

THE RAMBAM ON TORAH AND SCIENCE

THE RIDDLE OF THE FOURTH IKAR

סמנר מכללת מבשרת ירושלים

A] The Accurate Wording of the 4th Ikar

1. **הקדמות:** והוא, שזה האחד המתואר הוא הקדמון בהחלט, וכל נמצא זולתו הוא בלתי קדמון ביחס אליו. והראיות לזה בכתובים הרבה. וזה היסוד הרביעי הוא שמורה עליו מאמר (דברים לג:ז) *מֵעֵנָה אֱלֹהֵי קָדָם*. ודע כי היסוד היותר גדול של תורת משה רבינו הוא היות העולם מחודש, המציאו ה' ובראו אחר ההעדר הגמור. וזה שתראני סובב סביב ענין קדמותו על דעת הפילוסופים, הוא כדי שיהא המופת על מציאותו יתעלה - מוחלט, כמו שביארתי ובררתי ב'מורה'

רמב"ם - הקדמה לפ' חלק, משנה סנבדרין¹

B] 3 Mediaeval World Views on Creation

(i) The traditional Jewish approach - creation ex nihilo

That G-d created the world from total nothingness

(ii) Aristotle - eternity of the world without creation

That the physical matter in the universe today had **always** existed in essence but simply changes form as time moves on. Thus the physical universe is eternal and was not 'created' at all

(iii) Plato - creation using eternal matter

That G-d will not do the impossible and create something from nothing. Rather, He created the world from material which had always existed, albeit in a transient form

C] The Dangers of Aristotle

2. If we were to accept the Eternity of the Universe as taught by Aristotle - that everything in the Universe is the result of fixed laws, that Nature does not change, and that there is nothing supernatural - then we would necessarily be in opposition to the foundation of our religion. We would disbelieve all miracles and signs and certainly reject all hopes and fears derived from Scripture, unless the miracles are also explained figuratively. The Allegorist school amongst the Muslims have done this, and have thereby arrived at absurd conclusions.

If, however, we accepted the Eternity of the Universe in accordance with the second of the theories which we have expounded above (2:23), and assumed, like Plato, that the heavens are also transient, we would not be in opposition to the fundamental principles of our religion. This theory would not imply the rejection of miracles, but, on the contrary, would admit them as possible. The Scriptural text might have been explained accordingly, and many expressions might have been found in the Bible and in other writings that would confirm and support this theory. But there is no need to do so as long as the theory has not been proved. Since there is no convincing proof, this theory need not be considered, nor should the other one. We take the text of the Bible literally and say that it teaches us a truth which we cannot prove. The miracles are evidence for the correctness of our view.

Accepting the Creation, we find that miracles are possible, that Revelation is possible, and that every difficulty in this question is removed.

מורה נבוכים ב:כה

D] The Rambam's Esotericism

3. One of seven causes should account for contradictory or contrary statements to be found in any book

The fifth cause: is a necessary methodology which must be adopted when teaching profound matters which are difficult to explain. Namely, a difficult premise must sometimes be mentioned and assumed (although it should really have been explained properly), in order to illustrate some easier subject which has to be taught first

The teacher is forced to forgo a thorough explanation of the premise and must be prepared to give a superficial understanding. He should not get into the full detail, but should rather leave it on a level that the students can understand, so that they will be able to grasp what they have to right now. Later, at the appropriate time, he can treat the issue more thoroughly and develop it fully.

.....

The seventh cause: in speaking about very profound matters it is necessary to conceal some parts and to disclose others. Sometimes, in the case of certain statements, this requires that the discussion proceed on the basis of a certain premise, whereas in another place the discussion will proceed on the basis of another contradictory premise. It is best that the average [reader] should not be at all aware of the contradiction. The author accordingly uses some device to conceal it.

Whether contradictions due to the seventh cause are to be found in the books of the Prophets is a matter for further study and investigation. Inconsistencies in works of philosophy are due to the fifth and seventh cause. In the *Midrashim* and the *Haggadah* there are to be found also contradictions due to the seventh cause

Inconsistencies that are to be found in this book are due to the fifth and seventh causes. Be aware of this, understand it well and think very carefully about it, so that you will not be confused by some of the chapters

מורה נבוכים הקדמה

E] Did the Rambam (also) subscribe to the Eternity of the Universe

E1] Use of Eternity of the Universe in his philosophical proof of G-d

4. Twenty-five of the propositions which are used in the proof for the existence of God, or in the arguments demonstrating that God is neither a corporeal nor material being, or that He is One, have been fully established and their correctness is beyond doubt. Aristotle and the Peripatetics who followed him have proved each of these propositions. There is, however, one proposition which we do not accept - namely, the proposition which affirms the Eternity of the Universe, but we will admit it for the present, because by doing so we shall be enabled clearly to demonstrate our own theory.

