

**M A I M O N I D E S**  
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Maimonides  
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*for Tomas Zinner and Joseph Brenner*

*All causal chains advance in the direction of time forming, in this way, a huge common net interlaced in all senses... constituting the course of the world. Everything reflects in everything, everything has its echo in each thing...*

*Arthur Schopenhauer*

At a first sight it can seem strange how someone who dedicates his life to aesthetics can really be interested on the figure of a medieval thinker that never wrote a single line on art and never considered himself a philosopher.

But, there is a medieval thinker – who never considered himself a philosopher and never wrote anything on aesthetics – that has magnetized the attention of philosophers, artists and scientists for about one thousand years.

Moses Ben Maimon – who would popularly be known as Maimonides, Greek version of the Hebrew expression *son of Maimon* – made formidable works as humanist, physician, astronomer, theologian and philosopher anticipating in some centuries the spirit of Renaissance.

Maimonides was born in 1135, or 1138 accordingly to some historians, where nowadays is Spain, in the same Cordoba that would definitively exert a profound influence on Maurits Cornelis Escher's works and that was famous as the centre of the civilized world in that epoch.

Moses Ben Maimon could be considered, if the expression could be freely applied, a *pragmatic* par excellence – not had the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce coined such concept about seven hundred years later.

The words of Charles Sanders Peirce's stating that «only the experience can teach» could surely also be considered as a Maimonides' defence, for whom the «human being needs to subordinate to the thought all the powers of his soul».

This posture, oriented to thought and to experience, towards a continuous learning, would directly lead both of them and their reflections to the study of *logic*, even when dealing with issues whose nature was apparently diverse.

Maimonides didn't hesitate to defend that in the sacred texts it could be found the keys for the good functioning of any government, for the excellence in politics, for the *equilibrium* in the *polis*.

His father was a mathematician, astronomer, judge and celebrated Talmudist.

Pertaining to a very traditional Hebrew family, he finished to become one of the most eminent Talmudists ever.

Some even said he was direct descendant of the King David.

But, Moses Ben Maimon did not have an easy life.

When he was only fifteen years old, his family started a long and hard escape from Cordoba.

The terrible Almohadas – Islamic sect organized by fanatic fundamentalists that could be, in a certain sense, even very roughly, comparable to the 20<sup>th</sup> century *taliban* – had conquest a great part of the Iberian Peninsula, populating it with the most cruel persecutions.

For those fundamentalists, the only alternative for the refuse to conversion was death.

Father and sons – his mother died two years before – escaped going to the south of the Iberian world, through the Catalan coast and arriving to what presently is known as the French *Provence*.

After ten years of escapes and persecutions, they departed to Fez, in Morocco – where, despite be an important *almohada* centre, it is told that the local administration breathed some moments of more tolerance.

Apparently, the reason for that strange wave of tolerance is that Abd al-Um'min, the local Moor radical Islamic leader, was in advanced age and sweetened the persecution and repressive measures.

Even so, only five years were enough to justify a new escape, this time in direction to Palestine passing through Acre, Hebron and Jerusalem – that time devastated by the Crusades – finishing to be definitively fixed in Fustat, Old Cairo, Egypt.

Quickly he became responsible for the business of the local Jewish community, and also recognised physician and judge in the whole region.

Soon later his father passed away.

Then, Maimonides was about thirty years old.

Half part of those years was lived under persecution and the stress of constant escapes.

His youngest brother, David, who unveiled himself as a talented businessman of precious stones, nurtured the family with all material needs, in way to give Maimonides, who become his master, the ideal conditions for a total dedication to his studies.

Between them there was a relationship of profound love and respect.

David was proud of his dynamic life as a businessman, because of the importance to provide his brother with free time, so fundamental for his studies and reflections. For him, to be a businessman was something sacred, because with his help Mamonides' thoughts could be expanded and *illuminate* the world.

After some years of great prosperity, David decided to make a long and adventurous travel by the Indian Ocean, with the objective to conclude a big business.

He brought with him not only the whole fortune of his family but also of other ones, gave by diverse people who trusted him expensive goods in the hope of a fast success as partners in that profitable business.

Then, a terrible tragedy happened.

It is told that under a terrible tempest, or by criminal hands, there was a disaster – David died and the fortune disappeared in the deepness of the sea.

The lost of the adored brother was a brutal chock that would follow Maimonides to the end of his days.

