

# Jerusalem Letters

## What Is Revelation?

By Yoram Hazony, May 21, 2015

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Philosophy and science are often described as being the products of natural human reason—as opposed to “revelation,” which is said to be knowledge gained directly from God by miraculous means. But in *The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture*, I argued that if we want to truly understand the Hebrew Bible, we are going to have to do away with this dichotomy between reason and revelation, learning to see the world as it appeared to the prophets of Israel, long before this distinction was invented. In the book I promised to return to this subject, seeking a clearer picture of how God’s word to man can be understood as something that is not opposed to human reason.<sup>[1]</sup> In this essay, I’m going to do just that, suggesting that the prophets in fact understood God’s word as coming into the world through the vehicle of human reason—and that we should think of God as acting in this way as well.

Since the Jewish holiday of Shavuot, commemorating the giving of the *tora* at Sinai, is almost upon us, I would like to add one disclaimer. The revelation at Sinai is different in character from every other instance of God’s speech in the Bible. This is a subject that requires an essay of its own, and I hope to write something on this soon. For now, I will begin by focusing on the subject of God’s speech when it is addressed to an individual: What is being described when God speaks to Moses or Jeremiah?

### I.

Quite a few readers have asked me the following question: What’s so difficult about overcoming the dichotomy between natural human reason and God’s revelation? Isn’t the project of “overcoming” this distinction already central to the thought of many of the most important philosophers of the Middle Ages? Bible scholar Christina Brinks apparently speaks for many when she [writes](#) that she herself does not see “any problem whatsoever with thinking that God revealed something to Jeremiah by way of

Jeremiah's human reason, experience and observation.”[\[2\]](#) She then goes on to suggest that this view might not have been so unappealing to many of the most significant Christian philosophers, including Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, and Alvin Plantinga, who have historically sought to reconcile reason and revelation. A similar suggestion could easily be also be made with regard to many Jewish philosophers as well, beginning with Sa'adia Gaon.

But this suggestion is mistaken. True, there are some early Christian thinkers (Justin Martyr and Origen are candidates) for whom the prospect of dispensing with the distinction between reason and revelation altogether might not have seemed so problematic. Nevertheless, the Western tradition as it has come down to us revolves around this distinction to a rather extraordinary degree. This is not just a peripheral view endorsed by radicals such as Tertullian and Kierkegaard, plus assorted uneducated persons (“Billy Sundays,” in Brinks’ winsome phrase).[\[3\]](#) Aquinas, Calvin and Plantinga are no less clear in distinguishing the products of human reason from those of God’s revelation. They differ from Tertullian in that they do not deny the value of reason, and their aim is to make these sources of knowledge play nicely together. But there is no doubt in their minds that reason and revelation are two *entirely different* sources of knowledge that can and must be distinguished if we are to get our view of the world right.

As an example, consider Alvin Plantinga’s views on this subject.[\[4\]](#) In *Warranted Christian Belief*, he proposes an absolute distinction between Scripture, as the product of revelation, and works of human reason, as follows:

Scripture itself is taken to be a wholly authoritative and trustworthy guide to faith and morals; it is authoritative and trustworthy because it is a revelation from God, a matter of God’s speaking to us. Once it is clear, therefore, what the teaching of a given bit of Scripture is, the question of the truth and acceptability of that teaching is settled. In a commentary on Plato, we might decide that what Plato really meant to say was XYZ; we might then go on to consider and evaluate XYZ in various ways, asking whether it is true, or close to the truth, or true in principle, or superseded by things we have learned since Plato wrote.... These questions are out of place in the kind of [Christian] scripture scholarship under consideration.[\[5\]](#)

In this passage, Plantinga draws precisely the distinction between works of revelation and works of reason that I describe in my book. He classifies Scripture as revelation, and contrasts this with philosophical or scientific writings, which are a product of human reason. Because the Bible is revelation, its content is accepted on faith, whereas anything Plato wrote is properly subject to evaluation, questioning, and discussion that is rooted in human insights and arguments drawn from experience. Having made this distinction, Plantinga proceeds to elaborate upon it, suggesting that as revelation, the Bible must also be read and understood in a manner that is utterly different from the way we would read any text produced by human reason. As he writes:

[T]he principal author of the Bible—the entire Bible—is God himself. Of course each of the books of the Bible has a human author as well; still, the principal author is God. This impels us to treat the whole more like a unified communication than a miscellany of ancient books.... [T]he fact that the principal author of the Bible is God himself means that one can't always determine the meaning of a given passage by discovering what the human author had in mind.... [W]e can't just assume that what the Lord intends to teach is identical with what the human author had in mind; the latter may not so much as have thought of what is, in fact, the teaching of the passage in question.<sup>[6]</sup>

