

"I FEEL LOVE": HASDAI CRESCAS ON REWARD AND PUNISHMENT¹

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The problem of divine reward and punishment is a vexing issue in rabbinic thought as well as medieval Jewish philosophy. The text of the Torah speaks frequently of material, this-worldly rewards for obedience to divine *mitzvot*. Likewise, it describes terrible punishments that follow from neglect or outright disobedience.² Perhaps the most prominent collective reward described in the Torah is settlement and prosperity in the Land of Israel, with disobedience leading to defeat by national enemies and exile from the land. Rabbinic thought was forced to deal with the fact of the exile, leading to different interpretative possibilities: for instance,

¹ With apologies to Donna Summer (1977). All citations of Crescas's *Light of the Lord* below are from *Light of the Lord (Or Hashem)*, trans. Roslyn Weiss (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). Page numbers in parenthesis following quotations by Crescas refer to Weiss' edition. BT = Babylonian Talmud. My thanks to Mark Randall James and the anonymous reviewer for their comments, and to Ashley Tate for the careful editing.

² A thorough treatment of reward and punishment in the Bible can be found in Jože Krašovec, *Reward, Punishment and Forgiveness: The Thinking and Beliefs of Ancient Israel in Light of Greek and Modern Views* (Boston: Brill, 1999).

the exile as punishment for collective disobedience, and obedience as the key for national restoration.³

For several medieval Jewish thinkers, particularly those within the rationalist strain of Jewish thought, the topic raises a distinct set of problems.⁴ The Torah's notion of divine reward and punishment implies a conception of God as personal: a sentient personality, capable of change, and who responds to human actions. It presupposes, too, that God stands in direct control of nature, such that drought or rain can be manipulated as punishment or reward. For rationalist thinkers, by contrast, the proper way to conceive of God is as a depersonalized being, remote from direct control of the universe, not susceptible to change, and largely knowing only itself.⁵ Jewish rationalist thinkers tend to de-materialize and de-emphasize the idea of reward and punishment in this world,⁶ shifting emphasis to the eternal and cumulative reward of the continued existence of the rational part of the soul after death. The consequence of obeying discrete *mitzvot* is not physical or immaterial reward. Rather, obedience to the *mitzvot* is a version of the Greek *enkrateia*: cultivation of self-control and discipline, a propaedeutic practice necessary for the pursuit of philosophical and speculative investigation.

Hasdai Crescas develops a naturalistic account of the doctrine of personal reward and punishment. For Crescas, reward and punishment are not doled out by a deity to an individual for fulfilling the *mitzvot*.

³ Cf. the relevant essays in *Exile: Old Testament, Jewish & Christian Conceptions*, ed. James M. Scott (New York: Brill, 1997).

⁴ By "rationalist" I mean thinkers who accept the authority of science and philosophy in their interpretation of the biblical text and in their conception of Judaism. Cf. Steven Nadler, "Rationalism in Jewish Philosophy," in *A Companion to Rationalism*, ed. Alan Nelson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2013), 100-118.

⁵ This is a broad characterization. For details, see Kenneth Seeskin, "The God of the Philosophers," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 13, no. 3 (2006): 205-214, and Keith Ward, "The God of the Philosophers and the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 8, no. 2 (1999): 157-170.

⁶ It is important to note that medieval Jewish rationalists were already shaped by classical rabbinical reconfigurations of *r/p* that emphasize other-worldly or non-material reward and punishment. My thanks to the anonymous reviewer for this point.

Rather, reward or punishment depend on the extent to which an individual deploys will and exercises effort in investigating true beliefs. One is rewarded not merely for accepting true beliefs as such, but more for assenting to them, a process that involves will as well as exertion in establishing the truth of those beliefs. Furthermore, one is rewarded for the will and effort to perform a *mitzvah* aside from whether it is actually performed. Crescas identifies "joy" or pleasure as the reward that necessarily accompanies such will and effort. Joy flows from a sense of union with God, identified by Crescas as Love.⁷ Punishment is the sadness and feeling of disconnection from God/Love, which is the necessary result from misguided will and effort.⁸

The central contention of this article is that in *Light of the Lord*, Crescas puts forward an original conception of reward and punishment (hence *r/p*), one that reflects earlier sources but is unique to him. His concept of *r/p* is multifaceted, with theological, philosophical, psychological, and historical dimensions. In granular terms—themes that I return to later in this essay—Crescas's account shifts the emphasis of reward and punishment from the sphere of actions to the realm of beliefs and intentions. What is punished or rewarded is the intention, the will to carry out some action. It highlights individual effort rather than personal divine involvement, which is largely left out of his account. It proposes a naturalistic view of reward and punishment, viewing them as emotional states necessarily associated with intentions: the right intention has as its reward the feeling of joy. Material goods do not establish reward or punishment: the physical rewards accrued by the wicked are not rewards, for they have not accepted true beliefs, do not investigate them, and

⁷ Warren Z. Harvey describes Crescas's God as the God of infinite love, joy, and passion (*hesheq*), whose purpose for the Torah and the commandments is love. *Rabbi Hasdai Crescas* (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 2010), 97 [Hebrew].

⁸ Crescas describes God as the supreme example of love, whose action in causing his goodness to flow in to the world is designated as "love" and "true joy." God is further described as one who takes pleasure, which is identical to love, "through his essence, and therefore it must be a virtue and a perfection," making love an essential attribute of God (117-118).

therefore do not experience real joy. The calamities visited upon the just are not actual punishments: real punishment is sadness and alienation from God (Love). The right intention leads to the joy of closeness to Love.

In this essay, I lay out some theoretical principles for exploring the notion of reward and punishment as well as Crescas's argument. I then explore Crescas's view on *r/p* from three perspectives. As a theological reading, I ask why Crescas emphasizes reward and punishment in relation to intention rather than action. I relate Crescas's account to earlier Jewish thinkers, particularly Bahya ibn Paquda, and the rationalist tradition (represented by Saadia Gaon, Maimonides, and Gersonides). Second, I elaborate upon Crescas's system of *r/p* as analogous to the philosophical notion of cause and effect—what I call the metaphysical reading. Reward and punishment for Crescas should be understood as the *necessary* effects of precise causes (intention and effort), but these effects cannot be seen. This reading draws attention to a key distinction in Crescas between physical and psychic *r/p*. Third, I turn to Crescas's characterization of reward and punishment as emotional states, or what I call the psychological reading. The three readings illustrate the extent to which the notion of *r/p* touches on different branches of knowledge. Finally, I turn to Crescas's historical circumstances and the issue of forced conversions to Christianity. In that section, I speculate that Crescas may have developed his notion of *r/p* in part with the *converso* issue in the background.⁹

First Principles¹⁰

The theology of reward and punishment is not as straightforward as it seems. The initial matrix is the distinction between *r/p* doled out in this life vs. *r/p* that manifests only after death. This distinction is developed in

⁹ *Conversos* were Jews forcibly converted to Christianity in late-medieval Spain. For more details, see the historical section below.

