Article

Ibn Gabirol and Judah ha-Levi's Usage of Dialogue: The Role of the Disciple in *Fons Vitae* and that of the King in *Kitāb al-Khazarī*

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Abstract: The literary framework of Solomon Ibn Gabirol's *Fons Vitae* is a conversation between a master and a disciple. In this article, the nature of the disciple's questions will be analyzed in order to explain the advantages of the dialogical process in Ibn Gabirol's thought. The literary framework of Judah ha-Levi's *Kitāb al-Khazarī* is similar to that of *Fons Vitae*. Ha-Levi's composition is built as a conversation that allegedly took place between the king of the Khazars and a Jewish scholar (ḥaver). Analysis of the king's responses to the ḥaver shows that the king did not fully understand the ḥaver's lessons, in which the deep meaning of Judaism is taught. In this article, the king's responses will be analyzed and, likewise, the question of Judah ha-Levi's intention in using this literary sophistication. As is shown in this article both famous Andalusian poets and thinkers, R. Judah ha-Levi and R. Solomon Ibn Gabirol, masters of linguistic phrasing and style, used the dialogical form not only as an opportunity to present their world views, but also as a method by which to critique their own philosophies.

1. Introduction

Rabbi Solomon Ibn Gabirol's *Fons Vitae* and Rabbi Judah ha-Levi's *Kitāb al-Khazarī* both belong to the classics of Jewish theology and philosophy in the Middle Ages. Although their influence and appreciation in the medieval Jewish tradition were different, regarding their own historical context, both of them represent the pinnacle of the Jewish literature of Andalusia in the 11th and 12th centuries. The two compositions deal with theoretical issues (Neoplatonic metaphysics in *Fons Vitae* and apologetic theology in *Kitāb al-Khazarī*), and both were composed by the greatest of the Hebrew poets of medieval Spain, masters of language and artists of phrasing and style.[1] Another common denominator of these two compositions is that they use the dialogical form in order to communicate their messages. Although not very common, the literary framework of dialogue was in use in the Jewish and Islamic Middle Ages in the fields of theology and philosophy in various functions.[2] The examination and analysis of

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[1] On the connection between the languages of poetry and philosophy see (Lorberbaum 2011, pp. 1–12).

[2] The literary framework of different types of dialogue was in use in the Jewish and Arabic cultures in which Ibn Gabirol and Judah ha-Levi were immersed, in varied modes, in the fields of theology, philosophy, law, and ethics. Examples are Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman's *Kitāb al-ʿĀlim wa-al-ghulām* (Morris 2001); *Kitāb Bilawhar wa-Būdhāsf* (Gimaret 1972); the philosophical tale about Ḥay Ibn Yaqṭān of Avicenna and Ibn Ṭufayl (Goichon 1959; Gauthier 1936), as well as the literature of disputations (*munāẓarāt*; see Wagner 1993; and cf. Lazarus-Yafeh et al. 1999) and also the 'questions-and-answer' literature (Daiber 1991). The literary sources, as well as the historical circumstances, that contributed to the development of the usage of the dialogue among Muslim thinkers (religious sources—Qurʾān and Ḥadith literature—or tales and fables, and also religious debates and methods of dialectical study; cf. Morris 2001, introduction: 6–9), could at the same time have influenced Jewish thinkers like Ibn Gabirol and ha-Levi (cf. Hughes 2008, pp. 1–16). Indeed some Hebrew thinkers translated and

the different usages of the dialogue and its varied functions in the Jewish-Islamic world is beyond the scope of this research. Although this determination requires further study, it seems that in Ibn Gabirol's *Fons Vitae* and in ha-Levi's *Kitāb al-Khazarī* we find a unique usage of the literary framework of the dialogue. The dialogue as a literary framework in *Fons Vitae* and in the *Kitāb al-Khazarī* was discussed by researchers (see for example Strauss 1952; Motzkin 1978; Schweid 1970; Schlanger 1968b)—but not in an exhaustive manner and not with regard to the similarities and differences between these two compositions, which share common historical, linguistic and cultural circumstances. In this article I wish to explore a common aspect of the usage of dialogue in these two compositions, which will enlighten them in a new manner—the usage of dialogue for criticizing the messages that are being taught in the books and that are discussed by the protagonists in both compositions.

