SOLOMON IBN GABIROL: 
UNIVERSAL HYLOMORPHISM AND THE PSYCHIC IMAGINATION

DISSERTATION

Printed in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for 
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate 
School of The Ohio State University

By

Sarah Pessin, M.A.

****

The Ohio State University
2000

Dissertation Committee:
Professor Peter King, Adviser
Professor Tamar Rudavsky, Adviser
Professor Allan Silverman

Approved by

Adviser
Department of Philosophy

Adviser
Department of Philosophy
ABSTRACT

In this project, I offer an extended treatment of Gabirol's metaphysical doctrine of universal hylomorphism (UH). My thesis is that, for Gabirol (Avicebron), matter signifies the most sublime moment of the Neoplatonic Intellect, and, by extension, the pre-determinate, essential existence which each thing has in virtue of its subsistence in said Intellect. In analyzing Gabirol's UHist claim that 'all things are comprised of matter,' I thus stress a Neoplatonically emanationist conception in which matter, in signifying the most potential state of Intellect, demarcates a most generic grade of unspecified Being per se which lies at the ontological core of all things. Matter as such is shown to refer at one and the same time to the cosmic reality of the hypostasized Intellect and to the most essential existential foundation of each and every substance.

In thus identifying the material with a pure grade of Being, my project presents Gabirol's Neoplatonic cosmology and his UHist analysis of substances as integrally interrelated theses. On my interpretation, UH is for Gabirol an implication of his Neoplatonic views on the emanating Intellect; in stressing this point, my thesis succeeds in presenting a truly holistic picture of Gabirol in which
his emanationist cosmology informs his hylomorphic ontology. In thus treating Gabirol's UH as a function of his views on Intellect, my thesis differs from other approaches: First, my thesis differs from those treatments which see Gabirol's doctrine of Will as having displaced emanationism; secondly, unlike Augustinian accounts of UH in which matter and existence are placed on opposite sides of the ontological fence, my reading of Gabirol identifies matter and existence; lastly, my analysis of Gabirol's UHist ontology in terms of the Neoplatonic cosmology of a sustaining Intellect makes the link between Gabirol's ontological reference to 'universal matter' and Gabirol's cosmic reference to a 'first matter' more explicit than in the accounts of such scholars as Brunner and Schlanger: on my account, the universal matter at the heart of each and every substance simply is the manifestation in each thing of the first cosmic matter; on my account, the materiality which all things exhibit simply is the first 'material' moment - or purest existential state - of Intellect, their emanative source.

In addition to providing a truly holistic account of Gabirol's ontology and cosmology, my thesis has two other advantages: First, it provides an extremely clear sense of why, in general, Gabirol privileges the material over the formal in the Fons Vitae and, in particular, makes sense of Gabirol's vexing claims that (a) matter is 'per se existens,' (b) matter emerges more directly from the Godhead than does form, and (c) matter is like a Divine Throne. Secondly, in making explicit the link between matter and the existential role of Intellect in Gabirol's thought, my thesis sheds light on the odd waffling between the notions of 'matter' and 'intellect'
in the Ibn Hasday's Neoplatonist materials, as it similarly sheds light on the
divergent descriptions of First Matter to be found in the Arabic recension of the
Pseudo Empedoclean tradition on the one hand, and the Hebrew recension of that
tradition on the other.

Finally, my project closes with a 'meta' analysis of Gabirol's metaphysical
project in which I suggest treating Gabirol's interest in universal hylomorphism
-and any other bits of cosmo-ontology - in terms of said doctrine's ability to effect
the reader's soul in certain ethically and epistemologically crucial ways. In this
move, I suggest that the importance of Gabirol's philosophical metaphysics is not
best gauged by considering what his metaphysical propositions denote, but
instrumentally by considering the effect said propositions are intended to have on
the reader. I develop this point by providing analyses of Neoplatonic dialectic,
textual rhetoric, and the mechanics of imagination in Gabirol's Arabic Neoplatonic
tradition.
In proper Neoplatonic form, my dedication admits of a triparticity:

To my parents and grandparents, for the *Being* that has defined me;
To Andy, for the *Life* that he has helped me to foster;
To Dr. David Shatz, for setting me on my journey towards *Intellect*. 
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I must first thank the Melton Center for Jewish Studies at The Ohio State University for supporting my graduate research from 1997 through the summer of 2000. Through the generous funding of the Melton Center’s Renee and George Levine Graduate Fellowship I have been able to conduct my research and my writing of this project much more effectively than would have been possible otherwise. I am additionally thankful to the funding which I received from the Department of Philosophy at OSU and especially to Prof. Dan Farrell, who, as departmental chair during my years in the department, made possible my taking advantage of a number of academic opportunities that have proven invaluable. Thank you.

Turning to individual members of the welcoming academic community of medieval scholars, I must first thank my advisers Profs. Peter King and Tamar Rudavsky for their guidance and support throughout this project’s innumerable drafts, for their inexhaustible patience and for the time they’ve devoted to thinking about universal hylomorphism with me, but also for the many other philosophical ideas they have imparted to me over the years, and for the academic opportunities they have made available to me. I am additionally indebted to a number of scholars who shared with
me their insights, and who extended to me a kind willingness to guide my research at various points in the process, most notably Prof. Stephen Gersh at the Medieval Institute at The University of Notre Dame whose depth of understanding and Neoplatonic vision have been foundational sources of inspiration for me, and Prof. Tzvi Langermann in the Department of Arabic Studies at Bar Ilan University in the image of whose exacting analyses I hope to model my own work. I am also indebted to Prof. Elliot Wolfson at the Department of Hebrew and Judaic Studies at New York University whose inspiring writings on Jewish mysticism, imagination and ineffability have greatly influenced the way in which I approach Neoplatonic texts.

I am grateful to Prof. Allan Silverman for graciously agreeing to serve on my committee, to Fr. David Burrell at the University of Notre Dame for his help and advice at various stages in my research, to Dr. Richard Cross of Oriel College for many enjoyable discussions about medieval metaphysics and theology, and to Prof. Richard Taylor for giving me an opportunity to present early versions of this thesis at Marquette University’s Department of Philosophy. Thanks to OSU’s Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies for funding parts of this project’s research, and in particular to Prof. Nick Howe, the Center’s director, for
giving me the chance to present some of my research on Aquinas to colleagues at OSU. I am additionally grateful to the Mellon Foundation, the Medieval Institute at the University of Notre Dame and Prof. Pat Geary for inviting me to participate in a stimulating seminar on historical theory which has led me to rethink the very notion of ‘methodology,’ and was in part the impetus behind my engaging in the ‘meta’ analysis in this project’s fifth chapter.

I am grateful to my language teachers throughout the years, most notably to Prof. Bill McCulloh of Kenyon College and Prof. David Hahm in the Department of Classics at OSU for Greek, to Prof. Joseph Lynch in the Department of History at OSU as well as to Anna Grecco for Latin, and to Prof. Li Guo at the University of Chicago and Prof. Michael Zwettler at OSU for Arabic. Thank you as well to Profs. Michael Swartz and Dick Davis for their provocative seminar on mysticism, to Prof. Sarah Johnston for an exciting exploration of late ancient magic and to Peter Struck for discussions about Pseudo Dionysius and for a great lamblichus reading group.
I owe thanks as well to my colleagues Joseph Salerno, Lee Franklin and Andy Arlig for engaging me in lively philosophical discussions and reading groups over the years, and for their friendship.

Special thanks are also in order to Prof. George Pappas for being a constant source of level-headed advice, for reading and commenting on many of my works in progress, and for invaluable philosophical discussions and instruction over the years.

Last and certainly not least, I owe my greatest debts to Dr. David Shatz whose lectures on Maimonides at Stern College first inspired me to study philosophy, to my parents and grandparents for their ongoing understanding (and for the good humor that they’ve undoubtedly had to draw upon in telling their friends what it that I’ve been up to for the past decade or so), and to Andy Pessin for blessing me with all the philosophical, emotional and spiritual support one could ever hope for.
VITA


1994........................................ M.A. Philosophy, Columbia University

1994 – 1996............................... Graduate Teaching and Research Assistant,
The Ohio State University

1997 – Present.......................... Graduate Fellow, The Ohio State University

PUBLICATIONS

Research Publication


FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Philosophy
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vita</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>xvi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chapters:**

1. Laying the Groundwork: Metaphysics of Contingency, the Priority of the Material and the Doctrine of Will  
   1.1 Introduction to Universal Hylomorphism  
   1.2 Universal Matter as Essence and Potency to Be:  
   - “Matter / Form” composition as “Essence / Existence”  
   - Contingency Metaphysics?  
   1.2.1 Aristotelian vs. Essence / Esse  
   - Religious metaphysics  
   1.2.2 ‘Essence / Esse’ Analysis and Universal Essential Existential Contingency  

xii
1.2.3 UH and ‘Matter / Form’ composition as ‘essence / esse’: Reasons Against 24
1.2.4 Non-UHist Religious Metaphysics of Contingency vs. UHist
   Religious Metaphysics of Contingency 31
1.2.5 Universal Matter as ‘First Matter’ and as ‘Element’ 39
1.2.6 First Matter and the Genesis Account 41
1.2.7 Accommodating the Data Thus Far 46
1.3 Inverted Metaphysical Intuitions: The Unity of Matter and the Priority of Matter over Form 49
1.4 Will in the Context of Gabirol’s FV 61

2. Universal Hylomorphism, Intellect, and the Cosmic Procession 76

2.1 UH v. UH: Augustinian vs. Gabirolean
   Metaphysics of Matter 76
2.2 Being and Intellect:
   A Neoplatonic Heritage 82
2.3 Matter as Existential Essence:
   Further Implications 85
2.4 Unity of Matter 86
2.5 Universal Matter, Form
   and Will in Gabirol 87
2.5.1 The Upward Material Tendency:
   Neoplatonic Remaining and the Revertive Conjunction
   with Intellect 97
2.5.2 The Downward Formal Tendency:
   Neoplatonic Procession and the Plurality of Act 102
2.5.3 Summary: Universal Matter, Universal Form and Intellect 103
2.5.4 Summary: Conjunction, Will
   and the Vertical Procession 112
2.6 Applying the Thesis: Some Conclusions,
   Some Problem-Solving and Some Scholarly Debates 115
2.6.1 Brunner’s Analysis of Matter 116
2.6.2 Existens per se 121
   2.6.2.1 Schlanger: Existens per se
   as Divine Idea 128
2.6.3 Matter Arisen from First Essence, Form Arisen from a Modification of First Essence .......................................................... 129
  2.6.3.1 Schlangen Revisited .................................................. 129
  2.6.3.2 Rooting the Upward Tendency in the Godhead: Reflections on the Poem *Ahavtikha* .................................................. 134

2.6.4 Universal Matter, Intellect and the Divine Throne .......................................................... 138

2.6.5 Other More General Support for ‘Universal Matter as Intellect’ .................................................. 143

2.7 Universal Matter: A Summary .................................................................................................. 145

3. Matter as Genus: Sameness, Potency and Neoplatonic Causal Hierarchies .......................................................... 152
  3.1 Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 152
  3.2 Matter as Sameness: Neoplatonic Causal Cyclic Theory and Genus as Matter, Speciated Effect as Form .......................................................... 154
    3.2.1 Aristotelian Causation and the Principle of ‘Sameness’ .................................................. 154
    3.2.2 Neoplatonic ‘Vertical’ Causal Analyses and Genus as ‘Vertical matter’ .................. 156

3.3 Macrocosm and Microcosm: the Cosmology of Procession and the Ontology of Specification; Genus as ‘Matter’ and the Cosmic Link between ‘Cause’ and ‘Potency’ .................................................................. 164

3.4 Appendix: Aristotle on Genus-as-Matter ........................................................................ 178

4. First Matter in Context: A Broader Conceptual and Historical Analysis .......................................................... 182
  4.1 Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 182
  4.2 Matter and Creation as Emanation: *Nihil* and *Aliquid* in a Neoplatonic Context .................................................................. 184
    4.2.1 *Creation Ex Aliquo* as Demiurgic Crafting .................................................................. 186
    4.2.2 Orthodox *Creation Ex Nihilo* .................................................................................. 187
    4.2.3 *Creation Ex Nihilo* as *Creation Ex Aliquo* .......................................................... 188
4.2.4 *Creation Ex Aliquo* as Plotinian Emanation ........................................ 189

4.2.5 *Creation Ex Nihilo* as Plotinian Emanation ........................................ 190

4.3 Matter as Supernal and the Binarity of the First Moment: Other Sources ...................................................................................................................... 195

4.3.1 Plotinus and Proclus: Intelligible Matter and Binarity ........................................ 196

4.3.2 Nicomachus: From One Comes Two, as well as the Divinity of Matter ................. 198

4.3.2.1 From One Must Come Two ........................................................................... 199

4.3.2.2 Nicomachus on God as Matter ....................................................................... 200

4.3.3 The Ismaili Context of Hylomorphism .................................................................. 202

4.3.4 First Matter: Ibn Hasday’s Neoplatonist, Israeli, and the Theology of Aristotle ........................................................................................................... 206

4.3.5 Gabirol’s Matter and the Ikhwan tradition ......................................................... 210

4.3.6 Pseudo Empedocles ........................................................................................... 213

4.4 Conclusion .............................................................................................................. 216

5. The Ethics of Ontology: Literary Rhetoric and the Return to Intellect ......................................................... 221

5.1 Introduction ........................................................................................................... 221

5.2 Ontology and Ethics in Gabirol’s Ps. Empedoclean Source(s) ................................. 224

5.3 Neoplatonic Return: the Epistemological / Ethical End-Goal, and the Instrumentality of Dialectic ......................................................................................... 228

5.4 Gabirol and Imagination: Eikasia, Psychology and the Instrumentality of Creative Language ............................................................................................................ 233

5.4.1 The Centrality of Imagining in Gabirol’s Tradition ........................................... 234

5.4.2 The Importance of the Image: a Platonic and Aristotelian Background .......... 236

5.4.3 Imagination and “Taking In”: Sensory Nature in the Service of Noesis (Analogical Reasoning) ......................................................................................... 248

5.4.4 Imagination and ‘Taking in’ Revisited: Prophetic Dreams .................................. 249

5.4.5 Imagination and Reassembling Images: The Instrumentality of Creative Language ............................................................................................................. 253

5.4.6 Allegorical Hermeneutics .................................................................................... 261

5.4.7 Gabirol the Poet ................................................................................................. 264
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.5 Conclusion</td>
<td>266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index of Authors Cited</td>
<td>292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index of Texts Cited</td>
<td>295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index Rerum</td>
<td>297</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

Solomon Ibn Gabirol (known also as ‘Avicebron’) (1021/2 – 1054/5) is a medieval Spanish Jewish philosopher and poet. The current study is an attempt to better understand and contextualize the metaphysical doctrine of ‘universal hylomorphism’ (UH), a doctrine that Ibn Gabirol (henceforth, Gabirol) puts forth in his celebrated philosophical work, the Fons Vitae (i.e., the Yanbū’ al-Ḥayā’ (Ar.), the Meqor Ḥayyim (Heb.) or The Fountain of Life). Originally written in Arabic, this work is extant in a 13th century Hebrew summary by Shem Tov ibn Falaquera, as well as in an earlier, longer (and hence, more comprehensive) 12th century translation into Latin by the translation team of John of Spain and Dominicus Gundissalinus. We additionally have a small number of fragments that are quoted by Moses Ibn Ezra (in his text, Arugat ha-Bosem) in Arabic, presumably (but not necessarily) representing the very Arabic words in which Gabirol composed the original work. For the purposes of our current study, we have employed each of the Latin, Hebrew and Arabic materials, relying primarily on Baeumker’s edition of the Latin text (as it is the most complete and extended version of the text).

The current study differs from other treatments of matter and universal hylomorphism in Gabirol. While everyone readily admits that Gabirol is a
Neoplatonist, my account stands alone in consistently and overtly invoking the details of Neoplatonic cosmology in an interpretation of Gabirol’s UHist analysis of substances. That my account differs in this regard from other scholarly treatments can be evidenced quite readily: Where Pines sees Gabirol’s matter in terms of Avicennian essences, my analysis will show how Gabirol’s matter is best understood outside of the predominantly Aristotelian context of Avicennian essences; where Brunner, in identifying Gabirol’s matter with ‘indeterminate essence,’ sees a division between ‘indeterminate essence’ and ‘being per se,’ I will find identity; where Schianger (in seeing the ‘per se’ existence of matter in Gabirol as limiting its status to that of an idea in the Divine Nous) allows only two kinds of existence – existence in the mind of God on the one hand and ‘real’ formal existence on the other – I will demarcate a third kind of existence, viz., Neoplatonic pre-determinate (pre-formal) existence outside of the mind of God; and where Weisheipl sees Will in Gabirol as precluding emanationism, I will find that Will is part and parcel of what is for Gabirol an emanationist cosmic process.

My project thus differs from extant scholarly treatments of Gabirol in that it specifically unpacks Gabirol’s doctrine of matter in terms of an emanationist Intellect - Being. In taking seriously the Neoplatonic notion of a unified pre-determined hypostasized Intellect which is a source of Being in the cosmos, I am able to see in Gabirol’s analysis of the indeterminate materiality of each substance a reference to the pure existential unity of Intellect which, in a Neoplatonic context, is the emanative source of all other substances. My thesis hence involves
identifying ‘materiality’ with the ‘Being’ of Intellect: this ‘Being’ is the
‘indeterminate essence’ shared by each and every non-God existent. The UHist
claim that all things ‘contain matter,’ hence, adverts to the existential foundation of
each existent in the pureness of Intellect; it is Intellect in its role as each
substance’s most essential existential foundation that is the universal matter shared
by all.

An added implication of my reading is that it sets Gabirol’s universal
hylomorphism apart from Augustinian universal hylomorphism. While
historically, the Fons Vitae had its warmest reception amidst the ranks of
Franciscan and like-minded Augustinian Christians, my thesis makes clear that the
actual metaphysical world-view of Gabirol bears similarities with Augustinian
metaphysics in only a most general sense. While I show how Augustinians and
Gabirol alike may be seen as sharing a certain heightened sensitivity to the
contingency of all non-God substances, I nonetheless conclude that Gabirol’s
notion of matter (and hence of universal hylomorphism) bears only surface
terminological similarities to an Augustinian world-view. In effect, I conclude that
there are two kinds of universal hylomorphism: the kind actually at play in
Gabirol’s text, and the kind held by later Christian thinkers (who saw an exemplar
of Augustinianism in the Fons Vitae, wrongly taking Gabirol himself as a
Christian). The key difference, to be addressed in chapter 2, can be summarized
here as follows: whereas Augustinian UH treats ‘matter’ and ‘existence’ as two
opposing ontological features of a substance, my account of Gabirol’s UH
identifies the material core of each substance with its existential source and cause. On Gabirolean UH, the ‘matter’ of a substance and its ‘Being’ are one and the same inasmuch as both ontological terms refer to the pureness of Intellect – the emanative source of all substances. As such, Gabirolean UH lacks the ontological divide between ‘existence’ and ‘matter’ that is present in Aristotelian metaphysics, a divide which is present in Augustinian doctrines of UH.

*

We turn now to a word about methodology. This study is primarily a conceptual examination of Gabirol’s philosophical ideas, and is, more specifically, an examination of the implications of matter and hylemorphism in a non-Aristotelian context. Although we are interested in and sensitive to Gabirol’s historical context, we do not set out in this project to uncover new textual influences or manuscript transmissions. In fact, we will frequently talk of Plotinian and Proclean themes in Gabirol’s text in spite of the fact that Gabirol had no direct access to the Greek works of Plotinus or Proclus, and even in spite of the fact that the Arabic Neoplatonic corpus (texts to which he might have reasonably have had access, such as the Plotinus-based Theology of Aristotle and the Proclus-based Discourse on the Pure Good [or, as it became known, the Liber de Causis]) does not overtly evidence the key Plotinian and Proclean ideas which would seem most germane to Gabirol’s UHist metaphysical view. My reasons for nonetheless opting
to describe aspects of Gabirol’s view in terms of Plotinian and Proclean metaphysics are two-fold:

First, as our knowledge of what exactly was available in the 11th century Arabic Neoplatonic tradition is arguably incomplete, it seems fair to entertain the possibility that Gabirol was subject to the influence of some still unknown Plotinian and/or Proclean text or tradition. Consider in this regard Endress’ relatively recent discovery of an Arabic fragment of Proclus’ *Elements of Theology* (viz., the seventy second proposition; see chapter 4) not previously thought to have been available in the medieval Arabic milieu. Even more generally, consider the continuing state of debate regarding the relationship between the ‘longer’ and ‘vulgate’ versions of the *Theology of Aristotle*, as well as the lack of clarity about the nature of the ‘Pseudo Empedoclean’ tradition(s). As our knowledge of medieval Arabic Neoplatonic texts is arguably in flux, it is certainly plausible that future research will uncover other Plotinian and Proclean materials that might have been available to Gabirol.

Secondly, and more importantly, our adverting to Plotinian (and Proclean) metaphysics is crucial (even if textually unavailable to Gabirol) since it provides us with a philosophical vocabulary useful for analyzing Gabirol’s complex metaphysical system. Neoplatonic and emanationist ideas have a life of their own, outside of any ‘textual transmission’ stories, and as such, it is both pedagogically useful as well as conceptually plausible to suggest that Gabirol has a certain ‘Plotinian’ idea which he thinks of on his own or which he might have derived
from any number of textual traditions, Plotinian or otherwise. In effect, in our attempt to charitably understand the world-view of Gabirol, we are well served to draw upon the intuitions of other Neoplatonists, even if no textual link exists between the texts in question. Our describing certain elements of Gabirol’s system in Plotinian and / or Proclean terms is, in this way, a useful pedagogical tool which forces readers to take notice of and suspend their tacit (or overt) Aristotelian assumptions in those cases where there are clearly other conceptual alternatives. This is especially useful in the current project in which the reader must clearly put aside their Aristotelian assumptions to appreciate Gabirol’s identification of matter, essence and existence.

*

Turning here to an overview of our project’s structure, we may divide our five chapters into two main parts. Chapters 1 through 4 constitute the project’s ‘first part.’ In these chapters, I develop and contextualize the thesis that, for Gabirol, ‘matter’ signifies the most sublime moment of the Neoplatonic Intellect, and, by extension, the pre-determinate, essential existence which each thing has in virtue of its subsistence in said Intellect.

In chapter 1 I begin this exploration with a general consideration of Gabirol’s metaphysics as a variety of ‘contingency metaphysics.’ After explaining the notion of ‘contingency metaphysics,’ I show how Gabirol, together with other
medieval religious thinkers – even the more Aristotelian ones – must first and foremost be seen as modifiers of Aristotelian ontology.

Chapter 2 unpacks the details of my treatment of matter and universal hylomorphism in Gabirol’s text. The chapter explores the ways in which Gabirol’s universal hylomorphism is entirely different from anything we find in the more Aristotelian versions of ‘contingency metaphysics,’ but also from what we find in Augustinian contexts. After developing my view and showing how it makes sense of matter not only as ‘essence’ but as a ‘potency to be,’ a ‘unity’ shared by all and a ‘genus generalissimum,’ I turn to examining in particular three of Gabirol’s most vexing remarks about matter and how my thesis is able to accommodate each of them. The three remarks regard (a) the status of matter as ‘per se existens,’ (b) the claim that matter is descended from the First Essence, and (c) the likening of matter to the ‘Divine Throne.’ In addition to addressing each of these features of Gabirol’s account and how my thesis makes sense of and is supported by them, I also address Brunner’s and Schlanger’s alternate accounts of matter and how exactly my account differs from each.

Having established the details of my reading of Gabirol’s notion of matter and universal hylomorphism, I turn in chapter 3 to providing the reader with a larger Neoplatonic context against which to best consider my thesis. Chapter 3 hence aims to better develop my reader’s Neoplatonic intuitions about ‘vertical causal chains,’ the relation of all things to Intellect, the unity of Intellect, and the (subsequent) sense in which potency precedes (and proceeds into) act. Tying in
with my specific thesis regarding the nature of matter in Gabirol’s text, these
Neoplatonic considerations better elucidate the sense in which matter is superior to
form and the sense in which indeterminate unified Being is prior to determinate,
formal acts of being.

I turn in chapter 4 to providing the reader with further conceptual and
historical considerations about the supremacy of the material. The first part of
chapter 4 considers how our thesis’ identifying the material in Gabirol with the
most unified existential moment of Intellect can lead us to a conceptual
identification between *creation ex nihilo*, *creation ex aliquo* and straightforward
Plotinian emanation. The second part of chapter 4 considers possible corollaries to
a ‘matter as highest moment of Intellect’ in a variety of other textual traditions,
including the writings of Plotinus, Proclus, and the Neopythagorean Nicomachus,
as well as various Jewish and Islamic texts (such as *Ibn Hasday’s Neoplatonist*, the
*Longer Theology of Aristotle*, the writings of the Brethren of Purity, as well as two
different Ps. Empedoclean traditions). In addition to providing the reader with a
sense of related themes in a selection of other texts, I conclude in this chapter that
my suggested identification of matter with an aspect of Intellect is, in fact, able to
make sense of some textual oddities that seem evident in both the *Ibn Hasday’s
Neoplatonist* materials as well as in the tradition of Ps. Empedoclean texts.

Chapter 5 constitutes the ‘second part’ of the project. In this final chapter I
engage in a ‘meta’ analysis of Gabirol’s metaphysical project examining how the
true meaning of his philosophical cosmo-ontology might be found primarily in
terms of the Neoplatonic ethics of ‘return.’ In effect, by exploring the importance and implications of the psychic faculty of imagination in Gabirol’s Arabic Neoplatonic heritage, and by further showing how the psychic faculty of imagination works within that tradition’s epistemology and prophetology, I provide the reader with grounds for appreciating the importance of universal hylomorphism – and any other bits of cosmo-ontology – in terms of said doctrine’s ability to ‘revert’ the soul of the properly attentive reader to its most pristine and most essential state of ‘conjunction’ with Intellect. I additionally show how this ‘instrumental’ understanding of cosmo-ontology (as an means of effecting changes in the reader’s psychic state) may be seen as a non-anachronistic characterization of Gabirol, first by rooting the sense of ‘dialectic as instrument’ in the history of Neoplatonic thought, and second, by emphasizing the importance of allegorical hermeneutics in Gabirol’s medieval Arabic setting. From these considerations, I conclude that the importance of Gabirol’s philosophical metaphysics is perhaps not best gauged by considering what his metaphysical propositions denote, but the effect said propositions have on the properly trained reader’s soul. Along these lines, I am additionally able to suggest a way of reconciling ‘Gabirol the metaphysician’ with ‘Gabirol the poet.’
CHAPTER 1

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK:
METAPHYSICS OF CONTINGENCY, THE PRIORITY OF THE MATERIAL
AND THE DOCTRINE OF WILL

1.1 INTRODUCTION TO UNIVERSAL HYLOMORPHISM

Gabirol’s FV is most primarily associated with the philosophical doctrine
known as ‘Universal Hylomorphism’ (UH). Simply stated, UH is the doctrine that
all things are ‘matter + form’ composites. UH is seen as a ‘controversial’ claim in
its going a step beyond ‘ordinary’ Aristotelian hylomorphism: whereas Aristotelian
systems treat ‘intellects’ and ‘souls’ as purely formal entities devoid of matter, the
Universal Hylomorphist (UHist) treats all things, even intellects and souls, as
admitting of hylomorphic composition. Especially in Latin medieval debates, one
of the more popular ways in which Gabirol’s doctrine gets stated is in the thesis
that even angels – the separate intellects which, in most other systems of thought,
are purely formal entities – are ‘matter + form’ compounds. While Gabirol grants
that angels (or any spiritual substances), qua spiritual substances, are ‘simple,’ he
nonetheless sees their ‘simplicity’ in terms of ‘matter + form’ composition.
But what could this possibly mean? How can we understand ‘simplicity’ in terms of ‘composition’? And, as such, what is the ‘matter’ that all things are said to be comprised of?

One way to understand Gabirol’s strange UH thesis, then, would be to simply equate his notion of ‘matter + form’ composition with ‘essence / esse’ composition, where ‘essence’ is understood as the formal nature (we might say, the Aristotelian nature) of a substance which is seen as ‘really distinct’ from the ‘existence’ of said substance, as we find in both Avicennian and Aquinian traditions of ‘contingency metaphysics’ (to be discussed below). In fact, in his work on Gabirol’s poem, *Keter Malkhūt*, Pines has suggested an Avicennian influence at play in Gabirol, suggesting that matter in Gabirol’s account of creation (signified by the term ‘nothingness’ in the poem’s claim that ‘and He called to the nothingness, and it split’) refers precisely to an Avicennian ‘pre-existent’ essence (that is, to essence prior to its reception of ‘esse’). If this ‘materiality’ is the same ‘materiality’ at play in the UH doctrine of FV, this would seem to mean that the claim that even angels ‘have matter’ reduces to the Avicennian claim that even angels ‘are analyzable into ‘pre-existent’ essences, to which existence ‘is added’.

Can this be right? Can the FV claim that even angels are ‘matter / form’ composites amount simply to the more well-known Avicennian metaphysical claim that all non-God existents are ‘essence + existence’ ‘composites’? In what follows,
we aim to show that while Gabirol does indeed share the ‘essence + existence’
 sentiments of Avicenna and others, it is incorrect to reduce Gabirol’s UH to this
 view.

What then is the UH view? In the course of our analysis, we will set out to
 answer this question by addressing a number of seemingly unrelated descriptions of
 matter by Gabirol: the most exalted matter, Universal Matter, is variously described
 as

Essence,
Potency to Be,
and as
First Matter,
and,
‘the element.’

Additionally, under whatever description, this matter is had by all things (including
 intellects), and is furthermore treated by Gabirol as a ‘unity’ in all things; it is:

...of a single essence, since we find only one matter for all things, [unius autem essentiae,
 ideo quia non quaesivimus nisi unam materiam omnium rerum].

In our explication we will not only sort out each of these vexing characteristics, but
 will additionally concern ourselves with making sense of three of the most vexing
 features of Gabirol’s view:

1. the description of matter as ‘existens per se,’

2. the claim that matter comes directly from the First Essence, and

3. the association of matter with the ‘Divine Throne.’
Furthermore, in its precise details, our analysis of Gabirol’s view of ‘essential materiality’ will demarcate a sense of UH in Gabirol’s world-view that is distinct from Augustinian versions of UH. Our project, thus, will give us not only a sense of how Gabirol’s notion of ‘matter’ differs from Avicennian ‘pre-existent essence,’ but of why his notion of ‘matter’ additionally differs from the sorts of Augustinian accounts with which it is often equated. In making inroads into Gabirol’s world-view in these ways, we will at once provide an account of matter in Gabirol which differs not only from Pines’ above suggestion, but from Schlanger’s treatment of matter as well, as we will additionally have provided grounds for rejecting some of the approaches to UH ranging from Ibn Daud’s and Aquinas’ medieval critiques, to Franciscan Augustinian readings to Brunner’s and Weisheipl’s more contemporary treatments.

1.2 UNIVERSAL MATTER AS ESSENCE AND POTENCY TO BE: “MATTER / FORM” COMPOSITION AS “ESSENCE / EXISTENCE” CONTINGENCY METAPHYSICS?

1.2.1 ARISTOTELIAN VS. ESSENCE / ESSE RELIGIOUS METAPHYSICS

There is a large-scale difference between Aristotle and medieval religious (as well as Neoplatonic) metaphysicians of all stripes: Aristotle is content with an eternal world which does not rely for its existence upon anything; religious metaphysicians, and also all brands of Neoplatonic thinkers, insist on the world’s relying for its existence upon another. Looking at the matter in this broad way makes irrelevant whether a given author, in advocating a form of this view, sees the
world as eternal in some sense or not, whether he calls this source of existence ‘One’ or ‘God,’ or whether he sees this causal relation as \textit{creation ex nihilo}, \textit{creation ex aliquo} or as an emanative relation. We can appreciate this divide without worrying about the many differences between various religious and Neoplatonic thinkers. For our current purposes, though, let us speak of ‘religious’ thinkers, and let us put our divide as follows:

\begin{tabular}{|l|}
\hline
\textbf{Aristotle:} & God is the final cause of existence, and the efficient cause of motion; \\
\textbf{vs.} & \\
\textbf{Religious Metaphysician:} & God is additionally the efficient cause of existence \\
\hline
\end{tabular}

For Aristotle, there simply are, as a matter of fact, certain genera and species eternally present in the world, and hence, it is inappropriate to seek an existential cause of them. For our religious thinkers, however, God is the ever-present existential cause of everything, and hence, even genera and species (making up the essences of substances) are the sorts of things about which we can and must seek an existential cause. We might say that this translates into the following epistemological divide:
**Aristotle:** To know a given substance essentially is to know its Aristotelian essence;

**vs.**

**Religious Metaphysician:** To know a given substance essentially is to know

a) its Aristotelian essence,

but, also

b) the existential contingency of said essence.

We may hence isolate this epistemological sensitivity as lying at the heart of the ‘essence i existence’ analysis to be found in various guises in the metaphysics of medieval religious philosophers. In this regard, we might note two most general categories, the Avicennian and the Aquinian: While the ‘Avicennian’ tradition (in which we can include Avicenna, Maimonides but even Boethius’ ‘*quod est*’ / ‘*quo est*’ analysis) speaks of the existential contingency of substances in such a way which makes it sound as if their essences (i.e., genera and species) exist prior to and in abstraction from the substances which exemplify them, Aquinas’ analysis of substances is terminologically freer of any such implications. In either case, whether the existential contingency (i.e., reliance on another for *esse*) is presented in the ‘essence + existence’ verbiage of Avicenna or in the ‘substantial actualization’ verbiage of Aquinas, most scholars agree that there is a common idea being stressed in both traditions, and in any case, it is the commonality of these various religious traditions that we wish here to stress. We will refer, as such, to
the 'essence / esse' analysis in general and will mean by that any analysis which reflects the above epistemological and ontological sensitivities to existential contingency.

In effect, the implications for the essence of any actual or possible non-God existent may put in any number of ways: it is subordinate to another for its existence, it is reliant on another for its existence, its existence is an effect of an external cause. But, put in any of these ways, this essential 'existential contingency' is at once true of all non-God existents, be they tables, animals, humans, or separate intellects. It is in coming to first appreciate the similarity of all things in this regard that we will better be prepared to understand the inclusion of all things (including souls and intellects) in the UH claim of Gabirol. Exploring further this most general religious sensitivity to 'existential contingency,' we may note the following crucial and philosophically significant way in which the nature of this sensitivity differs among different religious traditions:
**Arabic emanationists:** For Islamic and Jewish thinkers, such as Avicenna and Maimonides, *esse* is caused by a series of Intellects, the lowest (the Active Intellect) being the cause of *esse* for all sublunars; for *Gabirol*, we contend that *esse* is caused either in this way or at least by the intermediation of one Intellect between God and the cosmos;

**vs.**

**Christians:** For Boethius and Aquinas, and also for the UHists Augustine, Bacon, etc., the cause of *esse* is always and only God, directly.

Let me stress here that I include Gabirol in the camp of Arabic emanationists on this issue. The reasons for my doing so will be addressed below; however it might be noted here that:

1. this runs counter to the treatment of Gabirol by the history of Franciscan philosophers, as well as scholars such as Weisheipl, all of whom see Gabirol (in his embrace of ‘Divine Will’) as having rejected Arabic emanationism;

2. this will result in my treating Gabirol’s UH as being importantly different from any Augustinian form of UH. As I will stress in what follows, accepting that Gabirol’s doctrine of Divine Will goes hand-in-hand with a commitment on his part to Arabic emanationism entails our seeing in his overall UH key differences from the non-emanationist (i.e., Christian) versions of said doctrines. We will examine these differences in chapter 2, showing how they follow upon our emanationist reading of Gabirol’s text.
Leaving these differences aside for now, we are here primarily interested in providing a heightened sensitivity to the ways in which medieval religious metaphysicians quite generally agree in their non-Aristotelian focus on universal essential existential contingency (i.e., all non-God substances are essentially such that they are reliant-on-another for their existence). As we will see, this ‘contingency metaphysics’ is often revealed through a number of different metaphysical apparatus. But in spite of the various differences in detail and terminology, all of the proponents of ‘contingency metaphysics’ analyze substances in terms of an ‘essence / esse’ divide, an analytical procedure which reveals substances to essentially fall short of being existent per se. We turn now to considering the occurrence of this metaphysical theme in a number of diverse conceptual traditions, including Gabirol’s own, in way of coming to ultimately see why UH represents a different metaphysical position.

1.2.2 ‘ESSENCE / ESSE’ ANALYSIS AND UNIVERSAL ESSENTIAL EXISTENTIAL CONTINGENCY

At a point in the Fons Vitae (FV) where Gabirol addresses the philosophical relevance of the four questions, ‘whether,’ ‘what,’ ‘how’ and ‘why,’ he suggests that only the existential ‘whether’ question (“an est,” i.e., ‘whether [s.th. exists]’) can be properly asked of God.⁴ Gabirol’s granting to God only an existential
‘thatness’ suggests quite readily that he here identifies God with Being Only.

Contextualizing Gabirol’s identification of this existential question, consider:

Master: ...I say that existence (esse) from the highest to the lowest extremes is distinguished by four orders, viz.,
   a) ‘whether X is’ (an est),
   b) ‘what X is’ (quid est),
   c) ‘how X is’ (quaest), [i.e., what sort of qualities X has],
   d) ‘why X is’ (quare est).

... the most worthy is the one concerning which it is asked ONLY ‘whether it is,’ not ‘what it is’ or ‘how it is’ and not ‘why it is,’ namely (sic) the Exalted and Blessed Unity; (p.302) and after this is the one concerning which it is asked ‘what it is,’ not ‘how it is’ or ‘why it is,’ namely, Intellect; after this is the one concerning which it is asked ‘what it is’ and ‘how it is,’ not ‘why it is,’ namely, Soul; after this is the one concerning which it is asked ‘what it is’ and ‘how it is’ and ‘why it is,’ namely, Nature and the things generated from it; and each one of these is ordered according to the order of number.
Disciple: In what sense?
Master: Since the question ‘whether it is’ is posited according to the order of ‘one,’ since it is being only [quia est esse tantum].

In fact, drawing on the fact that Shem Tov ibn Falaquera, in his Hebrew translation of this passage, employs the term ‘mezii’ for ‘esse,’ Munk suggests that the Arabic term used by Gabirol is ‘anniyya.’ We might add that the language of ‘Being Only’ in the above passage quite distinctively reverberates the language of ‘anniyya faqat’ (lit. ‘Being Only’) which we find in both the Liber de Causis and the Arabic Plotinian materials to describe the Godhead. This notion of God as a pure Being devoid of any complexity or limitation may be linked to the Mu’tazilite doctrine of the absolute unity of God (Himself seen, as is the case for Gabirol, as a pure essence, or dhāt), as it might also be related to the identification of God with pure and simple Being in Sufi theosophy.
From the above remarks in Ghiberti, we learn that one can only ascertain *that* God exists (and not *what* His essence is).⁸ From this suggestion that God is only subject to existential investigation, together with Ghiberti’s clear description of this ‘Being Only’ God as the First Essence (*al-dhāt al-'ūlā*, as evidenced in some of the extant Arabic fragments of the *Fons Vitae*),⁹ God hence emerges as the unique essence which is one with pure Being.¹⁰ In this way, God is essentially unlike any other existent in that He alone essentially exists per se. We may discern in this analysis a direct manifestation of the ‘contingency metaphysics’: since only God is essentially existent per se, all non-God *entia* are essentially contingent, or in other words, essentially dependent-on-another for their existence.

This ‘contingency metaphysics’ theme appears in many different guises, and may be found, for example, at the heart of Boethius’ famous ‘*quod est*’ vs. ‘*quo est*’ distinction,¹¹,¹² as well as at the root of Avicenna’s equally well-known analysis of the ‘adding’ of existence to essences,¹³ and in his distinction between the ‘absolute necessity’ of God vs. the contingent sort of necessity able to be had by non-God substances.

In effect, an appreciation for ‘contingency metaphysics’ allows us to see doctrinal sameness even in spite of prima facie differences in various metaphysical systems. As such, consider how each of the above prima facie conceptually distinct analyses – by Ghiberti, Boethius and Avicenna respectively – can be seen as making a single point about the difference in kind between God and all other existents:
**Gabirol:** God is such that only the ‘*an est*’ question applies to Him; all other things (including the spiritual simples) have at least one additional question which applies to them;

God is ‘simple,’ i.e., His essence = *esse*; non-God existents are ‘composite,’ i.e., their essence ≠ *esse* (and hence, more than just the ‘*an est*’ question applies to them).

**Boethius:** God does not participate in Goodness; all other things (including the spiritual simples) do – (where their ‘participation,’ though, is not like ordinary cases of participation);

God is ‘simple,’ i.e., His essence = *esse*; non-God existents are ‘composite,’ i.e., their essence ≠ *esse*, but rather, they depend-on-another (i.e., they ‘participate in Goodness’) in order to exist.

**Avicenna:** God does not have existence added to His essence; all other things (including the spiritual simples) do – (where the ‘adding of existence’ is not like the adding of other properties);

God is absolutely necessary; i.e., His essence = *esse*; non-God existents are contingent, i.e., their essence ≠ *esse*, but rather, they depend-on-another (i.e., they have ‘esse’ ‘added to’ their essence) in order to exist.

Note the conceptual similarity of each of Gabirol’s, Boethius’ and Avicenna’s stress on universal essential existential contingency, regardless of their various wordings of this idea: whether put in terms of Aristotle’s four questions, in terms of ‘simplicity’ v. ‘complexity,’ or in modal terms of ‘necessity’ vs. ‘contingency,’ we
have a single core idea here, one which reflects the ‘contingency metaphysics’ of the ‘religious metaphysician’ as demarcated from Aristotle above.

One might suggest that UH – or the stress on the universal ‘matter / form’ composition of all non-God things – be simply taken as yet another conceptual manifestation of this very same idea, and that on analogy with each of our above analyses, Gabirol’s interest in ‘matter / form’ composition reveals the following:

**UH:** God is not further analyzable into a ‘potency to be’ (‘matter’ or ‘pre-existent essence’) and an ‘act of being’ (‘form’ or ‘esse’); all other things (including the spiritual simples) are thus analyzable – (where the presence of this duality in things is not like ordinary composition, in that it characterizes even the simples);

God is absolute unity; i.e., His essence = esse; non-God existents are essentially composite, i.e., their essence ≠ esse, but rather, they depend-on-another; i.e., they have ‘form’ added to their ‘matter,’ in the sense of having their potentiality (i.e., materiality or ‘essence’) brought into ‘act’ via the form of esse in order to exist, as we find, e.g., in Boethius’ own ‘quod est’ / ‘quo est’ analysis, in Avicenna’s ‘essence + existence’ analysis, and in Aquinas’ ‘existence as substantial actualization’ analysis.

As such, UH would simply be another case of ‘contingency metaphysics’ and would best be seen as simply stressing the difference between God and others in much the same sense as we’ve seen in our other analyses. Here, though, that difference would be put forth in hylomorphic terms: the ‘conceptual duality’ of a given substance would be seen in terms of its ‘matter [or, potency] + form [or, act of esse],’ a composition which, in effect, would reveal said substance’s essential
‘reliance-on-another’ for existence. In these terms, God, on the contrary, would emerge as the ‘pure unity’ (where we may here remain neutral between whether that unity would best be seen as ‘pure act’ or ‘pure potency’). Taken in this way, UH would illustrate – by invoking yet another conceptual apparatus – that God is the only pure simple, the only absolutely necessary Being, the only existent whose essence entails its own uncaused and per se existence. Taken as a mere rewording of this religious metaphysical contingency view, the UHist claim that all non-God things – including such things as intellects and souls – are ‘matter / form’ composites would simply amount to the claim that all non-God things are ‘reliant-on-another’ for their existence (i.e., that unlike God, their essences do not entail their existence). ‘Matter’ would indicate nothing more than ‘potency’ or ‘pre-existent essence;’ whereas ‘Form’ would indicate nothing more than a substantial ‘act’ or ‘esse,’ and the point of UH would be quite unexceptional. In this way, ‘matter’ in Gabirol’s world-view would follow the Avicennian line advanced by Pines in his analysis of ‘matter’ in Gabirol’s Keter Malkhūt.

Taken in this Avicennian (or Boethian or Aquinian) way, there would be nothing alarming or controversial about the claim that even intellects are ‘matter / form’ composites! That is, where ‘matter’ in the claim that ‘all things have matter’ is taken simply to refer to an essentially contingent essence, even the staunchest monotheist critics of UH would seem to be in agreement with Gabirol’s thesis, even if not themselves enamored of Gabirol’s use of ‘matter’ and ‘form’ terminology for this task; for even Aquinas (a paradigmatic opponent of UH)
would not deny that angelic intellects are ‘essentially dual’ in the sense of being
‘essentially existentially dependent-on-another’!

While, as we have seen in his analysis of the Aristotelian 4 questions, Gabirol is undoubtedly committed to the essential existential contingency of all non-God substances, we will see why UH (while in important ways related to this contingency sensitivity) presents us, nonetheless, with a unique version of this sensitivity. Before elaborating upon the uniqueness of UH in chapter 2, we will here offer some prima facie reasons against treating UH as a simple example of ordinary ‘contingency metaphysics.’

1.2.3 UH AND ‘MATTER / FORM’ COMPOSITION AS ‘ESSENCE / ESSE’: REASONS AGAINST

While it is beyond doubt that Gabirol is overtly and firmly committed to the ‘duality’ of all non-God existents in the sense rehearsed above, the question remains as to whether this is the best way to understand his doctrine of UH. In fact, it seems that it is not, if for no other reason than none of the medieval critics took the doctrine in this innocuous sense. In effect, the suggestion that UH be taken in the above way as a mere conceptual variation on the ‘essential contingency’ theme seems at odds with the history of philosophy! If it were correct to say that UH is essentially a statement of the ‘contingency metaphysics’ theme, there would seem to be no controversy in UH; for, all religious thinkers can agree on the existential contingency of non-God substances! To make sense of the philosophical
controversy which historically surrounded UH, it must be understood as something different from the above garden-variety ‘essence / esse’ metaphysics of contingency.

It might seem that there is, nonetheless, an easy way to make sense of the controversy which surrounded UH, even while still treating UH as an ordinary case of ‘contingency metaphysics’: Perhaps the controversy merely stems from critics’ worrying about the potential misleadingness of hylomorphic terminology in the service of ‘contingency metaphysics.’ On this suggestion, UH might indeed simply be understood as a manifestation of the uncontroversial ‘contingency metaphysics’, but as a manifestation whose presentation of the contingency of substances in terms of material composition simply struck many as potentially misleading; it might, for example, erroneously lead one to think that angelic intellects are comprised of ordinary Aristotelian corporeal matter. That critics might have found fault in the view simply in virtue of its using an Aristotelian term like ‘matter’ to describe something other than Aristotelian matter seems prima facie plausible. Recall that a thinker like Aquinas sees in Aristotelian metaphysics a route to a true Christian apprehension of reality. As such, it seems plausible to suggest that such a thinker would have been annoyed with anyone who would use the undeniably Aristotelian terms ‘matter’ and ‘form’ in undeniably un-Aristotelian senses such that even intellects wind up being said to be ‘matter / form’ composites. Perhaps then it is
merely this semantic dissatisfaction that lies at the heart of various critiques of UH and its UHist proponents, and which thus accounts for the controversy surrounding the doctrine?

This suggestion, though, must be rejected once we look at Aquinas’ remarks in *De Substantiis Separatis*, as well as in his commentary on the *Liber de Causis*.

For, in both cases, there is revealed – in one case overtly, in the other tacitly – evidence that, at least for its medieval critics, UH was not seen as a merely semantically misleading variation on the philosophically acceptable ‘essence / esse’ metaphysics of contingency. To see this, let us examine Aquinas’ two sets of remarks in turn.

