

“The Starling’s Caw”: Judah Halevi as Philosopher, Poet, and Pilgrim

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HILLEL HALKIN. *Yebuda Halevi*. Jewish Encounters. New York: Nextbook/Schocken, 2010. Pp. vi + 353.

RAYMOND P. SCHEINDLIN. *The Song of the Distant Dove: Judah Halevi’s Pilgrimage*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. Pp. x + 310.

ADAM SHEAR. *The Kuzari and the Shaping of Jewish Identity, 1167–1900*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. Pp. xvi + 384.

I

Already in his lifetime, Judah Halevi (ca. 1075–1141) was acclaimed by his Andalusian contemporaries as “the quintessence and embodiment of our country, our refuge and leader, an illustrious scholar of unique and perfect piety.” As the late Geniza scholar Shlomo Dov Goitein noted, even in an age noted for its effusively hyperbolic encomiums, such praise was exceptional. Goitein, who cites this description twice in the fifth and final volume of his magisterial *Mediterranean Society*, comments, “In the combination of his perfection in form and the elementary power of religious conviction Halevi appears to have been unique.”¹ Indeed, over the course of generations, this sense of Halevi’s uniqueness, of the greatness of both his person and his literary output, has only grown stronger. The author of a dazzling variety of both secular and religious poetry of singular beauty and technical virtuosity, certainly the most celebrated and feted Jewish poet of his day, Halevi is widely considered the greatest

I would like to thank Esther Berezin and, in particular, Elliot Horowitz for their very helpful suggestions.

1. S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the . . . Cairo Geniza*, volume 5, *The Individual* (Berkeley, Calif., 1988), 289, 448.

The Jewish Quarterly Review (Winter 2011)

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Hebrew poet of all time. Moreover, Halevi's philosophical work, the *Kuzari*, written, or at least completed, in the late 1130s, has attained classic status, and, among medieval Jewish philosophical works, its popularity has been exceeded only by Maimonides' *Guide of Perplexed*, and perhaps Bahya ibn Pakuda's earlier *Duties of the Heart*.

Turning from Halevi's work to his life, what has particularly captured the popular imagination and transformed Halevi into a genuine cultural hero is his dramatic decision late in life (1140), to abandon his enviable and secure position—poet, physician, merchant, religious scholar, and theologian—at the very apex of Andalusia's Jewish aristocracy in order to settle in the Land of Israel, then quite desolate after the First Crusade, and end his days there. The inherent drama of this journey was further enhanced by the sixteenth-century legend that as Halevi reached the gates of Jerusalem he tore his clothes and crawled on the ground, reciting his later famous ode "Zion! Have you no greeting for your captive hearts?"—whereupon he was trampled to death by an Arab horseman.

Yet there is something deeply elusive about both Halevi's life and thought. Both his person and writing escape easy classification. We are confronted with a complex blend of rationalism and antirationalism, the personal and the communal, the timeless desire for God's closeness and the messianic yearning for national redemption, an almost entirely passive trust in divine action and a demand for human initiative.

How, for example, is the *Kuzari* to be described? Is it a philosophic or an antiphilosophic classic? In this work Halevi skillfully argues for the superiority of revelation and religious experience over abstract speculative philosophy and passionately places the doctrine of Israel's uniqueness at the very heart of his worldview; yet he can exclaim equally passionately "God forbid me from [accepting] . . . anything the intellect denies and posits as impossible" (1:89).² In a particularly famous statement, Halevi explicitly contrasts the God of Abraham with the God of Aristotle (4:16). But, as Howard Kreisel has recently forcefully argued, "Halevi's God of Abraham ultimately wears a visage reminiscent of the God of Aristotle."³

2. All references to the *Kuzari* are by book and paragraph and appear in the body of the text in parentheses. The English translations, with minor modifications, are from Barry Kogan's forthcoming translation from the Arabic to be published in the Yale Judaica Series.

3. Howard Kreisel, "Judah Halevi's *Kuzari*: Between the God of Abraham and the God of Aristotle," in *Joodse Filosofie tussen Rede en Traditie*, ed. R. Munk and E. J. Hoogewoud (Kampen, 1993), 27. See, as well, Diana Lobel, "'Taste and See that the Lord is Good': Ha-Levi's God Re-Visited," in *Be'erot Yitzhak: Studies in Memory of Iadore Twersky*, ed. J. Harris (Cambridge, Mass., 2005), 161–78.

In a similar vein, how are we to understand Halevi's motivation for journeying to the land of Israel: a political or, perhaps better, religious rejection of the exile; a messianic or, at least, redemptive venture; a religio-cultural critique of Andalusian Jewish society; or a pious personal quest for atonement and closeness to the divine? Must we, indeed, choose between these competing explanations?

Thus the key question with regard to the *Kuzari* concerns its blend of rationalism and antirationalism, while the key question with regard to Halevi's motivation for journeying to the Land of Israel is how to balance individual motives and more national ones. These, of course, are not new questions, but they have been raised anew with particular force by three important recently published books, Adam Shear's *The Kuzari and the Shaping of Jewish Identity, 1167–1900*, Raymond Scheindlin's *The Song of the Distant Dove: Judah Halevi's Pilgrimage*, and Hillel Halkin's *Yebuda Halevi*.

II

Shear examines the *Kuzari's* reception from 1167, the date when it was translated from the original Judeo-Arabic into Hebrew by Judah ibn Tibbon, until 1900, or more precisely until 1912, when Harry Wolfson, freshly graduated from Harvard, published in these pages his subsequently influential essay "Maimonides and Halevi: A Study in Typical Jewish Attitudes toward Greek Philosophy in the Middle Ages."⁴ As his book's title indicates, Shear seeks not only "to sketch the 'biography' of the book" but also "to examine its role in the formation of certain expressions of Jewish cultural and religious identity before the twentieth century" (p.vii).

Shear's book, a revision of his University of Pennsylvania doctoral thesis, is breathtaking in both its ambition and scope, and though its grasp does not ultimately equal its reach, it nearly does so. Shear ranges exceptionally widely in a dual sense. First, in terms of intellectual history, Shear's exploration of the *Kuzari's* reception leads him to a close examination of the cultural and religious climate and currents in European Jewish communities ranging from late medieval Provence and Spain to Western and Eastern Europe in the nineteenth century. Against these backgrounds, he discusses the interpretation and use of the *Kuzari* by medieval rationalist philosophers and by antirationalist Kabbalists, by humanisti-

4. Harry Wolfson, "Maimonides and Halevi: A Study in Typical Jewish Attitudes toward Greek Philosophy in the Middle Ages," *JQR* 2.3 n.s. (1912): 297–337 (reprinted in Wolfson, *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion*, ed. I. Twersky and G. H. Williams [Cambridge, Mass., 1973], 1:120–61).

cally inclined Renaissance Italian rabbis, by ex-Marranos or members of the Portuguese nation in Europe and the Ottoman Empire in the early modern period, by sixteenth- and seventeenth-century rabbinic scholars on the one hand and Christian Hebraists on the other, by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century maskilim and traditionalists, and finally by the German Jewish founders of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* and proto-Zionists.

But second, Shear's concern is with "reception history" in the broadest sense. He is interested in the mechanisms of the *Kuzari's* dissemination and transmission, in the concrete evidence for its popularity or lack thereof. All this leads him beyond the often rarefied realms of intellectual history into a painstaking examination of *Kuzari* manuscripts and the book's innumerable printed editions, of hundreds of book inventories, and of the most obscure incidental citations. One suspects that there is hardly a library collection he has not explored. Moreover, his concern not just with the *Kuzari's* metaphorical image but with its literal image as well, with the physical and textual appearance of both manuscripts and printed editions, leads Shear to closely scrutinize the paratextual elements of these manuscripts and printed editions: their colophons, introductions, prefaces, *incipits*, and paleography.

Shear shows that while during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the *Kuzari* exerted a modest measure of cultural influence, it does not appear to have been widely studied or viewed as a major work in Provence, Spain, or Italy, much less in Ashkenaz. As to why the *Kuzari* did not exert more influence among Spanish and Provençal intellectuals, Shear convincingly suggests that in light of the availability of both Maimonides' *Guide* and Averroes' Arabic commentaries on Aristotle, the latter of which sought to purge Aristotelianism of all neo-Platonic elements, the *Kuzari* became rather outdated, and its discussion and critique of a rather Neo-Platonic Aristotelianism was no longer "state of the art" (p. 32).

There was an increased interest in the *Kuzari* in fifteenth-century Mediterranean Europe. In Provence the first detailed commentaries on the work appeared; in Spain there was a slight increase in extant manuscripts, a greater frequency of *Kuzari* citation, and even a translation into Catalan; and in Italy the *Kuzari* begins to appear on booklists, and a fair number of surviving Italian manuscripts date from then. This increased Italian interest continues into the sixteenth century with the production of three printed editions, and the appearance in the third edition of what is perhaps the most important—certainly the most massive—commentary on the *Kuzari* ever written, Judah Moscato's *Kol Yehudah* (Venice, 1594). The *Kuzari* had finally attained the status of a classic.

This increased interest in the *Kuzari*, as Shear shows, was fed by differing and at times clashing intellectual and religious currents, each of which saw the book differently. In pre-expulsion Spain, the *Kuzari* was embraced by traditionalist critics of Maimonidean philosophy as presenting an explicitly antiphilosophical position and expressing views that were the very “opposite of the opinions of this man who wrote the *Guide of the Perplexed*” (p. 86). On the other hand, moderate Maimonideans in both Spain and particularly Provence—and this was the main cultural tendency—offered, as Shear states, “a more rationalistic interpretation of [the *Kuzari*] along with a more conservative interpretation of [the *Guide*]” (p. 89) and were thus able to see both works as broadly congruent. Finally, the *Kuzari* played an important role in the eclectic mix of humanism, philosophy, and Kabbalah that flourished among Italian Jews at the beginning of the early modern era, serving, in particular, as a source of “inspiration for a humanist-style Hebraism” (p. 97). Here Shear shows how Italian rabbis and scholars such as Judah Messer Leon (fl. after 1550), Azariah de Rossi (ca.1513–ca.1578), and, in particular, Judah Moscato (ca.1530–90), while not neglecting the book’s more religio-philosophical sections, paid special attention to its more humanistic, literary, and historical elements. Thus, Moscato saw the *Kuzari*’s dialogue form as a model of good rhetorical style. Both he and de Rossi “took the *Kuzari* to be a more or less reliable historical source” (p. 104), and both closely studied and made extensive use of the work’s historical sections, especially its discussions of the history of Jewish sects, particularly Karaism (3:64–67; 4:13–14). Above all, Halevi’s long discourse on the Hebrew language and its poetics at the end of book 2 served as the foundation for these and other Italian thinkers’ discussions of the primacy and greatness of Hebrew. This tendency reached its apogee in Moscato’s *Kol Yehudah*, to which Shear devotes an entire chapter, showing how the Italian rabbi utilized the *Kuzari* “as a kind of encyclopedia of Jewish knowledge” (p. 147).