When he was about fifty years old, in a letter dated of 1184, Maimonides wrote – «in Egypt I was victim of serious misfortunes. I plunged into the illness and lost many things. But, the hardest shock I suffered and that devastated me with the deepest pain of my whole life was the disappearance, in the Indian Ocean, of the most perfect and most virtuous of all human beings. Only approximately one year after the facts I knew about the sad news and I fought, in that moment, against the fever and the despair. These events happened more than eight years ago, but I still lament, because how could I find any consolation? What could be a consolation for that? My brother grew up with me; he was my son, my disciple. He made money to permit me to be at home, studying. He was very versed on the Talmud and on the Bible as well as excellent grammarian. My only happiness was to have lived with him, but now this happiness is transformed into darkness; he passed to the eternity and abandoned me here, prostrated in a foreign country. When I find, by chance, one of his books or even some of his writings, my heart treats to fail when my pain is reanimated. In resume: I will die of sadness by the death of my son; and if the study of Torah would not constitute a great pleasure for me, and if the investigation of science would not distract my pain, I would fall in the most complete misery».

In despite of a so hard tragedy, he would become a famous physician, and it has been even told that he arrived to attend important people like the legendary sultan Saladino.

And also that he treated the health of the king Richard Lion Heart.



But, his letters – and he was a man dedicated to them – reveal someone profoundly alone, a profoundly solitary man.

Through his more personal writings we can see a person whose roots were detached from this world launching him onto the dimension of the ideas, to the permanent questioning of *who we are*.

It is such questioning, this eternal doubt, that makes us to vacillate between *fate* and *free-will*, between the *mundus phenomenon* and a *mundus intelligibilis*, always designed by language, by the structure of thought. This made him so much admired along so many centuries.

Because of this essential question he became *universal*.

Following the talmudic tradition, Maimonides – who is traditionally called *Ramban*, world built with the initials of his name – dedicated his energy to extracted from practical elements, from objective situations, his whole theoretical universe and, also because of this, he was considered by many as an Aristotelian, in opposition to a Platonic or Pythagorean character – however such a classification would not make sense, at least in general terms, for a personality of his stature.

In his strongly pragmatic path, always in persecution of the observation of the teachings in Torah and taking as environment the Talmud's ethical universe, he departed to a profound dive into the *halachot* – the *laws*, precepts elaborated on the concrete reality of the human behaviour.

He took the *halachot*, in a certain sense, like the ideal of the *dharma* – an objective of equilibrium in life, a root for the *enlightenment*.

The *equilibrium, balance*, is, for Maimonides, the very first sign of a sane body – guided by the hands of a talented physician; of a sane mind – produced by the philosopher’s universe; but also sign of an integer society – oriented by sage governors.

*Three* steps that are always present in his thought.

For him, the *equilibrium* is founded in the *knowledge* – having everything blended by the *education*, which its Latin meaning, from the term *educere*, indicates the act of *to drive*, the *orientation*, reminding the rule of the *pilot* recalled by Norbert Wiener’s *cybernetics* or by the old and fascinating Greek Paideia.

*Knowledge* is, for him, a natural *need*, a natural *necessity*.

From the interminable persecution, crowned by the donation of a whole life to the intellectual reflection, it appeared his main and monumental work made in fourteen volumes – the *Mishné Torah*, that it is also known as the *Yad Hachazaká*.

In the introduction of the *Mishné Torah* he defended that «this book is a compilation of all Oral Law. Who studies the Written Law, the Pentateuch, and this work, will know the whole Torah and will not need to consult any other book».

Maimonides is recognised as a *Talmudist* par excellence – who privileges the observation of ethics.

And however he was never considered a mystic, it is important to remind that the logical structure of the kabbalah, took here as philosophical method, would had furnished him undeniable subsidies for practically everything he elaborated during the years.

Two elements emerge, in this moment, as structural reference of his thought. One of them is, exactly, that logical strategy that so deeply marked the kabbalah and that launches profound roots in the Sumerian universe.

Such logical strategy is characterised by *triadic* relations.

Typical relations that coined the *mind design* of so many thinkers along the times.

Together with this strong element, and in a very surprisingly way, a truly revolutionary approach that surely only could have appeared in a moment *between* civilisational fields, there is the other essential factor of his ideas: a thing we could, not free from some risk, indicate as a proto model of the *third included*: logical principle genially unveiled almost one thousand years later by the mathematician Stephanie Lupasco.

There were two basic structuring elements of Maimonides' thought – the ethics and the structure of thought, the latter responsible for intense, long, energetic and polemic discussions.