Plantinga thus moves from the identification of Scripture as revelation—that is, as a communication from God—to the view that the entire corpus of biblical works, both Jewish and Christian, are to be viewed as essentially a “unified communication” since they have only one “principal author,” which is God himself. The fact that the different works in the biblical corpus were written over a period of many centuries, often arguing with one another and seeking to advance points of view that are at odds even on central issues, is not something that Plantinga is unaware of.<sup>[7]</sup> But he deals with this problem by proposing that what the biblical authors—Moses or Jeremiah, say—believed to be God’s word to them is not always “in fact, the teaching of the passage in question.” Indeed, the “meaning of a given passage,” which is “what the Lord intends to teach,” may well be something that Moses or Jeremiah “may not have so much as thought of.” For this reason, we may be seeking in vain for the biblical teaching if we are trying to “determine the meaning of a given passage by discovering what the human author had in mind.”

I do not know whether Christian theology really needs to be committed to this highly problematic distinction between what Jeremiah intended when presenting God's word; and what God "in fact" meant to teach us through the vehicle of Jeremiah's words.<sup>[8]</sup> But Plantinga clearly believes that in offering this account of what it means for the Bible to be revelation, he is speaking for much of the Christian intellectual tradition, including Chrysostom, Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, and Karl Barth.<sup>[9]</sup> Whether this is exactly right or not, we can safely say he speaks for a powerful stream within past and present Christian thought. And this stream definitely regards the Bible as providing knowledge of a radically different kind from anything produced by human reason, not only in terms of its provenance, but also in terms of the way we are supposed to derive it from the texts before us and incorporate it into our understanding of reality.

Now, this view—and similar views that one finds among Jewish writers<sup>[10]</sup>—works systematically to undermine the possibility of what I have been calling the philosophy of Hebrew Scripture. For on the view that I have proposed, what should be of interest to us when we take up the study of the Bible is *precisely* "what the human author had in mind" (or, if this is deemed impossible, then what the human final editor had in mind) in creating the text that we now have before us. Indeed, the whole aim of my book was to persuade readers that we should be at least as concerned to reconstruct what Isaiah or Jeremiah "had in mind" as we are to reconstruct what Parmenides or Plato "had in mind." This, I suggest, is because Isaiah and Jeremiah were towering figures in the history of ideas, whose works deserve our respect and consideration. We should wish to recapture the unique ways in which they understood God, man's nature, and the moral and political realm. We should wish to properly assess the impact and influence of their ideas, and to seek the relevance of their insights to our own lives and world today. And we should desire this not a whit less than in the case of the early Greek philosophers who came centuries after them, upon whom academic scholarship has lavished such a prodigious intellectual effort.<sup>[11]</sup>

But this enterprise of learning what Isaiah or Jeremiah had to teach us melts into air the moment one determines to read their writings through the lens of something like the Plantinga-style concept of "revelation." For such a concept of revelation is specifically designed to allow us to look past the actual content of these human beings' thoughts, and to turn their individual personalities and works into an instrument given for teaching later generations something that, so far as it is possible for us to tell, in fact

never crossed their minds; and that they themselves had no intention of teaching to anyone.<sup>[12]</sup> Of course, one may propose that we could do both: We could learn to read Isaiah or Jeremiah as individual thinkers whose unique perspective is of interest to us; and then we could set that aside and read them, in addition, as unwitting spokesmen for a view presented more fully by other writers centuries later. But I am skeptical. Historically, the hermeneutic that Plantinga describes seems to have worked consistently, over many centuries, toward the suppression of the individual philosophies of the Israelite prophets.

What will happen when we stop suppressing their individual prophetic personalities, and the ideas for which they stood as unique individuals within the context of the Israelite or Jewish tradition? When we allow them to speak for themselves, and for their God, not only in their own words, but also with the aim of genuinely opening ourselves to God's speech as it appeared in their minds? In my experience, the impact can be searing, astonishing, devastating. Through it, we expose ourselves to "a consuming fire, to a hammer that shatters rock."<sup>[13]</sup> Once the protective filters are removed, and one is faced with the full fury of what a man such as Jeremiah had to teach mankind, and of the life he lived in the service of this teaching, any role that he may be made to play in a later drama five or six centuries hence may come to appear quite tangential.

