

# The Historical, Philosophical, and Theological Groundwork for Jews' Relations to Other Religions

By Rabbi Dr. Elliot Dorff

(excerpted from Chapter III of his book *To Do the Right and the Good: A Jewish Approach to Modern Social Ethics*, Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2002, pp. 73-84)

I would like to suggest yet another understanding of theology to establish a firm foundation for Jewish relationships with other peoples in our time. It is based on the same three considerations that argue for pluralism within the Jewish community -- history, philosophy, and theology -- but their application to interfaith relations requires some careful thought.

Clearly, the question of how Jews should interact with non-Jews does not arise in matters of justice, commerce, or other, general human concerns, for there what governs Jewish behavior are Jewish conceptions of God as the Creator of us all and Jewish laws insisting that all people be treated fairly.<sup>1</sup> Later Jewish law went further: in order to establish good relations between Jews and non-Jews, Jews must help the poor and the sick of all religions and aid in burying their dead and in comforting their mourners.<sup>2</sup> That kind of care for others is unusual even for peoples in the modern world. Moreover, the ways in which Christians and others persecuted Jews throughout history make this high standard of civility in traditional Judaism remarkable: Jewish theology, unlike some versions of Christian and Muslim theology, did not blind its believers to the human necessity of being honest, fair, and caring toward others who believed differently.

The deeper question, then, is not practical, but theological -- namely, how can and should Jews understand the truth status of other religions? How shall we understand their moral claims and practices? Are other peoples simply deluded, or may their religions contain truths and values from which Jews can themselves learn? On the other hand, if other religions do contain truths and commendable values, why should Jews remain Jewish? Answering such questions about one's own religion clearly and convincingly is absolutely critical for people of all faiths if adherents of the various religions or of none are ever going to go beyond persecuting others, avoiding them, or, at best, merely tolerating them and advance to the point of actually understanding and appreciating them while at the same time retaining their own convictions and sense of identity.

## 1. History.

I shall apply my historical argument first to Western religions and then to Eastern faiths.

Historically, Christianity has been subject to change and redefinition at least as much as Judaism has, if not more. Within both faiths, even within the same denomination, creeds created centuries ago have continually changed, sometimes through outright amendment, sometimes through new interpretations, emphases, or applications, and sometimes through simply ignoring them. This constantly evolving nature of both Judaism and Christianity makes some of the faithful uneasy; they long for certainty and stability. Each religion, though, has retained its relevance and its dynamism only by opening itself to change.

The same is true about each faith's understandings of others. The Second Vatican Council's repudiation of blaming Jews living then or now for the death of Jesus, and the recent rejection by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America of Luther's many anti-Semitic writings, are relevant cases in point. Conversely, few modern Jews dismiss other faiths out of hand as being theologically false and morally bad; on the contrary, this very chapter is but one of many attempts to create a new Jewish understanding of other religions.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, history does not undermine a religious community's ability to draw boundaries and to take a strong stand on what it believes. Even though the contemporary Jewish community is much exercised over the question of who is a Jew, for example, it has uniformly and authoritatively determined that groups like Jews for Jesus are decidedly *not* Jews. The historically evolutionary nature of both faiths should, however, help contemporary Jews and Christians get beyond the feeling that the present articulation of their faith is the only one possible for a decent person to have; on the contrary, history should teach us that people of intelligence, morality, and sensitivity most likely exist in other faiths too.<sup>4</sup>

Muslims affirm the importance of not only the Koran, but also the oral traditions, the *hadith*. Moreover, Islam included various denominations, with Shi'ite and Sunni as the chief divisions but with many subdivisions within those (e.g., Ishma'ili). The historical record and the present reality of Islam, then, make it clear that it has developed in various forms.

However, Muslims -- even Muslim scholars -- are loathe to interpret their tradition historically. Not even the most liberal schools of Islam study the Koran with the modern historical and linguistic techniques of scholarship that many, although not all, Jews and Christians apply to their own scriptures and traditions. As a result, Muslims treat the Koran as only fundamentalist Jews and Christians see their respective Bibles -- i.e., as the direct and indubitable word of God. Muslim scholarship, then, frankly denies what non-Muslims would assert -- namely, that Islam from its earliest stages is the product of historical influences, that the Koran itself and all later Muslim sources and practices manifest the effects

of Judaism, Christianity, and the other cultures that Muslims saw and learned from in each age. Only when Muslims acknowledge that historical development in their own faith will they be open to relations with other faiths that are not exclusivist and triumphalist.