*De Substantiis Separatis:*

Aquinas clearly finds Gabirol’s UH view to be blatantly wrong. In this regard, we find a description of Gabirol’s offending view as,

…he asserted that the separate or spiritual substances themselves are composed of matter and form,¹⁴

and that this opinion is

… an opinion that disagrees both with the view of Plato and the view of Aristotle.¹⁵

Aquinas describes Gabirol as having been ‘twice deceived’¹⁶ and goes on for an entire chapter to refute Gabirol’s position point by point. The details of this refutation aside, Aquinas is clearly opposed to Gabirol’s view on genuine
philosophical grounds. This indicates that for Aquinas, Gabirol’s UH is not simply an (albeit potentially misleadingly worded) version of the innocuous ‘contingency metaphysics.’ Furthermore, Aquinas goes on to say that one can, if one really wants to, speak of spiritual substances as ‘having matter,’ if what is meant by that is something totally different from Gabirol’s UHist account. As such, Aquinas states:

...nothing prevents us from positing a multiplicity among spiritual substances, on the basis that one is more imperfect than the other, provided that we do so in such wise that the more imperfect is in the potency in relation to the more perfect and so on upward to the first Form, which is act only, namely, God; so that in this way [even] lower spiritual substances can be called ‘matters’ according as they are in potency and ‘forms’ according as they are in act.

and

...since every being that is after the First Being, which is “to be” itself, is a being by participation, it has matter.

Even Aquinas can entertain a sense in which angelic intellects may be said to be essentially ‘material’ – its fine, that is, as long as its simply intended as a variation on the contingency metaphysics theme. That is, as long as the claim that ‘all things have matter’ is meant in the sense of ‘all things are not essentially esse itself,’ or, ‘all things are essentially dependent-on-another for esse,’ there are no grounds for alarm. That, on the contrary, Gabirol’s thesis is taken by Aquinas as grounds for alarm indicates clearly that, for Aquinas, Gabirol’s UH is not a mere hylomorphic statement of the innocuous ‘contingency’ metaphysics.

27
Commentary on the Liber de Causis:

Similarly, in commenting on the Liber de Causis, Aquinas renders philosophically harmless that text’s apparent claim regarding the hylomorphic composition of intellects, noting that “the subsistent form itself is compared to participated being as potency to act or as matter to form.” Richard Taylor has pointed out that, in fact, the Arabic text of the Liber de Causis does not even have the semblance of a UH view; where Aquinas’ Latin translation attributed to intellects ‘yliatim’ (hence leading him to incorrectly assume that this word was a transliteration of something in the Arabic text which was itself a transliteration of the Greek ‘hyle,’ or ‘matter’), in fact, an examination of the Arabic reveals the word ‘hilya’ which actually means something closer to ‘form.’ As such, the actual text does not in fact even say that intellects are composed of matter, but rather that intellects are composed of Being + hilya, (or, Form). This, however, needn’t concern us here, as Aquinas himself clearly took the Liber de Causis passage to be suggesting the hylomorphic composition of intellects. As such, what we are here interested in pointing out is the extent to which Gabirol’s own UHist attribution of matter to intellects is (tacitly) contrasted with an innocuous use of hylomorphic language to convey the theme of the ‘contingency metaphysics.’ Aquinas sees the Liber’s apparent attribution of yliatim (which, again, Aquinas took to mean hyle) to even intellects to be philosophically acceptable since Aquinas sees the claim as merely an application of the above contingency metaphysics, but in (potentially misleading) hylomorphic terms. We may conclude, then, that
Aquinas was comfortable embracing the philosophical legitimacy of a ‘hylomorphically’ worded manifestation of contingency metaphysics (viz., the Liber’s own apparent claim about the ‘form + matter’ composition of intellects). That he nonetheless fully rejects Gabirol’s UH (as well as fails to entertain Gabirol’s hylomorphic claims in the same way that he treats the Liber’s hylomorphic claim) clearly suggests that Aquinas did not likewise see Gabirol’s UH as a simple terminological variant of the philosophically acceptable contingency metaphysics.

*  

From these remarks, we have clear evidence that Aquinas distinguishes between the offensiveness of Gabirol’s UH and the potential misleadingness of those who opt to use ‘matter / form’ language in their statement of the universal essential existential contingency metaphysics. This gives us at least prima facie reason to suggest that Gabirol’s UH is something different. And the same sort of support may be adduced by turning to Gabirol’s main Jewish medieval critic, Ibn Daud. Ibn Daud criticizes Gabirol’s UH in his work the *Emunah Ramah*, (or, the *Exalted Faith*). Without going into the content of his actual criticisms, we might note that, like Aquinas, Ibn Daud obviously didn’t see Gabirol’s UH as a merely colorful restatement of the ‘existential contingency’ thesis. This is evident in the fact that alongside his harsh criticisms of Gabirol, Ibn Daud clearly himself champions the existential contingency thesis. As such, consider Ibn Daud’s remark that:
...what ibn Gabirol argued about the matter and the form existing in angels necessitates that the simple (pashut) has complexity (harkavah), but this is absurd (batel). Rather, the truth is that [angels] have possibility of existence from their essence, and from God, may He be exalted, they have necessity of existence [yesh la-hem me-azmūtam eʃharūt ha-mezūt, ā-min ha-shem y"t hāyōv ha-mezūt] according to what we shall explain in this book...²²

Once again, a look at a medieval critic of Gabirol’s UH does not support seeing UH as merely the run-of-the-mill existential contingency thesis. If we are to use Aquinas’ and Ibn Daud’s medieval criticisms of UH as any sort of a guide for our thinking about this doctrine, it would seem clear that Gabirol’s UH amounts to something less innocuous, more robust and hence, more recalcitrant than merely a terminological variant on the above ‘essence/esse’ or ‘potency/act’ view in which intellects are merely noted to depend for their existence upon another.

In effect, we turn now to seeing how UH adds to the ordinary contingency metaphysics a key claim, a claim which at once sets the doctrine apart from the views we have seen above, and which is presumably the source of all the controversy.

*
1.2.4 NON-UHIST RELIGIOUS METAPHYSICS OF CONTINGENCY VS. UHIST RELIGIOUS METAPHYSICS OF CONTINGENCY

We have just seen good reason to deny simply equating the ‘matter / form’ composition claim of UH with ordinary run-of-the-mill ‘essence / esse’ composition claims among various religious metaphysicians committed to the existential contingency of all non-God substances. Unlike the ‘contingency metaphysics’ we’ve examined above, the UHists provide an *added dimension* to said contingency. In addition to seeing all things as ‘dependent-on-another’ for existence as in all of our above cases (including Gabirol’s own analysis of the Godhead’s uniqueness with respect to the Aristotelian 4 questions), UH finds a more *positive* contingency in all non-God things, viz., all non-God substances are *‘positively’ comprised* of a single ontological element in virtue of which they are contingent. There is a *single shared* ontological element in all things – trees and humans as well as souls and intellects – that is the source of their contingency. Let us put the difference between ordinary contingency metaphysics and UH in terms of a ‘negative’ source of ontological contingency on the one hand, versus an additional ‘positive’ source of ontological contingency:
Non-UHist Metaphysics of Contingency:

*Negative Source of Ontological Contingency:* All non-God substances are ontologically contingent in virtue of something which they are not; viz., it is because they fail to be such that their essence = *esse* that they are said to be ‘dependent on another’ for their *esse*, and, as such, contingent.

vs.

UHist Metaphysics of Contingency:

*In addition* to the above ‘negative’ sense of contingency, though following upon many of the same overall sensibilities which led to this negative metaphysics of contingency altogether (viz., a heightened awareness of the role of a Divinity in the cosmos, more so, as we’ve seen, than in Aristotle), we add the following:

*Positive Source of Ontological Contingency:*

(a) All non-God substances are ontologically contingent in virtue of a single ‘matter’ (here, in the sense of a material substrate) which underlies their formal essence;

(b) This ‘material substrate’ is common to all substances: each and every substance is comprised of this same kind of ‘material substrate,’ or, we may say, this substrate is ‘essentially one’ in all things.
Another way to put this divide is as follows:

**Non-UH Metaphysics of Contingency:** All non-God substances are ontologically contingent in virtue of their various essences, that is, in virtue of the different kinds of thing they are; viz., it is because they all fail to be the kinds of things that ‘exist essentially’ that they are ‘dependent on another’ for their *esse*, and, as such, contingent.

**UH Metaphysics of Contingency:** All non-God substances are, additionally, ontologically contingent in virtue of some single shared essence.

Following through the implications of this distinction, we might add:

**Non-UHist:** We have revealed the essential contingency of things as long as we have revealed the particular contingency of each individual essence (or, the different specific contingencies of each different kind of essence);

vs.

**UHist:** We have only revealed the essential contingency of things when we have additionally revealed a universal contingency that all things share (or, a universal genus that includes all species).

We might say that whereas in ‘negative’ ‘essence / *esse*’ accounts it is the very fact of comparing a given essence to its source of (or act of) *esse* which suffices for revealing its essential contingency, for the UHist there is additionally revealed a single kind of essence which all things have. For the ‘non-UHist,’ to see the
essential contingency of all non-God substances, it is sufficient to note that, for
members of each species, their being what-they-are is distinct from their cause of
(or act of) being; and so, for cats, this is seen in their ‘being-a-cat’ being distinct
from their existing; for horses, this is seen in their ‘being-a-horse’ being distinct
from their existing; for a separate intellect, this is seen in its ‘being-an-intellect’
being distinct from its existing. And so:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Negative” Contingency:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Everything (other than God) has an essence not identical to esse, yet there is no essence that is had by everything.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Where the ‘having of an essence not identical to esse’ is understood precisely as ‘having an essence in a way which does not entail existence,’ we might say that we have here all the grounds we need for distinguishing God from all non-God substances, and for seeing all non-God things as existentially contingent. There is no further need to suggest that all substances have an essence in common. To this, we then contrast the UHist for whom the essential contingency of all non-God substances is evidenced not only in these substances ‘having essences’ in the above sense of ‘having essences in such a way which does not entail their existence,’ but, furthermore, in their being comprised of a single kind of essence (viz., the universal [or ‘first’] matter of creation accounts). As such, all cats, horses, intellects and anything else draw a contingency from precisely the same source, a single universal essence which we call the ‘[universal] element,’ (Arabic: ‘unṣur; Hebrew: yesod), ‘first matter’ or ‘universal matter.’ And so:
“Positive” Contingency:

In addition to each substance’s having a specific essence common only to members of its most immediate species (i.e., in the case of cats, a ‘cat’ essence), each substance has a generic essence common to all substances (i.e., ‘universal matter’).

Put in terms of ‘unity,’ we may hence characterize the UHist position as demarcating an ‘essential identity of’ or ‘essential unity of’ matter thesis, for, as the ‘generic essence’ had by all substances, ‘universal matter’ is a single kind of essence had by all things.

One immediate implication of the UHist account is already apparent: each non-God substance will have at least two essences—e.g., for a cat, the ‘cat’ essence which it shares with all cats plus the ‘universal matter’ essence which it shares with all substances across the board. It is here that we begin to understand how UH goes hand-in-hand with the doctrine popularly known as the ‘plurality of forms.’ In fact, for the UHist, each thing has not only two essences but also a number of other essences. For here, though, it suffices to note that UH properly understood entails that each substance has at least two essences.

*

The above differences from a merely ‘negative’ contingency schema in place, there emerges nonetheless an important sense in which UH is a manifestation of ‘essence / esse’ contingency metaphysics. Pines’ suggestion that Gabirol’s
notion of ‘matter’ be parsed in terms of Avicennian ‘pre-existent’ essence, though, falls short of capturing what we have identified as Gabirol’s more ‘positive’ program of UH in the FV. While Avicenna, Boethius, Aquinas and even Gabirol in his analysis of necessity vs. contingency and of the ‘an est’ question may all be seen as proponents of the ‘negative’ contingency metaphysics, Gabirol’s unique doctrine of UH goes a step further. As such, in the claim that all things admit of a ‘matter,’ what is meant is not simply that they admit of an Avicennian (or Boethian or Aquinian) Aristotelian essence which falls short of ‘being esse itself’ and is hence contingent and reliant-upon-another for existence. Rather, the ‘material’ signifies some single essence which all things share in common – a single essence that, we might say, underlies all ‘Aristotelian essences.’ On this UHist analysis, ‘matter’ can be taken to denote ‘potency’ or ‘essence’ (and hence, the ‘matter / form’ composition can be seen as a ‘potency / act’ or ‘essence / esse’ analysis). However, the ‘potency’ or ‘essence’ denoted by the UHist analysis is not the same as the more circumscribed, less universal ‘potencies’ and ‘essences’ denoted by ‘negative’ contingency analyses of Avicenna and others. While we may speak of the ‘potency’ or ‘essence’ denoted in a ‘negative’ contingency analysis as being ‘real,’ it simply is not the sort of ‘potency’ or ‘essence’ that is singly had by all things. A given ‘essence’ in the negative contingency analysis, while shared by all members of a given species, is decidedly not the sort of thing shared by all substances across the board: cat essences are only for all cats, human essences only for all humans, etc. For the UHist though, the ‘matter’ (or ‘universal’ or ‘first’
matter) in the claim of universal ‘matter / form’ composition precisely denotes some ‘material substrate’ which is a shared ‘essence’ and most generic ‘potency to be simpliciter’ which is shared by all substances – across the board.

*

Understood in this way, Gabirol’s claim of UH can be understood as a modified version of the uncontroversial ‘essence / esse’ claim. That is, Gabirol’s UH also primarily stresses the essential contingency of all things (in a way that Aristotle’s own analysis does not), and as such, the ‘matter’ that he attributes to all things is an ‘essence’ of substances. The ‘controversy’ comes in, then, in that unlike ‘negative’ construals of ‘essence / esse’ composition which entail only that each thing’s particular essence be such that it has a cause of existence (i.e., since said essence is not ‘equal to esse itself”), the UHist’s ontology additionally speaks of a single essence – a genus generalissimum – common to all things which marks this contingency. This shared essence emerges as a ‘first matter,’ a material substrate which all things are first and foremost composed of. What we have here, then, is a terminological and conceptual link between the ‘material’ and the ‘essential,’ between the notions of ‘first matter’ and a most generic ‘essence.’ Where a ‘negative’ analysis of ‘essence / esse’ means by ‘essence’ something different in the case of each kind of thing (and so, ‘cat’ in the case of cats, ‘human’ in the case of humans, ‘intellect’ in the case of intellects), the UHist analysis invokes an ‘essence’ that is the same regardless of what kind of thing we are
talking about. What is this ‘same’ essence for all things? Universal (or First) Matter. And so, the ‘essence’ in this ‘essence / esse’ composition denotes universal matter in the case of cats, in the case of humans and in the case of intellects. It is in this sense that UH presents a philosophically significant modification of the ordinary ‘negative’ ‘essence / esse’ analysis.

Matter, then, in the UH system, is described at once as a substrate and as a potency (descriptions that we normally think of when we hear ‘matter’), but also as essence, as a most generic genus, and as a general ‘potency to be’ simpliciter (terms and notions which we don’t normally think of when we hear ‘matter’ – or even when we hear ‘essence’ in an ‘ordinary’ Aristotelian context).

Taken in light of the above analysis and comparisons with ‘negative contingency’ theory, we can finally understand why one and the same phenomenon would go under the various descriptions ‘universal matter,’ ‘first matter,’ ‘substrate,’ ‘genus generalissimum’ and ‘potency to be [simpliciter].’ It is in understanding the interrelationship between these terms, then, that we begin to appreciate the thesis of UH. For matter here emerges as a universal essence. In this same sense, we may describe it as the ‘potency to be’ simpliciter: unlike the potency to be an animal, or the potency to be a cat, we here have simply and most generally the ‘potency to be.’ As we will see more in the next two chapters, this ‘essence’ or ‘potency’ is hence indicative of a ‘genus generalissimum,’ a ‘Substantiality per se’ which essentially characterizes all substance and which is, as such, a genus higher and more inclusive than any other genus.
1.2.5 UNIVERSAL MATTER AS ‘FIRST MATTER’ AND AS ‘ELEMENT’

Gabirol calls this universal matter the ‘*materia prima,*’ as well as ‘*unṣur*’ (Ar. ‘element). We must raise a few words of caution about these descriptions. First, ‘*materia prima,*’ Most obviously translated ‘prime matter,’ I have instead opted to translate this as ‘first matter’ in the hope of avoiding confusion. For, ‘prime matter’ immediately conjures up for most of us that greatly contested substrate of Aristotle’s *Physics.* As early as Simplicius’ treatment of the *Physics,* Aristotle’s remarks about ‘elemental change’ are taken by some to evidence a tacit commitment on the Stagirite’s behalf to a notion of corporeal matter simpliciter underlying the four elements, a matter which is itself comprised of prime matter plus the general form of corporeality. Central to many later medieval debates (as can be seen, e.g., between the Avician and Averroean traditions), Aristotle is variously interpreted as being committed to one or both of corporeal matter simpliciter and prime matter. The details of these debates aside,* prime matter in the context of these interpretations of Aristotle’s *Physics* is seen as something had by corporeal bodies, not by incorporeals such as intellects. As such, to approach the UHist ‘universal material substrate’ as ‘prime matter’ in this sense would be to immediately see the UHist program as a misunderstanding of the nature of ‘prime matter’ as something essentially had by even separate intellects and other spiritual simples. That is, if [wrongly] approached as simply a move in this popular series of debates on the nature of prime matter in Aristotle’s *Physics,* Gabirol’s UH would

39
certainly emerge as erroneously off the mark in its claim that matter underlies not only corporeals but souls and intellects as well!

However, to fault UH in this way is simply inappropriate, and it is to guard against this mistake that I have chosen to translate ‘materio prima’ as ‘first matter,’ as opposed to ‘prime matter.’ As our above development of UH in the context of ‘religious metaphysics’ and ‘metaphysics of contingency’ has hopefully revealed, UH is not best seen as a move within any debate whose main concerns center upon how to best understand the nature of elemental change in the physical, sublunar realm. Gabirol’s FV is not only clearly driven by the sorts of ‘existential contingency’ concerns which characterize, as we have seen above, a religious move away from a purely Aristotelian world-view, but, unlike even the works of Avicenna and other non-UHist religious thinkers, Gabirol’s work, far from a commentary of sorts on Aristotle’s Physics, has its primary roots in Neoplatonic and Ps. Empedoclean traditions and debates. As such, Gabirol’s ‘material substrate’ or ‘first matter’ is not at all best seen as a mistaken understanding of ‘prime matter’ in the context of Aristotle’s Physics. I hope by my translational shift from ‘prime matter’ to ‘first matter’ to at least avoid some confusion, thus extricating Gabirol’s UHist project and its notion of ‘matter’ from the context of issues relating to Aristotelian Physics, and the obvious problems to which UH would thus be immediately subject.
One must similarly warn against taking the name ‘element’ (Ar. ‘unṣur’) which Gabirol gives to universal matter as wrongly suggesting a primarily ‘Physics-centric’ analysis of the four elements, or even as referring to the aetherial fifth substance. Taken in either of these ways, the UHist’s suggestion that matter is had by even intellects would simply amount to a blatant misunderstanding of Aristotle. Gabirol’s ‘first matter’ is not an element on par with the four elements. Similarly, as even Aristotle’s quintessential fifth substance is not a component of intellects, we must also warn against equating Gabirol’s ‘first matter’ with the Aristotelian aether. We do a great disservice to Gabirol’s UH, then, when we primarily approach it as a ‘misunderstanding’ of Aristotelian ideas.

1.2.6 FIRST MATTER AND THE GENESIS ACCOUNT

These warnings in place, though, there is something to be learned from the description of universal matter as ‘first matter.’ For with the ‘prima’ of ‘materia prima’ indicating a priority of sorts which is more than just a ‘universality,’ this description alerts us to the identity of the most generic essence shared by all things (the universal essence which emerged from our metaphysical analysis above) and the ‘first matter’ – or material substrate – which we find in creation accounts. We will not here concern ourselves with whether Gabirol’s true understanding of creation is that of traditional *creation ex nihilo*, or whether his *creation ex nihilo* can itself be seen as a Plotinian emanation.²⁴ Leaving the precise nature of God’s ‘act of creation’ neutral between ‘orthodox [i.e., non-emanative] *creation ex nihilo*’
and `creation ex nihilo as emanation' (an issue we will pick up in a related vein in chapter 4), let us simply suggest that Gabirol’s world-view is best (and most charitably) appreciated when we ground his UHist notion of a universal ‘matter’ in the creation account at Genesis. For, we suggest that it is precisely in considering the identity of the UHist’s universal essence with the material substrate of Genesis accounts that we are afforded a sense of why a religious metaphysician might feel compelled to go a step beyond the ‘negative’ contingency metaphysics to the fuller UHist account. To see this, consider: UH might appear philosophically gratuitous if seen simply as an answer to the question: “What are the necessary features of the ontology of non-God substances which properly reveal their essential demarcation from God, and which, hence, accurately reveal for us their inherent ‘dependence-on-another-for-existence’?” Of course, if we are searching for a metaphysics that can sufficiently answer this question, we can stop at the ‘negative’ metaphysics of contingency (leaving aside the further question of whether such an account is itself truly ‘necessary’ for accommodating our question). Seen as an attempted answer to a question whose answer is already sufficiently well provided for in the ‘negative’ metaphysics of contingency, UH would appear to be overkill; for certainly, a ‘material substrate’ had by all non-God substances is not necessary for an ontology’s working in the ways outlined in our question. However, taken with an eye towards certain existing Biblical commentary traditions of Genesis, there is prima facie no reason to see UH as ‘overkill.’ Rather, UH may in fact be seen as an attempt by some thinkers to develop a requisite ‘contingency ontology’
in light of what seemed to them certain implications at the heart of the Genesis account of creation. It is clear, for example, that Augustine’s UH (as we will discuss more in chapter 2) is at least in part driven by his understanding of the Genesis account of creation as a creation out of a [created] material substrate. Seen as accommodating this tradition of Genesis commentary, Augustine’s ‘positive’ UHist doctrine of a universally present material substrate can be understood as a non-spurious addendum to a merely ‘negative’ contingency analysis (since the latter does not incorporate the notion of a ‘universally present’ – and hence, shared – matter at the heart of all creations). In the case of Gabirol, whose own FV makes no references to any Biblical sources, we might similarly suggest just this sort of Genesis-inspired concern at the heart of his own UHist positing of a universally shared material substrate. In fact, we may adduce each of the following in support of Genesis’ impact on Gabirol’s thought:

a. Abraham Ibn Ezra reveals for us part of what he describes as a commentary on Genesis written by Gabirol. We will look at this in more detail below in our analysis of Gabirol’s emanationism. Here though, it is sufficient to note that our evidence of such a commentary having been written by Gabirol supports in general the impact on his thinking of the Genesis text. Even more specifically for our current purposes, it is revealing and significant that in his reported Genesis commentary, Gabirol apparently compares matter to the river in the Garden of Eden. As such, Gabirol explicitly compares the universal material
substrate to a flowing source, an ontological repository of sustenance that is distinct from God (or His Will). While below, we will be especially interested in the obvious emanationist overtone of this analogy, here we are most interested in the extent to which Gabirol’s likening matter to the sustaining, life-giving river suggests his envisioning matter as a single, non-God sustainer of all subsisting things.

In this way, Gabirol’s UH can be seen as an attempt to forge an ontology of non-God substances which not only reveals their essential contingency (which is sufficiently achieved by a ‘negative’ metaphysics of contingency), but which additionally seeks to integrate into that ontology a robust – and Biblically inspired – notion of ‘prime matter’ (‘robust,’ in the sense of demarcating some single ‘stuff’ out of which God literally forges the world), whose unity and sustaining role the ‘negative’ metaphysics of contingency fails to accommodate.

b. Additionally, the FV has been shown\textsuperscript{25} to reveal the influence of the Sefer Yeẓirah (or, Book of Formation), a mystical Hebrew Genesis commentary. This may be taken in further support of the contention that Gabirol was actively thinking about Genesis-related issues which in turn further supports a link between the cosmic formation in the Sefer Yeẓirah account and his construction of a metaphysics of UH in the FV. More specifically, his interest in the Sefer Yeẓirah commentary on Genesis gives us particularly good grounds for suggesting a commitment on his part to a ‘material substrate’ from which all else is molded.
This can be seen first in the *Sefer Yeẓirah*’s seeing the cosmos as ‘formed’ as opposed to ‘created’ (and so, it is the ‘Book of Formation’ (*yeẓirah*), and not the ‘Book of Creation’ (*briah*)). Furthermore, we find in this commentary tradition (as in others) an explicit focus on the ‘*tohu*’ (the ‘void’ of Gen. 1: 2) as a significant element in the creation account (with a discussion of ‘*tohu va-bohu*’ to be found in Saadiah’s commentary). This together with the notion of ‘formation’ gives us further grounds for taking Gabirol’s own reading of Genesis to have involved a sensitivity to a single, foundational ‘moment’ (the ‘void’) as a single and essential ‘material [i.e., pre-determined] nothingness’ out of which all else is constituted. That Gabirol may well have seen in this Biblical ‘*tohu*’ a reference to a material substrate out of which God forms all things may be further supported if we relate this ‘*tohu*’ to the ‘*ayin*’ (or, ‘nothingness’) at play in his *Keter Malkhūt* verse in which he speaks of the Divine moment of creation in terms of a ‘splitting of the ‘*ayin*’ (or, ‘nothingness’). Treating Gabirol as having seen in the ‘moment of creation’ a formation of all things out of a starting ‘substrate’ (created or otherwise) seems to sit well too with at least one interpretation of the 11th line of his *Ahavtika* (a poem which we address later on in chapter 2) on which the pre-determined ‘proto-existence’ (‘*lo yesh*’) gives way to determinate ‘existence’ (‘*yesh*’) in the cosmic unfolding of reality.

In chapter 4, we will additionally explore the possibility of a Gnostic Islamic Genesis account on Gabirol’s thinking. Here, though, our main purpose has been to suggest the way in which certain Genesis-inspired notions might help
us to more charitably understand the motivation behind our UHists’ ‘positive’
contingency postulation of a shared material substrate at the heart of all things. In
effect, our suggestion is that we are helped in understanding Gabirol’s (and
Augustine’s) interest in supplementing a commitment to a ‘negative’ contingency
metaphysics with the more ‘positive’ contingency metaphysics of UH when we see
him as having held a tacit interest in accommodating in his metaphysics of even
tables and chairs (and intellects!) a cosmically ‘positive’ notion of a first material
substrate out of which God creates all things.

It is at least plausible to suggest, then, that certain interpretations of the
Genesis account – and not simply spurious metaphysical intuitions – might have
inspired our UHist thinkers to forge contingency metaphysics with the added
feature of a universally present material substrate.

*

1.2.7 ACCOMMODATING THE DATA THUS FAR

Consider how our investigations thus far have helped us address and explain
Gabirol’s synonymous employment of each of the following locutions to describe a
single reality:
Universal Matter
First Matter
Essence
Potency to Be
‘the element’,

and have likewise allowed us to fully appreciate the sense in which, for Gabirol, even intellects ‘have matter.’ First, we started out suggesting that Gabirol’s ‘matter / form’ constitution be construed as an ‘essence / esse’ composition of sorts. While we have been careful to show how this UHist ‘essence / esse’ composition is more ‘positive’ than the ‘negative’ ‘essence / esse’ contingency analysis of other religious metaphysicians, in having nonetheless put the UHist doctrine forth as a brand of such a contingency analysis, we have succeeded in highlighting the description of ‘matter’ as ‘essence.’ In particular, with recourse to the metaphysics of creation, we have seen that this ‘essence’ is one and the same with that ‘first matter’ from which God forges the cosmos. As such, this ‘matter’ or ‘essence’ has been shown to be the most generic ontological foundation, a ‘genus generalissimum,’ or, a most general ‘potency to be,’ simpliciter. For the UHist, a given substance has this most generic essence in addition, of course, to its ‘potency to be a cat,’ or a ‘potency to be a human,’ etc. (the more circumscribed essences which the UHist additionally grants, but which are the only essences entertained on the non-UHist ‘negative contingency’ accounts). Although going by the name
‘element’ (or ‘unṣur’), this most generic and universally present essence is quite
different than the notion of ‘prime elemental matter’ in the context of Aristotle’s
*Physics* and the tradition of commentary debates regarding the nature of elemental
change, and is even different than Aristotle’s quintessential aether. We may simply
say that as Aristotelian ‘prime [elemental] matter’ is to the four elements in such
thinkers as Avicenna, so is Gabirol’s ‘first matter’ (or most universal ‘element’) to
all things: it is that which underlies not only the four elements, but also celestial
bodies and even the simple spirituals. In this regard, it is one and the same as the
material substrate that we find in many interpretations of the Genesis account, some
of which Gabirol might certainly have had access to. In any case, we are not best
served to see Gabirol’s first matter primarily in terms of a misunderstanding on his
behalf of the notion of Aristotelian prime matter. (Note: In chapter 5, we will, in
fact, suggest a reason for why Gabirol might have indeed spoken about this most
exalted essential core in the spatio-temporal terms of ‘element’ and ‘matter’).

This essential matter or first material substrate is furthermore the most
generic ontological foundation, and is essentially ‘one’ for all things – it is as much
constitutive of tables, cats and humans as of souls and intellects. It is in this sense
that ‘even intellects’ are to be resolved into ‘matter / form’ composition.

* 

In the remainder of this chapter, then, let us turn to exploring some of the
‘inversion of metaphysical intuitions’ which additionally accompany Gabirol’s UH
account, followed by an examination of his notion of Will. This further data will help lead us to our complete treatment of Gabirol’s UH in chapter 2.

1.3 INVERTED METAPHYSICAL INTUITIONS: THE UNITY OF MATTER AND THE PRIORITY OF MATTER OVER FORM

From what we have seen thus far, it is clear that UH is best understood as positing a single universally shared essence at the heart of all things, a universally shared essence which is itself best identified with the ‘primordial matter’ (or the ‘pre-determined’ nothingness) out of which God forms the world on at least one commentary tradition of the Genesis account. That this shared essence be one and the same for all substances has been shown to distinguish the UHist’s program from mere ‘negative’ contingency metaphysics programs, a distinction supported in part (as we have seen) by our attempt to make sense of the critical reaction to UH by other ‘contingency metaphysicians’ in the history of religious philosophy. This ‘unity’ of matter thesis may be additionally seen, though, by looking directly at Gabirol’s FV text, as for example in the depiction of matter without form as a unity in all things (cf. FV 4.10; p. 232, 13 - 17), and in the suggestion that:

...the diversity that is among substances doesn’t come from the matter, but from form, since forms are many, but matter one.26

Furthermore, not only does Gabirol list ‘unius essentiae’ (i.e., ‘of a single essence’)27 as one of matter’s key descriptions, but we find the explicit claim that matter:
...is of a single essence, since we've sought only one matter for all things [unius autem essentiae, ideo quia non quaesivimus nisi unam materiam omnium rerum].

That there emerges in Gabirol’s UH world-view a single matter at the heart of all things seems clear in spite of points in the text that seem to rather loosely imply two matters, one for ‘spirituals’ and one for ‘corporeals.’ This latter [and, we suggest, inexact] sentiment can be seen, for example, in Gabirol’s suggestion that sensible things will have ‘body’ (or, corporeal matter) as their ‘sustainer,’ whereas non-sensible spiritual substances will have ‘spirit’ (or, spiritual matter) as their ‘sustainer,’ and so, in the former case:

...there ought to be a universal matter in sensible things, viz., ‘body,’ and a universal form, viz., all the things [i.e., forms] that are sustained in body.  

This seems to suggest that universal matter in the case of sensible bodies is ‘body,’ a sentiment that certainly does not stress the presence of a universal matter as a single shared essence for sensibles and intelligibles alike. However, in light of all of our above reasons for seeing in Gabirol a single matter at the core of all reality, we find in the description of ‘body’ as a ‘universal matter in sensible things’ only an inexact application of what is in Gabirol’s view the deeper and more accurate notion of a single universal matter shared by all things, both spiritual and corporeal. In fact, this same emergence of a single material core in spite of potentially
misleading remarks regarding *two* essential matters (one for spirituals and one for corporeals) can be seen in an analysis of Augustine as well. That is, in spite of his interpretation of the ‘heaven and earth’ of Genesis as the creation by God of ‘spiritual matter’ and ‘corporeal matter,’ Augustine may nonetheless be taken to understand both of these as arising from a single ‘unformed matter’ (or ‘materia informis’), as can be seen in his remark that: “...at the beginning matter is made confused and unformed, which I believe was called ‘chaos’ by the Greeks, from which all things which are distinct and formed are made.”\(^{30}\) Here, ‘matter’ (*materia*) occurs in the *singular*, as does his reference to ‘chaos.’ To further support the idea that Augustine’s focus on *two* matters corresponding to the ‘creation of heaven and earth’ does not indeed preclude our seeing in his view a single matter at the core of these various manifestations, note Augustine’s reminder that unformed matter may be called ‘heaven and earth’ because *heaven and earth emerge from it.* As Goheen explains, Augustine is here rehearsing the point that “one may call a thing by the name of that which is to come out of it.”\(^{31}\) As such, it seems that we may indeed speak even in the case of Augustine of a *single* unformed matter at the heart of all substances, corporeal as well as spiritual (even to the extent that we might describe said single matter as ‘double-natured’\(^{32}\)). In our analysis of both Gabirol and of Augustine we are hence certainly able to discern evidence (even in spite of some apparent indications to the contrary) that there is a *single pre-formed matter* at the core of all substantial realities. Once again, this ‘unity of matter’ ties in well with what we have suggested are Gabirol’s
commitments to a Genesis account on which God forms the world from a pre-
determinate matter, as well as what we have suggested is the best way to
distinguish the doctrine of UH from ‘negative’ versions of contingency
metaphysics.

In fact, it would seem that it is thus seeing in accounts of UH a single
universal matter which forms the basis for one of the more popular medieval
arguments against the view: “Why,” such thinkers as Aquinas and others ask,
“should we grant UHists a ‘matter without form’ when they themselves seem to see
it as giving way to two kinds of matters, one spiritual and one corporeal? Doesn’t
this suggest that this so-called ‘unformed matter’ is already differently formed to
begin with? And if so, isn’t this matter indeed ‘formed’? As such, in what sense
does the UHist insist that there is such a thing as ‘unformed’ matter?” Let us grant
that the criticism does raise the good question of how something ‘unformed’ can
result in two ‘differently formed’ variations of matter (viz., spiritual matter and
corporeal matter), or, for that matter, in anything with ‘form.’ We will not, though,
worry about this criticism here. We simply here raise this common criticism of UH
in way of stressing the extent to which UH was indeed taken by medieval critics in
precisely the way we suggest, viz., as the doctrine that there is a single universal
matter, and not two different ones. For were the UHist taken as suggesting that
there are, at the outset, two kinds of matters (as opposed to one matter which gives
way to different manifestations of itself, some ‘spiritual’ and some ‘corporeal’) the
above criticism would no longer make sense. Once again, the ‘controversialness’
of the UH doctrine is precisely best seen when we take it as a doctrine committed to a single matter out of which all other realities follow (or, are formed).

*

In addition, then, to what might be regarded as the ‘counter-intuitive’ thesis of ‘unity of matter,’ Gabirol’s UH – and here unlike anything we find in Augustinian accounts – additionally has the result of turning a number of our other metaphysical intuitions on their head. Most specifically, we find in the FV a most general priority of the material over the formal. While form is related in Gabirol to esse, it is particularly related as such to limit and finitude and emerges as the ‘principle of difference’ which accounts for the different species within the hierarchy of existents. That form is a principle of difference and plurality can be seen at a number of places in the text, as for example in the claims that:

...spiritual substances are one in matter, but diverse in form,\textsuperscript{33}

and

Diversity comes only from form, and simple matter has no form per se...\textsuperscript{34}

Such remarks reveal an association on Gabirol’s behalf of Limit (and hence, ‘finitude’)\textsuperscript{35} with form and existence, and of Unlimited (and hence, a tendency towards the infinite), with matter.
In effect, on this ‘register,’ we might note the perhaps somewhat unexpected correlations of the formal with the lower and the material with the more exalted, along with the following related correlations throughout the text:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form; Esse;</th>
<th>Limit; Difference;</th>
<th>Manifestation;</th>
<th>Act</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

and

| Matter; Unity; Unlimited; Sameness; Hiddenness; Potency |

One might wonder what to make of the fact that, nonetheless, there are times in the text where it is matter that is presented as imposing difference on substances, with form being identified with Unity and Being. So, at 4.14 (p. 242, 7ff.) the diversity and division among forms is not from form per se (itself taken as the first created unity and dubbed ‘First Pure Unity’), but is from the matter that sustains it. The apparent contradiction found in those passages which depict matter as the source of plurality seems to stem from the term ‘matter’ in those contexts in fact referring not to the formless matter per se with which we have been concerned, but to any lower hylomorphic substance that is already formally determined in such-and-so way. While such a lower substance may be called ‘matter’ to what follows beneath it (on microcosmic analogy with the sense of Intellect as unformed matter per se to all existents), the use of the term ‘matter’ in those contexts refers not to pre-formed matter per se, but to some already formed substance (which, Gabirol tells us, may be called ‘matter’ since it is ‘matter’ to its own individual
forms in the sense of proximately sustaining said forms). And hence, we may say that to the extent that difference is associated with matter in the sense of some such lower substance, the difference is not really coming from its materiality per se (in the sense of the prime, pre-formed matter that we have been interested in), but rather the difference is coming from the determination of that matter; it comes from the distance, so to speak, between said substance and its original source in pre-formed matter per se. (As we will see more in chapters 2 and 3, this distance is to be associated with the specification or differentiation of some genus into its species and individuals associated with the increasing actualization of forms from the pure potency of Nous to their manifestation in Nature). As such, it is the determination associated with the ‘distancing from the [pure material] source’ and not the essential materiality per se, which should be understood as the culprit in those parts of the text where Gabirol describes the material as responsible for the differences and divisions within form. One bit of support for this suggestion – in addition to the straightforward identification of matter with Unity and its association with the most sublime Essence, not to mention the clear association of form (and not matter) as the source of plurality, as we have seen above – is that, often, the texts which talk of matter as contributing to the difference among forms are precisely texts which talk of the parts of matter;\(^6\) as such, it is not the materiality per se which is being referred to, but rather the ever-lower substantialities associated with increasingly more determined substances (i.e., the increased manifestation of form
the further we get from the cosmic source). That it is the distance from the source which is in fact responsible for the diversification of form might also be supported, e.g., at 5.26 where, although we find that:

...quia forma in se una est, non diversa, non est diversificata nisi propter subjectam materiam. 37

we nonetheless find the initial statement of this very sentiment a few lines earlier as:

... non est diversa haec forma in suis essentiis, sed diversificata est in subjectis earum, nisi propter elongationem ab origine, sicut saepe praedictum est. 38

*

In order to properly appreciate Gabirol’s text, it is clear, then, that one must develop a set of ontological intuitions on which potency precedes act and matter is privileged over form. To reinforce these ideas, consider the following sampling of ontological ideas at play in Gabirol’s text:

(1) Matter comes directly from the Godhead:

In Book 5 of the FV, we learn that:

...Matter is created from Essence, and Form is from the property of that Essence, i.e., from Wisdom and Unity... 39

Here, it is clear that the principle of materiality – in whatever sense – follows immediately from the First Essence, with formal reality, rather, emerging from Wisdom, a modification of that First Essence. This clearly privileges the ‘material.’
(2) The ‘hiddenness’ – and proximity to the Divinity -- of Matter over Form:

Related to the above account, we find that:

...manifest esse is the form of the hidden, as the matter of corporeal substances must be the form to the spiritual thing, since it is resolved into it, even if it has matter which is more robust [corpulentius] than it. I only said that the manifest concerning esse is the form to the hidden because the matter which is closer to the sense[s] is rather similar to form; and for that reason it [i.e., matter] will be more manifest according to the evidence of form and hiddenness of matter, even though it is matter to sensible form. The more remote it becomes from the sense[s], the more similar it will be to matter, and through this it will be more hidden according to the hiddenness of the matter, even though it is form to first simple matter, or to one of the matters which is beneath it. And since corporeal matter is as I have said, then know that it is not resolved into [redigitur] materiality certainly unless to simple first matter which sustains all forms and matters.\(^{40}\)

‘Being formal’ carries the negative sense of ‘being more plural; i.e., being more available to discursive reasoning and the senses,’ whereas ‘being material’ holds the positive sense of ‘being more unified; i.e., being less graspable, and hence unavailable to discursive reasoning per se, and hidden from the senses.’ This overall description of the material as the ‘hidden’ is overtly positive; ‘hiddenness’ — far from revealing a sense of ‘confusion’ or the like — is the mark of that which is closer to Truth and Divinity. In pushing the simple forth into more and more ‘graspable’ (and hence, more and more plural) esse, the formal is at once the source of limit and of difference, and is, furthermore, in that very capacity viewed negatively -- especially when compared with the utter simplicity and inactivity of the material. On this system, then, the material is not only not the source of evil (as in other Neoplatonic accounts),\(^{41}\) but may be seen as a spark of divine simplicity in each creation.
Keep in mind as well the description in the above citation of that most basic ‘simple first matter’ (i.e., the universal matter into which all things are resolved) as that which “sustains all forms and matters.” This further supports our above description of a ‘unity of matter’ thesis in Gabirol, and will additionally be central to our particular analysis of universal matter in chapter 2.

(3) Matter as Genus:

The claim that ‘Matter is Genus,’ as we will address in detail in chapter 3, understands by ‘matter’ a substance (viz., a genus) in relation to any lower, more speciated, substance, with the ‘highest genus’ (or, First Matter) emerging, hence, as a shared ontological essence for all things. And so,

that which is from among substances, the matter to the lower is the form to the higher...the more subtle of substances is the subject (i.e., carrier) to the coarser of them, [and] all are forms sustained in First Matter.  

And that,

...the lower of the substances is form to the higher of them, and the higher of them is matter sustaining the lower, until it reaches the First Simple Matter.

Treating the ‘material’ as in this way indicative of the higher genus in any ontological analysis shows us a clear sense in which the term ‘matter’ denotes something that is superior to what is denoted by the term ‘form.’

58
Consider the modification in Plotinus and his followers of the Aristotelian causal principle on which the cause of \( \phi \) in some subject must itself – as cause – actually be \( \phi \) (and hence, able to bring forth ‘\( \phi \)’ from potency to actuality in some effect). For the Neoplatonist, given the shift from ‘horizontal’ Aristotelian causal analyses to ‘vertical’ causal analyses, the importance of the cause is that it is in potency what the effect is in actuality. In effect, here, the potency (associated with the cause) precedes act (associated with the effect). This shift in focus brings along with it a decidedly sharp focus on the more supreme levels of reality – the causes of the lower levels of reality – as potencies. The ‘material’ – in its terminological and conceptual affinity to the ‘potential’ – emerges in this context as the higher causal force in comparison to the lower (and more actual) nature of effect. We will elaborate upon this idea more in chapter 3.

Consider Gabirol’s celebrated Keter Malkhūt poem, where it is clear that all of reality is made to come forth from the ‘ayin,’ a ‘nothingness’ which may be associated with a primordial Matter. Similarly, we find in his short poem ‘Ahav tikha’ (‘I love thee…’) that ‘lo yesh’ (or ‘pre-existence’) – seen as picking out matter per se – is clearly superior to and causally responsible for all ‘yesh,’ (or ‘existence’).
(6) God as pure potency and (hence) as the 'pre-existent' 'Being Above Being':

While I will not address this issue in the current project, it might be noted that following on all of the above subtleties which place 'potency' above 'act,' and see God as the direct source of the material, even Gabirol's explicit identification of the Godhead with Being does not obscure a sense in which his God is, in the end, more like Matter (pure potency, infinite, hidden and 'pre-existent') than like Form (active, and existentially actualized). Related to this, and following what we have said above about the Neoplatonic view of 'cause,' even the description of God Himself can be seen to shift from one of 'pure act' (as best characterizes Aristotle's Unmoved Mover), to one of 'pure potency.'

*

That Gabirol's metaphysical intuitions are not the Aristotelian ones that many readers might be more familiar with is certain. In fact, given the extent of his metaphysical inversions, Gabirol's world-view stands at odds even with most medieval texts of Neoplatonism (where, for example, matter emerges in association with 'evil') and even with other forms of UH as they emerge in Christian Augustinian traditions. In fact, we will turn to this latter point in chapter 2, where, in the context of developing an account of UH which is able to accommodate all of the above metaphysical intuitions, we will urge a distinction between Gabirol's notion of matter and the notion of matter at play in any medieval Augustinian account. Furthermore, in chapter 3, we will turn to a fuller explication of the above
metaphysical intuitions by placing them within the broader context of emanationist cosmology and Neoplatonic cyclic theory of causation. In the remainder of this chapter though, let us first turn to that other key feature of Gabirol’s FV, viz., Will.

1.4 WILL IN THE CONTEXT OF GABIROL’S FV

In addition to his UHist analyses and prioritizations of the material over the formal, we find a strong focus in Gabirol on Will. In addition to suggestions within the content of the FV dialogue that Gabirol had either written or intended to write some separate treatise entirely devoted to the issue of Will, the FV itself spends a great deal of time highlighting this theme. In effect, we are told in the FV that there are three main sciences: the science of matter and form, the science of Will and the science of the First Essence. In this regard, we find: 50

\textit{Partes scientiae omnis tres sunt, scilicet scientia de materia et forma, et scientia de voluntate et scientia de essentia prima...Quia in esse non sunt nisi haec tria;}

There are three parts of ‘scientia,’ viz. the science of matter and form, the science of Will and the science of the First Essence...Because there are naught but these three in existence.

Preserved in an Arabic fragment in the writings of Moses Ibn Ezra, we find:

\textit{Ajzā' al-‘ilm bil-kul jīm (=3), wa-hiya ‘ilm al-unṣur wa-l-ṣura, wa-‘ilm bal-irāda, wa-l-‘ilm bil-dhāfi al-‘ūla wa-laysa fi-l-mawjūd ghayr hadha-l-jīm (=3). 51}
And further:

...layṣa fī-l-mawjūd ghayr ḥādha-l-jīm (i.e., 3): ful-‘illa[tu] al-‘ūla l-dhār,
wal-ma’alūl al-unṣur w-as-ṣura[tu], w-al-irāda mutawassīta[tun] bayna at-
tarafīna.

...in ‘Substance’ there are only these three: the cause is the First Essence, the
carried is the matter and the form, and the Will is an intermediary between the
extremes,
corresponding to the following Latin passage:

...in esse non sunt nisi haec tria...[...causa autem est essentia prima.
creatum autem materia et forma, medium autem horum est voluntas.