2. The Dialogue in Ibn Gabirol's *Fons Vitae*—Analysis and Discussion

Ibn Gabirol's *Fons Vitae*, as was preserved in its 12th century Latin translation, is formulated as a conversation between a master (or: teacher; *magister*) and a student (*discipulus*). A plain reading of Ibn Gabirol's composition gives the impression that its purpose is to construct a Neoplatonic metaphysics, mainly of the 'universal' matter and form, their existence in the 'simple (or: abstract) substances', and to articulate the arguments that sustain this philosophical view. If this is the whole purpose of *Fons Vitae*, the dialogical framework seems redundant (see Hughes' evaluation of the dialogue in *Fons Vitae*, Hughes 2008, p. 45). The paragraphs that were edited and translated by R. Shem Tov Ibn Falaquera in the 13th century, as well as the fragments from *Fons Vitae* that were discussed by Moshe Ibn ʿEzra's *Kitāb al-muḥaḍarah wa-al-mudhakarah* (12th century), are not built as a dialogue, but rather as a didactic lecture (Munk 1859; Pines 1977; Fenton 1976). It may be that these medieval scholars thought that Ibn Gabirol's philosophy is better taught not in its literary-dialogical form.[3] If, however, the dialogue in *Fons Vitae* is not just a literary framework, but rather it is of value for understanding the book's message, the reader must first take into account the profile of the disciple, and to pay attention to his questions and requests.

Already in the opening paragraph of the composition, the high level of the disciple's skills are stated. In his invitation to the philosophical conversation, the master says: 'Now that by your nobility of character (*bonitate naturae*) and your zeal for learning (*et studio scientiae profectus*) you have progressed to this point, you may now begin to ask questions about what has most impressed you in our inquiry. But in doing so, please approach the ultimate question of way man was created.' (I, 1; Baeumker 1895, p. 2; Jacob 1987, p. 3).[4]

It seems that the disciple thinks highly of his own scholarship (or at least, he has significant scholarly self-confidence). In *Fons Vitae* III, 46, he says: 'I have never found this opinion in any

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3　　The style of *Fons Vitae* was also criticized by Abraham Ibn Daʾūd for its length, see (Eran 2019, pp. 104–5).
4　　A similar quality of passion for knowledge ('desire for inquiry') is mentioned in the 'Epistle Dedicatory' by Maimonides in the beginning of *The Guide of the Perplexed* (see Pines 1963, p. 3). Nevertheless, in Maimonides' epistle it seems that Maimonides criticizes the disciple – the addressee of *The Guide*, Joseph ben Judah ben Simon – hinting that his desire is 'stronger than his grasp'. On Maimonides' attitude to Joseph ben Judah and on the meaning of the 'Epistle Dedicatory', see (Strauss 1963; Frank 1992).

philosopher' (Jacob 1987, p. 166) as if, according to his broad scholarship, he was supposed to find the teacher's opinion stated by a previous philosopher (cf. *Fons Vitae* III, 58).

The main fields in which the disciple educated himself towards the conversation with the master are psychology and logic. Psychology is essential for understanding the topics of the discussion since the inquiry in *Fons Vitae* about the knowledge of the being, and in particular the knowledge of the 'simple substances', is based upon the disciple's awareness that the soul is 'accurate' in 'comprehending all things' and 'sustaining all' (I, 8; Jacob 1987, p. 12). Logic, on the other hand, is necessary in order to apply the relevant method of the dialogue. This method is determined by the master in the beginning of the dialogue, when he says: 'And let the mode of discourse between us be question and answer according to the rule of proof (*interrogatio et responsio secundum regulam probationis*). (I, 1; Jacob 1987, p. 3; Baeumker 1895, p. 2).

Nevertheless, the disciple's education in logic and in psychology is not perfect, or even insufficient, as he himself states in several places (e.g., I, 1, 9). To these characteristics it should be added that the disciple believes in the physical theory of atoms (a position that is discussed in the second part of *Fons Vitae*, but see already I, 11), and in one place he also cites the Aristotelian position according to which matter is possibility (V, 42). The disciple is of philosophical-theological training but it is, of course, inferior to that of the master. He is highly motivated to learn the master's philosophy but his desire is not only for information but rather also for proofs and evidence. Over and over again the disciple demands explanations, which are based upon logical arguments (e.g., I, 1, 3, 6, 7; III, 2, 17; IV, 5).[5]

It seems then that the disciple's characteristics are that of talented student with whom a philosophical conversation is fruitful and educative. In addition, the disciple's background knowledge and his desire for proofs give Ibn Gabirol the author an opportunity to not only explain the master's stances, but also to criticize these stances and to see if they stand on solid ground. In several places in *Fons Vitae* the disciple raises essential objections to some of the master's positions which are the cornerstones of his Neoplatonic philosophy, and in these places, one might speculate if the master's responses are sufficient.