Awareness of Asian faiths should, if anything, make the point of this section -- that all faiths continually develop over time -- all the more compelling for devotees of all three Western faiths. Because Eastern religions differ from Judaism more extensively and obviously than the two other Western faiths do, and because the Eastern religions and peoples have not had a long history of conflict with Jews, as people of the other two Western faiths have had, Jews can view Asian religions more objectively and dispassionately than they see Christianity and Islam. The same, I would imagine, is true for adherents of Christianity and Islam (except, perhaps, for those Muslims living in countries like India, where they come into direct contact with devotees of Eastern religions). Moreover, much less is at stake in subjecting another religion to modern, critical analysis. Acknowledging that all of the world's faiths took a little from here and a little from there in shaping what has come down to us moderns as the particular form of contemporary religions will hopefully help Westerners recognize the same process of development in their own religion. That, in turn, should convince people of all religions that the present embodiment of their own faith's convictions will not likely be the way it will always be. Moreover, since even their own religion will inevitably change over time, the present form of it cannot be the only possible way for all people of intelligence and moral sensitivity to think and act.

The very awareness of historical development, then, should engender flexibility in understanding all religions, including one's own. Cognizance of the rampant borrowing among all cultures and religions should undermine exclusive claims to truth or goodness. Moreover, even if relations between people of specific faiths have not been good in the past, they *can* be reshaped in the present and future, for all religions change over time.

*Philosophy.* This realization is only reinforced when one turns from historical considerations to philosophical ones. In the previous chapter, I espoused the position of epistemological relativity in contrast to absolutism on the one side and relativism and subjectivism on the other. Relativity, when applied to interfaith relations, asserts that all human beings, whatever their background or creed, suffer from the same limitations on human knowledge. Many of us have sacred texts and traditions that, for us, reveal God's nature and will -- or, for non-theological traditions, ultimate reality and morality -- as clearly and fully as we think possible. We all must recognize, though, that other peoples make the same claim for their sacred texts and traditions. Moreover, we have no grounds outside the various traditions

to provide shared criteria to judge them; medieval Western philosophers tried to use reason to justify and compare all three Western faiths, but we now know that the rules of reason themselves vary with cultures and over generations. Therefore, we must either resort to vacuous and disingenuous debates like those of the Middle Ages about whose tradition is right, or we must finally confront the fact that none of us can know God's nature or will with absolute certainty.

At the same time, just as historical considerations like the interactions of nations and cultures do not make all faiths the same or spoil the significance of living by one specific faith, so too philosophical factors like the relativity of human knowledge do not undermine faith altogether. We may think that our particular understanding of God and all other religious topics is the correct one for all people, *as far as we can tell*. We may also advance arguments toward convincing others of its truth and worth and even of its preeminence over other faith claims. We must do so, however, knowing ahead of time that no human argument on these matters can be conclusive, for no person is omniscient and no human vantage point can claim inherent superiority over all others.

Moreover, we must recognize that part of the reason that the arguments for my faith seem most persuasive to me is because it is, after all, *my* faith and that of my family and my people.<sup>5</sup> One need not deny cognitive meaning to religion to take such a position, as A. J. Ayer, R. B. Braithwaite, and others did in the middle of the twentieth century,<sup>6</sup> for people of all faiths are trying to respond to objective reality as they see it; one need only be humble enough to recognize that none of us sees the world through transparent lenses, that we all view it through the lenses of our particular religion or philosophy of life and from one or another viewpoint, and that our autobiographical backgrounds inevitably do, and perhaps should, play a role in determining what we see and how we respond to it.<sup>7</sup>

This explains why I think that *Dominus Iesus*, the Vatican's document on interfaith relations issued on September 6, 2000, is based on a fundamental philosophical error. The document censures the spread of "religious relativism," "the mentality of indifferentism [that] leads to the belief that one religion is as good as another." Instead, while the Church has "sincere respect...for the religions of the world," followers of non-Christian faiths have "gravely deficient" chances for salvation, and other Christian churches have "defects," partly because they do not recognize the authority of the pope.<sup>8</sup>

The Vatican's mistake is to think that the only alternative to religious relativism is the kind of absolutism that the document embraces. As I have indicated above, proponents of all religions certainly have the right to like their own religion best and even to declare that among the various religions and philosophies of the world theirs most adequately articulates what is both true and good *as far as they can tell*. What they cannot do with philosophical warrant is proclaim that they have objective grounds

for preferring their faith, for the inevitable perspectivism of human knowledge means that no person has such grounds. Especially given the immense steps that the Vatican itself has taken in interfaith relations since the Second Vatican Council, it is both surprising and disappointing that this recent document seems to undermine all that progress. The Vatican, I would suggest, can satisfy both confidence in the rightness of Catholicism for Catholics and also outreach to people of other faiths if it instead adopts the epistemological relativity that I have been explaining and advocating.

