

Introduction

Beyond Reason and Revelation

What are we to make of the Bible? It's not easy to say. But a common approach goes like this: There are two kinds of literary works that address themselves to ultimate issues – those that are the product of *reason*; and those that are known by way of *revelation*. Works by philosophers such as Plato or Hobbes are works of “reason,” composed to assist individuals and nations looking to discover the true and the good as best they are able in accordance with man's natural abilities. The Bible, on the other hand, is “revelation,” a text that reports what God himself thinks about things. The biblical texts bypass man's natural faculties, giving us knowledge of the true and the good by means of a series of miracles. So what the Bible offers is miraculous knowledge, to be accepted in gratitude and believed on faith. On this view, revelation is seen as the opposite of reason in that it requires the suspension of the normal operation of our mental faculties, calling on us to believe things that don't make sense to us – because they are supposed to make sense to God.

The dichotomy between reason and revelation that is the basis for this understanding of the Bible has a great deal of history behind it. The fathers of the Christian Church adopted it as a way of sharpening the differences between the teachings of the New Testament and those of the various sects of philosophers with which they vied for converts in late antiquity. Many centuries later, the philosophers of the Enlightenment embraced this same distinction as an instrument with which to bludgeon the Church, using it to paint Christianity as a purveyor of superstition and irrationality. Fideists and heretics alike have thus had ample reason to insist on this distinction, and many continue to do so even today.¹

A case can be made that the *reason–revelation* dichotomy does succeed in capturing something of what was unique and compelling about the teaching

of Jesus' apostles in the New Testament. But it's much harder to make sense of this distinction in the context of the Hebrew Bible (or "Old Testament"*)). After all, the principal texts of Hebrew Scripture were written perhaps *five centuries* before the reason–revelation distinction was applied to them. They were written by individuals who spoke a different language from the Greek in which this dichotomy was framed, and professed a different religion from the Christianity whose virtues it was designed to emphasize. Moreover, nothing in the principal Hebrew texts suggests that the prophets and scholars of ancient Israel were familiar with such an opposition between God's word and the pronouncements of human reason when it is working as it should. In addition, the texts of the Hebrew Bible seem largely uninterested in the subjects that made the concept of revelation so important and useful in explaining Christianity. The hidden secrets of God's previously unrevealed plan for mankind, the salvific power of faith, the availability of eternal life – none of these subjects are even top-forty in the Hebrew Scriptures, a fact so obvious and so jarring that it prompted Kant to argue that the Judaism of ancient Israel was not really a religion!²

What *is* in the Hebrew Scriptures? Many of the same kinds of things that are found in works of reason: histories of ancient peoples and attempts to draw political lessons from them; explorations of how best to conduct the life of the nation and of the individual; the writings of individuals who struggled with personal persecution and failure and their speculations concerning human nature and the search for the true and the good; attempts to get beyond the sphere of the here and now and to try and reach a more general understanding of the nature of reality, of man's place in it, and of his relationship with that which is beyond his control. God is, of course, a central subject in the Hebrew Bible. But to a remarkable degree, the God of Israel and those who wrote about him seem to have been concerned to address subjects close to the heart of what later tradition calls works of reason.

Which raises the following question: What if the analytic framework that originally assigned the Hebrew Bible to the category of revelation was

* The Christian Bible consists of two distinct collections of works, which Christians traditionally call the "Old Testament" and the "New Testament," respectively. The Old Testament found in most Christian Bibles is a translation of a body of originally Hebrew-language works that Jews call the *Tanach* or *Mikra*, which I will refer to as the "Hebrew Bible" or the "Hebrew Scriptures." The books of the Christian Old Testament also appear in a somewhat different order from that of the Hebrew Scriptures. Unless otherwise noted, all references to "the Bible" in this work refer to the Hebrew Bible, which is the Bible that is in use almost universally in Jewish institutions of learning and synagogues around the world.

in fact ill fitted to the older Hebrew texts? What if its effect, historically, has been to force subsequent readers to see the Hebrew Scriptures as the early Christians saw them, eclipsing the concerns of the Jewish prophets and scholars who wrote them? What if the texts of the Hebrew Bible, or many of them, are in fact much closer to being works of reason than anything else – only we don't know it because this fact has been suppressed (and continues to be suppressed) by an alien interpretive framework that prevents us from seeing much of what is in these texts?

It is my contention that something like this is in fact the case: that read into the Hebrew Scriptures, the reason–revelation dichotomy becomes a kind of distorting lens – greatly exaggerating aspects of the old Hebrew texts that their authors would never have chosen to emphasize, even as it renders much that was of significance to them all but invisible. This means that in reading the Hebrew Scriptures as works of “revelation” (as opposed to “reason”), we come pretty close to destroying them. We accidentally delete much of what these texts were written to say – and then, having accomplished this, we find that the texts don't really “speak to us” as modern men and women.

This deletion of much of the content of the Hebrew biblical texts is not just a theoretical problem in hermeneutics or some other esoteric academic discipline. It has a direct impact on the way the Hebrew Scriptures are handled in almost every intellectual, educational, and cultural setting in which the Bible is today considered for an appearance: It affects the standing of the Hebrew Scriptures in the public schools, where they are neglected or banned outright because they are seen as works of revelation, not reason. And it affects their status in the religious schools, too – certainly the Jewish ones, but Christian ones as well – where teachers and administrators confer in bafflement over how to transmit a love of the Bible to the next generation despite the fact that these texts are works of revelation, not reason. It also dictates the way the Hebrew Bible is treated in the universities, where professors of philosophy, political theory, and intellectual history consistently pass over the ideas of the Hebrew Scriptures as a subject worth researching and teaching to their students, since they see their work as the study of works of reason, not revelation. And what is true for the schools and universities is true for the rest of our culture as well. Outside of religious circles, the Bible is often seen as bearing a taint of irrationality, folly, and irrelevance, the direct result of its reputation as a consummate work of unreason. This taint ensures that for most educated people, the Bible remains pretty much a closed book, the views of its authors on most subjects unaccessed and inaccessible.

I am by no means the only person to have felt discomfort over this. The ongoing exclusion of the Hebrew Bible from the universe of texts whose ideas are worth being taken seriously is increasingly a subject of discussion in the universities. And in recent years a number of prominent scholars have actually published studies in which biblical texts are read as though they were works of philosophy – often with fascinating results. But all this is still quite preliminary, and there hasn't yet been a book that takes on the question of the Bible as a work of reason in a systematic fashion. What I hope to provide in this book is the first direct and sustained argument in favor of approaching the Hebrew Scriptures as works of reason. More specifically, I will argue that the Hebrew Scriptures can be read as works of philosophy, with an eye to discovering what they have to say as part of the broader discourse concerning the nature of the world and the just life for man. On the way, I will enumerate the obstacles – both prejudices and genuine problems of method – that stand in the way of reading the Bible in this way, and propose tools for overcoming them. I will then take the reader through a series of studies in which I read the Hebrew texts as works of philosophical significance. By the end, my hope is to have made it clear both *that* the Hebrew Bible can be fruitfully read as a work of reason, and *how* the Hebrew Bible can be read as a work of reason.*

