

אור השם

Light of the Lord (Or Hashem)

Roslyn Weiss is the Clara H. Stewardson Professor of Philosophy at Lehigh University in Bethlehem, PA. She holds a doctorate in philosophy from Columbia University and an MA in Jewish Studies from the Baltimore Hebrew University. She has published four books on Plato and 50 scholarly articles on mainly Greek and Jewish philosophy.

אור השם

חסדאי קרשקש

Light of the Lord
(Or Hashem)

Hasdai Crescas

TRANSLATED WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES BY
Roslyn Weiss

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Great Clarendon Street, Oxford, OX2 6DP,
United Kingdom

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.
It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship,
and education by publishing worldwide. Oxford is a registered trade mark of
Oxford University Press in the UK and in certain other countries

© Roslyn Weiss 2018

The moral rights of the author have been asserted

First published 2018

First published in paperback 2020

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in
a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the
prior permission in writing of Oxford University Press, or as expressly permitted
by law, by licence or under terms agreed with the appropriate reprographics
rights organization. Enquiries concerning reproduction outside the scope of the
above should be sent to the Rights Department, Oxford University Press, at the
address above

You must not circulate this work in any other form
and you must impose this same condition on any acquirer

Published in the United States of America by Oxford University Press
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, United States of America

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Data available

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Data available

ISBN 978-0-19-872489-6 (Hbk.)

ISBN 978-0-19-289405-2 (Pbk.)

Links to third party websites are provided by Oxford in good faith and
for information only. Oxford disclaims any responsibility for the materials
contained in any third party website referenced in this work.

Table of Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	vii
Translator's Introduction	1
Crescas's Life and Works	4
Structure of <i>Light of the Lord</i>	6
Physics	7
Providence and Choice	10
About the Translation	14
Introduction	16
Preface	26
Book I	30
Part I	31
Part II	70
Part III	97
Book II	120
Part I	120
Part II	142
Part III	166
Part IV	169
Part V	188
Part VI	205
Book III: Division A	242
Part I	243
Part II	278
Part III	282
Part IV	293
Part V	305
Part VI	309
Part VII	313
Part VIII	315
Book III: Division B	321
Part I	321
Part II	325
Part III	330

vi TABLE OF CONTENTS

Book IV	331
Issue I	331
Issue II	334
Issue III	337
Issue IV	340
Issue V	342
Issue VI	345
Issue VII	347
Issue VIII	347
Issue IX	347
Issue X	349
Issue XI	352
Issue XII	352
Issue XIII	354
<i>Bibliography</i>	355
<i>Citations Index</i>	361
<i>Subjects and Names Index</i>	369

Acknowledgments

A full year of concerted and undistracted effort was required to complete the first draft of this translation. For affording me a year-long sabbatical, I am indebted to my home institution, Lehigh University. I thank the National Endowment for the Humanities for its financial support, without which this project could never have been completed. Several colleagues and scholars have been most helpful to me. First and foremost—and in a category by himself—is Dr Leonard Levin, who conscientiously and skillfully reviewed the entire manuscript several times, flagging errors, offering suggestions for improvement, challenging me on substantive issues which we then thrashed out together, and finding creative ways to make my task of translation proceed more efficiently. I am indebted as well to Éric Smilevitch's masterful translation of *Light of the Lord* into French. Among those who read sections of the manuscript and offered useful suggestions are Dr Warren Zev Harvey, Dr Charles Manekin, and Dr Ari Ackerman. Dr Daniel Lasker is the scholar to whom I turned when I needed help with the most recalcitrant passages. I am grateful to Ms Leslie Rubin for her skilled preparation of the index, and to Sylvie Jaffrey for her expert copyediting. I wish to acknowledge the encouragement and support of my colleagues in the Lehigh University Philosophy Department, who worked through several sections of *Light of the Lord* with me at our weekly faculty seminar in Spring 2017. Two close friends provided valued criticisms and suggestions: Dr Alan Udoff and Janette Rapp. Finally, I wish to express my appreciation to the many other colleagues and scholars who generously offered their time and assistance, and to my family, for whom I am always grateful.

Translator's Introduction

The beginning of wisdom is fear of the Lord. (Ps. 111: 10)

Ḥasdai Crescas (c.1340–c.1410) was a man of simple piety—but by no means a simple man. Suffused with an ardent and unwavering love for God and for the Jewish people, Crescas produced, out of the depths of his love, the philosophic masterpiece, *Light of the Lord* (אור השם; *Or Hashem*), a work of undisputed sophistication, monumental in scope and ambitious in conception and execution. Those acquainted with this work agree that it rivals the crown jewel of medieval Jewish thought, Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*—“rivals” it, indeed, in two senses: not only does it measure up to the *Guide* in range, brilliance, profundity, thoroughness, erudition, and certainly in originality and economy of expression, but it also combats the *Guide's* pervasive Aristotelianism. Because in his view Aristotelian physics and metaphysics deform and distort Judaism, Crescas dares to question the adequacy of the *Guide's* arguments and to challenge its unflinching determination to place God beyond human conception and understanding and to remove from Him all anthropomorphism and anthropopathism. If there is a single driving aim of *Light of the Lord*, it is to restore to Jewish thought its Jewish soul. Without sacrificing intellectual honesty or rigor, it champions and defends traditional religious belief and worship. Crescas approaches the thorniest issues in the philosophy of religion—the origin of the universe, the nature of God, the relationship between God and the world, the proper approach to Scripture and its commandments, human choice, divine providence, prophecy, the soul, and immortality—not only with a keen and crisp intellect but with a unique religious sensibility, duly recognizing the indispensability of the passional virtues of piety, reverence, and love to the perfected human life.

Crescas is one of the great systematic philosophers: all lines of thought in *Light of the Lord* are interconnected, converging on the single unifying theme of love. Love is at the heart of every issue: creation, infinity of space and time, providence, free will, prophecy, the end of the Torah and of human existence, and the soul's immortality. Anything that cannot be subsumed under love, anything that lies outside or obstructs this central theme, is rejected. Of the three components of Torah—deeds, beliefs, and love and fear of God—it is the last, Crescas asserts, which, though smallest in quantity, is greatest in importance (*Light of the Lord*, II. vi. 1).

It is perhaps because of the centrality of love to *Light of the Lord* that the biblical figure most prominent in it is not Moses, the man of intellect who at first resists God's call, but Abraham, the man of absolute devotion who faithfully follows God

wherever He leads, the only man who is called in the Bible “the one who loves Me” (Isa. 41: 18). Abraham is superior even to Adam, for Adam, despite his disposition to perfection, nevertheless succumbed to sin, whereas Abraham, despite having been raised among idol worshipers, was steadfast in his righteousness. It was therefore Abraham—and not Adam—who was deemed worthy to be the “father of a multitude of nations” (Gen. 17: 4), the “rock from which we were hewn” (Isa. 51: 1). The biblical incident recalled most frequently in *Light of the Lord* is the Binding of Isaac: its effect on Abraham was not a diminishment but rather a deepening of his love for God (II. i. 1).

The love that is central to Crescas’s understanding of God, man, and their relationship displaces intellect as the essential link between the human and the divine. Not only, Crescas believes, is intellect unable to sustain a religious connection between human being and God; it cannot even adequately support the triad of root-principles (שרשים; *shorashim*) critical to monotheistic faith—God’s existence, unity, and incorporeality. Philosophical speculation relies necessarily on uncertain and undemonstrated premises, so that philosophical arguments, in Crescas’s view, inevitably frequently beg the question. Only the Torah, the supreme gift of God’s love and the premier expression of His will to benefaction, can establish the foundations of faith. The Torah is not to be explained away—as a foil for deeper philosophical understanding (as it may well be in Maimonides’ *Guide*); it is, on the contrary, the very font of understanding.

From Crescas’s perspective, perhaps the most egregious sin committed by Greek philosophy is its positing of a God who has no care for human beings, who is at best an object for human intellectual apprehension. Crescas replaces the self-intellecting intellect which is Aristotle’s God with a God who is engaged in infinite creation out of boundless goodness and love. Only the divine *essence*, according to Crescas, is beyond all natural human apprehension; God’s attributes, however, may be to some degree accessible. They accompany the divine essence as rays of light do their source: neither essence nor attributes are conceivable apart from the other. What binds essence and attributes together is the unifying principle of God’s goodness. Moreover, since the divine attributes share with the corresponding human attributes a common definition—albeit differing from them in their infinitude—one may speak of a two-way relationship between God and His human creation. Indeed, *Light of the Lord* affirms God’s bond with the world He created and with all the creatures in it as an expression of His nature as a being of infinite passionate love (השקה; *hesheq*) and benefaction. Moreover, in Crescas’s view, although there is no individual human being to whom God is blind or indifferent, God has a special connection with the Jewish people to whom He gave His Torah.

For Crescas, unlike for Maimonides, intellect is neither necessary nor sufficient for attachment to God: not necessary, since one becomes attached to God through observance of the commandments rather than through contemplation; and not sufficient, since philosophers need not—and generally do not—love God at all. For Crescas, the providence, prophecy, and immortality that for Maimonides are consequent upon the intellect do not require intellectual perfection; it suffices that one love and revere God. In Crescas’s view the commandments make it possible for anyone—both those who are more perfect and those who are less so—to love God (IIIB. i. 1);

for Maimonides, since love of God and closeness to Him require a cultivated intellect, few people qualify.

In building his system, Crescas has many fascinating—indeed, groundbreaking—things to say about physics and metaphysics, the matters that occupied, and pre-occupied, his predecessors. It is certainly legitimate, then, to mine *Light of the Lord* for the positions Crescas takes regarding nature and beyond. Yet, arguably, in offering an alternative to Aristotelian philosophy, Crescas's concern is not in the first instance to revolutionize these fields—even if his thought is nothing short of revolutionary—but rather to weaken Aristotle's iron hold on the thinking person.¹ Recognizing Maimonides as a tragic victim of the seductiveness of Aristotelian thought, Crescas was alarmed by the already devastating influence Maimonides had on Jewish intellectuals who abandoned their Judaism with the *Guide* as their warrant. Even if Maimonides himself was able to remain steadfast in his faith, refusing (at least openly) to side with Aristotle against the Torah when the two were in conflict, what assurance was there that others, including his closest disciples, would do so? Although Crescas accused Maimonides' students of distorting their teacher's claims, it is at least possible that they reached their heterodox views not by perverting but by following to their logical conclusion the “astonishing things” (דברים מתמיהין; *devarim matmihin*) (as Crescas calls them in the Introduction to *Light of the Lord*) their master had said.

For Crescas, one thing is certain: God is the author of nature; all existence and all existents owe their being to Him, and everything that exists is thus utterly dependent on Him. The precise way in which God creates or emanates is ultimately of only secondary importance to Crescas. Even an anteriorly eternal world can be accommodated, so long as it is understood that God spent all of anteriorly eternal time bringing existents into being out of nothingness. Indeed, an anteriorly eternal world is compatible for Crescas, unlike for Maimonides, with Torah and miracles. For Crescas, since even an eternal universe would necessarily be a product of divine

¹ Harvey (1998c: 3–5) takes issue with Wolfson (1929: 114) concerning the extent to which Crescas took himself to be advancing new views in physics as opposed to merely dismantling the Aristotelian edifice to which Maimonides was, in Crescas's view, unduly attracted. Wolfson contends that Crescas “did not mean to be anything but negative and destructive in his treatment of the physical problems of Aristotle. All he wished to accomplish was to undermine the principles upon which were based the Aristotelian proofs for the existence of God. . . . Still, within this destructive criticism and within these arguments which are only *ad hominem*, we may discern certain positive tendencies in the direction of the early Greek philosophers the revival of whose views is the common characteristic of all those who long after Crescas struggled to emancipate themselves from the thralldom of Aristotle.” What is in dispute is clearly not whether in fact Crescas made any constructive contribution to physics—Wolfson no doubt agrees with Harvey (1998c: 3) that “Crescas' discussions of physics and metaphysics are more than only destructive” and that “he proposes new and original concepts in place of those he rejects.” Rather, the disagreement concerns Crescas's conception of his project. Harvey's defense of the claim that Crescas “saw himself” (p. 5) as venturing beyond the destructive into the constructive relies in part on Crescas's remark at the start of his critique in I. ii. 1 of Aristotle's arguments for the nonexistence of empty space: “we have deemed it fit to reply and to expose the falsity of those arguments, for there is in this no small benefit for this science” (pp. 4–5). Note, however, that what Crescas touts here as a valuable contribution to physics is precisely his discrediting of Aristotelian views.

goodness, such wondrous manifestations of God's creative love as these are surely to be expected to occur in it.²

The enterprise of ascertaining Crescas's position on a whole host of issues—notoriously, the free will question, but others as well, including what can be known of God—is extremely fraught, as there are many twists and turns along the way. Perhaps the virtue most needed for studying Crescas is patience: it can often seem that he has pronounced definitively on a question, when, in fact, the second shoe has yet to drop. Sometimes that shoe never drops. Yet even when we cannot be sure where Crescas stands, we need never be at a loss as to what he stands for.

