

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

## A guide to the AfterDeath: Maimonides on *olam ha-ba'*

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### Abstract

This article analyses Moses Maimonides' account of the AfterDeath and, more specifically, of *olam ha-ba'* (lit.: the world to come), the state of ultimate human happiness and perfection (in contrast to this world). Maimonides is unequivocal about what *olam ha-ba'* is not. Contrary to a competing medieval Jewish tradition, it is utterly incorporeal and, contrary to rabbinic tradition, it is not a motivational reward nor compensation for undeserved suffering in a theodicy. Instead, Maimonides gives two positive accounts of the metaphysics of *olam ha-ba'*. The first is an intellectualist account on which the denizens of *olam ha-ba'* are perfected intellects engaged in intellectual apprehension of the deity. The second is sceptical: it denies that humans have any understanding or knowledge (*'ilm*, episteme) of *olam ha-ba'* and claims that all language used to describe it is purely equivocal or homonymous, although it allows that some immutable thing, whatever it is, survives death. Instead of being a motivational reward or compensation, *olam ha-ba'* is the end, that is, final cause or telos, of the best possible human life in this world at which one aims and which one attempts to approximate even if one cannot actually realize it.

**Keywords:** Maimonides; AfterDeath; soul; intellect; scepticism

As Muslim polemicists reminded medieval Jews, the Hebrew Bible barely mentions what happens to a human being after her death or, as I will refer to it (not to beg questions), in the AfterDeath.<sup>1</sup> The rabbis cite verses such as 'in order that you may fare well and have a good life' (Deut. 22:7) and 'the life of my master will be bound up in the bundle of life in the care of the Lord' (1 Samuel 25:29).<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, rabbinic literature is full of rich images of the AfterDeath and, by the tenth century, a cluster of notions were blended together into one picture of the ultimate reward for a righteous life: (i) 'the garden of Eden' (*gan eden*), sometimes identified with 'Paradise', (ii) an eschatological 'days of the Messiah' (*yemot ha-mashiah*), (iii) *tehiyyat ha-metim* (lit: the bringing to life of the dead; often translated as '(bodily) resurrection'), and (iv) *olam ha-ba'* (lit: the world to come, or the world that is coming; commonly translated as 'afterlife') which is contrasted with *olam ha-zeh* ('this world', in which we live our lives).<sup>3</sup> This cluster of notions about the AfterDeath figures both among the rabbis' incentives to perform the commandments of the Torah and in their theodicies to justify the evils of this world, especially the suffering of the righteous.<sup>4</sup>

During the Middle Ages, there emerged two main rabbinic traditions interpreting the AfterDeath. The first, proposed by Saadia Gaon (1946/2002, 1948, chs 6, 7, 9) and then

elaborated by Moses Nahmanides (1964), identifies it with two stages that temporally follow this-worldly life. At the first stage, the souls of the righteous go on to a wholly disembodied spiritual world while the wicked are punished and cleansed of their sins. At the second stage, which begins in the eschatological messianic era, the righteous souls are resurrected in (their) bodies and receive their ultimate happiness and reward identified with *olam ha-ba'*, a future world yet to be created by God for this purpose. Saadia and Nahmanides disagree over the character of the pleasures the resurrected embodied souls enjoy in *olam ha-ba'*, but the crucial point for both of them is that the ultimate reward is enjoyed by the same human agents who earned it, namely, embodied souls.

The second medieval tradition begins with the focus of this article: Moses Maimonides, arguably the greatest Jewish thinker of the Middle Ages.<sup>5</sup> Maimonides addresses the AfterDeath in both his halakhic, or legal, compositions and his philosophical masterpiece, the *Guide of the Perplexed*. Of all topics in metaphysics and theology, he recognizes that it is the one most vulnerable to the distortions and misrepresentations of the human imagination. In particular, and setting him apart from Saadia and Nahmanides, he attacks the images scattered through rabbinic literature of the denizens of the AfterDeath as embodied substances who enjoy sensual pleasures as their reward.

Maimonides' starting point is the opening statement in chapter ten of *Mishnah Sanhedrin*, popularly known as 'Heleq': 'All Israel has a portion [*heleq*] in *olam ha-ba'*', following which the *mishnah* enumerates those who *lose* their portion: heretics, sinners, and sectarians. In his introduction to his commentary on *Heleq*, Maimonides takes this *mishnah* as an occasion to perform three related tasks: first, to disentangle the various notions – Eden or paradise, the messianic era, resurrection – that by then were identified with *olam ha-ba'*, the one term he takes to stand for the ultimate human good and happiness; second, to instruct his reader how to philosophically interpret rabbinic passages on these topics as parables; and, third, to radically redefine what is a 'portion [*heleq*] in *olam ha-ba'*' and who possesses it.<sup>6</sup> I begin with his dissection of the conflated notions.<sup>7</sup>

The first two notions Maimonides explains away in exclusively naturalistic terms. The Garden of Eden is an actual – but yet to be discovered – place on earth, a fertile *pardes* (Persian for orchard, from which our 'paradise' is derived) with the choicest fruits and plants, but not a supernatural space where rivers flow with wine and houses of jewels spring from the earth.<sup>8</sup> The 'days of the messiah' are a future historical era in which all physical and natural laws remain in place, the autonomous Davidic monarchy is restored, and everyone is engaged in the pursuit of knowledge rather than satisfaction of their bodily needs and desires. The third notion, *tehiyyat ha-metim*, the resurrection, or restoration of life, to the dead, is clearly the most problematic for Maimonides. In *Heleq* and *ER* Maimonides insists that it is a basic belief of Judaism but also hints that the less said about it, the better. Despite being *the* paradigmatic miracle, it has no necessary connection with either the messianic age or *olam ha-ba'*. Belief that it is possible requires only that *someone* at *some time* be resurrected, not that there be a cinematic mass rising of the dead at any one time, let alone in the eschatological future. In *Heleq* Maimonides cites the Talmudic statement that 'the wicked (*resha'im*) even in life are called dead and the righteous (*sadiqim*) even in death are called living', which can be interpreted either literally or figuratively.<sup>9</sup> Figuratively it might mean that the 'righteous', by whom Maimonides seems to mean the intellectually perfect, not the religiously pious, 'live' on as intellects after death, excluding the 'wicked' who have spent their lives pursuing bodily desires rather than perfecting their intellects. But on this reading *tehiyyat ha-metim* is simply another name for the AfterDeath or *olam ha-ba'*, notwithstanding Maimonides' claim that they are distinct. Alternatively, the rabbinic statement might be understood literally, dividing humanity into the wicked who are always dead and the righteous who are always alive. So, if '*tehiyyat ha-metim*' literally requires that one be alive, then dead, and then alive

again, no human, neither the righteous nor the wicked, meets that condition. And as if to support this literal reading, Maimonides follows the rabbinic statement with the assertion that ‘when a human absolutely dies, [his body] decomposes into [the elements] from which it is composed’, a standard piece of Aristotelian physics that *prima facie* excludes resurrection as the recombination or recomposition of the ur-elements into the ‘same’ original body. Rather, in *ER* Maimonides repeatedly defines *tehiyyat ha-metim* as ‘the return of the soul to the body’, that is, a kind of resuscitation or revitalization of a (still existing) body, which is also how he describes the act performed by Elijah in *Guide* I: 42: 92 (interpreting 1 Kings 17:17). In sum, Maimonides’ understanding of *tehiyyat ha-metim* remains elusive.<sup>10</sup> But can we say more about his general view of the AfterDeath?

