

# LIMITED KNOWLEDGE, UNLIMITED LOVE: A MAIMONIDEAN PARADOX\*

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## **Abstract**

Love of God is all encompassing in Maimonides' legal and philosophical writings. Maimonides equates the measure of love with the level of one's knowledge of God. Yet, paradoxically, Maimonides limits human knowledge, and so prevents full attainment of loving God. The key to the paradox lies in Maimonides' contextual epistemology, allowing for limited knowledge according to the capabilities of the individual, and thus for love tailored to individual subjectivity. Knowledge is also normative in the sense that knowing the boundaries of knowledge, vivid in Maimonides's imagery, allows limited knowledge, whereas crossing the boundaries leads to an abyss of error and doubt. Self-awareness of epistemological limitation translates itself into the emotion of awe. As such, awe is not a stand-alone emotion, and is therefore often neglected or demoted in Maimonides' discussion.

**Keywords:** love, awe, fear, contextualism, epistemology, Maimonides.

## **I. The Equation of Love and Knowledge**

Knowledge and love are inextricably, and paradoxically, intertwined in Maimonides' thought. Love of God is not merely an emotional and thus ephemeral aspiration, but instead is a legal mandate, derived from the biblical verse "and you shall love the Lord your God" (Deut. 6:5). Maimonides counts

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\* I dedicate this paper in awe to the loving memory of my father, Prof. Paul H. Baris, and to the living love of my mother, Dr. Sharon D. Baris, whom I thank for her helpful insights and editing advice. This paper incorporates some of my research done at Bar Ilan University, see *infra* note 44. I thank professors Hanina Ben-Menahem, Shimshon Ettinger, Warren Zev Harvey and Josef Stern for their help and advice, and my wife Ada for her loving active support.

love of God as the third positive commandment (*mitzvah*) in his enumeration of the commandments (*mitzvot*), in both the *Book of Commandments* and his *Code*,<sup>1</sup> preceded only by belief in God's existence and unity.<sup>2</sup> Aware, it seems, of the anomaly of commanding an emotion,<sup>3</sup> Maimonides plots a practical course for attaining love of the Divine. Love of God is to be achieved through knowledge of God's creation (and commandments, in Maimonides' early *Book of Commandments*, a clause dropped later in his *Code*).

Maimonides inseparably bonds love and knowledge: "as (the measure of) knowledge such is (the measure of) love, if large then large, if little then little" (ועל פי הדעה האהבה, אם מעט מעט ואם הרבה הרבה).<sup>4</sup> Maimonides' equation is not necessarily original. Sa'adia Gaon expresses a similar view.<sup>5</sup> Maimonides' position reflects his Aristotelian epistemology where knowledge is the union of knower and object, just as the Bible uses knowledge as a metaphor for carnal knowledge—"and Adam knew his wife Eve."<sup>6</sup> For Maimonides, the equation is

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<sup>1</sup> Maimonides, *Book of Commandments* (Jerusalem: Frankel, 1995) [hereinafter: *BOC*], positive commandments 3 and 4; Maimonides, *Mishne Torah: Laws of the Foundations of the Torah* [hereafter: *Foundations*] (Jerusalem: Frankel, 1975-2001), 2:1; quotes from Maimonides' *Mishne Torah* are as a rule based on the Frankel edition throughout this article.

<sup>2</sup> *BOC* positive commandments 1 and 2; *Foundations* 1:6-7.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Bahya Ibn Pakuda, *Hovot Halevavot* [Duties of the Hearts], trans. Shmuel Yerushalmi, (Jerusalem: Meorei Yisrael, 1978), 251: "And what is the way to love God? We shall answer and say that if one who searches for it will only attain it after many introductory (steps), and if these are fulfilled, one will attain it, but if one focuses on it directly, there is no way to achieve it"; Cf. Ibn Ezra to Exod. 20:14, Steven Harvey, "Love," in *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought*, ed. Arthur A. Cohn and Paul Mendes-Flohr (New York: The Free Press, 1987), 557-563.

<sup>4</sup> Maimonides, *Mishne Torah: Repentance* [hereafter: *Repentance*], 10:6; The more familiar text, prevalent in other printed editions, reads: "according to the [=measure of] knowledge shall be the [=measure of] love" (ועל פי הדעה תהיה (האהבה). Shailat in his edition points out that this is an unnecessary emendation, citing Isaiah 24:2 and I Sam. 30:24. See Maimonides, *Mishne Torah*, ed. R. Isaac Shailat (Ma'aleh Adumim: Shailat, 2004)

<sup>5</sup> Sa'adiah Gaon, *HaNivhar B'Emunot V'Deot*, ed. and trans. R. Joseph Kafih (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook 1995), 2:13; English edition: Saadia Gaon, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, trans. Samuel Rosenblatt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), 132-13.

<sup>6</sup> Gen. 4:1 (והאדם ידע את חוה אשתו). Similarly, kabbalists use "Knowledge" (דעת), in referring to the union of the Divine *sefirot* of Wisdom and Understanding,

absolute and inseparable: “It is obvious (or: well known) that love of God cannot be bound in one’s heart... except by the knowledge one knows Him.”<sup>7</sup>

Love of God is also all-encompassing. Maimonides invokes the second half of the passage mandating the love of God “with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your might” in depicting the “proper” way to fulfill the duty of love.

And how is this proper love? One should love God with a great and exceeding love, and an extremely intense love, to the point that one’s soul be bound up with love of God, and one finds oneself continually possessed by the thought, similar to those who are love-sick, whose thoughts are not free of the love of the woman of whom he is enraptured; (as one) who is continuously possessed by the thought of that woman while he sits, while he stands, while he eats and drinks, even more intense should be the love of God in the hearts of those who love Him, perpetually thinking of Him, as we are commanded “with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your might.”<sup>8</sup>

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for example cf. R. Moses Cordoveiro, *Or Ne’erav* [The pleasing light], (Venice: 1847; available at <http://hebrewbooks.org/24736>), 4:6.

<sup>7</sup> *Repentance*, 10:6. The prevalent printed editions repeat the last clause. Shailat in his edition points out the redundancy.

<sup>8</sup> *Repentance* 10:3. The translation follows the Oxford 577 (Huntington 80) manuscript used as the basis for both the Frankel and Shailat editions, and reads: כָּאֵלֹו חוּלִי הָאֵהָבָה (first diacritics are in the original manuscript, I have added the second, MB). Many printed additions unnecessarily “amended” the text and read כָּאֵלִיו חוּלָה חוּלִי הָאֵהָבָה, (diacritics added, MB) “as if he were suffering of lovesickness,” or: “like a lovesick individual”—thus attempting to achieve a consistency of plural and singular subjects in the same phrase—as in the translations of R. Simon Glaser (New York: Maimonides Publishing Co., 1927) and Moshe Haim Haimson (New York: Feldheim, 1937) respectively, even though Haimson reproduces the Oxford manuscript including the diacritics signifying the plural subject (כָּאֵלִיו). Cf. Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed* [hereinafter: *Guide*], trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1961), 89, 1:39: interpreting the commandment to love God with all your heart: “that you should make His apprehension the end of all your actions.” Citations of the *Guide* in this paper are as a rule to Pines’ edition.

