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## THE SYNTHETIC THINKING OF SOLOMON IBN GABIROL

SYNTEZA MYŚLI ŚREDNIOWIECZNEJ SALOMONA IBN GABIROLA

Streszczenie

Autorka wprowadza nowe spojrzenie na twórczość Salomona ibn Gabirola, wykazując, że był nie tylko eklektykiem, lecz wypracował syntezę całej średniowiecznej myśli arabsko-żydowskiej. Synteza ta stanowi z jednej strony podumowanie dotychczasowego stanu myśli filozoficznej i naukowej (medycyna, astronomia, psychologia), z drugiej strony nakreśliła nowe horyzonty intelektualne i wskazuje nowe problemy, jakie wymagają rozwiązania. Synteza Salomona ibn Gabirola posłużyła chrześcijańskiej filozofii w Europie za światło dalszego jej rozwoju i pośrednio przyczyniła się do nowego ukierunkowania mentalności europejskiej. Dalszym etapem filozofii europejskiej było zainteresowanie się tą filozofią oraz sięganie po źródła arabskie i żydowskie („domy przekładów“), a efektem dalekosiężnym – powstanie epoki odrodzenia .

### 1. THE MULTICULTURAL MILIEU OF GABIROL'S THINKING

Shelomo ben Yehuda ibn Gabirol (c. 1022-1057) is the most celebrated from among the Jewish poets and philosophers of mediaeval Muslim Spain. For Sarah Pessin he is – along with Isaac Israeli, thanks to their grounding in Arabic Neoplatonic textual tradition – an Arabic Neoplatonist.<sup>1</sup> They were both the Jews whose works demonstrated the depth of the influence of Islamic culture on Jewish philosophy of that period. The influence was mutual and led, in those countries where Islam had been holding sway, to the development of Judeo-Arabic culture, due to the predominant position of the Arabic language.<sup>2</sup> This interaction culminated in the

<sup>1</sup> S. Pessin, *Jewish Neoplatonism: Being above Being and Divine Emanation in Solomon ibn Gabirol and Isaac Israeli*, in: D. H. Frank and O. Leaman (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Mediaeval Jewish Philosophy*, Cambridge 2003.

<sup>2</sup> According to J. Blau, the gradual replacement of Aramaic in Palestine, Syria and Babylonia by Arabic reinforced it as the literary medium, in: J. Blau, *The Emergence and Linguistic Background of Judaeo-Arabic*, Jerusalem <sup>3</sup>1999, p. 21.

so-called Golden Age of intellectual life of the Spanish Jews, which was partly contemporaneous with the Golden Age of intellectual development in Islam (c8<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup>).<sup>3</sup> Ibn Gabirol has participated in it with his religious and secular poetry, as well as with his Neoplatonic philosophy. His work is considered an apex of the intellectual achievements of the time.

Ibn Gabirol's works are typical of all the Jewish philosophers of the Middle Ages;<sup>4</sup> their multicultural character is created by various elements, sometimes very different and distant.<sup>5</sup> They included the Arabic translation of the so-called *Theology of Aristotle*,<sup>6</sup> the Arabic translation of *Liber de causis* (Kalam fi mahd al-chajr),<sup>7</sup> the *Book on Five Substances*,<sup>8</sup> the *Epistles*, the encyclopaedic work of the Brethren of Purity<sup>9</sup> (which contained some facts on the views of Ptolemy and Galen), as well as the works of al-Kindi, al Fárabi, and ibn Síná.<sup>10</sup> These

<sup>3</sup> C. A. Qadir, *Philosophy and Science in the Islamic World*, London, Croom Helm 1988, chapter "Science in the Golden Period of Islam", p. 104.

<sup>4</sup> Such as his predecessor Isaac Israeli (late 9<sup>th</sup> and early 10<sup>th</sup> century), Bahya ibn Paquda (late c11<sup>th</sup> and early c12<sup>th</sup>), Josef ben Ja'akov ibn Zaddik (c12<sup>th</sup>), Abraham bar Hijja (first half of c12<sup>th</sup>) and Abraham ibn Ezra (c12<sup>th</sup>); including Juda Halevi (late c11<sup>th</sup> and early c12<sup>th</sup>), the critic of Aristotelian rationalism. Their common feature is the prevalent Neoplatonism derived from works by Plotin and Proclus, revised and completed by the elements of Islamic religious tradition and by some Aristotelian ideas, as is claimed by C. Sirat in her *History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge 1985, p. 57.

<sup>5</sup> C. Sirat, *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge 1985, p. 57.

<sup>6</sup> The Arabic version of the *Theology of Aristotle* was known in Baghdad at the very beginning of 9<sup>th</sup> century. De Libera explains ([10]; 87-90) that it consists of three parts: Prologue, Head of Questions and of Plotin's Enneads IV-VI. There exist a few different Arabic manuscripts of the so-called Theology of Aristotle, of which the well-informed analysis by F. W. Zimmermann is found in *The Origins of the So-called Theology of Aristotle*, in: J. Kraye, W. F. Ryan, C. B. Schmitt (eds.), *Pseudo-Aristotle in the Middle Ages*, London 1986, p. 110. The Hebrew translation of it, apart from some quotations, is lost. For the relation of the Arabic versus the Hebrew version of Theology of Aristotle see another well-informed analysis by P. B. Fenton, *The Arabic and Hebrew Theology*, edited in the already quoted *Pseudo-Aristotle in the Middle Ages*.