Crescas's Life and Works

Ḥasdai Crescas was born in or around 1340, in Barcelona, Spain. He is descended from a long line of Torah scholars and was a student of the great Talmudist, R. Nissim ben Reuben Gerondi (Ran). He counted among his friends the renowned R. Isaac ben Sheshet (Ribash) and R. Simeon ben Tzemaḥ Duran (Rashbatz), and among his students the esteemed R. Joseph Albo. Crescas relied upon his students as colleagues and acknowledges in *Light of the Lord* their help in composing it.

In the first period of his life, Crescas lived relatively peacefully in Barcelona. He was a student at the local yeshiva, which was headed by R. Nissim, where, in addition to the standard curriculum of Bible and Talmud, Crescas also studied Kabbalah, science, and philosophy. In his twenties, Crescas was a merchant and communal leader and, following the death of R. Nissim, Crescas and his friend Ribash became the most prominent authorities on matters of Jewish law and practice, not only in Aragon, but possibly in of all Spain.

In 1367, Crescas was falsely accused and imprisoned (along with Ribash and Ran and other prominent members of the Jewish community)—though they were soon released. In 1387, Pedro IV of Aragon died, and his son became king. The new king, Joan I of Aragon, was, along with his French queen, Violant de Bar, a patron of the sciences and arts; and their palace in Saragossa, the capital of the Crown of Aragon, became a cultural and scientific center. In 1389 Crescas left Barcelona for Saragossa, and a year later was appointed by the royal couple chief judge of the Jews of Aragon. In 1391, while Crescas resided in Saragossa, the Jews of Barcelona fell victim to horrific pogroms. The massacres began in Castilla, but spilled over into Aragon. The king and queen tried to save the Jews and to prevent the pogrom, but they were successful only in Saragossa. Thousands of Jews were killed and, within a short time, about one hundred fifty thousand Jews—almost half the Jews of Spain—were Christian. The major Jewish communities in Barcelona, Valencia, and Gerona vanished, and with them the yeshiva in Barcelona.

Following the slaughter, Crescas was faced with a Spanish Jewish community in serious danger of disintegration. With the help of the royal palace, he worked to revive the Jewish communities of Barcelona and Valencia. Until his death late in 1410

² Crescas entertains the possibility of an infinite succession of worlds (see IIIA. i. 5 and IV. i), and suggests at more than one point that each successive world improves upon the preceding one.

or in 1411 (or possibly even in 1412), Crescas remained the spiritual head of Spanish Jewry, although it is likely that his public activity diminished during the last decade of his life. He continued to teach Torah, Talmud, science, and philosophy, and to write—it was during his last years that he wrote *Light of the Lord*—and he strove to inspire new leaders to care for the Jewish people after his death.

The terrible turn of events of 1391 undoubtedly influenced the path of Crescas's literary career. Besides *Light of the Lord*, which was Crescas's last work, he wrote several others. His first known work was an epistle to the Jewish community of Avignon chronicling the slaughter of 1391. (This work appears as an appendix in M. Wiener's 1855 edition of ibn Verga's *Shevet Yehudah* [*Tribe of Judah*].) In this letter Crescas records the course of the destruction, as it passed from one Jewish community to another. In each community, as he recounts, nearly all either perished—occasionally he provides the number of dead—whether at the hands of the marauders or at their own hands (as many killed themselves and some killed their families as well), or felt constrained to convert to Christianity, leaving in some cases no Jews at all and in others very few. He singles out among the dead the great Torah scholars of that generation as well as his son, an “unblemished lamb,” yet another sacrificial Isaac demanded by God. For Crescas, the devastating loss he suffered reprised the trial of Abraham, and, just as Abraham's faith was reinvigorated as a result of his most excruciatingly painful trial, so, too, was Crescas's as a result of his.

Thus unshaken in his faith, Crescas continued to write. In 1397–8 he composed a treatise, *Refutation of the Principles of the Christians* (*Bittul Iqqarei ha-Notzerim*), spurred no doubt by the Christians' smug assertion of their faith's superiority to Judaism and by the Church's unrelenting efforts to convert the recalcitrant Jew. In this work Crescas sought to discredit, by way of reasoned argument, ten principles of Christianity—original sin, redemption, the Trinity, incarnation, the virgin birth, transubstantiation, baptism, the messiahship of Jesus, the New Testament, and demons—and thereby to challenge the Christian claim to superiority. (This text has survived only in R. Joseph ibn Shem Tov's Hebrew translation from what was probably the original Catalan.) Another work, *Sermon on the Passover* (*Derashat ha-Pesah* or *Maamar Or le-Arba'ah 'Asar*), is likely Crescas's as well. It contends that will is irrelevant to belief and impotent in the face of miracles. *Light of the Lord*, which amplified and modified some of the ideas set forth in the *Sermon*, was surely motivated by Crescas's felt need to shore up a decimated Jewish community. His intention was to produce a work that would provide a creditable alternative to the two Maimonidean works he regarded as deeply problematic, the *Mishneh Torah* and the *Guide of the Perplexed*. Unfortunately, the second volume (to be called *Lamp of the Commandment*) of the two-volume work he hoped to write in an effort to set the record straight on both Jewish law and Jewish belief, was never written (the two-volume work was to be called *Lamp of the Lord*). Crescas was able to produce no more than the single volume, *Light of the Lord*, his challenge to the *Guide*.

Crescas's bold philosophy had fewer adherents than it should have. Later thinkers tended either to toe the Aristotelian line or to return to a less philosophically inflected Jewish traditionalism. In addition, history was not kind to Crescas: Spanish Jewry was shattered by the 1391 pogrom and by further persecutions at the start of the next century. Nevertheless, *Light of the Lord* continues to be known and studied.

Moreover, Crescas's philosophical views—particularly those on the infinite and on free will—influenced two major later thinkers, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, who quotes Crescas extensively, and Spinoza, whose views on freedom, necessity, and love, as well as on extension and infinity, bear the Crescasian stamp. Spinoza refers to R. Ḥasdai explicitly in his Epistle 12 to Ludwig Meyer (April 20, 1663), where he paraphrases Crescas's version of the cosmological argument for God's existence.

Structure of *Light of the Lord*

The aims of *Light of the Lord* are reflected in its structure. Following, first, the Introduction, in which Crescas explains why he set out to write this work and why he thought it necessary to challenge Maimonides (“the Rabbi”) despite his reluctance to do so, and, next, the Preface in which he argues—against Maimonides—that belief in God's existence is not a commandment but is rather the foundation of all commandments, he proceeds to disabuse the reader of the idea that Aristotle and his Jewish followers are the place to turn for a demonstration of the root-principles of monotheism: God's existence, unity, and incorporeality. The first order of business, then, is to challenge the Aristotelian underpinnings of Maimonidean thought by thoroughly explaining the relevant Aristotelian propositions and the Maimonidean arguments based on them, and then proceeding to undercut them by exposing the extent to which they are flawed or inadequate. Book I of *Light of the Lord* is dedicated to these two projects, plus a third: to set the record straight on the foundations of Jewish monotheism, that is, on God's existence, unity, and incorporeality, both as the Torah and Jewish tradition teach and as proper reasoning tends to confirm. Only once Aristotle is stripped of his absolute authority—and only once physics (and the metaphysics to which it gives rise) is not seen as the best (and certainly not as the only) grounds for knowledge about God and the origin of the universe³—can Crescas move on to the central doctrines of Judaism.

In presenting Judaism's essential beliefs, Crescas distinguishes between, on the one hand, cornerstones (פְּנִיּוֹת; *pinnot*), to which he devotes Book II, and, on the other, beliefs the denial of which amounts to heresy, to which he devotes Book III. Crescas's innovative way of distinguishing between the two is in terms of whether or not the belief is a necessary condition for the existence of the Torah—only if it does it qualify as a cornerstone—rather than in terms of levels of importance. By drawing the distinction as he does, Crescas constructs a logical hierarchy. Just as he begins with an explication of the root-principles of all monotheism—indeed, these principles apply even to the belief in an Aristotelian unmoved mover or first cause—recognizing that they are a necessary preparation for the beliefs that ground the specifically Jewish theism which understands God as a being who loves, so he proceeds to list the beliefs without which there could be no Torah—that is, beliefs that make Torah possible—before turning to beliefs found in the Torah.

³ See Book IV Issue X: “But none of this [viz. the account of creation and the account of the Chariot] can be apprehended through metaphysics, for most of what is established there is extremely weak, as was established earlier.”

The six cornerstones are: God's knowledge of all existents, His providence, and His power; prophecy, choice, and end—that is, the final end of the Torah. The eight obligatory true beliefs discussed in IIIA are: creation, immortality of the soul, reward and punishment, resurrection, the superiority of Moses' prophecy, the eternity of the Torah, the reliability of the *Urim* and *Tummim* when consulted by the high priest, and the coming of the Messiah. Book IIIB presents three obligatory beliefs derived from specific commandments. They are: (1) that God is responsive to prayer and blesses the people via the priestly blessing; (2) that God welcomes the penitent; and (3) that God seeks to perfect people through the service He requires, particularly during specific seasons of the year: Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and the three pilgrimage festivals. It is striking that, whereas providence and choice (i.e. freedom to choose) are counted among the cornerstones, reward and punishment are placed in the category of obligatory beliefs. In other words, in Crescas's view, the Torah could not exist without providence and choice—but it could without reward and punishment. The significance of this difference will be addressed in the section "Providence and Choice."

Light of the Lord concludes with Book IV, in which Crescas considers thirteen issues whose true resolution is not definitively established in the Torah. He presents the arguments for and against each side and contends that reason or the rabbinic tradition tilts the balance to one side rather than the other. These are: (1) whether the universe is posteriorly eternal; (2) whether another universe or many other universes might exist; (3) whether the spheres are living and rational; (4) whether the movements of the celestial bodies affect and direct the course of human affairs; (5) whether amulets and incantations affect the acts of people; (6) whether there are demons; (7) whether a human soul transmigrates, which is what one sect of Sages calls *gilgul* (גלגול); (8) whether the soul of a child who has not yet begun his education is immortal; (9) Paradise⁴ and Gehenna; (10) whether "the account of creation" (מעשה בראשית; *ma'aseh bereishit*) refers to physics and "the account of the Chariot" (מעשה מרכבה; *ma'aseh merkavah*) to metaphysics, as some of the sages of our nation have held; (11) whether or not the intellect, the intellecter, and the intellected are one thing; (12) whether there is a separate prime mover; (13) whether it is impossible to apprehend the truth of God's essence.

Physics

In challenging widely accepted Aristotelian views of physics, Crescas offers alternatives to them. These Crescasian ideas, ideas that have influenced later philosophers and have indeed laid the foundations for science's modern turn, have come down to us as his settled views. It is likely, however, that Crescas proposed these views in the spirit of a defense attorney's attempt to plant reasonable doubt by offering an alternate theory of the crime—in Crescas's case, a more plausible one.

Since for Crescas the only way to know that God exists, that God is one, and that God is incorporeal is to look to the Torah and the rabbinic tradition—philosophic

⁴ Or, Garden of Eden.

proof can do no more than incline one in a particular direction—his allegiance or commitment to any particular set of beliefs about time, space, motion, and infinity as foundations for these root-principles can be only half-hearted. Indeed, from his perspective, no grounding in physics can reliably produce the truth concerning the fundamentals of theology. Whereas philosophical argument can support or confirm what the Torah has taught, and whereas proper reasoning will never conflict with the tradition's instruction, these cannot ultimately and definitively establish any of the root-principles.⁵ In other words, whereas Crescas does not discredit philosophical inquiry, what he doubts is its ability to achieve the truth on its own. As Crescas says (at the close of I. ii): “And what this condition of confusion teaches is that that which provides the truth with respect to these theses has not to this day been fully grasped by recourse to the philosophers. Indeed, the only thing that illuminates all of these deep difficulties is the Torah”; and (in his introductory description in Book I to what will be its Part III): “There is no way to grasp these root-principles perfectly other than via prophecy”; see also (in I. iii. 6): “Only the Torah and the tradition furnish complete truth”; and the parable with which Book I concludes: although Abraham is inclined by way of speculation to the truth, only the light of God is ultimately decisive for him.