מורה נבוכים הקדמה לחלק ב'

5. We have thus shown that whether we believe in Creation ex Nihilo, or in the Eternity of the Universe, we can prove the existence of God by demonstrative arguments.

מורה נבוכים ב:ב

E2] Acceptance that the Torah verses do not negate Eternity of the Universe

6. We do not reject the [theory of] the Eternity of the Universe just because certain passages in Scripture confirm [the theory of] Creation; for such passages are not more numerous than those in which God is represented as a corporeal being; nor is it impossible or difficult to find for them a suitable interpretation. We might have explained them in the same manner as we did in respect to the Incorporeality of God. We should perhaps have had an easier task in showing that the Scriptural passages referred to are in harmony with the theory of the Eternity of the Universe if we accepted the latter, than we had in explaining the anthropomorphisms in the Bible when we rejected the idea that God is corporeal.

For two reasons, however, we have not done so, and have not accepted the Eternity of the Universe. First, the Incorporeality of God has been demonstrated by proof: [thus] those passages in the Bible, which in their literal sense contain statements that can be refuted by proof, can and must be interpreted otherwise. But the Eternity of the Universe has not been proved. A mere argument in favour of a certain theory is not sufficient reason to reject the literal meaning of a Biblical text and explaining it figuratively, when the opposite theory can be supported by an equally good argument.

מורה נבוכים ב:כה

E3] Acceptance that Platonic Eternity is not against Jewish thought

7. If, however, we accepted the Eternity of the Universe in accordance with the second of the theories which we set out above (2:23) and assumed, like Plato, that the universe is transient, we should not be in opposition to the fundamental principles of our religion; **this theory would not imply the rejection of miracles, but, on the contrary, would admit them as possible. The Scriptural text might have been explained accordingly, and many expressions might have been found in the Bible and in other writings that would confirm and support this theory.** But there is no necessity for this expedient, so long as the theory has not been proved

מורה נבוכים ב:כה

8. ושאלת החדוש והקדמות עמוקה, וראיות שתי הטענות שוות, עד שתכריע החדוש הקבלה מאדם ונח ומשה בנבואה אשר היא יותר נאמנת מן ההקשה. ואם היה מצטרך בעל תורה להאמין ולהודות בהיולי קדמון ועולמות רבים קודם העולם הזה, לא היה בזה פגם באמונתו, כי העולם הזה הוא חדש מזמן ידוע ותחלת האדם אדם ונח

ספר הכוזרי מאמר א אות סז

E4] Correspondence between the Rambam's views on Eternity and on Prophecy

9. There are the same number of different opinions concerning Prophecy as concerning the Eternity or Non-Eternity of the Universe. For we have shown that those who assume the existence of God as proved may be divided into three classes, according to the view they take on the question of whether the Universe is Eternal or not. Similarly there are three different opinions on Prophecy ...

1. Among those who believe in Prophecy..... there are some ignorant people who think as follows: God selects any person He pleases, inspires him with the spirit of Prophecy, and entrusts him with a mission. It makes no difference whether that person be wise or stupid, old or young; provided he be, to some extent, morally good ...

2. The philosophers hold that prophecy is a certain faculty of man in a state of perfection, which can only be obtained by study. Although the faculty is common to the all people, yet it is not fully developed in each individual, either on account of a deficiency in the individual's character, or some other external cause..... It is only brought to a state of perfection in some individuals, and not in all; Accordingly, it is impossible that an ignorant person should be a prophet; or that a person who was not a prophet the evening before should, unexpectedly on the following morning, find that he is a prophet, as if prophecy were a thing that could be found unintentionally.

