

# THE TALMUD AS ANTHROPOLOGY

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## I

Gerson Cohen speaks of “the blessing of assimilation in Jewish history”, by which he means “the healthy appropriation of new forms and ideas for the sake of our own growth and enrichment”. He says, “Assimilation properly channeled and exploited can . . . become a kind of blessing, for assimilation bears within it a certain seminal power which serves as a challenge and a goad to renewed creativity.”<sup>1</sup> There is no area of Jewish expression more distinctive and intimate to the Jewish people, more idiomatic and particular to its inner life, than the study of the Talmud. In the present age, in my view, it is the study of the Talmud which has experienced<sup>2</sup> and must continue to undergo the fructifying and vivifying experience of assimilation. The reason is that it is precisely there that the Jewish intellect expresses itself.<sup>3</sup>

Now there have been two approaches to learning which already have stimulated students of the Talmudic and cognate literature to ask new questions and therefore to understand and perceive new dimensions in that literature. The first is the study of the language of the Talmud in the light of other Semitic languages, on the one side, and of Indo-European ones, Greek, Latin, and Iranian, on the other. The application to the Talmudic literature of comparative philology in fact is very old, since its first great monument appears in the eleventh century, after the Islamic conquest of the Mediterranean world.<sup>4</sup> The result of the modern phase of that project, which has been continuous since the nineteenth century, has been a clarification of the meanings of specific sentences, the specification of the origins and sense of words used in one place or in another, in all, a great improvement upon our understanding of the concrete and specific meanings of the Talmud’s various discrete words and phrases. This step forward in exegesis, however, has not vastly improved our understanding of the method and meaning of the Talmud. But it has given greater clarity and accuracy to our search for its method and meaning.<sup>5</sup>

The second approach is the study of the Talmud for historical purposes. It has been in three parts, first, use of Talmudic evidence for the study of the general history of the Near and Middle East of its own times;<sup>6</sup> second, use of historical methods for the study of what was happening among the Jews and especially the people who created the Talmud itself;<sup>7</sup> third, use of historical perspectives in the analysis and elucidation of the Talmud’s own materials.<sup>8</sup> None of these three methods has attracted a great number of practitioners. In a moment I

shall explain why use of historical methods for the study of the world of the Talmud has, on the whole, produced results of modest interest for people whose principal question has to do with the discovery of what the Talmud is and means. At this point it suffices to say that the assimilatory process has worked well. The Talmud is no stranger to historical discourse, just as it is a familiar and routine source for the pertinent philological studies.

In my view there is yet a third approach to the description and interpretation of texts and to the reconstruction of the world represented in them. It is the approach of anthropology, the science of the description and interpretation of human culture.<sup>9</sup> Anthropology began its work, as Marvin Harris points out, "as the science of history". It was meant to discover the lawful principles of social and cultural phenomena. In the past half-century "anthropologists sought out divergent and incomparable events. They stressed the inner, subjective meaning of experience to the exclusion of objective effects and relations . . . with the study of the unique and non-repetitive aspects of history".<sup>10</sup> In our own day there is a renewed interest in generalization and in regularities, for instance, in underlying structures of culture. Now what makes anthropology fructifying for the study of the Talmud is a range of capacities I discern in no other field of humanistic and social scientific learning. To me, anthropologists are helpful because they ask questions pertinent to the data I try to interpret.<sup>11</sup> We who spend our lives investigating and trying to master the Talmudic and cognate literature and to gain valid conceptions of the world created by that literature are overstuffed, indeed, engorged, with answers. Our need is for questions. Our task is through the exercise of taste and judgment to discern the right ones.

Information by itself nourishes not at all. Facts do not validate their own importance. Unless they prove relevant to important questions, they are not important. As I shall explain, among anthropologists of various kinds, who would not even agree with one another in many things, I find a common core of perspectives and issues which make their work stimulating for Talmudic learning of a particular sort. It is, specifically, because they show me the meaning of the data I confront that their modes of thought and investigation demand attention and appreciation.

## II

Before specifying those things to be learned from anthropology, let me spell out what I find wrong with the approaches of that field which, to date, has predominated in the academic study of the Talmudic literature,

I mean, historical study. There are two kinds of problems which in my view call into question the fruitfulness of historical study of the Talmud. It is because of these two problems that I turn to a field other than history to find some useful questions for those many answers which we have at hand.

The first problem is very obvious. The Talmud simply is not a history book. To treat it as if it were is to miss its point. That is to say, the Talmud and related literature were not created to record things that happened. They are legal texts, saying how people should do things (and, sometimes, do do things); or they are exegetical texts, explaining the true meaning of the revelation at Sinai, the Torah; or, occasionally, they are "biographical" (that is, hagiographic) texts, telling stories about how holy men did things. They are put together with an amazing sense of form and logic, so that bits and pieces of information are brought into relationship with one another, formed into a remarkably cogent statement, and made to add up to more than the sum of the parts. Talmudic essays in applied logic rarely are intended to tell us things which happened at some one point. They still more rarely claim to inform us about things that really happened.

For in the end the purpose of the Talmudic literature, as Talmudists have always known, is to lay out paradigms of holiness. The purpose is to explore the meaning of being human in the image of God and of building a kingdom of priests and holy people. For that purpose, the critical questions concern order and meaning. The central tension in the inner argument lies in the uncovering of sacred disciplines. The Talmud describes that order, that meaning, which, in society and in the conduct of everyday life, as well as in reflection and the understanding of the meaning of Israel and the world, add up to what God wants. The Talmud is about what is holy.

Now in the quest for the holy order, things of interest to historians, that is, the concrete, one-time, discrete and distinctive events of history, are obstacles. For order lies in regularity. But history is the opposite. It is what is interesting — which is what is unusual — that is worth reporting and reflection. So it will follow that the last thing of interest to people of the sort of mind who made the Talmud is whether or not things really happened at some one point.<sup>12</sup> What they want to know is how things always happen and should happen. If I may project upon the creators of the Talmudic literature what I think their judgment would be, they would regard history as banal. My basis for thinking so is not solely that they wrote so little of it. It is principally that they wrote something else. So history misses the point they wish to make.

