EMBRACING PARADOX: MAIMONIDES AND KIERKEGAARD ON DIVINE TRANSCENDENCE AND IMMANENCE

N. VERBIN
TEL AVIV UNIVERSITY

Abstract. Negotiating the relation between divine transcendence and divine immanence lies at the heart of Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* and of Kierkegaard's philosophical works. The purpose of the paper is to explore the manners in which they do so. I argue that despite various differences between them, both engage with the tension between divine transcendence and immanence by turning away from objectivity to subjectivity and, moreover, by placing paradox, riddle and secret at the heart of their philosophical works. In other words, I argue that they do not attempt to solve or dissolve the great paradox of God's immanent transcendence but to present it in its most acute forms as the paradox within which the religious life is lived.

I. INTRODUCTION

The tension between divine transcendence and divine immanence lies at the heart of Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* and of Kierkegaard's philosophical works. The purpose of this paper is to explore the manners in which they seem to negotiate it. The paper has three parts. In the first, I discuss Maimonides' two conceptions of divine transcendence: "absolute transcendence" and "qualified transcendence" as well as his shift toward subjectivity.[1] In the second, I discuss Kierkegaard's understanding of divine hiddenness, the manner in which it relates to his emphasis on inwardness and subjectivity, and the roles of "paradox", "absurd" and "offense" within it. I end, in the third part, with a few general observations about the role of riddles and secrets within their works.

I argue that paying attention to their central role reorients our understanding of their philosophical projects. In other words, I argue that we are to read both authors as attempting to gesture at the great riddle of our life with God, at presenting the great paradox of God's immanent transcendence — not as attempting to solve or dissolve it.[2] I, thus, show that considered in tandem, Maimonides and Kierkegaard shed light on each other. They reveal some of the difficulties inherent within the Jewish and Christian concept of "God", as well as in key religious notions, which embody the tension between divine transcendence and divine immanence, such as, "creation", "revelation", and "providence". They provide a per-

1 I am here following Reines in characterizing the tension between the different conceptions of divine transcendence in the *Guide* as between an "absolute" and a "qualified" conception of transcendence. See Alvin J. Reines, "Maimonides' True Belief Concerning God: A Systematization", in *Maimonides and Philosophy*, ed. Shlomo Pines and Yirmiahu Yovel (Martinus Nijhoff, 1986), 24–35.

2 In emphasizing the role of the riddle within the life of faith, I was greatly influenced by Galia Patt-Shamir, "To Live a Riddle: The Case of the Binding of Isaac", *Philosophy and Literature* 27, no. 2 (2003). For more on the riddle within the life of faith, see also Cora Diamond, *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy, and the Mind* (MIT Press, 1995), 267–90. I introduced the thesis that the notion of "riddle" is useful in reading Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* in my N. Verbin, "Moses Maimonides on Job's Happiness and the Riddle of Divine Transcendence", *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 8, no. 4 (2016). I here go beyond the latter in various ways, particularly in my use of Kierkegaard to shed light on Maimonides, and vice versa, and in using Maimonides and Kierkegaard as a "perspicuous representation" for the tension between divine transcendence and divine immanence.

spicuous representation for some of the manners in which the life of faith, lived with these notions, is riddled with paradox, thereby providing a perspicuous representation for the difficulty to talk about God, for faith and for the difficulty to sustain it.

II. MAIMONIDES

A great tension between Maimonides' commitment to God's absolute transcendence, on the one hand, and his commitment to a modified conception of God's relation to the world on the other, shapes Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed.* On the one hand, Maimonides emphasizes that we cannot *speak* about God, nor can we *know* anything about Him or *stand in any relation* to Him; on the other hand, he describes God as an intellect that overflows into the world in general, and into the prophet/sage who absorbs it in a mystical state of apprehension in particular.

This fundamental tension, as well as others that seem to arise from Maimonides' professed commitment to both reason and revelation, were recognized by Maimonides' scholars. McCallum, identifies three strands of interpretation of the *Guide*'s tensions: harmonistic, naturalistic, and dialectical.[3] Harmonistic interpretations view the tensions within the *Guide* as arising from Maimonides' commitment to both reason and revelation, insisting that those tensions can be resolved.[4] Naturalistic interpretations insist that certain tensions within the *Guide* cannot be resolved. They emphasize the allegedly esoteric dimensions of the text, which are weaved together with exoteric teachings, in order to disguise and hide them. The esoteric teachings, written for the intellectual elite, are viewed as the true heart of the *Guide*.[5] Dialectical interpretations view the tensions within the *Guide* as fundamental for Maimonides' thought and as representing Maimonides' genuine commitments. They seek to keep them in dialectical balance.[6] In so doing, they tend to minimize the scope of the tensions, insisting that they do not amount to an outright contradiction,[7] that they are not formally contradictory in Maimonidean terms,[8] or that they lead to the same religious climax.[9]

In this paper, I propose a different hermeneutic key for reading the *Guide:* I propose that Maimonides does not attempt to *combine* two characterizations of God in his own theology, nor does he wish to show that various tensions can be maintained in dialectical balance as proponents of the "dialectical strategy" attempt to show. As I stated, I propose that Maimonides' project, in the *Guide*, is *not* to present a thesis concerning God, His nature or His relation (or the lack of which) to the world, but to present the great riddle, the great paradox around which our life with God is lived.[10] Realizing that we cannot escape the great paradox, Maimonides calls us to leap into it and embrace it.

3 Donald McCallum, *Maimonides' Guide for the Perplexed: Silence and Salvation* (Routledge, 2007). The distinction between "harmonistic" and "naturalistic" interpretations is borrowed from Arthur Hyman. See, Arthur Hyman, "Interpreting Maimonides", in *Maimonides: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Joseph A. Buijs (Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1988).

4 See, e.g., Julius Guttman, *Philosophies of Judaism: The History of Jewish Philosophy from Biblical Times to Franz Rosenzeig* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964).

5 See, e.g., Leo Strauss, "How to Begin to Study the Guide of the Perplexed". In *Guide of the Perplexed*, ed. Shlomo Pines (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1963). For a lucid critique of this strand of interpretation, see, e.g., Yair Lorberbaum, "On Contradictions, Rationality, Dialectics, and Esotericism in Maimonides's Guide of the Perplexed", *The Review of Metaphysics* 55, no. 4 (2002).

6 See, e.g., Marvin Fox, *Interpreting Maimonides: Studies in Methodology, Metaphysics and Moral Philosophy* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1990); Hanna Kasher, "Self-Cognizing Intellect and Negative Attributes in Maimonides' Theology", *Harvard Theological Review* 87, no. 4 (1994); Ithamar Gruenwald, "Maimonides' Quest beyond Philosophy and Prophecy", in *The Complete Writings: Philosophical and Historical Studies*, ed. Joel L. Kraemer (Oxford Univ. Press, 1991).

7 Kasher, "Self-Cognizing Intellect and Negative Attributes in Maimonides' Theology", 462.

8 Fox, *Interpreting Maimonides*, 86.

9 Gruenwald, "Maimonides' Quest beyond Philosophy and Prophecy", 155.

10 In Quine's terms, the paradox around which the *Guide* is built is a paradox of antinomy (distinguishable from veridical paradoxes and falsidical paradoxes). In paradoxes of antinomy, two chains of argument lead to contradictory results, each of which seems well supported; neither of which can be given up. See W. V. Quine, *The Ways of Paradox and Other Essays* (Harvard Univ. Press, 1976).

In describing the great paradox around which the *Guide* is built, it is useful to distinguish between the metaphysical, epistemological and semantic dimensions of Maimonides' conceptions of "absolute" and "qualified" transcendence.

IIa: Absolute Transcendence

Maimonides denies that there is a relation between God and the world in the context of his discussion of predication. Being concerned with the question whether we can *describe* God as relating to something created by Him, he relays the semantic issue to the metaphysical one:

> The subject of investigation and speculation is therefore the question whether there is between Him, may He be exalted, and any of the substances created by Him a true relation of some kind so that this relation might be predicated of Him. (I/52, 117).[11]

It is in this context that Maimonides makes a strong metaphysical claim, namely, that there is no relation between God and the world, and that such a relation could not be meaningfully applied to God:

> There is, in truth, no relation in any respect between Him and any of His creatures… How then could there subsist a relation between Him, may He be exalted, and any of the things created by Him, given the immense difference between them with regard to the true reality of their existence, than which there is no greater difference? (I/52 p. 118).

