INSTRUCTIONS TO LIBRARY

Statement by author: Author deceased.

I hereby give permission to the Library to circulate my thesis

_____ (yes) _____ (no)

The Library may sell positive microfilm copies of my thesis

_____ (yes) _____ (no)

Date _____ _____ (signature of author)

Library record

The below-named thesis was microfilmed on 11/25/59 (date)

For the Library Minnie R Lewis (signature of staff member)

AUTHOR Freuder, Samuel

TITLE Jewish Philosophers on the Freedom of the Will. 1886.

7
755

Jewish Philosophers
On
The Freedom of the Will

by

Samuel Freeder
Student of the Hebrew Union
College, Senior - Class 1886.

The great law of preservation of force in the physical world holds good also in the realm of thought. As no product of Nature can be entirely destroyed, the destruction and decay we observe being nothing but the resolving into elements which survive and form new combinations, so it is with the productions of mind. Whatever the human mind has produced, whatever the great thinkers of all ages, representing the highest development of the human mind in their respective times, have thought, it is never wholly lost. Their theories may become superannuated, may appear childish as seen in the light of new discoveries, their most beautiful structures of philosophical systems may be upset by the wisdom of a school-boy; still they retain their value not only as a source of historical information but also as containing materials and elements out of which the mind forms new structures and systems. It is for this reason that the scholar takes pains to make himself acquainted with the opinions of the ancient writers on subjects that we are enabled to see

in a truer and clearer light than our forefathers did. But how more important must be the study of the opinions of the old writers in regard to subjects that present to the thinking mind as many difficulties to-day as they did centuries ago; and how more eagerly should we listen to the voice that speaks to us through ages, if it speaks of questions and problems which agitate our minds and await for a satisfactory solution.

Such is undoubtedly the question regarding the freedom of the will. There is no school of theology or philosophy that can ignore this question, and for ages it has agitated and divided the thinking world. And the battle still goes on, and the clashing of opinions was heard only a few years ago, coming from two great philosophers, J. S. Mill and Sir W. Hamilton. [See J. S. Mill, in his Examination of Sir W. Hamiltons Philosophy, Chapter "On the Freedom of the Will."]

We propose in the following to give an outline of the views on this question entertained by the various Jewish philosophers, hoping thus to contribute, if not towards a solution of the problem,

yet towards a clear understanding of the Jewish standpoint in regard to it.

A careful reader of the Bible cannot fail to recognize that the principle of freedom of the will is strongly asserted in it and is underlying all its precepts and commandment. In contradistinction to the Koran where the doctrine of fatalism and necessity forms the groundwork, the Bible insisted upon it that man is a free agent, free to choose to do a thing or not to do it. This is clearly expressed in ~~text~~ passages like these: See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil ..... therefore choose life (Deut. XXX. 15) A prudent man seeth the evil, and hideth himself. (Prov. XXII. 3.), and many other passages which tend to show that the freedom of the will was a fundamental principle of the ancient Hebrews. Still, we find already in Josephus, in his account of the Jewish sects (Antiq. Book XIII. Chap. 9.) that only the Sadducees advocated the free-will doctrine in its entire extent, while the Pharisees accepted it with limitations, and the Essens denied it altogether.

This diversity of opinion is reflected in the Rabbinical literature, where there are found many maxims bearing on this question, which more or less incline to opposite views and are rather puzzling to pious souls who believe in the inspiration of the words of our sages (דברי חכמים). To mention one instance, compare the well-known saying of: הכל תלוי במזל Everything depends upon luck (decided by the position of certain planets) with the other saying: אין מזל לישראל Israel is not subject to the influence of the planets. It is a striking fact the above-mentioned sects represent all views that can be taken of this matter, leaving no side of the question unrepresented in the Jewish world of thought. Unfortunately their arguments have not been preserved, and we are at a loss to know how each sect based its doctrine upon Jewish ground. We would gladly miss hundreds of pages in the Talmud for one page containing some information concerning matters like this. We would prefer a luminous to a voluminous work. As it is, the records of the Talmudical literature show only few traces of philosophical speculation on the question of the free-will

doctrine, and what there is of it gives us no clear idea of the Jewish conception. As a whole, we may safely say, that it appears from many passages of the Talmud, that the view ascribed by Josephus to the Pharisees was entertained by the Rabbis, namely that man's freedom is limited by the divine influence; in what manner, the Rabbis did not explain. Nor can they be expected to have done so, as philosophizing on religious subjects was considered by some useless and by others worse than that.

