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Is there a Primordial Torah?

§1 – Introduction

According to Rabbinic tradition the Torah existed before the creation of the world.¹ I shall call this pre-creation Torah, the *Torah Kadmonit*.² The word ‘Torah’ is ambiguous.³ We could be talking about a primordial copy of the *Pentateuch*, of the entire *Hebrew Bible*, or of some larger (or smaller) work; any of which could be called ‘Torah’. This paper doesn’t resolve that ambiguity. Instead, I ask, irrespective of its content, whether Orthodox Judaism should be committed to the existence of the *Torah Kadmonit*.

Given that this is a work of Orthodox Jewish philosophy, certain constraints are in play. For instance: any account I put forward of the *Torah Kadmonit* has to be well-buttressed by traditional Rabbinic texts; and/or, the taking of extreme interpretative liberties with those texts has to be supported by sufficiently compelling philosophical considerations.⁴ On the other hand, the prohibition on interpretative liberties doesn’t extend to the taking of certain liberties regarding original intent, since original intent wasn’t given

¹ A number of traditional sources that make this claim will be explored in what follows.

² Rabbi A. J. Heschel (2005, pp. 541-2) explains that medieval thinkers would often use the word ‘kadmon’ to mean uncreated, but that it originally could be used to describe something ‘created before the creation of the world’. Sometimes the *Torah Kadmonit* is referred to as the *Torah Keduma*, which simply means ‘the ancient Torah’ – my choice of ‘*Torah Kadmonit*’ follows Nachmanides (Introduction, Commentary to the Pentateuch) who refers to it as a ‘Sefer Kadmon’ – a Primordial book – this phrase has the benefit of expressing that it isn’t just old, but created before the creation of the world, and potentially eternal.

³ The word ‘Torah’ can mean instruction, as in Genesis 26:5. In Leviticus it often refers to a specific chapter of Priestly law (see, e.g. Leviticus 6:2). In Deuteronomy, the word takes on a wider extension, to refer to a book, although it isn’t always clear which book. In later usage, it can refer to the entire Hebrew Bible, and sometimes to the entire Rabbinic canon. For a survey of Rabbinic uses of the word, see Neusner 1985.

⁴ How well-buttressed is well-buttressed enough? Which sources are to be considered part of the Rabbinic canon? What constitutes a ‘sufficiently compelling’ consideration? I leave these questions unanswered, to be adjudicated by one’s Rabbinic sensibilities.

too much weight by the Rabbinic tradition itself, which was often (though not always) extremely ahistorical.⁵

Orthodoxy doesn't regard the Rabbis as infallible, especially outside of a strictly delineated area of discourse. When the Rabbis of the Talmud offer cures for various diseases, or share scientific insights, we're licensed to dismiss them. They don't have authority over science and medicine.⁶ But, if the *Torah Kadmonit* is a central posit of Talmudic *theology and hermeneutics* – disciplines among their lasting areas of authority – it won't be so simple for the Orthodox Jew to dismiss.

A comparison with demonology might be instructive. Some, within the tradition, have felt licensed to ignore⁷ or reinterpret demonological Talmudic texts,⁸ so as to avoid any continued Jewish commitment to the existence of demons. These moves were controversial,⁹ and were only adopted because of, what were thought to be, overwhelming considerations against the existence of demons.¹⁰ In §2, I hope to demonstrate that, just as with the denial of demonology, the denial of the *Torah Kadmonit*, from within the (Orthodox) Jewish tradition, would require compelling philosophical motivation.

One reason to deny the existence of the *Torah Kadmonit* is if one can make no ontological or metaphysical sense of it. Surely that would be sufficient reason to reject it – and to try to reinterpret our traditions accordingly. And thus, in §3, we shall explore the ontological and metaphysical possibilities for the *Torah Kadmonit*. In §4, we'll explore the theological considerations that can be brought to bear against the *Torah Kadmonit* in conversation with the writings of Saadya Gaon. If all of these considerations are found to be wanting, then Orthodox Judaism will seem to have no good reason to deny the existence of the *Torah*

⁵ Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein (2003) defends the rationale of this ahistorical practice. See the discussion between David-Hillel Ruben (2013a, 2013b), John Williams (2013), Jonathan Payton (2013), and me (Lebens 2013a, 2013b): it is by no means obvious that '*true successors*' of an intellectual tradition have to understand the doctrines and texts of their school in the way that their predecessors did. See also Ameriks (2014).

⁶ See Rav Sherira Gaon's responsum on this issue, as quoted by Carmell 2005, pg. 5

⁷ Maimonides fails to codify demonological laws from the Talmud. Tractate Sanhedrin 101a rules against inquiring of a Demon the whereabouts of one's lost property, a law which *is* codified by the Shulchan Aruch, YD, 179:16, but omitted by Maimonides in the Mishna Torah. See H. S. Lewis (1905, pp. 485-6).

⁸ When he doesn't ignore them, Maimonides reinterprets them (see *Guide* I.7). The Me'iri attempts to reinterpret quite consistently throughout his commentary to the Talmud. See his comments to BT Pesachim 109a s.v. *becama mekomot*. Rabbi A. Soloveichik (1991, pp. 50-2) even recasts demonology as microbiology.

⁹ See *Bi'ur ha-Gra*, YD, 179:6, note 13

¹⁰ Talmudic demonology is often susceptible to empirical disconfirmation. For instance: one could run a double blind trial to see whether the protective measures against demons prescribed in the Talmud carried out by a large group of subjects derive any benefits.

Kadmonit, and, given its centrality to the tradition, every reason to accept it as a part of their commitment to Jewish doctrine.¹¹

§2 – The Primary Sources

Although Orthodox philosophy licenses a degree of ahistoricity, it will be relevant later to have some pre-Rabbinic history on the table; a history I sketch before turning to the Rabbinic sources.

§2.1 – The Pre-Rabbinic History

Our story begins with the belief in God's *Logos* – a central feature of Philo's theology. David Winston provides a summary of Philonic descriptions of the *Logos* (1985, pp. 16-17):

It is the image of God, the first-begotten son of the Uncreated father, the chief of angels, the High Priest of the cosmos, the shadow of God or even the second God, the idea of ideas, the paradigmatic archetype of the macrocosm and of the human mind, the microcosm ... the cupbearer of God and the toastmaster of the feast, who differs not from the draught he pours, the *Logos* fills the soul of rational man with gaiety and gladness. He is a lover of the alone and the solitary, never mixing with the crowd of things created and destined to perish. Yet, extending himself from the center of the universe to its furthest bounds and from its extremities to its center again, he runs nature's unvanquished course, joining and binding fast all its parts. Constituting the unbreakable bound of the universe, he mediates and moderates the threatenings of the opposing elements, so that the universe may produce a complete harmony.¹²

It's not clear that these adjectives form a coherent set. Indeed, witness the following direct quote from Philo: '[The *Logos*] is neither uncreated by God, nor created as you, but midway between the two

¹¹ I'm not saying that I am providing reasons for *belief* in the existence of the *Torah Kadmonit*, but only for *acceptance* of it – 'acceptance' picks out a wider category of epistemic states than 'belief'. I say this in order to reconcile my argument in this paper with what I have argued elsewhere (Lebens 2013c; forthcoming). In those papers, I argue that Judaism doesn't demand belief in a particularly large list of propositions, but it might demand certain sorts of acceptance of propositions that one needn't altogether believe.

