Knowledge by Way of Prophecy

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"When you talk to God it is called prayer, but when God talks to you it is called schizophrenia."

(Thomas Szasz)

Abstract

This thesis investigates whether beliefs acquired by way of prophecy are safe. By 'prophecy' I have in mind the presentation of the prophetic method as found in the *Guide of the Perplexed*, which was Moses Maimonides' philosophical masterpiece. And by 'safe' I have in mind the work by Timothy Williamson on the safety condition for knowledge. Both authors have proven to be dominant forces on these respective topics. The significance of this investigation derives from the centrality of prophecy to the three monotheistic religions. My main goal in this thesis is to identify those safety risks associated with the prophetic method. In this manner I aim to undermine any presumption in favor of prophetic beliefs as a whole being safe. Importantly, this general conclusion does not entail of a specific prophetic belief p that p is unsafe. Additionally, the scope of these results is restricted to the model of prophecy found in the *Guide*.

The thesis begins with a critical elucidation of Williamson's extensive work on the safety condition for knowledge. Particular attention is paid to those issues related to method individuation and Williamson's cumulative conception of bases. Matters concerning these two topics inform the reading of Maimonides on prophecy found in the second chapter. In particular, I argue that Maimonides should be read as defending a cumulative conception of prophecy. As I emphasize several times during the chapter, the epistemology of prophecy cannot be reduced to the epistemology of testimony since prophecy for Maimonides does not involve the transfer of a proposition from God to the prophet. The third chapter is devoted to identifying those elements of the prophetic method that involve room for error. I argue that while all belief-forming methods in a fallibilist epistemology contain room for error, some are riskier than others. Prophecy should be considered one of the riskier sort. The fourth and final chapter shifts attention to non-standard semantics for 'knows,' David Lewis's in particular. I argue that the interaction between such semantics and the laws governing prophecy in Jewish law is problematic. In particular, I demonstrate that such semantics destabilize the prophetic phenomenon. As such, we must either choose invariantism and gain stability, or choose non-standard semantics for 'knows' and live with this lack of stability.

Acknowledgments

Contents

Introduction

This thesis addresses the following question and investigates one particular line of thought in response to it: Is prophecy a knowledge acquiring method? By 'prophecy' I have in mind the Old Testament phenomenon, though by no means do my findings exclude prophecy in the New Testament or Koran. By 'knowledge' I intend Timothy Williamson's work on the safety condition for knowledge. And by the prophetic 'method' I have in mind the treatment of prophecy found in Moses Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*, his seminal work in philosophy. Pared down in this manner, the thesis seeks to uncover those epistemic considerations pertaining to the safety of prophetic beliefs in Maimonides' model.[1]

The question of whether or not prophecy is a knowledge acquiring method derives its significance from the centrality of the prophetic phenomenon to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In traditional circles, two-thirds of the Old Testament is the work of prophets while the Koran is a prophetic work in its entirety. All three religions derive much of their theology and legal codes from those prophetic works. In a sense, therefore, this thesis examines the epistemic foundations of those religions. Given the importance of prophecy to monotheism,

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[1] The *Guide* was Maimonides' final and most philosophically-developed treatment of prophecy. Viewing an author's final publication as his 'settled' or 'mature' view is commonly adopted by historians of philosophy and that methodology has been adopted for present purposes. Peter Millican (2002: 32ff), for example, views the *Enquiry*, not the earlier *Treatise*, as containing Hume's settled philosophical positions. For a documentation of Maimonides' various views on prophecy in his many publications, see Kreisel (2001: 148-315). Finally, as shall be demonstrated in Chapter 2, all Jewish philosophers recognize a qualitative difference between Mosaic and non-Mosaic prophecy. The scope of this thesis is therefore restricted to the phenomenon of non-Mosaic prophecy. At the end of Chapter 3 I argue that as far as Maimonides' approach to the prophetic method is concerned, sense can be made of the qualitative supremacy of Mosaic prophecy in light of my findings in that chapter.

it is surprising to note that philosophers of religion have largely neglected the epistemology of prophecy. My enquiry aims to fill this lacuna. There are, however, a number of treatments in the vicinity that deal with closely related questions. In *Perceiving God*, William Alston defends the claim that one is practically justified in thinking that one's beliefs formed in response to perceptual experiences as of God are epistemically justified. In *Revelation*, Richard Swinburne examines the grounds one might have for rationally believing of some agent *S* that *S* has received a revelation from God. Alvin Plantinga, in his *Warranted Christian Belief*, defends an account wherein beliefs formed by way of the *sensus divinitatis*, a concept found in Aquinas and Calvin, are warranted. Prophecy is not the central concern of either Alston or Plantinga, however; that is, the scope of the religious or mystical experience that is central to their work does not include prophecy. And the epistemic status of the prophet's belief is not Swinburne's topic. Finally, no author has discussed the epistemology of prophecy from the perspective of Williamson's notable work on knowledge.

In contrast to the contemporary scene, there was a flurry of work on the nature of prophecy during the medieval period by a number of philosophers from across the religious spectrum. There was also a healthy trade of ideas across religious lines. As far as Judaism is concerned, Maimonides was the central philosophical figure of that time and his influence over Jewish philosophy continues into the present. An examination of Maimonides' mature philosophical treatment of prophecy in the *Guide* therefore goes to the heart of the dominant position on the matter in the Jewish tradition.

It proves instructive to note that medieval Jewish philosophers divide along a continuous dimension as per their commitments to the theological parameter of how much control, oversight, or regulation God exercises over the propositional content of prophetic beliefs. To a first approximation, on the one end of the spectrum are those who consider

prophecy to be a miraculous form of communication between God and a chosen human agent. While the precise nature of this miracle is subject to disagreement, the general idea is that during the prophetic experience the agent is a passive recipient of a special sort. On robust versions thereof, God determines both the recipient of this extraordinary communication and the words that the prophet utters. When understood in this fashion, the prophet adds nothing to the experience and 'cedes' control over her cognitive faculties to God, a type of 'surrender' that is not standardly the case with respect to either perceptual or testimonial knowledge. Robust regulatory accounts of prophecy in the Jewish tradition already appear in the classical period. Here is Philo:

> The mind that is in us is removed from its place at the arrival of the divine Spirit, but is again restored to its previous habitation when that Spirit departs … for in real truth the prophet, even when he appears to be speaking, is silent, and another being is employing his vocal organs, his mouth and tongue, for the explanation of what things he chooses; and operating on these organs by some invisible and very skilful act, he makes them utter a sweet and harmonious sound, full of every kind of melody.[2]

In these models the prophet is nothing but a mouthpiece for God, a puppet of sorts. One natural worry about Philo's picture is that, if it is indeed the case that the prophet's mind is 'removed' during the experience, it does not seem appropriate to attribute propositional attitudes to the prophet in that state. Since knowing *p* entails believing *p*, Philo's prophet does not gain knowledge by way of prophecy. Notable medieval exponents of robust regulatory prophecy are Saadia Gaon,[3] Judah Halevi,[4] and, in the early modern period, Isaac

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[2] "Who is the Heir of Divine Things?" (LIII, *The Complete Works of Philo*, trans. C.D. Yonge, Hendrickson, 1993).
[3] *Commentary on the Book of Creation* (pg. 108-9, trans. Y. Kafikh, Mossad Harav Kook, 1972).
[4] *Kuzari* (5.28) "Regarding prophetic speech, when Divine inspiration adorns prophets, all of their words are directed by the Divinity. The prophet has no personal choice in his usage of words" (trans. N.D. Korobkin, Feldheim, 2009).

Abrabanel.[5]

At other times, Saadia[6] and Halevi[7] take up a weaker regulatory view of prophecy. As in the robust regulatory account, prophecy constitutes a miraculous form of communication between God and a human agent. However, there is less stress on the miraculous property of the prophetic phenomenon, given that the prophet actually sees with her eyes a physical object called the 'Created Glory,' and hears with her ears sound waves called the 'Created Speech.' These two phenomena were created by God for the express purpose of communicating with prophets. In this model God expects the prophet to form beliefs appropriately responsive to what the prophet sees or hears. It may be suggested that on this picture prophetic knowledge can be reduced to quotidian perceptual or testimonial knowledge.

Populating the opposite end of the spectrum are deregulatory accounts of prophecy according to which the propositional content of the beliefs formed by way of prophecy are in some relevant sense contingent upon the prophet's discretion. As in weaker regulatory accounts, the nature of this dependency relation is subject to disagreement. In robust deregulatory accounts, God neither chooses the recipient of prophecy nor controls the propositional content of the beliefs formed by way of prophecy. More precisely, there is no form of communication between God and the prophet. Rather, prophecy is the name given to a unique, though not supernatural, way of forming beliefs restricted to those who satisfy certain necessary and jointly sufficient conditions. Maimonides and Gersonides are the

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[5] *Commentary on Maimonides' Guide of the Perplexed* (pg. 238ff, trans. A. Reines, Hebrew Union College Press, 1970).
[6] *Book of Beliefs and Opinions* 2.10 (pg. 121, trans. S. Rosenblatt, Yale University Press, 2001).
[7] *Kuzari* 1.89:62-3 and 2.4:87.

leading exponents of robust deregulatory accounts of prophecy.[8] Importantly, in these

models prophetic knowledge cannot be reduced to perceptual or testimonial knowledge.

Hasdai Crescas and Joseph Albo propose mixed views that combine what they consider to

be the virtues of the regulatory and deregulatory views.[9]

From a theological point of view it is easy to see the attraction of the robust regulatory

position—any theology that attributes its constituent parts to prophecy thus understood

will automatically count as the uncontestable will of God:

> By reason of its divine origin from within the Godhead itself, prophetic knowledge is
> *certain* and absolutely *infallible*, whereas philosophic knowledge is beset with *doubt*,
> *confusion*, and *error* (emphasis added).[10]

Faith will always trump reason. Philo's model proves an ideal counterpoise to Maimonides'

model in that the former indicates just how far the latter departs from robust regulatory

models that were of older pedigree and which enjoyed widespread support in the Jewish

tradition prior to Maimonides.[11]

Given the significance of the thesis question and the gravitas of Maimonides' position in

the historical tradition, I deemed it essential to distinguish myself by approaching the

question from a unique and original perspective. In short, I address the question from the

perspective of Williamson's work on the safety condition for knowledge. In the past fifteen

years, Williamson has produced a number of important works on knowledge that have

changed the manner in which epistemologists address central questions in their discipline.

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[8] Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed* (trans. Shlomo Pines, Chicago University Press, 1963). Gersonides, *Wars of the Lord*, Book 2 (trans. S. Feldman, JPS, 1987).
[9] Crescas, *Light of the Lord* (Hebrew), Book 2, §4. Albo, *The Book of Principles*, Book 3 (trans. I. Husik JPS, 1946).
[10] Alvin Reines (1970a: lxxviii)
[11] Maimonides (2.45.398-400) can be read as recognizing the kind of phenomenon Philo adverts to, though he denies it the name 'prophecy.'

This material proves to be a rich resource for approaching the question of prophetic knowledge.

The thesis opens with an extensive and critical elucidation of the safety condition for knowledge.[12] This elucidation of the safety condition is necessary for two reasons. Firstly, Williamson has developed his position in a number of publications over a fifteen-year period. An appreciation of the nuances in the safety condition therefore requires exposition and elucidation. Secondly, one cannot explore pathways to answering the question to which this thesis is addressed without having a thorough handle on the workings of the safety condition. The chapter then proceeds with a demonstration of how the safety condition handles some difficult cases in the literature. Chapter 1 concludes with a discussion of some puzzles facing the safety condition. These puzzles have been chosen in light of their relevance to discussions later in the thesis. Particular attention is paid to Williamson's cumulative conception of bases, which is a picture of belief forming methods in which one method may include several others. This idea will prove critical to my presentation of Maimonides on the prophetic method.

Reading Maimonides on prophecy proves to be a challenge for the modern reader. In the Introduction to the *Guide,* Maimonides informs his reader that his philosophical defense of Judaism's veracity, in particular his resolution of the problems created by the pervasive use of anthropomorphic language in the Old Testament, has been curtailed by the rabbinic injunction prohibiting the dissemination of theological 'secrets' to the uneducated masses.[13] This injunction was supposedly made to prevent the type of misunderstanding and confusion that could result in the masses abandoning Judaism. So as to remain faithful to

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[12] Ernest Sosa and Duncan Pritchard have also defended various formulations of a safety condition for knowledge. A longer version of Chapter 1, which includes a treatment of all three major safety theorists, can be found in Rabinowitz (2011).

[13] T.B. Hagiga 11b, 13a.

the rabbinic tradition while providing much needed illumination to the educated elite, Maimonides explains that he resorted to the use of a particular literary device popular among the Arabic philosophers of that period. In short, Maimonides admits to breaking up his treatment of any sensitive topic such that the reader is never presented with his view on that topic in any one place. He also warns that he will purposefully contradict himself so as to further hide his views from plain sight. To ascertain Maimonides' philosophical commitments, therefore, the reader must assemble the scattered pieces of the puzzle and attempt to put them together in a coherent way that dissolves the contradictions. The intended upshot of this literary device is a type of obfuscation that generates an exoteric level of meaning that will prove harmless to the masses while simultaneously providing an esoteric level of meaning for the educated who are capable of understanding the secrets Maimonides is keen to reveal.[14]

As demonstrated in Chapter 1, a central feature of the safety condition for knowledge is method individuation. Accordingly, the material presented in Chapter 2 centers on the prophetic method to the exclusion of much else that Maimonides wrote on prophecy.[15] In this sense the work presented in Chapter 2 should not to be considered a work in intellectual history, though it does demonstrate a sensitivity to that tradition. That kind of historical work on Maimonides has been undertaken by a wide range of scholars over the

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[14] According to Davidson (1979: 37 n.7) the Arabic philosophers Alfarabi, Avicenna, Algazali, and Averroes wrote in a manner that promoted esoteric vs. exoteric readings of their views. However, Maimonides, in his opinion, did not try very hard to hide his real or esoteric views despite his claiming to have done so. Davidson's position is bolstered by those places in the *Guide* where Maimonides writes quite openly that he has just revealed "a great prophetic secret" (2.6.265). *Pace* Davidson, Maimonides' explicit commitment to blatant contradictions throws into doubt his sincerity in either the Introduction or in those places where he openly reveals secrets. It is therefore contentious to draw general conclusions from isolated quotes.

[15] To give structure to my presentation of Maimonides on prophecy, I have introduced into the discussion in Chapters 2 and 3 a number of helpful distinctions and terms. These have been gathered together in the Appendix to assist the reader. The Appendix also includes a list that I have compiled of problematic cases involving prophecy; this list proves to be a useful tool when considering some of the epistemic issues raised in this thesis.

centuries and it is pointless to repeat it here. In response to those scholars working in that tradition who might accuse me of interpreting Maimonides using a tool foreign to his work, I argue that Maimonides demonstrates an acute awareness of the importance of method individuation. In particular, I shall argue that Maimonides presents us with a prophetic method that is best understood as a five-part method involving a number of bases of belief. Chapter 2 thus presents a cumulative conception of the prophetic method which does *not* involve the transfer of a proposition from God to prophet. This model ultimately gives the lie to the folk conception of prophecy as divine testimony. Finally, an emphasis on methods makes Maimonides' distinction between a true prophet and a false prophet more enlightening. Maimonides writes that a false prophet is "one who 'prophesies' regarding something that was never heard through prophetic vision; or which he heard from another prophet."[16] In short, Maimonides distinguishes the true prophet from the false prophet by way of method individuation, which reinforces the claim that Maimonides was concerned with method individuation.

Chapter 3 takes up the challenge of applying the safety condition to beliefs acquired by way of prophecy. A token belief *p* counts as either safe or unsafe on a case-by-case basis.[17] It would therefore be misguided to ask whether prophetic beliefs *simpliciter* satisfy the safety condition for knowledge. Nevertheless, once the specifics of the safety condition and the nature of the prophetic method in the *Guide* have been established, the purpose of Chapter 3 is to identify and discuss those factors of particular relevance to the safety of

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[16] *Code*, Laws of Idolatry 5.8.

[17] It is somewhat misleading to arrive at the conclusion that all beliefs generated by a specific method *M* will be safe on the grounds that in a particular case *M* generated a safe belief *p*. Cases involving fake barns demonstrate this point. Looking at a *real* barn under good lighting conditions at a comfortable distance in real barn country seems to be the same method as that employed when looking at a *real* barn under good lighting conditions at a comfortable distance in fake barn country. But surely the beliefs formed by that method in the latter case are not safe while those formed in real barn country are safe despite being formed by the identical method. For such reasons safety determinations are made on a case-by-case basis.

prophetic beliefs. Some of these factors are familiar from the safety literature while others are unique to prophecy or feature in a unique way *vis-à-vis* prophecy.[18] The discussion in this chapter is therefore intended to lead to an educated position from which the safety of particular prophetic beliefs can be addressed on a case by case basis. By the end of the chapter it shall be evident that the prophetic method, as found in the *Guide*, contains much room for error. These risks are not isolated; rather, a number of potential missteps are associated with all but one part of the method. Potential for error is thus systematic to prophecy. While all methods contain room for error in a fallibilist epistemology, some have a higher risk factor than others. Prophecy is an example of such a high-risk method. Religions predicated upon prophecy therefore stand on shaky epistemic grounds. Nevertheless, the risks identified and discussed in this chapter are those associated with the prophetic method when viewed independent of particular prophets in particular cases; that is, these conclusions do not entail that an individual application of the prophetic method by a prophet *S* in a case α will be unsafe. As stressed above, whether a belief *p* counts as safe in a case α depends on the particulars of α. The significance of the results reached in this chapter therefore lie in the denial of any presumption in favor of prophetic beliefs being *de facto* safe. Additionally, this chapter provides a helpful checklist of errors against which the safety of a particular prophetic belief can be assessed.

Williamson is a standard invariantist about the semantics for 'knows;' that is, the word 'knows' neither picks out a different knowledge relation in different contexts nor is knowledge open to pragmatic encroachment. In light of the popularity currently enjoyed by contextualism and sensitive invariantism, Chapter 4 explores the manner in which these

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[18] To simply matters, problems relating to epistemic defeat have not been factored into the discussion in Chapter 3. Naturally, for any *safe* prophetic belief *p*, relevant defeaters may undermine that epistemic status in the manner of one's favored account of epistemic defeat.

theories interact with the results reached in Chapter 3. Since 'safe' is a gradable adjective, the safety condition for knowledge is emendable to a contextualist or sensitive invariantist treatment. I suggest three ways in which the safety condition can be augmented to accommodate these views. So as to structure the dialectic in the chapter, attention will be limited to David Lewis's contextualism and a parallel Lewisian form of sensitive invariantism will be constructed for comparative purposes. As with most aspects of life, prophecy is subject to a number of regulations in Jewish law. The relevance of these laws lies in their introduction of the kinds of non-evidential factors contextualists and sensitive invariantists advert to in their arguments for an alternative semantics for 'knows.' Maimonides, as a legal scholar, was one of the only rabbinic figures in history to devote some attention to the laws of prophecy. That Maimonides was the codifier of these laws reinforces the pertinence of these laws to the discussion in the chapter. I then argue that the interaction between Jewish law on prophecy and Lewisian forms of contextualism and sensitive invariantism is highly problematic. In particular, the introduction of the high stakes associated with the laws governing prophecy problematize what different self-serving ascribers may choose to do when faced with such high stakes. When knowledge becomes sensitive to such pragmatic factors it undermines the practicability of some of the laws governing prophecy. The thesis concludes with an uncomfortable tension: either we must adopt semantic invariantism for 'knows' and thereby stabilize the prophetic phenomenon, or we can adopt non-standard semantics for 'knows' in which case we must learn to live with the kind of destabilizing fluidity about prophetic knowledge introduced by such semantics. Neither disjunct proves to be overly compelling.

CHAPTER 1

The Safety Condition for Knowledge

This chapter critically elucidates the safety condition for knowledge as found in several works by Timothy Williamson, the foremost proponent of this view.[19] Many of the features and virtues of the safety condition come into sharp relief when compared with some of the work done on knowledge following Gettier. §1 provides the relevant historical background while a closer look at Williamson's presentation of the safety condition follows in §2. §3 constitutes a thorough elucidation of the safety condition as a necessary condition for knowledge. The fashion in which the safety condition handles a number of famous test cases in the literature is found in §4. The chapter concludes with §5 in which a number of objections to Williamson's formulation of the safety condition are raised.

1. Historical Background

Knowledge is incompatible with accidentally true belief. That is to say, if an agent *S* is lucky that her belief *P* is true, *S* does not know *P*. This feature of knowledge was made explicit by

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[19] Ernest Sosa (1991, 1996 1999a, 1999b, 2000) and Duncan Pritchard (2005, 2007, 2008, 2009a, 2009b) are the other notable proponents of the safety condition. Each formulates the safety condition differently to Williamson, which makes for significant points of disagreement. Sosa no longer views safety as necessary for knowledge and Pritchard now accepts a virtue condition, in addition to the safety condition, as necessary for knowledge. I refer to Sosa and Pritchard on those occasions in which their theories supplement the focus on Williamson. For a treatment of all three safety theorists and the numerous ways in which the three differ, see Rabinowitz (2011). Sainsbury (1997), and to a lesser extent Peacocke (1999: 309ff), could also be considered safety theorists, though neither has defended a safety condition for knowledge as much as entertaining it in an explication of the notion of 'close possibility.'

Bertrand Russell (1948: 170) and, more famously, by Edmund Gettier (1963). Gettier who demonstrated that a justified true belief (JTB) is insufficient for knowledge as *S* can have a justified true belief *P* yet not know *P* because *S* is lucky that *S*'s belief *P* is true. To use Russell's case for illustrative purposes, suppose that *S* truly believes that it is noon upon looking at a clock that correctly reads noon. However, unbeknownst to *S* this clock broke exactly twelve hours prior. Even though *S* has good reasons to believe that it is noon and *S*'s belief is true, *S* does not know that it is noon since *S* is lucky that her belief is true.

Several notable attempts were made to improve the JTB analysis of knowledge; in particular, many were attracted to the idea that a stronger justification condition would resolve Gettier problems. Thus began the vast literature on the nature of epistemic justification.[20] Others, though disagreeing among themselves about the place of justification in an account of knowledge, sought a solution to the Gettier problem in a new anti-luck condition for knowledge. One of these attempts is particularly relevant here. Robert Nozick (1981: 179) proposed the following counterfactual as a necessary condition for knowledge: *S* knows *P* via a method *M* only if, were *P* false, *S* would not believe *P* via *M*. This came to be termed the sensitivity condition for knowledge.[21] To satisfy this condition it must be the case that in the closest world in which *P* is false *S* does not believe *P* using *M* (where possible worlds are ordered as per their similarity to the actual world). That the agent continues to believe that it is noon in the closest world in which it is not, explains the absence of knowledge in Russell's case.

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[20] See Shope (1983: 45-108) for a helpful overview of this literature. See Kornblith (2001) for more recent discussions on the topic of justification.

[21] More than a decade earlier Fred Dretske (1970) proposed an account of knowledge involving counterfactuals. However, since Nozick's account was more developed, it became more popular and influential. I therefore set aside Dretske in this chapter though much of what I say *vis-à-vis* Nozick will apply with equal force to Dretske.

Nozick's account enjoyed widespread popularity because of its anti-skeptical capabilities. Following Nozick, I count as knowing that there is tree in my garden since I would not believe that if none were planted there; that is, in the closest world in which there is no tree in my garden (for example, when none is planted there) I do not believe that there is a tree in my garden. Worlds where radically skeptical scenarios are true count as further off since those worlds are more dissimilar to the actual world than the world in which no tree is planted in my garden. That I would believe falsely in those worlds is thus irrelevant to whether I count as knowing that there is a tree in my garden.

Nozick's account came with two significant costs, however. Firstly, it cannot accommodate the very intuitive principle that knowledge is closed under known entailment. Roughly, this principle states that if *S* knows *P* and *S* knows that *P* entails *Q*, then *S* knows *Q*. By the closure principle it follows, then, that if I know that I have hands, and I know that if I have hands entails that I am not a handless brain in the vat, then I know that I am not a handless brain in the vat. However, I fail to know that I am *not* a handless brain in the vat since I would falsely believe that I was not a handless brain in the vat in the closest world in which the proposition "I am not a handless brain in the vat" is false (that is, the world in which I *am* a handless brain in the vat). In other words, the sensitivity condition for knowledge cannot be satisfied when it comes to the denial of radically skeptical hypotheses. Seeing no way to redeem his account from this problem, Nozick (1981: 198ff) was forced into the rather unorthodox position of having to deny the universal applicability of closure as a feature of knowledge.

Secondly, Nozick admits that the sensitivity condition cannot feature as a condition for knowledge of necessarily true propositions as there is no world in which such propositions are false since, by definition, necessarily true propositions are true in every possible world.

The scope of the sensitivity condition is thus limited to knowledge of contingently true propositions. That the sensitivity condition cannot, for example, illuminate the nature of our mathematical or logical knowledge makes it less preferable, *ceteris paribus*, than a condition that can.

The safety condition is similar to the sensitivity condition in that it too is a modal condition for knowledge. That is where any significant similarity ends. As shall be demonstrated at length, safety differs from sensitivity in the following ways. Firstly, and most importantly, safety permits knowing the denial of a radically skeptical hypothesis in a manner that maintains the closure principle. This advantage by itself advocates strongly in favor of the safety condition. Secondly, Williamson's formulations of the safety condition are not in the form of a counterfactual. And thirdly, the safety condition is more expansive than the sensitivity condition in that its scope includes knowledge of necessarily true propositions.

2. The Safety Condition as a Necessary Condition for Knowledge

Williamson (2000) is involved in the project of illuminating the structural features of knowledge. His safety condition is both the result of this project and an integral part of it. Williamson, in stark opposition to the standard practice in the post-Gettier period, resists being drawn into offering a conceptual analysis of knowledge in terms of non-trivial and non-circular necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for knowledge, a project he thinks is futile given its history of repetitive failures.[22] Knowledge, for Williamson, requires avoidance

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[22] Cassam (2009) and Goldman (2009) take issue with Williamson's arguments against the viability of conceptually analyzing 'knowledge.' See Williamson (2009a, 2009b) for his replies.

of error in similar cases. This is to be taken as a schema or toy model by which to elucidate the structural features of knowledge. The basic idea, then, is that *S* knows *P* only if *S* is safe from error i.e. there must be *no* risk or danger that *S* falsely believes in a similar case. The relevant modal notions of safety, risk, and danger are cashed out in terms of possible worlds such that a margin for error is created in so far as there is *no* close world surrounding the actual world in which *S* falls into error. Such worlds act as a 'buffer zone' from error and thereby prevent the type of epistemic luck that characterizes Gettier cases. In Russell's case, for example, *S* does not know that it is noon since there is a close world in which *S* falsely believes that it is noon e.g. where *S* looks at the clock slightly after noon.[23]

Despite Williamson's opposition to the project of factorizing knowledge, it seems clear enough that Williamson should be read as putting forward safety as a necessary condition for knowledge given that he presents the safety condition as a conditional using the appropriate locution *only if*. And this is how his critics have typically understood him. As Williamson formulates the safety condition in a number of different ways on different occasions, it is impossible to pin down one formulation as representing Williamson's view. Here is one recent formulation that will suffice for the time being:

(SF)   For all worlds *W*, times *T*, subjects *S*, belief-episodes *B*, and propositions *P*, *S* knows *P* at *T* in *W* as far as *B* goes only if *B* expresses a true proposition in every possibility that is close at *T* in *W* (Williamson 2009: 324).

Nevertheless, the manner in which Williamson expresses the safety condition still separates him from those who offer necessary conditions for knowledge. As Williamson emphasizes

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[23] It goes without saying that *S* knows that *S* knows *P* only if *S* safely believes that *S* knows *P*. Since there can be cases where that belief is unsafe yet the subject knows *p,* it follows that the KK principle is not universally true (Williamson 2012). See Williamson (2000: 114) for the argument demonstrating how knowledge can easily fail to iterate. See Sainsbury (1997: 910) for a case not involving epistemology which demonstrates how 'could not easily have' can fail to iterate.

time and again, the safety condition, as he states it, is *circular* in that whether or not a case β counts as a relevantly similar case to α is in part determined by whether we are inclined to attribute knowledge to the agent in α; safety (reliability in similar enough cases) cannot be defined without reference to knowledge and knowledge without reference to safety (2000: 100; 2009d: 9, 10).[24] Strictly speaking, then, safety is not a recipe by which to *determine* whether there is knowledge in a particular case. Rather, it is a model by which to illuminate the structural features of knowledge and by which we can begin talking about knowledge in individual cases: "the point of the safety conception of knowing is not to enable one to determine whether a knowledge attribution is true in a given case by applying one's general understanding of safety, without reference to knowing itself. If one tried to do that, one would very likely get it wrong" (ibid.).[25]

3. *Elucidating the Safety Condition*

The presentation of the safety condition thus far has been intentionally bareboned for introductory purposes. This section is devoted to spelling out the finer details of the condition. It goes without saying that for *epistemic* purposes possible worlds W_1, …, W_N count as closer to or further from the world W in which S believes P at time T on a case by case basis relative to most or all of the following factors: the belief P, time T, the agent S, and the method M by which S formed the belief P at T in W. In other words, the conditions of belief formation, represented by the set {S; P; T; M}, play a constitutive, though not

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[24] A similar sort of circularity, claims Williamson (2009d: 9), is in play with respect to Lewis's counterfactuals—the similarity of possible worlds is in part determined by whether or not one thinks the counterfactual true or false.

[25] While I continue to talk of safety as a necessary condition for knowledge in the remainder of this thesis, I have in mind the weaker sense of 'necessary condition' found in Williamson, namely a necessary yet circular condition.

exclusive, role in a determination of closeness.[26] It follows, then, that the adequacy of the safety condition will turn on, among other things, how close worlds are to be specified, the time of the belief formation, what type of reliability is at play, and how safety theorists understand methods. A foray into these important questions follows.

3.1. What Counts as a Close World?

As Williamson points out, the safety condition is notoriously vague owing to 'knowledge' and 'reliability' being vague concepts (2000: 100). As such it is unlikely that we will arrive at a very determinate answer as to exactly which worlds count as close, our expectations must be lowered. Nevertheless, the following points prove elucidating.

Firstly, to satisfy the safety condition it is *not* the case that in every close world the agent must truly believe the relevant proposition; that is to say, *S* can safely believe *P* in *W* even though there are close worlds in which the agent does *not* form the belief *P,* e.g., *S* does not believe the target proposition in several of the close worlds because *S* is distracted or preoccupied. For instance, in world *W S* comes to believe that a car is approaching when *S* sees a car coming down the road. There may very well be a close world in which *S* is standing in exactly that same position at that very time but does not form the belief that a car is approaching because *S* turns her head in the opposite direction to look at a squirrel in a tree. Despite the lack of belief in the target proposition in these close worlds, *S* may nevertheless counts as safely believing in *W* that a car is approaching. In light of such considerations, it is useful to consider close worlds as divided into two broad categories—

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[26] Some may prefer to think of possible worlds as branching possibilities *à la* Hawthorne and Lasonen-Aarnio (2009) or as concentric circles surrounding a subject-centered world *à la* Lewis (1973: 149). I commit to no metaphor in this chapter. Readers are encouraged to adopt whichever metaphor makes the dynamics of safety easiest for them.

relevant and irrelevant—a distinction which will prove important in the forthcoming discussion on skepticism.

Secondly, as Hawthorne (2004: 56) notes, closeness, as it pertains to safety, cannot be cashed out in terms of the notion of similarity found in counterfactuals. A counterfactual of the form $P \: \Box\!\!\rightarrow Q$ is non-vacuously true at a world W only if some world in which P and Q are true is closer to W than any world in which P is true but Q false. When determining the truth conditions for counterfactuals the history of both the actual world and the close world in which the antecedent is true are held fixed. However, as will become evident below, the similarity of worlds operative in safety permits for close worlds with a different history to the actual world.

Lastly, it is unclear whether believing a truthvalueless proposition (e.g. one that contains a term that fails to refer) in a close world should count as a knowledge-denying error possibility. Hawthorne (2004: 56) thinks it should since these count as "failed attempts at a true belief."[27]

3.2. The Time Factor

As far as safety goes, two worlds W and W^* may count as close at a time T with respect to the set {S; P; M} yet count as distant from one another, with respect to that same set, at a time prior to or following T. As long as S falsely believes P in W^* at T then S's belief P in W at T is unsafe. The following two cases illustrate that for the purposes of safe belief closeness must be understood as indexed to a point in time.

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[27] In conversation Williamson has said that he concurs with Hawthorne.

Cases concerning knowledge of the future demonstrate that closeness at the time of belief formation trumps distance at a later time. Suppose, e.g., that in a world *W* at time *T* (sometime in May 2009) an agent *S* truly believes that the 2012 Olympics will be hosted by London as a result of reading so in a local newspaper. Yet things in *W** in 2012 may be radically different from the way things are in *W* in 2012 when the Olympics indeed take place in London e.g. in *W** the British economy collapses and no Olympics take place in London in 2012. Nonetheless, *W* and *W** may count as close at *T* despite these significant differences between the two worlds in 2012.

It is not the case, however, that for a world *W** to be close to world *W* at *T* it must share a *complete* history with *W* up to and including time *T*. The following case elucidates this point. It is taken for granted that if in *W* Sally walks into a showroom displaying red shoes under red overhead lights she does not know that there are red shoes on display if there is a close world *W** in which there are white shoes on display but which look red under red lights and *S* falsely believes that the shoes are red. Notice that *W** counts as close to *W* at *T* even though they do not share an identical history: at *T—N* the factory owner in *W** is placing *white* shoes on the display shelves while in *W* at *T—N* the factory owner is putting *red* shoes on the display shelves.

Additionally, insisting on shared histories would make safety trivially true in some cases where the target proposition believed is true and concerns the present or the past; namely, were close worlds only those worlds which share complete histories with the actual world until the moment at which the belief is formed, then it would follow that in some cases the proposition believed would be trivially safe, which is an unsatisfactory result. Accordingly, if I recall going to the gym yesterday then I know I went to the gym yesterday only if there is

no close world which differs from the actual world with respect to my going to the gym yesterday and in which I falsely believe I went to the gym yesterday.

Lastly, there is room to think that the conceptual content of 'could easily have falsely believed' permits playing around with the time of the belief formation itself. It stands to reason, then, that cases of belief formation in a possible world W^* which occur shortly before or shortly after the belief formation in W should be factored into knowledge determinations as well. The motivation for permitting this flexibility with the time factor is that it allows safety to handle a wide variety of cases in which time is part of the content of the proposition believed, as exemplified by the Russell case. For example, S looks at two people kissing at a new year's party and forms the true belief that it is the new year. S does not count as knowing that it is the new year if there is a close world in which these two people begin kissing slightly before midnight, as a result of which S falsely believes it's the new year.

3.3. What Type of Reliability is Required?

Reliability, as a property of a belief-forming method, comes in different kinds, two of which are important for present purposes—local and global. The latter refers to a method M's reliability in producing a range of token output beliefs in different propositions P, Q, R, …, etc. A method M is *globally* reliable if and only if it produces sufficiently more true beliefs than false beliefs in a range of different propositions. For example, M could be the visual process and P the proposition that there is a pencil on the desk, Q the proposition that there are clouds in the sky, and R the proposition that the bin is full. If a sufficiently high number of P, Q, R, … are true then method M is globally reliable. A method M is *locally* reliable with

respect to an individual target proposition *P* if and only if *M* produces a sufficient ratio of more true beliefs than false beliefs in that very proposition *P*.

Accounts of knowledge in the post-Gettier period differ with regards to which type of reliability is necessary for knowledge. Nozick thinks only local reliability is needed, McGinn (1999) requires global reliability to the exclusion of local reliability, and Goldman (1986: 47) requires both. Where does Williamson fall on this spectrum? It is quite challenging to pin down the type of reliability at work in (SF) since Williamson formulates the safety condition in different ways on different occasions. Some of these formulations clearly advocate for local reliability only, while others also require global reliability. And, further still, others push for subtler versions of both. Starting with local reliability, consider this formulation:

> (SF1)   "[I]n a case α one is safe from error in believing that [a condition] C obtains if and only if there is no case close to α in which one falsely believes that C obtains" (2000: 126-7).

A condition, for Williamson (ibid.: 52), is specified by a 'that' clause relative to an agent and a time. Thus, '*S* believes that the tree is *i* inches tall' counts as *S* believing that a certain condition obtains. According to Williamson (ibid.: 114ff), a typical agent who looks at a tree and believes 'that the tree is *i* inches tall' does not know 'that the tree is *i* inches tall' because there is a close world in which the agent uses that same method and comes to falsely believe 'that the tree is *i* inches tall' when in fact it is *i*+1 inches tall. Most people cannot tell the height of a tree to the nearest inch just by looking at it. This case demonstrates that Williamson requires local reliability since this is a case where the agent lacks knowledge because in a close world he falsely believes the same proposition using the same method as that used in the actual world. Given that for Williamson, safe belief entails

a zero tolerance for false belief in a close world ("*no* close case"), Williamson requires *perfect* local reliability.

Here is another formulation of safety:

(SF2)   "One avoids false belief reliably in α if and only if one avoids false belief in every case similar enough to α" (2000: 124).

This formulation seems to rule out knowledge in the following case. Pat is pulling cards out of a hat on which sentences are written. Pat pulls the first out and upon reading it truly believes that oranges are fruits. Pat then pulls a second card out and upon reading the sentence written on it falsely believes that America is a province of Australia. Pat's true belief that oranges are fruits is unsafe because Pat does not avoid false belief in a similar case; that is, Pat could easily have falsely believed a *different* proposition using the *same* method in a close world. Because Pat uses a globally unreliable method she lacks knowledge. Given that for Williamson safe belief entails a zero tolerance for false belief in a close world ("*every* case"), Williamson requires *perfect* global reliability.

Yet further formulations of safety by Williamson advocate for subtler non-standard versions of local and global reliability:

(SF3)   "*P* is required to be true only in similar cases in which it is believed on a similar basis" (2009: 364-5).

So for *S* to safely believe *P* via *M* not only must *S* not falsely believe *P* in any close world via *M*, *S* must also not falsely believe *P* using a *relevantly similar* method to *M*. Williamson extends this principle in a way that results in a non-standard version of global reliability:

(SF4)   If in a case α one knows *P* on a basis *B*, then in any case close to α in which one believes a proposition *P** close to *P* on a basis [*B**] close to *B*, then *P** is true (2009: 325).

In other words, to safely believe *P* via *M* in α it must also be the case that one does not falsely believe *P** via *M** in a close case. For ease of reference, here is a gloss in the vicinity of Williamson's conception of a safe belief:

(SF!)   *S* safely believes *P* via a method *M* in world *W* if and only if there is no close world to *W* in which:

(i)   *S* falsely believes *P* via *M*; or
(ii)   *S* falsely believes *P* via a relevantly similar method *M**; or
(iii)   *S* falsely believes any proposition via *M*; or
(iv)   *S* falsely believes a relevantly similar yet different proposition *P** using a relevantly similar method *M**.

Williamson is thus committed to *S* knowing *P* in *W* at *T* only if *S* (SF!)-safely believes *P*.

There are independent reasons in favor of knowledge requiring both global and a local reliability. Firstly, some vague concepts may have different meanings in different worlds. It follows, then, that sentences with the same words can express different propositions in different worlds even when these worlds are very close (Williamson 1994: 230-4). For example, the property expressed by *bald* in the actual world might be *having less than twenty hairs on one's head* while the property expressed by *bald* in a close world *W* might be *having less than eighteen hairs on one's head*. If this is the case, then the sentence *Pollock is bald* expresses different propositions in these two worlds. Hence if Jackson, in the actual world, believes of Pollock that he is bald (Pollock having nineteen hairs on his head) then his belief will turn out to be unsafe as there is a close world, namely *W*, in which Jackson falsely believes of Pollock that he is bald. In cases such as these, for an agent to

know *P* via *M* it must be the case that the agent could not easily have falsely believed *Q* via *M* (where *Q* counts as a different proposition in that close world).

Knowledge of propositions with singular content also advocate for globally reliability. Consider the case in which Jones, looking at a real barn surrounded by fake barns, forms the true belief that '*that* is a barn.' The intuition is to deny Jones knowledge despite the fact that there is no close world in which that very barn is not a barn (assuming that a barn is essentially a barn). Since Jones could easily have falsely believed of a fake barn that '*that* is a barn,' which expresses a different and false proposition, Jones is denied knowledge.[28]

3.4. Methods

A method is a way of forming beliefs which "includes the specific causal process leading to it and the relevant causal background" (Williamson 2009b: 307). Methods, or bases of belief, can be individuated in a variety of ways: internally or externally, and in a coarse- or fine-grained way. A way of individuating methods is internal if it respects the constraint that agents who form a belief *P* and who are internal duplicates share the same method; and external if it does not respect that constraint. Alternatively, if method individuation supervenes solely on brain states, then methods are internally individuated; if two agents can be in the same brain state yet be using different methods, then methods are individuated externally.

A way of individuating methods is coarse-grained if methods are described broadly or generally e.g. the visual method. On the other hand, a way of individuating methods is fine-

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[28] Given that Williamson requires global reliability, even if only worlds with identical histories to the actual world count as close, I do not count as safely believing that I went to the gym yesterday if I could easily have formed a false belief in a different proposition using that method in a close world.

grained if methods are described in detail e.g. the visual method for large objects at close range under favorable lighting conditions. As the degree of detail to which a method can be described is a variable parameter along a continuous spectrum, fine- and coarse-grained individuation permit of a wide range of generality or detail. Specifying the relevant detail for each method is known as the generality problem for reliabilism. Given that reliably believing is part of safety, safety faces the generality problem, something Williamson acknowledges (2009: 308).

Nozick (1981: 233) argues for an accessibility constraint on method individuation; that is, regardless of how methods are individuated, a difference in methods must *always* be accessible to the agent. It is evident, then, that an accessibility constraint is in tension with both external and fine-grained individuation since, *ex hypothesi*, neither the difference between seeing and hallucinating nor the difference between two finely-grained methods is detectable by a typical agent.

Williamson denies such an accessibility constraint, thereby opening the way for external, fine-grained individuation of methods. For Williamson the accessibility constraint assumes that methods are a luminous condition, where a luminous condition is defined as a condition such that whenever it obtains the agent is in a position to know that it obtains (Williamson 2000: 95). But, as Williamson (ibid.: 96-8) argues, no non-trivial condition is luminous.

One further consideration against the accessibility condition is that it generates an infinite regress: *S* must be aware of which method she uses to believe *P*, the method she used to determine that, the method she used to determine that … and so on. While these arguments do not entail that internal and coarse-grained individuation are unsustainable, they do show that one reason in favor of such positions is unpromising.