It bears emphasizing that in arguing that the Hebrew Bible can fruitfully be read as a work of reason, I will not be defending any particular thesis concerning its status as revelation. In particular, I am not interested in denying that the Bible is a work of revelation. My point in this book is only this: If we are forced to choose between reading these texts as reason or as revelation, we'll get much farther in understanding them if we choose to read the Hebrew Scriptures as works of reason. But I don't actually think that the reason side of the Christian reason–revelation dichotomy is capable of doing full justice to the teachings of these texts either. As I've said, the reason–revelation distinction is alien to the Hebrew Scriptures, and ultimately this framework is going to have to be thrown out as a basis for interpreting the Hebrew Bible. But getting there won't be easy. In Christian countries,

* Some readers will want to know more precisely what I mean by the terms *reason* and *philosophy*. This is a fair question, but answering it requires a detour into issues distant from the present discussion. Rather than go into these matters here, I've positioned an outline of my thinking on the subject in an appendix at the end of Chapter 9. Readers who prefer not to take this detour right now can, I think, get by assuming that I am using these terms loosely, and more or less interchangeably, to refer to man's efforts to attain truths of a general (and therefore not historically conditioned) nature, through the deployment of his natural mental endowment.

the Bible has been read through this distorting lens for many generations. Freeing ourselves from it, I suspect, will not be achieved in a single leap. It will be a two-step process: The first step involves coming to recognize the riches that the biblical texts have to offer as works of reason. The second step involves discarding the reason–revelation distinction completely, and learning to see the world as it appeared to the prophets of Israel – before the reason–revelation distinction was invented.

I have quite a bit to say about this second step, and I'll touch on this subject again in my Conclusion. But the focus of this book has to be that first step: coming closer to the ideas the Hebrew Scriptures were written to advance by learning to read them as works of reason. If we can make headway on that, it will be plenty for this one book. After that, I hope to devote a different work to the question of that second step.

If the reason–revelation dichotomy works so poorly as a lens through which to read the Hebrew Scriptures, as I'm suggesting, what holds this interpretive framework in place? Why do intelligent people keep reading these texts this way, as though they were works of revelation, and have nothing significant to contribute to the advancement of our understanding of the world through reason? There are certainly a number of factors at work here. But only one, I think, has to be considered decisive. This is the way people respond to the fact that these texts are punctuated by phrases such as:

And the Lord said to Moses ...³

Or, in the case of the orations of Isaiah or Jeremiah, by expressions such as:

Thus says the Lord ...⁴

For many readers today, the presence of these phrases is enough to bring them, more or less immediately, to a number of conclusions about the authors of these texts. First, it is assumed that whenever these phrases appear in the text, the author intended to report that a miracle occurred – a miracle whereby knowledge is revealed to the mind of this or that individual without his having made use of the mental faculties that people normally use to understand things about the world. Second, it is assumed that the author's understanding of the world, in which a God or gods could miraculously impart knowledge to the minds of men, is no more than fantastic nonsense recorded by the weak-minded and gullible; or just plain lies set down in books by unscrupulous manipulators pursuing dreadful ends now forgotten. In either case, the very fact that these texts depict God as acting and speaking is enough to show that the authors of these books, whether

weak-minded or lying, were not the kind of people from whom you'd want to try to learn anything.

So as lots of people see it, it's the presence in the Hebrew Scriptures of all those instances of God speaking that makes the Bible a work of revelation, and rules out the possibility that these texts could be taken seriously as reason.

Now, you can't avoid the fact that the biblical authors very often attribute speech and actions to God. And you wouldn't want to, either, because such attribution is an essential feature of what the biblical texts have to say. But the line of argument that's tacked on to this – that these texts are reporting miracles every time God is depicted as saying something; that this way of looking at the world can have no more to it than rank superstition; that their promotion of such reports makes the biblical authors weak-minded or liars, and the texts themselves the product of weak-mindedness or lies; that this rules the Bible out as a work of reason – all this is something else entirely. It's basically a propaganda line worked out by French *philosophes* and German professors in their campaign to discredit the Bible and knock the Church out of the ring as a force in European public life. Maybe there were good reasons for them to have adopted this line of argument when they did. But there's nothing in that to recommend it to us. Like most propaganda lines, it isn't really fair. And when you look at it more closely, you see that it doesn't make much sense, either.

So let's take the bull by the horns. Is it true that in confronting a text that depicts God as speaking and acting, we really have no choice but to classify it as revelation; and, consequently, to rule it out as a work of reason?

The answer that should be given to this question is "No." It is not true that we have to classify works that have God speaking and acting in them as revelation, and to rule them out as works of reason. For if that were the case, then we would long ago have ruled out as works of reason some of the most famous works of philosophy ever written – works that are today unchallenged as works of reason, and, indeed, regarded as the basis for the tradition of Western philosophy.

Consider, for example, the writings of Parmenides (c. 515–440 BCE), an Eleatic philosopher of the generation before Socrates. Parmenides is no side-show in the history of philosophy. His examination of the nature of being had such an impact on subsequent Greek philosophy that Plato has one of his principal characters call him "father Parmenides."⁵ No modern history of philosophy sees him as anything other than crucial. Yet Parmenides, who lived about 130 years after the Israelite prophet Jeremiah (c. 647–572), writes philosophy as though it were – revealed to him by a god. Not, as it

seems, a metaphorical god, but one that Parmenides really understood as having taught and inspired him and permitted him to engage in philosophy.⁶ Here is a passage from the opening of his only known work:

The mares that carry me kept conveying me as far as ever my spirit reached, once they had taken me and set me on the goddess' way of much discourse, which carries through every stage straight onwards a man of understanding. On this I was carried, for the sagacious mares were carrying me, straining at the chariot and guided by the maidens along the way. The axle in the naves kept blazing and uttering the pipe's loud note, driven onwards at both ends by its two metallad wheels, whenever the daughters of the sun made haste to convey me....

Whereupon the maidens drove the chariot and mares straight on through the gates along the road. And the goddess received me warmly, and taking my right hand in hers spoke as follows and addressed me: "Welcome, O youth, arriving at our dwelling as consort of immortal charioteers and mares which carry you.... You must be informed of everything."⁷

In this passage, Parmenides carefully describes the experience of climbing into the night sky on a horse-drawn chariot tended by the "daughters of the sun," which ultimately enters the palace of an unnamed goddess who takes his hand and promises to inform him of "everything." And indeed, *everything* we have of Parmenides' philosophy consists of the words of this goddess as she revealed them to him.