¹² In this excerpt, Winston is weaving together references from various sources in Philo, e.g.: *Quaestiones in Exodum* 2.124; *De migratione Abrahami* 103; *De confusione linguarum* 63, 146; *Quod Deus sit immutabilis* 31; *Quis rerum divinarum heres sit* 205, 234; *De fuga et inventione* 112; *De vita Mosis* 2.134; *Legum Allegoriae* 3.96; *De somniis* 2.249; and *De plantatione* 9-10.

extremes, a surety to both sides.¹³ Is the *Logos* one of God's creations or not? Yes, and no! Elsewhere, Philo answers the question in the affirmative. The *Logos* was created.¹⁴ So now we have to say that, for Philo, the *Logos* is both created and also neither created nor un-created!

At one point, despite his avowed monotheism, Philo calls the *Logos* a 'Second God' (*deuteros theos*).¹⁵ Daniel Boyarin (2006) seems eager to read this as Binitarianism. But, who's to say that '*deuteros theos*' should be understood as 'a second person within the Godhead' rather than as 'a second, or deputy, god' (with a lower-case *g*)?¹⁶ There's only one person in the Godhead (with an upper-case *G*), and that God has a deputy, distinct from him.¹⁷

Philo is not, of course, an authoritative source for Orthodox Judaism, but it's important to ask, from where did he receive his *Logos* theology? The story has something to do with his Middle Platonism.¹⁸ But, it's also clear that Philo was responding to *Biblical* cues. 'The personified Wisdom already makes her appearance in Proverbs and Job [chapter 28] in the guise of a charming female figure playing always before [God], having been created by him at the beginning of his work (Prov 8:30).'¹⁹ According to Azzan Yadin (2003, 2004), it, or something like it, is also referred to, if somewhat obliquely, in the Pentateuch. Numbers 7:89 states:

And when Moses went into the tent of meeting that he might speak with him, then he heard the voice speaking unto him from above the ark-cover that was upon the ark of the testimony, from between the two cherubim; and he spoke unto him.

Yadin (2004, pg. 116) points out that there are no mentions of God in the previous verses to allow for words like 'he' and 'him' to refer anaphorically to God. Yadin (2003, pg. 602) also points out that the verb

¹³ *Quis rerum divinarum heres sit* 205-206

¹⁴ *De opificio mundi* 16

¹⁵ *Quaestiones in Genesim* 2:62

¹⁶ To be fair to him, Boyarin (2006, pg. 114) does eventually concede that, at least, 'Philo oscillates about whether *Logos*, God's son, exists separately or is totally incorporated within the godhead.'

¹⁷ You might even read the Prologue to John's Gospel in the same way, distinguishing between an uppercase and a lower case *g*: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a [i.e., second/deputy] god' (John 1:1). The lack of the definite article before 'θεός' in the final clause makes room for such a translation. If John's Binitarianism was less than clear, how much more so was Philo's!

¹⁸ See Winston (1985, pg. 15)

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

'speaking' appears, oddly, in the *hitpael* (or reflexive) form, and thus the verb could be read as 'causing oneself to speak' (Ibid., pg. 606). After throwing in some source-critical considerations, Yadin concludes that it isn't *God* that is speaking to Moses but *God's voice*. *God's voice*, that is to say, has some sort of independence from God. Orthodoxy eschews some of the methods that drew Yadin to this reading, but the considerations that I have quoted *are* Orthodox-friendly. Yadin notes that the Sifre to Numbers (58), a key *Rabbinic* text, comes to exactly the same reading. It says (as quoted in Yadin 2004, pg. 116):

[Scripture] states that Moses would enter into the Tent of Meeting and stand there, and the voice descended from highest heavens to between the Cherubs, and he heard the voice speaking to him from within.

It is not *God* but *God's voice* doing the speaking. Yadin (2003) also develops a close reading of the Sinai theophany in Exodus (Chapters 19-20) according to which a hypostasized intermediary is posited there between God and the Jewish people. Once again, the reading he ends up with finds independent support in the halakhic Midrash (this time, the Mekhilta on Exodus 20:22):

'[You yourselves saw that] I spoke to you from the very heavens' (Exodus 20:22). One verse says: 'from the very heavens' and one verse says, 'The Lord came down upon Mount Sinai' (Exodus 19:20). How can both passages be maintained? The matter is decided by the verse: 'From the heavens He let you hear His voice to discipline you [, on earth he showed you his great fire, and from amidst that fire you heard his words]' (Deuteronomy 4:36)...²⁰

Where was God during the Sinai theophany: in the heavens, or in the fire upon Mount Sinai? The Midrash answers: God was in the heavens all along, but his *voice* was present in the fire. 'The words [of the Decalogue] were God's, but they were conveyed through the mediation of God's great fire.'²¹ A hypostasized voice appears much more clearly in later books of the Bible, such as Daniel (4:28), and on numerous occasions, Ezekiel (see Yadin 2003).

According to the Jerusalem Targum, a hypostasized wisdom is referred to already in Genesis 1:1. Indeed, the *Divine Word* becomes a major feature of the Palestinian Targumim (which were Aramaic free-

²⁰ As translated by Yadin (2004, pg. 117); I add the completion of the verse in Deuteronomy.

²¹ Yadin (2004, pg. 119)

translations of the Bible), in the form of the *Memra* (Aramaic for *The Word*). And though Boyarin (2006, pg. 119) hasn't convinced me that this was full-on Binitarianism,²² his analyses do lead me to think that the Targumim *were* personifying God's Word, and treating it as a distinct *entity*. Boyarin tends to think of hypostatization as positing a divine person within the Godhead. For him, there is a straight line connecting hypostatization with Binitarianism. But that doesn't seem right. Hypostatization is just reification; it's not *deification*! A hypostasis is just a substance; not necessarily a *Divine* substance. So, I agree with Boyarin and Yadin that ancient Judaism, from the Bible onwards, hypostatized all sorts of things: God's word, God's wisdom, God's great fire, God's law, the *memra*, the Metatron angel, etc. But, that doesn't mean that they *deified* any of them, or posited any complexity within the Godhead. The evidence seems neutral on that issue.

Moving from the Bible to the Apocrypha, *God's Wisdom* is vividly personified in *Wisdom of Solomon* (which, incidentally, was canonical for Philo). She is called Sophia; an effulgence of God's glory and his agent in creation (7:25-26; 8:4; 9:1-2). The author takes Sophia to be his wife. She contains all scientific knowledge, and is the source of morality and prophecy. The *Logos* makes a noteworthy appearance in *Ben Sira*, and appears there, perhaps for the first time, as clearly identified with *the Torah* (Ben Sira 24:23).