<sup>7</sup> D. Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, London 1998, reprinted 1999, p. 120.

<sup>8</sup> D. Kaufman, *The Pseudo-Empedocles as a Source of Solomon Ibn Gabirol*, in: D. Kaufman (ed.), *Mahqarim be-sifrut ha'ivrit shel yemei ha-binayim*, Jerusalem, 1992, p. 78.

<sup>9</sup> According to I. Husik, it was also a source of Bahya ibn Paquda, Ibn Zaddik, Juda Halevi, Moses ibn Ezra and Abraham ibn Ezra's thinking, in: I. Husik, *History of Mediaeval Philosophy*, New York 1959.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem, p. XXXIX.

multicultural elements could lead us to a view that Ibn Gabirol's thinking was eclectic<sup>11</sup>, but such an inference would be rash. We would rather say that his exceptionally logical mind was capable of working out solutions of his own on the basis of the works of Arabic philosophers, as well as the philosophy of Plotin and later Neoplatonism, which were available to Ibn Gabirol in Arabic translations. This proposition is argued in the author's analysis of three works by Ibn Gabirol, the *Royal Crown*,<sup>12</sup> the *Fountain of Life* and the *Improvement of the Moral Qualities*.

In the *Royal Crown* Ibn Gabirol introduced a few innovations into the Jewish liturgical poetry, for example some Sufi motifs, what was no hindrance to the Yom Kippur liturgy of the Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews.<sup>13</sup> Another work of him, the *Fountain of Life* ("Fons Vitae", FV), an approximately five-hundred-page treatise, primarily discussing the principles of matter and form, provides some further evidences that Ibn Gabirol's thinking was synthetic rather than eclectic. According to Ibn Gabirol's doctrine presented in that treatise, the problem of matter and form is the first of three main branches of science.<sup>14</sup> The *Fountain of Life*<sup>15</sup> has survived only in its Latin translation,<sup>16</sup> and has been slowly forgotten among the Jews<sup>17</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Eclectic in the sense of G. W. F. Hegel's definition, according to which "Such an eclecticism gives nothing but an aggregate which lacks all internal consistency. Eclectics of this kind are sometimes ordinary uncultured men, in whose heads the most contradictory ideas can find a place side by side one another, without their ever bringing these thoughts together and becoming conscious of the contradictions involved; ... Eclectic philosophy is something that is altogether meaningless and inconsequent: and the Alexandrian philosophy is not such", in: G. W. F. Hegel, *Dějiny filosofie III*, Praha 1974, p. 27.

<sup>12</sup> The first Slovak translation of this work by Dov Goldstein and Mária Mičáninová was published in Prešov 2003.

<sup>13</sup> This is claimed by a few authors, for example by R. P. Schendlin, who devoted a part of his *Gazelle, Medieval Hebrew Poems on God, Israel and the Soul*, New York, 1991, to this topic as well as D. LobeI in her book *A Sufi-Jewish Dialogue: Philosophy and Mysticism in Bahya ibn Paquda's Duties of the Heart*, Pennsylvania 2007.

<sup>14</sup> The other two beings, in ascending order, are the science of God's will and the science of the First Essence, God. Ibn Gabirol claims (FV V, 40) that he has written a special book devoted to God's will, but no further evidence of such a book is available (FV I, 7).

<sup>15</sup> Written in Arabic, but only fragments of it have been preserved in one of Moses ibn Ezra's works.

<sup>16</sup> Avencebrolis *Fons vitae / ex arabico in latinum transl. ab Iohanne Hispano et Dominico Gundissalino; ex codicibus Parisinis, Amploniano, Columbino primum edidit Clemens Baeumker, Münster-Aschendorff 1892-1895.*

<sup>17</sup> In any case, Medieval Jewish authors were acquainted with Ibn Gabirol's philosophy, and in the fifteenth century he was still known to Isaac Abrabanel and his son Leo Hebraeus, who cited him under the name of Albenzubron.

because of the lack of specifically Jewish content and terminology. However, Christian thinkers have discussed the ideas presented in this work, sometimes accepting and sometimes rejecting them.<sup>18</sup> This was the reason why some asserted that the *Fountain of Life* played an important role in introducing notions which shaped the general ontology (scientia omnium secundum quod sunt, the study of the nature of being), theology (scientia de essentia prima, study of the first essence) and the onto-theology of the so-called ‘modernists’, continuing the Aristotelian vein and the basic intuitions of Isaac Israeli. This began the violent confrontation between the world of The Book and the world of Hellenism.”<sup>19</sup>

Apart from the above-mentioned works, *The Improvement of the Moral Qualities* is another work, in which we can find the evidences of Ibn Gabirol’s non-eclectic way of thinking. In comparison with the *Fountain of Life* it is quite a short treatise, divided into five parts (according to our five senses), which shows the origin of the features of our character and mood and gives instruction in how to improve them. In this text we can find that Ibn Gabirol took inspiration from the Aristotelian three-part division of the soul and from the mediaeval medicine.