Whereas the Latin talks of the three kinds of being ‘within existence’ [in esse], the
Arabic fragment (corresponding presumably to Gabirol’s own choice of terms)
instead decidedly describes three kinds of being ‘in Substance.’ Furthermore, in
the Latin text, the three varieties of being are not given in terms of ‘cause,’ ‘caused’
and ‘intermediary’ as in the Arabic fragment; in the Latin, the three varieties are
simply listed as matter and form, First Essence and Will, ‘the intermediary of the
extremes.’ The Arabic fragment found in Ibn Ezra jumps over this whole section in
the Latin to the causal language which in the Latin text occurs a number of lines
down. While Pines generally notes where the Latin and the Arabic do not agree, he
does not make any indication of this anomaly; as such, let me take this opportunity
to do so; I will underline only those parts of the Latin that correspond to the above
Arabic fragment:

62
Master: ...*in esse non sunt nisi haec tria: materia videlicet et forma, et essentia prima, et voluntas quae est media extremorum.*

Disciple: *Quid causae est quod in esse non sunt nisi haec tria?*

Master: *Causa in hoc haec est, quod omni creato opus est causa et aliquo medio inter se. causa autem est essentia prima, creatum autem materia et forma, medium autem horum est voluntas.*

In this vein, the Arabic description of Will as the ‘*mutawassitatun bayna at-tarfina*’ (or, ‘an intermediary between the extremes’) doesn’t exactly follow the Latin description of Will in the last line of this interchange between the Master and Disciple (as a ‘*medium horum*’), but more closely follows the earlier Latin description of *Voluntas* (a few lines before the last line, as indicated by my underlining) as a “*media extremorum.*”

Of Will we are told furthermore that it is ‘the creator of matter and form and moves them’ (FV 2.13), that it is the First Active Unity and the creator of First Form (the Second Unity), that it infinite essentially though finite with respect to its action, and that it is between the highest Essence and First Form (FV 4.19, p. 252). Already in these descriptions, we may begin to see some conflict: on the one hand, it emerges as the cause of form and of matter, but on the other hand, it is described in some contexts only as the creator of form. Similarly, while it is sometimes said to create matter and form, it is sometimes, rather, described as an ‘intermediary’ that connects them, with ‘creating’ being the proper activity of God alone. It is this latter point which has led scholars to note that while Will often appears to be an hypostasis separate from God (e.g., as we have just seen, it is ‘between’ God and
First Form), other features of Gabirol’s text (e.g., the fact that Will is said to create, in spite of the claim elsewhere that ‘only God creates’) seem to suggest, on the contrary, that Will is an aspect of the Divinity. In fact, the details of Gabirol’s precise vision of how the cosmos unfolds (or, ‘is created’) are not entirely clear. Consider the following as illustrative of just some of the possible ways to understand Gabirol’s view of the subtle ‘moments’ which follow upon the Divinity Himself:

[Figure 1.1]

[Figure 1.2]

[Figure 1.3]
In addition to the lack of clarity regarding the precise relationship between God and Will, an examination of Gabirol’s overall corpus reveals that something called ‘Wisdom’ is presented at times as one with Will, at times as superior to Will, and at times as inferior to Will. \(^\text{54}\) (That Wisdom does not itself simply refer to the Divine Nous seems evidenced by the description of Wisdom as the end state of Intellect, God’s ‘first created’ substance).
It is safe to say, then, that it is not at all certain how to best construe Gabirol’s cosmic topography as it concerns the delicate levels of reality between God and Intellect. Gabirol’s text leaves open a number of possible interpretations of the cosmic topography between God and Intellect, including the role and nature of ‘Will.’ As it relates to our current analysis of Will, though, we maintain that the undeniable degree of ambiguity in Gabirol’s text simply does not supply prima facie support for the claim that Gabirol’s doctrine of Will rules out a commitment to emanationism on his part. This, though, seems to be the reading of Gabirol that is held to follow from Gabirol’s notion of ‘Will’ not only by many medieval Augustinians, but even by contemporary medieval scholars. Consider, e.g., Weisheipl’s assumption in this respect:

As for...the primacy of God’s creative Will (Voluntas creatrix), Avicebron clearly wishes to eliminate philosophical emanationism as proposed by Alfarabi, Alkindi, Avicenna, Algazel, and the Liber de causis, by making the Divine Will the supreme cause in the production of the universe. Avicebron makes the Divine Will the mediating link between God and the universe. Thus the cosmic process is not a necessary and impersonal flow or radiation of all things from the First Principle but a voluntary activity of the Divine Will.\textsuperscript{55}

While perhaps it is true that Augustinian doctrines of Will denote a non-emanative context, the same simply cannot be said in any obvious way for the doctrine of Will in Gabirol, an 11\textsuperscript{th} century Jewish Neoplatonist in the Arabic tradition. Consider, that is, the pervasiveness of emanationist sensibilities among Jewish medieval thinkers: while both the Neoplatonic Isaac Israeli and the more decidedly
Aristotelian Moses Maimonides share little in common other than a general distaste for the other's mode of analysis, they both admittedly share in upholding at least certain key emanationist assumptions regarding the cosmos. Regardless of what these two philosophers think about the relationship between God per se and the cosmos, and even to the extent that they share in viewing it as genuine creation ex nihilo, they nonetheless both admit emanative processes of cosmic unfoldings within that reality. In fact, that they do so as Jewish philosophers in the Arabic tradition of analysis is hardly remarkable. Given, then, that Gabirol is himself a Jewish philosopher in the Arabic tradition, there is no prima facie reason to think that he would have differed in this most basic regard from the majority of other Jewish and Islamic thinkers (Neoplatonic as well as Aristotelian) of the 9th – 12th centuries. To be sure, most medieval Christian thinkers (Augustinians included) had rejected the Arabic Plotinian emanationist system of intermediary causes of existence; instead, they looked to God alone as the single and direct source of all existence. There is, though, no reason to suggest a similar rejection of Plotinian and Arabic emanationism in Gabirol. In positive support of his prima facie emanationist sensibilities, consider the extent to which Gabirol’s cosmos clearly reveals a Plotinian sensibility: Following upon the Plotinian cosmic structure, we find in Gabirol a universal Intellect, three World Souls (a modification here of Plotinus’ single World Soul), followed in turn by the realm of Nature. Given Gabirol’s clear employment of the very pieces of the Plotinian emanating cosmos (together with some additions), there seems no reason to deny a commitment on his
part to Plotinian emanation – if not at the level between God and His ‘first
creation,’ then certainly at all lower levels of cosmic generation from Intellect and
‘downwards.’ That is, while perhaps Intellect itself is ‘created’ in a genuinely non-
emanative sense, there can be no question that Gabirol – like Israeli and other
Neoplatonic Jewish writers – holds a firm commitment to the emanation of all
lower levels of reality out of said Intellect, just as we find in Plotinus.56 Gabirol’s
notion of Will, hence, in no way precludes our treating his system in emanationist
terms.

In fact, that the Neoplatonic pieces of Gabirol’s cosmos should prima facie
be taken to work along Plotinian emanative lines seems clear in light of Gabirol’s
own lavish employment of emanative imagery and language. Things are said to
‘flow’ from one level of reality to the next, with Intellect giving way to Soul(s) and
the latter to Nature, just as we might expect in a Plotinian context. There is a heavy
employment of light and shadow metaphors, and the importance of the notions of
‘proximity’ and ‘distance’ from ‘the source’ would additionally seem to indicate
that an emanative framework is in place.

Furthermore, consider our earlier reference to Ibn Ezra’s recounting to us a
Genesis commentary by Gabirol in which prime matter is aligned with the river at
the heart of the Garden of Eden.57 This image clearly invites us to envision the
unfolding of reality along the lines of an emanative flow. In addition to this, we
find that Gabirol’s poem ‘Ahavtikha,’ on at least one reading, seems to uphold the
idea that ‘matter’ – albeit it in a secondary role to God – is the fountainhead of existence. This too seems to clearly support an emanative sensibility at the heart of Gabirol’s thinking, on which it is not God but something inferior to God that serves as the proximate source of existence in the cosmos. Additionally, we may find support for an emanative reading of Gabirol by adverting to Ibn Daud, Gabirol’s main Jewish medieval critic. While Ibn Daud is (as we have already seen above) quite critical of Gabirol’s metaphysical views, there are two ways in which his critique supports our contention that Gabirol is best seen as having held emanationist commitments:

1. As we have stated above, medieval Jewish thinkers – both Neoplatonists like Israeli and Aristotelian ‘rationalists’ like Maimonides – held some variety or other of an emanationist view of the cosmos. Ibn Daud (himself following a more Aristotelian path) is no exception. In his treatment of Gabirol, he makes no mention of Gabirol’s having rejected the standard Jewish and Arabic emanative view of the cosmos, which it would seem he certainly would have mentioned if he (or other medieval Jewish and Arabic thinkers) thought Gabirol to have held such an extremely minority view.

2. Furthermore, as Kaufmann has noted, it seems that Ibn Daud’s respect for and interest in Gabirol’s poem ‘Ahavtikha’ reflects his judging that
poem to have uniquely captured certain difficult truths regarding the source of motion in the cosmos. In particular, Ibn Daud interprets Gabirol’s poem [rightly or wrongly] as implying (at line 11 of that poem, which we treat in chapter 2) that it is the angels’ love of God that leads to their motion, and, by extension, to all motion in the cosmos. While not revealing for us one way or another what Ibn Daud thought Gabirol’s view was with respect to God’s role as efficient cause of existence (viz., whether or not God’s causal efficacy is mediated by some series of emanating intermediaries), it would seem that he would not have taken such an interest in Gabirol’s poem had he considered Gabirol’s views about the general workings of the cosmos to be at odds with his own Arabic emanative sensibilities.

As such, it seems that we have reason to suppose that, at least to his Jewish medieval readers, Gabirol was not seen to deny the basic Arabic emanationist tendencies which governed the thinking of thinkers as diverse as Israeli, Maimonides, Avicenna, and Ibn Daud.

In light of all of these considerations – and especially in light of the fact that, as we have seen, Gabirol’s description of Will is highly ambiguous to start with – there are really no prima facie grounds for assuming that his doctrine of Will implies a rejection on his part of Neoplatonic and Arabic emanationist
mechanics. As a final point in this regard, consider at a purely conceptual level, the philosophical reconcilability between ‘Will’ and Neoplatonic emanation as we find, for example, in Plotinus’ own [admittedly unexpected] discussion at Enneads 6.8 that explicitly describes the One’s having willed Itself freely. This certainly suggests to us the viability within Neoplatonic thinkers of describing even the most thoroughgoing emanationist system in terms of ‘Will.’

And so for this reason together with all the others we have already examined, there is no good reason to think that Gabirol’s doctrine of Will rules out his embrace of at least some variety of genuine Neoplatonic emanationism. In light of all we have said in support of Gabirol’s emanationist leanings, as well as in light of what we know is Plotinus’ own recognition of the reconcilability of Will and emanation, the burden of proof is on anyone who takes Will and emanation to be at odds in the context of a text steeped in Arabic Neoplatonic traditions. That the assumption that ‘Will precludes emanation’ seems simply to be taken for granted by scholars and figures in the history of philosophy would seem to be tacitly based on a circular process of reasoning: the FV focuses on Will and Universal Matter and would appear to be Augustinian in nature; Augustine’s notion of Will stands in opposition to Neoplatonic emanation; therefore, Gabirol’s notion of Will, along proper Augustinian lines, precludes emanation. Of course, this line of reasoning represents an obvious methodological error. While it might be true that the FV’s doctrine of Will and UH stand in opposition to Neoplatonic Arabic emanation in
the hands of the Christian Augustinians who picked these doctrines up, this in no way settles the issue of whether in fact Will and UH, as they are penned by an 11th century Jew in an Arabic emanationist context, likewise preclude emanation.

Prima facie, it would seem that they do not. In fact, in providing a fuller account of Gabirol’s project in chapter 2, we argue that it is the very mechanics of Neoplatonic cosmology within Gabirol’s world-view that may be seen as the key to unlocking his UHist program in its fullest sense.

* * *

1 Pines 1982.

2 FV 1.10, p. 13, 26-27.

3 Consider, e.g., Rahman’s classic rendering of Avicenna; Rahman 1958; 1981. See, though, my “Proclean ‘Remaining’ and Avicenna on Existence as Accident: Neoplatonic Methodology and a Defense of ‘Pre-Existing’ Essences,” (forthcoming), where I address how the scholarly treatment of Avicenna’s ‘essence + esse’ analysis as a crude precursor to Aquinas own ‘esse as act’ analysis has led to undue criticism of Avicenna’s project.

4 This ‘whether’ question is based philosophically on Aristotle’s ‘to hoti’ classification at Posterior Analytics 2.1.

5 FV 5.24, p. 301, line 16 ff.

6 S. Munk 1859, 111, fn. 1.

7 F. Rahman 1965, 220.

8 Cf. Munk 1859, 110-12, footnotes.

9 For Arabic fragments corresponding to FV 1.7, p. 9, and 1.7, p. 10, see Pines1977, 52. That ‘essentia’ in general (i.e., and not just in the case of the proper name ‘First Essence’) corresponds to the Arabic ‘dhāt’ can be seen in a number of the Pines fragments, (in Pines 1977), as well as in additional fragments in Fenton 1976, 294-6.

10 This idea that God, in His essence, is existence is, of course, a well-rehearsed theme in the history of philosophy. For its extensive development in Avicenna, see Goichon1937.
See Boethius’ (480 - 524/5) short treatise the ‘Quomodo Substantiae’ (also known as the De Hebdomadibus). For references, see Pessin 1999.

For the suggestion of decidedly Neoplatonic and Neopythagorean resonances in Boethius, see Pessin 1999, and my “Boethius and the Neoplatonic Good: Hebdomads and the Nature of God in the Quomodo Substantiae,” forthcoming.

For the suggestion of a direct textual influence of Avicenna on Gabirol, see Pines 1982.

Aquinas, De Substantiis Separatis, V.22; Lescoe, 37.

Lescoe, 35.

Lescoe, 35.

Aquinas, De Sub. Sep., VIII. 38; Lescoe 51.

Aquinas, De Sub. Sep., VIII. 43; Lescoe, 55.

Aquinas, Commentary on Liber de Causis, Prop. 9, (Saffrey 1954, 64); Guagliardo/Hess/Taylor, p. 71. My emphasis.

Taylor 1979.

On the other hand, it is, of course, plausible that Aquinas is, knowingly or otherwise, indisposed to the FV for other reasons, and hence, it is possible that his willingness to see the Liber’s ‘matter / form’ analysis as innocuous, but the FV’s as unacceptable represents some sort of polemic that we no longer have access to. In this regard, it might be noted that unlike William of Auvergne who thought that the author of the FV was a Christian, Aquinas and Albertus Magnus thought him to be a Muslim; (Weisheipl 1979, 245).


On this issue, see my treatment of Israeli, in “Jewish Neoplatonism…..,” forthcoming.


FV 1.10, p. 13, 15 – 17.

FV 1.10, p. 13, 26-27.

FV 1.17, p. 22, 16 – 18.

31 Goheen 1940, 47-8.

32 See Goheen 1940, 51.

33 FV 4.1, p. 212, 2-3.

34 FV 4.1, p. 212, 7-8.

35 See, e.g., FV 5.28, p. 308, 7-12, where form is distinguished from Will in terms of the former’s being finite.

36 See e.g., FV 4.14, p. 243, 10ff.

37 FV 5.26, p. 305, lines 5-6.

38 FV 5.26, p. 304, line 24 - p. 305, line 3.

39 FV 5.42, p. 333, 4-5.

40 FV 4.8, p. 230, 4ff.

41 For the employment of Matter as a ‘negative’ principle, see Corrigan 1996; and for a somewhat more exalted notion of Matter in Plotinus, see Dillon 1992.

42 See FV 1.12 and elsewhere for Gabirol’s claim that sometimes ‘matter’ is used to refer to a substance – in particular, as we will see in our treatment of genus below, it is the term used to describe a substance qua ‘being superior to’ (and hence, standing in the role of sustainer of) some lower substance.

43 FV 4.9, p. 231, 4ff.

44 FV 4.9, p. 230, 19-23.

45 See Gersh 1978, 27 ff.

46 See Lewis 1961, 33 (“...That Will called to the void and it was cleft asunder...”). For related analysis of this line (though with the suggestion that this ‘void’ -- or ‘nothingness’ -- refers to Avicennian pre-existent essence), see Pines 1982.

47 See Bialik and Ravnitsky 1924, Vol. I (Shirei Hol), poem number 48, p. 112; (also in Yarden 1975). For treatments of the text which – although differing in key respects -- both agree that ‘pre-existence’ preceding ‘existence’ is the theme of this poem, see Kaufmann 1972 and Schlanger 1965. For differing interpretations of this poem, see Ibn Daud 1919, p. 61, and Liebes 1987.

48 For a more detailed treatment, see my “Jewish Neoplatonism...,” forthcoming.

49 For a key summary of this development in religious thought, see Clarke 1952.


51 Pines 1977, p. 52.
The translation of ‘mawjūd’ here by the quite general existential term ‘esse’ seems a bit odd, especially since, based on the correlation of Arabic to Latin philosophical terminology elsewhere, we might expect ‘esse’ to translate ‘wujūd’ (i.e., existence, akin to ‘anniyya’); i.e., the philosophical categories of ‘mawjūd’ and ‘wujūd’ are generally defined as ‘ens’ (‘an existent’) and ‘esse’ (‘existence’) respectively (see Van den Burgh 1960, D’Alverny 1959). Here, though, ‘esse’ is used to define ‘al-mawjūd.’ (Preceded, as it is, by the definite article, ‘mawjūd’ might at least be taken here in the generic sense, as ‘Substance,’ in the sense of ‘the category of “Substance.”’ Taken as the generic ‘Substance,’ the translation as ‘esse’ (or, existence) seems a bit easier to reconcile).

For the claim that Will might not be a separate hypostasis, see, e.g., Hyman and Walsh 1973, 357; and for an extended defense of this reading of Gabirol, see Liebes 1987.

While Will precedes Wisdom in the Fons Vitae, in his poetic corpus, Wisdom precedes Will: for discussion, see Scholem 1939 and Liebes 1987. Furthermore, for an analysis of ‘Will’ used almost interchangeably with ‘Word’ in Gabirol (at Fons Vitae 5.36, p. 322; 23 and p. 323; 17), see Pines on the influence on Gabirol of Saadiafl (cf. Pines 1989, p. 126); yet, see Goldziher’s treatment of ‘ANN iraht’ (Divine Word) in HaLevi for the suggestion that Divine Word is decidedly absent in Gabirol, perhaps representing a polemic with Kalam (cf. Goldziher, 1905); (but, in this latter regard, see Altmann who suggests that ‘amn’ is not even a genuine hypostasis in Halevi (or in Saadiah), but it is, rather, the act of receiving a Divine Revelation in the heart of the prophet; (cf. Altmann 1969).

Weisheipl 1979, 249.

See references to Wolfson and Altmann on Israeli in my “Jewish Neoplatonism…” (forthcoming) for a clear sense that Israeli, while perhaps committed to the non-emanative creation of Intellect (the first creation) is nonetheless clearly committed to emanation in general (as is Maimonides, as we have mentioned above).

Friedlaender 1964, 40.

See Enneads, 6.8.12, 13, 21. And so, e.g., at Enn. 6.8.12: “…ou gar aboulôn energei…” (“…for he does not act unwillingly…”). In this and related passages, Plotinus’ discussion centers on the notion of ‘boulêsis’ and its applicability to the One.
CHAPTER 2

UNIVERSAL HYLOMORPHISM, INTELLECT, AND THE COSMIC PROCESION

2.1 UH V. UH: AUGUSTINIAN VS. GABIROLEAN METAPHYSICS OF MATTER

We have thus far distinguished Aristotle’s metaphysics from religious metaphysics of contingency, and the latter into the ‘non-UHist’ (or ‘negative’ contingency) and UHist (or, ‘positive’ contingency) varieties. Now we must demarcate Gabirolean UH from Augustinian UH in a way that turns on Gabirol’s commitment to emanationism.

We have already seen reason to place Gabirol amidst the Arabic emanationists, and certainly as regards his views on the relationship between Intellect and all lower realities. As our thesis is only concerned with the relevance for UH of a commitment to emanation from the level of Intellect and downward, we need not in the current project concern ourselves with the implications of Gabirol’s describing the relationship between God and Intellect itself in terms of creation ex nihilo.
Let us assume, then, that in this emanationist sensibility Gabirol does indeed differ from Christian Augustinians. To see further, however, the sense in which this emanationist backdrop sheds an entirely different light on the metaphysics of UH, consider the following 4-way comparison in which an Augustinian, in spite of sharing with Gabirol a ‘positive’ contingency metaphysics which rivals the ‘negative’ contingency metaphysics of Aquinas and Avicenna, must nonetheless be grouped with Aquinas and in opposition to Gabirol when we entertain matter in Gabirol’s context in terms of emanationist sensibilities:

[Note: Arrows represent relations of ‘sustenance’ (though, in the case of the relationship between matter and substance Figure 2.1, not ‘existential sustenance’):]

Augustine

God / Divine Nous (containing all Logoi / reasons)

Substance

Matter / Seminal Reason

Aquinas

God / Divine Nous

Substance

Avicenna

God / Divine Nous

Intelect 1

Substance

Gabirol

God / Divine Nous

Intelect 10

Substance

First Matter

Will

[Figure 2.1] [Figure 2.2] [Figure 2.3] [Figure 2.4]
To see the most pressing aspect of this comparison, consider:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Augustine</th>
<th>Aquinas</th>
<th>Avicenna</th>
<th>Gabirol</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Existential</em> Sustaining Factors which are not God or the Divine Nous:</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1^3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Figure 2.5]

We need not here pursue the various differences between Augustinian and Thomistic metaphysics; for our current purposes, it suffices to note that while Aquinas’ ‘negative’ contingency metaphysics lacks Augustine’s robust notion of an essentially shared matter underlying all things (an idea in Augustinian contexts that additionally involves a metaphysical system of seminal reasons), both systems can be seen to align the source of existence with the Godhead (or with some Divine intermediary, such as the Divine Light in Augustinian contexts), as both similarly share in the generally Aristotelian intuition that ‘matter’ does not represent the source of existence within an ontological analysis. In contrast to this, the shared material core of all existents in Gabirol’s UHist analysis is, I suggest, best seen as describing what is within an emanationist ontology a genuine non-God (and non Divine) source of existence in the cosmos, viz., the most sublime moment of Intellect itself. And so, turning to the relevant comparison of our two positive contingency theorists:
Existential Sustaining Factors
Which are not God or the Divine Nous and which are identical with the essentially shared ‘matter’ of the ‘positive’ contingency (i.e., UHist) account:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Augustine</th>
<th>Gabirol</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Figure 2.6]

It is in this sense that I demarcate Augustinian UH from Gabirolean UH. In effect, looking to our above comparisons we can appreciate just how far apart Augustinian UH and Gabirolean UH are when we consider Gabirol from within an Arab emanationist context: whereas Augustine’s matter represents the lowest piece of his ontological puzzle, matter for Gabirol represents the highest piece. This sits well with what we have already seen to be Gabirol’s decided privileging of the material over the formal in his metaphysical account. Furthermore, the specific identification of matter with a grade of Intellect sits well with what we will see later in this chapter to be Gabirol’s likening of matter to the Divine Throne – a Throne which, as we will see, indeed emerges as a grade of intellect in various Jewish traditions available to Gabirol.

Whereas Augustine’s material substrate stands in opposition to the higher source of existence, our identification of Gabirol’s matter with the highest moment of Intellect suggests, rather, an identification between Gabirol’s matter and a grade
of pure Being Itself. On my proposed understanding of Gabirol’s UH – drawing explicitly upon the emanationist sensibility suggested by the FV’s own recourse to emanationist ideas, as well as by Gabirol’s Arabic Neoplatonic context – universal matter denotes Intellect itself, that cosmic existential source which for Neoplatonic emanationists (but not for Augustinian thinkers) is a most generic cause of Being in which all things are existentially sustained (and which is, furthermore, distinct from the Godhead (as well as from His Nous)).

Furthermore, seen in this way in relation to the existentially sustaining Intellect itself, universal matter might by extension be seen as picking out the simplicity of Being which underlies each and every substance – a simplicity of Being which each thing has precisely in virtue of its sustenance in Intellect. It is in this way that my treatment of universal matter (and hence, of UH) substantively differs from Augustinian accounts (even if one were to artificially amend the above Augustinian diagram [figure 2.1] to have matter appear ‘above’ the analysandum-substance). On my treatment, matter is aligned with the purest grade of substantial Being – that grade which is ‘pre-determined’ and ‘pre-formed’, and which is, as such, reflective of the purest unity of Intellect in all things.

In aligning ‘universal matter’ with Intellect (and by extension, with the simplicity of Being – or substantiality per se – that all other substances have in virtue of their sustenance in Intellect), there emerges a picture of Gabirol which is, thus, importantly different from anything suggested in an Augustinian context where, on the contrary, matter emerges in opposition to pure Being. It is in this
way that we suggest a total departure between Gabirol’s notion of matter and the notion of matter in an Augustinian context. As such, whereas UH – taken in the ‘positive’ contingency terms we have suggested in chapter 1 – suggests that ‘all things share a matter’ in both an Augustinian and a Gabirolean context, our above analysis allows us to distinguish those claims between our two traditions as follows:

**Augustinian UH:** All things (ultimately existentially sustained by God and his Divine Light) are composed of a material substrate which is filled by God with seminal reasons, which reasons are then actualized as formal determinations. Matter, which all things share, is the lowest piece of our ontological puzzle; the Divine source of Being is the highest.

**Gabirolean UH:** All things are existentially sustained in the pure Being of Intellect; since Intellect in this way stands as a sustainer for all substances, we say that it is a shared ‘matter’ at the heart of all things. Matter, which all things share, is, as source of Being, the highest piece of our ontological puzzle (albeit secondary to the transcendent role of God).
Whereas in the Augustinian context, ‘matter’ does not refer to the existential sustaining cause in the ontological system, my thesis maintains that for Gabirol, this is precisely what matter refers to. As we’ve seen above and as we will see in greater detail below, this identification of matter and Being in Gabirol’s doctrine of UH is precisely an outgrowth of taking quite seriously the emanationist nature of Gabirol’s thought.

*

2.2 BEING AND INTELLECT: A NEOPLATONIC HERITAGE

In our analysis, we are stressing the identity between Intellect and matter, and are specifically interested in Intellect’s ‘material’ contribution to the cosmos as its providing all things with a sustaining ‘pure unspecified Being.’ Let us here lay some groundwork for rendering plausible our treating Intellect’s ‘material’ contribution to all things as an unspecified Being per se. To see this, we must first stress the distinction in Gabirol between Universal Intellect and all other substances, including all other intellects (angelic or otherwise). Unless otherwise specified, I mean by adverting to ‘Intellect’ (with a capital ‘i’) this Universal Intellect. Intellect in Gabirol is something higher than any of the planetary separate intellects; in fact, for Gabirol, those separate intellects stem from Intellect.\(^5\) Intellect, for Gabirol, contains within it all reality in potency, as it is likewise diffused throughout all actualized reality; as he describes it:
...the substance of intellect is a universal substance, simple in the
extreme of simplicity and spirituality, and accordingly, it is diffused in
all things and united with all things...⁵

Furthermore, akin, we might say, to the Plotinian Universal Intellect, Gabirol’s
Intellect is the source of esse in all things, including other intellects. This can quite
generally be adduced from the clear role of Intellect in Gabirol’s FV as the
emanative source of the complete realm of Souls and Nature. Furthermore, as
Gabirol tells us, the form of Intellect is such that it:

...gives esse and ‘that it is’ (quoddity) to every form, just as matter⁶ is
that which gives all substantiality.⁷

In its giving esse to all things, and certainly in its role as emanative source of all
lower realities in the cosmos, we might see here the conceptual vestiges of
Plotinus’ own Intellect, which he identifies with Being itself. To be sure, Gabirol
(like other Arabic Neoplatonists) at least prima facie revises this Plotinian idea:
‘Being’ is seen by Gabirol as the hallmark of the God above Intellect (unlike in
Plotinus where the ‘One’ above Intellect is ‘beyond Being’). I have elsewhere
rehearsed the possibility of nonetheless seeing in Gabirol’s Arabic Neoplatonic
Intellect an Intellect which is, in the end, one with ‘Being’ in the same sense as is
to be found in Plotinus.⁸ For our current purposes, let us leave aside the
conceptual affinity (or lack thereof) with Plotinus, and let us simply note the
presence within Arabic Neoplatonic texts of a clear divide between two
overarching kinds of Being; we find a bifurcation of anniyya (Being) into ‘anniyya faqaṭ’ (‘Being Only’) (or ‘anniyya mahḍa,’ ‘Pure Being’)⁹ on the one hand, and ‘created Being’ on the other, where the latter is identified first and foremost with Intellect, the ‘first created Being.’ While GABIROL’s cosmology differs in many ways from other texts of Arabic Neoplatonism, we nonetheless find that GABIROL too treats Intellect – the first occurrence of ‘form in matter’¹⁰ composition – as the first¹¹ created¹² being. Regarding this Intellect, though, we might say that it emerges as both a ‘being’ (or, an ‘ens’), as well as a grade of generic ‘Being.’ For, regardless of whether the Godhead is Himself described as ‘Being’ (i.e., ‘Pure Being,’ ‘Being Only,’ ‘True Being,’ and the like), or whether He is seen as ‘above Being’ (as is the case for Plotinus’ One),¹³ Intellect is on all these accounts is not only the first being (ens) (in the sense of the first composite, limited, dependent-on-another thing), but is also a brand of generic Being per se in which all other composite entities subsist. It is this sense, then, that ties in with GABIROL’s claim that Intellect is the cause of esse in all lower things,¹⁴ and quite generally with his depiction of Intellect as emanating forth all lower reality. In effect, we may hence use a capitalized ‘b’ in ‘Being’ (and ‘e’ in ‘Esse’) in referring to the unique ens that is Intellect.

And so, while Intellect is a limited ens from the point of view of its having a cause (viz., it is caused by the First Cause, God), from the point of view of all lower existents, it is generic Being Itself and source of Being in the cosmos. We
may in this regard see Intellect as a veritable to on Platonic form of Being
(though one which primarily contains all other forms in it in a unified state of
potency, as we will see in chapter 3).

2.3 MATTER AS EXISTENTIAL ESSENCE: FURTHER IMPLICATIONS

As we will elaborate upon more fully in what follows, our account of
Gabirol, in identifying matter and the sustaining role of Intellect, sees all things
first and foremost in terms of their ‘pre-[determinate] esse’—or, in other words, all
things are primarily seen in terms of the most exalted, purely existential presence in
them of the Intellect that sustains them. It is this unspecified esse, then, which is
the universal matter at the core of each and every thing.

We have already noted how in thus identifying the material with the source
of Being, we have demarcated Gabirol from Augustinian versions of UH. Note
also how in this regard our account of Gabirol’s matter (the essence shared by all
things) differs from the Avicennian metaphysics of ‘pre-existent essences’: for
Avicenna, the ‘pre-existent essence’ is not identified with a grade of unspecified
Being per se, but stands, rather, in opposition to the source of Being per se. That is,
for Avicenna, the role of Being—or, the existence which is ‘added’ to the essence
(in Avicenna’s terminology)—is the conceptual foil to the ‘pre-existent essence,’
and that to which it is ‘joined.’ On my reading of Gabirol, though, pure Being (as
it is found in Intellect) is the first essence of each substance: the Being of Intellect
is the ‘pre-existent’ essence, in the sense (to be elaborated upon in this chapter) of
representing a higher pre-determine (i.e., material) existence within each thing.

The first essence of each substance is the pure potency of Being which it gets from Intellect, a pure state of substantiality per se which is prior to any determinate (i.e., formed, specified, actualized, etc.) state of a being.

In aligning the material with the purest existential foundation, my treatment of Gabirol thus finds lacking Pines’ suggestion of an affinity between Gabirol’s matter and Avicennian pre-existent essences. Similarly, my account is able to dispense with Brunner’s contrast between an existential treatment of matter and one which treats matter instead in terms of indeterminate essence;\textsuperscript{15} for, on my schema, matter is at one and the same time unspecified Being per se and, as such, an indeterminate essential core, the vestige of Intellect’s most potential state in each thing.

2.4 Unity of Matter

Consider how the account of UH we have offered thus far coheres with Gabirol’s own privileging of the material over the formal, as well as with his describing the material as a unified essence in all things. For, taken as referring to Intellect, the material substrate certainly comprises a unity at the heart of all existence. Within a Neoplatonic emanationist setting, Intellect is indeed a single shared essential aspect of all things in its universal manifestation as the underlying pre-determined Being per se (or, existential substrate) of all things. And so, we
have uncovered a clear sense in which there is a single universal matter at the
essential core of all beings.

In fact, differing from the Augustinian sense of a material substrate as well
as from the Avicennian sense of a pre-existent essence, our equation of Gabirol’s
universal matter with the most potential state of Intellect has provided us with a
literally numerically identical material substrate at the heart of all things! More,
that is, than just essentially one in all things, Intellect – as the hypostasized
ontological foundation of all things – emerges on our account as a numerically
single thing in / by which all things are essentially existentially sustained. We have
certainly done justice to Gabirol’s claim that “we find only one matter for all
things.”

In light of what we have seen, then, we can conclude that the claim to a
single shared matter in the context of Gabirol differs not only from anything we
find in the negative contingency metaphysics of Avicenna, but from anything we
find in even a positive contingency metaphysics in an Augustinian context.

*  

2.5 UNIVERSAL MATTER, FORM AND WILL IN GABIROL

In the remainder of the project, we turn to elaborating upon the thesis that
Gabirol’s matter be taken as a reference to the existentially sustaining role of
Intellect. We must of course examine the implications of this notion of matter for
Gabirol’s related notions of form and Will. Consider the following illustration as a
guide to my complete account of the roles of matter, form and Will in Gabirol’s
world-view:

[Note: Arrows represent causal relations of the form ‘cause → effect’):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>God</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>↓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Will (=downward process of manifestation, or, in this case creation ex
  nihilo or emanation as in Plotinus); (as a ‘Form[ing]’ – and
  unfolding of forms from a more unified and ‘hidden’ state to a
  more manifest and actual state) |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>[Universal] Intellect (= Universal Matter)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>↓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Will (=downward process of manifestation; as a ‘Form[ing]’ – and
  unfolding of forms from a more unified and ‘hidden’ state to a
  more manifest and actual state) |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rest of Substantial Cosmos, which includes:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lower intellects (angelic and human)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rational Soul and rational souls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitive Soul and sensitive souls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetative Soul and vegetative souls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realm of Nature (Celestial Bodies and Bodies in the Terrestrial Realm of Elements)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Figure 2.7]

Here we have a thoroughly Neoplatonically ‘vertical’ metaphysical schematization
in which ‘Will’ denotes a downward processive moment, and in which the
‘conjunction’ of matter and form (discussed in chapter 1) denotes a vertical cause’s
relation to its lower effect. Note how this emanative schema supports our
identifying universal matter (or, the universal tendency to ‘sustain’) with Intellect and, by extension, with the pure existence which each thing has in virtue of its sustenance in Intellect – a pure existence in each thing which sustains its various formal determinations. Here, universal form is best seen in alignment with Will as depicting the downward processive tendency towards greater plurality – a tendency precisely at play in Gabirol’s notion of ‘being sustained’. In effect, ‘universal form’ (or, the universal tendency to ‘be sustained’) here denotes the relation which holds between a substance’s determinate formal attributes and its higher (or, ‘prior’) pure existence, or substantiality per se. Form signifies having aspects of self which ‘are sustained,’ a notion which in turn highlights the manifestation of plurality in each and every non-God substance. In effect, the presence in each substance of ‘matter and form’ hence signifies their having a less than perfect pure existence – or, one which has become determined. This in turn signifies within non-God substances an insurmountable plurality, a plurality entailed by their admitting at one and the same time of ‘sustaining’ and ‘being sustained’ relations.

Taken in this way, UH is a variety of contingency metaphysics: adverting to dual ‘sustaining’ / ‘being sustained’ tendencies in substances immediately alerts us to how different they are from the absolute necessity of the per se existent God. However, in light of the evidence we have already seen for taking UH as a brand of ‘positive’ contingency metaphysics (in particular, Gabirol’s commitment to a single matter essentially shared by all), we identify this ‘sustaining’ capacity as some one thing in all substances. Intellect – described by Gabirol as the first substance and
the emanative source of Soul and Nature – emerges as a perfect candidate; Intellect is that most generic universal Being which, in the Neoplatonist’s emanative worldview, is the single essential core – and existential foundation – of all other substances. That all things exhibit a ‘sustaining’ (or material) capacity may hence be seen as adverting precisely to the foundation of all things in Intellect – or, we may say, to the manifestation of Intellect in each thing. To be sure, Intellect is at once the source of each thing’s pure existence (which sustains its determinations), as well as the source of each thing’s formal determinations (which are sustained in its pure substantial existence). For, as we learn:

...the essence of intellect is the specification of all things and the form of all things, and it follows from this that all is in its essence...¹⁷

However, it is the purely existential substantiality per se which is both Intellect’s own ‘prior’ nature as well as Intellect’s first ‘essential gift’ to each substance. Formal determination, on the contrary, is at once illustrative of the secondary nature of Intellect (i.e., of its own tendency towards plurality), and as such is manifest as the ‘posterior’ aspect of each substance (i.e., the forms which a thing derives from Intellect are secondary, posterior and inferior to the pure substantiality which it derives from Intellect).

Whereas universal matter, then, points us to the pure simplicity of Being (which is the primary manifestation of Intellect in all things and is that by which things are able to sustain their various formal determinations), universal form and
Will both point us to the processive force in the cosmos related to the manifestation of greater and greater plurality (i.e., the determination and formality which characterize things and which, while themselves arisen from Intellect, are the secondary manifestation of Intellect in things; they are the ‘sustained’).

This privileging of the material over the formal sits well with Gabirol’s own perplexing claim (already touched upon in chapter 1 and to be treated in greater detail below) that universal matter is descendant directly from the First Essence, whereas form is arisen instead from Will (or Wisdom), a modification of said Essence. Gabirol here not only reveals to us that the material is prior to the formal as the Divine Essence is prior to Will, but furthermore that the priority of the material is a direct manifestation of the simplicity of the Godhead, whereas the posteriority of the formal is, precisely in its link to Will, related to a modification of that Divine simplicity. My account follows precisely in this spirit in seeing the material as the purest, most simple pre-formal manifestation of Being in each thing – a pure Being which stands as a most exalted and existentially simple aspect at the heart of even the most plurally manifest substance. The manifestation in each thing of Intellect’s pre-formed substantiality per se is the manifestation in each thing of that which is closest to the Divine Essence because most devoid of formal determination and (hence) plurality. Each of Will and the formal hence indicates the anti- (or post-) material ‘downward’ tendencies in things (and in the cosmos) towards greater plurality, manifestation and act.
On the proposed reading, Will (as well as universal form) refers to a cosmic dispersive force, and not to an hypostasis per se, whereas universal matter refers to the purest non-dispersive state of Intellect (and, by extension, the purest existential state of each subsisting substance). As such, our final analysis of Gabirol aligns most closely to Figure 1.5 in chapter 1, with neither ‘form’ nor ‘Will’ denoting independent hypostases per se (and with matter denoting a moment of Intellect). Note how any semblances of ‘horizontal’ or ‘parallel’ realities of matter and form (as seen above in Figures 1.1 – 1.4, but also below in our treatment of Brunner [cf. Figure 2.12]) are absent in this analysis (as well as in our depiction of this analysis in Figure 2.7). Will here is precisely a ‘vertical’ power intermediating ‘between the extremes’ of higher and lower realities – between vertical causes (which are ‘matters’) and their effects (which, as we’ve seen in chapter 1, may be called ‘forms’), as well as between each individual substance’s own more ‘material’ and ‘formal’ ‘moments’ (the ‘material’ signifying within each substance the manifestation of the purest, pre-determined existential unity of Intellect, and the ‘formal’ signifying a substance’s specified and hence plural reality). Just as any higher vertical cause can be called the ‘matter’ to its lower effect (as we’ve seen in chapter 1), so too we may also call any ‘prior’ moment within a given substance (viz., its Intellect-derived pure existential substantiality per se) its ‘matter.’
In effect, we may detect the emergence of Intellect as the denotation of ‘universal matter’ in two related ways:

(1) Analysis with respect to the Cosmic Hierarchy of Causes: Intellect is the highest vertical cause within the emanative framework of the cosmos, and as such, it is ‘universal matter.’

As itself a vertical cause to all other substance-effects, Intellect can be seen not only as matter (since, as we’ve seen, for Gabirol ‘matter’ names any higher vertical cause), but can, as the highest such cause, be seen as the universal matter — as that vertical cause (or essence) which is shared by all existents (except for God). And so:

\[
\text{intellect} = \text{Universal Matter; it is the shared ontological essence to all things.}
\]

Since all substances in the cosmos stand as effects to the cause which is Intellect, we may say that Intellect is matter and all substances are form with respect to it. We have already seen support for this sort of sensibility in chapter 1 in Gabirol’s claim that a vertical cause may be called a ‘matter’ to its effect (which may in turn be called its ‘form’). We will rehearse this intuition more fully in chapter 3 where we will examine the fuller Neoplatonic causal analysis of genera as the matters to speciated (or ‘formed’) effects. Here, though, we may conclude that
Intellect may be identified as 'universal matter' in the sense of being the shared ontological (i.e., existential) essence to all things. We may simply equate the existential purity of 'Intellect' with 'universal matter' in this respect.

(2) Analysis with respect to a given Substance: Inasmuch as all substances are themselves sustained in Intellect, universal matter denotes that prior and pre-determinate, pre-formal, pre-actualized aspect of each and every substance which is its manifestation of the pure, undefined existential unity of Intellect. As we have said above, it is this pure existential substrate which is Intellect's own truest nature and which, as such, is Intellect's first 'gift' to each and every substance. It is this pure, undefined substantiality per se which is that in virtue of which each substance exists first and foremost. It is also this pure, undefined substantiality per se which is each substance's 'potency to be formed' or 'actualized' as this or that determinate substance.

Inasmuch as it is the purity of Intellect which is the manifestation in each substance of its own purest existential 'moment,' it is Intellect which is the true denotation of the underlying matter attributed to each individual substance.

Intellect emerges from both of these related analyses as the sustaining capacity (or 'part') of each and every substance and as the universal matter behind all substantial existence. In effect, Intellect is the materiality of all things in that it
first and foremost supplies all things with their Being simpliciter, or, Substantiality per se, which is, we may say, that 'force' within each thing by which it sustains its formal determinations and actualization.

*

Seeing things in these terms easily makes clear Gabirol's privileging of the material over the formal. For here, the 'material' signifies the highest and purest cosmic manifestation of Intellect in all things. In fact, we may liken the presence of this materiality in things to their Neoplatonic moment of 'remaining' — that purest, pre-processive and most unified state which characterizes each substance first and foremost. The formal, on the other hand, signifies the processive foray into greater plurality, greater determination, limitation and finitude — both as a cosmic description of the descent from the unity of a vertical cause to its lower effect, as well as a more microcosmic description of the tension within any individual substance between its manifestation of Intellect's pure unity and its lower manifestation of formal plurality. It is for this reason that our earlier chart (Figure 2.7) signifies 'First Form' as a 'First Form[ing]' — as a process of cosmic unfolding which results in a proliferation of actualized effects (and, hence, of determination and limit) in the cosmos.

*

Following upon these ideas, we may speak more generally of universal matter as a cosmic tendency (or, as giving rise to a cosmic tendency) in the
universe, and, microcosmically, in each and every substance, as we may likewise
speak of ‘universal form’ as a cosmic tendency (or, as giving rise to a cosmic
tendency). Where universal form signifies within things their ‘downward’
tendency to manifest determinate (and limited) states of existence, universal matter
may be seen to signify an ‘upward’ tendency of substances – a tendency to be as
close to Intellect (the ontological source and state of complete potency) as possible.
That is, in pointing us to the manifestation of Intellect’s purest existential potency
in each thing, universal matter may be seen not only to signify each substance’s
Neoplatonic moment of ‘remaining,’ but the impetus within said substance towards
the Neoplatonic moment of ‘return’ as well. For, representing a thing’s own
highest (and most essential) reality, the presence of Intellect’s existential
sustenance stands within each thing as that highest state towards which it must
strive. Taken in this sense as resulting in a ‘cosmic tendency’ in all things, we may
say that universal matter signifies a cosmic ‘upward’ tendency (a tendency towards
the most unified state) in Intellect and, by extension, in all of the things which have
Intellect as their existential essence. In sections 2.5.1 and 2.5.2, we turn to
exploring these ‘tendencies’ in greater detail, and how they link up with a variety of
overt Neoplatonic themes in Gabirol’s text.
2.5.1 THE UPWARD MATERIAL TENDENCY: NEOPLATONIC REMAINING AND THE REVERTIVE CONJUNCTION WITH INTELLECT

We may say of all things first and foremost that they have a tendency to 'remain in Intellect.' This manifests itself in Intellect as its own static, pre-causal, pre-processive, pre-active moment, in which it is a pure state of unity that has all forms present in it as one (cf. chapter 3). In turn, this state manifests itself in all things lower than Intellect in their tendency to revert, or 'return,' to Intellect. In Arabic accounts in general, and in Gabirol's FV in particular, this may be described as the desire for 'conjunction,' or, as Gabirol sometimes puts it, for 'unification' with Intellect. In terms of our above analysis, we might say that this 'tendency' in all things to unite with Intellect is in fact derived from the presence within them of 'indeterminate Being,' that most potential state which is, in them, a vestige of the pure potency of Intellect. We might say that the 'desire to conjoin with Intellect' is tantamount to the desire of a substance to return to – or remain in – its most potential state, to a state more exalted and encompassing than the determinate reality that is manifest in its actualized state. So, for example, we might say that an individual soul wishes to break free of its individuality, as it similarly wishes to break free of the 'motion' associated with Souls; it seeks rather first and foremost to be Intellect, viz., a pre-individual, pre-Soul state tantamount to a universal compresence of all forms in unity, which is neither this nor that, and is, rather, all things potentially. We may say, as such, that the particular determinate substance
(in this case, a soul) wishes to revert to the state of unspecified substantiality, or indeterminate Being per se, as it is found in Intellect.

Our talk in this regard of a desire to return to (or, remain in) Intellect can be linked to what is described by Gabirol as the ‘conjunction’ (but even more strongly as the ‘unification’) with Intellect which each individual must strive for. Consider in this regard two of the extant Arabic fragments, in which we find both the ‘conjunction’ and the ‘unification’ descriptions respectively (as well as the notion of ‘Return’):

1) Consider the passage at FV 1.2, p. 4, (p. 23 ff.),

D: Quae est ergo finalis causa generationis hominis?
M: Applicatio animae eius cum mundo altiore, ut unumquodque redevat ad suum simile.

In this exchange, we find a specific description of our phenomenon not only as a ‘return,’ but as, in fact, an ‘applicatio.’ Turning to the Arabic fragment which corresponds to this passage, we find:

wal-ʾilla(tu) t-tamāniyya(tu) fi kawn(i) l-insāni hawa ittišāl(u) (=applicatio)
nafṣi bal-ʾēlami l-ʾalēē(i) ʾinda rujū(i) kulli shakl(in) li-šaklihi...¹⁸

98
The final cause of being (kawn = being, esse) is the conjunction (šišāl) of soul with the upper realm, with the returning of every image to its exemplar.

In this regard, we might note that 'applicatio' translates 'šišāl' (i.e., the technical term for 'conjunction' with Intellect).  

2) In a passage corresponding to FV 3.56 - 57, (p. 204 ff.), we find that this conjunction is described as a 'unitio[nem] tuae essentiae cum essentiis earum,' or, 'a unifying of your essence with them (i.e., with the essences of the intelligible substances).’ Here, the notion of 'unifying’ is described in the Arabic as an 'ittihād.'  

It might be noted that this is, in fact, the very term used by Sufi mystics to describe the 'unity with God.'

This Sufi overtone certainly suggests that the state of conjunction with Intellect is for Gabirol an event of universal cosmic import, an event understood now in our terms as a renouncing of particular, determinate selfhood and the becoming one with that higher universal hypostasis.

*  

It is this 'tendency to remain in Intellect,' then, that we associate with the universal matter in each thing. In its manifestation in Intellect itself, we may further identify this with Plotinus’ own analysis of Intellect’s pre-plurality moment as ‘intelligible matter’ (see Enneads 2.4.1-5, 5.4.2 and 5.5.4). Once again, in its manifestation in things below Intellect, this material tendency is the tendency
which things have for conjunction (or, unification) with Intellect – the tendency to best exhibit, that is, their own ‘most potential’ (and hence, most essential, most exalted and most unified) state.

