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SAADIA VS. RASHI: ON THE SHIFT FROM MEANING-MAXIMALISM TO MEANING-MINIMALISM IN MEDIEVAL BIBLICAL LEXICOLOGY[1]

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ABSTRACT

לעילוי נשמתו של נפתלי בן דוד קינברג ז״ל

Saadia Gaon and Rashi held very different views concerning the task of the lexicographer. Saadia believed that the lexicographer must not limit himself to listing the common, well-attested meanings of a word; he has a duty to posit additional meanings as a means of resolving contradictions and producing smooth, coherent readings. Rashi felt that words have only one basic meaning from which all of the contextual meanings are derived, and that the task of the lexicographer is to find that meaning. Saadia's view was shaped by Muslim intellectual traditions. Rashi's view bears some resemblance to that of an anonymous 11th-century French speculative grammarian, but its roots are in rabbinic literature. Other exegetes cited in this article (the Masoretes, David al-Fāsī, Menaḥem ben Saruq, Jonah ibn Janāḥ, Joseph Qara, Abraham ibn Ezra, David Qimḥi, Joseph ibn Kaspi) have not been studied systematically, but the evidence gathered up to now suggests that the difference between Saadia Gaon and Rashi is part of a more general shift from meaning-maximalism to meaning-minimalism in medieval biblical lexicology—a shift which occurred independently in Spain and France.

[1] This article is an expanded version of papers delivered at the Eleventh World Congress of Jewish Studies (Division A, Bible Plenary Session) on June 24, 1993; at the Institute for Advanced Studies of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem on November 16, 1994; and at the Israel Academic Center in Cairo on May 8, 1995. It has benefitted greatly from the comments of those who attended, including Shraga Abramson ז״ל, Zeev Ben-Ḥayyim, Joshua Blau, Shelomo Morag, and Gad Sarfatti, and from those of my colleagues at the Institute, including Cyril Aslanoff, Menaḥem Ben-Sasson, Aron Dotan, Lenn E. Goodman, Aharon Maman, Carl Posy, Berel Septimus, David Tene ז״ל, and especially Naphtali Kinberg ז״ל. I am also indebted to David Berger, Arthur Hyman, Shnayer Z. Leiman, Yeshayahu Maori, Franz Rosenthal, Uriel Simon, Haym Soloveitchik, and my brother, Mark J. Steiner, for their valuable contributions to this article.

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1. Introduction

One of the oldest and most important facets of biblical exegesis is the glossing of words, and it is no exaggeration to say that every exegete is, in some measure, a lexicographer.

Most exegetes limit themselves to supplying the meaning of a given word in a given context, occasionally adding a parallel with the same meaning in a different context. They refrain from discussing occurrences and meanings that are not relevant to the passage at hand, presumably on the grounds that such discussions belong in a dictionary rather than a commentary.

Saadia Gaon and Rashi are exceptions to this rule. Both include semantic analyses in their commentaries that go well beyond what is needed to clarify the meaning of the passage under discussion. What led these two exegetes to provide information that more properly belongs in a dictionary?

In the case of Saadia, the answer may be that there were not yet any dictionaries to speak of. The earliest comprehensive dictionary of Biblical Hebrew known to us, *Kitāb Jāmiᶜ al-Alfāẓ* of the Karaite David ben Abraham al-Fāsī, postdates Saadia's commentaries. If there were earlier biblical lexica, they too were probably composed by Karaites, and Saadia would not have wanted his readers to consult them.

Rashi, on the other hand, did have a dictionary at his disposal, the *Maḥberet* of Menaḥem ben Saruq, but he was not happy with its theoretical underpinnings. Indeed, several of the semantic analyses in Rashi's commentaries can be viewed as a critique of Menaḥem's lexicological assumptions.[2]

It is safe to say that Rashi would have been even less happy with the semantic discussions of Saadia Gaon, had he been familiar with them, for the tendencies that he disliked in Menaḥem's definitions are even more pronounced in Saadia's. Rashi's lexicological approach is very different from that of Saadia Gaon. Saadia believed that words have many meanings, while Rashi held that they often have only one basic meaning. Saadia made the multiplication of meanings a cornerstone of his exegesis, while Rashi pursued a reductionist policy. In short, Saadia was a meaning-maximalist, while Rashi was a meaning-

[2] See § 11, below.

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minimalist.[3] Saadia's approach is adopted from Muslim exegetes, lexicographers, grammarians, and philosophers, who were heirs to a tradition going back to Aristotle, while Rashi's approach is rooted in rabbinic literature.

The contrast between these two giants is part of a much larger picture. It appears from a preliminary examination of a broader range of exegetes that biblical lexicology underwent a shift from meaning-maximalism to meaning-minimalism during the course of the Middle Ages. The evidence examined thus far suggests that the shift away from Saadia's approach was gradual in Spain and Provence, proceeding in small steps from Menaḥem to Jonah ibn Janāḥ to Abraham ibn Ezra and David Qimḥi to Joseph ibn Kaspi. In France, on the other hand, rabbinic meaning-minimalism reappeared suddenly, incorporated into a brilliant lexicological theory propounded by a single individual.

2. Saadia Gaon: Meaning-Maximalism as a Tool for Resolving Contradictions

One of the first things one notices about Saadia's Torah commentary is that it is full of lists of meanings, usually introduced by statements of the form, "I translated X in this way, because it has

[3] These terms come from Roland Posner; see, for example, his article "Bedeutungsmaximalismus und Bedeutungsminimalismus in der Beschreibung von Satzverknüpfern," in *Die Partikeln der deutschen Sprache*, ed. H. Weydt (Berlin, 1979) 378–394. For an example of their applicability to Hebrew philology, see G. Vanoni, "Zur Bedeutung der althebräischen Konjunktion ẇ=" in *Text, Methode und Grammatik: Wolfgang Richter zum 65 Geburtstag*, ed. W. Gross, et al. (St. Ottilien, 1991), p. 569. An extreme form of meaning-minimalism is Formal Determinism, the notion that there is a one-to-one correspondence between form and meaning; see R. D. Hoberman, *The Syntax and Semantics of Verb Morphology in Modern Aramaic* (New Haven, 1989) 21–22. It must be stressed that these terms refer to a tendency to maximize/minimize the number of meanings of words in the lexicon. They do not refer to a tendency to maximize/minimize the meaningfulness of words in a text, as described in my "Meaninglessness, Meaningfulness, and Super-meaningfulness in Scripture: An Analysis of the Controversy Surrounding Dan 2:12 in the Middle Ages," *JQR* 82 (1992) 431–449. The latter tendency might be referred to as *significance-maximalism/minimalism*. Using both variables, we can classify the medieval exegetes as combining (a) meaning-maximalism with significance-minimalism (Saadia), (b) meaning-minimalism with significance-maximalism (Rashi), (c) meaning-maximalism with significance-maximalism (Joseph Qara?), or (d) meaning-minimalism with significance-minimalism (Ibn Kaspi).

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so-and-so many meanings." Many of these meanings seem strange to the modern student of the Bible. What led Saadia to posit such meanings?

Part of the answer can be found in the introduction to the commentary. Saadia's very first principle of exegesis is that, under certain circumstances, it is the duty of the exegete to posit ambiguity:

> Since . . . in every utterance there must inevitably occur unambiguous and ambiguous elements (אלמחכם ואלמתשאבה)[4] (for every language is built that way, and the Torah is similar, since it was revealed in one of the languages),[5] it is incumbent upon anyone who interprets [Scrip-

[4] For the Quranic term *mutašābih*, see L. Kinberg, "*Muḥkamāt* and *Mutashābihāt* (Koran 3/7): Implication of a Koranic Pair of Terms in Medieval Exegesis," *Arabica* 35 (1988) 143–172. Saadia uses this term in his commentary to Exod 32:5 (MS St. Petersburg, Russian National Library Hebr.-Arab. I/129, f. 38b): וליס פי אלקצה כלמה מתשאבהה אלא חג ליי מחר פאן הרון קצד אן יקולהא בתשביה (צ״ל בתשאבה?), "there is no ambiguous utterance in the story except for חג ליי מחר, for Aaron intended to say it ambiguously." He goes on to explain that חג has the same meaning as זבח, including "slaughter (of humans)" in addition to "sacrifice (of animals)." And he uses the verbal noun תשאבה in the sense of "ambiguity" (or "uncertainty caused by ambiguity") in his commentary to Prov 25:11, giving three possible interpretations of כאנת לפלאן עין חסנה, "so-and-so had a good eye"; *Œuvres complètes de Saadia Ben Iosef al-Fayyoûmî*, ed. J. Derenbourg (Paris, 1894) 6:146; משלי עם תרגום ופירוש הגאון רבנו סעדיה בן יוסף פיומי, ed. Y. Qafiḥ (Jerusalem, 1976) 200. R. Samuel bar Ḥofni Gaon uses the term in the same way in the introduction to his commentary: ואליי״ו אן יערף אלמתשאבהאת פאן אלאסם אלואחד קד יקע עלי אשיא מכ׳תלפה אלחדוד ואלאנסאב מתי׳ל עין האדם עין הארץ ועין המים, "and the 15th (principle) is that one should recognize ambiguous words, for a single noun may be used of things differing in category and relation, e.g., the eye of a man, the surface of the earth, a spring of water"; פירושי רב סעדיה גאון לבראשית, ed. M. Zucker (New York, 1984) Appendix 3, p. 450. For the use of "eye" as an example of ambiguity by Al-Fārābī, Maimonides and Abraham de Balmes, see n. 77, below.

[5] In view of this unequivocal statement about the inevitability of ambiguity (אלמתשאבה) in human language, it may seem surprising to find Saadia stating, in his commentary to Prov 25:11 (ed. Derenbourg, 146; ed. Qafiḥ, 200), that one of the rules for the speaker who wishes to compose a דָּבָר עַל־אָפְנָיו is that "he should be careful to use language which eliminates תשאבה from the listener as much as possible." In this context, Saadia is stating rules of rhetoric that go back to Aristotle (*De sophisticis elenchis,* 165b–166a). Like Aristotle, Saadia warns against ὁμωνυμία "ambiguity," σύνθεσις "[incorrect] joining [of words]" and διαίρεσις "[incorrect] separation [of words]." But he tempers his warning to avoid ambiguity with the phrase "as much as possible," and then admits that there is ambiguity in the Bible, even in the formulation of the commandments, e.g., the ambiguity of הַשַּׁבָּת, which can have the meaning "the Sabbath" or "the holiday," as in מְמָחֳרַת הַשַּׁבָּת (see §3, below).

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> ture] to take that which agrees with knowledge . . . and tradition . . . to be unambiguous and that which contradicts either of them to be ambiguous.[6]

In other words, multiplication of meanings can serve to reconcile Scripture with reason, on the one hand, and with tradition, on the other. In view of the latter function, it also served as a weapon in Saadia's polemic with the Karaites, which I shall discuss in the next section.

Saadia's use of ambiguity to resolve contradictions with reason is illustrated by his treatment of נ-ח-ם:[7]

> I translated וַיִּנָּחֶם as 'threaten' [in Gen 6:6 וַיִּנָּחֶם ה׳ כִּי־עָשָׂה אֶת־הָאָדָם בָּאָרֶץ], because this word occurs with six meanings. One is 'regret,' according to common usage . . . ; another is 'threaten': Gen 27:42 הִנֵּה עֵשָׂו אָחִיךָ מִתְנַחֵם לְךָ לְהָרְגֶךָ; another is 'console' . . . ; another is 'forgive' as in Ps 106:45 וַיִּנָּחֵם כְּרֹב חֲסָדָיו and another is 'see, consider': Jer 18:10 וְנִחַמְתִּי עַל־הַטּוֹבָה.

According to Saadia, this root has six meanings. The usual meaning in the *nifʿal* stem is "repent, regret," but Saadia seems to be at pains to avoid this interpretation in cases where the verb is predicated affirmatively of God.[8] For those cases, he gives the meanings "threaten" (Gen 6:6), "forgive" (Ps 106:45), and "see, consider"

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[6] פירושי רב סעדיה גאון לבראשית, 17 (Heb. transl., 191): למא כאנת . . . וכאן כל כלאם לא בד מן אן יקע פיה אלמחכם ואלמתשאבה אדי כל לגה עלי הדיה אלבניה הי מבניה וכאנת אלתוראה במתיל דילך אדי נזלת באחדי אללגאת וגיב עלי כל מעבר להא אן יגיעל מא ואפק אלמעלומאת . . . ואלמנקולאת . . . הי אלמחכמאת אלאלפאטי ויגיעל כל מא כיאלף אחדיהמא מתשאבהא. I am indebted to Arthur Hyman for pointing out to me that the discussion of the examples that follows is parallel to אמונות ודעות, 7.1, as noted also by Zucker. The discussion was apparently imported from there without being fully assimilated to the context here. In particular, the example of a contradiction with sense perception fits well in אמונות ודעות, but is out of place here.

[7] פירושי רב סעדיה גאון לבראשית, 100–101 (Heb. transl., 333–334): ופסרת [וַיִּנָּחֶם] תואעד לאן הדיה אללפטיה תקע עלי ו׳ מעאני מנהא נדאמה עלי אלמשהור . . . ומנהא תואעד הִנֵּה עֵשָׂו אָחִיךָ מִתְנַחֵם לְךָ לְהָרְגֶךָ ומנהא עזא . . . ומנהא צפח כיק וַיִּנָּחֵם כְּרֹב חֲסָדָיו . . . ומנהא נטיר וְנִחַמְתִּי עַל הַטּוֹבָה. The passage is repeated with minor changes in Saadia's commentary to Exod 32:14 (MS St. Petersburg, Russian National Library Hebr.-Arab. I/129, f. 39b). Cf. Ibn Ezra to Gen 6:6 and 27:42.

[8] On the other hand, where the verb is predicated negatively of God (Num 23:19), he **does** translate with נ-ד-ם. Indeed, Saadia gives Num 23:19 as his example of נ-ח-ם meaning נדאמה in his commentary to Exod 32:14; see the preceding footnote.

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(Jer 18:10).[9] It is clear that his avoidance of the usual meaning in these cases is dictated by the exegetical principle set forth in his introduction. An interpretation according to the usual meaning would imply that God is susceptible to change, but since our intellect tells us that this cannot be true, we are duty-bound to posit the existence of other, less common meanings.[10] Later we shall see that Rashi insists that two meanings suffice for this verb.

Another example is Saadia's well-known interpretation of וַיֹּאמֶר in the first chapter of Genesis as "(God) willed/desired," an interpretation rightly criticized by Qirqisānī[11] and Ibn Ezra[12] on philological grounds, but which Maimonides was later to adopt.[13] Indeed, Saadia's forced use of ambiguity to resolve contradictions with reason should probably be viewed as a forerunner of the philosophical exegesis in Maimonides' מורה נבוכים.[14]

In his introduction, Saadia explains that the same method should be used when one verse contradicts another, e.g., Deut 6:16 לֹא תְנַסּוּ אֶת־ה׳ "You shall not test the Lord your God" vs. Mal 3:10 וּבְחָנוּנִי נָא בָזֹאת "Test me through this." The former utterance, with the verb

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[9] None of these interpretations is convincing, but the last one is particularly forced. It derives וְנַחֲמָתִי from the Galilean Aramaic verb ח-מ-י "to see" plus a preformative emphatic *nun*. (The same Aramaic verb is used by Abu al-Faraj Furqān to explicate Gen 30:39 וַיֶּחֱמוּ in MS St. Petersburg, Russian National Library Hebr.-Arab. I/4626, ff. 67b and 74a). Saadia (both in the passage cited above and in his response to Ḥiwi al-Balkhi) claims that the meaning "threaten" is also attested in Gen 27:42 הִנֵּה עֵשָׂו אָחִיךָ מִתְנַחֵם לְךָ לְהָרְגֶךָ, and David al-Fāsī accepts the meaning for that verse; I. Davidson, *Saadia's Polemic against Ḥiwi Al-Balkhi* (New York, 1915) 48, §20, lines 124–125; *Kitāb Jāmiᶜ al-Alfāẓ of David ben Abraham al-Fāsī*, ed. S. L. Skoss (New Haven, 1945) 2:265. However, none of the targums interpret the verse that way, and it is possible that Saadia's interpretation of that verse was motivated by the problem in Gen 6:6.

[10] פירושי רב סעדיה גאון לבראשית, 18 (Heb. transl., 191).

[11] See his commentary to Gen 1:3 (MS London, Margoliouth Cat. 251, pp. כז–כח).

[12] See his commentary to Gen 1:3.

[13] See מורה נבוכים, 1.65. See also Ramban, ad loc.

[14] Sometimes the ambiguity posited by Saadia to resolve a contradiction with reason is syntactic rather than lexical. Thus, in 1 Kgs 18:37 וְאַתָּה הֲסִבּוֹתָ אֶת־לִבָּם אָחֹרַנִּית (but presumably not in 2 Kgs 20:11 וַיָּשֶׁב אֶת־הַצֵּל בַּמַּעֲלוֹת אֲשֶׁר יָרְדָה בְּמַעֲלוֹת אָחָז אָחֹרַנִּית), Saadia takes אָחֹרַנִּית as modifying the adjacent noun phrase rather than the verb ("for you have turned around their backward hearts"); see אמונות ודעות, 4.6. And in Isa 6:2, שְׂרָפִים עֹמְדִים מִמַּעַל לוֹ, he separates לוֹ from מִמַּעַל and makes it modify שְׂרָפִים ("He has seraphs standing above, i.e., in heaven"); see his translation of the verse (תפסיר ישעיה לרב סעדיה גאון, ed. Y. Ratzaby [Qiryat Ono, 1993] 14) and his commentary to Prov 25:11 (ed. Derenbourg, 146; ed. Qafiḥ, 200).

