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I

CRESCAS ON THE PROBLEM OF
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BY

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CRESCAS ON THE PROBLEM OF DIVINE
ATTRIBUTES

BY HARRY AUSTRYN WOLFSON, Harvard University.

PREFATORY NOTE.

IT has been well said that in Arabic, and for that matter also in Jewish philosophy, the problem of Universals had never acquired, as it did later on in Scholasticism, the importance of an independent subject of inquiry. Still, the problem was not altogether unknown. Always latent, it occasionally cropped out in various philosophical discussions. We need only slightly penetrate below the surface of some controversies of the time in Metaphysics and Psychology to discover the lurking presence of the problem of Universals. For the true problem of Universals began with the rejection of Platonic Realism. Admitting with the Aristotelians that genera and species are mere products of the mind, the question was then raised as to what was the nature of those intellectual conceptions and their relation to the individual beings. It was this field of inquiry that proved a fertile ground for the crop of the many subtle and hardly distinguishable mediaeval theories of Universals. Now the same problem must inevitably appear whenever the mind perceives a distinction of a purely intellectual character in an object, and the solution of that problem will of necessity prove more difficult when, in addition to defining the nature of that intellectual distinction, we must at the same time safeguard

the unity of the object. Thus, for instance, in the case of the soul, one and homogeneous, we may ask what is the relation between the essence and its faculties. And in the case of God, too, the absolutely simple, how are His attributes related to His essence?

It is as a problem of Universals in disguise that the problem of Attributes will be herein presented. I shall therefore forego the discussion of the lexicographical and exegetical aspect of the problem, namely, the enumeration of all the Attributes found in the Bible, and their explanation by Jewish philosophers, the object of this paper being to discuss the general principles underlying the problem and its solution. As part of a larger work upon the philosophy of Crescas, it deals more fully with that author. The two chapters devoted to him are intended both to present a constructive view of his theory and to serve as a commentary on his text. They are preceded by a chapter devoted to a general treatment of certain representative authors advisedly selected for their value as an introduction to the study of Crescas.

CHAPTER I

AN ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEM AND SOME REPRESENTATIVE SOLUTIONS.

I.

THERE are four initial assumptions underlying the problem of divine attributes in mediæval philosophy. The starting-point of the problem is the rationalistic attempt to invest the Scriptural predications of God with the validity of logical judgements. Then, a logical judgement is defined, after Aristotle, as having a double content, synthesizing as it does two distinct terms, of which one must be a universal,

by bringing them together by one of the several relations obtaining between subject and predicate. In addition to these two assumptions, while Platonic Realism is not an essential prerequisite, the problem of attributes involves an anti-nominalistic conception of Universals. Finally, it follows Avicenna in identifying God with the metaphysical conception of necessary existence, whose simplicity by definition precludes from its being not only actual composition, but likewise any suggestion of noetic plurality and relativity. The question is then raised, How can we form a logical judgement about God without at the same time creating the anomaly of having the unrelatable Necessarily Existent brought into some logical relation with some predicate distinct from Himself? It is this apparent incompatibility of the formal interpretation of Biblical phraseology, the synthetic conception of a logical judgement, the anti-nominalistic view of universals, and the Avicennean definition of necessary existence that lies at the basis of the problem of attributes.

In Maimonides' treatment of Attributes we find a clear if not a formal statement of the problem. He sets out with a rationalistic definition of faith. Faith is not the correlative of reason, but rather the consummation of the reasoning process. Nor is it a mere attitude of mind, an inane state of consciousness; it is the comprehension of some objective reality. Furthermore, faith is not immediate comprehension or intuitive knowledge, the claim of mysticism, but it is resultant knowledge, the positive intellectual certainty arrived at after a process of ratiocinative reasoning. Faith thus being knowledge, derivative and logically demonstrable, the profession of faith must, therefore, have the force of logical judgements. They cannot be mere verbal

utterance, mere irresponsible exclamations indicative but inexpressive of an attitudinal belief; they must be the embodiment of the conclusions of logical syllogisms, in which the premisses, though not stated, are assumed. Consequently the articles of faith, containing asseverations about the nature and being of God, based upon corresponding affirmations taken from the Scriptures, are perforce logical propositions conforming to all the regimens regulating such propositions.¹