It is precisely this upward tendency toward the state of Intellect (which I’ve identified as a material tendency in all things) which can be identified as the mechanism at play in such claims in Gabirol’s text as:

What is the final cause of the generation of man? The conjunction [applicatio] of his soul with the higher world, such that everyone might return to his resemblance / like [simile] (Arabic, mith?24).

*  

Intentio appetitus et amoris est inquisitio applicationis cum amato et unionis cum illo;25

The meaning of desire and of love is the striving after conjunction with the beloved and unity with it...

*  

...similitudo est inter materiam et ceteras substantias et factorem primum...motus harum substantiarum est motus desiderii...;26

...there is a similitude between matter and other substances and the Factor Primum...the motion of these substances is the motion of desire...

*  

100
...inquirere factorum primum et moveri ad illum inditum esse omnibus...  

...to inquire after the *Factor Primum* and to be moved towards him is instilled in all things...

While some of these quotes speak of an upward tendency towards God, the *Factor Primum*. we might nonetheless note that in Gabirol's context, as in medieval Arabic and Neoplatonic accounts in general, it is Intellect that marks the end-state of this upward striving; it is Intellect which is the sought after object of the 'conjunction' (*ittišāl*) or 'unification' (*ittiḥād*).

*

To support our specifically associating the above sorts of upward tendencies in Gabirol's corpus with universal matter (as our treatment suggests), consider the following statement of Gabirol's commitment to the Neoplatonic Return, and the specific reference to 'universal matter' in the last line:

Master: ...And in general, when you want to imagine these substances, and how your essence is diffused in them and how it comprehends them, in order that you might lift up your intellect to the highest intelligible, and in order that you might purify and extricate it from every stain of the sensible, and in order that you might free it from the captivity of nature, and in order that with the power of your intellect you might attain the highest thing [i.e., knowledge?] that is possible for you to apprehend regarding the truth of intelligible substance, until you are as if stripped of sensible substance and become as if ignorant of it...
Disciple: I have already done your bidding, and have elevated myself through the grades of the intelligible substances, and have strolled amidst their pleasant gardens [lit. flowery pleasantness]...

Master: You have observed and understood well. But if you should lift yourself to the first universal matter and [are] illumined by its shadow, you will then see the most wondrous of wonders...

In this Plotinian based passage, we get a most vivid account of the Neoplatonic ‘Return’ – the final ‘end-state’ of man, a phenomenon which we know in the Arabic Neoplatonic context of Gabirol’s work most generally to be tantamount to conjoining with Intellect. On our analysis, ‘universal matter’ in this passage refers to the existential purity of Intellect per se, or, by extension, to that state of self which is most reflective of, and which most tends towards, said state of Intellect. This passage is especially useful for our purposes as Gabirol here explicitly describes what we know elsewhere to be the ‘return to’ or the ‘conjunction with’ (or, ‘unification with’) Intellect in terms of a ‘lifting’ to the level of ‘universal matter.’

*

2.5.2 THE DOWNWARD FORMAL TENDENCY: NEOPLATONIC PROCESSION AND THE PLURALITY OF ACT

We may further say that all things have a tendency to ‘proceed away from Intellect.’ This manifests itself in Intellect as its own causal, processive, active
moment, in which it moves from its state of pure potency and unity to yield more formally diversified effects. This manifests itself in all things lower than Intellect in their own respective causal, processive and active tendencies, tendencies by which they themselves are manifest in their own formal diversity, and by which they additionally give rise to further effects, thus adding to the cosmic plurality and diversity.

*

2.5.3 SUMMARY: UNIVERSAL MATTER, UNIVERSAL FORM AND INTELLECT

In our above analyses, we have seen two inter-related ways in which we may see the identification of ‘universal matter’ and the pure unspecified unity of Intellect:

1. Inasmuch as Intellect sustains all things, it is universal matter.

On a related note:

2. Universal matter is seen in the unspecified substantiality and Being per se of each and every substance.

From these considerations, we have derived a most general sense in which we may speak of a ‘material impulse’ and a ‘formal impulse’ in the cosmos,
impulses which are precisely rooted in the presence in each thing of Intellect's own 'remaining' (or, 'essential,' 'material') and 'processive' (or, 'active,' 'formal') capacities.

The dual cosmic tendencies we have described, then, are had by all things (including intellects and Intellect itself) precisely in virtue of their relationship to Intellect. Consider again though that it is not as if this materiality in things stems from one source, and this formality from another; rather, it is the processive emanation from Intellect to all things which, in virtue of its own dual tendencies, leads to these dual tendencies in all things. That is, Intellect is in one way a pure potency. It is this pre-causal, pre-actualized state which is manifest as a materiality in all things, linked, that is, to the resultant unspecified Being or substantiality per se which a thing gets from Intellect. Intellect, though, is additionally something that proceeds forth into actualization, as it is also the source of forms in all things. It is this causal, actualizing, emanating state that is manifest as a formality in all things. In fact, while our above analyses have associated the 'unspecified Being' from Intellect with materiality and the processive moment with formality, we may alternately say that the Being which all things receive from Intellect is itself is on the one hand a materiality and on the other hand a formality; and so:
Being of Intellect =

Pure Potential state of Remaining in Intellect + Processive Downward Impulse

(Materiality) (Formality)

[Figure 2.8]

Inasmuch as all substances are infused with the Being of Intellect they are automatically infused with a certain ‘material / formal’ duality. That is, combining the sense of Intellect’s being the shared ontological essence to all things together with the fact of its own dual tendencies for ‘remaining’ (i.e., a material tendency) and ‘proceeding’ (i.e., a formal tendency) we may hence say of all other substances that they too (i.e., in receiving their esse from Intellect) are permeated by these dual tendencies of materiality and formality. In the case of all substances (including other intellects) lower than Intellect itself, these dual tendencies are manifest in a tendency to strive toward Intellect on the one hand, and to proceed further from Intellect on the other. Intellect itself likewise reveals these two tendencies just as much as do the things that follow from it. The only difference, obviously, is that in its ‘material’ moment, Intellect ‘remaining in Intellect’ remains in itself, and in its ‘formal’ moment, Intellect ‘proceeding from Intellect’ proceeds from itself.

*
We might graphically summarize all of these findings, as follows:

![Diagram of First Essence, Intellect, Unspecified Being, Difference, Forms, Actualizations, Universal Matter, Universal Form, Substance, Materiality, Formality, Substance]

[Figure 2.9]

Or, to see the role of 'materiality' and 'formality' even more clearly:

![Diagram of First Essence, Intellect, Unspecified Being, Materiality, Formality, Substance]

[Figure 2.10]
Note the 'monistic' sensibility at play in this depiction of Gabirol's world-view: matter and form are here not 'parallel hypostases' of some inexplicable sort which are 'glued together' in some sense, but are, rather, descriptive of various stages within the monistic emanative schema which begins in Intellect. Whereas universal matter points to the unspecified Being which things have in / from Intellect, universal form points to the specification of said Being as part of the vertical process of emanation in the cosmos. Since both the unspecified Being and unfolding of forms (to yield determinacy) stem from Intellect, we have here a monistic picture on which 'from one comes one': Matter and form are not two hypostases which float around in Gabirol's world-view, but are descriptive of different stages — the static vs. the active — in each substance and in the cosmos as a whole. The microcosm of each substance thus mirrors well the macrocosmic structure of emanative reality which itself proceeds from unity (and stasis) to plurality (and act). This mirroring within an individual substance of the overall cosmic rhythm sits well with what we know quite generally is a keen interest in 'macrocosm' : 'microcosm' correlations in Gabirol's world-view.30

Here, then, the material is linked to the purest existential essence which all things share, whereas the formal is seen as the modification of said pure existential essence. This essential nature is an unspecified substantiality that is one and the same for all species because it is the essence of Intellect itself that infuses all things. As for the formal, while we may say that the fact of 'modification' (i.e., the fact of determinacy) is common to all species, nonetheless, the specific
modifications (or, formal determinations) will, of course, differ from species to species. While we may speak, hence, of a single shared materiality, we may only speak of a shared formality in a more qualified sense.

Our thesis highlights well the supremacy of the material over the formal.

This, of course, fits well with what we've seen in chapter 1 (and will continue to see in chapter 3) are the undeniable respects in which the material is privileged over the formal in Gabirol's lexicon of hylomorphism. Our reading additionally fits well with Gabirol's own treatment of the formal and active as representing a movement of sorts away from the essential material state. That is, not only does Gabirol clearly speak of the 'essence and act' of things in a way which clearly mirrors his talk of the 'material and formal' (as at 4.4), but, furthermore, that distinction seems to revolve around an association of the formal or active with a procession of sorts, just as we have urged. To see this, consider:

...it is not possible that matter without form have existence [esse]
absolutely, but if it ought to be said that it has existence [esse], let it be said to have existence [esse] in potency, viz., that when it receives form, it will go forth to effect and will have existence [esse] in act...32

Consider the link that emerges between the following notions:

Receiving form
Going forth into effect
Existing in act
Having esse 'absolutely'
And hence, the opposing links which emerge (tacitly or otherwise) between:

Matter
Existing in potency
Not having esse ‘absolutely’

We will return to this notion of ‘absolute esse’ later in this chapter. Let us here, though, focus on the implications in the above passage for distinguishing between the formal and the material in terms of ‘active’ and ‘static’ states in a way which sits well with our proposed analysis of Gabirol’s UH. Notice how ‘matter,’ the simple noun, is contrasted above not with ‘form,’ but with the ‘receiving of forms’ and the ‘going forth into effect.’ This alerts us to an important point: it is not simply that the term ‘matter’ corresponds with the term ‘potency’ and the term ‘form’ with ‘act,’ but that, as such, matter is primarily, for Gabirol, denotative of a static (and as such, superior and prior) state, whereas ‘form’ is denotative of a process of forming, a process of actualization. ‘Potency’ and ‘act’ are not only different states but, more accurately, one is a state and one is the moving from one state to another, or, at least, the ‘having moved’ from one state to another. We may roughly speak of act as implying a motion of sorts, which is not at all to be found in the notion of potency. As a motion, act is both parasitic upon and secondary to the static state of potency upon which it follows.

*
In further support of our thesis (and especially the implication that, at the microcosmic level, each individual substance reveals an upward [or material] and a downward [or formal] tendency), consider Gabirol’s sensitivity to a thing’s indeed having dual aspects or tendencies, the higher of which is related to the essential, and the lower of which is related to the finite. This sensitivity can be seen quite clearly in his description of Will: Will, Gabirol tells us, is infinite essentially, but finite ‘with respect to act.’ Its act, seen in its causal propensity to yield an effect, results in an increase of limitation and formality, with a concomitant decrease in unlimited, infinite potency that it has ‘essentially.’ In effect, this description clearly reveals to us Gabirol’s sensitivity to treating of dual cosmic moments or tendencies precisely in terms of ‘potency’ (as the higher, ‘essential’ — or material — moment) vs. ‘act’ (as the lower processive moment towards effect and greater plurality). It is our current suggestion, then, that universal matter and universal form be understood as respectively introducing the ‘potential’ (or, ‘essential’) vs. ‘active’ (or ‘formal’) capacities in things in the sense of dual tendencies towards potency (or, ‘remaining in Intellect’) and towards activity (or, ‘proceeding from Intellect’) respectively. These dual tendencies, then, are not only centered upon a thing’s relationship to (viz., going towards or going away from) Intellect, but, furthermore, it is its receiving esse from Intellect (i.e., their being sustained in Intellect) that is the causal source of these tendencies to start with. As we have seen, while Intellect in its formal capacity is the ontological source of specific
forms (of ‘catness’ for cats, color for surfaces, etc.), in its material – or essential – aspect, we may say that Intellect is the source of unspecified substantiality itself.

Seen as the primary source of substantiality (since, it is itself, as Gabirol tells us, the first substance), Intellect may hence be seen as the cosmic source of unspecified substantiality; it is also the source of formal specifications, but is the source of unspecified substantiality in a more prior and superior sense. Considering the nature of unspecified substantiality, we may identify it as the indeterminate Being which things have prior (so to speak) to their formal specifications. Of course, this is not a temporal priority. However, stressing the priority of sorts of indeterminate Being over specified Being allows us to incorporate Gabirol’s clear privileging of the material over the formal, and the essential over the actual. Intellect’s role as universal matter is more exalted than its role as supplier of forms, thus implying that the unspecified state of each thing is more exalted than its specified state. Of course, this may be said in a number of ways, the reverberations of which can be found throughout the FV in the privileging of one set of characteristics over another; in this vein, consider the interchangeable terms which may be used to support the following most general claim in a Gabirolean context:
The **material** state of each thing is more exalted than its **formal** state.  
**potential** actual  
**hidden** manifest  
**unspecified** specified/determinate  
**unspecified Being** being such and so  
**unspecified Substantiality** being such and so  
**essential** active / actual / actualized

[Figure 2.11]

All of the terms on the left denote a state of reality that is more exalted than the state demarcated by the terms on the right.

*

**2.5.4 SUMMARY: CONJUNCTION, WILL AND THE VERTICAL PROCESSION**

Continuing the summary of our thesis, we find that the ‘conjunction’ between matter and form (seen also in chapter 1 in our analysis of Will as the ‘intermediary’) is not to be thought of ‘horizontally’ as some inexplicable joining of two parallel puzzle pieces of sorts, but rather, taking matter as the reference to the more potential state of subsistence and form as the reference to the more active state which arises from that more potential state, the conjunction between the two must be seen as denoting the *vertical procession* from higher to lower existential states in virtue of which things move from potency to act. We thus take the description of Will as ‘mediating between the extremes’ (which we’ve addressed in chapter 1) as marking the downward processive motion of all substances.

Furthermore, as we have seen, Will may in this overall context be understood as the ‘intermediary between the extremes’ in two related but slightly different senses: On
the one hand, macrocosmically, looking at the relationship between a higher
‘vertical cause’ (in this case, Intellect) and some lower effect (let us say Soul), Will
marks the processive tendency from one substance (as the higher cause) to a lower
substance (which is its effect). On the other hand, microcosmically, Will marks the
tension between an individual substance’s own ‘higher self’ (typified by its own
unspecified Being and its tendency to revert towards Intellect) and its own ‘lower
self’ (typified by its actual specification, as well as its tendency to act as cause to
further effects). In both cases, Will signifies the ‘vertical’ joining of higher
(material) and lower (formal) states – either within an individual substance per se,
or between a substance and some other substance which is its lower effect. This,
then, in contrast to those depictions of Will which would seem to suggest some sort
of ‘horizontal glue,’ as it were, between two inexplicable ‘things,’ matter, and
form. It is this misleading sense which seems to come across from the sort of
diagram we will see in Brunner (cf. Figure 2.12), but also from most of the
diagrams suggested in chapter I (cf. Figures 1.1 – 1.4), on which matter and form
are depicted as roughly ‘parallel’ realities of some sort, separate from Intellect, and
‘joined together’ in some sense. In my above account, I hope, in specifically
having more consistently adverted to a vertical Neoplatonic causal schema, to have
provided a clearer sense of the dynamics of matter, form and Will in Gabirol’s
world-view.

*
Following upon this analysis on which both Will and ‘form’ mark off the downward processive tendencies in the cosmos, we may also better appreciate Gabirol’s rooting of ‘form’ in ‘Will’: as he says,

...Will is infinite considered only according to its essence without action, but it is not infinite according to form which flows forth from it [est defluxa ab ea]...\(^{34}\)

And furthermore:

...matter is created from Essence, and form is from the property of Essence, viz., from Wisdom and Unity....\(^{35}\)

(where ‘Unity’ in the phrase ‘Wisdom and Unity’ may be taken to refer to Will, the ‘First Active Unity’).

Leaving aside the hypostasized way in which Gabirol inevitably speaks of Will, we suggest that it is nonetheless descriptive in his tradition of the downward processive force in the cosmos, and is, as such, associated with act (note: it is called the ‘active unity’) and is the source of form (in virtue of which it is said to be ‘finite with respect to act’). Will, act, form and finitude all clearly go together for Gabirol, as they do on the account of UH we have put forth.
In this regard, consider also:

...Matter is as if the throne [cathedra] of unity, and Will, the giver [donatrix] of form sits [sede] in it and reposes [quiescit] above it...\(^{36}\)

We will address the implications for our thesis of this correlation between matter and a ‘throne’ in what follows. Here, though, we see once again the relation between Will and the ‘giving of forms’ in support of our association of Will as the downward processive, actualizing, formalizing force in the cosmic emanation.

* 

2.6 APPLYING THE THESIS: SOME CONCLUSIONS, SOME PROBLEM-SOLVING AND SOME SCHOLARLY DEBATES

In the remainder of this chapter, we will address three particularly vexing descriptions of matter in Gabirol’s text, showing how our thesis is able to accommodate each in turn. These three descriptions are:

(a) Existens Per se: on the one hand universal matter is described as getting ‘esse’ from form, but it is still seen as being ‘existens per se,’ even in isolation from form;
(b) First Essence: on the one hand matter is said to arise from Will along with form, but on the other hand it is said to arise directly from First Essence, with form coming only from Will, a modification of that Essence;

c(c) Divine Throne: Gabirol associates universal matter with something esoterically referred to as the ‘Divine Throne.’

In addressing these issues, I will additionally stop along the way to further place my thesis within a larger scholarly context. I have already shown how my thesis differs in its treatment of Gabirol from Pines’ account of essences and Weisheipl’s account of Will. In the course of what follows, I will turn to demarcating my thesis from some of the views espoused by Brunner and Schlanger. While I will address Schlanger’s view in the context of my discussions regarding the ‘per se existens’ status of matter and its relation to the Godhead in sections 2.6.2 and 2.6.3, let us begin here by briefly addressing the views of Brunner.

2.6.1 BRUNNER’S ANALYSIS OF MATTER

In his analysis of the ontology of UH, Brunner treats matter in Gabirol as a principle of sameness (viz., the indeterminate essence of substantiality) which is manifest in each of the various substances in the hierarchical chain of beings.
Like Brunner, I too see matter as the genus of substantiality manifest in all substances. However, my thesis goes a step further in identifying this genus with the highest moment of Intellect, and as such, with a cosmically unique hypostasized reality. As such, on my reading, matter, for Gabirol, is not just present in all substances – as it would appear to be for Brunner – on analogy with the way in which each higher reality is – in the emanative schema – present in each lower reality, but rather, matter is present in all substances in virtue of this emanative dynamic: as the existential foundation which is the generic Being of Intellect itself, matter is present in each thing as its most essential and indeterminate existential core; it is present in each thing in the sense that Intellect – the most essential and indeterminate existential core – is present in each thing.

In urging a sense in which matter at once denotes Intellect and (as such) the existential core of each substance, my reading succeeds in uniquely reconciling Gabirol’s notion of universal matter as an ontological feature of substances on the one hand together with his talk of a cosmic ‘first universal matter’ as some sort of
cosmic hypostasis on the other: On my account, the cosmic matter (which is to say, the generic pre-specified Being of Intellect) is precisely that which we refer to in adverting to the universal materiality of any given analysandum in an ontological UH analysis. In contrast, Brunner’s account does not seem to likewise see the ontological notion of materiality as of a single piece with the notion of the cosmic first matter. This is evidenced in Brunner’s not treating the notion of ‘universal matter’ within Gabirol’s analysis of substances as denoting an hypostasized genus in its own right, but yet treating ‘first universal matter’ as a genuine hypostasis of sorts above Intellect. In this latter regard, we find: “La matière et la forme sont toutes deux unes en tant qu’universelles et toutes deux multiples dans les êtres qui procèdent de leur composition…..”,38 a description which Brunner accompanies with the following diagram:

La matière universelle  La forme universelle  avant leur union

\[ \text{l'intelligence} \]
\[ \text{l'âme} \]
\[ \text{le corps} \]

après l'union de la matière et de la forme

[Figure 2.12]

Unlike my analysis which precisely sees the core materiality of any substance as a manifestation of a certain cosmic material reality (viz., the
indeterminate Being of Intellect), Brunner does not seem to explicitly unpack his account of Gabirol's analysis of materiality in substances in terms of the cosmic 'first matter.' As such, my thesis makes more explicit the identity between the universal material core of each substance adverted to in a UHist analysis and the cosmic 'first matter.'

Another difference between my account and Brunner's emerges from comparing the diagram in 2.12 with my own diagram of Gabirol's world-view in 2.7. That is, as is the case for diagrams 1.1 - 1.4 which I presented in chapter 1, Brunner's depiction of the cosmic topography in Figure 2.12 seems to suggest some mysterious cosmic 'parallel' puzzle pieces, matter and form, which are 'glued together' in some strange sense by Will (yielding Intellect (the first substance) first of all). In contrast to this depiction of Gabirol's cosmic space, my explication (as evidenced in Figure 2.7) at no point reverts to depicting matter or form as separate 'ones' above Intellect, as it similarly does not revert to depicting matter and form as some sorts of parallel 'things' to be 'connected' by Will in a 'horizontal' relation of sorts. Instead I have treated matter as the purest existential unity of Intellect in each thing (including in Intellect itself as well as in other intellects), and have treated form (and also Will) as denoting the downward emanative procession (or, the resulting effects of said downward emanation). And our schematization (see Figure 2.7) hence employs no misleading 'parallel' depictions of matter and form.
We might also note that whereas I conclude that matter in Gabirol (in being identified with the purest moment of Intellect) is to be identified with a grade of pure Being, in contrast, Brunner rejects an 'existentialist' reading of Gabirol and explicitly distinguishes the matter, or 'indeterminate essence' (i.e., the essential substantiality of each substance), from pure existence. The material essence is, Brunner stresses, a 'quid supérieur,' not a 'fondement existentiel.' On my reading, though, this 'indeterminate essence' is in being identified with the most potential state of the hypostasized Intellect – expressively a 'fondement existentiel'; the material essence, on my thesis, is to be identified with the Being simpliciter – the indeterminate existential foundation (or, the 'potency to be such and so') that Intellect emanates forth to all substances first and foremost. On my approach, then, a breakdown between 'quid' and 'esse' can be seen not only in the Godhead, but also already in the unique unity of Intellect's material moment and, by extension, at the core of each and every substance. Since each substance subsists first and foremost in virtue of the indeterminate, unified Being of Intellect, each substance hence has a pure existential foundation as its first matter, or first essence. This of course fits well with Gabirol's own description of matter's itself being directly descendant from God – and, more specifically, from God under the name "First Essence": Inasmuch as God is the purest Being of all (so pure, in fact, that Plotinus and other Neoplatonists see fit to describe Him as 'beyond Being' altogether), He is the source of the next purest Being – the highest moment of Intellect – which is
in turn the emanative source of Being to all other substances. It is this foundational existential essence which is, on my account, the universal matter.

* 

In the remainder of the chapter, let us turn to addressing each of the three prima facie perplexing descriptions of matter enumerated at the beginning of section 2.6, and how my account allows us to effectively accommodate each of them in turn.

2.6.2 EXISTENS PER SE

In spite of Gabirol’s repeated claims that ‘esse’ comes from form, he nonetheless clearly maintains that matter per se – in isolation from form – has a certain existence on its own. Even in his enumeration of the various characteristics of matter, we find:

\[\ldots\text{sit per se existens, unius essentiae, sustinens diversitatem, dans omnibus essentiam suam et nomen}\ldots\]

\[41\]

\ldots it is ‘existing per se’, of a single essence, sustaining diversity, giving to everything its essence and name.
Clearly and unambiguously, ‘per se existens’ is one of the characteristics of matter for Gabirol. We might note that even Augustine’s account may in fact be seen as holding a similar commitment; this can be seen inasmuch as he describes the ‘unformed matter’ out of which the world is created as not absolutely nothing, but midway between nothingness and formed matter, as he likewise describes it as ‘est non est’. Leaving aside how one might treat these notions in an Augustinian context, on our treatment of Gabirol this ‘pre-formal’ moment can be seen to highlight the moment of ‘remaining’ in cause – an important philosophical moment in an emanative schema which reveals each substance first and foremost in its most potential and most exalted state, drawing directly, as it were, upon its sustenance in Intellect. In fact, we may accommodate the description of matter’s being ‘existens per se’ in Gabirol in two ways in line with our above sense of ‘universal matter’ as denoting (within an emanative context) both the most potential state of Intellect and (by extension) the most essential ‘upward’ tendency within each thing:

1. Since Intellect is universal matter to all substances, universal matter is ‘existens per se’ in the sense of being ‘Being per se.’ That is, taken as the source of esse, we may see Intellect in Gabirol’s Arabic tradition as akin to the Form of Being itself, as we have rehearsed above. In effect, that the Neoplatonic Intellect emerges as something at least akin to the ‘to on’ of Plato’s Sophist is a commonplace of emanationist ontology. To find ‘Intellect as Being,’ we need look no further than Plotinus who treats the hypostasis ‘Intellect’ as the first occurrence of Being in the
cosmos. In Gabirol’s more immediate Arabic Neoplatonic context, we find the identification of Being with Intellect even in those traditions which, at least prima facie, treat God Himself as ‘Being,’ as we have already elaborated upon above.

2. Seen furthermore to highlight an upward tendency (towards Intellect) in all things, universal matter may be described in terms of ‘existens per se’ in a similar sense in which in Proclean metaphysics we describe a substance as ‘subsisting per se’ when we want to describe it ‘in its own right.’ In effect, on our analysis, a substance would be seen as ‘existens per se’ (or, ‘in its own right’) when viewed in its most essential reality, viz., qua its own existential link to the unspecified, pre-determinate potency of its cosmic source, Intellect. Although qua its actual specified state it is seen as an act of esse, in and of itself a substance ‘exists per se’ in its pre-causal state of greatest potency. Our next chapter will provide more of a context for this notion.

*  

Our account of UH thus certainly upholds Gabirol’s description of matter as ‘existens per se’ without form. Our account, then, is more sensitive to Gabirol’s world-view, it would seem, than Gundissaliaus’ treatment. Gundissalinus (the Latin translator of the FV text) (or, at least some later Latin editor) at one point in the text seems to deny matter any existence whatever, in spite of the Hebrew version of the text admitting of no such claim in Gabirol. That is, there emerges a
corruption in the Latin text at 1.13, just a few pages after the 1.10 description of
matter as explicitly ‘existens per se.’ The corruption at 1.13 – constituted by an
important difference between the Latin version of FV and Falaquera’s Hebrew
version on this very issue of ‘existens per se’ — is reported by Goheen⁴⁶ to have
been pointed out to him by H. A. Wolfson in personal correspondence: where the
Latin reads “Non dicimus materiam habere esse nisi cum conferimus ei formam
spiritualem. in se autem non habet esse, quod habet cum adiungitur ei forma; et
hoc est esse in effectu,”⁴⁷ Falaquera’s Hebrew replaces the underlined text with “in
se autem non adapta ad existentia.” A look to the Hebrew text indeed indicates
this replacement; the Hebrew selection (with the key portion underlined) reads,

Ve-amman amrenu she-ha-yesod nimza kishe-tizaraf elav ha-zurah ha-ruhanit aval be-azmo eino
hagun le-meziut she-hu hagun lo kishe-idbaq bo ha-zurah, kilomar, ha-meziut bi-soal, aval im
hayah i efshar biltu hu hagun le-meziut aher, kilomar, ha-meziut ba-koah.⁴⁸

This Hebrew version, but not the Latin text, preserves Gabirol’s general
commitment to matter as ‘existens per se,’ a commitment which we know (from
explicit claim at 1.10 and elsewhere) that Gabirol held. In this regard, we suggest
considering also the passage at 5.9 which, even in its Latin form, lends support to
Falaquera’s version of the above text:
...If you imagine [aestinaveris] matter without form, it will not be disposed to having the property of esse [non erit apta habendi proprietatem esse] in the way it is disposed when it is composed of form [cum componiur formae]....

Here it is made clear that matter per se – on its own and in isolation from form – can be seen as ‘disposed to esse,’ just that it is not disposed in the same way as it is when it is enformed.

In further support of the claim that matter has a genuine per se existence in isolation from form, consider the nature and tone of the Master’s replies to the Disciple’s queries about matter in Book 4. At 4.4,50 in response to the Disciple’s wanting to know how matter can exist on its own, the Master does not rebuke his student with a firm “it has not existence on its own!,” but rather, he states that this will be addressed in Book 5. Similarly, when at 4.551 the Disciple asks if matter is able to exist on its own, the Master replies by asking “what is your intention in this question,” and then goes on to say, ‘Just [modo] know that matter is not able to exist without form, since a things’ existence [esse] is only from form.’52 In conjunction with his pushing off dealing with the question of matter per se existence till Book 5, and in conjunction, of course, with his ultimate description of matter as ‘existens per se’ without form, this tone of ‘modo’ seems to have the force of, “Just hold on till we get to the issue in Book 5! For now, let’s just say...
that matter only has *esse* from form.” In none of these exchanges does the Master simply deny matter any existence *per se*, which we would expect to find across the board if this were indeed Gabirol’s view.

* 

To make precise sense of the claim that matter be describable as a ‘*per se existens*’ *in spite* of Gabirol’s clear suggestion that *esse* comes from form, consider the issue in light of earlier analysis: Above, we have seen Gabirol’s denial of ‘absolute *esse*’ to matter, and his association of such *esse* instead with form. Associating the formal in this way with ‘absolute being’ is a notion that we might further relate to Gabirol’s elsewhere describing form as ‘perfecting’ matter. In both cases — whether form is seen in association with ‘absolute *esse*’ or with the ‘perfection of matter’ — we must take the role of form as purely descriptive of its determining capacity, and not as indicating any ‘superiority’ of the formal. As such, form’s ‘perfection’ (*perfectio*) of matter in the context of the FV should simply be taken in its most neutral sense of ‘completion’ — itself in the merely descriptive sense of ‘determination.’ Similarly, that form is associated with ‘absolute’ *esse* ought, within Gabirol’s text, be understood as a reminder of its ‘determinate’ and ‘limited’ nature. For, as we have stressed repeatedly, the larger context of the FV, in its privileging the ‘hidden’ and ‘essential’ over the ‘manifest’ and ‘active’ as well as in its grounding the ‘material’ directly in the Godhead (as we will discuss more later in this chapter) we find Gabirol’s privileging of the
‘material’ over the ‘formal.’ Taking ‘absolute esse’ in this context, then, in the same neutral sense of ‘determination,’ we might at one and the same time deny ‘absolute esse’ to matter, and yet nonetheless grant a kind of existence (viz., unspecified Being) to said matter. Furthermore, this approach allows us to clearly see matter as existing in a more exalted way—viz., as a pre-determined, infinite reality (in much the same sense that, as we have seen above, Will is said by Gabirol to exist in a higher, infinite way in its essence, but in a lower, limited capacity according to its act). ‘Absolute esse,’ we might say, is determinate, specified esse which can only come with the presence of forms (which are, after all, the ‘determiners,’ or ‘specifiers’), but ‘indeterminate esse’ is, for Gabirol, an even higher grade of existence at the heart of each and every thing. In fact, this ‘indeterminate esse’ is, for Gabirol, ‘existens per se.’ Making this distinction between ‘absolute’ and ‘indeterminate’ esse allows us, hence, to better understand Gabirol’s describing universal matter as ‘existens per se,’ in spite of his simultaneously associating esse (which we now understand as ‘determinate’ or ‘absolute’ esse) with the limiting presence of form. Understood as such, there is no prima facie conflict between the claim that matter is ‘existens per se’ and the claim that it receives existence from form.

*
2.6.2.1 SCHLANGER: EXISTENS PER SE AS DIVINE IDEA

Let us turn now to Schlanger’s account and how the analysis we have offered differs in its treatment of the ‘existens per se’ of matter. While neither Schlanger nor I treat Gabirol’s ‘matter’ as an independent hypostasis per se ‘above’ Intellect, Schlanger opts to treat it as merely an idea in the mind of God. And so, he states:

La matière n’est pas un être, elle est le substrat de l’être; elle n’est pas Dieu, elle existe dans la connaissance de Dieu. 53

Instead, I identify the ‘universal matter’ which is operative in Gabirol’s UH not with an idea in the ‘Divine Nous,’ but with the most potential state of Universal Intellect, the ‘first created substance’ in Gabirol’s text – a substance decidedly outside of the Divine Nous. My reading hence differs from Schlanger’s in affording ‘universal matter’ a more robust subsistence; on my reading, matter, in its description as ‘existens per se,’ need not be merely thought of as an idea in the Divine Nous. It is Schlanger’s failing to consider the ‘pre-determinate existence’ which characterizes the Neoplatonic Intellect that forces him to treat matter’s ‘per se existens’ as referring to its ‘existence as an idea in the mind of God.’ Instead, our analysis sees matter as a ‘pre-determinate existence’ which denotes the potency

128
of Intellect (and, by extension, the highest and most essential aspect of each and every substance). Our analysis thus allows for matter's 'per se existens' outside of the Divine Nous.

2.6.3 MATTER ARisen FROM FIRST ESSENCE, FORM ARISEn FROM A MODIFICATION OF FIRST ESSENCE

At 5.42, we find the claim that:

materia est creata ab essentia, et forma est a proprietate essentiae, id est sapientia et unitate,\(^5^4\)

Matter is created from Essence, and form is from the property of Essence, viz., from Wisdom and Unity.

This passage of the FV is prima facie at odds, it would seem, with Gabirol's other notion, viz., that Will is the source of matter and form.\(^5^5\) It is not clear how this can be reconciled with what here seems clearly to be the claim that only form stems from Will, with matter, rather, being said to come directly from Essence.

2.6.3.1 SCHLANGER REVISITED

Tying together with his decision to treat Gabirol's matter per se as a mere idea in the mind of God, Schlanger concludes that in the case of the above passage, Gabirol simply has not meant what he has said. That is, while the passage clearly states that matter is created by the First Essence (or God), Schlanger nonetheless
maintains that Gabirol really means that matter is created (in the sense of ‘formally determined into existence’ [as opposed to its initial state as an idea in the mind of God]) by Will, for:

La matière ne en acte que quand elle est unie à la forme, c’est-a-dire avec la création de la forme. Si par créer, il faut entendre exister, c’est la volonté qui crée la matière.

Matter is only actual inasmuch as it is united to form, that is to say, with the creation of form. If by ‘creation’ we understand ‘existence,’ it is Will that creates matter.56

As for the apparently obvious claim to the contrary in our above passage, Schlanger suggests that the description of matter’s arising from the Divine Essence is a concealment on Gabirol’s behalf of his real view, perhaps suggesting some concern on his part for the reaction of fellow religious thinkers; and so:

...l’affirmation – la matière est créée par l’essence première – ne peut être prise a lettre, et cela, nous l’avons vu, pour deux raisons: il n’y a de création que par la volonté, le parfait ne peut être créateur de l’imparfait. Cette affirmation désigne essentiellement la coéternité de l’essence première et de la matière. Ce sont peut-être des raisons de prudence religieuse qui ont empêché Ibn Gabirol d’être plus clair et d’affirmer plus nettement que la matière coexiste de toute éternité avec l’essence première.57
...the claim that matter is created by the First Essence can’t be taken literally, and this, in our view, for two reasons: (1) only Will ‘creates,’ and (2) the ‘perfect’ cannot be the creator of the ‘imperfect.’ This claim, then, essentially points to the coeternity of First Essence and Matter.
Perhaps there are some religiously prudent reasons that held Ibn Gabirol back from being clearer and from affirming more clearly that matter coexists eternally with the First Essence.

In this and his related view of matter per se merely being an idea in the mind of God, Schlanger holds two assumptions about Gabirol that our analysis allows us to reject, viz.:

1. something either has ‘formal existence,’ or it subsists only as an idea in the mind of God – there is no ‘middle’ existential option;

2. the act of ‘creation’ (inasmuch as it certainly denotes the inception of something’s existence outside the Divine Mind) hence must be said to have as its end product something that has formal existence.

In effect, since matter lacks ‘formal existence’ (a point on which we can all agree), Schlanger is hence led to conclude on the basis of ‘1’ that:
3. therefore matter is merely an idea in the mind of God, and as such, on the basis of ‘2’ that:

4. therefore Gabirol can’t really mean that matter per se (i.e., without form) is created (since, only formal existents can be seen as ‘created’), unless he means that it is ‘formed’ by Will.

In effect, this last conclusion runs on the following assumption: either we can describe matter in its ‘pre-formed per se’ state, in which case we can only say that it is an idea in the mind of God (and, as such, not yet ‘created’), or we can describe matter in its formed state, in which case we can say that it is ‘created,’ but in which case we must say that it is Will that is responsible (for Will is always responsible for the adding of form to matter).

We can reject both Schlanger’s ‘3’ and ‘4’ by rejecting both ‘1’ and ‘2’ in turn. Responding first to ‘1,’ our analysis has granted a space in Gabirol’s thought for a kind of real ‘existens per se’ which is neither ‘formal’ nor ‘in the mind of God’ but which, rather, corresponds to the Neoplatonic indeterminate, unified state of Being associated with the most potential state of Intellect (and by extension, with the essence of each and every substance). Turning to ‘2,’ our analysis similarly allows us to question Schlanger’s concomitantly limited notion of
‘creation.’ As long as we have found the possibility of a kind of existence which is between ‘subsistence in the Divine Mind’ and ‘formal existence,’ then we have found, it seems, a new possible end product of creation. That is, it is Schlanger’s assumption that only ‘formal existence’ constitutes real existence outside of God’s mind that forces him to conclude that creation can only be ‘of formally existing things.’ As such, since matter per se certainly does not have ‘formal existence,’ it easily follows on Schlanger’s picture that matter – in its per se state devoid of form – cannot be ‘created’! However, since we have urged a sensitivity within a Neoplatonic context to a ‘pre-formal existence’ as a kind of real existence outside of the mind of God for Gabirol, we have no similar need to conclude that ‘creation’ must yield only ‘formally existing’ end-products for him. So, while we agree with Schlanger that Gabirol’s matter per se lacks ‘formal existence,’ we needn’t conclude that it subsists only as an idea in the mind of God, and hence we can conclude that matter can be ‘created’ and ‘devoid of formal existence’ at the same time. As such, while I agree with Schlanger that Will is the ‘creator’ in the sense of ‘creating formal existents,’ my understanding of a Neoplatonic ‘pre-formal per se existens’ outside of the mind of God allows me to conclude that for Gabirol, the ‘creator’ of matter needn’t be understood as Will. This allows me to take Gabirol’s claim that matter is, indeed, created by the First Essence and not by Will at face value, and not (as Schlanger takes it) as concealing his true view.

On my reading unlike on Schlanger’s. then, Gabirol does indeed mean what he says when he says both that matter is ‘existens per se’ and that matter is created
by the First Essence (and not ‘by Will’); on my reading, this means that matter per
se (or, the most potential state of Intellect) stands outside of the mind of God as a
genuine pre-formal grade of existence (a state of ‘unity of forms’ to be detailed in
chapter 3). My treatment is preferable to Schlanger’s in that it does not resort to
having Gabirol say something that he took to be false. Especially given what we
know to have been Gabirol’s general disinclination to society and inter-personal
issues, it seems a stretch to suggest that Gabirol would intentionally obscure his
true views – in a technical work of philosophy no less – in order to avoid possible
backlash from his religious community.

*

2.6.3.2 Rooting the Upward Tendency in the Godhead: Reflections on the
Poem Ahavtikha

Let us here turn to addressing the fuller resonances of Gabirol’s claim that
‘matter comes from First Essence’ in terms of our analysis:

Where ‘universal matter’ is seen as referring us to Intellect, we can certainly
see the sense in Gabirol’s characterizing this material substrate as having its roots
directly in the First Essence. To be sure, taken in either a creation ex nihilo or
Plotinian emanationist sense, we may speak of a direct relationship between God
and Intellect; for, after all, in Gabirol as in other Arabic Neoplatonic materials,
Intellect is the ‘first created Being.’ Seen furthermore in terms of the tendency
which the vestige of Intellect instills in each and every substance, the claim that
universal matter comes from God, or First Essence, reveals for us that the ‘upward

134
tendency’ of things has its root ultimately in God. In effect, while we have said that things get this tendency first and foremost from Intellect, Intellect itself gets it from its own ‘upward-directed’ desire towards God, a desire which comes at least in part from God. To see this theme explicitly in Gabirol, we might consider again the quotes cited earlier regarding the nature of cosmic desire. In looking to similar quotes we find the idea that it is something of the Godhead Itself that all substances are receiving when they turn themselves upwards:

*Omne quod est appetit moveri, ut assequatur aliquid bonitatis primi esse*; ⁹⁸

Everything that exists desires to be moved, as it attains something of the good of the First *Esse*.

To further see the sense in which this cosmic desire is rooted in God, consider his poem, ‘*Ahavtikha,*’ (‘I Love Thee’): ⁵⁹
I love you like a man loves his one and only,
with all of his heart, all of his soul, and with his all;

And I rejoiced that your heart strove
to understand the works of God Who bore it [i.e., He who bore your heart];

And the issue is very deep and very distant;
Who will know it? Who will understand its Yesod (foundation)?

But, I will tell you something that I heard,
and its up to you to delve into its secret:

The Sages said: ‘The secret of the existence of Kol (All)
is [due to? because of? for?] Kol which has Kol in its/his hand’;

And it / he longs to make Yesh (existence) like Yesh,
like a lover longs for his beloved;

And perhaps this is what the Prophets had in mind
when they said: ‘His creation is sustained by] His Kavod.’

I have answered you with an account,
now go!, devise a proof which will support it.
Centering on the implications of line 11, consider: Ibn Daud in his medieval account and Kaufmann in his more contemporary treatment variously see line 11 as advertting to some cosmic thing’s own desire for God. Hence, on both of their readings, the key force of cosmic desire in the universe stems from the things that desire God (for Ibn Daud, angels; for Kaufmann, matter). On the other hand, Schlanger sees line 11 as advertting to God’s own desire to turn ‘proto-existence’ into ‘existence.’ The details aside, this means that for Schlanger, God is the source of the key cosmic force of desire in the universe, leaving no room for that desire’s having its origin in the cosmos itself. Liebes, however, offers an analysis whose overall schematic is most appropriate for our current needs. Contrary to both the approaches of Daud and Kaufmann on the one hand, and Schlanger on the other, Liebes offers an account that uncovers the following appropriately complex schematic: it is God’s love for creation which leads to creation’s love of Him. On this reading, cosmic desire definitely has its root in the cosmos, but first and foremost in God Himself.

For our current purposes, this highlights well the sense in which the upward tendency that is found in cosmic substances ultimately has its root in God’s own love of the cosmos. (We needn’t worry here about whether God’s ‘love’ is best seen in an act of creation ex nihilo, or whether that love is in fact manifest in a Plotinian style moment of emanation from the Godhead).

*
2.6.4 UNIVERSAL MATTER, INTELLECT AND THE DIVINE THRONE

We turn finally to what is prima facie a most vexing and suggestive remark in Gabirol’s text:

...Matter is as if the throne [cathedral] of unity, and Will, the giver [donatrix] of form sits [sedeat] in it and reposes [quiescit] above it...\textsuperscript{65}

Not only, then, is our reading able to accommodate Gabirol’s association of universal matter with the ‘Divine Throne,’ but, in fact, it is here that we find a most exciting bit of evidence in explicit support of our identification of matter with Intellect. For, consider this identification on Gabirol’s part in light of the above sense in which our view has allowed us to identify ‘universal matter’ with Intellect. Drawing upon the work of Pines and others, let us assume a familiarity on Gabirol’s behalf with Saadiah’s commentary on the Sefer Yeẓirah (SY), (Book of Formation). While Gabirol does not himself make clear what the Divine Throne is, we might suggest, turning to Saadiah’s commentary on SY, that it is indeed a reference to Intellect itself:

As we have seen in the above quote, Gabirol likens Universal Matter to the Throne of God upon which the divine Will reposes,\textsuperscript{66} a throne likewise referred to in his celebrated poem Keter Malkhūt, (The Royal Crown), (though there -- given the non-philosophical context -- not specifically under the description ‘Matter’).\textsuperscript{67}
(See Loewe for a nice diagram of this phenomenon). In looking at Saadiah’s remarks on SY, we find an identification of ‘Divine Throne’ with something called ‘2nd Air.’ An examination of the material, though, suggests quite readily that ‘2nd Air’ is, indeed, a grade of Intellect. As such, we have a clear bit of evidence in support of the association of ‘universal matter’ in Gabirol with ‘Universal Intellect,’ for:

1. ‘Universal matter’ is associated with ‘Divine Throne’ (FV, 5.42),
2. ‘2nd Air’ is associated with Divine Throne (Saadiah’s analysis of SY)
3. ‘Universal matter’ = ‘2nd Air’ (1,2)
4. But, ‘2nd Air’ reveals itself to be a grade of Intellect

Thus,

5. We have strong support for associating Gabirol’s universal matter with his Universal Intellect

To see the development of ‘2nd Air’ as a kind of Intellect, then, consider: 2nd Air, as discussed by Saadiah in his Sharḥ (i.e., ‘exposition’) section of the SY commentary, is presented as corresponding to Glory (Kavod), the Spirit of the Living God (Ruḥ Elohim ḥayyim) and to Holy Spirit (Ruḥ ha-Qodesh). It is also presented as not corresponding to anything explicitly mentioned in the SY text itself (the SY’s reference to the ‘Spirit from the first Spirit’ instead being associated by him with the ‘External’ or ‘Perceived’ Air, something entirely different from -- and posterior to -- the 2nd Air).
Consider, in this regard the following: The ‘sefirot belimah,’ he tells us, are numbers (a’dād mahzūra⁸⁹) external to God. Looking to only the first six sefirot,⁷⁰ Saadiah identifies (or, correlates), the sefirot as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What the sefira is called in Saadiah’s Hebrew text of SY</th>
<th>* Saadiah’s tafsīr (i.e., ‘translation’)</th>
<th>* Saadiah’s Sharḥ (i.e., ‘exposition’)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Spirit (ruaḥ) of the Living God</td>
<td>1. Will (Mashi'a)</td>
<td>1. Will (Mashi'a, or Irāda); note: when this will becomes actual, it is called kalima / word; this Will is called ‘ruaḥ,’ – Spirit or Wind – by the author of SY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*. (absent)</td>
<td>*. (absent)</td>
<td>2. Second Air (al-Hawā’ al-Thānī); Glory / Kavod in the Holy Scriptures; called Shekhinah, according to the nation; called the Spirit of the Living God (ruaḥ elohim hayyīm) by SY author and Holy Spirit (Ruāḥ Ha-qodesh) by the sages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. a Spirit from the first Spirit Perceived Air</td>
<td>2. ‘External Air’ Perceived Air (al-Hawā’ al-zāḥīr)</td>
<td>3. External Air, or Perceived Air, in which the Creator has formed (ṣawara), the ten Numbers and 22 Letters</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The next four sephirot, sephirot 3–6, (in Saadia’s SY text, described as the four Winds -- ruhot -- or Directions of the sky, (i.e., space), viz., east, west, north and south), are identified by Saadia with four winds which blow from the second sefira. In Saadia’s Sharḥ, these correspond similarly with the four Directions (E, W, N, S) and the Winds that blow from the four directions.