While we typically talk about bases of belief in a coarse-grained way, Williamson favors a fine-grained, external individuation of bases. For example, Williamson (2009: 307, 325 n.13) thinks that, other things being equal, seeing a daschund and seeing a wolf count as different bases; believing that one is drinking pure, unadulterated water on the basis of drinking pure, unadulterated water from a glass is not the same basis as believing as much when drinking water from a glass that has been doctored with undetectable toxins by conniving agents; believing that one was shown x number of flashes after drinking regular orange juice does not count as the same basis as believing that one was shown x number of flashes after drinking a glass of orange juice with a tasteless mind-altering drug; and, finally, believing that S_1 is married by looking at S_1's wedding ring and believing that S_2 is married by looking at S_2's wedding ring count as different methods if S_1 reliably wears her ring while S_2 does not.

Williamson is inclined towards external, (super) fine-grained individuation of methods owing to his position on luminosity and skepticism. Regarding the former, in some cases the circumstances of the case can change in very gradual ways that the agent fails to detect such that at the start of the case the basis of belief is reliable while unreliable at the end of the case.[29] Consider, e.g., a case in which I see a pencil on a desk in front of me under favorable conditions. Assumedly I know that there is a pencil on the desk. I then begin to gradually walk backwards from the desk all the while keeping my eyes on the pencil until I reach a point at which it appears as a mere blur in the distance. At that point beliefs I form based on vision are no more than guesses. At each point in my growing distance from the desk my visual abilities *vis-à-vis* the pencil start deteriorating slowly such that at some indiscernible point my eyesight no longer counts as reliable with respect to the pencil. Were

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[29] See Williamson (2000: 183) for such a case.

bases of belief individuated in an internal, coarse-grained manner such that my looking at the pencil close-up and my looking at the pencil at a distance count as the same method, then I would fail to know that there is a pencil on the desk when close to the table since there is a close world in which I look at it from a distance and form a false belief that there is pen on the desk, which is intuitively the incorrect result. Consequently, minimal changes in the external environment can result in a difference in the basis of belief formation.

3.5.   Skepticism

One of the selling points of safety is that it, unlike the relevant alternatives and sensitivity conditions, permits one to know the denial of skeptical hypotheses, thereby maintaining closure. Here is the skeptical argument from closure:

(1)   I know I have hands.
(2)   If I know I have hands then I know I am not a brain in the vat.
(3)   I don't know that I am not a brain in the vat.

This triad is inconsistent because, claims the skeptic, one cannot know the denials of skeptical hypotheses i.e. one cannot know that one is not in the bad case (the denial of (3)).

There are essentially three different strategies a safety theorist can employ to oppose skepticism: (i) since the agent in the bad case uses a different method to the agent in the good case, the bad case does not count as close to the good case; (ii) the bad case counts as close to the good case yet remains irrelevant given that the agent in the bad case uses a different method to the agent in the good case; and (iii) while the agents in the good and bad cases use the same method, the bad case counts as far off given the overall

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dissimilarities between it and the good case. At various points in his work Williamson helps himself to all three strategies (2000: 156; 2009: 307, 2009d: 21).

Therefore, if I count as knowing that I have hands in the actual world, then the world in which I am a brain in the vat being fed images as of having hands is relevantly dissimilar to the actual case to count as close or relevantly close. I am thus in a position to know that I am not a brain in the vat, thereby maintaining closure and ensuring a consistent triad.

3.6. How does Safety differ from the Sensitivity Condition?

In some cases sensitivity, Nozick's third condition for knowledge, is the more stringent condition, while in others safety is. The following two points of logic elicit the difference between the safety and sensitivity conditions. When it comes to cases concerning knowledge of the denial of skeptical hypotheses, the safety principle is less demanding than the sensitivity principle. The latter principle requires that the agent not believe *P* in the nearest possible world in which *P* is false. As such no agent can know the denial of skeptical hypotheses by the simple sensitivity test, e.g., I am not a brain in the vat, because in the nearest possible world in which the agent is a brain in the vat the agent continues to believe that he is not a brain in the vat. So while agents count as knowing many everyday propositions, they do not know the denials of skeptical hypotheses. Hence the incompatibility of the sensitivity condition and single-premise closure, for knowledge of everyday propositions entails knowledge of the denial of skeptical hypotheses incompatible with those propositions.

The safety principle, however, is compatible with closure for it permits knowing the denial of skeptical hypotheses. By the safety principle I count as knowing the everyday

proposition *P* 'that I have hands' by method *M* only if I safely believe *P*. It follows, then, that if I safely believe *P* then there is no relevantly close world in which I am a brain in the vat and am led to falsely believe that I have hands by *M*. Consequently, if I know that I have hands and I know that that entails that I am not a brain in the vat, then I know that I am not a brain in the vat.

On the other hand, cases can be constructed in which safety is more demanding than sensitivity. Suppose *S* truly believes *p* in the actual world but (i) in the *closest* world in which *p* is false *S* does *not* believe *p,* and (ii) there is a *close* world in which *S* falsely believes *p*. In this case *S* satisfies the sensitivity condition but fails to satisfy the safety condition. The following case illustrates this point. Unbeknownst to Mary the thermometer she has just purchased is defective and will yield a reading of 39°C regardless of her temperature. Mary, who is running a fever of 39°C, then uses the thermometer to measure her temperature and it just so happens to correctly read her temperature of 39°C. However, in the nearest world in which her temperature is not 39°C and she uses this thermometer to take her temperature, she is distracted by her son and she does not form any belief about her temperature. She accordingly satisfies the sensitivity condition for knowledge. However, there happens to be a non-closest close world in which Mary, who is running a fever of 38.5°C, uses this thermometer to take her temperature and consequently forms the false belief that her temperature is 39°C. Mary thus fails to satisfy the safety condition.

3.7. The Semantics of Safety

Williamson is a standard invariantist about the semantics of 'knows.' In this respect he stands apart from those who have proposed contextualist or sensitive-invariantist semantics

for 'knows.' Roughly, contextualism about 'knows' is the claim that the truth conditions of the proposition expressed by '*S* knows *P*' depend on factors salient to the context of the attributer; sensitive invariantists recognize that while such factors should be considered in knowledge attributions it is the interests of the subject, not the attributer, that make the constitutive difference.

Given that 'safe' is a gradable adjective it is easy enough to see how one could model the safety condition according to either contextualism or sensitive invariantism—those factors that weigh in on the similarity measure of close worlds will be those salient to either the attributer or the subject.[30]

4. Safety in Action

To get a better feel for how the safety condition works, it proves beneficial to undertake an exercise in seeing how safety handles some of the troubling cases in the literature. Obviously each case can be modified in such a way as to make things harder for the safety theorist.

4.1. Gettier and Chisholm

Jones is told by his boss that Smith will get the promotion. Jones then sees that Smith has ten coins in his pocket. Jones accordingly infers that the man who will get the promotion has ten coins in his pocket. However, Jones gets the job and he happens to have ten coins in his pocket. According to Gettier (1963) Jones's belief does not amount to knowledge. How does

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[30] Chapter 4 discusses safety, contextualism, and sensitive invariantism in greater detail.

the safety condition handle this case? Jones's belief is unsafe because there are close worlds in which (a) a woman gets the job, or (b) in which Carter gets the job but has no coins in his pocket, or (c) in which Jones get the job but has nine coins in his pocket i.e. Jones's inferential method in this case is globally unreliable.

The same reasoning applies to Chisholm's (1977) case in which it seems to Jones that in the distance there is a sheep in the field. As a result Jones believes that there is a sheep in the field. However, while what Jones sees is a white dog there is indeed a sheep lying behind a rock hidden from Jones's sight. According to Chisholm Jones does not count as knowing that there is a sheep in the field. Jones's belief is unsafe because there is a close world in which there is no sheep behind the rock and Jones falsely believes that there is a sheep in the field i.e. the method of inferring the presence of sheep by seeing dogs is unreliable.

4.2. Fake Barns

Jones is in an area with many fake barns. Jones sees a real barn in the field and forms the belief that there is a barn in the field. Does Jones know that there is a barn in the field? This case is a little harder to explain because the details of the case can be manipulated into yielding bizarre intuitions in similarly structured cases (Hawthorne and Gendler 2005). What if, e.g., Jones would not have come across such a fake barn because he was not in walking distance of one? The permutations of the standard setup of this case abound (see e.g. Peacocke (1999: 324), Neta and Rohrbaugh (2004: 399), Comesaña (2005: 396), Lackey (2006), and Roland & Cogburn (forthcoming)). Similar permutations can be made for the Gettier and Chisholm cases, e.g., where circumstances are such that the person who gets the job in all close worlds is a man with ten coins in his pocket or that in all close worlds

there is a sheep behind the rock. And similar kinds of cases involving testimony can be constructed e.g. Jones, seeking the time of his train's departure, asks the nearest stranger to his right what time his train leaves. She truthfully tells him 'in the next five minutes.' But Jones nearly asked the nearest stranger to his left who would have informed him incorrectly. It is unclear whether Jones knows that his train departs in the next five minutes.

There are two points to bear in mind when considering these kinds of cases. Firstly, as far as the stronger version of the sheep and office Gettier cases go, it will be demonstrated that safety is not hostage to determinism; that is, even if it follows from the initial conditions and the laws of nature that all the men up for the job have ten coins in their pockets or that there will always be a sheep behind the rock, it does not follow that Jones's belief is safe in those kinds of cases since the initial conditions themselves could easily have been different such that his belief could easily have been false.

Secondly, these kinds of cases manifest the vagueness present in the safety condition. As Williamson (2000: 100; 2009: 305) indicates, there will be cases in which whether or not one thinks that there is a close world in which the agent falsely believes depends on whether or not one is inclined to attribute knowledge to that agent: the vagueness in 'relevantly similar,' 'reliable,' and 'knowledge' correspond with one another to make knowledge determinations in some cases notoriously difficult. Accordingly, the direction of one's intuitions about whether or not Jones knows in each permutation of these cases will influence whether or not one thinks he has a false belief in a close world, and *vice versa*.

There is one significant permutation of this case that requires attention. Suppose the details of the case remain identical except that instead of forming the belief *P* that there is a barn in the field, Jones forms the belief *Q* that that is barn (Hawthorne 2004: 56). Recall that *Q* is a singular proposition whist *P* is not. According to Williamson, if one thinks Jones knows

in this case, then there is no close world in which Jones falsely believes different propositions using that method or relevantly similar false propositions using a relevantly similar method.

4.3. Matches

Jones is about to light a match and forms the belief that the match will light once struck. Jones believes as much since all dry matches of this brand that he has struck have lit after being struck. However, the match does not light because it was struck but rather does so because of some rare burst of radiation (adapted from Skyrms 1967: 383). Stipulate further that in all close worlds the match lights by friction. Is Jones's belief safe?

The safety theorist seems drawn into denying knowledge in this case because there is a sense in which Jones is still lucky, in an epistemically malignant way, that his belief is true. When described in this way, this case is a stronger version of many of the Gettier cases mentioned so far for the belief is true by luck in the actual world but not so in any close world. Such cases would demonstrate that safety is not necessary for knowledge.

One way around this difficulty would be via Williamson's claim that worlds which differ as far as trends go count as far off (2009c: 327). Hence, only worlds in which the match lights by a freak burst of radiation count as close. If worlds are ordered in this way, the example is presented in a flawed way that incorrectly indicates a problem for safety. Since the match lights in all those close worlds via radiation, Jones knows that his match will light.

4.4. Reflections on Safety in Action

All these cases are difficult cases and it would be overly harsh to single safety out as a weak condition for knowledge if it struggles with these cases since all accounts of knowledge

struggle with cases such as these. However, many might find the results safety yields in the above cases quite unsatisfactory since safety can be used to support contradictory intuitions or fail to yield definitive results. At the heart of this 'shiftiness' is the vagueness of the similarity condition for possible worlds the upshot of which is that there is no determinate answer to which worlds counts as close and which distant. A condition for knowledge that displays such 'promiscuity' and 'wooliness' might strike many as a reason to discount it as an adequate condition for knowledge. This would be a premature and incorrect assessment, however. If classical logic holds, then it is the case that in every instance in which *S* truly believes *P, S* either knows *P* or S does not know *P*. But that does not entail that in every such case we are able to judge truly whether *S* knows *P* or not. Gettier cases and their ilk are examples of such cases. The vagueness inherent in the safety condition *tracks* or *accounts for* the vagueness generated by the way in which intuitions flicker across individuals. Safety explains why, e.g., there is no disagreement about the absence of knowledge in the (standard) sheep in the field case but significant disagreement about the absence of knowledge in fake barn cases or lottery cases—the difference in response is the result of differing intuitions about what constitutes closeness of possible worlds or the ease of false belief. The safety condition tracks disagreement about closeness metrics.

In light of these considerations, it is incorrect, therefore, to criticize safety, as Kvanvig (2008) does, for not specifying which worlds count as within the close worlds boundary and which outside it for there is no clear-cut way in which we can do so. As Nelson Goodman (1970) argued, 'similarity' is not susceptible to a conceptual analysis as it is sensitive to various contextual factors: "Clear enough when closely confined by context and circumstance, it is hopelessly ambiguous when torn loose" (ibid. 27). As such, it is an 'insidious' and 'invidious' concept that cannot be used without remainder. It does not help

to stipulate that two objects are similar if and only if they share at least one property because then all things would be similar to one another. Nor will it help to stipulate that two things are similar if and only if they have all their properties in common since no two objects have all their properties in common. And there is no non-arbitrary point along the scale at which to fix the number of properties required to satisfy the similarity condition. Nor is it clear which properties should count as more important for the purposes of measuring similarity. Stalnaker (1984: 126) and Lewis (1973: 91) both recognize that the presence of a similarity condition invites vagueness into their accounts of the semantics of counterfactuals. But both welcome this result since the vagueness in similarity *accounts for* the vagueness in some counterfactuals. The vagueness in two different concepts is often vague in a *coordinated* way, as we find with regard to (i) counterfactuals and similarity, and (ii) knowledge and closeness.

Nor should similarity be thought of as an empty concept either for we easily use it when making comparisons (Lewis 1973: 90), e.g., it seems perfectly sensible for one to say that Oxford is more similar to Cambridge than it is to London though it is unclear in exactly which respects this similarity is to be assessed; it all depends on which features of the three locales one places most emphasis or importance.

A second response to the above worry about safety is by way of luminosity. In light of the conceptual slipperiness of 'similarity,' it should come as no surprise that a safety condition, or for that matter any condition that incorporates a similarity condition e.g. a resemblance condition for representation in art or for the contents of some mental states, should fail to be a luminous condition. It is no criticism of safety that it not a luminous condition for all non-trivial conditions fail to be luminous (Williamson 2000: 13). There is just no getting around similarity being a vague primitive.

5. Problems for Safety

Of the several objections raised against safety, the following three deserve attention in light of their relevance to the discussion in the forthcoming chapters.

5.1. Knowledge of Necessarily True Propositions

A necessarily true proposition is one which is true in all possible worlds. One might think, therefore, that knowledge of such propositions presents a problem for safety since there can be no close world in which *S* falsely believes such propositions.

Given that knowing entails global reliability, knowledge of necessarily true propositions poses no problem for Williamson since there are cases in which the method used to believe a necessarily true proposition leads to error in a different proposition in a close world. For example, suppose I use a coin to decide whether to believe '42 x 17 = 714' or to believe '32 ÷ 0.67 = 40,' where I have no idea which is true without the use of a calculator. If the coin lands in such a way indicating that I should believe the first, which is necessarily true, then I am lucky to believe the necessary truth and not the falsehood. I consequently do not know that '42 x 17 = 714' as I could just have easily have falsely believed the different proposition expressed by '32 ÷ 0.67 = 40.'

5.2. Knowledge of the Future

The following lottery puzzle is thought to be particularly troublesome for safety. We take ourselves to know many things about the future, e.g., that the Lakers game is next Tuesday,

or that the elections will be held next month.[31] This being the case, intuitively at least, Suzy knows that she won't be able to afford to buy a new house this year. On the other hand, we deny that Suzy knows that her lottery ticket will lose (even if the draw has already taken place, the result yet to be made public). This state of affairs, however, presents a puzzle: assuming single-premise closure true, if Suzy knows that she won't be able to afford to buy a new house this year, and knows that this entails that her ticket is a loser, then Suzy should be in a position to know that her ticket will lose. But it is commonly held that agents do not know that their lottery tickets will lose.[32] The intuitive pull of single-premise closure is in tension with intuitions about what can be known about the future and about lottery tickets.

Problems involving lotteries can be generalized (Hawthorne 2004: 3). For instance, we are willing to say that Peter knows that (*P*) he will be living in Sydney this coming year. Yet we are hesitant to say that Peter knows that (*Q*) he won't be one of those unfortunate few to be drop dead from an unexpected heart attack in the coming months. Assuming single premise closure true, if we are willing to attribute to Peter knowledge of *P*, and Peter knows that *P* entails *Q*, we should be willing to attribute Peter knowledge of *Q*.

One way of explaining why agents do not know that their lottery tickets will lose or that they won't die from unexpected heart attacks is that both events (winning a lottery or having a heart attack) have a non-zero objective probability of occurring. That is, events with a non-zero probability of occurring can occur in close worlds, thereby establishing a conceptual link between safety and objective probability. Naturally, then, one might think that the world in which one's lottery ticket wins or in which one dies from an unexpected

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[31] It will be assumed that propositions about the future are either true or false. If one finds this assumption problematic, then there are cases, described by Hawthorne (2004: 3-5), that have the same structure as the lottery case but which do not involve propositions about the future.

[32] If one can know of a ticket that it will lose, then one can deduce the winner of the lottery from knowing of each ticket apart from one that it will lose, which is an absurd result.

heart attack is close and that therefore one's beliefs that one will lose the lottery or not die from a heart attack are unsafe.

This line of thinking is devastating for safety, however, as it would effectively rule out knowledge of many propositions the content of which regards the future since, assuming indeterminism true, there is a non-zero probability that many propositions about the future will be false i.e. for many true propositions P about the future there will be a close world in which P is false and one believes P. If safety leads directly to skepticism about knowledge of the future in this way, this result would be a good reason to give up safety.

One line of thought for a safety theorist to pursue in response to this problem is to support the following high-chance-close-world principle (HCCW): if there is a high objective chance at T_1 that the proposition P believed by S at T_1 will be false at T_2 given the state of the world at T_1 and the laws of nature, then S does not know P at T_1 as P is unsafe. The thinking behind this response is that if there is a high chance of some event occurring then that event could easily have occurred, which indicates that there is a natural connection between high chance and danger. For instance, if there is a high objective chance that the tornado will move in the direction of Kentucky, then it seems natural to say that Kentucky's inhabitants are in danger.

Hawthorne and Lasonen-Aarnio (2009) argue that Williamson cannot accept HCCW without thereby jeopardizing knowledge by multi-premise closure. Suppose that at T_1 a subject S knows a range of chancy propositions $P, Q, R, …$ about the future i.e. there is no close world in which any of those propositions are false. That said, for a sufficiently high number of propositions, the probability at T_1 that the conjunction of $\{P, Q, R, …\}$ will be true at T_2 is sufficiently low. Accordingly, the probability of the negation of $\{P, Q, R, …\}$ is high at T_1. By HCCW, then, there is at least one close world in which one of those propositions is

false. Therefore, while an agent may know each conjunct in a set of chancy propositions about the future, the safety theorist must deny by the lights of HCCW that the agent knows the conjunction of those propositions. HCCW is therefore incompatible with multi-premise closure.

HCCW also creates problems for single-premise closure. Consider Plumpton who is about to begin a significantly long series of deductions from a true premise P_1 towards a true conclusion P_N. Suppose that at every step there is a low objective probability that Plumpton's deductive faculty will misfire leading him towards a false belief. If the chain is sufficiently long then there will be a high enough probability that the belief at the end of Plumpton's deductive chain will be false, in which case, by HCCW, such a possibility counts as close. If closeness of worlds is cashed out in terms of HCCW, then Plumpton does not know P_N if he deduced it from P_{N-1}, which is effectively the denial of single-premise closure for whenever the chance that the next step will be false is high enough (e.g. the step leading from P_{N-1} to P_N in Plumpton's case) the deduction from that previous step will be ruled out as unsafe. The same problem arises for knowing a proposition at the end of a very long testimony or memory chain when there is a low non-zero objective probability that the process will go astray at any given link of the chain.

Moreover, HCCW also struggles to explain the inconsistency of why, in some cases, we *do* attribute knowledge to agents concerning events with substantially low probabilities of occurring while in some case we do *not*. For instance, we are happy to say, following Greco (2007) and Vogel (1999), that a veteran cop knows that his rookie partner will fail to disarm the mugger by shooting a bullet down the barrel of the mugger's gun, or that not all sixty golfers will score a hole-in-one on the par three hole, or that this monkey will not type out a

copy of *War and Peace* if placed in front of a computer. Yet it is common to deny knowledge in the lottery case where the chances of being wrong are substantially lower.

The safety theorist, therefore, owes us some story about how close worlds calibrate in cases involving objective chance. Williamson's response is to deny a conceptual link between safety and objective probability. When it comes to knowledge there are two conceptions of safety that one can have—a no risk conception or a small risk conception. Williamson (2009d) rejects the latter owing to the way we use the concepts of safety and danger in ordinary (non-epistemic) contexts. Williamson (ibid.: 11) asks us to consider the following two arguments about safety that seem to be valid where the context is held fixed between premises and conclusion:

Argument A $_{safety}$ S was shot

_____

S was not safe from being shot

Argument B $_{safety}$ S was safe from being shot by X

S was safe from being shot by Y

S was safe from being shot by Z

S was safe from being shot other than by X, Y, or Z

_____

S was safe from being shot

Williamson then asks us to consider which conception of safety secures the validity of the following arguments:

Argument A _{small risk}
S was shot

_____

S's risk of being shot was not small

Argument B _{small risk}
S's risk of being shot by X was small

S's risk of being shot by Y was small

S's risk of being shot by Z was small

S's risk of being shot other than by X, Y, or Z was small

_____

S's risk of being shot was small

Argument A _{no risk}
S was shot

_____

S was at some risk of being shot

Argument B _{no risk}
S was at no risk of being shot by X

S was at no risk of being shot by Y

S was at no risk of being shot by Z

S was at no risk of being shot by other than X, Y, or Z

_____

S was at no risk of being shot

A _{small risk} is invalid since even events with a small risk of occurring do occur e.g. lottery wins.

B _{small risk} is invalid for small risks add up to large ones. On the other hand, since *S* was shot in some world close to *W* (*W* being the closest world to itself), *S* was at some risk of being shot, which demonstrates the validity of *A* _{no risk}. This explains why *S* is not safe from being shot in *W* at a time *T*. Similarly, *B* _{no risk} is valid since if *S* was not shot by *X* in any close world to *W* at *T*, and so on with respect to *Y*, or *Z* or anyone else, then there is no close world in which *S* was shot. This exercise with the ordinary conception of safety demonstrates that the ordinary conception thereof is not in terms of small risk or probability.[33] Therefore, argues Williamson, the resulting conception of knowledge will not be a small risk one.

Accordingly, one counts as safely believing a conjunction if one safely believes the conjunction on a basis that includes safely believing each conjunct. Similarly, if one safely believes P and safely believes $P \rightarrow Q$, then one safely believes Q if the basis on which one believes Q includes the basis on which one believes P and $P \rightarrow Q$ for in that case there will be no close world in which one believes Q and Q is false. It stands to reason then, that there will be cases in which *S* safely believes P and safely believes $P \rightarrow Q$, yet does not safely believe Q since the basis on which *S* believes the latter does not include the basis of the former two beliefs. One must safely derive that which is entailed by what one already safely believes before one counts as safely believing the entailment: "We might say that safe derivation means that one makes a 'knowledgeable' connection from premises to conclusion, rather than that one knows the connection" (Williamson 2009d: 27).

Given these arguments, Williamson, demonstrates that in some cases knowing and objective probability dramatically diverge. For example, suppose I designate the winning

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[33] Peacocke (1999: 310-11) likewise understands the concept of 'safety' in this way: "The relevant kind of possibility is one under which something's not being possible means that in a certain way one can *rely* on its not obtaining" (original emphasis).

lottery ticket 'Lucky' and then believe that Lucky will win the lottery (where Lucky is a rigid designator). Nonetheless, I count as knowing in advance that Lucky will win despite each ticket having the very same low probability of winning.

For these reasons the cases involving knowledge of risky propositions do not bother a no risk conception of safety so long as one safely believes the conjunction on a basis that includes the bases on which one safely believes each conjunct. The same applies to very lengthy derivations. And so long as there is no close world in which one falsely believes a proposition P about the future, then one safely believes P even though there is a non-zero-probability that P is false e.g. that no monkey will type out *War and Peace*, that not all sixty golfers will score a hole-in-one, or that the rooky will not disarm the mugger. With respect to knowledge of the future, Williamson (2009c: 327) writes that "the occurrence of an event in β that bucks a relevant trend in α may be a relevant lack of closeness between α and β, even though the trend falls well short of a being a strict law." Trends are further indicators of closeness between cases. So in a case α an agent S can be in a position to know a proposition P about the future even though there is a non-zero probability that P will be false since the case β in which it is false is sufficiently distant from α owing to P's being false in β bucking a trend in α.

Matters involving lottery puzzles remain troublesome for Williamson, however. In the cases where the known proposition entails a risky proposition about the future e.g. that one will be healthy for the rest of the year, Williamson is happy to admit that one does safely believe that risky proposition given the divergence between safety and small risk explained above. However, this leaves cases in which one can safely infer that one's lottery ticket will lose. Williamson has traditionally remained committed to one being unable to know that one's ticket will lose (2000: 117, 247). In conversation Williamson has made two salient

remarks. First, he has admitted that he maintains that position with respect to believing that one's ticket will lose based on reflecting on the low odds of it winning. He is now open to one knowing that one's ticket will lose on some other basis of belief e.g. safe derivation. So in some lottery puzzles Williamson might concede that one can know that one's ticket will lose. Secondly, Williamson has emphasized that lottery puzzles are unstable since one readily attributes knowledge about the future only to retract it when the lottery entailment becomes salient. Williamson's concerns are the structural features of knowledge and he is not too perturbed by problems generated by specific cases, especially unstable ones.

In response to Hawthorne and Lasonen-Aarnio, Williamson claimed that if the basis of the belief in the conclusion includes the bases of each premise, then the belief in the conclusion counts as safe *if* each premise is safely believed. The safety of each premise is thus a *sufficient* condition for the safety of the conclusion so long as the basis of the latter includes the bases of the former. However, Williamson is silent on whether safe belief in the premises is a *necessary* condition for safe belief in the conclusion; that is, Williamson leaves unanswered whether he thinks one's belief in the conclusion is safe in those cases in which the basis of belief in the conclusion includes the basis of belief in the premise where said belief in the premise is unsafe.

Can knowledge be inferred from an unsafe belief? A natural starting point for a discussion of this question centers around discussions of knowledge from false premises, for a false belief is by definition unsafe. Common to Gettier's cases is an inference from a false belief. Several latched onto this feature and argued that the moral of such cases is that knowledge cannot be inferred from a false premise (Clark 1963, Harman 1973, Lehrer 1974, Feldman 2003). However, cases involving stopped clocks, fake barns, and sheep behind

rocks demonstrate that the key idea behind Gettier-like cases is the type of luck involved, not the inference from a false lemma.

As far as the safety condition for knowledge is concerned, the following cases of competent deduction begin to put pressure on the claim that knowledge cannot be inferred from a false premise.

(I)   Cindy, whom I trust, tells me that Maria is Danish. (Cindy is mistaken—Maria is actually Finnish.) I then deduce that Maria is European.

(II)   I enjoy making trivial inferences. I particularly enjoy applying the following rule—for any predicate F of a infer that a is a. Cindy, whom I trust, tells me that Maria is Danish. (Cindy is mistaken—Maria is actually Finnish.) I then infer that Maria is Maria.

(III)   If x is a zebra then x is a mammal.
        Maria is a zebra.
        Maria is a mammal.

In (I) and (II) my belief in the conclusion is made by way of a competent deduction from my unsafe belief that Maria is Danish. Nevertheless, there is room to argue that my belief in the conclusion is safe since there is no close world in which Maria is not European or in which Maria is not Maria. Similarly, in (III) my true belief in the conclusion is made by way of a competent deduction from the false belief that Maria is a zebra. Nevertheless, there is no close world in which Maria is not a mammal. In all three cases the method of inference does not seem to result in a false belief in a close world; that is, the method is globally reliable and satisfies the conditions of safety as per Williamson's advanced conception of global reliability in (SF!).

It is therefore not surprising that a number of epistemologists have pushed back against the idea that knowledge cannot be derived from a falsehood (Hilpinen 1988, Warfield 2003, Klein 2008, Fitelson 2010). Here is one of Warfield's examples:

> Counting with some care the number of people present at my talk, I reason: 'There are 53 people at my talk; therefore my 100 handout copies are sufficient'. My premise is false. There are 52 people in attendance—I double counted one person who changed seats during the count. And yet I know my conclusion.

Fitelson advances the dialectic one step further by developing cases that support the stronger claim that, "If the subject's belief that *p* had not been false, then the example would not have constituted a case of inferential knowledge" (ibid.: 667). As far as such cases go, there remain a number of dissenting voices, e.g., Coffman (2008).

Though now a worthy point of discussion, none of the above epistemologists discuss the question of knowledge from falsehood *vis-à-vis* the safety condition for knowledge, which has a particularly delicate focus on method individuation. However, in an unrelated discussion, Williamson (2007: 145) intimates that in cases *not* involving several inferential routes to the same conclusion or overdetermination,[34] safe premises are a *necessary* condition for knowledge in the conclusion:

> Normally, someone who believes a conclusion on the sole basis of inference from some premises knows the conclusion *only if* they know the premises (emphasis added).

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[34] The first involves inferring a conclusion but where the agent knows of several inferential routes to the conclusion e.g. inferring that something is an *F* from one's belief that '(*A* & *B*) are *F*,' but where that belief is false for *B* is not an *F*. The second involves inferring a conclusion from more premises than is needed to make the inference.

That said, Williamson realizes that folk physics, which he considers false (ibid. 146), is often used as a premise to gain knowledge. Indeed he admits that, "the conclusion that no belief formed on the basis of folk physics constitutes knowledge is wildly skeptical" (ibid.). To prevent this unwelcomed result while holding onto his earlier claim, Williamson develops a theory of folk physics as a belief forming method itself and not as false beliefs that act as premises in inferences to true conclusions. The latter theory need not concern us here. In short, Williamson is committed to the claim that a belief in a conclusion that is essentially based on a belief in a premise will be safe if and only if the belief in the premise is safe.

It is interesting to note an analogue of the present problem that provides additional weight to Williamson's position. Roughly, an internalist about epistemic justification is committed to the idea that a belief p is justified *if* the agent has some other justified belief q that justifies p. But, as many externalists argued, an infinite regress materializes if what is required for q to justify p is that q itself be justified by some other justified belief r, etc. In response to this regress argument, internalists defended several different structural conditions for justification that terminate the regress. Some, e.g., foundationalists, proposed the idea of basic beliefs, a group of self-justified beliefs that act as the foundation of all justification chains. Others, e.g. coherentists, defended a coherence condition that allowed for non-vicious circularity in a web of beliefs. One point of contention in the internalism-externalism debate about epistemic justification is thus the idea that in *some* circumstances only a justified belief can justify another belief. That is, a belief p cannot enjoy a superior epistemic status to that of q if the former is somehow dependent on the latter for its justified status. Despite Williamson's opposition to all such accounts of epistemic justification, this idea was deemed intuitive enough to anchor one of the more heated debates in recent epistemology.

Nevertheless, the three cases I provided above seem to indicate that a safe belief can be inferred from an unsafe belief. If these cases prove intuitively compelling, I wish to raise the following problem. Williamson equates one's evidence with one's knowledge (2000: 185ff). In cases where knowledge is generated as a result of competent deduction, it is natural to suppose that the premises are to be taken as evidence for the conclusion. However, if the premises in such a case are unsafe, either Williamson's equation of evidence with knowledge must be given up, or else we need to reconsider the claim that premises always act as evidence in cases of knowledge by competent deduction.

5.3. Safety and Determinism

If *S* knows *P*, then *S could* not have easily been wrong. Suppose our world is a deterministic world. In what sense, then, *could S* have easily gone wrong since, if determinism is true, *S* could not but have believed *P* truly? Williamson (2000: 124, 2009: 325) argues that "determinism does not trivialize safety." Williamson demonstrates this point by way of an example of a ball balanced on the tip of a cone. Such a ball, even in a deterministic world, is not safe from falling because, argues Williamson, the initial conditions could easily have been different such that the ball falls. By the 'initial conditions' he means "the time of the case, not to the beginning of the universe" (2000: 124).[35]

The suggestion, then, seems to be that in a case α in a determined world *W*, *S* safely believes *P* if and only if had the initial conditions of the case been slightly different *S* would still have truly believed *P*. What remains unclear, however, is why Williamson says that only

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[35] Peacocke (1999: 31-28) and Sainsbury (1997: 912-3) also discuss ways in which the locution 'α could easily have occurred' is compatible with determinism. While neither explicitly concur with Williamson, the reader gets the impression that they likewise have the start of the case in mind when thinking about how things could easily have been otherwise in a deterministic world.

the initial conditions of the case need to be changed and not the initial conditions of the universe, for, after all, on some standard assumptions about determinism altering the initial conditions of the case can only be achieved if one alters the initial conditions of the universe itself.

One maneuver a safety theorist can make in response to the foregoing difficulties is to adopt a move Lewis makes in his work on the semantics of counterfactuals. Suppose a world *W* is a deterministic world and in a case α in *W S* truly believes *P* at *T*. The safety theorist could argue that *S* safely believes *P* at *T* in *W* if and only if had there been a small miracle at *T* or some time shortly before *T* such that different conditions prevailed in a case β very similar to α, *S* truly believes *P*.

Many will find such a move rather unsatisfactory. So it appears that unless the safety theorist wishes to adopt a somewhat unorthodox metaphysics, safety, despite Williamson's insistence to the contrary, is hostage to determinism. But in the safety theorist's defense, it is not the case that assuming indeterminism true is problematic; on the contrary, given our best physics there is a better case for indeterminism than determinism. It remains the case, nevertheless, that the safety theorist needs to be more forthcoming about the relationship between the physical conditions of the world and the modality of the safety condition.

Prophecy in the *Guide* 2.32-48

Prophetic Method (PM):

> Know that the true reality and quiddity of prophecy consists in its being an emanation emanating from God, may He be cherished and honored, through the intermediation of the Active Intellect, toward the rational faculty in the first place and thereafter toward the imaginative faculty (2.36.369).

Maimonides' definition of prophecy is a sophisticated hybrid engineered from the materials of Jewish theology and medieval Arabic philosophy. An appreciation of (PM) therefore requires some necessary background in said theology and philosophy, to which the first two sections of this chapter are devoted. The remainder of the chapter engages in a detailed unpacking of (PM).

Two features of my analysis of (PM) need to be stressed at the outset. Firstly, my analysis is undertaken in the shadow of the safety condition for knowledge, which is to say that my reading of Maimonides is primarily concerned with those aspects of his work on prophecy that are *epistemic* in nature. In particular, given the centrality of method individuation to the safety condition for knowledge, my treatment of (PM) likewise emphasizes the epistemic features of the prophetic method itself.[1] Each feature of (PM) will be examined in detail regarding its role in the formation of prophetic beliefs.

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[1] While it is technically incorrect to speak of *the* prophetic method *simpliciter* given the fine-grained individuation of methods found in Williamson, I use the generic and perhaps slightly misleading definite article

Secondly, my analysis of (PM) has been undertaken in a manner that demonstrates beyond any doubt that as far as Maimonides is concerned the epistemology of prophecy cannot be assimilated or reduced to ordinary epistemology of testimony. As shall become evident in due course, Maimonides railed against the folk conception of prophecy as divine testimony. In other words, at no point does prophecy involve God actually addressing the prophet.

This twofold epistemic emphasis distinguishes my work on prophecy in the *Guide* from the *historical* readings thereof that dominate the literature. While some Maimonides scholars might find the presentation in this chapter somewhat narrow, I aim to demonstrate that much can be learnt when the focus is shifted away from the Arabic influences on Maimonides towards the finer details of his own philosophical contributions to the subject of prophecy. Since much of Maimonides' philosophical theology gravitates around the topic of prophecy, the discussion of prophecy in this chapter therefore seeks to nudge the literature in a new direction.

1. Maimonides' Toolbox

Maimonides wrote the *Guide* for two specific reasons: "to explain the meanings of certain terms occurring in the books of prophecy … [and to provide] the explanation of very obscure parables occurring in the books of the prophets" (1.Intro.6-7). Central to this project are Maimonides' cognitive psychology and epistemology. Unfortunately, Maimonides never

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the prophetic method in this chapter for ease of reference and leave the implications of finely-grained methods for the next chapter. It will prove helpful to think of 'the prophetic method' as a placeholder for a set of finely-grained prophetic methods satisfying Maimonides' definition of prophecy. For example, prophetic methods could be individuated in a fine-grained manner according to the degree of emanation received from the Active Intellect, which is a feature of (PM) that will be described in §1.1.

provides a systematic account of either. This conceptual lacuna is not the product of laziness or oversight, but is rather the result of Maimonides' having written the *Guide* for his pupil Rabbi Joseph, who was familiar with both Maimonides' earlier works, which touched on these subjects, and Arabic philosophy, a system of thought in which these topics were debated. It is therefore incumbent upon subsequent readers to 'reconstruct' the relevant aspects of Maimonides' toolbox from diverse sources. This is in itself a major undertaking requiring intimate knowledge of both Maimonides' extensive *oeuvre* and his manifold Arabic influences, a task that is both too large to be fully undertaken here and which has already been done with great success in recent years by a range of talented medievalists. The next two sections therefore contain only those parts of that literature most relevant to an appreciation of Maimonides' epistemic work on the prophetic method in the *Guide*.

1.1. *Maimonides' Cognitive Psychology*

Much of the cognitive psychology found in the *Guide* can be traced back to Aristotle's *De Anima* (*On the Soul*), though many of Aristotle's original ideas only reached Maimonides through their various percolations in Alexander of Aphrodisias and the Arabic philosophers. Working from within this tradition, Maimonides recognized that the human soul, which he takes to be the form of the human body, is divided into faculties, two of which are relevant here: the rational faculty and the imagination. Given the importance that the distinction between the rational and imaginative faculties plays in the *Guide*, and in Maimonides' treatment of prophecy in particular, the following paragraphs are worth quoting in full:

The *imagination* is that faculty which retains impressions of things perceptible to the mind, after they have ceased to affect directly, the senses which conceived them. This faculty, combining some of these impressions and separating others from one another, thus constructs out of originally perceived ideas some of which it has never received any impression, and which it could not possibly have perceived. For instance, one may imagine an iron ship floating in the air, or a man whose head reaches the heaven and whose feet rest on the earth, or an animal with a thousand eyes, and many other similar impossibilities which the imagination may construct and endow with an existence that is fanciful.[2]

[T]he act of imagination is not the act of the intellect but rather its contrary. For the intellect divides the composite things and differentiates their parts and makes abstractions of them, represents things to itself in their true reality … For the imagination apprehends only that which is individual and composite as a whole, as it is apprehended by the senses … in its apprehension, imagination is in no way able to hold itself aloof from matter (1.73.209).

As far as these two faculties are concerned, there are salient points of similarity and difference. Since both are faculties 'subsisting in a body' and inseparable from that body (1.72.192), each functions along a continuous spectrum depending on the degree to which physical impediments are present or absent.[3] If the body is physically ill or deformed, both faculties will function at suboptimal levels, a point that will be of significance with regard to prophecy.[4] This claim is rather uncontroversial. Consider, by way of a perceptual analogy, a simple memory exercise. If I am tired or suffering from a fever, my scores will most likely be lower than those achieved in good health.

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[2] Maimonides' "Commentary on Ethics of our Fathers" (*Commentary on the Mishnah,* Chapter 1 (c. 1168), trans. J. Gornfinkle, Columbia University Press, 1912, pg. 41).

[3] I leave to one side what, if any, thesis of mental supervenience on the physical body Maimonides would have been sympathetic towards.

[4] Motivated by his theological commitments to a rather unique theory of life after death, Maimonides has a particular (and problematic) position on the mind-body problem. Given the vastness of this literature, I leave this question to one side so that the features of his position most relevant to the phenomenon of prophecy remains in focus. For more on Maimonides on the limitations imposed by the body on the mind, see Freudenthal (2005a and 2005b).

In the context of prophecy, the imagination and the rational faculty differ in at least two relevant respects. Firstly, while the imagination's function is intimately tied to those material objects perceived by the agent, the rational faculty is described in 1.68 as abstracting from the stored impressions in the imagination, 'stripping' the form of an object from its material manifestation, and representing the abstract form to itself. Though rough in outline, the central idea is that pure thought is achieved once the rational faculty is able to divest itself from thinking in material terms.[5]

Secondly, unlike the imagination, the rational faculty undergoes stages of development. In its primitive state the rational faculty is in a state of potentiality and Maimonides uses the term 'Potential Intellect' to refer to this state.[6] In this state the Potential Intellect, to use a more familiar early-modern point of reference, is not quite Locke's *tabula rasa*, but is more akin to the Kantian model in the sense that the Potential Intellect is in possession of first intelligibles (akin to the *a priori* categories in Kant), e.g., that the whole is greater than a part and the law of transitivity.[7]

Once the rational faculty begins to abstract from those impressions retained by the imagination, it is called an 'Actual Intellect.' In line with broadly Aristotelian notions, the motion necessary to move from a state of potentiality to a state of actuality requires an outside force: "everything that passes from potentiality to actuality must have necessarily something that causes it to pass and that is *outside* it. And this cause must belong to the *species* of that which it causes to pass from potentiality to actuality" (2.4.257, emphasis added). To explain this motion Aristotle posited the existence of the Active Intellect, a further yet *immanent* intellect. However, by the time this idea, one of the more

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[5] For more on the mental act of abstraction, see Stern (2001 & 2005). Davidson (1992: 197-207) is another key work on that topic.

[6] See *Guide* 1.68, 70, 72 and 2.4.

[7] See Maimonides' *Logic* (chapter 8).

controversial in Aristotelian scholarship, reached Maimonides, the Active Intellect was considered a *transcendent* intellect. It is at this point that Arabic cognitive psychology and cosmology come together. Aristotle attributed the eternal movement of heavenly bodies to a unique First Cause or Unmoved Mover (*Metaphysics* 12:7). The Arabic neo-Aristotelians, however, adopted a Ptolemaic version thereof according to which God (the Unmoved Mover) brought into existence another intellect, the first intelligence, by an act of 'emanation,' the term Maimonides uses for action by an incorporeal agent (2.12.279). In turn the first intelligence emanates its sphere, the soul of its sphere, and a second intelligence. The second intelligence repeats this process with regard to a third intelligence and so on until a tenth intelligence comes into being. It is this tenth intelligence that Maimonides recognizes as the Active Intellect and to which he attributes the emanation of forms in the sublunar world inhabited by humans.