Let me analyze two examples: In the second part of *Fons Vitae*, the master presents his tenet that the qualities of the substance that sustain the nine categories, come from the activity of 'nature'. By this, he prepares the way for his principle world view, upon which later in the dialogue he will argue for the existence of 'simple substances' that mediate the 'Prime Creator' and the substance that sustains the nine categories. This principle world view is that: 'the lower comes from the higher' (II, 12; Jacob 1987, p. 47). In response, the disciple says:

> This reasoning convinces me that substance originates in 'nature' herself, because of the congruity they share. I say this, however, in agreement with you on the position of 'nature' (*sequens te in positione naturae*). Otherwise, if I wanted to take the contrary, I should assert that nothing has existence except the substance that sustains the nine categories, and its blessed and most high Creator, and that the blessed Creator made and created this substance together with its contingencies instantaneously and simultaneously just as they are. (II, 12; Jacob 1987, p. 47; Baeumker 1895, p. 44)

The disciple's objection is based on a traditional theological stance, that could have been known to the Jewish readers of *Fons Vitae* from the writings of Rav Saʿadya Gaʾon (see Qāfiḥ 1970), or other kalāmic literature, according to which God acts without intermediate substances. This is an attack on the heart of the Neoplatonic position that claims that there is a continuousness between God and the physical world.

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[5]   For comparison between the traits of the disciple in *Fons Vitae* and those of the disciple in Ibn Gabirol's enigmatic poem *Ahavtikha*, see (Liebes 1987, pp. 111–14; and cf. Liebes 2013; Harvey 2000).

To this question, the master replies: 'The response to this will come later when we investigate the existence of elemental (=simple) substances (*substantiarum simplicium*)' (II, 12; Jacob 1987, p. 47). The disciple again raises this question at the end of the second part of *Fons Vitae* in order to prepare the way for the discussion in the third part, which is dedicated to that subject: 'the affirmation of elemental (or: simple, abstract) substances' (III, 1; Jacob 1987, p. 73). The discussion in the third part is extensive and comprehensive. The master gives the disciple 56 proofs for the existence of 'simple substances' (and these proofs are only according to one mode of thinking). In addition to them he gives another set of 63 proofs that sustain the position that the forms of the physical body emanate from the 'simple substances'. It seems that the disciple get convinced by the arguments of the master (see III, 11), but somewhat surprisingly he again raises the kalāmic position in a later stage of the dialogue—in IV, 19 (Jacob 1987, p. 226)—when he claims that it is impossible to say (as the master taught), that some realities are closer to God than others, since, says the disciple, God's 'will',[6] is infinite and therefore there could be no relation between it and something other than it, which is necessarily finite.

The disciple's objection in part IV of *Fons Vitae*, shows that he actually did not abandon the kalāmic-Sa'adyanic theology, and that this theology serves as a constant alternative to the metaphysics of the master. Namely, the kalāmic-Sa'adyanic theology that is held by the disciple enables him to criticize the master's Neoplatonism and to demand explanations and proofs that will demonstrate that the master's stances are solid and convincing.

Another example of the use of dialogue as a method of critique in *Fons Vitae* can be seen in the disciple's attitude toward the master's theory of 'matter'. A basic tenet in Ibn Gabirol's Neoplatonism is that 'matter' has an abstract (or 'simple') existence. Along with 'will' and 'form', it is one of the three most exalted substances. According to Ibn Gabirol, 'matter' sustains everything and can be considered a principle of unity in the world. It enables the 'will' to produce existence—metaphysical as well as physical—from God, by its capacity to be united with 'form'.[7]

In *Fons Vitae* V, 10 the disciple is intrigued by the notion of the existence of 'simple matter'. He interrogates the master:

> From what you say I conclude that material is nonbeing (=matter is privation; *materia est priuatio*), for since the existence of anything depends on structure (=form; *formam*) [. . .] material (=matter; *materia*) for its part, must be nonexistence. (Jacob 1987, p. 246; Baeumker 1895, p. 274)

The disciple's question stems from the master's metaphysics: in a section that preceded the disciple's words (in V, 8), the master taught what seems to be an Aristotelian approach towards the relationships of matter and form. He says: 'You must realize that it is impossible for material (=matter; *materia*) to have existence (*esse*) apart from structure (=form; *forma*) because it exists only insofar as it is clothed in structure (=form; *uestitur forma*)" (Jacob 1987, p. 243; Baeumker 1895, p. 271; This stance was declared already in a previous section—IV, 5). The disciple's question in V, 10 relates therefore to a central tenet in Ibn Gabirol's philosophy, and it points to a seeming contradiction in the master's position: if matter cannot exist *per se*—devoid of form—what is the meaning of its existence as a 'simple substance'? In response, the master develops a theory according to which the existence of the 'simple matter' is a potential one, but still it is a real (or a sort of an actual) existence. The explanation for this, according to the master, is that there is reality in the matter's existence insofar as it exists in the knowledge of God:

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6   On this notion and its importance in Ibn Gabirol's thought see (Pessin 2013). Pessin would say: 'God's desire', ibid, pp. 9–21.
7   On the notion of 'matter' in *Fons Vitae* cf. Pessin (2013, pp. 91–117). The origins of Ibn Gabirol's position concerning the metaphysical essence and function of matter can be traced back to Arabic sources of what is called 'Pseudo-Empedocles' (see De Smet 1998; cf. Stroumsa 2002), of which their influence in al-Andalus may be associated in some way with the 10th century Ibn Masarrah (see Stroumsa and Sviri 2009; Stroumsa 2017). On the philosophical problems that are raised in *Fons Vitae* by the notion of the existence of 'simple matter' devoid of form, see (Schlanger 1968a).