Besides the triviality of history there is a second problem, of a quite

different order. It concerns how history is done today. For a long time in Western culture we have understood that merely because an ancient source says something happened, that does not mean it really happened that way, or even happened at all. An attitude of skepticism toward the claims of ancient documents was reborn in the Renaissance and came to fruition, in the religious sciences, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. From that time onward, it was clearly understood that, in trying to figure out who did what and why, we are going to stand back from our sources and ask a range of questions not contained in them. When we come to the Talmudic sources out of which some sort of history (biography, politics, or a history of ideas) may be constructed, so that we have a sense of what came first and what happened then, we have therefore to reckon with the problem of the accuracy and reliability of our sources. That problem would confront us in the examination of any other source of the period of which the Talmud is a part. It is not an insurmountable problem. But it must be met.

Now when we compare these two problems, the first, the problem of the intent of our sources and the meaning they wish to convey, and the second, the problem of the accuracy of our sources for the doing of that sort of work which people generally call historical, we realize that the historical approach to the Talmud requires a considerable measure of thoughtfulness. Studying the Talmud as history demands the exercise of restraint, probity, and critical acumen. Unfortunately, these traits, when Heaven divided them up, were not lavished upon the sorts of folk who think that the important thing to ask the Talmud is what really happened on the particular day on which Eleazar ben Azariah's hair turned white, or — for that matter — on which Jonah was swallowed by the whale. Let me give just one instance of this fact — the obtuseness of those who ask the Talmud to tell us about people who really said and did the things reported about them — so that I not be thought to exaggerate.

For this purpose I choose the most current book available to me, which is Samuel Sandmel's *Judaism and Christian Beginnings*.<sup>13</sup> Sandmel provides an account of what he at the outset admits are "legends" about some of the holy men of the Talmudic literature. These stories he tells specifically in the context of his description of the state of Judaism in the formative century of Christianity. It is self-evident that he would not write about these particular men if he were discussing the Judaism of the third or fourth centuries. But these are the centuries in which the stories he cites first are attested. When Sandmel chooses Hillel and Shammai, he clearly wishes the reader to believe that he is telling about people who are contemporaries of Jesus. When we listen to the fables Sandmel

brings in evidence of these contemporaries, what do we hear? That is characteristic of Sandmel's wide-eyed and credulous narrative as a whole:

Hillel loved his fellow man as deeply as he loved the Torah, and he loved all literature of wisdom as much as he loved the Torah, neglecting no field of study. He used many foreign tongues and all areas of learning in order to magnify the Torah and exalt it . . . , and so inducted his students.<sup>14</sup>

The voice of this paragraph is the historian, that is, Sandmel, claiming to tell us about dear old Hillel (and mean old Shammai). He puts nothing in quotation-marks, and his footnotes lead the reader to unanalyzed, unquoted sources, as though he had any basis whatsoever, other than third and fourth century fables, for every single sentence in this paragraph. But that paragraph, in fact is nothing but a paraphrase of materials found in rabbinic sources of a far later age than Hillel. None of the sources emerging from the late second century (a mere two hundred years after Hillel is supposed to have lived) knows about Hillel's vast knowledge. Indeed, in an age in which the sources report conflict on whether or not Jews should study Greek, and in which only a few highly placed individuals are allowed (in the Mishnaic corpus) to do so, no one thought to refer to the "fact" of Hillel's having known many languages. The reason, I think, is that no one knew it, until it was invented for purposes of story-tellers in the age in which the story was told, whatever these purposes may have been. It follows that, to represent Hillel in this way (and Sandmel runs on for fifteen pages with equivalent fairy tales) is simply meretricious. If it is the Hillel of legend, then it is a legend which testifies to the state of mind of the story-tellers hundreds of years after the time of Hillel (and Jesus). The stories Sandmel tells us on the face of it record absolutely nothing about the age, let alone the person, of Hillel himself. If they do, Sandmel does not show it. In my judgment, this kind of historiography is deceiving and childish. If Hillel were not interesting to Christians, Sandmel would not tell about him.

But even if this were the true, *historical* Hillel, what difference would it make? By that I mean, what important information, relevant to profound and interesting questions confronting ancient or contemporary culture, should we have, for instance, in the knowledge that "Hillel loved his fellow man", and in similar, didactic statements? The study of stories about saints is interesting, from the perspective of the analysis of culture and society, because it opens the way to insight into the fantasy and imagination of that culture and society. We learn from the hopes which people project upon a few holy men something about the highest

values of the sector of society which entertained those hopes and which assigned them to those men. Or we may learn something about the fears of that group. But the one thing which I think is dull and unilluminating is a mere repetition of stories people told, because they told them. In other words, when Sandmel claims to tell us about the time of Jesus and then arrays before us perfectly routine, third-, fourth-, or fifth-century rabbinical hagiography, he is engaged in a restatement, *as history*, of what in fact are statements of the cultural aspirations and values of another age. It was one in which — in the present instance — some story-tellers appear to have wanted people to appreciate Torah-learning in a broad and humanizing context (if we may take a guess as to what is at hand in these particular allegations about Hillel). But if, for the turn of the first century, we have evidence that the ideal of Torah-study was not associated with the very movement of which Hillel is supposed to have been a part, but of a quite different set of people entirely, then I am inclined to think Sandmel engages in deception.<sup>15</sup> If Hillel had not lived in the time of Jesus, Sandmel would not be interested in him for a book on Judaism and Christian beginnings, and he would not be asking us to believe these fairy-tales as history of a particular man, who lived at a particular time, *and who therefore tells us about the age in which he lived*. This is nothing short of an intellectually despicable deceit. But it is how things are among the historians, though, I admit, Sandmel's case is somewhat extreme.

### III

Of the two problems just now outlined, it is the first which I think more consequential. Merely because historians work unintelligently or without candor is no reason to wonder whether we have to turn elsewhere than to history to find useful questions — appropriate routes toward the centre and heart of our sources. But if, as I suspect, historians do not ask the critical and generative questions, then we have to look for help to those who do. Perhaps the most difficult problem is to overcome our own circumstance, our own intellectual framework. For in thinking the Talmud important, we tend to claim it is important for our reasons.<sup>16</sup> We ask it to address questions interesting to us, without finding out whether these are the right questions for the Talmud too. Let me now spell this problem out.

The distance between this century and the centuries in which the Talmud was brought into being is not simple to measure. For it is not merely that the rabbis and most others of their day thought the world was flat, and we know it is not. It is that the way in which they formulated the world, received and organized information about life, pro-

foundly differs from that of our own day. We are not equipped to interpret the Talmud's world-view if we bring to it our own. We drastically misinterpret earlier rabbinic documents when we simply seek places on the established structure of issues and concerns on which to hang whatever seems relevant in the Talmudic literature.<sup>17</sup> Let me illustrate the matter very simply.

