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Ehud Krinis opens this fascinating new examination of Judah Halevi's philosophical dialogue the *Kuzari* by distinguishing two forms of skepticism: suspension of assent and doubt. The first type of skepticism emphasizes that the proper condition of intellectual inquiry is to avoid assent to any proposition (9). By contrast, the second type of skepticism emphasizes that the proper condition of intellectual inquiry is to doubt specific propositions. In the first type, the method of investigation (*skepsis*) is to examine every argument and raise counterarguments, so that one arrives at a situation of *isostheneia*, the equipollence (equivalence) of counterarguments. One is thus encouraged to maintain a state of *epochē*, the suspension of judgment, so that one never settles into dogmatic certitude, but rather ever continues on in the search for truth (10). By contrast, the skepticism of doubt is a process by which thinkers engage in rational investigation of propositions they have acquired uncritically. They may in the end return to accept these truths, but from a new, more well-founded perspective. Krinis shows that Halevi engaged not only in the skepticism of casting doubt—as did al-Ghazālī, his contemporary in the Islamic world—but also in the classical skepticism of suspension of judgment (10–11, 51, 67–69).

He describes the skepticism of both al-Ghazālī and Halevi as fideistic skepticism. He explains that in general, fideism is an approach which maintains that faith is independent of reason. Pure or radical fideism completely rejects the need for intellectual inquiry, insisting that faith must attain knowledge independently. Moderate fideism distinguishes certain fields in which intellectual inquiry is legitimate and leads to genuine knowledge from fields in which intellectual inquiry is invalid, fails to lead to knowledge, and is thus illegitimate and unnecessary (19). Krinis asserts that like al-Ghazālī, Halevi is a moderate fideist. Both thinkers argue that reason has a legitimate place in logic and mathematics, but has overstepped its bounds when it addresses physics and metaphysics.

Krinis incisively shows the way Halevi reverses the values dominant in his contemporary Judeo-Arabic culture, a system of values Krinis terms “dogmatic rationalism.” Halevi thus engages in a transvaluation of values. Whereas earlier Judeo-Arabic thinkers such as Saadya and Bahya emphasized commandments given by reason, and even attempted to find a rational basis for revealed commandments, Halevi emphasizes the divine commandments given by revelation to the Jewish nation alone, commandments

whose purpose reason cannot discern. Halevi also strikingly reverses the relationship to reliance upon authority (*taqlīd*). From the orthodox Islamic theologian al-Ash‘arī to the Mu‘tazilite rationalist school, Islamic theologians held that one should pursue knowledge and independent understanding rather than simply rely upon authority. Halevi strikingly argues for acceptance of authority through *taqlīd* and expresses preference for the intuitive believer, rather than one who derives beliefs through intellectual investigation. The Ash‘arite school argued that one should liberate oneself from inherited tradition and reappropriate tradition through rational investigation. Al-Ghazālī accepts this Ash‘arite disdain for *taqlīd* (22–23).

Thus, in arguing in favor of *taqlīd*, Halevi shows himself to take a different approach from that of al-Ghazālī and the Ash‘arite school of Islamic philosophy. Krinis asserts that whereas Ash‘arites strove to liberate themselves from unquestioning reliance on tradition, Halevi seeks to liberate himself from the confines of the rational intellect. He notes that Halevi likewise rejects the value-system of the Arabic school of *falsafah* by arguing that much of physics and all of metaphysics lies beyond the realm of human wisdom in the realm of divine wisdom, a distinction Halevi expresses as Socratic (23, 83). In the same way, Halevi inverts the philosophical emphasis on universal attributes of the divine, stressing instead the unique, personal aspects of God known by the founding ancestors and prophets of Israel (24). Krinis identifies this series of inversions as fideistic in character; they emphasize a unique dimension of faith set apart from rational investigation. Yet Krinis notes Halevi’s markedly ambivalent relationship to reason as well.