Shear’s survey brings to light three major features characterizing the *Kuzari*’s reception that continued until the early twentieth century. First, the *Kuzari* constituted “neutral ground” (p. 291) between competing cultural groups. In medieval Spain, as mentioned above, both critics of Maimonidean philosophy and moderate Maimonideans used the *Kuzari* to advance their very different religious agendas. In eighteenth century Europe, both moderate maskilim and staunch traditionalists commented on and praised the book. In the following century as well, Shear shows, the *Kuzari* served Jewish romantics and rationalists, Orthodox, Neo-Orthodox, and Reformers, traditionalists and modernizers, cosmopolitans

and proto-nationalists. Indeed, it is only in the late nineteenth century that Shear is able to find a religious figure explicitly critical of Halevi: the Silesian-born Boston Reform rabbi Solomon Schindler, who in 1887 criticized Halevi for his particularist and exclusivist views, which he saw as “entirely new and strange to the spirit of Judaism” (p. 307). In this respect, we may add, the *Kuzari* should be contrasted with the two other most popular works of medieval Jewish thought, Maimonides’ *Guide* and Bahya’s earlier *Duties of the Heart*. The former, despite its popularity through the centuries, never ceased being controversial. And while Bahya’s work was widely studied as a guide to piety and human perfection, its first chapter was frequently viewed with suspicion on account of its extreme rationalism.

Second, Shear points to “two different modes of reading and reflection on a multi-faceted work like the *Kuzari*,” one “a thesis approach” and the other “a contents approach.” The thesis—or what might also be called the macroscopic—approach searches “for an overarching theme, an all-encompassing thesis, or a central message” in the work, while the content—or perhaps the microscopic—approach focuses on such things as “individual pieces of information, small scale arguments, [and] views on particular subjects” (p. 10). Rationalist philosophers in medieval Provence and both the supporters and critics of Maimonides in pre-expulsion Spain primarily adopted a thesis approach to the *Kuzari*, while Renaissance Italian rabbis opted for a contents approach, using Halevi as an “expert witness” on a wide range of issues. These approaches were not mutually exclusive. Judah Moscato of Mantua identified what he saw as a central thesis in the work, namely, that “God can be approached only through his commandments” (cf. *Kuzari* 1:98).⁵ Yet he primarily used the book as an encyclopedia of Jewish knowledge. Again, both these approaches, as Shear learnedly demonstrates, persisted into the modern period. It was only with the rise of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* that the contents approach gradually receded. First, once scholars uncovered new and often more reliably authentic sources of information regarding those very issues concerning which Halevi had previously been utilized as an expert witness,

5. Indeed, Moscato develops this thesis much more fully than would appear from Shear’s presentation. For after his initial identification of the *Kuzari*’s thesis as “God can be approached only through his commandments,” Moscato proceeds to greatly expand upon it, singling out four key themes of the *Kuzari*: the people of Israel, the land of Israel, the Temple, and the Torah, which serve to structure the work’s sections. It should also be noted that Moscato’s emphasis on these themes lends *Kol Yehudah* a stronger Jewish particularist coloration than Shear allows for. I will discuss this further in a forthcoming article on the *Kol Yehudah*.

there remained little need for the *Kuzari* to serve “as an authoritative repository of information” (p. 10). Second, as Shear notes, “Wissenschaft scholarship created a new *Kuzari*, the work of a particular author, whose intellectual and cultural context could be historically . . . described. Here, the *Kuzari* was taken . . . as a work that now formed part of a canon of historical study rather than a canon of cultural authority” (p. 255).

Third, and perhaps most important, while traditionalist anti-Maimonideans in pre-expulsion Spain viewed the *Kuzari* as presenting an explicitly antiphilosophical position, this was not the dominant understanding of the work’s thesis, which was rather the harmonizing approach adopted by moderate Maimonideans in both Spain and Provence, who advocated, as Shear notes, “a more rationalistic interpretation of the *Kuzari* along with a more conservative interpretation of [the *Guide*].” They were thus able to see the two works as espousing, albeit with minor differences, the same fundamental thesis, and therefore as classic canonical expressions of the moderately rationalist trend in Jewish thought to which they adhered. This harmonizing approach generally prevailed until the nineteenth century, when the dichotomizing approach, pitting an antirationalist and particularist *Kuzari*, with its emphasis on revelation as the road to spiritual perfection, against a rationalist and universalist *Guide*, with its emphasis on philosophy as the path to perfection, became dominant. Shear’s last two chapters are devoted to tracing the emergence of this dichotomizing approach, and it is therefore appropriate that he concludes chronologically with Harry Wolfson’s 1912 essay, which, for Shear, represents “perhaps the clearest statement of the dichotomizing view” (p. 3), and which, given “Wolfson’s foundational role in the development of the study of Jewish thought” (p. 4), contributed greatly, in Shear’s opinion, to this view achieving its still dominant position.⁶

There are, however, serious gaps in Shear’s account of the emergence of the dichotomizing approach. Some key nineteenth-century advocates of it are either treated cursorily or omitted entirely. Only toward the very end of his book does Shear refer to “the well known cases of Samuel David Luzzatto [Shadal] and Peretz Smolenskin who explicitly rejected what they took Maimonides’ message to be and turned to Halevi” (p. 312). Although a footnote directs the reader to recent secondary literature

6. Shear’s contention here appears dubious. Wolfson’s 1912 article, with its strong dichotomizing approach, was written when its author was an undergraduate. The mature Wolfson abandoned, however, this dichotomizing approach, and his many later articles on Maimonides and Halevi were, if anything, much closer to the harmonizing one.

on the subject, this is surely inadequate. Another leading representative of the dichotomizing approach, the Hebrew essayist, polemicist, and editor Shai Ish Hurwitz (1860–1922), is not even mentioned. Hurwitz may not be as major a figure as Luzzatto and Smolenskin, but, as Stanley Nash felicitously noted, he was certainly “a *major* minor figure.” Hurwitz, strikingly enough, advocated the dichotomizing approach at different stages in his literary career, but with reversed evaluations. In the 1880s, the young Hurwitz, following in Luzzatto’s footsteps, contrasted Halevi and Maimonides, lauding the former, while sharply criticizing the latter. In a 1908 Hebrew essay, however, the mature Hurwitz again contrasted Halevi and Maimonides, but this time, interestingly enough, to the latter’s credit.⁷ This reversal is of particular importance. Shear, as we have seen, seeks to describe the process whereby the *Kuzari* ceased to serve as “neutral ground” between competing cultural groups. In this regard, Hurwitz’s 1908 essay, with its extended trenchant critique of Halevi, proved to be much more significant than the few critical remarks leveled earlier against Halevi by Solomon Schindler, who is clearly no more than a *minor* minor figure.⁸

All three major characteristics of the *Kuzari*’s reception—its role as “neutral ground” between competing cultural groups, the existence of a contents approach to the work alongside a thesis approach, and the tendency to harmonize the *Kuzari* with the *Guide*—coexisted and flourished for centuries until the end of the nineteenth century, suggesting that they were at least loosely interrelated. Obviously, once the *Kuzari* ceased to serve as an authoritative repository of information, it could no longer be valued on that account. Moreover, though Shear does not quite put it this way, part of the *Kuzari*’s appeal derived from the possibility of adopting both a universalist contents approach and a particularist thesis approach to the work. As he notes concerning the *Kuzari*’s use in the late Middle Ages and early modern period:

The wide intellectual horizons reflected in the work’s treatment of natural science, the calendar, language, and other topics [the contents approach: L. K.], offered readers the opportunity to engage with realms of intellectual inquiry that brought them into contact with much “external wisdom.” At the same time the strong message of Jewish

7. Stanley Nash, *In Search of Hebraism: Shai Ish Hurwitz and His Polemics in the Hebrew Press* (Leiden, 1980), 2, 70–71, 78–87, 223–30.

8. It should also be noted that Hurwitz anticipated Shear’s point about Halevi serving as “neutral ground” between competing cultural groups, a neutral ground which he sought to destroy! *Ibid.*, 222–23.

cultural and religious superiority [the thesis approach: L. K.] allowed for the cooption of this “external wisdom” within the penumbra of Jewish knowledge, thus preserving a strong sense of group solidarity. (p.20)

With the rise of modern science and modern historical scholarship, however, this “external wisdom” escaped from “the penumbra of Jewish knowledge,” making impossible that balanced dual approach.

Despite the breakdown of the contents approach to the *Kuzari*, had the harmonizing thesis approach toward reading the work continued to predominate or even maintain its hold alongside the dichotomizing one, the book might still have served as neutral ground between moderate modern rationalizing universalists, who would have praised the *Kuzari* for its broad congruence with the *Guide*, and modern particularizing anti-rationalists who would have praised it for precisely the opposite reason. But with the almost exclusive predominance of the dichotomizing approach, readers were forced to decide between the *Guide* and the *Kuzari*, as a result of which moderate rationalizing universalists who championed Maimonides’ approach to the relationship between revelation and reason had little choice but to be critical of the *Kuzari*.⁹

What were the reasons for the breakdown of the harmonizing approach? Here Shear vacillates. Toward the end of his book he suggests that “the trajectory of the late modern period . . . moves toward a more dichotomized or more polarized view of Maimonides and Halevi, reflective of the various ideological rifts within modern Jewry that intensified over the course of the nineteenth century” (p. 313). This ideologically divided modern Jewry should be contrasted then, Shear maintains, with the more holistic premodern Jewish cultures, which sought to harmonize these great works. This explanation, which views the different approaches to reading the *Guide* and the *Kuzari* as reflecting dominant cultural trends, avoids privileging one approach over the other. Indeed, in his book’s very last sentence Shear allows for the possibility that “this early modern mode of reading the *Kuzari* will be revived in our post-modern era” (p. 313).

Yet barely two pages before his conclusion Shear, in attempting to explain how “most pre-modern readers could treat the *Kuzari* and the *Guide* as belonging to the same discourse and as offering ultimately compatible messages” and how “through much of the nineteenth century

9. For a contemporary example, see Menahem Kellner, *Maimonides’ Confrontation with Mysticism* (Oxford, 2006).

Halevi and Maimonides were seen as part of the same Sefardic pantheon," says something quite different. Here he acknowledges that "there may have been a failure (if we can term it that) to grapple substantively with the anti-rationalism of the *Kuzari* in order to fit Halevi into this pantheon, just as in earlier times clear differences in sensibility between the *Kuzari* and the *Guide* were similarly glossed over" (p. 311). This remark, despite the parenthetical qualification, clearly favors the dichotomizing approach as being substantively truer to the *Kuzari's* antirationalist content and to the clear differences in sensibility between it and the *Guide*. It would follow then, though Shear avoids saying so explicitly, that with the rise of *Wissenschaft des Judentums'* more detached approach to the Jewish philosophical classics, viewing them as works "that now formed part of a canon of historical study rather than a canon of cultural authority," that the dichotomizing approach would prevail simply on the grounds of its inherent scholarly superiority.

