

"Sweetness and Light": Hellenic and Hebraic Wisdom in Dialogue

Matthew Farrelly, Educator and Independent Scholar | | January 5-7, 2017, Oriel College, Oxford



THE JUBILEE CENTRE
FOR CHARACTER & VIRTUES

HELLENIC TRADITION



Matthew Arnold

"Nothing can do away with [the] **ineffaceable difference** [between Hellenism and Hebraism]... we can hardly insist too strongly on the **divergence** of line and of operation with which they proceed...And the practical consequences which follow from this difference, **leave their mark on all the history of our race and of its development.**"

- Arnold (112-114)

* "What Plato calls the true, firm, intelligible law of things; the law of light, of seeing things as they are. **Even in the natural sciences, where the Greeks had not time and means adequately to apply this instinct**, and where we have gone a great deal further than they did, it is **this instinct which is the root of the whole matter and the ground of all our success; and this instinct the world has mainly learnt of the Greeks**, inasmuch as they are humanity's most signal manifestation of it...But, oh! cry many people, **sweetness and light are not enough**; you must put strength or energy along with them, and make a kind of trinity of strength, sweetness and light, and then, perhaps, you may do some good. That is to say, **we are to join Hebraism**, strictness of the moral conscience, and manful walking by the best light we have, together with Hellenism, inculcate both, and rehearse the praises of both...but we must be careful to praise Hebraism most."

- Arnold (131-2)

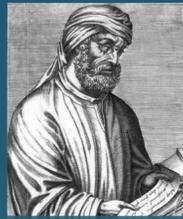
The Archetypal Human



* "For it is he who gave me [understanding (*phronesis*) and skill in crafts], **unerring knowledge** of what exists, to know the **structure of the world and the activity of the elements**; the beginning and end and middle of times, the alternations of the **solstices** and the changes of the seasons, the **cycles of the year** and the **constellations of the stars**, the **natures of animals and the tempers of wild animals**, the power of **spirits** and the **thoughts of human beings**, the **varieties of plants and the virtues of roots**; I learned both what is **secret and manifest**, for **wisdom**, the fashioner of all things, **taught me.**"

- Wisdom of Solomon 7:16-22, NRSV

SCHISM?

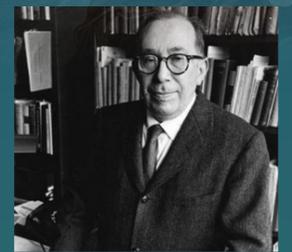


"What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?"
- Tertullian of Carthage

"Hebraism and Hellenism, - between these two points of influence moves our world. At one time it feels more powerfully the attraction of one of them, at another time of the other; and it ought to be, though it never is, evenly and happily balanced between them."

- Arnold, C&A (110)

HEBRAIC TRADITION



Leo Strauss

"Directing us to John Calvin, Strauss points to a condition within which **reason loses its authority.**

Revelation, the expression of the will of an omnipotent God, not only may **contradict the voice of reason**, but it also **constitutes an authority beyond the grasp of reason.** Reason, the product of the comparatively puny human intellect, is **denied 'the right to judge revelation.'** Indeed, **to wish to understand on one's own is an act of rebellion.** To seek confirmation of what is captured in Scripture betrays sinful pride and is the very meaning of impiety. Any claim to knowledge is properly **subordinate to the authority of the Law.**"

- Jon Fennell (319)

Hellenism

"To get rid of one's ignorance, **to see things as they are**, and by seeing them as they are **to see them in their beauty**, is the **simple and attractive ideal** which Hellenism holds out before human nature; and from the simplicity and charm of this ideal...**human life in the hands of Hellenism, is invested with a kind of aerial ease**, clearness, and radiancy; they are full of what we call **sweetness and light.**"

- Arnold (115-16)

Hebraism

"It is because the conflict between philosophy and revelation refers to **incompatible ways of life** that we can speak of it as **the 'theologico-political problem.'** This conflict is a species of a broader phenomenon, namely, the **tension between authority and unrestricted inquiry...Revelation is the clearest and most precise foe of philosophy.** It is such because both revelation and philosophy aspire to the same objective: knowledge of the truth, especially about how one should live – and they claim to do so through **mutually exclusive paths.** Each prescribes a way of life that strikes at the heart of the other."

- Fennell (321)



Philo of Alexandria

* THESIS: SYNTHESIS

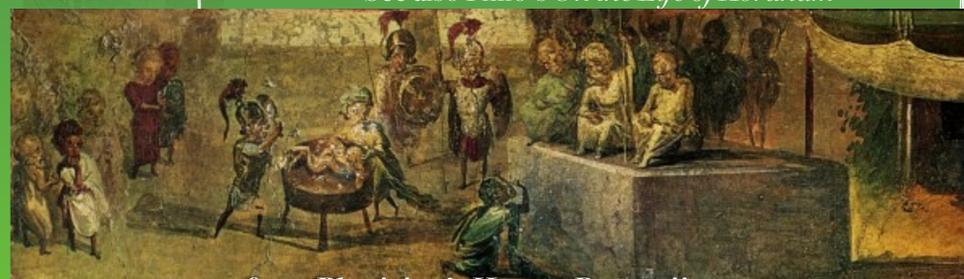
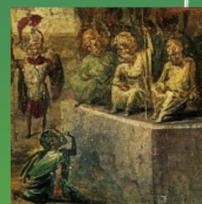
Compatibility & Complimentarity between Hellenic and Hebraic Wisdom Traditions



Hebraic Wisdom & the Covenantal Nature of Reality

For human flourishing to happen in such a matrix requires holistic wisdom, which invited one to live a rightly-ordered life in intimate, interdependent relationship with all spheres of reality: the divine, human society, the self, and the natural world.

hokma



from Physician's House, Pompeii

* Humans: "Citizens of the Cosmos"

"The cosmos was his **home and city**, since no hand-made constructions built out of materials of stone and wood were yet present. He resided in the cosmos with complete safety like in his native land, wholly without fear, because he had been **found worthy to exercise dominion** over earthly affairs and all mortal creatures stood in awe of him, having either been

trained or compelled to obey as master. And so **he lived in enjoyment of peace without conflict.** But since every well-governed city has a **constitution**, it was the case that the **citizen of the world necessarily**

made use of the constitution which belonged to the entire cosmos. This is the **right reason of nature**, which is named with a more appropriate title "ordinance", a **divine law**, according to which obligations and rights have been **distributed to each creature.**"

- Philo of Alexandria; trans. Runia (84)

** See also Philo's *On the Life of Abraham* **

contact: matthew.r.farrelly@gmail.com