The Cambridge Companion to

MEDIEVAL
JEWISH
PHILOSOPHY

Edited by

Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman
University of Kentucky

5. L. Nemoy (trans.), "The Pseudo-Qumisian Sermon to the Karaites," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 43 (1976), 49–105.

6. Cf. S. Stroumsa, "From the Earliest Known Judaeo-Arabic Commentary on Genesis," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 27 (2002), 375–95.

7. H. Malter, *Saadia Gaon, his Life and Works* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1921), 119, 198.

8. Saadya, *Amanat*, 4–10; Saadya, *Beliefs and Opinions*, 5–12.

9. Saadya, *Amanat*, 10; Saadya, *Beliefs and Opinions*, 13; Saadya, *Commentary on Ecclesiastes*, ed. J. Qafih (Jerusalem: Sura, 1976), 17–18.

10. Saadya, *Amanat*, 193–4; Saadya, *Beliefs and Opinions*, 236–9.

11. H. Davidson, "Saadia's List of Theories of the Soul," in *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, ed. A. Altmann (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), 75–94.

12. Saadya, *Amanat*, 44–58; Saadya, *Beliefs and Opinions*, 50–66.

13. R. Brody, *The Geonim of Babylonia and the Shaping of Medieval Jewish Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 257–8

14. For instance, Saadya, *Amanat*, 97–110; Saadya, *Beliefs and Opinions*, 112–16.

15. A. Dotan, *The Dawn of Hebrew Linguistics: The Book of Elegance of the Language of the Hebrews by Saadia Gaon* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1997), 1: 96–104.

16. S. Pines, "Points of Similarity between the Exposition of the Doctrine of the Sefirot in the *Sefer Yetzira* and a Text of the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies: The Implications of this Resemblance; Appendix II: Quotations from Saadya's Commentary on the *Sefer Yetzira* in a Poem by Ibn Gabirol and in the *Fons Vitae*," *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities* 7.3 (1989), 122–6; reprinted in W. Z. Harvey and M. Idel (eds.), *The Collected Works of Shlomo Pines*. v. *Studies in the History of Jewish Thought* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1997), 153–7.

17. Malter, *Saadia*, 228.

18. R. Drory, *The Emergence of Jewish–Arabic Literary Contacts at the Beginning of the Tenth Century* [Hebrew], *Literature, Meaning, Culture* 17 (Tel Aviv, 1988); Drory, *Models and Contacts – Arabic Literature and its Impact on Medieval Jewish Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), ch. 5.

19. L. Strauss, "The Literary Character of the *Guide of the Perplexed*," in his *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1952; reprinted, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 41. But see W. Z. Harvey, "Why Maimonides was not a Mutakallim," in *Perspectives on Maimonides*, ed. J. L. Kraemer (Oxford: Littman Library, 1991), 105–14.

SARAH PESSIN

5   Jewish Neoplatonism: Being above Being and divine emanation in Solomon ibn Gabirol and Isaac Israeli*

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGICAL OVERVIEW

Defining Jewish Neoplatonism is no easy task, due in no small part to the difficulty of defining "Neoplatonism." In an effort to best understand these categories, I will isolate two conceptual issues – the nature of the Godhead, and its relation to the cosmos – in Plotinus (the pagan third-century founder of Neoplatonism), and then, with recourse to Solomon ibn Gabirol in the first case and Isaac Israeli in the second, I will examine the extent to which these issues can be seen to exist – unmodified – within the corpus of Jewish Neoplatonism. By suggesting, first, ways in which each of these Plotinian issues seems, prima facie, at odds with the parallel Jewish Neoplatonic views, but then by emphasizing how in fact they are reconcilable with the Jewish versions, I will challenge oversimplified estimations not only of the nature of Plotinus' own philosophy, but of what real differences exist between it and Jewish Neoplatonism. In this way I will have indirectly been examining what exactly counts as "Neoplatonism," Jewish or otherwise. By proceeding in this way,

I hope to do justice to the elusive connections that exist between various Neoplatonic textual traditions. By focusing on the works of two early Jewish Neoplatonists, this chapter, rather than attempting to be comprehensive, suggests conceptual starting points from which one might address and evaluate the degree, implications, and development of Neoplatonism in any number of other Jewish texts.

Before proceeding, a further clarification of my methodology is in order. In what follows, I aim to analyze Gabirol and Israeli along Plotinian lines. Of course, neither Gabirol nor Israeli was directly influenced by Greek texts of Neoplatonism, and the Arabic versions of Plotinian and Proclean materials by which they were influenced contain many changes from Plotinus' *Enneads*. While mindful of this fact, I am here interested in questioning the extent to which textual changes between Arabic and Greek Neoplatonic texts need be taken as representing deep philosophical differences between the two traditions. I suggest that they need not be seen as representing such differences. While it is certainly possible that, for example, the replacement of Plotinus' notion of a One "above Being" with a God identical to Being, and a similar textual replacement of "emanation" with "creation *ex nihilo*" might represent major departures from Plotinus' worldview, in what follows I aim to examine the extent to which such changes might nonetheless be seen in genuinely Plotinian terms. As long as I can reconcile terminological changes in the Arabic Neoplatonic traditions (and in the Jewish texts that are rooted in those traditions) with Plotinus' own views, there is no prima facie reason to take those changes as reflecting deep conceptual upheavals of Plotinus' own views. In presenting below what I denominate as the "Neoplatonic Naming Principle" and the "Neoplatonic Causal Principle," as well as in addressing the different senses of "*nihil*" in "creation *ex nihilo*," I attempt to provide some means by which the reader might more readily entertain conceptual reconciliations between Arabic (and Jewish) texts and Plotinian Neoplatonism.