## II.

The eminent Christian philosopher Richard Swinburne proposes the following definition or account of *revelation*:

Knowledge which [God] communicates directly only to certain individuals, and which they communicate to the rest of the world, when the adequate grounds for believing these items of knowledge available to the first recipients are not available to the rest of the world, but the latter [i.e., the rest of the world] have adequate grounds for believing them, in the traditional phrase, "upon the credit of the proposer, as coming from God in some extraordinary way of communication." Knowledge of God and his purposes, obtained by this route, is the concern of revealed theology, as opposed to natural theology, which is knowledge of God and his purposes available from the study of publicly available evidence of the natural world.<sup>[14]</sup>

Among other features of this understanding of revelation, I would emphasize three points as being central:

First, this view supposes that God “communicates” various items of knowledge “directly only to certain individuals.” This is a view that asks us to understand God as speaking to human beings in much the way that one human being speaks to another. This does not mean that the means of communication between God and man is literally speech. But it is analogous to human communication in that there is something that is in God’s mind, as it were, and therefore external to the mind of the individual receiving it; and which is then transmitted into the mind of the prophet “in some extraordinary way.”

Second, this view supposes that those others who later hear this revelation from the prophet or his followers, or who read it in Scripture, have no real means of testing the truth of what they hear. They must accept it on faith due to the credibility or authority of the prophet and those who have transmitted his word to us.

Third, these characteristics of revelation together give rise to a clear distinction between knowledge that has been “revealed” in this sense, which cannot be tested; and knowledge that comes to us by way of “nature,” which is available to everyone, and so can be tested by anyone. This distinction between revelation and what is known by nature yields the distinction between works of revelation and works of human reason such as those encountered in philosophy and science.

Swinburne’s account of revelation reflects a common view of what is taking place when an Israelite prophet tells us he is speaking words that have been taught to him by God. But I believe this view is mistaken as an interpretation of what is meant by God’s speech in Hebrew Scripture.<sup>[15]</sup> One obvious indication that there is something wrong with this interpretation is the fact that the biblical prophets explicitly reject the second plank of Swinburne’s account, namely, the supposition that the prophet’s words have to be taken on authority or faith because their truth cannot be tested by those that hear it. Indeed, Moses himself is presented as rejecting Swinburne’s position in what is perhaps the most significant passage concerning the nature of prophecy in all of Scripture, the law of the prophet in Deuteronomy:

I will raise them up a prophet from among their brethren... and put my words in his mouth.... And if you say in your mind, “How will we know the word that the Lord has not spoken?” Know that if a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord,

and the thing is not, nor does it come, that is a thing that the Lord has not spoken, but the prophet has spoken it out of presumption, so do not fear what is from him.[\[16\]](#)

In this passage, Moses hands down God's law respecting the recognition of prophets by the broader public. Earlier, Moses has already rejected appeals to signs or miracles as being a legitimate means of authenticating the prophet's message.[\[17\]](#) Here he tells the people that if they wish to distinguish God's word from what has been spoken presumptuously, the test is whether the things that are spoken really come to pass: If "the thing is not, nor does it come," then anyone can know that what has been said in God's name "is a thing that the Lord has not spoken." Nor is Moses alone in proposing such an empirical test for determining what is God's word. Much the same test appears in the name of the prophet Michayehu in the book of Kings, and again in the writings of Jeremiah.[\[18\]](#) Moreover, there are numerous additional passages that suggest that the wisdom in God's teaching can in principle be recognized by anyone, from any nation;[\[19\]](#) and that the people of Jerusalem would be able to distinguish right teaching from wrong if only they would make a careful comparison using their own senses and judgment.[\[20\]](#) Together, these passages suggest that in Hebrew Scripture—or at the very least, in some of its most prominent texts—God's word is not at all something that must be accepted on faith due to the credibility or authority of the prophet. On the contrary, the prophet bearing a teaching that is truly God's word is supposed to be recognizable by anyone, using conventional human experience as the basis for judgment.[\[21\]](#)

If this is right, then a reasonable account of God's word as it appears in Hebrew Scripture will not be able to include Swinburne's third plank either, which calls for a sharp distinction between knowledge that has been "revealed," and the products of philosophy and science that are derived from conventional human experience. As the empiricism of the Mosaic test of the prophet's message suggests, Israelite prophecy was a forerunner and family relation of what later generations knew as philosophy and science. The Israelite prophets are involved in an enterprise of attempting to recognize and predict the consequences of human actions, doing so in an effort to understand which of the choices available to human beings are for the good, and which are for evil.[\[22\]](#) Unlike diviners in neighboring Mesopotamia and Egypt, they do not seek answers to their questions by examining the entrails of animals, nor from reading the patterns in their drink.[\[23\]](#) They direct their questions to God, at times striving for weeks until an answer comes to them.[\[24\]](#) And although they believe the truth of this

answer when it comes, they recognize that if the consequences they have foreseen do not come to pass, then the appropriate conclusion will be that these answers are not from God, but of their own minds.