By way of a proof for the existence of a *transcendent* Active Intellect, Maimonides writes:

> The tenth intellect is the Active Intellect, whose existence is indicated by the facts that our intellects pass from potentiality to actuality and that the forms of the existents that are subject to generation and corruption are actualized after they have been in their matter only in potential. Now everything that passes from potentiality to actuality must have necessarily something that causes it to pass and that is outside it. And this cause must belong to the species of that which it causes to pass from potentiality to actuality … In this way the giver of a form is indubitably a separate form, and that which brings intellect into existence is an intellect, namely, the Active Intellect (2.4.257-8).

In Maimonidean cognitive psychology, therefore, the actualization of the rational faculty is dependent on emanation originating in the Active Intellect, which in turn draws its powers of emanation from the ninth intelligence, and so forth until the series terminates in God's

constant act of emanation. It is in this sense that the actualization of the mind and the existence of the world are counterfactually dependent upon God; that is, if God ceased to maintain the stream of emanation, the universe would cease to exist. In *Guide* 2.4 Maimonides attributes his cognitive psychology and cosmology to Aristotle[8] and goes so far as to make the bold claim "there is then nothing in what Aristotle for his part has said about this subject [apart from the eternality of the universe] that is not in agreement with the [Jewish] Law" (2.6.265).[9]

1.2. *Maimonides' Epistemology*

For a scholar of Maimonides' stature it is surprising to discover that while the *Guide* contains lengthy discussions central to which are a number of epistemic concepts, at no point in either the *Guide* or in any of his other writings does Maimonides present in a detailed and unified manner his theoretical commitments on matters epistemic. This lacuna is especially surprising given how Maimonides connects human perfection to the acquisition of knowledge (3.27.511).

Despite the likelihood that Maimonides' epistemology, like his metaphysics and ethics, would have been broadly Aristotelian in nature, the precise nature of Aristotle's epistemology is itself a matter of dispute (Taylor 1990). Moreover, by the time Aristotle's epistemology had percolated into Arabic philosophy and from there to Maimonides it had

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[8] This point is emphasized by Kafih (1977: 174) and Pines (1963: 258) in their respective translations of the *Guide*. The relevant sections in Aristotle are *Metaphysics* 12:7 and *Physics* VIII 6, 258 b26-259a9. Davidson (1992: 206, 2011) demurs on this point when he writes that Maimonides' cognitive psychology and cosmology derives "from the Arabic Aristotelians, rather than from Aristotle himself." Either way, the theme of the Maimonidean approach is broadly Aristotelian in nature.

[9] Maimonides believed that the world was created while Aristotle thought that it had existed eternally. Some, however, read Maimonides as following Aristotle's view. For the relevant secondary literature on this debate, see Kaplan (1977).

splintered into competing interpretations (Black 2006). It is therefore unlikely that Maimonides deemed it *un*necessary to clarify his stance on the central concepts in epistemology despite his student's familiarity with Arabic philosophy, and, *pace* Stern (2005: 105), Maimonides' silence cannot, therefore, be comfortably attributed to his disavowal of making original contributions to philosophy or physics (2.2.253).[10]

Attempts have been made to reconstruct Maimonides' epistemology in the *Guide* from the few definitions of some key epistemic terms found therein e.g. belief and certainty, and from the various positions Maimonides takes on matters resting on key epistemic distinctions. But, as Charles Manekin (1990: 117-8) writes, "their diverging interpretations demonstrate more than anything else the speculative nature of the enterprise." The extent of the shiftiness within the *Guide* generated by the absence of a Maimonides epistemology is unlikely to be rectified, even though notable attempts have been made in that direction since Manekin wrote.

This precarious state of affairs problematizes those passages containing 'knowledge' (עלם) and its cognates. For instance, in some contexts we find Maimonides using the unqualified noun 'knowledge' and in other contexts he qualifies it with the property of certainty as in 'certain knowledge' (עלמא יקינא) (1.50.111; 2.47.407; 3.23.492). It is unclear whether Maimonides intended to indicate with this terminological inconsistency that he

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[10] In conversation Lenn Goodman pointed out to me that epistemology was often neglected by the medievals given that metaphysics, logic, and language dominated their attention. Saadia Gaon is one of the notable exceptions. Even though the absence of a developed Maimonidean epistemology may be accounted for in this manner, it nevertheless remains concerning that Maimonides did not make more explicit his epistemic commitments. One may conjecture that this lacuna in the *Guide* is part of Maimonides' overall strategy of hiding his views from plain sight; that is, had he specified his commitments on epistemic matters, his readers would too easily have uncovered his iconoclastic esoteric positions which he considered dangerous to the ignorant masses. In §6 I discuss the recent debate over the degree of Maimonides' skepticism about knowledge of God and metaphysics. The presence of a developed and explicit epistemology early in the *Guide* might have left this debate stillborn. That a debate of this sort depends counterfactually on the absence of a Maimonidean epistemology can be counted as evidence in favor of the hypothesis that Maimonides intentionally refrained from presenting his reader with the full gamut of his theoretical commitments vis-à-vis epistemology as a means by which to hide his esoteric philosophical views from plain sight.

considered there to be two kinds of knowledge, one characterized by certainty and one lacking such a property.[11]

The absence of a robust Maimonidean epistemology is acutely felt in the context of prophecy since the *epistemic* relation between the Active Intellect and the rational faculty is central to Maimonides' definition of prophecy. The nature of this relationship was hotly debated by the Arabic medievals. Two similar yet competing models dominated the day. According to Alfarabi, the Active Intellect is a source of 'light' that 'illuminates' the rational faculty in a way that enables the rational faculty to abstract forms from the sensory images stored in the imagination and, with the aid of first intelligibles, to thereby construct a body of propositional knowledge. The Active Intellect plays no role in the latter project.[12] Avicenna, on the other hand, attributed a more robust role to the Active Intellect in that in addition to providing the rational faculty with the first intelligibles, it also enters into 'conjunction' with a rational faculty that has prepared itself to receive emanation from the Active Intellect by beginning the process of abstraction from images stored in the imagination. In the moment of conjunction between the two, the Active Intellect furnishes the rational faculty with the content of human thought.[13]

Maimonides never explicitly endorses either model and various passages in the *Guide* can be read in support of either model. Since Alfarabi and Avicenna differed on a number of

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[11] This interpretive obstacle deepens when we take into consideration Aristotle's view that there are five kinds of knowledge, some of which are characterized by certainty and others not. See Taylor (1990) for further discussion on this five-fold division. Unfortunately Maimonides uses the Arabic word עלם ('knowledge') when discussing 'knowledge' and 'certain knowledge' whereas Aristotle had different names for the different kinds of knowledge. The lack of a clear linguistic distinction makes it near impossible to claim that Maimonides adopted Aristotle's schema.

[12] Alfarabi, *al-Madina al-Fadila* (ed. and trans. R. Walzer (1985) *Alfarabi on the Perfect State,* Oxford University Press, pp. 200-3) and *al-Siyasa* (ed. and trans. F. M. Najjar (1972) *The Political Regime*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press).

[13] Avicenna, *Shifa'* (ed. and trans. M. Marmura (2005) *The Metaphysics of the Healing*, Brigham Young University Press) and *Najdt* (ed. and trans. F. Rahman (1949) *Avicenna's Psychology,* Oxford University Press). For an extensive treatment of the Active Intellect in Arabic philosophy, see Davidson (1992).

theological points as a result of their competing models, prophecy being one of them, the significance of this interpretative problem ramifies in Maimonidean scholarship in which prophecy is similarly a central theme. Traditionally Maimonides has been interpreted as being an Alfarabian since (i) in a letter to the translator of the *Guide* Maimonides lauds Alfarabi as the philosopher he respects most after Aristotle, and (ii) Maimonides never mentions Avicenna by name in the *Guide*.[14] Recently some have drawn on passages in the *Guide* where Maimonides refers to the Active Intellect as the "giver of forms" (2.12.278) as proof for his being a follower of the Avicennian model since that is a term Avicenna, unlike Alfarabi, used to refer to the Active Intellect.[15]

While displaying sensitivity to this debate, my presentation of the prophetic method in Maimonides sets aside this interesting historical question of which philosopher had more influence over Maimonides for a number of reasons, all of which, apart from the first, are related to the conceptual link between method individuation and knowledge. Firstly, advocates of both interpretative schools admit that in all likelihood Maimonides adopted aspects of *both* models in addition to making modifications of his own.[16] This eclectic methodology rules out a rigid reading of Maimonides along the lines of either model. And as Stern (2005: 114) argues, Maimonides was in places a severe critic of Arabic celestial physics and metaphysics, so much so that it makes it unlikely that he adopted either the Alfarabian or Avicennian model in full.

With respect to method individuation, we find that Alfarabi and Avicenna displayed a keen appreciation of the relevance of method individuation. Their shared concerns engender further reasons to downplay the debate over who influenced Maimonides most.

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[14] See Kreisel (1999) and Pines (1979).
[15] This point is central to Davidson's interpretation of Maimonides' cognitive psychology (1992: 206).
[16] See Davidson (1992: 199 n. 374, 206-7; 2011: 208), Manekin (1980: 119), and Stern (2006: 114).

Firstly, Alfarabi and Avicenna recognize two distinct phenomena as prophecy. The distinction between the two phenomena rests on a difference in methods. For Alfarabi, a person who has yet to achieve perfection of his rational faculty can experience 'prophecy' while those who have achieved perfection experience 'revelation.'[17] Avicenna, on the other hand, recognized 'intellectual prophecy,' which involves the intellect only, and 'imaginative prophecy,' which involves the imagination only.[18] Maimonides, on the other hand, recognizes only one phenomenon as prophecy and it involves both the rational faculty and the imagination in addition to requiring that both faculties be in a state of perfection.

Secondly, Avicenna attributes prophetic knowledge of the future to the imagination's conjunction with the celestial spheres; that is, conjunction independent of the rational faculty. In (PM) there is no indication of the imagination acting independently of the rational faculty. Thirdly, a perfect imagination is not required for prophecy in Alfarabi, while it is a necessary condition for prophecy in Maimonides.

In the absence of a robust Maimonidean epistemology and the sketchiness involved in labeling him as either a thoroughbred Alfarabian or Avicennian, the remainder of this chapter is best viewed as a modest effort to 'lift' the prophetic method from the *Guide* and discuss it in terms relevant to the safety condition for knowledge. The results of my investigation do not thereby do violence to Maimonides' conclusions in the *Guide* since my concerns are somewhat foreign to his and I do not attempt to challenge Maimonides on his own terms.[19] 'Excavating' the prophetic method from the *Guide* requires interpretive work

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[17] *Fusal al-Madani* §89.
[18] Davidson (1992: 116-21).
[19] In response to those who may question my methodology, I wish to point out that Alvin Plantinga adopts this very methodology in his critically acclaimed *Warranted Christian Belief* (2000). In this work Plantinga 'lifts' the idea of a *sensus divinitatis* from the works of Calvin and Aquinas following which he applies his preferred account of epistemic warrant. Plantinga's conclusions about the epistemic status of religious beliefs formed by way of the *sensus divinitatis* are reached independent of Calvin's and Aquinas's respective epistemologies.

of its own (as shall become evident as the chapter progresses), and in this regard I have benefitted from the work of Davidson (1992), Kreisel (2001), Reines (1970), and Stern (2005, draft). Though the final product that emerges by the end of this chapter cannot be comfortably aligned with the positions taken by these authors on closely related topics in Maimonidean scholarship, this difference is a welcomed result since there is no consensus among these three authors on some of the delicate points concerning prophecy in Maimonides. If my reading of the prophetic method, whether in whole or in part, demonstrates points in favor of any these authors, the upshot is merely incidental.

2. Constraints from Jewish Theology

Before the particulars of (PM) can be appreciated in full, an additional background point requires attention. Apart from the notable exception of Saadia Gaon,[20] accounts of prophecy within the Jewish tradition respect two overriding theological constraints: (i) that all *non*-Mosaic prophecy occurs in either a dream or a vision, and (ii) that Mosaic prophecy is qualitatively superior to non-Mosaic prophecy.[21] The source for these constraints is a seminal story in the *Book of Numbers* in which we find God castigating Aaron and Miriam, Moses' siblings, for gossiping about Moses' separation from his wife:

> Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses regarding the Cushite woman he had married … They said, "Was it only to Moses that God spoke? Did He not speak to us as well? … [and God said to Aaron and Miriam] "If there be a prophet among you [the Israelites], in a vision shall I God make myself known to him; in a dream shall I speak with him. Not so is my servant Moses; in

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[20] Saadia is of the opinion that prophets actually perceived with their senses something he calls the 'created light' and the 'created glory' (*Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, trans. S. Rosenblatt, Yale University Press). See Kreisel (2001: 27-93) for an extensive treatment of Saadia's account of prophecy.

[21] (ii) is the upshot of (i).

my entire house he is the trusted one. Mouth to mouth do I speak to him, in a clear vision and not in riddles, at the image of God does he gaze." (Numbers 12.1,6-8)[22]

Maimonides adheres to the constraint set down in these verses yet refuses to delve, at least in an explicit fashion, into the nature of Mosaic prophecy. The scope of (PM) is therefore restricted to the phenomenon of *non-Mosaic* prophecy.[23] As shall be demonstrated at the end of the next chapter, my presentation of the prophetic method neatly accounts for Moses' uniqueness and the restriction of non-Mosaic prophecy to dreams and visions. The distinction between Mosaic and non-Mosaic prophecy is a serious one for Maimonides and features heavily in much of his work on religious dogma e.g. the unassailable legal supremacy of the *Pentateuch* (the supposed record of Mosaic prophecy) over the works of the other Old Testament prophets.[24]

From these verses we can draw the epistemically relevant conclusion that in her waking moments the prophetic method is unavailable to the prophet; that is, even if the prophet is in a state of perfect health and her method can function as described when asleep, she cannot perform the critical part of prophesying when awake. During this 'down time' prophets forms beliefs in the same way that regular people do (2.45.396). No prophet remains in a constant prophetic state. Indeed, some prophets only experience prophecy once in their lifetime (2.45.396).

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[22] All English translations of the *Old Testament* will be taken from the Stone Edition of the *Tanakh* (Mesorah Publications).

[23] Maimonides' views on Mosaic prophecy are a matter of significant dispute. One reason for the uncertainty surrounding his views lies in his differing treatments of the topic between his late work in the *Guide*, albeit a somewhat superficial treatment, and his earlier works *Introduction to the Mishnah* (Perek Helek) and the *Code* (Foundations of the Law 7.6). Of particular relevance to the *Guide* is Maimonides' claim that the essential difference between Mosaic and non-Mosaic prophecy is the involvement of the imagination in the latter and not the former (2.46.403).

[24] *Code* ("Foundations of the Law,: Chapters 7-10).

The incident in Numbers involving Moses, Aaron, and Miriam is no insignificant matter. In addition to laying down strict theological constraints on the nature of prophecy, this story is the key ingredient, so I argue, in the explanation of the strong conceptual tie between Greek philosophy, Islam, and Judaism on the topic of prophecy. Islam, like Judaism, accepts the theological constraints laid down in Numbers. The traditional Islamic position is that the Koran was revealed to Muhammad in a number of prophetic dreams and visions (Irving 2007: 35-6). For this reason the Arabic philosophers were most likely attracted to Aristotle's work on veridical dreams in his *De Divinatione per Somnum*, veridical dreams being either identical or relevantly similar to the manner in which Arabic philosophers conceived of prophecy. Given their theological commonalities, the medieval Jewish philosophers would have found their Islamic contemporaries natural resources on the philosophical questions associated with the prophetic phenomenon.

3. The Prophetic Method

With the necessary background in place, it is now possible to dissect Maimonides' definition of prophecy.

(PM)   Know that the true reality and quiddity of prophecy consists in its being an emanation emanating from God, may He be cherished and honored, through the intermediation of the Active Intellect, toward the rational faculty in the first place and thereafter toward the imaginative faculty (2.32.369).

To stress the various components at work in this definition, the analysis below will be divided into subsections. The following graphic aid will prove helpful for the forthcoming analysis.

FIG. 1   Prophetic Method in Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*

God

e

Intelligences 1-9

e   1

Active Intellect

e

Prophet's Soul   Prophet's Soul

PRF → RE → PI → RI   MRI → RF → Output belief *P*

2   3   4   5

Prophetic Dream or Prophetic Vision   *Awake*
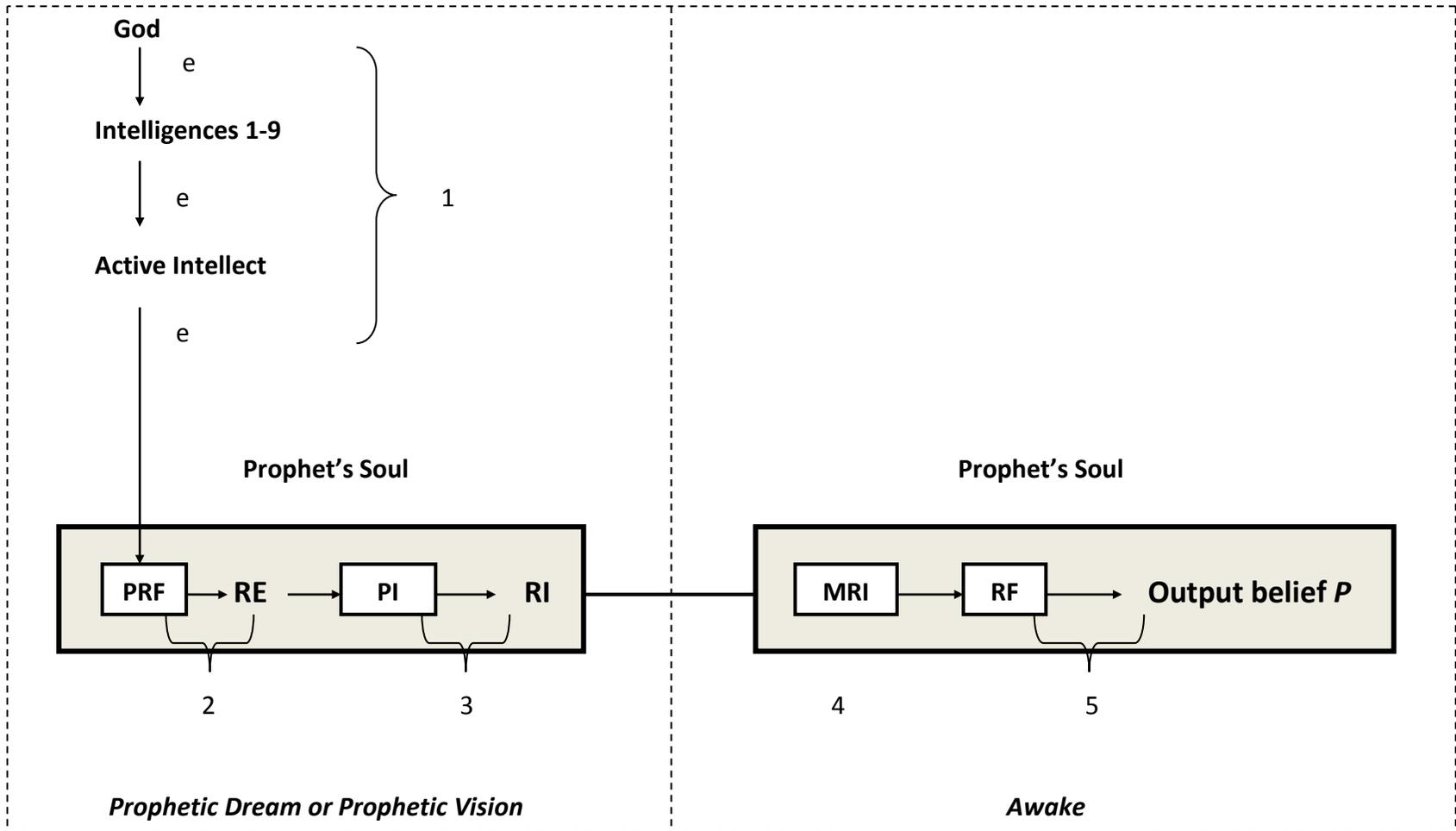
e = emanation   **MRI** = memory of rationalized impressions   **PI** = perfect imagination

PRF = perfect rational faculty   **RE** = rationalized emanation   **RF** = rational faculty

RI = rationalized impressions   **1, 2, 4, 5** = components of the prophetic method

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3.1. Component 1: Emanation (e)

'Emanation' is the term Maimonides uses for action by an incorporeal agent (2.12.279).

Though mention of the first nine intelligences is absent from (PM), it is assumed that in the

Maimonidean model *all* divine emanation resulting in an effect in the sublunar world is

channeled through those intelligences before reaching the Active Intellect. One important

theological upshot of this picture is that God "does not do things in a direct fashion: Thus He

burns by means of a fire, and this fire is moved by means of the motion of the sphere, and

the sphere in its turn is moved by means of a separate intellect [angel]" (2.4.258).

This conception of divine action is of particular theological relevance to prophecy. The

emanation involved in prophecy is *not* a unique emanation; that is, the emanation of which

Maimonides speaks in (PM) is the same ever-constant emanation originating in God which

sustains the existence of the universe. For this reason one may speak of Maimonides'

account of prophecy as prophecy 'naturalized' since anyone who fulfills the necessary and

jointly sufficient conditions for prophecy (as explained below) will prophesy unless God

'intervenes' to deny the prophet. In cases such as these it is considered a 'miracle' that the

prophet did not prophesy since it is akin to a law of nature that one who satisfies the

necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for prophecy will prophesy:

> [I]t may happen that one who is fit for prophecy and prepared for it should not become a
> prophet, namely, on account of the divine will. To my mind this is like all the miracles and
> takes the same course as they. For it is a natural thing that everyone who according to his
> natural disposition is fit for prophecy and who has been trained in his education and study
> should become a prophet. (2.32.361)[1]

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[1] See Kaplan (1977) for a treatment of the various opinions of Maimonides' medieval and early-modern
commentators on the point of the miraculous withholding of prophecy for one fit for prophecy.

Indeed, the 'naturalness' of prophecy is borne out by a Talmudic tradition according to which there were thousands of prophets in the history of the Israelite nation. However, when it came to the canonization of the Old Testament, only those prophetic works which had relevance for future generations were included in the Old Testament.[2]

3.2. Component 2: Rationalized Emanation (RE)

Though not explicit in (PM), Maimonides insists that prophecy is an *intellectual* achievement of the highest caliber: "[Prophecy] is the highest degree of man and the ultimate term of perfection that can exist for his species" (2.36.369). Indeed, Maimonides makes no bones about what he thinks of those who deem prophecy a gift endowed by God on any morally upstanding human being regardless of his or her intellectual pedigree (2.32.360). Perfecting one's rational faculty is thus a necessary condition for prophecy.

The precise manner in which such perfection is attained remains partly obscure, however. On the first level, Maimonides considers the faculties of the soul to be dispositions that subsist in the soul yet which somehow depend on the physical body, as explained above. Given that the rational faculty and the imagination are inseparable from the body, their perfection is, in part, connected to the relative state of perfection exhibited by that part of the human body on which they depend, presumably the brain.[3] Maimonides explicitly states as much when discussing a related to yet inferior phenomenon to prophecy:

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[2] T.B. Megilla 14a. One piece of textual evidence in favor of this tradition is the verse in 1 Samuel 10.5 which makes reference to a "band of prophets" the names and works of whom are never mentioned in the Old Testament.

[3] Maimonides does not make it clear what he means by a perfect brain.

"the defect of the rational faculty deriving either from its original disposition [physiological basis] or from insufficiency of training" (2.37.374).

On the second level, Maimonides recognizes that perfection of the rational faculty is a state that comes in degrees; that is, there is some vague quantity of *erudition* that will, in addition to a 'perfect' brain, satisfy the lower boundary or threshold for perfection of the rational faculty. And at the uppermost levels Maimonides recognizes a state in which the prophet is someone who knows "everything concerning all the beings that it is within the capacity of man to know" (3.27.511), though he is silent on what "all the beings" refers to.[4] Thinking of perfection as a property coming in degrees (i.e. as a threshold not an endpoint) amounts to far more than a mere quirk on Maimonides' behalf; rather, it functions as a key ingredient in his overall account of prophecy. While the emanation radiating from the Active Intellect is constant, the more erudite a person the larger the quantity of emanation received. Since Maimonides recognizes that the prophets differed in the degree of their intellectual perfection (2.36.372), he also recognizes higher and lower degrees of prophecy (2.45). Prophets can thus be classified according to their 'rank,' where Moses is the highest ranked prophet of them all.[5]

By way of metaphor, Maimonides compares the degree or quantity of emanation to wealth (2.11). One can be wealthy to the extent that one has all the money one requires to satisfy one's needs. Then one can be wealthy to the degree that one can satisfy one's needs and help someone else satisfy theirs. And so on for an increasing number of beneficiaries.

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[4] Alfarabi and Avicenna recognized a third and ultimate state of the rational faculty. For Alfarabi, the state of Acquired Intellect is reached when someone acquires all possible human thought (*Al-Madina* 242-5), which is a rather nebulous idea. When it comes to Avicenna, the state of being an Acquired Intellect is achieved when the rational faculty no longer depends on inputs from the imagination (*Shifa* 223, *Najat* 183). According to Davidson (1992: 202-4), it is not clear whether Maimonides is committed in whole to this final state.

[5] Given that Maimonides ranks prophetic visions higher than prophetic dreams (2.45.400-2), there is room to argue that prophetic visions involve a higher degree of emanation and thus intellectual perfection.

Likewise, a prophet who has achieved a state of perfection with respect to her rational faculty will receive a proportional quantity of emanation that will 'hit' her rational faculty and be sufficient to 'overflow' to her imagination and no further. If the prophet had achieved a higher degree of perfection then the degree of emanation received would have been larger, in which case the prophet will find herself compelled to preach the content of her prophecy to others in a manner that leads to them becoming more erudite. Through her preaching the prophet assists others in achieving perfection.[6] Maimonides goes so far as to suggest that if the degree of emanation received is considerable, the prophet will be compelled or obliged to teach others even if it will bring her to harm (2.29.347, 2.37.375).

For this reason Maimonides (2.38.376) also makes it a necessary condition for prophecy that the prophet be someone who is very courageous since calling out in the name of God often involves telling people what they don't want to hear, which can put the prophet's life in jeopardy. As is evident from many stories in the Old Testament, being a prophet often led to a life of suffering e.g. the torment suffered by the prophet Elijah at the hands of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel (1 Kings 19, 21). At the moment of prophecy emanation from the Active Intellect invigorates the prophet's degree of courage until it becomes "very greatly strengthened" (2.38.376) so much so that the prophet becomes fearless in disseminating her prophecy.

Closely connected to a perfect rational faculty in the context of prophecy and of central relevance to knowledge of the future is 'intuition,' which is a secondary cognitive feature of the rational faculty for Maimonides (2.38.376). By intuition Maimonides means the cognitive aptitude for drawing inferences.

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[6] As shall be demonstrated in §§5.4 and 5.5, the dissemination of prophetic knowledge is a seminal feature of the overall model.

Similarly the faculty of intuition exists in all people, but varies in degree. It exists especially with regard to things with which a man is greatly concerned and which his thought turns … in virtue of the strength of this intuition, the mind goes over all these premises and draws from them conclusions in the shortest time, *so that it is thought to happen in no time at all*. In virtue of this faculty, certain people give warnings concerning great future events (2.38.376-7, emphasis added).[7]

In prophets this aptitude reaches prodigious levels. Given the importance that intuition plays in his prophetic model, the following merits citation:

[T]rue prophets … grasp speculative matters; by means of his speculation alone, man is unable to grasp the causes [premises] from which what a prophet has come to know necessarily follows … For the very emanation that affects the imaginative faculty … is also the emanation that renders perfect the act of the rational faculty, so that its act brings about its knowing things … and it achieves this apprehension *as if* it had apprehended it by starting from speculative premises … the rational faculty being affected in a similar way as to apprehend *without having apprehended by way of premises, inference, and reflection* (2.38.377, emphasis added).

The point being stressed in this passage is the two-fold epistemic advantage that prophets enjoy over those who are not prophets. Firstly, when emanation hits her perfect rational faculty during a prophetic dream or vision, the prophet's reasoning abilities are not subject to the typical limits associated with reasoning in regular people. When in this state, the prophet does not have to reason towards a conclusion by way of premises, as is the norm. Rather, when aided by her prodigious intuitive faculty, the prophet's rational faculty 'hits'

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[7]Pines translates the Arabic word *hads* as divination. In the recent Maimonides literature and in Schwartz's 2002 Hebrew translation, *hads* is translated as intuition. In keeping with the current trend, I have replaced divination in Pines's translation with intuition. In the remainder of this thesis I use the word intuition in the Maimonidean sense thereof. It would be of interest, though beyond the confines of this thesis, to determine the conceptual relationship between the Maimonidean and the ordinary senses of intuition, especially given current work on intuitions in epistemology and the conceptual relationship between conceivability and metaphysical possibility.

the conclusion immediately without having to 'bother' with the premises that would lead to that conclusion. It is almost as if she just sees that p is the case.[8] Secondly, those who are not prophets are unable to reconstruct a line of reasoning that would lead to that conclusion. The inferential path to that conclusion is opaque to non-prophets. In modern terms we might consider an intellectual feat of this pedigree an instance of genius akin to that displayed by some savants where such remarkable individuals appear to know the answers to questions almost instantaneously, where arriving at such answers would require considerable amounts of reasoning in regular folk.

For ease of reference, I use the term 'the embedded proposition' for the proposition that the prophet arrives at in Component 2. Component 2 of the prophetic method culminates with an overflow of emanation leaving the prophet's perfect rational faculty. Maimonides does not inform his reader as to the nature of this emanation. However, on the assumption that the prophet 'infers' a proposition p while her perfect rational and intuitive faculties are under the influence of an emanation from the Active Intellect (2.38), it seems fair to read Maimonides as saying that when the overflow of emanation leaves the prophet's rational faculty it is appropriately related to the content of p. I call this conditioned overflow of emanation 'rationalized emanation.' Maimonides recognizes that the doxastic product accruing from the combination of <rationalized emanation + perfect imagination> is epistemically superior to the doxastic product generated by emanation reaching the imagination direct from the Active Intellect i.e. emanation that bypasses the rational faculty (2.37.374). Perhaps the idea is that when the imagination is the recipient of

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[8] This is reminiscent of rationalists who define *a priori* knowledge along the lines of rational insight, where seeing that p is the case is one necessary condition for knowing p *a priori*, the second necessary condition traditionally being that S came to believe p independent of experience. See BonJour (1998), Plantinga (1993), and Casullo (2003) for discussion of *a priori* knowledge and justification. The *a priori*—*a posteriori* distinction has fallen on hard times of late and it would interesting to see if there is any mileage in classifying prophetic knowledge as *a priori* knowledge, a question I do not pursue further.

emanation not 'filtered' by the rational faculty, it runs wild in its performance of combining impressions, which is not the case when it is 'constrained' or 'disciplined' in its duties when the recipient of rationalized emanation.

In summation, my reading of Maimonides on Component 2 is as follows: when a person with a relevantly perfect brain has reached a specified level of erudition, it will sometimes be the case that during sleep or a vision his rational faculty will be the recipient of an emanation from the Active Intellect proportional to the degree of its degree of perfection. In this heightened state the prophet's perfect rational faculty, with the aid of a prodigious intuitive faculty, generates a proposition p, the embedded proposition, without having to reason towards p. Those who are not prophets are unable to reason their way towards p since their mental and physical deficiencies prevent them from engaging in the requisite 'reasoning' that underpins the prophetic phenomenon (2.38.377). If a sufficient degree of emanation was received from the Active Intellect in the generation of p, Component 2 will culminate in rationalized emanation leaving the prophet's perfect rational faculty and overflowing towards his perfect imagination, where this rationalized emanation is appropriately related to the propositional content of p.

4. Component 3: The Perfect Imagination (PI)

In Maimonides' cognitive psychology the imagination is the cognitive faculty responsible for recording perceptual inputs and which freely combines those impressions into further complex impressions. Maimonides is conflicted *vis-à-vis* the imagination. On the one hand, the "imagination is in no way able to hold itself aloof from matter" (1.73.209), which is, as we shall see, the source of many errors in human thought, especially those egregious

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theological errors related to anthropomorphic conceptions of God (ibid.). Yet, a perfect imagination is also a necessary condition for prophecy and is that cognitive faculty charged with the invaluable job of converting the embedded proposition arrived at by the prophet's rational faculty in the prophetic moment into parables or images apprehensible to the lay person.

Unlike the rational faculty, the imagination is considered perfect if and only if the relevant part of the brain is perfect. No amount of training can compensate for a deficiency in the imagination's physiological host (2.36.369).[9] However, a perfect imagination can be prevented from functioning at optimal levels when (i) the agent is overcome by emotions, and (ii) when it is 'distracted' by the task of recording the constant incoming stream of sensory impressions. In light of (i), Maimonides states that prophets cannot prophesy when in a state of anger or sadness (2.36.372-3). For this reason Jacob, while mourning the death of his son Joseph, and Moses, in the forty years of suffering he experienced following the sin of the spies, did not prophesy for "the instrument ceased to function" (ibid.). Similarly, some Old Testament prophets used music to liven their mood as a way of preparing themselves for receiving prophecy (1 Samuel 10.5, 2 Kings 3.15).

As for (ii), in Maimonides' cognitive psychology the imagination operates at optimal levels when relieved of its role in the facilitation of perception: "And you know its greatest and noblest action takes place only when the senses rest and do not perform their actions" (2.36.370). Unshackled from the responsibility of recording perceptual inputs, the

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[9] This picture is complicated somewhat when Maimonides writes in 2.36.370, 2.37.377, and 2.41.385 that during prophecy the imagination is perfected as a result of the emanation it receives from the rational faculty. For the time being I set aside the question of whether or not Maimonides was aware of this inconsistency and the relationship it bears to the question of Maimonides' reliance on Alfarabi or Avicenna.

imagination freely indulges in the construction of dreams populated with fanciful combinations of images e.g. unicorns, floating iron ships, and centaurs.[10]

5. Component 3: Rationalized Impressions (RI)

(PM) is deceptively simple. Unless extensive attention is paid to subtleties concealed within Component 3, one will likely fail to appreciate that it functions as the nexus for several currents in Maimonides' philosophy. It is here that (PM) takes on a level of sophistication critical to the epistemology of prophecy.

5.1. Maimonides' on Method Individuation

Evidence for Maimonides' concern with method individuation can be found in his discussion of the different *sources* from which the imagination can receive emanation. Maimonides states that the imagination can receive emanation from two different sources: (i) from the Active Intellect via the rational faculty, as is the case in (PM), or (ii) direct from the Active Intellect (2.37.374). With regards to the latter, the type of person whose imagination receives emanation directly from the Active Intellect is someone who has some kind of deficiency in his rational faculty so much so that it prevents the imagination from receiving an overflow of what I have termed 'rationalized emanation' (2.37.374). In this group of

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[10] Though Maimonides does not say as much, we may similarly infer that for these reasons the rational faculty also functions at its peak when its host is asleep since it is free from forming beliefs in response to perceptual inputs. Prophecy, which Maimonides takes to be the highest intellectual achievement of the human species, only occurs in sleep or visions when the cognitive faculties can function at optimal levels undisturbed by perceptual inputs.

people Maimonides includes "those who govern cities, while being the legislators, the soothsayers, the augurs, and the dreamers of veridical dreams" (ibid.).

The point that bears emphasis is that Maimonides recognizes that such people can have what he calls 'veridical dreams.' While Maimonides never defines what he means by a veridical dream, a rough approximation would be a dream the content of which corresponds to a state of affairs in the actual world.[11] Unlike Aristotle who concluded that veridical dreams were the stuff of sheer luck, Maimonides hypothesizes that such people have veridical dreams because their imaginations conjure up images related to remnants of true opinions that remain in the imagination (2.39.378). Maimonides warns his readers not to pay any attention to these sorts of people who take pride in thinking themselves prophets for such people "have no rational conceptions at all and no knowledge, but only imaginings and whims" (2.38.377) and who are the source of much confusion to the unwary public.

In light of the distinction Maimonides draws between dreams involving *both* a perfect rational faculty *and* a perfect imagination, and dreams involving only an *im*perfect imagination, I venture to suggest that Maimonides was of the opinion that regular dreams/visions and prophetic dreams/visions are the products of two different methods. Support for this claim can be found in 2.41 where Maimonides is careful enough to use the expression '*prophetic* vision' as opposed to the terms 'vision' or 'hallucination.' This careful distinction between the two phenomena remains in place in 2.42.388 where we find Maimonides using the terms '*prophetic* vision' and '*prophetic* dreams.' And in 3.25.501-2 we find Maimonides using the terms 'dream of prophecy' and 'vision of prophecy.' This textual evidence for a difference in the origins of the emanation making for a difference in the

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[11] Intuition is required for knowledge of the future (2.38). Since Maimonides does not mention intuition when discussing those who cannot receive emanation to their imagination via their rational faculty, I assume he thought it impossible for such people to have veridical dreams about the future. Besides, in the three instances in which Maimonides uses the term 'veridical dream' he is not speaking of knowledge of the future.

method gains further traction when we consider Williamson's 'definition' of a method or basis of belief: "the basis of a belief includes the specific causal process leading to it [the belief] and the relevant causal background" (2009b: 307).

Finally, a prophetic vision has a different physiological presentation to an hallucination. Maimonides tells us that in the grip of a prophetic vision the prophet's senses cease to function, he becomes gripped by fear, and his body convulses, which is not the typical presentation of a hallucination (2.41.385).[12]

5.2. Non-Parabolic and Parabolic Prophecy

The imagination's role in Component 3 is perhaps the most delicate aspect of the prophetic method. At this point the imagination, which "is in no way able to hold itself aloof from matter" (1.73.209), must draw on prior sensory impressions to depict in the form of sensory impressions the embedded proposition it receives from the perfect rational faculty. I use the term 'rationalized impressions' for the sensory impressions thus generated because these impressions are constructed in response to the rationalized emanation overflowing from the rational faculty.

It proves illustrative to compare the imagination's role in perception to its role in prophecy. With regards to regular perception, the imagination first stores sensory impressions and then passes them along to the rational faculty for the purposes of

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[12] The physiological manifestations of Muhammad's prophetic experiences are described in similar terms (Irving 2007: 36). Given the physiological similarities between prophetic visions thus described and temporal lobe epileptic fits, it comes as no surprise that several neuroscientists, Persinger (1987, 2002) in particular, have claimed that religious experiences are no more than micro-seizures in the temporal lobe. See Freemon (1976) for a differential diagnosis of Muhammad as a temporal lobe epileptic. If I am correct in claiming that different methods underpin dreams and prophetic dreams, then there is reason to doubt that scientific findings on dreams, hallucinations, and temporal lobe epilepsy will apply with equal force to prophetic dreams or prophetic visions.

abstraction, reasoning, etc. In prophecy, however, the process begins with the cogitations of the rational faculty which is then followed by the imagination's depiction of those thoughts in the form of sensory impressions. Maimonides writes that "the imaginative faculty achieves so great a perfection of action that is sees the thing as if it were outside, and that the thing whose origin is due to it appears to have come to it by way of external sensation" (2.36.370). In other words, rationalized impressions seem tantalizingly real to the prophet.

The dominant sensory modalities involved in Component 3 are audio-visual (2.45). In the overwhelming majority of cases, the prophet, during a prophetic dream or a prophetic vision, will 'hear' someone talking to him. Typically, the agent addressing the prophet will be an unfamiliar man, an angel, or God (ibid.). And in those cases in which the prophet only 'hears' a voice and 'sees' no speaker, the voice 'heard' may be that of someone with whom the prophet is familiar e.g. when Samuel experienced prophecy for the first time he thought Eli was calling him instead of God (2.44.395).

At other times the prophet's imagination may generate within the prophetic dream or vision a 'scene' in the prophet's 'visual field' such that it appears to the prophet as if she is 'seeing' objects in the external world. Maimonides' calls this scene a 'parable' and his use of that term differs from ours in the following significant ways. By 'parable' we typically intend an allegorical or an extended metaphorical saying or narrative which conveys a moral lesson. In Maimonides' case, a parable is a scene constructed by the prophet's imagination in response to *two* embedded propositions generated by the rational faculty at Component 2. More precisely, the sentences used to describe the scene depict the embedded propositions. The first proposition is called the parable's 'external meaning' while the meaning of the second proposition is called the parable's 'internal meaning' (1.Intro.12). The external meaning is related to the internal meaning in so far as grasping the meaning of

the first proposition aids or assists the prophet's audience in grasping the meaning of the second (ibid.).

It is important to stress that the prophet does not construct the parable when she wakes up. The parable is constructed by the imagination *during* the prophetic dream or vision. Nor does Maimonides seem to admit of the possibility that the speaker in the dream or vision itself can preach a parable or that the prophet can 'view' a text inside the dream or vision where said texts records a parable. Though a parabolic prophecy can involve an agent talking, the scope of the parable is restricted to sensory *images*. This result can be gleaned from Maimonides' claim that prophets *see* parables (2.45.400-1).[13]

There are thus two overarching types of prophecies—parabolic and non-parabolic. Non-parabolic prophecies have only one meaning, while parabolic prophecies have two meanings—the internal and external. However, parabolic prophecies divide into two further kinds. The first, which I term the 'robust' parable, is one in which the "external meaning contains wisdom that is useful in many respects, among which is the welfare of human societies," and the inner meaning "contains wisdom that is useful for beliefs concerned with the truth as it is" (1. Intro.12). Maimonides does not say more about what he intends with these phrases, but the thought seems to be a distinction between propositions that have a specific utility with respect to the establishment of a just society while the subject matter of the second kind of proposition concerns more abstract subjects. Perhaps the kind of distinction Maimonides has in mind here is akin to the distinction between political/legal philosophy and metaphysics. Both domains are accurately concerned with wisdom, but the object of study is different.

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[13] Maimonides' example of a parabolic prophecy that involves speech is the 'covenant between the parts' (Genesis 15.9-10)(2.45.401). I assume that God's command to offer the sacrifice is *not* part of the parable though the structural layout of the sacrifice *is*.

The second kind of parable, here referred to as the 'lean' parable, is one where the external meaning is 'worthless' (contains no wisdom) and at times may be false, all the while the inner meaning containing wisdom "concerned with the truth as it is" (ibid.).[14] Some anthropomorphic descriptions of God in the external meaning are instances of lean parables that express a false proposition. What Maimonides means by 'worthless' is somewhat of a mystery as a false proposition can still be of value, e.g., when one infers a true conclusion from a false premise. Additionally, if the external meaning contains no wisdom yet aids in grasping of the internal meaning, then it should be seen to have some value, however minimal.