Maimonides explicates God's metaphysical transcendence in terms of God's incorporeality:

> There is no relation between God, may He be exalted, and time and place; and this is quite clear. For time is an accident attached to motion, when the notion of priority and posteriority is considered in the latter and when motion becomes numbered, as is made clear in the passages especially dealing with this subject. Motion, on the other hand, is one of the things attached to bodies, whereas God, may He be exalted, is not a body. Accordingly there is no relation between Him and time, and in the same way there is no relation between Him and place. (I/52 p. 117).

Epistemological transcendence naturally follows from Maimonides' denial of a relation between God and "any of His creatures". Indeed, Maimonides explicitly states that God's nature cannot be *known* by human beings:

> all men, those of the past and those of the future, affirm clearly that God, may He be exalted, cannot be apprehended by the intellects, and that none but He Himself can apprehend what He is, and that apprehension of Him consists in the inability to attain the ultimate term in apprehending Him. (I/59, p. 139).

Maimonides' convictions concerning God's metaphysical and epistemological transcendence shape his views of religious language. Maimonides insists that we cannot apply any predicate to God, as He is in Himself, including willing, knowing and existing:

> Without any doubt, neither power nor will exists in, and belongs to, the Creator in respect to His own essence; for He does not exercise His power on His own essence, nor can it be predicated of Him that He wills His own essence. (I/54, p. 122).

According to Maimonides, everything that is predicated of God is done so in a purely equivocal manner; he emphasizes that this applies to "existence" too:

> [T]he term 'existent' is predicated of Him, may He be exalted, and of everything that is other than He, in a purely equivocal sense. Similarly the terms "knowledge", "power", "will" and "life", as applied to Him, may He be exalted, and to those possessing knowledge, power, will and life, are purely equivocal, so that their meaning when they are predicated of Him is in no way like their meaning in other applications. Do not deem that they are used amphibolously. For when terms are used amphibolously they are predicated of two things between which there is a likeness in respect of some notion… Accordingly … the meaning of the qualificative attributions ascribed to Him and the meaning of the attributions known to us have nothing in common in any respect or in any mode; these attributions have in common only the name and nothing else. (I/ 56, p. 131).

11 All references to Maimonides within the text are to Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago Univ. Press, 1963).

I elsewhere argued, contrary to Seeskin, Davies and others, that when Maimonides insists that the meaning of, e.g., "knowledge", "power" and "existence", when applied to God, "is in no way like their meaning in other applications" (I/56, 131), he denies meaning to all *propositions* that purport to *refer* to God.[12] Indeed, Maimonides states:

> [I]t is impossible to represent oneself that a relation subsists between the intellect and color although, according to our school both of them are comprised by the same 'existence'. How then can a relation be represented between Him and what is other than He when there is no notion comprising in any respect both of the two, inasmuch as existence is, in our opinion, affirmed of Him, may He be exalted, and of what is other than He merely by way of absolute equivocation. (I/52, p. 117–118).

Maimonides, here, points to our inability to apply color terms to the concept of the intellect due to the fact that there is no relation between them. An attempt to do so clearly results in nonsense; indeed, an utterance, such as, "David's intellect is red" is nonsense. By analogy, it would be impossible to apply any concept whatsoever to the divine intellect, since no relation could subsist between them. An utterance attempting to describe the divine intellect would be nonsense in an even stricter sense than "David's intellect is red."

It, thus, seems to follow that if we conceive of utterances *about* God (whether biblical, post biblical, or Maimonidean) as propositions, that purport to say something about God, to describe Him, His will, or His actions, to the extent that they are truly *about* God, they must be judged meaningless. Given the mis-relation between God and the world, and given the fact that whatever meaning and/or definition that such attributes or actions can come to possess will be contaminated by their mundane origin and context, this seems inevitable. Thus, Maimonides' insistence that names are used equivocally in utterances about God is his insisting that, devoid of their ordinary meaning, the seeming names, attributes or actions do not come to possess a new one. In other words, Maimonides does not merely emphasize that utterances about God somehow miss the mark, as Seeskin maintains; he renders all our God talk, either non-propositional, perhaps poetic, as Lorberbaum maintains, or meaningless.[13]

Maimonides' austere view concerning religious language, despite appearances, is modified neither by his comments about attributes of action nor by his comments on negative predication. Maimonides seems to interpret biblical references to God's nature as references to His manner of acting: "Every attribute that is found in the books of the deity, may He be exalted, is … an attribute of His action and not an attribute of His essence…" (I/53, p. 121). Moreover, discussing Moses' request "Show me now Thy ways, that I may know Thee" (Exodus 33:13) Maimonides states:

> The answer to the two requests that He, may He be exalted, gave him consisted in His promising him to let him know all His attributes, making it known to him that they are His actions, and teaching him that His essence cannot be grasped as it really is. (I/54, 123).

As we have seen, however, Maimonides denies the application of relational attributes to God, insisting that there is no relation between God and the world. Thus, statements, which refer to "God's actions" cannot be taken at face value. Attributes of action cannot and, indeed, do not refer to God's own manner of acting in the world.[14] By "attributes of action" Maimonides means our human and perspectival tendency to interpret and describe certain worldly *realia* as effects, brought about by an agent. When we perceive embryos of living beings and the manners in which they are cared for by their caregivers, we tend to say of God that He is merciful. When we perceive calamities annihilating whole tribes or regions, exterminating both young and old, we tend to say that God is jealous and avenging. (I/54). Maimonides insists, however, that no conclusions concerning God's nature can be drawn on the basis of what we tend to misidentify as the effects of His

12 See N. Verbin, "Wittgenstein and Maimonides on God and the Limits of Language", *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 3, no. 2 (2011); Verbin, "Moses Maimonides on Job's Happiness and the Riddle of Divine Transcendence". For Seeskin's view, see Kenneth Seeskin, *Searching for a Distant God: The Legacy of Maimonides* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2000). For Davies' argument, see Davies Daniel, *Method and Metaphysics in Maimonides' Guide of the Perplexed* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2011).

13 Menachem Lorberbaum, *Dazzled by Beauty: Theology as Poetics in Hispanic Jewish Culture [In Hebrew]* (Ben Zvi Institute, 2011), 51–121.

14 See *The Guide of the Perplexed* I/52.

agency. Moreover, strictly speaking, Maimonides' God is not an agent and what we see are not the effects of His agency.

Given the potentially misleading effect of the use of "attributes of action", it appears that we are advised to climb above them to a more refined means of speaking about God, to negative predication, to negating in thought and speech what God is not:

> Know that the description of God, may He be cherished and exalted, by means of negations is the correct description — a description that is not affected by an indulgence in facile language and does not imply any deficiency with respect to God in general or in any particular mode (I/58, p. 134).

Maimonides' negative theology introduces a new "language game" into the life of faith. We do not merely negate various attributes (deficiencies) when using his *via negativa*, stating, for example, that God is not many, or that God is not finite. We also deny the appropriateness of applying attributes, any attribute whatsoever, to God. Using the analogy of the wall, which is *not* endowed with sight, Maimonides emphasizes that his *via negativa* involves double negations that cannot be replaced by positive utterances about God:

> Moreover, even those negations are not used with reference to or applied to Him, may He be exalted, except from the following point of view, which you know: one sometimes denies with reference to a thing something that cannot fittingly exist in it. Thus we say of a wall that it is not endowed with sight (I/58, p. 136).

