

AL-FARABI, AVICENNA, AND AVERROES  
 IN HEBREW: REMARKS ON THE INDIRECT  
 TRANSMISSION OF ARABIC-ISLAMIC  
 PHILOSOPHY IN MEDIEVAL JUDAISM

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Perhaps as early as the eighth century, in the Islamic East, the traditional Sanskrit tales about the Buddha's enlightenment—about his recognition of his own mortality and training with an ascetic monk—were translated into Persian and Arabic. The Arabic version, entitled *Bilawhar wa-Būdhāsaf*, then served as the basis for renderings into Georgian, Greek, Latin, Hebrew, and a long list of European vernacular languages.<sup>1</sup> These renderings were, more often than not, not straightforward translations but adaptations, often introducing significant modifications into the frame narrative. The Greek version, for example, transformed Bilawhar—an ascetic teacher—into Barlaam, a saintly Christian monk, and his disciple Budasaf or Yudasaf—the Buddha—into Joasaph or Josaphat, a saintly Christian Neophyte.<sup>2</sup> The Hebrew version is no less surprising than the Greek, when Bilawhar becomes not a Jewish sage but a Neoplatonic philosopher, and his

1 For the Arabic and Persian versions, see D. Gimaret (1972); D. Gimaret (1971). See also S. M. Stern and S. Walzer (1971). For the Georgian and Greek versions, see: D. M. Lang (1957), idem (1966); John Damascene (1914). The Hebrew version was edited by A. M. Habermann (1951), with extensive apparatus and commentary. For the vernacular versions, see most recently the studies of the German and English versions: S. Calomino (1990); K. Ikegami (1999).

2 In fact, both Barlaam and Joasaph/Josaphat became Christian saints.

final lesson to his young disciple is not a lesson in religious practice but an introduction to neoplatonic metaphysics, based on the Arabic versions of Plotinus—namely, that complex of texts associated with the *Theology of Aristotle*.<sup>3</sup>

This is one example of the indirect transmission of Greek and Arabic philosophy in medieval Judaism. It is perhaps the most complex example, but it is certainly not the only example. In fact, although hundreds of philosophical and scientific works of Greek, Arabic, and Latin provenance were translated directly into Hebrew during the Middle Ages,<sup>4</sup> the ideas and principles they taught were much more effectively transmitted in Hebrew and more easily absorbed into Judaism through indirect means: via abridgments, encyclopedias, glossaries, and literary works; and through citations and borrowings in sermons, commentaries on Bible and rabbinic literature, commentaries on the liturgy, and explications of the commandments.

The goal of this essay is to introduce several examples of this indirect process of transmitting philosophical ideas, focusing on the three most influential Islamic philosophers in Christian Europe: al-Farabi, Avicenna, and Averroes. I will present first a few remarks about what we know of the direct translation of their works—through straightforward Hebrew renderings—then shift my attention to examples of indirect transmission. What I hope to show is that the indirect process of transmission was more creative, innovative, and ultimately more influential than direct translation. The citing and rewriting of philosophical texts and ideas, cut away from their original literary context, shorn of any connection to their original author, often led to surprising modifications in the ideas themselves, and remarkable alliances and connections made between thinkers and traditions that would seem to have nothing in common. I start with al-Farabi,

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3 As shown by S. M. Stern (1960-1961) 32-35, it represents a text from the Plotinian tradition, the same or similar to texts that influenced Isaac Israeli and other Jewish Neoplatonists.

4 For the direct translations, see the classic work of M. Steinschneider (1956), together with G. Freudenthal (1993) 29-136; M. Zonta (1996); idem (2006); C. Manekin (1996) 713-717; idem, (1999) 123-147.

move to Avicenna and Averroes, and then end with one example relating more directly to Aristotle himself.

### I. ABU NASR AL-FARABI (C. 870-950)

Abu Nasr al-Farabi—or as the Hebrews sometimes called him, Abī Yesha‘—was one of the most important philosophical influences on the development of medieval Jewish thought. As is well known, Maimonides was “a disciple of al-Fārābī”—to use the moniker coined by Lawrence Berman (1988)—and, at least partly under Maimonides’ influence, several writings by al-Farabi were studied, cited, and translated into Hebrew during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.<sup>5</sup> Even in the fourteenth century, after Averroes had emerged as the “Commentator” and Aristotelian authority par excellence, the works of al-Farabi continued to receive attention. In fact, several of his writings were translated into Hebrew for the first time only in the fourteenth century.

The works of al-Farabi that were translated directly into Hebrew include the following: the entire collection of short treatises on logic, sometimes in two, three, or even four different versions.<sup>6</sup> *The Enumeration of the Sciences* was rendered together with a short treatise attributed to al-Farabi entitled “What one ought to learn before studying philosophy” (*Mā yanbaghī an yuqaddam qabla ta’allum al-falsafah*).<sup>7</sup> The “Treatise on Intellect” was translated twice, in two very different versions, and sometimes circulated together with a Neoplatonic treatise falsely attributed to al-Farabi.<sup>8</sup> Other writings rendered into Hebrew include the commentary on Euclid’s *Elements*,<sup>9</sup> the short “Treatise on the

5 Perhaps due to Maimonides’ letter to his translator Ibn Tibbon, as was argued by S. Harvey (1992).

6 On the medieval translations of al-Farabi’s logical writings, see Sh. Rosenberg (1973) 50-55 [in Hebrew]; M. Zonta, (1996) 189-193; idem (1997) 515-594; J. Robinson (2009).