His ideas unveil complex relations designed by a strong triadic nature, launching roots to the mythical Sumerian world, like what also happened with the primitive Indo European societies, very close to the kabalah.

In kabalah, the *Tree of Life* organises itself in triadic sceneries through its ten *sephirot*.

The comprehension of the *logic* as following – *a priori* – to a triadic principle will determine many of Maimonides' reflections during all his life.

In this way, accordingly to his texts, it would exist *three* natures of the evil: the degeneration of the matter, the despotic dominium between human beings, and «the evil that reaches each one of us through our own acts, so frequently happening».

For him, *wisdom* and *wish*, or *faith* and *reason* no longer are object of any conflict, reminding us that the main link between God and the human being is nothing more than *intelligence, knowledge*.

With a defence that brings to our minds some of the most recent discoveries in neurosciences – especially that one bravely explained by Antonio Damasio according to which *emotion* and *reason* pertain to a same cognitive complex – for Maimonides *faith, reason* and the *world* reveal themselves as continuous particles of a unique logical *corpus*.

All bundled by triadic structures.

Even the definition of the *four* types of propositions, suggested by him in his *Treated of the Art of Logics*, can be understood as immediately reversible to a system that notably is *triadic*.

He states that the *propositions*, at a logical level, would be of *four* types: the *sensorial propositions*; what he called the *first intelligible* – like to know, for example, that «the whole is more than one of its parts»; the *generally accepted opinions* and, finally, the *traditions*.

In that same work he suggested that either the “generally accepted opinions” as well as the “traditions” could be considered kinds of “phases” of a same category.

The so-called *first intelligible* would be the *perceived things*.

Thus, we would have the *sensorial perceptions*, the *first intelligible* and, finally, the *traditions*. Or: *sensorial qualities, concrete objects and laws*.

This logical principle seems to have been more than essential, true conceptual guide to his thought.

The whole existence would be, so, composed by *three* fundamental relations: *cosmic matter and form; terrestrial matter and form; and, finally, the pure form*. Relations we can take as *planets and celestial spheres; minerals, animals and vegetables; and, finally, the ideas*. It is a complex strategy of articulation that can be understood as relations of *deduction, induction and inference*. Or, even as rules that can be changed here or there: *reason, existence and quality*.

In his famous and fascinating *Guide of the Perplexed*, he considers *three* words as fundamental for what he called the “path to wisdom”.

These words are *hesed* – that could be understood as something close to love and care; *mishpat* – the judgement; and *sedaqah* – firmness and correction. «Thus, it can be resumed affirming that *hesed* is applied to the beneficence took in its absolute dimension; *sedaqah* to all good action made by you facing to a moral virtue with which the soul is perfected; and *mishpat*, that sometimes has as consequence the punishment and others the help».

*Hesed* can be related to Peirce's *firstness*, as *sedaqah* to his *secondness* and *mishpat* to *thirdness* – genial scheme designed already in the passage from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

*Sedaqah* – correction, ethics – directly refers to the behaviour, to the concreteness of actions, while *mishpat* bases itself on the laws, on the rational reflection *a priori*.

Maimonides accepted, still, the tripartite division of the soul as proposed by Galen and it surely was also inspired on the ancient Mesopotamian traditions.

According to that division, a thing he called *natural power* would be reinforced by the *correct food*; his concept of *vital power* could be improved and amplified by *sounds*; and, finally, the *psychic power* could be changed and improved by the *perfume*.

Even considering the alimentation as a *primary* thing, we can select what is more or less tasty, what we *prefer*, what we *judge* be better or worse to our bodies – establishing *judgements, decisions*. On the other hand, hearing obeys to a diachronic order, which has a polar and causal nature: a number *two*. And olfaction is the most integral of our senses, also in great part responsible for a good part of our long-term memories' structures – a number *one*.

*A third, a second and a first.*

*Flavours, music and perfume: three essential elements of the soul.*

To him it would also exist *three* distinct kinds of soul: the *natural*, the *vital* and the *psychic*.

His medicine follows to the same logical strategy with *three* different classes of treatments: the *preventive*, the *curative* and a third one oriented to the *recovering*, specially destined to convalescent people.

The first treatment looked to deal with health in way to prevent the appearance of illnesses – problems that are not present yet, manifesting a principle of *firstness*.

The second class referred to the concrete treatment of illnesses – perfect *secondness*.

