PREFACE

The present book consists of six studies in the physics, metaphysics, and psychology of Rabbi Hasdai Crescas, the great Catalanian Jewish philosopher. If Maimonides was the most important medieval Jewish philosopher, Crescas was his most important medieval Jewish philosophic critic.

Crescas was born around 1340 into a distinguished Barcelonian family of scholars; studied in Barcelona under the renown talmudist and political philosopher, Nissim ben Reuben Girondi (d. 1376); and served there as a rabbi. During the years 1387-1396, he was an adviser to the King and Queen of Aragon, Joan I and Violant. In 1389 he assumed the post of rabbi of Saragossa, and was later recognized by the Crown as judge of the Jews of Aragon. Following the anti-Jewish mob riots of 1391, in which thousands of Jews throughout Spain, including his son, were murdered, and more than a hundred thousand were converted to Christianity, Crescas—supported by the Crown—devoted himself to the reconstruction of the Jewish communities. His major philosophic work, The Light of the Lord (Hebrew: Or Adonai), was composed over many years and completed in 1410, about half a year before his death.¹ His work on behalf of the Jewish communities apparently did not allow him the leisure to complete it earlier. The Light is a systematic book treating of a wide range of philosophic, scientific, and theological topics. Its arguments are often framed in explicit opposition to Aristotle and his medieval disciples, particularly Averroes, Maimonides, and Gersonides. Although a systematic book, it contains some awkward contradictions due to changes in the author’s views over the many years of writing.² Among Crescas’ other works are a poem

¹ There is to date no complete translation of the Light in any language. For editions, see below, Bibliography. I am preparing a critical edition of the Hebrew text (to be published by the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities).
² E.g., in a discussion in Light, II, 1, 4 (dated early), Crescas defends Maimonides’ via negativa and criticizes Gersonides’ view that divine attributes are predicated per prius et posterius; but in discussions in I, 3, 1 and 3
(written in 1370), a chronicle of the mob riots of 1391 (written in their aftermath), a philosophic critique of Christian dogmas (written in about 1397-8), and a sermon on the Passover holiday (probably written in the early 1400s). Ḥasdai Crescas died in Saragossa in the winter of 1410/11.

The book before you is divided into two Parts:

Part One contains four interconnected studies on Crescas' physics and metaphysics. These studies are expanded versions of four lectures I gave at the École Pratique des Hautes Études, Section des Sciences Religieuses, Paris, in June 1995. I am very grateful to Professors Charles Touati and Gérard Nahon for inviting me to give these lectures. An abstract of the lectures appeared in the Annuaire EPHE, Section Sciences Religieuses, 104 (1995-1996), pp. 257-259. Let me seize this opportunity to thank my wife Nurit, my adviser in all things French, who assisted me in preparing the original French lectures. I also wish to acknowledge the help of Professor Sylvie-Anne Goldberg, Noémi Pinès, and Gad Shahar.

Part Two contains two previously published essays on Crescas' theory of determinism and liberty. The first of these originally appeared in English in Actes del Simposi Internacional (dated late), he defends Gersonides' view against Maimonides. See my "Bewilderments in Crescas' Theory of Attributes" (in Hebrew), pp. 133-136, 141-144. Manuscript evidence proves Crescas made corrections in order to remove such awkward contradictions, but communal obligations and failing health prevented him from doing a proper editorial job. He was assisted in the editing by students, who did not always fathom his arguments, and sometimes understood but disagreed. See Wolfson, Crescas' Critique, pp. 17-18, 23, 29-30; and see my "The Authorship of the Reservations concerning Determinism in Crescas' Or Adonai" (in Hebrew). In the studies that follow, problems concerning the dating of different strata of the Light are broached only when required for clarification of the subject at hand. They are discussed in detail in the introduction to my forthcoming edition.

See below, Bibliography. The poem, chronicle, and sermon, like the Light, were written in Hebrew. The polemic was written in Catalan, but survives only in Rabbi Joseph ben Shem Tob ibn Shem Tob's 1451 Hebrew translation.

On Crescas' life, see Baer, A History of the Jews in Christian Spain; Blasco Martínez, La Juderia de Zaragoza en el Siglo XIV; Assis, "Rabbi Ḥasdai Crescas' Plans for the Rehabilitation of Spanish Jewry after the 1391 Massacres" (in Hebrew). See also the Catalan version of my "Ḥasdai Crescas and Bernat Metge on the Soul" (in Hebrew), translated with additions (based on archival material) by Riera i Sans.
de Filosofía de L’Edat Mitjana, ed. P. Llorente, A. Boadas, F.J. Fortuny, A. Grau, and I. Roviró, Vic 1996, pp. 21-27. The second originally appeared in Hebrew in Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought 4, 3-4 (1984/5), pp. 275-280, and appears here in English for the first time. It was decided to include these two essays in order to clarify issues in Crescas’ determinism that are mentioned but not explained in the final chapter of Part One. Part Two thus complements Part One.

The book contains many translated texts from the Light of the Lord. These appear both in the body of the studies and in appendices to Chapters One-Four. The translations are based on the critical edition of the Hebrew text that I am preparing. However, page references are to the useful current edition by Shlomo Fisher. Additional page and line references are given to Harry Austryn Wolfson’s Crescas’ Critique of Aristotle, whenever the cited text is included in it (in Hebrew with facing English translation). For the sake of greater literalness or for the sake of uniformity of terminology, I have allowed myself to modify or retranslate the texts translated by Wolfson. I did this even though I am aware that my translations fall far short of Wolfson’s remarkable felicitousness. Similarly with regard to translations from other books, even in cases where I cite translations of others, I have taken the liberty to make changes. In discussions of textual problems in the Light, reference will sometimes be made to ms. Florence. This precious manuscript was originally copied in 1405 (according to an erased colophon), and substantially revised in 1410 (according to the present colophon). Its additions, emendations, and glosses reveal important facts about the editing of the Light in the five years before its final recension.

I thank Dr. Reinier Munk, editor of the Amsterdam Studies in Jewish Thought, who encouraged me to write this book, and supervised its publication. My brother, Professor Steven Harvey of Bar Ilan University, read the manuscript, and made his usual perspicacious corrections and suggestions. Dr. Ruth Glasner of the Department of the History of Science at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem read Chapter One, and made helpful

5 See below, Bibliography.
comments. I am indebted to my colleagues in the Department of Jewish Thought at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and especially to two fellow Crescas scholars, Professors Aviezer Ravitzky and Shalom Rosenberg. I am indebted also to Professor Arthur Hyman, who has followed my work in Crescas since he supervised my doctoral dissertation at Columbia University almost three decades ago. My ideas about Crescas were tested and sharpened in invaluable conversations with the late Professor Shlomo Pines.

This book is dedicated to my children in the hope they enjoy Crescas’ six centuries-old speculations about infinite worlds and infinite love.