7 See M. Zonta (1992), along with G. Sarfati (1972) 413-422 [Hebrew]; M. Zonta (1995b) 358-382.

8 See G. Freudenthal (2002) 29-115; idem (2003) 173-237.

9 See G. Freudenthal (1988) 104-219.

Aims of Metaphysics,”<sup>10</sup> and three works of political philosophy: *The Political Regimes* (aka *The Principles of Beings*, *Mabādi al-mawjūdāt*, in Hebrew: *Hathalot ha-Nimtsa’ot*);<sup>11</sup> *Exhortation to the Path of Happiness* (*Tanbih ‘alā sabīl al-sa’āda*, known in Hebrew as: *Sefer ha-he’arah ‘al derekh ha-hatslahah*);<sup>12</sup> and *Select Aphorisms* (in Hebrew: *Peraqim haluqim*).<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, there were no straight Hebrew translations of the writings by al-Farabi that have been most popular in our own time, including *The Opinions of the Citizens of the Virtuous City*, *The Attainment of Happiness*, *The Philosophy of Plato*, and *The Philosophy of Aristotle*, although much of the latter three works were included in Shem Tov Falaqera’s *Reshit Hokhmah* (Harvey, 2002).

This is what was available in Hebrew. The writings that were rendered into Hebrew were often translated several times, during different periods and in different geographical locations, and they represent different trends and stages in the translation of philosophical works into Hebrew. Even the texts that received several renderings, however, seem to have enjoyed a relatively limited readership; in any event, they survive only in a handful of manuscripts. In contrast, some of al-Farabi’s writings were translated, abridged, and cited anonymously in secondary Hebrew texts, including some of the most popular and widely read medieval Hebrew texts.

I will give just one example to illustrate this indirect transmission of al-Farabi, focusing on his short work of poetics entitled *Kitāb al-sh‘ir*, the “Book of Poetry.” This brief text—only five pages in M. Mahdi’s edition (1959)—was translated into Hebrew

10 See Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, ms héb. 989 (IMHM 33990); Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, ms héb. 1341 (IMHM 15639); Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, ms héb. 915 (IMHM 26870).

11 Edited by Z. Filipowski (1849) 1-64.

12 See Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, ms héb. 1341 (IMHM 15639); Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Mich. 370 (IMHM 22448); Moscow, Russian State Library, Ms. Guenzburg 270 (IMHM 19031).

13 See Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Poc. 280 (IMHM 22084); Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Mich. 370 (IMHM 22448); Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, ms héb. 1341 (IMHM 15639).

in the fourteenth century.<sup>14</sup> It survives in a single manuscript and seems to have had little if any direct influence on Jewish thought. Yet the Arabic original, in contrast, as used and transmitted indirectly by Judah Halevi and Samuel Ibn Tibbon, exercised extraordinary influence on one of the most celebrated ideas in medieval Jewish thought: that Biblical poetry is superior to the traditions of the Arabs because it is free and informal and governed by sound rather than rhyme and meter. I start with the texts of Halevi and Ibn Tibbon, then return to al-Farabi.

*a. Judah Halevi, Kuzari 2:67-78*

In *Kuzari 2:67-78*, in response to the Kazar king's suggestion that Arabic poetry is the finest and most complex—due to its well-developed rhyme-schemes and meters—the Jewish cleric defends the superiority of the Hebrew tradition. Precisely because it is not formal, he maintains, the biblical text is able to express the intended meaning (*ma'na*) of revelation in a clear and coherent way. Nor is anything lost in transmission, for, though the text is not formalized by rhyme and meter, it is governed by sound, controlled by the traditional cantillation signs which determine how the text is recited or sung. This is how the communities of Israel throughout history have preserved the integrity of the sacred text.

The decisive argument for sound and meaning over form, found at *Kuzari 2:72*, is worth citing in full:

The Jewish Cleric: The purpose of language is to transmit what is in the mind of the speaker to the mind of the listener. This purpose can be fully realized only when speaking face to face, for spoken words are better than written words. As the saying goes: "from the mouth of scholars, not from the mouth of books." This is because oral delivery is aided by pauses, linkages of phrases, raising and lowering of the voice, gestures and other means of expressing surprise, questions, narrative, expectation, fear, pleading, and other means which discourse itself is unable to convey. The speaker may even be aided by the movement of the eyes, his eyebrows, his whole head, and

14 This is the view of G. Tamami, who also speculates that the translator is Todros Todrosi (1994).

his hands to express anger, pleasure, supplication, or pride, to whatever extent he wishes. In the remnant that remains of our language [i.e., the Bible]—a divine creation and product—subtle but profound signs are imbedded to promote the understanding of the meaning; they serve in place of the aids in oral delivery. These are the [masoretic] accents according to which the Bible is recited. They indicate where to pause and where to continue, they distinguish question from answer, subject from predicate, things said in haste from those said with deliberation, command from request—on these matters books could be written. Whoever aspires to this must, of course, forgo metrical poetry, for metrical poetry can be recited in only one way, thereby forcing one to connect what should be separated and to pause where one should continue; and this cannot be avoided except with great effort.

The Kuzari: They rightly gave up the advantage of sound in favor of the advantage of meaning; for prosody pleases the ear, but the [masoretic] accents serve the meaning (Berlin 1991, 64-65).

