⁵⁰ into a higher state of consciousness for which love sets the stage: “From the words of our

Izbica and Radzin Hasidism (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003).

⁴⁷ GP III:17, p. 474.

⁴⁸ GP II:32, p. 361.

⁴⁹ MT, *Yesodei HaTorah* 2:2. Lawrence Kaplan has already ably argued for R. Kook’s reversal of Maimonides’ directional movement of love itself, which he claims progresses from a cold intellectual love to a passionate desirous one in Maimonides, while R. Kook follows the reverse route from passionate, intuitive love to a refined love. Though that may be the case with love, what I argue here is that ultimately, the path toward perfection does not end there. Rather, it is preliminary to “fear” as described here: see his “The Love of God in Maimonides and Rav Kook,” *Judaism* 43:3 (1994) pp. 227-239.

⁵⁰ Maimonides later abandons this intellectually based fear formulated at the beginning of the MT for a more popular based one, which Howard Kreisel (*Maimonides’ Political Thought: Studies in Ethics, Law and the Human Ideal*. (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999), p. 259) hypothesizes is attributable to the fact that “inferior forms of fear play an important role for the masses’ observance of the Law.”

master it appears that fear of the Exaltedness is a superior level that is consequent to a perfected love.”⁵¹ Maimonides continues, stating that in consonance with his definitions of love and fear, he will proceed to “explain important principles of the works of the Master of the Universe that will serve as an entryway (*petah*) for the intellectual to love God.”⁵² R. Kook ingeniously reinforces his reversal of Maimonidean priorities by midrashically reading *petah* as referring to love. In other words, love is merely the *preliminary*, the “entryway”, for further degrees of perfection.

The significance of Ps. 36:11, as it resonates in R. Kook's inversion of fear and love, is accentuated by his distinction, presented in the same comment, between lower and higher forms of fear corresponding to pre-love and post love manifestations of it. The former is simple fear (*yirah peshutah*) motivated by the literal fear of punishment or reprisal, while the latter is a more direct fear of God (*yirat hakavod veharomemut*) uncompromised by ulterior concerns for one's own welfare. This stratification of fear, endorsed repeatedly elsewhere in R. Kook's corpus,⁵³ is particularly pertinent to his exegetical engagement with the *Mishneh Torah*. Since the professed intention of that work is to provide a comprehensive guide to all of halakhah, or mandated Jewish practice, it runs the risk of cultivating an inferior form of fear caught up in the myriad of details Jewish law involves. This fear is best expressed by R. Kook in another context, unrelated to the *Mishneh Torah*, which itself climaxes in the utopian state envisioned by Ps. 36:11. Concern with the minutiae of the mitzvot stems from two sources, the lower one of fear of punishment and a much-enhanced one, from “the current of the light

⁵¹ OR, p. 173.

⁵² Here I agree with Menachem Kellner's interpretation (also citing Lawrence Berman's *Ibn Bajjah veHaRambam* (Ph.D. dissertation, Hebrew University, 1959) p. 37) that Maimonides' notion of human perfection entails two tiers of *imitatio dei*, one “before intellectual perfection and an imitation of God after such perfection. In other words, we obey God before intellectual perfection out of fear and after intellectual perfection out of love.” See his *Maimonides on Human Perfection* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990) p. 39.

⁵³ His development of this hierarchy of fear runs throughout his writing. For a few examples see SK 2:264 for the power of the superior fear possessed by the righteous; 2:304 for the evolution from “simple fear” to the superior form advanced by the progressive removal of doubts about reality and God; 1:274; 2:332, 333 for the detriment of excessive simple fear; 6:25 for fear that cultivates despondency and retards spirituality; 6:272 for how to elevate an overwhelming crude fear to the higher form of *yirat romemut*.

of life within the source of apprehension.”⁵⁴ That apprehension consists of consciousness of the sanctity of the mitzvot along with “the unity of the soulful nature of Israel with all the mitzvot, their different classifications and branches of their branches.” The ascent from that elementary fear is propelled by an overarching appreciation of the entire command structure and its intrinsic relationship with the whole community of Israel. Simple fear is fragmentary, manifested by a religiosity that is itself fragmentary in its obsession with details. Practice obsessed with concern for *mitzvot* lacking a deeply felt, integrated conceptual grasp of them amounts to a “sham *frumkeit*” containing an “alienating and foreign kernel”.⁵⁵ What must be read into R. Kook’s interpretation of Maimonides’ epigraphic verse is the assurance he sees expressed by it in one of his meditations that the petty legalistic attitude fuelled by “the lower spring of fear of punishment” inevitably ascends to “the upper spring of the light of life”.⁵⁶ In R. Kook’s hands, then, the verse spiritually reinforces what is purported to be a comprehensive legal code to inspire a love-grounded holistic fear over the legalistic religiosity it is most prone to induce.⁵⁷

The First Commandment: To Not Know God

At the commencement of each section of the MT Maimonides tallies all the positive and negative commandments contained therein, and so R. Kook’s first substantive comment on the body of the MT appears on the very first positive command “to know that there is a God.” Its argument revolves around a hyperliteral reading, which renders it as “to know *there* is a God,” taking the term “there” (אשר), an innocent Maimonidean locution for simply “there is”,⁵⁸ as a locational referent to another realm of knowing. Parallel to the two dimensions of the Torah postulated by R. Kook in the introduction to the MT and discussed previously are two epistemological ones with respect to God. They consist firstly in the

⁵⁴ SK 6:125.

⁵⁵ SK 5:241.

⁵⁶ SK 6:126.

⁵⁷ For the distinctions between a primitive fear and an advanced one which only appears outwardly to be opposed to human autonomy in its subordination to a supreme power, but in reality “is the motive power of life,” see Benjamin Ish-Shalom, *Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook: Between Rationalism and Mysticism* (O. Wiskind Elper, trans., Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1993) pp. 114-115; pp. 140-141.

⁵⁸ *Sham* is in all probability simply the Hebrew equivalent of the Arabic *fi*, meaning “there is”, and has no metaphysical implications whatsoever. I thank the anonymous reader of this article for this observation.

proposition that “knowledge acquired through things that are possible to know, that is recognition of Him through His actions,” and secondly “that aspect of knowledge which is impossible to know.”⁵⁹ The term “there” refers to this latter, superior form of knowledge which is “hidden” (נעלם), and comprised of a rigorous and methodical not-knowing which grasps its inaccessibility by establishing “its parameters, and the reasons preventing complete knowledge of the divinity.” For Maimonides there is no human knowledge other than that first type, identified by R. Kook as being gained “through His actions”, an unequivocal reference to Maimonides’ theory of attributes of action.⁶⁰ The latter are all that we can affirm of God, while direct attributes must be negated “undoubtedly com[ing] nearer to Him by one degree.”⁶¹ In another context, independent of the MT, R. Kook draws an analogy between Maimonides’ negation of attributes and his “negation of a purpose to the universe and the negation of reasons for the details of mitzvot.”⁶² R. Kook argues that they all share in an ineffability that exceeds our limited intellects. However, he concludes, all three are treated as one class by Maimonides, “who did not negate them intrinsically from the essence of their reality, but only from the capacity of our expression.”⁶³ Maimonides, though, argues at great length that to affirm attributes of God is tantamount to inventing an imaginary being, “an invention that is false; for he has, as it were, applied this term to a notion lacking existence as nothing in existence

⁵⁹ OR, p. 171.

