

CREATION

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Creation is a Jewish idea. Before the Hebrew Bible, the notion of Creation was unknown to human civilization. If one reads the myths of ancient cultures be they Chinese, Indian, Egyptian, Babylonian, Assyrian or Greek, one will not find the notion of a purely spiritual power that created the world from nothing. In these myths, the world evolved from night, darkness, mother earth, the infinite or some other vague source. However the notion that the world was created from absolutely nothing is not to be found in any of these so-called 'creation myths.' As a matter of fact, there is no word in the Greek language that can properly be translated as "creation." In the *Septuagint*, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible the first sentence reads, "*En arxei epoisen ho Theos ton houranon kai tain gain.*" The English translation of the *Septuagint*, published in England in 1794, translates this sentence correctly as "In the beginning G-d made the heaven and the earth." The Greek verb *epoisen* generally means to produce something. It in no way carries the meaning of Creation as this is understood in the Hebrew Bible, nor does any other Greek word for that matter..

Furthermore, the idea is foreign to all the ancient philosophers. Plato's Demiurge and Aristotle's Prime Mover did not create the world but simply fashioned the disorderly motions into the regularity of the world as we know it (Plato) or was the source of the forms that compose the substances of the world (Aristotle). All the Pre-Socratic philosophers thought of the world as eternal and coming from atoms or other elements that were eternal. It is safe to say that before the advent of

Judaism, Creation was unheard of. Furthermore, the familiarity of the Western world with the idea that G-d created the world does not exist in any of the Eastern religions. The origin of this idea among Jews, Christians and Moslems is of course the first sentence of *The Hebrew Bible*, "In the beginning G-d created the heaven and the earth." The question I would like to address is, what arguments can be brought to support Creation other than belief in the Divine revelation of *The Hebrew Bible*? This is a tall order, for it is acknowledged that Creation transcends human comprehension, so it seems almost contradictory to propose an argument to support a notion that defies understanding.

In particular, the notion of the Creation of a finite world is inconsistent with that of G-d as an absolutely infinite Being as follows: Either the created world is part of an absolutely infinite Being or it is not. If it is part of such a Being, then something has been added to it which is impossible for nothing can be added to an absolutely infinite Being. On the other hand, if the created world is not part of the absolutely infinite Being, then such a Being is limited in that there is something it does not contain, which is also impossible. Therefore, the creation of anything is inconsistent with the existence of an absolutely infinite Being.

In spite of all this, there is an argument that has some force in supporting the fact of Creation if not its intelligibility. This argument is like arguments for the fact of free will, in that while everyone believes they have free will and is prepared to argue for this, no one, so far as I know, has ever explained how free will is possible. There are numerous facts about the world that are inexplicable, the most significant being the origin of the world itself. The argument I present here does not attempt to explain Creation, but rather to argue that the fact of Creation does have rational support.

It is important to note that this argument does not claim to argue for the existence of G-d *per se*, as do most arguments for Creation. Rather the argument builds on other arguments that purport support to show there is some knowing Being whose existence is necessary. These arguments commonly called the teleological and cosmological arguments for G-d do not, however imply that G-d created the world from nothing.

In the *Moreh Nevuchim* Part II, chapters 21-25 Maimonides argues that G-d's necessary existence can be demonstrated, but not His creation of the world. In this Maimonides disagrees with Saadiah Gaon who argues in *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, Treatise I, Chapters 1 and 2, that one can demonstrate beyond a shadow of doubt that G-d created the world. I do not find the arguments of Saadiah Gaon convincing and side with Maimonides on this issue. I think it would be out of place to go into this matter at length here. In short, however, my own reasons for thinking that neither the cosmological argument nor the teleological argument can be used to demonstrate that G-d Created the world are as follows.

