IBN GABIROL'S THEOLOGY OF DESIRE

Matter and Method in Jewish Medieval Neoplatonism

SARAH PESSIN

CAMBRIDGE

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Drawing on Arabic passages from Ibn Gabirol's original *Fons Vitae* text and highlighting philosophical insights from his Hebrew poetry, Sarah Pessin develops a Theology of Desire at the heart of Ibn Gabirol's eleventh-century cosmo-ontology. She challenges centuries of received scholarship on his work, including his so-called Doctrine of Divine Will. Pessin rejects voluntarist readings of the *Fons Vitae* as opposing divine emanation. She also emphasizes Pseudo-Empedoclean notions of Divine Desire and Grounding Element alongside Ibn Gabirol's use of a particularly Neoplatonic method with apophatic (and what she terms "doubly apophatic") implications. In this way, Pessin reads claims about matter as insights about love, desire, the human relation to goodness, wisdom and God, and the receptive, dependent, and fragile nature of human being. Pessin reenvisions the entire spirit of Ibn Gabirol's philosophy, moving us from a set of doctrines to a fluid inquiry into the nature of God and human being – and the bond between God and human being in desire.

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חסד ודעת

This book is dedicated to my father (זצ'ל) and grandfather (זצ'ל)

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Introduction

1.1 DISCOVERING IBN GABIROL: THE AIMS AND GOALS OF THIS PROJECT

Ibn Gabirol's Theology of Desire is a new approach to the *Fons Vitae* and to the Jewish medieval Neoplatonism of an often misunderstood eleventh-century thinker. My project's main goal is to convey the living, philosophically and theologically vibrant voice of a thinker whose teachings have been rendered mute by the histories of philosophy and theology in two ways: (1) Ibn Gabirol's *Fons Vitae* has been overlaid by centuries of Augustinian and Kabbalistic readings and Aristotelian and Thomistic critiques, making it hard to hear what Ibn Gabirol is himself trying to say. (2) Under the weight of a particular set of scholastic lenses, the *Fons Vitae* has been boiled down to and recorded into the history of ideas in terms of two rather narrow ideas: The Doctrine of Divine Will and The Doctrine of Universal Hylomorphism. In addition to at best misrepresenting Ibn Gabirol (as a misreader of Aristotle, as I explain in Chapter 7) and at worst getting Ibn Gabirol wrong (as I argue in Chapter 5 is the case for scholarly treatments of his so-called Doctrine of Divine Will), this calcified canonization has also helped readers fail to engage Ibn Gabirol in broader and deeper terms. The history of ideas has all but missed the expansive spiritual-ethical vision of this Neoplatonic theologian-poet-philosopher.

I put this project forth as a first corrective step. Toward the goal of conveying Ibn Gabirol's teachings and underlying spirit, I advance a number of theses. I argue for reading Ibn Gabirol in terms of a Theology of Desire, which apophatically envisions God's entry into the world of being in terms of a Divine Desire that gives rise, first and foremost, to desire at the core of being – and, as such, at the core of all beings, including human beings. I show, furthermore, how this God-born desire is manifest for Ibn Gabirol in a principle of pure matter that permeates the entirety of existence. I trace the

Pseudo-Empedoclean roots of this pure matter and explain how this matter, which I call Grounding Element, refigures the Great Chain of Being from a downpouring of light to a complex downpouring of a "shadowed light" (with the further sense of "shadow" as a most positive image, beckoning to the hiddenness of God's own hidden Essence).[1] For Ibn Gabirol, God's entry into the world is marked not only by a flow of being, but by a concomitant God-born (and God-directed) Desire-to-Be, Desire-to-Know, and Desire-for-Goodness manifest in the folds of matter. In this way, Ibn Gabirol's universe is shown to be a pulsing dual field of shadows and lights in which, born of God's own Desire, matter (not form) – and, as such, shadow (not light) – emerges as the highest, most essential aspect of reality. Arisen from God's own Essence, matter emerges as the ground of being and as that which most fully manifests (in an utterly hidden way) God's own desire to move from His ownmost sameness to an embrace of other.