⁶⁰ See for example GP I:58-59. For a recent and typically concise exposition of Maimonides’ theory of attributes of action see Kenneth Seeskin, “Metaphysics and its Transcendence,” in Kenneth Seeskin (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Maimonides* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005), at pp. 83-91. As he states, “They are not descriptions of God, but descriptions of what God has made or done” (p. 87).

⁶¹ GP I:60, p. 144.

⁶² SK 6:78. See Tamar Ross’ discussion of R. Kook’s view of divine attributes which views the theistic conception of absolute incomparability or likeness between God and the world as not “the absolute truth but a deficient perception.” Hence, R. Kook’s understanding of God is diametrically opposed to that of Maimonides for, as Ross states, “it is only when we associate attributes with God himself ... that [divinity] is disclosed in a form superior to that accessible to intellectual understanding ...”, in “The Concept of God in the Thought of HaRav Kook,” (Heb.) *Daat* 9 (1983) pt.2, pp. 39-70, at p. 46.

⁶³ *Ibid*, הפרטים, והתארים, עולים בקנה אחד, שלא שללם הרמב"ם בעצם מעצמות והתכלית, הפרטים, והתארים, עולים בקנה אחד, שלא שללם הרמב"ם בעצם מעצמות, אלא מיכולת ביטוינו.

is like that notion.”⁶⁴ Refraining from positive attributes is not merely a matter of human incapacity. It is a truth claim. R. Kook’s creative reading of “there” reserves a space for what Maimonides would consider a distortion of reality, or worse, idolatry, for a meta-reality where God resides in the fullness of attributes.⁶⁵

Although Maimonides’ negative theology itself may culminate in a philosophically informed ignorance, that is what ultimately lies within the purview of the human intellect. R. Kook’s telling “there” broadens the narrow intellectual straits to which Maimonides has confined the essential religious enterprise and the mandate to pursue knowledge of God in order to allow for faith.⁶⁶ This is an extraordinarily crucial exegetical move, for it anchors the entire MT in a Kookian model of *homo religiosus* for whom an exclusively intellectual mould is limiting and even stifles the religious spirit in its quest for proximity to God. Purely rational thought cannot adequately accommodate the fullness of the holy within the Torah and the world according to R. Kook. This is consistent with R. Kook’s views expressed elsewhere in his body of work on the spiritual inadequacy of reason on its own. One needs therefore to boost reason, to “inject the components of reason which operate on the basis of their order and nature into the highest emanation of the holy spirit to extract them from their confined and constricted existence in which they find themselves, to their expanses, to the world of supernal freedom.”⁶⁷ R. Kook’s microscopic reading of Maimonides’

⁶⁴ GP I:60, p. 146.

⁶⁵ This notion of divine attributes is another formulation in a long history of kabbalistic struggles with the nature of the divine *sefirot* and Maimonides’ theory of negative attributes. As Moshe Idel has demonstrated, “Maimonides’ theory of negative attributes was not accepted at all by the mystics ... they negate the attributes from the *ein sof* (the hidden God) only to attribute them to the *sefirot*.” What I have argued here regarding R. Kook is another example of a long line of mystics who, Idel claims, “view the negative attributes as an expression of the philosopher’s inability to appreciate any positive ingredients”: see S. Heller Wilensky, M. Idel (eds.), “Divine Attributes and Sefirot in Jewish Theology,” in *Studies in Jewish Thought* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1989) pp. 87-112, at p. 112.

⁶⁶ For a lucid analysis of faith in R. Kook’s thought, see ch. 1 of Dov Schwartz, *Faith at the Crossroads: A Theological Profile of Religious Zionism* (Batya Stein, trans., Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2002), esp. pp. 27-30, where he concludes that faith for R. Kook must transcend “human epistemological or intellectual capabilities”, since those only render an “epistemological illusion”.

⁶⁷ SK 5:88, p. 233. להכניס את מערכי הלב ההגיוניים, העושים את דרכם על פי סדרם וטבעם, אל האצילות העליונה של רוח הקודש, להוציאם מתוך החיים הצרים והמצומצמים, שהם נתונים

inaugural formulation of the first *mitzvah* in the MT thus “injects” his own existential/kabbalistic thought into what is patently an Aristotelian formulation of God as a “primary existent” (מצוי ראשון) that lies within the scope of human knowing.⁶⁸ In supplementing the Maimonidean rational endeavor with a hidden realm, R. Kook also resolves a long-standing “contradiction” perceived by rabbinic thought between the *Mishneh Torah* formulation to “know” (לידע) God, and that of the “Book of Commandments” (*Sefer HaMitzvot*) to “believe” (להאמין) in God. Regardless of its chimerical attempt to harmonize the original Hebrew expression in the MT formulation with a Hebrew translation of a Judeo-Arabic expression in the *Sefer HaMitzvot*, it is essential to that which, according to our argument, is R. Kook's systematic derationalization of the MT.⁶⁹ The duplicitous language, claims R.

בהם, למרחביה, לעולם החרות העליון. As Hugo Bergman notes (“Rav Kook: All Reality is in God,” *Faith and Reason: Modern Jewish Thought*, (NY: Schocken Books, 1976) p. 125), for R. Kook, rational reflection only presents a fragmentary and disconnected view of reality while only the “non-rational faculty of his inner vision and the power of his imagination” can “push beyond the fragmentariness of conceptual knowledge and discover the underlying principle.”

⁶⁸ What can and cannot be known according to Maimonides' epistemology is an issue of considerable debate. For a particularly lucid overview of the various schools of thought on the extent of Maimonidean skepticism and the limits of the human intellect, see Josef Stern, “Maimonides' Epistemology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Maimonides*, above, n. 61, pp. 105-133, and especially his eminently sensible suggestions regarding a Maimonidean endorsement of the theoretical life that can at the same time “take into account his skepticism about metaphysical knowledge,” at pp. 127-129. For a list of all the major scholars involved in the debate see note 16, pp. 130-131. See also his “The Knot that Never Was,” in *Aleph* 8 (2008) pp. 319-339, and all the other articles in the forum discussion of that issue relating to “Maimonides on the Knowability of the Heavens and Their Mover,” pp. 151-317, as well as his extended discussion in “Maimonides on the Growth of Knowledge and the Limitations of the Intellect,” in T. Levy, R. Rashed (eds.), *Maimonide: Philosophe et Savant* (Louvain: Peeters, 2004), pp. 143-191.

