



The Philosophy of Don Hasdai Crescas. Part II

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THE PHILOSOPHY OF DON HASDAI CRESCAS

BY MEYER WAXMAN, New York.

PART II

CHAPTER III. INTRODUCTORY.

OPINIONS HELD BY THE PRE-MAIMONIDIAN JEWISH PHILOSOPHERS CONCERNING THE PROBLEMS OF OMNISCIENCE, PROVIDENCE, AND FREEDOM OF THE WILL.

THE problem of the freedom of the will presents one of the most interesting aspects in the history of human thought. Its roots lie far back in antiquity. It arose out of the peculiar position that man holds in the domain of nature, and at the moment that self-consciousness appeared in man and enabled him to reflect upon the surrounding world, and his own personality as related to it. Man represents a puzzling riddle unto himself. On the one hand, he feels himself to be the master of things, the lord of being; on the other, contemplation teaches him that he is only a part of that great mysterious environment called nature. Furthermore, this nature is not a haphazard conglomeration of things and events, but there is a kind of succession and sequence, law and order, and to which even he, *nolens volens*, must submit himself. The development of religion simply changed the aspect of the problem. It placed man in conflict with the will of the gods, instead of with the blind natural force. With polytheism, however, the gods were not strong enough to replace entirely the

old something that rules over the destiny of man, now known by the name of fate, and were even themselves supposed to be dominated by it. Homer says, 'When the hour of fate comes for man, even a god is helpless, no matter how much he loves him'.¹¹⁰ Herodotus goes farther, and asserts that a God is not able to avoid it.¹¹¹ Thus the problem becomes a much discussed subject in ancient thought; and it can really be said that out of this dual character of a man's position there developed Greek ethics with its special emphasis upon contemplation and thought.

With the rise of monotheism, positing a being all-powerful, all-wise, and all-knowing, the problem became more acute. How in the face of such a being, in comparison with which man dwindles into insignificance, can man save his personal freedom? It ought by the nature of the conception of God to be given up. Yet peculiarly enough, the first monotheistic religion not only did not reject the freedom of the will, but incorporated it as a dogma.¹¹² The story of the receiving of the ten commandments as described in the Bible,¹¹³ as well as the term covenant used innumerable times to designate the process of receiving the Law, implies plainly that man is free and that the Israelites were entirely at liberty to reject the Law of God. The idea of freedom is repeated many times in the Bible.¹¹⁴ One may argue that the monotheistic conception was probably loose with the Hebrews in the early times, yet none can accuse the Hebrew prophets, especially the later ones, of a lack of pure monotheism, and in spite of it the freedom of the will is asserted by them with the same

¹¹⁰ *Iliad*, XVII, 446.

¹¹¹ Herodotus I, 97.

¹¹² Dr. D. Neumark, תולדות העיקרים בישראל, I, pp. 81-6.

¹¹³ Exod. 19. 10.

¹¹⁴ Deut. 30. 19.

vigour as the unity of God.¹¹⁵ It is rather a curious fact that the problem of the compatibility of the freedom of the will with that of God's omniscience and providence is never found in prophetic writings. There are some allusions—in the Psalms—to the problem of injustice, namely, why the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper,¹¹⁶ and quite a discussion of it in Rabbinic literature,¹¹⁷ but the problem as a whole was never touched upon.

However, it was bound to crop up. With the rise of scientific philosophic reflection in Judaism, and the manifestation of the desire to base religious dogmas on philosophic principles, the monotheistic conception had to be carried to its logical conclusion, and as a result the problem of the relation of man and God appeared in its full vigour, and demanded a solution. A similar process was going on in the Mohammedan world. The Koran, preaching the purest and most abstract monotheism, and carrying it to logical conclusions, presents a decided predestinarian aspect, though some endeavour to find vestiges of free will in it.¹¹⁸ But human reason and philosophic speculation felt indignant at such a conception, and revolted against it. This brought about the rise of

¹¹⁵ Cp. Micah 6. 8.

¹¹⁶ Ps. 37. 25, 26, as well as the contents of the whole chapter, which seems to be intended as an answer to the problem of injustice. The problem itself is stated by Jeremiah in a rather bold way when he asks (Jer. 12. 1), **מדוע דרך רשעים צלחה שלו כל בגדי בנדר ארץ נתנה ביד רשע פני שופטיה יכסה אם לא**, and cries out, **אפוא מי הוא** 'the earth is given into the hands of the wicked: he covereth the face of the judges: if not, where and who is he?' (Job 9. 24).

¹¹⁷ Berakot 7 a.

¹¹⁸ Prof. Guyard in his book on 'Abd-er Razzaquu et son traité de la prédestination et du libre arbitre', quoted by L. Stein in his *Willensfreiheit*, p. 3.

the sects and various doctrines, attempting the solution of the problem in one way or another.¹¹⁹

The first who dealt with the problem in Jewish philosophy was, as might be expected, Saadia. Saadia says, Man is free in his actions, and there is no intervention on the part of God. This fact is proved by the evidence of sense, of reason, and of tradition. We see in daily life that man is master of himself; he speaks or is silent at will, does a number of other things or refrains from doing them, and never conceives that anybody can restrain him in acting according to his wish. This evidence, though it may seem superficial to us, carried a certain amount of conviction to Saadia, who, following the Mutazilites, attached great importance to conception, for whatever can be conceived is real, and the contrary, whatever is not conceived does not possess any reality.¹²⁰ Hence the emphasis laid by Saadia on the fact that man conceives and that accordingly he is free. Reason testifies to freedom. First, it is proved that it is impossible for one act to be produced by two agents. If God interfered in human actions, it would be the effect of two agents, God and man. Secondly, if God forces man to do a certain act, what reason would there be for his punishment or reward? The believer and the atheist would be on an equal footing.¹²¹ As for the

¹¹⁹ ואומר אחרי הדברים האלה כי הבורא אין לו שום הנהגה במעשי בני אדם ואיננו מכריחם לעבודה ולא למרי. ויש לי על זה ראיות מדרך המוחש ומדרך השכל וממה שבכתוב ושבקבלה, *Emunoth Wedeoth*, ed. Josefow, 1885, p. 64 b.

¹²⁰ Cp. Introduction, sect. 3.

