

Section II Chapter 13

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The opinions of people regarding the issue whether the world is eternal or was created ex nihilo, among those who believe in a Divine creator, are three.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁷ Here Rambam only lists the opinions of creation which assert the existence of a God. At the end of this chapter when Rambam summarizes the various opinions concerning creation, he again mentions that he only discussed those opinions which assert the existence of a Divine creator. This explicitly excludes the opinion of Epicurus who did not believe in God. Similarly, in chapter 17 of section III Rambam, when discussing the various opinions concerning providence, mentions the opinion of Epicurus who did not believe in either God and therefore not in any concept of providence. Rambam says there that he will not discuss that opinion, for since it denies the existence of God, it constitutes heresy. The other opinions regarding providence, according to Rambam, while not consistent with the view of the Torah, are not, however, considered heresy. Based upon this, we may conclude that here too, Rambam does not consider any of these opinions heretical. Rambam

The Guide for the Perplexed on Creation – Chapter 13

The first opinion is that of all who believe in the Torah (teaching) of Moshe Rabbeinu. It is that the entire world, that is everything which exists other than God, was brought by God into existence after absolute nothingness. Before creation, God existed alone, without anything else coexisting with Him, neither angels, nor celestial spheres, nor anything contained in the sphere. Afterwards God brought all existing things into existence as they are, in accordance with His will and desire, not from anything else.²⁰⁸ Time is among the creations, for time

explicitly says this later on with respect to the third opinion, i.e. the Platonic theory of eternity (see section I chapter 25). In *Mishne Torah* Laws of Repentance chapter 3 Rambam does not list those who say that the world is eternal in his list of heretics.

²⁰⁸ Rambam does not offer any source here for the claim that the position of the Torah is that the world was created ex nihilo. Later in this chapter Rambam credits Avraham with promoting this opinion, based upon the verse which tells us that he called to God “With the name Hashem, El-Olam”. In addition, Rambam adds that he (Avraham) stated this opinion explicitly when he referred to God as “He is *‘koneh’* the heavens and the earth”. (See introduction.) Later, however, in chapter 30, Rambam writes that the true interpretation of the first verse of the Torah is “In the beginning God created all that which is above and below” (Bereishis 1: 1), which corresponds to the opinion of creation ex nihilo. In addition, in chapter 25, he states that creation ex nihilo is the more likely interpretation of the first verse of the Torah.

Rambam’s precise usage of the terms “will and desire” in his definition of creation ex nihilo is central and fundamental to his concept of creation ex nihilo. His central argument in chapter 19 against Aristotelian eternity is that the universe which we behold necessarily indicates the role of a Divine will in creation. Hence, the opinion of the Torah of Moshe is not only that the world was created

is dependant upon motion,²⁰⁹ and is therefore an ‘accidental property’ which describes the movement of an object. Since motion itself, was created, time, therefore, came into being in the act of creation.²¹⁰

from nothing, but in addition, this creation from nothing came about through God’s “will and desire”.

²⁰⁹ Rambam’s language here needs to be examined, for he appears to be saying that the opinion of creation ex nihilo is constituted from four statements:

- a) God created the world from absolute nothingness,
- b) God existed (before creation) by Himself,
- c) In the act of creation God brought the world into existence in accordance with His “will and desire” and
- d) Included in things created was time.

It is clear that the belief that time was also created ex nihilo is central to his understanding of the position of the Torah, and he discusses it here at great length. It is clearly important to understand why this is so. See our discussion in note 5 below.

²¹⁰ Rambam’s assertion here that time is “dependent upon motion” is an axiom of Aristotelian physics which Rambam himself explicitly postulates in his introduction to the second volume (Axiom 15, see Schwartz 252). There he writes that “time is an accidental property as a consequence of motion and is inseparable from it”. One cannot exist without the other. Motion only occurs in time. In addition, time cannot be conceived except in relation to motion. Anything not in motion cannot be described by time.” As a consequence of this idea, he asserts in chapter 1 that “time does not apply to God, since motion does not apply to Him”. (Schwartz 262).

The Guide for the Perplexed on Creation – Chapter 13

When we say “God was before He created the world” – being that the word “was” refers to a certain time – and similarly that all thoughts of God’s existence before the creation of the world, which extends ad infinitum, all of this is speaking about hypothetical or imagined time, but not real time, for time is undoubtedly an accidental property and is, in our opinion, like all created accidental properties such as black or white, for even though it is a type of quality, it is still included in the accidental property of motion, as is clear to anyone who understands Aristotle’s theory of time.²¹¹

By “accidental property” Rambam means a property which is not necessarily intrinsic to the object itself, but is rather a possible state of the object which it necessarily goes into and leaves as a result of some other cause. For this reason, the state of the object is brought about by some external cause, i.e. the Creator. As Rambam writes in his introduction to volume II “the eighth axiom is that all that now moves accidentally must necessarily come to rest, since motion is not intrinsic to it. Therefore, it is impossible that such motion can be eternal” (Schwartz 252). This is based upon what Aristotle writes in chapter 5 of Book VIII of the *Physics*:

Let this conclude... that there never was a time when there was not motion, and never will be a time when there will not be motion.