JEWISH NEOPLATONISM IN CONTEXT

Among the earliest Neoplatonic Jewish thinkers are Isaac Israeli (850–c. 932/55) and Solomon ibn Gabirol (1021–1054/8). Because of the rootedness of early Jewish Neoplatonists within a host of Arabic textual traditions (Islamic Spain and North Africa being the home of

the Jewish Neoplatonists), we might meaningfully categorize them under the broader heading "Arabic Neoplatonists." In fact, Jewish Neoplatonism reveals traces of a huge mix of oftentimes conceptually disparate philosophical and theological Arabic materials, including the vulgate and "longer" versions of the *Theology of Aristotle*, the *Liber de Causis* (or, *Kalam fi mahd al-khayr*), the pseudo-Empedoclean *Book of Five Substances*, Ibn Hasday's *Neoplatonist*, the encyclopedic works of the Ikhwan al-Safa' (the Brethren of Purity), and the writings of al-Kindi, al-Farabi, and Ibn Sina. Additionally we find reverberations of more esoteric Jewish and Islamic materials such as the *Sefer Yetzira* (and its commentaries), the *Ghayat al-Hakim*,[1] and Gnostic Isma'ili materials.[2] Add to this mix Arabic translations of works of Plato, Aristotle, and Neopythagorean treatises and it becomes clear just how many conceptual possibilities must be weighed before interpreting even a single claim within a text of Jewish Neoplatonism.

Apart from the specific background philosophical sources, I might also note that an investigation into a number of literary forms, philosophical as well as non-philosophical, is often helpful, even necessary on occasion,[3] toward the goal of retrieving as complete a picture as possible of a given Jewish Neoplatonist's philosophical doctrine. In addition to philosophical treatises, many of our authors also composed Bible and/or *Sefer Yetzira* (*Book of Creation*) commentaries, as well as devotional and secular poems, many of which are replete with philosophically revealing details. The complicated philosophical system of Gabirol, for example, is presented not only in his famous *Mekor Hayyim* (Lat. *Fons Vitae*), but also in a commentary on Genesis attributed to him by Abraham ibn Ezra, and is certainly evidenced in many of his poems.

Finally, many Jewish Neoplatonic ideas might additionally be found amidst the rich tapestry of kabbalistic materials, though one must caution against anachronistically reading back later ideas into the earliest Jewish Neoplatonic thinkers.[4]

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF PLOTINUS: TOWARDS A SUBTLER APPRECIATION OF JEWISH NEOPLATONISM

Turning to an analysis of Jewish Neoplatonism, I will proceed as follows: I commence with Plotinus' views on (1) the nature of the Godhead, and (2) the nature of the Godhead's relationship to the

cosmos, along with parallel Jewish Neoplatonic discussions of these issues. In each case, I first examine the ways in which the Jewish Neoplatonic thesis seems to be a rejection – or at least a significant modification – of Plotinus. I then show, in each case, that the Jewish Neoplatonic thesis in question need not be seen in fact as representing any philosophical departure from Plotinus' own.

On the Nature of the Godhead: The Godhead as Being, the Godhead as "Above Being"

GABIROL AND PLOTINUS IN CONFLICT? Neoplatonic texts reveal in general an interest in various grades of reality, a great "chain of being," with one level nested in the next, leading, through a gradual series of ascending layers, to the Godhead itself, the highest level in the hierarchy. In this regard, consider some of the systemizations shown in Figure 1:

Plotinus
1. One (= above Being)
2. Universal Intellect (= Being)
3. World Soul
4. Nature

Proclus
1. One (= above Being)
2. *Henads*
3. Limit and Unlimited
4. One-Being
5. Life
6. Intellect
7. Soul
8. Nature

Liber de Causis
1. Pure Being (*Anniyya mahda*); Being Only (*Anniyya faqat*)
2. Intellect (First Created Being)
3. Soul
4. Nature

Gabirol
1. First Essence, Creator, Being Only (*Esse Tantum*)
2. Will[5]
3. Universal Matter, Universal Form
4. Universal Intellect (First Created Being)
5. [World] Rational Soul
6. [World] Animal / Sensitive Soul
7. [World] Nutritive Soul
8. Sphere / Nature

Figure 1. Neoplatonic Hierarchies of Being

Turning for our purposes to one main difference between these two pagan and two monotheistic cosmologies, one finds that whereas Plotinus and Proclus are committed to a Godhead that is a One above Being, our two monotheistic Neoplatonic systems have in common

the apparent rejection of any such description of the Godhead. Instead of placing God "above Being," these systems *identify* God with Being (Arabic, *anniyya*[6]), Being Only (*Esse Tantum*). (In addition, in the case of Gabirol himself, one should note his descriptions of God as the "Primum Esse"[7] and "Esse Verum,"[8] as well as his demarcating an infinite principle of Active Being [*Esse Agens*].[9])

For the Jewish Neoplatonic identification of God with Being Only, consider the following: At a point in the *Fons Vitae* (*FV*) where Gabirol addresses the relevance to God of the four questions that can prima facie be asked of any being, "whether?" "what?" "how?" and "why?", he suggests that only the existential "whether?" question ("*an est?*", i.e. "whether [something exists]") can be properly asked of God. This latter question is based on Aristotle's classification at *Posterior Analytics* 2:1, and it is in Gabirol's granting to God only an existential "thatness" that he may be seen as identifying God with Being Only. In context, Gabirol's identification of this existential question is presented in the following exchange in the *FV*:

Master: . . . I say that existence (*esse*) from the highest to the lowest extremes is distinguished by four orders, viz.,
   a. "whether it is" (*an est*),
   b. "what it is" (*quid est*),
   c. "how it is" (*quale est*) [i.e. what sort of qualities X has],
   d. "why it is" (*quare est*).
Moreover, of these, the most worthy is the one concerning which it is asked *only* "whether it is," not "what it is" or "how it is" and not "why it is," as in the case of [sicut] the Exalted and Blessed Unity; and after this is the one concerning which it is asked "what it is," not "how it is" or "why it is," as in the case of Intellect; after this is the one concerning which it is asked "what it is" and "how it is," not "why it is," as in the case of Soul; after this is the one concerning which it is asked "what it is" and "how it is" and "why it is," just as in the case of Nature and the things generated from it; and each one of these is ordered according to the order of number.
Disciple: In what sense?
Master: Since the question "whether it is" is posited according to the order of "one," since it is being only [*quia est esse tantum*] . . .[10]

From the fact that Shem Tov ibn Falaquera, in his Hebrew translation of this passage, employs the term *metziut* for *esse*, Munk suggested that the Arabic term used by Gabirol here would have been *anniyya*.[11] I might add that the language of "Being Only" in the

above passage quite clearly recalls *anniyya faqat* (lit. "Being Only") which we find in both the *Liber de Causis* and the Arabic Plotinian materials to describe the Godhead. This notion of God as a pure Being devoid of any complexity or limitation may be linked to the Mu'tazilite doctrine of the absolute unity of God (himself seen, as is the case for Gabirol, as a pure essence), and it might also be related to the identification of God with pure and simple Being in Sufi theosophy.[12]

In the above remarks in *FV*, then, we find that one can only ascertain *that* God exists (and not *what* his essence is). From this suggestion, together with Gabirol's clear description of this Being as the First Essence (*al-dhat al-ula*, as evidenced in some of the extant Arabic fragments of the *Fons Vitae*),[13] God emerges as the essence which is one with pure Being.[14] In this way, God is essentially unlike any other existent.

God thus construed as Being Only, then, would certainly seem to differ from the Plotinian One that is, on the contrary, "above Being."

GABIROL AND PLOTINUS RECONCILED. In what follows, however, I offer considerations that would lead us to question whether the Jewish Neoplatonic "God who is Being" must in fact be taken as conceptually distinct from the Plotinian One "above Being."

One must first note that in both the Arabic (incl. Jewish) Neoplatonic textual milieu, as well as in Plotinus' corpus, God is certainly "above *limited* (finite) Being." On this, all of our thinkers agree. Thus, one finds within the Arabic Neoplatonic tradition a bifurcation of *anniyya* into *anniyya faqat* ("Being Only") or *anniyya mahda* ("Pure Being")[15] on the one hand, and "created being" on the other, with the claim that the former is above the latter.

In this regard Gabirol treats Intellect, the first occurrence of "form in matter,"[16] as the first created, or limited, being.[17] But, this being (Intellect) is additionally said to be the cause of "*esse*" in all lower things,[18] and as such additionally emerges as a brand of generic Being per se in which all other composite entities subsist. It is clear that God is "above Being" in at least the sense of transcending the limited grade of Being associated with Intellect, as well as transcending, by extension, all lower composite entities that partake of the Being of Intellect.

Any suggestion, then, that this God is nonetheless not identical with Plotinus' Godhead "above Being" seems to rest on the assumption that, in fact, Plotinus' description is meant as something more extreme than merely "above limited Being."

However, consider the extent to which one might take Plotinus' own description as simply meaning "above limited Being." At *Enneads* 5:5.6, remarking on the access we have to knowing the One, Plotinus says: "the one wanting to contemplate that which is above the intelligible will contemplate the whole of the intelligible having been removed, since one learns 'that it is' in this way, with the 'what it is' having been removed."[19] Following Altmann and Stern,[20] one might see Plotinus' claim here as suggesting that the One is subject only to the existential "whether" question, and not to the "what" question. But, if so, this is no different from Gabirol's above treatment of God's "thatness." So in this regard, Plotinus' treatment of the Godhead is identical to the monotheistic Neoplatonist's account of "God as [identical with] Being."

Consider the sense in which Plotinus places his One "above Being":

Since the substance which is generated [from the One] is form – one could not say that what is generated from that source is anything else – and not the form of some one thing but of everything, so that no other form is left outside it, the One must be without form. But if it is without form it is not a substance; for a substance must be some one particular thing, something, that is, defined and limited; but it is impossible to apprehend the One as a particular thing: for then it would not be the principle, but only that particular thing which you said it was. But if all things are in that which is generated [from the One], which of the things in it are you going to say that the One is? Since it is none of them, it can only be said to be beyond them. But these things are beings, and being: so it is "beyond being."[21]

The One emerges in Plotinus as the principle, origin, and cause of all Being and beings, but is itself devoid of any limitation, and hence is itself "above Being" (*epekeina ontos*, lit. "beyond being"). But given this gloss on the Plotinian description of the Godhead as "above Being," there seems to be no reason to deny the equation of Plotinus' One with the Arabic tradition's *anniyya faqat/mahda*, and hence, with Gabirol's God as Being Only.

So far, then, we have seen that Plotinus identifies the Godhead as the cause of all Being, and also as "above Being." Yet there is Neoplatonic support for affixing the name "Being" to something which is "the cause of" as well as itself *above* Being. In both Plotinus and Proclus we find what we might call the "Neoplatonic Naming Principle" (NNP) at play.[22] This principle says that the cause of some formal reality, while itself lacking that reality, is nonetheless named by that reality. NNP gives us grounds on which to see Plotinus' Godhead under the name "Being," in spite of his not in fact having thus named the One. If such a principle is operative, then one can readily see that Plotinus' One and the "God that is Being" of Gabirol's *Fons Vitae* (and of Arabic texts more generally) are not conceptually distinct.

