

## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION : **Thematizing a Tradition**

One benefit of studying texts from another age is the access they afford us to alternative problematics and thus to crosschecks of our own speculations and assumptions. In the great tradition of philosophy that extends from Philo, the intellectual godfather of Neoplatonism, to Spinoza, who restructured the by then classic Neoplatonic mode of thought, it was not the existence of God or even the reality of minds or universals that principally exercised philosophic minds. Rather the great issues were those of relating the ineffable indefiniteness of the One with the finite and intelligible specificity of the many, the absoluteness of divine power and perfection with the seemingly arbitrary particularities of practical experience and choice. Minds and universals were not problems but parts of the solution of this single problem that loomed so much larger than any difficulty the bare fact of consciousness or notion of intelligibility might sometimes seem to pose: the problem we can identify under the shorthand title of the many and the One. If that name scarcely seems for us to designate a problem at all, it is only because we may not have assigned quite the role and function to the One and quite the rigorously construed alienness to the many that the schemes of philosophy ancestral to our own traditionally assigned.

The philosophic method founded by Plato and forged into a system by its synthesis with the thought of Aristotle provided philosophers in antiquity and throughout the Middle Ages not only with an explanation of the possibility of knowledge but also with an exposition of the content of that knowledge. It was clear why and

how God was real, if reality and value were coextensive, so that the highest value was the highest reality. It was clear as well how God could be known, if what was most real was also most beautiful and most intelligible in itself, and if the knowledge of all specificities came through the knowledge of the absolute truth Itself, the Source of all that is real, constant, or intelligible among changing things. It was clear how living beings are animated and how consciousness is possible, if reality and thought are gifts from the highest reality and pure thought is pure actuality. For it was clear that the loss of form and rationality betokens as well loss of reality. When amorphousness and indefiniteness are complete only the utter limit of non-being remains.

What was not clear and not agreed among Neoplatonists was why and how the One, or God, the Unconditioned, would compromise Its absoluteness. The problem was not how being was possible, for it was clear that being was actual. Nor was the problem how the Absolute was possible. For the Absolute was necessary in and of Itself. Rather the problem was how the Unconditioned could give rise to the conditioned. The problem of creation, the problem of evil, the problem of revelation, the problem of specifying the doable good in relation to the demands of absolute Perfection, were all conceived as special cases of the general problem of relating the finite to the Infinite, the many to the One.

In the Middle Ages varieties of Neoplatonic Aristotelianism afforded the overarching philosophic framework for most thoughtful Muslims, Jews and Christians who believed that they required a philosophic framework at all, and for many who believed that they did not. The cliché is that it was an age of faith. If this means that communities of faith defined the alignments of society, the cliché is probably true. But it is certainly false if it is taken to mean that philosophers in the Middle Ages were more dogmatic or less critical than philosophers of other epochs. And it is certainly false if it is taken to mean that the philosophers of Neoplatonic-Aristotelian persuasion took refuge in fideism from the problems of critical thinking. Such a description is a romantic projection, seeking comfort and escape in an illusory, idealized past from intellectual difficulties that were just as alive then as they are today, only confronted with different tools and perhaps tackled from a different end or aspect, as climbers might concentrate now on one face, now

on another, of the same peak or summit. When Philo made philosophy the handmaiden of theology, what was important was not merely that he gave philosophy a seemingly subordinate role, serving theology, but that it was philosophy he gave that role. When Origen reasoned that God's perfection requires that in the end even Satan will be reconciled and brought back to union with God, he found the proof-texts in Christian scripture, but they were used to bear out what reason had demonstrated must be so.

When Augustine molded Christian faith out of Platonic *pistis*, Ciceronian *fides*, and Stoic assent or appropriation, and spoke of faith seeking understanding, he made faith the means but understanding the end. Likewise when Saadia set forth his beliefs and convictions in treatise form, he qualified their description in the title of his book with the designation 'Critically selected' and organized the book around the arguments that vindicated each of his theses *vis-à-vis* its alternatives. When al-Ghazālī appraised the character that had made him a thinker, he mentioned an innate curiosity and an inability to accept dogmas on blind faith; he said that if critics expected him to refute a position he had not first assayed for its merits, they were expecting the wrong task from the wrong person; and he sustained all his criticisms of the established traditions in philosophy with detailed philosophic argumentation, rejecting only those theses that could not withstand such scrutiny. Maimonides too held that if scripture clashed with reason, scripture could and must be allegorized, adjusting our reading of its meaning to preserve its truth. And Thomas, in his mighty *Summas*, always states objections first, in the manner of the Arabic *kalām*, and follows his thesis with its Euclidean proof and then the answers to the objections. Sacred and authoritative texts are quoted only to establish the authenticity as Christian, traditional doctrine of the theses sustained by argument. The same is true with the proof-texts used by the Muslim and Jewish philosophers. All see a congruence and complementarity of reason and revelation, where tradition supplies the bond uniting the two—reconciling insight with insight by way of dialectic and so making possible the coherence of a community that endures from moment to moment and from epoch to epoch.

