

Polemics, Tradition and Modernity in Hasdai Crescas


Dossier edited and coordinated by José Antonio Fernández López and Alexander Fidora

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Polemics, Tradition and Modernity in Hasdai Crescas¹

Dossier edited and coordinated by José Antonio Fernández López and Alexander Fidora

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Born in Barcelona into an important family of merchants and Torah scholars, Hasdai Crescas (Catalan: Cresques, c. 1340-1411) was one of the leading rabbinical authorities of his time. A disciple of Rabbi Nissim Gerondi (1320-1376) and for many years the political leader of the Jews of Aragon, he was a direct witness to the tragic pogroms of 1391 which marked the beginning of the decline of Jewish life in the Iberian Peninsula. Until his death, Crescas continued to be the main spiritual and community reference for Hispanic Jews, trying to bring cohesion, leadership and comfort to decimated and dissolving Jewish communities in a tremendously hostile context. Beyond his role as representative of the Jewish community of Aragon and as a reference for Hispanic Jewry during its most critical period, as well as an authority in Talmudic studies, he was an exceptional religious polemicist against Christianity and one of the leading medieval Jewish philosophers. If the philosophical-theological work of an eminent Spanish-Jewish intellectual like Abraham ibn Daud (1110-1180), the first peripatetic philosopher of Jewish letters, was almost hidden by the unquestionable relevance and transcendence of the writings and the influence of Maimonides (1138-1204), it could seem to follow that the radical critique carried out by Crescas of Maimonides' philosophy and of some of its philosophical heirs – the result of a heuristic reinterpretation of the halakhic tradition – would remain stranded as well, due to various and complex factors, leading into a sort of blind alley in the history of Jewish and Western philosophy. But perhaps this is not so? Crescas' claim that the peripatetic doctrine and its different interpretations contradict not only the Jewish tradition but also the appropriate empirical and rational understanding of the world should not be understood as an interesting but merely theologically motivated criticism. Rather it represents, in the midst of a tragic and crumbling context, the birth of a new world of philosophical intuitions that bears the undeniable stamp of modernity, which was already dawning in Europe. In the manner of an alchemist who collects diverse elements and materials, some easily recognizable, others concealed, Crescas forges an original philosophical vision and a critique of medieval Aristotelianism that is of a logical, physical

and ontological nature. Thus, he brings together in his work traditional Jewish conceptions, peripatetic sources, the Neoplatonism of Alfonso de Valladolid – the apostate Abner de Burgos (1270-1346) – and the new science of the 14th century, represented by names such as John Buridan and Nicholas Oresme.

That Hasdai Crescas' contribution to Jewish intellectual history amounts to offering a comprehensive alternative to Maimonideanism, the philosophical-theological and halakhic pillars of which are, respectively, the *Moreh Nevukhim* and the *Mishneh Torah*, becomes evident in the introduction to his *magnum opus*, *Or Hashem (Light of the Lord)*. The Torah is, for Crescas, a light that illuminates Jewish existence through precepts and beliefs: its path can only be traversed by those who can discover the splendour of the *Shekhinah*, the Divine Presence. The rational elucidation carried out by Maimonides of the esoteric character of the Torah, as an instrument for individual and collective salvation, appears to Crescas as insufficient, counter-productive and even dangerous. While he does not spare praise throughout *Or Hashem* for the figure of the Cordovan rabbi and the outstanding relevance of his work within Jewish thought, the truth is that Crescas must be considered an implacable critic of Maimonides, and in particular of what he considers the harmful influence of the latter's thought and his responsibility for the deterioration of the spiritual life of the peninsular *aljamas*. In his opinion, a dangerous indeterminacy hovers over the Maimonidean writings due to their excessive hermeneutical liberality and a self-referentiality that seems to consciously ignore the rabbinic authorities, adding to the aura of contingency and contradiction that some precepts and many passages of the Hebrew Bible seem to present. The *Mishneh Torah*, according to Crescas, lacks the three fundamental requirements that must be possessed

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by a work called to reconcile container with content, the source with the water that emanates from it, and the “lamp of God” with the “light of the Lord”: namely, thematic precision, comprehensive exposition and protection against error. Maimonides’ dialectic between the interpretation of the precepts and the (physical and metaphysical) comprehension of the Torah’s notions of mankind and its world results in an indeterminacy that is a consequence, on the one hand, of his effort to obviate the dynamic which is proper to the Talmudic dispute, i.e. the essential root of what halakha itself means, and on the other, of the use of an esoteric hermeneutic approach accessible only to initiates of biblical interpretation.

Crescas’ alternative to the *Mishneh Torah* was never written. That book – comparable in its aspirations to Maimonides’ corpus of precepts, but free of its alleged limitations and errors – would only come down to us as a project and a title (*The Lamp of the Commandment*) mentioned in the introduction of *Or Hashem*. In principle, this inability to reply, or impossibility of replying, to the work of Maimonides in a field such as Talmudic learning – that is, a field in which RaMBaM has been recognized throughout Judaism from the beginning to this day as an authority and a sage – where the skills of Crescas were unquestionable and equally recognized, could lead us to think of *Or Hashem* as a futile and failed enterprise from its very beginning. Crescas’ original determination, of course, coincided with the purpose of anti-Maimonidean polemicists such as Nahmanides who, from the moment the *Guide for the Perplexed* came to light, never ceased to warn of its rational and hermeneutical liberality, its multiple “dangers” and its undermining of Jewish faith and tradition. Expressed in the language of *Or Hashem*, the peripatetic Jews “had become arrogant – though the words of prophecy had been shut up and sealed – in dreams, vanities and foreign ideas”. Maimonides was considered by his detractors as the main representative of the influence of this *hokhmah yevanit* (“Greek wisdom”), a concept that, although not clearly defined in its breadth by any Talmudic source, would serve throughout the Middle Ages as a synonym for agnosticism, rather than for Platonic or peripatetic philosophy. Thus, the philosophy of the Jewish religion that Hasdai Crescas develops in *Or Hashem* is systematically deployed as a type of thought whose premises differ substantially from those of Maimonides. Nevertheless, unlike other previous detractors of the Cordovan thinker, it displays an anti-Aristotelianism that is both original and sophisticated and, therefore, an anti-Maimonideanism that is likewise original and presents new philosophical ideas.

Crescas challenges widely accepted Aristotelian notions of physics and metaphysics, offering alternatives in his attempt to explore their link with tradition. If for Maimonides, as stated in the introduction to the *Guide for the Perplexed*, the foundations of Hebrew wisdom contained in the Torah, that is, the *Ma’aseh bereshit*, “the work or account of Creation”, and the *Ma’aseh merkabah*, “the account of the celestial Chariot”, are fully identified “with physics and metaphysics” respectively, the commitment of Crescas in *Or Hashem* to any particular set of beliefs about the existence of God and His attributes – such as substance, time, movement, eternity or

infinity – is always halfway and critical. From his perspective, neither physics nor metaphysics can provide reliable reasons to justify the foundations of theology. Philosophical arguments can confirm what the Torah teaches; as logical and precise reasoning, their highest aspiration will be not to conflict with the teachings of tradition, but never to establish their fundamental principles. What is at stake here is not only a question of epistemological demarcation. If it were so, the impossibility of determining the positive attributes of God affirmed by Maimonides – and, by extension, his general idea of a necessarily negative theology – could be reconciled with Crescas’ own position on the matter. This, however, is not the case. Crescas’ criticism of Maimonides’ interpretation exhibits a sharpness that reminds one of Yehudah Halevi’s anti-philosophism and, even more directly, of the critical logical mode of Averroes’ diachronic polemic with al-Ghazālī in reply to the latter’s *Self-destruction of the Philosophers* (*Tahāfut al-falāsifa*), refuted by the Commentator in the *Tahāfut al-tahāfut* (*Self-destruction of the Self-destruction*). For Crescas, Maimonides’ use of concepts such as power, act, efficient causality and necessity in relation to God is incompatible with the supposed impossibility of apprehending His quiddity. Crescas is profoundly bewildered by the way in which Maimonides categorically denies the correlation between God and His creatures, while affirming and concluding that God is the cause and first principle of those same creatures, thus maintaining the existence of an evident relationship, capable of being known, between God and His creation.

Crescas’ approach to this as well as to other issues is highly unique and eclectic. Looking more closely into a question as relevant as that of the speakability of the divine, we find how, despite rejecting Maimonides’ argumentative logic, Crescas nevertheless accepts his general conception that human beings cannot understand the true essence of God and that neither can they predicate anything of Him except negatively. Yet, as we can read in *Or Hashem*, there are other modes of attribution that can bridge the gap between human epistemological limitation and divine ontology. There are attributes that “relate” to the essence of God: that is, they do not describe the intimate divine nature, but do express characterizations that accompany it. Possessing the same nature as human attributes, they are infinite in number. Since the quiddity of a substance cannot be conceived separately from its existence, nor its existence separately from the former, “the existence of an attribute cannot be conceived apart from what it describes, nor what it describes apart from the attribute. This includes the absolute good that contains all kinds of perfections” (*Or Hashem* I, 3, 3). Crescas, as we have already mentioned, favours fusion among the magma of his own ideas, which are of diverse origin, regardless of creeds and eras. Thus, for example, the critique of Maimonidean negative rational theology also extends to the position held by Gersonides (1288-1344): that is, to the claim that human attributes and divine attributes are common in essence, but divergent in quantity (*Milhamot ‘Adonai* III, 3). Yet, while Crescas’ theory is in principle a frontal criticism of that theory as well, in its result, surprisingly, it appears rather as a creative development

thereof. And even more surprising, in Crescas' formulation one can perceive an echo of Duns Scotus' critique of the Thomistic reading of the infinity of divine attributes in number and potentiality as posited by Aristotle, as well as of the Neoplatonic vision of Alfonso de Valladolid in his rejection of Aristotelian-Maimonidean thought, namely, the distinction between the indefinable essence of God and the attributes related to that essence.

Crescas' attempt to develop a cosmology against the grain of Aristotelian physics is one of his most important contributions to the history of philosophy. Crescas, as always, draws on a series of eclectic sources in an original way for his purpose of offering a personal vision on the matter. Some of his best-known opinions include the existence of a vacuum, the postulation of an infinity of worlds and the existence of time without movement. The critique of the physical-cosmological writings of the Stagirite is, by extension, a questioning of the reception of this corpus, synthesized by Maimonides in the "twenty-six propositions" of the introduction to part II of the *Guide for the Perplexed*, which was also commented upon by Averroes and Gersonides. But there is more to it, for the detailed examination of the peripatetic doctrine is the starting point for the development, by Crescas, of a new cosmological conception that includes an alternative to Aristotelian conceptions of infinity, magnitude, place, void, movement, time, power, matter and form. As is well known, these ideas are essential for physics, cosmology and mathematics as they were conceived by the new paradigm developed in the modern era. Let us mention only in passing that Hasdai Crescas, going well beyond Aristotle, claims the possibility of an infinite magnitude compatible with circular movement, accepts the possibility of the existence of the vacuum in terms of an infinite incorporeal extension, and affirms the possibility of an infinite number of causes and effects. Since the beginning of the last century, scholars have demonstrated that such ideas on the part of a thinker destined to be forgotten or relegated to a sort of philosophical no-man's-land by the Western canon in fact have more implications and connections than their inconspicuous history suggests. The seminal investigations by Harry A. Wolfson, for example, showed and examined the nature of the influence of Crescas on Spinoza (1632-1677): how Spinoza's discussion of the idea of infinity developed in the *Ethics* (I, 15), as well as the arguments against its existence and their refutation, are taken directly from Crescas. Likewise, the similarities between Crescas and Giordano Bruno (1548-1600) have not gone unnoticed by scholars of the work of the Jewish thinker, although Bruno never quotes Crescas directly. While we cannot establish a direct connection between the two, some dialectical arguments against the plurality of worlds breathe a certain air of familiarity with the critical appreciations that Crescas makes in *Or Hashem* (I, 2).

But *Or Hashem* is not the only relevant contribution from the intellectual point of view of Hasdai Crescas. The rabbi of Barcelona dedicated his life to public service as a community leader in desperate times for Hispanic Jewry during the 14th and 15th centuries. Despite conditioning and limitations of all kinds that diminished his ability to produce an even more relevant philosophical-theological legacy, Crescas was

able to write some remarkable texts that show his genius and sharpness, as well as his awareness of his responsibilities as a political leader. In this latter sense, the "Letter to the Jews of Avignon", written immediately after the pogroms of the ill-fated year 1391, is an account of the unimaginable horrors suffered by Jewish communities – mass conversions, suicides, deaths, and the loss of great Torah scholars – which also reflects Crescas' personal tragedy: that is, the murder of his only son. This letter is not only a plea against the destruction of communities full of vitality and deeply rooted in peninsular life, but it is also a theological-political document in the sense of a declaration of principles, which describes an ideological and strategic position from which to reach out to a hypothetical Christian interlocutor capable of putting an end to the persecutions and the state of exception of Hispanic Judaism.

If the social unrest and economic tensions in Castile and Aragon were a determining factor in the development of the persecutions of 1391, no less important was the religious hatred that was latent for decades and finally exacerbated in the form of extreme violence. As a catalyst for a Christian resentment where atavisms and prejudices merged, religious intolerance took a qualitative leap in those years, to the point of an effort to annihilate or make the Other disappear: in this case, the Jew. To counter Christian efforts to convert the Jews, Crescas composed two polemical works, of which only one survives, the *Sefer Bitṭul Iqqare Ha-Noṣrim* (*The Inconsistency of Christian Dogmas*). Although the Jewish polemical tradition can be traced back centuries, this logical-dialectical resource, which relies on philosophical reasoning, is a novelty, which Crescas shares with his contemporary Profiat Duran (c. 1340-1415) and which has as a precedent the *Ta'anot* by Moses ben Solomon of Salerno (13th c.). Written in Catalan around 1397-98, *The Inconsistency* is a work that questions Christian dogma with logico-philosophical arguments and without resorting to quotes from the Bible. In its pages, Crescas, who demonstrates a deep knowledge of Christian theology and dogma, offers reasoned arguments to refute the fundamental principles of Christianity based on some "general principles" that he considers necessary for the correct approach to the controversy. This methodological decision is, in turn, the consequence of how Crescas understands, in very precise terms, the faith-reason relation, which is applicable to both Judaism and Christianity: faith does not force the intellect to believe something contradictory; divine power does not contradict the first logical principles or their conclusions; divinity seeks the good of the human being and leads it to maximum perfection. In the subsequent rational debate between the Jewish and Christian positions, the consistency of the previous logical and methodological principles is reinforced by Crescas using two complementary assumptions which are key to his way of reasoning. First is the assumption that if the argument of each of the two religions in the polemic is similar in its result, although different in the forms of its presentation, the Jewish position owns, by its own historical-salvific logic and the original possession of the divine Law, a "presumption of veracity". The second assumption is that faith is the final and determining element and the most sublime knowledge, which can only be criticized in

terms of the logical non-contradiction of “arguments free of all doubt”. For Crescas, the inconsistency of Christianity lies in the fact that its beliefs apparently lead the intellect to contradiction: it is a religion that embraces a conception of God and doctrinal principles – the idea of original sin, the mystery of the Trinity and the virginal conception of Jesus – which seem to be absurd and to come into contradiction with reason.

Although *The Inconsistency of Christian Dogmas* was Crescas' most direct intellectual response to the pogroms of 1391, the arguments he put forward in favour of God's infinite love in *Or Hashem* and his profound reflections on the meaning of faith and its relationship with the history of the Jewish people were also a response to the difficulties he and his community experienced. In fact, he had already addressed the reconciliation of faith, rationality and the future of history in his *Sermon for Passover*. As we have previously noted, Hasdai Crescas was a renowned Talmudist, a halakha specialist whose commentaries and sermons, many of them lost, influenced the spiritual life of the Jewish communities in exile. Some of his *responsa* are known because they were quoted by later halakhists, but this *Sermon* is his only work containing halakhic material that has come down to us in its entirety. Studying the manuscript collections at Harvard and in the Vatican, Aviezer Ravitzky from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem first identified the text of the *Sermon*, its distinctive character and the undeniable resemblance between its ideas and those of *Or Hashem*, publishing it in 1988. Although it is a short text, it is undoubtedly complex and covers, along the lines of the homilies of the *Shabbath ha-Gadol*, halakhic themes and theological reflections. In the *Sermon*, Crescas inquires about the experience of faith and its epitome in Jewish history in the form of the radical experience of the original Passover. Close to the Christian scholastic philosophy of Aquinas and Scotus from a methodological and a hermeneutical – though not from a doctrinal – point of view, the rabbi of Barcelona develops, from the meaning of the Easter event, a remarkable anthropological theory of miracles that is inspired by Avicenna (c. 980-1037) and by his own teacher Nissim of Girona. In his opinion, two questions must be clarified in particular: whether faith is, in general terms, an act of the will, and secondly, what role miracles play in the experience of faith. Crescas deals with these questions from a point of view in which the philosophical and theological perspective come together in the search for a general understanding of the phenomenon. This point of view also includes a prophetological inquiry, since miracles can have an actor or an individual as their protagonist. Thus, the performance of miracles is attributed to a series of specific qualities that are present in the “protagonist” or “doer” of the miracle, rather than to the unexpected rupture of the natural order thanks to divine action or to the instantiation of the divinity in the natural processes of Creation. The link between the will and religious faith is decisive in this matter, a question that is not incidental if we consider the historical kernel of Jewish faith and the role of this *emunah* in the face of the difficulties and hardships of life in exile. If miracles and prophecy, and the Sinaitic revelation, transcend personal will and can force a witness to these phenomena to believe, then what is the point

of a religion conceived as an experience where belief is rewarded and disbelief is punished? A required faith, which is the result of miracles, does not seem to leave room for human choice. Crescas responds to this question in the *Sermon for Passover*, as in all his works, in a subtle and reasonable way: faith cannot be a self-imposed obligation, but we can choose what kind of faith to have: a joyful or a rancorous faith, a sanguine or a melancholic one, a faith open to a rational understanding of its conditions or a faith alien to any rational effort and therefore, as the Torah says, to the pleasure and joy of service: “Choose life, then, so that you and your descendants may live” (Dt 30, 19).

These and other fundamental questions and topics are addressed in the two sections of the dossier on Hasdai Crescas that are offered in this and the next issue of the journal. A first step towards understanding the place of Crescas' intellectual production within Judaism itself is the study of the community reality of the Hispanic *aljamas*, their evolution and their dissolution, and their links with contemporary Christian political structures. Thus, the Ordinances of 1396, drawn up by Hasdai Crescas as the political leader of the Jews of Aragon, are a privileged example of the theological-political ideology of the Jewish elite in times of exceptionality; at the same time, they highlight the nature of community organization as it had developed over previous centuries. The article by Mario Macías from the Autonomous University of Barcelona, “The King and Jewish Authority: Political Foundations of the Catalan Jewish Communities in Royal Domains (14th C.)”, offers an introduction to the legal and political context of the Catalan Jewish communities in the century and a half prior to the pogroms of 1391. His contribution shows the complex interplay of circumstances, prescriptions and theoretical foundations that would shape the social environment of the Catalan-Aragonese Jews, based on a comparative study of Jewish and non-Jewish sources. Jewish community self-government was built from a convergence of interests: those of royal legislation, and the normative and theoretical production of the communities themselves. This complex reality was subject to the permanent vertigo of changing circumstances. Hasdai Crescas is a paramount example of a Jewish leader in whom the traditional figures of the *nasi* and the *gaon*, the statesman and the Talmudic scholar, merge – a mediator capable of managing the “privileges” and exemptions granted by the Christian monarchs to their Jewish subjects, while also providing a theoretical and regulatory framework in the form of a communal legal project.

The subsequent three articles in this dossier account for the heuristic nature of Crescas' philosophical ideas and intuitions as well as for their influence on the history of thought, fundamentally on science and philosophy as they developed in the modern period. The decisive character of Crescas' thought as a set of alternative intellectual intuitions to the medieval worldview, along with his vehement criticism of the Aristotelian paradigm transmitted by the *falsafa*, is addressed by Alexandre Leone, from the University of São Paulo, in “Infinity, Divine Transcendence and Immanence in *Or Hashem*”. His analysis of Crescas' *opus maior* focuses on the Catalan rabbi's criticism of Maimonides' use of this Islamic Aristotelianism in his

attempt to corroborate and prove the existence, unity and incorporeality of God, God being presented in the *Moreh Nevukhim* as a necessary and absolutely transcendent being in contrast to the contingency of the world. Leone highlights how Crescas elaborates, in *Or Hashem*, an alternative concept of necessary being. This concept is alternative because in it the antithetical notions of divine immanence and transcendence allow for a new understanding of necessary being that accommodates, in relational terms, both the one, simple and ineffable essence of the divinity and its infinite attributes. As a consequence of this link, Crescas argues that the universe, though ontologically contingent, is infinite in its actuality, God being the first, eternal and constant cause, the entelechy and “Place of the World”. In “The Death of the Heavens: Crescas and Spinoza on the Uniformity of the World”, José María Sánchez de León from the University of Barcelona analyses the role of Crescas and his imprint on Baruch Spinoza in the transition from medieval cosmology to the modern conception of the cosmos. Crescas provides an important example of the way in which the dialectic between the peripatetic conception and the worldview present in revelation causes – despite the primacy and normative nature of the latter – the substitution of the Aristotelian paradigm, paving the way for the modern conception of the universe. Some of the most suggestive and innovative ideas (though they have deep traditional roots) presented by Crescas in *Or Hashem* would be further developed by Spinoza, who radicalizes some of their fundamental features. This radicalization, Sánchez de León argues, undermines the traditional notion of the *Deus absconditus* and causes Spinoza to replace religion with philosophy as “authentic divine revelation”. The articles in this dossier strongly suggest that Hasdai Crescas’ critical reflections on the ontological substance of Aristotelian physics are essential to understanding the modern worldview. In this vein, Miguel Ángel Granada from the University of Barcelona examines in his contribution the conception of infinite space and time in Hasdai Crescas and its possible influence on the work of Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola and of Giordano Bruno. The presence of Crescas, explicit in Pico’s *Examen vanitatis* (1520), was

extended to Bruno by Harry A. Wolfson. By means of a careful comparison of the criticisms of peripatetic philosophy made by Hasdai Crescas and by Bruno, Granada arrives at a different and far more nuanced conclusion, however: with the exception of two items, Bruno was able to develop his positions independently of Crescas – that is, from his own critical reading of Aristotle and his knowledge of the developments of medieval scholasticism and the Neoplatonic concept of time. Crescas’ singular and distinctive definition of space and time as divine attributes in a purely metaphorical sense is absent from Pico. It appears in Bruno, however, in terms of a definition of space, time and matter as infinite and real attributes of a God who is intellect, space and matter insofar as He is the indifferent unity of opposites.

Finally, in “Hasdai Cresques’s Impact on Fifteenth-Century Iberian Jewish Philosophy and Polemics”, Daniel J. Lasker from the Department of Jewish Thought at Ben Gurion-University of the Negev investigates the causes that could justify the sad and paradoxical fate of the work of a thinker of the intellectual stature of Crescas. Although his works are currently studied with interest in academia, his impact on traditional Judaism has been almost non-existent. The fact that he did not develop his legal and Talmudic work distanced him from the very beginning from those whom Rabbinic Judaism considers as fundamental sources and references. His philosophical work, suggestive and provocative as an alternative to Aristotelianism/Maimonideanism, is complex to read, more apt to provoke a renewed “perplexity” due to its content and form than to dissolve it. Lasker points out that, although Crescas was remembered and valued in the century immediately following his death, in that same period one could already glimpse what would end up being the causes of his subsequent oblivion. The history of the reception of Crescas’ work in the 15th century demonstrates the extent to which his polemical, dogmatic and philosophical positions were largely rejected, even by those who were considered his closest followers.

[es] Polemismo, tradición y modernidad en Hasdai Crescas

Monográfico editado y coordinado por José Antonio Fernández López y Alexander Fidora

Nacido en Barcelona, en el seno de una importante familia de comerciantes y estudiosos de la Torá, Hasdai Crescas² (en catalán: Cresques, c. 1340-1411) fue una de las principales autoridades rabínicas de su tiempo. Discípulo de Rab Nissim Gerondi (1320-1376), como líder político de los judíos de Aragón será testigo directo de los trágicos pogromos de 1391, inicio del ocaso de la vida judía en la península

ibérica. Hasta su muerte, Crescas continuará siendo el principal referente espiritual y comunitario de los judíos hispanos, intentando aportar, en un contexto tremendamente hostil, cohesión, liderazgo y consuelo a unas comunidades judías diezmadas y en descomposición. Hasdai Crescas, en cualquier caso, más allá de su papel como representante de la comunidad judía de Aragón y como referente de la judería hispana durante su periodo más crítico, así como de su relevancia como autoridad talmúdica, fue un excepcional polemista religioso contra el cristianismo y es uno de los principales filósofos judíos medievales. Si la obra filosófico-teológica de un eminente intelectual hispanojudío como Abraham ibn Daud (1110-1180), el primer peripatético de las letras

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judías, quedó cuasi oculta por la incuestionable relevancia y trascendencia de los escritos y el influjo de Maimónides (1138-1204), la crítica radical de la filosofía maimonidiana y de algunos de sus herederos filosóficos llevada a cabo por Crescas, fruto de una reinterpretación heurística de la tradición halájica, quedará varada, merced a diversos y complejos factores, condenada a una suerte de callejón sin salida en la historia de la filosofía judía y occidental. O, tal vez, no tanto. Su denuncia de que la doctrina peripatética y sus distintas interpretaciones contradicen no sólo la tradición judía, sino también la verdadera comprensión empírica y racional del mundo, no debe entenderse solamente como una sugerente interpretación crítica de inspiración teológica, sino que representa, en medio de un contexto trágico y que se desmorona, el alumbramiento de un nuevo mundo de intuiciones filosóficas que tiene el sello innegable de una Modernidad que ya se alumbraba en Europa. Al modo de un alquimista que hace acopio de elementos y materiales diversos, reconocibles unos, intuitivos otros, Crescas reúne en su obra la concepción judía tradicional, las fuentes peripatéticas, el neoplatonismo de Alfonso de Valladolid –el apóstata Abner de Burgos (1270-1346)– y la nueva ciencia del siglo XIV, representada por nombres como Juan Buridán y Nicolás Oresme, para fraguar una original visión filosófica y una crítica del aristotelismo medieval de naturaleza lógica, física y ontológica.

Que la pretensión de Hasdai Crescas como intelectual judío es nada menos que ofrecer una alternativa integral al maimonidismo, cuyos pilares filosófico-teológicos y halájicos son, respectivamente, el *Moré nebujim* y la *Mishné Torá*, queda claro en la introducción de su obra magna, *Or Hashem* (*Luz del Señor*). La Torá es, para Crescas, una luz que ilumina mediante los preceptos y las creencias la existencia judía, un camino tan sólo transitable para aquellos capaces de descubrir el resplandor de la *Shejiná*, de la Divina Presencia. La dilucidación racional llevada a cabo por Maimónides del carácter esotérico de la Torá, como instrumento para la salvación individual y colectiva, se le presenta a Crescas como insuficiente, contraproducente y “peligrosa”. Por más que no ahorre elogios a lo largo y ancho de *Or Hashem* a la figura del rabí cordobés y a la absoluta relevancia de su obra dentro del pensamiento judío, lo cierto es que Crescas se nos presenta como un crítico implacable de Maimónides, de lo que él considera influencia nociva de su pensamiento y de la responsabilidad de este en el deterioro de la vida espiritual de las aljamas peninsulares. Una peligrosa indeterminación se cierne, a su juicio, sobre los escritos maimonidianos por su excesiva liberalidad hermenéutica y por una autoreferencialidad que parece ignorar conscientemente a las autoridades rabínicas, lo cual enfatiza el aura de contingencia y de contradicción que algunos preceptos y muchos pasajes de la Biblia hebrea parecen presentar. La *Mishné Torá* carecería, según Crescas, de los tres requisitos fundamentales que debe poseer una obra llamada a conciliar continente y contenido, la fuente y el agua que emana de ella, la “lámpara de Dios” y la “luz del Señor”, a saber, precisión temática, exposición comprensiva y preservación del error. La dialéctica maimonidiana entre la interpretación de los preceptos y la comprensión (física y metafísica) del mundo y del hombre que se

alumbran en la Torá, tiene como resultado una indeterminación que es consecuencia, por un lado, de su empeño en obviar la dinámica propia de la disputa talmúdica, raíz esencial de lo que significa la propia halajá, y, por otro, del uso de una hermenéutica de naturaleza esotérica sólo para iniciados en la interpretación bíblica.

La alternativa cresquiana a la *Mishné Torá* nunca fue escrita. Ese libro comparable en sus aspiraciones al corpus de preceptos de Maimónides, pero libre de sus limitaciones y errores, quedará tan sólo en un proyecto y un título (*La lámpara del mandamiento*) apuntados en la introducción de *Or Hashem*. En principio, esta incapacidad o imposibilidad de hacer frente a la obra de Maimónides en un ámbito como el talmúdico –recordémoslo, un ámbito en el que RaMBaM es reconocido desde el principio y hasta nuestros días como una autoridad y un sabio por todo el judaísmo–, allí donde las competencias de Crescas eran incuestionables y reconocidas también, podría llevarnos a pensar en *Or Hashem* como una empresa fútil y fracasada desde su propio inicio. Su determinación original, desde luego, coincidía con el propósito de polemistas antimaimonidianos como Nahmánides que, desde el mismo momento en que la *Guía de perplejos* salió a la luz, no dejaron de advertir sobre su liberalidad racional y hermenéutica, sobre sus múltiples “peligros” y su socavamiento de la fe y la tradición judías. Expresado con el lenguaje de *Or Hashem*, los peripatéticos judíos “se habían ensoberbecido –aunque las palabras de la profecía habían sido cerradas y selladas– en sueños y vanidades y en ideas extranjeras”. Maimónides era considerado por sus detractores como el principal representante del influjo de esta *hojmá yevanit* (“sabiduría griega”), un concepto que, aunque no definido con claridad y en su amplitud por ninguna fuente talmúdica, lo cierto es que a lo largo de toda la Edad Media vendrá a significar un sinónimo de agnosticismo, más que de filosofía platónica o peripatética. Así, la filosofía de la religión judía que Hasdai Crescas desarrolla en *Or Hashem* se despliega sistemáticamente como un pensamiento cuyas premisas quieren diferir substancialmente de las de Maimónides, pero que, sin embargo, a diferencia de otros detractores anteriores del cordobés hace gala de un antiaristotelismo original y sofisticado y, por ende, de un antimaimonidismo que, en su formulación también original, alumbraba nuevos contenidos filosóficos.

Crescas desafía concepciones aristotélicas de la física y la metafísica ampliamente aceptadas, ofreciendo alternativas en la búsqueda de una dilucidación de sus vínculos con la tradición. Si para Maimónides, tal como afirma en la introducción a la *Guía de perplejos*, los fundamentos de la sabiduría hebrea contenidos en la Torá, es decir, el *Ma’asé bereshit*, “la obra o relato de la Creación”, y el *Ma’asé merkabá*, “el relato del carro celeste”, se identifican de forma plena “con la física y la metafísica”, respectivamente, el compromiso de Crescas en *Or Hashem* con cualquier conjunto particular de creencias sobre la existencia de Dios y sus atributos, la substancia, el tiempo, el movimiento, la eternidad o el infinito, será siempre a medias y de forma crítica. Desde su perspectiva, ni la física ni la metafísica pueden aportar motivos fiables que permitan justificar los fundamentos de la teología. Los argumentos filosóficos

pueden confirmar aquello que la Torá enseña; como razonamientos lógicos y precisos, su máxima aspiración será no entrar en conflicto con las enseñanzas de la tradición, nunca establecer sus principios fundamentales. Pero, no se trata simplemente de una cuestión de demarcación epistemológica. Si fuera así, por ejemplo, la imposibilidad de la determinación de los atributos positivos de Dios afirmada por Maimónides –y, por extensión, su idea general de una necesaria teología negativa– podría conciliarse con la propia posición de Crescas al respecto, cosa que no ocurre. La crítica a la interpretación de Maimónides exhibe una mordacidad que nos recuerda lejanamente al antifilosofismo de Yehudá Haleví y, de forma mucho más directa, al modo lógico-crítico de la polémica diacrónica de Averroes con Algazel a cuenta de su *Destrucción de los filósofos (Tahâfot al-falâsifa)*, refutada por el Comentador en el *Tahâfot al-tahâfot (Autodestrucción de la autodestrucción)*. Para Crescas, el uso de los conceptos de potencia, acto, causalidad eficiente o necesidad en relación con Dios por Maimónides es incompatible con la supuesta imposibilidad de aprehensión de su quiddidad. No deja de sorprender a Crescas el modo en que Maimónides niega taxativamente la correlación entre Dios y sus criaturas, a la vez que afirma y concluye que Dios es causa y primer principio de esas mismas criaturas, es decir, la existencia de una relación evidente –susceptible de ser conocida– entre él y su creación.

El enfoque de Crescas en esta como en otras cuestiones es sumamente singular y ecléctico. Siguiendo con un asunto tan relevante como el de la decibilidad de lo divino, encontramos cómo, a pesar de rechazar la lógica argumentativa de Maimónides, acepta, sin embargo, su concepción general de que el ser humano no puede entender la verdadera esencia de Dios y que tampoco puede predicar de él sino negativamente. Junto a ello, tal como podemos leer en *Or Hashem*, hay otros modos de atribución que sí pueden, en este caso, establecer un puente entre la limitación gnoseológica humana y la ontología divina. Hay atributos que son “relativos” a la esencia de Dios, los cuales no describen esta naturaleza íntima divina, pero sí afirman caracterizaciones que la acompañan. Poseedores de la misma naturaleza que los atributos humanos, son infinitos en número. Dado que la quiddidad de una sustancia no puede concebirse aparte de su existencia, ni su existencia aparte de aquella, “la existencia de un atributo no puede concebirse aparte de lo que describe, ni lo que describe aparte del atributo. Esto incluye el bien absoluto que contiene todas las especies de perfecciones” (*Or Hashem* I, 3, 3). Crescas, ya lo hemos mencionado al principio, propicia la fusión en el magma de sus propias ideas, de referencias de origen diverso, al margen de credos y épocas. Así, por ejemplo, esta crítica a la teología racional negativa maimonidiana se hace extensiva a la posición de Gersónides (1288-1344) al respecto y a su opinión de que los atributos humanos y los atributos divinos son comunes en esencia, pero divergentes en cantidad (*Milhamot 'Adonai* III, 3). Siendo la teoría cresquiana, en principio, también una crítica frontal a la teoría de los atributos de Gersónides, termina, sorprendentemente, como un desarrollo creativo de esta. Y más sorprendente aún, en la formulación de Crescas resuenan también

la crítica de Duns Escoto a la lectura tomista de la infinitud de los atributos divinos en número y en potencia postulada por Aristóteles, así como la visión neoplatónica de Alfonso de Valladolid en su rechazo del pensamiento aristotélico-maimonidiano, a saber, la diferenciación entre la esencia indefinible de Dios y los atributos relacionados con esa esencia.

El intento, por parte de Crescas de alumbrar una cosmología a contrapelo de la física aristotélica es una de sus contribuciones más importantes a la historia de la filosofía. Crescas, como siempre, se nutre de un conjunto de fuentes eclécticas de forma original en su propósito de ofrecer una visión personal al respecto. Algunas de sus opiniones más conocidas incluyen la existencia del vacío, la postulación de una infinitud de mundos o la existencia de tiempo sin movimiento. La crítica a los escritos físico-cosmológicos del Estagirita es, en extensión, un cuestionamiento de la recepción de este corpus, sintetizado por Maimónides en las “veintiséis proposiciones” en la introducción a la parte II de la *Guía de perplejos*, comentado también profusamente por Averroes y Gersónides. Pero no sólo. Esta pormenorizada revisión de la doctrina peripatética es el punto de partida para el desarrollo, por parte de Crescas, de una nueva concepción cosmológica que recoge una alternativa a la concepción aristotélica del infinito, la magnitud, el lugar, el vacío, el movimiento, el tiempo, la fuerza, la materia y la forma. Estas ideas son, como bien sabemos, esenciales para la física, la cosmología y la matemática, tal como son concebidas en forma de nuevo paradigma por la Modernidad. Digamos como mero apunte que Hasdai Crescas, más allá de Aristóteles, defiende la posibilidad de una magnitud infinita compatible con el movimiento circular, acepta la posibilidad de la existencia del vacío como una sugerente extensión incorpórea infinita o afirma la posibilidad de un número infinito de causas y efectos. Que tales intuiciones por parte de un pensador abocado al olvido o situado en una suerte de *no-man's-land* filosófica por el canon occidental poseen más implicaciones y conexiones de las que ese precario estatus manifiesta, es algo que algunos estudiosos desde comienzos del pasado siglo no han hecho más que evidenciar. Las investigaciones seminales de Harry A. Wolfson mostraron y clarificaron ya, por ejemplo, la naturaleza de la influencia de Crescas en Spinoza (1632-1677), cómo la discusión spinoziana de la idea de infinito desarrollada en la *Ética* (I, 15), a la vez que los argumentos contrarios a su existencia y su refutación están tomados directamente de Crescas. Por su parte, las similitudes entre Crescas y Giordano Bruno (1548-1600) no son algo que haya pasado inadvertido a los estudiosos de la obra del pensador judío. Bruno nunca cita a Crescas directamente. Sin que pueda probarse la conexión directa entre ambos, sin embargo, algunas argumentaciones dialécticas en contra de la pluralidad de mundos respiran un cierto aire de familia con las presentaciones críticas que Crescas realiza en *Or Hashem* (I, 2).

Pero, no es *Or Hashem* la única aportación relevante desde el punto de vista intelectual de Hasdai Crescas. El rabino barcelonés dedicó su vida al servicio público como líder comunitario en unos tiempos de desesperación para la judería hispana en el tránsito de los siglos XIV-XV. A pesar de condicionamientos y limitaciones de toda clase que mermaron

su capacidad para producir un legado filosófico-teológico aún más relevante, Crescas fue capaz de redactar algunos escritos notables que dan muestra de su genio y agudeza, así como de la conciencia de su responsabilidad como líder político. En este último sentido, la “Epístola a los judíos de Aviñón”, escrita inmediatamente después de los pogromos del infausto año de 1391, es un relato de los horrores inimaginables que padecieron las comunidades judías –conversiones masivas, suicidios, muertes y la pérdida de grandes eruditos de la Torá–, así como de la propia tragedia personal de Crescas, el asesinato de su único hijo. Esta carta no es sólo un alegato frente a la destrucción de unas comunidades plenas de vitalidad e imbricadas plenamente en la vida peninsular, sino que es un documento teológico-político en clave de declaración de principios, de toma de posición ideológica y estratégica que quiere ofrecerse a un hipotético interlocutor cristiano capaz de poner fin a las persecuciones y al estado de excepción del judaísmo hispano.

Si la agitación social y las tensiones económicas en Castilla y Aragón fueron un componente determinante en el desarrollo de las persecuciones de 1391, no menos importante lo fue el odio religioso larvado durante décadas y exacerbado, finalmente, en forma de violencia extrema. Como catalizador de un rencor cristiano donde atavismos y prejuicios se fundían, la intolerancia religiosa dio en aquellos años un salto cualitativo hasta el empeño por aniquilar o hacer desaparecer al contrario, en este caso al judío. Para contrarrestar los esfuerzos cristianos por convertir a los judíos, Crescas compuso dos obras polémicas, de las que sólo se conserva una, el *Sefer Bitul Iqqare Ha-Nošrim* (*La inconsistencia de los dogmas cristianos*). Pudiendo remontarse la tradición polemista judía siglos atrás, sin embargo, este recurso lógico-dialéctico, el uso de razonamientos filosóficos, supone una novedad, que Crescas comparte contemporáneamente con Profiat Durán (c. 1340-1415) y que tiene como precedente los *Ta’anot* de Moisés ben Salomón de Salerno (s. XIII). Escrita en catalán alrededor de 1397-98, *La inconsistencia* es una obra que cuestiona el dogma cristiano con argumentos lógico-filosóficos y sin recurrir a citas de la Biblia. En sus páginas, Crescas, que demuestra un profundo conocimiento de la teología y el dogma cristiano, ofrece argumentos razonados para rebatir los principios fundamentales del cristianismo a partir de unos “principios generales” que considera necesarios para el correcto planteamiento de la polémica. Esta decisión metodológica es, a su vez, la explicitación de cómo entiende Crescas, en términos precisos, la dialéctica fe-razón, concepción aplicable tanto al judaísmo como al cristianismo: la fe no fuerza al intelecto a creer algo contradictorio; el poder divino no contradice los primeros principios lógicos ni sus conclusiones; la divinidad busca el bien del ser humano y le conduce a la máxima perfección. En el debate racional subsiguiente entre las posiciones judía y cristiana, la consistencia de los principios lógicos y metodológicos anteriores es reforzada por Crescas con dos presupuestos complementarios, a la vez que decisivos: si la argumentación de cada una de las dos religiones en la polémica es similar en su resultado, aunque diferente en sus formas de presentación, la posición judía posee, por la propia lógica

histórico-salvífica y la posesión original de la Ley divina, “presunción de veracidad”; la fe es, en cualquier caso, el elemento final determinante, el conocimiento más excelso, tan sólo cuestionable en su modo de presentación por la no-contradicción lógica de los “argumentos libres de toda duda”. La inconsistencia del cristianismo, a fin de cuentas, estriba para Crescas en que es un conjunto de creencias que conducen al intelecto a la contradicción, una religión que vendría a sostener la concepción de un Dios que parece tornar plausible el absurdo de una doctrina cuyos principios, entre los que se encuentran junto a otros dogmas la idea de pecado original, el misterio de la trinidad o la concepción virginal de Jesús, entran en contradicción con la razón.

Aunque *La inconsistencia de los dogmas cristianos* fue la respuesta intelectual más directa de Crescas a los pogromos de 1391, sin embargo, los argumentos que esgrime en favor del amor infinito de Dios en *Or Hashem* y sus profundas reflexiones sobre el sentido de la fe y su relación con la historia del pueblo hebreo, fueron también una respuesta a las dificultades que vivieron él y su comunidad. De hecho, la conciliación de la fe, la racionalidad y el devenir de la historia, ya había sido abordada previamente por él en su *Sermón de Pascua*. Como hemos comentado anteriormente, Hasdai Crescas fue un reputado talmudista, un especialista en la halajá cuyos comentarios y sermones, muchos de ellos perdidos, influyeron en la vida espiritual de las comunidades judías del exilio. Algunos de sus *responsa* son conocidos porque fueron citados por halajistas posteriores, pero este *Sermón* es la única obra cresquiana que contiene material halájico y que ha llegado a nosotros íntegra. A partir del estudio de manuscritos de las colecciones de Harvard y del Vaticano, el profesor de la Universidad Hebrea de Jerusalén Aviezer Ravitzky, identificó el texto del *Sermón*, su carácter distintivo y el innegable parecido entre sus ideas y las de *Or Hashem*, publicándolo en 1988. Aunque se trata de un texto de reducida extensión, posee una indudable complejidad y abarca, en la línea de las homilias del *Shabat ha-Gadol*, temas halájicos y reflexiones teológicas. En el *Sermón*, Crescas indaga sobre la experiencia fiducial y su epitome en la historia judía bajo la forma de la experiencia radical de la Pascua primigenia. Cercano a la filosofía escolástica cristiana de Aquino y Escoto desde el punto de vista metodológico y hermenéutico, mas no doctrinal, el rabino barcelonés desarrolla, a partir de la comprensión del acontecimiento pascual, una sugerente teoría antropológica de los milagros que se inspira en Avicena (c. 980-1037) y en su maestro Nissim Gerondi. Dos cuestiones, en particular, deben, a su juicio, ser dilucidadas: si la fe es, en términos generales, un acto de voluntad y, en segundo lugar, cuál es el papel que los milagros desempeñan en la experiencia de fe. Crescas trata estas cuestiones desde un punto de vista en el que lo filosófico y lo teológico se aúnan en la búsqueda de una comprensión general del fenómeno, lo cual incluye, también, dado que los milagros pueden tener como protagonista un actor o un individuo, una indagación profetológica. Así, la realización de milagros se atribuye a ciertas cualidades especiales que residen en el “protagonista” u “hacedor” de los mismos, no tanto a la repentina ruptura del orden natural merced a la acción divina

o a la implantación de la divinidad en la naturaleza de la Creación. El vínculo entre la voluntad y la fe religiosa es determinante en este asunto, una cuestión nada accesoria si tenemos en cuenta la substancia histórica de la fe judía y lo decisivo de esta *emuná* frente a la intemperancia y las dificultades de la vida en el exilio. Si los milagros y la profecía, si la revelación sinaítica trascienden la voluntad personal y pueden obligar a un testigo de estos fenómenos a creer, ¿qué sentido tiene entonces una religión concebida como una experiencia donde se recompensa el creer y se castiga la incredulidad? Una fe exigida o resultado de los milagros no parece necesitar de la elección humana. Crescas responde a esta cuestión en el *Sermón de Pascua* del mismo modo que en toda su obra, de forma sutil y razonable: la fe no puede ser una obligación autoimpuesta, pero sí podemos elegir qué clase de fe tener, gozosa o rencorosa, alegre o melancólica; una fe abierta a comprender racionalmente sus circunstancias o una fe ajena a cualquier esfuerzo racional y, por ende, tal como reza la Torá, al placer y a la alegría del servicio: “escoge la vida para que vivas tú y tu descendencia” (Dt 30, 19).

Todas estas y otras cuestiones y temáticas fundamentales son abordadas en las dos secciones del monográfico sobre Hasdai Crescas que se ofrecen en este y en el próximo número de la revista. Una aproximación necesaria para comprender el destino dentro del propio judaísmo del corpus cresquiano es el estudio de la realidad comunitaria de las aljamas hispanas, de su evolución y de su disolución, de sus vínculos con las estructuras políticas cristianas contemporáneas a las mismas. Así, las Ordenanzas de 1396, redactadas por Hasdai Crescas como líder político de los judíos de Aragón, son un ejemplo privilegiado del ideario teológico-político de la élite judía en tiempos de excepcionalidad que, al mismo tiempo, ponen en evidencia la naturaleza de la organización comunitaria tal como se había desarrollado desde los siglos anteriores. El artículo del profesor de la Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona, Mario Macías, “The King and Jewish Authority: Political Foundations of the Catalan Jewish Communities in Royal Domains (14th C.)”, ofrece una visión general del contexto jurídico y político de las comunidades judías catalanas en el siglo y medio previo a los pogromos de 1391. Su contribución muestra la compleja red de circunstancias, prescripciones y fundamentaciones teóricas que darán forma al entorno social de los judíos catalano-aragoneses, a partir de un estudio donde se confrontan las fuentes judías y no-judías. El autogobierno comunitario judío se construyó desde la convergencia de intereses de la legislación real y la producción normativa y teórica de las propias comunidades, una realidad poliédrica, sometida al vértigo permanente de circunstancias críticas. Hasdai Crescas es ejemplo personal y privilegiado de un líder judío en el que las figuras tradicionales del *nasí* y el *gaón*, el estadista y el sabio talmúdico, se funden, un mediador capaz de gestionar los “privilegios” y las excepciones concedidas a una comunidad singular por los monarcas cristianos a sus súbditos judíos, a la vez que de formular un marco teórico y normativo, una producción legal comunal.

Del carácter heurístico de las ideas e intuiciones filosóficas cresquianas, así como de su influjo en el pensamiento posterior, fundamentalmente


en la ciencia y la filosofía que se alumbran en la Modernidad, dan cuenta los tres artículos siguientes de la presente sección monográfica. El carácter determinante del pensamiento cresquiano como un conjunto de intuiciones intelectuales alternativas a la comprensión medieval del hombre y el mundo, su crítica vehemente al paradigma aristotélico transmitido por la *falsafa*, son abordados por el profesor de la Universidad de São Paulo, Alexandre Leone, en “Infinity, Divine Transcendence and Immanence in *Or Hashem*”. Su análisis del *opus maior* de Crescas pone el foco en la crítica del rabino catalán al uso, por parte de Maimónides, de este peripatetismo islámico en su intento por sustentar y probar la existencia, unidad e incorporeidad de Dios, presentado en el *Moré nebuqim* como un ser necesario y absolutamente trascendente frente a la contingencia del mundo. Leone trae a colación cómo Crescas elabora en *Or Hashem* un concepto alternativo de Ser necesario. Alternativo, porque en él las nociones antitéticas de inmanencia y trascendencia divinas se abren a una nueva comprensión que da cabida, en clave relacional, tanto a la esencia simple, una e inefable de esa divinidad como a sus infinitos atributos. Como consecuencia de este vínculo, Crescas viene a defender que el universo, ontológicamente contingente, es infinito en su actualidad, siendo Dios así causa primera, eterna y constante, entelequia y “Lugar del Mundo”. José María Sánchez de León, profesor de la Universidad de Barcelona, analiza en “The Death of the Heavens: Crescas and Spinoza on the Uniformity of the World” el papel de Crescas y su impronta en Baruch Spinoza en el tránsito de la cosmología medieval a la moderna concepción del cosmos. Crescas se nos ofrece como un importante ejemplo del modo en que la dialéctica entre la concepción peripatética y la cosmovisión presente en la revelación provoca, a pesar de la primacía y del carácter normativo de la segunda, la substitución del paradigma aristotélico, favoreciendo el camino a la concepción moderna del universo. Algunas de las ideas más sugerentes y novedosas –a pesar de su profunda raíz tradicional– que Crescas presenta en *Or Hashem* serán desarrolladas por Spinoza, el cual radicaliza algunos de sus rasgos fundamentales. Esta radicalización, sostiene Sánchez de León, socava la noción tradicional del *Deus absconditus* y provoca en Spinoza el remplazo de la religión por la filosofía como “auténtica revelación divina”. Que las reflexiones críticas de Hasdai Crescas en torno a la substancia ontológica de la física aristotélica son imprescindibles para comprender la cosmovisión moderna es algo que los artículos de este monográfico reiteran y evidencian. El profesor de la Universidad de Barcelona, Miguel Ángel Granada, examina en su artículo la concepción del espacio infinito y del tiempo en Hasdai Crescas y su influjo posible en la obra de Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola y Giordano Bruno. La presencia de Crescas, explícita en el *Examen vanitatis* (1520) de Pico, fue hecha extensible a Bruno por parte de Harry A. Wolfson. Sin embargo, el artículo del profesor Granada realiza una comparación de la crítica al peripatetismo efectuada por Hasdai Crescas y por Bruno para llegar a unas conclusiones realmente reveladoras: a excepción de dos puntos, Bruno pudo alcanzar sus posiciones con independencia

de Crescas, a partir de su propia lectura crítica de Aristóteles y de su conocimiento de los desarrollos de la escolástica medieval y del concepto neoplatónico del tiempo. La singular y diferencial definición de Crescas del espacio y del tiempo como atributos divinos, en un sentido netamente metafórico, algo que Pico no recoge, es en Bruno, por el contrario, una definición del espacio, del tiempo y de la materia como infinitos y atributos reales de un Dios que es, también, intelecto, espacio y materia, en tanto que unidad indiferente de opuestos.

Para concluir, en "Hasdai Cresques's Impact on Fifteenth-Century Iberian Jewish Philosophy and Polemics", Daniel J. Lasker, profesor emérito del Departamento de Pensamiento Judío de la Universidad Ben Gurión del Néguev, indaga en las causas que podrían justificar el triste y paradójico destino de la obra de un pensador de la talla intelectual de Crescas. Aunque sus obras se estudian en la actualidad con interés en el mundo

académico, sin embargo, su impacto en el judaísmo tradicional ha sido casi inexistente. El hecho de que no desarrollara su obra jurídica y talmúdica, le alejó desde el principio de aquellos a los que el rabinismo considera fuentes y referencias fundamentales. Su obra filosófica, sugerente y provocadora alternativa al aristotelismo-maimonidismo, es de compleja lectura, más apta para suscitar una renovada "perplejidad", por su fondo y por su forma, que para disolverla. Destaca Lasker que, si bien Crescas fue recordado y valorado en el siglo inmediato a su muerte, en ese mismo periodo ya se podían atisbar cuáles terminarían siendo las causas de su olvido posterior. La historia de la recepción de la obra de Crescas en el siglo XV demuestra hasta qué punto sus posturas polémicas, dogmáticas y filosóficas fueron mayoritariamente rechazadas, incluso por aquellos que eran considerados sus seguidores más cercanos.

The King and Jewish Authority: Political Foundations of the Catalan Jewish Communities in Royal Domains (14th C.)

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ENG Abstract: The aim of this article is to offer an overview of the legal and political context of the Catalan Jewish communities between 1240 and 1391. This contribution will synthesize the complex net of factors, rules, and theories that shaped the Catalan Jewry's social environment by combining the use of Hebrew and Christian sources. Communal self-government was built upon the convergence between the royal legislation and the normative and theoretical production of the communities. My objective is to capture this multi-faceted reality. The discussion below will focus on the main privileges granted by the Catalan-Aragonese kings to their Jewish subjects, the political theories developed by the Jewish scholars of the time, and the communal legal production. I will pay special attention to the social and historical elements that boosted the evolution of the communal system.

Keywords: Medieval Catalonia; communal self-government; Jewish political tradition; Jewish *aljamas*.

[es] El rey y la autoridad judía: fundamentos políticos de las comunidades judías catalanas en los dominios reales (s. XIV)

ES Resumen: El presente artículo es una breve aproximación al contexto legal y político de las comunidades judías catalanas entre 1240 y 1391. A través del uso combinado de fuentes hebreas y cristianas, se ofrecerá una síntesis de la compleja red de factores, reglas y teorías que moldearon el ecosistema social de las comunidades hebreas en Cataluña. En este sentido, el autogobierno comunal era el resultado de la convergencia entre la legislación real y la producción normativa y teórica de las comunidades. Nuestro objetivo es presentar el carácter poliédrico de esta realidad a través de los privilegios concedidos por los monarcas aragoneses a sus súbditos judíos, los modelos políticos desarrollados por los intelectuales hebreos, la legislación interna de las comunidades y el conjunto de factores sociales e históricos que impulsaron la evolución del sistema comunal.

Palabras clave: Cataluña medieval; autogobierno comunal; tradición política judía; *aljamas* judías.

Summary: 1) Introduction. 2) Some Notes on the Formal Nature of the Catalan *kehillot*. 3) The Consolidation of the New Political Trends: Shlomo ben Adret. 4) Communal Organization after Shlomo ben Adret. 5) Nissim of Girona and the Division of Communal Power. 6) Conclusions. 7) References.

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1. Introduction

The period covered in this article comprises what might be called the *classical age* of Jewish self-government in Catalonia. Throughout this century and a half, Catalan Jewry reached an unprecedented political sophistication that lasted until the summer of 1391. New political trends reached the Crown from the other side of the Pyrenees and

challenged the political models in force. A concatenation of charismatic and prolific scholars, such as Moshe ben Nahman and Shlomo ben Adret, contributed to reformulating communal approaches to self-government by implementing the so-called "majority rule". Furthermore, the concession of royal privileges granting greater levels of autonomy increased.

The article will begin by presenting the formal elements that composed the elementary framework for Jewish autonomy, as well as the events that redefined communal self-government in the mid-thirteenth century. The focus will be set on the causes and consequences of the overthrowing of the *nasi'im* in the community of Barcelona and on the royal response to the social unrest. A second section will discuss the political views on communal authority and self-government held by one of the key intellectual leaders of the thirteenth-century Catalan Jewry, Shlomo ben Adret. I will then address the contents of the statutes of Barcelona of 1327 as an example of communal ordinances, emphasizing the social circumstances that led to their approval. Finally, I will introduce the most relevant aspects of Nissim of Girona's political thought.¹

2. Some Notes on the Formal Nature of the Catalan

It is worth starting with some remarks on the formal nature of the Jewish communities in the Crown of Aragon, especially in Catalonia. The foundations of Catalan communal structures followed the same path as the rest of the Jewish communities in the Diaspora. The pillars of their self-organizational autonomy were erected upon two main axes. On the one hand, royal privileges provided the basic set of limits and rights for communal self-management and autonomy. These privileges were often royal graces individually conceded to particular *aljamas*, while others aimed at setting common prerogatives of regional scope—that was indeed the general trend from the reign of Peter the Great (1276-1285) onwards. On the other hand, the resulting framework gave grounds to communal scholars and leaders to develop political principles and legal regulations to rule the *kehillot* according to the *halakhah* and their actual needs.

The convergence of both factors placed communal life in a three-dimensional legal ecosystem. Firstly, royal privileges provided the elementary institutional configuration. Moreover, as any other subject, Catalan Jewry was also bound by royal legislation. The inhabitants of the community, as well as the community itself, had the natural duty to obey the lords of the land. In this sense, their autonomy was not absolute. Indeed, the Talmud openly accepts the authority of the host kingdom as a fundamental legal source, as reflected in the statement “the law of

the kingdom is valid law” (דינא דמלכותא דינא, “*dina demelkhuta dina*”)² (BT *Baba Batra* 54b-55a; *Nedarim* 28a; *Gittin* 10b; *Baba Kamma* 113a).³ Some authors have deemed this obedience to the external powers as one of the keys to the survival of the Jewish people as an autonomous social minority.⁴ Secondly, the *aljamas* were entitled to produce their own ordinances and to punish their transgressors. Thirdly, Christian-Jewish coexistence—especially in urban areas—required the development of co-regulative instruments.⁵ Therefore, the legislative environment of the Jewish communities was composed of i) royal/baronial legislation, ii) self-regulatory sources, and iii) co-regulation. Nevertheless, these categories were not unconnected.

Approaches to communal self-government did not remain unalterable throughout the Middle Ages. As with any other political system, it was in a constant evolution conditioned by the emergence of new ideas, the alteration of the inner social balances, their relationship with the external powers, or the omnipresent effects of acculturation.⁶ Changes were often subtle, quiet, and slow. However, punctual extraordinary events also shook the foundations of Catalan Jewry and drastically modified their social tissue. The mid-thirteenth century was one of these turning points. The concatenation of events that occurred at the equator of the century led to a period of political evolution and institutionalization, intense intellectual production, and social transformation. The

¹ Several bibliographical references that are frequently mentioned in the text will be cited using the following abbreviations:

[Adret =] Shlomo ben Abraham ben Adret, *Shelot ve-teshuvot*. 7 vols. Jerusalem: Makhon Yerushalayim, 1996.

[A =] ASSIS, Yom Tov, *The Jews in the Crown of Aragon: Regesta of the Cartas Reales in the Archivo de la Corona de Aragón*, 2 vols. Jerusalem: The Henk Schussheim Memorial Series, 1993-1995.

[B =] Baer, Fritz [Yitzhak], *Die Juden im christlichen Spanien*. Vol. I. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1929.

[BT =] *Talmud Bavli [Babylonian Talmud]* (Hebrew and English). Retrieved from: <https://www.sefaria.org/texts/Talmud>

[J =] Jacobs, Joseph, *An Inquiry into the Sources of the History of the Jews in Spain*. London: David Nutt, 1894.

[R =] Régné, Jean, *History of the Jews in Aragon*. Jerusalem: The Magnes Press and the Hebrew University, 1978.

In all these cases, citations refer not to page numbers, but to specific text sections.

² For an overview on this legal principle, see S. Shilo, *Dina de-Melkhuta Dina*. Jerusalem: Defus Akadekmie be-Yerushalayim, 1975. Catalan Jewish scholars set theoretical boundaries for the duty of obedience. Nahmanides, for example, considered that the Jews were only bound by those prerogatives that were traditionally inherent to royal power (see B. Septimus, “Kings, Coinage and Constitutionalism: Notes on a Responsum of Nahmanides”, *The Jewish Law Annual*, 14 [2003]). Shlomo ben Adret alleged that the *dina de-melkhuta* covers every subject that affects the king's interests (Adret VI: 254). Given the material impossibility of opposing the king's will, these attempts to set limits to royal power were just legal fiction.

³ For all Talmudic references, see *Talmud Bavli [Babylonian Talmud]* (Hebrew and English). Retrieved from: <https://www.sefaria.org/texts/Talmud>

⁴ See, for example, S. W. Baron, *The Jewish Community: Its History and Structure to the American Revolution*. 2 vols. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1942, vol. I, p. 214. Also D. Biale, *Power and Powerless in Jewish History*. New York: Schocken Books, 1986, p. 56.

⁵ Perhaps loans are the most well-known manifestation of this dimension. The distribution of butcheries and slaughterhouses is also a noteworthy example. Butcheries for *kosher* products were usually allocated via privilege or through an agreement between the *aljama* and the *universitat*. In this particular case, co-regulation tended to be problematic and used to lead to disputes between the two parties. Royal arbitration was not unusual. See, for example, the interventions of James II in Barbastro in 1297 (Archive of the Crown of Aragon [ACA], reg. 253, f. 12r [R: 2640]) and of Peter III in Girona in 1342 (ACA, CR, Pedro III, c. 14, n. 1830 [A: 993]).

⁶ Relevant authors like Baer, Feliu, and Assis noticed the influence of local government institutions in communal political organization. As will be discussed below, these influences did not lead to subtle and debatable similarities; on the contrary, the general trend was to equate the institutions and functioning of both kinds of governments. See Y. Baer, *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*. 2 vols. Skokie (Illinois): Varda Books, 2001, vol. I, p. 27. Y. T. Assis, *The Golden Age of Aragonese Jewry*. London: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2008, pp. 67ff. E. Feliu, “Cuatro notes esparses sobre el judaisme medieval”, *Tamid*, 2 (1998-1999), p. 110.

Catalan *kehillot* started what might be called their *classical* period.

At the dawn of the century, Barcelona was under the totalitarian rule of a *nasi'* (נָשִׂיא, “prince”). Bernard Septimus asserted that this traditional form of government could have been the last carryover of Arab influence in the city.⁷ The *nasi'im* were the virtual monarchs of the *aljama*. In that sense, they used to legitimate their power alleging a Davidic ascendance.⁸ The communal aristocracy and intelligentsia were the principal upholders of the regime.⁹ Nevertheless, this well-rooted legitimation did not prevent social unrest from increasing. Popular disconformity progressively swayed this original social order. However, the fall of the *nasi'im* materialized when the scholars withdrew their support. The reasons for this change of position are still unclear. Septimus suggested that it could be linked to the Maimonidean controversy, which was at its peak by then.¹⁰ Elka Klein accepted the same line.¹¹ It appears that the *nasi'im* and the aristocrats largely subscribed to Maimonides' philosophical vies, whose ideas on the prophet-king were useful to legitimate their power.¹² From their side, most Catalan intellectuals—then largely influenced by the mystical and political currents that had flourished beyond the Pyrenees—aligned themselves against the Andalusian rabbi.¹³ Similar events took place in other major cities of the Crown, like Zaragoza.¹⁴

King James I decided to intervene as the situation went out of control. In 1241, he granted a privilege to reformulate the political regime of the *aljama*. The new royal grace gave an end to the ruling of the *nasi'im* and allowed the community to choose two or three delegates to manage its affairs. The victory of the scholars and the popular classes entailed the

introduction of the “majority rule”¹⁵ in Barcelona, a decision-making system developed and popularized by the Tosafist circles in France and the Rhineland.¹⁶ The privilege stated:

Noverint universi, quod nos Jacobus etc. concedimus vobis toti conventui judeorum Barchinone [...] ut possitis eligere inter vos duos vel tres iudeos probos homines et legales vel plures, si volueritis, iuxta cognitionem vestram, qui videant et cognoscant diligenter in personis illis, qui aliquam fecerint stultitiam vel dixerint aliqua injuriosa verba aliis probis hominibus judeis, super quibus valeant ponere penam et bannum, quod habeamus nos et loco nostri detur bajulo nostro Barchinone, et ipsi etiam propria autoritate possint eicere inter vos et de vestro callo judayco [...].¹⁷

In 1272, James I confirmed and improved this privilege.¹⁸ The content was essentially the same: the community could choose representatives to deal with judicial and executive matters. However, the king timidly expanded the prerogatives of the *aljama* or, at least, permitted to understand better the scope of the former privilege. The document states that the leading officials were habilitated to resolve internal matters according to the halakhah (“legem judeorum et bonas consuetudines legis judeorum”, “the law of the Jews and the good Jewish customs”) and that their office could be temporary (“si necesse fuerit pro tempore, ipsos inde remove et alios loco eorum substituere”, “if it were eventually necessary, they could be removed or substituted”). Nevertheless, these points were probably implicit in the privilege of 1241.