> Although material (=matter) may be thought non-existent (*priuata*), it nevertheless ought not to be said to lack some sort of inherent existence apart from that which it has when joined with structure (=form); in other words: a potential existence [...] material (=matter) is not absolute potentiality, since it has the capacity for latent existence—no doubt that same existence which it had in the wisdom of the great and supreme Eternal, not combined with structure (=form). (V, 10; Jacob 1987, pp. 246–47; Baeumker 1895, p. 274)

The disciple continues to struggle with the notion of the existence of matter *per se* but it seems as if he gradually accepts the master's teachings on the subject and absorbs them. Nevertheless, as was the case in the previous example that was analyzed, here again the disciple raises a question regarding the conclusions that were already taught in previous sections of the book. The disciple again asks the teacher about the meaning of the matter's existence in V, 42, and here, surprisingly, the teacher answers in a way which differs from his previous teaching:

> Disciple: It is evident from these teachings that material (=matter) does not have existence (*non habet esse*) [...]

> Master: Material (=matter) never existed separately from structure (=form) even for a twinkling, and so it is not created nor does it possess existence (*non habeat esse*). It is, however, created simultaneously with structure (=form) [...]. (V, 42; Jacob 1987, pp. 299–300; Baeumker 1895, p. 334)

Here, the existence of simple matter is not considered as existence in the knowledge of God, and not even as a potential existence. It seems that the master abandoned the sophistications he elaborated on in part IV and in the beginning of part V (cf. Schlanger 1968b, p. 395), and he returns to the starting point—the Aristotelian notion according to which there is no existence for matter devoid of form. The readers, in this case, should ask themselves what the final conclusion of this discussion is: what is the meaning of the existence of matter *per se*, in its 'simple-abstract' mode?[9]

The function of the dialogue in *Fons Vita*, as shown by these examples, is twofold: it enables the master to deploy, and argue for, his Neoplatonic philosophy; and it creates the opportunity for the disciple to criticize this very same philosophy, and to demand proofs, showing the advantages of the master's positions. This process of criticism causes the readers to be critical towards the teachings of the master, asking themselves if indeed the master's proofs, explanations, and sometimes even sophistications, are really convincing. Jacques Schlanger concluded from this fact that Ibn Gabirol should not be identified with the 'master' nor with the 'disciple', but with the author who addresses the readers through the dialectic tension of the dialogue, calling them to pay attention to the problems that philosophy raises, and to the philosophical obstacles that still should be overcome (Schlanger 1968b, pp. 393–97).

It seems to me that Schlanger's analysis is principally correct, but I also think that it should be considered in light of Ibn Gabirol's own philosophy. One of the main basic theories of Ibn Gabirol is that God is active, and He endows reality to his creatures. This divine activity is also being done by the 'simple substances' that emanate from God by way of *imitatio Dei*. Nevertheless, this activity is dependent on the preparation of the matter to receive the divine power of existence. In the words of the master:

> The supreme and holy primary Creator (*factor primus*) bestows lavishly what is its own, because indeed the whole of existence flow forth from it. And since the primary Creator bestows the structure (*formae*) that it harbors, the flow is unrestrained and hence it is the fountainhead (*fons*) that encompasses, envelops, and comprehends the whole of existence.

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9   In the continuation of the discussion in V, 42, the master concludes that the matter is emanated from the essence of God. Although this stance highly elevates the matter, the meaning of its existence *per se* needs to be further clarified.

> For this reason all existing substances whatsoever must confirm to its activity and emulate
> it in bestowing their structure and conferring their potencies as long as they can discover
> an appropriate receptive material (*materiam paratam ad recipiendum*). (III, 13; Jacob 1987,
> pp. 100–1; Baeumker 1895, p. 107)

Pedagogy and education are also actions, similar to that of God: their meaning is bestowing the wisdom of the master onto the disciple. Nevertheless, this bestowing, like all the divine actions, is conditional. It can be realized only if there is 'appropriate receptive material', meaning that the student is qualified and has the ability to receive the knowledge (see Liebes 1987, p. 113). Contrary to Schlanger, it seems to me that Ibn Gabirol—the author—unreservedly held the master's positions. But the ability to teach these positions is dependent upon the preparation of the disciple (in the dialogue), and the reader (in real life).[10] The objections of the disciple in *Fons Vitae* invite the reader to invest intellectual effort in finding solutions for the problems that are raised in the dialogue.[11] In this way, the dialogue enables the reader to prepare him- (or her-) self for receiving the divine emanation—the wisdom of the master.[12]