When the rabbis of the late first and second centuries produced a document to contain the most important things they could specify, they chose as their subjects six matters, of which, I am inclined to think, for the same purpose<sup>18</sup> we should have rejected at least four, and probably all six. That is, the six divisions of Mishnah are devoted to purity law, agricultural offerings, laws for the conduct of sacrifice in the Temple cult, and the way in which the sacrifices are carried on at festivals, four areas of reality which, I suspect, would not have found a high place on a list of our own most fundamental concerns. The other two divisions, which deal with the transfer of women from one man to another, and with matters of civil law, including the organization of the government, civil claims, torts, and damages, real estate and the like, complete the list. When we attempt to interpret the sort of world the rabbis of the Mishnah propose to create, therefore, at the very outset we realize that that world in no way conforms, in its most profound and definitive categories of organization, to our own. That is why we need help in interpreting what it is that they propose to do, and why they choose to do it that way and not in some other.

It follows that the critical work of making sense and use of the Talmudic literature is to learn how to hear what the Talmud wishes to say in its own setting and to the people addressed by those who made it up. For that purpose it is altogether too easy to bring our questions and take for granted that, when the rabbis of the Talmud seem to say something relevant to our questions, they therefore propose to speak to us. Anachronism takes many forms. The most dangerous comes when an ancient text seems accessible and clear.<sup>19</sup> For the Talmud is separated from us by the whole of Western history, philosophy, and science. Its wise sayings, its law, and its theology may lie in the background of the law and lore of contemporary Judaism. But they have been mediated to us by many centuries of exegesis, not to mention experience. They come to us now in the form which theologians and scholars have imposed upon them. It follows that the critical problem is to recognize the distance between us and the Talmud.

The second problem, closely related to the first, is the work of allowing strange people to speak in a strange language about things quite alien to us, and yet of learning how to hear what they are saying. That is, we

have to learn how to understand them in their language and in their terms. Once we recognize that they are fundamentally different from us, we have also to lay claim to them, or, rather, acknowledge their claim upon us. The document is there. It is interesting. It is important and fundamental to the definition of Judaism. When we turn to the humanities and social sciences of our own day with the question, Who can teach us how to listen to strange people, speaking in a foreign language, about alien things, I am inclined to look for scholars who do just that all the time. I mean those who travel to far-off places and live with alien tribes, who learn the difficult languages of preliterate peoples, and who figure out how to interpret the facts of their everyday life so as to gain a picture of that alien world and a statement of its reality worth bringing back to us. Anthropologists study the character of humanity in all its richness and diversity. What impresses me in their work is their ability to undertake the work of interpretation of what is thrice-alien — strange people, speaking a strange language, about things we-know-not-what — and to translate into knowledge accessible to us the character and the conscience of an alien world-view.

When I turn to anthropology for assistance in formulating questions and in gaining perspectives on the Talmudic corpus, what I am seeking is very simple: fresh perspectives, fructifying questions.<sup>20</sup> To illustrate what I have found, let me now take up three specific problems solved for me by anthropologists, all three problems directly related to the study of early Rabbinic Judaism and its classic texts.<sup>21</sup>

#### IV

First, the most difficult task we have is to learn how to decipher the glyphs of an alien culture. For example, in the case of the Talmud, if we have a story about how a holy rabbi studied many languages and mastered all knowledge in his pursuit of Torah — as we do about Hillel — what is it that the story-teller is trying to express? And what communion of language and forms, perceptions and values makes it possible for him to speak to his listener in just this way about just this subject? In other words, once we concur that we want to create more than a paraphrase of the sources, together (in the case of the historians of conscience) with a critical perspective upon them, what is it that we wish to discover? We need to learn how to read these stories and so how to become sensitive to their important traits and turnings, both those of language and those of substance. Literary critics make their living on their sharpened mind and eye. For the purposes of ancient Jewish and Israelite sources, so too do people who learn to think like anthropologists.



Let me cite, as a stunning example, the perspective of the great structuralist-anthropologist, Edmund Leach, upon the story of the succession of Solomon to the throne of Israel. This is how he introduces his work:

My purpose is to demonstrate that the Biblical story of the succession of Solomon to the throne of Israel is a myth which 'mediates' a major contradiction. The Old Testament as a whole asserts that the Jewish political title to the land of Palestine is a direct gift from God to the descendants of Israel (Jacob). This provides the fundamental basis for Jewish endogamy — the Jews should be a people of pure blood and pure religion, living in isolation in their Promised Land. But interwoven with this theological dogma there is a less idealized form of tradition which represents the population of ancient Palestine as a mixture of many peoples over whom the Jews have asserted political dominance by right of conquest. The Jews and their 'foreign' neighbours intermarry freely. The synthesis achieved by the story of Solomon is such that by a kind of dramatic trick the reader is persuaded that the second of these descriptions, which is morally bad, exemplifies the first description, which is morally good.<sup>22</sup>

This brief statement of purpose tells us that Leach will show us, in stories we have read many times, meanings and dimensions we did not know were there. When we follow his analysis, we realize that we have been blind. For he shows us what it means to see.

## V

Second, the most difficult question is to find out what are the right questions. Precisely what we want to know when we open the pages of the Talmud is not simple to define. To be sure, these documents have been studied for centuries by people who knew just what they wanted to find out. The questions shaped and brought to the Talmud by the rabbinical scholars of earlier ages made sense both for the Talmud and for the social and intellectual circumstances of the scholars of the Talmud.<sup>23</sup> But, as I have made clear, the information and insight we seek, the problems we wish to solve, and the questions we find urgent are not those which flow, directly and without mediation, from the pages of the Talmud itself. It is one thing to point out that history provides us with the wrong questions. It is quite another to lay forth right ones.

For this purpose, I am much in debt to theorists of social anthropology for showing, in the study of other artifacts and documents of culture, the sort of thing one might do, too, with this one. I refer, for one

important example, to the conception of religion as a cultural system. This conception proposes that we view a document of a culture as an expression of that culture's world-view and way of life.