But a logical proposition must contain a synthesis of two distinct terms. Identity, contends Maimonides, is not a relation. A proposition in which the subject and predicate indicate one and the same thing is logically meaningless, for to assert that *A* is *A* is a mere tautology.² In this as well as in his subsequent elaborate statement of what he considers as real, logical relations, though at first sight he does not appear to do so, Maimonides is really following in the footprints of his Stagirite master. In order to show

¹ Cf. *Moreh*, I, 50. This identification of Faith with ratiocinative reasoning was common among certain classes of Moslem thinkers, and was not unknown to Jewish philosophers prior to Maimonides (cf. Kaufmann, *Attributenlehre*, p. 369, note 9. To Kaufmann's references may be added Hobot ha-Lebabot, I, 1). It seems to me that this view may be traced directly to Aristotle through Simplicius. In *De Caelo*, book I, chapter ii, Aristotle has the following statement: Διότι ἐξ πάντων ἂν τις τοῦτων συλλογιζόμενος πιστεύσειεν. Upon this Simplicius comments as follows: Ἡ πίστις διττὴ ἵσται, ἡ μὲν χωρὶς ἀποδείξεως ἀλόγως γνησιότη, οἷαν τινὲς ἰσχυροὶ καὶ ἐπὶ τοῖς ἀνοπατάτοις, ἡ δὲ μετὰ ἀπόδειξιν καὶ συλλογισμὸν ἀποδεικτικῶν, ἥτις καὶ ἀσφαλὴς ἐστί καὶ ἀνέλεγκτος καὶ τῇ ἀληθείᾳ τῶν ὄντων συμφωκονία . . . κάλλιον δέ, οἶμαι, λέγειν, ὅτι ταῖς ἀποδεικτικαῖς ἀνάγκαις προσείναι παραιεῖ παραχρῶ μὲν, μάλιστα δὲ ἐν ταῖς περὶ τῶν θεῶν λόγοις τὴν ἀπὸ τῆς πίστεως συμπάθειαν, οὐ μόνον βεβαίωσιν τῆς ἀληθοῦς γνώσεως ἐμποιοῦσαν, ὅταν μετὰ τὴν ἀπόδειξιν ἐπιγίνηται, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν πρὸς τὰ γνωστὰ ἴναται, ἥτις ἐστὶ τὸ τέλος τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης μακρότητος (*Simplicii in Aristotelis De Caelo Commentaria*, ed. I. L. Heiberg, Berlin, 1894, p. 55).

² Cf. *Moreh*, I, 51.

this congruity, let us first give a genetic analysis of Aristotle's predicables.

It is from his classification of the Categories that Aristotle derives his predicables, for whatever other purpose that classification might have originally served in Aristotle's system, its function as expressing logical relations between subject and predicate is unquestionable.³ When Aristotle, however, uses the categories in their restrictive application of predicables, instead of their common tenfold classification, he adopts their less current division into two, Substance and Accident.⁴ Thus the predicate of a proposition may be either a Substance or an Accident. Neither of these, however, can be a particular. Two individual substances, denoting one and the same thing, cannot be related as subject and predicate. Likewise a definite accident cannot be predicated of a subject. 'John is John' and 'The table is *this definite red*' are not logical propositions. Conse-

³ Whether the Categories were originally intended by Aristotle as logical or ontological divisions is a moot point (cf. Zeller, *Aristotle*, vol. I, p. 274, note 3; p. 275, note 1; Grote, *Aristotle*, vol. I, ch. iii). No question on this point, however, existed for the Arabic and Jewish philosophers. To them it was clear that the Categories were both logical and metaphysical, and are treated as such in the works of Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Algazali. Likewise in the Scholastic philosophy, the Categories had logical as well as metaphysical significance (cf. De Wulf, *Scholasticism Old and New*, p. 141).

⁴ Averroes, in his paraphrase of Aristotle's Categories (ספר הסאטרות) (לכן רש"ד), has the following classification: (1) Universal Substance (העצם הכולל), which is predicable of a subject but does not exist in it (ינשא על נושא ואיננו בנושא). (2) Particular accident (הוא בנושא) which exists in a subject but is not predicable of it (לא ינשא על נושא). (3) Universal accident (המקרה הכולל), which both exists in a subject and is predicable of it (ינשא על נושא והוא נ"ב). (4) Particular Substance (איש העצם), which neither exists in a subject nor is predicable thereof (לא ינשא על נושא ואיננו בנושא). Cf. Organon, *The Categories*, ch. ii.