At first glance all these three works differ in their genre. The *Royal Crown* is a religious hymn, in which Ibn Gabirol showed his mastery of combining religious and philosophical ideas with Ptolemaic cosmology and Jewish mysticism. The *Fountain of Life* is a mature but uncompleted, according to Alain de Libera<sup>20</sup>, Neoplatonic metaphysical treatise in five parts with Aristotelian elements. The content of this treatise proves that the process of shaping the Jewish mediaeval philosophy, which was com-

<sup>18</sup> In the fifth tractate we can find the master’s request to liken creation „to a word that a man speaks, since as he utters the word, its form and meaning are impressed on the hearing and understanding of the listener. By this analogy it may be said that the sublime and holy Creator utters the Word and its meaning is impressed on the true being of matter, which retains it; that is to say, the created form is impressed on a matter and portrayed in it.” (FV V, 43) It lead some Christian scholastics, for example Albert The Great, to the conclusion that the author of the *Fountain of Life* could be either a Muslim or a Christian. More in A. Magnus, *Liber de causis et processu uniersitatis a prima causa* / Buch über die Ursachen und den Hervorgang von allem aus der ersten Ursache lateinisch-deutsch, Hamburg 2006, as well as in J. Guttmann, *Die Scholastik des Dreizehnten Jahrhunderts in ihren Beziehungen zum Judentum und zur jüdischen Literatur*, Hildesheim–New York 1970.

<sup>19</sup> A. De Libera, *Stredoveká filozofia*, transl. M. Kanovský, Bratislava 1994, p. 19.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem, p. 208.

menced by Saadia Gaon (882 – 942), culminated in the philosophy of Ibn Gabirol.

However, looking more deeply, we discover that all three works, despite their specific differences, are devoted to the same motifs: our longing for God, our knowing his works and our self-improvement. So, it is interesting to investigate how are the different philosophical and scientific elements and motifs mirrored and synthetically mixed in the terminology of these works. This is the real subject of this paper.

## 2. THE ROYAL CROWN

First and foremost Ibn Gabirol is a religious thinker. His religious terminology is as rich as is the Jewish religious tradition. Therefore it is not surprising that in his liturgical poetry (*shirat hakodesh*) he used only the Hebrew of the Bible. He joined the biblical vocabulary with the philosophical description of God's attributes, the Universe and the relationships between God and man. Such are also the topics of the three parts of the *Royal Crown of Rabbi Shelomo ben Gabirol*.<sup>21</sup>

The opening (*p'tikha*) of the poem is followed by the first part, which is full of anaphoric repetitions, "Thine are...". Each stanza finishes with a biblical quotation; it's a typical feature of the *Royal Crown*. The anaphora is retained throughout all the stanzas of the first part, written in a rhyming prose, an effective means of a concise and explicit expression of the basic attributes of God. Ibn Gabirol summarizes them in the verses that begin with the words, "Thou art One", "Thou livest", "Thou art great", "Thou art mighty", "Thou art supreme light", "Thou art God", and "Thou art wise." The act of God's creation is described by the verses "Thou art wise and from Thy wisdom Thou gavest wisdom to the will, which was prepared as by an artisan and a craftsman, to draw the being from nothing like the light is drawn from the eye, and to take from the spring without a vessel."<sup>22</sup> Hereby Ibn Gabirol forms the sequence grounded in Neoplatonism, "God, the Wisdom, the Will", which we consider to be the key terms of the first part of the poem. Together with the attributes of God – the basic theme of each mediaeval philosophy of religion – this sequence is one of the forms of Neoplatonic metaphysics, expressed with a poetic and metaphorical language.

<sup>21</sup> It's the first Slovak translation of it made by D. Goldstein and M. Mičaninová under the title *Koruna kráľovstva rabína Šlomo ben Gabirola*, Prešov 2003.

<sup>22</sup> *Koruna kráľovstva rabína Šlomo ben Gabirola*, Prešov 2003, p. 23.

In the second part of the *Royal Crown* Ibn Gabirol celebrates God's creation of the Universe and its structure, common to the mediaeval cosmology as a branch of metaphysics, devoted to the physical nature of being. He commences his description with the creation of the Earth, encircled by the sphere of fixed stars, above which there is another sphere, the Zodiac, with its constellations. Ibn Gabirol combines Ptolemaic geocentricism with the hidden meaning of the biblical text. As, for example, in the verses, "And these four elements have one foundation and their source is One." (Gn 2), which hints of a river flowing from the Paradise. And it is followed by allusions to the mystical tradition of ma'aseh merkavah, a description of the mystery of God's throne (merkavah) and His presence (shekinah) at the centre, having their origin in the prophet Ezekiel's vision. (Ez 1).

Having described the ascension from the Earth to God's throne, which is the abode of the spirits of His saints, Ibn Gabirol concentrates on human soul.<sup>23</sup> God provided the soul with the spirit of wisdom and then placed the soul in the body "to give it life, to teach and show it the path of life, and to save it from evil."<sup>24</sup> Not only the soul, but also the senses have obtained body from God, what includes "the eyes to see Thy signs, the ears to hear Thy wonders, the mind to grasp a part of Thy mystery, the mouth to tell Thy praise, and the Tongue to relate Thy mighty deeds to every comer. To tell him, according to the shortness of my tongue, one tiny part of Thy greatness."<sup>25</sup>

These verses prepared Ibn Gabirol's path to the third lyrical part of his poem. All the stanzas start with the same word: 'Elohay!' (My God), which is followed by a stream of penitential disclosing of sins before God. A strong impression is reached by using the first person singular, in which the whole third part is written. Verses like, „What am I, what is my life, what is my strength, what is my justice? My life is unworthy, while I am here and still more after my death."<sup>26</sup> have achieved their goal in the last thousand years: a man must start to reflect upon himself, possibly ending in catharsis, in the hope of reaching eternal life in God's presence.