⁶⁹ Much ink has been spilled in the rabbinic academy on the perceived contradiction between the first commandment listed in the *Sefer HaMitzvot* in the ibn Tibbon translation as “to believe” (להאמין) in the existence of God, and that of the MT which begins with the *mitzvah* “to know” (לידע) that Being. What ibn Tibbon translated as “to believe” is *itiqad*, and therefore the MT is perfectly consistent with the Book of Commandments. See Abraham Nuriel's discussion in “The Concept of Belief in Maimonides” (Heb.) *Daat* 2-3 (1978-79) pp. 43-47,

Kook, precisely captures the totality of the *mitzvah* to know God which is fulfilled by “revealed knowledge and hidden knowledge”. “There” directs you to the realm in which “belief” is operative and is captured by the SM formulation, “for that aspect of knowledge defined as not knowing is perfected afterward clearly in the form of faith.”⁷⁰ In another passage unrelated to the MT, R. Kook identifies that hidden realm which invokes faith as a point at which “all knowledge is vitiated, and all classifications and strict logic are absolutely nullified as it ascends conceptually, there resides the hidden *shekhina*, and there the divine revelation flickers. Like light that appears through the cracks *running and returning as the appearance of a flash of lightning* (Ezek. 1:14).”⁷¹ It is no coincidence that R. Kook cites a key verse from Ezekiel’s account of the chariot, in order to remystify Maimonides’ naturalistic exegesis of it,⁷² thus elevating it from its scientific, logical, empirical framework to the realm where all such criteria break down.⁷³

at p. 43, and R. Haim Heller’s first note to the first commandment of his edition of the *Sefer HaMitzvot* (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1946) p. 35.

⁷⁰ OR, 171.

⁷¹ SK 6:278. שכל דעה מתבטלת, וכל הגדרה וכל הגיון מוגבל מתבטל בביטול אפסי בכל עת. עלותו ברעיון, שם השראת השכינה חבויה, ושם ההתגלות האלהית מתנוצצת, כאור הנראה מבין החרסים, רצוא ושוב כמראה הבוק. This closely parallels the affinity of R. Nahman of Bratslav, a major hasidic antagonist of Maimonidean rationalism, for the maxim, “The ultimate knowledge is that we do not know.” See for example *Likute Moharan* I, 24:8 and Ada Rapoport-Albert, “Self-Deprecation (*‘qatnuth’*, *‘peshituth’*) and Disavowal of Knowledge (*‘eyni yodea’*) in Nahman of Bratslav,” in S. Stein, R. Loewe (eds.), *Studies in Jewish Religious and Intellectual History Presented to Alexander Altmann on the occasion of His Seventieth Birthday* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1979), pp. 7-33. For the most recent examination of this tenet of Bratslav thought see ch. 7 of Zvi Mark, *Mysticism and Madness: The Religious Thought of Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav* (NY: Continuum, 2009), where his description is equally applicable to R. Kook’s formulation here, of “This knowing, yet not knowing, this attaining yet not attaining, is the ultimate knowledge...” (p. 230).

⁷² See Herbert Davidson’s decoding of Maimonides’ account which reads, “Ezekiel’s vision as a figurative depiction of the universe outside of God”: *Moses Maimonides: The Man and his Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) pp. 348-349.

⁷³ One of the most striking implications of this meta-rational realm in R. Kook’s thought is his approval of the medieval Islamic Mutakallimun’s notion that everything that can be imagined as possible “in truth exists” (SK 2:9), in stark contrast to Maimonides’ rejection of it. While Maimonides disparages the blurring of imagination and reality of which the Mutakallimun were guilty, R. Kook sees that blurring in a more positive light. For R. Kook, “the

Maimonides uses two phrases at the substantive beginning of the MT to express the crucial nature of the mitzvah to know God, calling it the foundation of foundations and the pillar of wisdoms (יסוד היסודות ועמוד (ההכמות). R. Kook assigns these phrases respectively to the two realms of knowledge. Since the not-known, inaccessible by science or philosophy, is more sublime than its rational counterpart, it corresponds to the “foundation”, while the known corresponds to “wisdom” or sciences. That pairing – foundation=knowing of the not-known, and wisdom=knowing of the known – in turn corresponds to what follows in the next four chapters of the MT as the *Account of the Chariot* and the *Account of the Beginning*.⁷⁴ The latter correlates to “the known by way of the actions, that part of knowledge possible to know, while the *Account of the Chariot* images the knowledge impossible to know, the recognition of the hiddenness of the hidden.”⁷⁵ By drawing these equations, the entire section on the two most important disciplines in the Maimonidean curriculum, which comprise the content of knowledge of God, are informed by R. Kook's kabbalistic epistemology. In so doing R. Kook has also tempered Maimonides' elitism, whose onerous intellectual demands would exclude all but a very minuscule number of individuals from ever fulfilling the primary mitzvah of Judaism to know God. R. Kook endorses scientific progress as a means of increasing worldwide familiarity with the Account of the Creation. Scientific advancement incrementally removes the Creation Account's esoteric cover since it is knowledge, he claims, “which becomes progressively an exoteric science that is investigated publicly.”⁷⁶ Such inroads into the Creation Account, he argues in a

epistemological function of the imagination should be asserted joyfully.” See Shalom Carmy, “Rav Kook's Theory of Knowledge,” *Tradition* 15 (1975), pp. 193-203, at p. 195. See also Benjamin Ish-Shalom's discussion which presents R. Kook's qualified endorsement of the Kalam as knitting together Kalam's necessary possibility with Maimonides necessary existence to render a hybrid formulation, in *Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook: Between Rationalism and Mysticism*, above, n. 57, pp. 41-42.

⁷⁴ *Yesodei HaTorah* 2:11 describes the subject matter of the first two chapters as the *Account of the Chariot*, and 4:10 dedicates chapters three and four to the subject matter of the *Account of the Beginning*.

⁷⁵ OR, pp. 171-172.

⁷⁶ SK, 1:597. R. Kook was a staunch advocate of the public dissemination of esoterica to “all hearts”, even to those “who have not reached that measure of expansive knowledge for the acquisition of broad and deep knowledge” (שלא באו (למדה של דעה רחבה לקנין מדע רחב ועמוק *Orot Hatorah* (Jerusalem: Yeshivah HaMerkazit HaOlamit, 1950) p. 56. See Jonathan Garb's discussion in *The*

discussion of it outside the context of the MT, “themselves are essential forces to opening the gates of the *Account of the Chariot*, that is the supernal channel that vitalizes the senses and the desires, the cognitions and the emotions, to grasp the depth of a formidable spirituality into the origin of eternal and perfect life.”⁷⁷

This core bi-dimensional epistemology carries through consistently further on in the section of laws governing the names of God where, at its outset, Maimonides describes those names as “the holy, the pure” (הקדושים הטהורים).⁷⁸ R. Kook first defines “holy” (*qadosh*) as “something separated and set apart beyond comprehension,” while “pure” (*tahor*) means “a clear comprehension untainted by false imaginings.”⁷⁹ Thus, those epithets, as objects of human contemplation somehow capturing God’s being, comprise both those realms.⁸⁰ R. Kook then homes in on the seemingly innocuous omission of the conjunctive “and” between the two adjectives “holy” and “pure” to corroborate his theory that knowledge of God is constituted by a knowing and a not-knowing. That grammatical quirk indicates that the two terms are inseparable, representing “one single notion to be pronounced in one breath, ‘holy pure’”.⁸¹ R. Kook’s attempt here to have the divine epithets subsume both realms of knowledge refers us to his concept of Names in which all the Names bridge the distance between existence and the *ein sof*, precisely that uppermost aspect of God within the kabbalistic sefirotic realm that is beyond all knowing, as “they sustain everything and call all to being.”⁸² R. Kook’s exegetical manipulation of the MT’s normally unproblematic syntax elides Maimonides’ philosophical taxonomy of divine names, as developed in

Chosen Will Become Herds: Studies in Twentieth Century Kabbalah (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009) pp. 23-29. Indeed the very title of this book is taken from a poem by R. Kook which expresses the hope that his kabbalistic thought “which had hitherto been espoused by elitist circles (“the Chosen”) only would turn into a mass movement of sorts (“the herds”)...”, at p. 27.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ *Yesodei HaTorah* 6:1.