The Rabbis clearly wanted to rid Judaism of any temptation towards Binitarianism. Witness their ambivalence towards Metatron, the powerful angel (see BT Tractate Hagiga 15a²³). They were also quick to dismiss Rabbi Akiva's reading of Daniel 7:9, which had King David sitting on a heavenly throne besides God; Rabbi Akiva obediently retracted (BT Tractate Hagiga 14a). Whether Rabbi Akiva's reading of Daniel, or people's beliefs about Metatron, ever descended into fully fledged Binitarianism (as Boyarin sometimes implicitly and sometimes explicitly alleges) is difficult to know; but the danger with these doctrines is clear and present, as is the danger of *Logos* theology. These doctrines *lean* in the direction of Binitarianism, which, for the Rabbis, was ruled out as heterodox.

Despite the Rabbinic fear of Binitarianism, good reasons for positing intermediaries like the Metatron and the *Logos* remain. Take the Metatron. There are Biblical verses that seem to refer directly to him, or to something like him (see, e.g. Exodus 23:20-22). And, for theological reasons, if you want to preserve God's

²² Even if people used to worship the Memra, as Boyarin (2006, pg. 119) argues they did; Jews have a history of worshipping angels, despite Rabbinic opposition to this practice. This doesn't automatically entail that they thought that those angels were gods or part of God rather than intermediaries.

²³ I use 'BT' as an abbreviation for 'Babylonian Talmud', PT for 'Palestinian Talmud'

transcendence, you might feel compelled to posit various beings charged with bridging the chasm between Him and us. The same two considerations apply to the *Logos*. It provides a referent for all of the Biblical talk of a pre-existent wisdom, and, granted a little poetic license, it could even provide a referent for God's hypostasized voice/fire. Like the Metatron, it could also serve as a bridge between the heavens and the earth. 'As Rabbi Ishmael says: ... "Torah spoke the language of man." It is *only* Torah that speaks the language of man; the language of God is radically, categorically, unattainable.'²⁴

Even if you belong to the school of Rabbi Akiva,²⁵ which focuses on God's *immanence*, you might have reason to preserve the belief in an eternal Torah/Logos (besides its Biblical warrant). That the world itself was created in consultation with the Torah; that the Torah is a book that has existed for all time, puts the Torah on a pedestal that suits the Rabbinic movement. And thus even Rabbi Akiva, despite his immanentism, is associated with belief in the *Torah Kadmonit* (Avot 3:14; Midrash Tanchuma, Yitro 15).

These posits have their role to play. The Rabbis don't get rid of them. Instead, they sanitize them. The Metatron is still spoken of; but he's put in his place (BT Tractate Hagiga 15a) – he's *just* an angel; nothing more grand than that (BT Tractate Sanhedrin 38b). The *Logos*, which at least *threatened* to become a Second God in the work of Philo, becomes, in the words of the Rabbis, as in *Ben Sira*, an eternal *book* – not an eternal *person*.²⁶ As Boyarin correctly notes, the Rabbis have removed the potential sting from this doctrine.²⁷ With this history in place, I'll jump into the data that matters most for Orthodox theology.

§2.2 – The Rabbinic Sources

The Sife to Numbers (134) alludes to a heavenly text, which God consults over matters of law. Genesis Rabbah (1:1 and 1:4), presents God as consulting his heavenly Torah; a blueprint for the creation of the world.²⁸ The Midrash Tanchuma (Bereshit 1:1) also has God consulting the Torah during creation, describing it as written in flames of black upon flames of white. It later presents God, at the theophany at

²⁴ Yadin 2004, pg. 141

²⁵ See Yadin's (2004) introduction for a discussion about the historical accuracy, and the heuristic utility, of the division between the schools of Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Ishmael.

²⁶ The book is still *personified*, but this now seems to be a metaphor only. One reason to continue the metaphor of personhood, is to highlight what Yadin (2004) calls the 'presponsiveness' of the text of the Torah; a text which seems to educate us.

²⁷ At one point, he claims that they might have got rid of these doctrines altogether had they not been too popular to eradicate (Boyarin 2006, pg. 143). I reject that reading because there are ample Biblical and theological reasons to hang on to these posits.

²⁸ See Runia (1989, pg. 411) and Urbach (1975, pp. 199-200) for a comparison between Genesis Rabbah and Philo's *De opificio mundi*.

Sinai, reading from a heavenly text (Ibid, Yitro 15). Perhaps the hypostasized 'great fire' of the theophany is being construed now as a fiery Torah. In Leviticus Rabbah (35:6) and Deuteronomy Rabbah (4:2), we're told that God judges our lives according to the precepts of the Torah that lies in front of him. The Midrash on Psalms (8:2) has angels lamenting Moses' taking the Torah from them; the Torah that was created 974 generations before the creation of the world (Midrash on Psalms 105:3), or, alternatively, 2000 years before the creation of the world (Genesis Rabbah 8:2).

The Mishna in Tractate Avot 3:14 reads: 'the precious instrument [i.e., the Torah] through which the world was created has been given to [the Jews].'²⁹ And, in the final Mishna of Tractate Kiddushin, at least as that Mishna appears in both Talmuds,³⁰ we are told that Abraham observed the entire Torah. After all, God praises him for observing 'my Torah' (Genesis 26:5)! This Mishna seems to assume that the Torah preexists, if not creation, then at least the revelation at Sinai.

Torah Kadmonit talk extends into both Talmuds. In BT Sanhedrin (111a) and Mencahot (29b), Moses ascends to the heavens to find God writing a Torah. This *could* be the Torah that he's about to give to Moses. On that view, the Torah in question is not necessarily primordial; God may have started writing it only moments earlier. But, according to the Bible (Deut. 31:9), it seems as if Moses wrote the Torah *himself*; it wasn't simply handed down to him; so *this* Torah can't be *that* Torah! Furthermore, if you're a Divine atemporalist, you'll think that God acts *outside* of time, in an eternal present. Accordingly, you're going to read these Talmudic tales as Moses somehow witnessing God *timelessly* writing an eternal Torah.³¹ BT Pesachim (54a) lists the Torah as one of the things that was created before the creation of the world,³² and presents the Torah as essential for the world's continued existence (68b).

²⁹ Admittedly, not every version of the text includes the clause 'through which the world was created', but a large number of versions do; versions with which Orthodox Jews would be familiar.

³⁰ The relevant part of the Mishna is likely to be a later interpolation, but Orthodox Judaism, impervious as it is to source criticism, is going to relate to it as a Mishna, regardless of these considerations.

