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Mašhad, Kitābhāna-i Āsitān-i Quds-i Raḍawī 300, f. 1v; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, grec 1853, f. 186v

Porphyry's First Definition of Difference in the Hebrew Logical Tradition

Charles H. Manekin

Abstract

Although most students during the Middle Ages began their study of the *Organon* with Porphyry's summary of the predicables in the *Isagoge*, Jewish students in Christian lands studied it mostly via Averroes' paraphrase or "middle commentary", since Porphyry's text was not translated into Hebrew. The popularity of Averroes' paraphrase was impressive; it is extant in over 80 Hebrew manuscripts, upon which there are thirteen extant Hebrew commentaries. This article introduces and illustrates those commentaries by taking one short passage from Averroes and seeing how it was subsequently interpreted. It argues that there was a Hebrew commentarial tradition in which later commentaries built upon earlier ones, which migrated with itinerant scholars. It also shows the influence of the Latin translation of Porphyry, chiefly that of Boethius, which differs from the paraphrase. And finally, it distinguishes the commentary of Judah Messer Leon (15th c. Italy) from its predecessors in its wholesale adaptation of Christian commentarial practices.

From the 13th to the 15th centuries, the study of logic, especially the study of the *logica vetus* (the *Isagoge* of Porphyry and the *Categories* and the *De Interpretatione* of Aristotle), was widespread among Hebrew-reading intellectuals in the Jewish communities of Southern Europe. The reason for this appears to have been twofold: According to the followers of Maimonides, the study of "Greek wisdom" was the key to unlocking the secrets of the Torah and rabbinic *Aggadab*, and that study began with logic. More practically, mastering the doctrines of *vetus logica* was essential for the medical profession, and although Jews were often restricted in that profession, many Jewish intellectuals practiced medicine in Christian Europe.¹ Works of logic and medicine began to be translated into Hebrew in the twelfth century, and, as in the Arabic, Latin, and Greek traditions, the first doctrine that Jewish students would be expected to learn would be that of the five predicables. Initially, the doctrine was studied in works written or influenced by al-Fārābī, which were among the first philosophical works translated from Arabic into Hebrew. These were joined later by writings of al-Ġazālī, Averroes, and Peter of Spain, especially Averroes's Paraphrase or *Middle Commentary* of the *Isagoge*, translated into Hebrew in 1231 by Jacob Anatoli.²

As is well known, the study of Aristotelian logic among the Jews was not carried out within institutional frameworks like the monastery school, university, or *madrassa*; it was generally a private or semi-private affair with students learning under the tutelage of a master. This fact, combined with the uncertainties of Jewish life in medieval Europe, makes it difficult to ascertain the extent of the study of Averroes's version of Porphyry in Hebrew among the Jews of Southern Europe and within the Byzantine/Ottoman orbit. Still, the fact that this version is extant in over

¹ See J. Shatzmiller, *Doctors to Princes and Paupers: Jews, Medicine, and Medieval Society*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1995, pp. 29, 30, 37-38, and 50.

² The actual text of Porphyry was not translated into Hebrew. For an overview of Hebrew logic, see C. Manekin, "Logic in Medieval Hebrew Culture", in G. Freudenthal (ed.), *Science in Medieval Jewish Cultures*, Cambridge U.P., Cambridge 2011, pp. 113-35.

80 manuscripts and was the subject of over a dozen Hebrew commentaries, testify to its enduring appeal. By far the most popular of those commentaries was that of Levi Gersonides (1288-1344), the first version of which was completed sometime c. 1319. Accounting for more than half of the extant manuscripts, it was translated into Latin by Jacob Mantino in the 1520s and printed in editions of the Juntine Averroes. With the exception of another commentary to the *Isagoge* by the 15th century Italian rabbi, Judah Messer Leon, which is extant in 10 manuscripts, the other commentaries are preserved in 1-2 manuscripts. Sometimes one commentary was incorporated within, or served as the basis, for another, and sections of a commentary, no longer extant in its entirety, have found their way into others.³

In this paper I will illustrate the Hebrew commentaries on the *Isagoge* by taking a short passage – Averroes’s paraphrase of the first definition of (essential) difference attributed by Porphyry to the philosophers -- and chart its course through 13 of them. Averroes may have been a faithful follower of Aristotle, but he had no such loyalties to Porphyry. He writes in the epilogue to the *Middle Commentary* that he felt the work needed no commentary, and indeed, that the *Isagoge* itself was unnecessary. In several passages he is critical of Porphyry’s argument, and the passage we examine is one of them.⁴

Porphyry’s first definition of difference is available to us in Greek, Arabic, and Latin.⁵ Jonathan Barnes’ English translation will do, more or less, for all three:

Defining them, they say: a difference is that by which a species exceeds its genus. For man surpasses animal by rational and mortal— animal is neither none of these items (for then whence would species get differences?) nor yet does it possess all the opposite differences (for then the same

³ For information on manuscripts, see M. Steinschneider, *Die hebräischen Übersetzungen des Mittelalters und die Juden als Dolmetscher: ein Beitrag zur Literaturgeschichte des Mittelalters, meist nach handschriftlichen Quellen*, Kommissionsverlag des Bibliographischen Bureaus, Berlin 1893. This information is updated in C. Manekin – H.H. Biesterfeldt (eds.), *Moritz Steinschneider. The Hebrew Translations of the Middle Ages and the Jews as Transmitters. Vol II. General Works. Logic. Christian Philosophers*, Springer, Dordrecht - Boston (forthcoming).

⁴ The Arabic original of Averroes’s *Middle Commentary* on the *Isagoge* is not presently known to exist. For Averroes’s criticism of Porphyry in the Hebrew translation of Anatoli, see Averroes, *Ha-Be’ur ha-’emša’i shel ‘Ibn Rushd ‘al sefer ha-mavo’ le-Porforiyus ve-sefer ha-ma’amarot le-’Aristoteles*, ed. H. Davidson, The Medieval Academy of America, Cambridge, MA 1969, pp. 6, 7, 11, 14, 28; English translation: Averroes, *The Middle Commentary on Porphyry’s ‘Isagoge’*, trans. H. Davidson, The Mediaeval Academy of America, Cambridge MA 1969, pp. 8, 9, 12, 15, 27.

⁵ Greek: “Ἀς δὴ καὶ ὁρίζόμενοι φασιν· διαφορά ἐστὶν ἢ περισσεύει τὸ εἶδος τοῦ γένους· ὁ γὰρ ἄνθρωπος τοῦ ζῴου πλέον ἔχει τὸ λογικόν καὶ τὸ θνητόν· τὸ γὰρ ζῷον οὔτε οὐδὲν τούτων ἐστίν, ἐπεὶ πρόθεν ἂν τὰ εἶδη σχοῖεν διαφοράς· οὔτε δὲ πάσας τὰς ἀντικειμένας ἔχει, ἐπεὶ τὸ αὐτὸ ἅμα ἔξει τὰ ἀντικείμενα, ἀλλ’ ὡς ἀξιούσι, δυνάμει μὲν πάσας ἔχει τὰς τῶν ὑφ’ αὐτὸ διαφοράς, ἐνεργείᾳ δὲ οὐδεμίαν· καὶ οὕτως οὔτε ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων τι γίνεται οὔτε τὰ ἀντικείμενα ἅμα περὶ τὸ αὐτὸ ἔσται (Porphyrii *Isagoge et in Aristotelis Categorias commentarium*, ed. A. Busse, Reimer, Berlin, 1887 (CAG IV), pp. 10-11.22-32). Arabic: وقد يحذون هذه الفصول فيقولون إن الفصل هو الذي به يفضل النوع على الجنس . وذلك أن الإنسان له شيء ؟ ولا الفصول أيضا يفضل به على الحي وهو الناطق والمائت ، لأن الحي ليس هو واحدا من هذين ، وإلا : فمن أين اقتنت الأنواع فصولا ؟ ولا الفصول أيضا معا يعينه معا (trans. by Abū ‘Utmān al-Dimašqī in *Manṭiq Aristū*, ed. ‘A. Bādawi, 3 vols., Cairo, 1948-1952, 1980, vol. 3, pp. 1042-1046. I did not examine other testimonies of Arabic translations, for which, see, S. Di Vincenzo, “Avicenna’s Reworking of Porphyry’s ‘Common Accident’ in the Light of Aristotle’s *Categories*”, *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* 27 (2016), p. 166 n. 9). Latin: *Quas etiam determinantes dicunt: “difference est qua abundat species a genere”; homo enim ab animalibus plus habet rationale et mortale: animal enim neque ipsum nihil horum est (nam unde habebunt species differences?); neque autem omnes oppositas habent (nam in eodem simul habebunt opposita); sed, quemadmodum probant, potestate quidem omnes habent sub se differences, actu vero nullam, ac sic neque ex his quae non sunt aliquid fit, neque opposita circa idem sunt* (trans. by Boethius, *Porphyrii Isagoge*, ed. L. Minio-Paluello – B.G. Dod, Brill, Leiden. 1966 [*Aristoteles Latinus* 1.6-7], pp. 17-18).