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נ-ס-י, is unambiguous; the latter, with ב-ח-ן, contains "an ambiguous word having an uncommon meaning which may be rendered so that it agrees with the unambiguous utterance in the Torah."[15]

Another contradiction resolved in this manner is the one between Exod 3:2 וְהִנֵּה הַסְּנֶה בֹּעֵר בָּאֵשׁ and 3:3 לֹא־יִבָּעֵר הַסְּנֶה. Saadia resolved this contradiction by taking the first phrase to mean "the bush was being kindled" and the second to mean "the bush would not burn."[15a] Here we have an example of a word occurring with different meanings in the same passage, but Saadia does not mention this example in arguing against the Karaite interpretation of מִמָּחֳרַת הַשַּׁבָּת, apparently because doing so would have weakened his position in another controversy with the Karaites (see below).

In at least one case, Saadia kills two birds with one stone, using one ambiguity to resolve both a contradiction with another verse and a contradiction with reason. According to Ibn Ezra, "the Gaon" held that סְנֶה has two meanings: "thorn-bush" in Exod 3:2 and "heavens" in Deut 33:16 שֹׁכְנִי סְנֶה.[16] This report is corroborated by a few manuscripts of Saadia Gaon's *Tafsir* that have two different renderings of סְנֶה, that is אלסנא "thorn-bush" in Exod 3:2–4 and אלסמא "heavens" in Deut 33:16.[17] Ibn Ezra states that the reason for the latter rendering is that the term שֹׁכְנִי implies permanent residence.[18] If that is the case, then שֹׁכְנִי סְנֶה contradicts Isa 33:5 שֹׁכֵן מָרוֹם, and Saadia's

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[15] פירושי רב סעדיה גאון לבראשית, 18 (Heb. transl., 192): הדיה הי לפטיה מתשאבהה להא מע(א)ני גיר משהור אללפטי בה תתכ׳רג׳ חתי תואפק אלמחכם אלדי׳ פי אלתוריה. The parallel passage in אמונות ודעות, 7.1, uses the terms פציח "clear" and ליס בפציח "unclear" instead of מחכם and מתשאבה in discussing these two verses; ספר הנבחר באמונות ובדעות, ed. Y. Qafiḥ (New York, n.d.) 219.

[15a] *Œuvres complètes de R. Saadia Ben Iosef al-Fayyoûmî*, ed. J. Derenbourg (Paris, 1894) 1:83; cf. Yaʿqub Qirqisani, *Kitāb al-Anwār wa-l-Marāqib: Code of Karaite Law*, ed. L. Nemoy (New York, 1939–43) 525–527.

[16] In the short commentary to Exod 3:2, Ibn Ezra writes: אמר הגאון כי סנה תחלק לשני חלקים: האחד קוץ והשני שמים; in the long one, he says: אמר הגאון כי זה מין קוץ; וּרְצוֹן שֹׁכְנִי סְנֶה, שמים.

[17] MSS JTS 651 (Egypt, 1678) and Oxford, Neubauer Cat. 171 (Syria). Saadia apparently hoped that the phonetic similarity between the words אלסנא and אלסמא would neutralize psychological resistance to the substitution; cf. the substitution of ענאיה "providence" for עין "eye" in his translation of Job 14:3, noted by L. E. Goodman, "Saadiah Gaon's Interpretive Technique in Translating the Book of Job," in *Translation of Scripture* (Philadelphia, 1990) 69. However, the substitution was so subtle that many copyists missed it.

[18] See again his short commentary.

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interpretation may be viewed as an attempt to resolve that contradiction. Indeed, he translates both שֹׁכְנִי סְנֶה and שֹׁכֵן מָרוֹם with the same Arabic phrase: סאכן אלסמא "Inhabitant of Heaven."

This interpretation also resolves what, for Saadia, would have been a contradiction between Deut 33:16 and reason, viz., the notion that God dwells in a finite place. That contradiction is normally resolved in the *Tafsir* by rendering שכן as סכן נורה "his light dwelled" or אסכן נורה "he caused his light to dwell."[19]

It is possible that Saadia's discussion of נ-ח-ם also belongs here since, in addition to the contradiction with reason discussed above, it involves a contradiction between verses (Num 23:19 לֹא אִישׁ אֵל וִיכַזֵּב וּבֶן־אָדָם וְיִתְנֶחָם vs. Deut 32:36 כִּי־יָדִין ה׳ עַמּוֹ וְעַל־עֲבָדָיו יִתְנָחָם for *hitpa*ᶜ*el*; 1 Sam 15:29 וְגַם נֵצַח יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא יְשַׁקֵּר וְלֹא יִנָּחֵם vs. Gen 6:6 וַיִּנָּחֶם ה׳ כִּי־עָשָׂה אֶת־הָאָדָם בָּאָרֶץ, Jer 18:10 וְנִחַמְתִּי עַל־הַטּוֹבָה, etc. for *nif*ᶜ*al*). However, this is not precisely the kind of contradiction between verses that Saadia describes in his introduction. In this case, the contradictory verses involve one and the same verb, so that there are no objective grounds for claiming that Num 23:19 and 1 Sam 15:29 are less ambiguous than the opposing verses.

If such tactics seem quaint today, it is not because modern Bible scholars refrain from positing new meanings to eliminate anomalies in the biblical text but because they have a different conception of anomalousness.[20]

3. Saadia Gaon: Meaning-Maximalism as a Weapon against the Karaites

Saadia's use of ambiguity to resolve contradictions with tradition is illustrated by his polemic with the Karaites over the verses in Leviticus which fix the date of the Shavuot holiday. The Karaites ar-

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[19] See *Tafsir* to Exod 25:8, 29:45,46, Num 35:34, and Ps 135:21 (תהלים עם תרגום ופירוש הגאון רבינו סעדיה בן יוסף פיומי, ed. Y. Qafiḥ [Jerusalem, 1966] 270, apparatus, n. 13). See also אמונות ודעות, 2.11 (ed. Qafiḥ, 106), where Saadia stresses that verses which refer to God as dwelling in the temple and other (finite) places refer to God's *Shekhina*—a light created by Him.

[20] One is reminded of the use of ambiguity by modern biblical philologists, as described in J. Barr, *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament* (Oxford, 1968) 125–155. The difference is that Saadia posited the existence of uncommon meanings as a means of resolving contradictions *between* verses, while modern philologists posit such meanings as a means of eliminating anomalies *within* verses.

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gued that the phrase מִמָּחֳרַת הַשַּׁבָּת must have the same meaning in Lev 23:15 וּסְפַרְתֶּם לָכֶם מִמָּחֳרַת הַשַּׁבָּת that it has in 23:16 עַד מִמָּחֳרַת הַשַּׁבָּת הַשְּׁבִיעִת תִּסְפְּרוּ חֲמִשִּׁים יוֹם, which is possible only if the phrase refers to Sunday. According to the rabbinic interpretation, the first occurrence of מִמָּחֳרַת הַשַּׁבָּת refers to the day after the first day of Passover (Saadia: מן גד אלעטלה) and the second one refers to the day after the seventh week (Saadia: גד אלאסבוע אלסאבע). In כתאב אלתמייז, Saadia relates that he searched through the entire Bible for cases of a word occurring with different meanings in one passage, and he gives a list of the examples he found.[21] In his commentary to Gen 2:2, he stresses that שַׁבָּת may refer to holy days other than the Sabbath.[22]

4. Saadia Gaon: Meaning-Minimalism as a Weapon against the Karaites

According to the Karaites, Exod 35:3 לֹא־תְבַעֲרוּ אֵשׁ בְּכֹל מֹשְׁבֹתֵיכֶם בְּיוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת prohibits not only kindling a fire on the Sabbath day but also allowing a fire which had been kindled before the Sabbath to remain burning during the Sabbath. Underlying this two-fold interpretation was the claim that the verb ב-ע-ר has the meaning "burn" as well as the meaning "kindle, ignite." Yefet, for example, tries to prove that the verb can refer to the "state of burning" (חאל אלאחתראק);[23] Al-Fāsī gives examples of its referring to the "persistence of burning" (תמאדי אלאחתראק).[24]

To eliminate this interpretation, which contradicts talmudic tradition, Saadia was forced to adopt an uncharacteristic meaning-minimalist position denying the legitimacy of the meaning "burn." However, consistent adherence to this position would have undercut

[21] Hirschfeld, "The Arabic Portion of the Cairo Genizah at Cambridge (*Third Article*)," *JQR* o.s. 16 (1904) 102: ותתבעת אלמקרא לאנטיר הל אגיד פיה לפטיתין מתגיאורתין תפסיר אחדהמא גיר תפסיר אלאכיר . . . See also the discussion in U. Simon, לדרכו הפרשנית של הראב״ע על פי שלושת באוריו לפסוק אחד, *Bar-Ilan Annual* 3 (1965) 119ff.

[22] See §7, below.

[23] Commentary to Exod 35:3; see H. Ben-Shammai, שיטות המחשבה הדתית של אבו יוסף יעקוב אלקרקסאני ויפת בן עלי (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University, 1977), vol. 2, Appendix 3, p. 169, line 12. The passage is repeated verbatim in Yefet's commentary to Lev 23:3; see H. Hirschfeld, "The Arabic Portion of the Cairo Genizah at Cambridge (*Thirteenth Article*)," *JQR* o.s. 18 (1906) 614, last line.

[24] *Jāmiᶜ al-Alfāẓ*, 1:253, lines 127–130.

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his efforts to resolve a second contradiction—the one in Exod 3:3 discussed above.

In his commentary to Exod 35:3, Saadia managed to extricate himself from this dilemma by means of a rule which recognizes the meaning "burn" but severely limits its frequency:

> Any occurrence of ב-ע-ר[25] in association with אש[26] is intended to come under the heading of 'uniting (flame and fuel)'—not the heading of 'causation of burning.'[27]

According to this rule, collocation with the word אש is the crucial conditioning factor. Exod 35:3 contains the word אש and thus ב-ע-ר must refer to the uniting of flame and fuel. The same goes for Exod 3:2. Exod 3:3, on the other hand, does not contain the word אש, and thus ב-ע-ר, in this instance, may have the meaning "burn." This is the only place in Saadia's extant translations where ב-ע-ר is so rendered. Thus, "burn" is an uncommon meaning which can be invoked in Exod 3:3 in order to resolve the contradiction with Exod 3:2.

5. Saadia Gaon: Meaning-Maximalism, Context, and Coherence

Just as lists of meanings are a hallmark of Saadia's commentary, freeness is a hallmark of his translation. It exhibits a marked tendency to vary the translation of words to fit the context, resulting in smooth, coherent renderings. In the absence of a concordance,[28] it is dangerous to make generalizations, but we *can* point to Ratzaby's

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[25] Saadia's use of the *pi^cel* verbal noun ביעור (rather than בעירה) and the causative אחראק (rather than חרק) should probably not be taken as establishing a second distinction between Exod 3:3 and 35:3. Such a distinction would undercut his effort to resolve the contradiction between Exod 3:3 and 3:2.

[26] Not "any occurrence of ביעור in association with fire" in contradistinction to ביעור referring to destruction by other means. Saadia intentionally used the *Hebrew* word אש.

[27] כל ביעור יקארנה אש אלקצד בה אלי באב אלתאליף לא אלי באב אלאחראק. Cited by Yefet in his commentary to Exod 35:3 and to Lev 23:3; see Ben-Shammai, שיטות המחשבה, vol. 2, Appendix 3, p. 169, lines 13–14 and Hirschfeld, "The Arabic Portion (*Thirteenth Article*)," 615, first two lines.

[28] It is to be hoped that students of Saadia's exegesis will, in the near future, produce a concordance of his translations, similar to those available for the Septuagint and Targum Onqelos.

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discovery that 47 different translations of BH *waw* can be found in the *Tafsir*, each one attested at least three times.[29] Since Saadia did not distinguish between the translations of a word and its meanings, the multiplication of translations was equivalent in his eyes to the multiplication of meanings.

It appears that Saadia considered coherence and cohesion to be a hallmark of *peshaṭ* exegesis, in contrast to *derash*, which was by nature atomistic. In varying translation to fit context, he did not limit himself to the positing of polysemy in individual words. Even phrases could have several meanings, and the meanings did not have to be related; phrases could be homonymous. Thus, Saadia broke with tradition to claim that the phrase ב-ק-ע הָרוֹת means "capture the mountains of" in Amos 1:13,[30] despite the fact that the same phrase occurs

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[29] Y. Ratzaby, הוראות הוי״ו בתפסיר רב סעדיה הגאון, in ספר יוסף ברסלבי (ברסלבסקי) (Jerusalem, 1970) 445–460. I have dealt with the alleged ambiguity of *waw* in a paper entitled "On the Polysemy or Pseudo-Polysemy of Some Grammatical Morphs in Biblical Hebrew," read at the North American Conference on Afroasiatic Linguistics on April 25, 1977. I am currently revising it for publication.

[30] In his שבעים מלים בודדות and his commentary to Ps 68:26. See N. Allony, *Studies in Medieval Philology and Literature*, vol. 1 (*Saᶜadia's Works*) (Jerusalem, 1986) 56: פיכון הד׳א אלאסם מרה ידיכר ומרה יונתי מתיל כִּי־שְׁנוֹת מִסְפָּר יָאֲתָיוּ מקאם שנים [ואיצ׳א] עַל־בְּקָעָם הָרוֹת הַגִּלְעָד מקאם הרים, "for this noun (חלי) is put sometimes into the masculine form and sometimes into the feminine form like כִּי־שְׁנוֹת מִסְפָּר יָאֲתָיוּ instead of שָׁנִים [and also] עַל־בְּקָעָם הָרוֹת הַגִּלְעָד instead of הָרִים." See also תהלים עם תרגום ופירוש הגאון רבינו סעדיה, 163–164: ופסרת עֲלָמוֹת פתיאן למא כאן אלשיר לם יקולה אלא אלרג׳אל מן אללוים כ׳אצה ולם אג׳יד מנכר ענד אבאינא אן ידיכרוא אלאסם אלמונתי׳ אוקאתא ויונתי׳ון אלמדיכר מתיל הָרוֹת הַגִּלְעָד אלדי׳ הי הָרִים ומתיל עִתִּים מְזֻמָּנוֹת אלדי׳ הי מְזֻמָּנִים ומא מאתיל ד׳לך, "And I translated עֲלָמוֹת 'young men' because only the men from among the Levites said the song, and I have not found that our ancestors considered it objectionable to make feminine forms masculine at times or to make masculine forms feminine, such as הָרוֹת הַגִּלְעָד, which are הָרִים, and such as עִתִּים מְזֻמָּנוֹת, which are מְזֻמָּנִים, and the like." These passages do not reveal Saadia's interpretation of בְּקָעָם. According to Dunash, Saadia took that word to mean "their capturing," presumably on the basis of 2 Chr 21:17, 32:1 and Isa 7:6; see ספר תשובות דונש הלוי בן לברט על רבי סעדיה גאון, ed. R. Schröter (Breslau, 1866) 6: בקיעת ההרים ולכידתה (צ״יל ולכידתם). Of the 10th-century exegetes who accepted Saadia's view of הָרוֹת, Yefet renders פתחהם ג׳באל אלג׳רש, "their capturing of the mountains of Jarash" (MS London, Margoliouth Cat. 287, p. קסב), while Al-Fāsī offers עלי שקהם ג׳באל ג׳רש . . . אי כאנו ישקון אלג׳באל ויכסרו חג׳ארהא ויסהלון אלכ׳שונה, "for splitting open the mountains of Jarash . . . , i.e., they would split open the mountains and break their rocks and smooth the roughness" (*Jāmiᶜ al-Alfāẓ*, 1:262–263. Samuel b. Ḥofni Gaon's formulation of this interpretation adds nothing to that of Saadia's; see פירושי רב סעדיה גאון לבראשית, Appendix 3, p. 449.

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in 2 Kgs 8:12 (cf. also Hos 14:1 הָרִיּוֹת ב-ק-ע) with the meaning "split open the pregnant women of." The reason, as pointed out by many of the later exegetes who adopted his view, is the context: "in order to expand their territory." Saadia had difficulty seeing a connection between splitting open pregnant women and expanding territory, and he was unhappy with this lack of coherence. In actuality, what we have here is a double entendre, as Glück[31] and Rendsburg[32] have pointed out; Saadia simply discovered the second reading.

6. Saadia Gaon: Meaning-Maximalism and the Recognition of Puns

Saadia's meaning-maximalist tendency gave him a decided advantage over other exegetes in the case of 1 Kgs 20:18 אִם־לְשָׁלוֹם יָצָאוּ תִּפְשׂוּם חַיִּים וְאִם לְמִלְחָמָה יָצָאוּ חַיִּים תִּפְשׂוּם. The problem in this verse is not a contradiction, but rather, as noted by Abarbanel, the meaningless division of Ben-Hadad's command into two antithetical contingencies, each having the same outcome.[33] Saadia's solution is cited by Abraham b. Solomon:

> Saadia said: When he puts the word חַיִּים after "take," he informs us that what is wished for them is life, and when he puts "take" after the word חַיִּים he informs us that what is wished for them is not life but destruction.[34]

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[31] J. J. Glück, "Paronomasia in Biblical Literature," *Semitics* 1 (1970) 65.

