

The Purpose of Creation

K J Cronin

Introduction

Maimonides described the question of God's purpose for Creation as "*absurd*" and declared that there is no single and ultimate purpose for Creation. Hasdai Crescas, by contrast, believed that God's purpose for Creation is that man shall be together with God in a relationship of perfect and eternal love. I feel sure that Moses would have agreed with Hasdai Crescas, in general if not in specifics, and will explain why in what follows.

However, when considering the purpose of creation it is important to keep in mind one very important distinction, one that tends to get lost in the terminology employed when discussing this subject. That distinction is between God's purpose for Creation on the one hand and man's purpose within His creation on the other, the latter of which is frequently and ambiguously referred to as '*the meaning of life*'. Needless to say the two purposes are linked but they are not identical and it is important to identify both if we are to be able to confidently answer all questions pertaining to this most important subject. In what follows I will therefore seek answers to two questions: What is God's purpose for Creation as a whole, including God's purpose in creating man, and what is man's purpose in Creation?

In the following explanation Parts 1 and 2 are identical to Parts 1 and 2 of the *Explanation of the Meaning of the Name*. The reason for this is that both explanations derive from the same fundamental premises, which are that God is One in His Person and perfect in unity in the condition of His essence, and because the first eight passages are equally a part of both explanations.

The format is identical to that of the *Explanation of the Meaning of the Name*.

AN EXPLANATION OF THE PURPOSE OF CREATION

1

There is a God.

There is only one God.

God is the only creator.

The Creator must be before His creation can be.

Therefore,

God was before He created.

All that is not God is His Creation.¹

All-That-Is is God and His Creation.

God Was before He created.

Therefore, there was a condition of All-That-Is where there was only God.

Before He created, All-That-Is was God.

God is perfect.

Disunity is imperfect.

Therefore in God there is no disunity.

In God there is perfect unity.

God in Himself is perfect in unity.

Perfect unity is a condition in which there are no differences by which to be distinguished.

It is a condition of perfect oneness in all aspects of existence.

In perfect unity there is no distinction of one from another.

In perfect unity there is only one.²

Perfect unity is the condition of existence in which there are no differences by which
to be distinguished.

Therefore in the condition of existence where All-That-Is was God, and He was
perfect in unity, the only conceivable object of perception would have been identical
to the mind that would perceive it.³

In such a condition of existence there was neither subject to perceive nor object to be
perceived.

If there was neither subject to perceive nor object to be perceived, then there can have
been no activity of mind.

**Therefore in the condition of existence where All-That-Is was God, there can
have been no activity of mind.**

Awareness requires the activity of mind.

Therefore when All-That-Is was God, He was not aware.

Mind is the capability to experience existence.

Therefore the experience of existence requires the activity of mind.

**Therefore when All-That-Is was God, there was in Him no experience of
existence.**

All experience of existence is had by mind.

The mind of God is active only in His relation to other.⁴

All that is other than God is His creation.

**Therefore in God all experience of existence is had in His relation to His
creation.**

If there is no purpose to creation, then there is no reasonable way to account for suffering in the creation of One who is perfect in love and knowledge and to whom all power belongs.

Therefore God created with a purpose.

As God is perfect, so too must be His creation for the purpose that He has ordained for it.

4

God is perfect.

Before He created, All-That-Is was God.

Therefore, before He created, His was the condition of perfect solitary existence.

If perfect solitary existence had been for God the perfect condition of existence, then He would not have created, but He did create.

That God did create informs us that the condition of existence in which He is in relation only to His own creation is preferable to the condition of perfect solitary existence.

That the condition of existence in which He is in relation only to His own creation is preferable to the condition of perfect solitary existence informs us that He will not return to a condition of perfect solitary existence.

To do so would be to render all of His works purposeless or it would imply that God had made a mistake.

God does not act purposelessly and He does not make mistakes.

Therefore it is preferable to God that He shall be in eternal relation to His creation.

God is perfect.

Therefore the condition of existence that He prefers must also be perfect.

All knowledge is in God.

His knowledge is perfect and had no beginning.

Therefore before God created He had perfect knowledge of what will ultimately be the perfect condition of existence.

Therefore the condition of existence that God has purposed since before He created will be the perfect condition of existence.

5

God has purposed that He shall be in eternal relation to His creation. Therefore the condition of existence in which God will be in eternal relation to His creation will be the perfect condition of existence.