The Maimonidean parable can exhibit one of two *design plans*. In the first kind, here called *specific* design, each image in the scene generated by the imagination is of critical relevance to the overall external and internal meanings of that parable (ibid.). Therefore, the prophet's description of the scene in words must accurately capture the scene such that the sentences used express the two different propositions depicted by the scene. Maimonides' exemplar of the *specific* parable is Jacob's dream in which "a ladder was set earthward its top reached heavenward; and behold angels of God were ascending and descending on it" (Genesis 28.12). The general idea seems to be that each and every rationalized impression contributes to the external and internal meanings of the parable; that is, when the prophet comes to, the manner in which he *describes* the scene is an intentionally delicate speech act. Without doing too much violence to the original Hebrew, it

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[14] The precise structure of the Maimonidean parable is a matter of dispute. The traditional view thereof is that the parable has a bipartite semantic structure with the external meaning representing the prophet's exoteric view and the inner meaning her esoteric intentions. Stern (1998, 2009) argues that the parable has a tripartite semantic structure not predicated upon the exoteric-esoteric distinction such that the internal meaning of a parable can sometimes be quite open to view. In my description of the Maimonidean parable I have attempted to navigate a course that effectively incorporates both the traditional view and Stern's view without making the additional theoretical commitments of either.

seems fair to read Maimonides as saying that with respect to Jacob's dream, had Jacob described the scene as one in which he beheld "a ladder on which angels were climbing up and down," that description would have failed to capture the dual meaning of the parable because the image of the earth and the image of the heavens are critical to the expression of that parable.[15] With respect to parables under the specific mode of design, word choice is thus of paramount importance when the prophet preaches or records her prophecy, something which will be discussed in §5.4.

On the other hand, *general* design occurs when "very many words are to be found, not every one of which adds something to the intended meaning; they [the words] serve to embellish the parable and render it more coherent or to conceal further the intended meaning" (ibid.). The idea here seems to be that instead of each impression making up the scene owing its presence to its role in contributing a specific and separate idea towards the overall internal and external meanings, some impressions are present merely to augment or contribute towards the overall external and internal meanings of the parable. Maimonides' exemplar of the parable in the general mode of design is the book of Proverbs of which very large sections are a parable the internal meaning of which is "a warning against the pursuit of bodily pleasures and desires" (1.Intro.13). Indeed, Maimonides warns his reader against engaging into excessive interpretation of parables designed using the general mode of design once their overall external and internal meanings have become apparent:

> [Y]ou should not inquire into all the details occurring in the parable … For doing so would lead you into one of two ways: either into turning aside from the parable's intended subject, or into assuming an obligation to interpret things not susceptible of interpretation and that have not been inserted with a view to interpretation (1.Intro.14).

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[15] This parable is discussed at length in the next chapter.

The implications of the bifurcation of prophecies into parabolic and non-parabolic for the prophetic method are taken up in the next chapter.

5.3. *Extended and Non-Extended Parabolic Rationalized Impressions*

Relatively late in his treatment of prophecy, Maimonides (2.43) adds a final qualification with respect to the rationalized impressions that constitute parabolic prophecies. Sometimes *within* the very prophecy itself an angel will explain the parable to the prophet, as was the case in Zachariah 4 and Daniel 7. It must be remembered that this 'explanation' is itself a rationalized impression because, as shall become clear in the remainder of this section, any 'sight' or 'sound' experienced during prophecy constitutes a rationalized impression. Furthermore, as has already been emphasized, prophecy does not involve the perception of God or an angel; rather, it is rational thought depicted by sensory impressions. The angel who explains the meaning thus refers to either the Active Intellect, the prophet's rational faculty, or the prophet's imagination (2.6.265, 2.46.403). In essence, when an extended rationalized emanation occurs we have a case of a prophet explaining the meaning of the parable to himself, where 'meaning' refers to both the internal and external meaning. For those prophetic dreams or visions containing the explanations of their meanings, I use the term '*extended* parables.'

In the majority of the cases, however, the meaning of the parable "is known by the prophet after he awakens" (2.43.392). In these cases the rationalized impressions are *non-extended* in nature. The relevance of the extended/non-extended distinction will feature heavily in §6 where the prophet's output beliefs in Component 5 is discussed.

It is now apparent that Maimonides' conception of the prophetic parable is highly developed and nuanced. The following diagram will aid in capturing the various distinctions in play:

FIG 2.

Parabolic Prophecies

Non-Extended   **Extended**

Robust   **Lean**   **Robust**   **Lean**

Specific   General   Specific   General   Specific   General   Specific   General
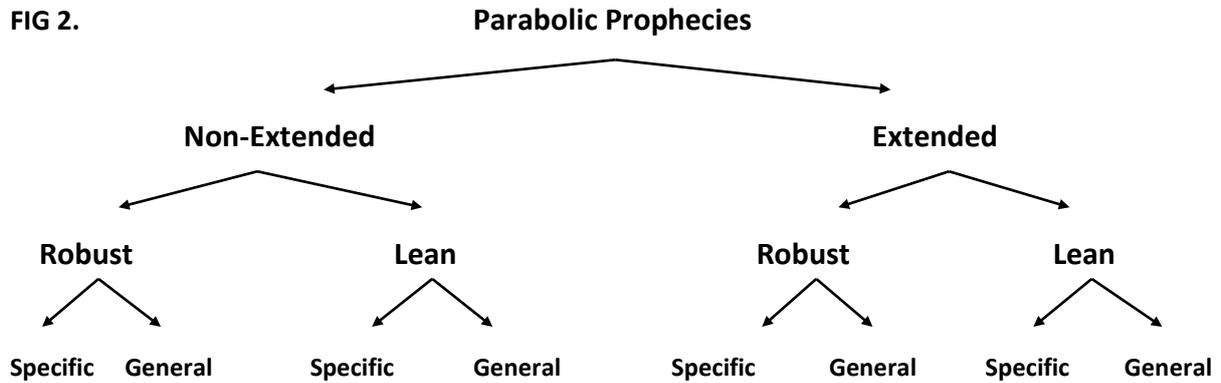
The relevance of this division of the conceptual space to the safety of prophetic beliefs will be taken up later in this chapter and at length in the next chapter. Before moving on, it remains to be said that though Maimonides is silent on the matter, we might suppose that there are a number of 'mixed' cases; that is, prophecies that are a combination of the various kinds delineated above. For example, a prophet might 'see' a man in some physical location and the man 'tells' the prophet *p*. The visual parts of this prophecy may constitute a parable while the auditory the non-parabolic part thereof.

5.4. *The Secrets of Prophetic Language*

The appeal of the Maimonidean model of non-Mosaic prophecy undoubtedly lies in his controversial claim that contrary to the plain meaning of scripture, at no point in the process does God actually speak to or address the prophet; that is, there is no transfer of

propositional content from God to prophet as one finds in a testimonial model. Maimonides takes seriously the constraint on non-Mosaic prophecy stipulated in Numbers 12.6. During a prophetic experience the prophet does not hear with her ears or see with her eyes since every instance of prophecy occurs in either a dream or a vision when the prophet's senses cease to function (2.36.370). The upshot of this position is that prophets never actually saw or heard God or angels. Reading the Old Testament without knowing Numbers 12.6-8 would easily lead one into this error.[16]

Given that the nature of prophecy is expressly stated in these verses, it is Maimonides' contention that scripture dispenses with the need to reiterate of each instance of prophecy that it occurred in a vision or dream (2.46.404). A prime example of this type of error is thinking that in the famous story in Genesis 18 Abraham actually saw and interacted with the three angels who visited his tent, ate with him, and who informed him of the forthcoming pregnancy of Sarah and the destruction of Sodom. Rather, all this occurred in a prophetic vision (2.42.389). Maimonides provides a similar reading for the famous incident of Jacob wrestling with an angel (Genesis 32.25-33). In the remainder of 2.42 Maimonides lists numerous examples of humans interacting with angels in the Old Testament and urges his reader to understand that all these incidents occurred in prophetic visions or dreams and *not* as they are described, an insight Maimonides considers a "great prophetic secret" (2.6.265).

The profundity of Maimonides' iconoclasm is deepened by his claim that when the prophets record that they were addressed by an angel or saw an angel, the term 'angel' in these contexts refers to either a force originating in God, the Active Intellect itself, the

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[16] Maimonides does not seem to consider that there may be a transfer of mental images instead of propositions. One reason for this may be that his cognitive psychology does not admit of such a possibility.

prophet's imagination, or the prophet's rational faculty (2.6). Of this insight, Maimonides writes "how beautiful must this appear to him who knows, and how distasteful to the ignorant!" (2.6.265). Because the imagination cannot hold itself aloof from material impressions (1.73.209), it represents such entities via the imagery of angels.

Maimonides explains that it is not by accident that prophecies contain storylines using the verbs 'seeing' and 'hearing' for in the Old Testament these verbs are used to convey the acquisition and transfer of knowledge:

> Similarly apprehension … comes about through the instrumentality of … hearing and seeing. And similarly we do not know nor can we represent to ourselves how a notion can be transmitted from the soul of one individual … to the soul of another individual except through the instrumentality of speech … All bodily organs [attributed to God] that you find mentioned in all the books of prophecy are either organs of local motion mentioned with a view to indicating life [that God exists], or organs of sensation mentioned with a view to indicating apprehension [that God is a knowing being], or organs of prehension [touch] mentioned with a view to indicating action [that God is an active being], or *organs of speech mentioned with a view to indicating the overflow of the intellects towards the prophets* (1.46.98, emphasis added).

> Predicating speech of Him is similar to predicating of Him all the actions resembling ours. Thus the minds of people are rightly guided towards the view that there is a divine science apprehended by the prophets … The terms in question never signify that He, may He be exalted, spoke using the sounds of letters and a voice (1.65.158).

In other words, when a verse says, for example, that God said *p* to prophet *x*, this choice of words is meant to convey to the reader that the prophet grasped a proposition *p* ('divine science') by way of prophecy, which is a method of belief formation that involves a high degree of emanation from God via the nine intellects and the Active Intellect. Because the imagination "is in no way able to hold itself aloof from matter (1.73.209), the prophet

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cannot help but convey the true nature of his prophetic apprehension of *p* except through the use of either (i) sentences involving God or angels speaking to him, or (ii) scenes containing images that depict *p*. As Maimonides explicitly informs his reader in the Introduction to Part One, the *Guide* is Maimonides' attempt at elucidating the language used by the prophets. He achieves this feat, so I argue, by 'reversing' the prophetic process wherein a proposition *p* (or two propositions in the case of parabolic prophecy) grasped by the rational faculty in Component 2 is depicted by the imagination in Component 3 through sensory impressions deriving from the prophet's perceptual interaction with the material world. By reversing this process Maimonides aims to correct many false beliefs and reveal 'secrets' concealed within the prophetic books: "My remarking that it is a parable will be like someone's removing a screen from between the eye and a visible thing" (1.Intro.14). By denying the literal sense of speech predicated of God, Maimonides gives the lie to the folk conception of prophecy while accommodating the anthropomorphic nature of human descriptions of God. Thus sentences such as "The mountains and hills shall break forth before you singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands" (Isaiah 55.12) are to be understood as expressing an idea akin to the claim that 'the ruling class and the land owners will be pleased with the Israelite nation.'

Maimonides also draws our attention to the following additional features of prophetic language. Firstly, the prophet will likely express the conclusions she reached in Component 2 in images and language with which she is familiar. By this Maimonides means that if the prophet was a rustic, we are bound to find terms associated with farming and animal husbandry in her prophecy. The manifestation of the prophet's surrounding in her prophecy can be explained by the imagination's involvement in prophecy. We already know that Maimonides considers the imagination as the 'storehouse' of perceptual impressions, the

contents of which are understandably sensitive to the kind of sights, sounds, and smells that the prophet encountered on a daily basis.

Secondly, there is a unique literary style of expression associated with each prophet much like each author has a style of their own: "every prophet has a kind of speech peculiar to him, which is, as it were, the language of that individual" (2.29.337). For present purposes we can define literary style as the manner in which the author uses language to express his ideas or "the selection of certain linguistic forms or features over other possible ones" (Thornborrow and Wareing 1998: 3). One might say, therefore, that much of the *Guide* is a work in prophetic stylistics. For instance, Maimonides points out that prophets often overlooked mentioning that their prophecies came in a dream or a vision since they assumed everyone knew that (2.42.388). Prophets also tended to skip the proximate causes of events and instead attributed events directly to God (2.48.410). At times some prophets even went so far as to substitute the term 'the human species' for the name of the people from the specific locality about whom they were prophesying (2.29.337). Certain prophets also had their favored metaphors. For instance, Isaiah, Maimonides tells us, enjoyed using astronomy in his construction of metaphors. Hence we find Isaiah foretelling the destruction and downfall of certain communities and empires using expressions like "the stars have fallen, the heavens rolled up, the sun blackened" (2.29.337). Finally, much as we find some people prone to the use of exaggeration, so too we find prophecies involving hyperbole e.g. "Cities great and walled up to heaven" (Deuteronomy 1.28).

5.5.   The Pedagogical Nature of Prophecy

While Maimonides would no doubt have preferred it that the prophet merely communicate the embedded proposition *p* to the community, he is aware that the majority of the

community is uneducated and would not be in a position to understand *p* in its 'raw form;' that is, for the ignorant, divine science is bound to come across as baffling. More concerning for Maimonides is the possibility that some of the folk would misunderstand the prophet's message if it is pitched above their intellectual threshold. This sort of miscomprehension can be unsettling and, in the worst-case scenario, a catalyst for the folk shirking their religious commitments because such commitments no longer make sense to them. For this reason Maimonides welcomes the phenomenon of prophecy riddled by the materialistic influence of the imagination since it assists the prophet in communicating a truth to the community in a form that the majority thereof can understand.

The pedagogical nature of prophecy is exemplified by the prophetic parable. In accordance with a Talmudic tradition,[17] Maimonides considers the Genesis creation story and Ezekiel's vision of the chariot to be secret parabolic discourses on natural science and divine science respectively (1.6-10). Similarly, many prophecies are, contrary to first impressions, parables with an external and internal meaning where the external meaning intentionally conceals the internal meaning since the latter contains a secret inappropriate for the uneducated masses. While not all parables involve concealed secrets, a good many do. In using the parable as a means of communication the prophet aspires to reach the folk with the external meaning while the educated elite will arrive at the inner meaning via the external meaning.

With respect to such parables, Maimonides cites the verse from *Proverbs* (25.11): "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver." Maimonides interprets this verse to mean that a statement uttered with the intention of a double or dual meaning is like a gold apple overlaid with filigree work of silver containing fine holes. From a distance the

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[17] B.T. Hagiga 11b ff.

apple looks silver and is considered valuable. But from close up one discerns that there is actually a golden and more valuable apple concealed by the silver filigree. Some parabolic prophecies are much the same—they have a secret internal meaning overlaid with a less valuable external meaning. To arrive at the internal meaning one has to work through or closely examine the external meaning. There is thus an epistemic relationship between the two meanings—grasping the first assists in grasping the second.

5.6.   Beholding the Future

The manner in which Maimonides accounts for prophetic knowledge of the future is rather obtuse:

> [T]he very overflow that affects the imaginative faculty … rendering it perfect so that its act brings about its giving information about what will happen and its apprehending those future events as if they were things that had been perceived by the senses and had reached the imaginative faculty from the senses … (2.38.377).

The idea here seems to be that in a state of perfection while under the influence of rationalized emanation during sleep or a vision, the perfect imagination constructs an image of a state of affairs out of its bank of sensory impressions in a manner which gives the prophet the phenomenological experience as if she were perceiving that state of affairs in a waking state. This explains why the Hebrew word for a prophetic vision (*mareh*) derives from the verb 'see' (*roeh*) and why prophets were sometimes referred to as 'seers' (1 Samuel 9.9).

So much for the imagery side to prophecy about the future. As we know, the imagination produces rationalized impressions in response to rationalized emanation. The prophet's perfect rational faculty must therefore be capable of generating an embedded proposition about the future. It appears capable of doing so when combined by prodigious intuition. This is what Maimonides says about regular people who have a *developed* intuitive faculty:

> You will find among people a man whose conjecturing and intuition are very strong and habitually hit the mark, so that he hardly imagines that a thing comes to pass without its happening wholly or in part as he imagined it. The causes of this are many – they are various anterior, posterior, and present circumstances (2.38. 376).

Such people seem to intuit future states of affairs by *extrapolating* from current circumstances and background knowledge. The prophet, on the other hand, who is in a possession of both a perfect rational faculty and prodigious intuition, need not bother with the inferential steps and is able to arrive at the embedded proposition about the future *instantaneously*. Once the embedded proposition about the future is generated in Component 2, it gets depicted by sensory impressions in Component 3, where such impressions give the prophet a phenomenological experience akin to wakeful perception.

Prophetic knowledge about the future is thus inferential in nature. Even those who are not prophets are able to gain knowledge of the future by way of inference. This makes perfect sense since I know, for example, that I will walk past the BP gas station next Thursday evening from inferring it from my knowledge that I have been invited to dinner at Jane's next Thursday evening and from my knowing that Jane lives next door the BP gas station. Similarly, I know that I will be living in Georgia next month from inferring it from my

knowing that I last week I accepted a job in Georgia. But these are easy cases of knowledge of the future by way of inference. A prodigious intuitive faculty combined with a perfect rational faculty will be able to arrive at knowledge of the future beyond the grasp of even those with a strong intuitive sense; that is, no one apart from the prophet can construct a line of reasoning from current circumstances towards the state of affairs expressed by the embedded proposition.[18] Though Maimonides does not say as much, such abilities will also enable the prophet to know propositions about the present and the past beyond the reach of most.

Maimonides' take on prophecies about the future can be demonstrated with this example from Jeremiah (1.13-16):

> The word of God came to me a second time, saying, "What do you see?" And I said, "I see a bubbling pot, and its spout is facing north." God said to me, From the north the evil will be released upon all the inhabitants of the land. For behold, I am calling all the families of the kingdoms of the north … they shall come and each of them shall place his throne at the entrance of Jerusalem's gates and by all its walls roundabout … for they [Judah] have forsaken Me and burned incense to the gods of others and prostrated themselves to their handiwork.

What we have here seems to be a case of an extended, specific parabolic prophecy about the future.[19] Jeremiah's perfect rational faculty, aided by his prodigious intuition, generated an embedded proposition about a future state of affairs involving the Jewish nation and some of its neighboring kingdoms that was then depicted by his perfect imagination in the form of a bubbling pot with its spout facing a northerly direction accompanied by extended rationalized impressions in which God is depicted as explaining the meaning of that image to

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[18] I am assuming that if the prophet can reach a conclusion without reasoning via premises he could, in theory, reconstruct the line of reasoning he did follow to reach said conclusion.

[19] It is unclear whether the prophecy is robust or lean.

the prophet. To a rough approximation, Jeremiah, with his keen grasp of the nation's sinful predicament and the political tension with its northern neighbors, experiences a moment of prophecy in which he beholds what will happen to the nation if the current state of the nation continues.

5.7.   Summation of Stage 3

Before moving onto the final components of the prophetic method, it will prove useful to reiterate the central features of Component 3. Upon receipt of the embedded proposition p, the imagination will represent p in the form of sensory impressions. These sensory impressions can be categorized according to the following distinctions: parabolic vs. non-parabolic; extended vs. non-extended; robust vs. lean; specific vs. general; and future-orientated vs. present- (or past) orientated. There is no *prima facie* reason for excluding the possibility of mixed cases. These sensory images are a critical ingredient of prophecy for they make the prophet's message accessible to the ignorant masses and function as devices by which to communicate secrets to the learned.

6.   Stages 4 and 5: Memory and Output Beliefs

For an author as careful as Maimonides, it is surprising that (PM) gives no indication as to when the prophet forms prophetic beliefs. For present purposes this lacuna is compounded by the centrality of belief formation and the time thereof to the safety condition for knowledge (as discussed in Chapter 1). The absence of a definitive Maimonidean epistemology exacerbates the predicament. In this section I argue that regardless of

whether a prophecy is parabolic or not, there are a number of reasons to deny that prophets form beliefs *during* prophetic dreams or visions. This section begins with two arguments against belief formation in Component 3 followed by two arguments against belief formation in Component 2. The section concludes with a general argument against belief formation during prophetic dreams and visions.

6.1. *Contra Belief Formation in Component 3*

6.1.1.   The Coherence Argument

It is generally taken for granted that agents do *not* form beliefs while asleep or hallucinating. This assumption has received relatively little attention by contemporary epistemologists. Sosa (2005, 2007), however, substantiates this guiding principle as follows. When we go to sleep we do not lose our knowledge or beliefs. They merely remain latent, as they are much of the time. In particular, when I go to sleep I retain my knowledge of the room's layout, that I am on my bed, my beliefs about what I will do tomorrow, etc. Suppose I then dream of being chased by a lion in the Kruger Park. If it were the case that we form beliefs in dreams, then the result would be that I assent to the obviously contradictory beliefs 'that I am in my bed' and 'that I am being chased by a lion in the Kruger Park.' Similarly, a childless or poor person who dreams of being a king or a father of three, will face an analogous contradiction in his beliefs. Unless we deny that agents form beliefs in response to their

dreams, the result is an unacceptable doxastic incoherence. Similar considerations apply for hallucinations.[20]

For these reasons we may conclude prophets do *not* form beliefs during a prophetic dream or vision since prophecies involve impressions that are incompatible with the prophet's latent beliefs about his surroundings. Consider the case of Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones (Ezekiel 37). Assuming that the prophets were not irrational enough to affirm an obvious contradiction, it seems problematic, for the reasons outlined by Sosa, to suppose that Ezekiel concurrently believed of himself 'that I am lying down in locale *x*' and 'that I am in locale *y* looking at a valley of dry bones.' Similarly, the more natural position would be to deny that Ezekiel actually believed of himself that he was eating a scroll given to him by God (Ezekiel 3.1-3) or that he actually believed that God carried him to Jerusalem in the air by way of a detached arm gripping his hair (Ezekiel 8.1-3), or that Jeremiah believed that he actually saw an almond tree (Jeremiah 1.11), or that Zachariah actually believed he had seen a golden candelabra (Zachariah 4). Similar considerations lead to the conclusion that the prophet does not form beliefs during a prophetic *vision*.[21]

6.1.2. The Negative Theology Argument

The extent to which Maimonides thought knowledge of God was possible is a matter of significant disagreement in recent Maimonidean scholarship.[22] Central to this debate is Maimonides' theory of negative theology. Maimonides vehemently denies that positive or

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[20] McGinn (2004: 96-112) begins his discussion on the nature of dream beliefs with a set of similar coherence considerations.

[21] Toward the end of this section I raise objections to belief formation during those prophetic dreams or visions that do not involve incoherence with background beliefs.

[22] See Stern (2005: 130 n. 16) for a summary of the views of the key players in this debate.

affirmative attributes connected with material constitution can be predicated of God for God is not a material being. For example, given Aristotle's definition of time as an accident associated with the motion of physical objects (2.intro.237), Maimonides denies that any durational property can be predicated of God. Similar considerations inveigh against spatial properties. Eventually Maimonides concludes that (i) only attributes of action can be predicated of God for such predicates do not address God's essence or nature and that such predicates are only attributed homonymously such that when we say 'God is merciful in performing action x,' we do not thereby suggest a similarity between human mercy and divine mercy; and (ii) negative predications are preferable, where, e.g., the negative predicate 'is not present,' following Aristotle's theory of negation in the *Categories*, indicates neither that God is present nor that God is absent; rather it makes the point that the categories of 'absence' and 'presence' to not attach or pertain to God (Rudavsky 2010: 46).

With this core Maimonidean theme in place, there is room to argue that Maimonides would not have considered people as 'perfect' as the Old Testament prophets to actually have believed the literal sense of that which is recorded in their name for the Old Testament prophecies are replete with anthropomorphic language and extensive reference to God's positive attributes. That is, assuming prophets subscribed to a roughly Maimonidean sort of negative theology and that the large portions of the prophetic books are records of the rationalized impressions experienced in Component 3, the prophets would not have believed the literal sense of what is recorded in their name. Indeed, Maimonides even goes so far as calling some preachers and poets who compose prayers praising God in anthropomorphic terms "truly ignorant" and their work "rubbish" (1.59.141). The prophetic books are written in such language so as to be accessible to the ignorant masses and to

guide them thereby towards correct beliefs (1.46). For instance, when God is described as taking the Israelites out of Egypt with "a strong hand and with an outstretched arm" (Deuteronomy 26.8), the purpose of this language is to guide the masses toward the belief that God is a providential being, though 'providential' here is merely homonymous with human providence. The literal sense of the anthropomorphic language found throughout the Old Testament is merely a pedagogical tool and not an indication of what the prophets actually believed. Maimonides, on several occasions in the *Guide*, expresses this thought by referencing the rabbinic motif "the Torah speaks as per the language of man."[23] Unfortunately the ignorant masses sometimes forget that the language in the prophetic books cannot be taken literally and thereby historically fell into the grave theological error of believing God to be a corporeal being. For these reasons Maimonides (1.73) has an ambivalent attitude towards the imagination as a faculty of the soul—it is both the source of error and the best medium by which to convey truths.

6.2. Contra Belief Formation in Component 2

6.2.1. The Extended Parable Argument

Maimonides provides no explanation for the presence of extended rationalized impressions in some cases of *parabolic* prophecies and their absence in others. That Maimonides mentions Zachariah and Daniel as exemplars of the extended parable phenomenon is revealing, however. In Zachariah's vision the angel asks the prophet if he *knows* the meaning of the rationalized impressions and the prophet repeatedly answers in the

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[23]B.T. Yebamoth 71a and B.T. Baba Metzia 31b.

negative. Similarly, Daniel (7.15-6) is described as being *bewildered* by the rationalized impressions in his vision and asked the angel to make the correct interpretation thereof *known* to him. Both prophets are recorded as being stumped by the rationalized impressions that their own imaginations generated in response to the embedded proposition, which is a rather bizarre scenario. The relevant point that needs to be gleaned from this comment is that both prophets did not believe the embedded proposition in Component 2 for otherwise it would make no sense for the prophet to explain the embedded proposition to himself in the dream or vision if he already believes it! Nothing would be gained from extended rationalized impressions if the prophet already believes the embedded proposition. This rules out belief formation in Component 2 for extended parabolic prophecies.[24]

In response to this line of reasoning some may contest that extended parabolic prophecies occur when a prophet merely forgets the embedded proposition in the progression from Component 2 to Component 3. As such there was belief formation in Component 2. This is an unpromising line of reasoning, however, as the prophet is, in Maimonides' view, in possession of both a perfect rational faculty and a perfect imagination. It is therefore unlikely that such an intellectually perfected individual will forget the embedded proposition so quickly. Furthermore, prophecy, for Maimonides, "is the highest degree of man and the ultimate term of perfection" (2.36.369). Such lapses of memory seem incompatible with the Maimonidean conception of prophecy.

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[24] The Coherence and Negative Theology Arguments would rule out belief formation in Component 3 of extended parabolic prophecies; that is, forming belief in the meaning of the prophecy once it has been explained by the angel.

The import of the extended / non-extended distinction can be used as a further argument against belief formation in Component 2 of non-extended parabolic prophecies. In 2.43 Maimonides' writes that *vis-à-vis non*-extended parabolic prophecies, the meaning of the parable is not interpreted to the prophet inside the prophetic dream or vision, but is "*known* by the prophet *after* he awakens" (2.43.392, emphasis added). If the prophet did formulate a belief in the embedded proposition in Component 2, then it would have been inaccurate for Maimonides to write that the meaning is known only *after* the prophet wakes up. [25] One natural explanation for the prophet not knowing the meaning of the parable (the embedded proposition) *during* the dream or vision is his not believing the embedded proposition in Component 2 (or 3) of the prophetic method.[26]

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[25] The preposition 'after' appears in both the Kafih and Schwartz Hebrew translations and in both the Pines and Friedlander English translations. The Judeo-Arabic word for 'after' (בעד) appears in the original Judeo-Arabic text of the *Guide*.

[26] There is in the vicinity another argument against belief formation in either Component 2 or Component 3. Call this the Integration Argument. The central feature of the Integration Argument is one popular picture in action theory (Davidson 1977). Roughly, an action *A* performed by an agent *S* is explained in terms of *S*'s beliefs and desires (the 'reason' for the action). For example, *S*'s striking of the match is explained in terms of *S*'s belief that striking the match will lead to its ignition and *S*'s desire to light the barbeque. When thought of in this way, beliefs are the kind of thing that combine with desire to cause action; that is, beliefs are *integrated* into our mental machinery in such a way as to connect desire to action.

The belief-desire-action triad can be used to explain why the prophet does not form beliefs in response to rationalized impressions in Component 3. Were it the case that the prophet truly *believed* that she was being chased by a lion and that she *desired* to remain alive, her beliefs and desires would have resulted in her fleeing. Since the prophet remains soundly asleep, her inertia can be accounted for by the lack of the relevant belief, namely that a lion is chasing her. That the prophet lacks the desire not to be eaten does not appear to be the natural account of the lack of action on the prophet's behalf. Similarly, regarding the embedded proposition of both parabolic and non-parabolic prophecies, the prophet lacks the relevant belief in Component 2 because of her lack of the relevant action. For example, if the embedded proposition is expressed by 'Esau is approaching and intends to kill me,' that Jacob remains asleep instead of fleeing for his life indicates his lack of the relevant belief.

There are at least three reasons to doubt the cogency of the Integration Argument. Firstly, not all prophecies result in the prophet coming to believe that some action is required of herself. Secondly, it is well-known that during REM sleep the body experiences a state of self-paralysis. Agents may therefore desire to do some action and believe that their desires can be fulfilled in some way yet be unable to achieve their aims owing to REM sleep paralysis. Assuming that prophetic dreams are accompanied by a similar state of self-paralysis, the prophet's inertia cannot be taken as an indication of the absence of the relevant beliefs. Finally, it seems intuitively compelling to attribute dispositions to act to people who are otherwise prevented from

The foregoing two arguments can be extended to what some may consider 'easy' cases of prophecy. Consider the following case. In Genesis 15.4 Abraham has a prophecy in which God tells him that Eliezer will not be his heir. To bolster the case for 'easy' prophecy, suppose we fine-grain the propositions available to Abraham as follows:

(i)   While standing under the night sky God told me that Eliezer will not be my heir.
(ii)   Eliezer will not be my heir.

The Coherence Argument cannot rule out Abraham's believing (ii) as there is no *prima facie* reason for suggesting that the proposition expressed by 'Eliezer will not be my heir' did not cohere with Abraham's background beliefs. He may well have thought prior to this prophetic experience that Eliezer would be his heir but in the prophetic moment he may have come to revise his belief once he realized that a child of his own blood (Isaac) would be his heir. And by fine-graining the propositions in this way the Negative Theology Argument becomes irrelevant since (ii) does not involve the kind of illegitimate anthropomorphic depictions of God that Maimonides' railed against. Nevertheless, the Extended Parable Argument and the Non-Extended Parable Argument count against Abraham believing (ii) as both arguments rule out believing the embedded proposition in Component 2 and (ii) appears to be the embedded proposition in this case. That is, even in instances of parabolic prophecy where the prophet seemingly has the opportunity to form a belief in Component 2 we do not find the presence of belief formation.

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acting in the desired fashion. For example, a person tied to a chair is disposed to avoid the oncoming rock but cannot do so because of his bondage. The requisite beliefs and desires seem to be present in all three cases even though action is absent.

6.3. The General Argument

There is another way to rule out belief formation during prophetic dreams or visions. Maimonides never explains why some parabolic prophecies are extended and others non-extended. I venture to suggest that this distinction can be accounted for by thinking that Maimonides is committed to the position that parabolic prophecies require interpretation on the prophet's part. That is, once the prophet experiences the rationalized impressions of Component 3, he must interpret the internal and external meanings thereof. Sometimes the prophet may, in some subliminal sense, be confident enough that his non-perfect rational faculty can achieve this act of interpretation successfully once he wakes up and other times he may be of the relevant conviction that he can only decipher the two meanings when his rational faculty is in its state of perfection during a prophetic dream or vision. In the latter case we have the phenomenon of the extended parabolic prophecy and in the former the non-extended parabolic prophecy.

What of non-parabolic prophecy that does not seem to require interpretation? In response to this question, I argue that *all* prophecies require interpretation regardless of whether they are parabolic or not. For example, in a non-parabolic prophecy the voice chosen to articulate the proposition expressed by 'Eliezer will not be my heir' may be part of the meaning of the prophecy. In 2.44 Maimonides tells us that the speech involved in prophecies may have a number of different properties. In particular, the voice used may be (i) either familiar or unfamiliar to the prophet, and (ii) the voice can be 'loud' or 'soft.' One might argue that there could be cases in which a variation of these properties is the imagination's way of depicting a segment of the embedded proposition. For instance, suppose the embedded proposition in the case at hand is that which is expressed by 'it is a

matter of secrecy that Eliezer will not be your heir.' When Abraham 'hears' God saying 'Eliezer will not be your heir' the volume in which God speaks those words is that resembling a whisper. The imagination picks up on the association between secrecy and whispering and depicts the first part of the embedded proposition by way of God's whispering 'Eliezer will not be your heir.' In this scenario it will be up to Abraham to interpret the voice's volume as either relevant or irrelevant to the meaning of the prophecy.

If this is indeed a viable possibility, which it should be given that all non-parabolic prophecies involve a prophet 'hearing' a voice, then we may conclude that even easy cases of non-parabolic prophecy require interpretative processing. This also rules out the prophet believing the embedded proposition once the angel explains it to her in extended parabolic prophecy since the properties of the voice in which the angel voices the explanation of the rationalized impressions may itself require interpretation. Alternatively, the angel's explanation may itself be a mixture of parabolic and non-parabolic prophecy, which again requires interpretation.

The mental act of interpretation, as shall be discussed in the next chapter, involves the mapping of an object from one set to the appropriate object in another set, where the 'appropriateness' of the mapping is context dependent. This act involves judgments as to which two objects appropriately map one another. In the Maimonidean scheme, this kind of mental act would most likely be undertaken by the rational faculty. Interpretation of the rationalized impressions of Component 3 would therefore require the involvement of the rational faculty once the imagination has completed the job of depicting the embedded proposition in the form of sensory impressions. But as Maimonides defines the prophet method, (PM) does not mention the involvement of the rational faculty at a stage following the imagination. We may therefore conclude that if interpretation is required it would have

to be undertaken once the prophet wakes up and recalls the rationalized impressions of her prophetic dream or vision. The necessary recall, so I will argue in the next chapter, occurs in Component 4 and the act of interpretation culminating in the relevant output belief in Component 5.

7. Concluding Reflections

Maimonides presents us with a very detailed model for acquisition of beliefs by way of prophecy. I want to conclude this chapter by stressing some of the features of the model that are not apparent or which are apparent but require emphasis. Firstly, at no point in the prophetic process does God actually speak to or communicate with the prophet. The epistemology of prophecy, at least as far as Maimonides is concerned, cannot be reduced to the epistemology of testimony, where testimony is typically marked by a transfer of a proposition *p* from a first person to a second and where the second person believes *p*. At most God can prevent the prophet who has adequately prepared herself from engaging in prophecy (2.32.361). Maimonides never explains why God would prevent the prophet from prophesying but considers it a miracle when such an impediment is put in place since "it is a natural thing that everyone who according to his natural disposition is fit for prophesy and who has been trained in his education and study should become a prophet" (ibid.). Prophecy is a natural phenomenon in the sense that it is well within the capacity of a good many individuals to satisfy all the necessary conditions for prophecy. The remaining necessary condition which is jointly sufficient with the others for engaging in prophecy, but over which the prophet has no control, is God's permission. God's role in Maimonides' model is therefore rather limited.

Secondly, the Old Testament gives the impression that God actually speaks to prophets as a result of a truncated mode of expression *vis-à-vis* cause and effect. When a cause *C* results in an effect *E* via a long chain of intermediate causes and effects, the scriptures will often leave out those intermediate steps and attribute the cause of *E* directly to *C*. A similar phenomenon occurs with respect to prophecy. The texts record God as being the initiator of the prophetic experience by describing God as 'appearing' to the prophet while in truth God is merely the source of the emanation that sustains the universe as it passes through the ten intelligences and then to the prophet's soul (2.48). Scripture skips these ten intermediate steps for the sake of brevity.

Thirdly, for the sake of the ignorant masses, the prophet 'deceptively' describes herself as being addressed by God or an angel in an attempt to convey to the masses the idea that the prophet grasps the truths of 'divine science' by way of prophecy. Furthermore, given that it was common knowledge that prophecy only occurs during a dream or vision, prophets often omit mentioning this fact. In some cases this omission can result in a misreading of the text e.g. falsely believing that Abraham actually interacted with three angels or that Jacob actually wrestled with an angel.

Fourthly, there is no epistemic distinction between a prophet who is awake and anyone else: "Now with regard to everything that can be known by demonstration, the status of the prophet and that of everyone else who knows it are equal; there is no superiority of one over the other" (2.33.364). Though the prophet may be more learned than most, she is subject to the same cognitive limitations as anyone else in her waking moments.

Finally, I have provided a number of reasons in favor of the view that prophets do *not* form beliefs in either Component 2 or Component 3. The upshot of this result is the inclusion of memory in Component 4 and interpretation in Component 5. As shall be

demonstrated at length in the next chapter, the absence of belief during Component 2 or Component 3 not only makes the prophetic method more interesting from a doxastic perspective, it also introduces a range of safety concerns that may have been absent had there been belief during the prophetic dream or vision.

My reading of Maimonides on the prophetic method can be summarized as follows. When not distracted by emotions and perceptual inputs, a prophet who is both sufficiently healthy and sufficiently erudite will fall into a prophetic dream or prophetic vision during which time the prophet's rational faculty will receive a quantity of emanation from the Active Intellect proportional to its degree of perfection. While in this heightened state, the rational faculty, with the aid of prodigious intuition, will generate the embedded proposition p, and, if sufficient emanation is present, yield an overflow of rationalized emanation conditioned by the propositional content of p. The prophet's perfect imagination will then receive that rationalized emanation and depict the embedded proposition in the form of rationalized sensory impressions, where the rationalized impressions can be structured in a variety of ways. The prophet will then wake up, recall the rationalized impressions, and will then believe p, all things going well, as a result of interpreting the rationalized impressions to be depicting p. When the prophet's perfect rational faculty generates more than one embedded proposition in Component 2, the prophet will likewise believe a conjunction of propositions in Component 5.

For the modern reader for whom the concept of emanation is foreign, it is possible to drop the element of emanation (Component 1) from (PM) without thereby doing much violence to Maimonides' point of view. After all, God's role in (PM) is rather limited. In modern terms, then, prophecy is a moment of subliminal genius reserved, by divine consent, for a rather select number of erudite, virtuous, and healthy people who are gifted

enough to translate their subliminal insights into a language capable of conveying those insights to both the ignorant and the learned.

Prophecy and Safety

A token belief *p* counts as either safe or unsafe on a case-by-case basis. It would therefore be misguided to ask whether prophetic beliefs *simpliciter* satisfy the safety condition for knowledge. Nevertheless, now that the specifics of the safety condition and the nature of the prophetic method in the *Guide* have been established, the purpose of this chapter is to identify and discuss those factors of particular relevance to the safety of prophetic beliefs. Some of these factors are familiar from the safety literature while others are unique to (PM) or feature in a unique way *vis-à-vis* (PM). The discussion in this chapter is therefore intended to lead to an educated position from which the safety of a particular prophetic belief can be addressed on a case-by-case basis.

1. Infallibilism, Fallibilism, and Safety

The notion of prophets as direct and infallible conduits to the 'mind of God' remains mainstream and can be found in works by a variety of authors in both the Jewish and Christian traditions.[1] Even Maimonides appears to make comments in favor of prophetic infallibility:

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[1] Here is one representative piece from the Jewish tradition: "A man in this world can have no truth in knowledge of things like the truth in his knowledge through prophecy: for that is knowledge about which there can be no misgivings, since it comes from the fountain of truth" (*Sefer HaKhinukh*, Commandment 516). And here is Locke speaking about prophecy in the Christian tradition: "The bare testimony of divine revelation is the highest certainty … because the testimony is of such a one as cannot deceive nor be deceived: and that is of God himself. This carries with it an assurance beyond doubt, evidence beyond exception" (*Essay Concerning*

Now there is no doubt that whenever—in an individual of this description—his imaginative faculty, which is as perfect as possible, acts and receives from the intellect an overflow corresponding to his speculative perfection, this individual will only apprehend divine and most extraordinary matters, will see only God and His angels, and will *only be aware and achieve knowledge of matters that constitute true opinions and general directives* for the well-being of men in their relations to one another (2.36.372, emphasis added).

A method counts as actually infallible if and only if it has not produced a false belief. The relationship between infallibility and safety is an interesting and complex one. Firstly, it would be a mistake to think that actual infallibility entails safety since by the lights of (SF!) a token belief *p* can fail to be safe even though it is the product of an infallible method *M* so long as there is a close world in which a relevantly similar method *M** produces a false belief, where *M** is a fallible method. Recall from Chapter 1 the case of the agent stepping ever further back from a table while looking at a pencil on the table (pg. 26). At some point in the process the agent will shift from an extremely reliable method to a relevantly similar unreliable method. Hence Williamson's insistence on the necessity of a margin for error surrounding cases of knowledge. Similarly, cases can be constructed where a shift occurs from the use of an infallible method to that of a relevantly similar fallible method.[2]

In the context of prophecy it would be a mistake to respond to this line of reasoning by arguing that all the token output beliefs of (PM) are safe since (PM) is *sui generis* as far as belief forming methods are concerned; that is, as far as (PM) is concerned, there just is no close world in which a relevantly similar method leads to error since there is no method

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Human Understanding IV: XVI). Worth highlighting is the presumption by both authors of a testimonial model of prophecy.

[2] Counterfactual infallibility is irrelevant given that there is no conceptual tie between counterfactual reliability and safety, as demonstrated in Chapter 1 (pg. 18). For the differences between actual and counterfactual reliability, see Goldman (1986: 45). Naturally, owing to the conceptual slipperiness of 'similarity' it is to be expected that some may be inclined to view an infallible method to be relevantly *dis*similar to a fallible method. The case involving the pencil seems to provide intuitive support in defense of such similarity.

relevantly similar to (PM). This line of reasoning only works if methods are individuated in a coarse-grained manner. However, when it comes to Williamson's presentation of the safety condition for knowledge, methods are individuated in a fine-grained manner, which is to say that (PM) is merely a placeholder for a wide range of prophetic methods some of which are relevantly similar to each other, as discussed in Chapter 2. Therefore, a token output belief *p* from (PM)' can fail to be safe if there is a close world in which the prophet believes falsely by way of (PM)'', where (PM)' and (PM)'' are relevantly similar prophetic methods.