To this end, consider Gabirol's identification of God with Being, in light of the following Neoplatonic notion, which we might call the "Neoplatonic Causal Principle" (NCP). This principle states that the cause of some formal reality itself lacks – or, is "above" – that formal reality.[23]

To root this principle in Gabirol, one might note his claim that all effects are in their causes (*FV* 3.30, 151, 3), but that they are in their causes only as potencies (*FV* 3.18, 118, 24). As such, causes lack in actuality the formal realities of their effects.

Applying NCP to Gabirol's claim that God is the cause of Being,[24] we might easily conclude that God is, indeed, above Being; we might say he is the "potency to Be," or a principle of preexistence. The mere fact of Gabirol's identifying God as "Being" (*esse*, *anniyya*), then, does not on its own rule out – and Gabirol's general commitment to NCP in fact supports – a clear sense in which God is "above Being."

In addition to the above sense of "Being" denoting the composite entity of Intellect, there is an additional use of "being" in the *Fons Vitae* to denote the "act of being" that – together with a "potency to Be" – comprises each composite entity. The "act of being" is associated by Gabirol with form,[25] and the "potency to be" with matter, and hence we have here at least one possible sense of his "universal hylomorphic" claim that all substances – even Intellect and intellects – possess both form and matter.[26]

As I suggest at length elsewhere,[27] the status of this "act of being" (form) is unclear in the *Fons Vitae*, since it sometimes emerges as superior to the "pre-*esse*" matter, but sometimes as inferior. To

render plausible the possibility of privileging the "pre-*esse*" state of matter over that of formal being, one may here note Gabirol's association of formal being with limitation, finitude,[28] and difference,[29] with matter (or pre-*esse*) on the contrary emerging as a pure, unlimited (formless), and infinite potency associated with unity and sameness.[30] It is this sort of structure (together with a number of detailed claims about matter which I treat of elsewhere)[31] that enables us to see in matter a superiority over the "act of being" associated with the formal. We might summarize this unexpected victory of matter over form as the emergence of potency over act, of "pre-*esse*" over "esse."

Consider the implications of these results for our description of the Godhead in light of Gabirol's own analogical methodology in which the order of things in the microcosm is used to reveal the order of heavenly things (itself rooted in his Neoplatonic belief that the order of things in the microcosm reflects the order of heavenly things).[32] In light of the "microcosmic" priority of "pre-*esse*" to "esse" that we have just noted, an analogy between pre-*esse* and God seems to suggest itself quite readily, in that both are infinite, predetermined potencies that precede any formal limitation. Material pre-*esse* – as infinite, pre-limited potency – is to the formal act of *esse*, just as God as infinite, pre-limited potency is to Being (to the formal act of *esse*). While God is not the same as matter, on this analogy he certainly seems to have more in common with the matter of composite existents than with their formal act of being.[33] Gabirol's own principle of analogy seems to suggest, then, that God is more akin to "pre-*esse*" than to *esse*, or that he can be accurately construed as "above Being."

A third approach to reconciling Gabirol's description of God as [only] Being with Plotinus' description of a God who is "above Being" is not so much a reconciliation as it is an acknowledgment of the centrality of paradox within Neoplatonic texts. Gabirol's description of God as "Being" need not rule out attributing to him a description of God as "above Being," even if we take "Being" in both cases as referring to a single reality, unlimited Being only. In fact, that God is actually both identical with and "above" some reality is not only a possibility for Gabirol, but one that would follow closely in the spirit of Neoplatonic apophasis, in which the utter transcendence of the divinity demands that one speaks of him in paradoxical terms.

I might note that this spirit of paradox leads in general to a fluid ontology of the divine realm in Gabirol's *Fons Vitae*, in which God, Will, First Matter, and First Form each seem to be treated under *prima facie* conflicting descriptions. While these conflicting descriptions need not be seen as paradoxes, the general point seems to reveal a heightened appreciation of the relatively intractable nature of the object in question. Consider just some of the descriptions that arise in the *Fons Vitae* (Figure 2):

God	Transcendent Above Being Above Substance	Immanent, Creator Pure Being, True Being, First Being; [i.e. Being Only] First Substance
Will	infinite, unlimited[14]	finite and limited (in relation to Form;[15] or, with respect to Intellect)[16]
Matter	infinite, unlimited (here symbolically linked with the "Divine Throne" image,[38] and perhaps with the "*'ayin*" or, "Nothingness" of *Keter Malkhut*[39])	finite and differentiated (here in the sense of a composite, "Matter + Form substance")[17]
Form	*esse* and source of unity (here as Second Unity, manifestation of Will, impression of the True First Unity [God])	*esse* and source of diversity (here in opposition to unity of matter, in association with Limit)

Figure 2. Descriptions of Reality in Gabirol

When describing a realm that is beyond knowing or definition, one must employ a fluid discourse, by whose opposing affirmations and negations one comes closest to uncovering that which cannot be uncovered.[40]

I have so far addressed the extent to which the relationship between the Jewish Neoplatonic conception of God as Being can consistently and meaningfully be described in Plotinus' own terms as a One "above Being." I turn now to considering the reconcilability of Plotinian emanation with Israeli's prima facie doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*.

On the Nature of God's Relation to the Cosmos: Emanation and Creation

ISRAELI AND PLOTINUS IN CONFLICT? It may well seem that Isaac Israeli's invocation of "creation" to describe the originative relation between God and the cosmos puts him directly in opposition to Plotinus. Further, it seems that any monotheist thinker would have no choice but to reject Plotinus' description of an "emanating" divinity, on the grounds that such a description of the Godhead (1) seems to rob God of a freely willed creative relationship to the cosmos, problematically submitting him instead to forces of insurmountable necessity, whereby his relationship to the cosmos is entirely beyond his control; and (2) blurs the line between creator and creation, by describing the cosmos as flowing forth from the essence of the divinity himself.