Maimonides here, continuing his analysis, ingeniously weaves the scriptural text into his definition of love, “while sitting and standing” (בשבתך [...] ובקומך),<sup>9</sup> fitting in with his interpretation of the previous scriptural passages as qualitative modifiers of the command to love God. Maimonides is aware of the rabbinic interpretation of love, that one is obliged at times to forfeit one’s life (ואהבת את ה' אפילו הוא נוטל את נפשך [...] בכל נפשך [...] א-לוהיך), in order to refrain from idolatrous situations, as he himself codifies.<sup>10</sup> For Maimonides, the practical implications of total love enhance, and do not dilute, the intensity of love “with all your soul,” to the point of self-sacrifice.

Maimonides reiterates his own interpretive insight at the conclusion of his discourse, again invoking the components of the biblical command as parameters of the emotion of love. Love of God cannot be bound in one’s heart “unless one continuously is *possessed by its proper thought*, and one leaves all that is in this world except for it, as He commanded: “‘with all your heart and with all your soul’, *according to one’s knowledge of God; as the knowledge so is the love.*”<sup>11</sup> It is thus at this juncture that Maimonides skillfully combines both the totality of love and the proportionate bond of love to knowledge. This equation leads to the inevitable conclusion: that total love of God implies total knowledge of God. Yet herein lies the paradox: while one is commanded to the total love of God, full knowledge of God is unattainable.<sup>12</sup>

Maimonides consistently limits the human capacity for knowledge of metaphysical truths, especially of the Divine. I will present what I understand as a contextualist interpretation of Maimonides’ position later, but it is important first to appreciate the limits Maimonides sets on human knowledge. As we shall see, Maimonides’ thesis of negative attributes, his emphasis on the epistemic implications of human sin, the containment of scientific knowledge to the sub-lunar realm, and his interpretation of the allegorical garden of metaphysical

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<sup>9</sup> Maimonides cites the first and last of the list of verbs listed in the familiar passage: “sitting at home, and walking on the road, and lying down (to rest) and standing (arising)”; (בשבתך בביתך ובלכתך בדרך ובשכבך ובקומך), Deut. 6:7; 11:19. Cf. Sa’adia Gaon, *HaNivhar B’Emunot V’Deot*, 133, who uses similar verbs, but based on Ps. 63:7.

<sup>10</sup> *Foundations* 5:7. While Mishna, Ber. 9:5, the source of the rule for self-sacrifice, differentiates between the different clauses in the scripture (heart, soul and might), Maimonides cites the trio together as the basis for the ruling “even if he takes your life (literally: soul).”

<sup>11</sup> See notes 5 and 9 above.

<sup>12</sup> Compare Pines, note 21 below, and Warren Zev Harvey, “Love: The Beginning and the End of the Torah,” *Tradition* 15(4) (1976): 6: “How can we be commanded love? How can we be commanded to imitate the Inimitable?”

knowledge—the dangerously enticing “*pardes*”—all testify to the limits of the human episteme recognized by Maimonides. While the love of God “with all your soul, all your heart, and all your might” demands a totality of emotion and action, as Maimonides emphasizes, his own equation of love with knowledge would imply that love of God is intrinsically limited. Taken to heart, the intimate entanglement of knowledge and love creates a religious quandary, if not a full-blown crisis.

## II. Skeptical Implications

Aristotle puts human striving for knowledge at the focus of his *Metaphysics*, which he opens by determining that “[a]ll men by nature desire (or: reach, stretch out, yearn for; *oregontai*)<sup>13</sup> to know (*eidenai*).”<sup>14</sup> For Maimonides, knowledge is a central aspect of human existence, defining one’s essence and efforts,<sup>15</sup> though altered by primal sin,<sup>16</sup> and ultimately constituting the personal reward of the individual<sup>17</sup> and the eschatological redemption of humanity.<sup>18</sup> Maimonides opens his *Code* by grounding all foundations and wisdom on knowing God’s existence,<sup>19</sup> and seals the *Code* with Isaiah’s vision of knowledge of God covering the earth just as the waters cover the sea.<sup>20</sup>

Yet at the same time Maimonides emphasizes that human knowledge is inherently limited. A central issue in Maimonidean scholarship has been to

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<sup>13</sup>Translation based on Henry George Liddell & Robert Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1889); Web edition available at <http://perseus.uchicago.edu/Reference/MiddleLiddell.html>; H. I. Roth’s Hebrew translation renders: כל בני האדם שואפים אל הדעת. See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. H.I. Roth (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975), 3.

<sup>14</sup> Greek text in Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, ed. W. Jaeger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957), I(A) 980a, 21; English translation in Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. W.D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924 ; repr. 1953). Web edition available at <http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/a/aristotle/metaphysics>

<sup>15</sup> *Foundations* 4:8.

<sup>16</sup> *Guide* 1:2.

<sup>17</sup> *Repentance* 8:1-3.

<sup>18</sup> *Mishne Torah: Laws of Kings and their Wars* [hereafter *Kings and their Wars*], 12:4-5.

<sup>19</sup> *Foundations* 1:1.

<sup>20</sup> See note 18 above, citing Isaiah 11:9.

measure the congruence of these two themes.<sup>21</sup> The possibility of metaphysical knowledge according to Maimonides has been a bone of contention for the past few decades. In order to defend a contextualist position later on, I will point to the passages that support a more critical, even skeptical interpretation as my initial premise.<sup>22</sup> While the struggle between the quest and the limitations of knowledge is apparent in multifold issues in Maimonides' writings, the primary issue—especially in our present context—is the knowledge of God. That will be our focal point.

Maimonides dedicates a significant portion of the first part of the *Guide* to demonstrating the impossibility of fully knowing God, while testing the

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<sup>21</sup> Shlomo Pines, "The Limitations of Human Knowledge According to Al-Farabi, Ibn Bajja, and Maimonides," in *Studies In Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, ed. Isadore Twersky (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 82:

One of the most perplexing problems posed by the *Guide of the Perplexed*—and to my mind a fundamental one—relates to two apparently irreconcilable positions held by, or attributed to, Maimonides. On the one hand, he sets very narrow limits to human knowledge; on the other, he affirms that man's ultimate goal and man's felicity consist in intellectual perfection, that is, in knowledge and contemplation (*theoria*).