In this light, I show that one of the main goals of Ibn Gabirol's project is to understand (or, as I explain, to apophatically engage) the mystery of God and the mystery in particular of the entry of a unified One into the diversities of being. In this context, I argue that the *Fons Vitae* is best understood as an attempt to understand God, but also human being. In the course of the project, I explain how Ibn Gabirol's entire endeavor of cosmo-ontology – including his talk of God and including his talk of cosmic layers and a Grounding Element – is a complex apophatic (and, as I explain, "doubly apophatic") reflection on God that itself immediately gives way to a prescriptive vision for human being. In this way, I show how the *Fons Vitae*'s descriptive investigation of "cosmic layers of matter" at once reveals a subtly apophatic encounter with God and a subtly prescriptive investigation of human life, as I show how Ibn Gabirol's teaching of the "rootedness of all things (including human being) in matter" is a teaching about the importance of a human subject experiencing herself "qua matter" – that is, qua dependent, receptive, and fragile desirer after wisdom, goodness, and God. In his cosmo-ontological investigation of a strange material Grounding Element and a cosmos filled with "layers of matter," Ibn Gabirol is shown to explore the very core of human life and the virtues that ground us.

In the spirit of this ethical point, I begin my study by emphasizing the *Fons Vitae*'s overarching concern with the ends of human being. My study in this way frames Ibn Gabirol in ethical terms: I begin by laying out Ibn Gabirol's sense of the ends of human being in terms of a tripart quest for wisdom, goodness, and God, and I arrive eventually at the insight that "living qua matter" – namely in a spirit of a dependency, receptivity, and fragility born of desire – is, for Ibn Gabirol, the very orientation that sets us on our tripart

quest. It is this set of teachings that I show to be at the heart of the *Fons Vitae* notion that "all being, and even human being, is rooted in matter," and it is this set of teachings that I show to be at the heart of Ibn Gabirol's Theology of Desire.

In addition to laying out this ethical framework, my project provides a thoroughgoing reappraisal of Ibn Gabirol's entire philosophical theology. In Chapter 8, I explain the particularly tripart nature of Ibn Gabirol's Neoplatonic apophasis in way of making sense of his "triune" sense of God. In Chapter 5, I argue vigorously against traditions of scholars (including Wiesheipl, Gilson, and Husik) who have presented Ibn Gabirol's Divine Will as a theological teaching that opposes emanation. In fact, so misdirected is this most popular reading that I completely reject the use of the term "Divine Will" in my study; referring to the term at play in the original Arabic text, I speak instead of the Divine *Irāda* (which I translate as Divine Desire) and I show how – *pace* the received scholarship – this divine reality not only does not oppose emanation, but actually demarcates the very downward flow of emanation itself. My new emanationist reading of the Divine *Irāda* allows me to highlight the role of the Neoplatonic Tripart Analysis at the core of Ibn Gabirol's thinking about reality (in tripart terms of "matter," "matter+form," and "form"), as it at once leads me to a thoroughgoingly emanationist rereading of the *Fons Vitae*'s metaphysics of matter, which I present in Chapter 7. My analysis in Chapter 7 includes a treatment of matter as Divine Throne, a rejection of Schlanger's treatment of matter's status as "per se existent," a critique of the popular summary of Ibn Gabirol's metaphysics of matter in terms of a "Doctrine of Universal Hylomorphism," and a set of reflections on Ibn Gabirol's description of creation (in his *Keter Malkhūt* poem) in terms of God's "splitting open the nothing."