It follows from this that time has no independent existence, but is a property of motion. Since motion is clearly a physical phenomenon, time is therefore as imminent in the physical world as any property we can perceive, such as color or taste. As a result, its “non-existence” is easily conceived and thereby necessary, as is any accidental property.

²¹¹ It is important to bear in mind, while reading this passage, the following paradox in the concept of creation ex nihilo. The assertion

We would like to clarify something which – even though it is not part of the topic that we are discussing – will be useful. That is, that which the concept of time has seemed mysterious

“Before creation, God existed above without anything else.” is inherently problematic. For if time itself is created, there cannot be a time before creation, by definition. Hence the assertion of God’s existence “before creation” is meaningless. This creates a paradox within the very concept of creation ex nihilo itself.

One solution to this paradox would be to assert that in fact time was not created ex nihilo. Rambam rejects this, for it would pose a contradiction to Aristotelian physics which views time as a property of motion. Instead, Rambam asserts that statements that refer to God before creation employ “hypothetical or imaginary” notions of time, but are not referring to physical time.

It follows from this that according to Rambam the statement “Before the creation of the world only god existed” does not correspond to any historical or physical reality, but is a synthetic concept constructed by the mind. In Rambam’s terms it is ‘hypothetical’ and ‘imagined’. To put in differently, creation is not a theory of the physical creation of the world, but a product of human thought. If so, the debate between creation and eternity is rendered incommensurable. For if creation ex nihilo is not an alternative physical theory to eternity, then there is in fact no dispute at all. On the contrary, both opinions can coexist for they are referring to different types of things. This brings us back to the type of contradictions that Ramban spoke about in his introduction – that is, complex matters that can be understood only from two seemingly contradictory points of view. Of course, none of this is explicitly stated by Rambam, but is to be inferred on the basis of what he does say.

The Guide for the Perplexed on Creation – Chapter 13

to most philosophers, such as Galen and others²¹² – up until the point that it has confused them so much as to ponder whether it is real or not – is because time is an accidental property within an accidental property. This is because accidental properties which are immediately detected in physical things, such as color and taste, can be grasped immediately. On the other hand, other accidental properties, such as the brightness of colors or curvature of lines, are more abstract. How much more so if the state of this property is not stable but moves from one to another. In such a case, the property is very abstract. In time there are two elements joining together, for time is connected with motion, and motion itself is a transitory property, unlike black and white, which are stable properties. Rather, the true essence of time is that it is never stable even for the time of a wink of an eye. The reason for this is that time is an abstract concept.²¹³

²¹² Rambam refers to the Greek philosopher/physician Galen earlier in chapter 73 of section I, where he also discusses the issue of time. He says there that time is a Divine (metaphysical) thing and therefore not easily understood. For this reason philosophers have misunderstood it.

²¹³ According to Aristotle time was not an abstract notion by rather a description of circular motion, such as that of a clock or the rotation of the earth on its axis (Sambursky (1987) *The Physical World of the Greeks* Princeton University Press, New Jersey p. 238). The opinion of Galen, as presented by Rambam, is similar to that of the Stoics. In chapter 73 of section I Rambam writes that these thinkers misunderstood time, and thought that time is an *inyan Elohi* – a Divine thing – which cannot be properly grasped. This concept of time more closely resembles the Newtonian concept of time – a mathematical abstraction by which man is able to describe the natural world. Eventually the Newtonian concept of time was replaced by

The correct position, in accordance with our opinion, is that time was created ex nihilo along with all other objects and their accidental properties. Therefore God's creation of the world did

Einstein who restored its immanence, similar to the opinion of Aristotle (See Lee Smolen (2001) *Three Roads to Quantum Gravity* Basic Books).

Rambam is clearly contesting the Stoic view of time. According to Rambam, time is not a metaphysical concept but physical. As such, it was clearly created ex nihilo along with the rest of the physical world.

The question for us to ponder is why Rambam discusses the Stoic concept of time here. He has already disposed of it in chapter 73 of section I. He himself mentions that the point is tangential but is nonetheless useful. Perhaps one can understand this passage as a continuation of the discussion immediately preceding it where he declared that the statement that “God existed before creation” is not referring to physical time, but rather to a “hypothetical or imaginary” time. It would appear that the Stoics would interpret this statement in metaphorical terms given their metaphysical view of time. Such an interpretation would, in fact, grant creation ex nihilo a type of ‘metaphysical’ reality which Rambam himself rejects. For one thing, this metaphysical reality would reify to a certain extent Divine acts which would border, according to Rambam, on idolatry, through the violation of negative theology. According to Rambam, the only thing we can talk about with respect of God’s essence is His thought (section I; chapter 68) which has its analogy in man’s thought. Creation ex nihilo, by describing God’s creation, must remain a product of man’s thinking, totally abstract from any physical or metaphysical reality. For this reason, Rambam came to describe the physical world and creation ex nihilo as an irreducible dichotomy. He denies the existence of any metaphysical medium which would bridge the gap between the creation ex nihilo and the physical world. One is a product of mind, the other a physical entity.