⁵ Harvey (1988c: 84–92) contends that there is only one proof—the proof Crescas discusses at I. iii. 2 and that Harvey calls the metaphysical proof of God—which Crescas regards as successful with respect to establishing the existence of God. (See, too, Urbach (1961 116, 140, 147)). Yet Crescas seems to insist that no philosophic proof can establish on its own any of the root-principles. And indeed, despite Crescas's hyperbolic pronouncement in connection with this argument that God's existence “has thus been proved beyond a doubt,” and his unequivocal assertion at the argument's conclusion that “it [namely, the determiner of existence over nonexistence] is God,” there remain several grounds for doubting the argument's unique sufficiency in Crescas's estimation. First, there is its hypothetical nature. To be sure, *if* all existents are effects, then all existents have (in respect of themselves) possible existence—in which case they require a cause to determine their existence over their nonexistence. But how would it be established that all existents (or even existence as a whole) are effects? The argument's soundness is not assured; it is valid at best. Second, until it is proved that there is but a single cause that is not an effect, it certainly may not be assumed that we have arrived at God as the determiner—and Crescas concedes that we have not as yet proved that there is one God. Moreover, if there is more than one God, there would be something else besides [the first] God that is not an effect, in which case the very foundation of the argument is undermined. Third, Crescas uses expressions such as “beyond doubt” quite liberally, even when presenting a view with which he disagrees. Fourth, Harvey's claim that for Crescas it is the “totality” of effects that requires a cause seems to play no part in the argument: Crescas states that what is needed is a determiner to determine “their”—that is, the many effects'—existence over their nonexistence. (We may note that Spinoza in his paraphrase of this argument in Epistle 12 to Ludwig Meyer (20 April 1663), makes no mention of “totality.” And Crescas uses the expression “totality of existents” elsewhere—see e.g. II. i. 4, where he addresses the third general difficulty—meaning by it nothing more than all existents.) Fifth, Crescas's saying, “even if we concede (כשנודה; *keshenodeh*) the existence of a first cause for the effects that follow,” suggests that the conclusion is less than firmly established. Finally, there is no attention drawn by Crescas to this proof's being somehow special, different from the other proofs by which he confirms by reason what the Torah has taught. Crescas's more favorable assessment of this version of the argument may be attributed to the specific advantage he thinks it has over others: it does not require, as, for example, Maimonides' argument does, a finite number of causes. Herein lies the superiority of this argument—though not its adequacy. For Crescas, this argument, like all philosophical arguments, can do no more than supplement and confirm what is known with certainty only via the Torah and the rabbinic tradition, namely, that the one God is the cause of everything, and everything is dependent on Him.

We can expect, then—and we in fact get—a certain degree of circumspection on Crescas's part with respect to his innovations in physics. That said, Crescas must be credited with introducing a series of new perspectives that altered the character of physical theory once and for all. Crescas frees place and time from their connection to corporeal substances: place for him is an infinite, empty, three-dimensional expanse, and infinite time a (mostly) psychological phenomenon requiring not actual motion but only its conception: insofar as time applies to both motion and rest, and insofar as rest is the privation of motion, time as it applies to rest may well require the notion of motion—but that and nothing more. Furthermore, Crescas can see no grounds for withholding actual infinitude from place and time. Whereas Aristotle's universe is a sphere, with the earth at the center surrounded by a series of concentric circles or spheres the final one of which marks the world's limit, Crescas can entertain the idea of an expansive universe with no boundaries, no end or limit, an infinite magnitude. Moreover, even if, as is likely, the world we inhabit is in fact finite and closed, nevertheless, for Crescas, the empty space in which it resides is infinite. This emptiness is not pure absence, but is rather an expansiveness whose dimensionality enables it to contain the world and its fullness. Furthermore, in Crescas's view there is no reason to exclude the possibility that this endless expanse harbors many, perhaps an infinite number of, worlds. For Crescas, to limit God's creation is to limit God.

Crescas also returns to the world its unity, its undisturbed continuity: as the product of the one God, the world, too, is a continuous and homogenous unit. In viewing the world this way Crescas departs from Aristotle—and from Maimonides in lockstep with him—who sees the world as hierarchical, distinguishing within it ranks and levels and positing in particular a sharp distinction between the inferior earthly realm beneath the sphere of the moon and the superior celestial realm above. According to Aristotle, the celestial spheres differ from the earthly elements in both their motion and their matter. For him, the motion of the spheres is circular, continuous, and unceasing—in contrast to that of the elements, which is rectilinear, discontinuous, and intermittent; moreover, the celestial spheres are intelligent and yearn for and are drawn to divine perfection as the object of their thought and desire. Celestial matter is more refined and purer than earthly matter and is not, like earthly matter, subject to coming-to-be, change, or destruction.

Crescas rejects the Aristotelian privileging of heaven over earth. All motion—whether rectilinear or circular, whether of the earthly elements or of the celestial spheres—is natural and of the same kind. So, too, is their matter the same: both earthly matter and celestial matter are not raw potentiality but are actual three-dimensionality. As a result of this reorientation—that is, with earth and heaven being seen as of the same rank—human dignity is restored: the human being is no longer deficient in comparison with the celestial spheres. Whereas for Maimonides, the human being, despite being capable of intellectual activity and thus verging on the divine, pales in comparison with the eternal, unchanging, and indestructible heavens whose perfect motion reflects the perfection of God who is the object of their thought and desire, for Crescas, despite the inevitable immeasurable inferiority of the human being to his Maker, God's ultimate purpose in creating the universe was to have human beings achieve happiness through their attachment to Him.

Providence and Choice

Of Crescas's six cornerstones, two in particular stand out. Although all six are prerequisites for Torah, providence and choice are arguably the most critical. Dividing the six cornerstones into two sets of three, the first set—knowledge, providence, and power—in which the focus is on God, and the second—prophecy, choice, and end—in which the focus shifts to man, the central cornerstone of the first set is providence and that of the second, choice. Providence is the concretization of God's love for man; choice, that of man's love for God.

It is, moreover, only in the case of providence and choice that the standard formula with which Crescas closes the major sections of his text is enhanced. In place of the usual conclusion, "Praise is to God alone, who is exalted above all blessing and praise," the sections on providence and choice end as follows: "*Adulation* (רְבוּחַ; *shevah*) and praise are to God alone, who is exalted above all blessing and praise." Divine providence and human choice elicit an intensification of Crescas's ardor.

In Crescas's view, there are many ways in which God extends His providence to our world, but foremost among them is His gift of the Torah. The Torah is the means by which God accomplishes His supreme end, namely, the binding of people to Him. Yet God cannot accomplish His end unless there is causal necessity. If it seems puzzling that Crescas, whose views are, in the final analysis, fairly traditional, would embrace causal necessity to the extent that he does, the explanation surely lies in his view that everything God does is purposeful. The only way God's issuing of the Torah can be purposeful is if its commandments are effective in establishing the divine-human bond; and the only way the commandments can be effective in establishing the divine-human bond is if there is fully operative causal necessity. If the Torah is to constitute a divine benefaction its commandments must have the power to produce their intended end. Therefore Crescas asserts: "And when the grace on high determined to perfect us through the giving of the Torah . . . the admonitions it contained sufficed for man to be drawn to perfection, to suppress his desires, to subdue his inclinations" (II. ii. 6). Whereas for Abraham, as Crescas tells us, one commandment, that of circumcision, sufficed to effect the connection between him and God, for everyone else many more commandments are needed. God, out of His love, consequently issues a multitude of commandments.

Yet if the world is governed by strict causation, is not the individual's freedom to choose necessarily curtailed? Is it not the case that there is in Crescas's view no choice after all? On the one hand, it seems indeed that there is not. People act in response to the causes operating on them, the Torah's commandments being one such cause. On the other hand, however, since choice counts for Crescas as a cornerstone—that is, as something without which there can be no Torah—it cannot be right simply to conclude, as many scholars have, that Crescas is a determinist.

Crescas seeks to carve out a space for choice in his discussion of the category of the possible. To that end he distinguishes between necessity in respect of itself and necessity in respect of causes: two alternatives may both be possible—in themselves—for someone, but once causes are factored in, only one alternative will, of necessity, be the one chosen. For Crescas this latter necessity is not the same as the necessity of a thing necessitated in itself, for necessitation in itself contains the element of

no-matter-whatness. If one is *causally* necessitated to choose a particular alternative, it is the causes that bring about the effect. But if something is necessitated in itself, causes are irrelevant. Just as there is no cause that will change the sum of $2 + 2$ —something which is necessary in respect of itself and not in respect of its causes—so, too, there is no cause that will make a person poor if it is necessary in itself that he be wealthy. Put another way, to be necessitated in respect of causes is to be responsive to causes; to be necessitated in respect of itself is to be impervious to them. Phenomenologically as well, the two forms of necessitation may be distinguished. When one is causally necessitated one experiences oneself as free; when one experiences oneself as unfree, when there is a sense of helplessness, a sense of no-matter-whatness, the necessity is experienced as coercive.

Scholars have tended to see the distinction between necessity in itself and causal necessity as a distinction without a difference: if, given the causes, a person will—must—choose one and only one of the possible alternatives, then what difference could it make that the choice was not necessary in itself? Consider, for example, the words of Abarbanel (b. 1437, Lisbon; d. 1508, Venice) in his commentary on Gen. 18: 20:

And I was alarmed at seeing this pious Rabbi [viz. Crescas] escape being burnt by the fire of the commentators' heresy only to have him succumb to it in the end. For what possibility remains for the thing that is necessary in respect of its causes when it is after all necessitated and constrained? (221)

and in his book *Naḥalat Avot (Ancestral Inheritance)*:

Insofar as a thing is compelled and necessitated by its causes, what possibility remains for it in respect of itself on account of which a person should be called free (בְּחִירִי; *beḥiriyi*) in truth? . . . And if the things are necessary in respect of their causes, how can they be subject to prescription and proscription? For the possibility they have in respect of themselves is not anything (אֵינוֹ כֵּלָל; *aino khelal*)—since in respect of their causes they are necessitated. (158)

Yet if for Crescas there really is no substantive difference between causal necessity and constraint, and if he believes, as he clearly does, that people are causally necessitated, how are we to take him at his word when he affirms choice as a precondition for the very existence of Torah? What does it mean to him to insist that unless there is choice there can be no Torah?

Crescas's inclusion of choice among his cornerstones suggests that Torah cannot exist—that is, cannot exist as the gift to mankind that it was intended to be, cannot fulfill its *raison d'être*—without human choice. As Crescas observes, the reason the Torah is not fully efficacious, the reason it cannot guarantee that those who receive it are perfected in their attachment to God, is that people often dislike what is commanded; they consequently obey—if they obey—unwillingly and unhappily. As Crescas puts it,

And if everything painful were removed—for example, if the pursuit of all their appetites were permitted to them, and so, too, the seeking of honor in vanquishing enemies, and the amassing of wealth—and if all that were required by way of service of God were the reciting of the first verse of the *Shema*^c once a week, there is no doubt that there would not remain a single person who would not serve God with love. (II. vi. 2)

The Torah, then, cannot effect its end alone. Without a human agent's effort, will, or pleasure and joy, and especially if the agent is actively resistant, opposed, or displeased and sad, the commandments cannot accomplish their end. Their causal power is aided or thwarted by the person's free choice—that is, by the two things Crescas highlights as marks of human freedom: effort and attitude.

Crescas's biblical exegesis may shed some further light on his thinking in this matter. Genesis 32 describes an agitated Jacob fearful in the face of his imminent encounter with Esau. The question Crescas considers in II. iv. 2 is why Jacob is afraid; after all, God has promised to protect him. Crescas's explanation is that Jacob knew that everything that occurs is the result of a causal sequence, but he did not know in his own case which cause would produce the promised effect. He therefore saw to it that all possible causes were put in place: he prayed, prepared for war, and assembled gifts. Jacob thus regarded his being protected by God as something possible in respect of itself though necessitated in respect of its causes. It is not that Jacob thought there was a chance that God's promise would not come to pass. Rather, the fact that it would come to pass but only as a result of causes gave Jacob the opportunity to participate. What causation does is open a space for personal engagement. Jacob took the opportunity to facilitate the very effect that he had been told—and therefore knew—would occur. We see here how Crescas thinks the distinction between “in respect of itself” and “in respect to causes” operates. Were God's protection of Jacob necessary in respect of itself, such that it would occur no matter what, Jacob would have had no reason to act. Freedom is located not in escaping causal necessity but in trying to—or refusing to—participate in it.