The succession of royal privileges conferred to the Catalan *aljamas* in the thirteenth century peaked in 1280. This year, James' successor, his son Peter II the Great, granted a new and unique privilege to all the communities in Catalonia. The new measures considerably enlarged and uniformized communal autonomy. This homogeneity was not absolute since the king could—and indeed he and his successors usually did—grant additional privileges to particular *aljamas* or even to individuals. Notwithstanding the limits of this apparent unification, the privilege provided standardized bases for the internal organization of the communities. The grace permitted the *aljamas* to appoint between two and seven officials

⁷ B. Septimus, “Piety and Power in Thirteenth-Century Catalonia”, in I. Twersky (ed.), *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*. Cambridge (Massachusetts): Harvard University Press, 1979. Also mentioned in D. Gutenmacher, *Political Obligation in the Thirteenth-Century Hispano-Jewish Community*. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Michigan, 1991, p. 65. For the Jewish preferences for personalistic regimes in the Islamic world, see A. Melamed, “Attitudes Towards Democracy in Medieval Jewish Philosophy”, *Jewish Political Studies Review*, 5:1/2 (1993).

⁸ B. Septimus, “Piety and Power in Thirteenth Century Catalonia”, *op. cit.*, p. 205. Y. Baer, *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 92.

⁹ Y. T. Assis, *The Golden Age of Aragonese Jewry*, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

¹⁰ See B. Septimus, “Piety and Power in Thirteenth Century Catalonia”, *op. cit.*, and B. Septimus “Open Rebuke and Concealed Love: Nahmanides and the Andalusian Tradition”, in I. Twersky (ed.), *Rabbi Moses Nahmanides: Studies in His Religious Virtuosity*. Cambridge (Massachusetts): Harvard Center for Jewish Studies, 1983.

¹¹ E. Klein, *Jews, Christian Society, and Royal Power in Medieval Barcelona*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006, pp. 117ff.

¹² For the Maimonidean concept of *prophet-king*, see H. Kreis- el, *Maimonides' Political Thought: Studies in Ethics, Law, and the Human Ideal*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999, especially chapter 1.

¹³ See N. Caputo, *Nahmanides in Medieval Catalonia*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2007, pp. 19ff.

¹⁴ Y. T. Assis, ““Masheber be-kehillah Saragosa be-shanim al fi makorot ivriyim ve-loazyim” [“The Crisis in the Community of Saragossa in 1263-1264 in the Light of Hebrew and Non-Jewish Sources”], *Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies*, 4 (1977), and Y. T. Assis, *The Golden Age of Aragonese Jewry*, *op. cit.*, pp. 76ff.

¹⁵ In his contribution to *The Principles of Jewish Law*, Shmuel Shilo defined the “majority rule” as “deciding a matter according to the majority opinion”. S. Shilo, “Majority Rule”, in M. Elon (ed.), *The Principles of Jewish Law*. Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1974, p. 163.

¹⁶ For a synthesis of the development of the “majority rule”, see H. Shapira, “Majority Rule in the Jewish Legal Tradition”, *Hebrew Union College Annual*, 81-83 (2011-2012).

¹⁷ “Everybody shall know that we, James etc., authorize the entire Jewish community of Barcelona [...] to choose two or three men among you—or even more if you wish—, who will be empowered to diligently prosecute and judge those [Jews] who disturb or defame the rest of good Jewish men. They [the delegates] will be allowed to impose penalties and bans on them, which will be observed by us and the *batlle* of Barcelona. They will also have authority over you and over your community of Barcelona [...]” (my own translation). ACA, reg. 16 f. 158r [R: 29; B: 93].

¹⁸ ACA, reg. 21, f. 32v [J: 634; R: 517; B: 106].

annually to manage communal government according to Jewish Law:

Noverint universi, quod nos Petrus, D. g. rex Aragonum, concedimus vobis universis aljamis judeorum Catalonie, quod quelibet aljama possit perpetuo constituere de duobus usque septem probos homines de dicta aljama annuatim vel ad aliud tempus, sicut eis expedire videatur, qui possint cognoscere et terminare questiones, controversias et querimonias [...] et possint condepnare et punire judeos et judeas dicte aljama vel locorum, qui sunt de collecta ipsius aljame [...]. Possint etiam facere statuta et prohibitiones, districtus et ordiantiones super gestibus et actibus eorum et ponere vetita et alatmas et niduy.¹⁹

The series of privileges granted throughout the thirteenth century contributed to redefining the conceptions of communal authority. The former personalistic approaches to self-government were progressively replaced by new political trends imported from beyond the Pyrenees by the Catalan scholars educated in the academies of Montpellier and Narbonne—such as Nahmanides. In this sense, the political theories developed by the Tosafists in Northern France and the Rhineland were crucial for moving the focus of communal leadership from individuals to the community itself. The so-called ‘majority rule’ was then adopted as the preferable decision-making system in many communities.

3. The Consolidation of the New Political Trends: Shlomo ben Adret

Privileges were not enough to develop and exercise this autonomy. This task was delegated to Jewish Law. In fact, the permission to enforce the halakhah was their ultimate finality. The responsibility of developing a Jewish political and legal construction within the community was in its members’ hands. The spiritual leaders primarily assumed this duty, whose scholarly authority was largely respected by their coreligionists. Their knowledge of the halakhah and their sensibility towards the situation of the Catalan-Aragonese Jewry allowed them to define the parameters of communal authority and self-government. In almost all cases, the commentaries on the Tanakh and Talmud and, especially, the *she’elot ve-teshuvot* became their elementary tools to formulate their ideas.

To a large extent, the crystallization of these reforms and the internal consolidation of the “majority rule” was conducted by Shlomo ben Adret, the Rashba (Barcelona, 1235-1310). In his *responsa*, Adret held a practical and realistic conception of politics. He was aware of the actual situation of the

Catalan-Aragonese communities and of their status as autonomous entities subjected to the will of a gentile monarch. Consequently, he attempted to address the real political, social, and economic needs of the *aljamas*. Adret’s premise was that a rigid interpretation of the Torah could not fulfill this task. The halakhah should be approached with flexibility and relying on local uses. In that sense, Adret used to avoid dogmatism.

Adret justified these views by adducing the broad interpretative spectrum provided by the Talmud to cope with the “needs of the hour”. In the *teshuvah* [Adret III: 393], Adret alleged the Talmudic statement “Jerusalem was destroyed only because they restricted their judgments to Torah law” (BT *Bava Metzia* 30b) to defend the capacity of the community to rule and impose penalties beyond the literacy of the Torah:

עמדתי על כל טענות הקונדרים הוה, ורואה אני שאם העדים נאמנים אצל הברורים רשאים הן לקנוס קנס ממין או עונש גוף, הכל נפי מה שיראה להם, וזה מקיוב העולם, שאם אתם מעמידין הכל על הדינין הקצובים בתורה ושלא לענוש אלא כמו שענשה התורה בחבלות וכיוצא בזה נמצא העולם חרב, שהיינו צריכים עדים והתראה, וכמו שאמרו ד”ל לא חרבה ירושלים אלא שהעמידו דיניהם על דין תורה [...] ²⁰

Respect for the law of the Torah cannot precede the protection of the community and its inhabitants. On the contrary, the survival of the Torah depends on the survival of the Jewish people. This inescapable relationship leads to the existence of two separate laws: on the one hand, the religious law; on the other hand, the legislation of the community. In this second case, the decrees and judgments should pursue the welfare and political stability of the group. This objective legitimates the community to rule independently of the Torah if the final goal is to “build a fence around the Torah”. In other words, the physical continuity of the Jewish people, the worshipers of the true God and His law, is indispensable. The Rashba summarized this position in his *responsum* [Adret IV: 311]:

שלה נאמרו אתן הדברים שאמרתם אלא בבית דין שדינין על פי דיני תורה כסנהדרין או כיוצא בהם, אבל מי שעומד על תיקוני מדינה אינו דן על הקינים הכתובים בתורה ממש אלא לפי מה שהוא צריך לעשות כפי השעה [...] וכן אמרו מכין ועונשין שלא מן הדין ולא לעבור על דברי תורה אלא לעשות סייג לתורה [...] ²¹

¹⁹ “Everyone shall know that we Peter, King of Aragon by the grace of God, concede to all the Jewish *aljamas* in Catalonia that every community will always be allowed to appoint between two and seven good men every year—or for longer periods, if you prefer—, who will be in charge of the matters, disputations, and ceremonies [of the community] [...], to condemn and punish the inhabitants of their *aljama* and *collecta* [...]. They will also be authorized to enact decrees, prohibitions, and ordinances on communal affairs, and to impose *alatma* and *niduy*” (my own translation). ACA, reg. 44, f. 167v-188r [R: 823; B: 121].

²⁰ “If the appointees (*berurim*) find the witnesses trustworthy, they are permitted to impose monetary fines or corporal punishment as they see [fit]. Society [*olam*, literally, ‘the world’] is thereby sustained. For if you were to restrict everything to the laws stipulated in the Torah and punish only in accordance with the Torah’s penal [code] in cases of assault and the like, the world would be destroyed (*ha-olam harev*), because we would require two witnesses and [prior] warning. The Rabbis have already said that ‘Jerusalem was destroyed only because they restricted their judgments to Torah law’ (BT *Bava Metzia* 30b).” Translation: M. Walzer *et al.*, *The Jewish Political Tradition*. 3 vols. New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2000-2018, vol. I, pp. 402-403.

²¹ “Those rules cited by you [that witnesses who are next of kin, etc., are incompetent] apply only to a court that judges according to the laws of the Torah, like the Sanhedrin or a similar body. But whoever is appointed on the basis of a communal enactment does not judge directly according to the laws set down in the Torah itself; he may do whatever is necessary to satisfy the needs of the hour [...] It has also

Following the steps of his master, the political thought of Adret was strongly influenced by the Tosafist notions of the nature of the community and the rule of the majority.²² This affinity becomes evident even in the allegorical images used by Adret to refer to the legislative and coercive powers of the community. Thus, he compares the authority of communal institutions to the king and the High Court (*Adret* III: 411, IV: 142 and V: 126 and 242, for example) or to the *geonim* (*Adret* I: 729).

Adret's theories cannot be considered a mere transposition of the Franco-German political conceptions. The context of the Iberian Jewry differed from that of the Central European communities in many regards, which resulted in different political challenges. Unlike most Tosafists, Adret considered that the community was not just a partnership of people, but a holistic entity independent of the sum of its members. As shown in his *responsum* 968, for example, Meir of Rothenburg linked the power of the community to legislate and impose penalties to a hypothetical foundational consent of its members.²³ The sovereignty of the association relies on a social contract whereby individuals ceded their will to a series of ruling institutions. In other words, Meir's position was based on a consent theory. Adret, by contrast, did not match this definition of communal association, as argued by Daniel Gutenmacher in his doctoral dissertation.²⁴ According to his analysis, Adret cannot be considered a theorist of consent since he apparently suggests that communal authority is inherent to its institutions and that individuals are subjected to them by nature.²⁵ Perhaps the initial authoritarian system of government in Catalonia hampered the development of a theory of consent and reinforced the idea of the natural authority of the community.

It is noteworthy that Adret's idea of the inherent power of the constitution does not annul the notion of partnership as the basis of communal association. These are two different concepts that should not be confused. Above all, there was a perception of the community as a group of Jewish people belonging to the same ethnic-religious body and subjected to

the same Divine law, who decided to join to preserve their traditions and identity. In the ontological-not material-plane, the community members were conceived as equals who had the duty of contributing to this final objective (*Adret* V: 183). No communal society can function without solid ties of solidarity between its members.

This natural power is exercised according to the majority will. The compulsion of any rule agreed by the majority of members of the community is out of discussion for Adret. Rashba held that the minority is inevitably compelled by the coercive force of the majority. In *teshuvah* [*Adret* III: 411], he states:

וכל שכן לענין הדין, כי הם זכות או חוזק יד יש לקהל אחד על אחד ואפילו ליחיד על רבים בדיני הממונות והנהגות והסכמות [...] לפי שכל צבור וצבור היחידים כנתונים תחת יד הרבים ועל פיהם הם צריכים להתנהג שכל עניניהם, והם לאנשי עירם ככל ישראל לב"ד הגדול או למלך.²⁶

One of the key functions of the majority was the appointment of communal officials. Officials were the representatives of the majority and the depositaries of the power of the community. Their functions were not homogeneous, but they often shared several common attributions, including managing communal properties and resources; tax collection (both royal and communal); law-making; and the power to judge and impose penalties, especially excommunications—but also capital punishment.²⁷

Adret considered that the majority's will must prevail over the candidates' scholarship. He vindicated that the seven good townsmen frequently mentioned in the Talmud were not the most versed men in the study of the halakhah or the wealthiest members of the community, but those chosen by their fellow neighbors. Following this idea, Adret equated the legislative attributions of the sage described in the Talmudic narration about the enactments of the butchers to the power of the elected officials (*Adret* IV: 185; see *BT Baba Batra* 9). In his opinion, seven was the appropriate number of secretaries because they were enough to represent the whole community without further authorizations. Nevertheless, many *aljamas* were not allowed to choose more than three secretaries. In other cases, like Valencia, the number of representatives was raised to twelve (as pointed out in *Adret* IV: 315). As he noted in III: 443, this amount is figurative, and the number of delegates might vary according to the community's needs or its population. In *Adret* I: 617, he states:

ואקדים לך הקדמה כי שבעה טובי העיר המזכרים בכל מקום אינם שבעה אנשי המובחרים בחכמה או בעושר וכבוד אלא שבעה אנשים שהמידום הצבור פרוסים סתם על עניני העיר והרי הן כאפטרופוסין עליהם [...] ואם

been said that punishment not prescribed by strict law may be imposed—not to transgress the Torah but in order to make a fence around the Torah [...].” Translation: M. Elon, *Jewish Law: History, Sources, Principles*. 4 vols. Philadelphia: Jewish Publications Society, 1994, vol. II, p. 691.

²² See, for example, I. M. Ta-Shma, “Shikulim filosofiyim behakraat ha-Halakhah be-Sefarad” [“Philosophical Considerations for Halakhic Decision-Making in Spain”], *Sefunot*, 18:3 (1985); Y. Kaplan, “Rov u-miut ve-hakhraot ba-kehillah ha-yehudit bi-yemei ha-veinayyim” [“Majority and Minority in the Decisions of the Medieval Jewish Community”], *Shenaton ha-Mishpat ha-Ivri*, 20 (1995); and M. Lorberbaum, *Politics and the Limits of the Law*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001, p. 94.

²³ Meir of Rothenburg, *Sefer Teshuvot Maharam bar Barukh*. Budapest: Buchhandlung Steinberg & Comp., 1895, *responsum* n. 968. See also, I. Agus, *Rabbi Meir of Rothenburg*. 2 vols. Philadelphia: The Dropsie College for Hebrew and Cognate Learning, 1947, vol. I, pp. 108ff; and J. I. Lifshitz, *Rabbi Meir of Rothenburg and the Foundation of Jewish Political Thought*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016, pp. 74ff.

²⁴ D. Gutenmacher, *Political Obligation in the Thirteenth-Century Hispano-Jewish Community*, *op. cit.*

²⁵ D. Gutenmacher, *Political Obligation in the Thirteenth-Century Hispano-Jewish Community*, *op. cit.*, pp. 116-121.

²⁶ “So too are the decrees or enactments of the majority of the kahal regarding the needs of the community (*kehillah*). Since the majority enacted it, even against the will of individuals, it is valid. [...] For in each and every public, individuals are considered to be under the rule of the many and must pay heed to them in all their affairs. They [the minority] stand to the people of their city as all Israel stands to the high court or the king.” Translation: M. Walzer *et al.*, *The Jewish Political Tradition*, *op. cit.*, vol. I, pp. 404-405.

²⁷ This list is largely based on I. Epstein, *The ‘Responsa’ of Rabbi Solomon Ben Adreth of Barcelona (1235-1310)*. New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1968, p. 35.

תאמר הם פרנסים ידועים הם למה לי שבעה [...] לפיכך כשהן שבעה יש להם רשות לכל דבר כאלו עשו כן כל בני העיר אף על פי שלא העמידו אותם דבר זה בפירוש אבל פחות משבעה אין כחן שיהיה להיותם ככל בני העיר עד שיטלו רשות בפירוש בני העיר [...] ²⁸

His pragmatism and commitment to the stability of the Catalan-Aragonese Jewry prevented Adret from becoming a political proselytist.²⁹ His political views favorable to the “majority rule” were evident, and he always advised its implementation in his *responsa*. Likewise, he was openly critical of tyrannical and despotic communal governments (*Adret V*: 245). However, he had to acknowledge the existence of alternative political systems within the Crown. This forced tolerance was in accordance with his defense of the local customs as a source of law. Adret’s theories on secular politics inevitably implied the acceptance of political diversity. It was inherent to his political and legal realism. In his answer to a *shelah* by the community of Zaragoza (*Adret III*: 394), he explained:

ואומר אני שמנהג המקומות בעניינין אלו אינו שוה בכל, לפי שיש מקומות שכל ענייניהם נהגין על פי זקניהם ובעל עצתם, ויש מקומות שאפילו הרבים אין רשאים לעשות דבר בלתי עצת כל הקהל ובהם כמת הכל. ויש מקומות בממנין עליהם אנשים ידועים למן שיתנהגו על פיהם בכל ענייניהם הכללים והם אפטרופין אליהן, ורוה אני שאתם נהגין כן שאתם ממנים עליכם קרויין מוקדמין. וכל מקום שנגו כן פסלו כל השאר לדברים אלו ואלו לבד מסכימין וטועין צריכי צבור הכללים, ואלוהם שקראום חכמים שבעה טובי העיר, כלומר שמנו אותם על כללי ענייני הצבור ³⁰

Adret’s tolerant acceptance of other kinds of communal political regimes can be symptomatic of the transitory period experienced by Catalan-Aragonese *aljamas* in the thirteenth century. The huge amount of legal and political doubts he was asked to solve and the subsequent thousands of *responsa* he produced point in that direction. Adret’s bet for stability rather

than for dogmatism prevented him from openly attacking alternative forms of government.

The role of Adret in the evolution of communal government was fundamental. His defense of the majority rule largely contributed to outpacing unipersonal regimes and legitimatizing the reforms contained in royal privileges.

4. Communal Organization after Shlomo ben Adret

Yitzhak Baer rightly noted that the death of Adret in 1310 left a void in the spiritual leadership of Catalonia and the whole Crown of Aragon.³¹ The vacuum lasted for at least thirty years. During this period, there was no identifiable political and religious authority with the charisma and influence of Nahmanides or Adret. This situation is unusual in the chronology of the Crown of Aragon. The second half of the fourteenth century and the first decades of the fifteenth century were also dominated by great names like Nissim of Girona (1320-1380), Hasdai Cresques (1340-1412), Sheshet Perfet (1326-1408) and Joseph Albo (c. 1380 – c. 1433). Therefore, the first half of the fourteenth century was a rather exceptional period.

This apparent political orphanage did not stop the process of evolution initiated in the previous century. The concession of privileges and the production of internal ordinances continued refining the complex communal self-government system. Barcelona was the starting point for this second wave of reforms. In 1327, the king accepted a number of *takkanot* proposed by the community to reformulate its internal organization.³² The ordinances were written in Catalan and attempted to provide additional legal security to the decision-making processes, set clear limits to the power and competencies of communal institutions, and establish mechanisms of control to prevent corruption. The document also attempted to fight external interferences and abuses of authority, which were potentially harmful to the autonomy of the *aljamas*.

Despite this set of rules being elaborated under the form of internal ordinances entirely conceived and formulated by the community itself, the instigation and participation of the king are almost certain.³³ The simplicity of the former institutional construction had become insufficient to properly respond to the needs of a community in continuous growth. Moreover, it had not eradicated the institutional monopolization by the plutocracy, and social unrest had arisen again. Some months before the approval of the statutes, in April, the complaints of the inhabitants of the Barcelonian community against the corruption of its leaders pushed James II to designate an external auditor to inquire into this issue.³⁴ The measure might have been unsatisfactory and inadequate to solve the

²⁸ “[The seven good townsmen], who are frequently mentioned, are not seven people who excel in wisdom, wealth, or honour, but seven people chosen by the people and authorized generally to be the administrators and trustees of the town affairs [and they are like the town guardians] [...] You may ask: if the leaders are recognized, why is there a need for seven? [...] When they are seven, they have full authority to act on all matters without further specific authorization, [and their acts are] as if done by all the townspeople. However, if there are less than seven, they do not have the general authority to act for the townspeople but are limited to the performance of those acts townspeople specifically authorize.” Translation: M. Elon, *Jewish Law: History, Sources, Principles*, op. cit., vol. II, pp. 727-728, with some additions.

²⁹ D. Gutenmacher, *Political Obligation in the Thirteenth-Century Hispano-Jewish Community*, op. cit., p. 97.

³⁰ “I tell you that the custom is not everywhere the same. There are places where the elders and the councillors manage everything. In other places, even the majority is not allowed to do anything without the previous agreement of the whole community. There are also places where some people are designed and entrusted to take care of the community’s general affairs and be like its guardians. I have noticed that you do it that way: you choose people called *muqadamin* (*adelantados*). Wherever this system has been adopted, no other practice is allowed anymore and only these people can look after the necessities of the community. They are those named the seven good townsmen by the sages, those appointed to look after the affairs of the public” (my own translation).

³¹ Y. Baer, *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, op. cit., vol. I, p. 18.

³² ACA, reg. 230, f. 106r-107v [R: 3454; B: 189]. We have divided the text according to Baer’s edition. Each section of the text is indicated by using the word *point*.

³³ Baer considered the statutes only as a community product, see Y. Baer, *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, op. cit., vol. I, pp. 227ff. Y. T. Assis, *The Golden Age of Aragonese Jewry*, op. cit., did not discuss this possibility.

³⁴ ACA, CR, Jaime II, c. 134, n. 223 [A: 443].

structural problems of the *aljama*, which would have led the king to sponsor a deeper reform. It is particularly striking that the complainants were headed by a secretary, Astruc Saltell, who had been appointed for this office the previous year thanks to the express support of the *infants* Peter and Alphonse, sons of James II.³⁵

The involvement of the king would also explain the abrupt interest of the community to equate its institutions as much as possible to the city government. In addition, the original document in the Archive of the Crown of Aragon is classified among the privileges conceded by James II.³⁶

Paradoxically, the first concerns reflected by the ordinances are related to external interferences in communal affairs. The concession of individual privileges by the king, local lords, or royal family members to their favorite Jews had been a traditional challenge for communal authorities. Those personal graces turned the recipients into untouchable. The scope and object of privileges were diverse. They used to consist of legal and fiscal immunities, the exemption of communal duties, or the appointment of the king's trusted men as officials of the *aljama*. They discredited the authority of communal institutions, distorted their functioning, and caused economic damages since the fiscal exemption of the larger donors did not imply a reduction in the general contribution of the *aljama*.³⁷

The community of Barcelona pursued the reversion of this praxis. The first point of the document stated that every member of the *aljama* who had been awarded with a special privilege must renounce it. In the two next items (2 and 3), the ordinance extended this measure to future concessions, preventing anyone from “recaptar assi mateix ne a altre neguna letra o manament aixi del senyor rey com del senyor infant com de qualquier altra persona” (“to achieve for himself or another person a privilege or commission from the king, the *infant* or any other person”).³⁸ The non-compliance with those three dispositions carried a fine of one thousand *morabitins*. However, these norms were virtually inapplicable: the community could not force the king to comply. They might have been a declaration of intentions rather than a real rule.

Nevertheless, the main focus of the statutes was the redefinition of government institutions. The epicenter of this reform was the improvement and institutionalization of the *'etsa* as the pivotal legislative and controlling body of the *aljama* and the institution in charge of appointing the highest officials. This traditional communal council was provided with clear positive competencies, and a stable structure. It was composed of thirty men from the wealthiest families in the community. It was expected to be renewed annually. In order to avoid nepotism, corruption, and family monopolies, the members of the *'etsa* could

not be “pare e fill ne sogre ne genre” [“father and son or father-in-law and son-in-law”]. The document declared:

[Els] quals XXX se facen totes les eleccions, que seran mester ne son acostumades de fer en la dita aliama, aixi d'eleccions de secretaris com de jutges e reebedors de compte como de totes les eleccions. Encara se dege ordenar a coneguda daquells, per quina manera la aliama pagara les questes e les altres contribucions [...]. E que hi vayan fer aquelles ordinations o contraforts, que a ells sera vist faedor, o que puguen triar certs homens, aixi daquells XXX com d'altres, a coneguda dels quals se puguen fer e acabar totes les coes damunt-dites. E tot aço encara, que los dits XXX ordenaran en tots los feyts de la aliama, haya lo dita aliama per ferm sens tot contrast. (Point 4)³⁹

Therefore, almost every decision, including the appointment of secretaries, was in the hands of the *'etsa*. The agreements of the institution must be adopted by a simple majority (point 5). The appointments of secretaries and assembly members were reciprocal. According to the text, the “thirty” appointed three secretaries, five judges, and five *reebedors de comptes* (a kind of fiscal supervisor or auditor). The renovation of secretaries and councilors was supposed to occur in different periods. When the council's office ended, the secretaries were in charge of electing the new members and vice versa (point 9). In addition, the secretaries were empowered to designate substitutes for the absent members of the assembly and to decide the day and place of the meetings (points 7 and 8).

Besides the prohibition of choosing members from the same family, the statutes included further measures to shield the independence of the *'etsa*. The election of foreigners and Christians for the council was expressly prohibited (point 24), and nobody was allowed to gather privileges that could undermine the authority of the assembly (point 17).⁴⁰ Furthermore, none of the “thirty” or the other officials could have two consecutive offices (point 13).

The composition and attribution of the new *'etsa* paralleled those of the Barcelonan local assembly, the *Consell de cent* (“council of the one hundred”,

³⁵ ACA, CR, Jaime II, c. 134, n. 152 [A: 367].

³⁶ The register number 230 of the *Cancillería Real* to which this document belongs is part of the *Graciarum 21* of James II.

³⁷ I. Epstein, *The 'Responsa' of Rabbi Solomon Ben Adreth of Barcelona (1235-1310)*, op. cit., pp. 29-32. Y. T. Assis, *Jewish Economy in the Medieval Crown of Aragon, 1213-1327*. Leiden: Brill, 1997, pp. 209-223.

³⁸ My own translation.

³⁹ “Those thirty will decide all the appointments for the necessary or customary offices of the *aljama*, such as the election of secretaries, judges, and *reebedors de comptes* [that is, fiscal supervisors or auditors]. They will also approve the procedure to pay the *questies* and the rest of taxes [...]. They will be empowered to enact these ordinances and regulations or to appoint some men—among these thirty or someone else—to manage these affairs. Those thirty will rule over all the affairs of the *aljama* without interferences” (my own translation).

⁴⁰ This measure offers ruled solutions to problems like the one submitted by the *aljama* of Zaragoza to Adret in the *responsa* III: 394. A number of delegates were commissioned by the *aljama* to obtain some privileges from the king. They accomplished their task, but they also successfully negotiated a number of additional graces for the community. Those last negotiations were not covered by the budget allocated by the *aljama*. The delegates attempted to have their expenses paid by the community alleging the general benefits of their goals. Adret considered that the community was not obliged to pay since its members had not authorized these negotiations. The statutes of 1327, thus, set limits to this sort of independent initiatives.

definitely established in 1274), an institution with fiscal and representative powers, as well as with some normative attributions.⁴¹ This later reform proved to be unable to solve the endemic problems of the *aljama*. Some years later, the situation remained the same. Apparently, these ordinances could not stop the generalized corruption among communal leaders, the institutional monopolization by the wealthiest families, and the continuous external interferences. The pretended reinforcement of political autonomy and transparency lasted until 1333, when the king commissioned one of his officials, Gerard de Palaciol, to inquire about the accusations of embezzlement against the whole former government team of the community.⁴² But, once again, the means of the community appeared insufficient to manage the situation and the *aljama* itself asked for royal intervention.

In the following years, royal interventions by request of Barcelonian Jews were as frequent as they used to be. In 1337, two members of the *aljama*, who had been appointed *ad hoc* to conduct some special tasks, resort to Alphonse III to get the expenses of their works reimbursed by the secretaries. One of the claimers was Hasdai Cresques—perhaps the grandfather of the philosopher—, who was one of the reported secretaries in 1333. This exchange of accusations evinces the dangers and complexities of communal political life.

In Barcelona, the statutes were in force until 1386. That year, Peter III decided to abrogate them, probably because of their inefficacy to avoid corruption and social unrest. The king decreed a new statute,⁴³ whose general aim was to reinforce the control of the 'etsa on the *berurim*. He also attempted to shield the election methods against manipulations and ensure the participation of the three *mans*⁴⁴—in this case, it was stated that public offices must be evenly divided among the *mans*. Ultimately, the king increased his own power of control over the *aljama*. The new statute did not have time to prove its efficacy. Less than five years later, the community of Barcelona was obliterated.

5. Nissim of Girona and the Division of Communal Power

We want to finalize this discussion with some notes on the political thinking of Nissim of Girona, the most outstanding Jewish intellectual between 1350 and 1375. Nissim's political thought was an inheritor of Adret's contributions. However, his works might not be considered a mere reiteration of the positions held by the Rashba half a century earlier. To begin with, their historical contexts were different. Adret led the halakhic response in a period of social and institutional changes. His *responsa* contributed to homogenizing the political foundations of the *kahal* in Catalonia and crystallizing the majority rule as the

basic principle of self-government. From his side, Nissim belonged to the next generation.⁴⁵

Nissim was a prolific author. His production includes several exegetical commentaries and dozens of *responsa*. However, the general lines of his philosophical and political ideas are developed and systematized in a series of *derashot* (דרשות, "sermons") he wrote throughout his life. The topics of these homilies are diverse, including prophecy, ethics, community ties, metaphysics, and liturgy; but the *Derashah* 11 is entirely devoted to politics.

The *Derashah* 11 starts as a commentary on Deut. 16:18,⁴⁶ but the author's purposes soon appear to be more ambitious. This verse leads Nissim to argue for the existence of two parallel normative systems. On the one hand, there is the realm of secular politics, which the king and his officials embody. They must rule the society according to its material needs—the *needs of the hour*—, even when this implies contravening the Revelation. On the other hand, there is the Torah, whose defense is in the hands of the priests and the Sanhedrin. They are in charge of preserving the spirit and rituals of the Torah; their actions must be utterly respectful of the contents of Scripture.

Nissim's division of powers confers significant autonomy to secular politics in front of the rigid and liturgy-focused religious law of the Torah. However, there is no unanimity on interpreting the scope of politics and their independence from religious law attending to *the needs of the hour*. For Aaron Kirschenbaum, the separation of secular law from the strict halakhah only applies in cases of urgency, when the physical survival of the community is in danger.⁴⁷ For scholars like Shalom Rosenberg,⁴⁸ Gerald Blidstein,⁴⁹ and Menachem Lorberbaum,⁵⁰ the distinction implies a permanent division into two legal realms. Lorberbaum considered that Kirschenbaum was mistaken when he interpreted the *needs of the hour* as a synonym for *emergency*. In his opinion, this concept refers to the real and habitual political requirements derived from the material situation of the communities.⁵¹ The theses of Lorberbaum, Blidstein, and Rosenberg offer a more convincing explanation in accordance with the idiosyncrasy of the Catalan *kahal*.

⁴¹ For a general reference, see P. Ortí Gost, "El Consell de Cent durant l'Edat Mitjana", *Barcelona Quaderns d'Història*, 4 (2001).

⁴² ACA, CR, Alfonso III, c. 20, n. 2376 [A: 715].

⁴³ ACA, reg. 948, f. 114v-122v [B: 381].

⁴⁴ The *mans* (literally, hands) were the three classes in which the non-noble inhabitants of the royal domains were divided according to their profession, wealth, and social status.

⁴⁵ For a brief biographical overview, see L. A. Feldman, "Rabenu Nissim: Biographical Highlights", *Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies*, 2 (1965).

⁴⁶ "You shall appoint judges and officers in all your gates, which the LORD your God gives you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with right judgement." The interpretation of Deut. 16 and 17 also played a main role in Nahmanides' comment on the Torah, see Ramban, *The Torah: with Ramban's Commentary*. Ed. and trans. Y. Blinder and Y. Kamenetsky. 5 vols. New York: Mesorah Publications, 2004-2010, vol. V, pp. 416-419.

⁴⁷ A. Kirschenbaum, "The Role of Punishment in Jewish Criminal Law: A Chapter in Rabbinic Penological Thought", *The Jewish Law Annual*, 9 (1991).

⁴⁸ S. Rosenberg, "Ve-shub al 'derekh ha-rov'" ["More on the 'Most Part'"], in E. Belfer (ed.), *Manhigut ru anit be-Yshrael: Morsheh ve-yad*. Ramat-Gan: Ha-Makhon le-Yehadut ve-le-Maḥshabah Bet-Zmananu, 1982.

⁴⁹ G. J. Blidstein, "'Ideal' and 'Real' in Classical Jewish Political Theory", *Jewish Political Studies Review*, 2:1/2 (1990).

⁵⁰ M. Lorberbaum, *Politics and the Limits of the Law*, *op. cit.*

⁵¹ M. Lorberbaum, *Politics and the Limits of the Law*, *op. cit.*, p. 133, also supported by D. Novak, *The Jewish Social Contract*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005, p. 148.

Thus, Rosenberg, Blidstein, and Lorberbaum suggested that the use of the institution of monarchy in Ran's sermon is allegorical. The king is a metaphor, a personification of secular power.⁵² The object of Nissim's reflections was not the idea of monarchy as a unipersonal and hereditary government, or to set a legal framework for a hypothetical messianic king—as Maimonides did—, but the exercise of secular power itself. In other words, Nissim was theorizing on the prerogatives of the lay communal authority. Nissim proposed a bicephalous construction based on a separation of powers and the secularization of monarchical attributes. Blidstein rightly compared this theory with the Gelasian doctrine of the *Two Swords*.⁵³

Nissim starts his comment by acknowledging that every society needs laws and judges to protect the social order and, ultimately, survive. Even a group of thieves, he says, has norms. The Jewish people are not an exception; they need governors and rules. However, Judaism is a special case. The Jews are also commanded to elect judges to guarantee the observance of the Torah. And they must do so according to the rules and procedures established in the halakhah. For Nissim, this is the *true justice* (אמית' משפט; *amiti mishpāṭ*). The task of judges is inexcusable, even if their judgment can be harmful to the community or contrary to the interest of the public. But social order must still be protected. For this reason, Deut. 16:18 commands: "You shall appoint judges and officers." This is the origin of Nissim's legal duality. On the one hand, the king and his officials must legislate and rule to protect the society according to the *needs of the hour* (השעה צורך; *hish'á tsórekh*). On the other hand, religious judges are told to judge following only religious law. In Nissim's own words:

ידוע הוא, כי המין האנושי צריך לשפט שישפטו בין פרטיו [...] וכל אומה צריכה לישב מאדיני [...] וישראל צריכים לזה (ב) [כ]יתר האומות, ומלבד זה צריכים אליהם עוד לסיבה אחרת, והיא: לעמיד חוקי התורה על תילם ולהעניש חייבי מלקיות וחייבי מיתות בית דין העוברים על חוקי התורה, עם היות שאין באותה עבירה הפסד יישוב מדיני כלל. ואין ספק, כי בכל אחד מהצדדים יזמנו שני עניינים- האחד: יחייב להעניש איזה איש כפי משפט צדוק אמיתי, והשני: שאין ראוי להענישו כפי משפט צדוק אמיתי, אבל יחייב להענישו כפי תיקון סדר מדיני וכפי צורך השעה. והי יתברך ייחד כל אחד מעניינים האלו לכת מיוחדת, וציוה שיתמנו "שופטים" לשפות המשפט הצדוק המיתי [...] ומפני שסידור המדיני לא ישלם בזה לבדו, השלים הי יתברך תיקונו במשפט המלך.⁵⁴

⁵² G. J. Blidstein, "Ideal' and 'Real' in Classical Jewish Political Theory", *op. cit.*, p. 56.

⁵³ G. J. Blidstein, "Ideal' and 'Real' in Classical Jewish Political Theory", *op. cit.*, p. 57.

⁵⁴ "It is well-known that men need judges to judge between individuals [...] And every nation needs some government [...] The people of Israel need it as the rest of nations do, but they also need it for another reason: to preserve the laws of the Torah against those who furrow it and are punishable by a bet din with the capital penalty according to the rules prescribed in the Torah, whether their crimes are harmful for the nation or not. And there is no doubt here, these concerns require two functions. The first is to punish a man according to true justice. And the second: to judge him not according to true justice, but for the sake of the benefit of society and the needs of the hour. The Almighty assigned these tasks to two kinds of servants; he commanded to appoint judges to give judgment on the bases of true righteous justice. [...] And be-

Nissim considers that the Torah encases a Divine Immanence which irradiates the terrestrial world and benefits society. For this reason, the commandments of the Torah must be preserved, and the Sanhedrin must judge observing its procedural rules. Like Maimonides,⁵⁵ Nissim asserts that religious *mitzvot* are not meaningless, although sometimes human intellect cannot comprehend their finality.⁵⁶ They all tend to an end, which always benefits society and contributes to its perfection.⁵⁷ The judges of the Torah are the natural depositaries and protectors of those influxes. They judge according to God's will, even when it is apparently against the interests of the public. For this reason, the Torah demands strict and deep inquiries to ensure that judgments are compliant with true justice. The decisions of the judges are, therefore, supposed to be infallible.⁵⁸

However, society is a human construction with down-to-earth necessities that require a ruler to fulfill them. The possibility acknowledged by the Torah of appointing a king with powers separated from the prerogatives of priesthood pursues this objective. The monarch must give judgment according to the context and do whatever is needed to ensure the continuity of the social order.

Nissim argues that the procedural requirements of the Torah are too strict. Sometimes, they are virtually inapplicable. They cannot be expected to guarantee peace and justice. In his opinion, if the Jews only relied on the principles of the Torah, criminals would be immune, and they would proliferate to the point of shaking the foundations of society.⁵⁹ This interpretation is close to the views of Adret (*Adret II*: 279, III: 393, IV: 311, etc.). The conclusion is clear to him: there must be religious judges to judge according to the Torah and lay judges to judge according to the will of the king:

השותפות הזה רומז למה שאמרנו, שכמו שבמעשה בראשית נראה שפע אלוהי בתחתונים, שמאיתו נתהוו כל שנתהווה, כן כל דיין שדן דין אמת לאמיתו ממשיך השפע ההוא, ישלם מצד דינו לגמרי התיקון המדיני או לא ישלם, שכמו שבמעשה הקרבנות- עם היותם רחוקים

cause the nation's welfare cannot be preserved just with this, God permitted the election of a king" (my own translation). Nissim ben Reuben Gerundi, *Derashot ha-Ran*. Ed. L. Feldman. Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rab Kook, 2003, pp. 412-414.

⁵⁵ Moses Maimonides. *The Guide for the Perplexed*. Ed. and trans. M. Friedländer. Skokie (Illinois): Varda Books, 2002, pp. 308-310.

⁵⁶ Nissim ben Reuben Gerundi, *Derashot ha-Ran*, *op. cit.*, pp. 436-437.

⁵⁷ Nissim ben Reuben Gerundi, *Derashot ha-Ran*, *op. cit.*, pp. 415-417.

⁵⁸ Nahmanides exposed the same views in his comment on the verse: "According to the sentence of the law in which they instruct you, according to the judgement they tell you, you shall do; you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left from the sentence they pronounce upon you" (Deut. 17:11). Departing from Rashi, the Ramban states:

[...] וענינו, אפלו תחשוב בלבך שהם טועים, והדבר פשוט בעיניך כאשר אתה

יודע בין ימיך לשמאלך, תעשה כמזומם [...]

"And the meaning of this [statement] is that even if you think in your heart that [the judges] are mistaken, and the matter is as obvious in your view as you know to differentiate between right and your left, you shall nonetheless act in accordance with their command"). Ramban, *The Torah: with Ramban's Commentary*, *op. cit.*, vol. V, p. 417.

⁵⁹ Nissim ben Reuben Gerundi, *Derashot ha-Ran*, *op. cit.*, pp. 414-415.

לגמרי מן ההיקש היה נראה השפע האלוהי, כן במשפתי התורה היה נמשך ושופע גם כי וצטרך כפי הסידור המדיני תיקון יותיר אשר היה משלימו המלך. ונמצא שמינוי השופטים היה לשפוט משפטי התורה בלבד, שהם צודקים בעצמם, כמן שאמר: "ושפטואת העם משפט צדק", ומינוי המלך היה להשלים תיקון הסידור המדיני, ואל מה שהיה מצטרך לצורך השעה. 60

Nissim admits that the will of the king can be fallible. His decisions and judgments are not under the influxes of the Torah; they are just human products. Nissim justifies this risk by recalling that the king rules only under God's acquiescence and people's acceptance. Notwithstanding the independence of royal legislation from the Sanhedrin implies that the king was to some extent independent from the Torah, his position and powers are provided by the Torah and God, to whom the king owes obedience. The exhortations of the Torah praising the good government and imposing conditions for the exercise of power must be observed by the monarch.⁶¹ These elements, Nissim concludes, provide kings with enough legitimacy to govern and judge with independence from the Torah. Zev Harvey has observed that Nissim's concerns for the limits and the control of monarchical power make him the most constitutional Jewish philosopher after Maimonides.⁶²

6. Conclusions

The above discussion has offered an overview of the political and social context in which Hasdai Cresques lived. Throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Catalan-Aragonese Jewry developed complex models and theories on self-government. The autonomy conferred by the Christian monarchs set the ground for implementing political and legal structures based on Jewish principles. Nonetheless, royal privileges only provided the elementary framework for institutional self-design. The construction of decision-making systems relying on the halakhah was in the hands of the communities themselves. The succession of outstanding scholars was fundamental to ensuring a real Jewish self-government. Spiritual leaders like Nahmanides, Shlomo ben Adret, and Nissim of Girona contributed to set

an autochthonous legislative and hermeneutical tradition that permitted the flourishing of Catalan communal politics.

When Hasai Cresques was born in the mid-fourteenth century, this tradition was at its peak—although it was close to start its process of decadence. Catalan Jewish communities were conceived as holistic structures with a natural authority directly linked to the secular power of Biblical kings. The "majority rule" was deemed the preferable and ideal self-government system, which was exerted by a solid network of communal institutions. At the same time, Jewish approaches to politics were enriched by the constant interaction with their Christian neighbors. However, the reality of communal life was far more complex. Political struggles, aggressive confrontations between factions, institutional control by oligarchs, the interferences of Christian officers, and fragile balances of power conditioned the inner life of the Jewish communities. The social history of Catalan-Aragonese Jewry elapsed on a permanent dialectic between the intellectual and idealistic views on communal brotherhood and the impositions of a problematic context.

Hasdai Cresques assumed his co-religionaries' spiritual leadership in a period of crisis—a crisis never overcome. The anti-Jewish riots of 1391 drastically changed the social and political panorama of Catalan-Aragonese Jewry. Cresques had to deal with the outcomes of this wave of destruction and lead the reconstruction of the communities. However, these events are beyond the current contribution, which was meant as a first contextualization. The scenario we have outlined is the social and idiosyncratic reality in which Cresques was born, where he grew as a man and scholar, and which molded his intellectual views.

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⁶⁰ "This partnership we were talking about implies that just as in the Beginning the Immanence of God spread along the terrestrial world and became the source of the whole creation, every [religious] judge sentences under this Immanence, no matter whether his judgment is beneficial for the nation or not; and just as the deeds of the sacrifices—which are inaccessible through logic—make visible the Immanence of God, the judges of the Torah extend those influxes, although the requirements of the nation make a king necessary to complement their judgments. Therefore, the judges [of the Torah] were appointed to judge only according to the laws of the Torah, which are righteous in themselves, as it is stated: 'They shall judge with righteous judgments'; and the king was appointed to complete them and fulfill the requirements of the nation regarding the needs of the hour" (my own translation). Nissim ben Reuben Gerundi, *Derashot ha-Ran, op. cit.*, pp. 417-418.

⁶¹ Nissim ben Reuben Gerundi, *Derashot ha-Ran, op. cit.*, pp. 440-444.

⁶² W. Z. Harvey, "Liberal Democratic Themes in Nissim of Girona", in I. Twersky and J. M. Harris (eds.), *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Culture*. Vol. III. Cambridge (Massachusetts): Harvard University Press, 2001; and W. Z. Harvey, "Rabbi Nissim of Girona on the Constitutional Power of the Sovereign", *Studies in Halacha and Jewish Law*, 29 (2013).

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Infinity, Divine Transcendence and Immanence in *Or Hashem*

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ENG Abstract: Hasdai Crescas (1340-1411) was a philosopher, rabbi and public person, who lived in a very turbulent period for the Iberian and Provençal Jewish communities of the late Middle Ages. Crescas made a vehement critique of the Aristotelian paradigm received from *falsafa*, which was used by Maimonides to support and prove the existence, unity and incorporeality of God, conceptualized in the *Guide of the Perplexed* as the necessary being which is absolutely transcendent in relation to contingent beings, that is, to the world. In *Or Hashem*, Crescas elaborates an alternative concept of the necessary being, in which the two antithetical notions of divine immanence and transcendence are related to the distinction within the necessary being between its simple essence and its infinite attributes. The simple, one, ineffable essence of the necessary being is expressed in infinite attributes in the eternal and constant act of giving in the univocity of being its good and its actuality to the infinite contingent beings. Crescas advocates that the universe, though ontologically contingent, is infinite in its actuality. God is thus conceived as the eternal and constant first cause, entelechy and Place of the World.

Keywords: Crescas; Infinity; Transcendence; Immanence; Necessary Being.

ES Infinitud, trascendencia divina e immanencia en *Or Hashem*

ES Resumen: Hasdai Crescas (1340-1411) fue un filósofo, rabino y figura pública que vivió en un período muy turbulento para las comunidades judías ibéricas y provenzales de la Baja Edad Media. Crescas lanzó una crítica vehemente contra el paradigma aristotélico recibido de la *falsafa*, que fue utilizado por Maimónides para sustentar y probar la existencia, unidad e incorporeidad de Dios, conceptualizado en la *Guía de los perplejos* como el ser necesario absolutamente trascendente en relación con el ser contingente, es decir, el mundo. En *Or Hashem*, Crescas elabora un concepto alternativo del ser necesario, en el que las dos nociones antitéticas de immanencia y trascendencia divinas se relacionan con la distinción en el ser necesario entre su esencia simple y sus atributos infinitos. La esencia simple, una e inefable del ser necesario, se expresa en infinitos atributos en el acto eterno y constante de otorgar en la univocidad del ser su bondad y su actualidad a los infinitos seres contingentes. Crescas defiende que el universo, aunque ontológicamente contingente, es infinito en su actualidad. Dios es así concebido como la primera causa, eterna y constante, entelequia y “Lugar del Mundo”.

Palabras clave: Crescas; infinitud; trascendencia; immanencia; Ser necesario.

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The debate in the context of medieval Jewish philosophy about immanence and divine transcendence is presented here at a specific moment, that is, in the original contribution of Hasdai Crescas. We have here an interesting example of how a concept initially formulated by a thinker or a school can become so transformed in the course of its reception and inter-generational debate as to leave the original concept unrecognizable within a tradition of thought. In our

case, the original concept is that of necessary being, as originally formulated by Avicenna in the context of *falsafa*. Avicenna’s original formulation sought to reconcile Islamic monotheism with the philosophical tradition, bringing together in an original way the concepts of the Aristotelian First Mover with the Neoplatonic concept of the One, in the idea of necessary being, that is, the one that exists by necessity of its essence, that is, without any cause outside itself.

Avicenna's modal ontology differentiates at first two types of being, classified according to their mode of existence: the *necessary being*, which exists by essence, that is, eternally, without any cause external to itself; and the *contingent being*, whose existence is only possible as the effect of its causes, considered always external to its essence. During the Middle Ages, between the 12th and 15th century, the distinction between the two modes of existence, the necessary and the contingent, engendered an important debate, among Jews, Muslims and Latins likewise, about how the relation between one mode of being and the other should be understood.

For Maimonides the distinction is radical since he conceives the necessary being (*haiav hametziut*) as radically transcendent (*nivdal*) in relation to the world. For Crescas, in turn, although the necessary being is distinct from all other beings in its unique essence, thus being transcendent,¹ it, nevertheless, relates to the infinite contingent beings, of which it is the first cause. It relates to the other beings through its infinite essential attributes, and in this sense, it is also immanent.² To arrive at this bold formulation, Crescas not only reworks the concept of essential attributes of necessary being, but also reworks the possibility of the actual infinity existing within the contingent.³ The concept of necessary being is thus understood in irreconcilable ways by Maimonides and Crescas.

The way Crescas weaves his arguments into the First Treatise of *Or Hashem* demonstrates the acute understanding he had of the very different ways he and the author of the *Guide of the Perplexed* conceptualize necessary being. This understanding of the different concepts of necessary being causes Crescas to devote an entire treatise, out of the four that make up his book, to criticizing and vehemently rejecting Maimonides' absolutely transcendent God.⁴ Of the four treatises of *Or Hashem*, the first treatise is the one that has a particular prominence for the modern reception of his work, because it is here that Hasdai Crescas presents his sharp critique of medieval Aristotelianism, both in its Avicennian and Averroistic strands.⁵ His clear objective is to demolish the philosophical foundations on which Peripatetic physics and metaphysics were based, in order to dismiss the concept of God that originated from the encounter between rabbinic rationalism and Aristotelian *falsafa*, as formulated by Maimonides in the second part of the *Guide of the Perplexed*. The first treatise is divided into three sections. In the first of them Crescas presents 25 of the 26 propositions that summarize the Aristotelian positions, as elaborated by Maimonides in the second part of the *Guide* to prove the existence, unity and incorporeality of God. The presentation of these 25 propositions draws on arguments elaborated by Averroes, al-Tabrizi, Gersonides and by other Islamic and Jewish philosophers whose works were available in Hebrew in his

time and who were supporters of Aristotelianism and therefore of the same propositions. He often quotes them from Hebrew translations or paraphrases them. In this endeavor, Crescas shows great proficiency in the use of the philosophical literature of his time. This allows us to acknowledge the deep knowledge that he possessed of the philosophical paradigm of medieval Aristotelianism.

In the second section of the first treatise of *Or Hashem*, Crescas then proceeds to expound his critique of each of the Aristotelian propositions. There are very few propositions with which he agrees, and in general he seeks to demonstrate their logical inconsistency and weakness. It is the first three propositions that Crescas dwells on the most, because they are precisely those that affirm the impossibility of the actual infinite, either by the impossibility of an infinite magnitude, or by the impossibility of an infinite series of causes and actions, or by the existence of infinite elements of finite magnitude. In constructing his theory, Crescas ends up criticizing the way infinity was thought of by Aristotelians up to his time, showing that various conceptions that refute the actual infinite arrive at paradoxes not because of the impossibility of actual infinite itself, but due to internal flaws in the way those conceptions were developed. These internal flaws in Aristotelian thought are for him the cornerstone of his critique of this paradigm. According to Crescas, Aristotelians seem to engage with the opposing theses, but, in fact, such as discussion never really takes place, because most of the times the opposing arguments appear in a flawed way, never being really verified whether the opposing premises are justifiable or not. In this way, throughout his critique, Crescas tries to demonstrate that many Aristotelian arguments are in fact fallacious, and he even claims that some of them are sophisms, for example *petitio principii*.

It is through the critique of the first three propositions which deny the possibility of the actual infinite within the contingent realm that Crescas demonstrates the intrinsic relationship existing in Aristotelian thought between the denial of the actual infinite and the denial of the existence of the vacuum,⁶ which, in turn, is closely interconnected with the Aristotelian definition of place as a two-dimensional surface enveloping a body. According to Aristotle, to be intelligible, the world needs to be finite. In his defense of this possibility and of the existence of the actual infinite, Crescas elaborates, step by step, before the reader, the logical possibility of the existence both of an immaterial or incorporeal infinite magnitude and of other forms of actual infinite like an infinite body. In this way, he constructs the theoretical possibility of the existence of an immaterial and incorporeal *continuum of infinite magnitude*, which is the vacuum, that is, the three immaterial dimensions, conceived as the general place of all bodies, that is, a *three-dimensional space of infinite extension*. In other words, Crescas conceives of extensive reality as infinite in its actuality. It is true that, although he concludes that the vacuum is neutral and neither hinders nor helps

¹ H. Crescas, *Or Hashem*. Ed. Fisher. Jerusalem: Sifrei Ramot, 1990, 1, 3, 1, pp. 95-96.

² See Éric Smilévitch in H. Crescas, *Lumière de l'Éternel*. Trans. É. Smilévitch. Paris/Strasbourg: Hermann, 2010, p. 498, n. 2.

³ H. Crescas, *Or Hashem*, *op. cit.*, 1, 2, 1, p. 66.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1, 3, 1, pp. 95-96.

⁵ H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929, p. 458, n. 82.

⁶ Aristotle, *Physics*, IV, 213a 11 – 216b 20, in *id.*, *The Complete Works. The Revised Oxford Translation*. Ed. J. Barnes. 2 vols. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984, vol. I, pp. 362-368.

the motion of bodies, Crescas does not draw all the possible conclusions from this concept, e.g. inertial motion, as Newton will do two hundred and fifty years later, but he comes very close. The formulation of the vacuum as an infinite place for all bodies, together with the defense of the possibility of infinite worlds, is enough for Wolfson to correctly refer to these ideas as a harbinger of a new conception of the universe,⁷ that is, a new physics, which will be formulated from the Renaissance on. Nevertheless, it is precisely because he does not go any further in his formulation that Crescas, so to speak, remains tied to medieval thought. This is an important aspect of the dialectics within Crescas' thought, namely that he is both a precursor of the idea of the infinite universe and at the same time remains within the horizon of medieval thought.

However, it is very important to note that, besides foreshadowing a new conception of the universe, Crescas also formulates a profoundly original ontology within the medieval philosophical tradition, and not only in the strict context of the Jewish philosophical tradition of the time. For by conceiving of extensive reality as infinite in its actuality, eternal in its duration and sharing the same existence as necessary being, through the idea of actual infinity, Crescas ends up bringing God and the universe closely together and interrelating them. This original ontology becomes explicit when Crescas draws a remarkable parallel between God and the vacuum, by stating, through analogy, that God is the Place of the World, just as the infinite vacuum is the place of all bodies:

ולזה, להיות הש"י הוא הצורה לכלל המציאות, כי הוא מח-
דשו ומיחדו ומגבילו, השאילו לו השם הזה, באמרם תמיד,
"ברוך המקום", "לא על דעתך אנו משיבועים, אלא על דע-
תנו ועל דעת המקום ב"ה", "הוא מקומו של עולם". והיה
הדמיון הזה נפלא. כי כאשר רחקי הפנוי נכנסים ברחקי
הגשם ומלאו, כן כבודו יתברך בכל חלקי העולם ומלאו,
כאמרו (ישעיהו ו, ג), "קדוש קדוש קדוש ה' צבאות מלא כל
הארץ כבודו". ירצה, כי עם היותו קדוש ובדל בשלש קד-
שות, שירמוז בהם אל היותו נבדל משלשה עולמות, הנה
מלא כל הארץ, שהוא יסוד העכור שביסודות, כבודו. ומזה
הענין אמרו (יחזקאל ג, יב), "ברוך כבוד ה' ממקומו". כל-
מר, שתואר הברכה והשפע ממקומו, ר"ל מעצמותו ולא
מזולתו. ויהיה הכנוי "ממקומו" שב אל הכבוד.

Then, since the Holy One, Blessed Be He, is the form of all reality, for He creates it, individualizes it, and delimits it, He is metaphorically called constantly by this name: Blessed be 'The Place'; 'Behold, I make you swear not by your permission, but by the permission of the Place.' 'He is the Place of the World.' This image is extraordinarily accurate, as the dimensions of the vacuum permeate the dimensions of the body, completely, just as it was said, 'Holy, Holy, Holy is YHWH (Hashem) of hosts, the whole earth is filled with His Glory (Presence).' If you will (one could say that), He fills the whole earth, for, His Glory (Presence), is the substrate of substrates.⁸

The extraordinary thing about this statement is not only the attribution of extension to God, as an attribute of his constant and eternal Presence in the universe. Interesting is also that the Presence is not as subtle *pneuma*, filling everything, but a place where extensive existence occurs and unfolds. However, even more important from the point of view of the many aspects of immanence in the concept of God, is Crescas' conceptualization of God not only as Place but also as Form of the World. In this regard it is true that Crescas seems to hesitate, for, despite his bold formulations, he insists that there still remains an element of otherness that makes the necessary being have its quiddity distinct from all others, thus being, in this respect, transcendent. But this characterization of the necessary being would be completely impossible in the system formulated by Maimonides, for whom the radical distinction of substances would prevent any immanence to be allowed.

In the third section of the first treatise of *Or Hashem*, Crescas will finally openly criticize Maimonides' idea of the radically transcendent God and propose other ways to prove the divine existence, unity and incorporeality, in a way that allows for divine immanence, without necessarily being completely denying divine transcendence. Starting from the distinction in necessary being between existence and quiddity, Crescas reinterprets the relation between divine essence and divine attributes and, from there, the relation of necessary being and contingent beings, affirming that although divine essence is transcendent, divine existence is shared with other beings. Crescas proposes the univocity of being in terms very similar to Duns Scotus, whom, however, he does not quote directly.⁹

Instead of conceptualizing transcendence as difference of substance, Crescas thinks of it as alterity of essence by means of which necessary and infinite being surpasses contingent and finite beings. Following this path, instead of following Maimonides and thinking of attributes when referred to God and beings as being conceptual homonyms, that is, equivocal, he understands divine attributes and those of contingent beings in terms of an amphibology of concepts, that is, univocally. To this goal, Crescas reworks the idea originally proposed by Gersonides, among the Jews, and by Duns Scotus, among the Latins, of the amphibology of concepts.¹⁰ The link between the attributes of both is possible because there are not two substances, two substrata, that exist in a different and incommunicable way. Necessary being and contingent beings exist in different ways, but the univocity of being allows existence itself to be the same. Thus, for Crescas, to predicate existence of God and of other beings is essentially to refer to the same concept. To this end he elaborates a minimal notion, formulated by him in the following words: "Therefore, the general meaning of existence is that what existence (actuality) is predicated of is not deprived of reality. This is exactly how existence is attributed

⁷ H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle*, *op. cit.*, p. 458.

⁸ H. Crescas, *Or Hashem*, *op. cit.*, 1, 2, 1, p. 69.

⁹ É. Gilson, "Avicenne et le point de départ de Duns Scot", *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge*, 2 (1927), p. 100.

¹⁰ É. Gilson, *Jean Duns Scot. Introduction à ses positions fondamentales*. Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 2003. p. 243.

primarily to God and subsequently to other beings.”¹¹ In other words, the priority of divine existence is due to the fact that it is always in act, while the existence of contingent beings can be actual or potential. This is how Crescas arrives at a notion of the univocality of being.

Crescas agrees with Maimonides that the essence of God is unknowable by another than himself. Also in this sense, God is said to be transcendent, that is, he is described in terms of otherness. Continuing his argument, Crescas identifies an important controversy regarding the relationship between existence and quiddity among the medieval followers of Aristotle. For Avicenna and Maimonides, they are distinct from each other, existence being an accident of quiddity. Averroes, on the other hand, asserts that existence is not distinct from quiddity. For the Islamic thinker from the Iberian Peninsula, since God’s quiddity is absolutely distinct from that of other beings, his existence is also absolutely distinct from the existence of other beings. Thus, although by a different route, Averroes agrees with Maimonides when he holds that the term existence must be used to refer to God and other beings in a homonymic way only (*be shituf shem gamur*), without any amphibology (*velo min miminei hasipuk*). Distancing himself from the two Aristotelian conceptions, Crescas traces another path of thought that rescues the idea of amphibology of concepts. He thus presents a general concept of existence, both for the one who exists by essence and for what exists by accident. Since the general meaning of the concept of existence is the same for any being, he says:

ובדרך הזה בעצמו יאמר בקדימה בו יתברך, ובאחור על שאר הנמצאות. ולזה הוא מבואר, שלא יאמר ה"נמצא" עליו ועל שאר הנמצאים בשיתוף השם גמור, אלא במין הספוק.

And by this way existence is attributed in priority to God, bless him, and secondarily to the other beings. It is thus made clear that ‘existence’ is not predicated of God and other beings by a complete homonymy, but as a kind of amphibology.¹²

Existence is attributed first with respect to God, whose essence is to exist without needing a cause external to himself, and secondarily with respect to contingent beings which exist by accident, that is, by causes external to them. Thus, with respect to the concept of existence, there is a difference of degree, not of substance.

It is in this context that Crescas proposes his demonstration of the existence of God, which is mentioned by Spinoza at the end of his *Letter on Infinity*. Here, Spinoza refers to the demonstration of the existence of God, as put forward by a “Jew named Rab Ghasdai”.¹³ This demonstration appears

in *Or Hashem* 1, 3, 2, and through it Crescas tries to demonstrate, against Aristotle and Maimonides, that even if the existence of an infinite chain of causes is admitted, which is one of the ways in which the actual infinite is presented, it would still be necessary to admit the existence of a first cause, which is primordial, not because it is the beginning of the finite series of causes, but because it is immanent to all the infinite causes. Crescas states that in virtue of the impossibility of the contingent coming to exist by itself, contingent reality (*metziut*) depends on a determinant capable of privileging the existence of (infinite) beings over their non-existence, being, in this way, the cause of the totality of effects and determining their existences.¹⁴ God is thus the first immanent cause always present in the existence of all the infinite causal series. The universe is thus, besides being infinite in extension, also eternal, in the sense of having no temporal beginning, even if, ontologically, it is understood as the effect of its eternal and constantly active first cause.

Using the same procedure, Crescas also discusses whether the concept of unity is to be understood unequivocally or equivocally when referring to God and beings in general. He follows a similar path to the one taken in the discussion of existence, beginning by pointing out the differences among Aristotelians themselves. In this way he notes that, while for Avicenna and Maimonides the unity of the essence of something in general is distinct from its quiddity, for Averroes, unity, like existence, is not distinct from quiddity. Crescas rejects both theses and states that unity, as a concept, would be neither the essence of a quiddity nor a supplement to it, “but something essential to every being in act and, at the same time, a judgment of the intellect about the absence of multiplicity in a being”.¹⁵ In this way, there is an interaction between being in act, that is, existent, and an intellectual judgment that is made about the being in act that presents itself to the one who observes it or reflects on it. It is in this parallelism that the univocality of the notion of unity in Crescas lies. Unity is thus not predicated of God in a different way from other beings, as Maimonides claims, for whom unity, like existence, is a positive attribute that cannot be predicated of God and other beings in the same way. Crescas disagrees with Maimonides’ theology, according to which only negative attributes can be asserted about God. Quoting a passage from the *Sefer HaBahir* (12th century) – an important book of Kabbalah that was very widespread in his time –,

um: ergo et illud. Quare vis argumenti non in eo sita est, quod impossibile sit, dari actu Infinitum, aut progressus causarum in infinitum: sed tantum in eo, quod supponatur, res, quae sua natura non necessario existunt, non determinari ad existendum a re sua natura necessario existenti” (If there is an infinite process of causes in nature, everything that exists will be the effect of a cause. Now, nothing that depends on a cause exists by virtue of its nature. So there is nothing in nature whose essence exists necessarily. But such a conclusion is absurd, and therefore so is the assumption from which it is deduced. The force of the argument does not lie in the fact that an Infinite in act is impossible, nor an infinite progress of causes. Rather, it lies in the supposition that things which do not exist necessarily by their nature are not determined to exist by a thing which itself exists).

¹¹ H. Crescas, *Or Hashem*, *op. cit.*, 1, 3, 1, pp. 95-96.

¹² *Ibid.*, 1, 3, 1, p. 98.

¹³ B. Spinoza, *Epistola XII*, in *id.*, *Opera*. Ed. C. Gebhardt. 4 vols. Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1972, vol. IV, p. 62: “Si datur progressus causarum in infinitum, erunt omnia, quae sunt, etiam causata. Atque nulli, quod causatum est, competit, vi suae naturae necessario existere. Ergo nihil est in natura ad cuius essentiam pertinet necessario existere. Sed hoc est absurd-

¹⁴ H. Crescas, *Or Hashem*, *op. cit.*, 1, 3, 2, pp. 98-99.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1, 3, 3, p. 103.