It was not until Anan ben David about the middle of the 8th Century called in question the authority of tradition and asserted the right of reason in religious matters, that the Rabbis awoke from their indifference to philosophy, and, in order to meet the enemy on his own ground, resorted to reason as the only powerful and legitimate weapon in the war of opinions. From this time we may date the birth of Jewish philosophy proper, and in the very first work written in a philosophical spirit we find a considerable space devoted to the free-will doctrine. (See Saadya's

"Emunoth Vedaioth" Chap. IV.)

But before we enter upon our task to give an outline of Jewish religious philosophers on the free-will doctrine, we will, in order to avoid unnecessary repitions, first state the principal points upon which their arguments turn. There are two points which present a difficulty to the religious inquirer in regard to this question, they being apparently incompatible with the freedom of the will.

The doctrine of the human freedom of the will seems to be in collision with:

A. The doctrine of the omniscience of God.

A. Argumentum ad Dei omniscientiam.

B. The doctrine of the omnipotence of God

B. Argumentum ad Dei omnipotentiam.

N.B.

We shall refer in future to these two arguments as to the argument A and the argument B.

Now, as to the argument A we may state the difficulty briefly thus:

If God knows all things, then He knows also all future things, and consequently there is no choice for man in his actions, since God's knowledge is infallible, and what He knows must necessarily happen. Omniscience ידיעת הבורא is apparently incompatible with free-will בחירה

The argument B turns upon the difficulty which arises from the doctrine of the omnipotence of God. The free agency of man seems to limit the power of God, inasmuch as God's will is dependent on the man's will, which, if free, is beyond God's control and power. Omnipotence יכולת הבורא seems then to collide with free-will בחירה.

Having stated the point at issue we are now prepared to hear what the Jewish philosophers have to say on the subject, and we proceed to give the opinions of the following theologico-philosophical writers, in the order mentioned: Saadja, Judah Halevy, Bachja, Maimonides, Abraham ben David, Gersonides, Isaac ben Sheshetz, Chisdai Crescas, and Joseph Albo.

The first great thinker who took up the arms of reason to defend the Jewish faith was

Saadja Gaon (892-942)

In his work "Emunoth Vedaioth" (Dogmatics(?) and Philosophy) he devotes ~~most~~ one out of ten Chapters to the discussion of the free-will doctrine. It is the fourth Chapter and its heading reads:

בַּעֲבוֹדָה וּמְרִי וְהַהֶכְרֵחַ וְהַצֶּדֶק

(On Obedience, Disobedience, Necessity, ~~and~~ Justice [viz. of God.])

He introduces the subject by showing that man is superior to all living beings by his intelligence, and that he may therefore be regarded as the centre of the universe and the end of all creation. After explaining seven cases, that show us the frailty of man and his inferiority, as, low passions, sickness, death a. s. f. he emphasizes the justice of God and His grace ~~shown~~ bestowed on man, in giving him the power to do right and to avoid sin. That man has such a power our reason tells us, otherwise God would not have commanded man to do any thing. He arrives then at the proposition that The Creator does not interfere with the actions of man, and that He does not compel man to obey or disobey His laws. This proposition is confirmed by our consciousness, for we are conscious that we have the power

to act or not to act; by our reason for if were compelled to act, there would be no room for precept and prohibition, nor for reward and punishment; and lastly by revelation. Deut. XXX. 19.; Mal. I. 9.; Isaiah XXX. 1. etc.

The objection urged against this proposition, that it limits the power of God, in asserting that God allows men to do actions without his will, or even against his will as in the case of a sinner, (Argument B. see p. 11.) is answered thus: Man's actions do not affect God, and they are good or bad only insofar as they affect the happiness of man himself; but God in his loving kindness hates bad actions, detrimental to man's welfare, out of love to man. God therefore does not exercise his power in regard to man's actions, and, being unaffected by them, he leaves it entirely with man to act or not to act.

He next goes on to refute those who argue against the free-will doctrine from the omniscience of God. (Argument B. see p. 11.) They say: if God foreknows all actions of man, he must also know that man will sin against him; if so, man cannot help committing sins,

else God's foreknowledge would be incorrect and deficient. This reasoning, Saadya answers, is fallacious; for God's foreknowledge of future events is by no means the cause of them; if such would be the case, namely that God's knowledge of a thing is the cause of its existence, then all things would be without beginning and without end, like God's knowledge which is the cause of them. But the truth is: Man does not perform one action or another, because it was foreknown by God; but God foreknew the action, because man, of his own free-will, chose to do it. God's omniscience does not affect the actions of man, as it concerns itself only with the actions that happen after man has exercised his free-will.