thing will possess opposites at the same time); rather, as they claim, potentially it possesses all the differences of the items under it and actually none of them. And in this way nothing comes to be out of what is not, nor will opposites be found at the same time about the same item.⁶

The English translation of Averroes's paraphrase of the passage is as follows:

[Porphyry] states: They [the philosophers] have given various definitions for differences. One of them is that whereby species exceeds genus. For by virtue of its difference, rationality, man exceeds animal, its genus, since difference is not actually present in animal. Were [difference] actually present [in genus], its opposite would also have to be present, that is, the absence of rationality, through which animal is divided, as when we say that animal is either rational or irrational. Only in the species below animal are these differences present. [Averroes comments]: There is a weakness in this discourse".⁷

It should be noted that Averroes's paraphrase omits three of Porphyry claims: that differences must be present in genus in some manner, for otherwise, where would species get them from; that were differences present in the genus actually, it would possess both a difference and its opposite simultaneously; and that differences are in genus potentially. He does not explain what weakness he finds in Porphyry's discourse, or why he calls it weak rather than absurd. On these and other matters Jewish commentators attempted to fill in the blanks.

Early 14th Century Hebrew commentaries on the *Isagoge*

We begin with an anonymous commentary on the *Isagoge* preserved in Vatican, Biblioteca apostolica ebr. 337, a mid fourteenth-century Italian ms. that contains various commentaries on the *Isagoge*, *Categories*, and the beginning of one on the *De Interpretatione* (in a different hand; that fragment is identical with the commentary on the *De Interpretatione* by Avigdor, of whom more below). The anonymous commentary refers to the explanations of "my teacher, R. Sar Shalom", who occasionally cites and compares the "translations of the Christians",⁸ with Averroes's text. The ms. also contains two commentaries on the *Categories*; the longest, dated 1316, is by a Moses b. Samuel b. Asher b. Samuel b. Joseph b. Moses b. Judah. The *Categories* commentary cites frequently the views and words of al-Fārābī; it also cites the views on the divisibility of language (as an example of discrete quantity) of Ibn Ezra and Ibn Ḡanāḥ, and refers to Samuel ibn Tibbon and the *Logical Terms* attributed to Maimonides. After al-Fārābī and "my teacher, Sar Shalom", the most frequently cited authority is "the Israelite Joseph b. Isaac Muqātil",

⁶ *Porphyry. Introduction*, trans. with an introd. and comm. by J. Barnes, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2003, p. 10.

⁷ Davidson, *The Middle Commentary* (above, n. 3), p. 15, with modifications. Davidson, *Ha-Be'ur ha-'emša'i* (above, n. 3): אמר וכבר יגדרו אלר ההבדלים בגדרים. אחד מהם שההבדל הוא אשד בו יעדיף המין על הסוג, וזה שהבדל האדם שהוא הדבר; (above, n. 3): בו יעדיף על החי שהוא סוג. וזה שזה ההבדל בלתי נמצא לחי בפעל כי אלו היה נמצא לו בפעל נמצא לו מקבילו, והוא העדר הדבר אשר יחלק החי בכמו אמרנו שהחי ממנו מדבר וממנו בלתי מדבר, ואמנם ימצאו במינים אשר תחת החי. ובדבור זה חולשה.

⁸ See, e.g., Sar Shalom's comment on החכמה ('capacity for science'), which is first given by Averroes as an example of property and later as an essential difference: After noting that "according to the translation of the books of Aristotle in the language of the gentiles, [property] is interpreted as risible" (fol. 5b; cf. trans. Boethius, *Porphyrii Isagoge*, p. 7.19 Minio-Paluello), Sar Shalom resolves the contradiction by appealing to al-Fārābī's distinction between the capacity for science as a property, and as the faculty through which intelligibles are known, hence, a difference. A somewhat similar reconciliation is offered by Levi; see Davidson, *The Middle Commentary* (cited above, n. 3), n. 44 (p. 84).

whose commentary on the *Isagoge* is otherwise unknown.⁹ Further research is needed to confirm Rosenberg's conjecture that Moses b. Samuel, the author of the long *Categories* commentary in the ms. is also the author of the *Isagoge* commentary at its beginning.¹⁰ If that is true, and if the *Isagoge* commentary was written around the same time, then it would be the earliest Hebrew commentary on the *Isagoge*, a few years earlier than that of Levi Gersonides. At any rate, both works cite "my teacher, R. of Sar Shalom"; the anonymous *Isagoge* commentary not only refers to Sar Shalom, but incorporates within the commentary some "Scattered explanations to the Introduction from the tongue of the sage, my teacher, R. Sar Shalom", that immediately follows the anonymous commentary.

According to our commentary's explanation of the definition (taken from Sar Shalom), species exceeds genus by virtue of difference because difference does not figure in the generation of genus, since rational can be eliminated without the elimination of animal.

Now if you say [as follows]: since rational produces the species, it is either present in the genus or not: If it is present, then non-rational is also present in the species, and since everything that is in the genus will be present in the species, it follows that two contraries will be in the same subject at the same time, which is false [...] But if they [rational and irrational] are not in the genus, they won't be in any genus, and hence the species will be produced from no thing (mi-lo yesh) – [To that] we will reply that differences are in the genus potentially, not actually, because [the genus] provides species with the potential to have [difference], like a king who appoints a minister to receive the municipal tax.¹¹

In this objection one sees the influence of Boethius' translation, which fills in the argument omitted by Averroes. Something like the commentator's explanation of the potentiality of the difference in the genus is found in Boethius's first commentary on the *Isagoge*, who understands it as the potency of the genus to produce difference in the species. (The tax analogy is missing).¹²

The anonymous commentary explains the "weakness" of the argument, according to Averroes, as follows:

"There is a weakness in this discourse". These are the words of Averroes. Since genera and species are present solely in the intellect, it is inappropriate to say that differences are in the genus potentially or actually, since no potentiality exists without qualification in anything spiritual. Moreover, if the difference were in species potentially, in what way would species exceed genus? Moreover, everything potential may be actualized, even in the genus.¹³

⁹ 'Israelite', to distinguish him from Muslims of the name '*Muqātil*'. Joseph may be a descendant of Isaac Muqātil, the Spanish Jewish physician and physicist mentioned by Jedaiah ha-Penini Bedershi in his *Apology*. See S. Rosenberg, *Logiqah ve-'ontologiyah ba-filosofiyah ha-yehudit ba-me'ah ha-'arba esreh* ('Logic and Ontology in Jewish Philosophy in the 14th Century'), The Hebrew University of Jerusalem doctoral diss., Jerusalem 1973, p. 116. The passage attributed to Joseph by Moses suggests that both of them knew Arabic grammar well-enough to remark on the passage from al-Fārābī.

¹⁰ See M. Zonta, "Fonti antiche e medievali della logica ebraica nella Provenza del trecento", *Medioevo* 23 (1997), pp. 515-94, esp. 522-3.