In this context, for example, there is much to be learned from the statement of Clifford Geertz:

... sacred symbols function to synthesize a people's ethics — the tone, character, and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood — and their world-view — the picture they have of the way things in sheer actuality are, their most comprehensive ideas of order. In religious belief and practice a group's ethos is rendered intellectually reasonable by being shown to represent a way of life ideally adapted to the actual state of affairs the world-view describes, while the world-view is rendered emotionally convincing by being presented as an image of an actual state of affairs peculiarly well-arranged to accommodate such a way of life.<sup>24</sup>

What Geertz's perspective contributes is the notion that the world-view and way of life laid forth by a religion together constitute a system, in which the character of the way of life and the conceptions of the world mutually illuminate and explain one another. The system as a whole serves to organize and make sense of all experience of being. So far as life is to be orderly and trustworthy, it is a system which makes it so.

Now it would be difficult to formulate a more suitable question to so vast and encompassing, relentlessly cogent a document as the Talmud than this simple one: How does this document inform us about the ethos of the community it proposes to govern? For this document does present a picture of the proper conduct of life, expressive of a cogent ethos. In this immense mass of ideas, stories, laws, criticism, logic, and critical thought, we are taught by Geertz to look for the centre of it all, and to uncover the principal conceptions which unite the mass of detail. Geertz for his part emphasizes that there is nothing new in his perspective: "The notion that religion tunes human actions to an envisaged cosmic order and projects images of cosmic order onto the place of human experience is hardly novel." But, he notes, it is hardly investigated either.<sup>25</sup> And, it goes without saying, all those who have spoken of the Talmud as an ocean share a single failing: none has offered us much by way of a chart.<sup>26</sup>

## VI

While the contributions of Leach and Geertz serve to make us aware of the potentialities of our sources, we may, third, point to yet another anthropologist, who has realized a measure of these potentialities. Some of

the work of Mary Douglas already has made a considerable impact upon the analysis of students of the Hebrew Scriptures and earlier strata of the rabbinical literature. *Purity and Danger*,<sup>27</sup> for example, opened new perspectives on the issues and meaning of the laws of Leviticus. Her contribution is both to the theory and the substantive analysis of a society's culture. Her stress is upon the conception that, "each tribe actively construes its particular universe in the course of an internal dialogue about law and order". So, she says,

Particular meanings are parts of larger ones, and these refer ultimately to a whole, in which all the available knowledge is related. But the largest whole into which all minor meanings fit can only be a metaphysical scheme. This itself has to be traced to the particular way of life which is realized within it and which generates the meanings. In the end, all meanings are social meanings.<sup>28</sup>

These judgments, which I think form a common heritage of social analysis for the work before us, present a challenge. It is how not only to decipher the facts of a given culture, but also to state the large issues of that culture precisely as they are expressed through minute details of the way of life of those who stand within its frame. Mrs. Douglas has done a fair part of the work. So she has given an example of how the work must be done. This is in her work on the Jewish dietary code, especially as laid out in the book of Leviticus. She introduces one of the most suggestive examples of her work in the following way:

If language is a code, where is the precoded message? The question is phrased to expect the answer: nowhere . . . But try it this way: if food is a code, where is the precoded message? Here, on the anthropologists' home ground, we are able to improve the posing of the question. A code affords a general set of possibilities for sending particular messages. If food is treated as a code, the messages it encodes will be found in the pattern of social relations being expressed. The message is about different degrees of hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries and transactions across the boundaries.<sup>29</sup>

What should be striking is that she treats as suggestive and important those very rituals in which the Talmud and the form of Judaism created and expressed in it abound.

## VII

While I have pointed to three specific contributions of anthropologists, I do not ignore a more general contribution of anthropology as a mode of thought. When we speak to anthropologists about the details of the Talmud's laws, not merely about its intellectual results, we do not have to feel embarrassed or apologetic, as we do when we talk to historians and theologians. Let me spell this out.

A critical problem facing us when we come to the Talmud is that it simply does not talk about things which people generally want to know these days. The reason that historians have asked their range of questions is in part a counsel of desperation: let us at least learn in the Talmud about things we might want to know — wars, emperors, or institutions of politics. The theologians and historians of theology similarly bring a set of contemporary questions, for instance, about the Talmud's beliefs about sin and atonement, suffering and penitence, divine power and divine grace, life after death and the world to come, because people in general want to know about these things. Both kinds of scholars do not misrepresent the results when they claim that the Talmud contains information relevant to their questions.

But neither the historian nor the theologian and historian of theology would ask us to believe that the Talmud principally is about the questions they bring to its pages. As I said, it is not divided into tractates about kings and emperors, or about rabbis and patriarchs, for that matter. It also is not organized around the great issues of theology. There is no tractate on the unity of God or on prayer, on life after death or on sin and atonement. Nor does the Talmud speak openly and unambiguously on a single religious and theological question as it is phrased in contemporary discourse. So the two kinds of work done in the past, theology, including history of theology, and history, have asked the Talmud to speak in a language essentially alien to its organizing and generative categories of thought.

What does the Talmud tell us? To take three of its largest tractates: it speaks about who may and may not marry whom, in *Yebamot*; about what may and may not be eaten, in *Hullin*; and about the resolution of civil conflict, courts of law, property claims, and similar practical matters, in *Baba Qamma*, *Baba Mesia*, and *Baba Batra*. If, to go on, we speak about the longest tractate of Mishnah, *Kelim*, we deal with questions of what sorts of objects are subject to cultic uncleanness, and of what sorts of objects are not subject to cultic uncleanness. What follows is an amazing agendum of information, answers to questions no one would appear in our day to wish to ask: marriage, food, property-relations, cultic cleanness.

Yet it is not entirely true that no one wants to know about these things. When an anthropologist goes out to study a social group, these are the very questions to be asked. As Mary Douglas says, "If food is a code, where is the precoded message? Here, *on the anthropologist's home ground*, we are able to improve the posing of the question."<sup>30</sup> The stress is in her words, *on the anthropologist's home ground*, because when we want to tell scholars of religious studies and theology about the things important to the Talmud, their interest perishes at the frontiers (however wide) of their courtesy. How I slaughter an animal is not deemed a question relevant to religion among philosophers of religion and theologians. But it is a critical question to an anthropologist of religion. The difference lies in the understanding of the task. The anthropologist wants to understand the whole of a social and cultural system, the group's way of living and its world view. As Geertz points out, the anthropologist seeks to tell us important things about how these interrelate and define a coherent system. Douglas insists that we uncover a cogent set of conceptions and social events, which, when uncoded, tells us something important about the human imagination. Viewed in this way, things which seem trivial are transformed into the very key to the structure of a culture and the order of a society.