Similarly, denying ignorance to God is not merely denying that God is ignorant of anything; in denying that God is ignorant we deny the relevance of the very concept of "knowledge" to Him. Thus, Maimonides' *via negativa* involves double negations that undo themselves. His *via negativa* reveals that it is not possible to know God's nature, to entertain thoughts and utter statements *about* Him:

> As everyone is aware that it is not possible, except through negation, to achieve an apprehension of that which is in our power to apprehend and that, on the other hand, negation does not give knowledge in any respect of the true reality of the thing with regard to which the particular matter in question is negated — all men, those of the past and those of the future, affirm clearly that God, may He be exalted, cannot be apprehended by the intellects, and that none but He Himself can apprehend what He is, and that apprehension of Him consists in the inability to attain the ultimate term in apprehending Him (I/59, p. 139).

We are, therefore, called to climb above negative predication as well. Maimonides' *via negativa* culminates in silence:

> The most apt phrase concerning this subject is the dictum occurring in the *Psalms*, *Silence is praise to Thee*, which interpreted signifies: silence with regard to You is praise (I/59, p. 139).

IIb: Qualified Transcendence

Parallel to Maimonides' conception of silence as revealing the sage's comprehension that God is wholly transcendent to the world and to his/her comprehension and language, we find Maimonides' emphasis on the role of God's articulated name, YHWH. Although Maimonides' views on negative predication and attributes of action do not modify his commitment to absolute semantic transcendence, his view of God's articulated name, which refers to God without stating anything about Him, does compromise it. Maimonides' commitments to absolute epistemological and metaphysical transcendence, too, are compromised in various ways in the *Guide*. As I noted in my introductory comments, metaphysical transcendence is compromised by his use of the metaphor of the divine intellectual overflow that flows into the human intellect that is ready to absorb it; epistemological transcendence is modified by the climactic mystical moment of contemplating the divine name. A great tension or, to be more precise, a paradox, thereby, emerges within the *Guide*. I shall start with the metaphysical and the epistemological dimensions and then turn to the semantic dimension.

Maimonides uses the metaphor of an overflow of intellect when speaking about God. He seems to be committed to the metaphor. Indeed, it features in a variety of issues in the *Guide*, among which are Maimonides' conceptions of cosmology, creation, revelation, prophecy and providence:

> Hence the action of the separate intellect is always designated as an overflow, being likened to a source of water that overflows in all directions and does not have one particular direction from which it draws while giving its bounty to others. For it springs forth from all directions and constantly irrigates all the directions nearby and afar… its action is constant as long as something has been prepared so that it is receptive of the permanently existing action, which has been interpreted as an overflow. Similarly with regard to the Creator, may His name be sublime. …. it has been said that the world derives from the overflow of God and that He has caused to overflow to it everything in it that is produced in time. In the same way it is said that He caused His knowledge to overflow to the prophets. (II/12, p. 279).

If there is an overflow of divine intellect into the world in general, (in creation or emanation) and into the philosopher/prophet, who is capable of absorbing it, in particular, in revelation, prophecy, or providence, then absolute transcendence: metaphysical and epistemic, is modified. God is placed in relation with the world and with (certain) human beings who are capable of apprehending Him.

Maimonides insists that the metaphor of the divine intellectual overflow does not designate a relation between God and the world:

> This term, I mean, 'overflow', is sometimes also applied in Hebrew to God, may He be exalted, with a view to likening Him to an overflowing spring of water, as we have mentioned. For nothing is more fitting as a simile to the action of one that is separate from matter than this expression, I mean 'overflow'. For we are not capable of finding the true reality of a term that would correspond to the true reality of the notion. For the mental representation of the action of one who is separate from matter is very difficult, in a way similar to the difficulty of the mental representation of the existence of one who is separate from matter. For just as the imagination cannot represent to itself an existent other than a body or a force in a body, the imagination cannot represent to itself an action taking place otherwise than through the immediate contact of an agent or at a certain distance and from one particular direction…. All this follows imagination, which is also in true reality the evil impulse. (II/12, 279–280).

Although Maimonides insists that the divine intellectual overflow that flows into the human intellect is immaterial and, therefore, does not place God and human beings in relation to each other, such insistence seems to carry no philosophical weight as far as the question of God's transcendence to the world is concerned. There seems to be — what may be characterized as — an "immaterial relation" between God and human beings, which reaches its peak in a moment of contemplation of the divine name. In other words, if there is an overflow of divine intellect, which certain human beings absorb at certain climactic moments, then God cannot be construed as wholly transcendent to the world.[15]

Maimonides insists that this climactic moment, during which dichotomies collapse, this moment which is both temporal and a-temporal, both a moment of divine immanence and of transcendence, is a moment during which propositional knowledge about God is *not* conveyed. In other words, Maimonides turns away from "objectivity" to "subjectivity" in his characterization of the climactic moment during which the divine intellectual overflow is absorbed. The climactic moment of absorption and apprehension, and the knowledge that is conveyed during that moment are described in mystical terms, as intense passionate love, as joy, light, or beauty[16]:

> Thus, all the philosophers say: We are dazzled by His beauty, and He is hidden from us because of the intensity with which He becomes manifest, just as the sun is hidden to eyes that are too weak to apprehend it. (I/59, p., 139).

Since this apprehension does not involve propositional content, it is a fleeting mystical apprehension:

> Sometimes truth flashes out to us so that we think it is day, and then matter and habit in their various forms conceal it so that we find ourselves again in an obscure night, almost as were at first. (I/Introduction, p. 7).

15 Even-Chen bites the bullet and argues that Maimonides was committed to the metaphor of the divine intellectual overflow and to an immanent conception of God, akin in various respect, to Spinoza's conception. See, e.g., Alexander Even-Chen, "Maimonides' Theory of Positive Attributes [in Hebrew]", *Daat: A Journal of Jewish Philosophy and Kabbalah*, no. 63 (2008).

16 I am here joining the minority view of interpreters who read the *Guide* as philosophical mysticism. For its prominent proponents, see, David R. Blumenthal, *Philosophic Mysticism: Studies in Rational Religion* (Bar Ilan Univ. Press, 2006); Gideon Freudenthal, "The Philosophical Mysticism of Maimonides", in *Maimonides and Mysticism*, ed. A. Elqayam and D. Schwartz (Bar Ilan Univ. Press, 2009).

In his discussion of divine providence, Maimonides characterizes the climactic moment of apprehension to which Moses, Aaron and Miriam have ascended in terms of "intense passionate love", in terms of a "divine kiss":

> [W]hen a perfect man is stricken with years and approaches death, this apprehension increases very powerfully, joy over this apprehension and a great love for the object of apprehension become stronger, until the soul is separated from the body at that moment in this state of pleasure. Because of this the Sages have indicated with reference to the deaths of Moses Aaron, and Miriam that the three of them died by a kiss… Their purpose was to indicate that the three of them died in the pleasure of this apprehension due to the intensity of passionate love. (III/51, p. 627–628).

The prophet-sage does not come to know anything about God that he or she can convey by means of propositions that can be true or false. Nevertheless, metaphysical and epistemological transcendence are modified during this moment, which takes place in time.

Although there is no propositional content to the mystical moment of apprehension, words do play a role in it. Semantic transcendence is also modified. As I pointed out, it is modified by the existence of the "articulated name", YHWH, which refers to God. In other words, although the Maimonidean sage is not in possession of *objective* knowledge about God, although he cannot speak *about* God, he can *refer to* God. He can do so by means of God's proper name YHWH.[17] Maimonides construes YHWH as a vocal incarnation of the divine:

> All the names of God, may He be exalted, that are to be found in any of the books derive from actions. There is nothing secret in this matter. The only exception is one name: namely *Yod, He Vav, He*. This is the name of God, may He be exalted, that has been originated without any derivation, and for this reason it is called the *articulated name*. This means that this name gives a clear unequivocal indication of His essence, may He be exalted. … in such a way that none of the created things is associated with Him in this indication. (I/ 61, 147–148).

The Maimonidean sage who has cleansed his mind of the false images of God that it tends to produce absorbs the divine intellectual overflow, and contemplates the divine name in a moment of intense passionate love. It is this content-less mystical contemplation that constitutes the Maimonidean sage as a sage.