And the last one, which also included what would be called *geriatrics*, which was proposed only in 1909 by Dr. Ignatz Leo Nascher: dealing with *aging* process: a *thirdness*.

Not only, he still defended that it would be *three* essential qualities to designate the true *disciple of Abraham*: the *good sight*, the *humbleness* and the *abnegation*.



The *good sight* is *firstness*, unequivocal relation of *quality*; the *humbleness* happens facing to an *Other* and, therefore, it is a relation of *existence*, of *secondness*; while *abnegation* implicates some kind of *judgement*, of *reason* – *thirdness*.

Maimonides considered also people, in general, as pertaining to *three* large groups.

The people who do not detain themselves in face to the surprising questions of life are the *flanneurs*, like it was *designed* by Baudelaire in the 19<sup>th</sup> century – true *zombies*, the Toltec's *phantoms*, or *badauds* for Walter Benjamin. They constituted the first group.

The next group would be formed by the people that obediently take as truth literally everything they perceive with their senses, without any questioning, without reflection, without criticism – people that consider themselves, according to Rambam, true *intellectuals*, but they are only *encyclopaedic* individuals, for whom everything can be resumed to a mechanic memorisation of facts and laws. We could easily include here some fundamentalists.

Finally, characterising a formidable minority, would be those whom, after profound questionings and reflections, would be able to understand the *logic*, the structural order of the ideas, distinguishing them «between clear and hidden meanings».

Just in the beginning of the *Guide of the Perplexed*, Maimonides designs *three* fundamental categories that will orientate his whole thought: the *symbolic*, the *imaginary* and the *real*!

The triadic relations, at a logical level, are strongly related to the emergence of the *verb* and to the phenomenon of *predication* – this *is* that, *principle-middle-and-end*.

A *logic* related to the physical and sensorial structure of the internal ear – which become *content* of a society in transition to a more intensely *visual* culture.

It was in this way that Aristotle, already living in a period of intensification of the use of vision through the papyrus associated to the phonetic alphabet – period that would disintegrate the logic represented in the Greek State-Cities and unchains Roman dominium – would establish the bases for a principle known as the *third excluded*. That is, if something is taken as *existent*, its *non-existence* is impossible. Or, in other words, it is not possible two contradictory things exist in simultaneity.

However this principle appears to many of us as evident and however it had dominated Western philosophy until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it is not an absolute truth.

Shopenhauer lively questioned that logical principle defended by Aristotle, with the introduction of the concepts of *local* and *non-local causalities*.

At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the various thesis turned to a *Super String Theory* would definitively crown Shopenhauer's ideas.

Maimonides represents a fascinating anticipation, in various centuries, of these intriguing ideas.

An anticipation that was many times equivocally interpreted as incomprehensible incoherence, paradoxes and contradictions.

The first of his writings of the adult phase was the *Commentary on the Mishná*, started when he was only twenty-five years old, in the moment he departed to Fez, and that consumed thirteen years of studies.

The *Mishná* essentially deals with the Hebrew *corpus juris*, elaborated in the first three centuries after Christ. They are the Hebrew laws transmitted, until then, orally – knew as the *oral tradition*.

Curiously, the root *sh-n-h* that composed the term *Mishná*, means “to teach”, but also “to repeat” – as if the teaching specially happened through *repetition*. This will be, also, at least in part, the second meaning of the word *religion*, that launches itself to the Latin medieval expression *relegere*, in a certain opposition, or complementation, to its previous root, much older, that was *religare*.

In his *Mishná*, Maimonides draws some essential deep considerations. The most important of them, known as *The Eight Chapters*, deals with the *Aboth* treated, a collection of ethical and religious maxims elaborated by ancient rabies – establishing a strong relation between religious elements and philosophical discussions.

It is in *The Eight Chapters* that his relation with Aristotle as well as with Arab thinkers – like Alfarabi, who he admired so much – is more clearly revealed.

Recalling the Aristotle's defence, according to which the faculties of the soul can be classified in five departments – also here launching himself to the ancient Sumerian universe – he asks about «what faculties would be pertinent to the religious law commandments». And he gives the answer: «those that are subject to our decision and choice».

Thus, the religious laws would always be oriented to *reason*.

We cannot control our digestion, our growing, our arterial pressure, the temperature of our bodies, or even our *imagination*.

Therefore, the Law couldn't be directly oriented to the aesthetics, but would be preferentially dealing with verbal language, essential fundament of the *reason*, leading to framework of aesthetical impact *a posteriori*.