Now that I have applied epistemological relativity to both internal, Jewish discussions and to external, interfaith matters, I would like to describe more of why it makes sense to think of human knowledge in that way. The stance I am advocating is, in Van Harvey's terminology, "soft perspectivism" rather than "hard perspectivism" or "non-perspectivism." Non-perspectivists claim that we look at the world through epistemologically transparent eyeglasses, that our personal and cultural differences make no difference whatsoever in how we see the world. Hard perspectivists, on the other end of the spectrum, maintain that one's perspective so strongly affects what one sees that it inevitably makes it impossible to understand, let alone learn from, those who see the world from other viewpoints. Instead of these two extremes, we should say, as soft perspectivists do, that we each have a perspective that influences how we think and act but that our perspectives are permeable enough so that we can all understand each other and even learn from each other.<sup>9</sup>

Later Hilary Putnam and Robert Nozick articulated the same approach from the other end, emphasizing the realism involved in it, even though the real world is always perceived through a particular lens. Thus, as they point out, it is erroneous to think of knowledge as our social conventions about what is true, where a statement is true if, and only if, it accords with a given society's "language game." That severs knowledge from any explicit tie to the real. On the other end of the spectrum, it is also wrong to assert "metaphysical realism," that is, that human beings can apprehend that which is beyond all human conception or possibility to know, namely, the world as it objectively is. Such a view ignores the limitations of human knowledge, especially the fact that none of us is an objective observer of the world, that we all see the world through conceptual lenses of one sort or another. We may be able to refine our own lens as we learn more about life, and we may even be convinced that we need to exchange our present lens for a new one, but there is no escaping the necessity of viewing the world from a particular vantage point and through some lens. Instead, we should embrace what they call "conceptual realism," where one affirms both the tie to the real and the need for a perspective to access it.<sup>10</sup> As Gordon Tucker has pointed out,<sup>11</sup> this last theory about knowledge avoids the tyranny that both of the other theories produce (either that of the society that claims to determine the truth or that of the

one person who somehow has absolute knowledge of the metaphysically real), and it opens the way for dissent, debate, and, I would add, democracy.

Westerners who are used to an "either/or" approach to truth in both their philosophy and religion will undoubtedly feel ill at ease with the "both/and" approach I am advocating. The religions of the Far East would find this approach quite compatible, for they have historically been inclusivists rather than exclusivists. That is, they have stated their convictions and practices and permitted individuals to adhere to them while simultaneously adopting other faiths. Rabbinic Judaism would also find my epistemological approach congenial, for, as we have seen in Chapter Three, the Rabbis understood that texts are open to multiple interpretations and that even impressive events like the revelation at Mount Sinai are experienced and understood differently by various people, each according to his or her abilities.

At the same time, this position does not entail that there is no such thing as knowledge and that people should therefore believe whatever suits them. The realism in the position I am espousing makes it possible to be right or wrong -- and to debate with others about which position is correct. Thus having strong convictions about the true and the good is compatible with a pluralistic approach to people of other faiths as well as one's own; I must just acknowledge that however much I believe in what I affirm, I am not omniscient and therefore may be wrong. I must therefore be open to discussions with people who hold other views in order to understand them, evaluate them, and either oppose them or learn from them.

Indeed, the only people who are philosophically ruled out of an accepting, pluralistic approach are those who maintain a brand of metaphysical realism, often coupled with fundamentalism, for such people insist that only they can be right. That cocksure stance is not only philosophically unfounded and intellectually fascist, often leading, when such people have power, to political fascism; it is also, in essence, an idolatrous worship of their own intelligence and views. For pluralism to take place, all people involved must have a much more accurate and humble understanding of their own knowledge, including the awareness that they may be wrong. At the same time, they must have the intellectual wherewithal and thoughtfulness to affirm convictions that they are prepared both to defend and to evaluate.<sup>12</sup> That stance, embracing epistemological relativity, soft perspectivism, and conceptual realism, has the double advantage of realistically describing human knowledge while simultaneously making pluralism and strong interfaith relations possible.