The Guide for the Perplexed on Creation – Chapter 13

not take place at any specific time, for time itself is included in the creation. Reflect upon this deeply in order that you will not bring upon yourself counter arguments which you will not be able to answer. Any positing of time before creation requires belief in the eternity of the world. For time itself is an accidental property and must therefore be a property of some other object. As a consequence, something must have existed before the world which we know of now. One must therefore free oneself from this viewpoint (i.e. that time was not created).²¹⁴

²¹⁴ Rambam’s exhortation “reflect upon this deeply” should cause us to pause and reflect. Rambam clearly detects a pitfall in our thinking of which he wishes to make us aware. What, however, is this point?

In chapter 1 of Book VIII of Aristotle’s *Physics* he writes:

So far as time is concerned we see that all with one exception are in agreement in saying that it is uncreated. In fact, it is just this that enables Democritus to show that all things cannot have had a becoming, for time, he says, is uncreated. Plato alone asserts the creation of time, saying that it is simultaneous with the world and that the world came into being. Now, since time cannot exist and is unthinkable apart from the now, and the now is a kind of middle point, uniting as it does in itself both a beginning and an end, a beginning of future and time and an end of past time, it follows that there must always be time: for the extremity of the last period of time that we take must be found in some now, since in time we can take nothing but the present. Therefore, since the now is both a beginning and an end, there must always be time on both sides of it. But if this is true of time, it is evident that it must also be true of motion, time being a kind of affection of motion. (251b lines 11-28).

This is no doubt one of the fundamental axioms of the belief of the Torah of Moshe Rabbeinu. It comes after the axiom of God's 'onenesses (i.e. his incorporeality). One should not consider any alternative opinion. Avraham Avinu was one of the first to promulgate this idea, which he arrived at by way of reason, and therefore "proclaimed the Name Adonai, Almighty of the Universe" (Bereishit 21: 33). He expressed this idea

The argument which Aristotle presents here is different from that which Rambam has presented us. According to Rambam, time was created ex nihilo only because time is a property of motion, and since motion is an accidental property and therefore necessarily created, time follows in suit. This argument, however, neatly avoids confronting the seeming inconceivability of the creation of time. For, as Aristotle argues, the creation ex nihilo of time is logically impossible by the very definition of time. Since time is a property of motion, motion must therefore be eternal. This is the counter argument to which Rambam is referring, stating that one cannot refute it. If, however, one cannot refute it, how does Rambam expect us to uphold the position of the creation ex nihilo of time?

Rambam, in my opinion, does not answer this explicitly, but hints at the answer. His exhortation "reflect upon this deeply" alludes to the fact that creation ex nihilo is not a physical theory of creation but rather a mental concept, a product of thought and not an objective scientific fact. The words "reflect upon this deeply" while externally an exhortation, is internally the profound truth about creation which Rambam is trying to communicate. Creation ex nihilo is not a contending theory of creation of eternity but rather a product of man's thought which introduces a dimension other than the objective physical world pictured by Aristotelian physics. This non-contention, however, is a deep idea which cannot be communicated except to the intelligent discerning reader whom Rambam addresses in his introduction to the *Guide*.

The Guide for the Perplexed on Creation – Chapter 13

*explicitly by describing God as “the Possessor of heaven and earth” (Bereishit 14: 22).*²¹⁵

²¹⁵ In understanding the above passage, one encounters several difficulties which arise from inconsistencies with other parts of the *Guide*. These can be enumerated as follows:

- 1) Rambam considers the opinion of creation ex nihilo an axiom of the belief of the Torah, akin to belief in incorporeality. However, rejection of the first opinion of the creation, creation ex nihilo, according to Rambam himself is not heretical. Rambam explicitly says in chapter 25 of this section that one may believe in the Platonic theory of eternity and nonetheless subscribe to the necessary beliefs of the Torah. See also note 1 above.
- 2) The verse brought by Rambam, Avraham’s proclamation in Bereishit, does not directly express creation ex nihilo.
- 3) The second verse quoted by Rambam, apparently brought as proof of Avraham’s proclamation of creation ex nihilo, is interpreted in chapter 30 of this section by Rambam as “tending towards eternity”. Rambam, then, not only quotes a second apparently extraneous verse – but even interprets it elsewhere as expressing the very opposite opinion of that which he seeks to prove!
- 4) Rambam says that Avraham Avinu arrived at the belief in creation ex nihilo through reason. This implies that the belief, according to Rambam, can be proven, just like incorporeality, which Avraham reached through reason (see *Mishneh Torah Hilchot Avodah Zarah* chapter 1). This, however, is contradicted by Rambam’s statements in chapter 25 where he clearly indicates that not only can creation ex nihilo not be proven – in could conceivably be demonstrated not to be true.

