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Kabbalah and Rationalism In the Works of Mosheh Ḥayyim Luzzatto* (by Alessandro Guetta)

Ranging from poetry to mysticism and from logic to morality, Mosheh Ḥayyim Luzzatto's works are so wide-ranging that finding their unifying elements can be difficult. This diversity challenges attempts at classifying him historically: is Luzzatto a modern author heralding a new age in Hebrew literature?¹ Or does he represent the final manifestation of a kabbalistic sensibility on the wane in Western Europe? The history of the reception of his works is equally problematic: Eastern European communities of different orientations² hailed him almost immediately as a master worthy of veneration, and this fervor continues to this day in religious Israeli circles, inspiring a rich variety of studies and publications.³ The Paduan author's works were recently rediscovered in Israel, where many understand them to articulate a New Age sensibility: an authentic religious experience expressed in modern terms. Poet and mystic, modern man and kabbalist, Luzzatto lends himself well to this kind of research. Indeed, the persecution he suffered at the hands of the rabbinic establishment gives him the aura of a victim of intolerance.⁴

Yet, in the West, he has been forgotten for almost a century. His memory was not helped when a few nineteenth-century Italian scholars, adhering closely to the critical method, reread him unsympathetically, complaining about his fascination with Kabbalah, which they considered an obscurantist discipline. Their lack of enthusiasm for kabbalistic studies was nevertheless tempered with admiration for his great theological and poetic talent. His well-known descendant, Samuel David Luzzatto (Shadal), clearly took this position:

R. Moses Chajim Luzzatto [...] a great genius, but unfortunately born in times too infelicitous and dark [...] devised a system which was all his own and founded upon the most abstruse questions of Theology—questions which are beyond human investigation. He had a talent for

* This chapter takes up and expands on my previous article: "Cabbale et rationalisme en Italie à l'époque baroque," in *Réceptions de la cabbale*, ed. P. Gisel and L. Kaennel (Paris: Editions de l'Éclat, 2007), 109-126. It does not take into account the important book by Jonathan Garb *Kabbalist in the Heart of the Storm: R. Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto* (Tel-Aviv University Press, 2014) that was not yet published when I wrote this chapter.

Chapter 9

interpreting all the mysterious doctrines of the modern kabbalistic school according to this system, and in so doing made his own hypotheses appear like the simple development and explanation of Kabbalah.⁵

According to Shadal, Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto develops personal theological concepts but presents them in kabbalistic terms, ill-serving his theological genius. This was also the view of Samuel David Luzzatto's contemporary, Yosef Almanzi, whose early—and excellent—biographical account of the Paduan kabbalist and poet at once praised and criticized him.⁶

Simon Ginzburg gave a more nuanced assessment of the kabbalist in *The Life and Works of Moses Hayyim Luzzatto* (Philadelphia, 1931). Despite its Romanticism, this work constitutes the most important biographical mono-graph on the kabbalist and poet. Ginzburg understands Kabbalah as a dy-namic force, especially in periods of isolation, as was the case during the period of the ghetto, when legalism tended to fossilize Jewish life. Ginzburg felt that Luzzatto's poetic talent rivaled the literary gifts of Yehudah ha-Levy, and restored beauty to the stagnant Hebrew language. Luzzatto's kabbalistic works were, for Ginzburg, a product of their age, and he read them as a form of resistance against legalism animated by a messianic spirit and argued that they testified thus to the vitality of Jewish life.⁷ Ginzburg nevertheless be-moaned the fact that:

a splendid combination of poetic emotion and mythological material, which Luzzatto, like Milton, could have embodied into a national epic, was turned into fruitless kabbalistic speculation.⁸

To this he added:

Had Moses Hayyim Luzzatto lived at an earlier date—he would no doubt have become a great religious leader, had he lived later—he would have become a great poet of the modern school. But living in a transition pe-riod as he did, tragedy was knocking at his door the first day he was ush-ered into this world.⁹

More recent critical appraisals of Luzzatto's works have been equally mixed. Although there have been a few analyses of his poetic works,¹⁰ as well as a biography based on a new examination of his correspondence,¹¹ most of these studies have concentrated on the messianic aspects of Luzzatto's

thought, both from a theoretical point of view (including an exploration of the Sabbatean question) and from an experiential perspective (focusing on the revelations which a celestial voice or *maggid*¹² made to Luzzatto). Other studies have concentrated on the question of the feminine dimension of the *sefiroth*.¹³ Finally, an important monograph has examined, among other things, the links between the Paduan author's rhetoric and his kabbalistic thought.¹⁴ Some of the points discussed in this last work deserve further ex-amination, in particular its exploration of the relationship of Luzzatto's works with both the Lurianic kabbalistic tradition and the philosophical-scientific thought of the age in which they were written.¹⁵ Among other things, such an investigation needs to meet the demands of Jewish intellectual historiography by contextualizing the Jewish experience. This means starting from the premise that, in a single period and place, Jews and non-Jews must have had analogous behaviors and perceptions of reality; different religious cultures merely expressed similar contents differently, because the society that lived within the walls of the Ghetto was not completely cut off from the outside world. Indeed, Luzzatto's own works are almost explicitly in conversation with ideas coming from outside the ghetto.

Luzzatto wrote solely in Hebrew. His kabbalistic, logical/rhetorical,¹⁶ ethical, and poetic works all fit within the Jewish tradition. A theoretician, rather than an encyclopedic writer, Luzzatto did not often cite other works or authors; among his rare quotations, there are no references to any non-Jewish texts. The sources of his brief logical/rhetorical treatises are evident, and he never sought to dissimulate them, even if he did not mention any names and titles. Yet, there is an even more obvious consonance between his thought and the philosophical-scientific ideas of his time. The texts that provide evidence for this are considered to have been exclusively intended for Jews, because the doctrine they articulate was developed within the confines of the religious intellectual "sanctuary" of Kabbalah. This is not to say that Luzzatto alludes, however implicitly, to this or that non-Jewish author. Instead, it is the general tonality of some of his important kabbalistic works which makes him an author of his time, even if only up to a point (we will address these reservations later): a writer who lived at a time when one could not ignore the new demands that rationality and scientific developments placed even on religious thought.

In other words, it seems appropriate to situate Luzzatto's works within the framework of early eighteenth-century European religious thought, when Cartesianism deeply influenced the way problems were approached and

methods developed. Clearly sensitive to the concerns of his time, the Paduan kabbalist responded to them in his own way, by attempting to offer a new reading of a doctrinal corpus which was *a priori* indifferent to such modern demands, and which constituted the shared heritage of all Jewish communities, in every region of the Jewish Diaspora. There is a rationalistic slant in the reading Luzzatto proposed, so much so that one might risk describing him as a rational theologian. In this sense, his descendant, Samuel David, who was struck by the power of his theological reflections, appraised him correctly.

Mosheh Hayyim Luzzatto may well have sought to accentuate the rationalistic character of his thought following the well-known events that obliged him to alter the nature of his writings from 1730 onward. From then on, he was no longer permitted to base his works on the revelations of celestial voices, and was ordered to stop publishing on kabbalistic material.¹⁷ Yet, the peremptory character of his rationalistic statements, as well as their importance in his eyes and the urgency of his tone, suggest a genuine exigency rather than a literary strategy.¹⁸

Of course, the rationalistic aspects of Luzzatto's thought do not preclude the fact that the young Paduan was also a mystic, the recipient of celestial revelations and the organizer of a group which aspired to perform *tiqqunym* (the restoration of the divine world). He believed in *gilgulym* (the reincarnation of souls), and believed he was the reincarnation of great personalities of the past. He was at one and the same time a mystic and a rationalist, and saw no contradiction in this. He adhered to a mystical form of religiosity which found collective expression during the years of belief in Shabbetay Tzevy, and survived discreetly in Italy at least until the beginning of the nineteenth century, if not beyond that.¹⁹ He nevertheless also embodied the intellectual elite's need to confront the most dynamic aspects of European culture. In other words, Luzzatto defended Kabbalah from the charges its rationalist critics leveled at it, even as he at least partly accepted the criteria on which they based their attacks. In order to situate this aspect of his work, one must retrace the history of the criticisms Kabbalah received in Italy before the era of Luzzatto.

Covert Critiques of Kabbalah

In 1558, the year of the polemics surrounding the first printed edition of the *Zohar* and other important kabbalistic texts, hostility to Kabbalah on doctrinal grounds was confined to a brief, anonymous text. We deduce the

existence of this critical pamphlet from the responses which it provoked from its adversaries. Drawing on observations found in Eliyah Delmedigo's book, *Behinath ha-dath* (An Examination of Religion, composed in 1490 and still unedited at the time), the anonymous author of the anti-kabbalist pamphlet questions the antiquity of the *Zohar* and voices reservations about the doctrine of the *sefyroth*, which he considers potentially heretical. Additionally, he reasons that the search for concealed and secret meanings within the di-vine commandments may potentially have an adverse impact on healthy religious behavior, which should be based on the study of Talmud and on basic obedience to the divine laws.²⁰

In the following years, and particularly throughout the seventeenth century, Kabbalah was the cornerstone of the dominant culture of Italian Jews. It determined the theoretical orientation of the elite, spread through the dissemination of its ritual behaviors, and played an important role in shaping mentalities. Any opposition to Kabbalah manifested itself in resistance to a tendency that pervaded all aspects of Jewish life and affected the population at all levels. Significant yet sporadic, this resistance was censored by the rabbinic authorities and in some cases was not made public: it is in large part thanks to its censors and virulent attackers that we know about it today.

It is possible to reconstruct the main criticisms leveled at Kabbalah, particularly Lurianic Kabbalah, which associated the doctrine of Yitzḥaq Luria—as transmitted by his disciple Hayyim Vital Calabrese—to the doctrines of the *Zohar* and earlier kabbalists such as Naḥmanides. It is also possible to trace the intellectual model which the critics of Kabbalah proposed as an alternative.

The major accusation directed against the kabbalists concerned the fact that they considered the Kabbalah to be “the true wisdom”—the *hokhmah ha-emeth*—but had neither verified the historical authenticity of its teachings nor produced a theoretical justification of their truthfulness. Yehudah Ariyeh Modena (1571—1648) stringently raises both of these points in *Ary nohem* (A Lion Roars), which, significantly, remained unedited until 1840.²¹ For Modena, Kabbalah is neither a true tradition nor a true science. It is not a tradition because the great rabbis of the past—from the Talmudic era on-ward—never mention it. Additionally, it seems evident to him that the major kabbalistic texts—particularly those collected in the *Zohar*, which have an aura of holiness and are attributed to the master of the Mishnah, Shim'on bar Yoḥai—are in reality apocryphal writings which were edited many centuries

later. According to Modena, the kabbalists imitated ancient philosophers and manufactured their texts out of apocrypha in the style of Jewish writings. It was not easy to make such assertions, and Modena fully expected those who believed in the texts to rebut him stiffly: “And I know that I must fortify myself with shield and armor, in order to protect myself against their violent verbal arrows.”²²

For Modena, Kabbalah is not an authentic tradition, but neither is it a science. Shifting to a theoretical argument, he presents a detailed epistemological analysis grounded in a definition of science (*hokhmah*). The Venetian rabbi argues that in order to be considered a science, a discipline must insist on reaching the truth (understood as the coincidence of a mental representation with reality) in its particular field through rational argumentation. In this sense, physics and mathematics are clearly sciences, as they follow a line of reasoning in order to reach rapid and authoritative conclusions. Similarly, astronomy is a science, as are, in a certain sense, rational theology (as long as it adheres to the proper rules of demonstration) and logic (the instrument for grasping the truth).²³ Developing this line of argument, Modena cites Nahmanides, Meyr ibn Gabbay and Moshe Cordovero in order to show that the kabbalists not only refused to investigate questions pertaining to the science of truth through rational argumentation, or *sevara*, but actually denounce such investigations as irreverent. The only proofs they produce are based on authority: they quote other quotations, and write books referencing other books. As the kabbalists do not think it apposite to extricate themselves from this circle of self-justification, their discipline is not a science. It is precisely *sevara* which leads Yehudah Ariyeh Modena to castigate the esoteric doctrine and its supporters.²⁴

The criteria which Modena invokes in his critique of Kabbalah are analogous to those he made in a previous work in order to criticize Catholic theology;²⁵ there, his discussion of Catholicism focused both on the historical reality of Jesus’ ideas and on the rationality of Catholic doctrine. Modena’s evaluation of Catholicism was negative on both counts: one the one hand, the “historical Jesus” differed significantly from the Catholic Jesus, and on the other, Catholic theology was based on hypotheses that were unacceptable to reason. However, the Venetian rabbi’s critique of Kabbalah is even harsher. The saying “*tiqqun ha-regel la-na‘al*” (“to adapt the foot to the shoe”) applies to both doctrines: both forge a series of notions with no historical or theoretical precedent, and are constrained to distort the biblical text as they adapt it to them, giving it non-literal interpretations. However, whereas

Catholic theology leaves a certain amount of room for rational discussion, the only possible strategy for the kabbalists is unquestioning assent.

Modena's positive alternative to Kabbalah is implicit in his critique: a religion open to moderate rationalism, and in particular to the rational justification of fundamental beliefs such as the unity of God, the creation of the world, and providence. Considered as a whole, the Venetian rabbi's complete works define a "cultural project" which was soon destined for failure, at least as far as mainstream Jewish thought was concerned. Modena wanted Jews to know and appreciate the sciences, be versed in the Latin classics, and engage with Hebrew literature, but also to engage with the most modern productions of the Italian language and literature (he explicitly uses the term "modern").²⁶ He also thought they should be familiar with Christianity, without accepting or denigrating its dogmas. He probably wished for a Jewish religion more solidly based on the Bible than was the Judaism of his day, and trimmed of some of the exclusive practices and beliefs that impeded its diffusion.²⁷

Seventeenth-century kabbalists departed significantly from this model. They turned to the East—in particular to Safed—for the light of truth.²⁸ They generally did not bother to justify Luria's complex doctrines on divinity, and when they did they invoked the notion of the *ruah ha-qodesh*, the Holy Spirit (a degree of prophecy) that descended upon the Master of Galilee. Rhetorically, their writings took the form of a series of assertions, often opening with a magisterial injunction such as "Know," or "You must know that..."; from a systemic point of view, their teachings did not conform to the traditional categories of rational theology—which in Jewish thought developed from the tenth-century Sa'adiyah Gaon to the fifteenth-century Yosef Albo—but instead followed a peculiar course inspired by Yitzḥaq Luria's emanationism. When, as sometimes happened, exegetical logic did prevail, their ideas took the form of peculiar biblical commentaries. Moreover, theirs was a theoretically and culturally exclusive doctrine: they presented the Jews as repositories of the science of truth and protagonists for the restoration of the divine world, and were suspicious of, or even hostile toward, anything that was not Jewish or not expressed in Hebrew.²⁹

A few years after Modena, Ya'aqov Francés (1615-1667) of Mantua, who was probably the best Hebrew poet of his generation, launched another critique of Kabbalah. In a controversial poem,³⁰ Francés denounces Kabbalah, not on the grounds of its doctrine—which he held in high esteem—but because its dissemination is detrimental to what should constitute the canonical

knowledge of a learned Jew. Francés complains that the kabbalists of his age neglect the study of traditional Jewish texts—such as the Talmud—let alone philosophy and science, and thus aim to scale the peaks of divine wisdom without proper preparation. He considers silence to be the only authentic discourse on the divine, but instead:

Today, whoever does not speak of the
Creator Is not considered a creature.³¹ [...]

The Kabbalah is talked about in the marketplaces:
It is tossed about in everyone's heads.³²

In these lines, he evokes the complex and detailed account Kabbalah makes of the divine world, contradicting the notion of absolute transcendence proposed by classical Jewish philosophy, in particular that of Maimonides.³³

Commenting on the kabbalists' ignorance of science and pretensions to perfect knowledge of the celestial worlds, Francés asks: "How can a man who is ignorant of the laws of nature (*derekh ha teva*) and the creatures of the earth and sky ("he does not know the course of the raptor / that every eagle discerns"³⁴), how can he scan the face of the firmament with his speculations?"