Crescas brings the concept of divine attributes close to the notion of Sefirot.¹⁶ Referring to the Talmudic passage about Rabbi Hanina and the possibility of giving many praises to God, Crescas eventually affirms the infinity of divine attributes. The problem would not be, as in Maimonides, affirming positive attributes, but thinking that, for the human mind, it is possible to know all the infinite divine attributes or even the most important ones. The essence of necessary being is simple but is expressed in infinite ways.

However, while divine unity can be deduced by way of reason, the deduction of oneness is not possible by this route. In referring to divine oneness, Crescas draws on the traditional statement that God is one, an affirmation that is found in the verse recited in Jewish liturgy twice a day: "Listen Israel, *YHWH* our God, the *YHWH*, is one" (Deut. 6:4), the *Shema Israel*. For Crescas, this verse contains two parallel meanings according to Jewish tradition. The first sense refers to the unity, that is the essential simplicity, of the necessary being that cannot be a composite. Here he relies on one of the few 26 Maimonidean propositions with which he agrees, that is, proposition 21. The second sense of God being conceived as one, is that he is unique, with no other like him.¹⁷ The conclusion about divine oneness is beyond the limits of reason and can only be affirmed by prophecy. However, both divine unity and oneness are predicated univocally.

Crescas understands divine incorporeality as the non-existence of any passivity in God, for only bodies are subject to affections. However, incorporeal does not necessarily mean non-extensive,¹⁸ for the divine Presence is conceived of as the Place of the World and its constant and eternal cause. So how to understand the traditional statement about divine joy, if joy is a passion of the soul, a passivity? For Crescas, divine joy is an expression of his goodness, which is realized in the constant giving of his existence, that is, of his good, in the eternal and constant creation of all contingent beings. The distinction between creation and emanation is blurred by Crescas. The universe is thus, besides being infinite in extension, also eternal in its duration,¹⁹ because it is the effect of the eternal and constant act of giving of existence, by which God is always generating and uniting with beings. This creative and participatory union is the expression of divine love, that is, the realization of divine immanence, in other words, the union of the necessary being, which in its essence is transcendent otherness, with all beings, which are effects caused by him and which subsist as they participate in existence as recipients of his good. Thus, this union, which is divine love, takes place not only in the generation of beings, but also in their duration, because the actuality of beings in particular, and of the universe in general, depends on the constant union between the contingent

and the necessary, through which the necessary gives its actuality to the contingent.²⁰

Another aspect of the original metaphysics proposed by Crescas is its determinism. Contingent beings are completely inserted in the causal chain, because they do not have, in themselves, the condition to cause their own existence. For this reason, Crescas denies that absolute free will can exist among contingent beings, since their deliberation and their will are always the fruit of previous causes. In the case of human beings, the will is the fruit of the coupling of imagination and desire, which produces deliberation. In this way, the will is distinguished from coercion, even though it is also determined. This determinism is a direct consequence of the way Crescas distinguishes between the necessary being and contingent beings, because while the former is always actual, since it does not need a cause external to its essence, the latter have their actuality completely linked to the causal chain.²¹ If in Aristotle there is randomness, in Crescas there is only the indeterminate, at least from the point of view of what is intelligible to men, because human reason cannot grasp the infinite causes that make an event actual. The first necessary cause acts simultaneously with the infinite contingent causes.²²

The concept of necessary being proposed by Crescas carries within itself a strong tension, because apparently there is an almost insoluble logical contradiction between conceiving necessary being as transcendent, that is, distinct from all others in its essence, on the one hand, and its essential attributes as immanent to *metziut*, that is, to the universe as a whole, on the other. Both Maimonides' *Matzui Rishon* and Spinoza's *Substance* are protected from this contradiction, for although these two systems are opposed by the vertex like two triangles, from the point of view of their internal logic they are both profoundly coherent and elegant. However, as in the strong electrical voltage produced by a Van de Graaff generator, the difference in polarity between the antithetical concepts of transcendence and immanence in necessary being can fulminate all internal consistency of a system. Crescas seeks to harmonize this very strong tension through the idea of actual infinity, namely that the *metziut*, the universe, is infinite in extension, eternal in duration and made up of infinite worlds. God is infinite and the universe is infinite. On the one hand, we have the simple essence *haiav hametziut*, which is expressed in infinite attributes, and on the other hand the first cause, generating infinite effects, eternally and constantly. This theoretical construction, however, is only weakly supported by the dynamics embedded in the conception of an eternal and constant creation. This is perhaps the expected fragility in a system that would be seen as a transition between the two poles of absolute transcendence and immanence. Crescas seeks to overcome the dialectic between transcendence and immanence in the constant dynamic of the eternal

¹⁶ W. Z. Harvey, *Rabbi Hasdai Crescas*. Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar Edition, 2010, p. 15 (Hebrew).

¹⁷ H. Crescas, *Or Hashem*, op. cit., 1, 3, 4, pp. 115-116. Also id., *Lumière de l'Éternel*, op. cit., pp. 516-518.

¹⁸ C. Fraenkel, "Hasdai Crescas on God as the Place of the World and Spinoza's Notion of God as Res Extensa", *Aleph*, 9 (2009), pp. 77-111.

¹⁹ S. Feldman, "The Theory of Eternal Creation in Hasdai Crescas and Some of his Predecessors", *Viator*, 11 (1980), pp. 313, 315, 317.

²⁰ W. Z. Harvey, *Physics and Metaphysics in Hasdai Crescas*. Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben Publisher, 1998, pp. 77-88.

²¹ H. A. Wolfson, "Studies in Crescas", in A. Hyman (ed.), *Studies in Medieval Jewish and Islamic Philosophy*. New York: Ktav, 1977, p. 297.

²² H. Crescas, *Lumière de l'Éternel*, op. cit., p. 742.

flow of existence, whereby God is always joining himself to beings. Conversely, the entelechy of all beings and the immortality are disposed towards the union with God, called by Crescas the flash of Presence, *ziv Hashekhinā*.

However, to place Crescas as a transitional philosopher is to conceive that a tradition of thought is the bearer of some phantasmagorical internal evolutionary teleology, which would need to be proven. Since a tradition is first of all a collective memory, a thinker, at a given historical period, does not know or resolve what will come later, with the unfolding resulting from the reception of his thought, because such transmission is always beyond his horizon of events. In this way, then, Crescas does not reconcile the contradiction between the systems of Maimonides and Spinoza, even if, without passing through him, this contradiction cannot be understood in all its significance. The internal dialectic proper to Crescas' thought lies in the tension generated by the reception within Jewish circles of Maimonides and Gersonides on the one hand, and of Abner of Burgos²³ and Kabbalistic literature on the other. The tension between divine immanence and transcendence in Crescas' thought is linked to his attempt to reconcile the sources of the philosophical discourse of his time with the sources of mysticism and rabbinic tradition.

Transcendence and immanence are reconciled by him through the infinite. The essence is simple and the attributes infinite. The Shekinah is the infinite attributes through which the divine Presence makes itself a place in the infinite universe. Following the thesis of Shlomo Pines,²⁴ it is possible to acknowledge that, in a certain way, such a theoretical construction would be linked to Crescas' use of a third source besides the Jewish and Islamic tradition. For, even if in an indirect way, Crescas uses the ideas of the univocity of being (*ens*) and of the infinitude of the first being, both formulated before him by John Duns Scotus. It is interesting that a Latin source can be used as a reconciliation between Jewish sources, but perhaps this is precisely why Crescas is in fact a philosopher.

As we have seen, the sources and intellectual traditions of Crescas' thought are very diverse. The same can be said of the reception of his thought in the following centuries. Even in the 15th century, aspects of his thought were taken up by authors as diverse as Joseph Albo and Pico della Mirandola. In the following centuries he will be read in Italy by Leone Ebreo and probably by Giordano Bruno, and in the Netherlands by Baruch Spinoza. It is also possible to note many similarities between his thought and that of seventeenth-century Englishmen such as Henry More, Joseph Raphelson, and even Isaac Newton, who nevertheless do not mention him, but cite Kabbalah sources for their concepts of divine extension.²⁵ Despite foreshadowing aspects of the

thought that will be developed in the Renaissance and Early Modern Times, what moves Crescas' investigation is not scientific curiosity, but the search for what he understood to be the most accurate concept of God; in this sense, he remains a medieval. For Hasdai Crescas the key to the tension between otherness and presence lies in the infinite. It is the infinite that rescues the unity of being.

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²³ W. Z. Harvey, *Rabbi Hasdai Crescas, op. cit.*, pp. 90-91.

²⁴ S. Pines, "Scholasticism after Thomas Aquinas and the Teachings of Hasdai Crescas and his Predecessors", *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities*, 1 (1967), pp. 5, 23-28 and 39-40.

²⁵ B. P. Copenhaver, "Jewish Theologies of Space in the Scientific Revolution: Henry More, Joseph Raphson, Isaac Newton and their Predecessors", *Annals of Science*, 37 (1980), pp. 489-548.

The Death of the Heavens: Crescas and Spinoza on the Uniformity of the World

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ENG Abstract: The paper examines the roles of Crescas and Spinoza in the transition from the medieval to the modern conception of the universe. Crescas is presented as an illustrative example of the tension between Aristotelianism and revealed religion and how the latter brings about the dissolution of the former, thus paving the way for the modern conception of the universe. It is then showed how this modern conception is embodied in Spinoza's thought, which radicalizes some of its defining traits. This radicalization undermines the traditional conception of the *Deus absconditus* and leads in Spinoza to the replacement of religion by philosophy as the true divine revelation.

Keywords: Hasdai Crescas; Baruch Spinoza; Infinity; Divine Essence; Created World.

ES La muerte de los cielos: Crescas y Spinoza sobre la uniformidad del mundo

ES Resumen: El artículo examina el papel de Crescas y Spinoza en la transición de la concepción medieval a la concepción moderna del universo. Crescas es presentado como ejemplo ilustrativo de la tensión entre aristotelismo y religión revelada y de cómo esta última provoca la disolución del aquel, allanando así el camino a la concepción moderna del universo. A continuación, se muestra cómo la concepción moderna se plasma en el pensamiento de Spinoza, el cual radicaliza algunos de sus rasgos definitorios. Esta radicalización socava la noción tradicional del *Deus absconditus* y conduce en Spinoza al remplazo de la religión por la filosofía como auténtica revelación divina.

Palabras clave: Hasdai Crescas; Baruch Spinoza; infinitud; esencia divina; mundo creado.

Summary: 1. Introduction: Ethical Cosmos and Abrahamic Excess. 2. Hasdai Crescas (c. 1340 – c. 1410): Reestablishing the Relatedness to God. 2.1. Against Aristotelian “Finitism”. 2.2. Infinite Spacetime and God's Presence in the Universe. 2.3. Concealment and Transparency of the Divine Essence. 2.4. A New Synthesis? 3. Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677): Infinity as Self-Affirmation of Reason. 3.1. Moral Neutrality of Nature. 3.2. Uniformity of Nature and Centralization of Divine Power. 3.3. Epistemological Priority of Infinity. 4. Concluding Remarks: The Abrahamic Excess Overtaken. 5 Bibliography.

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1. Introduction: Ethical Cosmos and Abrahamic Excess

In his book *La sagesse du monde: Histoire de l'expérience humaine de l'univers*,¹ Rémi Brague coins the compelling phrase “death of the heavens” to

describe the transition from the standard vision of the cosmos during the Middle Ages to the modern conception of the universe. By way of introduction to the subject of this essay, I would like to outline in very broad strokes the main argument that Brague presents by means of this expression. These introductory

¹ R. Brague, *La sagesse du monde: Histoire de l'expérience humaine de l'univers*. Paris: Fayard, 1999.

considerations will provide the framework of my ensuing reflections on Crescas and Spinoza.²

Rémi Brague characterizes the standard view of the world during the Middle Ages as an “ethical cosmos”. Its defining features can be illuminated by way of comparison to a central tenet of our contemporary mindset. We take nowadays for granted that the “physical” and the “axiological” are completely heterogeneous domains and that the latter is in no way entrenched or founded in the former. The physical world is for us completely devoid of values and moral significance. According to Brague, this sharp divide between the physical and the moral was foreign to the medieval (and ancient) mindset. What we nowadays call “values”—thus conveying their subjective character³—had then its proper seat and source *in the things themselves*.⁴ Normativity was thus inscribed in the very structure of reality; “goodness” and “being”, “ought” and “is” were not kept apart.

This is not to say that there was no room for evil—in the sense of imperfection and wickedness—in this conception, but rather that its scope was well circumscribed. Indeed, the sphere of evil and imperfection was located in the *sublunar region*, characterized by its mutability, corruptibility and “vileness”, in stark contrast to the *supralunar or celestial region*, characterized by its immutability, incorruptibility, higher dignity and “nobility”. Add to this that the earth is an insignificant point in comparison to *the whole of the world*—which aside from that was of finite dimensions. In this respect, goodness clearly prevails over evil, insofar as it “comprehends” or “encloses” it. On the whole, the cosmos is good.⁵ This clear distinction of areas or regions endowed with ethical significance made the medieval cosmos a hierarchical system of variously ranked compartments. As such, the cosmos constituted a model of normativity, both for the individual and for the collectivity.⁶ Brague thus speaks of a *cosmological ethics and politics*: the values that govern the individual and society are inscribed in the very structure of the world.

Despite its seeming stability—confirmed by centuries of hegemony—, this model was not free of internal tensions. For, according to Brague, the medieval ethical cosmos is already a synthesis—or rather a “compromise”—between two preexisting models, which he calls respectively “Timaeus” and “Abraham”. In other words: ancient pagan philosophy and revealed religion. According to Brague, “Abraham” contains certain “subversive” aspects or elements that destabilized the synthesis and gradually lead to its dissolution, thus giving rise to the modern conception of the universe. Among these destabilizing aspects, he stresses the fact that—for “Abraham”—the world has been created *ex nihilo* by a transcendent deity that acts by free will and governs the universe *in its entirety*. How does this exactly affect the stability of the medieval ethical cosmos? Brague’s reasoning on this point—supported by abundant textual evidence—can be paraphrased as follows. As has been just observed, the celestial realm is in the ethical cosmos nobler than and superior to the sublunar region. With respect to the creator, however, *everything* is equally vile and despicable. Taken in its radicality, the very idea of creation devalues the created in relation to the creator and leads to a relativization of the axiological differences and hierarchical ranks within the cosmos. The divide between the supralunar and the sublunar becomes relative; the contents of the world are leveled and put at the same distance of the creator.⁷ The world, in other words, becomes more uniform and homogeneous. *Moreover*, God’s unlimited power enables him to create more than one world; in fact, nothing can prevent him from creating *infinite worlds*, as well as an infinite spatiotemporal universe containing all of them. Even if the plurality of worlds remains a mere conjecture, its mere conceivability has already disastrous implications for the “ethical” character of the medieval cosmos. For it entails the separation of “goodness” and “being”: being our world just a particular one among infinite others, its presumable excellencies and perfections cease to be absolute and become a matter of perspective. “Goodness” is the source of the world, not the world itself, which is thus reduced to a mere “fact”, intrinsically devoid of value.⁸

In these far-reaching implications of the “Abrahamic excess”—as Brague puts it—we can already recognize three defining traits of the view of the universe that will follow the collapse of the medieval ethical cosmos. *A) It is uniform*: it does not have qualitatively differentiated domains or “compartments” governed by different sets of laws (unlike the medieval cosmos). In the new universe, matter is everywhere the same and natural phenomena are subjected to the same set of laws and explanatory

² Unless otherwise indicated, all references of Spinoza are from *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, 2 vols., translated by Edwin Curley, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985, 2016. I have used the following usual abbreviations to refer to Spinoza’s writings: TIE, *Treatise of the Emendation of the Intellect* [*Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*]; Ep., *Letters*; TTP, *Theological Political Treatise* [*Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*]; TP, *Political Treatise* [*Tractatus Politicus*]. When referring to the *Ethics*, I have used the following abbreviations: a=axiom, c=corollary, d=demonstration, p=proposition, s=scholium, app=appendix, l=lemma. Therefore, E1p10 refers to proposition 10 of part 1 of the *Ethics* and E2p40s2 to the scholium 2 of the proposition 40 of part 2.

³ Cf. R. Brague, *La sagesse*, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

⁴ Cf. R. Brague, *La sagesse*, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

⁵ R. Brague, *La sagesse*, *op. cit.*, p. 143: “Le monde, et avant tout ce qu’il y a de plus cosmique dans le monde, à savoir le ciel, donne à l’homme antique et médiéval l’éclatant témoignage de ce que le bien n’est pas seulement une possibilité, mais une triomphante réalité. La cosmologie a une dimension éthique. À son tour, la tâche de transporter un tel bien dans ce bas monde où nous vivons enrichit l’éthique d’une dimension cosmologique. C’est par la médiation du monde que l’homme devient ce qu’il doit être et, partant, ce qu’il est.”

⁶ R. Brague, *La sagesse*, *op. cit.*, p. 158: “L’éthique antique et médiévale contient donc une dimension selon laquelle la pratique morale doit prendre pour modèle la régularité du monde. Cette imitation ne vaut pas que pour l’individu. L’ordre cosmique est une norme pour la cité elle aussi.”

⁷ R. Brague, *La sagesse*, *op. cit.*, p. 185: “La dévalorisation du créé par rapport au Créateur mène à relativiser les différences de valeur à l’intérieur de celui-ci. Les êtres les plus nobles sont donc vils par rapport à Dieu.”

⁸ R. Brague, *La sagesse*, *op. cit.*, p. 210: “La pluralité des mondes, même si elle reste de pure hypothèse, a une conséquence ontologique. Le réel est réduit à n’être rien de plus que le factuel. L’être et le bien sont de la sorte dissociés: l’être de ce monde réel qui est le nôtre a sa source dans un bien qui ne coïncide pas avec lui, mais lui est extérieur, à savoir la bienveillance de Dieu qui l’a choisi parmi d’autres possibles.”

principles. *B) It is morally neutral*: it does not feature any hierarchies or differences of rank, no privileged or superior regions that would constitute models of behavior or sources of normativity, individually as well as socially. Categories such as “good” or “bad”, “merit” and “sin” are alien to the physical universe, which only contains facts devoid of axiological significance. *C) It is infinite*: it has no boundaries or limits; hence, no absolute points of reference, such as center, periphery, and the like. In this respect, it reflects the limitlessness of the creator. Given these traits, it is not surprising that Brague talks about the “the death of the heavens” with respect to this new conception: the celestial regions lose in this new outlook their preeminence and exemplary character.

It is against this backdrop that I would like to present the following reflections on Crescas and Spinoza. Admittedly, both thinkers have played a crucial role in the process of disintegration of the medieval ethical cosmos and in the emergence of the new conception of the universe.⁹ However, each of them epitomizes a different phase of the process: whereas Crescas exemplifies the tension and inadequacy between “Timaeus” and “Abraham”, Spinoza represents the definitive end of this synthesis and its replacement by an infinite, homogeneous and morally neutral universe. In what follows, I will spell out in more detail their respective role in the death of the heavens. In particular, I will argue that:

1. For Crescas, the tension between “Timaeus” and “Abraham” takes the form of an inadequacy between Aristotelianism (in its Maimonidean reading) and Judaism. Crescas perceives the main shortcoming of Aristotelianism in its “finitism”, which entails a notion of the divine as an *otherness* unrelated to the world utterly incompatible with the God of the Torah. Crescas thus carries out a remodeling of the philosophical discourse in order to make it more conform with the revealed message. The central notion in this remodeling is that of infinity, which is alien to the “Timaeic” model.

2. Regarding Spinoza, the aforementioned defining features of the modern conception of the universe are fully present in his thought. Yet his particularly radical interpretation of these features leads him to subvert the traditional unknowability of the divine—thus bringing further some of Crescas’ fecund insights—and to lay the foundations for a critical examination of religion, since the latter can no longer claim the monopoly of revelation.

2. Hasdai Crescas (1340 – 1410): Reestablishing the Relatedness to God

2.1. Against Aristotelian “Finitism”

The thought of Hasdai Crescas exemplifies the explicit awareness of the aforementioned tension between “Abraham” and “Timaeus”. In his major work, *Or Hashem*, Crescas sets out to subject the main philosophical tenets of Maimonidean Aristotelianism

to a careful scrutiny. The main motivation behind this critical undertaking is of theological and religious nature¹⁰. In particular, Crescas is extremely wary of Maimonides’ attempt to underpin the doctrines of Judaism by means of Aristotelian physics and metaphysics—i.e., by means of “Timaeus”. In Crescas’ view, the authority of Aristotle has been revered beyond measure to the detriment of tradition and revelation, which alone can teach us the truth and “open our eyes”.¹¹ However, Crescas’ approach should be clearly distinguished from religious anti-philosophical positions such as Yehuda Halevi’s and al-Ghazali’s.¹² His wariness is not towards philosophy *as such*, but rather towards Aristotelianism (in its Maimonidean version). In this respect, his project is not merely destructive, but contains fecund philosophical insights that depart from the prevalent Aristotelianism at the time and—as Wolfson put it—“foreshadow a new conception of the universe”¹³. These contributions include, among others: the possibility of actual infinity and of a vacuum, elimination of the break between the sublunar and the translunar region, affirmation of a plurality of worlds, etc. Although many of these innovative insights in *Or Hashem* remain inchoate and do not amount to a full-fledged theory, their presence is unmistakable.

Of special philosophical import is Crescas’ sharp critique of Aristotle’s rejection of infinity. In his classic book on Crescas’ critique of Aristotle, Wolfson observes that Crescas’ great merit is to have perceived that Aristotle’s rejects infinity by arguing “from the analogy of a finite”.¹⁴ Differently put: the *finite* constitutes for Aristotle the standard or measuring stick of being and knowability, and in this respect his philosophy can be fittingly described as “finitist”. Yet the rules that apply to the finite do not apply to infinity.¹⁵ In this respect, Aristotle’s approach is unsuited to adequately grasp the infinite *from the very outset*.

Yet why should Aristotle’s finitism pose a danger to the doctrines of traditional Judaism? In which sense could a conceptualization of the revealed message in Aristotelian—i.e., “finitist”—terms possibly misrepresent its content? I advance the following hypothesis, which will find its confirmation in the exam of Crescas’

⁹ As Lasker observes, Crescas’ thought “won few adherents among his contemporaries and successors in the late Middle Ages”; nonetheless, “the result of Crescas’ argumentation was a philosophical system which could compete with Aristotelianism on its own terms” (D. Lasker, “Chasdai Crescas”, in Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman (eds.), *History of Jewish Philosophy*. London: Routledge, 1997, p. 336).

¹⁰ Cf. J. T. Robinson, “Hasdai Crescas and anti-Aristotelianism”, in Daniel H. Frank and O. Leaman (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 391.

¹¹ For instance, regarding God’s unity, which according to Crescas cannot be sufficiently proven by philosophical speculation alone (see H. Crescas, *Light of the Lord [Or Hashem]*. Trans. R. Weiss. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018, p. 114). As for the illuminating power of revelation in opposition to Aristotle, see H. Crescas, *Or Hashem, op. cit.*, p. 24 (italics mine): “And since the source of error and confusion is reliance on the words of the Greek and the proofs he produced, it struck me as appropriate to highlight the fallaciousness of his proofs and the sophistry of his arguments—even those the Rabbi borrowed from him to bolster his own positions—in order, on this day, to show all the nations that *which removes confusion in matters of faith, and which lights up all the darkness, is the Torah alone [...]*”

¹² Cf. G. Vajda, *Introduction à la pensée juive du Moyen Âge*. Paris: Vrin, 1947, p. 170.

¹³ Cf. H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas’ Critique of Aristotle*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1929, p. 114.

¹⁴ H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas’ Critique of Aristotle, op. cit.*, p. 41.

¹⁵ See N. Rabinovitch, “Rabbi Hasdai Crescas (1340-1410) on Numerical Infinities”, *Isis*, 61 (1970), pp. 224-230.

doctrine that I offer below. The emphasis put on the finite as the yardstick of both being and knowability inevitably relegates the infinite (and hence God) either to non-being¹⁶ or to transcendence. In both cases, infinity becomes an *otherness* external to discourse and unrelated to the world of finite beings. This is where the inadequacy between “Timaeus” and “Abraham”—as articulated by Crescas—becomes apparent. The result of this banishment of the infinite out the world is a completely *alienated God*, which—in contrast to the God of the Bible—cannot possibly entertain any relation with creatures.¹⁷ The main problem with Aristotle’s finitism, when one tries to merge it with the revealed message (as Maimonides does), is that it *evacuates* and *estranges* God from the created world, hindering any possible relationship between them, as Judaism demands. Aristotelianism—i.e., “Timaeus”—thus obstructs the connectedness with God that constitutes the central message of the Torah. In this respect, we could say, Crescas’ critique of Aristotle aims at reestablishing the connectedness with the divine.¹⁸ In order to achieve this purpose, it is necessary to dismantle the whole conceptual framework that causes this alienation of the divine, namely Aristotle’s “finitist” metaphysics and physics. This explains how Crescas’ main theological worries—which at first sight are far away from physical concerns—can result in a complete reorganization of the standard cosmological and physical outlook during the Middle Ages.

Yet how far can such a dismantling and restructuring go in the 14th and 15th centuries, when Aristotelianism is still prevalent? The impossibility of carrying out a complete *tabula rasa* of Aristotelianism—and, by extension, of the *hochmá yevanit*—is the cause of numerous hesitations and uncertainties in Crescas’ work, as I will show in what follows.

2.2. Infinite Spacetime and God’s Presence in the Universe

Crescas presents an impressive array of arguments against Aristotelian “finitist” physics that undermine its very foundations. To examine these arguments in detail would go beyond the scope of this essay, so I will limit myself to the following observation: in the main, and as already observed, Crescas accuses Aristotle of arguing “from the analogy of the finite”,

thus hindering any possible grasp of infinity *as such*. In his approach to the notion of place, for instance, Aristotle takes particular bodies as the basis point of reference; place is thus defined as the “adjacent surface of the containing body”,¹⁹ making spatiality relative and depending on the body that occupies it. The same approach can be discerned in Aristotle’s treatment of time, which he characterizes as “the number of motion (or of rest) of a physical object (particularly the diurnal sphere)”²⁰. Crescas strategy on this issue chiefly consists in questioning this priority of the finite and in conceiving both space (*makom*) and time (*zman*) independently of physical bodies. He so-to-speak “emancipates” space and time from the primacy of the finite, turning space into an infinite vacuum and time into an infinite duration.²¹ The result of this “liberation” is an infinitely extended and perpetual universe devoid of physical bodies, yet susceptible of containing them.

In this infinite space-time continuum, an infinite number of worlds can be conceived, although Crescas nowhere asserts it peremptorily.²² In any event, by affirming that matter in this infinite continuum is everywhere the same, Crescas abrogates the divide between the translunar and the sublunar region and eliminates the differences of rank within the cosmos. The distinction between corruptible and incorruptible regions loses its meaning, and thus the possibility, not just of creation of the world at a particular moment of time, but of continuous creation at all instants of time (*ha-hiddush ha-temidi*) becomes admissible.²³ In support of this view, Crescas appeals to tradition quoting the rabbinic dictum: “He would construct worlds and destroy them.”²⁴ For Crescas, these conclusions bear witness to the radical infirmity and ontological dependence of all things with respect to God, who produces them out of absolute nonexistence.²⁵ Whether the world has been created at a certain time or always existed makes no difference: by contrast to the self-subsistent (yet still divinely governed) world conceived by Aristotle, for Crescas all beings originate *entirely* from God. This feature of radical dependence of the created with respect to the creator will become more salient in the 17th century, especially in Spinoza’s thought, as I will show below.

It is apparent that such an infinite universe reflects or manifests God’s unlimited power and glory more adequately than the limited ethical cosmos. Although it might sound paradoxical, the infinite distance of God with respect to all created beings—which, as repeatedly observed, relativizes the differences of rank within the cosmos—results here in a certain

¹⁶ Thus, Aristotle identifies infinity with matter and matter with privation; see *Physics*, III, 7, 208a. On the equation between matter, infinity, and non-being, see also Plotinus, *Enneads*, II, IV, 15.

¹⁷ See for instance Lasker’s description of Maimonides’ theory of negative attributes, which Crescas also attacks (D. Lasker, “Chasdai Crescas”, *op. cit.*, p. 341; italics mine): “The result of this theory is a totally transcendent God, *one who cannot be said to have a relationship to this world.*” Similar complaints against Aristotle’s “finitism” will be later forcefully presented by Giordano Bruno; see M. Á. Granada, *Filosofía y religión en el Renacimiento*, Sevilla: Thémata, 2021, p. 349.

¹⁸ Cf. D. Lasker, “Chasdai Crescas”, *op. cit.*, p. 342 (italics mine): “If there is one common thread in Crescas’ discussion of these corner-stones of Judaism, it is a rejection of the Aristotelian ‘intellectualist’ view of the relation between God and humanity [...] Crescas rejected this intellectualist approach to God’s relation to the world, *replacing it with the concept that God acts toward the world through his goodness, love, and grace.*”

¹⁹ M. Jammer, *Concepts of Space. The History of Theories of Space in Physics*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1954, p. 74.

²⁰ W. Z. Harvey, *Physics and Metaphysics in Hasdai Crescas*. Amsterdam: J. G. Gieben, 1998, p.7.

²¹ Cf. W. Z. Harvey, *Physics and Metaphysics*, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

²² Regarding the issue of plural worlds and the presumable connection between Crescas and scholastic philosophy, see S. Feldman, “On Plural Universes: A Debate in Medieval Jewish Philosophy and the Duhem-Pines Thesis”, *Aleph*, 12 (2012), pp. 329-366.

²³ Cf. H. Crescas, *Or Hashem*, *op. cit.*, p. 276. Cf. W. Z. Harvey, *Physics and Metaphysics*, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

²⁴ H. Crescas, *Or Hashem*, *op. cit.*, p. 276.

²⁵ Cf. H. Crescas, *Or Hashem*, *op. cit.*, p. 277.

closeness or immediacy of God towards all things. Once all hierarchies have been eliminated, no region or type of being can be considered to be closer or more related to the divine than the others. Verticality is thus replaced by horizontality, and all things are equally contingent upon God's boundless benefaction. It is thus not surprising that Crescas speaks of God-taking up again a rabbinic dictum—as “the place of the world”. Let us leave undecided whether this statement should be taken literally or metaphorically, “whether this infinite space-continuum is created by, emanates from, or is an attribute of God”²⁶. The important aspect to be stressed is that the infinite space-time continuum conceived by Crescas, insofar as it *tightens* the relationship between the creator and the created, serves Crescas' overarching purpose of reestablishing the connectedness with the divine that Aristotelian “finitism” had hindered.

2.3. Concealment and Transparency of the Divine Essence

A similar drive towards a notion of the divine that stresses its orientation towards creatures can be discerned in Crescas' conception of divine attributes, despite the difficulties and seeming inconsistencies that this conception is fraught with.²⁷ Seemingly in line with Maimonides' approach to this issue, Crescas stresses in numerous passages that the divine essence is “absolutely inscrutable” (*neelam takhlit healem*)²⁸ and “that the quiddity of God is at the highest degree of concealment (*betakhlit hahelem*), such that apprehension of His essential attributes was impossible even for the master of the prophets”²⁹. Maimonides had famously insisted upon the absolute unknowability of God's quiddity and denied the possibility of essential attributes, on the ground that their plurality would impinge upon God's simplicity.³⁰ From God's unknowability Maimonides inferred the absolute *unrelatedness* between God and creatures, and one might expect that Crescas draws a similar conclusion. Yet, in apparent contradiction with his own statements, Crescas affirms that “there is no avoiding affirming essential attributes of God”³¹ and that relatedness between God and creatures should be admitted. Crescas seems thus to be committed—quite problematically at first glance—to both the

impenetrability and the transparency of the divine essence.

Two divergent tendencies are recognizable in Crescas' approach to this difficult issue. In conformity with God's unknowability, Crescas argues that essential attributes, although essentially connected with God's innermost essence, *are nonetheless different from it*. Using a famous simile from the *Sefer Yetzirah*, Crescas compares the relationship between God's quiddity and essential attributes with a flame “connected to a live coal”.³² With this—rather unsatisfactory—solution, Crescas avoids the danger of attributive plurality colliding with God's simplicity. This explanation aligns him with the traditional approach as well as with the “finitism” endorsed by Maimonides.³³ Vajda has powerfully described the resulting scheme of things as follows: “behind the knowable essential attributes lies the indeterminate and absolutely hidden essence.”³⁴ The divine essence thus remains an *otherness* without relation to the world and human knowledge.

Yet Crescas presents another explanation of different character, which unfortunately he does not entirely spell out: “[...] although from our perspective attributes are separate, they are one from God's. And the infinite goodness that is His essentially includes them all and renders them divine on all counts.”³⁵ In this explanation, God's quiddity is no longer an otherness beyond all determination, but rather the *unifying principle* of a multiplicity of aspects and properties, which therefore do not constitute a *composite*, but an indissoluble unity, in which one aspect cannot be conceived independently of the others.³⁶ As Vajda observes, divine simplicity remains in this solution “intact”.³⁷ We can easily see the difference between the two examined solutions. Whereas the “traditional” one tends to *alienate* the divine essence from the world, conceiving it as something *extraneous* to diversity and plurality, the other, more “innovative” one conceives God as the underlying oneness of plurality. In one solution, God is, so-to-speak, one half of a split-up reality; in the other, God is an all-encompassing unity.

This thrust towards a more unified worldview, in which God ceases to be one half of a split-up reality, reappears in one of the most innovative aspects of Crescas' thought: his conception of divine love and benefaction. We have here—as Zeev Harvey has pointed out—a positive contribution of Crescas' philosophy, not reducible to his critique of Aristotle. Harvey has shown that Crescas' conception of love departs from the philosophical tradition—and ultimately from Plato and Aristotle—in that it attributes to God a loving

²⁶ J. T. Robinson, “Hasdai Crescas and anti-Aristotelianism”, *op. cit.*, p. 404. This is a controversial issue. See C. Fraenkel, “Hasdai Crescas on God as the Place of the World and Spinoza's Notion of God as ‘res extensa’”, *Aleph*, 9 (2009), pp. 77-111.

²⁷ See H. A. Wolfson, “Crescas on the Problem of Divine Attributes”, *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 7 (1916), pp. 1-44, pp. 75-121; W. Z. Harvey, “Bewilderments in Crescas's Theory of Attributes”, *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities*, 8 (1997), pp. 133-144 (Hebrew). Regarding the parallels between Crescas' and Spinoza's respective conceptions of divine attributes, see Y. Melamed, “Hasdai Crescas and Spinoza on Actual Infinity and the Infinity of God's Attributes”, in Steven Nadler (ed.), *Spinoza and Medieval Jewish Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, pp. 204-215.

²⁸ H. Crescas, *Or Hashem*, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

²⁹ H. Crescas, *Or Hashem*, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

³⁰ Cf. D. Lasker, “Chasdai Crescas”, *op. cit.*, p. 341.

³¹ H. Crescas, *Or Hashem*, *op. cit.*, p. 110. Essential divine attributes had already been admitted by Averroes and Gersonides, as part of their return to Aristotle. Cf. H. A. Wolfson, “Crescas on the Problem”, *op. cit.*

³² H. Crescas, *Or Hashem*, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

³³ Wolfson talks about the weight of tradition finally taking over Crescas (Cf. H. A. Wolfson, “Crescas on the Problem”, *op. cit.*)

³⁴ G. Vajda, *Introduction*, *op. cit.*, p. 175: “derrière les attributs d'essence connaissables se trouve l'essence indéterminée et absolument cachée.”

³⁵ H. Crescas, *Or Hashem*, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

³⁶ Cf. G. Vajda, *Introduction*, *op. cit.*, p. 174. Shlomo Pines has shown the striking parallels between this conception of divine attributes—as encompassed by God's goodness—and the one articulated by Duns Scotus. See S. Pines, “Scholasticism after Thomas Aquinas and the Teachings of Hasdai Crescas and His Predecessors”, *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities*, 1 (1967), 39 [527].

³⁷ Cf. G. Vajda, *Introduction*, *op. cit.*

impulse towards creatures. This loving impulse should not be understood in the sense of longing and privation—which would be unworthy of the divine nature—, but in the sense of *power and spontaneity*.³⁸ According to Crescas, God's loving impulse "causes His goodness and perfection to overflow" over creatures, thus sustaining "their existence by the constant overflowing of His goodness".³⁹ Recall that goodness is for Crescas the unifying principle of divine attributes. In the context we are now examining, goodness—through the mediation of love—is also the unifying principle and sustainer of all existents, a sort of *nexus universalis* that connects and links together the infinite plurality of creatures.⁴⁰ Therefore, that which accounts for God's unity, accounts also for the world's unity, as well as for the unity between God and the world!

Despite the inchoate character of these insights, they all point in the same direction, namely: towards a conception of the divine nature as that which is truly *universal, general, and common to everything*, as opposed to a more traditional conception of the divine as a transcendent *otherness* unrelated to the world. It is clear that, while the traditional conception relatively fits with Aristotelian "finitism"—insofar as it places God *outside of* the finite world—, the novel conception that Crescas is advancing requires its outright dismantling.

2.4. A New Synthesis?

Returning to Brague's terminology discussed in the introduction, we can say that Crescas' *Or Hashem* stages "Abraham"'s judgment of "Timaeus", a judgment that entails the repudiation of central philosophical tenets, not only of Aristotelianism, but of philosophy up to that point. Yet, as already observed, Crescas' demolition work is not merely destructive and anti-philosophical, but yields positive results, "viable alternatives"⁴¹ to the Aristotelianism of his time. Crescas does not exclusively lean on tradition to attack Aristotelianism: "Tradition, according to him, is a guide only in matters theological; he does not employ it in deciding problems concerning the nature of things."⁴² We can therefore safely say that Crescas offers a new "theological-philosophical synthesis",⁴³ but this synthesis can no longer be described as the (unstable) marriage between "Timaeus" and "Abraham", insofar as it operates with notions and concepts that were foreign to Greek philosophical thought. Let us briefly examine some of the features of this new synthesis.

In this new synthesis, religious truth does no longer need the support of philosophical speculation, as it happens in Maimonides.⁴⁴ What Crescas

rather seeks is the conformity and agreement between the two, without one relying on the other.⁴⁵ This audacious attempt to emancipate religion from the yoke of philosophy has led some commentators to speak of "anti-intellectualism" and "anti-rationalism" in Crescas. Yet what exactly should be understood under "rationalism" here? As my argument has tried to show, the dismantlement of Aristotelian "finitism" that Crescas carries out seeks to make philosophy more conform to the revealed message *by bringing the divine nature closer to the world and the human mind* (and conversely: by bringing the world and the human mind closer to the divine nature). Take for instance his critique of Aristotle's rejection of infinity: infinity is now *conceivable*, which means that it is no longer *alien* to human reason. Also recall the problem of divine attributes: although essentially concealed and impenetrable, divine quiddity is for Crescas susceptible of essential attributions and admits of a considerable degree of connectedness with created beings, etc. In sum: Crescas' reform of the prevailing philosophical framework seeks to expand its scope in order to better capture the richness and depth of the revealed message, and, in this respect, the talk of "anti-intellectualism" is misguided. Although this is not present in Crescas yet, the foundations are being laid for an immanentization of the divine and for its integration into human reason. And this shift—although foreign, even opposite, to Crescas' intent—entails a potential replacement of religion by philosophy, as I will show below with respect to Spinoza.

There can be of course no real transformation of a prevailing philosophical discourse without a general destabilization. The careful reader of *Or Hashem* might get often the impression that the *pars destruens* of Crescas' project outweighs the *pars construens*, which explains the use of labels such as "scepticism" and even "fideism" by some commentators to characterize his endeavor. This impression admits to characterization compatible with the reading I have presented so far: if the target of a thoroughgoing critique—such as Crescas'—are the pillars of an all-embracing system with no significant rivals back then—such as Aristotelianism—, then the results of such a critique necessarily entail a certain distrust of reason and the power of philosophical speculation, *at least in the terms of the philosophical system under attack*.

3. Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677): Infinity as Self-Affirmation of Reason

A bit more than two centuries separate Crescas' theological-philosophical synthesis and Spinoza's rationalistic monism. The context has significantly changed: by the time of Spinoza, the medieval ethical cosmos, without having completely disappeared, is in its terminal phase.⁴⁶ The philosophical dis-

³⁸ Cf. W. Z. Harvey, *Physics and Metaphysics*, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

³⁹ H. Crescas, *Or Hashem*, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

⁴⁰ Love is thus for Crescas—to use Hume's words— "the cement of the world". As Harvey notes (W. Z. Harvey, *Physics and Metaphysics*, *op. cit.*, p. 113), if Crescas had elaborated more these insights about love, translating them "into scientific propositions [...] he might have stumbled upon a theory of gravitation three centuries before Newton."

⁴¹ Hasdai Crescas, *Or Hashem*, *op. cit.*, text from the back cover.

⁴² H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle*, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

⁴³ G. Vajda, *Introduction*, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

⁴⁴ Cf. H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle*, *op. cit.*, p. 124; cf. J. A. Fernández López, *Estudios de pensamiento medie-*

val hispanojudío, Madrid: Universidad Pontificia de Comillas, 2022, pp. 127-132.

⁴⁵ W. Z. Harvey, *Physics and Metaphysics*, *op. cit.*, p. 65: "Truth, in other words, is coherent. The truth of science cannot contradict that of prophecy, but science and prophecy will inevitably bear witness to each other. Science cannot confirm religion, but also cannot disconfirm it. It agrees with religion, and even gives us an *inclination* toward its truths."

⁴⁶ A difference should be made between the beginning of the 17th century and the end; between the Galileo affair and the publication of Newton's *Principia*, the opposition to the new

course in which this worldview was cloaked persists but is largely discredited. At the same time, a new conception of the universe—the one “foreshadowed” by Crescas—emerges with force and towards the end of the 17th century becomes the standard one. This conception is closely linked to a new ideal of knowledge, as the ensuing reflections will show.⁴⁷ Some of the defining features of this new conception of the universe have been pointed out in the introduction: moral neutrality, homogeneity and infinity. These features can be found in Spinoza, as well as in those of his contemporaries that advocate new science. Yet, whereas most of Spinoza’s contemporaries search for a compromise between these themes and old ones, Spinoza adopts them in an especially *uncompromising* way. Spinoza’s unyielding approach to these questions upsets the traditional understanding of the relationship between God and the created world and causes a shift of the “locus of truth” from revelation to philosophy,⁴⁸ as I am about to show.

3.1. Moral Neutrality of Nature

The divorce between values and nature that characterizes the new conception of the universe is particularly blatant in Spinoza. He repeatedly stresses that notions such as good and bad, perfect and imperfect and the like are mere *modi cogitandi* and should not be uncritically projected unto nature itself.⁴⁹ As is well known, the distinction between primary and secondary qualities becomes customary during the 17th century. We can say that Spinoza extends this distinction—initially restricted to sensory perception—to concepts of value as well.⁵⁰ Merit and sin, beauty and ugliness, order and confusion, they all are as subjective and mind-dependent as color, flavor and taste. This explains Spinoza’s vehement rejection of teleology and final causation, which is for him the prejudice at the root of all others. The philosophical doctrine of final causation springs from our persistent tendency to misconstrue the universe as attuned and conformed to our particularity and point of view. Teleology and ethical conceptions of the universe—such as the medieval ethical cosmos—are both cases of philosophically uninstructed anthropocentrism.

Despite his reputation as a dogmatic thinker, Spinoza has a keen awareness of the relativity of our subjective viewpoint and of the way our “situatedness” within the world prevents us from acquiring knowledge of things as *they are in themselves*.⁵¹ Our

subjective view of things, the particular angle from which we perceive nature in accordance with our unstable and changeable state, is the main obstacle to genuine, impartial and unbiased cognition, insofar as it presents reality fragmentarily and in a “mutilated” manner, as “conclusions without premises” (E2p28d). This is actually the reason why Spinoza equates sense perception with imagination: insofar as the former unavoidably distorts reality and shows it *in relation to us* (not as it is in itself), it is as “fictitious” and “unreal” as the latter. This circumstance does not condemn us to sheer ignorance—there is in fact in Spinoza an unusual confidence in the scope of our cognitive powers, as I will show below. It also does not entail the rejection of sense perception and experience altogether.⁵² Yet the awareness of our particularity prohibits us from accepting sense perception *at face value* and making it the point of departure of our understanding of the world, as the vulgar and school philosophy purport. From mutilated perceptions only a mutilated worldview can result, and a conception of the universe that features irreducible breaks and bifurcations is ultimately unamenable to full intelligibility.⁵³ Now, this is according to Spinoza what philosophers have done until now, especially in their attempt to understand the relationship between God and the world: they have erected artificial superstructures based on incomplete and fragmentary perceptions rendering knowledge of the divine unattainable.⁵⁴

The medieval ethical cosmos can be seen as a good example—from Spinoza’s perspective—of a worldview constructed on these false premises.⁵⁵ The discontinuities and breaks that this conception features—for instance, in the divide between supralunar and sublunar world⁵⁶—are an unavoidable consequence of the discontinuity and fragmentary character of the observations upon which this conception is founded. The same can be said regarding the limitedness of the world in this conception! Just as our sense perception is finite and does not extend beyond certain limits, a conception of the universe based on it must necessarily be finite as well. Finally,

conception of the universe has significantly waned. Moreover, the durability of the medieval ethical cosmos up to that point is also due to the versatility and capacity of scholastic thought to integrate innovations. Cf. E. Grant, *Much Ado about Nothing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

⁴⁷ Cf. A. Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination*. Princeton/New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986, pp. 290-346.

⁴⁸ R. H. Popkin, *The History of Skepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979, 229: “Obviously Spinoza changed the locus of truth from religion to rational knowledge in mathematics and metaphysics. To accomplish this he had to start with a most critical analysis of the claims for revealed religious knowledge”.

⁴⁹ Cf. TIE § 12 (GII/8), Letter 32 (IV/170a).

⁵⁰ Cf. L. Robinson, *Kommentar zu Spinozas Ethik*. Leipzig: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1928, p. 237.

⁵¹ Regarding Spinoza’s nuanced stance towards skepticism and our cognitive impotence in general, see J. M. Sánchez

de León Serrano, “The Place of Skepticism in Spinoza’s Thought”, *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 35:1 (2018), pp. 1-19; also “Spinoza on Global Doubt”, in G. Veltri, R. Haliva, S. Schmid and E. Spinelli (eds.), *Skeptical Paths Enquiry and Doubt from Antiquity to the Present*. Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2019, pp. 147-164.

⁵² Regarding the indispensable role of experience in Spinoza’s seemingly anti-empiricist stance, see M. Walther, *Metaphysik als Anti-Theologie: Die Philosophie Spinozas im Zusammenhang der religionsphilosophischen Problematik*, Felix Meiner Verlag: Hamburg, 1971, pp. 59-76.

⁵³ Cf. M. Della Rocca, “Spinoza and the Metaphysics of Scepticism”, *Mind*, 464 (2007), p. 853.

⁵⁴ See especially E2p10s.

⁵⁵ What I am presenting here is a hypothetical critique that Spinoza, based on his views on imagination and sense perception, could address to the medieval ethical cosmos; I am therefore *not* reproducing here an argument explicitly set forth by him.

⁵⁶ H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas’ Critique of Aristotle*, *op. cit.*, p. 118: “In Aristotle’s conception of the universe, despite his assumption of an interconnection between the various parts of the universe and a continuity of motion running throughout its parts, there was still a certain break and discontinuity and heterogeneity in nature. This break occurs at the juncture of the translunar and the sublunar parts of the universe, and as a result of it nature becomes divided into two distinct realms.”

the moral and axiological significance that this conception assigns to the regions of the cosmos would be a consequence of the aforementioned human tendency to project subjective *modi cogitandi* onto things themselves.

3.2. Uniformity of Nature and Centralization of Divine Power

In line with the modern conception of the universe, Spinoza conceives nature as a homogeneous realm without compartments or dominions governed by different sets of laws:⁵⁷ “[...] for nature is always the same, and its virtue and power of acting are everywhere the same, i.e., the laws and rules of nature, according to which all things happen, and change from one form to another, are always and everywhere the same” (E3, *Preface*). Instead of locating change and immutability in different areas of the world—as it happened in the medieval ethical cosmos—, this new conception grasps immutability and lawfulness in change itself, as the overarching legality that governs it.⁵⁸

Yet this modern trait takes on in Spinoza—as the previous one—more radical overtones than among his contemporaries. The jurisdiction of nature extends in Spinoza over all things *without exception*. Thus, human affects should be studied as any other natural phenomenon, such as heat, cold, storms, thunder, etc.,⁵⁹ for the position of the human mind within nature is not to be conceived as “a dominion within a dominion” (*imperium in imperio*; E3, *Preface*). Moreover, if we happen to observe any breach of the lawfulness of nature, or a phenomenon that we cannot explain through the laws of nature *known by us*, we should not attribute it to a supernatural power exceeding the power of nature, but to our limited knowledge, for we cannot “determine how far its force and power [of nature] extend, and what surpasses its force” (Ep. 75, G IV/315a). There is no such thing as miracles, except *in relation to us*.⁶⁰ To interpret these breaches of natural legality as proof of a supernatural power, to which the power of nature would be subservient, is for Spinoza to explain something mysterious by means of something even more mysterious (cf. Ep. 75). The very notion of miracle involves the existence of “two powers numerically distinct from one another” (TTP, VI, G III/81), and this is precisely the

kind of discontinuous and heterogenous worldview that our mutilated perception of reality—when taken at face value—engenders. Spinoza thus endorses a strict naturalism.

With this absolutization of nature’s power, Spinoza might seem to return to nature the prerogatives that modern science—according to certain readings⁶¹—had denied to it. In fact, the very opposite is the case. Although Spinoza is not a scientist, he wholeheartedly partakes of the *ethos* of the new science. This means—among other things—that he also emphatically rejects the view of created beings as endowed with autonomous powers different from God’s, as if created nature were a sort of delegate or viceregent of God. The conception of nature as completely devoid of wisdom and activity *of its own*—and hence *entirely* subordinated to God’s power—is precisely what lies behind mechanical philosophy. In this respect, and as Robert Boyle forcefully argues in his *A Free Enquiry into the Vulgarly Received Notion of Nature*, mechanical philosophy is more in line with piety and religion than the scholastic-Aristotelian approach to nature, which borders on overt paganism.⁶² The modern conception of nature thus carries out—as Lorraine Daston rightly puts it—a “centralization of divine power”.⁶³ Spinoza endorses this view, even taking it much further than his contemporaries, insofar as he denies to created beings, not just efficacy of their own (as Malebranche and modern occasionalism do), but also *being of their own*. God is for Spinoza, not just the source of things, *but their very substance*, so that they cannot nor be conceived without God (E1p14-15). By equating God with nature and declaring it the only existing substance, Spinoza is not divinizing the natural world, but radically *de-substantializing* finite beings. We can recognize here the radical infirmity and dependence of the created with respect to the creator that Crescas had already conceptualized (with his idea of constant creation and destruction of worlds) but taken to its maximum degree.

Now, from Spinoza’s perspective, the reason why traditional philosophy has *substantialized* the finite is the same reason why it has conceived the universe as a discontinuous and heterogeneous assemblage, to wit: it has taken mutilated sense perception, our *images of things*, as the measuring stick of “thingness” and “substantiality”, without taking into account the relativity of our partial viewpoint. Traditional philosophy thus has—according to Spinoza—not only substantialized particulars, but also reified universals,⁶⁴ hypostatized all sorts of abstractions and beings of reason⁶⁵ and objectified the figments of

⁵⁷ Cf. M. Della Rocca, “Spinoza and the Metaphysics of Scepticism”, *op. cit.*, p. 853. See also J. M. Sánchez de León “The Place of Skepticism in Spinoza’s Thought”, *op. cit.*

⁵⁸ E. Cassirer, *Individuum und Kosmos in der Philosophie der Renaissance*, Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2013, pp. 206-207: “Nur durch das Medium der Vielheit kann hier die Einheit, nur durch das Medium der Veränderung kann die Konstanz erfaßt werden. Und beide Bestimmungen scheiden sich nicht in der Art, daß sie sich auf verschiedene Sphären des Universums verteilen, in deren einer die Veränderlichkeit, in deren anderer die Einheit und Gleichförmigkeit herrscht.”

⁵⁹ Cf. TP, 505 [G III/274].

⁶⁰ Regarding Spinoza’s conception of the laws of nature (and the resulting drastic rejection of miracles), see D. Lachterman, “Laying Down the Law: The Theological-Political Matrix of Spinoza’s Physics”, in A. Udoff (ed.), *Leo Strauss’s Thought: Toward a Critical Engagement*. Boulder, Co.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1991, pp. 123-153; see also D. Rutherford, “Spinoza’s Conception of Law: Metaphysics and Ethics”, in Y. Melamed and M. Rosenthal (eds.), *Spinoza’s Theological-Political Treatise. A Critical Guide*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 143-167.

⁶¹ Cf. C. Merchant, *The Death of Nature. Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980.

⁶² R. Boyle, *A Free Enquiry into the Vulgarly Received Notion of Nature*. Ed. E. D. Davis and M. Hunter. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. Another illustrative example of this marked emphasis in the 17th century on the ontological infirmity of created beings is Malebranche and modern occasionalism in general.

⁶³ L. Daston, “Marvelous Facts and Miraculous Evidence in Early Modern Europe”, *Critical Inquiry*, (1991) 18:1, p. 122.

⁶⁴ On Spinoza’s nominalism and anti-abstractionism, see K. Hübner, “Spinoza on Universals”, in Y. Y. Melamed (ed.), *A Companion to Spinoza*. Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 2021, pp. 204-213.

⁶⁵ TIE §39, 39 (GII/34): “Therefore, so long as we are dealing with the investigation of things, we must never infer anything

human imagination.⁶⁶ Consequently, it has fancied the world as an unintelligible aggregate of beings, instead of conceiving it—in conformity with reason—as a *unitary system of relations*.⁶⁷ It is consequently not surprising, from Spinoza's point of view, that the divine essence has remained for traditional philosophy *utterly unknown and concealed*. Therefore, as we can see, Spinoza's monism—understood as the reduction of all beings to *one being*—results from the vigorous rejection of reifying, hypostatizing thinking.

3.3. Epistemological Priority of Infinity

A good case can be made that the key to these bold innovations lies in Spinoza's approach to infinity. Following Descartes, and even more decisively than him, Spinoza understands infinity as a positive notion, and not merely as negation of the finite. Indeed, infinity is for him *the most positive notion*, insofar as we conceive finite beings as particularizations and partial negations of it. By contrast to Aristotle's finitism, infinity is for Spinoza the yardstick and criterion of everything else; the rest of things are to be conceived in analogy with it and with reference to it, as derivations of infinity—both in ontological and in epistemological sense. Infinity is no longer the *other* of reason, its limit, but its “self-affirmation”.⁶⁸ Spinoza can thus declare: the intellect forms positive ideas prior than negative ones, and positive ideas express infinity.⁶⁹ Infinity is, thus, not just the first in the order of being, but also the first in the order knowledge, a *primum cognitum* and point of departure of true cognition. Because traditional philosophy has disregarded this epistemic priority of infinity and taken sense perception as the first in the order of knowledge, it has turned the order of nature upside down and failed to grasp the divine essence *quoad se*, as it is in itself.⁷⁰ The results of this misguided approach are apparent: a mutilated worldview and a concealed God.

Yet the claim that the mind knows infinity prior to the finite sounds unwarranted and contrary to good sense. It also sounds contrary to the aforementioned awareness of our particularity and biased view of things that our exposition has ascribed to Spinoza (and which would exonerate him of the charge of “dogmatism”). Indeed: how are we supposed to know infinity prior to everything else if our view of things—due to our “situatedness” within nature—is irremediably partial and biased? Shouldn't we rather infer from our finitude that infinity is totally beyond our grasp and that “the whole is a riddle, an aenigma, an inexplicable mystery”⁷¹? If the admission of infinity entails—as has been observed in the introduction—a radical

relativization of our viewpoint, then the ambition of embracing infinity amounts to an utter contradiction, for we should cease to be ourselves in order to grasp the infinite.

To solve this issue and make sense of Spinoza's statements, let us first observe that knowledge of infinity—and hence of God's quiddity—in Spinoza's terms indeed entails that, in a way, *the knower and the known coincide*. By claiming that infinity comes first in the order of knowledge, Spinoza is implying that it constitutes an immediate object of cognition, and the mind can only know something *immediately* if it is intimately united with it. Now, in an obvious sense, infinity and the finite are radically different and the latter cannot possibly grasp the former (“finitum non capax infiniti”, as Calvin famously stated). Yet there is also a sense in which *they are the same*, for we have seen that the finite in Spinoza does not have a being *of its own* and God constitutes its very substance. If the finite does not exist independently of the infinite, this means that infinity is its very being, its *autós* or its own self.⁷²

The aspect of the finite that makes it radically different from the infinite is its *passivity*, i.e., its being extrinsically determined and exposed to external circumstances (for infinity has no *other*). This is also the aspect that accounts for sense perception and mutilated apprehension of reality (receptivity) in the human mind. Yet finitude is not sheer passivity and extrinsic determination, for otherwise the finite would be utter *nothingness*. Insofar as we are part of God, we partake of its positive being as well; therefore, there is something positive in us despite our limitedness, real being, *and that being is God's*. Now, this positive being is what we necessarily grasp when we grasp ourselves, i.e., when we deflect our attention from the solicitation of the senses and focus on our own being. This focus on ourselves cancels all limitations superimposed on us—for limitation is external—and reveals the infinite as our innermost nature. This fecund insight is ultimately of Cartesian origin: the same intellectual apprehension that reveals the “I” reveals the infinite as well, as two realities that belong essentially together.⁷³ Thus, Spinoza can say that the infinite is first in the order of knowledge, for its grasp coincides with our self-apprehension.

If passivity and extrinsic determination is what makes us different from God, then activity and power is precisely what makes us one and identical with him (Ep. 32; GIV/173a-174a): “For I maintain that there is also in nature an infinite power of thinking [...] I maintain that the human Mind *is the same power* [...]” This is a crucial insight, one that allows

from abstractions, and we shall take very great care not to mix up the things that are only in the intellect with those that are real.”

⁶⁶ Take for instance Spinoza's critique of the notion of “will”, understood as a faculty of the soul among others in E2p49sch.

⁶⁷ Cf. E. Cassirer, *Individuum und Kosmos*, op. cit., p. 210.

⁶⁸ Cf. E. Cassirer, *Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der neueren Zeit*. Vol. 1. Berlin: Verlag Bruno Cassirer, 1922, pp. 27-28. Cassirer refers in this passage to Nicholas of Cusa, but his words can be suitably applied to Spinoza as well.

⁶⁹ TIE §108, 43-44 (GII/39).

⁷⁰ See E2p10sch, GII/93-94.

⁷¹ David Hume, *Natural History of Religion*. Ed. J. C. A. Gaskin. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 185.

⁷² Spinoza's views on this issue feature striking parallels with those of his contemporary and compatriot Arnold Geulincx, usually labeled as an “occasionalist”. See J. M. Sánchez de León Serrano, “Arnold Geulincx: Scepticism and Mental Holism”, in Y. Meyrav (ed.), *Yearbook of the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2020.

⁷³ See AT VII, 51. Regarding this essential “togetherness” of the self and infinity in Descartes, see M. Gueroult, *Descartes selon l'ordre des raisons*. Vol. I. Paris: Aubier, 1968, pp. 244-247; S. Turró, “La no-univocitat de la substància com a metafísica de la causació”, *Anuari de la societat catalana de filosofia*, 8 (1996), p. 116; É. Mehl, *Descartes et la fabrique du monde. Le problème cosmologique de Copernic à Descartes*. Paris: PUF, 2019, pp. 121-125.

Spinoza to depart from the long-standing tradition of the *Deus absconditus* and to boldly claim that the mind can have adequate knowledge of God's quiddity. According to E1p34, God is essentially power: his essence is therefore to generate, produce—i.e., “*natura naturans*”.⁷⁴ The rest of things are “made” things: produced, generated, and, in this respect, derivative, not primordial—i.e., “*natura naturata*”. Every particular and determinate entity—whether corporeal or mental—is for Spinoza “*natura naturata*”, hence derivative. For this very reason, no particular concept or notion can adequately convey the divine essence. Only the primordial activity from which all particular thoughts flow—i.e., thinking as such—can adequately express the divine essence. Now, as the aforementioned quotation shows, the human mind is the *same power of thinking* in which the divine nature essentially consists. Therefore, by apprehending our own thinking activity (“*cogito*”), we grasp the essential and intimate nature of the divine. A similar reasoning can be applied to corporeality and extension. No particular body or region of space can adequately convey God's infinite essence, which is the ultimate source of all bodies and physical configurations, only extension as such. “*Absoluta cogitatio*” and “*absoluta extensio*” are thus the only notions (known to us) that appropriately convey God's intimate essence as *natura naturans*. They constitute the starting points of knowledge; they are the absolute and infinite contents through which we conceive everything else. Spinoza can thus triumphantly say (E2p46): “The human Mind has an adequate knowledge of God's eternal and infinite essence.”

4. Concluding Remarks: The Abrahamic Excess Overtaken

We have argued that Crescas' philosophical endeavor aims to reshape the philosophical discourse in order to make it more conform to the revealed message. In this respect, and as has been repeatedly observed (following Brague's terminology), his thought constitutes a revolt of “Abraham” against “Timaeus”. But philosophy for Crescas, although it can bear witness to the truth of religion, is not the locus of revelation as such, only an external medium of sorts.⁷⁵ In the case of Spinoza, by contrast, the human mind is able to adequately grasp God's infinite and eternal essence, precisely because the divine nature is the very substance of the human mind, which thus apprehends itself and the divine nature *in the same noetic act*. In this respect, God is not for Spinoza a *Deus absconditus*, and the human mind can therefore be considered the privileged locus of divine revelation. Spinoza can thus affirm (TTP I, 78, GIII/16, italics

mine): “Therefore, since our mind—simply from the fact that it contains God's Nature objectively in itself, and participates in it—has the power to form certain notions which explain the nature of things and teach us how to conduct our lives, *we can rightly maintain that the nature of the mind, insofar as it is conceived in this way, is the first cause of divine revelation (merito mentis naturam, quatenus talis concipitur, primam divinae revelationis causam statuere possumus).*”

Under these conditions, it can no longer be held that philosophy conceptualizes a message received from an external source, as Crescas would have it. Religion, therefore, cannot claim a privileged access to the divine essence; “Abraham” cannot assert any prerogative before rational thinking. Rather, human reason, by virtue of its connaturality with the divine essence, may well now subject “Abraham” to a critical scrutiny and assess its truth in terms of its conformity with rationality. This is precisely what Spinoza sets out to do in the *Theological-Political Treatise*. Hence, if “Abraham” once represented an uncontrollable excess for philosophy, this excess has now been overtaken by a philosophy that claims to be the true access to the divine.

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Hasdai Crescas, Gianfrancesco Pico, Giordano Bruno: On Infinite Space and Time

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ENG Abstract: This article examines the conception of infinite space and time in Hasdai Crescas, Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola and Giordano Bruno. If Crescas' presence is explicit in Gianfrancesco Pico's *Examen vanitatis* (1520), the reception by Bruno, who never mentions him, was postulated by Harry A. Wolfson in 1929. More recently, David Harari and Mauro Zonta posited the intermediary role of an unknown Jewish author. However, a comparison of the critique of Aristotle by Crescas and Bruno shows that, apart from two points, Bruno was able to reach his positions, independently of Crescas, from his own critical reading of Aristotle and from his knowledge of the developments in medieval scholasticism and the Neoplatonic concept of time. Significantly, Crescas qualifies space and time as attributes of God in a purely metaphorical sense, a question that Pico leaves aside, while Bruno conceives of infinite space and duration, together with matter, as real attributes of God, who, as an indifferent unity of opposites, is both mind and intellect as well as space and matter.

Keywords: Hasdai Crescas; Gianfrancesco Pico; Giordano Bruno; Space; Time; Matter.