Matters are not to be left in such general terms. When we speak about the human imagination, we are addressing a particular issue. It is how people cope with the dissonances and the recurrent and critical tensions of their collective existence. What lies at the heart of a group's life, and what defines both its problem and its power? In the case of ancient Israel, it is the simple fact that a small people lives upon a land which it took from others, and which others wish to take from it. So what is critical is the drawing and maintaining of high walls, boundaries to protect the territory — both land and people — from encroachment. As Douglas phrases matters:

Israel is the boundary that all the other boundaries celebrate and that gives them their historic load of meaning.

In the very next sentence, she says:

Remembering this, the orthodox meal is not difficult to interpret as a poem.

It is this mode of thought which I think makes us see the pages of the Talmud in a way in which we have never seen them before. It makes us realize we have never seen what has been there all the time. And it gives us confidence that others too should see what we do. Douglas concludes:

It would seem that whenever a people are aware of encroachment and danger, dietary rules controlling what goes into the body

would serve as a vivid analogy of the corpus of their cultural categories at risk . . . the ordered system which is a meal represents all the ordered systems associated with it.<sup>32</sup>

This is the sort of thesis which, I think, we are able to explore and analyze by reference to the documents of early Rabbinic-Judaism. For this purpose they are perhaps more compelling than some theological ones.

## VIII

Yet a second more general contribution accruing from the anthropological mode of thought is to be specified. We have to learn not only how to describe and make sense of our data. Once we have discerned the system which they evidently mean to create, we have the task before us of comparing that system to other systems, yielded both by Judaism in its various stages and by other religious and cultural contexts entirely. For a system described but not juxtaposed to, and compared with, other systems has not yet been interpreted. Until we realize what people might have done, we are not going to grasp the things they did do. We shall be unable to interpret the choices people have made until we contemplate the choices they rejected. And, as is clear, it is the work of comparison which makes that perspective possible. But how do we compare systems?<sup>33</sup>

In fact, whenever we try to make sense for ourselves of what alien people do, we are engaged in a work of comparison, that is, an experiment of analogies. For we are trying to make sense specifically by comparing what we know and do to what the other, the alien culture before us seems to have known and to have done. For this purpose we seek analogies from the known to the unfamiliar. But the work of comparison is exceedingly delicate. For, by using ourselves as one half of the equation for a comparative exercise, we may turn out to impose ourselves as the measure of all things.<sup>34</sup> That of course is something anthropology has taught us not to do, which is another reason for its critical importance in today's labor. In fact, matters prove more insightful when we reverse the equation and regard the other as the measure, and ourselves as the problem. That is, we have to recognize these are the choices those people made, which help us to understand that we too make choices. These are the potentialities discerned and explored by those folk who have made this document and this system. Now we may measure ourselves by whether, for our part, we too recognize potentialities beyond our actuality, whether we see that we too have the capacity to be other than what we are. These are critical questions of culture and sensibility.

That is the point at which the Talmudic literature proves especially interesting to students of culture, on the broad stage of the humanities, and to scholars of contemporary Judaism, on the narrow one of theology of Judaism. It provides us with the richest documentation of a system of Judaism among all the Judaic systems of antiquity, from the formation of the biblical literature to the Islamic conquest. When we consider that the Talmud also is formative for the systems of Judaism of later times, we realize how promising it is as a fulcrum for the lifting of that unformed mass of the ages: the making sense of the Judaic tradition in all its diversity, complexity, and subtlety. Clearly, I deem anthropology to be a useful instrument. Let me conclude the argument by specifying that thing I wish to make with diverse tools, one, but only one, of which is the anthropological instrument.

## IX

What I seek is insight into the world of ancient Judaism.<sup>35</sup> This is in part so that contemporary Jews may have a clearer picture of themselves, but in still larger measure so that contemporary humanists may gain a more ample account of a tiny part of the potentialities of humanity, that is, that part expressed within the Judaic tradition in its rabbinical formulation. We have to find out what others have made of that system, what it is that that Talmudic system contains within itself, so as to find yet another mode for the measure of humankind. The human potentialities and available choices within one ecological frame of humanity, the ancient Jewish one, are defined and explored by the Talmudic rabbis. (As it happens, we know a great deal about the results.) This same question — the possibilities contained within the culture of ancient Judaism — is to be addressed to the diverse formations and structures of Judaism, at other times in its history besides that of late antiquity. But we have to learn how to do the work in some one place, and only then shall we have a call to attempt it elsewhere. What we must do is first describe, then interpret. But what do we wish to describe?

I am inclined to think the task is to encompass everything deemed important, by some one group, to include within, and to exclude from, its holy book, its definitive text: a system and its exclusions, its stance in a taxonomy of systems. For, on the surface, what they put in they think essential, and what they omit they do not think important. If that is self-evident, then the affirmative choices — which are not the only ones about which we know — are the ones requiring description and then interpretation. But what standpoint will permit us to fasten onto the whole and where is the fulcrum on which to place our lever? For given the size of the evidence, the work of description may leave us with an

immense, and essentially pointless, task of repetition: saying in our own words what the sources say, perfectly clearly, in theirs. That is not an interesting task, even though, in some measure, it must be done.

So when I say that a large part of the work is to describe the world-view of the rabbis of the Mishnah and the Talmud, at best I acquire a license to hunt for insight. But I have not come closer to the definition of the task. What brings us closer, indeed, what defines the work as well as I am able, is the conception to which I have already alluded, the idea of a system, that is, a whole set of interrelated concerns and conceptions which, all together, both express a world-view and define a way of living for a particular group of people. (That word, system, yields a useful adjective, systemic: the traits pertinent to a system.) The work I do is to describe the system of the rabbis of the Mishnah and the Talmud. That is, I propose to bring to the surface the integrated conception of the world and of the way in which people should live in that world. All in all, that system both defines and forms reality for Jews responsive to the rabbis.