In what follows, I will respond to (1) by showing why Plotinus' God is not in fact robbed of freedom and will, and is certainly not subject to necessity in a problematic way. And in responding to (2), I will emphasize the extent to which the blurring of lines between creator and creation has not generally been seen as problematic from the monotheistic (religious) perspective. After removing the critical force from the above two anti-emanation observations, I conclude that behind the language of creation in Israeli emerges none other than Plotinus' emanating Godhead.

ISRAELI AND PLOTINUS RECONCILED. To respond to the theist's charge that a Plotinian Godhead is not free, but rather is problematically bound by necessity, I offer the following considerations about necessity and freedom:

As long as it is God's own essential goodness that accounts for his emanating, the Neoplatonist need not admit to any "necessitation," or to the presence in the Godhead of the sort of necessitation that brings with it negative overtones, those ordinary cases of necessitation where there is compulsion by some force from without, a compulsion related to the negativity of the material and irrational in the cosmos. On the contrary, when Plotinus speaks of the Godhead's activity as arising "out of necessity," this does not fall under ordinary necessitation (compulsion from without), the kind of necessity that the monotheist critic wishes to identify Plotinian necessity with.

In effect, I suggest that the critic has unjustifiably attached to the unique necessitation of the Godhead's overflow a set of negative associations inappropriately drawn from considerations of ordinary cases of necessitation. As such, the critic's attack on Plotinus' world-view here fails to strike home.

As for the denial of bona fide freedom in Plotinus, if one turns to Plotinus' discussion at *Enneads* 6:8, one finds an explicit description of the One's having willed itself *freely*.[41] More importantly, though, are the reasons we are given by Plotinus for why the One is neither free nor willing, none of which seems to rob the Godhead of anything such as suggested by the monotheist critic of Plotinus.

In light of the Neoplatonic Causal Principle (NCP above) – that, as the cause of freedom in all things,[42] God is himself above freedom – and by applying the Neoplatonic Naming Principle (NNP above), we could well say that God is freedom itself! In effect, his being said to be not "free" is not, as the above monotheist criticism seems to suggest, an attribution to God of some lack; rather it is as an ac-knowledgment of God's role as the cause of all freedom and as free-dom itself. Understanding the matter in this way lends plausibility to seeing Plotinus' worldview as amenable to monotheistic values (and vice versa). Prima facie, one has no reason to insist that Arabic and Jewish Neoplatonic texts reflect a deep opposition to Plotinus and his views.

Freedom and necessity are invariably intertwined in the Neopla-tonic tradition concerning creation, and I now turn to cosmology with a view to ascertaining the possibility of reconciling, of bridging the gap between, Israeli with Plotinus, if possible.

Creation *ex nihilo* is standardly rooted in Genesis 1:1 ("In the be-ginning, God created [*bara*]…") and in the Qur'anic description of God as the *Badi'* (absolute creator). Straightaway, we should note that the biblical notion of creation *ex nihilo* can be taken in at least two different ways, an "orthodox" way and an emanationist way.

According to the former ("orthodox") way of taking creation *ex nihilo*, one stipulates at least two things: (1) The world is created by God "from nothing," in the sense of "not from something/anything"; and (2) the creative act is not a flowing forth of things from the essence of God. On this view, taking creation *ex nihilo* as "creation not from something" not only blocks any suggestion of emanation,

but additionally ensures no mistaken identification of *nihil* with the "something" which is matter (the "something" which is a "no-thing"). (This sensitivity is reflected in the use in many con-texts of the Arabic expression *la min shay'* ["not from a thing"] as opposed to the expression *min la shay'* ["from no thing"]).[43]

However, a second account of creation *ex nihilo*, one that points in the direction of a Plotinian emanationist view, may be found as well. On this account, the *nihil* of creation *ex nihilo* is identified with God himself. This identification of God with *nihil* is based either on treating "nothing" as a name for God[44] or, more generally, on seeing God as "he who is beyond all predication," and hence, as essentially "no-thing" as far as human cognizing is concerned. Taken this way, creation *ex nihilo* reveals nothing different from Plotinus' own emanationist account of the divinity's relation to the cosmos.

Turning to Israeli, there is debate over which of the above two creation *ex nihilo* accounts best describes his own talk of *ikhtira'* ("invention," "origination," or "making anew") and *ibda'* ("abso-lute creation," or "innovation")[45] in such claims as "the first cre-ated things (*mukhtara'at*) are two simple substances…"[46] While Altmann defends a reading according to which this "absolute creation" is taken by Israeli in the "orthodox" sense,[47] Wolfson suggests the possibility of taking this creation in an emanationist sense.[48] That Israeli is committed to Plotinian emanation as it con-cerns those things arising from Intellect (including the emergence of the natural realm) is beyond doubt (we find his likening that process to the sun's natural radiation in such claims as "the light which em-anates from intellect is essential [*dhati jawhari*], like the light and shining of the sun, which emanates from its essence and substantial-ity [*dhatiha wa-jawhariyyatiha*]"[49]). The question is only whether it is simply this sort of emanation or a genuinely "orthodox" sense of creation *ex nihilo* that Israeli means to denote in his talk of the "absolute creation" of the first two substances. In the remainder of this chapter, I turn to considerations for and against seeing in Israeli a genuinely orthodox sense of creation *ex nihilo*.