3. The Dialogue in Judah ha-Levi's *Kitāb al-Khazarī*—Analysis and Discussion

Judah ha-Levi's *Kitāb al-Khazarī* has been studied and interpreted by commentators and researchers for centuries (see Shear 2008), but little attention was given to the comparison between the literary genre of ha-Levi's philosophical composition and that of Ibn Gabirol. In light of the philosophical function of the dialogue in *Fons Vitae*, it may be useful to re-examine the function of the dialogue in the *Kitāb al-Khazarī*. After all, it seems impossible that ha-Levi did not know Ibn Gabirol's literary works. As will be argued here, he used the dialogical method in a similar way to that of Ibn Gabirol.

The *Kitāb al-Khazarī*'s declared purpose, by its Arabic title *Kitāb al-radd wa-al-dalīl fī al-dīn al-dhalīl* (Baneth and Ben-Shammai 1977, introduction: 11–12) is to present rational proofs for the theological superiority of the Jewish religion, even though it, and its practitioners, suffer from political and social inferiority. In order to fulfil its mission, the book carries out complex and profound explanations of

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[10] Søren Kierkegaard distinguished between two types of dialogue: Jesusian and Socratic. The main difference between these dialogues is in the relation of the teacher to the disciple regarding the discovering of truth. In a Socratic dialogue, the truth lies in the disciple and the teacher only reveals what is hidden—the knowledge that needs to be delivered through arguments. On the other hand, in a Jesusian dialogue only the teacher possesses the truth whereas the disciple is in a state of error until being redeemed by the teacher (Kierkegaard 1974. For the application of Kierkegaard's distinction for the analysis of the dialogue in Kitāb al-Khazarī, see Sagi 2016, pp. 154–62). Although the teachings of the master in *Fons Vitae* represent Ibn Gabirol's world view and they are aimed at being transmitted to the disciple, the dialogue in *Fons Vitae* cannot be considered as Jesusian since the disciple in *Fons Vitae* is not in a state of error from which he must be redeemed. The dialogue in *Fons Vitae* also cannot be considered Socratic because the truth is not possessed by the disciple from the beginning. The *Fons Vitae* dialogue, as was presented here, is a pedagogical means to gain the knowledge–the demands for proofs and the examination of the reliability of the teacher's wisdom constitute the path and process through which the disciple is being prepared for the reception of wisdom. In the same sense, the reader of *Fons Vitae* is being demanded to walk this path in order to be able to grasp the messages of the book (cf. Sagi 2016, p. 190).

[11] Of course, in most of the dialogue of *Fons Vitae* the student's questions are fully answered. If this were not the case, obviously the philosophic discussion would be futile, and no intellectual progress would be achieved. Nevertheless, in several fundamental topics (two of them were discussed here), the master's answers seem insufficient or a contradiction may be found between. Moreover, in some cases, the disciple does not abandon his primary stances even though they were discussed in previous sections of the dialogue, and he adheres to them in order to criticize the master's position and to validate his arguments in other parts of the dialogue. These facts, that the dialogical writing of Ibn Gabirol communicates to the reader, encourage, or even make it necessary for the reader to make an intellectual effort in finding the solution to the problem at hand or to better understand the meaning of the master's theory.

[12] It may be that the enigma in Ibn Gabirol's poem *Ahavtikha* serves the same purpose: intrigue the student (and the reader), by a philosophical riddle, through which they will be prepared to grasp the philosophical truth. Cf. Harvey's analysis of the poem (Harvey 2000). According to Lorberbaum, in his poems, as well as in his *Fons Vitae*, 'the philosophical voyage of ascending the ladder of being' is described (Lorberbaum 2011, p. 136, my translation). However, in the poetic songs this voyage involves difficulties and it is full of obstacles, whereas 'the speaking voice in *Fons Vitae* is that of the leading master, the self-assured and experienced, and he is the one who leads the way' (ibid.). According to my analysis here, the metaphysical dialogue in *Fons Vitae* demands preparation and efforts by the disciple; the master does not only 'lead' the way. In this sense, the dialogical character of *Fons Vitae* reduces the gap that Lorberbaum found between Ibn Gabirol's poems and his *Fons Vitae*.