[32] G. Rendsburg, "Janus Parallelism in Gen 49:26," *JBL* 99 (1980) 292 n. 5.

[33] The question cannot be dismissed by citing parallels like Gen 24:49 וְעַתָּה אִם־יֶשְׁכֶם עֹשִׂים חֶסֶד וֶאֱמֶת אֶת־אֲדֹנִי הַגִּידוּ לִי וְאִם־לֹא הַגִּידוּ לִי וְאָפְנֶה עַל־יָמִין אוֹ עַל־שְׂמֹאל and 2 Kgs 7:4 אִם־אָמַרְנוּ נָבוֹא הָעִיר וְהָרָעָב בָּעִיר וָמַתְנוּ שָׁם וְאִם־יָשַׁבְנוּ פֹה וָמָתְנוּ. In the latter case, the repetition serves an important function: to show how careful weighing of the options led to a decision involving a calculated risk: וְעַתָּה לְכוּ וְנִפְּלָה אֶל־מַחֲנֵה אֲרָם אִם־יְחַיֻּנוּ נִחְיֶה וְאִם־יְמִיתֻנוּ וָמָתְנוּ. In the former case, we are dealing with a carefully crafted speech designed to persuade. The servant lays out a choice between two options, each corresponding to a different option for him: if they do the kindness, he will turn to the right; if not, he must turn to the left. Here too the division seems purposeful.

[34] קאל רבינו סעדיה ז״ל למא אכ״ר לפצ״ה׳ חַיִּים בעד אלתפישה אעלמנא אנה ירגיא להם אלחיאה, ולמא אכ״ר אלתפישה בעד לפצ״ חַיִּים אעלמנא אן ליס ירגיא להם אלחיאה אלא אלהלאך. B. Cohen, "Quotations from Saadia's Arabic Commentary on the Bible from Two Manuscripts of Abraham ben Solomon," *Saadia Anniversary Volume* (New York, 1943) 104. For Saadia's commentary on 1 Kings, see Hirschfeld, "The Arabic Portion (*Thirteenth Article*)," 606 and 609, line 13.

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According to this, the verse means something like "If they come in peace, take them alive; if in war, take their lives," and the inversion of the word order serves to signal contrast, like English *but* or *whereas*.

Saadia has assigned different meanings to the two neighboring occurrences of the phrase תִּפְשׂוּם חַיִּים in this verse, just as he did with the two neighboring occurrences of the phrase מִמָּחֳרַת הַשַּׁבָּת in Lev 23:15–16. The first meaning is well attested both in Hebrew (Josh 8:23, 1 Sam 15:8) and in Ben Hadad's native Aramaic (Bisitun 11, 17, 23, 27, 34, 44).[35] The second meaning can be supported by Prov 22:23 וְקָבַע אֶת־קֹבְעֵיהֶם נָפֶשׁ = וקבע מקבעיהם את נפשם.

It is quite likely that Ben Hadad's statement is a pun,[36] a pun that was missed by LXX, Peshitta, Targum Jonathan, Ibn Ezra (to Qoh 5:1), David Qimḥi, Ibn Kaspi, Gersonides, the Judeo-Arabic translation from 1354,[37] Malbim, Kittel,[38] Gray,[39] Würthwein,[40] NJPS and Sternberg.[41] Only Saadia, Baḥye (to Lev 5:15),[42] and

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[35] A. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.* (Oxford, 1923) 251–253; J. C. Greenfield and B. Porten, *The Bisitun Inscription of Darius the Great; Aramaic Version* (London, 1982) 28, 30, 32, 34, 38.

[36] As in Gen 40:13,19, a death sentence issued by a gentile king contains a cruel wordplay, which makes it sound initially like the pardon he issued moments before. The message may be that gentile kings view such decisions as an amusing game of little importance–like the Roman emperors deciding the fate of fallen gladiators. Under oriental despots, life is precarious: the tiniest variation of language, the slightest whim, makes the difference between life and death. This would fit the theme of the next two stories. In vss. 31ff, the ministers of the defeated Ben-Hadad tell him that his Israelite foe might listen to a plea to spare his life, since the kings of Israel have a reputation of being magnanimous–a reputation which turns out to be well-deserved. In 21:7ff, the Phoenician princess, Jezebel, teaches her husband, Ahab, that where *she* comes from, the taking of innocent life is part of the exercise of royal power (עשות מלוכה).

[37] התרגום הקדום לנביאים ראשונים בערבית יהודית, ed. Y. Avishur (Jerusalem, 1995) 249.

[38] R. Kittel, *Die Bücher der Könige* (Göttingen, 1900) 166.

[39] J. Gray, *I & II Kings: A Commentary*, 2nd ed. (London, 1970) 420.

[40] E. Würthwein, *Die Bücher der Könige: 1.Kön.17-2.Kön.25* (Göttingen, 1984) 234.

[41] M. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington, 1985), 256–257.

[42] It is quite possible that Baḥye's interpretation of our verse comes from Saadia; cf. the introduction to רבנו בחיי: באור על התורה, ed. C. B. Chavel (Jerusalem, 1966) 12. Baḥye's interest in this interpretation stems from his conviction that word-order variation is meaningful (2:415), והנה זה עקר גדול בלשון והפרש עצום יש בין המלות בהקדמת המאוחר ובאחור המוקדם אע״פ שנראה שהכל אחד ואינו מעלה ומוריד, וכענין שכתוב תִּפְשׂוּם חַיִּים ואמר חַיִּים תִּפְשׂוּם, והוא מה שאמר בן הדד מלך ארם על העם שיצאו משומרון, אִם־לְשָׁלוֹם יָצָאוּ תִּפְשׂוּם חַיִּים

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Abarbanel[43] recognized it. Saadia was primed to see it, because he was on the lookout for cases of a word occurring with different meanings in the same passage and because he was interested in the ambiguity of the word חיים. In his discussion of the tree of life,[44] he lists eight meanings for that word, including two which he would presumably apply in our case: חיוה׳ [א]לדניא "earthly life" as in לָמָּה לִי חַיִּים and נאס אחיא "living people" as in וְיָרְדוּ חַיִּים שְׁאֹלָה.[45]

Another pun noted by Saadia is in Ps 100:3 דְּעוּ כִּי־ה׳ הוּא אֱלֹהִים הוּא־עָשָׂנוּ ולא (קרי וְלוֹ) אֲנַחְנוּ עַמּוֹ וְצֹאן מַרְעִיתוֹ. Ibn Ezra to Exod 21:8 cites him as follows: ואמר הגאון כי שני טעמים יש לו כמו הוּא־עָשָׂנוּ וְלֹא אֲנַחְנוּ, "The Gaon said that this has two meanings like הוּא־עָשָׂנוּ וְלֹא אֲנַחְנוּ; one of them is that we did not make ourselves and the other is that we are his."[46] Here, too, recognition of the pun is probably a by-product of Saadia's search for words occurring twice in the same passage, each

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וְאִם לְמִלְחָמָה יָצָאוּ חַיִּים תִּפָּשׂוּם פירוש תִּפָּשׂוּם חַיִּים תפשו אותם והניחו להם חיים, כלומר אל תהרגום, ופירוש חַיִּים תִּפָּשׂוּם כי צווה להרגם ולתפוש חיותם מהם. In this he disagrees with Ibn Ezra (to Qoh 5:1), who held that it is meaningless: כי מה הפרש בין שלום עליך או עליך שלום, ראובן אתה או אתה ראובן, תִּפָּשׂוּם חַיִּים או חַיִּים תִּפָּשׂוּם. Another case of variation which Baḥye and Abarbanel find meaningful and Ibn Ezra and David Qimḥi do not is the number variation between יְהִי and וְהָיוּ in Gen 1:14 יְהִי מְאֹרֹת בִּרְקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם לְהַבְדִּיל בֵּין הַיּוֹם וּבֵין הַלָּיְלָה וְהָיוּ לְאֹתֹת וּלְמוֹעֲדִים וּלְיָמִים וְשָׁנִים. Baḥye and Abarbanel see in the singular number of יְהִי a hint that there is really only one source of light, while Ibn Ezra, David Qimḥi, Rashbam, and Meyuḥas see only (דרך המקרא(ות. For other examples of this deep-seated controversy, see my article cited in n. 3, above.

[43] ויותר נכון לפרש שחַיִּים הוא שם משותף יאמר על החיים שהוא שם דבר כמו כִּי חַיִּים הֵם לְמוֹצְאֵיהֶם, חַיִּים שָׁאַל מִמֶּךָּ. ופעמים יהיה שם התאר חַיִּים כֻּלְּכֶם הַיּוֹם: ולפי דרך השתופים האלה נוכל לפרש מאמר בן הדד, שאִם־לְשָׁלוֹם יָצָאוּ יתפשו אותם חיים ולא יהרגום ויהיה בכאן חַיִּים שם התאר, וְאִם לְמִלְחָמָה יָצָאוּ חַיִּים תִּפָּשׂוּם רוצה לומר שיתפשו חייהם שיהיה זה בשיהרגו אותם ויהיה חַיִּים בכאן שם דבר. Abarbanel views this interpretation as "more correct" than his first suggestion (a suggestion made also by Sternberg, *Poetics*, 256–257), that Ben-Hadad's formulation is the result of his inebriated state. Abarbanel may mean that Ben-Hadad is too drunk to weigh the options quickly and silently in his head or too drunk even to realize that the two outcomes are the same. But it is also possible to view him as a man whose wicked sense of humor has been unleashed by alcohol. In the latter case, Abarbanel's two suggestions are both true.

[44] פירושי רב סעדיה גאון לבראשית, 78 (Heb. transl., 296).

[45] Today, we would take חַיִּים in the latter example as an adjective meaning "alive."

[46] As pointed out by Ibn Ezra to Isa 49:5, Saadia habitually gives a double interpretation in cases of כתיב לא קרי לוֹ; see Cohen, "Quotations from Saadia's Arabic Commentary," 80. The Karaites were opposed to this type of exegesis, according to G. Khan, *Karaite Bible Manuscripts from the Cairo Genizah* (Cambridge, 1990) 20–21.

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time with a different meaning. In this case, the word occurring twice in the same passage is a homophone, with one occurrence "inside" (in the text) and the other "outside" (in the margin), to paraphrase Ibn Ezra.

Here again Saadia appears to be right. The reading "it was he who made us—not we ourselves"[47] is supported by Job 34:33 כִּי־אַתָּה תִּבְחַר וְלֹא־אָנִי; both examples express contrastive focus through the use of contrasting independent pronouns. The reading "it was he who made us, and we are his" is selected by the apposition with עַמּוֹ וְצֹאן מַרְעִיתוֹ "his people and his tended flock," with repetition of the suffixed pronoun ו-; cf. Ps 79:13 and 95:7. Nevertheless, both medievals (e.g., Ibn Ezra)[48] and moderns (e.g., Barr)[49] continue to insist that only one of the two interpretations can be correct. Even the Rabbis seem to adopt an either-or position.[50]

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[47] For the implied accusative reflexive pronoun, see P. Joüon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Rome, 1991) 545.

[48] Ibn Ezra concludes his citation of Saadia with the words: והנכון בעיני כי זה השני הוא האמת לבדו. This is in line with his general principle, cited by Simon (כדרכו הפרשנית, 113), that כל מחבר ספר, נביא הוא או חכם, טעם אחד לדבריו, רק רחבי לב יוסיפו ויוציאו דבר מתוך דבר. This principle applies primarily to words occurring only *once* in a passage. With words occurring two or more times, Ibn Ezra sometimes suspends that principle, for he does recognize wordplay as a feature of biblical style (דרך צחות בלשון הקדש); see Simon, לדרכו הפרשנית, 123, and E. Z. Melamed, מפרשי המקרא (Jerusalem, 1975) 579 on מלה נשנית בהוראות שונות. Indeed, he himself composed puns; cf. the play on the three meanings of יִתְרוֹ—"his bowstring," "the rest of it," "Jethro"—in the poem preceding his commentary to Exod 18:1 (personal communication from Simon). It seems likely that Ibn Ezra did not consider the *ketiv* in the text and the *qere* in the margin as two distinct occurrences constituting a wordplay.

[49] J. Barr, "A New Look at Kethibh-Qere," *Oudtestamentische Studiën* 21 (1981) 31: "Worshippers in the Church of England who repeat the familiar phrase 'it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves' . . . are perhaps not sufficiently aware that they are reading the Kethibh and that there is a good case to be made for 'he hath made us and we are his' with the Q. Linguistically both are possible: the choice between them must depend on exegetical considerations, e.g., which is the more likely sentiment to have been uttered by a poet in Old Testament Israel. This probably decides in favor of the Q, since few in ancient Israel would have imagined that man was his own creator, and therefore it was not very necessary to oppose that notion. . . . Here again it is important not to misinterpret the K: the writer of the basic text may well have *meant* 'to him' when he wrote the K לא; but by the spelling conventions which eventually became established that writing was normal for 'not' and inevitably suggested 'not.'"

[50] See GenR 100 (ed. J. Theodor and C. Albeck, 1283): רי יהודה בר סימון אמר דְּעוּ כִּי־יי הוּא (ה)אֱלֹהִים הוּא־עָשָׂנוּ ולא אֲנַחְנוּ בראנו את נפשינו, לא כפרעה שאמר לִי יְאֹרִי וַאֲנִי עֲשִׂיתָנִי, ורבי אחא אמר דְּעוּ כִּי־יי הוּא (ה)אֱלֹהִים הוּא־עָשָׂנוּ וְלוֹ אנו משלימי את נפשותינו.

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7. Saadia Gaon: Meaning-Maximalism and the Fallacy of Over-Specification

We have seen that Saadia's search for ambiguity had its positive side, but at times Saadia went too far. Some of his lists of meanings exhibit what Uriel Weinreich called the "fallacy of overspecification," i.e., the fallacy of "exaggerat[ing] the incidence of polysemy at the expense of vagueness or generality."[51] The problem arises when the analyst arbitrarily draws a boundary through what is properly a unitary domain of meaning, and thus splits a single relatively general meaning into a number of relatively specific ones. The result is a phenomenon which we may call "pseudo-polysemy."[52]

Some discussions of pseudo-polysemy deal with cases where a word is alleged to have different meanings in different contexts. Weinreich, for example, speaks of the verb "eat" in "eat bread" and "eat soup."[53] Quine questions the claim of some philosophers that the word "true" is ambiguous, having a different meaning in "true logical laws" than it has in "true confessions": "Why not view 'true' as unambiguous but very general, and recognize the difference between true logical laws and true confessions as a difference between logical laws and confessions?"[54] We shall refer to this type of pseudo-polysemy as "context-dependent" pseudo-polysemy.

Other discussions of pseudo-polysemy deal with meanings that may occur in the *same* context. Thus, Lyons notes that French *tapis* is not ambiguous despite the fact that it corresponds to three non-

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[51] U. Weinreich, "On the Semantic Structure of Language," in *Universals of Language*, ed. J. H. Greenberg, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Mass., 1966) 203 n. 53. For these two terms and their synonyms, see Appendix, below.

[52] This is my translation of the term "polysémie prétendue" used by L. Zawadoski, "La polysémie prétendue," *Biuletyn Polskiego Towarzystwa Językoznawczego* 18 (1959) 11–49. The term used by Weinreich is "infinite polysemy"; see his "Explorations in Semantic Theory," in *Semantics*, ed. D. D. Steinberg and L. A. Jakobovits (Cambridge, 1971) 322 (reprinted from *Current Trends in Linguistics*, vol. 3, ed. T. A. Sebeok [The Hague, 1966]).

[53] Weinreich, "Explorations," 322. He begins by saying that "*eat* has a slightly different meaning in each phrase," but he goes on to argue that they should not be represented in the dictionary entry for this word.

[54] W. V. O. Quine, *Word and Object* (Cambridge Mass., 1960) 131. My brother, Mark J. Steiner, points out that there are many philosophers who would reject this particular example and that in an example like this one it is difficult to disentangle linguistic and philosophical issues.

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synonymous English words: *rug*, *carpet*, and *mat*.[55] Kempson illustrates the point using the English pronoun *we* and its six Fijian equivalents.[56]

Consider Saadia's claim, in his commentary to Gen 2:2, that שביתה encompasses eight meanings.[57] Four of the meanings pertain to the nouns שבת and שבתון: "cessation of all types of work" (Yom Kippur), "cessation of most types of work" (Sabbath), "cessation of profitable types of work" (festivals), "cessation of one type of work" (sabbatical year).[58] This is a classic example of pseudo-polysemy, for all of these meanings can be reduced to one: "cessation of any amount of work." The pseudo-polysemy here is *not* context-dependent. Saadia's promise to present these meanings in detail when the time comes to explain his translation of מִמָּחֳרַת הַשַּׁבָּת shows that Saadia's goal here is to resolve a contradiction with tradition,[59] but it is difficult to see why the general meaning presented above would not have served Saadia's purpose just as well.