In all of the aforementioned ways, and by pointing in Chapter 8 to how the term "doctrine" obscures the apophatic nature of Ibn Gabirol's teachings, my project asks us to thoroughly rethink the history of philosophy's standard picture of Ibn Gabirol in terms of a "Doctrine of Divine Will" and a "Doctrine of Universal Hylomorphism." Approaching the *Fons Vitae* in terms of these two doctrines at worst gets Ibn Gabirol's main teachings wrong, and at best highlights aspects of his view that obscure his ethical-spiritual Theology of Desire, including his emanationist Divine *Irāda*, his Pseudo-Empedoclean material Grounding Element, his commitment to the Neoplatonic Tripart Analysis, and his apophatic investigation of God's own entry into being that, together with all of these cosmo-ontological details, reveals a prescriptive encounter with human being "qua matter" as a call to human desire, dependence, receptivity, and fragility.

In addition to providing a thorough rereading of the *Fons Vitae* philosophy, my project also makes a methodological contribution. As such, this project can be seen in two parts: in Chapters 2–7, I explore the details and content of key claims in the *Fons Vitae*; in Chapters 8–9, I turn to a methodological set of considerations about what Neoplatonic cosmo-ontology – in all of its talk of cosmic thises and thats – is actually up to. Along these lines, in Chapter 8 I explore the uniquely apophatic (and what I call the "doubly apophatic") nature of Neoplatonic cosmo-ontology, and in Chapter 9 I suggest how we might see cosmo-ontological texts as "transformative" writing; there I explore my own transcendental-phenomenological suggestion, as well as a range of mythopoetic and symbolic approaches. In Chapter 9, I also overtly address various pitfalls that can set us back in our approach to texts of Neoplatonic cosmo-ontology, such as approaching its talk of levels and layers as some kind of outdated science or odd cosmic cartography. I additionally highlight how such pitfalls have arguably led to a number of misdirected readings of the actual details of the *Fons Vitae* in the history of philosophy. Following on these considerations of the "transformational" nature of Neoplatonic cosmo-ontology, I also draw our attention to Ibn Gabirol's own identification of writing with creation.

The first full-length treatment in English of the philosophy of the *Fons Vitae*, my study aims to reveal Ibn Gabirol's Theology of Desire while recovering his proper place within the history of philosophy and theology as a Jewish Neoplatonist with a uniquely Pseudo-Empedoclean voice.

1.2 CHAPTER GUIDE

Reading the *Fons Vitae* within its own Arabic Neoplatonic and Pseudo-Empedoclean contexts and in conversation with Ibn Gabirol's Hebrew poetry, I exposit Ibn Gabirol's teachings on the Divine Essence, Divine *Irāda*, matter, and form in terms of what I call a Theology of Desire – a theological, ethical, and existential picture of Ibn Gabirol insufficiently explored in popular classifications of his thinking.

Toward this goal, in Chapter 2, I provide an overview of Ibn Gabirol's context and some details about the *Fons Vitae*, as well as a critical starting preamble about the use of the terms "desire" and "love" at play in this study and at the core of the Theology of Desire. I then offer two additional critical points of terminology: I explain why I replace the more common term "Divine Will" with the term "Divine *Irāda*" (as "Divine Desire") in my study, and I explain why I replace the term "prime matter" with the term "Grounding Element." As I explain, my terminological shifts from "Divine Will" and "prime

matter" to "Divine *Irāda*" (as "Divine Desire") and "Grounding Element" directly help us leave behind a range of unhelpful (and often misleading) starting caricatures of Ibn Gabirol, in this way allowing us easier entry into the subtle folds of his Theology of Desire.