^{ES} Hasdai Crescas, Gianfrancesco Pico, Giordano Bruno: Sobre el espacio infinito y el tiempo

ES Resumen: Este artículo examina la concepción del espacio infinito y del tiempo en Hasdai Crescas, Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola y Giordano Bruno. Si la presencia de Crescas es explícita en el *Examen vanitatis* (1520) de Pico, su recepción por Bruno, que nunca lo menciona, fue postulada por Harry A. Wolfson en 1929. Más recientemente, David Harari y Mauro Zonta han afirmado el papel intermediario de un autor judío desconocido. Sin embargo, una comparación de la crítica de Aristóteles efectuada por Crescas y Bruno pone de manifiesto que, excepto dos puntos, Bruno pudo alcanzar sus posiciones con independencia de Crescas, a partir de su propia lectura crítica de Aristóteles y de su conocimiento de los desarrollos de la escolástica medieval y del concepto neoplatónico del tiempo. La significativa calificación por Crescas del espacio y del tiempo como atributos de Dios en un sentido puramente metafórico, una cuestión que Pico deja a un lado, deja paso en Bruno a la calificación del espacio infinito, de la duración y también de la materia como atributos reales de Dios, que es a la vez mente e intelecto, espacio y materia, en tanto que unidad indiferente de los opuestos.

Palabras clave: Hasdai Crescas; Gianfrancesco Pico; Giordano Bruno; espacio; tiempo; materia.

Summary: 1. Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola and Hasdai Crescas. 2. Giordano Bruno, Gianfrancesco Pico and Crescas. 3. Bruno on Space and Time as Attributes of God. 4. Conclusion. 5. Bibliography.

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Hasdai Crescas' (Barcelona 1340-Zaragoza 1410/11) *Or Adonai* or *Or ha-Shem* remained in manuscript until the first edition, printed in Ferrara in 1555. Unlike

Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*, Crescas' work was never translated into Latin and has only recently been translated into modern European languages.¹

¹ H. Crescas, *Lumière de l'Éternel*. Trans. É. Smilévitch. Paris/Strasbourg: Hermann, 2010; id., *Light of the Lord*. Trans. R. Weiss. Oxford: OUP, 2018. In 1929, Harry Austryn Wolfson edited and translated into English the twenty-five propositions of Part I of Book I,

However, in the first half of the 16th century Crescas' work was known to the Italian Christian philosopher Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola (1469-1533), nephew of the more famous Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494), who made use of it in his *Examen vanitatis doctrinae gentium et veritatis christianae disciplinae*, a work published in Mirandola in 1520.² The presence of Crescas' work in the *Examen vanitatis* was noted as early as 1866 by Manuel Joël in his monograph *Don Hasdai Crescas' religionsphilosophische Lehren in ihrem geschichtlichen Einflusse*, and after being confirmed by Wolfson,³ it has been examined by Charles B. Schmitt in his book on the young Pico.⁴ Pico takes up and makes use of Crescas' critique in *Or Adonai* of the Aristotelian concepts of motion, time, place and void, within the framework of his own critique of Aristotle's physics in Book VI – which is the final part of the *Examen vanitatis*.⁵

1. Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola and Hasdai Crescas

Both Joël and Wolfson pointed out that Gianfrancesco Pico could hardly possess the necessary knowledge of Hebrew to read Crescas' work, so he certainly owed his knowledge of it and accessed the critique of those Aristotelian concepts through an intermediary who provided him with a translation.⁶ Schmitt has pointed out that this intermediary may have been the biblical scholar Sante Pagnini.⁷ Pagnini (Lucca ca. 1470-Lyon 1541) entered the Dominican order in Fiesole in 1487, was under the influence of Hieronymus Savonarola (1452-1498) in the Florentine convent of San Marco and was in contact with the two Picos.⁸ The edition of Gianfrancesco Pico's works includes two letters, unfortunately not dated, but undoubtedly subsequent

to the publication of the *Examen vanitatis* (1520).⁹ In them, the young Pico congratulates Pagnini on the completion, after twenty-five years of hard work, of his Latin translation of the Old Testament from Hebrew and notes:

Ego quidem (ut de me dicam) post Latinas et Graecas literas multis laboribus versatas, cum nihil aut parum profecisse videar, ut antiqua ipsa nostrae Religionis arcana prorsus haurirem, nisi et Hebraeas perdiscerem, conducto Hebraeo Isacio, lochanae illius, quem Ioannes Picus patruus meus sibi magistrum ascivit, filio, eo usus sum praeceptore. Sed bellis, quae plurima mihi illata sunt, impeditus, et quibus incumbendam voluminibus absolvendis distractus, quam parum a calce promoverim, tu ipse testis, cui me postea erudiendum tradidi.¹⁰

It is, therefore, possible that it was Pagnini who provided Gianfrancesco Pico with the translations of Crescas' critique of the concepts of Aristotelian physics that he used in the sixth book of the *Examen vanitatis*.¹¹ The *Examen* was, in many ways, a work of similar intent to *Or Adonai*. Crescas had been angered at Maimonides' *Guide* by its Peripatetic rationalism and its interpretation of the Law as coinciding in its esoteric (true) sense with the philosophy of Aristotle. This was the way the *Guide* was being read in the tradition of Hebrew Averroism (Moses of Narbonne, Levi ben Gerson), without taking into consideration the presence in Maimonides of a skepticism towards philosophy, as Shlomo Pines and more recently Josef Stern have argued.¹² In order to save faith and prophecy, Crescas argued against Maimonides' philosophical arguments, showing that they had no demonstrative value and opposing them other rationally possible conceptions.¹³ Thus, he opposed a whole series of rational considerations to the 25 propositions that Maimonides presents

with Crescas' replies, in his monumental *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle: Problems of Aristotle's Physics in Jewish and Arabic Philosophy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929, pp. 129-315.

² The English translation by Roslyn Weiss confuses Gianfrancesco Pico with his uncle.

³ H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle*, op. cit., p. 34.

⁴ C. B. Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola (1469-1533) and his Critique of Aristotle*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967.

⁵ Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Examen vanitatis doctrinae gentium et veritatis christianae disciplinae*. Mirandola: Ioannes Mazochius, 1520. We will cite the work from the reprint in Giovanni and Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Opera omnia*. Basel: Pietro Perna, 1557 (reprint Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1969), pp. 710-1264. There is a recent edition: *Examen vanitatis doctrinae gentium et veritatis christianae disciplinae*. Ed. N. Egel, Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2022 (our thanks to Dario Tessicini for the reference to this edition, which we have not been able to consult).

⁶ M. Joël, *Don Hasdai Crescas' religionsphilosophische Lehren in ihrem geschichtlichen Einflusse*. Breslau: Schletter'sche Buchhandlung, 1866, p. 83; H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle*, op. cit., p. 34. Joël and Wolfson mention *ibid.* Pico's work with the inaccurate title *Examen doctrinae vanitatis gentium*. In any case, Wolfson has carefully read the sixth book of the *Examen* in the chapters where Pico makes use of Crescas, pointing out correspondences, and extends, as we shall see, the brief mention of Giordano Bruno in Joël, p. 8 (where Bruno is put in relation to Spinoza) to an extensive confrontation of Crescas with Bruno.

⁷ C. B. Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola*, op. cit., pp. 27 and 130.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 130 note 4, refers, for the relations between them to Cecil Roth, *The Jews in the Renaissance*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1959, pp. 146-147.

⁹ Giovanni and Gianfrancesco Pico, *Opera omnia*, op. cit., pp. 1371-1376; in the second letter Pico mentions the already published *Examen vanitatis*: "nuper maiore, et cura, et diligentia, et opere vanitas doctrinae gentium a nobis detecta est, et Christianae disciplinae veritas celebrata, sex voluminibus sub Examinis titulo publicatis", p. 1375.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1371; italics are added.

¹¹ D. Harari, "Some Lost Writings of Judah Abravanel (1465?-1535?) Found in the Works of Giordano Bruno (1548-1600)", *Sophar*, 10 (1992), p. 64, has proposed that the intermediary author may have been Judah Abravanel (Leone Ebreo), who, according to later testimony, wrote a work (now lost) entitled *De coeli harmonia*, dedicated to Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola.

¹² S. Pines, "The Limitations of Human Knowledge according to Al-Farabi, Ibn Bajja, and Maimonides", in I. Twersky (ed.), *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*. Vol. I. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979, pp. 82-109; J. Stern, *The Matter and Form of Maimonides's 'Guide'*. Cambridge, MA/London: Harvard University Press, 2013.

¹³ H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle*, op. cit., pp. 124-125. For a recent assessment of Crescas' critique of Aristotle or, more precisely, of Maimonides' Aristotelianism, as basically negative and aimed at destroying contrary positions rather than positively proposing new ideas, see Y. T. Langermann, "East and West in Hasdai Crescas: Some Reflections on History and Historiography", in id. and J. Stern (eds.), *Adaptations and Innovations: Studies on the Interaction between Jewish and Islamic Thought and Literature from the Early Middle Ages to the Late Twentieth Century*. Paris/Louvain/Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2007, pp. 231, 243.

at the beginning of the second part of the *Guide* as premises for the demonstration of God's existence from physics, "all of which are demonstrated without there being a doubt as to any point concerning them. For Aristotle and the Peripatetics after him have come forward with a demonstration for every one of them".¹⁴ Thus, against the first proposition, which read "The existence of any infinite magnitude is impossible",¹⁵ Crescas maintained that "the argument [of Maimonides] is fallacious and a begging of the question"¹⁶ and ended by concluding that "it has been shown that on their own premises *an infinite incorporeal magnitude* [void space] *must exist*".¹⁷

For his part, Gianfrancesco Pico, a faithful and enthusiastic follower of Savonarola, intended with his *Examen vanitatis doctrinae gentium et veritatis christianae disciplinae* to continue the Savonarolian program of a skeptical critique – supported by the instrumental use of the sources of ancient skepticism, especially Sextus Empiricus – of the human capacity to attain truth by means of natural reason and experience, in order to establish the *vanity* of the philosophies received from the Greeks and especially from Aristotle and to conclude that the only source of truth resided in divine revelation through Scripture and therefore in Christianity.¹⁸

As we have already indicated, Crescas appears at the end of the *Examen*, in the sixth book, to support the refutation of Aristotle's physical concepts of movement, time, place and void.¹⁹ Schmitt punctually collects the arguments that Pico takes from the "Hebraeus Hasdai" or "Rabi Hasdai", referring always to Wolfson's edition and translation.²⁰

In his critique of the Aristotelian concepts of motion (*Examen*, VI, 2) and time (VI, 3) Pico relies solely on Crescas' arguments,²¹ present in propositions 8, 13 and 14 in the case of motion²² and in proposition

15 in the case of time.²³ As far as time is concerned, Pico presents in a very summarized and somewhat confusing way Crescas' rejection of the four premises on which the Aristotelian definition of time rests in proposition 15 of the Introduction to the second part of the *Guide*.²⁴

Rabbi Hasdai in no way assented to Moses the Egyptian [i.e. Maimonides], who had accepted the Peripatetic propositions as resting on a solid foundation, among which is that "time is the number of motion". For he [Crescas] affirms that time is measured by rest, although no motion ever takes place [...]. He defines time as follows (to use his own words): the measure of the continuity of motion or rest between two moments, so that the measure itself is the genus, and he rightly asserts that it seems that in the first place number cannot be genus, since it is a discrete quantity, whereas measure is a continuous [quantity]. Nevertheless, the soul measures motion and rest, so that, since time is said to be an accident [premise 1], he commands that the soul itself be referred to it; otherwise it would be false that it is an accident, extrinsic, since it also follows rest, which is privation, [...] so he asserts that it is false that time is joined to motion [premise 2], since it no less conforms to rest, which is opposed to it. It is also false that what has no motion is not contained under time [premise 4], since [intelligences] separated from matter lack motion and are usually placed under time.²⁵

Aristotle's arguments supporting that only circular motion is continuous.

¹⁴ Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*. Trans. S. Pines. 2 vols. Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1963, vol. II, p. 235; for the 25 propositions see pp. 235-239.

¹⁵ Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, op. cit., p. 235.

¹⁶ H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle*, op. cit., p. 179; cf. the English translation H. Crescas, *Light of the Lord*, op. cit., p. 70.

¹⁷ H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle*, op. cit., p. 189; italics are ours. Cf. H. Crescas, *Light of the Lord*, op. cit., p. 73. Wolfson's work edits the Hebrew text with English translation of these 25 propositions of the *Guide* together with Crescas' criticism.

¹⁸ See C. B. Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola*, op. cit.; M. Á. Granada, "Apologética platónica y apologética escéptica: Ficino, Savonarola, Gianfrancesco Pico", in id., *El umbral de la modernidad: Estudios sobre filosofía, religión y ciencia entre Petrarca y Descartes*. Barcelona: Herder, 2000, pp. 119-167. More recently, L. Pappalardo, *Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola: fede, immaginazione e scetticismo*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2014, where however Crescas is not mentioned.

¹⁹ Crescas' critique is presented in chapters II-VI, pp. 1183-1195 and 1208.

²⁰ C. B. Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola*, op. cit., pp. 128-159.

²¹ Gianfrancesco Pico, *Examen vanitatis*, op. cit., pp. 1184-1185.

²² H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle*, op. cit., pp. 249-251, 279-281, 281-283 (cf. H. Crescas, *Light of the Lord*, op. cit., pp. 53, 57-58, 88-89); C. B. Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola*, op. cit., pp. 131-136. Pico also records Crescas' refutation of Moses of Narbonne's argument in support of Maimonides (Wolfson, pp. 251-253; cf. H. Crescas, *Light of the Lord*, op. cit., p. 85) and his disqualification as "fables" (Wolfson, p. 279: "fancies and conceits"; cf. H. Crescas, *Light of the Lord*, p. 88: "imaginings and delusions") of

²³ H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle*, op. cit., pp. 283-291 (H. Crescas, *Light of the Lord*, op. cit., pp. 58-59, 89-90); C. B. Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola*, op. cit., pp. 136-138.

²⁴ Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, op. cit., vol. II, p. 237; H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle*, op. cit., p. 283: "Time is an accident that is consequent on motion and is conjoined with it. Neither one of them exists without the other. Motion does not exist except in time, and time cannot be conceived except with motion, and whatsoever is not in motion does not fall under the category of time" (cf. H. Crescas, *Light of the Lord*, op. cit., p. 58). Crescas begins his critique, which extends throughout pp. 287-291, by declaring that "the four premises which this proposition contains [...] are all false", p. 287 (H. Crescas, *Light of the Lord*, op. cit., p. 89).

²⁵ Gianfrancesco Pico, *Examen vanitatis*, op. cit., pp. 1184-1185: "R. Hasdai Mosi Aegyptio minime assensus, qui propositiones Peripateticas tanquam solido nixas fundamento receperat, inter quas illam: tempus esse numerum motus. Quietem namque mensurari tempus affirmat, etiam si nunquam motus inveniretur [...]. Definit autem ipsum tempus ita (ut eius verbis agam) mensura continuitatis vel motus, vel quietis, quae inter duo momenta: ut genus sit ipsa mensura, viderique iure affirmat numerum genus esse primo non posse, cum sit discretæ quantitatis, mensura continua. Motum autem et quietem dimittitur animus: quare cum tempus accidens appelletur, ad eum ipsum animum referri iubet, alioquin falsum esset [in the text: essent], illud esse accidens, extrinsecus, quoniam et quietem consequitur quae privatio est, [...] quare falsum [in the text: fallum] affirmat esse ut tempus dicatur motui iunctum, quando et quieti quae illi opponitur non minus aptetur. Falsum item, quod non habet [in the text: habent] motum, id sub tempore non contineri, quandoquidem quae sunt a materia seiuncta motum carent [in the text: caret] et sub tempore solent reponi." Pico omits premise 3, which says "time cannot be conceived except with motion" (H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle*, op. cit., p. 285; H. Crescas, *Light of the Lord*,

As Wolfson pointed out in his commentary and advanced in a brief, masterly article,²⁶ Crescas rejects the Aristotelian concept, which (like Plato's) essentially links time to motion (specifically to the first motion, which is the daily one of the first mobile, the universal time of the world), conceives time as an accident of the corporeal substance (like place) and therefore excludes that separate intelligences (therefore God) exist in time. On the contrary, Crescas adopts the Neoplatonic concept (formulated by Plotinus, Iamblichus, Damascius and Simplicius), according to which time is a continuous magnitude and *duration*, and "exists only in the soul".²⁷ Time is, therefore, prior to and independent of motion and rest, which are measured by it, certainly through the motion of a body (the daily revolution of the first mobile around the Earth) taken as the first measure. Crescas' time, as Wolfson points out,

in its purely ideal nature, when conceived absolutely apart from motion, is indeterminate and immeasurable. It is an unqualified limitless duration. It does not become a subject of measurement unless it is conceived in connexion with an external moving object. [...] through motion we are enabled to get a part of definite time out of the indefinite duration which has an independent conceptual existence of its own.²⁸

As duration (infinite, since beginning and end are established by motion), time also affects the separate intelligences, which exist in it.²⁹ Crescas can say, therefore, that "the passage of Rabbi Jehudah, son of Rabbi Simon, which reads: 'It teaches us that the order of time had existed previous to that' [the creation], may be taken in its literal sense".³⁰ As it will be shown below regarding space, time, as a continuous and infinite duration, can be said, *metaphorically*, to be the duration of God.³¹

Gianfrancesco Pico was not able to see all these implications of Crescas' concept of time, nor was he certainly interested in them. But we must keep in mind that this concept of time, as shown by Wolfson, comes to Crescas from the Neoplatonic tradition, circulates in the Islamic and Jewish tradition before and contemporary to him (where it was affirmed and

refuted) as well as in the Latin scholastic tradition. Crescas' only contribution is to have introduced rest in the definition of time.³²

In his criticism of the Aristotelian concept of place (*Examen*, VI, 4, pp. 1186-1190) and of the Aristotelian rejection of the void (VI, 5, pp. 1190-1194), Pico introduces Crescas' critique as support for his first and fundamental source: the critique by the Alexandrian commentator of the *Physics* John Philoponus (490-574). In the case of the void, Crescas' critique is collected in the brief chapter 6 (pp. 1194-1195). Philoponus, too, was a severe critic of Aristotle, but his sharp criticism of the Aristotelian concept of place and void was in 1520 still unknown to the large Latin public, for his *Commentary on the Physics*, containing the Corollaries on Place and Void, was only published in the original Greek in 1535 (Venice) while the Latin translation appeared, also in Venice, in 1539, with successive editions in 1546, 1550, 1554, 1558, 1569 and 1581.³³

As far as place is concerned, Pico presents in considerable detail Philoponus' critique of the Aristotelian definition as "the innermost motionless boundary of what contains it [the thing placed]" (*Physics*, IV, 4, 212a 20) and his alternative conception of space as an incorporeal three-dimensional extension, empty, but able to receive and contain bodies and in fact never empty.³⁴ This conception inspired sixteenth-century natural philosophers Bernardino Telesio (1509-1588) and Giordano Bruno (1548-1600) to formulate the new concept of absolute and homogeneous space. In this framework, Crescas is inserted by the young Pico in a brief mention that gathers, in a rather confusing way and with a truncated text, two passages of *Or Adonai* corresponding to the Second part of proposition 1, that is, to the refutation of the first proposition in Maimonides' *Guide*, which affirms that there is no infinite magnitude. These passages pertain to Crescas' Second Speculation, which examines "the arguments which he [Maimonides] has framed to prove the impossibility of a corporeal infinite magnitude"³⁵ and

op. cit., p. 58), perhaps because he has mistakenly thought that it is like premise 2 ("time is conjoined with motion").

²⁶ H. A. Wolfson, "Note on Crescas's Definition of Time", *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 10 (1919), pp. 1-17.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 10. Cf. H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle*, *op. cit.*, p. 289 (H. Crescas, *Light of the Lord*, *op. cit.*, p. 89). But Aristotle had already said that "if nothing but soul, or in soul reason, is qualified to count, it is impossible for there to be time unless there is soul", *Physics*, IV, 14, 223 a 25-26, in Aristotle, *The Complete Works. The Revised Oxford Translation*. Ed. J. Barnes. 2 vols. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984, vol I, p. 377. Neoplatonism magnifies the ideality of time and diminishes its physical reality to the point of practically denying it.

²⁸ H. A. Wolfson, "Note on Crescas's Definition of Time", *op. cit.*, 10-11.

²⁹ H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle*, *op. cit.*, p. 291: "the Intelligences, though immovable, may still have existence in time"; cf. H. Crescas, *Light of the Lord*, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

³⁰ H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle*, *op. cit.*, p. 291.

³¹ W. Z. Harvey, *Physics and Metaphysics in Hasdai Crescas*. Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1998, p. 29: "as God may be compared with infinite space, so He may be compared with eternal time".

³² Aristotle had already said, however, that time "will be the measure of rest too", *Physics*, IV, 12, 221b 8-9, *op. cit.*, note 27.

³³ See the English translation in Philoponus, *Corollaries on Place and Void, with Simplicius, Against Philoponus on the Eternity of the World*. Trans. D. Furley and C. Wildberg. London: Bloomsbury, 1991. On the originality and importance of Philoponus' criticism, see R. Sorabji, *Matter, Space, & Motion: Theories in Antiquity and Their Sequel*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988 and id. (ed.), *John Philoponus and the Rejection of Aristotelian Science*. London and Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987. Philoponus' criticism of the Aristotelian doctrine of motion and his assertion of the possibility of finite speed motion in a vacuum were known from the Latin Middle Ages as the doctrine of Avempace and through the critique by Averroes (in his *Commentary on the Physics*, book IV). C. B. Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola*, *op. cit.*, p. 149, attributes Pico's preference for Philoponus to the greater detail of his criticism and to Pico's "delight in citing esoteric sources such as Sextus Empiricus, Hasdai Crescas, [...] who were by no means well known in the early sixteenth century".

³⁴ Gianfrancesco Pico, *Examen vanitatis*, *op. cit.*, p. 1189: "Spacium itaque locus est, ex sese corpore quidem vacuum, sed nunquam tamen re ipsa vacuum, sicuti materia aliud est quam forma, nunquam tamen sine forma."

³⁵ H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle*, *op. cit.*, p. 191; *Light of the Lord*, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

states that “Aristotle’s definition of place will give rise to many absurdities”.³⁶

The first passage points out, in relation to the sublunary elements, that the Aristotelian concept of place is not suitable for the parts of the total element, because if air (for example) has the lower limit of the sphere of fire as the place of its upper part, it is impossible to say what is the place of the intermediate parts, which are also surrounded by air.³⁷

The second passage argues that “it proves false that all the bodies that are placed agree with their places, both with respect to the circumference of the supreme heaven and also to the Earth, to which is assigned a place, not a surface, but a tiny point to which does not correspond properly the name of place”.³⁸ Pico compresses to the maximum the text of Crescas, which points out the difficulty that statements like the following represent for the Aristotelian doctrine of place: “the outermost sphere, having no surrounding, equal and separate surface [...] cannot have any essential place”, “a rotating sphere must have a stationary centre, with reference to which the sphere could be said to exist in place”, and “when we were looking for a place for the element earth, we decided that it is the absolute below, but the absolute below is not a surface but rather a point”.³⁹

At this point, Crescas affirms: “Consequently, it will be in accordance with the nature of truth, which is evident by itself and consistent with itself in all points, if true place is identified with the void.”⁴⁰ And the void is studied by Pico next (chapter VI, 5), demonstrating – from Philoponus’ *Corollaries on Place and Void* – that Aristotle’s arguments against the existence of the void are inconclusive, in particular the objection that motion would be impossible because, without resistance from the medium, it should be of

infinite velocity and therefore instantaneous.⁴¹ Thus, the refutation of the Aristotelian reasons against the vacuum confirms the prior affirmation of the vacuum as space, understood as a three-dimensional disembodied extension and receptacle containing the bodies that move through it.⁴²

Pico exposes Crescas’ reasons in favor of the void – understood as “dimension or incorporeal magnitude”, that is, as space independent of the bodies contained in it –⁴³ in a brief sixth chapter that summarizes Crescas’ “first speculation” against the first proposition of the *Guide* and its Aristotelian basis.⁴⁴ I will point out only: 1) the refutation of the Aristotelian denial of the infinite spatial dimension on the ground that, being a dimension, it must be a body and therefore would entail the penetration of dimensions when occupied by a body:

Parvi facit etiam illam non penetratorum corporum, ob dimensiones rationem, cum dimensiones materiae iunctas id efficere posse dicendum sit, non seiunctas, et ab omni prorsus materia separatas;⁴⁵

2) A void is possible outside the finite world and the medium is not a necessary condition for the motion to occur:

praeterea nihil efficere eas quae sunt excogitatae contra vacuum rationes, et fundatae super motu recto, quando intermedium nullum sit necessarium: et dici queat gravitatem et levitatem naturaliter corporibus inesse mobilibus, nec ea mediis indigere. Dici etiam possit omnibus corporibus inesse gravitatem, eaque vocari levia quae videlicet gravia sint minus, eaque ipsa moveri sursum ex eorum, quae magis gravia sunt impetu, et violentia. [...] Sed quod attinet ad Hebraeum omnia corpora gravia

³⁶ H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas’ Critique of Aristotle*, *op. cit.*, p. 195; *Light of the Lord*, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

³⁷ Gianfrancesco Pico, *Examen vanitatis*, *op. cit.*, p. 1187: “proprius partium locus, quae ad totius motum agitantur, non est superficies circumdans aequalis adeo, ut seorsum habeat cum partibus loci convenientiam. Nam si (causa exempli) suprema pars aeris conveniet imae continentis, et circum valantis ignis, media tamen pars ei non ita conveniet, nec in suo naturali reponetur loco, qui si assereretur parti ipsi suapte natura congruere, tamen diversus haberetur a loco totius, et integri corporis collocati” [the proper place of the parts that are agitated to the movement of the whole, is not the surrounding surface, equal, so that separated, it has convenience with the parts of the place. For, if (for example) the upper part of the air agrees with the lower [part] of the continent and surrounding fire, the intermediate part will nevertheless not agree with it and will not be placed in its natural place, which, if it were claimed to agree by nature with the part itself, will nevertheless be different from the place of the whole and integrally placed body]. See C. B. Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola*, *op. cit.*, p. 139 and H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas’ Critique of Aristotle*, *op. cit.*, p. 197. On the conditions that Aristotle establishes for the place (surrounding the object, equal to it and separate from it) see *Physics*, IV, 4, 210b 32–211a 2.

³⁸ Gianfrancesco Pico, *Examen vanitatis*, *op. cit.*, p. 1187: “omnia quae collocantur corpora, suis congruere locis falsum esse aperiri, et ex supremi coeli circumferentia, et etiam ex terra, cui locus assignatur non superficies, sed punctus imus, cui loci nomen iure non congruit.”

³⁹ H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas’ Critique of Aristotle*, *op. cit.*, pp. 197–199; cf. H. Crescas, *Light of the Lord*, *op. cit.*, pp. 75–76.

⁴⁰ H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas’ Critique of Aristotle*, *op. cit.*, p. 199; cf. H. Crescas, *Light of the Lord*, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

⁴¹ C. B. Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola*, *op. cit.*, pp. 144–154.

⁴² See note 33 above.

⁴³ “But incorporeal dimensions mean nothing but empty place capable of receiving corporeal dimensions. We have advisedly used the words ‘empty place’ because it is evident that the true place of a body is the void, equal to the body and filled by the body”, H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas’ Critique of Aristotle*, *op. cit.*, pp. 187–189; cf. H. Crescas, *Light of the Lord*, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

⁴⁴ H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas’ Critique of Aristotle*, *op. cit.*, pp. 179–191; H. Crescas, *Light of the Lord*, *op. cit.*, pp. 70–74. In his extensive notes to these pages Wolfson points out the complete correspondence of Pico’s entire text with different passages of Crescas’ First Speculation.

⁴⁵ Gianfrancesco Pico, *Examen vanitatis*, *op. cit.*, p. 1195. Cf. H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas’ Critique of Aristotle*, *op. cit.*, p. 187: “according to them [those who believe in a vacuum] the impenetrability of bodies is due not to dimensions existing apart from matter, but rather to dimensions in so far as they are possessed of matter”; cf. H. Crescas, *Light of the Lord*, *op. cit.*, p. 72. This dimension of the void, as a continuous quantity, can be subject to measurement: “quas [dimensiones] explodi miratur cum magni et parvi nomine donentur, et per eius partes queamus illas dimetiri”, Gianfrancesco Pico, *Examen vanitatis*, *op. cit.*, p. 1195, which picks up from Crescas that “the void itself may be described as great and small and may be measured by a part of itself” (H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas’ Critique of Aristotle*, *op. cit.*, p. 189). On the impenetrability of dimensions, see E. Grant, *Much Ado About Nothing: Theories of Space and Vacuum from the Middle Ages to the Scientific Revolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, pp. 22–23.

non negat, et aerem descensurum, si terra loco moveretur affirmat, ob gravitatem verius, quam ne vacuum detur. [...] atque ut caetera obstarent vacuo, nihil tamen officere, quin orbiculare corpus in eo moveatur, cum in motu circulari, nec terminus a quo, nec terminus ad quem motus tendat, inveniatur, et secundum Aristotelem maxime, qui motum nunquam voluit incepisse, nec impediri ex intermedio quin vacuum extra mundum reperiri queat, immo accersiri vacuum ab iis vel nolentibus, quibus asseritur non inveniri corpus infinitum. Nam si nullum est extra mundum corpus, nec plenum ibi esse convincitur, vacuum potius et seiuncta dimensio. Negat praeterea dimensiones esse corporis extrema.⁴⁶

In the conclusion of chapter 9, Pico quickly points out two other new components of Crescas' criticism of Aristotle: the possibility of a plurality of worlds ("Hebraeus item ille cuius supra fecimus mentionem plures esse potuisse mundos asseverat")⁴⁷ and of an

infinite body: "negat enim corpus infinitum orbiculari figura pollere, quoniam quod non finitur caret extremis et affirmat praeterea omnem figuram posse in orbem moveri"⁴⁸

However, Gianfrancesco Pico did not take notice of a highly significant passage that appears in Crescas' work among the pages he has extracted in the *Examen vanitatis*. It is the passage in the Second Speculation in which Crescas expounds – from the assimilation of the place of a body with its *form* and thus from the *figurative* (or metaphorical) identification made by the rabbis with the form or essence of a thing –⁴⁹ that God (form of the universe inasmuch as He is its creator) is often *metaphorically* designated by them as "the place of the world".⁵⁰ Wolfson linked the passage to the *kabbalah*⁵¹ and Harvey has insisted that "Crescas makes it perfectly clear that he is using a metaphor or an analogy, and definitively does not identify God literally with space or time. [...] For Crescas, this metaphor is 'remarkably apt', but no more than a metaphor".⁵² While Pico's neglect (should he have known the passage) could perhaps mean that he saw a danger in it, this passage, as Harvey has pointed out,

made an impression on Spinoza. However, while Crescas held that God is *metaphorically* identified with infinite space, Spinoza held that *extensio* is literally an attribute of God. Spinoza thus took Crescas' metaphor literally.⁵³

⁴⁶ Gianfrancesco Pico, *Examen vanitatis*, *op. cit.*, p. 1194-1195. Cf. H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle*, *op. cit.*: "Among the later thinkers there is one who proposed to prove the impossibility of a vacuum by maintaining that the medium is a necessary condition in the existence of motion, and this because the medium has in its nature something akin to a *terminus ad quem*. But this is an assertion which has never been demonstrated and never will be, for it may be claimed on the contrary that the movable bodies have a certain amount of weight, differing only *secundum minus et majus*. Accordingly, those bodies which move upward are so moved only by reason of the pressure exerted upon them by bodies of heavier weight, as, e.g., air, when compressed in water, will tend to rise on account of the pressure of the weight of the water, which being heavier, will seek the below. That this is so will appear from the fact that when we make a hollow in the earth, even as far as the centre, it will immediately fill up with water or air, though, whether this is due to the impossibility of a vacuum within the world or to the weight of the air has not so far been demonstrated and never will be", p. 185. "Hence, with the assumption of a vacuum, neither natural nor violent motion would be impossible. Much less does this argument prove the impossibility of a vacuum outside the world, for even if there existed outside the world a vacuum in which there were no distinction of *terminus a quo* and *terminus ad quem*, it would not be impossible for a spherical body to have circular motion. This is self-evident", p. 183. "Furthermore, even if we were to admit that the medium is a necessary condition in the existence of motion, it is still not impossible for a vacuum to exist outside the world", p. 185; cf. H. Crescas, *Light of the Lord*, *op. cit.*, p. 72. "That dimensions are the limits of bodies, this, too, will not be admitted by him who affirms the existence of an incorporeal interval", p. 187; cf. H. Crescas, *Light of the Lord*, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

⁴⁷ Gianfrancesco Pico, *Examen vanitatis*, *op. cit.*, p. 1208. Cf. H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle*, *op. cit.*, p. 217 (Fourth Speculation): "Since the error of his initial premise [first proposition in *Guide*, ii, introduction] is manifest, for it has already been shown before that an infinite magnitude must exist and that outside the world there must exist an infinite plenum or vacuum, it clearly follows that the existence of many worlds is possible"; cf. H. Crescas, *Light of the Lord*, *op. cit.*, p. 82. See also W. Z. Harvey, *Physics and Metaphysics in Hasdai Crescas*, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-13, where it is further argued that "the conclusion that there exists an infinite number of worlds is inescapable", p. 11. See also *Or Adonai*, IV, 2, translated by Harvey, *ibid.*, pp. 36-40. On the possibility that Crescas may have been influenced at this point by Nicolas Oresme, see *ibid.*, pp. 23-29. Note that while Pico (with Oresme) believes in the uniqueness of the world ("Credidi equidem semper sensilem hunc mundum unum esse, sed fide credidi non Aristotelis id rationibus mihi persuasi", Gianfrancesco Pico, *Examen vanitatis*, *op. cit.*, p. 1205), even if he accepts

that the plurality of the worlds is possible (because of "Dei potestas infinita", *ibid.*, p. 1207), Crescas points out the impotence of human reason: "Inasmuch as the existence of many worlds is a possibility true and unimpeachable, yet as we are unable by means of mere speculation to ascertain the true nature of what is outside this world, our sages, peace be upon them, have seen fit to warn against searching and inquiring into 'what is above and what is below, what is before and what is behind'", H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle*, *op. cit.*, p. 217; cf. H. Crescas, *Light of the Lord*, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

⁴⁸ Gianfrancesco Pico, *Examen vanitatis*, *op. cit.*, p. 1208. Cf. H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle*, *op. cit.*, p. 213 (Third Speculation): "if a body is conceived to be infinite it has no extremities, and thus it has no figure. There would be some ground for his [Maimonides'] objection if circular motion required a spherical figure, but an object of any figure may have circular motion. By conceiving, therefore, a body devoid of any boundaries, we conceive it also to be devoid of any figure, and so it does not follow that it would have to be finite"; cf. H. Crescas, *Light of the Lord*, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

⁴⁹ H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle*, *op. cit.*, pp. 199-200: "our rabbis, peace be upon them, applied the term *figuratively* to the form and essence of a thing"; italics are ours. Cf. H. Crescas, *Light of the Lord*, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

⁵⁰ H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle*, *op. cit.*, p. 201: "Accordingly, since the Blessed One is the form of the entire universe [...], He is *figuratively* called Place, as in their oft-repeated expressions, [...] 'He is the Place of the world'. This last *metaphor* is remarkably apt, for as the dimensions of the void permeate through those of the parts of the world and the fullness thereof, so His glory, blessed be He, is present in all the parts of the world"; italics are ours; cf. H. Crescas, *Light of the Lord*, *op. cit.*, p. 77. See also W. Z. Harvey, *Physics and Metaphysics in Hasdai Crescas*, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-29. Harvey notes (p. 29) that Crescas also applies the metaphor to God's relationship to time.

⁵¹ H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle*, *op. cit.*, p. 459.

⁵² W. Z. Harvey, *Physics and Metaphysics in Hasdai Crescas*, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-29.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 30. The transformation by Spinoza had already been pointed out by Wolfson; see *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle*, *op. cit.*, p. 123 and *id.*, *The Philosophy of Spinoza*. 2 vols. New

It seems, then, that the moment has come to introduce Giordano Bruno, of whom there is no mention in Harvey's book and whom Carlos Fraenkel mentions in passing, when he echoes the connection established by Jacobi between Bruno and Spinoza,⁵⁴ and then completely forgets about him. However, according to Wolfson, "it is said that in Bruno there is an intimation that extension is one of God's attributes",⁵⁵ and in his book on Crescas he had patiently recorded passages in Bruno's work in which one could recognize a parallel or a connection with others in *Or Adonai* on space and the infinite universe.

2. Giordano Bruno, Gianfrancesco Pico and Crescas

Did Bruno know Crescas' work? Did he at least know the work of the young Pico and through it Crescas' critique of Aristotle? As far as Pico is concerned, it has been noted that Bruno's disparaging mention to Guillaume Cotin – librarian of the Parisian abbey of Saint Victor in December 1585, after Bruno's arrival to Paris, a few weeks earlier, from London, where he had published the six Italian dialogues – according to which, "il meprise Cajétain et Picus Mirandulanus, et toute la philosophie des Jésuites",⁵⁶ designates not Giovanni Pico, as Spampanato retained,⁵⁷ but Gianfrancesco Pico. This is what Eugenio Garin⁵⁸ maintained and what seems highly plausible considering that, despite his great differences with Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico, Bruno seems to have considered the latter a worthy interlocutor.

Bruno seems to have known Gianfrancesco's work and in particular the *Examen vanitatis*, which could have served him as a doxographical source. Thus, it has been noted that the mention in *La cena de le Ceneri* (London 1584) of the precursors of Copernicus in the affirmation of the motion of the Earth (Philolaus, Heraclides, Ecphantus, Nicetas [sic], Plato and Nicholas of Cusa)⁵⁹ may be based on the description in the *Examen vanitatis* (I, 12), although it surely also took into account the mention by Copernicus himself in the dedicatory letter of the *De revolutionibus* to Pope Paul III.⁶⁰ Other passages of the *Examen* have also been pointed out

as a probable source of similar ones in Bruno,⁶¹ as for example the mention of Philoponus' concept of space and the distinction between privative infinity ("qua infinitum pro carentia perfectionis capitur") and positive infinity ("qua id supereminentiam virtutis et potestatis indicat"),⁶² but they have a much more probable source in the very reading of Philoponus' Commentary⁶³ and Nicholas of Cusa respectively.⁶⁴

In any case, could Bruno have gained access to Crescas' criticism – whose name he never mentions – of Aristotle through the *Examen vanitatis*, which he surely knew? In his book on Crescas, Wolfson painstakingly recorded many parallels between the text of *Or Adonai* and passages of Bruno, both from the Italian Dialogues (*De l'infinito universo e mondi* and *De la causa, principio et uno*) and from the Latin poem *De immenso et innumerabilibus*. But he seems to lean, rather than towards Pico's mediation, towards that of "some unknown Jewish intermediary".⁶⁵ Although each of the multiple coincidences could have arrived independently to the mind of any critical reader of Aristotle, Wolfson argues that "the accumulation of all of those arguments creates the impression that there must have been some connecting link between Crescas and Bruno".⁶⁶

More recently, David Harari has postulated Leone Ebreo and his work *De coeli harmonia* – a lost work whose content we do not know – as the source that provided Bruno with the information on Crescas' criticism of Aristotle and therefore served him for the elaboration of his own doctrine.⁶⁷ We agree with

⁶¹ L. Brotto, "Giovanni Francesco Pico della Mirandola", *op. cit.*, p. 1486.

⁶² Gianfrancesco Pico, *Examen vanitatis*, *op. cit.*, pp. 1180-1181.

⁶³ Cf. G. Bruno, *De immenso et innumerabilibus*, I, 8, in id., *Opera latine conscripta*. Naples/Florence: Morano/Le Monnier. Vol. I, 1, p. 231; see also M. Á. Granada, "Giordano Bruno's Concept of Space: Cosmological and Theological Aspects", in F. A. Bakker, D. Bellis and C. R. Palmerino (eds.), *Space, Imagination and the Cosmos from Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*. Cham (Switzerland): Springer, 2019, pp. 160-161.

⁶⁴ Nicholas of Cusa, *On Learned Ignorance. A Translation and an Appraisal of 'De docta Ignorantia'*. Trans. J. Hopkins. Minneapolis: The Arthur J. Banning Press, 1981, II, 1, 97, p. 90. Cf. P. R. Blum, *Aristoteles bei Giordano Bruno. Studien zur philosophischen Rezeption*. Munich: Fink Verlag, 1980, pp. 41-42 and on infinity as absolute perfection D. Knox, "Libro II. La perfezione dell'universo", in M. Á. Granada and D. Tessicini (eds.), *Giordano Bruno, 'De immenso'. Letture critiche*. Pisa/Rome: Fabrizio Serra, 2020, pp. 71-102.

⁶⁵ H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle*, *op. cit.*, p. 36. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 35: "If it was possible for Giovanni Francesco Pico della Mirandola to become acquainted with some of Crescas' criticisms of Aristotle through some unknown Jewish scholar, we have reason to believe that it is not a mere fortuitous coincidence that many of Giordano Bruno's strictures on Aristotle have a reminiscent ring of similar strictures by Crescas. The name of Crescas is not mentioned by Bruno, but still one cannot help feeling that there must be some connection between them".

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁶⁷ D. Harari, "Who was the Learned Jew that Made Known Hasdai Crescas? The Light of the Lord to Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola?", *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, 14 (1998), p. 269 (Hebrew). Harari's proposal goes far beyond pointing to Leone Ebreo as Bruno's source in his knowledge of Crescas, since he goes as far as to argue, without sufficient support, that *De gli eroici furori* derives directly from the lost fourth book of Ebreo's *Dialoghi d'amore* (1535), that the *Candelai* is constructed from Hebrew and Aramaic materials that had to reach Bruno through an intermediary, and that even the *Spaccio de la bestia trionfante* derives from Leone

York: Meridian Books, 1958, vol. I, pp. 222-223. It has recently been studied by C. Fraenkel, "Hasdai Crescas on God as the Place of the World and Spinoza's Notion of God as Res Extensa", *Aleph*, 9 (2001), pp. 77-111.

⁵⁴ C. Fraenkel, "Hasdai Crescas on God as the Place of the World", *op. cit.*, p. 80 and note 9.

⁵⁵ H. A. Wolfson, *Spinoza*, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 223.

⁵⁶ Parisian Documents, II, in Vincenzo Spampanato, *Vita di Giordano Bruno con documenti editi e inediti*. Messina: Principato, 1921, p. 652.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 311.

⁵⁸ E. Garin, *Storia della filosofia italiana*. Vol. II. Turin: Einaudi, 1966, p. 672. See also, L. Brotto, "Giovanni Francesco Pico della Mirandola", in M. Ciliberto (ed.), *Parole, concetti, immagini*. Pisa/Florence: Edizioni della Normale/Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento, 2014, p. 1485a.

⁵⁹ G. Bruno, *La cena de las Cenizas*. Trans. M. Á. Granada, Barcelona, 2015, p. 116 and note.

⁶⁰ Gianfrancesco Pico, *Examen vanitatis*, *op. cit.*, p. 773 and Copernicus, *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium*. Nuremberg, 1543, p. iiiif. The coincidence with Pico's passage had already been pointed out by D. Tessicini, *I dintorni dell'infinito: Giordano Bruno e l'astronomia del Cinquecento*. Pisa/Rome: Fabrizio Serra, 2007, p. 48.

Francesco Malaguti that “despite all these analogies between Bruno and Crescas, we cannot demonstrate with certainty that the Nolan knew the doctrines exposed in *Or Adonai*”.⁶⁸ Even more recently, Mauro Zonta has affirmed, with evident exaggeration, that “la dipendenza di molte delle argomentazioni di Giordano Bruno contro Aristotele e l’aristotelismo, specialmente in relazione a temi quali il concetto di spazio e di tempo o l’esistenza dell’infinito, dalle consimili argomentazioni riportate nella principale opera del filosofo ebreo spagnolo Hasdai Crescas [...] è nota da molto tempo”.⁶⁹ Zonta, however, does not pronounce on the plausibility of the identification proposed by Harari and has presented the correspondence between Bruno’s and Crescas’ arguments on the plurality of worlds, already pointed out by Harvey,⁷⁰ with remarkable detail (pp. 149-153) to show “le analogie sussistenti tra di esse e quelle di Bruno”, while recognizing that Harvey has “individua[to] le fonti nella scolastica latina”.⁷¹

A close examination, however, of the connections and parallels recorded by Wolfson and Zonta reveals that Bruno was perfectly able to formulate his positions from the text of Aristotle himself and from the late medieval and Renaissance Latin tradition.⁷² However, from this examination some highly interesting and disturbing issues emerge that raise doubts and questions which are difficult to answer.

Thus, when Crescas argues in *Or Adonai* against the impossibility of an actually infinite body (i. e. an infinite universe), he points out, in line with the implicit

assumption that this is the main issue: “as an error in first principles leads to an error in what follows on the first principles, the implication of this proposition has led him [Aristotle] to conclude that there are not any other worlds”.⁷³ In his note to this passage Wolfson affirms that “this statement [...] is also quoted by Bruno”.⁷⁴ Indeed, it is; but this coincidence may be due to the fact that Bruno begins the discussion with Aristotle from the passage in *De caelo*, I, 5 (which was an ‘auctoritas’ from the Middle Ages)⁷⁵ that initiates the refutation of the possibility of an infinite universe:

We must go on to consider the questions which remain. First, is there an infinite body [...] or is this an impossibility? The decision of this question, either way, is not unimportant, but rather all important, to our search for the truth. [...] since the least initial deviation from the truth is multiplied later a thousandfold.⁷⁶

Bruno begins his refutation of Aristotle’s reasons against the infinite universe with the following words, which amplify the Aristotelian text:

Io referirò le sentenze d’Aristotele per ordine, e voi direte circa quelle ciò che vi occorre. “È da considerare”, dice egli, “se si trova corpo infinito, come alcuni filosofo dicono, o pur questo sia una cosa impossibile; et appresso è da vedere se sia uno over più mondi. La risoluzione de le quali questioni è importantissima: perché l’una e l’altra parte della contradizione son di tanto momento, che son principio di due sorte di filosofare molto diverso e contrario [...] perché quantumque poco di trasgressione che si fa nel principio viene per diecemila volte a farsi maggiore nel progresso.”⁷⁷

It will be noted that Bruno extends Aristotle’s text by adding that, once solved the question of the possibility or impossibility of an infinite universe, it follows whether there can be and there is in fact a plurality of worlds. This extension of the text and the following implication regarding the plurality of worlds had already been made by Crescas in the quoted passage: “the implication of this proposition has led him to conclude that there are not any other worlds”. Is this simply a coincidence, highly possible because both have recognized the implication of the issues and seen that Aristotle in *De caelo*, I, 8 and 9 refutes the possibility of there being more than one world from the refutation of the infinite universe in *De caelo*, I, 5-7, or did Bruno know Crescas’ work from a source different from the *Examen vanitatis* of the young Pico?

Ebreo. From Harari’s analysis it seems to follow ultimately that to Bruno arrived, it is not said how, materials from Leone Ebreo which he subsequently published as his own. See Harari’s article cited note 11 above.

⁶⁸ F. Malaguti, “Giordano Bruno and Jewish Thought: Reception and Reinterpretation”, *International Journal of Theology, Philosophy and Science*, 8 (2021), p. 80.

⁶⁹ M. Zonta, “Due note sulle fonti ebraiche di Giovanni Pico e Giordano Bruno”, *Rinascimento*, 40 (2000), p. 147; our italics. See also the shorter English edition: M. Zonta, “The Influence of Hasdai Crescas’s Philosophy on Some Aspects of Sixteenth-Century Philosophy and Science”, in J. Helm and A. Winkelmann (eds.), *Religious Confessions and the Sciences in the Sixteenth Century*. Leiden/Boston/Köln, 2001, pp. 71-78.

⁷⁰ Cf. note 47 above.

⁷¹ M. Zonta, “Due note sulle fonti ebraiche”, *op. cit.*, p. 148. If Harvey had referred to the possible influence of Oresme on Crescas (cf. *Physics and Metaphysics*, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-29), an influence already noted earlier by P. Duhem (*Le système du monde*. Vol. V. Paris: Hermann, 1917, pp. 230-232) and S. Pines (“Scholasticism after Thomas Aquinas and the Teachings of Hasdai Crescas and his Predecessors”, in id., *Collected Works*. Vol. V. Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1997, pp. 489-589), more recently Ari Ackermann has plausibly argued for the very likely influence of Thomas Aquinas. See A. Ackermann, “Hasdai Crescas and Scholastic Philosophers on the Possible Existence of Multiple Simultaneous Worlds”, *Aleph*, 17 (2017), pp. 139-154. See also the contributions by A. Ackermann, J. T. Robinson and specially T. M. Rudavsky in D. H. Frank and O. Leaman (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy*. Cambridge, 2003, where the influence of Latin scholasticism on the Jewish philosophers of the time and specially on Crescas is recorded.

⁷² F. Malaguti, “Giordano Bruno and Jewish Thought”, *op. cit.*, p. 79, has noted the case of Marcellus Palingenius Stellatus and his *Zodiacus Vitae* (Basilea, 1537), a work known and evaluated very critically by Bruno, as an intermediate link in the doctrine that “God has no limitations in the process of creation”; on Palingenius and Bruno see M. Á. Granada, *Filosofía y religión en el Renacimiento: de Gemisto Pletón a Galileo*. Sevilla, 2021, pp. 316-320, 327-337.

⁷³ H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas’ Critique of Aristotle*, *op. cit.*, pp. 215-217; cf. H. Crescas, *Light of the Lord*, *op. cit.*, pp. 81-82. The reference to Bruno’s *De l’infinito, universo e mondi* given by Wolfson is erroneous.

⁷⁴ H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas’ Critique of Aristotle*, *op. cit.*, p. 472.

⁷⁵ Cf. Jacqueline Hamesse, *Les Auctoritates Aristotelis: Un florilège médiéval. Étude historique et édition critique*. Louvain/Paris: Publications Universitaires/ Béatrice Nauwelaerts, 1974, p. 161 (n° 19): “Parvus error in principio, maximus erit in fine”.

⁷⁶ Aristotle, *De caelo*, I, 5, 271b1-10, in id., *The Complete Works*, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 452.

⁷⁷ G. Bruno, *De l’infinito, universo e mondi*, in id., *Œuvres complètes*. Vol. IV. Ed. G. Aquilecchia, trans. J.-P. Cavallé. Paris, 1995, pp. 119-121.

Crescas states that “since according to the view of those who maintain the impossibility of an infinite body, there is no body outside the world, there must necessarily be there a void. [...] But this incorporeal magnitude outside the world cannot have a limit”,⁷⁸ and Wolfson adduces Bruno’s parallel passage in *De l’infinito*: “Se si risponde che è nulla [outside this world], questo dirò io esser vacuo, essere inane: e tal vacuo e tale inane, che non ha modo, né termine alcuno oltiore.”⁷⁹ The parallelism is evident, but it may also be a coincidence, for Bruno knew (and mentions it in *De l’infinito*, p. 115) the Stoic doctrine of the infinite void outside the one world. Likewise, Crescas says that the Aristotelian concept of place as the inner surface of the surrounding body condemns the one world to have no place or at most an accidental place.⁸⁰ Wolfson refers the reader to *De l’infinito*, where Bruno makes the same consideration: “mi par cosa ridicola il dire che estra il cielo sia nulla, e che il cielo sia in se stesso, e locato per accidente” (p. 67) and to the later *De immenso*,⁸¹ where Bruno presents the different solutions to the Aristotelian difficulty found by Greek, Islamic and Christian Peripatetics. Curiously, these are almost the same authors whose solutions Wolfson presents in his annotation to the passage in Crescas (pp. 432-441), but which Bruno may have taken from a contemporary scholastic author (Benedictus Perera), whom he does not mention, but whose work he knew and very probably criticized in *De immenso*.⁸²

Crescas rejects Aristotle’s argument against the possibility of an infinite body (*De caelo*, I, 5, 271b 28-272a 7) from the impossibility of its circular motion:

As for the arguments [to prove the impossibility of an infinite body] from circular motion, they are likewise inconclusive, being again based upon the analogy of a [finite] body. His opponent may, therefore, argue that while indeed there is an infinite body, it is incapable of circular motion for those very reasons given by Aristotle.⁸³

Similarly, as Wolfson also observed in his note to this passage, Bruno states after quoting Aristotle’s passage:

Questa ragione è buona: ma non è a proposito contra l’intenzione de gli avversarii: perché giamai s’è ritrovato sì rozzo, e d’ingegno sì grosso, che abbia posto il mondo infinito e magnitudine infinita, e quella mobile. E mostra lui medesimo essersi dimenticato di quel che riferisce nella sua *Fisica*: che quei che hanno posto uno ente

et uno principio infinito, hanno posto similmente immobile.⁸⁴

Then Bruno adds: “Or vedete se de quante ragioni produce questo mendico [Aristotle], se ne ritrovo pur una che arguente contra l’intenzione di quei che dicono uno, infinito, immobile, infigurato, spaciosissimo continente de innumerabili mobili che son gli mondi”.⁸⁵ And Crescas also points out, a few pages after the last quoted passage, that an infinite body lacks a figure, since Aristotle’s argument “is based upon the proposition which states that an infinite body moving in a circle must necessarily have a spherical figure. This, however, is untrue for if a body is conceived to be infinite, it has no extremities, and thus it has no figure”,⁸⁶ to which he adds shortly after that “an infinite, having no extremities, likewise has no centre”.⁸⁷ Here again the obvious coincidence with Crescas may not go beyond a very interesting overlap, since Bruno may have reached this conclusion from his critical reading of Aristotle and, as regards the lack of a figure in the infinite body, from the famous definition of God, which he also applies to the infinite universe, as an “infinite sphere whose center is everywhere and the circumference nowhere”.⁸⁸ The eventual coincidence would rest on the unattested reading by Bruno of Crescas’ text, since these motifs are absent from the references to Crescas in Pico’s *Examen vanitatis*, and requires that Bruno necessarily accessed a Latin translation of *Or Adonai*, of which there is no indication, given the null foundation of Harari’s proposal.

Wolfson also points out that Crescas and Bruno agree in distinguishing an intensive and an extensive infinite power or force.⁸⁹ However, apart from the fact that Bruno may have taken the distinction from the Latin tradition, where it is widely documented,⁹⁰ Crescas rejects the possibility that a power of infinite intensity can move, since that movement would be timeless, that is, instantaneous,⁹¹ while Bruno, rely-

⁷⁸ H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas’ Critique of Aristotle*, op. cit., p. 189; cf. H. Crescas, *Light of the Lord*, op. cit., p. 73.

⁷⁹ G. Bruno, *De l’infinito, universo e mondi*, op. cit., p. 67.

⁸⁰ H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas’ Critique of Aristotle*, op. cit., p. 197; cf. H. Crescas, *Light of the Lord*, op. cit., p. 75.

⁸¹ G. Bruno, *De immenso*, I, 6, op. cit., vol. I, 1, pp. 221-225.

⁸² See B. Perera, *De communibus omnium rerum naturalium principis et affectionibus*. Paris: Sonnius, 1579, XI, 8, pp. 625-628. See also M. Á. Granada, “Libro I. La relazione Dio / mondo e la necessità dell’universo infinito”, in id. and D. Tessicini (eds.), *Giordano Bruno, De immenso. Letture critiche*. Pisa/Rome: Fabrizio Serra, 2020, pp. 58, 60, 66-69.

⁸³ H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas’ Critique of Aristotle*, op. cit., p. 205; cf. H. Crescas, *Light of the Lord*, op. cit., p. 79.

⁸⁴ G. Bruno, *Del infinito*, op. cit., p. 123. However, Crescas affirms that “there is nothing that proves conclusively the impossibility of circular motion in an infinite body. Quite the contrary, our discussion has made it clear that motion is possible in an infinite body”, H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas’ Critique of Aristotle*, op. cit., p. 213; H. Crescas, *Light of the Lord*, op. cit., p. 81.

⁸⁵ G. Bruno, *De l’infinito*, op. cit., p. 125.

⁸⁶ H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas’ Critique of Aristotle*, op. cit., p. 213; cf. H. Crescas, *Light of the Lord*, op. cit., p. 81.

⁸⁷ H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas’ Critique of Aristotle*, op. cit., p. 215; cf. H. Crescas, *Light of the Lord*, op. cit., p. 81.

⁸⁸ Ps. Hermes Trismegistus, *Liber viginti quattuor philosophorum*, def. 2: “Deus est sphaera infinita, cuius centrum est ubique, circumferentia nusquam.” On the fortune of this definition in the medieval and Renaissance tradition up to Cusa, see Dietrich Mahnke, *Unendliche Sphäre und Allmittelpunkt*. Halle: Niemeyer, 1937.

⁸⁹ H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas’ Critique of Aristotle*, op. cit., p. 273: “it is evident that the term infinite may be used in a twofold respect, with regard to intensity and with regard to time”; cf. H. Crescas, *Light of the Lord*, op. cit., pp. 87-88. In his note to this passage, Wolfson (on p. 613) refers to Bruno, *Infinito*, op. cit., pp. 95-96.

⁹⁰ See M. Á. Granada, “‘Blasphemia vero est facere Deum alium a Deo’. La polemica di Bruno con l’aristotelismo a proposito della potenza di Dio”, in E. Canone (ed.), *Letture bruniane I. Il del Lessico Intellettuale Europeo 1996-1997*. Pisa/Rome: Istituti Editoriali e Poligrafici Internazionali, 2002, pp. 166-178.

⁹¹ H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas’ Critique of Aristotle*, op. cit., p. 271: “the conclusion that there would be motion without time does not follow, inasmuch as every motion has that original

ing on Cusa and on the doctrine of the *coincidentia oppositorum*, affirms that the divine intensive power moves the infinite universe with a movement of infinite intensity in the instant, since such movement coincides with rest.⁹² Similarly, if both agree in affirming the plurality of worlds, Bruno starts from the criticism of Aristotle and the Latin tradition that (especially after the condemnation of 1277 but also before) affirmed the possibility, *de potentia absoluta*, that God had created more than one world, although his free *potentia ordinata* had established the unique world of Aristotle.⁹³ With Crescas, Bruno not only affirms the possibility of the plurality of worlds, but also their necessary infinitude, which in Crescas is an “inescapable” conclusion, according to Harvey, but does not appear in *Or Adonai* with the same emphasis that we find in Bruno.⁹⁴ In any case, God’s creation of the plurality of worlds is, in Bruno, a necessary effect of the divine essence, in which necessity and freedom are one and the same thing and where the production in accordance with all His infinite power entails the infinitude of the universe and of the worlds contained in it,⁹⁵ while in Crescas the creation of the universe and of its worlds (finite or infinite in number) is a free act of the divine will: “the coming into existence of the world was by will and in the manner of beneficence and grace”.⁹⁶ In his voluntarism, Crescas differs from Bruno and also from Spinoza, who give priority to God’s potency, to which they subordinate both His understanding and His will, viewed as two different ways of conceiving God’s power.

It cannot be forgotten that only Bruno’s Copernicanism, with the attribution to the Earth of the daily motion, opens the physical possibility of the infinite universe, with the consequent identification, by Bruno, of the stars as so many suns that are centers of respective planetary systems, which constitute the innumerable worlds (in Bruno ‘synodi ex mundis’) separated by vast extensions of empty space or better ether.⁹⁷ Inevitably, Crescas cannot

think the plurality of worlds except from geocentrism and recognize that the other ‘worlds’ repeat the structure of ours (with the central earth and a peripheral sphere of fixed stars in daily motion around it), so that “a causa della grande distanza che vi è tra i mondi, noi potremmo non vedere nulla di quelle stelle [in the other worlds]”.⁹⁸

However, if the correspondences pointed out by Zonta are present in the late medieval and Renaissance discussion on the infinite divine production by virtue of the infinite power and goodness of God, one of the arguments adduced by Crescas against the plurality of worlds certainly shows a striking correspondence with Bruno. Its presence, however, in intermediate Latin sources is unknown to me. This argument, taken from Gersonides and reproduced by Harvey, states:

Inasmuch as a plurality of individuals is found only with regard to individuals that are generated and corrupted, like animals and plants, it would seem that their plurality is only for the purpose of the preservation of the species, and thus there is no plurality with regard to incorruptible individuals. It follows that there is no plurality with regard to the world, it having been proved to be incorruptible.⁹⁹

This argument appears in Bruno’s *De l’infinito*, p. 235, in the following terms:

Da uno non può provenire pluralità d’individui, se non per tal atto per cui la natura si moltiplica per divisione della materia; e questo non è altro che di generazione. Questo dice Aristotele con tutti li Peripatetici. Non si fa multitudini d’individui sotto una specie, se non per l’atto della generazione. Ma quelli che dicono più mondi di medesima materia e forma in specie, non dicono che l’uno si converte nell’altro, né si genere dall’altro.

Bruno replies to this argument with the following words:

questo non è universalmente vero: perché da una massa per opra del solo efficiente si producono molti e diversi vasi di varie forme e figuri innumerabili. Lascio che, se fia l’interito e la rinovazion di qualche mondo, la produzione de gli animali, tanto perfetti quanto imperfetti senza atto di generazione nel principio viene effettuata dalla forza e virtù della natura.¹⁰⁰

Crescas’ reply is very different: that argument “based on induction, does not establish the truth. For proof cannot be brought from an analogical syllogism”.¹⁰¹

time from which it is never free”; cf. H. Crescas, *Light of the Lord*, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

⁹² G. Bruno, *De l’infinito*, *op. cit.*, p. 103: “nelle cose è da contemplare (se così volete) doi principi attivi del moto: l’uno finito, secondo la ragione del finito soggetto, e questo muove in tempo; l’altro infinito, secondo la ragione dell’anima del mondo, ovvero della divinità, [...] e questo muove in istante. [...] Tanto che in conclusione questi corpi essere mossi da virtù infinita, è medesimo che non esser mossi; per che muovere in istante e non muovere, è tutto medesimo et uno”. See also M. Á. Granada, “Blasphemia vero est facere Deum alium a Deo”, *op. cit.*, pp. 178-188.

⁹³ See, as a mere example, L. Bianchi and E. Randi, *Le verità dissonanti: Aristotele alla fine del medioevo*. Rome/Bari: Laterza, 1990, pp. 61-67.

⁹⁴ See note 47 above and H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas’ Critique of Aristotle*, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

⁹⁵ G. Bruno, *De l’infinito*, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-89 and 109: “Se dunque lui è operatore de l’universo, certo è operatore infinito, e riguarda effetto infinito [...] come la potenza attiva è infinita, così (per necessaria conseguenza) il soggetto di tal potenza è infinito.” Cf. G. Bruno, *De immenso*, I, 11, vol. I, 1, pp. 241-244 and M. Á. Granada, “Libro I. La relazione Dio / mondo e la necessità dell’universo infinito”, *op. cit.*, pp. 59-64.

⁹⁶ H. Crescas, *Or Adonai*, IV, Investigation 2, quoted in W. Z. Harvey, *Physics and Metaphysics in Hasdai Crescas*, *op. cit.*, p. 36; M. Zonta, “Due note sulle fonti ebraiche”, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

⁹⁷ See Miguel Ángel Granada, “Synodi ex mundis”, in E. Canone and G. Ernst (eds.), *Enciclopedia Bruniana e Campanelliana*. Vol. II. Pisa/Rome: Fabrizio Serra, 2010, cols. 142-154.

⁹⁸ Quoted by M. Zonta, “Due note sulle fonti ebraiche”, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

⁹⁹ W. Z. Harvey, *Physics and Metaphysics in Hasdai Crescas*, *op. cit.*, p. 37; M. Zonta, “Due note sulle fonti ebraiche”, *op. cit.*, p. 152. See H. Crescas, *Light of the Lord*, *op. cit.*, IV, 2, p. 335.

¹⁰⁰ G. Bruno, *De l’infinito*, *op. cit.*, p. 367. On the spontaneous generation of animals after periodical catastrophes (floods, for example), see M. Á. Granada, “Conflagración en el Renacimiento”, *Bruniana & Campanelliana*, 26 (2020), pp. 140-144.

¹⁰¹ W. Z. Harvey, *Physics and Metaphysics in Hasdai Crescas*, *op. cit.*, p. 39; cf. H. Crescas, *Light of the Lord*, *op. cit.*, p. 334.