Francés also denounces the kabbalists' methodology, which he considers fraudulent: characteristically introduced by the term "certainly" (*wadday*), the truths which they claim to utter are none other than the fruit of their imaginations (*badday*); the truth cannot grow in this arid soil.³⁵ While this denunciation echoes Modena's main criticism of the kabbalists, Francés also condemns them on moral grounds: he who practices Kabbalah is guilty, because

he searches for secrets, only because
they don't have to be proven.³⁶

Even if Francés targeted the inexpert kabbalists of his day rather than the doctrine of Kabbalah per se, the ideal program of studies which he proposes at the end of his poem nevertheless does not seem to leave much scope for Kabbalah.³⁷ The man the poet envisions will only come to know divine secrets after a slow and lengthy process (as instructed by philosophers, from Sa'adiyah to Maimonides). Avoiding great leaps forward "like the marten," he will "call the divine Torah his sister / and philosophy his friend."³⁸

Francés' poem, which was published in 1660 or 1661, was censored by the leaders of the Mantuan community, who forbade its reading and probably ordered its destruction. Francés wrote many other poems with violent under-tones against those he considered to be his persecutors, but they remained in manuscript form until the nineteenth century. It is possibly as a result of these events that Ya'aqov had to leave Mantua for Florence.³⁹

In 1704, Francés' text was reprinted by the rabbi of Ancona, Shimshon Morpurgo, in the appendix of a book he published anonymously, *'Etz ha-da'ath* (The Tree of Wisdom). This book was a commentary of *Behynath olam* (Examination of the World) by Yeda'yiah Bedersi, who had defended philosophical enquiry in a famous fourteenth-century polemic.⁴⁰ Needless to say, reprinting Francés' poem in such a context was not a neutral act. Morpurgo does not deny endorsing a moderate rationalism, in which scientific and philosophical research accompany, clarify, and support religion rather than being at odds with it. For Morpurgo, philosophy should not be condemned because a few philosophers deviated from the straight path of religion; in fact, the kabbalists too could lose their way, as Francés' poetic testimony pointed out. Morpurgo's decision to publish his book anonymously and print a controversial poem condemned by the rabbis point to his desire to pursue a concealed polemic against the hegemony of kabbalistic culture, while also suggesting that he may have feared the reactions this new book could provoke.⁴¹

Morpurgo's book was criticized by the kabbalist rabbi of Mantua, Avi'ad Sar Shalom Basilea (1680-1743) in a text entitled *Emunath hakhamym* (Belief of the Wise).⁴² Basilea did not launch a direct attack against the author of *'Etz ha-da'ath*; despite having identified him, he did not call him by name and maintained a respectful stance towards him, limiting himself to a few observations on the contents of the book. However, the Mantuan kabbalist adopted a much more virulent stance against Francés's poetry which Morpurgo had reprinted.

In a lengthy passage, Basilea declares Francés to be impure (*mezoham*) and devoid of any rabbinic qualifications.⁴³ Rejecting the notion that there is a link between adhering to Kabbalah and being ignorant of the Jewish sciences, he seeks to disprove this idea by listing the many contemporary Italian rabbis who were distinguished scholars in both Kabbalah and Talmud. As for the exact sciences, his own interests in mathematics, geometry, optics, and astronomy implicitly demonstrated that one could be both a kabbalist and a scientist. Basilea also responds to Francés' and Modena's criticisms of the

kabbalists' disregard for the logic of rational proof by appealing to the truthfulness of authentic tradition. In his view, the tradition of Kabbalah is even more faithful to the revealed sources than Talmud is; moreover, he proposes that this does not prevent it from being a true science, either in terms of its content, which is true, or its method: just as is the case with the human sciences one cannot study Kabbalah without respecting its particular order and progression (*ba-seder ha-rauy we-ha-nakhon*).⁴⁴ In essence, then, Kabbalah is a tradition which is true in content and scientific in method.⁴⁵

Basilea seems to have oscillated between a completely anti-philosophical stance and the acceptance of rational discussion:

I will enter into discussion [with the opponents of Kabbalah] in order to know the truth, according to the instructions of the intellect and of our great teachers [...] on the condition that the opponents of Kabbalah listen to me in order to understand, not in order to object, and that they accept the conclusions of this discussion according to the rules of philosophical debate.⁴⁶

Invoking his teacher, the great kabbalist Moshe Zacuto, Basilea asserts that philosophy is for *goyyim*, as its deductions can prove erroneous. Jews have no need for it, he argues, because they arrive at knowledge through tradition: “One learns the *hokhmah* [the true, received science] from a teacher, while one learns the *bynah* [deductive science] by oneself.”⁴⁷

The polemical tone adopted by Basilea in much of his book is itself clear evidence of infighting in the Jewish world. A close examination of the references Basilea makes to the rationalists of his time brings out these tensions: he speaks of contemporary Jews who not only deny the secrets of the Torah but lack respect for the Talmudic rabbis, presuming to “separate the wheat from the chaff” in their teachings.⁴⁸ Moreover, he writes, Christian authors are comparatively less radical in their rationalist critique of the Bible than these Jews,⁴⁹ as they appeal less to Jewish religious texts than to the profane writings of non-Jews,⁵⁰ and they pay more credit to these works than non-Jewish readers.⁵¹ According to him, the mere fact that a text has non-Jewish origins increases its prestige in their eyes. He notes that they teach the commentaries of the rationalist Avraham Ibn Ezra in schools, convincing their students of the falsity of certain traditional beliefs although they are manifestly true, for example the belief in the existence of demons.⁵² Basilea even admits having to expend more effort correcting the erroneous tendencies of

his coreligionists than entering into discussions with representatives of the Christian religion.⁵³ Indeed, quoting Pietro Galatino, he asserts that Christians reproach the Jews for not respecting their own laws.⁵⁴ Evidently, the medi-eval genre of the *disputatio* between different religions was in decline, and religious apologies were progressively taking over: aimed at skeptical un-believers and rationalists of all confessions, these rallied the proponents of different faiths to a common front.

In order to address the criticisms of his contemporaries, the Mantuan rabbi devised a strategy involving the introduction of elements pertaining to the human sciences into his account of Kabbalah: we will examine these elements in greater detail further along. This is the context in which Luzzatto should be situated: between loyalty to Kabbalah and adherence to a certain scientific model, which could evidently no longer be refuted solely on the basis of authority.

Often considered Italy's most esoterically inclined Italian community, Livorno was the site of additional indirect resistance to Kabbalah. Yosef Ergas, its most prestigious representative between the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-centuries, recounted in the first *teshuvah* (legal response) of his important collection, *Divrey Yosef*, that in 1710:

A certain person became agitated, and began to publicly defame the science of truth [i.e. Kabbalah], and those that study it, railing in particular against the holy Yitzḥaq Luria. Some people of no value, who thought of themselves as wise, but who were actually worthless, rallied around this person, and began to criticize the wise and devoted men who were better than they and their fathers.⁵⁵

Although the question at stake was relatively trivial (whether to omit two words from the prayers said during the Days of Penitence), Ergas' response gives us an insight into tensions that were not manifested more directly. It seems likely that his reference to people "who thought of themselves as wise" alludes to the advocates of a certain type of critical-rational culture: the same individuals that Basilea criticized.

Another case of resistance to Kabbalah, which was also censored by the authorities of the Jewish community, was recorded by a Christian source. In his famous *Bibliotheca Rabbinica* (1675), Giulio Bartolucci speaks of "a voluminous book against Kabbalah and the *sefiroth*," written by the Venetian

rabbi Mordehay Corcos. Objecting to this work, however, the rabbis from Corcos' city appealed to the public authorities in order to halt its publication and were apparently successful.⁵⁶

Against Obscurantism: The Strategy of Dialogue

The works of Yosef Ergas and Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto—the leading early eighteenth-century theoreticians of Kabbalah—should be read in light of these criticisms. Each of them chose to compose a dialogue between a kabbalist and a rationalist⁵⁷ in which the latter led the kabbalist to justify Kabbalah from a historical, and above all theoretical, perspective. Although these dialogues were not voluminous, their authors considered them fairly important. In both dialogues, the kabbalists are seen through the eyes of the rationalists and seem to be devout ignoramuses, whose ideas are obscure and confused, and who do not follow the ways of reason, instead relying solely on the principle of authority.

Shomer emunym (Guardian of Faith) is a dialogue by Yosef Ergas, published posthumously in Amsterdam in 1735 or 1736. According to the author, it constitutes a simply written introduction to Yitzḥaq Luria's Kabbalah, or, more precisely, an attempt to “correctly elucidate the writings of Ha'ARY [the acrostic of Ashkenazy Rabby Yitzḥaq, i.e. Luria].”⁵⁸ Ergas begins with a historical justification of Kabbalah, indirectly answering Leone Modena's criticisms, then proceeds to introduce the principal tenets of the doctrine, giving them a philosophical explanation and, in some cases, justification: this is evidently what Ergas meant by “elucidating” Lurianic Kabbalah. In doing so, he seeks to circumvent two problems of Jewish religious studies: a decreasing interest in the “science of the truth,” and—for those who still believe in and practice it—an engagement with the Lurianic doctrine that is excessively cursory and precludes the study of previous kabbalistic texts.⁵⁹

According to Shealti'el—who is the rationalist interrogator in Ergas's dialogue and represents those who approach Judaism literally, ignoring its esoteric dimension—any discussion with the kabbalists is superfluous, because:

All of their discourses are founded on their faith in their teachers [...], and one cannot refute them with intellect (*sekhel*), or reason (*sevara*), or true opinion, because they would not listen: the arguments would not enter into their ears. I therefore do not see the usefulness of talking with them.

The kabbalist Yehoyada‘ (whose name translates to “God knows”) concedes that Kabbalah is founded on traditional teachings, but reminds his interlocutor that it leaves space for discussion:

We do not refrain from researching, investigating, and questioning the discourses of the kabbalists and the foundations on which their premises rest. On the contrary, it is our habit to discuss (*lefalpel*) their meanings, just as we discuss the *halakhah*, i.e. legal matters.⁶⁰

The “rationalist” agrees to converse, even if there is scant space for free discussion: the legal *pilpul* operates within precise limits, which are set before each debate.

Granted the last word, the kabbalist ends by warning against an *a priori* refusal of kabbalistic ideas in the absence of counter-arguments, if research proves that they are close to the literal sense of the rabbinic statements in Talmud. In other words, although not entirely justified (let alone founded) on rational grounds, the doctrine the kabbalist proposes at least does not run contrary to reason. Furthermore, he implicitly reverses Modena’s argument against Kabbalah’s distorted, non-literal interpretation of texts (“the adaptation of the foot to the shoe”) by defending kabbalistic exegesis for being closest to the literal sense—at least regarding the teachings of the Talmudic masters, if not the Bible. Throughout the successive arguments he goes on to develop, Ergas maintains that Talmudic discussions cannot really be understood without reference to Kabbalah.⁶¹

Shomer emunym bears the mark of rationalism, despite a few dogmatic and authoritarian statements, such as when it asserts that anyone who knowingly denies the theory of the *sefyroth* is a heretic, or that one must believe the rabbis even if one does not fully understand them.⁶² Although the kabbalist’s interlocutor objects that Kabbalah contains several abstruse (*zarym*) and irrational elements which are not acceptable (*mityashevym*)⁶³ to a learned person (*hakham*), the kabbalist explains that these difficulties derive from a methodologically flawed approach to its study. He argues that, like any other human science, Kabbalah has a particular order (*seder rauy we-nakhon*): one must respect this order in order to understand the works of the kabbalists and grasp their correct meaning (*kawwanah*).⁶⁴ The notion—which Basilea also formulates—that Kabbalah is a discipline with its own particular order places it on a par with the sciences, at least from a methodological point of

view. However, the idea that the doctrine has to be explained in order to become intelligible is perhaps even more important. From Menahem Azariyah to Moshe Zacuto, the major seventeenth-century kabbalists set forth the doctrine of Kabbalah without resorting to this second, explicative level, instead following the descriptive, exegetical rhetoric of Yitzḥaq Luria. In contrast, Ergas—and with him Luzzatto—felt compelled to clarify Kabbalah, which led them to articulate a series of ideas drawn from the sphere of reason. Hoping, as they explained, that this would bring Jewish scholars back to Kabbalah, they also recognized that founding a doctrine on tradition, no matter how prestigious, was no longer enough in their day and age. Naturally, we must ask if this decision was born of genuine conviction, or if it was merely a defensive strategy. In other words, was their determination to resort to rational explanation the result of an *a posteriori* concession to making Kabbalah comprehensible for the uninitiated, or did these important eighteenth-century thinkers believe that kabbalistic notions should be based on intellectual-philosophical constructions (although these in fact constituted two separate categories for Ergas and Luzzatto, as we will see)?

Whatever the case may be, what is clear is that one had to be something of a rationalist theologian in order to be a kabbalist in the eighteenth century. In other words, the criticisms Modena and Francés leveled at the kabbalists did not hold completely. As Ergas' anti-kabbalist interlocutor, Shealti'el, declares (touching on the fundamental question of the existence of the *sefiroth*):

I must speak the truth: I never thought that the kabbalists analyzed this subtle material in order to explain it or make it acceptably (*le-ha-'amydam w-le-yashevam*) elegant or rational (*be-tuv ta'am u-sevara*). I effectively acknowledge that everything you say would be acceptable for any thinking person (*nekhohym la-mevyn*), and gives sufficient grounds for declaring rationally necessary your tradition of the existence of the *sefiroth* and the superior worlds.⁶⁵

In a dialogue between a philosopher and a kabbalist which later editors entitled *Hoqer w-mequbbal* (A Philosopher and a Kabbalist),⁶⁶ Luzzatto also felt compelled to enter the realm of reason in order to discuss Kabbalah.⁶⁷

In a dense introduction to his dialogue, Luzzatto denounces the decadent state of true knowledge, the prophetic knowledge which was revealed and transmitted to Israel alone, and which a long exile has overshadowed.

Whereas non-Jews, who arrived at their sciences rationally, were not subjected to this profound crisis, Jews now found themselves in possession of limited knowledge, and were reduced to simple, literal statements about the Scriptures. This lost prophetic knowledge of the intimate meaning of the Torah, for Luzzatto, is intellectual: a position which brings him very close to Maimonides. The soul, which Luzzatto identifies with the intellect (*sekhel*), was created in order to grasp (*le-haskil*) the light of divinity. Indeed, the content of Luzzatto's introduction is rather similar to, and possibly inspired by, Maimonides' well-known introduction to the *Mishneh Torah*.⁶⁸ Even so, for Luzzatto this understanding will come from kabbalistic knowledge, which is exclusively the prerogative of Israel.⁶⁹ Although it is true that the teachings of Luria and his disciples reintroduced prophecy after the long "sleep of exile," their doctrine has in fact become obscure and difficult, and requires much additional study; in contrast, as we will see, clarity is an important part of Luzzatto's own works.⁷⁰

Luzzatto goes on to say that it is hardly surprising if the scholars of his time consider the "true science" to be constituted of empty formulas, or even if they judge these formulas clumsy and unacceptable, and doubt if the *Zohar* may be attributed to the great teacher Shim'on bar Yoḥay. Whereas scholars are in search of clear (*meyusheveth*) and in-depth knowledge, according to Luzzatto, in its current state, Kabbalah presents itself to them as an obscure book (*sefer ḥatum*), where one definition follows upon the other—the *se-fyroth* and the *partzufym*, the various worlds and their dynamics—forming a series of statements unsupported by the merest attempt at intelligibility (*zikhron shel ghirsa, akh belo' sevara*).⁷¹

The task Luzzatto assigns himself, then, is to recover the lost meaning of the true knowledge: he seeks to clarify the obscure notions—that is, the notions that have become obscure—of the true science, Kabbalah. In order to accomplish this and convince those endowed with a clear intellect that Kabbalah not only is not a nonsensical doctrine, but is the truest and most complete of the sciences, Luzzatto deems it necessary to couch this science in the language of rational philosophy, or, to be more precise, rational theology.