¹⁰ I lay out the principles here with reference to Jewish sources. For a treatment of *r/p* that compares the legal and religious approaches, see Shlomo Biderman and Asa Kasher, "Religious Concepts of Punishment and Reward," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 44, no. 4 (June 1984): 433-451.

rabbinical writings; the Hebrew Bible for the most part does not have a concept of *r/p* after death, only as operative in this life. In reference to *r/p* after death, the Rabbis devise the concept of the "world to come" when sinners would be punished and the righteous rewarded. Several rabbinical statements reject, or at least attenuate, the possibility of *r/p* in this life.¹¹ Another well-known model of *r/p* in rabbinical writings is that of a category of *mitzvot* which generate *r/p* both in this world and in the world to come.¹²

A second distinction is that of material vs. non-material or psychic *r/p*. The predominant form of *r/p* in the Torah is material, and parts of the Hebrew Bible allude to non-material *r/p*. Rabbinical literature develops the idea of a psychic reward, one that pertains to the ethics of the soul in particular—for example in the form of increased virtue as the reward for observing a *mitzvah* and increased vice as the punishment for transgression or neglect.¹³

A third distinction is that of individual and collective *r/p*. Individual *r/p* is intrinsically bound with the notion of personal responsibility, the notion that the agent who performed the deed is the one who merits an individual reward for good acts (or religious commandments) and punishment for evil deeds. Individual *r/p* is perhaps best illustrated by the story of Job, even as it is a narrative that offers contrasting views on the matter.¹⁴ Collective *r/p* can take two forms: national, whether of Israel or other nations; and universal, which pertains to the entire world. The biblical narratives of the Tower of Babel or the flood, for instance, illustrate collective universal punishment. Exile from the Land of Israel, or the

¹¹ For example, BT *Hullin* 142a: "The reward for doing a *mitzvah* is not given in this world."

¹² For instance, Mishnah *Pe'ah* 1:1: "the following are the things for which an individual enjoys the fruits in this world while the principal remains for the world to come: honoring one's father and mother; acts of loving-kindness [*gemilut ḥasadim*]; and making peace between a person and their companion. And the study of Torah is equal to them all." See also Jerusalem Talmud *Pe'ah* 4a; Tosefta *Pe'ah* 1:2.

¹³ Mishnah, *Pirquei 'Avot* 4:2.

¹⁴ Krašovec, *Reward*, 635–646.

punishment that befell Sodom, are examples of collective national punishment. The line between individual and collective *r/p* is not always clear. The deeds of one or a few can bring punishment upon the many; for example, the women of Sodom are punished along with the men, who are described as the sinners. Job's children and animals are killed, passive victims of a punishment intended for him. Along with statements expressing a notion of personal responsibility, the Hebrew Bible also mentions the idea that God punishes generations of children for the sins of the parents, further blurring the line between individual and collective punishment.¹⁵

The notion of *r/p* intersects, but is not identical with, the problem of divine providence. Divine providence is defined by Crescas, for instance, as divine guidance and law to human beings "in order to direct them to their happiness" (143). It can be either general, directed to the species as a whole, or individual. It can lead to reward but it is not itself necessarily a reward, and it need not have any relation to the merit of the group or individual over whom providence is exercised. For example, Crescas identifies the giving of the Torah as an act of general divine providence, "through which, essentially and first and foremost, perfection is acquired" (146). The Torah was given to the entire nation irrespective of individual merit. The Torah itself is not reward, but it can lead to reward. A second distinction between providence and *r/p* is that the notion of providence is, strictly speaking, operative in this world. The soul after death is not in need of divine providence. On the other hand, *r/p* is a broader category that includes both this world and the world to come.¹⁶

¹⁵ How to read the contradiction between individual punishment (as in Deut. 24:16) and the notion that the children bear the punishment for the sins of the parents (Exod. 20:5) became something of a hermeneutical exercise both in rabbinical writings and in medieval Jewish philosophy. Cf. Igor H. De Souza, *Rewriting Maimonides: Early Commentaries on the "Guide of the Perplexed"* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 242, 250.

¹⁶ As David Bleich notes, the highest form of providence for Crescas is "direct and overt activity on the part of God," with the more common instances of providence occurring through intermediaries or natural forces—but it always refers to events occurring in this world, unlike *r/p* (David J. Bleich, "Providence in the Philosophy of Hasdai Crescas and Joseph Albo," in *Ḥazom Naḥum: Studies in Jewish Law, Thought and History Presented to Dr.*

Furthermore, for Crescas, providence is a fundamental principle of the Torah, "without which the existence of the Torah is inconceivable" (142). On the other hand, Crescas describes *r/p* as a belief without which the "Torah's existence is conceivable," although the belief is "obligatory" and those who deny it are to be classed as "heretics" (242). Crescas is not entirely consistent in making this distinction.¹⁷ In the beginning of his discussion of providence, he gives as an example of individual providence "the reward bestowed on those who serve God and the punishment visited upon the transgressor" (147). He ties individual providence and reward to the observance of non-rational *mitzvot* such as building a sukkah (divine providence here being defined as God giving a law to orient subjects toward happiness).¹⁸ Individual providence in the form of *r/p* is relative to one's perfection and is correlated with "psychic reward"—that is, non-material reward (147), which Weiss uses in the sense of "pertaining to the soul" and describes as meted out "after death" (Ibid., n91). However, when it comes to corporeal *r/p*—the physical *r/p* outlined in the Torah—it is a type of individual providence, "relative to the perfection of providential subjects" (147), but Crescas acknowledges that there is "confusion and perplexity with respect to what is seen of this providence" (147). The confusion is that we see that the ostensibly righteous suffer and the ostensibly wicked prosper.¹⁹ Crescas postpones a

Norman Lamm [New York: Michael Scharf Publication Trust of Yeshiva University, 1997], 314).

¹⁷ Dror Erlich explains Crescas's inconsistencies in *r/p* as the result of a prolonged process of composing the *Light*, with later sections conflicting with some earlier ones. Cf. Dror Erlich, "The Status of Divine Retribution in Hasdai Crescas' Dogmatic System," *Daat* 68-69 (2010): 3-13 [Hebrew].

¹⁸ By "non-rational" I mean *mitzvot* found in revealed sources and whose rational basis is not immediately apparent, vs. *mitzvot* that coincide with reason (i.e. not to murder). The distinction between rational and revealed *mitzvot* goes back to Saadia Gaon, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, trans. Samuel Rosenblatt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948, 1976), 138-145.

¹⁹ Scholars have advanced the thesis that inconsistencies in Crescas's account of providence can be explained by the fact that he composed the work over an extended number of years, with some sections reflecting his later thought. See Ari Ackerman, "The Composition of the

fuller discussion of corporeal *r/p* to later passages (II.II.2-4; IIIA.III), which I discuss in the next section.

Crescas's Argument

Along with scattered mentions, Crescas discusses *r/p* in three extended passages of *Light of the Lord*. Each passage reads the problem through a distinct lens. Passage 1 (II.II.1), deals with *r/p* from the perspective of divine providence. Passage 2 (II.IV.5) connects *r/p* to the problem of free will. The question treated there is "how divine justice in the meting out of reward and punishment can be reconciled with necessity" (200). Passage 3 concerns definitional issues: what kinds of *r/p* are there? In what sense can we say that one is rewarded or punished after death, or in this life? Is corporeal *r/p* an end in itself or a means to something else? (IIIA.III). I will schematize the argument of each passage here.