*b. Samuel Ibn Tibbon, Commentary on Ecclesiastes 1:1*

Some eighty years after Halevi wrote his Judaeo-Arabic *Kuzari* (1140), Samuel Ibn Tibbon presented a similar defense of Hebrew poetry in his Hebrew commentary on Ecclesiastes (c. 1213-1222). In the course of his survey of different types of speech—scientific proof, allegory, poetry—he argues that the verse of David and Solomon is superior to the formal poetry of the Arabs, since it can convey the meaning (*inyan*) intended without the restrictions of fixed literary conventions. What gives their writings a poetic quality, he concludes, is not rhyme and meter but rhythmic sound. Ibn Tibbon does not emphasize the unique superiority of the Biblical tradition for this reason (as Halevi had done). Instead he sets the work of David and Solomon in larger literary-historical context, citing Aristotle’s “book about poetry” to the effect that “some nations” create a metrical poetic quality through melody. I cite this important text of Ibn Tibbon *in extenso*:

The third species of discourse is speech expressed according to poetic figures. The logicians have already explained its methods, for it too is a type of syllogism.<sup>15</sup> They say that poetic statements establish an image in the heart of he who hears them by using words that imitate and create images by means of far-fetched figures and exaggerations. [They do this] in order to praise or condemn something so as to lead the listener's heart to love the thing they praise or hate and avoid the thing they condemn—all because of the image that results from the imitations. They stir his heart, even though he does not believe them. In fact, he knows they are not [true]. The art of poetry has many other conditions as well, either common to all or specific to each nation. They have been mentioned by Aristotle in his book about poetry. He also mentioned that in the poetry of some nations no attempt is made to make the last letters [of the line] the same, but only to make them equal in the time it takes to read them. Likewise, he said that the poetry of some nations does not require that there be a uniform meter based on vocalization, that is, that the long and short vowels be of like number and placement [in each line]; for whatever is lacking can be compensated with melody. Nevertheless, there was, no doubt, some ordering in this [system], for melody cannot be used to compensate for any discrepancy. I have written all this for you because it seems that at the time of David and Solomon, their poems were of this sort, for their poems will not be found to contain either meter or rhyme. It might well be said that in this their poems had an advantage over those that are produced nowadays, because their path was not so narrow. They could set forth in their poetry exactly the meaning they wished to set forth and in its complete form. But nowadays [poets] have accepted upon themselves many preconditions, things they must do or avoid doing, and have thus greatly narrowed the path before them so that they cannot move to the right or to the left. This leads them to force [the meaning of the words], to abbreviate and leave out, and they permit themselves [to say] foolish things. All of this leads them to destroy the meanings, or at least to make them difficult to understand. I have written at length about this in order to honor the

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15 For this conception of poetry as a type of syllogism, see Black (1990) and Kemal (2003).

poems of David and Solomon and establish means to defend them (Robinson 2007, par. 66-67).

I return now to al-Farabi's *Kitāb al-sh'ir*. In their studies of medieval conceptions of biblical poetry, J. Kugel (1979) and A. Berlin (1991) have shown that these two texts, by Halevi and Ibn Tibbon, stand at the beginning of a long history of medieval conceptions of biblical poetry, which extended from Ibn Tibbon's son Moses in the late thirteenth century to Isaac Abarbanel in the fifteenth. What they did not recognize, however, is that the idea of free rhythmic melodic verse, which contributed to this popular apologetic defense of the Hebrew Bible, was constructed not from any traditional Jewish text or ideology, not even from Aristotle, but from al-Farabi's *Kitāb al-sh'ir*. The relevant text of al-Farabi, together with the medieval Hebrew translation, reads as follows: [see the appendix]

To sum up: al-Farabi's *Kitāb al-sh'ir*, which was translated into Hebrew only in the fourteenth century, survives in a single manuscript, and seems to have had virtually no direct influence on Jewish thought, was, through indirect means, the major influence on the most popular defense of the poetry of the Hebrew Bible.

## II. AVICENNA (IBN SINA 980-1037)

The transmission of Avicenna in Hebrew is even more complex. In contrast to Latin Christendom, which produced early translations of the *Shifā'* and developed a robust Christian Avicennian synthesis, the direct influence of Avicenna in Hebrew was rather limited. Other than the Hebrew renditions of Avicenna's medical writings—the *Canon* and medical *Urjūza*—his works could be accessed in Hebrew only indirectly.<sup>16</sup> A few select examples can illustrate this trend. A short treatise by Avicenna on the soul—his *Risāla fī quwwat al-nafs* (or: *Maqāla fī al-nafs 'alā sunnat al-ikhtisār*)—was cited at length in Judah Halevi's Judeo-Arabic *Kuzari*, which

16 For a recent survey of Avicenna in Hebrew, see M. Zonta (2000) 647-660; (2002) 267-269. For the translations of the *Canon*, see B. Richler (1982) 145-168.



was translated into Hebrew during the twelfth century.<sup>17</sup> The section on minerals of the *Shifā'*, called in Latin *De congelatione et conglutinatione lapidum* (otherwise known as *Kitāb al-ma'ādīn*),<sup>18</sup> was partially rendered into Hebrew by Samuel Ibn Tibbon and incorporated into his philosophical-exegetical book entitled *Ma'amar yiqqawu ha-mayim*, which was completed by 1232.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps the fullest access Jews had to Avicenna's thought came through the translation of two secondary sources: al-Ghazali's *Maqāsīd al-falāsifah*, which was rendered into Hebrew three times in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries,<sup>20</sup> and Abraham Ibn Daud's *Book of Exalted Faith*, translated twice in the fourteenth.<sup>21</sup> It was not until the 1330s that more direct access was given to the philosophical writings of Avicenna himself, in the form of an anthology of texts translated from the *Shifā'* and *Najāt* by the Hebrew translator Todros Todrosi (Harvey 1992, 56, n. 17; 57-58, n. 22).

These examples are well known. There is, however, another source of Avicennian influence in Hebrew that is lesser known and which has not been explored. I refer to the Latin *De anima* by Dominicus Gundissalinus, bishop in Toledo during the twelfth century. The evidence is as follows. In the twelfth century, Toledo was the center of translation from Arabic into Latin. There works by Solomon Ibn Gabirol, Avicenna, Isaac Israeli, Qusta b. Luqa, al-Farabi, and others were translated into Latin by Dominicus Gundissalinus, together with Avendaut—probably identical

17 See Judah Halevi, *Kuzari* 5:10-12, together with H. Davidson (1972). The Arabic text was edited by S. Landauer (1875).