The cosmological argument, as Maimonides presents it (correctly in my opinion), simply demonstrates that the contingent existence of the world could not exist unless there were some Being whose existence is necessary upon which the existence of the world depends. This dependency is not the same thing as Creation. That the world depends upon G-d constantly for its existence does not entail that there was a 'time' when the world did not exist. Perhaps the necessary Being of G-d and the dependent, contingent world are co-eternal. Saadiah, in his argument, does not even discuss the necessary Being of G-d. Furthermore his arguments based on the impossibility of the world being infinite are questionable.

As far as the teleological argument is concerned, the fact that the orderliness of the world

implies the existence of a mind behind that orderliness again does not entail that that mind created orderliness. It could be, as Aristotle said, that the orderliness of the world is an eternal spin-off of G-d's mind and though the mind of G-d is the source of that orderliness there was never a time when that orderliness did not exist. Furthermore the existence of orderliness in the world does not entail that there was only one mind behind the world. Perhaps there was a 'committee,' which would explain some of the world's imperfections.

The point of all this that the idea that there exists a single, unique absolutely infinite Being that is the source of the finite world does not entail that this Being Created the world from nothing. This requires a separate argument. The purpose of this paper is to supply such an argument. So far as I know, this argument does not yet have a name, so for purposes of convenience I hereby dub this argument, "The Argument from Finitude." The remainder of this paper will attempt to expound this argument.

The Argument from Finitude

It is a *sine qua non* of monotheism that G-d is absolutely infinite. That is, there are no limitations to His Being or power or any other characteristics whereby G-d is described. I simply take it as a given that G-d is a Being with no limitations. The most persuasive argument for this is the ontological argument. Though it is questionable whether this argument demonstrates the existence of an absolutely infinite Being we call G-d, as it claims to do, nonetheless what the argument does succeed in doing is to get us to see that in the monotheistic tradition what we mean by G-d is a Being greater than which cannot be conceived of. Anything less than that is not what we mean by 'G-d.' Such a Being by definition would have to be absolutely infinite, otherwise a Being

greater than it could be conceived of, namely one that *was* absolutely infinite.

The Creation of a finite world by an infinite Being appears to involve the contradiction we described earlier. Namely, if the finite world is part of G-d, something has been added to an absolutely infinite Being which is impossible, and if the finite created world is not part of G-d, then such a Being is limited, which again is impossible. Given this destructive dilemma, the question is, how can the fact of Creation be rendered intelligible. This question is different from the one that was the origin of the cosmological argument. There the question was: Given the possibility that nothing might exist, why should anything exist? Here the question is: Given the fact that an absolutely infinite Being exists, how could anything finite exist? Even though the world as we know it might be eternal, as indeed the Greeks thought, this does not gainsay the indisputable fact that it contains finite individual things such as you and me to name just two. How did these finite things come to be? If an infinite Being composes all of reality it would seem inconsistent with His existence that anything finite could exist.

The Greeks were not faced with this problem as their idea of the origin of the world included neither the notion of an absolutely infinite Being nor that of a Creator. Most philosophers when they speak of G-d do not think of Him as an absolutely infinite Being, but limited in some form or other. Almost all philosophers think of G-d as being limited at least by what is logically possible. That is, G-d could not have made a logically impossible world. Since what is logically possible is determined by human intellect, G-d is limited to what the human mind can understand. Thus Leibnitz argued that when G-d created the world, the type of world he created was limited to the number of logically possible worlds. Even if the number of logically possible worlds be infinite, G-d is still limited to what the human mind can comprehend. Spinoza, to my knowledge, is the only

major figure in the history of philosophy to argue that G-d in His essence transcends human understanding, for G-d consists of an infinite number of attributes of which only two can be grasped by human reason, i.e., extension and thought. Spinoza is the only philosopher to conceive of G-d as an absolutely infinite Being. Spinoza, however, rejected the notion of Creation and therefore had no way of 'explaining' the existence of the finite world, which in the terminology of his philosophy translates into his inability of explaining the existence of 'finite modes.' This is indeed the greatest weakness of Spinoza's philosophy, but that is another problem.

