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RAV KOOK, NIETZSCHE, AND JEWISH INTELLECTUAL PLURALISM

We are unable to affirm and to deny one and the same thing at the same time—this is a subjective empirical principle, the expression not of any necessity but only of an inability (Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*).

The German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), was known for flamboyant statements meant to shock and shake up his readers. His words cannot always be taken at face value. Having written that “I obviously do everything to be ‘hard to understand’ myself,”¹ his oeuvre has left scholars trying, in fact, to understand what he meant ever since. Yet, without getting bogged down in a critical analysis of Nietzsche’s thought, I would not be the first to find parallels in certain statements, like that above, with positions penned by an almost equally challenging thinker, R. Avraham Yitzhak HaKohen Kook (1865–1935).²

In what follows, I will draw on the thinking of both of these iconoclastic thinkers and their pluralistic epistemologies. Pluralism was a concept Rav Kook found manifest in the Jewish mystical tradition. In turn, this allowed him to make sense of the fractured Jewish world he experienced and present a way forward towards making theological sense of

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¹ *Beyond Good and Evil* 27.

² See, for example, Jason Rappaport, “Rav Kook and Nietzsche: A Preliminary Comparison of Their Ideas on Religions, Christianity, Buddhism and Atheism,” *The Torah U-Madda Journal* 12 (2004), 99–129; Daniel Rynhold, “Unity, Plurality and Human Limits: Secularism in the Thought of Rav Kook,” in *Torah and Western Thought: Intellectual Portraits of Orthodoxy and Modernity*, ed. M. Soloveichik, et al. (Maggid Books, 2015), 19–20; Benjamin Ish-Shalom, *Rav Avraham Itzhak HaCohen Kook: Between Rationalism and Mysticism*, trans. Ora Wiskind-Elper (SUNY Press, 1993), 77. What place Nietzsche’s thought had in Rav Kook’s philosophical world is not clear; however, what seems beyond question is that Nietzsche’s ideas were widely discussed in some of Rav Kook’s circles (see Section VII for elaboration).

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that world. Nevertheless, his courageous use of pluralism was, in many respects, revolutionary. Similarly, Nietzsche sought bold new ways of looking at the world that, if not mystical, bypassed the more linear thinking of his contemporaries. Given that the ideas of both men would play a role in subsequent Jewish thought, it is well worth our while to compare their ideas on pluralism, its limits and possibilities. While coming from different worlds and espousing very different views and hopes for the future, their convergence may produce useful insights into negotiating disagreements without detaching ourselves from our commitments, both cultural-religious and ideological.

Though I am personally convinced that, at least for Rav Kook and his predecessors, we are dealing with a mystical ontological epistemology that altogether challenges the law of non-contradiction (that contradictory propositions cannot both be simultaneously true in the same sense),³ I will not pursue that avenue in this particular article. Rather, in the interest of working within a larger consensus, I will limit myself to arguing for a second-level epistemology, wherein true positions—even when competing and apparently contradictory—are not necessarily a reflection of reality itself, but rather the situated manner in which humans necessarily perceive that reality. That said, at several points throughout this article, the careful reader may still note some indications of what leads me to a more radical reading.

To be clear, my focus is on the development of intellectual pluralism in the Jewish tradition long before and even after Rav Kook. Our primary interest is about pluralism itself and not about the thought of any one individual. This will be reflected by a thorough discussion of the roots of the idea in the Jewish tradition, as found in the Talmud and especially in Maharal (Rabbi Judah Loew ben Betzalel, c. 1515–1609). Our concern with Rav Kook stems from his taking the idea to its logical conclusion and translating it into a broad and concrete plan of action, thereby representing the boldest and most ambitious version of intellectual pluralism within the Jewish tradition.

As for our interest in Nietzsche, it is mostly due to the likelihood that some of his ideas had an influence on Rav Kook, at least indirectly. But since that means that Nietzsche is ultimately tangential to our main discussion, we will not devote significant space to investigating his own influences, nor will we scan other cultures that have developed similar

³ Meaning that something cannot be x and not x at the same time. For its most classic formulation, see Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, IV:4.

modes of thought and may have served as inspiration for Nietzsche and his possible predecessors.⁴

I

Long before Rav Kook, the Talmud presented its readers with a curious assertion:

R. Abba said in the name of Shmuel, for three years Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel were arguing [each saying that the law followed their opinion]. A heavenly voice (*bat kol*) went out and said, “These and those (*elu ve-elu*) are the words of the living God!” (*Eruvin* 13b).

Clearly, “the words of the living God” can be reasonably understood as synonymous with truth. If so, this well-known passage establishes that x and not x can both be true.⁵

Granted, the Talmud never has a human voice presenting such a counterintuitive assertion (note that its source here is a “heavenly voice”). Yet it is nevertheless recorded by human teachers in order to instruct their human audience. Still, given its attribution to a supernatural source, it is fair to ask to what extent the actual understanding of this passage was perhaps meant to remain “in the Heavens.” In other words, was it intended as a mystical pronouncement that the reader is expected to accept on faith, or was it meant to be understandable on the plane of human reason? And if the latter—given that it cannot be the dominant

⁴ A case has been made, for example, to trace Nietzsche’s views on this topic to his interest in the pre-Socratic thinker, Heraclitus. Though overstated, see Matthew Meyer, *Reading Nietzsche Through the Ancients: An Analysis of Becoming, Perspectivism, and the Principle of Non-Contradiction* (De Gruyter, 2014). See also, Joanne B. Waugh, “Heraclitus: The Postmodern Presocratic?,” *The Monist* 74:4 (1991), 605–623. Another interesting connection may be found in similarities between Nietzsche’s thought and that found in the Chinese *Zhuangzi*. In that regard, see, for example, T. Connolly, “Perspectivism as a Way of Knowing in the *Zhuangzi*,” *Dao* 10 (2011), 487–505. Given the findings of this article, it would be interesting to see whether there may not have been indirect influences upon Nietzsche from Jewish sources as well.

⁵ I emphasize that they only *can* be true to make clear that the Talmud’s statement remains modest in scope. As we will later see in Maharal, the default would seem to remain otherwise. See Jeffrey S. Helmreich, “A Jurisprudential Problem as Old as the Talmud,” in *Jewish Philosophy in an Analytic Age*, ed. Samuel Lebens, Dani Rabinowitz and Aaron Segal (Oxford University Press, 2019), 60–77. Helmreich seems to miss this in formulating the problematic of his discussion, even as he acknowledges this straightforward reading as a possibility.

paradigm in making our decisions, legal or otherwise⁶—in what ways can and should it be incorporated into our thinking?