Shear's vacillation seems to hinge upon the important methodological question as to whether one can ignore authorial intent when addressing a text's reception history. Early in his book Shear signals his attempt to do precisely that. After briefly presenting the regnant dichotomizing approach to the *Kuzari* and the *Guide*, Shear comments that "it may be the case that this reading of the *Kuzari* is closest to the author's intentions" but considers such a determination "somewhat beside the point," since he is "concerned with using the *Kuzari's* reception to tell us something about Jewish culture in various historical contexts other than the one in which Halevi lived" (pp. viii–ix).

But authorial intent cannot be so easily evaded, unless one denies its existence altogether, in which case, as Nietzsche ironically noted, "the text disappears beneath the interpretation."¹⁰ And since I suspect that Shear really does believe in authorial intent, it is not surprising that this issue returns to haunt him at the book's end. True, in his conclusion he accounts for the dichotomizing approach's current predominance almost exclusively in ideological terms, locating its cause in the shift from the more holistic premodern Jewish cultures to the more ideologically divided cultures of Jewish modernity. Nevertheless, the reader may well conclude that Shear, though he may try to hide this even from himself, believes that the dichotomizing approach, at least in part, ultimately prevailed in modern times because in purely scholarly terms it deserved to prevail, because it is closer to the "'*pesbat*' of Halevi's text" (p. 291) than the harmonizing approach.

10. *Beyond Good and Evil*, section 38.

As an unreconstructed, perhaps naive, believer in authorial intent, I believe, as I have argued that Shear ultimately does, that the dichotomizing “reading of the *Kuzari* is closest to the author’s intentions.” But I further believe, contrary to Shear, that “such a determination” is *not* “beside the point.” Yet, at the same time, we should not dismiss the harmonizing approach entirely. First, if one looks at the Jewish philosophical tradition from the inside, then, indeed, the *Guide* and the *Kuzari* are in many ways polar opposites. But if one comes to this tradition from the outside, from the world of halakhah and aggadah, then the differences between the *Guide* and the *Kuzari*, in light of their common philosophical vocabulary, textual references, modes of argumentation—though marshaled for very different purposes—seem much smaller.

More important, given the predominance of the harmonizing approach throughout the premodern period and its espousal by so many of the *Kuzari*’s close and careful readers, I would argue that this approach cannot simply be attributed to prevalent cultural or ideological currents but must have some basis in the text itself. Shear’s account, then, should prompt all *Kuzari* scholars to reread the work with renewed interest and heightened sensitivities to those elements and themes that support the harmonizing approach. Perhaps we might conclude that while the *Kuzari*’s anthropology, doctrine of Israel’s uniqueness, and reasons for the commandments clearly differ from Maimonides’ views on these issues, Halevi’s doctrine of divine attributes is not that far removed from the *Guide*’s, and that, to revert to Kreisel’s aforementioned contention, “Halevi’s God of Abraham ultimately wears a visage reminiscent of the God of Aristotle.” Even with respect to the *Kuzari*’s position on reasons for the commandments we might discover that while in book 2 Halevi espouses a strictly sacramental view, radically removed from Maimonides’ instrumentalism, in book 3, along with this sacramental approach, Halevi presents a more rational interpretation of many commandments. Precisely in this way we may arrive at a more nuanced understanding of the subtle blend of and complex tension between the *Kuzari*’s rational and antirational elements.

It is a tribute, then, to the richness and suggestiveness of Shear’s book that it sends the reader to take up the *Kuzari* and read it with fresh eyes. Perhaps this is what any good reception history ought to accomplish.

III

Wissenschaft scholarship, as Shear has noted, sought to approach the *Kuzari* “as part of a canon of historical study rather than a canon of cultural authority.” In a similar vein, as it broadened its attention to encom-

pass not only the *Kuzari* but also Halevi's poetry and his biography, its goal was to put all these subjects on a firm philological basis through critical editions of known texts and the discovery of new ones. It also sought to establish "the intellectual and cultural context" within which Halevi—the man, his thought, and his poetry—could be placed. The question arises, however, whether, setting aside the *Kuzari*, Halevi the person—in particular, Halevi the pilgrim—has ever ceased serving as a "cultural authority" and been treated simply as an object of "historical study." In their recent books Raymond Scheindlin and Hillel Halkin, both born in America in the generation before Shear's, handle this question in radically different ways.

Scheindlin's *Song of the Distant Dove* sets as its main goal determining Halevi's motivation for journeying to the Land of Israel. The book, a study of Halevi's religious development culminating in that famous journey, is handsomely produced, elegantly written, and expertly crafted.¹¹ Scheindlin, a distinguished literary scholar and translator of medieval Hebrew poetry at New York's Jewish Theological Seminary, skillfully builds upon many decades of Halevi scholarship. He translates and sensitively glosses thirty of Halevi's key poems and quotes selections from many others. These enable us to understand better both Halevi's religious development and the poet's conception of his journey. Scheindlin also deftly uses letters by, to, and about Halevi to reconstruct the actual course of the journey and brilliantly portray the Jewish society in Egypt where Halevi was hosted and feted for nine months on his way to the Holy Land. These letters and fragments thereof in both Hebrew and Judeo-Arabic were first discovered over fifty years ago among the scattered manuscripts from the Cairo Geniza, and since then have been laboriously deciphered, reconstructed, and analyzed.¹² Many appear for the first time in English in Scheindlin's book, whose great value, then, is undeniable. Yet Scheindlin is arguably another in the long line of those who have sought to mobilize Halevi's personal authority toward what Shear has called "a particular Jewish cultural or religious agenda" (p. 293).

As Scheindlin shows, early in his career Halevi espoused a modified Neoplatonism, where the soul is seen as exiled from its divine source and imprisoned in the body. Through a process of moral and intellectual

11. The copy editor, however, appears to have had some trouble getting dates straight. Thus, on p. 21, line 26, change "twelfth century" to "eleventh century;" on p. 97, line 2, change "September 8, 1141" (!) to "September 8, 1140;" on p. 98, line 22, change "eleventh century" to "twelfth century."

12. See Moshe Gil and Ezra Fleischer, *Yebuda Halevi and his Circle* (Hebrew; Jerusalem, 2001). And see the following note.

purification, which for Halevi involves observance of the commandments, the soul's task is to rise from its bodily prison and return to its divine source. From this perspective, God's presence is to be found wherever the soul searches for it. Focusing primarily on Halevi's religious poetry, and secondarily on passages from the *Kuzari*, Scheindlin traces how Halevi gradually moved away from this view to one where the individual in all his concreteness and particularity can discover God's personal presence in its most intense form only in a particular place, namely, the concrete soil of Palestine.

It is against this background that Scheindlin understands the reason for and nature of Halevi's journey. Scheindlin's reading of the evidence, particularly Halevi's poetry, leads him to conclude that the "chief motivation for his pilgrimage" was "Halevi's personal piety and religious vision" (p. 156). On the verge of old age Halevi sought to leave behind the vanities of the "good life" of al-Andalus and undertook the journey to the Land of Israel in order to experience the Divine Presence in a manner that was not possible, he believed, in the Diaspora. This conclusion by itself is unexceptionable, but Scheindlin goes too far in dismissing any communal, historical, or redemptive purposes to the journey.

As Scheindlin notes, "in all of Halevi's extant writings there is only one passage in his own voice in which he offers to explain the pilgrimage" (p. 156); it is contained in a Hebrew epistle written in Alexandria to Samuel ben Hanania, *nagid* (prince) of Egyptian Jewry. Halevi there writes of the Land of Israel's special religious status, particularly that of Jerusalem. "Not every land is Canaan, not all of Canaan is the gates of heaven, not all the gates of heaven are Jerusalem" (p. 157). Here the personal motif is expressed, the yearning to experience God's presence in the Holy Land, even though it cannot be experienced fully under present conditions. Of special importance, however, is the letter's prose conclusion, which, in my view, clearly introduces a national and redemptive motif:

Seeing that all Israel bows toward the House of God, my heart yearned for my father's house and my soul longed for the Holy Mountain—to prostrate myself to it nearby; among the priests where the ark lies buried, and say to the Lord: "Rise and have mercy on Zion! For your servants take delight in her stones and cherish her soil" (Cf. Ps 102.14–15). My love was stirred . . . lest my face be one of those turned aside from God at the sound of the call. (p. 158)¹⁵

13. See Yosef Yahalom's critical edition of the letter, with an introduction, in "R. Yehudah Halevi's *'Aliyah* to the Land of Israel: In a Clear Vision and Not in Riddles" (Hebrew), *Sbalem* 7 (2001–2): 33–45.

Scheindlin, however, sees this conclusion as expressing Halevi's "own passionate longing for restoration: not of the fortunes of the Jewish people, . . . not the release from exile—though those would undoubtedly result if the prayer were granted—but for the restoration of the Land of Israel itself, with the rebuilding of the Temple, the resumption of sacrificial worship and the reinstatement of prophecy." Halevi thus differs from "the masses of the Jewish people, their communal leaders, and their rabbis," who "plead for the people's salvation from exile . . . and their national sovereignty" but care little "about the land, bereft of the *Shekhina* itself, of the presence of God." Halevi, by contrast, "turned his attention away from self-interested prayer for the redemption of the folk, and toward prayer for the redemption of the land" (p. 159).

Scheindlin's distinction here between the "self-interested prayer for the redemption of the folk" and the ostensibly selfless "prayer for the redemption of the land" is highly questionable. Since he admits that "the restoration . . . of the fortunes of the Jewish people, . . . [and] the release from exile . . . would undoubtedly result if the prayer [for the restoration of the Land of Israel itself] were granted," then in praying for the latter one is, *ipso facto*, praying for the former. Moreover, it is difficult to believe that Halevi would even for a moment view "the prayer for the redemption of the folk" as "self-interested" and turn his attention away from it. Thus, in a particularly powerful passage from the *Kuzari* (1:115), the spokesman for Judaism responds to the Khazar king's accusation that the Jews have not accepted their exile in a true spirit of humility by admitting:

You have hit my most vulnerable point, O king . . . If most of us . . . would have persevered in our degradation out of submission to God and his Law, the divine order would not have overlooked us this long. But few of us behave according to this view . . . Therefore, were we to bear this exile and tribulation for the sake of God himself . . . we would surely be a [source of] pride and glory to the age that we await with the [coming of the] Messiah. So, too, we would bring the time appointed for the long-awaited redemption nearer.

