Reshimu

Studies in Jewish Thought and History

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The Journal of the Hashkafa Circle

Under the guidance of Rabbi Meir Triebitz

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Table of Contents

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History of Philosophy and *Moreh Nevuchim*

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General Editor
David Sedley

Table of Contents

Table of Contents

Introduction

Baruch Hashem the first issue of ***Reshimu*** was very well received and we have had very positive feedback. Now we are excited to present the second issue.

The name ***Reshimu*** is based on a kabbalistic idea that Rabbi Triebitz explained during his series of video shiurim on the Vilna Gaon's ***Asarah Klalim***.[1] After God 'contracted' Himself through the mechanism of *tzimtzum* there was an empty 'space' where God was not readily apparent. This 'space' is called the *Reshimu* and allows for a natural world which runs according to laws of nature, apparently without God's intervention. God then came back into the world through the *kav* which allows for providence and miracles.

We named this journal ***Reshimu*** because our goal is to present an approach to Jewish philosophy which allows for the co-existence of both the rational and miraculous. We have made our main focus the works of perhaps the most famous Jewish rationalist philosopher - Rambam – and his *Moreh Nevuchim*.

In this issue we have also expanded our focus to different areas of Jewish philosophy and history. Rabbi Triebitz has written two articles

[1] Available from www.hashkafacircle.com/gaon

focusing on different periods of history, and giving each his own unique view. He shows how the history of Western thought since Descartes, which progresses in discrete paradigmatic steps, has been mirrored by similar paradigmatic changes in Jewish philosophy. He finds the common threads between the two apparently different approaches to the world. In his article on the emergence of the Mishna and Tosefta Rabbi Triebitz casts light on a little known subject, yet one which underlies almost all Jewish learning. He explains the change from scriptural exegesis to Talmud, which is a type of exegesis of mishna, the implications of that, and discusses the nature and function of Tosefta.

Rabbi Becker shows the relevance of *Moreh Nevuchim* to our generation. The questions and issues which Rambam faced almost 1000 years ago are, for the most part, still the questions and issues that face Jewish thinkers today.

Rabbi Salber shows that the concept of *creation ex-nihilo*,in the context of the history of Jewish thought. Furthermore, there are many rabbinic statements which flatly contradict the concept of creation from nothing.

My article examines the changing attitudes to aggada, and how it was used and understood by the Talmud, Gaonim and Rishnonim.

Finally, in time for Rosh Hashanah, the anniversary of creation, we are very pleased to be able to include the first two chapters of Rabbi Triebitz's forthcoming commentary on *Moreh Nevuchim*. He has been giving shiur for the past half year on those chapters where Rambam explains creation. The shiurim have been available for viewing online at www.hashkafacircle.com/rambam. These shiurim are now being written up as a book, with a new translation of *Moreh Nevuchim* and a brand new commentary explaining the issues that Rambam is dealing with.

As always, we hope that you enjoy this journal. It is available either as a free pdf download from www.hashkafacircle.com/reshimu or for purchase as a paperback journal from www.lulu.com

Please send any comments or feedback, or any articles for publication in future editions of ***Reshimu*** to hashkafacircle@gmail.com.

With blessings for a healthy and happy New Year and *ketiva ve-chatima tova*

David Sedley

Elul 5768, Yerushayalim.

A correction:

Thank you to Rabbi Aryeh Bergman for pointing out that the statement in the name of the Netziv *p'shuto shel mikreh* on p. 141 of volume 1; number 1 of *Reshimu* is not accurate. The Netziv is referring to the derashot of Chazal.

History of Jewish Philosophy – the Modern Era

By Rabbi Meir Triebitz

Overview

In Tzidkat HaTzadik, Rabbi Tzadok HaCohen of Lublin elaborates a theory of commensurability between Torah knowledge and secular knowledge:

> In each generation, it [the Torah] is a map of the world in that time. This is because the renewal of Jewish souls in every generation serves as the source for the renewal of the entire world at large. [In addition] just as the souls [of the Jewish nation] undergo changes from one generation to the next, so does the Torah. This is particularly true for the Oral Law which undergoes a renewal in every generation by the hands of its scholars. This renewal of the Oral Law, in turn, illuminates the new souls of that time, and this brings about renewal in the world at large. Consequently by reflecting upon the state of the world in each generation, one can understand the state of the Torah as propounded by the scholars of that generation[2].

2 Tzidkat HaTzadik 90

The concept of commensurability was also expressed by Rav Kook in Orot where he says:

> God acted charitably with his world by not placing all creative abilities in one place, one person, one nation, one country, or in one generation. Rather He scattered them. As a consequence perfection can only be achieved through conjunction. "On that day God will be one and His name will be One".
>
> Israel has hidden spiritual resources. However, in order to unite the entire world around them, it is necessary that Israel lack certain creative abilities in order to allow the other nations to participate in universal perfection. This generates a process by which Israel imports ideas from the other nations and infuses them with spirituality[3].

Commensurability for both Rav Tzadok and Rav Kook is not merely a temporal coincidence of ideas, nor of a simple process of import-export. Rather it is an inter and intra dynamical process through which ideas are generated both by the Jewish nation and its scientific-philosophic counterparts by the nations of the world. For Rav Tzadok, the process originates with the Torah scholars in each generation and filters into the secular world. For Rav Kook, the process can also originate in the nations of the world but is then given spiritual expression by Jewish thinkers. This bipolar dynamical process expressed by those two seminal thinkers is very much in contradistinction to a remark made by Julius Guttman:

> The Jewish people are not driven to philosophical thought from its very own, inner power. It received philosophy from outside, and the history of Jewish philosophy is a history of receptions of foreign intellectual goods, which were then of

3 'Yisrael veUmos HaOlam' in Orot (year) Mossad HaRav Kook; Jerusalem p. 152

> course adapted according to its very own, new points of view[4].

Guttman denies any creative role played by Judaism. The appearance of philosophical ideas in Jewish thinkers is merely one of export-import. In addition, according to Guttman, this process is an intentional self-conscious one. As a consequence, it applies only to the rational medieval philosophers and later on to those of the haskalah and onwards who did not necessarily have any deep connections with the traditional Jewish spirituality in texts. According to Rav Tzadok and Rav Kook this process is a natural phenomenology of mind. It is therefore not necessarily intentional or self-conscious.

In this essay, I will explore how the ideas of Rav Tzadok and Rav Kook are manifested in modern (post medieval) traditional Jewish thinkers such as the Arizal, Rav Chaim Volozhener and the Leshem. These no doubt were not people who actively pursued secular scholarship. Nonetheless, their original and innovative systems of thought bear the clear imprint of the evolution of Western philosophy expressed in spiritual language. The spirituality of these concepts inevitably brought these thinkers to different conclusions from that of their Western counterparts. On the contrary, these ideas are developed and, using Rav Kook's words, "infused with spirituality". Through them we can highlight the important theological differences between Judaism and Western thought.

The Difference Between Halacha and Hashkafa

There are two distinct components to Jewish texts and thought. One is legal, known as halacha and the other is philosophical and theological known as hashkafa. There is not always a clear line of delineation between these two. Nonetheless this distinction can be

4 Philosophy of Judaism p. 1, cited in Gordon, P. E. (2005) Rosenzwig and Heidegger: Between Judaism and German Philosophy; University of California Press p. 6.

traced from Scripture, through Mishna and Talmud, to the entire corpus of Jewish writings throughout history.

The difference between these two aspects of Judaism becomes apparent through a study of their historical development.

Halacha operates with the principle of historical continuity. All rulings are built upon those that came before, reinterpreting and modernizing earlier principles. There are also clear historical demarcations of authority; these emerge from clearly defined eras which create a hierarchy of halachic authority and interpretation. This historical, legal hierarchy, in turn, creates a tradition of text, the interpretation of which constitutes the norm of halachic discourse.

Each successive era interprets the previous era but may not contradict it. Hence the Talmud interprets the Mishna, the Rishonim interpret the Talmud and so on until the present. The form of halachic discourse is always interpretive and based on historical textural precedent.

Without tracing the origin of a halacha to its scriptural and/or Talmudic source, its exposition by the medieval authorities (Rishonim) and its further elaboration by the post-medieval authorities (Acharonim), halachic analysis is invariably truncated and incomplete. The very nature of halachic debate and controversy is characterized by differences of opinion in the correct interpretation of earlier texts.

In the realm of hashkafa, however, there is no historical hierarchy. Later Jewish thinkers often reject completely the philosophy of earlier eras. The hermeneutical process of reinterpreting earlier generations simply doesn't exist within Jewish philosophy. For example, Rambam's Guide or R' Saadiah Gaon's Emunos ve-Deos are not primarily works of interpretation of Talmudic passages or Scriptural verses. Though both of these works contain interpretations of Scripture and Talmud, these interpretations are presented as justifications for independent philosophical systems. Similarly the

works of post medieval thinkers such as the Maharal and Arizal are not interpretations of medieval Jewish philosophy, but rather are original systems of thought.

In essence Jewish hashkafic history consists of radical shifts of paradigm. Each theological paradigm makes use of entirely new and independent ideas. This process is similar to the historical advance of science as described by Thomas Kuhn in his Structure of Scientific Revolution. It is therefore clear that hashkafa operates according to a different historical system than halacha[5]. Unlike halacha, hashkafa does not recognize a historical hierarchy of authority.

The key to understanding a work of hashkafa, therefore, is not to seek its historical sources but to look for the theological paradigm within which it was written. In light of Rav Kook's statement above, the paradigm can perhaps be understood within the context of general intellectual history. As a result, the unrelated discontinuities which one sees in Jewish thinking are linked to their counterparts in the world of ideas at large.

The Philosophical Structure of the Arizal's Revolution

There is no greater quantum leap in the history of Jewish thought than that which we find between the Arizal and hjs predecessors. While a wealth of kabbalistic thought is to be found in earlier thinkers such as the Raavad, Yitzchak the Blind, Ramban and the Arizal's own teacher Rabbi Moshe Cordovero, the kabballah of the Arizal represents a radical change in paradigm. Jewish thought was never to be the same. The concepts of tzimtzum (Divine contraction), shevirat hakeilim ('breaking of the vessels' – cosmic implosion) and partzufim (faces of God) created the conceptual framework of almost all later mystical thinkers. The writings of the Arizal are the basic texts upon which the Shlah, the Ramchal, Chassidic masters, Rav Tzaddok and Rav Kook created entire systems of philosophy. The Arizal engineered an entire hermeneutical

5 See R' Soloveitchik's Uvikashtem Misham pp. 205-6.

revolution which radically altered the understanding of scripture and Talmud. Through these new concepts the Arizal removed the opaque nature of the Zohar and revealed its deep insights and meanings.

The general consensus[6] is that the thought of the Arizal severed the medieval dependence of Jewish thought on Greek rationalist philosophy. The Arizal's kabballah purged Jewish thought of secular philosophical language and created a uniquely Jewish system of symbol and metaphor. The Arizal speaks the language of revelation and not that of Plato and Aristotle. The Arizal's kabballah represents a unique revelation in which symbols and objects are not reducible to any Western philosophical system.

While much of the terminology can be found in the Zohar, the Arizal's use of terms and their interpretation in his metaphysical schemes is entirely original. The break of the Arizal with his predecessors can hardly be overestimated.

In is commentary on the Arizal's Etz Chaim the Leshem writes:

> It is well known that the holy Torah expands and is continually revealed at all times. It continuously expands in all levels of interpretation. Nonetheless, there is a major difference between its revealed and hidden parts. Both continuously grow in breadth and depth. The growth in depth is reflected by new Torah novella which are revealed at all times, whereas the growth in breadth is the expansion of explanation which comes after the brevity of earlier generations… In the revealed parts the major part of its expansion is in breadth, for each generation descends in understanding and therefore requires increased explanation and interpretation in order to understand the wisdom of previous generations… However, in the hidden part of the holy Torah, it is different. Its major expansion and resolution

6 See for example Gershom Scholem (1946) Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism Schocken Books; New York p. 851

> is in its depth…. This comes from the increasing illumination and revelation of God's divine light….[7]

The Arizal inaugurated a revolution of Jewish thought and consciousness which continues to leave its mark on all Jewish thinkers.

Descartes

Slightly after the time of the Arizal, another revolution in thought was taking place but this time in Western philosophy. The central figure in this revolution was the French philosopher Renee Descartes. His famous "Cogito ergo sum" summarizes his most important contribution to philosophy which was to create a total break with the Greek thought of Aristotle and Plato that had dominated Western though before him. In his Meditations, Descartes developed a argument from doubt which asserted that nothing can be known about the world with absolute certainty. The only thing that cannot be doubted and thus can be known with absolute certainty is the act of thought itself. Everything else, including the external physical world, is subject to philosophic scepticism. Descartes thereby forged a break between mind and matter which would forever be known as the Cartesian dichotomy. This gave rise to what is referred to in philosophy as the 'mind-body' problem. In consequence, philosophy would never be the same again. Man's relationship with the external physical world around him was forever altered[8].

For Descartes, as well as for many thinkers of the enlightenment, philosophy, science and theology were very much intertwined. Descartes predicated the certainty of thought on the existence of a benevolent God. The mind-body dichotomy of Descartes has

7 Elyashiv, Chidushim U-Biurim page 21 column 2

8 See Richard Rorty (1979) Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature Princeton University Press; New Jersey p. 45-69 for an in depth discussion of this shift in paradigm.

theological implications. This is not explicit in Descartes himself but lies at the basis of his thinking[9]. Descartes makes contradictory statements about God. On one hand, his whole system of scientific knowledge depends upon an assumed knowledge of God:

> The certainty and truth of all knowledge depends uniquely on my awareness of the true God, to such an extent that I was incapable of perfect knowledge about anything else until I became aware of Him.[10]

Conversely, Descartes states explicitly that the idea of God is beyond comprehension. In his Letter to Marsienne 15th April 1630 he writes:

> We cannot comprehend (grasp) the greatness of God, even though we know it[11]

Similarly on 6th May he writes:

> Since God is a cause whose power exceeds the bounds of human understanding and since the necessity of their truths (the eternal truths of mathematics) does not exceed our knowledge, these truths are therefore are something less than, and subject to the incomprehensible power of God.[12]

On 27th May 1630 he writes:

> I say that I know it, not that I conceive or comprehend it, because it is possible to know that God is infinite and all powerful, even though our soul, being finite, cannot comprehend or conceive of Him.[13]

In order to resolve this contradiction it is necessary to turn to the important changes, both scientific and theological which were taking

9 See Cambridge Companion to Descartes (1992) p. 174-199 Cambridge University Press, Cambridge for more detail.
10 Fifth meditation AT VII 71: CSMK 49
11 AT I 145; CSMK 33
12 AT I 110; CSMK 25
13 AT 152; CSK 25

place in the seventeenth century. The advent of exact mathematical methods to describe the physical world at this time led to a change in the conception of God. The mathematical precision associated with the Divine, which had heretofore been restricted to the celestial bodies, was now being used to describe the terrestrial world as well.

For the Greek philosopher, mathematical precision was only realized in the upper, lunar, bodies. The physical world, while subject to general laws of species preservation, nonetheless behaves randomly. The view of Aristotle, as described by Maimonides, (in chapter 17 of section III of the Guide) is that divine providence operates solely in the celestial spheres[14]. Since theoretical knowledge is limited to the non-physical, the medieval God remains transcendent.

The usage of exact mathematical and scientific methods to describe terrestrial movement of bodies allowed Divine properties to infiltrate the physical world. The emergence of theoretical forms within the terrestrial world requires a shift in man's understanding of God. Theoretical knowledge is no longer confined to the spiritual and non-physical domains. Philosophers such as Malbranche, Spinoza and Leibnitz as well as scientists such as Newton, began referring to God in immanent terms. As the world became more Godly, God became more 'worldly'. The God of the medieval theologians, under the influence of Greek philosophy, had always been conceived in transcendental terms. Suddenly, in the enlightenment, God emerged within the terrestrial world.[15]. A central figure in this revolution was Descartes. He advanced the usage of precise mathematical methods

14 In the terrestrial world only man is subject to Divine providence. What man and the celestial spheres have in common is intellect. In the celestial sphere the intellect is expressed by the precision of mathematical movement (see chapter 10 of section II). For man, it is his ability to perceive theoretical knowledge. In fact, the method of intellectualization of man, in actu, is analogous to that of God (chapter 68 of section I), whereby the knower, the object of knowledge and the act of knowing become one.

15 See Funkenstein Theology and the Scientific Imagination Princeton University Press; New Jersey pp 23-97.

to describe the physical world[16]. The statement of Descartes which associates scientific knowledge with knowledge of God is referring to God's immanental aspect. God can be clearly known as He manifests Himself in the world. However knowledge of the world itself is disconnected from man's conscious thought. Since man's conscious thought is also derived from God, we therefore end up with a dichotomy between two gods – the immanent and the transcendent. It is the transcendent God to which Descartes refers when he speaks about His incomprehensibility.

Descartes' "Cogito" presents us with a theology of irreducible dichotomy as well as a philosophical one. On one hand, God is removed from the physical world and embedded in man's conscious. This serves as the source for man's thoughts and intellectual awareness which are also removed form the physical world. On the other hand, the apprehension of precise mathematical laws to describe the physical world require Divine immanence.

The "Cogito" which produced the mind-body dichotomy also produced a dichotomy between transcendence and immanence with respect to God. Ontologically and theologically these are two sides of the same coin.

Arizal and Descartes

The Etz Chaim is a compendium of the Arizal's lectures, as recorded by his closest and foremost student, R' Chaim Vital. It begins with the following passage:

> Regarding God's purpose in the creation of the worlds…
>
> The first investigation is what earlier and later Sages have explored to know the reason for the creation of the world – for what reason was it created at all? Their conclusion was that the reason for [creation] was that as follows: God, may

16 Cambridge Companion to Descartes (1992) Cambridge University Press; Cambridge.

> His Name be blessed, is necessarily perfect in all of His acts and powers, and all of His names of greatness, and virtues and honor. Therefore if He did not bring His actions and powers into action and deed, He could not be called perfect, neither in His actions, names or descriptions…

According to the Arizal, God's attributes can be brought to perfection and completion only through the creation of man. For man is the necessary recipient of Divine justice, love and truth. This seems to imply that God needs man in order to attain perfection. This is, however, a paradoxical statement. For why should God be in need of someone outside of Himself for perfection? Does this not imply that God, in and of Himself, is imperfect and incomplete? If so, how can God still be the perfect Being as understood by Jewish thought?

The resolution of this paradox is that the Arizal establishes an irreducible dichotomy between God, in and of Himself, and God as He is perceived by man. There are two dimensions to God. On one hand, God is a perfect Being, whose perfection and completion cause Him to be unintelligible to man. On the other hand, there is the dimension of God as Creator. God relates to man in such a way that through His acts towards man He achieves greater perfection and completion – from man's viewpoint. This understanding of the Arizal is that of the Ramchal, Nefesh HaChaim, Vilna Gaon and the Leshem.

In other words, the Arizal's answer to the question "Why did God create the world" assumes a God-man dimension which is intelligible to man. This dimension is not describing God Himself, which can never be known, but rather describes God as He relates to man.

In this passage the Arizal introduces an independent God-man dimension which was unknown to medieval Jewish philosophers. Rambam, for example, when discussing the same question of the

purpose of creation[17], concludes simply that creation has no purpose. The world exists precisely because God wills it as such. Lying behind Rambam's conclusion is that man cannot make any claim about God, including His reason for creation. This is a consequence of Rambam's general theory of negative theology which asserts that man cannot make any claim about God.

Therefore the Arizal's answer for the reason of creation represents an important paradigm shift in the way Judaism thought about God.

By introducing an ontological dichotomy in the descriptions of God, the Arizal allows man to speak about God's purpose in creation from man's perspective without intruding on God's absolute otherness. This defines man's purpose and role in the world. In addition, man's intellect can now perceive God's immanence.

The Arizal's revolution in the Jewish concept of God bears strong philosophical affinity to the Cartesian revolution in Western philosophy, as discussed above. We noted that Descartes' dichotomy between mind and body led to two perspectives of God. According to Descartes, God is wholly unknowable, yet at the same time expresses Himself in the world through the precision of the sciences. This Cartesian dichotomy is purely epistemological. It deals only with man's knowledge.

Conversely, the Arizal's dichotomy, while philosophically similar, is primarily ethical. The chief consequence is to allow man to relate directly to God, while preserving the monotheistic idea of God's separateness. This relationship gives man a purpose, in that he perfects God.

Thus the Arizal imbued the Cartesian revolution with an ethical dimension. This is a beautiful example of Rav Kook's principle that "Israel imports ideas from the other nations and infuses them with spirituality".

17 section III chapter 13

Arizal continued: Hume, Kant and Hegel

The Cartesian dichotomy between mind and body only widened in succeeding centuries. Descartes' construction of the rational and scientific truth of the physical world was undermined by the Scottish philosopher David Hume who refuted the claim that scientific law is inherent in the physical world. He claimed that the ephemeral nature of the external world inherently resists any scientific or deterministic structure. As a result, according to him, science's claims of an intelligible natural order were baseless.

Hume's scepticism undermined the entire scientific enterprise. Without inherent natural laws science cannot make any claims or predictions. This crisis was salvaged by the efforts of the German philosopher Emmanuel Kant. Kant did not refute Hume. On the contrary, Kant took Hume's scepticism to its logical end. If, in fact, there is no inherent logical-causal law in nature, then what scientists refer to as natural law must originate in the human mind. The rational ordering of sensory data is a construct of the human intellect. The world itself is unintelligible and unknowable. The structure of man's thought imposes an order upon the physical world. Man's mind apprehends the world in a logical manner. The claims of science are descriptions of the human process of thought and not of the physical world.

The revolution brought about by Kant's philosophy is often referred to as 'Copernican'. This expression was used by the philosopher himself in his preface to the second edition of the Critique of Pure Reason. Whereas Copernicus in his day dislodged man from his vision of himself as standing at the center of the world to that of a bystander, Kant reversed the role.

Man, once again, took his place at the center of the world, but in a radically changed role. The centrality of man, however, was no longer objective but subjective. Man's' central role is that he creates systems of physical law which are a product of his mind, but not inherent in physical reality.

The deficiencies and weaknesses in Kant's philosophy soon became apparent. For one thing, Kant's transfer of scientific law from object to subject led to the question 'Who generates these laws? Is it man, or is it the mind of God acting through him? In addition, the synthetic nature of intellectual apprehension seemed to deny the reality of basic aspects of existence, such as the uniqueness of the individual. In an attempt to resolve these difficulties the nineteenth century German philosopher Hegel invented a new philosophy of reality which not only posited the epistemological reality of the external world, but also saw the relationship between object, subject and idea to be a dialectic process in which each component contributes to a logical process of increasing clarity. The Hegelian syllogism of logic, nature and mind (sometimes known as spirit) is a dialectic process both in reality and in history which teleological closes the gap between the universal the and particular, the physical and the spiritual, the finite and the infinite[18].

This dialectic process is an inherent central theme and idea in the kabballah of the Arizal. In the section in the Etz Chaim called 'Shaar Ha'Akudim' 'the Gate of Constraints', the Arizal describes a sophisticated and complex process of dialectics which he called expansion (hispashtut) and contraction (histalkut). These two movements interact with each other to create a world which serves as a receptacle for God's infinite Divine light. Through succeeding expansion and contraction a medium is created which resolves the opposition between the infinite and finite, God and the world. It is this process which allows the physical world to incorporate spirituality. The Arizal's system allows for the co-existence of Divine transcendence and immanence, thereby unifying the gap between God and the world, and God and man.