Maimonides’ first account emerges in the course of his exposition in *Heleq* of his theory of interpretation of scriptural and rabbinic texts. He is especially concerned with verses and statements whose ‘external meaning’ (*zahir*) – the lexical meanings of their words and the understanding of their narratives as historical or mythical stories – is absurd and contradicts what we know by reason or science to be impossible. After criticizing readers who take their external meaning to be their *only* possible meaning notwithstanding their falsity, Maimonides argues that these texts, like parables or riddles, also have an ‘inner meaning’ (*batin*) that expresses deep philosophical wisdom.<sup>11</sup> His primary example in *Heleq* of this parabolic interpretative approach are the rabbinic texts concerning *olam ha-ba’*, for example,

(OH) In *olam ha-ba’* there is no eating, no drinking, no bathing, no anointing with oil, and no sex; rather the righteous sit with their crowns on their heads, delighting in the splendour of the Divine Presence. (BT *Berakhot* 17a)

On its external meaning, (OH) is a rather austere description of what humans should look forward to after death. Instead of feasts of delicacies, shining smooth skin, and endless fornication, the denizens are hungry (‘no eating’), thirsty (‘no drinking’), dirty (‘no bathing’), dry-skinned (‘no anointing with oil’), and concupiscent (‘no sex’). All they do is sit inertly (weighed down by their crowns); their pleasure consists simply in being in the presence of the deity. This may not be what most people look forward to in the AfterDeath, but Maimonides’ real problem with (OH) is its presupposition that the ‘righteous’ in the AfterDeath *have* bodies and bodily needs and desires (even while they remain unsatisfied). Moreover, because there are no bodily activities (e.g. eating, drinking), Maimonides objects that it would be vain for God to create bodily limbs that serve no function – and God never acts in vain.<sup>12</sup> Instead, Maimonides explains, what the rabbis mean in (OH) is a parabolic inner meaning. The negation in ‘no eating/drinking/bathing’ is a categorial negation, meaning that the denizens of the AfterDeath do not fall under the category of things that either eat or do not eat, etc.<sup>13</sup> *Olam ha-ba’* is utterly incorporeal: none of its denizens have or are bodies, its true happiness and pleasure are not bodily, and no bodily activities occur there. If anything is unequivocal in Maimonides’ *olam ha-ba’*, it is this ‘anti-corporealism’.

Instead, the denizens of Maimonides’ *olam ha-ba’* are souls (sing.: *nefesh*; pl.: *nefashot*) that are neither corporeal nor dependent for their existence on bodies and that enjoy purely non-sensible soul-ish (*nafshiyi’im*) pleasures.<sup>14</sup> But (i) exactly what are these *nefashot*/souls? and (ii) what is the purpose or function of the pleasure or happiness they enjoy? In the next section I present two different stories Maimonides tells in response to the ontological or metaphysical question (i), one in his *halakhic*, or legal, works, the other in the *Guide*. In the following section, I turn to (ii): the purpose of the pleasure or happiness of *olam ha-ba’*. Maimonides is unequivocal throughout his writings about

what it is *not*: namely, a reward or compensation. His positive account is first sketched in the halakhic works although its most radical implications are drawn only in the *Guide*.

### The metaphysics or ontology of *olam ha-ba'*: intellectualism vs scepticism

Maimonides' first account – and the exclusive one attributed to him in the scholarly literature – is that the term '*nefesh*' ('soul') is short for the 'form [Ar.: *şura*, Heb.: *şurah*] of the [human] soul', namely, the intellect.<sup>15</sup> Let's unpack this opaque description. What Maimonides means by 'soul', following Aristotle, is, for each species, the distinctive principle in virtue of which its members are alive according to its species-specific mode of aliveness, for example, for plants, nutrition and growth, for animals, perception and appetite, and for humans, reason(ing).<sup>16</sup> For Maimonides, each species has one such distinctive kind of soul, and the word 'soul' is purely equivocal when applied to different species. Moreover, for each species, Maimonides posits only one kind of soul notwithstanding its multiple powers or faculties each of which is a 'part' of the one soul. Thus, for humans, one 'part' of their soul is appetitive and perceptive and another, rational. But of these 'parts', the 'form of the soul' is that 'part' which defines what it is to be of that species; for example, for humanity, the form of its soul is its intellect in virtue of which a human is a *rational* animal.<sup>17</sup> Finally, by 'intellect' Maimonides does not mean a potentiality, the material intellect, or the rational faculty that 'prepares' or predisposes one to engage in cognitive activity; these are all powers that depend on the bodily senses to abstract intelligibles. Instead, he means the intellect in act at each moment when it actively abstracts and apprehends and thereby actualizes an intelligible and, at the culminating stage, a fully actualized (the so-called 'acquired') intellect that has abstracted and apprehended all possible intelligibles, has acquired complete knowledge of physics and metaphysics, and is exclusively and constantly engaged in representation and reflection on the intelligibles and truths it has acquired. Such an intellectual achievement (if it is indeed achievable) is, Maimonides states, 'the true human perfection' that 'belongs to the human alone' (*Guide* III: 54: 635), the human's true self.<sup>18</sup> At such a stage, having realized her intellectual potential, she no longer requires senses, hence, a body, and because this self is constantly and exclusively engaged in intellectual activity, she attends to no bodily needs or desires. Already in her lifetime, then, this intellectually perfected self would be for all purposes free of, or separated from, her body. So, unsurprisingly, or naturally, when her body dies, her fully actualized intellect simply continues doing what it has been exclusively and continuously doing: unchanging intellectual apprehension of physics and metaphysics, even of the deity who is Himself an intellect (and intelligible) and with Whom, as the object of intellection, her human intellect conjoins. The happiness or pleasure of this intellectually perfected self consists in her intellectual apprehension of the most noble being. This philosophers' paradise is *olam ha-ba'*, the state of the fully actualized, or acquired, intellect, the true human self, constantly engaged in intellectual activity concerning the highest knowledge – and in the same senses of 'intellect' and 'knowledge' as in this world.<sup>19</sup>

This intellectualist conception of *olam ha-ba'* was revolutionary and controversial in Maimonides' day and deeply influenced subsequent Maimonideans.<sup>20</sup> Instead of a pious rabbinic life centred on the Mosaic commandments, one attains Maimonides' AfterDeath by mastering physics and metaphysics. This intellectualist conception also faced a slew of objections that were already raised by Maimonides' medieval readers. Some attacked its narrow intellectual elitism that excludes simple pious Jews who faithfully observe all the commandments but know no physics or metaphysics. Others claimed that it is too broad because intellectually perfect non-Jews as well as Jews merit *olam ha-ba'*.<sup>21</sup>

There are also philosophical objections to this intellectualist conception of *olam ha-ba'*, largely because this philosophers' paradise is shaped by the philosophers' *theory* of the intellect that transfers notions whose home is this-worldly human cognitive activities to the AfterDeath.<sup>22</sup> One of the best known objections follows from the philosophers' dictum (K) that when the intellect is actively engaged in intellection (i.e. is in act), 'the intellect [in act] as well as the intellectually cognizing subject and the intellectually cognized object . . . are one single notion in which there is no multiplicity' (*Guide* I: 68: 162).<sup>23</sup> In *Heleq* and *Eight Chapters* Maimonides uses (K) to describe both God's knowledge and the knowledge of the souls, or human intellects, in *olam ha-ba'*. One problem is that (K) entails that two humans with fully actualized intellects – the kinds of souls that make it into the AfterDeath – that know *all* truths and intelligibles, hence, the *same* ones, are themselves identical and constitute one simple thing. Without matter to individuate them, these intellects lack personal or individual AfterDeaths (or, in traditional terms, personal immortality); all perfected humans constitute one soul or intellect.