Another question connected with God's omniscience is this: To what purpose did God try the pious ones, as e.g. Abraham, since God knew beforehand how they would act? The answer is that He wanted to inform the pious ones of his wish, and furthermore, for the reason that He wanted to reward the pious ones, and it would be unjust to reward or punish

without cause. After dwelling with some length upon the use there is in sending prophets to admonish the people, and upon some other questions, only loosely connected with the subject of free-will, he concludes by explaining the various Scripture-passages that seem to contradict each other and the free-will doctrine. We give his closing remarks in full:

"By these explanations of the various
"Scripture-passages we hope to remove
"all doubt in regard to the freedom of
"the will and to make clear God's
"justice in his demands of his creatures,
"so that we have nothing to find fault
"with, as it is said: Shall mortal
"man be more just than God: Shall
"a man be more pure than his maker?
"(Job IV. 17.) And the justice of God
"has been confirmed by extraordinary
"miracles and by the sending of the
"prophets."

More elaborately is the subject at hand treated by

Jehudah Halevy (1085-1140(?))

whose main-argument is directed against the fatalistic theory, as will be seen from the abstract, we give from his

treatise on this subject in his work "Kusari" Book V. Chapter XX.

At the outset our author states that those who pretend to believe in fatalism are inconsistent, inasmuch as they show by their efforts to maintain life and to obtain its necessaries, that they acknowledge that there are things which are not necessary, but only possible (טבע האפשר) and are therefore subject to the will of man. But how this is consistent with the government of God may be explained thus: All objects of our perception הדיעות (comp. Cassel's edition, who prefers the reading of הדעלות, probably, because he overlooked that הדיעות is a very expressive word for "Wahrnehmungen" and fits admirably.) may be traced back to a first cause in a direct or indirect way. In looking at the wonderful creation we ascribe its cause directly to an intelligent creator, but in seeing a piece of wood consumed by fire, we give as cause the effect of the subtle substance of the fire on the susceptible substance of the wood; this is the mediate cause, and by tracing back this cause to a preceeding cause you will at last come to the first cause viz. God. We may divide the parting events into four classes: divine, caused by the immediate will of God,

natural, proceeding from mediate causes founded in Nature, accidental, owing their existence to chance, and contrived events effected by the choice of man, which choice was only the mediate cause and may be traced back to the first cause. Yet, man is made responsible for his choice, as it is in his power to choose, and as he shows his intention to do wrong. The experience of our senses contradicts the theory of the fatalists, this theory would also remove all responsibility of man. Continuing, the author refutes the objections raised against the freedom of the will.

Ad B. (see p. 11.) he says, that free-will does not take away from God's power, since everything that happens must be ultimately brought back to God as its primary cause.

Ad A. he refers to the view, already expressed by the "Medabberim" that the knowledge of a thing cannot be taken as its cause, and therefore God's foreknowledge of events does not cause their existence; if it did, there would be no reward due to the pious ~~ones~~ nor punishment to the wicked, since God knew how they would act. Here the author makes a little excursion to the exegetical regions, where we do not intend to follow him, and then sums up with the statement of the following

six propositions:

1. The free-will doctrine is confirmed by the belief in a first cause, that is an intelligent agent, who works according to wisdom and perfect order. And if the believer finds anything that seems to be unjust in the government of the world, he ascribes it rather to his limited faculties of understanding the ways of God.

2. By the conviction that there are mediate causes, that are not self-working, but only means, by which the primary cause effects the thing to be accomplished.

3. By the belief in the goodness of God who provides for all living creatures, and to whose decrees we have to submit.

4. By the contemplation that there is a graded scale in the universe, by which the value of beings is measured. A being possessed of sensations and perceptions stands higher than the one lacking those things; the lowest animal stands higher than the most precious of the minerals a. s. f. a. s. f.

5. Sensitive souls are impressed by admonitions and reprimands; and even the sinner, though he may not be restrained by them, still they leave in his soul a spark of remorse, which is the beginning of a reformation.

6. Man finds in his own soul the power

of doing good and avoiding evil, as far as possible; and if he fails to do so, it is only because the mediate causes are wanting or because man does not know how to use them as a poor regent, who has the power to rule over his people, but does not know how to use it aright. It is therefore that the game of chess is considered not to be subject to chance, because the mediate causes that lead to victory are clear and readily seen by the more skillful player. Everything then is to be traced back to the First Cause. Israel's history, as long as the Shekinah was among them, was certainly directed by the First Cause. In the subsequent periods it remains doubtful whether the First Cause or the spherical influence or chance had its sway. The best way is, to attribute all ~~th~~ events to God, especially momentous events like death, war, etc.

