

Jewish Philosophy Past and Present

In this innovative volume contemporary philosophers respond to classic works of Jewish philosophy. For each of twelve central topics in Jewish philosophy, Jewish philosophical readings, drawn from the medieval period through the twentieth century, appear alongside an invited contribution that engages both the readings and the contemporary philosophical literature in a constructive dialogue. The twelve topics are organized into four parts, and each topic and part commences with an overview of the ensuing dialogue and concludes with a list of further readings. The introduction to the volume assesses the current state of Jewish philosophy and argues for a deeper engagement with analytic philosophy, exemplified by the new contributions.

Jewish Philosophy Past and Present: Contemporary Responses to Classical Sources is a cutting edge work of Jewish philosophy, and, at the same time, an engaging introduction to the issues that animated Jewish philosophers for centuries and to the texts that they have produced. It is designed to set the agenda in Jewish philosophy for years to come.

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Jewish Philosophy Past and Present

Contemporary Responses to Classical Sources

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6 Human Ontology and Personal Immortality

Classical Jewish texts and later Jewish thinkers offer a wide variety of views on the ultimate destiny of individual human beings. The views range from the denial that anything at all lies beyond the grave to the embrace of an elaborate combination of purgatory, heaven, reincarnation, and eventual resurrection to eternal life. This section focuses on two medieval Jewish positions, both of which ostensibly embrace the possibility of an eternal afterlife but differ considerably over the details: What does the eternal afterlife consist of? How does one attain it? And what sort of thing are we, metaphysically speaking, that we are able to survive the decomposition of our bodies?

Steven Nadler presents the view of Gersonides. On the matter of what we are, metaphysically speaking: we are literally constituted by the truths we know. One survives death if one has already come to know some eternal (necessarily existing) truth, and thus to have it as a constituent. Finally, the afterlife consists exclusively in constant contemplation of eternal truths. Nadler argues, however, that Gersonides failed to pursue his position to its logical conclusion. According to Nadler, Gersonides' premises lead inexorably to the denial of personal immortality (and afterlife).

Some of Nadler's arguments echo earlier objections leveled by **Hasdai Crescas**. Crescas attacks Gersonides' position both for its poor fit with traditional sources and for its intrinsic implausibility. Intellectual achievement, traditional sources suggest, is not necessary for the ultimate blessing of eternal life, and eternal life won't be spent exercising the intellect. It is implausible, and perhaps absurd, to suggest that we are constituted by the truths that we know. Crescas, therefore, holds a very different opinion on these matters. We are simple substances. One attains the afterlife not by cultivating one's intellect but by following God's way. Finally, the afterlife consists in loving devotion to God.

Aaron Segal evaluates the debate between Crescas and Gersonides. He finds Gersonides' position on human ontology untenable and his position on the "entrance criteria" morally and religiously problematic *in excelsis*. With the collapse of Gersonides' position on these matters, the chances for a naturalistically acceptable path to eternal life are slim at best. Eternal life will require divine intervention of some sort. On the character of the afterlife, however, Segal declares no clear victor. That aspect of the debate raises

axiological questions about the ultimate good for human beings, and, more specifically, about what value or disvalue there might be in an *eternal* life of any sort. Segal concludes his discussion of the axiological questions, and with them his essay, by tentatively suggesting that an eternal afterlife is for God's sake, not for the one who lives it.

STEVEN NADLER

Spinoza's Heresy: Immortality and the Jewish Mind (2001)

[excerpt from Chapter 4: The Philosophers]

In the *Guide* Maimonides distinguishes between four varieties of human perfection. At the bottom of the ranking there is the perfection of possessions, where an individual has acquired a great deal of material and social wealth: money, clothing, land, slaves, and even power. Then there is physical perfection, 'the perfection of the bodily constitution and shape'. Both of these 'lower' types of perfection are fleeting and mutable. Wealth and health are easily subject to change and usually due to circumstances beyond our control. More significantly, they do not represent the improvement of a human being *as* a human being. More desirable is the perfection of the moral virtues. These are the character traits that, on Maimonides' view, dispose us to be useful to other human beings: generosity, courage, temperance, and so on. While also useful to its possessor, this 'excellence in moral habits' is not really an intrinsic perfection of the person himself. It is more a matter of relative perfection and a kind of social good. 'For if you suppose a human individual is alone, acting on no one, you will find that all his moral virtues are in vain and without employment and unneeded, and that they do not perfect the individual in anything; for he only needs them and they again become useful to him in regard to someone else.' Practical virtue is thus not an end in itself and not our ultimate goal. Rather, it is of merely instrumental value, 'good as a means toward' something higher.

'True human perfection', on the other hand, consists—as in the halachic writings—in intellectual perfection, or what Maimonides now calls 'the acquisition of rational virtues'. 'I refer to the conception of intelligibles, which teach true opinions concerning the divine things. This is in true reality the ultimate end; this is what gives the individual true perfection, a perfection belonging to him alone; and it gives him permanent perdurance; through it man is man.' Through knowledge and wisdom, the soul can achieve a non-relational perfection within itself; it may perfect itself intrinsically as an intellect. Important to this perfection, of course, is a rational understanding of the natures of things in the world, of the laws and order of Nature itself, and of the nature and ordering of the celestial realm. All of this belongs to natural science. But this is only a preliminary stage on the way to the greater and more important divine science, that is, to an understanding of the highest possible object of apprehension: God. Through an intellectual grasp of the essence of God—'the apprehension of His being [*metziyur*] as He, may He

be exalted, is in truth'—and of his actions, we enter into a state of worshipful union with God. And this, according to Maimonides, is what we should all strive for. The practical virtues are useful and good, especially in our relations with others. But the perfection of the intellect is the true and highest good, the *summum bonum* of human existence.

Now when the intellect ordinarily comes to know a thing, what happens is that the form of the object—but not its matter—enters the soul of the knower. When a person knows a horse, the human intellect assumes the form of 'horse'. The intellect does not literally become a horse, of course, since the appropriate matter is lacking. It does, however, become 'informed' by the essence of horse, and so in a very literal sense becomes one with its object: the same form that, in the matter, makes a horse a horse now exists cognitively in the knower's soul and makes him a horse-knower. In knowledge, the mind thus becomes identical in character with its object (the mind of the horse-knower is, in an important sense, truly horselike). To know a thing is to move from a state of potentiality (that is, from being merely 'receptive' to the forms of things) to a state of actualization (that is, actually assuming the form of one known object or another). Here is how Maimonides puts it:

Know that before a man intellectually cognizes a thing, he is potentially the intellectually cognizing subject. Now if he has intellectually cognized a thing (it is as if you said that if a man has intellectually cognized this piece of wood to which one can point, has stripped its form from its matter, and has represented to himself the pure form—this being the action of the intellect), at that time the man would become one who has intellectual cognition in actualization. Intellect realized in actualization is the pure abstract form, which is in his mind, of the piece of wood. For intellect is nothing but the thing that is intellectually cognized.

(*Guide* I: 68; 1963, 163–164)

The intellect so actualized, Maimonides concludes, just *is* its content or object, the form of the thing. Before knowing, the intellect is mere potential or capacity, that is, nothing actual. In a state of knowing, on the other hand, what is actual is the form that now constitutes the mind.