Thus, Maimonides seems to negotiate the tension between divine transcendence and immanence by turning away from objectivity to subjectivity, away from the pursuit for objective knowledge about God, His nature, will or actions, to the pursuit of a subjective *state* of contemplating Him. The highest truth cannot be conveyed by means of propositions, which can be true or false. It is made possible and realized through one's becoming a full human subject, a perfected human intellect; it is achieved in subjectivity, as Maimonides conceives of it. In a way, as far as the highest truth is concerned, "truth is subjectivity", for Maimonides, in the convergence of the "subjective" with the "objective" during the climactic state of contemplation.

Are we to climb beyond subjectivity too? After we have climbed beyond God's attributes of action and beyond negative predication, are we to climb beyond the articulated name as well, and beyond the mystical "pleasure of apprehending Him"? Maimonides' shift to subjectivity does not provide an answer to this question, nor does his shift to subjectivity solve or dissolve the tension between the absolute conception of divine transcendence and the modified one, within the *Guide*. Is Maimonides committed to God's absolute transcendence to the world, to language and understanding, or, does he maintain that God is an intellect overflowing to the world and absorbed by those individuals that are ready to do so in a mystical moment of apprehension, during which God's articulated name, YHWH is contemplated? Can this *paradox*, on which the *Guide* is built, be resolved? Should we *aim* to resolve it? Relying on Kierkegaard's use of "paradox" and the "absurd", I shall propose that Maimonides' purpose is to present the paradox, not to solve it.

17 For a lucid discussion of the difference between meaning and reference within the *Guide*, see Ehud Z. Benor, "Meaning and Reference in Maimonides' Negative Theology", *Harvard Theological Review* 88, no. 3 (1995).

III. KIERKEGAARD

I rely on a Wittgensteinian justification for treating Maimonides and Kierkegaard in tandem. As Wittgenstein has recommended, I am looking for a perspicuous representation of the tension between "divine transcendence" and "divine immanence" by assembling reminders and connecting links.

In his "Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough", Wittgenstein provides "reminders" to various religious practices, which Frazer views as crude mistakes. In providing those "reminders", Wittgenstein wishes to offer a perspicuous representation that would help us perceive a "formal connection":

> [A]n hypothetical connecting link should in this case do nothing but direct the attention to the similarity, the relatedness of the *facts*. As one might illustrate the internal relation of a circle to an ellipse by gradually converting an ellipse into a circle; but *not in order to assert that a certain ellipse, actually, historically, has emerged from a circle* (evolutionary hypothesis) but only in order to sharpen our eye for a formal connection.[18]

In like manner, I believe that despite their differing historical, religious and ritualistic commitments, observing the manners in which our reminders, Maimonides and Kierkegaard, engage with their commitments to divine transcendence and divine immanence may "sharpen our eye for a formal connection"; it may shed new light on each of them separately, as well as on the meaning of the tension and its role within the life of faith, in general.[19]

IIIa: Kierkegaard on Divine Hiddenness

Kierkegaard's concern with the manner in which we are to understand our relation to God and God's relation to us, while being phrased in different terms than the Maimonidean, betrays various similarities to the Maimonidean account. Those similarities can be perceived particularly in the dialectics between God's hiddenness and His self-revelation.

In both the pseudonymous and the non-pseudonymous works, Kierkegaard insists that God is never *directly* present to us, never *directly* revealed. He emphasizes the ambiguity of our experience:

> The works from which I want to demonstrate his [God's] existence do not immediately and directly exist, not at all. Or are the wisdom in nature and the goodness or wisdom in Governance right in front of our noses? Do we not encounter the most terrible spiritual trials here, and is it ever possible to be finished with all these trials? …I still do not demonstrate God's existence from such an order of things…[20]

He insists that God is present to us, but never *directly* so: "is it not the case that God is so unnoticeable, so hidden yet present in his work…?"[21] He emphasizes that there is no *direct* transition into faith from any observable objective fact or thesis; seeing God, believing, always involves a *subjective leap*, an *inward* act of will:

> Nature is certainly the work of God, but only the work is *directly* present, not God. With regard to the individual human being, is this not acting like an illusive author, who nowhere sets forth his result in block letters or provides it beforehand in a preface? And why is God illusive? Precisely because he is truth and in being illusive seeks to keep a person from untruth. The observer does not glide *directly* to the result but on his own must concern himself with finding it and thereby break the *direct* relation. But this break is the actual breakthrough of inwardness, an act of self-activity, the first designation of truth as inwardness.[22]

Like Maimonides, for Kierkegaard too, the emphasis on the "breakthrough of inwardness", i.e., on subjectivity, has to do with God's transcendence to the material world. God is not an object of perception.

18 Ludwig Wittgenstein, "Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough". In *Philosophical Occasions 1912–1951* (Hackett Publishing Company, 1993), 133.

19 For more on the Wittgensteinian method in approaching questions in philosophy in general and in philosophy of religion in particular, see N. Verbin, "Martyrdom: A Philosophical Perspective", *Philosophical Investigations* 35, no. 1 (2012): 69–71.

20 Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Howard V. Hong and Hong, Edna H. (Princeton Univ. Press, 1985), 42.

21 Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Howard V. Hong and Hong, Edna H. (Princeton Univ. Press, 1992), Vol I, 244.

22 Ibid., 243–44. The italics are mine.

Kierkegaard, like Maimonides, emphasizes that the "grammar" of "God" is different from the "grammar" of physical objects. God is never present to us as a public observable medium-sized object, on whose existence or nature we can all agree. He is hidden in creation.[23] Perceiving God, therefore, involves "inwardness" and "self-activity". It is in one's *inwardness* that one perceives God "out there":

> No anonymous author can more slyly hide himself, and no maieutic can more carefully recede from a direct relation than God can. He is in the creation, everywhere in the creation, but *he is not there directly*, and only when the single individual turns inward into himself (consequently only in the inwardness of self-activity) does he become aware and capable of seeing God.[24]

Construing the tension between divine transcendence and immanence in terms of the dialectics between divine hiddenness and divine presence, Kierkegaard, similarly to Maimonides, seems to negotiate the tension by shifting from objectivity to subjectivity and inwardness.

Since God is never *directly* revealed, Kierkegaard points out that the logic of faith *qua* choice, *qua* subjective commitment, is made perspicuous through the ordinary, not the remarkable. Locating faith in the realm of the objectively remarkable belongs to idolatrous paganism, and its confused attempt to disambiguate an ambiguous reality: "Direct recognizability is specifically characteristic of the idol."[25] He states:

> All paganism consists in this, that God is related directly to a human being, as the remarkably striking to the amazed. But the spiritual relationship with God in truth, that is inwardness, is first conditioned by the actual breakthrough of inward deepening that corresponds to the divine cunning that God has nothing remarkable, nothing at all remarkable, about him — indeed, he is so far from being remarkable that he is invisible, and thus one does not suspect that he is there, although his invisibility is in turn his omnipresence… his very visibility would annul his omnipresence. This relation between omnipresence and invisibility is like the relation between mystery and revelation…[26]

The extraordinary and remarkable obscures God's hiddenness. It misleads us into thinking that if we had access to the remarkable, God would have been immediately and objectively present to us; it misleads us into thinking that if we had access to the extraordinary, we would have had a direct transition into faith. Kierkegaard, however, emphasizes that no fact or event *directly* leads to God; no event is *directly* seen as a miracle. Kierkegaard emphasizes that miracles and demonstrations, like everything else, are ambiguous:

> demonstrations can at best serve to make a person aware, so that made aware he can now come to the point: whether he will believe or he will be offended. The demonstrations are still ambiguous… Only in the choice is the heart disclosed (…) whether a person will believe or be offended.[27]

And:

> The miracle can demonstrate nothing, for if you do not believe him to be who he says he is, then you deny the miracle. The miracle can make aware — now you are in the tension, and it depends upon what you choose, offense or faith; it is your heart that must be disclosed.[28]

Kierkegaard emphasizes that Christ, too, appears ambiguous. In other words, not only is God hidden in His creation but He is also hidden in His revelation and Incarnation. Christ walks incognito on earth.[29] His divinity is hidden in his humanity. It is not an objective given, like the color of his hair, his weight or height. One cannot perceive it by simply looking.[30] Kierkegaard construes the transition into disciple-

23 In this paper, I focus on the similarities between Maimonides and Kierkegaard. There are significant differences in their construal of divine hiddenness, which have to do with Kierkegaard's notion of God as an "illusive author". These differences merit a thorough discussion, which I cannot undertake here.