¹²¹ *Emunoth Wedeoth*, p. 65 a. Aristotle offers similar arguments to prove his assertion that man is the originator of things. He says: 'Testimony seems to be borne both by private individuals and by lawgivers, too, in that they chastise and punish those that do wrong, while they honour those who

objection on traditional grounds, he quotes a number of verses to that effect.

The problem arises then, How is it possible to conceive freedom of human action and at the same time prescience of God? If God knows beforehand that man will rebel against His will, does it not follow *eo ipso* that man must act in this fashion, for otherwise God's knowledge is not perfect? Saadia replies that, in reality, the supposed conclusion does not follow. God's knowledge is not the cause of human actions. Were it the cause, we should have to grant that man's actions are predestined, for God's knowledge is eternal, and necessarily the effects would be determined, but the case is not so. It is true that He knows beforehand the events that are going to happen, but He knows them in their true light. God knows whichever way man is going to select, yet His knowledge does not have any causal relation to the things which are going to happen. It is pure knowledge without any active force. The fact that the things happen in the future and He knows them beforehand does not bear on the subject, for His knowledge is above temporal accidents. There is only one time existing in regard to God, and that is the present. If one will ask, How is it possible that, if God knows a man is going to speak, yet he could have chosen to be silent? to this the reply is made, that had he kept silent God's knowledge would have taken cognizance of the fact, for God knows the way man will choose after deliberation.¹²²

By way of illustration, we may compare the prescience

act rightly'. Of course, here the reference is not to theological authority, but political; however, the force of the argument is the same. *Nic. Ethics*, III, V.

¹²² *Emunoth Wedeoth*, p. 65 a-b.

of God, as Saadia conceived it, to a man standing on a very high mountain, and from this exalted position he views an exceptionally long row of men passing by; some have passed, some are passing, and some will pass. He sees them all, for his position is very elevated, but his seeing is not the cause of their passing.¹²³ However, we cannot help admitting that a shrinkage in God's prescience has been assumed by Saadia. As a result, objections to his theory have been raised by later religious philosophers.¹²⁴ But Saadia was very zealous to save human freedom, and some sacrifice had to be made.¹²⁵ The problem of the compatibility of the providence of God with the freedom of the will is not treated by Saadia definitely. It seems, nevertheless, from the whole tenor of his book, that he believes in the existence of such a providence, for how could he not believe it? It is found in the Bible. There are, however, some passages bearing on the subject. In one of them it is stated that the events that happen to man are through Divine causality, but at the same time they are partly caused by man himself, namely, that some come as a punishment for his previous choice.¹²⁶ The question still remains open. Are the events predestined to happen simultaneously with God's prescience of them, or is it that God causes them to happen after the human actions have taken place? But no such discussion is found.

Bahia, as an ethical philosopher, and a man imbued

¹²³ Commentary to *Emunoth Wedeoth*, *ad locum*.

¹²⁴ Albo says that Saadia's view is almost tantamount to the opinion that denies God any knowledge of possibles.

¹²⁵ The early Christian fathers encountered a similar difficulty, and followed the same path. So did Origen allow a kind of narrowing of God's prescience. Fischer, *History of Christian Dogma*, 106.

¹²⁶ *Emunoth Wedeoth*, 66 b.

with religious feeling, does not devote much discussion to this difficult problem in its philosophical aspect. The conflict between freedom and prescience, and the logical contradiction resulting from the full conception of the former, are hardly brought to light. The problem is rather viewed from the aspect of Providence. He does not call it the problem of freedom and necessity, but of necessity and justice. The point of gravity is, How can we conceive Divine justice in distributing reward and punishment when human actions are pre-ordained? Bahia puts forth several solutions to the problem. Some, he says, have denied Providence in regard to human actions, and asserted that man is entirely free, thus saving the justice of God. Some, on the other hand, have given up freedom, but as for justice they denied the possibility of the human understanding to grasp it. Some admit Providence in human actions, excepting such as pertain to right and wrong. In such acts choice is left to man. This is really the traditional view expounded in the Talmud.¹²⁷ It is also the one that Bahia follows. He feels, however, that the problem is not solved yet, that there are points which demand a solution, especially prescience; this last is not even mentioned by name, but it is surely meant by the following explanation. Just to cover all difficulties, Bahia adds that the ways of God are hidden from man, and human understanding cannot conceive the way God's justice works in the universe.¹²⁸ It must be admitted that this solution of the problem is hardly a philosophical one. Bahia's distinction between

¹²⁷ טפה זו מה תהא עליה . . . ואילו רשע וצדיק לא קאמר כד"ר . . . הכל בידי שמים חוץ מיראת שמים חנינא, Niddah 16b; also Berakot 33 b.

¹²⁸ *Hobot ha-Lebabot*, pp. 131-32.

human and Divine knowledge does not carry with it the speculative characteristics which attend that of Maimonides, who offered a similar suggestion (cp. *infra*). It is simply a blind resignation of a believer to the dogmas of belief.

Halevi treats the problem of freedom in an accurate and philosophical manner. He asserts that human actions are possible and not necessary, and proves it from the general belief of man.¹²⁰ Halevi always laid great emphasis on the generality of an idea and the *consensus omnium*. As for the conflict of freedom with God's providence, Halevi evades it by asserting that there are two kinds of Divine causality, direct and indirect. As examples of the first kind may serve such things as the order of the universe, the way and manner of the composition of all living being, the genera of the vegetable kingdom, and all such phenomena that *eo ipso* testify to the plan of a wise maker. As an instance of the second kind, we may quote the burning of a log of wood by fire. The immediate cause of this phenomenon is easily explained; but this cause has another cause, and so on until we finally reach the first cause, still the connexion is not a direct one. We have then a fourfold division of events, divine, natural, chance-wise, and elective or choice-wise.¹³⁰ The Divine are those that must be referred immediately to Divine attention, such as have been mentioned. The natural arise through mediate causes (סבות אמצעיות), but with an end in view. The chance-wise arise also through mediate causes, but with no particular order or design. The elective are those

¹²⁰ *Kuzari*, ed. Isaac Metz, Hamburg, 1838, p. 119.