What does the goddess's revelation to Parmenides include? Most of the text is lost, but we do know that she tells him of the creation of night and day, the sun and moon, the stars and the ether,⁸ and of "the divinity who governs all things," which looks like this:

For the narrower rings became filled with unmixed fire and those over them with night, in which moves a proportion of flame. Between these is the divinity who governs all things. For everywhere she initiates hateful birth and union, sending female to unite with male, and conversely with female.⁹

Moreover, the goddess tells Parmenides that:

Being is in a state of perfection from every viewpoint, like the volume of a spherical ball, and equally poised in every direction from its center. For it must not be either at all greater or at all smaller in one regard than in another.¹⁰

And that:

First of all the gods she devised love.¹¹

The goddess informs Parmenides of these things and of much else. Moreover, she issues commands ("These things I command you to heed"¹²) that are

to govern Parmenides' life going forward. And in all she teaches him, the goddess insists that only her own "discourse and thought about reality" is reliable,¹³ whereas "human beliefs" are "that on which mortals with no understanding stray two-headed, for perplexity in their own breasts directs their mind astray, and they are borne on, deaf and blind alike in bewilderment, people without judgment."¹⁴ But since the goddess has revealed all these things to Parmenides, he no longer has to rely only on human beliefs, and so she tells him that "[N]ever shall any mortal outstrip you in practical judgment."¹⁵

This dependence of philosophy on revelation is not restricted to Parmenides. Empedocles (c. 490–430), too, portrays the process of his own thought and philosophizing as depending on the goddess Calliopeia, who "sends" him that which is appropriate for men to hear on a chariot from on high. As he writes:

And you, maiden muse of the white arms, much remembering,
I beseech you: what is right for ephemeral creatures to hear,
Send [to me], driving your well-reined chariot from [the halls of] piety.
For if, immortal muse, for the sake of any ephemeral creature,
It has pleased you to let our concerns pass through your thought,
Answer my prayers now, Calliopeia,
As I reveal a good discourse about the blessed gods.¹⁶

Here, Empedocles tells us that the concerns of men may pass through the thought of the goddess, who answers our prayers by sending down from heaven those words that are appropriate for human listeners. And indeed, it is such a revelation that we have recorded in Empedocles' philosophy.

We only have small fragments of the works of Greek philosophers before the time of Plato, so we can't know for certain how many other significant philosophers explicitly attributed their thought to the revelation of a god as Parmenides and Empedocles did. But the snatches we have suggest that this way of understanding philosophy may well have been characteristic of others as well. Heraclitus (c. 535–475), for example, says that "The wise is one alone; it is unwilling and willing to be called by the name of Zeus,"¹⁷ and that "a god is wise in comparison with a man, as a man is with a child,"¹⁸ so that he too may well have been inclined to see philosophy as requiring the assistance of a god.¹⁹ And similar suggestions could easily be made with regard to other pre-Socratic philosophers as well.²⁰ Even Socrates, the very archetype of the philosopher guided by reason, is depicted by Plato (c. 428–348) as receiving revelations and commands and dreams from the gods that give form and content to his life and work. Here, for example, is

Socrates describing the divine voice he often hears, warning him away from doing “anything I should not”:

You have heard me give the reason for this in many places. I have a divine or spiritual sign.... This began when I was a child. It is a voice, and whenever it speaks turns me away from something I am about to do.... [M]y familiar prophetic power, my spiritual manifestation, frequently opposed me, even in small matters, when I was about to do something wrong.... [I]n other talks it often held me back in the middle of my speaking, but now it has opposed no word or deed of mine.²¹

In this text, Socrates speaks of himself as possessing a “prophetic power” that “frequently” intervenes in his actions and speeches, a “voice” that, “whenever it speaks,” warns him to avoid doing or saying certain things. Moreover, the philosophy that Socrates pursues is itself the result of a series of divine commands “enjoined upon me by the god, by means of oracles and dreams and in every other way that a divine manifestation has ever ordered a man to do anything.”²² And while it is true that Socrates does not, like Parmenides, describe his philosophy as itself the speech of a goddess, Plato nonetheless describes him as calling on the Muses and other gods to provide him with answers to the questions that arise in his philosophy, and Socrates does on occasion describe his philosophical speech as being inspired by the intervention of a divine voice.²³ Thus even the Platonic texts can reasonably be said to have presented us with a world in which gods speak to men, guiding them in what they say and how they live.²⁴

What these texts suggest is the following: During the two hundred years between Jeremiah and Plato, there flourished a philosophical tradition – the very tradition that gave birth to Western philosophy – in which the ability to conduct philosophical inquiry was frequently seen as partially or wholly dependent on revelation or some other form of assistance from a god. In this tradition human beings were seen as being unable to attain answers to significant questions on the strength of their own native abilities, so revelation or some other form of divine assistance was needed if they were to reach the truth, which was the possession of the gods alone. Where philosophy in this tradition was successful, it was therefore presented as though it were words spoken or sent by a god, or under the direction of a god.

Yet despite the putatively revealed character of such works, they are today read as though they were works of reason, and not revelation – with historians and professors of philosophy writing about them and teaching courses about them as if they were any other philosophical work. Bertrand Russell’s *History of Western Philosophy*, for instance, devotes a short chapter each

to Parmenides, Empedocles, and Heraclitus without so much as mentioning the role of the gods in producing their philosophies. He does draw attention to the fact that Socrates believed he was guided by a divine voice, oracles, and dreams. But nothing is said to follow from this.²⁵ And other histories of philosophy aren't much different in this respect. Virtually all of them take the fact that some philosophers presented their works as divine revelation in stride, either ignoring it entirely or mentioning it in passing without drawing any weighty conclusions from it.

Now, what would happen if we were to apply the same rules of interpretation commonly used in reading, say, the prophet Jeremiah, to Parmenides' text about his ascent to heaven in a chariot driven by gods? To his being led by the hand by the goddess and receiving commands from her? To his writing down the words he heard from her mouth, and descriptions of the things she showed him, so mankind could attain truth?

Applying the standards that are often applied today in reading the Bible, we'd have to assume, first, that whenever Parmenides describes the goddess as speaking or acting or showing him things, or when he describes himself riding skyward in the chariot, or the actions of other gods he encounters, he is reporting on the occurrence of a series of miracles to which he was witness – miracles whereby knowledge was revealed to him not due to the operations of his own faculties, but due to the will of the gods who chose to reveal this otherwise hidden knowledge to him. Second, we'd assume that all this is no more than fantastic nonsense, and that Parmenides, in choosing to write these things down, must either have been weak-minded and gullible, or else an unscrupulous liar trying to manipulate his audience for the sake of ends now forgotten. And then, having understood that Parmenides is either a fool or a liar for making such false presentations to us, we'd naturally conclude that his writings aren't works of reason, and that they don't, therefore, have anything significant to contribute to our own effort to understand reality. We'd then dispose of Parmenides the way we've disposed of other ancient texts of unreason.

As it happens, I'm no great enthusiast of Parmenides. My personal assessment is that his attempt to derive metaphysics from something like mathematical logic was a wrong turn in the history of mankind's quest for truth, and that we continue to suffer the consequences down to our own day. But I don't see how it makes sense to dismiss a thinker of Parmenides' stature from serious consideration for no reason other than that his ideas are presented in the form of revelation. As the history of philosophy amply attests, we can't expect the great figures of faraway times and places to see the world as we do on every issue, and not even on every issue we see as

crucial.²⁶ And if the supposition that Parmenides really did experience his philosophy as the revelation of a goddess is just too much for us, it seems to me there are many possible ways of understanding the presence of the goddess in Parmenides' text that don't go quite so far, and yet do not end in a quick and arrogant dismissal of his work: Perhaps we think that in the case of the pre-Socratic philosophers, the invocation of divine revelation was merely a stylistic convention. Or perhaps we believe that the goddess is a metaphor, after all. Or perhaps we believe that in the old days people simply interpreted what we today call the "insight" of the human mind as the speech of a god. Or perhaps we believe that Parmenides was in fact a little crazy, but it doesn't matter because he came up with some good stuff too. Or perhaps we believe that he inherited old traditions concerning the speech of the gods and developed them in such a way as to make the philosophical lines clearer, while retaining the old story line. Any of these would work to permit us at least a first approach to the content of Parmenides' ideas if we find reading revelation difficult to swallow. And I'm sure there are many other ways of approaching his text that leave Parmenides' strength of mind and character intact, and permit us to consider his philosophy with an open mind.

