ETHICAL AND UNETHICAL IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

GOD AND HUMANS IN DIALOGUE

EDITED BY
KATHARINE DELL

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Katharine J. Dell

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Dedicated to the founders of the Cambridge Old Testament Seminar:

Ronald Clements, Andrew Macintosh
and the late Barnabas Lindars†

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Preface

The chapters in this volume all originated as papers read at the Cambridge Old Testament Seminar between 2005 and 2008. Many of the contributors are local and frequently attend the Seminar, which is a lively, fortnightly event during term. Others come to Cambridge from time to time to make use of the library and research facilities. In recent years the Seminar has been chaired by Robert Gordon, Graham Davies and myself, but in our dedication we would like to honour the founders of the seminar, Ronald Clements, Andrew Macintosh and the late Barnabas Lindars. It was their foresight that led to the establishment of what has become the main forum for senior members of the University in both Divinity and the Faculty for Asian and Middle Eastern Studies (formerly the Faculty of Oriental Studies), for graduate students and others living in the Cambridge area with a more than passing interest in the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible, the Hebrew language and its cognates, the wider ancient Near Eastern context, and so on. I am particularly indebted to Robert Gordon for helping to guide my editorship of this volume, and to Hilary Marlow for her help on the practical side. I would also like to mention the sad passing of Carol Dray, who contributed to the volume despite her serious illness, but died before it came to completion.

Katharine J. Dell
Cambridge, September 2009

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ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
AHw	*Akkadisches Handwörterbuch.* W. von Soden. 3 vols. Wiesbaden, 1965–81
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
ANET	*Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*. Edited by J. B. Pritchard. 3d ed. Princeton, 1969
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
ATANT	Abhandlung zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
BAR	*Biblical Archaeology Review*
BDB	Brown, F., S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Oxford, 1907
BHT	Beiträge zur Historisches Theologie
Bib	*Biblica*
BK	Biblischer Kommentar
BS	*Bibliotheca Sacra*
BTB	*Biblical Theology Bulletin*
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentlich Wissenschaft
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
COS	*The Context of Scripture*. Edited by W. W. Hallo (and K. Lawson Younger). 3 vols. Leiden, 1997–2003
DJD	*Discoveries in the Judaean Desert*
DNWSI	*Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions.* J. Hoftijzer and K. Jongeling. 2 vols. Leiden, 1995
DSD	*Dead Sea Discoveries*
EvTh	*Evangelische Theologie*
FAT	Forschuung zum Alten Testament
GTJ	*Grace Theological Journal*
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HUCA	*Hebrew Union College Annual*
ICC	International Critical Commentary
Int	*Interpretation*
JANES	*The Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JETS	*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
JJS	*Journal of Jewish Studies*
JNSL	*Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages*
JPS	Jewish Publication Society

JR	*Journal of Religion*
JSJ	*Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Periods*
JSJSup	Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Periods: Supplement Series
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
JTS NS	*Journal of Theological Studies*, New Series
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LSTS	Library of Second Temple Studies
NCB	New Century Bible
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIDOTTE	*New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*. Edited by W. A. VanGemeren. 5 vols. Grand Rapids, 1997
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
NTOA	Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus
NTS	*New Testament Studies*
OBO	Orbis biblicus et orientalis
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
OTL	Old Testament Library
PIBA	*Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association*
RB	*Revue Biblique*
ResQ	*Restoration Quarterly*
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLABib	Society of Biblical Literature Academia Biblica
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBLSS	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SJLA	Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity
SOTS	Society for Old Testament Study
SSN	*Studia Semitica Neerlandica*
STDJ	Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
TDOT	*Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*
THAT	*Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament*. Edited by E. Jenni, with assistance from C. Westermann. 2 vols., Stuttgart, 1971–76
ThWAT	*Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament.* Edited by G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren. Stuttgart, 1970–
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
TSAJ	*Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism*
TynBul	*Tyndale Bulletin*
UF	*Ugarit Forschungen*
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
VTSup	Vetus Testamentum Supplement Series

WÄS	*Worterbuch der Ägyptisches Sprache*
WBC	Westminster Bible Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*
ZDPV	*Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins*

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INTRODUCTION

Katharine J. Dell

While there exists in current scholarship a lively interest in applying ethics to the Old Testament, the focus does not generally lie the other way around—that is, allowing the Old Testament to speak for itself regarding the ethical behaviour contained within its pages in relation to the different genres of Old Testament material. This volume is interested in what the Old Testament and beyond (Dead Sea Scrolls and Targum) has to say about ethical behaviour through its characters, through its varying portrayals of God and humanity in mutual dialogue, and through its authors. It covers a wide range of genres of Old Testament material such as law, kingship, prophecy, and wisdom. It takes key themes such as friendship and the holy war tradition and it considers key biblical and extra-biblical texts. It considers authorial intention in the portrayal of ethical stances. It also links up with wider ethical issues such as the environment and human engagement with the "dark side" of God. It opens up the many and varying ethical stances found in texts in relation to character interaction, particular themes, and author input, at each point considering key texts from the Old Testament that speak to this theme.

The volume divides into two parts, Part I treating different Old Testament texts across the different genres of narrative, prophecy, wisdom, law, and so on. It opens with an article by Robert Gordon on "The Ethics of Eden: Truth-Telling in Genesis 2–3." He draws out a debate between James Barr and Walter Moberly about the interpretation of this text, specifically regarding which one of God and the serpent is speaking the truth when threatening death in Gen 2:17. Moberly accuses Barr of portraying God as lying in this passage and the serpent as telling the truth. Gordon's article is an exploration of this accusation—which raises an important ethical issue in relation to God's behaviour here in his first dealings with humankind—in the context of the passage as a whole and indeed in reference to wider echoes in the Old Testament and beyond. The possibility of God speaking metaphorically rather than literally in Gen 2:17 is raised, as well as the idea that God may have mitigated his

threat at a later point. Gordon wishes to shift the emphasis of the Eden narrative away from death as the central issue, towards the key elements of wisdom and immortality.