¹³⁰ (Corrected by Zifrinowitsch in his edition, p. 120, וואס תקצר.) תקרב מציאות זה בחלוקה הזאת: המעשים יהיו אלהיים או טבעיים או מקריים או מבחריים. Cp. for a similar division the *Physics* of Aristotle, II, 5-6.

of which the human will is the cause. Freedom is one of the mediate causes. We have then a twofold system of Divine causality, the immediate and the mediate. The mediate through the causal nexus returns to God, but the connexion is a loose one, no force is exerted and man is free to choose.¹³¹ Divine providence is thus saved, for all events revert to Him indirectly. Halevi goes on polemizing against those that deny the possible. He argues, If man has no choice in acting, but is forced to perform the act by the sequence of events, why then do men display greater anger at the one who injures them willingly than at the one who does so unwillingly? Are not all human actions involuntary?¹³²

In regard to the problem of the compatibility of the prescience of God with freedom, Halevi does not add anything original, but follows Saadia and the Mutazilites,¹³³ in asserting that the knowledge of an event beforehand is not the cause of the realization of that event. Halevi lays a great deal of stress on the middle causes (cp. above). His ethics thus receives a contemplative aspect. The middle causes are powerful influences, and it is necessary to know which to choose and which to obviate.¹³⁴ The natural causes are necessary, but yet there is a possibility by a knowledge of facts to obstruct their results and avoid them. Halevi admits a special kind of Providence, for in his division of events there is one class of Divine action; and there is nothing preventing God from interfering at

¹³¹ *Kuzari*, p. 120. The idea of the mediate causes was known in antiquity by the Stoics. Cp. L. Stein in his *Willensfreiheit*, p. 110, note 175.

¹³² *Kuzari*, p. 120.

¹³³ Halevi alludes directly to the Muta'zilah in that.

¹³⁴ *Kuzari*, p. 122.

certain occasions, and effecting something immediately even in a world of mediate causes. He evades, however, the problem of injustice. It is possible, he says, that if we were able to penetrate and follow up the long series of causes, we might discover the reasons why the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper, but this is really beyond human intelligence. We must, therefore, rely on the knowledge of God and His justice, and admit our own shortcomings.¹³⁵

Abraham Ibn Daud, the first Aristotelian in Jewish philosophy, is a strong supporter of the freedom of the human will. In fact, it is his principal ethical foundation. He says, Man possesses the possibility to do evil, and the stronger the inclination is in a certain man, the harder the struggle to overcome that inclination, the higher the value which is attached to the virtuous act.¹³⁶ He utilizes the doctrine of the twofold Divine causality, but it is hardly possible that he borrowed it from Halevi, as he evidently did not know him.¹³⁷ Most likely both derived it from a common source.¹³⁸ In regard to the problem of prescience and freedom, Ibn Daud solves it in a very simple manner. He concedes that God's foreknowledge is undecided in regard to the exact way man will act. He knows beforehand that certain actions will be presented to human choice,

ואפשר שיגלה בחקירה ברוב הסבות כצדי (בצדיק (Zifrinowitsch) ורע לו רשע וטוב לו ומה שאיננו נגלה ימסרו בו הענין אל דעת האלוהים וצדיקו, p. 125.

¹³⁵ *Emunah Ramah*, ed. Weil, Fran

¹³⁶ In the introduction to the *Emunah Ramah*, p. 2, Ibn Daud mentions that he read Saadia's book as well as Ibn Gabirol, but makes no mention of the *Kuzari*. This goes to prove that he was unacquainted with it, for otherwise he certainly would have mentioned it.

¹³⁷ On this subject there is a difference of opinion between D. Kaufmann, *Attributenlehre*, p. 279, and Stein in his *Willensfreiheit*, p. 20, note 43.

but not which way he will choose.¹³⁹ Ibn Daud is also radical in his theory of Providence. According to him it extends only to the universals, namely, as far as things are connected with the order of the universe, but not to the particulars. He, however, excepts the human genus, an exception which we find later in Maimonides. He introduces also an ascending scale of Providence, even in regard to this genus. Those that strive more in the knowledge of God and the principles of reason are especially looked after.¹⁴⁰ The question of the existence of evil in the world is answered by Ibn Daud by negating its reality. There is no evil in the world; God is the cause of good only. The answer is often repeated in Jewish as well as in general philosophy. We shall meet it in a modified form also in Spinoza.

¹³⁹ *Emunah Ramah*, p. 96.

¹⁴⁰ ולעצמים הנכבדים השגחה בנמצאות זה העולם בכללי ובמין האנושי בפרט והנה על כל פנים ייוחד ההשגחה בשיעור רב אחר זריותו להפקיד רוחו אליו, *Ibid.*, p. 97.

CHAPTER IV

MAIMONIDES, VIEW AND CRESCAS'S COMMENTS.

MAIMONIDES, the chief conciliator between theology and philosophy in Jewish thought, devotes much space to the elucidation of the problem discussed in the previous chapter, as well as to its solution in all its aspects. Maimonides, as his predecessors, distinguishes between the first cause of events and the proximate ones. The proximate ones he divides, as those before him, into natural, chance-wise, and choice-wise.¹⁴¹ Choice, however, is the exclusive gift of man who is endowed with a special faculty. Maimonides introduces a distinction, already made by Aristotle,¹⁴² between instinctive willing which is only a result of desire, and human choice.¹⁴³ He, however, does not connect choice with reason as much as Aristotle does. Maimonides, as a theologian, attributes it to a direct act of the will of God. Just as God willed that fire should tend upwards and earth downwards, so did He institute that man should be master of himself, and his actions should be in his own hands.¹⁴⁴ He, like Ibn Daud,

¹⁴¹ *Moreh*, II, ch. 48; *Guide*, p. 222.

¹⁴² Moral choice is plainly voluntary, but the two are not coextensive, voluntary being the more comprehensive term; for first, children and all other animals share in voluntary action, but not in moral choice. *Ethics*, III, 2. 113 b.

¹⁴³ ור"ל בבחירה שהיה סבת המתחדש ההוא בחירת אדם עד שאפילו *Moreh*, II, ch. 48. Notice the distinction between בחירת אדם and בעלי חיים רצון בעלי חיים.

¹⁴⁴ Code, Div. I, Teshubah (Penitence), ch. 5, 4; *Guide*, III, 8.

recognizes the inclination in man to do evil, and therefore assumes freedom as a standard of actions; the more the struggle, the higher the worth of the ethical action. Since free will was instituted in man by the will of God, it may on special occasion be taken away from man, such as we find in the case of Pharaoh.¹⁴⁵ This case is well known to all theological philosophers, Christian as well as Jewish.¹⁴⁶ Of course, such a possible limitation will not be pleasing to the upholder of absolute free will.