It will not be out of place to remark here, that the closing sentences of Jehudah Halevy are by no means to be taken ~~that the author, con-~~ ~~se~~ as an indication that the author was conscious of the weakness of his argument and therefore appealed after all to faith. A little ~~acquaintance~~ acquaintance with Jehudah Halevy's writings will show us his timidity and diffidence in

relying too much on philosophy. As for himself, he needed no philosophy to support his sublime faith, which he received like the prophets their divine visions, from the elevation of his pious soul towards the Divine Being. It was for less inspired men that he undertook to prove faith by reason, and he did it reluctantly, for he had his suspicions that the use of reason might lead to the overthrow of faith. He therefore, in his book Kusari repeatedly ~~the~~ emphasized the insufficiency of reason for the wants of human nature, and with all his reasoning he considered the unphilosophizing faith the highest good. And indeed, his Kusari stemmed for a while the current of philosophical inquiring, and brought about a reaction which resulted in the study of the Kabbalah, that gave more satisfaction to ~~the~~ souls longing for religious truth. (Comp. Munk's Philosophy and philosophical authors of the Jews, Kalisch's Translation P. 25) The same intense religious fervor and unshaken faith, ~~that is~~ so prominent a feature in Bekeudah Halevy, distinguishes the work חובות הלבבות (The Duties of the Hearts) by

Bachya ben Joseph (11th Century)

whose opinion of free-will is laid down

in the Third Part of the אמונות ודעות Chapter VIII.
The following is the substance of the Chapter.
The soul, representing faith, points out to the intellect, representing philosophy, the contradictory passages in the Sacred Scriptures concerning free-will. While we find on the one hand so many passages expressing in exalted strains the omnipotence of God as e.g. Psalms CXXXV. 6.; 1. Sam. II. 6.; Psalms. CXXVII. 1. etc, we meet on the other hand with passages tending to show that the actions of man are the results of his own choice, hence he is also made responsible for them as e.g. Deut. XXX. 15.; Mal. IV, 3.; etc. The intellect answers thus: The difficulty you find in the Bible we are confronted with in our daily experience. How often do we see that men plan things and are unable to carry out their plans, because God's will opposes them, and still we see men rewarded or punished according to their actions. This difficulty has given rise to various theories. Some think, that God has given man the power to act according to his choice, and God restrains from interfering with his action; others hold the opinion that all our actions as well as any other creatures are subject to the will and control of God and are to be ascribed to Him. To the objection that then there

would be no room for reward and punish-
ment they reply that the mode of reward
and punishment is unintelligible to our
limited understanding, and we have so many
proofs of God's justice that we may readily
assume it in cases where it seems to be
absent. A third opinion, shared by our
author, is that the belief in both the Necessity
of man's actions הַהֶכְרֵחַ and the justice of
God הַצְּדָקָה must be accepted, though the
attempt to reconcile the one with the
other is difficult and may lead into
great danger. The best way to escape which
is that we should in practice act upon
the principle that we are responsible for
what we do and in theory we should
firmly believe in the justice of God and
his unlimited power and control over
us, though it may be beyond the reach
of our imperfect understanding. There
are many things in the universe which
at first sight seem to us impossible;
but after we improve our knowledge we
find them to be in accordance with
the law of nature. As illustration may
serve the wonderful astronomical appa-
ratus called Astrolabe, which is used
by astronomers to observe the position of the
stars; our mind is hardly capable of
forming a conception of such a wonder-

ful instrument; no less wonderful is the invention of the Roman balance (or steel-yard); or the working of mill-stones. If we would never have seen any of these appearatus we would hardly believe that such things are possible; why should we then be astonished to find in this great world and in the government of it many things that we cannot comprehend? And why should we hesitate to ascribe the seeming inconsistencies in regard to necessity and reward and punishment to ~~our~~ the weak and imperfect faculties of our souls rather than to the injustice of God? The best is then for a believing soul to say with the Psalmist (Psalm CXXXI.) Lord, my heart is not naughty, nor mine eyes lofty; neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too wonderful for me. a. s. f. a. s. f.

Our attention is now called to the greatest among the Jewish religious philosophers, the Jewish Aristotle, as he was properly called, to

Maimonides (1135–1204)

The subject before us is touched upon (and it is rather strange that he only touches upon such momentous a question, without devoting to it a seperate Chapter in his "Moreh.") in the Third Part of the "Moreh" Chapters XVI.—XXIV, where the subject

of Providence is treated. ... As there has appeared only within the last few months an excellent translation of the "Moreh" ("The Guide of The Perplexed by M. Friedländer, London, Trubner & Co. 1885.") we refrain from giving an abstract of those chapters and refer the reader to the book itself. Instead, we give in the following passages by Maimonides found in works of his that have not yet been made accessible to the English-speaking world.