³¹ Clearly, a detached historical academic study of these texts might want to distinguish between an eternal Torah that pre-exists the world, and a heavenly Torah written later on, perhaps just before the revelation at Sinai. But, in addition to reasoning from Divine atemporalism, as I have done in this paragraph, an Orthodox theology will often be motivated by a harmonizing principle that seeks to reconcile divergent texts when doing so doesn't seem to do tremendous violence to those texts. This gives us added reason to think that the Talmudic texts are speaking about the same *Torah Kadmonit* that is ubiquitous in the Midrashim.

³² Not every member of the list is to be read hypostatistically, but some of them clearly could be, including the *Torah*. Rabbi Yehuda Halevi reads this list differently to me (Kuzari 3.73), as we shall see in §4.

PT Shekalim 6:1 and Sota 8:3 describe a fiery Torah of black and white flames, given to Moses by God. Once again, this can't be the Torah that Moses wrote and put in the Holy Ark. Rather, these texts seem to be talking about the blueprint from which Moses copied his Torah. Its description exactly echoes/anticipates Midrashic descriptions of the *Torah Kadmonit*.

After the closing of the Talmud, references to the *Torah Kadmonit* can be found among the Geonim (the Rabbis from c.590 until c.1040) and the Rishonim (Rabbis from c.1040 until 1563). Among the Geonim, a responsum can be found that explains why every word of the public reading of the Torah must be directly read from the scroll – not by heart – since even God himself read from the scroll that was laid out before him in heaven (Teshuvot Hageonim, Sha'arei Teshuvah 351)! Among the Rishonim, Nachmanides' introduction to his commentary to the Pentateuch, stands out in terms of its vivid account of the *Torah Kadmonit*.

The tradition of the *Torah Kadmonit* has Biblical warrant, appears in the Midrashim, the Mishnah, both Talmuds, and in the writings of the Geonim and Rishonim (not to mention its integrality to the Jewish mystical tradition, see, e.g., Zohar Parshat Terumah). The idea that there can such a thing as an Orthodox Jewish theology, is unrealistic. Jewish Orthodoxy is too open to difference, in belief and practice, and lacks anything like an elaborate and precise catechism. Instead, we should talk of Orthodox theologies. One way in which these theologies will differ, is the weight that they give to certain texts. Some recognizably Orthodox theologies give very little weight to the mystical texts in our tradition; some give more weight to them. Some give more weight to certain Rabbis than others. But the tradition of the *Torah Kadmonit* appears or is at least alluded to, throughout the ages, in pretty much every text that any Orthodox Jew is likely to take seriously. And thus, I hope to have demonstrated that the *Torah Kadmonit* is not a notion that any Orthodox Jewish theology can lightly dismiss.

§3 – The Ontology of Primordial Literature

Could a book exist before the creation of the physical space required to contain it? Rabbi Yehuda ben Barzilai was concerned that it couldn't.³³ The Ibn Ezra declares that Rabbinic talk of a pre-existent Torah must be profoundly figurative and shouldn't be understood as an ontological thesis about something created *before* the world. Without physical motion, he thinks, there can be no such thing as time; to be

³³ As he is cited by Heschel (2005, pg. 339)

before the physical creation is, therefore, to be before *time*, and you can't have anything before time, because 'before' picks out a relation between temporal relata.³⁴ Of course, if you're not offended by abstract objects, then no such problems arise. Abstracta aren't in space and time. But what kind of abstractum would something have to be, in order to fit the profile of the *Torah Kadmonit*?

Elsewhere (Lebens 2015), I argue that all talk about literary works is ambiguous.³⁵ In what follows, I hope to demonstrate that talk about *Heavenly* literature is less open to ambiguity. I think we can safely say exactly what sort of thing the *Torah Kadmonit* must be, and that the worries of Rabbi Yehudah ben Barzilai and Ibn Ezra will not stick.

§3.1 – The Ontology of Literature

There are at least three entities worthy of the name 'Moby Dick', and talk of *Moby Dick* is correspondingly ambiguous. The first relevant Moby-Dick-entity is a pure abstractum; something like the ordered lexical items reproduced in every copy, or the ordered set of propositions expressed by the symbols printed in them. In fact, there may be a number of abstracta that could claim to be *Moby Dick*. Sometimes we're interested in the *content* of the book (i.e., a set of propositions), and sometimes we're interested in the way that those propositions are expressed (i.e., a set of *sentences* under an interpretation). Either way, one disambiguation of 'Moby Dick' will be in terms of a pure abstractum. But, when speaking of the *Torah Kadmonit*, I think we're *rarely* identifying it with its content. I have two reasons for thinking this.

(1) If the *Torah Kadmonit* shares its content with the Pentateuch, which is the opinion of Nachmanides, then the Pentateuch, considered in terms of its content, will be identical to the *Torah Kadmonit*, but, in that we're talking about the *Torah Kadmonit* as *opposed* to the *Torah simpliciter*, it seems that we're not *identifying* the *Torah Kadmonit* with its content alone.

(2) What becomes of God's authorship of the *Torah Kadmonit*? If literary works are pure abstracta, then authorship is *discovery*; not *creation*. But, if *Moby Dick* pre-existed Melville, presumably God, in his omniscience, discovered it long before Melville did. Does this mean that God is a co-author of *Moby Dick*, qua pure abstractum? No. We can restrict the authorship-relation to be a relation between a Platonic

³⁴ Ibn Ezra's Introduction to his Commentary to the Pentateuch, Path 4.

³⁵ For the purposes of this paper, much of §3.1 has to summarise the conclusions of my more lengthy paper on the ontology of literature (Lebens 2015).

literary-structure and a *non*-Divine mind. Accordingly: when we're thinking of literary works as pure abstracta, what we mean by *authorship* is a discovery-relation between a non-Divine mind and an abstractum. But that's not going to help us to define what it means for *God* to author a work – since *God* is a Divine mind; and, if we want to say that *God's* variety of authorship is the mere *discovery* of a Platonic literary form, then we're going to have to say that, relative to the relation of *divine*-authorship, *God* is the author of *every* literary work qua pure abstractum, since he must have discovered them all. But surely *God's* relationship to the *Torah Kadmonit* is somehow privileged over his relationship to all other works of literature!

One route out of this second issue would be to say that *God's* special relationship to the *Torah Kadmonit* – his authorship of it – is that it is the one book that he *chose* to use as a blueprint for the creation of the world and/or as a legal guide to the Jewish people. And yet, the notion that *God* merely picked the *Torah Kadmonit* off of his mental book shelf and decided that 'this would be a good one to roll with', does violence to Midrashic traditions about the *Torah Kadmonit*. Some of those texts include *God* *creating* his *Torah*. To do justice to this Midrashic trope, we have to secure *God's* intimate and special relationship to the *Torah Kadmonit* above and beyond the relationship that he bares to the Platonic essences of all *other* books; and above the mere choice of *using* this book above all others. So, even though talk of *Moby Dick* can sometimes be cashed out in terms of pure abstracta, talk about the *Torah Kadmonit* doesn't obviously seem amenable to such treatment.