The perfect experience of existence can only be had in the perfect condition of existence.

Therefore God will have His perfect experience of existence in His eternal relation to His creation.

In the beginning creation was without form. Therefore in the beginning His experience of existence was entirely of Himself in relation to His formless creation.

If His experience of existence in relation to His formless creation had been His perfect experience of existence, then He would not have given His creation form; but He did give it form.

Therefore His perfect experience of existence will be one in which He is in eternal relation to His formed creation.

God could have formed His creation without causing it to be inhabited by living creatures.

If His experience of existence in relation to a cosmos without living creatures had been His perfect experience of existence, then He would not have created living creatures; but He did create living creatures.

Living creatures suffer.

God is perfect in love and knowledge and is the owner of all power.

He did not needlessly create suffering.

Therefore, because God's creatures suffer we can be certain that their presence in His creation is absolutely necessary for the accomplishment of His ultimate and perfect purpose.⁵

God's perfect experience of existence will be one in which He is in eternal relation to His formed creation.

Within His formed creation His creatures are absolutely necessary for the accomplishment of His ultimate purpose.

Therefore God's ultimate purpose in creating is that He shall have the perfect and eternal experience of existence in relation to His creatures.

6

God is perfect.

Therefore God is perfect in love.

Love is experienced only in the relation of one to another.

All that is other than God is His creation.

Therefore God's own creation is the sole object of His love.

God's ultimate purpose in creating is that He shall have the perfect and eternal experience of existence in relation to His creatures.

Therefore God's own creatures will ultimately be the sole object of His love.

God does not cease to love whatsoever He loves.

Therefore, because His creatures will ultimately be the sole object of His love, they must now be the sole object of His love.

Therefore God loves His creatures perfectly and absolutely.

God's ultimate purpose in creating is that He shall have the perfect and eternal experience of existence in relation to His creatures.

His experience of existence will be perfect only when His experience of love is perfect.

His creatures are the sole object of His love.

Therefore God's ultimate purpose in creating is that He shall have the experience of perfect and eternal love in relation to His creatures.

7

The experience of love cannot be perfect unless it is reciprocated.

Therefore God's experience of love will be perfect only when the love that He has for His creatures is reciprocated by them.

Within Creation it is only those creatures endowed with the capacity to love who can love God.

Therefore God's ultimate purpose in creating is that He shall have the experience of perfect and eternal love in relation to those of His creatures who are endowed with the capacity to love Him.⁶

8

God's ultimate purpose in creating is that He shall have the experience of perfect and eternal love in His relation to those of His creatures who are endowed with the capacity to love Him.

His purpose in creating will not be fully realised until those of His creatures endowed with the capacity to love Him reciprocate the love that He has for them.

Therefore the purpose that God has ordained for all creatures who are endowed with the capacity to love Him is to love Him as fully as they are able.

Therefore the individual purpose of each and every creature endowed with the capacity to love God is to love Him as fully as they are able.

We are such creatures.

7

**Therefore the individual purpose of each and every one of us is to love God
as fully as we are able.⁷**

It is for this reason alone that He has created us.⁸

9

Our purpose in Creation is articulated as follows in the first two verses of the most important prayer in Judaism; the Shema.

**“Hear, O Israel! Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone.
You shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul
and with all your might.” (Deuteronomy 6:4-5)**

Conclusion

That is why I believe Moses would have been in at least general agreement with Hasdai Crescas.^{9 10 11}

The reader will recall that I set out above to identify both the purpose that God has for His creation and our individual purpose within His creation. The former of these ends Part 7 of the explanation and reads: *God's ultimate purpose in creating is that He shall have the experience of perfect and eternal love in relation with those of His creatures who are endowed with the capacity to love Him.* The latter of them ends Part 8 of the explanation and reads: *Therefore the individual purpose of each and every one of us is to love God as fully as we are able.*

To love God is one of the 613 commandments traditionally identified in the Torah. However, we are also commanded to fear God (Deut.4:10, 6:13, 10:20) and some might understandably wonder how these two commandments can be reconciled, especially in the same person and at the same time. Indeed some people might wonder why anyone should fear God at all. That He has complete power over the whole of Creation is obviously good enough reason to fear Him, but many will know from experience that those who pay no heed to God are not directly struck down and the possibility of being struck down in some manner after they die is apparently too remote to be persuasive. However, I believe there is a much better reason to fear God,

especially for those who already love Him. That reason finds expression in the concept of *Devekut*, the mystical cleaving to God that in Kabbalah refers to the experience of both loving God and fearing Him.¹²