Accordingly, it has become clear to you that the thing that is intellectually cognized is the abstract form of the piece of wood, that this form is identical with the intellect realized in actualization, and that these are not two things—intellect and the intellectually cognized form of the piece of wood. For the intellect in actualization is nothing but that which has been intellectually cognized.

(*ibid.*)

The actualized intellect, the intellect that is in a state of knowing, is not distinct from *what* it knows. On the contrary, the former is reduced to the latter; they

are 'always one and the same thing'. 'That which has been assumed to be an intellect in actualization has nothing belonging to it except the form of the piece of wood. Accordingly, it is evident that whenever intellect exists in actualization, it is identical with the intellectually cognized thing.'

It now becomes clear what it is that is immortal for Maimonides. In the halachic writings he spoke of the intellect—*nefesh*, as distinct from the *neshamah*—as the 'form' of the soul, and as that which, when perfected, remains after a person's death. When we thus strive for our specific perfection—the perfection of the intellect—and seek to acquire knowledge of the highest kind, what we are really striving for is the greatest actualization of our intellects. In his philosophical writings he explains that the intellect is, when actualized, nothing but the forms of the things known. Or, in other words, the actualized intellect—also called the 'acquired intellect'—is nothing but the contents of the knowing mind, or the objects known *as* they are known. Thus, it is this knowledge alone that will remain after the death of the body. If a person is righteous, it is this that will be granted entry into the world to come.

The souls that remain after death are not the soul [*neshamah*] that comes into being in man at the time he is generated. For that which comes into being at the time a man is generated is merely a faculty consisting in preparedness, whereas the thing that after death is separate from matter is the thing that has become actual and not the soul that also comes into being; the latter is identical with the spirit that comes into being.

(ibid. I:70; 173–174)

And if a person has followed the path of true intellectual perfection, the actualized intellect that will remain after death just is the knowledge of God. The halachic writings themselves say as much: 'There is nothing which remains eternally except the knowledge of the creator of the world.' (*MT Hilkhot Mezuza* 6:13) As God is the highest of all possible objects of knowledge, the knowledge of God is the supreme good of the rational intellect; and it is a knowledge that partakes of the character of its object. The pursuit of intellectual perfection—the pursuit of the knowledge of God—thus leads to immortality, but only because the knowledge thus acquired is itself (like its object) eternal. 'The soul . . . refers to the form of the soul, the knowledge of the Creator which it has comprehended according to its potential . . . This is the form that we described in chapter four of *Hilchot Yesodei haTorah* [of the *Mishneh Torah*]. This life, because it will not be accompanied by death . . . is called "the bond of life".' Now it seems very difficult to find much here that could, in any interesting sense, be viewed as an individual and *personal* kind of immortality. To what extent can a body of knowledge—which is all that the perfected intellect consists in—be seen as my *self*? Can memory and consciousness belong to it once it is separated from the body and the other, mortal faculties of the soul? How, in fact, can one perfected intellect, outside of the body and the space-time parameters that define existence

in this life, be distinguished from another? What, in other words, is personal and individual about the perfected intellect?

It is this question—one that is raised by the accounts of immortality in both the halachic works and the *Guide*—that puzzled Maimonides' contemporary critics, as well as later scholars. It also gave at least one of his intellectual disciples the opportunity he was looking for to move carefully but (I believe) deliberately even closer to depersonalizing the immortal soul.

Unlike Maimonides, whose views on the immortality of the soul need to be gleaned from a variety of his halachic and philosophical writings, Gersonides devoted an entire book of his philosophical *magnum opus* explicitly to this issue. The opening fourteen chapters of his *Sefer Milchamot haShem* (*The Wars of the Lord*) are entitled *behasha'arut hanefesh* ('On the Immortality of the Soul'). His, too, is a thoroughly Aristotelian conception of the human soul and of its capacity for immortality. But it also stands in stark contrast to the views of earlier Aristotelians, such as Alexander of Aphrodisias (a second-century Greek commentator on Aristotle's works) and Averroes, or Ibn Rushd, the great but highly controversial twelfth-century Arabic philosopher and the author of several important commentaries on Aristotle. The topic of the immortality of the soul is of supreme importance for Gersonides, for upon it depends not just the metaphysical fate of the soul, but also our happiness and well-being—and not only in the afterlife, but in this life as well.

Gersonides begins his discussion by singling out that part of the soul that is the prime candidate for immortality.

Since the intellect [*hasekhel*] is the most fitting of all the parts of the soul [*nefesh*] for immortality—the other parts are obviously perishable together with the corruption of the body because they use a bodily organ in the exercise of their functions—it is necessary that we inquire into the essence of the human intellect before we investigate whether it is immortal or not, and whether if it is immortal, in what way it is immortal.

(*Wars* I.1; 1984, 109)

Although Gersonides uses *nefesh* to refer to the soul as a whole, the echoes of Maimonides' distinction between *neshamah*, or the part of the soul that governs and depends upon the body and thus perishes with it, and *nefesh* or *ruach*, the rational part of the soul, are unmistakable here. The soul, for Gersonides, is likewise composed both of parts that use the body in their functioning (such as sensibility and imagination) and of pure intellect, *hasekhel*.

That part of the soul that does depend on the body—and, in particular, on the senses and the imaginative faculty—for its operations is called the 'material intellect' (*hasekhel ha-hayulani*). The material intellect is pure potentiality, the bare capacity for thought. ...

And this brings us, finally, to immortality. What is immortal in a human being is, for Gersonides, nothing beyond the acquired intellect. Despite the fact that the acquired intellect is generated *in us*, it does not follow that it is corruptible;

Gersonides rejects Aristotle's claim that 'everything generated is corruptible' (ibid. I:11; 212). Because the rational order of the world in the Agent Intellect is eternal and incorruptible, our knowledge of that order (once it is acquired) must likewise be eternal and incorruptible, since knowledge (being identical with what is known) takes its character from the object known. Moreover, he argues, the acquired intellect (unlike the material intellect) is both immaterial and separable from the body, and thus not subject to the forces that destroy the body. 'The acquired intellect is immaterial, and an immaterial substance does not have the conditions requisite for corruption.' (ibid.) Hence, he concludes, 'the acquired intellect is immortal'. When a person dies, the soul understood as the material intellect ceases along with the body. As a result, all further acquisition of knowledge necessarily comes to an end as well. But the acquired intellect remains. The immortality available to any human being consists only in this persistence, after the death of the body, of the knowledge that he or she has acquired in this lifetime.

To his contemporaries, Gersonides must have seemed to be treading perilously close to—if not right into the eye of—the Averroist storm. Averroes' writings, especially his commentaries on Aristotle, were the subject of several virulent condemnations in the thirteenth century. His views were regarded as inconsistent with a number of Christian dogmas, indeed, with the whole notion of there being a single, Christian truth. In fact, Averroes saw himself as simply laying out the proper understanding of Aristotle's views, and philosophers and theologians in the Latin West who were committed to the Aristotelian system had to drive a wedge between the master and his important but heretical commentator.

Among the Arabic Aristotelian's greatest sins, at least in the eyes of his Christian critics, was the denial of an individual, personal immortality. Averroes had argued that the material intellect in a human being is not a particular product of the union of a body (matter) and an individual soul (form), but rather simply the manifestation in that person of the single, all-embracing Agent Intellect. Thus, a person's 'soul'—the form animating his body—is nothing but the Agent Intellect itself; and his cognitive powers and achievements are simply the direct activity in him of that higher intellect, which actualizes certain potentialities in his body. All human beings, that is, literally share the same form—the Agent Intellect is common to them all. And a person 'thinks' only because of his union or 'conjunction' with the Agent Intellect and the intelligibles it contains.