The *ḥoqer*—the philosopher interlocutor in Luzzatto's dialogue—begins by expressing his reservations. Even though persons of unquestionable piety (*ḥasydym*) follow Kabbalah, their arguments appear abstruse (*zarym*), and in some instances absolutely vain and empty (*devarym shel mah bekhakh*), as in the case of the discourse on the *sefyroth*. This leads him to request

elucidations which, if they cannot reach the level of logical necessity, will at least not be at odds with straightforward reasoning (*ha-sekheh ha-yashar*).

Naturally, the philosopher is rapidly won over by the kabbalist's disquisitions, and especially by his style of argumentation, which is worthy of true science in its rigor and clarity. Thanks to the explanations of the kabbalist—Luzzatto's alter-ego—nonsense metamorphoses into knowledge of the highest order. The text emphasizes the purposefully "historical" character of Luzzatto's elucidations, demonstrating his ambition to see Kabbalah recover its true status in his own times. The rationalist concludes:

I could not stand the things I heard about this knowledge. I judged them foolish and banal, and could not find anything in them that could be called science. Yet, in this generation, I affirm that we are confronted with an extraordinary science, and it is good that every intelligent person should abandon all the other intellectual pursuits in the world in order to follow this great and holy science. In comparison, all other intellectual pursuits have no value.⁷²

The idea of engaging in a rational discussion with Kabbalah's detractors is also present in Basilea's text. Significantly, the Mantuan kabbalist calls for a public debate on the crucial subject of the antiquity of the *Zohar* and of Kabbalah in general, in which reason and the conclusions of indisputably authoritative teachers will be the only decisive criteria. In fact, he warns his (Jewish) rationalist opponents against the prejudices they might show by rejecting evidence merely in order to deny prestige to the ancient traditions of their own culture.⁷³ Evidently, in the early eighteenth century, the public space where one debated one's opinions was just as much of a concrete reality as was the attraction that many Jews felt for rationalist critique.

Although Basilea did not write a dialogue between a kabbalist and a rationalist, his *Emunath hakhamym* makes an interesting reference to debates that actually took place.⁷⁴ In this book, the Mantuan rabbi mentions having assiduously studied philosophical and scientific texts in his youth before going on to read Kabbalah—as developed by Mosheh Cordovero—which he found in no way at odds with rational inquiry: "and I showed [these ideas] to several philosophers of our people, believers who asked me many questions on difficult topics touching on the science of the secrets of the Torah." He then repeated this experiment at the age of forty-four, reading Lurianic

Kabbalah with Shemuel Norzi. Basilea mentions proving the truth of the notion of *tzimtzum*—the contraction of the Divinity—to various Jewish philosophers solely on the basis of philosophical proofs, before publicly repeating his demonstration and only making reference to topics pertaining to the natural sciences.

Basilea thus invites his reader into a discussion guided by a single imperative: rationality, on the grounds that “the truth will emerge only through debate, and we will both profit.” Nevertheless, the authority of the Torah and the Talmudic masters also carry weight as proof, because their truths are as evident as tangible experience.⁷⁵

Rational Reductions of Kabbalah

In their different ways, two Italian kabbalist-philosophers who lived four centuries apart, Yoḥanan Alemanno (1434–post-1504) and Eliyahu Benamozegh (1823–1900), observed similarities between certain kabbalistic notions and some aspects of the philosophical thought of their own time. Alemanno, who lived in the Florence of Lorenzo de’ Medici and Pico della Mirandola, identifies the *sefiroth* with “spiritual numbers” of Pythagorean-Platonic origin.⁷⁶ Contemporary with Positivism and Post-Hegelian Idealism, Benamozegh devotes himself to finding equivalents for various kabbalistic concepts in the terminology used in those schools of philosophical thought.⁷⁷ Rather than merely assessing the relative merits of Jewish and non-Jewish doctrines, both Alemanno and Benamozegh focus on understanding and elucidating their own conceptual tradition in light of the intellectual coordinates of the culture surrounding them.

It is difficult to ascertain whether eighteenth-century Italian kabbalists shared the same motivations. Certainly they explicitly regarded Kabbalah as the true doctrine; for them, it was as superior to philosophy as divine revelation was to human thought. However, this did not imply a coherently elaborated opposition between Kabbalah and philosophy. Their audience was essentially, or exclusively, Jewish. They aimed their partially philosophical readings at those educated “modern” Jews who had grown increasingly wary of the “mythical” language and dogmatic tone of Lurianic Kabbalah and were distancing themselves from it, lured away by post-Cartesian rationalism.

As the kabbalist Avi’ad Sar Shalom Basilea is more of a scientist than a theologian, his calling does not lead him to elaborate a logical-rational

reduction of Kabbalah. Instead, he seeks scientific and empirical confirmations for various kabbalistic notions, such as the *gilgul* (the transmigration of souls), the effectual value of the pronunciation of the names of God,⁷⁸ and the existence of spirits. He suggests there is a striking harmony between rabbinical affirmations and the conclusions of modern science: he maintains that the Talmudic rabbis—who are infinitely wiser than his contemporaries—already declared that the Earth was spherical in form,⁷⁹ and that their astronomical observations anticipated those of contemporary scientists, as well as his own.⁸⁰ Furthermore, the configuration of the highest *sefiroth* is confirmed by the science of anatomy, which has identified the tripartite structure of the brain.⁸¹

The theoretical framework of Basilea's magnum opus, *Emunath hakhamym*, is especially interesting, because it attempts to justify compulsory belief in the affirmations of the masters of the Jewish tradition, the Talmudists and the kabbalists. According to Basilea, both philosophy and science are founded solely on hypotheses, which are neither empirically certain nor logically necessary. If these hypotheses change, so do the entire constructions they support. Although Aristotelian physics and metaphysics had long constituted the peak of human knowledge for philosophers—including many Jewish thinkers, especially Maimonides—they had recently been displaced by Cartesianism. Notions which for centuries had been accepted as true, and which generations of philosophers had toiled over—*prima materia*, form and matter, substance and accident, the active intellect and separated intellects, etc.—had been discarded as though suddenly irrelevant. Moreover, if past theories could prove to have been vain, it was clear that this could eventually happen to current theories. It was a small step that separated this realization from the belief the only true certainty lay in tradition (Talmudic-kabbalistic).⁸² Basilea's expertise in contemporary science is thus associated with an extreme traditionalism, founded on the notion of the weakness of the human intellect, which has produced dreams and madness and mistaken them for the truth. The Mantuan rabbi condemns medieval philosophy for not being Jewish enough, and turns instead to the *emunath hakhamym* (faith in the masters of the tradition), in the belief that there is no other solid ground to stand on in that period of epistemological transition. The Jewish tradition is just as true as sensitive perception, even though our inability to find a true explanation means that we must sometimes content ourselves with mere awareness, as in the case of magnetism and the tides.⁸³

Yosef Ergas admits that there are some points of contact between philosophy and Kabbalah, particularly in ideas of unity, incorporeity, and the immutability of God, although, quoting the fourteenth-century Menahem Recanati, he specifies that the only philosophy he takes into account predates Aristotle—which we may easily infer means Pythagoras and Plato.⁸⁴ In effect, his *Shomer emunym* essentially attempts to explain the major notions of Lurianic Kabbalah according to standard philosophical categories. Although Ergas considers Pythagoras and Plato to be close to Kabbalah, he nevertheless constantly (although obviously only implicitly) evokes neo-Platonic ideas, especially in his accounts of the emanations which exist between the *eyn sof* and the *sefyroth*; moreover, his account of the cosmological system of the spheres⁸⁵—which is tied to the theory of the four physical elements⁸⁶—has Aristotelian roots, as do the principle of causality and the idea of rational necessity. In other words, Ergas’s conceptual frame of reference is entirely medieval.

Ergas feels obliged to “explain” Lurianic Kabbalah in order to save it from accusations of irrationality,⁸⁷ but attempts this rescue operation by turning to categories that were already considered irrelevant by intellectuals who kept abreast of contemporary epistemological shifts. This included Jewish scholars, even religious ones such as Basilea.

Nevertheless, Ergas’ explanations and clarifications are noteworthy. He considers the existence of the *sefyroth*—which is central to kabbalistic doctrine—to be a logical necessity in order to explain the transition from unity to multiplicity, and from perfection to imperfection; that is, from God to the world (or worlds). Implicitly alluding to Platonic ideas, Ergas describes the *sefyroth* (divine emanations) as the “model” and the “ideal type” (*defus*) of being.⁸⁸

This relationship may also be considered from the perspective of the relationship between living beings and the divinity. Intermediate entities existing between the created worlds (the material one included) and the absolutely transcendent *eyn sof*, the *sefyroth* justify and enable the existence of commandment, prayer, sacrifice, and the Torah itself, all of which reside in the world of multiplicity but are directed toward the unreachable eminence of God. In effect, humans cannot address themselves directly to God, who lies beyond the reach of representation, and therefore their prayers state what they are capable of knowing: his attributes, the actions of which correspond to the *sefyroth*, another important philosophical “reduction.” Man might, for

example, evoke the divine attribute (which is to say, the *sefyrah*) of greatness, while always keeping in mind (this is *kawwanah*, or intention) his aspiration to elevate himself to the *eyn sof*. In other words, it is through the *sefyroth* that humans attempt to reach the unknowable and ineffable when they pray, keep the commandments, perform sacrifices, study the Torah, and engage in all acts of religious value.⁸⁹ There can be no relationship between humankind and God without the *sefyroth*, given the absolute transcendence of the divine:

For us, the recipients of the Torah, philosophical notions [of the unity, incorporeity and immutability of God] are not sufficient. In order to comprehend the *Torah* and its commandments we must know the secrets of existence and of the production of intermediate causes—i.e. the *sefyroth*—by the *eyn sof*, blessed be His name. Most elements of the divine cult depend on the knowledge of their existence, the order of their connections, and their unification through the commandments of the Torah. No one can serve God perfectly without knowing the characteristics of this science.⁹⁰

Ergas insists on this necessity, presenting it as though it logically confirms the existence of the *sefyroth*. However, he specifies that this is only an *a posteriori* justification demonstrating the non-irreconcilability of Kabbalah and Reason, because the existence of the *sefyroth* is a fact, decided by God, and communicated to the Jews through the prophets: “kabbalistic notions have no need of proof.”⁹¹

The imaginative and mysterious definitions proposed by Yitzḥaq Luria and his disciple, Hayyim Vital, thus become clear and intellectually satisfying (*devarym nekhoḥym la-mevyn*), even though they are the product of revelations rather than human reasoning.⁹² Ergas describes the kabbalistic notion of *ziwwug* (union) as the union between an emanating (*mashpia*’) and an emanated body (*mushpa*’), and defines *‘ibbur* (pregnancy) as the passage from a thin and invisible existence to a thick and visible one.⁹³ He gives an intellectual and neo-Platonic account of the *hithlabbeshuth* (garment), explaining it according to a system wherein intermediate entities know and contemplate each other:

The garment and the enfolding (*hithkaleluth*) of one *sefyrah* by another have the meaning (*‘inyiano*) of knowledge; an entity knows another entity, and enfolds and clothes it with its comprehension.⁹⁴

In more complex passages, Ergas deploys the notions of *mashal* (allegory) and *sod* (esoteric interpretation, which seems to be equivalent with *mashal*)⁹⁵ in order to explain the more material and anthropomorphic images of Lurianic Kabbalah: *shi'ur qomah* (measurement of the dimensions of the world of the *sefiroth*), and *tzimtzum* (contraction of the divine to permit the creation of the worlds). In order to understand *shi'ur qomah*, it is necessary to think of an intermediate entity, or *sefyrāh*, being enfolded by another, just as the body clothes the soul. The compound formed by these two divine entities, in which each directs a lower one according to precise and measurable relations, may be represented by the image of man, his dimensions being the object of measurement.

The notion of *tzimtzum* being more difficult to explain, Ergas is compelled to refer at length to Moshe Cordovero's⁹⁶ and Menahem 'Azariyah Fano's differences of opinion on the meaning of the divine will—*ratzon* (a notion which is central to Luzzatto's elaboration)—in order to conclude that *tzimtzum* does refer to the Divinity so much as to divine energy. Ergas describes *tzimtzum* as the image (*mashal*) of an act which is hard to grasp: God reducing his own infinite energy in order to create space for the creation of the worlds. Aware of having provided a personal explanation, Ergas develops a purely logical reflection, based on the categories of the finite and the infinite.⁹⁷

The “theological” dimension of Ergas' work is clearer still in two other important stances he adopts. The first is his enunciation of the principles of faith as they appear in kabbalistic writings (particularly in the *Zohar*), although he formulates them with a clarity that leaves no room for doubt, in order to respond to his rationalist interlocutor. The second is a description of the various types of divine providence (*hashgahah*). In both cases, Kabbalah becomes theology, because Ergas invokes the particular terminology and problems of this discipline.

We shall limit ourselves to listing Ergas' principles of faith (*'iqarey ha-emunah*), although it is worth noting at the outset that this kind of treatment had fallen out of favor two centuries earlier, after Yitzḥaq Abrabanel had modified the principles set down by Maimonides, Ḥasday Crescas, and Yosef Albo.⁹⁸ Ergas' *'Iqqarym*—which have not yet been studied by specialists of Jewish dogma⁹⁹—are important both because they are founded exclusively on kabbalistic sources and because they demonstrate that in the eighteenth century, even a kabbalist felt the need to proceed systematically. As we shall see, Luzzatto will go on to develop a similarly systematic stance and declare

it one of the fundamental requisites of all knowledge, and in particular of the supreme knowledge, Kabbalah. According to Ergas, there are six kabba-listic-theological dogmas which all the Masters of Israel have received, and which carry an obligation for all the faithful: “whoever accepts the celestial yoke must believe in them [the principles]; he who rejects them has no share in the God of Israel and in His Torah.”¹⁰⁰

These principles are as follows: 1) God fills the world, there is no place devoid of his power; 2) God supports the world, attends to it, and directs it; 3) God is alone in his world; 4) God does not receive influence or benefit from any other being; 5) He is not a body, nor energy in a body, and does not mix with nor associate with any body; 6) He is not knowable; the only thing we know about him is that he exists, and that his existence is necessary.¹⁰¹

The other section of Ergas’ work worth mentioning here is a passage on providence¹⁰² which responds to the same classificatory imperative as his profession of the dogmas, and is not founded on theoretical kabbalistic sources. In the first part of a series of ten affirmations, Ergas analyzes the general or individual manifestations of divine providence on various earthly beings based on his own theological deductions. In the second part, he explores the causes of suffering and premature death with reference to kabbalistic beliefs, such as the reincarnation (*gilgul*), the defense against demoniac accusers (*mekatregym*), and the evil eye (*‘ayin ha-ra’*).

Ergas’ theses on providence were criticized by several important Hassidic masters for being too “philosophical,” even though they did on the whole commend *Shomer emunym*.¹⁰³ Although he did not acknowledge it, Ergas based his ideas on Maimonides,¹⁰⁴ who in turn referred back to Aristotle, in order to argue that whereas providence applies to humans on an individual basis, its impact on minerals, plants, and animals is only general—in other words, collective, common to an entire species. He links whatever happens individually to these lower beings to chance, an idea which is at odds with the principle that every event, from the greatest to the most infinitesimal, from “the horn of the unicorn to the eggs of lice,” is dependent on the direct will of God.

Whereas in the first part of his analysis of providence Ergas’ arguments could be considered too rationalist-Maimonidean for a religious thinker, in the second part the reader is reminded that Kabbalah contains practices and beliefs that have little to do with rational theology. Ergas clearly notes that philosophy and Kabbalah diverge on questions relating to the belief in the efficacy of amulets, the performative power of pronouncing the names of

the divine, demonology, the nature of the soul, and the punishments inflicted upon it. There is a limit to how much Kabbalah may be rationalized, and its practices overstep this limit.