Is this for Halevi a self-interested hope? Again, Halevi in the next to the last stanza of one of his most famous liturgical poems, "Yom le-Yabashah" ("The Day the Deep Sea Turned"), turns to God and pleads:

Then marry her [Israel] as once before,
Not to divorce her as of yore.
And let arise her sun's bright light,

Putting her shadows to the flight.¹⁴

What does this stanza express if not Halevi's ever present longing for "the redemption of the folk"?

Scheindlin even denies that even the limited notion of the redemption of the land served as the goal of Halevi's pilgrimage, which, he asserts, "was the act of a man who had given up on the masses and the leaders of his people and on the idea of an imminent redemption altogether, but who believed that there were steps that a person could take who wanted to come as close as possible to the divine presence" (pp. 161–62). Thus, for Scheindlin, Halevi's "departure for the Land of Israel is not . . . a summons for other Jews to follow." Rather, in departing for the land Halevi "goes a solitary way" (p. 160). Here Scheindlin, to sustain his radically individualistic reading of the journey's purpose, either ignores or downplays much contrary evidence. Moreover, his main argument for such an understanding is based, to my mind, on a misreading of one of the *Kuzari's* key texts.

First, the verses from Psalms, so often cited by Halevi, "You will arise and have mercy on Zion, for it is time to favor her . . . For your servants take delight in her stones and cherish her soil" (Ps 102.14–15), imply that he saw himself as one of a group of pietists dwelling in the land, cherishing its soil and its stones, and thereby awakening God's mercy and favor. This comes across with particular force at the *Kuzari's* end when the "rabbi," serving as spokesman for Judaism, explains to the skeptical king why he plans to depart for the Land of Israel:

Moreover, there is a reward for rousing people and moving them to love that holy place and giving [them] assurance of that order which is still awaited, as it says, "You will arise and have mercy on Zion, for it is time to favor her . . . For your servants take delight in her stones and cherish her soil" (Ps 102.14–15). This means that Jerusalem will be rebuilt only when Israel desires it so completely that they will feel compassion even for its stones and its dust. (5:27)

The rabbi here is clearly a spokesman not only for Judaism but for Halevi, and just as the former's departure was intended to "rouse people and move them to love that holy place and give [them] assurance of that order which is still awaited," the same was presumably true for Halevi himself.

14. Translation by Jakob J. Petuchowski, in *Theology and Poetry: Studies in Medieval Piyyut* (London, 1978), 67.

In addition, in the epistle to Samuel ben Hanania, Halevi writes of his longing to prostrate himself “*among the priests* where the ark lies buried,” evidently an allusion to the Mount of Olives, which until the late eleventh century, shortly before Halevi’s time, had been the site of an annual Jewish pilgrimage during the festival of Sukkot. Halevi here seems to be expressing the hope of reviving this annual practice when he arrived in Jerusalem.¹⁵ Finally, the second part of “Zion! Have you no greeting?,” as Scheindlin himself notes, focuses on Jerusalem and a select group of its devotees, of which the poet himself is a member (pp. 178–81). Where in any of this does one find a trace of Halevi’s supposedly “solitary way?”¹⁶

Scheindlin’s individualistic understanding of the purpose of Halevi’s journey appears to rest almost exclusively on the *Kuzari’s* conclusion, where the rabbi in departing for the Land of Israel neither reproaches the king “for staying in his own land” nor invites him to accompany him on his journey. Scheindlin comments:

The king, now a full-fledged and committed convert to Judaism, will carry on his life of political leadership and conventional religious probity in the land of the Khazars, a course good enough for a man of ordinary religious constitution . . . The rabbi . . . makes greater demands of himself. Through his action, he sets an example of love of Zion, a love that if it were more deeply rooted and more widespread among Jews might have redemptive power. But the rabbi’s departure for the Land of Israel is not a declaration of the messianic era or a summons for other Jews to follow. Like Halevi himself, the rabbi goes a solitary way. The [national and redemptive] swerve that his discourse takes near the end is merely a quiet parting rebuke to a nation that is content with its exile. (pp. 160–61)

Scheindlin’s argument assumes that just as the rabbi represents Halevi, the king represents the Jew of ordinary religious constitution. Thus the rabbi’s failure to reproach the king “for staying in his own land” and to

15. I am indebted for this observation to Yahalom, *R. Yehudah Halevi: The Song of His Life* (Hebrew; Jerusalem, 2008), 96, though Yahalom exaggerates somewhat the messianic significance attached to the hoped for revival of this practice.

16. At the end of his commentary on the poem Scheindlin writes, “The Ode to Jerusalem owes at least some of its poignancy to its oblique expression of the poet’s discovery of just how alone he is, even among his few fellows, as it is always poignant when one realizes belatedly that the givens of one’s inner life are not shared by others” (p. 181). The expression must be oblique, indeed, for I do not discern the slightest hint of this “poignant” aloneness anywhere in the poem.

invite him to accompany him on his journey symbolizes Halevi's giving up on the Jewish people. But this is simply not the case. The *Kuzari's* king is *not* a stand-in for the ordinary Jew: he is a convert, and, for Halevi, as he repeatedly emphasizes, the convert can never equal the native-born Jew, even one possessed only of an "ordinary religious constitution." Thus, Halevi states that "the person who enters the religion of Israel is not equal to the native-born Jew, since native-born Jews are people specifically qualified for prophecy. The aim of others [converts] is to learn from [native-born Jews] and to become learned and pious friends of God, not prophets" (*Kuzari* 1:115; cf. 1:27).

What is remarkable is that Halevi distinguishes between the convert and the native-born Jew precisely in the *Kuzari's* conclusion where the rabbi announces his planned pilgrimage. The king objects and argues, "What would one seek [there] today, when the Divine Presence is no longer present and one may draw close to God anywhere by means of pure intention and fervent desire?" (5:22). The rabbi replies that "actually, it is [only] the visible Divine Presence . . . that has disappeared . . . The hidden, spiritual, Divine Presence, however, is with *any native-born Israelite* who is blameless [in his] actions, pure of heart, and sincere in his intention towards the Lord" (5:23). Could anything be clearer? Only *the native-born Israelite* will be able to commune with the hidden, spiritual, Divine Presence in the Land of Israel, not the king who, however "blameless [he may be in his] actions, pure of heart, and sincere in his intention towards the Lord of Israel," is a convert.¹⁷ There is no reason then for the rabbi to reproach the king "for staying in his own land" or to invite him to join him on his journey. Many, including myself, regret Halevi's drawing an innate ontological distinction between Jewish and non-Jewish souls,¹⁸ but in light of his distinction Scheindlin's argument here is untenable.¹⁹

17. This was already noted by Moscato in *Kol Yehudab*, ad.loc. "And he [the rabbi] specified a native-born Israelite in light of his comment above in 1:115 that 'the person who enters the religion of Israel is not equal to the native-born Jew.'" See also Daniel Lasker, "Proselyte Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in the Thought of Judah Halevi," *JQR* 81.1 (1990): 81 and 88, n. 41.

18. To return to the issue of reception history, my impression is that it is the greater moral queasiness felt by people in the twentieth century in the presence of the slightest hint of racism in a text that has been the main reason for the emergence of a critical attitude to the ontological essentialism at the base of the *Kuzari's* conception of the Jewish people's uniqueness. At the same time, as scholars have noted, in fairness to Halevi, we should judge him by the standards of his day and not our own. See below for further discussion of this issue.

19. For recent scholarly discussions of the status of the proselyte in the *Kuzari*, see Lasker, "Proselyte Judaism," 75–92; and Robert Eisen, "The Problem of the

Scheindlin's problematic reading of the *Kuzari's* conclusion leads him to offer a similarly questionable reading of a famous passage in *Kuzari* 2:21–24 where “the rabbi and the king discuss the question of settling in the Land of Israel.” Scheindlin writes:

The king exclaims on the Jews' hypocrisy: believing that the Land of Israel has such virtues and constantly praying to be restored to it, they make no effort to actually go there and settle it. In one of the most memorable passages in the book the rabbi confesses that the people are to blame. God was ready to restore the Jewish kingdom . . . at the time of Ezra, had the people been willing to leave Babylon and return . . . Likewise, if the desire were sincere and sufficiently powerful, the redemption would come today . . . But the people are not worthy . . . They have degenerated to the level of ordinary people . . . routinely pious and comfortable in exile. (p. 161)

Although Scheindlin elsewhere quotes at great length directly from Halevi, it is unfortunate that he does not do so here, particularly since this “memorable passage” exerted great influence over the course of history.

Indeed, you have reproached me with cause, O king of the Khazars . . . Our saying, *Bow down towards his Holy Mountain, and bow down to his footstool! He who restores his presence to Zion*, and other such things (Ps 99.9, 5, and the final blessing in the *Avodah* section of the Eighteen Benedictions), is like the starling's caw, since we do not realize what we are saying . . . just as you said, O Prince of the Khazars. (2:24)

Scheindlin claims that “with that the subject is dropped,” asserting that “Halevi has no expectation that the salvation is at hand or that it will come from human initiative. This passage was clearly a reproach to Halevi's contemporaries . . . but it is no more a call for a mass migration to Zion than is the rabbi's solitary departure at the *Kuzari's* end” (p. 161). But the subject is *not* dropped. Earlier in 2:8–12, the rabbi in explaining how “the [Lord's] *glory* is a ray of divine light, which is beneficial when his people are in his land” (2:8) offers the vineyard analogy. In order to yield an excellent vintage, choice vines, choice land, and proper cultivation are required. Similarly, in order for a people “to become attached to the divine order,” a choice people, a choice land, and proper cultivation

of that choice people in that choice land are required (2:12). In this light, the progression of the *Kuzari* from the issue of settling in the Land of Israel to that of sacrifices, far from being a change of subject, flows quite logically. For after having discussed the choice people, namely, the Jewish people, and the choice land, namely, the Land of Israel, the *Kuzari* moves, as one would expect, to the proper cultivation of that people in that land through “the actions and Laws” prescribed by the Torah associated with that land, particularly those concerning the Temple and the sacrifices. This, in turn, leads to a discussion of the Jews’ present condition and future prospects, with the Temple destroyed, the sacrifices discontinued, and the people exiled from the land.

More important, the subject of the Holy Land is not dropped, for Halevi returns it at the *Kuzari*’s conclusion. This is part of the work’s drama. Until its conclusion, the reader receives the impression that settling in the Land of Israel is just one subject among many discussed in the *Kuzari*, albeit an important one, and suddenly, at the very end, it turns out that this subject forms its climax and moreover brings us back to the book’s beginning. The *Kuzari* is set into motion by a dream that came to the king “repeatedly as though an angel were addressing him, saying, ‘Your intention is pleasing to God, but your actions are not pleasing’” (1:1). At the book’s end the rabbi realizes that seeking to “draw . . . close to God . . . in any place by means of pure *intention* and fervent desire” is not sufficient, but God requires of every native-born Jew the *action* of settling in the Land of Israel, unless circumstances render that action impossible.²⁰ It is as if the rabbi finally internalized the implications of his earlier exchange with the king. He wants no longer to be subject to the king’s justified reproach or for his prayers to be no more than “the starling’s caw.” And so he departs for the Holy Land.²¹

Aside from its dubious textual basis, Scheindlin’s claim that Halevi’s “departure for the land of Israel is not . . . a summons for other Jews to

20. The implication seems to be that a “native-born Israelite who is blameless [in his] actions, pure of heart, and sincere in his intention towards the Lord of Israel” who truly longs to go to the Land of Israel, but circumstances make it impossible for him to do so, can commune with the invisible Divine Presence even in the Diaspora.