Since Rav Kook was hardly the first Jewish thinker to address this passage,⁷ it is useful to look at some of his predecessors. Of these, the interpretation of Maharal does the most to set up Rav Kook's reading of the text and is of particular interest.⁸

Maharal occupies a rather unique place in the pantheon of Jewish thinkers. He was a highly creative and prolific writer not easily grouped into any particular school of thought. That would help explain his work being largely unnoticed until it was rediscovered by some of the early Hasidim two centuries after his death. In any event, his highly careful and insightful reading of this passage in the context of other related Talmudic statements (particularly *Hagiga* 3b) is useful, less because it is representative of the Jewish tradition, but because of how it relates to the topic at hand.

Like several others who grapple with this passage, one of the central questions Maharal addresses is that if two differing opinions are attempting to capture one objective truth, how can they both be true. He answers the question by going back to its assumptions, and suggesting that the question is rooted in an ultimately false understanding of that which is being evaluated: In determining whether a piece of meat is kosher, for example, we would have presumed the question is subject to binary categorization. It is either kosher, or it is not—there is no third possibility. Maharal rejects this way of thinking, suggesting that it is based on a simplified model of objective reality, necessary only because of its utility. Instead, he claims that reality is never binary: A piece of meat is actually always both kosher *and* not kosher. The only actual question is whether it is more kosher than not.

Just like in the world, one finds a complex object made of opposites . . . and you will not find a thing that is completely simple (made up of only one element)—so too in the Torah, there is no thing that is completely

⁶ In fact, the Talmud continues after the cited passage to make a heavenly decision that the law follows Beit Hillel. Without such a pronouncement, the academy would have seemingly been frozen in inaction.

⁷ For an inventory and analysis of many of these thinkers' approach to our passage in *Eruvin*, see Moshe Sokol in "What Does a Jewish Text Mean? Theories of *Elu ve-Elu Divrei Elohim Hayim* in Rabbinic Literature," *Daat* 32–33 (1994), xxiii–xxv; and Avi Sagi, *Elu ve-Elu* (HaKibbutz HaMeuhad, 1996). Because of the paradox set up by the straightforward reading of this passage, it is no wonder that many commentators discussed in these works sought alternative readings.

⁸ *Be'er ha-Gola* 1 (London, 1964), 19–20.

impure and which does not have any trace of purity as well If so, [regarding] the scholar who claims an object to be impure and the one who claims it to be pure, the first one studied the Torah just like the second, since each one sees an aspect [of the truth].⁹

Maharal explains that when we transcend the simplification required for decision-making, we realize that the true nature of all existence is complex. Using the classical notion of the four basic elements (air, water, fire, earth), he reminds his reader that everything in the physical world is comprised of a combination of these elements. If today's scientific understanding would deny this and maintain that there are some basic elements on the periodic table that can be found in isolation, it would still recognize that the vast majority of substances we encounter (e.g., air, water, etc.) are nevertheless compounds of two or more elements. For our purposes, this ultimately comes to the same thing—that which appears singular is actually complex. The only difference is whether this is usually or always the case.

Regardless of how we would update the model, Maharal uses it as a paradigm for how God's world works more generally. Just as natural matter and substance are made up of several elements, so too religious legal constructs are comprised of multiplicities. According to this, one would never¹⁰ be completely guilty or completely innocent of a crime. Rather there would always be elements of both in any given situation. That means that when there is a well-thought-out disagreement (as opposed to one in which one or both sides make a mistake in their reasoning), the two sides are simply focusing on different elements of the same reality, both of which are truly present.

To cite an example from another realm of Jewish law, most of the decisive commentators opine that if a *solid* food is cooked before Shabbat, reheating it on Shabbat would not constitute a prohibited act of cooking on Shabbat; in the case of a *liquid* food, reheating does pose a transgression.¹¹ But what happens when we are dealing with a food that is half-solid and half-liquid? Though we will develop this case further in the next section, it is immediately apparent that there are two variables with opposing implications here. Hence one could focus on either of those variables and still be observing something that is true—"the first one studied the Torah just like the second, since each one sees an aspect."

⁹ Ibid., 20. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Hebrew are my own.

¹⁰ Again, if we would want to adjust the metaphor to the science of our days we would change "never" to "usually."

¹¹ *Shulhan Arukh, Orach Hayyim* 318:4, 15; and see *Biur Halakha* 318:4, s.v. *yeish*.

Likewise regarding many of the laws of *kashrut*. Though one thinking in strictly binary terms may not realize it, these laws also lend themselves very well to Maharal's point because the *kashrut* of a food item often depends on multiple variables that may be in opposition. So in a case in which it is limited to two variables—such as an animal both having split hooves and chewing its cud—an animal that has one but not the other, could very easily be described as being “half-kosher.”¹²

Since attention to such complexity hinders action, it is necessary to create a simpler model as best we can. That is to say that when and if it has practical consequences, the option of saying that something is half-kosher—even when that would be its most accurate description—would be rather unhelpful in the normative world, which is the locus of Jewish law. In spite of the theoretical complexity involved in classifying the status of any food item, then, it must somehow be declared operatively kosher or not kosher without qualification.¹³

II

If we should now be able to agree that (at least some) realities are complex and can be seen from different perspectives, we could theoretically still severely limit its application. Maharal's pronouncement of the correctness of both sides (*elu ve-elu*) can be limited to a case when two or more components are *equally* present.¹⁴ That is because once the ratio is not 50/50—though both sides are seeing a true aspect of reality—one

¹² This is assuming—as would Maharal—that these qualifications are neither random nor symbolic but essential. In other words, these features embody spiritual qualities that make an animal kosher. That an animal possessing only one sign is actually forbidden by the Torah is not a denial of the half-kosher essence of the animal. It may be understood as a pragmatic determination that a half-kosher animal must be *treated* as if it were completely un-kosher.

¹³ While there is room for indeterminacy in halakha—what is called a *safek* (doubt)—this is generally not a reflection of the indeterminacy of the facts before us, but rather the result of incomplete knowledge about something or the inconclusivity of a discussion. There are, of course, exceptions such as the *koi*, which is both a wild animal (*hayya*) and domesticated beast (*behema*) and the two categories of androgens, the *tumtum* and the *androgynos*.