Many people wish to get as close as possible to God while they are alive and for the thinker the effort to do so includes thinking our way towards Him. I take it as axiomatic that the more we understand of God through contemplation the more do we know Him in reality, and the more we know Him in reality the greater will be His presence in our lives, and the greater His presence in our lives the greater an impact will His Personal reality make upon us. Under certain circumstances that impact can be so great as to cause us to experience fear. I believe that the experience of fearing God is an entirely natural response to an authentic encounter with the infinitely impressive Personal reality that is God. Perhaps this fear is the experience of one who is limited encountering the One who is unlimited, of the finite encountering The Infinite. Or perhaps it is the experience of the creature encountering the ineffably awesome mystery and perfection of their Creator. Whatever the reason, I do believe that it is both entirely natural and deeply spiritually healthy to experience fear of God.

When contemplating God causes the thinker to experience fear, I believe that fear will in time always result in an increase in love for Him. I say so because when we experience fear of God through contemplation, we do so because we have come to understand Him more fully, and in that greater understanding we encounter Him more fully, and in that fuller encounter we grow in love for Him because, after all, He is perfect. Perhaps that is why it is written that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge (Prov.1:7, 2:5, 9:10).

This is why I have no doubt that the commandment to fear God is not only reasonable but also highly desirable and second only in desirability to loving Him. To love God with all of our heart and with all of our soul and with all of our might is in my opinion and without any doubt the ultimate purpose of all of our strivings.

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References and Endnotes

¹ That is to say, God created all that is not Him and before He created there was only Him. I have made this point in two different ways and in successive lines because I particularly want to impress it upon all who are contemplating God to any extent. There is no more fundamental and crucial an understanding of God than that before He created He was All-That-Is; the totality of Existence, besides Whom there was none other.

² For an authoritative statement of the Jewish understanding of the perfect unity of God, see Maimonides' *Guide*, Ch.51 (LI), where he puts it as follows: "*Belief in unity cannot mean essentially anything but the belief in one single homogenous uncompounded essence; not in a plurality of ideas but in a single idea. Whichever way you look at it, and however you examine it, you must find it to be one, not dividing itself in any manner or for any reason into two ideas. No plurality must be discoverable in it either in fact or in thought*" (Quoted from: *Maimonides, The Guide of the Perplexed, An Abridged Edition with Introduction and Commentary by Julius Guttmann, Translated from the Arabic by Chaim Rabin*, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1995, p.67-68).

Pines translates the same passage as follows: "*For there is no oneness at all except in believing that there is one simple essence in which there is no complexity or multiplication of notions, but one notion only; so that from whatever angle you regard it and from whatever point of view you consider it, you will find that it is one, not divided in any way and by any cause into two notions; and you will not find therein any multiplicity either in the thing as it is outside of the mind or as it is in the mind*" (Pines S., Vol. I, University of Chicago press, 1963, p.113).

Alternatively, Friedlander's translation of this passage is available online at: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/jud/gfp/gfp061.htm>, p.69.

³ For an authoritative Jewish statement of this understanding see: Maimonides M. *Guide*, Ch.53 (LIII), where he put it thus: "*if by wisdom we understand the consciousness of self... the subject and the object of that consciousness are undoubtedly identical [as regards God]: for according to our opinion He is not*

composed of an element that apprehends and another that does not apprehend". Available online at: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/jud/gfp/gfp063.htm>, p.74.

Pines translates the same extract as follows: "*For we wished to signify by "knowledge" the apprehension of one's own essence. Now the essence that apprehends is undoubtedly the same as the essence that is apprehended. For in our opinion He is not composed of two things, the thing that apprehends and another thing that does not apprehend.*" (Pines, Vol. I, p.122).

⁴ See the *Explanation of the Meaning of the Name* on this website.

⁵ The concept of *absolute need* does not imply any imperfection in the Personal existence of God. An absolute need is a need that is intrinsic to and implied by the perfection of His existence. It is because He is perfect that He cannot but conform to the logical necessities of His own perfection. Moreover, an absolute need is not a need in the Personal existence of God; it is a need in the realm of existence.