So now the obvious question is this. If it makes little sense to dismiss Parmenides' philosophy from serious consideration just because it is presented as the revelation of a goddess, why should anyone take up this same approach to the text, which would embarrass us in the case of the pre-Socratic philosophers, and apply it shamelessly to the authors of the Hebrew biblical works? Is it not the case that *however* we wish to explain (or explain away) the character of Parmenides' writings as works of revelation, these same explanations, or similar ones, will apply just as well to Jeremiah? If we can forgive the Greeks the strange gods and oracles that speak to them, looking beyond this difficulty and judging them by the content of their teachings, why should not this same standard be applied to the writings of the Jews?

In my opinion, the answer to this question is just this: We don't approach the Greek texts by way of the same interpretive posture as we do the Jewish ones because we look at both through the prism of early Christian doctrine – that is, through the prism of the reason–revelation dichotomy, which teaches us to see Greek wisdom as derived from reason, whereas what the Jews have to say is revelation. This dichotomy is applied a priori, without any need for further investigation or justification. Parmenides' vision is studied as a work of reason because his is Greek wisdom; Jeremiah's writings as revelation for no other reason than that his is Jewish wisdom. And this a priori categorization

is self-fulfilling. For once scholars and educated people have been hard at work for generations trying to find what is reasonable and philosophical in Parmenides, they do find it. Meanwhile, the work that is done on Jeremiah's text remains tightly focused on whatever seems to qualify it as revelation.

But this is all wrong. The idea that a given composition can't be a work of reason – indeed, that it can't be philosophy – because it presents itself as revelation is nothing but a bare prejudice. And nothing other than this bare prejudice of ours justifies denying Jeremiah the same consideration as Parmenides. If approached with appropriate respect and common sense, the great Israelite prophet will, I think, be quickly found to have at least as much reasoned discussion and philosophy to offer as many others who have long been studied as philosophers. And the same will be the case with many other texts of the Hebrew Bible, if not all of them.

For much of Western history, the reason–revelation dichotomy was maintained and elaborated primarily through the efforts of the Church.²⁷ But the cultural terrain has shifted, and over the last two centuries perhaps the most influential purveyor of this distinction has been the modern research university. Before proceeding to describe the outline of this book, I'd like briefly to consider the special role that the universities have played – and continue to play – in holding the reason–revelation dichotomy in place as the basis for our understanding of the Bible.²⁸

The Christian reason–revelation dichotomy was intended to impart a conviction that works of revelation were in some important sense superior to works of mere reason, and therefore worthy of especial awe and respect. So it's not the Christian version of the reason–revelation dichotomy that is responsible for the common view that takes Parmenides to have been an epoch-making thinker, while Jeremiah is seen as a half-mad street preacher hearing voices in the air. This view of things owes its force and currency to the philosophers of the end of the eighteenth century, who retained the reason–revelation dichotomy but reworked it to achieve ends entirely alien to those of the Christians who originally popularized it. As is well known, French and German culture during this period was characterized by an extraordinary enthusiasm for Greek philosophy and art. In Germany, especially, it was common to speak of the classical Greeks almost as a kind of super-race, and to hold them up as the sole example of a segment of humanity worthy of serving as an ideal for contemporary Germans. Consider, for example, the following passage from the philosopher Wilhelm von Humboldt, who, as the Prussian minister of education, was the architect of the system of German research universities that eventually became the

model for American higher education as well. I will quote at some length so that his message can't be mistaken:

The study of Greek history is not as it is with the history of other peoples.... [W]e would absolutely misjudge our relationship to them, were we to dare apply the yardstick of the rest of world history to them. Knowledge of the Greeks is not simply pleasing, useful, and necessary to us – it is only in them that we find the ideal which we ourselves would like to be and to bring forth. Although every other period of history enriches us with human wisdom and human experience, we acquire from the contemplation of the Greeks something more than the earthly, something even almost divine....

If we compare our restricted, narrow-hearted situation, oppressed by a thousand shackles of capriciousness and habit, fragmented by countless petty occupations, which never delve deeply into life, with the Greeks' free, pure activity, whose sole goal was the highest in humanity; if we compare our labored works, maturing slowly by repeated efforts, with theirs, which flow forth from the mind and spirit as if from free abundance; if we compare our gloomy brooding in monastic solitude, or mindless intrigues in casual society, with the serene cheerfulness of their community of citizens, who were bound by the holiest bonds; then, one might think the memory of them must make us sad and depressed, just as the prisoner becomes when recalling the unrestrained enjoyment of life; the invalid when remembering his robust health....

But, on the contrary, it is only the transposition to that time of antiquity which, uplifting our heart and widening our spirit, restores us to such a degree to our initial ... human freedom, that we return to our ever so contrary situation with fresh courage and renewed strength, drawing true inspiration at that inexhaustible spring alone. Even a deep awareness of the gap which fate has eternally placed between us and them, urges us to use the ... power born of contemplating them, in order to uplift us to our allotted height. We imitate their models with a consciousness of their unattainability; we fill our imagination with the images of their free, richly endowed life, with the feeling that it is denied us, just as the easy existence of the inhabitants of their Olympus was denied them.²⁹

This passage, published two years before the establishment of Humboldt's University of Berlin, captures the sense of the Enlightenment Grecophile frenzy quite well. In it, Humboldt warns that no one should "dare apply the yardstick of the rest of world history" to the Greeks, for it is "only" in the Greeks that "we find the ideal which we ourselves would like to be." Moreover, Humboldt emphasizes that the Greeks are "more than earthly," indeed "almost divine," and says that our relationship to the Greeks is like the Greeks' own relationship to their gods. True health, life, community, freedom, and holiness are all said to have been theirs alone. And he calls upon his fellow Germans to find themselves in "drawing true inspiration at that inexhaustible spring alone."

To find one's ideal only in the Greeks. To draw inspiration from the Greeks alone. These were fighting words in Christian Europe, and one doesn't have to think too hard to figure out whom they were aimed at. The elevation of the Greeks to the *sole* source of learning and knowledge announced a profound reconfiguration of Christian Europe's self-understanding – a reconfiguration in which the old Judeo-Hellenic synthesis was declared to have been, in retrospect, a mistake; and all that was Jewish in the history and thought of Europe would henceforth be deemed as having been, in fact, detrimental and unneeded.