21. Similar suggestions regarding the link between the exchange with the king in book 2 of the *Kuzari* concerning settling in the Land of Israel and the *Kuzari*’s conclusion may be found in Ross Brann, *The Compunctious Poet: Cultural Ambiguity and Hebrew Poetry in Muslim Spain* (Baltimore, Md., 1991), 108–9; Aaron Hughes, *The Art of Dialogue in Jewish Philosophy* (Bloomington, Ind., 2008), 32 and 49; and, most recently, Halkin, *Yebuda Halevi*, 178–86. See below.

follow” makes little psychological or rhetorical sense. After all, most writers seek to convince their readers of the truth of their messages. And if those messages have any practical implications, they ordinarily hope that at least some readers will be inspired to put them into practice. And, in truth, many Jews since the twelfth century went to the Land of Israel, at least in part, because they were inspired by both the “memorable passage” in the *Kuzari*’s book 2 and the work’s conclusion.

What then was the goal of Halevi’s journey? I maintain that while the philosopher and poet could hardly assume that masses of Spanish Jews would leave their comfortable exile for the Land of Israel, his journey, along with his poems of longing for the Land and the *Kuzari*, were all intended to rouse a select group to follow his path and settle there alongside him. This group of pietists, comprising “native-born Israelite[s], blameless [in their] actions, pure of heart, and sincere in [their] intention towards the Lord of Israel,” would commune there with the invisible Divine Presence. Further, these servants of Zion by “tak[ing] delight in her stones and cherish[ing] her soil” and (perhaps) renewing the annual pilgrimage to the Mount of Olives would induce God to “rise and have mercy on Zion, [and] favor her” and miraculously redeem both his land and his people. Then, with God’s restoration of his people to his land, and with the rebuilding of the Temple and the renewal of the sacrifices and the other “actions and Laws” associated with the land, God’s visible Divine Presence would reappear, this time never to depart. There is no imminent messianism in this vision, but neither, contra Scheindlin, does it reflect a purely personal spiritual quest. Rather we have here a delicate and complex weave of individual and national, pietistic and redemptive motifs.

How is it that such a genuinely eminent scholar could have got it so wrong? In part it would appear that Scheindlin, the distinguished scholar of medieval Hebrew poetry, privileged Halevi’s pilgrimage poems, in which personal, pietistic motivations loom large, while communal, historical motivations are nearly absent, over such texts as Halevi’s famous “Zion! Have you no greeting?,” the epistle to Samuel ben Hanania, and the *Kuzari*, in which communal and historical motivations play a more major role, (mis)interpreting the latter group of texts in light of the former.²²

22. Similarly, though Scheindlin takes note of the (originally Muslim) theme of *tawakkul*, an attitude of pious quietism, an almost entirely passive trust in divine action, found in much of Halevi’s personal religious poetry, he fails to note the demand for human initiative set forth in his communally and historically oriented texts. (Note the correlation between the personal religious realm and *tawakkul* and the communal/historical realm and human initiative.)

Yet I believe something else is at work here. Scheindlin's ostensibly detached, objective arguments regarding Halevi's motivation for undertaking his journey seem to implicitly advance what Shear calls "a particular Jewish cultural agenda." While the words "Zionism" and "proto-Zionism" seem to be deliberately absent from *The Song of the Distant Dove*, Scheindlin's approach by implication rebuts collectivist, historical, "Zionist" interpretations of Halevi's journey,²³ one of which—that of the late Israeli scholar Ezra Fleischer—he describes as "perversely modernizing" (p. 277, n. 2).²⁴ Scheindlin's own exaggerated individualistic interpretation of the journey seems, however, no less ideological than the collectivist Zionist interpretations he rejects. He is certainly justified in his wariness of those who regard Halevi as a "cultural authority" and anachronistically convert him into a proto-Zionist; yet is not his own Halevi, the solitary poet and pilgrim, a cultural hero especially tailored and decked out for our "post-Zionist" era, indeed, a Halevi who is something of a proto-post-Zionist? Despite its impressive scholarship and acute literary sensibility, does not Scheindlin's *Song of the Distant Dove*, then, with its own one-sided interpretation of Halevi's journey, fall into the same trap of "perverse modernizing"?

IV

While Scheindlin's book purports to be above the current ideological fray, the opposite holds true for Hillel Halkin's recent biography, *Yebuda Halevi*, published in the Schocken/Nextbook Jewish Encounters series.

23. See below, note 49.

24. See Ezra Fleischer, "The Quintessence and Embodiment of our Country" (Hebrew), *Pe'amim* 68 (1996): 4–15. In this essay, Scheindlin writes, Fleischer "characterizes Halevi's journey as 'essentially political, not religious,' and calls Halevi 'not a pilgrim, but an *oleb*,' a perversely modernizing reading that flies in the face of Halevi's own words." Scheindlin's criticism is well taken, if rather sharply expressed, but does not represent Fleischer's views accurately. First, Fleischer characterizes Halevi's journey not as "essentially political, not religious," but as "essentially political and national (*politi u-le'umi*), not religious" (p. 10). Second, in explaining what he means by this characterization, Fleischer emphasizes the (supposedly) cultural aspect of Halevi's journey more than he emphasizes either the political or the religious aspect. He writes that Halevi felt that the Spanish Jews had to settle in the Land of Israel in order to achieve "cultural independence and establish an . . . autonomous Jewish culture in which the Jewish religion will . . . stand at its center . . . as a source of national pride and a foundation stone for creative spiritual activity even in those areas which are not 'religious' in the ordinary sense" (pp. 10–11). I agree with Scheindlin that this is a highly anachronistic portrait, but Fleischer, a distinguished scholar and poet who was imprisoned in Romania for Zionist activities from 1952 to 1955 before making his own *'aliyah*, autobiographically portrays Halevi here not as a

Halkin's biography, a very wide-ranging and ambitious work, is popular in the best sense of the term. Written in a lively and informal style, the book captures the drama and color of Halevi's life, of the Mediterranean societies in which he lived, and of his reputation's vicissitudes throughout the ages. And though it dispenses with footnotes and relegates all technical discussions to a series of appendices, it is based on solid scholarship, displaying a deep familiarity with the relevant primary sources and secondary literature. In a recent interview Halkin commented, "Yehudah Halevi is one of the perhaps few great writers that the more you know him as a person, the more you love him as a person."²⁵ That love, without dulling Halkin's critical sensibilities, comes through in the biography.

After the book's first chapter describes the emergence of the young Halevi as a bright new poetic star in the Andalusian firmament, the second chapter sets forth its bold agenda.

Yehudah ben Shmuel Halevi . . . was to become one of the greatest Hebrew poets of all time. He was also to write one of the most important works of religious philosophy in the Jewish canon; to make, late in life, a personal decision that was to resound in Jewish history; to then vanish mysteriously . . . ; to be turned subsequently into a legend, most of whose poetry was lost; to have, in modern times, first his lost verse miraculously recovered, and then, his fate clarified with the help of an astonishing archival discovery; and finally, to be implicated . . . in the great intellectual and political debates regarding Zionism and the State of Israel. Such is the bare outline of our story. (p. 19)

Certain parts of this story are, as one might expect, related with more flair and authority than others. Halkin, a prolific translator of both Medieval Hebrew poetry and Modern Hebrew and Yiddish prose and a distinguished literary critic, is particularly strong in limning the cultural contours of Halevi's "poetic age" (p. 48), in delineating the strengths and limitations of the so-called Spanish *convivencia* ("the relative harmony . . . in which Muslims, Christians, and Jews cohabited in Halevi's time" [p. 21] and the cultural and literary interactions between the three groups), and in explaining how Halevi became "one of the greatest Hebrew poets of all time." His translations of a wide and varied selection of Halevi's

proto-political Zionist (the impression Scheindlin gives), but as a proto-cultural Zionist, or, better, a proto-religious cultural Zionist.

25. "Q and A with Hillel Halkin," *Jewish Star*, February 24, 2010.

poems are exceptionally fine,²⁶ and his analyses of those poems are always sensitive and incisive. Of particular note is Halkin's comparison of Halevi's great Zionide poem "Zion! Have you no greeting?" with his great love poem "Why, my darling, have you barred all news?," thereby supporting Heinrich Heine's "wonderfully astute" observation (p. 120) that Halevi, in portraying the Land of Israel as the cherished beloved and himself as the "pining lover" from whom she has been torn "by a cruel fate" (p. 119), was, to cite Halkin's paraphrase, "Judaizing the troubadour's cult of devotion . . . by replacing its idealized woman with a divinely chosen holy land" (p. 126).²⁷

Halkin's vivid narrative of Halevi's eventful nine-month stay in Egypt on his way to the Holy Land is based on the same Geniza texts used by Scheindlin.²⁸ While the latter's account is fuller and better documented—Halkin, for example, ignores important sections of Halevi's letter to Samuel ben Hanania—that of Halkin more successfully captures Halevi's complex and shifting psychological states over the course of that stay. Halkin also conveys the pathos and, even more so, the humor of many of the events which befell him along the way, whether the "comic picture of an [Alexandrian] Jewish community so eager to entertain Halevi that it did not balk at using its connections with the Muslim authorities to compel him to accept its invitations" (p. 201) or "the singular scene [of] the renowned poet on his way to a solitary life in the Land of Israel and . . . the nabobs of Egyptian Jewry getting drunk and jousting at poetry as he did when he was young!" (p. 209).

Halkin's analysis of the *Kuzari*, by contrast, is uneven. He erroneously assumes, for example, that for Halevi the debate between Rabbinism and Karaism, treated in book 3, was not primarily theological but either "a purely historical one, having to do with whether the Oral Law . . . was the unbroken chain going back to Moses that the rabbis held it to be or, rather, as the Karaites maintained, a rabbinic invention," or a purely legal

26. In his translation of Halevi's famous poem "E-lohai mishkenotekha yedi-dot" (p. 113), Halkin, however, translates the half-line "ve-sharti malachotav ha-ḥamudot" as "to sing in its lovely worshipping." This is both syntactically and contextually impossible, and, as all the standard, annotated Hebrew editions of Halevi's poetry indicate, "ve-sharti" here does not mean "and I sang," but "and I saw." Cf. Num 23.9, 24.17. Scheindlin correctly translates the half-line as "watching every holy rite" (p. 91).