We shall presently discuss Maimonides' own view of this controversy whether there exists one universal intellect or individual, personal intellects/souls in the AfterDeath, but (K) also poses a second, and more serious, problem. As Maimonides describes *olam ha-ba'* in *Heleq*, its fully actualized human intellects apprehend God Himself.<sup>24</sup> But how is that possible? On the contrary, elsewhere Maimonides argues that no human intellect can apprehend God's knowledge, let alone His essence, and he criticizes anyone who wishes to know even God's knowledge for wishing to know no less than God Himself!<sup>25</sup> Even if the disembodied intellect in the AfterDeath is able to know more than it could when it was embodied, (K) entails that a human and the divine intellect are one.

These problems that arise from extending a theory of the human intellect in this world to the AfterDeath point to a competing counter-theme, suggested already in *Heleq*, then in the *Mishneh Torah*, and, in its most mature articulation, in the *Guide*. Maimonides prefaces (OH) with the following remark:

Know that just as a blind person cannot apprehend colors, a deaf person sounds, or a eunuch sexual appetite, so bodies cannot apprehend spiritual pleasures . . . [and] so the pleasures of the spiritual world cannot be known in this material world, because we do not have in this world any pleasure other than bodily pleasure and what we apprehend through our senses . . . , and everything other than these are for us non-existent and we do not know or apprehend it at first thought but only after much investigation . . . there is no relation at all between [the spiritual] and the bodily pleasures . . . (*Heleq*, 204)<sup>26</sup>

This passage states that, as material substances in a material world, we have no knowledge or apprehension of any non-sensible pleasure like that experienced in the AfterDeath. In the next passage from the *Mishneh Torah*, Maimonides seems to generalize the lack of knowledge to all human powers:

It is not in the power of a human being to apprehend as it really is the goodness of *olam ha-ba'*, and no one knows its greatness, beauty, and strength, only the Holy One . . . the goodness of the world to come has no value or [standard of] comparison and the prophets did not [even] try to imagine it in order not to diminish it through imagination . . . (*MT* 'L. Repentance' viii, 6–7)

In short, both passages say that humans cannot grasp and therefore appreciate the goodness, pleasure, and value of *olam ha-ba'*. But there are at least three ways to read these passages. The weakest way is (i) as hyperbolic praise of the incomparable,

unimaginably great pleasures and goods of *olam ha-ba*'. A stronger reading (ii) asserts that we do not have a *full* understanding of what *olam ha-ba*' is, possibly because of the kinds of philosophical problems we have mentioned. The strongest thesis (iii) makes two claims: (a) the metaphysical claim that the goodness and pleasures of this world and of *olam ha-ba*' are truly incomparable because they fall under different species, even genera; that they share no relation by which to compare or rank them; in short, that they differ in kind; and (b) the epistemological claim that, because all we know is of what exists in this world which completely differs qualitatively from *olam ha-ba*', it follows that we have *no* understanding of the pleasure, goods, happiness, and values in *olam ha-ba*'.

In *Heleq* and in the *Mishneh Torah*, Maimonides might merely intend (ii). However, in the *Guide* he seems to endorse the strongest thesis (iii). Furthermore, in the *Guide*, Maimonides draws semantic implications from his metaphysical and epistemological claims: where the goodness, pleasure, happiness, and value of things in this world and in *olam ha-ba*' are metaphysically different in kind, the very words 'goodness', 'pleasure', 'happiness', and 'value' are all purely equivocal, or homonymous, with respect to what they designate in *olam ha-ba*' and in this world. As he often puts it, the two applications have only the word in common. Just as terms like 'intellect', 'form', 'apprehension', or '(intellectual) pleasure' applied to purely immaterial beings like the separate intellects have nothing in common with their application to hylomorphic composite substances like humans, so for the terms 'soul' or 'intellect' applied to the denizens of *olam ha-ba*'.<sup>27</sup> Not only is the *intellectual* activity of *olam ha-ba*' unknown; its terminology is purely equivocal. The intellectualist vocabulary Maimonides uses to reinterpret corporeal rabbinic descriptions of *olam ha-ba*' must itself be interpreted equivocally. The bottom line is that we have no understanding of what we are talking about when talk about *olam ha-ba*'.

As we said, the problems with the intellectualist conception of *olam ha-ba*' result from invalidly projecting theoretical claims about the human intellect in this world onto the AfterDeath. This problem is of a piece with another well-known error that Maimonides explicitly criticizes: the error of conceiving of God in the physical shape of the best corporeal being, a human, what he calls the 'doctrine of the pure corporeality of God' (I: 1: 21) and what we nowadays call 'anthropomorphism'. But the error is not only a matter of projecting a physical body onto God. The intellect is what distinguishes the human from all other animals. Therefore, to think of God as an intellect is, more than any physical property like shape, to think of Him in a distinctively human way in this world, hence, anthropomorphism. An analogous cognitive error is conceiving of *olam ha-ba*' in the same way as, or by employing terms in the same sense as those we employ for, this world. Maimonides explicitly draws this analogy about corporeality, but it also holds for the language of the intellectualist conception.<sup>28</sup> We can call this error of thinking of *olam ha-ba*' in this-worldly terms 'this-worldliness-morphism'. And let's call this second conception of the AfterDeath, according to which we have no understanding of *olam ha-ba*', the 'sceptical' conception.<sup>29</sup>

In the *Guide* Maimonides works out the sceptical conception with specific arguments not found in *Heleq* or the *Mishneh Torah*. He never refers to the intellect as the 'form of the soul' and he never claims that the denizens of *olam ha-ba*' are fully actualized or acquired intellects. Instead, three times he refers to 'the *thing* (*al-shay*) that remains (*al-bāqī*) of man after his death' as the meaning of the terms *ruah* (I: 40: 90) and *nefesh* (I: 41: 91; III: 22: 488). Furthermore, he distinguishes that meaning of *nefesh* from *another* of its meanings: 'the rational soul, . . . the form of man' (I: 41: 91) which he does *not* say 'remains after death'.<sup>30</sup>

Maimonides also has a specific sceptical argument for referring to the denizens of *olam ha-ba*' by using the bare, non-descriptive term 'the thing' – whatever it is – 'that remains



after death' that emerges from a controversy he reports in the course of evaluating the seventh kalam 'method' to prove the creation of the world and to refute its eternity.<sup>31</sup> According to the kalam proof, were the world eternal, there would also be 'an infinite number of souls [of the infinite number of people who have died in the eternal past] existing simultaneously', a demonstrated impossibility. Maimonides calls this argument 'a wondrous method, for it makes clear a hidden matter by something even more hidden [as if its author already] possessed a demonstration of the permanence of the souls and as if he knew in what form they last and what thing it is that lasts' (*Guide* I: 74: 221). But Maimonides does not stop there. He next reports how the eternalist 'adversary' might respond: insofar as 'souls endowed with continued existence' are not 'bodies in places and positions', and given that they (unlike the separate intellects) cannot be individuated by causal relations, the very notion of 'infinity in number' does not apply to them; 'all are one in number' as those who speak 'of these obscure matters have made clear' (*ibid.*). But having reported this dispute, Maimonides makes no attempt to resolve it or to endorse one of the two dogmatic positions. Like a good sceptic, he concludes that 'premises by which other points are to be explained should not be taken over from such hidden matters, which the mind is incapable of representing to itself' (*ibid.*). In other words, he suspends judgement.