However, the coincidence in the presentation of the argument of the opposing party, so specific, is striking and still leaves open the possibility of an as yet unknown intermediate source.

3. Bruno on Space and Time as Attributes of God

As noted above, Spinoza – who knew Crescas' work in the original Hebrew –¹⁰² took literally what in Crescas was a simple metaphor and made space (as extension-matter) an attribute of God, conceived no longer as a transitive (transcendent or 'separate'), but as an immanent cause of *natura naturata*, with the result that infinite nature is an expression of God. Bruno made the same transformation in the conception of God, taking also literally what in Crescas was a metaphor about God and developing in a different way some initial coincidences in the critique of Aristotle. These coincidences, rather than resulting from Bruno's knowledge of Crescas' critique, show a similar development from their common insertion in a philosophical tradition.

In the case of time, and contrary to what happens with space and matter, Bruno only dwells on it in the Italian dialogues to note that the infinite universe is also eternal, since the infinite divine power unfolds necessarily and freely in an infinite and eternal universe: "dopo aver detto l'universo dover essere infinito per la capacità et attitudine del spacio infinito, e per la possibilità e convenienza dell'essere di innumerabili mondi come questo: resta ora parlarlo e dalle circostanze dell' efficiente che deve averlo prodotto tale, o (per parlar meglio) *produrlo sempre tale*".¹⁰³

The moment to address the question of time arrived in 1586, when during his second stay in Paris Bruno wrote the *Centum et viginti articuli de natura et mundo adversus Peripateticos*, intended to serve as material for a *disputatio* at the College of Cambrai that took place at the end of May.¹⁰⁴ There, among the articles that refute Aristotle's *Physics*, Bruno includes three "On time" (articles 38-40).¹⁰⁵ The printed edition contained only the text of the articles or theses. In 1588, however, during his stay in Germany, Bruno published in Wittenberg the Parisian articles, adding explanations (*rationes*) for the articles related to the *Physics* and therefore for the three articles on time.¹⁰⁶

The first article (38) assumes, awaiting a modification that occurs in the following article, that "time is a measure of motion", adding however that the presumed first motion established as a measure of time "is not found in the heavens, but in the heavenly bodies", more specifically: "it has no other subject than the Earth". This assertion could not be in Crescas, because it assumes the Copernican doctrine of the daily motion of the Earth (whereby the daily motion of the first heaven is mere appearance), a doctrine that Bruno adopts and develops with the infinite expansion of the universe, which accordingly becomes motionless. The consequence, drawn by Bruno in the Explanation, is that there is no universal physical time by virtue of the daily motion of the whole, but that this presumed universal time is in reality a particular time, of the Earth, so that "tot sane erunt in universo tempora, quot sunt et astra".¹⁰⁷ Each world (i.e., each star) has, by virtue of its own motion, its own time, with which it measures all other motions.

The second article (39) affirms, by virtue of the reciprocal measure of movement and time, that "motion is rather the measure of time than the opposite". The multiple determination of times by the multiple and different motions of the worlds, allows Bruno to relativize physical times and make them mere concretions of "duration" (*duratio*), which is the true universal time, also called "eternity",¹⁰⁸ completely independent of motion and prior to it. In this way, time manifests itself as something parallel to absolute and infinite space.¹⁰⁹ space is motionless while duration is a continuous and uniform 'present', in which all existents (both those considered eternal and those existing during a greater or lesser age) are in a 'flow' of different intensity.¹¹⁰

The Medieval Concept of Time: Studies on the Scholastic Debate and its Reception in Early Modern Philosophy. Leiden: Brill, 2001, pp. 477-505.

¹⁰⁷ G. Bruno, *Camoeracensis Acrotismus*, *op. cit.*, p. 144; id., *Acrotismo Cameracense*, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

¹⁰⁸ G. Bruno, *Camoeracensis Acrotismus*, *op. cit.*, p. 147: "tempus universale aeternitatem dicimus"; id., *Acrotismo Cameracense*, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. P. R. Blum, *Aristoteles bei Giordano Bruno*, *op. cit.*, p. 50: "Parallelisierung der strukturell gleichen Begriffe Raum und Zeit (bzw. Dauer)".

¹¹⁰ Cf. G. Bruno, *De immenso*, I, 12, *op. cit.*, vol. I, 1, p. 244: "Praeteritum, praesens, quidquid capis, atque futurum, / Ante Deum praesens unum est unumque perenne"; id., *Camoeracensis Acrotismus*, *op. cit.*, pp. 146-147: "Sicut igitur locus unus, infinitum unum, infinitum spacium commune pro universo infinito esse oportet, ita unum tempus commune, una duratio, nec finem neque principium ullum recognoscens. Et veluti sub uno infinito spacio, continuo, communi infinita particularium loca, propriaque spatia intelliguntur, quae singulis quibusque quadrant: ita sub communi una omnium duratione, diversis diversae durationes atque tempora appropriantur. Different autem duratio atque spatium, quia undique, in generali, et particulari, spatium immobile manens, tempus vero velocissime fluens intelligitur in iis, quae citissime moventur, tardius in iis, quae aegrius mutantur, minime in iis, quae nullam suscipiunt alterationem. Sub una igitur duratione alia dicuntur aeterna, alia simpliciter temporalia, et horum alia maioris, alia minoris aetatis." Note, however, that while Crescas accepts the existence of separate intelligences (the unmoved movers of the celestial spheres), eternal *a parte post*, Bruno rejects their existence, interpreting the intelligences as internal to the soul of the infinite worlds or stars (the true angels or ministers of the Most High) and therefore the principle of their movement.

¹⁰² Spinoza mentions and cites him in Letter 12 to Lodowijk Meyer; see B. Spinoza, *Opera*. Ed. C. Gebhardt. 4 vols. Heidelberg: Winter, 1972, vol. IV, pp. 61-62.

¹⁰³ G. Bruno, *De l'infinito*, *op. cit.*, p. 83; italics are ours; see M. Á. Granada, "Giordano Bruno y la eternidad del mundo", *Enodoxa*, 31 (2013), pp. 349-372.

¹⁰⁴ The *Figuratio aristotelici physici auditus*, printed in 1586 and the *Libri physicorum Aristotelis explanati*, which remained in manuscript, date back to this time.

¹⁰⁵ See G. Bruno, *Centum viginti articuli sulla natura e sull'universo contro i Peripatetici / Centum et viginti articuli de natura et mundo adversus Peripateticos*. Ed. E. Canone. Pisa/Rome: Fabrizio Serra, 2007, pp. 16-17.

¹⁰⁶ G. Bruno, *Camoeracensis Acrotismus seu rationes articulorum physicorum adversus Peripateticos Parisiis propositorum*, Wittenberg, 1588, in id., *Opera latine conscripta*, *op. cit.*, vol. I, 1, pp. 53-190 (: 143-150 on time); id., *Acrotismo Cameracense: Le spiegazioni degli articoli di fisica contro i Peripatetici*. Trans. B. Amato, Pisa/Rome: Fabrizio Serra, 2019 (: 102-107). For an analysis of Bruno's concept of time as expounded in these articles, see M. Á. Granada, "The Concept of Time in Giordano Bruno: Cosmic Times and Eternity", in P. Porro (ed.),

Finally, article 40 states, as Crescas had already done, that “certainly, if there were no movement or mutation, nothing would be called temporal, [but] one and identical would be the time of all things, the one and identical duration, which is called eternity”.¹¹¹ Just as Crescas had introduced rest into the definition of time,¹¹² so does Bruno: “as far as rest is concerned, we also say that it is measured by motion and time”.¹¹³

As regards time and the distinction between time and duration or eternity, Bruno certainly coincides with Crescas, but far from this showing a dependence on the Jewish philosopher, through an unknown intermediary, the striking coincidence – from which he only departs in what Copernicanism implies with respect to universal motion and the consequent measurement of physical time – is sufficiently explained by their common insertion in the Neoplatonic tradition that conceives time as duration. Crescas attributes *duratio* to God *metaphorically*, but Bruno (although he makes no statement in this respect) seems to mean the concept *literally and really*, as it happens with space and with the matter that fills it. While in the case of space the maximum coincides with the minimum, in the case of ‘duration’ the totality of time coincides with the instant. This is because infinity, according to Bruno, has properly no parts, unless an arbitrary or conventional point of reference is introduced, according to which the three-dimensionality of space and the unidirectionality of time are organized.

Accordingly, *duratio/aeternitas* (although it is, like infinite space, a continuous quantity)¹¹⁴ can only be a ‘flow’ once the point of reference is established with the movement. Moreover, in *eternity* everything is given.¹¹⁵ Only for us, placed (thanks to movement) in the flow of time, is there a future. From the perspective of infinite duration everything has already happened, because absolute unity is there, without spatial or temporal distinctions, and with the modes of the substance complicated and indistinct.

Bruno defines infinite space in *De immenso*, with reference to Philoponus, as

quantitas quaedam continua physica triplici dimensione constans, in qua corporum magnitudo capiatur, natura ante omnia corpora, citra omnia corpora consistens, indifferenter omnia recipiens, citra actionis passionis conditiones, immiscibile, impenetrabile, non formabile, illocabile, extra et omnia corpora comprehendens, et incomprehensibiliter intus omnia continens.¹¹⁶

According to Edward Grant, “the consequences of Bruno’s description of space and the properties he assigned it lead inevitably to an infinite space that is coeternal with but wholly independent of God [...]. It does seem that the space God occupied was not of His own making”.¹¹⁷ Shortly before, he states that “although God’s powers and nature were of considerable concern to Bruno, he had virtually no interest in the relationship between the divine power and space”¹¹⁸ and adds:

Bruno’s thoughts on this [...] must be inferred from general cosmological concepts and statements about the deity. Let us recall that for Bruno God is not prior to the universe but coeternal with it. Thus, form and matter, which constitute the substance of the world, are coeternal with God even though they emanate from Him directly and coequally. As a basic entity in the universe, space would also seem to be eternal and to bear some relationship to God. On these issues, however, Bruno was silent.¹¹⁹

For our part, we believe that passages from Bruno’s Latin works not examined by Grant as well as others in the Italian dialogue *De la causa, principio et uno*, allow to affirm that, far from remaining silent and affirming the independence of space with respect to God, Bruno has postulated a rigorous ontological monism in which space results, literally, an attribute or property of God.¹²⁰ Thus, a later passage in *De immenso*, built on the spatial application of the biblical terms ‘heaven’, ‘heaven of heaven’ and ‘heaven of the heavens’, as well as on the biblical application to God of the opposites ‘light’ and ‘darkness’, states:

Spacium dicitur aether quia decurritur. Tot sunt caeli quot astra, si caelum intelligamus contiguum et circumstans configuratum uniuscuiusque spacium, ut caelum Telluris dicitur non solum spacium in quo est, sed et quantum spacii perambit ipsum distinctum a spacio perambiente Lunam, et alia (quae circa sunt) corpora mundana. Caelum caeli est spacium unius synodi sicut in quo hic sol est cum suis planetis. Caelum caelorum est maximum et immensum spacium; quod et aether dicitur, quia totum est percurribile, et quia in toto maxime flagrant omnia. [...]. Sedes

¹¹¹ G. Bruno, *Camoeracensis Acrotismus*, *op. cit.*, p. 148: “Certe si motus non esset et mutatio, nihil temporale diceretur, idem unumque esset omnium tempus, una eademque duratio, quae aeternitas dicitur”; *id.*, *Acrotismo Cameracense*, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

¹¹² See note 25 above.

¹¹³ G. Bruno, *Camoeracensis Acrotismus*, *op. cit.*, p. 149: “Quod autem ad quietem attinet, et hanc per motum mensurari dicimus atque tempus”; *id.*, *Acrotismo Cameracense*, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

¹¹⁴ G. Bruno, *Camoeracensis Acrotismus*, *op. cit.*, art. 43, p. 156: “Si rite definiatur tempus, videbitur per se illi continuitatem convenire, quia per se quantum continuum est”, italics are ours; *id.*, *Acrotismo Cameracense*, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Bruno, *De immenso*, I, 12, *cit. supra*, note 110, and *id.*, *De gli eroici furori*, in *id.*, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. VII. Ed. G. Aquilecchia, trans. P.-H. Michel. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1999, p. 235, where eternity is described, from Boethius (*De consolazione philosophiae*, V, 6, 10: “Aeternitas igitur est interminabilis vitae tota simul ac perfecta possessio”), as “una possessione insieme tutta e compita”. On the transition from a Boethian eternity to an eternity as “existence at all time”, see Luca Bianchi, “Abiding then: Eternity of God and Eternity of the World from Hobbes to the *Encyclopédie*”, in P. Porro (ed.), *The Medieval Concept of Time: Studies on the Scholastic Debate and its Reception in Early Modern Philosophy*. Leiden: Brill, 2001, pp. 543-560.

¹¹⁶ G. Bruno, *De immenso*, I, 8, *op. cit.*, vol. I, 1, p. 231. For a discussion of the definition, see E. Grant, *Much Ado about Nothing*, *op. cit.*, pp. 186-192.

¹¹⁷ E. Grant, *Much Ado about Nothing*, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ In what follows we rely on M. Á. Granada, “Giordano Bruno’s Concept of Space”, *op. cit.*, particularly pp. 166-176. See also *id.*, “Bruno and Maimonides: Matter as a Woman and the Ontological Status of Matter”, *Bruniana & Campanelliana*, 23 (2017), pp. 457-472.

ergo beatorum sunt astra: sedes deorum est aether seu caelum: astra quippe Deos secunda ratione dico. *Sedes vero Dei est universum ubique totum immensum caelum, vacuum spacium cuius est plenitudo; pater lucis comprehendentis tenebras, ineffabilis.*¹²¹

If the 'heaven' is the space of a star or world and the 'heaven of heaven' the space occupied by a planetary system (*synodus ex mundis*), the 'heaven of the heavens' is infinite space; and just as the first two (finite) regions of space are occupied by gods (the stars or worlds, which Bruno calls gods "in a second sense"), so the 'heaven of heavens' or infinite space is the "seat of God", which Bruno seems to say is filled with God as "father of light comprising darkness".¹²² In *De la causa*, after having stated (in the third and fourth dialogues) that the material principle is infinite in total correspondence with the infinity of the active principle (God), Bruno affirms (in the fifth and last dialogue) that the two principles (matter and form, that is, God as mind and intellect possessing all the forms) coincide in the unity of the infinite universe as a single substance, which is God's expression or self-realization:

Con il suo modo di filosofare gli Peripatetici e molti Platonici alla moltitudine de le cose, come al mezzo, fanno procedere il purissimo atto [God] da uno estremo, e la purissima potenza [i. e. matter] da l'altro. Come vogliono altri per certa metafora convenir le tenebre e

la luce alla costituzione di innumerabili gradi di forme, effigie, figure e colori. Apresso i quali, che considerano due principii e due principii, soccorreno *altri nemici et impazienti di poliarchia* [Bruno], e fanno *concorrere que' doi in uno*, che medesimamente è abisso e tenebra, chiarezza e luce, oscurità profonda et impenetrabile, luce superna et inaccessibile.¹²³

Further on, Bruno points out that to unity

tendeva con il pensiero il povero Aristotele ponendo la privazione (a cui è congiunta certa disposizione) come progenitrice, parente e madre della forma: ma non vi poté aggiungere, non ha possuto arrivarvi; perché fermando il piè nel geno de l'opposizione, rimase inceppato di maniera, che non [...] giunse né fissò gli occhi al scopo: dal quale errò a tutta passata, dicendo i contrarii non posser attualmente convenire in soggetto medesimo.¹²⁴

In a Latin work that remained in manuscript, the *Lampas triginta statuarum*, written in two phases between 1587 and 1591, that is, in the same period in which he finished *De immenso*, Bruno presents (in connection with those passages in *De immenso* that contemplate God's relation with space and probably in connection too with the critique of ontological dualism in *De la causa*) "six principles" distributed in two triads, called 'superior' and 'inferior', which we can represent with the following figure:¹²⁵

Derivation: Father → Son			
Upper triad (Male)	Father	Intellect	Spirit (Soul)
	Mind	Apollo	Light
	Plenitude	Source of the Ideas	
Inferior triad (Female)	Chaos	Orcus	Night
	Void	Privation	Matter
	Space	Desire	

¹²¹ G. Bruno, *De immenso*, IV, 14, *op. cit.*, vol. I, 2, p. 231; italics are ours.

¹²² On the application of 'light' and 'darkness' to God, see Psalms 104: 2: "he covers himself with light as with a garment"; 1 Kings 8: 12: "Yahweh, has said that he would dwell in thick darkness" (Word English Bible).

¹²³ G. Bruno, *De la causa, principio, et uno*, in id., *Œuvres complètes*. Vol. III. Ed. G. Aquilecchia, trans. L. Hersant. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2016, p. 291; italics are ours. The reference to the two 'princes' (of light and darkness) clearly alludes, beyond Platonism and Aristotelianism, to Gnosticism. The rejection of polyarchy is clearly inspired by Homer's *Iliad*, II, 204 ("the rule of the many [πολυκοιρανίη] is not good; let there be but one ruler") as quoted by Aristotle in *Metaphysics*, XII, 10, 1076a 4. This is a reference by Aristotle to ancient wisdom, which he, unlike Bruno, was unable to follow, so that it is justified, according to Bruno, to hold Plato and Aristotle as Gnostics, the great accusation that Bruno hurls against Palingenius in the eighth and last book of *De immenso*. As W. D. Ross comments, "Aristotle is not a thoroughgoing monist. He is a monist in the sense that he believes in one supreme ruling principle, God or the primum movens. But God is not for him all-inclusive. The sensible world is thought of as having a matter not made by God", in Aristotle, *Metaphysics, a Revised Text with Introduction and Commentary*. Ed. W. D. Ross. 2 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1924, vol. II, p. 405. According to Aristotle (*Physics*, II, 7, 198a 22-26), the efficient, formal and final cause "often coincide", but matter is not contemplated.

¹²⁴ G. Bruno, *De la causa, op. cit.*, p. 315.

¹²⁵ G. Bruno *Lampas triginta statuarum*, in id., *Opere magiche*. Ed. S. Bassi, E. Scapparone and N. Tirinnanzi. Milan: Adelphi, 2000, pp. 938-1065.

The adjectives ‘superior’ and ‘inferior’ do not entail ontological hierarchy, in accordance with the equating of matter and form in *De la causa*¹²⁶. In each triad the succession to the second and third member from the preceding one is described as that of father and son. The upper triad describes the generation of the persons in the Christian Trinity, but with an exclusively cosmological meaning, that is, eliminating the distinction between *generatio ad intra* of the Son and the Spirit and *creatio ad extra* of the universe, which receives the character of necessity and infinity proper to the trinitarian process. The same can be said of the opposite triad: empty space, privation and matter (or filled space) are also a tri-unity, the same thing or process, related to the other and complementing it, just as the production of the infinite universe is the explication of God, a God who contains in itself (as Nicholas of Cusa, Bruno’s mentor on this point, had already affirmed) the unity of the opposites, potency and act or matter and form.¹²⁷

Thus, we arrive at the relationship between empty space (Chaos) and God, the Father of the superior triad, also named *Plenitudo* (in consonance with the passage in *De immenso*, IV, 14). In *De la causa* Bruno states that God is certainly the coincidence of the opposites light and darkness (i. e. mind and space-matter) referring to a biblical passage: “La coincidenza di questo atto con l’assoluta potenza è stata molto apertamente descritta dal spirito divino dove dice: ‘Tenebrae non obscurabuntur a te. Nox sicut dies illuminabitur. Sicut tenebra eius, ita et lumen eius’ [Psalms 139, 12].”¹²⁸ Both light and matter (as filled space) seem to belong equally to God, who is filled space as well as the mind that fills it with forms. Grant acutely perceived the core of the problem: if space is a primary principle not created by God, the absolute sovereignty of God is called into question, and an

insurmountable dualism arises.¹²⁹ However, from the fact that space is not the work of God, it does not follow that it is totally independent from Him. The Void or Space and the matter that fills it is God Himself,¹³⁰ just as He is the spirit-mind-intellect that fills it by introducing the forms into it. This is the true meaning of the expression “void space whose fullness is [God]” or “void space of which there is fullness” in *De immenso*, IV, 14. God is space no less than its *fullness*, chaos-abyss-darkness no less than mind-intellect-spirit, since both trinitaries are equivalent and constitute one and the same essence, that is, the substance. Thus, God and the infinite universe are one and the same, as had already been demonstrated in the fifth dialogue of *De la causa*.

Aristotle (like Plato) transmitted the erroneous concept of a duality of principles to the later metaphysical tradition. The ensuing tradition conceived matter (also the space filled by it) as entirely separated from the other three causes that coincide in one, as Maimonides had stated in his *Guide* (I, 69):

One of the opinions of the philosophers, an opinion with which I do not disagree, is that God [...] is the efficient cause, that He is the form, and that He is the end [...] in order to comprise these three causes – that is, the fact that God is the efficient cause of the world, its form, and its end.¹³¹

This affirmation is directly related to the Aristotelian concept of God as “intellection of intellection” (*noësis noëseôs*; *Metaphysics*, XII, 9, 1074b 34), which implies the coincidence and unity of intellect, intellection and intelligible, as Maimonides also states:

You already know that the following dictum of the philosophers with reference to God [...] is generally admitted: the dictum being that He is the intellect as well as the intellectually cognizing subject and the intellectually cognized object, and that those three notions form in

¹²⁶ Significantly, in the pages of the fourth dialogue of *De la causa*, in which matter as potency is assimilated to act and form, the contemporary reader known as *postillatore napoletano* (a Protestant Italian exiled in England) noted concerning the coincidence or ‘indifference’ of matter and form: “Qual differenza dunque ponete tra questa materia e Dio?”, pp. 245 and 413 in the second edition, Paris, 2016. For an exposition of the structure and relationship between the two triads, see also L. Girelli, *Bruno, Aristotele e la materia*. Bologna: Archetipo Libri, 2013, pp. 75-85. According to Girelli, “non si dà alcuna eventualità di preesistenza o di esistenza indipendente dai principi superiori del *Chaos*, dell’*Orcus* e della *Nox* in quanto la condizione di possibilità che essi rappresentano è immediatamente tradotta in realtà dall’infinita attività esplicativa della triade superiore che rappresenta le tre articolazioni del principio efficiente-formale”, p. 83. The author, however, does not go so far as to affirm the substantial unity of the two triads and maintains her analysis in the same stage of unresolved dualism denounced by Bruno in Peripatetics and the Platonists contrary to his own affirmation of the “coincidence of these two principles in one” in *De la causa*, *op. cit.*, p. 291. More in line with our reading, S. Carannante, *Giordano Bruno e la filosofia moderna: Linguaggio e metafisica*. Florence: Le Lettere, 2016, p. 291, sees in the two triads “una duplicità di piani che, giova ripeterlo, *identifica i due aspetti* – fundamentalmente eterogenei ma *coessenziali* – in cui si articola l’*unica sostanza* infinita” (p. 291; italics are ours) and says that Bruno “introduce quest’ultima [passive potency, that is, matter] nel suo stesso seno [of God] quale condizione del suo necessario esplicarsi”, p. 293.

¹²⁷ Cf. G. Bruno, *De la causa*, *op. cit.*, pp. 203-207, where Cusa’s *De possesset* is tacitly adopted.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

¹²⁹ E. Grant, *Much Ado about Nothing*, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

¹³⁰ See B. Amato, “La nozione di ‘vuoto’ in Giordano Bruno”, *Bruniana & Campanelliana*, 3 (1997), pp. 209-229: “lo spazio vuoto assurge alla stessa dignità posseduta dall’Uno nella *Causa* in quanto fondamento dell’originaria determinazione forma-materia, rendendo a questo modo plausibile l’ipotesi dell’identificazione dello spazio vuoto con Dio”, p. 226. Even Nicoletta Tirinnanzi, “‘Materia prima’ e ‘scala della natura’: Dalla *Lampas triginta statuarum* alle opere magiche”, in ead., *L’antro del filosofo: Studi su Giordano Bruno*. Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2013, pp. 152-166, accepts that in the *Lampas* “l’asse del ragionamento si sposta invece [...] sulla vitalità della materia, le cui infinite metamorfosi collegano ed uniscono piani diversi dell’essere, dissolvendo di fatto lo scarto tra la triade superiore e quella inferiore”, p. 155, so that “l’immagine della scala segnala un processo che muove in direzione esattamente opposta, e dimostra che una materia unica e identica può [...] identificarsi, in ultimo, con Dio”, p. 156.

¹³¹ Maimonides, *Guide*, *op. cit.*, I, 69, vol. I, p. 167. Cf. the Latin translation: *Dux seu Director dubitantium aut perplexorum*. Ed. Augustinus Iustinianus. Paris: Jodocus Badius, 1520, fol. xxvii: “De credibilitate vero ipsorum [philosophorum] et opinione cui ego non contradico, est: quia credunt quod creator est causa efficiens & forma [&] finis: & ideo vocaberunt ipsam causam ut coniungantur in ipso tres causae: & sit ipse factor mundi & forma & finis”.

Him [...] one single notion in which there is no multiplicity.¹³²

In Germany, at the end of the eighteenth century, Solomon Maimon (1751-1800) wrote in German a Commentary to the *Guide of the Perplexed*, in which, commenting the last quoted passage, he noted: “Mais comme en Dieu rien n'est à l'état de puissance et que tout ce qui est intelligible est intelligé par lui, il en découle que Dieu, en sa qualité de sujet intelligent, son intellection et l'intelligible ne sont qu'une seule et même chose. Quelles en sont les conséquences, cela le lecteur attentif le comprendra facilement.”¹³³ And in *Giv'at ha-Moreh* (his second commentary on the *Guide*) he used the partial German translation of Bruno's *De la causa* by Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (1789), to argue, concerning the above mentioned passage of *Guide*, I, 69 and without mentioning Spinoza, that Maimonides should also have conceived of God as a material cause, and consequently as extended:

comparé à toutes les autres causes, Dieu est la cause ultime. Car si nous posons que Dieu, qu'il soit exalté, est la forme et la fin sans qu'il soit la cause matérielle, il nous faudra envisager l'existence d'une matière éternelle, c'est-à-dire non causée [and, we may add, a space containing this eternal matter]. Or ceci contredirait au concept de Dieu, qu'il soit exalté, lui qui est la cause universelle de tous les existants. [...] Dieu, qu'il soit exalté, est, de tous les points de vue, la cause ultime. Eu égard à la complexité de la question, j'ai jugé bon de reproduire ici les propos du philosophe italien Jordan Bruno de Nola tirés de son livre sur la cause.¹³⁴

From what has been said it is clear, in our opinion, that in his concept of space (joined to the matter that fills it completely) Bruno has gone much further than Crescas and conceived, literally and not metaphorically, that space is an attribute of God. He also has thought (as Spinoza in the following century) that God is the only substance, that thought and space are His attributes and that He is the immanent or not transitive cause (not a cause transitive and separate) of the infinite and eternal universe and of the infinite modes it contains. This does not contradict Bruno's frequently expressed statement – for example in *Spaccio de la bestia trionfante*,¹³⁵ in *De gli eroici furori*¹³⁶ and in

the equivocal and intentionally ambiguous pages at the beginning of the second dialogue of *De la causa*¹³⁷ – that God himself (absolutely) is unknowable. Since we are on the manifest face of God, his other side, like the other side of the coin, is unavailable to us.

4. Conclusion

From the foregoing we can conclude that, although Giordano Bruno surely knew the work of Gianfrancesco Pico in which Crescas' critique of the Aristotelian concepts of space, void and time was included, it is not certain that Bruno knew and followed these specific ideas, using them for his own critique of Aristotle and for his own elaboration of these concepts, in part coinciding with Crescas, as well as for his affirmation of the plurality of worlds, which in Pico is mentioned only in passing. Moreover, Bruno's treatment of these topics is completely different from that of Pico. Furthermore, despite the attempts of Wolfson and Mauro Zonta (not to mention the unsubstantiated speculation of David Harari), there is no evidence of an intermediary source that provided Bruno with knowledge of Crescas' critique, nor is Crescas the only possibility for Bruno's development of his conceptions of space, time, the actual infinite universe, and the infinite plurality of worlds.

The criticism of Aristotle on these points and the positive elaborations of Crescas and Bruno, initially coinciding, may be due to their common knowledge of an ancient and medieval philosophical tradition of critical comments to Aristotle with alternative proposals – a knowledge that in Bruno is, unlike in Crescas, a consciously assumed insertion and not simply a knowledge for the defense of faith and criticism of the unacceptable philosophical rationalism. Only one argument against the plurality of worlds (that of the impossible plurality of coexistent worlds because they should proceed from generation; see p. 204 above), an argument that Crescas takes from Gersonides and is present in Bruno, for which I have no scholastic Latin sources accessible to him, would seem to make Bruno dependent on Crescas by an unknown intermediary agent, since it does not appear in Pico's work. But we have also seen that Bruno's refutation of that argument is very different from Crescas'.

For all these reasons, it seems most prudent to suspend the judgment on Bruno's dependence on Crescas and consider such dependence an unlikely possibility, attending instead to what really matters: the development and insertion of some preliminary coincidences in a cosmological and ontological conception by Bruno profoundly different from that of Crescas and marked by the appearance of the heliocentric proposal and the consequent

¹³² Maimonides, *Guide*, *op. cit.*, I, 68, vol. I, p. 163; *id.*, *Dux seu Director dubitantium*, *op. cit.*, fol. xxvii: “Iam scis verbum manifestum quod philosophi dixerunt de Creatore, quod ipse est intellectus & intelligens & intellectum: & quod ista tria sunt unum in Creatore: & non est ibi multitudo”; italics are ours.

¹³³ S. Maimon, *Commentaires de Maimonide*. Ed. and trans. M.-R. Hayoun. Paris: Cerf, 1999, p. 99.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 261. Maimon quotes on pp. 261-268 the excerpt that Jacobi translated from *De la causa*.

¹³⁵ G. Bruno, *Spaccio de la bestia trionfante*, in *id.*, *Œuvres complètes*. Vol. V. Ed. G. Aquilecchia, trans. J. Balsamo. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1999, p. 427: “quel dio, come assoluto, non ha che far con noi, ma per quanto si comunica alli effetti della natura, et è più intimo a quelli che la natura istessa: de maniera che se lui non è la natura istessa, certo è la natura de la natura”.

¹³⁶ G. Bruno, *De gli eroici furori*, *op. cit.*, vol. VII, p. 391: “però a nessun pare possibile de vedere il sole, l'universale Apolline e luce assoluta per specie suprema e eccellentissima; ma sí bene la sua ombra, la sua Diana, il mondo, l'univer-

so, la natura che è nelle cose, la luce che è nell'opacità della materia: cioè quella in quanto splende nelle tenebre”.

¹³⁷ G. Bruno, *De la causa*, *op. cit.*, vol. III, p. 109: “Lasciando dunque (come voi dite) quella considerazione per quanto è superiore ad ogni senso et intelletto, consideriamo del principio e causa per quanto, in vestigio, o è la natura istessa, o pur riluce ne l'ambito e grembo di questa”. Shortly before, Bruno had said, pp. 105-107, referring to Exodus 33:23, that “della divina sustanza [...] non possiamo conoscer nulla se non per modo [...] di spalli o posteriori come dicono i Talmutisti” (cf. Maimonides, *Guide*, *op. cit.*, I, 54, vol. I, p. 123).

movement of the Earth, which Bruno assumes as physical truths that made possible the affirmation of the actual infinite and eternal universe. This development of Copernicanism joined a conception of the relationship between God and the universe characterized by ontological monism (substance is one), by the conception of God as infinite power that necessarily unfolds in an infinite and eternal universe with infinite worlds (planetary systems) in all its infinite extension and duration, and by the attribution to God of extension and matter. With Bruno and later with Spinoza (whose knowledge of Bruno is a problem similar to Bruno's knowledge of Crescas) a development of the scientific revolution and Enlightenment is outlined, which is profoundly different from the reconciliation with revealed religion proposed by Bacon, Descartes, Mersenne and Newton: a 'Radical Enlightenment' that would have also aroused the critical reaction of Crescas (Bruno and Spinoza are, to a certain extent, Maimonidean rationalists)¹³⁸ and that has been studied by Jonathan Israel in the great work with that title.¹³⁹

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¹³⁸ See W. Z. Harvey, "A Portrait of Spinoza as a Maimonidean", *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 19 (1981), pp. 151-172; C. Fraenkel, "Maimonides' God and Spinoza's 'Deus sive Natura'", *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 44 (2006), pp. 169-215. On Bruno, see M. Á. Granada, "Bruno and Maimonides: Matter as a Woman and the Ontological Status of Matter", *op. cit.*


¹³⁹ Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

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Hasdai Cresques's Impact on Fifteenth-Century Iberian Jewish Philosophy and Polemics

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ENG Abstract: Hasdai Cresques was a major Jewish thinker, author and communal leader at the end of the fourteenth and beginning of the fifteenth centuries, whose works are studied closely in the academic world. Nonetheless, his impact upon the traditional Jewish community has been almost non-existent. He never finished his legal opus, which might have made an impression on traditional Jews. His extant philosophical writings are difficult to follow; only one of two vernacular anti-Christian polemics survives, in a Hebrew translation/paraphrase. Although Cresques was well remembered in the century after his death, one can already detect during this period the reasons for his subsequent neglect. An examination of the fifteenth-century reception history of Cresques's oeuvre demonstrates the extent to which his polemical, dogmatic and philosophical stances were mostly rejected by those who followed him, including his close students. It is not surprising, then, that in subsequent centuries, Cresques's memory was almost erased from Jewish communal consciousness.

Keywords: Jewish Philosophy; anti-Christian Polemics; Jewish Dogmatics; Fifteenth-Century Spain; Cresques Reception History.

ES El impacto de Hasdai Crescas en la filosofía y la polémica judía ibérica del siglo XV

ES Resumen: Hasdai Crescas fue un importante pensador, autor y líder comunitario judío de finales del siglo XIV y principios del XV, cuyas obras son estudiadas con detalle en el mundo académico. No obstante, su impacto sobre la comunidad judía tradicional ha sido casi inexistente. Nunca terminó su obra legal, la que podría haber tenido impacto en los judíos tradicionales. Sus escritos filosóficos conservados son difíciles de seguir; solo sobrevive una de las dos polémicas anticristianas vernáculas, en una traducción/paráfrasis hebrea. Aunque Crescas fue bien recordado en el siglo posterior a su muerte, ya en este período se pueden detectar las razones de su posterior olvido. Un examen de la historia de la recepción de la obra de Crescas en el siglo XV demuestra hasta qué punto sus posiciones polémicas, dogmáticas y filosóficas fueron mayoritariamente rechazadas, más allá de que tuvo partidarios, fundamentalmente entre sus alumnos más cercanos. No es de extrañar, entonces, que en los siglos posteriores, la memoria de Crescas fuera casi borrada de la conciencia comunitaria judía.

Palabras clave: Filosofía judía; polémicas anticristianas; dogmática judía; España en el siglo XV; historia de la recepción de Crescas.

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Among the many philosophical works written by Jewish thinkers in the Middle Ages, one can distinguish those compositions which have been important enough to be considered canonical. There is, however, a difference between the canon of medieval Jewish philosophy as seen inside the academia

and the canon of medieval Jewish philosophy as seen inside the traditional Jewish community. The academic canon can be determined by examining histories of Jewish philosophy written since the middle of the nineteenth century in the context of secular scholarship. The traditional Jewish canon can

be determined by examining the number of printed editions produced over the past 500 years, as well as the lists of condemned books issued by a number of anti-rationalist traditional Jews, most noticeably by Hasidic leaders. A book which was rarely printed could not be said to be part of the traditional canon, and if the book was virtually unknown, no one would bother to proscribe reading it.

Although some works are part of both the academic and the traditional canon, like Maimonides's *Guide of the Perplexed*, there are still marked differences between the two canons. Thus, in the academic canon of medieval Jewish philosophy, one does not have to be a rabbinic Jew in good standing to make the list. One could be a Karaite (Aaron ben Elijah of Nicomedia); an excommunicated heretic (Spinoza); or even an apostate (Abu'l-Barakat al-Baghdadi or Abner of Burgos/Alfonso de Valladolid). Some of the thinkers on this list were mostly unknown to the traditional Jewish community and had little or no impact on it. Thinkers made it onto the academic canon of medieval Jewish philosophy if they interested the scholars, especially if the academic researchers considered their thought innovative, unusual or original. The Jewish community's self-understanding of its major thinkers, what could be called the traditional canon, consisting only of observant, rabbinic Jews, was not as important to the scholars as their own judgments concerning the worth of particular treatises. In similar fashion, scholarly histories of medieval Jewish philosophy, based on the academic canon, have rarely had much of an impact beyond the gates of academia.¹

The relevance of this distinction to the case of Hasdai Cresques is obvious. Although Cresques has a central position in the academic canon of medieval Jewish philosophy, he has been a virtual unknown to the traditional community.² Although, in his time, Cresques was an important communal leader and a central figure in Iberian Jewry after the riots of 1391, he was subsequently forgotten by most Jews. It would seem that if one wanted to be remembered as a Jewish philosopher, it is recommended that one do something else as well: be a halakhic expert like Saadia Gaon or Maimonides; a biblical exegete like Abraham ibn Ezra or Gersonides; or a poet like Judah Halevi or Solomon ibn Gabirol. In addition, one should also write in Hebrew or have one's works translated into Hebrew as soon as possible after they were written. Thus, if Cresques had completed his promised halakhic work and been recognized in the traditional Jewish community for his legal acumen, his philosophical work would undoubtedly have had greater resonance in the community. And although he wrote his *Or Hashem* ("Light of the Lord") in Hebrew, his very

difficult, abstruse style did not help him; in contrast, his student, Joseph Albo, who was a much less important communal leader and who left little legacy other than his *Book of Principles*, did make it into the traditional Jewish canon, probably because of the clarity of his language and the simplicity of his thinking.³

Hasdai Cresques's descent into virtual oblivion did not happen overnight. In fifteenth-century Sepharad, Cresques's reputation remained intact, even as his views were often attacked. There were three aspects of Cresques's legacy in the last Jewish century in Spain: Cresques as polemicist, Cresques as dogmatist and Cresques as philosopher. The present article will review these three aspects of Cresques's intellectual achievement as seen by his own community in the nearly 100 years after his death. The discussion is not meant to be exhaustive and discuss every fifteenth-century Sephardic thinker; undoubtedly one could bring other examples, but the general picture is not expected to change as a result.

Let us begin with Cresques's anti-Christian polemics. It is often forgotten that Cresques wrote two vernacular polemical treatises, an apparently unremarkable one based on exegetical arguments relating to the Hebrew Bible, and a philosophical one, which we now know as *The Refutation of the Christian Principles*, even though it is doubtful that that was Cresques's original name for this treatise. We are familiar with the philosophical treatise because Joseph ben Shem-Tov translated it in 1451; we are not familiar with the exegetical one because no one bothered translating it. Joseph ben Shem-Tov admits that he was too lazy to render the work into Hebrew since the book's argumentation was rather standard in Jewish anti-Christian polemics and those looking for such arguments already had a large number of possible books in Hebrew from which to choose. The originals of both works are lost, leaving for posterity only Ben Shem-Tov's translation/paraphrase of the philosophical refutation.⁴

We know all this because Joseph's translation activity included some important editorial comments. In the introduction to the edition which we possess now, Joseph remarks that, because of its brevity, depth and the vernacular language, the benefits of Cresques's original polemic were lost on his contemporaries. When Cresques composed this work in approximately 1398, his target audience were highly assimilated Jews (and not, as one often hears, the Christian nobility);⁵ and apparently these assimilated

¹ See D. J. Lasker, "The Canon of Medieval Jewish Philosophy", *Review of Rabbinic Judaism*, 6:2/3 (December 2003), pp. 317-328.

² This is true despite the fact that the current standard edition of Cresques's *Or Hashem* was edited by Rabbi Shlomo Fisher of the strictly Orthodox community in Israel; see H. Cresques, *Sefer Or Ha-Shem*. Ed. S. Fisher. Jerusalem: Sifrei Ramot, 1990. Despite this fact, one would hardly expect a conference about Hasdai Cresques to take place in a strictly Orthodox environment, but the conference at a secular university in Barcelona, at which this paper was first presented, seems totally appropriate.

³ Ignorance of Cresques extends beyond the traditional community: The street named after him in Tel Aviv has transmogrified, first into Hasdai Mi-Cresques and then into Hasidei Caracas (the pious of Caracas). There is now a street named after Cresques in Jerusalem, named so during the last major Cresques conference held in Jerusalem in 2011. Neither the Jerusalem nor the Tel Aviv Cresques Street is a major, important thoroughfare.

⁴ All references to *The Refutation* will be to D. J. Lasker, *The Refutation of the Christian Principles by Hasdai Crescas*. Albany: SUNY/Albany Press, 1992. The mention of the second treatise is on p. 84. The text of Joseph ben Shem-Tov's Hebrew version of *The Refutation* is found in H. Cresques, *Bittul Iqqarei Ha-Nozrim*. Ed. D. J. Lasker. Ramat Gan/Beer Sheva: Bar-Ilan University Press/Ben-Gurion University Press, 1990; second printing, 2002.

⁵ Arguments for the claim that *The Refutation* was written for a Jewish audience is provided in both D. J. Lasker, *Refutation*,

Jews could not read sophisticated philosophical argumentation in Hebrew. Fifty years later, those Jews who remained loyal to Judaism had not, in Joseph ben Shem-Tov's words, "been accustomed to study science except in our holy language." It is possible that since Joseph was a Castilian, perhaps Cresques's Catalan was also beyond Joseph's cohort's linguistic abilities for that reason as well. Whatever the case, Joseph took it upon himself to translate this polemic into Hebrew, but even that was not good enough as he comments:

Since, however, believers have been removed and men of science have been lost, only those who do not know the law of the God of the land have been left. They were not able to derive from it the secrets of existence and divine mysteries, because of the brevity of his language and his excessive use of indirect allusion.⁶

The bottom line was that Joseph went back to the drawing board and produced a paraphrase rather than a direct translation, and he included notes to help his woefully undertrained contemporaries to understand what Cresques was writing.

If Cresques's Catalan original was beyond mid-fifteenth-century Castilian Jews; and if Joseph ben Shem-Tov's first effort to render the book into Hebrew was inappropriate for his target audience, whose philosophical training was deficient; we might ask whether the second Hebrew version was any more successful. The second translation is still a dense attack on Christian doctrines based on Aristotelian physics and metaphysics, hardly an easy read. Did fifteenth-century Iberian Jews read Cresques's *Refutation* and did it make much of an impression upon those who read it? The question is not whether the composition was successful in preventing Jewish conversion to Christianity, since we have no way of checking whether any polemical treatise had an impact on actual behavior. But we can ask about resonances of *The Refutation* in subsequent Jewish literature.

We do know of at least one Iberian thinker who read and cited Joseph ben Shem-Tov's translation of the *Refutation*, and that was Don Isaac Abravanel, at the end of the fifteenth century, who, unlike Joseph's contemporaries, was eminently qualified to read the book. Abravanel cites the work at least twice, emphasizing that Cresques wrote it in the language of his country and, in his day, it was available in Joseph ben Shem-Tov's translation. In a citation in *Shamayim hadashim* ("New Heavens"), a book devoted to the question of the creation of the world, Abravanel cites approvingly Joseph's estimation that the *Refutation*, which, as noted, we usually date to 1398, was written after *Or Hashem*, completed apparently in 1410 before Cresques's death. Joseph had proposed a different order of composition because, in the *Refutation*, Cresques adopts Averroes's arguments against eternal creation in his rejection of the eternal generation

of the Son, whereas he criticizes such arguments in *Or Hashem* in the context of the discussion of eternal creation of the world. Joseph ben Shem-Tov, and Abravanel in his wake, assumed that after Cresques had written *Or Hashem*, in which he advocated eternal creation of the universe, he became familiar with Averroes's critique of eternal creation and, thus, was able to adopt his arguments to polemicize against the Christian doctrine of the generation of the Son.⁷ In contrast to Joseph and to Abravanel, some modern scholars have assumed the opposite trajectory, namely that in his youth Cresques objected to eternal creation and then adopted it in *Or Hashem*.⁸ Nevertheless, the use of contradictory arguments in two different compositions is not necessarily a sign of the author's changing his mind but is probably a function of a polemical license which allows an author to use arguments against opponents, even if he did not necessarily agree with those arguments.

Abravanel's second citation of Cresques's *Refutation* is in his Commentary to Isaiah 52, the beginning of the central "Suffering Servant of the Lord" passage. Abravanel cites Cresques's arguments against original sin and the redemption from it by means of the incarnation of the Son. If the Christian doctrine of vicarious atonement is baseless, according to Abravanel, then the Suffering Servant could not, as Christian exegetes would have it, have referred to a God-man Messiah.⁹

In addition to these direct citations, did the *Refutation* have an impact on Jewish anti-Christian polemics in fifteenth-century Sepharad, a century of intense inter-religious strife? Joseph ben Shem-Tov, as noted the translator of Cresques's *Refutation*, also wrote a commentary to Profiat Duran's *Epistle Be not like your Fathers*, in the introduction of which, he describes six polemical methodologies. The fifth one is described as follows:

[This] is the method of one who intended to raise objections against each of the principles of belief, called roots 'articulos'. He thought it proper first to set forth the premises which are admitted by both parties, and those about which they disagree. These polemical treatises lead to either positive or negative conclusions. This is the way of the sage, Rabbi Hasdai Cresques, of blessed memory, in a treatise which is composed in the vernacular concerning this. It is a

⁶ *op. cit.*, pp. 8-10; and *id.*, "R. Hasdai Crescas' Polemical Activity in Light of the Medieval Jewish-Christian Debate", in E. Eisenmann and W. Z. Harvey (eds.), *Or Ha-Shem from Spain. The Life, Works, and Philosophy of Rabbi Hasdai Crescas*. Jerusalem: Shazar Center, 2020, pp. 146-150 (Hebrew).

⁶ D. J. Lasker, *Refutation, op. cit.*, p. 20.

⁷ D. J. Lasker, *Refutation, op. cit.*, pp. 40-43; I. Abravanel, *Shamayim hadashim*. Rödelheim: Wolf Heidenheim, 1828 (reprinted Jerusalem, 1966/67), p. 28a. For Cresques's discussion of eternity, see Hasdai Cresques, *Sefer Or Ha-Shem, op. cit.*, pp. 297-309; H. Crescas, *Light of the Lord (Or Hashem)*. Trans. R. Weiss. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018, pp. 262-271.

⁸ S. Rosenberg, "The *Arba'ah Turim* of Rabbi Abraham bar Judah, Disciple of Don Hasdai Crescas", *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, 3:4 (1983/84), p. 527; cf. also H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929, pp. 16-18. For another discussion of changes in Cresques's views over the years, see N. Ophir, *R. Hasdai Crescas as Philosophic Exegete of Rabbinic Sources*. Diss., Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1994 (Hebrew).

⁹ I. Abravanel, *Peirush al nevi'im aharonim*. Jerusalem: Torah va-da'at, 1955/56, p. 242; reference is to D. J. Lasker, *Refutation, op. cit.*, pp. 33-36.

very valuable treatise; may God, may He be exalted, reward him for it.¹⁰

In this context, Joseph does not mention Cresques's other polemical treatise, the one based on biblical prooftexts (methodology number one in Joseph's taxonomy); nor does he give any other examples of polemicists who adopted Cresques's method. Despite Joseph's silence concerning other treatises which followed this fifth method of polemics, can we find Iberian polemicists who were influenced by Cresques's polemical method in his *Refutation of the Christian Principles*?

The interplay of polemics and dogmas was a common theme in fifteenth-century Jewish literature in Iberia, the best example of which is probably Joseph Albo's *Book of Principles*.¹¹ As noted, Albo was Cresques's student, but he did not accept many of the central features of his teacher's thought. In addition, it is the Jewish principles of faith which are at the center of Albo's work, not the Christian ones, even in the chapter (3:25) devoted to explicit anti-Christian polemics (in contrast to the implicit critique which is found throughout the book). That chapter shows the imprint of Profiat Duran's *Kelimmat ha-goyim*, rather than that of Cresques's *Refutation*.¹²

Another treatise from Iberia, if we accept Harvey Hames's analysis, is devoted to Christian and Jewish dogmas, namely, *Hoda'at ba'al din*, the "Confession of the Litigant", attributed to a David Nasi of Crete.¹³ This small composition is divided into two parts. The first takes Maimonides's thirteen principles, as encapsulated in the hymn *Yigdal Elohim Hai*, and demonstrates how each principle is supported by citations from the New Testament. The second part takes Christian principles, as encapsulated in an anti-Christian parody of *Yigdal*, and demonstrates that New Testament verses testify to the falseness of these principles. The list of Christian principles is apparently based on Profiat Duran's discussion in *Kelimmat ha-goyim*, a treatise which is specifically mentioned along with *Mahaziq Emunah* of Mordecai ben Joseph of Avignon,¹⁴ and *Ezer ha-emunah* of Moses ha-Kohen of Tordesillas.¹⁵

In addition, the argumentation is purely exegetical based on New Testament verses, not philosophical based on Aristotelian philosophy. There does not seem to be any influence here of Cresques's *Refutation*. In general, I think that one can see that Profiat Duran's polemical treatises, especially *Kelimmat ha-goyim*, had a much greater impact on subsequent Jewish anti-Christian polemics, in Iberia and outside it, than did Hasdai Cresques's *Refutation*. This can be seen as well in a comparison of the number of surviving manuscripts of the two treatises.¹⁶

There is another aspect of Cresques's polemical methodology which should be examined, namely the assertion that although reason cannot prove the truth of a particular religion, it can demonstrate that a religion is refuted by reason and therefore not possibly true. This methodology, based on Averroistic principles,¹⁷ is summarized in the introduction to the *Refutation*; 1) "faith will not force the intellect to believe something which leads to a contradiction;" and 2) "one cannot imagine that the divine power is able to contradict either the first intelligibles or the derivative principles which have been clearly and absolutely demonstrated since they derive from the first intelligibles."¹⁸ In other words, a religion which contradicts reason cannot be a divine religion, presumably eliminating Christianity from contention without having to prove the truth of Judaism, only that it does not contradict reason. Although Jews used philosophical arguments against Christianity from the inception of the Jewish critique of Christianity in the ninth century, this Averroistic framework was new in the late fourteenth century. It can be seen as well in the works of Joseph Albo, Abraham Bibago, Elijah del Medigo (who was not Iberian), and others.¹⁹ Was Cresques the innovator of this argument or only part of the trend? I tend to think the latter, since other polemicists who adopted this framework use language which does not seem to fit in with Cresques's *Refutation*.

In addition, Cresques's use of the vernacular was not unique. A decade or two before him Moses ha-Kohen of Tordesillas also wrote a vernacular polemic because he felt his target audience would not understand him if he wrote in Hebrew, even though he also wrote a much longer Hebrew polemic. One can assume that the conversos at the end of fourteenth century were assimilated linguistically into Iberian society. Fifty years later, those Jews who had not converted were not as assimilated, which is the reason Joseph ben Shem-Tov had to translate the *Refutation* into Hebrew for them. One hundred fifty years after that, as descendants of conversos fled from Spain and Portugal to Italy and Holland, the vernacular polemic came into

¹⁰ Joseph ben Shem-Tov, *Commentary on the Epistle; Be Not Like Your Fathers*, in the edition of Profiat Duran's *Epistle*, published by the Akademon, Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1969/70, on the basis of Adolf (Zev) Poznanski manuscript, National Library of Israel, ms. Heb. 8° 757, p. 24. The *Epistle* itself can be accessed in F. Talmage, *Polemical Writings of Profiat Duran*. Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center/The Dinur Center, 1981 (Hebrew), pp. 73-83.

¹¹ J. Albo, *Sefer ha-'ikkarim: Book of Principles*. Ed. I. Husik. 4 vols. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1946.

¹² J. Albo, *Sefer ha-'ikkarim*, *op. cit.*, vol III, pp. 217-245; for Duran's *Kelimmat ha-goyim*, see F. Talmage, *Polemical Writings*, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-69.

¹³ D. D. Nasi, *Hoda'at Ba'al din*. Frankfurt a. M.: H. L. Brönnner, 1866; for its possible Iberian provenance, see H. J. Hames, "And on this Rock I will Build my Community": Jewish Use of the Gospel in Fifteenth-Century Spain", in M. M. Tischler and A. Fidora (eds.), *Christlicher Norden, Muslimischer Süden*. Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2011, pp. 215-226.

¹⁴ See Y. Engelberg-Cohen, *Machazik Emunah, the Reinforcer of the Faith: Rabbi Mordechai ben Joseph's Polemical Work*. Diss., New York University, 2003.

¹⁵ See Y. Shamir, *Rabbi Moses Ha-Kohen of Tordesillas and His Book 'Ezer ha-Emunah - A Chapter in the History of the Judeo-Christian Controversy - Vol. II*. Coconut Grove: Field Research Projects, Florida, 1972.

¹⁶ There are approximately ten extant manuscripts of Cresques's work; see H. Cresques, *Bittul*, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-26. For the dozens of manuscripts of *Kelimmat ha-goyim*, see the on-line catalogue of Institute for Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts in the National Library of Israel.

¹⁷ See D. J. Lasker, "Averroistic Trends in Jewish-Christian Polemics in the Late Middle Ages", *Speculum*, 55:2 (1980), pp. 294-304.

¹⁸ D. J. Lasker, *Refutation*, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

¹⁹ See D. J. Lasker, "Averroistic Trends", *op. cit.*, and *id.*, "Averroism, the Jewish-Christian Debate, and Mass Conversions in Iberia", in R. Haliva et al. (eds.), *Averroes and Averroism in Medieval Jewish Philosophers*. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2024, pp. 185-197.

vogue, since these New Christians were not able to read Hebrew at all.²⁰ In sum, then, Hasdai Cresques's innovative anti-Christian polemic, the *Refutation of the Christian Principles*, does not seem to have had an impact on other Iberian Jewish polemicists.

We may turn now to dogmatics. As is well known, Cresques took issue with Maimonides's thirteen principles of faith, both in terms of content, e.g., he did not accept that there is a commandment to believe in God; and in form, namely that Maimonides did not posit a hierarchical difference among those principles. In contrast, Cresques argued that one cannot be commanded by God to believe in God; and that one must distinguish between roots, cornerstones, true beliefs and open questions. Thus, belief in the existence of God is a prerequisite for a divine religion, unlike, for instance, a belief in creation of the world. Judaism, and other divine religions, presuppose the roots of God's existence, unity and incorporeality. Cresques's cornerstones: God's knowledge of particulars, providence, God's power, prophecy, choice and purposefulness of the law are not necessary dogmas of Judaism, but rather beliefs the acceptance of which makes it possible to believe in revelation in general. The true beliefs are those doctrines which Judaism actually teaches, denial of which makes one a heretic. The open questions are just that – issues about which there is no clear guidance in the tradition and about which different opinions are allowable.²¹

We see, then, that Cresques's analysis of the beliefs of Judaism differs greatly from that of Maimonides. Yet, when we look at the many discussions of dogmas in fifteenth-century Iberia, which should be understood in light of the Jewish-Christian encounter,²² Cresques was pretty much ignored. Joseph Albo mentions his views, but does not advocate them, choosing instead the three central roots posited before him by Simon ben Zerah Duran, namely existence of God, divine revelation, and reward and punishment. Each one of these principles has subordinate true beliefs, conscious denial of which would make one a heretic with no place in the World to Come. Since the chronological relationship between the works of Duran and Cresques is unclear, it is hard to determine whether their hierarchical presentations of the principles are related.²³

Albo mentions his teacher a number of times, sometimes explicitly when he agrees with Cresques that the coming of the Messiah, the resurrection of the dead, and the immutability of the Torah are not separate principles of Judaism; or implicitly, when he writes that there is an opinion that the principles of Judaism are six, argues against those six principles as not sufficient for defining a divine religion, or makes the distinction between principles and true beliefs. Apparently, when Albo is critical of his teacher,

he does not mention his name specifically; when he agrees with him, he is happy to cite him as an authority.²⁴ Abraham Bibago (or Bivagch), writing around 1480, mentions in passing Cresques's view of the six principles of religion without attributing this view explicitly to Cresques. He rejects both Cresques's six principles and Albo's three, but he sees some value in Albo's presentation of the three principles as a summary of Maimonides's thirteen principles.²⁵

Bibago's discussion of the principles of Judaism and his defense of Maimonides had a great impact on Isaac Abravanel, yet in contrast to both Bibago and to Albo, Abravanel had no scruples about mentioning Hasdai Cresques by name. Abravanel was not Cresques's student, and, when he was born in Portugal in 1437, Cresques, who was from faraway Aragon, had already been dead for over two decades. In his semi-defense of Maimonides's principles, *Rosh Amanah*, Abravanel analyses both Albo's and Cresques's disagreements with Maimonides and offers refutations of their positions. Despite his defense of Maimonides, Abravanel was uncomfortable with the choosing of some beliefs as cardinal principles at the expense of other beliefs, and he taught that if one were to choose principle beliefs, the only true principle would be creation of the world. Yet, he saw pedagogical value in Maimonides's thirteen principles, value which would be lost if one were to accept Cresques's or Albo's critiques.²⁶

We see, therefore, that Cresques's critique of the Maimonidean principles, and their substitution with a totally new framework of discussion, did not have resonance, even among his students and the generations who lived after him in Iberia. In addition, those who are familiar with the Jewish prayer book know that there are two renditions of Maimonides's thirteen principles intended for daily recitation, but no rendition of Cresques's principles. That represents the ultimate victory of Maimonides in the realm of dogmatism.

What about Cresques's innovative and creative philosophy, a philosophy which is at heart a conservative reaction to Maimonides and Gersonides, and, thus, could be expected to be popular in fifteenth-century Sepharad? Here, too, the naysayers outnumbered those who adopted Cresques's philosophy. When Harry Wolfson wrote his classical book on Cresques a hundred years ago, he thought that Cresques had changed the whole direction of philosophy, and the abandonment of Aristotelianism in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, by mostly non-Jewish thinkers, gave support to Wolfson's theory.²⁷ Since then, however, the research of such scholars like Zev Harvey has demonstrated that Cresques was not as original a thinker as Wolfson supposed, and he had

²⁰ D. J. Lasker, "Polemical Activity", *op. cit.*, pp. 146-149.

²¹ For Cresques's dogmatics, see M. Kellner, *Dogma in Medieval Jewish Thought*. Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1986, pp. 108-139.

²² See D. J. Lasker, "Principles of Religion, Interfaith Polemics and Communal Leadership in Fifteenth-Century Spain", in N. Ilan et al. (eds.), *Studies of Leadership Phenomenon in Jewish Communities during the Middle Ages. A Jubilee Festschrift on the Occasion of the Seventieth Birthday of Prof. Menachem Ben-Sasson*. Jerusalem: Magnes, 2023, pp. 329-342 (Hebrew).

²³ See M. Kellner, *Dogma, op. cit.*, pp. 83-107; 140-156.

²⁴ See, e.g., J. Albo, *Sefer ha-'ikkarim, op. cit.*, vol. I, pp. 36, 61, 200; vol. II, pp. 106-108; vol. III, p. 148.

²⁵ See A. Bibago, *Derekh Emunah*. Constantinople, 1522 (reprinted, Jerusalem: Sifriyyat Mekorot, 1970), p. 102b; for Bibago's discussion of the principles of Judaism, see M. Kellner, *Dogma, op. cit.*, pp. 165-178.

²⁶ See I. Abravanel, *Principles of Faith (Rosh Amanah)*. Trans. M. Kellner. Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1982. For Abravanel's relation to Cresques, see p. 269 index, s.v. "Crescas, Hasdai". Abravanel's theory of principles of Judaism is discussed as well in M. Kellner, *Dogma, op. cit.*, pp. 179-195.

²⁷ H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique, op. cit.*, pp. 34-37; 114-127.

Christian contemporaries who were also attacking Aristotelianism and influenced those Christian thinkers who came after them.²⁸ So, Wolfson's grandiose portrayal of the Jew Hasdai Cresques as the thinker responsible for non-Aristotelian philosophy and physics in the early modern period, at a time when anti-semitism and prejudice against Jews and Judaism were rampant, was probably exaggerated.²⁹ What, however, can be said about Iberian Jewish philosophers who came after Cresques?

We can begin with Cresques's own circle of students. This circle was active in editing his works and propagating his thought. Yet, as Ari Ackerman, who has studied this circle, has remarked: "None of them accepted wholesale [Cresques's] revolutionary scientific, philosophic and theological conceptions." Nonetheless, in Ackerman's evaluation, "they discussed, developed, and – to a certain degree – internalized (far more than among other subsequent Jewish philosophers)".³⁰ The most prominent of these students, who are not exactly household names in either the Jewish tradition or academia, was Joseph Albo, who, as pointed out, generally cited Cresques by name only in the few instances where he agreed with him. Albo's thought is an attempt at synthesizing all the various trends of Jewish philosophy which preceded him (in addition to proposing a theory of principles of Judaism as a method of attacking Christianity and maintaining Jewish identity and solidarity). Cresques's role in this synthesis is minor. A good example of Cresques's impact on one aspect of Albo's thought was the latter's definition of time, as Zev Harvey has demonstrated.³¹

If even his students were not convinced by Cresques's revolutionary thought, we should not expect very much sympathy on the part of non-students, and, indeed, we do not find much in common between Cresques and his fifteenth-century Iberian successors. Some of them were aware of his thought, however, as seen in a comment by Joseph ben Shem-Tov in the section of the *Refutation* in which Cresques attacks the doctrine of positive divine attributes as a stand-in for the Christian trinity. Just as in the case of Averroistic arguments against eternal creation, adopted in the *Refutation*, but rejected in *Or Hashem*, here, too, there is an ostensible contradiction between the treatises. Joseph ben Shem-Tov remarks on the contradiction concerning arguments for and against eternal creation, and, as mentioned, he solves the dilemma by positing a change in Cresques's mind caused by reading Averroes. In the case of positive,

divine attributes, Joseph informs us that there were some scholars (*qezat maskilim*) who had objected to Cresques's theory of positive, essential attributes in *Or Hashem* by use of arguments which were very similar to those used by Cresques in the *Refutation*. Joseph does not tell us whether those objectors were familiar with the *Refutation*, only that their arguments against Cresques were similar to the ones he used in the polemical work. Who these scholars were is not made clear; but it does indicate that Cresques's philosophical work was read and criticized. For his part, Joseph does not recognize a contradiction, distinguishing between attributes, usually translated *te'arim*, and Persons of the Trinity, also often called *te'arim* in polemical literature. Joseph suggests that if Persons had been translated correctly as *parzufim*, there would not have been this confusion.³² Interestingly enough, the Hebrew *parzuf*, used in Rabbinic literature to mean face, is derived from the Greek *prosopon*, the term the Greek Church used for the Persons of the Trinity. It should be noted that even into the present, Jews and Christians have both had difficulty coming up with agreed upon Hebrew terminology for the basic Christian doctrines.³³

Among fifteenth-century Iberian philosophical critics of Hasdai Cresques, perhaps the best known is Abraham Shalom, even though his work *Neve Shalom* ("The Dwelling Place of Peace"), has not had much resonance, either in the traditional community or in academia. His philosophical work was published only once, almost 500 years ago (with two somewhat recent photo offset editions).³⁴ This treatise is devoted mostly to a defense of Maimonides against his two most prominent critics, Gersonides and Hasdai Cresques. Shalom adopts some of Cresques's conservative stances, but, in general he sides with Maimonides.³⁵ In mid-fifteenth century Iberia, Cresques's philosophy might have been alive, but it certainly was not doing very well.

This brief survey indicates that Hasdai Cresques's descent into relative oblivion already began in Sepharad in the century after his death. He had a reputation as a philosopher and polemicist, but not much more than that. There were no prominent followers who adopted either his philosophical or his polemical methodology. Originals of his vernacular compositions were lost; he was attacked rather than praised. By the time of the expulsion, not many Jewish thinkers mentioned him, other than Isaac Abravanel, who was critical of his dogmatics. Over the centuries, both *Or Hashem* and the *Refutation* were printed, but with little impact on the traditional community, leaving his legacy to the academia.