An example of such an absolute need is to be found in the *Explanation of the Meaning of the Name* where I identified an absolute need for there to have been something other than God in the realm of existence in order for Him to have become aware. Before He created all that is other than Him, God was All-That-Is, and so there was nothing else for Him to be aware of. The perfect unity of His essence excludes the possibility of God having become aware of Himself without first becoming aware of something other than Himself and so there was an absolute need for there to be something other than Him in the realm of existence in order for Him to become aware. Without that 'something other' God could not have become aware and hence it was an *absolute need*. That does not imply any need or imperfection in God any more than saying that He as Creator needs a creation in order to be Creator. It is simply a logical and ontological necessity of His Personal existence.

At this point in the explanation I am identifying His creatures as an absolute need in His creation because there is otherwise no way to make reasonable sense of the suffering they endure in the creation of One who is perfect in love and knowledge and to whom all power belongs. His creatures must be absolute necessary in His creation because if they were not then their presence in it would contradict His perfection.

Nor is it difficult to make sense of the suffering of His creatures providing it is considered dispassionately and providing it is kept clearly in mind that before God created He was absolutely and perfectly One and All-That-Is. It is this that informs us that Creation must somehow have come forth from His essence (the kabbalistic concept of ‘emanation’) and so His creatures are truly and literally from Him. He is the “*Father-and-Mother*” of us all, as stated in the exchange between Honi the Circle Maker and Simeon ben Shetach in the Talmud, Berakhot 19a³. In Bialik and Ravnitzky’s *The Book of Legends (Legends from the Talmud and Midrash*, NY: Schocken Books, 1992, p.203, n.2), the term “*Father and Mother*” in Berakoth 19a³ is described as “*a very bold epithet for God the Creator*”.

Given this understanding, the question that must be asked is how does The Perfect One become truly more than one? How does He who is perfectly One and All-That-Is come to be in true relationships with the persons who are His creatures and who are at once from His own essence and yet absolutely distinct from Him? After all, for creation to be understood as having a Divinely ordained purpose there must be a true relationship between God and His creatures and that true relationship requires the Person of the Creator and the persons of His creatures to be absolutely distinct. It is the creation of that distinction that necessarily and inevitably results in the suffering of His creatures. It is not God’s desire that we should suffer. It simply cannot be any other way because it is intrinsic to and implied by the perfect unity of His essence. Moreover, I believe that it is a very important part of our job in Creation to do all that we can to relieve the burden of suffering within it, which we can do by showing compassion to all of God’s sentient creatures. Such compassion for His creatures is a way of loving God in practice.

⁶ This is the purpose that God has for His creation, and so is the first of the two answers we are seeking. There remains the question of our purpose in His creation, which I will now address.

⁷ This is our purpose in God’s creation and so is the second of the two answers we are seeking.

⁸ Lest this might give the impression that God is acting selfishly and is indifferent to the suffering of His creatures, I will clarify. Think of God's relationship with His creatures by analogy to the relationship a parent has with their child. The parent can choose not to have the child at all and so there will be no new person to experience anything. If the parent does choose to have a child in the hope that it will be happy and that there will be a bond of mutual love between them, then there is no way to accomplish that without being the original cause of whatever hardships and sufferings that child endures. The parent does not want their child to struggle and suffer, but these are a greater or lesser part of all normal and wholesome lives and so there is no way for the parent to safeguard their children from these travails except by being a good parent. We are all the children of God. If He did not create us then we would not suffer but we would also not have the possibility of great joy and love and the greatest joy of all that is being in relation to God for eternity. So He creates us, but like any parent He cannot safeguard us from hardship and suffering if we are to grow into individuals who can live in true relation to him and thus have the possibility of a mutually loving relationship with Him. It is ultimately we who benefit from being created. God does not need each one of us but each one of us does need Him. The choice is ours but His purpose will be brought to pass with or without us.

⁹ Crescas H., *Sefer Or Adonai*. The *Sefer Or Adonai* is not available in English but substantial extracts of it are available in: Wolfson H., *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle*, (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1929). An extract from Wolfson's text is available at: <http://www.dvjc.org/discussion/messages/323.html>, where you will find the following: "*Just as objects produced by men have a purpose, so the Torah, produced by the Prime Intellect (God), must have purpose. It is the purpose of the Torah to effect in the one to whom it is addressed love for man, correct opinions, and physical felicity, which are all subsumed under one final goal—spiritual felicity, the infinite love for God. But even for God, the Commander, the Torah has a purpose, namely to bestow His infinite love upon His creatures. Against both Platonism and Aristotelianism, Crescas argues that God's love for man is stronger than man's love for God, for God's infinite essence is the source of both loves. Man's love for God results in devekut ("conjunction" or "communion") with God; for among spiritual beings, as well as among physical objects, love and concord are the causes of*

perfection and unity. Love, the purpose of Torah, is the purpose also of man, and, further, of all that is”.

