


Infinity, Divine Transcendence and Immanence in *Or Hashem*

Alexandre Leone
Universidade de São Paulo ✉ 

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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 ונבדל 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 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 univocality 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.