Sometimes, when we're talking about a work of literature, what we're really talking about is the author's *achievement*; and thus the object of our attention is the generative performance that gave rise to copies of the work. Sometimes you might merely be interested in the propositional content of a work; or the sound of the words, without any regard for the author and her particular achievements. But, sometimes, what you appreciate, when you appreciate a work of literature, is what the author *did*. *What-Melville-did* is the second entity worthy of the name 'Moby Dick'. However, I'm pretty sure that, when we're talking about the *Torah Kadmonit*, we're *not* talking about *God's* literary achievement. First: *God* might merely have said, 'Let there be a *Torah Kadmonit*', which doesn't give us much, by way of generative performance, to get our teeth into! Secondly: when *God* turns to the *Torah Kadmonit* to guide his creative activity, it doesn't seem right to say that the generative performance that gave rise to the *Torah Kadmonit* is the object of his consultation.

The final way in which to disambiguate talk of *Moby Dick* is in terms of *impure abstracta*. Amy Thomasson (2004) thinks that literary works are always to be identified with impure abstracta. She says:

[W]orks of literature ... seem to fall between the cracks of traditional category systems: accommodating them will require acknowledging intervening categories for temporally determined, dependent abstracta: abstract artefacts created by human intentional activities.

It is the product of these activities that we call *impure abstracta*. Think of a sonata by Beethoven written in 1806. We don't want to identify the sonata with its sound-structure, given that we're rejecting pure Platonism, and we don't want to identify it with its performances or physical score-copies. Jerrold Levinson (1990) suggests that we identify it with 'the performed-sound-structure-as-indicated-by-Beethoven-in-March-1806' (pg. 224); not with the structure itself, but with *the structure as indicated*; an 'indicated type'.

Indicated types can be thought of in terms of impure sets. Beethoven's Sonata will be the set that includes him, his act, at a specific time in 1806, of indicating a particular sonic-structure, and the sonic-structure itself. This helps us to explain how the *Torah Kadmonit* is more intimately related to God than *Moby Dick*. God didn't merely select the *Torah Kadmonit* from his library, preferring it to *Moby Dick*. Instead, his action of selecting the content of the *Torah Kadmonit* created a new entity: an indicated-type.

When I marvel at how *Moby Dick* has influenced American literature, it is not the form of the work alone that did that trick, or instantiates that property (of having influenced American literature), nor Melville's acts of scribbling. I'm interested in an impure abstractum, something that Melville created and which has taken on a life and an influence of its own. That we often think of art in terms of generative performances and impure abstracta is what undergirds our intuition that, if two poets sat down and wrote the same words in the same order, there would at least be some sense in which they *don't* end up writing the same poem; they invested the same set of words with a different significance. Conceivably, the two poems could take on quite different lives. Talk of the *Torah Kadmonit* is not concerned about pure form, or a generative performance; so, by a process of elimination, it seems to me that when we're talking about the *Torah Kadmonit*, we're talking about an impure abstractum.

Although thinking of works as impure sets is a good way of getting your head around indicated type theory, I argue (in Lebens 2015) that impure abstracta theory is better off thinking of works, not in terms of sets, or *n*-tuples, but in terms of *simple* abstracta – without members and without parts. When you create a work, part of what you do, is to bring this abstract thing – *the work* – into existence.³⁶ You also invest the work with properties: it has literary content, it has style, etc. But those properties are not constituents of the thing; they are simply *properties* of the thing. It also takes on *new* properties – such as, being much beloved by fans of sci-fi, or harshly criticised, or misunderstood – that are beyond your control. As I explain (in Lebens 2015), thinking of your impure abstracta as *simple* saves you from various problems that infect indicated type theory.³⁷

Through some intentional act, God brought a simple impure abstractum into existence – the *Torah Kadmonit* – it has a literary-structure because it's a book, but that structure isn't a constituent of the *Torah Kadmonit* so much as a property *held* by the *Torah Kadmonit*. It isn't concrete and doesn't need a physical location in order to exist. We have escaped the concern of Rabbi Yehuda ben Barzilai.

§3.2 – The Torah Kadmonit and Time

Now to the concern of Ibn Ezra. When was the *Torah Kadmonit* created? Perhaps it exists timelessly, but then it makes little sense to speak, as the Rabbis do, of its *creation*. But, if it was created *in* time, can we make sense of a time before the creation of the world? Furthermore, impure abstracta, it seems, *have* to be created. If the *Torah Kadmonit* is timeless, and therefore uncreated, we seem forced back towards a *pure* abstracta account of the *Torah Kadmonit* as an eternally existing form, which reintroduces problems we sought to discard above.

If you think that God himself is outside of time, then I think we can usefully borrow a term from Christian philosophy. Christian thought developed a notion of *eternal generation* in order to describe the relation between the Father and the Son. G. L. Prestige introduces eternal generation in these terms (quoted in Wiles 1976, pp. 20-2):

³⁶ One can't deny the possibility of doing this, saying that it's part of the definition of 'abstract' to exist timelessly and therefore not to be capable of coming into existence. First of all, the abstract-concrete distinction is notoriously difficult to define. Secondly, following Thomasson, we're looking for an ontological category that we have reason to believe lies between the cracks of classical taxonomies. If you're not happy calling these created things abstract, call them 'shabstract', since they certainly don't seem to be concrete!

³⁷ Problems raised by Davies (2004) and by Caplan and Matheson (2004)

[T]he begetting of the Son was not an event in time, but represents an eternal process within the eternal being of God, no less actual at this moment than it was before the worlds were made ...

Echoing Prestige, we can say: God's begetting/creation of the *Torah Kadmonit* was not an event in time, but represents an eternal process between a timeless God and his timeless Torah, no less actual at this moment than it was before the worlds were made. The *Torah Kadmonit* is co-eternal with God. It exists in the same eternal present as him. But, it is ontologically *secondary* to him. He is eternally writing it in his eternal present.³⁸ We are licenced to speak of the Torah *as if* it existed before creation, given that its creation is an *eternal process* – outside of, or beyond, time. God is constantly giving birth to his Torah in his eternal present; indeed, the Rabbis describe the Torah as God's only daughter³⁹ – so the metaphor of begetting seems particularly apt.

If the property of *redness* exists timelessly, then so does the singleton set containing *redness* as its member. But, even though both of these entities are timeless, and neither is created by the other, the singleton set is ontologically dependent upon the property of redness. Likewise the *Torah Kadmonit* and God might both be outside of time, but the *Torah Kadmonit* is dependent upon God for its existence. More than that, the *Torah Kadmonit* in order to be a literary impure abstractum needs to be eternally ontologically dependent upon an eternal *act* of God – his act of *writing* the *Torah Kadmonit*.