*Theology.* In addition to these historical and philosophical considerations, Judaism contains some important theological tenets that can be used to lay the groundwork for a genuine appreciation of

others. Many of the same sources that we reviewed in the last chapter to justify pluralism within the Jewish community, although originally intended for that context, can be applied, with varying degrees of stretching, to the interfaith context as well.

Thus, for example, the Rabbis' assertion of the uniqueness of both the bodies and thoughts of each individual is, of course, true for non-Jews as well as Jews. In those remarks, the plain meaning of the Rabbis' comments applies to non-Jews as well as Jews without any expansion of their comments whatsoever.

On the other hand, in claiming that at Sinai God did not reveal the truth about Himself or His will completely but rather wants us to argue with each other in each generation to discern it, the Rabbis clearly were talking about the conversations among Jews based on the Torah, and so applying that comment to non-Jews takes it beyond its intended context. Even so, biblical and rabbinic sources indicate that Jews learned about theological and moral matters from their discussions with non-Jews. Thus despite the fact that Job and his friends were not Jewish,<sup>13</sup> the Rabbis intentionally included the Book of Job in the biblical canon, undoubtedly because they knew that Job's discussion did indeed increase our knowledge of God and His ways. Indeed, much of the Bible, and especially the Wisdom literature (Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, etc.), reflects the significant influence of the ancient cultures near whom the Jews were living.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, the Talmud records a number of conversations between the Rabbis and non-Jews on theological and moral topics, including, for example, the theological questions posed by Tineius Rufus, the Roman governor of Palestine, to Rabbi Akiba.<sup>15</sup> In some of the talmudic conversations with heathens, the point is to demonstrate not only the superiority of Judaism, but also the difficulty of the topic. Thus in some cases the rabbi gives the non-Jew a facile answer, but then the rabbi's students say, "You have pushed him away with a [weak] reed, but what are you going to say to us?"<sup>16</sup> In all these biblical and Talmudic conversations with heathens, the Jews involved are stimulated by the non-Jews' questions and thoughts to real learning.

And yet there are some limitations to this line of reasoning as the basis for Jewish relations to other faiths. It may be the case that God wants us to think independently, but ultimately the Jewish tradition asserts that Judaism's Torah is God's true teaching, the one that all nations, according to the biblical Prophets, will ultimately learn.

One should note that Micah, a younger contemporary of Isaiah, copies the latter's messianic vision but then adds a line of his own that effectively changes it: "Though all the peoples walk each in the names of its gods, we will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever."<sup>17</sup> This is a decidedly pluralistic vision of Messianic times: every people shall continue to follow its own god. Even

so, Micah added this line *after* quoting Isaiah's vision that "the many peoples shall go and say: 'Come, let us go up to the Mount of the Lord, to the House of the God of Jacob, that He may instruct us in His ways, and that we may walk in His paths.' For instruction shall come forth from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Isaiah 2:3; Micah 4:2). Thus even for Micah, apparently, other gods and other visions of the good life might exist, but only Israel has the true understanding of God's will.

In sum, God may indeed want multiple conceptions of the divine, but traditional sources assign non-Jewish views to a clearly secondary status. God may like variety among His creatures, and He may hold non-Jews responsible only for what they could be expected to know (the seven Noahide laws); but ultimately only the Jews know what is objectively correct and good. This is liberal toleration -- and it should be appreciated as such -- but it certainly is not a validation of others' views. In that sense, it falls short of Rabbi Simon Greenberg's criterion for genuine pluralism -- namely, that "your ideas are spiritually and ethically as valid -- that is, as capable of being justified, supported, and defended -- as mine."<sup>18</sup> And, indeed, Greenberg himself may not have wanted to extend his thesis beyond disagreements among Jews.

I would take a somewhat broader view. It is only natural that the Jewish sources discussed above should reflect a tension between nationalism and universalism. God is, according to Jewish belief, the God of all creatures, but, at the same time, He chose the Jews to exemplify the standards He really wants for human life. This is how *Jews* understand God's will, the reason why Jews commit all their energies and, indeed, their very lives to Jewish belief and practice.