Whereas Crescas's discussion of Gen. 32 focuses on the difficulty that arises for choice from the perspective of causation, it does not address the additional putative obstacle to choice, namely, divine foreknowledge. Here, too, turning to Crescas's analysis of a biblical text may be of use. In Ps. 139, a text pivotal to the argument of *Light of the Lord* and discussed at length in II. i. 1 (and also in I. iii. 3 and II. iv. 3), David turns to God—as the one who knows his innermost thoughts and desires—seeking to excuse his bad behavior. “O God,” he says, “if only You would slay the wicked, then murderous men would depart from me.” But God does not slay, and David's associations continue. Crescas derives three lessons from David's words in this Psalm. First, that God knows particulars—He knows David's thoughts and desires. (For Crescas, there is no less forgivable error than the one committed by virtually all the great philosophers, namely, imputing ignorance, “the greatest of all defects” [II. i. 3, 5], to God. To withhold from God knowledge of particulars is, for Crescas, far worse than failing to protect Him from multiplicity and change, which the philosophers were determined to do no matter the cost); second, that God knows the future—He knows that David will sin; and third, that God's knowledge does not make the possible necessary—despite God's knowledge of David's future sin, David's sinning was nevertheless not necessitated: somehow God knows what will occur without making the possible necessary. (Crescas entertains briefly in II. v. 3—and nowhere dismisses—the notion that God's knowledge is outside time, and that His eternal apprehension encompasses what does not yet exist as if it were existent. Crescas recognizes, however, that such a view presumes to know how God knows. Moreover, it appears to imply that God's knowledge “derives

from existents," that is, that God knows by observing rather than by conferring existence and essence. Crescas does, however, entertain the notion that one apprehends in accordance with one's nature rather than in accordance with the nature of that which is apprehended. If this is so, it would not then be impossible to say that the eternal God apprehends, with an eternal apprehension, that which does not yet exist as if it were existent.) If it were the case that God's foreknowledge makes the possible necessary, David would need no excuse; he would not be responsible for his sin. But the reason David believes he has an excuse is that he has good intentions, intentions of which God is without doubt aware. In other words, David appeals to God's recognition of his unwillingness to sin, of his regret and displeasure with respect to his sin. David can be forgiven because God knows he is not obstinate but weak.

For Crescas, then, what will be will surely be, though, in cases in which the necessitation is causal and not in-itself, what will be is dependent on causes. Although Crescas's distinction between these two kinds of necessitation is critical to his view, it is not, we see, the whole of it. In the two biblical sources considered, Jacob and David exhibit some measure of freedom even though they cannot change what will be. Jacob exerts effort, and David adopts an attitude of disapproval toward his inevitable sin. Even though both causal necessity and divine foreknowledge entail that what will be will be, how people relate to what will be is up to them.

Thus far we have considered choice in the realm of human action. The matter of belief, however, brings with it a further complication. For in the case of belief, resolution in terms of the distinction between the two kinds of necessitation is precluded. Belief, according to Crescas, unlike action, is always and necessarily involuntary—that is, will plays no part in it: the self-evidence or incontrovertible proof of a proposition has *coercive* power. Nevertheless, here, too, a person's effort or lack thereof and his joy or displeasure are deciding factors in his closeness to or remoteness from God. Let us look then to another instance of Crescas's biblical exegesis, as he draws together at II. v. 6 two seemingly unrelated biblical texts.

The first is Exod. 19: 17, which describes the scene as the Israelites prepare for the revelation at Sinai. The verse reads: "And they stood at the bottom (בתחתית; *betaḥtit*) of the mountain"—which can also be rendered: "And they stood beneath the mountain." According to the Rabbis, this verse, when interpreted in this second way, implies that the people were constrained to accept the Torah under threat of death; will played no part in their acceptance of it. The second text is Esther 9: 27: "The Jews affirmed, and took upon themselves." As the Rabbis understand this verse, the Jews in the time of Ahasuerus affirmed, after the fact, through the joy they experienced as they witnessed the miracles and deliverance that were enacted for them then, what they had already taken upon themselves at Sinai. Crescas explains that what the Jewish people accepted at first under constraint, they later willingly embraced. Even with regard to involuntary belief, then, it is possible to be free—free to embrace the belief with enthusiasm, or to resist it, even as one cannot deny it.

One exercises freedom, then, according to Crescas, either in exerting effort or in feeling pleasure and joy with respect to acting or believing. Indeed Crescas recognizes explicitly "the exertion of effort in investigating the belief's truth" (II. v. 5). It is for how actively one is engaged in the process of causation or investigation, or for how

one feels about one's acts and beliefs—how happy or unhappy one is with one's decisions and convictions—that one is rewarded or punished.

It was observed earlier that reward and punishment is not included among the cornerstones without which there could be no Torah. Instead, it is counted as one of the beliefs whose denial constitutes heresy. To be sure, Crescas has illuminating things to say about reward and punishment: that it is natural—one who touches fire is burned, one who violates God's commandments is distanced from God; that true reward and punishment are psychic or spiritual in nature—the former consists in closeness to God, the latter in remoteness from Him; that reward and punishment should not be the motivation for obeying God; that, as the Rabbis say, the reward for fulfilling a commandment is a commandment—whether an additional one or the very one performed; and that divine reward and punishment are not only not vindictive, they are also not political—that is, they are not a matter of political justice, in which desert is paramount; they are rather only for the sake of benefit, “as a father chastens his son” (Deut. 8: 5). Yet by excluding reward and punishment from the list of cornerstones, Crescas indicates that reward and punishment are not prerequisites for the Torah as God's great benefaction; it is the commandments themselves that exhibit God's grace. Whereas for other thinkers freedom to choose justifies reward and punishment (II. v. i), for Crescas what freedom to choose justifies is the commandments, as he says: “But all alternatives must be open to [a person's] simple will. Only then will an *imperative* (צוה; *tzavaah*) be appropriate and relevant” (introduction to II. v). The Torah confers benefit directly by way of its commandments—it is one's joyful and effortful embrace of commandments that ensures one's closeness to God—not by way of any further rewards and punishments that accompany their observance or violation. What causes attachment to God is not desire for good things and fear of bad but devoted service. Through issuing commandments God chooses man; through loving acceptance of the commandments man chooses God.

About the Translation

Only one complete translation of *Light of the Lord* exists in any occidental language, and that is the French translation by Éric Smilevitch, which appeared in 2010 under the title *Lumière de l'Éternel*. Although some selections of *Light of the Lord* have appeared in English, the bulk of the work has remained untranslated into English.

Partial English translations are listed in the bibliography. Notable among them are the extensive translations in Warren Harvey's Ph.D. dissertation, ‘Hasdai Crescas's Critique of the Theory of the Acquired Intellect’ (1973), and in his *Physics and Metaphysics in Hasdai Crescas* (1998c); and Harry Austryn Wolfson's translation of most of Parts I and II of Book I, in his *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle: Problems of Aristotle's Physics in Jewish and Arabic Philosophy* (1929). There are in addition short selections translated by Seymour Feldman in J. David Bleich's *With Perfect Faith* (1983); by Menachem Kellner in his *Dogma in Medieval Jewish Thought: From Maimonides to Abravanel* (1986); and by Charles Manekin in *Medieval Jewish Philosophical Writings*, ed. Charles Manekin (2008).

In 1990 Rabbi Shlomo Fisher rendered *Light of the Lord* into vocalized modern Hebrew print. This edition serves as the primary basis for the current translation,

though I have checked it for accuracy against the original printed edition (Ferrara 1555) and a partial printed edition (Vilna 1905), as well as against the Florence and the Vienna manuscripts. I have indicated variants in the notes.

The Hebrew of *Light of the Lord* is idiosyncratic and its style compressed and notoriously difficult; moreover, the work contains discrepancies, most likely because it was written over a long span of time. It is clear from the Florence manuscript that additions were made to the original work that sought to reconcile some of the more glaringly inconsistent passages and to moderate some of the more radical opinions expressed, such as that concerning choice. I have tried in this translation to present the work as it is, preserving Crescas's voice and style and adding few embellishments in the body of the text. To the extent possible I have translated critical Hebrew terms consistently throughout. For the sake of clarity I have occasionally modified or supplemented the text, sometimes by bracketing added words or phrases and sometimes by merely inserting them. Many of Crescas's sentences are extraordinarily long and complex. Often a single sentence will contain a string of several clauses beginning with "since," and will reach its conclusion only after recording several qualifications and asides. Prudence has made it necessary in these cases to deviate from the text's original form. Long sentences have been broken into shorter ones, and often the serial "since" has been eliminated, with premises being treated as self-standing assertions, and their conclusion being signaled by the "therefore" in its independent sentence. Notes indicate biblical and rabbinic sources, and, where appropriate, explain and clarify the text. The reader will find, however, that there are stretches of text to which virtually no explanatory notes are appended, for there are passages in which Crescas's arguments, though difficult, are self-explanatory: notes would do little more than repeat the text. I have not for the most part sought to indicate Crescas's likely philosophic sources for the arguments he advances. Wolfson (1929) may be consulted for extensive discussion of Crescas's philosophic sources—among whom, as we know, are the major figures in Jewish and Islamic thought, as well as the apostate Abner of Burgos whom Crescas never mentions by name. At the start of Book I Crescas credits Maimonides with not simply reproducing the ideas and proofs advanced by others but rather distilling their essence, thereby rendering unnecessary a return to those earlier views. Crescas himself has no doubt done the same. As he says at the close of I. i. 1:

These are the proofs that have come to us concerning this issue in the books of Aristotle and of other authors and of commentators on his books. But they came to us confused and likely to bewilder the reader, for this is a topic susceptible to error. We therefore formulated them in their [proper] form and with splendid brevity. And we reinforced them with some things that they did not mention.

It is perhaps sufficient, then, to present Crescas's arguments as he formulated them.

I have aimed in this translation to render *Light of the Lord* accessible to many readers—scholars, students, and the interested public. I have not simplified the text or offered a comprehensive commentary on it. *Light of the Lord*, even in English, remains exceedingly demanding. What I have provided is a text to be wrestled with. It is my hope that it will spark renewed engagement with a thinker who merits far more attention and study than he has hitherto received.

Introduction

A lamp unto my foot is Your word, and a light unto my path.¹

Shine Your face upon Your servant; save me with Your kindness.²

For a commandment is a lamp and Torah is light; and the reproofs of instruction are the path of life.³

Teach me, O Lord, Your way; I will walk in Your truth; unite my heart in awe of Your name.⁴

You will make known to me the path of life; in Your presence is the plenitude of joys, and pleasures at Your right hand forever.⁵

May God's name be blessed⁶ and exalted above all blessing and praise,⁷ for He has been wondrously kind⁸ toward His creatures, in bringing them into existence and in creating them following absolute nothingness,⁹ through a kind of wisdom of whose mystery hearts cannot fathom even one part in a thousand of thousands of thousands, through the might of His greatness and His wonders and awesome deeds which outstrip the limits of a tongue to speak of things great and marvelous.¹⁰ When the Lord God made the earth and the heavens,¹¹ and the heaven of heavens and all their hosts,¹² and when higher still were *erelim* and *hashmalim*, *serafim* and *qedoshim*¹³—thousands upon thousands, and myriads upon myriads—then He, dwelling on high,¹⁴ sitting supremely¹⁵ on a throne, exalted and elevated,¹⁶ made for them a seal of perfection.¹⁷ The Lord God fashioned the human being in the image and likeness of all His creatures—and the Lord himself at their head—as God said: “Let us make the human being in our image, according to our likeness.”¹⁸ God was joined in this effort by the totality of existent beings, in order that the human being bear the imprint of all parts of existence; and, just as all parts of

This Introduction is to the entire two-volume work, *Lamp of the Lord*, the second volume of which, *Lamp of the Commandment*, was never written. See n. 75. The opening of this work is composed of biblical verses interwoven with the author's words to form a continuous narrative.

¹ Ps. 119: 105. ² Ps. 31: 17. ³ Prov. 6: 23.

⁴ Ps. 86: 11. ⁵ Ps. 16: 11. ⁶ Ps. 113: 2; Job 1: 21.

⁷ Neh. 9: 5. The phrase, “exalted above all blessing and praise,” closes the major divisions of this work.

⁸ Ps. 31: 22.

⁹ “Following absolute nothingness” translates the expression, אחר האפס המוחלט (*aḥar haefes hamuḥlat*).

¹⁰ Ps. 12: 4. ¹¹ Gen. 2: 4. ¹² Neh. 9: 6.

¹³ These are names of various celestial beings. ¹⁴ Isa. 32: 16. ¹⁵ Ps. 113: 5.