Modern historians of ideas who write of medieval philosophy as though it were a battleground between reason and revelation are projecting their own unease about the sacred and the secular, the

ancient and the modern, left and right, red and black, fathers and sons, onto domain where such a conflict does not enter the terms of reference. Scholars play this game of old and new, reason and faith, only by refusing to allow the philosophic texts to speak for themselves and define their own concerns. For the primary food for any philosophy is the corpus of texts bearing the critical thinking of past generations; and the primary test of the scholarship that profits from those texts is its willingness to allow them to thematize themselves. Only the scholarship that is willing in this way to listen to the great thinkers is qualified to judge their critical achievement, and only through such judgment can our own thought become critical and in some measure transcend the boundaries of its generation.

Ennui is the great enemy of scholarship, and it takes many guises—not only literal boredom with the musty tomes, but fear of readers' boredom and a resultant desire to make old texts palatable or relevant by reducing them to pawns or players in some contemporary contest or struggle. Such reductionism is both self-aggravating and self-defeating. It buries the insights of past thinkers beneath concealing projections and muffles the voices of their advocates, stifling the freshness they might bring us from another age and thus perpetuating ennui by confronting a vision as yet unfocused with an apparent wall of opacity and the temptation merely to silver that wall, on the cynical assumption that scholarship must always be about ourselves. Intellectuals who believe that the texts they study will tell them nothing that does not resolve to partisan advocacy of contemplation or praxis, autonomy or heteronomy, individual or society, universality or particularity, or any other preconceived polarity, are not prepared to glean more from the texts they con than what they have already brought with them—least of all are they prepared to profit from the discovery of alternative problematics.

One who supposes that medieval thought revolves around a conflict between reason and revelation operates as though reason and revelation were products rather than processes, and as though it were already known, before scholarship or philosophy, or the dialectic between them, has begun its work, what will be the outcome and content of each. But if there is any truth in saying that the Middle Ages were an age of faith, that truth lies in the fact that the great issues of the day, for so many, could be summed up in the question: What ought to be the content of faith?

The present volume brings together the papers presented at the International Conference on Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought held in Honolulu November 30-December 3, 1987. If there is merit in these papers it arises in each author's probing of a particular text or body of texts for its Neoplatonic themes and their intellectual relevance, allowing the texts to speak for themselves. The striking finding, if we may use a somewhat scientific-sounding word, is that independent scholars, writing independently about figures who worked in different periods and languages, albeit in a common religious confession and philosophic construction, alighted repeatedly on the issue of mediation, the central Neoplatonic concern with the means by which the Absolute can be related to the here and now. This became the unifying theme of the conference and of this volume, linking the diverse approaches adopted by the thinkers studied and the diverse methods of the scholars, theologians and philosophers who took part, as a spontaneous but recurrent focus. Arranged in a rough chronological sequence, the papers afford a striking historical sampler of the ideas, achievements, difficulties and philosophic struggles of a group of men who worked not quite at one another's sides, nor wholly in isolation, to form a tradition of intellectual exploration that grew out of the philosophic work of antiquity and late antiquity. Readily bridging the gap that separates pagans from monotheists and rival confessions and sects from one another, this tradition, sustained by common theological values and philosophical concerns, continued for centuries to aid thinkers in confronting problems in a wide variety of contexts, fostering a common conceptual vocabulary and indeed a common philosophical aesthetic for mystics, rationalists, and empiricists, Jews, Christians, and Muslims—a philosophic source whose vitality is not yet exhausted.

David Winston, a specialist in the thought of Philo of Alexandria, the great Hellenistic Jewish thinker of the first century B.C., opens the volume with reflections on the very Maimonidean, Rabbinic, and indeed universal problem of naming or describing God. He shows how Philo availed himself of Stoic strategies to prevent the idea of divine transcendence, say, of the passions, from strangling discourse about the divine altogether, discovering and exploiting affective terms that do not imply passivity, and so licensing and rendering coherent with the Biblical idea of divine transcendence the

seemingly incompatible usage that conceives of God in terms of compassion, joy or will. The idea of divine joy becomes an important theme for mystics, including philosophic mystics; the idea of divine will becomes the common focus of all monotheistic thinkers in the Middle Ages in responding to the Neoplatonic theme of emanation.