18 See *Avicennae De congelatione et conglutinatione lapidum; being sections of the Kitāb al-shifā'*. The Latin and Arabic texts, edited with an English translation of the latter and with critical notes by E. J. Holmyard and D. C. Mandeville (1927).

19 See G. Freudenthal (1991).

20 For the Hebrew translations of Ghazali and their influence, see C. B. Chertoff (1952); G. Vajda (1960); and S. Harvey (2001).

21 On Ibn Daud, see R. Fontaine (1990); and A. Eran (1998).

with the aforementioned Abraham Ibn Daud—along with many others.<sup>22</sup>

Ibn Daud and Gundissalinus also wrote original works based on the writings they had translated into Latin. Thus Ibn Daud's *Exalted Faith*, as already mentioned, is influenced profoundly by Avicenna and polemicizes against Ibn Gabirol. Dominicus Gundissalinus produced composite works of a similar nature, including his *De anima*, which is a systematic introduction to the soul pieced together from Avicenna, Ibn Gabirol, Qusta b. Luqa, Augustine, and other sources.<sup>23</sup> He reorganized all this material into a framework of ten questions. These ten questions are the following:

- 1) Whether or not the soul exists?
- 2) What is the soul?
- 3) Is the soul created?
- 4) Is it one or many?
- 5) If it is many, were these many all created together at the beginning of the world, or are new souls created every day?
- 6) Are they created from nothing or from something?
- 7) If they are created from something, are they created from the souls of the parents, in the same way that the body comes from the bodies of the parents, or are they created from some substance of the body?
- 8) Is the soul mortal or immortal?
- 9) If immortal, does it retain, after its separation from the body, all the faculties it possessed while still in the body?
- 10) If it does not retain all of them, which of them survive and which do not?

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22 For the translation movement in Toledo, see especially the research of Burnett; his bibliography is now online: <http://warburg.sas.ac.uk/institute/cburnett.htm>.

23 See the edition of J. T. Muckle (1940) 23-103; with discussion by D. Hasse (2000) 13-18. On Gundissalinus, see also A. Fidora (2003).

In the 1950s J. L. Teicher identified a Hebrew translation of this work by Dominicus Gundissalinus in Cambridge,<sup>24</sup> and he discussed it, together with contemporary Hebrew translations of Israeli, Qusta and others (Teicher 1956). He posited the existence of a Toledan school of Jewish translators, which paralleled the Christian school of Latin translators. We know now that there was really neither a Jewish nor a Christian school of translators, but rather individual scholars working according to individual initiative, although generally at the instigation of Gundissalinus. This, however, does not make these early translations any less interesting.

The Hebrew translation of Gundissalinus survives, as far as we know, in a single manuscript. The translated text itself seems to have had very little influence on later Jewish thought, at least in a direct way. Yet it did have considerable indirect influence through the work of Gershom b. Solomon, who used the Hebrew translation of Gundissalinus as one of his main sources in the psychology section of his Hebrew encyclopedia entitled *Sha'ar ha-Shamayim* ("The Gate of Heaven"), which was written during the last quarter of the thirteenth century.

I move now from Avicenna and Gundissalinus to Gershom b. Solomon and his *Gate of Heaven*: Gershom b. Solomon's encyclopedia is divided into several parts, in which he describes nature from below to above, ascending Jacob's ladder from the vapors and elements, to minerals, plants, animals, human anatomy, the human soul, and astronomy.<sup>25</sup> The section on the human soul is composed primarily of three texts: The beginning of Maimonides' *Eight Chapters*, which is itself based on al-Farabi's *Select Aphorisms*;<sup>26</sup> Dominicus Gundissalinus' *De anima*, which is based largely on Avicenna; and Averroes' two treatises on the

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24 See Cambridge, University Library Add. 1858 (IMHM 17522), with S. Reif (1997) 379.

25 For a description of Gershom's work and its sources, see J. Robinson (2000) 248-274.

26 For this identification of Maimonides' source, see H. Davidson (1963) 33-50.

possibility of conjunction with the agent intellect.<sup>27</sup> These three sources were abridged, rearranged, and reworked by Gershom, often in relation to one another. For example, the long final section of Dominicus's *De anima*, relating to the question of immortality, was almost entirely cut, and replaced with the two treatises by Averroes on the possibility of conjunction with the active intellect.

Dominicus' *De anima* is, as already mentioned, pieced together from several sources, especially Avicenna's *Shifā'*. He retains many of the distinctive characteristics of the *Shifā'*, including the famous "flying man" thought experiment.<sup>28</sup> Here I want to present a translation of a passage in Hebrew from Gershom's encyclopedia, which corresponds with Dominicus' *De anima*, and ask if this sounds rather familiar.<sup>29</sup>

It can be proved in a similar way that [the soul] is not a body. Let us suppose the following: a man is created all at once in the air. He is in a perfect state, but his eyes are covered so he cannot see his external limbs. He is flying [literally: moves] in the air in such a way that his limbs are separate and do not touch one another; nor do they collide with anything that can be perceived. This man will not grasp or know the things external to his limbs or his limbs themselves or what is inside them. He will not know if he is animate or sensate or the like. But nevertheless he will not stop from affirming the existence of his essence or his senses or some other thing, even though he will not be able to affirm and know his own body's length, width or depth. It is true that the thing affirmed is other than the thing not affirmed, and the thing known is other than the thing not known. This individual affirms and knows his

27 I refer to the texts translated into Hebrew by Samuel Ibn Tibbon and appended to his commentary on Ecclesiastes. For the text, translation, and dissemination of these treatises in Hebrew and Latin see J. Hercz (1869); M. Geoffroy and C. Steel (2001); J. Robinson (2007) 9-10.

