

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 Avicena 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, Avicena, 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.

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

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. Ḥasdaï Qresqas le-al-Ghazali”, in N. Ilan (ed.), *Ha-Islam we-’olamot ha-she-zurim bo. Qoveš 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.

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, “Hasdaï 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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