In initial support of seeing in Israeli a commitment to orthodox creation *ex nihilo*, recall his description of the first creations in terms of "innovation" and "making anew" (*al-ibda' wa'l-ikhtira'*), terms that he defines as "making existent existences from the

non-existent" (*ta'yis al-aysat min lays*).[50] However, as we have seen in the above account, creation "from nothing" (or, from the non-existent) might indeed be taken in an emanationist sense. So we need more information to support a genuinely orthodox creation *ex nihilo* reading in Israeli. To this end, we may turn to Altmann, who draws our attention to Israeli's demarcation (in *The Book of Substances*) of two causal mechanisms: (1) causality by action, which is creation by the power and by the will (*min al-qudra wa-l-irada*) by way of influence and action (*'ala sabil al-ta'thir wa-l-fi'l*); and (2) essential causality, which is an "essential and substantial" (*dhati jawhari*) emanation, one which, as we have seen, is "like the light and shining of the sun, which emanates from its essence and substantiality."

Since (according to Altmann) the second of these clearly corresponds to emanation, it follows that the first denotes something different, viz., orthodox creation *ex nihilo*. However, does this really follow? As Wolfson has argued, one might just as readily conclude that these two causal mechanisms pick out two varieties of emanation: one kind of emanation that is not entirely "unconscious," and that describes the relationship between God and the first creation(s), and one regular Plotinian variety of emanation that describes the relation between all lower cosmic stages. While Wolfson's remarks suggest that the kind of emanation that Israeli predicates of God is not straightforwardly Plotinian, one might go even further to suggest that there is here no need to see any real departure from Plotinus at all. Even Plotinus can be read as distinguishing the relevance and nature of the first emanation from all other emanations (an emanation that, given his description of the One's having "willed itself freely," might even be described as the sort of "not entirely unconscious emanation" to which Wolfson adverts).

Turning back to Altmann, one finds a second argument for seeing Israeli's creation *ex nihilo* as non-emanative, a second argument that he himself describes as "the most potent argument against any attempt of interpreting his [Israeli's] use of the term creation ex nihilo in an emanationist sense."[51] Altmann here reasons as follows: We know that Israeli is committed to the presence of not one, but two "first creations" (viz., First Matter and First Form).[52] But as such, Israeli cannot have held an emanative account of God's creative act without violating the Neoplatonic rule that, in the arena of

emanation, "from one comes only one." To successfully avoid breaching the "from one comes only one" rule of emanation, Israeli clearly must not have taken these first two creations as products emanated from (the one) God, but as the effects of an orthodox creation *ex nihilo*. Altmann thus suggests that Wolfson's emanationist reading of Israeli only seems appealing because Wolfson ignores the two first substances,[53] First Form and First Matter.

I must note, though, that, even if Altmann were correct in his suggestion that only orthodox creation *ex nihilo* could save Israeli from violating Neoplatonic doctrine, one cannot rule out the possibility that Israeli was indeed guilty of just such a violation. As such, one cannot simply conclude that Israeli's understanding of God's creative act was non-emanationist. More importantly, one might undercut Altmann's above strategy by questioning his own assumption that Israeli's two simultaneous first creations, First Form and First Matter, would, if emanated, stand in genuine conflict with the "from one comes only one" rule. For, what if the two were really, in some important sense, one? Then there would be no problem in reconciling their emanation from God with the "from one comes only one" dictum. Turning to Israeli, we find that he does indeed describe the two first creations as comprising the single Intellect. Since there is a real sense in which for Israeli the two in question are also a single one (viz., Intellect), a suggestion on Israeli's part that these "two" emanate from the Godhead would not amount to a violation of the Neoplatonic "from one comes only one" rule. Once again, Altmann's argument that only orthodox creation *ex nihilo* is amenable to Israeli's Neoplatonic cosmology is undermined, and one is left with the genuine possibility of seeing in even Israeli's talk of "absolute creation," the Plotinian doctrine of emanation.

CONCLUSION

I have suggested ways of blurring the lines between "Being" and "above Being," as well as between creation *ex nihilo* and divine emanation. I have done this in order to encourage a greater sensitivity to the possibility of discovering sameness (between seemingly disparate traditions), even in apparent difference. I hope in this way to have provided both a sense of the sorts of issues at play in Jewish Neoplatonism, as well as a useful lens through which one might

begin to reconceptualize the relationship between monotheist and pagan traditions.

NOTES

1. See discussions in A. Altmann and S. Stern (eds.), *Isaac Israeli: A Neo-platonic Philosopher of the Early Tenth Century* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958); see also D. Pingree, "Some of the Sources of the Ghayat al-Hakim," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 43 (1980), 1–15.

2. See S. Pines, "Points of Similarity between the Exposition of the Doctrine of the Sefirot in the *Sefer Yetzira* and a Text of the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies: The Implications of this Resemblance," *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities* 7/3 (1989), 63–141.

3. For example, Gabirol privileges Will over Wisdom in his *Fons Vitae*, but Wisdom over Will in his poetic corpus; see n. 5 below.

4. For a treatment and overview of Jewish Neoplatonic themes in kabbalistic writings, see G. Scholem, "Iqvatav shel Gevirol ba-Qabbalah," in *Measef Sofrei Eretz Yisroel*, ed. E. Steiman and A. A. Kovak (Tel Aviv: n.p., 1939), 160–78. See also M. Idel, "Jewish Kabbalah and Platonism in the Middle Ages and Renaissance," in *Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought*, ed. L. E. Goodman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 319–51.

5. Though, in his poetic corpus, Wisdom precedes Will; for discussion, see Scholem, "Iqvatav shel Gevirol," and Y. Liebes, "*Sefer Yezirah* ezel R. Shlomo ibn Gevirol u-perush ha-shir Ahavtikha," in *The Beginnings of Jewish Mysticism in Medieval Europe*, ed. J. Dan (*Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6 [1987], 73–123). It might additionally be noted that sometimes Will appears in the text to be a self-standing hypostasis, but sometimes it seems to be one with the Godhead.