In regard to the Divine knowledge, Maimonides, after polemizing against some of the philosophers who wanted to limit it, asserts that God is omniscient and nothing is hidden from Him.¹⁴⁷ In this connexion, Maimonides remarks that great philosophers of the pre-Aristotelian period accepted the doctrine of omniscience. He refers to the book *De Regimine*, by Alexander of Aphrodisias, where their opinions are quoted. The only one to whose opinion we find a distinct reference is Socrates. In Xenophon's *Memorabilia* he is quoted as preaching that the gods know all things, what is said, what is done, and what is meditated in silence.¹⁴⁸ Maimonides further asserts that this knowledge is eternal. The problem then appears in full vigour, How are we to reconcile the freedom of man with this prescience? The answer to this problem Maimonides finds in his Theory of Attributes (cp. above).¹⁴⁹ Maimonides conceives the Divine attributes in a negative way, and says that when applying the same attributes to God and man, we use them in an absolute homonymous

¹⁴⁵ Chapters of Maimonides, ch. 8, ref. to Exod. 7. 3.

¹⁴⁶ Origen, *De Principiis*, III, 1, grapples with this problem.

¹⁴⁷ *Guide*, III, 16.

¹⁴⁸ *Memorabilia*, I, 1. 19.

¹⁴⁹ Chapter 2.

way. This theory contends that it is absolutely impossible for the human mind to grasp the meaning of the attributes applied to God. Since the attribute of prescience forms no exception, the difficulty is solved. The problem arises only when we conceive knowledge in the human sense. With man, knowledge is correlative with fact. Applying the same conception by analogy to that of God, it follows that God's prescience ought to agree with the fact, otherwise it contradicts itself. But since we do away with that analogy and assert that His knowledge is different in kind, the difficulty disappears. God knows things beforehand, yet the possible still remains.¹⁵⁰ This teaching is not merely a concession of ignorance, but, as mentioned, grounded in the theory of attributes. God's knowledge is not a separate thing from His essence but connected with it, and just as the essence, it is unknown. In the act of human knowledge we distinguish the יודע ידוע מדע, the knower, the known, and the knowledge itself, but with God He is all three in one.¹⁵¹

As for the question of Providence, Maimonides treats it in detail. He quotes four different opinions, and then adds his. The first is the Epicurean, denying Providence entirely. The second is the Aristotelian, in the garb of Alexander of Aphrodisias,¹⁵² namely, that Divine providence ceases at the sublunar world. But as Providence, even in regard to the spheres, consists mainly in their preserva-

¹⁵⁰ *Guide*, III, ch. 20.

¹⁵¹ Chapters 1-8. A similar use of the homonymous theory is made by Spinoza, *Cogitata Metaph.*, VI, 9. It is interesting to compare with the last Fischer's note 24 in his *Anhang* to Spinoza.

¹⁵² As for Aristotle himself, it is doubtful whether he ever expressed any opinion on the subject. See Jules Le Simon in his *Étude de la Théodicée de Platon et Aristote*, p. 100 f.

tion, it filtrates also to a certain degree to the sublunar world, in so far as the genera are endowed with perpetual preservation. The third is that of the Ash'aria—extremists on the orthodox side of the Kalamitic movement—assuming perfect subjection of the universe and its beings to the Divine will, denying chance and choice. The fourth is that of the Mutazilites, positing freedom, and Divine justice and Providence at the same time. They went so far in their conception of justice, according to Maimonides, that they extended reward even to animals for their being killed.¹⁵³ The fifth is his own, which according to him agrees with the Jewish tradition. Divine providence extends in the sublunar world to the human species only. The other beings are subjected to chance or natural law. However, he admits that the genera of other beings have a kind of providence in so far as the natural law originates from God.¹⁵⁴ As it is evident, the Maimonidian theory differs from the so-called Aristotelian only in attributing Providence to the human species. The reason for the exception is found in the possession by the human genus of the mind, which is a means of conveyance for Divine emanation. It follows, therefore, as we noticed in Ibn Daud, that the one who is more intellectually perfect should receive more attention from Providence.¹⁵⁵

Note.—Objections to this last assertion have been raised by many religious thinkers, and with justice. Among the thinkers is also the Karaite Aaron Ben Elijah in *Eṣ Ḥayim*.

והוא שאני אאמין שהשגחה האלהית אמנם היא בזה העולם התחתון
 ר"ל מוחתת נלגל הירח באישי מין האדם לבר *Moreh*, ch. 17.

¹⁵⁴ *Guide*, III, ch. 17. For a certain inadequateness in his exposition of the Mutazilistic teaching see Stein, *Die Willensfreiheit*, p. 86.

¹⁵⁵ *Guide*, III, 17, 18.

The chief critic, however, is Crescas himself. This question will be discussed in detail. I have also omitted for the present the Maimonidian theory of origin of evil, as well as some philosophic arguments for the denial of prescience and Providence quoted by Maimonides. These are discussed at length by Crescas, and should be taken in connexion with his own solutions as they form a part of his theory.

CRESCAS ON PRESCIENCE.

Crescas, as a foundation to his discourse on the subject, posits three principles, which, according to him, agree with and are necessitated by tradition. These are (*a*) the infinite science of God, (*b*) His prescience, (*c*) that His foreknowledge of the possible event does not change the nature of it. He proceeds then to analyse the philosophical doubts that arise in connexion with such conceptions, and, as usual, reproduces them first. First, if God knows the events happening in this world, it follows that God is being perfected by this knowledge, for it has been established that knowledge is a kind of perfection; but such conclusion is absurd, for how can the absolute Perfect be perfected through the knowledge of inferior things? Second, since it is known that the mind in conceiving things becomes identified with the concepts and assimilates them to its essence, it follows that there will result a multiplicity in God's essence, for the things are many. The third and fourth arguments attack God's assumed knowledge of particulars. There were two current philosophical opinions in regard to the Aristotelian conception of the matter. The first denied entirely God's knowledge of anything external to Himself. (This seems to be the right one,

cf. above, Introduction, IV.) The other, following Alexander, admitted the knowledge of universals.¹⁵⁶ Particular things can be conceived only through their matter and passive intellect, but God has no matter; it follows that He cannot conceive the particular things.¹⁵⁷ Again, particulars are temporal, and whatever relates to time is an accident of motion; but God is above motion and time, He therefore does not know of the particulars. Finally, the positing of Divine science of the world's affairs is untenable, as the disorder in the natural sphere and the existence of evil in human affairs testify.¹⁵⁸

These are the objections to the general principle of positing God's knowledge of the world's affairs. There are several objections especially to several of the specific principles, namely, the infinite science of God and His prescience. How, asks the opponent, can God's knowledge be infinite? Is not knowledge a comprehensive and determining thing? How, then, can the infinite be comprehended or determined? There is then a contradiction in terms. Again, prescience seems to be impossible. Real knowledge of a thing implies that the object known exists, for in what consists

¹⁵⁶ Gersonides, *Milhamot*, III, 1, p. 120.