Pines is troubled by similar issues in his earlier writings, in addressing Aristotle's definition of God as mind, see: Shlomo Pines, "Jewish Philosophy," in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967), vol. 4, 261. See also Pines., "Translator's Introduction—The Philosophic Sources of the Guide of the Perplexed," in Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, xcvi-xcviii; Pines., "The Philosophical Purport of Maimonides' Halachic Works and the Purport of the *Guide of the Perplexed*," in *Maimonides and Philosophy*, ed. Shlomo Pines and Yirmiyahu Yovel (Dordrecht, Boston, Lancaster: Martinus Nijhoff, 1986), 13 n. 12. The now classic scholarly debate has several definitive landmarks, among them Alexander Altmann, "Maimonides on the Intellect and the Scope of Metaphysics," in *Von der mittelalterlichen zur modernen Aufklärung – Studien zur jüdischen Geistesgeschichte* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1987), 60-129; Herbert A. Davidson, "Maimonides on Metaphysical Knowledge," *Maimonidean Studies* 3 (1992-93): 49-103.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Introduction (or: "Assumptions") at the beginning of the second part of the *Guide*, 239.

epistemic possibilities left for humans within that essential constraint.<sup>23</sup> In Maimonides' version of Aristotelian epistemology, knowledge takes place when the intellect "lifts" the form of an object from its material substrata, and merges with that form.<sup>24</sup> Abstraction of form from immaterial objects is obviously something of a quite different sort. Maimonides, relying on the biblical translation of Onqelos, points out that "there are great created beings whom man cannot apprehend as they really are," as opposed to "things endowed with matter and form."<sup>25</sup> Knowledge of God is even more removed from human cognition, as Maimonides himself emphasizes:

What then should be the state of our intellects when they aspire to apprehend Him who is without matter and is simple to the utmost degree of simplicity, Him whose existence is necessary, Him who has no cause and no motion attaches that is superadded to His essence, which is perfect...?<sup>26</sup>

Maimonides carefully elaborates his doctrine of negative (or: negating) attributes. In brief, Maimonides first denies any knowledge of God based on positive attributes, or any mode of analogy at all. Uses of language that would indicate any similarity between attributes as we know them and God are merely

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. Warren Zev Harvey, "Maimonides' Critical Epistemology and Guide, II, 24," *Aleph* 8 (2008): 213-235.

<sup>24</sup> *Guide* 1:68, 163-165:

Now if he has intellectually cognized a thing (it is as if you said that if a man has intellectually cognized this piece of wood to which one can point, has stripped its form from its matter, and has represented to himself the pure form—this being the action of the intellect) at that time the man would become one who has intellectual cognition *in actu*... Consequently the intellect, the intellectually cognizing subject, and the intellectually cognized object are always one and the same the thing in the case of everything that is cognized in actu.

Cf. Josef Stern, "Maimonides' Epistemology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Maimonides*, ed. Kenneth Seeskin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 110-115.

<sup>25</sup> *Guide* 1:37; 86. Cf. *Foundations* 4:6: "Never do you see raw material without a form or form without material, rather it is the heart of the human that so divides the object in the mind, and knows that the object is a fusion of material and form, and knows that there are objects made from the four (material) elements and objects whose substratum is simple and not made of other raw components."

<sup>26</sup> *Guide* 1:58, 137.

metaphors, if not metonyms, and definitely not analogies. Maimonides emphasizes that God is incomparable to everything else: “To whom then will you compare me, that I should be equal?”<sup>27</sup> Comparison by analogy is only possible where there exists some form of relation between two objects. No such relation could possibly exist between God and anything else.<sup>28</sup> Even the concept of existence itself—implying causal relations—is not applicable to God, the origin of all, in the same way as we use the term for all of creation.<sup>29</sup> Only through negating attributes can anything about God be said, and ultimately the most appropriate form of acknowledging God is by silence.<sup>30</sup>

Those who have explored the religious implications of a full critical or skeptical interpretation of Maimonides have emphasized other forms of religious experience. Pines saw in Maimonides an emphasis on a practical, political worldview.<sup>31</sup> In a different vein, Stern interprets Maimonides’ silence as leading a life of religious contemplation with the search for knowledge of God as a way of life, not as a philosophical result.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, Lobel<sup>33</sup> and Harvey<sup>34</sup> understand the

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<sup>27</sup> Isaiah 40:25; *Guide* 1:55.

<sup>28</sup> *Guide* 1:56.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* 1:57.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* 1:58-59.

<sup>31</sup> See note 21 above.

<sup>32</sup> Josef Stern, “Maimonides on Language and the Science of Language,” in *Maimonides and the Sciences*, ed. Robert S. Cohen and Hillel Levine (Dordrecht, Boston, London: Kluwer, 2000), 173-226; Stern, “Maimonides on the Growth of Knowledge and the Limitations of the Intellect,” in *Maïmonide: Perspectives Arabe, Hébraïque, Latine*, ed. Tony Levy and Roshdi Rashed (Louvain, Paris: Peeters, 2002), 143-191; Stern, “Maimonides’ Demonstrations: Principles and Practice,” *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 10 (2001): 47-84. I thank Prof. Stern for his precious time and warm instruction and advice.

<sup>33</sup> Diana Lobel, “Silence is Praise to You: Maimonides on Negative Theology, Looseness of Expression, and Religious Experience,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 76 (2002): 25-49.

<sup>34</sup> Warren Zev Harvey, “Maimonides on Human Perfection, Awe and Politics,” in *The Thought of Moses Maimonides – Philosophical and Legal Studies*, ed. by Ira Robinson et al. (Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 1-15. Prof. Harvey causally links awe and awareness of epistemic limits, it “gives rise to the awe of God,” 4; “true awe of Him comes *after* knowledge and love, and is a *result* not of the knowledge but of the man of knowledge’s awareness of his ignorance,” Warren Zev Harvey,



Maimonidean silence as opening the way to the true (and feasible) religious experience of awe. I will take a step further, and fully identify awe with the self-awareness of epistemic limitation, but first it is important to examine the textual difficulties that inhere to Maimonides' description of awe and love.

### III. Love, Awe, and Fear

Inconsistencies emerge upon analysis of Maimonides' richly layered postulation of the relations between knowledge, love and fear of God. In identifying the source of both love (אהבה) and awe (יראה), Maimonides equates the two emotions. Both erupt at the identical moment of contemplation of God's majesty through His works, as Maimonides depicts in a famous passage (*Foundations* 2:2):

And when one looks at His wondrous and great works and creations, and sees (or: comprehends) His infinite greatness and magnitude, one immediately loves and praises and glorifies and craves with great craving to know God's great name; as David said: "My soul thirsts for the Lord, the living God". And immediately, upon contemplating those very same things, one recoils with awe and fear and realizes that one is but a tiny, dark and lowly creature, standing with frivolous and meager knowledge before the One who is of perfect knowledge; as David said: "When I see Your heavens etc. who is the human to be remembered by You?"<sup>35</sup>

The temporal moment of recognition simultaneously creates the dual moments of the soul—love and awe. Both emotions are consecutive commandments, by Maimonides' count.<sup>36</sup> Both spring from the identical act of contemplation. It is noteworthy at this point that Maimonides here modifies his definition of יראה, from fear of Divine retribution as he had initially stated in the *Book of Commandments*,<sup>37</sup> to awe of God's majesty. This move brings the two emotions closer conceptually, and makes possible their synchronization, which lies at the foundations of Maimonides' deeply moving passage. But Maimonides concludes with what seems a blatant inconsistency:

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"Holiness: A Command to *Imitatio Dei*," *Tradition* 16(3) (1977): 7, 11 (emphasis added, MB). Here I propose to fuse the two states of mind and soul into one. I thank Prof. Harvey for his warm guidance and instruction. Cf. Gilad Bareli, "On The Fear of God in Maimonides." *Iyyun* 45 (1996): 381-388 [Hebrew].