The philosophers of the Enlightenment applied their formidable skills to constructing an understanding of European history that worked in just this way. Associating the texts of the Jews with ignorance and superstition, they argued that no genuine works of reason had arisen among the Jews and that nothing that was originally Hebrew had made a significant contribution to the history of ideas. Kant, for example, wrote that it is safe to bypass the Hebrew Scriptures in a history of the development of Western thought because they were written by an ignorant people, who gained whatever wisdom they may later have obtained from the Greeks. As he writes:

The Jewish faith was, in its original form, a collection of mere statutory laws upon which was established a political organization; for whatever moral additions were then or later *appended* to it in no way whatever belonged to Judaism as such. Judaism is not really a religion at all but merely a union of a number of people who, since they belonged to a particular stock, formed themselves into a commonwealth under purely political laws.... [Only later was Judaism] interfused, by reason of moral doctrines gradually made public within it, with a religious faith – for this otherwise ignorant people had been able to receive much foreign (Greek) wisdom.³⁰

A similar argument is made by Hegel, who argues that philosophy has been the possession of only two peoples, the Greek and the Teutonic.³¹ As for the supposition that Christian ideas were in some way indebted to those of Judaism, Hegel explains that this is not the case, and that the content of Christianity arose more or less *ex nihilo*, as if in a “second Creation” of the world:

In Christianity [the] absolute claims of the intellectual world and of spirit had become the universal consciousness. Christianity proceeded from Judaism, from self-conscious abjectness and depression. This feeling of nothingness has from the beginning characterized the Jews; a sense of desolation, an abjectness where no reason was, has possession of their life and consciousness.... [In Christianity] that nothingness has transformed itself into what is positively reconciled. This is a second Creation which came to pass after the first.³²

In such passages, the leading thinkers of the German Enlightenment introduced a new twist into the history of the reason–revelation dichotomy, mixing contempt for revelation with an acid anti-Semitism to create a new view of Western history, in which absolutely nothing of worth is to be attributed to the Jews.³³

The impact of this way of looking at the history of the West was immense. From 1810, the German universities were, under Humboldt's leadership, reorganized, with the new natural sciences rather than Christian philosophy at their center. This revamping of the universities was in many respects an extraordinary success, placing vast new resources in the hands of scholars capable of conducting research in the natural sciences and mathematics. German universities quickly became the world center for academic achievements in a dazzling array of disciplines, including mathematics, physics, biology, and medicine. But the scientific worldview was not supposed to be limited to mathematics and natural science alone. History, too, and the study of religion, were also refashioned as sciences. And what the German universities produced in the name of the scientific study of history was the Enlightenment historical narrative of Kant and Hegel. In this way, the burgeoning prestige of science, so well justified by the achievements of Harvey, Boyle, and Newton, was made to shine as well on a historiographic revolution whose achievements were much more ambiguous, and whose motives were far removed from the simple pursuit of the truth about the history of Western ideas.

In the decades that followed, the German universities became an international engine for the dissemination of the Enlightenment philosophy. Tens of thousands of American and British students flocked to Germany for advanced degrees, and by the 1870s, the German model of the “research university” had been established as the standard for advanced studies as far abroad as America and Japan. Of course, the research university was brought to America mostly because of its success in the sciences and mathematics. But it brought with it the Enlightenment interpretation of the history of Western ideas as well. And it is this interpretation that is studied and taught, almost exclusively, in universities around the world today.

This was much the same view of history that was being taught at Rutgers when I began studying there for a doctorate in political theory in the late 1980s. At Rutgers, as at most leading universities of the time, political theory and the history of political ideas were presented as a tradition that began in pre-Socratic Greece, and proceeded from there to Plato and Aristotle, to the Greek and Roman philosophical schools, and to the political thought of Christianity as found in the New Testament and the writings of the Church

Fathers, especially Augustine. The intellectual storyline then continued through medieval political thinkers such as Thomas Aquinas, and to early modern philosophers such as Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, before finally reaching a rousing grand finale with German thinkers such as Kant, Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche. This view of the history of Western political thought was what was available in the standard textbooks, of which the most highly regarded was probably that of George Sabine.³⁴ And it appeared with only minor variations in what were considered the “revisionist” histories proposed by Leo Strauss and Sheldon Wolin.³⁵ In these works, and in every other competitor I’ve seen, the contribution of the Hebrew Bible to the political ideas of the West is either passed over in silence, or else dismissed in a handful of (often quite offensive) sentences.³⁶

Typical of this trend is Wolin’s suggestively titled history, *Politics and Vision*, which devotes all of three sentences to Judaism before going on to a series of chapters describing the contributions to Western thought of Christian political ideas (which he calls “a new and powerful ideal of community which recalled men to a life of meaningful participation”³⁷). Here is what he says:

For the religious experience of the Jews had been strongly colored by political elements.... The terms of the covenant between Jahweh and his chosen people had often been interpreted as promising the triumph of the [Jewish] nation, the establishment of a political kingdom that would allow the Jews to rule the rest of the world. The messiah-figure, in turn, appeared not so much as an agent of redemption as the restorer of the Davidic kingdom.³⁸

Thus according to Wolin, a thousand years of Jewish political thought prior to the advent of Christianity can be effectively nutshelled as the belief that the Jews should seek ultimate political power with the aim of establishing their rule over the entire planet.³⁹

The situation is even worse in the philosophy departments, in which both the history of philosophy and current constructive philosophy are researched and taught much as though the Bible had never existed. Here, too, you can turn to textbooks to get a feel for the tone of the thing.⁴⁰ Bertrand Russell’s *History of Western Philosophy* goes out of its way to point out that Greeks of the generation of Thales – usually described as the first Greek philosopher – may actually have met leading Jewish intellectual figures involved in the composition of the Bible. Russell makes this point in order to be able to speculate about what must have happened in these encounters. As he writes:

The most important [Greek settlement in Egypt] during the period 610–560 BCE was Daphnae. Here Jeremiah and the other Jewish refugees took refuge

from Nebuchadnezzar (Jeremiah 43:5ff.); but while Egypt undoubtedly influenced the Greeks, the Jews did not, nor can we suppose that Jeremiah felt anything but horror towards the skeptical Ionians.⁴¹

Thus Russell, without a shred of historical evidence to go on, flatly asserts that Jeremiah “did not” have any influence on the Greeks he met, and, indeed, that he must have reacted to them with “horror” – conclusions that are in fact no more than the reason–revelation dichotomy projected back into a historical encounter that may well have taken place, but about which we have no record and in fact know absolutely nothing.⁴²

Similarly disappointing is Anthony Kenny’s *New History of Western Philosophy*. This work refers to the Hebrew Bible for the first time in a section entitled “Judaism and Christianity,” which begins as follows:

For the long-term development of philosophy the most important development in the first century of the Roman Empire was the career of Jesus of Nazareth.⁴³

Kenny then proceeds to discuss the moral teachings of Jesus, nowhere returning to consider what ideas may have entered philosophy from the Hebrew Scriptures.⁴⁴ All other histories of philosophy with which I’m familiar proceed in more or less this fashion.