Further orienting us toward Ibn Gabirol's Theology of Desire in Chapter 3, I highlight the epistemological, ethical, and theological spirit of Ibn Gabirol's project. In his strong identification of human being in terms of a desire for "something of the goodness of God" (itself a trifold desire for wisdom, goodness, and God), Ibn Gabirol reveals the central role of desire in his project, as he also reveals his core teaching about the grounding of human being in matter (a point explained in fuller detail in Chapter 8). Starting with a focus on the human tripart quest in Chapter 3 helps us better appreciate Ibn Gabirol's overarching concern for human being, which in turn allows us to approach the cosmo-ontological details of his project with a better sense of direction: Because Ibn Gabirol is driven by a sense of the human's desire for something of the goodness of God, we ought approach his cosmo-ontological project in that light. With this in mind, we will be able to better understand Ibn Gabirol's teaching of "the root of all things (including human being) in matter" as a teaching about "the root of all things (including human being) in desire" – itself an emphasis on human being's groundedness in her desire after wisdom, goodness, and God. For, as we will see, it is precisely matter that stands as the marker of this critical God-born and God-directed desire at the root of all things, including at the root of the human spirit. By emphasizing the God-born and God-directed desire at the core of all things – in and through the activity of Divine *Irāda* and the Grounding Element, as we will see in greater detail in Chapters 4–7 – we will be able to see the prescriptive sense of human being's root in a desire for wisdom and goodness, as we will also be able to better understand the special significance of matter in Ibn Gabirol's worldview. In this light, we will consider, in Chapter 3, how matter (the kind of pure grounding matter that Ibn Gabirol has in mind) emerges in a decidedly positive light in the *Fons Vitae* and how Ibn Gabirol in this way reverses some of our more standard negative intuitions about matter across a range of Pythagorean, Platonic, Aristotelian, and Neoplatonic contexts.

In Chapter 4, I explore desire at the root of Ibn Gabirol's cosmos, and its role in grounding human beings, the fabric of reality, and even God. Following this theme through, I explore Ibn Gabirol's Pseudo-Empedoclean heritage, and I show how an appreciation of that heritage can further help us see in his technical claims about matter an exploration of the presence of love-desire at the foundation of being. In this chapter I also explore Greek and Islamic contexts for Ibn Gabirol's sense that "love makes the world go round" in

Aristotle, the *Theology of Aristotle*, and Avicenna's "*Risālah fi'l-'ishq*," as well as in traditions of Neoplatonized Aristotelian angelology in Islamic and Jewish thought. I end Chapter 4 by showing how Ibn Gabirol's particular treatment of Neoplatonic Return in terms of an "illuminated shadow" precisely reveals his uniquely Pseudo-Empedoclean worldview.

In Chapters 5 and 6, I invite us to thoroughly rethink extant scholarly treatments of Ibn Gabirol's so-called Doctrine of Divine Will. In the course of this treatment, I reject the conclusion – shared across Weisheipl's, Gilson's, and Husik's respective works – that Ibn Gabirol's "Divine Will" marks a rejection of emanation. After attempting to even make sense of what one might mean in claiming that "will rejects emanation" (including a consideration of Brunner's horizontal sense of "Divine Will" in occasionalist terms), I go on to show in Chapter 6 how a careful reading of Ibn Gabirol reveals full Plotinian emanationism (alongside a Pseudo-Empedoclean emphasis on spiritual hylomorphism). Drawing inspiration from Stephen Gersh's work on Greek and Christian Neoplatonism, I emphasize the importance and centrality of the Neoplatonic Tripart Analysis within Ibn Gabirol's worldview, and I show how this helps us understand the deeply Neoplatonic resonances of his analysis of individual realities in terms of "matter," "matter+form," and "form." Advancing a thoroughly emanationist reading of Ibn Gabirol's *Fons Vitae* project, I conclude, *pace* much received scholarship on the *Fons Vitae*, not only that Ibn Gabirol is a thoroughgoing emanationist, but that his Divine *Irāda* itself signifies the very downward flow of emanation. In this way, I completely reverse the more common reading of his "Doctrine of Divine Will" as rejecting emanation. In support of my new reading, in Section 6.5 I provide a detailed diagram (followed by detailed explanations) of the emanationist cosmo-ontology at play in Ibn Gabirol's Theology of Desire, including a treatment of the roles of Divine *Irāda*, a pure material Grounding Element, and additional "layers of matter" throughout Ibn Gabirol's cosmos. In all of these ways, I show how Ibn Gabirol's hylomorphic project is best interpreted as ordinary Plotinian Neoplatonism laid out with a sensitivity to Neoplatonic Tripart Analysis and understood through a uniquely Pseudo-Empedoclean (that is, matter-centric) lens.