Compared to the explicitly intellectualist ontology of *olam ha-ba'* in *Heleq* and the *Mishneh Torah*, the shift in the *Guide* to the 'thing' that remains after death that is 'more hidden' than the 'hidden' can only mean that Maimonides withholds his commitment to substantive theoretical claims about the metaphysics of the AfterDeath. He also seems to have a deliberate reason for using expressions like not 'undergoing passing-away' and possessing a 'permanent preservation' (*Guide* III: 27: 511) and 'enduring permanence' (*Guide* III: 51: 627–628) to describe the 'thing' that remains after death. Their emphasis is on immutability or unchangeability, not on immortality per se. Because *olam ha-ba'* is neither bodily nor spatial, it is presumably also not temporal, or in time, since time is a measure of the motion created by God. Therefore the 'things' of the AfterDeath are not immortal in the sense of everlasting in time.<sup>32</sup> They are out of time, timeless, like God the Creator. Admittedly, immutability, hence, incorruptibility, entails eternity at least *a parte post*, but note again that the negative prefixes 'im-' and 'in-' are also categorial, designating the sort of things that are neither mutable nor not, and the same for timelessness.<sup>33</sup> All of this is to say that we have no understanding of the ontology or metaphysics of *olam ha-ba'*.

### The function or purpose of *olam ha-ba'*: a reward for or the end of life in this world?

According to traditional rabbinic Judaism, the eternal happiness and pleasures of *olam ha-ba'* are the greatest reward and compensation one can receive for living the life of the Mosaic Law. Hence, the promise of *olam ha-ba'* serves as a powerful motivational incentive. On the intellectualist conception, however, it is not clear how much more *olam ha-ba'* adds beyond what one already has already achieved in this world as an acquired intellect. If anything, it seems that one loses his identity as an individual intellect. And on the sceptical conception, according to which it is not one's (actualized, acquired) intellect but some 'thing' that remains in *olam ha-ba'*, only God knows what, it is unclear what one has to look forward to after death, period. Even if the sceptic takes Maimonides' repeated statements that the true human perfection is intellectual to be referring to an epistemic ideal we cannot in actuality achieve, it is not obvious how the 'things' that remain after death are related to that epistemic ideal.<sup>34</sup>

Maimonides' response to these concerns, like his ontology of *olam ha-ba'*, consists in a bold negative claim and positive hints. The negative claim, which recurs in all of

Maimonides' halakhic and philosophical writing, is that *olam ha-ba'* is neither a reward nor compensation, period. To perform the commandments or engage in the life of the mind for the sake of achieving *olam ha-ba'* is improper worship:

A human should not say: I shall fulfill the commandments of the Torah and engage in its wisdom in order to receive all its blessings or in order to achieve *olam ha-ba'*; and I shall separate from transgressions . . . in order to be saved from the curses written in the Torah or not to be excised from *olam ha-ba'* – this is not the proper way to serve God. One who serves [God] in this way serves out of fear which is not the level of the prophets or the sages [*hakhmamim*; also: philosophers]. Only the multitude [*amei ha-'aretz*], women, and children serve God in this way, and we educate them to so serve out of fear until their intellect matures and they serve out of love. (*Mishneh Torah*, L. 'Repentance' x, 1)

To say that *olam ha-ba'* should play no normative motivational role in worship is not to deny that *olam ha-ba'* is the greatest happiness.<sup>35</sup> But to treat it as a prize or payback demotes the commandments and intellectual activity to mere instrumental means – and qua worship makes them improper. Maimonides never clarifies whether it is worship *only* for the sake of achieving *olam ha-ba'* that is improper or whether it should never enter one's motivations, period. Nor is it clear whether he absolutely rejects such worship or whether he only demotes it *relative* to proper worship. He does acknowledge that, notwithstanding its impropriety, *olam ha-ba'* is necessary to accommodate proper worship to the human need for incentives to act. He describes how early education requires carrots and sticks to motivate children to learn and how, as people mature, the incentives change – from candy to the promise of a career to fame and public recognition – although the true goal is always to learn only because of the intrinsic value of knowledge or the truth.<sup>36</sup> Maimonides goes on to identify the proper/improper distinction with two further rabbinic distinctions: (i) performance of commandments 'out of love' – 'doing the true because it is true'<sup>37</sup> – versus 'out of fear' of punishment (or of not obtaining a reward) and (ii) study of the Torah 'for its own sake' (*leshmah*) versus 'not for its own sake' (*shelo' leshmah*) – that is, 'because of his love of the Lord' rather than 'to receive a reward or to avoid calamities'.<sup>38</sup> So, to perform the commandments or perfect one's intellect (only) for the sake of achieving *olam ha-ba'* counts as worship 'out of fear' and 'not for its own sake'. To think of *olam ha-ba'* as a reward is simply an accommodation to or a compromise made for humanity's this-worldly needs, conceiving *olam ha-ba'* in the image of this world.

Instead of being some other world where one enjoys rest and recreation *after* one ends her (bodily) life in this world, Maimonides' *olam ha-ba'* is the end, that is, the telos or final cause, of the best human *life in this world*: namely, an embodied life that focuses as much as is humanly possible on intellectual activity whose ideal is intellectual perfection. Towards the end of *Heleq*, Maimonides describes the culminating moment in the *life* of the lover of God when, after cultivating what is 'specifically human' in him, namely, his intellect, he 'becomes a perfected human, . . . [and] there is nothing [external to his intellect] to prevent his soul from existing through the existence of what it knows . . . and this is the *olam ha-ba'*'.<sup>39</sup> There is no mention here of death, a world other than this one, or a reward. *Olam ha-ba'* is nothing more, but also nothing less, than realization (or approximation) of the ideal of intellectual perfection, the good *not for the sake of which* one lives her life but *to which* her life is directed.<sup>40</sup>

The *Mishneh Torah* situates its discussion of *olam ha-ba'* in the 'Laws of Repentance' (*teshuvah*; lit.: return). Maimonides distinguishes two kinds of repentance.<sup>41</sup> The first is for particular transgressions; its components include regret, verbal confession,



punishment, and, in some cases, a sacrifice or another act or event of atonement. The second kind of repentance, and where *olam ha-ba'* comes on stage, consists in a total life of returning to one's creator or source. One does not repent for a bad act and, after completing the procedure, is done repenting. Rather, the best possible human life in this world in its entirety is a constant, never-ending process of repenting, that is, returning to one's divine-like state of perfection as a pure intellect contemplating the deity in love. This second kind of repentance is not in order to enable an ultimate return after death; it transforms life here and now in this world. It makes *olam hazeh* into *olam ha-ba'*.<sup>42</sup>

How does one achieve this transformation? Intellectual perfection is a function of two factors. First, one must acquire complete scientific knowledge or understanding (*episteme*, '*ilm*') of physics and metaphysics. Second, the subject must be constantly and undividedly engaged in intellectual apprehension and reflection on the knowledge that she has acquired, demanding a degree of unceasing attention and concentration that the ordinary embodied intellect of a living human cannot achieve because of her material needs and desires. In describing the love of God that qualifies one for *olam ha-ba'*, Maimonides most emphasizes this second factor: the all-absorbing concentration on or attention to the beloved.