<sup>35</sup> Citing Psalms 42:3 and 8:4-5; cf. *Foundations* 4:12

<sup>36</sup> See note 35 above.

<sup>37</sup> *BOC*, positive commandment 4.

Accordingly, I will now explain general principles of the Master of the World's creation, as an opening (or: introduction) for one who understands to love God, as the Rabbis said concerning love: "thereby you will know the one who spoke and the world was (or: came into being)".<sup>38</sup>

Contemplation of God's creation leads to both love and awe, at the same stroke. Yet at this point Maimonides abandons the dual import of the act of recognition, drops awe, and introduces his synopsis of physics and metaphysics as a vehicle for attaining love, with no mention of any other implication. One might have forgiven Maimonides' omission of awe as an uncharacteristic slip of the pen, were it not for the fact that Maimonides refers to these chapters time and again, in the context of inducing love of God, and love alone.

Thus, at the end of the same volume of his *Code* (*Repentance 10:1-5*), in delineating the different modes of Divine worship, Maimonides draws a bright line between love (אהבה) and fear (יראה). Maimonides structures these two in a stark hierarchy, and demotes fear as an inferior motive of worship. Maimonides portrays fear as but a stepping stone towards worship through love of God. This would seem out of synch with his equation of the two emotions earlier in the *Book of Knowledge*, as we have seen (*Foundations 2:2*). Classic commentators have pointed out that Maimonides makes it clear that the term יראה in this context stands for fear of retribution, as opposed to יראה signifying awe.<sup>39</sup> Fear is inclusive of any ulterior motive, in Maimonides' conceptualization. Hope for reward, and not only the actual fear of punishment, compromises the integrity of individual motivation. Awe, on the other hand, is a pristinely devotional emotion, not to be classified as mere fear of external circumstance. The contexts also differ. While at the beginning of the book he presented the human emotional response to God's grandeur, here Maimonides discusses human motivation of

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<sup>38</sup> *Foundations 2:2*, emphasis added; although Maimonides' precise source remains somewhat elusive, cf. *BOC* positive commandment 3; *Guide 3:28*; Maimonides, *Responsa* 150, ed. Blau (Jerusalem: Mekitzei Nirdamim, 1958); Hannah Kasher, "Does 'Ought' Imply 'Can' in Maimonides' Teachings?," *Iyyun* 36 (1987): 21 n. 21 [Hebrew].

<sup>39</sup> Cf. R. Joseph Kafih's incisive comments in his edition of the *Code* to *Foundations 2:2* and *Repentance 10:2* (Jerusalem: Machon Moshe, 1984); Eliyahu Nagar, "Fear in Maimonides' Teachings (A Reexamination)," *Da'at* 39 (1997): 89-99 [Hebrew]. By heavily relying on Maimonides' earlier writings, especially his *Commentary* to Avoth (See note 41 below) both inadvertently support my textual hypothesis. Cf. R. Joseph Cohen, *Sefer HaTeshuvah* [The Book of Repentance], (Jerusalem: Harry Fischel Institute, 1992), 145-171.

worship. But while it seems right to differentiate between the two contexts and terminologies, the text as a whole is rather awkward. While it is clear that Maimonides is using two different meanings of the same word, it would seem more than a coincidence that he contrasts these two concepts of love versus awe or fear, using the identical language אהבה/יראה in two such different contexts, without explicitly alerting his readers. Add to all this the coincidence of the shift in defining the commandment of יראה from fear to awe, from the *Book of Commandments* to the *Code*, in the symmetrically opposite direction as the parallel shift within the *Book of Knowledge* itself.

The best textual explanation would seem to be that in the transition from fear (as in the earlier *Commentary to Avoth* and *Book of Commandments*) to awe (as in *Repentance*), in defining the fourth positive *mitzvah*, Maimonides retained the theological implications of the different motives of worship, while shifting the actual definitions of the *mitzvah*. He demoted ulterior considerations such as retribution to inferior and temporary status—something that he had worked out according to his previous definition of יראה as fear in his early *Commentary to the Mishna*.<sup>40</sup> At the same time, he redefined יראה as awe in *Foundations 2:2*. Maimonides incorporated his prior exposition at a later point in the *Code (Repentance 10:1-5)* as a self-contained discourse, albeit with some rough edges in the move, relying on the reader to interpret the different terms according to the different contexts.<sup>41</sup> Love and fear as motives of worship (*Repentance*) remain therefore conceptually distinct from love and awe as emotions (*Foundations*), and as personal attitudes towards God.

But it is Maimonides himself who mixes the issues and leaves us baffled. In directing the reader to worship through love, endorsing love as the proper motive of worship (at the conclusion of the passage in *Repentance*), Maimonides commends that one devote oneself to mastering and understanding the sciences that lead to knowing God “as we have explained in the *Foundations of the Torah*.” His cross-reference, from love as motive to love as emotion, blurs what we saw as a clear distinction. Simply put, this means that love of God—of any type, for any purpose, in any context—is based on knowing God’s works. But if so, shouldn’t the same be said even for fear as a motive of worship? Isn’t יראה too the product of knowledge?

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<sup>40</sup> Avoth 1:3. Maimonides, *Commentary on the Mishna Avoth*, ed. R. Isaac Shailat (Jerusalem: Ma’aliyot, 1994), 4-5.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. David Hanshke, “On Maimonides’ Halakhic Thought: Inner Dynamism versus Institutional Conservatism—On the Nature of the Halakha in Maimonides’ *Sefer ha-Mitzvot*,” in *Maimonides: Conservatism, Originality, Revolution*, ed. Aviezer Ravitzky (Jerusalem: The Shazar Center for Jewish History, 2008), 119-153.

This Maimonidean paradox assumes practical dimensions towards the end of the *Guide*, where he prescribes contrasting modes of attaining love and fear of God. There Maimonides sets the different courses of achieving the prescribed emotions: love through contemplation and knowledge of God, and awe (or fear) through obeying the Divine commands, the *mitzvot*. In contrast, Nahmanides and the Zoharic tradition identified the love/fear divide with positive versus negative commandments. For Nahmanides and the *Zohar*, reversing both direction and destination of the flow of influence, love leads to fulfillment of positive commands; fear leads to obedience in not transgressing the negative *mitzvot*.<sup>42</sup> For Maimonides, knowledge leads to love, action induces awe. This is a far cry from Maimonides' emphasis, as we have seen towards the beginning of the *Code*, that both love and awe are attained simultaneously, through the identical act of contemplation ("when one thinks of these very same things," (וכשמחשב בדברים האלו עצמן). And yet Maimonides obviously refers the reader to these specific opening chapters, where he expounded the connection between knowledge and love "as we have made clear several times". Again, the internal cross-reference underscores the absence of the second emotional component of worship: that of awe. The conundrum is this: Maimonides' pairs awe with love as simultaneous and inseparable, and then seems to ignore awe while at the same referring to the original statements that joined the two emotions. What's going on?