The next essay is an exploration of the ethics of desire in the context of the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife (Mrs Potiphar) by Diana Lipton. This is to focus on ethics within biblical narratives which potentially speak powerfully to our modern context, but which we have to "handle with care" due to the often complex nature of the ethics contained therein. Lipton opens her essay with a discussion of character ethics, maintaining that biblical narrative does not produce role models or simple "types" and that biblical characters are generally complex and often ambiguous. She advocates a case study approach and then applies this to Gen 39. She seeks to redeem Mrs Potiphar from the accusations of sexual immorality and marital infidelity that have lingered in the scholarship. She stresses the continuity of Potiphar's line as the main focus of Mrs Potiphar's actions. She explores issues of male infertility that have a surprisingly modern ring. Potiphar, seen as a "eunuch," is thought by Lipton to have purchased Joseph in order to provide an heir for him (Exod 21:4 hints at this practice). Lipton re-evaluates the power play between Mrs Potiphar's apparent attempt to seduce Joseph and his refusal of her attentions and considers the encounter in the light of cross-cultural (Egyptian/Israelite) ethics.

The ethics of kingship with particular reference to Ps 101 is the topic explored in the next contribution, by Andrew Mein. The morality of kings is certainly of great interest in the Hebrew Bible and there is much indictment of bad kings. However, here Mein chooses to look on the more positive side of the issue, examining a psalm that gives a window onto a king's moral responsibilities towards his people Israel and hence also an insight into the ethics of kingship. He attempts to reconstruct the moral world of the text by means of the questions: What are the explicit ethical norms to be found? What is the basis or rationale for those norms? What are the social values that the text promotes? Psalm 101, with its emphasis on the royal character, is then considered in depth, and a reflection on the subtleties of what that entails is offered. While honesty and integrity and imitation of God are the keynotes of the successful king, the king also serves as an exemplar for those around him, a code of conduct for his courtiers. Paradoxically, the king needs obedience from those around him in order to maintain his control, and so the psalm is not simply one of praise but has a practical, even polemical aspect in attempting to inspire loyalty among courtiers. It raises issues about "insiders" and "outsiders" in relation to the closed world of royal politics, outsiders being a constant threat to the stability of king and hence also nation.

Janet Tollington treats the ethics of warfare with special reference to the book of Judges and the holy war tradition contained therein. The ethical problem raised by the perception of YHWH as a warrior God fighting on behalf of his people is aired. Judges is chosen as a text that reveals numerous different aspects of the ethics of warfare, and Tollington treats each pericope in turn, drawing out the nuance of ethical attitudes towards war in these chapters and reading from a theological perspective. While divine power is present in situations of conflict and God acts on behalf of his people, or sometimes for simply the tribe of Judah over other tribes, Tollington argues that God is not presented as openly advocating war. War is treated as an inevitability when human beings clash and sometimes the horrific aspects of it are "played up" by the biblical translators. Ethical actions are often forgotten in such situations, and so we find a large variety of both ethical and unethical responses that have little consistency across this warlike text.

Ronald Clements airs the difficult issue of divine anger as depicted particularly by the prophets. Military hostility towards Israel is frequently seen in this light—this time the Israelites are the recipients of violence and killing, a sign that God is angry with them, the reason for which is found in their behaviour. This sets up a moral code that transcends the particular historical situation to become a lasting message. Clements airs the many reasons for divine anger and their moral connotations. He airs problems of the moodiness of God, of the sometimes arbitrary or purely self-interested nature of his anger, and of the difficulty of reconciling anger and partiality with a monotheistic God. While the wider context of God's mercy and grace may mitigate this picture, as does a positive evaluation of the moral code that often springs from such outrage, the difficulty of sometimes seemingly unethical outbursts of anger by the deity cannot be explained away. Clements airs various scholarly attempts to sidestep or reinterpret such problems, such as by emphasizing divine retribution or providence. He looks at different phases of scholarly evaluation of the prophets in relation to history, literary approaches, and theological emphases. He stresses the centrality of torah in the midst of these shifting sands of biblical interpretation as giving a focus for the invective of the prophets in this key ethical area.

Applying the biblical text to modern ethical concerns is the other side of the coin when looking at how ancient biblical texts speak to us today. Hilary Marlow invites us to look at the prophets in the light of social and environmental ethics, notably in relation to the key terms "justice and righteousness." She adopts a three-way model of relationships—between God, human beings, and the natural world—as her hermeneutical tool to

draw out the imagery, vocabulary, and themes that articulate such relationships. She focuses on the eighth-century prophets, Amos, First Isaiah, and Micah in terms of social justice where it intersects with the natural world. This is more frequently expressed in the language of the "injustice" that the prophet finds in society and is often linked to the well-being of the land. The issue of divine wrath reappears in the context of the effect of judgment as punishment of society for ethical misdemeanours, a wrath that affects all of society and the eco-system too. The divine gift of land is also compromised by the indictment of society and ensuing divine judgment. The issue is raised of oppression from enemies which leads to devastation of land and people in like manner and Isa 34 is examined as a key text. The disorder that results and leads to wild animals breaching human habitations is a reminder of the natural state of the world when human settlement breaks down. Marlow ends her study with a look at the eschatological restoration of justice that provides hope for the future—the end of injustice in society and a corresponding return to fruitfulness of the land.

John Barton takes us further into the ethical issues surrounding the portrayal of God in the Old Testament by focusing on God's "dark side." He draws our attention to a little-known work in German by Dietrich and Link on this subject and uses this as his starting point for discussion. Problems with God begin with God's freedom—that is, his ability to act as he likes—and that can include arbitrary action. It seems that justice and righteousness do not always prevail in examples of God's favouritism or seemingly unjust treatment of individuals. Muddying the waters is the issue of divine election first of Israel, second of the poor to whom God has a special leaning, and third, at other times, of humanity as a whole. God's violent side, mainly in warfare, is also aired, linking up with Clements's essay, and the point is raised that this is a natural corollary of God's being emotionally involved with the nation Israel. God's omnipotence and yet apparent powerlessness in certain situations is another key theme here. The impression of God's arbitrariness is increased by the fact that God is alone in his divinity and hence responsible for life and death, light and darkness, weal and woe. In relation to all these themes there is an attempt to absolve God from the "darkness" of the picture and to present the positive aspect, and Barton draws out these points and is not himself afraid to emphasize the more negative side of the apologetic coin.