This, however, brings us to the crux of our argument. If one accepts the notion of G-d as an absolutely infinite Being, the existence of a finite world becomes inexplicable. However, there are forceful arguments that lead us to accept G-d as a knowing, necessary Being who is absolutely infinite. On the other hand, it is undeniable that finite things exist. The only way of reconciling these two inconsistent facts is to ascribe the existence of the finite world to an act of G-d's inscrutable will that transcends human understanding. This is exactly what Creation is. That is, G-d brought into existence, in a manner we know not how, the finite world in which we live. The only way of avoiding this conclusion is to maintain that G-d is not absolutely infinite or that finite objects and things do not exist. It is possible to reject either horn of this dilemma, but the argument from finitude is that: 1) it is more rational to accept G-d as a Being that is absolutely infinite than not, and 2) it is obvious that finite things exist, 3) therefore, it is rational to accept G-d's Creation of the world as an inscrutable act of His will. This implies that Creation was a conscious act of G-d and not a natural emanation or effect of His of which He may have been unaware, as Aristotle's *Nous* is unaware of the world of sub-lunar substances that have been formed as a natural consequence of *Nous* upon matter. Thus the world was intentionally Created by G-d implying that there was a

reason for the Creation and that the world is not some unconscious 'doodle.' Given the fact of Creation as we have expounded it here, namely that it was an inscrutable act of G-d's will, it follows that it is rational to assume that G-d Created the world for a purpose, just as it is perfectly rational to assume that if a person is working hard at something, there is some reason or purpose why he is working so hard, in contrast with someone taking a leisurely stroll down the street. Why G-d would have wanted to create the world is another question. All that we are arguing here is that G-d had to go 'out of his way,' so to speak, in order to do so. In other words, the world of finite events and things cannot be part of G-d's essence, since G-d's essence is absolutely infinite and nothing can be part of this essence without itself being infinite. There is no room in G-d's infinite Being for anything finite. How then can our understanding come to grips with the existence of a finite world?

The only possible answer is Creation and this act of Creation requires that G-d had to remove in some way his infinite essence or constrict it to make room for finitude. This 'constriction' is referred to in the language of Kaballah as *tzimtzum*. This idea had its origin in the teachings of Isaac Luria, (1534-1572) a 16th century mystic who is the father of what we call today 'Kabbalah.' There are various interpretations of the notion of *tzimtzum*, but the one we follow here is the one expounded in the literature of *Chabad* philosophy. An outline of the various ways of interpreting the 'tzimtzum' notion of Isaac Luria is traced in a letter written by the Lubavitcher Rebbe Menacha Mendel, of blessed memory, written in 1939 from Paris to Rabbi Yerachmiel Benjaminson in America. The basic bone of contention among students of Kabbala after Isaac Luria was whether the notion of constriction (*tzimtzum*) was to be taken literally as applying to G-d's very Being or only to the light emanating from G-d. Generally the view of Chabad on this matter is that 'constriction' is not to be taken literally, and the G-d's infinite Being by definition cannot be

constricted or removed to make room for the world. In other words, the essence of G-d's infinite Being permeates every particle of the finite world. This is the essence of mysticism in Chabad philosophy.

There are two ways of understanding the relationship between G-d and the world. One way is called 'The Higher Understanding' and the other way is called 'The Lower Understanding.' This is roughly equivalent to the way G-d understands His relationship with the world and the way man understands the relationship of the world with G-d. In the Higher Understanding, G-d is reality and the world is unreality. In the Lower Understanding, the world is reality and G-d is unreality. 'Reality' and 'unreality' here are epistemological terms that are an index of a kind of understanding. That is, in the Higher Understanding, G-d does not see the world as really existing for the finite world cannot exist side-by-side with G-d. In order to create the world G-d had to bring forth a situation that would give the appearance to man of a finite world that exists independently of G-d. In truth, however, such a world is unreal as far as G-d Himself is concerned. Let us try to give an analogy that might help to explain this idea.