the foundations and meaning of Judaism. In this sense, the *Kitāb al-Khazarī* is a sort of kalāmic work (Strauss 1952, p. 99). But although the arguments in *Kitāb al-Khazarī* are based on propositions whose primary assumptions were commonly accepted among the thinkers, theologians, and philosophers of the time, the conclusions reached through them establish the existence of the particular miraculous divine realm, which is exclusively Jewish. The Jewish sage of *Kitāb al-Khazarī* (the *ḥaver*), aims to make the king of the Khazars conscious of a supernatural dimension, the ʾamr al-ʾilāhī ('the divine order') (on this notion see Wolfson 1942; Davidson 1972; cf. Efros 1974), which adheres to the Jewish people and is present in their history. According to ha-Levi, the acknowledgement of the metaphysical nature and essence of Jewish history, and of the miraculous existence of Biblical Israel, is far more than acknowledgment of historical information; rather, it is an acknowledgement that the miraculous existence of our forefathers belongs to us, the Jewish community of the present.

According to the *Kitāb al-Khazarī* III, 5, the 'noble man' (*al-khayir*) imagines events and places he has not seen, on the basis of the collective historical memory: He 'charges his imagination to produce, with the assistance of memory, the most splendid pictures possible, in order to resemble the divine thing sought after, such as the standing at Mount Sinai and the standing of Abraham and Isaac at Mount Moriah and such as the Tabernacle of Moses, the Temple service, the presence of God's glory in the House (=the Temple), and the like' (Baneth and Ben-Shammai 1977, p. 93; Hirschfeld 1946, p. 122 with my revisions of the translation). To ha-Levi it seemed obvious that the 'noble man' reconstructs the memory of the people as it is preserved in the Scriptures, precisely as if it has been his own memory.[13]

Here, to my mind, is an internal problem for ha-Levi: is it possible to convey through rational arguments what can only be experienced? Can the mystical-Sufi 'taste' (*dhawq*) be grasped by 'reason' (ʿaql), through an argument (*qiyās*)?[14] Ha-Levi's answer to this pedagogical challenge seems to be found in the dialogical nature of the book, or more precisely in the character of the king of the Khazars.

Various scholars have discussed the religious, intellectual, and sociological profile of the king, among them Leo Strauss, Eliezer Schweid, and recently also Daniel Lasker. According to Leo Strauss, ha-Levi chose the character of the king for his 'apology' of Judaism because it serves his purposes perfectly: If a gentile, idol-worshipper, of high social rank, and prejudiced against Judaism, following his meeting with the Jewish sage, converts and accepts Judaism, then, says Strauss, the arguments of the sage will be proven true and convincing (Strauss 1952, pp. 101–2).

According to the analysis of Eliezer Schweid, the king is in possession of 'practical wisdom, an alert power of judgment, complete honesty which makes him willing to admit his mistakes, and at the same time also a clear inclination toward criticism'. He accepts the truth wholeheartedly, but only after having examined and tested it by means of rational tools. He is also a man of 'strong religious sentiment'. This makes him fit to receive 'a prophetic dream'. In this way, he expresses his status as a man raised in a religious tradition—which constitutes 'an authoritative revelation', a revelation which causes the religious man to investigate the matters of his faith (Schweid 1970, pp. 40–44).

Recently, Daniel Lasker has analyzed the intellectual profile of the king, and reached the conclusion that the king represents the Jewish audience of *Kitāb al-Khazarī*. According to Lasker, 'the king is described as a half-educated Jew, who aspires to rationalism and intellectualism, whose knowledge of Judaism is broad but superficial. He is drawn towards philosophy and other religions, while doubting the truth of his own [. . .] In other words, the king of the Khazars is not a real king, but an Andalusian Jew, the Jew that is the intended audience of ha-Levi' (Lasker 2018, p. 128).

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[13] Ha-Levi himself experienced a personal reconstruction of the collective Israelite history, in several prophetic dreams (see Schirmann 1954–1956, 515, #222: 'And my heart beheld You and believed in You as if it had been standing at Sinai'; ibid. p. 517, #223: 'In my dream I entered the sanctuaries of God, and I beheld His delightful works' [my translation]). Cf. (Sagi 2016, pp. 176–77).

[14] According to Sagi (Sagi 2016, p. 171): 'The *ḥaver* transmits to the Khazar's king his life essence and the quality of his religious faith' (my translation), meaning that the king authentically grasps the 'taste' of faith through the dialogue with the *ḥaver* (see also ibid. p. 185). In my analysis, as will be shown, the dialogue enables the king to understand Judaism as a religion that is based upon arguments, but to the actual experience of religious life he does not become a partner.

In my opinion, the character of the King is essential for understanding the nature and function of the dialogue in *Kitāb al-Khazarī*. I would like to suggest here another analysis of the king, based upon clues that are scattered throughout the book (cf. Ravitsky 2018). These clues show that the king is not, to put it mildly, the brightest of pupils, and despite his strong ambition to learn how to draw near to God, he does not succeed in internalizing the essence of Judaism—the meaning of adhering to the ʾamr al-ʾilāhī ('the divine order'), through the observance of the Torah's commandments.

