Die Lehre vom Göttlichen Willen

Bei den jüdischen Religionsphilosophen des Mittelalters von Saadja bis Maimuni

Von Dr. Arnold Grünfeld

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of the Jewish religious philosophers of the Middle Ages, from Saadia to Maimonides

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Introduction

The cause for the late emergence of philosophy within a people cannot always be because of lack of talent. The conflict between religion and reason in Judaism appeared relatively late, maybe because the religious views stayed down to earth and truthful. Traditional religion tried more or less successfully to solve everyday problems. Only at a much later time did Jewish philosophy appear. This paper aims at discussing the motives and characteristics for the relatively late emerge at a time, when it was attempted to explain the teachings of the Jewish religion philosophically.

The problem of the Godly will in Arab philosophic systems

The idea of the pure Monotheism means that God, the highest being, created everything that is and will be through his own free will. For the naïve religious consciousness this assumption is enough to lose any doubts that might arise. But doubt is the "father of philosophy" and this will lead a person to search for the deeper essence of God and to get clarity of the many questions that arise in life. Doesn't the unrestricted will, which religion attributes to God, represent a humiliation from the viewpoint of our morality because of its difference to reckless arbitrariness? On the other hand, doesn't the attribution of will present God in its essence with a restriction of a will, i.e. a wish represents something missing? And, if assumed that God has an act of will before each creation isn't he put in relation to everything finite, especially in relation to the human being who knows that there is firstly an act of will which follows an action? Whatever the answers for those questions might be, the Jewish religious philosophers see in them the difference between themselves and the followers of Aristotle. According to Jehuda Halevi, God is the source of all being, at creation his will did not contribute to it. Indeed, in the Aristotle and neo-Platonic system there is no room for the act of will of the original being. Plotinus explicitly denied the original being the act of will because the will is identical with the desire for good, which the original being is not; within God there would then have to keep apart the "being" from the "wanting". Philo viewed God as attributeless but on the other hand perceived God to be a personal being who intervenes in personal acts of will and events. Philo, being Jewish, could not renounce the "Godly will" when trying to harmonize his religious views with the Greek philosophy.

Prior to the Jewish philosophers it was the Muslim Arabs of various religious backgrounds who philosophized about God's will. Apart from the traditional dogmatic teachings (Hadit), there are two main parts of Islamic research: Fiqh, the judicial-theological science which works with analogies and speculations and Kalam, the dialectic analysis of truth and basic concepts of religion. Known as Mutakallimun, are the ones who have taken it upon themselves to defend religious dogmas against philosophy with the help of dialectics. This big orthodox party represented the Islamic theology. Its basic concepts were the oneness and justice of God, the denial of Godly character traits, allegorization, denial of the eternity of the Godly word (of the Koran) and freedom of will. Kalam, which means word, is the science of God's words. Indeed, the assumption of eternity or the very nature of creation of the Godly word forms the main point of difference between the later representatives of orthodoxy, the Ashari and the freethinking Mutazilah.

From an orthodox perspective, the claim that the Koran contains the eternal words of God should determine the legality of Islam opposite of Judaism and Christianity. In Christian circles the "word" became important as a hypostatic Godly personality which came in conjunction with the teaching of the Godly word with the attribute-doctrine – i.e. if God has character traits and if so, which ones can be attributed to him. Eventually, the "word" was brought in connection with the "Godly will" as the "word" is a summary of the Godly commandments given to humanity. The different religions and the various sects among them have very different understandings about the Godly will, his word and his attributes. Some sects identify God with knowledge or with power. As an example, may be stated the views of the orthodox Ashari, whose views have a strong influence on the philosophy of life of the Islamic masses until today. Their views draw a picture of an all-knowing and all-powerful God. God`s will is eternal, as is God himself, who, with his actions affects all of his creations. The Ashari were convinced that God`s will includes everything good and evil, useful or harmful which meant for them the abolishment of man's free will. The Arab theologists dealt very intensely with the question of will. According to Empedocles, the creator never stops being himself, he is the pure will, knowledge, force, power, goodness and truth. Anaxagoras equated the will, the wanting and the wanted with actions. The origin of all of all things is according to Farabi not the all-encompassing will of creation but the necessity of events, as the forms exist in God for eternity.