#### IV. The Protective Veil of Ignorance

The key to a unified interpretation of Maimonides' complex position, I propose, lies in his epistemic theory.<sup>43</sup> Knowledge is indeed the foundation of foundations, the source of individual and eschatological redemption, and yet perfect knowledge is not humanly attainable. Maimonides reaffirms and grades

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<sup>42</sup> Nahmanides, *Commentary on the Torah*, Ex. 20:8; *Zohar*: Ra'aya Meheimna, ed. R. Reuven Margaliyot (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1940), 3:122b. Interestingly, Maimonides' holds a similar view in his *Commentary* to Avoth, supra note 40: "האוהב לא יזנח הציורי, והירא לא יעבור על האזהרה".

<sup>43</sup> For examples of non-unified approaches, that interpret the discrepancies according to the different purposes and readerships of Maimonides' writings, see Howard Kreisel, *Maimonides' Political Thought – Studies in Ethics, Law and the Human Ideal*, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999), chapters 6- 7; Norman Lamm, "Maimonides on the Love of God," *Maimonidean Studies* 3 (1992-1993): 131-142; Kasher, "Does 'Ought' Imply 'Can' in Maimonides' Teachings?"

knowledge in appropriate contexts, even while denying the certitude of metaphysical truths and the possibility of full human knowledge of God. Far from being a skeptic, Maimonides holds a normative, contextual view of knowledge, which accepts the endeavor of human knowledge while recognizing its finitude. The simultaneous movements of love and awe (here indeed similar to fear), reflect the expansive epistemic quest of knowledge, of uniting with God, and the cringing recognition of human limitations. This human endeavor is neither futile nor tragic. Its fruits are the emotions of love and fear that reflection and self-reflection continually generate. His carefully structured exposition on knowing God focuses the central chapters of the first part of his *Guide*,<sup>44</sup> to which I now turn.

Maimonides opens the discussion with his definition of certitude, containing two primary components—belief (*a'atakad*; defined as “the affirmation that what has been represented is outside the mind just as it has been represented in the mind”), and “realization” (*tassuwar*) of its necessity (“that a belief different from it is in no way possible and that no starting point can be found in the mind for a rejection of this belief or the supposition that a different belief is possible”).<sup>45</sup> I see a strong structural analogy between Maimonides’ presentation and two of the three components of the classic conditions of knowledge as justified true belief (where the third condition, truth, is implicit in that of justification—indeed, one has no direct access to truth except through justification).<sup>46</sup> Justification is generally prone to contextualization. A journalist

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<sup>44</sup> I leave the epistemic structure of what Leo Strauss termed the “lexicographical” chapters of the *Guide*, for fuller discussion elsewhere. In the meantime see Michael Baris, “Vision versus Verity: Doubt and Skepticism in Maimonides’ Jurisprudence” (PhD diss., Bar Ilan University, 2009), 92-113 [Hebrew].

<sup>45</sup> See the detailed analysis, specifically emphasizing belief and not knowledge and pointing to Al-Farabi’s influence here, of Charles H. Manekin, “Belief, Certainty and Divine Attributes in the *Guide of the Perplexed*,” in *Maimonidean Studies* 1 (1990): 117-141, and see notes 1-4 to 1:50 in Maimonides, *The Guide to the Perplexed*, ed. and trans. Michael Schwartz (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 2002).

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1965), A822/B850, 646: “[W]hen the holding of a thing to be true is sufficient both subjectively and objectively, it is *knowledge*. The subjective sufficiency is termed *conviction* (for myself), the objective sufficiency is termed *certainty* (for everyone).” Cf. Francis Macdonald Cornford, *The Theaetetus and the Sophist of Plato—Translated with a Running Commentary* (London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan

may rely on standards that differ from the academic historian. The measurements of the baker, the chemist and the surgeon each employ varied criteria of accuracy, and so on. Similarly, in enumerating the various sources of knowledge (thus excluding astrology) in his epistle to the sages of Montpellier, Maimonides enjoins his readers to keep in mind the particular source at hand. “Every reasonable man ought to distinguish in his mind and thought all the things that he accepts as trustworthy and say: ‘this I accept as trustworthy because of tradition, and this because of sense-perception, and this on grounds of reason.’”<sup>47</sup> In other words, Maimonides is saying, the strength of one’s knowledge-claim hinges on its source, its justification. Here, in the context of knowing God, Maimonides mandates a specific form of justification, namely certitude of the particular truth being necessary. Thus Maimonides creates a subset of knowledge—apodictic knowledge, allowing for certitude. But there may exist other types of knowledge, which rest on weaker justifications. Even certitude can never exceed the cognitive and intellectual capacity of the individual knower, and therefore cannot escape the limits of knowledge intrinsic to the human condition, as Maimonides emphasizes further on in his exposition.

Maimonides proceeds to negate the possibility of knowing God, even through analogy, by pointing to God’s ultimate ontological otherness as necessary being, since God exists without prior cause.<sup>48</sup> The resulting epistemic barrier is absolute. God cannot be known *per se* to humans (or to any creatures, for that matter). Maimonides goes on to expound his version of the doctrine of negative (or: negating) attributes,<sup>49</sup> initially commending *via negativa* as “the correct description” yet ultimately leading his readers to silence—“Silence is praise to You.”<sup>50</sup>

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Paul, 1935), 142-147; Paul K. Moser, introduction to *The Oxford Handbook of Epistemology*, by Paul K. Moser, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 4; Robert K. Shope, “Conditions and Analyses of Knowledge,” *The Oxford Handbook of Epistemology*, 29-30; Michael Williams, *Problems of Knowledge – A Critical Introduction to Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 13-27.

<sup>47</sup> Maimonides, *Epistles of Maimonides*, ed. R. Isaac Shailat (Jerusalem: Ma’aliyot, 1986), 479.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Stern, “Maimonides’ Epistemology,” 120-122.

<sup>49</sup> Maimonides was not the first to expound similar ideas, cf. Zevi Diesendruck, “Maimonides’ Theory of the Negation of Privation,” in *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*6 (1935): 140-148.