¹⁴ In fact, Maharal himself maintains that the concept of “these and those are the words of the living God,” only applies in the case of Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai, in which the two opinions are *equally* correct. See also his *Derekh Hayyim* on *Avot* 15:(16) 17, in which he expands on the uniqueness of this case. However this need not be a major concern for us. Of greater interest is Maharal's paradigm of multiple truths as applied more generally to cases when they are not equally correct—when one perspective is more correct than the other. At that point, they may no longer be equally good descriptions of a given reality, yet they can both remain accurate—in that they both reflect an aspect of reality that corresponds to what actually exists.

perception would seem to be *more* accurate than the other and, hence, the correct position.¹⁵ Examining this more carefully leads to the realization that it is actually more complicated.

Let us begin by pointing out that our model of complexity up until now was itself a simplification. To illustrate Maharal's position, we looked at a food that was half-solid and half-liquid. Yet it is entirely possible that one variable is *qualitatively* more meaningful than the other, even when there is quantitative parity. For example, it may be argued that the law is determined by the liquid even though it is in the minority.¹⁶

Another good illustration of the qualitative element superseding the quantitative in halakha is the notion of *miktzat ha-yom ke-kulo*, that the last day of mourning can be considered a full day if one only performs the mourning rituals for a short time in the early hours of the day (*Shulhan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 395:1*). According to our understanding, the evaluation represented by this halakhic decision is that a day is defined as one of mourning so long as mourning is not completely absent.¹⁷

Of course, this does not necessarily extend the seemingly equal truth value granted by *elu ve-elu* to all situations where there is a reasonable argument. All we have shown so far is that it need not be limited to quantitative equality. Two sides of an argument can be equally correct, even when looking at quantitative disparity. That is because, just like there can be superiority in quantity, there can also be superiority in quality.

III

There is another important statement that takes the application of Maharal's model even further—one which need not automatically follow from what we have seen so far. We might have thought that what truly interests us is determining the dominant element of any particular

¹⁵ It should be noted, however, that Maharal sets up a simplified binary model which leads to such a conclusion. Yet it is unlikely that he was not aware of other dimensions—such as those we discuss in this section—that complicate the model.

¹⁶ The rationale given for this position is more subtle, but it does not significantly alter our point. See *Peri Megadim, Mishbetzot Zahav* 253:13, *Yabia Omer* 6:48, n. 3, and *Yalkut Yosef* 4:55, n. 66. More generally, there will be some interplay between quantity and significance: If and when I have established which element is the more significant, I will still need to determine at what point its presence is outweighed by its quantitative minority, such as when a non-kosher item loses its dominance when it is mixed in with 60 times as much kosher food.

¹⁷ Although its rationale is ultimately secondary, perhaps it is that the intensity of mourning colors an entire day and so characterizes it as one of mourning. Of course, while this idea is only applied to the last day of a mourning period and not to the others, that does not negate our analysis but rather implies the need for nuance.

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reality. Once we have determined that, we can proceed to deciding its correct legal resolution. That being the case, the defeated arguments that saw a non-dominant element as being dominant should then only be of academic interest.

Yet, Maharal makes the following claim:

Nevertheless, do not say that something that is not dominant is not considered to be anything. This is not so. For one who hears all of the opinions is the one who surely grasps the matter according to [the reality], that the matter has multiple qualities.¹⁸

Apparently, the only way to understand something fully is to see all of the coherently possible ways of looking at it. And that is why we must be attentive of others' opinions even when they are "wrong." For even though we may already be aware of a non-dominant aspect of a given reality, we will apparently not realize its full significance until we hear the value ascribed to it by someone else who (mistakenly) sees it as dominant.

According to this position of Maharal, it appears that our evaluation of something affects our cognition. Even though scholars looking at a given question may be well aware that there are other coherent ways of looking at it and that the models they build ignore certain variables that would unnecessarily complicate them, nevertheless, they must often work with these models as if they were absolute. And it is a natural and short step to go from "as if," to "actually is." That is to say that once I have determined that something is not kosher, I will have often—on some cognitive level—simplified its kosher aspects out of existence.

Maharal tells us that once I have determined something to be more un-kosher than kosher, the only way to truly retain my awareness of the presence of its having aspects of *kasbrut* is to listen to the voices that are focused on those aspects. While I cannot agree with their assessment of the reality as being primarily kosher, they do me a great service by reminding me that it is nevertheless still *also* kosher (independent of permission to consume it). As we will soon see, this dovetails with an idea also found in Nietzsche.

IV

As already mentioned, understanding Nietzsche's philosophy is notoriously difficult. Even if we had the luxury of a more extended discussion, it is not at all clear that we would be able to come to an authoritative

¹⁸ *Be'er ha-Gola* 1, 20.

understanding even as it relates to the aspect of his thought known as perspectivism.¹⁹ For our purposes, we propose to only look at one possible way of understanding some of the most salient features of his perspectivist epistemology—that all human understandings are inevitably limited by being situated in individual selves.

We come to Nietzsche in order to answer a question that emanates from the discussion of Maharal above: Why I cannot include awareness of the solid food when I focus on the liquid food that is mixed in with it. For—at least, intellectually—I must certainly be aware that the former is also present.

Perhaps the most famous among Nietzsche's statements about this is the following passage from *Genealogy of Morals*:

There is *only* a perspective seeing, *only* a perspective knowing; and the *more* affects we allow to speak about one thing, the *more* eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our "concept" of this thing, our "objectivity" be.²⁰

That Nietzsche uses sight here to illustrate his point seems to be far from incidental. Indeed, the metaphor of optics takes up a significant place in his writings. In several places, for example, he talks about the perspective of an artist in drawing a picture: A painter will traditionally be trained to look at the "larger picture," in order to reduce what is actually in front of him into things that are, in Nietzsche's words, "beautiful, attractive and desirable for us, when they are not."²¹ Of course, in order to do so, he must also "shut his eyes" to the many details that are also present in front of him. Why is that?