John Dillon addresses the *Fons Vitae*, or *Fountain of Life* of Solomon Ibn Gabirol, a remarkable work of almost pure Neoplatonic metaphysics, which, as Dillon, Mathis and McGinn show, is rooted in the late ancient theories of Greek Neoplatonism and spreads its influence far beyond its own time and place to become a point of departure and dialectical response to Christian continuators of the philosophic tradition of natural theology. It is commonly said that the chaste dialogue of the *Fons Vitae*, which survives in full only in a Latin translation of the Arabic original, is devoid of Biblical allusions or other distinctive marks of its Jewish origin—so that the schoolmen who used it could not tell if the author was Muslim or Jewish. Indeed, it was not until Rabbi Salomon Munk of Paris in 1845 discovered quotations from the work in a text by Shem Tov Ibn Falaquera that scholars knew that Ibn Gabirol, the well-known Hebrew poet of sacred and secular themes, was identical with the “Avicebrol” of the *Fons Vitae*. But in fact, the work bears in its title an allusion to the beautiful lines from the Psalms: “For with Thee is the Fountain of Life; by Thy light do we see light.” It was this poetic equation of life with light, the principle of being with that of understanding, that convinced many Jewish neoplatonists of the underlying harmony between Biblical and Neoplatonic theism: At bottom the Torah and the philosophers were saying the same thing in different ways—thus the insights of either tradition could shed light on the problems of the other.

Newcomers who came to Plato's Academy to hear his famous Lecture on the Good were shocked to find that instead of a discussion of the good life, Plato was exploring the most basic problem of arithmetic, the relation between the numbers one and two. But for Plato this issue had become the final undissolved residue of philosophy. If it could be explained how the pure simplicity of the One, or the Good, gave rise to that first otherness of “the Indefinite Dyad,” of “the great and the small,” then the emergence of the cosmos, of matter from idea or spirit, of time from the eternal, of

change from changelessness, and of specificity from pure generality, would seem easy. The key to Plato's problem, Ibn Gabirol thought, lay in the recognition that thought has an objective, thus objectifying aspect to it: Thought itself is like matter, a principle of differentiation or otherness and thus the first precipitate of emanation—the first matter.

Dillon shows how Ibn Gabirol drew his striking idea of a material nature in the spiritual realm of the divine from a well developed Neoplatonic tradition of thinking about "intelligible matter," applying that idea, as earlier Platonists had done, to preserve divine transcendence—mediating but not compromising the absoluteness of God's oneness and perfection. He shows how Ibn Gabirol responds, much in the manner of Plotinus, the founder of Neoplatonism, and Iamblichus (fourth century), to difficulties about the notion of intelligible matter, drawing upon our familiarity with the anatomy of thought to assign to intelligible matter the hybrid character it will need if it is to function successfully as the vehicle of the mind's access to the divine world and of God's access to nature.

Carl Mathis pursues the parallel between Ibn Gabirol and Iamblichus, exposing more fully the motive of preserving the absolute transcendence of the One while conceptually allowing the traffic between God and nature, without which the most transcendent God becomes a metaphysical irrelevancy. In Iamblichus, as in Ibn Gabirol, Mathis finds a "doubling" of the One, which allows God both to remain in "unspeakable splendor" and to "unfold Himself" into principles that give rise to nature and diversity as we know it. Here Ibn Gabirol is seen continuing work on the problem that was racking Plato's mind in the years before his death in much the way that Einstein, in his last years, was seeking a unified field theory. The same motives and values and often the same strategies are at work later in the Kabbalistic thinkers, as we see in the papers of Novak, Katz, Idel and Popkin—the need to preserve divine transcendence, yet to allow access of God to the world and of the human mind and heart to God.

Bernard McGinn takes us to an endgame of Ibn Gabirol's gambit in philosophy, showing how problems in the idea of intelligible matter—for example, about the unity of the human person—made that idea less helpful than Ibn Gabirol had hoped, even for thinkers who took his approach far more seriously than did the

mainstream Jewish philosophical tradition. At the same time, he takes us deeper into the architecture of Ibn Gabirol's intellectual universe (to borrow A. H. Armstrong's phrase), revealing the central role of divine will (*Voluntas*), a theme preserved in all the later Jewish philosophers and in the Kabbalists. Indeed the centrality of Will becomes a hallmark of Jewish Neoplatonism, in a way curtailing or redefining the commitment to Neoplatonic thinking. God's will becomes a Neoplatonic hypostasis or is identified with the Ineffable highest Unity that Neoplatonism taught Jewish thinkers how to conceptualize without reduction, and so, in their own distinctive ways, to address without compunction (despite its utter transcendence) and even (in the case of some Kabbalists) to engage with in the expectation of a response.