However, if we take Maimonides in 2.36 at face value, prophetic infallibility would trivialize the question of the safety of prophetic beliefs since *all* prophetic methods, regardless of how finely-grained they are individuated, count as infallible. The present study of prophetic beliefs from the perspective of the safety condition for knowledge therefore requires for its very motivation arguments demonstrating the fallibility of at least some prophetic methods belonging to the set (PM). Toward this end I begin by raising some obvious considerations in favor of reading Maimonides as a *fallibilist* about prophecy. The remainder of the chapter builds on this conclusion by demonstrating the various ways in which prophetic beliefs can fail to be safe. By the end of the chapter it should be evident that Maimonides was being insincere in 2.36.

The pressure to read Maimonides as a fallibilist about prophecy begins to build when one considers cases in which the Old Testament prophets either contradicted themselves or disagreed with one another. Assuming the presence of veridical prophecy in each case and the law of the excluded middle, these examples constitute counterexamples to prophetic infallibility:

I) The *Book of Ezekiel* was considered at variance with the *Pentateuch*, e.g., Ezekiel 18 appears to disagree with Exodus 34.7 and Jeremiah 32.18 regarding the period in which God holds a sinner accountable for her sins.[3]

II) Jeremiah (18:8-10, 28:7,9) contradicts himself when discussing the constraints on God's commitment to promises.

III) Jeremiah and Hananiah provide conflicting prophecies regarding Nebuchadnezzar.[4]

IV) Samuel (1 Samuel 15.29) believed that "God never repents any decision He has made" whilst Jeremiah (18.8-10) believed the opposite.[5]

The difficulties presented by these cases would have been obvious to a scholar of Maimonides' pedigree. The more definitive case for Maimonides being a fallibilist about prophecy, however, centers on his explicit admission that Samuel formed a false belief by way of prophecy and, less forcefully, his implicit critique of Ezekiel's astronomical knowledge. (Both cases are discussed at length in §2.1). The Maimonides presented in this chapter is therefore a revisionist pushing back against the tradition of prophetic *in*fallibility. This conclusion is significant in that it reveals Maimonides to be a scholar who thinks that any religion founded upon prophecy, as he defines it, may very well contain errors and that major historical events could have been orchestrated in the name of God by misguided prophets.

2. Hidden Dangers

With the above precedents in place *vis-à-vis* prophetic error, the remainder of this chapter investigates those features of (PM), both those in common with other belief forming methods and those unique to (PM), which conceal room for error. The intention of these

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[3] This is Spinoza's example (*Tractatus Theologico-Politicus,* chapter 2) of the general principle mentioned in B.T. Sabbath 13b.

[4] Jeremiah 28. Hasdai Crecas, basing himself on B.T. Sanhedrin 89a, considered Hananiah a true prophet (Kreisel 2001: 459).

[5] Spinoza (ibid.).

arguments is not to prove of any specific prophetic belief *p* that it is unsafe. Rather, these arguments should be taken as a cumulative case for the conclusion that there are a significant number of factors that must be taken into account when considering whether or not a specific prophetic belief *p* produced by way of (PM) counts as safe or not.

2.1. Error-Inducing Background Considerations

No belief is formed in an epistemic vacuum; latent background beliefs frame our acquisition of new beliefs. For example, anti-skeptical beliefs act, to borrow a term from Wittgenstein, as the 'hinges' upon which the remainder of our beliefs 'swing.'[6] Of particular importance to prophecy are the epistemic dangers associated with (i) false background beliefs, and (ii) the lack of true beliefs (ignorance). In this section I argue that prophets are not immune to these background considerations and that Maimonides acknowledges (i) implicitly and (ii) explicitly. These cases will provide the first building blocks for thinking that there will be cases in which the prophet might come too perilously close to false belief in a case β to count as safely believing a true proposition *p* in a case α.

2.1.1. False Background Beliefs

Maimonides writes as follows about the intermittent nature of prophecy:

> You know that every bodily faculty sometimes grows tired, is weakened, and is troubled, and at other times is in a healthy state. Now the imaginative faculty is indubitably a bodily faculty. Accordingly you will find that the prophecy of prophets ceases when they are sad or angry … Similarly you will find that several prophets prophesied during a certain time and that

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[6] Wittgenstein *On Certainty* (1963: §613).

afterwards prophecy was taken from them and could not be permanent because of an accident that had supervened … *For the instrument had ceased to function* (2.36.372-3, emphasis added).

[A] prophet *may not prophesy continuously* the whole of his life, but prophesies at a certain moment and is *abandoned* at many other moments … (2.45.396, emphasis added).

To realize the epistemic import of these passages, consider for a moment the case of the Old Testament prophet Elisha. At some point in his adult life he gained the requisite intellectual perfection to compliment the underlying perfection of the relevant parts of his brain so as to achieve prophecy. No one is born a prophet. Despite his ability to prophesy, he is not constantly engaged in the utilization or activation of the prophetic method since a prophet can only prophesy in a dream or vision. At all other times the prophet's prophetic method is not being utilized. Hence, we find Elisha calling for musicians to soothe his anger so as to remove emotional impediments as he prepared himself for the activation of his prophetic method (II Kings 3.15). For similar reasons relating to emotional distress, Maimonides claims that Jacob and Moses were unable to prophesy for extensive periods of their respective lives (2.36.372-3).

In these non-prophetic moments when (PM) is dormant, the prophet is susceptible to all kinds of quotidian epistemic errors associated with normal epistemic functioning e.g. falsely believing *p* based on misleading evidence. The Old Testament prophet Jacob is a case in point. As a young man he deceived his aged and blind father Isaac, who was himself a prophet, into falsely believing that he was his brother Esau. Later in his life we find Jacob raging against his father-in-law Laban for deceiving him into marrying Leah instead of his beloved Rachel: "What is this you have done to me? … Why have you *deceived* me?" (Genesis 29.25, emphasis added). And as a prophet is his old age, Jacob was deceived by his

ten sons into falsely believing that Joseph, his eleventh son, was dead (ibid. 37.33-36). We also find that Samuel falsely believed Eliab to be God's chosen candidate for the monarchy (I Samuel 16.6). And Jeremiah records the incorrect date for the breach of Jerusalem's walls (Jeremiah 39.2). In light of these considerations it is no surprise that Maimonides gives us no indication that prophets enjoy immunity to error *outside* of their prophetic moments.

The presence of false background beliefs raises concerns about the safety of some token beliefs generated by (PM). It would be unreasonable, for example, to expect a parity between the ancients and ourselves with respect to scientific knowledge. Bear in mind that it was only towards the end of the sixteenth century that the geocentric model, of which Maimonides was clearly a proponent, was with great resistance replaced by the heliocentric models of Galileo, Kepler, and Copernicus. In the early modern period we find Spinoza making a strong case for the epistemic impoverishment of the prophets *vis-à-vis* the sciences. According to Spinoza (1989: 73-87) Joshua thought that the sun rotated around the earth and mistook the refraction of the sunlight in extremely cold weather to be a miracle; Isaiah mistook a parhelion for a miracle; and Solomon thought the ratio of a circle's circumference to its diameter was exactly 3:1.

Spinoza does not restrict the epistemic impoverishment of the Old Testament prophets to the domain of the scientific, however. Spinoza lists cases in which prophets made *theological* mistakes. For instance, Spinoza (ibid.) claims that Adam, Cain, Abraham, and Moses erroneously believed that God was not omniscient; that Moses thought that God had a visible face; that Moses thought God dwells in the sky; and that Jacob, Moses, Jonah, and David were polytheists.[7]

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[7] See the Appendix for the complete list of prophetic errors identified by Spinoza.

In the context of prophecy the connection between scientific mistakes and theological mistakes is more intimate than might be suspected at first blush. As Maimonides describes Component 2 of (PM), the prophet 'reasons' from background beliefs and concepts towards new beliefs. It is to be expected, therefore, that during Component 2 one of the prophet's false background scientific beliefs may, e.g., creep into a 'deductive chain of reasoning' where all the remaining premises are true. In this scenario the conclusion (the embedded proposition) will be false. If the embedded proposition is false, it will be taken up by the imagination in Component 3 and converted into sensory impressions which depict a falsehood, which may in turn result in a false output belief in Component 5.[8]

Gersonides (1288–1344) identifies Maimonides as having implicitly endorsed the foregoing explanation as the mechanism by which (PM) can lead to error. Given that Maimonides intentionally penned the *Guide* Janus-facedly, it should come as no surprise, therefore, to learn that some of Maimonides' notable commentators read him, despite his explicit statements to the contrary, as being a fallibilist about prophetic beliefs.[9] In other words, there is sufficient evidence for being suspicious of Maimonides' sincerity in 2.36. To use Gersonides' example, Maimonides (2.8.267), basing himself on Aristotle (*De Caelo* ii.9.290b), rails against the false belief that the celestial bodies make a sound as they move. Yet, in 3.3.422 and 3.7.428 Maimonides claims that the wheels of the heavenly chariot in Ezekiel's prophecy refer to the heavenly spheres. At this point Maimonides (intentionally or not) leaves it up to his readers to make the connection between these two claims and verses 1.24-5 and 10.5 in Ezekiel where the prophet attributes sound to the motion of the wheels; that is, Maimonides' interpretation of Ezekiel and his commitment to Aristotle

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[8] Toward the end of §2.2.2 I discuss a second way in which false background beliefs about the natural world have the potential to undermine the safety of a prophetic belief.

[9] See, e.g., Gersonides, *Commentary on Genesis* 15 and *Commentary on Job* 39:18-21; Shem Tov, *Commentary to Guide* 3.7.

entail that Ezekiel falsely believed that the heavenly bodies emit sound.[10] On the assumption that Ezekiel was a true prophet and his prophecy was veridical, here is a case of an error within a prophecy.

Gersonides takes the error-inducing influence of false background beliefs one step further in his *Commentary on the Pentateuch*. In Abraham's prophetic vision recorded in Genesis 15.5-6, God is depicted as calling on Abraham to look up at the evening sky whereupon God promises Abraham that his descendants, much like the evening stars, will be uncountable. According to Gersonides, the number and name of all the stars was already known in Abraham's day. Abraham's false belief about the number of stars was thus taken up in his prophetic vision and resulted in his falsely believing that his descendants would be so numerous as to be uncountable.[11]

Before moving onto the error inducing nature of ignorance, a word in defense of Maimonides. In the previous chapter I argued that prophets believe the embedded proposition, not any proposition full of imagery-laden language corresponding to the rationalized impressions. For instance, Isaiah did not actually believe that (p') 'the mountains and hills shall break forth before you singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.' Instead, the prophet believed, so I argue, something akin to (p) 'that the ruling class and the land owners will be pleased with the Israelite nation.' (p) is the embedded proposition depicted by Isaiah's imagination during his prophetic dream, and captured, in Isaiah's unique literary style, in his formulation of (p'). It may therefore be suggested that in some cases the recorded language of the prophecies is a poor indicator of what the prophet actually believed. These considerations act as a counterweight to Spinoza

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[10] At no point in the *Guide* are the two problematic quotes from *Ezekiel* discussed.

[11] Despite Genesis 15.5 featuring in several discussion in the *Guide*, Maimonides does not insinuate that Abraham's vision is an instance of prophetic fallibility since Maimonides (1.31) was of the opinion that there were more stars than the ones that could be seen.

who seems overly quick to infer prophetic error from a literal reading of the rationalized impressions of the Old Testament prophets.

2.1.2. Ignorance

Ignorance can be an epistemic hazard. In some cases it leads to false belief, e.g., Paul falsely believes 'that the bank is open' because he is ignorant of today being a public holiday. Call this *sheer ignorance*. In the context of prophecy, I argue that Maimonides recognizes the epistemic hazards associated with sheer ignorance.

False beliefs are unsafe; since the closest world to the actual world is the actual world, a false belief in the actual world is automatically unsafe. Under the right conditions, being ignorant of available evidence can lead a prophet into error, a problem Maimonides explicitly recognizes in 2.44. Maimonides tells us that when the prophet's imagination generates the divine voice 'heard' in the prophetic dream or vision, it will sometimes use a voice familiar to the prophet. We thus find that when Samuel first experienced a prophetic dream, his imagination used the voice of Eli, his priestly mentor at that time, for the voice of God:

> Then the Lord called Samuel. Samuel answered, "Here I am." And he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." But Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." So he went and lay down. Again the Lord called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." "My son," Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord: The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. A third time the Lord called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." Then Eli realized that the Lord was calling the boy. So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if He calls you, say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay

down in his place. The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening." (1 Samuel 3.4-8).

The natural reading of this story is that on three consecutive occasions Samuel falsely believed that Eli was calling him. The reason for (PM) generating false token output beliefs in these cases is Samuel's ignorance of two facts: (a) that prophecy is experienced in a dream or vision, and (b) that familiar voices can be used for 'God's voice.' Samuel's sheer ignorance leads to the absence of knowledge in all three cases.

The *Guide* is, to a large degree, Maimonides' attempt to solve a range of philosophical problems associated with the prophetic works of the Old Testament, which are works that contain 'great secrets.' However, Maimonides is constrained by a Talmudic fiat prohibiting the complete and public exposition of these secrets.[12] To achieve his aims under these exigent conditions, Maimonides approaches these secrets in a staccato manner thereby leaving it up to his reader to 'join the dots.' Assuming that the prophetic works are the outputs of prophecy, the nature of prophecy is itself one of these secrets and it is therefore no surprise to find comments on the nature of prophecy scattered throughout the *Guide*. Additionally, in his focused treatment of prophecy in 2.32-48, Maimonides often urges his reader do draw inferences from certain comments (2.45.396, 2.48.410). In light of Maimonides' comments about Samuel's errors, it is possible to argue that Maimonides makes an example of Samuel to indicate that prophets can sometimes experience a 'rocky start,' particularly when the prophecy merely involves a disembodied voice familiar to the prophet.[13] In such cases where "nothing in it [the prophetic dream or vision] strikes him [the prophet] as strange" (2.44.394), the prophet may mistake the prophecy for a regular dream

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[12] B.T. Hagigah 11b, 13a.
[13] Maimonides' examples of such prophecies are listed in 2.45.401.

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or an external perceptual stimulus, in which case the prophet is likely to form a false belief

upon waking up as Samuel did. When sheer ignorance is present in these ways, the modal

neighborhood of a token belief *p* from (PM) is not safe from error.

2.2.   Prophecy and Interpretation

In the previous chapter (§6), I argued that the prophet forms the output belief in the

embedded proposition only after he wakes up, recalls the rationalized impressions

generated during Component 3, and interprets the meaning of those impressions. The

discussion in this section centers around those dangers associated with the interpretation of

prophecies. §2.2.1 begins with some remarks about the nature of interpretation, while the

main argument is developed in §2.2.2.

2.2.1. A Toy Model for the Interpretation of Prophecy

Until now the discussion about the manner in which the imagination produces sensory

impressions in response to the embedded proposition has been somewhat loose. The

appropriation of a familiar and developed model is desirable as it would assist in revealing

those aspects of this process that invite or open the door to error. One model in the vicinity

is that of dream interpretation, especially that associated with Freudian psychoanalysis. This

model is not as natural a fit for prophecy as may be thought. Firstly, as argued in the

previous chapter, Maimonides is emphatic about the dissimilarities between regular dreams

and prophetic dreams, the deepest dissimilarity being a difference in method. Secondly, in

psychoanalytic theory a dream is taken to be an expression of deep-seated emotional

concerns and wish fulfillment whereas prophetic dreams are wholly expressions of abstract reasoning.

A second model in the vicinity that may seem a natural fit is that of pictorial representation in philosophical aesthetics. While this model boasts a highly-developed machinery that would be an asset in our analysis of Component 3, there are some worrying dissimilarities between pictorial representation and prophecy. Firstly, pictorial representation is discussed in the context of an audience member experiencing a work of art while awake. The conscious, aesthetic experience itself is taken to be fundamental to the analysis of representation. When it comes to prophecy, however, there is no corresponding waking experience of an artwork; there is only the memory of sensory impressions.

Secondly, as far as representation is concerned, the artist maintains knowledge of the artwork's meaning throughout the artistic process whereas the prophet, as I have argued, only comes to know the meaning of the prophetic dream or vision in Component 5 at the completion of the prophetic process. Thirdly, and perhaps more significantly, the pictorial representation model excludes a discussion of auditory perception, an attenuated version thereof being a central feature of prophetic dreams and visions.

In light of these considerations, a more promising approach is the construction of a toy model with the necessary machinery to aid in the analysis of Component 3. This involves borrowing terms from other models and augmenting the senses of those terms to suit present needs. The various components of this model are as follows:

Object = the set of sensory impressions generated by the imagination in Component 3

Meaning = the embedded proposition

Depiction = the portrayal or expression of the meaning through the object

Design plan = the structural relationship between the meaning and the design of the object

Interpretation = the functional mapping of an object to its meaning

Depiction is made possible by a set of background conditions. For instance, I cannot use an image of a horse if I have never seen a horse or a picture of a horse. Additionally, I cannot use an image of a lion to depict a frog for doing so amounts to excusing oneself from the depiction game. Much like pictorial representation, these background conditions determine what objects can be used to depict meaning in prophecies. However, depiction in the context of prophecy is more confined than pictorial representation for the former, unlike the latter, does not permit of abstract sensory impressions; that is, we do not find recorded instances of prophecies in the Old Testament which approximate the form of abstract art.

An object depicts its meaning in virtue of its design plan. A design plan counts as apt if and only if the object depicts its meaning. A design plan can take one of two forms. An object can be designed in such a way that its meaning is depicted by a designated impression in the object while the remainder of the object's constituent impressions merely facilitate the mapping of the object's meaning to the designated feature (hereafter *general design*). Alternatively, each impression constituting the object is designed to be mapped to a designated meaning such that the overall meaning of the object is the composition of those constituent meanings (hereafter *specific design*).[14]

Works of art can be presented under different modes. *Open presentation* occurs when an artist presents her artwork accompanied by her design plan; that is, the artist will make

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[14] This is akin to the compositional theory of meaning according to which the meaning of a complex expression in a language *L* is determined by the meaning of its constituent parts and the syntax of *L*.

her intentions transparent to the audience by having the object accompanied by a blurb stating her intention and the manner in which the object was designed so as to depict that intention. Under this mode of presentation the interpreter will have reliable access to the artwork's meaning (on the assumption that the meaning of an artwork is identical to the artist's intentions). However, the overwhelming majority of artworks are presented absent their design plan (*closed presentation*). In these cases the interpreter will most likely find it difficult to ascertain the meaning of the artwork in a reliable fashion. Extended parables are examples of open presentation. All other prophecies exhibit a closed mode of presentation.

Interpretation is here taken to be the functional mapping of the object to the meaning. In the context of prophecy, this involves the prophet mapping the object to the embedded proposition. Interpretation is thus an exercise involving judgments; that is, the prophet must judge what each rationalized impression in the set comprising the object depicts *and* how the object as a whole depicts its meaning. By making these judgments the prophet works out the embedded proposition. For illustrative purposes, consider an object comprised of a scene by the Nile riverbank in which seven emaciated cows eat seven fat cows yet remaining emaciated. In this case the object depicts the embedded proposition 'that there will be seven years of plenty for Egypt followed by seven years of such severe famine that the seven years of plenty will be forgotten.[15] In this case the prophet must judge that each cow depicts one year; that the relative emaciation and obesity of the cows depicts famine and agricultural abundance respectively; that the Nile depicts Egypt; and that the continued emaciation of the lean cows depicts the severity of the famine. Only once these judgments

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[15] This example is taken from Genesis 41 where we are told Joseph correctly interpreted this dream as a result of which he became the Egyptian viceroy and minister of agriculture.

have been completed can the prophet work out that the object as a whole depicts the aforementioned embedded proposition.

The standard account of judgments is a doxastic one; that is, to judge that *p* is to believe that *p* (Peacocke 1998: 88, Crane 2001: 104).[16] With this picture in mind, an act of interpretation involves an interpreter forming a number of beliefs and on the basis of those beliefs coming to hold a belief about the meaning of the object. In the context of prophecy, an interpretation of the object will involve the prophet coming to a belief about what each impression depicts and on the basis of those beliefs coming to hold a belief as to what the embedded proposition is. Interpretation, like memory, deduction, and testimony involves a basis of belief at time *t* including the bases of certain relevant beliefs at times prior to *t* (the 'cumulative conception of bases,' as discussed in Chapter 1). This model of interpretation is a cumulative conception of interpretation.

Finally, for the sake of simplicity, I shall assume that the impressions constituting the object have the kinds of properties exhibited by the typical objects of perception e.g. color, shape, dimension etc.[17]

With this toy model in hand, it is worth recalling before turning to the argument of §2.2.2 that prophecies come in two broad kinds—non-parabolic and parabolic—and that the latter submits to the various distinctions below.

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[16] Williamson (2000: 17) implicitly endorses the standard account. See Cassam (2010) for a refinement of the standard account.

[17] For example, rotation experiments conducted by Shepard and Metzler (1971) seem to indicate that mental images can be presented in three dimensions. There is much debate over the properties of mental images. Unfortunately, owing to the complexity and diversity of views on this subject, this topic has been set aside here. See Tye (1991) for a helpful synopsis of the relevant literature.

FIG. 1
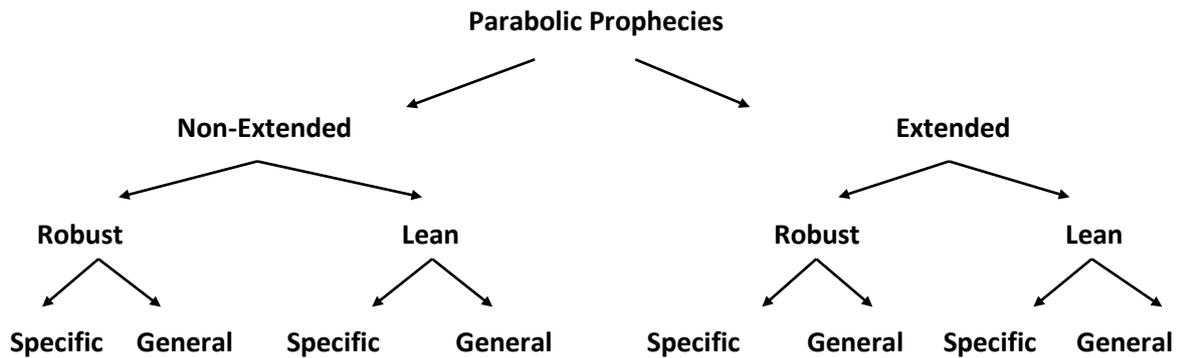
Parabolic Prophecies
- Non-Extended
  - Robust
    - Specific
    - General
  - Lean
    - Specific
    - General
- Extended
  - Robust
    - Specific
    - General
  - Lean
    - Specific
    - General

Extended parabolic prophecy: parabolic prophecies accompanied by an explanation of their meaning during the prophetic dream (or vision) or in a consequent prophetic dream (or vision).

Non-extended parabolic prophecy: parabolic prophecies unaccompanied by an explanation of their meaning either during the prophetic dream (or vision) itself or afterwards.

Robust Parables: parables the external meaning of which contains a lesson of its own in addition to being an epistemic conduit to the parable's internal meaning.

Lean Parables: parables the external meaning of which merely serves as an epistemic conduit to the parable's internal meaning.

Specific Parables: parables in which every word describing the impressions contributes to the external and internal meaning of the parable.

General Parables: parables in which "very many words are to be found, not every one of which adds something to the intended meaning; they [the words] serve to [i] embellish the parable and render it more coherent or [ii] to conceal further the intended meaning."

2.2.2.   Interpretation and Safe Judgments

All prophecies involve the generation of a set of rationalized impressions in Component 3 (the object). Sometimes the object is solely auditory in nature (e.g. when the prophet 'hears' a voice addressing him), other times the object is solely visual in nature (e.g. when the prophet 'sees' a range of images), and in some cases the object contains both auditory and visional elements (2.45.400-3). When the prophet wakes up from her prophetic dream or vision and recalls the object (Component 4), she must begin her task of interpreting the object. As I argued in the previous chapter (§6), every prophecy requires interpretation, which is what occurs in component 5.

According to Maimonides, prophecies come in two general kinds—parabolic and non-parabolic. Despite Maimonides' silence on the matter, I ventured to suggest that we should entertain the possibility of mixed kinds where the object is part parabolic and part non-parabolic. As far as parabolic and non-parabolic prophecies go, each kind depicts its meaning (the embedded proposition) in relevantly different ways. Firstly, non-parabolic prophecies do *not* admit of either the internal/external meaning distinction, or the non-extended/extended distinction.

Secondly, in the case of *non*-parabolic prophecies, the meaning of the object seems to be expressed by those sentence(s) that the prophet 'hears.' The images 'seen' during such prophecies do not seem to be involved in the manner in which the object depicts its meaning, though there is no *prima facie* reason to exclude them from so doing. That is, non-parabolic prophecies have a general design plan in which the impressions 'seen' by the prophet merely facilitate the auditory part of the object which is the sole feature of the object in virtue of which it depicts its meaning. This claim gains additional support from the

fact that Maimonides does not recognize the possibility of non-parabolic prophecy that involves sight only (2.45.400-3).

In light of these considerations, when the prophet recalls the object, the prophet, in her attempt to interpret the object, is faced with a number of important judgments, where each judgment is taken to be an instance of belief formation. If the prophet judges that the object is of the parabolic kind, she will proceed to interpret the object so as to arrive at the internal and external meanings of the parable. If she judges the object to be of the non-parabolic kind, she will attempt to interpret the embedded proposition from those sentences uttered by the speaker. Much hangs on the correctness of this judgment. For instance, if the prophet mistakenly judges that the object of her prophecy constitutes a parable when it does not, she will be "assuming an obligation to interpret things not susceptible of interpretation and that have not been inserted with a view to interpretation" (1.Intro.14).[18] When she undertakes an interpretation of such an object with the view of uncovering the parable's external and internal meanings, she is in danger of falling into error since there is no internal and external meanings to be uncovered. Conversely, if she mistakenly judges the object of a parabolic prophecy for that of a non-parabolic prophecy, she is in danger of failing to correctly interpret the external and internal meanings of the parable for she does not think such layers of meaning are present.

How easily might the prophet fall into error when making this judgment? As is the case with all knowledge attributions, the particulars of the individual case will make for differences in the presence or absence of knowledge. Additionally, much depends on how familiar the individual prophet was with the different kinds of prophetic objects classified by

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[18] While Maimonides says this regarding a different yet related issue, his comment aptly captures the central idea under discussion.

Maimonides. For the sake of argument I will henceforth assume that they were familiar with these distinctions (and those I make in Maimonides' name in Fig. 1).

Before addressing the safety of this judgment in more detail, the following general considerations deserve attention. According to Williamson (2000: 24) a condition C is transparent for S if and only if S is always in a position to know whether or not C obtains. If a condition C is transparent for S, then C is a luminous condition for S and not-C is a luminous condition for S. But there are no non-trivial luminous conditions according to Williamson (2000: 95). There are therefore no non-trivial transparent conditions. Consequently, for no non-trivial condition related to the design and types of prophecies will the prophet always be in a position to know the relevant condition.

Additionally, from a number of comments that Maimonides makes we can infer that there will be easier and harder cases. Firstly, there remains one obvious way for the prophet to tell the difference between *some* objects constitutive of parabolic prophecies from those constitutive of *some* non-parabolic prophecies—namely, non-parabolic prophecies do not admit of the extended/non-extended distinction, whereas parabolic prophecies do. Any prophecy involving objects of the extended type will therefore constitute parabolic prophecy by definition.

Secondly, from Maimonides' classification of prophecy into nine degrees (2.45), it is obvious that Maimonides does not recognize the possibility of non-parabolic prophecies that do *not* involve speech. If the object recalled involves only 'seeing' a number of images then the prophet will correctly judge the object to be of the parabolic kind.

On the other hand, to see that there will be harder cases, we can sharpen the discussion by considering a case of non-extended parabolic prophecy. Both parabolic and non-parabolic prophecies can be constituted by objects involving images of agents *talking* to

the prophet (2.45); that is, a parabolic object may appear to the prophet no different from a non-parabolic object. This commonality compounds the difficulty involved in making the correct judgment. Since judgments are propositional attitudes, the propositional content of the prophet's judgment is crucial to the safety of his belief. For the sake of argument, suppose that the propositional content of the prophet's judgment consists in a condition C 'that this object is constitutive of φ prophecy,' where φ, depending on the case, is a placeholder for either 'parabolic' or 'non-parabolic.'

Maimonides gives us no indication, apart from the extended/non-extended property, that prophets can tell the difference between parabolic objects and non-parabolic objects. As far as safety is concerned, the indiscriminability of two cases does not by itself entail a relevant lack of safety. In the good case I may count as safely believing that this is a dog while in the bad case I fail to know that this is a dog (since it is a fake dog) even though the good case and the bad case are phenomenally indistinguishable to me. So long as there is no relevant world close to the good case in which I falsely believe the object to be a dog, my belief in the good case counts as safe.[19] Similarly, the prophet's judgment 'that this object is constitutive of parabolic prophecy,' will count as safe so long as there is no relevant close world in which that belief is false. Do we have any good reason to think that there is such a close world? That is, regarding a case of parabolic prophecy, for example, might there be good reason to think that there is a close world in which the prophet falsely judges 'that this object is constitutive of non-parabolic prophecy'?

One natural approach to this question is by way of Maimonides' comment that the overwhelming majority of prophecies are non-parabolic (2.45); that is, there is a high

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[19] For more on the relationship between phenomenal indiscriminability and safety, see Williamson (2000: 165-8).

objective probability that the object under consideration is non-parabolic. In all likelihood the prophet's judgment 'that this object is constitutive of *non-parabolic* prophecy' will be true. To see that this approach is bankrupt as far as safety is concerned, we need only recall that Williamson denies that there is a straightforward relationship between safety and objective probability. Not only does Williamson deny that one knows that one's ticket will lose despite the very high objective probability that that proposition is true (2000: 117), he is also committed to safe belief being compatible with extremely high objective probability that the proposition believed is false (2009c, 2009d). In light of these considerations, despite the prophet's reflection on the odds of any prophetic object being non-parabolic in nature, his judgment that it is non-parabolic can be unsafe despite the odds in his favor. The case at hand is a case in point since the object under consideration is *parabolic* in nature, a false belief being by definition unsafe. Moreover, a prophet may only experience prophecy a few times in his life and all such occasions may be parabolic in kind. As such, believing that a prophetic object is non-parabolic for no other reason than reflection on the odds is much like believing that one's lottery ticket will lose merely by reflecting on the long odds of winning. If the latter belief is unsafe, so will the former belief.

Another way to approach the question at hand is by way of a perceptual analogue. According to Williamson (2000: 37), '*S* sees that *p*' entails that '*S* knows that *p*.' One question to ask on this controversial claim is whether I count as *seeing* that Judy is across the road if I cannot tell the difference between Judy and her identical twin sister Trudy. One intuitive thought in favor of this being a case in which knowledge is absent is that for all I know it is Trudy instead of Judy. On the other hand, if Trudy lives in a different country, then that counts in favor of my knowing that Judy is across the road. A similar conflict of intuitions is present in fake barns cases and their ilk. As Williamson says, whether or not we

consider a case of false belief to be close or not in part depends on whether we already think that the agent knows in the actual case (2000: 100). Here too, we may think of a prophet's epistemic standing in the present case to be like my epistemic standing *vis-à-vis* identical twins and fake barns. Whether we think there is a case of non-parabolic prophecy in the vicinity will in part depend on whether we think the agent knows that this object is of the parabolic kind (and *vice versa* in the converse case).

Mixed cases involving objects combining both parabolic and non-parabolic elements generate additional safety concerns since it makes for an additional way in which condition *C* can be false. To see as much, in cases in which the object is solely *parabolic* in nature, for the prophet to safely believe 'that this object is parabolic in kind' there must be no close worlds in which the prophet falsely believes either 'that this object is non-parabolic in kind,' or 'that this object is mixed in kind.' Mixed cases thus make it harder for the prophet to safely judge the kind of object.

There does not, therefore, seem to be any *general* conclusions to draw about the safety of the prophet's judgment in this case apart from that the judgment is unsafe if made on the basis of reflection on the odds alone and that it will be harder for the judgment to be safe if mixed cases are considered as a serious possibility. It seems fair to conclude that in cases of extended parables and objects that contain no speech, the prophet's judgment that such objects are parabolic in nature is safe.

I now turn to some *specific* safety concerns associated with the interpretation of *parabolic* prophecies. In all extended parabolic prophecies the meaning of the parable (the embedded proposition) is made explicit to the prophet. In all cases of *non*-extended parabolic prophecy it is left to the prophet to determine, work out, or interpret the meaning of the parable. Of such cases, Maimonides merely says, "Among the parables of the prophet

there are many whose meaning is not interpreted in a vision of prophecy, but whose purpose is known after he awakens" (2.43.391-2); that is, Maimonides is silent on the manner in which the prophet comes to know the meaning of such parables.[20] The arguments in this section demonstrate that there are a number of junctures during the interpretive process that involve potential danger of error. (These considerations apply with equal force to those instances of non-parabolic prophecies in which some of the images 'seen' participate in the depiction of the object's meaning.)

 Once the prophet has judged the object to be of the (non-extended) parabolic type, the act of interpreting the parable begins by judging which type of relationship between design and meaning is present in the object. When details of the design plan are absent from the mode of presentation (closed presentation), which I take to be the standard case, it follows that if *general design* was adopted in the design of the object but the prophet judges *specific design*, the interpretation will fail to map the object to the meaning. A similar fate awaits the interpreter who judges *general design* but where *specific design* has been adopted. In both of these cases the prophet is in danger of falling into error and if he does manage to successfully map the object to its meaning his correct interpretation thereof will be accidental.

 The danger of error does not end there since every successive judgment in the interpretive process involves room for error. That is, even if the prophet correctly judges that the parable exhibits a *general* design plan, he is immediately faced with a third judgment as to which individual impression is the designated impression that depicts the object's meaning and which impressions merely facilitate the manner in which the

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[20] At least we can rule out the prophet's coming to know the meaning by remembering it since Maimonides would have chosen the more natural construction "but whose purpose is *recalled* after he awakens."

designated feature depicts the meaning. Similarly, even if the prophet accurately judges the presence of *specific* design, he must accurately judge what each impression depicts and accurately compose the internal and external meanings therefrom. Additionally, as the prophet attempts to interpret the parable's meaning, the robust/lean distinction will be playing out in the background; that is; if the prophet has some prior reason for thinking that the parable is lean, he will be inclined to interpret the object in way that results in a 'worthless' external meaning.

To make some intuitive assessment of the relevant safety of such judgments, it helps to consider a number of remarks that Maimonides makes about the complexity with which objects can be designed. To sharpen the case, consider Jacob's ladder dream, a non-extended parable according to Maimonides:

> A ladder was set earthward and its top reached heavenward; and behold! angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And behold the Lord stood above it … (Genesis 28.12-3).[21]

When Jacob recalled this object he would have had to correctly judge that the object was of the parabolic kind. This judgment would have been safe since it contained no audio elements, which is a distinguishing mark of parabolic prophecy. He then would have to judge whether the object exhibits a general or specific design plan. If the design of the object above is general, then a designated impression thereof depicts the object's meaning and Jacob would have to identify that impression, discern its relationship to the rest of the object's facilitating impressions, and thereby come to determine the meaning of the object. Alternatively, if the object has a specific design, Jacob would have had to determine the meaning of each impression and then compose the object's overall meaning therefrom.

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[21] This prophecy is an example of a prophecy that is recorded *without* its meaning.

Maimonides' interpretation of this parable demonstrates the degree of sophistication with which prophetic objects can be designed. According to Maimonides, this object exhibits a *specific* design plan (1.Intro.12-3). Maimonides breaks the object down into the following seven constitutive impressions:

      1   2   3   4

A [ladder] was [set earthward] and [its top reached heavenward]; and [behold! angels of God]

      5   6   7

were [ascending] and [descending on it]. [And behold the Lord stood above it].

In 1.15.41 Maimonides tells us that (7) depicts the permanence of God's existence given the equivocal nature of the phrase 'stand erect,' which indicates both "standing at attention" in addition to "stability and permanence." Maimonides continues (ibid.) with his interpretation by claiming that (4) depicts prophets themselves. The basis for his claim is Numbers 20.16 which refers to Moses using the word 'angel.' In 1.10.36 Maimonides tells us that when a person rises in intellectual status by directing his attention to sublime matters, he is referred to in prophetic language as ascending, which is the meaning of (5). The converse is the meaning of (6). Moreover, 'ascending' also indicates the gaining of prophetic knowledge and 'descending' the cessation of prophecy. Though Maimonides does not explicitly interpret the meaning of (1), (2), or (3) for us, it seems that given what he has said thus far, (2) indicates a state of ignorance, (3) a state of intellectual perfection, and (1) that the gaining of knowledge is the means by which the human being reaches perfection and that the rungs of the ladder indicate the different levels of intellectual perfection one can attain. Finally, 'ascending' is mentioned before 'descending' to indicate that the prophet must return to the "people of the earth" to teach them the insight he has gained (1.15.41), which is

assumedly an allusion to Plato's cave allegory. The *external* meaning of this prophecy, according to Maimonides, is roughly the point that prophecy is the perfection of the human being and that prophets are responsible for guiding their communities towards knowledge of God. This interpretation accords with Maimonides' view that the external meaning of parabolic prophecies concerns the welfare of human society (1.Intro.12).

As for the *inner* meaning of this prophecy, we need to recall that Maimonides was of the opinion that the equivocal term 'angel' can denote a force of nature (2.6.263). In 2.10.272 Maimonides falls back on the rabbinic tradition that there were four angels in Jacob's dream: two ascending and two descending. In his view the two ascending angels depict the forces responsible for the existence of matter and the animal soul, while the descending angels depict the forces responsible for the preservation of the material world. Furthermore, according to rabbinic tradition when the angels meet on the middle rung of the ladder, together they spanned a length greater than the diameter of the earth which in Maimonides' view depicts that "they [the forces of nature] are accordingly the cause of everything that comes to pass in time" (2.11.273). The *inner* meaning depicted by the object of Jacob's prophetic dream is therefore a claim about the nature of the universe, which accords with Maimonides' view that the inner meaning of parabolic parables "contains wisdom that is useful for beliefs concerned with the truth as it is (1.Intro.12).[22]

Assuming that this interpretation is accurate, it is evident that a prophetic object can display a remarkable degree of sophistication in the manner in which the embedded proposition(s) is depicted. It is therefore natural to wonder how easily a prophet could fall

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[22] Note that Maimonides, true to his word in the Introduction to Part 1 of the *Guide*, does not reveal the meaning of this parable in a single location, but spreads its meaning across several disparate chapters. There Maimonides writes, "[The] external meaning also ought to contain in it something that indicates to someone considering it what is to be found in its internal meaning, as happens in the case of an apple of gold overlaid with silver filigree-work having very small holes." It is unclear, however, from Maimonides' interpretation of the ladder parable how its external meaning connects to its internal meaning.

into error when it comes to making the necessary judgments as she interprets the object in Component 5. One consideration in favor of this judgment being safe, is the following tempting line of thought. Since, on average, we are adept at interpreting the meaning of ordinary parables (otherwise they wouldn't be a feature of our language use), it should be an equally simple matter for the prophet to accurately interpret prophetic parables. For instance, we are told that King David grasped the meaning of Nathan's parable immediately and accurately (2 Samuel 12). Indeed, Maimonides seems to hint as much when he says that even his reader, someone less perfect that a prophet, is capable of correctly interpreting some of the parables:

> In some matters it will suffice you to gather from my remarks that a given story is a parable, even if we explain nothing more; for once you know it is a parable, it will immediately become clear to you what it is a parable of (I.Intro.14.).

Though tempting, this line of thought conceals some relevant dangers associated with the process of interpretation, as detailed below. When this degree of difficulty is cashed out in modal terms, as shall be discussed toward the conclusion of this section, then there is room to argue that the prophet's interpretation of some parables is too perilously close to error to count as safe.

That the degree of difficulty associated with correctly interpreting an object will be remarkably high in some cases is evident from Maimonides' claim that when the embedded proposition is depicted by sensory impressions in Component 3, a specific impression may have been chosen because the *word* for that impression is somehow related to the words in the sentence which expresses the embedded proposition (2.43.392). For example, we are told that in a prophecy the prophet Jeremiah saw "a staff of an almond tree" (*makel*

shakeid) (Jeremiah 1.11). In the following verse God tells Jeremiah that He, God, "will hasten to fulfill My word" (*ki shokeid ani*). In other words, the meaning of the prophecy is not related to the image of the almond tree *per se*, but is rather a play on the word for an almond tree in Hebrew: "in this case the intention of the parable did not concern the notion of [a] rod or that of [an] almond" (2.43.392).

Another technical manner in which an embedded proposition can be depicted is by way of a play on the sequence of letters within the word for a specific image. Maimonides brings as an example Zachariah's prophecy in which he sees a shepherd herding a flock with two staffs, the second of which is called *hobelim* (Zachariah 11.7). According to Maimonides (2.43.392) the name *hobelim* was chosen because of a play on the sequence of the letters in that word (*ha*, *ba*, *lam*) which are related to the letters in the word "and their soul loathed (*bohalah*) me" (*Zechariah* 11:8). By calling the staff *hobelim* the image supposedly depicts the idea that God sent armies to ravage the Israelites because they despised Him. According to Maimonides, this second way of rationalizing impressions is rife in the works of Ezekiel's very graphic and obscure prophecies which contain many secrets (2.43.393).

These two sophisticated ways of depiction invite the following epistemic concerns. From Maimonides' comments we can glean that in the context of prophecy an essential element to the act of interpretation can be the choice of words used to *describe* the object. The OED defines 'description' as "the action of setting forth in words by mentioning recognizable features or characteristic marks." To describe *x* is to list the properties of *x*. The act of description has at least two properties that prove hazardous for interpretation as they invite the possibility of erroneous interpretation. Firstly, the linguistic phenomenon of synonymy entails that word *A* and word *B* in a language *L* can refer to the same object *φ*. In the context of prophecy, however, it may be essential to the design plan that the prophet

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choose word *B* instead of word *A* to refer to the impression φ. For example, the prophet might choose the word 'cemetery' to describe an impression while the correct interpretation of the object may require the prophet to pick up on a word play involving the word 'graveyard.'

Secondly, a prophet may choose a word that aptly describes the impression but which is somehow lacking relative to its role in the manner in which the overall object depicts its meaning. To use one of Maimonides' examples to demonstrate this problem, if Jeremiah had chosen the word 'tree' instead of 'almond tree' to describe the impression in his dream the play on the word 'almond' would have been unavailable for interpretative purposes.