¹⁵⁷ All these objections are also found arranged in a similar order in Gersonides, *Milhamot*, III, 2. However, we notice in Crescas a more logical arrangement. It is not necessary that he borrowed them directly from Gersonides, though the contents and form are similar. These objections were current in the thought of the age. Some of them are also mentioned by Maimonides. In the third objection there is a digression by Crescas which deserves some notice. It is the first with Gersonides. He says that the particular is conceived through the hylean power such as sense and imagination. Crescas substitutes matter instead of sense. That would agree with the Aristotelian conception of individuality which consists in matter, for it is this that gives the uniqueness since form is general to genus. *Metaph.*, XII, 8.

¹⁵⁸ *Or Adonai*, p. 29 a.

the truthfulness of a conception of things if not in the fact that the mental conception of a thing agrees with the object existing outside of the mind? ¹⁵⁹ Furthermore, if we grant that God does know things before their occurrence, a change in His knowledge is necessitated. Before they occur He knows them as future happenings, after that as past. And since the mind essence changes with the concepts, there will then be a change in His essence, but this is impossible. The assumption that the existence of possible future events is compatible with the prescience of God is also assailed. If we posit that God knows before the realization of one of the two possible aspects of a future event, and at the same time we assert that the opposite aspect is possible of occurrence; then while in His prescience the opposite is still conceived as possible, after the action occurs the possibility is removed and a change in the Divine knowledge necessarily effected. Moreover, the assumption that God knows whichever aspect is going to occur proves to be untenable, for with a possible event, in as far as it is possible, either side may be assumed. Suppose, then, that we assume the opposite side of that of which God is prescient, existing, if so absurdities would result, (a) a change in His knowledge, (b) a falsity in it. If that cannot be the case, the possible is done away with and God's prescience involves the necessity of human actions. ¹⁶⁰

After reproducing at length all the objections, which, as remarked, are identical with those quoted by Gersonides in his book *Milhamot* (The Battles of the Lord), Crescas quotes also the Gersonidian solution, though not mentioning

¹⁵⁹ Cp. Locke's definition of knowledge in *Essay on Human Understanding*, Bk. 4, ch. 1.

¹⁶⁰ *Or Adonai*, Tr. II, p. 29 a.

him by name. The objection may be answered in the following manner: The first which involves the question of God's perfection disappears when we consider that the existence of other beings arises through God's existence, and also conceived through His own conceptions. His knowing other beings would not mean then an additional perfection, for He knows them through the general order of things (סדר הכלל), the principle of which is in Himself.¹⁶¹ The second, raising the objection of multiplicity, is solved by the same conception. Since God knows the general order which emanates from Himself, and this order unites all the different things (for though things are different in certain respects they are also connected in a certain aspect and perfect each other), He then knows the particulars from their side of unity. In the same manner the third doubt is refuted. It is founded on the principle that in order to know the particulars God must possess hylic powers, but though we grant the validity of the principle it does not follow that God should not know the particular things through their general conceived order wherein their unity is manifested. The doctrine of the inherence of things in the general order also meets the fourth objection, basing itself on the fact that particulars are in time, while God is above time, for God's conception of the general order does not depend upon time. The fifth, the question of evil, is deferred for future discussion. Again, the other doubts, named by Crescas partial, are also met. The difficulty of knowledge being infinite (cp. above), it is done away with by removing the infinite. Things are infinite in their differentiation but not in their unity.¹⁶² The

¹⁶¹ *Milhamot*, III, 4; *Or Adonai*, p. 29 b.

¹⁶² The words in the text, both in Gersonides and Crescas, are סדר מושכל,

general order preconceived by God is finite. In the same way the two objections raised against prescience (cp. above) are righted. Since God knows things through their general order which emanates directly from Him, the things are already existing, and surely there is no change in the knowledge itself. If God knew the particulars in as far as they are particulars, that is from the point of their differentiation, that change would be implied, but He knows them from their general order, and this is not changed. Finally, the most difficult question is solved; this is the question of the existence of the possible in spite of prescience. Possible events have two aspects, and may be preordained in one way, and possible in the other. From the aspect of general order of events they are determined, but from the aspect of human choice they are indeterminate. God knows these things only so far as they are possible, but He does not know which side of the possibility will be realized. It is evident, therefore, that when Gersonides speaks of possible things as being determined by the general order, he means that only their possibility is determined but not their realization.¹⁶³

Crescas, in resuming the foregoing discussion, points out that the reasoning of those philosophers—still not mentioning any name—compel us to posit two principles: (1) God knows the particulars only through their general order; (2) God knows only that certain things are possible, but not the manner of their realization. From these two conceptions there follows necessarily a third one. God does not know of the happenings of one of the possible

which means literally conceived arrangement, i. e. division into genera. But the concept of genus implies always the notion of unity.