27. A similar comparison of these two poems (minus the Heine link) may be found in Yahalom, *Yehudab Halevi*, 1–2.

28. Halkin's account of the Geniza's discovery (pp. 71–72) is, however, out of date and inaccurate.

one “with rabbinic Judaism claiming a divinely sanctioned right to interpret Scripture freely and the Karaites insisting on every individual’s right and obligation to arrive at a more literal understanding on his own” (pp. 140–41). But for Halevi, following an earlier geonic tradition, the talmudic rabbis *rejected* such “a divinely sanctioned right to interpret Scripture freely.” On the contrary, all the legal interpretations of Scripture found in rabbinic literature were, for Halevi, *not* based on “free” interpretation but were precisely revealed oral interpretations. The Karaites, following their own reason and making use of logic and analogy, sought to extrapolate new laws from divinely revealed Scripture. Halevi, by contrast, claimed that both the written Torah *and* its oral interpretations found in the Talmud were divinely revealed. Karaism, then, under philosophical influence, attempts to discover those deeds pleasing to God by supplementing revelation with reason, while Rabbinism accords with the *Kuzari*’s central thesis that “God can be approached only through his commandments,” both written *and* oral.²⁹

Halkin basically accepts the dichotomizing approach to the *Kuzari* and the *Guide*, and, in this connection, devotes much attention to Halevi’s criticisms of the philosophical conception of God. He fails, however, to discuss Halevi’s own conception of the divinity. Indeed, he does not even cite the *Kuzari*’s famous distinction between the God of Abraham and the God of Aristotle (4:16). Had Halkin read Kreisel, he might have concluded with him that “Halevi’s God of Abraham ultimately wears a visage reminiscent of the God of Aristotle” and might perhaps have modified the rather stark contrast he draws between Halevi and Maimonides.

Given his concern with Halevi’s critique of the philosophical approach to religion, it is surprising that Halkin underplays the radicalism of the “philosopher” who makes a brief but critical appearance early in the *Kuzari*. First, contrary to what is implied by Halkin’s translation, the philosopher never refers to a “Creator” (p. 144).³⁰ Second, Halkin erroneously claims that the philosopher’s “formal religious affiliation is unstated.” But it’s not clear that he has any formal religious affiliation. Third, Halkin asserts that the philosopher “tells the king that all three monotheistic faiths are equally valid symbolic systems meant to represent a higher reality that the ordinary man cannot comprehend without the

29. I am simplifying here somewhat. For a full and incisive discussion of Halevi’s critique of Karaism, see Lobel, *Between Mysticism and Philosophy* (Albany, N.Y., 2000), 55–75.

30. Halkin was understandably misled here by Judah ibn Tibbon’s medieval translation, which mistakenly translates the standard Arabic word for God, “Allah,” as “Borei,” meaning “Creator.”

aid of religious dogmas and rituals” (p. 144). The philosopher, however, never refers to the three monotheistic religions but rather suggests that the king either dispense with all formal religion or, if he feels he has need for a structured religion, he should either create his own religion or adopt that of the philosophers. It would appear that Halkin conflates Halevi’s “pure,” radically unaffiliated philosopher, who is an “ideal type,” with such actual medieval Muslim philosophers as Farabi (d. 950), Avicenna (d. 1037), and (unmentioned by Halkin) ibn Bajja (d. 1139), from whom, indeed, Halevi’s philosopher borrows key doctrines.³¹

Halkin is strong, however, on the work’s literary and dramatic features. He is particularly alert to the subtle aspects of the exchanges between the king and the rabbi, peppering his account of their unfolding dialogue with such comments as “The king is offended . . . Huffily he replies”; “The rabbi is unfazed”; “The king replies sarcastically”; “Now it is the rabbis turn to be stung”; and the like (pp. 148, 149, 173, 174). Some of these “stage directions” are more convincing than others, but they remind us that the king and the rabbi are more than merely the bloodless, abstract, stick-figures typical of most medieval dialogues, but full-fledged individualized characters, and that the *Kuzari*’s meaning, like that of Plato’s dialogues, resides precisely in the complex interplay between its dramatic and intellectual aspects.

Especially incisive is Halkin’s portrait of the king, which he draws in connection with Halevi’s assertion that the convert, in certain respects, is inferior to the native-born Jew. Halkin suggests that Halevi drew this ontological distinction out of “a sense of historical desperation,” and that “by making the Jewish people a discrete building block of the universe . . . he was seeking to anchor to a metaphysical reality that could withstand the buffeting of history” (pp. 176–77).³² Still, he acknowledges that this “genetic” affirmation of Jewish superiority “cannot but strike one as an anticipation of modern racist ideologies that the *Kuzari* would be better off without” (p. 296). At the same time Halkin insists, following the lead of earlier scholars,³³ “that contemporary attacks on Halevi’s racism are

31. See Shlomo Pines, “Shi’ite Terms and Conceptions in Judah Halevi’s *Kuzari*,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 2 (1980): 211–15, 219.

32. Halkin overlooks the possibility that Halevi may be basing himself on and giving a “scientific” veneer to certain highly ethnocentric rabbinic statements denigrating non-Jews and even proselytes. See Lasker, “Proselyte Judaism,” 90–91, and Elliot Wolfson, *Venturing Beyond* (Oxford, 2006), 42–57.

33. See, for example, Eliezer Schweid, *Homeland and a Land of Promise* (Hebrew; Tel Aviv, 1979), 59–61; and David Novak, *The Election of Israel: The Idea of the Chosen People* (Cambridge, 1995), 207–21.

unjustified and perversely overlook the most important single feature of the *Kuzari*—namely, its telling the story of a gentile’s conversion to Judaism” (p. 296). Halkin adds:

More than any other Jewish book of the Middle Ages, the *Kuzari* insists on Judaism as a universal faith. Nor is its gentile just a foil for its Jew. The Khazar king has a mind of his own; he asks the rabbi perceptive questions and more than once scores a point against him . . . His sincerity and determination to do the right thing are the cornerstone of the dialogue between them. Nowhere else in medieval Jewish literature is a non-Jew portrayed so sympathetically. (p. 297)³⁴

Although this is well put, Halkin goes too far in arguing that, for Halevi, the difference between the convert and the born Jew is now “purely theoretical,” since Jews “no longer have prophets” (p. 175). Like Scheindlin, he overlooks the fact that Halevi’s urgent demand that any Jew “who is blameless [in his] actions, pure of heart, and sincere in his intention towards the Lord of Israel” follow his path and settle in the holy land is made only of the “the native-born Israelite.”

Finally, Halkin is sensitive to the religious significance of the *Kuzari*’s story line. He correctly argues, in sharp contrast to Scheindlin and close to my earlier comments in this essay, that the rabbi’s decision at the book’s end to depart for the Holy Land was triggered by the king’s earlier rebuke. The king’s criticism, asserts Halkin, forces the rabbi “to admit to himself that he has been living a lie. Nothing he has taught the king has the slightest value unless he decides to live in the Land of Israel” (pp. 185–86).

Halkin, as becomes increasingly clear over the book’s course, is also—perhaps primarily—speaking autobiographically. *Yebuda Halevi* is a very personal work. In 1970 Hillel Halkin, then living in his native United States, became convinced, like Judah Halevi in twelfth-century Andalusia, that he belonged in the Land of Israel, and, like Halevi, he acted upon that conviction. A few years after arriving in Israel, he wrote “a Zionist’s polemic” addressed to “an imaginary American Jewish friend,” trying to convince him “that if he was serious about being Jewish, the only honest place to be it in was Israel” (p. 282).³⁵ Between its writing and publication Halkin read the *Kuzari* for the first time. Upon reading the aforementioned passage in book 2, where the rabbi, responding to the king’s reproach, confesses that Jewish prayers for returning to the Land of Israel are noth-

34. Cf. Schweid, *Homeland*, 60.

35. Halkin, *Letters to an American Jewish Friend* (Philadelphia, 1977).

ing more than “the starling’s caw,” Halkin immediately called his editor and suggested changing the book’s title to “The Starling’s Caw.” The editor wisely demurred, but the passage served as the book’s epigraph.³⁶

And so, at the heart of Halkin’s biography is Halevi’s decision to abandon Andalusia for the Land of Israel. Halkin, unlike Scheindlin, acknowledges that modern discussions regarding the nature of and motivation for Halevi’s decision have been “implicated . . . in the great intellectual and political debates regarding Zionism and the State of Israel.” His own discussion of that decision contributes both to the modern reception history of Halevi the person³⁷ and, in this connection, to the historiography of modern Zionism.

Halkin, like Shear,³⁸ stresses that scholars and thinkers in the modern period have generally emphasized Halevi’s nationalist side, often presenting him in proto-Zionist colors. Thus, for the pioneering nineteenth-century historian Heinrich Graetz, Halevi’s “full stature was revealed only in the ‘national religious verse’ of his songs for Zion” (p. 263).³⁹ Not surprisingly, Halkin notes, Halevi has served as an ideological hero to the modern religious-Zionist movement (pp. 266–68).⁴⁰ At the same time, members of the religious-Zionist community who have been critical of its (alleged) extremist tendencies, such as Yeshayahu Leibowitz (1903–94) and David Hartman (1931–), also focus on Halevi the nationalist but accuse him of excessive ethnocentrism, bordering on, in Leibowitz’s view, “racist chauvinism” (pp. 270–73).

This nationalist emphasis has been applied with particular force to Halevi’s decision to settle in the holy land. True, Halkin observes, the

36. Note, incidentally, the similarity between Halkin’s giving his imaginary friend “a few good lines at my own expense” (p. 282), and Halevi’s allowing the king to “more than once score a point against” the rabbi. Note also the name of Halkin’s 1960s girlfriend and its not-so-subtle significance (pp. 121 and 286).

37. As Shear notes, “Over the course of the nineteenth century . . . the reception of the *Kuzari* merged with the reception of Halevi” (p. 295).

38. Shear, 299–309. Shear notes, however, that “a detailed analysis of the impact of Halevi and his works on Jewish nationalism as well as the construction of Halevi’s biography in Zionist thought is beyond the scope of this book” (p. 309). In this respect, Halkin, in his book’s last two chapters, takes up the story where Shear leaves off.

39. Halkin errs, however, in referring to Graetz as a “secular Jew.” To the contrary, he was religiously observant and was what today would be considered “traditional Conservative.”

40. Indeed, in certain religious-Zionist circles, the *Kuzari* is widely viewed as being the most outstanding and authentic work of Jewish thought of all time and has succeeded in eclipsing even the *Duties of the Heart* and the *Guide*.