¹⁶ Isa. 6: 1. ¹⁷ Ezek. 28: 12. ¹⁸ Gen. 1: 26.

existence are under the governance of the Lord, so is the human being¹⁹ under the governance of his intellect. It is for this reason that our predecessors, peace be upon them, called him a “microcosm”²⁰—because God made him a miniature imprint and seal onto which all His creatures are engraved. Furthermore, in the magnitude of His kindness and the abundance of His goodness, God was provident over all from the realm of His abode,²¹ and chose the house of Jacob in whose midst to rest His glory,²² that they [viz. the Israelites] might love and be in awe of Him, serve Him, and cleave unto Him.²³ For to live thus is the pinnacle of human happiness, in pursuit of which many have become perplexed and have walked in darkness²⁴—among them men wise in their own eyes and intelligent in their own estimation.²⁵

With the light of His Torah God lit up for us the two great lights:²⁶ the lamp of God²⁷ and the light of the Lord,²⁸ which are the commandments and the beliefs,²⁹ respectively, in order to prepare the way for us, the way of life,³⁰ a way that would be so very distant without them—who could find it?³¹—unless there shone upon it the true light that is called “the radiance of the Divine Presence.”³²

The rock³³ from which we were hewn,³⁴ the test stone,³⁵ the foundation stone upon which the world was founded,³⁶ was the singular Abraham our father, peace be upon him, who, at the age of three,³⁷ from the time he attained to reason, recognized his creator and attracted others to God’s service—without the Torah’s having preceded him. Blessings and praises upon His great name on account of all the benefits He bestowed upon us—an abundance of goodness upon the house of Israel.³⁸ Indeed, because of Abraham’s superlative eminence a covenant was enacted with him by way

¹⁹ Whether read והיותו, “he” (as in the Ferrara and Vilna, eds.), or (with Fisher) והיותן, “they,” the intent is that, as all parts of existence are under the governance of the Lord, so too the human being—or the imprints of all the parts of existence engraved onto the human being—are under the governance of the human intellect.

²⁰ עולם קטן (*‘olam qatan*); *Tanḥuma Pekudei* 3. ²¹ Ps. 33: 14.

²² Ps. 85: 10. ²³ Deut. 11: 22, 30: 20; Josh. 22: 5. ²⁴ Ps. 82: 5.

²⁵ Isa. 5: 21. ²⁶ Gen. 1: 16. ²⁷ 1 Sam. 3: 3; cf. Prov. 20: 27: “the lamp of the Lord.”

²⁸ Isa. 2: 5.

²⁹ Although the Fisher, Ferrara, and Vilna editions all have והמצוות והאמונות, nevertheless, the reverse order, as found in the Florence and Vienna manuscripts, המצוות והאמונות, “the commandments and the beliefs,” is followed here. Crescas associates נר (*ner*), lamp, with commandments, and planned to name his work on the commandments נר מצוה (*Ner Mitzvah, Lamp of the Commandment*). See Warren Harvey (1973), 235 (Heb.), 245 (Eng. trans.).

³⁰ Jer. 21: 8. ³¹ Eccles. 7: 24.

³² “Divine Presence” translates the Hebrew term שכינה (*shekhinah*) throughout.

³³ Reading הצור (with the Ferrara and Vilna editions and with the Florence and Vienna manuscripts) rather than כצור (with Fisher).

³⁴ Isa. 51: 1. ³⁵ Isa. 28: 16. ³⁶ *Num. Rabbah* 12: 4.

³⁷ Crescas’s notion that Abraham was three years old when he acknowledged God is based on a midrash in BT *Nedarim* 32a concerning the verse Gen. 26: 5. This verse contains the phrase, “because Abraham hearkened to my voice.” The Hebrew term for “because” is עקב (*‘eqev*), whose *gematria* is 172. Since Abraham lived for 175 years (Gen. 25: 7), he must have been three years old when he first “hearkened.” See, too, *Gen. Rabbah* 30: 8. (In *gematria*, each of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet is assigned a numerical value so that each word or phrase is the sum of the values of its individual letters. *Alef* is one, *beit* is two, and so on until *yod*, which is ten; the next letter of the alphabet, *kaf*, is twenty, *lamed* is thirty, and so on until *tsadi*, which is 90. The following letter, *kof* is 100, *reish* is 200. The final letter of the alphabet, *tav* is 400. This is the highest value a single letter can represent.)

³⁸ Isa. 63: 7.

of just one commandment, that of circumcision; and that alone sufficed, because of his elevated status. Indeed, for one who is worthy, all that is needed is but a few acts; there is no need for many—as in the case of the diurnal sphere as compared with the other spheres. For the diurnal sphere one motion suffices for it to achieve its perfection, the emanation of its goodness; but for the other spheres, since they are lower than it in eminence, many motions are required. It was therefore necessary, when the kindness of the blessed and exalted One determined to perfect us, the congregation of the community of Israel, that He increase our acts,³⁹ as is confirmed by the dictum of R. Ḥanania son of ‘Aqashia: “The Holy One Blessed Be He wished to make Israel meritorious; He therefore increased for their sake Torah and commandments.”⁴⁰

Since it is the performance of the commandments that leads to this perfection, but there can be no performance of them without an understanding of them, the following dictum in the Mishnah is to be understood in its literal sense: “and the study of Torah is the equivalent of all.”⁴¹ And for this reason the Rabbis concluded that study is the greater, for it leads to performance.⁴²

Since knowledge of the Torah’s commandments is the straight path leading to this perfection, so that it would be appropriate that the Torah be such that knowledge of it can be attained in as perfect a manner as possible, the perfection of the knowledge of things and the comprehensiveness with which they are known turn on three things: precision with respect to them; the ease with which they are grasped; and their preservation and being remembered. Divine wisdom therefore determined that the Torah be such that these three criteria can be most perfectly met. Thus, it indeed set forth all the commandments and beliefs in written form, as well as in the oral form that was preserved through the true tradition, along with rules and signs—namely, the thirteen exegetical techniques employed in interpreting the Torah.⁴³ It is because the foundation of the commandments as a whole is in written form, and because they were not transmitted orally, that precision with respect to them is assured. The Torah thus insisted, in accordance with what was received through the true tradition, that: “It is not permitted to state orally things that appear in writing.”⁴⁴ The Torah’s intention was that these things not be entrusted to hearts alone, lest they occasion dispute on account of common forgetfulness. This is especially so considering how

³⁹ In Ptolemaic astronomy the rotation of the diurnal sphere—the supreme outermost sphere encompassing within it the spheres of the sun, moon, planets, and fixed stars—is simple: it rotates once every twenty-four hours. By contrast, the motion of the planets is complex, needing to be explained by a theory of numerous cycles and epicycles. In Crescas’s analogy, Abraham, who can achieve perfection through but one commandment, is compared to the diurnal sphere, while the Israelite community, whose perfection requires many commandments, is compared to the planets.

⁴⁰ *Makkot* 3: 16; *Avot* 6: 11. ⁴¹ *Peah* 1: 1.

⁴² BT *Kiddushin* 40b. This rabbinic dictum may be understood as maintaining, paradoxically, that study is greater than performance because study leads to performance—which is greater. Alternatively, and less paradoxically, what the Rabbis may have meant is that study is greater because it leads to performance, whereas performance need not lead to study. For Crescas, however, it would seem that the reason study is greater is that there can be no performance—or, perhaps, no genuine performance—without it, for performance devoid of understanding is without merit.

⁴³ The thirteen interpretive techniques, known as the שלש-עשרה מדות, are found in the Introduction to *Sifra*. See n. 58.

⁴⁴ BT *Gittin* 60b; BT *Temurah* 14b.

painstaking the Torah is with respect to the form of its script and its letters—the spare form being used on some occasions, and on others the full⁴⁵—for all this care diminishes the chance that error and dispute will befall it.

Indeed, all the commandments and their divisions and subdivisions, along with their exponential expansion—to which the necessity of perfecting us led, as was discussed above—are contained, with splendid conciseness, in the written Torah along with its orally transmitted signs and exegetical techniques. Two consequences thus follow. First, the commandments can be grasped with the greatest of ease, thanks to their utmost conciseness; and, second, they can be remembered and preserved—and this, thanks, on the one hand, to their being concise and, on the other, to the exegetical techniques that were set forth in the form of signs which are the foundations and principles of the Oral Torah. For making signs for things—lest they be forgotten—is one of the devices for facilitating memory, which is especially critical considering that the Torah mandates its own constant study.⁴⁶ All this is an important root and foundation for the commandments’ preservation and for their being remembered. The Torah has indeed been most insistent in this regard, as is attested in the true tradition in which the [Rabbis] say: “It is not permitted to state in writing things that are oral.”⁴⁷ This proscription stems from a concern that the oral things might depart from a person’s heart so that he will come to rely on the written text and, as the subjects proliferate, this will lead to his forgetting. This is just like the Torah’s insistence with regard to the written things that one may not state them orally. This proscription too derives from the Torah’s fear that if someone permits himself to state the written things orally he will come to regard his having stated them orally as a reason to trust what he recalls—and this will lead to diminished precision.⁴⁸ Indeed, in order to create both love and a fierce passion to keep vigil at its gates always,⁴⁹ the Torah went so far as to organize the totality of the commandments, and to plant in them the seed of truth—which is derived from its stories about the forefathers and the heightened providence extended to them and the bounty of God’s kindnesses and wonders. As a result of one’s diligence and devotion, the following three ends should be attained at once: grasping the commandments easily; attaining precision with respect to them; and remembering and preserving them. Indeed, this is a path that was hardly foreign to the sages of the nations, as is suggested by what is found in their compilations. One of them, in defaming another who committed his words to writing, said to him: “You distrust your pristine ideas,

⁴⁵ In Hebrew certain vocalizations can be indicated—but need not be—by the inclusion of the letter *vav* or *yod*. The spare (חסר) form omits the letter; the full (Crescas’s term is יתר) includes it. The technical terms for the full and spare forms are, respectively, *scriptio plena* and *scriptio defectiva*.

⁴⁶ Josh. 1: 8; Ps. 1: 2; cf. Deut. 6:7.

⁴⁷ BT *Gittin* 60b; BT *Temurah* 14b. Fisher has אֵי אִי־אִי, “it is impossible,” as do the Ferrara and Vilna editions. In the Florence and Vienna manuscripts, as well as in the Talmud, the expression is אֵי אִי־אִי, “one is not permitted.”

⁴⁸ Writing down what was transmitted orally will cause excessive reliance on the written text and will diminish the capacity to remember the copious and ever-expanding body of oral material. Similarly, making oral what was written will lead to excessive reliance on possibly faulty memory and thus to error.

⁴⁹ The expression, “to keep vigil at its gates always,” is based on a similar expression in Prov. 8: 34.

and instead place your trust in the hides of dead animals!”⁵⁰ Our forebears adhered to this approach from the days of Moses our Teacher to the days of the Men of the Great Assembly.⁵¹ Throughout that period no dispute or error arose concerning anything in the Torah.

When, however, the Greeks rose to ascendancy and troubles rained down on Israel following the period of the Men of the Great Assembly, the number of disciples who were insufficiently diligent in their studies increased, disputes proliferated,⁵² and several of these men allowed themselves to write down what was transmitted to them [orally]. They called these writings a “scroll of secrets.”⁵³ This situation persisted until the end of the generations of the Tannaim,⁵⁴ when our holy Rabbi, peace be upon him,⁵⁵ arose and saw that hearts were contracting. Out of fear lest the Torah be forgotten in Israel, he compiled the six orders of the Mishnah, which very concisely comprise the Oral Torah. Following him came R. Ḥiyya and R. Osha‘iya, who added the *Baraita*⁵⁶ to those very orders, declaring: “It is time to act on the Lord’s behalf; they have violated Your Torah.”⁵⁷ After them the *Sifra*⁵⁸ and *Sifrei*⁵⁹ were composed. All the generations of the Amoraim⁶⁰ studied these texts, along with the Jerusalem Talmud that was subsequently composed by R. Joḥanan. The period of authoritative teaching reached its culmination when Ravina and Rav Ashi arose and composed the Babylonian Talmud with the consent of the Sages⁶¹ of that generation. According to tradition, the editing of these works continued into the period of the Rabbis known as the Savoraim.⁶² They were all following the intention of the Torah to make room for the tradition in some way.

After that the Geonim⁶³—for example, R. Simeon Kayyara, the venerable R. Jehudai, R. Saadia of Fayyum, R. Samuel son of Ḥofni, and R. Hai—allowed themselves to compose works. Some, such as R. Ḥananel and Rabbeinu Nissim and, culminating with the last of the commentators of the period, Rabbeinu Solomon of France,⁶⁴ composed commentaries on the Talmud. After him, Rabbeinu Samson,

⁵⁰ Warren Harvey (1973a), 351 n. 1, points out that Crescas is quoting Hunayn ibn Ishāq, *Ethics of the Philosophers* I. 1. The speaker is presumably Socrates.

⁵¹ The Men of the Great Assembly, אנשי כנסת הגדולה, were a group of scribes and Sages who served as authorities for the Jewish community in the period from the end of the biblical prophets to the early Hellenistic period.

⁵² See BT *Sanhedrin* 88b.

⁵³ מגילה סתרים; BT *Shabbat* 6b, 96b; BT *Baba metzia* 92a.

⁵⁴ The Tannaim are the Rabbis cited in the Mishnah. They flourished in the years 10–220 CE.

⁵⁵ The reference is to Judah Hanasi.

⁵⁶ ההיתנות; the reference is to the Tosefta, comprising additional rabbinic oral traditions not included in the Mishnah.