The first of the eight meanings listed for שביתה by Saadia is "cessation of creation—a meaning which he says is required by philosophical speculation, i.e., designed to resolve a contradiction with reason.[60] This meaning is needed in Gen 2:2 וַיִּשְׁבֹּת בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מִכָּל־ מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה to eliminate any suggestion that God had previously been engaged in a physical activity involving motion and exertion.[61] Here the pseudo-polysemy *is* context dependent; part of Saadia's definition ("of creation") more properly belongs to the modifier מִכָּל־ מְלַאכְתּוֹ "from all his work."

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[55] J. Lyons, *Semantics* (Cambridge, 1977) 238.

[56] R. M. Kempson, *Semantic Theory* (Cambridge, 1977) 97–98 (cf. also 125–126).

[57] As pointed out by B. Septimus, I am assuming that Saadia here is using the word מעאני to mean "meanings," as elsewhere in his commentary, rather than "varieties of application." It must be admitted, however, that Saadia may have used the term in two different senses.

[58] פירושי רב סעדיה גאון לבראשית, 56 (Hebrew transl., 261): ותחיט לפטיה׳ שביתה בח׳ מעאני . . . תים בטלאן כל עמל ודילך פי אלכיפור: תִּשְׁבָּתוּ שַׁבַּתְּכֶם וסימא לאנה יום צום. תים בטלאן אכתיר אלאעמאל ודילך פי אלסבת: שַׁבָּתוֹן שַׁבַּת־קֹדֶשׁ לייי מָחָר. תים בטלאן צנאיע אלכסב ודילך פי אלאעיאד: בַּיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן שַׁבָּתוֹן. תים בטלאן צנאעה ואחדה כאלפלאחה פי אלסנה אלסאבעה: שַׁבַּת שַׁבָּתוֹן יִהְיֶה לָאָרֶץ.

[59] See §3, above.

[60] פירושי רב סעדיה גאון לבראשית, 56 (Hebrew transl., 261): ותחיט לפטיה׳ שביתה בח׳ מעאני הדיא אלאול [תרך אל]אבדאע כמא אוגיב אלנטיר.

[61] See אמונות ודעות, 2.12 (ed. Qafiḥ, 108–109).

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Another example of context-dependent pseudo-polysemy is Saadia's claim that in Deut 28:47–48 . . . תַּחַת אֲשֶׁר לֹא־עָבַדְתָּ אֶת־ה׳ אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְעָבַדְתָּ אֶת־אֹיְבֶיךָ the first occurrence of ע-ב-ד has a different meaning than the second occurrence.[62] To paraphrase Quine: Why not view ע-ב-ד "serve" as unambiguous but general, and recognize the difference between serving the Lord and serving one's enemies as a difference between the Lord and the enemies?

An even clearer example of this type is found in Saadia's commentary to Gen 4:4, where he discusses the biliteral root ש-ע:[63]

> I translated וַיִּשַׁע as "accept" because these two letters when adjacent have [seven] meanings . . .; then "accept": וַיִּשַׁע ה׳ אֶל־הֶבֶל וְאֶל־מִנְחָתוֹ; then "desist" and "leave": Job 14:6 שְׁעֵה מֵעָלָיו; then "head for" and "go towards": Isa 17:7 יִשְׁעֶה הָאָדָם עַל־עֹשֵׂהוּ; then 'occupy oneself': Exod 5:6 וְאַל־יִשְׁעוּ בְּדִבְרֵי־שָׁקֶר.

Saadia claims that this root has the meaning קצד "head for" in Isa 17:7 יִשְׁעֶה הָאָדָם עַל־עֹשֵׂהוּ and the opposite meaning, תרך "leave," in Job 14:6 שְׁעֵה מֵעָלָיו. He makes no attempt to attribute the difference in meaning to the difference in prepositions—to say simply that שעה על and שעה מעל are opposites because על and מעל are opposites. Later we shall look at Rashi's discussion of this verb and see how different it is.

8. The Fallacy of Over-Specification in Saadia's Time and Before

Saadia was not the only one in his time to fall prey to the fallacy of over-specification. Other 10th-century authors, David al-Fāsī[64] and Menaḥem ben Saruq,[65] also assign different meanings to שעה preceding על, and שעה preceding מעל.[66] Similarly dubious distinc-

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[62] Hirschfeld, "The Arabic Portion (*Third Article*)," 102.

[63] ופסרת וַיִּשַׁע קבולא לאן הדיין: פירושי רב סעדיה גאון לבראשית, 85 (Heb. transl., 307): אלחרפין אדיא (א)[ת]גיאורא כאן להמא פי אללגה [סבעה] מעאני: . . . תים קבול וַיִּשַׁע ייי אֶל־הֶבֶל וְאֶל־מִנְחָתוֹ. תים כף ותרך שְׁעֵה מֵעָלָיו וְיִחְדָּל. תים קצד ואימא יִשְׁעֶה הָאָדָם עַל־עֹשֵׂהוּ. תים תשאגל וְאַל־יִשְׁעוּ בְּדִבְרֵי־שָׁקֶר.

[64] *Jāmi*ᶜ *al-Alfāẓ*, 2:691–692.

[65] *Menaḥem ben Saruq: Maḥberet*, ed. A. Sáenz-Badillos (Granada, 1986) 365*–366*.

[66] See also *Jāmi*ᶜ *al-Alfāẓ*, 2:265, where Alfasi lists six meanings for the verb נ-ח-ם, of which four are the same as Saadia's. Curiously, both he and Saadia treat Isa 57:5 נֶחָם together with נָחַם. In the Babylonian tradition, the two were in fact homonyms; see I. Yeivin, מסורת הלשון העברית המשתקפת בניקוד הבבלי (Jerusalem, 1985) 33.

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tions were made by Saadia's predecessors, the Masoretes. Dotan[67] has pointed out that among the words which appear in Masoretic lists with the rubric ב בתרי לישני "two occurrences with different meanings" are words like טְרִיָּה (Judg 15:15, Isa 1:6) and וַיֶּרֶב (2 Sam 18:8, Lam 2:5), which, according to both modern scholars and medievals, have only one meaning.[68]

Saadia's Muslim predecessors and contemporaries—exegetes, lexicographers, grammarians, and philosophers—were no different. Thus, when the 9th-century Quranic exegete, Ibn Qutayba, tries to present examples of *al-lafẓu l-wāḥidu li-l-maᶜānī l-muḫtalifah* "one expression for varied meanings" in his *Taʾwīl muškil al-Qurʾān*,[69] he stumbles into a mine-field of pseudo-polysemy. For *kitāb* "writing" he gives the meanings *qaḍā* "decreed," *faraḍa* "imposed," *jaᶜala* "placed," *ʾamara* "commanded";[69a] for *ʾal-ʾamr* "command" he has *al-qaḍāʾ* "decree," *ad-dīn* "religion,"[70] *al-qawl* "remark," *al-ᶜaḏāb* "punishment," *al-qiyāmah* "resurrection," *al-waḥy* "revelation," and *aḏ-ḏanb* "sin."[70a] In both cases, Ibn Qutayba is careful to add that there is an *ʾaṣl* "root-meaning" from which the various meanings branch out, but this hardly suffices to rectify the situation.

The 9th/10th-century Quranic mystic, Al-Tirmiḏī, is not much different. The first entry in his glossary of ambiguous terms in the Quran is *al-hudā* "right guidance," for which he lists fifteen meanings: *al-bayān* "elucidation," *al-ʾislām* "submission (to the will of God)," *at-tawḥīd* "monotheism," *ad-dīn* "religion," *ad-duᶜāʾ* "prayer," *baṣīrah* "insight," *al-maᶜrifah* "knowledge," *al-qurʾān* "the Quran," *ar-rasūl* "the Messenger," *ar-rušd* "proper conduct," *aṣ-ṣawāb* "rightness," *at-taqwā* "piety," *at-tawfīq* "success," *at-tawbah* "repentance,"

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[67] A. Dotan, "Homonymous Hapax Doublets in the Masora," *Textus* 14 (1988) 134.

[68] Many exegetes point out that טְרִיָּה means "moist" in Isa 1:6 as well as in Jud 15:15. Saadia translates מסתקיחה "purulent, full of pus" at Isa 1:6, a translation which, of course, does not fit Jud 15:15. Unfortunately, his commentary to Isa 1:6 is not extant, and it is therefore impossible to say whether he believes that the two occurrences represent two meanings or one.

[69] I am indebted to Naphtali Kinberg for calling this chapter to my attention.

[69a] ᶜAbd Allāh ibn Muslim ibn Qutayba, *Taʾwīl muškil al-qurʾān* (Cairo, 1973) 462–463.

[70] The meaning "religion" is also listed under *al-ʾummah* "nation," *al-ṣalāh* "prayer," and *al-ḫalq* "creation"; Ibid., 446, 461, 507.

[70a] Ibid., 514–515.

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al-mamarr "the passageway."[71] Al-Tirmiḏī does attempt to show that every one of these meanings can be derived from the meaning *al-mayl* "inclination,"[72] but the result is nothing more than a thin veneer which cannot hide the error in the underlying assumptions.

The 9th-century grammarian, Abū ᶜAlī Quṭrub, includes the verb *rāġa* in his book on words with two opposite meanings, *Kitāb al-ᵓAḍdād*. His analysis of this verb parallels Saadia's analysis of שעה: *rāġa ᶜalayhim ᵓatāhum warāġa ᶜanhum ḏahaba ᶜanhum*, "*rāġa* to them—he came to them; *rāġa* from them—he went from them."[73] Cohen, following Nöldeke,[74] cites this as an example of "false *ᵓaḍdād*":[75]

> D'autres formes auxquelles on ne peut accorder le statut d'*aḍdād* sont celles qui n'opposent des significations que dans des constructions différentes. Par exemple lorsqu'il s'agit de verbes qui dénotent un procès dont les directions opposées sont exprimées au moyen de prépositions.

Even the great 9th-century philosopher, Al-Fārābī, was not immune. In his short treatise on Aristotle's *De Interpretatione*,[76] he gives examples of various types of ambiguity. The examples for one type are (a) "military" (*ḥarbī*), as in "military man" (*rajul*), "military horse/weapon" (*faras/silāḥ*), "military speech" (*kalām*), and "military ledger" (*daftar*) (4 meanings); (b) "medical" (*ṭibbī*), as in "medical ledger" (*daftar*), "medical remedy" (*ᶜilāj*), "medical instrument" (*ᵓālah*) (3 meanings); (c) "wine (adj.)" (*ḫamrī*), as in "wine-grape(s)" (*ᶜinab*) and "wine-color" (*lawn*) (2 meanings). Modern linguists would

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[71] Al-Ḥakīm Al-Tirmiḏī, *Taḥṣīl naẓāᵓir al-qurᵓān* (1969, n.p.) 19–24. I am indebted to Naphtali Kinberg for this reference.

[72] Ibid., 19.

[73] H. Kofler, "Das *Kitāb al-Aḍdād* von Abū ᶜAlī Muḥammad Quṭrub Ibn al-Mustanīr," *Islamica* 5 (1931–32) 278.

[74] T. Nöldeke, "Wörter mit Gegensinn," *Neue Beiträge zur semitischen Sprachwissenschaft* (Strassburg, 1910) 69.

[75] D. Cohen, "Aḍdād et ambiguïté linguistique en arabe," *Arabica* 8 (1961) 9. The other examples of false *ᵓaḍdād* in different constructions which Cohen cites from Quṭrub and Ibn al-Anbārī are much less explicit.

[76] M. Küyel [-Türker], "Fârâbi'nin Peri Hermeneias Muhtasari," *Araştirma* 4 (1966) 50–51; *Al-Manṭiq ᶜinda al-Fārābī*, ed. R. El-Ajam (Beirut, 1985), 1:142; F. W. Zimmermann, *Al-Fārābī's Commentary and Short Treatise on Aristotle's De Interpretatione* (Oxford, 1981) 229–230. I am indebted to B. Septimus for calling Zimmermann's book to my attention and to Ilai Alon for making Türker's article available to me.

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define these adjectives as "relating to war/medicine/wine," ignoring the nuances of the various possible relationships, but Fārābī held the view that each of these relationships corresponds to a different meaning.[77]

Fārābī's view is an integral part of the Aristotelian tradition, as one can see by tracing the roots of his medical example. Three meanings of "medical" (ἰατρικός)—one in the phrase "medical book" (βιβλίον), another in "medical remedy" (φάρμακον), a third in "medical scalpel" (σμιλίον)—are listed already in the commentaries of Porphyry (3rd century CE) and Simplicius (6th century CE) to Aristotle's *Categories*.[78]

Porphyry's analysis, in turn, is based on a discussion by Aristotle himself (*Metaphysics* 11.3.2, 1060b37 ff.),[79] according to which the word "medical" (ἰατρικός) is used of both an utterance (λόγος) and a knife (μαχαίριον), i.e., a diagnosis and a scalpel. The phrase used by Aristotle here, "said in several ways" (πολλαχῶς λέγεται), was interpreted by Porphyry as a reference to ambiguity rather than mere variety of application, and modern scholars generally agree with this

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[77] In addition to these examples of pseudo-polysemy, Al-Fārābī has an example of pseudo-homonymy. According to him, an eye and a spring have nothing in common; thus, the use of Arabic *ʿayn* to refer to both is pure coincidence; Küyel [-Türker], "Fârâbi'nin Peri Hermeneias Muhtasari," 49; El-Ajam, *Al-Manṭiq*, 1:141. Maimonides, whose treatise on logic is based on Fārābī's, accepts his analysis of this example while skipping his examples of pseudo-polysemy; I. Efros, "Maimonides' Treatise on Logic," *PAAJR* 8 (1937–1938) לה–לו; cf. מורה נבוכים, 1.44. Abraham de Balmes, מקנה אברם (Venice, 1523) pp. ג,ד agrees, as do modern scholars. BDB has separate entries for I. עין "eye" and II. עין "spring" and a note that the "connexion [of II. עין] with I. עין [is] dub[ious]." F. R. Palmer, *Semantics* (Cambridge, 1976) 66–67, states that "in English, *eye* is used with a variety of other meanings, e.g., the center of a hurricane or a spring of water, which are not so obviously related semantically to the organ of sight." In fact, we are dealing with a dead metaphor comparing water flowing from a spring with tears flowing from an eye. The metaphor is frequently revived, e.g., Jer 8:23 וְעֵינִי מְקוֹר דִּמְעָה and bEruv 19a שבוכין ומורידין דמעות כמעיין. The fact that karst springs, such as the Siloam spring, do not flow continuously makes the metaphor even more apt.

[78] A. Busse, *Porphyrii Isagoge et in Aristotelis Categorias Commentarium* (= Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca 4) (Berlin, 1887) 66; K. Kalbfleisch, *Simplicii in Aristotelis Categorias Commentarium* (= Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca 8) (Berlin, 1907) 32; I. Hadot, *Simplicius commentaire sur les Catégories*, fascicule 3 (Leiden, 1990) 23–24.

[79] H. A. Wolfson, "The Amphibolous Terms in Aristotle, Arabic Philosophy and Maimonides," in *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion*, ed. I. Twersky and G. H. Williams (Cambridge, Mass., 1973) 463–464. I am indebted to B. Septimus for this reference.

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interpretation.[80] In a related passage (*Metaphysics* 7.4.15, 1030a34 ff.), Aristotle states that the word "medical," applied to a patient's body and a procedure and an instrument, is not used "in one sense" (καθ' ἕν). What emerges from reading both passages together is that "medical" is used "in (several senses having) something in common" (κατά τι κοινόν), i.e., "in relation to one end" (πρὸς ἕν).

Ironically, it was this same Aristotle who developed the conceptual tools—definitions and even diagnostic tests—for distinguishing ambiguity (equivocation) from generality (univocation).[81] It is even more ironic that Aristotle's pseudo-polysemous treatment of "medical" was juxtaposed with his distinction between equivocation and univocation in the writings of Porphyry, Simplicius, Al-Fārābī, et al.

It should not be assumed, however, that Aristotle stumbled blindly into this trap. His discussion in *Physics* (7.4, 249a23 ff.) suggests that he was well aware that some of his examples of ambiguity were less than obvious:

> When a term is equivocal, the senses covered by it may be widely removed, or they may have some resemblance, or they may, in fact or by the closeness of their analogies, draw so near to each other that *the ambiguity of the term that includes them all, though very real, easily escapes our notice.*[82]

Moreover, an examination of the many tests presented in *Topics* (1.15) for distinguishing ambiguity from generality reveals that most are designed to establish that a word is *not* merely general. Indeed, the bias in this discussion is revealed clearly by the fact that it contains only one occurrence of the word for generality but two dozen occurrences of expressions for ambiguity.

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[80] It may be objected that "Aristotle uses the phrase πολλαχῶς λέγεται . . . in many passages where he is not concerned with ambiguity of a term at all in the modern sense of the word"; K. J. J. Hintikka, "Aristotle on the Ambiguity of Ambiguity," *Inquiry* 2 (1959) 145. However, that does not seem to be the case here; see the translation given on 138.

[81] See especially the beginning of the *Categories*, cited in the Appendix, below. Note, however, that Aristotle's example of univocation and the case in which he fails to recognize univocation are rather different. The former involves a noun ("animal") and is **not** context-dependent; the latter involves an adjective ("medical") and **is** context-dependent.

[82] Trans. P. H. Wicksteed and F. M. Cornford. Aristotle, *The Physics* (Cambridge, Mass.–London, 1929) 2:251.