In the Arizal's Kabballah spiritual acts of God are described as supernal lights. These lights first emerge from the highest spiritual

[18] See discussion in Stern, R. (1990) Hegel, Kant and the Structure of the Object Routledge, London and New York chapters 1-2.

world, Adam Kadmon, and create the first vessels which are called the world of Akudim. Akudim is a world in which these lights are bound by spiritual vessels. The Arizal describes the very intricate process which leads to the formulation of the vessels of Akudim. The process is governed by two types of movement: expansion (hispashtut) and contraction (histalkut). These primal lights first emerge then immediately ascend, returning to their source. This movement of expansion and contraction, appearance and disappearance, results in the creation of imprints.

Through this process the Arizal defines three types of lights: 1) the initially emergent light called the "straight light" which moves forward. 2) a light which is produced by the ascending lights called the "returning light". 3) the imprint made by the initial light before its return, which is also called a "straight light". These three types of light correspond to the kabbalistic concepts of chesed (unconditional love and mercy), din (strict justice) and rachamim (mercy).

Chesed and din are two opposites. Chesed, as expansion, is the unbridled light illuminated by the Creator which expresses His infinite love and desire for goodness. Din, as contraction, is essentially a process of negation by which God's infinite love and desire are arrested creating boundaries and limitations. While chesed is a gushing forth of spirituality, din is the constraint of physicality. When the supernal lights emerge as "straight light" they turn toward the creation. When they ascend again, they turn their backs to creation. Chesed is an act of approaching while din is an act of turning away. The "returning light" which originates in the supernal lights which ascend in order to reunite with their Creator illuminates the imprint of "straight" light. This produces a collision between the two types of light: "straight" and "returning".

This collision creates rachamim which is different combinations of chesed and din. From this collision emerges the first vessels which serve as receptacles of the Divine Light and thereby allow for a relationship between the Creator and the creation.

The Interpretation of the Leshem

In his commentary on the Etz Chaim the Leshem writes in the beginning of Shaar HaAkudim:

> "It was the will of the Divine Creator that all aspects of reality should be united. This is because every aspect of reality is in need of every other aspect for its basic existence. In addition every aspect serves each other aspect continually and thereby achieves perfection. This whole process comes about through man's acts when he acts according to the Divine holiness of the Torah and commandments. Man's spiritualization of the world can only be accomplished through this underlying natural unity.[19]

This passage of the Leshem expresses the underlying philosophical ideas of the world of Akudim. The three central components are 1) the external world; 2) man and 3) the Divine Torah. Judaism constitutes a tripartite system which links God, man and the natural world. In addition, the natural world has an underlying unity which is made use of by man. This unity will achieve its spiritual completion only if man acts in accordance with the mandates of the Torah. Man raises the world from its natural unity to a higher spiritual unity.

How does man raise the world to its higher spiritual unity? In the above passage the Leshem provides the following explanation: He first asserts that the myriad components of the natural world are interrelated and interdependent. He then states that this unity is actualized only through man.

What is unique about man such that he is capable of utilizing natural unity to create spiritual unity? It seems to me that man's uniqueness is his ability to think. The essence of thought is to disclose the underlying unity of all beings in the world. Through thought man formulates the fundamental laws and concepts which bind disparate

19 Leshem; Chidushim u-Biurim 12: 6

objects together and thereby brings intellectual unity to the external world. However, according to Judaism, thought is not only a pure intellectual activity. By giving man the power of thought, God has empower him, allowing him to fulfil the Divine mandate to "fill the earth and subdue it"[20].

In addition, every thing in the world is defined by its use for man. For "each thing receives the will of man as its substantial end, its definition and soul, for it has no end in itself"[21]. The essence of each thing is determined by its usability in the service of a specific need This enables man to see the sameness of different things through their common usage and service of need. This process of abstraction from the particular to the universal, allows thinking man to attain knowledge of the the Being of things which is God.

The Vilna Gaon explans[22] that the inherent order and unity which lies within the objects of the external world is the imprint, reshimu, created by the illumination of God's light. This reshimu reveals a little of the wisdom with which G-d created the world and left to man in order to develop and cultivate it and thereby make use of it.

However, the act of thought through which man perceives logic and order in the world is always accompanied by a simultaneous equal act of negation. For the essence of abstraction is to go beyond the pure irreducibility physicality of objects in order to ascertain their abstract content. Through abstraction man leaves the particular in favor of the general. Thought, therefore, is inherently an act of negation for it does away with the particularism of objects in the world in attaining knowledge of their underlying unity.

The irreducibilty of the external world constitutes the notion of din which emphasises multiplicity and variability in contradistinction to

20 Bereishit 1:28
21 Leshem ibid.
22 Avivi, Y. (ed) (1993) Asarah Klalim (Hebrew) Kerem Eliyahu, Jerusalem chapter 4 pp131-133

inherent unity. This din is in ultimately incomprehensible to man. This is the meaning of the statement of the Sages that "God thought to create the world with din but saw that it would not be able to sustain itself"[23]. Din represents the unfathomable irreducible existence of the world which can only be known in the thought of God. Man's thought, however, is finite and can only understand unity. Hence the reshimu and the "returning light" which clash in the world of Akudim.

These dual aspects of thought, unification and negation, are the basis of Hegel's philosophy of mind. In his Logic he writes that the pure thought of the being of things in abstraction from all further determination, is the thought of "the pure nothing… perfect emptiness… or rather empty imitation of thought itself"[24].

The Creation of the Vessels: Hegel vs. Arizal

The clash between the two lights of chesed and din results in the creation of the first vessel. The purpose of this vessel is to contain the original illumination of light. After this there is a second expansion which does not leave an impression, a reshimu, like the first, but its external dimension accommodates itself perfectly in the first vessel. This second dichotomy of chesed and din which is an expression of the dichotomy from the human subject and external object is now be mediated through this vessel.

It would appear that this is analogous to Hegel's third syllogism in his Encyclopaedia – The Philosophy of Mind. There, the dialectic of nature and logic are mediated by mind, or spirit. The tripartite of nature, logic and spirit was, for Hegel, the phenomenology of the mind which brings man to God and transcendence.

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23 Quoted Rashi, Bereishis 1: 1

24 vol. I: part 3. see chapter 10 in Stanley Rosen (1974) C.W.F. Hegel: An Introduction to the Science of Wisdom Yale University Press, New Haven Conn.

It is however at this point that Hegel and the Arizal take different paths. Hegel called his philosophy the final philosophy, whereas for the Arizal, it was only the beginning. Hegelian philosophy is primarily Christian in nature – it is based upon the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Ghost[25]. The Arizal's kabbalah, conversely, is an expression of the inevitable self-destruction of Christianity, and the triumph of Yaakov over Esav.

This is expressed by the fact that the process of Akudim eventually leads to a breaking of the vessels. For Hegel the collision brings to synthesis which he viewed as the perfection of the Trinity. For the Arizal the collision leads to the destruction of the breaking of the vessels.

The Trinity was the paradigm for Hegel for bridging the separation between subject and object. The philosophical significance of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is that the Father 'poses' the world and is reflected with its essence as the Son. This separation between subject and object, Father and Son, is overcome within the Spirit or Holy Ghost. The 'reunion' of Father and Son within the Holy Ghost is the paradigmatic expression of the reunion of subject and object which takes place by the manifestation of 'Absolute Spirit'.

For the Ari the dichotomy between the straight light of chesed and the returning light of din finds its resolution in the containment of light within vessels. The Leshem also understood this as the union of nature and thought.

However, for Hegel, this union, achieves completion which was his vision of Christianity. According to the Arizal the successful containment of light within the vessels can never be completed in this world. The vessels eventually break, their pieces falling into the worlds of physicality and spiritual alienation. The spiritual goal of the Christian Trinity, according to Judaism, is fundamentally flawed and doomed to self-destruction. Even in Atzilus, where God and His

25 See Rosen Hegel

creations are united, synthesis is unattainable. The "breaking of the vessels" – Sheviras Hakeilim – represents the authentic Jewish refutation of Christianity as expounded by the most overarching philosopher of the 19th century – Hegel. This is the Leshem's interpretation of the Arizal's Shaar HaAkudim. We see clearly that the Leshem's ideas are addressing the phenomenology of mind of the nineteenth century.

The Copernican Revolution and the Nefesh HaChaim

Modernity's conception of man began in the sixteenth century with Copernicus' discovery of the heliocentric nature of the solar system. All earlier Western philosophies and theologies were based on the fact that man occupies the central role in the Divine cosmic plan and providence. The new cosmology called this fundamental belief into question and plunged man into a theological crisis from which he has still not entirely emerged. Moreover, the "Copernican system became one of the strongest instruments of that philosophical agnosticism and skepticism which developed in the sixteenth century"[26].

The solution to this crisis has an entire history, beginning with the Italian philosopher Giordano Bruno and developed by such thinkers as Galileo, Descartes, Leibniz and Spinoza[27]. The central idea is that despite his physical insignificance, the infinite power of man's intellect suffices to encompass the universe conceptually. Man's central role in creation is thereby reaffirmed, for his mind can elucidate the mathematical structure underlying the entirety of the natural world. These theories, however, are not necessarily theologies and as a result their religious connotations were eventually

26 Montaigne Essais II chapter xii, Hazlitt, works of Michael de Montaigne p. 205

27 See Ernst Cassirer (1944) An essay on Man Yale University Press; Conneticut pp. 29-34.

abandoned, leaving man's intellectual legacy with scientific theories where God does not play any role[28].

In Jewish thought, the turn of the nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of an entirely new theology of the relationship of man to God and the world. This theology is worked out explicitly in the major work Nefesh HaChaim of Rabbi Chaim Volozhiner. There the author presents an entirely new concept of man and the reaches of his metaphysical and intellectual powers which, in essence, provides the theological answer to the Copernican challenge. In bold new interpretations of both Midrash (God looked at the Torah and created the world) and Zohar (Israel, God and the Torah are one), Rabbi Chaim conceives of a Torah which, on one hand, is ontologically prior to all of creation, but on the other hand, is within man's intellectual ability not only to comprehend but to creatively interpret. Basing himself on a Gemarah in Gittin 6b where Elijah the prophet reveals to two Talmudic sages, Rabbi Yonatan and Rabbi Evyatar, that God is repeating after them a dispute in the exegesis of a certain verse, Rabbi Chaim makes the bold claim that man's study of Torah is not ontologically posterior to God's relationship to the world. Through Torah study man affects the physical and spiritual cosmos with Divine-like powers.

The power of Rabbi Chaim's philosophy goes further than Descartes and Leibniz for man's infinitude is not limited to sheer knowledge. Man's ability to explicate and interpret the Torah and consequently act upon it also has cosmic repercussions. Ultimately man is the living force of all of the physical and spiritual worlds and in this sense, literally imitates God, imitatio Dei. This is Rabbi Chaim's understanding of the Torah when it says that man was created "in the image of God".

28 see Funkenstein (1986) Theology and the Scientific Imagination Princeton University Press; New Jersey p. 116.

Though Rabbi Chaim's philosophy is akin to that of Kant, being that it posits a transcendental, namely the Torah, through which man understands the world, it actually goes further. For Kant, the world in and of itself is unknown and man makes use of his own conceptual scheme in organizing and interpreting the natural data with which he is presented. As such, Kant posited a radical dichotomy between subject and object whereby all of man's efforts have affect only in the subject without any relationship to the object. The attribution of a human effect on the object itself was the starting point for Hegel's critique of Kant and his own phenomenology, which is endowed with spiritual notions of immanence contrary to the anti idolatrous stand of Jewish philosophy.

The philosophy of Rav Chaim, in contrast, created a methodology by which man incorporates the world in itself in a process which leads to greater intellectual and ethical perfection.

Conclusion

This article has traced the development and evolution of modern Western thought from traditional Jewish texts, beginning with the modern era. We have seen that the history of modern Jewish thought, commencing with the Arizal in the sixteenth century, provides us with a "map", to borrow Rav Tzadok's term, of intellectual history which commences with Descartes and continues to Kant and Hegel. In contrast to intellectual historians such as Guttman, we have also seen that this exchange is not one of conscious import but is one by which abstract ideas are given spiritual content and direction. As a consequence a deep bifurcation emerges between Western religious thinkers, who are deeply influenced by Christian theology, and their Jewish counterparts.

The Timeless Message of *Moreh Nevuchim*

By Rabbi Moshe Becker

Contemporary study of *Moreh Nevuchim* has become almost exclusively the occupation of academics and students of medieval philosophy. Little, if any, serious attention is given to Rambam's great philosophical treatise in many Yeshivas. This is perhaps too broad a generalization, and certainly the issues are more complex, yet such a trend can be discerned. The following essay will suggest that, in contrast to the attitude mentioned, *Moreh Nevuchim* can in fact be a relevant text and source of inspiration to a Torah student even today. I will be using Rambam's treatment of the creation as our model. This is not to imply that study of *Moreh Nevuchim* in the context of medieval Jewish philosophy alone is not a worthwhile pursuit. My intention here is to present what I believe to be the overall purpose of *Moreh Nevuchim* and its primary content, and thereby address some objections that could be raised against studying *Moreh Nevuchim* as a relevant text or as a fulfillment of Talmud Torah.

To clarify the context of the discussion, I will begin with an overview of the main schools of thought regarding the purpose and content of *Moreh Nevuchim* and some of the difficulties associated with them.

The natural place to expect to find the purpose of a book is in the author's introduction. Yet, Rambam's description of the content of *Moreh Nevuchim* appears to fall short of actually providing this information. A simple reading of the Introduction to *Moreh Nevuchim* reveals two purposes the author attributed to the book. The first is to explain certain terms and phrases found in the Torah which appear to be incompatible with an all-encompassing rational understanding of the world. Here Rambam describes his reader as an individual who is committed to Torah, perfected his person, and has studied the natural sciences and philosophy. This person has come to appreciate the place of the intellect, and feels that a rational position at times conflicts with a simple reading of the Torah, such as where anthropomorphic references to G-d are found. The second objective of *Moreh Nevuchim*, writes Rambam, is to identify, and at times explain, sections of the Torah that are to be understood allegorically. Chief among these are the doctrines of Ma'ase Bereishis – the story of creation, and Ma'ase Merkava – the description of "G-d's chariot" as described by Yechezkel. Rambam says that these esoteric doctrines, along with several others, were intended to be understood figuratively, and Rambam wished to explain as much of their message as possible.[29]

However one wishes to broaden the meaning of these statements in the Introduction, it is clear that *Moreh Nevuchim* goes well beyond exegesis, even of the complex matters referred to. Lengthy argumentation detailing the precise logical foundations for proving G-d's existence[30]; attacks against proofs that Rambam felt were incorrect[31]; a lengthy discourse on G-d's incorporeality and

[29] *Moreh Nevuchim*, Introduction. See also H. Davidson, Moses Maimonides, [New York: Oxford University Press, 2005] pp. 327-329.
[30] Beginning of Section 2 of *Moreh Nevuchim*.
[31] *Moreh Nevuchim*, Section 2, Chapter 8, 19.

attributes[32], and a detailed analysis of the philosophical underpinnings of the creation versus eternity question[33] are but some of the areas where Rambam extends himself far beyond instruction in an intellectually satisfying and rational reading of the Torah. At the same time, it is hardly fair to ignore the words of an author describing his book and its purpose, and I believe that my essay will also serve to address this difficulty[34].

To all appearances, *Moreh Nevuchim* seems to be a philosophical work, addressing all or most of the issues facing philosophers in the middle ages. Rambam brings the opinions of the different philosophers on these issues and argues for those which he felt were correct, usually favoring Aristotle's positions. In general, Aristotle's opinions are the logical framework for much of Rambam's discussion, and one need not be full versed in Rambam's works to realize that he held Aristotle in very high esteem.[35]

Most medieval readers of *Moreh Nevuchim* viewed the work as a reckoning between the Torah and Aristotelian science[36]. Rambam does not only align the Torah with Aristotelian thought as much as possible; a general characteristic of *Moreh Nevuchim* is the attempt to rationalize more oblique elements of the Torah and place them in a more understandable conceptual framework[37].

This reading of *Moreh Nevuchim* led to two types of reactions. Readers who were philosophically oriented and viewed Aristotelian science as

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[32] *Moreh Nevuchim*, Section 1, from Chapter 68.
[33] *Moreh Nevuchim*, Section 2, Chapter 13-30
[34] See H. Davidson, Moses Maimonides, [New York: Oxford University Press, 2005] p. 332-333
[35] See *Moreh Nevuchim* Section 1:92, Shemona Perakim, 8
[36] See J. Guttmann, The Philosophy of Judaism, [Northavale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1988] from p. 183.
[37] As he does with his explanations of various Mitzvos, for example.

authoritative embraced *Moreh Nevuchim* as a synthesis between two important sources of truth - the Torah and philosophy. On the other hand, those who were not inclined to accepting philosophy as a viable source of truth felt that *Moreh Nevuchim* was quite dangerous. The enterprise of reconciling Torah and philosophy obviously carries with it an endorsement of something other than Torah as a source of truth. This was at best a foreign, at worst a dangerous, idea threatening to undermine basic acceptance of Torah as the ultimate source of wisdom. [38]

The two opposing viewpoints, and the reactions to *Moreh Nevuchim* that they engendered, evolved into an ongoing controversy. Beginning already in Rambam's lifetime, the ensuing, centuries-long dispute led to much acrimony in the Jewish community. Early on already, *Moreh Nevuchim* was banned by some communities, eventually leading to Christian authorities publicly burning the book[39].

For their part, the individuals and communities who embraced *Moreh Nevuchim* concentrated their efforts on interpretation and exploring precisely how Rambam went about resolving conflict between the Torah and philosophy. A large number of Torah scholars and philosophers wrote commentaries on *Moreh Nevuchim* with this goal, including those who translated the work from its original Arabic to Hebrew; every translation necessarily containing an element of interpretation as well.

To a certain degree, the prevailing attitude towards *Moreh Nevuchim* in the Jewish community today, which I described at the beginning of this essay, is really a modern, perhaps more passive form of the same

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[38] See J. Guttmann, The Philosophy of Judaism, [Northavale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1988] p. 184, and n. 11.

[39] See I. Dobbs-Weinstein, "The Maimonidean Controversy" in History of Jewish Philosophy, [London: Routledge, 1997] from p. 331, and Y. Dan **"הפולמוס על כתבי הרמב"ם"**, Tarbiz 35 (1965) from p. 295.

conflict. Some of the greatest opponents to *Moreh Nevuchim* and study of philosophy in general were the great leaders of their generation, and respected as towering figures in Torah and Halachic ruling. For this reason, their position regarding *Moreh Nevuchim* was accepted by many - if not outright at the very least by default: as teachers, they were the ones setting the patterns of study for students, ultimately affecting the entire constituency. Study of philosophy, which had actually been formally banned for younger students[40], came to be regarded as a less than legitimate occupation and *Moreh Nevuchim* remained an object of some suspicion. Eventually this approach pervaded a good deal of the Jewish community, adumbrating the current situation in many Yeshivas, where *Moreh Nevuchim* is largely ignored. Among those who do study *Moreh Nevuchim*, the approach has remained similar to that of the medieval readers, and *Moreh Nevuchim* is seen as some type of reckoning between the Torah and the Aristotelian science which Rambam adopted. Once again, to a strict traditionalist the suggestion that Aristotelian science is something to be reckoned with is itself a problematic position. There is however, one major difference between then and now. In the middle ages much more was at stake, as Aristotle's description of the natural world was largely accepted as true. In our times, it is rationalism itself that has come to be looked upon as incompatible with Torah, while Aristotelian science can hardly be viewed as a serious threat. I believe that this difference leaves more room for the approach I am going to suggest.

The difficulties with understanding *Moreh Nevuchim* as an attempted reconciliation between the Torah and Aristotle go beyond the "religious" issue of Rambam having accepted foreign sources of truth. In the first place, if it is true that Rambam's goal was to present a rendering of Torah compatible with Aristotle's philosophy, he failed to do so. Aside from the very obvious point of creation ex

[40] She'elot U'teshuvot HaRashba Responsa 415

nihilo, where Rambam openly rejects Aristotle's position, the basic ideas of providence and reward and punishment are not reconciled with Aristotle. Furthermore, the idea of a G-d given Torah is hardly a concept that fits in with Aristotle's conception of G-d's role in the world. Aristotle's view of natural law is purely deterministic, and G-d, although causally prior to the universe, cannot in fact change anything about the world. As Rambam himself points out, this position is entirely at odds with the concept of G-d giving the Torah to a chosen people[41].

Different authors sought to resolve these difficulties in various ways, some of their conclusions highly original. On the one hand the most extreme "harmonists" truly believed that Rambam was teaching a doctrine that interpreted the Torah as Aristotelian philosophy. Faithful to this understanding, they wrote commentaries explaining and clarifying *Moreh Nevuchim* and revealing the "secrets" of the collusion of Torah and Aristotelian science. They had no compunctions about doing this and stated clearly that where there appears to be an ambiguity in *Moreh Nevuchim*, the passage should be interpreted so as to agree with Aristotle. In their own original works as well, the attempt at achieving an interpretation of the Torah in accordance with Aristotelian science can be seen.

At this point, the idea of an esoteric message in *Moreh Nevuchim* formed. There are in fact many vague statements and even entire sections in *Moreh Nevuchim* which are puzzling, but the main catalyst for this idea is Rambam's declaration in his introduction that the book contains contradictions[42]. Locating these contradictions and discovering their meaning is a pursuit that was taken up soon after

[41] *Moreh Nevuchim*, Section 2, Ch. 25
[42] End of Introduction to *Moreh Nevuchim*.

the book's appearance and continues today[43]. This enterprise was crucial in the development of the various approaches to *Moreh Nevuchim* and to Rambam as an individual.

In the Middle Ages it was thought by many authors that Rambam was actually perpetuating an existing secret philosophical Jewish tradition that he concealed beneath the surface of *Moreh Nevuchim*, and they in turn saw themselves as the bearers of that tradition, cognizant as they were of Rambam's true message. Their method focused on using the contradictions as keys to the areas where Rambam sought to indicate that Aristotle's position is the true opinion of the Torah.

The opposite of this view, in terms of methodology, agreed that the key to understanding *Moreh Nevuchim* is by way of the esoteric message, particularly by using the tool of locating contradictions. However, the method they used was not one of harmonization, but rather of bringing out the full extent of the contradiction. In this way they attempted to show that the hidden message in *Moreh Nevuchim* is that often Aristotle's positions are to be adopted over those of the Torah. The scholars who followed this approach maintained that Rambam used the contradictions to conceal his true beliefs as an Aristotelian[44].

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[43] See A. Ravitzky, "The Secrets of the "Guide to the Perplexed" between the thirteenth and twentieth centuries" in History and Faith, [Amsterdam: J.C. Gieben, 1996] from p. 246.

[44] The full extent of this approach was developed relatively recently with the work of Shlomo Pines (English translation of *Moreh Nevuchim*) and Leo Strauss (Persecution and the Art of Writing and Introduction to Pines' translation). For several centuries *Moreh Nevuchim* had been "left alone", and speculation and creative interpretation slowed down. Renewed interest in *Moreh Nevuchim* was awakened by the writings of Shmuel D. Luzzatto in the 19th century.