Passage 1 is located within a discussion of providence. Crescas divides the discussion into three topics: who is the providential agent, who are the subjects provided for, and what is the nature of divine providence (143)? The last question is the most relevant for our present discussion. Divine providence operates at the general and individual level. At the general level, Crescas mentions the organic constitution of the human species, which God has provided with an intellectual faculty. Another example of general providence, but not extending to the entire species, is the giving of the Torah to a specific nation, and within the nation, the obligation of some *mitzvot* for priests alone, and some *mitzvot* for one gender but not for another.

At the individual level, providence is exercised through *r/p* for observing the *mitzvot*. For Crescas *r/p* is a form of providence inasmuch as *r/p*, especially of the corporeal kind, is meant to lead to the acquisition of some perfection. He will later explain in the third passage that the primary intention of corporeal *r/p* is "benefaction and the imparting of perfection"

Section on Divine Providence in Hasdai Crescas' 'Or Ha-Shem', " *Daat* 32-33 (1994): xxxvii-xlv.

(283) rather than the granting or withholding of material goods. In other words, corporeal *r/p* is not an end in itself but is rather a means to something else. Nonmaterial or "psychic" *r/p* is the "form of providence that is affirmed in the true tradition" (147) despite its not being mentioned in the Torah, a difficulty that Crescas will take up in II.II.2-4 but need not detain us here.²⁰

The mentions of *r/p* in the context of providence reveal that in this passage, the notion of *r/p* Crescas has in mind is not *r/p* after death, but rather in this life. This approach can be usefully contrasted with Passage 3, which begins with a markedly different binary: that of *r/p* as corporeal and "spiritual," which Crescas specifies as pertaining to the "soul after its separation from the body" (282). Indeed, in Passage 3 Crescas will take up the notion of *r/p* after death as the ultimate destiny of the soul, but nowhere in Passage 1 does Crescas take up the notion of *r/p* after death. All of the examples of providence that Crescas mentions in Passage 1 involve actions that happen in this life.²¹ The emphasis he places on *r/p* as a form of providence in Passage 1 is whether it is proportional to the "rank" or "perfection" of the subject.

There is further evidence that we have in Passage 1 a notion of non-material (or psychic) *r/p* in this life. One of the main objections that Crescas

²⁰ In chs. 2-4 Crescas draws a key distinction between the corporeal and non-corporeal modes of *r/p*. Non-corporeal or "psychic" *r/p* is the "true punishment and reward—and this is the very truth" (156) and each person is judged individually, with merits and demerits appropriate to the individual's perfection. Corporeal *r/p*, on the other hand, is "general" and "according to the majority," on the basis of BT *Kiddushin* 40b ("the world is judged according to the majority"), and subject to the influence of the celestial bodies (158). Crescas's intention in these chapters is to safeguard the notion of divine justice, and hence he introduces external factors that, according to him, explain why the bad may befall good individuals or the good befall wicked individuals. One such factor is the influence of the constellations or celestial bodies. Other such external factors include the "occasional dissolution of the bond and attachment between the righteous person God insofar as the righteous person is a corporeal being; or it could be the kind of bad whose end is good, whether corporeal or psychic, as, for example, something distressing that leads to a corporeal good, or to the person's not inclining toward the lusts to which he was disposed, or to making him perfect or acquiring for him a firm hold on psychic virtues" (156).

²¹ Notwithstanding Weiss 91n6.

addresses in this passage is the idea that the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper, belying the notion of *r/p* as providence. I would note that this is an empirical objection, based on direct observation of what exists in this life. Crescas says as much when he describes this objection as based on the “deplorable condition of the order” of the “human realm” (156). Crescas’s riposte to the objection reflects the same reading of *r/p* as the objection: there are several reasons why the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper *in this life* (156-157).

If I seem to digress, it is in the service of emphasizing that in my reading of this passage, Crescas seems to develop a notion of psychic or non-material *r/p* in this life—and not only after death.²²

Passage 2 seems to confirm this idea. In that passage Crescas considers *r/p* from the perspective of free will. Perhaps surprisingly, Crescas agrees in principle with the rationalist medieval tradition that one does not have free will concerning beliefs. In Crescas’s context, “belief” is not the same as “conviction,” but rather something closer to a demonstrated or revealed truth. One is not free to believe or disbelieve something that has been proved; beliefs are not volitional. Such being the case, God cannot properly be said to confer *r/p* for something that was not freely chosen. The force of “beliefs” here is that they are, simply put, facts, and one is not free to reject the facts.²³ Neither is one rewarded or punished for accepting some fact as such. Hence Crescas’s surprise, tinged with irony, at “how could there be reward and punishment for beliefs held concerning the Torah’s cornerstones? If only I knew!” (200).

²² Scholars who have written on Crescas and *r/p* tend to emphasize eternal *r/p*, that is, after death; see for example the excellent article by the late Gabriela Berzin, “‘Happiness,’ ‘Pleasure’ and ‘Good’ in the Thought of Maimonides and Ḥasdai Crescas,” in *Shefa Tal: Studies on Jewish Thought and Culture*, eds Zeev Gries, Ḥayim Kreisel and Boaz Huss (Beer-Sheva: University of Ben Gurion Press, 2004), 85-111 [Hebrew], where *r/p* is considered primarily as occurring after death.

²³ “It is impossible for one who holds a certain belief, particularly if it is a belief that is demonstrated, not to feel utterly necessitated and constrained to hold that belief” (201).

He does seem to know.²⁴ While we cannot exercise freedom of choice over the validity of demonstrated beliefs (that is, over facts), we can exercise free will over

something that is attached and joined to beliefs, something that borders on them, namely, the pleasure and joy we experience when God graciously endows us with belief in Him, and the exertion we exercise in apprehending its truth...[I]t is the stirring of joy and the exertion of effort in investigating the belief's truth, things which are consequent upon will and choice, to which it stands to reason that reward and punishment would apply. (203)

The same applies for physical acts. Since deeds for Crescas are largely determined (as the effects of causes), *r/p* is issued not for the deed itself but for the "choice and willing of it," a purely psychical event. "The punishment that results is only on account of the will and the choice, which in this dictum is called thought" (203).²⁵ And a few lines later: "one is not punished for a deed alone...punishment applies from the perspective of the deed as well, yet the more severe one applies from the perspective of the will" (203).

Turning now to Passage 3 (IIIA.III), Crescas develops the notion of *r/p* along a different criterium: the distinction between corporeal *r/p*, which is operative in this life, and "spiritual" *r/p*, which involves "the soul after its separation from the body" (282). With the help of numerous examples from the Torah, Crescas maintains that the purpose of corporeal *r/p* is not to bestow a corporeal good or evil, but rather to "remove the obstacle and

²⁴ The expression "if only I knew" may be an esoteric indicator, that is, a sign that there is a subtext here—hence my speculation that Crescas "does seem to know." Cf. Erik Dreff, "Crescas as an Esoteric Thinker" (presentation, 51st Annual Conference of the Association for Jewish Studies, San Diego, December 16,

2019). However, at least when it comes to the status of *r/p*—is it a "cornerstone of the Torah" or merely "true belief"?—Dror Erlich rejects the possibility of esotericism. He argues that it is unlikely that Crescas would approach such a fundamental topic in an esoteric manner. See Erlich, "Divine Retributio," 12.