Hungarian-Jewish scholar David Kaufmann in his 1877 German biography of Halevi⁴¹ “maintained that [he] set out on his voyage for purely personal reasons—principally to atone for the sinful years of his youth” (p. 265), but his proved to be a minority view.⁴² Throughout the twentieth century and into the present one both Halevi’s devotees and critics have viewed his decision through nationalist/proto-Zionist lenses. Particularly influential were two articles on Halevi written in 1935 (the date is significant) by two of the most prominent members of the “Jerusalem School” of nationalist historians at the Hebrew University, Ben-Zion Dinaburg (later Dinur)⁴³ and Yitzhak (earlier Fritz) Baer.⁴⁴

Halkin builds here upon David Myers’s 1994 monograph, *Re-Inventing the Jewish Past*, which devotes a chapter each to Dinaburg and Baer.⁴⁵ For both historians, Myers shows, it was no longer faith but peoplehood which served “as the source of Jewish identity and historical inquiry.”⁴⁶ Dinaburg was a cultural-Zionist who advocated a Palestinocentric reading of Jewish history,⁴⁷ while Baer “gave clear articulation to the ‘immanentist’ conception . . . of Jewish history, [whereby] impelled by an inner life force, the Jewish people moved through history as a unified organic unit.”⁴⁸ Although Myers makes use of neither Dinaburg’s nor Baer’s essays on Halevi, both might have served as perfect illustrations of his above-mentioned characterizations.

For Dinaburg, who left Eastern Europe for Mandate Palestine, “Halevi’s journey,” writes Halkin, “was not a private act, but . . . a call for action and emulation” (p. 265). As Dinaburg wrote:

41. Reprinted in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 2 (Frankfurt am Main, 1910), 99–151.

42. Shear, 299, maintains that Joseph Jacobs’s pamphlet, “Judah Halevi, Poet and Pilgrim” (London, 1887), also presents Halevi’s decision as “reflecting the individual religious sentiment of an exceptional individual,” but a reading of the essay fails to substantiate this claim.

43. Dinaburg, “Rabbi Yehudah Halevi’s *‘Aliyah* to the Land of Israel and the Messianic Ferment in His Days,” in *Minḥab le-David*, ed. S. Assaf (Hebrew; Jerusalem, 1935), 157–82.

44. Baer, “The Political Condition of Sefardic Jewry in the Generation of R. Yehudah Halevi” (Hebrew), *Zion* 1 (1935/36): 6–23.

45. David N. Myers, *Re-Inventing the Jewish Past: European Jewish Intellectuals and the Zionist Return to History* (New York, 1995), 109–28 (Baer) and 129–50 (Dinaburg).

46. *Ibid.*, 7.

47. The subtitle of Myers’s chapter on Dinaburg is “Between Cultural Zionism and Palestinocentrism.”

48. *Ibid.*, 127.

Yehuda Halevi's projected path of redemption was a serious attempt . . . to blaze a new trail for a messianism that would engage less in calculating the awaited end than in hastening it . . . and that would demand of the Jews that they settle in Palestine of their own accord rather than wait to be magically transported there.⁴⁹

Baer, who refers to Dinaburg's essay, carries its thesis one step further, transforming Halevi into a Herzl *avant la lettre*. He sought, writes Halkin, "to make the case for Halevi as a political thinker." Living at a time when many Jews fled the Muslim south for the Christian north, Halevi, Baer wrote (in Halkin's paraphrase), "had the prescience to foresee that Christian rule would end badly too, and that the age-old Jewish strategy of cultivating the powers that be was doomed to . . . failure." Furthermore, according to Baer, "Halevi understood that Gentile oppression was the inevitable result of exilic existence, so that, in calling upon Jews to end the exile by their own efforts, he was urging them to cast oppression permanently off. It remained for Zionism, centuries later, to do so" (p. 266).

Of course, Halkin's last sentence is his own extrapolation of the historian's barely hidden message. Baer, himself, was not so crude as to state this explicitly. Still, when at the essay's beginning he wrote that Halevi's interpretation of the significance of his generation's suffering "made him their teacher and ours as well,"⁵⁰ the lesson Baer—a German-born Jew writing in Jerusalem in 1935—wished "us" to draw was blindingly clear.

Similarly, when Dinaburg, at his essay's conclusion, states that "Halevi paved a 'path for generations:' from the 'aliyah of the three hundred rabbis from France [1211] and the 'aliyah of Nahmanides [1270] until the 'aliyah of the ascetics and pietists at the end of the eighteenth century,"⁵¹ it requires little imagination for the reader to add to the list: "and until the first Zionist 'aliyah in the 1880s."

A similar nationalist/proto-Zionist perspective on Halevi's pilgrimage, as Halkin notes, can also be found among Halevi's critics. Thus Maria Rosa Menocal in her recent work, *The Ornament of the World*,⁵² building

49. Dinaburg, "Yehudah Halevi's 'Aliyah,'" 182. Scheindlin devotes much space and effort to rebutting Dinaburg's reading. See Scheindlin, 59–63 and 264–65, nn. 21, 23, 27, and 30. He does not mention, however, that Dinaburg's thesis derives from his Cultural-Zionist orientation and Palestinocentric reading of Jewish history.

50. Baer, "The Political Condition of Sefardic Jewry," 6.

51. Dinaburg, "Yehudah Halevi's 'Aliyah,'" 182.

52. Menocal, *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain* (Boston, 2002).

on the work of earlier scholars, sees Halevi's voyage as the culmination of his social and cultural critique of the Adalusian Jewish courtier class and the Judeo-Arabic cultural synthesis it espoused.⁵³ But while these earlier scholars viewed both Halevi's critique and subsequent departure either positively or neutrally, Menocal sees Halevi as having committed, in Halkin's words, "an act of betrayal" (p. 275) in that "he chose to . . . abandon the culture that had made his poetry possible!"⁵⁴

Menocal's sentimentalized and idealized portrait of the Spanish *convivencia*—her book's subtitle, *How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain* speaks volumes⁵⁵—which Halevi supposedly abandoned, "has often," according to Halkin, "been mobilized by . . . pro-Arab intellectuals as supposed proof of Muslim civilization's liberal attitude toward Otherness until driven to a defensive belligerence by Western colonialism and modern nationalism—especially by Zionism" (p. 294). Halkin therefore reasonably concludes that "although she does not speak of Zionism, Menocal, one suspects, sees Halevi as a proto-Zionist too; it is this that makes him the snake in her Eden of *convivencia*" (p. 295).

Ironically enough, Halkin observes, Scheindlin's view on Halevi's motivation for his journey revives David Kaufmann's individualist reading, though, we may add, for Kaufmann the reason for Halevi's voyage was "principally to atone for the sinful years of his youth," while for Scheindlin it was principally "to come as close as possible to the divine presence."⁵⁶ Halkin implies that despite Scheindlin's pose of pure, "scru-

53. Baer, *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, trans. L. Schoffman (Philadelphia, 1961), 1:72–76; Gerson Cohen, ed. and trans., *The Book of Tradition by Abraham ibn Daud* (Philadelphia, 1967), 295–302; Michael Berger, "Toward a New Understanding of Judah Halevi's *Kuzari*," *Journal of Religion* 72.2 (1992): 210–28; Scheindlin, 55–58. Scheindlin judiciously comments, "Halevi's pilgrimage . . . represented in part a rejection of the Andalusian Jewish courtiers' admiration for and engagement in Arabo-Islamic culture . . . but this social and cultural critique cannot provide a complete description of his mentality and certainly not a complete explanation for his pilgrimage" (pp. 55, 58).

54. Menocal, *Ornament of the World*, 162. The exclamation mark is not in the original. Another (inadvertent) stage direction on Halkin's part?

55. Even Harold Bloom in his generally laudatory forward to Menocal's book concedes that her Andalusia "may to some degree represent an idealization," and he notes that her ascribing "the terrible massacre of Jews in Granada in 1066" entirely to fundamentalist Berbers "is not wholly convincing," though he hastens to add, "Still, the [book's] central vision . . . is persuasive" (*ibid.*, xiv).

56. But see Scheindlin's brief introduction to "Pilgrimage: by Judah Halevi," trans. R. Scheindlin, in *Essays in Hebrew Literature in Honor of Avraham Holtz*, ed. Z. Ginor (New York, 2003), 15. "A cycle of poems written after the poet, on the

pulous scholarship,” he has been influenced by current cultural trends, and biting remarks, “The national poet, in the spirit of the first years of the twenty-first century, has been privatized” (p. 281).

Halkin, himself, does not deny the individual side to Halevi’s journey. Along with other scholars, he notes that Halevi underwent a psychological and spiritual crisis in his middle years, expressed in a number of letters⁵⁷ and, perhaps most acutely, in his powerful poem “Lord, You are my sole desire,” which ends with the exclamation, anticipating the angel’s address to the Khazar king (see p. 157), “I am naked of deeds” (*Ani mi-ma’asim sholal ve-’arom*).⁵⁸ As Halkin remarks, “‘Heading East’ was the deed he chose to clothe himself in” (p. 131).

Yet he rejects Scheindlin’s view that Halevi’s voyage “was no more a call for a mass movement to Zion than is the rabbi’s solitary departure at the *Kuzari*’s end,” arguing that “the *Kuzari* is . . . a dialogue not a meditation . . . It is precisely a call for a mass movement to Zion, though not one he thought would be immediately responded to” (p. 292). While I sympathize with Halkin’s critique of Scheindlin, I cannot agree with his assertion, following Dinaburg, that the *Kuzari* contains “a call for a mass movement to Zion.” That call, as I have argued, is addressed to a limited audience, comprising “native-born Israelite[s], blameless [in their] actions, pure of heart, and sincere in [their] intention towards the Lord of Israel”—though no doubt many of the *Kuzari*’s readers over the generations fancied themselves as belonging to that elite group.

This leads to a larger question: Can we view Halevi as a proto-Zionist? Halkin grants that “he was not, [contra Baer], a forerunner of Zionism in its Herzlian sense of a political struggle to gain Jewish independence in Palestine; no such goal was imaginable in his day.” He maintains, however, that “if one conceives of Zionism [as] a belief in the return of the Jews to Palestine as an intrinsic good that the Jewish people must undertake for its own benefit, a strong case for Halevi’s proto-Zionism can be made” (pp. 292–93). I cannot agree. Halkin, like Dinaburg before him, fails to appreciate the gap separating the sentiment behind Halevi’s *aliyah* from modern Zionist ideology in all its forms. Gideon Shimoni has

brink of old age, and after years of indecision, abandoned his family, home, and country, intending to end his days as a penitent in the Land of Israel.” And note Scheindlin’s comment at the beginning of *Song of the Distant Dove* that Halevi “went to the Land of Israel . . . to mend his worldly ways” (p. 5).