Between these two very different methods and conclusions is a wide range of attempts to grapple with the difficulties in *Moreh Nevuchim* without adopting either extreme. These attempts were characteristic of Torah leaders and scholars in the 16th – 18th centuries, when the need to contend with the Aristotelian elements was no longer so great. It is not necessary to review them in this context, though it is interesting to note that the turmoil and confusion surrounding *Moreh Nevuchim* was so great as elicit such curious resolutions as denying Rambam's authorship of *Moreh Nevuchim*[45], or conversely, of Rambam's Halachic work, Mishne Torah[46].

All the approaches mentioned take for granted that *Moreh Nevuchim* is somehow intended to deal with Torah versus Aristotelian science. What is the true message, and how one goes about finding it, are fascinating and perhaps important questions. From the Torah perspective though, there is a more troubling and fundamental issue. That is, the conclusion one is bound to reach if in fact *Moreh Nevuchim* is a work centered on Aristotle's science. Setting aside the objection to recognizing philosophy as an independent source of truth, Aristotle's physics, which form the basic foundation of Rambam's logic and philosophy, is no longer relevant. Modern science has an entirely different understanding of the world than that held by Aristotle[47]. Consequently, Rambam's opinions as expressed in *Moreh Nevuchim* are basically fossilized, frozen in time and of interest only as a remarkable work of medieval philosophy. It has virtually no

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45 R' Yaacov Emden (18th century), Mitpachat Sefarim 64, 70.

46 Yosef ben Yosef. (16th century). See G. Scholem "ידיעות חדשות על ר' יוסף אשכנזי", Tarbiz 28 (1958).

47 To the Greeks, "philosophy" included study of the natural world, what would be considered today biology, physics etc. Aristotle used logic and reasoning based on simple observation in these areas, which nowadays would amount to speculation. The modern scientific method, which began its development in the 16th century, is rooted in applying mathematics to natural science and requires rigorous experimentation for establishing the validity of a theory.

relevance to us, and perhaps would not even be valued as Torah study, based as it is on an obsolete, secular system. Even if one were to align oneself with those medieval Torah scholars who subscribed to the Aristotelian content of *Moreh Nevuchim*, he would have difficulty finding justification for such an approach toady. We began with what the author describes as a work of Torah literature, designed to clarify and explain difficult concepts in the Torah, and are left with basically a fascinating relic.

A careful look at one of the topics treated in *Moreh Nevuchim* suggests an alternative approach. The topic of creation has not been overlooked by earlier authors; on the contrary, it provides much material for the ongoing discussion of Rambam's intentions. The problems with the "Creation discussion" in *Moreh Nevuchim* are well known. On the one hand, Rambam insists, repeatedly, that creation ex nihilo is the position of the Torah[48]. On the other hand, in his discussion of prophecy, Rambam equates three views of prophecy with the three positions on creation. The view of prophecy which Rambam says is the Torah one[49] is parallel to the opinion that matter is eternal, the Platonic position, and not to creation ex nihilo[50]. Moreover, at the very beginning of section two of *Moreh Nevuchim*, Rambam enumerates the axioms which form the logical background for proving G-d's existence[51]. Paradoxically, the 26th axiom is the eternity of the universe[52]- the position Rambam so strongly argues against later in the book!

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[48] *Moreh Nevuchim*, Section 2, Chapter 13 – 30.

[49] That while it is necessary for the person to perfect his intellect as a prerequisite, prophecy is not a natural, automatic outcome of that perfection, rather a Divine will is still needed.

[50] Ibid, Section 2, Chapter 32

[51] Beginning of Section 2.

[52] Strictly speaking, eternity of the universe fits far better with the monotheistic ideal of Rambam than creation does. Creation implies a change, at the very least a change of will, in G-d. Rambam stresses many times that no change whatsoever can be attributed to G-d.

These very challenges in understanding Rambam led to some of the most extreme readings of *Moreh Nevuchim* referred to above. Various commentators sought to explain or explain away these contradictions, and their resolutions in turn have been duly examined[53]. The conclusions are unsatisfying and often stretching credulousness. It is not my intention to address these issues here. I would however, like to make a few simple observations.

If we strip the core points of Rambam's discourse on creation of the language and philosophical context it is presented in, we see a striking phenomenon. Rambam's position, which he presents unequivocally as that of the Torah, is simply stated, with virtually no justification or philosophical support. True, Rambam devotes several chapters to addressing the theories of eternity. Yet very little argumentation is actually given to establish the scientific or philosophical validity of creation ex nihilo. For Rambam, the simple point that creation ex nihilo is a necessary part of the Torah suffices. This point is very straightforward and is repeated several times by Rambam: If the world exists eternally, G-d is not a willing Creator, rather the 'prime mover' of Aristotle, and is subject to natural law. In this deterministic model, G-d cannot perform miracles, nor give His Torah to the Jews and elevate them as the chosen people. Reward and punishment, the results of a G-d appointed ethic, are impossible. Belief in creation on the other hand, is an affirmation of G-d's free will, as well as man's, enabling man to fill a designated role in the universe.

In his insistence that we accept creation ex nihilo and reject eternity, Rambam is making a theological statement - not taking a scientific stance on cosmology. This can be seen in his arguments against eternity. Rambam hardly makes any effort to refute the arguments for

[53] To mention a few: A. Ravitzky, "The Secrets of the "Guide to the Perplexed" between the thirteenth and twentieth centuries" in History and Faith, [Amsterdam: J.C. Gieben, 1996] from p. 246, and H. Davidson, Moses Maimonides, [New York: Oxford University Press, 2005] pp. 387 – 402.

eternity; the only arguments that he does treat seriously are the ones that carry theological significance. For example, Aristotle points out that the idea of creation ex nihilo necessarily implies a change in G-d. At one point G-d did not will the world's existence, and then subsequently willed its creation. G-d changed from a potential Creator to an active Creator, and any change in G-d is a direct violation of Rambam's concept of monotheism[54]. Change is a positive 'act' which cannot be attributed to G-d. Rambam admits this difficulty, and is ultimately left with something of a dichotomy, but most of his arguments against Aristotle consist of the claim that Aristotle himself did not hold that eternity was proven. That, and the simple fact that creation lies at the foundation of belief in the Torah make up the entirety of Rambam's argument. While the entire section in *Moreh Nevuchim* dealing with creation is formulated with a clear philosophical reasoning, at the end of the day Rambam is not making a scientific point, rather relying on a religious, almost dogmatic, appeal.

Perhaps most telling in this respect is Rambam's statement in Chapter 23, where he exhorts the reader to carefully consider all sides of the discussion. After delivering a pep talk about not being swayed by one's upbringing or preconceived notions, Rambam insists that one must accept creation ex nihilo as it provides the foundation for the Torah. What happened to the carefully considered rational analysis that Rambam always advocates? What was the meaning of his encouragement that one be aware of their prior conceptions?

Clearly, Rambam is presenting a theological position that he believed to be highly important. Creation ex nihilo is a concept validating G-d's free will. Rambam is not dealing with the scientific question of the origins of the world. As far as Rambam is concerned there are no two sides whose evidence must be examined and weighed. To maintain

[54] *Moreh Nevuchim*, Section 1, Chapter 70?

G-d's role as giver of the Torah, it is necessary to believe in creation ex nihilo as an expression of G-d's freedom to act as he wishes. Encouraging his reader to carefully consider the options is not an admission that two sides in fact exist, rather a reminder of the theological consequences of belief in eternity.

I believe that this reading can be extended to other parts of *Moreh Nevuchim* as well. Throughout *Moreh Nevuchim*, topics are treated in rational, logical fashion usually following Aristotelian reasoning. However, in so many crucial areas Rambam's conclusion departs from Aristotle's. It is easy to become confused and wonder how it is that a work on philosophy winds up with such un-philosophical conclusions when the author appeared to have been treating Aristotelian logic so seriously. This confusion lay at the root of the creative interpretation of *Moreh Nevuchim* which has abounded over the centuries. However, using creation as our model, we see that in fact Rambam's only goal is to teach us the Torah position on these complex matters. In the chapters on creation this can be seen very clearly, as shown earlier, in other areas perhaps the point is more subtly made.

Evidently, while the methodology and reasoning was borrowed from Greek sources, primarily Aristotle, the substance of Rambam's statements is derived from the Torah alone. Furthermore, there is no attempt on Rambam's part to justify or reconcile the Torah views with those of Aristotle. Aristotelian philosophy, science, and logic, all provide the context and logical framework for Rambam's discussion, but they are not the actual subject matter of *Moreh Nevuchim*.

Understood in this vein, *Moreh Nevuchim* certainly bears relevance today as much as in Rambam's generation. Rambam the teacher and codifier, who labored his entire life to clarify and categorize many parts of the Torah, is instructing the reader of *Moreh Nevuchim* in some of the most difficult aspects of Jewish thought – the "secrets"

of Torah, as it were. The language of rationality in Rambam's time was the science of Aristotle, and Rambam made his presentation in that language. The theological essence of *Moreh Nevuchim* holds fast, unaffected by shifts in the world of science.

The point is perhaps put forth best by R' A.Y. Kook. In a beautiful essay written as a counterpoint to the claims of Z. Yaavetz that *Moreh Nevuchim* was an exception to the generally high quality of Rambam's works, R' Kook writes that this approach, similar as it is to the critiques of Rambam in his own time, is entirely mistaken. R' Kook stresses that the Aristotelian content of *Moreh Nevuchim* is not its primary feature or function. According to R' Kook, only the positions and methods of Aristotle which Rambam felt were in accordance with the Torah view were included in *Moreh Nevuchim*. As such, the Aristotelian elements underwent a type of 'purification' at the hands of Rambam. R' Kook insists that *Moreh Nevuchim* is purely a work presenting the fundamentals of Torah belief, and Aristotelian thought was only included where it complimented those beliefs and suited Rambam's purpose.[55]

This approach would also serve to shed light on Rambam's introduction. As noted above, Rambam's statement that his purpose in *Moreh Nevuchim* is to explain some difficult terms in the Torah and point out which passages are to be allegorized, appears to fall short of describing the work. Written by anyone other than the author it may very well be considered an affront. However, if we understand that in truth the essential core content of *Moreh Nevuchim* is in the main points Rambam makes about G-d and the Torah, and Aristotelian science is a methodological device, the description makes perfect sense. Not that *Moreh Nevuchim* serves a minor purpose. The topics and passages dealt with are highly complex and the implications of allegorizing the Torah are always serious. It was therefore necessary

[55] *Ma'amarei HaRAY"H*, pp. 105-117.

that a work be carefully composed to convey these interpretations in a sensitive manner.

Rambam teaches us another subtle, yet important point alongside the fundamental tenets of Torah he expresses. Making use of the tools available to present and clarify Torah matters is not something to be looked down upon, even if these tools come from sources alien and contradictory to Torah. Instead of discrediting Rambam for using foreign resources in *Moreh Nevuchim* at worst, or writing it off as obsolete at best, we should rather give a more careful reading of the work. Such a reading should allow us to pick out the points which Rambam considered fundamental components of belief in G-d and the Torah. We would then do well to apply those tools which are available and relevant to us in understanding and developing Rambam's statements further. Such a study would not be anachronistic and disloyal to Rambam; on the contrary, I believe that this would be a true application of Rambam's methods, and loyal to the essence of his teaching.

R' Tzadok Hakohen writes in many places that Torah sheba'al peh is the utilization of man's intellect to develop and understand the Torah given by G-d. The human creative aspect is an essential part of the process of Torah study[56]. R' Tzadok specifically writes concerning Greek (Aristotelian) philosophy that it was the 'external' to the Oral Torah, based on the principle of "zeh le'umas zeh" which R' Tzadok often refers to[57]. While it is manifest that Rambam did not express himself in such a manner, I believe that the idea is apparent in *Moreh Nevuchim*. Rambam did not shy away from availing himself of whatever tools he needed to teach Torah, and he therefore incorporated Aristotelian logic into *Moreh Nevuchim*. Having

[56] *Tzidkat Hatzadik*, 90, at length in Likutei Ma'amarim, and throughout his works as a recurring theme.
[57] *Pri Tzadik,* Chanuka n. 2, Resisei Layla.

integrated the positive value of that 'foreign' source of knowledge, expressing himself in philosophical language did not appear to Rambam to be contradictory to the autonomy of the Torah as the ultimate source of truth.[58]

Perhaps the most powerful message that Rambam taught us is the very timelessness of the issues. The tension between the axioms and basic tenets of the revelatory truth we learn in the Torah do not always accord easily with our rational inclinations. This difficulty is true at all times, albeit to varying degrees. The co-existence in *Moreh Nevuchim* of the 'secrets of Torah' and the philosophical language these secrets are presented in can be viewed in two ways. On the one hand we see an example of a successful meeting between the ultimate source of truth – the Torah – and rational human thought. Yet, at the same time the very confusion and difficulty this meeting led to shows how tenuous the co-existence can be. I believe that Rambam intended that both elements be discerned. If there is a secret message to *Moreh Nevuchim*, it is that as Torah students and human beings, we are constantly going to be faced with this tension. The conflict between our physical world and a higher world will at times seem resolvable and at others a chasm too great to bridge. Teaching us to deal with this struggle is one of the underlying purposes of *Moreh Nevuchim*. A complete and satisfying resolution is not necessarily possible, but we must have the tools to face the challenge, and this is the 'secret message' of *Moreh Nevuchim*. In this respect scholars such as Strauss and Pines were in line with the message of *Moreh Nevuchim*. Far out as their conclusions may be, the fact that 800 years after Rambam's life the issues are still fresh and relevant is itself a measure of Rambam's success.

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[58] For an extensive treatment of the relationship between the Torah and secular wisdom in R' Tzadok's thought, see Y. Elman, "The history of gentile wisdom according to R. Zadok ha-Kohen of Lublin", in *Journal of Jewish Thought & Philosophy* 3,1 (1993) 153-187.

Earlier I observed that while Aristotelian science may have been perceived as a serious threat to the autonomy and authority of the Torah at one point, we are no longer contending with this struggle. Realizing this should make it that much easier to incorporate the invaluable Torah content of *Moreh Nevuchim* into our contemporary Torah consciousness. What has indeed become something of a struggle today is a rational approach to Torah. This challenge invites the extremes of either accepting that which is written because of who wrote it, or rejecting it because of a perceived 'foreign' element. It is important to realize that *Moreh Nevuchim* certainly cannot be learned in such a way. Now that we are no longer faced with the 'threat' of Aristotle, Torah students can give *Moreh Nevuchim* a second chance.

Studying *Moreh Nevuchim* with this attitude should allow us to free ourselves, and *Moreh Nevuchim*, from the questions of the middle ages. The main difficulties I mentioned were: First, if we view *Moreh Nevuchim* as an attempted reconciliation between Torah truth and the truths of Aristotelian science, we will be hard pressed to see this resolution played out, as none of the main points of contention are in fact reconciled. Second, and more problematic for a Torah student, is the question of how we are to relate to a work that is based on a system of thought that is not only secular, but also obsolete. I suggested that a careful examination of the section devoted to the creation versus eternity question shows that Rambam is unapologetically presenting a Torah message – that of G-d's free will. An honest and careful application of this method to the rest of *Moreh Nevuchim* should give us access to the 'secrets' of *Moreh Nevuchim* – its pure Torah message. Rambam was using the tools of his day, and so *Moreh Nevuchim* took on Aristotelian form; our role as loyal students is to take the content and apply ourselves to it with our tools - our own sensibilities and awareness and paradigms of our time.

The Emergence of the Mishna and Tosefta

By Rabbi Meir Triebitz

Overview

The Mishna is the foundational law upon which was built the two Talmuds, Babylonian and Jerusalem. It is widely accepted that it was Rebbi who compiled the Mishna and that he did so in order to facilitate the transmission of the Oral Law through the vicissitudes of future exiles. Nonetheless, it is also recognized that the Mishnaic form preceded Rebbi. In addition, Rebbi's Mishna did not freeze the process of the Oral Law, but rather closed the era of Tannaim and initiated the era of Amoraim. This essay will examine some of the questions regarding Rebbi's Mishna; what was the difference between Rebbi's Mishna and earlier Tannaic texts such that it ended the Tannaic era? What is the relationship between Rebbi's Mishna and other extant Tannaic texts, particularly the Tosefta?

Shamma Friedman[59] writes:

> The early scholars of the Mishna and Tosefta based themselves on sources from the Talmud and Rishonim. Statements such as "an anonymous Tosefta is the opinion of Rabbi Nechemiah"[60] or that the Tosefta was compiled by Rabbi Chiya have clouded their judgement. They base themselves on the words of the Gaonim and Rishonim as if they based themselves on tradition and history rather than their own opinions.

Friedman, as a scholar of Jewish history, rejects this approach. Nevertheless, we feel that not only is the approach of understanding the Mishna and Tosefta from the words of the Amoraim, Gaonim and Rishonim the authentically Jewish approach, but in addition it is more useful. Historical conjectures of the kind that Friedman and other scholars make can be neither proven nor disproved. One can choose whether to accept them or not. What is certain, however, and thus more valuable to us, is how Jewish tradition has viewed these texts and understood their purpose, value and historical relationship to each other. For only this gives us insight into the halachic process as it continues into the present day. Thus in this article we will base ourselves on traditional Jewish texts to show how they viewed the Mishna and Tosefta.

The Emergence of the Mishna

The corpus of Tannaic[61] texts takes on two different forms: exegetical[62] and apodictic[63]. The various midrashic halachic commentaries such as the *Sifra* and *Sifrei* are examples of the former,

59 Friedman, S. (2002) *Tosefta Atiqta Pesach Rishon* Bar Ilan University Press. p. 93

60 Sanhedrin 86a

61 Meaning 'from the time of the Mishna'.

62 Meaning 'derived from Scripture'.

63 Meaning 'Stated without reason'.

while, for the most part, the *Mishna* and *Tosefta* are examples of the latter. There is a long standing scholarly dispute as to which form came first[64]. In addition even according those who claim that the exegetical form preceded the apodictic, there is a sharp difference of opinion as to when the apodictic form emerged in history. This form, also referred to as the "Mishnaic form", is usually considered to be a precursor to Rebbi's *Mishna*, for even a cursory examination of the *Mishna* reveals a composite of texts which were assembled in time[65].

Chanoch Albeck[66] and David Halivni[67] locate the emergence of the Mishnaic form in the end of the first century in Yavneh. They base this claim on a Tosefta in Ediyut[68] which explicitly documents the construction of the first Mishna in tractate Ediyut.

> When the Sages gathered at the vineyard of Yavneh, they said "there will be a time when a person will seek a word from the teaching of the Torah and will not find [it] and a word of the teaching of the Rabbis [scribes] and will not find [it], as it is written "Therefore, behold the coming of days when… they will wander in search of the word of God but they will not find it … [when] one word of the Torah will not be like the other" (Amos 8: 11-12). They said: Let us begin with Hillel and Shamai. Shamai says…

According to Albeck and Halivni this Tosefta describes the emergence of the first Mishnaic form – Ediyut, which itself is a precursor to the rest of Rebbi's Mishna. Further evidence of this is the unique form of the entire tractate of Ediyut which indicates its relatively early redaction. The decision to initiate a new literary form was made as a reaction to the destruction of the Second Temple. This

64 Halevi, Y. *Dorot HaRishonim* vol 3 and Hoffman *The First Mishna*
65 See for example Mishna Pesachim 1: 1 and end of chapter 30 of Mishna Keilim and the commentary of Rabbi Akiva Eiger in both places.
66 *Introduction to Masechet Ediyut,* Hebrew, Nezikin 275-279.
67 *Midrash, Mishna and Gemarah* p. 43.
68 Chapter 1 Mishna 1.

terse Mishnaic form would facilitate the memorization and transmission of the Oral Law in the stormy exile ahead.

In is my opinion that this Tosefta is not describing the emergence of a new halachic literary form, but rather describes an attempt to arrive at a halachic consensus in an era of great halachic division and confusion. This interpretation is borne out by several Talmudic passages which directly discuss the above Tosefta. The question that should be asked is not what were the historical facts but how do the traditional texts view these facts.

This claim of Halivni and Albeck is contradicted by all Talmudic discussions of this same Tosefta. In tractate Shabbos 138b the Talmud develops the verse cited by the Tosefta in a different direction:

> And what is meant by the verse "they will wander in search of the word of God?" They said, in the future a woman will take a loaf of bread of Terumah and will go to the Synagogue and study halls to know if it is impure or pure and she will not understand if it is pure or impure.

The passage above indicates that the Sages of Yavneh were concerned that in the future there would be no halachic consensus among the various schools of Rabbis. The remedy for this is to establish a universal opinion of Halacha, which is in fact what the continuation of the Tosefta does:

> They said let us begin with Hillel and Shamai. Shamai says that [dough] is obligated in challah for a volume of a kav, Hillel says two kavs, and the Chachamim say not like this [opinion] or that [opinion] but rather [dough] is obligated in challah from a volume of a kav and half.

The term 'Chachamim' (which translates literally as 'Sages') seems to refer to those same Sages who gathered at Yavneh. Their decision was to do away with the plethora of opinions which were in existence

at that time and to establish a universal consensus unifying halachic observance. In this way they sought to prevent the catastrophic prediction of the prophet Amos.

This interpretation of the event of Yavneh and the goal in composing the Tosefta is also born out by the Talmud in Tractate Berachot 28a. The Talmud recounts an episode that took place at the end of the first century CE in Yavneh when Rabban Gamliel was 'overthrown' as the president of the Sanhedrin. As a consequence, the Talmud tells us that Rabban Gamliel's strict exclusivity policies were abandoned, the 'doors of the study hall were opened to all', and 'there was no halachic debate which was not resolved' on that day. The Talmud adds that Tractate Ediyut was 'taught' on that day.

Assuming that the Talmud and the Tosefta are referring to the same event, it appears that the redaction of the Tractate of that time was an attempt, as the Tosefta indicates, to arrive at a halachic consensus. Another goal of the compilation of the Tosefta was to record the minority opinions. The reason for this is explicitly stated in the opening Mishna of Ediyut: "In order that a future Sanhedrin will be able to rely on minority opinions in the future if it should warrant it". We will discuss the reason for this aspect of the Tosefta later in this article.

From these Talmudic passages, it is clear that the Sages of Yavneh were concerned with the danger of Halachic confusion fostered by multiple opinions and the need to arrive at uniform legal standards. This, then, was the interpretation of the Tosefta, according to the Talmud. This interpretation is offered by the Tosefot Rid[69], who writes, concerning the Tosefta in Ediyut:

> In the beginning of the dispute, first Shamai and Hillel disputed, and after that, disputation increased between the students of the House of Shamai and the House of Hillel.

69 Shabbat ibid.

> This is the meaning of the verse "They will wander in search of the word of God". In the beginning the Torah was clear without dispute, for if any doubt would arise the Sanhedrin would rule on it and establish the law for all of Israel. Eventually oppression increased and people could not study the Torah properly, and as a result, doubt and dispute increased in Israel

In addition to the above Talmud passages, which directly contradict Halivni's claim, his position is not even supported by a simple reading of the Tosefta. In his book *Midrash, Mishna and Gemara* he points out that the text of the Tosefta which reads: "they will seek a word from the teaching of the Torah and will not find [it] and a word of the teaching of the Rabbis [scribes] and will not find [it]", indicates that there will be a lack of clarity in the halacha even when there no dispute. The lack of clarity came from a literary form other than the Mishna. As a result the simple Mishnaic form was developed. However the exegesis which follows this statement: ""The word of God" – that one word of the Torah will not be similar to another' seems to indicate that the uncertainty will arise from multiple opinions[70].

To summarize, both the Talmudic and medieval interpreters concur that the Tosefta saw dispute as the impending danger and this is why the Sages compiled Ediyut. We conclude that Albeck and Halivni's assertion that the Tosefta is describing the emergence of the Mishnaic form is unfounded.