Because art – inevitably linked to *imagination* – would be, in its most profound sense, and should always be, free!

That is, free from everything that is culture!

Related to the sensorial universe, but tracing deep links to the transcendental and enlightening some of what he could had taken as *aesthetics*, we find his conception of *prophecy*.

«The prophecy is a overflow overflowing from God through the intermediation of the active intellect, first by the rational faculty and later by the faculty of the imagination» – clearly defending the rule of the knowledge, of the intellectual formation, as *sine qua non* condition for the *prophecy*.

It is curious, to say the minimum, to observe the parallel between this statement and Hegel's one when explaining that the work on art follows a direction from the laws to the relations of quality.

By this way, the prophets could not be unprepared people, but yes true philosophers leaded, principally, by *reason*.

Reason that *explains* us, by its own nature, the meaning of the *prophecy*, *pre-vision*, anticipation inside a complex of *causality*.

All this means that Maimonides privileged took the behaviour world as *content*, evidencing a phenomenon knew as *illusion of contiguity*, which would *design* the Western society centuries later.

Our behaviour would correspond to *contents of information*, complexes of reason.

To him, everything in the obeisance of Law must, therefore, be founded in the *volition*, in a certain sense anticipating – again – Schopenhauer and the will as essential representation of the world.

The Law would be, thus, consecrated in a strongly hierarchic structure, in a *vanishing point, perspective* strategy – that does not directly affect the world of the senses, the quality relations.

It is with *decision* and *action* – always implicating language – that Maimonides privileged deals with.

Around the year of 1180, when he was about forty-two years old, his great work is presented – the *Code of the Law*, also known as *Mishné Torah* – trying to code «all Laws in Torah and its regulations, omitting nothing».

Here, as it would happen so many times, the word *codification* seems to constitute the central key of his thought.

Maimonides takes the Universe as a *coded system*, whose comprehension, intellection, through continuous learning, can lead to *enlightenment*, to a cosmic understanding, to *revelation*.

But, *revelation* only and exclusively through *knowledge*.

It is when he definitively eliminates all separation between *science* and *philosophy*, through methodological and ethical principles projected by the sacred scripture.

During all life he practically always wrote in Arab or in Jewish-Arab. His only work wrote in Hebrew was the *Sefer há-madda* – the *Book of Knowledge* – the first part of the *Mishné Torah*.

He started writing very early.

His first work was *Millot há-higgayon* – *Logical Terminology* – wrote when he was only thirteen or fourteen years old, still living in the Iberian Peninsula.

Israel Efros would define the *Logical Terminology* as a true introduction to philosophy.

For him everything turns around the *writing*, the letter – the word pertaining to the book.

It is a posture that much later would be characteristic, by the most diverse ways, to the so-called West after Gutenberg's invention of the movable types press.

So, the *Mishné Torah* is a profound exercise of *classification*, very similar to what that characterised Aristotle's work.

Everything founded on *knowledge*.

It would be placed in the original knowledge, in the essential laws of the Universe, the key for the understanding of life.

By this way, Aristotle's *First Motor* becomes nothing more than an element of *intelligence*.

His *Commentary on the Mishná* was followed by a gigantic ensemble of texts, passing by the *Treated of the Art of Logics*, the famous *Guide of the Perplexed* and his epistles among many others.

It would be in his fascinating and intriguing *Guide of the Perplexed* the definitive recognition of his works devoted to the philosophical interpretation of the sacred texts.

Wrote between the years of 1185 and 1190, as a reply to a young pupil called Joseph ben Judah ibn Shimon, from Morocco, who travelled to Egypt to study with him, the *Guide* would become, surely, in the most celebrated work by Maimonides.



For about three years the young disciple studied with him astronomy, logics and philosophy.

In 1185, ibn Shimon departed to Aleppo. In the same period Maimonides became physician of Saladino's vizier, in Cairo, and decided to write a profound reflection on the perplexity that affects a cult and intelligent person when read the sacred scriptures.

Being the scriptures the key for the comprehension of the Universe, the work refers, in last instance, the perplexity that we all are object facing to the complexity of the knowledge itself.

Before, yet, it deals with the perplexity facing to the amazement of discovery, to what Socrates so magisterially presented a Theaeteto as the justification, par excellence, of life itself.

The first sixty-nine chapters of the *Guide of the Perplexed* take the greatest possible generator of perplexity – the concept of God.