⁷⁹ OR, p. 182.

⁸⁰ R. Kook’s use here of these two terms, holy and pure, parallels the different senses in which he uses “intellect” throughout his corpus, as delineated by Ish-Shalom. At times it designates a “secular intellect” based on reason, and at others a “holy intellect” which signifies mystical perception: see *Between Rationalism*, above, n. 57, p. 185.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² See SK 1:756, p. 241 והם הם המקיימים את הכל, וקוראים את הכל להויה.

the *Guide*. There he offers a noetic distinction between the tetragrammaton and the other divine epithets where the former signifies God's *essence* stripped of any association with material existence, since, according to the Midrash, it preceded the creation of the world and therefore conveys an ontology absolutely distinct from it.⁸³ It also "is not indicative of an attribute but of simple *existence* and nothing else" [emphasis mine],⁸⁴ whereas all other divine names "derive from actions."⁸⁵ R. Kook infuses all the Names with the hidden dimension of not-knowing that transcends the essential/derivative classification, to incorporate the *ein sof*, or the "hidden realm", that indiscriminately inhabits every *expression* or utterance of God's name.⁸⁶ Thus, in his spiritual diaries R. Kook poetically expresses a passionate paean to God, "the limitless (*ein sof*) light inhabits the expression of the name, the expression of *elohim*, and all the names and epithets that the human heart conceives and contemplates as the soul ascends higher and higher."⁸⁷ R. Kook's exegetical overlay would have Maimonides now in accord with this theological passion.

⁸³ GP I:61, p. 149 adopting *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer*, 3.

⁸⁴ GP I:64, p. 156.

⁸⁵ GP I:61, p. 147

⁸⁶ Due to the unsystematic nature of R. Kook's literary corpus, which consists of spiritual diaries in a stream of consciousness-like presentation rather than treatises, his thought on this issue as well as others is often inconsistent and paradoxical. As Ben Zion Bokser, describes it, the entries in these diaries "read like poems, or prose-poems, and they are independent meditations, each born in the newness of the experience that continued to unfold day by day." See his *Abraham Isaac Kook: The Lights of Penitence, The Moral Principles, Lights of Holiness, Essays, Letters, and Poems* (NY: Paulist Press, 1978), p. 3. Sometimes R. Kook also makes distinctions between names: see for example SK 2:5, p. 294. On the distinction drawn in this passage between *elohim* and *YHVH*, Shalom Rosenberg draws an analogy between this distinction and Kant's phenomenon and noumenon. *Elohim* is the phenomenon, or nature, "veiled in the essence of being" (הגמסך ... בעצמיותה של ההויה) while *YHVH* is the noumenon which "subsumes past, present, and future, transcending temporal categories" (כוללות את העבר ההווה והעתיד למעלה מסדר זמנים וצורתם), "HaReiy'a VeHaTanin HaIver," in *BeOro: Studies in the Thought of Reiyah Kook*, ed., Chaim Hamiel, (Jerusalem: Hotzaat HaTziyonit HaOlamit, 1986) pp. 317-352, at p. 328. However, the general thrust of his thought is to avoid pigeonholing God with the various names.

⁸⁷ SK 1:164, p. 66. ובכל השמות, בביטוי של האלהים, וכן הוא אור אין סוף בהביטוי של השם, הכינויים שלבב האדם הורה והוגה, בהנשא נשמתו למעלה למעלה. For a complete translation of this as a poem see Ben Zion Bokser, above, p. 373. R. Kook's theory of names described here coincides with that of a mystical predecessor, Joseph Gikatilla, as

Reuniting God with the World: From Theism to Panentheism

When defining the God that is to be known in fulfillment of the first commandment, Maimonides distinguishes between the essential being of God and the contingent being of all other existents, “for all existents are dependent on Him, but He, blessed be He, is not dependent on them and not any one of them, therefore His true essence is unlike the essence of any one of them.”⁸⁸ Here R. Kook transforms what is a purely Aristotelian formulation, which differentiates necessary from contingent existence,⁸⁹ into a kabbalistic distinction that lies at the very core of his panentheistic conception of reality. Maimonides’ rigid bifurcation of the material world versus God and the divine realm rules out the possibility of any kind of inherent presence of the divine in the world.⁹⁰ Indeed one can characterize Maimonides’ entire philosophical enterprise as the attempt to maintain a strict separation between God and the world as captured by the *via negativa*, where there is nothing in common between God and the world and “the relationship between us and Him, may He be exalted, is considered as non-existent – I mean the relation between Him and what is other than He.”⁹¹ Conversely, R. Kook perceives a divine source of all life to be discernible in all things so that all distinctions evaporate and meld in the common universal ground of all being.⁹² He confronted all appearances of opposition in

Scholem describes it, where “The Torah as published is completely founded and built on the tetragram; it is woven from the tetragram and its qualifying names, that is from the divine epithets which are derivable from it and emerge in it at any given moment”: see his “The Name of God and the Linguistic Theory of the Kabbala,” *Diogenes* 80 (1972) pp. 164-94, at p. 179.

⁸⁸ MT, *Yesodei HaTorah*, 1:3.

⁸⁹ See GP I:57, p. 132 for his Avicennian formulation of this notion expressed in the MT that only “His existence is necessary ... [it] is identical with His essence and His true reality, and His essence is His existence Consequently He exists but not through an existence other than His essence.”

⁹⁰ It should be noted here that, as scholars such as Alfred Ivry have pointed out, there are many Neoplatonic dimensions to the *Guide* with which Maimonides struggled, though readers of the *Guide* have been oblivious to them because of the *Guide*’s avowed admiration of Aristotle. See his “Maimonides and Neoplatonism: Challenge and Response,” in Lenn Goodman (ed.), *Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992) pp. 137-156.

⁹¹ GP I:56, p. 130.

⁹² Tamar Ross (“Between Metaphysical and Liberal Pluralism,” above, n. 36, at p. 89) discovers a striking parallel on this between R. Kook and the neo-Hegelian English philosopher F.H. Bradley (d.1924) who “like R. Kook, was a

order to uncover the reality of convergence between all things, which replaces distinction with the sameness of the divine underpinning of all existence. As he expresses time and again in his spiritual diaries, R. Kook's spiritual quest was fuelled by an acosmism that sought to "demonstrate that in the place of fragmentation dwells unity, in the place of oppositions there resides identity, in the place of conflict there is the residence of peace. And what emerges from this is that in the place of the profane there is the dwelling of the holy and the light of the living God."⁹³

Employing a hyperliteral midrashic manoeuvre, R. Kook converts Maimonides' formulation from its strict separation between God and the world to a monistic one that transforms the object of the first commandment into one consistent with his mysticism. The catalyst for this reading is firstly superfluous language in the definition of God's utter non-contingent being as "not dependent on them and not any one of them." Why the need for "not any one of them" when the general proposition "not dependent on them" would have been sufficient to convey the notion of non-contingency? Secondly, the implication of the second half of the formulation – "His true essence is unlike the essence of any one of them" – would seem to be that it *is* like *all* of them. The key to deciphering this formulation, states R. Kook, is Maimonides' initial assertion regarding the nature of all existents outside of God as existing "only through His true existence", which means that "all existence is only in Him and from that perspective they all form a unity

metaphysical monist, believing, in line with the Parmenidean, Neoplatonic tradition, that only the One was real, leaving no room for the existence of separate entities, not even individual selves."