⁵⁷ Ps. 119: 126. The Rabbis relied on this verse for permission to commit the Oral Torah to writing in disregard of the longstanding prohibition on doing so.

⁵⁸ *Sifra* is a *midrash halakhah*, a legal commentary, on the book of Leviticus.

⁵⁹ *Sifrei* comprises two *midrashei halakhah*, one on Numbers from ch. 5 on, and one on Deuteronomy.

⁶⁰ These are the Rabbis of the *Gemara* who flourished in the years 219–500 CE.

⁶¹ “Sage,” when in lower case refers to more recent thinkers. When in upper case, it refers to the Sages of the Mishnah and Talmud. In both cases it renders חכם (*hakham*).

⁶² These Rabbis flourished in the first half of the 6th century CE.

⁶³ The title *gaon* was given to the heads of the Babylonian academies of Sura and Pumbedita from the end of the sixth to the end of the twelfth century.

⁶⁴ The reference is to Rashi.

the disciple of the renowned Tosafist R. Isaac, composed books and produced original arguments and dialectics on the entire Talmud. And also the great Rabbi, R. Abraham son of David,⁶⁵ composed commentaries on the whole of the Talmud. Although some [of these Rabbis] composed [legal] works drawing upon certain sections of the Talmud, there were no comprehensive compositions other than the legal composition of Rabbeinu Isaac Alfasi, which comprises three orders, and the great work composed by our master and Rabbi, Rabbi Judah Hanasi the Barcelonian, one that is of considerable length and includes the disputes of the Geonim and their responsa. There followed the comprehensive composition of the Rabbi, our teacher Moses son of Maimon,⁶⁶ which he called *Mishneh Torah*,⁶⁷ which proceeds without recording rabbinic disputes except in a few places, and without citing a Tanna, an Amora, a Rabbi, or a Gaon. He included in it that which appears in the Talmud, the *Tosefta*, *Sifra*, and *Sifrei* concerning the commandments. In addition, in order to teach the Jewish people the roots of the [proper] beliefs and views, and to illuminate the dark recesses of doubt, he composed a book which he called *Guide of the Perplexed*.

But despite what this Rabbi and author wondrously achieved in his lucid books, nevertheless, because in his composition on the commandments he omitted the disputes of the Geonim as well as their names, and also failed to cite the textual sources that are the roots of the issues, we were unable on those occasions when the books of other great authors were found to contain rulings and views opposed to his, to escape confusion and doubt. Aside from this, he did not fully cite the reasons for things or their general principles, except to allude to details found in the discourses of our predecessors. Since the great part of the commandments are in the category of the possible,⁶⁸ a category broader than the sea, and since knowledge cannot encompass their details which are infinite in number, it appears that, were a single detail of those mentioned there [i.e. in the *Mishneh Torah*] to change, we could not reach a sure determination. Indeed, just as there is no comparison between a finite number and an infinite, so, too, there is no comparison between what is grasped of the finite details that are recorded there, and what is not grasped of the infinite details that are not recorded there. It is clear, therefore, that knowledge will not be perfected through that work in even one of the three requisite ways mentioned above.⁶⁹ Precision in the

⁶⁵ This is R. Abraham son of David of Posquières, popularly known as Raavad.

⁶⁶ This is Maimonides.

⁶⁷ This title has been variously translated. Its sense is probably, at least in part, “recapitulation of the Torah.”

⁶⁸ “The possible,” האפשר (*haefshar*), is to be understood as the modality of possibility, and to refer to that which is neither necessary nor impossible. Whereas the term “contingency” might have been used (especially to avoid the error of taking, for example, “there is no possibility” to mean “it is impossible”), nevertheless, there is reason to prefer “possible” as the translation of אפשרי. For although it may be the case that things that are possible are possible because they are contingent, i.e. dependent on something else, the term “possible” does not in itself carry the implication of dependence. Crescas devotes considerable attention to whether the category of the possible is itself possible—in light of the causal nexus on the one hand, and of divine foreknowledge on the other. See I. i. 30 and II. v.

⁶⁹ My translation follows Harvey’s 1973 text. An alternate version, found in the Ferrara and Vilna editions as well as in Fisher, and which is reflected in Smilevitch’s translation, proceeds to list the “three requisite ways” as follows: precision in matters considered, grasping them easily (והשגתם על נקלה), and

matters considered and preservation from error [will not be secured]—for two reasons: first, because he failed to note the disputes and the texts that are the sources for the roots of the issues which would have made matters crystal clear; and, second, because he neglected to mention the reasons and general principles relevant to the issues. It is thus evident that perfect knowledge of matters will be had only when we know them in their reasons in accordance with their context. So long as our knowledge of matters is incomplete, we will not be safe from mistake and error. This is also a cause of our not inscribing them in our minds and not preserving them—which is the third problem. Even more so, we will not grasp them easily—and this is the second problem—since we will grasp only a small part, as was mentioned earlier, and even with respect to that part, our comprehension will be sorely lacking. What is most surprising and a great wonder is how it could enter Maimonides’ mind and how he could imagine that, aside from his book [which would endure], books of earlier writers would be set aside, and that the whole of the Oral Torah could be contained in his work, to the point that he called it *Mishneh Torah*.⁷⁰

In these generations, however, when strange and mighty troubles rain down on us, it is surely good to prepare a path with great precision and with much care, through which complete knowledge of the commandments of the Torah, and complete knowledge of the Talmud, will be easily attained. This, however, requires that a work be composed that contains the commandments of the Torah along with their reasons, arranged topically, and along with a conception of their definitions and general principles. In addition it should be one that clarifies them with a precise explanation, and cites their Talmudic sources, and provides a record of the disputes of the Geonim and the Rabbis, and the consensus of the Aḥaronim⁷¹—and all this with splendid conciseness.

Therefore I, Ḥasdai the son of R. Judah the son of R. Ḥasdai the son of R. Judah,⁷² may they rest in peace, have taken upon myself to walk this path—with the approval of scholars and with their help,⁷³ and if God favors me with life. In those places, however, where I innovate and depart from what was said earlier, I will be a bit more expansive. My intention is that, in a matter in which there is disagreement, it be easy for anyone who looks into it to find the roots of the issues where they originate in the texts. Thus it would be best that one who studies this book attain in advance a familiarity with the Talmud and be engaged in Talmud study, for then he will grasp [1] easily, and [2] with precision, the matters relating to the commandments and their general principles and reasons, so that by the mere mention of definitions and general principles, once he has command of them, he will master the totality of the commandments of the Torah, which in turn will be an evident cause of his

preservation from error. These, however, are not the three requisite ways enumerated earlier. “Precision in matters considered” and “preservation from error” together constitute just one of the earlier three ways, and the third way mentioned earlier, “preserving and remembering,” is missing entirely.

⁷⁰ See n. 67. ⁷¹ These are later authorities.

⁷² Some later manuscripts, as well as the Ferrara edition and Fisher, erroneously have “Ḥasdai the son of R. Abraham.” I thank Professor Zev Harvey for alerting me to this error.

⁷³ This aside may be taken quite literally, as manuscripts of *Light of the Lord* contain corrections and additions that are the handiwork of Crescas’s students or collaborators. See n. 95.

[3] remembering and preserving—the three things toward which the whole of our intention is directed. Because in this book things will be made crystal clear and will be purified, and because they will shine forth from the dark recesses of doubt that arise from this great part of the commandments,⁷⁴ it is appropriate to call it *Lamp of the Commandment*.⁷⁵

This is yet another⁷⁶—for indeed it is great⁷⁷—namely, the cornerstones of faith and the foundations of the Torah and the principles of its roots, about which, until the sealing of the Talmud, no dispute arose. Rather, these were known and agreed upon by the Sages of our nation—except for the secrets of the Torah, among them the account of creation and the account of the Chariot⁷⁸ which were in the hands of a select few modest men who transmitted them to their disciples at special times and under special conditions. But when the generations weakened, so that those who were repositories of the received Oral Torah and of the recesses of its secrets and mysteries lost their vigor, the wisdom of our wise men dissipated, and the understanding of our intelligent ones went into hiding.⁷⁹ Then many of our people aggrandized themselves to put forth a vision⁸⁰—though words of prophecy had been closed up and sealed⁸¹—in dreams and vanities⁸² and foreign ideas,⁸³ to the point that some of our great sages were drawn to their words and decorated themselves with their discourses and adorned themselves⁸⁴ with their proofs. Chief among them was the great teacher our Rabbi Moses son of Maimon, who, despite the greatness of his intellect, the prodigious comprehensiveness of his Talmudic knowledge, and the expansiveness of his mind, was nevertheless vulnerable when he delved into the books of the philosophers and their discourses: they seduced him and he was seduced.⁸⁵ Upon their weak principles he erected pillars and foundations to support the secrets of the Torah in the book that he called *Guide of the Perplexed*. Even though the intention of the Rabbi⁸⁶ was proper, there now arose rebellious slaves⁸⁷ who turned the words of the living God into heresy, blemishing the sacred offerings and introducing defilement⁸⁸ instead of beauty⁸⁹ into the words of the Rabbi. As he

⁷⁴ The manuscripts have “the great part of the commandments,” בחלק הגדול הזה מהמצוות, referring back, no doubt, to “this great part of the commandments” that is in the category of the possible, with regard to which Crescas faults Maimonides for not dealing with it properly. Harvey (1973) reproduces the manuscript version. Fisher and Smilevitch follow the Ferrara edition in which the word “great” is absent.

⁷⁵ Prov. 6: 23. This work was, unfortunately, never written. It may be assumed that it was to be comparable in scope to Maimonides’ *Mishneh Torah* but free of those perceived deficiencies to which Crescas calls attention in this Introduction.

⁷⁶ Hag. 2: 6. “This” refers to matters of belief, which are discussed in *Light of the Lord*, the only part of the projected two-part work that was written.

⁷⁷ Esther 1: 20.

⁷⁸ The account of creation is found in Gen. 1–2. The account of the Chariot refers to Ezekiel’s vision in Ezek. 1: 4–26.

⁷⁹ Based on Isa. 29: 14. ⁸⁰ Based on Dan. 11: 14. ⁸¹ Dan. 12: 9.

⁸² Based on Eccles. 5: 6. ⁸³ Based on Isa. 2: 6; lit., “children of strangers.”

⁸⁴ The term נתייפ (nityapu) may well be alluding to Yefet (Japheth): see the following note.

⁸⁵ A similar expression, but used with respect to God and with a different sense, is found at Jer. 20: 7, אולי יפתה ונבולה לו, פתיתני ה’ ואפת (“Perhaps he will be persuaded and we shall prevail against him”). It is likely that there is an allusion, too, to Gen. 9: 27, יפת אלהים ליפת (“God will enlarge Japheth”—Gen. 9: 27), and thus to the allure of Greek wisdom.

⁸⁶ “The Rabbi” refers to Maimonides. ⁸⁷ 1 Sam. 25: 10.

⁸⁸ A similar expression is found in Isa. 50: 20. ⁸⁹ Isa. 3: 24.

solemnly swore them not to reveal the matters he concealed and the mysteries of his thoughts, these others indeed did not reduce his word to naught and did not violate that to which he swore them;⁹⁰ instead, they turned his words to heresy, subverting his intention. The remaining others who trembled at the word of the Lord,⁹¹ when they saw these people rendering clean the unclean swarming thing⁹²—as if in accordance with the Torah—and offering seemingly plausible proofs,⁹³ were not freed from confusion, and bewilderment assailed them. At the heart of the matter is that up until now there was no one to take issue with the proofs of the Greek,⁹⁴ who darkened the eyes of Israel in our times.

For this reason I, whose eyes have been somewhat opened with respect to this enterprise, have seen fit to present in writing the root-principles and cornerstones upon which the Torah in its totality rests, and the axes on which it turns, without favoring anything but truth. I will indeed accomplish this by investing, together with the most important scholars,⁹⁵ much study and great diligence. I will at the same time explain that, with respect to these principles of belief the Rabbi did not, God forbid, dissent. Nevertheless, if his book in fact turns out to contain astonishing things, it is unthinkable that we should say nothing about them. For although the words of the Rabbi our teacher, including even his remarks on secular matters, are dear to us and are loved by us, the truth is yet more beloved.⁹⁶ And it is particularly necessary [not to remain silent] when it is possible for desecration of the holy name to result from these points. For our maxim is: “Wherever there is desecration of the holy name one ought not accord deference to the Rabbi.”⁹⁷ 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 that which removes confusion in matters of faith, and which lights up all the darkness, is the Torah alone, as he [viz. Solomon] says: “For a commandment is a lamp and Torah is light.”⁹⁸ In saying this he did something extraordinary: he compared the relationship between the Torah, which in its roots and grounds is wisdom (and which is that to which this part [of my intended two-part book] is devoted), on the one hand, and the commandment, that is, the totality of the commandments (which we deal with in the

⁹⁰ Crescas’s point is that Maimonides’ students, because they lacked the necessary subtlety and discernment, did not—because they could not—reveal their master’s secrets.