And what is the proper love of God? That one shall love God with a love that is so exceeding and strong that one's soul is bound up with love of God and [one] finds oneself constantly absorbed in it as if one was sick with lovesickness in which one's mind is not free from love of a [certain] woman and one thinks of her continuously, whether sitting or standing, eating or drinking. More than this, the love of God should possess the heart of His lovers [who] think about it constantly . . . (MT 'L. Repentance' x, 3)

Here Maimonides describes 'the proper love of God', the intellectual love that results in the state of *olam ha-ba'*, as an all-consuming love that crowds out everything other than the deity, everything this-worldly. Nonetheless, this ideal is achieved, if it is, in this world while one is embodied, just as the lover is completely absorbed in his beloved, and cannot think of anything else, even while he is 'sitting or standing, eating or drinking', going through the motions of satisfying his bodily needs and desires but with a totally disengaged state of mind.<sup>43</sup> Maimonides goes on to describe how this intellectual love of God requires that the person 'thinks about it constantly in the proper way and he abandons everything in the world other than it' (*ibid.*, x, 6). By pairing together these two conditions, Maimonides transforms the significance of intellectual activity. Its value does not lie in the knowledge acquired but in the activity itself. By engaging totally in intellectual activity one *ipso facto* 'abandons everything in the world other than it'. Intellectual activity becomes an exercise in de-corporealization of the self. By making intellectual pursuit all that matters to oneself, one separates herself not only from satisfaction of her bodily needs and desires but also from thinking, valuing, and caring about them. While Maimonides' metaphysics of the AfterDeath is *anti-corporealist*, the way in which one maximally approximates the ideal of *olam ha-ba'* in this world is by *de-corporealization*.<sup>44</sup>

In the *Guide*, Maimonides again describes the 'passionate' love of God (*'ishq*), figuratively expressed by a 'kiss' of death, accompanied by a unique joy and pleasure that culminates at the moment of death. Again, all this is experienced *while alive in this world*.<sup>45</sup>

The philosophers have already explained that the bodily faculties impede in youth the attainment of most of the moral virtues, and all the more that of pure thought, which is achieved through the perfection of the intelligibles that lead to passionate love of Him . . . In the measure in which the faculties of the body are weakened and

the fire of the desires is quenched, the intellect is strengthened, its lights achieve a wider extension, its apprehension is purified, and it rejoices in what it apprehends. The result is that when 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 . . . [The Sages] mention the occurrence of this kind of death, which in true reality is salvation from death, only with regard to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam . . . but for all [perfected individuals] the apprehension of their intellects becomes stronger at the separation . . . After having reached this condition of enduring permanence, that intellect remains in one and the same state, the impediment that sometimes screened him off having been removed. And he will remain permanently in that state of intense pleasure, which does not belong to the genus of bodily pleasures . . . (*Guide* III: 51: 627–628)

What is most remarkable about this passage is its integration of de-corporealization into the natural, even biological, process of ageing. In youth the distracting drive to satisfy one's bodily needs and desires prevents the full concentration required for intellectual perfection. But as the desires and needs weaken as one normally ages and approaches death, her intellectual concentration *ipso facto* grows and, with it, the joy and 'intense pleasure that does not belong to the genus of bodily pleasures'. This is the same pleasure of the AfterDeath that Maimonides describes in *Ḥeleq* and the *Mishnah Torah*, but here it is nothing more than an experience integrally belonging to a natural process in this world. Death is not that *after which* one experiences this intellectual pleasure; death is the climax of a succession of stages of *life in this world* 'until the soul is separated from the body at that moment in this state of pleasure'.<sup>46</sup> Rather than be the paradigm of evil that it usually is, death marks 'salvation from death'. The soul undergoes no change at the moment of death. It remains frozen in the immutable 'condition of enduring permanence' that it has already reached while alive. Maimonides' *olam ha-ba'* is found not in the AfterDeath but as a stage in a life whose consummation is death.

## Appendix

Chapter 10 of *Mishnah Sanhedrin*, popularly known as *Ḥeleq*, opens: 'All of Israel has a portion (sing.: *ḥeleq*; pl.: *ḥalaqim*) in *olam ha-ba'*" followed by an enumeration of heretics and sectarians who have lost their share. This is usually understood to mean that each *individual* Israelite/Jew, qua Israelite/Jew, has her *own* portion in *olam ha-ba'* (which she can lose by a false belief), implying that individuals have personal AfterDeaths rather than unite, as the philosophers claim, into one universal soul (or intellect). Because the statement only mentions Israelites/Jews, it also raises the question whether non-Israelites/non-Jews have 'portions' in *olam ha-ba'*.

At the end of his Introduction to '*Ḥeleq*', Maimonides famously lays down thirteen 'foundational principles' of the Torah:

1. God's existence.
2. God's unity.
3. God's incorporeality.
4. God's eternity.
5. Only God should be worshipped.

6. The possibility of prophecy.
7. Mosaic prophesy is the highest form of prophecy.
8. The divinity of the Torah.
9. The authenticity of the Mosaic Torah (that we now possess).
10. God's knowledge of all human actions.
11. Reward/punishment for obeying/disobeying the Law, including the greatest reward: *olam ha-ba'* and the greatest punishment: *karet*.
12. Belief in the coming of the messiah.
13. *Teḥiyat ha-metim* (Resurrection or revivification of the dead).

Maimonides then comments:

When a person truly believes in these foundational principles, he enters the community of Israel, and it is an obligation to love and pity him and to act towards him with all the love and fellowship in the ways that God has commanded us. Even if he were to commit every transgression in his power out of lust and because he is overcome by his evil inclination, he will be punished according to his degree of rebelliousness, but he has a portion [in *olam ha-ba'*]; he is one of the sinners of Israel. But if the person doubts any one of the fundamental principles, he leaves the community [of Israel] and denies the fundamental principle [*kafar be'iqar*], and he is called a sectarian (*min*), an *epiqoros* [heretic], and one who 'cuts among the plantings [*qoṣeṣ benetiyot*; see BT Hagigah 14b, for this kind of apostasy]. One is obligated to hate and destroy him . . . (*Ḥeleq*, 217)

I won't review the large scholarly literature about why Maimonides laid down these principles when and where he did.<sup>47</sup> Nor will I analyse the contents of the individual principles. My sole aim is to explicate the phrase '*ḥeleq be-'olam ha-ba'*' ('a portion in *'olam ha-ba'*') and the relation between these required beliefs and *olam ha-ba'*.

In his quoted comment on the thirteen principles, Maimonides turns the *mishnah* on its head. It literally states that every Israelite/Jew is awarded by default a portion in *olam ha-ba'* but loses it by a heresy or false belief. Maimonides interprets the *mishnah* to mean that one must first 'truly believe' the foundational beliefs as a precondition to enter 'the community of Israel', a phrase he substitutes for '*ḥeleq be-'olam ha-ba'*'; furthermore, no matter how one acts, she does not lose her *ḥeleq*. This is doubly striking: (i) the shift from *ḥeleq be-'olam ha-ba'* to 'the community of Israel' and (ii) the shift from the received rabbinic view that the *actions* commanded by Moses and elaborated in rabbinic *halakhah* constitute the core of the Torah that entitles one to *olam ha-ba'* to *beliefs* as the defining condition for membership in the community of Israel that earns one a *ḥeleq be-'olam ha-ba'*.<sup>48</sup> But the passage also raises other questions.