<sup>50</sup> *Guide* 1:59, 139-143, citing Psalms 65:2, and echoed in (or at least reminiscent of) Wittgenstein’s closing sentence of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, “what we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.” Ludwig

But Maimonides does not totally reject the human claim for knowledge of God. Neither do negative attributes negate knowledge. Saying that God is simply not such-and-such does not cure any of the problems pointed to in claiming knowledge of God. But it does affirm positive knowledge, namely knowing that each particular category is not relevant to God's essence (and hence the more accurate way of putting it: negating attributes). Instead, Maimonides reaffirms knowledge while persistently appending the qualification "to the utmost of human capacity" or "to the utmost of one's strength (of knowing)."<sup>51</sup> A contextual view of knowledge is not satisfied with a yes/no question: "do you know?" but rather with the qualitative query: "what is the strength of your knowledge (or knowledge-claim)?" Indeed, Maimonides reaffirms a gradation of knowledge of God, in which Moses achieves the maximum level of knowledge of God humanly possible. What Maimonides is saying is simply this: not being able to know everything does not equal not knowing anything. Whereas the skeptic's strategy is to point to the inaccessibility of certitude in many fields, Maimonides focuses on the fields of knowledge that can be attained.

Thus, delimiting knowledge has two functions: rejecting what cannot be known, while reaffirming knowledge within its legitimate confines. This is evident from the structure of Maimonides' exposition on knowledge of God. After negating what cannot be said of God (*Guide* 1:51-56), Maimonides emphasizes God's ontological Otherness (1:57), thus setting up an essential, impenetrable epistemic barrier preventing knowledge of God. Only then does Maimonides proceed to expound *via negativa* as positive knowledge—reaffirming what can be said of God and accepting a gradation of knowledge of God, while falling silent as to what cannot be said (1:58-59). It is significant that Maimonides prefaces the two chapters that serve as focal points or stepping stones of his argument—God's Otherness preventing knowledge and predication on the one hand, and affirming limited, graded knowledge via negative in the other (1:57-58)—with the warning that this discussion is "more obscure"<sup>52</sup> than what preceded." Maimonides deploys this literary marker as a beacon, to illuminate both sides of the epistemic barrier he has constructed. This epistemic barrier thus serves a twofold purpose, simultaneously blocking out claims to knowledge that are humanly unattainable, while reaffirming legitimate knowledge claims that are cut to human measure. Awareness of the limits of human knowledge is therefore imperative. What can be said is internally

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Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), 74.

<sup>51</sup> *Repentance* 8:3; 10:6; *Kings and their Wars* 12:5; *Guide* 3:8; 3:54. Cf. the emphasis on limitations of knowledge in *Repentance* 5:5; 6:5; 8:7; *Kings and their Wars* 11:4.

<sup>52</sup> Per Pines; or: "deeper", as the other translations have it.

dependent on recognizing what cannot be said. It is this dual function that will manifest itself in the simultaneous dialectical movements of the soul—love and awe—as we shall see.

Maimonides had explicitly developed the theme of demarcation earlier in the *Guide*. In attempting to enter the secret, dangerous garden of metaphysical knowledge, as represented in the parable of the *pardes* story, Maimonides instructs that one should emulate Rabbi Akiva who did “not aspire to apprehend that which he was unable to apprehend.”<sup>53</sup> In sharp contrast, Elisha ben Avuya’s irreverence, his hubris in not accepting the ultimate Otherness of divine truths, lead to metaphysical error, and ultimately to his own ostracism as the Other. One must therefore recognize “a limit at which it (= the human intellect) stops.”<sup>54</sup> To transgress that boundary is to attempt to transcend humanity. In reality, trying to exceed the inherent limitations of knowledge empties the human self of its own identity, while failing to achieve transcendence. Attempting in vain to stand on the wrong side of the epistemic divide, the “I” then mutates to the inferior, not the transcendent, “Other”.

Mapping the contours of knowledge has thus revealed a literally normative dimension alongside its contextualism. Not only is the *possibility* of knowledge confined, so are legitimate *attempts* to know.

This means you should let your intellect move about only within the domain of things that man is able to grasp.<sup>55</sup>

Maimonides discerns two distinct epistemic realms—of permissible and of forbidden inquiry, corresponding to what can and what cannot be attained. Maimonides quotes the injunction “do not inquire about things that are hidden”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> *Guide*, 1:32, 68, citing BT Hagiga 14b.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* 1:31, 67.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>56</sup> Pines translates נפלאות as “too marvelous”, which conforms to the prevalent understanding of biblical usage, see Menahem Zvi Kaddari, *A Dictionary of Biblical Hebrew (Aleph-Taw)* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2006) entries פלא, נפלאות. But the root פלא also connotes something hidden, as in והוא פלאי, Judg. 13:18, of which marvels and miracles are just specific examples, and parallel to something detached and remote as in Deut. 30:11 לא נפלאות היא לא נפלאות היא ממך ולא רחוקה היא, translated by Onkelos לא מפרשא היא מנך, not removed from you, and by Pseudo Jonathan לא מכסיא, not covered. In Num. 15:3 and elsewhere, לפלא נדר, means clearly stating a vow, literally not leaving the statement unclear. Radak connects this form of פלא with division (הפרשה), possibly connoting the precise cutting of words in the speech-act of the vow.



from you; do not investigate what is covered from you; inquire into things that are permitted to you; you have no business with that which is hidden” (במופלא ממך) (אל תדרוש ובמכוסה ממך אל תחקור, במה שהורשית דרוש ואין לך עסק בנפלאות).<sup>57</sup> The two distinctions are interconnected. Knowing that there is that which cannot be known is critical for reaffirming knowledge within its legitimate domain. Crossing the boundaries is dangerous. Not only does it create room for error in deep metaphysical issues, but the epistemic trespass also jeopardizes knowledge within its legitimate realm. Maimonides uses vision as his model:

For when you see with your eye, you apprehend something that is within the power of your sight to apprehend. [...] if you force your eye, in spite of its reluctance, to find out the true reality of the thing, your eye shall not only be too weak to apprehend that which you are unable to apprehend, but also too weak to apprehend that which is within your power to apprehend.<sup>58</sup>

Maimonides concludes by referring to the Mishna, defining the normative limits of human inquiry with a geometric metaphor: “whosoever contemplates (literally: looks at) four things does not deserve to come into the world: what is above, what is below, what is in front and what is behind” (כל המסתכל בארבעה דברים ראוי לו) (כאילו לא בא לעולם: מה למעלה, מה למטה, מה לפנים ומה לאחור).<sup>59</sup> The boundaries of knowledge now assume substantive, almost spatial dimensions.

A similar boundary exists, circumscribing physical knowledge. The realms transcending the lunar sphere are inaccessible to human scientific inquiry, allowing only practical inferences from observation. Maimonides, writing in the shadow of the “Andalusian crisis”<sup>60</sup> in astrophysics, removes the astronomer from valid knowledge claims in those realms: “for his purpose is not to tell us in which way the spheres truly are, but to posit an astronomical system [...] and to

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Similarly cf. Gen. 18:14 (היפלא מה דבר); Exod. 9:32 (כי אפילות הנה); 33:16 (ונפלינו אני) (ועמך), all connote concealment or separation. Berachyahu Lifsihtz expands on this point, in congruence with his thesis of that legal terms in Jewish Law basically carry a connotation of division. See Berachyahu Lifsihtz, *Law and Action—Terminology of Obligation and Acquisition in Jewish Law* (Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute, 2001), 13, 162-164. In any event, the term נפלאה carries significant import as we shall see. I have also substituted “covered” for מכוסה.