3. The third view is that which is taught in Scripture, and which forms one of the principles of our religion. It coincides with the opinion of the philosophers in all points except one. For we believe that, even if one has the capacity for prophecy, and has duly prepared himself, it may yet happen that he does not actually prophesy. In that situation, it is the will of God [that withholds from him the use of the faculty]. For the laws of Nature demand that every one should be a prophet, who has a proper physical constitution, and has been duly prepared as regards education and training. If that person is not a prophet, he is in the same position as a person who, like Jeroboam (1 Kings 13), is deprived of the use of his hand, or of his eyes, as was the case with the army of Syria, in the history of Elisha (2 Kings 6:18)

מורה נבוכים ב:לב

Aristotelian Eternity ----- *The Philosopher's View of Prophecy*
Fully Natural Fully Natural

Creation Ex Nihilo ----- *The Ignorant View of Prophecy*
Fully Supernatural Fully Supernatural

Platonic Eternity ----- *The Torah View of Prophecy*
Natural with G-d's Intervention Natural with G-d's Intervention

E5] Approach in the Mishne Torah

10. חמשה הן הנקראים מינים: האומר שאין שם אלוה ואין לעולם מנהיג, והאומר שיש שם מנהיג אבל הן שנים או יותר, והאומר שיש שם רבון אחד אבל שהוא גוף ובעל תמונה, וכן האומר שאינו לבדו הראשון וצור לכל, וכן העובד כוכב או מזל וזולתו כדי להיות מליץ בינו ובין רבון העולמים כל אחד מחמשה אלו הוא מין..... כשגת הראשון: **7: וכן האומר שאינו לבדו הראשון. א"א כאותו שאמר אלהיכם אייר גדול היה אלא שמלא לו סמנים גדולים תהו ובהו חושך ומים ורוח, ובהם עשה מה שעשה**

רמב"ם הלכות תשובה פרק ג הלכה ז

E6] Is Creation based on a pre-existing rationale?

11. [Man's] actions are divided into four classes; they are either purposeless, unimportant, in vain, or good. I maintain that no intelligent person can assume that any of the actions of God can be in vain, purposeless, or unimportant. According to our view, and the view of all that follow the Law of Moses, all actions of God are "very good." Thus Scripture says, "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good".....Those who adopt the absurd idea that God's actions are utterly purposeless, and refuse to consider them as the result of His wisdom, are afraid they might otherwise be compelled to admit the theory of the Eternity of the Universe.....

מורה נבוכים ג:כה

E7] Classical Interpretations of the Rambam's approach

The following classical interpreters of the Rambam all considered that the Rambam's esoteric belief was inclined towards Eternity, rather than Creation:-

- R. Shmuel ibn Tibbon (1162-1232)
- R. Yosef ibn Kaspi (1280-1340) - commentary on Guide 1:9, 2:13
- R. Nissim b. Moshe - Ma'aseh Nissim 223
- R. Profiat Duran - commentary on Guide 1:9
- R. Moshe of Narbonne - Pirkei Moshe 302-3²

F] A Synthesis - Creation and Eternity - Both true in an irreducible dichotomy³

12. יח ומלכי צדק מלך שלם הוציא לחם ויין והוא כהן לאל עליון: יט ויברכהו ויאמר ברוך אברהם לאל עליון קנה שמים וארץ: כ וברוך אל עליון אשר מגן צדיק בידו ויתן לו מעשר מכל: כא ויאמר מלך סדם אל-אברהם תן לי הנפש והרכש קחלק: כב ויאמר אברהם אל-מלך סדם הרמתי ידי אל-ה' אל עליון קנה שמים וארץ:

בראשית יד:יח-כב

13. [Creation] is the first theory, and it is undoubtedly a fundamental principle of the Law of our teacher Moses; it is next in importance to the principle of God's Unity. Do not follow any other theory. Abraham, our father, was the first that taught it, after he had established it by philosophical research. He proclaimed, therefore, "the name of the Lord the God of the Universe" (ה' א-ל עולם) (Gen. 21:33); and he had previously expressed this theory in the words, "The Possessor of heaven and earth" (Gen 14:22)

מורה נבוכים ב:ג

14. We must also consider the four different terms employed in expressing the relations of the heavens to God, *Boreh* (Creator), *Oseh* (Maker), *Koneh* (Possessor), and *E-I* (G-d)..... [I]n reference to the Universe which comprises the totality of the Creation, Scripture employs the verb *bara*, which we explain as meaning that he produced something from nothing; *kanah*, "he possessed," because G-d rules over them like a master over his servants. For this reason He is also called, "The Lord of the whole earth" (Jos. 3:11-13); *Ha-adon*, "the Lord" (Exod. 23:17). And since one cannot be a master unless there exists something that is in one possession (*kinyan*), **and this would seem to indicate a belief in the Eternal existence of primal matter**, it therefore uses the expressions *bara* and *asah*

מורה נבוכים ב:ל

2. See further Shapiro, Marc: The Limits of Orthodox Theology p77

3. For further detail listen to Rabbi Meir Triebitz's full shiur at <http://hashkafacircle.com/shiurim/ikarim/13-ikkarim-06-creation-ex-nihilo/>