The ethics of friendship in the wisdom literature forms the subject of the contribution by Graham Davies, a theme neglected in biblical scholarship. After a study of the terminology of friendship, Davies focuses on

the wisdom literature, where the majority of the Old Testament texts that deal with the topic are to be found. Davies evaluates the observations of Proverbs concerning the clear benefits of having friends and the value of a true friend who sticks by you in the bad times. He looks also at the pragmatism that indicates that wealth or presents can make a difference, as does *who* is one's friend—especially if that is the king! Themes of maintaining and indeed losing friendships are aired in various ways. In Job, the friends that come to comfort him provide the opportunity for some reflection on friendship and its limitations as far as Job is concerned. Davies draws out four aspects—their mercenary attitude, their mockery of him, their abandonment of him, and their pitiless attitude towards him. He notes, however, the one-sided nature of this presentation on Job's part and the possibility that a friend can be cruel to be kind (Prov 27:6a). Ben Sira is the richest mine on this topic. Davies draws out from this text issues of caution in friendship and the place of mutual fear of God between friends as a guide to their friendship. He presents key ancient Near Eastern wisdom texts on friendship and notes a stronger element of guidance in that literature than in the Israelite material.

The treatment of Proverbs continues in the next contribution, but this time with a question about one of the key characters in the book, the counterpoint to the female figure of Wisdom, the strange woman. Daniel Estes asks the question "What makes the strange woman of Proverbs 1–9 strange?" Estes looks at the terminology used and then analyses the portrayal of the strange woman. The contrast with Wisdom is clear also to the wise teacher, but there is an interesting contrast to YHWH too in this section. Estes airs different possibilities as to the strange woman's identity, as raised by Fox, including contributions by feminist biblical scholars. Estes wishes to emphasize the element of "foil" to woman Wisdom that the strange woman represents as a literary image. The polarity of the two images is a means of communication of the ethical message that the sage wishes to deploy under the umbrella of the ethical standard of the fear of YHWH. Estes looks at the paradigm of imitation of God as a standard of ethics for this material and regards the strange woman as the stated antithesis of the divine ideal which is more truly embodied in Wisdom herself.

My own essay poses the question whether God behaves ethically or not in the book of Job. After a discussion of natural and revealed law as two possible models for illuminating this debate, the various relevant sections of the book of Job are discussed. The first section is the prologue, with its famous wager between God and Satan, which does not, however, exonerate God for responsibility for inflicting trouble upon Job

and might be seen as a licence to arbitrariness. Differing scholarly viewpoints are explored. The second section is the speeches of God with the delicate balance they contain between a statement of God's power and justice. A wide range of scholarly views is discussed, including those who believe that Job gets the upper hand over God in the end. A stress is placed on God's knowledge, an aspect that has often been neglected by scholars. The paradox of God's freedom and yet corresponding desire to be in relationship with human beings is also raised. The third section contains Job's responses to God in dialogue and epilogue. Job's profound challenge and refusal to give up his position in the dialogue is noted and differing evaluations of Job's reactions are aired. Whether God behaves ethically or not in this context probably comes down to perspective—by human standards of justice the answer is that God is probably being unethical here, but then who are we mere mortals to judge God?

The volume turns now to biblical law in an article by Philip Jenson on hierarchies in biblical law. Beginning with Deuteronomy, which he sees as a reflection on earlier laws, a collective singular summary of a body of laws, Jenson identifies three levels of law. This singular summary is the highest commandment, to be distinguished from the many commandments (lowest level), as in Deut 12:26, and, in turn, from the ten commandments in Deut 5 (middle level). Each level of law comprises a complete moral-religious field, but they are related in showing elements of a covenant structure and in shared content. Their weightings are different and here the issue of ethical priority comes in. The divine authority and need for the law to be taken on board inwardly by the nation, Israel, are two further uniting factors. Using images of first snakes and then ladders, Jenson takes us through the complexities of the levels of Deuteronomic law, showing the interaction between them. He ends by looking outside Deuteronomy for other applications for his scheme and he draws some broader conclusions as to the ethical implications of treating the law in this way.

Part II contains three studies that deal, in the main, with post-biblical interpretations of the ethical/unethical concerns that are central to this volume. Charlotte Hempel treats the issue of family values in the Second Temple period as reflected in the Hebrew Bible (mainly Ezra–Nehemiah) and the Dead Sea Scrolls (notably the Damascus Document). Hempel points out a clear relationship between these two texts under headings of location, community, and wider issues. She looks at family and household structures in the two, emphasizing afresh the importance of such issues in the Damascus Document in the wake of an emphasis on celibacy and the less than full appreciation of the role of women that it

contains. The role of the "overseer" is of interest in the way he appears to regulate even quite intimate family practices and gradually takes over the paternal role of arranging a suitable marriage for his daughter. This evidence from the Damascus Document enhances and develops the picture of community life presented in Ezra–Nehemiah, where a similar development took place.

Ethical stance as an authorial issue in the Targum is the contribution by Carol Dray. This raises some rather different questions about the freedom of translators and communities to shape a religious text that is closely based on its Hebrew original, but not in fact an exact duplicate. How far should a text be made applicable to its own time and hence subtly changed? The nature of the Targum as an interpretation opens the door to some authorial licence, and yet within early Jewish communities the distinction between biblical text and Targum was carefully maintained. Dray explores the depictions of the actions of characters in the Targum, which tends to polarize good and bad behaviour, especially in relation to adherence to the law and to prayer. She explores with examples the way the Targum maintains the dignity of the ancestors by adjusting behaviour such as drunkenness, lying, contending with God, divination, and sacrifice at high places. Characters are enhanced by the writers—such as Jacob's apparent gullibility, cowardliness, and deceitfulness. Matriarchs such as Sarah, Rebecca, and Rachel are also "edited" as to their actions. The behaviour of Joseph, Aaron, and Jehu is also subject to adjustment by the Targumists. God too is not exempt from some modifications in the way motives or actions are presented. The motivation for making such changes seems to have been primarily ethical—applying the standards of the time to wipe out hints of less than savoury behaviour among biblical characters who were by then held in high esteem as the ancestors of Israel.