24 Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*, 243.

25 Søren Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, ed. Howard V. Hong and Hong, Edna H. (Princeton Univ. Press, 1991), 136.

26 Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*, 245.

27 Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, 96.

28 Ibid., 97.

29 See, e. g., ibid., 127–33.

30 "One cannot *know* anything at all about Christ; he is the paradox, the object of faith, exists only for faith. But all historical communication is the communication of *knowledge*; consequently one can come to know nothing about Christ from history." (*Practice in Christianity*, 25).

ship in terms of *contemporaneity* with Christ, emphasizing that contemporaneity is not to be understood historically. It involves seeing-in or through the ambiguity, through his humanity, through his suffering and lowliness. Seeing through the ambiguity is relating subjectively — not objectively to Christ.[31] Recognizing the Jesus of history as the Christ of faith, therefore, involves a leap, indeed, the *greatest* leap, the *greatest* inwardness, and the most passionate subjectivity, as we shall see.

IIIb: From Divine Hiddenness to Offense

The challenge of discipleship goes beyond reckoning with God's hiddenness. Neither Christ nor his disciples can *directly communicate* who Christ is. Kierkegaard uses various literary means including a complex net of pseudonyms, literary characters and genres in order to show what cannot be directly said. Much has been written about these issues.[32] I will not rehearse it. In this context, I wish merely to point to some of his comments on different secrets.

Kierkegaard distinguishes between accidental secrets and essential secrets. Accidental secrets can be understood directly as soon as they are made public. The secret that lies at the heart of the life of faith is an essential secret, according to him. It cannot be formulated, expressed or communicated directly. Indirect communication is the only possible means to convey it and to facilitate its appropriation:

> It is possible to distinguish between an essential secret and an accidental one. For example, what has been said in a privy council is an accidental secret as long as it is not publicly known, because the statement itself can be understood directly as soon as it is made public… an essential secret… could not be communicated directly… Everything subjective, which on account of its dialectical inwardness evades the direct form of expression, is an essential secret.[33]

Similarly to Maimonides, Kierkegaard too points to the difficulty to communicate "religious knowledge", and to the unusual means that must be employed when seeking to *gesture* at it. He emphasizes that the embodiment of the paradox in the figure of the teacher, Christ, renders direct communication impossible: "when the teacher, who is inseparable from and more essential than the teaching, is a paradox, then all direct communication is impossible."[34] He emphasizes that Christ is the sign of contradiction:

> If he is the sign of contradiction, then he cannot give a direct communication — that is, the statement can be entirely direct, but the fact that he is involved, that he, the sign of contradiction, says it, makes it indirect communication.[35]

Not only are Christ's statements about himself, and the disciples' statements about him opaque and indirect, but they are also offensive and repulsive. The impossibility of direct communication and recognizability is enhanced by the offense:

> Thus, the possibility of offense … is the negative mark of the God-man. For if there were no possibility of offense, there would be direct recognizability, and then the God-man would be an idol; then direct recognizability is paganism.[36]

The repulsion of the offense is the stumbling block for faith:

31 For more on discipleship and contemporaneity with Christ, see, N. Verbin, "Maimonides and Kierkegaard on Fictionalism, Divine Hiddenness and the Scope for Inter-Religious Dialogue", in *Religious Truth and Identity in an Age of Plurality*, ed. Peter Jonkers and Oliver J. Wiertz (Routledge, 2019).

32 See, e.g., James Conant, "Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and Nonsense", in *Pursuits of Reason*: *Essays in Honor of Stanley Cavell*, ed. Stanley Cavell et al. (Texas Tech Univ. Press, 1993); James Conant, "Putting Two and Two Together: Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and the Point of View for Their Work as Authors", in *Philosophy and the Grammar of Religious Belief*, ed. Timothy Tessin and Mario von der Ruhr (Macmillan, 1995); Jamie M. Ferreira, "The Point Outside the World: Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein on Nonsense, Paradox and Religion", *Religious Studies* 30, no. 1 (1994); Genia Schönbaumsfeld, *A Confusion of the Spheres: Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein on Philosophy and Religion* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2010).

33 Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*, 79–80.

34 Ibid., 123.

35 Ibid., 135.

36 Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, 143.

> the possibility of offense is the stumbling block for all, whether they choose to believe or they are offended. Therefore the communication begins with a repulsion. But to begin with the repulsion is to deny direct communication.[37]

The greater the offense, the greater the contradiction, the greater is the passion of subjectivity that is needed, and the greater is the leap into discipleship.

We can, thus, see that the hiddenness of the divine lies at the heart of the life of faith, for Kierkegaard, or, to be more precise, an offense, a paradox, the sign of contradiction, lies at its heart. An essential secret shapes faith as inwardness, as subjectivity, which cannot be communicated directly, but can only be shown.[38] It cannot be directly described but has to be appropriated.

Like the different voices in Maimonides' *Guide*, Kierkegaard's pseudonymous and non-pseudonymous authorship gestures at the immensity of the challenge of "showing" the secret, of speaking indirectly about God, of appropriating in subjectivity the divine "truth". Unlike what Strauss had supposed, the challenge is not an accidental, political one. It is not because the "*Guide* is devoted to the explanation of an esoteric doctrine" that those multiple voices are employed. Rather, to use Wittgensteinian terminology, since the logic of God is different from the logic of ordinary objects, and since a paradox lies in its heart, the "doctrine" itself cannot be directly formulated and presented.[39]

IIIc: Paradox

Much of the discussion about "paradox" and the "absurd" in Kierkegaard, has focused on his religious epistemology and on his conception of the relation between faith and reason. Much of it revolved around the question whether Kierkegaard construes faith as rational, irrational or a-rational, whether the "contradiction" is a logical one or whether it is "merely" the "improbable" that the Christian is supposed to embrace.[40] Although rich and interesting, I believe that this discussion is in certain respects, misdirected.

As we have seen, Kierkegaard uses different terms, e.g., "offense", "secret", "paradox", "contradiction", "absurd", "repulsion", to emphasize the enmity between Christianity and the world and thereby, the difficulty to become a Christian. He uses them in different contexts and manners, thereby emphasizing the different ways in which being a Christian is scandalous, when considered against "prudence" and "common sense". Indeed, Kierkegaard revives the sense of "scandal" involved in following Christ, and in faith as such. In a characteristic passage in "What We Learn from the Lilies in the Field and from the Birds of the Air" he characterizes the enmity between Christianity and the world, with the following stark words:

> Love of God is hatred of the world and love of the world is hatred of God; therefore this is the colossal point of contention: either love or hate; therefore this is the point where the most terrible struggle carried on in the world must be fought, and where is this place? In a person's most innermost being.[41]

37 Ibid., 139.

38 The question whether the distinction between saying and showing can be substantiated in general, and the question of the extent to which something along its lines is employed and/or substantiated by either Maimonides or Kierkegaard is a genuine one, which I cannot address in this context. For more, see Lorberbaum, *Dazzled by Beauty*, 46–48; Conant, "Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and Nonsense"; Conant, "Putting Two and Two Together"; Ferreira, "The Point Outside the World"; Schönbaumsfeld, *A Confusion of the Spheres*.

39 Leo Strauss, "The Literary Character of the Guide of the Perplexed", in *Leo Strauss on Maimonides*: *The Complete Writings*, ed. Kenneth H. Green (Univ. of Chicago Press, 2013), 359.