¹¹ Vatican, BAV, ms. 337, f. 3b (cf. 5a): אם כן הוא בסוג החי או אינו סוג. אם הוא בסוג אם כן ימצא גם כן בלתי מדבר בסוג וכל שימצא בסוג ימצא במין ובאישיו אם כן ימצא בראובן שני מתנגדים בנשוא אחד בזמן אחד וזה שקר [...] ואם אינם בסוג אינם אם כן בשום סוג ואם כן המין יתהוה מלא יש. ונשיב כי ההבדלים הם בסוג (הכח) [בכח] ולא בפעל כי הוא נותן כח למין להיות (לו) [כמו] המלך אשר הפקיד שר על עיר לקבל מס כלומר שההבדל הוא לסוג בכח.

¹² In *Isag.* 1 26.15-27.18, discussed in Barnes, *Porphyry. Introduction* (above, n. 5), pp. 190-191.

¹³ Vatican, BAV, ms. 337, f. 3b: ודבור הזה חולשה. זה לשון אבן רשד ורוצה לומר כי אחר שהסוגים והמינים הם בשכל לבדו אינו ראוי לומר שיהיו לסוג מבדילים בכח ולא בפעל כי אין דבר רוחני כח כלל. ועוד אם כן היה המדבר במין בכח גם כדרך הסוג ואם כן מה עדיף המין על הסוג. ועוד כל דבר שבכח הנה יתכן לצאת לפעל גם כן בסוג.

The commentary locates the weakness of Porphyry's exposition in its assumption that difference is present in some way in the genus and actually in the species. But it notes that "according to the translation of the Christians", species possess differences only from the genus despite the fact that genus does not have a contrary difference, for it did, then contrary differences would exist in the same substance He concludes,

In truth, genus encompasses differences, but not one of them exists [within the genus] in act. For this reason it was said [in the Latin translation] that something is not produced from nothing, and there is no contrary difference in one thing.¹⁴

The upshot of the explanation is that the Latin translation avoids the weakness found by Averroes in his formulation of Porphyry's argument. Differences are in the genus animal not as potencies that could become actualized in all individual animals, but as the capacity to produce such differences (and their opposites) in its various subordinate species.

If Sar Shalom taught his student(s) in the Midi, that would provide evidence of an earlier penetration of the Latin *Isagoge* into Jewish study circles in Provence than previously thought. A Northern Spanish or Italian provenance cannot be ruled out at this stage of the research. Even if Sar Shalom taught in the Midi, his familiarity with the Latin text was acquired, according to our manuscript, through personal encounters with Christian savants. This is not an isolated phenomenon. In 1320 the Provençal Jewish savant Hezekiah bar Ḥalafta translated and commented upon a gloss-commentary of Petrus Hispanus's *Tractatus* that he chanced upon, and of course, there were contacts between Jewish and Christian intellectuals in the Midi. Still, other commentaries at this place and time do not demonstrate the commentators' awareness of the Latin translations of the *Organon*; rather they testify to a tradition based almost entirely on the Arabic writings translated into Hebrew.

Several fourteenth-century commentaries on the *Isagoge* from Southern France are extant or are reported. These include the aforementioned commentary by Levi, and commentaries by Samuel b. Judah of Marseilles (1294-1340), and Jedaiah ha-Penini (Bedersi, c. 1280-1340). The commentary by Jedaiah is no longer extant; sections of the commentary by Samuel b. Judah are preserved in a later commentary, as we shall see below. Both scholars studied in Salon with R. Abba Mari b. Eligdor, and appear to have written their commentaries partly in response to Levi's.¹⁵

Levi's commentary was by far the most popular. Unlike Sar Shalom, Levi did not have access apparently to the text of Porphyry in its Arabic or Latin translations. He usually adopts and adds to Averroes's criticisms of Porphyry, suggesting improvements to the latter's definitions. In the case of the first definition of essential difference, Levi claims that it is too broad, since species exceeds genus not only by virtue of difference but also by virtue of property and accident; for the definition to apply solely to difference, one has to add phrase qualification "by virtue of an essential notion." Levi understands Porphyry to be saying that difference cannot be present in the genus qua genus; nor can it be denied of all the genus, for the genus in this art exists through its subordinate species, and some individuals of the species are rational and others irrational.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*: ועל דרך האמת הסוג מקיף בהבדלים אך אין אחד מהם נמצא לו בפעל על כן נאמר שלא יתהוו דבר מאין דבר ואין מבדיל מתהפך בדבר אחד.

¹⁵ For these commentaries, see C. Manekin, "'Composition, not Commentary': Gersonides' Commentary on the *Isagoge* of Porphyry and its Afterlife", in O. Elior – G.D. Wirmer – R. Leicht (eds.), *Gersonides' Afterlife: Studies on the Reception of Levi Ben Gerson's Philosophical, Halakhic and Scientific Oeuvre in the 14th Through 20th Centuries*, Brill, Leiden [etc.] 2020, pp. 3-46.

Porphry therefore claims that difference in genus potentially, for otherwise it could not be actual in some species.¹⁶

Averroes finds a weakness in this discourse, according to Levi, for the following reasons: first, potentiality implies possibility, and if the genus possesses the difference possibly, then, according to the *Prior Analytics*, one can assume without absurdity that the entire genus possesses it actually, but this is clearly false. Second, if the genus animal is potentially rational, then all its species are potentially rational, but horses are not potentially rational. Third, possibility resides only in individuals, not in species nor genera, according to this art, which omits discussions of the ontological status of universals. Hence, Porphyry should not imply that difference exists potentially in the entire genus, but rather it is affirmed of some of the genus necessarily and denied of some of the genus necessarily. Averroes refers to a “weakness” in the discourse rather than an “absurdity” because in the art of logic, a weak discourse leads to an absurd one. Still, there is a sense in which one form can possess potentially what is in another form, e.g., the relation of the rational form to the sensitive form. So in that sense, Porphyry’s claim that differences are in the genus potentially could be construed as correct; hence Averroes writes of a weakness but not an absurdity.¹⁷

In most manuscripts of Levi’s commentary, there is an additional interpretation of Porphyry’s discourse and Averroes’s “weakness” remark. On this interpretation, Porphyry claims that difference is contained actually in the species qua universal. Averroes finds this weak because it assumes that species and genera exist extramentally, and so the argument will not be accepted by those who consider universals to be mind-dependent. Still, the discourse, though weak, is not absurd because the nonexistence of species and general extramentally will not be demonstrated until the *Metaphysics*. Explaining the weakness of Porphyry’s argument on the grounds that it posits the extramental existence of universals is reminiscent of Sar Shalom’s explanation, as is the argument that if a difference is potential in the genus, then it could be actualized in the entire genus.¹⁸

The additional explanation of the weakness rests on the assumption that dealing with the ontological status of universals is inappropriate in the art of logic, a point made explicit by Levi in the introduction to his commentary.¹⁹ Porphyry famously promises not to discuss the subject of their status in the *Isagoge*, and in some instances Averroes and Levi criticize him for tacitly assuming Plato’s belief in the extramental existence of universals.²⁰ We shall see that some other Jewish commentators follow suit. Perhaps in these criticisms of Porphyry they found a clue to explain Averroes’ “weakness” remark.

How did Levi’s interpretation of this passage fare in subsequent Jewish commentators? We begin with Levi’s contemporary, Samuel ben Judah of Marseilles, who is known primarily as a translator of Arabic philosophical material into Hebrew. Samuel wrote a commentary on the *Isagoge* and the *Categories* in which he generally criticized Levi’s interpretations. Although the commentary is no longer extant, passages are cited in extenso in a commentary on the *Isagoge*

¹⁶ Paris, BNF, ms. 958 *héb.*, f. 6b-7a. Cf. J. Mantino’s Latin translation in Aristotelis *Omnia Quae Extant Opera...*, Junta, Venice 1562, Vol. 1, 12b-d.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 7a-7b. Ed. Venice 1562, 1, 12B-D.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, f. 7b. The additional explanation is missing in Mantino’s Latin translation.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, f. 2a. Ed. Venice 1562, 1, 1M-2D.