The final contribution treats key issues of death and justice in the Hebrew Bible and at Qumran. Ed Noort is interested in the question of why a shift towards the afterlife, or "post mortem existence" as he terms it, took place in Jewish thought, and he explores this movement as it appears in the Hebrew Bible and post-biblical material. He uses role-play to recreate the situations of two imaginary characters in relation to life, death and the deity, but with recourse to current historical and anthropological information. The first is an eighth/seventh-century B.C.E. character whom he names Schebnayahu, whose death is regarded by his community as final, although evidence of necromancy exists at this time which may open the door to the possibility of his being "consulted" when important family decisions were to be made. The possibility of

YHWH's involvement with the dead is also suggested primarily in a protective role, without any form of afterlife for the dead person being envisaged. The second character is from the first century B.C.E. and designated by Noort as "Q20" due to his connection with Qumran. Here the link with justice is made, for in a number of Qumran texts, the reward for being faithful to YHWH and leading a righteous life is resurrection from the dead. Judgment and punishment correspondingly await the wicked and the concept of a final judgment is introduced. These developments are prefigured in such late texts in the Hebrew Bible as Daniel and in some psalms. There was thus an expansion of the idea of YHWH's power over death and a corresponding emphasis on YHWH's justice. An increasing concern for ethical behaviour and its reward, if not in this life then in another, motivates this distinctive change in the whole perception of death in Hebrew thought, ideas that are taken up in the New Testament and beyond.

Part I

Old Testament Texts and Genres

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The Ethics of Eden: Truth-Telling in Genesis 2–3

Robert P. Gordon

The importance of Gen 2–3 is self-evident, given the subject-matter of these chapters. Yet despite their canonical position and their importance for later tradition, they exercise little direct influence on the rest of the Old Testament. Ezekiel 28 addresses the king of Tyre *sub figura* the primal man and mentions Eden "the garden of God" (v. 13), but the differences between Gen 2–3 and Ezek 28 are sufficient to raise questions about the nature of the relationship between the two. As regards the *dramatis personae*, Eve is not mentioned again, and outside Genesis Adam features mainly in the quiz question, "Which Old Testament book has Adam as its first word?" To which the answer is, of course, 1 Chronicles! Very few find Adam's name in Hos 6:7, unless it is in the interests of covenant theology and a despairing quest for evidence of a primal covenant between God and the gardener of Eden. Like much other literature from after the Old Testament period, the New Testament has more to say of both Adam and Eve, and so these two chapters and their afterlife already raise questions in connection with that *cause célèbre* of the relationship between the two Testaments and the extent to which, if at all, the New Testament should influence the interpretation of Old Testament texts. The contrasting fates of Gen 2–3 in the Old Testament and in Christian tradition form the basis of R. Kendall Soulen's case against what he calls "structural" supersessionism, which by highlighting certain moments in the biblical narrative outline—notably creation, fall, redemption, consummation—is said to disregard most of the Old Testament story of God and Israel, vaulting in effect from Gen 2–3 to the New Testament (Soulen 1996, 48–58). "Supersessionism" is the issue here and it is an important one, but it will not be discussed further in this essay.[1]

1. I have discussed this topic in Gordon 2008, 36–53.

Barr and Moberly

One of James Barr's last publications dealt with Gen 2–3, appearing in the January 2006 issue of the *Journal of Theological Studies* under the provocative title "Is God a Liar? (Genesis 2–3)—and Related Matters" (Barr 2006). The article brings into sharper focus some disagreement between Barr and Walter R. L. Moberly about the interpretation of Gen 2–3 and specifically about the respective claims of God and the serpent to be speaking the truth in relation to the threat of death in 2:17, where Adam is warned that he will die "on the day" that he eats from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Coincidentally, both Barr and Moberly had published studies on Gen 2–3 in 1988. Moberly, in an article entitled "Did the Serpent Get it Right?," also published in the *Journal of Theological Studies*, sees the narrative in Gen 2–3 as turning on the issue of who speaks the truth to Adam and Eve (Moberly 1988). Moberly takes as his starting point that it would have been inconceivable for a biblical writer to attribute untruth to God. He suggests on the basis of 2:16–17 that the issue is living life according to Torah, and the consequences of failing to do so. Interestingly, for a theologian of the two Testaments, he does not refer to New Testament interpretation of Gen 2–3, or to post-biblical use of these chapters. At the same time, this follows naturally from his de-emphasizing of the punctiliar or episodic character of the story in favour of a paradigmatic function. On the headline question of "getting it right," he turns to metaphor to explain how God inflicted a penalty of death on Adam and Eve, in accordance with the kind of "two-way theology" expressed in Deut 30:11–20: "I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life…" (v. 19).

In his 1988 essay, Barr used Gen 2–3 as the basis for a contribution to the first Henry Chadwick Festschrift, in which the essayists discussed various aspects of biblical and ecclesiastical authority (Barr 1981). Here Barr contends that the Eden narrative has suffered at the hands of traditional Christian interpretation. For him it tells how the first humans, having disobeyed God, came close to obtaining the immortality which being merely human did not confer on them. The story is little concerned with sin or with death as its consequence for Adam and Eve and their descendants. The vocabulary of sin does not begin to appear until Gen 4 ("sin is lying at the door," v. 7), and the vastly increased incidence of wrongdoing post-Eden shows the relative mildness of the original offence in the earlier narrative. It is the federal theology of Paul in Rom 5 especially—reflecting interpretative tendencies that surface outside the Hebrew canon—that accounts for the prominence given to Adam's sin

and its consequences. For Paul, Christ was the universal redeemer whose one act of righteousness brought deliverance, and it was convenient for Paul's theology to find in Adam's primal act of transgression the corresponding head and fount of all human sinning and dying.