For our current purposes, it suffices to note that Saadia describes the 2nd Air not only as ‘Glory’ (Kavod), ‘Holy Spirit’ and ‘Shekhinah’ but Throne as well,71 thus aligning it with Gabirol’s own ‘universal matter.’ Turning, then, to Efros’ elaboration on this issue, we find this ‘2nd Air’ described as a fine substance created before all else which, akin to the Active Intellect in Avicenna, is a “spiritual substance that conveys prophecy.”72 In considering the nature of this ‘2nd Air’ (and hence, presumably, Gabirol’s own First Matter) as a prophetic intermediary of sorts, we must conceptually demarcate it from an Avicennian Active Intellect; for, while both are treated as the substance which conveys prophecy, 2nd Air is treated as the first hypostasis after Will / Word, whereas Avicenna’s Active Intellect is decidedly removed (hierarchically speaking) from this exalted level. For, as we know from Avicenna (and the Arab emanationist systems associated with Kindi, Farabi, et al.),73 the Active Intellect is the 10th emanated intellect, and is associated with the sublunar realm. As such, it certainly does not occupy the highest cosmic status, and as such, would correspond neither to Saadia’s 2nd Air nor to Gabirol’s cosmic Matter (both of which do occupy a decidedly higher status in their respective hierarchies). This might be supported on the ‘sephiotic’ side by pointing
out that, in its association with ‘Kavod’ (itself correlated with ‘Malkhut’ or ‘Shekhinah’), 2nd Air emerges as the lowest of the 10 sefirot; however, unlike the ‘lowest of the 10 separate intellects’ in the Arabic tradition, the lowest of the 10 sefirot demarcates a level of reality immediately outside of the Godhead; while the 10th separate intellect demarcates a reality just above the sublunar realm, the 10th sefirot demarcates a level of reality which is the interface between Divinity and the cosmos as a whole (including the supralunar and sublunar realms). While this science of ‘sefirot’ is not worked out until the 13th century, it nonetheless additionally confirms our sense here, viz., that Saadia’s ‘2nd Air’ (and hence, Gabirol’s First Matter) are, in their clear role as an Intellect of sorts, to be identified with something much higher up on the scale of being than the Active Intellect in most Arabic accounts where it is the 10th lowest intellect.

We have here, then, added support for our associating Gabirol’s universal matter with a grade of Intellect, and furthermore, with a most exalted grade of Intellect. As we have suggested above, universal matter is identifiable with the most sublime moment of Universal Intellect itself, the first substance and fount of unspecified Being in all things. Taken in this sense, we can certainly appreciate why Gabirol’s ‘matter’ talk would extend not only to corporeal bodies, but to even the separate intellects themselves, as certainly they too are characterized by a subsistence in Universal Intellect, the first and highest of all realities.

*
2.6.5 OTHER MORE GENERAL SUPPORT FOR ‘UNIVERSAL MATTER’ AS INTELLECT

The affinity between Matter and Intellect can be found in the general development of the Divine Intellect as a ‘receptacle for’ – and hence, we may say, as the ‘Matter to’ – all Forms. This can be seen in a number of traditions, any of which might reasonably – and at least indirectly – have exerted influence over Gabirol. In effect, this idea can be found in the Neopythagorean tradition in Nicomachus (a tradition available in Gabirol’s Arabic milieu), where the Divine Nous itself is seen as Matter (see chapter 4), and traces of this idea can be found even earlier in Philo’s own placing within the Demiurge those Forms which – in Plato’s Timaeus – are outside Him: in this ‘internalization’ of the Forms within God, a theme which can be found as early as the writings of Antiochus, there emerges an important sense in which God’s Nous is something of a material receptacle (even if not always thus called) inasmuch as it holds the Forms.

The development of this idea of ‘God’s Nous’ as the ‘receptacle’ of all forms, then, gives us one way of appreciating why one might come to more generally associate ‘Intellect’ with ‘Matter,’ and gives us a context in which to envision Gabirol’s Universal Intellect (though not identical with a Divine Nous) as the existential substrate of all existents.

In fact, we might consider in the above regard Gabirol’s own description of the Unity of Intellect: “et in hoc est firmior ratio, quod unitas est retentrix omnia
et sustinens omnia," and the clearly related description of Matter as the ‘sustentatrix diversitatis’ which is ‘receptibilis omnium formarum.’

In what may well be a related vein, we might also note Plotinus’ own analysis of Intellect into two moments, the first of which is called ‘Intelligible Matter’ (cf. chapter 4) as itself highlighting the perhaps unexpected link between Universal Intellect and Matter.

In further support of the identification of Matter with Intellect even in our Arabic Neoplatonic milieu, we might note that the terms ‘First Matter’ and ‘First Form’ in some key passages from the Neoplatonic works of Israeli and Ibn Ḥasday (to be examined in chapter 4) are in fact replaced by the terms ‘First Intellect’ and ‘Second Intellect’ in the Longer Theology of Aristotle, suggesting some historical conceptual tie (or at least, some matter of fact substitution) between ‘First Matter’ and ‘Intellect’ in early Arabic Neoplatonic traditions. The suggestion that Gabirol might have himself been operating under the assumption of such a tie seems at least prima facie plausible in light of Stern’s account of said ‘longer’ version of Theology of Aristotle; for, at least on Stern’s account, it is ‘longer’ than its vulgate form precisely in virtue of sharing with Israeli’s and Ibn Ḥasday’s texts certain discernibly common ideas which can be traced in all three cases to a single early [non-extant] textual tradition which Stern has called ‘Ibn Ḥasday’s Neoplatonist’. While the exact relationships between these texts, the Ps. Empedoclean tradition(s) and Gabirol is all highly uncertain, we might nonetheless note that if Stern is
correct, there are grounds for suggesting something of a conceptually fine line –
and perhaps no line at all – between ‘First Matter’ and ‘Intellect’ within at least one
Arabic Neoplatonic account which pre-dates (and hence, could reasonably be
posited to have influenced) Gabirol.

*

2.7 UNIVERSAL MATTER: A SUMMARY

On our analysis, matter denotes Intellect, but as such, also denotes that most
essential existential core of each and every substance. We have applied our reading
to three main sets of remarks about matter in Gabirol’s text, and have seen in each
case how our reading is able to accommodate the data and to offer solutions to
prima facie vexing moments in the text. Our reading has allowed us to reconcile
Gabirol’s notion of pre-form ‘per se existens’ with the claim that existence is from
form, as it has likewise allowed us to make sense of the claim that ‘matter is
created by First Essence’ without suggesting that Gabirol has intentionally hidden
his ‘real’ view. Finally, with recourse to Saadiah’s SY commentary, we have
shown how our identification of universal matter and Intellect is borne out by
Gabirol’s explicit association of said matter with the Divine Throne. To further see
the applicability of our reading to Gabirol’s specific descriptions of matter,
consider:
...sit per se existens, unius essentiae, sustinens diversitatem, dans omnibus essentiam suam et nomen.

...it is 'existing per se', of a single essence, sustaining diversity, giving to everything its essence and name.

Intellect is, as a veritable 'form of Being,' is, as pre-determined existential sustainer of all other substances, certainly a 'per se existens.' Furthermore, Intellect sustains diversity: not only does it, as cause of esse in all things, sustain the diversity within all substances, but, just as the Divine Nous in the Augustinian system, and the 10th Intellect in the Avicennian system, the first created Intellect in Gabirol's account is the repository of all forms (though in a unified 'pre-formal' manner to be outlined in chapter 3), and hence, is a 'sustinens diversitatem' in this sense as well. Finally, Intellect, as the first substance and source of substantial esse in all, gives to all their most basic essence and name, viz., 'substantiality' per se. While members of different species differ in many respects, all of them are identical in one sense: they are 'substances' in virtue of their being sustained in — and desiring to return to — the purity of Intellect, their ontological core.

*

On a final note, consider the implications my reading has for our reconciling this 'matter' with the primordial matter from which God forges the world in the Genesis account: on the reading I have suggested, this 'substrate' may

146
be seen as Universal Intellect itself, a substance which we already know to be the ‘cause of esse’ in all things for Gabirol. What better candidate then for the primordial matter of creation?

*

1 For discussion of the *logoi* in the Divine Nous, see, e.g., Augustine, *De Diversis Quaestionibus*, LXXXIII; P. L. 40, col. 30. See discussion in Goheen 1940, p. 55 ff.

2 For the related issue of the ‘*potentia activa*’ in Roger Bacon, see Crowley 1950, 111 ff.

3 It might be noted that Gabirol can also be additionally posited to have all of Avicenna’s intellects as well. For the sake of comparative clarity for our current purposes, though, we will not here pursue that possibility.

4 In this regard, see, e.g., the poem cited by Loewe 1989, 99.

5 FV 5.1, p. 258, 13 – 15.

6 We read this in the sense of ‘its matter’ (viz., the matter of Intellect) or ‘Intellect in its material capacity.’

7 FV 5.16, p. 286, 15 – 17.

8 See my “Jewish Neoplatonism...,” forthcoming.

9 See, e.g., *Liber de Causis*, in Bardenhewer 1882, 79, line 1 for ‘anniyya faqat’, and 65, line 7 for ‘anniyya mahda.’

10 FV, 5.10, p. 274, 19; 5.11, p. 277, 4.

11 Intellect is the highest of all substances, and is as such the first ‘form + matter’ existent.

12 That God creates ‘esse’ in this composite way may be seen at FV, 5.40, p. 329, 4.

13 But see my suggestion that, in the end, God’s being ‘above Being’ need not be seen as different from His being identical with ‘Pure Being’ or ‘Being Only’; cf. my “Jewish Neoplatonism...,” forthcoming.

14 FV 5.15, p. 286, 16.


16 FV 1.10, p. 13.

17 FV 5.4, p. 264, 8 – 9.
18 For this and other passages of FV preserved in Arabic in Moses ibn Ezra’s work, see Pines 1977, pp. 44–59. For this reference, see p. 58.

19 See Pines 1977, p. 58.


21 For Maimonides use of this notion at Guide II. 36, 78, see Efros 1966, p. 57.

22 See, e.g., Efros 1966, p. 57.

23 While the above passage is not one of those preserved for us in its original Arabic in Moses ibn Ezra’s Arugat ha-Bosem, we find the translation of ‘exemplum’ for ‘mithl’ two times in the preserved fragment of FV 1.7; p. 10, l. 7 – 10; (Cf. Pines 1977, p. 52).


26 FV 5.33, p. 319, 4ff.

27 FV 5.34, p. 319, 16 – 17.

28 Falaquera’s Hebrew text leaves out the notion of ‘being illumined’ by the shadow, and instead speaks of hiding in the shadow: “...ve-basita bī-ṣelō...” See, though, Altman and Stern 1958 (e.g., p. 177) for the clear occurrence in the Jewish Neoplatonic materials of this notion of illumination by shadows.

29 FV 3.56, p. 204, line 13 - 3.57, p. 205, line 18; my emphasis.

30 For a general introduction to this methodology in Gabirol, including an enumeration of four different applications of this method in the Fons Vitae, see Schlanger 1968, 141-57, and on the ‘macrocosm / microcosm’ in general, 313-16. See also my discussion of analogical reasoning in my ‘Jewish Neoplatonism...,’ forthcoming.

31 FV 4.4, p. 218, 1ff.


33 FV 4.19, p. 252.

34 FV 4.19, p. 252, 19 – 23.

35 FV 5.42, p.333, 4-5: “…materia est creata ab essentia, et forma est a proprietate essentiae, id est sapientia et unitate.”

36 FV 5.42, p. 335, 23 – 24.

37 Brunner 1965, 54.


On the conceptual reconcilability of the Arabic (and Gabirollean) Neoplatonic notion of ‘God as Being’ and the Plotinian notion of ‘God as Beyond Being,’ see my “Jewish Neoplatonism…,” (forthcoming).

FV 1.10, p. 13, 15 – 17.

Augustine, Confessions, XII, Cap. XII, lines 14 – 18.

Augustine, Confessions, XII, Cap. VI, 6, line 38.

Consider also Mathis II’s suggestion of an Iamblichean strain in Gabirol; cf. Mathis II 1992.

See Proclus’ Elements of Theology, Proposition 65 (Dodds 1963, 62) on the tripartite analysis of a thing ‘kat’ atian’ (‘according to cause’), ‘kath’ hyparsin’ (‘according to subsistence’), and ‘kata methexsin’ (‘according to participation’). We here in mind the second of these descriptions. While Proclus’ initial presentation seems to suggest that an analysandum can be known in one or another of these three ways, the content of the 65th proposition seems rather to indicate that each analysandum can be known in each of these three ways. It might be noted that the 65th proposition is not incorporated into the Liber de Causis corpus (see Taylor’s chart of Elements of Theology: Liber correlations; Taylor 1992, 39 – 40), however, we see no reason to think that this overall mode of Neoplatonic thinking (even if not from Proclus per se) would have been unfamiliar to Gabirol or to any other Neoplatonic thinker.

Goheen 1940, 18, fn. 39.

FV 1.13, p. 16, 21 – 23.

Falaquera, Sefer Megor Hayyim, Qetaim, Book 1, section 8; cf. text in Blovstein ca. 1960, pp. 438 – 439.

FV 5.9, p. 272, 8 – 10.

FV 4.4, p. 218, 25 – p. 219 lff.

FV 4.5, p. 221, 8.

FV 4.5, p. 221, 11 – 12.

Schlanger 1968, 294.

FV 5.42, p.333, 4-5.

FV 2.13.

Schlanger 1968, 293.

Schlanger 1968, p. 293.

149
For Hebrew text of this poem, see Bialik and Ravnitsky 1924, Vol. I (Shirei Hol), poem number 48, p. 112; (also, in Yarden 1975).

See Liebes 1987 for discussion of (and a different rendering of) this line; various manuscripts have either the expression ‘meh motef’ or ‘kneh motef’ where I’ve translated ‘devise a proof.’


Kaufmann 1899 / 1972.

Schlanger 1965.


FV 5.42, p. 335, 23 – 24.

FV 5.42, p. 335, 22 – 24.

For Hebrew text, see Bialik and Ravnitsky 1925, volume 2, poem number 62, pp. 62-78; (for an English translation, see Lewis 1961). In this poem, the Throne, while not specifically called ‘Matter,’ is described as “higher than all height.” Lewis 1961, 28.

Loewe 1989, 114.

This is Saadiah’s Arabic rendering of ‘sefirot belimah,’ and can be rendered literally, as either (a) numbers having a limit, (b) numbers which should not be approached, (where the notion of secrecy may be implied, a la Gruenwald), or (c) numbers that are defined. See Pines 1989, p. 81, with fn. 161.

On similarities between the notion of six sefirot emanated from God with the six extensions of God in Pseudo-Clementine Homilies 17, see Pines 1989, 63 - 141. Cf. pp. 118 if. where Pines discusses the possibility that an earlier version of the Sefer Yeẓirah had not ten, but only six -- or possibly seven -- sefirot enumerated. One bit of support for this contention is the fact that, while Saadiah’s Hebrew SY text lists 10 sefirot, Saadiah, in his taṣīr (i.e., translation) of the text accounts for only six of these, while, in his commentary (i.e., the sharḥ section of his account), he talks of the sefirot’s corresponding to seven ‘Roots,’ (Uṣūl).

See Saadiah’s Commentary on the Sefer Yeẓirah, Lambert 1891, 72, and Maʿānī al-Nafs, p. 10. See Efros 1941, 39 for references.

Efros 1941, 39.

For comparison of these cosmologies see Netton 1989.

75 FV 5.22, p. 298, 13 – 17. For the Arabic fragment -- which describes Matter as 'hāmil lii-ikhtilāf" -- together with Pines' replacement of 'qā'im' with 'qābal' in this regard -- see Pines 1977, p. 53.

76 Stern 1983a. For other accounts of the Longer Theology of Aristotle, see the references and discussion in Pines 1954.

77 FV 1.10, p. 13, 15 – 17.
CHAPTER 3

MATTER AS GENUS:
SAMENESS, POTENCY AND NEOPLATONIC CAUSAL HIERARCHIES

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In the current chapter, I will examine more fully the sorts of Neoplatonic intuitions which give us a fuller philosophical context for the treatment in chapter 2, and in particular, which give us a more complete sense of why the term ‘matter’ would emerge as describing the more superior ontological state. The overall Neoplatonic causal theory – on which, as we will see, the genus or cause is superior to the speciated effect – precisely takes its strength from the Neoplatonist’s emanationist intuitions, even though these ties (between ontology and cosmology) are not always stated explicitly. In other words, it is in appreciating the Neoplatonist’s genuine commitment to an ontological source of Being which is lower than God and which itself grounds the existence of each thing below it that we can appreciate why someone would think of potency as superior to act, and materiality as superior to form and esse. That this ontological source is not God (or, the One) seems relevant to appreciating why within this emanationist system
said ‘source’ can be robustly described as the ‘material substrate’ for all things:
whereas such a claim about God (or, the One) would seem to violate God’s utter
transcendence, no such threat to God’s transcendence emerges from seeing in
Intellect, God’s first creation, a ‘material substrate’ which literally grounds all
things. The conceptual link between per se Being and matter is not at all a religious
threat once we identify this Being with something other than God. We, of course,
have identified it in Gabirol with the first created Intellect (different, we have
stressed, from the Divine Nous).

In what follows, then, we turn to better unpacking the sorts of Neoplatonic
intuitions which go hand-in-hand with our above analysis of Gabirol, intuitions
which predominate even those Neoplatonic texts which do not adopt Gabirol’s
language of UH. If my thesis is correct, though, Gabirol’s doctrine of UH does not,
in the end, represent anything especially controversial from within a Neoplatonic
framework, even if its terminology does represent something of a minority
approach. In effect, where the ‘form / matter’ constitution of all things is seen as
referring us to the subsistence of all things in (or, by) an unspecified Being in
Intellect on the one hand, and in (or, by) the formal determinations in Intellect on
the other, we have nothing conceptually remarkable from a Neoplatonic point of
view (even if Gabirol’s work, in taking these issues and putting them forth in UHist
verbiage, is remarkable – because original, or at least a minority approach – from a
purely historical point of view). Even terminologically, then, we do indeed find
traces of Gabirol’s sensibility in Plotinus’ own talk of ‘intelligible matter’ as the

153
first moment of Intellect, but also in the general sensibility of genus as matter and form as effect within the Neoplatonic cyclic causal theory, to which we now turn.

3.2 MATTER AS SAMENESS: NEOPLATONIC CAUSAL CYCLIC THEORY AND GENUS AS MATTER, SPECIATED EFFECT AS FORM

To best approach the conceptual link between the material and a state of ontological superiority, consider the relationship between the Aristotelian ‘hupokeimenon’ and sameness, and the implications of that in light of the Neoplatonic modification of Aristotelian causal theory:

3.2.1 ARISTOTELIAN CAUSATION AND THE PRINCIPLE OF ‘SAMENESS’

Consider one of the descriptions of matter which might be found in Aristotle’s Physics: matter is a principle of Sameness; it is that which ‘remains the same’ across all accidental (i.e., non-substantial) changes in a given substance. While to be sure, a closer inspection of Aristotle’s world-view suggests that it is said matter’s being dominated by a certain substantial form which is the ultimate source of sameness in a given substance across accidental change, commentary traditions had arisen which interpreted Aristotle as having been committed to a genuine ‘prime matter’ devoid of form and underlying all corporeal reality. This can be seen as early as Simplicius’ commentary on Aristotle’s Physics, as it can be seen in the Avicennian (vs. Averroean) tradition as well (see chapter 1 where this
was touched upon). And so, looking at least to the notion of elemental change, it seems intuitively – at least to certain Aristotle commentators – that if a bit of water can change into a bit of air, then certainly there must be some ‘prime matter’ which underlies this change; having held the qualities ‘cold’ and ‘wet,’ the quality ‘wet’ simply becomes replaced in it with the quality ‘dry.’ It is in this sort of thinking (whether properly Aristotelian or not) that we suggest the emergence in a number of historical traditions of Aristotle’s prime matter as the source of sameness across change. And so, looking to the most fundamental case of elemental change, let us focus on the interpretation which sees in Aristotle an ultimate prime matter in virtue of which we account for some X being one and the same X even after undergoing changes. It is in this sense that we might say that matter is, as that which stays the same across [horizontal] change, the genuine source of sameness.

Consider, then, what sorts of implications this well-known tradition of Aristotle interpretation can be seen to take on in light of some of the Neoplatonist’s shifts from Aristotelian ‘horizontal’ causal scenarios to a decidedly ‘vertical’ context of causal analysis. In effect, from the above linking of matter with sameness in a horizontal context, we are but a short step from the further linking of matter as the sameness which exerts itself in vertical causal series. It is this latter intuition, then, that is, of course, germane to Gabirol’s own notion of matter. And so, consider:
3.2.2 NEOPATONIC ‘VERTICAL’ CAUSAL ANALYSES AND GENUS AS ‘VERTICAL MATTER’

On the Neoplatonic cyclic [vertical] causal theory, a cause is seen as producing – or, proceeding forth into – an effect that is at once both like it, and unlike it. This effect may hence be seen as a compresence of Sameness (with cause) and Difference (from cause), a phenomenon which can itself be described as the reality of the cause passing through an intermediary stage associated with difference on its way to yielding its effect. Seen in these terms, we might say that a vertical cause (e.g., Intellect) proceeds forth to its effect (e.g., Soul) through an intermediary unfolding from a state of more potency to one of more actuality; or, in other words, the vertical cause has in potency what the effect manifests in actuality (a departure from Aristotelian [horizontal] causal theory which places its focus, rather, on the act of the cause and the potency of the effect). As such, putting aside our ‘usual’ (that is to say, Aristotelian) intuitions, we must privilege matter over form within the current metaphysical analysis; to see this as clearly as possible, consider:

(i) *Form is Difference and is to be thought of (relatively) negatively*:

The intermediary stage between cause and effect (or, the procession from cause to effect) signifies the introduction of difference into the cosmos, and is best understood here as the unfolding of a cause’s potency into greater actuality. But, as we will detail below, this unfolding of potency (or inception of difference) is
precisely an increase in the manifest-ness of forms from their state of greater
unification to one of greater discrete-ness one from the next. As we will see, we
may hence say that the procession itself is a differentiating of forms from a state of
unified potency to a state of manifest act. On this register, the presence of form in
a given substance-effect is (relatively speaking) a negative phenomenon, indicating,
as it were, the descent of the vertical cause (a substance more unified in potency) to
a more plural – i.e., more manifesting of forms – state (viz., the effect, a substance
which is less unified in potency than said cause and in which forms appear more
actually).

(ii) *Matter is Sameness and is to be thought of positively:*

Inasmuch as the substance-effect is indeed like the cause in even some
limited sense, we might say of this cause that it has stayed the same across the
vertical change from cause to effect: even though differences have affixed
themselves to the reality of cause in its procession (but of course, not to the reality
of the cause itself which remains untouched and unmodified), since those
differences are *of* the cause, we may still say that the resulting effect is not the
differences alone, but those differences plus some vestige of the original cause
‘onto’ which said differences – or *forms* – have become manifest. Hence, the cause
emerges as the ‘vertical matter’ of the effect, on analogy with the above
interpretation of Aristotelian matter for cases of horizontal change: in both the
Neoplatonic vertical and Aristotelian horizontal causal analyses, we attribute the

157
element of ‘sameness across change’ to that which we call the matter. However, as within our vertical analysis it is the genus of a given effect which is its cause and which hence emerges as the matter (i.e., the ‘vertical matter’), and as within the Neoplatonic context it is the genus which is the most primary and exalted of substances, the matter of the effect hence emerges as its primary substantial cause, or, we might say, as its primary substantial essence. The matter – and the not form – hence emerges as the most privileged and essential of ontological elements, very much in contrast to what we find within an Aristotelian ontology.

It should be clear, hence, why one would think of genera as matters.

To see the application of these ideas, consider: like the above interpretation of Aristotle’s matter as remaining the same across horizontal change, here, the ‘Vertical matter’ – or Genus – is what remains the same across vertical change, but, as such, it emerges as the identity – or sameness – of a substance-cause across vertical change [into its lower effect]. In effect, matter as the vertical cause signals the substantial genus – the substantial genus which in Aristotle is associated with form, not matter! We might schematize our vertical analysis of genus as matter as follows:

Cause (or ‘[Vertical] matter’): Animal
Procession (or, the increasing manifestation of forms): the Difference,
  Reason
Effect: Man

[Figure 3.1]
In this example, the effect is a speciated manifestation of the original genus, Animal: it is Animal supplemented by a certain difference, in this case, rationality – or we might say, the effect is the manifestation of the cause, Animal, in a more formally actualized guise. The resulting effect is hence a compresence of sameness (i.e., sameness with Animal, as it most definitely is [an] Animal) and difference (i.e., difference from Animal, as it is most definitely not the genus, Animal).

To see this idea in Gabirol, consider:

that which is from among substances, the matter to the lower is the form to the higher...the more subtle of substances is the subject (i.e., carrier) to the coarser of them, [and] all are forms sustained in First matter.”

And that,

...the lower of the substances is form to the higher of them, and the higher of them is matter sustaining the lower, until it reaches the First Simple matter.”

In effect, “matter” is used relativistically to describe any substance in which another substance subsists, where, in the relativistic context, it is precisely that substance which is more superior (at level n+1) that will be called the matter to the lower substance (at level n), which lower substance is in turn called the form of – or we might say, the difference from – the higher substance. These and similar remarks clearly evidence the presence in Gabirol of this Neoplatonic link between genus and matter. This very same set of ideas is also evidenced in what Stern has called the ‘Ibn Hasday’s Neoplatonist’ tradition in Israeli (and later in Ibn Ḥasday)”
on which First Matter (to which we will turn more in chapter 4) is described as the
‘the root of roots,’ and the ‘genus of genera’ respectively. For, turning now to the
cosmic level, we can begin to appreciate the emergence of each of the spiritual
simples, (Nature, Soul(s) and Intellect) as supreme ‘matters’ – as self-subsisting
generic substances in which – and in virtue of which – all lower effects subsist,
with Intellect being the most generic such substance of all.

*  

We might note that in light of the above, form is in one way indicative of
the process of ‘becoming more enformed’ (i.e., related to the cosmic procession
itself), but is in another way denotive of the effect of said processive process, the
final effect as a ‘formed matter.’ So, form functions in much the same way as
otherness, a principle with which form (and not matter) is associated throughout the
text’s privileging of matter as principle of unity; just as otherness may describe the
process of cause leading to effect, otherness may describe the resultant effect in its
relation to its cause. And so, we may say:

[Vertical] cause / Matter

                      Otherness / Other-ing

Effect / Otherness / ‘formed matter’

[Figure 3.2]
As this is sometimes stated in Neoplatonic parlance, the effect is a compresence of sameness (with cause) and otherness (from cause). Or, we may say, the cause is the matter, the process of ‘othering’ is the form[ing], and the resultant effect is a hylomorphic composite, or, in other words, a compresence of sameness with the material cause plus formal specification, or difference. In relation to its cause, though, we may say of this effect simply that it is otherness, or, we may describe it as form simpliciter, following upon Gabirol’s above claim that the lower effect is simply form to its higher cause.

*

Turning specifically to the case of Intellect in this regard, consider:

Cause (or ‘[Vertical] matter’): Intellect (as a state of all forms in potency, it is primarily the Being – or ‘substantiality per se’ – in all things)
Procession (or, the increasing manifestation of forms): denoted in text on the one hand by the elaboration of cosmic intermediaries and other cosmic phenomena, such as Shadow, and Distance, and on the other hand by Light, form, act and also ‘Will’
Effects: Soul, Nature and all existents

[Figure 3.3]

Soul, Nature and all existents are the effects of Intellect; Intellect is the genus in which they all subsist, and they are all, as such, specifications of Intellect. Seen in this way, Intellect emerges as a genus precisely because it is a sameness (viz., Being itself, or Substantiality per se) which, on analogy with Aristotelian matter in horizontal causal chains, remains constant across vertical processions.
Furthermore, unlike, say, the genus Animal, which only unites and sustains a subset of all existents, the genus Intellect is shared by all existents. As we will see in our next section, the inception of difference onto the pure genus Intellect is precisely the manifestation / actualization (or, the act of becoming different or discrete) of forms from their state of utter unified potency in Intellect. As such, the appearance of discrete forms demarcates an inferior ontological state.

While we have already suggested in our previous chapters the sense in which Will and form must hence be seen as denoting for us this downward processive unfolding, we must also note the relevance in this regard of a number of other recurring themes in Gabirol’s text, themes which, we suggest, must likewise be understood as denoting this downward processive unfolding: ⁸

(1) ‘Essential Aptitude’: the lower the substance, the thicker and less pure it is, and the less is its aptitude to receive the Divine Light; ⁹

(2) Distance: the lower the substance, the further it is from the source; ¹⁰

(3) Darkness: lower substances have a shadow cast over them by the action of the highest intelligibles. ¹¹
All of these themes, together with the larger-scale themes of cosmic Will and the inception of form work to highlight in our text the Neoplatonic notion of the vertical procession from higher, more essential and potency-filled causes to lower more diverse, specified and actual effects.

*  

We might further note that our above elaboration of the notion of matter in the vertical sense as a source of Sameness amongst all existents sits in opposition to the more common Neoplatonic association of matter with Unlimit and Otherness, and form with Limit and Sameness. There is no question that this linking of the material with otherness is a schema which predominates Neoplatonic accounts, and which, undoubtedly, lies behind Plotinus’ own association of the material with privation and evil. However, upon co-mingling the Aristotelian account of horizontal – or corporeal – matter together with the emergence of Genus in the vertical Neoplatonic causal theory along the above lines, we have found a clear link between the material and potential (and hence, the Unlimited) and Sameness. As such, formal Limit and actuality have emerged as the inferior metaphysical notions.

*
3.3 MACROCOSM AND MICRO COSM: THE COSMOLOGY OF PROCESSION AND THE ONTOLOGY OF SPECIFICATION; GENUS AS 'MATTER' AND THE COSMIC LINK BETWEEN 'CAUSE' AND 'POTENCY'

To most fully appreciate the above Neoplatonic metaphysics, we are best served to see it as linked within the Neoplatonist’s thoughts to the larger cosmic state of reality on which, as we have already seen above, Intellect – the most simple and unified state of non-God (or, non-One) reality – gives way to effects which are, in turn, less and less simple and less and less unified. This cosmic sensibility helps make sense of the more general ontological impulse to associate the more generic cause with the superior (because, more unified) moment within any causal analysis, as well as the impulse to associate the more potential capacity of any substance as superior to its determinate actuality. We have suggested, then, that the further tendency to see the more generic cause as the material can be seen to follow upon the quasi-Aristotelian sense of matter as sameness (and not simply upon some vague affinity between the notions of matter and potency). As such, the more potency there is in the analysandum, the more universal a matter it is. It is in this sense that I have argued for Intellect as the most universal matter of all. We can hopefully by now better appreciate why matter would emerge in Gabirol's project as the superior term within his metaphysical lexicon.

Here, then, we will try to provide our reader with the very sorts of cosmic intuitions needed to better appreciate the above Neoplatonic causal theory and the sense in which the material is privileged over the formal. This, of course, in way of
better appreciating Gabirol’s own privileging of the material over the formal, and of the potential over the actual. In our efforts to show how matter is that which best describes the more exalted ontological state, we have above focused on the sense of matter as sameness and form as difference. Here, then, let us examine in a bit more detail the material as the potential, and why, precisely when seen within an emanationist cosmology, the potential is surely superior to the actual.

In addition to supplying for us a general context for the ideas we have drawn upon in chapter 2, the analysis which follows will help us reconcile our treatment of matter in Gabirol thus far with the claim that:

Esse huius substantiae expoliatae a forma non est nisi in opinione, non in esse.\textsuperscript{12}

The existence of this substance devoid of form is only conceptual, not actual.

That is, in spite of the fact that (as we have seen in chapter 2) Gabirol describes matter as ‘per se existens’ without form, in the above claim (and in others like it) Gabirol seems rather to deny any real existence to matter per se without form: matter per se without form here seems to be relegated to the conceptual realm. We suggest reconciling these conflicting sentiments in Gabirol by rethinking what we take him to mean by ‘without form.’ That is, while our identification of matter with the highest moment of Intellect in fact treats of a real (and not merely conceptual) referent for ‘matter per se’ in Gabirol, it does so in a way which
uniquely satisfies our two seemingly opposing demands: for, on the one hand, the highest moment of Intellect is a pure state of unity, and so, is ‘without form’ or ‘pre-formal’; and yet, that very state of unity is, in the Neoplatonic description of Intellect, a state constituted by the compresence of all forms as one, and so, we have, on the other hand, a state which is not devoid of form. This unique Neoplatonic theme of a unity of forms in Intellect taken together with our thesis that matter refers primarily to said state of Intellect provides us, hence, with a nice way of reconciling an embrace on Gabirol’s behalf of a real (and not merely conceptual) matter per se without forms – without forms, that is, in a sense that is also ‘full of forms.’ Leaving aside for our current purposes the epistemological implications of Gabirol’s above quote, it suffices to point out the way in which, technically speaking, our thesis that matter per se refers primarily to the real ‘pre-formal’ state of existential unity in Intellect does not violate the quote’s stipulation; for, as we will see better in what follows, this ‘pre-formal’ state of unity in Intellect is in fact full of forms. It is to treating this state of Intellect and its relation to actualization and formality that we now turn.

* 

To see the prima facie inferiority of the formal and actualized to the purely material, consider the respective relationships between the cosmic realities of Intellect, Soul and Nature. Following in general a Neoplatonic commitment to the inferiority of act to potency, Gabirol describes all simple substances (Nature,
Soul(s) and Intellect) as potencies, claiming in quite general terms that the more something is ‘in potency’ the more ‘spiritual’ it is (FV 3.24, p. 134, 23). Consider in this regard as well: “Anything which receives a multitude of forms does not have in itself a single form which is proper to it,” and of soul (and a fortiori for intellect): “all the forms are collected into one form...and [so too for] the form of intellect, because the form of each of these substances collects all intelligible forms, with the exception that the form of intellect is more collective of forms than is the form of soul,” and immediately following: “and when we say this, we do not mean that each of these forms is in each of these substances [viz., Intellect and Soul] in a singular fashion [singillatim]...but we mean that the form of each of them in itself is universal form, that is, in its nature and its essence it [viz., a simple spiritual] is apprehending every form and sustaining it.” The conclusion reached here, then, is that: “we are not able to say that all forms exist in a form which ‘collects’ them...unless these very forms are in potency.” As such, we may say that the forms in Intellect enjoy the most potential state of all (leaving God out of the picture for our present discussion). Specifically with respect to the potency in Intellect, we find furthermore Gabirol’s description of the act of Intellect as Wisdom, with this latter state itself described not as the possession by Intellect of some actualized particular form (i.e., a ‘form of Wisdom’), but as the possession by Intellect of all forms in potency. And so: “...Intellect does not have a proper form per se, and is the apprehension of all forms always...” While he sometimes describes the plurality of forms as ‘distinct’ in Intellect, the above remarks --
together with overt associations of the universal form with the form of unity in the
case of simple spirituals -- seems to support the complete unity of all forms in
Intellect (as they are ‘more potential’ there than in any of the other states of reality).
As such, we might suggest that like Plotinus’ Universal Intellect, Gabirol’s Intellect
is characterized in at least one important sense as a unity: it is the unity of all
forms. We might note that the potency of the state of forms in Intellect can be
further seen in Gabirol’s own treatment of ‘in intellectu’ and ‘in potentia’ as
synonyms.∞

*

From the state of purest potency in Intellect, then, we trace a processive
lessening of potency from Intellect to Soul to Nature. This macrocosmic
phenomenon is mirrored even within the microcosm, and as such, an individual
natural body will have a lesser degree of potency than an individual soul. As such,
the individual soul can be seen to occupy a decidedly intermediate role between
Nature and the upper spiritual realm, and as such, a state better reflective of the
state of Intellect. To see this in terms of the greater actuality in nature than in soul
(and hence, soul’s greater resemblance to the pure potency of Intellect), take the
example of the form of Pallor. While Pallor as found in a natural body can actually
make that body pale, and while Pallor as found in Intellect cannot make Intellect
pale and is one with all other forms, Pallor, as found in soul (viz., in soul’s
conceiving or imagining Pallor), neither can make soul pale, nor is present ‘as one’

168
with all other forms; in soul, Pallor is presented as distinct from all other forms, and the conception (or imagining) of that form precludes the simultaneous conception (or imagining) of any form that is its opposite. And yet, unlike in the case of some corporeal item in the Natural realm, a soul does not become pale when the form of Pallor becomes activated within it. In soul, forms are never as actual as in natural bodies.

In this regard, consider the following demarcation of descending grades of potency from Intellect to an individual soul to a natural body:

In the macrocosm:

In Intellect: the actualization of forms is always as a complete potency of all forms; i.e., Wisdom, or the act of Intellect, is such that all forms are in full potency, and fully compresent; Intellect does not take on any particular form, but is the sustainer of all forms;

In Soul and Nature respectively: forms are less potential than in Intellect.
In the microcosm:

(a) In a particular soul: the actualization of forms is in a state intermediary between the Noetic and natural states; conception or imagination -- in which there is an actualization of some subset of all the potential forms in Soul -- results in forms more discrete from one another than in Intellect, but closer to the full potency of Intellect than in the case of Nature. While the actualization of one form rules out the compresence of an opposite form, it does not result in the soul's taking on the form in question; (see pallor example above).

(b) In a natural body: the actualization of any given form from among all the potential forms

   (i) rules out a compresence of any opposing form in
       some bit of the corporeal matter of Nature, and
   (ii) results in the corporeal matter's taking on the form in question; (see pallor example above).

We might say that while Intellect presents forms entirely in potency, form becomes actualized in the natural body more so than in the soul. In effect, we find here precise grounds for seeing in soul a greater correspondence to the state in Intellect than is to be found in Nature. In chapter 5, this idea of soul as intermediary between Intellect and Nature will be further elaborated upon in our examination of soul as a cosmic intermediary, in particular in its role as 'imaginer.'

*
Not only does soul receive -- or, conceive -- the unity of Intellect in a non-unified fashion, but -- seeing that distortion now precisely in terms of the addition of form -- it is soul's characteristic fracturing, as it were, of the unity of forms (as they are in Intellect) into discrete, individuated forms -- and not anything primarily having to do with matter -- which is the culprit. In fact, this suggests that the illumination by Intellect of things below is itself best seen as Intellect’s shining forth its own pure materiality, and not as its shining forth of discrete forms. The discrete-ness of forms is rather best construed as resulting from the more limited capacity of soul, and hence, its inability -- or, lack of 'fitness' -- for receiving that materiality in its pure potency from Intellect. From Intellect we get a pure matter -- as we have seen, an unspecified Being or Substantiality per se -- in which all things subsist; in Soul, though, the purity of matter is fractured as discrete forms become manifest.

The implications of soul’s thus sullying, as it were, the pure potency of Intellect may be seen in two ways as follows (in line with what we have already seen above):

Epistemologically:

Soul conceives as a fractured plurality that which is in fact a unity; soul considers forms discretely and as such, the forms are more actualized than in their purely potential state in Intellect;
Ontologically:

Soul is the fractured manifestation of Intellect in that it emanates forth from Intellect (the unity of all forms) as something which is, on the contrary, filled with discrete forms; from the unified potency of all forms in Intellect, the forms becomes more actualized, in the emanative process, resulting in Soul.

What results is the intermediary state of soul (between Intellect and Nature) in which the soul’s possession (viz., in conception) of, e.g., the form of Pallor does not make soul pale (as is the case for the characteristic possession of forms within Nature), but does -- contra what goes on in Intellect -- rule out the simultaneous compresence of any form which is the opposite of Pallor. Whereas the characteristic possession of forms in Intellect is as a unity, the characteristic possession of forms in Soul is such that they are not present all simultaneously as a unity, but, on the contrary, as discrete entities, the conception of one ruling out the concurrent conception of its opposite. As we have seen above, act emerges here with a negative valence, representing at once the downward procession of soul from Intellect, as well as the difference between psychic conception and noetic Wisdom, (i.e., the state of pure potency in Intellect).

*
To maintain this idea of the potency of Intellect even in light of Gabirol’s own description of Intellect as an actualized state, consider the following opposing correlations between ‘degree of reality’ and ‘degree of actuality’ depending on whether we approach the issue from the point of view of cosmic emanation (which is what we are concerned with currently) or epistemology:

Cosmically: The higher the reality, the higher the degree of potency;
Intellect is pure potency.
Epistemologically: The higher the reality, the more Wisdom is actual in it;
Intellect -- with respect to degree of Wisdom -- is pure act.

Note, though, that ‘Wisdom’ is itself characterized by Gabirol as the possession not of any single form, but of all forms. As such, Wisdom -- the act of Intellect -- is really illustrative of Intellect’s utter cosmic / ontological potency – its having of all forms in a hidden, unified manner.

* 

As we will address in chapter 5, it is in soul’s entertaining concepts that it emerges in an intermediary role between sense organ (which deals only with sensibles) and the end-state of Wisdom in Intellect. The difference between what we might in Plato or in Aristotle identify as the highest rational state of soul is arguably different from that state truly describable as Intellect in Gabirol, as the
experience of this latter state is a single unifying conjunction with a separate Universal Intellect, in which the intelligibles are compresent all at once, as a unity. In fact, we might even say that the act of ‘noesis’ in Gabirol’s context is not so much what we might ordinarily describe as an exercise of intellect in an Aristotelian context, but something closer to esoteric accounts of Gnosis, a Return to the level of the Plotinian Intellect. In any case, the Intellect in question represents a state of reality in which, as Plotinus tells us, all the forms are present as a plurality in unity: they are all compresent, ‘telescopied’ one inside the next, but in a non-spatial, non-temporal sort of way. That this sort of state is difficult for us to describe or imagine should come as no surprise since neither the enterprises of description nor of imagining do very well with the notion of unity. While Intellect for Gabirol comprises a unified, mind-independent universal reality in which we subsist and to which we strive to conjoin, the mental life of any individual intellect or soul has no such status, and – even in its relation to Intellect – necessarily represents the unity of Intellect in a distorted way.

And so, in spite of the ontological rootedness of things in Intellect, we cannot lose sight of the gulf that must necessarily exist between conceptual reality as it occurs in any individual intellect or soul, and reality as it is to be found in the inexplicably unified realm of complete potency in Intellect. To see the emergence of this gulf, consider that the conceptions in our individual souls merely reflect the reality of Intellect. Just as the sensible world is seen as falling short of intelligible
reality because a mere reflection of intelligible reality, so too, the life of the soul (viz., its conceptual endeavors) falls short of intelligible reality, since it too is a mere reflection of that reality (albeit a reflection which -- due to the clearer quality of soul’s substance -- is ‘better’ than the reflection found in the sensible realm).

But, even so, the reality in soul does not approximate the full potency of forms in Intellect, and, as such, must be seen at best as offering us a distorted view of that higher reality. As well-prepared as soul might be, it is, by its very nature, receptive of forms in a more discrete and individuated (i.e., more actual) manner than is the case in Intellect (as we have seen above in our analysis of Pallor); this emphasizes the unavoidable distortion of the intelligible truth as it is filtered through to us via soul.

Interestingly, we might note that while the reality of Intellect (precisely because of its unity) is not a state which can be fully achieved by a particular soul in its individuated (i.e., determined) state, nonetheless, it is precisely the activities of soul – and first of all, the exercise of soul’s imaginative faculty – that indeed afford us the means by which the soul may unite with Intellect. We will examine this idea fully in chapter 5.

*
We have found that the very nature of soul is ill equipped to receive the unity of Intellect as such. The very procession of Intellect to Soul consists in a distortion of the unity of Intellect to a more actualized -- and hence, inferior -- grade of reality in Soul and souls.

Looking back to our earlier analysis of form as a speciating procession, we might here note that the inability on the part of individual intellects and souls to receive an untainted unity is precisely modeled on that inability, as the cosmic level, of Universal Souls to represent the unity of Intellect. In effect, the microcosm reflects the macrocosm: Soul’s emerging as both ontologically less unified than Intellect, as well as epistemologically unable to comprehend the unity of Intellect, becomes manifest in the microcosm more generally in form’s marking in each substance its lower state. Following directly on analogy with the cosmic state of things, form in any individual substance indicates an increase in manifestation, an increase in actuality, and, as such, a move from its higher generic potency to a lower state of determinate existence. This, then, on direct analogy with the cosmic fact that while Intellect is characterized by the pure potency of all forms, these forms take on a decidedly more actual subsistence in the processive unfolding of reality into Soul and then into Nature.
That a lower processive unfolding of reality should be associated with form may be seen in the following interrelated observations at the cosmic level:

**Epistemological conception:** Intellect, a pure unity, can only be conceived (or, construed) by Soul in some discursive (which is to say, non-unified) way; whereas forms are compresent as a unity in Intellect, they are present to Soul as separate and discrete;

**Constitutional reception:** In emanating forth, the pure unity of Intellect becomes manifest as a discrete field of forms in Soul. Soul (and individual souls) receives unity as plurality.

To appreciate, then, the ontological sense in which the formal is inferior to the purely material or potential, we must appreciate this macrocosmic sense in which, within the unfolding of reality, Soul stands as a level inferior to Intellect precisely in its tendency to receive and present forms in a more actualized way. It is in Soul’s thus having forms in a more discrete and robust sense than in Intellect that Soul presents a cosmic distortion of the unified potency of Intellect. Reflecting this macrocosmic fact, then, we find in the case of individual souls a concomitant lack of perfect correspondence between the items of conception and the state of reality in Intellect, as well as quite generally a privileging of the material (which is to say pre-formal) over the formal in our ontological analysis of any substance.

*
We have seen a most general sense in which genera are said to be matters (or, essences) to lower species (and hence, to the existing individuals that exemplify said lower species). This ontology, then, precisely reflects the macrocosmic presence of a most potential Intellect which, in its cosmic emanation, emerges as a shared essence (or, a common matter) to all substances.

*

3.4 APPENDIX: ARISTOTLE ON GENUS-AS-MATTER

Although Aristotle, at Metaphysics Z,\(^23\) likens Genus to Matter, there is a great difference between such a correlation in an Aristotelian context and in our above Neoplatonic analysis. Prima facie Aristotle only likens Genus to Matter. But, even if we take Aristotle’s claim to be more than a mere likening, we not only have no grounds for finding in Matter an unspecified Being per se (as we have been suggesting is the case for Gabirol) but, on the contrary, the Genus-as-Matter seems to suggest nothing more than a given entity’s proximate matter. In this regard, then, consider Rorty’s suggestion that Aristotle in fact means to go further than merely ‘likening’ Matter to Genus,\(^24\) but that, in the end, this theme within the Metaphysics is best seen as highlighting the fact that when it comes to a definition, the genus marks out the ‘material cause’ of the analysandum; and hence:
...animality stands to rationality as the brass of the statue stands to its shape. The proximate material cause of a man is that sort of organic material which can be called ‘animal’ but cannot be called ‘human.’ As he puts it as 1.8: “The matter is indicated by negation, and the genus is the matter of that of which it is called the genus,” (1058a23-24). If we do not think of the genus of an individual as telling us about its proximate material cause, the claim in H, 6 that the unity of definitions is simply the sort of unity which unites the proximate material cause with the form will have to be taken as merely a loose analogy...on the view I want to present, Aristotle is saying more than this, both in H, 6 and in the various passages...where he speaks of genus as matter... the way to flesh out the notion of genus-as-matter is to think of him as saying that the genus is a name for the sort of thing that an exemplar of a species of that genus can be made out of... 25

Regardless, then, of how precisely one takes this talk of ‘genus-as-matter’ in Aristotle, it is certainly clear that he cannot be seen as equating Matter with Genus in the sense of the former’s being an unspecified Being, and hence, a ‘highest genus’ and shared essence to all. Not only does Rorty’s above account suggest, if anything, an identification between genus and the proximate matter (thus in fact saddling both genus and matter with the relatively inferior role in an ousia and its definition), but we know independent of this, of course, that Aristotle quite generally frowns upon the Platonic conception of Forms, and as such, certainly frowns upon any notion of a ‘Form of Being’ or the concomitant notion of ‘unspecified Being per se.’ Leaving aside any details of Aristotle’s view of ousiai, of which are primary and of the relationship between genera and particulars, for our purposes we might simply point out that whatever he means by likening Genus to
Matter, he can hardly be seen as committed to our above sense of genus as the more existentially superior (because most unspecified) state of any analysandum. We must stress the difference of our above Neoplatonic idea of ‘genus as matter’ from Aristotle’s own view, even in light of the possibility that a given Neoplatonist himself might indeed erroneously interpret Aristotle’s claim in the above Neoplatonic sense.