In his commentary to "the Sayings of the Fathers" פִּרְקֵי אָבוֹת he explains the meaning of the saying הַכֹּל צָפוּי וְהָרְשׁוּת נְתוּנָה (Everything is foreseen, and freedom is given) Aboth III. 19. to be an affirmation of the very important doctrine, that both predestination and free-will must be maintained. But how these two principles may be reconciled, the Mishnah fails to tell, and its commentator evidently did not care to explain.

More information on the subject before us do we get from our author's יַד הַחֲזָקָה (The Strong Arm) Hilchoth Teshubah Chapter V. where he dwells upon Argument B (see p. 11) and in refutation of the objection raised against free-will from the omnipotence of God, Maimonides says: "Know that as God's will made fire and air ascend, water and earth descend (viz. the laws regarding the four elements) m. s. f., so also He made it a law

"that man should have free-will, that his doings
"should be entirely left to him, that none should
"influence his actions, but he himself; and it
"is through the agency of reason, bestowed
"on him by God, that man does whatever he does".
These few sentences, it seems to us, cover
the whole ground and may regarded as
the best that can be said ad argumentum
B.

With greater length Maimonides treats upon the subject before us in his psychological treatise, the celebrated "Eight Chapters" שמונה פרקים, the last Chapter of which is devoted to it. The argument turns mainly upon point A (see p. 11) and its substance is as follows:

In contradistinction to those who think the Spheres decide the character of man, and that the good and bad qualities are innate in man, our author maintains that character is not the result of the influence of the Spheres, but man is the architect of his own character. It is true, there are inborn in man certain propensities and inclinations of the soul for certain things as e.g. a good or bad temper; but the development of those inclinations and its results rest entirely with man, who is a free moral agent. If this should be denied

all morality would be lost, since man would be irresponsible for his actions. The Sacred Scripture and Tradition abound with passages showing clearly that man is a free agent. After explaining the Talmudic dictum הַכֹּל בִּידֵי שָׁמַיִם חוּץ מִיִּרְאַת שָׁמַיִם Everything is ordained by Heaven expect the fear of Heaven (Berochoth 33) and also the passage in ~~Jeremiah~~" Lamentations III, 38 , by enlarging upon the argument adduced in Hilchoth Teshuba (quoted above) he proceeds to refute the objections raised against free-will from Scripture-passages that indicate that it was God's preordination that brings about events even by compelling man to act contrary to his own interests, as was the case with Pharao and the Egyptians who by the ordinance of God, made known beforehand to Abraham, were bound to keep the Israelites in bondage for four hundred years, and still, they were afterwards punished for so doing. This difficulty is removed by asserting that though it was God's will that the Egyptians should afflict the Israelites, it was only a general order, referring to the Egyptians at large, and not pertaining to the individual Egyptians, who had it in their power to refrain from maltreating the Israelites. A rather

subtle distinction and superfluous, too, as this the special case of Pharao, explained presently, would have fitted the Egyptians' case also. But, our author continues, there remains to be explained the justice of Pharao's punishment in the face of the fact that it was God himself who hardened his heart and confirmed him in his disobedience to Moses' mission. This is ingeniously explained by the author in saying that It was in consequence of Pharaoh's wickedness that free choice, the gift bestowed upon man by God, was taken away from him. Such was also the case with Sihon the King of Heshbon (Deut. II. 30), with the idolaters in Elijah's time (I. Kings XVIII. 37.) and with all those whose punishment served a certain purpose of God's plan in the government of mankind. As to the difficulty of reconciling free-will with God's omniscience, Maimonides refers to the error we inevitably fall into if we measure the attributes of God by our own limited and imperfect standard. Thus we cannot conceive of a knowledge that comprises the past and the future and the infinite. (Compare More III c.l.) And it is only our imperfect conception of God's omniscience that makes it collide with the doctrine of free-will. He therefore concludes that we must abide

by the principle that Man's actions are free and it is in his power to do right or wrong without the interference of God; hence the necessity of warnings, admonitions, reward and punishment. The mode of God's knowledge, though, transcends the comprehension of our too limited faculties of the soul.

For completeness' sake we give a summary of the view taken by Maimonides in regard to the omniscience of God, as expressed in the Third Part of the "Moreh" Chapters XIX – XXI.