28 For background on the so-called "flying man" thought experiment, see the discussions by D. Black and M. Aminrazavi in the present volume.

29 Note that this text is found in the manuscripts of *Sha'ar ha-shamayim* but not in the printed editions.

essence but does not affirm and know his body. Thus the essence is other than the essence of the body; he has no need for the body in order to know his soul and have intellectual cognition of it.<sup>30</sup>

To sum up: Avicenna's *De anima*, as cited and summarized by Dominicus Gundissalinus and translated into Hebrew, was anthologized by Gershom b. Solomon in his thirteenth-century Hebrew encyclopedia entitled *The Gate of Heaven*. This encyclopedia, moreover, would become the most popular Hebrew encyclopedia in the later Middle Ages and even into the modern period. In other words, contrary to conventional opinion on the history of Jewish thought, Avicenna Latinus played an important role in the popularization of philosophy in Hebrew among the Jews.

### III. AVERROES (IBN RUSHD 1126-1198)

I move now to the third philosopher to be considered in this paper, the philosopher who had more influence than any other on medieval Jewish philosophy in Hebrew. I refer of course to Averroes, most of whose works were translated systematically

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30 Cf. the version of Avicenna's *Shifā'*, as translated by D. Hasse (2000) 80: "We say that the person among us [who is intelligent enough] should imagine [the following]: He is created all at once and in a perfect state, but his eyes are prevented from seeing things outside, and he is created flying in the air or the void in such a way that the substance of the air does not collide with him so as to all him to perceive; his limbs are separate and do not meet or touch each other. He then reflects whether he affirms the existence of his essence [or his self]. He does not have doubts about his affirmation that his essence is existent; but still, he does not affirm any outer [organs], such as his limbs, nor anything inside, such as his inner organs, neither the heart, nor the brain, nor any of the things [existing] outside; rather, he affirms his essence, without affirming for it length, breadth or depth. If it were possible for him in this state to imagine a hand or another limb, he would not imagine it as a part of his essence or as a condition for his essence. You know that what is affirmed is different from what is not affirmed and what is concealed is different from what is not concealed. Therefore, the essence which he affirms to be existent is specific for him in the sense that it is he himself without his body and his limbs; these he does not affirm."

into Hebrew.<sup>31</sup> In fact, as is well known, several of Averroes' writings survive only in Hebrew.<sup>32</sup> For the Jews in Christian Europe, already by the end of the thirteenth century Averroes was considered the commentator par excellence and Aristotelian authority without peer. His stature was recognized even by the opponents of philosophy, who gave him the honor of being the primary target of their attacks.

Although most of the Averroean corpus was available in Hebrew, it seems, nevertheless, that the translations were not widely read. The lack of popularity of Averroes' commentaries on Aristotle is suggested by an early fourteenth-century report by Menahem ha-Meiri. Writing against a proposed ban on the study of philosophy, he argued as follows:

We consider it disgraceful that ignorant men, with no expertise either in Bible or rabbinic tradition, are always getting up to preach publicly, teaching things improper, interpreting simple biblical verses in far-fetched figurative ways. Yet, these ordinances of ours [viz. banning the study of philosophy by anyone under twenty-five] do not help us at all. For the preachers do not preach from the *Physics*, *On the Heavens*, *Meteorology*, *On Generation and Corruption*, *Parva naturalia*, *On the Soul*, or *Metaphysics*. Indeed, some of them do not know even a single page of these books. They know only what they have read in [Maimonides'] *Guide of the Perplexed*, [Jacob Anatoli's] *Malmad ha-Talmidim*, [Samuel Ibn Tibbon's] *Commentary on Ecclesiastes* and *Ma'amar Yiqqawu ha-Mayim*, and other such works. They find there some figurative interpretations and do their work with them.<sup>33</sup>

I will present just one example of the indirect transmission of philosophy alluded to by Meiri. The example relates to a basic

31 For Averroes in Hebrew, see the pioneering work of H. A. Wolfson (1931) 412-427. The most recent bibliography is found in G. Endress (1999) 339-381.

32 One example is the *Middle Metaphysics*, which was translated twice into Hebrew. See M. Zonta (1995a).

33 Letter to Abba Mari (cited in the latter's response) (D. Kaufmann 1884) 166-167. The translation is by M. Saperstein (1989) 383. See also G. Stern (2000) 199-200; and M. Halbertal (2000) 152-180; [in Hebrew].

dispute between Avicenna and Averroes, as it played out not in the Hebrew translations of philosophical texts but in Jewish exegetical writings. First the philosophical background; then the exegetical.

In the Middle Ages, most Aristotelians held to a relatively strong doctrine of celestial influence, which relates to two things: the physical influence of the celestial bodies and spheres on the sub-lunar world through movement, heat, and light; and the giving of form by celestial intelligences—in particular, by the agent intellect. The movement of the spheres, especially the solar sphere, causes the mixture and blending of the four elements, and it is this elemental mixture that serves as substrate for form. In other words, the planets prepare sub-lunar matter to receive mineral, plant, and animal form.<sup>34</sup>

How and to what extent the agent intellect gives form—this is where the philosophers differed. According to Avicenna, as well as Maimonides, the agent intellect is responsible for giving form to plants, animals, and human beings. For Averroes, in contrast, the agent intellect gives form to human beings only. All other sublunar beings come to be as the result of purely physical materialistic processes. For them, form is simply the end result of mixture.