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It appears, then, that Saadia was heir to several intellectual traditions in which semantic distinctions which today appear unnecessary were both commonplace and respectable. The principle, later to be enunciated by William of Ockham, that "entities are not to be multiplied beyond necessity" did not play much of a role in discussions of meaning in those traditions. Parsimony and generality were not an important goal in lexicology in Saadia's time. To be sure, Saadia was well acquainted with the meaning-minimalism of the Rabbis,[83] but he avoided it, probably because he associated it with *derash*.

Explicit protests against pseudo-polysemy in the Islamic world came long after Saadia's time. One of the most interesting is that of Ibn al-Jawzī, who, like Al-Tirmiḏī, wrote a glossary of ambiguous terms in the Quran.[84] In his introduction, he criticizes previous contributors to this genre, known as *al-wujūh wa-n-naẓāʾir*:

> Those who wrote them [i.e., books of *al-wujūh wa-n-naẓāʾir*] have gone too far and cited words whose meaning is the same in all places—such as *balad* "country," *qaryah* "village," *madīnah* "city," *rajul* "man," *ʾinsān* "human being," and the like—except that that which is denoted by "country" in one verse is not the country in another verse.[85]

In his conclusion he returns to this theme:

> If a careful observer were to argue with those who said them [i.e., cited those examples of ambiguity], he would have to combine many of the meanings into one meaning. And if we were to do that, most of the meanings would be invalidated. . . . Let not the plethora of meanings and entries you see in this kind of book delude you, for they are like a mirage.[86]

9. Spanish Meaning-Minimalism before Rashi

Menaḥem b. Saruq and Jonah ibn Janāḥ seem to be less eager to multiply meanings than Saadia, although in the absence of a comprehensive study we cannot say anything definite. In the case of ם-ח-נ,

[83] See §13, below.

[84] Ibn al-Jawzī, *Nuzhat al-ʾaʿyun al-nawāẓir fī ʿilm al-wujūh wa-l-naẓāʾir*, ed. Muḥammad al-Rāḏī (Beirut, 1987). I am indebted to Naphtali Kinberg for calling to my attention the following passages from this work.

[85] Ibid., 83.

[86] Ibid., 643–644.

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both Menaḥem and Ibn Janāḥ have dramatically distanced themselves from Saadia, replacing his six meanings with two.[87]

In the case of ש-ע-י, the movement of Menaḥem and Ibn Janāḥ away from Saadia is less dramatic. Nevertheless, Ibn Janāḥ's treatment of one of Saadia's translations of the verb is strikingly similar to Rashi's treatment of the Targum:[88]

> Even though the meaning of לֹא שָׁעָה is 'he did not accept,'[89] the pure sense of the word is 'he did not turn his attention, he did not look attentively' as in אַל־תֵּפֶן אֶל־מִנְחָתָם. And it is as if it said וְאֶל־קַיִן וְאֶל־מִנְחָתוֹ לֹא פנה.[90]

In the case of ב-ק-ע הרות, Menaḥem follows Saadia in assigning different meanings to different occurrences of the phrase. In the *Maḥberet*, Amos 1:13 appears in the first מחלקה s.v. הר, while 2 Kgs 8:12 appears in the second.[91] Dunash and Ibn Janāḥ, on the other hand, assign the same meaning to both occurrences.[92]

10. French Meaning-Maximalism in Rashi's Time

It has often been noted that R. Joseph Qara considered discourse cohesion (חבור המקראות) to be a central concern of *peshaṭ* exegesis.[93] Thus, it is not surprising that, like Saadia, he occasionally gives radically different interpretations to a single phrase in different contexts.

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[87] *Maḥberet,* 254* and *Kitāb al-ʾUṣūl; The Book of Hebrew Roots*, ed. A. Neubauer (Oxford, 1875) 424–426.

[88] See §11, below.

[89] This interpretation is from Saadia, who apparently had לם יקבל in the first form; ultimately, it is from Targum Onqelos.

[90] ואן כאן מעני לא שָׁעָה לם יתקבל פאן מחצ׳ אללפט׳ אנמא הי לם ילתפת ולא תאמל עלי מד׳הב אַל תֵּפֶן אָל מִנְחָתָם פכאנה קאל וְאֶל קַיִן וְאָל מִנְחָתוֹ לֹא פנה. *Kitāb al-ʾUṣūl*, 736, lines 5–8.

[91] *Maḥberet*, 142*.

[92] *Tešubot de Dunaš ben Labrat*, ed. A. Sáenz-Badillos (Granada, 1980) 54*–55*; *Kitāb al-ʾUṣūl*, 181, line 17. Surprisingly, Saadia's view prevailed among the later Spanish exegetes, including Ibn Jiqatilla, Ibn Balʿam, Ibn Ezra, David Qimḥi, Ibn Kaspi, Gersonides, and Abarbanel.

[93] See, most recently, N. Eliakim, שיטתו הפרשנית של ר׳ יוסף קרא (Ph.D. diss., Bar-Ilan University, 1984) 128–134, and the introduction to פירוש רבי יוסף קרא לספר איוב, ed. M. M. Ahrend (Jerusalem, 1988) 13–14, 57.

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Some of these interpretations are rather forced. Thus, he takes Gen 37:26 וְכִסִּינוּ אֶת דָּמוֹ to mean "let's pocket his sale price," relating the verb to כיס "pocket" and the noun to mishnaic דמים "sale price":

וְכִסִּינוּ אֶת דָּמוֹ כלומר נשתכר בו אם נהרוג אותו? מוטב למכור אותו ונמלא את כיסינו מדמי ממכרו. וְכִסִּינוּ לשון כיס, דָּמוֹ לשון דמים.[94]

By contrast, in Job 16:18 his interpretation of אַל־תְּכַסִּי דָמִי is the conventional "do not cover up my blood," judging from his comment to the second half of that verse: וְאַל־יְהִי מָקוֹם לְזַעֲקָתִי אל יהי מקום שתתכסה בו צעקתי.[95] It is only in Gen 37:26 that the concealing of blood seems to be irrelevant to the context (a discussion of profit). It is ironic that an interpretation arising out of such unmidrashic concerns should have such a midrashic flavor.[96]

Another example is his claim that the stereotyped phrase רְאֵה עָנְיִי, which in Ps 9:14 and 25:18 means "see my affliction," has the meaning "find answering me appealing" in Job 10:15:

וּרְאֵה עָנְיִי: אחר כל צדקתי נראה ישר בעיניך לענות אותי. וראה כמ׳ הִשָּׁמֶר לְךָ פֶּן־תַּעֲלֶה עֹלֹתֶיךָ בְּכָל־מָקוֹם אֲשֶׁר תִּרְאֶה, שפתר׳ בכל מקום אשר יישר בעיניך וכן רואה אני את דבריך. כן חיבור פרשה זו לפי פשוטן של מקראות.[97]

This interpretation is designed to establish a connection with 9:15–16, where Job complains that God never answers him. That Qara had no interest in applying it to the dozen or so other occurrences of ע-נ-י in the Bible can be seen in his comment to Lam 1:9:

. . . אבל ציון אין המנחם יכול לדמות אליה שום אומה ולשון שלקתה כמותה והוא שאמר רְאֵה ה׳ אֶת־עָנְיִי כִּי הִגְדִּיל אוֹיֵב.[98]

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[94] פליטת סופרים, ed. A. Berliner (Breslau, 1872) 16 (Hebrew section), as emended by Ahrend in פירוש רבי יוסף קרא לספר איוב, 21. Berliner took this comment from MS Munich 252. A similar comment, attributed to Qara, is found in MS Oxford 284, according to תוספות השלם, ed. J. Gellis (Jerusalem, 1985) 4:41.

[95] פירוש רבי יוסף קרא לספר איוב, p. נ.

[96] The interpretation of וְכִסִּינוּ as a denominative from כיס derives the two words from a single biliteral root, כ-ס, with no regard for the morphological difference between them. As such, it is reminiscent of R. Jose Ha-Galili's interpretation of נְסָה in Gen 22:1 as a denominative from נס "mast (of ship)": גדלו כנס שלספינה; GenR 55 (ed. Theodor–Albeck, 588). The interpretation of דָּמוֹ based on postbiblical usage is also typical of midrash.

[97] פירוש רבי יוסף קרא לספר איוב, p. לב, corrected at the end according to the variant reading in the critical apparatus.

[98] ספר רבנו יוסף בכור שור, פירוש על התורה in פירוש על איכה מר״י קרא, ed. C. J. I. Gad (Benei Beraq, 1959) 3:103.

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On the other hand, Qara does not follow Saadia and Menaḥem in taking ב-ק-ע הָרוֹת as a homonymous phrase. It seems that he saw no need to resort to this solution because he was convinced by Dunash's clarification of the connection between splitting open pregnant women and expanding territory in Amos 1:13.[99]

11. Rashi: Meaning-Minimalism through *Gemeinbedeutung* and *Grundbedeutung*

The dominant figure in the shift towards meaning-minimalism was Rashi.[100] Rashi was constantly on the lookout for core meanings (common denominators), such as:

ברי׳ מה, ח. חֵלֶב הָאָרֶץ: כל חֵלֶב לשון מיטב הוא.[101]

שמ׳ ו,יב. עֲרַל שְׂפָתָיִם: אטום שפתים וכן כל לשון ערלה אומר אני שהוא אוטם עֲרֵלָה אָזְנָם אטומה משמוע; עַרְלֵי לֵב אטומים מהבין; שְׁתֵּה גַם־אַתָּה וְהֵעָרֵל והאטם משכרות כוס הקללה; ערלת בשר שהגיד אטום ומכוסה בה; וַעֲרַלְתֶּם עָרְלָתוֹ עשו לו אוטם וכיסוי איסור שיבדיל בפני אכילתו; שָׁלֹשׁ שָׁנִים יִהְיֶה לָכֶם עֲרֵלִים אטום ומכוסה ומובדל מלאוכלו.[102]

שמ׳ לה, יב. פָּרֹכֶת הַמָּסָךְ: פרכת המחיצה. כל דבר המגין בין מלמעלה בין מכנגד קרוי מסך וסכך, וכן שַׂכְתָּ בַּעֲדוֹ, הִנְנִי־שָׂךְ אֶת דַּרְכֵּךְ.[103]

ש״א יח, י. וַיִּתְנַבֵּא: ואשתטי. נביא ושוטה מדברים דברי רמזים שאינם ניכרים.

תה׳ קטז, יא. כָּל־הָאָדָם כֹּזֵב: . . . כל לשון כזב אינו אלא לשון חסרון מבטח שבטחו עליו פליינצא בלעז כמו אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יְכַזְּבוּ מֵימָיו.

Rashi has a fondness for definitions of the form "every occurrence of term X, whether pertaining to +Y or to -Y, has the meaning

[99] *Tešubot de Dunaš ben Labrat*, 54*–55*.

[100] All citations from Rashi's commentary to the Torah have been corrected in accordance with MSS Leipzig 1, Vienna 23 and 24. The folio numbers are given for the two Vienna manuscripts but not for Leipzig 1, since they are not visible in the microfilm available to me. Citations from the commentary to Samuel are from שמואל עם פירוש רש״י, ed. M. L. Katznellenbogen (Jerusalem, 1995); citations from the commentaries to Minor Prophets, Isaiah, and Psalms are from I. Maarsen, *Parschandatha: The Commentary of Raschi on the Prophets and Hagiographs* (Amsterdam, 1930–36). For other books, Vienna 24 has been consulted. Only a few key passages are translated below.

[101] Leipzig 1; Vienna 23, 35a; Vienna 24, 27a.

[102] Leipzig 1; Vienna 23, 40b; Vienna 24, 35a. See also the commentary to Hab 2:16.

[103] Leipzig 1; Vienna 23, 61b; Vienna 24, 66a.

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Z." Some of these definitions may have been designed to challenge Menaḥem's claim, borrowed from the Muslim lexicographers, that a word can have two diametrically opposed meanings:[104]

במ׳ יד, לו-לז. כל דיבה לשון חינוך דברים שמלקיחים שם לאדם לדבר בו, כמו דּוֹבֵב שְׂפָתֵי יְשֵׁנִים וישנה לטובה וישנה לרעה לכך נאמר כאן מוֹצִאֵי דִבַּת־הָאָרֶץ רָעָה שיש דבה שהיא טובה.[105]

דב׳ כב, ט. פֶּן־תִּקְדַּשׁ: כתרגומו תסתאב. כל דבר הנתעב על האדם בין לשבח בין לגנאי כגון הקדש כגון דבר איסור נופל בו לשון קידוש כגון אַל־תִּגַּע(!)־בִּי כִּי קִדַּשְׁתִּיךָ.[106]

יחז׳ טז, מג. וְלֹא עָשִׂית אֶת־הַזִּמָּה: . . . כל זמה שבמקרא לשון עצה הוא יש לטובה ויש לרעה.[107]

חב׳ א, י. וְהוּא בַּמְּלָכִים יִתְקַלָּס: מתלוצץ בהם וכל לשון קלסה לשון דיבור הנדברים בו, יש לטוב יש לרע, פרלדיץ בלעז.

סוטה כז. קלסה לשון דבור יתר הוא, לפיכך הוא נהפך ללשון שבח וללשון גנאי.

For cases where no common denominator could be found, Rashi developed a theory of primary meanings.[108] As we have seen, Muslim exegetes like Ibn Qutayba had a theory of this type as well, but it did nothing to stem the proliferation of meanings in their work. Indeed, it may have had the opposite effect, giving license to pseudo-polysemy by serving as a kind of disclaimer: "Naturally, I realize that all of these meanings derive from a single, primary meaning."

For Rashi, the theory of primary meanings was an integral part of his meaning-minimalist program. This is clearest in his treatment of

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[104] *Maḥberet*, s.v. אשתוללו, 66*–67*.

[105] Leipzig 1; Vienna 23, 84b Vienna 24, 95b.

[106] Leipzig 1; Vienna 23, 106a; Vienna 24, 121a. For the reading תִּגַּע instead of MT תִּגַּשׁ, see Berliner's note ad loc. Rashi to Isa 65:5 also has תִּגַּע, as does Qara (see מקראות גדולות הכתר), but, surprisingly, only the latter interprets קִדַּשְׁתִּיךָ in a way that fits the comment to Deut 22:9. This does not mean that the comment is really Qara's. It is possible that Qara added just the reference to Isa 65:5 or that Rashi simply changed his mind.

[107] Vienna 24, 225b.

[108] I am indebted to David Tene ז״ל for the suggestion that Rashi's use of Hebrew, rather than French, to define Hebrew words may have encouraged him to view one of them as primary. This makes a good deal of sense in the case of a word like יד; instead of straining to find some way of explaining the meaning "hand," it was simpler for Rashi to refer to משמעו.

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the meaning of יד. Of Rashi's many comments on this subject, the one at Exod 14:31 is the fullest:

> אֶת־הַיָּד הַגְּדֹלָה: את הגבורה הגדולה שעשתה ידו של הקב״ה. והרבה לשונות נופלין על לשון יד, וכולן לשון יד ממש הן, והמפרש יתקן הלשון אחר ענין הדבור.[109]

> The great hand—the great mighty deed which God's hand has performed. Many meanings fit[110] the word יד, but they are all the same as the meaning of an actual hand, which the interpreter adjusts according to the context. [111]

Here Rashi is speaking from the viewpoint of the exegete: the interpreter has to adjust the basic, literal meaning of the word to fit the context. His grandson, R. Jacob Tam, makes what seems to be the same point from the viewpoint of the linguist: והענין ימשוך הפתרון מעט למשכו לפי ענינו אך כולם ענין דרישה.[112] Here it is the context which pulls and stretches the basic meaning, not the exegete.

Rashi's view that there is really only one meaning, which "the interpreter adjusts according to the context," marks him as a true meaning-minimalist. Indeed, it foreshadows the very definition of the term given by the linguist who coined it: "Meaning-minimalists attribute more importance to pragmatic rules of *reinterpretation*

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[109] Leipzig 1; Vienna 23, 44a.

[110] The linguistic term נופל על has the meaning מתאים ל- in Rashi's commentary to Gen 5:29, Deut 7:17 (rendered "appropriately fit in with" in *Pentateuch with Targum Onqelos, Haphtaroth and Rashi's Commentary*, ed. A. M. Silbermann and M. Rosenbaum [London, 1934], 5:43), Isa 37:33, Zac 13:7; cf. also Isa 1:6. The generally accepted meaning "is used of" (= Arabic يقع على; see n. 4, above, and n. 201, below) does not fit there. Cf. also the formula נופל בה לומר "it is appropriate to say of it" used by Rashbam or someone of his school; S. Japhet and R. B. Salters, *The Commentary of R. Samuel Ben Meir* Rashbam *on Qoheleth* (Jerusalem-Leiden, 1985) 84 n. 40.

[111] Rashi's אחר corresponds to לפי "according to" in Rabbenu Tam's formulation, below. For Rashi's frequent use of אחר in the sense of "according to" (rather than "after"), see I. Avinery, היכל רש״י (Jerusalem, 1979–1985) 2nd ed., 1:44–45. Avinery surmises that השמוש באחר במקום לפי נובע אולי מהשפעת הצרפתית. The Old French preposition which corresponds to אחר is *secont* < Latin *secundum* "after; according to." Indeed, as we shall see in §13, below, the entire Hebrew phrase אחר ענין הדבור bears a strong resemblance to the Latin phrase *secundum actum constructionis* used by a French speculative grammarian of Rashi's time.