For him, the anthropomorphic descriptions of God in the Bible are symbolic with a didactical objective – how to turn everything more comprehensible to the ordinary human being, to our original limitations.

It is here, in his analysis of the concept of God that such a proto-model of the *third included* principle appears with clearest evidence – revealing his giant leap ahead Aristotle.

If, by one side, when «we consider the divine actions it is the same to say about the natural actions» – presenting the roots of Espinoza’s ideas, who was so violently attacked under the accusation of atheism – we have God as everything, time and space. On another side, God is the *First Motor*, which caused everything, being the original cause and total essence.

Being the origin of everything and being in everything, God simply cannot be *known*.

But, He is – equally – everything and nothing, including the human beings.

To Maimonides, there is no room for any opposition or difference between Nature and God.

However, simultaneously, God is another entity, separated from its creation.

This eminently paradoxical approach has been, since a long time, questioned because the logical instrumental of its critics, with a strong literary nature, did not predicted the *third included* principle: the possible existence of *a, non-a*, as well as *a* and *non-a*.

To Maimonides, God is everything, eternal, but also is the *First Motor: fate and free-will*.

But! Being eternal and in everything, the *first cause* would be free of time and space and, therefore, eternal and always present. However, if this is true, it shouldn't be possible the *beginning* of the times and, so, the sacred texts would be condemned.

Maimonides defended that God is eternal, present in everything, but He is also the *first cause*, unchaining what we call as *existence*.

On the other hand, an eternal world – as defended by Aristotle – implicates the notion of *free will*, of the volition; while a world started by a *cause*, with a *space-time* character, provoking a causal system in chain, in a crescent complexity, meaning the absolute dominium of the *destine*, not of volition.

Maimonides considers, however, that the world is not eternal – having a beginning, a middle and an end – but, in apparent paradox, the Law exclusively refers to the universe of volition, to the free will, to reason, indicating its eternal nature.

Defences took as contradictory and polemic when we do not have on hands the *third included* logic resource.

Thus, the most interesting point isn't exactly *what* he defends, but *how* he does it: the structure of thought that characterises, that *designs* his ideas.

The Law is *thirdness* par excellence – as it was later defined by Charles Sanders Peirce. So, it is the *reason* and it obligatorily refers to it, implicating a past and a future, a universe of *causality*.

But the *obedience* to the Law implicates the notion of free will, of decision, of eternity.

The beginning of everything can had been subject to the will, to the volition, to a condition of eternity that projects itself in causality, in a finite world – this is the conflictive logic of the Law.

After all, how could miracles exist in an eternal process?

God is eternal.

And how could we admit the inexistence of strong relations between the world and its Creator?

The notion of *miracle* implicates the *non-eternal*, a *singularity*, a change – in the same way that it happens with the beginning and the end of things.

Eternity is *non-Law*, par excellence, because it implicates the *non-change*, the permanence as *totality*.

According to Maimonides, God is eternal and, simultaneously, the *First Motor*, the *First Cause*, in a world *created*, departing from a *will*, and that can be subject to miracles, *being and not being*, at the same time, not submitting itself to a logic of the *third excluded*, typically Aristotelian, but anticipating the *third included principle*.

The same happens with his treatment to the *divine attributes*, considered as a very controversial point of his thought.

The word *attribute* was born from the Arab term *sifa*, which can also indicate the ideas of *description*, of *character* or of *property* in the sense of quality of something.

But, if God is *One* – in the Pythagorean sense of *total unity*, universal singularity – how could exist His *attributes, properties*?

To be *and* not to be, this is the question.

When we have a property, an attribute, it exists in reference to something exterior to itself. For example, if something is blue – this quality, blue, is a part of its object and not its totality. However if it is its own *totality*, it would be the object itself and not an *attribute*.

However, as defended by Maimonides, God is *One*!

God is and is not – implicating the whole, and existing as an absolute whole it also means to be His own negation.

Only a *totos*, an absolute whole is also its own negation.

There is no possible direct relation between God and His creatures and, at the same time, God is everything, *including* His creatures.

Departing from this formidable logical design, Maimonides deals with the proof of the existence of God: if He is everything, then it is not possible any knowledge *about* Him – because any knowledge that could exist nothing more is than *part* of its object.

Being everything, being One, a universal *totos*, God can not be *known*, being much beyond of any comprehension because He is, in Himself, the total *knowledge*.

Always when we mean something, we do it in relation to something that is out of its own meaning. The *meaning*, like the *History*, always aspires to its maximum signification, to its object, but it is an impossible aspiration, because if we would reach to it, the signification itself would less to be, becoming its own object.