It is Will for Ibn Gabirol that brings matter and form together and so makes creation possible. Creation is thus in some way a free act of God. It is not a mere timeless flowing forth of necessity, a freezing of the event within the eternity of God, as though nature somehow remained embedded within God and never actually acquired its own reality. This idea, the reality of creation—symbolized by the thesis that nature had an origin and epitomized in the affirmation of divine volition, God's freedom to act or not to act, according to his grace and pleasure—becomes the great theme of medieval Jewish philosophy and the great thesis to be defended. Human freedom, the contingency and openness of the future, are just two of the corollaries of this response to what was seen as the constraining necessitarianism of the intellectualist, determinist reading of Neoplatonic emanation theory. It is here that Arthur Hyman's paper introduces the challenge that scriptural monotheists consistently threw down at the feet of the more strictly intellectualist and deterministic exponents of emanation: How can what is one and simple (as the Neoplatonic God is supposed to be, if God is to be absolute, indestructible, necessarily existent, unique and unrivaled) give rise to anything but what is one and simple? That is, even assuming the success of some Neoplatonic strategy of mediating the gap between the One and its product, through a series of Neoplatonic-Aristotelian disembodied intellects, how can any outcome emerge but a series of such presumably "simple" beings—not a world of multiplicity and change, but simply an indeterminately long sequence of undifferentiated and therefore undifferentiable theoretical beings. The answer, as Ibn Gabirol



clearly anticipated and as Jewish philosophers of many backgrounds and persuasions were to underscore, with aid from Muslim predecessors who had raised the same question, was that only divine will could make a difference where none was given at the outset.

Hyman shows how the tension between divine simplicity and the world's multiplicity and complexity was addressed by Plotinus, Avicenna, al-Ghazālī, Isaac Israeli, Ibn Gabirol, Ibn Daud, Maimonides, Averroes, Ibn Falaquera, Narboni, and Albalag. He follows the principle that the simple can give rise only to the simple from its origins in Neoplatonic philosophy to its use in the critique of that philosophy by al-Ghazālī and Maimonides and its eventual refinement, qualification or abandonment by Jewish Averroists, under pressure from adversaries who sought to restructure emanationism in a more voluntaristic, less mechanical direction.

Alfred Ivry questions the success of Maimonides in fusing emanationism with the idea of creation, insightfully glossing Maimonides' emphatic strictures against polytheism as veiled attacks on the Neoplatonic-Aristotelian scheme of celestial intelligences associated with the spheres and mediating God's governance over the sublunary world. Maimonides saw the ultimately pagan roots of this scheme, Ivry argues, but rather than reject a solution to the problem of the many and the One that was at its root "inimical to monotheism," he sought to tame it by emphasizing the createdness of the intelligences. In inveighing against an Aristotelian view that seemed to make God "*primus inter pares*," first among His peers, "Maimonides is protesting against a world view in which God plays essentially a mechanistic role." Critically exploring the somewhat neglected Neoplatonic side of Maimonidean thought and its backgrounds in the philosophy of Ibn Sīnā, Ivry finds that the Avicennan philosophy had failed to resolve its problem of the many and the One: "Perhaps Maimonides realized this and therefore drew back from utilizing the distinction between essence and existence more than he did." But Maimonides' ambivalence between commitment to Neoplatonic solutions and sensitivity to Neoplatonic deficiencies remains unresolved, in Ivry's view, a source of continuing difficulties in his philosophy, which are concealed by his reticence.

My own paper takes a more favorable view of the success of Maimonides' neoplatonizing project, although within the framework

of the assumption that no work of philosophy, as a human enterprise, can achieve perfect coherence and resolve all tensions. The paper focuses on Maimonides' bold effort to interpret the Biblical imagery of angels as divine messengers, with the help of Neoplatonic and Aristotelian philosophy, in a manner that will preserve both the naturalism of the sciences (and his own art of medicine) and the Biblical axiom that God is the ultimate author of all events. Here again we see our theme of the mediation between God's absoluteness and the conditional realm of the ephemeral and empirical. Maimonides sharply attacks "those men who purport to be the Sages of Israel" for superstitiously believing that God sends an angel, a being one-third the size of the physical world, to form the foetus in the womb, and failing to understand what Rabbinic usage about angels plainly indicates: that angels are natural forms and forces imparted by God through the Active Intellect—that this is "the real meaning of greatness and power" in God's act. Maimonides glosses the midrashic equation of angels with the third part of the world as proposing a tripartite ontology in which Platonic forms, classically conceived as thoughts of the supernal intelligences, play a critical mediating role. After laying out the anatomy of this scheme, my essay seeks a philosophical significance for it in an era after the Ptolemaic spheres have fallen.