Now all worth knowing about the rabbis and the Jews around them is not contained within their system as they lay it out. There is, after all, the hard fact that the Jews did not have power fully to shape the world within which they lived out their lives and formed their social group. No one else did either. There were, indeed, certain persistent and immutable facts, which form the natural environment for their system. These facts do not change, but do have to be confronted. There are, for instance, the twin-facts of Jewish powerlessness and minority-status. Any system produced by Judaism for nearly the whole of its history will have to take account of the fact that the group is of no account in the world. Another definitive fact is the antecedent heritage of Scripture and associated tradition, which define for the Jews a considerably more important role in the supernatural world than the natural world obviously affords them. These two facts, the Jews' numerical insignificance and political unimportance, and the Jews' inherited pretensions and fantasies about their own centrality in the history and destiny of the human race, created (and still create) a certain dissonance between a given Jewish world-view, on the one side, and the world to be viewed by the Jews, on the other. And so is the case for the rabbis of the Mishnah and the Talmud, and that seems to me a critical problem to be confronted by the Talmudic system.<sup>36</sup>

But, as I have stressed, we cannot take for granted that what we think should define the central tension of a given system in fact is what concerns the people who did create and express that system. If we have no way of showing when our surmise may be wrong, then we also have no



basis on which to verify our thesis as to the core and meaning of our system.<sup>37</sup> The result can be at best good guesses.<sup>38</sup> A mode for interpreting the issues of a system has therefore to be proposed.

One route to the interpretation of a system is to specify the sorts of issues it chooses to regard as problems, the matters it chooses for its close and continuing exegesis. When we know the things about which people worry, we have some insight into the way in which they see the world. So we ask, when we approach the Talmud, about its critical tensions, the recurring issues which occupy its great minds. It is out of concern with this range of issues, and not some other, that the Talmud defines its principal areas for discussion. Here is the point at which the great exercises of law and theology will be generated — here and not somewhere else. This is a way in which we specify the choices people have made, the selections a system has effected. When we know what people have chosen, we also may speculate about the things they have rejected, the issues they regard as uninteresting or as closed. We then may describe the realm of thought and everyday life they do not deem subject to tension and speculation. It is on these two sides — the things people conceive to be dangerous and important, the things they set into the background as unimportant and uninteresting — which provide us with a key to the culture of a community, or, as I prefer to put it, to the system constructed and expressed by a given group of people.

## X

I have outlined what must appear to be a formidable and serious agenda for scholarly work. Yet the truth is otherwise.

The work of learning is not solemn but is like the play of children. It is an exercise in taking things apart and putting them back together again. It is a game of seeing how things work. If it is not this, then it is a mere description of how things are, and that is not engaging to active minds. If I do not have important questions to address to the facts in my hands — the documents which I study — then I am not apt to discover anything interesting. I am unlikely to make of the documents more than a statement of what already is in them. But the Talmud and its cognate literature have exercised a formidable and continuing power over the minds of the Jewish people for nearly twenty centuries. They contain the artifacts of a foreign culture, exhibiting distinctive traits, and capable of sustaining quite searching scrutiny by scholars of culture. Therefore, merely saying what is in the Talmud and its cognate literature is not sufficient.

The central issues, those questions which generate insight worth sharing and understanding worth having, therefore are to be defined in these

terms: What does the Talmud define as its central problems? How does the Talmud perceive the critical tensions of its world? We want to describe the solutions, resolutions, and remissions it poses for these tensions. We propose to unpack and then to put back together again the world-view of the document. When we can explain how this system fits together and works, then we shall know something worth knowing.<sup>39</sup>

## Notes

1. Gerson C. Cohen, "The Blessings of Assimilation in Jewish History", in J. Neusner, ed., *Understanding Jewish Theology, Classical Issues and Modern Perspectives* (N.Y., 1973, KTAV Publishing House), pp. 251-258. Quotations pp. 257f.
2. The ways in which Talmudic scholarship has confronted, if not wholly assimilated, some of the approaches and methods of the nineteenth and twentieth century humanities (and even social sciences) are sketched in J. Neusner, ed., *Formation of the Babylonian Talmud: Studies on the Achievements of Late Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Historical and Literary-Critical Research* (Leiden, 1970, E.J. Brill), and in J. Neusner, ed., *The Modern Study of the Mishnah* (Leiden, 1973, E.J. Brill). A broader analysis of the relationship between Jewish learning and the secular university, to which Jewish learning comes only in the twentieth century (and, for the most part, in the third quarter of that century) is in my *The Academic Study of Judaism, Essays and Reflections* (N.Y., 1975, KTAV Publishing House) and *The Academic Study of Judaism, Essays and Reflections, Second Series* (N.Y. 1977, KTAV Publishing House). Later in this essay I point to two points in which assimilation has been completed, philology and Semitics. The third point at which, I think, assimilation to a fresh mode of thought will be fructifying is in the area of social and cultural anthropology, as I shall make clear.
3. I hasten to add that that is not the only classic and distinctively Jewish document. The Hebrew Scriptures are still more important and, read as Judaism has read them, equally distinctive. This point should not be given more weight than is intended here.
4. I refer to the *Arukh* by Nathan B. Yehiel of Rome, 1035-c.1110, who gives the meaning and etymology of the Talmudic lexicography in Latin, Greek, Arabic, and Persian. This is not to suggest he is the only important "comparativist" in post-Talmudic times. For their part, Talmudic rabbis themselves are acutely aware of linguistic origins, differences in word choice, and other aspects of

what we should now call comparative philology and lexicography. There are, moreover, pericopae in the Babylonian Talmud which can have been composed specifically with the interests of sociolinguistics in mind. But it was in the time of the beginnings of modern Semitics that the true weight and meaning of these facts were grasped and taken seriously.