By this way, the word *apple*, for example, aspires – while signification – to its object, but it is different, and it continues to be a word.

This exercise of verbal language is *a priori* impossible in relation to the concept of God that is, by definition, *everything*.

Because of this, he considers the imagination as a *lower* faculty – because it is *far* from its object, it is, in some sense, degenerated.

Maimonides aspires himself to the maximum concreteness, to the very last signification of everything.

It was this approach that, in a certain sense, made Jackson Pollock – among others – when looking for a painting that would be nothing more than itself: everything being there, in its own existence.

Surely, the most popularised trace of his logical strategies was the principle of *negation* – our no knowledge about God is the great proof that He exists; because so great is His grandiosity that we wouldn't have *existential* conditions to detect His own existence, however we know that it is because we can *cogitate* on.

A negation that implicates the concrete existence of everything.

In cabalistic terms, the principle of negation is expressed, in the *Tree of Life*, by the highest degree of the ten *sefirot* – called *Keter*, or *Crown*, that disappears in the *Nothing*, but which also is *Everything* and that, so, can not have a *Name*.

However such articulation by Rambam had been of a unique excellence, projecting itself through the centuries, the philosophical principle of negation was not new in his lifetime.

At least since the ancient Greece, in a systematic way, it always happened all kinds of speculations from such principle.

Following these steps, Maimonides would defend that, considering that all and any *existence* implicates its opposite, it would be, consequently, a *non-existent* entity.

If something is *everything*, it is because this *everything* is in opposition to a *nothing*.

To know something that doesn't exist we deal, therefore, with what exists – and even so, its signification will always be negative.

According to this strategy we try to know God by what He is not – that is, by everything we know. Because, in a last instance, we only know particulars and never, in fact, the universal.

This logical exercise become known as *via negativa* and would indicate many of his ideas.



Following to his words, the affirmative, or *positive*, attributes «always indicate a part of the thing we want to know, be a part of the substance, be a part of its accidents, while the *negative* attributes makes us know, in some way, what really is the essence of what we wish to know».

Maimonides' *via negativa* flagrantly touched Espinoza, hardly accused of atheism because only through negation we could suppose to know something about the concept of God.

But, Maimonides goes beyond and defends a thing that becomes known as the *principle of admissibility*: anything we can imagine is admissible.

This principle nothing more is than the essential fundament of what, several centuries later, we would know as the *utopia*: what is surprisingly possible, but not previously admitted as such.

And from this point he makes to emerge a question: why the things are like they are and not in a different way? Recalling as answer, another time, the Law – but not as a dogmatic theologian and yes taking the Law itself as indicative of the Nature's *way of work*.

Things are like they are because of their *way of work*, because of their *function* – taking, therefore, the *function* as the very first nature of everything.

This essential difference between an organization established by an exclusively hierarchic way – as it happens with the *teleology* – and other, of metabolic nature, like what it would happen with the Darwinian principles, would be definitively illuminated in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by the concept of *teleonomy* by Konrad Lorenz.

In fact, for Maimonides the world is a creation of God and it happens in a hierarchical form – but, at the same time, God is everything, eternal and, therefore, without time.

«The fishes swim and the birds fly» – he said, indicating that the behaviour, the concrete existence is, in itself, the nature of the things.

Already in the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century we find curious references in Gerald Edelman's thesis named *topobiology* – the tendency of atoms, molecules and even substances to form specialised groupings in function to their structural order – or even before with the Gestalt.

In an environment that had practically lost many of its links to the Greek tradition, Maimonides would recall much of the Aristotle's thought – for whom the number privileged was *quantity*; but also that of Plato and Pythagoras – for whom the number was *quality* – giving a new life to the Classical tradition and pushing ahead an enriched philosophical current that would unchain what it would be known as the *Western Renaissance*.

Maimonides lived in an epoch when Europe started to produce paper, for the first time..

The beginning of paper production in Europe, which would indicate a formidable social transformation, happens, precisely, in the Iberian Peninsula, where he was born.

It was a period that gradually announced the domination of vision on the other senses.

Even on this point Maimonides was a pioneer.

When he described the development of an *ideal* human being, a human being closer to perfection, he made clear the importance of the dominion of vision on the other senses.