To begin with, what does 'truly believe' mean? If it is just sincere verbal assent or mental affirmation to the principles as literally stated, without the kind of understanding and (demonstrative) knowledge of a fully perfected intellect, this hardly qualifies one for Maimonides' *olam ha-ba'*, either on its intellectualist or on its sceptical interpretations. And if someone meets Maimonides' intellectually perfectionist bar (or sceptically suspends judgement), why must she be Jewish or belong to the 'community of Israel'? This is often posed in contemporary literature as the question whether Maimonides' *olam ha-ba'* is universalistic or particularistic, but the prior question concerns the nature of the required belief or attitude.<sup>49</sup>

These obligatory foundational beliefs are also not Maimonides' only ways to earn a *ḥeleq be-'olam ha-ba'*. Elsewhere in his writings, Maimonides (following rabbinic sources) lists a variety of people who either gain or lose their portion regardless of

belief in thirteen principles and, indeed, regardless of the Mosaic commandments they perform. For example, embarrassing or shaming someone or calling him by his nickname can cost someone her portion, and walking four cubits in the Land of Israel can earn her one.<sup>50</sup> In L. ‘Repentance’ Maimonides is also very explicit that righteous people (*šadiqqim*), who merit that title because of their actions, not their beliefs, have a *heleq be-‘olam ha-ba’*, even if only the majority of their actions are righteous.<sup>51</sup> It seems that a *heleq be-‘olam ha-ba’* is not earned only by perfection, unlike *olam ha-ba’* itself.

Elsewhere in the *Mishneh Torah* Maimonides also says more about non-Jews’ ‘portions’ in *olam ha-ba’*:

One [i.e. a gentile] who accepts the seven Noahide commandments and observes them scrupulously is one of the righteous of the nations of the world and he has a *heleq be-‘olam ha-ba’* but only if (*ve-hu’*) he accepts and performs them because the Holy One . . . commanded them in the Torah and made it known to us by Moses our Teacher that Noahides were commanded to perform them before the Torah was given. But if he performs them because his intellect so determines (*hekhre’a ha-da’at*), he is not deemed a resident alien or one of the righteous of the nations of the world but [*ela’*] one of their sages [*hakhmeihem*]. (MT L. ‘Kings and Wars’, viii, 11)

Previously Maimonides had ruled that Gentiles can never be compelled (even when they reside in the land of Israel, by a Jewish government) to convert. However, all humans can be forced on pain of death ‘to accept’ the seven Noahide commandments (*ibid.*, viii, 10) that prohibit (i) idolatry, (ii) blasphemy, (iii) murder, (iv) adultery, (v) robbery, and (vi) eating a limb torn from a living animal, and (vii) that prescribe that there be courts of law. Furthermore, one who accepts the Noahide commandments in the presence of a rabbinic court in the Land of Israel receives official recognition as a ‘resident alien’ (*ger toshav*), a politico-legal status.<sup>52</sup> The quoted *halakhah* (viii, 11), introduces two additional categories: ‘the righteous of the nations of the world’ (*hasidei umot ha-‘olam*) and Gentile ‘sages’ (*hakhmamim*; also: philosophers). Both accept and observe the Noahide commandments ‘scrupulously’, but the ‘righteous’ perform them because they were ‘commanded by God even prior to the Torah as that is revealed through Moses’, while the sages perform them because their intellects prescribe that they *ought* to be performed, that is, because they are true and right. Yet only the righteous are explicitly said to have a *heleq be-‘olam ha-ba’*. Maimonides does not deny the sages a *heleq*; he simply omits their status. This raises the question: why the difference between the righteous and the sages? And, in order for the righteous to receive their *heleq be-‘olam ha-ba’*, why must they perform the Noahide commandments because they believe that God commanded them?

To answer these questions, let’s look again at Maimonides’ thirteen principles, which divide into three groups: Principles 1–5 all concern the existence and nature of God. Principles 6–9 demand belief in prophecy and in particular Mosaic prophecy and its product, the Torah. Principles 10–11 concern accountability in performing or transgressing the Law. Principles 12–13 express two eschatological and the most nation-specific of the principles: the restoration of an autonomous Davidic kingdom and the return of the soul to the body. Belief in these thirteen principles is, according to Maimonides, what earns the Jew a *heleq be-‘olam ha-ba’*.

Analogously, belief in the first eleven principles is presupposed by the proviso that the righteous Gentile must keep the seven Noahide commandments because he believes God ‘commanded them in the Torah and made it known to us by Moses our Teacher that Noahides were commanded to perform them before the Torah was given’.<sup>53</sup> That long proviso presupposes the existence of one God (Principles 1–5), that Mosaic prophecy is valid, hence, that prophecy is possible (Principles 6–9); and that one must obey God’s commands

heteronomously (Principles 10–11). Only the last two of the thirteen principles, which are nation-specific to the Jews, need not be believed by the righteous Gentile. In sum, both the Gentile *hasid* and the Israelite share the same core set of foundational beliefs, and those core beliefs entitle them to their respective *halaqim* (portions) in *'olam ha-ba'*. Alternatively, just as their core beliefs define membership in their community for Israelites, so do theirs for the community of righteous Gentiles.

What, then, is a *heleq be-'olam ha-ba'*? So far we have assumed that the phrase *heleq be-'olam ha-ba'* means one's (personal) portion, that is, place or share, a piece of the pie, in *olam ha-ba'* proper, the state of ultimate happiness consequent on perfecting one's intellect. But Maimonides does *not* state that 'when a person truly believes in these foundational principles, he enters *'olam ha-ba'* but instead that he enters 'the community of Israel' (*kellal Yisrael*), that is, a social covenant that entails mutual obligations on members to love and care for one another. This is not a community in the AfterDeath, but a community of the living in this world. Similarly for the righteous among the Gentiles who fulfil the Noahide commandments believing the proviso. Their *heleq* is not in an AfterDeath but in a this-worldly community. Moreover, if communal membership for Jews and righteous Gentiles is defined by holding the same set of eleven core beliefs, 'the righteous among the Gentiles' and 'the community of Israel' constitute one cross-national community.<sup>54</sup> This is what it means to have a *heleq be-'olam ha-ba'* – as distinct from achieving *olam ha-ba'* proper, the AfterDeath, whatever it is. This meaning of *heleq* is not 'portion' in the sense of a piece of a whole, but closer to a connection or relation, as in 2 Samuel 20:1 ('we have no *heleq* in [i.e. connection or relation to] David'). Those who belong to this community share belief in the value of knowledge, and of the wisdom of the Torah, which in turn will enable at least some of them to achieve *olam ha-ba'* proper.<sup>55</sup> However, in contrast to the righteous, the *hakhamim* among the Gentiles are sages, or philosophers, who have achieved intellectual perfection and fulfil the Noahide commandments because they know that they are true and right. These perfected individuals live in contemplative isolation and, unlike ordinary people, have no need for a community (*Guide* III: 51: 621) in order to achieve *olam ha-ba'* proper. Hence, they do not have a *heleq be-'olam ha-ba'*; they have the real thing.<sup>56</sup>