This brings us to the first plank of Swinburne's account of revelation, which proposes that God's word is a "communication" of certain items of knowledge to the mind of the prophet "in some extraordinary way." This picture of God's speech assumes a familiar, but nonetheless rather peculiar, picture of the human mind: One in which the mind is understood as if it were a bounded receptacle that can have knowledge "in" it or "outside of it."[\[25\]](#) By the same token, the mind is also thought to have perceptions, beliefs and memories in it; and if one is reasoning about something or imagining something, then these operations are likewise supposed to be taking place "in the mind."

However, as has been said many times, the supposition that there is a natural and fixed boundary that divides those things that are in the mind from those that are outside of it is deeply problematic. It seems much more likely that the location of this boundary, and perhaps even the character and existence of such a boundary, is a cultural artifact, and that it varies significantly from one culture to the next, from one individual to the next, and even from one moment to the next.[\[26\]](#) This does not mean we have to endorse every proposal that has been made concerning the differences between our conception of the mind and those of our forebears in antiquity. But we should proceed with caution when arguing for an interpretation of Scripture that leans heavily on a particular conception of the human mind, considering well whether this conception is not being read back into biblical texts whose assumptions are quite different.

This, I believe, is the case here. We are all familiar with the invocation of the Muse, or another god, by Homer and Socrates, Parmenides and Empedocles, as they set out to engage in poetry or philosophy. Why request assistance from the gods in something that is so clearly under the control of the individual human mind as is poetry or philosophy? The reason for this request for assistance appears to be that these individuals and the cultures from which they sprang were keenly aware of the *lack* of control that individuals ultimately exercise over difficult creative endeavors. We should be able to appreciate their sensibilities on this point: We all feel that the movements of our limbs are under our own control, as is the manner in which we perform routine mental operations such as solving simple problems in arithmetic. And we also know that our control over the creation of a new book or song or institution is nothing like our control

over carrying out multiplication problems or driving to work in the morning. The latter can be performed reliably virtually every time. We have no doubt whatsoever of our success—that is, unless an “act of God” such as a flat tire or a pressing phone call interrupts our work. The former, on the other hand, is frightening, an adventure, a journey. The truth is that its successful completion depends on things that are experienced as being entirely beyond our control. How many times in the composition of a book will I encounter a knotty problem that threatens to wreck the entire enterprise? How many times will I have to attack such a problem with all my energies, turning it over and over, wrestling it and being thrown by it; until finally I feel a tremor in my frame, I feel the earth move, I see the skies open, and I have the answer like a flash, like a thunderclap, from I know not where?[\[27\]](#)

The answer, of course, is that no great work will come into being without our having such experiences time and again. And so its existence depends on factors that are not experienced as being in our control at all. The Greeks appealed to their gods because they felt that if they were to achieve such things, it would be thanks to assistance external to their own minds. The same is true in Hebrew Scripture, where the accomplishment of great things in terms of wisdom, politics, and art is portrayed as the result of “a wind from God” that guides the work to its extraordinary and successful conclusion.[\[28\]](#)

Compare this with our present perspective on this matter. Few of us think of insight and inspiration as coming from beyond ourselves. When I write a book or a song, I suppose that that the performance is entirely my own, not less than if I had copied over last week’s grocery list. Insight and inspiration are now considered to be a part of our conventional intellectual endowment—just things that happen “in the mind” like the mental operations that permit us to perform multiplication problems or to drive the car to work in the morning. In other words, we have naturalized insight and inspiration.[\[29\]](#)

My inclination is to think that this placement of insight and inspiration entirely within the boundaries of the self or mind is a mistake. We can grant that there is a natural human capacity for insight or inspiration. But we should also suppose that this capacity is the psychological basis for revelation. Believing that we possess such a capacity, we may decide to embark on one great effort or another, seeking understanding, illumination, the revealing of the true nature of things. Still, it is only God’s gifts that permit its successful completion.[\[30\]](#)

This does not mean that every genuine experience of human insight must be considered the revelation of God's word. On the contrary, it is possible for the experience of revelation to be perfectly genuine, and yet for the contents of this revelation to be mistaken. Recognition of this fact will allow us to set aside our incredulity when we examine the works of a philosopher such as Parmenides, who presents his philosophy as having been revealed to him by a goddess. The revelatory quality of his thought is not a mere convention, nor is it a hallucination or a lie. He does not present his thought as revelation because this was "the thing to do if one wanted [one's] ideas to be taken seriously."[\[31\]](#) Rather, we should be prepared to consider Parmenides' account as the record of a genuine human experience of revelation, and we can do so without automatically having to accept that what he experienced the goddess to be teaching him was in fact the truth.[\[32\]](#)