⁹³ *Hadarav: Peraqim Ishim*, R. Sarid (ed.) (Dabri Shir: Ramat Gan, Israel, 2002) 3rd edition, pp. 130-131. See Nathan Rotenstreich's discussion of the holy and profane in R. Kook's thought, which is again informed by an ultimate harmony where the two coalesce in an ultimate unity, at which point one views "the profane also in light of the holy, to know in truth that there is no absolute profane", in his essay on R. Kook, "Harmony and Return," in *Jewish Philosophy in Modern Times: From Mendelssohn to Rosenzweig* (NY: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1968) pp. 228-231, p. 227. There is a large body of scholarship on acosmism and its doctrinaire appearance in Habad thought, but for one succinct overview see ch. 11 of Rachel Elijor, *The Paradoxical Ascent to God: The Kabbalistic Theosophy of Habad Hasidism* (Jeffrey Green, trans., Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1993) and the literature cited in note 1, p. 238, and most recently Elliot Wolfson's intensive study of it in *Open Secret: Postmessianic Messianism and the Mystical Revision of Menahem Mendel Schneerson* (NY: Columbia University Press, 2009).

precisely like His unity However from the perspective of all the existents it is possible to speak of division and fragmentation and individual existences.”⁹⁴ This provides the solution to the first question: contingency is ruled out both from the perspective of universal being and from that of particular existence. However, from the point of view of all of existence together, “nothing exists at all apart from God, since everything exists through His true existence, and from that truth of His existence, nothing else exists at all.”⁹⁵ Therefore, R. Kook reasons, in the second half of Maimonides’ formulation, it is not possible to state that one thing is unlike another within the indivisible totality of existence, since that totality is identical with God. Unlikeness could only apply to “the existents when they are individuated.”⁹⁶ R. Kook radically subverts the strict separation Maimonides posits between God and the world, transfiguring him from an Aristotelian theist to a Hasidic panentheist.

This of course has far-reaching implications, especially for the way R. Kook reinvents Maimonides’ intellectualism, according to which whatever can be known of God the creator must be derived from a thorough knowledge of the creation. Reason and empirical observation, whose primary functions are to discriminate and classify, are the instruments of that knowledge. The very apex of human knowledge is reached by Moses who achieves ultimate apprehension of God’s “goodness” (Exod. 33:19) which “alludes to the display of all existing things.” That “goodness” apprehended by Moses is the very *good* that God perceived after surveying the totality of creation on the sixth primordial day, when He viewed *all* that He made in Gen. 1:31.⁹⁷ If this

⁹⁴ See for example SK 8:154, 292: “Everything that appears to us as a particular is really in truth but one manifestation of a unified whole , כל מה שנראה לנו פרטי, איננו באמת כי אם הופעה אחת מהכלל המאוחד

⁹⁵ There are many formulations by R. Kook that express this panentheistic view of the world, but for just one that clearly demarcates two different views of reality and ranks the one that views God as creator and the world as His creation as far inferior to the one that realizes that God “encompasses everything in a supernal and wondrous unity”, see SK 2:92, p. 322.

⁹⁶ All the citations in this paragraph are to OR, p. 172.

⁹⁷ GP I:54, pp. 124-125. Interestingly R. Kook blends Maimonides on this episode of supreme intellectual achievement with modern and kabbalistic strains. He interprets the talmudic tradition that what is meant by God revealing his “back” to Moses (Exod. 33:17-23) is the knot of His *tefillin* (see *Hevesh Pe'er*, a collection of early sermons on the significance of phylacteries as the controlling power of the intellect). For a discussion, pertinent to our theme, of R. Kook’s engagement in these sermons with the philosophical tradition, and Maimonides

Mosaic enlightenment is the pinnacle of human knowledge, then the outermost limit of the human intellect is a comprehensive grasp of all of nature, upon which one can ground contemplation of God. The two are utterly distinct.

For R. Kook, that outermost limit is the point where all existence becomes one indistinguishable unity, where the all is in God and God is in the all. The most esoteric of all thought lies in a domain of knowledge that supersedes the highest allowed by Maimonides in his version of the *Account of the Chariot*. As a restricted area, off-limits to all but the most advanced of philosophers, Maimonides codifies the strict rabbinic restraints on its public teaching, since its subject matters “are extremely profound which most minds cannot tolerate ... and with respect to them it is said *honey and milk under your tongue* (Song of Songs 4:11); the early Sages have explained this to mean that things that are like honey and milk should be kept under your tongue.”⁹⁸ A verse that for Maimonides forbids dissemination of esoteric knowledge and shrouds it in impenetrable secrecy, becomes an endorsement of panentheism for R. Kook and turns Maimonides' medieval metaphysics into the kabbalistic meta-metaphysics of the unity of opposites. R. Kook identifies the inferior intellects that cannot sustain the depth of this metaphysics as “narrow minded”, trapped in the world of distinctions.⁹⁹

in particular, to establish the primacy of the mind, see Yehuda Mirsky, *An Intellectual and Spiritual Biography*, above, n. 24, pp. 128-136, who concludes: “He was trying to navigate his way between the several spiritual traditions that he saw as his inheritance – Lithuanian Talmudism, medieval philosophy and Kabbalah – granting primacy to the mind while linking it to a more dynamic cosmos than the one imagined by the philosophers...” (p. 136).

⁹⁸ MT, *Yesodei HaTorah*, 2:12. A more fitting context would be difficult to find, since the next verse (12) repeats the terms for “locked” (*na`ul*) and “sealed” (*hatum*) three times, while verse 13 imports the rare term *pardes* into its garden imagery. The *pardes* is virtually impenetrable, both because of the formidable barriers the philosophical novice must overcome and because of the constraints imposed on dissemination of its material. See also Maimonides' comments on Song 4:11 in his Introduction to his *Mishnah im Perush Rabbenu Moshe ben Maimon: Seder Nezikin* (Joseph Kafih, ed., Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1965), p. 35.

⁹⁹ One needs to escape this “narrow-mindedness” to appreciate the ultimate harmony of all. See for example: SK 2:154 – “for all contradictions appear only to the constrained intellect that has no value at all in contrast with the ultimate truth”; 2:270 – “everything that appears distinct and opposite is only because of the smallness of their intellect and the narrowness of their perspective.” כל הנראה לרבים כדברים חלוקים והפוכים הוא רק מפני קטנות שכלם וצמצום השקפתם.

The broader one becomes in thought, the more evident it appears “that even what is considered pure evil to the eyes is not absolute evil and is also necessary for the good, and the good emerges from it.”¹⁰⁰

R. Kook then draws on the honey/milk metaphor to transform what Maimonides considered a practical restriction on the public dissemination of esoteric disciplines into an endorsement of the identity of opposites. Milk and honey both violate the general halakhic rule that “all that is a product of something impure is itself impure,”¹⁰¹ for they are permissible despite their impure sources,¹⁰² thus analogously “all great things are compared to honey and milk, through which the impure becomes pure.” R. Kook’s theory of transubstantiation captured by the milk/honey metaphor closely resembles Habad’s appropriation of a medieval motif that the pig, the ultimate symbol of impurity in Judaism, will become pure in messianic times. Elliot Wolfson’s characterization of this utopian expectation in Habad thought as one that “culminates in an ontological transubstantiation and an axiological transvaluation,”¹⁰³ applies with equal force to R. Kook’s conception of a realm where the rigid distinctions between good and evil collapse in an overarching harmony of opposites.