²⁰ For Averroes see Davidson, *Ha-Be’ur ha-’emša’i* (above, n. 3), pp. 8-9, l. 87-91 and p. 21, l. 3-7.; Davidson, *The Middle Commentary* (above, n. 3), pp. 10, 22; for Levi cf. p. 96, note on 5.20 (*Ha-Be’ur ha-’emša’i*); and p. 83, n. 37 (*The Middle Commentary*).

and the *Categories* by the early fifteenth century writer, Judah b. Isaac b. Moses Kohen, who refers to Samuel by his Provençal name, Barbevaire (“Greybeard”). Judah’s commentary, which is preserved in one manuscript, has been the subject of several recent studies.²¹ For the present, I will concentrate on what information we can extract from it concerning Samuel’s interpretation of Porphyry’s first definition and his response to Levi’s comments.²²

The gist of Samuel’s interpretation is as follows. Difference is that whereby species exceeds genus, i.e., whereby species is superior to genus, since both the entire essence and substance of the genus and the difference, exists in the species. Genus is to species as matter is to form, and hence the difference, which perfects the genus, does not exist in it actually. But it can be said to exist in genus potentially in the same way that matter has the potential to be perfected by form, “for animality and reason are like matter and form with respect to man”. The weakness of this discourse, according to Samuel, is that it assumes the extramental existence of species and genera. For those who deny the extramental existence of species and genera, difference is not in the genus or species potentially or actually, since they do not exist apart from the particulars.²³

Samuel disputes Levi’s explanation line by line. He first uses his own interpretation of Porphyry’s definition to dismiss the emendation of “the great sage Maestre Leon.” Clearly that which is superior to genus cannot include property or accident, but must relate to its essence, so there is no point in adding “essentially” to the definition. “Hence, the Lion in the Fellowship’s objection to the definition is of no import, since the definition is perfect”.²⁴ Levi’s claim that difference is not in the genus potentially is also incorrect; the genus has the disposition to receive the form of the difference, like prime matter has the disposition to receive the form of the elements. This also refutes Levi’s second point, that if the genus animal were potentially rational then all its species would be potentially rational; his mistake rests on his misunderstanding here of potentiality as possibility rather than disposition. Levi’s third point, that possibility only resides in the individual, not in the species or genus, is opposed by those who believe in the extramental reality of species and genera. Moreover, even if the possibility resides in the individual, it is not by virtue of its being individual, but by virtue of its nature.

²¹ For details, see M. Zonta, “Una disputa sugli universali nella logica ebraica del Trecento. Shemuel di Marsiglia contro Gersonide nel ‘*Supercommento* all’ *Isagoge*’ di Yehudah b. Ishaq Cohen”, *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* 11 (2000), pp. 409–58 and C. Manekin, “Composition not Commentary”, (above, n. 2), pp. 13–23.

²² It is interesting to note that Judah first cites the passage of Averroes as found in most of the books and then a version of the passage found in Samuel’s commentary. The latter version adds a line not found in Davidson’s edition of Anatoli’s Hebrew, nor in the edition of the Latin translation attributed to William of Luna (Averroës *Commentum Medium Super Libro Porphyrii*, ed. by R. Hissette, Peeters, Louvain 2016, p. 26.) The omission of the line can be explained by homoioteleuton, or, less likely, a gloss that made its way into the text: Here is a translation of the passage with the additional line in bold; it may be compared with Davidson’s English translation cited above.

Were [difference] actually present [in genus], its opposite would also have to be present, that is the privation of rationality, since animal is divided into rational and irrational. And then the same thing would be rational and irrational together. If so, rationality and the privation of rationality, through both of which animal is divided, as when we say that animal is either rational or irrational. Only in the species below animal are these different things present.

לפי שאלו היה נמצא לו בפעל היה נמצא לו מקבילו והוא העדר הדבור אחד שהיה החי יתחלק למדבר ובלתי מדבר והיה שיהיה האחד בעינו מדבר ובלתי מדבר יחד. הנה אם כן הדבור והעדר הדבור אשר בשניהם יחלק החי בכמו אמרו שהיה ממנו מדבר וממנו בלתי מדבר אמנם ימצאו במינים אשר בחי החי (Ibid., f. 30b).

The addition of the line brings Averroes’s paraphrase a bit closer to the text of Porphyry.

²³ Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS *Christ Church heb.* 201, f. 31b–32a.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 32b. ואם מה כן מה שהקשה הארי שבחבורה בגדר אין ענין לו כי הגדר שלם. From this passage it appears that Samuel b. Judah, and not just Judah Kohen, refers to Levi by the Talmudic phrase, “the Lion in the Fellowship”.

Samuel approves of Levi's additional explanation for the weakness of the discourse, i.e., that it assumes the extramental existence of genera and species, but he sharply criticizes Levi's formulation, peppering his criticisms with invective, and defending Porphyry.²⁵ Be that as it may, it is noteworthy that the three commentators considered so far agree in at least one explanation of the "weakness" of Porphyry's discourse – that it assumes extramental existence of species and genera, which is inappropriate for the art of logic.

Subsequent Hebrew Commentaries on the Isagoge

The author of a recently discovered Hebrew commentary on the *Isagoge*, found in Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Library, *LJS* 229,26 refers to "my teacher, Levi" without any reference to his passing, and to Jedaiah ha-Bedersi as deceased. If Levi was the author's actual teacher, the commentary was composed no later than the early 1340s and hails from the Midi. The commentary contains questions and answers that indicate that it was used in an instructional setting, and it reads as part notebook, part summary of doctrine. A systematic examination of the work is likely to reveal much about the practices of mid-14th century instruction in logic to Jewish students in Provence.²⁷

In reformulating Porphyry's first definition of essential difference, Averroes writes that if difference is present actually in genus, then its opposite will also be present actually. But as we saw above, unlike the Latin translation, he fails to explain what would be the problem with that. From the version of Averroes preserved by Samuel b. Judah, however, we learned that this would entail opposites in the same subject simultaneously, which is impossible. Our anonymous commentator follows Samuel's version here. Averroes's comment on the weakness of the Porphyry's discourse is taken to refer to the claim that difference exists in the species, which implies that species possess extramental existence, which is false. However, since its absurdity is not demonstrated in the art of logic, Averroes used the term "weak", i. e. not absurd. Perhaps the statement is weak but not absurd because although difference is present actually in individuals and not in species, the species is closer to the individuals than is the genus. Another explanation is that the weakness refers to Porphyry's earlier claim that difference cannot be present actually in genus. Since universals only exist in the mind, we might think it possible that a difference and its opposite can be present in their genus in this manner, i.e., *qua* mental (or: cogitative) conception (*siyyur mahshavi*). The commentator prefers the first explanation.²⁸ The absence of Levi's explanations for the weakness, is striking, as is referring the judgment of weakness to the claim that difference is actually present in the species.

In Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek *Cod. hebr.* 63 and in New York, Columbia U X893 Ar. 432 there are commentaries on the *Isagoge*, *Categories*, and *De Interpretatione*, by a certain Avigdor, whom Steinschneider attempted to identify with the late fourteenth century savant, Abraham Avigdor, the author of the poem *A Royal Treasure*, and translator from the Latin.²⁹

²⁵ *Ibid.*, f. 32b-34a.

²⁶ Hereafter, UPL, *LJS* 229, ff. 1a-23b

²⁷ For some preliminary remarks on this text, see, C. Manekin, "Composition, Not Commentary" (above, n. 7), pp. 8-13.

²⁸ UPL, *LJS* 229, f. 11a-11b.

²⁹ For Abraham Avigdor see See S. Harvey – C. Manekin, "The Curious 'Segullat Melakhim' by Abraham Avigdor", in J. Hamesse – O. Weijers (eds.), *Écriture et réécriture des textes philosophiques médiévaux. Mélanges offerts à C. Sirat*, Brepols, Turnhout 2006, pp. 215-52. A comparison of Avigdor's commentary with Abraham Avigdor's commentary on his *A Royal Treasure* may clarify matters.