Menachem Kellner explores the idea that faith can be a virtue and shows that this virtue is not to be understood in strictly intellectualist terms. The problematic of his paper is expressive of the longstanding Maimonidean/Ghazalian protest against the intellectualism of that strand of Neoplatonic-Aristotelian philosophy that was taken up and pushed to deterministic extremes by Jewish and Muslim philosophers of Averroistic inclination. David Burrell, in a different way, takes up the same theme. A theologian whose background is informed by Avicennan and Ghazalian studies as well as the Thomistic tradition, he brings a Whiteheadian and perhaps also Bergsonian slant to his inquiry when he asks why Maimonides did not more fully pursue the idea that God's knowledge is practical rather than strictly cognitive. He asks further whether theologians today should not follow up on this approach, which Thomas, for one seemed to regard as promising in terms of preserving both divine and human freedom.

Idit Dobbs-Weinstein, like Ivry, stresses the tensions between Neoplatonic and Aristotelian elements in Maimonides' philosophy. Such an exercise always runs the risk of submerging the synthetic achievements of a philosopher who sought to reconcile what others might conceive as incompatible ideas. But the feminist slant of Dobbs-Weinstein's writing vividly highlights an ancient Neoplatonic difficulty which Maimonides himself pinioned as the Achilles heel of Neoplatonism: its desire to treat matter both as the explanation of all evil and as a mere "receptacle" or condition of otherness, with no positive being or character of its own. In Maimonides' exegeses, matter is personified both as the married harlot of the Book of Proverbs, always changing forms, never content with just the form it has; and as the good woman (the so-called Woman of Valor, in the familiar mistranslation) of the same book. Maimonides seeks to reconcile these two images by arguing that matter itself is neutral and that whether it becomes good or evil depends on what is done with it. It is not evil in itself; yet, as a condition of otherness and privation, it is the basis of evil. But Dobbs-Weinstein discovers unresolved tensions within Maimonides' accounts of matter as created and physical or as metaphysical and notional; and she finds similar problems in his accounts of evil, which sometimes seek to relativize, sometimes to objectify it. Maimonides, she argues, "deliberately declines to give matter an essential role in human perfection." Dobbs-Weinstein finds a resolution of such tensions in the philosophic synthesis of Aquinas, which "succeeds in dissociating matter from evil and overcomes the tension between sub- and supralunar existence."

Whether it is true that Maimonides' sometimes magisterial dicta and sometimes Puckish silences about matter and evil conceal unease and bad faith or a profound insight into the strengths and weaknesses of Neoplatonism will continue to be debated well beyond the confines of this volume, but Dobbs-Weinstein's engaging paper, as the very least of its merits, may attract some students of Maimonidean and post-Maimonidean philosophy away from endless and usually ill-conceived debates over the preferability of the intellectual or the practical life and encourage them to address the question whether Neoplatonic or Aristotelian approaches, or some hybrid or synthesis of the two, can aid us in addressing the question of our embodiment

and the ambiguities of our status as creatures who live, as Dobbs-Weinstein puts it, in both realms, the intellectual and the physical.

David Bleich's paper is a Talmudic *shū'ur* and in some measure a *jeu d'esprit*, arising from the endeavor to explain the efforts of such medieval rabbis as Me'iri to disallow the claim that Christians were idolators. Cutting away from socio-economic explanations, Bleich sifts the record of Christian dogmatics for evidence of early Christian heretics whose doctrines of the Trinity may have provided a theological basis for Me'iri's ruling. The focus of his study, which follows in the traces of Harry Wolfson's survey of the teachings of the Church Fathers, call to mind one of the central findings of Wolfson's work in the history of ideas: that while Jews and Muslims may reject trinitarianism, its central metaphysical ideas are not exclusively of Christian interest but arise precisely from the Platonic problematic of the One and the many and were pioneered by Philo before the founding of Christianity, and thoroughly explored by the Muslim theologians of the *kalām* in dialogues and debates that laid the basis of the philosophic claim for the radical simplicity of the divine nature and thus for the central themes of medieval natural theology in Ibn Sīnā, al-Ghazālī, Maimonides, Thomas, and other Western thinkers down to and including the argumentation of Spinoza.

With Seymour Feldman's paper we turn to Gersonides and the juxtaposition of his views about epistemology with the corresponding arguments and theses in Plotinus, Alexander of Aphrodisias, and Themistius. Gersonides' reliance on an external and hypostatic Active Intellect, Feldman argues, jeopardizes empiricism, carrying rationalism to the point of regarding all knowledge as essentially inspired. If sensory data are needed at all on such a scheme, he argues, it will only be as cues, Platonic "reminders," not of what we know eternally, but of what our limited, material intellect is given to know by the Active Intellect. Like Dobbs-Weinstein, Feldman finds a fuller resolution to the difficulties he raises in the philosophy of Thomas, where the Active Intellect is dethroned from its hypostatic state and restored to an immanent position as an aspect of the human mind. Averroes pioneered this more naturalistic approach, shying away from a hypostatic formgiver, in reaction to what he came to see as the excesses of Avicennan Neoplatonism. But Gersonides did not

follow Ibn Rushd here, evidently less convinced of the adequacy of a reductionistic account of the informing of the human mind and the natural world at large.