Despite my disagreement with Albeck and Halivni that the Tosefta describes the historical emergence of the Mishnaic form, it is true that Ediyut seems to have been redacted and edited before Rebbi's *Mishna*. (Perhaps for this reason, there is no separate Talmud on Ediyut).

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70 See *Chasdei David* who learns "the reasoning of one will not be like the reasoning of the second"

Masechet Ediyut represents a significant intermediate point between the change from the exegetic to Mishnaic form (which probably began earlier), and the final edition of the mishna as it emerged from the study hall of Rebbi in the beginning of the third century CE. This is clear from three unique aspects of Ediyut; the recording minority opinions; arriving at halachic consensus; and the structure of the mishna which is arranged by Sage and not by topic.

Rebbi's Mishna

In light of our conclusion in the above section that the concern of the Sages of Yavneh was to prevent the fragmentation of the Jewish people after the destruction of the Second Commonwealth and ensure a uniform halachic observance with all that entails, what motivated Rebbi to further consolidate the Mishnaic form and redact it a hundred years later?

The answer is to be found in a Baraita in Bava Metzia[71] which says:

> The Rabbis taught: those who occupy themselves with the study of Scripture are engaged in something which is only partially worthwhile; while those who occupy themselves with the study of Mishna are engaged in something entirely worthwhile, and will receive reward for it; but there is nothing more worthwhile than the study of Gemarah; one should always pursue the study of Mishna more than the study of Gemarah.

This Baraita presents us with an apparent contradiction. While the first part ranks Scripture, Mishna and then Gemarah in ascending order of importance, the last statement places the study of Mishna over that of Gemarah in importance. Both the Babylonian[72] and the

71 33a.
72 Ibid.

Yerushalmi[73] raise the issue and both reconcile the difficulty in different ways. The Bavli says:

Rabbi Yochanan says; this statement (that there is nothing more worthwhile than the study of Gemarah – Rashi) was taught during Rebbi's (Rabbi Yehuda HaNassi) lifetime. Everyone left Mishna and pursued Gemarah. As a reaction to this they were subsequently taught to pursue the study of Mishna more than Gemarah.

Rabbi Yochanan's remark that the pursuit of Gemarah more than Mishna was 'taught' during Rebbi's time indicates that in fact Rebbi's policy was to encourage the study of Gemarah more than that of Mishna. This is clear from Rashi's commentary which says that Rebbi's policy was to encourage people to study the reasons underlying the Mishna. This seems at odds with the popular conception of Rebbi as a codifier, or, to put in one scholar's words "a transmitter of law in apodictic form"[74].

In fact the opposite seems true. Rebbi took laws which heretofore had been transmitted without explanation and sought to find their underlying reasons. In essence, if we are to understand that Gemarah is the elucidation and explanation of Mishna, as it is generally understood, then Rebbi was not the originator of Mishna but of Gemarah. It was only after people took reason too far, as the Gemarah tells us, that it was subsequently taught (presumably not by Rebbi but after his lifetime) that the study of Mishna should be reemphasised, even more than that of Gemarah.

The Yerushalmi resolves the contradiction in the Baraita in a different manner:

> Rebbi Yossi the son of Rabbi Bun teaches that the statement (which says to pursue the study of Mishna more than that of

73 Shabbat chapter 16 halakhah 1 (79b).
74 See Halivni, D. (1986) *Midrash, Mishnah, and Gemara* Harvard University Press; Cambridge and London pp. 54-59.

> Gemarah) was said before Rebbi incorporated ('sank') most of the Mishnayot (in the Gemarah). However, after Rebbi incorporated most of the Mishna (in the Gemarah) one should always pursue Gemarah more than Mishna.

There is a tremendous difference between the Bavli's and the Yerushalmi's reading of the Baraita. The Bavli maintains that the Baraita was composed in historical sequence; the first part constitutes Rebbi's policy of encouraging Gemarah as opposed to Mishna whereas the second part is a 'reaction' to Rebbi's first policy and restates the importance of Mishna to reduce the imbalance.

The Yerushalmi, however, reads the Baraita in reverse historical order. According to the Yerushalmi the Baraita's first statement refers to the era after Rebbi incorporated Mishna into Gemarah, while the second part refers to a previous era before Rebbi incorporated Mishna into Gemarah.

While the two Talmuds differ on the precise reading of the above Baraita, they are nonetheless in accord with the fact that Rebbi's role was to encourage the study of Gemara. In the language of the Yerushalmi Rebbi "sank" the Mishna in the Gemara.

This understanding of Rebbi's role in initiating the 'interpretation' of Mishna through Gemarah is corroborated by what Rav Sherira Gaon says in his famous epistle[75]:

> Perhaps you will ask why Rebbi Chiya composed [the Tosefta] and not Rebbi? [The answer is that] if Rebbi would have recorded everything that was taught it would have been too lengthy. Rather Rebbi recorded the main things such as general rules in covert short phrases so that from one word are derived fundamental and unbelievable reasons and piles upon piles of laws….

75 Page 36.

The language of Rav Sherira Gaon is taken here from the Talmud in Menachot 29b which says that God told Moshe Rabbeinu:

> There is a certain person who will live in the future [at the end of] several generations and his name is Akiva ben Yosef who will expound on each point (or each letter) piles upon piles of laws.

Rav Sherira Gaon's usage of the phrase "expounded upon each point piles upon piles of laws" is a clear reference to Rebbi's replacement of the exegesis of Scripture with the exegesis of Mishna. This was to become the principle mechanism of the halachic process until the redaction of the Talmud in the fifth century by Ravina and Rav Ashi.

The Abandonment of Creating Halacha through Scriptural Exegesis

Rav Sherira Gaon[76] writes that during the period of the Second Temple, before the emergence of Rebbi's Mishna, the laws were studied through exegesis of Scripture similar to the laws of Midrash Halacha that we find in the *Sifra* and *Sifrei*.

It is not clear when the shift from Midrash Halacha to Mishna took place, but from Rav Sherira's letter it appears to have been no later than at the end of the Second Temple period.

In addition, the Gemarah[77] implies that by the time of the Amoraim this methodology of generating new laws was invalidated:

> Rabbi Yochanan said to Reish Lakish, 'I saw Ben Pedat who was deriving laws from Scripture like Moshe did through hearing the Divine Voice!' He (Reish Lakish) responded, 'Those are not his exegeses, but rather they are to be found in the Torat Kohanim (Sifra)'."

76 Page 39
77 Yevamot 74b.

The passage seems to suggest that already by the time of Rabbi Yochanan (who was among the first generation after the Tannaim) the Amoraim were not entitled to derive original laws from Scripture. All halachic exegesis was already encoded within the Tannaic Midrash Halacha.

When was the authority to derive laws from Scripture curtailed? It would appear that since the final editor of the *Torat Kohanim* (*Sifra*) was Rav, who lived in the generation after Rebbi, the cessation of original exegesis must be located during the generation of Rebbi.

On the basis of this, we propose an added historical interpretation to the first part of the Baraita from Bava Metzia cited above:

> 'Those who occupy themselves with the study of Scripture are engaged in something which is only partially worthwhile; while those who occupy themselves with the study of Mishna are engaged in something entirely worthwhile and will receive reward for it.'

The deeper meaning of the phrase 'those who occupy themselves with the study of Scripture' is 'those who study and derive laws through exegesis'. The Talmudic statement in the Bavli that 'this Baraita was taught during the lifetime of Rebbi' can now give meaning to the entire Baraita. Rebbi initiated the era of developing law through the Gemara's interpretation of Mishna. Therefore he first discouraged use of the old system of deriving law through exegesis. Those who are engaged in the study of Scripture in order to derive laws are engaged in a type of study which is of very 'limited' worth. It is better for them to engage in a study which is not directly Scripture-based - either Mishna or Gemarah (depending upon whether one follows the Bavli or Yerushalmi's version of events).

As we have shown, Rebbe not only discouraged Scriptural exegesis as a methodology but also ended its authority. The Amoraic Sages after Rebbi only used verse to derive already established laws, but not to generate new ones. Hence Rav, one generation after Rebbi, put

together the final compilation of Midrash Halacha which would forever provide an authoritative exegesis of verses for all future generations.

To summarize, the revolution engineered by Rebbi was the abandonment of deriving new laws through scriptural exegesis and its replacement by Gemara which derives new laws through interpretation of Mishna. As a consequence, Rebbi inaugurated an entirely new style of halachic process for the next era or Amoraim.

The Emergence of the Tosefta

The historical circumstances surrounding the compilation of the Tosefta is in certain ways analogous to those relating to Scriptural exegesis outlined above. While the Tosefta is generally viewed as a 'commentary' on the Mishna, an analysis of both the relevant sources and the text itself of the Tosefta reveals a more complex body of law.

Rav Sherira Gaon in his above quoted letter writes;

> And should you ask why Rebbi Chiya composed the Tosefta and not Rebbi? – Because if Rebbi had incorporated everything that had been taught, it would have been too lengthy. Rather, Rebbi limited the Mishna to essential laws and used abbreviated language so that one could derive piles upon piles of laws from even one word…. Reb Chiya then came along and incorporated into the Baraita details of the basic laws. Most laws in the Tosefta can be derived from the Mishna, and this can be seen from the story of Ilfa (Taanit 21a) who tied himself to the mast of a ship and declared that if there is a halacha that appears in the baraita of R' Chiya and R' Oshiya which he cannot derive from the Mishna then he will jump and drown in the sea.

The above passage shows that the Tosefta is not a direct commentary on the Mishna but contains detailed Halachos which are not explicitly found in the Mishna.

Rav Sherira Gaon appears to contradict himself when he writes[78]:

> There is no doubt that after the Mishna was composed, the Tosefta was composed, and the laws of the Tosefta were taught as a commentary on the Mishna.

This latter passage indicates that Tosefta was composed as a commentary on the Mishna. The resolution of this apparent contradiction is that even though many of the detailed laws of the Tosefta were not original commentaries on the Mishna, nonetheless they were incorporated into a Tannaic corpus which was taught in conjunction with the Mishna. This is what Ilfa means when he says that he can derive the laws of the Tosefta from the Mishna. Even though the laws were not originally derived from the Mishna, they can be interpreted as implicit within the Mishna.

In a third passage Rav Sherira Gaon writes[79]:

> Where Rabbi Chiya in his Baraita argues with Rebbi we disregard his opinion. When Rebbi wrote a halacha anonymously in the Mishna, even though originally there was a dispute, Rabbi Chiya often argues by citing the original dispute in his Tosefta.

This passage implies that there are laws in the Tosefta which were written either in order to directly dispute laws of the Mishna or to offer possible alternative views.

The above passages of Rav Sherira Gaon's letter imply that there are two distinct functions of the Tosefta. On one hand the Tosefta contains numerous Tannaic laws which were not incorporated into Rebbi's Mishna but are consistent with it. On the other hand, Rabbi Chiya's Tosefta is a work which argues on Rebbi's halachic decisions by presenting original disputes in places where Rebbi recorded his decision as an anonymous law.

78 Page 34
79 Page 37

As a consequence we find two different literary forms in the Tosefta:

1. Details which are not explicitly found in the Mishna but which are consistent with it.
2. Direct commentaries on the Mishna which either offer alternative halachic points of view or limit the Mishna.

Many scholars question the classic understanding of Tosefta as interpretation of the Mishna because it contains much material that clearly preceded the Mishna[80]. However, after a close analysis of the medieval commentaries upon whom they base themselves, this view is mistaken. We have already discussed the opinion of Rav Sherira Gaon. Now we will look at Rambam's opinion of the purpose of Tosefta.

Rambam states in his Introduction to the Mishne Torah:

> "Rabbi Chiya composed the Tosefta in order to elucidate (*be'er*) matters of the Mishna".

Rambam here uses the term *be'er* as opposed to a similar term *perush* which he uses in the beginning of that same introduction:

> "All of the commandments that were given to Moshe were given with their *perush* (commentary)".

The Oral law given at Sinai is not the *bi'ur* of the commandments, but is rather their *perush*. The distinction between the two terms is as follows: *Perush* refers to a commentary which at the time of its composition was written with the explicit intention of interpreting and explaining something. When Moshe received the Torah, of necessity he received the *perush* with it, which explained God's intentions and meanings.

Biur, however, is to take an previous composition or tradition and attach it to a text to create a commentary. The important difference

80 See Friedman *Tosefta Atiqta* introduction.

between *biur* and *perush* is that in the case of the *biur*, the original work was not composed with this intention but is being used by a later authority as the basis for commentary. In other words, the text originally existed independently of the commentary. Conversely, *perush* provides the original intention of the text or tradition, and originated at the same time as the original. Without the *perush* the text is either meaningless, or subject to misinterpretation.

With this distinction in mind we can better understand how Rambam viewed the Tosefta. The entire passage reads as follows:

> Rav compiled the *Sifra* and *Sifre* to explain (*be'er*) and make known the main parts of the Mishna. Rabbi Chiya compiled the Tosefta to explain (*be'er*) the matters of the Mishna. Rabbi Hoshea and Bar Kappara compiled Baraitot to explain (*be'er*) the words of the Mishna.

The exegeses of that Rav used in his *Sifra* and *Sifre*, as we have proven, must have been composed prior to the Mishna. Nonetheless, Rav adopted them as providing exegetical proof for the laws of the Mishna. In what is clearly a parallel statement, Rambam makes the same claim about the Tosefta. Statements which were originally made in other contexts were put together as a type of 'commentary' by Rabbi Chiya to give *biur* (as opposed to *perush)* to the Mishna.

When Rambam describes the purpose of the Talmud as the "*perush* of the words of the Mishna and the *biur* of its depths"[81] he is describing two ways in which the Talmud understands a Mishna. The Talmud either tries directly to interpret a Mishna, which is *perush*, or it uses some statement by a certain Tanna which was not originally referring to the Mishna as a *biur* of the Mishna.

81 ibid.

The Problem of Tosefta

The often opposing viewpoints taken by the Tosefta and the Gemara have been extensively discussed both by the classical medieval Talmudic commentators and by modern scholars. In his classic compendium Rabbeinu Asher (Rosh) writes in Tractate Chulin[82]:

> It makes more sense to say that the redactor of the Gemara did not want to bring laws which are taught in the Tosefta etc to resolve this issue for he was of the opinion that [this law] was not taught by Rabbi Chiya and Rabbi Oshiya and one should therefore only rely upon something which was known by the redactor of the Gemara. It also makes sense to say that the entire Tosefta was not made accessible until after the final redaction of the Gemara and is therefore not authoritative; it can be assumed that since the Sages desired to put together an authoritative legal corpus, they investigated all works written by the Sages and selected those which were authoritative and used only those in the Gemara. Therefore we cannot rely upon the Tosefta since the Sages of the Talmud themselves did not rely upon it.

The Rosh's opinion is that the Gemara did not bring proof from the Tosefta because it did not consider it to be authoritative.

Ramban writes in *Torat HaAdam*[83]:

> We find in many places that the Gemara could have brought a Tosefta as a support and didn't…. There are many examples of this.

It seems that the usage of the word 'authoritative' does not have to be understood as meaning that it is not 'authentic'. It may mean that the Sage of the Gemara did not view the Tosefta as the authoritative interpretation of the Mishna or in some other legal sense. For this

82 Chapter 2 section 6
83 47: 3

reason the Gemara adopts its own interpretation and legal line of reasoning, in contradistinction to that of the Tosefta[84]. This is indicated by Ramban in Bava Metzia 65a who writes:

> It is the manner of medieval commentators in general to say that a law in the Tosefta which contradicts the Talmud is 'inaccurate' (*meshubeshet*).

While it is true that there are classical commentators who write that the Gemara was not aware of certain laws found in the Tosefta, from our point of view this amounts to not being authoritative. For the lack of knowledge of parts of the Tosefta is a consequence of the fact that it was not viewed as a corpus of legal authority by the Gemara.

The inconsistencies between the Gemara and the Tosefta have been a central topic of modern scientific Talmudic scholarship. In his *Introduction to the Talmud* at the end of a long discussion of the Tosefta, Chanoch Albeck concludes:

> There is no doubt that many statements of the Amoraic Sages come from the Baraitot. However, in the study halls they were unaware of this fact, and so they mistakenly attributed them to the Amoraim. We also see that the Baraitot in the Tosefta are often different from the Baraitot in the Talmud and many times contradict them. We therefore conclude from this that the redactors of the Talmud were not familiar with the Tosefta which we possess, but that it was edited at the end of the Amoraic period.[85]

An altogether different opinion is taken by Yosef Nochum Epstein in his *Introduction to the Mishna* where he concludes:

> Our Tosefta is therefore a compendium of old and new Mishnas. Some of them fill in our Mishna (either

84 See also Rif Chulin chapter 3: 764; Rabbeinu Yonah cited in *Shita Mekubetzet* Ketuvot 21b, *Ohr Zarua* volume II: 368
85 p. 137

> intentionally or unintentionally) or take issue with it. Some bear no relationship to our Mishna, and their order is not always parallel to that of our Mishna. Rather in many places the order of the Tosefta appears to follow that of a Mishna which predates our Mishna: a more original and more logical order.[86]

With regard to the relationship between our Tosefta and the Gemara, he writes:

> The relationship [between our Talmud and the Tosefta] therefore is that there is an original, proto-Tosefta which gave birth to two progenies: the Baraitot of our Talmud and our Tosefta. The Baraitot which are quoted in the Jerusalem Talmud are often from our Tosefta.

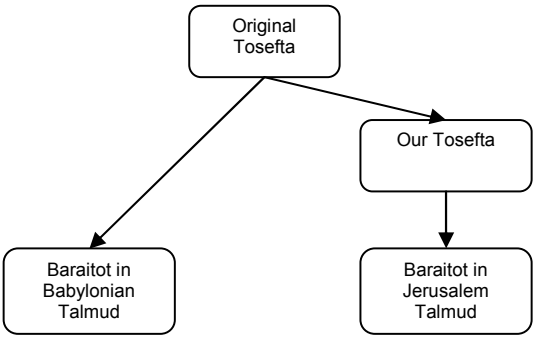

Diagram of Tosefta according to Epstein

While the historical details of the theories of Albeck and Epstein differ, their common position is that the Babylonian Talmud, at least, operated without knowledge of our Tosefta.

Traditional Judaism cannot, however, accept this opinion. The claim that the Tosefta was compiled after the Gemarah negates the

86 p. 257

historical testimonies of the medieval authors[87], and also contradicts explicit statements in the Gemara[88].

In recent years a third opinion has been formulated due to S. Friedman and J. Hauptman. This opinion asserts that our Mishna used the Tosefta as its basis and is in fact, in many cases, a concise summary of it. The implication of this opinion is that the Talmud, where its interpretations of the Mishna differ from that of the Tosefta, is in fact arguing on it[89].

This claim that the Mishna is a summary of the Tosefta therefore undermines the veracity of the Talmud's interpretation of Mishna, since it almost never seeks to understand Mishna in light of Tosefta.

Two Rabbinic traditions

It seems to me that we can formulate a more traditional and comprehensive explanation of the nature and function of the Tosefta. Rav Sherira Gaon, cited above, asked why Rabbi Chiya wrote the Tosefta, or alternatively, why Rebbi rejected that collection of Baraitot which contained the Tosefta and opted for Mishna. Rav Sherira Gaon answered that Rabbi Chiya sought to record greater detail whereas Rebbi, by keeping the Mishna compact and terse, was creating a text from which the Gemara would be able to derive piles upon piles of Halachos through exegesis./z This dichotomy of Talmudic-like hermeneutics and source analysis describes the dual nature of the Tosefta.

By including more Baraitas R' Chiya sought to expand the database of sources, thus producing a more reliable and accurate account of Tannaic material, including that of the Mishna itself. On the other hand, Rebbi understood the constraint of source analysis and saw the

87 Rav Sherira Gaon and Rambam cited above.
88 Sanhedrin 86a: "An anonymous Tosefta is the opinion of Rabbi Nechemiah".
89 Friedman, S. (2002) *Tosefta Atikta Pesach Rishon* Bar Ilan University Press; Hauptman, J. (2005) *Rereading the Mishna* Mohr Siebeck, Tubingen, Germany.

Mishna as the basis of generating 'Gemara'. He wanted future generations to make use of a technique which could produce new ideas which could be 'derived' from the Mishna, even though not explicitly stated.

We should not understand Rabbi Chiya's Tosefta as overly conservative and undermining Rebbi's approach of creating Gemara. Part of the Rabbinical process of hermeneutics is to preserve earlier materials as a type of 'check' on the theoretical process of Rabbinical interpretations.

The Mishna in the first chapter of Ediyot states that minority opinions were recorded in the Mishna to allow future generations to have halachic alternatives. In fact, the Gemara in Berachot[90] relates the historical event of an 'uprising' against Rabban Gamliel. The Talmud tells us that the doors of the study hall were opened, more students were admitted (even those whose fear of heaven was not on par with their intellectual processes) and all halachic debates were resolved. In addition tractate Ediyut was taught on that day.

The events of this day appear contradictory. Opening the doors of the study hall to everyone allowed for expanded halachic debate and consensus in resolution. Yet on the same day they recorded minority opinions and the testimonies of tradition which runs limits the development of halacha and appears to run contrary to expanded halachic debate.

Clearly both expansion and limitation are necessary for the development of Halacha with integrity. The minority opinions provide alternatives while testimonies act as checks and balances, ensuring the preservation of tradition alongside the growth and flexibility of the halachic system.

In a similar way we can understand Rabbi Chiya's Tosefta. As Rebbi introduced Gemara – the technique of deriving new laws through

90 28a

original and creative interpretations of Mishna, Rabbi Chiya ensured that the original sources be preserved for future generations.

Based on the above principle we now have a new understainding of the Bavli's interpretation of the last part of the Baraita in Bava Metzia 33b:

> This statement (that there is nothing more worthwhile than the study of Gemara) was taught during Rebbi's lifetime. Everyone consequently left Mishna. In reaction, they were subsequently encouraged to pursue more the study of Mishna than Gemara.

Rashi states that "it was Rebbi who encouraged people to study Gemara more than Mishna".

Who was it, then, who reversed the process and encouraged the study of Mishna? Perhaps we can venture to say that it was Rabbi Chiya, Rebbi's student, who by compiling the Tosefta put more of an emphasis on source study.

Appendix

Based upon the above analysis, we arrive at a new appreciation of the Mishna, Tosefta and Raavad's commentary in the first chapter of Tractate Ediyut. Mishyanot 4 and 5 of chapter 1.

There is only one Mishna that speaks about the nature of Mishna. There is also only one Tosefta which speaks about its role. These are parallel pieces in the first chapter of Ediyut. Given that the Tosefta was intended to give halachic rulings, it would make sense if we see the Tosefta taking a more conservative position on overturning majority opinions. Conversely the Mishna which encouraged creative interpretation would be expected to take a more liberal view with respect to overturning earlier majority rulings.

4. Why are the views of Shamai and Hillel recorded only to subsequently be rejected? To teach future generations that one

should not insist on maintaining this view. For we see that our forefathers did not insist on maintaining this view.

5. And why is the opinion of one individual included with the majority opinion – since the halacha is like the majority? In case a [future] court should examine the individual opinion and choose to rely upon it. For a court cannot overturn the position of a previous court unless it [the latter court] is greater in both wisdom and numbers.