²⁵ The dictum is "thoughts of transgression are worse than transgression" (BT *Yoma* 29a), Weiss 203 n334.

the impediment to perfection" (283). Here Crescas follows a trend in Jewish rationalist thought that seeks to reinterpret corporeal *r/p* as non-physical *r/p*. In that trend, corporeal *r/p* is understood as a means to the development of the soul towards perfection (or flourishing). Crescas reinterprets examples of the Torah according to this view, claiming, for example, that the punishment of the Egyptians through the last plague (the death of the first born) contained a "profound lesson" and illustrated the notion of "measure for measure" — an act of justice in light of Egyptian mistreatment of Israel, God's first born.²⁶

Turning to "spiritual" *r/p*, Crescas notes that it is only "hinted at in many places in the tradition" although it is not put forth explicitly anywhere (286). He notes that this is "quite astonishing" (288). As with corporeal *r/p*, there are similarities here between Crescas and the rationalist tradition. The substance of the spiritual reward is the pleasure that the soul experiences in its non-intellectual apprehension of God, an apprehension that is necessarily limited while the soul was joined with the body (288); for rationalists, the apprehension that the soul can exercise while with the body is also necessarily limited. Also in common with rationalists, Crescas treats the notion of the afterlife as a disembodied state that concerns primarily only one aspect of the soul. Where Crescas departs from the earlier tradition is in the part of the soul that ostensibly lives on after death. For rationalists like Maimonides or Gersonides, that one aspect was the intellectual soul. For Crescas it is something more akin to an emotional soul, the experience of pleasure or love derived from attachment from God.²⁷ In receiving spiritual reward,

the soul's constant attachment [to God] will be strengthened for infinite time. The ranks of individuals will differ [in their pleasure] in accordance

²⁶ Weiss 284 n113. Crescas's view of material *r/p* as instrumental was developed by Maimonides before him. See Isadore Twersky, *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides (Mishneh Torah)* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 228.

²⁷ What is new here is that Crescas separates the intellect from pleasure, deviating from the Aristotelian association of the two that was also adopted by Maimonides. True pleasure is love as an emotional experience in connection with God — and not an intellectual apprehension of God (Berzin, "Happiness," 105).

with how their love and [the strength of] their bond differed while they lived their lives of body-and-soul. Similarly, the soul of the rebellious transgressor, after it separates from the body, will experience severe pain as it dwells in a darkness contrary to its nature. (286)²⁸

It is clear that, for Crescas, it is pleasure or love that leads to the perfection of the soul, both in this world and the next—not the intellect.²⁹ In his view of spiritual *r/p*, Crescas adopts yet another notion common to the rationalist tradition, which is the idea that the ranks of souls after death are individualized. In the rationalist tradition, they are individualized by virtue of the intellect they had cultivated while in the body; for Crescas, souls after death are individualized by virtue of the love of God they had cultivated while in the body. The "world-to-come" for the righteous, in Crescas's view, is not a democratic aggregate of souls. This position he shares with the rationalist trend. Unlike the rationalists, what individualizes the soul after death, in Crescas's view, are the emotional states of love and pleasure it had experienced before death.

The destiny of wicked souls ostensibly parallels that of the righteous: "the degrees of suffering" (292) vary according to the pleasure and love that individuals did *not* experience while in the body. They failed to expend effort in investigating beliefs, and hence did not experience the pleasure and love that such effort provokes. Crescas leaves open the possibility that some souls will be completely destroyed. He writes that in Gehenna,

the suffering might intensify to the point of necessitating the soul's passing away. That which is under investigation, however, is: does it pass away into something or into nothing? And if it passes into something, then into what? Even if the doors to investigation are locked in this matter, it would nevertheless appear that the final passing-away...is the passing away of the disposition that the substance has by its nature, as if

²⁸ Words in brackets added by Weiss. On spiritual punishment, see also 287.

²⁹ "That which is essential to the perfection of the soul is something distinct from intellection, namely, love" (220). See Bleich, "Providence," who points out that for Crescas an individual with a "high degree of spiritual excellence" may be endowed with an inferior intellectual capacity (320-321).

there could remain a spirit naked of all disposition. This is what the Rabbis call ash, which is the remnant of a thing after it has been burned. (292)³⁰

These are the broad lines of Crescas's treatment of the issue. I will now turn to three different readings that build upon these arguments. These readings are: theological, metaphysical, and psychological. In my last section, I outline the distinctive aspect of these readings in light of the historical problem of the *conversos*.

Theological Reading

In his elaboration of the doctrine of *r/p*, Crescas emphasizes intention rather than action. In Passage 2 (II.V.5), he states that "if we look into deeds, we will find that the reward is not first and foremost for the deeds themselves but for the person's choice of the deed in performing it" (203). In other words, intention counts far more heavily than actual performance, although Crescas is careful not to completely obliterate the compensatory force of the deed ("choice of the deed *in performing it*").³¹ He returns to this detail when explaining punishment: it "applies from the perspective of the deed as well, yet the more severe one applies from the perspective of the will—and particularly when will is joined to deed" (203). Crescas creates a distinction between intention and action by considering action without intention—this is a "compelled deed"³²—and intention without action. He concludes that "one is not punished for a deed alone" and punishment will "devolve on the thought and will" (203).³³

³⁰ On post-death punishment in Gehenna, see *Light*, 348. It is a question worth raising just why Crescas believes the "doors to investigation are locked in this matter."

³¹ Emphasis added.

³² The expression "compelled deed" is associated with Crescas's determinism; but from another perspective, it recalls the notion of forced conversion.

³³ Crescas quotes Leviticus Rabbah in support: "in the case of coercion, God exempts him" (203 n335).

This claim is significant in several dimensions. It turns a psychic act into a matter to be rewarded or punished. Although action is not entirely blameless, Crescas's deterministic system places actions largely outside the bounds of personal responsibility, and he prefers to view them within a system of causes and effects. He therefore shifts *r/p* to the psychic realm, emphasizing thought and intention rather than concrete actions. This line of thinking relies on rabbinical rather than biblical sources, and indeed Crescas does not marshal biblical sources in Passage 2 in support of his position, only rabbinical dicta. Furthermore, since Crescas's system is one where actions are determined, there are no deeds that are not "compelled" in some sense. True freedom, and hence *r/p*, applies only to will and thought.

From a theological perspective, Crescas's position is anomalous in a religious system that emphasizes physical performance of the *mitzvot*. Shifting the location of *r/p* from physical acts to intentions makes Judaism largely a matter of cultivating the right disposition to some action. It is an ethics of the self that emphasizes states of mind, and it necessarily leads to a process of self-analysis. In that self-analysis, the Jewish religious practitioner does not rely on relatively objective criteria for performing the *mitzvot*— such as acquiring the proper ritual objects, or performing the *mitzvot* in a prescribed manner. Instead, the practitioner must turn to inner dispositions and to emotional states as the sites of proper religious observance.³⁴

In this shift from action to intention, Crescas stands apart from the rationalist tradition. Thinkers such as Saadia Gaon, Maimonides, or Gersonides all agree that physical observance of the *mitzvot* is necessary (though not sufficient) for happiness or *eudaemonia*.³⁵ It does not seem to

³⁴ As Manekin remarks, "what is most meaningful is not the actual performance of the commandment (though this, too, carries with it necessary recompense), but rather the will and desire to perform the action" (Charles H. Manekin, "Spinoza and the Determinist Tradition in Medieval Jewish Philosophy," in *Spinoza and Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, ed. Steven Nadler [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014], 54).