Different options present themselves if you believe that God resides *within* time.⁴⁰ If the Orthodox Jew wants to adopt a model of Divine temporalism, they're probably going to have to invoke the notion of a *pre-creation* time – since God, the creator of everything, *has* to pre-date his creation. They'll also deny Ibn Ezra's contention that there is no time without motion. A problem immediately arises for this view: why did God chose the point in pre-time that he chose, in order to create the world, when he could have done it sooner, and he could have done it later? God's creation of the *Torah Kadmonit* heightens the question. We now have to justify *two* completely random choices – why did God chose the *two* moments that he chose (first for the creation of the *Torah Kadmonit*, and then for the creation of the world)?

³⁸ You're going to have to make sense of the notion of an eternal present to allow for eternal processes like this. Stump and Kretzmann (1981, 1987, 1992) and Stump (2016) try to defend this notion.

³⁹ See e.g., Tanchuma Pikudei 4; Exodus Rabbah 33:1

⁴⁰ This part of the paper owes a great deal to Zimmerman (2002)

Dean Zimmerman suggests an easy way out (2002, pg. 12): ‘If God were confronted by a set of mutually incompatible states of affairs none of which was intrinsically better than any other, but any one of which was better than none, then it would be an imperfection in God if He could not arbitrarily select one among these states of affairs and bring it about. The indecisiveness of Buridan’s ass is not a virtue but a defect.’ There was no reason to choose any particular pair of points in pre-time, so God simply picked at random – and there’s nothing imperfect about that.

Further: you might think that time intervals are nothing more than measurements relative to a set of physical laws. The laws allow you design what the laws will call a perfect clock. In worlds with different laws of physics, clock design would be different. Before God choses to adopt a set of physical laws to govern the world, there can be no notion of a clock. And thus, if such a thing as time exists, before the laws of nature, it will have a before and an after (a topology), but there will be no fact of the matter as to how far away one instant is from another (there will be no metric). Time intervals are relative to laws of physics (post-Einstein, we’d say that they’re relative to laws of physics and a reference frame). So, though you can still ask why God chose to create at the two moments that he chose, you *can’t* ask, ‘why did He wait that long?’ because there are no facts about the length of any waiting period in pre-time.⁴¹

Further still: a theist might not want to be a substantivalist about the instants of pre-time – a substantivalist is someone who believes that time is comprised of real things called ‘instants’. If time instants really exist (in time and in pre-time), and if God exists in time (and before that, in pre-time), then it looks as if God might be dependent upon those instants for his existence. So the temporalist theist might eschew substantivalism. And, once you deny the existence of instants, you’re well on your way to denying that there is some particular instant at which God created the world. Perhaps our problem, to the extent that you’re still worried about why God chose the moments he did for his acts of creation, would dissolve.

Zimmerman (2002) explores two constructivist views which deny that instants are ontologically basic – they are instead, *constructed* out of other things. The two options are these: (1) instants are defined as sets of simultaneous events (of course, the relativity of simultaneity is going to complicate matters, but I leave that to one side); or (2) instants are defined as propositions describing a complete world state. For

⁴¹ That pre-time would have no metric is a central argument of Swinburne (1993)

either view, a new problem emerges. Unless you think that God undergoes changes in pre-time, the constructivist is only going to be able to find one instant in pre-time; there was only one event; only one world state – an unchanging God existing unchangingly – and so, there was only one *instant*. Once you factor in the creation of the *Torah Kadmonit*, there will be three pre-world instants: (1) God existing unchangingly alone; (2) God creating the *Torah Kadmonit*; (3) God existing unchangingly alongside the unchanging *Torah Kadmonit* before the creation of the world. But, the posit of pre-time is hardly saving God's eternity if it only lasts for one, or *three*, instants before the creation of the world.

The constructivist can respond: our construction of instants is only intended to help us measure the passage of time relative to laws of physics. Before the laws of physics apply, the things which will later serve as instants, needn't be thought of as being instantaneous. In pre-time, the things that will later play the role of instants – sets or propositions – needn't be thought of as durationless, because in lieu of physical laws, there can be no facts about the length of temporal intervals (see Zimmerman 2002, pg. 26).

The next worry is that, because there are no facts of the matter as to how long pre-time is, it is no more wrong to say that it's infinitesimally short as it is to say that it's infinitely long. In order to protect God's eternity, surely the former must be *more* wrong than the latter! Here Zimmerman appeals to the alleged impossibility of instantaneous conscious (or at least phenomenal) states. He quotes C. L. Hamblin (1971, pg. 128), who advances the argument that you can experience a colour, say, for 'half a second or half a century but [the red book] cannot turn Green durationlessly and instantaneously at the stroke of twelve, remaining red at all times earlier and later.' If God's states in pre-time are *conscious* states, then we can't say anything about their length, other than that they are *not* infinitesimally short.

To summarise: you could go substantialist and say that pre-time is comprised of a continuum of instants with no *first* instant. You can say that at one of those instants, God created the *Torah Kadmonit*, and that at another of those instants, he created the world. The cost is that God has to make a random choice as to which instants to pick for his acts of creation (which might not be such a cost), and that God relies on the existence of instants in order to exist in time (which, again, might not be a cost, if you're happy to say that God *could have* existed timelessly). Alternatively, if you're worried by these costs, you can say that pre-time isn't comprised of instants at all, but of a number of events that have no determinate length. On this view, God is no longer reliant on instants, and there is no question about why he chose certain instants to act in over others. The cost is that God's existence now has a first instant, but, to be fair to the position,

you *can* deny that pre-time has finite length, because it doesn't really have any length-facts at all, other than the theologically pleasing fact that it wasn't infinitesimally short.

One cannot salvage Rabbinic talk of '2000 years' or '974 generations' in pre-time, because pre-time, on either model, admits of no metric. This isn't a terrible cost because both phrases are almost self-evidently figurative/hyperbolic/symbolic. Furthermore, both models of pre-time *do* salvage Rabbinic talk of God's history of creating and destroying worlds *before* the creation of our world (Genesis Rabbah 2:7).⁴² During the time line of those earlier worlds, God would have existed in times that are measured relative to the physical laws that God elected to govern those worlds; at times in-between worlds, God would exist in pre-time. Whether you believe that the *Torah Kadmonit* is created eternally, or was created during pre-time, the Ibn Ezra's temporal objection – based on the spurious connection between motion and time – doesn't seem to bite.

§3.2 – Intellect or Impure Abstractum

The source material in question contains a lot of figurative language. I'm not advocating a bone headed literalism. There isn't a concrete Torah scroll made out of parchment in heaven; or even a fiery Torah of black and white flames. But, to say that beneath the metaphors and the figures of speech, there was no underlying belief in the existence of something worthy of being called a *Torah Kadmonit* beggars belief – especially if you appreciate the history of the ideas in question; a history of hypostatization – followed by sanitization – of various heavenly beings. And, since we *can* make sense of the posit of a *Torah Kadmonit*, in terms of a simple impure abstractum, eternally generated, or created in pre-time, we have no philosophical reasons to adopt such revisionary re-readings. Again, revisionary readings would be justified, even within Orthodoxy, if there were compelling philosophical reasons to deny that a *Torah Kadmonit* could possibly exist, but R. Barzilai and Ibn Ezra's reasons for thinking its existence to be impossible rely upon faulty metaphysical reasoning.

