

ARISTOTELIAN PHILOSOPHY IN THE *KUZARI*

Aristotelian philosophy plays a central and systematic role in the *Kuzari*. This is not surprising, since Judah Halevi's thought developed through an ongoing dialogue with it. Moreover, he believed that Philosophy (i.e., Aristotelian philosophy),¹ including those of its postulates that he refutes in his book, is an essential component of the process through which both the individual and humanity as a whole work out their relationship with God. Halevi's thought aims to provide appropriate answers to the questions raised by the confrontation with philosophy (1,1 [4]). As we shall see, however, the same questions underlie the progress of his own thought.

In his early period, Halevi still adhered in principle to the fundamental axioms of Aristotelian philosophy. When he

Translator's note: References to the *Kuzari* are given in the form book-paragraph, followed by one or two bracketed page numbers, separated by a slash. The first (and sometimes only) number refers to the Hebrew translation by Ibn Tibbon (the version through which the *Kuzari* has been known and interpreted over the generations), in the Zifroni edition (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1967). On rare occasions, where Ibn Tibbon's rendering is problematic, a reference is given to the modern Hebrew translation by Yehudah Even-Shmuel (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1972), as indicated by the prefixed letters ES.

invoked them he endeavored to synthesize them with concepts derived from Jewish tradition. In his later thought, which is strongly marked by the debate with philosophy, he freed himself from some of these axioms and emphasized the intrinsic virtues of traditional concepts. His quarrel with philosophy does not seek mainly to contradict its assertions, but to undermine its confidence in itself as the absolute expression of intellectual truth, whose practical implications are valid in all contexts. In his later thought, Halevi conceded to philosophy that, in principle, rational thinking can be carried through unambiguously and exhaustively. Aristotle had actually done so; Aristotelian philosophy is the substantive expression of his achievement. Were it not for certain events in which God was revealed to human beings, philosophy would be accepted—and rightly so—as the loftiest religious truth that human beings can conceive by their own power. Philosophy is the fruit of study and careful research (1,62 [29]): “There are differences in the ways of demonstration; some of them are exact, others insufficient; but

The page number after the slash refers to what is still the only complete English translation, that by Hartwig Hirschfeld (New York: Schocken, 1964; originally published 1905). Thus 1,1 [5/36] means Part I, §1, p. 5 in Zifroni, p. 36 in Hirschfeld. Unfortunately, Hirschfeld’s translation leaves much to be desired, in terms of both readability and accuracy. Isaak Heinemann, in his abridged edition (Oxford: East and West Library, 1947), which is really a revision of Hirschfeld, drastically improved the readability and fidelity to the original of Hirschfeld’s text. But Heinemann rarely indicated where he cut material from the beginning, middle, or end of a section, and even joined parts of different sentences into one, silently deleting the end of the first and beginning of the second; this approach makes his version quite unusable for scholarly purposes. Any reader of this book who wants to consult the *Kuzari* in English and see how a particular passage fits into its context has no choice but to use Hirschfeld. Given the problems with his version, however, I have been compelled to revise his translation so extensively (including many silent borrowings from Heinemann) that it would be confusing and pointless to indicate deviations from his text. Thus readers who consult Hirschfeld to locate a passage in context may not always find the text presented here.

1. The terms *philosophy* and *philosopher*, without further qualification, refer throughout to the Aristotelian school, whose main tenets are presented in the first section of Book One of the *Kuzari*. The Philosopher, with a capital *P*—and, similarly, the King and the Rabbi—refer to the three main characters in the book.

the ways of the philosophers are the most exact of all" (4,3 [218/199]). Its practitioners have a "refined intuition and clear view" (2,54 [112/116]). Hence philosophers cannot be reproached for their misleading world-view;² in fact, they merit reward in the world to come (1,111 [61]).³ On the other hand, Halevi refused to accept that their positivist assertions are unconditionally valid; they are merely "convincing" (1,2 [10/39]).⁴ In particular, he attempted to undermine the foundations of philosophy's answer to the problem of human mortality and death—the answer that gives Aristotelian philosophy its religious significance and turns it into a rival of the historical religions. He carefully avoided any confrontation with the philosophers' trenchant critique of the concept of divinity that lies at the core of revealed religion; this evasion must be understood as an admission that, from the purely theoretical perspective, their criticism is irrefutable.