Though the passage quoted at the beginning of this article has more to do with logic than with optics, it could be related to our question as well. Most critical here is Nietzsche's mention of *inability*—our minds are hard-wired in ways that prevent us from doing certain things that are otherwise theoretically possible. Though one could argue otherwise, he appears to be claiming that there is a contingent (as opposed to it being a "necessity") impediment in how we understand opposing propositions. While trying to fully identify the source and nature of this impediment

¹⁹ For those who wish to read more about Nietzsche's perspectivism, good introductions can be found in Steven D. Hales and Rex Welshon, *Nietzsche's Perspectivism* (University of Illinois Press, 2000); and James Conant, "The Dialectic of Perspectivism: Part I," *Nordic Journal of Philosophy* 6:2 (2005), 5–50 and "Part II," 7:1 (2006), 6–57.

²⁰ *The Genealogy of Morals* III:12 (emphasis in original).

²¹ *The Gay Science* 299.

is far beyond our scope, it would be fair to point to some type of unconscious filter that blocks one from simultaneously entertaining opposing propositions. Relating that back to our example above, we could point to a similar inability to focus on the solid food within the mixture when one is focused on the liquid—or at least to contemplate it fully.²² For even though it is not identical, one can easily equate my perspective with x and any other perspective with not x . For in the same way that I cannot presently entertain an alternative to what my mind “knows” to be true, neither can it entertain a perspective that is not the one I have in front of me. That, in some cases, one can change one’s perspective is not the point. One can also go from asserting x to asserting not x —It is simply that we cannot do them both at the same time.

The lacuna just described can be felt in the way we internalize data more generally—be it raw sensory data or processed intellectual data. Whatever it is that I perceive, it is that and not something else. Whatever their source, these limitations prevent us from being able to *assert* a reality that is different from our own at any given point in time. Being an inability, it exists even when one is aware that his truth is limited by his perspective and, hence, ultimately no more absolute than that of another.²³

Since I am locked into my own perspective at any given instance, the closest I can get to another perspective is by hearing about it from someone else. Once it is embodied by another responsible intelligent agent, ultimately no different than I, it lends it a credibility that can be more easily integrated into my sense of what it is that I am actually observing. While it is true that I may not see it any more than before, I can now give it epistemological validity. To illustrate, if I am under the impression that all people agree with me that the mixed food under discussion is more liquid than solid (remember that “more” here need not be a question of

²² In this regard, philosophical and scientific discussion of how we look at ambiguous figures—such as Wittgenstein’s well-known duck-rabbit picture—may be helpful. Though there will continue to be discussion about its nature and whether it is absolute, our experience informs us of the general truth of E.H. Gombrich’s assertion that, “the more closely we watch ourselves, the more certainly we will discover that we cannot experience alternative readings at the same time” – *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (Pantheon Books, 1960), 5. For some of the recent scientific discussion about this, see Fiona Macpherson, “Ambiguous Figures and the Content of Experience,” *Noûs* 40:1 (2006), 82–117; J. Kornmeier and M. Bach, “Ambiguous Figures – What Happens in the Brain when Perception Changes but not the Stimulus,” *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 6 (2012), 1–23.

²³ As above, we are not talking about mistaken perspectives. To use vision as a metaphor, I could mistake a cat for a dog, but that would be a mistake easily corrected by more careful evaluation of the data.

quantity but can also be a question of significance), there is no reason for me to consider that it may somehow be more solid than liquid. But if there are some who rationally and sincerely perceive it to be the opposite, I ultimately have no reason to doubt the truth of their perspective. Meaning that, all other things being equal, there is no objective reason to claim that my perspective is epistemologically truer than theirs. Though—as per Nietzsche—we may be *unable* to fully integrate a perspective besides our own, we can now at least give it more credence.

As with Maharal, this understanding of Nietzsche brings benefits to the individual by essentially enlarging one's field of vision. For, according to either, the *only* way to get a more complete understanding of something is by incorporating an understanding of it as viewed through the lens of others along with one's own.

As we saw earlier, Nietzsche informs us that, “the *more* eyes . . . we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our ‘concept’ of this thing . . . be.” In line with the metaphor of visual perspectives, that means that the more locations covered, the more complete (which is notably not in quotation marks, meaning a term that Nietzsche did not see a need to qualify as being merely conventional) a picture we will have. Moreover, that “external” vision of someone else will sometimes even be critical, if I am to successfully interact with the reality in question. For example, if the first time I experience a dog, I can only see its back, I will be unaware that it has the ability to bite me. But if a person standing at a different angle, with visual evidence of the dog's fangs would share his perspective, I would be better prepared with regard to the dog's potential danger.

While Nietzsche was speaking neither of religious law nor spirituality, he presents a useful model easily adapted by those who feel that these realms also involve rational observation and cognition. (In the case of Judaism, much of this is concerned with the proper understanding of classic religious texts.) Indeed, on some level, such a model had already been suggested by Maharal and possibly even by the Talmud. But we will briefly examine other possible influences on Rav Kook's development of this model before turning our attention directly to him.

V

In looking at Rav Kook's predecessors, we will focus on a question that we have not yet addressed: Why is it that opposing schools of thought see their own group's position as correct? Going back to the half-liquid food (or is it half-solid?), what makes one group focus on its solid characteristic while

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the other focuses on its liquidity? Examining this helps us realize the shortcoming in Nietzsche's visual metaphor. If people are looking at the same thing from different perspectives, I understand why they see things differently. But why should this be the case when we are all ostensibly looking at something from the *same* place? In other words, why do different reactions to ambiguous phenomena occur, and why are the reactions distributed as they are? Though the question is particularly charged when the reality is truly indeterminate—as may be the case with the arguments of Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai, according to Maharal—it is a question that can be asked for every well-reasoned argument. Given that both perspectives are coherent views of the reality in question, what made one person or group favor one view over the other?²⁴ In the introduction to his *Yam shel Shlomo* on *Hullin*, Rabbi Shlomo Luria (Maharshal, 1510–1573) answers this by writing:

[It] is because all the souls stood at Sinai and accepted [the Torah] through 49 conduits (*tzinorot*) Each one saw through his own conduit according to his apprehension and accepted according to the strength of his upper soul, depending upon its height or limitations . . . until one person arrives at a conclusion of pure, a second at the opposite extreme of impure, and a third in the middle . . . and they are all true.²⁵

According to Maharshal, there are two factors that shape a person's perspective, at least when it comes to his understanding of Torah. The first is the conduit through which one's soul received the Torah and the second is the strength of the specific soul in question. The Torah's understanding here is presented as fragmented into 49 basic visions. So while there may be some overlap in these perspectives, human access to knowledge (Torah) is understood as fragmented from the beginning. Moreover, one's orientation towards that fragmentation seems to be determined from birth. Not only would this explain why any one of us would see a given perspective as opposed to another, it would also help explain our inability to see the other perspective equally well, even when we have been made aware of it.

Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev (1740–1809) further explains this idea as follows:

²⁴ Here one is reminded of the work of Jonathan Haidt, who—though in a very different and more limited way—also tries to address this question. See, for example, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (Pantheon, 2012).

²⁵ Both this translation and that of the next source are based on that found in Moshe Sokol, "What Does a Jewish Text Mean?"

[One] studies the simple meaning of the holy Torah according to his perspective. If he is from the world of kindness (*hesed*), then all is pure, permissible, and kosher, according to the determination of his intellect in the holy Torah. So too . . . if he is of the attribute of strength (*gevura*), then he will follow the opposite direction. Beit Hillel's attribute was kindness, and therefore Beit Hillel took the lenient view.²⁶

What both of the last two sources do is root the perspective in different aspects of God. God is not fragmented and hence able to contain everything, even those attributes that appear to be opposed to one another. But since man does not have that capability, the various attributes need to be distributed to different people for them to be manifested.

It turns out from this that man most accurately reflects God when different sides observe reality differently and *express* it as such. To only hear one side would *always* be a partial understanding of ultimate reality.²⁷

VI

Rav Kook brings together the ideas of Maharal and the other thinkers that we have seen so far: He endorses the value of perspectives rejected in the process of determining the law, along the lines of Maharal; and he connects the various perspectives with man's situated and therefore limited refraction of God's truth, along the lines of Maharal and R. Levi Yitzhak. (As we will discuss in the next section, it is possible that he incorporates Nietzsche's contribution to the discussion as well.)

But by taking these two ideas to their logical conclusion he does something far more important. The Jewish thinkers presented up until this point had limited their observations to arguments about how to understand various halakhic conclusions. This is certainly the locus of the discussions about parallel truths in the Talmud and other classic sources. However, once we have established the legitimacy and value of perspectives that are "wrong" (e.g., identifying an element as dominant when it is not), it is difficult to see what would differentiate the Rabbis from any other serious and careful thinkers. The ideological pluralism within Judaism that we have discussed so far seems to be rooted in the limited accuracy of human cognition—something unrelated to anything that is

²⁶ *Kedushat Levi* (Jerusalem, 1958), vol. 1, 155.

²⁷ This may be why Maharal has a preference for a universe in which, as he says, "nothing is simple" (meaning not compounded). Only God can be simple, in the sense that it is only His unity that can contain and harmonize opposing elements.

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specific to Torah scholars or even Jews more generally.²⁸ That is to say that even if some explanations of this phenomenon explain it in theological terms that might be more restrictive (such as Torah, the Jewish soul, etc.), the phenomenon of varying perspectives is clearly universal. To deny this would be to make the difficult claim that when traditional Jewish scholars argue about Torah, their arguments may be rooted in their varying identifications of different elements; but when others argue, it is simply that one side is making a mistake.

It appears that Rav Kook saw the universality of multiple valid perspectives, which we have been discussing, as straightforward and obvious. One of the reasons for this was a mystical worldview that saw God's immanence in everything; and another was a personal inclination towards inclusiveness. At least as important a reason was that it was the best way to explain a world in which it was becoming increasingly clear that the Orthodox Jewish establishment did not have a monopoly on truth. As someone actively participating in the rapidly changing Jewish society of early twentieth-century Palestine, the weaknesses of the Orthodox community and the strengths of other groups were painfully obvious. Even earlier, as a yeshiva student and community rabbi in Europe, his worldview was already affected by the Jewish community's increasing exposure to the outside world and the intellectual ferment this created. Nor was he isolated from all of the scientific, technological, and political progress that was, in many cases, changing the world for the better. This led him to adapt the notion of ideological pluralism within Judaism as expressing a reflection of God's manifestation in the world:

We glorify in the Lord of the Universe who created all mankind in His image. . . . Each branch grows in its own way, the one to the right and this one to the left . . . but in their essence they all ascend to a single place.²⁹

Nor was this limited to the secular realm. Rather, even religious perspectives at odds with Judaism could refract some of God's truth:

²⁸ This is not to say that it is impossible to differentiate between Jews and gentiles, especially according to the Kabbalistic tradition that posits a qualitative difference between Jewish and gentile souls. On that level, it is particularly noteworthy that in spite of Rav Kook's being highly influenced by Kabbalah, he did not apply this notion of a *qualitative* difference to this discussion (or at least, not without much nuance).

²⁹ Ms. *Kovetz Katan* 97, cited and translated by Benjamin Ish-Shalom, "Tolerance and its Theoretical Basis," in *Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook and Jewish Spirituality*, ed. Lawrence Kaplan and David Shatz (New York University Press, 1995), 193.

And since the character in which human thought and feelings are connected with the unlimited divine light must be [refracted] in different shades – because of that, the spiritual approaches of each nation and group are different.³⁰

Rav Kook combined an urgent need to explain his world with a pre-existing tradition of pluralism rooted in classical Jewish texts. However, he did not just apply that tradition to his times; he developed it in profound and important ways. Arguably among the most important was his suggestion that the coming together of partial visions was a critical component of the messianic process. He accordingly explained most ideological conflicts—especially at that rather tumultuous time in Jewish history—as rooted in an unenlightened consciousness that had not yet discovered the nature of human cognition. So long as people believe that their ideas and understandings cannot coexist with those of others, it is natural for there to be conflict. However, when it will become fully understood that this is not at all the case, there will conversely be very little reason for discord. In other words, it is this notion of partial and complementary perspectives more than anything else that will allow for the universal peace that most broadly characterizes the messianic period. In his own words:

It is impossible for true peace to come to the world except specifically through valuing [the need to] make visible all sides and approaches and to clarify how each one of them has its place³¹

VII

While it is possible that Rav Kook was influenced by Nietzsche's ideas, it is unlikely that Rav Kook saw it that way. That is, of course, very different than saying he had no exposure to the influential German thinker. As opposed to some of the other Western philosophers he discusses, he never mentions Nietzsche by name; nevertheless, several of his writings seem to relate to, or at least closely parallel, ideas found in Nietzsche.³² Given Rav Kook's involvement with both Orthodox and non-Orthodox intellectual circles in which Nietzsche's thought was a not-infrequent subject of conversation, it would have been highly unlikely for Rav Kook not to have encountered the German philosopher's trendy and provocative ideas.³³

³⁰ *Orot ha-Kodesh* III (Mossad HaRav Kook, 1985), 15.