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## Notes

1. On the Islamic literature, see Stroumsa (1998), 67 n. 59. For overviews of the primary sources on the AfterDeath, see Altmann (1987), 85–91; Blumberg (1965); Brody (2016–2017); Goldschmidt and Segal (2017), and Shatz (*forthcoming*), ch. 7. Under the umbrella term 'AfterDeath' I include both the good (*olam ha-ba'*) and the bad (*gehinnom*, or hell, or *karet*, lit. excision, the unnatural termination of life in this world and/or in the AfterDeath). I leave *olam ha-ba'* untranslated in the text since its correct understanding is what is at issue. For reasons of space, I do not discuss *gehinnom*/hell or *karet*; for Maimonides, they are nothing but the privation of *olam ha-ba'*.
2. See also 1 Sam. 28:11–15 and Dan. 12:2–3, Jub. 23:29–31. Nahmanides (1959–1963), vol. 2, 114, takes the frequent scriptural admonitions that specific transgressions will lead to *karet* to presuppose that, in the natural course of events, the life of the righteous continues in the AfterDeath.
3. Another notion in this cluster is transmigration of souls (*gilgul neshamot*), but, since this idea grows primarily from mystical and theological roots, I ignore it here.
4. On compensation in *olam ha-ba'*, see Saadia (1948), chs 6, 7, 9 and Maimonides (1963a), III: 17: 468, III: 24: 498.
5. Moses Maimonides (b. Cordoba, Andalusia 1135; d. Fustat, Egypt 1204) – (Ar.) Musa ibn Maymun, (Heb.) Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, abbreviated RaMBaM – wrote three major works: (1) *Commentary on the Mishnah* (1161–1168) which includes, among the works we discuss, 'Eight Chapters' (EC) and the 'Introduction to *Heleq*' (*Heleq*); references to these works in the text and notes are to Maimonides (1963b), vol. 4 (*Nezikin*), by page. (2) *The Mishneh*

*Torah* (1168–1178), a legal code that includes ‘Laws (L.) of the Foundations of the Law’ and ‘L. Repentance’; references are to the Hebrew Maimonides (rep. frequently) designated as *MT* followed by the relevant ‘Laws’ (L.) with chapter and paragraph, for example, ‘*MT* L. ‘Repentance’ ix, 5’. For an English translation, see Maimonides (1949–1972). (3) Maimonides’ philosophical treatise, *Guide of the Perplexed* (1161–1168); references are to Maimonides (1963a) followed by part, chapter, and page, for example, *Guide* III: 12: 367. (4) In addition, Maimonides composed a number of more popular works and epistles, including the ‘Epistle on Resurrection’ (*ER*) that defends his affirmation of resurrection; references to *ER* are to Maimonides (1985/1987), with pages for both the English and Hebrew.

6. On Maimonides’ analysis of this opening statement, see the Appendix.

7. On all three notions, see *Heleq*, 203–209; *ER* 1985, 214–215, 219–221/1987, 343–345, 352–356; *Guide* I: 43: 92–93, II: 27: 333. For the quoted definition of *tehiyyat ha-metim*, see *ER* 1985, 219, 221, 228/ 1987, 353, 356, 366. See also Maimonides’ commentary on *M. Avot* ii, 19 in Maimonides (1963b), vol. 4, 429 that identifies *olam ha-ba’* with *atid lavo’*. For a comprehensive analysis of resurrection in Saadia, Maimonides, and Nahmanides, see Brody (2016–2017).

8. Notwithstanding his claim that the Garden of Eden is a place on earth, in *Guide* I: 2: 23–26 Maimonides interprets Genesis 3 as a parable about the true human perfection; see Stern (2013), 64–96.

9. *BT Berakhot* 18a–b, cited in *Heleq*, 206–207. See *Guide* I: 42: 93 where Maimonides cites this statement but interprets it according to ‘the figurative sense’ of Deut. 22, 7 which in III: 27: 512 he explains refers to *olam ha-ba’*.

10. Throughout this paragraph I am indebted to exchanges with Zev Harvey and Aaron Segal.

11. In the *Guide* Maimonides divides the parabolic inner meaning into two levels; on the development of his theory of parable, see Stern (2013), 18–96.

12. *ER* 1985, 220/1987, 355–356. In *MT* ‘L. Repentance’, viii, 2, Maimonides argues, inversely, that because there are no bodies, there are no bodily activities in *olam ha-ba’*.

13. On categorial negation, cf. *Guide* I: 58: 136 and Stern (2013), 208–212; *Idem* (2021). For an English translation, see Maimonides (1949–1972).

14. In *MT* ‘L. Foundations of the Law’ iv, 9 and ‘L. Repentance’ viii, 8, Maimonides distinguishes the *nefesh* (also called: *ruah*) from a body-dependent soul, the *neshamah*, which ceases to exist when the body dies.

15. See Altmann (1987), 85–91; Tirosh-Samuels (2009), 735–736; Robinson (2009), 536–537; Brody (2016–2017); Goldschmidt and Segal (2017); Shatz (forthcoming). For the phrase, ‘form of the soul’, see *EC*, 376; *MT* ‘L. Foundations of the Law’ iv, 9 and ‘L. Repentance’, viii, 3. In *Heleq* and *ER* Maimonides does not use this phrase to refer to the intellect but describes the activities of the soul using the language of intellect (*aql*, ) and intellectual understanding (*‘ilm*). Cf. *Heleq*, 212, Principle 6, that refers to the ‘form of the intellect’.

16. In *Guide* II: 4: 255 the heavenly spheres are also given souls to account for their local motion and in I: 46: 99 even God is said to be attributed a soul because, as Maimonides explains, the multitude cannot believe that anything can be living unless it possesses a soul.

17. For Maimonides’ fullest discussion of the soul and its parts and form, see *EC*, ch. 1, 373–375.

18. I have added the parenthetical qualification in this sentence because of the contemporary scholarly debate over whether Maimonides believed that it is possible for the human intellect to achieve scientific knowledge or understanding (*‘ilm*) of metaphysics and, hence, whether it is possible for humans to realize the fully actualized state of an acquired intellect. This controversy lies beyond the scope of this article; for arguments pro and con, see Pines (1979), *Idem* (1987) (although he prefers to call his view ‘critical’ rather than ‘sceptical’), Altmann (1987), Davidson (1992–1993), Harvey (2008), and Stern (2013), chs 5–6). My own view, as hinted below, is that the Maimonides of the *Guide* (though not always in his halakhic works) is sceptical with respect to human knowledge not only of *olam ha-ba’* but of *all* metaphysics. So, although he articulates his *conception* of the fully actualized, or acquired, intellect most explicitly and fully in the *Guide*, that is not to imply that he believes that it is humanly realizable; instead the idea functions as a regulative epistemic *ideal*. However, on the intellectualist interpretation of *olam ha-ba’* as described in this paragraph, the Maimonides of the halakhic works does believe that humans can achieve the state of an acquired intellect.

19. On the intellectualist interpretation of the statement (OH), see *Guide* I: 30: 63–64 for ‘eating’ and ‘drinking’ as metaphors for human knowledge (but I: 26: 56 as deficiencies when applied to God) and I: 34: 76 for ‘righteous’ (*ṣaddiqim*) as referring to the wise.