For Halevi, the dispute with philosophy is not anchored exclusively in historical or biographical circumstances, but in the very essence of man as a rational being. Because the degree of the prophet builds on the degree of the rational man—just as each degree enlarges upon the perfections of those lower than it (1,30–43)⁵—the prophet, as a rational being, must deal with the arguments of philosophy that are necessarily visible on the horizons of his consciousness. Hence Halevi distinguished a philosophical or quasi-philosophical stage in every process

2. See 1,63–65; 4,13; 4,16.

3. This contrasts with the opinion of al-Ghazali, who contended that the philosophers, including al-Farabi and Avicenna, were heretics. See al-Ghazali, *Al-Munqid min adalāl*, trans. (into French) F. Jabre (Beirut, 1959), p. 73. Halevi's "liberal" view on this question simply reflects the theory of degrees of reality, on the one hand, and his view of the inferior value of speculative thought, on the other.

4. We must not understand *convincing* here in the narrow sense of the term, equivalent to "proven." Its sense is rather on the order of "adequate" or "plausible," although lacking decisive material proofs. Compare 1,13, where an explicit distinction is made between arguments that are *decisive* and those that are *sufficient*. Compare 1,68; 2,59; 5,2. See also Moscato on 1,68. This is also the opinion of H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle* (Cambridge, 1929), p. 369.

5. See 1,95 [46]; 2,26 [96/103]; 2,48 [106/111]; 2,50 [108/113].

whereby the individual or nation draws near to its God. Adam should be seen as the first father of philosophy (1,63 [30]), because “he was endowed . . . with the most perfect soul and with the loftiest intellect that it is possible for a human being to possess” (1,95 [46/64]). Before his first prophetic experience, he too could have only a limited perception of the Deity, that corresponding to the degree of rational understanding—God as Elohim (4,3 [219]).⁶ Similarly, the patriarch Abraham, before God was revealed to him in a vision, conceived of Him rationally, by means of speculation. Halevi believed that this conception essentially resembles that of the Philosopher (4,27 [269]). *Sefer Yetzirah* is the literary expression of Abraham’s prerevelatory thought (4,37 [270]). Only after his first epiphany did Abraham learn that “no detail of his life escaped God and that He rewarded him instantly for his piety and guided him along the best path, so that he moved forwards or backwards only according to God’s will. How should he not despise his former speculations?” (4,17 [247/223]). Similarly, the Jewish people, before their collective experience of the Divine revelation at Sinai, were distinguished among the nations for their philosophical excellence; the other nations learned from them (2,66 [121]).⁷ Consequently, the Israelites could not accept the opinion that “God spoke with man, until [Moses] caused them to hear the Ten Commandments” (1,49 [26/50]).

In light of the preceding, the introduction of the Philosopher before the representatives of the revealed religions should be understood as reflecting the idea that philosophical knowledge is prior to the degree of understanding derived from revelation. The philosophical world-view represents the highest stage that can be attained by the pagan. We may plausibly assume that the biography of the Khazar king embodies in miniature the

6. Right before this (4,3 [281]), Halevi noted that the philosophers, too, are incapable of surpassing the degree of conception of God expressed by the name *Elohim*, even though in its context they are able to reach the most “precise” idea.

7. See 1,63 [30]; 3,17 [162]. See also D. Neumark, *Essays in Jewish Philosophy* (Cincinnati, 1929), pp. 225ff.

chief stages in the process whereby humanity as a whole aspires to draw nearer to God.⁸ The order in which the speakers have their audiences with him parallels the sequence of the historical epochs through which mankind is passing en route to its future full acceptance of Judaism. The Philosopher's appearance before that of the representatives of the revealed religions corresponds to the historical fact of the advent of Greek philosophy before the Torah influenced the nations of the world.

