American columnist Marilyn Von Savant once wrote, “To acquire knowledge, one must study; but to acquire wisdom, one must observe.”[1] As one looks at the people of the Ancient Near East, one looks to blend learning and observing when it comes to these people and their outlooks, perspectives, actions, and rationale. This is done in concert with comparing and contrasting the ANE’s way of life to those of Israel. Although there are incredible similarities, there are also notable differences.

The purpose of this exploration is to delve deeper into particular points and questions both raised and made by John Walton. In his book, Walton poses the question “What is the Human Role in the Cosmos? (Why were humans created, and what is the decreed destiny of humanity?)”[2] Upon research and inquiry, it is believed that although the human role will have similarities such as being directed by a divine power whether, in the ANE or Israel, the roles humans have are distinctly different regarding their functions and jobs. The crux of this investigation will utilize chapter 9 of Walton’s book, *Ancient Near East Thought and the Old Testament*, portions of Genesis 1, and secondary sources related to the topic at hand.

To begin, there is much that binds together the people of the ANE and those of Israel. The roles given to them at face value or how they were gotten can seem incredibly similar. Except for Egyptians not having a clear explanation as to how humans came about, Sumerians and Akkadians have been demonstrated to do the work of the gods. In his writing, Walton discusses such terms as *Enki and Ninmah, corvee, atrahasis, and Enuma Elish*. All of these terms refer to humans doing and fulfilling the work of the Gods so that the Gods could be content with the work of the humans. Without this, the Godgods the ANE would not be able to

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1 https://www.quotesplanet.com/quote-22290, March 10, 2023. https://www.quotesplanet.com/quote-22290.

2 John Walton, *Ancient Near East Thought and the Old Testament,* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Acacdemic, 2018), 287.

thrive or in fact survive as they needed human labor to fulfill these obligations.[3] Writer Tyson L. Puthoff states, "In the earliest days of creation, the divine community was forced to work the earth on their own. To relieve them of their toil, Marduke proposed to create humans."[4] What is significant about this statement is that Marduke is required to propose this idea to the other Gods of Mesopotamia. In other words, this could not be a decision made by one God but a decision that needed to be approved by a majority of Gods. One sees that for the ANE, the creation of humans and their role either leaves one in mystery or sees that the creation is one to relieve the burden and ensures the survival of the Gods.

Having seen this context for the creation of humans in the ANE, the creation of humanity according to the Israelites and what is found in the Old Testament have some similarities but are strikingly different. Of course, humanity is developed by the work of divine authority in both areas. In addition, both the ANE and the Israelites believed that they had a purpose that was solely their own and given to them by their respective God/s. This being said, one will find that it is at this juncture that similarities begin to become harder to see while stark differences are going to be seen when looking at the first chapter of Genesis.

In Genesis 1, God is creating the world both perfectly and systematically without needing to confer or assemble with any other beings. One sees as God creates through the six days, there is never a need for His to be addressed by any of the creations. When looking at Genesis 1:11 and one sees that God has commanded the land to produce vegetation, this will not be food that is needed for Him. The creation of this was good according to the Old Testament.[5] It was not created because of necessity. Without seeing what occurred in the places like Mesopotamia, one

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3 John Walton, 287-288.
4 Tyson L. Puthoff, "Composite Beings and Sexy God-Kings: The Divinity of Humanity in Ancient Mesopotamia." in *Gods and Humans in the Ancient Near East,* (Cambride: Cambridge University Press, 2020). 56.
5 Genesis 1:11-12.

could miss that God was acting independently and without any motive other than to create. This is a point that seems obvious once it is pointed out but maybe not thought of as often as necessary. Thai and Pillay point out that God's attributes are ones of omnipotence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence. They continue to argue that these attributes hold up Acquinas' argument that God is simple in that He embodies these traits fully and without fault.[6]

Concerning what one sees with the ANE and the creation of humans, the Old Testament demonstrates that God is looking to only create in His image but to provide for His very creation as well. As one sees in Genesis 1:26, God's purpose for mankind was first to be made in His likeness so that man could rule over all creatures whether they were on the ground, in the water, or sky.[7] Furthermore, unlike the ANE God's whose agenda was to have a man use the resources of the earth to better their divine consistency and their legacy, the Old Testament shows that God wished for humans to have jurisdiction over the beings and to utilize almost all seed-bearing fruit, trees, and other vegetation. God states, "I give every plant for food. And it was so."[8]

One could look at the creation of humans in both cases and argue that a similarity that exists is that humans are restricted in their power whether it be mentally or physically. Although this is true, the rationale as to why does require further investigation. In regards to the Old Testament and the creation of Adam, Adam and his ancestors are not given impeccability. For humans to have gotten this, they would also have to receive the other traits which God has including the ones previously mentioned like being omniscient. For this to happen, this would mean that God would be creating another God. Since God wasn't created, God cannot create another (as there is only one God).[9]

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6 Lee Pham Thai and Jerry Pillay, "Can Can God Create Humans with Free Will Who Never Commit Evil?" *Hervomde Teologiese Studies* 76, no 1 (2020), 1-7.
7 Genesis 1:26.
8 Genesis 1:29.
9 Pham Lee Thai and Jerry Pillay, 1-7.

Although in both the ANE and the Old Testament humans were made by God, one can see just how different the perspective was for the divine being on mankind. While the God of the ANE saw humans as servants and would only be for servitude, the people of Israel had understood their creation to also be one for serving God. The difference however was that they would serve in priestly roles.[10] "God planted the garden to provide food for people rather than people providing food for the Gods."[11] These concepts are shown in Genesis as God blesses the male and female He created and states, "Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it."[12] God bestows an enormous amount of power on humans and demonstrates His approval by stating what He had created was very good.[13]

One can certainly draw similarities between the creation of humans in both ANE and the Old Testament. Without divine power, humans would have never found their way into existence. It is clear that when looking at the Old Testament that God's care, love, and just behavior towards humans is diametrically different than those Gods of Mesopotamia. One only has to look to the disobedience of Adam and Eve. Rather than strike them down or provide them with physical death, God adjudicates a punishment on them but it is a punishment for learning and one of protection. God did not need Adam and Eve and God does not need anything from any of us like the gods of Mesopotamia. Because of His willingness to love, guide, and protect us that He will separate himself from all gods of all religions. One only has to look back to the first chapter in Genesis and be reminded that in all of His creations in six days, humans were one of them and He saw us as being very good. Although there are many reasons the people of the

10 John Walton, 288.
11 Ibid., 288.
12 Genesis 1: 28.
13 Genesis 1: 31.

Old Testament and the ANE can be separated, this particular circumstance holds great importance for all who study this topic.

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