²⁸ See, e.g., W. Z. Harvey, *Physics and Metaphysics in Hasdai Crescas*. Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1998, pp. 23-29; id., "Bernat Metge and Hasdai Crescas: A Conversation", in F. Wallis and R. Wisnovsky (eds.), *Medieval Textual Cultures*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016, pp. 77-84; id., "Nicole Oresme and Hasdai Crescas on Many Worlds (with an Appendix on Gersonides and Gerald Odonis)", in R. Fontaine et al. (eds.), *Studies in the History of Culture and Science: A Tribute to Gad Freudenthal*. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2011, pp. 347-359.

²⁹ On Cresques's attraction for Wolfson, see W. Z. Harvey, "Wolfson's Pragmatic Crescas", *Journal of Textual Reasoning*, 13:1 (2022).

³⁰ A. Ackerman, *Hasdai Crescas on Codification, Cosmology and Creation*. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2022, p. 65.

³¹ J. Albo, *Sefer ha-'ikkarim*, *op. cit.*, vol. II, pp. 108-115; W. Harvey, "Albo's Discussion of Time", *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 70:4 (1980), pp. 210-23.

³² D. J. Lasker, *Refutation*, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-47; for Cresques's discussion of attributes, see H. Cresques, *Sefer Or Ha-Shem*, *op. cit.*, pp. 99-115; H. Crescas, *Light of the Lord*, *op. cit.*, pp. 101-114.

³³ See D. J. Lasker, "Christian Concepts in Hebrew – The Trinity as an Example", *Leshonenu*, 75:2-3 (2013), pp. 239-250 (Hebrew).

³⁴ A. Shalom, *Sefer Neve Shalom*. Venice, 1574/75 (reprinted, Jerusalem, 1965/65; Farnborough: Gregg International Publishers, 1969).

³⁵ H. A. Davidson, *The Philosophy of Abraham Shalom: A Fifteenth-Century Exposition and Defence of Maimonides*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964.

Some segments of the traditional Jewish world have objected strongly to the academic study of Judaism for its critical approach to what are considered sacred texts. It is impossible to know how Rabbi Hasdai Cresques, a strong defender of the traditional Jewish world, would have reacted to *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. One thing is certain though. It is because of academic Jewish Studies that the name of Hasdai Cresques has not fallen into complete oblivion and the message he presented to Iberian Jewry in its hour of political and intellectual crisis has not been lost.


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Polemics, Tradition and Modernity in Ḥasdai Crescas (II)¹

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The rabbi of Barcelona Ḥasdai Crescas (in Catalan: Cresques, c. 1340-1411) was one of the most outstanding medieval Jewish philosophers, as well as a community leader and a remarkable religious polemicist. Crescas was a radical critic of peripatetic teachings and their reception in Maimonides' thought, as he was convinced that these philosophical traditions contradicted not only the essence of faith in Judaism, but also any empirical and rational understanding of the world. Crescas' vision – a critical and evocative interpretation of theological inspiration – offers, nonetheless, a wide range of philosophical intuitions that anticipate a Modernity already in the making. He thus pioneered a philosophy where tradition and innovation go hand in hand and whose sources, varied and eclectic as they are, include the very Aristotelian notions he questioned, along with Neoplatonic doctrines of diverse origins and the new science of the *Trecento*. The most important outcome of this approach was an exceptional book, *Or Hashem (Light of the Lord)*, wherein logic, physics, ontology and the study of the Bible were put in service of intellectual deconstruction. In this work, Crescas presents himself to us as an implacable critic of Maimonidian scriptural hermeneutics, of Maimonides' use of Greek philosophy, and of his dialogue with the earlier Jewish tradition. His ultimate goal – namely, to develop an alternative cosmology to Aristotelian physics – must be considered, along with his anti-Maimonideanism, Crescas' most decisive contribution to the history of philosophy.

Or Hashem is not, of course, the only intellectually relevant contribution of Ḥasdai Crescas. Despite various adversities and limitations, and in particular the pogroms of 1391 and their terrible consequences for Hispanic Judaism, Crescas was able to write some works of great value that show his genius and

acuity, as well as his awareness of his responsibility as a political leader. As a response to the mass conversions to Christianity after those persecutions, Crescas wrote two controversial works, of which only one survives: the *Sefer Biṭṭul Iqqare Ha-Nošrim (The Inconsistency of Christian Dogmas)*. From a logico-philosophical vantage point and without resorting to references from the Torah, this kind of a dialectical manual represents a fully-fledged challenge to the fundamental principles of Christianity. The inconsistency of Christianity, Crescas maintains, lies in the fact that it is a system of beliefs and dogmas which tends to lead the intellect to contradiction and absurdity. In contrast, Judaism manifests itself as the perfect religion, one whose reconciliation of faith, rationality and the future of history most closely resembles the divine will with respect to human beings. This conception is also defended by Crescas in his *Passover Sermon*, an interesting text, containing halakhic material, which fathoms the precise meaning of the Jewish experience of faith. Employing a hermeneutics which is methodologically close to Christian scholasticism, this text develops a unique theological anthropology focused on the idea of human will and the possibility of miracles.

The study of these fundamental questions, which were in part already addressed in a first monographic section dedicated to Ḥasdai Crescas in the last issue of this journal, is expanded in its perspective and scope by the articles contained in this second dossier. Resianne Fontaine from the University of Amsterdam offers a study of Crescas' criticism of peripatetic philosophy from a highly original perspective: that of the link between *Or Hashem* and the first Aristotelian work in the Jewish tradition, *Ha-Emunah Ha-Ramah* by the Sephardic philosopher Abraham ibn Daud (1110-1180). Drawing on previous research, Fontaine asks to what extent Ibn Daud's work was relevant to Crescas. The lack of direct textual quotations, the similarities between Ibn Daud's thought and that of Maimonides and of Gersonides – whose opinions Crescas also criticizes – and the handling of a common philosophical corpus, albeit an extremely indeterminate one, turns this task of inquiry into an almost impossible mission. And yet,

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the biblical exegesis present in both works does provide important evidence. Crescas seems to adopt from Ibn Daud hermeneutic approaches to sapiential literature, for example to Psalm 139, which turn out to be useful for settling the problem of God's knowledge and of the relationship between philosophy and religion.

Shalom Sadik from Ben Gurion-University of the Negev further analyses Crescas' development of these topics by focusing on the latter's notion of ideal certainty, which he explores from a comparative perspective drawing on both *Or Hashem* and the *Passover Sermon*. The parallel study of both texts leads the author to develop a hypothesis which sheds light on why the notion of certainty is better and more extensively explained in the *Sermon* than in Crescas' main philosophical work. Broadly speaking, Hasdai Crescas identifies four distinct levels of certainty: irrefutable evidence and prophetic experiences; reasonable logical proofs and miracles that go beyond empirical verification; proofs and miracles of a more dubious nature; and the literal meaning of the text of the Torah and of tradition in general. According to Sadik, the omission of this fourth level in *Or Hashem* may be best explained in terms of the eminently critical philosophical character of the work.

The polemical dimension of Hasdai Crescas' work is accounted for in the article by José Antonio Fernández López from the University of Murcia. In *The Inconsistency of Christian Dogmas*, Crescas demonstrates a deep knowledge of Christian theology and dogma. Fernández López investigates Crescas' critical interpretation of the Christian doctrine of original sin, and its place within the author's thought in general as well as within the particular context from which the work springs. Redemption from original sin, as conceived by Christianity, seems to Hasdai Crescas to be the result of a spiritual excess, disproportionate and impossible. What the *Sefer Bitṭul* in fact denounces is the irrationality of a

Christian dogma that contradicts itself by granting human souls the characteristics of individuality and distinct quality, while at the same time subsuming them in a totality that makes them susceptible to spiritually transmitting the original sin. Added to this is the fact that, by denying the redemption transmitted by Abraham's circumcision due to his human nature, Christian dogma also does the same with the circumcision of Jesus. A deeply rooted disproportion is identified in Christianity, which entails that the price of redemption becomes a mystery for human beings, totally dependent on grace.

Manuscripts such as MS Parma 2666, which combine philosophical texts, glossaries and elements of Jewish tradition, have confirmed Maimonides as an authority not only among the Spanish Jews and converts of the 15th century but also among the descendants of the Sephardim who abandoned the Peninsula and settled in Provence or Italy. The same can be noted in works such as Alfonso de la Torre's *Visión deleitable (Delightful Vision)*, a true cento of the *Guide of the Perplexed*. In contrast, a link that until now had not been delved into is that between Crescas' work and this re-exiled Judaism. This is what Warren Zeev Harvey, emeritus professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, does in his article. As he shows, Hasdai Crescas' disquisitions on the "delight of God" (*simḥah*) in *Or Hashem* I, 3, 5 exerted a marked influence on the reflections on the "delight of God" (*la delectazione*) that Judah Abrabanel, alias Leone Ebreo (1464-1530), developed in his *Dialogues of Love*. The shared use of scriptural and Talmudic sources and references testifies to this link, as does the choice of key concepts. Thus, Leone Ebreo's formulations on the delight and love of God bespeak a direct reading of Crescas that turns the latter into an indisputable reference for understanding the process of cultural transmission which characterized Judaism among the Iberian diaspora in the 15th and 16th centuries.

ES Polemismo, tradición y modernidad en Hasdai Crescas (II)²

Monográfico editado y coordinado por José Antonio Fernández López y Alexander Fidora

El rabino barcelonés Hasdai Crescas (en catalán: Cresques, c. 1340-1411) es uno de los principales filósofos judíos medievales, además de líder comunitario y notable polemista religioso. Crítico radical del peripatetismo y de su recepción en el pensamiento maimonidiano, estas tradiciones filosóficas, para Crescas, contradicen no sólo la esencia fiducial del judaísmo, sino también la comprensión empírica y racional del mundo. La visión de Crescas, una interpretación crítica y sugerente de inspiración teológica, ofrece, sin embargo, un haz de intuiciones filosóficas

que anticipan una Modernidad ya en ciernes. Una filosofía precursora donde tradición e innovación se dan la mano y cuyas fuentes, variadas y eclécticas, incluyen el propio aristotelismo que cuestiona, doctrinas neoplatónicas de diverso origen o la nueva ciencia trecentista. El resultado más importante de esta concepción será un libro excepcional, *Or Hashem (Luz del Señor)*, donde la lógica, la física, la ontología y la ciencia bíblica se ponen al servicio de una tarea de deconstrucción intelectual. Crescas se nos presenta en esta obra como un crítico implacable de la hermenéutica escriturística maimonidiana, de su uso de la filosofía griega y de su diálogo con la tradición judía que le precede. Su pretensión, en último término, de elaborar una cosmología alternativa a la física aristotélica será, más allá de su antimaimonidismo, su contribución más decisiva a la historia de la filosofía.

Or Hashem no es, por supuesto, la única aportación relevante desde el punto de vista intelectual

² Las dos secciones de este monográfico dedicado a Hasdai Crescas se inscriben dentro de la investigación financiada por los proyectos del Ministerio de Ciencias e Innovación PID2020-112592GB-I00 y de la Generalitat de Catalunya 2021 SGR 00152 GRC. Los editores del monográfico agradecen al Instituto de Estudios Medievales (UAB) su apoyo en esta empresa.

de Ḥasdai Crescas. A pesar de condicionamientos y limitaciones, de los pogromos de 1391 y de sus terribles consecuencias para el judaísmo hispano, Crescas fue capaz de redactar algunos escritos de gran valor que dan muestra de su genio y agudeza, así como de la conciencia de su responsabilidad como líder político. Como respuesta a la sangría de conversiones masivas al cristianismo, tras aquellas persecuciones, Crescas redactará dos obras polémicas de las que sólo se conserva una, el *Sefer Biṭṭul Iqqare Ha-Nošrim* (*La inconsistencia de los dogmas cristianos*). Desde un argumentario lógico-filosófico y sin recurrir a referencias de la Torá, esta suerte de manual dialéctico se presenta como una impugnación en toda regla de los principios fundamentales del cristianismo. La inconsistencia del cristianismo, sostiene Crescas, estriba en que es un sistema de creencias, algunos de cuyos dogmas llevan al intelecto a la contradicción y al absurdo. Frente a este hecho, el judaísmo se manifiesta como la religión perfecta, aquella cuya conciliación de la fe, la racionalidad y el devenir de la historia se asemeja más a la voluntad divina en torno al ser humano. Esta concepción es defendida también por Crescas en su *Sermón de Pascua*, un interesante escrito que contiene material halájico y donde indaga en el sentido de la experiencia de fe judía. Desde una hermenéutica emparentada metodológicamente con la escolástica cristiana, este texto desarrolla una singular antropológica teológica, focalizada en la idea de voluntad humana y en la posibilidad de los milagros.

El estudio de estas cuestiones fundamentales, abordadas ya en una primera sección monográfica en el pasado número de la revista, se amplía en su perspectiva y alcance con los artículos que contiene esta segunda sección dedicada a Ḥasdai Crescas. La profesora de la Universidad de Ámsterdam Resianne Fontaine ofrece un estudio del criticismo cresquiano del peripatetismo desde una perspectiva sumamente original, la del nexo existente entre *Or Hashem* y la primera obra aristotélica de las letras judías, *Ha-Emuná ha-Ramá*, del filósofo sefardí Abraham ibn Daud (1110-1180). A partir de investigaciones previas, Fontaine se pregunta hasta qué punto el trabajo de Ibn Daud fue relevante para Crescas. La inexistencia de citas textuales directas, las similitudes del pensamiento de Ibn Daud con el de Maimónides y con el de Gersónides, cuyas opiniones Crescas también critica, el manejo de un corpus filosófico común, aunque sumamente indeterminado, convierte esta tarea de indagación casi en un imposible. Y, sin embargo, la exégesis bíblica presente en ambas obras sí que aporta más resultados. Crescas parece tomar de Ibn Daud ejemplos concretos de hermenéutica sapiencial, por ejemplo, el Salmo 139, útiles para la dilucidación del problema del conocimiento de Dios y de las relaciones entre filosofía y religión.

El análisis del tratamiento de estos tópicos en *Or Hashem*, así como en el *Sermón de Pascua*, comparativamente y desde la perspectiva filosófica del ideal de certeza, es examinado en su artículo por el profesor de la Universidad Ben Gurión del Néguev, Shalom Sadik. El estudio paralelo de ambos textos permite al autor del artículo desarrollar una hipótesis en torno a por qué el tema de la certeza se encuentra más y mejor explicitado en el *Sermón* que en



su principal obra filosófica. En términos generales, Ḥasdai Crescas identifica cuatro niveles distintos de certeza: pruebas irrefutables y experiencias proféticas; pruebas lógicas razonables y milagros que desbordan la comprobación empírica; pruebas y milagros de naturaleza dudosa; la significación literal del texto de la Torá y de la tradición en general. A juicio del profesor Sadik, la omisión de este cuarto nivel en *Or Hashem* pudiera haberse debido a su intencionalidad como obra filosófica eminentemente crítica.

De la dimensión polemística de la obra de Ḥasdai Crescas da cuenta el artículo de José Antonio Fernández López, profesor de la Universidad de Murcia. En *La inconsistencia de los dogmas cristianos*, Crescas demuestra un profundo conocimiento de la teología y del dogma cristiano. El profesor Fernández López indaga en la interpretación crítica de la doctrina cristiana del pecado original que Crescas realiza, su conexión con el ideario del propio autor, así como con el contexto del que la obra brota. La redención del pecado original, tal como la concibe el cristianismo, se presenta a Ḥasdai Crescas como un ejercicio de desmesura espiritual, desproporcionado e imposible. Lo que de hecho denuncia el *Sefer Biṭṭul* es la irracionalidad de un dogma cristiano que se contradice a sí mismo al otorgar a las almas humanas las características de individualidad y calidad personal para, a continuación, subsumirlas en una totalidad que las hace susceptibles de transmitir espiritualmente el pecado original. A ello se añade el que, al negar la redención transmitida por la circuncisión de Abraham por su naturaleza humana, también lo hace con la circuncisión de Jesús. Una raíz de desproporción se da en el cristianismo, que implica que el precio de la redención se torne un arcano para el ser humano, totalmente dependiente de la gracia.

Manuscritos como el MS Parma 2666, donde se combinan textos filosóficos, glosarios y elementos de la tradición judía, han señalado a Maimónides como una autoridad no sólo entre los judíos y conversos españoles del siglo XV, sino también entre aquellos descendientes de los sefarditas que abandonaron la Península y se instalaron en Provenza o en Italia. También textos como la *Visión deleitable* de Alfonso de la Torre, auténtico centón de la *Guía de perplejos*. Sin embargo, un vínculo en el que hasta ahora no se había profundizado es el de la obra de Crescas y este judaísmo reexiliado. Esto es lo que realiza en su artículo el profesor emérito de la Universidad Hebrea de Jerusalén, Warren Zeev Harvey. Las disquisiciones de Ḥasdai Crescas sobre el “deleite de Dios” (*simhá*) en *Or Hashem* I, 3, 5, ejercieron, tal como pone en evidencia el profesor Harvey, una marcada influencia en las reflexiones en torno al “deleite de Dios” (*la delectazione*) que Judá Abrabanel, alias León Hebreo (1464-1530), desarrolla en sus *Diálogos de amor*. El uso compartido de las mismas fuentes y referencias escriturísticas y talmúdicas, la elección de los conceptos clave para sus formulaciones, son testimonio de este vínculo, de cómo las formulaciones de León Hebreo sobre el deleite y el amor de Dios reflejan una lectura tan directa de Crescas que lo convierten en una referencia indiscutible en el proceso de transmisión cultural en el que se vio envuelto el judaísmo de la diáspora ibérica en los siglos XV y XVI.

Some Notes on Hasdai Crescas's use of Abraham Ibn Daud

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ENG Abstract. Abraham Ibn Daud is known as the philosopher who in his *Ha-Emunah ha-Ramah* (written originally in Arabic c. 1160) transplanted the Aristotelianism of the Muslim *falāsifah* al-Farabi and Avicenna to Jewish soil. Some 250 years later, Hasdai Crescas subjected this system to a severe criticism in his *Or Ha-Shem* (c. 1410). In his introduction Crescas classifies Ibn Daud as an Aristotelian philosopher but does not refer to him any further. Drawing on previous research by other scholars the paper examines the question to what extent Ibn Daud's work was relevant for Crescas. Exact literary parallels that point to a unique influence of Ibn Daud on Crescas regarding philosophical doctrines are hard to uncover because Ibn Daud's philosophical sources are the same as Crescas's. Moreover, Ibn Daud's thought displays many similarities to that of Maimonides and also to Gersonides whose views Crescas criticizes. The area of Biblical exegesis yields more results: Crescas can be shown to have drawn on Ibn Daud's use of certain Biblical verses. Ibn Daud's interpretation of Psalm 139 in relation to the key problem of God's knowledge as well as his use of the light metaphor is likely to have inspired Crescas to ponder the question of the relation between philosophy and religion.

Keywords: Medieval Jewish philosophy, Aristotelian philosophy, Avicenna, al-Ghazali, Maimonides, Gersonides, Biblical exegesis, Light metaphor.

ES Apuntes sobre el uso de Abraham Ibn Daud en Hasdai Crescas

Resumen. Abraham Ibn Daud es conocido como el filósofo que en su *Ha-Emunah ha-Ramah* (escrito originalmente en árabe ca. 1160) incorporó el aristotelismo de los *falāsifah* musulmanes al-Farabi y Avicenna al ámbito de reflexión judío. Unos 250 años después, Hasdai Crescas sometió este sistema a una severa crítica en su *Or Ha-Shem* (ca. 1410). En su introducción, Crescas clasifica a Ibn Daud como un filósofo aristotélico, pero no se refiere más a él. Basándose en investigaciones previas, el artículo examina la cuestión de hasta qué punto el trabajo de Ibn Daud fue relevante para Crescas. Paralelos literarios exactos que apunten a una clara influencia de Ibn Daud en Crescas con respecto a las doctrinas filosóficas son difíciles de descubrir porque las fuentes filosóficas de Ibn Daud son las mismas que las de Crescas. Además, el pensamiento de Ibn Daud muestra muchas similitudes con el de Maimónides y también con el de Gersónides, cuyas opiniones Crescas critica. La exégesis bíblica aporta más resultados: se puede demostrar que Crescas se basó en el uso de ciertos versículos bíblicos por parte de Ibn Daud. Es probable que la interpretación de Ibn Daud del Salmo 139 en relación con el problema clave del conocimiento de Dios, así como su uso de la metáfora de la luz, hayan llevado a Crescas a reflexionar sobre la relación entre filosofía y religión.

Palabras clave: Filosofía judía medieval, filosofía aristotélica, Avicenna, al-Ghazali, Maimónides, Gersónides, exégesis bíblica, metáfora de la luz.

Summary: 1. Introduction. 2. A Methodological Problem. 3. Literary Parallels. 4. Biblical Exegesis: the Problem of God's Knowledge and Psalm 139. 5. Religious Practice. 6. In Conclusion. 7. Bibliography.

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1. Introduction

In the history of medieval Jewish philosophy Hasdai Crescas and Abraham Ibn Daud (c. 1110–1180) can be viewed as key figures. Abraham Ibn Daud is known as the first Jewish Aristotelian. With his philosophical treatise *Ha-Emunah ha-Ramah* (The Exalted Faith), written ca. 1160 in Arabic, he transplanted the Aristotelianism of the Muslim *falāsifah* to Jewish soil, a trend that was continued a few decades later by Maimonides (1138–1204) in his *Moreh Nevukhim* (The Guide of the Perplexed). Hasdai Crescas (1340–1410/11), on the other hand, is known as the thinker who, in his *Or ha-Shem* (Light of the Lord), completed some 250 years after the composition of Ibn Daud's work, sought to undermine the Aristotelian foundations on which Ibn Daud built his philosophy. Moreover, Ibn Daud wished to demonstrate the harmony between philosophy and religion, whereas Crescas rather aimed at separating the two modes of knowledge. In a certain sense Ibn Daud and Crescas thus mark the beginning and the end of the period in which Aristotle dominated medieval Jewish religious philosophy². Does this mean that their systems of thought are diametrically opposed to each other, in other words, that they should be seen as antagonists? This contribution proposes to examine the relation between these two thinkers.

At the very beginning of his *Light of the Lord* Hasdai Crescas lists some commentators on Aristotle's works as well as what he calls "authors who followed Aristotle"³. The commentators are Themistius,

Alexander, Alfarabi and Averroes. The Aristotelian authors are Avicenna, al-Ghazali and Abraham Ibn Daud. To this he adds that Maimonides (referred to by him as "the Rabbi" or "the Master") also made use of Aristotle's propositions in his *Guide of the Perplexed*. Throughout the *Light*, these commentators and authors appear from time to time (some more so than others), and most of all Maimonides with whose views Crescas is constantly engaged. Curiously, however, Ibn Daud is the only one who receives no further mention, not even once, even though Crescas apparently regarded him as an independent philosopher, not as a "commentator". This raises the question of Crescas's relation to Ibn Daud. Does the fact that Crescas criticizes the building blocks of Aristotelian science, the very system that Ibn Daud introduced into Jewish philosophy, mean that Ibn Daud's philosophical work, *Ha-Emunah ha-Ramah*, was not at all relevant to Crescas?

Of course this is not necessarily the case. Crescas's silence with respect to Ibn Daud is remarkable, but not very telling. As already observed by Wolfson, there is no one-to-one correspondence between authors referred to in Crescas's introduction and sources actually or probably used by him. Crescas does not mention all his sources by name, and some of the authors whom he does mention, like Judah Halevi, Moses Ha-Levi and Gersonides, do not appear in Crescas's introduction, even though Crescas opposes many of Gersonides's positions⁴. Moreover, several scholars have observed that Crescas used or borrowed views from authors whose doctrines he criticized. As Haim Kreisel poignantly notes: "Crescas is not adverse in adopting from his philosophic predecessors many salient details of their views once he renounces the foundation upon which they built them"⁵, a practice that Zev Harvey has called "subversive use"⁶.

Furthermore, we know that Ibn Daud's book was read in circles close to Crescas. In the last third of the fourteenth century its translation from Arabic into Hebrew was commissioned by a close associate of Crescas, R. Isaac bar Sheshet (Ribash), and it is possible that Crescas himself, who did not read Arabic, instigated/requested this translation⁷. Mauro Zonta

² This is not to say that Aristotle was absent in the works of Jewish thinkers before Ibn Daud. We find Aristotelian doctrines, for example, in Judah Halevi's *Kuzari* (The Kuzari) and in Joseph Ibn Zaddiq's *'Olam Qatan* (The Microcosmos), and for Halevi Aristotle is The Philosopher. However, in Ibn Daud's philosophical work the Aristotelian current is much more dominant because of his systematic use of Aristotelian philosophy. For general surveys on medieval Jewish philosophy, see C. Sirat, *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages*. Cambridge/Paris: Cambridge University Press/Éditions de la maison des sciences de l'homme, 1985 and I. Husik, *A History of Medieval Jewish Philosophy*. Mineola, New York: Dover Publ., 2002 (repr. of 1941, with a new Preface by S. Harvey). For comprehensive studies on Abraham Ibn Daud, see R. Fontaine, *In Defence of Judaism: Abraham Ibn Daud. Sources and Structure of 'ha-Emunah ha-Ramah'*. Assen: Van Gorcum, 1990 and A. Eran, *From Simple Faith to Sublime Faith*. Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-meuchad, 1998 (Hebrew). On Hasdai Crescas, see W. Z. Harvey, *Physics and Metaphysics in Hasdai Crescas*. Amsterdam: J.C. Gieben, 1998 and *Rabbi Hisdai Crescas*. Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar, 2010 (Hebrew); E. Eisenmann and W. Z. Harvey (eds.), *Or Ha-Shem from Spain. The Life, Works, and Philosophy of Rabbi Hasdai Crescas*. Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center, 2020 (Hebrew). The dedicated entries to Abraham Ibn Daud and Hasdai Crescas in the online *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* provide easy access to the life and thought of the two thinkers and to further bibliographical information. For two recent publications on these thinkers, see the studies in *Anales del Seminario de Historia de Filosofía*, 40:1 (2023) (on Ibn Daud) and *Engaging Crescas = Journal of Textual Reasoning*, 13/1 (2022), (<https://jtr.shanti.virginia.edu>).

³ References to Crescas's *Light of the Lord* are to the Hebrew edition: *Sefer Or Hashem*, Ed. S. Fisher. Jerusalem: Sifrei Ramot, 2010, and to the English translation: *Light of the Lord (Or Hashem)*. Trans. R. Weiss, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018 (paperback ed., 2020). The passage referred to here is found at the beginning of Book 1, ed. p. 13, trans. p. 30. In what follows, I will also refer to the translation of *Light*, Book II by C. Manekin in id. (ed.), *Medieval Jewish Philosophical Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 192–235.

⁴ See H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957, Introduction, pp. 5–6.

⁵ H. Kreisel, *Prophecy, The History of an Idea in Medieval Jewish Philosophy*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001, p. 456.

⁶ W. Z. Harvey, "Arabic and Latin Elements in Hasdai Crescas's Philosophy", in S. Shaked, H. Ben Shammai and S. Stroumsa (eds.), *Exchange and Transmission Across Cultural Boundaries. Philosophy, Mysticism and Science in the Mediterranean World*. Proceedings of an International Workshop Held in Memory of Professor Shlomo Pines at The Institute for Advanced Studies. The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 28 February – 2 March 2005. Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences, 2013, pp. 106–115, on p. 113.

⁷ Ibn Daud's Arabic original was translated into Hebrew twice during the last third of the fourteenth century. On the question of the relation between the two translations, see A. Eran, "The Hebrew Translations of Abraham ibn Daud's *Exalted Faith*", *Tarbiz*, 65 (1995), pp. 79–107 (Hebrew), and W. Z. Harvey, "The Puzzling Hebrew Translations of Ibn Daud's *Exalted Faith*", in F. Gorgoni, I. Kajon, and L. Valente (eds.), *Philosophical Translations in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages in Memory of Mauro Zonta*. Rome: Aracne, 2022, pp. 35–62. I thank Prof. Harvey for showing me his article before publication.

has argued that it was the Avicennian interpretation of Aristotle found in Ibn Daud's book that triggered the translation⁸. Some of Crescas's pupils, for example Joseph Albo, can be shown to have used *Ha-Emunah ha-Ramah*⁹. But what about Crescas himself? How did Crescas relate to Ibn Daud? To what extent was Ibn Daud relevant or useful to Crescas? Did Crescas make direct use of Ibn Daud's work?

2. A Methodological Problem

It is not so easy to answer this question because of the following methodological problem. Ibn Daud's book is based on the writings of the Muslim *falāsifah* Alfarabi (870–950), Avicenna (980–1037) and their critic al-Ghazali (1058–1111), which he read in Arabic and whose words he often rendered literally or almost literally. Maimonides, whose *Guide of the Perplexed* displays many points of contact with Ibn Daud's work drew on the same Arabic sources as Ibn Daud, and in all probability also knew *Ha-Emunah ha-Ramah*, even though he does not mention his predecessor. Then, in the course of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Aristotle's writings and Averroes's commentaries on Aristotle became available in Hebrew translation, and Gersonides (1288–1344) wrote supercommentaries on Averroes's commentaries. Other Jewish authors also produced – in Hebrew – commentaries or works that reacted in one way or another to the writings of the Muslim Aristotelians and to Averroes, for example, Moses Narboni (d. ca 1362) and the apostate Avner of Burgos of Valladolid (1260–1347). Thus, when Crescas set out to survey and refute Aristotelian doctrines in his *Light of the Lord*, a wide variety of sources were available to him. He could have found the Aristotelian doctrines in which he was interested in sources other than *Ha-Emunah ha-Ramah*, either in Hebrew translations of Ibn Daud's Arabic sources or in Hebrew treatises written after the composition of Ibn Daud's work. Indeed, Crescas engages with Maimonides and Gersonides, who are his major points of reference. Therefore, since the positions put forth by Ibn Daud are found in several other texts, and sometimes in very similar wording, it is difficult to distinguish an "Ibn Daud" layer in the *Light of the Lord* and to disentangle *Ha-Emunah ha-Ramah* from later sources that Crescas used or could have used. Ibn Daud is, as it were, "covered" underneath several layers.

I shall provide a few examples to illustrate this point. The first example is Crescas's metaphysical proof for God's existence¹⁰. After an examination and refutation of Maimonides's proofs, Crescas argues that there must necessarily exist a First Cause, for if all things are caused, their existence is only possible, that is, contingent, so there must be a cause or "decisive factor"¹¹ for the entirety of existing things

that determines their existence over their nonexistence, and this is God, the uncaused cause of all, the Necessary Existent. Maimonides's metaphysical proof for God's existence was based on the distinction between necessary and contingent, or possible, existence. His discussion of the issue and Crescas's critique have been thoroughly analyzed by Zeev Harvey¹². We need not go into detail, but what is important for our topic is that Maimonides's proof ultimately derives from Avicenna and that, before Maimonides, Ibn Daud introduced it into Jewish philosophy. Like Maimonides, Ibn Daud offered two proofs for God's existence. He first presents Aristotle's physical proof from motion which proves the existence of a First Mover, and then continues: "We can also approach this in a different way and say that all existents can be divided into causes and effects", after which follows the metaphysical proof based on the distinction between possible and necessary existence¹³. According to this proof, the chain of contingent (that is, caused) things cannot go on infinitely and must stop at a Necessary Existent that does not derive its existence from anything.

Like Maimonides, Ibn Daud takes this proof from Avicenna. His procedure signifies a break with Jewish thinkers before him, like Saadya and Bahya Ibn Paquda, who sought to prove God's existence from creation. The common denominator between the physical and the metaphysical proof is that both arrive at a first principle (a First Mover or a First Existent) because an infinite series of movers or causes cannot exist in actuality.

Crescas cannot use this argument in his own proof for God's existence, because he believes that an infinite number of causes and effects is possible, in opposition to the commonly held Aristotelian view, endorsed by Ibn Daud and Maimonides¹⁴. Despite Crescas's rejection of the argument that an infinite series is impossible, his own proof is close to that of Maimonides and Avicenna, and by the same token to Ibn Daud's, because it is based on the concept of the possible/contingent and the distinction between cause and effect. This was the point of departure of Ibn Daud's metaphysical proof, but given the similarity between Ibn Daud, Maimonides and Avicenna/al-Ghazali with respect to this proof, it is hard to determine whether Ibn Daud was of any influence here.

The second example concerns the issue of divine attributes, a topic that Ibn Daud and Crescas both treat extensively in relation to the issue of God's unity. In this regard Crescas relates to the positions of al-Ghazali, Avicenna, Maimonides and Averroes. In his discussion of the question whether or not divine unity is distinct from God's quiddity, Crescas denies that unity is the essence of quiddity of a thing, since

⁸ M. Zonta, "Avicenna in Medieval Jewish Philosophy", in J. Janssens and D. De Smet (eds.), *Avicenna and his Heritage*. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2002, pp. 267–279, on pp. 267–268, 277–278.

⁹ Cf. D. Ehrlich, "Le-hashpa'ato shel ha-emunah ha-raham le-R. Avraham Ibn Daud 'al sefer ha-ikarim le-R. Yosef Albo", *Alei Sefer*, 21 (2010), pp. 35–46. See also Ehrlich, "R. Joseph Albo's Discussion of the Proofs for the Existence of God", *Journal for Jewish Thought and Philosophy*, 15:2 (2007).

¹⁰ H. Crescas, *Light* 1.3.2, ed. pp. 98–99, trans. pp. 100–101.

¹¹ This is Pines's term, see S. Pines, "Scholasticism after Thomas Aquinas and the Teachings of Hasdai Crescas and his Pre-

decessors", *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities*, 1 (1967), pp. 1–101, on p. 24.

¹² W. Z. Harvey, *Physics*, *op.cit.*, Chapter Three. For the English translation of this proof, see *Ibid.*, p. 84 and p. 97.

¹³ *ER* II.4.1, ed., p. 378 (4) ff. References are to the edition of A. Eran: Abraham Ibn Daud, *The Exalted Faith: Ha-Emunah ha-Ramah* Translated by Solomon Ibn Lavi, *Ha-Emunah ha-Nis-sa'ah* Translated by Samuel Ibn Ma'ut with the Anonymous Commentary to *Ha-Emunah ha-Ramah*. Ed. A. Eran. Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 2019 (= *ER*).

¹⁴ W. Z. Harvey, *Physics*, *op.cit.*, pp. 82–84, and H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique*, *op.cit.*, pp. 224–229.

this would entail a logical problem. For if unity were the essence of quiddity, then describing a substance, for example, man, as “one” would result in a tautology, because then the assertion “man is one” would amount to saying: “man is man”¹⁵. In Jewish philosophy Ibn Daud was the first to call attention to this logical problem in relation to the problem of God’s attributes. In his discussion of the attribute “one”, he criticizes philosophers who hold that God’s unity is His essence, for then the assertion “God is one” would amount to saying “God is God,” a tautology that expresses nothing¹⁶. However, this argument in slightly different wording (saying: “a substance exists” amounts to saying: “a substance is a substance”) is already found in al-Ghazali’s *Maqāṣid al-falāsifah*¹⁷. Maimonides says the same about the attribute “existence”. In other words, here too one cannot conclude that Crescas drew on Ibn Daud specifically, for he could have found the argument in other sources.

Yet another example pertains to certain similarities in the accounts of prophecy in the two works: (i) Ibn Daud and Crescas both believe that the prophecy of Moses came directly from God, not through an intermediary; (ii) they maintain that certain periods of time are better suited for the occurrence of prophecy than others, and (iii) like Ibn Daud, but against Maimonides, Crescas contends that all Israel attained the level of prophecy during the revelation at Mount Sinai¹⁸. However, the first belief is also shared by Maimonides, the second by Judah Halevi, whereas the third may derive from a Talmudic statement in bMegillah 14a, where it is said: “Many prophets arose for the Jewish people, numbering double the number of Israelites who left Egypt.” Hence, as in the two preceding examples, none of these similarities can be considered distinctive for Ibn Daud.

3. Literary Parallels

It would help us if we could detect literary parallels between Crescas’s *Light* and *Ha-Emunah ha-Ramah* that suggest a direct usage. Are there any such parallels? In his classic study, *Crescas’ Critique of Aristotle* (1929), H. A. Wolfson points to several parallels with passages in *Ha-Emunah ha-Ramah*¹⁹. In most cases, however, these passages do not necessarily imply a use of Ibn Daud’s work. They appear in a list with other parallel passages in works of Jewish or Muslim philosophers, a list that Wolfson provides for the sake of completeness or as background information, for example on the statement that matter and form are both substances²⁰.

¹⁵ *Light* I.3.3, ed. p. 99, trans. p. 101.

¹⁶ *ER* II.3j, ed. Eran, pp. 412 ult–420.2.

¹⁷ On Crescas’s position vis-à-vis Avicenna and al-Ghazali, see S. Harvey and W. Z. Harvey, “Yeḥaso shel R. Ḥasdai Qresqas le-al-Ghazali”, in N. Ilan (ed.), *Ha-Islam we-’olamot ha-she-zurim bo. Qoveṣ ma’amarim le-zikhrāh shel prof. Hawah Lazarus-Yafeh*. Jerusalem: Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2002, pp. 191–210, on pp. 206–208.

¹⁸ According to Crescas, all those present at Mt Sinai, even though not all of them were worthy of receiving prophecy, miraculously apprehended the truth concerning God’s existence and unity, *Light* IIIA.6.2, ed. p. 361, trans. p. 312. Ibn Daud says that there were “600,000 prophets or more” at Mt Sinai, ed. Eran, p. 522 (4). 600,000 is the number of Israelites who left Egypt, according to tradition.

¹⁹ H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas’ Critique, op.cit.*, Index, s.v. Abraham Ibn Daud.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 573–575.

Yet Wolfson also notes a few passages in Book One of the *Light*, where certain formulations in Crescas’s investigation of Maimonides’s 25 propositions indeed suggest a direct use of *Ha-Emunah ha-Ramah*, even though the doctrines concerned can also be found in other sources. An example is Crescas’s exposition of Proposition X (“Everything that is said to be in a body falls under either of two classes”), in the presentation of the argument of why there must exist a substrate that underlies the transformation of the elements²¹. In a way similar to Ibn Daud, Crescas argues that there must exist such a substrate because the form of an element, after having passed away cannot be at the same time the recipient of a new form. Hence, there must be an underlying substrate, which is prime matter. However, the argument that that which no longer cannot be the recipient of that which is coming to be also appears in the subsequent examination of Proposition X, where Crescas dismisses Averroes’s view that the celestial sphere is not subject to actual division²². In other words, Crescas may also have derived the argument from Averroes. Similarly, Crescas’s formulation of the notion that the elements are not moved by themselves (Proposition XVII) is reminiscent not only of *Ha-Emunah ha-Ramah*, but also of al-Ghazali’s *Maqāṣid al-falāsifah* and of al-Tabrizi’s commentary on Maimonides’s 25 propositions, as Wolfson notes himself²³.

More convincing, in my view, is another passage signaled by Wolfson, which likewise is found in Proposition X, in the examination and refutation of the proposition. According to Wolfson, Crescas defends here Ibn Gabirol’s concept of universal matter against Ibn Daud’s criticism of it. Against Ibn Daud Crescas asserts that first matter should be understood as corporeal form (= corporeality) and that it has actual and independent existence. Notes Wolfson: Crescas’s “proposed theory of first matter corresponds almost verbally with the description of Ibn Gabirol’s universal matter as found in *Ha-Emunah ha-Ramah*”²⁴. This implies that Crescas derived the argument from Ibn Daud’s book and used it to *refute* an Aristotelian doctrine held by Ibn Daud, an example that is illustrative of Crescas’s “subversive use” of arguments noted above.

All in all, however, literary relationships that are distinctive for Ibn Daud seem to be very few. Nonetheless, it cannot be overlooked that there exist some general points of similarity other than literary parallels between the two thinkers. To begin with, for all his reliance on philosophical doctrines, Ibn Daud also criticizes “the philosophers” at times, for example regarding their theory of emanation²⁵. Furthermore, both Ibn Daud and Crescas were

²¹ *ER* I.2, ed. Eran, p. 152 (3), H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas’ Critique op.cit.*, p. 572, Crescas prop. X, part I; *Light* I.1, ed. pp. 41–42, trans. pp. 86–87.

²² H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas’ Critique, op.cit.*, pp. 260–261.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 670–675.

²⁴ H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas’ Critique, op.cit.*, p. 599, see the extensive discussion on pp. 582–602. On this issue, see also J. T. Robinson, “Hasdai Crescas and anti-Aristotelianism”, in D. H. Frank and O. Leaman (eds.), *Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 191–413, on pp. 401–403.

²⁵ *ER* II.4.3, ed. Eran, pp. 500–504 (30–32).

engaged in polemics against Christianity in troubled times and they entertained contacts with Christian scholars. Crescas devoted a book to the refutation of Christian principles²⁶. In *Ha-Emunah ha-Ramah* the refutation of Christian claims is limited to the issue of the validity and eternity of the Torah, which Ibn Daud vindicates in his defense of Mosaic prophecy²⁷. Crescas dedicates chapter 9 of his *Refutation* to this theme and also discusses it in the *Light*²⁸. Some similarities relevant to this issue can be noted: both Ibn Daud and Crescas contend that the Torah is perfect because it guides the people to felicity; that the people of Israel were particularly predisposed to receiving the Torah, and that the preservation of divine law throughout the ages testifies to its eternal validity. Both authors also assert on the basis of Deut. 28ff. that the commandments of the Torah are eternal. Yet these assertions are not specific to either Ibn Daud or Crescas.

4. Biblical Exegesis: the Problem of God's Knowledge and Psalm 139

The field of Biblical exegesis is more promising for our subject. Here Zev Harvey has made an important discovery, namely that several of the Biblical proof texts for the soul's immortality, advanced by Crescas's Christian contemporary Bernat Metge, have a parallel in Ibn Daud's discussion of the subject²⁹. This parallel can only be explained by assuming that Crescas informed Metge about these proof texts and that Crescas readily found them in Ibn Daud's book. Crescas himself also made use of them. In *Light* Book IIIA, Part 2, Chapter 2 he provides nine Biblical proof texts, eight of which appear in the same order in *Ha-Emunah ha-Ramah* I.7³⁰. Some of them are also found in Chapter 9 "On the New Torah" of his *Refutations*. So here we do have a compelling case of literary dependence.

The use of Biblical verses provides another parallel between *Ha-Emunah ha-Ramah* and the *Light of the Lord*. I am referring to the interpretation of Psalm 139 and it concerns the following. As mentioned above, Ibn Daud wished to establish harmony between philosophical speculation and religion. To this end he concludes the exposition of each philosophical topic with a section of Biblical verses that in his view prove or allude to the veracity of the philosophical doctrines³¹. Now, in the opening section of

his *Ha-Emunah ha-Ramah* Ibn Daud discusses the concepts of substance and accident and Aristotle's division of all that exists into the ten categories. In his view, these categories are alluded to in Psalm 139, and in a quite elaborate exegesis he takes pains to point out in which verses of this psalm each of them is found. According to Isaac Husik, "it must be an extraordinary mode of exegesis that can find such things in such unusual places"³². Apparently, Husik deemed this piece of exegesis rather far-fetched. But on closer inspection, Ibn Daud's exegesis is not as far-fetched or "strange" as it may seem at first sight. Ibn Daud starts his explanation by saying that in Psalm 139 "David has already summarized substance and most of the accidents and has said that God's wisdom embraces them". The general theme of the psalm is divine omniscience, and Ibn Daud focuses on the interpretation of verses 13–15, which emphasize God's encompassing knowledge that includes even what is in the womb ("my frame was not concealed from You when I was shaped in a hidden place"). In his exegesis of the psalm he thus links the ontological status of the categories to their epistemological status and in so doing he points to a theme that he will discuss later on in his work and that forms a key element of his thought: the question of God's knowledge, a theme that is connected to the problem of free will vs. determination. According to Ibn Daud's own declaration in his introduction, this was the problem that led him to compile his book³³.

Crescas relates to Psalm 139 on various occasions, but especially in Book II, where he treats God's knowledge and God's providence³⁴. He emphasizes that the entire psalm is about divine knowledge and asserts that its verses "indicate God's apprehension in minute detail"³⁵. The central theme in Book II is the defense of divine omniscience against those who assert that God's knowledge applies only to the modality of necessity. With regard to this issue he refers to "some of the wise men of our nation" who "stumbled"³⁶ and to those who believed that God knows the possible as possible, that is, without knowing which of the possible alternatives will occur³⁷. The primary target here is Gersonides, but Gersonides

²⁶ H. Crescas, *Biṭṭul Iqqerei ha-Noṣrim*. Ed. D. J. Lasker. Ramat Gan/Beer Sheva: Bar-Ilan University Press/Ben-Gurion University Press, 1990. H. Crescas, *The Refutation of the Christian Principles*. Trans. D. J. Lasker. Albany: SUNY/Albany Press, 1992.

²⁷ *ER* II.5.1, ed. Eran, pp. 525–547.

²⁸ H. Crescas, *Light*, Book III A, part 5.

²⁹ W. Z. Harvey, *Rabbi Hisdai Crescas*, *op. cit.*, pp. 83–85; id., "Bernat Metge and Hasdai Crescas: A Conversation", in F. Wallis and R. Wisnovsky (eds.), *Medieval Textual Cultures: Agents of Transmission, Translation and Transformation*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016, pp. 77–84, and "L'ànima: un tema comú a Rabí Hasday Cresques i Bernat Metge", *Calls*, 4 (1990), pp. 53–68.

³⁰ W. Z. Harvey, "Bernat Metge", *op. cit.*, pp. 80–81.

³¹ This is Ibn Daud's practice in Parts I and II of his book, up to his account of prophecy in II.5. From there on until the end of the book the supporting Biblical verses are incorporated in the philosophical exposition and do not appear in a separate section.

³² I. Husik, *A History*, *op. cit.*, p. 205. Husik continues: "But the very strangeness [my emphasis] of the phenomenon bears witness to the remarkable influence exerted by the Aristotelian philosophy upon the Spanish Jews at that time." On Ibn Daud's exegesis in relation to Aristotle's account of the categories, see W. Z. Harvey, "Ibn Daud's Aristotelian-Sufi Reading of Psalm 139", *Iyyun. The Jerusalem Philosophical Quarterly*, 68 (2020), pp. 297–306.

³³ *ER*, Introduction, ed. Eran, pp. 98–110.

³⁴ H. Crescas, *Light* I.3.3, ed. pp. 107–108, trans. pp. 107–108, trans. Manekin, *op. cit.*, pp. 193–194 (on verses 16–18); *Light* II.1.1, ed. p. 125, tr. p. 121; *ibid.* ed. pp. 126–127, tr. pp. 123–124, tr. Manekin, *op. cit.*, pp. 194–195 (on verses 4, 15–17, 19, 23–24); *Light* II.6.2, ed. p. 256, trans. p. 229 (on the psalm in its entirety and specifically on verses 19 and 23). R. Weiss (translator's Introduction, p. 12) describes Ps. 139 as "a text pivotal to the argument of *Light of the Lord*". See also her article "Hasdai Crescas's Philosophical Biblical Exegesis", in *Engaging Crescas = Journal of Textual Reasoning*, 13:1 (2022), (<https://jtr.shantivirginia.edu>).

³⁵ H. Crescas, *Light* II.1.1, ed. p. 125, trans. p. 121, trans. Manekin, *op. cit.*, pp. 193–194.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, II.4.1, ed. p. 184, trans. p. 170.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, II.1.2, ed. p. 133, trans. p. 128, trans. Manekin, *op. cit.*, p. 201, and the discussion in II.1.3, ed. pp. 133ff., trans. pp. 129ff. Manekin, *op. cit.*, pp. 201ff.

had a predecessor on this point: Ibn Daud. Basing himself on a division of existents into things necessary, impossible and possible, Ibn Daud reasoned that God knows the possible as possible, but that this does not imply a defect in God's knowledge³⁸. The implication of this position is that God does not know beforehand the outcome of man's choice, so that human freedom is guaranteed. We do not know whether Gersonides was aware of Ibn Daud's work for in his time the book had not yet been translated into Hebrew, but the subject of free will in connection with divine knowledge in relation to the nature of "the possible" was a theme of shared interest in Ibn Daud, Gersonides and Crescas³⁹. In criticizing Gersonides, Crescas therefore *ipso facto* criticizes Ibn Daud, be it directly or indirectly.

Gersonides's position on the nature of the possible and divine knowledge was likewise attacked in a responsum (dated 1395) by Crescas's associate, R. Isaac ben/bar Sheshet (Ribash), the very authority who commissioned the translation of Ibn Daud's Arabic work into Hebrew⁴⁰. Therefore, Amira Eran has argued that it was this very problematique and the similarity between the views of Gersonides and Ibn Daud that occasioned Ribash to request this translation⁴¹. This assumption is highly probable, especially in view of the fact that this scholar was in touch with the two translators of Ibn Daud's book, Solomon Ibn Lavi (likewise an associate of Crescas) and Samuel Ibn Motot.

To this we may add that the problem of divine knowledge is the subject of an extensive discussion by Crescas's pupil Zerahya Halevi Saladin. In a sermon on God's utterance "Now I know that you are God-fearing" in the chapter on the Binding of Isaac (Gen. 22:12), Zerahya reviews in great detail the various positions and arguments pertaining to the problem, and in this context he also adduces Psalm 139, emphasizing God's omniscience⁴². Interestingly, this sermon contains another parallel with *Ha-Emunah ha-Ramah*. Zerahya refers to the episode of 1 Sam. 23, which relates how David, fleeing from Saul in Keilah, consults God asking whether the inhabitants of Keilah will deliver him to Saul. After God's positive response ("they will deliver"), David and his men fled from the city and escaped. This suggests that free choice is possible, for in the end David was not delivered and could escape. God's answer ("they will deliver"), says Zerahya, must be understood as "they may deliver" / "it is possible that they deliver"⁴³. Ibn Daud invoked this Biblical episode as an argument in

support of free will⁴⁴. Zerahya does not mention Ibn Daud, but it is likely that he found it in Ibn Daud's work. Zerahya, who knew Arabic and translated al-Ghazali's *Tahāfut* from Arabic into Hebrew, belonged to a circle of philosophers and translators in Saragossa where Crescas was residing⁴⁵.

Mention must also be made of a commentary on *Ha-Emunah ha-Ramah*, the author and provenance of which are as yet unknown. This commentary is preserved in a manuscript dated 1477, but it was presumably compiled much earlier, perhaps even in Crescas's day⁴⁶. Was this commentator perhaps a student or associate of Crescas?⁴⁷ The anonymous author does not mention Crescas, but does refer to Gersonides's views on divine knowledge, as pointed out by Amira Eran, and moreover elaborates on Ibn Daud's exegesis of Psalm 139⁴⁸.

All this suggests that it was the problematique that underlies *Ha-Emunah ha-Ramah* and its proximity with Gersonides's views that triggered Crescas's interest in Ibn Daud's work, and that he became aware of it through his associates or pupils who read Arabic, even though we do not know exactly when and how he became aware of Ibn Daud's work. In this regard Wolfson's observation that Crescas's *Light* "had its origin in class-room lectures and discussions" is particularly relevant⁴⁹.

Crescas's own discussion on the issue of human freedom is complicated and has given rise to different interpretations⁵⁰. But it seems safe to say that he defends the opposite position to Ibn Daud, namely, that God has foreknowledge of human actions, and that Psalm 139 plays an important role in his argumentation⁵¹.

5. Religious Practice

Besides Crescas's and Ibn Daud's shared interest in the problem of God's knowledge we may note

³⁸ *ER* II.6.2, ed. Eran, pp. 650 (12) – 652 (13).

³⁹ On the similarities and dissimilarities between the views of Ibn Daud and Gersonides on God's knowledge of the possible, see Appendix B in S. Pines, "Scholasticism", *op. cit.*, pp. 91-101.

⁴⁰ A. Eran quotes from the Responsum in her "What Was Ralbag's Influence on the Translation of Ibn Daud's Exalted Faith and on Its Anonymous Commentary?", *Da'at: A Journal of Jewish Philosophy & Kabbalah*, 85 (2018), pp. 167-188 (Hebrew).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 168, 173, 183.

⁴² See A. Ackerman (ed.), *The Sermons of R. Zerahya Halevi Saladin*. Beer-Sheva: The Ben Gurion University of the Negev, 2012, pp. 74-103, and Ackerman's Introduction, pp. 65-68 (Hebrew).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, Introduction, pp. 66-67, text p. 95.

⁴⁴ *ER* II.6.2, ed. Eran, p. 654 (15).

⁴⁵ Ackerman, *Sermons*, *op. cit.*, Introduction, p. 14. On Saragossa as one of the centers in Spain where Arabic language and culture survived, see T. Lévy, "The Hebrew Mathematics Culture (Twelfth–Sixteenth Centuries)", in G. Freudenthal (ed.), *Science in Medieval Jewish Cultures*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 155-171, on p. 166.

⁴⁶ This commentary is printed in Eran's edition of *ER*, see also her Introduction, pp. 86-93, and R. Fontaine, "For the Dossier of Abraham Ibn Daud: Some Observations on an Anonymous Commentary on his *ha-Emunah ha-Ramah*", *Zutot*, 7 (2010), pp. 35-40.

⁴⁷ Eran suggests that the author of the commentary was aware of Crescas's positions, "What Was Ralbag's Influence", *op. cit.*, pp. 178-179.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

⁴⁹ H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique*, *op. cit.*, pp. 29-30.

⁵⁰ See W. Z. Harvey, *Physics*, Chapter Six, S. Sadik, "Hasdai Crescas", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2020 Edition), E. N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2020/entries/crescas/>, section 5. See also Manekin's Introduction to *Medieval Philosophical Writings*, *op. cit.*, p. xxvi, and R. Weiss, "Hasdai Crescas's Philosophical Biblical Exegesis", in *Engaging Crescas = Journal of Textual Reasoning*, 13:1 (2022), (<https://jtr.shanti.virginia.edu>).

⁵¹ It should be noted that Crescas's teacher, Nissim of Girona, also elaborates on this psalm in his first sermon, emphasizing the difference between God's knowledge and that of humans. Humans attain knowledge of a thing through its accidents, whereas God knows the true reality and essence of a thing, see Nissim of Girona, *Derashot*. Ed. A.L. Feldman and M. L. Katzenbogen. Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 2016, pp. 11-13. I am obliged to Prof. W. Z. Harvey for this reference.

another point of similarity between the two authors, namely their emphasis on religious practice. The last part of Ibn Daud's book is devoted to practical philosophy⁵². In this short section Ibn Daud seems to make a kind of U-turn. After having filled the bulk of his book with philosophical theories based on Aristotelian physics and metaphysics he now strikes a different note. In these last few pages the God of the philosophers gives way to the God of the fathers. It is no longer the philosophical-intellectual conception of God, in which God is "the First Cause" or "the Necessary Existent" that takes pride of place, but instead the God of the Bible who should be loved and served. The basis for this shift is Ibn Daud's theory of virtues, the highest of which is justice, the virtue of the intellect. Justice, which is not only a philosophical virtue but also a religious requirement, demands that man shall recompense the good that God bestows on him by lovingly serving God⁵³. To this end the commandments of the Torah offer the most perfect possibility⁵⁴.

Although these last pages of *Ha-Emunah ha-Ramah* are very few in comparison to the philosophical expositions, they constitute the next logical step in Ibn Daud's thought. Now that he has demonstrated, with the help of philosophy, the freedom of the will (the endeavor underlying the motivation for writing his book), there is no longer any obstacle to accept the commandments and to serve God out of love. The shift to practical philosophy was already announced in the introduction: "the goal of philosophy is action/practice"⁵⁵.

A vital part in his discussion of religious service is the division of the Torah into four or five "parts", not all of which, Ibn Daud maintains, are equally important⁵⁶. The last (and, as he says, "weakest") are the commandments for which the usefulness and reasons are unknown. Yet it is precisely this class of commandments that constitute the difference between faith and unbelief. Man should accept them without asking for a rational explanation, thus following the example of Abraham who was ready to obey God and sacrifice his son without questioning. So at the end of the book, when all is said and done, it is Abraham the obedient, rather than Moses, who should guide our behavior. The end of philosophy, felicity, is attained through religious praxis, not through intellectual knowledge of God. It is thus religious belief that has supremacy over philosophy. Notwithstanding his confidence in the usefulness of philosophical speculation Ibn Daud comes surprisingly close to Judah Halevi here.

This section in *Ha-Emunah ha-Ramah* is not only close to Halevi, it also displays similarity to Crescas's emphasis on the observance of the commandments in *Light* II.6. Like Ibn Daud, Crescas is convinced

that the Torah is the most perfect guide to the good life. Like Ibn Daud, but more expansively, Crescas explains the usefulness of some of the commandments relating to behavior with respect to family and society, as Haim Kreisel has rightly noted⁵⁷. Although it is Maimonides's discussion of *ta'amei ha-mitsvot*, the reasons for the commandments, that seems to underlie Crescas's exposition, it is not impossible, indeed it is even likely, that Ibn Daud's musings on the subject here were also a source of inspiration for Crescas. Kreisel concludes that Crescas attaches special importance to those commandments that his predecessors like Ibn Daud described as "revelatory" (*shim'iyot*) – commandments the rationale of which is not immediately clear – and that are necessary to attain perfection, that is to say, love of God⁵⁸. Indeed for Ibn Daud, too, religious practice is the highest good at the end of the day, even though for him, unlike for Crescas, man's love of God is consequent upon intellectual perfection.

6. In Conclusion

Returning now to the questions that I raised at the beginning of this paper: was Ibn Daud's philosophical book of any relevance for Crescas and did he use it? My answer would be in the affirmative. We do not know exactly when and how Crescas became acquainted with *Ha-Emunah ha-Ramah* and how he became aware that Ibn Daud was an Aristotelian author, as he acknowledged in the beginning of the *Light*. Nonetheless, the contents of Ibn Daud's book were certainly relevant for Crescas. *Ha-Emunah ha-Ramah* may have served him as a kind of manual or source-book of philosophical doctrines that he could consult alongside other writings by authors whom he mentions by name: Avicenna, al-Ghazali, Maimonides and Averroes. But more relevant for Crescas was Ibn Daud's Biblical exegesis, it seems, in particular in so far as it was related to the problem of divine knowledge and human freedom (even though Crescas's positions on these issues were different). More generally, *Ha-Emunah ha-Ramah* seems to have inspired Crescas to ponder and rethink the relation between philosophy and religion, between thought and action, and the importance of observance of the commandments in a time when Judaism was threatened. If this interpretation is correct, then Ibn Daud's book served as an incentive for Crescas to rethink the relation between faith and reason and the position of Judaism in his day rather than as a treasure house of Aristotelian philosophical doctrines.

Perhaps there is something more, and this brings us back to Ibn Daud's exegesis of Psalm 139 at the beginning of his book. After having explained how Psalm 139 alludes to the categories, as mentioned above, Ibn Daud expands on verse 12 of the psalm, "darkness is not dark for You; night is as light as day; darkness and light are the same". He then draws up a hierarchy of four lights: that of the candle, the moon, the sun and the light of the intellect, one above the

⁵² *ER* III, ed. Eran, pp. 664–692.

⁵³ *ER* III, ed. Eran, p. 668 (7). As Manekin notes in his Introduction to *Medieval Philosophical Writings*, *op. cit.*, p. xxvii, Crescas rejects the notion of retributive justice, since God cannot be benefited or wronged by anything.

⁵⁴ *ER* III, ed. Eran, p. 670 (8).

⁵⁵ *ER*, Introduction, ed. Eran, p. 110 (16).

⁵⁶ *ER* III, ed. Eran, pp. 682 (21) ff. In Fontaine, *In Defence of Judaism*, *op. cit.*, p. 234, the sentence "all of which he says are equally important" should be corrected into: "not all of which [...]".

⁵⁷ H. Kreisel, "The Philosophic Sources for the Approach of R. Hasdai Crescas to the Revelatory Commandments", in E. Eisenmann and W. Z. Harvey (eds.), *Or Ha-Shem from Spain*, *op. cit.*, pp. 209–228, on p. 217; pp. 222–225 (Hebrew).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

other, and each having its imperfections. Here the notion of perfection emerges, another important theme in Ibn Daud's work. The light of the intellect is the most perfect, it enables us to distinguish between substance and accident, and to see things that cannot be perceived by the senses and what he calls "subtle things". Yet, he continues, the knowledge attained by the intellect cannot be compared to that of the incorporeal intelligences, the angels, let alone to God's knowledge, for the light of God's knowledge knows even what is in the womb⁵⁹. As Amira Eran has shown, the hierarchy of four lights has its basis in al-Ghazali's explanation of the Quranic sura "The Light (*al-Nūr*)"⁶⁰. The aforementioned anonymous commentary on *Ha-Emunah ha-Ramah* elaborates on the hierarchy of lights, linking it to the four stages of intellectual development⁶¹.

The title of Crescas's *Light of the Lord* –the only one of his known works of which the title is certain–⁶² is well thought out. In his introduction Crescas explains why he chose the title *Or ha-Shem*: the philosophical work was to be supplemented by an halakhic work on the commandments, entitled *Ner ha-Shem*, a work that apparently was never written. The two titles are derived from Prov. 6:23: "For a commandment is a lamp (*ner*) and Torah is light (*or*)", and in Crescas's view, this verse expresses the relation between the two parts: *Ner ha-Shem* is about praxis and *Or ha-Shem* about theory⁶³.

Light imagery plays a prominent role in *Or ha-Shem*. The Introduction to *Light of the Lord* opens with three Biblical verses in which the words "lamp", "light" and "shining" figure⁶⁴. Contrasting light to darkness, he emphasizes that the Law, Torah, illuminates, whereas Greek philosophy darkened the eyes, and that the true light is the radiance of the divine presence (*shekhinah*)⁶⁵. Crescas also employs light imagery in his defense of the immortality of the soul, where he says that the soul has an essence beyond intellection and is called "light" by the Rabbis. Here he invokes Prov. 20:27: "The soul of man is the lamp (*ner*) of the Lord."⁶⁶ In a recent article, James A. Diamond has examined Crescas's light imagery in the *Light of the Lord*, illustrating how it contrasts with Maimonides's use of the metaphor of light in the *Guide*⁶⁷. Crescas's conscious choice of the title for his work can certainly be viewed as an answer to Maimonides, and it follows logically from his use of the Biblical verses he adduces. But as a speculative afterthought I would like to suggest that perhaps this title can also be understood as inspired by Ibn Daud's

light imagery and his description of the hierarchy of lights, that is, as conveying that the light of the Lord is the true supreme light above that of the intellect. In the Introduction to *Ha-Emunah ha-Ramah* Ibn Daud depicts religion and philosophy as two lights (*nerot*), saying that often the light of religion (*dat*) goes out when the light of philosophy (*hokhmah*) starts burning⁶⁸. It is precisely the question of the relation between the two lights and the wish to show the superiority of the light of Torah that lies at the heart of Crescas's *Light of the Lord*.

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⁵⁹ ER I.1, ed. Eran, pp. 138–142.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 139, n. 45, and W. Z. Harvey, "Ibn Daud's Aristotelian-Sufi Reading", *op. cit.*, p. 300.

⁶¹ ER I.1, ed. Eran, pp. 138–142.

⁶² The original title of the *Refutations*, written in the vernacular, is unknown, and so is that of the Passover sermon. Interestingly, Abrabanel calls the sermon *Ma'amar Or le-Arba'ah 'Asar*, as Prof. W. Z. Harvey kindly pointed out to me (e-mail communication, 19 March 2023).

⁶³ H. Crescas, *Light*, Introduction, ed. p. 9, trans. pp. 24–25.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, ed. p. 1, trans. p. 16.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, ed. p. 2, trans. p. 17.


⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, IIIA.2.2, ed. pp. 322–323, trans. pp. 281–282.

⁶⁷ James A. Diamond, "The Inexhaustible Metaphor of Light: Illuminating the Fault Lines Between Crescas and Maimonides", *Engaging Crescas = Journal of Textual Reasoning*, 13:1 (2022), (<https://jtr.shanti.virginia.edu>).

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Faith and the Question of its Certainty in the Thought of Rabbi Hasdai Crescas

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ENG Abstract. This article examines the various levels of certainty in the thought of Rabbi Hasdai Crescas, as expressed in his *Sermon for Passover* and his major philosophical work, *Or Hashem*. In the first part of the article, the main discussion of R. Crescas on this subject in his *Sermon for Passover* is analyzed. In the second part, the findings are compared to the opinion of R. Crescas in his major philosophical work. Additionally, the article seeks to explain why this topic is more developed in the sermon than in his major philosophical book. Ultimately, it concludes that R. Crescas identifies four distinct levels of certainty: (1) irrefutable proofs and experiencing prophecy; (2) reasonable logical proofs and witnessing miracles that have no earthly explanation; (3) less likely proofs and miracles of a dubious nature; and (4) accepting the plain meaning of the text of the Torah and tradition in general. It is likely that R. Crescas did not mention this subject in the *Light of the Lord* due to the low degree of certainty of tradition, which he chose to keep concealed.