So to be clear: We can distinguish, as Scripture does, between true and false revelation, only the first of which is properly described as God's word. In the Bible, when the things spoken by the prophets cannot be relied upon, they are called *nevuot sheker*, "unreliable prophecy." Thus Jeremiah has God saying: "The prophets prophesy unreliable things in my name.... An unreliable vision, and divination, and worthlessness, and the deception of their own minds are these that they prophesy to you."[\[33\]](#) Note that the false prophets of whom Jeremiah speaks here are not accused of intentionally lying. Rather, they speak the "deception of their own minds." As Ezekiel puts it, they have "set up idols in their minds," deceiving themselves so they cannot see what is before them.[\[34\]](#) This is, in my view, the best way of understanding the revelation of Parmenides, which is a misleading and unreliable revelation, and so should properly be attributed to a false god, or to the deception of his own mind, these two things being in my view just different ways of referring to the same thing.

I believe the revelation of Parmenides was a false revelation. And yet I would not say that it is entirely false. Perhaps a better way of thinking about this would be to say as follows: All human insight or revelation, even if we are right to judge it as false, nonetheless touches on some aspect of the truth. This is a view that is proposed in the Talmud, and I have discussed it elsewhere, so I will only mention it here.[\[35\]](#) Because the human mind is unable to encompass all aspects of what it surveys, the revelation or insight of a human being is always partial. This was true of Moses, the greatest of the prophets, as the *tora* tells us, and it is so with respect to all others as well.[\[36\]](#) This means that revelation is always from a given perspective. However, some of these

perspectives are truer than others. They are more true because they encompass a broader view of the reality they survey, or because they grasp what they survey from a better point of vantage, and so they are more to be relied upon. The revelations to Moses and to the prophets of Israel are considered, in Jewish tradition, to be greater than all others.[\[37\]](#) Having studied the philosophy of the nations my whole life, and having come to greatly admire some gentile philosophers, I nevertheless always find myself returning to this same conclusion.

### III.

With this in mind, let's consider again Swinburne's account of revelation, which proposes that God's word is a "communication" of items of knowledge that are in God's mind to mind of the prophet "in some extraordinary way." This description seems to me to miss the mark in a few ways. First, the supposition that God's word is received "in some extraordinary way" looks to me to be misleading. In *The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture*, I offer examples of biblical texts from which it is clear that Isaiah and Jeremiah equate the attainment of wisdom with the speech of God to man.[\[38\]](#)

Moreover, in Scripture we find that every event that takes place in the world is described as being the result of God's speech; revelation refers only to those rare moments in which this constant speech of God penetrates the darkness of the human mind. Such true human insight is indeed precious and rare, and it deserves to be recognized for the miracle that it is.[\[39\]](#) But we go too far if we mean by this that there are certain routes to knowledge that are natural, while others, which are to be sharply distinguished from them, are "extraordinary" routes to knowledge that deserve to be considered an entirely distinctive phenomenon and described as "super-natural." There is no evidence that the prophets and scholars who composed the Bible were aware of a distinction between what is "natural" and what is "supernatural," and indeed, such a distinction is entirely superfluous for a complete account of true revelation.[\[40\]](#) The actions of the human mind, when these, on rare occasion, rise to the heights of true insight, are sufficient as a vehicle for God to present his word to the world. In any case it is God, and not the prophet, who chooses when God will speak.[\[41\]](#)

In the same way, we should avoid placing too much weight on the metaphor of God's "communication" to man. Although this metaphor is certainly authentic to the Hebrew Bible, it is also insufficient as a general view of revelation as presented in Scripture,

since many texts suggest that man's relationship with God's word is quite different from this. In Exodus, for example, God tells Moses that he is going to "teach you what to say" in speaking with Pharaoh; and in Deuteronomy, Moses tells the people that whenever God sends them a prophet, "I will put my words in his mouth." Similarly, he tells Isaiah and Jeremiah "I have put my words in your mouth."<sup>[42]</sup> This metaphor of God placing his words in the mouth of the prophet is not one of communicating knowledge that, as the result of a certain communication, moves from the mind of God to that of the prophet.<sup>[43]</sup> A more straightforward understanding of these texts is that God has given his prophets the ability to know what to say themselves. Again, God's word appears as coming into the world through the abilities and intellectual endowment of the individual prophet.