Despite this nationalistic side of the Jewish tradition, however, what ultimately rings through it is the Rabbis' assertion that non-Jews fully meet God's expectations by abiding by the Seven Noahide Laws and the Rabbis' statement that "The pious and virtuous of all nations participate in eternal bliss."<sup>19</sup> Jewish sources that speak about God wanting plural approaches to Him within the Jewish community can therefore apparently be applied, without too much tampering, to inter-communal relations as well. Of course, the same segments of the Jewish community that have difficulty with pluralism within the Jewish community would undoubtedly shun it in dealing with non-Jews, except on the most pragmatic of levels. For that matter, even some Jews committed to pluralism within the Jewish community would need to stretch their understanding and sensitivity to apply Jewish theology to interfaith relations. Nevertheless, a firm basis for this kind of theology exists within the Jewish tradition, and so theological as well as historical and philosophical considerations can and should make Jews open to serious interfaith discussions and motivate them to participate in many interfaith activities on behalf of the general good.



---

1. According to the Talmud (B. *Bava Metzia* 59b), the commandment to love the stranger and not to wrong him occurs 36 times in the Torah, including, for example, "You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Exodus 22:20); "You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the feelings of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt" (Exodus 23:9); "You shall love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Deuteronomy 9:19); and, perhaps most explicitly, "When a stranger resides among you in your land, you shall not wrong him. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt; I am the Lord your God" (Leviticus 19:33-34). Furthermore, "There shall be one law for the citizen and for the stranger who dwells among you" appears often in the Torah (e.g., Exodus 12:49; Leviticus 24:22; Numbers 15:15-16). These principles, together with the need to avoid the enmity of non-Jews, made Jews treat non-Jews with the same principles of justice that they used for themselves and even to bury the non-Jewish dead and to provide for the basic needs of the non-Jewish poor. See next note.

2.. B. *Gittin* 61a; M.T. *Laws of Gifts to the Poor* 7:7; *Laws of Idolatry* 10:5; *Laws of Mourning* 14:12; *Laws of Kings* 10:12; S.A. *Yoreh De'ah* 335:9, 367:1.

3. For some other modern Jewish formulations of the Jewish-Christian relationship, see Rothschild, ed. (1990), which includes excerpts on the subject by Leo Baeck, Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, Will Herberg, and Abraham Heschel; Jacob Neusner (1993).

4. Some modern Christian attempts to reformulate the Jewish-Christian relationship include these: John Hick in Hick (1982) and in Hick and Meltzer, eds.(1989), pp. 197-210; Paul Van Buren (1980-1988).

5. Judah Halevi made this point. He has the Kuzari say that he does not believe the arguments presented for Christianity and Islam and that the only way he could is if he had grown up with them: "Here is no logical conclusion; nay, logical thought rejects most of what you [the Christian] say. It is only when both appearance and experience are so palpable that they grip the whole heart, which sees no way of contesting, that it will agree to the difficult, and the remote will become near....As for me, I cannot accept these things, because they have come upon me suddenly, seeing that I have not grown up with them. My duty is, therefore, to investigate further" (Judah Halevi, *The Kuzari*, Book I, par. 5. Cf. also par. 6, where the Kuzari tells the Moslem scholar, among other things, that "if your book [the Koran] is a miracle, a non-Arab, like me, cannot perceive its miraculous character because it is written in Arabic"!

6.. The two non-perspectivists mentioned, A. J. Ayer and R. B. Braithwaite, share the view that religion does not make true or false assertions but rather motivates one emotionally, but the former thinker sees this as a major limitation on religion, while the latter thinks that this description is both accurate and fine. Cf. Ayer (1936), pp. 114-120; R. B. Braithwaite (1955).

7. James Wm. McClendon, Jr. and Michael Goldberg, among others, have emphasized the role of biography -- one's own and that of others -- in theology, along with other stories that inform a tradition. See James William McClendon, Jr., *Biography as Theology* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1974); Michael Goldberg, *Theology and Narrative: A Critical Introduction* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981), esp. pp. 66-70, 91-95; and Michael Goldberg, *Jews and Christians: Getting Our Stories Straight* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985).