A solution to all of these questions would be to say that Rambam here is not referring to the first opinion of creation ex nihilo, but rather to Plato's theory of the eternity of the universe. According to Rambam's own statements in chapter 25, belief in Plato's opinion still maintains a concept of God who can "fashion" the world as He wishes. As a consequence, He can be called "Almighty of the Universe" and can still be said to be its "Possessor". While Plato's theory cannot be arrived at through empirical logic, it is consistent with the historical facts of miracles and the choosing of prophets which means that it is a "reasonable" belief. This could be the "method of reasoning of Avraham" to which Rambam is referring.

Considered by itself, in isolation from what Rambam writes beforehand, this solution offers a possible interpretation of Rambam's words. The problem is, of course, that the passage occurs as part of a discussion of the opinion of the Torah of Moshe, which is creation ex nihilo.

To remedy this problem, I would like to propose a slightly different interpretation of Rambam's words. A careful translation of the wording of the *Guide* is:

This is one of the opinions and it is not doubt an axiom of the Torah of Moshe Rabbeinu".

What does Rambam mean when he says that "this is one of the opinions"? Why did he not say "this is the first opinion"? Perhaps he means to say that this is one of the "acceptable opinions". In this case, Rambam is implicitly referring both to creation ex nihilo and Plato's theory of eternity. What Rambam is implying is that both of those opinions fulfil the demands of the concept of creation as expressed by the Torah. Perhaps for this reason, Rambam brings here two verses from Avraham Avinu. The first one is referring to creation ex nihilo, while the second is referring to Plato's eternity.

The Guide for the Perplexed on Creation – Chapter 13

The second opinion concerning creation is the opinion of someone whose views have been both orally and texturally disseminated among philosophers. They maintain that it is impossible that God can bring something into existence from nothing. Likewise, in their opinion it is impossible that something which exists can cease to be. I mean by this that it is impossible that any object possessing substance and form can be created from the absolute absence of substance, and cannot similarly return to the absence of substance. In their opinion, ascribing to God the ability to do this, is equivalent to ascribing to Him the ability to create two contradictory things at once, or to create a God like Himself, or to make Himself corporeal, or to create a square whose diagonal is equal to its sides, and similar creations²¹⁶.

²¹⁶ The second opinion is the Platonic theory of eternity, which asserts the eternity of a formless matter from which the world as we know it was created. The statements of Rambam in this first passage present arguments in favour of all theories of eternity. The contention is that the theory of creation ex nihilo is no different than any logical or natural contradiction. God's creating the world out of nothing is likened to creating a square whose diagonal is equal to the sides in length.

In chapters 71 and 73, Rambam attacks the thinkers of the Kalam for making assumptions or drawing conclusions which are logical or natural impossibilities. As far as the creation ex nihilo of the world is concerned, Rambam makes a distinction:

In my opinion the seeker of truth who is of religious faith cannot attempt to deny the proofs of the Greek philosophers. For every intelligent thinker who is a man of truth, who does not delude himself, knows that regarding the issue of the creation of the world, whether it is eternal or created ex nihilo, one cannot bring any exact proof, for it is a

point where the intellect stops. (book I chapter 72 – Schwartz edition pp 190-191)

In other words, for Rambam, mathematical truths such as the length of the diagonal of a square in relation to the sides can be proven mathematically. Natural truths can be demonstrated by observation. Philosophical truths, such as the incorporeality of God, can be proven philosophically. However, how the world was created is not something which can be known through investigation or proof.

How, then, does one come to formulating an opinion regarding the creation of the world? At the end of chapter 22 Rambam writes:

Do not criticize me for having set out the doubts that attach to his (Aristotle's) opinion. You may say: can doubts disprove an opinion or establish its contrary as true Surely this is not so. However, we shall treat this philosopher as his followers have taught us to treat him. For Alexander has explained that in every case in which no demonstration is possible the two contrary opinions with regard to the matter in question should be posited as hypotheses and it should be seen what doubts attach to each of them: the one to which fewer doubts attach should be believed. Alexander says that things are thus with respect to all the opinions regarding the divine that Aristotle sets forth and regarding which no demonstration is possible. For everyone who has come after Aristotle says that what Aristotle stated about them arouses fewer doubts than whatever else might be said about them. We have acted in this way when it was to our mind established as true that, regarding the question whether the heavens were generated or eternal, neither of the two contradictory opinions could be demonstrated. For we have explained the doubts attaching to each of the opinions and have shown to you that the opinion favoring the eternity of the world is the one which raises more doubts and is more

The Guide for the Perplexed on Creation – Chapter 13

harmful for the belief that ought to be held with regard to the deity. And this, in addition to the fact that the world's being produced in time is the opinion of Avraham Avinu and our prophet Moshe Rabbeinu. (Pines p. 320).