Although something of a pre-Enlightenment wind, as the writings of Yosef Attias testify,¹⁰⁵ blew on the Jewish community of Leghorn, where Ergas resided, it also later hailed kabbalists such as Ḥayyim Yosef David Azulay (Jerusalem 1724—Leghorn 1806), an immensely erudite man with partially “modern” tendencies who nevertheless also supported himself by writing amulets.¹⁰⁶

In Padua, with its prestigious university, the young Moses Ḥayyim Luzzatto displayed a propensity for rationality from his first writings, while also receiving the celestial revelations of a *maggid*. Similarly, although the passion for and competence in the sciences of Avi‘ad Sar Shalom Basilea of Mantua is well-established,¹⁰⁷ the following passage from his *Emunath hakhamym* provides a fairly balanced perspective on the whole spectrum of ideas and beliefs held by eighteenth-century Italian kabbalists:

A great philosopher of our people, who lived in an earlier age than ours, though not too long ago, completely rejected the existence of demons. A house was shown to him in Venice, in which the noises of spirits were heard at night, in particular from a window that faced a narrow alley, as is common in that city. The demon would knock at night, and when the house was opened there was no one to be found inside, nor could there have been anyone inside. [...] Yet [that philosopher] asserted: “I see all this, and nevertheless, I do not believe it.”¹⁰⁸

Like Ergas, Luzzatto proposes a reduction of Kabbalah grounded in rational theology, starting from *Hoqer w-meqqubal*, a dialogue illustrating several fundamental principles of Kabbalah with exemplary clarity. Indeed, clarity is what Luzzatto seeks to achieve in this and other works which could be described as attempting to divulge Kabbalah. Luzzatto feels that the written transmission of meaning imposes limits on clarity, because the transmission will be incomplete if the reader does not strive to understand the author’s intentions. Yet he believes that it is just as impossible to find explanations that will be clear and satisfying for every reader as it is to find spectacles suitable for every eye.¹⁰⁹

Although Luzzatto touches on many topics in his dialogue, we will focus on his definition of Kabbalah and its field of application, as it is obviously central to the kabbalist's conversation with his rationalist interlocutor, who thinks according to different categories. Luzzatto writes that the object of that doctrine cannot be God, who lies beyond any possible thought or discussion. Instead, what is at stake is the way God directs the world. Kabbalah is nothing other than

the explanation of the procedure of He whose name is blessed, the order of the rules of direction (*hanhagah*) through which the Holy One, blessed is He, directs and articulates all the events occurring in His world with great wisdom.¹¹⁰

As for the *sefyroth*, they make the divine will tangible, and he creates and directs the world through them: the world depends entirely on these entities.¹¹¹ Luzzatto grounds the fields of application of Kabbalah in categories reminiscent of traditional philosophical classifications: God, humankind, soul, world. The parallel between these systems of classification nevertheless stops there, as they differ radically in their content. The topic of God, as developed in Kabbalah, focuses on—and is limited to—knowledge of the diffusion (*hithpashetuth*) of his supreme light, the only thing that we may know of him. As for humankind, it is not conceived on its own terms but relative to the bonds which it has with the divine worlds and can act on: the human body is considered to represent these worlds in operation, while the soul is conceived of in relation to the divine service it performs, conditioning worldly events until the final redemption. This includes the theory of the reincarnation of souls (*gilgul*). Finally, the world is not studied according to philosophical or scientific methods, which are not only superficial but erroneous; instead, under the influence (*hashpa'ah*) of the *sefyroth*, an esoteric reading of the world effectively leads to knowledge of the functioning of the worlds and the *sefyroth* themselves, in parallel with events in the inferior world.¹¹²

None of this is proven rationally. Instead, it is revealed by God. Nevertheless, “the intellect may experience pleasure and may be enriched in its natural need to know and understand.”¹¹³ All the explanations given by the kabbalist conform to rational imperatives, even though they are not rational in origin: Kabbalah is not portrayed as a doctrine blindly adopted by simple intellects incapable of reflection, but as true *hokhmah*, that is to say a

praiseworthy and coherent knowledge which has the merit of explaining the totality of the created world in both its being and its becoming.

Throughout his works, Luzzatto praises straight reason (*sekhel yashar*), which is one of the criteria for evaluation in Kabbalah.¹¹⁴ On close examination, the Paduan kabbalist is reminiscent of medieval Jewish philosophers: like the great Jewish rationalist Sa'adiyah Gaon,¹¹⁵ he considers knowledge and understanding to be religious obligations—*mizwoth*. Nevertheless, for Luzzatto, this commandment does not imply the rational comprehension of the Torah, but concerns the precise knowledge of the entire system of the divine guidance of the world.¹¹⁶ Luzzatto writes that humans were created for the purpose of knowledge, and more precisely, “the knowledge [*hassagah*] of the glory of the Creator [...] for which they were given cognizance and abundant knowledge.”¹¹⁷ This closely echoes Maimonides: “true praise of God is the comprehension [*hassagah*] of His greatness [...] and only human-kind praises him with words that indicate that which he has understood with his intellect.”¹¹⁸

The true, life-giving light comes from cognizance and knowledge, writes Luzzatto;¹¹⁹ this is not the light born of the act of comprehension in itself, but the divine light that descends into the world as a consequence of human understanding. Luzzatto's brand of intellectualism fits within a kabbalistic context, wherein each human action corresponds to a divine action (and vice versa); again, this evokes medieval philosophers, including Maimonides, for whom the act of comprehension unites the passive intellect with the active—divine—intellect.¹²⁰

For Luzzatto, human history is a history of intellectual decadence. Whereas the ancients were closer to true intellectual knowledge, more recent generations have become distracted from their true purpose, and pursue their activities while being immersed in materialism.¹²¹ Redemption (*tiqqun*) will therefore be a return to full knowledge. Once the unity of God is revealed, hu-mankind will be able “to bask in the splendor of His holiness, and completely and permanently understand deeper things than before, without limits.”¹²²

A Theology That Implies Kabbalah

The rational reduction of Kabbalah is particularly in evidence in Luzzatto's other dialogue, *Da'ath tevunoth*, which may be translated as “Knowledge of Clear Things” or “Knowledge of Comprehensible Things.”¹²³

This dialogue does not pit a rationalist against a kabbalist. Instead, its interlocutors are the soul and the intellect: it dramatizes the soul turning to the intellect in order to understand principles of faith which it believes in, but is unable to justify rationally—providence, reward, the Messiah, and the resurrection of the dead. The soul's position is clear: it requests *havanah* (comprehension), *yedi'ah* (knowledge), and *sevara* (rational thought) for principles in which it has a simple faith.

Throughout this book, Luzzatto behaves like a rational theologian and refers to traditional theological categories. The questions he addresses are: the origin of evil, and consequently original sin and free will; the necessary existence of God and the contingency of beings; God's attributes; humankind as final cause of creation; and, finally, redemption. However, the content of this theology is more or less obviously supported by kabbalistic notions, and this certainly bestows a certain originality on Luzzatto's rational construction. In other words, *Da'ath tevunoth* is not, like Ergas' *Shomer emunym*, an attempt at reading Kabbalah in light of philosophical categories. Instead, it is a theological treatise constructed according to a rational model, which implies Kabbalah without alluding to it explicitly.¹²⁴ Luzzatto's only kabbalistic references are to sections of the *Zohar*, which he conveniently calls *midrash*.¹²⁵ Even a reader completely unfamiliar with kabbalistic notions would be perfectly capable of understanding the dialogue.

It certainly seems possible to think this was part of a "strategy": although he did not dissimulate his kabbalistic activities during that difficult period, the Paduan author nevertheless tended to emphasize the absolutely orthodox character of his thought, couching it in the language of traditional theology without recourse to Kabbalah. Yet, a few months after completing *Da'ath tevunoth*, Luzzatto wrote *Kelalym rishonym* (First Principles): although more or less parallel in content to *Da'ath tevunoth*, this series of propositions resorts to the terminology of Lurianic Kabbalah.¹²⁶ One might therefore suggest that the philosophical-theological tendency of Luzzatto's kabbalistic thought allowed him to move seamlessly between different disciplinary languages. Indeed, one might even ask whether the philosophical-theological character of Luzzatto's thought in fact shaped his understanding of kabbalistic categories from the outset, rather than intervening *a posteriori* in the form of explanation or comment. In other words, did the categories of rational theology frame his conceptual grasp of the Lurianic Kabbalah?

In *Da'ath tevunoth*, Luzzatto understands the originally kabbalistic notion of *tiqqun* (repair) in terms of the traditional category of redemption, which is absolutely central to his thought. Indeed, one might equate *tiqqun* with the *geulah* (redemption) of which the prophets and the Talmudic masters speak: it is the progressive and inevitable revelation of the unity of God, which will dispel ideas of merit or guilt and therefore free will. It corresponds to a time when there will no longer be space for guilt, and good will replace evil. In this definitive phase of *tiqqun* the divine light (*he'arath panym*) will reveal His concealed face (*hester panym*), leading to perfection. The absence of unity, the alternation of good and evil, and the material shadow prevail during the phases that come before this culmination.

Luzzatto's kabbalistic influences are most evident in his account of these phases. The divine decision to make visible the various forces presiding over the operation of the world is a case in point. As the attributes (*middoth*)—analogous to the *sefiroth*, which are significantly not mentioned—of Judgment and Kindness take turns directing the world, they produce light and darkness in varying proportions, more or less disclosing and concealing the divinity. This is illustrated and made visible in man through the soul and the body: whereas the soul is the image (*tziyur*) of the law, or the direction (*hanhagah*) of disclosure, the body represents concealment. In other words, the soul is one, like the unified perfection that will manifest itself through the total disclosure of divine unity, but the body is constituted of various parts, because it represents the world in the intermediate stage of reward and punishment, when God is concealed, not wanting to make manifest his perfection. In this phase, just as His ways of directing are multiple, so too he has wanted the created body to have many parts and various members, in order that it may truly correspond (*maqbylym*) to the laws that govern the world. This, according to Luzzatto, is the true sense of the verse, “Let us make Man in Our image after Our likeness.”¹²⁷ Similarly, the individual parts of the human body correspond to different aspects of divine direction: thus, the right and left sides of the body are, respectively, images of severe and benevolent governance.

Luzzatto's approach to the same questions is radically different in his treatise *Kelalym rishonym*. Written after *Da'ath tevunoth*, this brief text engages with the same topics—creation, the existence of evil, the overcoming of evil—but in kabbalistic terms. In keeping with the program he set himself at the beginning of his dialogue *Hoqer w-mequbbal* (Philosopher and Kabbalist), the Paduan kabbalist strove to elucidate the notions of Kabbalah,

in particular Lurianic Kabbalah.¹²⁸ Nevertheless, he cannot entirely help resorting to technical jargon, which only readers at least partly familiar with the doctrine can understand. For example, Luzzatto compares the mixture of good and evil typical of the phase that comes before *tiqqun*—or redemption—to the relationship of the *reshymu* (the remainder of the divine light in the world) and the *qaw* (the ray of divine light that crosses the created worlds). Whereas the former is synonymous with exteriority (*hitzoniyuth*), the latter evokes interiority (*penimiyuth*): in other words, the two together conjure the concealment and disclosure of the divine face. These ideas pre-suppose the fundamental notion of *shevyrath ha-kelym* (rupture of the receptacles or instruments), which caused the divine light formerly contained within the receptacles to instead coalesce with those receptacles. Together these two dimensions—good and evil, spirituality and materiality—constitute the *hanhagah*: that is, the law regulating the combination and succession of good and evil as the worlds operate. The image of the *hanhagah* in its fullness is primordial man (*adam qadmon*), and the individual events taking place in the various worlds are the branches (*'anafym*) of this primordial man. At the end of the process of repair and redemption, illumination will overwhelm the shadow of matter, disseminating knowledge throughout the community of Israel, the ray (*qaw*) will reabsorb the remainder of the light (*reshymu*), and the operation of the world will be characterized by unity.¹²⁹

This brief treatise becomes yet more complicated when Luzzatto turns to more specific notions, in particular the different parts of primordial man, the roots and the individualization—i.e. the coming into existence—of events in the various worlds, and the split between inferior and superior *sefyroth* in the four worlds of the divinity. His treatment of these notions makes it clear that *Kelalym rishonym* was intended for a very different audience than *Da'ath tevunoth*.

Kelalym rishonym also offers some interesting new insights into another question, already evoked in *Da'ath tevunoth*: how the human image makes the operation of the worlds visible. Instead of merely presenting that idea, Luzzatto now contextualizes it within the dynamics of the *sefyroth*. In other words, he now explains where—and to a certain extent how—the visualization of the divine laws governing all the worlds and their concrete application in history (*hanhagah*) is possible. At the same time, he deploys kabbalistic notions in order to clarify the possibility of prophecy. According to Luzzatto, this is all thanks to the last *sefyrah*, the *malkhuth* (kingship) of the last divine

world, the world of action (*'asiyah*). This *sefyrāh* is the door, or passage, leading from the world of divine action to the world of human visualization:

Malkhuth is called “the image of God,” because it is the root of the images of all created beings, which are the branches of the superior attributes. The Lord, blessed be He, wanted to reproduce (*leha'atīq*) the mode of operation of His attributes, including all the details connected with them, according to the images of the created beings. The root of these images, according to the law of such a reproduction, is the *malkhuth*. Prophets perceive the upper lights according to their reproduction in images. Therefore, they perceive only the *malkhuth*, thanks to what the upper lights understand and conceive. This is explained several times in the *Zohar* and the *Tiqqunym*, through the esoteric meaning of the verses: “But let him that glorieth glory in this” (Jeremiah 9:23), and “This is the gate of the Lord” (Psalms 118:20).¹³⁰

The rational reduction of Kabbalah by two nearly contemporary authors, Ergas and Luzzatto, is no coincidence. It clearly constitutes their response to what they perceived to be an intellectual necessity at a time when philosophical-scientific rationalism was spreading through Europe.

However, the two authors probably had different intellectual frames of reference. Unlike his Livornese counterpart, the Paduan kabbalist does not appeal to medieval, Aristotelian, or Platonic categories of thought. Luzzatto cannot do without the kabbalistic notion of *hashpa'ah* (emanation), which defines both the relation between the worlds created by the divine will—in a descending order of spirituality—and the divine will's constant direction (*hanhagah*) of the worlds. In order to clarify the concept of *hashpa'ah*, he turns to “the great teacher,” Maimonides, in a rare textual reference:¹³¹ “All that is produced and exists among beings is produced or exists insofar as it is emanated from Him, blessed be He.”¹³² Yet, the reader quickly realizes that Luzzatto does not explain what he means by “emanation.” He only speaks generically of “that which originates from the Creator and is destined to his creatures,” which is not otherwise definable because humans cannot know how God really operates, and are limited to ascertaining the effects of his actions. In other words, this category is left open, and represents nothing more than a simple name.

Luzzatto also deploys another notion which seems to pertain to an Aristotelian worldview: finalism. His conception of redemption is marked by

a strong and basically optimistic finalism: good will ultimately triumph. The final causes of Aristotelian physics are not in play here, however. Instead, what we find is a philosophy of history which seems fairly consistent with the optimistic conceptions of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe (including the Jewish *haskalah*). Spinoza's radical critique notwithstanding, finalism would still find fertile ground in European thought for many years to come.