Imagine that by dreaming one could create entities that have an existence in their own right. This, of course, is unlike real dreams where the so-called 'dream entities' have no reality of their own. Let us imagine for the moment that our dreams do have genuine creative power that can bring into existence entities that have a reality of their own that could include real people and things, and that these entities cease to exist when we wake up. As far as we know such dream worlds might indeed be created by our dreams and destroyed by our wakings in a manner such that we have no awareness of them, other than the fact that we dreamt them. Thus if you dream about a snake pit writhing with snakes, the snake pit would have a reality of its own that is dependent for its existence

upon your dreaming them. You never meet these snakes in real life. You know when you wake up that the snakes do not really exist, and whatever existence the dream snakes had, ceases when you wake up. Nonetheless, let us suppose that your dreaming brings into existence, temporarily, dream snakes that have a life and reality of their own which as far as the snakes are concerned is totally unconnected with your dreaming. In other words, the snakes writhing in this pit are unaware that their existence depends on your dreaming them and that they will cease to exist when you wake up from your sleep. How could one possibly explain to the snakes their true situation in a way that they could understand? Even if the snakes had a human intelligence as the original snake that led Adam and Eve astray is purported to have had, how could they understand that they will cease to exist when you wake up from your sleep. Wouldn't the snakes say that this is utterly preposterous and that there is absolutely no empirical evidence for this wild idea? That is, there is no evidence that there is some mysterious sleeper whose nightmare is keeping the snakes in existence. Imagine now that the snakes created by your dream are just ordinary snakes with a snake's understanding, whatever that is. Think how far removed that snake's understanding is from the truth, i.e., that its very existence depends upon a human being having a nightmare. Multiply this 'distance' by infinity and you will get an idea how far we are from understanding G-d's Creation of the world! The difference is that the snakes have a conception neither of a human being nor of a dream, whereas we do have some conception of G-d and what it means for G-d to have created the world. We do not mean to imply that G-d's Creation of the world is to be compared with someone having a dream in every respect. For one thing, G-d's Creation of the world, as we argued before, had to have been an act of His free will as it could not be part of His Essence, nor could it have emanated from his Essence. Dreams however are not acts of will. They generally are understood as having causes

rooted in the psyche that is not subject to free will. If you understand what a human being is, you can understand what having a dream is and that dreams are not volitional. You cannot say this about G-d. That is, you cannot say that if you could understand the nature or essence of G-d, you would then understand that G-d created the world. An understanding of G-d *per se* could in no way enable one to understand that G-d should have created the world. Our argument from finitude is required to reconcile G-d's absolutely infinite Being with the existence of a finite world that is not part of His essence insofar as we can understand His essence. However, there are some aspects of the dream metaphor that can fruitfully be utilized to explain the notion of what we call 'The Higher Understanding.' Let us try to draw out the relevant points of this analogy.

The dream is G-d's Creation of the world. If you ask me whether my nightmare about the snake pit really exists I will tell you 'it's just a dream.' So for G-d, the world that He created has no real existence and therefore its finitude is not a contradiction to His absolute infinity. It is, so to speak, just a dream.

As far as the snakes are concerned, they really exist as do you and I. They do not consider themselves a figment of anyone's dreams anymore than you and I do. What the snakes have no knowledge of and which they have no reason whatsoever to think is true, is that their existence depends upon the dreams of some creature they know not what! Human beings, however, are not snakes and they have the capacity to conceive that their existence and that of the entire world depends upon the creative act of an omniscient, omnipotent absolutely infinite Being they call 'G-d.' Furthermore, they have rational grounds for believing that such a Being exists and that therefore the existence of the finite world is the result of a creative act of G-d that defies human comprehension, as we have argued. Though we have a glimpse of this truth with our minds, it is only a glimpse of

something about which we have no real understanding. The logic of the human mind, displayed by science, common sense and courses in logic recognizes the reality of the world but not that of G-d. As far as our understanding goes, though we may have some glimpse or intuition of some higher Being we call G-d, nevertheless we have little or no understanding of this Being. The world has tangible reality and G-d is something very abstruse and ephemeral. This is what is called 'The Lower Understanding.' We can, through certain acts of meditation or through sudden intuitions, have some insight into the Higher Understanding in which the unity of G-d with the world is revealed to our understanding or awareness. However, these unusual acts of human awareness are uncommon and attained only by select individuals at rare moments. It is not the ordinary human awareness of the world.