From the above passage it appears that the opinion of Rambam is that the issue of creation in principle cannot be settled by demonstration. Hence all views on the matter are no more than hypotheses or assumptions. This is clearly in line with Rambam's statement that at this point "the intellect stops".

At the end of chapter 24 Rambam writes:

The deity alone fully knows the true reality, the nature, the substance, the form, the motions and the causes of the heavens. But He has enabled man to have knowledge of what is beneath the heavens, for that is his world and his dwelling place in which he has been placed and of which he himself is a part. This is the truth. For it is impossible for us to accede to the points starting from which conclusions may be drawn about the heavens, for the latter are too far away from us and too high in place and in rank. And even the general conclusion that may be drawn from them, namely that they prove the existence of their Mover, is a matter of knowledge which cannot be reached by human intellects. And to fatigue the minds with notions that cannot be grasped by them and for the group of which they have no instrument, is a defect in one's inborn disposition or some sort of temptation. Let us stop at a point that is within our capacity and let us give over the things that cannot be grasped by reasoning to him who was reached by the mighty Divine overflow so that it could be fittingly said of him "with him do I speak mouth to mouth" (Bamidbar 12: 8). That is the end of what I have to say about this question. It is possible that someone else may find a demonstration by means of which the true reality of

what is obscure for me will become clear to him. The extreme prediction that I have for investigating the truth is evidenced by the fact that I have explicitly stated and repeated my perplexity regarding these matters as well as by the fact that I have not heard nor do I know a demonstration as to anything concerning them. (ibid. p. 327)

In this second passage, Rambam appears to contradict himself. He starts out by stating that knowledge of this type of issue cannot be reached by the human intellect, and is in need of Divine intellect revealing to man. He then, however, states that it may be possible for someone in the future to offer a demonstration. In any case, the two competing opinions are not described as assumptions, but rather that there does exist an intellectual truth which might not be attainable by the unaided human intellect.

The resolution of these two seemingly contradictory passages is that within the bounds of normative scientific reasoning the two positions are in fact two different assumptions of how to understand physical reality. Each side can muster proof but also is laden with difficulties. The truth is that there are two separate epistemologies: knowledge of the physical world and knowledge of 'creation' which reside within two very different ontologies. This second type of epistemology is not a product of man's imagination, but rather a property of thought which, like all thinking, is rooted in the Active intellect whose source is God. The common man, who cannot think out of the popular conception of reality, is expected to choose between two assumptions on the basis of his religious tradition, Avraham Avinu and Moshe Rabbeinu.

The type of person that Rambam is reaching out to is enjoined to be conscious of two non-equivocal epistemologies.

To return to our passage in chapter 13, Rambam presents the 'eternalist' view of creation and even attempts to defend it.

The Guide for the Perplexed on Creation – Chapter 13

It is clear from what they are saying that just as there is no lack in God in the fact that He cannot create something which is impossible, for impossible things are of a permanent nature that they cannot be produced, and this cannot ever be violated, so too, there is no lack in the Creator stemming from the fact that He cannot bring something into existence from nothing. For this is also an impossible thing²¹⁷.

Therefore they believe that there is a certain type of substance which is primordial (eternal) just as God is primordial (eternal) – God cannot exist without this substance and the substance cannot exist without God²¹⁸.

²¹⁷ Rambam here is arguing that there is no reason to regard God's seeming inability to create things ex nihilo as detracting from His power or perfection. The argument for this is not merely that practically speaking, relative to that which is possible, God remains all powerful and perfect. Rather, Rambam is making a logical argument. By definition, an impossible thing is something which cannot be created. If we were to call into question God's ability in this case, then we are undermining the logical basis of our reasoning, which is the basis of how we know of God in the first place.

Rambam here is doing more than presenting the opinions of eternity. He is actually supporting their arguments and showing how they do not in any way detract from one's proper belief in God. It is important to note that Rambam's argument applies to all theories of eternity, not just Plato's, which he first presents in the next statement.

²¹⁸ This primordial substance is the formless matter described by the commentators as 'heuli'. It is interesting to note that Rambam takes the relationship between God and the primordial matter in both directions. He says "God cannot exist without the primordial matter and the primordial matter cannot exist without God". The first statement, that "God cannot exist without the primordial matter" is a

Nonetheless they do not believe that this primordial matter is Divine, like God, but rather God is the cause for the existence of the primordial matter. The matter is for God just as clay is for a potter, or iron for a blacksmith. He creates from the matter whatever He desires. Sometimes He will create heavens and earth, other times something else²¹⁹.

consequence of the fact that God created the world. For given the fact that God created the world, He cannot possibly exist without this matter, because otherwise He couldn't have created the world. This is due to the fact that creation ex nihilo is impossible. This is therefore the exposition of this opinion.