The Philosopher's appearance earlier than the other speakers also hints at the methodological role of philosophical knowledge, which is a necessary precondition for attaining the true religion.⁹ Only thanks to the insight he gained from the Philosopher can the king of the Khazars understand the fundamental difficulty of positing the existence of a God who addresses individuals qua individuals: "What could be more erroneous, in the opinion of the philosophers, than the belief that the world was created, and that in six days; or that the Prime Cause spoke with one of the mortals" (1,4 [12/39]).¹⁰ His awareness of this fundamental problem leads the King to the Rabbi and subsequently to Judaism. His recognition of this difficulty engenders

8. This aspiration goes back to the pagan era (1,98 [53]; 3,23 [170]; 4,1 [216]). Compare Solomon Ibn Gabirol's *Keter Malkhut*: "For the intention of all is to attain you." See Heinemann, "Philosopher-Poet," p. 202 and n. 8. Most instructive is the analogy between the stages in the integration of the personality of the pious man and the arrangement of the Israelites at Mt. Sinai (3,5 [143]). The analogy rests on the assumption that there is a parallel between the process of spiritual development of the individual and of the human collective.

9. Halevi explicitly describes human history as a process in which philosophical perception plays a positive role in the evolution of humanity (3,54 [112]). See also 4,1-3; 4,15 [246].

10. Here God is intentionally designated by the radically impersonal term *Prime Cause*. This epithet is meant to reiterate the paradox involved in even positing the possibility of "Divine speech." The paradox is even greater when this speech is directed to "one of the mortals" and is thereby an unequivocal expression of a personal relationship. After the Philosopher departs the scene the Khazar king, having been persuaded by the "adequacy" of the Philosopher's remarks, adopts the main points of his view and measures the presentations of the representatives of the three religions against it. See Schweid, *Ta'am ve-haqqashah*, p. 61.

a suspicious and critical attitude toward stories of God's appearing to an individual; hence his strict methodological stipulations for accepting factual and empirical arguments "that God has intercourse with flesh and blood" (1,8 [16/43]). When the representatives of Christianity and Islam confess that they cannot satisfy these demands without relying on the Jewish tradition, the King is compelled to turn to the Rabbi.¹¹ It is not only for the non-Jew who is searching for the path to God that awareness of the problem of Divine revelation and a critical attitude toward the assumption of its possibility play an essential role. Prophetic knowledge, too, entails the methodical adoption of a critical and skeptical attitude. According to Halevi, the prophets must assume this attitude even toward their own prophetic experiences. Prophets can comprehend the objective significance of their prophetic experiences only when they juxtapose them with the experiences of other prophets: "The best proof of its truth is the harmony prevailing among the whole of this species regarding those forms. By this I mean all the prophets. For they witnessed things which one described to the other" (4,3 [228/207]).¹² In other words, prophets, too, must satisfy one of the central methodological stipulations that the King sets for verifying the factual and objective status of the revelatory experience—publicness.¹³ Furthermore, sensory knowledge, by its very nature, cannot attain the essence of things (4,3 [228/207]). The role of discursive thought is to penetrate to the heart of the revelation and uncover the essence of things. A prophetic experience of revelation that is not subjected to rational criticism leads to an anthropomorphic conception of the Deity. In the words of the King: "If any one were to hear you relate that God

11. See 1,4 [12]; 1,9 [16]; 1,109 [58]; 2,54 [112]; 5,21 [328].

12. Compare 4,11 [240].

13. Both the Exodus and Revelation at Sinai involved a public experience "in the presence of great multitudes, who saw indistinctly" (1,8 [16/43]). See also 1,49 [26]; 1,84–87; 4,11 [240]. These crucial events satisfied another methodological criterion: They involved wonders that overturned the natural order, so that "man may recognize that God alone, who created him from nought, is able to do so" (1,8 [16/43]). See also 1,83–86; 1,91 [45]; 2,2 [71]; 5,21 [329].

spoke to your assembled multitude, and wrote tablets for you, etc., he could not be blamed for accusing you of believing in the corporeality of God” (1,88 [42/62]). To this charge the Rabbi replies: “Heaven forbid that we should assume what is impossible or that which reason rejects as being impossible” (1,89 [43/62]).¹⁴ Polytheism, too, has roots in prophetic experiences. These experiences are characterized by a multiplicity of different images; but because all of them are given in immediate experience, they all have equal validity. Prophecy has the capacity to uproot these sources of polytheism by subjecting itself to the light of rational criticism. Such criticism can distinguish the multiplicity and variety of the prophetic images from the single substance that underlies them all (4,3 [228]).¹⁵

It is a scholarly commonplace that in his youth Halevi was an adherent of the dominant philosophical currents of his age, but that his world-view underwent a sea change before he wrote the *Kuzari*. This opinion is supported by various allusions in the *Kuzari* and in Halevi’s poetry.¹⁶ For example, there is the