The problem of will, as seen by Jewish religious philosophers

I. Eclectic

Saadia Gaon (892 – 942)

The area of the Jewish philosophers of the Middle Ages starts with the great Saadia ben Joseph Al-Fayyumi from northern Egypt. At first, he studied the basic teachings of traditional Judaism in depth. The attacks of the Karaites and the philosophic efforts on one hand shook the Jewish religion and Saadia found it necessary – with his knowledge of Jewish law and philosophy – to combine those two fields and show that religion and philosophy matched and published it in his work called "Emuna ve deot". This work was written like a Mutazilah- Kalam and has great importance for Jewish philosophy because of its selection and his assessment and response to the problems, especially for his successors.

The first book of his "Emunda ve deot" deals with the creation of the world of perception, which, according to Holy Scripture must be a creation out of Nothingness. Some philosophers, on the contrary, believe in the theory of coincidence which states that everything was created by coincidence and not by intent or some sort of force or action. This can be said for the Atomistic approach for example, whose most prominent feature of religious philosophy was the theory of coincidence. However, a disproof of this theory was not only important but necessary. Saadia tried this similarly to the Mutakallimun; he did acknowledge though, that it was impossible to expect someone to really grasp what a creation out of Nothingness meant. The answer can only be an indication of God's will, which is hidden to humankind. The question arises: if God is a being that can act according to his own free will, then why was the earth not created at a different point in history, earlier or later. This question can only be answered with the statement: it was the will of God. Saadia himself, however, finds this answer to be poor and attempts to explain that no time existed before creation; there did not exist an earlier or later. Much more interesting for him was the question about the purpose of creation of earth which obviously is very difficult to answer given the fact that God's activity cannot be put in relation to harm or benefit as he is above all and everything. It would also be possible to see in the creation God's will to share and reveal his wisdom with man and be useful to him, who are supposed to come to this recognition and start to worship him. Saadia calls the creation of humankind the ultimate goal, as well as the earth the ultimate goal for the

creation of the universe. The conclusion of creation means that there was a creator, which means that there needed to be creator for all existence which leads to the assumption of a divine oneness. And yet, we are unable to imagine such a being could create earth and everything in it; this being obviously needs to have some sort of life, power and knowledge in addition to God's incomparability. He can create things without any action or contact; his will is enough to create and work. From man's viewpoint then, will can be identified with power, i.e. God's omnipotence, as man is only able to see in creation the will and the other way around: will in creation. This means that will and creation, from man's perspective, always go together. Another important issue is the connection of the will of God with evil. The question is how the permission of evil, which so to speak could be the objective passivity of Godly will, can be explained. Evil is the necessary opposite of good, its elimination is a conceptual impossibility which is not part of the sphere of Godly will or his almightiness. So how about the moral evil, the sin? It is an undeniable challenge of great justice not to rob man of his freedom of will and to refrain from influencing human behaviour. Given the fact that man was given commandments and prohibitions, the assumption of coercion or compulsion would be unreasonable and would make the punishment for a transgression unexplainable. And yet, simply tolerating sin as something which God does not want, seems to be a difficult problem to solve. According to Saadia Gaon does the Godly will solely seek to benefit man; if man sins then he hurts himself, he alone is responsible. The next question that arises is, if God wants only our best how can he permit that we do harm to ourselves? Under no circumstances may God be viewed as being a part of the sin.

II. Neo-Platonist

a) Salomo Ibn Gabirol (1021 – 1070)

One of the mysterious phenomena of the history of Jewish religious philosophy is Salomo Ibn Gabirol. He is one of greatest and the most celebrated Jewish poets. He was a deeply religious person for whom the Holy Scripture was sacred and non-negotiable. Ibn Gabirol seems to be the only Jewish religious philosopher who did not possess knowledge about Jewish law. That is why his philosophic work is without citations of Bible verses.

According to his book "Fons Vitæ" the world is composed of substances which are either in physical or spiritual form. The substance of nine categories in which four matters and

forms are distinguished: the special, the natural, the heavenly and the physical. The following substances which are between God and sensual represent the same world and are only discerned by fine subtleties:

1. Nature, whose force is to transform, hold back and eject
2. Soul
3. Intelligence
4. Reality as a universal form
5. Universal matter

According to Ibn Gabirol, everything that exists may be summarized into three categories: God, matter and form and will. All beings constitute of form and matter, which is true for the spiritual and physical world.