In Chapter 7, I draw out the implications of my new emanationist reading of Ibn Gabirol and I show in particular how a number of Ibn Gabirol's claims about matter can now be better understood in that light. As part of this chapter, I address the limits of describing Ibn Gabirol's unique theology in simple terms as a "Doctrine of Universal Hylomorphism," as well as the limits of Augustinian and Kabbalistic allegiances to and Thomistic critiques of the *Fons Vitae*. I also turn in Chapter 7 to explaining and defending the idea of

matter as "existing per se" in Ibn Gabirol, and in so doing I reject aspects of the thirteenth-century Latin translation of the text as well as Schlanger's more Philonic reading of matter in Ibn Gabirol. In Chapter 7, I also consider how Ibn Gabirol's unique description of creation (in his *Keter Malkhūt* poem) in terms of God's "splitting open the nothing" fits well with our emanationist reading of the *Fons Vitae*.

Having in Chapters 2–7 thoroughly reworked the received scholarship on Ibn Gabirol from a picture of Divine Will and Universal Hylomorphism to a Theology of Desire, I turn in Chapters 8 and 9 to a methodological set of considerations about the kind of endeavor that Neoplatonic cosmo-ontology really is. In Chapter 8, I explore Ibn Gabirol's Neoplatonic cosmo-ontology as an apophatic (and, as I explain, "doubly apophatic") project that reveals a deep affinity for and use of Neoplatonic Tripart Analysis. By highlighting Ibn Gabirol's use of Neoplatonic Tripart Analysis, I am able to make sense of the oft-misunderstood description in the *Fons Vitae* of a "triune" God (in terms of Divine Essence, Divine *Irāda*, and Divine Wisdom). In this chapter, I also bring things full circle, showing how Ibn Gabirol's apophatic project directly opens onto the prescriptive human project with which we began in Chapter 3. Having unpacked the details of the *Fons Vitae* cosmo-ontology in Chapters 4–7, I am here able to lay out the prescriptive nature of Ibn Gabirol's vision for human being in a way that directly draws on his teaching of the self's rootedness in matter. Emphasizing an experience of the self in terms of "self qua matter," I explore the self's orientation in particular terms of dependency, receptivity, and fragility, and I show how this grounding orientation arises from the very contours of Ibn Gabirol's uniquely "matter-centric" cosmo-ontology.

In Chapter 9, I explore the pitfalls of misreading Neoplatonic cosmo-ontology as if it were some kind of archaic and arcane pseudoscientific cosmic topography, and I further explore the subtle theological, ethical, and existential nature of Neoplatonic cosmo-ontology as an exploration of God, human being, and the transformation of human life. After advancing my own reading of Neoplatonic cosmo-ontology as a transcendental ground for human living, I explore a number of other ways to consider Neoplatonic writing as transformative, including a range of scholarly perspectives on mythopoetic and symbolic texts and their capacity to enact new paths for living. I end Chapter 9 with a consideration of Ibn Gabirol's own self-reflective correlation of the acts of writing and creation.

Drawing on Ibn Gabirol's conception of matter and form in terms of "hiddenness" and "embroidery," in Chapter 10 I explore the phrase "embroidering the hidden" in way of capturing three core elements of Ibn Gabirol's unique

project, namely the teaching that the cosmos unfolds from matter to form, the teaching that God unfolds from Essence to being, and the fact that qua cosmo-ontologist, Ibn Gabirol creates new worlds of meaning in which his readers may live anew.

I end the project with an appendix exploring further historical and textual contexts for Ibn Gabirol's *Fons Vitae* philosophy and its positive valuation of matter.