¹⁰ To read what Maimonides has to say about the purpose of creation, see: Maimonides M., *Guide of the Perplexed*, Part 3, Ch.13 (XIII), available at: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/jud/gfp/gfp149.htm>.

The following are extracts from his essay on the subject and a brief analysis of my own. His words are in italics and my comments in brackets.

Page 1....“*Intelligent persons are much perplexed when they inquire into the purpose of the Creation. I will now show how absurd this question is.*” (His opening words.)

Line 2.....“*An agent that acts with intention must have a certain ulterior object in that which he performs. This is evident, and no philosophical proof is required.*” (Here, despite his opening words, he appears to be acknowledging that God must have created with a purpose.)

Line 9.....“*According to these propositions it is clear that the purpose is sought for everything produced intentionally by an intelligent cause; that is to say, a final cause must exist for everything that owes its existence to an intelligent being*” (Again he seems to be acknowledging that there must be an ultimate purpose to creation because God is ‘an intelligent agent’.)

Page 273, L.8.....“*But the existence of an ultimate purpose in every species, which is considered as absolutely necessary by every one who investigates into the nature of things, is very difficult to discover: and still more difficult is it to find the purpose of the whole Universe*” (This is where his difficulty with the subject becomes apparent and where his thinking begins to go astray. Maimonides evidently hadn’t made sense of the purpose of creation to his own satisfaction and in order not to leave his readers in a state of perplexity he did the only other thing he could do, which was to set about demonstrating that there is no purpose to creation.)

Page 274, L.5..... “*Even if the Universe existed for man's sake and man existed for the purpose of serving God, as has been mentioned, the question remains, what is the end of serving God? He does not become more perfect if all His creatures serve Him and comprehend Him as far as possible; nor would He lose anything if nothing existed beside Him*” (Note that Maimonides here considers the possibility of man having

been created for a purpose but his conception of God was such that he could not consider a true relationship between God and man, for which see Guide Ch.52 (LII) p.71 at <http://www.sacred-texts.com/jud/gfp/gfp062.htm>. Maimonides thought of God primarily in terms of His essential (metaphysical) perfection and I believe did so to the detriment of His Personal perfection. Of course we do not have any effect upon God's essential perfection but we must have an effect upon His Personal experience of perfection or else we wouldn't be here, as I have explained above.)

Page 274, L.10.....*"We must in continuing the inquiry as to the purpose of the creation at last arrive at the answer, It was the Will of God, or His Wisdom decreed it; and this is the correct answer"* (At this stage it is clear that Maimonides has in fact given up discovering the purpose of creation.)

Page 276, L.7.....*"Just as we do not ask what is the purpose of God's existence, so we do not ask what was the object of His will, which is the cause of the existence of all things with their present properties"* (With sincere respect to Maimonides, this statement is nonsense. The question of God's existence having a purpose is not only inadmissible; it is absurd. It is absurd because even to entertain the notion of a purpose beyond God is to posit a cause for the existence of God, which is in turn to posit the existence of a creator of God, which is in turn to posit a god beyond God, which is absurd. The question of why God created has no rational connection with this absurdity and so this association is very misleading. I should stress that Maimonides was aware of the absurdity of considering a purpose for God's existence, and my criticism of him here is only that he should not have associated this absurdity with the entirely valid and extremely important question of God's purpose in creating simply in order to discredit this question.)

Page 277, L.5.....*"We must be content, and not trouble our mind with seeking a certain final cause for things that have none"* (In his concluding statement.)

¹¹ For an anthology of Jewish writings on the subject of the purpose of creation, see: Alter M., *What Is The Purpose Of Creation, A Jewish Anthology*, (NJ: Jason Armstrong Inc., 1995). Note that Crescas' opinion is not included in this anthology.

¹² See Scholem G., *Encyclopedia Judaica CD-ROM Edition*→*Kabbalah*→*The Basic Ideas of Kabbalah*→*The Mystic Way*→*Devekut*, (Jerusalem, Keter Publishing House Ltd.). See also: Deuteronomy 10:20, 11:22, 13:5 and 30:19-20.