*

1 We might, of course, note a further difference between the Neoplatonic and Aristotelian treatments of ‘genus’; whereas the Neoplatonists’ Platonic sensibilities allow them to envision substantial genera as self-standing hypostases independent of (and prior / superior to) the substance-effect, Aristotle’s own ‘in re’ realism about universals, of course, leads him to deny any such primary and independent existence to genera.

2 Consider Israeli’s likening the speciating ‘form’ to ‘Reason’: “...Specific form is not brought into being from an influencing and acting thing, but from an essential one -- like reason which establishes the essence of man, and which does not come from the soul in the way of influence and action, but is essential,” (B.Subst., Fragment III, Altmann and Stern 1958, 84).

3 FV 4.9, p. 231, 4ff.

4 FV 4.9, p. 230, 19 - 23.

5 See Stern 1983a for the thesis that the passages surrounding these descriptions of First matter and First form in Israeli and Ibn Ḥasday represent the impact of some single [non-extant] Neoplatonic treatise which was used by both authors.

6 Isaac Israeli, Mantua Text, § 1; Stern 1983a, 66.

7 Ibn Ḥasday, The Prince and the Ascetic, Ch. XXXIII, lines 9 - 15; Stern 1983a, 104.

8 These themes can also be found in Israeli; see e.g. Altmann and Stern 1958, e.g., 176-80.

9 E.g., FV 2.14, p. 48, line 24 - p. 49, line 2: “Surely it is according to this reason, inasmuch as it descends from simples to composites, it will be thicker and coarser...” And FV 3.55, p. 202, 1 ff., “…the reception of form in matter by an efficient power is only according to the preparedness [praeperationem] of matter for this...”
10 E.g., FV 2.14, 48, 24 ff. And, FV 3.55, p. 202, 10 ff.: "Since the matter that is closer to the flowing of power [fluxi virtutis] it is more prepared [paratior] to receive its action than another that is further, therefore it is necessary that the manifestation of power in closer matter is stronger than in more distant matter."

11 E.g., FV 3.55, p. 201, 6-8: "It is not possible that the divine power be weakened, but in its desire, powers roused themselves [erexerunt se] and cast a shadow upon the things below."

12 FV 3.22, p. 169.

13 For related discussion of the notion of 'potency' over 'act,' see Clarke 1952. See also Gersh on Neoplatonic causation in contrast to Aristotelian causation, and the Neoplatonic notion of 'active potency' in this regard; Gersh 1978, 27 ff.

14 FV 3.22, p. 131, 18 – 19.


18 FV 2.3, p. 31, 7 – 8.

19 FV 2.3, p. 31, 10ff.

20 Both in opposition to 'in actu'; see FV 5. 23, p. 300, 6.

21 We might here speak of all simple substances, but, I isolate Intellect as it is this spiritual simple the 'conjunction' with which is the ultimate goal of the human soul, and which is the main simple (as well as the universal matter) under examination in the current study.

22 This is a common Neoplatonic theme; the Greek term 'epitedeiotes,' for 'fitness,' is used in discussions of the inability of lower hypostases to 'receive' the fullness that overflows from superior hypostases.

23 See, e.g., 1038a6.

24 Rorty 1973. My thanks to Lee Franklin for bringing this article to my attention.

CHAPTER 4

FIRST MATTER IN CONTEXT:
A BROADER CONCEPTUAL AND HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

When it comes to the historical motivation behind the FV we must be careful to stress that we know very little about the sorts of things Gabirol actually read. This is further exacerbated by the fact that our knowledge about the Arabic Neoplatonic texts which were even available is arguably incomplete, and as such, we can’t rule out that Gabirol had access to some works of which we currently have no extant records.

These caveats aside, we do, it seems, have reason to see him as having been influenced by the Ps. Empedoclean tradition. In Shem Tov Ibn Falaquera’s 13th century Hebrew summary of Gabirol’s original Arabic text, we are told:

...iyanti ba-sefer she-hiber ha-hakham R’ Shiomo z”l ben Gevirol ha-nisra

‘Megor Ḥayyim’ veha-nir’eh li ki hā nimshakh be-‘ōvan h-dēōvahar da’at ha-
qadmōnim mē-hakhmē ha-mehqar kemo she-nizkar ba-sefer she-hiber

Bandakēs [ = Empedocles] ba-‘Aẓamim ha-Ḥamīshah...’
...I examined the book compiled by the sage, Rabbi Solomon (peace be upon him) the son of Gabirol, [the book] that is called ‘The Fountain of Life’ [i.e., the Fons Vitae], and it seems to me that it followed in the same tradition as that of the ancient thinkers as recorded in Empedocles’ book, ‘[The Book of] the Five Elements’...

In addition to the suggesting the possibility of translating the book attributed to Empedocles as the ‘Fifth Element,’ scholars point out that Falaquera might have only meant that Gabirol’s work seems to be similar to some Ps. Empedoclean works, and not necessarily that Gabirol’s text was in fact influenced by those works. As such, we cannot be sure of even this ‘Ps. Empedoclean’ influence.

In addition, then, to the Ps. Empedoclean avenue, we will here pursue a number of other possible historical influences. Our primary aim will be to develop a strong context for seeing in matter a more exalted principle than in form. While most of the ideas that I will examine in this chapter might have in theory been available to Gabirol via Arabic Neoplatonic materials, it is not the goal of this chapter to uncover evidence of textual transmissions and indisputable lines of influence. My goal here, rather, is to provide the reader with a better sense of the supremacy of matter over form by adverting to similar themes in other early Greek and Arabic texts. Two justifications for such a methodology are:

1. it is always useful from a conceptual point of view to use other historical examples in way of better understanding a certain notion (even if, in the end, no actual ‘historical influence’ can be traced from the occurrence of said notion in one text to its occurrence in another); and

183
2. given the incomplete state of our knowledge regarding the manuscripts in the Neoplatonic tradition (especially regarding the transmission of Greek texts into Arabic texts), it is possible that we will in the future uncover evidence of heretofore-lost texts from the Arabic Neoplatonic corpus. This has been the case for the 72nd proposition of Proclus’ *Elements of Theology*, as we will see below. As such, sections of Plotinus or Proclus which today we do not know Gabirol to have had access to might be revealed to have in fact been available to him in Arabic translation (or at least in a modified and attenuated form in some Arabic text).

In adverting in this chapter to a number of philosophical case studies, then, we will at worst have given the reader a heightened conceptual sensitivity to the privileging of materiality, and we will have at best also hit upon some of the actual sources for Gabirol’s thoughts. Since, though, the conceptual goal is our main one, we begin by suggesting a way in which the reader might best think about matter in association with what is higher, even in the language of standard creation accounts.

4.2 MATTER AND CREATION AS EMANATION: *NIHIL* AND *ALIQUID* IN A NEOPLATONIC CONTEXT

We have already in chapter one touched on the reasons for seeing in Gabirol’s account a tacit concern with matter in a creation context. Let us here examine, then, the sense in which Intellect (that which we have suggested is to be associated with matter in Gabirol’s account) may be seen as at one and the same time
both the ‘nihil’ and ‘aliqurd’ of creation ex nihilo and creation ex aliquo accounts respectively, when those accounts are taken in an emanationist sense. To see this, consider:

In approaching the principle of materiality in a creation context, we have, it seems, not one, but two options: either, as is more commonly assumed, the material is to be associated with a disordered, privative substrate in opposition to the creative source, or, rather more exaltedly, it is to be associated with said creative source inasmuch as all creation subsists in said source. If, though, taken to denote the creative source, we once again have at least two options: matter may either denote the Creator Himself, or, some first creation which is itself a creative source for all other existents, (and not a disordered substrate inferior to its final ordered – which is to say, informed – state). In our having identified the material substrate of creation with Intellect itself (the emanative source for the rest of the cosmos), our treatment, of course, embraces this latter option: the material is the creative source, but is not God Himself. In general, though, upon considering these various possibilities for the role of matter in a creation account, we are led to consider finer demarcations than are sometimes drawn between creation ex nihilo (or, ‘creation out of nothing’) and creation ex aliquo (or, ‘creation out of something’). While the former is sometimes thought of as inconsistent with either creation ex aliquo or Plotinian emanation, we will be helped in our exploration of the material to the extent that we can in fact see in creation ex nihilo both creation ex aliquo and Plotinian emanation. Similarly, we will be helped in our exploration of the material to the extent that we can in fact see in creation ex aliquo something more like Plotinian emanation than like the Demiurgic
crafting account of the Timaeus. Consider first some ‘orthodox’ accounts of both 
creation ex aliquo and creation ex nihilo which highlight not only a seemingly 
insurmountable difference between ‘ex aliquo’ and ‘ex nihilo’ creation, but also 
between each of these views and Plotinian emanation:

4.2.1 CREATION EX ALIQUO AS DEMIURGIC CRAFTING

As can be seen in Plato’s Timaeus 50d, the world on this account is 
fashioned, molded or crafted by the Craftsman God out of some ‘stuff.’ This ‘stuff’ 
is co-eternal with God, has always existed alongside Him, and does not have its 
source in Him. The world itself in this picture is ‘crafted by God’ out of this stuff.

Creation ex aliquo is in its most immediate sense a doctrine on which creation 
is

(i) not eternal, and

(ii) not a flowing forth of things from the essence of God or from 
    anything else.

In these two ways it differs from Plotinian emanation.

To the extent that this ‘stuff’ becomes associated in textual traditions with a 
pre-existent matter, the material hence emerges as inferior both to the Craftsman, as 
well as to the principles of order (associated with Form) which He uses to mold said 
stuff.
4.2.2 ORTHODOX _CREATION EX NIHILo_

This account can be found in Genesis 1.1, ("In the beginning, God created (bara)...," ("b'reisht bara Elohim..."))), as well as in the Qur'anic description -- at II, 117 and at VI, 101 -- of God as the "Badāʾ," (Absolute Creator).

The world is created by God ‘from nothing,’ or, ‘not from something.’ The translation of ‘_ex nihilo_’ as ‘not from something’ reflects a sensitivity which ensures no mistaken identification (as, e.g., on the part of certain Kalam thinkers) of ‘nihil’ with some sort of ‘something’ (viz., matter, the ‘something’ which is ‘a no-thing’) from which the world is created. This sensitivity is reflected in the use of the Arabic expression ‘_lā min Shayy_’ (‘not from a thing’) as opposed to the expression ‘_min lā Shayy_’ (‘from no thing’) which latter expression is deemed misleading precisely because it is ambiguous between (a) the acceptable sense of ‘from nothing’ in the sense of ‘not from a thing,’ and (b) ‘from a ‘no-thing’’, allowing ‘no-thing’ to be construed as a privative substrate of sorts, the presence of which proponents of ‘orthodox creation _ex nihilo_’ want to deny. ²

In its most orthodox sense, then, _creation ex nihilo_ is a doctrine on which creation is

(i) not eternal,

(ii) not a flowing forth of things from the essence of God or from anything else.
In these above two ways, it differs from Plotinian emanation. Furthermore, this creation

(iii) does not involve any uncreated substrate.

As such, it differs from creation *ex aliquo* above.

To the extent that the material is seen either as the privative *‘nihil’* which stands in opposition to both God and the ordered cosmos, or as a privative tendency of created things which marks, as it were, their tendency to ‘not be’ (or, their having been created *ex nihilo*, as opposed, that is, to God who is uncaused), the material emerges as inferior both to the Creator as well as to the formal reality of things which stand as a mark of God’s existential sustenance.

Having seen these approaches to creation *ex aliquo* and *ex nihilo*, consider now the breakdown both of the divides between these two sorts of creation, between these two sorts of creation and Plotinian emanation, and, as a consequence, the emergence of entirely new ways of thinking about the material:

4.2.3 *CREATION EX NIHILO AS CREATION EX ALIQUO*

While above we have said that what is created by God from nothing is the cosmos, we might, it seems, instead say that, on creation *ex nihilo*, what is created by God from nothing is some first ‘stuff’ from which the rest of the world follows. If this ‘stuff’ is the *‘aliquid’* of creation *ex aliquo* above, then we have an initial sense of how these two views might be prima facie combined.
In tweaking these views, consider additionally that this ‘first stuff’ may be described as ‘created’ even if what is meant is some form of Plotinian eternal sustenance. In this regard, consider how each of \textit{creation ex nihilo} and \textit{creation ex aliquo} may be seen to demarcate Plotinian emanation:

\subsection{4.2.4 \textit{Creation ex Aliquo} as Plotinian Emanation}

\textit{Creation ex aliquo} may be seen to yield Plotinian emanation in light of the following two sensitivities:

1. The ‘crafting’ talk may be taken as a merely colorful (or, pedagogically effective)\textsuperscript{3} description of what is in fact an eternal and atemporal process; taken atemporally, the claim that “God crafts the world” might in fact be taken in the sense of “God sustains the world eternally.”

2. The further notion of a ‘basic substrate’ might be taken to denote not a ‘substrate out of which’ God creates the world, but rather, a ‘substrate in which God eternally sustains the world’ – or, a substrate ‘out of which all other existents take their existence.’ Taken as the substrate in this eternal sense, the material emerges no longer in a privative sense, but as that which God appoints, as it were, as the primary existential cause of all things – as that in which / in virtue of which all things exist. On our current thesis, Universal Intellect is a material substrate in just this sense.
Where matter refers to something like this (as we've suggested is the case for Gabirol), it certainly demarcates the most exalted existential core of reality.

4.2.5 CREATION EX NIHILO AS PLOTINIAN EMANATION

From the above orthodox statement of creation ex nihilo, we may demarcate a number of other approaches to the doctrine. As such, consider creation ex nihilo as in fact denoting:

A. Religiously Modified Aristotelian Eternity:

This take on creation ex nihilo is discussed – although not unambiguously embraced – by both Maimonides and Aquinas.4 We might state the view as follows: God chooses to have created an eternal world; i.e., He wills to create the world eternally. While eternal, here the world is said to be created ex nihilo in the sense that it is

(a) a function of God's Will,

(b) dependent on God existentially (and not just with respect to change and motion), and

(c) indicative of the dependence upon God for its order (i.e., 'ex nihilo' in the non-temporal sense of 'after privation'; in other words, it evidences the hand of God in its order, even if this order has been supplied by God eternally).

While (c) gives us a way to link the seemingly temporal notion of 'ex nihilo' to even an eternal process, (a) and (b) illustrate how this eternal process is different
from the one in Aristotle. Looking to (a) for example, the act of creation is here clearly willed by God (even if it is an act of eternal duration), thus differing from the unwilled, natural sustenance of Aristotle’s eternity account.

This view of creation ex nihilo differs also from Plotinian emanation to the extent that emanation is seen to be unwilled in at least some sense. Also, unlike on this modified Aristotelian eternity account, on the Plotinian view, the world comes forth from the essence of the Godhead.

B. Creation ex aliquo:

If, that is, one takes ‘nihil’ (in the phrase ‘creation ex nihilo’) to in fact refer to the ‘nothing’ which is ‘matter,’ then creation ex nihilo and creation ex aliquo are the same view. As H. A. Wolfson discusses, this approach is adopted by certain Kalam thinkers, and might be understood in light of their understanding of ‘al-ma’du’m’ (privation, or non-existence), which is itself a translation of the Greek ‘to mé on,’ which in Aristotle means either ‘nothing’ (and not a ‘something,’ (ti)), or, refers to matter.

We turn now, though, to the take on creation ex nihilo that is of most interest to us here:

C. Plotinian emanation:

On the possibility of identifying creation ex nihilo and Plotinian emanation consider: In his analysis of the Jewish mystical tradition, Scholem notes:
...creation out of nothing means to many mystics just creation out of God.

Creation out of nothing thus becomes the symbol of emanation, that is to say, of an idea which, in the history of philosophy and theology, stands farthest removed from it.⁸

In fact, though, this blurring of the line between creation ex nihilo and emanation is not a feature of mystical texts alone. It is, on the contrary, a dominant feature of Neoplatonic philosophy in general. In at least the history of philosophy with which we are here concerned, emanation does not, in fact, stand ‘farthest removed’ from creation ex nihilo.

In order to begin blurring the lines between creation and emanation, consider the Arabic term “Ibdaʾ,” a philosophical neologism which predominates the Arabic Neoplatonic materials. This verb form clearly describes some sort of ‘creating’ activity (an activity, moreover, related to the Creator God, called the Bādīʿ (Creator) in the Qur’an). However, given its newly coined status, we must acknowledge in this term a certain elasticity, with the possibility of its having different shades of meaning in different texts.⁹ And, while it definitely demarcates a grade of ‘absolute’ creation or ‘innovation,’ for our current purposes, it is sufficient to note that this notion on its own need not prima facie rule out a commitment to Plotinian emanation.

Furthermore, the identification between creation ex nihilo and emanation can be more positively seen to emerge from the association of the “nihil” of creation ex nihilo with God Himself, based either on treating ‘Nihil’ as a name for God, or, more
generally, on seeing God as He Who is beyond all naming, all predication, all language and thought, and hence, essentially ‘nihil’ as far as human conception is concerned. In support of thus seeing ‘nihil’ as literally naming God, we might note Armstrong’s translation of *Enn.* 6.9.5, in which he has Plotinus naming the One “Nothing,” (*ouden*). Yet while Altmann and Stern have pointed out that Armstrong’s rendering of Plotinus is here incorrect,\(^{10}\) we might note that even if we have no support for actually naming God “Nothing,” creation from ‘nothing’ might still aptly describe the process whereby things emanate forth out of the entirely transcendent Godhead who is ‘nothing’ in the sense of being above all predication and conception.

In effect, not only mystics but also Neoplatonic philosophers such as Scotus Eriugena (in his *Peri Phuseon*), and Al-Farabi,\(^{11}\) can be seen to follow the above Plotinian sensitivity on which the Godhead is ‘nihil’ in a key respect. As such, *creation ex nihilo* can become conceptually identifiable with Plotinian emanation, a point further grounded in the uncertainties surrounding the neologism of ‘*ibda*’” in Arabic texts.\(^{12}\)

* 

All in all, then, we may certainly uncover a sense in which *creation ex nihilo* does indeed denote Plotinian emanation. It is this sensitivity – together with the sensitivity to the similar amenability between *creation ex aliquo* and Plotinian emanation – that can help us to better appreciate the suggestion that for Gabirol, *creation ex nihilo* be understood as a commitment on his part to the sustenance of the
cosmos in Intellect, as per the emanationist world-view. Drawing upon these above
sensitivities, we can understand this as an intermediary position, one that does not
stress the flowing forth of all things from the Godhead, but from Intellect. We will
not here worry about what is the precise relationship between God and Intellect in the
FV, and whether God’s creation of Intellect *ex nihilo* is itself best seen in terms of a
straightforward Plotinian emanation or not. For our purposes, it suffices to note that
whatever God’s relationship is to Intellect, Intellect itself, as an emanative source in
Gabirol, is the ‘*nihil*’ (in the sense of being a pure potency which admits of no
particular formal predication, as we have seen in chapter 3), and the ‘*aliiquid*’ (in the
sense of being a thing) from which the rest of the cosmos arises. Given our
description of Intellect in chapter 3 as a pure unified potency in which we nonetheless
find the inception of plurality, we may say that it is the unique existent which is both
an ineffable ‘nothing’ as well as the most comprehensive ‘something’ from which all
else stems. Of course, it is in this sense of its being the ‘*nihil*’ or the ‘*aliiquid*’ that
we may describe it as the matter out of which the world is formed and in/ by which it
is sustained. As such, our treatment of Gabirol leads us to identify the universal
matter with the ‘*nihil*’ of *creation ex nihilo* taken in an emanationist sense, and with
the ‘*aliiquid*’ of *creation ex aliquo* taken in an emanationist sense. *Creation ex nihilo*,
*creation ex aliquo* and Plotinian emanation in this way come together in our treatment
of universal matter in Gabirol as denoting Intellect, the substrate out of which all else
is comprised and in which all else subsists.
On a final note, in way of strengthening the plausibility that Gabirol might have himself understood the ‘creation’ of Intellect by God as its arising from the Godhead via a straightforward Plotinian emanation, consider the extent to which the religious inclination to deny identifying creation and Plotinian emanation might in fact stem from particularly Christian concerns: That is, consider the fact that even Aquinas employs the robustly emanationist language of ‘flowing forth from the essence of God,’ but does so only to describe the relationship of the Son to the Father, and not to describe the relationship between the created world and God. We might suggest that perhaps, then, it is specifically the desire to avoid describing the cosmos itself in the same terms used to describe the relationship between members of the Trinity—and not simply a prima facie uneasiness with Neoplatonism—that might account for at least some of the negative Christian reaction to Eriugena in particular and the identification of creation and emanation in general. As such, a similar embrace of Neoplatonic emanationism on the part of either a Muslim or a Jewish theologian would not pose any similar problem.

*

4.3 MATTER AS SUPERNAL AND THE BINARITY OF THE FIRST MOMENT: OTHER SOURCES

In our project thus far, we have already seen a number ways to understand the supremacy of the material over the formal, and have likewise shown the important sense in which there are dual tendencies at the heart of all substances, even Intellect
itself. Here, then, let us provide some case studies of these ideas, seeing in each case the conceptual affinities to and differences from the version of Gabirol’s view that we have defended.

* * *

4.3.1 PLOTINUS AND PROCLUS: INTELLIGIBLE MATTER AND BINARITY

Plotinus quite generally treats ‘Matter’ as a negative notion aligned in many contexts with Evil and Privation. As such, Gabirol’s notion of First Matter, as well as his use of the term ‘Matter’ to denote something in it truest, most essential subsistence, has rightly been seen, at least for the most part, as part of a non-Plotinian tradition of Matter. However, consider the notion of ‘intelligible matter’ in Plotinus. While not in any part of the Enneads which we know to have been received in the Arabic Plotinus materials, we find, nonetheless, discussions – at 2.4.1-5, 5.4.2 and 5.5.4 – which highlight the first ‘moment’ out of the Godhead in terms of ‘matter.’ We might say that in its most pure, simple moment, Intellect is ‘intelligible matter’; only in its ‘second moment,’ in which it ‘looks back’ upon itself resulting in an immediate divide between subject and object do we have the inception of binarity in the cosmos. Here as in Gabirol, materiality is the mark not only of potency but also of superior simplicity and greater proximity to the Godhead.

Let us turn now to the Arabic summary version of Proclus’ work which circulated in the Arab world in a truncated form known as the Kalām fī maḥḍ al-khair (The Discourse on the Pure Good), or as it became known in Latin, The Liber de Causis (The Book of Causes), (henceforth, Liber). Circulating in the Arab world
under the name of Aristotle, the text was eventually (by Aquinas) identified as a collection of excerpts from Proclus’ *Elements of Theology*, yet the origins of the Arabic text remain uncertain. In its Arabic form, the Liber does not put forth a view supporting UH nor does it advert to any superior principle with the term ‘matter.’ It might be noted, though, that some have indeed seen in the 23rd Proposition of the Liber possible roots for Gabirol’s notion of various levels of matter. As for the apparent UHism in the claim of ‘form + *yliciam*’ composition of intellects at proposition 9 of the Liber, we have already noted why in fact this is not a claim of ‘form + matter’ composition.

Looking outside of the parts of Proclus’ work that survived in the Arabic Liber, we find in the 72nd proposition of the *Elements of Theology* an apparent statement of UH. This proposition – while not corresponding to any of the propositions in the *Kalām fī maḥd al-khair* – was found by Gerhart Endress to be available in Arabic manuscripts, albeit, as Dillon describes it, in a “rather truncated form.” While we do not know that Gabirol would have had access to any such Arabic text, Dillon nonetheless refers us to the relevant Arabic passage, as it does seem to put forth Gabirol’s notion of a matter which is the first entity after the God, the First Principle; as such:

Every substratum which has the capacity to underlie a great number of things proceeds from a more universal and perfect cause. Every cause which is a cause of more things is more universal, stronger and nearer to the ultimate Cause than a cause which causes less and less important things. If this is as we have set out, and if the first substratum can underlie all things, and the first
agent can effect all things, then the first agent must actualize and produce the first substratum, namely matter, which embraces all things. It is clearly proved, then, that the first substratum, that is, matter, underlies all things and that it is an intelligible substratum, even as the first agent actualizes it, because it is the agent of all things.²⁰

This clearly seems to entail that even intellects and souls would be ‘composite’ of matter plus form, just as we find at the heart of Gabirol’s UHist view.

4.3.2 NICOMACHUS: FROM ONE COMES TWO, AS WELL AS THE DIVINITY OF MATTER

While we cannot know for certain the details regarding the extent of Gabirol’s Pythagorean influence, we do know that the Introduction to Arithmetic by Nicomachus (a Neopythagorean of the 1st or 2nd century) was translated into Arabic as early as the 9th century and then again later by Thabit ibn Qurra,²¹ and that Gabirol additionally had access to Pythagoreanism through at least the Ikhwān as-Ṣafā and Saadia.²²,²³ We find suggestions of Pythagorean influence evidenced in Gabirol’s use of numbers within his cosmology, and his use of 1, 2 and 3 in interplay with the ideas of Limit and Limitlessness in the Fons Vitae seems to reveal a Neopythagorean influence.²⁴ We might note in this regard a potential indication of Gabirol’s familiarity with Nicomachean works even outside the Ikhwān texts, viz.: We find at 4.11 that Gabirol treats ‘3’ as the ‘radix’ of all things, a claim which seems related to Nicomachus’ identification of ‘3’ as the first ‘limited multitude’ — and hence, the first number — as opposed to the Ikhwān’s identification of ‘2’ as the first number.²⁵

198
4.3.2.1 FROM ONE MUST COME TWO

Gabirol’s view of a matter and form duality following upon the unity of the Godhead – or, ‘from one must come two’ – is often seen as a violation of the more common Neoplatonic emanationist dictum that ‘from one comes only one.’ In looking to Nicomachus, though, we may discern a sense in which we can conceptually reconcile ‘from one must come two’ with the more common Neoplatonic dictum. For, in the Neopythagorean literature in general, we find that the cosmic hypostases are, to an important extent, characterized as numbers. Hence, ‘1’ represents the highest hypostasis, i.e., God or Limit itself, whereas ‘2’ represents the ‘infinite flow of otherness’ which stands in need of God’s limitation, and upon which God (as principle of Limit) is said to impose limit in the way that ‘rennet curdles flowing milk.’\(^{26}\) Regardless of the differences from Gabirol’s view of matter and form as a binarity which follows upon the Godhead, we have here, nonetheless, a clear historical source for the general claim that, cosmically speaking, ‘from one must come two.’ For, taken in their capacity as numbers, the Neopythagorean hypostases will most centrally be described in such a way that, as in the number line, the hypostasis representing ‘2’ will always follow the hypostasis representing ‘1’: and hence, from one, 2 will follow.

Additionally, unlike systems (such as Iamblichus’ and Proclus’) where Limit and Unlimited, in their association with Monad (‘1’) and Dyad (‘2’), are seen as ontologically parallel (both occupying the same hierarchical level), the picture which emerges in Nicomachus (in line with the picture that I have suggested for Gabirol in which matter is ‘vertically above’ – and not ‘parallel with’ – form) treats the Monad
(Limit) as prior to, and ontologically superior to, the Dyad (Unlimit). As such, more so than in other Monad / Dyad systems, Nicomachus’ system reflects the sense in which the 1 and the 2 in question occur in hierarchical succession, and are not ‘ontologically parallel.’ This, then, is not only obviously the case in Gabirol for the relationship between God and whatever follows after Him, but, again, is what I’ve suggested is the case even for First Matter and First Form in Gabirol. Care must be taken, though, in drawing too clear a parallel between Gabirol and this Neopythagorean source (or, even between Gabirol and the Proclean / lamblichean discussions of Limit / Unlimited), since, as we have described it above, Gabirol’s notion of Limit (and of esse and act) is inferior to the material principle of Unlimit (and hiddenness, inactivity, etc.) In this latter regard, though, we may find some support in Nicomachus’ sometimes treating the Monad not as the Limiting principle of form, but as the infinite, Unlimited receptacle, matter. It is to this that we now turn.

4.3.2.2 NICOMACHUS ON GOD AS MATTER

While, as we have already stated, we cannot be sure of the degree of Gabirol’s familiarity with Nicomachus’ ideas, in what follows, we will nonetheless illustrate the emergence in Nicomachus’ writings of an association of God with Matter, and, by extension, further support for the priority of matter over form in general and for the association of matter with Intellect in particular. This can be found most overtly in his *Arithmetica Theologoumena*, though even tacitly in his *Introduction to Arithmetic* as well.
In his *Arithmetica Theologoumena* (a work which we know to be extant only in a summary by Photius, as well as in an anonymous compilation of a similar name -- the *Theologoumena Arithmeticae* -- sometimes attributed to Iamblichus)\(^{27}\), we find Nicomachus' association of God and Matter in no uncertain terms:

There is a certain plausibility in their also calling [the Monad] 'matter' and even 'receptacle of all' (*pandoxea*), since...it is capable of containing all principles; for it is in fact productive and disposed to share itself with everything...\(^{28}\)

And,

God coincides with the monad since he is seminally everything which exists...\(^{29}\)

In the above citations, we have, then proof not only of Nicomachus' willingness to associate the Monad with matter, but, given the coincidence of God with Monad, his willingness to associate God with matter.

As Receptacle of all, Monad -- as the source and container of all the infinite forms which proceed forth in the dyadic moment of Otherness -- emerges as matter to the myriad forms, as opposed to its more prominent emergence in other contexts as the Form which imposes limit on the dyadic infinite otherness (where there, it was the otherness -- and not the Monad -- which was called matter).

201
To see how this association of matter with God might be seen even in Nicomachus' *Introduction to Arithmetic*, consider his treatment there of the Monadic source not only as a limiting Form, but as a material receptacle for forms. In this sense, then, the Monad can't possibly be equated with a Form, since it exists prior to the forms. And, furthermore, it exists as the repository or receptacle of the forms. In this sense, the divine principle of Monad may be likened to the Divine Nous -- it emerges as the divine receptacle of the forms (themselves understood as Divine Logoi, or seminal ideas). In this respect, the Divinity is matter. While Gabirol does not describe God as matter, this Neopythagorean context is at least a possible impetus for seeing a supreme Intellect as matter.

4.3.3 THE ISMA'ILI CONTEXT OF HYLOMORPHISM

Looking at Gabirol's intellectual context for other possible sources for his dual-principled UH, we might also consider the doctrines of Ismailism. In, e.g., such writers as Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī (henceforth, 'Sijistani') we have evidence of an earlier Gnostic idea of two cosmic principles out of which all else is created. These dual principles, *kūnī* and *qadar*, are treated in Ismaili sources not -- as in the Gnostic sources -- as creating forces which act in isolation from God, but rather as the products and extensions -- in the form of the two very first productive effects -- of God's creative force. The following is the account of the *kūnī / qadar* cosmological doctrine:
He [God] existed when there was no space, no eternity, no time, no things occupying space and no minute of time. When He conceived a will and a wish, He created a light and produced out of this light a creature. This light remained for some length of its eternity not knowing whether it was a creator or a created thing. Then God breathed into it a spirit and directed at it a voice: “Be!” (kun), thus it came into being with God’s permission. All things were made by God through creating them from the letters kāf and nūn [= the word ‘kun’]. There is bringing-into-being, one who brings-into-being, and a thing which is brought-into-being. Then there is Allah. Then through the waw and the yā’, which became a name for what is above it, calling it therefore kūnī.

Then the command of the Creator of all things went to kūnī: “Create for yourself out of your own light a creature to act for you as vizier and helper and to carry out our command.” Thus it created a creature out of its light and gave it a name, calling it qadar. Through kūnī God brought into being all things, and through qadar He determined them.31

While in Sijistani, the two principles in question are aligned with the hypostases Intellect and Soul, we might note that, outside of the particulars of any given Ismaili text, these two principles might certainly be seen as conceptually germane to the development of Gabriol’s own thoughts on matter and form.

Using Sijistani’s Ismailism as a guide, let’s look critically at the kūnī / qadar doctrine in its conceptual relation to Gabriol’s UH as I have been sketching it:

1) Sijistani clearly associates kūnī and qadar, the first two creations, with Intellect and Soul. As such, the doctrine of ‘from one comes one’ is still upheld, in that, from God comes Intellect (kūnī) and from Intellect (kūnī) comes Soul (qadar). Given the close association of these two principles -- kūnī and qadar -- with the
intelligible realm in Ismailism, we have here a strong association of the first moment of creation with *two* first principles, i.e., the *aṣlān* (which, given the Arabic dual form, specifically means ‘two roots / principles’). This strong notion of *aṣlān* -- even in isolation from the specific details upheld by any individual Ismaili thinker -- might certainly have played a role in Gabirol’s commitment to his doctrine that from one, two must follow, but, furthermore, in such a way which in no way threatens the ‘from one comes one’ principle.

(2) Furthermore, looking to the very meanings of *kūnī* and *qadar*, it seems quite reasonable to suggest in these principles a possible impetus for Gabirol’s account. For, *kūnī* is derived from the imperative form of the verb ‘*kana*,’ to be, (viz., a substantival form from the imperative, *kun*, meaning ‘Be!’ While this does not on its own suggest a correlation to Matter, consider this suggestion in light of its being coupled with its partner, ‘*qadar*.’ *Qadar* denotes a power or determining / delineating capacity, with its original sense associated with the notion of measuring. As such, it is certainly reminiscent of form -- the measuring and determining force to matter. It should be noted that such an association would align matter with the superior and ‘prior’ of the two principles, aligning it, as it were, with the existential ‘Be’ principle. *Kūnī* emerges as the first manifestation of undetermined being, whereas only in *qadar* do we find the delimiting (or, formal) force. This certainly sits well with the analysis we have provided of matter and form demarcating dual moments, as it were, of the cosmos and of any individual substance in terms first of unspecified potency (or, pure existence), and secondarily in terms of determinate, formal, specification and actuality.
In looking for an affinity between the principle of kūnī and an exalted existential state of matter, we might further note that ‘kūnī,’ as such, is morphologically also the feminine form of the imperative of kana, (to be). While this is not the morphology of ‘kūnī’ given in the above Ismaili retelling of the Gnostic account (in which it is, rather, explicitly presented as being a substantival form of the masculine imperative, ‘kun,’ with the letters waw (ū) and yā’ (ī) added to it), we might nonetheless note that one less familiar with the details of the account might well hear in the notion of ‘kūnī’ a feminine imperative, and as such, a reference to matter in light of the well-entrenched Platonic association of matter as the Mother / Receptacle, both in the Timaeus and elsewhere.

(3) Consider Sijistani’s analysis of the inception of Soul from Intellect:

Primary intellect which is perfect in both potentiality and actuality...was the cause of its mate at the moment of regarding its own essence. There generated out of it the form of its essence at the moment it regarded that essence.39

Note the specific affinity between his talk of Soul’s emergence from Intellect and Plotinus’ description of the emergence of Intellect from the One via ‘intelligible matter’ as we’ve discussed above. In both cases, it is Intellect’s recognition of self—or, its essential recognition—which gives way to the formal and the plural. This essential moment is explicitly identified by Plotinus with matter, but is, in its giving way to form even in the above passage, clearly suggestive of a link between the higher essential simplicity as the matter to the procession of the formal which follows. This
affinity between Sijistani’s above language of ‘essential recognition’ and the
Plotinian analysis of intelligible matter might suggest that there was available in the
Arabic milieu around the time of Gābirol a source for the Plotinian theme of
intelligible matter. In any case, it certainly reverberates the Gābirolean theme of the
material as essential and the formal as what follows upon that as the inferior act.

4.3.4 FIRST MATTER: IBN HASDAY’S NEOPLATONIST, ISRAELI, AND
THE THEOLOGY OF ARISTOTLE

S. M. Stern gives the name “Ibn Hasday’s Neoplatonist” (henceforth IHN)
to what he argues is a (non-extant) common source of an identifiably unique strain of
thought not only in the 13th century Ibn Ĥasday’s work, The Prince and the Ascetic,
but in the writings of Isaac Israeli and in the Longer Theology of Aristotle (henceforth
Longer Th.). Looking solely to the theme of matter in these texts, we find an
important difference between the writings of Ibn Ĥasday and Israeli, on the one hand,
and Longer Th. on the other: While the former authors reveal a doctrine of First
Matter, the Longer Th. instead talks only of a First Intellect. Looking explicitly at the
this difference in the texts, a number of other points of similarity (and difference)
might be drawn for Gābirol’s own analysis of First Matter:

Israeli:

Aristotle the philosopher and master of the wisdom of the Greeks said: The
beginning of all roots is two simple substances: one of them is first matter,
which receives form and is known to the philosophers as the root of roots. It
is the first substance which subsists in itself and is the substratum of
diversity. The other is substantial form, which is ready to impregnate matter.
It is perfect wisdom, pure radiance, and clear splendour, by the conjunction of which with first matter the nature and form of intellect came into being, because it [intellect] is composed of them [matter and form].

Note: (1) First Matter is here described as a substance. We have already seen the extent to which, taken to denote Intellect, Gabirol’s First Matter would certainly denote a substance.

(2) First Matter is here said to subsist ‘in itself.’ This sits quite well what we have already said about the ‘per se existens’ characteristic of matter in Gabirol.

(3) Though First Matter is treated before First Form, it might seem in this passage from Israeli that it is First Form which emerges as superior. For, it is given the active role of male impregnator of the feminine material receptacle, and is also described as ‘perfect wisdom, pure radiance and clear splendour.’ As such, while Israeli addresses a ‘First Matter,’ it might not come across here as ‘first’ in the sense that we have already suggested is the case for Gabirol. However, as for Gabirol, the tradition at hand may well be understood as associating activity with negativity; that is, to the extent that Form is active, it is the less perfect of the two principles; the inactive matter is hence superior. In immediate support of an affinity to Gabirol’s approach here, then, we find that even in the above characterization, it is form – and not matter – which is saddled with being the source of diversity; we see this inasmuch as matter is described as the “substratum of diversity,” i.e., presumably that which receives -- but is not per se responsible for -- the diversity.
Ibn Hasday:

The first of created things were two simple substances: the first matter which
is the substratum for everything, i.e., the first hylic matter which is the
substratum for all forms, and is called by the philosophers the genus of genera;
and the form which precedes that which is found with it, i.e., the perfect
wisdom, by the conjunction of which with matter the nature of the intellect
came into being, so that the intellect, being composed of it and matter, is a
species of it.36

(1) Stern notes37 that “the form which precedes that which is found with it” in the
above text is a mistranslation on Ibn Hasday’s part, and should read, “the form which
is united to the essence of that which it is.” Leaving aside what this corrected
translation might mean, we might note that -- addressing any seeming superiority of
First Form to First Matter in Israeli’s understanding of this tradition, despite First
Matter’s being introduced first -- Ibn Hasday, in his mistranslation, does seem to give
First Form the superior role: First Form, i.e., perfect wisdom, here seems to be said
to precede matter in the (admittedly mistranslated claim that) it ‘precedes that which is
found with it.’ That is, taking ‘perfect wisdom’ as characterizing First Form, within
the context of the mistranslation what seems to be said is that First Form, which is
Perfect Wisdom, precedes First Matter -- that which, as the rest of the sentence goes
on to say, is found -- at least in the case of intellect -- ‘with’ it. As such, Ibn
Hasday’s mistranslation seems -- in stressing that First Form ‘precedes’ First Matter
-- to obscure the superiority of matter.
(2) In opposition to any negative implications for matter that we’ve seen in Ibn
Hasday’s text, consider the implication in that same text of First Matter’s — and not
First Form’s — being called the ‘genus of genera,’ (similar to ‘the root of roots’ as it
is described in Israeli). This, of course, reverberates what we have discerned as
Gabirol’s own clear identification of the material and the essential, or, the most
general of all genera, the unspecified Being per se of Intellect.

**Longer Theology of Aristotle (‘Longer Th.’):**

The first of created things is the first intellect, which is united with the word
of the Creator, (may He be exalted), which is the first substratum of the first
form, the genus of genera which comprises all substance, and which possesses
pure brilliance and unmixed light. Then follows the second intellect, which is
like the species of the first, because out of it was composed its substratum and
its form, which is united to the essence of that in which it is.38

As was stated earlier, we find in the Longer Th. no mention of ‘First Matter’;
instead, we find ‘First Intellect’ as the ‘first of created things’ and as ‘the first
substratum of the first form.’ Like First Matter in Ibn Ḥasday’s (but not Israeli’s)
text, it is called the ‘genus of genera,’ and clearly -- as the ‘first substratum of the
first form’ -- it seems related to First Matter in our above quotes from Israeli and Ibn
Ḥasday. Here, as for the ʿIkhwān’s analysis,39 as for the Ismaili tradition in
Sijistani,40 as well as for the author of the Arabic Liber de Causis,41 ‘Intellect’
emerges as the first ‘created’ thing -- the first hypostasis -- after the Creator. In
effect, there seems to be a link of some sort between ‘First Matter’ in some texts and

209
‘First Intellect’ in others. This, as we have suggested earlier, can be taken in further support of our claim that in Gabirol First Matter in fact refers to Intellect (though, as in the case of Plotinus’ reference to ‘intelligible matter,’ to a certain most simple, most unified moment of Intellect, a moment we have described in chapters 2 and 3 as Intellect’s pre-causal, pre-processive state of potency).

*

4.3.5 GABIROL’S MATTER AND THE IKHWĀN TRADITION

The Ikhwān aš-Šafā (the ‘Brethren of Purity’) (like Sijistani) actually use the term ‘matter’ to refer to what, hierarchically, comes after — and is produced by the motion of — Soul. Although we have tried to suggest a supremacy of matter between the lines of the ‘kānī / qadar’ myth, in Sijistani, as in the Ikhwān, matter is explicitly seen in association with Soul, a lower effect, and not the most exalted of hypostases. There is, in other words, no question that the Ikhwān (in the first chapter in their second book, i.e., the 15th of the Rasā’il) order Intellect, Soul and then Matter (in 4 grades) as the 2nd, 3rd and 4th hypostases after God (the 1st Hypostasis); as such, the term ‘Intellect,’ and not ‘matter,’ is used, as it is for Sijistani, in association with the First Created Being.

Consider, though, the suggestion made above, viz., that perhaps the First Matter tradition is simply the same as the First Intellect tradition, save an interesting change of terminology (or, in other words, that ‘First Matter’ simply refers to First Intellect). In fact, in support of such a contention from within the Ikhwān’s text, consider the following remark:42
Various people have said that the world is made of form and matter, others light and darkness, substance and accident, spirit and body, Guarded Tablet and Pen, expansion and contraction, love and hate, this world and the next, cause and effect, beginning and end, exterior and interior, high and low, heavy and light...

And that,

...in principle, all these views are the same; they disagree only in secondary aspects and in expression.

Turning to Nasr’s expansion of these remarks, we learn further that, “In all these cases the duality refers to the Intellect and Soul which contain in themselves the active and passive principles through which the life and activity of the Universe can be understood.” In other words, focusing as they do upon the interplay of active and passive forces to explain the world, the Ikhwān are sensitive to the possibility of speaking of the ultimate constituents of the world in terms of ‘form and matter.’ However, within their system, the ‘form and matter’ description is only true inasmuch as it reduces to their own claim, viz., that the ultimate constituents of the world are intellect and soul -- the 2nd and 3rd hypostases. As such, consider the extent to which Gabirol’s own First Matter tradition is different:

1. In general, the Ismaili tradition -- as seen in Sijistani, and even in the above remarks of the Ikhwān -- do not use the language of ‘form and matter’ but the language of ‘intellect and soul’ to describe the ultimate constituents of the universe.
Matter, properly speaking, is seen, rather, as coming after Soul. Even the Ikhwān who
demarcate 4 grades of Matter -- the highest two being called ‘Original Matter’ and
‘Universal Matter’ respectively -- place these after Soul.

2. Furthermore, it seems that the suggestion that ‘form and matter’ are
equivalent to ‘Intelect and Soul’ is in the Ikhwān (and in the source being referred
to) based on a very straightforward idea: viz., that in its relation to Intellect, Soul -- in
its capacity to receive from Intellect -- is like Matter. On this reading, Intellect is like
Form and Soul like Matter. That this is what the Ikhwān have in mind in referring to
the ‘various people’ who ‘have said that the world is made of form and matter’ seems
clear once we consider that in fact, the Ikhwān themselves, in their analysis of Soul,
liken it to Matter for just the reason mentioned -- viz., in its relation to Intellect, it is
the ‘receiver.’

To the extent, then, that the Ikhwān sees in the terms ‘form’ and ‘matter’
references to ‘Intelect’ and ‘Soul’ respectively, there is revealed a bias against the
material, in that it is the term ‘matter’ which gets correlated with the lower of the two
hypostases, i.e., it is ‘form and matter’ (note the order) that are said to correlate to
‘intellect and soul,’ (not ‘matter and form’). As such, Gabirol’s approach -- an
approach on which the term ‘matter’ is lexically superior to ‘form’ in all
hylomorphic analyses -- reflects a different sensibility.

All of the above points notwithstanding, we might certainly see a fair bit of
influence upon Gabirol from the Ikhwān. For example, their four grades of Matter --
Original, Universal, Natural and Artefactual -- together with their commitment to
‘beings of this world’ [al-Muwalledān]⁴⁶ (as perhaps reflecting their logical category of ‘the individual,’ [al-shakhṣ] which they added as a sixth category over Porphyry’s five),⁴⁷ seem to be germane to Gabirol’s own 5-part division of matter. However, as I hope to have shown above, any residual influence — even with respect to Matter itself — will, ultimately, be transformed in Gabirol. For, while the Ikhwān certainly have a relatively exalted variety of matter in their system — viz., Original Matter, which has only existence, and no determination — they still do not use the term ‘matter’ in their description of the highest, first creation. That we might see in Gabirol many Ikhwān-based intuitions about materiality, then, does not allow us to overlook the fact that his world-view invokes a decidedly more positive use of the term ‘matter’: in seeing ‘matter’ even prior to Soul, Gabirol here must be seen as differing from the Ikhwān, from Sijistani and from the Longer Th., all of which only use the term ‘matter’ to denote either soul, or some post-soul phenomenon.

*

4.3.6 PSEUDO EMPEDOCLES

Both the origins and the precise nature of this tradition — as well as whether or not there was ever a single ‘Empedoclean’ tradition — are far from clear. While some point to Ibn Masarra (883 - 931),⁴⁸ as having imported this tradition from the East, (with al-Madīrītī (ca. 1005/6), al-Kirmani and the Ikhwān having disseminated it further),⁴⁹ others shed doubt on there ever having been a single such tradition to speak of.⁵⁰ It is not clear whether this work was itself — as in the cases of the Theology of Aristotle and the Liber de Causis — based on an original Greek text, nor
is it clear whether the direct Arabic and Hebrew evidence of an ‘Empedoclean’
tradition which we have are themselves directly descendent from such a Greek
tradition even if there was one. It is also unclear whether references to Empedocles’
“Book of Five Substances” refers to one book from which all -- or any -- of the Ps.
Empedocles traditions are derived, as it is likewise unclear whether the actual name of
the book should be “The Book of the Fifth Substance.” With respect to Gabirol,
while some go so far as to suggest Gabirol himself as the source of the Empedoclean
Book of Five Substances,51 we find others who not only deny this, but, additionally,
some who doubt if Gabirol even ever had access to such a text at all, pointing out that
Falaquera, in noting the similarity of Gabirol’s ideas to the Empedoclean Book of Five
Substances, does not specifically claim that this book was actually read by Gabirol.52
In any case, Shem Tov Ibn Falaquera -- in his introductory remarks to his 13th
century Hebrew summary of Gabirol’s text -- does point to the prominence of this
tradition in Gabirol’s thought,53 and as such, it is certainly worth investigating in our
attempt to best understand the notion of matter in the Fons Vitae.