According to his view ~~the~~ God's knowledge differs from our knowledge in the following five points: 1) God's knowledge comprises the most heterogeneous elements. 2) His omniscience extends even to things not yet in actual existence. 3) It comprises also the infinite. 4) It undergoes no change by the apparent change of things. 5) It does not exclude the contingency of events.

It is only proper that we should give now the floor to Maimonides' great antagonist

Abraham ben David (? – 1198)

who, although confessing that he cannot refute Maimonides' argument, still ~~tries~~ tries to weaken it by the following annotation to "Hilchoth Teshuvah" Chap. V. (see p. 41) which we give in literal translation:

"Although I have no strong rejoinder to this,
"it will be well to state some objection; I say
"therefore, if man's goodness or badness were
"dependent upon God's foreordination, we would
"have to maintain, that his foreknowledge is
"also a decree, and then the question would be
"puzzling; but since ~~his foreknowledge~~ God
"has abandoned this part of his government
"and has given man free-choice his foreknow-
"ledge is as little to be regarded a decree
"as the foreknowledge of the astrologers
"who through some other power know the
"future events. It is well known that God
"has put the destiny of man into the power
"of the Spheres, but at the same time has
"endowed man with intellect that enables
"him to overcome the power of his star, and
"this makes man free to choose between
"good and evil. Now, God knows beforehand
"whether a man will or will not use his power
"to counteract the influence of his star;
"such a foreknowledge is therefore by no
"means an inevitable decree of God."

In boldness of thought and originality of style

Gersonides (1288 – ?)

has few equals among the Jewish philosophers of the Middle Ages. On the question of free-will, too, he takes a decidedly bold stand, and is duly berated for it by Isaac ben Sheshet

(see infra p.) and Isaac Arama (p. 75).

Gersonides' view as quoted by Isaac ben Sheshet is expressed as follows:

The knowledge of God as regards human affairs is limited to the fate that the higher powers הַעִלּוֹנִים have allotted each individual; but man's free-will is stronger than his fate and can govern it; hence it follows that there is nothing that can compel man to do what the higher powers have destined him to do, but, on the contrary, he is free to act or not to act. In this manner the teachings of the Scripture may be reconciled with the doctrine of the nature of the possible.

According to this view God has no unlimited knowledge of the future, for He knows only the decree of the Spheres, while man may by his superior will overthrow that decree. In order to maintain the freedom of the will, Gersonides went so far as to limit God's knowledge, by excluding from its range those actions that are done by man contrary to his destiny. This view was respectfully but decidedly repudiated by

Isaac ben Sheshet (? — 1406.)

in his שְׁאֵלוֹת וּתְשׁוּבוֹת (Enquiries and Decisions) Number 418 (Cassel in a note to Kuzari V. 20 gives a wrong number) who, like Saadya (see p. 15) insists upon the

doctrine of God's unlimited knowledge, otherwise there would be a deficiency found with God whose attributes must be perfect; on the other hand, ~~as~~ he emphasizes the principle of free-will, without which the Law would be practically useless; yet, man's freedom is not done away with by the knowledge of God, for, our author says, the knowledge of God has reference to a man's action, after it was decided by man's own free-will and after man could have done the reverse. It is therefore safe to say that man has freedom of the will, notwithstanding the foreknowledge of God as regards the way he will make use of his freedom.

In a more philosophical manner is the present question treated by a contemporary and intimate friend of Isaac ben Shesheth, the celebrated

Chisdai Crescas (14th Century.)

in his philosophical work "Or Adonai" (The Light of God), ~~[illegible]~~ Book II. Proposition V. Chapters 1—4.

In the first Chapter the arguments in favor of free-will, or as he calls it, the אפשרות (Notion of possibility) are set forth by our author, in the second the opposing arguments, in the third and fourth the reconciliation.

As favoring free-will the following

arguments taken from reason and Scripture are enumerated: a) from reason 1) Since nothing can be effected without an agency, and since the presence of an active cause is not necessary but only possible, it follows that the thing effected is also only possible. 2) Our experience of senses tells us that we have a choice. 3) Events happen accidentally, which excludes necessity. 4) Our preparing against coming events would be useless. 5) Since the will is a faculty of the soul it would be absurd that the material (sphere) should have control of the spiritual. b) from Scripture: 1) Laws and precepts presuppose a choice 2) Reward and punishment are only just if man is a free agent.