R. Kook in a sense “transubstantiates” Maimonides’ own work here in two crucial ways. First, paradoxically, he grounds what is intended as a comprehensive legal code in a hypernomian foundation. Halakah, or the normative, that which involves details and particulars, which invites dispute, which is historically and socially conditioned, anticipates its own utopian supersession. This is consistent with R. Kook’s own anguished self-reflective sentiments of the stifling effects of halakhah on those unique individuals who have transcended the pettiness of the individuated world where it normally operates. These extraordinary individuals, as he daringly posits elsewhere, altruistically fulfill their communal responsibilities as halakhic

¹⁰⁰ OR, pp. 173-174.

¹⁰¹ *bBekhorot* 7b.

¹⁰² Honey is permissible even though it originates in bees, which are impermissible. As for milk, there is a rabbinic opinion R. Kook cites that (*bNiddah* 9a) considers milk to be a chemical transformation of blood, which of course is prohibited.

¹⁰³ *Open Secret*, above, n. 93, p. 167. One of the core implications of Habad thought brilliantly elucidated by Wolfson in his study of “*coincidentia oppositorum*, a state where evil will be changed to good, impure to pure, and guilt into innocence,” (ibid) is shared to a great extent by R. Kook, who himself was highly influenced by Habad theology.

practitioners, while at the same time, personally suffering “great internal conflicts”, since they “inhabit a plane so exalted that, should everyone exist on their level, the commandments would be dispensable, as they will be in the future ...”.¹⁰⁴ Secondly, it subverts the distinctions that Maimonides' incorporation of the milk/honey image was meant to reinforce. For Maimonides it maintains an elite that holds a monopoly over profound knowledge that they are prohibited from sharing. For R. Kook it bears the message of the collapse of all distinctions, albeit one that is borne by an elite.

R. Kook strategically chooses the passage in the *Mishneh Torah* that defines the prophet in order to instantiate this theology of the identity of opposites. One of the essential prerequisites for prophecy, according to Maimonides, is the mastery of “an exceedingly broad and correct knowledge” (בעל דעה רחבה ונכונה עד מאד).¹⁰⁵ This, consistent with previous appearances of the phrase “broad knowledge” in the *Mishneh Torah*,¹⁰⁶ suggests intellectual depth and acuity that can attain perfection in the progressive acquisition of a definitive truth. R. Kook, though, takes it in the literal sense as the ability to accommodate a multiplicity of ideas. In keeping with the hyperliteral manner of reading, with which we are now familiar, R. Kook interprets “broad” and “correct” as two different psychological traits rarely possessed by the same human being. There is “the one of broad knowledge who can assimilate all opposing ideas but is not strong in the unique method appropriate to strong practice, while there is the one who is strong in practice because his mind is constrained by one idea in accordance with his character.”¹⁰⁷ The prophet, however, must combine the two qualities “that oppose each other, so that his mind is *broad* and encompasses the thoughts and ideas of many people, while at the same time it is *correct* and vigorous in the practice of the good ...”. The prophet singularly fuses normative inflexibility with a meta-normative malleability that can harmonize diversity, accomplishing a unification that spans the

¹⁰⁴ SK 1:410, שגם אנשים גדולים כאלה, שמהלך רוחם הוא כ"כ נשא, עד שמצדם אם כל העולם, כמו שיהיה לעתיד לבא For similar expressions see 1:212, 400, 412. As Smadar Cherlow demonstrates in her examination of R. Kook's SK, the diaries are not simply those of a mystic but of one who considered himself possessed of all the powers, duties, and goals of a hasidic rebbe, or a *tsadiq*, in line with all the connotations of the phrase *zaddik yesod olam*: see “Rav Kook's Mystical Mission,” (Heb.) *Daat* 49 (2002) pp. 99-135.

¹⁰⁵ MT, *Yesodei HaTorah*, 7:1.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 4:11; Introduction.

¹⁰⁷ OR, p. 185.

entire spectrum of human thought.¹⁰⁸ According to Maimonides, the prophet is adept at popularizing a single truth by crafting norms that best direct most people toward the truth. R. Kook transforms that model into a human paradigm of the acosmism that constitutes existence in its totality. The prophet can govern practically by a rigid adherence to one unalterable set of norms, while at the same time he theoretically accommodates a myriad of conceptions and ideas subjectively held by many different individuals in a paradoxically unified whole. The prophet's capacity to combine qualities that "oppose each other" reflects the nature of reality. For Maimonides, the prophet must adopt the language of the many to *teach* the truth of the One,¹⁰⁹ while for R. Kook the language of the many *is* in fact the truth of the One.

Prophecy: Attuned to Nature or in Control of It

Support for our contention that R. Kook's conception of the prophet endows Maimonides' model of the prophet with a suprarational dimension that aspires to achieve the unity of all opposites is provided by R. Kook's interpretation of Maimonides' situating of man on the lowest rung of his cosmological intellectual hierarchy. The stars and the spheres occupy the intermediate rung of that hierarchy, between the "angels" above and man below. His precise formulation, crucial for R. Kook's hyperliteral exegesis, is that "the knowledge of the stars and spheres is inferior to that of the angels but superior to that of men (מעוטה מדעת המלאכים וגדולה מדעת בני האדם)." ¹¹⁰ Apparent inconsistencies, contradictions, and lexical variations between similar contexts have always been the bedrock of rabbinic creativity and so, in good rabbinic form, R. Kook seizes on one here as an opportunity to promote his own theology through Maimonides. He discerns a contradiction between placing man on an intellectual level below the stars here and a statement in the previous chapter in the MT, where man is placed on a plane nearly

¹⁰⁸ On this see Avinoam Rosenak's book-length treatment of *The Prophetic Halakha*, above, n. 19, esp. pp. 114-150 on the terms "sage" (*hakham*) and "prophet". What I have delineated here by the terms "broad" and "correct" precisely parallel those qualities of prophetic halakha identified by Rosenak, which allow for "the balancing, in a dialectical manner, between the various impulses of prophecy and aggadah on the one hand and particularized halakha on the other." (p. 149)

¹⁰⁹ For the philosophical background to Maimonides' critique of emanationists and his solution to the problem of how multiplicity can emerge from simple unity see Arthur Hyman, "From What is One and Simple Only What is One and Simple Can Come to Be," in *Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought*, above, n. 90, pp. 111-135.

¹¹⁰ MT, *Yesodei HaTorah*, 3:9

equal to that of the angelic realm, which is situated beyond the stars. There, the *ishim*, the lowest category of angels, are those which communicate with prophets “because their level approximates to that of the level of human intelligence” (שמעלתם קרובה ממעלת דעת האדם).¹¹¹ Playing on the term “level”, which bears the sense of “above” or “beyond”, R. Kook resolves the apparent discrepancy by distinguishing between the phrase “level of intelligence”, indicating superior or extraordinary intelligence, and simple “intelligence”, referring to the average mind. The human intelligence close to that of the lowest angels is still “beyond the intelligence of common men,” for “ordinary men cannot achieve this level, only outstanding individuals,”¹¹² while most people function at a level below the stars. Prophetic intelligence borders upon the angelic realm, a level to which the mundane intellect can never aspire.