*The exegesis:*

Already early in the history of Christianity, the problematic plural of Gen 1:26—“Let us make man in *our* image”—was transformed into an opportunity for defending theological positions. The Gnostics read it as supporting their dualistic cosmologies, whereas the orthodox saw in it a reference to the Trinity: the father, son, and holy spirit, made man in the image of father, son, and holy spirit. The Rabbinic Sages, in contrast, focused their attention on the negative task of responding to both Dualists and Trinitarians—as in this well-known Midrash from *Genesis Rabbah* 8:8:

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34 For philosophical and scientific background, as summarized in this and following paragraph, see the series of studies by G. Freudenthal (1995); (2002) 111-137; (2006) 29-68; (2004) 81-129; (2000) 335-370.

Rabbi Samuel b. Nahman said in Rabbi Jonathan's name: When Moses was engaged in writing the Torah, he had to write the work of each day. When he came to the verse: *And God said, Let us make man*, he said: Sovereign of the Universe! Why dost Thou furnish an excuse for heretics? Write, replied He. Whoever wishes to err may err (Freedman 1983, 59).

The polemical approach to Gen 1:26 in Jewish circles continued into the Middle Ages. However, in the twelfth century, Jews began to develop more positive philosophical readings as well. Joseph Kimhi, for example, explained the plural "Let us make man in our image," in relation to the dualistic nature of man. In other words: Let you, the four elements, and I, God, make man as body and soul (1972, 39-42). One half generation later, Maimonides interpreted Gen 1:26 in a similar direction, although connecting more clearly with Aristotelian rather than Platonic and Neoplatonic traditions. In *Guide* 2:6 he explains "Let us make man" as referring to God, the first cause, and the celestial intelligences. That is: Let God, the first cause, and the celestial intelligences, make man with intellectual form—that is, in, or with, the image of a separate intelligence (1963, 261-65).<sup>35</sup>

It was only after Averroes' critique of Avicenna, however, that this reading reached its full potential. As introduced first by Ibn Tibbon, then cited and repeated by a host of Jewish exegetes throughout the later Middle Ages, this new philosophical reading of Gen 1:26 runs as follows: Let us, the first cause, together with the celestial intelligences, make man with, or rather, through the agency of, one of our images, meaning one of the celestial intelligences, in particular, the agent intellect. Or expressed more succinctly: Let God and the celestial intelligences make man through the agency of the agent intellect. This, as Ibn Tibbon and his followers were quick to emphasize, was said only with respect to human beings. All other creatures were brought forth from earth and water only.<sup>36</sup>

35 See also *Guide* 1:1-2.

36 See J. Robinson (2007), par. 310-314; and also D. Kimhi (2004) 69-81.



Ibn Tibbon sums up his new reading of Gen 1:26 with reference to other related verses, especially Genesis 2:7. It is worth citing his most complete statement on the subject in full:

As for this *breathing in* of the *breath of life* [see Gen 2:7], all the philosophers agree that it requires another principle, besides the sun's motion. They allude to what they call, in their terminology, the "agent intellect," which is the giver of forms. It has already become clear to them that this activity of this intellect—that is, the giving of forms—is not perpetual, but when it comes across matter ready to receive form, it gives [form] immediately. They all agree, furthermore, that it is not required for the giving of forms to minerals; and it is certainly not required for the giving of form to the elements, when they act upon one another. In general, anything not possessing a vegetative soul does not require any principle other than the motion of the spheres; for them, celestial motion alone is sufficient. With respect to plants and irrational animals, however, they are not in agreement. Everyone before Aristotle thought that they too require another principle—in addition to the sun's motion—for the giving of their forms. Aristotle alone said that the sun's motion is sufficient for them as well. It seems that his opinion agrees with the true Torah, for it mentioned that God *breathed in the breath of life* only with man, even though the *breath of life* is shared by all animals. As it is said: *All in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life* [see Gen 7:22]. Man alone is in the *image of God* [Gen 1:26], that is, he has a superior intellectual form. The form of the intellect is what led Aristotle to introduce another principle with respect to man<sup>37</sup> (Robinson 2007, par. 410).

To sum up this example: for Ibn Tibbon, and the philosophers and exegetes who followed his reasoning, all philosophers before Aristotle (which would include Avicenna and Maimonides) thought the active intellect was a cause of existence for all beings with soul; Aristotle, in contrast, meaning some form of Averroes, agreed with the Torah in singling out the active intellect as a cause of existence for human beings only.

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37 With further discussion at pp. 99-101.

IV. ARISTOTLE, PSEUDO-AVICENNA,  
GERSHOM B. SOLOMON, MENAHEM B. ZERAH

In the examples discussed thus far, we have seen the transmission of philosophical ideas indirectly through the agency of a dialogue, an encyclopedia, and a biblical commentary. The last example I will present follows Aristotle's work on sleep and dreams in the *Parva naturalia*, as adapted and modified in the Hebrew version, into a Jewish legal writing of the fourteenth century. This book, the *Tsedah la-derekh* ("Provisions for the Way") by Menahem b. Aaron Ibn Zerah (c. 1310-1385), summarizes Aristotle (anonymously) following the laws of saying the *shema* before bed.

I start with the Hebrew version of Aristotle and work forward. The text I am concerned with is a work entitled in Hebrew *Sefer ha-shenah we-ha-yeqitsah* ("Book on Sleep and Waking"), translated from Latin by a certain Solomon b. Moses of Laguri, the same figure responsible for a Hebrew version of Pseudo-Avicenna *De caelo et mundi*.<sup>38</sup>

The text itself consists of two basic parts:<sup>39</sup> the first relates to sleep and waking and the second to dreams and prophecy in sleep. The first defines sleep and waking, establishes its place in the soul and body, and explains its function and physiology, according to the Aristotelian causes. The efficient cause of sleep is respiration, the material cause is digestion—vapors rise from the stomach to the brain; when they descend, the common sense shuts off, and all other senses cease as well. The final cause is waking, or rather, being healthy so that one can engage in perception while awake.