Jewish mysticism does not abandon the positions and problematics of Jewish philosophy in general or of Neoplatonism in particular. Rather, it is attracted to the Neoplatonic device of dispatching hypostatic beings to mediate between divine infinity and the compromised world of the here below. The inspiration may be gnostic at times, as Kabbalists view the world with deepening anguish, but the element of hope is never wholly beneath the surface, and the most demonically infested Kabbalistic visions are still animated by the ancient Biblical conviction that this world can be redeemed by human action in concert with the purposes of God. Mythic masks may obscure the features of the Kabbalistic surrogates for argument, but all of the most sophisticated cosmographers of the Kabbalah remember the philosophic problems which the figures they evoke are meant to resolve; and, as the papers of Dethier, Idel, and Popkin reveal, founding figures of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment like Leone Ebreo (Isaac ben Judah Abarbanel, 1437-1508) and Spinoza reclaim what is distinctively philosophical from the creative achievements of the Kabbalah.

Steven Katz, paralleling Winston's paper on Philo, shows how the apophatic or negative theology of pure transcendence was not allowed, in the name of consistency, to exclude all characterizations of the divine. Rather, from Philo to Isaac Israeli, Ibn Gabirol, Bahir, Cordovero, Luria, Azriel of Gerona, Moses de Leon (the author of the *Zohar*) strategies of mediation and qualification were devised both to allow characterization of the divine by man and to ensure that access to creation was not denied to its creator, ruler and judge. Moshe Idel and David Novak develop these themes in detail.

Idel shows how Kabbalistic thinkers took up the idea of God's inner knowledge of the forms of all things and made this the basis of the scheme by which the *Sefirot*, dynamic Kabbalistic hypostases, mediate between God and creation. He also examines the Kabbalists' reliance on other mediating entities and images, surveying the contributions of Ya'akov ben Sheshet, Isaac the Blind, Menaḥem Recanati, Shem Tov ben Shem Tov, Azriel of Gerona, Naḥmanides, Isaac Abravanel, Alemanno, Luzzato, Cordovero, Herrera and others

in their responses to the philosophic tradition and its problems.

Novak complements this exposition with a detailed anatomy and dynamic of one of the most original conceptions of the Kabbalah, the idea of *zimzum*, divine self-contraction, as a means of reconciling emanation with the Biblical ideas of divine creation and human freedom. As he shows, *zimzum* was intended to make clear not only how God allows room for creation and affords freedom and existence to lesser beings, but also how the revelation of the Torah and the delegation of its interpretation and elaboration to human minds and hands is a mark of divine favor, withdrawing somewhat from the creaturely realm to afford authenticity to creation in its own right. As Novak writes, "For Kabbalists there is no real difference between creation and revelation. Creation is itself an act of revelation." And the impact of this equation is twofold. Not only was the world an epiphany, as it had always been for serious theists of all persuasions, but the Torah, as the articulate expression of God's will, became our means of participating in the life of God and helping to bring about the cosmic reconciliation which was the great theme of the Kabbalistic version of Neoplatonic eschatology.

Hubert Dethier closely follows the Italian text of the Renaissance Jewish Neoplatonist Leone Ebreo to show how Leone took up Kabbalistic ideas to develop what would become one basis for Spinoza's idea of the intellectual love of God. God imparts His own perfection to creation, and "human sin may adversely affect God himself. . . . It is love that imparts the unity at each level and thus explains the existence and active functioning of each thing in the universe and each level of the celestial hierarchy. . . . Although God is perfectly one and simple, a mysterious multiplication occurs within Him [a theme we have seen in Iamblichus, Ibn Gabirol and the Kabbalah]: Just as Eve is said to have sprung from the body of Adam, the original active entity, God's beauty or simply essence, produces a feminine entity. . . . Beyond his original, intrinsic love, God also loves extrinsically. For, in loving himself, God also desires to reproduce his beauty. . . . The divine Intellect contemplates itself as well as God, and from this contemplation a female entity is produced. . . . From their mutual love emerges all generation."