¹⁶³ *Milhamot*, III, 4; *Or Adonai*, pp. 29 b-30 a.

sides, even *a posteriori*.¹⁶⁴ Were He to know of the fact, a change in His knowledge would be implied. Before the occurrence of the event He knew of it only as a possible, and after it as actual. Crescas sees in such an assumption a shrinkage of God's science, a dangerous doctrine, and sets out in his acute manner to refute it. These philosophers, he says, have not solved the doubts at all. In spite of their insisting on unity by positing that God knows things through the unified aspect, namely, the general order, these philosophers, according to Crescas, have not succeeded in removing multiplicity. True knowledge consists in knowing things through all their causes, mediate or immediate. Knowledge of composed things then would be perfect only when the elements of which they are composed would be conceived by the knower, for the elements are causes of things, but the elements are many, there follows then that the knower must conceive the manifold. Again, even if we grant that existing things form a kind of unified order of perfection, this will be true only of the broadest genera, such as the division of the kingdoms, e. g. the vegetative, animal, &c., but considering the narrower genera or the species, we find that one does not perfect the other, e. g. the horse has no relation of perfection to the donkey. If we posit, then, of God a knowledge of genera, He cannot escape conceiving multiplicity. Thirdly, even if we assume that God's knowledge is limited to the spheres and intelligibles, the difficulty is not solved, for though they present a certain unity they also exhibit differentiation; the knowledge of the differentiating aspect would then

¹⁶⁴ ויתחייב להם ענין נ' וזה שאחר שיגיע החלק האחד מחלקי האפשר ¹⁶⁴ ויתחייב להם ענין נ' וזה שאחר שיגיע החלק האחד מחלקי האפשר
בו אין לו ידיעה בו, *Or Adonai*, p. 30 a.

imply multiplicity.¹⁶⁵ Lastly, there is an astrological argument directed chiefly against Gersonides, who attributes great influence to the spheres and constellations. The knowledge of particulars by God arises, according to him, out of the order of the heavenly spheres, which order is due to the various combinations of the constellations. But the combinations may be infinite; for the great circle in the sphere is a quantity, and it is infinitely divisible. It follows, then, that the arrangements can be infinite, and so God's science does not escape multiplicity.

It is evident, then, that the principal object in removing the manifold from Divine knowledge has not been obtained. But there is still a greater error. The followers of the foregoing theory, in their endeavours to put forth an exalted conception of God, have attributed to Him imperfections, namely, finiteness. If, as they say, God does not know the particulars as particulars, it follows, since the number of particular things is infinite, that He possesses ignorance in regard to the infinite, and that the relation of God's knowledge to His ignorance is as the finite to the infinite, for the number of things that He does know is finite. Again, if God does not know beforehand which of the two possible sides of an event will be realized, it appears, since the possible events are incomparably greater than the necessary ones, that God is ignorant of most of the happenings of the world. Lastly, those philosophers, in order to avoid the assumption of the possibility of a change in God's knowledge, asserted that God does not know of the

והג' כשהונחה היריעה מצד הסדור הכולל בגרמים השמימיים¹⁶⁵ ובשכלים הנפרדים שאישיהם נצחיי באיש והם מתחלפים במין הנה בצד אשר הם מתחלפים במין אינם מתאחדים היריעה א"כ בהתחלף עצמיהם במין כבר תחיב רבוי ידועים, *Or Adonai*, p. 30 b.

result of a possible happening, even as a past occurrence. If this is the case, we must evidently assume that God is ignorant of the greatest part of human history, for in the long row of centuries thousands of possible actions, events, and occurrences were realized, and all these things escaped His knowledge ; such an assertion is certainly absurd.¹⁶⁶

To meet all these doubts and objections, Maimonides put up his theory of the homonymity of the Divine attributes. (See above in the exposition of the Maimonidian theory.) This theory was severely attacked by Gersonides. He argues that it is impossible to speak of absolute homonymity in regard to Divine attributes. In attributing to God certain qualities, and speaking of them as belonging to Him, we inevitably borrow human conceptions. The case in question furnishes an example. We conceive knowledge as a perfection, we attribute it also to God. But in this case no absolute homonymy is possible, for when one attribute is predicated of two things, it is impossible to be used in an homonymous way, as it does not then convey the same idea. Again, when we negate certain attributes in regard to God, we do not negate them in an homonymous way. When we say, God is not movable, we do not mean that His not being moved and the not being moved of a certain thing are absolutely homonymous, for in this case the idea that we wish to convey is not at all proved. He may be moved, and yet the movement has no association with what we call being moved. Still we go on negating. Again, if all attributes are employed in an homonymous way, why shall we not say, God is a body, conceiving it in an absolute homonymous way with no relation to what we call body? Gersonides, therefore,

¹⁶⁶ *Or Adonai*, p. 31 a.

assumes that all attributes and knowledge included are said to differ in their application to God and man only in degree, but not in kind. The Maimonidian solution of the problem of prescience and the possible falls then, the foundation being undermined.¹⁶⁷

Against the assaillment of Gersonides, Crescas steps forth as a defender of Maimonides. Knowledge attributed to God and man must be in an absolute homonymous way. It cannot be said that it differs only in degree, for the content of any attribute predicated of things and differing in degree, is the same, no matter how widely the degrees it may connote in various applications may differ, as, for instance, the content of existence, which is predicated of substance as well as of other things.¹⁶⁸ The contents in both predications are the same, namely being, but the degrees are various; substance exists through itself, while the other things exist through the substance. But in speaking of the knowledge of God, since His knowledge is a kind of essential thing, and His essence is different from ours in kind, it follows that the same will be said of His knowledge. It is true that negatively, when conceiving the attributes under a negative aspect, namely knowledge, denoting not ignorant, existent, not non-existent, the contents are one when employed of God and man. But when applying these attributes in a positive way, we must admit that the application is homonymous. It is evident from the exposition, and more so on reading the original, that Crescas finds himself in his defence in a rather difficult position.

¹⁶⁷ *Milhamot*, III, 3.

¹⁶⁸ The word in the text is **מאמרות**, which means literally Categories, but to one who is not acquainted with the Aristotelian conception of Categories the word here would be confusing.

He apparently contradicts himself in defending Maimonides, and in assuming the homonymy theory he changes his own attitude which he expressed in his first section,¹⁶⁹ where he distinctly states that existence, when applied to God and man, is not used absolutely homonymously, but in a kind of non-essential likeness,¹⁷⁰ and he speaks definitely of a difference in degree. However, the contradiction is removed by his insisting on the distinction between a negative proposition and a positive, and claiming that while the negative content may have a likeness, the positive which we are going to assume may differ absolutely. Still, Crescas admits that it is only defensive, but he himself probably holds a different view. Towards the end of the argument he remarks: 'Be it whichever way, whether following the master (Maimonides) that knowledge is applied homonymously or that there is only a difference of degree as we say, and denotes an essential attribute as we showed in the third section of the first tractate, it remains for us to solve the question in a different way.'¹⁷¹

Crescas then proceeds to state his own view. The real and special distinction between the knowledge of God and ours is that His knowledge is active and causal, and ours derivative. Through His knowledge and true plan of His will, the known existing things have acquired their existence. Our knowledge is derived from the existing

¹⁶⁹ See *Or Adonai*, I, sect. iii, p. 22 a, and *supra*, ch. II, 2.

