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The topic of this book is “creation.” It breaks down into discussions of two distinct, but interrelated, questions: what does the universe look like, and what is its origin? The opinions about creation considered by Norbert Samuelson come from the Hebrew scriptures, Greek philosophy, Jewish philosophy and contemporary physics. His perspective is Jewish, liberal and philosophical. It is “Jewish” because the foundation of the discussion is biblical texts interpreted in the light of traditional rabbinic texts. It is “philosophical” because the subject matter is important in both past and present philosophical texts, and to Jewish philosophy in particular. Finally, it is “liberal” because the authorities consulted include heterodox as well as orthodox Jewish sources. The ensuing discussion leads to original conclusions about a diversity of topics, in the philosophy of religion, including the limits of human reason and religious faith, the character of religious belief, the relevance of scientific models to religious doctrine, and the nature of the creator/creature relationship between God and the universe.

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Preface

This book is the result of several radical revisions and close to twenty years of conversations about Judaism, philosophy and creation with friends, colleagues and students. I no longer am sure who contributed what to this final product, and I fear that I will not mention many who deserve recognition. But I will do the best that I can. The two primary forums that have allowed me to exchange ideas about creation were the graduate religious studies program at Temple University and the annual meetings of the Academy for Jewish Philosophy (AJP). I wish first to thank all of the students who have met with me on a regular basis over the past two decades to exchange ideas, read texts and argue (particularly Jacob Staub [Reconstructionist Rabbinical College], Michael Paley [Columbia University], Almut Bruckstein [Jerusalem], Martin Srajek [Champaign, Illinois] and Julius Simon [Philadelphia]), as well as my colleagues in the AJP who shared their own scholarship and ideas with me and offered open, constructive criticism of my own views as I worked them out.

A third avenue for learning available to me over the years has been Temple University's generous program of academic study leaves and faculty exchanges that enabled me to be a visiting scholar at several academic institutions, where I had exceptional opportunities to meet with scholars from all over the world and share ideas with them. In particular, I want to thank my colleagues at the Oxford University Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies in the winter of 1987 (notably Ron Nettler, Kyu Jung, and Daniel and Adini Frank) and at

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The Chicago Center for Religion and Science in the spring of 1992 (notably Phil Hefner and Tom Gilbert).

I mentioned above that this book has gone through several metamorphoses. It began as independent research on creation in various disciplines. At the initial level of study I received assistance from many who read first drafts of the chapters related to their expertise. I wish to express my thanks to all of them for making many thoughtful, critical suggestions that always resulted in my developing a richer, more precise, deeper understanding of the texts in question. These colleagues were Robert Wright (Temple University) [on Genesis], Ron Hathaway (Temple University) and Ken Seeskin (Northwestern University) [on the *Timaeus*], Menachem Kellner (Haifa University) [on the medieval commentaries], Gad Freudenthal (Chatenay-Malabry, France) [on Gersonides' philosophy], Don Lichtenberg (Indiana University) [on physics], and Tom Dean (Temple University) and Joseph Cohen (St. John's College) [on philosophy of religion].

The first person to see my entire manuscript was William Scott Green (University of Rochester). Through his careful reading and constructive criticism, I came to realize that I was trying to do too much in a single text. I separated my consideration of how the different Jewish and Western sources have interpreted creation from my discussion of the philosophical meaning inherent in the biblical text itself. My conclusions about the latter, thanks to the generous support of Jacob Neusner (University of South Florida), were published as part of the South Florida studies in the history of Judaism (*The First Seven Days: A Philosophical Commentary on the Creation of Genesis*. Atlanta, Scholars Press, 1992). But I had not yet decided on a proper format to present the historical study of creation that is the subject of this book until I had extensive conversations about my organizational problems with Peter Ochs (Drew University). No one's advice has been more important to me in completing this book than has Peter's.

I wish to dedicate this book to everyone whose personal affection has supported me over the years in this work. Learning and writing are extremely important parts of my life, but

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without their love all of my work would be empty. In particular, I want to thank my children who produced the most important creativity in my personal world – my *Enkelkinder* Ellie, Johnny, Annie and James. Finally, I want to single out James for thanks – because he specifically asked me to, but also because of his intelligence, inquiring mind, love of nature and mathematics, and (most important of all) because of his love of his SABA and SAVTAH.