14. See also 1,67 [31]. This is the source of the Rabbi’s reservations about a number of talmudic legends (3,73 [211]).

15. A critical attitude toward experience, aware of the problems inherent in the postulate that revelation is possible, is a prerequisite for recognizing authentic revelation. Hence it plays a central role in the debate between Judaism and the other revealed religions. This is how we must understand the Rabbi’s remark: “One who accepts [the service in the Tabernacle] with all his heart, without scrutiny or scruple, is superior to the man who scrutinizes and investigates. By contrast, someone who descends from this highest grade to scrutinizing does well to seek a wise reason for these commandments, instead of casting misconstructions and doubts upon them, which leads to corruption” (2,26 [99/106]). The remark is not aimed against Aristotelian philosophy but against the quest to find a rationale for the commandments, a quest that cannot lead to unambiguous conclusions. On this point, compare 2,49. See also Neumark, *Essays*, p. 228; A. Jacobus, “Ha-yaḥas shel sefer ha-kuzari el filosofiya” (The *Kuzari*’s attitude toward philosophy), *Alumah* (1936), pp. 61–62. For a different view see D. Kaufmann, *Geschichte der Attributenlehre in der jüdischen Religions-Philosophie des Mittelalters von Saadja bis Maimuni* (Gotha, 1877), pp. 122ff.

16. See D. Kaufmann, “R. Yehudah Halevi” (trans. from German by A. Zeidman), *Sinai* 9 (1941–1942): 23 and Appendix E [Hebrew]. See also Salo W. Baron, “Yehuda Halevi, An Answer to an Historic Challenge,” *Jewish Social Studies* 3 (1941): 259, n. 33; L. Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of*

Rabbi's rhetorical question: "Where is the soul that is strong enough not to be deceived by the view of the natural scientists and astrologers and sorcerers and philosophers and others, and can adopt a belief without having first passed through many stages of heresy?" (5,2 [279/248]). Then there is the decisive argument that only after the Holy Spirit settles on a person do "there vanish all previous doubts of man concerning GOD, and he despises all these syllogistic proofs by means of which men endeavor to attain to knowledge of His dominion and unity" (4,15 [246/222]). In these passages Halevi was relying on his experiences during the period when he was an adherent of philosophy and employed the syllogistic method—which (according to the *Kuzari*) led him into error and skepticism.¹⁷ This scholarly hypothesis is further reinforced by Halevi's overall view of the place of the philosophical stage in the process of man's rapprochement with God. It seems reasonable that Halevi, who found support for his view in the history of mankind, of the Jewish people, and of the patriarch Abraham, also found support for it in his own spiritual biography.¹⁸ A comparison of Halevi's early and later thought reveals his increasing distance from the Aristotelian school.

In his early thought, before the *Kuzari* was written, Halevi seems to have been inclined to Aristotelian philosophy. The Philosopher's discourse in the first section of the book expresses the opinions of that school (or should be understood as a retrospective and critical attempt to uncover the implications that the Aristotelian philosophers themselves attempted to conceal).

Writing (Glencoe, Ill., 1952), p. 109; Shraga Abramson, "Mikhtav R. Yehudah Ha-levi 'al 'aliyato le-eretz Yisrael" (A letter by R. Judah Halevi on his aliya to Eretz Israel), *Qiryat Sefer* 29 (1953–1954): 134 and n. 8; Komem, "Poetry and Prophecy."

17. For his opinion on the association between the syllogism in metaphysics and skepticism, see later, Chapter 3, note 6.

18. Isaak Heinemann suggested that Halevi saw the biography of the patriarch Abraham in the mirror of his own life; see Y. Heinemann, "Helekh ha-ra'yonot shel hathalat sefer ha-kuzari" [The current of ideas at the beginning of the *Kuzari*], in *Zemora, R. Yehudah Halevi*, p. 247.