This is not a communication at all, but rather God speaking his word through the mind of the prophet—so that the intentions that are "in the mind" of the prophet are themselves God's word. Those who are concerned to determine the message that God has in fact spoken, should therefore seek it in the intended teaching of the prophet, and not elsewhere.

## Notes

<sup>[1]</sup> Yoram Hazony, *The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 1-5, 260.

<sup>[2]</sup> C.L. Brinks, "Response to Yoram Hazony's *Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture*," *Journal of Analytic Theology* 2 (2014), pp. 238-249, p. 245.

<sup>[3]</sup> C.L. Brinks, "Response to Yoram Hazony," p. 244. Brinks, like a number of other Christian scholars, reads my book as suggesting that Tertullian is representative of Christian tradition. This was not my intention. Indeed, I write that Tertullian and Kierkegaard stake out a fanatical position that is embraced only by a strand of Christianity (*Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture*, p. 225), namely, the view that the words of God are to be regarded as "absurd" or "foolishness" when measured by the standards of human reason. The reason I cite this view (which has attracted Jewish adherents as well) is to contrast it with the position common in the Hebrew Bible, according to which the absurdity or foolishness of God's word is unthinkable because God's word is always identical with wisdom—the very same wisdom that wise human beings gain from experience. I suspect that the position found in the Hebrew Bible is also very different from that of Paul, who distinguishes between "the wisdom of the world" and "God's wisdom," but I understand that this passage can be interpreted in different ways.

<sup>[4]</sup> Regarding Aquinas and Calvin, see: Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1.1: "It is necessary for man's salvation that there should be a knowledge revealed by God, besides philosophical science built up by human reason.... [I]t was necessary for the salvation of man that certain truths which exceed human reason should be known to him by divine revelation." Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Allen, Texas: Thomas More, 1948

[1981]), p. 1. Along the same lines, Calvin writes that men guided by “the power of human reason” are “blinder than moles” with regard to “knowledge of God,” and especially in all that concerns “his paternal favor towards us, which constitutes our salvation.” For this reason, he recommends bypassing reason and seeking to “establish the fact... by Scripture.” John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Henry Beveridge, trans. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1989), 2.218-19, p. 238.

[5] Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford: Oxford, 2000), pp. 383-384.

[6] Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, pp. 384-385.

[7] On the diversity of viewpoints presented in the Hebrew Bible, see Yoram Hazony, *The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture*, pp. 41-46, 63-65.

[8] Plantinga’s proposal that a revealed text may mean “something rather different” from what its human author intended is motivated in part by the desire to make room for New Testament readings that depart from the plain sense of the earlier Jewish Scriptures they are interpreting. As he writes: “Paul refers to the Old Testament on nearly every page of Romans and both Corinthian epistles. There is no reason to suppose that the human authors of Exodus, Numbers, Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, or Habakuk had in mind Jesus’ triumphal entry, his incarnation, or other events of Jesus’ life and death—or, indeed, anything else explicitly about Jesus. But the fact that it is God who is the principal author here makes it quite possible that what we are to learn from the text in question is something rather different from what the human author proposed to teach.” Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 385. Similarly, he suggests that “Passages in Psalms or Isaiah can be interpreted in terms of the fuller, more explicit disclosure in the New Testament.” Plantinga, p. 384.

[9] This list appears on p. 374 of Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*. On p. 383, Plantinga says that “Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin, and the others I mentioned above” wrote “an impressively large number of volumes devoted to powerful reflection on the meaning and teachings of Scripture.... Their aim was to determine as accurately as possible just what the Lord proposes to teach us in the Bible. Call this enterprise ‘traditional biblical commentary’ and note that it displays at least the following... features.”

[10] Sa’adia begins his principal philosophical work by introducing a sharp distinction between reason and revelation. See Saadia Gaon, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, Samuel Rosenblatt, trans. (New Haven: Yale, 1948), pp. 26-33. Sa’adia suggests that everything that is known by revelation can be attained by way of reason. Nevertheless, he does insist that reason and revelation are entirely different things, and much of subsequent medieval Jewish thought follows him in this.

[11] On how we came to think of the philosophy of Jeremiah as being of so little interest in comparison with pre-Socratic thought, see Yoram Hazony, *The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture*, pp. 5-20.