⁹¹ Isa. 66: 5.

⁹² The expression וטהר את השרץ, “and he purified the swarming thing,” is found at BT *Eruvin* 13b and BT *Sanhedrin* 17a.

⁹³ The expression וּמְרָאָה לִי פָנִים is used in this sense at BT *Eruvin* 13b, with respect to R. Meir’s uncanny ability to defend his positions, even when they seemed indefensible, with plausible arguments.

⁹⁴ The reference is to Aristotle.

⁹⁵ It is likely that these scholars, or “associates,” חֲבֵרִים (*haverim*), are Crescas’s students, who may have prepared the collections of material and the abstracts of literature he used in this work. Talmudic Sages graciously referred to their students as “associates.” See Wolfson (1929), 23. Also see n. 73.

⁹⁶ Something similar was uttered by Aristotle (*EN* I. vi. 1096^a) with respect to “those who introduced the Forms,” intending no doubt Plato’s followers (cf. *Metaph.* III. ii. 987^{a-b}). It was Plato’s Socrates who first made this remark—with respect to Homer (*Rep.* X. 595b–c; cf. X. 607c–d).

⁹⁷ BT *Berakhot* 19b; BT *Eruvin* 6a. ⁹⁸ Prov. 6: 23.

other part),⁹⁹ on the other, to the relationship between light and lamp. We have therefore called this part *Light of the Lord*. Since this part is the foundation and pillar of the other part, it is appropriate that it precede it in sequence. Indeed, the name of this book, which comprises both of these parts—should God will its completion—is *Lamp of the Lord*.¹⁰⁰ For it is from the Lord¹⁰¹ to light a path with His Torah and His commandments. From Him I request help and guidance, for there is no helper but He, and no one to rely upon but Him. Now I begin, in the name of the Lord. Amen.

⁹⁹ This part was never written. See n. 75.

¹⁰⁰ See Harvey (1973), 367, who contends that although all manuscripts and printed editions have “*Lamp of God*” (נר אלהים; *ner elohim*), nevertheless “*Lamp of the Lord*” is intended. The text’s next sentence supports Harvey’s view, since “Lord” is the divine name contained in the verse it cites. It is likely that the reason the manuscripts and printed editions all have “*Lamp of God*” is that their editors assumed that the verse Crescas has in mind is Prov. 20: 27—“The soul of man is the lamp of the Lord”—in which traditionally, for some reason, the Tetragrammaton was pronounced *elohim*. It seems clear, however—and it is indeed quite explicit—that the verse Crescas has in mind is the one cited in the following sentence, viz. Ps. 18: 23, in which “Lord” is the name used: “For it is from the Lord . . .” Moreover, it is evident that Prov. 20: 27 is the verse Crescas has in mind earlier in the Introduction, when he speaks of two lights, the lamp of God, which concerns the commandments, and the light of the Lord, which concerns beliefs. It is surely in this earlier passage that the traditional *elohim*-pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton in Prov. 20: 27 comes into play. Inasmuch, however, as “lamp of God” is reserved there for the commandments-part of the larger work, it could hardly be the name of the whole.

¹⁰¹ Ps. 118: 23.

Preface

O house of Jacob arise and let us walk in the light of the Lord.¹

The foundation of beliefs and the root of first principles² which will lead directly to the knowledge of truth concerning the fundamental cornerstones of the divine Torah is the belief in the existence of God. And since the intention of this part³ is to prove the cornerstones and views of the Torah of God, it is appropriate that we investigate this root-principle and the way in which we arrived at our knowledge of it.⁴

Since the root of the first principles of the divine Torah is the belief in the existence of God, this root-principle is self-evident—since the Torah is arranged and commanded by an arranger and commander, and its being divine has meaning only if the arranger and commander is God. Anyone who included belief in the existence of God among the positive commandments therefore committed an infamous error—since commandments are relational and no commandment can be conceived without a certain commander. Thus, if we regard the belief in the existence of God as a commandment, we in effect make the belief in the existence of God precede—in the order of our knowing—the belief in the existence of God! Moreover, if we regard the preceding belief in the existence of God as itself a commandment, this, too, will necessitate a prior belief in the existence of God. And so on to infinity. It would then follow that the commandment to believe in the existence of God would go on to infinity—but this is the height of absurdity. It is clear, therefore, that it is inappropriate to count the belief in the existence of God among the positive commandments.⁵

This Preface introduces only *Light of the Lord*, the first volume of the intended two-volume work, *Lamp of the Lord*, the second volume of which, *Lamp of the Commandment*, was never written.

¹ Isa. 2: 5.

² Crescas echoes here the opening of Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*. He does so, however, only to go on to disagree with Maimonides on the matter of whether there is among the commandments a commandment to believe that God exists.

³ The reference is to this first part of Crescas's projected two-part work, the part called *Light of the Lord*. See Introduction n. 75.

⁴ In addressing “the way in which we arrived at our knowledge of it,” Crescas considers the extent to which speculative arguments support the view favored by Torah and tradition.

⁵ These are the first two of five arguments directed against the notion that belief in God is commanded: (1) If belief in God is a commandment, it would have been commanded by God, and so it would have to presuppose belief in God *ab initio*; and (2) the presupposed belief in God entailed by taking belief in God to be a commandment (as per argument (1)) would itself be a commandment that presupposed belief in God—and so on to infinity. The first argument locates the flaw in the view that belief in God is commanded in its begging the question. In the second, the view is faulted for generating an infinite regress.

This may be seen in another way, in that it is indeed clear from the meaning of the term “commandment” and its definition that it can only find its place among things to which will and choice apply.⁶ If indeed, however, the belief in the existence of God is among the things to which will and choice do not apply, it follows that the meaning of the term “commandment” will not extend to it.⁷ This is something we shall investigate later on, God willing.⁸ Be that as it may, because it is evident that this belief is a root and first principle of all the commandments, if we count it itself as a commandment, it would follow that it is its own premise. Yet this is the height of absurdity.

That indeed which led him [who counted belief in the existence of God as a commandment] to do so—that is, to count this root-principle as a commandment—is a statement at the end of *Gemara Makkot*, where the Rabbis say:

613 commandments were spoken to Moses at Sinai. What is the scriptural support for this? “Moses commanded the Torah to us.”⁹ Yet they objected, “But Torah in *gematria* is only 611.” And they responded: “I am the Lord” and “You shall not have”—these we heard from the mouth of the Almighty.¹⁰

Those [who count belief in the existence of God as a commandment] came to think because of this that “I am” and “You shall not have” are two commandments, and they therefore regarded the belief in the existence of God as a commandment. But it is evident that this conclusion is unwarranted. For what is intended there [viz. in the Rabbis’ response to the question they raised] is that the God who is referred to in this way [viz. as the Lord your God] is the very deity and leader *who took us out of the land of Egypt*. Therefore the Rabbi our teacher Moses, of blessed memory, did well,¹¹ according to this way of thinking, when, in his *Book of the Commandments* (*Sefer Hamitzvot*), he counted the first commandment concerning belief in the divine as the command “to believe that there is a cause and determinant that is the agent responsible for all existents—which is why He said: ‘I am the Lord your God.’”¹² The Rabbi thus interpreted the divine name as signifying God’s being the agent responsible for all existents. And for the same reason God says, “who took you out of the land of Egypt”; this, too, is a kind of proof for that belief, since it is on the basis of this event that we grasp the power of God, such that all existents stand in relation to Him “as clay in the hand of the potter.”¹³ Therefore, indeed, this commandment will apply to the belief that God is the one who took us out of Egypt. Nevertheless, it is

⁶ Crescas will argue that belief is not voluntary—and certainly not once the truth of the proposition in question has been demonstrated.

⁷ This is the third argument: commandment implies choice and will; belief precludes them; hence, belief in God cannot be a commandment. The fourth follows: Since belief in God is the root of all commandments, if it were itself a commandment, it would be its own root.

⁸ See II. v. 5.

⁹ Deut. 33: 4. The idea is that the number of commandments derives from the *gematria* of “Torah.” One would therefore expect the *gematria* of Torah to be 613. On *gematria*, see Introduction n. 37.

¹⁰ BT *Makkot* 23b–24a.

¹¹ Crescas’s approval of Maimonides in this matter is confined to just this one view that he attributes to him, namely, that God is the cause of all existents and that this God is the very same God who took the Israelites out of the land of Egypt. Crescas disagrees both with Maimonides’ interpretation of the rabbinic dictum in tractate *Makkot* and with Maimonides’ view that belief in God is commanded.

¹² Exod. 20: 2.

¹³ Jer. 18: 6.

clear that even this way of thinking is absurd in itself. For from the Rabbis' having said: "I am' and 'You shall not have,'" it would indeed appear that the entire extended utterance¹⁴ through "to those who love Me and observe My commandments" is to be included. For, note: these two utterances take the grammatical form of the first person singular—"I am the Lord"; "who has taken [first-person sing.] you"; "before Me"; "because I am the Lord your God"; "to those who love Me and keep My commandments." Since the remaining utterances proceed in the grammar of the third person—as it is said: "For the Lord will not acquit"; "for in six days the Lord made"; "He rested and was refreshed"—they agreed that "I am" and "You shall not have" issued from the mouth of the Almighty. Because all those writers who were enumerators of the commandments¹⁵ thought it appropriate to count "You shall not make a graven image" and "You shall not bow down to them" as two commandments—and this is indeed the very truth—were "I am" to be counted as a commandment, there would be three that we heard from the mouth of the Almighty, so that there would be 614 commandments. Furthermore, if we take "You shall not have any other gods" as a commandment not to believe in any divinity other than Him, as the Rabbi wrote, their number would rise to 615.

It is therefore appropriate that we deny that the Rabbis, in saying that "I am' and 'You shall not have'—these we heard from the mouth of the Almighty," intended each to count as a commandment. Rather, since both alike were framed in the language of the first person singular, as we noted earlier, *that* is what they meant when they said that we heard them from the mouth of the Almighty. It follows that the two commandments in the utterance "You shall not have," which are "You shall not make for yourself a graven image or any representation," and "You shall not bow down to them," which we heard from the mouth of the Almighty, will complete the [count of] 613 when added to the 611 that were heard from Moses' mouth.

What remains to be explained is why the Rabbis did not count "You shall not have any other gods before Me" as a commandment, in which case there would be *three* commandments in this one utterance. This is easily accounted for: for if beliefs are something to which will and choice do not apply,¹⁶ the term¹⁷ "commandment" would not apply to them. And if nevertheless the term "commandment" does apply [to "You shall not have"], then the meaning of "You shall not have" will be that we may not *acknowledge* anything else as a god.¹⁸ It was in fact made clear in *Sanhedrin* that one who does so merits the death penalty.¹⁹ The Rabbis did not see fit to count "You shall not have" and "You shall not bow down" as two, because these share a single common root-principle, namely, the acknowledgment of [other gods']

¹⁴ I translate דבור, "utterance," when referring to any of the Ten Utterances, popularly known as the Ten Commandments.

¹⁵ The term אזהרות (*azharot*) normally refers to the negative commandments, the proscriptions, in the Torah. In the expression, מוני האזהרות, "enumerators of the *azharot*," however, the term refers to commandments, whether negative or positive.

¹⁶ See nn. 6 and 7.

¹⁷ Reading *shem* ("term") rather than *sham* ("there") (contra Fisher's vocalization of שם).

¹⁸ Acknowledgment is understood as active and hence not as a matter of belief alone.

¹⁹ *Sanhedrin* 7: 6. Here the acknowledgment, קבלה (*qabbalah*), consists in proclaiming to the unauthorized god, "You are my God": והאומר לו אלי אתה.

divinity. But “You shall not make for yourself a graven image” stands—even if one does not worship or acknowledge it—and therefore they counted them [viz. “You shall not bow down” and “You shall not make”] as two. But it never occurred to the Rabbis to count “I am the Lord” as a commandment,²⁰ since it is the root and first principle of the totality of the commandments, as we explained previously.²¹

Now that it has become clear that this belief is a root and first principle of the totality of the Torah’s beliefs and of the commandments, it is indeed appropriate that we examine this belief as well as how we arrived at our knowledge of this root-principle. Of the beliefs contained in the Torah, however, some are cornerstones and foundations of the totality of the commandments and others are not. Nevertheless, they too are true views. Indeed, all are alike in that they are all beliefs such that one who believes in the divine Torah must believe them and one who denies them denies the entire Torah. But there are some [beliefs] that are opinions that recommend themselves to reason; those who deny these are not considered heretics. The intention of this part²² is to prove the cornerstones and views of the divine Torah. Because of these considerations, we have seen fit to divide this part into four Books: the first will deal with the first root-principle, which is the first principle for all the Torah’s beliefs; the second, with those beliefs that are cornerstones and foundations for the totality of the commandments; the third, with the true views that we who believe in the divine Torah ought to believe; and the fourth, with those opinions that recommend themselves to reason.