Whatever their formal similarities, Ergas and Luzzatto's intellectual reference points differ significantly. Luzzatto departs in three important ways from Ergas, who thinks according to the medieval categories of metaphysics, physics, and cosmology (the four elements of the sub-lunar sphere, the celestial spheres).¹³³ First, Luzzatto's thought is more dynamic, centering as it does on a philosophy of history that leads to the total and definitive revelation of divine Unity. Second, it is more systematic, as it emphasizes the importance of conceptual coherence and distinguishing between concepts. Third, it is less openly neo-Platonic: instead, it was inspired by a scientific, post-Cartesian model, as we will try to show.¹³⁴

Between 1736 and 1743, when Luzzatto lived in Amsterdam and was neither writing nor teaching on kabbalistic matters, he devoted himself to writing brief but edifying treatises on logic and religious works intended for a larger public than the works of his Italian period. They included a treatise on ethics, *Mesyllath yesharym* (The Path of the Just, published in Amsterdam in 1740), which remains his best-known work to this day, and *Derekh ha-Shem* (The Way of the Lord, published in Amsterdam in 1896), which synthesized the principles of Jewish faith and practice. Luzzatto composed these works in order that the reader might "gather from them an intellectually correct and sufficient representation, free from inaccuracies and confusion."¹³⁵

Derekh ha-Shem is a small manual intended for good believers and observers. It is meant as a starting point for religious study and consists of four sections on the following topics: 1) the existence of God and the created worlds; 2) providence; 3) prophecy; and 4) worship. Even then, the Kabbalah implicitly makes its presence felt right from the first section, where the author establishes that

one of the great principles that we possess is that to each body of the inferior world there corresponds separate forces on high, from which inferior beings and that which happens to them [literally: their accidents, *miqrey-hem*] emerge, according to a concatenation willed by divine Wisdom.

The superior forces are the roots, the inferior beings are the branches and the derivatives; and they are linked one to another, like the rings of a chain.¹³⁶

The *sefyroth*, which Luzzatto explains with the philosophical term *mid-doth* (attributes) in *Da'ath tevunoth*, simply becomes *kohoth* (forces) in *Derekh ha-Shem*. As for providence, it is now called by its traditional name, *hashgahah*, instead of *hanhagah*, the typical term of his earlier works. After reading Kabbalah through the lens of rational theology, Luzzatto makes it the subject of a popular catechism in *Derekh ha-Shem*, emphasizing the importance of the devotion of the faithful and of terrestrial and celestial rewards. Furthermore, a range of topics which he hardly, if at all, touched upon in prior works make their appearances in this book, in particular the influence of the stars,¹³⁷ the effects of the evocation of the divine names and of magical acts (*kyshuf*),¹³⁸ and the presence of impure forces during the nighttime hours.¹³⁹ The daily prayers are explained according to the kabbalistic *kaw-wanah*, but in a language comprehensible to people not familiar with the esoteric doctrine. A work of divulgation, *Derekh ha-Shem* nevertheless also seeks to “translate” Kabbalah, although at a different level than the works of Luzzatto’s Italian period.

Even at this popular level, Luzzatto insists on the need for precision. In his presentation of the *Derekh ha-Shem*, he asks the reader to give each term due consideration, without forgoing exactitude, so as not to miss any necessary argument, because his exposition follows principles of order and progression.

Luzzatto’s reaffirmation of the centrality of intellectual knowledge echoes Maimonides’ aforementioned treatment of providence, which is one of the most controversial points of the Andalusian philosopher’s intellectualism. Maimonides asserts in *The Guide of the Perplexed* that divine providence follows the divine emanation (*shefa*) of intelligence. In other words, “providence depends on intelligence,” for Maimonides, and the most intelligent people (the prophets, in particular) enjoy special celestial attention.¹⁴⁰ Picking up on this notion, Luzzatto applies it to the kabbalistic notion of human action, suggesting that it attracts the emanation (*hashpa’ah*): the more elevated the action, the higher the level of emanation, or influence. Studying the Torah according to the right criteria (*higayon*) thus not only means reaching the highest level of comprehension (*haskalah*), but also enjoying the

most elevated influence (which can be parallel to Maimonidean providence), since the two are linked. Luzzatto's position on providence confirms his in-tellectualist orientation, even though he sets it out in the context of practical Kabbalah, where knowledge is seen as a religious action corresponding to a reaction in the divine world.¹⁴¹

The proximity between the intellectualism of the medieval philosophers and that of the eighteenth-century kabbalist is further demonstrated by Luzzatto's assertion that there are two paths to the fundamental truths (such as the unity of God): the prophetic path and the rational path. Claiming that he does not wish to linger on rational demonstrations, Luzzatto prefers to focus on prophetic notions—that is to say, kabbalistic notions, even though he doesn't make it explicit in this context—which demand rigorous exposition:

[God's perfection, revealed at Sinai and transmitted by tradition] can also be confirmed by rational study and theoretical demonstrations, when necessary, according to physics, geometry, astronomy, and other sciences, from which one can draw true premises that clarify these true notions. But we shall not dwell on this approach here; instead, we will formulate true premises, putting things in their proper order, according to the tradition that is ours and to ideas that are well-known throughout our Nation.¹⁴²

Kabbalah as System: A Jewish “Neo-Scholasticism”?

Luzzatto's approach in one of his most ambitious texts, *Qelah pithhey hokhmah* (One Hundred Thirty-Eight Doors to Wisdom) may surprise one who thinks of the rhetoric of the kabbalists a century before. In this work, the author states a principle (a “door”) and proceeds to explain it in detail by subdividing it into two parts. This constitutes the apex of systematic formalism in kabbalistic exposition and departs markedly from the assertive rhetoric and narrative-exegetical form that Kabbalah assumes in the works of important seventeenth-century authors such as Moshe Zacuto. In some ways, the expository style of *Qelah pithhey hokhmah* echoes contemporary manuals of Catholic scholastic theology based on Aquinas' *Summa theologica*.¹⁴³ Indeed, one might even speak of neo-scholasticism in relation to this text, as with those of contemporary Catholic authors. The uniqueness of this Jewish form of “neo-scholasticism” lies in the fact that its content derives

from Lurianic Kabbalah rather than from Jewish medieval philosophers, to continue our parallel with Catholic thought.

The attempts of eighteenth-century authors, and Luzzatto in particular, at systematizing Kabbalah and couching it in rational terms took place at a time when philosophical production had stalled, according to historians of Jewish thought. Traditionally, Jewish philosophical thought is said to have gone through a period of stasis between the end of Jewish Aristotelianism—between the late fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries (especially after Elia Del Medigo's *Behynath ha-dath*, and Ovadiyah Sforno's *Or 'ammym*)—and the “rebirth” of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with the authors of the *Haskalah*.¹⁴⁴ It is in this “void” that Kabbalah developed, until it assumed the formal character of a theology toward the end of this period in Italy.

Spelling out the name of God in an acrostic as it lays out its first principle, the beginning of *Qelah pithhey hokhmah* is explicitly inspired by *Sefer ha-mada'*, Maimonides' philosophical introduction to *Mishneh Torah*. As in Maimonides' text, Luzzatto highlights the unity of God only to set out the object of Kabbalah directly afterwards, the object being to develop knowledge of the creation and the functioning of all beings on the basis of the direction (*hanhagah*) of the divine will.

The principle of faith and the foundation of knowledge is the unity of the Highest, blessed be He; and it is therefore this that must be explained at the beginning, because all the knowledge of the truth is nothing other than a knowledge that demonstrates the truth of faith; so that one understands how everything that is created or that happens in the world comes from the will of the Highest, and how everything is directed in the world as suits the one God, blessed be He, and how everything develops in order to reach perfection in the end.¹⁴⁵

The unitary direction of all wordly things is the fundamental principle of this treatise, and Luzzatto repeats it many times. All created beings and events are linked to one another by a unitary intention—expressing a unitary will—and Kabbalah is the revealed doctrine allowing us to know this, down to the smallest detail.¹⁴⁶ Reiterated several times in other works as well, Luzzatto's definition exhibits the totalizing ambition of the doctrine which grants us knowledge of all of the worlds. This ambition finds an echo in science, although its field of application is rather different. We will see further along

that analogies may be drawn between science and Luzzatto's understanding of Kabbalah.

As the object of this study is to explicate the formal aspects of Luzzatto's work, we shall refrain from giving a detailed account of the Paduan kabbalist's systematic treatment of the 138 principles of Lurianic Kabbalah, which he enumerates, explains, and fits into a general conceptual framework. This framework is essentially optimistic in nature: all the negative aspects of creation and history are seen as necessary steps toward the final revelation of divine unity. Evil exists for the benefit of good.¹⁴⁷ Nevertheless, this rich exposition addresses two complex questions which deserve to be examined, both for their "philosophical" content and for Luzzatto's attempt to engage with them at a conceptual level. These are 1) the relationship between the *sefyroth* and the *eyn sof*; and 2) the relationship between infinity and finitude, God and creation.

1) The *sefyroth*: these emanations from God (*hem mah she-ha-elohuth mithpashet*) are not created, since they are divine. It is their revelation that is created. As for the *eyn sof*, it calls for the principles of negative theology, because there is no word that can speak of him, nor any thought that can conceive of him. Yet, knowledge of the *sefyroth* is possible. They are qualities or aspects (*middoth*) of the *eyn sof*, forces (*koḥoth*) which are not separate from him, knowable manifestations of his will; they are the ways in which the divine will directs the world. The *sefyroth* and worldly beings have different origins: whereas the creation of the *sefyroth* is nothing other than their manifestation, since they are divine, and therefore eternal, the very existence of worldly beings is created. The fact that the aspects of the *eyn sof* have been made manifest and can subsequently be known implies a limitation, because the divine in itself is not knowable: this justifies their name, *sefyroth*, from the verb *safar* (to count, or to measure). Their created limitation allows them to be known.

All of God's aspects are originally infinite in themselves, and so too is their number. However, although God's aspects are infinite in number, only those through which the world was created and is directed have been made manifest. The manifestation/limitation of the *sefyroth* corresponds to a divine providential design within which humankind plays a decisive role.¹⁴⁸

At first glance, these notions recall Spinoza's conception of the attributes of substance as defined in his *Ethics*. Luzzatto's *myddoth* echo Spinoza's definition of "attribute": "what the intellect perceives of substance, as

constituting its essence,” and which is infinite in itself and in number.¹⁴⁹ Similarly, Luzzatto’s account of the kabbalistic *partzufym* (faces) as “the particularization of the modes of acting of each of these forces,”¹⁵⁰ recalls Spinoza’s definition of “mode”: “the affections of a substance, or that which is in another through which it is also conceived.”¹⁵¹ In spite of such affinities, there are many fundamental differences between the concepts Spinoza and Luzzatto deploy. In particular, they refer to very different systems. As the kabbalist’s account of creation and the divine direction of the world suggests, his conceptual universe is religious. The philosopher, on the other hand, deploys non-religious Cartesian concepts, such as thought and extension: “Thought” and “extension” are two of “God’s infinite attributes.”¹⁵²

2) The relationship between infinity and finitude: this is extremely difficult to conceive, let alone describe. In order to account for the passage from infinite divinity to finite materiality, Luzzatto turns to the Lurianic concept of *tzimtzum*. Although the *eyn sof* possesses an infinite number of aspects—or forces—according to him, the human intellect can only conceive of those that played a role in the origin of the world and in directing it. As the force which produces the world undergoes a reduction, or contraction (*tzimtzum*), it renounces its infinity. This benefits humankind, because it allows humans to play a role in perfecting (*tiqqun*) the world and returning it to perfection. How was the move from infinity to finitude possible? Luzzatto asserts that infinity already contains finitude—limits are already present within limit-lessness—and the divine will decided to make these limits manifest. It is through the passage into existence of limits that the unknowable divine will becomes knowable, or—in kabbalist parlance—visible. The limitation of the divine force leading to the material world is therefore not a non-being in the neo-Platonic sense, but rather a being (*qiyum we-lo he’der*) that is already present within the infinite. Although there is no space within the infinite, this reduction allows the creation of a space (*halal*) in which the root of justice (*dyn*) is manifested, altering the initial perfection. Infinite light made visible thanks to the reduction of divine force is called *reshymu*: that is, the impression (*roshem*) of infinite light.¹⁵³ As limits are uncovered, the worlds gradually begin to come into being according to a hierarchy defined by their levels of spirituality, and imperfection starts to manifest itself.

Beyond its attempt to conceptualize the Lurianic doctrine, Luzzatto’s text describes the transition from infinity to finitude in terms of a very optimistic philosophy of history. The divine will sets the whole process into motion in

order to allow humankind to recognize that even evil is the work of the will of God, who will eventually eliminate it. On the other hand, Man is responsible for the final revelation of divine unity, since he can contribute to the perfection of the world, at least at its lower levels.¹⁵⁴ However, the divine will complete the process by imposing perfection onto the world even if human-kind fails to contribute adequately to this apotheosis.

Although *Qelah pithey hokhmah* gives a detailed account of the relative roles that human and divine action will play in the advent of the future world, this question becomes problematic in *Da'ath tevunoth*. Indeed, there seems to be an unresolved contradiction in Luzzatto's thought: if redemption is certain, what is the point of human activity? If the divine will is going to manifest itself "in any case,"¹⁵⁵ why try to draw the divine closer by keeping the *mitzwoth*? The "Soul" is fully conscious of these problems in this dialogue: bewildered by the possible consequences of determinism, which could both make human efforts futile and doom to irrelevance the notion that imperfection allows Man greater merit as he strives to achieve perfection, the "Soul" asks the "intellect" to clarify. His interlocutor's response is simply to quote biblical verses demonstrating beyond any shadow of a doubt that divine redemption is independent of human behavior—a rather disappointing answer in light of the exacting arguments presented in the dialogue.¹⁵⁶

The Scientific Method: The Importance of Making Distinctions

Like any rigorous scholarly text, Kabbalah must be set out according to precise criteria in order to be understood clearly. The "modern" kabbalists never tired of repeating this. Luzzatto's kabbalistic works all introduce methodological criteria designed to foster a formal association between esoteric knowledge and science.¹⁵⁷

The first of these criteria is a solid foundation: as the rationalist in Luzzatto's dialogue explains to the kabbalist, the doctrine must be built on an unquestionable assertion:

Had I found at least one stable principle on which to build all these notions, perhaps their details would also have become comprehensible. But without this principle it is useless to strain over the details, seeing as the whole is problematic.¹⁵⁸

Supplying his interlocutor with this stable principle, the kabbalist simultaneously defines the object of Kabbalah. As he explains that the unity of God is this principle (*yesod*), and that the object (*'inyan*) of the doctrine is to explain how God directs the world,¹⁵⁹ Kabbalah ceases to be a disordered mass of complex, obscure, and unnecessary notions.

This principle supplied, the next criterion is to establish distinctions (*havḥanah*) between terms: definitions must be very precise because “comprehension depends on distinction.”¹⁶⁰ It is important to start by naming concepts¹⁶¹ before one can proceed in an orderly and progressive fashion. The rationalist interlocutor is adamant that disorderly progress leaves the intellect dissatisfied, bewildered, and confused (*navokh w-mevulbal*). One must therefore proceed step by step, examining the various parts of the construction one by one.¹⁶² Incremental progression is key to knowledge: it is necessary to start from general premises before one can move toward a satisfying global vision.¹⁶³

Whereas disorderly progress fosters doubt by jumping from one topic to the next, an orderly disquisition will allow for a correct understanding of Kabbalah. Proceeding in an orderly fashion will grant rational coherence to Kabbalah, will explain the doctrine, and will make it perfectly acceptable to the intellect, which accepts the idea of God but is not satisfied by obscure formulas that do not belong to a rigorous system. Without elucidating the meaning of each concept and the connections between them, one cannot pretend to know Kabbalah. To omit this step is to confine oneself to stating abstruse terms which mean nothing in and of themselves, such as “faces” (*partzufym*), “situations” (*matzavym*), and “ascents and descents” (*aliyoth we-yeridoth*). These examples taken from Lurianic Kabbalah were the most embarrassing to a rational mind,¹⁶⁴ and it was no coincidence that Luzzatto invoked them.

In case of doubt, the criterion of order would help to justify one conclusion relative to another, because notions are validated by their logical connections. Whereas logical relationships generate knowledge, their absence produces confusion (*mevokhah*).¹⁶⁵ In other words, form can sometimes be a criterion for evaluating content.