<sup>57</sup> *Guide*, 1:31., citing BT Hagiga 13a with minor variance.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* 1:31, 68.

<sup>59</sup> Mishna Hagiga 2:1; literally meta-physics.

<sup>60</sup> See Pines’ translator’s introduction to *Guide*, cix-cxi. The crisis refers to “the problem of the relation between the theory of celestial physics and the dominant Ptolemaic system of astronomy.”

correspond to what is apprehended through sight, *regardless of whether or not things are thus in fact.*<sup>61</sup> On the bottom side of the divide, what exists in the sublunar realm is epistemically attainable, indeed accurately and comprehensively portrayed by Aristotle.<sup>62</sup> As Maimonides expounds the passage in Psalms: “the heavens are the heavens of God,” since only God fully knows them—their true reality, nature, substance, form, motions and causes. Yet the earth is for the sons of man,<sup>63</sup> to be known, since “He has enabled man to have knowledge of what is beneath the heavens, for that is his (= man’s) world and his dwelling place in which he has been placed and of which he himself is a part.”<sup>64</sup> The heavens/earth divide corresponds to the normative boundaries of knowledge: the domain of possible human knowledge is that which is “given” to humans. Beyond lie the realms that are inaccessible to humans as true knowledge, with only the shadows of observation filtering through for practical use.

Elsewhere, Maimonides’ imagery of the epistemic barrier is just as tangible. Matter is the heavy veil (or: curtain, screen, partition)<sup>65</sup> preventing true

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<sup>61</sup> *Guide* 2:24, 326, emphasis added. See Gad Fruedenthal, “‘Instrumentalism’ and ‘Realism’ as Categories in the History of Astronomy: Duhem vs. Popper, Maimonides vs. Gersonides,” *Centaurus* 45 (2003) 96-117; Fruedenthal, “Maimonides’ Philosophy of Science,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Maimonides*, 134-166; Menahem Kellner, “On the Status of the Astronomy and Physics in Maimonides’ Mishneh Torah and Guide of the Perplexed: A Chapter in the History of Science,” *British Journal of the History of Science*, 24 (1991): 453-463. But compare with Y. Zvi Langermann, *The Jews and the Sciences in the Middle Ages IV* (1991): 1-11. I have purposefully set aside references to the debate on *Guide* 2:24, for now.

<sup>62</sup> *Guide*, 2:24, 326.

<sup>63</sup> Psalms 115:16.

<sup>64</sup> *Guide* 2:24, 327.

<sup>65</sup> *Guide* 3:9, 436: “Matter is a strong veil preventing the apprehension of that which is separate from matter as it truly is”. Michael Schwartz in his edition of the *Guide* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 2002) comments that the literal translation is a curtain or screen, connoting the curtain at the entrance to a king’s palace, where the guard stands preventing unwelcome visitors from entering. Ibn Tibbon translated: ... מחיצה גדולה ומסך מונע; Alharizi (Tel Aviv: Hamenorah, 1984) and R. Kafih (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1977) translated מסך גדול, a great screen; M. Friedlander, following Ibn Tibbon, translated: “A large screen and partition” (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1904). Cf. Maimonides, *Commentary on the Mishna: Introduction to Avoth* (“Eight Chapters”), 246-248.

metaphysical knowledge. Indeed, perception of that barrier lies at the heart of Maimonides' reading of the story of the cave (נקרת הצור), in its various versions throughout his writings.<sup>66</sup> In the biblical story, Moses requests God to “show me, please, Your Glory,” and is turned down in response, “for no human can see me and live.”<sup>67</sup> Maimonides construes this story as epitomizing the human endeavor to know God, and recognizing its ultimate impossibility. Although the specifics of Maimonides' reading shift, he seems preoccupied with this passage, as he returns to it time and again. One of the constants is Maimonides' grappling with the biblical imagery. In most versions, Maimonides draws a sharp line between the metaphorical front and back of God, corresponding to the contours of human knowledge. Hannah Kasher<sup>68</sup> accurately points to the discrepancies apparent between the different versions of the requests that Maimonides ascribes to Moses, and accordingly to the differences in God's responses, representing a “skeptical turn” (I would propose: “critical”) in Maimonides' later formulation. Maimonides' emphasis on the practical, didactic, import of God's response to Moses reflects the epistemic limits of revelation.<sup>69</sup> But even at that juncture, Maimonides does not despair of human knowledge, repeating his qualifying appendage: “through which he can apprehend to the furthest extent that is possible of man.”<sup>70</sup> To the contrary, Maimonides reiterates the religious centrality of knowing God:

Furthermore, his saying “That I may find grace in Thy sight” indicates that he who knows God finds grace in His sight and not he who merely fasts and prays, but everyone who has knowledge of Him. Accordingly those who know Him are those who are favored by Him and permitted to come near Him, whereas those who do not know Him are objects of His wrath and are kept away from Him. For His favor and wrath, His nearness and remoteness, correspond to the extent of a man's knowledge or ignorance.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.; *Foundations* 1:10; *Guide* 1:37-38; 54. The comparison to Plato's cave is inviting, but as far as I can tell without sufficient textual or historical warrant.

<sup>67</sup> Exod. 33:18-23.

<sup>68</sup> Hannah Kasher, “Maimonides' Interpretations to the Story of the Cave,” *Daat* 35 (1995): 29-66 [Hebrew].

<sup>69</sup> Elsewhere I develop two distinct interpretive models of Maimonides' position—epistemic and practical, see Baris, *Vision versus Verity*. This paper is geared primarily to the epistemic model.

<sup>70</sup> *Guide* 1:54, 123.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 123-124, citing Exod. 33:13.

Maimonides' dichotomy,<sup>72</sup> dividing hidden and revealed—here referring to attainable and non-attainable<sup>73</sup>—realms of knowledge (נסתרות/נגלות), is further reflected in his comparison of prophecy to the courtroom. In both situations, audiences are invited, even required, to accept or reject inaccessible phenomena. The thrust of Maimonides' comparison is to mandate acceptance of the prophet's claim as legitimate, and therefore as both instructive and binding. The prophet's experience is singularly personal (with the historic exception of the revelation at Sinai).<sup>74</sup> Typically, God addresses the prophet personally, particularly speaking through the prophet's imaginative faculties. The prophet alone can hear God's word.<sup>75</sup> And yet, the prophet shares, even imposes, that inner experience with and upon others, assuming a presumption of legitimacy. Similarly, a judge must rely on testimony or on other external evidence, and will never be able to re-experience the particular act personally.<sup>76</sup> The judge's knowledge of the case is inherently vicarious. At this point Maimonides invokes the passage: "what is concealed is God's, what is revealed is ours and our descendants' etc." (הנסתרות 'לה' אלוהינו והנגלות לנו ולבנינו וגו' (Deut. 29:28). Some would claim that Maimonides' rationale is pragmatic, pointing to the closing words of the prooftext alluded to, but not explicitly quoted by, Maimonides: "to do all that this Torah states" (לעשות ככל דברי התורה הזאת).<sup>77</sup> But it might seem tenuous to have Maimonides rely on the reader to fill such a significant gap in the text, and out of sync with the second prooftext: "For man sees to (or: with) the eyes and God sees to the heart"<sup>78</sup> connoting knowledge, not action. Maimonides presents prophecy as a mode of attaining knowledge,<sup>79</sup> and the prophet as one who informs, not just directs action.<sup>80</sup> Rather, Maimonides invokes the sharp scriptural distinction

<sup>72</sup> I would add: proto-Kantian, were that not to trigger the Pines/Altman&Davidson debate, see note 21 above. Here I lean towards Pines' characterization, but definitely not towards his conclusions.