R. Kook's concern with an inconsistency in this instance, unlike others previously encountered, is in fact legitimate. Indeed, his resolution of the inconsistency by drawing a distinction between average and singular intellects is remarkably astute, in that it draws attention to a preferable textual variant to which he was not exposed and which may very well vindicate his distinction. In the best manuscripts, we find the reading, the *knowledge of man* (דעת האדם), referring to knowledge on par with the lower angels, as opposed to *knowledge of the sons of man* (דעת בני האדם), referring to knowledge inferior to the stars and spheres.¹¹³ Had R. Kook been working with this version, he probably would not have had to resort to a forced distinction between the two passages but could have more reasonably supported his idea on the basis of the subtle distinction between *man* and *sons of man*. When juxtaposed, the two precisely capture R. Kook's distinction between the extraordinary individual in the former case and the common one in the latter. The anthropomorphic language of the Torah, for example, appeals to the *sons of man*, “I mean the imagination of the

¹¹¹ Ibid., 2:7. See also GP 2:6, p. 262 identifying all Jewish traditional references to angels with Aristotle's separate intellects. In that chapter Maimonides drains the term “angels” entirely of its mythological, ontological, and pagan connotations by equating them with any causal force in nature. Menachem Kellner considers this the most radical of Maimonidean subversions of tradition (ch. 8 on angels in his *Maimonides' Confrontation With Mysticism*, (Oxford: Littman Library, 2006) pp. 272-285).

¹¹² OR, p. 175.

¹¹³ The MT editions of Moses Hyamson (New York, 1937), Shabse Frankel, and Joseph Kafih all concur in this text.

multitude,” which caters to the crude conceptions of God and the world held by the majority of humankind.¹¹⁴ They constitute the mass audience to whose intelligence the external, easy-to-digest, anthropomorphic language of the Torah caters, as suggested by the rabbinic maxim that Maimonides endorses: “The Torah speaks in the language of the *sons of man*.”¹¹⁵ The verse that Maimonides chose for an epigraph for the *Guide* conveys this very distinction. The citation of Prov. 8:4, “Unto you O men (*ishim*) I call and my voice is to the sons of men (*benei adam*),” envisages two very different types of readers, as the main classical medieval commentators on the *Guide* such as Efodi and Abravanel already point out.¹¹⁶ These two audiences precisely parallel the two intellectual hierarchies of the MT, with the former, the *ishim*, representing the elite whose intellects approximate that of the angel with which they are in contact, and the former, the *benei adam*, intellectually plebeian men who are inferior to the spheres and stars.¹¹⁷ The proof-text Maimonides cites to support his understanding of the term ‘man’ (*adam*) is the following: “Both the *sons of man* (*bnei adam*) and the sons of an individual (*ish*)” (Ps. 49:3). In this verse, the phrase

¹¹⁴ See G I:26, pp. 56-57.

¹¹⁵ See Abraham Nuriel, “The Torah Speaks in the Language of the Sons of Man in the Guide of the Perplexed,” (Heb.) in M. Hallamish and A. Kasher (eds.), *Dat VeSafah* (Tel Aviv: Mifalim Universityyim leHotsaah LeOr. 1981) pp. 97-103, who notes that Maimonides transformed this rabbinic maxim, which originally limited halakhic creativity, into an Aristotelian formulation that views biblical language as mythological. For its original connotations as a distinguishing feature between the schools of R. Akiva and R. Ishmael, see Jay Harris, *How Do We Know This: The Midrash and the Fragmentation of Modern Judaism* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1995) pp. 33-43. See SK 1:567 for the anguish of the great man who cannot communicate clearly with the masses, not out of fear of them, but because of his great love and concern for them, lest they be adversely affected in their misunderstanding of him.

¹¹⁶ *Sefer Moreh Nevukhim* (Jerusalem: 1960) p. 3b. See also Michael Schwarz’s Hebrew edition of the *Guide* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 2002) vol.1, p. 8, note 3. See my own close analysis of this epigraphic verse in *Maimonides and the Hermeneutics of Concealment: Deciphering Scripture and Midrash in the Guide of the Perplexed* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2002), pp. 7-9.

¹¹⁷ See *bYoma* 71a where the term *ishim* alludes to the learned class or the sages (*talmidei chakhamim*). See also *Midrash on Proverbs* (Burton Visotzky, trans., New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992) p. 45, which draws this distinction and identifies the virtuous men with the *ishim*: “If you have [earned the] merit of upholding the words of the Torah you will be called *ishim*, as are the ministering angels. If not you are to be called *benei adam*.” Maimonides may have had this very midrash in mind.

sons of man contrasts with the term “designating the multitude, I mean the generality as distinguished from the elite.”¹¹⁸ Maimonides' use of this proof-text corroborates the distinction drawn by R. Kook between the two hierarchies of intelligence found in the thought of Maimonides.

While in one respect, R. Kook echoed the original intent of Maimonides, he transforms another idea found in Maimonides from its naturalistic sense into his own preferred meta-natural one. He argues that individuals of superior intelligence can attain supernatural powers, for –

‘[t]hey arrive at a prophetic state that is in truth beyond the intellect of the stars and therefore controls them. Therefore the prophets performed miracles even with the heavenly bodies such as *stand still sun at Gibeon* (Josh. 10:12) and making the shade recede ten steps (Is. 38:8).’¹¹⁹

R. Kook transforms Maimonides' prophet into a miracle worker; by perfecting his intellect, he attains knowledge of the natural world that affords him mastery over it. For Maimonides, the prophet approximates the intelligence of the *ishim* because that angelic realm represents the Active Intellect¹²⁰ whose emanative intelligence the prophet has naturally accessed by virtue of his intellectual acuity. What is popularly considered a miracle is simply a substantiation of the prophet's insight into the workings of the natural order. According to Maimonides, miracles are historical contingencies, inherent in the natural order from the time of creation, which are forecast by the prophet, not performed by him. “The sign of a prophet consists in God's making known to him the time when he must make his proclamation, and thereupon a certain thing is effected according to what was put in its nature when first it received its particular impress.”¹²¹ Even “miracles” like the splitting of the sea can all ultimately be considered as “natural” in the sense that they were pre-programmed into nature at creation.¹²² The prophet does

¹¹⁸ GP I:14, p. 40.

¹¹⁹ OR, p. 175.

¹²⁰ See GP II:36, p. 369; II:41, p. 386.

¹²¹ See GP II:29.