Although in itself general, the Agent Intellect undergoes a temporary process of 'individuation' when it is attached to and embodied in an individual human being in a lifetime. But since the Agent Intellect is, in truth, *one*, and thus the same in and for all individuals, when a person dies all such individuation acquired through the body disappears and his 'soul' reverts back to its transcendent, separate, impersonal existence as the pure Agent Intellect. There is no *personal* immortality for Averroes.

Gersonides is aware of the philosophical problems here. For example, if all human beings literally share the same intellect, he argues, then how can we account for the different intellectual attainments of different people? But of even greater importance, it seems, are the religious and theological objections he has

in mind. As Gersonides goes to great lengths to distinguish his own view of the soul from that of Averroes, he concentrates especially on the issue of personal immortality. If the human intellect is really nothing but the Agent Intellect, then immortality is of no practical value or moral consequence. For, he suggests, it would follow that *all* human beings, whatever their character or virtue—‘be he fool or sage’, good or evil—will, because they literally share the same eternal soul, obtain this alleged immortality. Moreover, if immortality is indeed a totally impersonal affair, as Averroes claims, then it can have no relevance for our very personal and particular lives. If it is not *I* who survive postmortem, then that eternal existence can be of no interest to me and have no connection to (and play no motivating role in) what I do in *this* lifetime. ‘It has no utility at all’, Gersonides says of Averroes’ view; in it ‘theoretical knowledge plays no role in the attainment of human perfection.’ (ibid. I:4; 131)

But does Gersonides himself have a doctrine of *personal* immortality? After a person’s death, can the body of knowledge that constitutes his acquired intellect be distinguished from that of another person? More importantly, since it is presumably one’s *self* that is rewarded with immortality, can that person’s acquired intellect, postmortem, be linked up with his life and identified as his self? Gersonides apparently thinks so. Each person’s acquired intellect is, he argues, a ‘unity’ (*echad*), ‘numerically one’, and thus can be distinguished—without any reference to the body at all—from other acquired intellects, even if those intellects have some knowledge in common. ‘One piece of knowledge can be common to Reuben and Simon yet differ in them insofar as the kind of unity differs in them; so that, for example, the unity in the acquired intellect of Reuben differs from the unity in the acquired intellect of Simon.’ (ibid. I:13; 224) What gives each acquired intellect its unity and identity is both the amount of knowledge it involves and the content or character of that knowledge—not just its items, but also the way they are connected or synthesized.

These differences [between the acquired intellects of Reuben and Simon] are attributable to the differences in the acquisition of this knowledge with respect to quantity and quality. For when someone acquires more knowledge within a particular science, the unity of his knowledge in [his acquired intellect] differs from the unity of knowledge who has acquired less knowledge in that science. Similarly, he who has acquired knowledge in a science different from the science in which another has acquired knowledge, his acquired intellect differs from the acquired intellect of the other. In this way, the levels of intellectual perfection are considerably differentiated.

(ibid.)

Different people acquire different, and different amounts of, intellectual knowledge. This will presumably allow one disembodied acquired intellect to be distinguished from another. And Gersonides seems to think that a sense of selfhood will accompany this unity. He speaks of the happiness and pleasure that

the immortal soul will feel when, having been released from the body, it will contemplate the knowledge it acquired during its temporal, embodied existence.

But what Gersonides offers seems like both a rather thin kind of unity and an accidental kind of individuality for the acquired intellect to possess. It is not a unity that accrues to a collection of bits of knowledge because of the substantial unity of the knower or consciousness (or 'soul') to which they belong, much in the way a bunch of grapes has a unity because of the stem to which the grapes are connected. There is nothing to the acquired intellect beyond the knowledge itself; the content does not literally *belong to* something. Nor is there anything here similar to the 'internal' phenomenological unity—the unity that we *perceive* and are conscious of—that memory provides for our states of consciousness. Gersonides' acquired intellect is not a consciousness, nor even a true substance; it is a body of knowledge. And it would seem to be theoretically possible for two persons, in their lifetimes, to acquire exactly the same amount and kind of knowledge about exactly the same things. To use Gersonides' own words, two minds might 'approximate the unity of knowledge in the Agent Intellect' in precisely the same way and to the same degree, in which case each possessor of that knowledge has attained the same 'level of perfection'. Would not the acquired intellects of two such people be indiscernible from each other, particularly after the death of their bodies? If the quantity and content of their intellectual attainments are the same, then how could the acquired intellect of the one be distinguished from the acquired intellect of the other? And if the acquired intellects cannot be at least qualitatively distinguished, how can they be personalized, that is, identified with one human life rather than another? Moreover, whence does this alleged sense of self derive? What explains the consciousness and memory that Gersonides seems to attribute to the immortal acquired intellect?

Gersonides does not appear to be worried by such questions. In his mind, the philosophical and theological advantages of his own account of immortality over the Averroist doctrine are obvious. And the consequences for our happiness and well-being—certainly in this life, and more importantly in the world to come—are immense. True human happiness consists in the intellectual achievement represented by the perfecting of the mind, by the attainments of the acquired intellect.

The true reward and punishment [for righteousness and sin] do not consist of these [material] benefits and evils that we observe [in this life]. For the reward and punishment that accrue to man insofar as he is a man have to be good and evil that are truly human, not good and evil that are not human. Now human good consists of the acquisition of spiritual happiness, for this good concerns man as man, and not of the pursuit of good food and of other sensual objects.

(*Wars* IV:6; 1987: 182–183)

In this lifetime we can enjoy some measure of this perfection. The knowledge it affords us will grant us a degree of protection from the vicissitudes of this

world. It is good and useful for navigating life in this world to possess a knowledge of nature that approximates that of nature's maker. But the demands of the body and the force of worldly circumstances often stand in the way of the enjoyment of true perfection. Thus, even virtuous people—those who have devoted their lives to the search for true knowledge—are subject to the elements, to the disturbances and imperfections of the world. It is only when they die that they are capable of enjoying their highest happiness to the highest degree.

It is important to realize that each man who has attained this perfection enjoys the happiness resulting from his knowledge after death. We have some idea of this pleasure from the pleasure we derive from the little knowledge we now possess which subdues the animal part of our soul [so that] the intellect is isolated in its activity. This pleasure is not comparable to the other pleasures and has no relation to them at all. All the more so will this pleasure be greater after death; for then all the knowledge that we have acquired in this life will be continuously contemplated and all the things in our minds will be apprehended simultaneously, since after death the obstacle that prevents this kind of cognition, i.e., matter, will have disappeared . . . After death, [the intellect] will apprehend all the knowledge it has acquired during life simultaneously.

(*Wars* I:13; 1984, 224–225)

The true reward for virtue, for pursuing the life of knowledge and intellectual achievement, will, Gersonides believes, be in the world to come.

The view of our rabbis (of blessed memory) is that true reward and punishment occur in the world to come and that there is no necessity for reward and punishment in this world to be such that the righteous and the sinner receive material benefits and evils, respectively.