Keywords: Faith, Medieval Philosophy, Crescas, Theology, Epistemology.

ES La fe y su certeza en el pensamiento de Rabí Hasdai Crescas

Resumen. Este artículo examina los diversos niveles de certeza en el pensamiento de Hasdai Crescas, tal como pueden encontrarse en su *Sermón de Pascua* y su principal obra filosófica, *Or Hashem*. En la primera parte del artículo se analiza la discusión principal de Crescas sobre este tema en el *Sermón*. En la segunda parte, las principales ideas expuestas allí se comparan con la opinión de Crescas en *Or Hashem*. Además, el artículo busca explicar por qué este tema está más desarrollado en el *Sermón* que en su principal obra filosófica. En última instancia, se concluye que Hasdai Crescas identifica cuatro niveles distintos de certeza: (1) pruebas irrefutables y la experiencia de la profecía; (2) pruebas lógicas razonables y la presencia de milagros que no tienen explicación terrenal; (3) pruebas y milagros menos probables de naturaleza dudosa; y (4) aceptar el significado claro del texto de la Torá y la tradición en general. Es probable que R. Crescas no mencionara este tema en *Or Hashem* debido al bajo grado de certeza de la tradición, que eligió mantener oculta.

Palabras clave: Fe, filosofía medieval, Crescas, teología, epistemología.

Summary: 1. Introduction. 2. The Definition of Faith in the *Passover Sermon*. 3. "Faith" as Used in *Or Hashem*. 4. Concluding Remarks. 5. Bibliography.

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1. Introduction

Rabbi Hasdai Crescas (Aragon c. 1340-1411/12) maintained a position regarding faith¹ that is both

fascinating and original, and consequently it has merited the attention of more than a few researchers, chief among them Aviezer Ravitzky and Zev

¹ On the question of faith in the Jewish philosophy of the Middle Ages see Rosenberg 1988. Rosenberg discusses Crescas's approach on pp. 385-387. This article correctly states that the question of belief is related to three important issues: epistemology (a philosophical problem that is in principle not related to religious questions), the question of the authority and origin of religious beliefs, and the question of the duty to believe. Rosenberg's analysis of Maimonides is both extensive and incisive. However, it should also be noted

that, although Rosenberg's article mentions a fair number of Jewish thinkers of the 15th century and duly notes their widely differing opinions, it is far too short to be considered an in-depth analysis of all these opinions, including Crescas's. The concept of faith in Jewish philosophy in general was also reviewed Wolfson 1942; and also by Efrat 1965. Apart from these studies, there are extensive discussions in the literature on the thought of Saadia Gaon, Maimonides, and to some extent Yehuda Halevi.

Harvey². One finds Rabbi Crescas's discussion of faith concentrated in just a few places in his writings: it is the lion's share of his Passover Sermon³, it gets addressed in the introduction to his great philosophical work, *Or Hashem*⁴, and it is also addressed later in *Or Hashem*, specifically in the fifth and sixth chapters of the fifth part of book 2⁵. Despite the ample research attention earned by his approach to faith, and in particular his position that faith is not a commandment as, *inter alia*, it depends on the will, in my opinion, there are still several important issues related to Crescas's approach to faith which the research has not yet discussed exhaustively. The main topic that this paper will address is the different types of faith and the question of their reliability.

Most of the studies on the thought of R. Crescas focus – and rightly so – on *Or Hashem*, but, as we will see, his more developed definition of faith is found in his Passover Sermon⁶, which is why I will begin my analysis with this lesser-known work rather than with *Or Hashem*. One of the things that you will find striking in this discussion, which centers on the reliability of miracles as a source of faith, is that although he cites various sources of faith, R. Crescas does not mention anything said in the Torah, nor other traditional texts, nor the Sages as a source of faith. Be that as it may, I will then, in the second part of this paper, compare faith as described in the Passover Sermon with R. Crescas's description of faith as found in *Or Hashem*⁷. There we will address in particular his position that the Torah and Sages afford us the opportunity to obtain information on subjects that philosophy is not decisive about. As we will see, in *Or Hashem* it turns out that, for R. Crescas, what is written in the Torah and in the traditions of the Sages is of a lesser degree of reliability than other sources of faith, such as logical proofs, miracles, and prophecy. In his main discussion on the subject of faith in the Passover Sermon and therefore he refrained from introducing the discussion in the sermon into his main philosophical book 'Or Hashem'. Finally, I will conclude the paper by offering an explanation as to why R. Crescas avoided calling the Torah and the Sages sources of faith, and from there explaining

why this unique discussion of faith does not appear in *Or Hashem*.

2. The Definition of Faith in the Passover Sermon

As noted above, R. Crescas devoted most of the discussion in the Passover Sermon to the issue of the relationship between miracles and faith⁸. At the beginning of his discussion, he deals with the question of whether faith resulting from miracles is contingent upon human will⁹. He then turns to the question of the legitimacy of faith based on miracles¹⁰. This discussion is not found in *Or Hashem*. R. Crescas distinguishes between three different types of faith in terms of their reliability, and in so doing he ends up spelling out his peculiar take on faith:

The term "faith" [emunah] is applicable to opinion [da'at], faith [emunah], and certainty [imut]. To clarify, when reason is employed regarding some matter, one automatically says that they have attained a certain opinion, which is to say an inclination to that perspective – just that it immediately becomes subject to occasional refinement via falsification. And indeed, when some matter is verified for them via intellectual proof based on one of the things that has absolute proof, then they will immediately declare that they have attained certainty. Indeed, when there is no irrefutable proof brought to verify a given matter via an intellectual proof, but rather it was [only] verified via strong arguments which are not actually falsifiable, one can [still] declare belief in this thing, this [belief] being the mean between two extremes, i.e. opinion and certainty, even though the term "faith" is applied generally to all of them [i.e. the three concepts of opinion, faith, and certainty]. And regarding this, it becomes clear that a miracle, when not characterized by being beyond all doubt, with no possible [natural] explanation however tenuous, albeit engendering an opinion, nevertheless cannot engender faith, and certainly not certainty. But that which is characterized by being beyond doubt, with not even a tenuous possible [natural explanation], albeit not engendering absolute certainty, it does undoubtedly engender faith¹¹.

R. Crescas presents here a threefold division of the types of beliefs according to their reliability¹². The be-

² On the subject of faith in Crescas, see Harvey 2010 pp. 107-118; Ravitzky 2019 pp. 34-68, and Rosenberg 1988.

³ Specifically pp. 130-158. All quotations from the Passover Sermon are from the Ravitzky edition (hereafter Sermon).

⁴ All quotations from *Or Hashem* are taken from the S. Fisher edition, Jerusalem 1999, pp. 9-12.

⁵ *Or Hashem*, p. 219-225. In his polemical book *The Refutation of the Christian Principles* (published by D. Lasker, Jerusalem 1979), R. Crescas frequently mentions the concept of faith. It is important to remember that we do not have the original text, which was probably in Spanish or Catalan, but only a Hebrew translation by Rabbi Yosef Ibn Shem Tov.

⁶ Although Ravitzky's research dealt extensively with the analysis of the sermon and its relationship to *Or Hashem*, he did not emphasize the differences between the definition of faith in the Passover Sermon and the various roles of faith in *Or Hashem*. There is a lack of discussion regarding the relationship between R. Crescas's definition of faith in the Passover Sermon versus his noteworthy position in *Or Hashem*, according to which in cases where there are no philosophical proofs in any direction, i.e. only in cases where there are philosophically several possible answers must one turn to the Torah to determine the correct opinion.

⁷ And to a certain extent also to what is said in *The Refutation of the Christian Principles*.

⁸ Sermon, pp. 130-158

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 130-141. This discussion is largely like the content of Part 2, part 5 chapter 5 of *Or Hashem*.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 141-155. Starting on page 155, the text realigns with the content of *Or Hashem* 2:5:6.

¹¹ Sermon, pp. 141-142. Hebrew text:

הוא שם האמונה כבר ישתתף לדעת ולאמונה ולאמונה. וביאור זה, שכאשר תגזור הסברא על דבר מה, כבר יאמר שיש לו דעת מה, והוא הנטייה אל הצד ההוא. אלא שכבר יקבל שיעור והצעה לפעמים מן הדחייה. ואמנם אשר התאמת לו בדרכי המופת השכלי דבר מה מהדברים שבא עליה המופת המוחלט, כבר יאמר שיש לו אמות נכ. אמנם כאשר לא התאמת בדרכי המופת השכלי דבר מהדברים שבא עליהם המופת המוחלט, אך התאמת בטענות חזקות בלתי מקבלות שיעור מן הדחייה אצלו, יאמר שיש לו אמונה בו, והוא כאמצי בין ב' קצוות אשר הם הדעת והאמונה. אמנם בכלם יפול עליהם שם האמונה בכלל. ולזה הוא מבואר שהנס שאינו באופן שלא יסופק בו אפילו באפשר רחוק, עם היות שיקנה דעת וסברא לא יקנה אמונה, וכל שכן אמות. באופן שלא יסופק בו אפילו באפשר רחוק, עם היות לא יקנה אמות מוחלט, יקנה אמונה בלי ספק.

¹² My reading here is slightly different from Ravitzky's (pp. 54-57). I disagree with him mainly on two points: 1. In my opinion, there is no essential distinction between the levels of reliability of prophecy and logical proofs. I base this especially on the fact that R. Crescas mentions them together in *Or Hashem*: "...regarding that which has become clear, [namely]

iefs that are absolutely reliable are beliefs based on irrefutable intellectual proofs (though later R. Crescas adds prophecy as a basis for reliable knowledge). This type of belief he calls "certainty". After that come beliefs that arise from strong proofs regarding which the person who holds them cannot find any counter-proofs, which leads to a level of belief called 'faith'. At a lower level yet are those things which are just on the level of opinion, which include positions a person has reasons to believe are correct, even if there are also reasons to reject those positions. R. Crescas asserts that the term 'faith' is used both generally to describe all three types of belief, regardless of their degree of credibility, as well as to specifically describe those beliefs that have intermediate credibility. He then remarks that miracles never afford a person certainty, but they can help a person to attain either faith or at least to form an opinion regarding some idea¹³.

Further on in the text¹⁴, R. Crescas notes that there are two doubts that can arise regarding the miracles that people witness:

1. That the miracle is not a miracle but merely an act of trickery or sorcery.
2. That the miracle does not come directly from God but is a feat performed by the prophet who, thanks to the virtue of his intelligence, can literally alter nature¹⁵.

that faith attained through logical assumptions, and all the more so that attained through the prophecy that occurred at that distinguished event [i.e. the revelation at Mt. Sinai], there is no room for human will to become involved." (p. 224). It should be noted that these words are not in the corresponding passage in the Passover Sermon where he talks about faith attained via signs and prophecy. 2. There seems to be no alternative position in *Or Hashem* stating that miracles can also lead to absolute faith. Crescas's words on p. 358 of *Or Hashem* are, in my opinion, completely compatible with what is written in the Passover Sermon, for although it is written there that miracles can engender complete faith, nevertheless, it also says that miracles are questionable because there is always a suspicion that they may be the result of witchcraft or sleight of hand.

¹³ In terms of the role of the will in attaining the various degrees of belief, R. Crescas's position is not entirely clear. On the one hand, he states in the Passover Sermon (p. 154) that: "... miracles engender what they can, whether opinion or faith, without recourse to human will." R. Crescas seems to be saying that faith is entirely the result of a person's intuitive conviction, which depends on the information in front of him and his psychological state. In other words, no intellectual decision to believe is made based on any sort of logical deduction or inference. Yet just two pages later in the Sermon (and also in *Or Hashem*, pp. 220 and 224), he emphasizes that prophecy and irrefutable proofs lead to a level of belief that has even less influence of the will on it than belief stemming from witnessing a miracle. In saying "less influence of the will", R. Crescas is clearly implying that the will is in fact very much involved in all levels of faith. The simplest way to reconcile this apparent contradiction is to say that while the will does not produce the initial faith generated by the witnessing of a miracle, a person can in principle later contemplate and refute or at least raise doubts about such faith by willfully searching for reasons that contradict those uncertain beliefs, such that the final beliefs maintained by a person are in part determined by the will. It should be noted here that although the will is involved in the process of finalizing beliefs, the will itself still remains deterministic in nature for R. Crescas. For a review of his deterministic position (alongside the positions of other thinkers as well), see Sadik 2017 pp. 268-276.

¹⁴ Sermon, pp. 142-154.

¹⁵ Ravitzky devoted the third part of the introduction to the Passover Sermon (pp. 69-110) to this subject and its various

R. Crescas then makes various statements to the effect that the miracles performed by Moses were relatively reliable. But towards the end of this discussion¹⁶, he states that only prophecy can engender certainty, and this only for the prophet who receives prophecy. This, he says, is why the Israelites fully believed in Moses only after the revelation at Mount Sinai.

It is important to summarize that in the opinion of R. Crescas as expressed in the Passover Sermon, beliefs come from two sources:

1. Sources that are unrelated to rational reflection or theoretical study, and in particular, miracles and prophecy.
2. Human intellectual endeavor via different kinds of syllogistic thinking.

The most reliable beliefs (i.e. those things we know with certainty) come from irrefutable proofs and from prophecy. Syllogisms and miracles can provide the basis for faith or the development of an opinion, each according to their degree of reliability. In the Passover Sermon, which is the main source in which he distinguishes between the reliability of different beliefs, R. Crescas does not mention at all belief that stems from traditions or study of the Holy Scriptures, and this is an important point to which we will return in detail later. When he discusses the efficacy of miracles or prophecy, R. Crescas is only referring to the degree of reliability of that belief for the prophet himself or for those who witnessed the miracle. This is the reason why he does not mention the possibility of doubting the veracity of miracles and the belief engendered by them out of a fear that poor transmission (or even outright invention) occurred between the occurrence of the miracle and the reception of the miracle generations later¹⁷.

There is certainly room for the argument that the nature of the discussion in the Passover Sermon and its overall tenor stem from the fact that R. Crescas's entire focus with the sermon is the concept of miracles. As we will see later, in *Or Hashem*, R. Crescas does in fact refer to tradition and the writing of the Torah as legitimate sources of faith. Therefore, my claim is not that when he wrote his sermon, R. Crescas rejected the tradition as a worthy source of faith, but only that he consciously avoided mentioning the tradition (including the written Torah and the words of the Sages) in his central discussion of the various sources of faith and their reliability.

To understand why R. Crescas would frame his arguments differently in his sermon versus his book, we must consider a few things. First, in my opinion, the avoidance of reference to tradition in the sermon is noteworthy because R. Crescas, while discussing miracles and the extent to which they can engender faith in people, mentions other sources of information

manifestations in Jewish philosophy as well as its origins in Arabic philosophy. It is interesting to note that in this section, R. Crescas actually raises the possibility that a complete prophet might perform a miracle to prove a belief that is not true.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 154-155.

¹⁷ Such a concern is mentioned, for example, in R. Isaac Pulgar's analysis of miracles as found in his *Ezer Ha-Dat*, Part I, Chapter 5 (Leviner edition, Tel Aviv, 1984, pp. 51-53).

such as various types of intellectual proofs and prophecy. So he could just as easily have mentioned the tradition during this discussion simply by pointing out that those people who did not witness the biblical miracles become aware of them via the oral tradition and scripture. And yet R. Crescas completely avoided touching on this rather obvious point in his dealing with the degree of reliability of the various sources of information. Given the fact that he certainly believed that the tradition is a source of faith, it must be that he was not interested in discussing the reliability of faith based on tradition because in his opinion – as can be seen in *Or Hashem* – the reliability of tradition is less than that of intellectual proofs, but also less than experiencing miracles and prophecy.

R. Crescas's division of the three terms used for belief – opinion, faith, and certainty – according to degree of reliability, does not exist in *Or Hashem*. It therefore behooves us to examine the use of the term 'faith' and its role in that book, and its relation to the tripartite, reliability-based division of belief as found in the Passover Sermon.

3. 'Faith' as Used in *Or Hashem*

R. Crescas uses the word 'faith' dozens of times in *Or Hashem*¹⁸. As mentioned, nowhere in his book does he indicate the specific meaning of the word 'faith', that is, belief that is at a level of reliability that lies somewhere between opinion and certainty. In the vast majority of cases, 'faith' is used as a general term that indicates that the person who has faith about something holds a certain position and considers it to be correct, this being in accordance with R. Crescas's statement in the Passover Sermon that 'faith' is an equivocal term¹⁹. It should also be noted that there are also several times in which he explicitly uses the word 'faith' to describe belief in errant positions²⁰. This fact does not contradict the definition of faith that we saw in the Passover Sermon, because there may be beliefs that are not very reliable

(especially those at the low end of the spectrum, i.e. opinion, though possibly also those at the intermediate level of faith) that will eventually turn out to be incorrect²¹. Only beliefs that result from irrefutable proofs and those that result directly from prophecy are necessarily true because their reliability is absolute. Curiously, R. Crescas does not mention in *Or Hashem* the logical possibility that a belief arising from an irrefutable proof or a prophecy could turn out to be incorrect.

As noted earlier, in *Or Hashem* there is an additional type of faith not found in the Passover Sermon that is quite different from the latter's three types of belief: faith based on tradition (including both the Torah as well as the writings of the sages). We will briefly review the different ways in which such faith finds expression in *Or Hashem* in order to try and determine the reliability of this type of belief.

An interesting example of tradition-based belief in *Or Hashem* relates to the question of the eternality of the Torah, which R. Crescas addresses in the fifth chapter of the first part of the third book. As per the general division used in *Or Hashem* wherein the beliefs of Judaism are categorized according to the degree of their so-called "rootedness", that is, according to the question of the extent that some given belief is a condition for believing in the divine source of the Torah, none of the beliefs of the third book are recognized as having the status of "cornerstone", i.e. they are not necessary for keeping the Torah, but are rather a belief that there is a religious obligation to believe in the truth of the Torah, even though those who do accept this belief still do not uproot the entire Torah²².

In the first section of the part dealing with the eternity of the Torah²³, R. Crescas explains that the Torah represents the highest level of legal perfection in terms of the actions it requires of people to do and in terms of the beliefs it teaches²⁴. The Torah sits at the peak of theoretical and practical perfection and therefore there is no possibility of improving on it with some other sacred book (תורה) and therefore it is eternal²⁵. Then, in the second section of the part R. Crescas raises the possibility that perhaps some

¹⁸ For example, pages (pages are in edition of the Hebrew original by R. Fisher): 3, 7, 9-13, 60, 66, 93, 116, 149, 156, 165, 170, 200, 202, 219-225, 249, 253, 269-270, 272-274, 280, 290, 309, 314-315, 317, 328, 350-351, 354-356, 358, 365, 371-372, 375, 399, and 401.

¹⁹ There are places where the source of the belief is clearer, such as pp. 202, 342, 350, and 358. There, R. Crescas is speaking about beliefs that stem from miracles. On pp. 220 and 224, he describes beliefs that arise from irrefutable proofs. It should be noted that even in the Passover Sermon, in the majority of cases, R. Crescas uses the word 'faith' in its broader sense, i.e. to refer to all positions that a person holds as true, and not in the limited sense that he sometimes employs where it only refers to beliefs of medium reliability. Thus, one must read the Sermon carefully and pay attention to context to correctly understand what R. Crescas is saying regarding faith.

²⁰ Mainly belief in the eternity of the universe. See, for example, *Or Hashem*, pp. 60, 273-274, 280, 290, 309, 314, 317, 342, and 371. It should be noted that also in his polemical work, *The Refutation of the Christian Principles*, most of the appearances of the word 'faith' are, not surprisingly, in the context of descriptions of Christian beliefs that he rejected as false. Examples can be found on pp. 34, 39, 40, 44, 47-48, 60, 68, 70, 76-79, 84, 87, and 90. However, it should be noted that some of these cases may be errant, while other legitimate occurrences are no longer identifiable as the extant version of *The Refutation* is the Hebrew translation by Rabbi Yosef Ibn Shem Tov, and not the original Catalan text written by R. Crescas.

²¹ We will not be discussing in this article R. Crescas's approach to errant beliefs stemming from prophecy because he concurs with Deut. 18:20-22 that the correct prediction of events is the main way in which prophets are proven trustworthy (book 2, part 4, especially chapter 2). It should be noted, however, that R. Crescas's statements in this source corresponds to his words in the Passover Sermon in that he mentions the possibility that humans can theoretically confuse an act of witchcraft for a miracle.

²² On R. Crescas's theory of Jewish principle of faith see Kellner 1986 pp. 108-139.

²³ *Or HaShem*, pp. 351-353.

²⁴ He refers to the sixth part of the second book, where he deals with these issues extensively. His words are similar to those of Maimonides in *Guide of the Perplexed* II:39-40 and III:27-28.

²⁵ R. Crescas's position assumes that there is no evolution whatsoever in the intellectual perfection of the human race. On the lack of human evolution from a philosophical and moral perspective, see Strauss 1997. In R. Crescas's opinion, from the fact that the Torah was given by God, who is fundamentally perfect, it follows that the Torah is most perfect as well. Moreover, given his rejection of human moral evolution, R. Crescas also rejected the proposition that the Torah could ever become irrelevant, such that whatever laws were appropriate in ancient times remain appropriate for all later gener-

people will doubt a part of the Torah (he mentions the Karaites who do not accept the Oral Torah). According to R. Crescas, such skepticism is problematic because if everyone were to constantly doubt the truth of the beliefs given in their sacred book, then people would not be able to trust in their belief system under any circumstances and they would perforce change their beliefs all the time. Therefore, the determination of what exactly are the correct beliefs was left to the sages. After that, R. Crescas raises the obvious objection to his argument: the Karaites also have their own sages and traditions. His answer is important to his case. According to R. Crescas, the authority of the Torah derives from the circumstances of its transmission:

But something which could be considered as raising doubts about our position is the sect of the Sadducees [i.e. the Karaites], who boast of the tradition they have received from their sages. However, it is also well known, given the events as passed down to us, that during the period of the members of the Great Assembly – by whose words we live our lives – the high priests and the Sanhedrin were comprised [entirely] of Pharisees. And it is they who are the ones who passed down the tradition to the masters of the Mishnah [and not the Karaites]... [And this sound tradition is not] as it is, undoubtedly, with regard to the sect of the Sadducees, since the basis of their fabrication is well known, given the simplistic thought and fabrication involved with taking texts literally, as opposed to tradition received from forefathers...²⁶

According to R. Crescas, it is clear and well known to all nations that the Karaism (or more precisely, Sadducism) arose in Judaism late in history, and therefore the Pharisaic Jewish tradition that preceded it is more correct, because it is the original source²⁷. Moreover, R. Crescas argues, we know that the tradition of the Oral Law is correct. How? Because we have a tradition – which itself is part of that same Oral Law – that most of the sages were amongst the Oral Law's supporters and indeed helped to create it. Now on its surface, the argument seems completely circular – the authority of the Oral Torah derives from the same Oral Torah! However, one can understand R. Crescas's words better if we refer to the various sources of information that Aristotle lists in the first chapter of his *Topics*²⁸. According to Aristotle, along with irrefutable intellectual proofs and evidence from

the senses, there are two other important sources of information: generally accepted notions and traditions. Traditions, according to how R. Crescas uses the term, consist mostly of reliable and well-known historical bits of information, while Aristotle's generally accepted notions are positions or opinions known to most people or to most professionals in a certain field²⁹. The source of the authority of accepted notions is that they are known to be true by the majority of people and/or the majority of knowledgeable experts. This is why R. Crescas emphasizes the fact that the majority of the Jewish sages received the Oral Law, and were partners in its on-going evolution.

What is important for our purposes (analyzing the philosophical nature of R. Crescas's criticism of the Karaites is not the purpose of this article) is that R. Crescas freely uses a source of information, i.e. tradition, that he does not mention in the definition of faith that he provides in the Passover Sermon. To reiterate, in the Passover Sermon, R. Crescas only mentions syllogisms and solid evidence (including the experience of miracles) as possible sources of beliefs. It should be noted that at the beginning of the second chapter of his discussion on the eternity of the Torah in *Or Hashem*³⁰, he explicitly mentions the word 'faith' many times to describe the positions that follow from the Torah. Therefore, it is impossible to resolve this tension by simply arguing that R. Crescas in some places in *Or Hashem* used the word 'faith' for sources of knowledge that are derived from syllogisms or miracles, much like in the Passover Sermon. An alternative explanation is needed to deal with his reference to tradition in *Or Hashem* that is lacking in the Passover Sermon.

From this it follows that in 'Or Hashem', R. Crescas accepted the fact that a well-known belief among the Jewish sages is legitimate evidence of its correctness. It is important to distinguish again between the reliability of prophecy for the prophet himself and the reliability of prophecy for those who merely hear or read the prophet's words – and the same distinction applies to miracles as well. The highest level of reliability is reserved for the prophets and for those who witnessed miracles. By contrast, the people who come later and can only rely on what is written in the Torah or passed down in Jewish tradition do not have as reliable knowledge. However, there is no alternative to relying on tradition when there is no more prophecy or miracles. This explains the frequent reliance on what is written in the Torah or on the Jewish

ations. This too then becomes part and parcel of the Torah's perfection.

²⁶ *Or HaShem*, p. 356. Hebrew original:

אבל מה שיחשב שהוא מסתפק עלינו, הוא כת הצדוקים, שמתפארים בקבלתם מחכמיהם. ואמנם הוא מפורסם גם כן, לפי הזמן שהעתיקו אלינו קורותיו, שבזמן אנשי כנסת הגדולה שעל פיהם אנו חיים, היו הכהנים הגדולים והסנהדרין מפורשים. והם אשר מסרו הקבלה לבעלי המשנה.... כמו שהוא בלי ספק בכת הצדוקים, שיסוד בדיאתם מפורסם, עם שהוא קל הבדיאה והמחשבה לקחת הדברים כפשוטן, בהפך מה שהוא בקבלה מן האבות....

²⁷ It should be noted that this assertion has generally been made by adherents of rabbinic Judaism, while others, especially the Karaites, have asserted that it is their ideology that predates the ideology of rabbinic Judaism.

²⁸ This chapter is also Maimonides' source in the eighth chapter of his *Words of Logic*. On Maimonides' approach to accepted

notions, the attribution of *Words of Logic* to him, and its various sources, see Sadik 2021.

On the topic of generally accepted notions in Aristotle see E. V. Haskins 2004. For the controversy in modern philosophy surrounding the moral validity of *ἔνδοξα* see Klein 1992.

²⁹ Regarding the question of when generally accepted notions should be believed as fact, in my opinion there is a distinction to be made between Maimonides versus Aristotle and al-Farabi. According to Maimonides, one can only learn from accepted notions those concepts that are related to morality, and not things that deal with scientific or metaphysical descriptions of the world. In contrast to this, with Aristotle and al-Farabi, there is certainly the possibility of relying on accepted notions relating to science and metaphysics. In this matter, R. Crescas concurred with the Aristotelian position and rejected Maimonides' approach – just as we saw above regarding the belief in the unity of God.

³⁰ *Or Hashem*, p. 354.

tradition in *Or Hashem*, the most important of which is the belief that God is one³¹.

The question now becomes, what is the degree of reliability of faith based on transmission alone, in relation to the other sources of faith, i.e. experiencing miracles and prophecy along with the various types of solid evidence?³² R. Crescas does not deal with this question explicitly. Fortunately, though, it is possible to arrive at an answer using indirect evidence based on two types of discussions that exist in *Or Hashem*:

First, in *Or Hashem* there are a number of examples in which R. Crescas clearly states that there are certain positions that are derived from transmitted material that are incorrect³³. Alongside these weaker traditions are certain sources regarding which he states that a position is correct based on the nature of their transmission alone³⁴. From this it can be concluded that the credibility of transmitted material is not absolute. Nevertheless, it is necessary at times to

³¹ Alongside this belief, R. Crescas mentions in the third and fourth books a series of beliefs that he knows to be correct based on what is said by the Sages or based on what is written in the Torah. This is the case, for example, on p. 391 regarding the existence of other worlds, on p. 396 regarding the question of whether the heavenly bodies are alive, and on p. 404 regarding the essence of demons. It should be noted that in the Passover Sermon (p. 144), R. Crescas mentions the public nature of the miracles performed in the presence of Moses as another reason for their reliability. Here he mainly means that they were done in front of a multitude of onlookers. The only other mentions of accepted notions in the Passover Sermon (pp. 131, 150-151, and 166) do not deal with the question of their reliability as such; they are simply acknowledged as being public knowledge. Similarly, we find that in his *Refutation*, the concept of generally accepted notions is used to establish the correctness of the miracles and the Torah of Moses in general (see pp. 79-80), while elsewhere the concept is merely used to indicate generally known things, regardless of their degree of reliability.

³² A phrase that recurs many times in the writings of R. Crescas is: "Truth bears witness to itself." With these words, he is pointing out that what is said in the Torah or by the Sages corresponds with intellectual proofs. The more interesting question is, of course, what to do in cases where there is only faith based on what is said in the Torah without any intellectual proof.

³³ For example, *Or Hashem*, pp. 37 & 273.

³⁴ For example: God's providence (p. 192), that forbidden foods are unhealthy (p. 228), reward and punishment in the World to Come (p. 234), the unique providence over the Jewish nation (p. 253), reasons for the commandments against evil-doing (p. 259), the publicizing of miracles (p. 311), that providence is related to observing the biblical commandments (p. 325), the story of the golden calf (p. 369), and the existence of heaven and hell (p. 406). From this assortment of examples it becomes clear that most of the positions accepted by R. Crescas purely on the basis of their being traditions are related to the issue of divine providence. This is an intriguing observation and begs further research into the role of providence in the methodology of R. Crescas.

There are also positions that have a different basis, and R. Crescas notes their form of dissemination as well in *Or Hashem*: the impediments to understanding God's essence (p. 96), the computations involved in the movement of the stars (p. 136), the naturalness of prophecy (p. 196), that diligence is rewarded – a position based on both experience and common knowledge (p. 207), the error of the philosophers regarding the essence of the soul after death (p. 245), the perfection of the heavenly bodies (p. 283), the existence of the soul after death (pp. 316, 319-320, and 334), the truth of the rabbinic dictum that "every created thing is fleeting" (p. 385), the influence of the stars (p. 397), the influence of amulets based on experience and the common knowledge of the sages (p. 399), and the existence of demons, also based on experience and common knowledge (p. 402).

utilize generally accepted notions – especially when there are no other reliable sources on the same subject – to establish the truth. We will briefly review two examples in which a rabbi relies on tradition or the written Torah when there are no longer any reliable sources of information, which is to say that when, in terms of the other sources of information, the contention at hand is possible, then it is the tradition that determines which of the possible contentions is correct. Second, there is one issue regarding which R. Crescas clearly states that there is a contradiction between what is known about it from the Torah and what is known based on intellectual evidence – the question of free choice – and we will discuss this point later.

After analyzing the various definitions of the existence of the one God in book 1, part 3, chapter 2 R. Crescas concludes that, theoretically at least, there could be two gods in the universe, one of which is not related to the world at all³⁵. However, argues R. Crescas, it is statements in the Torah, such as the famous verse, "Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one" (Deut. 6:4), that convinces us to believe that there is only one God³⁶. In other words, belief in the unity of God does not derive from philosophical evidence (not even of the less reliable sort), but solely from the authority of the Torah³⁷.

Another similar source is R. Crescas's discussion of the possibility of the existence of many universes. In this discussion, he gives rational reasons for and against the existence of many universes³⁸. At the end of his discussion, he dismisses all the reasons he brought and concludes the discussion with an important statement regarding his case regarding the different levels of reliability of the different sources of beliefs:

Since...it is established that in all the arguments [re multiple universes which] we have mentioned, whether in support of an affirmative or of a negative conclusion, there is nothing that determines the truth about this issue, and [indeed] all they do establish is the possibility of plurality, it is fitting that we not depart from the interpretation offered by some of our Rabbis of blessed memory. They said in the first chapter of [tractate] Avodah Zarah [on page 3b]: "This teaches that God courses through eighteen thousand worlds." Their intent here is that God's providence traverses all those worlds. And this is what they intended with respect to this³⁹.

In this passage we see explicitly the same attitude that we see implicitly regarding the unity of

³⁵ *Or Hashem*, pp. 99-115

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 115-116

³⁷ In this section, R. Crescas does not attempt to explain the source of the authority of the Torah and why one must believe what is written in it. Rather, he deals with this subject in a different context in the third book of *Or Hashem*.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 388-392 (book 4, issue 2).

³⁹ *Or Hashem*, p. 391 (book 4, issue 2). Hebrew original: וכאשר היה זה כן, והוא, שכבר התבאר שאין בכל הטענות שזכרנו, אם לצד החיוב ואם לצד השלילה, שיתן האמת בדרוש, ומה שהתבאר מהם הוא אפשרות הרבוי לבד, הנה ראוי שלא נרחיק מה שבא בדרש לקצת ר"ל. אמרם בראשון מע"ז (ג: ב) "מלמד ששט ב"ח אלף עולמות". והכונה בו, שהשגחתו משוטטת בכל העולמות ההם. וזהו מה שיכינו בדרוש הזה.

God⁴⁰ and other issues: when there is no intellectual evidence for any side of a given issue, we turn to what is said in the Scriptures and tradition, and this shows us which of the options – all of which are possible in terms of the intellectual evidence – should be chosen. From here we see that intellectual evidence stands at a higher level of certainty given that one is to turn to the tradition and the text of the Torah only when the intellectual evidence is insufficient for deciding regarding competing opinions. If there was clear intellectual evidence for one of the sides of a given debate, R. Crescas would, apparently, interpret the tradition according to the more reliable intellectual evidence than the explicit (but can be interpreted in divers' ways) words of the Torah or the words of the Sages.

Regarding most issues, R. Crescas interprets what is said in the Torah in light of intellectual proofs, therefore it is impossible to see in these cases which of the two (i.e. tradition vs. philosophy) is more reliable because he presents all the sources as compatible with each other. Only in the case of the absence of intellectual proofs (as in the issue of the unity of God and the issue of the existence of multiple universes) or in the case of an explicit conflict (as we will see later regarding free choice) is it possible to see which source has a higher level of reliability.

In one case, regarding the question of free choice, R. Crescas agrees that the correct position should not be openly disseminated. According to him, causal determinism is a secret that should not be made public lest it cause the masses to generally despair that their efforts have any real effect, leading to serious social dysfunction⁴¹. From this we can learn two important things for this discussion:

1. The Torah sometimes takes an incorrect position for educational purposes.
2. It follows from #1 that in the event of a conflict between an intellectual proof and what is taught in the Torah and by the Sages⁴², the intellectual proof is considered the more credible because it

cannot be interpreted non-literally. In such a case, what is written in the Torah and the writings of the Sages become the official message given to the masses for educational purposes, while the conclusions of the philosophical line of thought become the true (and correct) secret message of the Torah.

According to R. Crescas, these secrets can also be seen in the Torah and the words of the Sages, but from the order of his arguments it is certainly reasonable to assert that the basis for this interpretation is intellectual proofs and not subtle insights into the text of the Torah or the texts of the Sages.

Since this is ostensibly just a one-off example of R. Crescas positing that there is a true but secret position hidden within the text of the Torah that contradicts the plain meaning, it can be reasonably argued that it is unjustified to learn out from this singular case that R. Crescas's general approach to the reliability of tradition and scripture was to see these as inferior to philosophical insight. However, in my opinion, this argument is itself unjustified because the assertion that this is the only case in which R. Crescas seems to defer to philosophy is imprecise to the point of being essentially incorrect. As we have already detailed, there are a number of places where R. Crescas only advised ignoring philosophical arguments because logical proofs could not reach an indisputable conclusion. We saw this in his discussion of the unity of God and the existence of multiple universes. So, I would argue that R. Crescas quite clearly believed in the primacy of philosophical inquiry over tradition. I would also argue that given the absence of an explicit discussion of the reliability of the various sources of beliefs, researchers and other thoughtful readers who wish to ascertain R. Crescas's opinion on this point really have no alternative other than to make inferences from R. Crescas's implicit references to the reliability of tradition versus philosophy⁴³.

Therefore, it can be concluded that according to R. Crescas, there are four levels of belief that vary according to their reliability. Belief based only on generally accepted notions (including the agreement of the Sages) is inferior in relation to the various types of logical proofs (but also in relation to witnessing miracles and experiencing prophecy, which are identical in terms of their reliability to the different levels of logical proofs). Reliance on generally accepted notions is

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 115-116 (Book 1, part 3, chapter 4)

⁴¹ On the subject of the secret determinism in the thought of R. Crescas, see Stav 2018. Regarding his use of the Hebrew word for 'disseminate' (נפיש) in *Or Hashem*, it is worth noting that he usually employs the term in the positive context of the general public's edification, such as: spreading the opinion that God has necessary existence (p. 104), teaching that Balaam the prophet was crooked (p. 200), publicizing of various miracles (pp. 201-202), spreading of God's reputation amongst the Gentiles via the Jewish Diaspora (p. 203), description of Greek wisdom as well-known (p. 205), popular belief in divine justice (p. 344), informing of Pharaoh of the miracles he would witness (p. 357), prophetic insight being expanded to include an array of political and military leaders via the Urim and Thummim (p. 363), and the fact that physics and metaphysics are familiar to the public – unlike the kabbalistic concepts of the Account of Creation and the Account of the Chariot, which the sages chose to guard from the general public (pp. 408-409).

⁴² Such tradition-based sources of knowledge are by definition examples of generally accepted notions that have become widely disseminated amongst the public. Since R. Crescas focuses here on the potential conflict between logical proofs and traditions (i.e. accepted notions), it would seem that for him, evidence based on a miracle, and of course prophecy, is more reliable than evidence based on accepted notions like traditions. Despite this, I don't think there is an actual case in which R. Crescas points to a contradiction between tra-

ditional knowledge and knowledge gained from miracles or prophecy.

⁴³ The possibility that R. Crescas considered all the sources of belief to be equal – and never questioned the reliability of tradition – is in my opinion simply not realistic, for as we saw earlier in the Passover Sermon, R. Crescas paid close attention to the subject of the various degrees of reliability of the general sources of belief, which in principle covers all sources of belief, including tradition. It would therefore seem most likely that he also had an opinion about the reliability of the tradition but chose not to write about it explicitly for various reasons (which we will attempt to unravel in the summary of the article). Furthermore, we note that in his citing of Biblical and rabbinic traditions that R. Crescas consistently limits their applicability to cases where purely rational considerations alone afford only conclusions of low reliability. Indeed, we never find in *Or Hashem* a case where R. Crescas rejected a solid intellectual argument in favor of a scriptural text or oral tradition.

usually reserved for religious topics (especially the existence of one providential deity) or trivial topics (such as the nature of demons). And there are other such topics found in the fourth book of *Or Hashem* for which there is no religious obligation to hold a certain position towards them. Regarding these issues, R. Crescas thinks that there is no reason to reject what is written in the Torah, even though the degree of certainty regarding the issues raised in the Torah is much less than the certainty that is associated with logical proofs.

4. Concluding Remarks

I would now like to sum up what I have hopefully demonstrated in this paper. First, R. Hasdai Crescas divided belief into four different types according to the degree of reliability:

1. Irrefutable proofs and experiencing prophecy
2. Reasonable logical proofs and witnessing miracles that have no earthly explanation
3. Less likely proofs and miracles of a dubious nature
4. Accepting the plain meaning of the text of the Torah and tradition in general

According to our discussion here, it is possible to understand why R. Crescas did not explicitly present in the Passover Sermon during his discussion of the different types of belief the notion of faith that arises from acceptance of tradition and Scripture, nor did he discuss the place of tradition in his theory of cognition, thereby departing from the approaches of Aristotle in the *Topics* and Rambam in the *Words of Logic*. R. Crescas thought that publishing his true position regarding the degree of reliability of commonly accepted notions could have a negative effect on the masses of the believing people, whom he was sincerely concerned might become deterred from practicing the religion due to harm to their faith caused by his position, which asserts that the reliability of certain key religious positions (especially the existence of one God and issues related mainly to providence) is not particularly high, and because of this, they are subject to a certain amount of doubt⁴⁴. Because of this, R.

⁴⁴ Maimonides in *Guide* II:66 has, at least on the exoteric level, a similar description of the creation of the world. On the problem of the literal understanding of Maimonides, see Sadik 2021. On the subject of the creation of the world and the main research and interpretive controversies surrounding the topic, see Lemler 2015. It should be noted that according to our analysis, the implicit position of R. Crescas is that one should accept the literal claims of the Torah and of the Sages only where there is no demonstrable proof to the contrary, but that where such irrefutable proof is available, the dictates of logic take precedence even over traditional religious beliefs. This position is identical to Maimonides' explicit position, though only like his esoteric position as understood by the adherents of the extreme naturalistic interpretation of Maimonides, such as found in the medieval writings of R. Moses of Narbonne and R. Yosef Ibn Caspi, or in modern analyses, such as that of Colette Sirat. According to these philosophers, Maimonides held an even more extreme position than did R. Crescas, to wit, that there are irrefutable proofs according to which the universe is eternal. It is interesting to note that, according to the radical reading, each of the thinkers who concealed their true beliefs nevertheless allowed the precise reader to perceive his true intention, which was always one step further in the philosophical direction than as would appear from a straight-forward reading of their works. However, the extent of concealment differed from one thinker to the

Crescas preferred to refrain from openly revealing his position. That is why in his Passover Sermon he did not analyze generally accepted notions, tradition, and the written Torah in his discussion of the various sources of faith and their reliability. By contrast, in *Or Hashem* he did not even discuss the various levels of belief, even though he utilized a significant portion of the materials found in the Passover Sermon. Despite this, R. Crescas's radical position favoring rational arguments over tradition can certainly be seen emerging from his discussions in the Passover Sermon and *Or Hashem*, individually as well as from their juxtaposition.

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next. For example, Maimonides' esoteric approach included intentionally contradicting himself, while R. Crescas used no such tactics and allowed his audience to readily understand his more radical positions without mentioning them explicitly. On the question of esotericism in the Middle Ages see, among others: Schwartz 2002.

Polemismo interreligioso y concepción del pecado original en Ḥasdai Crescas

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ES Resumen. Escrito originalmente en catalán alrededor de 1397-1398, *La inconsistencia de los dogmas cristianos (Sefer Biṭṭul Iqqarei Ha-Nošrim)* de Ḥasdai Crescas es una obra polemística que cuestiona el dogma cristiano utilizando argumentos filosóficos y lógicos, y no citas de la Biblia. En sus páginas, Crescas demuestra un profundo conocimiento de la teología y el dogma cristiano. Esta obra, como la totalidad de la obra cresquiana, es inseparable del contexto histórico del que brota: las persecuciones de 1391 y su corolario de conversiones masivas y de fundamentalismo misional cristiano. Nuestro propósito en este artículo es abordar su estudio indagando en la interpretación crítica de la doctrina cristiana del pecado original que Crescas realiza, su conexión con el ideario del propio autor, así como con el contexto del que la obra brota.
Palabras clave: Ḥasdai Crescas, pecado original, polemismo judío, judaísmo ibérico, psicología.

ENG Interreligious Polemism and Conception of Original Sin in Ḥasdai Crescas

Abstract. Originally written in Catalan around 1397-1398, *The Refutation of Christian Principles (Biṭṭul Iqqarei Ha-Nošrim)* by Hasdai Crescas is a polemical work that questions Christian dogma using philosophical and logical arguments, not quotations from the Bible. In its pages, Crescas demonstrates a deep knowledge of Christian theology and dogma. This work, like the whole of Crescas' work, is inseparable from the historical context from which it springs: the persecutions of 1391 and their corollary of mass conversions and Christian missionary fundamentalism. Our purpose in this paper is to approach its study by investigating Crescas' critical interpretation of the Christian doctrine of original sin, its connection with the author's own ideology, as well as with the context from which the work springs.

Keywords: Ḥasdai Crescas, Original Sin, Jewish Polemics, Iberian Judaism, Psychology.

Sumario. 1. Introducción. 2. Una breve mirada al contexto. 3. Cristianismo y judaísmo a propósito del pecado original. 4. La crítica de Ḥasdai Crescas a la doctrina cristiana del pecado original. 5. Conclusión.

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1. Introducción

Líder político de los judíos de Aragón, sólido exponente del polemismo judío, Ḥasdai Crescas (c. 1340-1411), discípulo de Rab Nissim Gerondi (1320-1376), es testigo directo de los pogromos de 1391 que significarán el inicio del ocaso de la vida judía en la Península. Hasta su muerte, Crescas seguirá siendo la cabeza espiritual de la judería española, tratando en un contexto extremadamente hostil de proveer a las comunidades judías de un renovado liderazgo. Desde el punto de vista intelectual, su filosofía de la religión judía se presenta como un sistema de

pensamiento que aspira a ser alternativa a la concepción que Maimónides (1138-1204) desarrolla en la *Guía de perplejos*. Maestro indiscutible, sin embargo, a juicio de Crescas, Maimónides desarrolla un racionalismo religioso en estrecha –y excesiva– dependencia del helenismo filosófico, de la *hojmá yevanit*¹.

¹ La Misná, en *masejet Sotá* (9. 14) muestra el vínculo existente entre el tiempo histórico y la cotidianeidad de la vida comunitaria; también, cómo el comportamiento colectivo es capaz de generar consecuencias históricas. A partir de crítica de la helenización del judaísmo del Segundo Templo, los sabios sancionan negativamente el estudio de la *hojmá yevanit*. El

Es por ello, que su objetivo no será otro que mostrar la propia racionalidad intrínseca de la Torá y lo erróneo e innecesario que resulta para el judaísmo forzar la Escritura desde una hermenéutica ajena a su propia semántica. Para Crescas, quien profesa que la religión judía es la revelación divina puede y debe hallar en ella la fundamentación racional de su fe. En este sentido, su obra fundamental, *Or Hashem (Luz del Señor)*, explicita este rechazo a un racionalismo peripatético que, cree, no incurre solo en contradicción con la tradición judía, sino también –y esto es fundamental– con la verdadera comprensión empírica y racional del mundo. Al mirar retrospectivamente a aquel mundo peninsular a caballo entre los siglos XIV y XV, no parece incongruente, frente a la hostilidad del contexto, frente a la percepción del hombre judío de una intemperancia histórica amplificada y padecida por sus comunidades, la alianza y fusión en el pensamiento de Crescas de la investigación de la naturaleza, la preservación de la tradición y el cuidado de las aljamas, todo ello expresión de una personal forma de compromiso espiritual.

Nuestro propósito en este artículo es abordar el estudio del *Sefer Bitṭul Iqqarei Ha-Noṣrim (La inconsistencia de los dogmas cristianos)*, que, junto al citado *Or Hashem* y el *Derashat ha-Pesaj (Sermón de Pascua)*, conforman la tríada de obras fundamentales de Crescas que han llegado hasta nosotros. En concreto, queremos indagar en la interpretación crítica de la doctrina cristiana del pecado original que Crescas realiza, así como su conexión con el ideal del propio autor. En esta dilucidación queremos atender también dos cuestiones relevantes para la comprensión de la crítica cresquiana, a saber, el contexto polemístico de la que brota, así como la aparente contradicción existente entre las tesis del *Sefer Bitṭul* sobre el pecado original y la fundamentación antropológico-teológica de *Or Hashem*.

2. Una breve mirada al contexto

Escrito originalmente en catalán alrededor de 1397-1398, el *Sefer Bitṭul* sólo ha llegado a nosotros en la traducción hebrea medieval del rabino Josef ibn Shem Tov (1451)². En sus páginas, en las que Crescas demuestra una competente comprensión de la teología cristiana de su tiempo, polemiza contra el dogma cristiano utilizando argumentos filosóficos y lógicos, y no citas de la Biblia. Pudiendo remontarse la tradición polemística judía siglos atrás, sin embargo, este

recurso lógico-dialéctico, el uso de razonamientos filosóficos, supone una novedad, que Crescas comparte contemporáneamente con Profiat Durán y que tiene como precedente los *Ta'anot* de Moisés ben Salomón de Salerno (s. XIII)³.

Como hemos apuntado, este texto polemístico, como en el fondo la totalidad de la obra cresquiana, es inseparable del contexto histórico del que brota: las persecuciones de 1391 y su corolario de conversiones masivas y de fundamentalismo misional cristiano, inicio de un camino sin retorno para el judaísmo ibérico. Fijemos nuestra atención brevemente en este contexto. En la ya clásica descripción interpretativa de Américo Castro del trágico devenir de las aljamas españolas, secuela y expresión de ese “problema judaico que toca la médula misma de la historia de España”, basculan dos formas eficaces de idealización antitéticas: la positiva, un pueblo judío industrioso, práctico, ducho en el comercio, la técnica y las artes liberales; la negativa, un pueblo cristiano que, más allá del odio religioso o racial, gesta, a partir de un cierto momento del siglo XIV, la conciencia de poseer una civilización opuesta a la hebrea, al tiempo que desarrolla una necesidad de autoafirmación y de ocupación del ámbito total de su experiencia vital, en clara confrontación con el protagonismo sociopolítico de los judíos⁴. Esta interpretación idiosincrásica y sociohistórica contrasta con la también clásica de Yitzhak Baer, para quien la agitación social, las tensiones socioeconómicas en Castilla y Aragón, no fueron más que una causa secundaria de la persecución, ya que “el factor decisivo de los disturbios de 1391 fue el rencor religioso”⁵. Más allá de esta contraposición causal, lo cierto es que parece evidente que ambos polos, el socioeconómico y el religioso, fueron determinantes, como también que, a despecho de la visión de Castro, en una sociedad políticamente teologizada como la hispana, en un contexto de virulenta transformación religiosa, el debate teológico destinado a mostrar la superioridad de una fe y de su cosmovisión resultase esencial⁶.

La Disputa de Tortosa será el epítome y el punto de inflexión de un “tiempo de disputa” que se despliega, a partir de la infausta fecha de 1391, a lo largo de casi tres décadas y que, en cualquier caso y más allá de las circunstancias del momento, bebe y recoge el influjo de unas fuentes polemísticas cristianas cuyas profundas raíces recorren toda la Edad Media, no sólo hispana⁷. Crescas vivirá y será

Talmud de Babilonia (Sotá 49b: 1-20) profundiza en la cuestión y reivindica la superioridad de la tradición judía sobre cualquier otra manifestación cultural. El racionalismo religioso judío en la Edad Media se sentirá claramente incómodo con la prohibición talmúdica de la “sabiduría griega”. En este sentido, Maimónides realiza una redefinición del concepto de *hojmá yevanit* que pretende situarlo, más allá de las controversias talmúdicas, en un plano que no afecte al debate filosófico. De todos modos, aunque ninguna fuente talmúdica indica realmente qué incluye la “sabiduría griega”, durante toda la Edad Media la determinación de este contenido será objeto de controversia.

² Hasdai Crescas, *La inconsistencia de los dogmas cristianos. Bitṭul Iqqarei ha-Noṣrim le-Rabbí Hasdai Crescas*, ed. y trad. C. del Valle Rodríguez (Madrid: Aben Ezra, 2000); Hasdai Crescas, *The Refutation of the Christian Principles*, trad. Daniel J. Lasker (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992). En adelante, utilizaremos la traducción de Carlos del Valle, citada en forma abreviada como *La inconsistencia*.

³ Un análisis de esta cuestión en Joel E. Rembaum, “Medieval Jewish Criticism of the Christian Doctrine of Original Sin”, *Association for Jewish Studies Review*, 7-8 (1982/83): 360-362.

⁴ Américo Castro, *Aspectos del vivir hispánico* (Sevilla: Renacimiento, 2021), 119-124; Américo Castro, *España en su historia* (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1948), 471-478; 493-504.

⁵ Yitzhak Baer, *Historia de los judíos en la España cristiana* (Barcelona: Riepiedras, 1998), 544-545.

⁶ Interpretaciones más recientes que indagan desde ambas perspectivas han puesto de relieve otros factores socio-religiosos como, por ejemplo, el miedo irracional a las minorías, símbolo del socavamiento del orden cristiano, o la violencia como un elemento esencial e idiosincrásico, liberador de tensiones sociales y delimitador de las fronteras entre centralidad y periferia, mayoría y minoría. Así, por ejemplo, David Nirenberg, *Comunidades de violencia. Persecución de las minorías en la Edad Media* (Barcelona: Península, 2001).

⁷ Una clara delineación de las fases históricas de este polemismo en Gilbert Dahan, *The Christian Polemic Against the*

protagonista –a su pesar– de este tiempo. Sirva como ejemplo la referencia al infructuoso intento por parte de Salomón Haleví –junto a Yehosúa Halorquí, el converso por antonomasia de esa generación– de emplazar a Hasdai Crescas a una disputa pública al más alto nivel, sólo evitada por este último gracias a su influencia en la corte aragonesa⁸. Esta anécdota y la referencia a estos conversos nos resulta útil en nuestra aproximación al *Sefer Biṭṭul*. Fijemos por un momento nuestra atención en la epístola que un Halorquí aún no convertido al cristianismo envía a Salomón Haleví, ahora Pablo de Santa María, poco tiempo después de la conversión de este⁹. En ella, Halorquí sugiere a su destinatario cuatro posibles causas que, a su juicio, podrían haber motivado su conversión. Estas causas, más allá de lo personal, en el fondo permiten comprender de modo general el paso dado por aquellos contemporáneos judíos que abrazaban en número creciente el cristianismo. Más allá de las motivaciones espurias, del pesimismo histórico o de la reflexión filosófica, el descubrimiento de la supuesta verdad cristiana en las palabras de la Torá y de los profetas se presenta como el elemento decisivo que podría justificar la apostasía. Halorquí manifiesta a Santa María que no le cabe duda de que esta última ha sido, en su caso, la razón determinante, es decir, el examen y la meditación de las ideas religiosas, algo que Santa María ha podido realizar de modo exigente dado su conocimiento de la lengua latina y castellana, así como de los evangelios. En esta misiva, por cierto, bajo la superficie del carácter apologético de la misma, de su combinación de fórmulas convencionales y de referencias bíblicas, Halorquí parece deslizarse hacia su propia conversión¹⁰.

Dejemos por el momento a Halorquí y también estas breves pinceladas iniciales de contexto. Resaltemos simplemente, a modo de síntesis y para concluir, que esta polémica epistolar es ejemplo de una forma de *disputatio* que nos ofrece una perspectiva privilegiada para entender el fundamento del polemismo interreligioso de estos tiempos controversiales: investigar los fundamentos del otro, que, en el caso de un converso al cristianismo como Santa María, equivale a “la puerta de la esperanza por la que penetrar en la tradición de la alianza”; situar la religión dentro de los límites de la razón, como remarca Profiat Durán en *Al Tehí ka-Aboteja*, cuando afirma que la salvación llega a través conjuntamente

de la fe, que no contradice las demandas del intelecto y el cumplimiento de los preceptos;¹¹ hacer de la necesidad histórica una virtud paradójica, como, por ejemplo, Juan el Viejo de Toledo, quien, en el *Memorial de Jesucristo* (1416), hablando del infausto año de 1391, afirma que “en ese anno vino a nos el Mexías por fuerça, e fuemos convertidos por fuerça a la santa fe católica, ca el día en que el omme viene a conosçimiento, en aquel día le viene el Mesías”¹².

3. Cristianismo y judaísmo a propósito del pecado original

No es irrelevante al abordar la cuestión del pecado original en Hasdai Crescas el que nos preguntemos, de entrada, si realmente el judaísmo y el cristianismo se hallan separados radicalmente por dos concepciones antropológico-teológicas opuestas. Si hacemos caso a lo que podríamos llamar “dicotomía popular”, habría que afirmar sin paliativos que el judaísmo rechaza el pecado original, mientras que el cristianismo lo acepta. Una dicotomía de trazo grueso en la que, en el caso del judaísmo, la praxis vital de cada ser humano vendría a ser el campo de batalla de una lucha entre la inclinación hacia el bien y hacia el mal que, en el caso de los justos, implicaría una victoria de la tendencia positiva merced a un acto de voluntad¹³. La interpretación midrásica de *Berajot*, a cuenta de la inusual doble yod de “vayyitzer” (וַיַּיְצֵר, “formó”) en Gn 2, 7, aludiría al hecho de que Dios habría creado dos inclinaciones, una buena y una mala en el hombre¹⁴. Así, la Torá, tal como leemos en el tratado *Kidushin* del Talmud, es el baluarte contra esta segunda inclinación¹⁵. Por su parte, el cristianismo presenta al ser humano como creado en un estado de perfección, deliberadamente corrompido por él mismo. Subvertida la perfección original, la corrupción de estos progenitores de la humanidad pasaría a sus descendientes, los cuales sólo podrían superar esta situación merced a la gracia. Un pasaje de la Carta a los Romanos resulta paradigmático en este sentido:

En consecuencia, igual que por un hombre entró el pecado en el mundo y por el pecado la muerte, y la muerte se propagó sin más a todos los hombres, dado que todos pecaban. Porque antes de la Ley había ya pecado en el mundo; y, aunque donde no hay Ley no se imputa el pecado, a pesar de eso la muerte reinó desde Adán hasta Moisés, incluso entre los que no habían pecado cometiendo un delito como el de Adán¹⁶.

Jews in the Middle Ages (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998).

⁸ Baer, *Historia de los judíos*, 573.

⁹ Edición bilingüe de la misiva en L. Landau, *Das apologetische Schreiben des Joshua-Lorki an den Abtrünnigen Don Salomon ha-Lewi* (Amberes: Teitelbaum & Boxenbaum, 1906). El texto hebreo en Judah D. Eisenstein, *Ozar Wikuhim. A Collection of Polemics and Disputations* (Nueva York: J. D. Eisenstein Publishing, 1928).

¹⁰ Sobre las interpretaciones de la carta, véase: Michael Glatzer, “Lorqi and Solomon Halevi: Towards an Examination of the Causes of Apostasy among the Jews in Spain in the Fourteenth Century”, *Pe'amim* 54 (1993): 103-116; Eliazar Gutwirth, “Pablo de Santa María y Jerónimo de Santa Fe: Hacia una lectura de la Epístola de Lorquí”, *Estudios de Historia de España* 17, n° 1 (2015): 75-109; Yosi Yisraeli, “Joshua Ha-Lorki on the Meaning of Emunah: Between Religion and Faith”, en *Polemical and Exegetical Polarities in Medieval Jewish Cultures. Studies in Honour of Daniel J. Lasker*, ed. Ehud Krinis et al. (Berlín: De Gruyter, 2021), 364-382.

¹¹ Profiat Durán, *Al tehí ka-aboteja*, en *The Polemical Writings of Profiat Duran*, ed. Frank Talmage (Jerusalén: Hebrew University, 1981), 73-84.

¹² Juan el Viejo de Toledo, *Memorial de Jesucristo*. Valladolid, Biblioteca de Santa Cruz, Ms. 334/80, fol. 20v.

¹³ Alan Cooper, “A Medieval Jewish Version of Original Sin: Ephraim of Luntshits on Leviticus 12”, *Harvard Theological Review* 97, n°4 (2004): 445.

¹⁴ TB, *Berajot* 61a: “Rav Nachman bar Rav H̄isda interpretó en una homilía: ¿Cuál es el significado de lo que está escrito: ‘Entonces el Señor Dios formó al hombre [vayyitzer]’ (Génesis 2.7), con una doble yod? Este doble yod alude al hecho de que el Santo, Bendito sea, creó dos inclinaciones; una inclinación buena y otra, una inclinación mala”.

¹⁵ TB, *Kidushin* 30b: “Hijos míos, creé una inclinación al mal, que es la herida, y creé la Torá como su antídoto”.

¹⁶ Rom 5, 12-14.

Indagando más allá de lo dicotómico, podemos advertir, por un lado, que la perspectiva cristiana radicalizada en la teología agustiniana, en la esteología paulina, que “Dios creó al hombre recto, pero él, pervertido espontáneamente y justamente castigado, engendró hijos pervertidos y castigados”¹⁷. También, que ciertos textos rabínicos parecen polemizar con esta concepción cristiana, enfatizando la idea de salvación por encima de la pecaminosidad. En el Talmud encontramos tres versiones de una misma idea: la contaminación moral de la serpiente sobre Eva permaneció en todos los seres humanos; cuando el pueblo judío estuvo en el Monte Sinaí cesó, cosa que no ocurrió con los gentiles¹⁸. Lo que muestra en esta tradición, más allá de su evidente polemoso, es que la Ley posee una eficacia continuada como contrapunto al pecado de los hombres, frente a la idea cristiana que recoge Pablo en Romanos de que la Ley “sólo renta pecado y muerte” y que su mediación ha sido reemplazada por el espíritu de Cristo¹⁹. Algunos intérpretes contemporáneos creen advertir que los textos talmúdicos reflejan una concepción que diluye esa escisión radical entre las dos visiones de la pecaminosidad humana, las cuales parecen fundirse en una etiología común: una corrupción transmitida por Eva a sus descendientes²⁰. Estrategia premeditada o no en aras de una superación dialéctica del contrario, podría pensarse que, o bien el Talmud se acerca semánticamente al ámbito del cristianismo para mostrar la superioridad de la solución judía al problema del mal, o bien, en línea con la posición clásica de Israel Lévi, que ya en el periodo rabínico, contrariamente a la opinión mayoritaria, algunos judíos tenían una noción del pecado original que incluía la idea de que el primer pecado fue transmitido de Adán y Eva a sus descendientes²¹.

Más allá de la verosimilitud o no de lo anterior, de su carácter más o menos polemístico y de cuáles sean las raíces y el alcance de la noción de “caída” en el judaísmo rabínico, lo cierto es que el judaísmo medieval desarrollará su propia interpretación

y versión de la doctrina del pecado original. Y esto como consecuencia de su evolución interna y de la influencia dialéctica del cristianismo. El mitologema de la “contaminación de la serpiente”, explorado por el rabinismo, se filtra en el Medioevo judío a través de la tradición filosófica y cabalística, con una notable impronta en los siglos XIII y XIV²². Así, por ejemplo, el *Zohar* reelabora materiales talmúdicos mostrando cómo la idolatría del becerro provoca la degradación del estado de gracia e iluminación amparado por la protección del Santo Nombre, dejando al pueblo expuesto al mal de la serpiente como antaño²³.

La noción de pecado original se convierte en una preocupación creciente para el polemoso judío anticristiano. Joel Rembaum ha destacado cómo los fundamentos de esta crítica son establecidos por los polemistas de los siglos XII y XIII, a saber, desde una perspectivación a partir del sentido común, el uso del hebreo bíblico y, en menor medida, del Nuevo Testamento²⁴. Sin embargo, tal como ejemplifica Crescas, los escritores de la segunda mitad del siglo XIV y comienzos del siglo XV reflejan una gran independencia de las fuentes escriturísticas. Sus obras tienden a estructurarse desde el análisis conceptual y la argumentación lógico-racional. Estos polemistas, provenientes de las tierras hispanas y de Italia, muestran un cierto conocimiento de la cultura secular y están influenciados por las tradiciones filosóficas, tal como las investigaciones de Gad Freudenthal, Warren Zeev Harvey, Daniel Lasker o Mauro Zonta han mostrado²⁵. Decisivo en ellos es la indagación ideológica y la generación de ideas más allá del marco de referencia de la Escritura y la Tradición. ¿Por qué, en el caso de Crescas, como también, por ejemplo, Elijah de Genazzano, la doctrina del pecado original como pórtico de una refutación general de los dogmas cristianos? Porque característico de este polemoso judío a caballo entre los siglos XIV y XV es el reconocimiento explícito de la centralidad de la doctrina cristiana del pecado original. Parece, pues, perfectamente comprensible que la refutación de este principio suponga el desmoronamiento del edificio dogmático del cristianismo²⁶.

Profiat Durán o Ḥasdai Crescas asumen que el eje en el que descansa la concepción cristiana del

¹⁷ San Agustín, *De Civitate Dei* XIII. 2: “Deus enim creavit hominem rectum, naturarum auctor, non utique vitiorum; sed sponte depravatus iusteque damnatus depravatos damnatosque generavit. Omnes enim fuimus in illo uno, quando omnes fuimus ille unus, qui per feminam lapsus est in peccatum, quae de illo facta est ante peccatum. Nondum erat nobis singillatim creata et distributa forma, in qua singuli viveremus; sed iam erat natura seminalis, ex qua propagaremur; qua scilicet propter peccatum vitiatum et vinculo mortis obstricta iusteque damnata non alterius conditionis homo ex homine nasceretur”.