The leading points in Barr's 1988 essay are taken up in his Read-Tuckwell Lectures for 1990, published in 1992 under the title *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality*. In his monograph, Barr continues to challenge what he regards as traditional misunderstanding of Gen 2–3: the issue of sin and judgment seems to be more appropriate to the generation of the flood (Barr 1992, 78; cf. 1988, 66–67); for that matter, humans are never represented as "perfect" in their Eden phase (Barr 1992, 92); relations between God and the humans do not break down in Gen 3 (Barr 1992, 11; cf. 1988, 63), and so on. On Barr's reading, Genesis tells how the first human pair almost stumbled upon eternal life through their act of disobedience (Barr 1992, 16; cf. 1988, 64).

Moberly reviewed *The Garden of Eden* in a 1994 issue of the *Journal of Theological Studies* (Moberly 1994). He expresses surprise that Barr had not referred to Moberly's 1988 study, but, more significantly, also makes several serious criticisms of Barr's approach: Barr implies that in the Eden narrative God comes across as a liar; Barr, an expert in semantics, is loose in his discussion of the word רע, to which he gives the meaning "evil," without further qualification; while, in his defence of his own reading of Gen 2–3, Barr appeals to canonical considerations, which comes very oddly from such a flagellator of the so-called canonical approach associated especially with the name of Brevard Childs. These criticisms registered with the great Hebraist, but some years passed before he addressed himself to them.

Twelve years on, Barr finally returned to Moberly's review in his 2006 essay (Barr 2006). He takes up the first of Moberly's points and refers in his closing sentence to the other issues as also deserving of reply, but not on this occasion. Barr takes particular exception to Moberly's suggestion that he was happy to portray God as lying in Gen 2–3. It is indeed the case that Barr does not use language of this sort in *The Garden of Eden*. He says that God "is placed in a rather ambiguous light" (Barr 1992, 12), and that he "comes out of this story with a slightly shaky moral record" (Barr 1992, 14), and that in certain respects he "must have been pretty naïve" (Barr 1992, 71), and Moberly interpreted the general tenor of Barr's comments as "somewhat euphemistic for what would be a downright lie on the first recorded occasion of God speaking to humanity," adding that such a presentation of God appeared not to be particularly problematic for Barr (Moberly 1994, 173). "It appears [apparently from

my argument] that God told a lie and that the serpent was right," says Barr quoting Moberly, as he thinks, on Barr (Barr 2006, 1).[2] In fact, it is clear enough that in this sentence Moberly is not referring to Barr at all, but to the conclusion that seems to follow if death is made the central issue in the story. Since death is the central issue for Moberly, he is simply acknowledging that a narrative tension is thus created and that it requires discussion. What in general appears to have happened is that Barr speaks in a rather relaxed tone about the role of God in the narrative, and it seemed to Moberly that he was essentially in agreement with the not uncommon view that it was the serpent that spoke the truth in Eden. Moberly published a response to Barr's article two years later, in a 2008 issue of the *Journal of Theological Studies* (Moberly 2008). The purpose of the present study is to pursue this issue of who spoke truly, without restricting discussion to the specifics of the Barr–Moberly exchange.

Sin and Genesis 3

The act of disobedience described in Gen 3 is sometimes characterized as trivial in comparison with the fratricide recounted in Gen 4 or the pandemic of evil attributed to the generation of the flood a couple of chapters later. Put alongside these later sombre episodes, the Eden narrative can be made to sound almost playful. According to Barr, the story is not so much about hubris as about "youthful curiosity" (Barr 1988, 65). It is indeed arguable that, in assessing the seriousness of the first sin, traditional interpretation has overplayed the element of hubris in the narrative, for, although the serpent holds out the possibility of the humans "being like God," this is not stated as their motivation: the fruit of the tree was appealing to the senses and offered the possibility of gaining wisdom, and for these reasons Eve stretched out her hand. Even so, Hugh White may have a point when he claims that Eve's "inadmissible desire for god-likeness is carefully concealed behind the more acceptable desire for 'wisdom'" (White 1991, 134). At any rate, Barr's citing of youthful curiosity rather than hubris certainly understates the significance of Eve's action. The key point about the eating of the forbidden fruit is that it is an act of disobedience, and there is no problem in recognizing that

2. The full sentence in Moberly's review runs as follows: "My article concurs with many of Barr's theses in his book, such as assumptions about mortality or nakedness, but gives a different thrust to the overall interpretation by focusing on the issue of death, where it appears that God told a lie and the serpent was right" (Moberly 1994, 173).

manifestations of the human condition worsened after Eden: this, after all, gives rise to the "spread of sin" theme that others have detected in early Genesis (von Rad 1962, 154–60). Indeed, it is a recurrent feature of Old Testament descriptions of wrongdoing that it is not necessarily the luridness of the fault or sin that determines its gravity. One has only to think of the thin margin of error allowed Saul in 1 Sam 13, when he is denounced by Samuel for disobedience, having been panicked into offering sacrifice when Samuel fails to appear after seven days as promised (1 Sam 13:8; cf. 10:8), or the serious interstate consequences when Joash of Israel displeases Elisha by failing to strike the ground with arrows a sufficient number of times (2 Kgs 13:19), or the denunciation of "the house of David" and the issuing of the threat of Assyrian depredation for Ahaz's declining to ask God for a sign (Isa 7:10–17). One should also take into account that if something comparable to Cain's crime had occurred in ch. 3, there would be no human story to tell.[3] When, therefore, Genesis reaches ground zero with the generation of the flood, a whole family is preserved so that human history may continue.