(*Wars* IV:6; 1987, 197)

The immortality of the soul understood as the eternity of a body of knowledge—this is surely a far cry from what the rabbis of the Talmud and the *midrashim* had in mind. Both Maimonides and, perhaps to a greater extent, Gersonides offer a highly intellectualized conception of immortality, one that seems to threaten the personal character of this, the ultimate reward. This may even have been their intention. To Maimonides, reducing immortality to the persistence of abstract knowledge may have appeared to be the most effective means of discouraging metaphysical speculation about the world to come, and especially the overly simplistic and materialistic pictures of that realm being offered by his contemporaries. But neither philosopher, however rationalistic his commitments, was willing to dispense altogether—at least openly and explicitly—with the broad Jewish conception of immortality and the world to come, especially its moral dimension as the domain of ultimate reward for virtue. It would take a bold thinker indeed to do so.

HASDAI CRESCAS (1340–1410/11)

The Light of the Lord (1410)

Book 2, Part 6, Chapter 1 (tr. W. Z. Harvey)

Does Man's Happiness Require Intellectual Perfection?

We must dwell on this question [namely, whether man's ultimate happiness requires intellectual perfection], for from what we have seen, the feet of some of the savants of our nation have stumbled upon it. We, however, shall rectify ourselves upon it to understand the true end of this Law.

We say that it is agreed among [those savants] that the intellect becomes constituted as a substance from what it apprehends of the intelligibles; that from them is originated an acquired intellect which is not commingled with the hylic [material] intellect; and that owing to its being separate from the hyle, even though it was generated and originated, the acquired intellect survives eternally, for it has no cause of corruption, since matter is the cause of corruption and evil, as was demonstrated in the *Metaphysics*. Accordingly, eternal happiness consists of the apprehension of the acquired intelligibles; and the more concepts one apprehends, the greater in quality the happiness, all the more so when the concepts are valuable in their own right. And it is also agreed among them that each of those who attain happiness will rejoice and delight after death in that which he has apprehended. Now they speculate this by [extrapolating from] the pleasure we experience in our lifetime when we apprehend the intelligibles, which will be even greater after death, when we shall intellectually cognize them together in perpetuity. It also follows from this that there is no proportion between the pleasure which will come from the lesser intelligibles and that from the nobler intelligibles; for the pleasure in our lifetime differs exceedingly in this respect. This is the entirety of what they commonly affirm and upon which they agree.

However, we have found a difference among them. For one of them holds that this happiness will be greater when many existents are apprehended, whether they be material or incorporeal. For he holds that, inasmuch as the order of all things is in the soul of the Agent Intellect, the more its degree of apprehending the intelligibles approaches that of the Agent Intellect, the higher its rank. And there is one who holds that what survives is what the human intellect truly apprehends of the existence of God (may He be blessed), and His angels; and that the more it apprehends the higher its rank. The meaning of this, apparently, is that the intellect becomes constituted as a substance through its cognition of the incorporeal substances alone, and that is what survives eternally. The more it apprehends of them, the more immense the happiness.

And these two opinions, while they destroy the Law and extract the roots of the Tradition, are demonstrably untenable from the point of view of philosophic speculation. That they destroy the principles of the Law and the tradition will be seen for the following reasons:

First, it is one of the principles of the Law and the Tradition that by the performance of the commandments a man attains eternal life, as is stated explicitly in the Mishnah: 'Upon all who perform one commandment, goodness is bestown.' And its explanation appears in the Gemara that what is referred to 'is the goodness reserved for the righteous' [i.e., the world-to-come]. However, according to these opinions the practical commandments are only preparatory for the intelligibles, and since the intellect becomes constituted as a substance out of the latter, there is no advantage in the performance of the commandment.

Second, from the Law and the Tradition we learn of matters concerning reward and punishment that are contained in the practical commandments and prohibitions, and that could not possibly be the case according to these opinions. Thus regarding reward there is the matter of those who give their life in sanctification of the name, as in the Rabbis' statement 'There is no creature who can stand in the rank of the martyrs of Lydda.' Now, the Rabbis did not specify the condition that the martyrs had become constituted as substances through the intelligibles. And if they had become constituted as substances, what advantages would there have been in the death of their bodies? Regarding punishment one finds cases like informers, traitors and he who shames his fellow in public of whom it is stated in the Tradition that 'they have no portion in the world-to-come.' Yet if their intellect had become substantiated through the intelligibles, it would be impossible for it not to survive eternally, unless God were to work a miracle and punish that acquired intellect, whose nature is to survive eternally, and annihilate it!

Moreover, the sectarians are included in this category [i.e. of those who have no portion in the world-to-come] if they deny one principle of the principles of the Tradition; e.g., he who says that the resurrection of the dead is not attested to in the Law. Now, if his intellect has become constituted as a substance through other intelligibles, even though the intelligible which he denies, and in virtue of which he is called a heretic, does not survive, why should the remaining intelligibles not survive? Nevertheless, according to the true Tradition, he has no portion in the world-to-come.

Third, it has assuredly become well known and accepted among the [Jewish] nation, that the delight and misery of the souls [after death] shall be according to the number of merits and sins. Thus, there are many homilies concerning the Garden of Eden and Gehinnom. Yet according to these opinions, reward and punishment consist in nought whatsoever but the survival or loss of the acquired intellect. Now, the proposition that the intellect delights in its intelligibles after death is demonstrably false, as will be shown later, God willing. But even if it should be granted that it is capable of delight, still there is no way to account for misery, even should one wish to contrive some contrivance!

Fourth, from the dicta of our Rabbis (of blessed memory) it appears that the practical part [of observance] is that which is the final cause. For some of them said, 'Practice is greater [than Study]', and in the end they voted and concluded that 'Study is greater, in that Study brings one to Practice.' Thus, they considered the practical part to be the final cause of the speculative part.

For all these reasons, it is manifest that these [two] opinions go against the roots and principles of the Law. That they are also untenable from the point of view of philosophic speculation will be seen from the following reasons:

First, if these opinions were true, the goal of the Law would be something other for man than what it is for his species. For according to these opinions, the surviving acquired intellect is incorporeal and not commingled with him; and therefore it is not his form. Nor is it an accident conjoined to him, since it has been posited as incorporeal and as becoming constituted as a substance out of the intelligible.

Moreover, the corruption of a man may be conceived without the acquired intellect's corruption, as, in fact, is posited in regard to its survival after death. And that whose corruption is possible without the corruption of a certain thing, and which is not commingled with it, is necessarily a different individual from that thing. And whatever is a different individual from a thing, and is disjoined from it, is not its form.

Moreover, the passing away of the incorporeal substance (sc. the acquired intellect) may surely be conceived without the passing away of the man. Now, once it has been demonstrated that [the acquired intellect] is not his form, it is ipso facto demonstrated that the end of the Law for man – i.e., to bring about the survival of this intellect – is for something other than him! That it is for something other than his species, is easily demonstrated from the nature of each. For man by his nature moves towards corruption, and the eternal existence of an individual man is impossible. But the acquired intellect is qua individual, posited to be eternal by nature, and impossible of corruption, owing to its very essence. Whatever has such characteristics differs in species [from man].

Second, it is remote with regard to divine justice that man's true reward and punishment should accrue to something other than to him who serves or him who rebels.

Third, the proposition that the intellect becomes constituted as a substance out of its objects of apprehension, and that it is originated separate from the hylic intellect, is demonstrably untenable for several reasons:

One of them is that since [the acquired intellect] has been posited to be non-hylic, it has no matter which could be its substrate and from which it could come into being. And since it is posited to be originated, it follows that it must come into being ex nihilo. But this proposition is notoriously false, for coming into being ex nihilo is among the impossible things that have a stable nature; unless it is by a miracle from the Absolute Power, may He be blessed!