The identification is plausible, but the evidence is not compelling.³⁰ Our Avigdor is familiar with the *Summulae Logicales* of Peter of Spain and elsewhere cites Boethius' translation of the *Isagoge* and Levi's commentary. Avigdor interprets Averroes as follows: If the difference rational were actually present in the genus animal, then so would its opposite, irrational, and how can it be said that the genus animal is both actually rational and irrational, for then every animal would be rational. Avigdor's interpretation seems to combine, or conflate, Porphyry's problem of opposite differences inhering in one object with the Levi's problem of the specific difference being present in the entire genus. Moreover, he continues, it would follow that every individual human, e.g., Reuben, will be both rational and irrational, since what is true of the genus will be true of the species and the individuals subordinate to it. Hence, like Levi, he interprets Porphyry to be saying that difference is potentially in genus.³¹ Averroes considers Porphyry's discourse weak because difference is also not present actually in species but only in individuals; moreover, species and genera do not have extramental existence. Still because species is closer to the individuals than is genus the discourse is not contradictory or absurd.³² This is the same explanation found in the anonymous commentary in UPL, *LJS* 299, which may make that commentary contemporary with or somewhat later than Avigdor's commentary.

I mentioned above that excerpts of Samuel b. Judah's commentary are preserved in a much larger commentary on the *Isagoge* by the early fifteenth century Provençal Jewish savant, Judah Kohen.³³ Judah appears to have had at his disposal not only the commentaries of Samuel and Levi, but several translations of Arabic works, such as excerpts of al-Fārābī's *Long Commentary* on the *Categories*,³⁴ and a quaesitum by Abū l-Qāsim ibn Idrīs on genus and difference, translated by Samuel. With respect to the first definition of difference, Judah cites the version of the text that appears "in most of the books" and then quotes, approvingly, Levi's emendation of Porphyry's definition, which Judah finds equivalent to the definition of difference offered by al-Fārābī. Then Judah provides his own interpretation of Porphyry's "discourse": difference cannot be potentially in genus because then it would be a stable habit for genus, which is impossible, since animal would be described by the habit rational and by its privation, irrational. Rather, differences belong to the species "since differences are essences that belong in act to the individuals of species, according to which their activities are ordered". Explained in this manner, continues Judah, there is no weakness in Porphyry's discourse, "and none of the savants can disagree with it, except for Averroes, the quarrelsome bandit (...). Who will not cry out against this impure robber, may his bones be crushed, the Arab merchant son of an Arab merchant?"³⁵

The so-called "weakness" of Porphyry's discourse, according to Judah's understanding of Averroes, is that species cannot be described as possessing difference because as a universal it has no extramental existence. But that point is irrelevant because the disposition of individual men

³⁰ See Steinschneider, *Die hebräischen Übersetzungen* (above, n. 2), pp. 74-76, and Manekin – Biesterfeldt (eds.), *Moritz Steinschneider. The Hebrew Translations* (above, n. 2).

³¹ Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, *heb.* 63, f. 202a-202b.

³² *Ibid.*, f. 202b.

³³ Zonta dates the commentary to 1420-1430; see "Una disputa", (cited above, n. 17), pp. 411-12.

³⁴ See M. Zonta, "Al-Fārābī's *Long Commentary* on Aristotle's *Categories* in Hebrew and Arabic: A Critical Edition and English translation of the Newly-found Extant Fragments", in B. Abrahamov (ed.), *Studies in Arabic and Islamic Culture*, Bar Ilan University Press, Ramat-Gan 2006, pp. 185-254.

³⁵ Oxford, Christ Church, *heb.* ms. 201, f. 29a-b: ומי לא [...] רשד הפלג הקפחון יכול לחלוק עליו רק בן רשד המקפח הטמא שחיק טמא או טייעא בר טייעא.

to receive intelligibles is by virtue of the universal specific nature they share. This disposition is the *virtus*, the stable habit, that individuals actually possess; Averroes is wrong to identify this with the *potentia* that is synonymous with possibility. The scribe's capacity to write is not to be confused with the possibility of writing, nor the bread's capacity to nourish with the possibility of nourishing. Levi also conflates the two when he attributes to Porphyry the view that differences are potentially in genera. In fact, remarks Judah, differences are not in genera at all; they are stable habits that are actually in species, or more precisely, the individuals of species, by virtue of which their activities are ordered. Judah can only wonder how a man of Levi's stature could utter such statements that open him to the ridicule of small minds,³⁶ and he cites Samuel's criticisms of Levi on this point.

Having explained the version of the text in most books, Judah proceeds to comment on the version of the text found in Samuel's commentary.³⁷ Were the difference rational actually present in the genus animal, so would its opposite, irrational, which would mean that the same thing would be both rational and irrational. The weakness of this discourse is in Porphyry's superfluous use of the phrase "actually" (*be-fo'al*), which implies that, according to Porphyry, difference is potentially in genus – whereas, as we have seen, it is not in genus at all! That Averroes finds this a weakness rather than an absurdity shows that the problem is not one of assuming the (extramental) existence of forms. Judah then cites at length Samuel's own explanation of the discourse and his criticisms of Levi that we brought above.

Although his conceptual appeal to the distinction between *virtus* and *potentia* reveals an acquaintance with scholastic philosophy, Judah largely stays within the tradition of *Isagoge* interpretation of an earlier generation in Provence. We learn from his commentary that as a young man he traveled to Italy and studied, perhaps unofficially, at the university in Bologna when Niccolò da Fava was the rector. Zonta speculated that Judah's drew his position on the question of universals from unidentified texts of Latin scholasticism.³⁸ Further research may help to determine the extent of his familiarity with Latin logic.

Another anonymous commentary on the *Isagoge* from fifteenth century Provence or Northern Italy is found in Jewish Theological Seminary ms. 2440.³⁹ Since the front page is illegible, and the next items in the manuscript are Levi's commentaries on the *Categories*, *De Interpretatione*, *Prior Analytics*, and *Posterior Analytics*, the cataloguers assumed that the anonymous commentary was Levi's commentary on the *Isagoge*. But it is in fact a later and longer work. One may speculate that it was substituted for Levi's because of its comprehensiveness. Levi's commentary on the *Isagoge* consists mainly of critical and explanatory glosses, leaving much of the text without commentary. The anonymous commentator appropriates a great deal of Levi's commentary but adds explanations on passages where Levi did not comment. The commentator makes more than two dozen explicit references to Levi by the acronym מ"ל, which probably stands for Maestre Leon.⁴⁰ Like Judah Kohen's commentary, the commentator frequently incorporates Levi's glosses and as well as the comments of others.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, f. 29b: סוף סוף ראו להפלא ממנו ולא אתיר על נפשי האמללה לגזם איש גדול מעלה ושיעור כמוהו אבל אומר כי הנני נבוכ; על תמים דעים כמוהו איך יוציא מפיו אמרים ילעגו עליו קטני השיעור.

³⁷ See above, n. 19.

³⁸ M. Zonta, "Una disputa" (above, n. 17), p. 424

³⁹ See C. Manekin, "Composition, Not Commentary" (above, n. 7), pp. 23–6. A version of this commentary is found in Mantua, CI MS. *ebr.* 68/1 under the title, "באור יוסף" ('Joseph's commentary'), and is arranged on the page of Averroes's text together with commentaries by Levi and Judah Messer Leon

⁴⁰ In the Mantua ms. מ"ל becomes ר"ל, i.e., an acronym for 'Rabbi Levi'.