The doctrine of necessity is supported: a) from reason 1) It is a law in Nature that nothing is without cause, and since everything must be traced back to a first cause, this first cause necessarily existing, consequently every event comes about by necessity. 2) Since everything that comes into existence or fails to do so must be effected by some cause, then the failing of an event to happen must have a cause, and the cause excludes so also a possibility, since the cause determined the non-appearance of the event. 3) In order to bring a thing from the potential into the

actual existence it is necessary to assume an active moving power; the will of man must then also have a motive power, which consequently makes the action of the will a necessity. 4) Omniscience of God would be done away with. 5) and would be made dependent upon man's choice. 6) Providence of God 6) from Scripture where the knowledge of God extending to particulars is asserted and also the knowledge of the prophets in regard to future events.

The truth, therefore, our author proceeds, must lie in the middle, which can be found by examining the contrary arguments carefully and bringing them together to a convergent point. He does it thus: In going over the arguments in favor of free-will we find only those to be valid that prove the existence of possibilities (excluding necessity) as regards the event itself, but not as regards the causes that help to bring it about. The refutation of the arguments that go to prove also the latter the remarks ad 1) that it was begging the question, so is also the second; the third proves only that the possibility of the thing itself. So does also the fourth. The premise of the fifth is false, for the soul is not an abstract to-to substance but a concrete substance which therefore can be acted upon by the material

speakers. As to the arguments from Scripture they also prove only the possibility of the thing itself; for, the first argument is not forcible enough to prove absolute freedom, nor is the second, although it seems ~~that~~ first sight that reward or punishment is only just with absolute freedom. But why should we consider it unjust to reward or punish, even in the case that the action was the result of causes? Is it unjust that fire should burn (you) even if you approached it involuntarily?

Turning to the arguments favoring the principle of necessity, he finds ~~that only~~ those arguments to be valid only in so far as they ~~that~~ go to show the necessity of the causes of the events but not that of the event itself. This distinction removes also the difficulty in regard to God's knowledge; for, the possibility of things does not apply to God's knowledge, which being an attribute of God is infinite and certain in regard to the future as well as to the present, but as to the mode of God's knowledge we must accept Maimonides' explanation (comp. More III. XIX.)

To sum up Crescas' argument we state the following as Crescas' own views:

There is a distinction to be made between the causes that brings about an event and the event itself; while the former is certain and necessary, the latter is doubtful and

contingent.

As will be seen Chisdai inclines more towards the theory of necessity, and it is a weak point in his argument that if the necessity of a cause is admitted, then the result of that cause, the event, is also necessary, and the contingency of events is excluded altogether. To this flaw in Crescas' theory attention is called by a pupil of his

Joseph Albo (15th Century.)

who discusses this subject in his philosophical work "Ikarim" (Fundamental Doctrines) Book IV. Chapters 1–6. (It seems rather strange that Albo cites Crescas' theory as that of יש מן האחרונים (some of the recent authors) without mentioning Crescas' name. Perhaps the respect for his Master induced him to omit his name in attacking his theory.)

We shall now give the leading points in Albo's discussion on free-will.

He commences by stating the difficulty that arises from the doctrine of God's knowledge (Argumentum A p. 11) and adduces the usual arguments from reason and Scripture in favor of free-will. To solve this difficulty Saadja tried to make the existence of things independent of God's knowledge, (see p. 19) which theory our author rejects as inclining too much towards a denial

of God's knowledge of contingent events. Some of the recent authors (Over car see p. 59) have tried to find their way out of the dilemma in distinguishing between the contingency of the cause and that of the effect, and in so doing, our author thinks, they came very near to the fatal theory of Necessity. Dissatisfied with these theories the author proceeds to give his own theory. But before doing so, he devotes one chapter to ~~the~~ an enquiry into the reason of the divergence of ~~the~~ opinion on certain questions, and finds it in ~~the~~ different starting-points taken by diffirent men. This leads him to assert that where reason fails to satisfy the enquiring mind it is best to appeal to our own consciousness to whose guide we may safely trust. He illustrates this by an ~~analogy~~ from astronomy, where reasoning leads to results entirely opposed to the experience of our senses. Since then we have surely upon our own consciousness, we cannot fail to admit the truth of both the contingency of things and God's knowledge, both being demanded by our consciousness. But how can we reconcile them? The author answers by referring to what Maimonides said in regard to this matter (see p. 53). As it is usual with Albo, he adduces in support of Maimonides' view a number of Scripture-and Talmud-passages, some

of which Albo's ingenuity makes express ideas never dreamed of by their author. The fourth Chapter dilates upon the different views taken in regard to the influence of the planets upon man's fate, Like many of the Jewish philosophers of the Middle Ages, Albo is a believer in astrology and in many other nonsensical things; still his truly Jewish mind saved him from believing too much in it, and he concedes that God changes the decree of the stars according to His will, which change, man by his good or bad acts is enabled to bring about.