5. I do not make reference to important modern and contemporary advances in the exegetical methods brought to bear upon the interpretation of the Talmudic literature, because these appear to me to emerge essentially within the limits of classical Talmudic exegesis. They exhibit only casual, and, in any event, unsystematic interest in exegetical and hermeneutical experiments outside of Talmudic studies or on its fringes. The reason is that the exegesis of the text is, alas, of interest principally to people who teach in *yeshivot* and Jewish seminaries or in Israeli university Talmud departments. These scholars have no access to, or interest in, the work of exegetes in the larger field of hermeneutics in secular universities. Still, the noteworthy achievements of David Weiss Halivni in *Meqorot ummesorot* (Tel Aviv, 1968, 1975) [English titles: I. *Sources and Traditions, A Source Critical Commentary on Seder Nashim*, and II. *A Source Critical Commentary on the Talmud, Seder Moed, From Yoma to Hagiga*] should be ample evidence of what can be achieved even within an essentially traditional ("aharonic") frame of reference.
6. Historians of the Near and Middle East who have turned to Talmudic materials as a routine part of their examination of the sources are not numerous. In general well-trained Semitists will be apt to turn to the Talmudic corpus more readily than Classicists and Byzantinists, for obvious reasons. Still, I cannot point to a single major work on the history of the region from Alexander to Muhammed which intelligently and sustainably draws upon Talmudic evidence. As a general overview, though, I recommend F.E. Peters, *The Harvest of Hellenism, A History of the Near East from Alexander the Great to the Triumph of Christianity* (N.Y. 1970, Simon and Schuster).
7. All the historians of the Jews of this period, by contrast, draw extensively upon the Talmud's evidence. But most of them draw solely upon that evidence. The best examples of well-crafted historical accounts of the period, making ample and, *for their day* (which has passed), reasonably critical use of the Talmudic evidence are Salo W. Baron, *Social and Religious History of the Jews*, Vol. II, (N.Y. 1952, Columbia University Press), Michael Avi-Yonah, *The Jews of Palestine, A Political History from the Bar Kokhba War to the Arab Conquest* (Oxford, 1976, Basil Blackwell), and Mary Smallwood, *The Jews Under Roman Rule* (Leiden, 1976, E.J. Brill). Each volume in my *History of the Jews in Babylonia* (Leiden, 1965-1970) I-V, opens with a chapter on the political history of the Jews at a given period in the history of the Parthian and Sasanian dynasties; in these chapters the evidences of the Talmudic stories are brought together with those deriving from other sources entirely, Christian, Iranian, Greco-Roman, and the like. The second chapter of each of

those books then deals with the inner political history of the Jewish community, and for this purpose Iranian and Talmudic evidences are utilized as well.

8. I am inclined to think that historical perspectives have clouded the vision of those who attempt a historical exegesis of Talmudic literature. The most ambitious, and, consequently, the most unsuccessful such effort at a kind of historical exegesis of the Talmud and its law is in Louis Finkelstein, *The Pharisees* (Philadelphia, 1936: The Jewish Publication Society). But in this regard he merely carried forward the perfectly dreadful approach of Louis Ginzberg, for example, in "The Significance of the Halachah for Jewish History", 1929, reprinted in his *On Jewish Law and Lore* (Philadelphia, 1955, the Jewish Publication Society of America), pp. 77-126. My reasons for regarding this approach to the exegesis of the law of the Talmud as untenable and the results as capricious and unsystematic are amply spelled out in my *The Rabbinic Traditions about the Pharisees before 70* (Leiden, 1971, E.J. Brill, Vol. III), pp. 320-368. There I review a very wide range of historical writings about the Pharisees and place into context the work of Finkelstein and Ginzberg (among many others). I am able to point to the underlying and generative errors in their approach to the interpretation of the legal materials for historical purposes and in their claim to interpret the legal materials from a historical perspective as well (a totally confused work).
9. In what follows, I point to the work of a few specific anthropologists. In doing so, I do not pretend to have mastered the corpus of contemporary anthropological theory or to know more than the works I cite. Nor do I even claim fully to grasp all of the writings of the scholars whom I find, at some specific points in their corpus, to be strikingly illuminating for the work of understanding the Talmudic literature. In pointing toward social and cultural anthropology as a source of helpful questions and methods, moreover, I do not mean to take a stand on any of the mooted issues of that field. Nor do those whose names I omit make no or little impact upon me. Indeed, the scholar whose works I should most want to emulate is not cited here at all, namely, Melford Spiro. If I could write for Judaism an equivalent to his *Buddhism and Society*, I believe I could make a contribution of lasting and fundamental importance to the study of Judaism within the study of religions. So, in all, what follows should be understood as a preliminary and tentative account of some of what I have learned from a few interesting people in a field presently altogether too remote from mine.
10. Marvin Harris, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory, A History of Theories of Culture* (London, 1968, Routledge & Kegan Paul), pp. 1-7. It goes without saying that I do not wish to take a position on the controversy generated by this stimulating book. I learned much from Harris's history and critique.
11. I cannot overemphasize the priority: anthropology here is important *because* it serves the exegetical project of the Talmud. Whether the Talmud is important for anthropological work I do not know.

12. I stress that this issue is simply beside the point. It is not relevant to Talmudic discourse. Therefore to accuse the rabbis of lying because they tell didactic tales and moral or theological fables, rather than writing history like Tacitus or Josephus, is to miss the point of what the rabbis of the Talmud mean. By their long arguments of analysis and applied and practical reason they propose to bring to the surface underlying unities of being. It is the most naive sort of anachronism to accuse them of being uninterested in truth because they do not record events, or record them in fanciful ways, since it denies the logicians their task but expects them to work like historians instead.
13. N.Y., 1978, Oxford University Press. Under discussion: pp. 236-251.
14. *ibid.*, p. 237.
15. See my "Oral Tradition and Oral Torah: Defining the Problematic", in *Method and Meaning in Ancient Judaism* (Missoula, 1979, Scholars Press for Brown Judaic Studies). This same argument is made in my *Rabbinic Traditions about the Pharisees before 70*, which, naturally, Sandmel fails to cite. I hasten to add that Sandmel is taken solely to show something acutely contemporary. I could adduce in evidence a great many others over the past two hundred years, as I indicate in *Rabbinic Traditions*, III, pp. 320ff., cited above. That discussion, too, thus far has elicited not a single contrary opinion. I think the reason is that the other side has not got much to say in its own behalf.
16. Since in my years in rabbinical school and graduate school, the two paramount humanistic disciplines were history and philosophy (philology was a poor third), and since my undergraduate concentration had been in history, it was perfectly natural to me to ask historical questions of the Talmudic sources. I still think these are important questions. In the end, my hope is to contribute to the intellectual and cultural history of the period in which the Talmud came into being. But, as I stress, there are more important questions than the ones with which I (and so many others) began to work.
17. This is the sort of thing characteristic of theologians of Talmudic Judaism, whose theological categories are imposed upon, and do not flow from, these of the Talmudic literature. I have spelled this problem out, in one concrete instance, in "Comparing Judaisms", *History of Religions* 18, 2, 1978, pp. 177-191, and, in another, in my essay-review of Urbach's *The Sages, Journal of Jewish Studies* 27, 1, 1976, pp. 23-35. I think the only modern student of Talmudic Judaism to confront this problem and to try to overcome it is Max Kadushin. See for example his *Worship and Ethics, A Study in Rabbinic Judaism* (Evanston, 1964, North-western University Press). My impression is that his failure lies in his trying to do too much, on too broad a canvas; for his results are entirely unhistorical and undifferentiated. But the effort is impressive and not to be forgotten.
18. As if we knew their purpose!
19. I think theologians and historians of Talmudic theology most consistently commit the sin of anachronism. In this regard the list of examples covers the bibliography of available monographs and books. I cannot think of a