With respect to our passage, the author explains Porphyry's definition according to Levi, even giving Levi's improvement of Porphyry's definition without attribution. Difference is not in genus actually but it is in genus potentially and in species actually; i. e., it is present actually in the species under the genus, e.g., rational and irrational. As for his explanation of Averroes's remark, "There is a weakness in this discourse":

There is a dispute among our predecessors how to explain this. This one says such-and-such; this one says such-and-such, and one can find no common denominator between them.⁴¹

The commentator proceeds to give three explanations of the weakness, followed by an explanation of why the discourse is "weak" but not "absurd", and followed by a fourth explanation of the weakness – all based on Levi's commentary and ultimately attributed by the commentator to Maestre Leon. Although bits of Levi's commentary are directly quoted, the commentator feels free to elaborate. For example, here is Levi's first explanation of the weakness:

This is because the potential is the possible. Now it has been said in the definition of the possible that in the Book of the Syllogism [= Averroes's paraphrase of the *Prior Analytics*] that it is assumed to exist, then no absurdity follows. This is evident, for if every animal is assumed to be actually rational, then an absurdity follows, i.e., that horse, mule and pig are rational.⁴²

The anonymous commentator elaborates upon this as follows:

One explanation refers to the preceding explanation of Porphyry's words, "It follows that rationality and the other differences will be in genus potentially." Of this was said, "This is absurd", since the potential is the possible – this is known since it can only be impossible or necessary or possible; now it cannot be necessary, since then it would not be potential, nor can it be impossible, since the impossible is that which is neither potential nor actual. And since it was also shown that it is potential, there remains for it to be possible. Now since it is possible, it follows that every animal actually is rational, hence horse and mule are rational, which is absurd. This is explained in the following manner: Aristotle said in the *Book of the Syllogism* that the possible is such that when assumed to exist, no absurdity follows. But an absurdity has followed from this assumption. Hence this discourse is absurd, and this is what "There is a weakness in this discourse", means.⁴³

One may speculate that the commentary originated in an instructional setting, where the teacher felt compelled to explain at greater length Levi's remarks, and a reportatio in the form of a commentary was written up. Following the four explanations attributed by the commentator to Levi, he cites the explanation of another commentator "who passed by here." This itinerant commentator claims that difference is actually in genus, since genus exists as an intelligible concept, and as a true concept it reflects extramental existence. So since some animals are actually rational, the difference rational must actually be contained in the concept animal; hence

⁴¹ New York, JTS 2440, fol. 16a: ככה הצד השוה שבהם בלתי נמצא: וכזה המאמ' מחלוקת בין הקודמי' בביאורו זה אמ' ככה זה אומ' ככה הצד השוה שבהם בלתי נמצא.

⁴² "Pig" is not in all the manuscripts.

⁴³ New York, JTS 2440, f. 16a-16b: הפירוש האחד יכנה על מה שקדם מביאור דברי פורפיריאוס זה שאמרנו שיחייב שיהיה הדיבור: ויתר ההבדלים לחי בכח ועל זה אמ' כי זה בטל זה כי הכח הוא איפשר זה ידוע כי או יהיה או נמנע או מחוייב או אפשרי אינו מחוייב שא"כ לא היה בכח ואינו נמנע כי הנמנע הוא אשר אינו לא בכח ולא בפועל וכבר הוכח הוא בכח נשאר א"כ שיהיה אפשר וכאשר היה שהוא איפשר הנה יחוייב שיהיה כל חי נמצא מצד ויהיו הסוס והפרד מדברים זה בטל איך יתבאר זה הנה ארסטו אמ' בספר הקש כי האיפשר שאם הונח נמצא לא יקרא מהנחתו בטל וכבר קרא מהנחתו בטל הנה זה הדיבור בטל והוא אמרו ובדיבור זה חולשא.

Porphyry's entire definition of difference as that whereby species exceeds difference is incorrect, which is why Averroes called the discourse "weak", i.e., absurd. After citing this explanation the anonymous commentator concludes by saying, "I have seen many explanations of this discourse increasing folly, and truly the wind will carry all of them away. But I have seen fit to bring here only those of Maestre Leon (מ"ל) and the last one. I cannot explain which of the two comes out properly because doing so would only prolong things".⁴⁴

Another anonymous commentary that cites "the translation of the Christians" (העתקת הנוצרים) and compares it with the text of Averroes is found in Munich, BS, *Cod. hebr.* 307, a fifteenth century manuscript that is mostly a compilation of logical texts. The translation to which the author refers does not appear to be that of Boethius, or the translation of Averroes's *Middle Commentary* attributed to William of Luna. In any event, it is difficult to know the time and place of the commentary. Steinschneider points out that the commentator's explanation of Peripatetics (משאיים) combines two explanations of R. Moses of Narbonne, which would make it no earlier than the mid-fourteenth century. Because the author has another translation of Porphyry at his disposal, he is able to distinguish between the text of Porphyry and the explanation of Averroes; for example, he correctly attributes the decision to write a small introductory summary to Porphyry rather than to Averroes.⁴⁵

The commentator does not comment directly on Porphyry's first definition of difference but he offers two explanations of the "weakness" of Porphyry's discourse: The first sees the weakness in Porphyry's attributing essential differences to species in act and not in the genus; this is the view of Plato who said that forms exist extramentally. From this it follows that the contradictory opposites will be present in the genus potentially, not actually. But this is not the view of Aristotle, who holds that genera exist mentally, which means that both opposites can be conceived together, a fortiori, contradictory opposites. So differences like rational and irrational, although they cannot exist in one subject extramentally, can be conceived as such. Nevertheless, Averroes called the discourse weak but not absurd since differences can indeed be viewed as potentially in genera, inasmuch as the diverse species are generated from the universal nature present the genus. This is similar to the second explanation of the weakness in the anonymous commentary in UPL, *LJS* 229.

The anonymous commentator cites another explanation of the weakness that we haven't yet encountered: The first definition of genus applies only to affirmative differences, i.e., those on one side of the Tree of Porphyry, and not to negative differences. For if we say that irrational is potentially in the genus, privation does not become actualized in the species. That makes the definition weak. And yet it is not absurd to posit that the species exceeds genus by virtue of the negative differences as well, because irrational needs to be actualized in other species just as rational does in man.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 17a: "ל זה האחרון ואין ראוי לומר זה העוברים למה זה הוא מיניהו סליק כהוגן כי יאריכו הדברים לבאר אי זה הוא מיניהו סליק כהוגן כי יאריכו הדברים".

⁴⁵ Munich, BS, *Cod. hebr.* 307, f. 144b. The text of Averroes does not make clear who is speaking here. See Davidson, *Ha-Be'ur ha-'ems'a'i* (above, n. 3), p. 4, l. 8-10; Davidson, *The Middle Commentary* (above, n. 3), p. 6. Davidson adds in square brackets: "Porphyry says" to the sentence. Other instances are cited by Steinschneider, *Die hebräischen Übersetzungen* (above, n. 2), p. 87. This is not always the case; for example, the anonymous commentator in Vatican Neofiti *heb.* 15, f. 16a, attributes the words to Averroes. Because that commentary breaks off in the middle of the discussion of species, it is not considered here.

⁴⁶ Munich, BS, *Cod. hebr.* 307, f. 146b-147b.

The Commentaries on the Isagoge associated with "the Sage Eli"

A group of four commentaries in three manuscripts seem connected with each other, but the degree of their connection requires a comprehensive study of the works. (1) The first is the commentary on the *Isagoge* attributed in the heading to "the sage Eli" that is extant in Oxford, *Huntingdon heb.* ms. 519. (2) Much of this commentary appears also word-for-word in an anonymous commentary in Oxford, Christ Church 200, with many passages missing. (3) And an "explanation of the difficulties in the *Isagoge*" in Berlin, SPK, *Or. Qu.* 831, (4) preceded by an anonymous commentary on the *Isagoge*, is also related. Could these works have emanated from the same circle, that of the "the sage Eli"? And who, precisely, is he? Steinschneider identified him with the Portuguese savant and translator from the Latin, Eli Habillo, which would place him in the second half of the fifteenth century, but doubts have been raised about that identification.⁴⁷ Eli refers around a dozen times to Rabbi Levi, almost always critically. His criticisms are generally couched in a polite, if not overly respectful tone; on rare occasions he will write, "I say that all this is unnecessary length, reflecting little understanding of the definition", or "This is obvious to any beginner in these matters".