In the fifth Chapter the subject of free-will is again taken up, and after rejecting the opinions advanced on it, Albo sums up in giving his own theory, viz: All human ~~actions are to be~~ divided into 1) voluntary, 2) necessary, and 3) both voluntary and necessary. To the first kind belong those affairs that are determined and executed by our own free-will. In regard to them effort and exertion are indispensable. The second class consists of those affairs that have been foreordained by the decree of God or the influence of the spheres; all efforts towards their accomplishment is useless. To the third kind, a mixture of volition and necessity, belongs e.g. the case that a man digs the ground and finds a treasure. Here the digging was a voluntary act, while the finding

of the treasure was necessitated. The difficulty to bring our affairs under the right head of this three-fold classification has caused not a little confusion and has led men to accuse God of injustice in the government of the universe.

The sixth Chapter is only an illustration of the foregoing Chapter based upon Bible-passages.

It remains for us to mention some Jewish authors who touched upon the question before us, from whose writings we do not give an abstract partly, because they contain nothing original and partly, because we could not consult them, laboring as we do under the great disadvantage of having only a limited number of books at our disposal. For the benefit of the reader who may be better situated and may be desirous of further pursuing this subject we mention:

Abraham Ibn Ezra (1092-1167.)
in his Commentary to Gen. XXII and several other places.

Nachmanides (? - 1270(?))
who also touches this subject in commenting upon Abraham's trial (Gen. XXII.)

Bedaya Hapenini (14th Century.)
in his כְּתַב הִתְנַצְּלוּת (Apologetic Writing), contained in the שְׁאֵלוֹת וּתְשׁוּבוֹת לִרְשְׁבָּא I. 418.

Moses Narboni (? - 1368)
who wrote a treatise "On the Free-Will" הַמַּאֲמָר בְּדִבְחִירָה

a manuscript of which was found by Munk in the National Library at Paris (See Kalisch's Translation of Munk's "Philosophy and Philosophical Authors of the Jews" Pag. 52.) It was written in answer to a treatise "אגרת הגזרה" ("Letter ~~of~~ on Fatalism") the author of which Narboni fails to mention.

Isaac Arama (? — 1506)

in his homiletic — exegetical work entitled "Akedath Yitzchak" is a strict follower of Maimonides in this question and attacks fiercely Levi ben Gerson (see p. 54) on account of his liberal view taken in this matter (Portae 19, 21, 103.)

Valuable hints and more sources perhaps may be found in Dr. Stein's Dissertation entitled "Ueber die Willensfreiheit bei jüdischen Schriftstellern" Printed in Berlin Germ. 1880 or 81. Much to our regret we were unable to secure a copy of it.

Having passed in review the most prominent Jewish philosophers who wrote on the subject of free-will, we may be permitted to state the following ~~four~~ propositions, as the result to which the investigation of the Jewish conception of this question has led us.

Proposition I.

There is no Jewish religious philosopher

who denies the Freedom of the Will. They all reject the doctrine of Necessity, as leading to Fatalism, which is fatal to all religion and morality. However difficult the task of reconciling free-will with other important doctrines, they tried to perform it without sacrificing the highest and noblest of man's possessions, his freedom. Gersonides (p. 57) even went so far in his effort to maintain free-will as to sacrifice part of God's knowledge in order to save the free-will doctrine.

Proposition II.

While there are a number of passages to be found in the Bible, which support the doctrine of Necessity, there are many more yet that are opposed to the doctrine of Necessity and teach explicitly the Freedom of the Will

Proposition III.

As Jewish learned men are the best interpreters of the Bible, and as they unanimously declare that those passages, generally adduced by Christian theologians in favor of Necessity (Predestination), may be explained in conformity with free-will, we are safe in saying that the teachings of the Bible go to show that man was endowed by his Creator with the power of freedom of

of the will. But more than that,

Proposition IV.

A careful student of the Bible must come to the conclusion that the Bible assumes the freedom of the will as a fundamental principle, upon which the Sinaic Revelation is based and all the laws and precepts of the Bible are founded, as is clearly shown by I. M. Wise in a short essay on this subject ("Judaism and Christianity" VIII p. 49) who demonstrates that the necessitarian doctrine, as held by almost all Christian believers, is contrary to the spirit of the Sinaic Revelation as well as to every philosophical system of ethics and arrives at the conclusion that "As far as "moral philosophy is concerned, so "much is certain, the civilized world "decides in favor of the Jewish doctrine "of freedom as the postulate of ethics."

תם ונשלם ענין גזרה ובחירה
שבח ותהלה לאדון היצירה.

7/755