³¹ *Olat Re'iyah* I (Mossad HaRav Kook, 1985), 330.

³² See note 2 above.

³³ Among those through whom Rav Kook could have encountered Nietzsche's ideas was Micha Josef Berdyczewski, who had earlier studied together with him at

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In spite of the theoretical value that he ascribed to non-Jewish thinkers discussed in the previous section, Rav Kook never manifestly integrated ideas that he ascribed to non-Jewish sources.³⁴ Rather, as he does with the ideas of Kant, Darwin, Bergson, and others, Rav Kook had a propensity to find the best of their ideas already anticipated in Judaism—oftentimes specifically in its Kabbalistic tradition. Moreover, as we can see from the following, he was not immune from the natural human tendency to claim that “we” not only said it first, we also said it better:

Even the neo-Kantian revival cannot match even the smallest part of Israel’s strength. It is true and [the Jews] have always known it—and we did not need Kant to reveal this secret to us—that all human cognitions are relative and subjective.³⁵

I feel confident that what he says here about Kant he would have said about Nietzsche and other philosophers whose ideas he found dovetailed with the Jewish tradition. However, even if Rav Kook did not find inspiration in such thinkers, it seems that he understood the tremendous value in the confirmation of Jewish ideas by influential world thinkers. He must have been aware of the weight these figures carried in certain important Jewish circles and understood the benefit that could be reaped by aligning their ideas with traditional Judaism. What the presence of the idea of multiple truths (perspectivism) outside of Jewish circles meant, then, was that mankind—and the Jewish people in all of its contemporary diversity—was better prepared to accept this less than obvious idea.

Yet, despite Rav Kook’s contrary pronouncements, his involvement with Western thinkers may have been more than mere strategy to promote traditional Judaism. We cannot categorically reject Nietzsche’s impact on Rav Kook. For our purposes, however, it is enough to say that Rav Kook’s thought is enriched when read across the backdrop of Nietzsche.

VIII

To sharpen the connection between Rav Kook and Nietzsche, it may be helpful to briefly contrast what they had to say with what has been said

the yeshiva of Volozhin and who later became highly engaged with Nietzsche—to the point that he became known as the “Nietzschean Hebrew.” For more on Nietzsche’s influence upon Jewish thinkers of the time, see David Ohana, *Nietzsche and Jewish Political Theology* (Routledge, 2019).

³⁴ See note 48 below.

³⁵ *Rav A.Y. Kook: Selected Letters*, translation by Tzvi Feldman (Ma’alot Publications, 1986), 92. The original is found in *Iggerot ha-Re’iyah*, vol.1, #44 (Mossad HaRav Kook, 1985), 47–48.

more recently by thinkers associated with postmodernism.³⁶ In this regard, it may be most important to point out that—as opposed to many postmodernists—Rav Kook did not accord the same *level* of truth to all perspectives.³⁷ It is likely that this was rooted in his theological commitments as well as in his Kabbalistic orientation. The former, because it assumes pride of place for prophecy in general, and Mosaic prophecy in particular. The latter, because it is bound up with a worldview built on a hierarchy of the diffusion of God’s “light.” But these need not be the only reasons. On this score, Nietzsche the atheist may well have lined up squarely with Rav Kook.³⁸ Going back to the sight metaphor, not all visual perspectives are as clear or as proximate. Moreover even among those that are equally clear and proximate, some may be more significant than others.³⁹ Recall the different understandings of the dog as seen from behind or in front. In that case, the latter is surely able to perceive more important information than the former. It is of course true that Rav Kook went further in his ordering of perspectives than did Nietzsche. However, neither would have denied that one can speak of truth or truths, a grounding that would be subsequently severed by many postmodernists.⁴⁰

³⁶ In this regard, see Tamar Ross, “The Cognitive Value of Religious Truth Statements: Rabbi A.I. Kook and Postmodernism,” in *Hazon Nahum: Presented to Dr. Norman Lamm on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Yaakov Elman and Jeffrey S. Gurock (Yeshiva University Press, 1997), 479–528. Though Ross’ reading of Rav Kook allows her to find more commonality between Rav Kook and postmodernism than I believe actually exists, it nevertheless provides us with some useful parallels. Though one might be surprised that Ross discusses this topic without mentioning Rav Shagar (see Section IX below), who—modeling himself upon Rav Kook—was most well-known for his appropriation of certain strands of postmodernist thought, in this case Ross would have been correct, since the modeling has almost nothing to do with postmodernism. Instead, the comparison is one of how to work with the zeitgeist as opposed to fighting it. Shagar himself notes that while his orientation was postmodern, Rav Kook’s was modern—“Judaism and Postmodernism, Concluding Thoughts” (http://shagar.co.il/?page_id=1260).

³⁷ In all fairness, neither do many postmodernists. In discussing postmodernist attitudes on truth, we are clearly dealing with a spectrum of viewpoints. However, living in a time largely dominated by the scientific model and Kantian thought, Rav Kook and Nietzsche would both have found themselves near the opposite end of the spectrum from radical postmodernists.

³⁸ Of course, this is not a consensus position in Nietzschean studies, a field that Steven D. Hales aptly describes as one that “only contains pockets of agreement and little satisfactory unification.” See his “Nietzsche’s Epistemic Perspectivism,” in *Knowledge from a Human Point of View*, ed. A.M. Crețu and M. Massimi (Springer, 2020), 21.

³⁹ See Ken Gemes, “Postmodernism’s Use and Abuse of Nietzsche,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 62:2 (2001), 337–360.

⁴⁰ See David Pilgrim, “The Real Problem for Postmodernism,” *Journal of Family Therapy* 22 (2000), 6–23.