In the Huntingdon ms. Eli rejects Levi's emendation of Porphyry's first definition as unnecessary, since difference is indeed that by which species qua species exceeds genus. Of course, this is just an equivalent way of remedying the problem; apparently Eli believes that the qualification "qua species" is implicit in the definition. As for Averroes's labeling the discourse "weak", two explanations are given in the Huntingdon manuscript: First, if differences are present actually in the species but not in the genus, then the species and genera are different things and exist independently of each other and of individuals. This seems to imply that species and genera exist extramentally, which is false. But since the *Isagoge* is not the place to investigate these matters, Averroes did not say that Porphyry's statement was true or false, rather weak. The second explanation focuses on Porphyry's statement that difference is not actually in the genus, from which one could infer that it is potentially in the genus – for otherwise, why use the language "actually"? But rational is present neither potentially nor actually in animal qua animal; for if it were present potentially then at some time it would be actual in the whole genus, but it is false to say of animal qua animal that it is actually rational. Rather, rationality belongs to animal qua man. And if one asks, why did Averroes call this a weakness rather than an absurdity, the answer is that although that which is potentially the case must be actualized at some time, it is not yet actual, and that fact weakens the discourse without rendering it absurd. And one can also reply that "weakness" means that the discourse cannot be relied upon, because it is false.⁴⁸ In the Christ Church manuscript the first explanation is not brought, and the second explanation does not continue and say why the discourse is weak and not absurd; instead, the reader is referred to the commentary of R. Levi for that explanations, as well as other explanations.⁴⁹

As noted above, Berlin, SPK, *Or. Qu.* 831 presents first a series of glosses on the *Isagoge* that cite "Ralbag" (Levi ben Gershon) and "Maestre Geronimo", or "Eli called Maestre Geronimo", with the latter phrase struck through by the scribe. With respect to Porphyry's first definition, the

⁴⁷ On the identity of "the Sage Eli" see See C. Manekin, "Composition, Not Commentary" (above, n. 7), pp. 33-6. Oxford, Christ Church ms. 200, f. 6a, refers to the *Book of Logic* by Elijah b. Eliezer ha-Yerushalmi, who is thought to have flourished in Crete in the second half of the 14th century.

⁴⁸ Oxford, *Huntingdon heb.*, ms. 519, f. 18a-19a.

⁴⁹ Oxford, Christ Church, *heb.* ms. 200, f. 9a.

commentator in the series of glosses cites Levi's emendation and Maestre Geronimo's rejection of it as superfluous. It is clear that Porphyry was intending to exclude accidents, because accidents such as white and black can be said of all the subordinate species under 'animal', so it is not particular to one species. This does not answer Levi's objection with regard to property. Still the commentator raises his own question about Porphyry's definition of difference as that by which the species exceeds the genus, because the species is contained within the genus, and it is well known that whatever is predicated of the species is predicated of the genus or of some of it. The answer is the difference predicated of the genus does not exist in the genus at all.⁵⁰

The weakness of the discourse is in three respects: first, because these matters are not to be discussed in the *Isagoge*, as Porphyry mentioned at the beginning of the book; second, because the species is a universal, and universals are in the intellect, and we cannot say that difference is actually found in the species in the intellect; third, whatever is in potentia must be actualized at some time, and that will result in the absurdity that opposites like rational and irrational will be actualized in the same subject and the same time. (Note that this third respect appears to conflate Levi's first explanation of the weakness, which relies on identifying potency with possibility, with Porphyry's own explanation why differences cannot actually be in genus). Averroes used the word weakness, for if he were to say "absurd" then he would have had to bring philosophical arguments to prove his point, argument that would be irrelevant to the matters at hand.⁵¹ Next in the Berlin Manuscript is the "Explanation of Difficulties in the *Isagoge*". This is written occasionally in the first person, and some of the explanations are identical with those in the Huntingdon and Christ Church manuscripts. For example, the commentator rejects Levi's emendation of the definition of differences as "that by which species exceeds genus" because clearly Porphyry's intention is species qua species. After presenting Levi's first three explanations for the weakness (but not absurdity) of the argument, the commentator adds a fourth explanation, which is the same as the first explanation of in the Huntingdon ms. But then the commentator offers a fourth explanation for the weakness of the argument, this time in reference to Porphyry's statement that the difference rationality is not present in genus actually, for if it were, then its contrary, irrational, would also be present in the genus actually. This argument means nothing, we are told, for genus qua genus and universal is nothing other than the universality of the species. Hence, animal qua genus and universal contains man and ass and other species and others, and if they are contained in the genus actually, then so are their differentia, i.e., rational and irrational – and, contra Porphyry, no absurdity follows. Just as color is nothing but whiteness and blackness, and even this doesn't entail two contraries in one subject, likewise for animal and what is genus and universal. The argument is considered weak and not absurd, because there is a sense in which it is true: Rational and irrational are not present in animal qua animal, except in the subordinate species. Another reason why Averroes considered this a weakness and not an absurdity is because a weak argument will not stand, hence, it is akin to absurd.⁵²

Judah Messer Leon's Commentary on the Isagoge

The major works on logic by R. Judah Messer Leon (c. 1420 to 1425 – c. 1498) have yet to be edited. They are heavily influenced by Latin texts that were taught at universities like Padua

⁵⁰ Berlin, SPK, Or. Qu. 831, f. 6a.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, f. 6a.

⁵² *Ibid.*, f. 14a-15b

and Bologna in the mid-fifteenth century, where he may have studied. His commentary on Averroes's *Middle Commentary* on the *Isagoge*, *Categories*, and the *De Interpretatione*, was written in Bologna sometime in the 1460s,⁵³ in the decade after he wrote his *trivium* trilogy, *Livnat sapir* (grammar), *Mikhlal yofi* (logic), and *Nofet zufim* (rhetoric). Messer Leon is one of the first Jewish Averroists in the Italian renaissance of Averroism, but his Averroism, at least in the commentary on the *Isagoge*, extends to his choosing for his main text the text of Anatoli's translation, and his willingness to accept Averroes's criticisms against Porphyry, as we shall see. In the passage on difference he shows himself not only familiar with Jewish predecessors like Gersonides, but willing to follow their interpretations, despite his criticisms in other places. We also see his adaptation not only of the style of popular Latin commentators in Italy like Walter Burley, Paul of Venice, and Radulphus Brito, but of their structure and content.⁵⁴ Still, unlike the Latins, the base text is not that of Boethius but of Averroes, and so his commentary cannot be merely considered a translation but rather a synthesis of sources. In this he is not unlike many medieval writers of commentaries who drew quite freely on their predecessors.

Here is, for example, how he begins his interpretation of our passage:

This part is divided into 12 parts, as will be demonstrated, and [Porphyry] brings in the first part one definition for difference. He says that the Peripatetics have defined difference as "that through which species exceeds genus".

"This is because the difference of man", etc.; this is the second part, in which he explains what he has said. This is the sixth conclusion explained in this book. The syllogism is arranged as follows: "Everything that contains one thing in act, and with that [thing] includes other things, then the latter exceeds the former. Species includes genus in act, and with [genus] includes something else that the genus does not include in act; if so, the species exceeds the genus". The syllogism is in the third [mood] of the first figure. The major is well-known, and the minor is evident, since the species includes the genus in act and with it the difference in act.

That the genus does not include the difference in act will be demonstrated as follows: If the difference is present in the genus in act, it is possible that two opposites are present together in one subject at the same time. Now if the opposite of the consequent ("It is not possible that two opposites are together in one subject at the same time") is repeated, then the opposite of the antecedent follows, i.e., that the difference is not present in the genus in act. This is a conjunctive conditional

⁵³ See D. Carpi, "Notes on the life of Rabbi Judah Messer Leon", in E. Toaff (ed.), *Studi Sull'ebraismo Italiano in Memoria Di Cecil Roth*, Barulli, Roma 1974, pp. 39-62, esp. p. 48, n. 36.

⁵⁴ For the most recent work on the sources of Messer Leon, see M. Zonta, "Scholastic Commentaries in Hebrew: Some Notes about Judah Messer Leon (Italy, 15th Century)", in *Il Commento Filosofico nell'Occidente Latino (Secoli XIII-XV): Atti del Colloquio Firenze-Pisa, 19-22 Ottobre 2000*, Brepols, Turnhout 2002, pp. 429-43, and M. Zonta, *Hebrew Scholasticism in the Fifteenth Century: A History and Source Book*, Springer, Dordrecht, 2006, pp. 280-84. Cf. I. Husik, *Judah Messer Leon's Commentary on the "Vetus Logica: A Study Based on Three Mss., with a Glossary of Hebrew Logical and Philosophical Terms*, Brill, Leiden 1906. Husik argued for the influence of Burley, but as Zonta pointed out, his conclusion needs to be reexamined in light of A. Conti's demonstration that much of Burley's work was reproduced in Paul of Venice's *Expositio super Universalia Porphyrii et Artem Veterem Aristotelis*. See A. Conti, "Alcune note sulla *Expositio super Universalia Porphyrii et Artem Veterem Aristotelis* di Paolo Veneto: Analogie e differenze con i corrispondenti commenti di Walter Burley", in A. Maierù, *English logic in Italy in the 14th and 15th Centuries*, Bibliopolis, Naples, 1982, pp 293-303. Judah Messer Leon was already said to have borrowed from Paul of Venice in his lifetime. Zonta also found similarity with the *Quaestiones in veterem artem* of Radulphus Brito. I hope to examine further the question of Latin scholastic influence on Judah's logic at a later date.