40 Evans argues that Christian faith, for Kierkegaard, does not involve a formal contradiction but improbability. As such, it is neither irrational nor trans-rational. See, e.g., Evans Stephen C., "Is Kierkegaard an Irrationalist? Reason, Paradox and Faith", *Religious Studies* 25, no. 3 (1989); Evans Stephen C., "Faith and Reason in Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript", in *Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript*: *A Critical Guide*, ed. Rick A. Furtak (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010). Distinguishing between immanent faith and Christian faith, Miller emphasizes that when describing "Christian faith", Kierkegaard does not make do with the "paradox"; rather, he goes beyond the "uncertain" to the "objectively absurd", and beyond "paradox" to the "absolute paradox." See Ed L. Miller, "At the Center of Kierkegaard: An Objective Absurdity", *Religious Studies* 33, no. 4 (1997): 438. In emphasizing "absolute paradox" and "objective absurdity" as characteristic of Christian faith, Miller construes them as violating reason; he, thereby, construes Kierkegaardian faith as irrational.

41 Søren Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, ed. Howard V. Hong and Hong, Edna H. (Princeton Univ. Press, 2009), 205.

Paying attention to the very diversity and richness of the terms "offense", "repulsion", "paradox", "absurd", and to the diverse contexts in which they are used reveals, at the very outset, that the hatred, the repulsion, extends beyond logic and epistemology.

Moreover, it is hard to suppose that Kierkegaard had considered the repulsion of the logical and epistemological to be of greater importance and a greater impediment to faith than the repulsion of the psychological and social. Indeed, in certain passages, Kierkegaard emphasizes that the repulsion is not to be *reduced* to a logical or epistemological one; he emphasizes that the offense is not to be understood as a mere doctrinal matter:

> Christianity is no doctrine; all talk of offense with regard to it as doctrine is a misunderstanding…No, offense is related either to Christ or to being a Christian oneself.[42]

Kierkegaard, here, emphasizes that the offense is not a theoretical doctrinal matter but an existential one. Taking this to heart, I shall attempt to briefly gesture toward several existential aspects of the enmity between Christianity and the world, and toward the scandal that Christianity provokes, as Kierkegaard conceives of it.

The terminology of "offense" features highly in *Works of Love* and in *Practice in Christianity*. In *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard focuses on what he characterizes in *Practice in Christianity* as the "offense of lowliness", on the suffering that the Christian will endure on account of his Christian commitments. He characterizes the commandment to love the neighbor as an "offense: "the commandment [to love the neighbor] … to flesh and blood is an offense and to wisdom foolishness."[43] He points to the double danger that it involves, emphasizing that the Christian cannot escape it:

> What Christianity calls self-denial specifically and essentially involves a double danger, otherwise the self-denial is not Christian self-denial… The merely human idea of self-denial is this: give-up your self-loving desires, cravings and plans — then you will be esteemed and honored and loved as righteous and wise...The Christian idea of self-denial is: give-up your self-loving desires and cravings, give-up your self-seeking plans and purposes so that you truly work unselfishly for the good — and then, for that very reason, put up with being abominated almost as a criminal, insulted and ridiculed. For that very reason, if it is required of you, put up with being executed as a criminal…[44]

There is no way, for the Kierkegaardian believer to bypass the double danger, to bypass offense, to bypass what the world views as obtuseness and lunacy.[45]

In *Practice in Christianity*, Kierkegaard construes the offense in relation to both Christ's lowliness and to his loftiness and, thereby, explicitly to the "paradox":

> The God-man is the paradox, absolutely the paradox. Therefore, it is altogether certain that the understanding must come to a standstill on it. If a person is not conscious of offense at the loftiest, he will be aware of it in relation to the lowliness.[46]

Kierkegaard emphasizes that it is primarily in the encounter with the suffering Christ, with Christ's lowliness and with the offensive conceptions of "help", "rest", "compassion" or "consolation" that he introduces, that enmity with the world is experienced in its starkest forms: "The possibility of offense lies in the contradiction that the remedy seems infinitely worse than the sickness."[47] And:

> But the inviter was indeed this divine compassion — and therefore he was sacrificed, and therefore even those who suffered fled from him; they understood (and humanly speaking, very correctly) that when it comes to most human misery one is better helped by remaining what one is then by being helped by him.[48]

42 Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, 106.
43 Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, ed. Howard V. Hong and Hong, Edna H. (Princeton Univ. Press, 1995), 59.
44 Ibid., 194–95.
45 Ibid., 195.
46 Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, 82–83.
47 Ibid., 110.
48 Ibid., 60.

The understanding's standstill, the seemingly logical and epistemological dimensions of the "absurd", of the "paradox" are directly linked to nature of the remedy, which is worse than the sickness, in *Practice in Christianity*. They are directly linked to the incomprehensibility of choosing such a remedy, choosing such suffering. The same is true of many of the *Postscript's* passages where Kierkegaard characterizes faith as believing *against* the understanding and as a *martyrdom* of the understanding:

> Where understanding despairs, faith is already present in order to make the despair properly decisive, least the movement of faith become a transaction within the haggling territory of the understanding. *But to believe against the understanding is a martyrdom*… The speculative thinker is exempted from this martyrdom.[49]

The understanding's martyrdom, here, is not a logical, epistemological matter. The understanding, with its evaluation of probabilities and outcomes is the means through which we aim to realize our ordinary purposes, desires and wishes; it is immersed in the world and in the world's conceptions of what we should aim to have and to be. Kierkegaard, thus, emphasizes:

> …to believe with the understanding cannot be done at all, because the person who believes with the understanding talks only about job and wife and fields and oxen and the like, which in no way are the objects of faith.[50]

Faith involves the sacrifice of such purposes, the martyrdom of such goods. It is in that sense that Kierkegaard first and foremost emphasizes that faith is a crucifixion of the understanding.

Several passages in the *Postscript*, however, seem to turn from "prudence" to "reason" in their use of "paradox" and "the absurd", suggesting that the paradox goes *against* both, suggesting that the paradox includes the irrational: "The paradox emerges when the eternal truth and existing are placed together."[51] And:

> The absurd is that the eternal truth has come into existence in time, that God has come into existence, has been born, has grown up, etc. has come into existence exactly as an individual human being.[52]

The synthesis of the "finite" and the "infinite" in subjectivity in general, and in the God-man in particular, is identified here as the *locus* of the "absurd".

The clearest expression of offense, as going against *both* prudence and reason, phrased in the terminology of "paradox" and "absurd", is manifest in Abraham's binding of Isaac. Kierkegaard emphasizes that Abraham's faith goes against our ordinary prudential calculations of "benefit" and "loss": "[Abraham] had faith by virtue of the absurd, for human calculation was out of the question…"[53]; "but to be able to lose one's understanding and along with it everything finite…"[54]; "he [Abraham] left behind his worldly understanding and he took along his faith."[55] Since the "understanding" is related to "the finite world"[56], to finite ends, going against it is "absurd" and incomprehensible: "Abraham I cannot understand; in a certain sense I can learn nothing from him except to be amazed."[57]

Abraham's "crucifixion of the understanding", however, has logical, epistemological and semantic dimensions as well, as expressed in the following famous words of Johannes de Silentio; such formulations seem to refute any attempt to limit the "paradox" that Kierkegaard places at the center of the life of faith to the rationally improbable:

> The absurd does not belong to the differences that lie within the proper domain of the understanding. It is not identical with the improbable, the unexpected, the unforeseen. The moment the knight executed the act of resignation, he was convinced of the impossibility, humanly speaking; that was the conclusion of the

49 Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*, 233–34; my italics.
50 Ibid., 233.
51 Ibid., 208.
52 Ibid., 210.
53 Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, ed. Howard V. Hong and Hong, Edna H. (Princeton Univ. Press, 1983), 35.
54 Ibid., 36.
55 Ibid., 17.
56 Ibid., 47.
57 Ibid., 37.

> understanding, and he had sufficient energy to think it. But in the infinite sense it was possible… in the finite world where it dominates this having was and continues to be an impossibility. The knight of faith realizes this just as clearly; consequently, he can be saved only by the absurd, and this he grasps by faith. Consequently, he acknowledges the impossibility, and in the very same moment he believes the absurd, for if he wants to imagine that he has faith without passionately acknowledging the impossibility with his whole heart and soul, he is deceiving himself…[58]

De Silentio's words, here, cannot be taken as a positive description of Abraham's faith. "Believing the absurd" is not a doxastic description. Rather, de Silentio's words gesture at Abraham's incomprehensibility. De Silentio uses language to draw its own limits. It is, here, that Kierkegaard emphasizes the relation between the psychological and the logical, between the social and political, and the epistemological. The Christian "offense" undermines them all. The paradox encompasses all.