Proceeding logically also has pragmatic consequences, because a correctly and rigorously ordered argument makes it possible to concentrate on general principles, instead of lingering on details,¹⁶⁶ while also sparing the

intellect useless effort.¹⁶⁷ Less is often more: economy is one of the guiding principles of argumentation.¹⁶⁸

Luzzatto's tendency towards conceptual rigor goes beyond his kabbalistic works. Written and published in Amsterdam in 1742—i.e., at a time when he was not officially working on Kabbalah—Luzzatto's study of Talmud, *Derekh tevunoth* (The Way of Understanding)¹⁶⁹ is essentially a treatise on logic. According to him, the principles governing Talmudic discussions correspond to innate intellectual notions, which the Talmud simply elucidates:

If one investigates correctly, one will find that all the questions (*qushi-yoth*) and answers (*terutzym*), like every part of Talmudic reasoning (*pilpul*), lean on principles and notions that are innate to intellectual comprehension, imposing themselves spontaneously and necessarily on the human intellect without having to be learned.¹⁷⁰

It is the scholar's task to order these principles correctly in order to make them operational. Studying complex arguments is made easier by reducing them to a few brief, simple rules.¹⁷¹

The rules Luzzatto sets out for the study of Talmud are not based on traditional rules of Talmudic hermeneutics, such as the thirteen rules of Rabbi Ishma'el. Instead, they are grounded in the principles of formal logic, which draw on and develop Aristotelian logic. Thus, Luzzatto devotes a chapter of *Derekh tevunoth* to the different types of argument, distinguishing between sensitive, conventional,¹⁷² and logical demonstrations.¹⁷³ Whereas the *havhanoth* discriminates between terms and content in kabbalistic texts, in *Derekh tevunoth* they become criteria of definition analogous in function to Aristotelian categories, only more numerous (twenty-four instead of ten).

In that same year—1742—Luzzatto wrote the *Sefer ha-higayon* ("Treatise on Logic"),¹⁷⁴ which was mostly inspired by non-Jewish works.¹⁷⁵ In this brief text, he confirms that the correct use of the intellect depends on rigorous classification. He ends his first chapter by stating that "distinction is the necessary foundation of intellectual operations in the quest for knowledge,"¹⁷⁶ and declares that Jewish readers would find a treatise on logic useful. For Luzzatto, disseminating such a work amounts to a religious task: just as farming perfects nature by increasing its beauty and usefulness,¹⁷⁷ so too does logic allow each person to achieve a correct knowledge, free from confusion; both complete the work of God.¹⁷⁸

This short work stands out not for its originality but for its translation of the traditional terms of logic into Hebrew. Even then, this “Hebraization” of logic was redundant because Italian Jews likely to be interested in this material could easily access it in Italian and Latin texts. The significance of this attempt is essentially historical: it demonstrates that efforts to assimilate external cultural products into Jewish cultural coordinates were still being made in the first decades of the eighteenth century. Although there were many such endeavors in the history of Jewish culture, this was one of the last in the history of Italian Jews, who were to confront non-Jewish works directly in the coming decades, no longer needing to “Hebraize” them.

Luzzatto’s apologia of order and distinctions reached its apex in the introduction to his religious manual, *Derekh ha-Shem*, where he deployed the neo-classical metaphor of the Italian garden to describe how intelligent human action imposed order on nature:

The advantage of having knowledge of things according to their subdivisions and the order of their relationships, as opposed to knowledge without distinctions, corresponds to the vision of a garden with well maintained hedges, and adorned with narrow paths and lines of trees, compared with a bush of reeds or a wood that grows in a disordered manner. For the intellect that desires to know, the representation of multiple parts which ignores their relationships and proper position in the construction of the whole is a tiresome and pleasureless operation.¹⁷⁹

Kabbalah: A Science of the Knowable

For Luzzatto, however, the parallels between Kabbalah and science are not merely methodological. Just as physical science—and the sciences connected to it—establishes the laws governing natural events, the object of Kabbalah is to know the causes of these events, which constitute the divine direction (*hanhagah*) when united with the totality of physical and human events. While physics attempts to describe the laws governing events that are merely effects, Kabbalah states the laws presiding over physical and human causal events. Yet, even though the origins of physics are human and those of Kabbalah divine, both disciplines nevertheless seek to give an ordered, precise, and exhaustive account of their object. Luzzatto’s descriptions of the divine worlds sometimes appear to borrow from the terminology of physics:

it is not a coincidence that he refers to the *sefiroth* as “forces” (*koḥoth*). Indeed, the kabbalistic term *hokhmah* may be understood as meaning “science”: it is the supreme science, a meta-science (or “metaphysics”) which goes beyond what other human sciences can do by establishing the connections between the superior and the inferior worlds. Yet this *hokhmah* shares the demonstrative rigor of the human sciences as well as their mechanistic outlook and ambition to achieve total knowledge of their object.

Kabbalah touches on the “roots” of beings and the rules governing them. On the one hand, it seeks to know the primary source of all beings, but on the other it ignores the natural laws inscribed in the *sefiroth*, which are the concern of human science.¹⁸⁰

Luzzatto writes in a post-Cartesian context, at a time when mechanics are the model for all the sciences and when all that is really left of the categories of Aristotelian physics and metaphysics are terms largely stripped of their meaning. The world of the *sefiroth* is a very ordered world, which Luzzatto describes with the metaphor of a clock: it is built like a mechanism and its elements are connected to each other and the inferior world like a series of gears. Luzzatto is so bent on a mechanical model that he sees Man and the material world as proto-robots covered with skin, or a material membrane reverberating up to the divinity through their motions before returning down to humankind.¹⁸¹ Human acts are at the origin of the motion of the totality and depend on the soul, which is located in the body.

The following account may be read as a religious transposition of Cartesian dualism, with the soul taking the place of Cartesian thought, and the global mechanism put at the service of God and the final proclamation of his unity. The various worlds are regulated by precise laws of operation (*huqqym*) and a system governing the interaction (*‘arakhym*) of different forces¹⁸² in a dynamic combination responding to a unitary principle:

The totality is a fabric of many forces coming from different orders, each of which acts solely in its designated time and manner. This is called “the diffusion of the forces” (*hithpashtuth ha-koḥoth*), that is, the diffusion of the forces in different ways and according to different well-defined and established rules. [...] This order is not dispersed and divided into parts that do not report to a single principle; rather, there is one general order governing the expansion of every force in the ways which pertain to it. Everything is calibrated with an eye to a final direction.¹⁸³

If the object of Kabbalah is to explain how this dynamic works both at the time of creation (at the origin) and over the course of time (in history) according to a unitary principle,¹⁸⁴ then the kabbalist should give a de-tailed account of the existence and present and future behavior of all be-ings. In other words, although Kabbalah is a science of divine origin, its object is the functioning of the worlds (*hanhagah*), which Man can—and should—understand.

Creation has come about by divine design: in his extraction of limits—and renunciation of his infinity—God wanted to perform an act of mercy. The final *tiqqun*, the moment of redemption when his unity will definitively manifest itself, will come after a lengthy period when good and evil will be intermixed beyond the grasp of human knowledge. *Tiqqun* demands human intervention in a world that Man is able to know despite his limits. Thus God operates not according to his capacities, but according to Man's: God wants Man to understand his ways, however limited that knowledge will be. Humans live in a comprehensible world because God wishes it to be so, subordinating his infinite action to the laws of causality and temporality.¹⁸⁵

Human understanding cannot conceive of God's essence, since, as Maimonides stated, the only thing we can affirm is the necessary existence of God. His actions, too, are thus only partly conceivable. Since everything—good and evil, imperfection and perfection—is created by God, humans do not know what anything means for the divine will, i.e., in itself. Instead, what we know and understand corresponds to our way of knowing:

That which is inside Him is unreachable for any intelligence; we can understand only that which is within us creatures."¹⁸⁶

In other words, humans cannot know God's works per se, only their effects.¹⁸⁷ Strictly speaking, central notions such as emanation (*shefa*'), potential, or ac-tion lie beyond our grasp: we cannot understand them from the agent's point of view, only from our perspective as recipients.¹⁸⁸

Luzzatto's gnoseology is a theory of the limits of knowledge (rather like the philosophy of Kant), which nevertheless is optimistic about the possibility of achieving knowledge within those limits. God wants us to achieve knowledge according to our capabilities. The content of this knowledge constitutes the object of the science of Kabbalah, and lies within the grasp of Man despite its divine origins. In the age of redemption, things will not

change fundamentally: our understanding of the divine remaining within the limits of our abilities, we will grasp “a drop compared to the ocean.”¹⁸⁹

The entire science of truth consists of this: distinguishing between the forces God used to create the world, their intensity, their measure, and the relationships between forces and created beings. In effect, we are capable of knowing these forces only after they have been limited, and chosen between all the others. God created the world according to a single intention (*kawwanah*), and this intention implied limiting and ordering the forces that He wanted to introduce, and establishing their order and relationships. Man can understand this, if this knowledge is given to him, because it is not unlimited and does not lie beyond the abilities of the human intellect. The totality of this order constitutes this science. And therefore we assess the measure of those forces according to a hierarchy; we understand how things exist in a reciprocal relationship, and how created beings are connected together. It is essential to understand that everything pertaining to created beings has its root in these forces, that everything happens according to a hierarchy and an order, that all these beings are connected one to another and oriented toward a single aim (*kawwanah*).¹⁹⁰

It is the scientific character of Kabbalah that Luzzatto posits in these lines, by linking it formally to physics on several levels. He fosters a mechanistic vision by evoking “forces,” speaks of the human capacity to know this totality, and founds the successful operations of this knowledge on a methodology based on order and distinctions.

Venerated to this day in Orthodox Jewish circles and rediscovered by a generation in search of a new spirituality, the young Paduan mystic who never wrote a word in any language other than Hebrew straddled two worlds: the old and ever-enduring world of kabbalistic thought and devotion and the eighteenth-century world of rationalism, marked by the scientific method and an optimistic understanding of human destiny.

- 1 Leopold Zunz, *Literaturgeschichte der Synagogalen Poesie* (Berlino, 1865), 449; Ḥayyim N. Bialik, “Ha-baḥur mi-Padova,” in *Kol kitvey Ḥ. N. Bialik* (Tel Aviv, 1938), 228-229.
- 2 Y. Tishby, “Darkhey hafatzatam shel kitvey kabbalah le-Ramḥal be-Polin u-ve-Lyta,” in his *Ḥiqrey kabbalah w-sheluḥoteya: meḥqarym w-meqoroth* (Jerusalem, 1982-1983), vol. III, pp. 911-940.
- 3 See Y. Leibowitz’s reflections on Luzzatto’s ethics (which were probably spurred by the interest which Eliyahu, the Gaon of Vilna, showed in this question) in *Siḥoth ‘al Mesillath Yesharym le-Ramḥal* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1995), and *Ḥamishah sifrey emunah* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1995), 81-86. The annotated manuscripts of Luzzatto’s kabbalistic works edited by Moshe Friedländer (Bnei Brak in the 1970s-80s) constitute essential reading. The *Makhon* (Institute) *Ramḥal* organized by Mordekhay Chriqui has for the last decade carried out the important work of disseminating the works of the Paduan author through new book editions, conventions, seminars, and other initiatives. For a general bibliography of Luzzatto, see Natascia Danieli, *L’epistolario di Moṣeh Hayyim Luzzatto* (Florence: Giuntina, 2006), 291-308.
- 4 In May 2007, for example, Gai Biran organised a series of events celebrating Luzzatto’s work by staging conversations with poets, public readings, and musical performances at the Beth Avyḥay Theater in Jerusalem. Spanning several days, this initiative met with great success and attracted both religious and secular audiences.
- 5 S. D. Luzzatto, *Lezioni di teologia dogmatica israelitica* (Trieste, 1863), 42. S.D. Luzzatto went on to illustrate this assessment with a passage taken from the then-unpublished *Da’ath tevunoth* (see *infra*), acknowledging both that Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto was an excellent poet, and that he was among the first to recognize the literary value of the Bible.
- 6 Yosef Almanzi, “Toledoth Rabbi Moshe Ḥayyim Luzzatto mi-Padova,” in *Kerem Hemed* 3 (1838): 112-168. See in particular p. 114: “Wishing to study and probe major questions in depth, he led a group dedicated to unfounded pursuits.” See also the piece by Mordekhay Shemuel Ghironi in *Kerem Hemed* 2 (1836): 53-67, which is more sympathetic and attempts to exculpate Luzzatto from the accusations of Sabbateanism.
- 7 S. Ginzburg, *The Life and Works of Moses Hayyim Luzzatto* (Philadelphia: Dropsie College, 1931; 2nd ed. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1975), Introduction.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 28.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 43.
- 10 Luzzatto’s dramaturgical and poetic works have not been comprehensively examined as yet. Benami Feingold’s article (“Le opere teatrali di Moshe Chayyim

- Luzzatto,” *Rassegna Mensile d’Israel* 60, special issue “Poesia ebraica italiana. Mille anni di creazione sacra e profana,” ed. A. Guetta [1994]: 146-182) constitutes a significant step forward in the investigation of the relationship between Luzzatto’s kabbalistic and poetic works. Ariel Rathaus’ analysis of poetics (“Poetiche della scuola ebraico-italiana,” 189-226, in particular 221-226) is the best attempt to date at understanding the place of Luzzatto’s theory of poetry in the Italian tradition.
- 11 N. Danieli, *L’epistolario*.
 - 12 Meir Benyahu and Y. Tishby have written extensively on this question. See in particular Meir Benyahu, “Ha-maggid shel Ramhal” (The Celestial Voice of Luzzatto), *Sefunoth* 5 (1961): 297-336. See also Y. Tishby, “Ha-tesyah ha-meshihit be-hugo shel Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto le-oram shel ketubah we-shyrym meshihim” (Messianic Ferment in M.H. Luzzatto’s Group in Light of the Nuptial Contract and Messianic Poetry), in *Hiqrey kabbalah*, 729-755, and Mordekhay Chriqui, *Le maguid et les écrits zohariques de Rabbi Moché Hayim Luzzatto* (Montreal: Editions Ramhal, 1991).
 - 13 Elliot R. Wolfson, “Tiqqun ha-shekhnah: Redemption and the Overcoming of Gender Dimorphism in the Messianic Kabbalah of Moses Hayyim Luzzatto,” *History of Religions* 36, no. 4 (1997): 289-332.
 - 14 Hansel, *Moïse Hayyim Luzzatto (1707-1746). Cabbale et philosophie* (Paris, 2004).
 - 15 An important contribution is Charles H. Manekin, “On Moses Hayyim Luzzatto’s Logic, and on Ramist Influence in His Writings,” *Daat: A Journal of Jewish Thought* 4 (1998): 5-27.
 - 16 These two terms can be associated here, because for Luzzatto, as for Aristotle, logic is the study of human discourse.
 - 17 On the vow he made to no longer disseminate writings dictated by the celestial voice, and to refrain from composing any more such writings, see the document dated the 3rd of the month of Av 5490 (July 17, 1730), in S. Ginzburg, *R. Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto w-vney doro: Osef iggeroth w-te’udoth* (R.M.H.L. and His Contemporaries: A Collection of Letters and Documents) (Tel Aviv, 1937), 176-177 and 401-402.
 - 18 A dialogue between a kabbalist and a rationalist, *Maamar ha-wikkuaḥ* dates from 1734. Luzzatto insisted on being granted permission by his teacher, Isaia Bassan, before publishing this work (S. Ginzburg, *RM.H.L. w-vney doro*, 242-249). This could imply that Luzzatto intended to publicize the non-mystical-messianic aspects of his thought, even at that difficult time. The theological treatise *Da’ath tevunoth*—in which Kabbalah is never explicitly mentioned—also dates from 1734, when Luzzatto was preparing to leave Padua for Amsterdam. For more on these works, see *infra*.
 - 19 It is only after young Samuel David Luzzatto openly questioned the authenticity of the *Zohar* that the Jewish-Italian intellectual elite lost faith in Kabbalah. Although Luzzatto’s questions initially perplexed Italian scholars, they quickly