- single theologian who begins with consideration of the character of the sources and what he proposes to say about them. Everyone works as if "we all know" what we are doing.
20. It is far from the truth that historians do not bring fresh perspectives on ancient or medieval sources. I point for contrary evidence to the splendid work of Peter Brown, for instance, in readily accessible form, his *The World of Late Antiquity, From Marcus Aurelius to Muhammad* (London, 1971, Thames and Hudson). There is a certain insightfulness in Brown's work which some may call *ad hoc* and impressionistic, but I think it is genius.
  21. Once more I emphasize that I do not pretend to be a master of contemporary anthropological thought or research. I point only to a few of the writings of a handful of people who have given much to me and made me see things in a fresh way. I have no news to bring to anthropologists, and little enough to Talmudists.
  22. Edmund Leach, "The Legitimacy of Solomon", in Michael Lane, ed., *Introduction to Structuralism* (N.Y. 1970, Basic Books, Inc.), pp. 248-292.
  23. The *yeshivot* in Europe trained masters of the Talmud able to exemplify and apply its teachings (in that order of importance) and who could serve as judges and clerks for the Jewish community. That is why the Talmud was studied by them as it was; for instance it explains the tractates they chose. Their larger cultural tasks — to perpetuate the relevance of the text through continuing and extraordinarily brilliant work of exegesis, and application — were wholly successful. So what they did was congruent to their social and cultural context. Indeed, in large measure, because of their success, they imparted to that context its distinctive social and cultural traits. (If universities in the Western countries should enjoy an equivalent success, then the populations of those countries would enjoy the power to think clearly and analyze an issue critically.) Precisely why *yeshivot* and Jewish seminaries in the USA and Canada study the texts which they do, and ignore the texts they ignore (out of the same corpus of Torah-writings) is not so clear. My impression is that the curriculum, once crucial to the formation of Jewish culture, has not changed, so that the things the students might know in order to have something worth sharing with their own age are not given to them. The result among *yeshiva*-alumni I have known is rather sad, people who cannot, for example, operate in a world in which statements are verified by reference to empirical testing, not by what sounds right or seems reasonable (let alone what some holy rabbi tells them). In the end they tend to make things up as they go along and call it Torah-true.
  24. Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System", in his *The Interpretation of Cultures* (N.Y. 1973, Basic Books Inc.), pp. 87-88. I may point out that this is not the first point in my work at which I have drawn upon Geertz's thoughtful proposals. His "Religion as a Cultural System" originally appeared in Michael Banton, ed., *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion* (London, 1966). It made an immediate impact upon my

- approach to the history of the Jews in Babylonia, which I made explicit in the preface to the concluding volume, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia* (Leiden, 1970) V. *Later Sasanian Times*, p. xvii. In fact, it was from Vol. III onward that the shape of the work changed in some part in response to what I was able to learn from Geertz.
25. I think the most difficult thing to investigate in the Talmudic ethos is also the most obvious: the character of the literature, its logic and the sorts of arguments and analyses it presents. I have tried to present such an analysis in my *Invitation to the Talmud, A Teaching Book* (N.Y. 1973, Harper and Row), particularly on pp. 223-246, and in "Form and Meaning in Mishnah", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 45, 1, 1977, pp. 27-54. But these papers, I should claim, only scratch the surface.
  26. Though, as I said, some have tried, Kadushin being the one worth noting. Among yeshiva-trained Talmudists none even tried.
  27. (London, 1966). I point out, also, that Mrs. Douglas was kind enough to read in manuscript and to write an important critique of my *Idea of Purity in Ancient Judaism* (Leiden, 1973), pp. 137-142. This critique was my first exposure to the interesting perspective of anthropologists. Further discussions with her and (of a quite different order) with Melford Spiro have proved stimulating.
  28. cf. *Implicit Meanings, Essays in Anthropology* (London, 1975, Routledge, Kegan and Paul).
  29. *ibid.*, p. 249.
  30. *loc. cit.*
  31. cf. *ibid.*, pp. 272-273.
  32. *loc. cit.*
  33. Much that is called 'comparative religions' compares nothing and is an exercise in the juxtaposition of incomparables. But it does not have to be that way.
  34. It seems to me any pretense that we stand outside of the equation of comparison is misleading. When we teach a foreign language to our students, it is, in significant measure, by trying to locate analogies to facilitate memorization, and, at the outset, to relate the unknown to the known. That is so in any sort of interpretive enterprise, I think, and it is best to admit it at the outset. But it is specified not as what must be, only as what is anachronistic and must be avoided.
  35. In a moment I make this banal statement much more specific.
  36. The conception of an 'ecology of religion' is spelled out as best I can in the third edition of my *Way of Torah: An Introduction to Judaism* (Duxbury Press, in press for 1979).
  37. Furthermore, *if we cannot show it, we do not know it*. I am tired of the appeal to "it seems reasonable to suppose", and "this has the ring of truth", which fills the pages of Talmudic history. It is just as weighty an argument as is the common criticism, "not persuasive".
  38. That is, pure subjectivity and impressionism. These can be avoided.

39. I do not mean to suggest there are no problems in anthropological approaches and methods. For one thing, we address ourselves to historical data and seek to accomplish the interpretation of a world known through its literary remnants. But anthropologists tend to do a better job on living societies than on books. Leach and Douglas are exceptional, I think. Further, there is a range of questions I have not confronted here, specifically, about whether, when we speak of systems, we mean merely philosophico-religious ones — that is, intellectual constructs, or we refer also to social-cultural groups — “real people”. The Talmudic literature begins in Mishnah, which is an essentially theoretical account of a non-existent world (see “Map Is Not Territory” and “History and Structure” in my *Method and Meaning in Ancient Judaism, Essays on System and Order* (Missoula, 1979, Scholars Press for Brown Judaic Studies). But it ends in the Jewish community formed under rabbinical authority and governed by the Talmud. So there are more ambiguities than I have suggested — many more.

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