

DA'AT TEVUNOT - SECTION 3: CHAPTER 4

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Da'at Tevunot 3:4 (¶'s 116 [beg.])

1.

Ramchal is about to offer something that will serve as a prelude to what's to follow ¹. It's that even though G-d certainly had the ability from the first to create a universe before He actually created it, He still and all can't be said to have had a mere "potential" for doing it which then had to be "actualized" ².

In fact, believing that He only potentially had that ability and that it had to be actualized is one of the mistaken assumptions made by those who believed that the universe is eternal ³.

2.

The truth of the matter is that since it's simply impossible for us to comprehend anything about G-d Himself ⁴ before He created the universe ⁵, it follows then that we can't speak about states of "potentiality" or of "actualization", since that would necessitate arguments about things passing from a "potential" state of before creation to one of them being "actually created" afterwards, and we're not equipped to do that.

What's true instead is that G-d created the notions and realities of "potential" and "actualization" along with everything else at the point of creation, and He then used that system to set everything in linear space and time ⁶.

That's why we're taught that "(The phrase) 'In the beginning' ⁷ is also a statement of creation" (Rosh Hashanah 32a), even though it's different from all the others ⁸. Because the phrase "In the beginning" refers to the universe in toto in its potential state before it was actualized.

it's just that once G-d created the potential state, everything then actualized by means of the aforementioned "emanations".

Footnotes:

¹ Let's quickly lay out the flow of ideas here so far and where they'll lead. Recall that the overarching subject at hand is the why's and wherefore's of wrong and injustice (see 3:1). Along the way we discussed the "emanations" that G-d uses to manage the cosmos (3:2) which will be cited below and play a major role in the creation of wrong and injustice. We then learned about the role of G-d's will in those emanations (3:3), and we're about to dwell on another truism that will help explain the existence of wrong and injustice.

All of this seeming obfuscation is unavoidable, we're afraid. For as we'd indicated very early on, one has to keep his "eye on the ball" when studying *Da'at Tevunot* (see 1:1:1), as so much is discussed in depth here that's of such importance that a lot of groundwork has to be laid in order to understand the truths to be revealed.

Much of what's touched on in this chapter will be discussed in 7:11 below, and was cited to a degree in 1:19:2 above. Also see *Moreh Nevuchim* 2: 14, 18.

² He can't be said to have changed from "being potentially able to" create the universe to "actually able to", as His pristine self doesn't experience change.

³ Those who believed that G-d had a latent trait that could only be actualized if a universe existed would then argue that since He's eternal, then a universe in which He could eventually manifest that trait had to have always existed, too. But that's not so.

⁴ And His "environment".

⁵ Ramchal discussed this before; see 2:7 above for example. His point in repeating it here is to underscore the fact that even though we're discussing the pre-creation state of things, we're still and all not touching upon His inherent self.

⁶ The idea of things being purposefully made to proceed from "potential" to "actual" is discussed here because the analogous idea of things proceeding from "cause" to "effect" -- which is a major pattern that G-d uses in His management of the universe -- will be cited in 3:5 below. The point again is that all of that had to have been created outright; it isn't an inherent part of reality.

The other point is that their creation underscores just how radically *thorough* the act of creation was. We're conditioned to thinking that there has never been a time when there wasn't "time" (or, the notions of "before" and "after", "potential" and actual, and "cause" and effect") and that there'll never be a time without any of that, as if they were all set and fundamental elements of reality. In fact, we're also conditioned to think of "reality" as we know it to be a fundamental element of the cosmos, and that without it there'd simply be no existence.

The truth is that everything but everything both abstruse and concrete had to have been created by

G-d. Each instance of "something" was created anew out of the essential "nothingness" that preceded it. Time, reality, potentiality, cause, and everything else in the here-and-now could have remained un-created and forever subsumed in the vast and terrible never-to-have-been.

⁷Which starts the statement that "*In the beginning* G-d created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1).

⁸Because the others begin with a directive that's immediately followed by a fulfillment, as in "G-d said, 'Let there be light' and there was light" (1:3), "And G-d said, 'Let there be an expanse in the midst of the water ... and it was so" (1:6-7), etc.