- came to share his views. See A. Guetta, “The Last Debate on Kabbalah in Italian Judaism: I.S. Reggio, S.D. Luzzatto, E. Benamozegh,” in *The Jews of Italy: Memory and Identity*, ed. B. D. Cooperman and Barbara Garvin (Bethesda, MD: University Press of Maryland, 2000), 256-275.
- 20 Cf. Yeshayahu Tishby, “The Controversy about the *Zohar* in Sixteenth Century Italy” (in Hebrew), *Peraqim: Yearbook of the Schocken Institute for Jewish Research of the Jewish Theological Seminary* (1967-68): 131-192 (in Hebrew).
- 21 Is it possible that some form of censorship blocked the publication this text? See Moshe Carmilly-Weinberger, *Censorship and Freedom of Expression in Jewish History* (New York: Sepher-Hermon Press with Yeshiva University Press, 1977), 75: “The rabbis of Italy, notably R. Samuel Meldola and R. Aviad Sar-Shalom Basilea, directed the full force of their opposition against the publication of *Ari nohem*. They went so far as to request the government to prevent the book from being published.” However, Carmilly-Weinberger gives no source for this information. Self-censorship on the part of the author is a more likely explanation.
- 22 *Ary nohem*, ed. Julius Fürst (Lipsia, 1840), 47. On Modena’s opposition to Kabbalah, see Yaacob Dweck, *The Scandal of Kabbalah: Leon Modena, Jewish Mysticism, Early Modern Venice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).
- 23 *Ibid.*, 11.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 67, on Luria and his supposed miracles.
- 25 *Magen wa-ḥerev*, ed. S. Simonsohn (Jerusalem, 1960). For more on this text, see the chapter on “Leone Modena’s *Magen wa-ḥerev*.”
- 26 *Novo ditionario hebraico et italiano* (Padova: 1640), introduzione.
- 27 See Talya Fishman, *Shaking the Pillars of Exile* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), on *Qol sakhal* (The Voice of the Fool), an anti-rabbinic work attributed to Yehudah Ariyeh Modena.
- 28 See Robert Bonfil, “Halakhah, Kabbalah and Society: Some Insights into Rabbi Menahem Azaria da Fano’s Inner World,” in *Jewish Thought in the Seventeenth Century*, ed. I. Twerski and B. Septimus (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 39-61; Robert Bonfil, “Cultura e mistica a Venezia nel Cinquecento,” in *Gli ebrei e Venezia*, ed. G. Cozzi, 469-506; and Moshe Idel, “Les renaissances culturelles européennes et la mystique juive,” in *Réceptions de la cabbale*, ed. P. Gisel and L. Kennel (Paris: Èd. de l’Éclat, 2007), 13-55.
- 29 It is said that Moshe Zacuto (ca. 1625-1697) fasted in order to forget his knowledge of Latin (see, among others, L. Zunz, *Literaturgeschichte*, 441). Yosef Ergas and M. Ḥ. Luzzatto’s rare remarks on the subject of Christians were harsh. For Ergas, see *Pery megadym*, published with *Minḥath Yosef* (Leghorn, 1832), cap. 34: “It is forbidden to praise a non-Jew [...] because one will then become attached to him and learn from his evil actions.” In general, Luzzatto was disdain-ful of non-Jews. Interestingly, though, when he listed all those who did not believe in the absolute unity of God in an important passage of his *Da’ath tevunoth*

- (10-12), he only mentioned the Gentiles (*goyye ha-aratzoth*) because of their refusal to accept the election of Israel. In other words, Luzzatto did not seize on this occasion to radically criticize Christian doctrine. Nevertheless, one should not lose sight of the climate of fear created by the Inquisition.
- 30 See Peninah Naveh, ed., *Kol shirey Ya'aqov Francés* (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1969), 401-408.
- 31 Vv. 13-14.
- 32 Vv. 19-20.
- 33 In truth, kabbalists such as Ergas and Luzzatto insist on the ineffability and incomprehensibility of God (*eyn sof*), while Kabbalah speaks only of the world of divine emanations, which man may know in part.
- 34 *Kol shirey*, vv. 31-35.
- 35 Vv. 65-68.
- 36 Vv. 53-54.
- 37 Meyr Benayahu claims that Francés “criticizes Kabbalah while seeming to praise it.” Cfr. *Haskamah we-reshuth bidefusey Venetziyah* (Copyright, Authorization and Imprimatur for Hebrew books printed in Venice) (Jerusalem: Maḥon Ben Tzevy and Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1971), 107. In another poem (*Kol kitvey*, 167-174), Francés proposed the model of “wise ignorance,” while awaiting the Redeemer who would clear up all doubts.
- 38 Vv. 75-80. Facetiously, Francés went on to present himself as that ideal Jew. The interesting aspect of this auto-panegyric concerns his self-portrait as a poet who weighs and measures his words, and who considers the constrictions placed on poetry “more precious than jewels.” The ability to compose beautiful verse is another requisite for the ideal Jew, because “the purity of his words captures hearts / which become slaves of the superior King,” i.e. God (vv. 92-93).
- 39 Evidently, Rabbi Yeḥiyel Finzi of Florence issued a judicial act condemning Francés. The poet replied to this condemnation (which is no longer extant, and the content of which is no longer known) with a very harsh poem against the rabbi. See Naveh, 418-420. See H. Brody, *Meteq sefatayim, hebräische Prosodie von Immanuel Frances* (Cracovia, 1892), 74, and H. Brody, *Wikkuaḥ Livny we-Shim'y*, in *Hahoqer* 1 (1893): 213 (cit. in Benayahu 107 note 4).
- 40 *Behynath olam* (Venice: Vendramin, 1704).
- 41 For more on Shimshon Morpurgo, see Asher Salah, *La République des Lettres. Rabbins, écrivains et médecins juifs en Italie au XVIII siècle* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 455-460. The rabbi of Ancona took a moderate position in the argumentation that surrounded Luzzatto’s kabbalistic works and led to their condemnation. It is possible that the title of Morpurgo’s book contains a veiled polemical reference to the well-known work by Hayyim Vital, *‘Etz Hayyim* (“Tree of Life”).
- 42 *Emunath ḥakhamym* (Mantua: S. Benedetto, 1730), 31r-31v. For more on A.S.S. Basilea, see A. Salah, *La République* 70-73. For more on this controversy, see the wide-ranging study by D. Ruderman, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery*

in *Early Modern Europe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 213-228. Ruderman downplays the ideological stakes of the conflict between the kabbalists and the anti-kabbalists. He rightly notes that Morpurgo and Basilea were both admirers and practitioners of experimental science, and had a cordial personal relationship. He attributes their conflicting positions to a shared desire to safeguard the Jewish religion from strong Christian pressures. Whereas Morpurgo sought to achieve this by downplaying the importance of Kabbalah, which provided theological fodder for the Christians, Basilea tried to bolster all Jewish intellectual energies in the name of a single tradition.

⁴³ In one of his many polemical poems attacking Shabbetay Tzevy and his followers, Francés cited and attacked a certain “Basilea,” describing him as a Sabbatean sympathizer. Cfr. Naveh, 457. If the Basilea in question was meant to be Menahem Basilea, Avi’ad Sar Shalom’s father (as suggested in Shlomo Simonsohn, *History of the Jews in the Duchy of Mantua* [Jerusalem: Kiryath Sepher, 1964], *pas-sim*), then the latter’s polemic against the poet could be personal. If this was the case, an interesting chapter could be written on the subterranean permanence of Sabbateanism in eighteenth-century Italy, i.e. in an era and location in which it should have been totally eradicated. It is curious to note that, while A. S. S. Basilea was probably the son of a Sabbatean, his contemporary, Yosef Ergas—a protagonist in the polemic against Neḥemiyah Hayyun, accused of professing Sabbatean and Christianizing doctrines—was the grandson of Moshe Pinheiro, who was a faithful friend of Shabbetay Tzevy and student of the famous Sabbatean kabbalist Binyamin ha-Cohen of Reggio Emilia. Cf. Malakhay ha-Cohen’s introduction to the collection of “responsa” *Divrey Yosef* (Leghorn: 1742). As for Luzzatto, it is known that he wrote a work, *Qinath ha-Shem tzevaoth* (The Zeal of the Lord of Hosts), refuting Sabbatean ideas (v. Sh. Ginzburg, *R.M.H.L. w-vney doro*, 153-156). However, Luzzatto’s insistence on certain ideas—that redemption would come when the negation of God’s unity would be more diffuse, and that good was recognized by evil—lent his thought an apocalyptic quality bordering on heresy. See, above all, *Da’ath tevunoth*, 32-33.

⁴⁴ *Emunath ḥakhamym*, ff. 11r, 32r.

⁴⁵ S. D. Luzzatto (*Lezioni di Teologia*, 41) judged Basilea rather severely: “R. Aviad Basilea, of Mantua, published in 1740, in that city, his *Emunath ḥakhamym*, where, without philosophy and without criticism, he takes on the philosophers, as well as those in favor of criticizing the Sacred Writings and interpreting them literally. There, deploying the weapons of authority and disparagement, he de-fends the infallibility of the Talmudists’ decisions and the divine origin of kabbalistic doctrines.”

⁴⁶ *Emunath ḥakhamym*, 11v.

⁴⁷ 30r.

⁴⁸ 2v.

⁴⁹ 6r.

50 29v and 48v.

51 38r.

52 22v.

53 22v.

54 Basilea seems not to have picked up on the criticisms which Pietro Galatino directed at modern Jews in *De arcanis catholicae veritatis* (1518) for not following the doctrines of their Talmudic teachers. According to Galatino, this implied that the rabbis of the Talmud implicitly accepted the Christian message.

55 Yosef Ergas, *Divrey Yosef* (Leghorn, 1742), ff. 9r and 9v. Developing his legal argument, Ergas noted that Yitzḥaq Luria's opinion was applicable because "he received inspiration from the holy spirit in his school." This demonstrates the influence Kabbalah—and especially prophetic Kabbalah—had on juridical decisions, even if in this case what was at stake was a secondary question, which essentially touched on a matter of principle.

56 Cfr. Benayahu, *Hadpasah*, 107-108; the anonymous introduction to Yehudah Ariyeh (Leone) Modena, *Ary nohem* (Lipzig, 1840), xvii; and Giulio Bartolucci, *Bibliotheca Rabbinica* (Rome, 1675), part IV, p. 56. See also Moshe Carmilly-Weinberger, *Censorship and Freedom of Expression in Jewish History*, 231 (which lacks quotations from the source material).

57 In a letter to Luzzatto's teacher, Yeshayahu Bassan, Yosef Ergas described his *Shomer Emunym*, which was still in manuscript form, as "a book small in volume, but great in quality"; see S. Ginzburg, *R.M.H.L. w-vney doro*, 102. The importance Luzzatto placed on the publication of his dialogue, *Maamar ha-wiqquah*, is evidenced by his insistence on obtaining his master Bassan's authorization; see note 18. Bassan saw his student's text as an apologia for Kabbalah, answering skeptical works such as Yosef Delmedigos' *Matzref la-hokhmah* and even Basilea's *Emunath hakhamym*; see S. Ginzburg, *R.M.H.L. w-vney doro*, 246.

58 *Shomer emunym*, Introduction, p. 4. All quotes are from the 1965 Jerusalem edition. On Ergas, see Beracha Sacq's general presentation, "'Yiun be-qab-balato shel R. Yosef Ergas" (Examination of the Kabbalah of Yosef Ergas), in *Yahaduth: sugiyoth, keta'ym, panym, zeuyioth, Sefer Rivqah* ("Judaism: Topics, Extracts, Aspects, Identities. The Book of Rebecca—In Honor of Rivka Schatz-Uffenheimer"), ed. Chaviva Pedaya and Efraim Meir (Beer Sheva: Ben Gurion University, 2007), 393-407. For discussions of particular aspects of this work, see Roland Goetschel, "Kawwanah' et finalité de la prière dans le 'Shomer Emûnim' de Joseph ben Emmanuel Ergaz (1685-1730)," *Jewish Studies at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* II (1999): 34-39; Roland Goetschel, "La notion de simsum dans le 'Somer 'Emunim' de Joseph Ergaz," in *Hommage à Georges Vajda*, ed. G. Nahon and Ch. Touati (Parigi: ISD, 1980), 385-396; Roland Goetschel, "La justification de la cabbale dans le Shomer Emunim de Joseph Ergas (1685-1730)," in *Jewish Studies in a New Europe*, ed. U. Haxen, H. Trautner-Kromann, and K.L. Goldschmidt-Salamon (Copenhagen: Reitzel, 1994), 269-283; Joëlle

- Hansel, “La figure du ‘mashal’ dans l’herméneutique du XVIe au XVIIIe siècle,” in *Revue des études juives* 160, no. 1-2 (2001): 135-154; Joëlle Hansel, “La lettre ou l’allégorie: la controverse sur l’interprétation du ‘Simsum’ dans la cabbale italienne du XVIIIe siècle,” in *La controverse religieuse et ses formes*, ed. Alain Le Boulluec (Paris: Ed. du Cerf, 1995), 99-125. In addition to these theoretical sources, see a complete bibliography in A. Salah, *La République des Lettres*, 227-230.
- 59 For more on the superficial study of Kabbalah, see Ergas’ “responsum” in *Divrey Yosef*, ff. 45v-46r.
- 60 *Ibid.*, 6.
- 61 *Shomer emunym*, 46. The emphasis Ergas places on the continuity between the Talmud and Kabbalah evokes both Basilea and another important Livornese kabbalist who lived in the following century, Elia Benamozegh. For more on Benamozegh, see A. Guetta, *Philosophy and Kabbalah: Elijah Benamozegh and the Reconciliation of Western Thought and Jewish Esotericism* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2009).
- 62 *Shomer emunym*, 45. It should be noted that these assertions appeared in the introduction to the second part of the dialogue, not in the dialogue itself.
- 63 Luzzatto later made repeated use of this term in his own theoretical argumentation.
- 64 *Ibid.*, 13-14.
- 65 *Ibid.*, 34.
- 66 This dialogue, probably written in 1734, was published posthumously on several occasions and under two different titles: *Hoqer w-mequbbal* and *Maamar ha-wikkuah*. For comprehensive bibliographies of Luzzatto’s writings, see A. Salah, *La République*, 382-389, and Natascia Danieli, *L’epistolario di Moše Hayyim Luzzatto* (Florence: Giuntina, 2007), 291-308. This dialogue was the Paduan kabbalist’s only work to receive a *haskamah* (authorization for publication) from his teacher, Yeshayahu Bassani.
- 67 Luzzatto was committed to reawakening Israel from its slumber. A parallel could be drawn between his vision of Jewish cultural decadence and reawakening and the way in which, in the following century, the German *maskylym* conceived of their own work as the rebirth of Judaism after dark centuries of exile. Indeed, it is possible to argue that Luzzatto’s historical vision anticipated the *maskylym* even though its content was different. For the historical vision of the *haskalah*, see Shmuel Feiner, *Haskalah and History: The Emergence of a Modern Jewish Historical Consciousness* (Oxford: Littman Library, 2004), esp. 45-50.
- 68 Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Introduction: “In our days, severe vicissitudes prevail, and all feel the pressure of hard times. The wisdom of our wise men has disappeared; the understanding of our prudent men is hidden. Hence, the commentaries of the Geonim and their compilations of laws and responses, which they took care to make clear, have in our times become hard to understand so that only a few individuals properly comprehend them. [...] The *Talmud* itself—the

- Babylonian as well as the Palestinian—the *Sifra*, the *Sifre*, and the *Tosefta* re-quire, for their comprehension, a broad mind, a wise soul and considerable study.” Luzzatto probably saw himself as a new Maimonides, though he replaced Talmudic knowledge with Kabbalah. For more on the prophetic mission which Maimonides may have imagined to be his, see Israel Yuval, “Moshe redivivus: ha-Rambam ke-‘ozzer la-melekh ha-mashiah” (Moses redivivus: Maimonides as an “Assistant to the King Messiah”), *Zion* 72, no. 2 (2007): 161-188.
- 69 Mosheh Ḥayyim Luzzatto, *Maamar ha-wikkuaḥ* (B’nai Brak, 1989), 33.
- 70 In a letter sent to the rabbi of Altona, Yeḥezkel Katzenellenbogen, in 1730, the rabbis of Padua clearly realized that Luzzatto’s intellectual contribution was “re-establishing the knowledge of the subject matter of the holy Luria, insofar as these are obscure and hard to understand.” See S. Ginzburg, *R. M.H.L. w-vney doro*, 88.
- 71 *Ibid.*, 37.
- 72 *Ibid.*, 62.
- 73 *Emunath ḥakhamym*, f. 11v.
- 74 *Ibid.*, f. 35v.
- 75 F. 7v.
- 76 Y. Alemanno, *Hay ha-‘olamim*, L’immortale, ed. Fabrizio Lelli (Florence, 1995); Moshe Idel, *La Cabbalà in Italia (1280-1510)* (Florence: Giuntina, 2007).
- 77 E. Benamozegh, *Teologia dogmatica e apologetica* (Leghorn, 1877); A. Guetta, *Philosophy and Kabbalah*.
- 78 *Emunath ḥakhamym*, f. 19r.
- 79 *Ibid.*, 19r, ff 8r and v.
- 80 *Ibid.*, f. 9r.
- 81 *Ibid.*, f. 43 v.
- 82 *Ibid.*, ff. 4r, 4v, 16v, 26r, 26v, 30v.
- 83 *Ibid.*, f. 7v.
- 84 *Shomer emunym*, 26-27.
- 85 *Ibid.*, 31.
- 86 *Ibid.*, 42.
- 87 *Ibid.*, 13.
- 88 *Ibid.*, 35.
- 89 *Ibid.*, 83-84.
- 90 *Ibid.*, 28.
- 91 *Ibid.*, 29.
- 92 *Ibid.*, 34.
- 93 *Ibid.*, 21.
- 94 *Ibid.*, 76. In other cases, Ergas provides a philosophical exegesis of entire passages of the *Zohar*, which he reproduces in Aramaic and translates into Hebrew: see p. 40, on the *sefyrāh keter*, the absolute Unity, which corresponds to the philosophical categories of “knowledge,” “knowing,” and “known,” based on Maimonidean notions (*Guide of the Perplexed* I:68).