Maimonides is inclined to reduce all talk of angels to talk of forces (Guide II.6). Some of these forces are transient and some exist eternally – but the same is true of the angels in the Rabbinic presentation of them. These forces are ontologically real, for Maimonides. On Maimonides' account, the Metatron is

⁴² This Midrash notes that the first evening of the Genesis account is introduced with the words, 'And there was evening, and there was Morning; One day' (Genesis 1:5). The presence of the word 'And' at the beginning indicates that the first evening followed on from some previous event; that is to say, before the time of this world, there was a pre-time, in which God created and destroyed other worlds.

nothing other than the Active Intellect (Ibid). More generally: whenever God is presented as *consulting* a heavenly host, just as he is presented in our sources as consulting the *Torah Kadmonit*, Maimonides would present matters as follows:

These passages do not convey the idea that God spoke, thought, reflected, or that He consulted and employed the opinion of other beings, as ignorant persons have believed. How could the Creator be assisted by those whom He created! They only show that all parts of the Universe, even the limbs of animals in their actual form, are produced through angels: for natural forces and angels are identical.⁴³

In Rabbinic sources, God is presented as consulting primordial texts. Maimonides tells us to interpret this as follows: God creates via Aristotle's separate intellects, which the Rabbis call angels.⁴⁴ Maimonides identifies the Metatron angel with the active Active Intellect.⁴⁵ Perhaps he would view the *Torah Kadmonit* as a different metaphorical conceit for speaking of the same thing. For after all, the *Torah Kadmonit* is spoken of as an entity that God consults; and, in those sources, it is presented as the most senior of consultants. For Maimonides, the Metatron and the *Torah Kadmonit* are *one*: they are both ways of speaking about the Active Intellect.⁴⁶ Or, perhaps the *Torah Kadmonit* is a *higher* intellect – closer to God.

Clearly, Maimonides' *Torah Kadmonit* is not an impure abstractum, nor even a literary work. Maimonides is a Neo-Platonized Aristotelian, and he tries to make sense of the sources in terms of those philosophical commitments. For Maimonides, the only difference between our Rabbinic source material and Aristotle is the Rabbinic belief that the intellects were *created* (Guide, II.6). Where my account agrees with Maimonides is that you can't cash out the relevant metaphors *non-ontologically*; the source material in question is *making ontological posits*. I happen to prefer literary impure abstracta to Aristotelian

⁴³ Translation from Friedlander (1947, pg. 161)

⁴⁴ That this chapter of the *Guide* might be aimed at the *Torah Kadmonit* tradition, alongside angelology is suggested by Urbach (1975, pg. 200).

⁴⁵ Friedlander (1947, pg. 161)

⁴⁶ In the Guide, I.65, Maimonides says that, according to Jewish tradition, the Torah is created and it looks, at least *prima facie*, as if Maimonides is saying that the Torah was created at the time that it was revealed to Moses. This doesn't undermine my reading of the Guide II.6, according to which the *Torah Kadmonit* is said to exist and to be identical with the Active Intellect. On a closer reading of I.65, Maimonides isn't really clear that the Torah was created *at the time* that it was revealed, only that it was *created* – Maimonides leaves it open that there may have been a delay between its creation and Moses' reception of it. It's also possible that the Torah of Moses is not lexically identical to the *Torah Kadmonit*; they're not the same thing. The *Torah Kadmonit* exists, as a creation of God – one of the separate intellects.

intellects, since I'm not a Neo-Platonized Aristotelian! But we agree: the texts that I quoted in §2.2 leave us with an ontological posit.

§4 – Theological Worries

The *Torah Kadmonit* tradition first arose from consideration of Biblical references to a pre-existent wisdom – as in Proverbs 8. Saadya Gaon's reading of those verses doesn't allow for any hypostatization. As far as I know, Saadya Gaon doesn't explicitly deny that there is, or was, anything called a *Torah Kadmonit*, but if the Bible doesn't refer to a hypostatic wisdom, then there may be no *need* to posit the existence of a *Torah Kadmonit* to serve as a sanitized referent for those verses. Saadya's reading of the relevant Biblical verses is motivated by a heightened allegiance to what Alvin Plantinga (1980, pp. 54-55) labels the 'sovereignty-aseity intuition'. According to this intuition:

- (a) God has created everything distinct from himself, (b) everything distinct from God is dependent upon him, (c) he is not dependent on anything distinct from himself, and (d) everything is within his control.

Each of these clauses is intuitively compelling to the theist. But problems are lurking nearby. Imagine God's hypostasized wisdom exists. Can we say that it is *dependent* upon God, as clause (b) would demand? If God wasn't wise, then he wouldn't be *God*. Consequently, doesn't God, in fact, depend upon his wisdom, and not the other way round? And thus, if you accept the existence of Divine wisdom, you either have to deny clause (b), or, you have to say that God's wisdom *isn't* distinct from God himself. Denying clause (b) is unattractive because of its intuitive force, but, accepting that God is identical to his wisdom seems even more bizarre. God isn't a property.

We could adopt a nominalism about God's wisdom. Just because he's wise, it doesn't mean that there is such a thing as 'the Wisdom of God'. This seems to be the route that Saadya Gaon adopts. When Proverbs refers to a pre-existent wisdom, Saadya, implicitly denying the grounds upon which the whole *Torah Kadmonit* tradition is built, says that 'What is meant by it is not that God created all things by means of wisdom as an instrument, but merely that He created them wisely so that whoever saw them would testify that a wise being had made them.'⁴⁷ God's wisdom is manifest in all that he does, but his wisdom it is not

⁴⁷ Emunot Va'Deot, II.6 (Rosenblatt 1948, pg. 107; see also pg. 55)

a thing that exists, and therefore it needn't give rise to a counterexample to clause (b). 'God's wisdom' is read nominalistically.

As Plantinga (1980, pg. 89) argues, nominalism might salvage clause (b) of the intuition, but, as long as you still think it true that God is wise, you violate clause (d), which states that everything is within God's control. A God who isn't wise isn't the God of classical theism. And thus, you have got rid of an *entity* – God's wisdom – that offended against clause (b), but you're still left with a *truth* that God has no control over; the necessary truth that God is wise. Clause (d) has been violated.

You could revert to the position that God isn't *distinct* from his wisdom, but then you go down the road of saying that God and his essence are identical, which has all sorts of strange consequences. God turns out to be identical to his wisdom, and to his love, and to his knowledge that $2+2=4$, which are all identical to each other. We end up having to say more and more counterintuitive things just to hold on to the sovereignty-aseity intuition.⁴⁸ Our overall intuitive economy is, Plantinga maintains, better served simply by denying, or editing, certain aspects of the sovereignty-aseity intuition itself. Let's just say that God's wisdom exists and that it isn't identical to God!