We turn our attention, then, to our main sources regarding this obscure
‘Empedoclean’ tradition. Our first source is Shahrastani, who in his ‘Kitāb Al-Milal
wal-nihal,’ (Book of Religions and Sects) II, Book 2, Ch. 1,54 recounts the teachings
of the great Empedocles. We will call this account the ‘Arabic Empedocles.’ Our
second source is what we will call the ‘Hebrew Empedocles.’ This source is one of
two Kabbalistic texts that give us fragmentary evidence of the Ps. Empedoclean Book
of Five Substances. Of the two Kabbalistic texts in question, one is anonymous with
no date.55 In our advertting to the Hebrew Empedocles below and in chapter 5, we will
hence be referring to the Empedoclean account as it occurs in the other of these Kabbalistic texts, viz., in the 14th century Yesod Olam by Elḥonan ben Avrohom.56

In looking to these two traditions, differences abound. One important difference is that neither the Arabic nor the Hebrew Empedocles in their doctrines of First Matter speaks, as does Gabirol, of First Form. Additionally, while the Hebrew Empedocles treats First Matter -- called ‘Yesod,’ or ‘foundation’ (akin to the Arabic ‘unṣūr) -- as the first hypostasis out of the Godhead which is entirely simple (as we find in Gabirol), Shahrestani’s doctrine instead focuses on this First Matter’s own composite nature, itself being composed of the dual principles of Love and Strife (these latter two principles actually suggesting to us vestiges of the historical Empedocles doctrine).

Here, then, we have evidence of ‘first matter’ in some traditions (i.e., the Hebrew Empedocles) emerging as the first component of the cosmos, and in other traditions (i.e., the Arabic Empedocles) as the first composite. While interesting as the subject of another study, for our present purposes this seems to stand in support of our seeing in Gabirol’s talk of First Matter an implicit reference to First Intellect itself, in that, as we have seen, in referring to Intellect, matter can meet both of these desiderata: on the one hand it can be seen as the first component (inasmuch as Intellect is the first existential component of all things), but on the other hand it can be seen as the first composite (as Intellect is the first dual effect in the cosmos).

*
4.4 CONCLUSION

In addition to suggesting to us a reconciliation between the notions of
creation ex nihilo, creation ex aliquo and Plotinian emanation, our decision to treat
Gabirol's 'first matter' as referring to Intellect provides us with a conceptual means
by which to reconcile the two textual anomalies we have seen: on the one hand it
reconciles the apparent replacement within various IHN texts of 'First Matter' with
'First Intellect,' and on the other, it reconciles the apparent replacement within various
Ps. Empedoclean texts of 'matter as first component' on the one hand with 'matter as
first composite' on the other. It is precisely in seeing the link between matter and
Intellect that all of these prime facie conflicting descriptions can be seen as variously
depicting one and the same existential substrate.

* 

---

1 Falaquera, Qeta'im; see Sifroni 196[-], 435.
3 In fact, Neoplatonists commonly read Plato's 'demiurgic' account in the Timaeus as a
pedagogically simplified presentation of what was in fact his true commitment to the Neoplatonic
emanationist account.
4 See Maimonides, Guide of the Perplexed, II. 13, ('second theory') and II.30; Aquinas, Summa
Theo., i, 41, 3c; i. 45, 1.
6 Aristotle, De Gen. et Corr., i, 3, 318a 15 where the 'not-existent' (to mé on) is identified as
'nothing' (mèden).
7 Aristotle attributes this meaning to the Platonists; cf. Physics, i, 9, 192a, 6-7.
8 Scholem 1941, 25.

9 See E1³, Volume III, 663; Lane, Bk. I, Part 1, 163, entry #4, “ibdā’.”

10 Altman and Stern 1958, 156, with fn. 2.

11 Cf. Kitāb al-Jam’, edited by F. Dieterici in Alfarabi’s philosophische Abhandlungen, 1890, p. 23, lines 15 – 16. We might also note that while Hasdei Crescas (Or Adonai, iii, i, 5, pg. 69a, lines 4 - 18, Vienna, 1859), also suggests an affinity between creation ex nihilo and emanation, as Wolfson points out, Crescas does not mean to “reinstate in religious good standing the doctrine of emanation, but rather to show that creation ex nihilo is not less rational a belief than the philosophic doctrine of emanation,” (cf. Wolfson 1973, 218); as such, Crescas does not identify ‘creation ex nihilo’ with emanation in the positive sense that we find in Eriugena and in Farabi.

12 See my “Jewish Neoplatonism . . .” (forthcoming) for a more extended discussion of the terms ‘ibdā’ and its related ‘ikhtirā’ in the Arabic Neoplatonic schema, as evidenced in the works of Isaac Israeli.


14 See Corrigan 1996.

15 For details of the texts and possible authors, see Taylor 1986 and Taylor 1992. Generally, a terminus a quo is given as early 9th century, and a terminus ad quem of 992 AD. The first edition of the Arabic text is Bardenhewer’s 1882 version, with a 1955 version by Badawi; both worked from a single manuscript; a critical edition is found in Taylor 1981, 43 - 104.


17 In this regard, see our earlier discussion in chapter one of Aquinas’ criticism of UH, and Taylor 1979.


19 Dillon 1992, 55.

20 As cited in Dillon 1992, 55.

21 Gutas 1998, 30 and 140.

22 For a tracing of the writings of Nicomachus into the hands of the Ikhwan as-safa’ in the Arabic Neoplatonic tradition, cf. Goldstein 1964-5. In this article, Goldstein also provides an English translation of the first Risala on Number; see 135 - 60.
23 For references to the impact of Neopythagorean ideas on Ibn Ezra -- himself a follower of Gabirol in many ways -- see Wolfson 1990, 93, n. 63. See also Wolfson 1994, 141 where he discusses the impact of Nicomachean ideas on Saadia, Dunash (a student of Gabirol) and Donnolo.

24 FV 4.11, p. 237, 15 - 17; though, admittedly, in that specific context Gabirol is relying upon the association of Limit and Form as the ‘unity’ prior to the Unlimit of Matter as ‘duality’; viz., an association which privileges Limit and Form to Unlimit and Matter. As such, the Fons Vitae does not here reflect the Nicomachean privileging of Matter which we will see below -- a privileging, though, which, as we have seen, is characteristic of the Fons Vitae.

25 See Goldstein 1964/5, 136 where the Ikhwān identify ‘2’ as the first number, and also p. 141 where they describe ‘3’ as merely the first odd number. See also Nasr 1993, 49.

26 Theologoumena Arithmeticae, Ast (Leipzig 1817), 8. For more information about this text and the overall framework of Nicomachus’ ontology, see D’Ooge 1926, and for this sentence in Nicomachus’ corpus, see p. 117. See also Pessin 1999. See also some more discussion below.

27 For Greek text see de Falco 1922; for translation, see Waterfield 1988.

28 De Falco, p. 5, line 12 - 16; Waterfield, p. 39.

29 De Falco, p. 3, line 2 - 3; Waterfield, p. 37.

30 For this association of Matter with God in Nicomachus’ Introduction to Arithmetic, see Dooge 1926, and especially the introductory material by Louis Charles Karpinski, 88-124.

31 See S. M. Stern 1983c, p. 18.

32 Sijistani also refers to the two founding principles (which, again, he associates with Intellect and Soul) as ‘Asāsān,’ (., the ‘two foundations’); see Walker 1993, 18.

33 Abū Ya’qūb al-Sījistānī, Kitāb al-maqālāt (The Keys), Ms. Hamdani Library, p. 32; as quoted (and translated) in Walker 1993, 97.

34 Unlike Borisov -- who first discovered the Longer Theology of Aristotle -- who argues that the Longer text was in fact the original, with the Shorter (“vulgate”) Theology of Aristotle being the work of a later editor, Stern -- in agreement here with S. Pines -- instead views the Shorter version to have been written first, with the Longer version representing the work of a later editor. Borisov argues that the later editor, faced with the Longer version, extracted -- among other things -- all references to the Divine Will because he thought this doctrine was Christian in nature (of course, as Borisov also discusses, the notion of Divine Will in fact gets picked up again by Gabirol). Pines maintains that, faced with the Shorter version, the later editor added in -- among other things -- a doctrine of the Divine Word, wherein the ‘First Intellect’ is said to be in union with the Word, arguing furthermore, that the addition of this doctrine reveals Isma'il influence. Stern, while agreeing that the Shorter version comes first, does not necessarily think that the Longer version
reveals the editorship of someone under the influence of Ismailism, pointing out (as in fact had Pines) that both the Ismalis and the editor who produced the Longer version may have been mutually influenced by a common source. This issue aside, Stern argues that the editor who produced the Longer version was in fact influenced by Ibn Hasday’s Neoplatonist, and he argues for this by providing side-by-side comparisons of very closely related passages from Ibn Hasday’s The Prince and the Ascetic and passages from the Longer Theology of Aristotle (which don’t appear in the Shorter version); since these passages (a) reveal shared threads, (b) also match up with the same threads in Israeli, and (c) represent, (i) in the case of Ibn Hasday’s The Prince and the Ascetic, material that is ‘added on’ to that work’s well-entrenched Persian heritage, and, (ii) in the case of the Longer version of the Theology of Aristotle, material that is ‘added on’ to the Shorter version, Stern concludes that there was a common Neoplatonic text -- Ibn Hasday’s Neoplatonist -- which was a common source for all of these works.


35 Isaac Israeli, Mantua Text, § 1; cited in Stern 1983a, 66.

36 Ibn Hasday, The Prince and the Ascetic, Ch. XXXIII, lines 9 - 15; Stern 1983a, 104.


38 Stern 1983a, 91.

39 See Netton 1982, 35, where the Ikhwân’s 4 grades of Matter don’t come in at this early stage; rather, the order of hypostases is: 1. Creator, 2. Intellect, 3. Soul, 4. First Matter, 5. Nature, 6. Second Matter / Absolute Body, 7. Sphere, 8. the 4 elements, and 9. being of this world, (this latter category seems to indicate a ‘sixth’ category which they added on to Porphyry’s five; see in this regard Netton 1982, 46 - 8).

See also Nasr 1993, 51 - 2.

40 See Walker 1993, 83 ff.

41 See Liber, Prop. 4, where while the first created thing is initially called ‘anniyya’ (i.e., Being), it is soon described as ‘‘aql kulluha’, (i.e., wholly intellect). For Arabic text, see Bardenhewer 1882, 65 ff. For English text of Liber, see Guagliardo, Hess and Taylor 1996; (for Proposition 4 see pages 28 - 9).

42 Ḥāmi‘ah, II, 7 - 9; cited in Nasr 1993, 56.

43 Nasr 1993, 56.


45 Although, it should be noted that some of the other ‘pairs’ seem out of order: e.g., ‘Tablet and Pen’ should be in the order ‘Pen and Tablet’ if they are to match with the ‘active and passive’ order, and so too for some of the other pairs. As such, the mere ordering of ‘Form and Matter’ does not on
its own rule out that it is actually 'Matter and Form' which the Ikhwān are correlating with 'Intellect and Soul.' That it is, however, Form which is being associated with Intellect and Matter with Soul, the lower of the two hypostases, is immediately evident from a broader analysis of the Ikhwān's treatment of Matter.

46 See Netton 1982, 35.


48 See Asín Palacios 1978.

49 See Kaufmann 1899 / 1972, 84.

50 Stern 1983b.

51 Kaufmann refers to Zachs' having made this indefensible suggestion, see Kaufmann 1899 / 1972, 122.

52 See Musk 1859.

53 Kaufmann notes the relevance of Falaquera's having thus only pointed to this one tradition given that we know Falaquera to have been familiar with the many other textual traditions we have addressed in this chapter; see Kaufmann 1899 / 1972, 79.


56 Manuscript Ginsberg 607; Manuscript from Baron Ginsberg's library in Leningrad; see Kaufmann 1899 / 1972, 85 and 88 ff.

Kaufmann also notes that in the 15th c., this Ps. Empedoclean tradition seems to have been quite well known; one example (which text Kaufmann cites) is the work of Yohanan Alemanno, (the teacher of Pico della Mirandola); Cf. Kaufmann 1899 / 1972, 87, fn. 36 for references to location of manuscript in Steinschneider's Bodleian Catalogue; the manuscript is Oxford 2234; see Kaufmann 1899 / 1972, 112.
CHAPTER 5

THE ETHICS OF ONTOLOGY:
LITERARY RHETORIC AND THE RETURN TO INTELLECT

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Let us here begin to shift gears. In the project until now, we have centered on the notion of matter in Gabirol, and have attempted to provide the reader with similar strains within other philosophical traditions in way of best enforcing the precise implications of Gabirol’s view. We have, therefore, thus far engaged in what we might call an analysis of the ‘cosmo-ontological’ features of Gabirol’s UH. Here, though, we turn to a ‘meta-analysis’ of sorts, one in which we consider the overarching reasons behind Gabirol’s construction of the ‘cosmo-ontological’ view that we’ve been examining. We might in one sense see this ‘meta-analysis’ as an examination of Gabirol’s epistemology / ethics: As we’ve already seen, as part of a general Arabic tradition, Gabirol believes that the goal of each human soul is to conjoin with Intellect, to return, as it were, to its source and to sojourn in a state of Wisdom. We have already examined some of the sources for this idea in the FV, as well as the larger Neoplatonic cosmology that grounds this idea. In this, our
final chapter, we will examine just how this epistemological / ethical end-goal can in fact be seen as the underlying goal of even the most minute philosophical detail of the FV. In effect, the ‘meta-analysis’ in this chapter might be expressly seen as answering two questions that arise from considering our project thus far:

1. We’ve concluded that matter is the real predeterminate existential foundation associated with Intellect (and is hence, by extension, the first essence of each non-God substance); what, though, are we to make of this so-called ‘foundation’? More specifically, looking at this material with a critical philosophical eye, how should we understand the reality of this sort of odd non spatio-temporal state, and how should we charitably understand the mindset of the thinker who posits such a state?

2. Even if we are to make some sense of what this ‘predetermined’ state of Intellect-derived essential existence is and why our author (and his tradition) posits it, why would he call it ‘matter’ and ‘element’?

In providing an analysis of the notion of imagination in Gabirol’s tradition, this chapter can be seen as answering our first question roughly as follows: Let us understand by ‘real’ that which is able to effectively move the soul of the reader to a certain state, viz., the state of Neoplatonic ‘return,’ or, as we have already seen Gabirol’s Arabic tradition refers to it, the state of ‘conjunction’ or ‘unification’ with Intellect. In effect, this suggests an ‘instrumentalist’ approach to answering
the question in that it urges us to reconceptualize the meaning of a Neoplatonic author’s metaphysics not primarily in terms of what ‘out there’ it refers to (for, given the non spatio-temporal nature of our ‘material’ existential foundation, this approach is doomed from the start) but in terms of said author’s own epistemological / ethical end-goals in composing the treatise. The content of the metaphysical corpus is thus analyzed in this chapter as a means to the end of effecting ‘return’ in the reader’s soul, and its value and meaningfulness is hence a function of its effectiveness in bringing about said ends. In the service of this ‘instrumentalist’ approach, I develop a detailed account of how, within a Neoplatonic context, a page of text – in this case, metaphysics -- can lead to this state of ‘return,’ a state characterized by an epistemological / ethical improvement in the reader’s soul. By providing grounding for this idea in ancient and medieval textual traditions, I offer this meta-reflection as in fact a plausible and non-anachronistic account of what Gabirol himself might have been up to (and not simply as a philosophically interesting way that we might approach the text).

Along these ‘instrumentalist’ lines, I further suggest in particular – again with non-anachronistic recourse to ancient and medieval textual traditions – that it is precisely by invoking spatio-temporal imagery that a page of text (in this case, the metaphysics of UH) is able to effect its intended end-goal. This, then, effectively provides us with an answer to our second question: Gabirol couches a discussion about the most exalted, obscure and non spatio-temporal existential
foundation in terms of ‘matter’ and ‘element’ precisely because the latter terms carry with them certain effective spatio-temporal imagery. In providing the reader’s mind something to imagine, ‘matter’ and ‘element’ – and the relationship between them to various other phenomena in Gabirol’s account of UH – allow Gabirol’s analysis of a most difficult subject to have a better impact on his readers’ souls. Again, the details of this mechanism will be spelled out in the course of this chapter.

*

Before turning to detailing the mechanism of ‘return’ and its precise relationship to the working of imagination in a Neoplatonic Arabic setting, let us begin by seeing some of the foundation in the Ps. Empedoclean materials for the clear emergence of this epistemological / ethical focus, a focus which is central to Gabirol’s project as well.

5.2 ONTOLOGY AND ETHICS IN GABIROL’S PS. EMPEDOCLEAN SOURCE(S)

In examining the various Ps. Empedoclean texts and focusing solely on the respective discussions of ‘first matter,’ we find that the Hebrew Empedocles as well as Shahrazuri’s Arabic text have more of an epistemological focus than Shahrastani’s account. I mean by an ‘epistemological focus’ a clear interest in prescribing to man how he is to proceed if he wants to effect his ultimate
Neoplatonic Return; in this sense, a text has an ‘epistemological focus’ to the extent that it is interested in instructing us how to behave if we are to attain the highest level of Wisdom, and to hence attain the level of true Sage.

In Shahrastani’s account the only ‘epistemological’ information seems to be that, “...according to the measures [of Love and Strife] in the composites, we know the measure of the spiritual in the corporeal.” Man can ascertain the relative spirituality of something, it would seem, by ascertaining that thing’s degree of plurality and division: the less the plurality and division, the greater the quotient of spirituality. However, as it is presented, this information does not appear to be offered as a means to attaining the end of Wisdom. That is, it is not, in the context as we have it, put forth as a prescriptive to Man that he engage in this sort of analysis of things — ascertaining their degree of Love or Strife — as a means to the ultimate end of perfect Wisdom. Instead, with respect to ‘lifting’ Man to a more exalted state, it seems that Man’s role emerges as fairly passive: First, we are told that the World Soul sends forth from itself prophets to each generation to assist those who have gone astray, and then we are reminded that “he to whom God does not give His light will have no light.” In both cases, as in the overall Empedoclean account by Shahrastani, the focus is decidedly cosmic — focusing more on the cosmic topography and the role of God and the hypostases in aiding Man, than on offering epistemological pointers to the person who wants to effect — to bring on, as it were — his Return.
Looking for a specifically epistemological focus in the Arabic tradition, then, we do seem to find something in Shahrazuri -- who has, although perhaps wrongly, sometimes been included with Shahrastani as representing parts of a single Ps. Empedoclean tradition.\(^1\) Without addressing the question of whether this is in fact part of a single Arabic Ps. Empedocles tradition, we might, nonetheless, note the following greater degree of epistemological focus in Shahrazuri:

Anyone who pretends to attain knowledge of the supreme beings and who begins with the prime substance will experience great difficulty in perceiving them. Likewise, he who seeks them and who begins with the lowest will also experience great difficulty in attaining knowledge of the supreme world. This is because he will have to pass from a dense, coarse substance to one that possesses the highest subtlety. On the other hand, he who seeks them and who begins with the intermediate and who knows well this intermediate being with profound knowledge, is the one who will succeed in attaining knowledge of the two extremes; his study will be easy and serene. One cannot understand this exceedingly important doctrine in all its scope without knowing the intermediate being which is the human soul.\(^2\)

It is this focus on how a person can -- and should -- go about collecting knowledge which is even more strongly seen in the Hebrew Empedocles tradition. In the Hebrew version, the Empedoclean account is framed precisely in terms of a prescriptive to the person who wants to become a Sage. As in the above Shahrazuri passage, the Soul emerges in an important capacity, and there emerges even a more
pronounced focus on how one must use one’s soul to access the hidden nature latent in each creation, itself as a means to attaining the highest Wisdom.

The Hebrew Empedocles additionally focuses on the importance of Imagination, a psychic faculty whose importance towards effecting the epistemological / ethical end of ‘return’ will be spelled out in our current chapter. It is this focus together with the prescriptive tone of the work which is most relevant for seeing the impact of the Ps. Empedocles on Gabirol’s text, and for helping us appreciate the way in which we may come to understand Gabirol’s cosmo-ontological program as able to help enliven his readers’ imagination, precisely so as to effect said epistemological / ethical end-state in their souls (presumably the end-state which in the Ps. Empedocles materials is described as reaching the level of ‘Sage’). Let us now turn to delineating the interplay of literary rhetoric and the soul’s imaginative function, and how, as such, the text of the FV itself – in all of the details regarding UH and matter we have rehearsed thus far – may be seen as helping effect the state of ‘conjunction with’ (or ‘return to’) Intellect. In effect, in this last chapter, we will examine the mechanism by which the cosmological details of Gabirol’s text can be seen as the instruments of his overall epistemological / ethical program.

*
5.3 NEOPLATONIC RETURN: THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL / ETHICAL END-GOAL, AND THE INSTRUMENTALITY OF DIALECTIC

Given their pressing interest in Return, we find among Neoplatonists not only texts in which they overtly address the science of Return, but additionally, a decided sense in which the goal of Return tacitly lies behind their understanding of all other sciences -- where 'sciences' here should be taken in its broadest sense to include all fields of knowledge: Astronomy and Mathematics as much as Cosmology and Ontology. We might properly call this a variety of 'instrumentalism,' then, inasmuch as the sciences themselves are ultimately viewed as means to the end of Return. This of course is not meant to denigrate the sciences, and calling them 'means' is not meant to conjure up any of the derisive implications that we sometimes colloquially mean in calling something a 'means' -- seen, e.g., in our frequent modification of that idea with the qualifier 'mere.' To describe something as a means to the end of Return is, rather, quite a compliment indeed. The Instrumentalist Methodology, then, approaches a science primarily as a means of this sort.

To better see this Instrumentalist Methodology, we will consider first clear manifestations of this approach in Plato and in Proclus, for the cases of astronomy and mathematics respectively (showing, in the end, that it is really mathematics -- and, specifically arithmetic -- which is the means by which all other sciences help
effect Return). We will then move on to considering the larger implications of this Methodology within the Neoplatonic world-view; by carefully considering the arts of dialectic and rhetoric within Neoplatonic accounts, we will reach an understanding of the instrumental approach to the sciences as part of a larger methodology which sees not only the science itself, but the language used to construct that science -- the metaphors and / or images invoked along the way -- as important towards the end of effecting Return. It is this latter sensitivity, then, which will be key to our ‘meta-analysis’ of Gabirol’s own project – our analysis, that is, of how the many cosmo-ontological details we have seen thus far are, in the end, offered by our author in way of helping lead his reader toward the epistemological / ethical end-state of conjunction.

*  

To see clearly the sense in which a science is understood as itself a means to effecting key changes in the practitioner’s state, we turn to Plato’s Timaeus and Proclus’ Commentary on Euclid’s Elements.

In this regard, consider the suggestion in the Timaeus that it is by engaging in astronomy -- by charting the motions of the heavens, and most of all, of the Sun -- that we help return our souls to their most perfectly ordered states. In effect, according to Timaeus, the Demiurge ensures that the Sun is the brightest light in the sky so as to orient all living things to the principle of Sameness (as opposed to Difference) which is manifest most clearly in its daily motions. While in the
immediate context of the notion of Time in the cosmos, the Demiurge's purpose in so appointing the Sun is to help mankind learn to count and engage in Mathematics, the ultimate aim of such numerical reflection is clearly, in the context of the Timaeus' overall discussion of Sameness and Difference, to strengthen -- and re-orient -- the soul. Astronomy, hence, is a means towards the end of Return -- albeit via Mathematics.

Turning to Proclus, we get an account of why Mathematics is effective in this regard. In Proclus' own account of arithmetic, we find that it is in reflecting upon the nature of numbers that we can best re-orient our souls, best preparing ourselves ultimately for acquaintance with (or, Return to) Unity itself. In discussing 'The Utility of Mathematics,' Proclus tells us, among other things, that

...mathematics makes ready our understanding and our mental vision for turning towards that upper world,

and, referring us to Socrates' remarks in Plato's Republic (i.e., Republic 527e ff.), Proclus adds that:

...when 'the eye of the soul' is blindered and corrupted by other concerns, mathematics alone can revive and awaken the soul again to the vision of being, can turn her from images to realities and from darkness to the light of intellect, can (in short) release her from the cave, where she is held prisoner by matter and by the concerings incident to generation, so that she may aspire to bodiless and partless being.
In effect, Proclus views even Mathematics as a means: by engaging in it -- as in the rest of the sciences of the *quadrivium* -- we engage in dialectical, dianoetic thinking, *itself a stepping stone* to the pure, non-discursive level of noetic apprehension of the pure intelligibles. More so than the other sciences, though, mathematics -- and especially arithmetic as we’ve seen above -- trains our mind in the art of proper *dianoësis* in that it engages us directly with notions of Unity, Sameness, Otherness, Limit, Unlimit and Order. And, this ordering of soul’s dianoetic activity prepares the soul for its “upward journey,” or Return. As such, consider:

We must lay it down that the function of general mathematics is...dianoetic thinking [i.e., discursive thinking]. It is not the kind of thought that characterizes intellect, steadfastly based on itself, perfect and self-sufficing, ever converging upon itself. Nor is it such as goes with opinion and perception, for these forms of knowing fix their attention on external things and concern themselves with objects whose causes they do not possess. By contrast mathematics, though beginning with reminders from the outside world, ends with the ideas that it has within; it is awakened to activity by lower realities but its destination is the higher being of forms. Its activity is not motionless, like that of the intellect, but because its motion is not change of place or quality as is that of the senses, but a life-giving activity, it unfolds and traverses the immaterial cosmos of ideas, now moving from first principles to conclusions, now proceeding in the opposite direction, now advancing from what it already knows to what it seeks to know and again referring its results back to the principles that are prior in knowledge. Moreover, it is not, like Nous, above inquiry because filled from itself, nor is it satisfied, like perception, with matters other than itself; rather it advances through inquiry to discovery and moves from imperfection to perfection.
and,

Nous, then, wraps up the development of the dialectical methods, binds together from above all the discursiveness of mathematical reasoning, and is the perfect terminus of the upward journey and of the activity of knowing.

Taken in this way, as reorienting the soul upwards to the non-discursive state of noetic knowledge, Mathematics, especially in the context of Proclus’ more general world-view as seen in his Elements of Theology, might be hence seen as a means towards the end of Return. In this regard, consider additionally Plotinus’ choosing to begin his discussion of dialectic with the cry, “What art is there, what method or practice, which will take us up there where we must go?”

*

We might here note in general the Pythagorean interest in the quadrivium -- an interest which is embraced and popularized in the Latin tradition by Boethius, but which pervades much of late antique Greek Platonism and Neoplatonism -- including Plato’s own Timaeus. In effect, the four mathematical sciences of the quadrivium -- the respective sciences of Astronomy, Geometry, Music and Arithmetic -- are put forth as a progression of sciences: Astronomy studies magnitude in motion, Geometry studies magnitude [not in motion], Music studies multitude in relation to another (i.e., in its study of harmonic ratio), and Arithmetic
studies multitude per se.\textsuperscript{11} For our purposes it is sufficient to simply note the 

\textit{proportion} that, for many centuries, was thought to govern these sciences: That, in 
some important and revealing sense, 'astronomy leads to music leads to geometry 
leads to arithmetic,' might be best understood by reflecting on what we have seen 
in both Plato and Proclus above, viz., that it is the ultimate goal of every science to 
familiarize our souls with -- or, we might say, to orient our souls towards -- Unity, 
and its concomitant principles of Limit, Order, Sameness, Wholeness; as such, each 
science relies ultimately upon arithmetic, since that science orients our soul to the 
principle of Unity, and draws it along towards that unity via dialectical exploration 
(provided for in the principles of multitude, Difference, Parts and Harmonic 
Ratios).\textsuperscript{12} 

* 

5.4 GABIROL AND IMAGINATION: Eikasia, Psychology and the 
Instrumentality of Creative Language 

In what follows, then, we wish to follow upon the above sense in which a 
science -- in this case, Gabirol's entire cosmo-ontology, including the sciences of 
Will, matter/form and God -- can be understood as an instrument able to effect the 
epistemological/ethical end-state of the reader's soul. That is, on analogy with 
astronomy and mathematics above, we may see in Gabirol's cosmo-ontology a 
dialectical exercise which in theory is able to re-orient readers' souls. In the 
remainder of this chapter, we wish to explain how, within the context of medieval
epistemological theory, a bit of writing – in this case the FV – can exert this sort of re-orienting effect on a soul. To see this in the most precise terms possible, we will elaborate upon the mechanics of ‘imagining’ in Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy. This in turn will alert us to why Gabirol’s own focus on imagining in the FV can be seen as a clue to understanding how exactly a cosmo-ontology can effect the reader’s soul in the requisite ‘re-orienting’ way.

5.4.1 THE CENTRALITY OF IMAGINING IN GABIROL’S TRADITION

First, let us motivate the sense that within Gabirol’s world-view, there emerges a decided focus upon the imaginative capacity of soul:

A. Gabirol in the FV repeatedly invokes the act of imagining. This can be seen in such remarks as:

If you want to imagine [the All] at once, rise from the inferior to the superior...take the manifest [viz., the sensible microcosm] as a sign [signum] of the obscure [viz., the higher intelligible macrocosm], (3.56; p. 202, 19 - 24),

and,

You must always take the sensible things as an image [exemplum] of the intelligibles, and then it will be easy for your imagination regarding the intelligible things, (3.56, p. 203, 4 - 6).

To suggest that such passages reveal a decided focus on ‘imagination,’ we must rule out the possibility that the Latin expressions of ‘imagine’ and ‘imaginaion’ (in the extant Latin text of FV) are just loose translations of some more general notion in the original Arabic text. In this regard, we might turn to one
passage in which Gabirol invokes the act of ‘imagining’ for which we do in fact have an Arabic fragment, (in Moses ibn Ezra’s Arūgat ha-Būsem). The passage in question is the key passage at the end of Bk. 3 that we have already examined, a passage in which the Master instructs his Disciple regarding the attainment of the highest stage of human existence:

Master: ...And in general, when you want to imagine these substances, and how your essence is diffused in them and how it comprehends them, in order that you might lift up your intellect to the highest intelligible, and in order that you might purify and extricate it from every stain of the sensible, and in order that you might free it from the captivity of nature, and in order that with the power of your intellect you might attain the highest thing [i.e., knowledge?] that is possible for you to apprehend regarding the truth of intelligible substance, until you are as if stripped of sensible substance and become as if ignorant of it...

Disciple: I have already done your bidding, and have elevated myself through the grades of the intelligible substances, and have strolled amidst their pleasant gardens [lit. flowery pleasantness]...

Master: You have observed and understood well. But if you should lift yourself to the first universal matter and [are] illumined by its shadow you will then see the most wondrous of wonders.  

In this important exchange, as in our two earlier quotes, we find the emergence of imagination. Looking to the phrase ‘...when you want to imagine...’ we find in this case support in the Arabic text for the contention that Gabirol is here in fact using the technical term for the imaginative capacity of soul. Looking to the passage, we find that it is the verb ‘tasawwara’ (form 5 of šwr, 2 sing. in the subjunctive form ‘tatassawwara’ following an ‘an’ particle) which is used in this regard. We need only look as far as H. A. Wolfson’s comprehensive work on the
internal senses in medieval thought to confirm that this verb is one of the technical terms used in Arabic to refer to an exercise of the soul's imaginative faculty.  

B. Looking to Gabirol's philosophical sources, we have already seen Shem Tov ibn Falaquera's claim that Gabirol's thought is most related to the Empedoclean Book of 5 Substances. Looking to that textual tradition, then, we find a decided focus on the notion of imagining. This can be seen, e.g., in the Hebrew Ps. Empedoclean text in the key role played by the soul in its description as the 'metzayer' in particular; once again looking to H. A. Wolfson, we find that this is the technical term for the soul's imaginative faculty.  

*

5.4.2 THE IMPORTANCE OF THE IMAGE: A PLATONIC AND ARISTOTELIAN BACKGROUND

We cannot here enter into a full-scale analysis of the history of Imagination from Plato through Aristotle and up through Gabirol, much less of the history of the 'internal senses' from Greek into Arabic traditions. It will be helpful for our purposes, though, to offer a brief thumbnail sketch of some of the key Platonic and Aristotelian views of soul's imaginative capacity, together with some remarks about the notion of 'fidra' (or, 'perception') in Gabirol, in way of better understanding the philosophical motivation behind and implications of the emphasis on Imagination in Gabirol's tradition. In our brief treatment of Plato and Aristotle, we will concern ourselves solely with the what role soul's imaginative
capacity plays in a human being’s encounter with sensible forms (e.g., the form of a tree), (or, in Platonic parlance, the reflection of the forms in the sensory realm).

While we will not here sketch the well-known differences between Plato and Aristotle’s theory of forms (with consequent differences for their respective epistemologies), a note of clarification is in order: in general, we will talk of soul’s ‘taking in’ of forms (a somewhat more Aristotelian expression), in a way neutral between Plato’s sense of soul’s perceptually ‘taking in’ of the images of forms, and Aristotle’s sense of soul’s perceptually ‘taking in’ the forms themselves. In general, this focus on imagination’s ‘bringing forms in’ from the sensible realm of nature will be crucial for helping us understand the centrality of imagining in Gabirol (though, as we will see, in Gabirol’s tradition there will be an additional focus on imagination’s prophetically, as it were, ‘bringing in’ information directly from the intelligible realm on high).

Plato talks of the ‘imaging’ [eikasia] function (condition) of soul -- or, that condition in which soul interacts with sensibles, the mere ‘images’ [eikones] of the intelligible realm of Forms -- as the most inferior of soul’s functions related to attaining knowledge. This can be seen in his ‘divided line’ analogy at Republic 509d, where ‘eikasia’ (‘imaging,’ sometimes translated ‘imagination’) is listed as the lowest of the four conditions (Rep. 511 d7: ‘pathêmata’) of soul, with each of ‘pistis’ (belief), ‘dianoia’ (thought) and ‘noêsis’ (understanding) weighing in above it. ‘Images’ (eikones) are here treated as the pale copies of Forms in the sensory
world, and are opined (or, are the objects of *pistis*), while forms are known (or, are the objects of *noêsis*), (see Rep. 511a). However, as the theory of recollection (in the *Meno* and elsewhere) highlights, the sensory interaction with the realm of images is a necessary pre-requisite for *dianoêsis*, and hence, for *noêsis* itself; in effect, while consideration of images leads to *pistis*, it can also lead to the sort of dianoetic activity which leads to *noêsis*, in which soul comes to consider the Forms themselves.

One account of how interaction with the realm of sensible images is thus necessary towards reaching the higher noetic states can be found in Plato’s *Republic* in the analysis of the role of drawn lines (the ‘*eikones*’ in this example, as they are merely pale copies of Line Itself in the intelligible realm) in the study of geometry: on the one hand, the geometer’s consideration of the drawn lines per se (qua drawn lines per se, and not yet seen qua ‘images of something higher’) can only lead him to hypotheses, but not yet to knowledge (even though he himself might deludedly treat the hypotheses ‘as if they were known’ (510c6: *hôs eidotê*). Enter the philosopher (or dialectician as is the philosopher’s description here). Unlike the non-philosopher geometer, the philosopher sees the value of these drawn lines in their being images of Forms, and hence, he appreciates that the geometer’s hypotheses per se do not comprise knowledge — a state which can only result from consideration of the Forms per se. Arrived at solely on the basis of consideration of particular lines, squares and circles drawn in the sand, the
geometer’s hypotheses are just that -- they are not known first principles, and are, rather, products of non-noetic discursion. In the hands of the philosopher, though, the geometer’s hypotheses, and the discursive thinking involved in their production, can themselves be used as stepping stones (511b: ‘epibaseis’) by which the soul might travel ‘upward’ to ‘grasp’ the ‘unhypothetical first principle of everything.’ Once ‘grasped,’ this ‘first principle of everything’ allows the discursive process of thinking to arrive ‘downward’ at these very hypotheses, but this time, as conclusions based not on the images, but on the Forms themselves (511b-c). It is in this way that the geometer’s hypotheses -- in the hands (or, soul!) of the philosophically minded dialectician -- can comprise genuine knowledge.

We will not here examine the precise relationship between the ‘first principle of everything’ (presumably the Form of Good discussed quite generally in the surrounding divided line and cave allegories) and the other Forms; for our purposes, it will suffice to note that the soul’s role of ‘imaging’ (eikasia), while the lowest condition of soul involved in knowledge, is, nonetheless, a necessary starting point for entrée, as it were, into the intelligible realm; it is, for the properly trained soul at any rate, the catapult which re-orientst soul towards its highest, noetic condition.

Turning to Aristotle’s analysis of phantasia (or, ‘Imagination’) in De Anima (with attention solely to its role in our apprehension of sensible objects), we find here too the importance of soul’s interaction with the particulars of the sensory
world for reaching knowledge of their universal essences, or intelligible *ousiai*.

Here, given the general differences between Plato's and Aristotle's theories of universals and their respectively different epistemological sensibilities (differences which we won't rehearse here), the notion of images (here, *phantasmata*) refers most specifically to certain events, states or representations within the soul's imaginative faculty (*phantasia*) (and not, as above, to the sensibles themselves 'as compared with' some higher realities). The *phantasia* emerges as the repository of those forms which 'come in' via the senses from our apprehension of sensibles. Using the case of vision for the sake of simplicity, the sensible tree, on this account, is seen with the eyes, upon which the form is present to the imaginative faculty (*phantasia*); at this stage, the form is present not in corporeal matter as is the case for the form 'out there' in the actual tree in nature, but rather, the form is present in the substance of soul. At this 'imaginative' stage, the form presents itself as an image -- as a depiction that reflects its occurrence in the actual particular tree, viz., *qua* a form in determinate corporeal matter. Of course, the soul itself is not comprised of corporeal matter (for, given the description in the last sentence, if it were, the stage of imagining would have a tree literally materialize in the person's soul!), and hence, the '[re]presentation of the form qua its occurring in determinate corporeal matter' itself is a [re]presentation which, ontologically speaking, involves only 'soul substrate.'
While the occurrence of images in the imagination, in this Aristotelian picture, marks a ‘removal’ of sorts of form from the realm of nature and hence from its actual physical corporeal trappings, we still do not have knowledge. For knowledge, there must follow an even further abstraction on soul’s part of the form, resulting in said form’s now being present to soul qua ‘form + indeterminate corporeal matter.’ In effect, while imagination marks the soul’s apprehension of a particular tree, this latter abstraction marks the soul’s rational apprehension of tree qua universal, devoid of any particular corporeal material determination (though, as Aristotle’s analysis of ‘snubness’ (or, ‘concavity in a nose’) makes clear, not devoid of corporeal matter completely, because this form is, after all, an ordering of corporeal matter -- in the case of ‘snubness,’ human flesh and bones -- in such-and-so way). In effect, this latter abstraction activity marks the soul’s apprehending the ousia of tree, upon which the possessor of said soul is in the position to render an account of ‘what it is to be a tree,’ viz., to provide a logos -- or definition -- of ‘tree.’ This apprehension of the logos of tree, hence, marks the soul’s having apprehended not just some particular tree sensorily, and not just that particular tree as an image in phantasia, but having apprehended ‘what it is to be a tree,’ which applies to trees in general, or, universally.

*
Imagination and sensory interaction with the particulars of the sensory realm, then, mark the key starting points for the epistemic end-state in both Platonic and Aristotelian accounts.

Furthermore, drawing upon our above analyses of Plato and Aristotle, we might better be able to see precisely why soul’s intermediacy is, in Gabirol’s tradition, specifically linked to the imaginative capacity. For, in light of what we’ve said above, it is precisely soul’s interaction with the images of (or forms in) nature (i.e., sensible reality) which actuates soul’s ‘intermediating’ role between Nature and Noésis; that is, unlike its nutritive activities which enforce its imprisonment in Nature, and unlike its rational Noésis which marks its endpoint, it is in its ‘eikasia’ role of presenting the images from the sensory world, or in its phantasia capacity to represent reality via internal images, that it lays the groundwork for soul’s upward journey towards Nous; it is specifically in this imagining capacity that soul is truly revealed in its most intermediary role between Nature and Nous.

Seen furthermore specifically in terms of our above Aristotelian psychology, this intermediating role can be seen in terms of a form’s being present in Imagination midway between its particularity in nature and its universality in knowledge, for, in Imagination, it is indeed present qua a particular, though not in particular corporeal matter which characterizes its particularity in nature. In this way, we might recall our earlier analysis [see chapter 3] of the intermediary status
of psychic representations in general. We might note, though, that while our earlier analysis of soul’s intermediacy (in terms of its [re]presenting forms with a degree of actuality between that of Nous and a natural body) highlighted the intermediacy of soul (i.e., of psychic representation) in general, we here can appreciate the intermediacy of soul associated with Imagining in particular.

*

Turning to Gabirol, while we find no extended analysis of the precise mechanics of psychology and epistemology, we can nonetheless use both the Platonic ‘eikasia’ and the Aristotelian ‘phantasia’ accounts sketched above to give us, quite generally, a sense of why soul’s ‘imaginative’ capacities per se would best highlight its role as ‘intermediary’ between natural and noetic states. It is only this most general sense which I hope to have provided by looking both at Plato and Aristotle. The current project does not, for example, aim to pin down exactly which of the vast array of ‘middle faculties’ of soul are operative in this imaginative -- i.e., intermediary -- capacity in Gabirol, or in his Arabic tradition in general. In fact, as H. A. Wolfson’s work on the internal senses reveals, subtle distinctions between various Arabic textual traditions result in the enumeration of anywhere between three and seven ‘inner senses,’ one or more of which emerge as related to the imaginative powers of man as we’ve been treating them above. As for the various possible inner faculties of soul which in different texts are operative
in soul’s ‘imaging,’ one of these faculties is ‘phantasia,’ as we’ve seen in Aristotle above, as well as ‘common sense,’ but there are also ‘estimation,’ ‘retentive imagination,’ ‘composite imagination,’ and others, each named and described somewhat differently depending on the given Arabic textual tradition at hand: oftentimes this results in unclear demarcations between not only the number but also the precise activities of these various imaginative faculties. This makes it rather difficult to pin down the precise mechanics which a given author associates with the imaging / imaginative capacity of soul.

To make matters more confusing, we additionally have the fact that Gabirol’s Neoplatonic and Arabic context represent unique blends of Platonic and Aristotelian sensibilities, resulting, essentially, in hybrid psychological and epistemological accounts (with knowledge acquisition itself emerging as a mix between Platonic recollection, Divine illumination (and, as we have seen, even Sufi mysticism!), and yet, couched always in terms of Aristotelian psychological theory). Furthermore, we have the confusion which arises from competing desiderata of physiological accounts of soul (on which no distinctions are drawn between different ‘functions’ of soul as long as they all take place in the same part of the brain, the damage of which would simply result in the person’s lacking all of those functions) and epistemological accounts (on which different ‘functions’ are assigned to even a single physiological part of the brain in order to account for precise philosophically distinct concerns). So, e.g., while the receiving of images
from outside and the retaining of said images are philosophically distinct
‘activities,’ hence associated with two distinct imaginative faculties, given that they
are nonetheless seen as being in the same part of the brain, a given philosopher will
sometimes -- when driven by more physiological concerns -- treat these as a single
capacity under one name. The terminology, as one might imagine, can hence
become quite complicated and confusing.

Add to all of this our starting claim that Gabirol does not even offer us any
especially detailed psychological or epistemological analyses per se, and it obvious
that any attempt to pin down precisely how he would have construed the mechanics
of soul with respect to Imagination per se will involve at least some conjecture on
our parts.25,26 Luckily then, our interest in Imagination in Gabirol is not an interest
in one over another of the various imaginative capacities associated with soul, but
with any and all of the set of psychic capacities related to ‘taking in forms’27 from
without, and ‘re-assembling’ them, precisely in such a way as to make use of said
forms as instruments (or stepping stones) towards the end of noēsis. We have -- in
our treatments of Plato and Aristotle -- already seen how, analyzed in this way,
there is revealed a rather coarse-grained yet epistemologically relevant sense in
which soul in its imaginative capacity is an ‘intermediary.’ Our interest in the role
of Imagination in Gabirol, hence, can be seen in either the Platonic or Aristotelian
senses above, regardless of precisely which mechanics of soul are involved.
And while pinning down the mechanics of soul involved in this intermediating role in Gabirol is not key to our project, let us nonetheless suggest hypothetically that it is in fact the ‘fatr’ function of soul mentioned by Gabirol which most immediately encapsulates both the ‘taking in’ and ‘re-assembling’ activities of soul in which we are primarily interested: in his Sefer Tiqqun Midot ha-Nefesh (The Improvement of the Moral Qualities²⁸), Gabirol gives us a very general enumeration of three functions of soul, “fatr,” (‘perception’), “fikr,” (‘thought’) and “fahm” (‘understanding’). While there is no mention in this list of the psychic function(s) that normally pick out phantasia and are translated as ‘imagination’ (viz., ‘khayāl’ or ‘muṣawwar’), we have already seen his interest in the imaginative work of soul, both in his ample employment of the verb ‘taṣawwara’ (associated with the ‘muṣawwar’ aspect of soul), as well as in the description of soul’s ‘mezayer’ capacity (the Hebrew equivalent of ‘muṣawwur’) in the Ps. Empedoclean tradition in whose footsteps he follows. In fact, looking to Gabirol’s own three-way demarcation of psychic faculties, we might note that ‘fatr,’ the first of these, while translated by Wise as ‘perception’ is from the verb ‘fatara,’ meaning ‘to split’ or ‘break apart,’ but also ‘to create’ or ‘to bring forth, and hence literally demarcates a creative capacity. Construing this ‘creativity’ specifically as a kind of ‘breaking apart,’ we might suggest seeing in fatr the site of each of two imaginative activities which best reveal soul’s use of sensory images in leading us towards noēsis:
(1) **The ‘taking in’ of forms:** linked to the notion of ‘breaking apart,’ we might see in this perceiving act of soul the ‘removal’ of sorts (which we have already addressed in our Aristotelian analysis) in which the form is ‘brought in’ devoid of any of its determinate corporeal matter.

(2) **The ‘re-assembling’ of said forms:** here ‘fatr’ suggests the creative imaginative capacity to **re-organize** images from sensory experience to form new images. This incorporates what are sometimes distinguished as three separate capacities, (a) the ‘receiving’ of the forms (usually associated with the ‘common sense’), the (b) ‘retaining’ of images (associated with ‘phantasia’ in many accounts), and (c) the assembling of those images into new images.

In what follows we turn to these two activities as they are evidenced in Gabirol, first focusing on the ‘taking in’ function of soul, and next, on its creative re-assembling of images to form new images; in effect, these two activities are -- in ways to be shown -- precisely the ways in which soul ‘makes use’ of images as instruments towards attaining the noetic state, and are, as such, precisely the way in which a literary construct – such as the cosmo-ontology of the FV – may be instrumental towards re-orienting readers’ souls.
5.4.3 IMAGINATION AND "TAKING IN": SENSORY NATURE IN THE SERVICE OF NOÉSIS

The first way in which images are instrumental towards noésis can be seen in soul’s ‘taking in’ of sensory information. In Gabirol, this can be best seen in his general affinity for analogical reasoning, or, seeing the macrocosm in the microcosm.31

**Analogical Reasoning:**

Turning to the following two passages, we find the inherently analogical Neoplatonic notion that the microcosm reveals the macrocosm.32

If you want to imagine [the All] at once, rise from the inferior to the superior...take the manifest [viz., the sensible microcosm] as a sign (signum) of the obscure [viz., the higher intelligible macrocosm], (3.56, p. 202, 19 - 24), and further that

You must always take the sensible things as an image (exemplum) of the intelligibles, and then it will be easy for your imagination regarding the intelligible things [Note: these refer to the intelligible substances, such as Nature, World Soul(s), Universal Intellect]; (3.56; p. 203, 4 - 6).