[112] תשובות דונש בן לברט עם הכרעות רבנו יעקב תם, ed. Z. Filipowski (London, 1855) 54. The language is reminiscent of Menaḥem's introduction to *Maḥberet*, 16*, lines 13–14 על כן יש מלה אשר הענין ימשכנה ויורה עליה וילמד על גזרתה, but it is not clear that Menaḥem is talking about the same thing.

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according to the context and tend to accept only minimal meanings and unambiguous words.[113]

Rashi applies this principle frequently, especially in dealing with the meanings of the word יד ("hand," "might," and "place"), for which no common denominator can be found.[114] At Exod 2:5, he again uses the phrase יד ממש to refer to the basic, literal meaning of the word:

עַל־יַד הַיְאֹר: אצל היאור כמו רְאוּ חֶלְקַת יוֹאָב אֶל־יָדִי והוא לשון יד ממש שיד האדם סמוכה לו.[115]

Rashi's formulation shows that he was thinking of the principle discussed in bBM 56b: כל היכא דכתיב ידו ידו ממש הוא, "wherever ידו is written, it means his actual hand."[116] This discussion deals with only two of the meanings of יד: "hand" and "possession." In his Bible commentary, Rashi reinterprets this talmudic principle, applying it to the full range of meanings of יד.

It is mainly in Genesis and Exodus that Rashi uses the term ממש.[117] At Num 2:17, he uses a different formulation:

עַל־יָדוֹ: על מקומו, ואין לשון יד זז ממשמעו. רוח שלצדו קרוי על ידו סמוכה לו לכל הושטת ידו.[118]

What Rashi means by this last comment can best be understood by examining the dictionary he used, Menaḥem ben Saruq's *Maḥberet*:

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[113] Posner, "Bedeutungsmaximalismus," 378.

[114] For the attestations of these and other meanings according to Rashi, see C. S. Segal, מונחי רש״י (Jerusalem, 1989), s.v. I shall cite only those comments of Rashi which invoke his semantic principle. It is probably just an accident that he does not mention the principle in connection with the meaning "possession" in his commentary to Gen 24:10, Exod 22:3, Num 21:26. The comment ועל יד הירדן: יד כמשמעו, אצל הירדן (Num 13:29), found in Berliner's edition of Rashi and in Vienna 23, 84a, may not be original. The comments in Vienna 24, 94b–95a and in Leipzig 1 (at the beginning of a section of the commentary which was initially omitted and subsequently inserted) are very different from the above text and from each other.

[115] Leipzig 1; Vienna 23, 39a; Vienna 24, 32a.

[116] I am indebted to David Berger for calling my attention to this key source. Cf. also bMen 37b ידך ממש.

[117] Cf. Rashi to Exod 7:4 אֶת יָדִי: יד ממש, להכות בהם, Gen 45:2 אין זה לשון בית ממש, 45:16 לשון בית ממש, 48:22 שכם ממש (referring, apparently, to the toponym rather than the body part), and Num 24:8 לשון חצים ממש.

[118] Leipzig 1; Vienna 23, 78a; 24, 87b.

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יד: מתחלק לארבע מחלקות. האחת: יָד תַּחַת יָד; וְעַל־בֹּהֶן יָדוֹ הַיְמָנִית; יְדֵיכֶם דָּמִים מָלֵאוּ; וַיִּשְׁלַח תַּבְנִית יָד; וִידֵי אָדָם. כמשמעם. השנית: וְיָד תִּהְיֶה לְךָ; יָד חֲזָקָה; עַל־יַד הַיְאֹר; וְהָאֲתֹנוֹת רֹעוֹת עַל־יְדֵיהֶם. ענין מקום המה. . . .[119]

The examples in the first category are labeled כמשמעם. Menaḥem's use of this term has engendered much controversy, beginning in his own time,[120] but his intention appears to be "[these examples are used] according to their basic, literal meaning."[121] The examples in the second category have a non-basic, non-literal meaning: "place." Thus, when Rashi asserts that the word יד, even when it means "place," does not depart from משמעו, it would seem that he is saying that Menaḥem's second category is derived from the first.

The other predecessor to whom Rashi is reacting is Onqelos. That Rashi associated the interpretation of יד as "place" with the Targum[122] can be seen in his comment to Deut 23:13:[123] וְיָד תִּהְיֶה לְךָ: כתרגומו [ואתר] כמו אִישׁ עַל־יָדוֹ.[124] It appears that Rashi is attempting to modify or clarify Menaḥem's interpretation of the Targum.

The same can be said of Rashi's comment to Gen 41:47:

וַתַּעַשׂ הָאָרֶץ: כתרגומו [וכנשו דירי ארעא] ואין הלשון נעקר מלשון עשייה.[125]

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[119] *Maḥberet*, 204*.

[120] See Skoss' introduction to *Jāmiᶜ al-Alfāẓ*, 1:xci–xcii; A. Maman, השוואת אוצר מלים של העברית לערבית ולארמית למן רס״ג ועד אבן ברון (Jerusalem, 1984) 172–175 and the literature cited there.

[121] This is the meaning of the term in the commentaries of Rashi; see E. M. Lipschuetz, רש״י (Jerusalem, 1966) 167 (הוראתן הראשונה של המילים); N. Leibowitz and M. M. Ahrend, פירוש רש״י לתורה (Tel-Aviv, 1990) 470 (ההוראה המילולית). Thus, Rashi to Gen 18:2 asks: מהו וַיַּרְא וַיַּרְא שני פעמים? הראשון כמשמעו והשני לשון הבנה, "What is וַיַּרְא וַיַּרְא two times? The first is used according to its basic, literal meaning, and the second is a reference to understanding." Similarly, Ibn Ezra writes that the meaning of וַיֹּאמֶר in Gen 1:3 is not, pace Saadia Gaon, "desired" but כמשמעו, i.e., "said." David Qimḥi uses the expression לא כמשמעו to refer to figurative language; M. Z. Cohen, "Radak's Contribution to the Tradition of Figurative Biblical Exegesis" (Ph.D. diss., Yeshiva University 1994) 63–83. The term comes from rabbinic literature; cf. Rashi to Exod 21:6, וַעֲבָדוֹ לְעֹלָם, Lev 18:7 עֶרְוַת אָבִיךָ, Deut 15:17 עֶבֶד עוֹלָם. It is clear from all of this that little can be learned about the meaning of כמשמעו from Rashi's comment to Prov 30:15 עֲלוּקָה: מנחם פתר כמשמעו, למדנו שהוא ערבי. Rashi is merely agreeing with Dunash that Menaḥem's failure to explain this hapax suggests that it was known to Arabic-speaking Jews.

[122] Although it is also found in Sifre Deut 257 (ed. L. Finkelstein, 281): אין יד אלא מקום שנאמר וְהִנֵּה מַצִּיב לוֹ יָד ואומר אִישׁ עַל־יָדוֹ לְדִגְלֵיהֶם.

[123] Leipzig 1; Vienna 23, 106b; Vienna 24, 121b.

[124] Moreover, the interpretation of יד as "might" is found in the Targum but not in Menaḥem.

[125] Leipzig 1; Vienna 23, 33b; Vienna 24, 25a.

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Here again, Menaḥem seems to interpret the Targum as assigning a second meaning to the word, distinct from the basic, literal one—an interpretation that Rashi rejects. Two other comments of this type can be viewed as reactions to the Targum (Gen 41:41) or Menaḥem (Prov 3:29) alone:

בר׳ מא, מא. נָתַתִּי אֹתְךָ: מניתי יתך ואע״פ כן לשון נתינה הוא כמו וּלְתִתְּךָ עֶלְיוֹן. בין לגדולה בין לשפלות נופל לשון נתינה עליו כמו נָתַתִּי אֶתְכֶם נִבְזִים וּשְׁפָלִים.[126]

משי׳ ג, כט. אַל־תַּחֲרֹשׁ: אל תחשוב, ואינו זז ממשמעות חרישה. מה דרך החורש מכין מקום לזמן הזריעה, אף החושב רעה מכין מקום ותחבולות איך יעשנה.[127]

The terminology that Rashi uses in his *Grundbedeutung* exegesis is of great interest. In one example, Gen 18:19, he uses the word עיקר, the Hebrew equivalent of Arabic *ʾaṣl*:

בר׳ יח, יט. כִּי יְדַעְתִּיו: לשון חבה כמו מוֹדַע לְאִישָׁהּ, הֲלֹא בֹּעַז מֹדַעְתָּנוּ, וָאֵדָעֲךָ בְּשֵׁם, ואמנם עיקר (לשון) כולם אינו אלא (לשון) ידיעה, שהמחבב את האדם מקרבו אצלו ויודעו ומכירו.[128]

This use recalls the use of the root ע-ק-ר in the phrase ואין הלשון נעקר מלשון עשייה cited above.

We should also look more closely at the formula "it does not budge from its basic meaning," which appears nine times in varying forms in Rashi's commentaries. In addition to Num 2:17, Gen 41:47, and Prov 3:29 already cited, we have:

שמי׳ כח, לח. וְנָשָׂא אַהֲרֹן: לשון סליחה, ואף על פי כן אינו זז ממשמעו. אהרן נושא את המשא של העון, נמצא מסולק העון מן הקדשים.[129]

במי׳ כד, ח. וְחִצָּיו יִמְחָץ: . . . ויש לפתור לשון חצים ממש: חציו של הקב״ה ימחץ בדמם שלצרים: יטבול ויצבע בדמם, כמו לְמַעַן תִּמְחַץ רַגְלְךָ בְּדָם. ואינו זז מלשון מכה כמו מָחַצְתִּי שהצבוע בדם נראה כאילו מחרץ ונגוע.[130]

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[126] Leipzig 1; Vienna 23, 33b; Vienna 24, 25a. Here, Rashi's respect for Onqelos brings him perilously close to Saadia's position. His acceptance of "appoint" as the meaning of נ-ת-ן in Gen 41:41—albeit only the *contextual* meaning—forces him to posit a diametrically opposed contextual meaning for the same verb in Mal 2:9.

[127] Vienna 24, 317a. Rashi says that plowing is preparation for sowing, just as planning is preparation for acting. Menaḥem, on the other hand, puts this verse in his third category (לשון מחשבות), separated from the fifth category which has examples of חרש meaning "plow"; *Maḥberet*, 190*.

[128] Leipzig 1; Vienna 23, 11; Vienna 24, 10a.

[129] Leipzig 1, Vienna 23, 57a, Vienna 24, 59a. According to Rashi, even the Aramaic usage of פרק in the sense of "expiate" is derived from the older meaning "remove (a burden)"; cf. his comment to Dan 4:24 וַחֲטָאָךְ בְּצִדְקָה פְרֻק: מעל צוארך, alluding to Gen 27:40.

[130] Leipzig 1, Vienna 23, 93a, Vienna 24, 103a.

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ש״א ד, כא. אֶל־הִלָּקַח: כמו על הלקח. ואינו צריך לזוזו מלשון אל מי שיודע להבין דברו.

ש״א כ, יד. וְלֹא אִם־עוֹדֶנִּי חָי: לשון בקשה הוא כמו וָלֹא יֻתַּן־נָא לְעַבְדְּךָ ואינו זז ממשמעו אנא אחי ולא תעשה לי טובה בעודני חי. . . .

ש״ב ג, יח. אָמַר אֶל־דָּוִד: על דוד ואינו זז ממשמע אל.

ירמ׳ מט, כו. יִדַּמּוּ: יחרבו ואינו זז מלשון דממה שכל עיר חריבה אין קול נשמע בה.

An interesting perspective on this formula is provided by a similar formula which Rashi uses in connection with the phrase פֶּן־יִפְרָץ־בָּם (Exod 19:24), vocalized with *qameṣ qaṭan*, in contrast to פֶּן־יִפְרֹץ בָּהֶם (Exod 19:22) with the expected *ḥolam*:

פֶּן־יִפְרָץ־בָּם: אף על פי שהוא נקוד חטף קמץ אינו זז מגזירתו. כך דרך כל תיבה שנקודתה מלא פום כשהיא סמוכה במקף משתנה הניקוד לחטף קמץ.[131]

"Lest he break out against them"—even though it (יִפְרָץ־) is pointed with a *ḥaṭaf qameṣ*, it does not budge from its basic form (יִפְרֹץ). So it is with every word pointed with a *ḥolam*—when it is attached with a *maqqef*, the pointing changes to *ḥaṭaf qameṣ*.

What the formula אינו זז מגזרתו conveys is that the form in question is not an independent by-form; it is a variant of the *Grundform* (גזרה)[132] conditioned by the phonological context. Similarly, the formula אינו זז ממשמעו makes the point that targumic renderings like "place" for יד and "gather" for עשה are not independent meanings but variants of the *Grundbedeutung* (משמע) conditioned by the semantic context (ענין).[133] It is based on the conception that המפרש יתקן הלשון אחר ענין הדבור. Its purpose is to reduce secondary meanings to conditioned variants of the *Grundbedeutung*.

Thus, Rashi employs both *Grundbedeutung* exegesis and *Gemeinbedeutung* exegesis in the cause of meaning-minimalism. It is not

[131] Leipzig 1; Vienna 23, 48a; Vienna 24, 45b.

[132] For the uses of the term גזרה in Rashi's commentary, see H. Englander, "Grammatical Elements and Terminology in Rashi," *HUCA* 14 (1939) 405–406. The use in our passage is paralleled by its use at Gen 7:23 (וַיִּמַּח: לשון וַיִּפְעַל ואינו לשון וַיִּפָּעֵל והוא מגזרת וַיִּפֶן וַיִּבֶן), Deut 32:35 (ויש מפרשים וְשִׁלֵּם שם דבר כמו ושלום והיא מגזרת וְהַדִּבֵּר אֵין בָּהֶם), and Est 3:13 (וְנִשְׁלוֹחַ סְפָרִים . . . והוא מגזרת אִם־נִלְחֹם נִלְחַם, הֲנִגְלֹה נִגְלֵיתִי, נִדְמֹה נִדְמָה).

[133] According to Leibowitz and Ahrend, פירוש רש״י, 471, a meaning of this type is called a פשט.

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easy to ascertain where Rashi drew the line between these two techniques. Why, for example, does he treat יד as a case of *Grundbedeutung* but ערלה as a case of *Gemeinbedeutung*—to the extent that he places the concrete sense of "foreskin" (ערלת בשר) in the middle of his list of uses?[134]

To make matters more difficult, we occasionally find a discussion of *Gemeinbedeutung* containing phraseology typical of *Grundbedeutung* exegesis, such as ואע״פ כן and משמעו:

בר׳ מא, מא. נָתַתִּי אֹתְךָ: מניתי יתך ואע״פ כן לשון נתינה הוא כמו וּלְתִתְּךָ עֶלְיוֹן. בין לגדולה בין לשפלות נופל לשון נתינה עליו כמו נָתַתִּי אֶתְכֶם נְבָזִים וּשְׁפָלִים.

ויק׳ יא, י. שֶׁרֶץ: בכל מקום משמעו דבר נמוך שרוחש ונד על הארץ.[135]

This may indicate that Rashi did not make a sharp distinction between the two categories, which for him served the same goal.[136] Indeed, it is possible that, in his eyes, a core meaning was simply a special kind of primary meaning.

According to Rashi, then, many words which his predecessors seem to treat as ambiguous actually have a single underlying meaning. In some cases, the latter is a *Grundbedeutung*, a primary meaning; in others, it is a *Gemeinbedeutung*, a core meaning. In addition to the primary meaning or the core meaning, there is also a set of derivative, contextual meanings—variants of the underlying meaning conditioned by the context.

12. Rashi vs. Saadia

The difference between Rashi and Saadia Gaon is striking: Saadia is a meaning-maximalist while Rashi is a meaning-minimalist. Where the constant refrain of Saadia is "X has so-and-so many meanings," the refrains of Rashi are "every X means Y" and "X does not budge from its basic meaning."

Saadia makes no distinction between translation and lexicology; if a Hebrew word has a dozen Arabic translations, it has a dozen meanings. Rashi sees exegesis and lexicology as very different activities.

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[134] See above.

[135] Leipzig 1; Vienna 23, 66b; Vienna 24, 73a.

[136] This possibility was suggested to me by Yeshayahu Maori.

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The lexicographer records the basic meaning of each word; the exegete makes verses more intelligible by adjusting the basic meaning to fit its context within each verse.

In other words, Saadia seems to recognize only contextual meanings; if he accepted the existence of an underlying meaning in some instances, he does not bother to tell us. What he tells us is that some meanings are more common than others—not that they are more basic. Rashi does not deny the existence of contextual meanings, but he gives them less weight than the underlying meaning.