The corresponding passage in Tosefta Ediyut, chapter 1, 1 and 2 reads as follows;

> An incident took place when two weavers came through the Gate of Ashpot in Jerusalem and testified in the name of Shmaya and Avtalyon that a volume of three logs renders a mikva (ritual bath) unfit and there testimony was accepted. Why is the place [that they came through] and their professions mentioned? There is no profession lower than that of a weaver, and no place more disgusting than the Gate of Ashpot? To teach us that just as scholars in previous generations did not insist on maintaining their view in the face of oral tradition, how much more so should we not insist on maintaining our positions in place of oral tradition.
>
> One should always rule like the majority. Minority (individual) opinions are recorded only because perhaps in times of need one can rely on them.

In his commentary on Mishna 5, Raavad points out the difference in language between the Mishna and Tosefta. He writes:

> The language of the Tosefta is that should the court be in need of [the individual's] ruling for a short period of time and rely upon it. This is similar to the language [which we find elsewhere in the Talmud] that "the court of law cannot rely upon a minority opinion except in a time of need" (see Nidah

> 9)… it is possible to say that the reason given in the Tosefta is distinct from the reason given in the Mishna, for in the Mishna the latter court of law can examine the minority opinion and rely upon it, meaning to establish permanently that the law is like the minority opinion, just as we see often that 'later Amoraim (Talmudic Sages of the Gemara) will establish the law in accordance with minority opinion of previous generations, even though the majority argues on them. However, if minority opinions were not recorded they would not reject [the majority] opinions based upon their own reasoning for a later court cannot etc. but since the minority opinion is recorded along with the majority opinion, they can rely [permanently] upon the minority opinion. However the Tosefta offers another explanation as we explained above and this is the principle interpretation.

We see according to Raavad's second understanding of the Mishna and Tosefta, which he himself writes is the principle interpretation, that there is a fundamental methodological difference between the Mishna and the Tosefta. The Mishna advocates the permanent rejection of majority opinions by minority opinions by later generations of scholars in much the same way as we say the Gemara itself rules like the minority opinions. The Tosefta, however, accords far less power to future rulings. Minority opinions may only be relied upon temporarily. The power of future interpretations is vastly limited. This distinction clearly highlights the central thesis alone which was gleaned from the Talmud and the letter of Rav Sherira Gaon. The Mishna of Rebbi was constructed with the agenda of creating the basis of a new judicial hermeneutics which would grant ultimate halachic power to later interpreters of the Mishna. The Tosefta of Rabbi Chiya was redacted in order to curtail this power and rule more in accordance with previous sources and not novel interpretations.

The History of Creation Ex-nihilo Within Jewish Thought

By Rabbi Rafael Salber

The recounting of the creation of the world is arguably the most famous story of the bible known to both young and old alike. It even lays claim to being one of the rare instances which all major world religions actually agree upon. God created the world in six days and on the seventh he rested; this has become engrained even in the life of one who has no religious affiliation in the form of the work week and the weekend. Whether that day of rest which celebrates the creation and the subsequent cessation of creation falls on a Sunday or on a Saturday, both attest to an identical claim that the world was created by a creator.

The theory of the creation of the world holds within it ideas which are fundamental to a life which is based on purpose and meaning, in particular a religious life. A world which was created out of chance or without direction contradicts the basic tenet of all religious philosophy which is that there is a system of divine ethics and laws governing our world that obligates individual and collective responsibility to fulfill those requirements. Attaining spiritual fulfillment is also dependant on a world which is invested with

purpose and direction. The direct implication is that there was a reason for the world being created.

Although there are many theories discussing how the world came into being, they can be simply classified into two; *creation ex- hylis* and *creation ex- nihilo*, from pre-existent matter or out of nothingness. The former theory has been attributed to the philosophers, in particular the Greek philosophers[91], whereas the latter has been attributed to the promoters of the religious faith, including Christianity and Islam. One also can clearly see the emergence creation ex nihilo within medieval Jewish sources[92]. Maimonides divides theses opinions into three basic groups (although the opinions of Plato and Aristotle are two divisions of one camp); Moses and the opinion of the Torah, Plato and Aristotle. Plato, according to Maimonides, does believe in a creation of sorts, although it is not from nothing. Rather there is a basic prime matter which is eternal; however it does not share the same status as God. Rather it has a relationship as pottery does to a potter. There is creation in as much as there is a transience of forms from one to the other and the possibility exists that that form will cease to exist as well. The opinion of Aristotle and his followers is that there is never a creation or destruction of forms, rather there is a basic indestructible substratum of forms which always has been and always will be. The nature of this paper is to trace the history of creation ex nihilo within Jewish thought until the medieval period, to attempt to discover what the doctrine of creation is within Judaism and to explore whether the alternative approach is reconcilable to religious belief and practice.

The natural course of direction for attempting to trace the history of creation within Jewish sources would be to go to the source of it all,

91 See section entitled Moses Maimonides or Moses Maimonides, *The Guide*, section 2 chapter 13, where a brief introduction is given by Maimonides on the opinions of Plato and Aristotle.

92 Beginning with Saadiah Gaon and continuing throughout the period of the Rishonim.

the written Torah. Whilst this would theoretically satisfy the heart of the purist, in reality it cannot suffice intellectually since we are limited by the scarcity of early interpreters. In this reality even the history of its interpretation is not available to us. There is a gaping hole in the philosophic works of the Jewish scholars prior (and in contrast) to the Rishonim, with almost nothing available within Gaonic literature, except that of Saadiah Gaon who was one of the last of that era. Prior to the Gaonic period, we are left with midrashic literature (which seems to have been redacted as late as the fifth century) which presents a further obstacle in its own right. Once again, theoretically this should provide a solid, reliable source in the interpretation of the account of creation and indeed it does provide the bulk of information on this topic, however it is by its very nature *midrash*, homiletical interpretation which strays away from literal interpretation. The method through which one can understand midrashic literature is an entire study in itself, however what becomes extremely apparent is that discerning between the intention of the statements and its often explicit wording is ambiguous and is therefore difficult to garner an authoritative interpretation free from dispute.

Midrash Rabbah: Torah is the blueprint of the world

At the opening of Genesis Rabbah, the midrash recounts that the Holy One blessed be He "looked into the Torah and created the world". The analogy is made between a craftsman who does not build a building off the top of his head, rather it is created based on plans and blueprints, so too God when creating the world used a blueprint, and that was the Torah.

> Another interpretation: *amon* is a workman (uman). The Torah declares: "I was the working tool of the Holy One blessed be He." In human practice, when a mortal king builds a palace, he builds it not with his own skill, but with the skill of an architect. The architect moreover does not build it out of his head, but employs plans and diagrams to

> know how to arrange the chambers and the wicket doors. Thus God consulted the Torah and created the world, while the Torah declares, "*In the beginning God created" (Genesis 1: 1), the beginning* referring to the Torah, as in the verse, "*The Lord made me as the beginning of His way" (Proverbs 8: 22).*[93]

Whilst one may infer from this statement that the Torah existed prior to the creation of the world, as it was in fact the very plan of creation, one can also assert that this is not referring to a temporal description of the creation. Perhaps an alternate interpretation is that the midrash is intending to teach the reader the purpose for the creation of the world and the impetus for the creation, namely the will of God, and that is what Torah over here is intended to represent. However there are those who have suggested[94] that this is a copy of the Plato's Timaeus, "The artificer looked for a pattern to that which is eternal"[95], prompting speculation as to whether the world was created out of primordial matter or out of nothing. Maimonides also seemed to be bothered by the expression *looked into* or *contemplated*, which is mentioned in this midrash, as he claims that "Plato uses this very expression when he states that God contemplates the world of ideas and thus produces the existing beings."[96]

Six things preceded the creation of the world

The midrash relates that six things preceded the creation of the world, however of those six things, only two were created and the other four were intended to be created (but were not). Those that

93 *Midrash Rabbah*, translated into English with notes, glossary and indices under the editorship of H. Freedman and Maurice Simon ; with a foreword by I. Epstein (Soncino Press, London, 1939), 1: 1

94 Altmann, Alexander, *Studies in Religious Philosophy and Mysticism* (Routledge and K. Paul, London, 1969), p. 128

95 Timaeus 29a

96 Moses Maimonides, *The Guide* 2: 6, also see Efraim Elimelech Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* / translated from the Hebrew by Isarel Abrahams (Harvard University Press, London, 1987), p. 191, footnote 69

were actually created were the Torah and the Throne of Glory. Those that were not actually created were he forefathers, (Nation of) Israel, the holy temple, and the name of the messiah. There is also an opinion which includes repentance in the last list.

> Six things preceded the creation of the world; some of them were actually created, while the creation of the others was already contemplated. The Torah and the Throne of Glory were created. The Torah for it is written, "*The Lord made me as the beginning of His way, prior to his works of old" (Proverbs 8: 22).* The Throne of Glory as it is written, "*Thy throne is established of old, etc" (Psalms 93: 2).* The creation of the Patriarchs was contemplated as it is written, "*I saw your fathers as the first- ripe in the fig tree at her first season*" (*Hosiah 9: 10*). [The creation of] Israel was contemplated as it is written, "*Remember thy congregation which thou hast gotten aforetime" (Psalms 74: 2).* [The creation of] the Temple was contemplated, for it is written, *"Thou throne of glory, on high from the beginning, the place of our sanctuary" (Jeremiah 17: 12).* The name of the Messiah was contemplated for it is written; "*His name existeth ere the sun" (Psalms 72: 17).* Rabbi Ahavah ben Rabbi Ze'ira said: Repentance too as it is written "*before the mountains were brought forth etc* and from that very moment, *thou turnest man to contrition and sayest: Repent ye children of men" (Psalms 90: 2).*[97]

A very similar version is also found in *Pirkei De-Rabbi Eliezer*, however there a seventh creation is added:

97 *Midrash Rabbah*, translated into English with notes, glossary and indices under the editorship of H. Freedman and Maurice Simon ; with a foreword by I. Epstein (Soncino Press, London, 1939), 1: 4

> Seven things were created before the world was created. They are: the Torah, gehinnom, the Garden of Eden, the throne of glory, the temple, repentance and the name of the messiah.[98]

On a superficial level, the midrash seems to be hinting at the to the idea that the creation of the world as recorded in genesis is not necessarily to be understood that it was the initial creation, rather there were things that preceded it. This reading would not reject the possibility that there could have previously been a creation of the world out of nothing; rather that genesis was not that event. However the ambiguity of midrashic literature must be noted prior to any conclusive analysis. One encounters the limits of explanation and interpretation, where it becomes almost impossible to claim any definitive understanding of the true meaning of the sages. What are the things that preceded creation? Were they physical creations or spiritual entities as some commentaries suggest[99], or perhaps they were merely concepts intended to emphasize a certain ethical principle rather than a temporal description of creation? There is however a certain midrash which actually attributes a period of time with which the Torah preceded the creation:

> Thus the works of each day asked one another, "Which creatures did the holy one blessed be he create among you today?" The sixth asked the fifth, the fifth of the fourth, the fourth of the third, the third of the second, the second of the first. Of what was the first to ask? Surely of the Torah which preceded the creation of the world. As Reish Lakish says:

98 *Pirke De Rabbi Eliezer: The chapters of Rabbi Eliezer the Great*, translated by Gerald Friedlander (Hermon press, New York, 1965), ch. 3

99 פירוש מהרז"ו מדרש רבה

> "The Torah preceded the creation of the world by two thousand years".[100]

The difficulty that this midrash presents is twofold. Firstly, the fact that it provides a period of time that the Torah preceded creation makes it more difficult to push aside suggestions that it is indeed discussing a temporal description of creation. Secondly, it also implies that there was time prior to creation, which implies a belief in eternity of the world.[101]

The Philosopher and Rabban Gamliel

Perhaps one of the most explicit encounters between these two opposing world views and a clear indication of the opinion of the sages is found in this section of Bereishit Rabbah. A certain philosopher approaches the Nasi, the political and religious head of the Jewish community in Israel, Rabban Gamliel, and attempts to highlight that according to the accounting of the Torah, the world was not created ex- nihilo, but rather that God used pre-existent materials with which to create the world.

> A certain philosopher asked R. Gamliel, saying to him: "Your God was indeed a great artist, but surely He found good materials which assisted Him?"
>
> "What are they", said he to him?
>
> "*Tohu, bohu*, darkness, water, wind and the deep," replied he.
>
> "Woe to that man" he exclaimed. "The term creation is used by scripture in connection with all of them." ***Tohu* and *Bohu***, *I make peace and create evil* (*Isaiah 45: 7*); **darkness**: *I form the light and create darkness*; **water**: *Praise Him, ye the heavens of*

100 *Midrash Rabbah* / translated into English with notes, glossary and indices under the editorship of H. Freedman and Maurice Simon ; with a foreword by I. Epstein (Soncino Press, London, 1939), 8: 2
101 *The Guide*, 2: 30

> *heavens and ye waters that above the heavens* – wherefore? *For he commanded, and they were created (Psalms 148: 5)*; **wind**: *For Lo, He that formeth the mountains and created the winds* (*Amos 4: 13*); **the depths**: *When there were no depths I was brought forth* (*Prov. 8: 24*).[102]

The opinion of the philosopher seems to be similar to the concept of the Platonist theory of creation. It does not deny a certain direction or "will" within creation, nor does it suggest the eternity of the world, rather that the creation was performed through an eternal amorphous matter. The philosopher does not attempt to engage in philosophical debate with the opinion of the Torah, rather he attempts to prove that the opinion of the Torah is in accordance with his. Therefore the response of Rabban Gamliel is within a similar vein; through the verses of the torah he disproves the theory of the philosopher. The accounting of the interchange between Rabban Gamliel and the philosopher is interesting since it does not follow the usual dialectical discussion in that Rabban Gamliel calls out "woe to that man" in response to his suggestion. Despite the fact that we do see many examples of strong language used by the sages towards each other, the method of debate is usually a back and forth of question and answer. For what purpose would this great sage recoil and harshly criticize this certain philosopher, if it were not to illustrate and emphasize that the suggested opinion is anathema to Torah belief. The fact that the sage mentioned is Rabban Gamliel, who was the political and religious head of *Israeli* Jewry, is extremely important for it clarifies the mainstream opinion of Torah thought at that time.

"Let there be light"

When expounding the following verse of the Torah, we encounter an eye opening dispute between two great sages:

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102 *Midrash Rabbah*, translated into English with notes, glossary and indices under the editorship of H. Freedman and Maurice Simon ; with a foreword by I. Epstein (Soncino Press, London, 1939), 1: 9

And God said Let there be light (*Genesis 1: 3*)

> Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Nechemiah disagree. Rabbi Yehudah maintains: that light was created first, this being comparable to a king who wished to build a palace, but the site was a dark one. What did he do? He lit lamps and lanterns, to know where to lay the foundations; in like manner was the light created first. Rabbi Nechemiah said: The world was created first, this being similar to the king who built a palace and then adorned it with lights.[103]

The basic question being addressed is whether the world was created first or whether the "light" was created before the world. If the "light" was created prior to the world, what can be said of the initial verses of the Torah, was it not the initial creation? Due to the lack of detail of the statement of Rabbi Yehudah, it is difficult to know what exact opinion he was espousing with this statement on the order of creation. Was he referring to the theories of eternal matter existing before the world or was he hinting at a theory of creation as one of emanation that the world came out of the light? It does not seem that that Rabbi Yehudah is referring to one of the concepts of eternity, since the midrash implies that the light was in fact created and not eternal matter. One still needs to question the relevance of this statement within the context of creation ex nihilo, since this midrash does not address how the light was created. However what is clear is that according to Rabbi Yehudah the mechanism and the order of the creation do not follow the normative approach that is generally understood on a simple level according to the verses of the Torah. If he can claim that light was created before the world, in seeming opposition to the verses, what else is one permitted to claim about the account of creation?

103 Ibid. 3: 1

An emanation of light

On the same verse discussed previously, there is another dispute which is relevant to the subject of creation ex nihilo:

> And God said: "Let there be light"
>
> Rabbi Shimon ben Yehotzadak asked Rabbi Shmuel ben Nachman: "As I have heard that you are a master of aggadah, tell me whence the light was created?" He replied: "The Holy One blessed be He, wrapped himself therein as in a robe and irradiated with the luster of his majesty the whole world from one end to the other." Now he had answered him in a whisper, whereupon he observed, "There is verse which states it explicitly: *"Who covers Yourself with light as with a garment"*, yet you say it I a whisper!" "Just as I have heard it in a whisper, so have I told you in a whisper", he rejoined.[104]

This midrash is not only limited to the midrash Rabbah, it is also found in Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer, however the statement is not attributed to Shmuel b. Nahman. There are those who claim that this midrash refers to a certain theory of emanation, in which the rest of creation was brought into existence through the light as a type of butterfly effect, a developmental evolution of creation out of one base matter, the light, and not the usual description of the cosmology of the world as a creative power.[105] While there may be theories of emanation within Jewish literature which testify to the creation of the world as an emanation from God, this midrash seems to be limited to a description of the creation of light alone, and not the entire creation, for the midrash states, "whence was the light created".

104 Ibid. 3: 4

105 Altmann, Alexander, *Studies in Religious Philosophy and Mysticism* (Routledge and K. Paul, London, 1969), p. 130/ 31

And there was evening

> *And there was evening*
>
> Rabbi Yehudah ben Rabbi Shimon said: "Let there be evening" is not written here, but "And there was evening": hence we know that a time order existed before this.[106]

Maimonides particularly takes issue with the subject of this midrash, since according to him, time was part of creation itself as it dependant on motion which is itself a vital element of creation. If time were to exist prior to the world, it would imply the eternity of the universe.[107]

Furthermore we see the existence of worlds prior to ours, a theme which has appeared throughout the midrashic literature. However over here it is more explicit, since it is discussing specifically worlds that were created and destroyed and not merely the creation of light before the earth or the like.

> Rabbi Abahu said: This proves that the Holy One blessed be he, went on creating worlds and destroying them until he created this one and declared, "This one pleases me, those did not please me". Rabbi Pinchas said: "This is Rabbi Abahu's reason: *And God saw everything that he had made and behold it was very good* (*Gen 1: 31*): this pleases me, those did not please me.[108]

106 *Midrash Rabbah*, translated into English with notes, glossary and indices under the editorship of H. Freedman and Maurice Simon ; with a foreword by I. Epstein (Soncino Press, London, 1939), 3: 7
107 *The Guide*, 2: 30
108 This is repeated in *Genesis Rabbah* 9: 2

One Day

> *"And there was evening and there was morning one day."*
>
> Rabbi Yudan said: The day in which the Holy One blessed be He was one with his universe, *for there was only him in the world (existence).*[109]

This appears to be an example one of the few midrashim which does not claim that there was an existence of any other material, substance, concept or other prior to the creation, rather all that was in existence was God. What is slightly perplexing about this statement is that the "one day" which it is discussing is mentioned after the account of the initial creation, when there was more than just God in the world. Is the author claiming as we have witnessed several times that the account of creation cannot be interpreted literally and chronologically? Similarly we see this statement in the Pirkei *De-Rabbi Eliezer*:

> Before the world was created the holy one blessed be he with his name alone existed, and the thought arose in him to create the world.[110]

Fire and Snow

Perhaps the most astonishing statements regarding creation are found in the following midrashim. The common denominator amongst all the varying opinions is that when describing how the heavens and earth were created, they all state that they were fashioned from a seemingly pre- existent material, either fire and snow or water. This is more explicit than the discussion of how light was created, for there it is limited to a discussion of the creation of light alone and here it

109 *Midrash Rabbah*, translated into English with notes, glossary and indices under the editorship of H. Freedman and Maurice Simon ; with a foreword by I. Epstein (Soncino Press, London, 1939), 3: 8

110 *Pirke De Rabbi Eliezer: The chapters of Rabbi Eliezer the Great*, translated by Gerald Friedlander (Hermon press, New York, 1965), ch. 3

encompasses the entire world. Once again the sages seem to be hinting to a platonic version of the creation out of primordial matter. Maimonides clearly recognizes the platonic undertones and speaks harshly against the advocates of these opinions.[111]

> *"And the Heaven and the Earth were finished."*
>
> How did the holy one blessed be he create his world? Said R. Yohanan: "The Lord took two balls, one of fire and the other of snow, and worked them into each other, and from these the world was created. R. Hanina said: "He took four balls, for the four corners of the universe. R. Hama said: Six, four for the four corners and one for above and one for below.[112]

We find a similar statement in the name of Rav:

> And the Lord called the firmament Heavens (Shamayim). Rav said: Fire and water. R. Abba bar Kahana said in the name of Rav: The Holy One blessed be he took fire and water and kneaded them into each other and therefrom were the heavens made.[113]

A slight variation of this account is also recorded in *Bereishit Rabbah* and identically in *Pirkei De-Rabbi Eliezer*:

> Whence were the heavens created? From the light of the garment with which he was robed. He took of this light and he stretched it like a garment and the heavens began to extend continually until he caused them to hear, "It is sufficient".

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111 The Guide, 2: 30

112 *Midrash Rabbah*, translated into English with notes, glossary and indices under the editorship of H. Freedman and Maurice Simon ; with a foreword by I. Epstein (Soncino Press, London, 1939), 10: 3

113 Ibid. 4: 7; Efraim Elimelech Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* / translated from the Hebrew by Isarel Abrahams (Harvard University Press, London, 1987), p. 195, footnote 43

> Whence do we know that the heavens were created from the light of his garment? Because it is said, "Who coverest Thyself with light as with a garment; who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain.
>
> Whence was the earth created? He took the snow which was beneath his throne of glory and threw it upon the waters, and the waters became congealed so that the dust of the earth was formed, as it is said, "He saith to the snow, Be thou earth.[114]

It is eye opening to see the opinions that are found in these various midrashim ranging from one extreme end of the spectrum to the other. What is even more intriguing is that the one who steps up to present the authoritative opinion of the Torah many centuries later, out rightly rejects any suggestion that there is more than one correct approach.

Saadiah Gaon

The ninth century witnessed the emergence of the first organized and articulated discourse on the creation clarifying the Jewish tradition, in the form of Saadiah Gaon's *Emunot Ve-De'ot*.[115] One is presented with a lengthy and detailed composition of the various proofs for creation ex- nihilo as well as refutations those opposing theories of creation and eternity. This treatise comes like a lightening bolt out of dark skies of Jewish philosophy (not necessarily due to the actual lack of philosophic activity, but at the very least due to the absence of

114 *Midrash Rabbah*, translated into English with notes, glossary and indices under the editorship of H. Freedman and Maurice Simon ; with a foreword by I. Epstein (Soncino Press, London, 1939), 12: 10 and *Pirke De Rabbi Eliezer: The chapters of Rabbi Eliezer the Great*, translated by Gerald Friedlander (Hermon press, New York, 1965), ch. 3

115 Saadia Gaon, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, translated from the Hebrew and Arabic by Samuel Rosenblatt (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1948) Treatise 1, p.38

articulated Jewish philosophical writings from that time period) and its thundering message resounds emphatically; one can only believe in the creation of something out of nothing! Rationally there can be no alternative, and scriptural evidence verifies that conclusion. Saadiah Gaon, as his name suggests, was the head of the Babylonian Jewry in the mid tenth century and toiled to reestablish Jewish centers of learning within Babylonia. The leader and scholar of his generation, his importance is emphasized by Maimonides who states that "were it not for Saadiah, the Torah would almost have disappeared from among Israel".[116]. As the translation movement intensified in Baghdad in the eighth century, with works of the Greek philosophers now becoming readily available to the Arabic speaking lands[117], so did the "threat" of foreign elements infiltrating Judaism intensify. If this was the cultural backdrop of the times of Saadiah Gaon, it is not surprising to encounter such a clear exposition of the basic Jewish principles of faith in Emunot Vede'ot, in particular commencing with the treatise on the creation of the world.