We see in this regard the importance of Imagination in the intermediary role that it plays in our human journey towards ultimate intellectual perfection: where
the goal is to gaze upon the pure intelligibles on-high, to Return, as it were, to our
cosmic origin in the upper world, the best way for us, as corporeally enslaved souls,
to begin this upward ascent is by utilizing soul’s power to ‘take in’ aspects of the
world around us. How do we utilize this in our favor? By using these sensory bits
of information as stepping stones to appreciating the intelligible substances from
which they are emanated, and in which they ultimately subsist. In effect, since, on
Gabirol’s Neoplatonic world-view, all the images we receive from the corporeal
world are in fact emanated down from the higher substances, we can use those
images to help us better picture those higher substances, thus at least orienting us
‘upward’ towards our source, as a first step in Return.

5.4.4 IMAGINATION AND ‘TAKING IN’ REVISITED: PROPHETIC
DREAMS

In all of our above discussion of images, it was Imagination’s ‘taking
information in’ from the sensory realm which was key. Here, we shift to
Imagination’s role in ‘taking information in’ from Nous on high. In Gabirol’s
tradition, imagination is able to take in information directly from Nous on high,
resulting in a focus on the importance of dreams as prophetic -- even dreams where
one sees oneself flying, which is used by Plato as an example of a nonsense
dream, but by Israeli as an example of a prophetically relevant dream vision.
Even Plato who attests to dream prophecy nonetheless describes dreams as useful /
prophetic only to the extent that rational soul is operative, i.e., only to the extent
that the imaginative faculty (or any lower faculties of soul) keeps out of it (see Republic 9.571e ff.). On the contrary, we find in Gabirol that the imaginative faculty is itself crucial in the ‘channeling’ of prophetic dreams from on-high; and so:

...soul inclines itself to corporeal matter, apprehends forms which are sustained in actuality [in effectu] in that corporeal apprehension, and apprehends them in its own spiritual apprehension in potency [in potentia]; and when it raises itself to Intellect, it apprehends them with an intelligible apprehension, that is in cognizing their definition and what they are...[...]

...the substance of soul receives intelligible form from the substance of Intellect in a dream sensorily [animaliter], that is imaginarily [imaginabili{r}er], and after sleep, the soul senses them corporeally and materially. And on this model, we will consider the existence of every lower thing in the higher, until we arrive [veniat] at First Matter which sustains all things...

Turning to Israeli, we find a similar account, (one which can be found in many Arabic authors, and which, in Israeli, be traced back to al-Kindi):

...[the Ancients] observed that when intellect wishes to reveal to soul what its Creator, blessed and exalted be He, has caused to emanate upon it [intellect], namely an understanding of the spiritual forms which it finds in itself, and of the spiritual things which belong to it, it shows the soul the spiritual forms and things which it finds in itself and imparts to them forms intermediate between corporeality and spirituality in order that they may be more readily impressed upon the sensus communis. For when the Creator wishes to reveal to the soul what He intends to innovate in this world, He makes intellect the intermediary between Himself and the soul, even as the prophet is an intermediary between the Creator, blessed be He, and the rest of His creatures. It is only the corporeal and imaginative form which will be impressed upon the sensus communis, thanks to the prevalence of the corporeal form upon it. This is due to the proximity of the sensus communis to the corporeal sense, seeing that it [the sensus communis] is intermediate between the corporeal sense of sight and the imaginative faculty, which resides in the anterior ventricle of the brain and is called fantâsiya. It is for this reason that it is called ‘common sense,’
for it receives from the corporeal sense, i.e., that of sight, the corporeal aspects of things and transmits them to the spiritual sense mentioned before, i.e., the imaginative faculty.\textsuperscript{37}

And, further, that:

We mentioned that the forms with which intellect clarifies the spiritual forms are intermediate between corporeality and spirituality because they result from the imaginative representations of the corporeal forms, and are more subtle, spiritual, and luminous than the latter, which are found in our waking state and are full of darkness and full of shells. It is for this reason that the Ancients compared them to the forms in the higher world. Evidence of this may be seen in the fact that a man will behold himself during sleep as if endowed with wings for flying, and flying therewith between heaven and earth; and it will seem to him as if the heavens are open, and a voice is calling thence and speaking to him; and as if he is walking upon the waters of the sea and across great rivers; and as if the beasts are talking. The evidence lies in the fact that the character of these forms and images is spiritual, subtle, transcending the natural order, and contrary to what one experiences in waking condition. Otherwise they would be without purpose and meaning and inexplicable, seeing that they are beyond the ways of intellect. But this is not the case, for we discover that they do teach us certain truths once some really intelligent person interprets them.

Further evidence may be seen in the fact that when the prophets, peace be upon them, desired to stand out from the rest of men, and wished their proper qualities to become manifest, they armed themselves with those spiritual forms and revealed them to all and sundry in order that their fellow creatures might know their exalted qualities and their achievement of having passed from the flesh to a spiritual state, since that which they made manifest transcends the natural order. From this point of view, there is agreement between all authors of books on religion and all who believe in prophecy that dreams are a part of prophecy.

After having explained and verified this, we should have made it clear that during sleep the sensus communis sees forms intermediate between spirituality and corporeality -- i.e., forms in which intellect has clarified the spiritual forms -- but knows them only in their corporeal aspects. For it is not within its power and ability to know more of them than their image and imaginary form on account of its proximity to the corporeal sense, i.e., that of sight. But once it knows their corporeal aspects, it transmits them to the imaginative faculty which resides in the anterior bain, and imagination receives them in a more subtle way since it is more subtle than the sensus communis and more remote from the corporeal sense, i.e., that of sight. Once the imaginative faculty has received them from the sensus communis, it transmits them to the memory and deposits them there. When the person awakes from his sleep, he claims these forms from the memory, and memory returns to him the remembrance of all their traces, impressions, and characteristics as received from imagination. Remembering them, one seeks to understand their spiritual meaning through the cogitative faculty, because the latter possesses the power to scrutinize, discern, and combine, and it discerns and distinguishes between the shells of a thing and its kernel. Having
discerned and purified them, it returns them to the faculty of memory, and memory receives them and stores them away until such time as they are required...

In looking to the above accounts, we can discover the emergence of Imagination -- over even 'rational soul' -- as the key receptor of Nous' overflow into an individual's soul in the case of dreams. In the above picture, the rational soul is important, but only in a posterior role as 'interpreter' of those images which the imaginative faculty presents to us -- images which though themselves merely vessels for the noetic overflow are nonetheless vessels uniquely capable of thus collecting and making manifest Nous' unity in visual and auditory ways.38

Related to our two capacities of imaginative soul -- its 'taking in' and 're-assembling' capacities -- we might note that here, Imagination both takes in some sort of overflow from on-high, though not images per se, and, in receiving that overflow in the form of images, makes that overflow available to our discursive souls (in such a way able to be interpreted by [at least some of] us upon waking). That is, the overflow itself is from Nous, and -- recalling our discussion chapter 3 -- this overflow is hence best thought of as a pure unity, something which, as such, is essentially ungraspable by our own discursive rational souls. But, in this overflow's pouring forth specifically into some re-assembled mix of images from among Imagination's own repository of sensory-derived images, that unity is in some way given over to our apprehension in a vivid, inner-visual kind of way.

And, without pursuing this issue here in any detail, the overflow's manifesting
itself in certain re-assembled images as opposed to others will allow its recipient to derive (by proper interpretation) certain specific truths.

We might also note that this sort of overflow of Nous onto soul in a dream – traditionally a lowest grade of prophecy – seems to afford us an example in which a person might come into contact – albeit rather weakly – with Nous in advance even of having a fully perfected rational faculty. For this nocturnal dream commune with Nous, it is, rather, a well-honed imaginative faculty that is necessary. Here then, it is precisely the Imagination which allows even the less than perfectly ordered rational soul its first glimpses of communion with the reality of Nous. Here again, the role of Imagination in Gabirol’s tradition emerges as key.

*

5.4.5 IMAGINATION AND REASSEMBLING IMAGES: THE INSTRUMENTALITY OF CREATIVE LANGUAGE

We here turn to what we will call ‘the use of creative language,’ an activity in which soul makes use of its stock-pile of sensory-derived images by re-assembling them into new images, here specifically in the couching of cosmological and ontological accounts in spatio-temporal language, as well as more generally in the construction of mythical, parabolic, poetic accounts -- all in the service of attaining noësis.
Before elaborating on what precisely we mean by ‘creative language’ and its efficacy in re-orienting souls, though, we must be careful to distinguish between language’s general instrumentality in effecting the soul on the one hand, and the specific efficacy of some particular choice of language on the other, the latter of which is what we wish to focus on here. For language’s efficacy in leading the soul towards noësis in general, we might consider Aristotle (and, e.g., Augustine’s theory of language in De Magistro), where the efficacy of language is seen in an appreciation of the very nature of words themselves as images (or, signs). But as such, it is language in general -- and not particularly any especially creative use of language -- which is the focus; put in another way, we might say that, at this level of analysis, it is the very act of dialectic (i.e., the stringing together of words in certain ways), or the enterprise of language itself, which emerges as the subject of philosophical analysis and appreciation. However, in addition to this most basic role of language, that in virtue of which words succeed in transmitting ‘meaning’ at all, there is another focus: this other focus is on the rhetorical force of the language employed. Here, the focus is on which words in particular are used in a given discourse (or, we might say, not only on the stringing together of words but on the (a) most effective stringing together of (b) the most effective words). It is here that the creativity of the rhetorician (the speaker or author) becomes an issue. For only the skilled soul is able to employ precisely those words which will most effectively propel the soul upwards. And while Aristotle’s analysis of rhetoric certainly
addresses the power of persuasive speech towards a number of circumscribed ends (e.g., getting a jury to convict a felon), in Gabirol, we have a tradition which can be seen as giving to rhetoric a key place even in bringing about the highest end of all, viz., the soul’s turning upwards.\textsuperscript{39, 40} Consider in this regard the following two theses:

1. The very instrumentality of at least certain kinds of philosophical dialectic (as, e.g., that dialectical act in which a cosmological system – such as Gabirol’s UH – is put forth) comes from its rhetorical force; it is more effective in turning a soul ‘upward’ to the extent that it employs the right images. Culled from the repository of images which our imagination receives from the sensory world, the images that one employs in a given act of communication are the ‘right’ ones to the extent that they successfully convey certain spatio-temporal cues to their reader (or listener) – in particular, those spatio-temporal cues which succeed in reorienting their readers’ (or listener’s) souls towards the noetic end-state (or, in Gabirol’s terms, towards the conjunction with Intellect).

As such, we have the related thesis that:

2. Each of the following may be said of engagement in reading / writing rhetorically effective allegories, myths, poems and the like (which themselves certainly are more effective to the extent that they employ the right images):
(a) They can *indirectly* lead to *noēsis*; i.e., they can be a highly effective means to preparing said person’s soul to most immediately be ‘turned upwards’ (that is to say, properly affected) by

(i) the rhetoric of dialectic (of 1); in this way these creative bits of poetry and prose can *indirectly* lead to *noēsis* by better ensuring that the person’s soul will be able to be *directly* propelled towards *noēsis* by the philosophical dialectic of 1 above;

(ii) the very interaction with the sensible world which is itself a ‘visual dialectic’ of sorts; in this way, creative language *indirectly* leads to *noēsis*, here, though, by preparing the person’s soul to be directly propelled towards *noēsis* by sensory experience itself. (For elaboration on this idea, see the discussion that follows in the section on ‘allegorical hermeneutics’ below).

(b) They can *directly* lead to *noēsis*; i.e., rhetorically effective allegories, myths and poems may themselves *directly* lead to the experience of *noēsis*.

At the heart of all of these inter-related theses is the importance of creative uses of language, itself predicated on what we have above identified as the imaginative capacity of ‘re-assembling’ the images in our imaginative repositories.
By ‘re-assembling’ images in this way, we are able to spin from them language acts able to persuade the soul upward in any and all of the above ways.

What language is most effective in propelling the soul upwards? That language which best capitalizes on elements of the sensory world. In our first case, that of certain ‘regular’ (i.e., non-poetic, non-allegorical) philosophical dialectical exercises, as, e.g., the recounting of a certain system of cosmology or ontology, it is the employment of spatio-temporal language to describe realities which are neither spatial nor temporal which is the most effective aspect of the said speech act. The ‘creative language,’ here is the ‘spatio-temporal’ terminology. Our analysis would suggest, for example, that Plato’s talk of the Forms is effective to the extent that it gives the listener’s soul a spatial analysis (viz., “the Forms are ‘up there’”) which -- given a human soul’s experience of ‘upper’ things in the sensory world (e.g., the Sun) as superior -- immediately impresses upon that soul a sense of its subordination to more universal realities. This ‘impression’ in turn, we may suggest, is effective in ‘re-orienting’ the soul: it sets the soul on the right track towards conjunction with Intellect.

Turning now to the creative language associated with poems, allegories, myths and parables we find a similar dynamic. Let us take the example of a parable in which God is a king and an individual human is a servant. Similar to what we have said in the case of cosmological accounts above, here too, the language act (here, a parable) is effective precisely to the extent that it capitalizes
best on elements of the sensory world: the suggestion that ‘there once was a king who rewarded his servant...’ hence, can effectively lead to actual changes in a listener’s soul (viz., ‘turning it towards God,’ which is to say re-orienting that soul towards noēsis) to the extent that it plays upon the listener’s familiarity with the dynamics and implications of socio-political facts about kings and servants within the sensory world. As above, it is precisely the spatio-temporal imagery -- though here, at a more ‘macroscopic’ level of socio-political reality -- which lies at the heart of the speech act’s efficacy.

In this regard, we might note that the more ‘heavy-handed’ the sensory imagery the better!\textsuperscript{42,43} Whereas ‘subtlety’ -- and hence, more ‘complex’ accounts -- might in some contexts seem better equipped for the complicated business of revealing difficult truths, the trade-off is that such accounts are able to effect re-orientation in fewer people.\textsuperscript{44} But, since ‘re-orientation’ is ‘re-orientation’ regardless of how it is brought about, we can of course see the wisdom of relying on less subtle linguistic constructions to effect that re-orientation -- and, as such, the more heavy-handed the imagery the better! So, describing soul’s re-orientation spatially as a ‘turning upwards’ is -- given our experience of the sensory world as a place where ‘better things’ (e.g., the Sun) are above us in the sky -- better (i.e., more effective in re-orienting the soul) than describing soul’s re-orientation either in decidedly more ‘subtle’ (and hence, more complicated) terms as ‘a removal of discursive plurality from the state of noetic reality,’ and certainly better than
describing it as ‘a total mystery.’ Similarly for our parable: a parable which, towards the end of re-orienting the reader’s soul, speaks of the relationship between God and man in terms of a king and his servant is -- given our experience of socio-political reality -- better (i.e., more effective in re-orienting the soul) than one which speaks of that relationship somewhat enigmatically in terms of a butterfly and a rabbit (even if one could construct some analysis which shows how thus describing things in fact more subtly reveals truths about the relationship between God and man), and is certainly better than one which simply describes that relationship as ‘a total mystery.’

Relating this idea specifically to Gabirol’s own thesis of universal hylomorphism, recall that the essential indeterminate subsistence of each substance is specifically described by him as ‘matter’ and as an ‘element.’ In light of our above analysis, we can say that Gabirol (and the traditions upon which he is drawing) employs the heavy-handed spatially suggestive terminology of ‘matter’ and ‘element’ to describe something which is neither matter or an element in any of the more palpable Aristotelian corporeal (i.e., spatial) senses. However, instead of seeing Gabirol’s employment of this decidedly spatio-temporal terminology as either irrelevant to understanding his project, or as a sign of his being a cruder thinker than Aristotle (or indicating some confusion on his part), we may say that it is precisely his recourse to the spatio-temporal terms ‘matter’ and ‘element’ that enables his readers to best — and hence, most effectively — conjure up images of
ever ascending strata of sustainers and things sustained. This latter image can in turn lead the reader’s imagination to apprehend the great chain of being which is beyond both sensory and direct intellectual apprehension. In this way, by employing the spatio-temporally evocative imagery of material sustainers, Gabirol is able to effect a certain indirect reorientation of the attentive reader’s soul.

Reflecting on the instrumentality of ‘creative language’ in general, then, we might say that it is not so much the content of what is being said, but the language used to say it that is most effective in re-orienting the soul. To see the role of Imagination -- both on the part of the author/speaker and on the part of the reader/listener -- in all of this, we might note the following: as it is precisely the appropriate sensory imagery which is giving the account its ‘re-orienting’ impact on soul, what is key, hence, is precisely:

(i) the author’s imaginative activity of ‘re-assembling’ images to form new and creative images (evidenced in either the spatio-temporal couching of a given cosmological or ontological account, or in the construction of myths, poems, parables and allegories), as well as

(ii) the impact of these new creative images on the recipient’s imaginative capacity (which ‘takes in’ and is affected by images -- here in the form of reading a text with one’s eyes, or hearing it with one’s ears).

As such, we might note that it is precisely the dual function of fatr (or, soul’s imaginative capacity in Gabirol) as we have analyzed it above -- viz., soul’s
‘taking in’ of images and ‘re-assembling’ them -- which is at the heart of this analysis, supplying us respectively with the imaginative roles of the author and of the reader in the process of re-orienting the reader’s soul.

As such, we might note that poetry, symbolic parables and any other kind of ‘mythic’ (i.e., not literally true, but persuasively effective) enterprises will be useful in helping the soul attain its highest state in one way (corresponding to ‘2a, (i) and (ii)’ above) precisely because they will be able to provide the Imagination with an exercise of the very sorts of analogical skills that it will need if it is to successfully be ‘re-oriented’ by certain kinds of cosmological and ontological analyses (such as Universal Hylomorphism), as well as if it is to be able to present the input from the sensible microcosm as images of (and hence, as instruments or stepping stones leading to the possibility of apprehending) the higher intelligible realities of which they are the pale analogues. Furthermore (as we’ve suggested in ‘2b’ above), poems and the like can effect noēsis directly in certain cases where both the poem and the reader/author are of a certain ‘well-ordered’ standing.

*  

5.4.6 ALLEGORICAL HERMENEUTICS

To root in Gābirol and his tradition the importance of using creative language towards re-orienting souls, consider the prominence within Gābirol’s Islamic and Jewish textual milieu of allegorical hermeneutics (taʾwil) -- viz., interpreting Biblical, Qur’anic and other textual materials not in terms of their
surface meanings, but as symbolic creations expertly crafted (in some cases, by
God or His prophet/s) to present the imaginative faculty with colorful images in
way of addressing ideas which are themselves too abstract for the average person to
grasp directly. As in our above case of spatio-temporal language to describe that
which is neither spatial nor temporal, we find here too the following sensibility:
sometimes, in order to help us grasp a certain difficult reality, we must be given a
more ‘colorful’ – or, more ‘robust’ – albeit inaccurate version of that reality which
we might more easily grasp, as a means to grasping that more difficult reality. In
the case of allegorical hermeneutics, the text is seen as employing parables, stories
and other ‘not literally true’ accounts in way of helping its reader to grasp some set
of difficult but important truths.

In this very regard, we might turn to Maimonides who, under the influence
of al-Farabi and Avicenna, affords great value to the role of allegorical
hermeneutics and other modes of analogical analysis; as such, he provides
allegorical accounts not only of Biblical events, but he employs parables in the
construction of his own philosophical text: In fact, it is by the aid of a somewhat
parabolic image that Maimonides most famously puts forth the importance of
allegory, parables and the like; viz., quoting from Proverbs 25:11, he seizes on the
image of ‘golden apples in silver filigree casings (maskiyot keṣef)’ as an apt way to
describe the dynamics and value of allegorical method: 45 sometimes, to get the
reader to grasp certain essential truths, the philosopher must address these truths
indirectly in colorful, vibrant, ‘filigreed’ terms which speak, as it were, directly to
the Imagination.

In more exact epistemological terms, they ‘speak to the Imagination’
precisely because they involve images of corporeal substances -- of forms
ensconced, as it were, in corporeal accidents, as opposed to entertaining definitional
/ scientific accounts which would demand that we grasp forms in abstraction from
corporeal accidents. In providing us with robust images -- which treat forms
together with their corporeal trappings as they occur to us sensorily -- allegorical
accounts are precisely the sorts of things which feed the imaginative faculty in hope
of re-orienting it towards noësis.

In fact, we may say that our approach to the sensory world should be akin to
our approaching a brilliantly constructed parable or allegorical account: just as the
properly devised allegory is able to propel its reader’s soul towards a conjunction
with Intellect, so too, the sensible world itself, when properly viewed, is a tool
(recall Plato’s notion of ‘stepping stones’ above) able to reorient the soul. Looking
to our above analysis of Gabirol’s own analogical treatment of the microcosm as
itself an image of the macrocosm, we find a very interesting -- and illuminating --
turn of phrase which seems to tacitly make just this point; in his advice (addressed
earlier in this chapter) that we should ‘tak[e] the sensory’ as an ‘exemplum’ of the
intelligible substances, we might note that the Arabic ‘mithl’ -- for ‘exemplum’ -- is
a term which means not only ‘image’ or ‘picture,’ but also denotes ‘simile,’
‘parable’ and ‘allegory.’ As such, the sensible world, as a manifestation of the highest intelligible substance (viz., Nous), itself emerges in this tradition exactly as an ‘allegory’: it is a visual parable of sorts which, just like allegories to be found in the Bible or in other texts, provides the properly trained Imagination with uniquely effective access to the higher reality of Nous which lies behind it.

* 

Our above analyses of the epistemology of imagining in Plato and Aristotle, in stressing the importance of soul’s taking in images from the outside sensible world, have afforded us a precise mechanism by which to understand the effectiveness of allegorical hermeneutics and its importance in Gabirol’s philosophical tradition. As such, we have uncovered the importance of choosing with care even the very words used in one’s construction of a given philosophical discourse, as it is the effectiveness of the imagery evoked (in direct correlation, it would seem, with the ability of said imagery to effectively enlist certain spatio-temporal cues in the description of non-spatio-temporal realities) which, it seems, is at the root of a discourse’s effectiveness in re-orienting the reader’s soul.

5.4.7 GABIROL THE POET

It is in thus focusing on Gabirol’s allegorical context in general, and his clear championing of the effectiveness of analogical analyses as means to the ultimate noetic end, that an intimate link between ‘Gabirol the philosopher’ and
'Gabirol the poet' may be seen to emerge. For taken as a proponent of these ideas in his philosophical project, Gabirol may be seen as thus replacing Aristotelian science or more formal modes of Platonic dialectic as the main means to attaining the end-state of Intellect. Instead, exercises which enliven the Imagination -- which provide it with images and not just abstracted formal accounts -- are just as good a means to the end-state of Nous. As such, we might see Gabirol as having had an actual philosophical reason for spending so much time writing poetry: like allegorical interpretations, parables and other analogical exercises, a properly penned verse of poetry too can exercise the Imaginative faculty in a way best able to propel the human soul towards its highest state. Following on 2a,ii above, we might say that poetry, in fine-tuning our analogical skills, allows us to most easily and reliably come to see all of sensible reality as the 'maskiyot kesef' -- the finely woven filigree screen through which we can glimpse the 'tapuhe zahav' ('golden apples') which are the intelligible substances, including Nous. Furthermore, following on 2b, we might say that certain poems -- and here, we must rank Gabirol's own poems -- can in and themselves directly propel the properly sensitive reader towards conjunction with Nous. As such, we might liken Gabirol’s employment of the spatio-temporal imagery of material sustenance in his metaphysical account of existential essences to his composition of moving verses of poetry; for, in both cases, the overarching goal is the effective enlivening (and reorientation) of the reader’s soul. We may hence in many respects liken both
Gabirol’s composition of the metaphysics of UH as well as his composition of 
poetry to a mystic’s own relationship to various meditative exercises on his journey 
towards ittibād.

*  

5.5 CONCLUSION

In having examined the details of psychic imagining in terms of Platonic 
and Aristotelian epistemology, we have hopefully succeeded in uncovering a way 
in which, quite generally, Gabirol’s FV – in all of its cosmo-ontological details – is 
able to effect a re-orienting effect on the souls of certain readers. Which readers? 
Those readers who most clearly grasp and are able to picture the spatial images 
which Gabirol’s ‘form / matter’ analyses invoke. Gabirol’s UH presents to us a set 
of extremely deep and moving ideas about the relationship between God and the 
world, about the nature of human contingency and regarding the human being’s 
own epistemological / ethical goals. However, he conveys these complicated 
notions by offering us an elaborately ‘spatial’ sort of account: here there is God’s 
Essence, yonder there is Will; here there is Wisdom, over there is Word and a 
Divine Throne; here there is Intellect, lower there is Nature; and through it all, there 
is the presence in each thing of a material sustainer. This imagery – used to 
describe man’s relationship to God and his ethical end-goal of Wisdom, neither of 
which are spatial or temporal sorts of states – is replete with spatio-temporal cues. 
In effect, like the construction of his most moving poetry, Gabirol’s technical 

266
metaphysics of UH aims – by its use of certain well-crafted spatio-temporal imagery culled from the sensory world – to lead its reader closer to the epistemological / ethical end-goal of conjunction with Intellect. Gabirol’s very construction of a text of cosmo-ontology (including the details of his doctrine of UH) may hence be seen in the service of this larger epistemological / ethical goal. In this way the text of the FV itself may be seen as an instrument towards the goal of Return.

---

1 See Asín Palacios 1978.

2 Al-Shahrazūrī, Rawḍah al-Afrāḥ, MS 1488 of the Library of Leiden, folio 14r, line 4 (Arabic printed in Appendix IV of Asín Palacios 1978); Translation from Asín Palacios 1978, 47 - 8.

3 Plato, Timaeus 39b3-c1.

4 Comford 1935, 115.


7 Note: such as the Sun in the case of astronomy in our quote from Timaeus above.


10 Plotinus, Enneads 1.3.1; 153 Armstrong, my emphasis.


12 Recall above Proclus’ idea that the dialectical, discursive reasoning of soul is itself a stepping stone, as it were, to help the soul move beyond that state to the state of pure noēsis. In this regard, we might say that the involvement with notions of Otherness and the like is in the ultimate service of moving the soul towards Sameness with its source, the One. The Return towards Unity is hence the goal of dialectic.

13 FV 3.56, p. 204, line 13 - 3.57, p. 205, line 18; my emphasis.
swr in form ΙΙ = to form, to shape; in form V = to imagine.

Pines 1977, 47.

Wolfson 1935, 69 - 133. See 130 ff. for a quick summary of Greek, Hebrew and Latin terms in this regard.

It should be noted that the technical terminology for parts of the soul becomes quite complicated, as H. A. Wolfson describes. ‘Mešayer,’ hence, is certainly not the only Hebrew term associated with imaginative capacities; we find, e.g., the term ‘dimayon’ used by Falaquera in his Hebrew summary of the FV text, (see, e.g., Si(f)roni edition, p. 443).

The verb in question is ‘haptō’; as such, the ‘grasper’ is called the ‘hēmmenos,’ [see, e.g., Republic Bk. 7, 527c7].

In a case employing more than one of the 5 external senses, the ‘common sense’ is responsible for coalescing the forms together into a single whole representative of the given object ‘out there’ being sensed; this coalesced ‘image’ then resides in the person’s imaginative faculty.

For discussion of whether phantasmata of imagination are different from ‘concepts’ (noēmata), see Wedin 1988. Wedin argues for the thesis that images are different from -- though necessary for the formation of -- concepts, yet he discusses the view of those who maintain an identity in Aristotle between ‘phantasmata’ and ‘noēmata’). In general, the following De Anima passage clearly suggests the distinction between images and noēmata, whereas the passage from De Memoria has seemed to some to support the identity of these two phenomena in Aristotle:

De Anima III.8 (432a11 - 14):
“But imagination (phanstasia) is different from assertion (phaneōs) and denial (apophaneōs). For truth and falsity involve a combination of thoughts (noēmatōn). But what distinguishes the first thoughts (ta prōta noēmata) from images (phantasmata)? Clearly neither these nor any other thoughts (talla) will be images; but they cannot exist without images,” (I cite the translation in Wedin 1988, p. 122).

De Memoria 449b31 - 450a7:
“...thinking is not possible without an image [noēin ouk estin aneu phantasmatos], for the affection that occurs in thinking is just the same as that involved in constructing a diagram; for while we draw it as a determinate size, we make no use there of the fact that the triangle is of a definite size and similarly when one is thinking, though he may not be thinking of a quantity, a quantity is put [tithetai] before the eyes but he does not think of it as a quantity; and should the nature of what he thinks about be quantitative, but indefinite, a determinate quantity is put before the eyes but he thinks of it as a quantity only [noei hé poson monon],” (Wedin, 1988, p. 136).

Metaphysics Z, Book 5, 1030b14 ff.

This is of course further supported by the Plotinian cosmology in which Soul is seen midway between Nous and Nature, and by our analysis of soul’s representing forms in a state of ‘actuality’ midway between forms’ occurrence in Nous and in a natural body.
For an analysis of Neoplatonic epistemology which highlights the interplay of Platonic and Aristotelian sensibilities, see Gersh 1978, 90 ff.

See Wolfson 1935, 97.

See Altmann and Stern's remark that even Wolfson's extensive work on the inner senses in general and in the inner senses in Israeli in particular still do not help elucidate one of Israeli's remarks about Imagination (e.g., the precise function of 'wahr') in The Book of Definitions. Cf. Altmann and Stern 1958, 63.

We might note that even Avicenna who on many occasions does go into great detail regarding the faculties of soul ultimately presents his reader with a number of disparate accounts of the soul's precise mechanics (see Wolfson 1935, 95 - 101). In effect, we might suggest that regardless of how many pages a given thinker devotes to the subject, the precise business of 'teasing apart' one of soul's inner functions from the next in these medieval Arabic textual traditions -- for all the reasons already cited -- inevitably results in a bit of a muddle.

Recall: I use this expression neutrally between 'taking in of images of forms' in Plato and 'taking in of forms' in Aristotle, though the former is undoubtedly closer to the spirit of Gabirol's Neoplatonic world-view.

For Arabic text and translation of this work by Gabirol, see Wise 1966.

See Aristotle, De Anima 3.2; 425b, 24-25, and Wolfson 1935, 78.

The second and third of these are, though, treated as dual aspects of 'phantasia' by the Ikhwān as-Safā. Unlike the Ikhwān who call that capacity "mutakhayyala" (related to the more usual 'khayāl' language in describing soul's imaginative faculty), and who list this as one of five psychic faculties, in Gabirol, we instead find the term 'fār', and a list of only three. Wolfson 1935, 77 ff.

For a more general introduction to 'macrocosm / microcosm' analysis in Gabirol (as well as for an analysis of four distinct varieties of analogy employed by Gabirol), see Schilinger 1969, 141 - 57, and Appendix, 313 - 16.

We might contrast the exalted role of analogical reasoning (i.e., from microcosm to macrocosm) in Gabirol with its rebuke in Maimonides, where such 'non-Aristotelian' methodology get associated with the Mu'takallimun (cf. Guide, I. 73, p. 209 ff.; I. 74, p. 215 ff.). When Maimonides does, however, himself invoke the 'microcosm / macrocosm' parallel, it is only as an extremely circumscribed analogy, and is not reflective -- as it is in Gabirol -- of a large-scale philosophical methodology; so, cf. Guide I. 72 (Pines, p. 191, my emphasis): "It is only with a view to this that it is said of man alone that he is a small world, inasmuch as there subsists in him a certain principle that governs the whole of him." Even this clearly circumscribed use of the analogy by Maimonides is followed in the text by further caveats limiting the usefulness of this analogy between 'man as a microcosm' and the world as a macrocosm.

We might further note that Maimonides, while in general agreement about the importance of a well-honed imagination (e.g., for the reception of prophecy -- except for the case of Mosaic prophecy), his above dissatisfaction with Mu'takallimun methodology -- which, as I hope to elaborate upon elsewhere, is of a piece with Gabirol's analogical methodology -- is tied in Maimonides work to a number of negative remarks about the Imagination. In effect, Maimonides
views this analogical methodology as erroneous precisely because it relies too heavily on the imagination (in his text as: khayāl / sakhayyul) and not heavily enough on Aristotelian principles of reasoning. In this regard, we might note Maimonides’ remarks at Guide 1.2 (p. 25) on the sin of Adam at Genesis 3:6 where we find the phrase: "...that the tree...was a delight to the eyes.” Maimonides comments that the notion of ‘a delight to the eyes’ signifies that Adam’s sin was “that he inclined toward his desires of the imagination and the pleasures of the corporeal senses.” In addition to thus censuring imagination, we find, immediately following this remark in I, 3 the lexical chapter on ‘temunah’ (figure) and ‘tavnit’ (shape), where, interestingly, one of the texts he cites as an example of this notion is Deut. 4:15 on ‘graven images,’ a reference to idolatry which we might take as a subtle added censure on his part of the imaginative faculty (which deals in images). Not only does this idolatry reference follow immediately on the tails of the I, 2 censure of Adam’s imaginative faculty, but, the sentence following the ‘graven images’ example points out that the term ‘figure’ can also be used to refer to the ‘imaginary form’ (i.e., phantasta) which resides in the imagination after perception.

33 I might briefly note that this emanative feature is -- as I hope to discuss in a future project -- that which makes the Neoplatonic epistemology, even in its Platonic ‘recollective’ sensibility, also akin to Aristotle who sees the forms as in the sensibles per se. In effect, we here have the forms on-high on the one hand, but some other genuine ontological extensions of those forms having emanated down. At least prima facie, this emanative element might be seen, hence, as giving the ‘forms as they are present in sensibles’ a more robust status than mere ‘reflections’ of the upper forms, as in Plato.

34 At Theatetus, 157e dreams are categorized together with ‘disorders,’ including ‘madness,’ as cases of ‘false perceptions’; and at 158b Theatetus says: “I cannot undertake to deny that madmen an dreamers believe what is false, when madmen imagine they are gods or dreamers think they have wings and are flying in their sleep.”

35 Of the rational person who goes to sleep with their soul in restful, ordered state Plato says “he is most likely to apprehend truth, and the visions of his dreams least likely to be fallacious,” (Rep. 9, 572b). In the context, this suggests that in the case of properly rational soul, at least the ‘beastly and savage part’ of soul (which is ‘replete with food and wine...’) won’t run amuck during sleep, and hence won’t cause silly / licentious / meaningless dreams. The former part about ‘apprehending truth’ is elsewhere in the passage linked to the third and highest part of soul, the rational.


38 See C. Sirat’s work on visionary experiences in Jewish thought, cf. Sirat 1969. See also E. R. Wolfson’s work on the importance of images in this regard for the mystical experience in Wolfson 1994.

39 This may ultimately be at play even in Aristotle’s treatment of rhetoric in more circumscribed contexts (e.g., in courtrooms, at public events, etc.), assuming that the rhetorician is always and only effective to the extent that they persuade the people towards what is in fact true. This, though, does not seem to be the case in a general Aristotelian account of rhetoric (and likewise with respect to the effectiveness of myth in Plato) where ‘persuasiveness’ and inclining an audience’s soul towards the true don’t always seem to go hand in hand.

270
40. In this regard, one might also confer discussions in scholarly literature on the notion of ‘myth’ in Plato -- and particularly the ‘instrumentality’ of myths to properly lead the soul towards knowledge and the Good, in spite of their ‘not being literally true.’ On the persuasive power of myth in this regard, see Brisson 1998.

41. In a related regard, see Gersh on the characteristic -- and necessary -- employment within Neoplatonic texts of *admittedly inaccurate* spatio-temporal language; cf. Gersh 1996.

42. Why this should be so presumably has to do with the Platonic fact that the sensible microcosm simply is -- as a matter of cosmic record -- a copy of the intelligible macrocosm. We will not evaluate the coherence of this premise in our current study.

43. I have made a related point about Avicenna’s talk of ‘existence added to pre-existence’ in my ‘Proclean ‘Remaining’ and Avicenna on Existence as Accident: Neoplatonic Methodology and a Defense of ‘Pre-Existing’ Essences,” forthcoming.

44. In this regard, see my discussion of the inappropriateness of Thomistic rebukes of Avicenna’s ‘crude’ analysis of existence’s being ‘added’ to essence; cf. my “Proclean ‘Remaining’…” forthcoming.


46. While the passage in question is not one of those preserved for us in its original Arabic, we find the translation of ‘exemplum’ for ‘mithl’ two times in the preserved fragments of FV 1.7; p. 10, l. 7 – 10; (Cf. Pines 1977, 52).

47. We might note the difference in this regard of Plato’s estimation of the importance of poetry; see Republic Book 7 where poetry weighs in at a fairly low level in the educational hierarchy.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY GABIROL TEXTS

THE FONS VITAE (LATIN EDITION, HEBREW SUMMARY, ARABIC FRAGMENTS AND MATERIALS IN TRANSLATION):


-- Contains the Latin text of the Fons Vitae.


-- French translation of book three of the Fons Vitae, with commentary by Brunner.


-- Contains a Hebrew translation of the Latin text of the Fons Vitae. The volume also includes the 13th century Hebrew summary of the original Arabic text, by Shem Tov ibn Falaquera, (with an index).


-- Contains text of Falaquera’s 13th century Hebrew summary of the Fons Vitae (from the Arabic), as well as Munk’s French translation and commentary.

-- Contains Judeo-Arabic fragments of Gabirol’s Fons Vitae as found in Moses Ibn Ezra.


-- Contains additional Judeo-Arabic fragments of Gabirol’s Fons Vitae as found in Moses Ibn Ezra.

*

ADDITIONAL GABIROL TEXTS CITED:

Bialik and Ravnitsky, eds. 1924. Shirei Shlomo ben Yehudah Ibn Gevirol, Vol. 1 (Shirei Hol). Tel Aviv; Berlin: Dwir-Verlags-Gesellschaft.

-- Contains text of Gabirol’s poem Ahavitkha (in Hebrew).

-----------. 1925. Shirei Shlomo ben Yehudah Ibn Gevirol, (Shirei qodesh), volume 2. Tel Aviv; Berlin: Dwir-Verlags-Gesellschaft.

-- Contains text of Gabirol’s Keter Malkhût poem (in Hebrew).


-- contains (in Hebrew) Abraham Ibn Ezra’s recounted version of Gabirol’s commentary on Genesis.


-- Arabic text and translation of Gabirol’s Sefer Tiqun Midot ha-Nefesh.


-- Gabirol’s Hebrew poetry (in Hebrew).

*
OTHER PRIMARY SOURCES


Elhonan ben Avrohom. *Yesod Olam*.
-- This is a ca.14th century Hebrew text of Kabbalism which contains Ps. Empedoclean materials. It is available in Manuscript Ginsberg 607 and Oxford 2234 in Steinschneider’s Bodleian Catalogue. Cf. Kaufmann 1899 / 1972, 85 and 88 ff.


-- This is the *Book of Religions and Sects*; Ps. Empedoclean materials can be found at II, Book 2, Ch. 1, pp. 260–265. French translation available in Schlanger 1968, 76 ff.


SELECTED SECONDARY MATERIALS


281

Paris: Desclée de Brouwer.


282


--------------------. “Ha-Pseudo Empedocles ka-Mekor le-R’ Shlomo ibn Gabirol,” Meikarim ba-Sifrut ha-Ivrit. 78-164.


284


286


290


INDEX OF AUTHORS CITED

Aquinas
11, 13, 15, 17, 22 – 3, 25 – 30, 36, 52, 77 – 8, 190, 195, 197

Aristotle
10 – 11, 13 – 15, 18, 21 – 2, 24 – 26, 31 – 2, 36 – 41, 48, 59, 60, 67, 69, 76,
78, 154 – 58, 161, 163 – 4, 173 – 4, 178 – 80, 190 – 1, 197, 234, 236 – 7,
239 – 45, 254, 259, 264 – 6, 268 (n. 20), 270 (ns. 32, 39)

Augustine, Augustinianism
3, 13, 17, 43, 46, 51, 53, 60, 66 – 7, 71 – 2, 76 – 82, 85, 87, 122, 146, 254

Avicenna,
2, 11 – 13, 15, 17, 20 – 3, 36, 39, 40, 48, 66, 70, 77 – 8, 85 – 7, 141, 146,
154, 262, 269 (n. 26), 271 (ns. 43 – 4)

Boethius
15, 17, 20 – 3, 36, 232

Brunner
2, 7, 13, 86, 92, 113, 116 – 121

Elhonian ben Avrohom
215

Goheen
51, 124

Gundissalinus
1, 123

Ibn Daud, Abraham
13, 29 – 30, 69 – 70, 137

292
Ibn Ezra, Abraham
43, 68, 218 (n. 23)

Ibn Ezra, Moses
1, 61, 62, 235

Ibn Ḥasday, Abraham
144, 159, 206, 208 – 9

Ibn Sina (see Avicenna)

Ikwān as-Ṣafā (Brethren of Purity)
8, 198, 209 – 13, 269 (n. 30)

Israeli, Isaac
66 – 70, 144, 159, 180 (n. 2), 206 – 9, 249 – 52, 269 (n. 25)

Maimonides
15, 17, 67 – 70, 148 (n. 21), 190, 262, 269 – 70 (n. 32)

Muʿtazilites
19

Nicomachus
8, 143, 198 – 202

Pines
2, 11, 13, 23, 35, 62, 86, 116, 138

Plato
26, 85, 122, 143, 173, 179, 186, 205, 216 (n. 3), 228 – 30, 232 – 4, 236 – 9, 242 – 5, 249, 257, 263 – 6

Plotinus
4, 8, 59, 67, 68, 71, 83 – 4, 88, 99, 120, 122, 144, 153, 163, 168, 174, 184, 193, 196, 205, 210, 232

Proclus
4, 8, 123, 149 (n. 45), 196 – 8, 228 – 33

Ps. Empedocles
5, 40, 144, 213 – 215, 198, 224 – 7, 236, 246
Saadiah
45, 138 – 142, 145, 218 (n. 23)

Schlanger
2, 7, 13, 116, 128 – 134, 137

Scholem
191 – 2

Shahrastani
214 – 15, 224 – 5

Shahrazuri
224, 226

Shem Tov ibn Falaquera
19, 182, 214, 236

Sijistani (Abū Ya`qūb al-Sijistānī)
202

Stern, S. M.
144, 159, 193, 206, 208, 218 (n. 34)

Weisheipl
2, 13, 17, 66, 116
INDEX OF TEXTS CITED

Ahavtikha (Gabirol)
59, 68, 69, 134 – 137

Arūgat ha-Bōsem (Moses ibn Ezra)
1, 148 (fn. 23), 235

Commentary on Euclid’s Elements (Proclus)
229 – 32

Commentary on Liber de Causis (Aquinas)
28 – 9

De Memoria (Aristotle)
268 (n. 20)

De Anima (Aristotle)
239, 268 (n. 20), 269 (n. 29)

De Substantiis Separatis (Aquinas)
26 – 7

Elements of Theology (Proclus)
4, 149 (n. 45), 184, 197, 232

Emūnah Ramah (The Exalted Faith) (Abraham ibn Daud)
29, 150 (n. 61)

Enneads (Plotinus)
71, 193

Genesis
41 – 52, 68, 146, 187, 270 (n. 32)
Ibn Ḥasday’s Neoplatonist materials
8, 144, 159, 206

Keter Malkhūt (Gabirol)
11, 23, 45, 59, 138

Liber de Causis (Kalām fi maḥd al-khair)
4, 19, 26, 28 – 29, 66, 147 (fn. 9), 149 (fn. 45), 196 – 7, 209, 213

Physics (Aristotle)
39 – 41, 48, 154

Pseudo Empedoclean materials
5, 8, 213 – 215, 224 – 7, 236, 246
- Shahrastānī
  214 – 5, 224 – 5,
- Shahrazūrī
  224, 226
- Elḥonan ben Avrohom
  215

Pseudo-Clementine Homiliae 17
150 (n. 70)

Republic (Plato)
230, 237 – 9, 250, 271 (n. 47)

Sefer Tiqqūn Midrōt ha-Nefesh (The Improvement of the Moral Qualities) (Gabirol)
246

Sefer Yeẓirah (SY)
44 – 5, 138 – 142, 145

Sophist (Plato)
122

Theology of Aristotle
4, 5, 213
- Longer version
  5, 8, 144, 206, 209 – 10

Timaeus (Plato)
143, 186, 205, 216 (n. 3), 229 – 30, 232

296
INDEX RERUM

Allegory
8, 239, 255 – 7, 260 – 5,

anniyya
19, 75 (n. 52), 84, 147 (n. 9), 219 (n. 41)

Arithmetic
228, 230 – 3

Astronomy
228 – 30, 232 – 3

‘Ayin (nothingness)
45, 59

Conjunction
– to intellect (ittiṣāl)
8, 97 – 102, 174, 181 (n. 21), 221, 222, 227, 229, 255, 257, 263, 265, 267
– of matter and form by Will; (Will as ‘intermediary’)
62 – 3, 88, 92, 112 - 115, 125, 207 – 8

Creation
11, 34, 41 – 3, 45, 47, 51, 136 – 7, 147, 184 – 95
– Creation as Emanation
8, 189 – 95
– Creation ex aliquo
8, 14, 186, 188 – 91
– Creation ex nihil
8, 14, 41, 67, 76, 88, 134, 137, 187 – 94
– First Creation (viz., Intellect)
68, 185

297
of matter and / or form
130 – 134, 153, 185, (for chapter 4, cf. ‘creation ex aliquo,’ and ‘First Matter’ entries)

Dialectic
8, 228 – 9, 231 – 3, 238 – 9, 254 – 7, 265

Distance (as a cosmic theme)
55 – 6, 68, 161 – 2

Divided Line, (Plato)
237, 239

First Essence, (God as)
7, 12, 20, 56, 61 – 2, 91, 106, 116, 120, 129 – 137

First Matter
12, 34, 37 – 41, 47 – 8, 57 – 8, 64 – 5, 77, 118 – 20, 141 – 2, 144 – 5,
159 – 60, 180 (n. 5), 196, 200, 206 – 11, 215 – 16, 224, 250

Genus Generalissimum
7, 37, 38, 47

Imagination
8, 233 – 267
– Phantasia
239 – 247, 268 (n. 20), 269 (n. 30), 270 (n. 32)
– Eikasia
233, 237 – 9, 242 – 3

Intelligible Matter (Plotinus)
99, 144, 153, 196, 205 – 6, 210

Ismailism
202 – 6, 209, 211, 218 – 9 (n. 34)

Kavôd
136, 139 – 42

Malkhût
142
Mu’tazilism
19

Per se existens (as a feature of matter)
7, 12, 115 – 16, 121 – 9, 132 – 3, 145 – 6, 165, 207

Plurality of Forms Doctrine
35

Potency to Be
7, 12, 22, 37, 38, 47, 94, 120

Prime Matter (Aristotelian)
39, 40, 44, 48, 68, 154 – 5

Quadrivium
231 – 2

Rhetoric
227, 229, 254 – 6, 270 (n. 39)

Second Air
139 – 142

Sepirōt
140 – 142

Semital Reasons (Augustinian)
77, 78, 81

Sufism
19, 99, 244

Shadow (as a cosmic theme)
68, 102, 148 (n. 28), 161 – 2, 235

Throne (as a cosmic theme)
7, 12, 79, 115 – 16, 138 – 142, 145

Unification (ittihād)
97 – 102, 222

299
Unity of Matter
49, 51, 53, 58, 86 – 7

Will
2, 17, 44, 49, 61 – 72, 77, 87 – 9, 91 – 2, 110, 112 – 116, 119, 127,
129 – 34, 138, 140 – 1, 161 – 163, 190, 218 (n. 34), 233, 266

300