[12] There is a moral issue here, as well, which is broached by the Bible scholar Baruch Halpern with respect to deconstruction and other literary techniques for absolving us from the responsibility of seeking the intention of the biblical author as an actual human being. As he writes: “[W]hat proposal could be more immoral than that readers ought not to engage the intention encoded in the text they choose to exploit? Here is Ezekiel, reaching out a hand across the eons, asking us into his world, his mind. What with the New Criticism, reader-response, and some varieties of deconstructionism, his is the only ‘creation of meaning’ in which no literary critic is interested.” Baruch Halpern, *The First Historians: The Hebrew Bible and*

*History* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1984), p. xx. The same moral issue attends recent proposals by Jewish source-critics to adopt a form of progressive revelation as an alternative to seeking the teachings of the prophets of in the Bible. See Yoram Hazony, “Open Orthodoxy?” in *Torah Musings*, May 27, 2014, available

at: <http://www.torahmusings.com/2014/05/open-orthodoxy/>

[13] Jeremiah 23.29.

[14] Richard Swinburne, *Revelation* (Oxford: Oxford, 2007 [1992]), p. 1. I have removed parentheses for clarity. The “traditional phrase” to which Swinburne refers is quoted from Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* 4.18.2.

[15] I cannot accept his proposal that God’s speech should be considered something different from revelation because, for example, a command from God does not involve God revealing anything. See Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1995), p. 20. It is important to remember that in biblical Hebrew, there is no term that corresponds to the term revelation. The word *hitgalut*, usually translated as “revelation,” does not appear in the history of Hebrew thought until the Middle Ages. The biblical terms that should be of greatest interest here are “prophecy” (Hebrew, *nevua*); and variations on the expression “God’s word” (*devar adonai*). A command from God is certainly in the category to which these two terms refer.

[16] Deuteronomy 18.18, 21-22. Note that in this passage, the terms that are translated as “word” and those that are translated as “thing” both refer to the same Hebrew word. The normal Hebrew term that is translated as speech is *devarim*, which is also the most common Hebrew term for “things.” The lack of an analytic distinction between speech and the objects of speech is an important indicator that the prophets and scholars who composed the Hebrew Bible built their worldviews without the mind-world dualism that is standard in much of Western thought. Among other things, this suggests that when God speaks in the Bible, what he is presenting is certain “things”—which is to say, a certain view or understanding of things. See Yoram Hazony, *The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture*, pp. 193-218.

[17] Deuteronomy 13.1-3.

[18] Kings 1.22.28, Jeremiah 28.9.

[19] For example, Deuteronomy 4.6, 8. For further sources and discussion see, Yoram Hazony, *The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture*, pp. 228-239.

[20] Jeremiah 6.16.

[21] All this assumes, of course, that the prophet is speaking about worldly things that can be tested by human beings. The biblical prophets do not, as a general matter, speak to questions such as the immortality of the immaterial human soul, which cannot, of course, be answered on the basis of human experience.

[22] For discussion, see Yoram Hazony, *The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture*, pp. 88-89, 161-191.

[23] Jean Bottéro, *Mesopotamia: Writing, Reasoning and the Gods*, Zainab Bahrani and Marc van de Mieroop, trans. (Chicago: Chicagor, 1992 [1987]), pp. 113-137. Bottéro famously argues that the Mesopotamian search for omens in animal entrails is a forerunner of science.

[24] Jeremiah 42.5-7, Ezekiel 3.15-16.

[25] This picture of the mind leads directly to a mind-world dualism that cannot, it seems, be reasonably defended. For a survey of modern thought on the subject of a monistic world-picture that is “neutral” between mind and world, see Leopold Stubenberg, “Neutral Monism,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2003 Edition), Edward N. Zalta, ed., available

at: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/neutral-monism/> . The most important treatment of the monism of the Hebrew Bible to date is Claude Tresmontant, *A Study of Hebrew Thought*, Michael Francis Gibson, trans. (New York: Desclee, 1960 [1956]).

[26] Treatments of this issue from different angles include Bruno Snell, *The Discovery of the Mind in Greek Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Dover, 1982 [1953]); Charles Taylor, *Source of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989); Andy Clark, *Supersizing the Mind: Embodiment, Action and Cognitive Extension* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Also relevant to this topic is my discussion of the absence of mind-world dualism in the Hebrew Bible *The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture*, pp. 193-218.

[27] See Maimonides' discussion of the experience of insight, which he compares to "someone in a very dark night over whom lightning flashes again and again."

Maimonides, *Guide*, Introduction. See Moses Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Shlomo Pines, trans. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1974), vol. 1, pp. 7-8.

[28] Genesis 41.37-40; Exodus 31.1-5, 35.31; Samuel 1.11.5-9. See also Daniel 6.4, where the Aramaic expression *ruah yatira* ("a surpassing spirit") is used with reference to political and administrative ability as well as dream interpretation.