6. Much scholarship has been devoted to parsing apart the various meanings of such philosophical terms as *anniyya*, *mahiyya*, and *huwiyya*. See S. van den Bergh, s.v. *anniyya*, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., ed. H. A. R. Gibb et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1960), 1: 33–4; and M.-T. d'Alverny, "Anniyya – Anitas," in *Mélanges offerts à Etienne Gilson* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1959), 59–91.

7. *FV* 5.32, 316, 23 & 26; 317, 21 & 25. As Gabirol's original Arabic text is non-extant, references are to the twelfth-century Latin translation of the *Fons Vitae* (*FV*), which is earlier and more complete than Falaquera's Hebrew translation; cf. Baeumker's edition, *Avencebrolis [Ibn Gabirol]*

Fons Vitae, ex Arabico in Latinum Translatus ab Johanne Hispano et Domenico Gundissalino, in *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters*, ed. C. Baeumker (Münster: Aschendorf, 1892). The translation and emphases are my own.

8. *FV* 5.42, 335, 15.

9. Infinite *esse agens* is demarcated from finite *esse patiens*. See, e.g., *FV* 5.25, 303, 25 ff.

10. *FV* 5.24, 301, 16 ff.

11. S. Munk, *Mélanges de philosophie juive et arabe* (Paris: Ch. Franck, 1859), 111 n. 1.

12. F. Rahman, "Dhat", in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1965), II: 220.

13. For Arabic fragments corresponding to *FV* 1.7, 9 and 1.7, 10, see S. Pines, "Sefer Arugat ha-Bosem: ha qetaim mi-tokh Sefer Meqor Hayyim," *Tarbiz* 27 (1957–58), 218–33; reprinted in S. Pines, *Beyn mahshevet Yisrael li-mahshevet ha-amim* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1977), 44–60; cf. 52.

     That *essentia* in general (and not just in the case of the proper name "First Essence") corresponds to the Arabic *al-dhat* can be seen in a number of the Pines fragments (see Pines, "Sefer Arugat"), as well as in additional fragments in P. Fenton, "Gleanings from Mosheh ibn Ezra's '*Maqalat al-Hadiqa*'," *Sefarad* 36–7, fasc. 2 (1976), 294–6.

14. This idea that God, in his essence, is existence is, of course, a well-rehearsed theme in the history of philosophy. For its extensive development in Avicenna, see A.-M. Goichon, *La distinction de l'essence et de l'existence d'après Ibn Sina* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1937).

15. See, e.g., *Liber de Causis*: O. Bardenhewer, *Die Pseudo-Aristotelische Schrift, über das reine Gute* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herdersche Verlagshandlung, 1882), 79, line 1 for *anniyya faqat* and 65, line 7 for *anniyya mahda*.

16. *FV* 5.10, 274, 19; 5.11, 277, 4.

17. That God creates *esse* in this composite way may be seen at *FV* 5.40, 329, 4.

18. *FV* 5.15, 286, 10–17. I discuss this theme in greater detail in my "Solomon ibn Gabirol: Universal Hylomorphism and the Psychic Imagination," Ph.D. dissertation, The Ohio State University, 2000.

19. My translation is here informed by Altmann and Stern's rendering, but sticks to the Greek a bit more closely (Altmann and Stern, *Isaac Israeli*, 21). Armstrong's translation is a bit more confusing, and it is less clear with respect to the point I am trying to emphasize here (cf. *Enneads*, Loeb edition [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966], v: 173–5).

20. Altmann and Stern, *Isaac Israeli*, 21.
21. Plotinus, *Enneads* 5:5.6, lines 2–11, trans. Armstrong, in Loeb Classical Library, v: 173.
22. While not stated as a "naming principle" per se, Proclus' remarks at, e.g., *Elements of Theology*, Proposition 101 clearly evidence this phenomenon. For this principle in Plotinus, see *Enneads* 6.8 on God as "freedom" because he is the cause of freedom; see my treatment of this below.
23. For a circumscribed application of this principle within even the *Liber de Causis*, see Proposition 2, and the claim that the First Cause is above eternity because eternity is caused by it.
24. See, e.g., *FV* 5.42, 335, 16.
25. In support of the association of Being and Form, cf. *FV* 1.13, 16, and *FV* 4.10, 237; 5–7.
26. Gabirol's point taken in this way would not be conceptually dissimilar from Avicenna's analysis of composites into "essence" and "existence." For possible influence of this Avicennian idea on Gabirol, see S. Pines, "Ve-qara el ha-ayin ve-nivqa, lahqor *Keter Malkhut* le-Shlomo ibn Gevirol," *Tarbiz* 50 (1980–81), 339–47.
27. Pessin, "Solomon ibn Gabirol."
28. See, e.g., *FV* 5.28, 308, 7–12, where Form is distinguished from Will in terms of the former's being finite.
29. *FV* 4.9, 231, 13–15.
30. *FV* 4.1, 212, 2–3, and 4.1, 212, 7–8.
31. Pessin, "Solomon ibn Gabirol".
32. For a general introduction to this methodology in Gabirol (including an enumeration of four different applications of this method in the *Fons Vitae*), see J. Schlanger, *La philosophie de Salomon Ibn Gabirol* (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 141–57, and on the "macrocosm/microcosm" in general, 313–16.
33. This theme in Gabirol would additionally seem to suggest that materiality is the clearest mark of the divinity, a theme that, while not consistently reflected throughout the *Fons Vitae*, nonetheless finds support in the claim that "Matter is created from Essence, and Form is from the property of that Essence, i.e., from Wisdom and Unity" (*FV* 5.42, 333, 4–5). While the principle of materiality follows immediately from the First Essence, the principle of form emerges from Wisdom, a modification of that First Essence.
34. As I have already noted (see n. 5), Gabirol's notion of Will – taken under this exalted description – is sometimes seen as identical to the divinity himself.
35. *FV* 5.28, 308, 7–12.