Our discussion of these things will proceed along two paths: one, the clarification of their sense as the Torah determines it; and two, the way in which we arrived at our knowledge of them. May His name be praised.

²⁰ Not every utterance counted among the “ten utterances” need be regarded as a commandment.

²¹ This completes the fifth argument, which is a refutation of Maimonides. The argument, in brief, runs as follows. Since the verse Deut. 33: 4 states, “Moses commanded the Torah to us,” and since the word “Torah” in *gematria* is 611, there have to be two commandments that issued directly from the mouth of God (since, according to the tradition—for which this verse may well be the source—there are 613 commandments). Crescas contends that the two divine commandments are: “You shall not bow down” (which may comprise “You shall not have”) and “You shall not make”—these are distinct from one another because one can make a graven image yet not worship it or worship it yet not make it. Crescas argues that if, as Maimonides would have it, “I am the Lord” is one commandment, “You shall not have” is another, “You shall not make” is a third, and “You shall not bow down” is a fourth, the total number of commandments would rise to 615. From Crescas’s perspective, as we have seen (see n. 7), belief cannot be commanded, so “I am the Lord” cannot be a commandment nor can “You shall not have”—so long as this is viewed as a matter of belief rather than of action. As Crescas interprets the Rabbis, when they say that “I am” and “You shall not have” proceeded directly from God, all they intend is that the early part of the Decalogue was uttered by God in the first person; all commandments contained in this early part of the Decalogue spoken by God in the first person, however, forbid actions; they do not require beliefs.

²² Of Crescas’s projected two-part work.

Book I

CONCERNING the first root-principle, which is the first principle for all the beliefs of the Torah: the belief in the existence of God.

The meaning of a proposition is clarified in two ways: the first, by explaining the terms that it contains, and the second, by explaining the relation between the one term and the other—for instance, is the predicate to be affirmed or denied of the subject? It is evident, too, in the case of this proposition, namely, our assertion that God exists, that its subject-term is “God,” who is absolutely inscrutable, as will be discussed, God willing, later on. Therefore, the point of this proposition is solely that the cause and first principle of all existents exists. For this reason it would seem that the study of this root-principle can be conducted in the second way alone, that is, by the way in which we arrived at knowledge of its truth.¹ It is therefore appropriate that we investigate whether we came to know the true meaning of this root-principle on the basis of tradition alone, that is, on the authority of the divine Torah, or whether we came to know it also by way of speculation and investigation.

First among those who discussed this root-principle at length from the point of view of investigation were: Aristotle in his works the *Physics* and the *Metaphysics*; the commentators on Aristotle’s works, such as Themistius and Alexander; the later commentators, such as Alfarabi² and Averroes³; as well as the authors who followed him, such as Avicenna,⁴ al-Ghazali,⁵ and R. Abraham ibn Daud. Indeed, since the Rabbi and author who in his book called *Guide of the Perplexed* also made use of many of their propositions, stating them concisely in order to clarify this root-principle in a variety of ways, and seeing fit to join to it two precious root-principles, namely, that God is one and that He is neither a body nor a force in a body,⁶ we decided to investigate Maimonides’ proofs, with respect to whether they establish

¹ This is the second of the two ways, set forth at the end of the Preface, in which the truth of beliefs may be established. The first is via the Torah and the rabbinic tradition. The second is via speculative reasoning.

² Alfarabi is also known as abu Nazzr.

³ Averroes is the Latinized form of ibn Rushd.

⁴ Avicenna is the Latinized form of ibn Sina.

⁵ Al-Ghazali is also known as abu Hamed.

⁶ By “force” Crescas means to include whatever cannot exist except in something else. It includes, therefore, accidents, forms, the lower faculties of the rational soul, the internal principle of motion, and universals.

comprehensively the truth concerning these three root-principles or not. Since Maimonides' proofs derive from a synoptic grasp of the discourses of the first philosophers, one need not attend in addition to anything else that appears in their discourses.

Inasmuch as Maimonides' proofs are based on the twenty-six propositions that he posits at the beginning of the second part of his book,⁷ the order of investigation herein will proceed by considering the following two questions: first, whether the propositions Maimonides uses to prove these root-principles are truly established demonstratively—for if the propositions required for the proof of the root-principles are not themselves proved demonstratively, neither will the root-principles be proved demonstratively; and second, if we do assume these propositions to be true—and to be proved demonstratively—whether the root-principles are also proved demonstratively from them. In this study, we shall proceed by addressing the author's own claims. Accordingly, it is appropriate that we divide this Book into three Parts:

Part I. An exposition of these propositions in accordance with how they were proved in the discourses of the philosophers, and an exposition of the proofs of the Rabbi. For inasmuch as we shall be examining them, it is appropriate that they be understood by us clearly and straightforwardly and free of any uncertainty—as the Rabbi intended.

Part II. An inquiry into some of the propositions and into the proofs of the Rabbi, to determine whether they have been proved demonstratively.

Part III. An account of the root-principles in accordance with what the Torah prescribes and in accordance with the way in which we arrived at our knowledge of them. In this Part the intention of Book I will be made manifest, to wit, to show that there is no way to grasp these root-principles perfectly other than via prophecy, as the Torah attests and the tradition confirms. This fact notwithstanding, it will also become evident that reason concurs.

Part I

PROOF of the propositions as they were proved in the discourses of the philosophers and in the proofs of the Rabbi as derived from the discourses of the philosophers. We have consequently divided this part into thirty-two chapters: twenty-six to explain the twenty-six propositions [of the philosophers], and an additional six to clarify the six proofs of the Rabbi.

Chapter I

PROOF of the first proposition, which states that the existence of anything whose measure is infinite is absurd.

An investigation of this proposition was conducted by Aristotle in various places in his works the *Physics*, *On the Heavens*, and the *Metaphysics*,⁸ and he produced proofs

⁷ The reference is to *The Guide of the Perplexed*.

⁸ *Physics* III. iv–viii; *On the Heavens* I. v–vii; *Metaph.* XI. x.

for it: a proof of the impossibility of the existence of an infinite incorporeal magnitude; a proof of the impossibility of the existence of an infinite corporeal magnitude; a proof of the impossibility of the existence of an infinite moving thing—whether its motion is circular or rectilinear; a general proof of the impossibility of the existence of a body whose infinity is actual. Consequently, we divide this chapter into four sections, corresponding to the number of these classes of proofs.

CLASS I. PROOF OF THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF THE EXISTENCE OF AN INFINITE INCORPOREAL MAGNITUDE.

This proof proceeds as follows. He⁹ asserted that the following disjunction is inescapable: an incorporeal magnitude is either subject to division or not. If it is not subject to division it surely cannot be described as infinite except in the sense in which it is said of a point that it is infinite or of a color that it is inaudible.¹⁰ The remaining alternative is that it *is* subject to division. But if so, it is inevitable that it be either an incorporeal quantity or one of the incorporeal substances such as the soul or the intellect. Yet it is absurd that it be an incorporeal substance, since any incorporeal thing, insofar as it is incorporeal, is *not* subject to division; yet we have been proceeding on the assumption that it *is* subject to division.¹¹

In addition, it is unavoidable that we say that it [viz. the incorporeal substance] is either divisible or not divisible. If, on the one hand, it is divisible, then, since that which is incorporeal is simple and homogeneous, it would follow that the definition of the part and of the whole is the same. And because it is assumed that the whole is infinite, it would be necessary that the part, too, be infinite. But it is the height of absurdity that the whole and the part be the same. If, on the other hand, it is not

⁹ In this Part as well as in Part II Crescas frequently uses the third-person singular pronoun without specifying its referent. This translation for the most part follows suit. Nevertheless, since it is Maimonides who formulates in the Introduction to Part II of his *Guide of the Perplexed* the twenty-six propositions that Crescas presents and discusses here, the third-person pronoun usually refers to him, even when the proofs presented are not originally his. Of course, there are also discussions in which Aristotle is either explicitly (as in I. i. 1) or implicitly (as in I. ii. 1) Crescas's target. Moreover, Crescas is well aware that the proofs that undergird Maimonides' twenty-six propositions often derive not directly from Aristotle but more generally from "the discourses of the philosophers," that is, from the writings of the medieval Aristotelian commentators, especially Averroes. Crescas occasionally refers by name to a specific philosopher or commentator. He clearly relies as well on al-Tabrizi's *Commentary on Maimonides' Twenty-Five Propositions*, a digest that sets forth the medieval interpretation of the Aristotelian position. For extensive consideration of Crescas's likely sources, see Wolfson 1929.

¹⁰ To say of a point that it is infinite or of a color that it is inaudible is to commit a category mistake: neither "finite" nor "infinite" applies to a point; a color can be neither audible nor inaudible. Whereas it is true of a point that it is infinite in the sense that it is not finite, and true of a color that it is inaudible in the sense that it is not audible, these assertions are true not because a point might have been finite or a color audible though as it happens they are not, but rather because they are not subject to this sort of characterization. The point here is that finitude and infinitude apply only to things that are subject to division.

¹¹ In this paragraph the argument maintains that no *indivisible* incorporeal magnitude is infinite. It proceeds to consider whether a divisible incorporeal magnitude might be infinite. The incorporeal magnitude in question might be either a quantity or a substance. Yet surely it cannot be a divisible incorporeal substance, since nothing incorporeal is divisible.

divisible, as is indeed a necessity for any incorporeal thing, we would have to be saying that it is infinite in the way that a point is said to be infinite.¹²

The sole remaining possibility [once it has been shown that the incorporeal magnitude cannot be an incorporeal substance] is, therefore, that it is a quantity, in which case it is inevitable that it be either a quantity that inheres in a substratum¹³ or a quantity that is incorporeal. But it cannot be an incorporeal quantity, since number and measure, which are now being posited as infinite, are not separable from sensible things. But if it were a quantity that inheres in a substratum, then, since accidents¹⁴ are not separate from their substratum, and since the finite and the infinite are accidents of quantity, it follows necessarily that they are not incorporeal, since quantity is not incorporeal.¹⁵

Since this proof is based on a premise that requires the impossibility of measure separate from sensible things, this proof would be question-begging from the perspective of one who endorses the notion of incorporeal extension, which allows for the existence of such a quantity.¹⁶ It would seem, therefore, that he must be relying on his belief in the impossibility of empty space.¹⁷ For were we to admit the existence of empty space, then the existence of a quantity separate from sensible things would not be impossible, but, on the contrary, its existence might actually be necessitated, for in fact, it would be capable of measurement, and we would be justified in saying of it that it is large or small or in applying to it any of the other concepts of quantity. So it is only because he denied the existence of empty space that he could base this proof on the aforementioned premise [viz. that number and measure are not separable from sensible things]. We therefore see fit to cite his proofs [for the impossibility of empty space] briefly within this class of proofs [viz. those dealing with the impossibility of an infinite incorporeal magnitude], so that we may investigate them further in the second part [viz. in Book I Part II], God willing, to see whether they establish comprehensively the truth of his view.

¹² This paragraph offers a further explanation of why it is that an infinite incorporeal substance cannot be divisible: since an incorporeal substance lacks internal differentiation, each part in it will be identical to the whole. Yet if this is the case then the parts would have to be infinite just as the whole is; but it is absurd that what is true of the whole, namely, that it is infinite, be true of the parts. The paragraph concludes with the application to incorporeal substances of what was said earlier regarding incorporeal magnitudes generally: that if they are indivisible they cannot be described as infinite except in the way that a point is—that is, illegitimately, by way of a category mistake.

¹³ “Substratum” renders נשוא (*nosei*), which in turn translates the Greek *hupokeimenon*: that which underlies and is thus the bearer of the various properties.

¹⁴ “Accident” renders מקרה (*miqreh*), which in turn translates the Greek *sumbebekos*: a property that a thing happens to have but which is not essential to or definitive of it. “Accident” is also used more broadly to mean anything that cannot exist other than in something else. For this notion Maimonides—and Crescas as well—generally employs the term “force” כח (*koah*).

¹⁵ This argument seeks to show that “incorporeal quantity” is an oxymoron: if something is incorporeal, and hence separate from sensible things, it cannot be a quantity, since quantity is not separable from sensible things; but if it is a quantity that is in a substratum it cannot be incorporeal, because quantity—whether finite or infinite—is an accident of sensible things.

¹⁶ Whereas incorporeal quantity may be an oxymoron when quantity is regarded as a property solely of corporeal things, incorporeal quantity might be admissible if quantity may be regarded as a property of “incorporeal extension,” that is, of empty space.

¹⁷ By “empty space” what is meant is vacuum; empty space is empty of everything, including air.