This trend is perhaps at its most blatant in moral philosophy – a field that one intuitively supposes must have been influenced in *some* significant way by the constant exposure of Western thought to the Hebrew Scriptures over more than twenty centuries. Yet this possibility is all but absent from the best overviews of the field of moral philosophy. Gilbert Harman’s *The Nature of Morality* and Bernard Williams’s *Morality: An Introduction to Ethics* present reasoned discourse on morals as involving a discussion of the ideas of Aristotle, Aquinas, Kant, Hume, and Bentham, among many others. But neither of them makes even a passing reference to the Hebrew Bible.⁴⁵ John Deigh’s *An Introduction to Ethics* does mention that certain systems of ethics (deontological ones) ultimately have their roots in the Mosaic law. But Deigh doesn’t feel the need to pursue this point because in the New Testament Paul says that God’s laws are “written on our hearts” and can be studied without recourse to any book. As he explains:

[Paul] means that we can have knowledge of [God’s laws] through reflection on what is in our hearts. For this reason, none of us needs to be familiar with any holy book to have this knowledge. Exercising one’s rational and reflective powers is sufficient. *There is, therefore, a distinction to which Paul alludes, between knowing the law through Scripture and knowing it through reason and reflection. The former is knowledge through revelation, and the latter*

is knowledge through reason. Ironically, then, this central tenet of Christian thought makes recourse to the Bible or any other religious text unnecessary for having knowledge of right and wrong.⁴⁶

Notice that Deigh does not here rely on Paul's claim that the law is "written on our hearts" to say we should do away with *all* books and just study ethics off the top of our heads. Rather, the reason–revelation dichotomy is invoked to distinguish between those books that we do need for ethics and those that we do not: It is only "recourse to the Bible or any other religious text" that is said to be "unnecessary for having knowledge of right and wrong." Consequently, the Hebrew Bible makes no further appearances in Deigh's book, whereas thinkers from Plato and Aristotle to Dostoyevsky, Camus, and Sartre turn out to be sufficiently necessary for the study of ethics to be brought in time and again.

From what has been said, it would seem that there are quite a few philosophers and historians of ideas who are unable to point, in a professional way, to a single idea of significance that might have entered the Western philosophical tradition through the texts of the Hebrew Bible. But I suppose this isn't any more remarkable than the fact that even university *Bible studies* programs often tend to devote little or no attention to the question of the ideas the Hebrew Scriptures were written to advance.⁴⁷ Here, too, the source of the difficulty can be traced to the academic tradition of the German research university, which set out to turn the study of religion into a "science." Perhaps the signal achievement of this effort, in the eyes of its progenitors, was the development of the "source-critical" method for studying the Bible, which understood the biblical texts as "corrupt" – the result of centuries of tampering and abuse by anonymous scribes representing mutually hostile religious sects.⁴⁸ This tampering is said to have resulted in texts that are little better than patchworks of fragments that are at times less than a single verse in length. The hypothetical authors of these text fragments – J, E, P, and D – are seen as different "layers" in the biblical text, with the later layers (P, D) effectively defacing the texts that had been composed earlier on (J, E). For Julius Wellhausen and the founders of the source-critical method, none of this is innocent either. They saw the later layers as having been written by the inventors of "Judaism," whereas the earlier layers had been written by authors whose worldview was much closer to being Christian – so that in the hands of the scientific Bible scholarship of Enlightenment Germany, the Jews turn out not to have been the *authors* of the Old Testament, so much as those who *perverted* and *corrupted* it.⁴⁹ The anti-Semitism of the authors of this theory has been commented upon by Jewish scholars working in the field of biblical studies time and again.⁵⁰ But

here, too, as with Hegel's history of philosophy, it is simply assumed that the truth of the theory is independent of its anti-Semitic provenance.

In light of this picture of a corrupt and fragmented Bible, the idea that the biblical texts could be capable of advancing a consistent view on any subject has come to seem far-fetched in the eyes of many scholars. And indeed, the majority of academic Bible scholars have, for over a century, avoided the investigation of the ideas the biblical texts were written to advance for precisely this reason. The result is that today the field of biblical studies produces a steady stream of works on the philology, compositional history, and literary character of the biblical texts. But the ideas that find expression in the Bible – the metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and political philosophy of the biblical authors – have all too often eluded the interest of academic scholars of Bible. Moreover, the incapacity to deal with the Hebrew Scriptures as works of reason affects numerous other academic disciplines, including the history and archaeology of the Near East, the history of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, the history and philosophy of law, the history and philosophy of science, the history of Western languages and writing, and more.⁵¹

The upshot of all this is that there may be no real reason for treating Parmenides as an epoch-making thinker, while Jeremiah's writings continue to languish under the weight of their ill repute as works of unreason. But it makes little difference. At the universities, the reason–revelation dichotomy continues to barrel onward, the many centuries of accumulated momentum carrying it through. Each discipline passes responsibility for inquiring whether there is something wrong to its neighbor. None seem to feel the disgrace and danger that a profoundly flawed understanding of our history may bring in its train.

What was once an unashamedly anti-Semitic revisionism aimed at showing that the Greeks were “almost divine,” and that the West – and Germany in particular – was descended from these demi-gods alone, has long since crystalized into an orthodoxy. Of course the anti-Semites are long gone, and the job of promulgating this orthodoxy has been handed down to thousands of well-intentioned professors, many of them brilliant scholars in their own fields, who have never given much thought to the origins of the historiographic framework that determines the bounds of their discipline, the research agenda into which they fit their writings, and the outlines of the survey courses that are the basis for imparting knowledge to their students. None of these scholars has the slightest interest in convincing their students that the Jews contributed nothing of worth to the West. Yet their laudable intentions are contradicted by the academic training they have received and

the analytic frameworks they have inherited, which make it difficult, if not impossible, for them to see the Hebrew Scriptures as a potential source for ideas of worth and interest.⁵²

The Hebrew Bible is the modern university's blind side.

The way the Hebrew Bible is read in the universities isn't just a problem for scholars. More than any other institution in the modern world, the universities are seen by educated people as the engine for the discovery and dissemination of truth on pretty much every subject of general significance. And if the professors of philosophy, political theory, intellectual history, Bible, and law at the leading universities are, as a collective, propagating the Enlightenment prejudice that the Hebrew Bible is a work of unreason and, as far as important ideas go, an irrelevance, you can be sure that this is ultimately going to be how most educated people see the matter. And in fact, this is more or less where most Western countries have been since the second half of the nineteenth century.

But the last generation has brought important changes in the intellectual climate. We now stand at the far shore after many years of withering attacks on the Enlightenment heritage. And in many places the old prejudices, even if they are still standing, are not what they once were. At the universities, this has found expression in a new openness to different ways of looking at things, which has been especially manifest in everything having to do with the Hebrew Bible. Most striking in this regard has been the emerging understanding that the argument for the corruption of the biblical texts has been given far too much weight in academic discussion of the Bible. A deep impression was made beginning in the 1970s, when scholars of literature such as Robert Alter and Meir Sternberg began using the techniques of literary analysis to show that many of the biblical texts – regardless of their textual prehistory – are in fact polished works of literature with an evident internal unity.⁵³ This development showed that the Bible scholarship of the universities had radically underestimated the worth of the biblical texts as artistic achievements, and this new respect for the texts has in turn made it legitimate to inquire about the ideas that the craftsmen who composed these texts were concerned to advance in writing them. At the same time, Bible scholars such as Brevard Childs began developing what is now called “canonical criticism” – the academic study of the completed biblical texts, with a particular concern to understand their intended function within the biblical corpus as a whole.⁵⁴ By the 1980s, there had been significant pioneering works on the ethics of the Hebrew Scriptures by Bible scholars such as John Barton and Jacob Milgrom, and on the political ideas of these works

by political theorists such as Michael Walzer, Aaron Wildavsky, and Daniel Elazar.⁵⁵ And since then we've seen book-length academic treatments of the Hebrew Scriptures as works of reason by scholars of widely disparate outlooks such as Joshua Berman, Mary Douglas, Lenn Goodman, Steven Grosby, Leon Kass, Mira Morgenstern, Eleonore Stump, Shmuel Trigano, and Gordon Wenham, among others.⁵⁶ The fact that some of the most prestigious academic presses in the world have been at the forefront of this trend suggests that what we are looking at is quite a profound change in attitudes, and not merely a surface phenomenon.