2

Text in Context

kī ʿimkha meqōr ḥayyīm, be-ōrkha nirʾeh ōr

For with You is the fountain of life; by Your light we will see light

– *Psalms* 36:10

2.1 FIRST UNFOLDINGS

Drawing on the poetry of *Psalms* 36:10, Solomon Ibn Gabirol's *Fons Vitae* (*Fountain of Life*) explores God's creative revelation as a nourishing downpour that sparks the human spirit. With this image of unbounded flow, we enter Ibn Gabirol's universe, a symphony of being in three manifestations – the reality of a divine First Essence as ultimate cause, His presence in being through the gentle unfolding of a Divine *Irāda* (often translated as Divine Will), and the entirety of being as itself revealing an inescapably dual matter-with-form complexity:

> *ajzāʾ al-ʿilm bil-kull jīm, wa-hiya: ʿilm al-ʿunṣur waṣ-ṣūra, wal-ʿilm bil-irāda, wal-ʿilm biḏh-ḏhāt al-ʾūlā; wa-laysa fīl-mawjūd ġhayr hāḏhihi al-jīm. fal-ʿilla al-ʾūlā aḏh-ḏhāt wal-maʿalūl al-ʿunṣur waṣ-ṣura wal-irāda mutawassiṭa bayna aṭ-ṭarafayn . . .*
>
> There are three parts of knowledge in all:[1] (1) the knowledge of matter (*al-ʿunṣur*) and form (*aṣ-ṣūra*); (2) the knowledge of Will (*al-irāda*); and (3) the knowledge of the First Essence. In existence, there is nothing other than these three. First Essence is cause;[2] matter and form, effect; and Will (*al-irāda*) is the intermediary between the two extremes.[3]

So unfolds Ibn Gabirol's cosmic drama, a dance of dual realities in which the unity of the divine "two" (God's Essence and His *al-Irāda*) gives way to

the "two" of being – the binary nature of all reality in terms of matter and form.

In its further unfolding, Ibn Gabirol's cosmic drama features Neoplatonic layers of being: a Universal Intellect, followed upon by three World Souls, down through the realm of Nature. Against this backdrop, Ibn Gabirol (here prima facie deviating from Neoplatonic – as well as from Platonic and Aristotelian – tradition)[4] further details various levels of forms and matters that make up reality, including a pure grade of matter at the root of the Great Chain of Being and present in all things – a sublime, pure, universal matter that he likens to the Divine Throne. Reading across his *Fons Vitae* and his vast corpus of Hebrew poetry, we find many additional – and oftentimes confounding (because seemingly contradictory) – details: he tells us of the existence of matter only with form, as well as of the existence of matter before form; he tells us of the existence of Divine Will over Divine Wisdom, of Divine Wisdom over Divine Will, and of the identity of Divine Wisdom and Divine Will; and he tells us of the emergence of matter from the Divine Will, as well as of the emergence of matter from the Divine Essence itself. In addition to these ambiguities, the sheer complexity of Ibn Gabirol's cosmic drama invites various characterizations and varied foci of attention: in his doctrine that all things (including intellects) are composed of form and matter (a doctrine to which later Christian Latin authors give the name Universal Hylomorphism; see Section 7.6), he is criticized by some as a misreader of Aristotle (for whom intellects are, rather, pure forms devoid of matter) and hailed by others as a champion of Augustinian metaphysics;[5] in his doctrine of forms and matters, he is characterized (by later Christian Latin authors) as advancing a doctrine of "the plurality of forms," and is seen in this way in metaphysically charged opposition to Aristotelian views of substance;[6] and in his reflections on forms' relationship to pure matter's existence per se, he is seen by some as a follower of Avicenna's idea that existence is added to preexistent essences,[7] and by others as a Philonic advocate of a Divine-Mind-as-repository-for-Ideas.[8] And while Ibn Gabirol's "Doctrine of Divine Will" is most often seen as a firm rejection of emanation,[9] it is at other times seen as championing the emanationism of Jewish Kabbalistic theosophy.[10]