³⁵ According to Saadia Gaon, "the service of God consists in the fulfillment of all the rational as well as the revealed precepts of the Torah" (*Beliefs and Opinions*, 396); see discussion in

be the case for Crescas. The status of the *mitzvot* is not just that of a commandment to do something, but also—and maybe overwhelmingly so—a commandment to desire or to intend something. The rationalists saw an ethical purpose in observing the *mitzvot* as a means of cultivating self-discipline (*enkrateia*). Despite their emphasis on intellect, for the rationalists there remains a need to attend to the body and bodily *mitzvot* as a means for disciplining the soul. Crescas's system largely does away with the body, reducing (although not eliminating completely) its religious importance. As I speculate later on in this essay, the significance of this position comes into focus if indeed Crescas is speaking not just to unconverted Jews but also to *conversos*, those who were forced to convert to Christianity through a physical ritual and who would now be compelled to carry out Christian rituals or ceremonies despite how they might feel.

That is not to say there are no antecedents in Jewish sources for Crescas's views on intention. Some thought-provoking parallels exist between Crescas and Bahya ibn Paquda (c. 1050-c.1156) in his treatise *The Book of Direction to the Duties of the Heart*. Ibn Paquda highlights what he calls the "duties of the heart" above the "duties of the limbs." Like Crescas, Ibn Paquda posits a radical distinction between intention and act. Furthermore, as it might be surmised, the duties of the heart concern interior psychic states rather than physical performance of the *mitzvot*. Ibn Paquda, like Crescas, does not do away with observance entirely: "what determines the punishment is the participation of both heart and body in

Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, *Happiness in Pre-Modern Judaism: Virtue, Knowledge, and Well-Being* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 2003), 152-160. See also Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed* III:27, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1963), 510-512, and the discussion by Daniel Davies in *Method and Metaphysics in Maimonides' Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 157-160. All further references to the *Guide* refer to the Pines edition. Gersonides' view of the *mitzvot* is developed mostly in the introduction to his Commentary on the Torah; see *Perush 'al ha-Torah (Commentary on the Torah)*, vol. 1, eds. Baruch Braner and Eli Fraiman (Ma'aleh 'Adumim: Ma'alilot, 1992); see the discussion by Robert Eisen in *Gersonides on Providence, Covenant, and the Chosen People: A Study in Medieval Jewish Philosophy and Biblical Commentary* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 84-93.

the act—the heart in the intention and the body in carrying out the heart's intention. The same is said of him who does good, but not for the sake of God. He gets no reward for it" (91).³⁶ However, similarly to Crescas, the heart of Ibn Paquda's system is in his statement that "when intentions are defective, deeds are not acceptable to God, numerous and insistent as they may be" (97). Furthermore, in a line that anticipates Crescas for centuries, Ibn Paquda claims that "all is according to intention and purpose. The thought of a good deed by a true worshipper and his desire to carry it out, even if he prove unable to do so, may be balanced against many a good deed carried out by others" (99). My claim here is not that Crescas had direct knowledge of Ibn Paquda's *Duties of the Heart*, nor do I reject that possibility. What is significant is that there existed for Crescas at least one model of a Jewish theology that was anchored primarily on inner states of the soul.³⁷

Metaphysical Reading

In Passage 2 Crescas notes that the *mitzvot* are "motivating causes for deeds of goodness...reward and punishment are consequent upon them as effects are upon causes...[and] divine justice as exhibited in reward and punishment accords with necessity" (201). In other words, the *mitzvot* act as causes for proper action, which is necessarily rewarded—or, if the *mitzvah* is ignored and a bad deed follows, punishment will necessarily follow ("accords with necessity"). As Weiss notes, this approach renders

³⁶ Bahya Ibn Pakuda, *The Book of Direction to the Duties of the Heart*, trans. Menahem Mansoor (Portland: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1973, 2004). Subsequent page numbers refer to this edition.

³⁷ There are also several parallels between *Light of the Lord* and medieval Christian philosophy on the topic of the nature of the soul, as well as on *r/p*. See Shlomo Pines, "Scholasticism after Thomas Aquinas and the Teachings of Hasdai Crescas and His Predecessors," *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Arts and Sciences*

1, no. 10 (1967): 46-49; Warren Z. Harvey, "Bernat Metge and Hasdai Crescas: A Conversation," in *Medieval Textual Cultures: Agents of Transmission, Translation and Transformation*, eds. Faith Wallis and Robert Wisnovsky (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2016), 77-84.

r/p as “natural,” and just like the effect of fire is to burn, “one who violates God’s commandments is distanced from God” (14).

The naturalistic approach makes *r/p* not at all a matter of a deity who distributes rewards and punishments to deserving subjects. Rather, it considers *r/p* to be a part of nature, invariable and universally valid. In that light, it might be more fitting to speak of *r/p* as “consequences,” and even then, the force of Crescas’s position would not be in full view. It is imaginable that one may avoid the consequences of some behavior, but one cannot avoid divine *r/p*. A stronger reading of this claim would be that God could not withhold either reward or punishment.

When it comes to corporeal *r/p*, however, Crescas takes leave from his naturalistic system. He maintains that “the promise of a corporeal bad thing to the transgressor may not come to pass” (285),³⁸ and the same applies to promises of corporeal rewards. The naturalism of Crescas’s approach, then, is not one that is visible or can be verified through the senses. In fact, we may not rely on the senses to learn anything at all about divine *r/p*, and to do so is misleading. As Crescas asserts in Passage 3, “corporeal good is not in the first instance to reward the observance of a commandment but rather to remove from the person the obstacle to his perfection. The true reward pertains to the soul” (291). All we can gather from a corporeal good or evil is that it is meant to inculcate some lesson; we cannot interpret physical good or evil as *r/p*. Inasmuch as this is a naturalistic system of *r/p*, it is one that is also largely invisible, one that can only be experienced in the psyche but is never manifested concretely.

We may not make any conclusions or pronouncements regarding *r/p* on the basis of what we can perceive with the senses. Instead, Crescas proposes, emotional states constitute a more reliable source for thinking about *r/p*. In the metaphysical reading I present here, Crescas’s system renders emotions, especially joy and love, as well as estrangement and alienation, as part of nature, as effects or consequences that are inevitable.

³⁸ Weiss adds “in the here and now.”