<sup>73</sup> And not to be confused with the esoteric/exoteric division of knowledge, designating private versus public propagation of knowledge, see Mishna Hagiga 2:1; *Foundations* 4:13; *Guide* 3: introduction, 415-416.

<sup>74</sup> *Guide* 2:32-33.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. BT Meg. 3a.

<sup>76</sup> With the rare exception where the judges actually witnessed the occurrence, as in BT Rosh Hashana 25b. In capital cases that could never occur, *ibid.* 26a.

<sup>77</sup> Shailat ad loc. n. 5.

<sup>78</sup> I Sam. 16:7; Pseudo-Jonathan renders the passage: "For humans see with their eyes but their thoughts lay revealed before God".

<sup>79</sup> *Foundations* 7:1-2, 7; *Guide* 2:36-38.

<sup>80</sup> *Foundations* 7:7 should be read in conjunction with the above so that אדם לבונן אותם is distinct from ולהודיעם מה יעשו או למנוע אותם ממעשים הרעים שבידיהם.

between the obscure and the intelligible; between the revealed domain of attainable knowledge (נגלות) and the intrinsically concealed realm of that which cannot be known (נסתרות), an allusion echoing the normative divide (ואין לך עסק) (בנסתרות).<sup>81</sup> Maimonides here reaffirms that limited knowledge is knowledge. The revealed/concealed (נגלות/נסתרות) divide is thus also a protective barrier, insulating human knowledge from infinite doubt.

## V. Love with All *Your* Heart

Awe embodies human finitude, first and foremost the epistemic limitations of humankind. The act of cognition is simultaneously a self-reflection on the limits of knowledge. According to Maimonides, awe *means* knowing these limits and therefore knowing the objective limits of love. A second look at Maimonides' paralleling of love and awe at *Foundations* 2:2 reveals the epistemic dimension of human limitations as the central motif of awe: "standing with frivolous and meager *knowledge* before the one who is of perfect *knowledge*" (עומד בדעת קלה) (מעוטה לפני תמים דעות).<sup>82</sup> Maimonides' metaphor of darkness (אפלה) is to be read in a similar vein: light and darkness connote knowledge and ignorance.<sup>83</sup> Whereas one can subjectively be overfilled with emotion, just as the lover is imbued with the beloved's countenance, objective fulfillment of love of God is inherently limited, along the contours of the human episteme. Internalization of knowledge expresses itself in love; of the limits of knowledge in awe. Here ends the symmetry between love and awe of God. Love is the thing itself. It has its own self-existence. Awe, however, is not a stand-alone emotion. Awe represents, rather, the inherent limitations of the epistemic quest, and consequently manifests itself diversely in different contexts, often subordinated or even ignored.

One of the primary implications of epistemic limitation is the emphasis on praxis. Actions fill the epistemic gap between limited knowledge and religious experience. Even the troubled skeptic must chart a practical course through doubtful, troubled waters.<sup>84</sup> Although textually, Maimonides' words of guidance towards the beginning of the *Code* and towards the end of the *Guide* seem divergent, at the core they in fact address the same issue of epistemic limitation—

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<sup>81</sup> See note 57 above .

<sup>82</sup> See note 35 above.

<sup>83</sup> Introduction to the *Guide*, 7-8.

<sup>84</sup> Myles Burnyeat, "Can the Skeptic Live His Skepticism," in *The Skeptical Tradition*, ed. Myles Burnyeat (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 117-148.

the eternal glass ceiling of human knowledge—either by self reflection on human finitude or by preferring action over contemplation. The emotional moment that both texts reflect is identical: the awareness that the existential chasm between the infinite God and the finite human is, for the human, epistemically unbridgeable.

Similarly, Maimonides' synopsis of physics and metaphysics towards the beginning of the *Code* is directed primarily towards instilling love. Awe is a byproduct of the inherent failings of human knowledge, and although it is an emotion to be cultivated as a commandment, it “rides” on love as a derivative emotion, and is not the focus of Maimonides' *conspectus*<sup>85</sup>—or of the passages in Maimonides' corpus of writings that refer to it. Accordingly, awe stemming from cognition is mentioned again only when one compares oneself to the holy bodies or the angels, being forms without bodies—possibly due to the difficulty in apprehending them. Rather, awe follows the *external contours* limiting knowledge of God. Love describes the *internal content* within that framework. It is this moment of dual recognition—knowing, yet reflecting that knowledge is ultimately elusive—which transforms the two moments of the human episteme into the dialectic movements of the soul.

Another way of putting it is this: just as full knowledge of God would be impossible to attain, even conceptually incoherent, so would be full love. Here Maimonides' contextual epistemology comes into play. Once Maimonides defines the test for knowledge “according to human capacity,” then that too becomes the test for love of God. Knowing “to the utmost of one's intellectual capacity” leads to love “with all one's heart (read: emotional capacity).” One is expected to worship God with all the possible heart *that one is given*, not the ideal “heart” that humans can only imagine. One can develop one's love of God, and advance in motivating one's worship from ulterior to intrinsic value, as he prescribes in *Repentance*. Maimonides places epistemic development at the heart of didactic progress: accepting worship through fear as an intermediate stage “until their knowledge increases, and they accumulate great wisdom.”<sup>86</sup> In love, as with knowledge, the barrier blocking full realization serves as a protective shield as well. The emphasis shifts from loving God “with *all* your heart”—in a never ending, asymptotic, unattainable, effort—to “loving God with all *your* heart”, cut to one's measure. Ultimately, by allowing for the objective limits of love-as-absolute-knowledge, and thereby accepting love-as-contextual-knowledge, love reaffirms itself as a subjective emotion, as a motive for worship and as a practical guide. The true lover's heart overflows with passion, and even

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<sup>85</sup> *Foundations*, chapters 2-4.

<sup>86</sup> *Repentance* 10:5.

beyond to self-sacrifice (מסירות נפש).<sup>87</sup> It is thus therefore that one can indeed love God with *all* one's heart.

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<sup>87</sup>See note 10 above. It is noteworthy that the primary instances of self-sacrifice are negative transgressions (primarily idolatry, murder and forbidden sexual relations). That would support Maimonides' conceptualization of love as applying to both positive and negative *mitzvot*, cf. note 42.

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