¹²² See PM, *Avot* 5:5. What precisely Maimonides' position was with respect to miracles is not easy to determine. According to some scholars, Maimonides' statements that seem to endorse a traditional divine interventionist view of miracles are for popular consumption, while his naturalistic view is the esoteric one intended for a philosophic audience. Others have argued that various

not manipulate nature; rather, his apprehension of the workings of nature is so profound that he could predict these “miraculously” natural events just as a scientist’s comprehension of nature allows him to safely do so with the daily rising and setting of the sun.¹²³

It is no coincidence that R. Kook cites Joshua’s arresting of the sun in Joshua 10:12-13 as an example of the prophet’s miraculous power over the natural order. That incident is the one chosen by Maimonides as paradigmatic of his naturalist view of miracles as opposed to supernaturalist in both his earlier commentary on the Mishnah and his later *Guide of the Perplexed*. In the former it appears as an illustration of his position that miracles are really extraordinary natural occurrences woven into the fabric of nature at its inception, for “on the fourth day at the time the sun was created, it was endowed with the future of standing still at a certain time as when Joshua addressed it.”¹²⁴ The *Guide*, though from a different perspective, also naturalizes it, perhaps even more radically than his earlier position: “It is as if it said that the day at Gibeon was for them the longest of the days of the summer that may occur there.”¹²⁵ The sun did not halt its rotation and orbit but rather simply mimicked another of its own movements that occurs annually as

positions can live together in a dialectic of religion and philosophy: see, e.g. M.Z. Nehorai, “Maimonides on Miracles,” (Heb.) *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 9:2 (1990) pp. 1-18, and A. Reines, “Maimonides’ Concept of Miracles,” *HUCA* 45 (1975) pp. 243-285.

¹²³ There is a lively scholarly debate concerning the nature of Maimonidean prophecy, but suffice it for our purposes to endorse both Lawrence Kaplan’s and Warren Harvey’s naturalistic views of it. The only miraculous element of prophecy is the “possibility” that God might withhold prophecy from someone who has naturally developed to the point where he must, of natural necessity, become a prophet. See Kaplan’s “Maimonides on the Miraculous Element in Prophecy,” *Harvard Theological Review* 70:3/4 (1977), pp. 233-256, and Harvey in a subsequent issue, “A Third Approach to Maimonides’ Cosmogony-Prophology Puzzle,” 74:3 (1981) pp. 287-301, esp. note 52, p. 299. For a recent comprehensive summary of the various positions on the issue see Tamar Rudavsky, *Maimonides* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 116-124. For a recent critique of Harvey’s and Kaplan’s arguments see Roslyn Weiss, “Natural Order or Divine Will: Maimonides on Cosmogony and Prophecy,” *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 15:1 (2007) pp. 1-25, which argues for the most extremely naturalistic view on both creation and prophecy and identifies Maimonides’ true position with the Aristotelian philosophical refusal to admit anything outside the natural order. This view would simply have exercised R. Kook even further and would render his interpretation even more subversive.

¹²⁴ PM, Avot 5:5

¹²⁵ GP II:35, pp. 368-369.

part of its natural movements. To compound the naturalism of this regularly occurring phenomenon the sun may have only appeared to have stood still in the mental perception of the Israelite onlookers.

R. Kook the mystic, for whom the intellect alone does not satisfy the human urge for transcendence, as we have seen, provides another realm to which the soul can soar. Since that realm transcends the limits of intellect it also provides a domain where the immutable laws of nature can be suspended, interrupted, or created anew. For R. Kook the divine intellect is “creative” (שכל היוצר) while the human intellect is “artistic” (שכל המצייר), able only to work with what is there. However the latter can aspire to the former, and, as he formulates it in another spiritual diary entry, “the power of creativity is commensurate with his divine proximity,” at which point the normal confines of the natural world can be breached.¹²⁶ That is the world that the prophet inhabits, the world above the stars and level with the angels, empowering the prophet with the “creative” control of the stars or all of existence ontologically situated below him. In R. Kook's hands, therefore, Maimonides' Joshua is transformed from an astutely informed observer of nature to one who can control certain natural phenomena.

Conclusion:

A fundamental question that implicitly emerges from this study is that of the precise relationship between philosophy and mysticism, and whether a strict dichotomization between the two can be maintained, at least in the history of Jewish thought. In R. Kook the lines between Jewish mysticism and Jewish rationalism – disciplines normally considered unbridgeable and antithetical forms of thought – become somewhat blurred. R. Kook, in this short commentary on the most philosophically oriented section of Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*, combines the two domains seamlessly in constructing an intellectualist mysticism for which Maimonides' rationalist corpus is indispensable. This is a modern illustration of what Elliot Wolfson has noted regarding the relationship between Jewish philosophy and mysticism in the medieval period: “Not only that the mystical tradition exceeds the bounds of philosophical discourse, but that the former is unimaginable without the latter.” As a result, Wolfson's assertion that “it is impossible to disentangle the threads of philosophy and mysticism when

¹²⁶ SK 4:110 השכל האלהי הוא שכל יוצר, שיש לו פועל בכל מילואיו, ושכל הברואים הוא שכל מצייר, שאיננו יכול כי אם להציג לפניו את מה שישנו. הקרבה האלהית מקנה לנבראים את סגולתו של השכל האלהי, ולפי ערך קרבתו האלהית כך גדל כח יצירתו.

examining the texture of medieval Jewish mysticism,”¹²⁷ is equally applicable to R. Kook’s engagement with Maimonides.

R. Kook’s approach to the *Mishneh Torah*, as has been examined in this study, can be encapsulated in the contrast between his exegesis of a verse which brackets the entire *Guide*, appearing, as it does, at its beginning and at its conclusion. Maimonides’ analysis of the nature of Adam and Eve’s awareness of their nakedness after their sin draws a philological comparison between the “opening” of their eyes in Gen. 3:7 denoting that awareness, and other biblical appearances of that term including the messianic expectation of *Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened* in Isa. 35:5. The “opening” they both share is a metaphor for “uncovering mental vision,” that is, it represents a cognitive, rather than a visual, development whereby some new mental consciousness is attained. In Eden it is an epistemological transition from contemplating the universal objective categories of “true and false” to the subjective fluctuating ones of “good and bad”.¹²⁸ If the opening of the eyes in Eden signifies an intellectual deterioration at the beginning of the *Guide* (and the world!), then the opening of the eyes in *Isaiah*, in its cited context at the very end of the *Guide*, anticipates a progressive reversal of that intellectual decline. It acts as a supplication for the realization of its promise: perfection of the intellect to the point where the human being’s original “mental vision” of philosophical truths is restored.¹²⁹ For R. Kook, however, this verse envisions an all encompassing appreciation of the world that transcends the narrow and skewed views that individual perspectives produce, be they emotional or intellectual. Each of these, cultivated in isolation, tends to occlude the others and therefore render a distorted grasp of reality which isolates the physical from the

¹²⁷ “Jewish Mysticism: A Philosophical Overview,” in Daniel Frank, Oliver Leaman (eds.), *History of Jewish Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1997) pp. 450-498, at p. 453.

¹²⁸ GP I:2, p. 25.

¹²⁹ As Aviezer Ravitzky notes, the key to understanding the messianic vision at the end of the MT, where all the world will be preoccupied with the knowledge of God “is to be found precisely in Maimonides’ allegorical interpretation of the story of the Garden of Eden in the opening chapters of the *Guide*.” The true meaning of the messianic era is when “the opening of human history is united with its final perfection ... the universal redemption of the human race ... refers in fact to man’s return to his original stature represented by the human archetype.” See “‘To the Utmost of Human Capacity’: Maimonides on the Days of the Messiah” in Joel Kraemer (ed.), *Perspectives on Maimonides: Philosophical and Historical Studies* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1991), at pp. 230-233.