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It may, however, be worth noting here that Rav Kook's realism was actually closer to Kant, and so even further from postmodernism than it was to Nietzsche. For—in clear opposition to Kant, who spoke about *das ding an sich* (the thing-in-itself)—Nietzsche denied the coherence of anything beyond human truths, even if some human truths might be more accurate than others.⁴¹ For Nietzsche, to claim coherence of anything beyond our situated perspective would not only be impossible, it would be meaningless.⁴²

More nuanced than what is usually found in postmodernism, however, even Nietzsche's approach did not go as far as Rav Kook's in this regard. As the latter saw it, the existence of truth beyond that which is currently available to mankind is of tremendous importance—less as a referent for human truth, than to embed our very existence in absolute meaning. Here, too, the grounding of Rav Kook's philosophy is his religious worldview. Accordingly, God provides a framework within which to understand the validity of the various perspectives beyond mere empiricism. One of the most important ramifications of such a framework is that it grants ultimate validity to all of the legitimate perspectives, given that they are all expressions of God.

Whereas some have found similarities between Rav Kook's understanding of multiple truths and postmodernist thought, such an equation would not only be anachronistic, it would, more problematically, be limiting. That is because Rav Kook was finally relating to something he found to be part and parcel of the Jewish tradition and a straightforward reading of the Jewish sources. This is buttressed by the fact that he was preceded by other traditional thinkers, such as Maharal, long before him. The claim, presumably shared by all classical Jewish commentators, would be that the information they were presenting was already embedded in Judaism's foundational texts and, thereby, part of the tradition itself.⁴³

IX

Although the concept of truth and how to relate to it is an expansive and highly complicated topic, it is not one that a religious Jew can simply

⁴¹ How accuracy can be squared with the incoherence of an actual thing is another paradox, but one that is beyond the scope of this article. It is, however, a good example of the types of problems that exist in Nietzsche's writings that have led to the diversity of interpretation alluded to in the previous note.

⁴² Most famously in *Beyond Good and Evil* 16; and see Maudemarie Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 1990).

⁴³ On the interplay of classical texts and traditional Jewish hermeneutics, see Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, "Torat Hesed and Torat Emet: Methodological Reflections," *Leaves of Faith*, vol. 1, (Ktav, 2003), 61–87.

put to the side. For, on the one hand, one is expected to maintain the truth of his or her faith commitments and the various assertions that support them.⁴⁴ On the other hand, he or she must live with the fact that, in the modern period, the provability of such ideas has been largely undermined. While no one is forcing us to accept Kant's rejection of the provability of God and revelation, that rejection's elegant power and its broad acceptance make it quite formidable. But even more critical is that it represents a new and different type of challenge. For the critique is no longer specific, as with Christianity, but rather epistemological. In other words, it does not challenge the content of our arguments, as much as deny our ability to make them altogether.

The primary traditional Jewish response to the challenge of Kantian philosophy has been to say that we come to our religious truths from experience, and not from philosophy.⁴⁵ It is our experience of God that informs us of His truth; and our experience of Him is largely, though not exclusively, through the Torah. But for many—and in line with the epistemological challenge just mentioned—the *nature* of this claim must also be defended in order to withstand its critique.

Largely in response to this challenge, Rav Shagar (Shimon Gershon Rosenberg, 1949–2007) sought to destabilize the basis of the modern critique of Judaism (and of traditional faith more generally). He did so by harnessing postmodernism as a manner in which an educated Jew could legitimate the assertion of the personal, experiential truth of his or her beliefs.

Rooted in some of the Nietzschean ideas presented above, postmodernism went one step further in the denial of objective truth. Obviously, such an approach does nothing to lift Judaism's own truth claims. But it does bring down all other truth claims as well—including those of Kantian philosophy and even science. By doing this, it creates a space for all cultures, including Judaism, to assert their own localized truths.

While Rav Shagar was able to reconstruct some postmodernist sense of truth that would allow the faithful Jew to subscribe to traditional Judaism's claims, it was a thin one that many find unsatisfying. In that regard, Rav Shagar's identification with postmodernism's frontal

⁴⁴ Defining those commitments is far beyond the scope of this article. However—Menachem Kellner's provocative *Must a Jew Believe Anything* (Littman Library, 1999) notwithstanding—the default is that such assertions not only exist but are central to traditional Judaism.

⁴⁵ See, for example, Eliezer Berkovits, *God, Man, and History: A Jewish Interpretation* (Jonathan David, 1959), and R. Kalonymus Kalman Shapira of Piaseczno in *Tzav ve-Ziruz* (1966), 10–11.

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attack on the various claims that challenged Judaism can be seen as a Samson-like effort of “let me die together with the Philistines”: It may well undermine the grounding of earlier attacks against our beliefs, by bringing their own assertions into question. But it only does so by devaluing the concept of truth altogether, thus further eroding our own truth claims as classically understood.

What is required then is an epistemology that evens the playing field without turning it into some sort of artificial game. In fact, we have seen that such an epistemology already exists. It can be found in Rav Kook as well as in Nietzsche. And for the former, it can further be drawn from ancient sources within the Jewish tradition. Accordingly, the ideas presented here show that one need not buy into the postmodernist project to allow for the coexistence of Jewish truth claims with others that seem to contradict it—whether they be specific, such as those found in Christianity, or epistemological, such as those found in Kantian philosophy. Yet because this approach is fully rooted in the classical Jewish tradition, it follows that tradition’s clear premise that objective truths do exist.

The problem with this approach is the question with which we started, of how two competing versions of the truth can both be objectively correct. More than anything else, however, the answer to this question may be found in understanding that our inability to get past this question may be rooted in our human limitations. That realization, in turn, requires humility—a humility that begins with Nietzsche’s insight about our innate need for non-contradiction—to understand that it, too, is a human model and, as such, a partial truth, even as we must subscribe to it when making practical decisions.

Indeed, the main point of the passage in *Eruvin* with which we began may contain this very message. We asked whether the passage was something that humans could fathom. Much of our discussion has been an attempt to do just that—to understand it. And yet much of what is to be understood is that man can never fully understand; this is a paradox of the human condition. But even if we are prevented from fully understanding the multifaceted nature of truth, we can still use the multiplicity of human perspectives to come closer to understanding that which is possible for us to grasp.

If we have briefly outlined the theoretical advantages of this approach, we should not fail to also outline its possibly even greater utilitarian advantages. Briefly, the ideological pluralism envisioned here allows for the acceptance of others who are the carriers of competing notions of truth, without any need to abandon one’s own convictions. Once truth is not understood as zero-sum, disagreement becomes more manageable.