In other words, in his various uses of "absurd", "paradox", "offense", etc., including those that appear in *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard emphasizes the infinite distance between Christianity and the world; he portrays faith as a scandal both to prudence/understanding and to reason; he, thereby, emphasizes the greatness of the leap of faith, the greatness of the passion of subjectivity, the greatness of the riddle of our life with God.

The paradox, the offense, will not be undone in time, for Kierkegaard. It is an essential feature of living the life of faith: "the paradox is not a transient form of the relation between the religious in the strictest sense and the existing person…"[59] "Offense" and the "double danger" of Christianity too, will not be undone in time, according to him. Thus, we are obliged to "stop with the paradox…"[60] We ought not aim to tone it down, nor are we to aim to solve, dissolve or resolve it.[61] Indeed, Kierkegaard's whole authorship can be understood as directed at presenting the tensions, at presenting the great paradox in its manifold manifestations, as a "contradiction", an "offense", a "repulsion", a horror, as lunacy and obtuseness. Placing it at the center of the Christian life, *together with* "the reflection of eternal salvation"[62] joy and blessedness, he pushes the believer further into the contradiction, further into "offense" and the "absurd", while insisting on the presence of the "eternal" in it.[63]

IV. STOPPING WITH THE PARADOX

Borrowing from Kierkegaard, from his refusal to negotiate the tension between divine transcendence and immanence, and from his emphasis on the indispensable role of the paradox within the life of faith, we can now return to the *Guide*. Placing the *Guide* next to Kierkegaard reveals the availability of a different interpretative strategy for reading it. Instead of attempting to resolve the great contradiction around which it is built, or to place its constituents in dialectical balance, we can view it as a book whose purpose is to *show* the great contradiction, to *present* it.

The significance of this hermeneutic key for reading the *Guide* does not depend on the limitations of other interpretative strategies. It lies (if at all) with the perspicuity of the representation, with the light that it can shed on our understanding of Maimonides, Kierkegaard, and key religious notions. Indeed, key religious concepts, e.g., revelation, providence and prophecy, appear as "riddles" that embody the paradox between divine transcendence and immanence. Considering Maimonides and Kierkegaard in tandem reveals that these concepts cannot be construed as "objective" *realia*, analogous to ordinary his-

58 Ibid., 46–47.
59 Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*, 182.
60 Ibid., 218.
61 As Law notes in relation to anti Climacus' engagement with the Chalcedonian definition: "Anti Climacus does not seek ways to resolve the tensions of the Chalcedonian Definitions, but heightens these tensions still further." David R. Law, "The Existential Chalcedonian Christology of Kierkegaard's Practice in Christianity", *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook* (2010): 149.
62 Søren Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses and The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress*, ed. Howard V. Hong and Hong, Edna H. (Princeton Univ. Press, 1997), 175.
63 For more on the two aspects of "faith", the horror and the joy, see my N. Verbin, "Three Knights of Faith on Job's Suffering and its Defeat", *International Journal for Philosophy and Theology* 78, no. 4–5 (2017).

torical empirical events. It reveals that "subjectivity" and "inwardness" are internally related to the logic of such terms.

Subjectivity, however, does not provide a mediation for the contradiction, as both Maimonides and Kierkegaard reveal; subjectivity is the *locus* of the paradox between divine transcendence and immanence. It is where the paradox shows itself in its most poignant forms, be it in the Maimonidean intellect's contemplation of the divine name that is both in time and in eternity, both transcendent and immanent, or in the Kierkegaardian synthesis of the temporal with the eternal that is fully realized in the figure of Jesus Christ, the God-man.

There is, indeed, an analogy between Kierkegaard's God-man and Maimonides' conception of God's proper name YHWH. Both bear "the sign of contradiction". God's articulated name, YHWH, which refers to God with no equivocation, is the divine incarnate — not in flesh — but in word: letter/sound/logos. Like the God-man, God's articulated name, YHWH, exists in a spacio-temporal dimension and "at the same time", embodies the divine, or, as Maimonides puts it, gives an unequivocal indication of His essence. Construing their philosophical works and philosophical outlooks around their "sign of contradiction", Maimonides and Kierkegaard place their "sign of contradiction" at the center of the religious life, of devotion, piety and ritual. In so doing, they argue that the paradox is an indispensable one and that we are to stop with the paradox.

A "perspicuous representation" involves recognizing the differences too; in this case, among others, are their different manners of presenting the paradox and their conceptions of what living the paradox involves. While both Maimonides and Kierkegaard, each in his own way, boldly and unapologetically present the paradox as the ground on which the religious life is lived, Kierkegaard does so explicitly and openly. He characterizes the God-man as the "sign of contradiction", as a "paradox". He presents the paradox in its offensive form, naming it a "paradox", naming it an "offense", an "absurd", characterizing it as incomprehensible and repulsive, and letting it stand as such. Maimonides, unlike him, does so covertly; he hides the paradox. Maimonides does so particularly in the *Guide's* Introduction, where he discusses contradictions in general and the *Guide's* contradictions in particular, characterizing the *Guide's* contradictions as pedagogically or politically motivated. Through these discussions, Maimonides leads his readers astray into seeking ways to reconcile the *Guide's* contradictions, or to do away with them, instead of letting them stand. The *Guide's* Introduction is, indeed, the most efficient component of the hiding mechanism that Maimonides employs to confuse his untutored reader.

Not only is their indirect communication different but also is its appropriation. Living the paradox is different for each of them. Although leaping into the paradox involves inner struggle with the body and its passions, the struggle develops differently for each of them. While for Kierkegaard, the struggle is an endless one, necessarily involving suffering, sacrifice and martyrdom, for Maimonides, the struggle ends in a happy state of self-transcendence. The Maimonidean sage who reaches such a state no longer struggles with the body and its passions but wholly transcends it, coming to live a split existence of body and mind: his intellect is wholly turned toward God while the body continues to mind its own affairs and to endure its own contingencies. Maimonides describes the sage's manner of transcending his body and its passions, and the world's contingencies as a whole, with the following words:

> And there may be a human individual who, through his apprehension of the true realities and his joy in what he has apprehended, achieves a state in which he talks with people and is occupied with his bodily necessities while his intellect is wholly turned toward Him, may He be exalted, so that in his heart he is always in His presence, may he be exalted, while outwardly he is with people, in the sort of way described by the poetical parables that have been invented for these notions: I sleep but my heart waketh… (III/51, p. 623).

Thus, while loving God means suffering, for Kierkegaard, it is uninterrupted happiness and joy, for Maimonides.

Is this difference between Maimonides and Kierkegaard as acute as it seems? If the hermeneutic key that I propose is at all useful then we may wish to apply it "backwards" to the seemingly more minor tensions and contradictions within the *Guide*. It may be no longer clear whether those seemingly minor contradictions are to be seen as included in the *Guide's* great project of showing the great contradiction

between divine transcendence and immanence, or whether they are to be reconciled (by harmonization or by giving-up on the seemingly exoteric components of the *Guide*), and dissolved.

The *Guide's* two conceptions of divine providence and of happiness may be seen as an instance of this dilemma.[64] In his discussion of Job (III/22, 23), a contemplative conception of divine providence and of happiness emerges, according to which the wise person who is protected by God's providence is *not* free from physical harm, pain and loss; rather, s/he is free from the suffering and distress that enduring such contingencies characteristically produces, since s/he ascribes no significance to them, and, as we have seen, transcends them. However, in the *Guide* III/17–18 and particularly in various passages in the *Guide* III/51, Maimonides presents a different conception of divine providence, and of happiness, according to which the wise person is guarded against *all* types of harm, physical and emotional, against loss, pain and suffering.[65] Does Maimonides reject one of these conceptions of divine providence and happiness, presumably the latter one, presenting it for the sake of the untutored reader as a useful myth, without embracing it? Or does Maimonides wish to show that two different and incompatible conceptions of divine providence lie at the heart of the Jewish religious life, maintaining that they give rise to different religious responses, outlooks and challenges, and insisting that both *are embraced* and *are to be embraced* by the *Guide's* learned reader?