There is another aspect of the unity of G-d and the world that is well illustrated in this analogy and that is the manner of the dependency of the world on G-d and how that dependency is a relationship of knowing. Just as the dream snakes are dependent for their existence on my dreams, so the world and everything in it down to the last quark is dependent for its existence on an act of G-d's knowing which is identical with the act of G-d's Creation. Just as the continued existence of the dream snakes over time is identical with my dreaming them, so the continued existence of the world and everything in it down to the last sub-atomic particle is identical with G-d's knowing it. In fact G-d's knowing it is identical with its existence which completes the unity of G-d's knowledge with the world, as Maimonides writes: "He (G-d) is the Knower, He is the Thing Known and He is the Knowledge itself. All is one. This matter is beyond the ability of our mouths to relate, or our ears to hear, nor is there the capacity within the heart of man to grasp it in its entirety." (See his code, *Hayad Hachazakah*, Hilchot Yesodei Hatorah 2:10)

The world and G-d are really one but this unity defies understanding and as Maimonides goes on to say in the same passage quoted above, G-d knows the world by knowing Himself and this knowledge is the source of the very being of the world. The creative act of G-d whereby He maintains the existence of the world is identical with that whereby He knows the world, but this knowledge is not something external to G-d as our knowledge is external to us. G-d's knowledge can not change, increase or decrease as our knowledge does as we mature and later become enfeebled, for a *sina quo non* of G-d is that He does not change. The Creation cannot have made any difference to G-d. He must be the very same G-d after Creation as before Creation. This, of course, defies human understanding, but this should come as no surprise, for G-d indeed surpasses human understanding. What we can understand, however, is that such a G-d must exist in order that we should be able to come to grips with 'understanding' the Creation of the world insofar as we can understand this. Our conclusion is that the fact of Creation must be the origin of the world, though this fact transcends our understanding. Thus, even though Creation is an act of G-d that in some sense extends beyond His essence as this is understood by the human mind, nonetheless, it is compatible with the absolute unity of G-d and the world, though this unity as well as the creative act itself defy human understanding.

It is interesting to note that for Maimonides and the philosophy of Chabad, faith in G-d is not described as a belief that G-d exists. Both Maimonides and the literature of Chabad claim that reasonable or rational support for this belief can be found though they may not amount to a demonstration or proof. However, the absolute unity of G-d with the world defies human comprehension altogether and about this nothing can be said. This is what must be accepted on faith alone and this is the meaning of the pronouncement, "Hear O' Israel, G-d our G-d, G-d is One." This is interpreted to mean not just that there is only one G-d and not two or more, but that G-d and

the world are one and unified. It is this mysterious and baffling unity of G-d and the world that is the motif of Jewish mysticism found in the Kabbalah and in Hasidic literature generally. Furthermore it is the notion of Creation that has the most important existential implications for man. It is G-d as a loving and compassionate Creator in whom we find comfort and to whom we pray. No one ever prays to the G-d of the philosophers, i.e., an omniscient, necessary Being. G-d's Creation of the world furthermore implies a purpose to the world and everything in it. This lends meaning to life in a way that cannot be attained by pursuing one's self-interest. The whole power of the idea of G-d in the life and actions of human beings flows from this notion of G-d as Creator and the unique role that G-d plays in our lives is inseparable from this idea that was introduced to the world for the first time in the first sentence of the Hebrew Bible.

In all this, we assume that G-d is good and His creation of the world is also good and serves some good purpose which is connected with the purpose of human life generally. This assumption, however, does not follow from anything we have said so far. G-d's goodness, as we shall see, requires a separate argument in itself which is rightfully, the subject of a different paper.