¹⁷⁰ The Hebrew word is ספוק, which is to be translated by the whole phrase; cp. Maimonides, מילות ההניין, p. 43

¹⁷¹ ואיך שיהיה משם הידיעה אם שיהיה בשתוף גמור בדרך הרב אם שיאמר בקדימה ואיחור ויורה על תואר עצמותו כמו שנראה אנחנו למה שהידיעה תהיה לעצמותו כמו שקדם לנו בכלל הנ' מהמאמר הא' וכבר נשאר עלינו שנאמר בהתר הספקות בדרך מיוחד מה שיספיק בו כמו שיעדנו, *Or Adonai*, p. 32 b.

things by means of the senses and imagination.¹⁷² This fundamental difference will remove all objections. First, in regard to God it cannot be said that knowledge of external things adds perfection, for it is this knowledge that causes the existence of other things. It is evident, therefore, that the things themselves cannot add anything to their cause since they are dependent upon it. The difference between Crescas's point of view and that of Gersonides must be made clear at the outset, as the solution of the first objection by Gersonides seems to be similar in language.¹⁷³ Gersonides also speaks of the fact that the existence of other things is dependent upon the existence of God, and that God's conception of other things is derived through the conception of His self. The difference consists in this, that Gersonides left out the voluntary element; the God of Gersonides, as well as of some others of the Peripatetic followers, was to a certain degree an imperfect personality. God, they say, is the cause of existence, but not directly, only through a kind of emanation by means of certain emanative beings which form a channel of causality. He knows the beings by knowing Himself, but He knows them only by means of the general order; the details were left to the other emanated beings. It is this loophole that enabled Crescas to overthrow the whole Gersonidian structure, and show its logical unsoundness (see his argument above). The great failure of the Peripatetic philosophical theologians was that they stopped midway between an absolute personality of God and an

שההפרש המיוחד בין ידיעתו לדיעתנו . . . שמדיעתו וציוור רצונו קנו הידועים המציאות. וידעתנו אצולה וקנויה מהידועים באמצעות החוש והדמיון, *Or Adonai*, p. 32 b.

¹⁷³ *Milla not*, III, 2, and exposition above.

absolute impersonality. Spinoza followed the last path, and arrived at his system where God is not only the cause of the world but also the ground; Crescas the first; and both of them succeeded in a certain way. Moreover, several of their conclusions are strikingly similar, for the principle is really one, a certain wholeness, but of this further. Crescas conceives the beings as arising not through emanation, but through the will and plan of God, and as every plan requires preceding knowledge; God's knowledge of things therefore is causal, nay, it is creative. He knows things, not because He knows Himself, but *eo ipso*; it is through His knowledge that they exist. This knowledge and will are not to be construed in any gross form, but, as has been discussed, they are essential attributes. The second objection disappears also, for there is no multiplicity implied on account of the fact that the known things are many and the mind assimilates and identifies itself with the things known. This objection may be true of a derivative mind, but not of God who is the cause of the existence of things, and thus knows them whether one or many.

In this way, God also knows the particulars without using the senses and imagination as a means of conception, for the particular also acquires its existence through His knowledge. The question of time, which is raised by the fourth objection, namely, that particulars are in time, is removed, for even time derives its existence from Him. Besides, Crescas has already shown (above, chapter I) that time is not an accident of motion but a mental concept. The argument from the existence of evil in this world is deferred for a later chapter.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁴ Or *Adonai*, p. 32 b.

Crescas then proceeds to discuss the objections which he terms partial. The question, How can knowledge comprehend an infinite number of things? is answered by maintaining that the objection would be valid if the knowledge were of a finite kind such as the human is, but since it is itself infinite there is no difficulty. The contention that God's knowledge may be infinite is strictly connected with the possibility of the existence of an infinite number of effects, and this is maintained by Crescas (cp. above, chapter I of this work). The second argument insisting that foreknowledge of a thing implies already the existence of the thing known, for it is this that constitutes true knowledge, is met by Crescas in the following manner. The assertion, he says, is true of human knowledge which is derivative, but not of God's; His prescience of a thing that it will exist is real and true, for it is that which assures the thing its existence. The other difficulty connected with the question of prescience, the one of change, namely, that there is a change in the status of the thing from being a future happening to a past occurrence, and therefore also a change in the knowledge of it, does not affect the knowledge of God, for He knows beforehand that at a certain time the event will happen. He finally arrives at the most difficult part of the problem, the compatibility of the existence of the possible with God's prescience. How can we call a thing possible when God knows beforehand whichever way it is going to happen? Here Crescas gives us a glimpse of his theory of an apparent or nominal possible. His consistency in refusing to admit any shrinkage in God's prescience forces him to abandon a great part of the freedom of the will. A thing, he says,

may be necessary in one way and possible in another.¹⁷⁵ As an example he cites the knowledge which a man has of certain things that are possible of existence, as most things are. The knowledge that we have of them necessitates their existing, for knowledge is an agreement of the mental ideas with the things existing. Yet this knowledge does not change their nature of being possible of existence. In a similar way, the knowledge of God knowing the way which man will elect does not change the nature of the possibility. It must be admitted that the example is not happily chosen, for human knowledge of things is *a posteriori*, the possibility of the existence is already a past thing, while the knowledge of God which we speak of is *a priori*, and the possibility is still existing. In addition, human knowledge is not causal, while that of God is, and His prescience must affect the future occurrence, unless we assume with Saadia that God's knowledge is not the cause of things; but Crescas really argued the contrary. However, the question is taken up again in connexion with freedom of the will, and he solves it quite dexterously.

It is a mooted question whether Spinoza's reputed impersonality of God is so complete as many of his interpreters want to attribute to him.¹⁷⁶ There are others who assert that in spite of some passages which lend themselves to such an interpretation, the God of Spinoza is not entirely robbed of consciousness.¹⁷⁷ The question what Spinoza meant by God's knowledge or intellect is dependent on the previous conception. The language is confusing, and

¹⁷⁵ והנה יתבאר לה במה שאומר אין ספק שהיות הדבר מחויב בצד מה
לא יחייב חיוב הדבר בעצמותו, *Or Adonai*, p. 33 a.