Only those effects truly represent *r/p*, whereas material *r/p* is not the "true reward." I turn to the issue of emotion in the next section.³⁹

Psychological Reading

Crescas is atypical within the rationalist tradition in assigning a largely positive role for the emotions in religious life. As early as Saadia Gaon, rationalist Jewish thinkers tended to de-emphasize the relevance of emotions.⁴⁰ The limited role for emotions goes hand in hand with a particular view of God as intellect. Intellect is the only element in humans that can create any kind of connection with the divine, and even that connection is tenuous, since the human intellect is necessarily imbricated with the body. The body is seen at best as auxiliary, and at worst as a distraction from the pursuit of intellect and, hence, from the pursuit of God.⁴¹ Love of God, in the rationalist tradition, is primarily realized through the cultivation of intellectual truths that are not bound by time or space. While there are exceptions—Maimonides speaks of the "passionate love" (*hesheq*) that one feels for God—such exceptions tend to be circumscribed to believers who have already achieved an advanced state of intellectual love for God.⁴² Crescas does not do away with intellect entirely, inasmuch as a religious believer must engage in the investigation of beliefs commanded by the Torah. However, what verifies the validity of the investigation is the pleasure and joy that one feels. The notion of intellectual pleasure is not at all foreign to the rationalist tradition, and it has its roots in Aristotle. But Crescas gives pleasure an ontological status

³⁹ Manekin, in "Spinoza and the Determinist Tradition," 53, describes the scholarly debate on Crescas's notion of *r/p*, which runs along a different parameter than what I propose here (divine justice in dispensing *r/p* in relation to compelled or freely chosen actions. See Manekin, "Spinoza and the Determinist Tradition," 53.

⁴⁰ For a parallel to an earlier source, see again Ibn Paquda, in a passage with a dialogue between Soul and Mind, where the Mind identifies the emotional traits of the Soul (*Duties of the Heart*, 218-220).

⁴¹ See *Guide of the Perplexed*, Introduction, 13.

⁴² Cf. *Guide of the Perplexed* III:51, 627-628.

of its own, one that is not related to the intellect but rather to “attachment” and “devotion” to God.⁴³

Crescas does not break entirely with the rationalist tradition. Like the rationalists, he is loath to ascribe “passions” to God. The medieval Jewish philosophical term of “passion,” which covers what we would term emotions, indicates a being who is “acted upon,” that is, an emotion as an effect of something else. Since God is not a being who can be acted upon—only bodies can be acted upon—God cannot have emotions. Echoing rationalist notions, Crescas writes that “every passion, insofar as passions are corporeal, must necessarily be denied with respect to God” (116). However, on the basis of biblical and rabbinical passages, Crescas concludes that “it is fitting that we attribute joy to Him” (Ibid). Crescas emphasizes the goodness of God, as well as divine grace, in bringing the world into existence and sustaining it “by the constant overflowing of His goodness” (117).⁴⁴ Since God sustains the world “by will and intention...He necessarily loves bestowing goodness and having it overflow. This is love—for there is no love without pleasure in the will—and this alone is true joy” (117). Hence, by redefining God as a being oriented towards love rather than intellect, Crescas redefines the nature of human attachment to God as emotional rather than intellectual.⁴⁵

⁴³ Warren Z. Harvey describes Crescas’s position on pleasure as “pleasure is of the will, not the intellect,” unlike the Aristotelian position of intellectual pleasure as the highest attainable pleasure. (“Crescas versus Maimonides on Knowledge and Pleasure,” in *A Straight Path: Studies in Medieval Philosophy and Culture*, ed. Ruth Link-Salinger [Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1988], 113-123).

⁴⁴ On “overflow,” a technical term in medieval Jewish philosophy, see *Guide of the Perplexed* II:11, 275; II:12, 279; II:36, 369; II:37-38, 373-378.

⁴⁵ Harvey notes that Maimonides, too, has a notion of non-intellectual love of God (*Guide* III:51). The ultimate love of God is not in knowing but in the inquiry—in the will to know—in which all bodily forces participate (following Maimonides’ interpretation of Deut. 6:5 in I:39). See Harvey, “Crescas versus Maimonides,” 122-123.

Therefore love and joy accompany a will that is properly oriented towards God. Sadness, or rather, the absence of love and joy,⁴⁶ characterizes a misguided will. It is not only bare will, but also the emotional component to will, that constitutes the locus for *r/p*. Reward for beliefs, Crescas asserts, depends on "pleasure and joy"; "reward is for the will and joy of the one who holds the belief" (205). This notion effectively moralizes emotions, giving them a religious weight and making them liable to *r/p*. Joy in this world leads to enduring joy in the next, and the same is true for sadness.⁴⁷ Lack of joy is a sign of a will that has been misused, and it points to a moral fault in the subject.⁴⁸ Hence the role of emotion is to validate the will that is properly deployed, and the emotion is itself liable to *r/p*. Feeling an emotional attachment to God through joy confirms to the believer that their intention or will is on the right path. The emotional attachment, conceived separately, is liable to its own *r/p* ("reward is for the will *and* joy") (Ibid).

One may conclude, then, that Crescas shifts the *summum bonum* of the religious life—happiness in this world and the next—from external and verifiable criteria to internal and subjective criteria. In other words, in versions of Judaism that prize observance of the *mitzvot* as the factors that determine *r/p*, observance can be externally verified. Furthermore, the believer knows with certainty whether or not they fulfilled a certain *mitzvah*, because the conditions under which it is legally valid can be known. In the rationalist tradition of medieval Jewish philosophy, which

⁴⁶ Reading punishment as privation, rather than ontologically independent. However, Crescas also describes the emotional punishment of sadness also as "conflict in the will," suggesting it is not merely a privation (117).

⁴⁷ As Crescas writes, "it is most appropriate that, in return for their [the righteous'] service with love and fierce devotion, and for the attachment of their desire and will to God, they attain enjoyment and intense pleasure in the attachment for which they yearned while they were yet joined to matter" (221). The joy and love one feels in this world is rewarded with greater joy and love in the next.

⁴⁸ There are here echoes of the medieval Christian view of *melancholia* as a sin or transgression (from the vice *acedia*). See Siegfried Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth: Acedia in Medieval Thought and Literature* (Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 1960).

sets up intellect as the factor that determines *r/p*, intellect can be at verified and externalized as well, through writing or through oral teaching. Crescas's version of *r/p*, however, relies on emotion, which cannot be externalized or verified, only felt.

In this sense, I argue that the *Light of the Lord* constructs a picture of a religious believer that is deeply preoccupied with the emotions and, by extension, with the self.⁴⁹ What shapes the embodied self in this life, and the experience of the self after death, are not things one has done but the joy and pleasure one has felt. It is not an anti-intellectualist position as much as one that subordinates intellect to emotion and the emotional life. In this way, Crescas stands apart from the rationalist tradition that emphasizes intellectual achievement as the primary or sole means for accruing reward.

Reward, Punishment, and the *Converso* "Problem"

In Passage 2 above, where Crescas considers *r/p* from the perspective of free will and agency, we recall that he writes that "one is not punished for a deed alone...punishment applies from the perspective of the deed as well, yet the more severe one applies from the perspective of the will" (203). The clear implication is the converse—that reward, too, is dispensed based on deeds, yet greater reward is given from the "perspective of the will," that is, one's intention and effort. Not only punishment, but also reward, is given for purely psychic, non-intellectual states of the soul.

⁴⁹ This move parallels the way in which Foucault describes the contrast between classic Greek ethics of the self to early Christian ethics. The preoccupation in early Christianity, per Foucault, shifts from actions to thoughts and intentions, giving rise to a new relationship with the self: "we are now far away from the rationing of pleasure and its strict limitations to permissible actions...what does concern us is a never-ending struggle over the movements of our thoughts...this has nothing to do with a code of permitted or forbidden actions but is a whole technique for analyzing and diagnosing thought, its origins, its qualities, its dangers, its potential for temptation...it involves an indeterminate objectivization of the self by the self" (Michel Foucault, "The Battle for Chastity," in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow [New York: The New Press, 1997], 191, 195). Foucault is speaking on chastity in particular, but his remarks seem apropos of Crescas, inasmuch as Crescas emphasizes thought and intention.