¹⁸ TB, *Sabbat* 146a; *Yebamot* 103b; *Abodá Zará* 22b. “La serpiente se encontró con Eva, es decir, cuando la sedujo para comer del Árbol del Conocimiento, la infectó con contaminación moral, y esta contaminación permaneció en todos los seres humanos. Cuando el pueblo judío estuvo en el Monte Sinaí, su contaminación cesó. Sin embargo, como los gentiles no se pararon en el Monte Sinaí, su contaminación nunca cesó” (*Sabbat* 146a).

¹⁹ Rom 8, 17; 5, 17: “En otras palabras: si por el delito de aquel solo la muerte inauguró su reinado, por culpa de aquel solo, mucho más los que reciben esa sobra de gracia y de perdón gratuito, viviendo reinarán por obra de uno solo, Jesús Mesías”.

²⁰ Joel Kaminsky, “Paradise Regained: Rabbinic Reflections on Israel at Sinai”, en *Jews, Christians, and the Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures*, ed Alice O. Bellis y Joel Kaminsky (Atlanta: Scholars, 2000), 17.

²¹ Israël Lévi, *Le péche originel dans les anciennes sources Juives* (Paris: École Pratique des Hautes Études, 1907), 13.

²² Una aproximación general a la cuestión en Deborah Schachterman, “The Doctrine of Original Sin and Maimonidean Interpretation in Jewish Philosophy of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries”, *Da’at* 20 (1988): 65-90.

²³ *Zohar* I. 52b. “Mas después que pecaron con el becerro, los abandonaron todos esos grados y luces supremas, y los abandonaron esos cobertores armados que los protegían, que habían sido ornamentados por el Nombre Supremo sagrado, y a atrajeron hacia ellos a la malvada Serpiente como antes y provocaron la muerte en el mundo entero”.

²⁴ Rembaum, “Medieval Jewish Criticism”, 354.

²⁵ Véase: Gad Freudenthal, “Gersonide, génie solitaire. Remarques sur l’évolution de sa pensée et des ses méthodes sur quelques points”, en *Les méthodes de travail de Gersonide et le maniement du savoir chez les scolastiques*, ed. Colet Sirat et al. (Paris: Vrin, 2003), 291-317; Warren Zeev Harvey, “Nissim of Gerona and William of Ockham on Prime Matter”, *Jewish History* 6 (1992): 87-98; Daniel J. Lasker, “The impact of Christianity on Late Iberian Jewish Philosophy”, en *In Iberian and Beyond. Hispanic Jews between Cultures*, ed. Bernard Dov Cooperman (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1998), 175-190; Mauro Zonta, *Hebrew Scholasticism in the Fifteenth Century* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), 3-32.

²⁶ Rembaum, “Medieval Jewish Criticism”, 356.

pecado original subvierte la lógica de la comprensión de la justicia divina, en la que los medios deben ser coherentes con los fines. ¿Cómo puede sostenerse una doctrina en la que la naturaleza del propósito divino para con el hombre sea capaz de generar tanta injusticia? La razón y el sentido común rechazan esta concepción de la divinidad, como también una antropología errónea que afirma que ciertas cualidades psicofísicas del ser humano justificarían la persistencia del pecado original después de Jesús, nada menos. Que las consecuencias del pecado de Adán no habrían podido ser transmitidas a través de su alma a las almas de sus descendientes, había sido ya sugerido en clave polémica por Naḥmánides en la Disputa de Barcelona, negando la culpabilidad espiritual de la humanidad por causa de un pecado primigenio. Si las almas son creadas *ex nihilo* para cada individuo por Dios, tal como afirma la teología cristiana, las consecuencias hereditarias de la caída sólo puede ser físicas²⁷. En cualquier caso, lo relevante aquí es que, tal como decimos, para los polemistas judíos la concepción dogmática del cristianismo se resquebraja frente a esta argumentación al convertir en prescindible la redención del pecado por Cristo, su encarnación y crucifixión.

En el *Bittul Iqqarei ha-Nošrim* de Ḥasdai Crescas confluyen de forma evidente todo este haz de problemáticas y visiones. Adelantemos, de forma sintética, que en ellas resuenan no sólo una tradición polémica judía, sino también el marco de comprensión teológico cristiano con el que implícitamente dialoga²⁸. De forma muy genérica, por un lado, Agustín de Hipona, el cual, frente a un pelagianismo que desconecta la teología de la creación de la de la redención y otorga a la naturaleza un papel decisivo, sitúa el problema en el núcleo de la fe cristiana: Cristo es el redentor de todos, lo que significa que todos deben ser salvados por él²⁹. En segundo lugar, Anselmo de Canterbury, que entiende el pecado original como

“privación o ausencia de la justicia debida” y que enfatiza la no pecaminosidad de la naturaleza humana de Jesús como condición necesaria y realizada para la restauración de la humanidad a un estado de justicia ante Dios³⁰. Por último, Tomás de Aquino, que entiende el pecado original como consistente en un elemento material, la concupiscencia, y una formal, “la ausencia de la justicia original”³¹. Para Aquino, aunque Dios hubiera podido perfectamente haber optado por otras vías, escogió a su hijo para redimir a una humanidad, a los “derivados de Adán que son como los miembros de un solo cuerpo”³². Crescas, podríamos decir, rebate dialécticamente esta concepción porque conduce, a su juicio, a un callejón sin salida teológico, a suposiciones teológicas insostenibles. La encarnación y la redención de Cristo son imposibles, ambas se sostienen en un constructo de pecaminosidad que desde el castigo de Adán y Eva mantiene una vigencia sólo clausurada por la encarnación de Jesús.

Un análisis estrictamente escriturístico de la Biblia judía –que sería el único aceptable como marco de referencia para la exégesis cristiana– deja en evidencia el uso que Pablo y sus seguidores hacen de la noción de caída y de sus repercusiones para el género humano. Siguiendo a Samuel S. Cohon, creemos que es importante señalar algunas consideraciones al respecto: la tradición yahvista está fundamentalmente preocupada por el origen de la muerte y el sufrimiento y no tanto por el origen de la pecaminosidad humana, lo cual no significa que no reflexione sobre la gravedad del pecado; el relato del Génesis no sugiere en ningún momento que el pecado de Adán se transmitirá a sus descendientes, aunque sí que enfatiza la difusión del mal moral como una condición antropológica que prevalece más allá de un tiempo particular; el pecado es un acto voluntario o un hábito resultante de muchos actos³³. ¿Cuál es la presencia de la historia del Paraíso en el resto de la Escritura? Prácticamente no existe. Tal es así que el Yahvista ni tan siquiera conecta el relato de la caída, por ejemplo, con el pecado de Caín (Gn 4, 6-7). Su pecaminosidad no es herencia de sus progenitores, sino que posee una naturaleza propia. De modo que, todo lo que se puede decir es que la transgresión de Adán fue la primera manifestación de pecado, pero no la causa de la pecaminosidad de sus descendientes. Por su parte, la tradición Elohista presenta a Noé como perfecto y justo, alguien que, como Henoc, “caminó con Dios”, indicando que la corrupción que se extendió antes del Diluvio representa una condición epocal y no el estado propio de la humanidad derivado de Adán (Gn 5, 24; 6, 9-12). Tampoco se desprende de la fuente Sacerdotal que la “imagen divina”, que marca a Adán en su creación, desapareciera con la caída. Lo que enfatiza esta tradición en Gn 6-9 es que “la tierra estaba viciada, porque toda carne tenía una conducta viciosa sobre la tierra” (Gn 6, 11-12). Más allá del Pentateuco, la literatura profética denuncia el mal y el pecado, no como una herencia, sino como un fracaso moral del

²⁷ Leemos en la crónica hebrea de la Disputa (39; 45): “Adán, el primer hombre, vivió mil años menos setenta; y los versículos declaran en forma explícita que murió a causa de su pecado, y si no hubiera pecado podría haber vivido mucho más o para siempre”; “Este argumento de ustedes es impropio para Dios, ya que los justos no reciben el infierno como castigo del pecado de Adam, el primer hombre, su ascendiente; mi alma está cercana al alma de mi padre como al alma del Faraón, por ende a causa de los pecados del Faraón no entrará mi alma al infierno. No obstante, los castigos fueron corporales ya que mi cuerpo proviene de mi padre y de mi madre y cuando fue decretado sobre ellos que serían mortales, su descendencia para siempre serían también mortales”. La edición crítica del texto hebreo en: Alfonso Tostado, *La Disputa de Barcelona de 1263. Controversia Judeocristiana* (Salamanca: UPS, 2009), 291-317.

²⁸ De entre la inmensa bibliografía sobre la cuestión, algunas referencias fundamentales sobre este marco de comprensión cristiano: Maurizio Flick y Zoltan Alszeghy, *El hombre bajo el signo del pecado. Teología del pecado original* (Salamanca: Sígueme, 1972); Vittorio Grossi et al., *El hombre y su salvación. Historia de los dogmas*. Vol. II (Salamanca: Sec. Trinitario, 1996), 117-202; Luis F. Ladaria, *Teología del pecado original y de la gracia* (Madrid: BAC, 1993), 5-110; Wolfgang Panenberg, *Antropología en perspectiva teológica* (Salamanca: Sígueme, 1993), 99-179.

²⁹ San Agustín, *De peccatorum meritis et remissione* (I, 8. 8): “Item quod ait: Per hominem mors et per hominem resurrectio mortuorum; quid aliud quam de morte corporis intellegi potest, quando ut hoc diceret de resurrectione corporis loquebatur eamque instantissima et acerrima intentione sua-debat?”

³⁰ Anselmo de Canterbury, *Cur Deus homo* II, 1-8.

³¹ Tomás de Aquino, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 82, a. 3.

³² Tomás de Aquino, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 81, a.1.

³³ Samuel S. Cohon, “Original Sin”, *Hebrew Union College Annual* 21 (1948): 279-286.

hombre contemporáneo (“el que peque, morirá”), al no reconocer la voluntad divina y su soberanía por la vacilación de su corazón (Jer 17, 9; Ez 18). Sólo los apócrifos y los libros psudoepigráficos judíos toman la historia del Paraíso como la base para una especulación sobre el origen del pecado y la muerte, destacando, en este sentido, el Sirácida, donde se afirma que “por la mujer fue el comienzo del pecado, y por causa de ella morimos todos”, y el Libro de la Sabiduría, con alusiones a la muerte como consecuencia del primer pecado: “le hizo imagen de su misma naturaleza; pero por envidia del diablo entró la muerte en el mundo”³⁴.

4. La crítica de Hasdai Crescas a la doctrina cristiana del pecado original

Estas reflexiones y matizaciones nos sitúan frente al núcleo de nuestra exposición. Ya hemos destacado anteriormente cómo el tipo de polemismo tardomedieval judío que encarna Crescas refleja una gran independencia de las fuentes escriturísticas y se estructura desde el análisis conceptual y la argumentación lógico-racional. En el prefacio al *Sefer Bitṭul*, Crescas establece unos “presupuestos generales” necesarios para la polémica en aras a que “la comprensión de la verdad sea más clara y manifiesta”³⁵. En síntesis, son tres: la fe no fuerza al intelecto a creer cosa alguna que suponga contradicción; el poder divino no puede entrar en contradicción los primeros principios, evidentes *per se*, ni con las conclusiones lógicas probadas a partir de aquellos; la justicia divina busca el bien y la máxima perfección posible de la especie humana. Si el uso de estos presupuestos condujese a constatar que las dos concepciones contrapuestas afirman por caminos diferentes algo similar, “el grupo hebreo es el que tiene la presunción (de verdad), el que tiene la Ley divina”, una idea esta ya expresada por Yehudá Haleví en el *Cuzary*³⁶. Sobre que Dios no contradice los primeros principios no deja de resultar llamativo el paralelo que encontramos en el *Mostrador de justicia* de Abner de Burgos, cuando se asevera que “ay algunas cosas que se salen dellas, por cierto, que nunca las querría de fazer Dios e como las imposibles”³⁷. En último término y como declaración hermenéutico-metodológica de principio, dado que aquello que se dilucida está inmerso en la dialéctica más amplia entre fe y razón, afirma Crescas que, “siendo la fe lo más excelente

de todo, conviene que no se aparte de su posesión a no ser por objeciones serias y argumentos fuertes, libres de toda duda”³⁸.

El análisis de la doctrina cristiana del pecado original en el *Sefer Bitṭul* presenta una doble dimensión, a saber, una valoración del verdadero sentido del pecado de Adán y, en segundo término, cuál es, supuestamente, la posibilidad de su redención. Con respecto al primer aspecto, el cristianismo, sostiene Crescas, afirma la gravedad e infinitud del pecado originante de Adán. Este carácter de suma negatividad, de insólita gravedad, está justificado por un principio de correlación moral entre el pecador y el objeto de la ofensa, que es nada menos que Dios; Dios, quien ha creado a este hombre que peca “perfecto, carente de disposición al pecado y de inclinación a la culpa”³⁹, la naturaleza menos predispuesta a la pecaminosidad. Hablamos de gravedad, pero también de infinitud. Tanto el principio de economía anteriormente citado como esta idea de infinitud del pecado cristiana son entendidas por Crescas a partir de una lectura bastante fiel de la teología tomista⁴⁰. Con respecto al principio económico-correlativo, Aquino afirma, siguiendo a San Agustín, que tanto en el juicio divino como en los humanos, la pena está en proporción de la culpa en cuanto al rigor⁴¹. Por su parte, sobre la idea de infinitud, afirma Santo Tomás que “el castigo es proporcional al pecado”, si bien, en el pecado, como hay aversión hacia el bien inmutable, que es infinito, por ello, el pecado es infinito⁴². El resultado de todo ello es que el pecado original, tal como lo entiende el cristianismo, extiende *ad infinitum* la culpa de Adán, afectando a toda la humanidad que procede de él, a excepción de Cristo, dado que “todos los hombres que nacen de Adán pueden considerarse como un único hombre, en cuanto convienen en la naturaleza que reciben del primer hombre”⁴³.

Crescas entiende, aunando lo polémico y lo dialéctico, que al cristianismo le interesa esta amplitud extrema del radio del pecado de la humanidad. ¿Por qué esta conveniencia en la infinitud del pecado? Para minusvalorar al hombre y a sus obras y amplificar la gracia y misericordia divina. Para Crescas, cuatro son las razones que concierten en errónea la concepción cristiana⁴⁴. Con respecto a la primera, la doctrina tomista del sujeto del pecado original le ayuda a articular el inicio de su razonamiento. Afirma Santo Tomás: “Así pues, como el alma puede ser sujeto de culpa, pero el cuerpo, de suyo, no puede serlo, (se sigue que) todo aquello que le viene al alma de la corrupción del primer pecado tiene razón de culpa; pero lo que deriva al cuerpo no tiene razón de

³⁴ Si 25, 24; Sab 2, 23-24. Para Gerhard von Rad, intérprete cristiano por excelencia de las tradiciones escriturísticas del Hexateuco (Torá y Josué), un examen de estos escritos “nos muestra cuán raras son las ocasiones en las que se habla del pecado en términos de teología, como un fenómeno religioso complejo”. Y allí donde simplemente se apunta, como en el tratado yahvista en Gn 3, 11, el interés del autor es mostrar una cadena de hechos reales, como “un camino recorrido por los hombres”. Véase: Gerhard von Rad, *Teología del Antiguo Testamento I. Teología de las tradiciones históricas de Israel* (Salamanca: Sígueme, 1972), 203-205.

³⁵ Crescas, *La inconsistencia* (0.17), 110.

³⁶ Ibid. (0.18), 111. Yehudá Haleví. *Cuzary. Diálogo filosófico*, ed. Adolfo Bonilla, trad. Jacob Abendana (Madrid: Librería General Victoriano Suárez, 1911; (reimpresión, Madrid: Editora Nacional, 1979); Yehudah ha-Levi, *Kuzari*, Trad. N. Daniel Korbkin: *In Defense of the Despised Faith* (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1998). La referencia en I, 10ss.

³⁷ Abner de Burgos, *Mostrador de justicia*. París, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Ms. Espagnol 43, l. 33, fol. 41v.

³⁸ Crescas, *La inconsistencia* (0.18), 111-112.

³⁹ Ibid. (1.1), 113-114.

⁴⁰ En concreto, de las *quaestiones* 81, 86 y 87 de *Summa Theologiae* I-II y 163-164 de II-II.

⁴¹ Tomás de Aquino, *Summa Theologiae* q. 87, a. 3: “Ad primum ergo dicendum quod poena peccato proportionatur secundum acerbitatem, tam in iudicio divino quam in humano, sicut Augustinus dicit, XXI de Civ. Dei, in nullo iudicio requiritur ut poena adaequetur culpae secundum durationem”.

⁴² Ibid., a. 4: “Respondeo dicendum quod poena proportionatur peccato. In peccato autem duo sunt. Quorum unum est aversio ab incommutabili bono, quod est infinitum, unde ex hac parte peccatum est infinitum”.

⁴³ Tomás de Aquino, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 81, a. 1.

⁴⁴ Crescas, *La inconsistencia* (1.4-1.7), 117-120.

culpa, sino de castigo. Por consiguiente, el alma es el sujeto del pecado original, no el cuerpo"⁴⁵. Esta disposición anímica, piensa Crescas, coloca a los justos ante la máxima injusticia. Dado que, para el cristianismo, la Ley judía es un estadio infantil de la humanidad, ella no predispone para la plenitud y la gloria, siendo, sin embargo, un marco revelado de actuación moral. El culto divino y los preceptos, "a no ser que vayan acompañados de la gracia divina", no salvan⁴⁶. Pero, además, y como segunda razón, lo más grave de esto es el lugar en el que coloca a los verdaderos modelos de probidad y justicia bíblica, Noé y los patriarcas. ¿Cómo va a haber un retraimiento de la gracia y del favor divinos a un justo? Crescas encuentra una falla de incongruencia en la concepción cristiana, en paralelo con su propia concepción psicológica. Si "la creación implica la relación del alma con Dios solo" –tal como el mismo Tomás de Aquino afirma– es decir, si Dios crea el alma para un cuerpo concreto y determinado y si, además, según la doctrina cristiana el pecado original se transmite al alma no al cuerpo, que sólo es sujeto de pena, no de culpa, ¿cómo pudieron pecar Noé y los patriarcas, siendo justos? Su salvación esta, pues, asegurada⁴⁷.

En tercera instancia, un aparentemente simple ejercicio de argumentación lógica le sirve a Crescas para enfatizar el aserto anterior y la contradicción que evidencia: "si Adán, antes de que pecara, fue digno de la gracia, de la misericordia y de la herencia del gozo eterno", cuántos más Abraham y el resto de los justos que no habían pecado, "eran más dignos de recibir esta gracia"⁴⁸. Aparente, porque, sin embargo, de este razonamiento parece seguirse un reconocimiento implícito del hecho antitético del pecado original, consignado de forma explícita en la Escritura y que, por extensión, permitiría afirmar que "Abraham nació en el pecado, fue concebido en la culpa y que, a pesar de ello, no le sedujeron sus pensamientos ni le apartaron sus cavilaciones del culto divino y del amor de Dios"⁴⁹. Todo hombre nace impuro, como reconocen los Salmos o el Libro de Job y por ello inclinado al mal⁵⁰. No cabe duda de que el recurso dialéctico de Crescas es un arma de doble filo para su propia argumentación. Parece situarse implícitamente en una concepción que, como veremos, acepta en *Or Hashem* y que, sin embargo, se ve obligado a rechazar argumentalmente en el *Sefer Bittul*. El sentido de esta concepción es el que incorpora San Anselmo a la tradición cristiana. El pecado original es la ausencia de la "justicia debida" que, habiendo sido conferida por Dios a Adán para que la transmitiera junto a la naturaleza, al perderla por el pecado, ya no puede transmitirla. Lo que ahora se propaga con la naturaleza es el *debitum justitiae integrae*. Frente, por ejemplo, al traducianismo de Tertuliano, sostenido

en su concepción de la transmisión del pecado, Anselmo pone el énfasis en que la generación no es causa, sino condición de esta transmisión. Esto es así porque en Adán, el ser personal ha hecho indigente a la naturaleza humana, haciendo por esa misma indigencia pecadores e injustos a personas que genera de sí misma. De este modo, pasa el pecado personal de Adán a todos los que proceden de él naturalmente⁵¹. Anselmo destaca también, en la misma línea de la argumentación de Crescas, la gran diferencia entre el pecado de Adán y el pecado original transmitido a partir de él, la diferencia que media entre pecar por propia voluntad y nacer bajo el signo de ese pecado⁵².

Por último, si el cristianismo ha enfatizado desde la Patrística y a lo largo de toda la teología medieval la idea de la excelencia del alma con respecto al cuerpo, tal como podemos reconocer –aunque Crescas no los cite explícitamente– en Orígenes, Clemente de Alejandría, Agustín o el propio Tomás de Aquino⁵³, por citar a cuatro pilares del pensamiento teológico cristiano, si el alma "coincide con los ángeles en la naturaleza intelectual", ¿por qué ese énfasis cristiano en sumirla en la negatividad de un tormento cuasi material? Siendo como es, sigue Crescas, una entidad cuya tendencia natural es vincularse al intelecto agente, del que procede y de cuya naturaleza participa⁵⁴. En este sentido, es necesario indicar que Crescas incurre en una cierta contradicción con su propio pensamiento, tal como lo formula en *Or Hashem*. Si en este pasaje del *Sefer Bittul* afirma que "el alma, por su naturaleza, aun careciendo de la gracia divina, no puede estar sumida en un tormento que causa dolor ni en un fuego que no se atiza", en *Or Hashem* no rechaza una cierta materialidad susceptible de dolor en el alma del pecador en el momento de la muerte:

No es inverosímil que este dolor conduzca al final a la destrucción y la aniquilación. Tampoco es inverosímil que, debido a que ha sido contaminado por la materialidad, en el momento de la muerte permanezca con él algo de materialidad y el más mínimo rastro de cualidad, por lo que también sufrirá dolor y será confinado a un lugar⁵⁵.

Con respecto al vínculo entre el alma humana y las Inteligencias angélicas, digamos simplemente que Crescas plantea la cuestión de un modo muy genérico, no muy distinto del marco común de comprensión de su significado por el cristianismo. Su posición en el *Sefer Bittul* sobre la naturaleza del alma es similar a la que sostiene en *Or Hashem*: un alma con capacidad para "continuar eternamente por naturaleza"; y que participa o tiene vínculo con

⁴⁵ Tomás de Aquino, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 83, a. 1.

⁴⁶ Crescas, *La inconsistencia* (1.4), p. 117.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* (1.5), 118-119. La afirmación de Santo Tomás la encontramos en la cita anterior, así como también en *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 90, a. 2 y q. 118, a. 1.

⁴⁸ Crescas, *La inconsistencia* (1.6), p. 118.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁵⁰ Sal 51, 5: "Mira, en la culpa nací, pecador me concibió mi madre"; Job 14, 1, 4: "El hombre nacido de mujer, corto de días, harto de inquietudes" "¿Quién sacará pureza de lo impuro? ¡Nadie!".

⁵¹ Anselmo de Canterbury, *De conceptu virginali et originali peccato* 1, 22: "Illud quidem quod trahitur in ipsa origine, vocatur originale; quod potest etiam dici naturale, non quod sit ex essentia naturae, sed quoniam propter ejus corruptionem cum illa assumitur".

⁵² *Ibid.* 2. 23.

⁵³ Así, por ejemplo: Orígenes, *Contra Celso* VI, 63; Clemente de Alejandría, *Stromata* IV, 164, 3-5; San Agustín, *De Civitate Dei* XXI, 10; Tomás de Aquino, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 76 a. 1 ad 5.

⁵⁴ Crescas, *La inconsistencia* (1.7), 119-120.

⁵⁵ Hasdai Crescas, *Light of the Lord. Or Hashem*, trad. Roslyn Weiss (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 348 (IV.9).

“las Inteligencias separadas”⁵⁶, una concepción que conecta con el punto de vista maimonidiano sobre la cuestión, donde la décima de estas Inteligencias, el Intelecto activo, su existencia queda demostrada “por el tránsito de la potencia al acto de nuestro intelecto”⁵⁷.

Sin abandonar el plano del razonamiento lógico de estas cuatro objeciones, conforme al principio económico-correlativo arriba formulado, Crescas presenta una nueva argumentación que considera plenamente evidente⁵⁸. Según la teología cristiana, el precepto de la circuncisión le fue otorgado a Israel como remedio parcial del pecado original, a la espera de la pasión de Cristo. Así, por ejemplo, San Agustín, en *De nuptiis et concupiscentia*, afirma que la circuncisión al octavo día permite una expiación, por “el sacramento del Mediador que tendría que venir en la carne”, ya que por la fe en Cristo, quien vendría en carne mortal por la salvación de la humanidad, merced a su resurrección, “también los justos antiguos eran salvados”⁵⁹. Por su parte, Tomás de Aquino afirma en el sentido anterior, en *Summa Theologiae*: “circunciso autem, pero al ser circuncidado, confirió gracia a cuanto fue un signo de fe en la futura pasión de Cristo”⁶⁰. Pues bien, si un precepto como este fue capaz de mermar en parte el castigo espiritual fruto del pecado original, cuánto más amplia sería la supuesta condonación de la culpa merced a una Ley moral entendida como una totalidad de 613 preceptos. Si esto lo fue para Abraham, aún con mayor razón para el alma de Moisés y de los profetas, a despecho de la enorme injusticia que sería lo contrario⁶¹.

Las afirmaciones de Crescas nos sitúan frente a un ámbito controversial de claras y definidas referencias. En la sesión trigésima de la Disputa de Tortosa (14 de junio de 1413), Jerónimo de Santa Fe, el otrora Yehosúa Halorquí, argumentando en torno a la misión del Mesías, sostendrá que el pecado de Adán no fue perdonado hasta la venida de Cristo, su pasión y muerte, así como que el Mesías Jesús restableció el equilibrio que la creación perdió con el primer pecado. Tras el pecado de Adán, todas las almas de los nacidos, tanto justos como pecadores fueron al infierno. Esto se prolongó hasta que el Mesías vino y los sacó de allí, lo cual permite extraer la conclusión –tal como afirman, dice Jerónimo, “los profetas y sabios”– de que estamos ante una muerte

ánimica, no corporal, que es irreparable. Lo interesante aquí para nosotros viene a continuación. Acto seguido, Jerónimo introduce en su argumentación dos concepciones sobre el perdón del pecado de Adán que él atribuye a “algunos rabís”, a saber, por la circuncisión de Abraham o por la donación de la Ley en el Monte Sinaí:

Hoc encara que algunos de los rrabís han por opinión que el pecado de Adam fue perdonado quando Abraam rrescibió la circuncisión. E pruévalo del testo de Zacharías, c. IX, do dize: “Ecce tu per sanguinem pacti tui emisisti captivos tuos de puteo in quo non sunt aque”. E otros entienden que fue perdonado quando rrescibieron la Ley en el monte de Sinay, que así dize el Talmud: ‘Quando la sierpe [vino] sobre Eva lançó en ella suziedat, pero Israel que estudieron en el monte de Synay tirósse su suziedat, mas las otras gentes que non estudiaron allí non se tiró su suziedat’⁶².

Jerónimo cita el pasaje del profeta Zacarías en el que se afirma que “en cuanto a ti, por la sangre de tu alianza, yo soltaré a tus cautivos de la fosa en la que no hay agua”⁶³, así como los pasajes del Talmud de Babilonia anteriormente citados de los tratados *Yevamot* y *Sanedrín*, que aúnan, respectivamente, ambas perspectivas:

Quando la serpiente vino sobre Eva, la infectó con contaminación moral y esta contaminación permaneció en todos los seres humanos. Cuando el pueblo judío se detuvo en el Monte Sinaí, su contaminación cesó, mientras que, con respecto a los gentiles, que no se detuvieron en el Monte Sinaí, su contaminación nunca cesó⁶⁴.

Como está escrito que Dios dijo a Abraham con respecto al mandato de la circuncisión: “Y en cuanto a ti, guardarás mi pacto, tú y tu descendencia después de ti, por sus generaciones” (Gn 17,9). Y se repitió en el Sinaí para el pueblo judío: “Y al octavo día se circuncidará la carne de su prepucio” (Lev 12,3), y sin embargo se estableció sólo para el pueblo judío y no para los descendientes de Noé⁶⁵.

En este punto, nos resulta muy útil la mención de un pasaje de la crónica hebrea anónima de esta Disputa de Tortosa que relata la intervención de los disputantes judíos en la segunda sesión de la misma (8 de febrero de 1413)⁶⁶. Esta crónica amplía y da consistencia teológica al exiguo e irrelevante testimonio tanto de las actas latinas como de la crónica hispano-aragonesa⁶⁷. El asunto que aborda el pasaje es el de la pecaminosidad de los “dos mil años de

⁵⁶ Crescas, *Light of the Lord*, 278 (III.2). Sobre el vínculo epistemológico-cosmológico en la obra de Crescas, a cuenta del Intelecto agente, véase: Ari Ackerman, *Hasdai Crescas on Cofication, Cosmology and Creation* (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 111-118.

⁵⁷ *Guía de perplejos* II, 4. Maimónides, *Guía de perplejos*, trad. David Gonzalo Maeso (Madrid: Trotta, 2015), 250. Una excelente aproximación a la psicología y epistemología cresquiiana y a su crítica a la posición maimonidiana en el trabajo seminal de Warren Z. Harvey, “Hasdai Crescas’s Critique of the Theory of the Acquired Intellect” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1973), 28-43.

⁵⁸ Crescas, *La inconsistencia*, 121-122 (1.9).

⁵⁹ San Agustín, *De nuptiis et concupiscentia* II 11.24: “Et hoc in illo significabatur expiari circumcissione octavi diei, hoc est sacramento Mediatoris in carne venturi, quia per eandem fidem venturi in carne Christi et morituri pro nobis et tertio die, qui post septimum sabbati fuerat futurus octavus, resurrecturi etiam iusti salvabantur antiqui”.

⁶⁰ Tomás de Aquino, *Summa Theologiae* III, q. 70, a. 4.

⁶¹ Crescas, *La inconsistencia*, 122 (1.9).

⁶² *Actas de la controversia de Tortosa*. Salamanca, Biblioteca General Histórica de la USAL, Ms 2365, fol. 94r.

⁶³ Zac 9, 11.

⁶⁴ TB *Yevamot* 103b.

⁶⁵ TB *Sanedrín* 59a.

⁶⁶ Solomon Z. Halberstam, “Vikkuach Tortosa”, *Jeschurum* 6 (1868): 45-55.

⁶⁷ Una edición reciente en tres tomos de las actas latinas, de la crónica hispano-aragonesa, de la copia de Salomón ibn Verga de la crónica hebrea de Bonastruc y del relato anónimo hebreo en: *La Disputa judeocristiana de Tortosa*, ed. Carlos del Valle (Zaragoza: Institución Fernando el Católico, 2021).

confusión”, del tiempo sin Ley y sin conocimiento donde, sin embargo, hubo hombres justos como Henoc, Matusalén o Noé. La crónica hebrea incorpora un interesante excursus sobre el pecado de Adán:

El primer hombre conoció a su creador y fue un hombre íntegro y sabio, aunque cometió el primer pecado. Por aquel pecado, todos nosotros, hijos de un mismo hombre, nosotros los que descendemos de Adán, incluso los propios justos somos mortales. Adán pecó por la instigación de la serpiente, porque aquella culpa es castigada en el cuerpo y no en el alma, porque las almas no tienen ninguna relación ni ninguna participación, porque el alma del padre y el alma del hijo no tienen en absoluto ninguna participación común, tal como explica RaMBaN⁶⁸.

En último término, esta posición concuerda de pleno con la explicación sobre los vínculos entre el cuerpo y el alma, en relación a la idea de castigo que Crescas defiende, como hemos visto, tanto en el *Sefer Biṭṭul* como en *Or Hashem*⁶⁹. Esta coincidencia nos lleva, paradójicamente, a un aspecto de suma relevancia en el estudio de la concepción cresquiana del pecado original: la aparente contradicción entre las afirmaciones del *La inconsistencia de los dogmas cristianos* y las de *La luz del Señor*⁷⁰. Sostiene Crescas, en el prefacio del *Sefer Biṭṭul*, que “el judío, en cambio, afirma y cree que el castigo espiritual afectó solo al alma del primer hombre y que aquel castigo no pasó a ninguna otra alma fuera de él”⁷¹. Rechaza, pues, la creencia en el pecado original o, mejor dicho, rechaza que el primer pecado sea un “pecado originante” del “pecado original”. Como hemos visto anteriormente, un cierto halo de indeterminación parece desprenderse en algunas aseveraciones del *Sefer Biṭṭul* (recordemos, por ejemplo, la realizada a cuenta de la idea de que “Abraham nació en el pecado, fue concebido en la culpa”). En ese caso concreto, Crescas parece deslizarse hacia una tierra de nadie teológica, un ámbito intermedio y aparentemente cercano a las tesis cristianas, tal vez, más de lo que la intencionalidad polemística de Crescas desearía. Daniel Lasker ofrece una explicación al respecto que nos parece plausible y que invita a la gnoseología preventiva a la hora de extraer conclusiones de las aseveraciones del *Sefer Biṭṭul*. Así, más que una contradicción se trataría de una estrategia lógico-argumentativa condicionada por el

objetivo del texto, proveer de un repositorio de respuestas a los argumentos cristianos⁷².

A ello añadiríamos lo siguiente: siendo el pecado original la clave de bóveda histórico-salvífica que da sentido a la muerte expiatoria de Cristo, y dada la estrategia lógico-argumentativa del *Sefer Biṭṭul*, resulta mucho más difícil demostrar la inconsistencia de la creencia en la redención de Cristo si se prolonga explícitamente la acción del pecado original hasta Moisés y la donación de la Ley en el Monte Sinaí. En este sentido, la idea que recoge Crescas en el capítulo segundo de *La inconsistencia de los dogmas cristianos* de que “los pecados deben curarse con los preceptos”⁷³, conduce a un callejón sin salida dialéctico, ya que resulta insuficiente para rebatir argumentalmente la perspectiva cristiana, que Pablo explicita en la Carta a los Romanos: Adán es la “figura de aquel que debía venir”, un nuevo Adán, cuyo espíritu “te liberó de la ley del pecado y la muerte”⁷⁴. Insuficiente, no por inferior, sino por radicalmente antitética, ya que conduce a rechazar de plano el pecado original todo lo enfáticamente que se pueda, aunque esto suponga contradecir los propios principios metodológicos, esos que Crescas formula en el prefacio de la obra y a los que ya nos referimos más arriba: “si los argumentos y pruebas de los dos grupos son diferentes, pero iguales, de manera que no halles ventaja de uno respecto a otro, el grupo hebreo es el que tienen presunción de verdad, el que tiene la Ley divina”⁷⁵. Si tal es así, ¿qué sentido tiene el énfasis antitético? ¿Por qué no aceptar, simplemente, el pecado originante como transmisible hasta la circuncisión de Abraham o la donación de la Ley?

Ajeno a la radicalidad polemística interreligiosa, en *Or Hashem*, dentro del marco del estudio general de la providencia, Hasdai Crescas se pregunta retóricamente si “hay algo especial, además de la Torá, que es característico de la nación en general, como si recibiera un extra de providencia o no”⁷⁶. La respuesta es que sí, y que, en este sentido, el mandamiento de la circuncisión dado a Abraham, es algo único y diferenciador, “algo de lo que en parte depende la providencia”⁷⁷. Si la liberación de la aniquilación y la destrucción es la inmortalidad eterna, ¿cuál es la relación entre este precepto y la providencia? ¿Por qué afirma el Talmud, se pregunta Crescas, que es necesario incluirlo como liberador de la destrucción, que es recuerdo del castigo, pero no afirma que este precepto tiene como recompensa la inmortalidad?⁷⁸ El argumento de Crescas nos lleva de nuevo al pasaje ya citado anteriormente, correspondiente, también como este, al tratado *Sabat* del Talmud. Cuando Israel estuvo en Sinaí, la contaminación del pecado

⁶⁸ Ibid. (vol. III), XV, 1653. Tal vez no por casualidad, la transcripción de Salomón ibn Verga (1460-1554) en el *Sefer Shebet Yehudá* que recoge parte de esta crónica omite estas cuestiones y se centra en el sentido de los tiempos mesiánicos. Un estudio sobre esta variabilidad en: Jaume Riera Sans, *La crónica en hebreo de la Disputa de Tortosa* (Barcelona: Fundació Salvador Vives Casajuana, 1974), 5-14, 57-68; Jeremy Cohen, “Interreligious Debate and Literary Creativity: Solomon ibn Verga on the Disputation of Tortosa”, *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 20 (2013): 159-181.

⁶⁹ En extenso en Crescas, *Light of the Lord*, 287-293 (III.III. 2-3).

⁷⁰ Para una perspectiva general sobre las contradicciones entre *Or Hashem* y el *Sefer Biṭṭul*, véase la introducción de Daniel Lasker a su traducción *The Refutation*, 11-15. En lo relativo a la diferencias sobre la doctrina del pecado original: Daniel J. Lasker, “Original Sin and its Atonement According to Hasdai Crescas”, *Da’at* 20 (1988): 127-135.

⁷¹ Crescas, *La inconsistencia*, 107 (0.7).

⁷² Lasker, *The Refutation*, 14.

⁷³ Crescas, *La inconsistencia*, 128 (2.6).

⁷⁴ Rom 5, 14; 8, 2.

⁷⁵ Crescas, *La inconsistencia*, 111 (0.18).

⁷⁶ Crescas, *Light of the Lord*, 159 (II.II.6).

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ TB *Sabat* 137b: “Y el que recita la bendición adicional dice: Quien hizo santo al amado desde el vientre, marcó el decreto en su carne, y dio a sus descendientes el sello y el signo de la santa alianza. Por eso, como recompensa por esto, el Dios vivo, nuestra heredad, ordenó librar al amado de nuestra carne de la destrucción, por amor a su pacto que estableció en nuestra carne. Bendito eres Tú, Señor, que estableces la alianza”.

cesó. La explicación de esto es que el pecado de Adán y Eva fue una seria rebelión que introdujo la contaminación en la especie humana generando una atracción profunda hacia la materialidad que propicia la destrucción⁷⁹. Esta mancha cesó cuando la humanidad fue perfeccionada moralmente con la Torá. Abraham se opuso diametralmente a Adán y su circuncisión “puso fin a la contaminación de sus hijos y de los de su casa [...] queda pues probado que este mandamiento en particular es para liberar nuestra carne de la destrucción a la cual fue dispuesta a causa del primer pecado”⁸⁰.

5. Conclusión

La redención del pecado original, tal como la concibe el cristianismo, se presenta a Hasdai Crescas como un ejercicio a todas luces de desmesura espiritual, desproporcionado ilógico, desigual e imposible. Lo que de hecho denuncia el *Sefer Bitṭul* es la irracionalidad de un dogma cristiano que se contradice a sí mismo: bien porque, otorgando a las almas las características de individualidad y calidad a la que nos hemos referido anteriormente, se empeña en subsumirlas en una totalidad que las hace susceptibles de transmitir espiritualmente la mancha de Adán; bien porque, negando la plenitud redentora de la circuncisión de Abraham por su naturaleza humana, también lo hace de la circuncisión de Jesús. Engendrado y no creado, *Deus-homo*, ese signo redentor hubiera hecho innecesarios su sacrificio y muerte⁸¹. Esta raíz de desproporción implica que el precio de la redención se torna un arcano para el ser humano, totalmente dependiente de la gracia, como Agustín –y en su estela el protestantismo– han enfatizado a lo largo de la historia del cristianismo⁸². Es, pues, el redentor el que “tenía que dar algo a cambio de lo que tenía que redimir”⁸³, una idea, pensamos, que Crescas debió leer en Tomás de Aquino:

Para que alguien redima, se necesitan dos cosas: el acto de la redención y el pago del precio. Si uno paga el precio para la redención de una cosa, y ese precio no es suyo, sino de otra persona, no se llama redentor principal; lo es más el que es dueño del precio. Ahora bien, el precio de nuestra redención es la sangre de Cristo, o su vida corporal, que es su sangre (cf. Lev 17,11), entregada por el propio Cristo⁸⁴.

Crescas rechaza el carácter sacrificial de la muerte de Cristo. Su muerte fue consecuencia de la necesidad. Y el reino de la necesidad entra en conflicto con el mundo volitivo de los preceptos y del culto. En su argumentación, el *Sefer Bitṭul* se apoya en la ética aristotélica: “la virtud se refiere a pasiones y acciones,

y mientras las voluntarias son objeto de alabanzas o reproches, las involuntarias lo son de indulgencia y a veces, de compasión”⁸⁵. Concuera con ello lo que sostiene los propios aristotélicos cristianos como Tomás de Aquino, que en *Summa contra Gentiles* afirma que la ley presupone el ejercicio de la racionalidad y la libertad por parte del hombre⁸⁶. Que la muerte de Cristo no fue un acto de Justicia es evidente, como también que fue desproporcionado en virtud de su naturaleza, donde la humanidad se diviniza.

La crítica a la idea del pecado original cristiana finaliza, al igual que en todo su desarrollo, con las implicaciones de un ejercicio de argumentación lógica: los pecados deben curarse con el cumplimiento de los preceptos; la antítesis de la rebelión es la sumisión. Tomás de Aquino aporta todo un repositorio de objeciones a la encarnación de Dios en la *Summa contra Gentiles*, previas a la exposición de su concepción, en las que podemos reconocer un aire de familia con el razonamiento Crescas⁸⁷. En cualquier caso, la radicalidad de Crescas desborda estas razones. Para él, la rebeldía de Adán no puede tener como contrapunto la rebeldía de todo el pueblo elegido (matando a su mismo Dios). No puede ser más absurdo condenar a la humanidad al pecado original para redimirla propiciando el mayor acto de rebeldía imaginable.

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⁷⁹ TB *Sabat* 146a.

⁸⁰ Crescas, *Light of the Lord*, 160 (II.II.6).

⁸¹ Crescas, *La inconsistencia*, 124-125 (2.3).

⁸² San Agustín, *De praedestinatione sanctorum* 6.11: “Gratis ergo consecuta est, quod consecuta est electio: non praecessit eorum aliquid, quod priores darent, et retribuere illis: pro nihilo salvos fecit eos. Ceteris autem qui excaecati sunt, sicut ibi non tacitum est, in retributione factum est. Universae viae Domini misericordia et veritas. Investigabiles sunt autem viae eius. Investigabiles igitur sunt, et misericordia qua gratis liberat, et veritas qua iuste iudicat”.

⁸³ Crescas, *La inconsistencia*, 125 (2.4).

⁸⁴ Tomás de Aquino, *Summa Theologiae* III, q. 48, a. 5.

⁸⁵ Aristóteles, *Ética a Nicómaco* III. 1. 1009b. Crescas, *La inconsistencia*, 126 (2.4): “La muerte del Mesías no fue por cumplimiento de un acto cultural o de un precepto, ya que esto sólo afecta a las cosas voluntarias, según Aristóteles en el primer libro de las *Éticas*”.

⁸⁶ Tomás de Aquino, *Summa contra Gentiles* III. 114. “Cum lex nihil aliud sit quam quaedam ratio et regula operandi, illis solum convenit dari legem qui sui operis rationem cognoscunt. Hoc autem convenit solum rationali creaturae. Soli igitur rationali creaturae fuit conveniens dari legem”.

⁸⁷ Tomás de Aquino, *Summa contra Gentiles* IV. 53: “Quia vero incarnationis fides ab infidelibus stultitia reputatur, secundum illud apostoli, I Cor. 1-21, placuit Deo per stultitiam praedicationis salvos facere credentes; stultum autem videtur aliquid praedicare, non solum quia est impossibile, sed etiam quia est indecens: insistunt infideles ad incarnationis impugnationem, non solum nitentes ostendere esse impossibile quod fides Catholica praedicat, sed etiam incongruum esse, et divinam bonitatem non decree”.

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Hasdai Crescas & Leone Ebreo on Love and Joy

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ENG Abstract. Rabbi Hasdai Crescas' discussion of God's joy (*simḥah*) in his *Light of the Lord*, Book I, Part 3, Chapter 5, had a marked influence on the discussion of God's joy (*la delectazione*) by Rabbi Judah Abrabanel, alias Leone Ebreo, in his *Dialogues of Love*, Dialogue III. Leone, following Crescas, holds that God's joy is active not passive; that it is mentioned in Psalms 104:31; and that it is also mentioned in BT *Ketubot* 8a. Moreover, Leone, like Crescas, cites Genesis 6:6, which attests to God's sadness. Leone's theories concerning God's joy and love reflect his reading of Crescas.

Keywords: Love, Joy, Sadness, Passions, Creation, Levi Gersonides, Joseph Albo.

ES Hasdai Crescas y Leone Ebreo sobre amor y deleite

Resumen. Las disquisiciones del rabino Hasdai Crescas sobre el "deleite de Dios" (*simḥah*) en su *Luz del Señor*, libro I, parte 3, capítulo 5, ejercieron una marcada influencia sobre las reflexiones en torno al "deleite de Dios" (*la delectazione*) del rabino Judá Abrabanel, alias Leone Ebreo, en sus *Diálogos de amor*, diálogo III. Leone, siguiendo a Crescas, sostiene que el "deleite de Dios" es activo, no pasivo, que se menciona en Salmos 104, 31 así como también en BT *Ketubot* 8a. Además, Leone, como Crescas, cita Génesis 6, 6, que da fe de la tristeza de Dios. Las teorías de Leone sobre el deleite y el amor de Dios reflejan su lectura de Crescas.

Palabras clave: Amor, deleite, tristeza, pasiones, creación, Levi Gersónides, Joseph Albo.

Summary: 1. The Joyous God. 2. The Sad God. 3. The Love of the Superior for the Inferior. 4. God as Creator and Lover. 5. Philo and Sophia. 6. Conclusion and Caveat. 7. Bibliography.

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1. The Joyous God

Rabbi Hasdai Crescas (c. 1340-1410/11) begins his discussion of God's joy (*simḥah*) in *Light of the Lord*, Book I, Part 3, Chapter 5, by noting that joy is a passion (*hippa'alut*). Passions are corporeal, and God, who is incorporeal, has no passions. Nonetheless, he continues, the Bible attributes joy to God, as in the verse "Let the Lord rejoice (*yismah*) in His works" (Psalms 104:31). Moreover, he adds, the Rabbis too attribute joy to God, as in the benediction prefaced to the Grace after the Wedding Meal: "Blessed be our God in whose habitation there is joy (*ha-simḥah*)" (BT *Ketubot* 8a). Crescas' text reads as follows:

Since every passion (*hippa'alut*) must be negated of God [...] for it is something corporeal, we should examine one notion we have found attributed to Him in prophecy and in the dicta of our Rabbis of blessed memory, namely, joy (*ha-simḥah*). In the Hagiographa, it says: "Let the Lord rejoice in His works (*yismah*...

be-ma'asav)" (Psalms 104:31). As for the dicta of our Rabbis, they instituted the formula of the benediction: "in whose habitation there is joy" (*she-ha-simḥah bi-m'ono*)" (BT *Ketubot* 8a). This attribution [of joy to God] is found in many Scriptural texts and Rabbinic exegeses [...].

If joy is a passion, how did the Bible and the Rabbis attribute it to God? Crescas explains: God's joy, as opposed to ours, is not a passion but *an action*. God is not passive (*mitpa'el*) but active (*po'el*). He does not suffer joy, but causes it. Crescas puts this as follows:

Now, since it has been demonstrated true beyond any doubt that God is the true Agent (*ha-po'el*) of all existing things intentionally

¹ H. Crescas, *Or Adonai*, ed. S. Fisher (Jerusalem: Sifrei Ramot, 1990), 118; id., *Light of the Lord*, trans. R. Weiss (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 116. In quotations Weiss' translation may sometimes be modified.

and voluntarily, and sustains their existence through the overflowing of His goodness perpetually [...] it follows that in His intentionally and voluntarily causing His goodness and perfection (*ha-shelemut*) to overflow, He necessarily loves the increasing of goodness [...]. Now, love (*ha-ahabah*) is nothing other than pleasure of the will (*'arebut ha-raṣon*), and this is the true joy, as it is said, "Let the Lord rejoice in His works" (Psalms 104:31). This states explicitly that the joy [of God] is in His works, that is, in His causing His goodness to overflow unto them by His sustaining their existence continuously in the most perfect (*shalem*) of ways [...] [O]ur Rabbis of blessed memory said in several places that the Holy One, blessed be He, "desires" [...]. They meant that [...] pleasure and joy for Him consist in His causing the good to overflow².

Crescas' comments here contain three distinct elements that are echoed in the *Dialogues of Love*, Dialogue III, by Rabbi Judah Abrabanel, alias Leone Ebreo (c. 1460-c. 1530): first, God's joy is active not passive; second, it is mentioned in Psalms 104:31; and third, it is mentioned in BT *Ketubot* 8a. Here is the passage in the *Dialogues of Love*:

SOPHIA: If the love (*l'amore*) and joy (*la delectazione*) in intellectual beings are not passions (*passioni*), what are they?

PHILO: They are intellectual activities (*atti intellectuali*) [...] free from natural passion.

SOPHIA: And what are [love and joy] in the divine intellect?

PHILO: Divine love is the inclination of God's most beautiful wisdom toward [...] the universe created by Him [...]. Therefore, David says, "Lord rejoice in His works (*Dilettasi...ne li effetti suoi*)" (Psalms 104:31). For in this union of created with Creator consists [...] the joy (*la delectazione*) of God, relative to the happiness (*la felicità*) of His work (*effetto*) [...]. The ancient Hebrews, when they were rejoicing (*quando avevano diletto*), used to say: "Blessed be He that joy dwells in Him (*che la delectazione abita in lui*)" (BT *Ketubot* 8a)³.

Leone follows Crescas in teaching that God's love, joy, and pleasure are actions and causes, not passions or effects. Like Crescas, he illustrates God's joy by citing Psalms 104:31 and BT *Ketubot* 8a. Note his distinctive translation of Psalms 104:31. Instead of translating *be-ma'asav* as *nelle opera sue* ("in His works"), he translates it: *ne li effetti suoi* ("in His

effects"). God's joy is that of the Cause in His effects. His translation of the nuptial benediction is also distinctive: "Blessed be He that joy dwells *in Him*"; i.e., the joy is not in God's habitation or dwelling place but in God Himself.

The similarities between Leone's discussion of God's joy here in *Dialogues of Love*, Part III, and Crescas' discussion of the subject in *Light of the Lord*, Book I, Part 2, Chapter 5, are very clear.

2. The Sad God

Both Crescas and Leone discuss not only Scripture's attribution of joy to God, but also its attribution of sadness to Him. Crescas mentions God's sadness in the same passage quoted above from *Light of the Lord*, Book I, Part 3, Chapter 5:

Inasmuch as the knowledge of contraries is one [cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, XI, 3, 1061a], if we attribute to [God] sadness (*iṣṣabon*), as it is said "And He was sad at His heart" (Genesis 6:6), "They made sad His holy spirit" (Isaiah 63:10), and "I will be with Him in trouble" (Psalms 91:15), according to the way the Rabbis [homiletically] interpreted this verse [in BT *Ta'anit* 16a, i.e., "I will be with Him in *His* trouble"], then we should also attribute to Him joy (*ha-simḥah*) [...].

[J]oy and sadness (*ha-ēseb*) are contraries, and fall under one genus, namely, the genus of passion (*ha-hippa'alut*) [...]. [J]oy is nothing but the pleasure of the will (*'arebut ha-raṣon*), while sadness is opposition in the will (*hitnaggedut ba-raṣon*), and they are passions of the soul⁴.

Leone writes in the parallel passage in *Dialogues of Love*, Dialogue III:

PHILO: [...] It is not strange that we should say that God *rejoices* in the perfection of His creatures, when we see in Sacred Scripture that because of the universal sinfulness of humans there came the flood, and "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth [...]. And He was sad at His heart" (Genesis 6:5-6) [...]. If, therefore, the wickedness of humans makes God sad (*attrista*) at His heart [...], how much more will their perfection and blessing give Him cause to rejoice! But in truth neither sadness (*la tristeza*) nor joy (*la letizia*) are passions in Him; for [His] joy (*la delectazione*) is the gracious agreement (*grata corrispondenza*) in the perfection (*la perfezione*) of His work (*suo effetto*), and [His] sadness is the privation of this [agreement] on account of [the imperfection of] the work (*l'effetto*)⁵.

Following Crescas, Leone argues that if Scripture attributes sadness to God, one should by the same token attribute joy to Him. Whereas Crescas does not present the argument explicitly as an *a fortiori* one, Leone does. In their references to Sacred Scripture, both Crescas and Leone cite Genesis 6:6, a verse

² Crescas, *Or Adonai*, 120; Crescas, *Light of the Lord*, 117-118. See my work: Harvey, Warren Zev, *Physics and Metaphysics in Hasdai Crescas* (Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1998).

³ Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d'Amore*, ed. D. Giovannozzi (Rome: Laterza, 2008), 358-359; id., *Dialogues of Love*, trans. D. Bacich and R. Pescatori (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2009), 351; see my *Physics and Metaphysics*, 114. Bacich and Pescatori translate *la delectazione* as "pleasure", which is definitely justified. However, I translate it here as "joy" since Leone often uses it as a translation of *simḥah*, e.g., his translations here of Psalms 104:31 and BT *Ketubot* 8a. Miguel Ángel Granada suggested to me that Leone's significant use of the word 'delectazione' may reflect the use of the term in Alfonso de la Torre's *Visión deleitable* (c. 1440).

⁴ Crescas, *Or Adonai*, 118-119; id., *Light of the Lord*, 116-117; see my study: Harvey, *Physics and Metaphysics*, 119-120.

⁵ Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d'Amore*, 358-359; id., *Dialogues of Love*, 351; see my *Physics and Metaphysics*, 114.

which describes God's reaction to the generation of the flood: "And He was sad at His heart."

A less obvious parallel between the texts of Crescas and Leone concerns the term "perfection". When explaining God's joy in the world, Crescas speaks of His causing His "goodness and perfection" to overflow unto His creatures and His sustaining their existence "in the most perfect of ways". Leone similarly speaks here of God's joy in "the perfection of His creatures". It may be inferred from the statements of both philosophers that God's sadness is caused by imperfect human behavior.

3. The Love of the Superior for the Inferior

One of Crescas' most distinctive theological doctrines is that the love of the Creator for His creatures is greater than that of His creatures for Him. Abraham's love for God is called only *ahabah*, that is, "love" (Isaiah 41:8), while God's love for the Patriarchs is called *hesheq*, that is, "passionate love" (Deuteronomy 10:15)⁶. That the love of the superior is greater than that of the inferior follows from Crescas' premises: "The perfect one (*ha-shalem*) [...] loves good and perfection (*ha-shelemut*), and desires it; and in proportion to the perfection [of the lover] will be the love (*ha-ahabah*) and the pleasure in the will (*ha-'arebut ba-ḥefes*)."⁷ This doctrine contradicts the common Platonic and Aristotelian view according to which the love of the inferior for the superior is greater than that of the superior for the inferior⁸.

In the continuation of his discussion of God's joy in *Dialogues of Love*, Dialogue III, Leone broaches the subject of whether God's love for His creatures is greater than His creatures' love for Him:

PHILO: [...] In the love of the superior for the inferior [...] the joy (*la delectazione*) of the superior [...] consists in uniting [...] the less beautiful [or inferior] with itself, giving it beauty or perfection [...]. Not only does the inferior effect (*effetto*) receive an enjoyable perfection (*perfezione delectabile*), but so does its cause, [...] because a beautiful and perfect effect increases the beauty and perfection of its cause and gives it reason to rejoice (*dilettante*) [...]. And since God rejoices (*si dilettata*) in the perfection of His works (*effetti*) and is saddened (*s'attrista*) by their defects (*difetti*), so much the more is it fitting that the created being should rejoice (*dilettare sé*) in the good of its [...] effect (*effetto*) and be sad (*attristarse*) at its doing bad.

SOPHIA: [...] I see how the end of all love in the universe is the joy (*la delectazione*) of the lover in his union with the beloved, whether inferior or superior to him (*sia inferiore o vero superiore*) [...]. If the love of the universe for God is that which leads to its ultimate perfection in union with Him, why did you say [...] that

the love of the Creator for the universe is that which produces this effect (*effetto*) [...]?⁹

Sophia's response to Philo makes it clear that he has left open the question of whether the love of the superior is greater than that of the inferior. He has explained that both the superior and the inferior enjoy their love, but has not indicated whose love is the greater – or the most joyful. But note Sophia's intimation: *sia inferiore o vero superiore*. Is the love of the two lovers equal?

4. God as Creator and Lover

In a passage in *Light of the Lord*, Book II, Part 6, Chapter 1, Crescas explains that God's love, goodness, and perfection are manifest in His creation of the universe:

Since it is known that God, may He be blessed, is the source and fountain of all perfections, and by virtue of His perfection, which is His essence, He loves the good, as may be seen from His actions in bringing into existence the entire universe, sustaining it eternally, and continuously creating it anew (*hiddusho tamid*) [...] it must necessarily be that the love of the good is an essential property of perfection. It follows from this that the greater the perfection [of the lover], the greater will be the love and the pleasure in the desire¹⁰.

In an earlier passage in *Dialogues of Love*, Dialogue III, Leone repeats this view:

SOPHIA: What, therefore, is the meaning of the word 'love' (*amore*) for God?

PHILO: It means the will to benefit (*bonificar*) His creatures and the whole universe, and to increase their perfection [...] God rejoices (*se n'allegra*) to see His creatures increase in perfection through their love of Him [...]. The Psalm says: "The Lord rejoices with the things He has made (*Iddio s'allegra con le cose che fece*)" (Psalms 104:31) [...].

SOPHIA: How can the world be both temporal and eternal at the same time?

PHILO: It is temporal in having had a beginning in time, and eternal because, as many of our theologians hold, it is not to have an end. Supreme power is reflected in its temporal origin [...] [and] infinite kindness (*beneficio*) in its eternal conservation (*l'eterna conservazione*)¹¹.

God's love for the universe is manifest in His eternal creation of it. Leone's opinion on this is identical with Crescas'. In addition, both Crescas and Leone speak of an eternal creation in some sense.

It will be noticed that in this text Leone translates Psalms 104:31 in a very different way from that in the previously quoted passage concerning God's joy. The Hebrew original is: *yismah adonai be-ma'asav* ("Let the Lord rejoice in His works"). In the previously quoted passage, the verse was translated: *Dilettasi il*

⁶ Crescas, *Or Adonai* (I, 3, 5), 121; (II, 6, 1), 242-243; id., *Light of the Lord*, 118, 218-219; see my *Physics and Metaphysics*, 111-113, 123-125.

⁷ Crescas, *Or Adonai* (II, 6, 1), 239; id., *Light of the Lord*, 215; see my *Physics and Metaphysics*, 110, 124.

⁸ See Plato, *Symposium* (200a and seq., 203b; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VII, 7, 1158b; but cf. IX, 7, 1067b-1068a; see my *Physics and Metaphysics*, 108-113.

⁹ Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d'Amore*, 359; id., *Dialogues of Love*, 352; see my *Physics and Metaphysics*, 115-116.

¹⁰ Crescas, *Or Adonai*, 242; id., *Light of the Lord*, p. 218.

¹¹ Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d'Amore*, 222, 227; id., *Dialogues of Love*, 226-231.

Signore ne li effetti suoi ("The Lord delights in His effects"). In this passage, it is translated: *Iddio s'allegro con le cose che fece* ("God rejoices with the things he made").

Everything is different! Is "God rejoices" *dilettasi* or *s'allegro*? Are His "works" His *effetti* or *le cose che fece*? Does God rejoice *in* His works or *with* them?

Is God *il Signore* (= Adonai) or *Iddio* (God)?

I don't know how to explain these blatant differences, but they definitely tell us something or other about the composition of the *Dialogues*. Were different texts written at different times and perhaps in different cities? Did Leone use different editors or – perhaps – different translators? Did he change his mind about the meaning of Psalms 104:31? These questions need to be explored.

5. Philo and Sophia

Philo and Sophia are engaged in a romantic philosophical courtship in which Philo plays the role of the teacher (= the superior), much like that of the teacher in Solomon ibn Gabirol's *Fons Vitae* or like that of the teacher in the same author's Hebrew poem, *Ahabtikha* ("I have loved thee"). The relationship of Philo to Sophia, like that of the teacher to the student in Ibn Gabirol's two works, represents the relationship of God to the universe. As the universe finds its perfection in its joyful union with its Creator, so Sophia may find her perfection in her joyful union with Philo. However, just as it is God's love of the universe that awakens the universe's love of God, so it is Philo's love of Sophia that must awaken her love for him.

Whose love is greater, God's love for the universe or the universe's love for God? Philo's love for Sophia or her love for him? Or perhaps in true love there is always equality between the two lovers, *sia inferiore o vero superiore* (as Sophia wisely intimated). There is no answer to this question in Leone's three *dialoghi d'amore*. Leone promised a fourth dialogue, which was either lost or never written. Perhaps it held the answer to our question¹².

Did Leone agree with Crescas – and Philo's love for Sophia was, according to him, greater than Sophia's love for Philo? Or did he agree with Plato and Aristotle, and Sophia's love for Philo was, according to him, greater than Philo's love for her? Or did he perchance agree with Sophia, and believe that in true love the passion of both lovers is always equal?

6. Conclusion and Caveat

Crescas' direct literary influence on Leone is manifest. Doubtless, a more extensive examination of Leone's debt to Crescas is a desideratum. However, a caveat is in order.

Crescas' discussions of God's joy and love were influenced by Gersonides' discussions on the subject in his *Wars of the Lord*, Book I, Chapter 13¹³, and

Book V, Part 3, Chapter 12;¹⁴ in his *Commentary on I Chronicles* 16:27;¹⁵ and in his lessons at the end of his *Commentary on I Chronicles*¹⁶. Moreover, both Gersonides and Crescas influenced Joseph Albo's discussion of God's joy and love in his *Book of Principles*, Book II, Chapter 15¹⁷. Leone without doubt read all three of these authors. It is not always easy to recognize when he is indebted to Crescas, and when he is indebted to Gersonides or Albo.

In this regard, it may be observed that the reference to Psalms 104:31 does not appear in Gersonides' discussions but does appear in Albo's; the reference to BT *Ketubot* 8a appears in Gersonides' discussions (both in the *Wars* in in the *Commentary on I Chronicles*) and in Albo's; the reference to Genesis 6:6 does not appear in Gersonides' discussions but does appear in Albo's; the critical distinction between love and joy as "passions" and as "actions" does not appear either in Gersonides' discussions or in Albo's. It does, however, appear in Spinoza's *Ethics*, Part III, Propositions 57-59, and Part V, Propositions 33-35¹⁸. Spinoza read both Crescas and Leone.

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¹² In several studies, D. Harari raised provocative questions about "the lost fourth dialogue". See, e.g., his "Some Lost Writings of Judah Abrabanel Abravanel (1465?-1535?) Found in the Works of Giordano Bruno (1548-1600)", *Shofar* 10 (1992): 62-89.

¹³ Gersonides, *Milhamot Adonai, Books I-IV*, ed. O. Elior (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 2018), 206-207; id., *Wars of the Lord*, trans. S. Feldman. 3 vols (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1984-1999), vol. I, 223-225.

¹⁴ Gersonides, *Milhamot Adonai, Book V, Parts 2-3, and Book VI*, ed. O. Elior (Beer Sheva: Ben-Gurion University Press, 2021), 144-145; id., *Wars of the Lord*, vol. III, 173-174.

¹⁵ Gersonides, *Be'ur on Chronicles*, ed. M. Mortera (Cracow: Fischer, 1888), 51.

¹⁶ Ibid., 62.

¹⁷ Josef Albo, *Sefer ha-ikkarim: Book of Principles*, ed. and trans. I. Husik. 4 vols (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1946), vol. II, 90-92.

¹⁸ Baruch Spinoza, *Opera*, ed. G. Gebhardt. 4 vols. (Heidelberg: Winter, 1925), vol. II, 186-189, 300-302.