¹⁷⁶ Cp. K. Fischer, *Spinoza*, p. 366.

¹⁷⁷ Joel, *Zur Genesis der Lehre Spinozas*, p. 16.

the passages often ambiguous. It seems, however, that a certain discrepancy exists between his earlier remarks on the subject of Divine knowledge in the *Cogitata Metaphysica* and that of the *Ethics*. In the former, his language is more in accord with the philosophico-theological terms. He attributes omniscience to God, and of singulars more than of universals. In his polemics against those that want to exclude singulars from God's science, he reminds us of Maimonides in denying any existence to universals.¹⁷⁸ He further speaks of God being the object of His own thoughts. In the *Ethics*, on the other hand, in the famous scholium to proposition XVII in the first book of *Ethics*, Spinoza remarks, 'that neither intellect nor will appertain to God's nature', yet again, in the same scholium he describes the way he attributes intellect and will to God in quite Maimonidian fashion, insisting on absolute homonymy in applying these attributes to God. Again, in a corollary to proposition XXXII, in the first book, Spinoza says: 'Will and intellect stand in the same relation to the nature of God as do motion and rest and absolutely all natural phenomena.' This last passage shows Spinoza's view of God to be impersonal; yet he goes on to say in the scholium to proposition VII, book II, that 'whatsoever can be perceived by the infinite intellect as constituting the essence of substance belongs altogether to one substance'. What the word 'perceived' means here is difficult to tell. Joel concludes that all that Spinoza means to say in the scholium is that there is no relation between the human

¹⁷⁸ Cp. Maimonides, *Guide*, III, 18, and *Cogitata Metaph.*, pt. II, ch. 7: 'deinde res realiter existentes Deum ignorare statuunt universalium autem, quae non sunt nec ullam habent praeter singularium essentiam, cognitionem Deo affingunt'.

conception of these attributes and their real nature as they exist in God.¹⁷⁹ His conclusion, however, may be unjustified, but the discussion is beyond the range of our work.

What interests us most are two points, which bear a decided resemblance to the theory of Crescas. Spinoza speaks of the intellect of God as the cause of things both in regard to their essence and their existence.¹⁸⁰ Things arise because they exist by representation as such in the intellect of God. It is not clear what Spinoza may mean by 'representation'. To take it literally would mean a too great concession to personality, but whatever it intended to convey, even if we grant that it may connote the necessity of the unfolding of the attribute of thought, the formal side of it is almost identical with the teaching of Crescas, which, as was shown, emphasizes the point that the knowledge of God is the cause of things not only through the general order, but of the essence of all things. Again, Spinoza repeats continually that the intellect and the will of God are identical.¹⁸¹ It is exactly the same teaching that we find in Crescas when he says that 'through His knowledge and representation of His will the things acquired existence'.¹⁸² Such a conception is necessitated when knowledge is conceived as an efficient cause, not merely contemplation as Aristotle conceives the Divine thought to be. It is true that there may be a difference of contents in these two conceptions, that of Crescas having a voluntaristic ring, while that of Spinoza

¹⁷⁹ *Zur Genesis der Lehre Spinozas*, p. 18.

¹⁸⁰ *Ethics*, Bk. I, Prop. 17, scholium.

¹⁸¹ *Ethics*, Prop. 17, scholium, p. 32.

¹⁸² *Or Adonai*, p. 32 b.

a ground of causal necessity, but still the kinship of the teachings cannot be denied. It is not definitely known whom Spinoza had in mind when he makes the statement in connexion with the intellect of God in the foregoing passage, 'This seems to have been recognized by those who have asserted that God's intellect, God's will, and God's power are one and the same'; but that in Crescas this idea is expressed clearly is evident. However, we shall return to this subject later in the discussion on will and creation.

I wish, nevertheless, to say a few words concerning K. Fischer's stand on the subject. Spinoza, in scholium to proposition VII, book II of his *Ethics*, in discussing the unity of thinking and extended substance, remarks: 'This truth seems to have been dimly recognized by those Jews who maintained that God, God's intellect, and the things understood by God are identical'. Fischer, in quoting this passage,¹⁸⁸ does not attach much importance to any influence which it may possibly indicate, but in note 34 in his *Anhang* he says: 'Derartige Vorahnungen einer Identitätsphilosophie finden sich nicht wie man gemeint hat bei Maimonides, sondern bei Ibn Esra, so in dessen berühmtem Satz (Exod. 24), *כי הוא לבדו יודע ורעת* (He alone is knower, knowledge, and known)'. Why Fischer should see in this dictum the foreshadowing of the Spinozistic identity of substances is difficult to see, as well as his discovery of it in Ibn Ezra alone. This identical dictum is quoted also by Maimonides in the eighth chapter of his treatise known as 'The Eight Chapters', where he says: 'It has been explained that He, blessed be His name, is His attributes, and His attributes are He, so that it is said of Him that He is the knowledge, the knower, and the

¹⁸⁸ Spinoza, p. 273.

known; He is life, living, and the cause of His own life'. It was also quoted quite often by the Arabic philosophers. This dictum does not contain any other idea than the Aristotelian conception that God is the object of His own thought, and it is quoted by Maimonides in this sense to show the difference between God's knowledge and that of man, which is something separate from the subject, the knower. The later commentators of Aristotle interpreted Aristotle to mean that God in thinking of His own subject conceives ideas which are realized in the world as general principles, and so He knows the universals. It is in this sense that it was used by Ibn Ezra, following the Arabic philosophers who maintained that God's science is only limited to general order, but no foreshadowing of Spinoza can be seen in that dictum. If any claim to foreshadowing is admitted on that basis alone, Maimonides surely cannot be excluded from being a forerunner of Spinoza, as has been shown. That the origin of the dictum is to be found in the Aristotelian conception of God's thinking quoted in *Metaphysics*, XII, 7 and 9, has been pointed out by L. Stein.¹⁸⁴ Vestiges of a Spinozistic identity conception can be found only in Crescas, but of that later.

¹⁸⁴ *Willensfreiheit*, pp. 70, 116.

(*To be continued.*)