57. See Scheindlin, *Song of the Distant Dove*, 16–17.

58. Scheindlin’s translation “I stand before You now, as a naked man” (pp. 38–39) omits the motif of deeds, thereby effacing the line’s link with the Khazar king, and is of a piece with his overall quietistic reading of the poem.

cogently argued that “all the ramifications of Zionist ideology” share three common denominators:

First the situation of the Jewish entity under conditions of dispersion is critically defective, not just in a messianic sense, but emphatically in a worldly sense; second, the solution lies in territorial ingathering of Jews in Eretz Israel under conditions of autonomy at least and sovereignty at best; third, these purposes should be effected by political diplomacy, settlement activities, and the revival of Jewish national morale and culture.⁵⁹

How different is this from Halevi’s aforementioned aim of rousing a group of pietists to settle in the land alongside him, commune there with the invisible Divine Presence, “take delight in [Zion’s] stones and cherish her soil” and perhaps renew the annual pilgrimage to the Mount of Olives, thereby inducing God to miraculously redeem his land and people. The aims of both Halevi and Zionism are, indeed, national and collective, even redemptive, but the one vision is distinctively medieval, the other equally distinctively modern.

Despite Halkin’s criticisms of Scheindlin’s “privatized” Halevi, his tone is surprisingly mild. Gone is the Zionist polemicist of *Letters to an American Jewish Friend*.

Were my personal history different, my Halevi would be different as well. But this is equally true of Raymond Scheindlin . . . Like nearly all American Jews Scheindlin has remained in America; his Yehuda Halevi does not criticize him for that. I have settled in Israel and my Halevi thinks otherwise. (p. 293)

Halkin is utilizing the concept of projection. One can grant Halkin’s claims that the young Hebrew poet Micha Lebensohn in the ballad he wrote about Halevi in 1849–50, already stricken with the tuberculosis that would kill him two years later at the age of twenty-four, “was projecting his own doomed psychological and emotional state onto the Halevi of legend” (p. 257) and that Heine in his famous ballad about Halevi was similarly projecting his own romantic self-conception as poetic genius onto his medieval predecessor (p. 260). We expect such projecting from romantic poets. But Halkin further claims that Graetz’s nationalist Halevi, “the first to grasp the significance of Judaism as an independent

59. *The Zionist Ideology* (Hanover, 1995), 85.

historical manifestation," is also a personal projection (p. 263), as is Dina-burg's proto-Zionist Halevi, as is Scheindlin's, and, of course, his own (p. 293). Moreover, Halkin contends, "This is as it should be. It is one of the measures of literary greatness that we see ourselves in it. The good reader reads with his whole mind, the best reader, with his whole life. Yehuda Halevi brings out the best in us" (p. 293).

I find this troubling. We have returned to the issues of reception history raised earlier, except that now not just the text but the person is in danger of disappearing beneath the interpretation. To be sure, such a rich and complex individual as Halevi is rightfully subject to multiple interpretations, and one's mind and life will affect one's view of his mind and life. Setting aside current debates about such technical issues as the dates of his birth,⁶⁰ of his first making the acquaintance of Halfon Halevi,⁶¹ and of his letter in which he announced his intention of "Heading East,"⁶² which future discoveries may resolve definitively, many critical issues regarding Halevi's life and thought are open to legitimate differences of interpretation and by their nature may never be resolved. For example, the trajectory of his religious and intellectual development, the extent of his break with the Andalusian cultural tradition,⁶³ exactly how the idea of making his journey blossomed in his mind, and the blend of rationalism and antirationalism and of rabbinic and Sufi motifs in the *Kuzari*. But there comes a point when one must be ready to affirm that one reading of Halevi's life, while not final or definitive and always subject to revision, is closer to the truth of that life than another reading. One may debate the exact balance to be struck between the individual and the national motives for Halevi's journey, but the time has come to unequivocally affirm, contra Halkin's newfound latitudinarianism, that such a balance needs to be struck and that Kaufmann's and Scheindlin's

60. Scheindlin, 254, n. 3, argues for 1085, while Halkin, 316–17, argues for the early 1070s. As both Halkin and Scheindlin note, this issue greatly affects one's conception of Halevi's later life.

61. Scheindlin, 114 and 254, n. 4, argues for 1138 at the earliest, while Halkin, 127, argues for 1129 at the latest.

62. Scheindlin, 108 and 269, n. 16, maintains the letter "was probably" written in Alexandria in 1141, while Halkin, 127 and 340, following Gil and Fleischer, *Yehuda Halevi*, 324–26, maintains it was written in Spain in 1129!

63. See Brann, "Judah Halevi," in *The Literature of Al-Andalus*, ed. M. R. Menocal, R. Scheindlin, and M. Sells (Cambridge, 2000), 277–78. "Yet Halevi . . . did not . . . altogether break with Andalusian culture. Although the poet's devotion to Palestine and Jewish piety certainly undermined his prior attachment to al-Andalus/Sefarad and its culture, he remained steeped in the consciousness of al-Andalus and its discursive languages."

privatized readings of that journey simply fly in the face of the evidence. As John Searle forcefully maintains, “Intellectual standards are not up for grabs. There are both objectively and intersubjectively valid criteria of intellectual achievement and excellence.”⁶⁴

APPENDIX

In light of Shear’s book’s strengths, it is regrettable that it is marred by a surprising number of textual imprecisions and errors. Here I will limit myself to three examples of Shear’s translations of passages from Moscato’s *Kol Yehudab* where the inexactness of the translation changes the meaning of the text. In each case, I will first present the Hebrew text, followed by Shear’s translation, my own translation, and a comment.

1. *Kol Yehudab*: Introduction, p. 7a.

ותכליתו . . . להודות לשם ה' על שלימות תורתו הנותנת שלמות נשמה לעם.

Shear: And its end [the purpose of the *Kuzari*] is . . . to acknowledge the name of God in the completeness of his Torah that was given completely in the hearing of the people.

Kaplan: And its end is . . . to give thanks to the name of God for the perfection of his Torah that imparts perfection of the soul to the people.

Comment: Shear states, “Here Moscato offers a somewhat different phrasing of the thesis of the work . . . and emphasizes in particular that [God’s commands] were offered in a complete package to the Jewish people” (p. 146). But שלימות in this context does not mean “completeness” but “perfection,” and נותנת שלמות does not mean “was given completely” but “gives [imparts] perfection.” It turns out, then, that Moscato’s formulation of the *Kuzari*’s thesis here complements his formulation of its basic thesis that “God can be approached only through his commandments.”

2. *Kol Yehudab* on *Kuzari* 1:97, p.61b.

ואין אנחנו רשאים לחדש פעולות דומות לאלהיות כי לא תצלחנה; ולא נדע מה נעבוד את ה' אם לא יורינו מדרכיו ללכת באורחותיו.

Shear: We are not permitted to invent efforts similar to divinity because they will not succeed; and it is not known who will worship God, if we do not act according to his path or walk in his ways. (p.151)

64. “Rationality and Realism: What is at Stake?,” *Daedalus* (Fall 1993): 67–68.

Kaplan: We are not permitted to invent actions similar to divine ones because they will not succeed; and we will not know how we will worship God, if he will not instruct us in his path so that we will walk in his ways.

Comment: Shear here misses and therefore misunderstands Moscato's two biblical allusions. 'ולא נדע מה נעבוד את ה' is a direct citation from Exod 11.26, while יורינו מדרכיו ללכת באורחותיו closely paraphrases Isaiah's famous vision of the end of days (Is 2.3). Moscato here is yet once again presenting Halevi's famous point that we can worship God only by means of his revealed commandments.

3. *Kol Yebudab* on *Kuzari* 2:26, p.42a.

והכלל שכיון החבר במשל הזה להורות איך הכל נעשה יפה בסדר ותבנית חכמה אלהית, כאלו שם מגמת חכמתו להשלים עדתו במזג שוה נכון ומזומן אל מול קבלת הענין האלהי, כדרך שיושלם מזגו של אדם אל מול קבלת השכל.

Shear: And the principle which the *baver* intends to teach in this analogy is how all is created in beautiful order to teach understanding of the divine wisdom. For it is as though the aim of his wisdom is to offer testimony to the balanced nature of the elements [of the Temple service?], which prepared correctly, correspond to [lit. “stand opposite”] the reception of the divine influence in the same way that man's completed temperament corresponds to the reception of reason.⁶⁵

Kaplan: And the principle which the *baver* intends to teach in this analogy is how all is created in beautiful order, in the understanding of divine wisdom. For it is as though the aim of his wisdom is to perfect his community[by providing them] with a balanced temperament, prepared and ready for the reception of the divine order, in the same way that the individual's perfected temperament [is prepared and ready] for the reception of the intellect.

Comment: According to Shear, this passage supposedly makes the point that the elaborate analogy that Halevi draws in *Kuzari* 2:26 between the functioning of the human body and the sacrificial service in the Temple is part of a “broader understanding, linking man as a microcosm to the overall order of the universe” (p. 150). But עדתו which Shear reads as *'eduto*, “testimony,” should be read as *'adato*, “his community,” and נכון

65. The two insertions here in square brackets are Shear's.

does not mean “correctly,” but “ready.” The correspondence set forth in this passage, then, is not between man as a microcosm and the overall order of the universe, but between the individual and the Jewish community. Just as the individual, when his temperament is perfected, is ready to receive the influx of the intellect, so the Jewish community, when its *communal* temperament is perfected *through the maintenance of the sacrificial service*, is ready to receive the influx of the divine order.

These three passages, when translated properly, all turn out to be variations and elaborations on the *Kuzari*'s central thesis as understood by Moscato, namely, that “God can be approached only through his commandments.” The second passage makes the same point in different words by affirming that Jews can worship God only via his commandments, while the first and third passages elaborate on this point and explain that the Torah imparts perfection of the soul to the Jewish people by providing them with a balanced temperament, rendering them ready for the reception of the divine order. Although these and other mistranslations do not affect any of Shear's major theses, they do constitute unsightly blemishes on an important and impressive work.⁶⁶ One looks forward to a carefully revised paperback edition.

66. There are also many places where Shear mistranslates a term or a phrase from *Kol Yehudab*, though the mistranslation does not affect the overall meaning of the passage in question. Thus “Al na ta'avov 'al da'at ḥaverekha” is not “do not go past the knowledge of your comrades” (p. 136), but “do not disregard the wish of your comrades;” “le-vakesh mimeni gedolot u-betsurot ka-ele” is not “to request from me great things and in these forms” (p. 136), but “to request from me such great and fortified [i.e., difficult] things” (Dt 1.28, 9.1, and Jer 33.3); “teshuvato ha-nitsahat” is not “winning answer” (p. 145), but “decisive answer;” “emunat 'iti” is not “faith in my pen” (p. 146), but “the craft of my pen;” “kitur le-melekhet shamayim” is not “burning the works of heaven” (!) (p. 150), but “to burn incense to the Queen of Heaven” (Jer 44.17, 18, 19, 25); and “ḥashivut” is not “thinking” (p. 164), but “importance.”