It stands to reason that in writing these lines, and in his approach to *r/p*, Crescas possibly had in mind the plight of unwilling *conversos*, the large numbers of Jews forced to convert to Christianity during a series of attacks that took place in 1391-1392.⁵⁰ He himself lived through those turbulent events, losing a son in Barcelona, and he emerged as the leader of the Jewish community in Spain.⁵¹ He took an active part in rebuilding the community. In addition to his political activities countering Christian aggression and conversionary efforts, Crescas turned to anti-Christian polemics after 1391 in his *Refutation of Christian Principles*. Written originally in Català, the book clearly had a *converso* readership in mind.⁵² In this section, I speculate that turning to a *converso* lens highlights how the theological, metaphysical, and psychological readings of *r/p* in *Light of the Lord* come together in a response to historical circumstances.⁵³

In my theological reading of Crescas's *r/p*, I showed how he emphasizes the intention to act as something that can be rewarded or punished. Those forced to accept Christianity could take comfort in the

⁵⁰ I state "unwilling" not as a general description of what took place in 1391, but as a specific audience for Crescas. Some converted willingly, and others unwillingly, and pressures surrounding conversion began long before (and continued after) 1391. Cf. Paola Tartakoff, *Between Christian and Jew: Conversion and Inquisition in the Crown of Aragon, 1250-1391* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), and the overview of the period 1391-1492 by Haim Beinart, "Order of Expulsion from Spain: Antecedents, Causes, and Textual Analysis," in *Crisis and Creativity in the Sephardic World 1391-1648*, ed. Benjamin Gampel (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 79-94.

⁵¹ See a detailed and illuminating overview of the riots in Benjamin Gampel, *Anti-Jewish Riots in the Crown of Aragon and the Royal Response 1391-1392* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

⁵² See the translation by Daniel J. Lasker, *The Refutation of Christian Principles* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).

⁵³ The *Light of the Lord* is not typically read in relation to *conversos*. Most who have written on the text have read it against its philosophical background, but that may be because the *Light* has primarily attracted the attention of philosophically-trained scholars. One noteworthy exception is the article by Nathan Ophir, "A New Reading of R. Hasdai Crescas' *Or Ha-shem*: the 'Conversos' Perspective," *Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies* 11 (1993): 41-47 [Hebrew]. Ophir brings together several passages as evidence that the *Light* reflects concerns with *conversos*. This essay focuses only on the evidence around *r/p*.

fact that, according to Crescas's system, one would not be divinely punished (or perhaps not punished as harshly) for a purely nominal conversion. The choice or will to observe a *mitzvah* might be enough to guarantee reward for a *converso* who finds it impractical or impossible to execute it physically. One can still receive reward for the "exertion" and "joy" involved in investigating a belief found in the Torah even if one is now a nominal Christian. Largely transferring it from the physical to the mental realm, Crescas's claims here give *conversos* a larger space to practice Judaism than his deterministic system would seem to imply at first. A *converso* who read *Light of the Lord* might legitimately conclude that, whereas they had had no choice in the matter of converting to Christianity—deeds are determined, at any rate—they did have a choice in wanting or not wanting to convert to Christianity. That latter choice, which remains putatively free despite the determinism of Crescas's system, is liable to *r/p*. Likewise, *conversos* who might wish to observe rabbinical law, yet are prevented from doing so, can accrue reward for their intentions. The joy that accompanies those intentions is how a *converso* would verify that the intention is correct and meritorious. Ultimately, Crescas deploys the positive value of the Jewish religious knowledge that *conversos* did have, rather than cast them as outside the pale by virtue of their conversion.⁵⁴

Crescas's approach to belief, intention and action could be read as an attempt to respond to those circumstances. Instead of Christian beliefs, which for Crescas are evidently not real beliefs, he emphasizes the effort and joy derived from investigating true beliefs, ostensibly those beliefs explained at length in *Light of the Lord*.⁵⁵ He deemphasizes deeds in terms

⁵⁴ Ophir argues that Crescas thus emphasizes the value of repentance specifically with *conversos* in mind; see "A New Reading," 46.

⁵⁵ Presumably the truths that Crescas designates as "root-principles" which undergird all monotheism, as well as the "cornerstones" of the Torah without which the Torah would not be conceivable. The doctrine of *r/p* is neither, but it is one of the "true beliefs that we who believe in the divine Torah believe, the denier of any one of which is called a heretic." These latter true beliefs are not discoverable by reason but rather established "in accordance with the Torah and tradition." See Crescas's preface to *Light of the Lord* (26-29), and Crescas' opening to Book III (242-243).

of *r/p*, hence accommodating the practice of Christian practices or rituals that some *conversos* might find impossible to avoid. Crescas's position strengthens the Judaism of *conversos* by filling in the gap for their lack of formal instruction in Christian beliefs.⁵⁶

In Passage 2 (II.II.5) Crescas comes close to hinting at the tense situation with *conversos*. As he writes, while we acquire "beliefs" independently of the will (such "beliefs" correspond to what we would call "facts"), *r/p* "pertain[s] to the will—reward for the passionate love and effort and joy at belonging to this sect of believers, and punishment for the opposite" (204). This is followed by two significant illustrations drawn from rabbinical sources: the first is that of the Jews accepting the Torah at Sinai; the second is the situation of the Jews in the days of the biblical book of Esther. I will return to the illustrations shortly.

This excerpt is significant in refashioning the Jewish community as a "sect of believers." This is not new to Crescas—it recalls the Maimonidean conception of Judaism.⁵⁷ However, it is exquisitely sensitive to the plight of *conversos*, who could potentially consider themselves, too, as belonging to the "sect of believers" despite any Christian practices, as long as they cultivated [Jewish] beliefs. Not only could they consider themselves as belonging to the "sect of believers," but Crescas encourages them to derive love and joy from that self-assignment, assuring *conversos* that such attachment to true beliefs would bring [Jewish] religious reward. Those

⁵⁶ It is a known fact that Crescas was personally responsible for the physical and political rebuilding of Jewish communities decimated by martyrdom and forced conversion. He "explored a number of different avenues," as Ram Ben-Shalom has written, by raising money, working in concert with the crown, resettling Jewish families across the kingdom of Aragón, and preparing plans for Jewish emigration. It stands to reason that he would be concerned with *conversos* as well, especially if he saw them as unwilling converts. See Ram Ben-Shalom, "Hasdai Crescas: Portrait of a Leader at a Time of Crisis," in *The Jew in Medieval Iberia*, ed. Jonathan Ray (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2011), 315-321.

⁵⁷ In his commentary on *Mishnah Sanhedrin*, Maimonides lays out thirteen principles of Judaism, explaining that "when all these foundations are perfectly understood and believed in by a person he enters the community of Israel" (16). See English translation of the passage and analysis in Menachem Kellner, *Dogma in Medieval Jewish Thought: From Maimonides to Abravanel* (Portland: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization 1986, 2004), 10-65.

who derive no joy or love from it merit punishment (“punishment for the opposite”), which may be a hint about *conversos* who accepted Christianity willingly, or about those who were wont to abandon Jewish beliefs. Crescas’s project, then, can be understood as strengthening the religious fervor of both public Jews and of *conversos* towards Judaism.