38 See R. Glasner (1996) 89-112; O. Gutman (2003).

39 The following summary of the text is based on H. Kahana-Smilansky, "Aristotle on Sleep and Wakefulness; A Medieval Hebrew Adaptation of an Unknown Latin Treatise," *Aleph: Historical Studies in Science and Judaism* 10: 67-118; idem, "The Mental Faculties and the Psychology of Sleep and Dreams," in *Science in Medieval Jewish Cultures*, ed. G. Freudenthal (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2011) 230-254. I wish to thank Dr. Kahana-Smilansky for sharing her work with me.

According to the second part of the text, dreams result from sense impressions embedded in the sense organs, which work through the imagination while asleep. Although some people seem to predict the future in dreams, and to intuit things that are not recognized while awake, the author of this text is very keen on disproving the divine origin of dreams. If dreams were divine, he maintains, then the elite intellectuals would have visions, but in fact it is just the opposite. Moreover, that lower animals, such as dogs, dream (they bark in their sleep), dreams cannot have a rational principle. In general, the author maintains, future predictions are the result not of cause but accident or coincidence.

The text, for the most part, follows the authentic Aristotle—as it has come down to us in the Greek tradition. There are some significant additions. These include details added regarding digestion, borrowed from the medical tradition; additional examples, drawn from meteorology, to illustrate the physiology of vapors. Yet, what is most significant is what is not changed. Unlike other adaptations of Aristotle in the Middle Ages—which emphasize, contrary to Aristotle, the divine cause of dreams—this text stays very close to the naturalistic explanation found in the Greek. It even adds greater detail and arguments, including the argument from barking dogs.

This then is the text, as translated into Hebrew in the middle of the thirteenth century. But what of the transmission?

The Hebrew translation by Solomon b. Moses was already used, extensively, by Gershon b. Solomon in his encyclopedia, *The Gate of Heaven*, which, as mentioned previously, was completed during the last quarter of the thirteenth century in southern France. Gershon abridged it, rearranged it, cited it in the name of Avicenna, and added material from medical sources relating to digestion and respiration.

All this I have already discussed in another study (Robinson 2000, 260–61). Much more interesting is another source which I haven't before discussed, namely the use of this text by Menahem b. Zerah in his *Tsedah la-derekh*.

*Tsedah la-derekh* is a strange work.<sup>40</sup> The author was a refugee from France. His family left Navarre in 1328—after anti-Jewish riots there—and resettled in Castile, where the young Menahem was educated in the tradition of the Rosh, Rabbi Asher b. Yehiel; he himself says he studied with Rosh's son Judah b. Asher. In Castile, he also became involved in courtly circles, and was befriended and patronized by Samuel Abarbanel, the grandfather of Isaac Abarbanel. *Tsedah la-derekh* is dedicated to Samuel; it is written for him and courtiers like him, who, because constantly on the move, require a handy reference work for matters of law and belief.

The work itself consists of five main sections: 1. prayer and blessings; 2. ritual law; 3. family law; 4. holy days; 5. fast days. It is, generally, a very useful and handy introduction to law and custom, but it is also—and this is the strange part—saturated with philosophy. The legal discussions are drawn mainly from Maimonides, Nahmanides, and the traditions of Spain, but they are framed with philosophical homilies, along with philosophical discussions borrowed directly from texts that had been rendered into Hebrew. This is especially remarkable when the very author himself, trained in the tradition of Rosh, attacks, in his preface, those evil philosophers who cannot find time to study the law!

In order to illustrate the use of philosophy, I will briefly summarize the first section of the first part of the work, which relates to prayer and blessings, and which ends with *Sefer ha-she-nah ve-ha-yeqitsah*.

Menahem begins with reasons for blessing and prayers, explains the morning blessings and the first blessing before the *shema* (*asher yatsar*), then he digresses and introduces a long discussion of astronomy (1:1:25-31).<sup>41</sup> He returns to the second blessing before *shema* (*ahavah rabbah*); explains the *shema* in relation to Maimonidean proofs for divine existence, unity, and in-

40 For *Tsedah la-derekh*, see M. ben Aaron ibn Zerah (1859).

41 1:1:25: description of the spheres and planets; 1:1:26: the celestial powers; 1:1:27: the twelve constellations; 1:1:28: the levels of the constellations; 1:1:29: the qualities of the celestial bodies; 1:1:30: that the perfect one ought not to fear the astrologers' predictions; 1:1:31: the limitations of astrology.

corporeality. He explains the blessing after *shema*, the eighteen benedictions, the various times for prayer, and then ends with saying *shema* before bed. This final subject is then brought to completion not with law but philosophy: with an abridgement of Pseudo-Avicenna, “On Sleep and Waking.”

Menahem—legal scholar in the tradition of the Rosh, critic of philosophy—does make significant changes to the text. He eliminates almost all technical discussion, adds a few biblical verses and rabbinic dicta, and does make reference to God’s prophecy in dreams, as attested in the Bible. Yet he makes no attempt to eliminate Aristotle’s naturalistic explanation of dreams. On the contrary, as in Solomon b. Moses’s text, as in Gershom b. Solomon’s encyclopedia, so in Menahem the argument from barking dogs retains its central place.

To sum up: here, in a halakhic reference book, relating to saying *shema* before bed, we have Aristotle in Hebrew on sleep and dreams!

To conclude, I would note that the translation of Greek and Arabic texts into Hebrew and Latin is one of the most remarkable events in medieval history. The translations served as the foundation for the so-called renaissance of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries; they provided the textual basis for the emergence of a Hebrew tradition of philosophy and the foundation for the rise of Christian scholasticism. When focusing on the translations alone, however, one tells only half the story.