20. See Gersonides (1984–1999), vol. 1. Bk. One: ‘Immortality of the Soul’. The view is, of course, widely shared by Maimonides’ Arabic sources, e.g., Al-Farabi and Avicenna.

21. See, for example, Crescas (1410/2017b).

22. Notwithstanding Aristotle’s view of contemplation as the highest pleasure of the perfected intellect, a separate problem is that if pleasure (*ladhdha*) is an affection that depends on bodily appetite and imagination, it is not clear how disembodied intellects in the AfterDeath can enjoy it. For discussion, see Schwartz (1995), 188–192. Note that the intellectual pleasure described in *Guide* III: 51: 627–628 (discussed below) is primarily *before* death in this world.



23. A number of scholars, among them Altmann (1987) and Segal (2017b), drop the intellect in act and take the identity to hold between the subject and object of intellection. But the intellect in act is essential to (K) because only when the intellect is in act, and indeed when it is fully actualized, does (K) hold for Maimonides (following Al-Farabi contra Avicenna). For a thorough study of (K) in all of Maimonides' works, see Steiner (2020). On its use in *Guide* I: 68, see Stern (2013), 232–240, who emphasizes that Maimonides attributes (K) to the *philosophers* and who argues that he criticizes rather than endorses it.
24. *Heleq*, 205, contrary to the philosophers' standard claim that what the acquired intellect conjoins with is the Active Intellect.
25. See *EC*, ch. 8, 405–406 but cf. ch. 7, 395–396; *MT* 'L. Foundations of the Law', ii, 10; 'L. Repentance', v, 5.
26. On Avicenna's influence on Maimonides in this passage, see Schwartz (1995) and Stroumsa (1998).
27. See *Guide* II: 2: 279–280; II: 18: 299–300; III: 20: 482. Note that throughout *Heleq*, God is denoted by 'the Creator' (Ar: *al-b'āri*; Heb: *ha-bore'*), which Maimonides uses in the *Guide* (e.g., in I: 69: 169) to refer to the Avicennian Necessarily Existing Being in Itself which Maimonides demonstrates (in II: 4: 259) cannot be a (separate) intellect and instead is beyond intelligibility.
28. See *ER*, 1985, 214–216/1987, 345–348 where Maimonides explicitly compares corporealism about God (which he takes to be idolatry) to corporealism about *olam ha-ba'* (although he allows that belief in this-worldly-morphism is excusable).
29. Here I allude to the contemporary controversy over the (im)possibility of human knowledge of metaphysics described in n. 17; on the AfterDeath (or afterlife), in particular, see Pines (1979), 95–97 and (1987), 8–9 and Altmann (1987), 85–91.
30. There are, however, isolated passages that suggest something more, though never explicitly the intellect. (i) *Guide* I: 70: 173–174 distinguishes between 'souls that remain after death [that] are separate from matter [and] . . . become actual' and the 'soul that comes into being in man at the time he is generated' and, for both, uses the term *neshamah*, which in the *halakhic* works (in contrast to *nefesh*) refers to the body-dependent soul that dies with the body. However, about the soul that is separate, that is, immaterial, Maimonides writes, it is 'one thing only'. On the meaning of this phrase, see the Hebrew translation in Maimonides (2002), 183–184 and n. 31. (ii) *Guide* II: 27: 333 says that 'the souls of the virtuous, according to our opinion . . . are created, but will never become non-existent'. In that context, however, Maimonides is reporting the opinion of the Sages and the scope of 'our opinion' is syntactically unclear. (iii) *Guide* III: 8: 432 describes those who seek perfection as 'seeking a state of perpetual permanence according to what is required by their noble form', reflecting only on intelligibles and truths and on 'union with the divine intellect [i.e., Active Intellect]', suggesting that these individuals seek to become acquired intellects that are 'perpetually permanent' in the AfterDeath. However, in the very next sentence, Maimonides adds that because these individuals are embodied in this world, they can never realize this epistemic ideal.
31. *Guide* I: 74: 221; on this controversy, and the identities of its protagonists, see Steiner (2021), 5–11.
32. For a convincing critique of the desirability of immortality per se, see Segal (2017a), whose notion of immortality is, however, endlessness in time.
33. On the timelessness of God, see *Guide* I: 57: 133. However, as Aaron Segal points out (p.c.), Maimonides' language, for example 'remains after death', is clearly temporal. I take this to be an example of what Maimonides means when he writes that 'these subtle notions [about the immaterial or the timeless] that very clearly elude the minds cannot be considered through the instrumentality of the customary words . . . so that we cannot represent this notion to ourselves except through a certain looseness of expression'. At best 'we give the gist of the notion' (I: 57: 132–133).
34. See *Guide* III: 27: 511, III: 54: 635 which the sceptic will interpret as a regulative epistemic ideal that is humanly unrealizable.
35. For a close analysis of the motivational roles of *olam ha-ba'*, see Blau (2006–2007).
36. *Heleq*, 197–198.
37. *Mishneh Torah* 'Laws of Repentance' x, 2.
38. *Ibid.*, x, 5.
39. *Heleq*, 208–209.
40. Note that the quoted passage occurs in *Heleq* where Maimonides still holds an intellectualist ontology of *olam ha-ba'*, yet takes it to be not a reward but the telos of life. For the sceptic, it is the life itself directed at *olam ha-ba'* that approximates, as much as is humanly achievable, the ideal of intellectual perfection.
41. Cf. Soloveitchik (1974), 254–256.
42. For other this-worldly focused conceptions of *olam ha-ba'*, both medieval and modern, see Halevi (forthcoming); Kogan (2004); Abravanel (1964), v. 2, c. Lev 26, 3; Hartman (1976), 78–81; and Segal (2019) and (forthcoming).
43. Compare the description of Moses in *Guide*: III: 51: 623–624.
44. On the distinction between anti-corporealism and de-corporealization, see Stern (2022).

45. On Maimonides language for love, see Harvey (1997).
46. On Maimonides' use of trajectories like this to identify metaphysically unknowable states or things, see Stern (forthcoming).
47. See, for example, Hyman (1967), Kellner (1986), Kasher (2011).
48. See also 'L. Repentance' iii, 6.
49. On the universalist-particularist controversy, see, for example Korn (1994).
50. Kasher 34–43 and references therein.
51. See *MT* 'L. Forbidden Sexual Relations', xiv, 4; 'L. Repentance' iii, 1, 5 and ix, 1.
52. On this passage and the relation between the resident alien and the righteous Gentile, see Nahorai (1992), *Idem* (2003).
53. See Maimonides (1958), 282–284, Responsum 148 where he invokes an almost identical formula that must be believed by the Gentile in order for his voluntary performance of a Mosaic commandment to count as a commandment to be rewarded. Thanks to Aaron Segal for bringing this responsum to my attention.
54. For another example of a Maimonidean cross-national, Abrahamic, community, based on belief in the unity of God symbolized by the sign of circumcision, see Stern (1998), 91–102.
55. By analogy, as Zev Harvey (p.c.) suggests, every player on a victorious sports team has a portion in the team's victory, and in its trophy, including those who did not star and those who sat on the bench.
56. For an analogous distinction, see Maimonides' distinction in *Guide* III: 27 between communal welfare (Ar.: *salāh*; Heb.: *tikkun*) and individual perfection (Ar.: *kamāl*; Heb.: *shelemut*), as discussed in Stern (2013), 34–36, based on Galston (1978).

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