If this is the case then Maimonidean religiosity is closer to Kierkegaardian religiosity than we may have supposed in its acknowledgement of the existential struggles and challenges that the religious person must reckon with in his or her life with God. Maimonides' biography provides some support for that: Maimonides was both as a philosopher who ascribed no absolute value to the body, while working as a physician to heal it; as the *Guide's* author, he placed a content-less state of contemplation of God's articulated name at the center of the religious life, construing it as the end of human life and the very fulfilment of our divine image; however, instead of living a secluded contemplative life, directed at realizing that end, he lived as a committed community leader, and a committed Halachic scholar, immersed in the details of his community's daily life. If we consider him an exemplary believer then his very life reveals that the religious life is replete with tensions and contradictions, many of which cannot and should not be undone. His very life reveals that the paradox is not a transient form of religious existence.

In calling us to leap into the paradox and embrace it, Maimonides and Kierkegaard send us back to the *bios praktikos*:

> …of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh. The end of the matter, all having been heard: fear God, and keep His commandments; for this is the whole man. (Ecclesiastes 12:12–13)[66,67]

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Benor, Ehud Z. 1995. "Meaning and Reference in Maimonides' Negative Theology". *Harvard Theological Review* 88, no. 3: 339–60.

Blumenthal, David R. 2006. *Philosophic Mysticism: Studies in Rational Religion*. Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan Univ. Press.

Conant, James. 1993. "Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and Nonsense". In *Pursuits of Reason: Essays in Honor of Stanley Cavell*, edited by Stanley Cavell et al., 195–224. Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech Univ. Press.

—. 1995. "Putting Two and Two Together: Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and the Point of View for Their Work as Authors". In *Philosophy and the Grammar of Religious Belief*, edited by Timothy Tessin and Mario von der Ruhr, 248–331. London: Macmillan.

Davies Daniel. 2011. *Method and Metaphysics in Maimonides' Guide of the Perplexed*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press.

64 For more on Maimonides' two different conceptions of divine providence, see Verbin, "Wittgenstein and Maimonides on God and the Limits of Language".

65 This conception seems to involve a commitment to divine justice, retribution, as well as commitment to divine intervention.

66 Quoted from The New Jewish Publication Society translation of the Hebrew Bible. http://jps.org/books/jps-bible-commentary-ecclesiastes; accessed 5.5.2019

67 This research was supported by the Israel Science Foundation [Grant Number 1110/13].

Diamond, Cora. 1995. *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy, and the Mind*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Evans Stephen C. 1989. "Is Kierkegaard an Irrationalist? Reason, Paradox and Faith". *Religious Studies* 25, no. 3: 347–62.

—. 2010. "Faith and Reason in Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript". In *Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript: A Critical Guide*, edited by Rick A. Furtak, 204–18. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press.

Even-Chen, Alexander. 2008. "Maimonides' Theory of Positive Attributes [in Hebrew]". *Daat: A Journal of Jewish Philosophy and Kabbalah*, no. 63: 19–45.

Ferreira, Jamie M. 1994. "The Point Outside the World: Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein on Nonsense, Paradox and Religion". *Religious Studies* 30, no. 1: 29–44.

Fox, Marvin. 1990. *Interpreting Maimonides: Studies in Methodology, Metaphysics and Moral Philosophy*. Chicago, IL: Univ. of Chicago Press.

Freudenthal, Gideon. 2009. "The Philosophical Mysticism of Maimonides". In *Maimonides and Mysticism*, edited by A. Elqayam and D. Schwartz, 77–97. Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan Univ. Press.

Gruenwald, Ithamar. 1991. "Maimonides' Quest beyond Philosophy and Prophecy". In *The Complete Writings: Philosophical and Historical Studies*, edited by Joel L. Kraemer, 141–57. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press.

Guttman, Julius. 1964. *Philosophies of Judaism: The History of Jewish Philosophy from Biblical Times to Franz Rosenzeig*. New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Hyman, Arthur. 1988. "Interpreting Maimonides". In *Maimonides: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Joseph A. Buijs. Notre Dame, IN: Univ. of Notre Dame Press.

Kasher, Hanna. 1994. "Self-Cognizing Intellect and Negative Attributes in Maimonides' Theology". *Harvard Theological Review* 87, no. 4: 461–72.

Kierkegaard, Søren. 1983. *Fear and Trembling*. Edited by Howard V. Hong and Hong, Edna H. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press.

—. 1985. *Philosophical Fragments*. Edited by Howard V. Hong and Hong, Edna H. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press.

—. 1991. *Practice in Christianity*. Edited by Howard V. Hong and Hong, Edna H. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press.

—. 1992. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*. Edited by Howard V. Hong and Hong, Edna H. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press.

—. 1995. *Works of Love*. Edited by Howard V. Hong and Hong, Edna H. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press.

—. 1997. *Christian Discourses and The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress*. Edited by Howard V. Hong and Hong, Edna H. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press.

—. 2009. *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*. Edited by Howard V. Hong and Hong, Edna H. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press.

Law, David R. 2010. "The Existential Chalcedonian Christology of Kierkegaard's Practice in Christianity". *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook:* 129–151. doi:10.1515/9783110223026.129.

Lorberbaum, Menachem. 2011. *Dazzled by Beauty: Theology as Poetics in Hispanic Jewish Culture [In Hebrew]*. Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute.

Lorberbaum, Yair. 2002. "On Contradictions, Rationality, Dialectics, and Esotericism in Maimonides's Guide of the Perplexed". *The Review of Metaphysics* 55, no. 4: 711–50.

Maimonides Moses. 1963. *The Guide of the Perplexed*. trans. Shlomo Pines. Chicago: Chicago Univ. Press.

McCallum, Donald. 2007. *Maimonides' Guide for the Perplexed: Silence and Salvation*. London: Routledge.

Miller, Ed L. 1997. "At the Center of Kierkegaard: An Objective Absurdity". *Religious Studies* 33, no. 4: 433–41.

Patt-Shamir, Galia. 2003. "To Live a Riddle: The Case of the Binding of Isaac". *Philosophy and Literature* 27, no. 2: 269–83.

Quine, W. V. 1976. *The Ways of Paradox and Other Essays*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press.

Reines Alvin J. 1986. "Maimonides' True Belief Concerning God: A Systematization". In *Maimonides and Philosophy*, edited by Shlomo Pines and Yirmiahu Yovel, 24–35. Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff.

Schönbaumsfeld, Genia. 2010. *A Confusion of the Spheres: Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein on Philosophy and Religion*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press.

Seeskin, Kenneth. 2000. *Searching for a Distant God: The Legacy of Maimonides*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press.

Strauss, Leo. 1963. "How to Begin to Study the Guide of the Perplexed". In *Guide of the Perplexed*, edited by Shlomo Pines. Chicago, IL: Univ. of Chicago Press.

—. 2013. "The Literary Character of the Guide of the Perplexed". In *Leo Strauss on Maimonides: The Complete Writings*, edited by Kenneth H. Green, 341–98. Chicago, IL: Univ. of Chicago Press.

Verbin, N. 2011. "Wittgenstein and Maimonides on God and the Limits of Language". *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 3, no. 2: 68–87.

—. 2012. "Martyrdom: A Philosophical Perspective". *Philosophical Investigations* 35, no. 1: 68–87.

—. 2016. "Moses Maimonides on Job's Happiness and the Riddle of Divine Transcendence". *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 8, no. 4: 125–41.

—. 2017. "Three Knights of Faith on Job's Suffering and its Defeat". *International Journal for Philosophy and Theology* 78, no. 4–5: 382–95.

—. 2019. "Maimonides and Kierkegaard on Fictionalism, Divine Hiddenness and the Scope for Inter-Religious Dialogue". In *Religious Truth and Identity in an Age of Plurality*, edited by Peter Jonkers and Oliver J. Wiertz, Chapter 5. London: Routledge.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 1993. "Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough". In *Philosophical Occasions 1912–1951*, 119–55. Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company.