Let me analyze three examples of the king's characteristics as a disciple. In the following first and second examples the king does not say anything; he acts. Nevertheless, these are responses to the teachings of the Jewish sage—the ḥaver—and in this sense, they clearly show what the king had absorbed from the conversations with his Jewish teacher, and they reveal the nature of the dialogue in the book.

In the beginning of the second treatise, the process of the spreading of Judaism throughout the kingdom of the Khazars is described. The king revealed his dream to 'his vizier', and the two slowly began to reveal the secret to their closest associates, and 'when the number had increased they made the affair public, and induced the rest of the Khazars to embrace the Jewish faith' (*Kitāb al-Khazarī* II, 1; Hirschfeld 1946, p. 72). This description is aimed to make the reader realize that the king does not understand the meaning of Judaism as it was explicated by the ḥaver. In the first treatise of the book, the king explicitly asks the ḥaver how the Jewish religion is disseminated, and the ḥaver answers him that the 'rational laws'—those originated by man—are disseminated in a natural sociological-political way. Nevertheless, according to the ḥaver, the Jewish faith is a religion of a community (or a nation), that was supernaturally revealed by God, under miraculous circumstances (I, 81). The king, as the converter of his people, views Judaism as a rational human-made constitution, which could serve as the constitution for any human collective. In his actions, he expresses his understanding that Judaism is not necessarily a framework for the existence of an organic-intimate community that was conveyed directly from God in a miraculous way. It is as if the king had forgotten (or better: repressed), from his consciousness, the entire paragraph I, 95, which discusses the uniqueness of the Jewish people, and their being the best of mankind (ṣafwah) (on this notion in ha-Levi's thought and its origin, see Pines 1997, pp. 167–72).

The second example is also taken from the conversion process of the Khazar's king. In the beginning of the second treatise of the *Kitāb al-Khazarī* (II, 1), ha-Levi relates that:

> The king of the Khazars [and his Vizier] [. . .] sent to various countries for scholars and books and studied the Torah. [Their chronicles also tell] of their prosperity [. . .] with their love for faith and [their] passion for the Holy Temple [that was so great that they] erected a form of the Tabernacle that was built by Moses, peace be upon him (*maʿa ḥubbihim fī al-dīn, wa-tashawwuqihim ilā bayt al-maqdas, ḥattā aqāmū hayʾat al-qubbah allatī aqāmahā Mūsā ʿalayhi al-salām*). (Hirschfeld 1946, p. 72, with my revisions of the translation; Baneth and Ben-Shammai 1977, p. 42)

A similar matter is described in the letter of Joseph, the king of the Khazars, to Ḥasdai ibn Shaprut, which constitutes the background for the framework story of the *Kitāb al-Khazarī*. In this letter it is stated that it was the angel of God that commanded the king to build 'a house for My name':

> And he [=king Bulan, the king of the Khazars] believed in Him [=in God] and he did as He ordered him [. . .] and built [. . .] the tent and the ark and the candelabrum and the table and the altars and the holy vessels, in the mercy of God by the power of Shaday. (Kokovtsov 1932, p. 29, my translation)[15]

According to this description, the king was only obeying the divine command when he built a Temple. Ha-Levi's adaptation of the story undoubtedly conveys an ironical message: After all, if, as

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[15] According to the *Qol mevaser*'s version: 'a tent and an ark and a candelabrum and a table and an altar and a holy vessel' (Kokovtsov 1932, p. 22, my translation).

ha-Levi emphasizes, the king and his associates 'sent to various countries for [Jewish] scholars and books, and studied the Torah', they were supposed to know the law found in the Talmud according to which:

> A person should not make a house in the form of the Temple sanctuary, a pavilion corresponding to the Temple antechamber, a courtyard corresponding to the Temple courtyard, a table corresponding to the [Temple] table, a candelabrum corresponding to [Temple] candelabrum. (*Babylonian Talmud*, *Menaḥot* 28b; ʿ*Avodah Zarah* 43a; *Rosh ha-Shana* 24a-b)

This Talmudic source was ruled by R. Yitzhak al-Fāsī, (Rav Alfas 1883), and was considered a binding law (it was also accepted after ha-Levi by Maimonides in his law code, see Fraenkel 1994). From the viewpoint of the 12th century Jewish community, the king's 'love for faith and passion for the Holy Temple', were probably perceived as a platform for transgressions, and in any case, the king's action showed that he does not act as a normative-observant Jew. Moreover, according to the parable of the pharmacist that was explained to the king already in the first treatise of the book (I, 79), the actions leading to adherence to the ʾ*amr al-*ʾ*ilāhī* must be carried out according to Revelation as passed down through the Rabbanite-Talmudic tradition, which prohibits the king's deeds. It was the religious fervor characteristic of idol worshippers in general—unacquainted with the true divine commandments—that made the king err in his worship of the God of Israel.[16] Thus, ha-Levi wished the reader to notice that the king does not understand the true meaning of the Jewish faith, which is beyond religious endeavors and beyond human reason.