Maimonides

Maimonides devotes the first half of the second section of the *Guide* to the perplexed to the investigation of the creation; there he introduces his readers to the varying opinions on the creation of the world. Maimonides states clearly that he is not even attempting to address those who do not believe that the world was brought into being by God, but rather through an accidental occurrence, since those opinions clearly deny the existence of God or of a Divine governor and ruler, which is untenable within the realm of Jewish thought.[118]

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116 *History of the Jewish People: From Yavneh to Pumpedia* by Meir Holder (Mesorah Publications Ltd., Jerusalem 1986), p. 297- 300

117 *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy: Islamic Philosophy and Jewish Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005), p.353

118 *Moses Maimonides, The Guide for the Perplexed* translated by M. Friedlander PhD (Dover Publications, INC., New York), Ch. 13, p. 171- 173

When introducing the opinion of Moses and the Torah, Maimonides focuses on the idea that time is part of the creation. He explains that this is fundamental to believing that the world is created for if one asserts that time is more abstract than other "accidents", one may be mistaken into thinking that time is not created. The danger of that is that one will come to claim that there was time before creation and thus admitting to eternity of the world. The second opinion, which is the opinion of Plato (as mentioned in the introduction), opposes the concept of creation ex- nihilo since it presents a logical impossibility. It is equal to God making himself into a body, or making a square which the diagonal is equal to its sides. Except for creation ex-nihilo, Maimonides also holds that creating a logical impossibility is not possible[119] however for the philosophers this is also true of creating something from non-being into being. According to the third opinion, which is the opinion of Aristotle, something can never go from a formless state to formed state, rather from one form to another. Neither can something go from basic form to a more complex form, rather from one category to another. The Heavens could not have come from any substratum that is different to it; rather the world is as it always was. Both the second and the third theory have beneficial aspects – How can "God" create something out of nothing, which is a logical impossibility, and yet cannot create a square that its diagonal is equal to is side? Secondly, how could God reject his previous will? Rejecting Aristotle compromises one's monotheism, the oneness and incorporeality of God who is not subject to change, whereas rejecting Plato compromises one's rationalism! The dilemma that one encounters when proposing creation ex- nihilo is that one's monotheism and rationalism is compromised. Can one assert creation if it rejects monotheism and vice versa? Despite the fact that Maimonides expresses that the opinion of the Torah proposes creation and not one which implies eternity, at no stage does Maimonides out rightly reject the opinion of

119 *The Guide*, 1: 73

Plato. In fact the following chapters are devoted to demonstrating that the theory of Aristotle is not logically necessary and are not directed at Plato at all. Furthermore, Maimonides does not declare that he is attempting to prove creation ex- nihilo; rather he is attempting to prove that it is not a paradox.

A major point of discussion within Maimonidean literature, especially "The Guide", is the real message of Maimonides. There is the overt or exoteric message which is intended for the masses and there is the subtle, esoteric message intended for the intelligent reader. In the introduction to "The Guide", Maimonides lists seven causes for contradictions to occur, of which he claims are absent in his work, except for cause five and seven. The contradictions mentioned in the seventh cause are those which present two perspectives, a and b, when a is true, b is false and vice versa. Either this could mean that one is true and the other is acting as a decoy to conceal the truth. Alternatively, both are true, however depending on one's stance one seems to be true and not the other! Both these truths reveal a deep truth that cannot be reconciled, an irreducible dichotomy which naturally occurs when discussing the *secrets* of the world. It has been pointed out[120] that one of these contradictions occurs at the very place where Maimonides is declaring the belief of the Torah on creation. Maimonides brings two verses which externally seem to testify to the supreme governance of the creator of the world. The second verse states that God is "The Possessor (acquirer) of heaven and earth". It is most perplexing that Maimonides chose this verse to be the banner under which creation ex-nihilo is to be represented for he himself states[121] that the word **קונה**, possessor, implies eternity of the world. One should use the word creator of the heavens and earth, not possessor. One would use the word possessor by a slave, since one does not create a slave, rather one owns one. Therefore when

120 Lectures of Rabbi Meir Triebitz on Rambam and Creation, The Guide, section 2, chapters 12- 30 available at www.hashkafacircle.com/Rambam.
121 *The Guide*, 2: 30

used in relation to the world, it implies that the relationship is like that of a master to a subject that has always been there! This would seem to be a clear indication of one of those contradictions in The Guide, highlighting that the very nature of this treatise of creation is a Maimonidean contradiction, an irreducible dichotomy.

Conclusion

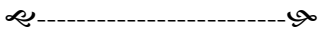
The lack of discussion within Chazal on creation ex- nihilo raises questions particular to this subject. Whose opinion was Saadiah Gaon espousing with his treatise of creation? Was it really a flash out of the darkness, symbolizing a shift and change in Jewish thought? Perhaps Saadiah Gaon was merely the illuminator of opinions and beliefs so basic to Judaism that it needed no articulate presentation until an external threat was perceived, coming in the shape of the availability of Greek philosophy. Based on the previous midrashim that were presented, both of these suggestions seem to have evidence counter to their claim. It is clear that there was a strong tradition of creation ex- nihilo, as is evident in the opinion of Rabban Gamliel, even though it only seems to come to light when challenges are faced. Interestingly, both the adamant and unfaltering position of Rabban Gamliel and of Saadiah Gaon is brought to the fore by a "certain philosopher" and the backdrop of philosophic activity in the Middle East. However on the other hand, there is an abundance of midrashim whose obscure message can easily be interpreted as laying claim to the opinions of the eternity of matter, perhaps most clearly from the writings of *Pirkei De-Rabbi Eliezer* and the statements in the name of Rav. According to the various midrashim, it would almost seem that there was not one definitive position on the creation, but rather multiple perspectives with which to view that auspicious moment. While it would be heretical to assume that God did not have a part to play in creation and that the Divine will is not free to create out of nothing, it would seem that to claim that there was a prime matter from which the world was formed is not. How the eternity of matter is reconcilable with the image of an omnipotent

creative God is perhaps as was hinted in the writings of Maimonides a paradox, an irreducible dichotomy, which cannot be fathomed according to the constraints of the mind of man. Whether the story of creation is there to teach us a fundamental principle of the Will of God, that it is absolutely unconfined and "free", and thus substantiating the unchangeability and incorporeality of God and not necessarily literally intended to be interpreted as creation ex- nihilo, or it is in fact meant in its simple interpretation, both attest to the omnipotence of God. The trend to interpret the opening passages of Genesis as the simpler interpretation would suggest is undeniable, with almost all of the earlier and latter commentaries following in this path. The only difference is that the earlier commentaries all seem to hold on to the philosophical vernacular when expressing the account of creation, as is overtly apparent in the commentary of Nachmanides.[122] However the option of interpretation in contrast to this trend has been made available through the subtle hints of Maimonides.

As we have seen, the position of the creation in Jewish thought, in particular the earlier midrashic sources, is not as streamlined as the latter medieval campaigners would suggest. Whilst the reality of the opposing views of creation is fascinating in its own right, it also raises fundamental questions as to the nature of Jewish thought and philosophy. Beyond the halachic demands to the opinions and thoughts a Jewish person is required to adhere to, is there an authoritative position and tradition of Jewish thought? What is the basis and root of Jewish philosophy and what guidelines does a Jewish philosopher advocating the way of the Torah have in formulating his philosophical outlook? Do the treatises and expositions of leading Jewish sages whose works are based on the opinions of their times enter the canon of Torah literature, even though there is a divergence of opinions on this topic prior to their own. Furthermore, what becomes of their opinions when the basis of

122 פירוש הרמב"ן על התורה, ספר בראשית, א, א

their treatises and expositions becomes outdated and disproved, does their Torah now cease from being Torah. Is there an eternal backbone of Jewish thought which remains invulnerable to the seasons of time? Perhaps that is the real paper that begs to be researched and written, but it is possible that the nature of that very topic, the nature and development of Jewish thought, will always be one that is inconclusive and unauthoratative as it is also inevitably subject to be a product of its time.



Aggada in Jewish Thought: Changing Paradigm

Rabbi David Sedley

Overview

> "Rabbi Chiya bar Ami said in the name of Ulla: Since the day that the Temple was destroyed, the Holy One, blessed be He, has nothing in His world but the four cubits of *Halakhah* alone"[123].

It is the halakhah which gives definition to Judaism, and by extension to God Himself. A person can only define himself in relation to his Creator in terms of halakhah. Yet it is aggada which gives life to that relationship. It is the stories and legends of the Talmud and other rabbinic writings which give a human side to our relationship with God.

The distinction between halakhah and aggada is not always so clear. Law and lore blend into a sometimes seamless, inseparable whole. In simple terms halakhah defines the way a Jew must act, the laws and behaviours expected of an observant Jew. Aggada is the stories, history, legends and any other non-legal writings. Ostensibly their purpose is to teach about faith, philosophy and weltenschaung of Jewish life.

123. Brachot 8a

Shmuel Ha-Nagid defines aggada as "any explanation that comes in the Talmud on any topic which does not concern a mitzvah"[124]. According to *Beit Aharon* the purpose of aggada is to teach "words of reproof, good traits, fine attitudes, and polite behaviour. It teaches us the wisdom of religion with purity and the principles of faith, the unity of God etc, to bring our hearts close to serving God with holiness and purity".[125]

Chaim Nachman Bialik, who was responsible for making aggada accessible to the wider world[126], poetically described the relationship between aggada and halakhah:

> Aggada is the plaintive voice of the heart's yearning as it wings its way to its haven; Halakhah is the resting-place, where for a moment the yearning is satisfied and stilled. As a dream seeks its fulfilment in interpretation, as will in action, as thought in speech, as flower in fruit – so Aggada in Halakhah

The simplest understanding of the purpose of aggada is that it contains the philosophical and theological underpinnings of Judaism. Joseph Heinemann wrote, "Aggada can, in a way, be seen as the 'philosophical literature' of the rabbinic period"[127].

There is a fundamental difference in the history of development between the world of halakhah (Jewish law) and hashkafah (Jewish theology and philosophy). Halakhah always builds on texts and sources that came earlier. The halachic arbiters of the medieval period were interpreting and developing laws that were laid down by the authors of the Mishna and Talmud. Later authorities base their rulings on the laws of the medieval authorities. When confronted

124. *Mevo Ha-Talmud* (end of Babylonian Talmud Berachot) p. 90
125. *Beit Aharon* vol. 1 page 204-5.
126. Bialik and Ravitsky *Sefer Ha-Aggada*
127. *'Nature of Aggada' in Midrash and Literature* (1986) Harman G.H. And Budick S. (eds); Yale University Press, New Haven Conn. p. 49.

with a new reality or legal problem halakhah always seeks a precedent which can illuminate and give guidelines for the current issue. Thus, halakhah evolves slowly – the rulings of one generation grow organically out of the rulings of previous generations.

Hashkafah, by contrast, changes in accordance with principles similar to those described by Thomas Kuhn in the scientific world. In his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions,* he writes that science develops through a series of paradigm shifts. These changes in paradigm do not simply fill in gaps in existing theories, but radically change the way we view the world. A paradigm shift does not merely involve the revision or transformation of an individual theory, it changes the way terminology is defined, how the scientists in that field view their subject, and, perhaps most significantly, what questions are regarded as valid, and what rules are used to determine the truth of a particular theory. Kuhn observes that they are incommensurable — literally, lacking comparability, untranslatable. The new theories were not, as the scientists had previously thought, just extensions of old theories, but were radically new worldviews.

Hashkafah develops in a similar way. Radical changes in Jewish philosophy did not add pieces to previous philosophies, but changed the way that we look at the world and our relationship with God. For example, looking back from our modern vantage point, we cannot even imagine how Rambam's critics could have believed that God has a body.

Like Kuhn's scientific paradigm shifts, major changes in hashkafah are not built on what came before but represent radical shifts from previous thinking. Theological changes are prompted by crises in Judaism, either from the outside world, or from within the Jewish world.

Heineman writes:

> Unlike the teachers of the Halakhah, who transmit basic legal traditions which they personally received from their own

> teachers thus creating a reliable chain of tradition linking one generation to the next, the teachers of Aggada are not limited to transmitting what they heard form their own teachers. The aggadist adds, deviates from, changes or permutes the traditions he has received according to his own devices and the dictates of his own will.[128]

The concept that later generations can argue on earlier generations in aggada is implicit in the abrogation of the principle that a son may not argue with his father.

Just as Jewish philosophy has changed radically over the generations, so has the attitude and relationship to aggada – the atomic material of that philosophy. Each new paradigm in theology was accompanied by a paradigm shift in the nature and function of aggada. This essay will explore how the understanding of the purpose and function of derashot (and other allegorical parts of rabbinic writings) changed from the time of the Talmud, through the Gaonim, to the time of the Rishonim.

Introduction

The term midrash is sometimes confused with aggada. In simple terms, anything taken from a verse is called midrash. *Pachad Yitzchak* in the name of *Kitzur Mizrachi* makes the following distinction between midrash and aggada: "Midrashim from which halachot are learned are called midrashim. Midrashim from which halakhot are not learned are called aggada"[129]. However in his introduction to *Pilpula Charifta* on Nezikin Rabbi YomTov Lipman Heller explains that both midrash aggada and midrash halakhah are called midrash. For the purposes of this essay all aggada can be treated the same way, whether it is derived from a verse or not.

128. (1986) p. 52.
129. *Pachad Yitzchak* 'Midrash' cited in *Beit Aharon* vol. 1 p. 203.

Despite the beauty of aggada, it has traditionally been almost entirely ignored by most of the commentators of the Talmud. Similarly, traditional Yeshiva learning either skips it entirely, or glosses over it quickly[130]. Perhaps the reason for this is that it not only difficult to understand, but is potentially dangerous. Though aggada contains the ethical and philosophical underpinnings of Judaism, if it is not understood correctly it can lead to perverted or even heretical beliefs. As we will see, the heretical face of aggada was used by many challengers to Judaism who sought to destroy Judaism with aggada.

The Talmud's View of Aggada

The sages of the Talmud seem to treat aggada very seriously. With only a few exceptions, they give aggada equal weight with all other parts of the Torah and consider it just as holy and also from Sinai. "Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: Torah, Mishna, Talmud, aggada, and even what expert students will teach in the future, were all said to Moshe at Sinai."[131] Similarly the Babylonian Talmud states in the name of Rabbi Yochanan: "What is the meaning of the verse "on them, like all the words..."?[132] This teaches that at Sinai God showed Moshe the details of the Torah and the details of the Sofrim [Rabbis] and the laws that the Sofrim would add in the future".[133] According to *Menorat Ha-Maor* 'the details of the Sofrim' is evidence that aggada was received from Sinai.

There were some Tannaim who were expert in the field of aggada, and some who were held by their contemporaries to be not so

130. As evidence of this see *Michtav Me-Eliyahu* V p. 511 where Rabbi Dessler writes: This is all because the work of the Satan has succeeded. The great masters of Torah have put all their energy into the halachic component of Torah, and in this area there many who can teach. However the aggadic component has been abandoned and they haven't illuminated it with their lights of truth which shine into every corner of the soul.
131. Yerushalmi Megillah 4: 1
132. Devarim 9: 10
133. Babylonian Talmud Megillah 19b

capable in that field. For example, even though Rabbi Akiva was the greatest Rabbi of his generation[134], and was the only one of the four who entered the *pardes* (which is usually understood to be the esoteric aspects of Torah) and left unharmed, when he ventured into the realm of aggada he was not considered an authority and was directed back to halakhah. "Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah said to him [Rabbi Akiva] 'What are you doing in aggada? Retract your words and go back to [laws of impurity of] leprosy and tents!'"[135]

Conversely there were certain Tannaim who were considered to be experts at aggada. For example Rabbi Yochanan tells us in the name of Rabbi Elazar bar Rabbi Shimon: Whenever you find the words of Rabbi Elazar the son of Rabbi Yossi Ha-Gelili in aggada make your ears like a funnel [to learn as much as possible from him][136].

We find similar areas of expertise amongst the Amoraim: Rabbi Shimi bar Akaviah would be present before Rabbi Shimon ben Pazi [when he taught] in halakhah and before Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi [when he taught] in aggada[137].

There was also clearly some crossover from halakhah to aggada, as we find:

> When Rabbi Ami and Rabbi Assi were sitting before Rabbi Yitzchak Nafcha, one of them said to him: 'Will the Master please tell us some halakhah?' while the other said: 'Will the Master please give us some aggada?' When he commenced an aggadic discourse he was prevented by the one, and when he commenced a halakhic discourse he was prevented by the

134. See Babylonian Talmud Berachot 27b where Rabbi Akiva was suggested to take over as head of the academy, and was not given the position only because he lacked the merit of righteous ancestors.
135. Babylonian Talmud Chagiga 14a
136. Babylonian Talmud Chullin 89a
137. Babylonian Talmud Berachot 10a. See also Bava Kamma 54b which states that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi was expert in aggada.

> other. He therefore said to them: I will tell you a parable: To what is this like? To a man who has had two wives, one young and one old. The young one used to pluck out his white hair, whereas the old one used to pluck out his black hair. He thus finally remained bald on both sides.
>
> He further said to them: I will accordingly tell you something which will be equally interesting to both of you: If fire break out and catch in thorns; 'break out' implies 'of itself'. He that kindled the fire shall surely make restitution. The Holy One, blessed be He, said: It is incumbent upon me to make restitution for the fire which I kindled. It was I who kindled a fire in Zion as it says, And He has kindled a fire in Zion which has devoured its foundations, and it is I who will one day build it anew by fire, as it says, For I, [says the Lord] will be to her a wall of fire round about, and I will be the glory in the midst of her. On the halakhic side, the verse commences with damage done by possessions, and concludes with damage done by the person, [in order] to show that 'fire' implies also human agency.

Aggada was the popular favourite of the two approaches to Torah, as is evident from the following story:

> Rabbi Abahu and Rabbi Chiya ben Abba once came to a place; Rabbi Abahu expounded aggada and Rabbi Chiya ben Abba expounded legal lore. All the people left Rabbi Chiya ben Abba and went to hear Rabbi Abahu, so that the former was upset. [Rabbi Abahu] said to him: 'I will give you a parable. To what is the matter like? To two men, one of whom was selling precious stones and the other various kinds of small ware. To whom will the people hurry? Is it not to the seller of various kinds of small ware?[138]

138. Babylonian Talmud Sotah 40a

According to *Sifri* the purpose of aggada was to know God – which seems to imply both theology and ethical behaviour:

> Dorshei Reshumot say: If you wish to know the One who spoke and caused the world to come into existence, learn aggada. Through this you will know the Holy One, blessed is He, and will attach yourself to His ways[139].

Aggada contains not only the knowledge of God, but also the secrets of His creation according to Midrash Tehillim: "For they will not understand the works of God" - Rabbi Yehoshua says this refers to aggada[140].

On the other hand, there are a few cases where the Talmud implies that aggada was an educational technique not meant to be taken quite so seriously.

> Before Rabba commenced his lesson before the scholars he used to say something humorous, and the scholars were cheered; after that he sat in awe and began the discourse[141].

We don't know for certain, but it is likely that his introductory humour was something from the realm of aggada, and presumably was not intended to be understood too deeply.

> Rabbi Jeremiah said to Rabbi Zeira: 'Let Master go and teach." And he answered: "My heart is weak, and I cannot." "Then let Master relate some trifling thing from aggada," said Rabbi Jeremiah[142].

In Israel it seems that aggada was taken less seriously. There is a midrash that says:

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139. Sifri Parshat Ekev Piska 13 (p. 79-80 in the 1977 edition with Emek Ha-Netziv commentary).
140. Midrash Shochar Tov psalm 28 verse 5 (s.v. Ki Lo)
141. Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 30a
142. ibid. Taanit 7a

> Rabbi Akiva once noticed that his students were dozing off. In order to awaken them, he said, "What did Esther see in order to rule over 127 nations? She saw that Sarah lived 127 years."[143]

Perhaps this is not typical of all aggada, but the fact that aggada was used to wake the sleepers seems to imply that it is not of as much importance as halakhah, which would have been the main focus of the shiur.

In several places the Yerushalmi implies that aggada was not intended to be taken so seriously.

> He is a master of aggada, which doesn't forbid nor permit, doesn't render impure, nor pure[144].

> Rabbi Zeiri was sitting … and made fun of those who make derashot… "We don't learn anything from them". He concludes with instruction to his son Rabbi Yeremiah to stick to halakhah which is superior to aggada[145].

> Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi says one who writes Aggada has no portion [in the World to Come]. One who listens to them doesn't receive reward. In my whole life I never looked at books of Aggada, except for once…"[146]

And finally asks the rhetorical question:

> Is midrash fundamental? Expound and receive reward![147]

On the other hand, we also find statements in the Yerushalmi such as:

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143. Bereishit Rabba 58: 3. See also Kohelet Rabba 1: 15 with a similar story of Rebbi waking a dozing audience with aggada.
144. Yerushalmi Horayot 3: 5 (19b)
145. ibid. Maaserot 3: 4 (17b-18a)
146. Yerushalmi Shabbat 16; 1
147. ibid. Nazir 7: 2 (35a)

> "The rich man is wise in his own eyes; but the poor that has understanding searches him through"[148] – "The rich man is wise in his own eyes" refers to the master of Talmud. "The poor man that has understanding" refers to the master of aggada. [This is analogous to] two men who came to a city. One had bars of gold, the other had small change. The one with the bars of gold couldn't find food to live, the one with small change could find food to live[149].

Even though the verse used as a proof text seems to imply that aggada is the true riches, we could understand this Talmudic statement to be simply the parallel of the Babylonian statement above, in which Rabbi Abahu demonstrates that aggada is more popular with the masses than halakhah, even though ultimately halakhah is more valuable.

There is another piece of Yerushalmi which seems to imply that aggada is a more esoteric type of learning, not suitable for all students.

> Rabbi Simlai came to Rabbi Yochanan and said to him 'teach me aggada'. He replied, 'I have a tradition from my fathers not to teach aggada to either a Babylonian or a southerner, because they are haughty and know little Torah. You are from Nahardea [in Babylon] and live in the South!'[150]

However in the parallel piece in the Babylonian Talmud (Pesachim 62b) Rabbi Simlai is asking Rabbi Yochanan to teach him Sefer Yuchasin which was a history book rather than simple aggada. Rashi explains that Rabbi Simlai himself did not come from a family with a long and proud history and therefore Rabbi Yochanan was reluctant to teach it to him.

148. Mishlei 28: 11
149. Yerushalmi Horayot 3: 5 (19b)
150. ibid. Pesachim 5; 3 (34b).

So perhaps we can conclude that aggada was held to be less important and less valuable in the land of Israel than it was in Babylon.

Aggada in the View of the Gaonim

The Gaonim were the Babylonian based leaders of world Jewry from the time of the compilation of the Talmud[151] until the medieval period of the Rishonim. They were unanimous in denying the obligation to take aggada literally or even as necessarily meaningful. They all held that aggada was non binding and were not from Sinai, but were the insights of the Tannaim and Amoraim.

Rav Sherira Gaon[152] wrote regarding aggada:

> These words that are derived from verses and are called midrashim or aggada are estimations (*umdena*)... therefore we do not rely on aggada. The sages have said, "We don't learn from aggada".... Accept as reliable only those that follow from logic or from the verses[153].

Similarly his son Rav Hai Gaon[154] writes:

> You should know that the words of aggada are not considered received tradition. Rather each person would expound what came into his heart. It is in the category of 'perhaps' or 'possibly' and is not definitive. Therefore we do not rely on it[155].