Crescas’s two rabbinical illustrations speak to the *converso* problem. The first narrates how God raised Mount Sinai upon the Jews when they received the Torah, and said: “If you accept the Torah, fine; if not, here is your grave” (204).⁵⁸ This story is interpreted by Crescas to indicate the compulsory character of true beliefs (“they had to believe, whether they wished to or not”), emphasizing that “will played no part in it.” In the rabbinical imaginary, as Crescas points out, there is a connection between this imagined event of coercion, and the verse from Esther 9:27 (“The Jews confirmed, and took upon themselves”). As Crescas explains it, the passage from Esther is taken to mean a willing acceptance of the Torah that was coerced at Sinai. This acceptance, Crescas writes, was confirmed by the “the joy they experienced over the miracles and deliverance that were enacted for them in those days” [i.e., the days of Esther] (204).

What ought to arrest us in the second example is the idea that Esther is the quintessential *converso* story. Decades later, as the Inquisition was established (1478) to ferret out potential Jews among the *conversos*, and as Jews were expelled from Spain (1492), the story of Esther became the ground for a collective self-conception of *conversos* who wished to retain ties to Judaism. *Conversos* deeply identified with the story of a girl who hides her true origins, which are only revealed, in dramatic fashion, at the proper time and for the ultimate benefit of the entire Jewish community. The story helps make sense of the *converso* condition by placing it in a longer arc of Jewish history, and it gives *conversos* a teleology and shared sense of destiny. It suggests that their suffering has value, even if that value is not apparent at present. It suggests, too, that Spanish *conversos*, in a future when they reveal themselves to be Jews, will eventually fight against and overcome Christian Spaniards, as the Jews did to their

⁵⁸ Weiss, 204 n337.

neighbors in Esther's Persia.⁵⁹ It is not unlikely that Crescas's readers, both in his time and in the following centuries, would have identified his quotation of this story with the *converso* experience in Spain.⁶⁰

The metaphysical reading of *r/p* proclaims that *r/p* is guaranteed. Like the heat that accompanies fire, an intention or act will be rewarded or punished. However, *r/p* is entirely emotional and cannot be seen. The significance of this reading from a *converso* perspective is that it can serve to strengthen adherence to Judaism, as some *conversos* saw others ascending the ranks of the Church or being upwardly-mobile and might interpret visible comforts as divine reward. The phenomenon of *conversos* succeeding in the Church preceded 1391, as the career of Abner of Burgos (one of a long line of Church-affiliated converts) illustrates. Against this light, a reader of *Light of the Lord* might gather that corporeal advantages need not be interpreted as divine reward. Correspondingly, oppressive political or economic measures against Jews or against *conversos* need not be interpreted as divine punishment. At the same time, the reader of *Light of the Lord* would know that those who have willingly converted are—at a minimum—unhappy.

My psychological reading of *r/p* in *Light of the Lord* highlighted how reward and punishment are transferred to the realm of states of the soul.

⁵⁹ The depiction of Esther as a crypto-Jew appears already in Abraham ibn Ezra's (1093-1167) commentaries on the Book of Esther. Cf. Barry Dov Walfish, *Esther in Medieval Garb: Jewish Interpretation of the Book of Esther in the Middle Ages* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 124-125. On the significance of Esther among the *conversos* after Crescas's time, see Emily Colbert Cairns, *Esther in Early Modern Iberia and the Sephardic Diaspora: Queen of the Conversas* (Cham: Springer, 2017), and Miriam Bodian, *Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation: Conversos and Community in Early Modern Amsterdam* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 10.

⁶⁰ In later centuries the *Light of the Lord* may have been particularly popular among *conversos* and former *conversos* who had returned to Judaism; it is probably not a coincidence that it was first printed in Ferrara in 1555 in the press of Abraham Usque, who had printed the Ferrara Bible in 1553 and several other works of interest to *conversos*. It is also well-known that Spinoza, who hailed from a community of *converso* origins, was thoroughly acquainted with Crescas and mentions him by name. See Manekin, "Spinoza and the Determinist Tradition," 36, for references to Spinoza's familiarity with Crescas.

Crescas's picture of a believer is of an individual concerned with emotions and intentions. This turn to an "interiorized" form of religion, rather than one built on *mitzvot* that can be externally verified, makes it possible for *conversos* to maintain a covert attachment to Judaism. Effort at investigating true beliefs and joy in their apprehension need not respect public partisan boundaries of Jew and Christian. In principle, effort and joy are at the reach of any reader of the *Light of the Lord* who wills to know.

In this specific sense, the system of *r/p* in *Light of the Lord* is democratizing. It makes no distinction between those who continued to be public Jews, or were forcibly converted to Christianity (those who convert willingly would not fare well under Crescas's system). It makes no distinction between those with more education and those with less; what is necessary is the will to investigate true beliefs. Furthermore, Crescas's system of *r/p* makes no distinction in terms of gender. Unlike rabbinical *mitzvot* that are indexed by gender, Crescas's turn to interiority and the emotions takes gender out of the equation entirely. Any one individual can wish to investigate truth, and any one individual can feel joy in it. The notion of *r/p* in *Light of the Lord* deemphasizes rabbinical and rationalist male-female distinctions and hierarchies.⁶¹

Taken together, the three readings reveal a philosophical system that might not be explicitly directed to *conversos*, but is certainly friendly to their circumstances. We know from other sources regarding Crescas that he was solicitous to their plight: not only did he author polemical anti-Christian works, but he also intervened personally when his help was sought. For instance, one Moshe Sarqoniel, a *converso*, sought Crescas's help to marry his daughters. Crescas wrote a letter of recommendation for him.⁶² In light of Crescas's activities in turning *conversos* towards Judaism,

⁶¹ I note this as a tentative claim, since Crescas was never able to complete the second part of *Light of the Lord*, which was to be called *Lamp of the Commandment*, where he would presumably address Jewish law directly (on the basis of the title).

⁶² Ram Ben-Shalom, "The Innocent Converso: Identity and Rhetoric in the *Igeret orhit* Genre Following the Persecution of 1391," in *Between Edom and Kedar: Studies in Memory of Yom Tov Assis*, eds. Aldina Quintana et al, Part 1, vol. 10 (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University of Jerusalem; Ben-Tzvi Institute, 2014), 71.

it seems unlikely that an engaged leader such as Crescas would have bracketed off all of his social and political concerns in the *Light*. Even if those concerns are not mentioned explicitly, it stands to reason that they constitute a significant background to *Light of the Lord*.

Finally, I am not arguing that Crescas is an esoteric writer in the mold of a Maimonides, who writes simultaneously for distinct classes of readers. It is possible that Crescas is an esoteric writer, and the *Light* is deliberately meant for Jews and *conversos* as different audiences and with different messages—that is a question for future research. My claim is more circumspect, and I am suggesting that his communitarian and political concerns could not but have an effect on his writing, even if indirectly. Whether or not he had *conversos* in mind as he wrote, his views on reward and punishment dovetail in several respects with the needs of those who wished to preserve their religious attachment to Judaism.