Moreover, this proposition contradicts itself. For when it is posited that the intellect becomes constituted as a substance out of its objects of apprehension, what is meant is not the hylic intellect. This is because the intellect which has become constituted as a substance has already been posited separate from the hylic one. And should we mean by it the acquired intellect, then, indeed, since we have said that it 'becomes constituted as a substance out of its objects of cognition', we will be positing it to exist before its coming into being! By God!

It is as if we are saying that the thing brings its own self into existence! This is obviously ridiculous and false!

Moreover, that the intellect should be constituted as a substance out of its objects of cognition is demonstrably absurd. This is because a disjunction is unavoidable: either the intellectual cognition, which is the act of apprehending the intelligible, is the intelligible itself (as is the agreement of the philosophers, [i.e.] that the intellect, the intellectually cognizing subject, and the intelligible are one and the same thing) or it is not. If the intellectual cognition is the intelligible itself, one of the two absurdities necessarily follows: Either one intelligible must be the same as the other, and all the intelligibles are likewise one intelligible, provided that the intellectual cognition is one and unvarying for all intelligibles. But this is clearly absurd, for there would be no advantage or pre-eminence of him who apprehends many intelligibles over him who apprehends one intelligible! Or one intelligible is different from the other intelligible; and the act of the intellectual cognition of one intelligible is not the act of the intellectual cognition of the other intelligible. But it follows that when the intellect has become constituted as a substance through one intelligible, and afterwards apprehends another intelligible, it will have as many substances as it has intelligibles! Or else it will undergo change, and one intelligible will become constituted as a substance through the other, and it will take on another essence different in species from the previous! But this is perfectly absurd.

Moreover, since according to this [hypothesis] the essential form of man is continuously originated, it follows that the individual man will change and vary from essence to essence. This is perfectly absurd and ridiculous.

Fourth, this acquired intellect, which was constituted as a substance through its intelligibles, cannot avoid being either living, or dead, or not predicable by life and death. Now it is false that it is not predicable by them, for that sort of thing is an inanimate body or a certain accident. And it is false that it is dead, for then it would have no advantage and pre-eminence in its eternity. Thus it necessarily is alive. And since it is self-evident that life is different from intellectual cognition, it must be, therefore, that this intellect is compounded of life and intellectual cognition. Thus, there unavoidably is a substrate. But it has already been posited separate. This is a contradiction!

For these reasons, the untenability of these [two] opinions is proved manifest. But the first opinion is more reprehensible in one respect, and the second in another respect. With regard to the first, because it follows necessarily from it that survival depends upon the apprehending of the intelligibles which are in philosophy, the principles of the Law would therefore be derivatives of philosophy! And it would follow that he who intellectually cognizes one of the intelligibles of geometry, inasmuch as they all exist in the soul of the Agent Intellect, will live eternally! But this is a fantasy and a contrivance, wholly without merit.

With regard to the second, because the intellectual cognition of the essences of the separate beings is not through affirmation but through negation, as the Master of the *Guide* has expounded at length; and thus the cognition will be imperfect, and, surely [the intelligible] will not be in the intellect as it is extramentally.

And so I wish I knew how this deficient intelligible, which does not exist so extramentally, becomes constituted as a substance!

But the philosophers contrived these opinions, as if the nature of the truth had obliged them to believe in the survival of souls, and they thought up thoughts and increased words that increase vanity. Some of the savants of our nation were seduced to follow them, and they did not perceive, nor did it enter their minds, how thereby they were razing the wall of the edifice of the Law and breaching its hedges, even as the theory itself is groundless!

Now, inasmuch as it has been demonstrated concerning the perfection of opinions that this end [viz., the eternal happiness of the soul] is not consequent upon it, in the way that [those savants] had supposed, and since it has also been established concerning the other perfections [viz., the happiness of the body and the perfection of moral qualities] that they are only a preliminary to the intelligibles, it follows from this that this end [viz., the eternal happiness of the soul] is primarily and essentially consequent neither upon opinions nor upon actions. And inasmuch as this end necessarily belongs to the Law, in accordance with what is found concerning it in the Tradition, it necessarily follows that it is primarily and essentially consequent upon a part of [the Law] which is neither of opinions without qualification nor of actions without qualification. Now when we examined [the Law] and its parts, we found in it a part small of quantity but large of quality, which is neither of opinions without qualification nor of actions without qualification, namely, the love for God, may He be blessed, and the true fear of Him. I say that it is upon it that this end [viz., the eternal happiness of the soul] is consequent, by every analysis, according to the Law and the Tradition, and according to philosophic speculation itself ...

AARON SEGAL

“Immortality: Two Models”

Some Questions and Some Answers

There are many questions one might ask about the immortality of human beings. Here is a partial list: Will some human beings survive their deaths? If so, under what circumstances? In particular, will they require a miracle? And in what condition will they be afterwards? What are we human beings like, metaphysically speaking (are we material or immaterial? substances or bundles of perceptions), and do the answers to any of the previous questions depend on the answer to this question? Supposing some human beings do in fact survive their deaths, does each of them ultimately perish, as Cebes suggested to Socrates, or do at least some go on existing forever? And if some do, in what condition?

By the beginning of the Rabbinic period (at the latest), canonical Jewish texts and standard Jewish practice had answered some of these questions fairly unequivocally. Thus, the second blessing of the *Amidah* prayer refers to God no fewer than six times as the One who resurrects the dead. If God will one day

resurrect the dead, then it is clear that at least some human beings will indeed survive their deaths. One of the central Biblical verses upon which that blessing is based, Daniel 12:2, goes further still, in stating that the resurrected will enjoy *hayei olam*, that is, *everlasting* life. And although that verse is certainly the most explicit on this score, there are other Biblical “intimations of immortality,” including the promise recorded in Isaiah 25:8 that God will “destroy death forever” and the description in Psalms 125:1 of those who trust in God as being “like Mount Zion that cannot be moved, enduring forever”.¹ In any case, and despite standing in some tension with other Biblical verses, the positions that some human beings will survive their deaths and live forever quickly became authoritative and exerted a heavy influence on normative Jewish liturgy.² As such, they have since then gone virtually unchallenged (at least explicitly) by self-consciously Jewish philosophers.³

While this settled some of the questions we posed, others remained, and remain, unsettled. The character of the everlasting afterlife, its consistency with a thoroughgoing naturalism, the conditions for its attainment, and the metaphysical nature of human beings were battlegrounds for later Jewish philosophers. Our two selections, one primarily representing the view of Gersonides and the other authored by Hasdai Crescas, defend very different packages of views on these other issues. We might summarize the two packages as follows:

Intellectualism:

(IN-1) A human being, whenever she exists, has as parts whatever eternally existing facts she then knows (such as facts of metaphysics, mathematics, and physics); when, and only when she is “embodied,” she also has a human organism as a part (which, together with the facts she knows, compose her then);

(IN-2) Whether one survives death and endures forever in a conscious state entirely depends on whether one has come to know some such fact,⁴ and

(IN-3) the eternal afterlife of one who does survive death consists in a steady, continuous, and perfect cognition of those truths the person knew only dimly when she died, since she is finally unencumbered by bodily needs and desires (a circumstance often referred to by the Talmudic rabbis as *Olam Haba*, “The World-to-Come”).