Richard Popkin completes the arc from Philo to Spinoza by showing why the first readers of Spinoza saw him as a crypto-Kabbalist. Popkin uncovers the sources of the Kabbalistic ideas that

formed a vital part of Spinoza's thinking, despite his rejection of the cosmographical and exegetical excesses of the millenarian Kabbalah of his day. Herrera in particular, in the metaphysical portions of his *Puerta del Cielo*, provides the unifying structure that Spinoza would call to his aid in responding to the dualism of Descartes. And the early responses to Spinoza by such figures as Moses Germanus rightly noted the connection. When the French Huguenot Jacques Basnage ascribed Spinoza's monism to a commitment on his part to the "Kabbalistic" principle *ex nihilo nihil fit*, he was not speaking nonsense, but was rightly perceiving, if rather crudely stating, the Neoplatonic basis of Spinoza's treatment of matter and thought as attributes of God. If the world was not to be sundered by the Cartesian epistemological turn, into corporeal substance and spiritual or intellectual substance, with no possible connection between them, either in the case of human perception and voluntary movement or in the case of divine creation and governance—or love—then matter (even Cartesian matter, as it now was, no longer the intellectual stuff of Ibn Gabirol or the curious "otherness" of Ibn Sīnā and Maimonides) would have to be given back somehow to God, no longer alienated from Him. If nothing comes from nothing, then the materiality in nature cannot "come from" what in itself contains no materiality: Matter must be one manifestation or "attribute" of God (using Maimonides' interpretation of the word 'attribute' as an aspect under which we apprehend divinity). If God is everywhere, then God is in matter too; if the highest monotheism, as al-Ghazālī put it, sees God in everything, then matter is not exempt; and if dualism is untenable and renders matter inaccessible to God or the mind, then the idea of emanation must be revised to reveal not a penetration of alien matter by the pure light of form—the female by the male—but a coordinate authenticity of extension and idea, as each other's representations, conjoint manifestations of the infinite essence of the Divine.

In the final conference paper, Robert McLaren surveys Neoplatonism as a whole and Jewish Neoplatonism in particular with a view to discerning the psychodynamical needs and theological conundrums which the recurrent Neoplatonic epochs in Western philosophy may address. His appraisal does not (in the manner of Freud's classic dismissal of the religious quest) simply dismiss Neoplatonism, or the religious impulses it expresses, as a delusion,

on the ground that it answers questions of the heart; but equally it does not seek in the manner of pop theology to validate Neoplatonism on those same grounds, as if the service of the needs of the heart were sufficient vindication of an idea's veracity. For if our age can learn anything from the thinkers of the past it is that religion in general and religious philosophy in particular are not elevated by being treated as a consumer commodity. To a wiser sensibility like that of Baḥyā ibn Paquda, the service of the heart means not service *to* but service *by* the heart.

McLaren seeks sympathetically to explicate, in psychodynamic terms, the same crosspressures that the classic thinkers studied in this volume sought to reconcile philosophically. One is reminded of Maimonides' comment, echoing Saadia as he so often does, that the Ash'arites and occasionalists of the *kalām* are not to be scorned but respected for their endeavors to struggle with great issues, and for the honesty, clarity and consistency of their respect for the values we still find enshrined within their philosophies, even where those philosophies do not succeed in making all coherent but leave the threads and crossthreads imperfectly disentangled.

Expositors, here in this volume and in the past, have sought to tease out some of those threads, sometimes to weave them into a more durable fabric, sometimes simply to show them to be hopelessly snarled or at risk of unraveling completely if handled any further. The names of the great thinkers whose work informs the matter of this volume are thus themselves intertwined in the notes and bibliography with the names of scholars of their work whose thoughts were never far from the minds of our symposiasts and whose writings underlie much of what is written here: Alexander Altmann, M.-M. Anawati, A. H. Armstrong, W. Bacher, Abdur-Rahman Badawi, Zvi Baneth, Clemens Baeumker, Maurice Bouyges, Émile Brehier, Fernand Brunner, Hermann Cohen, Israel Efros, J. N. Findlay, Louis Gardet, Étienne Gilson, Louis Ginzburg, A.-M. Goichon, Julius Guttmann, P. Henry, A. J. Heschel, George Hourani, Isaac Husik, Louis Jacobs, J. Kafah, David Kaufman, S. Landauer, R. J. McCarthy, Ibrahim Madkour, Muhsin Mahdi, Henry Malter, Philip Merlan, P. Moraux, Salomon Munk, David Neumark, Joseph Owens, Shlomo Pines, Fazlur Rahman, Franz Rosenthal, W. D. Ross, Cecil Roth, Joseph Sarachek, Shmuel Sambursky, Solomon Schechter, Gershom Scholem, Steven Schwarzschild, H. Schwyzer, Leo Strauss,



Samuel Stern, Leo Sweeney, Georges Vajda, Simon Van Den Bergh, Richard Walzer, Zwi Werblowski, John Wippel, Stephen Wise, Harry Wolfson, A. S. Yahudah, and a handful of others. Their influence is pronounced, not only here, but in the writings of many of our colleagues cited frequently in these pages: Edward Booth, Pierre Cachia, Vincent Cantarino, Herbert Davidson, Majid Fakhry, Stephen Gersh, Dimitri Gutas, David Hartman, Raphi Jospe, Barry Kogan, Joel Kraemer, Michael Marmura, Dominic O'Meara, Eric Ormsby, Ian Netton, F. E. Peters, Shalom Rosenberg, Everett Rowson, Tamar Rudavsky, Norbert Samuelson, Jacques Schlanger, Kenneth Seeskin, Yirmiyahu Yovel, and others recurrently cited in the notes to our papers.