What I hope I have done in this essay is point to some of the complex processes of transmission, naturalization, absorption, and transformation of philosophical texts and ideas, processes that were taking place outside the normal straightforward channels of professional translation and school philosophy. This secondary form of transmission, what I call a secondary form of philosophy, helps bring out some of the dynamic of the relationship between philosophy and religion in the Middle Ages. It also shows that philosophy played a more active role in medieval Judaism—in all its literary and cultural manifestations—than is usually admitted.

## APPENDIX

<p>Sefer ha-shir, Jena MS 10 (IMHM 47389), 65b</p>	<p>Kitāb al-shi'r, ed. Mahdi, pp. 2-3.</p>
<p>אמר אבונצר:</p> <p>שלערב מהעיון בתכליות הבתים אשר בשיר יותר ממה שיש להרבה מהאומות אשר ידענו &lt;שיריהם&gt;, ואם כן אמנם יהיה יותר טוב ויותר שלם בתיבות מה מוגבלות, אם נכריות ואם מפורסמות, כשהיו הענינים המובנים ממלותם ענינים {יקיפו} &lt;יחקו&gt; ענינים אשר במ המאמר ושהיו בהפלה ושהיו מחלקים החלקים ושהיו חלקיהם בכל הפלה משלמות וסבות &lt; &gt; גבולות המספר &lt;ושהיה סדרם בכל משקל סדר מוגבל&gt; ושהיו סדרם בכל חלק הוא סדרם באחר, כי בזה יהיו חלקיהם שוים בזמן הדבור במ, ושהיו סבותיהם בכל משקל מסודר סדר מוגבל ושתהיה תכליתם מוגבלת אם באותיות בעצמם או באותיות שוות בזמן הדבור במ, ושהיו סבותיהם ג"כ בחקויים לענין אשר המאמר אשר בו, שיהיו מולחנים.</p>	<p>ان للعرب من العناية بنهايات الابيات التي في الشعر اكثر مما لكثير من الامم التي عرفنا اشعارهم فاذا انما تصوير اكمل وافضل بالفاظ ما محدودة اما غريبة واما مشهورة وان تكون المعاني المفهومة عن الفاظها امورا تحاكي الامور التي فيها القول وان تكون بايقاع وان تكون مقسومة الاجزاء وان تكون اجزاؤها في كل ايقاع سلاطات واسباب واوتاد محدودة العدد</p> <p>وان يكون ترتيبها في كل وزن ترتيبا محدودا</p> <p>وان يكون ترتيبها في كل جزء هو ترتيبها في الاخر فان بهذا تصوير اجزاؤها متساوية في زمان النطق بها وان تكون الفاظها في كل وزن مرتبة ترتيبا محدودا وان تكون نهاياتها محدودة اما بحروف باعياتها او بحروف متساوية في زمان النطق بها</p> <p>&lt; &gt;</p> <p>وان تكون ملحنة</p>
<p>וקצת האומות ישימו הנגון אשר יגנו בו השיר &lt;חלקים לשיר&gt; כקצת אותיותיו עד שנמצא המאמר בלתי הנגון בטל משקלו כמו לו חסר ממנו</p>	<p>فبعض الامم يجعلون النغم التي يلحنون بها الشعر اجزاء للشعر كبعض حروفه حتى ان وجد القول دون اللحن بطل وزنه كما لو نقص منه حرف من حروفه بطل وزنه</p>

<p>אות מאותיותיו שיבטל משקלו, וקצתם לא ישימו הנגון כקצת אותיות המאמר אמנם ישימו המאמר באותיותיו לבדם וזה כמו שירי הערב ואלה כאשר נלחנו פעמים נתחלף הפלת הלחן הפלת המאמר ויסור ממנו מה שילחן נפילת המאמר עצמו. ואלה אמנם {ידעו} &lt;עשו&gt; הנגון כקצת אותיות המאמר שומר {משיכו על} &lt;משיבטל&gt; משקל המאמר כאשר הולחן בו.</p>	<p>وبعضهم لا يجعل النغم كبعض حروف القول ولكن يجعلون القول بحروفه وحدها وذلك مثل اشعار العرب وهذه اذا لحنتم فربما خالف ايقاع اللحن ايقاع القول فيزول عندما يلحن ايقاع القول نفسه واولئك انما جعلوا النغم كبعض حروف القول حذرا من ان يبطل وزن القول اذا لحن به</p>
<p>וההמון ורבים מהמשוררים אמנם ראו המאמר שיר כאשר היה שקול מחולק בחלקים ידברו במ בזמנים שוים ולא ישימו לב היו מחוברים במה שיחקה הדבר אם לא ולא ישימו לב בתבותם איך היו אחר שיהיו &lt; &gt; באותו הלשון אבל יבחרו מהם מה שהיה מפורסם קל.</p>	<p>والجمهور وكثير من الشعراء انما يرون ان القول شعر متى كان موزونا مقسوما باجزاء ينطق بها في ازمنة متساواة وليس يباليون كانت مؤلفة مما يحاكي الشئ ام لا ولا يباليون بالفاظه كيف كانت بعد ان تكون فصيحة في ذلك اللسان بل يؤثرون منها ما كان مشهورا سهلا</p>
<p>ורבים מהם יתנו במ עם זה שווי תכליות חלקיהם וזה אם שיהיו אותיות אחרות בעינם או אותיות ידובר במ בזמן &lt;שוה&gt;, שזה עשה אומיראש משורר היונים שהוא לא ישמר בשווי התכליות.</p>	<p>وكثير منهم يشترطون فيها مع ذلك تساوي نهايات اجزائها وذلك اما ان تكون حروفا واحدة باعيانها او حروفا ينطق بها في ازمان متساوية ويبين من فعل او ميروش شاعر اليونانيين انه لا يحتفظ بتساوي النهايات</p>

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