<sup>23</sup> Adena Tannenbaum wrote a very interesting monography on man's soul as a motif of Ibn Gabirol's works, entitled *The Contemplative Soul, Hebrew Poetry and Philosophical Theory in Medieval Spain*, Leiden–Boston–Köln 2002, in which beside Ibn Gabirol she discussed the same motif in works of Moses ibn Ezra, Abraham ibn Ezra, Judah Halevi, and Judah Alharizi.

<sup>24</sup> *Koruna kráľovstva rabína Šlomo ben Gabirola*, Prešov 2003, p. 53.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 55.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 59.

It is necessary to assert that Ibn Gabirol's poetic celebration of God in the *Royal Crown*, despite its Biblical source, doesn't contain anything typically and exclusively Jewish, nor typically Platonic. In contrast, Ibn Gabirol asserts that man's intellect could not merge with God, evidence of which is found in the verses, "My God, who can come to Thy foundation, to that Thou didst raise up above the sphere of Intelligence, the Throne of Glory, in which is the abode of mystery and majesty, in which is the secret and the foundation, to which the intelligence tries to reach, and then stops short".<sup>27</sup> In regard to the last part of the poem we can only agree with I. Levin's words, "Philosophical ideas in the first two parts and their scientific views, widespread in the Moslem world crossed borders of religions. Their influence shines out from all parts of this work to strengthen its universal character".<sup>28</sup>

### 3. FOUNTAIN OF LIFE

The *Fountain of Life* is a book which is traditionally described as a Neoplatonic metaphysical treatise. Such a characteristic is acceptable from the ontological perspective. But, if we take into consideration the purpose of Ibn Gabirol's text, then we should add another, mystical characteristic, because the *Fountain of Life* was written in order to show to the man the way in which he can "pursue the knowledge of the Final cause, the purpose for which he was created, and after a long study, how he can achieve happiness".<sup>29</sup> It is a prerequisite of the final aim of the man's efforts "to unite his soul with the higher world, so that everything returns to what it resembles."<sup>30</sup> If mysticism is defined as ecstatic union in which subject and object are erased, then "Ibn Gabirol lacks mysticism, as we do not find evidence of unio mystica in his poetry. However, we can also define mysticism more broadly as the longing of a soul for direct communion with the divine. And we do find clear evidence of such longings in Ibn Gabirol's poetry; indeed his poetry offers some of the finest evidence

<sup>27</sup> Ibidem, p. 49.

<sup>28</sup> I. Levin, *Keter malchut leravi Šlomo ben Gvirol*, Tel Aviv 2005, p. 28

<sup>29</sup> Avengebrolis, *Fons vitae / ex arabico in latinum translatus ab Iohanne Hispano et Dominico Gundissalino; ex codicibus Parisinis, Amploniano, Columbino primum edidit Clemens Baeumker, Münster–Aschendorff 1892-1895.*

<sup>30</sup> This sentence resembles the verse from *The Royal Crown* "For all of this is a mystery, and when the names change, everything goes towards one place", p. 21.

of such intense longings.<sup>31</sup> The other form of expression of his mysticism is displayed in the *Fountain of Life* in the form of intellectual mystical thinking<sup>32</sup> on the First Essence and what results from it.

In his *Fountain of Life (Fons vitae, FV)* Ibn Gabirol decided to use a classical form of mystical instruction – a dialogue between a master and a pupil of mystics.<sup>33</sup> For this purpose a master, having used the “regulae dialecticae artis”<sup>34</sup>, explains to his pupil the key entities of the order of being. These are *Essentia prima*, *Voluntas*, and *materia et forma*. Three different sciences are consistent to them: the science of the First Essence, science of Will and science of matter and form. The logical relation between them is understood by Ibn Gabirol as a causal line, in which the First Essence is a cause, the matter and form in compound substances are effects, and the Will is an intermediary factor between them both. The First Essence is the uncaused cause, the Will is the effect as well as the cause of matter and form. In the physical universe there is a sequence of causes and effects, according to which the highest substance is the cause and the lowest is the effect.<sup>35</sup>

This work of Ibn Gabirol is devoted to the science of matter and form and to the ways of acquiring this knowledge.<sup>36</sup> Hereby the knowledge of

<sup>31</sup> I. Levin, *Keter malchut leravi Šlomo ben Gvirol*, Tel Aviv 2005, p. 23.

<sup>32</sup> “The concept of the intellectual mysticism is based on the notion that what’s divine is fundamentally intellectual, and thus the union between a man and the divine can be described as a connection, a contact, or a conjunction of the human intellect with the divine intellect.” D. Lobel, *A Sufi-Jewish Dialogue: Philosophy and Mysticism in Bahya ibn Paquda’s Duties of the Heart*, Pennsylvania 2007, p. 22.

<sup>33</sup> It is common in the Sufi tradition.

<sup>34</sup> It brings to mind Eriugena’s *De divisione naturae*.

<sup>35</sup> The reader may recall Propositions 11, 56, 57, 58, 71, and 72 of Proclus’ theory from his *Elements of Theology*; a revised Text with Translation, Introduction and Commentary by E. R. Dodds, Oxford 1963.