In an attempt to best recover the spirit of Ibn Gabirol's philosophy, the current study puts aside later scholastic and Kabbalistic lenses and attempts to approach Ibn Gabirol's work on its own eleventh-century Jewish and Islamic Neoplatonic terms. In this way, we aim to avoid muting Ibn Gabirol's voice under the weight of other philosophies and theologies. The picture of Ibn Gabirol that emerges will hopefully give readers a fresh starting place from which to reread and rethink Ibn Gabirol's vast corpus of poetry and philosophy.

2.2 BACKGROUND

Solomon Ibn Gabirol is an eleventh-century Jewish Neoplatonic philosopher and poet writing in an Arabic philosophical milieu. Although we are not certain of what traditions most influenced his work, we might certainly see in the pages of his philosophy and poetry a unique blend of Jewish, Islamic, Neoplatonic, Pythagorean, philosophical, Biblical, and mystical source materials. Additionally circulating in the background of his writing is a philosophical tradition (or traditions) that scholars have described as "Pseudo-Empedoclean," and to which we will return later. Among Ibn Gabirol's writings is his expansive philosophical treatise, the *Fons Vitae* (*The Fountain of Life – yanbū' al-ḥayāh* in Arabic,[11] and *meqōr ḥayyīm* in its later Hebrew translation). Originally written in Arabic (in particular, Judeo-Arabic) in the eleventh century in the form of a dialogue between a teacher and his student (we will refer to this throughout as the Arabic text), the *Fons Vitae* was translated into Latin in the twelfth century by the translation team of Dominicus Gundissalinus and John of Spain, and an abridged Hebrew version (one that loses the dialogue format) was made by Shem Tov Ibn Falaquera in the thirteenth century. The original Arabic text is lost to us, although we do have some extant fragments in the form of citations of the original Judeo-Arabic version in the Judeo-Arabic language texts of other Jewish medieval philosophers. Because the Arabic fragments are sparse, the main version of the text is the twelfth-century Latin translation; it is considered more true to the original than the later, thirteenth-century translation because it is an earlier translation, but also because unlike the Hebrew translation, the Latin edition is (ostensibly) a complete translation, maintaining – as the Hebrew summary does not – the original dialogue format of Ibn Gabirol's text. It might be additionally noted, however, that because of the greater affinity – linguistically and conceptually – between Hebrew and Arabic, sometimes the Hebrew translation is able to better capture the nuance of a translated term than the Latin text. Along these lines too, sometimes the thirteenth-century Hebrew translation is more helpful than the Latin one because it resonates with various Hebrew terms at play in Ibn Gabirol's own vast corpus of Hebrew poetry; this is often helpful in shedding light on the nature of a given philosophical point in the *Fons Vitae*.

In way of background introduction, we might add that Ibn Gabirol is most well known within a range of medieval and modern Jewish traditions not for his philosophical tract, the *Fons Vitae*, but for his Hebrew poetry, including his very popular *Keter Malkhūt* (variously translated as the *Crown of the King*, *Kingdom's Crown*, or *The Royal Crown*), a long devotional poem exploring the ineffable splendor of the divine and tracing God's presence throughout the cosmos. In fact, this poem is included even today in many Jewish prayer books

for recitation on *Yōm Kippūr*, the highest of Jewish holy days. Philosophically speaking, Ibn Gabirol's strongest impact was arguably in the Christian world: Translated into Latin in the twelfth century, and circulating no longer under Ibn Gabirol's name, but rather under the Latinized version of his name (as Avicebron, Avicembron, Avicenbrol, or Avencebrol), the *Fons Vitae* came to exert a great influence on centuries of medieval Christian opponents and supporters, who variously assumed the author to be a Muslim or a Christian, none suspecting the author to be the accomplished medieval Jewish poet, Solomon Ibn Gabirol. The Latin translation itself ends with Gundissalinus, the translator, declaring:

> *libro perscripto sit laus et gloria Christo,*
> *per quem finitur quod ad euis nomen initur . . .*
>
> May the completion of this project bring praise and glory to Christ through whom is now finished that which for [the glory of] his name is begun . . . [12]

Gundissalinus is referring to the completion of his own task of translation (he goes on to cite himself and John of Spain as the translators), but the sentiment certainly can be said to have spilled over to cover "Avencebrol" the author of the work as evidenced by the popularity of the book as a repository of Christian Augustinianism for so many centuries of readers.

Taken up in just this way by many Christian philosophers, Ibn Gabirol's *Fons Vitae* text became a cornerstone in many theologically charged debates between Franciscans and Dominicans, with the Franciscans pointing to many of the *Fons Vitae* doctrines in support of what they took to be true, untainted Christian ideas as laid out by Augustine, in contrast to the more heavily Aristotelianized ideas of Thomas Aquinas and other Dominicans. It was not until the nineteenth century that the process of returning the *Fons Vitae* to its Jewish roots began with Solomon Munk's uncovering of the thirteenth-century Hebrew summary attributed to Solomon Ibn Gabirol, leading to Munk's recognition that the *Fons Vitae* had in fact been penned by the eleventh-century Jewish poet.

Turning to a brief starting overview of Ibn Gabirol's *Fons Vitae*,[13] we may note that Ibn Gabirol sets out throughout the course of five treatises to explain how all things are composed of a series of matters and forms, mediated in some way by a central divine force, namely the Divine *Irāda* (generally translated as Divine Will). Across his five treatises, Ibn Gabirol sets out to address the topics of (1) corporeal matter, (2) spiritual matter as a substrate for corporeal matter, (3) simple spirituals, (4) the hylomorphic composition of substance, and (5) the highest principles of universal matter, universal form, and Will.

In the course of the project, Ibn Gabirol delineates four simple substances in a way that at once illustrates his Plotinian heritage as well as his unique emphasis on matter and form:

1. Universal Matter and Universal Form
2. Universal Intellect
3. Universal Soul (itself presented by Ibn Gabirol as three separate cosmic hypostases corresponding to three aspects of individual human souls; in this regard, he speaks of Universal Rational Soul, Universal Sensitive Soul, and Universal Nutritive Soul)
4. Nature

At *Fons Vitae* 2.14, Ibn Gabirol also delineates "nine orders of substance," the first three of which give us a good insight into the aspects of his system that are most difficult to understand (and that we will set out to explain in the course of this project):

1. the substance of all things in the knowledge of the Creator
2. the substance of universal form in universal matter
3. the substance of the simple substances one in the next

He also demarcates five grades of matter that constitute the fabric of existence, a hierarchy of types of material "substance" or "essence" he describes in turn as:

1. universal spiritual matter
2. universal corporeal matter
3. universal celestial matter
4. universal natural matter
5. particular matter (natural and artificial)

Associated with matching grades of form, these "levels of matter" further illustrate Ibn Gabirol's matter-centric approach to his cosmo-ontology. (In Chapters 6 and 7, we will see how these "grades of matter," or "levels of matter," are Ibn Gabirol's uniquely hylomorphic way of describing the ordinary Neoplatonic Great Chain of Being through a Pseudo-Empedoclean lens.)

Ibn Gabirol also goes on (as we will treat in great detail in Chapter 8) to speak of God in tripart terms of Divine Essence, "Divine Will" (a term we will replace in this project with "Divine Desire" for reasons to be addressed later in the chapter, in Section 2.4), and Divine Wisdom (itself sometimes in terms of Divine Word). We might add by way of introduction that Ibn Gabirol's claims about the presence of matter in all things (including souls and intellects) come along with the idea of a grade of pure, unformed matter