In keeping with the Scholastic consensus of his age, and in an attempt to bridge between Jewish tradition and the philosophical world-view, one of the centerpieces of Halevi's thought was a metaphorical interpretation of those ideas derived from the former that are incompatible with the latter. According to this interpretation, those comments interpolated into the Philosopher's discourse that do not seem to play any defined role in his exposition (or any other role in the book) are to be seen as relics of this stage in Halevi's philosophical thought.¹⁹ By the same token, the depiction of philosophy is influenced by Halevi's critical and polemic interests while he was writing the book. Accordingly, Halevi emphasized the radical conclusions of philosophical thought because of his desire to lay bare the dangers it poses for Judaism. It is unlikely that he was aware of all these conclusions in the earlier period when he was still an adherent of philosophy.

A comparison of the philosophy of the *Kuzari* with the various Aristotelian schools known to Halevi indicates that it cannot be identified with any one of them. It differs from those of al-Farabi (875–950), Avicenna (980–1037), and Ibn Bajja (died 1138).²⁰ The divergences represent not imprecision, but his own original views. Part V of the *Kuzari* must be distinguished from the others sections of the book in this respect. In Part V, Halevi summarized the philosophical views current in his day with the explicit polemic aim of “refuting dangerous and foolish views” (5,1 [278/248]). Here he also summarized Avicenna's psychology (5,12 [292]).²¹ By contrast, in the opening section of the *Kuzari* Halevi expounded his own philosophical outlook, a position about which he had reservations by the time he wrote the book. This is the position to which he was referring in his remarks about philosophy in general (without noting explicitly that he is dealing with another philosophy) in

19. In the very first section of the book we find metaphorical use of the concepts *creation* and *Divine will*. See also 1,87 [42]; 4,13 [241].

20. This is despite his closeness to the thought of Ibn Bajja. See Pines, “Sh'ite Terms,” p. 215.

21. For a different opinion, see H. Davidson, “The Active Intellect.”

the first four parts. We shall find that, as a rule, there are contradictions in his description of the philosophical position only when we compare what is attributed to philosophers in the first four parts with what is attributed to them in Part V.

If we assume that the Philosopher's exposition at the beginning of the book reflects the main points of Halevi's own position before the *Kuzari* was written, the book can also be seen as a spiritual autobiography that describes the stages in the development of his thought and the reasons for his passage from stage to stage. The first section of the present volume, which deals with the Philosopher's thought, should be seen as a portrait of Halevi's thought in its first stage, before the composition of the *Kuzari*. The second and third sections of this volume deal with Halevi's thought while he was writing the book: the second with his earlier thought, the third with his later thought.

The first postulate shared by Halevi, the Philosopher, and the representatives of the revealed religions is that, alongside the general and egalitarian relationship that pertains between God and the universe in general, there is also a special relationship between God and some particular entity. Against the background of its milieu, this object appears (or may appear) in terms of its peculiar relationship to God. This is a necessary postulate, both metaphysically, with regard to the relationship between the universe and God, and anthropologically, with regard to the relationship between man and God. From the metaphysical perspective, for both the Philosopher and Halevi God is an agent that explains the existence of the universe—in one sense or another, in its entirety or in one of its aspects. God could not be a factor explaining the existence of the universe were it not for the special relationship between God and the realization of the essence of the universe—its emergence from potentiality to actuality. From the anthropological perspective, the special relationship between the Deity and a particular entity is a necessary postulate of any world-view in which God's existence is a significant factor in the intentional constitution of a way of life for human beings, or at least in their aspirations and expecta-

tions. In other words, given the existence of God, the attribution of normative redemptive meaning to human actions entails the fundamental postulate that some situations, things, or deeds are more godlike than others: These situations, things, or deeds are possible poles of attraction for concrete human aspirations. The very possibility of an "ascent," in theological terms, depends on the existence of "higher" and "lower."

A second postulate shared by Halevi and the Philosopher is that human initiative is at least an essential condition for the constitution of the special relationship between God and man.

These postulates occupy a central place in the contest between philosophy and Halevi's later view. The specific meanings ascribed to them by the disputants express different world-views about the essence of these poles of attraction, as well as about their relationship and the conditions in which it is constituted.

Our exposition of the Aristotelian philosophy of the *Kuzari* will begin with the description of the relationship between God and non-Divine reality, that is, the Divine emanation. Next we shall turn to the relationship between the non-Divine and God, followed by a consideration of the essence of God, on the one hand, and the essence of non-Divine reality, on the other. We shall try to understand the Philosopher's anthropology as one manifestation of the relationship between God and non-Divine reality. At the end of the discussion we shall focus on the systematic conclusions concerning the human way of life.