- 95 Joëlle Hansel, “La lettre et l’allégorie.”
- 96 It is significant that although Ergas seeks to give a rational account of the doctrine of Yitzḥaq Luria, the author to whom he refers most frequently in the *Shomer emunym* is Moshe Cordovero, the most “philosophical” (or theological) of the sixteenth-century kabbalists.
- 97 Cf. Roland Goetschel, “La notion de *Simsum*.”
- 98 Yitzḥaq Abrabanel, *Rosh amanah*, ed. Menahem Kellner (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1992).
- 99 See, especially, Menahem Kellner, *Must a Jew Believe Anything?* (London: Littman Library, 1999).
- 100 *Shomer emunym*, 63.
- 101 *Ibid.*, 58-63. Benamozegh also composed a series of articles of faith, which he titled *Il mio credo* and defined as “philosophical-religious.” See E. Benamozegh, *Teologia dogmatica e apologetica, Vol. 1: Dio* (Leghorn, 1877); New edition *Il mio Credo* (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2002).
- 102 *Shomer emunym*, 91-96.
- 103 See the introduction by Yitzḥaq Stern to *Shomer emunym*.
- 104 *The Guide of the Perplexed* III:17.
- 105 On Yosef Attias, see A. Salah, *La République*, 50-2; and Lucia Frattarelli Fischer, “Lo specchio di un intellettuale cosmopolita: La biblioteca di Giuseppe Attias,” forthcoming.
- 106 Meir Benayahu, *Rabbi Hayyim Yosef David Azulay* (Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 1959), 134-141. On the intellectual atmosphere in Tuscany during the first half of the eighteenth century, see Ulrich Wyrwa, “‘Perché i moderni rabbini pretendono di dare ad intendere una favola chimerica...’ L’illuminismo toscano e gli ebrei,” *Quaderni storici* 103, XXXV.1 (2000): 139-161. This article divides the eighteenth century into two periods. Whereas Jewish and Christian intellectuals were still at odds in the first half of the eighteenth century, this hostility died out in the second half, particularly during the 1770s, when German and French ideas on religious tolerance reached that area. On Livorno see A. Guetta, “Livorno, un centro di qabbalah?,” in *Livorno 1606-1806. Luogo d’incontro tra popoli e culture*, ed. Adriano Prosperi (Turin: Allemandi, 2010), 375-381.
- 107 David Ruderman, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery*.
- 108 *Emunath ḥakhamym*, 22r and v. It may be that this “great philosopher” was none other than Simḥa Luzzatto, a rational mind *par excellence* and a famous scientist.
- 109 *Maamar ha-wikkuaḥ*, 60.
- 110 *Ibid.*, 45. Beyond the reference to spectacles, Luzzatto’s position may be considered “modern” insofar as it integrated the hermeneutic conception of the author’s intention, which the works of Protestant thinkers were developing during that period. See Jakob Rambach, *Institutiones hermeneuticae sacrae*, 1723.
- 111 *Maamar ha-wikkuaḥ*, 49.
- 112 *Ibid.*, 74-5.

- 113 Ibid., 55.
- 114 Ibid., 40.
- 115 Sa'adiyah ben Yosef Al-Fayyumi, known as Sa'adiyah Gaon, *Ha-nivhar ba-emu-nath we-ha-de'oth* (Selection of beliefs and opinions), trans. Y. Qafih (Jerusalem, 1993), 28.
- 116 *Maamar ha-wikkuaḥ*, 70; *Qelah pithḥey ḥokhmah*, 44: "We are forbidden to know the reason for the existence [of the *sefiroth*] [...] but we have to study and know their precise and wisely executed operation (*hanhagah*)."
- 117 *Da'ath tevunoth*, 64.
- 118 *The Guide of the Perplexed* I:64.
- 119 *Da'ath tevunoth*, 65.
- 120 There are a few instances in Luzzatto's thought where the relationship between human and divine action seems unresolved, and where it is not clear whether the human act of comprehension is the cause or consequence of the influx of divine light.
- 121 *Da'ath tevunoth*, 64.
- 122 Ibid., 103.
- 123 Written in 1734, it remained in manuscript form until Shemuel Luria's edition (Warsaw, 1889). All quotations refer to Hayyim Friedlander's edition (Bnei Brak, 1998).
- 124 Shemuel David Luzzatto wrote (in his *Lezioni di Teologia*, 42) that he "set out his system with great clarity in various works, principally in one entitled *One Hundred Thirty-Eight Doors to Wisdom (Qelah pithḥey ḥokhmah)*. Without using kabbalistic terms, he laid it out in a dialogue between the intellect and the soul (*Wikkuaḥ beyn ha-sekhel we-ha-neshamah*), which only exists in manuscript form, in the possession of the afore-praised, most excellent Rabbi Ghirondi."
- 125 *Da'ath tevunoth*, 57, 59 (*Midrash ha-ne'elam*), and 71 (*Ra'iya meheymna*, called "the *midrash* of Shim'on bar Yoḥay"). On page 63, Luzzatto attributes a quotation from the *Zohar* 3,113 to Ḥazal, i.e. to the Talmudic masters.
- 126 *Da'ath tevunoth*, introduction by Friedlander, 11 n12.
- 127 Ibid., 68.
- 128 According to Luzzatto, the advantage of the Lurianic doctrine over Cordovero's is that while Cordovero limits himself to general statements about the ten *se-fyroth* and what they produce, Luria defines this process in detail. Cf. *Maamar ha-wikkuaḥ*, p. 66.
- 129 *Kelalym rishonym*, p. 172 in the same volume that contains the *Da'ath tevunoth*.
- 130 Ibid., 287.
- 131 Essentially a theoretician, Luzzatto seldom made references to other works.
- 132 *Da'ath tevunoth*, 91.
- 133 See notes 84 and 85.
- 134 On the diffusion of Cartesianism in Italy, see Vincenzo Ferrone, *Scienza natura religione. Mondo newtoniano e cultura italiana nel primo Settecento*, Naples,

- 1982; and in particular 151: “The reference [...] to Descartes meant clear and distinct ideas, methodical doubt, and an exultant and convincing vision of science at odds with Aristotelianism, for entire generations of intellectuals (from Valletta to Muratori).” See also 465, on the *Discours de la méthode* and the greater impact it had than the *Principia philosophicae*.
- 135 This quotation is taken from Y. Spiner’s edition, with critical notes by M. Chriqui (Jerusalem, 2007).
- 136 *Derekh ha-Shem*, 1, 5, 2, 48. On this image in kabbalistic literature see Moshe Idel, *Enchanted Chains: Techniques and Rituals in Jewish Mysticism* (Los Angeles, CA, 2004).
- 137 *Ibid.*, 2, 7, 1, 114-6.
- 138 *Ibid.*, 3, 2, 1-9, 137-50. Luzzatto briefly alluded to the power of invoking God’s names in *Qelah pithey hokhmah*. He made this remark in the context of an analysis of the correspondence between the letters of the tetragrammaton and *sefiroth* (see 55-57).
- 139 *Ibid.*, 2, 8, 1-2, 117-21.
- 140 *The Guide of the Perplexed* III:17 and 18.
- 141 For a comprehensive account of Luzzatto’s perspective on Maimonides, and in particular on the distinction between the essence and existence of God, see Joëlle Hansel, *Moïse Hayyim Luzzatto (1707-1746)*, 205-210. Hansel’s book constitutes the most exhaustive study of the relationship between logic and Kabbalah in Luzzatto’s thought. Among her many important insights is the suggestion that internal kabbalistic sources—in particular Hayyim Vital’s *Etz Hayyim*—may have inspired the logical orientation of the Paduan author.
- 142 *Derekh ha-Shem*, 1, 1, 2, 9-10. One may also find a certain similarity between Luzzatto and Gersonides. The Provençal philosopher and scientist believed the Agent Intellect possessed “the Law of the existing things here (i.e. in this sub-lunar world), their right plan, and their order” (*Sefer Milhamoth Ha-Shem* (Riva del Garda, 1560), f. 7v. My translation differs slightly from Seymour Feldman’s in Gersonides, *The Wars of the Lord* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1984), 146.
- 143 See Ghislain Lafont, *Histoire théologique de l’Église catholique. Itinéraires et formes de la théologie* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1994), 252-275: Le temps des ruptures (1563-1774); Battista Modin, *Storia della teologia*, vol. 3 (Epoca moderna) (Bologna: Edizioni Studio Domenicano, 1996), 259; José Luis Illanes and Josep Ignasi Saranyana, *Historia de la teologia* (Madrid: Biblioteca de autores cristianos, 1996), 237.
- 144 For an attempt to alter this traditional perspective, see Hava Tirosh-Rothschild, “Jewish Philosophy on the Eve of Modernity,” in *History of Jewish Philosophy*, ed. Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman (London: Routledge, 2003), 499-573.
- 145 *Qelah pithey hokhmah* (Bnei Brak, 1992), 1.
- 146 *Ibid.*, 38, 53.

- 147 Ibid., 76, 89.
- 148 Ibid., 19.
- 149 Benedict Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. Stuart Hampshire. (London: Penguin Classics, 1996), Part I, def. IV, p. 1.
- 150 *Qelah pithhey hokhmah*, 49.
- 151 Benedict Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part I, def. V, p. 1.
- 152 Ibid., Part II, prop. I and II, pp. 32-33. For a comparison between kabbalistic theology and Spinoza's system, see the astute observations of the philosopher-kabbalist Elia Benamozegh in his *Spinoza et la cabbale*, published in various numbers of the *Univers Israélite* in 1864 before being republished separately in Padua in 1962 and then Jerusalem in 1988.
- 153 *Qelah pithhey hokhmah*, 58-70.
- 154 Ibid., 176-177.
- 155 *Da'ath tevunoth*, 25.
- 156 Ibid., 32-33.
- 157 This was almost obviously in reference to Descartes' clear and distinctive knowledge. The French philosopher was well known in Italy by this time, including by Jewish scholars. As already noted, in his *Emunath hakhamym*, Basilea described Descartes as the author whose physics had supplanted Aristotle, exposing the vanity of the scientific pretension to definitive truth.
- 158 *Maamar ha-wikkuaḥ*, 43.
- 159 Ibid., 44, 56. *Qelah pithhey hokhmah*, 89. On the importance of the idea of God's unity, see *Da'ath tevunoth*, 10.
- 160 *Da'ath tevunoth*, 21.
- 161 *Maamar ha-wikkuaḥ*, 48.
- 162 Ibid., 62, 76.
- 163 *Da'ath tevunoth*, 9.
- 164 *Maamar ha-wikkuaḥ*, 68.
- 165 *Qelah pithhey hokhmah*, 124.
- 166 Ibid., 168.
- 167 *Da'ath tevunoth*, 74.
- 168 *Maamar ha-wikkuaḥ*, 65.
- 169 The lexical and semantic echoes between *Derekh tevunoth* and *Da'ath tevunoth* (a theological treatise grounded in Kabbalah) are significant.
- 170 *Derekh tevunoth* (Amsterdam, 1742), f. 3r.
- 171 Ibid., author's introduction (no page numbers).
- 172 There were two types of conventional demonstrations: those that were common to everyone (e.g., "modesty is praiseworthy") and those that were the reserve of Israel (e.g., "the oral and written Torah is true").
- 173 Ibid., ff 17v-19r.
- 174 First edition published in Warsaw in 1897. The quotations are from the Jerusalem edition, published in 1993.

- 175 Mostly Petrus Ramus, according to C. H. Manekin. See above, note 15.
- 176 *Sefer ha-higayon*, 3.
- 177 It is worth pointing out that both this aesthetic criterion (which is surprising in a Jewish text) and the pragmatic criterion of utility are attributable to a “modern” sensibility.
- 178 *Sefer ha-higayon*, 1-2. The rhetorical treatise Luzzatto composed at the age of 19, *Leshon limmudym* (“A Cultured Language,” published in Mantua in 1727), also proceeded rigorously: praising distinctions from its opening pages, it began with general definitions (*geder*) and gradually progressed to particulars.
- 179 *Derekh ha-Shem*, 3.
- 180 *Da’ath tevunoth*, 262-263.
- 181 *Ibid.*, 102. “The supreme will wanted man to have power over numerous [superior] beings, which all move according to his acts and movements. This great contrivance is like a clock, the gears of which meet each other in such a way that a small gear puts many other larger gears in motion. Thus did the blessed Lord connect all of His creatures with many points of contact, and He connected all to man, who acts, thus putting the totality in motion with all His acts. He also covered everything with a membrane of skin and a layer of flesh, so that only the bodily surface is seen. But all this has a meaning: the great device created by God in His world operates according to man’s acts and worship, elevating him and sanctifying him, or diminishing him—may this not happen!— thus producing manifold situations. And all this depends on the soul, its parts and the roots that He put in the human body.” The same image of the clock gears is taken up in *Kelalym rishonym*, chapter 12, p. 256. Ergas deploys the more traditional meta-phor of a chain hanging between the worlds; see *Shomer emunym*, 88.
- 182 *Maamar ha-wikkuah*, 53. Cf. *Qelah pithey hokhmah*, 202, on the precise relationships that unite the *sefyroth*. As well as having an adverse impact on the exposition of a system, disorder may affect its operation. This occurred after the *shevyrath ha-kelym*, before the action of the *sefyroth* was coordinated and unified by the *sefyrah malkhuth*. Cf. *Qelah pithey hokhmah*, *ibid.*
- 183 *Qelah pithey hokhmah*, 25. In *Da’ath tevunoth*, 98, Luzzatto insists that measure (*middah*, *shi’ur*) and hierarchy or gradation (*hadragah*) are divine creations and that every being occupies a precise position (*ish ‘al meqomo*).
- 184 *Ibid.*, 1.
- 185 *Da’ath tevunoth*, 22.
- 186 *Ibid.*, 36.
- 187 *Ibid.*
- 188 *Ibid.*, 87, 92.
- 189 *Ibid.*, 46.
- 190 *Maamar ha-wikkuah*, 53.