This leads into the third error inducing factor relating to the nature of description. A describer of an impression φ is confronted by a vast array of properties by which to describe φ. For example, I can describe my colleague's chair as 'Dave's chair' or as 'an office chair.' And so on.[23] When considered in the context of prophecy, the prophet is similarly confronted by a vast array of properties by which to describe the various rationalized impressions. To use another of Maimonides' examples of a word play, Amos (8.2) described the object of his dream as a 'basket of summer fruits.' In this case, Maimonides tells us that the meaning of that object is depicted in virtue of a play on the word 'summer' (2.43.392). Therefore, had Amos described the object as a 'basket of fruits,' the correct interpretation of his prophetic dream would have been unavailable to him. The problem at hand cuts both ways as the prophet might home in on a specific property that is irrelevant to the object's meaning. For instance, were the relevant property of Amos's object its being a 'basket of

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[23] One way to cash out this idea that some descriptions are more suggestive than others is to view some descriptions as more natural than others in the spirit of David Lewis's (1986: 60) distinction between natural and gerrymandered properties.

fruits,' then had Amos described it as a 'basket of *summer* fruits' he may have been misled by the superfluous word 'summer.'

The epistemic difficulties mount further once we begin to consider the manner in which the audio and olfactory modalities might participate in the depiction of the object's meaning. Maimonides tells us that in some prophecies the prophet will hear a voice that sounds like a voice he is familiar with such that "nothing in it strikes him as strange" (2.44.394). Now if the design plan is specific, the choice of *voice* may be critical to the interpretation of the object. Hence, if the prophet fails to pay attention to the identity of the voice in addition to the content of the 'spoken' word, she may fail to accurately interpret the object. Similarly, we may wonder whether color and smell may equally play a role in the depiction process. Maimonides gives us no indication whether or not the prophet can tell when the 'color,' 'sound,' or 'smell' (and perhaps even the 'touch') of the object is relevant to its meaning.

Another epistemic hurdle derives from comments Maimonides makes when discussing Jacob's ladder dream. If we take Maimonides at his word, an essential feature of this object is the sequential order in which the prophet's mind notices the various impressions making up that object; that is, a necessary condition for a correct interpretation of this object is Jacob's noticing first that two of the angles are ascending and only then noticing the other two angels descending. The direction of movement is critical to the external meaning of the object. Had Jacob first noticed the descending angels, he may have interpreted the object incorrectly.

Before concluding the discussion of the dangers associated with the interpretive process, there are two final challenges worth consideration. Firstly, the optical illusion is a well-known phenomenon associated with visual perception. We might wonder, therefore, if

such illusions might similarly create epistemic hazards for the prophet's interpretation of the object. For instance, Jastrow's rabbi-duck figure is sometimes seen as a rabbit, then a duck. Such images are radically ambiguous. When it comes to such images, interference from background *cognitive* factors determines what is seen. Similar considerations apply to the Rubin vase, a Necker cube, and the Schroeder stairs. And in images such as the Mach band, the Hermann grid, and the checker shadow illusion there are *physiological* explanations for why the eye 'sees' what is not shown in the image. Additionally, there are distorting optical illusions such as the Café illusion and paradox illusions e.g. the Penrose stairway. Despite these phenomena being associated with regular vision, we may begin to wonder whether they can occur inside prophetic dreams and visions. If they can, then there is reason to suspect that the prophet's attention may be drawn towards one 'phenomenal' feature of the image that is unrelated to the manner in which that impression depicts its meaning. Worse still are images such as the Hermann grid where that which is 'seen' is not present in the image at all. The presence of an 'epiphenomenal' image might radically mislead the prophet's interpretation of the object.

Finally, the impressions constituting the object can be individuated in a fine-grained or coarse-grained manner. As we saw with Maimonides' treatment of Jacob's ladder prophecy, the successful interpretation of the object depends in large part on a particular division of the impressions. For instance, if the object is constituted by a scene in which a man is riding a horse by the lake, the impressions constituting this scene can be divided in a number of ways, some more fine-grained than others, e.g. as {horse + man + lake}, or {man on horse + lake}, or {man on horse by lake}. It is easy enough to see how each division can be used to depict something different, especially in the case of specific design.

With a far more educated sense of the difficulties involved in object design, it is evident that the interpretation of objects involves room for error. To be more precise, the correct interpretation of the object requires, depending on the case, the prophet making the correct judgments in response to the questions listed below:

1. Is the object parabolic or non-parabolic?
2. If non-parabolic, is the meaning thereof contained in the words spoken or are the impressions also involved in the meaning?
3. If parabolic, is the design plan general or specific?
4. If general design, what is the designated impression and how do the other impressions facilitate the depiction of the meaning?
5. Is impression φ depicting a meaning or is the word for φ depicting a meaning?
6. If the word for φ depicts a meaning, is it merely the word for φ that depicts a meaning or does a play on the word for φ depict a meaning?
7. Should word $W1$ be used for impression φ or word $W2$, where $W1$ is synonymous with $W2$?
8. Is description $D1$ the correct description of the impression or is it description $D2$, $D3$, …?
9. Is 'smell,' 'color,' 'taste,' or 'touch' relevant to the meaning or not?
10. Is the sequential order of the impressions significant or not?
11. Am I paying attention to the correct phenomenal aspect of the impressions?
12. Have I individuated the impressions correctly?
13. Is the parable robust or lean?

While Maimonides is confident that in some cases even non-prophets will accurately interpret the parable (I.Intro.14.), he does express concern over the difficulty involved in the interpretive process:

> When … I have explained the meaning of a parable … you should not inquire into all the details occurring in the parable, nor should you wish to find significations corresponding to them. For doing so would lead you into one of two ways: either into turning aside from the parable's

intended subject, or into assuming an obligation to interpret things not susceptible of interpretation and that have not been inserted with a view to interpretation (ibid.).

Maimonides warns his readers against trying to map the meaning to the object even when he has informed them of the meaning. In cases such as these Maimonides recognizes that his reader (the intellectual elite) may easily fall into error. It seems that Maimonides was wary of the dangers associated with interpretation. And this warning is given when the parable's meaning is made clear to the reader!

At this point the dangers associated with interpretation must be addressed in light of Williamson's cumulative conception of bases. In response to the challenge to multi- and single-premise closure from objective probability, Williamson claimed that if the basis of the belief in the conclusion includes the bases of each premise, then the belief in the conclusion counts as safe *if* each premise is safely believed. The safety of each premise is thus a *sufficient* condition for the safety of the conclusion so long as the basis of the latter includes the bases of the former. Williamson was silent, however, on whether safe belief in the premises is a *necessary* condition for safe belief in the conclusion. I then discussed the debate about knowledge from a falsehood and indicated that as far as the safety condition is concerned a number of cases can be constructed in which belief in the conclusion is safe despite being inferred from unsafe premises. Nevertheless, Williamson does intimate that a belief in a conclusion counts as safe *if and only if* it is derived from safe premises.

This debate bears directly on the safety of the prophet's output belief in Component 5. In my presentation of the prophetic method I have argued that prophecy involves a series of preliminary interpretive judgments resulting in a final belief, which is a similar model to that of memory, testimony, and an inference from several premises towards a conclusion. It is

evident, from the manner in which I have investigated the intimate relationship between the imagination, depiction, and interpretation that in some cases arriving at the correct meaning of a prophecy is no small feat. This result is the upshot of the prophet's lack of belief in Component 2 in conjunction with the delicate and sophisticated manner in which the imagination can depict the embedded proposition. It follows that in particularly difficult cases there is room to suspect that one of the preliminary judgments made will be false or unsafe. Moreover, since no condition is transparent, the prophet is not always in a position to make the necessary preliminary judgments safely. Though this conclusion follows trivially from those cases in which the prophet forms a false output belief, I have argued that some may worry that the lack of safety in the relevant preliminary judgments may result in the prophet's output belief being unsafe. This would be the natural result from Williamson's position that safe premises are both a necessary and sufficient condition for a safe conclusion in his cumulative conception of bases model. On the other hand, I have demonstrated that there is room to argue for the opposite view in which case the prophet can have a safe output belief despite having made unsafe preliminary judgments.

The following case illustrates the above maneuvers more clearly. Suppose, for example, that prophet *S* falsely believes of a certain tree *T* that *T* is an almond tree when in truth it is an oak tree. On the basis of this error *S* falsely believes that all almond trees look like *T*. If this false background belief gets taken up in Component 2, which is not unlikely given how many times trees feature in Old Testament prophecies,[24] then there will be cases in which the prophet's imagination in Component 3 produces an impression of an oak tree. Despite these two false background beliefs and the incorrect impression for almond trees, the impression of the oak tree will nevertheless suffice for those cases in which the word for the

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[24] One Old Testament concordance records the nouns 'tree' 129 times, 'cedar' 148, and 'palm' 32.

impression plays the dominant role in depicting the embedded proposition. Take for example, Jeremiah's prophecy about the almond tree, a case which Maimonides discusses in 2.29.347 and 2.43.392. In Jeremiah 1.11, the prophet experiences a prophecy in which his imagination generates an impression of an almond tree, which depicts p 'that God intends to act quickly on the subject matter of Jeremiah's previous prophecy.' The image of an almond tree is chosen because in the Hebrew language there is a play on words between 'almond' (*shakeid*) and 'swiftness' (*shokeid*). For argument's sake, suppose that it p is true in the actual case and in all close cases. In our version of this case, Jeremiah similarly truly believes p despite his false background beliefs and the impression of an oak tree in his dream since he thinks it is an almond tree. The earlier mistake gets cancelled out at a later point.

If one follows Williamson, then Jeremiah's belief p is unsafe since his belief in the embedded proposition included the bases of unsafe beliefs. On the alternative picture, Jeremiah's belief counts as safe since a belief in a conclusion can be safe despite unsafe premises. Considering that there are quite a number of steps in which the prophet can fall into error as he interprets the object of his prophetic dream, it becomes increasingly difficult to intuitively embrace the alternative picture as the number of missteps leading to the output belief in the embedded proposition steadily increases.

2.3.   Component 4 and Memory

In §2.2 I argued that upon closer inspection it becomes apparent that the correct interpretation of a prophetic object involves room for error. The argument in this section is

a natural extension of that argument but where the room for error concerns the delicate interplay between memory and interpretation.

2.3.1. Preservation vs. Generation

When she wakes up from her prophetic dream or comes to from her prophetic vision, the prophet must, in Component 4, recall the object generated in Component 3. The memory of the object features as the input for the interpretation that occurs in Component 5. The nature of this recall requires examination. While a thorough treatment of memory is beyond the confines of this work, the discussion points below prove salient for present purposes.

Some may find this a compelling argument against the notion that the prophet *remembers* the rationalized impressions of his dream or vision in Component 4:

(1) For S to remember that p at $T2$ it must be the case that S believed p at $T1$.
(2) The prophet does not form beliefs during Component 3 (as argued in Chapter 2).
(3) Therefore, Component 4 does not involve an act of memory.

Many accounts of memory take premise (1) as a necessary condition for remembering that p. According to such *preservative* accounts of memory, memory is not a source of knowledge or belief; rather, memory merely preserves knowledge or belief from an earlier time to a later time: "person B remembers that p if and only if B knows that p because he knew that p" (Malcolm 1963: 223; 1977: 102); "to remember now is to know now what you knew in the past, without learning in-between what you know now" (Margalit 2002: 14); and "memory is not a source, still less a ground, of knowledge: it is the maintenance of knowledge formerly acquired by whatever means" (Dummett 1993: 420–1).

There are at least two ways to push back against premise (1). Firstly, the discussion on memory has not been one-sided. William James (1890: i.649n2) thinks that S counts as remembering that he did not lock the door when leaving the house even though S did not believe that he did not lock it at the time of leaving the house. James reasons that if S had believed that the door was unlocked when leaving the house he would have locked it. And to alter a case from Carl Ginet (1975: 149), I count as remembering that I did not have Coke today even though at no time during the day did I believe as much. More recently, Jennifer Lackey (2005: 650-1) has argued that owing to sensory overload (e.g. listening to music while driving), one can remember something about the environment during the drive even though one did not form the relevant belief at the earlier time.[25]

Additionally, one could argue that S counts as remembering that p at $T2$ even though S merely entertained (i.e. did not take a propositional attitude towards) p at $T1$. Similarly, if S withholds whether or not p at $T1$ because of the presence of defeaters and at $T2$ the defeaters for p that were present at $T1$ are no longer in play, then S remembers that p at $T2$ even though S did not believe that p at $T1$.[26]

I therefore help myself to the point that premise (1) is false. Given that the very act of memory is under question, it is still incumbent upon me to defend my positive claim that Component 4 involves memory proper by identifying at least one account of memory according to which it counts as such. According to the empiricist accounts of memory found in Locke,[27] Hume,[28] and Russell (1921: 158-60), remembering that p requires a mental representation plus the additional belief (or feeling) that the representation corresponds to

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[25] See Lehrer and Richard (1975: 122) for a similar case. For criticisms of such cases, see Bernecker (2009: 85ff).
[26] Steup (1992) presents cases in which S *dis*believes p at $T1$ owing to defeaters but remembers p at $T2$ once the defeaters are no longer relevant.
[27] *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* 2.10.2.
[28] *Treatise* 1.3.5., *Enquiry* 5.2.

a previous experience. And according to causal accounts of memory, e.g. Martin and Deutscher (1966), S remembers that p so long as p is true and there is an appropriate causal connection between S's earlier representation that p and S's current representation that p. The prophet's recall of rationalized impressions in Component 4 satisfies both of these accounts.[29]

Component 4 thus involves a genuine act of memory which yields an output belief. This output belief features as the input for the interpretative process undertaken in Component 5. The propositional content of such beliefs could be of this form: 'last night I dreamt that φ' where φ is a placeholder for the object. To make the claim more concrete, we may hypothesize that upon waking from his prophetic dream and recalling the rationalized impressions of his dream, Jacob remembered that 'last night I dreamt that angels were ascending and descending upon a ladder the bottom of which stood on the earth and the top of which reached the heavens.'

The arguments in §2.3.2 detailing the safety risks associated with the relationship between Components 3 and 5 via Component 4 do not stand or fall on whether or not Component 4 is an act of memory yielding an output belief. For those who find unconvincing the cases motivating generative accounts of memory, it remains plausible, for present purposes, to consider Component 4 an instance of non-propositional memory where such memory involves memory of an event, not a proposition. Williamson draws a distinction between cases in which S remembers *that* Olga was playing chess from cases in which S remembers a situation in *which* Olga was playing chess (2000: 38). In the former case S has the concept of chess and in the latter S does not. Since knowing p entails grasping

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[29] See Breckner (2009: 88) for additional cases that (supposedly) demonstrate that S counts as remembering that p at t even though S does not believe that p at t.

the proposition *p* (Williamson ibid. 36), only the first case involves propositional memory i.e. an output belief.[30]

In the context of prophecy there is at least one significant difference between propositional memory and non-propositional memory. If Component 4 counts as propositional memory, then Component 4 constitutes a belief forming process or basis in its own right. In that case, the output belief produced in Component 5 will include the basis of belief in Component 4 as per Williamson's cumulative conception of bases. However, if Component 4 counts as non-propositional memory, then Component 4 does not constitute a basis of belief and thus will not be included in the basis of belief found in Component 5. This significant epistemic upshot will be reintroduced towards the end of this section where I reflect on the challenges presented by the type of recall found in Component 4 to the safety of the prophetic output belief in Component 5.

2.3.2.   Memory and its Properties

When the prophet recalls the object, this recall may exhibit a number of different properties. On the one hand, the prophet could recall *every* impression constituting the object and *only* those impressions. Alternatively, the prophet could recall *every* impression constituting the object *in addition to* impressions not generated in Component 3, e.g., impressions stored from past experiences. On the other hand, the prophet could recall *some*

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[30] Some may be tempted to use the term 'introspection' for Component 4. This term isn't the right term either for introspection involves forming beliefs about one's present mental states or those in the immediate past (Schwetzgebel 2010). Since Maimonides gives us no indication to the contrary, we may assume that Component 4 can occur many hours after Component 3; that is, a prophet could experience a prophetic dream in the early part of the night and wake up many hours later. Additionally, introspection offers no epistemic advantage over memory for introspective beliefs, like memories beliefs, can be unsafe (Williamson 2000: 96-8).

of the impressions constituting the object and *only* those impressions. Alternatively, the prophet could recall *some* of the impressions constituting the object *in addition to* impressions not generated in Component 3. For ease of reference, these differences can be categorized as follows:

(i)   *Pure* Recall   = the prophet recalls the object in full and nothing else.

(ii)   *Impure* Recall   = the prophet recalls the object in full plus additional impressions not generated in Component 3.

(iii)   *Partial* Recall   = the prophet recalls the object in part and nothing else.

(iv)   *Inapt* Recall   = the prophet recalls the object in part plus additional impressions not generated in Component 3.

Each type of recall presents a safety challenge of its own when considered in light of the different design plans that objects can exhibit. To remind ourselves, design plans are of two types—general and specific. A design plan counts as *general* if and only if the object's meaning is depicted by a designated impression while the remaining impressions merely facilitate the manner in which the designated impression depicts the object's meaning. Alternatively, a design plan counts as *specific* if and only if each impression depicts a meaning such that the object's overall meaning is the composition of those constituent meanings. (The general and specific design plans are those which Maimonides discusses in the context of parabolic prophecies. As for the design plans of non-parabolic prophecies, Maimonides is silent. Since the salient difference between parabolic and non-parabolic prophecies is the additional layer of meaning exhibited by the former, it stands to reason that non-parabolic prophecies, which similarly depict meaning by means of impressions, are themselves designed according to a general or specific design plan. For this reason I do not distinguish parabolic from non-parabolic prophecies in the discussion below.)

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Maimonides displays an acute sensitivity towards the role that memory plays in the prophetic method when he discusses extended prophetic parables. In those cases Maimonides implicitly assumes that the prophet remembers the impressions of her dreams so as to explain them to herself in the consequent 'explanatory' part of the prophetic experience. In keeping with Maimonides' concerns with memory, the following problems for the safety of the prophetic output beliefs in Component 5 arise when recall and design are considered side by side:

i) *Pure Recall*: The recall in Component 4 counts as pure if and only if the prophet recalls every impression generated by the prophet's imagination in Component 3 and nothing else. Pure recall does *not* put the prophet *in a position to know* the meaning of the object, however. Consider Williamson (2000: 95):

> To be in a position to know *p*, it is neither necessary to know *p* nor sufficient to be physically and psychologically capable of knowing *p*. No obstacle must block one's path to knowing *p*. If one is in a position to know *p*, and one has done what one is in a position to do to decide whether *p* is true, then one does know *p*. The fact is open to one's view, unhidden, even if one does not yet see it.

The design plan of a prophetic object is neither a transparent nor a luminous condition; that is, the prophet is not always in a position to know the meaning of the object, as is evidenced by the cases of Daniel and Zachariah that Maimonides discusses in 2.43.391. Additionally, as demonstrated above, there will be cases in which, despite the prophet's making the correct judgment for each step of the interpretive process, there will be close worlds in which he falls into error at each step. Thus, despite being in the strong position of having achieved

pure recall, the prophet is not in a position to know the meaning of the object since the meaning is not 'open to view' since there are interpretive 'obstacles' blocking the prophet's path to knowing the meaning. Pure recall does not entail knowing the meaning of the object; it merely places the prophet in a better epistemic position *vis-à-vis* the meaning than the prophet who achieves one of the other categories of recall.

An additional worry concerns the significance that Maimonides attaches to the serial order of impressions in some prophecy. In the case of Jacob's prophecy, for instance, it is important that the prophet recall that the angels first ascended and then descended the ladder. The storing of past experiences in serial order is the purview of serial memory.[31] So even if the prophet achieves pure recall, the prophet also has to achieve pure serial recall for those prophecies in which the serial order of the impressions in Component 3 is of particular relevance to the interpretation of the object's meaning. In such cases there must therefore be no close world in which the prophet achieves pure recall but where the impressions are out of their serial order, for in such cases the recall will be an unreliable basis on which to interpret the object in Component 5.

(ii) *Partial Recall*: a recall is partial if and only if the prophet recalls part of the object and nothing else. Partial recall poses problems for the safety of the prophet's output belief in Component 5. Jacob's prophecy about the angels on the ladder is again a case in point. According to Maimonides' classification of prophecies, Jacob's prophecy was a non-extended, robust, specific, parabolic prophecy. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that Jacob managed to recall only the angels ascending the ladder but did not recall their descent. According to Maimonides, the meaning of Jacob's prophecy is roughly as follows:

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[31] For the psychology of serial memory, see Baddeley et. al. (2009: 30ff).

- Internal meaning = (*P*1) there are four forces of nature that are the causes of all that occurs in time.

- External meaning = (*P*2) prophecy is the perfection of man and that prophets are responsible for guiding their communities towards knowledge of God by sharing their prophetic insights.

For the prophet to correctly arrive at these meanings in Component 5, it is essential that Jacob recall the angels' descent as well for the angel's descent depicts (a) the forces responsible for the preservation of the different kinds of objects and the individual tokens thereof, and (b) the requirement that the prophet must return to the 'people of the earth' to teach them the insight he has gained. If Jacob's recall in Component 4 was only partial in the way described, then he may have come to believe the following relevantly similar propositions:

- Internal meaning = (*Q*1) there are *only two* forces of nature that are the causes of all that occurs in time.

- External meaning = (*Q*2) prophecy is the perfection of man and that prophet are *not* responsible for guiding their communities towards knowledge of God by sharing their prophetic insights.

Suppose further that *P*1 and *P*2 are true while *Q*1 and *Q*2 are false. It stands to reason, therefore, that if Jacob only managed a partial recall in Component 4, his act of interpretation in Component 5 will easily lead to error given that a number of impressions central to the object's meaning are absent in the interpretive moment.

Partial recall is particularly hazardous *vis-à-vis* prophecies with a general design plan. In such prophecies the object's meaning is depicted by a designated impression while the remaining impressions merely facilitate the manner in which the designated impression depicts the object's meaning. With respect to such prophecies, if the prophet's recall in Component 4 is merely partial, and one of the impressions *not* recalled is the designated impression, then it follows that if the prophet correctly interprets the object in Component 5 her interpretation will be accidentally true since objects absent their designated feature are unreliable bases for interpretation. Similarly, objects absent those parts intended to assist in the correct interpretation thereof, will also be unreliable bases for interpretation, especially in those cases in which the design is a particularly complex one.

(iii) and (iv) *Impure and Inapt Recall*: it goes without saying that any recall that involves impressions not generated in Component 3 will constitute an unreliable basis for interpretation of the prophetic object given the misleading presence of impressions not constituting the prophetic object.

Individuation of methods deepens the concerns raised above. Those advocating a propositional account of memory may object that pure recall is a relevantly similar method to impure, partial, and inapt recall. If the latter three methods are unreliable methods and are used in a close case, then a belief based on pure recall will nevertheless be unsafe as there are close worlds in a which a relevantly similar method results in error. At this point the concerns raised earlier *vis-à-vis* the necessity and sufficiency of safe premises for a safe conclusion need to be revisited. On Williamson's cumulative conception of bases view, any memory belief that is itself unsafe prevents the prophet's output belief in Component 5

from being safe. Combining Williamson's view on bases with the view that all four methods of recall are relevantly similar results in the view that the role of memory in the prophetic method is primarily to the prophet's epistemic disadvantage. In response to this line of reasoning, some may wish to counter as follows. Since a necessary condition for being a prophet according to Maimonides is intellectual perfection, it is possible to argue that prophets possessed exceptional memories, perhaps even eidetic memories.[32] As such, prophets *always* achieved pure recall, thereby putting them in the strongest epistemic position to determine the correct meaning of their prophecies. There is thus no close world in which the prophet interprets on the basis of impure, partial, or faint recall.

In reply to this thought, Maimonides' cognitive psychology, as mentioned in the previous chapter, is silent on the matter of memory. There is thus slim evidence on which to pursue the argument that prophets possessed exemplary memories. Indeed, there is room to argue that prophets were just as likely to misstep *vis-à-vis* memory as non-prophets. According to one rabbinic tradition, Moses, the greatest of prophets, forgot material he had come to believe by way of prophecy owing to his being in a state of anger.[33] If Moses could succumb to forgetfulness *a fortiori* the lesser prophets could do so as well. Besides, even if prophets did have eidetic memories and always achieved pure recall, they would still have the challenges of correct interpretation discussed in §2.2.

On Williamson's view, Component 4 is thus a potential hazard for the safety of any and all prophetic output beliefs in Component 5. However, on a more liberal view according to which the belief in the conclusion is immune from the relevant lack of safe premises, the

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[32] Eidetic memory is defined as "extraordinarily detailed and vivid recall not limited to, but especially of, visual images" (*American Heritage Dictionary*, 4th ed.).
[33] Rashi on *Leviticus* 31.21.

prophet may still achieve a safe belief in Component 5 despite an impure, partial, or inapt recall in either the actual or close worlds.

2.4.   Knowledge of the Future

A distinctive feature of Old Testament prophecy is its concern with future state of affairs. We find prophets repeatedly warning of future doom or preaching about the end of days. Are there any concerns relating to the safety of these prophetic beliefs about the future?

Before tackling this question, two points require attention. Firstly, Maimonides was writing in a broadly Aristotelian tradition. As far as knowledge of the future is concerned, it must be recalled that Aristotle's position on the truth-value of future contingents has been a matter of intense debate. According to the standard reading of the sea battle example in the *De Interpretatione*, Aristotle was of the view that "any statement which asserts or denies, concerning a contingent event, that it is going to occur, is neither true nor false, the world being as yet indeterminate with regard to the existence or nonexistence of such things" (Taylor 1957: 1). If Maimonides, who was writing in a broadly Aristotelian tradition, held this view, then it follows that there would be no prophetic knowledge of contingent events in the future since knowledge is factive. Of relevant historical significance, however, is the fact that this (skeptical) interpretation did not hold sway among some of the Arabic medievalists. For instance, in their independent commentaries on Aristotle's *De Interpretatione*, both Alfarabi and Averroes interpreted Aristotle to be claiming that of two future events *p* or not-*p*, necessarily *either p* or not-*p* will occur (Benor 1995: 149-50); that is, future contingents do have a truth value and that such propositions are necessarily either true or false. While Maimonides never discusses Aristotle's sea battle case, I shall assume,

for the sake of argument, that Maimonides took it that future contingents are either true or false.[34]

Secondly, it is worthwhile reminding ourselves of Maimonides' position on prophetic knowledge of the future. In addition to being in possession of a perfect rational faculty, prophets possess a prodigious intuitive faculty that enables their minds to arrive at conclusions without having to work through the inferential steps from premises to conclusion. Once the prophet's rational faculty grasps the conclusion (the embedded proposition), her perfect imagination will depict the future scenario in a vivid manner:

> [T]he very overflow that affects the imaginative faculty … rendering it perfect so that its act brings about its giving information about what will happen and its apprehending those future events as if they were things that had been perceived by the senses and had reached the imaginative faculty from the senses … (2.38.377).

Worth stressing is that Maimonides does not treat knowledge of the future any differently from prophetic knowledge not concerning the future since both kinds of beliefs are formed by the same five-step prophetic method discussed thus far.

To return to the question at hand, a case can be made for thinking that one of the problems related to knowledge of the future is more acutely felt in Maimonides' case than in Williamson's. Recall that the prophet does not infer her belief about some future state of affairs by inferring it from her other beliefs in the step by step manner involved in forming beliefs by way of closure. According to Maimonides (2.38.377), prophets have a prodigious intuitive faculty such that in the moment of prophecy they arrive at a belief *p* without

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[34] There are at least three reasons supporting my assumption. Firstly, Maimonides uses 'know' many times in his discussion of prophecy. Secondly, Maimonides' attributes to God knowledge of contingent propositions about the future (2.36.372). And thirdly, in 2.38.377 Maimonides speaks derogatively of diviners because they, unlike the prophet, lack knowledge.

having to go through the typical inferential steps from (q & r) to $p;$ that is, there just is no

actual inference *per se*. The problems Williamson had with objective probability and closure

are thus absent here. Moreover, prophets can arrive at beliefs that no non-prophet can in

virtue of this prodigious intuitive faculty: "by means of his speculation alone, man in unable

to grasp the causes [premises] from which what a prophet has come to know necessarily

follows" (2.38.377). That said, it seems reasonable to conclude in the absence of any

evidence to the contrary in Maimonides, that a prophet could hold a belief about the future

that entails a proposition we intuitively deny can be safely believed. For instance, suppose

Isaiah prophesizes that he will live the remaining decades of his life in poverty. If Isaiah

knows that, then by closure Isaiah can come to know that his lottery ticket will not win.

Similarly, he can come to know that he will not be one of the unfortunate few to drop dead

of a heart attack in the next year. To use a pertinent example of such a case, Joshua, on the

basis of prophecy, came to believe that God would protect him all the days of his life

(Joshua 1.5). If he knew this proposition then he could, by closure, come to know that he

would not die from a heart attack at any time before the conquest of Canaan was complete.

All three inferences are problematic given our intuitive denial of knowledge of the inferred

proposition.[35] Additionally, if prophets can 'intuitively' grasp propositions that regular

people cannot reason towards, then there is the further worry that a prophet may, on the

basis of a prophecy, come to truly believe that her lottery ticket will lose. This too clashes

with widespread intuitions about what can be known *vis-à-vis* lottery tickets.

In addition to the above problems, a prophetic belief about the future will similarly

involve the kinds of interpretive judgments discussed earlier in the chapter given that

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[35] The significance of the problem would ramify if we had clear examples of Maimonides ruling out knowledge of these kinds of inferred propositions. But given his lack of epistemology it is unclear what his position would be on our epistemic standing *vis-à-vis* such propositions.

prophetic beliefs about the future are formed in precisely the same manner in which all prophetic beliefs are formed. For example, in some cases the impressions concerning the future will be in the form of a parable, e.g., Jeremiah (1.13) who 'saw' a bubbling pot which was a prophetic parable depicting the invasion of Israel from the north.[36] Like all prophecies, this prophecy about the future would have required Jeremiah's undertaking a sequence of judgments upon waking up after, in the ideal case, achieving a pure recall of the parable. This raises the problems associated with inferring safe beliefs from unsafe premises in Williamson's cumulative conception of bases, as discussed in Chapter 1 and above in §2.2.2 and 2.3. So prophetic knowledge in the *Guide* faces formidable challenges on two fronts.

Finally, there are a number of cases in the Old Testament in which prophets formed false beliefs about the future.[37] Given these instances of prophetic error, it follows that as a whole prophetic beliefs about the future do not automatically count as safe. Indeed, in an earlier work Maimonides explicitly states that both Isaiah and Jonah formed false beliefs about the future.[38]

One line to pursue in response to the foregoing problem is by reference to Maimonides' position on prophecies about the future in one of his earlier works. In the *Code* Maimonides tried to downplay the significance of unfulfilled prophecies by claiming that an *unfavorable* prophecy about the future can fail to come about because God is merciful or the people for whom punishment has been prophesied may repent thereby circumventing the need for the prophesied punishment:

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[36] This parable was discussed in the previous chapter §5.6.
[37] See the Appendix for a list of these cases.
[38] *Code* (Foundations of the Law 10.4). Isaiah (38.1) prophesied King Hezekiah's imminent death and Jonah (3.4) prophesied the destruction of the city of Ninveh. Neither event occurred as prophesied.

In contrast, all the words of a prophet come true, as [II Kings 10:10] states: "God's word will not fall to the ground." [This] principle does not apply to prophecies of retribution which a prophet will utter - e.g., "So and so will die," "This or that year will be a year of famine or a year of war," and the like. If his words do not come true, this does not nullify the validity of his prophecy, nor do we say [in condemnation of him]: "Behold, he spoke and his words were not fulfilled." [This is because] the Holy One, Blessed be He, is slow to anger, abundant in kindness, and forgiving of evil.[39] [Alternatively] it is also possible that they will repent and [their sin] will be forgiven … This does not apply regarding prophecies for the good. If a prophet promised that good would come and such and such will occur, and the good about which he prophesied did not materialize, he is surely a false prophet. Any good which God decrees - even if [the decree] is provisional - will never be nullified (*Code*, Foundations of the Law 10.3, 4).

Unfavorable prophecies about the future should therefore not be viewed as *bold* threats but more as *conditional* threats.

However, reference to Maimonides' position in the *Code* is rather unhelpful for present purposes. Firstly, there are clear cases in which a prophet prophesied for the good and that good did not transpire, e.g., Samuel's prophecy to David that God would cement his kingdom turned out to be false.[40] Secondly, Maimonides omits the above distinction between favorable and unfavorable prophecies about the future in the *Guide*. This divergence between the two books indicates that the models presented in the two works are rather different thus downgrading the significance of the above piece from the *Code*. Thirdly, even if God does have mercy or forgives those for whom punishment is foretold, at the time of belief formation the prophet's belief would have been false on the assumption that propositions about the future are either true or false. So the prophet's belief about the future would have automatically failed to be safe. Finally, even if it is the case that favorable

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[39] This principle can be stated as follows: If God does not have Mercy, then if you continue Sinning God will Punish you [¬M → (S → P)]. Since Maimonides never discusses the logic of conditionals (Benor 1995), there is no pretheoretical reason to think he would have objected to this construction.
[40] II Samuel 7.11-16. In I Kings 11.11, 29-40 we learn of how David's kingdom splintered. See Anscombe (2008: 39) for the problems associated with determining whether or not a prophecy has been fulfilled.

prophecies about the future must come true, considerations arising from global reliability lead to the conclusion that the prophet's true belief in such a favorable prophecy may be unsafe if there is a close world in which the prophetic method leads to error.

Some may wish to respond to the last of these problems with reference to Maimonides' position on miracles in the *Guide*. On the topic of miracles, Maimonides held the following iconoclastic view according to which God builds miracles into the laws of nature:

> They say that when God created that which exists and stamped upon it the existing natures, He put into these natures that all the miracles that occurred would be produced in them at the time when they occurred. According to this opinion, the sign of a prophet consists in God's making known to him the time when he must make his proclamation, and thereupon a certain thing is effected according to what was put into its nature when first it received its particular impress … For instance, … it was put into the nature of water to be continuous and always flow from above downwards, except at the time of the drowning of the Egyptians; it was a particularity of that water to become divided (2.29.345).

The relevance of this position to the safety of prophetic beliefs about the future can be stated as follows: If a miracle M is due to occur at a future time $T2$, then if a prophet S prophecies at $T1$ that M will occur at $T2$ S's belief is safe since S's belief could not easily have been false in light of this determinism.

This is line of reasoning is misguided, however. As discussed in Chapter 1, Williamson (2000: 124, 2009: 325) argues that "determinism does not trivialize safety." Williamson demonstrates this point by way of an example of a ball balanced on the tip of a cone. Such a ball, even in a deterministic world, is not safe from falling because, argues Williamson, the initial conditions could easily have been different such that the ball falls in close cases. Similarly there might be a close world in which God built in different miraculous exceptions to the laws of nature or built them in at slightly different times. Consequently, even if

prophet S truly believes at $T1$ that miracle M will occur at $T2$, this belief will be unsafe so long as there is a close world W in which God does not include miracle M at $T2$ in the laws of nature pertaining to W.

In defense of Maimonides, it is important to realize that this line of argument rests on two questionable assumptions: (i) that, *pace* Leibniz, there is no best possible world that God must create, and (ii) that a world with slightly different miraculous exceptions in the laws of nature remains a close world. Nevertheless there is room to argue that Maimonides would have been satisfied with (i) since, argues Kreisel (1984: 110n35), Maimonides' metaphysics and ontology are compatible with God choosing different initial conditions for the universe. Additionally, there is growing evidence that Leibniz's claim is false.[41] As for (ii), it is true that we do find Williamson claiming that even the slightest difference between two cases can make for a relevant dissimilarity between the two cases.[42] If a difference in the definitions of the laws of nature is one such relevant dissimilarity, then there will be no close world in which miracle M does not occur at its prescribed time. Despite this line of reasoning, a prophet's true belief at $T1$ that miracle M will occur at $T2$ will be unsafe if the prophetic method is globally unreliable, e.g. if there is a close world in which the prophet misinterprets her prophetic dream or vision and falsely believes that miracle M will occur at $T3$ or miracle M^* will occur at $T2$. [43]

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[41] See, e.g., Rowe (2004: 74-87).

[42] See, e.g., Chapter 1 §3.4.

[43] Maimonides' position on miracles is further support for my claim that his account of prophecy in the *Guide* is very different to his account thereof in the *Code*. In the *Guide* Maimonides writes that God does not act in time and that the laws of nature cannot change once the world has been created (2.13, 28, 29.345-6). It follows from these claims that God cannot change His mind about whether or not a miracle will occur at a specific time. The upshot of this result is that an unfavorable prophecy about the future that involves a miracle cannot fail to come true regardless of whether the people repent or not. In other words, the formula ¬M → (S → P) is incompatible with Maimonides' position on miracles found in the *Guide*. For example, Joshua prophesied that the people of Jericho would be conquered if the Israelite army performed an elaborate ritual which would result in the city walls of Jericho falling down (Joshua 6.1-5). If this miracle involving the unfavorable demise of Jericho's inhabitants was determined to occur, then it makes no sense to say that if the city had repented or

In light of the considerations raised in this section, prophetic knowledge about the future is particularly problematic when considered from within the safety framework.

2.5.   Skepticism about Prophecy

Of the many challenges facing any account of knowledge, none is more pervasive than the challenge from skepticism. As the skeptical challenge can be presented in a number of different ways, it is necessary to identify the form it might take *vis-à-vis* prophetic knowledge. As demonstrated in Chapter 2, prophecy involves a prophet interpreting a belief p (or (p & q) for parabolic prophecies) from a prophetic dream.[44] One road toward skepticism would be to posit a bad case in which the prophet interprets p from a regular non-prophetic dream which she mistakes to be a prophetic dream. In the bad case nothing appears different from the good case of prophecy. But in the bad case p is false while in the good case p is true. The skeptic argues that because the prophet falsely believes in the bad case, she does not count as knowing p in the good case despite p being true in the good case.

To help the skeptic construct a more robust challenge to the Maimonidean conception of prophetic knowledge, we can add the following consideration. Maimonides admits that the ability to prophesy is fleeting: "a prophet may not prophesy continuously the whole of his life, but prophesies at a certain moment and is abandoned by prophecy at many other

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God had had mercy on them the walls would not have fallen down. This discussion raises a large number of questions that develop well beyond the confines of this paper. The significance of this discussion on prophetic knowledge of the future lies in the outcome that no treatment of providence, free will, and foreknowledge can be complete without considering how prophetic knowledge about the future coheres with those questions. To the best of my knowledge no discussion on these topics in recent analytic philosophy of religion attends to the prophetic element of these problems.

[44] For the sake of simplicity, I ignore prophetic visions. The results reached in this section will apply with equal force to prophetic visions.

moments" (2.45.396). One upshot of this claim is the real possibility that following a prophet's first experience of a prophetic dream at $T1$ he may, for any non-prophetic dream φ at $T2$ and onwards, mistake φ for a prophetic dream.

To develop the bad case further, consider the position of Hasdai Crescas, a fifteenth-century philosopher, on the difference between prophetic dreams and regular dreams. According to Crescas, prophetic dreams are more vivid, much as perceptual impressions are more vivid than the impressions of the imagination. (This is reminiscent of the line Hume takes to distinguish perceptual impressions from ideas, where the latter are less vivid copies of the former.)[45] Nevertheless, Crescas admits that some regular dreams can be as vivid as some prophetic dreams such that there will be cases in which the prophet mistakes the former for the latter.[46] This is what occurred, argues Crescas, in the case of the prophet Hananiah who mistook a regular dream for a prophetic dream (Jeremiah 28.1-11).[47] In more familiar terms, vividness is a varying parameter along a continuous spectrum such that there will be cases in which the prophet cannot tell whether his dream is sufficiently vivid to count as a prophetic dream. The vividness of prophetic dreams is thus a non-luminous condition. Hananiah is thus the skeptic's representative of the unfortunate prophet who experienced a regular dream in the penumbral zone of the spectrum.

Does such a case present a problem to the safety of prophetic beliefs? Since Maimonides was familiar with ancient Greek skepticism, it is unsurprising to note that Maimonides considered such a possibility and wrote as follows:

> For even if prophetic revelation came to each of the latter [prophets] in a dream, every one of
> them was informed through that same prophetic revelation that this was a prophecy and that

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[45] *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* 2.2, 3.
[46] Crescas, *The Light of the Lord* (*Sefer Or Hashem* 2.4.3.195-6, Shlomo Fischer (ed.), Sifrei Ramot: Jerusalem).
[47] Crescas has a different reading of this event than that recorded in the Babylonian Talmud (Sanhedrin 89a).

prophetic revelation had come to him … For those who prophesy in a dream by no means call this state a dream after prophecy has come to them in a dream, but state decidedly that it was a prophetic revelation (2.45.399).

In other words, even if regular dreams can be as vivid as prophetic dreams, the latter self-identify to the prophet thereby enabling the prophet to distinguish the bad case from the good case. The basis for Maimonides' claim is his interpretation of texts in which the protagonist is recorded as having awoken from a dream and correctly identified it as either of the prophetic or the regular kind.

No doubt, the skeptic will be dissatisfied with this type of maneuver since it is open to the skeptic to accept Maimonides' claim but to retort that there is the metaphysical possibility of a regular dream deceptively self-identifying as a prophetic dream all the while exhibiting the phenomenal vividness of a prophetic dream. Assuming conceivability as a guide to metaphysical possibility, Maimonides' position proves ineffective against the skeptic.

As discussed in detail in Chapter 1, that an agent cannot discriminate the bad case from the good case is not a point Williamson thinks leads to skepticism. We are therefore in a better position than Maimonides to deny skepticism. In response to the sort of bad case developed above, prophetic beliefs will count as safe so long as the method in the good case is relevantly dissimilar to the method in the bad case. Alternatively, if the world in which prophet S forms prophetic beliefs after having a prophetic dream at T is relevantly dissimilar to the world in which prophet S has an phenomenally indistinguishable regular dream at T, then the former beliefs will count as safe.

As far as Maimonides work on prophecy goes, there is more incentive to opt for the first anti-skeptical maneuver. As Maimonides defines the prophetic method, it involves

emanation to a perfect imagination via a perfect rational faculty. Regular dreams, on the other hand, involve emanation directly to the imagination regardless of whether the agent's imagination is perfect or not. This difference can count as a relevant dissimilarity between the two methods, which would result in the bad case as counting as far from the good case or as close but irrelevant.

2.6.   General Safety Concerns

This chapter concludes with a number of fairly short considerations that need to be taken into account when considering the safety of a prophetic belief.

2.6.1. Safety and Long Conjunctions

Thus far the discussion has proceeded as if the prophetic method culminates in the prophet believing a single proposition. This was merely a simplifying assumption. In this section I intend to interrogate that assumption and discuss what safety concerns arise in those cases in which the prophet comes to believe more than one proposition.

