Crescas, Hasdai [addendum] Encyclopedia Article

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Hasdai Crescas takes a radical anti-Aristotelian position, and yet he himself presents conclusions that are threatening to the traditional understanding of religion. For example, in attacking the views on the creation of the world by Maimonides and Gersonides he ends up presenting a theory that allows for an eternal world. The world could be eternal in the sense that it would be eternally dependent on God. According to Crescas there is no difficulty about the existence of a vacuum before the creation of the world, and so it is no good objecting to Aristotle that something could not come from nothing. He even contemplates the possibility of this world being only one of a number of worlds, each existing along with the others.

Crescas is unusual also in accepting the existence of the infinite, a concept that many Aristotelians think suggests an absurdity, and the discovery of which is taken by Aristotelians to indicate an impossibility in the argument. The concept of infinity allows Crescas to envisage an infinite space in which a vast variety of worlds could exist.

Still, the qualms about infinity that his predecessors held had allowed them to argue for the necessity of a first cause, since otherwise the series of causes and effects would continue infinitely. Crescas's attack on Aristotle led him to propose a range of ideas and arguments that were to play a major part in the acceptance of new ways of thinking not only in philosophy but also in science.

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