The absence of the vocabulary of sin in Gen 3 may or may not strike us as significant. Such absence can be deliberate as well as significant, as when Benjamin Disraeli set out to compose his eulogy for the Duke of Wellington without mentioning the word "duty"; and apparently he did (Hibbert 2004, 210). However, if key terms are the essential indicator of meaning in a text, one would have to conclude, for example, that the idea of covenant is not at the heart of 2 Sam 7, simply because the word ברית does not occur in the chapter. In fact, the vocabulary of sin is also missing from the Babel narrative in Gen 11:1–9, while the story of the selling of Joseph into Egypt in Gen 37:12–36 also manages to recount the wretched deed without using sin vocabulary. And so it is with many a comparable narrative in the Old Testament. This happens because it is a feature of certain kinds of biblical narrative describing wrongful action that they do not use the lexicon of sin because events are left to speak for themselves. Conversely, Gen 6:5–8 speaks of the wickedness of the antediluvians and of their evil imaginings, but that is because the passage does not tell us what precisely they did or thought, and hence the generalizing statement about wickedness and evil.

The claim that the humans are not "perfect" in Gen 2–3, so that talk of a "fall" from a state of perfection is inappropriate (see Barr 1992, 92), is equally questionable. Whatever "good" may signify in Gen 1, in the second creation narrative the ideal state of being can be satisfactorily

3. Barr comments on this common sense point on the last page of Barr 2006; see also Moberly 2008, 33.

defined in terms of living in harmony with, and in obedience to, God. For oblique commentary there is Ezek 28:12–19, which stands in some relation to the Genesis creation traditions, as noted earlier. Here the primal "Royal Adam" figure is described as "blameless in your ways from the day that you were created, until iniquity was found in you" (v. 15).[4] Admittedly, few hints are given about the moral and spiritual life of Adam and Eve in the garden; they seem to represent a kind of "religionless Judaism," with mention of neither cultic ritual nor the commoner exercises of piety. It is only in Gen 4:26 that people "began to call on the name of the Lord." If Adam and Eve are worshipping creatures, it is not expressly said. That they have direct conversation with God presumably represents a higher level of relating to God in which cult is unnecessary because there is no infraction and worship is not rendered because they talk with God. Again, if there is substance in the suggestion that the garden is presented in these chapters as a kind of sanctuary, then all life for the primal couple is lived within the realm of the holy. In that case, life in the garden would not involve the paraphernalia of cult and yet would be describable as "religious."

The Role of the Serpent

Sometimes the serpent is the surprising beneficiary of attempts to play down the importance of the act of disobedience and its consequences described in Gen 3. At the beginning of the temptation scene, the serpent is characterized as uniquely cunning among the animal creation, and this is not meant to be complimentary. Appeals to the serpent-image Nehushtan in 2 Kgs 18:4 to show that serpents could be viewed positively in the Old Testament are unconvincing, and they merely sidestep the indicators within Gen 3 itself. Moreover, even if Nehushtan was venerated because of healing properties attributed to it, Num 21 relates its manufacture to the deadly work of serpents among the Israelites in the desert.[5] Actual authorial distaste for the scene that the serpent initiates in Gen 3 is suggested by the way in which the divine name is withheld from the exchanges in vv. 1 to 5; references to "the Lord God" lapse after the introductory statement in v. 1, to be resumed only in v. 8. In between, the serpent and the woman refer only to "God." Something comparable happens in Num 22:8–22, where the non-Israelite prophet Balaam refers

4. Barr (1992, 48) thinks that here the king of Tyre is identified with one of the "heavenly creatures" rather than with the primal man.

5. Barr (2006, 13) maintains, however, that the serpent "could have had considerable prestige in the Hebrew culture of early Genesis."

to "the Lord," or even, somewhat proprietorially, to "the Lord my God" (v. 18), while the narrative framework insists that it was (simply) "God" with whom Balaam was dealing. Moberly suggests that in Gen 3 the serpent avoids the divine name because he is insinuating that God is indifferent to the needs of the humans whom he has installed in the garden (Moberly 1988, 6),[6] and some such explanation is admissible. The Numbers parallel opens up the possibility that it is the author's own view of the episode that accounts for the omission.

In Gen 3:4 the serpent challenges God's word, deploying syntactical variation in order to highlight the key words and contradict them outright: "You will not 'surely die'."[7] It is the serpent who suggests that God has lied to Adam and Eve ("for God knows…," v. 5). Then when the pair are confronted with what they have done, the man blames the woman (v. 12), and the woman the serpent for having deceived her (v. 13). There may be wordplay here, for it is האשׁה who complains that the serpent השׁיאני ("deceived me").[8] The serpent is cursed, condemned to a diet of dust, and told that the humans will deal him (or whatever he symbolizes) a deadly blow. In that it is the serpent, rather than the humans, that is placed under the curse, Gen 3 contrasts with Gen 4. In ch. 4, Cain the fratricide is cursed "from the earth" (v. 11), whereas in ch. 3 it is as if God is steering round the idea of cursing the human parties. There is indeed a curse that will affect Adam, but it is a curse upon the ground whence comes his food (vv. 17–19). And since the original prohibition in 2:17 is laid upon Adam before ever there was an Eve, and he has failed, the final sentence is for him, and it is heavy: cursed ground and toilsome struggle with the soil until he returns to it—"dust you are and to dust you will return" (v. 19). The serpent, far from being a neutral, or in any way a positive, figure in the narrative, has led Adam and Eve to pain and loss.

Sin and Death

The warning of 2:17 links death with disobedience: "on the day that you eat from it you will surely die." The question whether the Hebrew ביום should be translated "when," as in NIV, hardly seems crucial, since it does not significantly alter the relation of the warning to what actually

6. On this reading, the woman simply takes up the serpent's designation for God in her reply.

7. Moberly 1988, 7 n. 15, referring to GKC §113v. For the more normal usage see Waltke and O'Connor 1990, 583 (§35.2.2 e).