Nevertheless, I don't want to exaggerate what has been achieved. The Hebrew Bible remains a closed book for the overwhelming majority of educated men and women. There are still no books or even encyclopedia articles that can serve as an introduction to the thought of the Bible for professionals and lay persons who want to begin to understand the subject. Undergraduates still cannot sign up for introductory courses in the ideas of the Hebrew Scriptures, and survey courses in philosophy, political theory, intellectual history, and similar subjects still tend to skip the Hebrew Bible as a subject of discussion altogether. Doctoral students in these fields can still study for their general examinations without fear that the ideas of the biblical authors will turn up on the test. And the first book by a prominent philosopher arguing for the need to incorporate the biblical narratives into the discipline of philosophy, Eleonore Stump's *Wandering in Darkness*, has only just recently appeared (2010). So while there has been quite a bit of highly suggestive work showing that it is possible to approach the Hebrew Scriptures as works of reason, this material remains scattered and relatively unknown, its most suggestive findings often familiar only to a small circle of experts. Moreover, these studies for the most part contain little in the way of systematic reflection on reading the biblical texts as works of reason – so that it remains difficult to get a really clear view of the decisive shift in approach that is implicit in the new scholarship.

Given these circumstances, it seems there is a need for an introductory work that can serve as a gateway to the new approach to the investigation of the biblical texts – a gateway that will permit scholars, educators, and interested lay persons to better understand what is happening and what is at stake, and, hopefully, to take part themselves in the enterprise of retrieving the ideas of the biblical authors and bringing them into a more open dialogue with the ideas of the Western philosophical tradition than has been possible until now. This book is intended to serve as such an introduction. More specifically, I've written it with two purposes in mind: First, it is intended to provide a methodological framework that makes clear what I take to be the

implicit assumptions of some of the best works on the Bible as a work of reason that have appeared thus far; and to extend these assumptions so as to permit more rapid advance in the direction of a well-articulated understanding of the philosophical content of the Hebrew Scriptures. Second, it is intended to provide what I hope are some provocative examinations of the philosophical interests of the authors of the Bible. My hope is that this methodological framework and these provocative examinations will together suffice to make the project of investigating the Hebrew Scriptures as works of reason seem more plausible and engaging, both to those who have been skeptical about it, and to those who have been interested in and excited about the prospect of such a project but have felt it to be lacking in clear direction.

The book is divided into two main parts, followed by a conclusion: Part I, consisting of Chapters 1–3, offers an interpretive framework for reading the Hebrew Scriptures as works of reason or philosophy, including a discussion of the Bible’s internal structure, the purposes for which it was written, and the ways in which the biblical authors use biblical narrative and prophetic oration to advance arguments of general significance. Together, these chapters provide a proposed roadmap for “how to read the Hebrew Scriptures” as works of reason or philosophy.

Chapter 1, “The Structure of the Hebrew Bible,” is devoted to a survey of the internal structure of the Jewish Bible. I suggest that from the point of view of the philosophical reading of Scripture, the most important literary unit of the Hebrew Scriptures is the narrative sequence of nine works extending from the book of Genesis to the book of Kings – the first half of the Jewish Bible – which collectively can be called the *History of Israel*. I then discuss the other principal works of the Jewish Bible in their relation to this History, and make a first approach at answering the question of why the compilers of the Bible brought together such a diversity of viewpoints and genres in a single anthology.

In Chapter 2, “What Is the Purpose of the Hebrew Bible?” I argue that the principal interpretive framework of the New Testament, which sees the Bible as having been written to bear witness or give testimony to the occurrence of revelations and other miraculous events, is largely absent from the Hebrew Scriptures. I suggest that the History of Israel as we have it was composed with the purpose of preventing the disappearance of the Jews as a people after the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem and their exile from their land. It therefore reissues the law of Moses and calls for its observance. But the narrative in which the law is embedded also strives to provide a broader framework for understanding the significance of this law, offering

what I think we should recognize as a philosophical argument for the importance of Israel's covenant with God not only for the Jews but also for "all the nations of the earth." The crux of this argument is that the law of Moses, alone among the laws of the nations, is fitted to man's nature and directed toward his well-being. The History thus holds out the prospect of "life and the good" for all of mankind, and charges the Jews to keep the Mosaic law both for their own well-being and as bearers of this prospect. The narrative tracts of the History of Israel should therefore be seen as intended, among other things, to establish political, moral, and metaphysical truths of a general nature within the context of an effort to explain and understand that which is of particular relevance and concern to the Jewish people after the destruction of their kingdom. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of the other parts of the Hebrew Scriptures, and the way in which they amplify and argue with the standpoint advanced in the History.

The picture that emerges from this discussion is one that sees the biblical authors as concerned to advance arguments of a universal or general significance. But this flies in the face of a series of common prejudices concerning the proper form for the presentation of such arguments. For example, narrative is often said to be a medium that focuses one's attention on the particular, not the universal. Similarly, the metaphors that appear in almost every line of prophetic oratory are considered to be the stuff of poetry, not reasoned argument. In Chapter 3, "How Does the Hebrew Bible Make Arguments of a General Nature?" I therefore look at some of the techniques the biblical narratives and prophetic orations use to advance arguments applicable to the generality of human experience. I conclude the chapter with a look at the way the History and the prophetic orations present their particularistic teachings – concerning the covenant and the Mosaic law – as being based upon, and growing out of, universal characteristics of human nature and of the nature of God's creation more generally.

Having proposed a framework for reading the Hebrew Scriptures as works of reason, I turn, in the next part of the book, to applying this framework to particular studies of the thought of the biblical authors. Part II, Chapters 4–8, thus offers a series of five interrelated studies that examine the metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and political philosophy of the Hebrew Bible.

I begin, in Chapter 4, "The Ethics of a Shepherd," with an exploration of the ethics of the History of Israel, focusing especially on the book of Genesis. The Bible is often said to advocate an ethics of obedience. But I suggest that this view involves a serious misreading of Hebrew Scripture. Nearly all the principal figures throughout the biblical corpus are esteemed

for their dissent and disobedience – a trait the biblical authors associate with the free life of the shepherd, as opposed to the life of pious submission represented by the figure of the farmer. At a certain level this emphasis on disobedience is not too surprising. Since the biblical authors saw most of the human sources of authority with which they were familiar as corrupt, it makes sense that they were advocates of dissent and resistance in dealing with human institutions. The biblical narratives, however, go much farther than this. Abel, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, and other biblical figures are at times portrayed as resisting not only man, but *God himself*, with God going so far as to give Jacob the name Israel, “for you have wrestled with God and with man and have prevailed.” I suggest that in these stories, the biblical narrative endorses what I call an *outsider’s ethics*, which encourages a critique even of things that appear to be decreed by God in the name of what is genuinely beneficial to man. For in the eyes of the biblical authors, what is genuinely beneficial to man is that which will ultimately find favor in God’s eyes.