Philosophy, like Penelope's web, is torn down in the night but rewoven every morning, not out of mere doggedness or temporizing, but in a continual effort to capture adequately and in the perfect balance of its natural colors a single subtle but elusive pattern that will be emblematic of all reality. In the course of our studies of that weaving and unweaving, we may catch traces of the design that animates the ancient craft, and may seek to describe it to one another, or perhaps ourselves to take our places in the weaver's chair and touch our fingers to the clews.

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Our conference was the Seventh Congress of the International Society for Neoplatonic Studies. R. Baine Harris, the president of that society, deserves special acknowledgment for his many years of service to Neoplatonic studies and for first suggesting the conference whose deliberations are represented here. He had long felt the need for a conference exploring the achievements of Jewish Neoplatonism, the responses of Jewish thinkers to Neoplatonic philosophy, and the impact of that philosophy on Jewish thought. He invited me to organize such a meeting; and, finding a warm response from prospective scholarly participants, academic sponsors, and funding agencies, I was glad to do so. The conference was sponsored by the University of Hawaii Department of Philosophy, which has a history of commitment to comparative philosophic studies that goes back over fifty years. Our meeting was aided with generous grants and in

kind support from the University of Hawaii, the Matchette Foundation, the Hawaii Committee for the Humanities, a state-based program of the National Endowment for the Humanities, the American Friends of the Hebrew University, the Jewish Federation of Hawaii, Temple Emanu-El of Honolulu, and the Hawaii Council of Churches.

Special thanks are due to F. Glen Avantaggio for giving freely of his time to prepare the index of this volume, to John Casey for his graphic design work and photography at the conference, and to Guy Axtell, Ray Steiner and their fellow members of the Philosophy Students' Association at the University of Hawaii for driving the conference vans and facilitating the meeting in many other ways. Ours was the first Jewish studies conference to be held in Hawaii and the first conference to bring together the unique constellation of scholars represented in this book, many of whom had never met before. In addition to its formal academic proceedings, which are represented here, the conference also involved an ecumenical scholar-in-residence weekend, a public lecture series, a University of Hawaii mini-course for the academic and lay community on Neoplatonism and the Kabbalah, and publication of an adult education Interpretive Guide for the benefit of the host community. The scholars and I join in thanking the sponsoring bodies and the communities locally, nationally, and internationally, from whom they draw their support, for the opportunity they gave us to work together and the occasion for which we produced the body of work represented in this volume.

We met in true conference style, seated like the members of an orchestra, with our music before us, at the concentric tables of the Asia Room in the East West Center on the University of Hawaii campus. The papers as presented here cannot reproduce the full liveliness of the exchanges that took place, although most of them profited from those exchanges, often in ways now imperceptible. The twinkling eye of Bernie McGinn, the jovial laughter of Menachem Kellner, the hearty earnestness of David Novak, and Dick Popkin's delightfully low-key narrative style as he reported the forgotten or hitherto unknown comings and goings of Renaissance and Enlightenment figures—the general tone of anticipation and delight as each of us warmed to his topic and sparked off one another's observations, cannot be recorded here. But it was when the players took up their instruments in earnest that the real event began—the

light, airy allegro of David Winston, introducing Philo's theme in the flutes and piccolos, against a background of Greek woodwinds, followed by the extended andante passages of Ibn Gabirol in the cellos of Dillon, Mathis, and McGinn; the stately adagio of Maimonides in the strings, offset by reedy counterpoints of Islamic rhythms and Thomistic counterstatements in the basses, and by Ivry's and Dobbs-Weinstein's querulous oboe and clarinet solos; the intricately patterned Kabbalistic largo, and the brilliant scherzo and finale in which the new themes of Leone and Spinoza are heard in counterpoint with the now familiar material of the earlier presentations, and the whole brought together, rousingly, pleasingly but quizzically in McLaren's brassy and tympanic coda. Some of this effect is recorded here. The significance of none of the materials touched on is exhausted, but if this volume leads some of its readers to delve further into the texts themselves and the intellectual questions they subtend, it will have fulfilled its purpose.

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