Why, however, does Rambam make the second statement “the primordial matter cannot exist without God”? Clearly this statement is superfluous, for it has nothing to do with Plato's theory of eternity. It is merely saying that God is primordial in the sense that nothing can possibly exist beforehand. This statement is clearly coming to say that the Platonic theory of eternity does not detract from the temporal eternity of God and may even be theologically acceptable. In other words, not only does eternity of matter not detract from God's power and perfection, it does not even detract from His primordially.

²¹⁹ The assertion of this second opinion, according to Rambam, is that God, while not temporary prior to the world, is ontologically prior. God can be said to be the Creator in the sense that He creates the scientific laws upon which the physical world operates. Hence the scientific structure of the world is not primordial but is created by God.

The source for this opinion, as Rambam himself states later in, is Plato's Timaeus. There the 'primordial matter' which Rambam discusses here is not really a central theme. Plato there is not interested so much in the act of creation but in the nature of

The Guide for the Perplexed on Creation – Chapter 13

scientific reality. It is his contention that the world can be described in terms of an overarching mathematical system. There was an ancient Greek school called the Pythagoreans who were of the view that the world was equal to mathematics. Plato, in his dialogue *Timaeus*, argued with them and defended the position that the world is somehow an expression is an imperfect model of a mathematical system. The four elements which comprise the fundamental units of matter were given by Plato geometrical meaning. Plato's opinion, therefore, is that the world is an approximation of an a priori mathematical system.

The explicit reference to creation which Rambam is referring to is the passage in *Timaeus* where he says:

The god wanted everything to be good and nothing to be bad so far as that was possible. And so he took over all that was visible – not at rest but in discordant and disorderly motion – and brought it from a state of disorder to one of order, because he believed that order was in every way better than disorder. (*Timaeus* 15 trans. Donald J. Zeyl; Hackett Publishing Company; Indianapolis/Cambridge 2000).

Oddly enough, Rambam himself adopts the Platonic viewpoint in chapter 6 of section II. There he writes:

For our Law does not deny the fact that He, may He be exalted, governs that which exists here through the intermediation of the angels. Thus there is the text of the Sages with reference to the dictum of the Torah “Let us make man in our image” (Genesis 1: 26) and its dictum “Come let us go down” (ibid. 11: 7) which dicta are in the plural. They said: “The Holy One, blessed be He, as it were, does nothing without contemplating with the host above”. Marvel at their saying “contemplating” for Plato uses literally the same expression, saying, God looks at the world of the

The advocates of this view are divided into different groups concerning which there is no purpose in describing them and their opinions in this book. The general idea is what I have mentioned to you – this is also the opinion of Plato. Aristotle mentions him explicitly by name in his Physics when he says that he believes that the heavens were created and are subject

intellects and that in consequence that which exists overflows from Him” (p. 262-3).

We see clearly here that Rambam adopts the Platonic theory of creation of the physical world based upon an a priori idealistic system. Does this constitute a contradiction to creation ex nihilo? Rambam, later on in the same chapter, makes a disclaimer:

However a point on which he [Aristotle] disagrees with us in all this is constituted by his belief that all these things are eternal and that they proceed necessarily from Him, may He be exalted, in that way. For we ourselves believe that all this has been created and that God has created the separate intellects and has put in the sphere the force of desire toward them, and that it was He who created the intellects and the spheres and put in them the governing forces”. (p. 265).

So much for Aristotle. But what about Plato? In any case, by comparing this passage with that of the Timaeus, it is not clear that after the stage that the physical universe is actually created that there is any disagreement whatsoever. With respect to the origin of the forms themselves, Timaeus declares;

Now to find the maker and father of this universe [to pan] is hard enough, and even if I succeeded, to declare him to everyone is impossible. (Timaeus 15)

The Guide for the Perplexed on Creation – Chapter 13

*to degeneration. This opinion can also be found explicitly in his book The Timaeus*²²⁰.

²²⁰ The creation of the heavens is asserted in Plato's Timaeus:

Now as to the whole heaven [ouranus] as world order [kosmos] – let just called it by whatever name is most acceptable in a given context – there is a question we need to consider first. This is the sort of question one should begin with in inquiring into any subject. Has it always been? Was there no origin [arché] from which it came to be? Or did it come to be and take its start from some origin? It has come to be. For it is both visible and tangible and it has a body – and all things of that kind are perceptible. And as we have shown, perceptible things are grouped by opinion, which involves sense perception. As such, they are things that came to be, things that are begotten (Timaeus 28 b-c).

The argument made by Aristotle against the contention of Plato that the heavens were created is based on the fact that Plato's opinion implies that time had a beginning. This, maintains Aristotle, is impossible.