8. Other words for "deceive," such as פתה or כחשׁ, were available.

happened or failed to happen (see below). There is no divine oath involved, but the statement is solemn enough. ביום has a formalizing effect, while the use of the infinitive absolute in מות תמות, if anything, accents the warning.[9] When the serpent questions the woman in the temptation scene in 3:1–6, she shows how well she understands the prohibition. Even if "they"—for the original prohibition of 2:17 is now pluralized to take account of her presence—so much as touch the forbidden tree they will die (v. 3). This is serious, and invites comparison with the prohibition laid on the Israelites at Sinai in Exod 19: "Anyone who touches the mountain will be put to death" (v. 12). The possibility of death therefore remains real and daunting, and leads to the familiar question: In what sense did Adam and Eve die, "on the day" or otherwise? Plainly, they do not die physically on the day or for a long time after. Nevertheless, the developing story is of death overtaking the human scene. Adam and Eve are predeceased by Abel in ch. 4, while ch. 5, traditionally assigned to the Priestly source, follows Adam's death notice with a lived-and-died sequence which, while functioning to bridge the gap between the earliest generations and the flood, contributes strongly to the theme of human mortality. In asking how this eruption of death came about, developments in chs. 2–3, where death and disobedience are linked, are recalled. To some extent this is paralleled in the Mesopotamian *Atrahasis* tradition, where destruction by plague, drought and flood is implemented as a kind of Malthusian response to over-population and noisy disturbance of Enlil's sleep (see Lambert 1980, 57–58).

If, on the other hand, it were provable that Genesis assumes mortality as a feature of the human condition from the start, the causal connection between the disobedience of Adam and Eve and death as the punishment for their disobedience would necessarily dissolve. Their constitution in respect of mortality and immortality has therefore been much debated. Barr contends that immortality lies beyond them, and that only thus can one make sense of God's determination in 3:22 to keep them from the tree of life which, on a natural reading of "lest he stretch forth his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat and live forever," may mean that they have not previously eaten from it.[10] The best-known Mesopotamian text to comment on the status of primal humanity declares that humans were created mortal—"When the gods created mankind they assigned death to mankind, but life in their own hands they retained"

9. Moberly 1988, 4; but see Barr 2006, 9.

10. Barr (1992, 58) argues strongly that Gen 3:22 implies that there was no eating from the tree of life in the garden.

(*Gilgamesh* X III 3–5 [cf. *ANET*, 90])—but nothing of the sort is said in Genesis. Death is mentioned simply in the context of disobedience.

Sentence Commuted?

If there is good cause to regard death as the consequence of disobedience in Gen 3, the questions about the nature and the timing of that "death" still have to be addressed. Two explanations with established pedigrees are especially deserving of attention, viz. commutation of the death threat and metaphorical death. On the former view, God shows mercy to the humans, even though judgment cannot be set aside or death avoided indefinitely. On this reckoning, even the act of prevention and expulsion by which the humans are excluded from access to the tree of life may have its merciful aspect, for it is the humans judged and sentenced, at war with the serpent, impaired in their own relationship, and in hard struggle with the ground that sustains them, who are saved from a perpetual living death in 3:23–24.

This idea of God moderating his punishment in the light of circumstances is familiar in the Old Testament, including the Genesis protohistory. There already are examples of God showing mercy in Gen 3 and its companion-piece in Gen 4, in the provision of animal skins for Adam and Eve (3:21) and the imposing of a protective mark on Cain so that no one should kill him (4:15). In the latter case, a sevenfold talion is threatened against anyone who harms Cain, and the scale of the mercy is not explained simply by saying that it is not until after the flood that capital offences are punished with capital sentences (see 9:5–6). The logic of the sevenfold talion would say that Cain, who killed his brother Abel, should be far more susceptible to the law of talion than any assassin of Cain the murderer. In point of fact, it is possible to expound the whole of Gen 1–11 in terms not only of "spread of sin" but also of "spread of grace" (Clines 1978, 64–73). Nevertheless, Moberly objects that it is difficult to see what mitigating circumstances might account for the alteration of the threat of 2:17 in ch. 3 (Moberly 1988, 10–13). It is difficult, but not impossible. It might be argued, for example, that when the prohibition is announced to Adam the complication of deception by the serpent of an as-yet-uncreated spouse is beyond the horizon; perhaps in God's reckoning there are extenuating circumstances even though an offence has been committed. It is noticeable in this regard that the prohibition on eating in 2:17 is followed immediately by the determination of God to provide a "helper" suitable for Adam (v. 18). But, as it turns out, in the crucial matter Eve is no "helper."

This idea of the commutation of the original threat includes Barr among its advocates. Thus he suggests that, because God wants the man and woman to live, "the warning issued beforehand is now simply left aside," and new conditions of living are set out (Barr 2006, 22). Biblical narrative certainly provides sufficient illustration of God "repenting" and moderating his threats of judgment. Even the "jealous" God of the Decalogue, who prohibits his people's veneration of other gods, abandons the thought of destroying them when, newly delivered from Egypt, they make a golden calf for themselves (Exod 32). This is a useful parallel, for once more a new development—now the creation of a nation out of a mass of slaves—is in danger of being undone. And in a manner that recalls Gen 3, Moses and God engage in blame casting. Says God to Moses, "Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely" (v. 7), while Moses responds, "O Lord, why does your anger burn hot against your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt *with great power and with a mighty hand*?" (v. 11). God even expended unusual energy to bring these people out, according to Moses. The upshot is that God, reminded of his oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, relents; and Israel are spared. So too in Gen 3 God "withholds the threatened penalty of death," according to David Clines.[11] In 4:1 there is even a claim from Eve that she has gained a son "with the Lord" ("with the help of the LORD," NRSV). At the same time, the reign of death begins, as chs. 4 and 5 amply attest, albeit the actual imposing upon humanity of a reduced lifespan comes in the context of the miscegenation described in 6:1–3.

According to this view, then, there is mercy in Eden. This is, of course, Milton's reading of Gen 3 in *Paradise Lost*:

> let him live
> Before thee reconcil'd, at least his days
> Number'd, though sad, till Death, his doom (which I
> To mitigate thus plead, not to reverse)
> To better life shall yield him… (III.38–42)

Here death becomes the "final remedy," avoiding the "eternizing of woe," pending the entering into "second Life" (III.61–66). It is not exactly an Augustinian view of the first transgression. For Augustine, the susceptibility of Adam and Eve to the tempter arose from their prior dallying with rebellion:

11. Clines 1978, 65. Barr (2006, 9) notes that in certain circumstances a death sentence can be revoked (citing 1 Sam 14; Jer 26:8).