(IN-4) The fact that a person survives death and endures forever, and the character of her eternal life, is wholly due to the natural course of things, without the need for any special divine action; indeed, it is not clear God could prevent such a person from attaining the sort of eternal life she does even if God wanted to.

(Incidentally, some human beings who die will one day be embodied again – this is the resurrection of which Daniel spoke and for which traditional Jews pray thrice daily – but they will die yet again and return to their more perfect state of constant cognition.⁵)

Devotionalism:

- (DV-1) A human being is a substance with no relevant ontological structure;
(DV-2) Whether one survives death and endures forever in a conscious state entirely depends on whether, and to what extent, one has devoted oneself emotionally, cognitively, and behaviorally to God, and
(DV-3) the eternal afterlife of one who survives death consists in an increasingly intense devotion to God and reciprocally loving relationship with Him while in the embodied state that she attains upon resurrection (a circumstance referred to by the Talmudic rabbis as *Olam Haba*, “The World-to-Come”).
(DV-4) The character of a person’s eternal life is determined at least in part by special Divine action.
(Incidentally, those who will be resurrected exist in the period of time between death and resurrection. The character of their existence in that intervening period is much like the character of their existence post-resurrection, except that they do not then enjoy the full panoply of benefits that attend an embodied religious devotion.)

In a nutshell, that is what Gersonides and Crescas, respectively, believed about our immortality. Their positions or variations thereof dominated the “immortality landscape” of medieval Jewish philosophy.⁶ We might ask which position, if either, is right. Relatedly, we might wonder what view on these matters strikes the best balance between a fidelity to Jewish texts and practices, on the one hand, and overall plausibility and defensibility, on the other hand. It seems to me that with regard to the issues of human ontology and the conditions under which one survives death – issues (1) and (2) – Crescas’s withering critique of Intellectualism was decisive. Moreover, the prospects for a view about those issues that is consistent with the sort of naturalism advanced by Intellectualism are not good: (IN-4) is thus not in good shape. However, on issue (3) the Intellectualist seems to me to have something of an advantage; but not an unanswerable one. Let me elaborate.

Human Ontology

The first thing to say about (IN-1) is that it is not entirely clear what it is a view *of*. Adherents of Intellectualism frequently speak of a person’s intellect – or his *nefesh* – being constituted by what the person knows, but it is not entirely clear what the relationship is supposed to be between a person and his intellect. Consequently, it is not entirely clear whether their view is supposed to be a view about the ontology of human persons at all. I have (I hope charitably) assumed that theirs is indeed a view with implications for what human persons, and not just their intellects, are at least partly made of. For otherwise their claims about immortality would be either non sequiturs or much less important than they take them to be. If their claims about immortality are about the immortality of human persons, then they would not follow (without further premises) from facts about

the ontology of intellects. If their claims about immortality are instead about the immortality of human intellects, then they would lack the existential importance that they attribute to them. It would be like learning that my favorite bicycle will be preserved forever. Interesting, I suppose, but not particularly comforting. (Crescas makes this very point. He assumes that their ontological view is only about what human intellects are made of and that their claims about immortality are consequently only about the immortality of human intellects.) The second thing to say about the view is what a contemporary philosopher has said about a strikingly similar view: it sounds “like the sort of thing that comes to one in a dream after eating too many oysters”.⁷ Less colorfully, it is simply incredible. Could I really be made up even in part by such things as *the fact that $2 + 3 = 5$* and *the fact that it is wrong to kill babies for no reason*?

More specific difficulties abound when we look at the conjunction of (IN-1) and (IN-2). That conjunction rules out the possibility of two people knowing exactly the same facts, in exactly the same way, when they die – at least if no two things can be composed of exactly the same facts and two things cannot become one thing.⁸ But that scenario is surely possible.⁹ (Gersonides seems to be aware of the difficulty (Feldman 1984, p. 224), but relies in his reply on the implausible assumption that while it is possible for two people to know the same facts, it is not possible for them to know those facts “in the very same way” – a matter of seeing the explanatory relations between facts, which, for some reason, do not constitute facts to be known.) Likewise, that conjunction rules out the possibility of a human being who dies knowing just one eternally existing fact – assuming, again, that two things cannot become one thing.¹⁰ But that scenario is surely possible. And that problem is only exacerbated, *greatly* exacerbated, if every set of eternally existing facts composes something. For then an analogous argument shows that if (IN-1) and (IN-2) are true, it is not possible for anyone to die knowing *any* eternally existing facts. And that is a devastating blow to Intellectualism. For at least these reasons, (IN-1), and certainly the conjunction of (IN-1) and (IN-2), fails the test of overall plausibility and defensibility.¹¹

Conditions for Eternal Life

The same can be said about (IN-2) all by itself. It fails the test of overall plausibility and defensibility, as I shall argue. But, as Crescas argues, it also fails the test of fidelity to Jewish texts and practices. Crescas cites several Rabbinic texts, which, taken together, clearly imply that pious devotion to God and his commandments is both necessary and sufficient for attaining *Olam Haba*; he thus takes himself to have established (DV-2). He infers that (IN-2) is false, and twice over. Cognitive achievement is not necessary for attaining *Olam Haba*, since pious devotion suffices, and cognitive achievement is not sufficient for attaining *Olam Haba*, since pious devotion is necessary.

In making this inference, Crescas is assuming both (a) that (the relevant sort of) pious devotion does not suffice for (the relevant sort of) cognitive achievement – otherwise the fact that pious devotion suffices for attaining *Olam Haba* would

fail to show that cognitive achievement is not necessary for attaining *Olam Haba*; and (b) that (the relevant sort of) cognitive achievement does not suffice for (the relevant sort of) pious devotion – otherwise the fact that pious devotion is necessary for attaining *Olam Haba* would fail to show that cognitive achievement is not sufficient for attaining *Olam Haba*. And each of these can be challenged by adherents of Intellectualism. Indeed, each one has. Gersonides took issue with (a): in the penultimate chapter of his treatise on immortality, he interprets the Mishna's statement that "All Israel has a portion in the World-to-Come" to mean "that since the Torah has directed Israel toward the acquisition of this knowledge in the marvelous way that is found in it, it is impossible that many should not acquire some knowledge, much or little."¹² And Maimonides took issue with (b): in his commentary on the continuation of that Mishna, which excludes certain individuals from the World-to-Come ostensibly on the grounds that they were religiously wicked, he writes that "none of these activities could come about – even though they are thought to be insignificant – except from a deficient *nefesh* that was not perfected and [hence] was unfit for the World-to-Come." Given his views on the conditions for attaining *Olam Haba*, the deficiency to which he refers is presumably cognitive.

However, Crescas seems to have the better of this argument. While Gersonides's claim is plausible – it is hard not to acquire a *little* knowledge of eternal truths – Maimonides's defense is much less so. Is it not clear that one can be a very fine metaphysician, mathematician, or physicist and yet be religiously wicked? Indeed, it is not just religious wickedness that seems compatible with such significant cognitive achievements, but moral wickedness as well. And therein lies the overall implausibility of (IN-2), even setting aside Jewish texts and practices. Any view according to which a permanently unreformed moral reprobate can enjoy a blessed eternal life is one that we should believe only on the basis of the strongest of evidence. And if we are evaluating that view against a background that includes the assumption that there is a perfectly just God, then I am not sure any amount of evidence would suffice to have us reasonably accept the view.¹³

A Role for God?