He also wrote:

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151. According to the view of Rambam (*introduction to Mishne Torah*). Others posit a group of Savoraim for almost a century between the end of the Talmudic period and the time of the Gaonim (e.g. *Seder HaDorot* (p. 171) year 4234).
152. c. 900-c. 10000
153. *Otzar HaGaonim Chagiga* Levine (ed.) (1984) Wagshal publishing. Daf 14a (p. 60) (also cited in the introduction to *Menorat Ha-Maor* p. 47).
154. 939-1038
155. Ibid. (p. 59)

> These explanations and derashot are not something received from Sinai, nor are they halakhah. Rather they are only meant as tentative explanations... the midrashim were only suggested as possibilities[156].

Elsewhere, commenting on the Talmud which says that God sheds tears Rav Hai Gaon denies that God has any physical form, and writes:

> These words are aggada, and in this and all similar statements the Rabbis have said 'we do not rely on words of aggada'.... All things that the Rabbis said similar to this were not meant in their literal meaning, rather as an analogy or a metaphor for something that was well known amongst them. Just as the Torah speaks in the language of people, for example when the prophets use metaphors and say "the eye of God", "Behold the hand of God", "God's anger flared – smoke came out of His nose and fire from His mouth" which are not meant literally but are analogies using human language. Similarly these words of aggada.

Shmuel Ha-Nagid[157] writes the following about aggada:

> You should not learn anything from aggada except that which makes sense to you. You should know that whenever the sages establish the halakhah regarding a mitzvah it is from Moshe Rabbeinu who received it from God. You may not add to it or subtract from it. But anything that they explained from the verses, each Rabbi did according to what came to him and what made sense to him. Those that make sense to you of those explanations you should learn, and the rest do not rely on.

156. Ibid.
157. 993-1065

Clearly Rabbi Shmuel Ha-Nagid does not agree with the Talmudic statement that everything, including the aggadot, was received at Sinai. It is therefore difficult to accept Rabbi Dessler's assertion that Shmuel Ha-Nagid is of the opinion that all aggadot are valuable and contain deep secrets. Rabbi Dessler writes;

> Those parts of aggada that we don't understand we are not obligated to learn them or to base our service [of God] on them. However it is clear that they are the foundations of the Torah. [The difference between halakhah and aggada is that] in halakhah which is practical, we are obligated to do the mitzvot even if we don't understand them. But aggada, which comes to enlighten the heart, if it does not shed light for us (because of our limited understandings) we are not obligated to involve ourselves with it until we merit to reach a high level where we are able to understand it. Furthermore there are great secrets of the Torah hidden in aggada. Until we reach the level where the secrets of each statement are revealed to us there is no benefit in involving ourselves with it [aggada].... This is what Rav Shmuel Ha-Nagid meant when he wrote "You should not learn... learn only from these explanations and don't rely on the rest".... He is not implying that only those [that you understand] are true and the rest are fantasies – Heaven forbid! Rather it must be as we said, that we shouldn't rely on them because we won't be able to serve God in our hearts based on them unless we understand them. Also the [true] meaning of those statements is a secret and is hidden from us[158].

Interestingly, the Gaonim consider the cures and medical knowledge of the Talmud to be in this category of aggada, rather than halakhic. Therefore one may not rely on Talmudic cures unless independently verified.

158. *Michtav Me-Eliyahu IV* p. 353-4

Rav Sherira Gaon[159] writes:

> You have asked me to write about the cures for someone who has *kordiakos* and the opinions of Rav and Shmuel[160]. The answer is that I must tell you that the Rabbis were not doctors, and they were giving advice according to common knowledge in their time. Each one said what they thought was best, but there is no mitzvah to listen to the words of the sages. Therefore do not rely on those cures. One should not follow their advice unless it has been confirmed by contemporary medicine, and we know for certain from expert doctors that this will work, and will not put the patient in danger.[161]

In contrast, the French medieval school of Tosefot seems to consider the medicinal knowledge of the Talmudic sages to be correct. Although they agree with Rav Sherira that nowadays one cannot rely on the cures of the Talmud, this is not because the sages were limited in their knowledge:

> Perhaps this [the nature of people or food] has changed, like the cures in the Talmud which are not effective nowadays[162].

We will see later that some of the French Tosafists gave much more credence to aggada than the Gaonim, which explains this different approach to explain why the cures of the Talmud no longer work.

Marc Saperstein summarises the views of the Gaonim when he writes:

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159. or perhaps his son, Rav Hai Gaon, or perhaps both of them together – see *Milchamot Hashem* p. 84 footnote 18

160. see Babylonian Talmud Gittin 67b

161. *Teshuvot Rav Sherira Gaon* regarding cures in the Talmud cited in Milchamot Hashem p. 84 footnote 18

162. Tosefot Moed Katan 11a s.v. kivra

> The medicines and cures recommended by the Talmudic sages were repudiated by Hai Gaon as reflecting a state of knowledge more primitive than that of his own time; intelligent Jews should therefore receive their prescriptions from contemporary physicians and not from the pages of the Gemara[163].

However it is a mistake to think that the Gaonim merely discarded aggada when it didn't fit in with their view of theology. They often try to explain aggada, giving it credence and value and a non-literal meaning. For example, Rav Hai Gaon writes:

> This statement is aggada. Concerning it and all that are similar to it, the rabbis said, "We do not rely on the aggada." *The way to interpret them is* to make clear at the outset that both according to reason and according to the words of the sages, there is no doubt that God cannot be compared to any creature, and that no laughter, weeping, sighing, tears, or distress apply to Him. When this statement is explained, it becomes known that all rabbinical statements similar to it were said not in accordance with their apparent meaning but as analogies and comparisons with things known to us by the senses. Just as the Torah spoke in the language of men when the prophets used such metaphoric expressions as the "eye of God", the "hand of God"... so in the case of aggadic statements[164].

The Rishonim on Aggada

In the medieval era we find two distinct approaches to aggada. The majority of works of the Rishonim that we have in our possession today treat aggada similarly to the way the Gaonim treated it. They

163. Saperstein, M. (1980) *Decoding the Rabbis*, Harvard University Press; Massachusetts. p. 9 citing Otzar Ha-Gaonim Gittin p. 152
164. Hai Gaon commenting on Berachot 59a *Otzar ha-Geonim: Berakhot*, "Teshuvot," p. 131

make statements that it is not considered binding and not to be taken too seriously. On the other hand, there is a school of Rishonim, mainly based in France, which holds that aggada is to be taken literally and must be accepted in the same way that all halakhah which originated at Sinai must be accepted.

Rabbeinu Chananel

The Talmud relates an argument between Rabbi Eliezer and the sages about whether a certain type of oven can become impure. Rabbi Eliezer brought logical proofs to his position. When this failed to convince his colleagues he brought miraculous proofs, culminating with a voice coming out of Heaven declaring that the halakhah is always like Rabbi Eliezer. At that point Rabbi Yehoshua stood up and declared that the halakhah cannot be decided in Heaven, but must follow the majority opinion of rabbis on earth. In *Shitah Mekubetzet* Rabbeinu Chananel is quoted as saying:

> Some say that one of the sages of midrash fell asleep during his midrash and saw in a dream that Rabbi Eliezer was arguing with the sages. Rabbi Eliezer said, 'why are you arguing with me – let the water course prove that I am right…. Why did they not explain that this was a dream? Because they had a tradition that dreams were almost like prophecy. But they concluded that dreams speak falsely and the halakhah remains that they follow the majority ruling.[165]

Ohr Zarua

Shiltei Giborim cites the opinion of *Ohr Zaruah*[166] regarding aggada. He writes:

> Because I have seen some of the destroyers of our nation who make fun and mock the words of our sages and teach others to mock our Torah, therefore I have come to explain

165. Bava Metziah 59a
166. R' Yitzchak ben Moshe of Vienna 1200-1270

> the concept of midrash and what was the intention of our Torah regarding it. Know and understand that midrashim are of three types. There are some which are exaggerations… there are many which are exaggerations, such as the stories of Rabba bar bar Chana in chapter 5 of Bava Batra. There are some midrashim which describe miracles where God showed His strength and awesomeness…. And some of the midrashim show the intent of the sages to explain the words of the Torah in any way that they are able…. The Sages did not say their midrashim in a way that is fundamental or essential; rather they wanted to give many meanings to the verses and to explain them in many ways[167].

Kuzari

Rabbi Yehudah Halevi devoted a chapter of the Kuzari to various categories of perplexing aggadic statements. He has the Rabbi conclude by confessing his inability to understand some of them.

> 68. Al Khazari: Indeed, several details in their sayings appear to me inferior to their general principles. They employ verses of the Torah in a manner without regard to common sense. One can only say that the application of such verses once for legal deductions, another time for homiletic purposes, does not tally with their real meaning. Their aggadot and tales are often against reason.
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> 73. ... It is also possible that they applied both methods of interpreting verses, and others which are now lost to us. Considering the well-known wisdom, piety, zeal, and number of the Sages which excludes a common plan, it is our duty to follow them. If we feel any doubt, it is not due to their words, but to our own intelligence. This also applies to the Torah and its contents. We must ascribe the defective understanding of it to ourselves. As to the aggadot, may

167. *Shiltei Giborim* Avodah Zara 6a in the pages of the Rif.

serve as basis and introduction for explanations and injunctions. ... Statements of this kind are introduced by the word *kiveyakhol* which means: if this could be so and so, it would be so and so. Although it is not to be found in the Talmud, but only in a few other works, it is to be so understood wherever it is found.... Do not consider strange what Rabbi Yishmael said: 'I heard a voice cooing like a dove, etc.' For the histories of Moshe and Eliyahu prove that such a thing is possible and when a true account is given, it must be accepted as such. In a similar sense we must take the words: 'Woe to Me that I have destroyed My house'... Other Rabbinic sayings are parables employed to express mysterious teachings which were not to be made public. For they are of no use to the masses, and were only handed over to a few select persons for research and investigation, if a proper person suitable – one in an age, or in several - could be found. Other sayings appear senseless on the face of them, but that they have their meaning, becomes apparent after but a little reflection.... I will not deny, O King of the Khazars, that there are matters in the Talmud of which I am unable to give you a satisfactory explanation, nor even bring them in connection with the whole. These things stand in the Talmud through the conscientiousness of the disciples who followed the principle that 'even the common-place talk of the Sages requires study.' They took care to reproduce only that which they had heard from their teachers, striving at the same time to understand everything they had heard from their masters. In this they went so far as to render it in the same words, although they may not have grasped its meaning.... Occasionally the teacher concealed from his pupils the reasons which prompted him to make certain statements. But the matter came down to us in this form, and we think little of it, because we do not know its purport. For the whole of this relates to topics which do not touch on lawful or

> unlawful matters. Let us not therefore trouble about it, and the book will lose nothing if we consider the points discussed here[168].

Abarbanel

Abarbanel also considers aggada to be unreliable, and non-essential. He writes regarding to the Talmudic discussion whether the people who are resurrected at the end of days will be wearing their clothes, or whether that is a metaphor for their physical bodies:

> It is clearly explained that this statement is only words of aggada, and you can't ask questions on it. But the words of great wisdom that were in the words of these men make sense according to what we say[169].

Meiri

In his commentary on Talmud Shabbat 55a Meiri speaks about the principle of 'there is no person who has never sinned', and its implications for free choice. He concludes with the following words:

> Even though this opinion remains with a challenge, the fundamentals of faith do not depend on proofs from the simple meanings of verses or aggada. You already know that you don't have to answer questions from aggada.

Rashba

Rashba writes at length about the section of Talmud describing Og's attempt to destroy the Jewish people[170] and about the nature and purpose of Aggada in general. His explanation is the starting point

168. *The Kuzari* part III (translation H. Hirschfeld (1964) Schocken Books; New York pp192-7)
169. *Yeshuot Meshicho* part 2 chapter 4
170. Babylonian Talmud Berachot 54b

for several other commentators[171].

> Let me first explain the concept of aggada which comes from the Talmud and Midrashim. Know that some of them appear in deep language for several reasons. Sometimes you will find that they are hinting at very simple ideas, or things that don't need to be said at all. Nevertheless they are stated in strange and deep language until someone looking thinks that there is some great secret hidden there. This is not so. Rather sometimes they said things in very strange language in order to sharpen the intellects of the students and also in order to awaken the eyes of the fools who make mistakes in the words of the sages… There is also a third reason in a few cases which is sometimes the sages would give public lessons and would go on at length on important topics, and the people would begin to fall asleep. In order to awaken them they would say strange things to startle them and awaken them from their sleep[172].

Raavad

Until now we have spoken of aggada as analogies and metaphor. However after the period of the Rishonim and with the revelation of the Zohar (and later the revolution of the Arizal) aggada became the focus of mystical thought. Instead of metaphor, aggada now became esoteric, requiring a lexicon of terminology to make it literally true in the kabbalistic sense, rather than the physical sense. We will now look at how two of the Rishonim who were versed in kabballah understood aggada.

The Raavad was known, along with his son Rabbi Yitzchak the blind, as one of the fathers of kabballah in Provencal. He challenges

171. E.g. Rabbeinu Bachya, Maharsha and Iyun Yaakov.
172. In *Ein Yaakov* Berachot 54b (p. 162)

Rambam's view that someone who believes that God has a body is considered a heretic with the following words:

> Why does he call such a person a heretic? Many greater and better than he held this opinion because of what they saw in the verses and even more because of what they saw in the words of the aggada, which confuse the mind.[173]

From here it looks as though Raavad holds that any aggada which appears confusing should be rejected. Yet in another challenge on Rambam he writes the opposite:

> 'Before' and 'After' are very deep secrets, and it is not appropriate to reveal them to just anyone. Perhaps the author of these words [Rambam] did not know them.[174]

Perhaps the resolution is that since aggada contains deep kabbalistic secrets which are not to be revealed to the masses, he calls aggada confusing to the mind, to steer people away from the simple meaning of the words. But only someone not privy to the secrets of kabballah should reject aggada. To those who the secrets each word of aggada contains deep secrets.

Ramban

Ramban was one of the principle Rabbis in the chain of transmission of kabballah. Therefore it is surprising that he seems to consider aggada and midrash to have no necessary deep meaning. In his famous disputation with Pablo Christiani he dismisses aggada when he says:

> Further, there is a third kind of writing which we have [in addition to Bible and Talmud, or, halakhah] called *midrash*, that is to say, sermonic literature of the sort that would be produced if the bishop here should stand up and deliver a

173. Glosses on Mishne Torah Hilchot Teshuva chapter 3 halacha 7.
174. Ibid Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah chapter 1 halacha 10

> sermon, which someone in the audience who likes it should write down. To a document of this sort, should any of us extend belief, then well and good, but if he refuses to do so no one will do him any harm. Furthermore, this literature is given to us the title *aggada*, which is the equivalent of *razionamiento* in the vernacular, that is to say that it is purely conversational in character[175].

There are many who claim that this is not the true opinion of Ramban. He was merely answering the challenges of his Christian opponent, but did not intend his words for a Jewish audience. For example Mordechai Eliasberg writes:

> It is clear that the words that Ramban was saying with his mouth he was nullifying with his heart. His own opinion is to explain them [aggada] differently – either according to the Abarbanel or others, or perhaps even according to kabballah[176].

However he continues to explain that his main objection is not to Ramban, but to those more recent thinkers who use these words of Ramban to discard aggada as meaningless. Without evidence from Ramban himself, he projects modern thought back into the words of the Rishonim. Chavel himself also rejects this reading of Ramban and suggests that Ramban is presenting a valid approach to aggada[177].

Lieberman shows that even when writing for a Jewish audience, Ramban still treats aggada in a similar way. In *Sefer Torat Ha-Adam* Ramban states:

> These are some of the places where they described *gehinnom* and the pain and suffering there in the Talmud and

175. *Kitvei Ramban* vol. 1: p. 308 ed. Chavel (1963) Mossad HaRav Kook; Jerusalem (translation Sapperstein p. 11)
176. cited in ibid. footnote s.v. she-adam megid le-chavero
177. ibid.

> midrashim, and they measured its dimensions. These and similar things cannot be understood as metaphors or analogies because they mention dimensions, and they also learn halakhah from here[178]…[179]

However according to Lieberman, the continuation of this paragraph is as follows:

> Only these kinds of aggada are reliable, but other aggadot and midrashei aggada which do not have any halakhah associated with them – some of them can be considered metaphors or analogies[180].

Lieberman asserts:

> Even though professor Yitzchak Beer asserts that "It is not correct that Ramban didn't believe in aggada…"[181]… but I am almost certain that his [Ramban's] holy mouth didn't say a lie.

We can perhaps substantiate Lieberman's view that Ramban doesn't consider aggada binding or authoritative from Ramban's commentary on Chumash. Many times he disregards explicit statements of the sages and innovates a new reading of the verse which he considers to be more correct in the simple meaning of the words. For example, in dating the exodus from Egypt and resolving the contradiction between two verses as to the length of time that the Israelites spent in Egypt, Ramban disregards the writings of the sages of the Mishna in *Seder Olam*[182] and creates his own chronology[183]. If history is considered to be in the category of aggada and is not halachic, we can

178. regarding covering food on Shabbat in the hot pools of Tiberias
179. *Kitvei Ramban* vol. 2: p. 285 ed. Chavel (1963) Mossad HaRav Kook;
180. Leiberman, S. (1992) *Sheki'in* (Hebrew) Shalem; Jerusalem p. 69
181. *Tarbitz* 1942 p. 184
182. According to the Talmud (Yevamot 82b and Nida 46b) this was written the by second century sage Rabbi Yossi ben Halafta.
183. *Ramban commentary on Chumash* Shemot 12: 40

explain his disregard for earlier authorities if he subscribes to the view that aggada is only sermonic literature.

Rabbi Yehudah He-Chassid

Rabbi Yehudah He-Chassid, in Sefer Chassidim[184], has also got something to say about teaching Aggada and Midrash.

He quotes the Yerushalmi: Rebbi said he had a tradition from his forefathers not to teach Aggada to people who have ... little Torah ... and not to tell surprising, astonishing Aggadot to ... (those) who might say "there is nothing in it, and since there is nothing in this branch of Torah there is nothing in other branches of Torah" ... and also to the ignorant and to all those who scoff at the Aggadot.[185]

Alternative Views of the Rishonim

According to what we have seen so far, the basic consensus amongst the Rishonim was that aggada is not to be understood literally, but to be taken as metaphorical. However, there was a radical school of Rishonim who held that aggada must be taken absolutely literally. This school included Rabbi Shlomo Min Ha-Har, Rabbi Yosef ben Todros and possibly Rabbeinu Yonah. These Rabbis all held that to treat aggada as analogy or metaphor was to degrade the Torah. In the words of Rabbi Yosef ben Todros: "To make all the words of the Torah and of the prophets into metaphors and riddles, and all the miracles and wonders into mockery … and to mock the words of the sages… [will eventually lead a person to disregard all the words of the Torah and consider themselves] exempt from prayer and from tefillin"[186].

Similarly Rabbi Shlomo min Ha-Har writes that he heard of people expressing new ideas that had never been part of Jewish tradition "to

184. 297
185. Pesachim 5: 3
186 Printed in *Kevutzot Michtavim* 2. Cited in *Torah Shleima* parshat Yitro p. 303

destroy the [words of] the prophets and to make metaphors out of the words of the Torah… to make all the stories into analogies … and mock the words of our Rabbis. When I heard this I was shocked … and I argued with them many times."[187]

These Rabbis held that aggada must be taken literally, and to interpret it in any other way was to undermine the foundations of the Torah. Once the aggadot are open to interpretation in a non-literal way (the held), the words of the prophets and the Torah itself may be understood to be metaphorical and not literal (as Rambam actually states in *Moreh Nevuchim*). From there it is a small step to invalidate the mitzvot themselves and claim that they are non-binding, and that they too are not to be understood according to their literal meaning.

This literal understanding of aggada led these Rabbis to claim that God has a body, since His physical form is mentioned many times in the biblical and rabbinic writings. Unfortunately we don't have any writings from them that express this idea explicitly, nor do we know how they would answer obvious theological issues which arise from this viewpoint. However there is one medieval rabbi who was part of this literalist camp whose book still survives to this day.

Rabbi Moshe ben Chasdai Taku was one of the Tosafists. He is mentioned by Ramban[188], Rama[189] and others. His book *Ketav Tamim* is the sole text left today of a school of thought which has all but disappeared from the historical record. This book was written as a response to Rabbi Saadiah Gaon's *Emunot ve-Deot* and Rambam's *Moreh Nevuchim* and their claims that aggada is not to be understood literally, and that it would be logically impossible for God to have any physical form or body.

Rabbi Taku responds to a passage of Saadia as follows:

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[187] ibid 7.

[188] *Chidushei Ramban* on Gittin 7b

[189] *Responsa of the Rama* siman 123 and *Torat Ha-Olah*

> Ignoramus! Of the words of an amora, spoken through the ruach hakodesh and the sacred tradition, he writes 'All Israel is not in accord with this'; with his own idle chatter, who is in accord!?[190]

Rabbi Taku argues strongly that all the words of the Torah and of the rabbis must be taken literally. Regarding aggada in general he writes:

> It is preferable for us to reject these new opinions which have only recently appeared, than to reject the words of the Torah and the words of the Rabbis which are the words of the Living God.[191]

> Those wise people who argue [with Rabbi Saadiah Gaon] … the wise men of his generation disagree with him, in order not to contradict the words of the Torah and the words of the Rabbis …. Though they didn't write their opinions in books, and in *Emunot ve-Deot* [Rabbi Saadiah] ignores these opinions. He wrote that many things are metaphor or riddles in order to dismiss those opinions…. Anyone who learns Torah, Talmud or aggada will not agree with his words.[192]

Rabbi Taku thus claims that he represents the traditional and authentic view of Judaism and that even in the time of the Gaonim the majority of Rabbis held that aggada was literally true. This lead Rabbi Taku to understand that it is not only possible for God to choose to manifest Himself in a physical form or body, but that whenever the prophets saw God they were literally seeing God (and not a created form, as Rabbi Saadiah proposes).

To fully understand this viewpoint, which has been all but erased from the record (and certainly is not considered today to be a legitimate Jewish view) requires and essay in its own right.

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190 *Ketav Tamim* p. 70
191 ibid. p. 83
192 ibid. p. 79

Nevertheless it is interesting to note this strong opposition to the writings of the majority of Rishonim. Furthermore, it seems that Rabbi Taku (and presumably the other rabbis in his 'camp') was so extreme in his position because of the perceived threat of the Karaites, who didn't believe in the Oral Law. Rabbi Taku writes:

> This opinion of the minority of the Gaonim and the Karaites [that God does not have a body] is taken from the Kalam movement of the Muslims… You should know that everything that the Muslims said regarding this is all taken from the words of the Greeks and the Arameans.[193]

While the reaction of his contemporaries to the challenges of the Karaites and the Muslims (and indirectly the Christians, from whom the Muslims took some of their theology) was to distance Judaism from the literal meaning of aggada, Rabbi Taku and others responded by insisting on the literal truth of the Torah and the aggadot of the Rabbis.