<sup>36</sup> In the first tractate of the *Fountain of Life* we can read that, “Because it is our intention to study the universal matter and form (*materia universali et forma universali*) we have to say that what consists of matter and form is divided into two parts, the composite corporeal substance (*substantia corporea composita*) and the simple spiritual substance (*substantia spiritualis simplex*). The corporeal substance divides into two parts, because the corporeal parts, which sustain form, differ from the spiritual matter (*materia spiritualis*), which sustain the corporeal form. Therefore it is necessary to have two tractates. The first tractate is devoted to what should be established to determine the universal matter and the universal form, to get knowledge about matter and form in sensually perceptible way and to discuss the corporeal matter sustaining qualities. In the second tractate we are to discuss the spiritual matter sustaining the corporeal form. Therefore the spiritual substance

three important propositions in Ibn Gabirol's work can be understood as follows: the first is that the knowledge/science<sup>37</sup> requires evidence and proof, the second that a man can only prove the existence of created being with the help of reasoning, and the third that the created being is matter and form, their combinations and implications, the source of which is the Will, the divine power creating matter and form and binding them together from the highest beings down to the lowest.

When Ibn Gabirol wrote, "with the help of reasoning", he was having in mind the Aristotelian art of deductive formal logic based on the theory of syllogism. Ibn Gabirol applied this art skilfully, for example in the third tractate of the *Fountain of Life*, to demonstrate simple substances as follows: "Every simple substance that unites with another substance by itself is finite; being terminated exactly where it unites with the other substance. Now, whenever a thing is terminated in another thing, its essence is finite. Therefore every simple substance that unites with another substance has a finite essence. I now take this proposition and assert as follows: every simple substance that unites with another substance by itself, has a finite essence. Now, the essence of the First Author is infinite. Therefore the essence of the First Author is not united with any of simple finite substances" (FV III).

The same way of demonstration is applied by Ibn Gabirol to all beings created of matter and form, the combinations and implications of which create the physical multiplicity of the world. Ibn Gabirol wanted to explain it as something that followed from the one and only spiritual source, God. But to know God is impossible, so he began to examine what had been created through His Will,<sup>38</sup> namely matter and form in sim-

needs evidence to be joined to, and proofs to become, a certain being; because it does not know itself necessarily, we need the third tractate, in which we will think about the reality of simple substances. It is also necessary to have the fourth tractate to discuss an enquiry into the science of matter and form of simple substances. Once the enquiry in these four tractates is complete, we shall have to examine the universal matter and the universal form in themselves; hence there should be the fifth tractate. And so it is that everything that we should consider with reference to matter and form can be found in these five tractates we had just specified. Such is the whole content of the present work" (FV I,12).

<sup>37</sup> The word 'science' is used in this place of the Latin version of the *Fountain of Life* (*Fons vitae*).

<sup>38</sup> "The Will may be compared to the Stoic and Philonic Logos, which is that aspect of the first principle, which permeates and informs the universe, being even closer to the will of the Father in the Chaldean Oracles, a source which was not available in Arabic, but which influenced many documents of the time." J. M. Dillon, *The Great Tradition*.

ple substances, which exist between the corporeal things of our experience and the First Agent (called the First Author in the text) of all. In Ibn Gabirol's version of emanation, God's Will is the cause of creating bodies from matter.<sup>39</sup> Like in the case of Plotin and the Sufis, in the *Fountain of Life* the intellect undertakes a return journey to unite with the divine. In contrast to Sufi motifs, in the *Fountain of Life* Ibn Gabirol did not depict God as a personal and loving being.<sup>40</sup> However, we can find some classically mystical features in the language of the *Fountain of Life*, which are common with the Sufi language in "describing the reality as what's known and unknown, and what both is and is not." Most Sufi thoughts don't describe philosophy as a prerequisite for the union with God.<sup>41</sup> However, Ibn Gabirol's master knows that his pupil can long only for the union with God's Will, and not with God himself, which is perfectly compatible with the same idea expressed in the *Royal Crown*. Ibn Gabirol could acquire such a knowledge from the *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity*, who are generally recognized "to have their hands" on such typical Neoplatonic attempts.

Ibn Gabirol utilized in the *Fountain of Life* two methods with respect to these basic propositions: one is to consider the properties of the First Author and the properties of the substance that supports nine categories; the other is to examine the effects produced in the latter in accordance with the general emanation of everything from the First Author. The first of them really establishes the existence of simple substances; the second leads, synthetically and analytically, to a knowledge of what they are in themselves and how they are, and why.<sup>42</sup> One can understand why Aristotelian logic, as well as the Neoplatonic theory of emanation are perfectly compatible with the mystical purpose, which is the subject of fascinating conjectures in the *Fountain of Life*.

*Further Studies on the Development of Platonism and Early Christianity*, Aldershot 1997, p. 69.

<sup>39</sup> Exactly as in the Arabic version of the Theology of Aristotle, which is quoted by al-Farabi, "It was the God's Will to create bodies from matter, and it was the Creator, who created matter of nothing." More about it we can learn from F. W. Zimmermann's paper *The Origins of the So-called Theology of Aristotle*, in: *Pseudo-Aristotle in the Middle Ages*, ed. by J. Kraye, W. F. Ryan, C. B. Schmitt, London 1986, p. 177.

<sup>40</sup> In contrast to *The Royal Crown*.

<sup>41</sup> D. Lobel, *A Sufi-Jewish Dialogue : Philosophy and Mysticism in Bahya ibn Paquda's Duties of the Heart*, Pennsylvania 2007, p. 23-24.

<sup>42</sup> More details in J. Schlanger, *La philosophie de Solomon ibn Gabirol, études d'un néoplatonisme*, Leiden 1968.