Human knowledge is also divided into three categories: knowledge about matter and form, knowledge of will, knowledge of the first being. Gabirol saw asceticism as the only means that will eventually lead to the will; only after man is fully stripped of his physical substance can he fully appreciate the true intelligibility and the minor importance of sensitive substances. The achievement of all wisdom is the study of the will as only the will can give us answers to questions like what, how and when everything came into being.

b) Bachya ibn Pakuda (around 12th century)

Bachya ben Yosef ibn Pakuda was a Rabbi, Dayan (a judge in a religious court) and a philosopher from Andalusia. Already the title of his book "Chovot ha levavot" (Duties of the heart) points out the fact that man has to search for the meaning of will in the moral philosophic area. Rabbi Bachya explained in the introduction to his book that the many religious philosophic works, apologetic and grammatical writings brought him to write a book about Jewish ethics. His position demanded a high understanding of bible and Talmudic knowledge and his writings was therefore deeply influenced by Jewish sources. Bachya's deep religiosity and the influence of neo-platonic thoughts made him see the purpose of his works to bring people closer to God. Based on the Jewish sources, his approach is that God is one. The world has one creator who created it out of Nothingness, for which Bachya brings three proofs. No thing could create itself; all beginnings are from a limited number and something must have preceded them; everything that is composed

of something was created. He finds the thought outrageous that the world came into existence through a coincidence, without the intention of someone or something or without the plan of an almighty, omnipotent being. Everything is divided into categories which can be subsumed into elements, then into matter and form and finally into one: the will of God, which is identical to God. With free will did God create everything, this means that he did so without coercion or necessity. Proof for his theory is for Bachya the fact that no creation is exactly the same as another one. Its emergence is due to God's command and will. Similarly to Ibn Gabirol, Bachya also views ascetism and the striving towards God as the right way of life. When man's knowledge of God grows and he realizes the true purpose of his creation and the fact that this world is purely transitory, he will despise all temporary and material things and his body and soul will strive for the realization of God's will. This is how man will learn to see without eyes, hear without ears and his will, will be the will of God.

c) Joseph ibn Zaddik (died 1149)

Rabbi Joseph ibn Zaddik was a Spanish poet, rabbi and philosopher. His goal was to help man achieve moral perfection by the recognition of the highest truth. Ibn Zaddik was strictly against an anthropomorphic view of God and rejected the attribution of human traits, emotions or intentions towards him. God is powerful but not through power, he is living but not through life. Ibn Zaddik describes God's self-contentment and frugality which proves that God did not need a being to create him. The truth is that God does not require anything and the reason for creation and its purpose needs to be searched for in himself or in his will. God created time which means that he is above time and space.

III. Aristotelian

a) Abraham ibn Daud (1110-1180)

It can be the uncontested merit of Abraham ibn Daud to be the first to combine Jewish medieval religious philosophy with the strict systematics of Aristotle, which is usually attributed to Maimonides. Ibn Daud referred often to the compatibility of religion and philosophy. God's will is unforced and is impossible to compare with a human kind of will,

which strives towards desire out of lack for something. As all things in life require God, he then wants only to impart on the world of his perfection and completeness.

b) Maimonides (1135-1204)

Jewish religious philosophy reached its peak with the appearance of Moses ben Maimon. It was his deep conviction that science and faith or knowledge of reason and teachings of revelation are separate paths but will, if chosen correctly, lead to the ultimate source. There are three teachings for the origin of the world: a) the Jewish teaching which views the creation of the world as an act of God's free will; b) the creation of the world happened from an eternal primeval matter, as Plato claimed; c) the eternity of the world according to Aristotle. Maimonides states that there is no analogy between God and the world and mankind has no way of understanding God's will; it is impossible to compare between God's will and man's will. The similarity between God's will and our will is just the empty word. According to Maimonides, we need to pay attention when analyzing God's will: God created the world by the use of the word, yet we must not perceive the word as a tool through which the world came into being. God's creations happen out of his will only. Whenever the Holy Scripture uses expressions like "speech" or "words" we are never supposed to perceive them literally – we must never think that God actually speaks. These terms are used for our benefit to understand God's will. God's providence, so Maimonides, extends to all creations, be it in the animal or plant kingdom, where it extends to groups and species. With mankind however, God does not just choose certain groups but also individuals on which he extends his providence in order to repay or punish them according to their good or evil deeds. Godly providence, however, isn't the same for everyone: the further away a person is from moral perfection, the more power do laws of nature have over them. Yet the question remains of how the existence of evil can be incorporated into the divine world order. What is the relation between Godly will from which can only originate goodness and perfection and evilness? Maimonides distinguishes between three kinds of evilness: a) evil from which we cannot escape because we are composed of matter and form; b) evil between people c) evil that we do to ourselves. The last two forms of evils are because of our own foolishness, i.e. our lack of sensibility. This means that the biggest evil is caused by man himself. The reason for this view sees Maimonides in man's mistake to see things only from his point of view and believes that

everything was created for man's benefit. The weakness of such an anthropocentric approach is the fact of how little meaning humankind has within the great universe.