The difference between these two great scholars can also be seen in their contrasting treatments of four individual examples: נ-ח-ם, ש-ע, חֵלֶב, and ב-ק-ע הָרוֹת. We saw above that Saadia lists six meanings for נ-ח-ם in his commentary to Gen 6:6 and Exod 32:14. Rashi's position is strikingly different. In an impressive demonstration of Ockham's razor, he shows that one meaning, "to reconsider, have a change of heart" suffices for all of the occurrences that do not deal with consolation:

> בר׳ ו, ו. וַיִּנָּחֶם ה׳: נהפכה מחשבתו של מקום ממדת רחמים למדת הדין. עלתה מחשבה לפניו מה לעשות באדם שעשה בארץ, וכל לשון ניחום שבמקרא לשון נמלך מה לעשות: וּבָן־אָדָם וְיִתְנָחֵם, וְעַל־עֲבָדָיו יִתְנָחָם, וַיִּנָּחֶם ה׳ עַל־הָרָעָה, נִחַמְתִּי כִּי־הִמְלַכְתִּי, כולן לשון מחשבה אחרת הם.[137]
>
> בר׳ כז, מב. מִתְנַחֵם לְךָ: ניחם על האחוה לחשוב מחשבה אחרת להתנכר לך להרגך.[138]
>
> שמ׳ לב, יב. וְהִנָּחֵם: התעשת להם מחשבה אחרת להטיב על הרעה אשר חשבת להם.[139]
>
> ירמ׳ יח, ח. וְנִחַמְתִּי: וחשבתי מחשבה אחרת.
>
> יואל ב, יג. וְנִחָם עַל־הָרָעָה: נהפך למחשבה אחרת.

Similarly, for the biliteral root ש-ע Saadia lists seven meanings in his commentary to Gen 4:4, of which four correspond to the triliteral root ש-ע-י.[140] Here again, Rashi is very different. He believes that three of the four occurrences have the same meaning: "to turn":

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[137] Leipzig 1; Vienna 23, 3; Vienna 24, 4a.

[138] Leipzig 1; Vienna 23, 22; Vienna 24, 16b.

[139] Leipzig 1; Vienna 23, 60a; Vienna 24, 63a.

[140] פירושי רב סעדיה גאון לבראשית, 85 (Heb. transl., 307). *Maḥberet*, 365*–366* has eleven entries. With this lexeme we have not only pseudo-polysemy but also pseudo-homonymy created by the biliteral root theory (or rather, the failure to distinguish different types of biliteral roots).

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ברי ד, ד. וַיִּשַׁע: ויפן וכן שְׁעֵה מֵעָלָיו.[141]

ישעי יז, ז. יִשְׁעֶה: יפנה כמו וַיִּשַׁע אֶל־הֶבֶל.

Furthermore, Saadia takes the two occurrences of חֵלֶב in Deut 32:14 עִם־חֵלֶב כָּרִים . . . עִם־חֵלֶב כִּלְיוֹת חִטָּה as having two different meanings,[142] which he renders שחום "fat" and לב "best part" in the *Tafsir*, unlike Rashi who, in his commentary to Gen 45:18, gives the latter as a core meaning: כל חלב לשון מיטב הוא.

Finally, Rashi gives ב-ק-ע הָרוֹת in Amos 1:13 the same meaning that it has in 2 Kgs 8:12 and Hos 14:1, viz., "split open the pregnant women of," unlike Saadia who takes it to mean "capture the mountains of" in Amos 1:13, a meaning which does not fit the other occurrences of the phrase.

13. The Origins of Rashi's Theory

Rashi is not known as a linguist and it is, therefore, natural to assume that his remarkable semantic theory was borrowed—but from whom? Menaḥem b. Ḥelbo is not likely to have been the source, judging from the meaning-maximalist exegesis of his nephew, Joseph Qara.[143]

We are certainly not dealing with a borrowing from the Christian exegetes of France, whose approach to biblical lexicology has far more in common with the approach of Saadia than that of Rashi. The dictionaries of biblical terms composed by the French scholastics beginning in the 12th century were known as *distinctiones*, apparently because of their tendency to make fine distinctions, resulting in lists of up to ten or fifteen literal and figurative senses.[144] Exegetes, too, were fond of such lists. One 12th-century English copy of Luke has a marginal note distinguishing five senses of *maledictum* 'cursed': 'cursed in anger,' 'cursed by reason,' 'cursed by blame,' 'cursed by punishment,' 'cursed in being shamed.'[145] This type of exegesis began at least six centuries earlier:

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[141] Leipzig 1; Vienna 24, 3a (Vienna 23 is missing the page with this comment). Berliner's version of this comment has additional parallels, but Leipzig 1 and the Rome and Guadalajara editions have only the parallel from Job 14.

[142] Hirschfeld, "The Arabic Portion (*Third Article*)," 102.

[143] See §10, above

[144] G. R. Evans, *The Language and Logic of the Bible: The Earlier Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1984) 80. I am indebted to Haym Soloveitchik for this reference.

[145] Evans, *Language and Logic,* 81.

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> Studies of individual words, designed to separate their meanings or significations had been a commonplace in exegesis for many centuries. In his *Moralia in Job*, Gregory the Great says that the word "man" is used in three ways in the Bible: to refer to man's nature . . . ; in reference to man's frailty . . . ; to refer to man's sinfulness. . . .[146]

As with Saadia, the purpose of these sense distinctions was often to resolve contradictions. Thus, in the 12th century, Hugh of St. Victor reconciled two contradictory statements in the gospel of John by distinguishing different senses of *iudicium*: "judgment in this world" and "judgment in the next world."[147] Like Saadia, he is not content to give only the two meanings necessary for the problem at hand; for the sake of completeness he records his list of four senses. With Saadia, such lists of irrelevant facts are a manifestation of the encyclopedic style of gaonic exegesis which drove Ibn Ezra to distraction.[148]

When we turn to the medieval French speculative grammarians, we find that they are much closer to Rashi. Like Rashi, they distinguish the basic meaning of words from their meanings in context. Already in the second half of the 11th century, the anonymous author of the *Glosule* to Priscian's *Institutiones Grammaticae* wrote:

> For active (verbs) frequently govern inanimate (nouns), as "I love the book," but even so, in such a construction, "I love" does not lose its force of governing, by nature, men. For words are not to be judged according to their (contextual) construction, but rather according to the intrinsic nature of their meaning.[149]

The phrase *sed tamen . . . non perdit potentiam* reminds one of Rashi's phrase ואף על פי כן אינו זז ממשמעו in his gloss to Exod 28:38. And the phrase *secundum actum constructionis* may be compared to the phrase אחר ענין הדבור in Rashi's gloss to Exod 14:30.[150]

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[146] Ibid.

[147] Ibid., 82.

[148] See the beginning of Ibn Ezra's introduction to his Torah commentary.

[149] L. M. de Rijk, *Logica Modernorum*, vol. 2, part 1 (Assen, 1967) 114: "Sepe enim activa ad inanimata diriguntur, ut *amo librum*, sed tamen in hac tali constructione *amo* non perdit potentiam naturaliter dirigendi ad homines. Non enim sunt iudicande voces secundum actum constructionis, sed secundum propriam naturam inventionis." I am indebted to Cyril Aslanoff and David Berger for correcting my translation of this passage. For the time and place of its composition, see Margaret Gibson, "The Early Scholastic 'Glosule' to Priscian, 'Institutiones Grammaticae': the Text and Its Influence," *Studi Medievali*, serie terza, 20 (1979) 235–247.

[150] See n. 111, above.

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Despite these parallels between Rashi and the *Glosule* and the apparent agreement in time and place, it is unclear to what extent one may speak of influence. Rashi's theory is clearly a product of his experience as an exegete, and the problems with which he grapples are genuine lexicological problems—unlike the ones in the *Glosule*. Rashi deals with polysemy, while the *Glosule* deals with variety of application.

Rashi's distinction between basic meaning and contextual meaning does not necessarily owe anything to the work of the French speculative grammarians. We have already seen that Rashi's formulation and favorite example of this distinction owe much to bBM 56b: כל היכא דכתיב ידו ידו ממש הוא. As for the distinction itself, Rashi may have hit upon it independently, in striving to reconcile the conflicting lexicological tendencies of targumic literature and ancient rabbinic literature. The former, like all translations in varying degrees, is forced to vary its renderings of individual words according to the requirements of context. The latter tends to assume a single meaning in all contexts, often with fanciful results.[151] This is particularly true of amoraic *midrash aggadah*,[152] but meaning-minimalist

[151] I am indebted to Yeshayahu Maori for pointing out to me this influence on Rashi's lexicology. He points to the many midrashim cited by Rashi which assume the literal meaning of idiomatic expressions in the Torah, e.g., Gen 24:10 וְכָל־טוּב אֲדֹנָיו בְּיָדוֹ, "with all the bounty of his master in his hand" (referring to a deed held in his hand; Leipzig 1; Vienna 23, 18; Vienna 24, 14) and Exod 8:2 הַצְּפַרְדֵּעַ (referring to a single frog; Leipzig 1; Vienna 23, 41a; Vienna 24, 35b). In the latter case, Onqelos translates הַצְּפַרְדֵּעַ as a plural. Rashi apparently viewed this as closer to the *peshaṭ*, but as merely a contextual rendering. His own suggestion combines the literalism of the Midrash with the contextualism of the Targum: the singular noun הַצְּפַרְדֵּעַ can refer to a single swarm of frogs. As for Gen 24:10, both the Mekhilta (ed. H. S. Horovitz and I. A. Rabin, p. 267) and Sifre Num 157 (ed. H. S. Horovitz 210) cite this verse to prove that בְּיָדוֹ elsewhere in the Torah means ברשותו "in his possession." There is no reason to assume that Rashi understood the amoraic midrash, which he cites, as contradicting the tannaitic interpretation. It seems more likely that, in Rashi's view, the amoraic midrash merely explains how the contextual meaning of בְּיָדוֹ in Gen 24:10 derives from its basic meaning. Rashi's comment is thus equivalent to something like: בְּיָדוֹ ברשותו, ואין לשון יד זז ממשמעו, שהרוצה להראות שיש נכסים ברשותו מביא שטר בידו.

[152] See the preceding footnote. However, meaning maximalism can also be found in, e.g., R. Osha^cya's *derasha* on Prov 8:30 at the very beginning of GenR: וָאֶהְיֶה אֶצְלוֹ אָמוֹן פידגוג אָמוֹן מכוסה אָמוֹן מוצנע—אָמוֹן וָאֶהְיֶה שַׁעֲשֻׁעִים. The last two meanings are difficult to distinguish and the occurrences of א-מ-ן cited as prooftexts for the three meanings (Num 11:12, Lam 4:5, Est 2:7) were viewed as having one and the same meaning by Saadia (who renders them all with Arabic *ḥaḍana* "bring up") and most other exegetes. For further discussion of this *derasha*, see J. Fraenkel, דרכי האגדה והמדרש (Tel-Aviv, 1996) 93–94.

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treatments of legal terms can also be found in the Talmud[153] and in tannaitic *midrash halakhah*.

Tannaitic definitions are usually of the form . . . אלא . . . אין,[154] but in a few places, we find an expanded formula which exhibits a quest for generality: . . . בכל מקום אלא . . . אין. Thus, in Sifre Numbers, we have definitions like:

אין מעילה בכל מקום אלא שיקור, וכן הוא אומר וַיַּמְעֲלוּ בֵּאלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵיהֶם ואומר וַיַּמְעֲלוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מַעַל בַּחֵרֶם ואומר וַיָּמָת שָׁאוּל בְּמַעֲלוֹ אֲשֶׁר מָעַל בַּה׳ ואומר בעוזיה צֵא מִן־הַמִּקְדָּשׁ כִּי מָעַלְתָּ ואומר וּמָעֲלָה בוֹ מָעַל. הא אין מעילה בכל מקום אלא שיקור.[155]

אין נזירה בכל מקום אלא פרישה, וכן הוא אומר וְיִנְזְרוּ מִקָּדְשֵׁי בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל ואומר אֶת סְפִיחַ קְצִירְךָ לֹא תִקְצוֹר וְאֶת־עִנְּבֵי נְזִירֶךָ לֹא תִבְצֹר ואומר הֵמָּה בָּאוּ בַעַל־פְּעוֹר וַיִּנְזְרוּ לַבֹּשֶׁת ואומר הַאֶבְכֶּה בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַחֲמִשִׁי הִנָּזֵר. הא אין נזירה בכל מקום אלא פרישה.[156]

Although Rashi never cites the first definition,[157] he cites the second no less than seven times in his commentaries.[158] It seems to have made a profound impression on him, and he cannot but have noticed that it contradicted the Aramaic renderings of Onqelos and Jonathan: וְיִנְזְרוּ = ויפרשון (Lev 22:2), נְזִירֶךָ = שבקך (Lev 25:5), וַיִּנְזְרוּ = וטעו (Hos 9:10), הִנָּזֵר = האמנע נפשי מתפנוקין (Zech 7:3). Each of the four occurrences of the root cited by Sifre has a different translation; only the rendering at Lev 22:2 agrees with the Midrash. This tension between targumic and rabbinic exegesis must have bothered Rashi. In attempting to account for it, Rashi built a sophisticated theory which is a true milestone in the history of biblical philology, although it has not been recognized as such.[159]

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[153] In bYev 102b, the Talmud attempts to defend the position that the verb חלץ means "remove" everywhere in the Bible. In the end, it is forced to concede that in some places it means "gird."

[154] S. Lieberman, יוונית ויוונות בארץ ישראל (Jerusalem, 1962) 186–188 = *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (New York, 1950) 49–51; Melamed, מפרשי המקרא, 109ff. Lieberman (p. 51) believes that the definitions of this form "which are incorporated in the *Halakhic Midrashim* have their origin in a very ancient commentary."

[155] Sifre Num 2 and 7 (pp. 5 and 11).

[156] Sifre Num 23 (p. 28), cited by Melamed, מפרשי המקרא, 112.

[157] He cites only the parallel definition from the Sifra, in his commentary to Lev 5:15.

[158] Avinery, היכל רש״י, vol. 2, part 2, col. 741.

[159] It is not even mentioned in recent studies of Rashi's lexicological method: N. Netzer, הנוסח ״לשון x״ לציון הבחנות סמנטיות בפירושי רש״י למקרא, *Proceedings of the*

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14. Spanish Meaning-Minimalism after Rashi

The reaction against the excesses of Saadia's meaning-maximalism which began with Menaḥem and Ibn Janāḥ became much more pronounced among the later Sephardi exegetes. This can already be discerned in the writings of Abraham ibn Ezra.

Ibn Ezra, in arguing against the existence of *ʾaḍdād*, gives a core meaning for a word that seems to have two opposite meanings: ודע כי חסד תוספת דבר שאיננו חיוב, בין טוב ובין רע.[160] Although this resembles Rashi's definitions of the form "any X, whether good or bad,"[161] it is unlikely that Ibn Ezra was influenced by them.[162]

Simon, in describing Ibn Ezra's exegetical method, writes of "his marked tendency to minimize, to the extent possible, his recourse to the exegetical strategy of 'this word has to be interpreted in two senses.'"[163] Thus, in מאזני לשון הקדש, Ibn Ezra writes: וכל מה שיוכל המפרש לחבר עניני המלות לדבר אחד הוא הטוב.[164] However, his example involves two different parts of speech—the noun פרד "mule" and the verb להפרד "to separate"—and therefore has less relevance for synchronic semantics than Rashi's examples.

Tenth World Congress of Jewish Studies, Division D, Volume 1: The Hebrew Language, Jewish Languages (Jerusalem, 1990) 93–100; M. M. Ahrend, לדרכו של רש"י בביאור מלים, in רש"י, עיונים ביצירתו, ed. Z. A. Steinfeld (Ramat-Gan, 1993) 9–19.

[160] Simon, לדרכו הפרשנית, 114–115. B. Septimus calls my attention to a similar definition given by Maimonides: אלמבאלגה פי אלשי יתסמי חסד כאנת תלך אלמבאלגה פי כ"יר או פי שר, "exaggeration in a thing is called חסד, whether that exaggeration is for the good or for the bad" (*Commentary on the Mishnah*, Avot 5.6; cf. *Guide* 3.53). Uriel Simon suggests that this may be an example of Ibn Ezra's influence on Maimonides, to be added to I. Twersky, ההשפיע ראב"ע על רמב"ם?, in *Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra: Studies in the Writings of a Twelfth-Century Jewish Polymath*, ed. I. Twersky and J. M. Harris (Cambridge, Mass., 1993), Hebrew Section, 21–48.

[161] See §11, above.

[162] In his article, Simon shows that Ibn Ezra's view of the meaning of חסד was shaped by his belief that the existence of *ʾaḍdād* would undermine the communicative function of language. In a personal communication, he adds that Ibn Ezra's halachic errors and infrequent references to Rashi (only thirteen in his Torah commentary, twelve of them in the long commentary to Exodus) show that he did not have constant access to Rashi's commentaries.

[163] Simon, לדרכו הפרשנית, 117. Simon informs me that the passage that he cites there from ספר שער השמים is to be ignored, since that work, although attributed to Ibn Ezra, is not his (personal communication).

[164] מאזני לשון הקודש, ed. W. Heidenheim (Offenbach, 1791) 41a, cited by Simon, לדרכו הפרשנית, 114.

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In that same work, Ibn Ezra rejects the view of his predecessors that the prefix -הַ is a homonym. Dunash[165] held that in וַיֹּאמֶר ה׳ אֶל־הַשָּׂטָן יִגְעַר ה׳ בְּךָ הַשָּׂטָן (Zech 3:2) the first occurrence of הַשָּׂטָן has the הא הידיעה while the second occurrence has the הא הקריאה.[166] Ibn Ezra held that such a distinction could not be drawn: וכלל אומר שאין בלשון הקודש סימן קריאה רק הענין יורה עליו כמו אַבְרָהָם אַבְרָהָם וכן הַקָּהָל חֻקָּה אַחַת לָכֶם ההא של הידיעה הוא.[167] This is a fine example of meaning-minimalism.