In his doctrine of matter and form, Ibn Gabirol distinguishes, apart from the First Essence (Author, Creator) and his Will, the universal matter and universal form, and matter and form as causes of all diversities in the created Universe.<sup>43</sup> He asserts that there are four kinds of matter<sup>44</sup> which have one origin in the universal matter, and four kinds of form which have one base in the universal form. (On the other hand, each matter has its form).<sup>45</sup> Nothing is present in sense-perceptible things except matter and form, because matter is the universal physical substantiality, and form is the totality of everything supported therein. So it follows that the universal matter and the universal form support parts of all created things. If the universal matter and the universal form were the ultimate of all created things and the ultimate of all simple (intelligible) substances because of their simplicity and spirituality, we ought “to refine our mind, unify our nature and purify our imagination as far as we are able, freeing it from physical contingencies and transcending sense and sense objects, in order to realize that the power of our reason can comprehend everything. Thereupon we can achieve a true understanding of the one and the other, of the universal matter and of the universal form” (FV V, 1).

The relation between the universal matter and form and the matter and form of physical substances is explained by Ibn Gabirol in his fourth tractate of the *Fountain of Life*, where he asserts that not only physical substances are composed of matter and form, but the same is true of intelligible (simple) substances. He produces two arguments in support of this assertion. The first argument arises from the resemblance between the two worlds, the higher and the lower, characteristic of each Neoplatonic way of thinking. If the lower originates in the higher, then all that exists in the lower must exist in the higher, for which Ibn Gabirol provides a proof, “Since their effects differ, their forms undoubtedly differ, and it is not possible that the matters of these substances differ, because they are all simple and spiritual, and difference arises only from form, and simple matter is without form in itself” (FV IV, 1). Thus, since physical spheres possess matter and form, simple (intelligible) ones must also do so. These are identical in matter but dissimilar in form (FV IV, 1).

<sup>43</sup> Ibn Gabirol differs the universe from the wholeness. The latter denotes the cosmic sphere and the transcending substances that envelop it (FV III, 58).

<sup>44</sup> There are four kinds of matter: the particular artificial matter, particular natural matter, universal natural matter, which is subject to generation, and the celestial matter.

<sup>45</sup> It resembles the verse, “And these four elements have one foundation and their source is one.” *Koruna královstva rabína Šlomo ben Gabirola*, p. 27.

The second argument is that arising from the diversity of the intelligible world (the world of simple substances), which seems to correspond with the view of Plotinus in *Enneads* VI, 7. In spite of this, Ibn Gabirol differs from Plotinus in his solution to the question of how a spiritual substance can be composite, being also spiritual (FV IV, 2). “You must take great care on this point, since the error is not minor here. What you ought to imagine in relation to spiritual forms is that all of them consist of one and only spiritual form (FV III, 26), with no difference among them by reason of themselves. They are simple and spiritual, and no diversity touches them except by virtue of the matter that sustains them. If this lies close to Perfection, it will be rarefied and the form sustained in it will possess simplicity and spirituality, and conversely” (FV V, 2).

First and foremost therefore it must be said that Plotin’s emanationism can be clearly identified on the basis of the *Fountain of Life*. We should add, however, that in Ibn Gabirol’s milieu Plotin’s emanationism was recognized in the Arabian-Neoplatonic version, which was current in the Sufi circles in his times.<sup>46</sup>

On the other hand, Ibn Gabirol wasn’t a slave to this. For instruction, he put the cause of diversity back onto matter and not form. The role of form is, according to him, to require the support of matter, which has no existence apart from form, because existence depends on form. In conclusion, the philosophies of Plotin and Ibn Gabirol give interesting parallels, but there is no evidence of any direct connection between the two thinkers.<sup>47</sup> “What we seem to have, rather, is the situation of two incisive and

<sup>46</sup> Anyway, Avicenna’s influence must be taken into consideration, because his concept or reality and reasoning does occupy the central place in his philosophy. “In his scheme, the Reason can allow to make progress through various levels of understanding and can finally lead us to God, to the ultimate truth. He stresses the importance of acquiring knowledge, and develops a theory of knowledge based on four faculties: sensual perception, retention, imagination, and estimation. Imagination plays the principal part in intellection, as it can compare and construct images which give access to what’s universal. Again the ultimate object of knowledge is God, the pure intellect.” In: Shlomo Ibn Gabirol, *The Fountain of Life (Fons Vitae)*, specially abridged edition translated from Latin by H. E. Wedeck, introduction by T. E. James, London, 1963, p. 4.

<sup>47</sup> The same can be asserted on the influence of other sources of Ibn Gabirol’s thinking, for example in the *Book of Five Substances*. It contains the altered Neoplatonic doctrine: first the Creator creates matter which contains state all the forms of the universe in their embryonic state. Having created matter, he creates intellect and provides it with life by way of matter. The intellect, taking its life from matter, turns its own attention towards the forms of matter, and draws the beauty of form from them. Thus it can assume intelligible forms which, combined with matter, can produce the soul. In this we can find some

highly original minds, within the same tradition, coming to similar conclusions about the structure of the universe.”<sup>48</sup>

The second thing that needs to be pointed out is that despite the clear Aristotelian influence on Ibn Gabirol’s way of thinking, he changed the meaning of key Aristotelian notions of ‘matter’ and ‘form’ by postulating the universal matter and form *per se* and by expressing open intelligible origin, not only of the universal matter but of the universal form, too. (V)  
<sup>49</sup> On the other hand, in the same fifth tractate Ibn Gabirol saw no problem, saying that matter is the potentiality, and form the actuality. It is clear to us that Ibn Gabirol’s theory provoked stormy discussion among the Aristotelian philosophers of the Middle Ages. Albert the Great wrote, “Besides those places in the *Fountain of Life* which sound controversial (God’s Will), I do not believe that Avicbron wrote this book, but I do believe that it was created by one of the Sophists.”<sup>50</sup> In addition, we have to admit that no quotation from the Hebrew Bible can be found in the *Fountain of Life*.