Such an *ideal* human being would acquire knowledge up to reach «a perfect intellect as well as pure and balanced habits». When this happens, «all his wishes are directed to the learning of the science on everything that exists and the respective causes... Through that knowledge he will have his thought detached from all bestial things, as he will had abolished his wishes for these things – I want say about the preference for the pleasures of the food, of the flavours, the drinks, the sexual acts and, in general, the sense of tact...».

It is in this way that, in the fifth chapter of the *Guide of the Perplexed*, he explains *three* Hebraic roots related to the visual perception, as of essential importance to prepare the intellect.

This posture would know a strong development in the West, principally after the Renaissance.

He defended that of all faculties of the human spirit, only the intellect, founded on the *reason* and established after the vision, can be immortal. The other senses, like taste, olfaction, hearing or tact, would be so intensely and so directly linked to the matter that, with the disintegration of the body, nothing could survive of them.

Vision, coined by light, immaterial element par excellence, would produce a kind of detachment from the matter, generating the only form that could become *immortal*.

Also here Maimonides doesn't hide his admiration for Aristotle's thought.

The structure that fundamentals his ideas articulate itself by a unique *corpus*, merging religion and philosophy, recalling in the Nature the sacred laws, producing a kind of *Unified Theory*, all established in a network of relations that happens in function of a strongly hierarchical tree, as if it would be designed by a virtual, potential and generator *vanishing point*.

We identify all these elements, of one or other way, with the Renaissance thought, with the Enlightenment, with the Decartes' ideas, or even the ideas of Hume, Berkeley, Kant, Hegel and many others.

One can imagine how Maimonides' work would end to reveal itself as an essential reference for thinkers like Espinoza, Thomas Aquinas, Newton, Leibniz and Emanuel Kant – to refer just a very few names.

In his powerful jump to the classical Greece Maimonides would represented, still, the fundamental link, at a logical level, to the ancient Sumerian tradition.

Charles Sanders Peirce affirmed that «the imagination of the ancient Babylonian was a help and not a barrier to their great advance facing to the Egyptian of even facing to the first Greek in the discovery of general truths in geometry, algebra and astronomy, this being the 'queen of the sciences'».

For Maimonides, the “logic” – *mantiq* in Arab, word derived from a verb that means *to reason* or *to speak*, but that many times is curiously translated as *divination* – has *three* different senses.

The first one is the *reason* itself.

The second is the *intelligible thing*, what is perceptible, the *perceived* thing.

The third sense is the notion emerged in the soul, the emotions: *perception* in its iconic dimension.

«The first is (...) the rational power. The second meaning is the intelligible itself (...). The third meaning is the expression, in language, of the notions impressed on the soul»... all this according to his own words.

How many identities we can easily find between the strategies of thought of Maimonides and Peirce!

However, for Maimonides, even acting in the sphere of the reason, the idea of Law is not a pure *rational* thing – it would be placed *beyond* what we understand as *reason*.

For him, the *Law* means what ordines all things, the general principle of articulation of everything and that, meaning *total* order, being beyond the logic itself, cannot completely be understood by reason.

While for Maimonides the idea of *Law* is something similar to the Anaxagoras' *hidden order*, to the Pythagoras' principles of *number*, the concept of *law* for Peirce is a phenomenon of language, near to the *logos* as understood by Heraclitus.

Thus, the concept of *law* for Peirce seems to be, synthetically, equivalent to the *rational power* of Maimonides.

Maimonides would be considered one of the most important medieval philosophers. His celebrity did not remain closed inside the strict circles of acclaimed thinkers and philosophers.

In Portugal, he was even taken as a Portuguese master, however never had been there.

But his gigantic and fascinating work did not pass free of controversies and persecutions.

In 1320, Solomon ben Abraham, living in Montpellier, prohibited the study of the *Guide of the Perplexed*, the *Book of the Knowledge* and his philosophical works in general, under the risk of excommunication for the Jewish community.

In Spain, critics of his ideas solicited help from Dominican and Franciscan priests to confiscate and burn his books.

For Maimonides, along his whole life, the establishment of the method was a manifested essential thing.

Everything forging a world where knowledge, the continuous learning of the laws of Nature, the non-separation between action and reflection, between faith and reason, are his essential signs.

In his approaches to the world, the classificatory apparatus – typically Aristotelian – is only a tool for the comprehension of a dynamic and *non-linear* model.

A think that makes us remind Octavio Paz when he affirmed that «a community would be that universal society where the relations between human beings, far to be an imposition of the exterior necessity, would be like an alive fabric, made by the fatality of each one interlacing to the freedom of all».