The difficulties that confront (IN-1) and (IN-2) infect (IN-4), the naturalistic component of Intellectualism. It is not quite the case that (IN-4) implies (IN-1) or (IN-2); though something near enough is the case. The Intellectualist's naturalism, coupled with the assumption that some human beings are in fact immortal, is consistent with only a very narrow range of positions on both human ontology and the conditions under which a human being manages to be immortal. The Intellectualist position on these issues – (IN-1) and (IN-2) – was probably the best bet for a marriage of their naturalism with the *hayei olam* of which traditional Jewish texts speak. Barring their position, even just surviving death in a conscious state, let alone enduring in such a state forever, will require either divine intervention or some highly specific conditions, conditions that do not align particularly well with devotional or moral ones. After all, if you are

a biological organism that endures from moment to moment (i.e., you do not persist by having a so-called temporal part at each moment that you exist), and God does nothing particularly special for you when you die, then your prospects for survival are worse than dim.¹⁴ Your organs and cells will quickly disintegrate, you will be recycled for parts, and there is not much you can do about it. And even if you (and everyone else) are interestingly constituted – maybe you are constituted by but distinct from an organism, or maybe you persist by virtue of having temporal parts, or maybe you are an immaterial substance – but God does not step in to help you survive death, then either you will survive as a conscious being only if you have made some very special arrangements, such as arranging to have your psychological makeup imposed “in the right sort of way” on an unsuspecting cobbler,¹⁵ or you will survive as a conscious being no matter what you do or how you lived your life, à la Plato. Neither of those views on the conditions under which you survive death comports particularly well with traditional Jewish texts. And neither fares better morally than (IN-2).¹⁶ Worse still, it is not clear there are any arrangements you could reasonably make which are special enough to ensure an *eternal* life. Any hope for an eternal life whose existence and character is determined by our religious devotion and moral rectitude will have to be a hope for God to shape our ultimate individual destiny.

Character of Eternal Life

Intellectualism has not made out very well so far. But on the issue of the character of one's eternal life, of what it will be like to live forever, Intellectualism has a *prima facie* advantage, I think, over Devotionalism. Their dispute about this issue is itself multi-faceted. For one, and true to my labels, they differ over whether one's eternal life will be primarily of the mind or primarily of the heart, of arresting intellectual vision or growing devotion.¹⁷ (It should be noted that when this facet is taken all by itself, the positions of the two sides are not mutually exclusive.) On this question, both sides can claim the authority of tradition, for there are rabbinic texts that support each position.¹⁸ And the test of overall plausibility is equally inconclusive. The question of what the *summum bonum* is cuts so deep that it is unlikely to be settled conclusively by any argument. It is also far from obvious whether there is a single ultimate good, given that people have such varied temperaments. Perhaps some will see the Intellectualist *Olam Haba* as Gersonides did, while others will see it as akin to endless *shiur* (Talmud class) without recess or lunch.¹⁹

For another, they differ over whether one will spend eternity embodied or disembodied. Here, while the bulk of Biblical and rabbinic material that speaks of or intimates immortality seems to assume as a matter of course that immortality will be corporeal – as many have pointed out, the Greek idea of an incorporeal immortality is foreign to the Bible – there are nonetheless rabbinic sources that can easily be read as suggesting the opposite. As Maimonides queries, what sort of bodies would it make sense for one to have in *Olam Haba* if, as Rav (3rd

century) contends, one will not eat or drink or procreate?²⁰ As to be expected, Devotionalists have a ready retort: Why would Rav bother telling us that that there is no eating or drinking in *Olam Haba* if no one there had any mouth with which to eat or drink? And how would they wear the crowns of which Rav spoke if they had no heads?²¹ But this exegetical dispute just demonstrates that Rav's statement can reasonably be construed either way. And here too, the test of overall plausibility is hardly conclusive. The question of whether our corporeal existence is something preferably escaped or preferably embraced is not something I could hope to settle here.

Nevertheless, although taken singly each of the two facets – intellect/devotion and corporeal/incorporeal – provides no dialectical advantage to either side, taken together they do. Intellectualism has a distinct *structural* advantage, in the following sense. The eternal afterlife, according to Intellectualism, is radically unlike the life we live now; or at least it is sufficiently different to provide its beneficiaries with a great good that is simply *unattainable* in our present state. This is because the intellectual goods promised by Intellectualism are, according to Intellectualism itself, unavailable to a person while she is covered by the epistemic veil that is her body.²² On the other hand, Devotionalism, at least as articulated by Crescas, offers nothing to the eternal “afterlifer” that is not in principle available to her in this life.²³ And this structural difference confers an advantage upon Intellectualism. Devotionalism, but not Intellectualism, stands in a rather uncomfortable tension with some of the earlier Biblical teaching on death. As others have noted, death often seems in the Bible to be nothing to lament – and not only in cases where it cuts off an otherwise tormented life, but also in cases where the life that it ends was complete as it was. Thus, Abraham is said to have died “in a good old age ... and full of years” (Genesis 25:8); while there is no hint in this and other verses of the Epicurean view that *no* experience can be made better by being longer, there is a strong suggestion that more life of roughly the sort they already had would not have added one bit to Abraham's or others' already complete life. What good then would an eternity of such a life be? And yet that is precisely what Devotionalism appears to offer. Even regarding those whose pre-resurrection life was less blessed than Abraham's, couldn't many of them come to have such blessing by living a mere additional 175 years, like Abraham? Why have them live forever? Intellectualism avoids this tension, ironically enough, by promising something that is in many ways foreign to the world of the Bible.

Defending Devotionalism

We could of course bring this to a close now, declaring “victory” to the Devotionalist on points (2) and (4) and to the Intellectualist on point (3). (The Intellectualist “lost” on point (1), but as far as we argued, the Devotionalist might “lose” on that point as well.) As far as I can tell, there is nothing inconsistent with adopting such a mixed package ourselves. But there is something awkward and

mismatched about it. So I will instead close with two suggestions for denying Intellectualism its alleged advantage on point (3).

The first suggestion is to deny the datum on which the alleged advantage is based. In some versions of Devotionalism, the character of one's eternal afterlife, though embodied, is indeed radically different from the character of one's life now. The suggested differences are agential (we are no longer able to turn against God), motivational (we no longer desire evil), and even epistemic (we have a qualitatively different sort of knowledge of God).²⁴ According to these versions of Devotionalism, Intellectualism is robbed of its alleged advantage. But Devotionalists need to tread carefully here. Such radical differences threaten to undermine some of the central motivations for a Devotionalist characterization of the afterlife. Supposing such radical differences, it is not obvious that we would be embodied, strictly speaking, or that our pious devotion – with no desire or ability to do otherwise – would be of much value.