There is also evidence of a meaning-minimalist tendency in David Qimḥi's writings. His comment to Ps 17:1 רִנָּתִי looks like an imitation of Rashi's style: וכל לשון רנה הוא לשון צעקה ויש מהם לשירה ולשמחה ויש מהם להכרזה ויש לתפלה ולבקשה ויש לבכי ואנקה וכל אחד יתפרש לפי מקומו. Compare this with Rashi's comment to Hab 1:10,[168] and note how many words are shared: כל לשון . . . לשון . . . יש ל- . . . ויש ל- . . .

Qimḥi's treatment of the particle כי is an impressive display of meaning-minimalism.[169] His starting point is the treatment of Ibn Janāḥ: המלה הזאת חלקה רבי יונה על פנים רבים. In fact, Ibn Janāḥ had given sixteen meanings for כי and eight for כי אם; Qimḥi was able to make do with three meanings for כי and two for כי אם. In some cases, the reduction is achieved through reinterpretation of verses. Thus, Qimḥi argues at length that all of Ibn Janāḥ's examples of כי

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[165] See ספר תשובות דונש הלוי בן לברט על רבי סעדיה גאון, 59; cf. also 39–40.

[166] See also Ibn Janāḥ, *Le livre des parterres fleuris*, ed. J. Derenbourg (Paris, 1886) 84 = ספר הרקמה, ed. M. Wilensky (Jerusalem, 1964) 101. For a modern defense of this view, see H. S. Nyberg, *Hebreisk Grammatik* (Uppsala, 1952) 235. Nyberg believes that, in such cases, the -הַ represents an interjection which has fallen together with the definite article.

[167] מאזני לשון הקודש, 23b. See also Ibn Ezra's commentary to Num 15:15. Scholars have wondered at Ibn Ezra's reference to the vocative in his commentary to Deut 15:22 and at the interpretation of Num 15:15 in his commentary to Ps 9:7, but for no good reason. Like many moderns (e.g., A. B. Davidson, *Hebrew Syntax* [Edinburgh, 1901] 27; P. Joüon and T. Muraoka, 508), Ibn Ezra denies the existence of a vocative *particle* in BH, not the existence of vocative *nouns*. According to him, the -הַ prefix commonly prefixed to vocative nouns is not a vocative marker but an ordinary definite article. Judging from the syntactic distribution of the prefix (e.g., 2 Sam 16:7 and Jer 31:21) and from the use of the definite article with vocatives in Aramaic and Egyptian, he is right.

[168] See §11, above.

[169] For a different evaluation, see A. Maman, הארמית והערבית ותרומתן לפרשנות הפילולוגית למקרא בימי הביניים, *Am va-Sefer* 7 (1992) 28–31.

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"although" really mean "because." In other cases, Qimḥi provides a core meaning. Thus, his statement that כי אם sometimes serves to exclude (למעט) is equivalent to four of Ibn Janāḥ's meanings: "but rather," "except," "though," and "but."

Despite this, Qimḥi was not enough of a meaning-minimalist to satisfy the ever-carping Joseph ibn Kaspi, from whose partially published dictionary Rosenberg[170] cites the following entry (s.v. זמר):

> כמו שאמרנו כמה פעמים עם היות יסודינו שמור שכל שרש זה אין בו רק ענין אחד גמור ופשוט לא עשרה כמו שאמר הקמחי.

15. Meaning-Maximalism Today

In modern Bible scholarship, meaning-maximalism has enjoyed something of a revival. There are remarkable parallels between Saadia's translation and commentary to Genesis and certain modern works, such as Speiser's translation and commentary to Genesis[171] and the new JPS translation of the Torah. Like Saadia's *Tafsir*, they represent a break with an earlier tradition of translation. And like Saadia's *Tafsir*, they contain introductions stressing the obligation of the translator/exegete to note the ambiguity of Hebrew lexical items. Thus, Speiser's Introduction makes the following claim:

> The Hebrew term *ʾmr* coincides by and large with the English verb "to say." But the Hebrew verb in question carries many other nuances: *to tell, promise, threaten, express fear, reflect* (speak to oneself), and the like. A uniform translation would result not only in monotony but also in under-representation.[172]

The parallel with Saadia extends even to details: a similar list of meanings for אמר is found in an abridgment of Saadia's commentary.[173]

The passage cited above goes beyond the rejection of slavish, purely mechanical translations. For Speiser, varying the translation of אמר is not merely a device to help the modern reader understand

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[170] S. Rosenberg, שפה ופרשנות המקרא בכתביו של ר׳ יוסף אבן כספי, in הגיון ושפה, ed. M. Halamish and A. Kasher (Tel-Aviv, 1981) 106.

[171] *The Anchor Bible Genesis*, ed. E. A. Speiser (Garden City, New York, 1964).

[172] *Genesis*, p. lxvii.

[173] פירושי רב סעדיה גאון לבראשית, p. ל.

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and enjoy the Bible;[174] it is necessary to avoid "under-representation." Like Saadia, Speiser believes that each of his translations represents a distinct meaning.

It appears that, in attempting to avoid under-representation, Speiser has gone too far in the other direction. If אמר means "express fear" in some contexts, does it not also mean "express anger," "express joy," "express surprise," etc., etc. in others? There is no limit to the number of contexts in which a word may occur, and there is no limit to the number of meanings that zealous meaning-maximalists may discover. Meaning-minimalists can also be over-enthusiastic, but, since the number of meanings of a word cannot be less than zero, there is a limit to how far they can go.

16. Appendix: Terms for Ambiguity and Generality through the Ages

According to the curriculum established in late antiquity, the first topic in the study of philosophy was the distinction between ambiguity and generality at the beginning of the *Categories*:

> Things which have only a name in common, the definition [lit., statement of essence] corresponding with the name being different, are said to be equivocally named (ὁμώνυμα). For instance, while a man and a portrait can properly both be called "animals," these are equivocally named. . . . Things which have the name in common are said to be univocally named (συνώνυμα) when the definition [lit., statement of essence] corresponding with the name is the same in both cases. Thus a man and an ox are called "animals."[175]

Aristotle does not have a consistent terminology. In the passage cited above, he uses the term ὁμώνυμα (contrasted with συνώνυμα)

[174] The merits of that have been debated in the past, as when Franz Rosenzweig attacked E. Kautzsch for his misguided attempt to relieve the "monotony" of the Tabernacle pericope by varying his translation of the recurring verb ע-ש-י; see N. Leibowitz, *Studies in Shemot* (Jerusalem, 1976) 485–486. Uriel Simon points out (personal communication) that a similar critique of modern scholarly translations, including that of Speiser, is to be found in R. Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary* (New York, 1996) ix–xxxix.

[175] Trans. Harold P. Cooke. Aristotle, *The Organon* (Cambridge, Mass.–London, 1938) 1:13.

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to refer to things. However, in his long excursus on ambiguity in *Topics* 1.15, he uses it to refer to words, and he switches back and forth between it and the terms πολλαχῶς/πλεοναχῶς λεγόμενα "used (lit., said) in several ways" (contrasted with μοναχῶς λεγόμενα "used [lit., said] in a single way"). One can also find places where ὁμώνυμα is restricted to one type of ambiguity[176] as well as places where πολλαχῶς λεγόμενα refers to uses which are not distinct meanings.[177] As for the term συνώνυμα, in *Topics* 8.13, 162b38 and *Rhetoric* 3.2.7, Aristotle uses it in our modern sense of "synonyms."[178]

Aristotle's συνώνυμα is rendered *mᶜazlay šmā* "intertwined in name" in the Syriac translation of the *Categories* by George, Bishop of the Arabs; *al-mutawāṭiʾatu smāʾihā* "agreeing in their names" in Isḥāq ibn Ḥunayn's Arabic translation;[179] *univoca* in Boethius' Latin translation,[180] and (with reference to names rather than things) *al-ʾasmāʾu l-latī tuqālu bi-tawāṭuʾ* "names used (lit., said) in agreement" by Al-Fārābī,[181] and *al-ʾasmāʾu l-mutawāṭiʾah* "agreeing names" by Maimonides.[182] Hebrew treatises usually have השמות המוסכמים/ המסכימים "agreed/agreeing names" or השמות הנאמרים בהסכמה "names used (lit., said) in agreement," but one also finds התיבות הממוצעים

[176] See Hintikka, "Aristotle on the Ambiguity of Ambiguity," 138–139 and "Different Kinds of Equivocation in Aristotle," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 9 (1971) 368–372, and see my discussion below.

[177] Hintikka, "Aristotle on the Ambiguity of Ambiguity," 144–145.

[178] The two uses of the term are discussed by Sh. Rosenberg, "תורת ה"שמות בפילוסופיה היהודית בימי-הביניים, in *Language, Thought, Society: In Memoriam Yehoshua Bar-Hillel*, ed. Y. Melzer (Jerusalem, 1978) 110. Apparently unaware that the medieval and modern sense is attested already in Aristotle, Rosenberg treats this as a case of diachronic semantic change. He argues that the term shifted its meaning as a result of the shift in its application from things to names. His diagrams are presumably intended to show that the two uses have a common denominator. (The diagram representing the use of συνώνυμα in the *Categories* needs to be corrected; as it stands, without any representation of meaning, it represents ὁμώνυμα as well.) If this is correct, the term συνώνυμα itself is not ambiguous but merely general.

[179] These two renderings are cited by K. Georr, *Les catégories d'Aristote dans leurs versions syro-arabes* (Beirut, 1948) 249. A third rendering by Jacob of Edessa is too slavish to be of any interest.

[180] Boethius, *In Categorias Aristotelis* (Patrologia Latina, 64) 167.

[181] Küyel [-Türker], "Fârâbi'nin Peri Hermeneias Muhtasari," 49; El-Ajam, *Al-Manṭiq*, 1:140. See also Ilai Alon, *Al-Fārābī's Philosophical Lexicon* (forthcoming).

[182] Efros, "Maimonides' Treatise," p. לה.

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"centered words," השמות המתאימות/התאומים "matching/twinned names" and השם אשר יאמר לו בהשואה "name used in congruence."[183]

Following Boethius, the term *univocation* is used in Aristotelian studies to this day. Modern philosophers and linguists use a wide variety of terms: generality,[184] vagueness,[185] variety of application,[186] indefiniteness of reference,[187] semantic indeterminacy,[188] non-determination,[189] indifference,[190] unspecificity,[191] lack of specificity,[192] lack of specification,[193] neutrality, and unmarkedness.[194]

Aristotle's ὁμώνυμα is rendered *šway šmā* "equal in name" by George, Bishop of the Arabs; *al-muttafiqatu smāʾihā* "coinciding in their names" by Isḥāq ibn Ḥunayn;[195] *æquivoca* by Boethius,[196] and (with reference to names rather than things) *al-ʾasmāʾu l-muštarikah*

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[183] See the comparative chart in Rosenberg, "יתורת השמות", 142, and the texts in the appendices.

[184] B. A. W. Russell, *Analysis of Mind* (London, 1921) 184; Quine, *Word and Object,* 130–131; D. L. Bolinger, *Generality, Gradience and the All-or-none* (Janua Linguarum Series Minor 14) ('s-Gravenhage, 1961) 15–16, D. A. Cruse, *Lexical Semantics* (Cambridge, 1986) 51, 81.

[185] Weinreich (see below), G. Lakoff, "A Note on Ambiguity and Vagueness," *Linguistic Inquiry* 1 (1970) 357–359; A. Zwicky, Review of J. G. Kooij, *Ambiguity in Natural Language,* in *Lingua* 32 (1973) 100; Kempson, *Semantic Theory,* 125–126; D. Geeraerts, "Polysemy," in *The Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*, ed. R. E. Asher (Oxford, 1994) 6:3227. Other scholars prefer to use this term in a different sense.

[186] M. Black, *Language and Philosophy* (Ithaca, 1949) 31.

[187] U. Weinreich, "Explorations," 323.

[188] T. Shopen, "Ellipsis as Grammatical Indeterminacy," *Foundations of Language* 10 (1973) 72.

[189] H. Weydt, "On G. Lakoff, 'Instrumental Adverbs and the Concept of Deep Structure,'" *Foundations of Language* 10 (1973) 578.

[190] A. Reeves, "Ambiguity and Indifference," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 53 (1975) 220–221; C. Luzzati, "Legal Language: Vagueness," in *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics,* 4:2091.

[191] T. Williamson, "Vagueness," in *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics,* 9:4869.

[192] Luzzati, "Legal Language: Vagueness," 2091.

[193] A. Zwicky and J. Sadock, "Ambiguity Tests and How to Fail Them," in *Syntax and Semantics* 4, ed. J. Kimball (New York, 1975) 5, 7; Kempson, *Semantic Theory,* 125–126.

[194] A. Zwicky and J. Sadock, 2. Most of the terms and references given here are also listed there.

[195] These two renderings are cited by Georr, *Versions syro-arabes,* 249. Again, a third rendering by Jacob of Edessa is too slavish to be of any interest.

[196] *In Categorias Aristotelis,* 163.

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"shared names" by Al-Fārābī[197] and Maimonides.[198] Hebrew treatises usually have השמות המשותפים/המשתתפים/השותפין "shared names" but one also finds השמות הנקרים "coinciding names."[199]

The meaning of ὁμώνυμα in Aristotle's *Categories* (but not in the *Metaphysics*!)[200] is broader than the meaning of our modern term *homonyms*. For the phenomenon described in the *Categories*, we use the term *ambiguity*, and we distinguish two types: *homonomy* (two entries in the dictionary) and *polysemy* (one entry with two meanings).[201] Aristotle (*Physics*, 7.4 249a23–4) makes a similar distinction between ὁμώνυμα which are widely removed (πολὺ ἀπέχουσαι) and those which have some resemblance (ἔχουσαί τινα ὁμοιότητα).[202] The ὁμώνυμα of the former type are probably the same as those described as bearing the same name by chance (ἀπὸ τύχης) in *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.4, 1096b26–28.[203] Al-Fārābī's equivalent of ἀπὸ τύχης is *ʾittifāqan* "coincidentally."[204] Maimonides' term *is ʾal-muštarikatu l-maḥḍatu l-ʾištirāk* "names shared in the pure sense."[205]

The term for "ambiguous" used by the Masoretes is (ב)תרין לשנין "(with) two meanings." It appears in the titles of various lists of ambiguous forms—one compiled by Aaron b. Asher in the 9th-century, another in אכלה ואכלה.[206] In his אשכל הכפר, the Karaite Yehudah

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[197] Küyel [-Türker], "Fârâbi'nin Peri Hermeneias Muhtasari," 48; El-Ajam, *Al-Manṭiq*, 1:140. See also I. Alon, *Al-Fārābī's Philosophical Lexicon* (forthcoming).

[198] Efros, "Maimonides' Treatise," p. לה.

[199] See the comparative chart in Rosenberg, "תורת השמות," 142, and the texts in the appendices.

[200] See Hintikka, "Aristotle on the Ambiguity of Ambiguity," 138–139. Hintikka's examples show that our modern, narrow use of the term "homonymy" goes back to Aristotle. He argues that that use is the norm in Aristotle's works.

[201] A similar method of displaying the distinction visually is found already in Ibn Balʿam's *Kitāb al-tajnīs*. Although there is only one entry for each set of homonyms, there are two or more lemmas at the beginning of the entry, e.g., חול and חול חול; S. Abramson, שלשה ספרים של רב יהודה בן בלעם (Jerusalem, 1975) 13, 46. In one case, one of the homonyms has a metaphorical meaning, but that is not accorded a separate lemma: אב אב אלאול [בֶּן יְכַבֵּד אָב] ויקע עלי סביל אלמגיאז וכקוי אָבִי אָבִי רֶכֶב . . . יִשְׂרָאֵל. ואלתיאני; Abramson, שלשה ספרים, 9–10.

[202] Hadot, *Simplicius* 3:83.

[203] Ibid.

[204] Küyel [-Türker], "Fârâbi'nin Peri Hermeneias Muhtasari," 49; El-Ajam, *Al-Manṭiq*, 1:141; Zimmermann, *Al-Fārābī's Commentary*, 229.

[205] Efros, "Maimonides' Treatise," p. לה.

[206] A. Dotan, ספר דקדוקי הטעמים לרי אהרן בן משה בן אשר (Jerusalem, 1967) 17; Dotan, "Homonymous Hapax Doublets," 132.

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Hadassi describes a supplementary list which he compiled: ויש מלין שוין בהברת׳ ושנויי׳ בביאור׳ תרין בתרין זוגין נצמדי׳ רבו מארבה כאשר חקרתי וחקקתי ספר תרין בתרין תוספת על שמוני׳ זוגות של בן אשר.[207] That the term נצמדים "yoked together" used by Hadassi in this description is a technical term meaning "homonymous" is shown by the Hebrew title of Ibn Bal^{c}am's collection of homonyms: ספר הצימוד (Arabic כתאב אלתג׳ניס). Hadassi's use of this Hebrew term suggests that it had a broader meaning than *tajnīs*, which refers to paronomasia, i.e., the literary use of homonymy.

[207] Dotan, ספר דקדוקי הטעמים, 17; Dotan, "Homonymous Hapax Doublets," 139.

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