As discussed in Chapter 1, for S to know p in a case α, it must be that α is surrounded by cases in which S believes p truly. These surrounding cases are what Williamson calls margins for error (1994: 226ff., 2000:17ff). Similarly, for S to know a conjunction (p & q) in a case α, it must be the case that α is surrounded by cases in which S truly believes (p & q), where the

conjunction (p & q) is true if and only if p is true and q is true. Stated otherwise, the safety condition for a conjunction is harder to satisfy than for a single proposition.[48]

One relevant upshot of this feature of the safety condition is the increasing difficulty associated with safely believing long conjunctions held on the basis of a single prophecy. If one looks at some examples of prophecies in the Old Testament, one will notice that on the basis of a single prophetic dream or vision the prophet reports a large number of sentences to the audience. It is unlikely, especially in cases of non-parabolic prophecy, that such vast reports express only a single proposition. In light of the safety concerns associated with long conjunctions, it follows that for sufficiently lengthy conjunctions to count as safe there must be a very wide range of relevantly similar cases in which the prophet does not fall into error. Assuming that there are a number of ways in which the prophet can fall into error with respect to a belief in a single proposition, as argued in this chapter, it stands to reason that in cases of prophecy involving sufficiently lengthy conjunctions it will be prove particularly onerous for the prophet's belief to satisfy the safety for knowledge. While this result does not in and of itself entail, e.g., that some of Isaiah's beliefs were unsafe, it provides *prima facie* suspicion of the safety of the long conjunctions found in that work.

2.6.2.   Safety and Rich Propositions

The richness of propositional content is a varying parameter along a continuous dimension. Consider the following set of true sentences in a case α:

(A)   The cat is on the mat.

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[48] The work by Hawthorne and Lasonen-Aarnio (2009) drew attention to a similar feature of multi-premise closure for sufficiently long conjunctions.

(B)   The brown cat is on the mat.

(C)   The brown cat is on the green mat.

(D)   David's brown cat is on the green mat.

(E)   David's brown cat is on Jennifer's green mat.

The number of ways in which the proposition expressed by (A) can fail to be true in cases close to α is rather limited. On the other hand, the proposition expressed by (E) can fail to be true in cases close to α in a variety of ways e.g. a case β close to α in which I mistakenly believe that Peter's brown cat is on the mat, or I mistakenly believe that David's brown cat is on Jennifer's blue mat, etc. The richer a proposition the harder it is to satisfy the safety condition for that proposition.

In light of this point, it proves instructive to consider some sentences recorded in the Old Testament prophetic books:

(F)   It is a powerful nation, an ancient nation, a nation whose language you will not know, so you will not understand what they say. (Jeremiah 5.15)

(G)   Thus said the Lord: How much more when I send [all of] my four evil judgments— sword, hunger, ferocious beast, and pestilence—against Jerusalem, to cut off from it man and animal. (Ezekiel 14.21)

(H)   While they are still like tangled thorns and while they are drunk in their swelling, they will be consumed like fully grown dried straw. (Nahum 1.10)

(I)   Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire, as for your land— strangers consume its yield in your presence; it is desolate as if overturned by strangers. (Isaiah 1.7)

It is evident that sentences (F) through (I) express much richer propositions than (A) through (E). Since (F) through (I) are typical examples of sentences one finds in the prophetic books,

it is reasonable to conclude that a large proportion of prophetic beliefs have a rich propositional content, which creates *prima facie* suspicion of the safety of such beliefs.

2.6.3.   Methods at their Extremes

A number of general observations about the reliability of methods are relevant to our consideration of the prophetic method in Maimonides' *Guide*. Absent any evidence to the contrary, the prophetic method should not be immune to the considerations discussed below.

(i)   *Stretched to the limits*: When a method is forced to operate under straining conditions, its reliability decreases. For example, trying to read a signpost from a distance, doing complex mathematical calculations, or performing long logical inferences.

(ii)   *The agent's physical health*: Physical illness and brain abnormalities often result in the decreased reliability of some methods. For instance, an agent suffering from a fever or brain damage will exhibit decreased reliability in some of her perceptual methods.

(iii)   *Degraded inputs*: When the inputs to a method degrade in quality, the method's outputs will decrease in reliability. For example, separating brown beans from black beans in poor light.

(iv)   *Emotional distress*: when one is seething with anger one is bound to become a less reliable judge of a good many things e.g. the appropriate moral course of action to pursue in certain cases.

Maimonides displays sensitivity to all these factors in a number of places e.g. 1.32.68-9 and 2.36.372-3. Since Maimonides provides us with no reason for thinking that the prophetic method has any unique properties that makes it immune to the above considerations, we have no reason to deny the manner in which the foregoing factors can diminish the reliability thereof. Of the above factors (i) is the most relevant to prophecy since there are no phenomenal inputs into the prophetic method and Maimonides makes being in good physical, mental, and emotional health a necessary condition for prophecy, as discussed in the previous chapter. (The reason I mention factors (ii), (iii), and (iv) is to demonstrate Maimonides' keen awareness of factors that influence methods.)

The question before us now is to what degree factor (i) affects the reliability of the prophetic method. It seems that the prophetic method will similarly display increasing unreliability with increasingly strenuous levels of functionality; that is, like all methods its reliability is inversely proportional to the strain under which it operates. For instance, if the duration of the prophet's dream is extensive it seems intuitively plausible to think that the prophetic method will become increasingly unreliable just as other belief forming methods decrease in reliability as the period of functionality increases.[49] If the length of some of the chapters in the prophetic books are anything to go by, it seems that prophets often had very complex dreams that resulted in output beliefs in a very large number of rich conjunctions, as discussed above. It stands to reason, then, that Maimonides either did not realize that his own statements about belief forming methods committed him to cases in which the prophetic method would be unreliable, or he did not wish to state as much openly thus leaving it to his readers to infer his 'esoteric' position on the fallibility of prophecy.

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[49] See Davidson (1992: 98) who claims that Avicenna similarly thought that error creeps into prophecy if one of the methods involved in the prophetic method is unreliable.

3. Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to demonstrate that the prophetic method, as found in the *Guide*, contains much room for error. These risks are not isolated; rather, a number of potential missteps are associated with each component, apart from Component (1). Potential for error is thus systematic to prophecy. While all methods contain room for error in a fallibilist epistemology, some have a higher risk factor than others. Prophecy is an example of such a high-risk method. As far as the safety condition for knowledge is concerned, the parity that Maimonides (1.65.158-9) draws between perceptual knowledge and prophetic knowledge is misleading, for the former is on the whole a safer method.

Nevertheless, the risks identified and discussed in this chapter are those associated with the prophetic method when viewed independent of particular prophets in particular cases; that is, these conclusions do not entail that an individual application of the prophetic method by a prophet *S* in a case α will be unsafe. Additionally, considerations concerning the finely-grained individuation of methods still needs to be factored in. As stressed on a number of occasions, whether a belief *p* counts as safe in a case α depends on the particulars of α. The significance of the results reached in this chapter therefore lie in the denial of any presumption in favor of prophetic beliefs being *de facto* safe. Additionally, this chapter provides a helpful checklist of errors against which the safety of a particular prophetic belief can be assessed.

I have presented and defended Maimonides' model of prophecy as a cumulative conception of prophecy. In light of the uncertainty surrounding the necessity of safe belief in the premises for safe belief in the conclusion, there will be cases in which the prophet's

output belief in Component 5 may be safe despite a range of errors in Components (2)—(5).

In other words, despite the large number of risks associated with prophecy, the output belief *p* may nevertheless count as safe despite there being close worlds in which the prophet falls into error on his way to believing *p*.

Before moving onto the application of non-standard semantics for 'knows' to prophetic knowledge, it is worth returning to the distinction Maimonides draws between Mosaic and non-Mosaic prophecy. In 2.46.403 Maimonides writes that essential difference between the two types of prophecy lies in the absence of the imagination from Mosaic prophecy. If we read this 'superiority' as an epistemic superiority, then Maimonides' claim begins to make sense. As discussed in Chapter 2, the imagination can only reach perfection during a dream or a vision when it is not distracted from its role in perception. For this reason, non-Mosaic prophecy is restricted to dreams or visions. Once these restrictions are built into the prophetic method, the errors associated with depiction, memory, and interpretation become relevant. Moses, on the other hand, whose rational faculty reached perfection while awake was immune to those potential errors. This makes for Mosaic prophecy being on the whole a far less risky method.

CHAPTER 4

Non-Standard Semantics for 'Knows' and Prophetic Knowledge

In Chapter 1 it was explained that as far as the safety condition for knowledge is concerned, Williamson is a standard invariantist about the appropriate semantics for 'knows.' Despite Williamson's (2005) opposition to non-standard semantics for 'knows,' this chapter investigates the manner in which said semantics interact with the results reached in the previous chapter. The significance of this investigation arises from the important role knowledge ascriptions play *vis-à-vis* prophecy as a religious phenomenon. §1 begins with a rough overview of contextualism and sensitive invariantism (SI). In light of there being a number of competing accounts within each of these two camps, I have, for strategic purposes, chosen to focus on David Lewis's contextualist account as he is one of the few contextualists to describe the kinds of rules that govern the non-evidential machinery central to contextualism. These rules will provide the structure around which the discussion in the latter parts of the chapter will gravitate. To even out matters for comparative purposes, §1 concludes with a toy SI model governed by Lewis's rules. §2 explores the manner in which the safety condition for knowledge can accommodate non-standard semantics for 'knows.' In §3 attention is shifted to Maimonides' treatment of prophecy in Jewish law. The discussion in §4 brings to bear the considerations found in Maimonides' legal texts on knowledge ascriptions to prophets. The chapter concludes in §5 by noting the

manner in which the conclusions reached in §4 ramify in a worrisome manner that has yet to be systematically investigated.

1. Contextualism and Sensitive Invariantism

Common to contextualism and SI is the claim that in addition to the standard conditions for knowledge, a number of non-evidential factors need to be taken into account when making knowledge ascriptions. However, the major point of contention between the two schools concerns whether it is factors relevant to the *ascriber* or factors relevant to the *subject* that make for differences in knowledge ascriptions. Contextualism favors the former and SI the latter. A discussion of each follows below.[1]

1.1. Contextualism

It is evident that contextual factors have a bearing on language. Indexicals are a trivial example of this phenomenon, where the referents of indexicals such as 'I,' 'she,' and 'there' differ depending on the context of use. Similarly, utterances involving gradable adjectives differ in truth-value depending on the context of use. A mathematics professor may look at a mathematical problem and truly utter 'this is an easy problem.' A freshman mathematics student may look at the same problem and truly utter 'this is a difficult problem.' As the standard of difficulty in the first context of utterance is much higher than that in the second, both utterances come out true.

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[1] Since the purpose of this chapter lies in a different direction, a bare-boned treatment of contextualism and SI will suffice for present purposes. Notable proponents of contextualism include DeRose (1991, 1992, 1995) and Cohen (1988, 1998, 2000); Fantl and McGrath (2002, 2007, 2009) and Stanley (2005) are the seminal defenders of SI.

The contextualist invites us to think that the truth value of knowledge ascriptions displays a similar sensitivity to contextual factors relevant to the *ascriber*. Hence, at time *t*, in the mouth of one ascriber the sentence '*S* knows that *p'* is true while in the mouth of another ascriber in a different context that sentence is false all the while both ascribers are speaking of the same subject *S* and proposition *p* at *t*. The verb 'knows,' the contextualist would have us believe, displays sensitivity to contextual factors much like indexicals or gradable adjectives such that the word 'knows' expresses a different relation in different contexts.

Thus far the 'bare bones' of contextualism. According to Lewis (1996), the shift in context is explained by a shift in the different error possibilities relevant to the ascriber. Though by no means an exhaustive list, Lewis provides us with a number of rules that explain why there is the shift in the attributor's attention to or ignoring of certain error possibilities. Given that the discussion in §3 hinges on these rules, it is important to summarize them here. As shall become evident in §4, these rules are somewhat vague and their application can lead to conflicting results. Lewis (554-8) begins by mentioning four rules governing which error possibilities the attributor may *not* properly ignore:

(1) *The Rule of Actuality*: the actual case cannot be ignored. Where the subject's case and the ascribers case are different, it is the subject's case that matters.

(2) *The Rule of Belief*: "a possibility that the subject gives a sufficiently high credence to is not properly ignored, whether or not he is right to so believe. Neither is one that he ought to give sufficiently high credence to—one that evidence and arguments justify him in believing—whether or not he does so believe … If the stakes are sufficiently high, few error possibilities may be ignored."

(3) *The Rule of Resemblance*: if an error possibility E2 is sufficiently similar to an error possibility E1, and E1 is a possibility that cannot be properly ignored, then E2 cannot be ignored. This rule explains why subjects in Gettier cases do not count as knowing. Truly believing at noon that it is noon from a stopped clock sufficiently resembles falsely believing at 12.15 that it is noon from the same stopped clock.

(4) *The Rule of Attention*: any possibility that is currently being attended to cannot be properly ignored: "No matter how farfetched a certain possibility may be, no matter how properly we might have ignored it in some other context, if in this context we are not in fact ignoring it but attending to it, then for us now it is a relevant alternative."

Lewis (558-60) then provides the following list of rules governing which possibilities *may* be properly ignored.

(1) *The Rule of Reliability*: with respect to methods that are typically reliable (e.g. perception, memory, testimony), possibilities in which such processes are unreliable can properly be ignored. The Rule of Reliability is defeated by the Rule of Actuality and/or Resemblance in Gettier cases.[2]

(2) *The Rule of Conservatism*: those possibilities that are commonly ignored and known to be commonly ignored by those around the ascriber, may be ignored by the ascriber.

Many find the appeal of contextualism to lie in the manner in which it solves the skeptical challenge from closure. Here is the skeptic's argument:

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[2] Lewis also has two rules of method according to which the ascriber is entitled to inductive inferences and inferences to the best explanation; that is, the ascriber may assume that the samples at hand are representative and that the best explanation of her evidence is the true explanation. Since Lewis thinks that these two rules can be subsumed under the Rule of Reliability, I have followed him on this point.

(1) I know that I have hands.

(2) If I know that I have hands, then I know that I am not a brain in the vat.

(3) I do not know that I am a brain in the vat.

(4) Therefore, I do not know that I have hands.

The contextualist argues that there is an illicit shift of context from (1) to (3). In the context in which (1) is uttered the possibility of my being a brain in the vat is properly ignored. However, in the context of (3), when I am attending to the possibility of my being a brain in the vat, that skeptical possibility can no longer be properly ignored. The context in which the speaker truly utters (1) is also the context in which (3) is false. And the context in which (3) is true is a context in which (1) is false.

To use a crude toy model to demonstrate the above point, suppose that the word 'knows' picks out a low standard for knowing in (1) while in the context of (3) the word 'knows' picks out a different relation associated with a higher standard for knowing. If the context of utterance is kept fixed throughout, then one knows$_{LOW}$ that one has hands *and* knows$_{LOW}$ that one is not a brain in the vat. Similarly, assuming a fixed context of utterance throughout, it is not the case that one knows$_{HIGH}$ that one has hands *and* it is not the case that one knows$_{HIGH}$ that one is not a brain in the vat. The skeptic, so argues the contextualist, draws us into skepticism by concealing the fact that the word 'knows' in the context of (1) and the word 'knows' in the context of (3) pick out two different relations. In the spirit of Lewis's rules, those error possibilities that can be properly ignored in (1) remain properly ignored in (3) when the context of (1) remains fixed throughout. Similarly, those

error possibilities that are not properly ignored in (3) cannot be properly ignored in (1) if the context of (3) remains fixed throughout.[3]

Before moving onto sensitive invariantism, it will prove helpful for the discussion in §4 to mention a distinction that Stewart Cohen (2006: 293ff) identifies in Lewis's rules. On the one hand, one group of rules determines what can be properly ignored from the perspective of the *subject*. For instance, the Rule of Actuality states that the actual case cannot be ignored, where the actual case is that of the subject not the attributor. Similarly, the Rule of Belief concerns the belief of the subject. On the other hand, the second group of rules determine what can be properly ignored from the perspective of the *speaker*. The remaining rules are part of this group. The Rule of Attention is an example of this kind of rule—those error possibilities to which the attributor is attending cannot be properly ignored. The first group of rules Cohen labels 'subject-sensitive' and the second 'speaker-sensitive.' Importantly, Cohen (ibid.: 295) claims that as Lewis understood it, the Rule of Resemblance is 'speaker-sensitive.' The upshot of this rule is that Lewis's contextualism delivers some rather odd results in some Gettier cases. Cohen uses the classical case of *S* looking into a field and truly believing that there is a sheep in the field. Unbeknownst to *S*, the object *S* is looking at is actually a sheep-shaped rock behind which is concealed a sheep. According to Lewis, the Rule of Resemblance explains why the agent lacks knowledge in Gettier cases. But, argues Cohen, Lewis restricts this rule to resemblances that are salient to the *speaker*. That is, error possibilities will differ from speaker to speaker. Consider speaker *A* who is

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[3] Hawthorne (2004: 63) complains that Lewis speaks as if merely entertaining a skeptical possibility makes it salient for the purposes of knowledge attributions. If this were the case, then skepticism would come on the cheap for both contextualism (assuming the entertaining is done by the ascriber) and SI (assuming the entertaining is done by the subject). If Hawthorne is correct, merely entertaining the possibility of error cases should not in and of itself make such error possibilities salient. Hawthorne concludes that more work is required by contextualist and sensitive invariantist alike on the concept of 'saliency' and its role in knowledge ascriptions. Hawthorne does acknowledge Lewis's nod towards the role of high stakes, which is the central feature of the kind of sensitive invariantist model Hawthorne explores (2004: 157-92).

unaware that *S* is in a Gettier situation; that is, as far as *A* is concerned, *S* is looking at a sheep. The possibility of *S* looking at a sheep-shaped rock does not saliently resemble the actual case for *A*. It can therefore be properly ignored. *A* will thus truly utter that "*S* knows that there is a sheep in the field." However, for an attributor *B* who is aware that *S* is in a Gettier case, the possibility of *S* looking at a sheep-shaped rock without there being a sheep behind it saliently resembles the actual case. Therefore, *B* will truly utter "*S* does not know that there is a sheep in the field." According to Cohen, that *A* truly attributes knowledge to *S* is a counterintuitive result. As such, Cohen argues that Lewis was incorrect to categorize the Rule of Resemblance as speaker-sensitive. Rather, it should be speaker-*in*sensitive. In §4 I follow Cohen's lead on this point.[4]

Finally, if the Rule of Belief is indeed subject-sensitive, then it is somewhat vague what Lewis intends by the 'ought' in the second part of rule; that is, Lewis does not tell us *whose* evidence and arguments the subject 'ought' to attend to. It is clear enough that if the subject herself is attending to evidence that she has which gives her reason to believe that a certain error possibility actually obtains, then owing to such defeating evidence she is denied knowledge as she ought to place a sufficiently high credence in such evidence.[5] But what if the subject is not attending to this piece of evidence that she has that would give her sufficiently high credence in the error possibility obtaining? Perhaps this evidence has momentarily slipped her mind. Or perhaps she, unlike those around her, is unaware of such evidence. If the Rule of Belief is indeed subject-sensitive then an agent blissfully oblivious to evidence may nevertheless count as knowing despite this evidence. To prevent this

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[4] Cohen (2006: 305) admits that if the Rule of Resemblance is indeed speaker-insensitive, then Lewis cannot use it to solve the lottery problem. As this raises a number of large issues, I do not explore this problem here.
[5] This is Cohen's (2006: 300) understanding of the rule. It goes without saying that sufficiently high cannot be over .5 since it would be probabilistically incoherent to say of a subject *S* that *S* both has a credence over .5 in *p* yet also has a credence over .5 in not-*p*.

counterintuitive result, one can read the 'ought' in the Rule of Belief as excluding such cases; that is, despite such evidence slipping the agent's mind, she does not count as knowing because there is evidence that she ought to have considered.[6] As shall be demonstrated in §4, the lack of clarity in the formulation of this rule can make for rather divergent attributions.

1.2. Sensitive Invariantism

While the sensitive invariantist agrees with the contextualist that additional non-evidential factors must be considered when making a knowledge ascription, the sensitive invariantist insists that these additional factors make for differences in knowledge ascriptions only in so far as they are of relevance to the subject of the ascription and not the ascriber. When viewed from this perspective, the word 'knows' picks out the same relation between subject, proposition, and time regardless of context. It is in this sense that SI is an invariantist semantics for 'knows.' It will therefore not be the case that two ascribers can both speak truly of the same subject if the first ascriber utters '*S* knows *p'* and the second utters '*S* does not know *p*.' By way of analogy, suppose that by 'is rich' we mean 'has more money than anyone in one's country.' This meaning of 'is rich' differs from the more standard meaning 'has a lot of money.' In this scenario an agent *S* may count as being rich in country *x* but not in country *y*. Thus it is not the case that two different ascribers can both point to *S* in *x* at *t* and both speak truly of *S* if the one says *S* is rich while the other says *S* is not rich.

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[6] This intuition that available defeating evidence cancels out knowledge was famously expressed by Harman (1973: 142-54) in his presidential assassination case.

As far as the skeptical argument from closure is concerned, Hawthorne argues that "certain inferences are what we might call *anxiety-provoking* for certain subjects" (2004: 161, original emphasis); that is, if certain error possibilities become salient to a subject in the process of making an inference from a known proposition, the inference will "destroy knowledge of the premises, rather than producing knowledge of the conclusion" (ibid). In other words, if skeptical error possibilities become salient to the subject in the process of making the inference from her having hands to the proposition that she is not a brain in the vat, then she loses her knowledge in the premise that she has hands. Closure is maintained so long as the variety of error possibilities remains constant throughout the inference.

Of the various error possibilities that can become 'anxiety-provoking' for the subject, the notion of high-stakes has been emphasized by some sensitive invariantists. Jason Stanley (2005: 1-15) motivates his version of SI by offering up a series of cases involving varying degrees of stakes for a subject. The objective of his presentation is to draw on the intuitive hesitation to attribute knowledge to subjects who are in high stakes situations where those subjects knowingly have a significant amount riding on the truth of the proposition under consideration. While not denying the force that high stakes has in the sensitive invariantist formula, Hawthorne (2004: 185-6) claims that SI outperforms standard invariantism and contextualism across a range of difficult puzzles, which is, by his lights, sufficient motivation for preferring sensitive invariantism over standard invariantism and contextualism.

It proves helpful for comparative purposes to construct a toy Lewisian model of sensitive invariantism (LSI). In the LSI model those factors that were relevant in so far as the ascriber was concerned (*à la* the contextualist), will now be relevant is so far as the subject is concerned. The reading of some of some of Lewis's six rules will have to be changed to

accommodate the importance of the subject for the sensitive invariantist. For example the rule of the Rule of Conservatism will now read: those possibilities that are commonly ignored and known to be commonly ignored by those around the *subject* may be ignored by the subject. Much as is the case with the form of SI found in Stanley and Hawthorne, this Lewisian form of SI also places emphasis on high stakes given the stress that Lewis places on high stakes in the Rule of Belief.

2. Safety and Non-Standard Semantics for Knows

Since neither contextualism nor SI disputes the necessity of the standard conditions for knowledge (non-accidentally true belief), both theories are in principle compatible with any account of knowledge. How might either insight be worked into the safety condition for knowledge? Here is one suggestion. A central insight shared by both contextualism and SI is that in light of certain non-traditional factors, pragmatic ones in particular, sometimes the word 'knows' expresses a relation that comes easy, other times 'knows' expresses a relation that is harder to come by. As far as contextualism is concerned, this notion of varying degrees on difficulty can be captured in the gradability of the adjective 'safe.' When skeptical error possibilities are salient to the ascriber, the subject must count as safer from error than otherwise would be the case. Similarly for the sensitive invariantist—the subject must be safer than usual to count as knowing when the stakes are high for the subject of the knowledge attribution, where the additional degree of safety required will be indexed to the relevant increase in stakes.

In the course of arguing for a non-probabilistic conception of the safety condition for knowledge, Williamson (2009d: 17-9) recognizes that standard, non-epistemic uses of 'safe'

and 'danger' are susceptible to gradability. Williamson (ibid.) suggests that the gradability of these adjectives can be accommodated in at least one of two ways:

> There are several ways in which the grading might work. It might concern the proportion of close worlds in which the eventuality obtains, just as a glass two-thirds full is fuller than a glass one-third full even though neither is full; call that the 'proportion view of graded safety.' Alternatively, it might concern the distance from the actual world of the closest worlds in which the eventuality obtains; call that the 'distance view of graded safety.'

Williamson demonstrates the difference between these two conceptions with an example involving the throwing of a dice. Suppose *S*'s opponent throws a 5. According to the proportional view, *S* is no safer from her opponent throwing a 2 than she is from her opponent throwing a 4 since both eventualities obtain in equal proportion in close worlds. Nevertheless, *S* does count as being safer from her opponent throwing a 5 than she is from her opponent throwing a number divisible by 3 since the proportion of worlds in which the first obtains is smaller than the proportion of worlds in the latter case. The guiding thought behind the proportion view is that the fewer close worlds in which the eventuality obtains the safer one is from its obtaining. On the distance view, however, *S* counts as safer from her opponent throwing a six than her throwing a 5 since the actual world is the closest world to itself. The guiding thought here is that the further the world in which the eventuality obtains the safer one is from that eventuality obtaining.[7]

Williamson overlooks a third way of integrating the gradability of the adjective 'safe' into the safety condition for knowledge—by altering the measurement of closeness itself. An analogy brings out this point. There are at least two ways to measure how close a person is to the wall: from the tip of a person's belly or from behind a person's heels. An obese

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[7] DeRose (1995) adopts this strategy in his contextualist version of Nozick's tracking account of knowledge.

person will count as closer to the wall on the one scale than on the other. On such a scale world *W*1 may count as close to both *W*2 and *W*3 while on a different scale of closeness *W*1 counts as close to *W*2 and not *W*3, where, for example, closeness scales differ according to how many properties two worlds must share to count as close.

With these three mechanisms in place, *S* counts as knowing *p* only if there is no close world in which *S* falls into an error salient to the ascriber (for the contextualist) or an error salient to the subject (for the sensitive invariantist). It remains open to both the contextualist and the sensitive invariantist to choose which of the three mechanisms for grading safety best captures the ethos of their respective theories.

3. Prophecy in Jewish Law

Central to Lewisian contextualism and Lewisian sensitive invariantism are relevant error possibilities and high stakes. The purpose of this section is to demonstrate that both feature in Maimonides' presentation of the laws of prophecy, thereby setting up the discussion in §4 which focuses on the conceptual link between these two semantic theories and the laws of prophecy.

Maimonides was a polymath. His most influential work is in Jewish law. His *Code* not only covered the full gamut of Jewish law, it also transformed the manner in which Talmud would be studied by successive generations. That the *Code* was banned in some places and even burnt in others demonstrates the extent to which the *Code* presented both a blinding innovation and a serious challenge to previous traditions in legal scholarship.[8] Jewish law extends to almost all aspects of life and prophecy is no exception. Maimonides records the

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[8] See Davidson (2005) for more on the reception of the *Code* in the Jewish communities of the twelfth century.

laws regulating prophecy in the final three chapters of the section of the *Code* called the

Foundations of the Law.[9]

The following relevant material can be gleaned from Maimonides. With regards to prophecy, there are two categories of commandments: those pertaining to the prophet and those to his audience. The first category includes the following five prohibitions:

1. It is prohibited to claim as prophecy that which one did not come to believe by way of prophecy.[10]
2. It is prohibited to claim as one's own the prophecy of another prophet.[11]
3. It is prohibited to prophesy in the name of an idol.[12]
4. It is prohibited to suppresses one's prophecy.[13]
5. It is prohibited to transgress one's prophecy.[14]

As for the prophet's audience, we find the following negative and positive commandments:

6. It is obligatory to listen to the prophet.[15]
7. It is prohibited to ignore the words of a prophet.[16]
8. It is prohibited to stay the execution of a false prophet.
9. It is prohibited to fear a false prophet.

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[9] These laws are first discussed in the *Babylonian Talmud* (Sanhedrin 89a). The biblical source for these laws is Deuteronomy 18.9-22. Maimonides also records a few auxiliary laws pertaining to prophecy in other places in the *Code*: (i) Book of Commandments, Positive Law 172, Negative Laws 26-8; and (ii) Laws of Idol Worship 5.8.

[10] The prophet Tzidkiah ben Kenaanah (1 Kings 22.11) transgressed this law when he added a detail not included in his initial prophetic belief.

[11] The prophet Hananiah ben Azur (Jeremiah 28) transgressed this law when he testified to a prophecy that he heard from his contemporary Jeremiah.

[12] The prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18) are examples of such a phenomenon. It is unclear whether these prophets were originally true Israelite prophets.

[13] Jonah transgressed this law when he initially refused to go to the city of Nineveh to deliver his prophecy (Jonah 1).

[14] When a prophet prophesies *p* and does not herself heed *p*, then she has transgressed this law. The prophet Iddo (I Kings 13.9) transgressed this law when he ate in violation of his own prophetic decree to refrain from food.

[15] Maimonides tells us that a prophet is entitled to instruct people on a wide range of matters unrelated to religion: 'a prophet may command us to do something which [is neither permitted nor forbidden by Torah law] — for example, "Go to such and such a place," "Do not go there," "Wage war today," or "Do not do so," "Build a wall," or "Do not build it" ' (*Code*, Foundations of the Law 9.2).

[16] A contemporary of the prophet Micah (1 Kings 20.35) transgressed this prohibition when he failed to strike Micah when commanded to do so by the prophet himself.

Violations of any of these prohibitions are subject to *capital* punishment.[17]

Given the political and religious power enjoyed by Old Testament prophets, the false prophet presents a significant religious and socio-political threat. In a somewhat rare biblical nod towards skeptical considerations, Jewish law mandates that a prophet must self-identify to the people by accurately foretelling a future event: "Now if you say to yourself, 'How will we know the word that the Lord did not speak?' If the prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, and the thing does not occur and does not come about, that is the thing the Lord did not speak. The prophet has spoken it wantonly; you shall not be afraid of him" (Deuteronomy 18.21-2).[18] Once a prophet's credentials have been verified, the people are required to obey (6) and (7). In his treatment of this verification process, Maimonides adds the following embellishments:

> Just as we are commanded to render a [legal] judgment based on the testimony of two witnesses, even though we do not know if they are testifying truthfully or falsely, similarly, it is obligatory to listen to this prophet even though we do not know whether the wonder is true or performed by magic or sorcery.[19]

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[17] More precisely, the Talmud (Sanhedrin 89a) states that those who violate 4, 5, and 7 receive their death sentence "at the hands of heaven," which is a form of capital punishment.

[18] It is interesting to note that one natural implication from these verses is that a prophet can tell whether or not she has experienced prophecy or not; that is, the verses never discuss the skeptical predicament from the prophet's perspective. Given that Jewish law mandates warning a subject on the verge of transgressing a law that such an action is prohibited, it is interesting to note that 1 and 2 are subject to capital punishment as determined by the Sanhedrin of seventy-one judges. It is not clear how someone was supposed to warn such a prophet when it is impossible to determine from the outside whether or not the prophet had indeed experienced veridical prophecy or merely falsely believed himself to have done so. According to one opinion in the Talmud (BT. Sanhedrin 89b) when prophecy 'descends' it does so to all the prophets, in which case the other prophets can warn the prophet designated as the spokesperson for that prophecy not to suppress the prophecy. Maimonides does not seem to accept the claim that a single prophecy 'descends' to all the prophets, which places him in direct opposition to a Talmudic tradition. It is evident that as far as the prophetic method is defined in the *Guide*, there is no mechanism in place to account for more than one prophet having the same dream or vision. Maimonides model of prophecy is thus in tension with prohibition (1).

[19] *Code*, Foundations of the Law 8.2.

Maimonides recognizes that the verification process is not foolproof; that is, the legal maneuver described in Deuteronomy is not entirely successful in discharging the skeptical challenge since people with a keen intuitive faculty could sometimes accurately foretell the future. Given the stakes involved, Maimonides writes that the people are therefore entitled to subject the same prophet to the verification process on several separate occasions:

> We should test him many times. If all of his statements prove true, he should be considered to be a true prophet, as [I Samuel 3:20] states concerning Samuel, "And all of Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, knew that Samuel had been proven to be a prophet unto God." (10.2)

> Once a prophet has made known his prophecy, and his words have proven true time after time, or another prophet has proclaimed him a prophet, if he continues in the path of prophecy, it is forbidden to doubt him or to question the truth of his prophecy. (10.4)

It is worth closing this part of the discussion by mentioning that Maimonides is considered the definitive authority on the laws of prophecy since no other legal authority in Jewish history attempted to systematize the laws pertaining to prophecy to the extent Maimonides did.[20]

4. Knowledge Attributions and Prophecy

With the relevant epistemology and Jewish law in place, it is now possible to examine how these two disparate systems of thought come together on the subject of knowledge attributions to prophets. This section begins with a short discussion of some skeptical and

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[20] In comparison to the laws of Sabbath or marriage, the laws of prophecy have been neglected by legal scholars given that prophecy ceased when the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed. Maimonides, unlike many other codifiers of Jewish law, attempted to codify all aspects of Jewish law, including those that were no longer relevant, e.g., the laws of Temple sacrifices.

high stakes considerations concerning Old Testament prophets. An investigation of the interaction between Lewisian contextualism and the laws regulating prophecy follows. The parallel discussion with respect to a Lewisian form of sensitive invariantism concludes the section. As Lewis's rules are somewhat vague, it shall become apparent that they can lead to different and sometimes contradictory results.

4.1. Skepticism, High Stakes, and Old Testament Prophets

If we take some events involving Old Testament prophets seriously, we begin to get a clearer picture of both the skeptical considerations and high stakes in play. To begin with the former, certain Old Testament stories make it evident that the verification process detailed by Maimonides is not foolproof. There are at least three cases in which an unsuspecting audience was duped by people who had passed the verification process but who were nonetheless false prophets at the time of the case. Firstly, Hananiah was considered a true prophet when he prophesied that which he did not believe by way of prophecy (Jeremiah 18). The same can be said for Zedekiah's prophecy to the kings Jehoshaphat and Ahab (1 Kings 22.11). Finally, the prophet Iddo was himself duped by another prophet (I Kings 13.9).[21] In light of incidents such as these, it is fair to say that the despite legal maneuvers to the contrary, there remains a *de facto* skepticism towards anyone claiming prophecy.

As for high stakes, it is clear that the prospect of capital punishment is not the only kind of 'anxiety-provoking' high-stakes factor in play. The Old Testament is replete with instances

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[21] In all three cases I am assuming that no one would have acted upon the words of someone proclaiming prophecy unless that person had passed the verification process.

in which prophets had to face a variety of high stakes. Firstly, prophesying before the king

was often a risky move since some of the Old Testament kings lashed out at the prophets if

they did not like what they heard. For instance, we find that King Ahab and Queen Jezebel

hounded Elijah and threatened to kill him (I Kings 17-9). And Ahab threw the prophet

Micaiah into prison and subjected him to starvation because Micaiah always prophesied

doom for Ahab (ibid 22).[22]

Prophets were also at the center of many high-stakes historical events of national

significance:

1. Moses threatened Pharaoh with plagues.[23]
2. Prophets ordered the nation to go to war or refrain from engaging in warfare.[24]
3. Jeremiah prevented the Israelites from returning to Israel.[25]
4. The nation attempted to kill Isaiah when he prophesied the destruction of the Temple.[26]
5. Prophets were responsible for choosing kings.[27]
6. The prophet is entitled to temporarily suspend a biblical commandment apart from the prohibition against idol worship.[28]

Finally, the prize example of high stakes is Abraham. On the basis of prophecy he left his

family and homeland for Canaan, circumcised himself (and all the males in his entourage) at

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[22] Nathan's castigation of King David for his affair with Bathsheba is another example of the jeopardy a prophet put himself in when confronting a king. In this case, however, David accepted the prophet's reprobation and admitted his poor behavior.

[23] Exodus 7-13. In a separate and earlier event, Pharaoh ordered that the workload of the Israelites be doubled in response to Moses' request that he let the Israelites go free (Exodus 5).

[24] E.g. I Samuel 15 and 1 Kings 22. The High Priest in a ceremony involving the combination of prophecy and the stones of his breastplate, was also empowered to permit or prohibit the nation from going to war (Maimonides, *Code*, Laws of the Temple 10.10).

[25] Jeremiah 29.

[26] Isaiah 26.

[27] Samuel selected and anointed the first two kings of Israel (1 Samuel 9, 16).

[28] *Code*, Foundations of the Law 9. It is forbidden to bring a sacrifice outside of the temple. Elijah's sacrifice on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18) is an example of a prophet temporarily suspending a commandment.

the age of ninety-nine, banished his son Ishmael and wife Hagar from his home, and attempted to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice to God.[29] It is therefore unsurprising that Maimonides makes having courage a necessary condition for being a prophet.

4.2. Lewisian Contextualism (LC) and Prophecy

Lewis would have us believe that variations in a number of factors concerning the ascriber make for a difference in knowledge attributions. Central to this claim is the identity of the ascriber. As far as prophecy is concerned, there are at least three ascribers that are worth considering for present purposes: one of the prophet's audience members in Old Testament times, the prophet herself, and the contemporary epistemologist.

To give the forthcoming discussion some structure, I have chosen to center the discussion around a knowledge attribution in the case of the Old Testament prophet Samuel who, on the basis of prophecy, ordered King Saul to send the Israelite army into battle with the Amalekite nation (1 Samuel 15). To simplify matters further, it will be assumed that Samuel truly believed on the basis of prophecy that *p* 'it is God's will that the Israelite army go to battle with the Amalekites.'[30] As this background assumption makes the Rule of Actuality redundant, that rule will be ignored in the discussion below. Additionally, it will be assumed, for the sake of argument, that Samuel and the contemporary epistemologist are

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[29] Genesis 17, 21-3.
[30] I ignore concerns arising from negative theology in this discussion. Despite the numerous cases in the Old Testament that do not involve problematic religious language, I chose this case because it involves high stakes for a wide array of parties.

familiar with the safety condition for knowledge, the prophetic method, and non-standard semantics for 'know.' [31]

4.2.1. Rachel—The Old Testament Ascriber

On a plain reading of Maimonides' codification of the laws of prophecy, a person identifies herself qua prophet to her community by accurately predicting the future on several consecutive occasions. Once she has passed this verification process she is considered a true prophet and is no longer subject to authentication tests. When the prophet Samuel reached this stage it is written, "And all of Israel, from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel had been proven to be a prophet unto God" (1 Samuel 3.20). At some point in time thereafter we are told that Samuel, on the basis of prophecy, ordered King Saul into battle with the Amalekites (ibid. 15.3).[32] Now consider Rachel, a common field worker living at that time. It will be assumed that sacred to Rachel's community are those texts recording the feats of the great Pentateuchal prophets and the laws relating to prophecy. The discussion below explores Rachel's knowledge ascriptions from the perspective of LC.

- *The Rule of Belief*:

According to Cohen this rule is subject-sensitive. Therefore, *if* Samuel either gives a sufficiently high credence to a certain error possibility obtaining in this case *or* he has

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[31] Cases in which the agent is mistaken about the method responsible for her belief *p* are well-documented in the literature (Armstrong 1973: 209). Since safety will similarly deliver the intuitively incorrect result when centered on the incorrect method (Pritchard 2005: 153, Rabinowitz 2011), a safety-based contextualism or sensitive invariantism will inherent this mistake. It is therefore more interesting to discuss cases in which the relevant ascriber is accurate about the basis of prophetic beliefs. For the sake of completion, I describe a case in §4.2.1 in which the speaker is incorrect about the basis of the subject's belief.

[32] I have chosen to discuss a case involving Samuel at a time *after* he had passed the legal verification process since it makes for a more interesting discussion. Naturally, the results reached will differ when considering a knowledge attribution to Samuel at a time *prior* to his passing the legal verification process since knowledge attributions are time sensitive.

evidence available to him that ought to make him have a sufficiently high credence in that proposition if he attended to it, *then* Samuel lacks knowledge in this case since Samuel cannot properly ignore such an error possibility.[33]

A closer look at Samuel's psychological state in this case proves how this rule can lead to a range of different results. As far as the first disjunct in the antecedent of the above conditional is concerned, the following line of thought proves illuminating. Despite Samuel's having passed the verification test and being recognized as a true prophet by the nation, a number of error possibilities may have troubled Samuel so much so as to lead him to have a sufficiently high credence in at least one of them. Certain Old Testament stories make it evident that some recognized prophets prophesied falsely: (i) Hananiah erred in his prophecy about Nebuchadnezzar (Jeremiah 18); and (ii) Zedekiah falsely prophesied to the kings Jehoshaphat and Ahab (1 Kings 22.11). Assuming that news of such stories gained traction in the community, Samuel may have been concerned that he too may be at risk with respect to such error possibilities.[34]

A number of additional error possibilities may have been on Samuel's mind given his familiarity with the dynamics of the prophetic method. According to Maimonides no prophet remains in a constant state of prophecy; rather, she proceeds in and out of prophetic states: "a prophet may not prophesy continuously the whole of his life, but prophesies at a certain moment and is abandoned by prophecy at many other moments" (2.45.396). Additionally, there may have been cases in which the prophet experienced only one prophetic state after having passed the verification process. Other times she may have

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[33] Since this rule is subject-sensitive, it applies in the same manner regardless of the ascriber. It will therefore be ignored in §4.2.3 below.

[34] Despite Samuel's preceding both Hananiah and Zedekiah, I ignore the chronological sequence of events for the purposes of elucidating the kinds of error possibilities that may have been salient to even the most widely-recognized true prophets. Naturally, if Samuel was unaware of any prior cases of prophetic error then we may reasonably assume that he would most likely have ignored such error possibilities.

experienced numerous prophetic states for many years thereafter: "For there is no doubt that the prophesying of all the prophets comes to an end before their death, either shortly or long time before" (ibid). In light of these considerations, another error possibility to which Samuel may be attending is one in which he experienced a vivid *non*-prophetic dream or hallucination and on one of those bases came to believe falsely that it is God's will that the Israelite army go to battle with the Amalekite nation. Perhaps, contra Maimonides (2.45.399), Samuel finds that he feels no different when he wakes up from his regular non-prophetic dreams than when he wakes up from his prophetic dreams. Both cases seem to resemble each other. Indeed, he has sometimes woken up wondering whether he experienced a prophetic or a non-prophetic dream. In this scenario Samuel may find himself considering whether he had woken up from a non-prophetic dream and on that basis came to believe *p*.

Then there are those error possibilities discussed at length in Chapter 3. Given that Samuel is, as the case is constructed, familiar with the mechanics of the prophetic method and the safety condition for knowledge, it is taken for granted that he is aware of the numerous ways in which the prophetic method may result in an unsafe belief. Samuel, in particular, may have had a keen awareness of the fallibility of the prophetic method in light of his falsely believing on the basis of prophecy 'that Eli is calling' when he first experienced prophecy.[35]

When the above considerations are on Samuel's mind and he gives a sufficiently high credence to at least one of them, then Rachel cannot truly ascribe knowledge that *p* to

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[35] It remains contestable how much weight Samuel might have placed on his falsely believing on the basis of prophecy that it was Eli who was calling him (1 Samuel 3), as discussed in Chapter 3 and 2.44.394-5. If we were to speculate about Samuel's mental state at that time, it seems fair to assume that the errors of his 'novice' days are unlikely to have bothered him at this advanced stage of his being a 'professional' prophet. That said, at least the errors of established prophets like Hananiah and Zedekiah would have troubled Samuel.