In conclusion, it is typical for intellectual mysticism<sup>51</sup> to think of all created beings in logical way. It is characteristic of the *Fountain of Life*, as well as of *The Royal Crown* and *The Improvement of the Moral Qualities*. Differences can be found in terminology. In the *Royal Crown* there is God,

of Ibn Gabirol’s notions that are present in his doctrine of matter and form, however they have different meaning and arrangement. Therefore, we think that it is not possible to conclude: Ibn Gabirol only eclectically chose some elements/ideas from different sources which were united into a new ‘system’. On the contrary, the *Fountain of Life* is the evidence of Ibn Gabirol’s capacity to think originally and synthetically on the basis of the Arabian-Neoplatonic philosophy.

<sup>48</sup> J. M. Dillon, *The Great Tradition. Further Studies in the Development of Platonism and Early Christianity*, Aldershot, 1997, p. 69.

<sup>49</sup> More details in: J. Schlanger, *La philosophie de Solomon ibn Gabirol, études d’un néoplatonisme*, Leiden 1968, p. 166. In addition, we recommend to study C. Baumker, *Das Problem der Materie in der griechischen Philosophie*, Frankfurt am Main 1963, unverändlicher Nachdruck der Ausg., Münster 1890, as well as H. Happ, *Hyle : Studien zum aristotelischen Materie-Begriff*, Berlin 1971.

<sup>50</sup> A. Magnus, *Liber de causis et processu universitatis a prima causa* / Buch über die Ursachen und den Hervorgang von allem aus der ersten Ursache lateinisch-deutsch, Hamburg 2006, p. 77.

<sup>51</sup> “Intellectual mysticism is a term appropriate to the Aristotelian school of al-Fārābī, Ibn Bajja, and Maimonides, who hold that the essence of human being is his reason; it is intellect that lives beyond the grave and can achieve the ultimate fulfilment (sa’āda). The goal of intellectual mysticism is the conjunction of human intellect with the divine Active Intellect.” D. Lobel, *A Sufi-Jewish Dialogue: Philosophy and Mysticism in Bahya ibn Paquda’s Duties of the Heart*, Pennsylvania 2007, p. 24.

Wisdom and Will,<sup>52</sup> but in the *Fountain of Life* there is The First Essence, The Will, and (universal) matter and (universal) form, which helped to place the *Fountain of Life* in the line of general philosophical tradition of the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, all three works have the same Neoplatonic origin.<sup>53</sup> The basis of Ibn Gabirol's thinking in mediaeval medicine will be discussed in another part of this paper.

#### 4. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MEDIAEVAL SCIENCES IN THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE MORAL QUALITIES

Comparing *The Improvement of the Moral Qualities* with the above-mentioned works by Ibn Gabirol prompted us to investigate another dimension of the background of Ibn Gabirol's thinking. He was well-versed not only in the Bible, Arabian Neoplatonism, astrology and astronomy, but also in mediaeval medicine in the form created by Galen. It is a work devoted to topics belonging nowadays partly to the area of psychology, and perhaps even psychiatry. We have in mind Ibn Gabirol's view on sadness; today we would rather call it depression. "Thou shouldst know that if a man were madly in love with this world, which is a world *de generatione et corruptione*, he would never omit to seek the gratification of the senses, constantly moving on from one thing to another. If he attains them and then loses them, gloom overcomes him. On the other hand, if he could forget this world, and apply himself to the world of intellect, he would be able to escape the psychical ills which are (occasioned by) worldly acquisitions. It means that he could turn away from vain works and incline in the fullness of the soul to ethical science and religion laws. ... We ought to strive to cure our souls of this evil (disease), in the same way as we must suffer hardships in training to cure our bodies and to rid them of diseases by means of burning and cutting (fire and iron), and so forth."<sup>54</sup>

Ibn Gabirol uses emphasis to avoid developing merely one quality of the soul. If he had not, the one-sidedness would have lead him to mental illness. In the second chapter of the third part of this work, he explains,

<sup>52</sup> "You are wise; and wisdom, the fountain of life, flows from Thee, and every man is too brutish to know Thy wisdom." *Koruna královstva rabína Šlomo ben Gabirola*, p. 23.

<sup>53</sup> According to J. M. Dillon it is Platonic rather than Neoplatonic. J. M. Dillon, *The Great Tradition. Further Studies in the Development of Platonism and Early Christianity*, p. 59.

<sup>54</sup> Shlomo Ibn Gabirol, *The Fountain of Life (Fons Vitae)*, p. 79.