Rambam's views on Aggada

In his commentary on the mishna, in the introduction to *Chelek*, Rambam describes three attitudes to aggada:

> There are three different types of people when it comes to understanding the midrashim and aggadot. The majority of people I have met or whose books I have read or heard about, take the words of the sages of the Talmud at face value and do not attempt to explain them at all. In their eyes the unreasonable and impossible becomes an article of faith. Their reason for taking this line is simply due to ignorance. They just do not realise what they are doing. Unfortunately they have not come across anyone who could explain matters to them. They honestly think that their simple and superficial understanding of the Midrashim reflects the intention of the

[193] ibid. p. 69

authors. This simple understanding may contain some impossibilities. Presenting these simplistic ideas to a public or to individuals would cause great astonishment. They would produce a reaction of "... How on earth can anyone say such things and honestly believe them to be true, and find them appealing?" Such people are extremely unfortunate. I pity their foolishness. They think they are elevating the status of the sages whereas in fact they are degrading it to the lowest level ... whilst remaining blissfully ignorant of what they are doing. They destroy the honour of the Torah and blacken its reputation. In fact they convert the Torah into the very opposite of what God intended it to be!

Look at the Torah. How does God describe it? "... It is your knowledge and wisdom in the eyes of the nations who, when they hear of these statutes, will say this great nation is surely a wise and understanding people."[194] The people we are referring to, explain the words of the sages in such a way that, if the nations were to hear them, they would say "... this petty nation is surely a foolish and worthless people." A lot of this is achieved by those who try to teach what they themselves do not understand. If only they were to keep silent... it would be the wisest thing they could do. Alternatively, they should state clearly that they do not understand what the sages meant. However, because they think they understand, they allow themselves to relate their ideas to others as they understand them, rather than telling them what the sages actually meant. They quote the aggadot such as those in the last chapter of Sanhedrin and other such sources verbatim and in stark simplicity.

The second group is also very large and is comprised of those who see the words of the sages in their simplicity, believe

194. Devarim 4: 6

them to be as they are, and scoff and mock them. They then consider themselves wiser and more knowledgeable than the sages. The sages are to them fools and idiots, lacking in all wisdom and science. Most of these are people who are educated in secular sciences and consider themselves thinking people. They are worse than the first group.

The third group is so small it can hardly be called a group. These are the ones who really understand how great the sages were and that their words reveal great and deep truths. They know what is the reasonable and possible and what is the unreasonable and impossible. They know that the sages did not speak empty words, but words with a depth and a meaning which go beyond the superficial. Anything impossible said by the sages is simply metaphor. When speaking of lofty ideas, the sages couched them in allegorical terms. This is the style of the wise. Shlomo HaMelech opens Mishlei with the statement "... To understand parables and allegories...the words of the wise and their riddles"[195]. Those who understand the Hebrew language know that when he refers to "riddles" he is referring to phrases in which the true meaning is the deep one and not the superficial one. When the very wise speak of great and lofty principles they only speak about them in allegorical form. We should not, therefore, be surprised to see that the sages also couched their teachings of deep ideas in allegories and clothed them in common language. Shlomo HaMelech himself wrote the whole of Shir HaShirim, Mishlei and parts of Kohelet in such a style. Why, then, should it surprise us if we have to seek deep explanations in the words of the sages, deny their superficial meaning, and make their words fit in with that which is sensible and true? They themselves often explained

195. Mishlei 1: 1-2

> many of the words of the Bible as being allegorical, denying their superficial meaning in favour of the deeper meaning.

Similarly we find Rambam wrote so strongly against those who believe that God can manifest Himself in a physical body because of an incident where he met someone who believed that aggadot and derashot are literally true:

> I once met a man who was considered to be one of the sages of Israel, and he certainly knew very well the give and take of the details of the Torah. But his theology was based on what he had learnt as a child and he was in doubt as to whether God has a physical form – an eye, a hand, a foot, intestines – as the verses imply, or whether He has no physical form. Yet others who I met from other countries held definitively that God has a body, and they considered anyone who held the opposite to be a denier of God, a min and an apikoros. They understood many of the derashot according to their simple meaning. I have also heard similar theology in the name of others who I have not seen…Their brains are full of crazy old wives' tales and foolish imaginings. Therefore I saw that it was necessary to explain the principles of our Torah without bringing proofs and sources, because these people do not have the intelligence to understand the proofs.[196]

Rambam seems to define a new understanding of aggada, which is neither literal, nor completely allegorical, but rather has a deeper, intentional meaning. Unlike those Rishonim and Gaonim who suggest that one can read into aggada any meaning, Rambam seems to explain that the sages had a specific meaning when they said their words. Rambam apologises in the introduction to his *Moreh Nevuchim* that he did not follow through on his promise to write a full commentary of these deeper meanings within the words of aggada:

196. *Letter on Resurrection of the Dead* Mossad HaRav Kook (Rambam Le-Am) *Iggrot Ha-Rambam* p. 345

In our commentary on the Mishna we stated our intention to explain difficult problems in the Book on Prophecy and in the Book of Harmony. In the latter we intended to examine all the passages in the Midrash which, if taken literally, appear to be inconsistent with truth and common sense, and must therefore be taken figuratively. Many years have elapsed since I first commenced those works. I had proceeded but a short way when I became dissatisfied with my original plan. For I observed that by expounding these passages by means of allegorical and mystical terms, we do not explain anything, but merely substitute one thing for another of the same nature, whilst in explaining them fully our efforts would displease most people; and my sole object in planning to write those books was to make the contents of Midrashim and the exoteric lessons of the prophecies intelligible to everybody. We have further noticed that when an ill-informed theologian reads these Midrashim, he will find no difficulty; for possessing no knowledge of the properties of things, he will not reject statements which involve impossibilities. When, however, a person who is both religious and well educated reads them, he cannot escape the following dilemma: either he takes them literally, and questions the abilities of the author and the soundness of his mind-doing thereby nothing which is opposed to the principles of our faith,--or he will acquiesce in assuming that the passages in question have some secret meaning, and he will continue to hold the author in high estimation whether he understood the allegory or not. As regards prophecy in its various degrees and the different metaphors used in the prophetic books, we shall give in the present work an explanation, according to a different method. Guided by

> these considerations I have refrained from writing those two books as I had previously intended[197].

Rashba bases his understanding of Aggada on the principles laid down by Rambam in his introduction to his commentary on the Mishna. There he describes four different categories of Talmudic literature. The fourth category is:

> … The derashot that are relevant to each chapter in which they appear. One should not consider that this fourth category of derashot is not important, or of limited value. It serves a very great purpose, in that it contains within it deep allusions and wonderful concepts. If a person will delve deeply into these derashot he will learn from them the ultimate good, and Divine and true ideas will be revealed to him. These include ideas that the scientists have concealed and philosophers of each generation have hidden. [However,] when a person looks at the simple meaning he will find them contrary to logic, and there is nothing greater than it [logic]. They [the Sages] made it like that for several reasons. Firstly they wanted to encourage the understanding of the students. They also wanted to hide it from the eyes of the fools … since their intellects are unable to fully understand the truth. The Sages would [even] hide the secrets of the Torah from each other…. When God reveals [the secrets] to a person he should conceal them, and only reveal them through hints and only to a person whose intelligence is whole and straight…. Furthermore public teaching can only be done through parable and metaphor, to include the women and young children, so that when their minds reach perfection they will know the meanings of the metaphors…. For this reason the Sages spoke of Divine matters through hints.
>
> Therefore if a person finds some of their words [of the

197. Introduction. M. Friedländer Translation (1903) p. 4-5

> Sages] to go against logic, he should not attribute the fault to those words, but rather to his intelligence. When he finds a parable which seems far from his understanding he should be upset that he is not able to understand the idea…. Each person has a different type of intellect. There is no doubt that the intellect of someone who knows these lofty concepts is greater than that of someone who does not know them, for one has realized their intelligence in actu, while the other only has it in potential. For this reason there are some things that certain individuals find to be correct and perfectly clear, while others find them to be impossible, each according to their level of wisdom.

Rambam, according to Rashba's understanding, clearly attributes very great value to Aggada. Not only does it contain the principles of faith and an understanding of Divinity, but it is this area of learning that separates those who have actualized their intelligence from those who have not. Rambam does not make this claim about any other type of Talmudic study. In his letter on astrology to the Rabbis of Southern France Rambam states:

> I know that you may search and find sayings of some individual sages in the Talmud and Midrashim whose words appear to maintain that at the moment of a man's birth the stars will cause such and such to happen to him. ... it is not proper to abandon matters of reason that have already been verified by proofs, shake loose of them, and depend on the words of a single one of the sages from whom possibly the matter was hidden.
>
> Perhaps you will say to me, as many say: You call words in the Talmud "aggada!" I reply: Yes! All these words and those similar to them are aggada in their content, whether they be

> written in the Talmud, or in books of derashot, or in books of aggada.[198]

According to Netziv[199], Rambam holds that one who learns aggada comes to understand both maaseh bereishit and maaseh merkava – the workings of the universe. He claims that this is Rambam's intent in chapter 2 of Hilchot Yesodei Ha-Torah, where he paraphrases the midrash, saying:

> I will explain important principles in the works of the Master of the Universe, in order that you should have a beginning of an understanding of how to love God. This is the meaning of what the sages wrote regarding love "that through this you will recognise the One Who spoke and the world came into being".

Saperstein describes Rambam's approach to aggada, and the reason he chose such an approach:

> Unlike Karaite, Muslim and Christian polemicists, Maimonides does not ridicule or dismiss such aggadot. Yet they create problems that he cannot ignore. He discusses these passages because he knows that any Jew reading his work will think of the rabbinic pronouncements as a counterexample. Unless they can be explained away, they will undermine the foundations of his exposition[200].

It is clear that aggada, which is the basis of Jewish theology and philosophy, actually causes theological and philosophical problems because many of the aggadot apparently contradict basic tenets of Jewish thought and religion.

198. *Teshuvot ha-Rambam* p. 739 in Saperstein p. 9
199. *Emek Netziv* on Ekev piska 13
200. Saperstein p. 6

The Problem of Aggada

What caused the Gaonim and Rishonim to abandon the literal meaning of aggada (with only a few exceptions)? Obviously they understood that this was the intent of the Talmudic sages when they wrote aggada, but there were external factors which also created the need to explain aggadot in non-literal ways. Aggada not only led to theological problems, but also opened Judaism to attack by Christians, Muslims and Karaites. The primary danger in aggada, as we have already seen from Rambam's letter on the Resurrection of the Dead cited above, was that aggada often implies that God is corporeal or has physical manifestations. This implies theology caused a serious external threat to Judaism, which ultimately led to the burning of the Talmud, forced conversion and the loss of the elevated status of Dhimmi in certain Muslim countries (without such status Jews were forced to pay higher taxes, and faced the threat of expulsion from Muslim countries).

Saperstein describes the historical problem of aggada:

> Detailed knowledge of the aggadot was introduced into medieval Christian literature by Petrus Alfonsi, a Spanish Jew who converted to Christianity in the first decade of the twelfth century and spent the rest of his life in England. Following his apostasy, he wrote a polemical work against the religion he had abandoned in the form of dialogues between "Peter", his name as a Christian, and "Moses", his name as a Jew. The first chapter of these *Dialogues* is devoted, in large part, to a critique of the aggada. Many of the passages cited speak about God, and they are introduced by the charge that "you sages... assert that God has body and form, and attribute to His ineffable majesty such things as are inconsistent with any manner of reason."

A generation after Alfonsi's *Dialogues*, Peter the Venerable, abbot of Cluny and a towering figure in twelfth century Christendom, turned

to the aggada in the fifth section of his *Tractate* "Against the inveterate obstinacy of the Jews." In this work he mocks Jews, insults them, reviles them, heaps upon them torrents of scorn and abuse, all because of "the absurd and utterly foolish fables" of the Talmud.

Ultimately the challenges on the aggada of the Talmud led to putting the Talmud itself on trial, in the famous Disputation of Paris. New charges were made against the aggadot of the Talmud by Nicholas Donin. These included "blasphemies against the Christians" and "blasphemy against the humanity of Christ." Included in this category is the accusation that Jews curse the clergy of the Church, the king, and all other Christians three times each day in a blessing considered to be extremely important, known as *birkat ha-minim*.

In the Muslim world the challenges on the Talmud and Judaism were equally damning. In his *Treatise on Contradictions and Lies*, the eleventh-century Spanish Muslim, Ali ibn Ahmad ibn Hazm attacks the Torah for proffering a blatantly anthropomorphic portrait of God. He claims that Jews are thus not monotheists and do not deserve the status of Dhimmi. A Dhimmi is a non-Muslim subject of a state governed in accordance with sharia law. The term connotes an obligation of the state to protect the individual, including the individual's life, property, and freedom of religion and worship, and required loyalty to the empire, and a poll tax known as the jizya. Losing this status would lead to expulsion, conversion or death as an infidel.

The Gaonim and Rishonim were forced to respond to the Christian and Muslim challenges based on aggada. The majority (certainly the opinion which ultimately became 'mainstream' Jewish thought) removed any theological truth to implied anthropological descriptions of God by denying the literal meaning of aggada. Others, such as Rabbi Moshe Taku, responded to external challenges, and the perceived heresies of their contemporaries, by formulating a theology which allowed for the aggadot to be understood literally. This led to the denial of the incorporeality of God, and allowed for a

Judaism which held that God could manifest Himself in physical form.

There were similar challenges from Karaites, who claimed that Rabbinic Judaism had distorted the truth of the Torah, and from philosophers who held that Judaism was no longer monotheistic since it held of physical descriptions of God.

Conclusion

It appears that from the time of the Talmud (and presumably earlier) until the late Gaonic period aggada was accepted as literally true. There was a paradigm shift in the time of the Gaonim, which was accepted and continued by most of the Rishonim in the attitude towards aggada. No longer was it to be accepted as literally true, but rather it was metaphorical. Furthermore aggada could be sacrificed for the sake of theology.

This was probably a reaction to the competing theologies of the time; Christian, Muslim, Karaite and the challenges of Greek philosophy. This later led to direct attacks on the Talmud and Jews throughout the world. These challenges and attacks led the majority of Gaonim and Rishonim to abandon the apparent Talmudic view of aggada (though strengthening the faith of others such as Rabbi Moshe Taku), and caused Rambam to formulate his new understanding of aggada.

The Guide for the Perplexed on Creation

By Rabbi Meir Triebitz

With great pride we present here an excerpt from Rabbi Triebitz's soon to be published book ***The Guide for the Perplexed on Creation***. This forthcoming volume presents a new translation of chapters 13-30 of section II of *Moreh Nevuchim* with Rabbi Triebitz's commentary. This is probably the first new linear commentary on *Moreh Nevuchim* in the modern era.

It is hoped that this volume ***on Creation*** will be the first in a series of selections from *Moreh Nevuchim*.

This selection has not yet undergone final editing for publication, but we wanted to give this advanced preview to the readership of ***Reshimu.***

The Guide for the Perplexed on Creation

Introduction

By Rabbi Meir Triebitz

Since Rambam's declaration in his famous introduction to the *Guide* that he is going to deliberately contradict himself in order to hide secrets of the Torah from the unenlightened reader, the true position of Rambam emerged as the 'Holy Grail' of virtually every commentator. As one prominent scholar puts it, "It would be difficult to point to any other problem in the history of Jewish philosophy which has so absorbed scholars and fascinated their curiosity, both in the Middle Ages and in recent generations".[201] Moreover, the history of Maimonidean commentary frequently reads like a virtual intellectual history of Judaism whereby each commentator attributes to Rambam the philosophical vogue of his respective era. Nowhere is this more manifest than in the chapters of the *Guide* which deal with creation. Rambam's discussion of this central issue is replete with all types of contradictions, vague statements and various sorts of innuendos, all of which were

[201] Ravitsky, 'The Secrets of Maimonides between the 13th and 20th Centuries'

meticulously picked up by the various commentators. Major Medieval commentators, such as Ibn Tibon, Moshe Narboni and Ibn Kaspi were of the opinion that although Rambam states clearly that the position of the Torah is that God created the world ex nihilo, he was in secret, an Aristotelian who believed in the eternity of the universe. These Medieval philosophers felt that the *Guide* was intended to demonstrate how the truths of the Torah reduced to those of Greek philosophy. In modern times, scholars such as Shadal, Pines and Strauss were of the opinion that Rambam's hidden message is that Judaism cannot be reconciled with philosophy. While the minds of the masses are put to rest that the contradictions between philosophy and Torah can be resolved, the true position of Rambam is that one cannot be both a believing Jew and admit to the truth of Greek thought. In essence, both forms of interpretations are none other than descriptions of the position of the interpreters themselves. Ibn Kaspi, Ibn Tibon and Narboni were religious Jews who believed in the truth of Greek philosophy and that this truth could be resolved with the religious truth of the Torah. Strauss and Pines, on the other hand, were secular Jews who no doubt believed that the Torah has no relevance to the modern conception of truth.

For the 'medieval commentators of contradiction'[202] the purpose of contradiction in the *Guide* is to distinguish 'revealed truth' from a 'hidden truth'. For them, the 'revealed truth' of the Torah, based upon tradition and prophetic revelation, is coming to exclude the sacrilegious beliefs of the philosophers. The 'hidden truth' is that Greek philosophy constitutes the hidden teaching of the Torah. Hence the two truths are in fact reconcilable. For the modern commentators[203], contradictions are coming simply to distinguish between false assertions and true assertions. As Strauss writes in his essay 'the Literary Character of the Guide for the Perplexed':

[202] i.e. Kaspi, Ibn Tibon and Narboni
[203] such as Pines and Strauss

> The duty of the interpreter is not to explain the contradictions but to find out in each case which of the two statements was considered by Maimonides to be true and which he merely used as a means of hiding the truth.[204]

Further on in the same essay, Strauss writes that:

> All important contradictions in the *Guide* may be reduced to the single fundamental contradiction between the true teaching based on reason, and the untrue teaching, emanating from imagination.[205]

The assumption of Strauss, that the contradictions of the *Guide* are to distinguish truth from falsehood, must be questioned and brought to task. Let us look at the crucial passage in the Introduction which is the source of all the controversy.

> The seventh reason [for 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. It is important that the masses not be aware in any way of the contradiction. The author must take every precaution to hide the contradiction[206].

Rambam is not claiming that having two contradictory premises necessarily implies that one is true and the other is false. He is simply stating that certain issues are of such orders of complexity that they cannot be understood completely on the basis of the set of self-consistent assumptions. It may be that two assumptions are both true, relative to different perspectives. The reason that the masses

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[204] *Persecution and the Art of Writing* p. 69

[205] ibid. p. 73

[206] Introduction to the *Guide* Schwartz ed. p 22. authors translation.

must be protected from awareness of such contradictions might simply be because they lack the sophistication of thought to accept such truths. As a result, they might come to reject the entire belief because of its lack of clarity and precision. It is for this reason that Rambam writes in chapter 26 of section I that the Bible employed anthropomorphic images of God. The philosophical notion of monotheism and Divine incorporality would have seemed incomprehensible to the uneducated and drive them towards atheism.

For most people, theological issues must be presented and thought of in black and white terms. Only sophisticated minds can appreciate irreducible dichotomies and multi-layered depths. Contradictions for Rambam are natural consequences of the exceedingly difficult and ultimately impossible task of comprehending Divine truths. The masses, however, must not be made aware of these contradictions because it will only confuse them and convince them of the futility of the whole enterprise.

If we return to the issue of creation, we find clear evidence that the contradictions to be found in Rambam's discussion of the eternity of the world versus creation ex nihilo cannot possibly be understood as implying that one position of the two is true and the other false. At the end of chapter 30 of section II Rambam states that there are four words which are used in Scripture to connote Divine creation; *Barah* (ברא); *Assah* (עשה); *Kannah* (קנה) and *Kel* (א-ל). *Barah* refers to creation ex nihilo (בריאה יש מאין). *Assah* refers to the creation of the particular forms of things, while *Kel* refers to God's perfection in comparison to His creation. When he explains the meaning of the term *Kannah* Rambam writes:

> It says *Kannah* (literally 'possess') because He, may He be exalted, has dominion over them (His creations) just as a master has over his slaves. For this reason He is also called 'The Lord of all the earth' (Joshua 3: 11 and 13) and the Lord (Exodus 23: 17, 34: 23). However, as there is no Lord

without there being something possessed by Him, and this tends toward the road of the belief in the eternity of a certain matter…" (section II chapter 30).

We see clearly, then, that Rambam understood that there are contradictory terms in Scripture itself with respect to creation. *Kannah* implies the eternity of creation, whereas *Barah* is creation ex nihilo. Now Rambam has informed us in his introduction that contradictions in the prophetic Scriptures are either due to the third reason, namely that one verse is literal and one figurative, or due to the fourth reason, that either a stipulation which cannot be made in one verse is placed in the other, or that the topics are different in the different places, giving the appearance that the two verses contradict each other, although there is really no contradiction. Since Divine possession is clearly not a metaphor, we would have to conclude that the contradiction between *Barah* and *Kannah* is only apparent. We then are forced to conclude, as I have already indicated, that the contradictions to be found in the *Guide* between the position of eternity and the position of creation ex nihilo were not regarded by Rambam to be contradictory, but rather reflected different aspects of viewpoints of our understanding of God's relationship to the creation. Rambam, therefore, clearly saw creation ex nihilo and eternity as only apparently contradictory but not mutually exclusive.

It is instructive to note where the above passage explicating the four Scriptural terms for creation appears. In the beginning of chapter 30, Rambam presents the clear position of the Torah, that God created the world from nothing. He then goes on to write that various statements to be found in the Sages which speak about the existence of time or other worlds before the account of creation in the Bible are to be ignored for they are based upon the Greek philosophy of

eternity, which the Torah rejects. After a lengthy chapter in which Rambam offers a combination of literal and philosophical interpretations of the opening two chapters of Genesis, he concludes, without any seeming thematic continuity, with the discussion of Biblical terms denoting creation. The statement that *Barah* "tends" to eternity is stated almost parenthetically without any connection to the discussion at hand. Clearly this is an apparent contradiction which Rambam might have felt would go unnoticed except for the most alert reader.

Rambam's position that the two contradictory beliefs in creation ex nihilo and eternity must both be maintained requires explanation. It must be that these two theories are themselves consequences (or necessary requirements) of two philosophical positions which Rambam himself felt cannot both be dispensed with. In chapter 25 of section II, Rambam regards creation ex nihilo as essential for the possibility of miracles, the selection of the Jewish people, the privileging of prophets and the giving of the Torah. On the other hand, in chapter 1 of section II, the eternity of the universe is an axiom used in his proof of God's non-corporeality and is explicitly listed as the twenty sixth axiom in his introduction to the section. Clearly, then, eternity of the universe was essential to maintain monotheism. God's free will (and hence man's free will) and incorporeality are the two pillars of the *Guide* and Maimonidean thought in general. The problem is that these two beliefs lead to two contradictory theories of creation. This is the central philosophical problem which faced Rambam and he dealt with it through his method of contradiction.

Section II Chapter 13

By Rabbi Meir Triebitz

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, in 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 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

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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]

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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).

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

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"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.

to most philosophers, such as Galen and others[212] – 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]

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[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

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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.

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 ad 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]

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[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 form 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

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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*.

explicitly by describing God as "the Possessor of heaven and earth" (Bereishit 14: 22).[215]

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[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 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 form 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 creations[216].

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[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

> 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 form 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 no 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.

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 form nothing. For this is also an impossible thing[217].

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 God[218].

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[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 else[219].

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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 primordiality.

[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

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

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> 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)

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

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[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 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

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> 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 <u>is</u> what has come to be, that what is coming to be <u>is</u> what is coming to be, and also that what will come to be <u>is</u> what will come to be, or that what is not <u>is</u> 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 appear[221].

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

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[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 that 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 nay 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.

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].

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[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'.

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 true[224].

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.