Samuel. As discussed in §1.1, the second part of the Rule of Belief is vague. That is, even if these error possibilities are part of Samuel's evidence, they may have slipped his mind at the time of the case, in which case he would count as knowing *p*. To avoid this counterintuitive result, Samuel won't count as knowing as per the second disjunct in the above conditional since he *ought* to give a sufficiently high credence to at least one of the above error possibilities.

The role of high stakes in Lewisian contextualism complicates the above results. Lewis writes that "when error would be especially disastrous, few possibilities may be properly ignored. Then even quite a low degree of belief may be 'sufficiently high' to bring the Rule of Belief into play" (ibid. 551). Given Lewis's mention of high stakes, it is important to point out the kinds of high stakes that could be in play for Samuel. Perhaps Samuel has a family member in the Israelite army. Perhaps an unsuccessful military strike against the Amalekites would place Israel in danger of a counterattack, which would imperil national security and Samuel's life. Therefore, even if Samuel gives very low credence to the error possibilities mentioned above, the presence of very high stakes may make such low credences sufficiently high to rule out Samuel's knowing *p*.

The Rule of Belief is somewhat incomplete, however. Lewis writes that when the stakes are high enough even a *low* credence in an error possibility is sufficient for the absence of knowledge "whether or not he is right to so believe." Most pertinent to Lewis's rule is the anxious person who despite very good evidence in favor of *p* nevertheless places a low credence in a not-*p* error possibility because of anxiety. It is easy enough to see how this would apply were Samuel prone to anxiety. However, from Maimonides (2.38.376) we learn that a necessary condition for being a prophet is being courageous. The OED defines 'courage' as "that quality of mind which shows itself in facing danger without fear or

shrinking; bravery, boldness, valor." An epistemic gloss on 'courage' might include ignoring

pertinent counterevidence; that is, in a dangerous situation a person who acts in a way that

displays disregard for the evidence of danger and achieves some important result therefrom

is considered to have displayed courage. For instance, when David went forth to fight

Goliath (1 Samuel 17), he would not have fought him if he placed a high credence in himself

losing. Rather, he would have ignored the counterevidence that the *entire* Israelite army

fled from Goliath, and proceeded to face Goliath with the belief that he could beat the

giant. One might begin to wonder whether this disregard for counterevidence may extend

to the realm of prophecy where courage is an integral part of the picture. More specifically,

might prophets have been dogmatic to ignore relevant error possibilities? If Samuel did

ignore the error possibilities raised above as a result of his courage and dogmatism, then the

introduction of high stakes will have no effect since high stakes make for a difference in

which relation the word 'knows' picks out in a specific context *only if* the agent already has a

low credence in an error possibility; that is, high stakes do not cause credences in error

possibilities to emerge from the ether. Nevertheless, to prevent the counterintuitive

attribution of knowledge to a dogmatic prophet, the 'ought' in the second disjunct can be

used to introduce the relevant low credences Samuel ought to have in the kinds of error

possibilities introduced above.[36] Once these credences are in place the presence of high

stakes for Samuel will result in such credences being sufficiently high to result in his not

knowing *p*.

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[36] Dogmatism combined with contextualism yields counterintuitive results (Hawthorne 2004: 174).

- *The Rule of Resemblance*:

As far as contextualism is concerned, Lewis warns that the Rule of Resemblance should be applied with care for it leads directly to skepticism if one thinks that skeptical possibilities resemble the actual case with respect to the subject's evidence; that is, Lewis thinks that the bad case resembles the good case in so far as the subject has the same evidence in both cases. To avoid this result Lewis claims that, "the Rule of Resemblance was never meant to apply to *this* resemblance!" (562, original emphasis). Lewis admits that this exemption is unacceptably *ad hoc*. In the Williamsonian framework, this resemblance can be denied in a non-*ad-hoc* fashion given Williamson's claim that the subject does not have the same evidence in the good case as she has in the bad case. Given that Williamson equates one's evidence with one's knowledge, the good case is dissimilar to the bad case given that the agent counts as knowing in the good case and not in the bad case. This maneuver is not available to Lewis because Lewis does not think evidence is context sensitive.

According to Lewis, the Rule of Resemblance explains why an agent in a Gettier case fails to know. Cohen then alerted us to the fact that *pace* Lewis, this rule should be taken as speaker-insensitive. Therefore, only if Samuel's belief *p* is safe can those cases in which it is unsafe be properly ignored. Whether or not Samuel's belief *p* counts as safe will depend on those factors discussed at length in Chapter 3. Rachel, who we can assume is ignorant of matters concerning the safety condition for knowledge, will falsely attribute knowledge to Samuel in those cases when his belief is unsafe, and truly attribute knowledge to him otherwise.[37]

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[37] Since this rule is subject-sensitive, it applies in the same manner regardless of the ascriber. It will therefore be ignored in §§4.2.2. and 4.2.3 below.

- *The Rule of Attention:*

If Rachel is currently attending to an error possibility then in Rachel's context Samuel will fail to know *p*. Therefore, much hangs on Rachel's frame of mind. Though Lewis does not say as much, this is another point in his account where high stakes may make a difference. When nothing much hangs on whether Samuel knows *p*, Rachel may properly ignore the kinds of error possibilities discussed above. In the converse case, however, Rachel may attend to such error possibilities. Perhaps she has a family member in the Israelite army; or she fears military reprisals from the attack; or the political instability the war will create. When so much hangs in the balance she may be epistemically more demanding of prophets than cases in which not much hangs on their words as far as Rachel's life is concerned. On the other hand, there are other considerations that may lead Rachel to disregard such error possibilities despite the high stakes. If, for example, Rachel has the utmost faith in Samuel or is in awe of his spiritual connection to God, then it is unlikely that she will attend to any error possibilities. In these kinds of cases it may not even occur to Rachel that a prophet may make a mistake.

- *The Rule of Reliability*:

If the speaker presumes a method *M* to be reliable, then cases in which *M* fails to be reliable may be properly ignored. As far as Rachel is concerned, the Rule of Reliability can cut both ways. On the one hand, Rachel may be overwhelmed by Samuel's stature on the national level. In this frame of mind it may not even occur to her that prophecy might be unreliable. In that context she may properly ignore cases in which prophecy is unreliable. On the other

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hand, Rachel may have recently heard of stories about false prophets. When in this skeptical frame of mind, she cannot properly ignore cases in which prophecy is unreliable; that is, the Rule of Attention will defeat the Rule of Reliability.

Matters become increasingly problematic in those cases in which the speaker is mistaken about the method responsible for the output belief. Assume that Rachel is a representative of the uneducated masses of whom Maimonides speaks so disparagingly. If we take Maimonides at his word, such a person thinks that God actually speaks to the prophet using sound. On this testimonial model it is unlikely that someone like Rachel will think that prophecy involves cases of accidentally true belief since God is the source of the belief. On this folk conception of prophecy, Locke's words ring true: "The bare testimony of divine revelation is the highest certainty … because the testimony is of such a one as cannot deceive nor be deceived: and that is of God himself. This carries with it an assurance beyond doubt, evidence beyond exception."[38] When the Rule of Resemblance is correlated to the speaker's knowledge of the case in the way Cohen argues, it is to be expected that a speaker who misconstrues the nature of the method will end up with a counterintuitive result.

The Rule of Reliability is also amenable to being ascriber-insensitive in the following manner. Assuming a fine-grained individuation of methods, if the basis on which Samuel believed p is indeed reliable, then Rachel may properly ignore instances in which it is unreliable. And if indeed unreliable, Rachel may not properly ignore cases in which it is unreliable.[39]

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[38] *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* IV: XVI.
[39] Apart from the point regarding mistaken notions of the bases both these considerations apply with equal force to Samuel. They will thus ignored in §4.2.2.

- *The Rule of Conservatism*:

This rule has particular relevance to knowledge ascriptions in religious communities. In religiously conservative communities, it will mostly likely be the case that error possibilities relevant to prophecy will be ignored. In such circumstances it will likely be the case that said devotees will consider prophecy to be the infallible conduit to the 'mind of God.' However, in more questioning religious communities it can be expected that there will be some concern over the reliability of prophecy. If Rachel is a member of the former community and she ignores error possibilities related to the reliability of prophecy, she will truly assert that Samuel knows *p*. However, if she similarly ignores error possibilities while a member of the latter community, she will falsely ascribe Samuel knowledge that *p* (where the word 'knows' expresses a different relation in the two communities).

4.2.2. Samuel—Subject and Ascriber

- *The Rules of Belief and Attention*:

Given that the Rule of Belief is subject-sensitive, the considerations discussed above with respect to the Rule of Belief *vis-à-vis* Rachel will apply with equal force here. A closer look at Samuel's mindset in warranted, however. Maimonides informs us that a different set of laws pertain to the prophet. As such there are a number of different considerations relevant to Samuel that did not feature in the foregoing section. In particular, two prohibitions govern Samuel's proclamations of prophecy: A prophet is prohibited, on the pain of capital punishment, from (a) suppressing his prophecy, and (b) claiming as prophecy that which he

did not come to believe by way of prophecy. The first law is amenable to the following epistemic gloss:

(a*)   If *S* knows *p* by way of prophecy, then *S* must assert *p* as prophecy.[40]

This epistemic gloss is framed from the perspective of invariantism about the word 'knows' for (a*) makes no reference to contextual considerations; that is, this rule does not specify which knowledge relation is picked out by the word 'know' as it appears in the rule. For present purposes, the following rough contextualist variations on (a*) will suffice:

(a')   For any context *C* and proposition *p* believed by way of prophecy, if the prophet stands in the relation expressed by the word 'knows' with respect to *p* in *C*, then the prophet must assert *p* as prophecy.

With this contextualist epistemic gloss in place, a case can be made for thinking that in the face of high stakes the laws governing Lewisian contextualism can be manipulated by the pragmatic interests of the ascriber. Instances of self-attributions where the ascriber is identical to the subject demonstrate this feature best. Consider the following scenario in which Samuel is considering whether or not in his context he stands in the relation expressed by the word 'knows' with respect to *p* 'that it is God's will that the Israelite army go to battle with the Amalekites.' Suppose further that while Samuel is not dogmatic, he

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[40] This gloss will be objectionable to those who support justified belief, not knowledge, as the norm of assertion. In response to such an objection I wish to counter that some, e.g., Wedgwood (2008), argue for a contextualist semantics for 'justified belief.' Indeed, for those who consider justified belief as a necessary condition for knowledge, Wedgwood's account could be used to support the further claim that 'knowledge' is susceptible to a contextualist semantics in virtue of a contextualist semantics for 'justified belief.' The line of reasoning that follows above can be run using 'justified belief' instead of 'knowledge' without detracting from the thrust of the problems that it generates.

nevertheless lacks as part of his evidence error possibilities relevant to prophecy. With (a')
in mind, Samuel might reason as follows:

> If I am in a context in which I stand in the relation expressed by the word 'know' with
> respect to *p* believed by way of prophecy, and I do not assert *p* as prophecy, then I am
> liable to capital punishment. But if I do stand in that relation and assert *p* as prophecy,
> then many will die in battle. Furthermore, if I assert *p* as prophecy I may suffer, as did
> the prophet Elijah, if King Saul does not approve of my prophecy.[41] The stakes are thus
> incredibly high for both myself and for many others. As such, I would prefer not to
> assert *p*. However, I can only refrain from asserting *p* if I do not stand in the relation
> expressed by the word 'know' in this context. I will therefore attend to error
> possibilities that I would otherwise ignore in cases with low stakes.[42] My context will
> thus shift to one in which I no longer count as standing in the relation expressed by the
> word 'knows' in that context with respect to *p*. In this context I am no longer entitled as
> per (a') to assert *p* as prophecy. Therefore I can now refrain from asserting *p*.

Suppose that at the time Samuel believed *p* by way of prophecy he did indeed stand in the
relation expressed by the word 'knows' in that context with respect to *p*. For the sake of
ease, let us term that knowledge relation '*knowledge(LOW)*.' However, once Samuel begins to
intentionally attend to error possibilities he shifts to a different context where the word
'knows' expresses a higher standard for knowledge than in his previous context. For sake of
ease, let us term the relation in the second context '*knowledge(HIGH)*.' In this context Samuel
does not count as knowing(HIGH) that *p*. In this way Samuel has manipulated his way into not
having to assert *p*.

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[41] See Chapter 2 (§3.2) for my discussion of that story. I have also ignored correct Old Testament chronology
to bring across the relevant point.
[42] When discussing the Rule of Attention *vis-à-vis* Rachel, I argued that high stakes could cause an attributor to
attend to error possibilities that she would have otherwise ignored when the stakes are low.

This sort of self-interested manipulation of the Rule of Belief by toggling the Rule of Attention can also work in the opposite direction; that is, a case can be constructed in which a subject motivated by high-stakes considerations manipulates his way from *not* standing in the relation expressed by the word 'knows' with respect to a proposition p in his context into standing in the relation expressed by the word 'knows' with respect to p in a different context. Suppose that counting as knowing$_{(LOW)}$ p brings with it a high-stakes reward while not believing p brings with it a high-stakes punishment (or no reward). Pascal's wager exemplifies this kind of arrangement between stakes and propositional attitudes. Confronted by inconclusive evidence for either theism or atheism, Pascal argues that one should wager on theism given the high pragmatic stakes that hang in the balance—an eternal life in heaven or an eternal life in hell. Here is Pascal:

> Nothing is so important to man as his own state, nothing is so formidable to him as eternity; and thus it is not natural that there should be men indifferent to the loss of their existence, and to the perils of everlasting suffering … all our actions and thoughts must take such different directions, according to the state of that eternity, that it is impossible to take one step with sense and judgment, unless we regulate our course by the truth of that point which ought to be our ultimate end … If you gain, you gain all; if you lose, you lose nothing. Wager, then, without hesitation that He is (*Pensées* L. 680).[43]

Pascal (and others) would have us believe that high stakes is conducive to belief in the existence of God. As he conceives of the relation between high stakes and an agent's agnoticism *vis-à-vis* God's existence, high stakes are to be taken as a pragmatic incentive towards belief in God. Pascal's concerns do not quite match the contextualist's in the sense

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[43] According to Jordan (2006: 149) Locke, Paley, Leibniz John Craig, and John Tillotson all put their weight behind pragmatic arguments in favor of theism. Jordan (ibid n.35) provides the relevant bibliographical details for each source. William James's "Will to Believe" is the notable nineteenth century example of a pragmatic argument for belief in the existence of God.

that Pascal deems *belief*, not *knowledge*, a sufficient basis for earning the requisite reward and avoiding the potential punishment. For present purposes consider a relevant analogue of Pascal's case in which a subject S in a context C adheres to the following rule: 'only believe p on the basis of testimony from two independent speakers.' Call this rule the 'High-Bar Rule of Testimony.' Assume further that if S were to satisfy that rule with respect to a proposition p, S would stand in the 'knows$_{(HIGH)}$' relation to p. At $T1$ in C speaker A tells S that 'God exists and that the reward for such belief is eternal bliss and that the punishment for lack of this belief is eternal damnation.' Adhering to the high-bar rule of testimony that is applicable in C, S abstains from believing that God exists. At $T2$ in C, S reasons that in light of these potential high-stake considerations and the her lack of relevant evidence to the contrary, it is practically in S's best interests to adopt the 'Low-Bar Rule of Testimony,' which permits S's believing p on the basis of testimony from a *single* speaker. At $T3$ S shifts into C^* in which the low-bar rule of testimony is operative and S accordingly believes that God exists. Assume further that if S were to satisfy that rule with respect to a proposition p in C^*, S would stand in the 'knows$_{(LOW)}$' relation to p. In C^* S therefore counts as knowing$_{(LOW)}$ that God exists. In this case the introduction of high stakes seems to compel S to adopt a more *permissive* epistemic rule. In other words, a case can be made for thinking that there will be instances in which high stakes drive *down* the standard for knowledge, which is contrary to how this relationship is typically understood.[44]

The manipulation of high stakes finds a natural home in Maimonides who was no stranger to the evocation of high stakes for theological purposes. When discussing the laws of repentance, he writes as follows:

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[44]In the §4.4 it will be observed that a similar problem arises for Lewisian sensitive invariantism.

Accordingly, throughout the entire year, a person should always look at himself *as if* equally balanced between merit and sin and the world as equally balanced between merit and sin. If he performs one sin, he tips his balance and that of the entire world to the side of guilt and brings destruction upon himself. [On the other hand,] if he performs one mitzvah [commandment], he tips his balance and that of the entire world to the side of merit and brings deliverance and salvation to himself and others (*Code*, Laws of Repentance 3.4, emphasis added).

Maimonides urges his reader to act *as if* the stakes were as high as he suggests as a means by which to inspire (or intimidate) people towards a law-abiding life. But when laws are connected to epistemic principles susceptible to manipulation from context to context, as demonstrated above with respect to Samuel and (a'), then it becomes possible for people to avoid doing that which is uncomfortable or potentially hazardous by denying themselves high-standards knowledge. Alternatively, agents can use high-stakes considerations to maneuver themselves into a context with low-standards for knowledge.

There are several ways to push back on this sort of self-interested manipulation of Lewis's rules. The first is to notice that in light of high-stakes considerations Samuel can maneuver himself into a context in which he does stand, with respect to p, in the relation expressed by the word 'knows' in that context. Suppose it is indeed God's will that the Israelite army go to battle with the Amalekites. Suppose further that failure to inform King Saul of God's will on this matter will bring punishment upon Samuel and that failure to go to battle with Amalekites will bring punishment on the nation. When the stakes are viewed from this perspective, Samuel will be motivated to abstain from letting his 'paranoid fantasies rip,' in which case he will count as knowing$_{(LOW)}$ that p in his current context. In other words, self-interests can equally cause speakers to avoid shifting into high-stakes contexts in which they do not stand in the relation expressed by the word 'knows' in those contexts thereby cancelling out the import of such self-serving manipulation.

The second manner in which self-interested manipulation can be denied is by making certain religious rules *permissively* context-sensitive. Consider the following contextually permissive formulation of (a*):

(a'')   If S counts as standing in the relation expressed by the word 'knows' in some context C at T with respect to a proposition p believed by way of prophecy, then S must assert p as prophecy even if S is not in C at T.

The kind of permissiveness generated by (a'') prevents Samuel from shirking his duty to assert his prophecy in the following manner. Despite now being in a context in which Samuel does not stand in the know$_{(HIGH)}$ relation with respect to p, he nevertheless remains in the know$_{(LOW)}$ relation in that same context. Since there is some context in which Samuel stands in the relation expressed by 'knows' in that context, namely his first context, Samuel is duty bound by (a'') to assert p.

A third option open is by way of a contextualist constraint on Pascal's wager. Suppose that the reward of an eternal life in heaven is restricted to those who know$_{(HIGH)}$ that God exists, where know$_{(HIGH)}$ is a high standard for knowledge picked out by the word 'knows' in a context C^* and only in C^*. When this constraint is placed on Pascal's wager, the type of maneuver demonstrated above will not work since knowing$_{(LOW)}$ that God exists does not secure the high-stakes reward.

Unfortunately all three responses have drawbacks. The first response does not challenge the notion that subjects can be motivated by personal gain to purposefully maneuver themselves from context to context. The direction of movement is not the problem; rather it is the type of epistemic arbitrage exhibited by such movement that is the

cause of concern. 'Lucrative' epistemic positions do not seem to be the kind of thing into which one can scheme one's way.[45]

The second response generates an undesirable wedge between what is known in a specific context and what can be asserted in that context. Assume, for the sake of argument, the knowledge norm of assertion. A contextualist version thereof would have to make the necessary amendments since the norm does not specify the context of assertion. Here is a rough first approximation of such a principle:

(N)   In a context C, assert p only if you stand in the relation expressed by the word 'knows' in C with respect to p.

In light of this contextualist formulation of the norm of assertion, the line of thought developed in the second response can result in a case in which Samuel stands in the relation expressed by the word 'knows' in some context C at T but does not stand in the relation expressed by 'knows' in his current context C^* at T. Thus Samuel cannot assert p in C^*. (a'') is therefore an unsatisfactory principle. Additionally, a permissively contextual version of (N) would similarly be unsatisfactory since it would not account for the impropriety of asserting in C^* that one's lottery ticket will lose when in C^* the possibility of the ticket winning is being discussed; that is, even if one counts as standing in the relation expressed by the word 'knows' in some context C with respect to the proposition expressed by 'my ticket will lose,' it remains infelicitous to assert as much in a context in which one does not stand in the relation expressed by the word 'knows' in C^*.

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[45] There will also be cases in which such maneuvering raises those problems associated with doxastic voluntarianism. As these issues are rather large, I merely raise the point here as an additional factor worth consideration.

Lastly, there is no *prima facie* reason to restrict the rewards of an eternal life in heaven to those who have achieved the high standard of knowing$_{(HIGH)}$ that God exists. If the standards for knowledge expressed by 'knowing$_{(HIGH)}$' are indeed very high, we might suppose that a contextualist version of Pascal's wager will lose much of its appeal and argumentative force.

Before moving on, it should be pointed out that the potential for manipulating Lewis's rules is not limited to self-ascribers. Any ascriber who has a vested interest in whether or not the subject stands in the relation expressed by 'knows' in the conversational context may manipulate the rules to suit her interests. Consider Rachel, who may be part of the army's support core and who does not wish to leave her young children to go out into battle. When the stakes are high for Rachel in this way, she may "let her paranoid fantasies rip" and attend to farfetched error possibilities thereby *ipso facto* denying that Samuel stands in the relation expressed by 'knows' in that context with respect to *p*. Similarly, a soldier in the Israelite army whose life hangs in the balance may adopt a similar line of reasoning towards the same conclusion. When neither thinks that Samuel stands in the relation expressed by the word 'knows' in that context with respect to *p,* they will refrain from obeying him.[46] This result will materialize when there is a contextualist epistemic gloss of the law to listen to what the prophet preaches. The upshot of this kind of manipulation will be taken up in §4.3.

- *The Rule of Conservatism*:

Since prophets wielded significant power in ancient Israel and most likely were surrounded by devote followers, Samuel would have been surrounded by people who considered

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[46] I am assuming that no one would listen to a prophet if said person thinks that the prophet does *not* know that which the prophet asserts in that conversational context.

prophecy reliable. In such a context he can properly ignore error possibilities and attribute knowledge that *p* to himself.

4.2.3. Peter—The Epistemologist as Ascriber

Now consider Samuel's prophecy from the perspective of Peter, the contemporary epistemologist who is thinking about Samuel's mental states from the comfort of his departmental armchair.

- *The Rule of Attention:*

Given that Peter is an epistemologist, he is trained to consider the relevance and implications of skeptical scenarios. In particular, Peter may concur that Maimonides has structured the prophetic method in a fashion that opens it to the kinds of error possibilities detailed in Chapter 3. When attending to such error possibilities, he cannot properly ignore them. In that context Peter cannot truly ascribe Samuel knowledge that *p*. On the other hand, Peter is aware that methods are individuated in a fine-grained manner as far as the safety condition for knowledge and prophecy are concerned. That is, Peter will realize that the kinds of error possibilities discussed in Chapter 3 arise when the prophetic method is discussed on a general level. As such, on the very specific instance of Samuel's believing *p* on the basis of prophecy his belief *p* may indeed be safe. Additionally, Peter may find compelling the notion that one can, in a cumulative conception of bases model, safely believe a conclusion inferred from unsafe premises. When attending to these considerations Peter may find irrelevant the kinds of error possibilities discussed in Chapter 3, in which case

he may count as properly ignoring them. Peter's ascription of knowledge that *p* to Samuel in such a context may therefore be correct.

- *The Rule of Reliability*:

Prophecy is a method unfamiliar to many in contemporary times. As such Peter is unlikely to have a particular position on the reliability of the prophetic method. If Peter thinks prophecy is like clairvoyance, and considers clairvoyance unreliable, then Peter will deny that Samuel knows *p*. But if Peter thinks prophecy could well be a reliable method, then he may be more willing to attribute to Samuel knowledge that *p*. Much will also hang on how finely Peter individuates methods. If Peter follows Williamson as far as method individuation goes, then Peter will be disinclined to think that prophecy is like clairvoyance. Additionally, Peter will realize that there are many finely-grained yet similar methods that fall under the label 'prophetic method.' Some may be more reliable than others. If he considers one of these reliable ones the method responsible for Samuel's belief, then Peter can properly ignore those cases in which Samuel prophecies *p* by way of one of the unreliable prophetic methods.

As mentioned above in §4.2.1, the Rule of Reliability is amenable to being ascriber-*in*sensitive in the following manner. Assuming a fine-grained individuation of methods, if the basis on which Samuel believed *p* is indeed reliable, then Peter may properly ignore instances in which it is unreliable. And if indeed unreliable, Peter may not properly ignore cases in which it is unreliable. That is, Peter will be an unreliable ascriber of knowledge when his judgment as to the reliability of the basis underlying Samuel's belief is itself unreliable.

- *The Rule of Conservatism*:

Since philosophy departments are on the whole skeptical of theism, Peter will be surrounded by people who find prophecy questionable. In such a context Peter cannot properly ignore the kinds of error possibilities discussed in Chapter 3. In such a context Peter cannot truly ascribe knowledge that *p* to Samuel. However, if Peter then proceeds to the theology department (or Notre Dame's philosophy department) where there is a more accepting attitude towards the prophetic phenomenon, then Peter may properly ignore those error possibilities in that context and truly attribute knowledge that *p* to Samuel.

4.3. *Précis of Lewisian Contextualism and Prophetic Knowledge*

Though few general conclusions about prophetic knowledge can be derived from the above discussion, three points do stand out. Firstly, the relationship between high stakes, the Rule of Belief, and the Rule of Attention is open to manipulation by both speakers and subjects with a vested interest in the outcome of the knowledge attribution. Self-serving ascribers may take advantage of shifts in context by manipulating the way the word 'knows' picks out different relations in their mouths in different contexts.

Secondly, some of the laws regulating the assertion of prophecy can be given an epistemic gloss. When this gloss is that of the contextualist's, these rules become slippery in the hands of Lewis's rules. In particular, it becomes hostage to the kind of manipulation of those rules discussed above. Additionally, permissive contextualist formulations of these laws do not prove to be satisfactory.

Thirdly, the above exercise highlights the ease with which Samuel can count as standing in the relation expressed by the word 'knows' with respect to p in a first context and not standing in the relation expressed by the word 'knows' with respect to p in second context. As far as prophetic knowledge in concerned, such variation makes for a rather fragmented response to the prophet. This kind of fragmentation ramifies in at least two uncomfortable directions. On the one hand, diverging knowledge attributions with respect to Samuel's assertion that p would make for a threat to national security in Old Testament times. No king would send his army into battle and risk his kingdom when he does not think that the prophet stands in the relation expressed by the word 'knows' with respect to p in the context in which said prophet asserts p. Yet failing to listen to a prophet would have meant death for the king. Similarly no soldier would risk his life for someone he considers a potential false prophet. On the other hand, and from the modern perspective, contextualism permits my denying that all the Old Testament prophets did not stand in the relation expressed by the word 'knows' in my context merely because I'm sitting in a class on Cartesian skepticism in which the word 'knows' picks out an almost unattainably high standard for knowledge. Since much of monotheistic theology and law is predicated upon the prophetic works of the Old Testament, contextualism permits the theological foundations of entire religions to be thrown into question with consummate ease.

Several invariantists have chosen to question contextualist treatments of 'knows' by noting the unfavorable results it permits. Williamson (2005: 99-101), for example, notes that if contextualism is true, then the flow of information via testimony is thrown into disarray. The following demonstrates the problem. Assuming knowledge as the norm of assertion, in a context $C1$ a speaker S may count as knowing$_{C1}$ the location of her house but in context $C2$ she cannot assert that she knows$_{C2}$ the location of her house when asked as much because

in *C*2 she does not count as knowing$_{C2}$ for in *C*2 the epistemic standards are higher than in *C*1. Similarly, a case begins to build for doubting the adequacy of Lewisian contextualism by noting the problematic results it delivers on the topic of knowledge attributions to prophets.

4.4. Neo-Lewisian Sensitive Invariantism (LSI) and Prophecy

LSI differs from Lewisian contextualism in that all six of Lewis's rules are taken to be subject-sensitive. For this reason no two speakers can both count as speaking truly if the first ascribes knowledge to a subject *S* while the second denies that *S* knows. In light of this characterization of Lewis's rules, LSI will deliver the same results as LC did with respect to Samuel's self-ascriptions of knowledge; that is, only factors relevant to Samuel can make for a difference in the truth-value of a knowledge ascription to Samuel. Pragmatic encroachment has featured heavily in several sensitive invariantist semantics for 'knows,' where said high stakes factors are those relevant to the subject, not the speaker. LSI subscribes to the relevance of pragmatic encroachment by incorporating high stakes in the Rule of Belief. In light of this correlation between LC self-ascriptions and LSI, it follows that LSI will inherit the problems discussed above with respect to prophets manipulating themselves in and out of having to assert their prophecies in the face of high stakes. If this is indeed the case, then the adequacy of LSI as an account of the semantics for 'knows' is similarly thrown into doubt. If the *Book of Jonah* is any indication, God strongly disapproves of those prophets who shirk their responsibilities for disseminating their prophetic insights. In LSI's favor, however, it, unlike Lewisian contextualism, does not permit that kind of fragmented response to the prophet that I argued speaks against Lewisian contextualism.

Two attributors cannot both speak truly of Samuel if the one asserts that Samuel does not know *p* while the second asserts that Samuel knows *p*.

4.5. Reflections

When Lewis's non-standard semantics for 'knows' is introduced to the safety condition for knowledge, Maimonides' work on the prophetic method in the *Guide*, and Maimonides' codification of the laws governing prophecy in the Jewish tradition, an uncomfortable tension surfaces: either we must adopt semantic invariantism for 'knows' and thereby stabilize the prophetic phenomenon, or we can adopt a Lewisian semantics for 'knows' in which case we must learn to live with the kind of destabilizing fluidity about prophetic knowledge introduced by such semantics.

5. Doing Religious Epistemology on the Guillotine

Both the contextualist and the subject-sensitive invariantist invite us to take seriously the idea that variations in the relevance of error possibilities and high stakes makes for differences in knowledge ascriptions, where the relevance is that of the ascriber for the contextualist and that of the subject for the subject-sensitive invariantist. While each of these ideas may boast a range of strengths in dealing with a number of puzzles within mainstream epistemology, their value has yet to be tested in the context of religious epistemology. This chapter has taken some tentative steps in that direction with respect to the question of prophetic knowledge.

Old Testament prophecy is a well-documented phenomenon. Assuming that at least some of those stories are accurate records of that phenomenon, it is evident that prophecy is to be found in the foundations of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; that is, there seems to be a direct relation between matters of theological doctrine and prophecy. For Judaism and Islam, which are religions governed by extensive legal codes, prophecy, in particular that of Moses and Mohammed, has a stronghold over religious law. Casting aspersions on the integrity of knowledge by way of prophecy has the potential for a devastating critique of religion.[47] It should be clear enough that the following line of thought ought to be resisted:

In light of Pascal's claims, all contexts in which knowledge attributions are being considered *vis-à-vis* religious matters count as high stakes contexts. In such contexts a wide range of error possibilities cannot be properly ignored. Therefore in all such contexts the standards for knowing are very high. As such, most will fail to know in such contexts.

As far as LC and LSI are concerned, this type of reasoning does not demonstrate sufficient sensitivity to the divergent ways in which Lewis's rules can be applied. Additionally, success with lottery-like problems aside, failure to capture the epistemic credentials of a phenomenon taken by so many to be intuitively compelling does constitute a significant liability on the balance sheet of any semantic for 'knows.'

There nevertheless remain some residual concerns over the kind of self-serving manipulation of Lewis's rules in the face of high stakes. As detailed in §§4.3 and 4.4 it seems

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[47] Even if we grant Maimonides his claim that Mosaic prophecy is *sui generis*, the epistemic challenge presented by high stakes remains in place for Moses as much as it does for the other prophets. One might even argue that the stakes were higher with Moses given that he, like Jesus and Mohamed, was the only nomothetic prophet in Judaism; that is, the entire legal code, so the story goes, has its origin in Mosaic prophecy. This was certainly Maimonides' opinion (*Commentary on the Mishnah*, Introduction to Perek Khelek). For a different reading of Maimonides on this point, see Shapiro (2011).

open to both prophets and their audience members to 'abuse' shifts in contexts for LC and

relevant attending by the subject *vis-à-vis* LSI for selfish reasons. If LC and LSI are indeed

open to this kind of manipulation, then we are faced with a hard choice—either admit that

prophetic knowledge can be traded when the price is right, or LC and LSI should be shelved.

Neither option is overly desirable or compelling.

Conclusions

With respect to Williamson and Maimonides, the main aim of this thesis has been to argue that (i) beliefs formed by way of prophecy are not *de facto* safe, and (ii) that the problems associated with this result deepen with the introduction of Lewisian semantics for 'knows.'

The thesis opened with a critical examination of Williamson's work on the safety condition for knowledge. Of the many features exhibited by that condition, I stressed the external and fine-grained individuation of methods. I then pointed out the importance of Williamson's cumulative conception of bases, which is a model he developed in response to problems generated by the relationship between knowledge and objective probability. Both points proved crucial to my reading of Maimonides on prophecy.

In the second chapter I argued that Maimonides takes prophecy to be a five-part method that includes several additional methods. I called this a cumulative conception of prophecy. This reading of Maimonides preserves the robust deregulatory flavor since this method in no way involves the transfer of a proposition from God to the prophet. Of particular relevance to the safety of prophetic beliefs was my claim that the prophet does not form beliefs during his prophetic dream or prophetic vision. Rather, the prophet only forms the requisite belief once he wakes up and interprets his dream or vision. This opened the door to the epistemic problems related to memory and interpretation. I also argued for a number of additional problems that throw into question the safety of prophetic beliefs.

I tempered my results by emphasizing three important points. Firstly, the discussion in Chapter 3 addresses the safety of prophetic beliefs in the general case; in the specific case, however, consideration must be given to the fine-graining of methods, the epistemic home of the individual prophet, and the vagueness of the safety condition. It will thus prove challenging to say of any specific prophetic belief *p* whether or not *p* is safe. Secondly, the scope of my results is limited to Maimonides' conception of non-Mosaic prophecy in the *Guide*. More attention will be needed to determine the implications, if any, for other deregulatory models of prophecy. It goes without saying that my results are irrelevant to regulatory accounts of prophecy, robust ones in particular. Thirdly, I noted that with respect to a cumulative conception of bases model, a subject *S* may nevertheless count as safely believing a conclusion *C* despite *S* inferring *C* from premises $\{P_1, …, P_N\}$ that are not safely believed. If this point proves cogent, then despite one or several missteps in the stages leading up to the final output belief *p*, the prophet may nevertheless still count as safely believing *p*.

In the fourth chapter I examined how Lewisian contextualism and a parallel form of Lewisian sensitive invariantism interact with the laws of prophecy as codified by Maimonides. When some of these laws are provided with an epistemic gloss, I argued that Lewis's rules are open to manipulation by self-serving agents who have a vested interest in whether or not the prophet knows. The destabilizing impact of such manipulation was demonstrated using the pragmatic dimension of high stakes common to both non-standard semantics for 'knows' and the laws regulating prophecy. I concluded that this result gives rise to an uncomfortable tension: either we stabilize the prophetic phenomenon by embracing invariantism or we learn to live with the instability generated by Lewisian contextualism and sensitive invariantism. Neither disjunct proves to be overly compelling.

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APPENDIX

Compendium of Prophetic Errors

I have compiled the following list of cases in which there is error of one sort or another.
Cases from Spinoza[1] and Charles Touati[2] have been included as well.

A. Errors inside a prophecy

1. Genesis 15:4 (Abraham's false belief about the number of stars)

2. Ezekiel 1:24, 10:5 (Ezekiel's incorrect attribution of sound to the spheres' movement)

B. Errors by a prophet outside of prophecy

1. I Samuel 16:6 (Samuel mistakes Eliav as God's preferred candidate for the kingship)

2. Genesis 37: 32-36 (Jacob falsely believed Joseph was dead)

3. Genesis 27 (Isaac mistook Jacob for Esau)

4. 11 Kings 2: 23-4, 5:27, T.B. Sotah 47a (Elisha commits an immoral act)[3]

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[1] *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, chapter 2.

[2] "Le problème de l'inerrance prophétique dans la théologie juive au Moyen-Âge." *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, 1968, 174(2). pp. 169-187. Thanks to Caroline Audrey for assistance with the French.

5. Genesis 29:25 (Jacob deceived by Laban)

6. Jeremiah 39:2, T.Y. Ta'anit 4:5 (records the wrong date for the breach of the walls)

C. Problem cases:

I) Unfulfilled bold predictions for both good and bad (bold = unconditional)

1. Jonah 3:4 (Nineveh was not overturned)

2. Isaiah 38:1 (Hezekiah did not die)

3. II Samuel 12: 11 (David does not receive his punishment)

4. II Samuel 7:11-16 (David's kingdom split)[4]

5. Habakkuk 3:1 (falsely believed God to be unjust)

6. Exodus 32:10 (God does not punish the Israelites)

7. Genesis 22:2-12 (God changed his mind regarding the binding of Isaac)

8. Genesis 2:17 (God does not kill Adam as intended)

9. T.B. Shabbat 55a (God revokes his protection of the righteous)[5]

II) God Misinforms a Prophet

1. Genesis 18:12 (God 'lies' to Abraham about Sarah's retort)

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[3] Either Elisha knowingly sinned, or he did something he falsely believed was morally permissible. (Similar considerations would apply to any prophet who acted immorally.) The fact that in both cases Elisha works by way of miracle problematizes the issue for miracles usually indicate divine consent.

[4] c.f. I Kings 11:11, 29-40.

[5] C.f. those editions of Maimonides' *Code* (Foundations of the Law 10.4) that include the relevant piece.

C. Touati's Examples

1. Ezekiel 26, 27 (Tyre was not destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar)[6]

2. Isaiah 23, 48 and Jeremiah 50-1 (When Cyrus conquered Babylon in 538 he never subjected the city to mutiny)

3. Jeremiah 10:13 (Jeremiah did not understand the nature of thunder)

4. Jeremiah 11:23 (contradicted by Nehemiah 7:27)

5. Joshua 10:12 (attributes sound to spheres)[7]

D. Spinoza's cases:

1. Joshua 10:12 (falsely believed that the sun rotates around the earth)

2. II Kings 20:11 (Isaiah falsely believed that the sun rotates around the earth and mistook a parhelion for a miracle)

3. I Kings 7:23 (incorrect ratio of a circle's diameter to its circumference)

4. Genesis 3:10 (Adam did not know God was omnipresent or omniscient)

5. Genesis 4:9 (Cain did not recognize God as omniscient)

6. Gen. 31:29 (Laban mistakenly thought each nation had its own God)

7. Gen. 18:24 (Abraham thought God did not know how many righteous people were in Sodom)

8. Gen. 18:21 (Abraham did not think God omniscient)

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[6] cf. *Meor Enayim* (273 trans. J. Weinberg) and http://www.greatcom.org/resources/areadydefense/ch06/default.htm

[7] The psalmist of Psalm 19:4 makes the same mistake.

9. Noah thought that the world beyond his vicinity was uninhabited.

10. Exodus 4:8 (Moses did not believe God to be omniscient and providential)

11. Deuteronomy 33:27 (Moses thought God dwelt in the heavens)

12. Several examples of monolatrism involving Moses, Jacob, Jonah, and David.

13. Exodus 33:18 (Moses believed that God could be seen)

14. Moses believed God experiences emotions

15. II Kings 2 (the prophets did not understand the prophecy about Elijah's death)

D. Disagreement between prophets

1. Ezekiel 18 vs. Exodus 34:7 & Jeremiah 32:18 (Spinoza)

2. Ezekiel 44:31 & 45:20 vs. Pentateuch (Spinoza quoting B.T. Shabbath 13b)

3. I Samuel 15:29 vs. Jeremiah 18:8-10 (disagreed over whether God could retract a decision once it has been made) (Spinoza)

4. Jeremiah 18:8-10 [& Jacob (Genesis 28:15, 32:8)] vs. Jeremiah 28:7,9 (conditional true prophecies)[8]

5. Jeremiah 28 vs. Hananiah[9]

6. Jeremiah 11:23 vs. Nehemiah 7:27 (disagreed about the destruction of Tyre)

E. Prophet's exposing their epistemic impoverishment vis-à-vis question x

1. Moses regarding the laws of inheritance pertaining to women (Numbers 27)

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[8] This may be a case of a prophet contradicting himself.
[9] Hasdai Crescas, on the basis of Sanhedrin 89a, considered Hananiah a true prophet (Kreisel 2001: 459).

2.   Moses regarding the punishment for Sabbath violation (Numbers 15)

3.   Moses regarding the punishment for public sexual indecency (Sanhedrin 82b)

4.   Moses regarding the punishment of blasphemy (Leviticus 24)

5.   Jacob's ignorance as to God's presence (Genesis 28)

Glossary of Terms

Closed mode of presentation: objects absent their design plan.

Depiction: the portrayal or expression of the meaning through the object.

Design plan: the structural relationship between the meaning and the design of the object.

Emanation: causation by an incorporeal agent.

Embedded Proposition: the proposition that the prophet's perfect rational faculty arrives at in Component 2.

Extended parabolic prophecy: parabolic prophecies accompanied by an explanation of their meaning during the prophetic dream or vision itself.

General Parables: parables in which "very many words are to be found, not every one of which adds something to the intended meaning; they [the words] serve to embellish the parable and render it more coherent or to conceal further the intended meaning."

Interpretation: the functional mapping of an object to its meaning.

Intuition: the cognitive aptitude for drawing inferences.

Lean Parables: parables the external meaning of which is worthless.

Meaning: the embedded proposition.

Non-extended parabolic prophecy: parabolic prophecies unaccompanied by an explanation of their meaning during the prophetic dream or vision itself.

Non-parabolic prophecy: prophecies that do not exhibit the dual-layered meaning structure of parabolic prophecies. These are typically auditory in nature.

Object: the set of sensory impressions generated in Component 3.

Open mode of presentation: objects accompanied by their design plan.

Parabolic prophecy: prophecies that typically involve the depiction of two embedded propositions in the form of an audio-visual scene. Parabolic prophecies have an internal and external meaning.

Rationalized Emanation: that emanation which overflows from the prophet's perfect rational faculty in Component 2 to the prophet's perfect imagination in Component 3. This emanation is conditioned to the embedded proposition.

Rationalized impressions: those sensory impressions stored from prior experience that are used to depict the embedded proposition(s).

Robust Parables: parables the external meaning of which is useful.

Specific Parables: parables in which each and every image comprising the rationalized impressions contributes to the external and internal meaning of the parable.