[syllogism].⁵⁵ The first consequent is evident, in as much as genus divides into opposite differences in equal measure such that that if one of them is present in the genus in act, it follows that the other will also be present in as much as they divide the genus in equal ranking. Porphyry's intent here is that these difference are present in the genus *in potentia*; and this is said explicitly in the translation of the Christians.⁵⁶

The division of the text into discrete units and the reformulation of Porphyry's discussion syllogistically is standard exegetical and instructional practice in Italian universities of the period. Although the base text of Judah's commentary is Averroes's paraphrase, his comments are occasionally more relevant to the text of Boethius (e.g., "It is not possible that two opposites are together in one subject at the same time"), and he says outright that Porphyry's claim that differences are in genus potentially is made explicitly in the Latin translation; it will be recalled that some Jewish commentators who only were familiar with the paraphrase of Averroes, denied that Porphyry makes this claim. On the other hand, he sticks to the traditional Hebrew terminology, as, for example, when he refers to "conditional conjunctive syllogisms."

Because Judah, unlike the scholastics, is commenting on the text of Averroes, he has to explain the comment about the weakness in Porphyry's argument. Three explanations are provided, the first which we have seen before in Levi: potentiality implies possibility and, given Aristotle's understanding of possibility in the *Prior Analytics*, the absurdity would result that all animals will be rational. But Judah offers a different explanation than Levi why Porphyry's explanation is "weak, but not absurd"; rational and irrational can be said to be present in the genus potentially in so far as some animals are in some instances rational and in others irrational.

Judah's additional explanation of the weakness of the discourse has to do with the inappropriateness of the first definition for the art of logic, which deals with the predicables as entities in the intellect. To define difference "as that by which species exceeds genus" is to refer to the way things are extramentally. However, from the standpoint of universals in the mind, the genus exceeds species, since it includes not only the differences but also what is essential to the genus animal, i.e., animality. Note that this is not the claim we saw advanced above by Sar Shalom and Levi that Porphyry's argument is inappropriate for the art of logic because it assumes that genera and species exist extramentally.

In fact, since universals are understood in the art of logic as rational entities, it is even possible to say that differences are *actually* present in the mind. "For one individual may make the statement, 'The rational is animal' at the same time that another individual makes the other

⁵⁵ I.e., *modus tollens*.

⁵⁶ Munich, BS, *Cod. hebr.* 27, f. 36-37, with collations from Paris, BNF, ms. *heb.* 999 and Oxford, BL, ms. *Mich.* 499, based on Husik's textual emendations in his unpublished edition (available as New York, JTS, ms. 10935): זהו החלק יחלק: ל"ב חלקים כאשר יתבאר והוא מביא בחלק הא' גדר אחד להבדל ואמר שכבר גדרו המשאים ההבדל באשר הוא אשר בו יעדיף המין על הסוג. «וזה שהבדל האדם», וכו' הוא החלק הב' באשר יבאר מה שאמר וזאת היא התולדה השישית המובארת בזה הספר ומכלל דבריו יסודר ההיקש ככה. כל דבר אשר יכלול ענין אחד בפועל ועם זה כולל דברים אחרים בפועל אשר לא יכללם הוא יעדיף עליו והמין יכלול הסוג בפועל ועם זה יכלול דבר אחר אשר לא יכלול הסוג בפועל א"כ המין יעדיף על הסוג. ההיקש הוא בג' מהתמונה הראשונה והגדולה מפורסמת [א220] והקטנה מבוארת למה שהמין כולל הסוג בפועל ויכלול גם עמו ההבדל. ואמנם הסוג איננו כולל בהבדל בפועל וזה יתבאר ככה. אם ההבדל ימצא לסוג בפועל היה אפשר בשני מקבילים שיהיו יחד בנושא אחד בזמן אחד וישנה מקביל הנמשך אבל אי אפשר בשני מקבילים שיהיו בנושא אחד בזמן אחד ויתחייב מזה מקביל הקודם, ר"ל שההבדל לא ימצא בסוג בפועל ההיקש הוא תנאי מדובק והנמשך הראשון מבואר למה שהסוג יחלק אל הבדלים מקבילים והוא בערכם בשום עד שאם אחד מהם ימצא לסוג בפועל היה מחוייב שיהיה לו האחר ג"כ אחר שהם מחלקים אותו במדרגה שוה. והנה המכוון מפורפירוס בזה המקום שאלה ההבדלים ימצאו לסוג בכך וכן תאמר בפרסום ההעתקה הנוצרית.

statement, “The irrational is animal”, in which case that is predicated actually of contradictory opposites together at the same time, albeit in relation to different things.

The upshot of all this, according to Judah, is that Averroes is correct in criticizing Porphyry; whether the latter understands the subject matter of logic to be extramental things from the standpoint of generally accepted opinion, or as rational entities in the mind, the first definition of different according to the Peripatetics is weak – though not absurd. Unlike Judah Kohen, Judah Messer Leon accepts Averroes’s criticism of Porphyry, although he explains it through the lens of the scholastics who accept the subject matter of logic as “second intentions” or, using the terminology of al-Fārābī and Avicenna, “secondary concepts”.⁵⁷

From our examination of how thirteen different Hebrew commentaries on Averroes’s *Middle Commentary* of the *Isagoge* deal with Porphyry’s first definition of difference, we may draw some preliminary conclusions. Needless to say, a fuller picture requires studies of the commentaries in their entirety.

First, not only was there a tradition of studying the *Isagoge* among the Jews, but also that study was built on commentarial traditions. This is clear both from the study of Gersonides’ commentary and from the similar explanations that are found in multiple works. Of course, only a sample of the commentaries in the manuscript tradition has survived. And one can only speculate as to the relations between the various works. Still, although the study of philosophy was often a local affair, explanations may have traveled from place to place, as in the case of the itinerant scholar whose explanation made its way in the anonymous commentary found in JTS 2440.

Second, several of the commentaries cite “the translation of the Christians”, which shows that Averroes’s text was not unfrequently studied in conjunction with Boethius’s Latin translation and not only in light of the Arabic-into-Hebrew tradition. Given the practical uses of the study of *Isagoge*, e.g., for the practice of medicine, that is not surprising, though worthy of note.

Third, among the Jewish commentators, even those who mention the translations and explanations of the Christians, Judah Messer Leon stands out as unique in his attempt to bring together scholastic logic with the older Hebrew-Arabic tradition and to replicate some of the methods of the Italian schools in his own academy. Already in his lifetime he was accused of merely translating Paul of Venice into Hebrew and pawning it off as his own work, and Husik characterized him as “a compiler, and a compiler for the most part from a single source.” Yet while he himself admits in his introduction that much of his work is based on the work of others, further research will be needed to determine to what extent his books are mere translations or attempts to synthesize for his coreligionists the two great traditions of logic of which Jewish savants were the heirs.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ See A. Sabra, “The Subject Matter of Logic”, *The Journal of Philosophy* 77 (1980): 746-764, and T. Street – N. Germann, “Arabic and Islamic Philosophy of Language and Logic”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2021 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2021/entries/arabic-islamic-language/>> (2021.09.20). Messer Leon is translating the ‘intentiones secundae’ of the scholastics with familiar Hebrew terminology. See Husik, *Judah Messer Leon’s Commentary* (above, n. 54), p. 15.

⁵⁸ I would like to express my thanks to the Editor for his helpful comments.