The second suggestion, to which I incline, is to accept the datum on which the alleged advantage is based, but to deny a presupposition of the objections we raised. In objecting to (DV-3), we presupposed that God's purpose in granting eternal life was to make the afterlifer's life better than it would otherwise be. Medieval adherents of Devotionalism, including Crescas, explicitly assumed as much.²⁵ And the assumption is certainly implicit in much of rabbinic literature on *Olam Haba*.²⁶

Perhaps, though, that is not the only way to see things; perhaps even a finitely long life suffused with devotion to God and intimacy with Him can be as good as a human life can get. Even so, a world in which those who were once intimately related to God nevertheless perish and will never again live is a world in which *God's own interests* – His eternally abiding interest in the lives of those whom He loved and cared for – have been thwarted by death. Indeed, the great Jewish mystical work, the *Zohar*, consistently applies to the age of the resurrection a verse in Psalms (104:31) that speaks exclusively of God's glory and joy: "May the glory of the LORD endure forever; let the LORD rejoice in His works!"²⁷ God's own interests thus provide purpose enough for the resurrection, and purpose enough for granting the resurrected everlasting life.²⁸ On this way of seeing things, there is no tension between the fact that Abraham already lived as full a life as one can live and the fact that we can expect God to one day resurrect him. God will resurrect Abraham, not necessarily because it will make his life better, but because the God of life cannot abide Abraham's absence and will always rejoice in his presence.²⁹

Notes

- 1 For these and other related sources, see Levenson 2008, chapters 5 and 12.
- 2 Some verses that seem to suggest that death is the final word for each and every human being include Genesis 3:19; 3:22; Psalms 49:10; Psalms 89:49, Ecclesiastes 9:2. See Maimonides' *Essay on Resurrection* (Halkin and Hartman 1994, 225–6) for a more comprehensive list.

- 3 There were some exceptions, such as the 14th century philosopher, Moses Narboni, who followed Averroes in denying individual immortality. See Bland 1982. Narboni attributes to Maimonides as well a denial of individual immortality, an attribution endorsed by some contemporary scholars (see Pines 1963, cii–cii, Sirat 1985, 170 and Rudavsky 2010, 102–107); Pines 1979 goes further still and claims that Maimonides denied the possibility of an afterlife altogether. Cf. Davidson 1992–93.
- 4 This is the view of Gersonides (see Feldman 1984, chapters XI and XIII). Several of the interpreters of Maimonides cited in the previous note attributed to Maimonides the view that a person survives death if and only if he has come to know fully the Agent Intellect (or God) – a condition whose attainability by human beings is dubious. (Crescas mentions roughly this distinction in the selection above. For a discussion of Crescas on this point, and which variation he found more objectionable, see Harvey 1977.)
- 5 See, inter alia, Halkin and Hartman 1994, 232.
- 6 Maimonides, of course, and Joseph ibn Kaspi stand out as devotees of some version or other of Intellectualism, while Nachmanides and R. Meir Abulafia (Ramah) were prominent defenders of some version or other of Devotionalism.
- 7 Olson 2007, 143. In deference to the Jewish tradition, we might replace ‘oysters’ with ‘gefilte fish balls’.
- 8 On the question whether two things can become one thing, see Gallois 1998.
- 9 See Olson, *ibid.* Steven Nadler, in the selection printed above, effectively argues that for this reason Gersonides could not really have accepted (IN-1) and (IN-2), strictly speaking. Gersonides is ultimately committed, according to Nadler, to a denial of personal survival.
- 10 The conjunction implies that such a person would, after death, be identical with the fact he knows. The trouble is, that fact existed before the person died, and the person wasn’t then identical with the fact. After all, one, but not the other, had a material part. Such a scenario would thus involve two things becoming one thing.
- 11 To be fair, I should note that one can perhaps parry some of the foregoing objections if one adopts the view that human beings (among other beings) persist by having temporal parts. See Olson 2007, 144–45. But (IN-1) is still incredible.
- 12 Feldman 1984, 225.
- 13 To be fair to Maimonides, he might have been defending a different view with a *much* higher cognitive standard, one that entails intimate knowledge of, and behavior in accordance with, all moral truths. See *Guide for the Perplexed* 3:54 and nt. 4. In that case, his view does not imply that a moral reprobate can enjoy blessed eternal life. However, that just makes (a) unassailable. If the relevant sort of cognitive achievement is so nearly unattainable, then it is very unlikely that every moral-religious exemplar will achieve such cognitive heights. In effect the Intellectualist faces a dilemma, one already posed by Judah Halevi in his *Kuzari* 5:14. (Thanks to David Shatz for discussion on this point.)
- 14 For some of the particularly special things God might do to help save an enduring organism, see van Inwagen 1978, Zimmerman 1999, and Zimmerman 2012.
- 15 Less drastically, if you are indeed interestingly constituted, your survival might just depend on your attitude! See Johnston 2010 and Zimmerman 2012.
- 16 Though Johnston 2010 is at least an *attempt* to develop a naturalistically acceptable and morally adequate view according to which some of us survive death.
- 17 A similar tension exists in the Christian theological tradition. See Hick 1994, 202–7.
- 18 A favorite proof-text for the Intellectualist camp is the Talmudic description (*BT Berakhot* 17a) of *Olam Haba* as a situation in which the righteous sit with their crowns on their heads feasting on the brightness of the divine presence; the Devotionalists could cite the passage in *BT Sanhedrin* 92a that portrays the righteous in *Olam Haba* as engaging in the very same righteous activities in which they engaged before death.

- 19 The remark about recess was made by a classmate of the historian of medieval Judaism, David Berger.
- 20 See, inter alia, Halkin and Hartman 1994, 214.
- 21 Abulafia, commentary to *BT Sanhedrin* 90a.
- 22 See, inter alia, Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Laws of Repentance*, 8:2 and *Guide* 3:9. For an excellent account of the multifarious nature of this veil, see Stern 2013, especially chapters 4 and 5. For discussion of whether Maimonides, at least, might have acknowledged exceptional cases, such as Moses, in which embodied people are able to overcome that veil, see Stern *ibid.* and Shatz 1990.
- 23 Indeed, R. Isaac Abarbanel understood R. Nissim of Gerona (Crescas's teacher) to be making precisely this point in the latter's explanation of the Torah's omission of *Olam Haba*. See Abarbanel's commentary to Leviticus 26:1 (sixth answer). See also Kuzari 1:104–17 and Kogan 2004.
- 24 See Nachmanides's commentary to Deuteronomy 30:6 for the agential and motivational metamorphoses (although there he dates them to the Messianic Age, which, by his account, precedes the resurrection of the dead) and his *Torat ha-Adam* (Chavel 1964, 303–6) for the epistemic ones. See also Levenson 2008, 189.
- 25 See Crescas' *Or Hashem* (Fisher 1990, 231 and 250–1).
- 26 Consider, e.g., the statement of R. Ya'akov in *BT Kidushin* 39b, which interprets the verse (Deuteronomy 5: 15), "that it may be good for you," as a reference to "the day that is entirely good," i.e. the age ushered in by the resurrection.
- 27 *Zohar* I 119a, 182a, and II 57b. See also R. Moshe Hayim Luzzatto's *Da'at Tevunot*, sections 128–30. Luzzatto maintains that the final purpose of creation, which will be realized only in *Olam Haba*, is for God to rejoice in His creatures (2012, 181–3). In this connection he cites the verse from Psalms 104, a verse with tellingly serves as a closing epigraph for both *Da'at Tevunot* and *Mesilat Yesharim*.
- 28 See also Levenson 2008, 200: "... it would seem that death ... is one of the enemies, or even the ultimate enemy, of the people of God, and no victory of that God can be complete until this lethal foe is finally eliminated."
- 29 Many thanks to David Shatz and Tyron Goldschmidt for invaluable comments and criticisms of an earlier draft. Work on this paper was supported by a generous grant from the Immortality Project at UC-Riverside, sponsored by the John Templeton Foundation.

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