8. Richard Boudreaux and Larry B. Stamer, "'Vatican Declares Catholicism Sole Path to Salvation,'" *Los Angeles Times*, September 6, 2000, pp. A-1, A-8. In a subsequent editorial, "Partnership Is Still a Goal of the Catholic Church" (*Los Angeles Times*, September 10, 2000, p. M5) Cardinal Roger Mahoney of Los

---

Angeles notes that at one point (page 20) the document affirms that those who are not formally part of the Roman Catholic Church can, indeed, be saved. It is not clear to me, though, whether that sentence applies to non-Christians as well. In any case, he rightfully reminds his readers that "In the greater Los Angeles area, Roman Catholics have enjoyed a long-standing and valued relationship with Christians of other churches and peoples of other religious traditions," and he says that he "would like to reassure our partners in dialogue that our mutually beneficial conversations and joint pursuit of the truth will continue," indeed, he pledges his "unyielding support for these efforts." He also correctly points to all the efforts on the part of Pope John Paul II to reach out to non-Catholic Christians and to people of other faiths as the context in which the document must be read. He admits, though, that "the tone of 'Dominus Iesus' may not fully reflect the deeper understanding that has been achieved through ecumenical and inter-religious dialogues over these last 30 years or more" after the Second Vatican Council. Moreover, he himself understands the document as "a firm critique of those theological views that appear to relativize the Christian faith and the Roman Catholic Church." It is to that issue that this section on the epistemological grounds of dialogue is addressed.

9. For the terms, "hard" and "soft" perspectivism, cf. Van A. Harvey, *The Historian and the Believer* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), pp. 205-230; cf. also James Wm. McClendon, Jr., and James M. Smith, *Understanding Religious Convictions* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), pp. 6-8.

It is interesting to note that even a medieval, hard-line anti-rationalist like Judah Halevi was open to considering the claims of other faiths and recognized that part of his inability to accept them stemmed from the fact that they were not *his* faiths, that he had not had personal experience with them; cf. his *Kuzari*, Book I, Sections 5, 6, 25, 63-65, 80-91 (reprinted in Section Three of *Three Jewish Philosophers*, Isaak Heinemann, ed. [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1960], pp. 31-32, 35, 37-38, 41-45).

10. Hilary Putnam, *The Many Faces of Realism* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1987), esp. pp. 17-19. Robert Nozick, *The Examined Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), pp. 49-51.

11. Gordon Tucker, "Metaphysical Realism: Theoretical and Practical Considerations," *Conservative Judaism* 51:2 (Winter, 1999), pp. 84-95, esp. pp. 93-95.

12. Gordon Tucker has made this point (see the previous note), and, in discussions with me, Dr. Hanan Alexander has emphasized it. I would like to thank them both for making me aware of these philosophical (and political) limits of pluralism.

13. According to Job 2:11, Eliphaz is a Temanite, Bildad is a Shuhite, and Zophar is a Naamathite. Only the fourth interlocutor, Elihu, bears a name that appears Jewish; see Job 32:2. On the religious status of Job and his friends, see Robert Gordis (1965), pp. 65-67 and Chapter Six generally. On the international influences on the Book of Job, see Gordis (1965), pp. 53-64; M. H. Pope, "Job, Book of," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 2:911-925, esp. 2:914-917; and Victor H. Matthews and Don C. Benjamin, *Old Testament Parallels: Law and Stories from the Ancient Near East* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), pp. 201-226, esp. pp. 219-226.

14. As the biblical scholar M. H. Pope says,

The recovery of the literatures of the ancient Near East, of Egypt, Mesopotamia, Syria, and Anatolia has shed much light on the OT [Old Testament]. It is no longer possible to study the OT in isolation from the larger world in which it originated. Wisdom literature of the OT in particular has so much in common with similar literatures of Egypt and Mesopotamia that international influence appears likely. (Pope [1962], 2:914)

15. E.g., B. *Bava Batra* 10a, on whether God would support human efforts to help the poor; B. *Sanhedrin* 65b (=Genesis *Rabbah* 11:5 and *Tanhuma*, Ki Tissa 33), on whether the Sabbath is incumbent on non-Jews in the hereafter; and *Tanhuma*, Tazria 5 and 7, on whether God's creations or man's are more beautiful, given that a male human is born uncircumcised.

16. E.g., *Midrash Psalms* on 50:1 (139b, par. 1) and J. *Berakhot* 9:1 (13a), with regard to the Bible

---

multiple names for God; *Numbers Rabbah* 19:8, with regard to the mysterious ability of the ashes of the red heifer to purify, making the process look like sorcery; B. *Hullin* 27b, with regard to whether birds were created from water or earth.

17. Micah 4:5. Compare Micah 4:1-3 with Isaiah 2:2-4.

18. Simon Greenberg, "Pluralism and Jewish Education," *Religious Education* 81 (Winter, 1986), p. 23. See also p. 27, where he links pluralism to the absence of violence in transforming another person's opinion.

19. T. *Sanhedrin* 13:2. See note 39 above.