Plato alone asserts the creation of time, saying that it is simultaneous with the world, and that the world came into being. Now, since time cannot exist and is unthinkable apart from the now and the now is a kind of middle-point, uniting as it does in itself both a beginning and an end, a beginning of future time and an end of past time, it follows that there must always be time: fro the extremity of the last period of time that we take must be found in some now, since in time we can take nothing but the present. Therefore, since the now is both a beginning and an end, there must always be time on both sides of it. (Physics Book VIII chapter 1 251b, 17-26)

Plato's account of the creation of time appears in this passage from the *Timaeus*:

“Now when the Father who had begotten the universe observed it set in motion and alive, a thing that had come to be as a shrine for the everlasting gods, he was well pleased, and in his delight he thought of making it more like its model still. So, as the model was itself an everlasting Living Thing, he set himself to bringing this universe to completion in such a way that it, too, would have that character to the extent that it was possible. Now it was the Living Thing's nature to be eternal, but it isn't possible to bestow eternity fully upon anything that is begotten. And so he began to think of making a moving image of eternity: at the same time as he brought order to the heavens he would make an eternal image, moving according to number, of eternity moving in unity. This image, of course, is what we call 'time'.

For before the heavens came to be, there were no days or nights, no months or years. But now, at the same time as he framed the heavens, he devised their coming to be. These all are parts of time, and was and will be are forms of time that have come to be. Such notions we unthinkingly but incorrectly apply to everlasting being. For we say that it 'was' and 'is' and 'will be', but according to the true account only 'is' is appropriately said of it. 'Was' and 'will be' are properly said about the becoming that passes in time, for those two are motions. But that which is always changeless and motionless cannot become either older or younger in the course of time – neither ever

The Guide for the Perplexed on Creation – Chapter 13

The third opinion is that of Aristotle and those who are his disciples or comment on his works. Aristotle supports the contention , mentioned above, that it is impossible for that something physical can come into existence form something which is not physical. He adds, in addition, that the heavens are not subject to creation and destruction. His position can by succinctly summarized as followed: He claims that everything which exists, as it exists, has always existed, and will always exist. Something which his permanent which his not subject to creation or destruction, such as the heavens, will never cease to

became so, nor is it now such that it has become so, not will it ever be so in the future.

And all in all, none of the characteristics that becoming has bestowed upon the things that are borne about in the realm of perception are appropriate to it. These, rather, are forms of time that have come to be – time that imitates eternity and circles according to number. And what is more, we also say things like these: that what has come to be is what has come to be, that what is coming to be is what is coming to be, and also that what will come to be is what will come to be, or that what is not is what is not. None of these expressions of ours is accurate. (Timaeus 37d,e – 38 a,b).

Time, then, is a consequence of change and motion. It is, as Plato says, a ‘moving image of eternity’. The argument between Plato and Aristotle would appear to revolve around the issue of whether time is included in motion or is a concept independent of it.

Aristotle himself, however, has claimed that time is included in motion. It is for this very reason that Rambam claimed that time is something created, which corresponds to Plato’s argument in the passage from the Timaeus quoted above.

be. Time and motion are eternal, neither created nor destroyed. Something which is created and destroyed, such as that which is below the heaven, will not cease to be. That is, the physical substratum itself is not created nor destroyed itself, but rather changes in form, one coming after the next. It removes one form and takes on another. This process, in the celestial and terrestrial regions, will never be violated or nullified. Its nature is forever unchanging and no radical change will appear²²¹.

However, Plato does not believe in what we believe, as is asserted by someone who does not carefully examine opinions and think deeply. He claims that our opinions are identical. This is not so. For we believe that the heavens were created from absolute nothingness, whereas Plato believes that they

²²¹ Aristotle's theory of creation is part of a larger theory of the natural world which contrasts very sharply with that of Plato. According to Aristotle, there is no underlying mathematical model upon which the natural world is based. There is no more to the physical world than its very phenomenology. The consequences of this world view for creation as far as Rambam is concerned, is that the world was never subject to any change in nature nor will it be in the future.

It is important to note that Aristotle makes an important distinction between the celestial and terrestrial domains. In the terrestrial domain there is a concept of creation and destruction, which Aristotle attributes to changes in form of a constant substratum. In the celestial domain, there is only movement, but no phenomena of creation and destruction. Plato's contention was therefore that the celestial domain is similar to the terrestrial one, with the substratum analogy of the terrestrial domains being a mathematical system. Aristotle, however, asserts a strict antinomy between the two domains.

The Guide for the Perplexed on Creation – Chapter 13

*were created from something. This, then, is the second opinion*²²².

*Even though he [Aristotle] does not state it in this manner, a conclusion of his option is that it is impossible, that there can be any change in the desire of God, or that any will should appear, and that all of existence was brought about in accordance with His will, but not after non-being. Similarly, it is impossible that God can ever undergo any change as above, for Aristotle contends that it is impossible that God's will undergo any change, so that there arises within Him any desire. Therefore, it follows necessarily that everything that exists, the way it is, has always and will always be*²²³.