The third example is from the very end of the dialogue of the *Kitāb al-Khazarī*. Just before the end of the book, we are told that the Jewish sage has decided to emigrate to Jerusalem. To this report the king responds that 'closeness to God is achieved in any place, with a pure intention (*bi-al-niyyah*) and strong desire' (V, 22; Baneth and Ben-Shammai 1977, p. 227; Hirschfeld 1946, p. 258, with my revisions), and he adds later on (V, 26; Baneth and Ben-Shammai 1977, p. 229; Hirschfeld 1946, p. 260, with my revisions): 'God knows thy intention (*niyyataka*), and the intention (*wa-al-niyyah*) is given to God Himself, who knows the intentions (*al-niyyāt*) and discloses what is hidden'. The king's emphasis on the religious intention (*niyyah*) as if it constituted the principal means to draw near to God leads the readers back to the beginning of the entire book where the king, in his prophetic dream, was told: 'your intention (*niyyataka*) is pleasing to God, but not your action (ʿ*amalaka*)' (I, 1; Baneth and Ben-Shammai 1977, p. 3; Hirschfeld 1946, p. 31, with my revisions), and in wake of this, the king began to investigate what is desirable in the eyes of God. It becomes clear that even after five treatises of elaborate and profound rational discussions, the king still does not understand that it is not only the intention (*niyyah*) that counts, but also the deed (ʿ*amal*).

Should the Jewish reader of *Kitāb al-Khazarī* be surprised by its final result? It seems to me that from the point of view of the book's teachings, the reader ought not to be surprised. Already in paragraph I, 115 the final result described above is anticipated: the proselyte cannot equal the Jew, whose existence is supernatural.

The *ḥaver* of *Kitāb al-Khazarī* is truly an eminent theologian. He establishes a rational basis founded on the most prominent Jewish and non-Jewish sources available to an educated and broad-minded Jew, of the cultural elite in 12th century Andalusia—as was shown in the vast research literature on this book. In contrast, the author of the book himself, Judah ha-Levi, conveys to the reader of his book a more profound message lying beyond the theological framework: Jewish theology, no matter how complex and sophisticated, is doomed to fail. Historical memory is, like individual experiences,

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[16] It is possible to interpret the above-mentioned Talmudic source in such a way that it does not refer to the model of the Tabernacle made by Moses in the desert, but only to the First and Second Temples (for a discussion of this issue see Baabad 1990). But it is unperceivable that ha-Levi should have hinted that the king, through casuistry, had interpreted this source in this narrow sense.

unmediated. 'Taste' (*dhawq*) is not something that can be argued for or defended—a point that was already mentioned by al-Gazālī (Lazarus-Yafeh 1965), and now serves ha-Levi in order to strengthen the Jewish identity among 12th century Jews: Whoever has experienced prophecy or has collective historical memory, does not need proofs or arguments. Theological explanations may bring a gentile to convert, but they can never replace the live experience of being an organic part of the people of Israel.[17]

4. Conclusions

Both famous Andalusian poets and thinkers, R. Solomon ibn Gabirol and R. Judah ha-Levi, who were masters of linguistic phrasing and style, chose the dialogical framework in order to teach their philosophies. Both of them used this dialogical platform, not only as an opportunity to present their world view, but also as a method by which to criticize their own philosophies: ha-Levi criticized the possibility of defending Jewish religious superiority, while clarifying that Judaism is a historical and existential experience. Ibn Gabirol on the other hand, created a magnificent Neoplatonic metaphysics, while using the dialogue literary form in order to make the readers speculate on further questions that his own philosophical system raises. For both Ibn Gabirol and ha-Levi the dialogue served not only the purpose of the conversation between the teacher and the disciple—the protagonists of their 'plays'—but rather it enabled them, as authors, also, to converse with their readers.

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[17] Through the dialogue, the king did not make significant progress in understanding his identity as a Jew, but the *ḥaver* did. He understood the meaning of action in God's worship and he is now, after and because of the dialogue, motivated to emigrate to Jerusalem. In this sense, the end of the book carries a practical message to the reader: now, after and because of the dialogue, the reader, like the *ḥaver*, should understand the meaning of action in God's worship, leave the exile, and go to Jerusalem. In this case ha-Levi, the author, in his emigration to the Land of Israel, represents the ideal reader of his own composition.

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