“Apprehensiveness is a living death.” He adds that “Healing psychical ills is other than spiritual remedies”, and continues that “The constitution of apprehensiveness is cold and dry, like the black gall (humour). No man can absolutely escape it. In some it attains immense proportions, so that thereby they become afflicted with psychical ailments.” In this connection Ibn Gabirol quotes Galen’s work on qualities of the soul.<sup>55</sup> It does not mean that Ibn Gabirol agrees with Galen in all things, but it is a fact that in the chapters on joy, grief and wrath, he always appeals to him. “Like anxiety (apprehensiveness) gives rise to weeping, when aroused, gladness incites to laughter, when stirred. Therefore an intelligent man ought to understand that this quality and some other qualities are not of the rational soul, as Galen holds, but of the animal soul. The proof of this is that thou seest laughter break out in spite of dreadful events. Considering this, man should urgently seek to render his animal soul submissive to his rational soul: namely, that his intellect would guide his nature.”<sup>56</sup>

Notwithstanding this, the whole work is aimed at the improvement of the qualities of the animal soul, taking into consideration that, after reaching maturity, the rational soul appears as one’s strength, which makes a man concentrate on the improvement of his qualities, not being usual for an animal soul to do this. Ibn Gabirol was able to explore in *The Improvement of the Moral Qualities*, along with Neoplatonism and the Bible, the knowledge of medieval medicine on how to work with the body. Before the completion of his definite scheme of the qualities of the soul united with the fact of the five senses of the body, Ibn Gabirol draws attention in his introductory essay to the fact that “God, Mighty and Exalted, has created the expanse of the smaller world dependent upon four elements: He places in man blood corresponding to air, yellow gall corresponding to fire, black gall corresponding to earth, and white moisture corresponding to water. Moreover, God, exalted be He, equipped him, i.e. man, with perfectness of form and with every organ complete and not wanting in any respect; and He created within him five senses, as we shall relate.”<sup>57</sup>

His scheme produces the following hierarchy:

1. Sight: pride – meekness; pudency – impudency
2. Hearing: love – hate; mercy – hard-heartedness (cruelty)
3. Smell: wrath – good-will (suavity); jealousy – wideawakedness

<sup>55</sup> Ibidem, p. 84. However not mentioning its title.

<sup>56</sup> Ibidem, p. 77.

<sup>57</sup> Ibidem, p. 32-33.

4. Taste: joy (cheerfulness) – grief (apprehensiveness); tranquillity – penitence (remorse)
5. Touch: liberality – neggardliness; valour – cowardice.<sup>58</sup>

This hierarchy is to be found in the hierarchy of senses and the hierarchy of the qualities which they command. In this, the most important is sight, which is in the body as the Sun is in the universe. As to the importance of the sense of hearing, it follows the sense of sight. It has a lesser effect on the soul than sight, but we have to pay it the same attention as sight. Smell follows the sense of hearing and is of less importance than hearing. Less important in the hierarchy means less training is required. Taste follows the sense of smell and is very similar. Pleasures of taste are peculiar to those members of the body in which the humour is well balanced. There is no opportunity for the reasoning soul therein, except to guide the body. It needs to be trained, because the body cannot exist without it. “As to the manner of exercising it, thou must know that these desires are ills of the body, which thou must treat, and diseases which thou must heal.”<sup>59</sup>

If we now proceed to represent the qualities of the senses according to their number, the result is that every sense has four qualities, giving twenty in total.<sup>60</sup> The whole work is patterned according to this scheme: five parts with four chapters (without titles). The ascription of an opposite quality to each sense is considered a characteristic of Ibn Gabirol’s ethical conception. In the case of pride – meekness, pudency – impudency. Ibn Gabirol emphasises that it is necessary to rule them, changing our mental approach. This is the aim of Ibn Gabirol’s work.

<sup>58</sup> Ibidem, p. 50.

<sup>59</sup> Ibidem, p. 37.

<sup>60</sup> Diana Lobel holds that Ibn Gabirol, as well as Bahya ibn Paquda, could be “drawing upon a classification that was known among Spanish intellectuals. Although Bahya presents the pairs of opposites as if they were just occurring to him, the pairs themselves have the ring of an inherited scheme. It is certainly striking that both thinkers based their ethical system upon these ten pairs of qualities rather than on the four temperaments of Greek medicine, the usual basis for mediaeval ethics. However, given that the two authors make very different use of this table, it is just as possible that each of them has adapted a well-known system to his own purposes.” D. L o b e l, *A Sufi-Jewish Dialogue: Philosophy and Mysticism in Bahya ibn Paquda’s Duties of the Heart*, p. 4.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This article aimed at an analysis of the ways how the different philosophical and scientific elements and motifs are reflected and synthesised in three works of Ibn Gabirol. In doing so, we came to the conclusion that in the case of Ibn Gabirol's thinking the analysis should focus on its complexity, and not on the individual sources of inspiration. It is so, because Ibn Gabirol's originality comes from him, and not from Plato, Aristotle, Plotin, or any other philosopher and their works which were known in his time. From our analysis it emerges that the character of his thinking is not eclectic, but rather synthetic and unique. If we take into consideration that during the Middle Ages the word 'philosophy' had a broad and a restricted signification at the same time,<sup>61</sup> then we'll have that these three works by Ibn Gabirol provide a thorough cosmogony, cosmology, psychology and metaphysics that offer a complete explanation of the world with their topics and terminology, reflecting – as they do – the philosophy and science of his time. Their attractiveness stems from the Spanish multicultural environment of the time, what is also typical of today's Europe. Ibn Gabirol could teach us a better understanding of one another.

<sup>61</sup> The word 'philosophy' referred to the 'explanation of the world' and the 'thought system' elaborated by the Greeks, what had its culmination in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. with Plato and Aristotle. C. Sirat, *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, p. 1.