36. Will in its finite and limited actuality is also described as "Word;" see Pines, "Points of Similarity" on the relation of this idea to Saadya.
37. Gabirol sometimes uses "Matter" and "Substance" interchangeably; see his claim to this effect, e.g., at *FV* 1.12.
38. For the depiction of Matter as the Divine Throne in Gabirol, cf. *FV* 5.42. Gabirol also talks of the Throne in his celebrated poem *Keter Malkhut* (The Royal Crown) (for Hebrew text, see *Shirei Shlomo ben Yehudah Ibn Gevirol, II* [*Shirei qodesh*], ed. C. Bialik and Y. Ravnitsky [Tel Aviv and Berlin: Dwir-Verlags-Gesellschaft, 1925], poem number 62, 62–78; for an English translation, see B. Lewis, *Solomon ibn Gabirol, The Kingly Crown* [London: Vallentine, Mitchell, 1961]). In this poem, the Throne, while not specifically called "Matter," is described as "higher than all height" (Lewis, *Kingly Crown*, 28).
39. See Lewis, *Kingly Crown*, 33 ("That Will called to the void and it was cleft asunder"). For related analysis of this line (though with the suggestion that this "void" – or "nothingness" – refers to Avicennian pre-existent essence), see Pines, "Ve-qara el ha-ayin."
40. On the fluidity of language and its instrumentality in apophatic discourse, see M. Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). For a detailed analysis of this phenomenon in Jewish esoteric texts, see E. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).
41. See *Enneads* 6:8.12, 13, 21.
42. See *Enneads* 6:8.15, where human freedom is presented in terms of striving towards the Goodness of the Godhead.
43. See H. A. Wolfson, "The Meaning of Ex Nihilo in the Church Fathers, Arabic and Hebrew Philosophy, and St. Thomas," in his *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion*, 2 vols., ed. I. Twersky and G. Williams (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 1: 207–21, esp. 212ff.
44. In support of seeing "*nihil*" as literally naming God, note Armstrong's translation of *Enneads* 6:9.5, which has Plotinus naming the One "nothing" (*ouden*). Altmann and Stern, however, point out that Armstrong's rendering of Plotinus is here incorrect (Altmann and Stern, *Isaac Israeli*, 156, with n. 2).
45. This "creation"/"innovation" terminology in Israeli may be traced to al-Kindi, himself preceded in this regard by pseudo-Ammonius, "On the Opinions of the Philosophers." It might also be noted that it is under the influence of this notion in Israeli that Joseph ibn Zaddiq draws the distinction between *khalq* (creation *ex aliquo*, or generation) and *ibda'*

(creation *ex nihilo*, or innovation); see Altmann and Stern, *Isaac Israeli*, 68ff.

46. *The Book of Substances* (*Kitab al-Jawahir*), fr. III, in Altmann and Stern, *Isaac Israeli*, 83. For the Judeo-Arabic text, see "The Fragments of Isaac Israeli's 'Book of Substances'," in S. M. Stern, *Medieval Arabic and Hebrew Thought*, ed. F. Zimmermann (London: Variorum, 1983), 24 (line 4).

47. A. Altmann, "Creation and Emanation in Isaac Israeli, a Reappraisal," in *Essays in Jewish Intellectual History*, ed. A. Altmann (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1981), 1–15.

48. H. A. Wolfson, "The Meaning of Ex Nihilo in Isaac Israeli," in his *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion*, I: 222–33.

49. *Book of Substances*, 84; S. M. Stern, "Isaac Israeli's Book of Substances," in his *Medieval Arabic and Hebrew Thought*, 139 (followed by the Judeo-Arabic text).

50. *Book of Definitions*, in Altmann and Stern, *Isaac Israeli*, 66 (sec. 42).

51. Altmann, "Creation," 4.

52. For a proposal regarding the roots of this tradition, as well as its reverberations in the *Longer Theology of Aristotle* and in Ibn Hasday's corpus, see S. M. Stern, "Ibn Hasday's Neoplatonist," in his *Medieval Arabic and Hebrew Thought*, 58–120.

53. Altmann, "Creation," 5.

BARRY S. KOGAN

6 Judah Halevi and his use of philosophy in the *Kuzari*

The Book of Refutation and Proof on Behalf of the Despised Religion,[1] better known as *The Kuzari*, is one of the last and most popular works of medieval Judaism's premier poet, Judah Halevi (c. 1075–1141). While originally undertaken to respond to the queries of a Karaite scholar,[2] it was reworked and expanded over nearly two decades into the artful and multifaceted dialogue we now possess. Halevi crafted it to address a broad array of religious, philosophical, and cultural issues that concerned him and his contemporaries in the wake of bloody conflicts generated by the *Reconquista* and the First Crusade. These reflected ongoing quarrels between belief and unbelief and between belief and belief, both within and among the cultures and communities of Andalusia, which continue in important ways to this day. While the work is generally regarded as apologetic in character,[3] it is no mere polemic. Rather, its theological defense of Judaism is deeply informed by philosophy and respectful of both its integrity and methods.[4] In what follows, my goal is to analyze and explain a number of Halevi's key ideas and arguments, to show how he uses them and also revises them, to raise a number of salient questions about them, and to identify the trajectory of their reappearance later in the dialogue.

The *Kuzari* begins with an unnamed narrator mentioning how he was asked about any argumentation he had against those who differ with the Jews, such as the philosophers, the adherents of other religions, and sectarian dissenters. This reminded him of the arguments of the Jewish sage who had persuaded the king of the Khazars to convert centuries before.[5] As is well known, the story behind the narrator's recollection tells of a Khazar king who had a recurrent dream, "as though an angel were addressing him." Its message was