[29] On insight as a psychological phenomenon, see, for example, the essays collected in Robert J. Sternberg and Janet E. Davidson, *The Nature of Insight* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1995); Jacques Hadamard, *The Psychology of Invention in the Mathematical Field* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996 [1945]). Despite such works, insight and intuition continue to defy attempts at being brought under logical or scientific scrutiny. We continue to live with Karl Popper's view that "there is no such thing as a logical method of having new ideas, or a logical reconstruction of this process.... [E]very discovery contains an 'irrational element,' or a 'creative intuition' in Bergson's sense." Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (New York: Routledge, 1959), p. 32.

[30] A similar view is that of Maimonides, *Guide* 2.32-48; *Mishneh Torah*, Hilchot Yesodot Hatora 7-10. However, Maimonides sees the imaginative faculty, an endowment of the mind familiar from Aristotelian psychology, as the psychological basis for prophecy. I do not believe this distinction between reason and imagination provides a tolerable basis for human psychology, in part because the capacity for insight is an integral aspect of the operation of reason. See Yoram Hazony, *The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture*, pp. 259-273; Yoram Hazony, "Newtonian Explanatory Reduction and Hume's System of the Sciences," Zvi Biener and Eric Schliesser, eds., *Newton and Empiricism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), esp. pp. 153-163.

[31] Brinks, p. 241.

[32] I have suggested that we should be willing to accept certain revelatory accounts of ancient Greek philosophers, for example, as genuine. But this does not automatically mean that all such accounts are genuine. There must have been philosophers who only pretended to have had such experiences, just as there were prophets who did. The fakes were imitating and embellishing accounts of true experiences about which they had heard from others.

[33] Jeremiah 14.14.

[34] Ezekiel 14.3-4, 7.

[35] Yoram Hazony, *The Dawn* (Jerusalem: Shalem Press, 2000), ch. 5, pp. 62-64.

[36] Exodus 33.21-23.

[37] In this context, it may not be superfluous to emphasize that the truth of a given revelation

has nothing to do with whether it is spoken by a Jew. Scripture records that God spoke to members of other nations, the case of Bilam the seer being the best known, and the rabbis endorse this view as well. See Tana Devei Eliahu 9; Maimonides, *Epistle to Yemen*.

[38] Yoram Hazony, *The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture*, p. 232.

[39] Although note that a *peleh*, or a “wonder,” is the way that Hebrew Scripture describes what we today call a miracle.

[40] Perhaps it will help to put this matter in the following way. There is no understanding among the prophets that there is, as in Aristotle, an immutable natural order that is built upon eternally fixed and immutable natures. The world-conception of the Israelite prophets is in any case one of constant change. All things have natures in that they can be found, in general, to act in a certain way. However, since in Scripture, no natures are immutable, the fact that there are occasional deviations from what you or I take to be the nature of a thing does not lead to the conclusion that the natural order has been “violated.” The only thing that we are licensed to conclude is that something has occurred that is, in our eyes, “wondrous.” Least of all is there any hint in Hebrew Scripture that God or God’s actions are supernatural in that they involve a “violation” of an otherwise immutable natural order. To speak of God as “violating” the order of his world through his existence or his actions strikes me as evidence of a misunderstanding of the scriptural view of the natural order created by God, and of God’s ongoing role in it. (For these reasons, too, it would be incorrect to refer to the view presented here as a “naturalist” reading of Scripture. It is rather a reading in which the distinction between nature and super-nature is recognized as being anachronistic and misleading as a way of characterizing biblical metaphysical assumptions.)

[41] Such an understanding of revelation may have relevance beyond the period of classical Israelite prophecy. During the Talmudic and medieval periods, rabbinic figures not infrequently referred to their own knowledge of Scripture and law as having been “shown to me from heaven,” although the context often seems to indicate that such knowledge was the result of their own inquiries. This has been puzzling to contemporary scholars, most famously Isadore Twersky, *Rabad of Posquières: A Twelfth Century Talmudist* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 291-300. But the best explanation may simply be that many of the rabbis considered the most significant efforts of human reason to require God’s revelation to reach their consummation.

[42] Exodus 4.12; Deuteronomy 18.18; Isaiah 51.16; Jeremiah 1.9. See also Isaiah 59.21; Jeremiah 5.14.

[43] In order to preserve the “communication” metaphor, Wolterstorff proposes that when God put his words in the prophet’s mouth, there are two different actions being described: First God spoke privately to Hosea, and then God repeats the same message spoken earlier by way of the public speech of Hosea to the people. Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, p. 46. This proposal that God speaks everything twice is both cumbersome and entirely unnecessary. The simpler and correct reading of such texts is that God’s speech is depicted as being communicated from the mind of one human being, the prophet, to his audience. The natural functioning of the prophet’s faculties appears here as a vehicle for God’s speech.