Among the most fascinating aspects of Krinis’ analysis is his assertion that the root cause of Halevi’s ambivalence is the tension between two levels of expression: the discursive expression of rational philosophy and the mystical language of the prophets and friends of God who have experienced a dimension that transcends rational thought. Krinis suggests that Halevi aimed to express such intuitions through his poetry and in the *Kuzari* struggles to translate his intuitive perceptions into the discursive language of his Andalusian rationalist contemporaries (24–31). Yehuda Liebes made a similar argument with respect to an earlier Spanish-Jewish poet, Solomon Ibn Gabirol (c. 1022–1058)—that his natural language was poetry, and that in his philosophical work the *Meqor Hayyim* he struggles to translate his intuitions into prose.¹ However, while Ibn Gabirol’s *Meqor Hayyim* is arguably somewhat dry and scholastic, the *Kuzari* is a work of imaginative literature, not simply a philosophical or theological treatise. Through the dramatic give and take of the dialogue, Halevi captures with wit and irony some of the tensions in his theological positions.

Al-Ghazālī’s fideism led him to return to an assertion of the truths of Orthodox Islam. Halevi’s position is more complex. He does not simply assert traditional Jewish teachings, but reinterprets them in light of his own amalgamation of hierarchical thinking, strongly influenced by Shi‘ite notions of a chosen elite, as Krinis illustrated in precise detail in

¹ See Yehuda Liebes, “Rabbi Solomon Ibn Gabirol’s Use of the *Sefer Yesirah* and the Commentary on the Poem ‘I Love Thee,’” [in Hebrew,] *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6 (1987): 73–123.

his book, *God's Chosen People*.² While offering a thoroughgoing critique of dogmatic philosophical metaphysics based on a hierarchy of separate intellects, Halevi offers his own alternative theory of a hierarchy of being, culminating in the prophets, who, with their inner eye, reach an angelic level (90).³ Is this not simply another form of dogmatic rationalism? Does Halevi claim that this alternative system is the fruit of his own prophetic inspiration, rather than the systematic rational intellect? The limits of his skeptical inquiry seem to go only so far.

Krinis artfully identifies the skeptical moves Halevi puts forth in the dialogue between the King and the Jewish Sage. His Judeo-Arabic predecessors Saadya and Bahya present affirmative proofs for the existence and attributes of God, and the King is poised to expect these from the opening statements of the Christian and Muslim sages. However, Halevi is skeptical of the ability of reason to prove apodictically the existence of God. The Jewish Sage thus skillfully moves away from rationalist discourse to present eyewitness and reliable tradition as more trustworthy proof of God's existence than demonstration (I.15, 45–46; I.25, 58). In his discourse, Halevi expands upon the classical skeptical approach based on disagreements between philosophers to also emphasize disagreements among adherents of religions (I.3; 42–44).

Halevi likewise introduces the equivalence of argument in his discussion of the world's eternity versus innovation. In contrast to the rationalist assertion of creation *ex nihilo* set forth by Saadya Gaon, Halevi introduces the equivalence of arguments for creation and eternity. He thus relies upon a traditionalist epistemology which does not dogmatically assert creation *ex nihilo*, but rather emphasizes creation of this world at a particular time, as well as a solid chain of tradition tracing back to the first human beings Adam and Noah (I.67; 69–73).

Krinis suggests that the dialogue form of the *Kuzari* is Halevi's attempt to meet his Andalusian colleagues where they are. Although the gap between the mystical and the discursive is essentially unbridgeable, he attempts to bridge that gap by speaking to his colleagues in their own rationalist language. Krinis notes that this *ad hominem* form of argument is itself a characteristic of skeptical philosophy (12, 30n43).

Krinis thus offers an original interpretation of the *Kuzari* that departs from the esoteric interpretation offered by Leo Strauss. Krinis argues that Halevi is not attempting to conceal his own true view, but rather aims to express what he has apprehended on an intuitive level in discursive terms to reach those in his circle of intellectuals, representatives of the rationalist Andalusian tradition. This novel thesis, presented through a thorough analysis of Halevi's skeptical moves, will continue to provoke fresh examination of a multi-dimensional and at times paradoxical text. Krinis has invited us to reexamine Halevi's complex relationship to reason and rational argument, and in doing so opens up the text of the *Kuzari* in a new way.

² Ehud Krinis, *God's Chosen People: Judah Halevi's Kuzari and the Shi'i Imām Doctrine* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014).

³ Cf. Howard Kreisel, "Judah Halevi's *Kuzari*: Between the God of Abraham and the God of Aristotle," in *Joodse filosofie tussen rede en traditie*, ed. Reinier Munk and F. J. Hoogenwoud (Kampen: Kok, 1993), 32.