Chapter 5, “The History of Israel, Genesis–Kings: A Political Philosophy,” argues that the History of Israel was also composed with an eye to advancing a consistent political philosophy. This part of the Bible issues biting criticism of both the imperial state familiar to the ancient Near East and of its opposite, political anarchy. In place of these, the narrative advocates a new and intermediate form of political association: the unification of all Israel under a limited state, to be ruled by an Israelite whose thoughts “are not lifted above his brothers.” This limited state would differ from the imperial states of the ancient Near East in that it would be constrained with respect to its territorial ambitions, the size of its military, and the resources it would expropriate from the people in the form of taxes and forced labor. Such a state has set out on “the good and the just way,” and can hope for success and longevity. Thus the freedom of the Israelites is understood to depend not only on maintaining a ban on idolatry, as is often said, but also on adherence to a political theory of a limited government over one nation. The ultimate collapse of the Israelite state is attributed by the biblical narrative to the abandonment of this political theory by the Israelite kings.

The ethics and political philosophy of biblical narratives treated to this point raise pressing questions of epistemology, and in particular the question of how human beings can escape the circle of their own opinions to attain knowledge of that which is enduring and true. In Chapter 6, “Jeremiah and the Problem of Knowing,” I suggest that the book of Jeremiah grapples constantly with this question. Indeed, the central theme of the book can be said to be the question of how it is possible for the individual to distinguish truth

from falsity and right from wrong in the face of the wildly contradictory views being promoted by prophets, priests, and political leaders. Jeremiah's reflections on how this problem arises and the solutions he offers are shown to constitute an early and substantively interesting attempt to develop a theory of knowledge.

The question of what is meant by *truth* in Hebrew Scripture is pursued in Chapter 7, "Truth and Being in the Hebrew Bible," which seeks a reconstruction of the metaphysical presuppositions of the biblical authors. I begin by observing that in the Hebrew Bible, truth and falsity are not usually qualities of things that are said, but of objects: In Scripture, we find that things such as roads, men, horses, bread, and seeds can be true or false! Examining the way the Hebrew word for truth (*emet*) is used in the Bible, I conclude that an object is considered *true* to the extent that it can be relied upon in the face of hardship and changes in circumstance. But how does this work? It seems to leave the biblical authors without a coherent way of understanding what is meant by *true speech*. Answering this question, I suggest, forces us to look more carefully at the Hebrew term for spoken words (*davar*, pl. *devarim*), which is also the principal term used in biblical Hebrew to refer to objects. I argue that the biblical authors don't subscribe to a metaphysical picture in which word and object are independent from one another because they don't see the world and the mind of the observer as independent from one another. They recognize the *object as understood* as the only reality, and hold that true speech (or true things) is that which can be relied upon in the face of hardship and changing circumstance. In fact, this is what is meant by God's word.

In Chapter 8, "Jerusalem and Carthage: Reason and Faith in Hebrew Scripture," I turn to consider the place of faith in Hebrew Scripture. In contemporary discourse *faith* is often opposed to *reason* (as in the familiar opposition between "Jerusalem" and "Athens"). But I argue that the kind of faith that is usually invoked in establishing this opposition – in the writings of Tertullian or Kierkegaard, for example – cannot be found in the Hebrew Bible *at all*. Indeed, I make the case that the tradition of inquiry found in the Bible is opposed to "faith" in this sense. I then examine the biblical conception of faith, which refers to the belief that God can be relied upon to keep his promises, especially concerning the effectiveness of the Mosaic law in bringing well-being to mankind. Although Moses is depicted as emphasizing the efficacy of the law time and again, the narrative itself limits the extent to which Moses, or indeed any man, can have such knowledge in its portrayal of Moses' attempts to learn God's nature. Thus the narrative is found to both enjoin observance and at the same time to criticize the ideal of a perfect

trust in God. I suggest that the absence of a commandment to have faith in God reflects the biblical teaching limiting the desirability of a perfect faith.

I end this book with a Conclusion and Appendix that seek to tie up loose ends and suggest some directions for further thought and discussion. In my brief Part III, Chapter 9, entitled “God’s Speech After Reason and Revelation,” I return to the question of whether an approach that treats the biblical texts as works of reason can be a sufficient basis for a full understanding of the teaching of Scripture. A significant difficulty, I suggest, comes from the fact that the medieval understanding of what is meant by *reason* – the one traditionally employed in making the reason–revelation dichotomy work – has been under fire for centuries, and no consensus has yet emerged as to what should replace it. Moreover, the common understanding of what is meant by *revelation*, which depends heavily on Greek metaphysical assumptions, may also begin to totter if something like what I’ve proposed in Chapters 6–8 concerning biblical conceptions of truth and being turns out to be right. These two considerations lead me to suggest that with our understanding of both reason and revelation in motion, we may find the in-principle differences that made the reason–revelation dichotomy seem plausible in the Middle Ages growing more and more difficult to maintain.

Finally, I’ve attached an appendix entitled “What Is ‘Reason’? Some Preliminary Remarks.” Throughout this book I use the terms *reason* and *philosophy* without attempting to define them. But philosophers and others who are interested in what I mean by reason are invited to take a look at this appendix, which offers a short sketch of my views on this subject. In it, I point to the fact that the traditional reason–revelation distinction depended on a medieval understanding of reason as a series of deductions proceeding from self-evident premises (or from reports of the senses, which are also evident in themselves). But the success of modern physical science has forced a radical revision of this view. Newton’s science was, after all, based on abstracting general laws (or propositions) from experience. Deductions from these general laws were then confirmed or disconfirmed through further experience, and these results were used to confirm or disconfirm his general laws. This shift in the way we conceive of the functioning of human reason is important to the present discussion because it sheds light on why it was so difficult for many medieval thinkers to recognize reason in the Hebrew Scriptures. After all, if what counts as reason is mostly deductions of chains of propositions from other propositions, there really isn’t much of this to be found in the Bible. But our view of what reason is has changed, and as a consequence the question of whether the kinds of argumentation characteristic

of biblical instructional narrative or of prophetic oratory count as good examples of reason should, as it seems, be considered an open one.

In the Appendix, I point to a possible path for updating and developing Newton's conception of reason to incorporate the growing body of scholarship that sees metaphor and analogy as fundamental to the way the human mind reasons about abstract causes or natures. On the view I present, metaphor and analogy appear at a level of conscious human reasoning that is prior to and more basic than the articulation of such reasoning in terms of propositions. Newton's *Principia*, for example, relies heavily on metaphor and analogy in the forging of its basic concepts, which are only subsequently interrelated by means of a superstructure of mathematical propositions from which deductions can be taken. As soon as one recognizes that the operations of the human mind involved in analogical reasoning are basic to human reasoning concerning general causes or natures – and that neither Newtonian science nor any other form of advanced human reason seems to do without it – it becomes much easier to see that many, if not all, of the biblical authors are indeed engaged in reason, and that it is the exercise of reason they hope for in their readers as well.