To appreciate the history of the *Torah Kadmonit* tradition is to appreciate a tradition of hypostatization and a good dose of Rabbinic sanitization of those hypostatic posits. This hypostatic tradition goes all the way back to the Bible, as it was consistently understood by Jewish tradition right throughout the Rabbinic era. Admittedly, orthodox theology is not immune to radical re-reading of the tradition. With a doctrine of ongoing revelation, you can even allow for the tradition to evolve in quite radical ways, such that the tradition corrects itself over time. But, when a tradition goes *this* far back, and has such foundations in the Bible itself, and is so frequently re-iterated throughout all of the strata of the tradition, I would say that you need exceptionally good philosophical or theological reasons to engage in violent re-reading of the relevant texts.

⁴⁸ Eleonore Stump (2016, pp. 89-97) proposes a 'quantum metaphysics' that allows us to shut off some of these strange consequences of identifying God with his essence; including the unsightly consequence that God is a property. On this metaphysics, we can say that God is identical to his essential properties, *and* that God *isn't* a property. I don't want to rule out the possibility that her quantum metaphysics might be of help to the classical theologian, but without some heavy duty philosophy, the sovereignty-aseity-intuition certainly gets into all sorts of trouble.

I'm walking a delicate road here in terms of the role that historical awareness is playing in my argument. In the introduction, I argued that Orthodox theology doesn't have to be all that historically aware. But I'm now arguing that a non-ontological reading of the *Torah Kadmonit* tradition doesn't respect the history (outlined in §2.2), according to which the Torah Kadmonit tradition is one of hypostatization and sanitization of the hypostasized posits. Am I demanding a historically aware theology or not? On the other hand, the notion that the *Torah Kadmonit* is a simple impure abstractum sounds distinctively twenty-first century. But my actual position is that the tradition is allowed to evolve, and to introduce notions that couldn't have been articulated in early ages, but that even as it evolves, it has to respect the history that it's seeking to change. This is a delicate balancing act to perform, and different Orthodox thinkers will calibrate the balance in slightly different ways. But the idea should be clear enough: to re-read this clearly hypostatic tradition to be ontologically neutral is to totally disrespect its history, and can only be justified by exceptionally strong philosophical reasons; but the introduction of contemporary metaphysical notions is completely consistent with the unfolding of the tradition.

Saadya Gaon simply hasn't provided us with *exceptionally* good justification for his ontologically reductive rereading of the foundational verses in Proverbs 8. As long as the hypostatic wisdom is *dependent* upon God, either created in pre-time, or generated eternally, we do not have to fear the scepter of polytheism, nor even Binitarianism that seems to worry Saadya. Saadya Gaon himself is happy to hypostatize *God's glory* – something like a bright light, created at some point in time;⁴⁹ his problem with God's hypostatized *wisdom* seems only to be how it would be related to God *himself* and to *eternity*, being presented somehow as *before* time. The sovereignty-aseity-intuitions that might motivate Saadya's reductive readings of the Biblical source material seem, to me at least, unworthy of protecting, since, in order to protect those mildly-plausible intuitions, you end up, as Plantinga has demonstrated, having to say ever more counterintuitive things.

Saadya Gaon was famously happy to engage in allegorical readings of the Bible, when reason requires it.⁵⁰ But, he was also explicit that one shouldn't go to extremes. You could, he argues, read all of the Biblical texts that refer to the future resurrection as allegories, but to do so would allegorize the primary texts to such an extent that, so to speak, nothing is left of the original.⁵¹ He draws a comparison to the Genesis

⁴⁹ Emunot Va'Deot, II.12 (Rosenblatt 1948, pg. 130)

⁵⁰ See Emunot Va'Deot VII.2 (Rosenblatt 1948, pp. 265-7), and Treatise I.5 (Rosenblatt 1948, pp. 16-26)

⁵¹ See Emunot Va'Deot, VII.4 (Rosenblatt 1948, pp. 272-3) and the variant version, VII.5, which was the basis of Ibn Tibbon's translation (Rosenblatt 1948, pp. 423-6)

narrative of creation. If you allegorize it to such an extent that you no longer think it committed to God's having created the world, then, so to speak, you've allegorized the text out of existence! Unfortunately, if we follow Saadya Gaon's lead in interpreting Proverbs 8, and apply it to all of the sources that talk about the *Torah Kadmonit*, we will end up having interpreted those texts out of existence.

Rav Yehuda Halevi (paying attention to tractate Pesachim 54a)⁵² and Rav Yosef Albo (paying attention to Genesis Rabbah),⁵³ also allegorize away ontological commitment to the *Torah Kadmonit*. For them, these texts merely mean to imply that the Torah is part of God's telos for creating the world. The Torah prefigures creation – not ontologically, or chronologically, but teleologically. I don't deny that our source material implies things about God's plans for the world, but I think it implausible, given the history, that the texts don't *also* contain an ontological commitment.⁵⁴ As far as I'm aware, no denial of the existence of the *Torah Kadmonit* has ever been presented alongside a sufficiently moving reason to engage in such textual violence.

§5 – Conclusion

Commitment to the *Torah Kadmonit* is grounded in the Bible, Midrash, Mishna, and Talmuds. Some very great Rabbis stood against it – Saadya Gaon, Rabbi Yehuda Halevi, and the Ibn Ezra, to name a few. But their opposition always seems to have been based upon dubious philosophical premises. The posit, differently understood, is found in the works of both Nachmanides (in the form of a primordial Pentateuch) *and* Maimonides (in the form of an Aristotelian intellect) – two of the most prominent Jewish thinkers of the medieval age. Given a contemporary metaphysics, how should we understand this posit? I suggest that the *Torah Kadmonit* is a literary impure abstractum, eternally generated, or created in pre-time. The posit poses no philosophical or theological problem worrisome enough to justify a radical reappraisal of the texts that subscribe to its existence.

Is the entire Pentateuch contained in the *Torah Kadmonit*; how about the entire Oral tradition; or, does the *Torah Kadmonit* stand in some different relationship to the texts and traditions that we generally call 'Torah'? Has all of the content of the *Torah Kadmonit* been revealed?⁵⁵ Given the seemingly unavoidable

⁵² Kuzari 3.73

⁵³ Sefer Halkrim 3.12

⁵⁴ In the words of Rav Huna (BT Shabbat 63a): 'a verse cannot depart from its plain meaning.'

⁵⁵ Even a simple impure literary abstractum has literary content – that content is not an ontological constituent of the impure abstractum, since the impure abstractum is *simple*. It is rather a *property* held by the impure abstractum.

Orthodox acceptance of the existence of the *Torah Kadmonit*,⁵⁶ questions about its literary content, and its relationship to revealed scripture, now become pressing. I hope to return to these questions in future work.

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⁵⁶ My talk of 'commitment' to the *Torah Kadmonit*'s existence is consciously framed in terms of acceptance rather than belief, see footnote 11 above.

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