Otherwise—ostensibly, in line with the principle of non-contradiction—the truth of a competing position would force us to relinquish our own. Understandable reluctance to do this can—as has often happened—lead to addressing such a threat with hostility, and with violence against those that bear it. But once competing ideas are no longer threatening in the same way, neither are those individuals that hold them.

The practical advantage to our approach is not only that it removes the basis for unnecessary hostility. It also allows societies and groups to more freely examine, ponder, and evaluate the ideas of others, since something that is not a threat can be appreciated, even when it differs greatly from my own conceptions.

Not only was this not lost on Rav Kook, he even gave it religious significance. Returning to the continuation of a passage cited earlier:

And even things that appear . . . contradictory, only via the gathering of all the parts and all the elements and all opinions that appear to differ . . . only through them will the light of truth and justice appear. . . .⁴⁶

Rav Kook adds an additional important dimension here. Not only is disharmony resolved by finding truth in seemingly contradictory positions, but injustice is eradicated as well. For even if a given culture's truth is overwhelmed by that of another, and its community is peacefully convinced to accept it, an injustice has still been committed.

This is in strong opposition to the idea that the universalization of legal and ethical standards is the mechanism to best bring justice for all. The reason this is not so is that the standards of that universalization have always been determined by the strong against the weak. Strength here is not measured only in military, economic, and political terms, but perhaps primarily in intellectual ones. What I mean is that classic Greek culture, for example, had developed a strong intellectual tradition that often overwhelmed its competitors. But that strength does not mean all of its ideas were necessarily right and those of its opponents wrong. A strong debating team will almost always defeat its opponents regardless of how ridiculous the position they argue. As with physical conflict, such a victory means they wielded stronger “weapons.” When played out between cultures, it can be seen as domination accomplished as a result of an uneven balance of power.

The above does not mean that there is no room for cross-cultural debate and discussion. But the starting point needs to be different than what has generally been assumed. If one begins with the idea that there

⁴⁶ *Olat Re'iyah* I 330.

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will be a winner and a loser according to shared standards of truth, it sets up the field for what Rav Kook characterized as injustice. Rather, debate must be waged with the premise that disagreement is not only natural, but that it is desirable as well. Natural, because we are all differently situated; and desirable, because it exposes us to more perspectives of the truth. A debate should begin with the understanding that all the participants are seeking to better grasp the position of their opponents and not to primarily convince them of their own.

The above follows from Rav Kook's emphasis on the added value presented by each different perspective. Because for Rav Kook, echoing what we saw previously in Maharal and Nietzsche, the full picture requires every truth to be expressed. All cultures have an obligation to the rest of mankind to express their particular truth. And so from the perspective of the Jewish nation—as would be the case for all other nations as well—an additional advantage of this approach would be that it provides an important rationale for national identity, thereby preserving it and preventing defections.⁴⁷

A question remains: Can this approach allow Judaism to maintain its claim of being somehow truer than other doctrines. If all perspectives are true, is there any way in which Judaism can be “truer”? As already discussed, to say that all legitimate perspectives are true and valuable need not be the same as saying all truths are *equally* valuable and true. It is not only conceivable, but almost unavoidable that some truths, due to their richness, clarity, or utility, will add more to humanity as a whole than others.

And so, given Judaism's contribution to civilization, it need not be ethnocentric and self-interested to say that the Jewish people are the carriers of its most important voice—even if it is certainly not meant to be its only voice. This, in turn, would explain the concept of the chosen people: It is not that this people will carry the only truth. Rather, it is that—because of their unique closeness to God—they will bear the most significant accessible truth (which recognizes that ultimate truth cannot be fully contained by anything but God Himself). Rav Kook expresses it as follows:

On reaching full maturity the human spirit aspires to rise above all conflict and opposition. It will recognize all expressions of the spiritual life as an organic whole, in which differences in states will not be erased,

⁴⁷ It should be clear that in such a pluralistic context, the preservation of national identity and each nation's unique perspective would not lead to the abuses rooted in xenophobic strains of nationalism.

in which there will remain a distinction between the primary and the peripheral, high and low, more holy and less holy. . . . But this will not be in a grievous form that inspires discord and hostility. It will be in a form similar to the division of the organs in the body . . . each of which recognizes its place as that of its neighbor, whether it be below or above it.⁴⁸

X

Is what we have written here immune to critique from itself? Meaning, if all truths are indeed partial, can we really demand that more monolithic conceptions of the truth be discarded? Certainly not. Consistency demands that we should not expect, nor even want, to see our approach completely replace the dominant Western paradigms. There is still some value to competitive zero-sum visions of the truth. Their contribution may be in raising the bar, such that rigor and consistency be applied when it is applicable and helpful. But whatever their contribution, our own approach forces us to find them a seat at the table, even if they would not reciprocate. From our perspective, it will not be the only, nor even the dominant, seat. Rather it will need to take its place as one voice among many.

Regardless of how truth is perceived by other cultures, our contention is that what we have presented is the most faithful understanding of the Jewish tradition's vision of truth. Furthermore, the ideological pluralism intrinsic to such a vision may well represent an important contribution to the rest of the world as well.

But will Western thought ever actually come to appreciate such an approach? The insights of Nietzsche show that the pluralistic Jewish approach to truth may find affinity and precedents even there. Of course, Nietzsche's work is well more than a century old. His intellectual descendants have largely turned to a postmodernism that has largely abandoned the concept of truth altogether. Hence we are left with either the (neo-) Kantian school that seeks one universal truth or a postmodernism that is uninterested in any truth at all.

But today's reality need not be an indication of what always will be. Rav Kook believed that the pluralistic approach to truth was tied

⁴⁸ R. Avraham Y. Kook, "Fragment of Lights (*Talelei Orot*)," *Takhamoni* (1910), 12–24, translation by Ben Zion Bosker in *Abraham Isaac Kook* (Paulist Press, 1978), 311–312. Ultimately, Rav Kook saw Judaism as, at least potentially, encompassing all of the perspectives carried by the other nations. Indeed, it was the task of Judaism to "gather the sparks" dispersed among the nations and bring them to a higher level. But whether Rav Kook would agree or not, it seems clear that there are valuable perspectives that are better expressed by other cultures today than they are in Judaism—if they are expressed by it at all.

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to the clearer understanding that will be man's lot in the messianic period. Moreover, for Rav Kook—as for us—that period may well have already begun, and is certainly not very far off. Regardless of when it will happen, our conviction is that its eventual adoption by all mankind is only a question of time.