²²² While Rambam does not disclose exactly who is claiming that Plato's theory of creation and that of Moshe are identical, it is clear that he understood that there could be room for confusion. In fact, Rambam explicitly writes that only someone who is careful in "examining opinions" and "thinks deeply" will be able to ascertain the distinction between creation ex nihilo and Plato's creation from an amorphous substratum. Once again, Rambam is suggesting to the intelligent reader that creation ex nihilo is far more complex than what would appear at first sight, as well as its distinction from an eternity theory of a Platonic type.

²²³ In this crucial passage Rambam is supplying an entirely original argument for the Aristotelian version of eternity. The argument is based upon Rambam's own negative theology which posits that one cannot make any affirmative statement about God, no less attribute a change in Him. Such attributes lead to corporeality and, ultimately, idolatry. What Rambam is really saying is that theory of creation ex nihilo, while affirming the significance of God's will and power over the natural world, brings about diminishing returns for it makes serious inroads on God's incorporeality. It is therefore no small wonder that Rambam, in proving God's incorporeality in chapter 1

of section I, makes use of the eternity of the universe (in the Aristotelian sense) and even posits it as an axiom in his introduction to the second section. It would appear that Rambam was well aware of the fact that monotheism and creationism are in fact two contradictory concepts of the seventh type (mentioned in the introduction). There he explained that “contradiction arises from the necessity to discuss very deep issues which must be partly revealed and partly hidden. Sometimes it is necessary on the basis of certain statements to understand these issues based upon a certain a priori assumption, and sometimes it is necessary to understand the issue based upon a contradictory a priori assumption.”

Rambam is therefore intimating that in order to posit God’s complete incorporeality it is necessary to extend the physical world ad infinitum. Since physical infinity is impossible, it is time which must be infinite. Monotheism demands eternity. Law and ethics, however, are based upon Divine free will and Divine free will in turn demands creation ex nihilo. Since creation ex nihilo, as Rambam has already pointed out, cannot have taken place at any time, it cannot be a theory of creation. The antinomy between eternity theories, particularly Aristotle’s, and the irreducible creation ex nihilo is in fact no other than the dichotomy between ontology and ethics.

It appears in Rambam that only Aristotle’s position can maintain a never changing will of God. Plato’s theory, on the other hand, asserts a point of time when God decided to create the orderly world which we recognize. This distinction is elaborated later on in chapter 25 where Rambam writes explicitly that Plato’s eternity allows for miracles and Divine Providence. This is, according to Rambam, in contradistinction to Aristotle’s opinion. Plato’s opinion recognizes changes in the Divine will in time, and therefore does not admit a maximal theory of monotheism. From this standpoint Plato’s opinion is closer to that of the Torah than is Aristotle’s. A consequence of this is that Plato’s theory does not contain the best of ‘both worlds’.

The Guide for the Perplexed on Creation – Chapter 13

This is a brief summary of these opinions and their true positions. They are all opinions of those who take the position that it has been rigorously demonstrated that God brought the world into existence.

Regarding those who do not acknowledge the existence of God, but maintain rather that things come into being and cease to be through chance encounters and disassociations, and that there is no one who designs the world – these are the fellows of Epicurus, as is related by Alexander – there is no benefit in mentioning them for the existence of a God has already been demonstrated. There is no benefit in citing the opinions of people who have based themselves on assumptions which contradict rational demonstration. In addition, it would not help us to adopt the position of the second opinion, that is, that the heavens are created and destroyed, for they still believe in eternity, and from our perspective there is no difference between the ‘eternalists’ who believe that the heavens are created and destroyed, and between the ‘eternalists’ who believe in the Aristotelian version of eternity. For all those who follow the Torah of Moshe and Avraham Avinu or who subscribe to their positions believe that there is nothing which is eternally coexistent with God and that creation ex nihilo is not a logical impossibility. Moreover, according to some thinkers it is necessarily true²²⁴.

Its acceptance does not do away with the need for a monotheistic-friendly cosmology which only Aristotle can provide.

²²⁴ While Rambam appears to be summarizing the opinions present in this chapter, it is worthwhile to point out several nuances in his language. Firstly, he is definitely stating that belief in the eternity of the universe according to all opinions does not interfere with the belief in God as creator. Secondly, the position of creation ex nihilo cannot necessarily be proven, but can be thought of as a theology of

those who follow the Torah. While he does mention that there are those who maintain that creation ex nihilo is necessarily true in chapter 22 he clearly regards the debate to be a draw. In addition, he does not use the term ‘rational demonstration but rather the term ‘necessarily true’. Creation ex nihilo for Rambam was not like the belief in a Divine Creator, which can be rationally demonstrated.

The Guide for the Perplexed on Creation – Chapter 13