> Actually, their bad deed could not have been done had not bad will preceded it… Our first parents, then, must already have fallen before they could do the evil deed, before they could commit the sin of eating the forbidden fruit… The conclusion, then, is that the Devil would not have begun by an open and obvious sin to tempt man into doing something which God had forbidden, had not man already begun to seek satisfaction in himself and, consequently, to take pleasure in the words: "You shall be as Gods."[12]

Augustine invoked the full panoply of death for Adam and Eve: first the death of desertion by God "on the day," and other manifestations of death thereafter.

One obvious problem with the idea that mercy interposed in Eden, so that death did not come "on the day," is the lack of any specific mention of God's mitigating of the penalty. Should not such a significant change have been scored in the text? Would mitigation to the extent envisaged not have warranted a statement, as on some other occasions, that God had "repented" of the action of which he had spoken? There is, of course, no one to intercede for Adam and Eve in Eden. Both humans are implicated, and so there is no exploring of the terms and conditions of mitigation as in the story of Abraham's attempted intercession for Sodom (Gen 18) or in the already-mentioned episode in Exod 32. If God is to act, he must do so simply on his own initiative. Milton is aware of all this and makes room for mercy precisely by introducing Christ as intercessor on behalf of the disobedient pair, with a speech of intercession worthy of Moses at Sinai:

> Or shall the Adversary thus obtain
> His end, and frustrate thine, shall he fulfil
> His malice, and thy goodness bring to naught…
>
> Abolish thy Creation, and unmake,
> For him, what for thy glory thou hast made?
> So should thy goodness and thy greatness both
> Be question'd and blasphem'd without defence. (III.156–58, 163–66)

However, in the actual world of Gen 3 there is no hint of mitigation, on the basis of mediation or anything else. Somewhat to the contrary, the divine speech in 3:17 recalls the warning of 2:17, maintaining the second person singular address to Adam in the earlier text and preparing the way for the sentence of judgment in vv. 17b–19.

12. Augustine, *City of God* xiv 13; translation by Walsh and Monahan (1952, 380–82).

Metaphorical Death

I have already noted that Moberly favours a metaphorical explanation of the death threatened in Gen 2:17: Adam (and Eve) will suffer in such a way that the loss may aptly be described as a death. Moberly seeks support for this explanation from Deut 30:11–20, which confronts the Israelites on the plains of Moab with the choice of life or death, depending on whether they obey or disobey the commandments of God (Moberly 1988, 16).[13] Now, while Deut 30 has literal death significantly within its purview ("you will certainly be destroyed; you will not live long in the land," v. 18), this metaphorical construal of death can be illustrated from the story of Saul's rejection in 1 Sam 15–16, where he experiences a metaphorical or virtual death when Samuel announces his rejection "today" (15:28), mourns his loss (15:35; 16:1), anoints his successor (16:1–13), and, the episode in 1 Sam 19:21–24 notwithstanding, is said not to have seen Saul again (15:35), though Saul remains king for the rest of 1 Samuel (Gordon 1984, 53–54). This is a metaphorical death, and it has immediate effect. One could find a similar parallel in the obituary notice on Saul's "house," which "dies" at Gilboa in 1 Chr 10:6, even though 2 Samuel, not to mention the genealogical lists in 1 Chronicles (see 8:33; 9:39), is well aware of Ishbosheth's existence and of his attempt to resuscitate his father's kingdom. Barr (1988, 64; 2006, 11–12) dismisses the idea of a metaphorical explanation, but he confuses the issue by using the term "spiritual" instead of "metaphorical." "Spiritual death" makes no sense for Barr since, on his reading of Gen 3, the humans by their disobedient act come close to achieving immortality. "Metaphorical" is, however, the better term, involving fewer difficulties than "spiritual," especially when used in association with death. Most of all, however, Barr thinks that by embracing the metaphorical interpretation Moberly has landed himself in difficulty, for when God utters the words "you will die" Adam is bound to understand them literally, whereas if they are meant metaphorically God has, in fact, misled him. There is therefore at best a serious miscommunication on God's part, if he has metaphorical death in mind (Barr 2006, 14–15). Moberly (2008, 35–36) responds, however, that questions of genre and purpose are involved, and that his concern is not with reading the story from the perspective of Adam and Eve but, rather, with pursuing "the logic of the narrative *as it impinges on the reader*" who, in reflecting on the meaning of the story, is led to construe "die" metaphorically.

13. According to Moberly, the issue is primarily quality of life, and only secondarily "existence" and "non-existence," in Deut 30.

Sin and Death Elsewhere in the Old Testament

Given the lack of connection between Gen 2–3 and most of the Old Testament canon, it follows that nothing is made elsewhere of the failure of Adam and Eve or of the consequences for their descendants. Of course, if Gen 2–3 is given a date significantly later than the traditional source-critical consensus has envisaged—as is increasingly the case—that would give a possible explanation of this silence. More importantly, however, it seems that the intention of the Genesis proto-history itself is to make a connection between Adam and Eve under judgment and the later generations of humanity. Adam's second naming of his wife as "Eve" in 3:20 is relevant in this regard. The verse has caused some puzzlement and has even been dubbed secondary, but it is not difficult to read it as a statement with implications for all the offspring of Adam and Eve, arising from the judgment speeches in vv. 14–19: they are all subjected to the pain and struggle to which the first pair are sentenced. "The placement of the naming of woman after the curses thus makes clear the fateful limits imposed from birth upon all human offspring. It verbally enshrines the transfiguration which has occurred" (White 1991, 144).[14]

It is important in this respect that Gen 2–3 begins the story of humanity with the creation of a couple ("monogenesis") and not with a population mass ("polygenesis"), as in other ancient Near Eastern traditions.[15] This places greater emphasis on the couple as the source of what follows from their act of disobedience, in a way that would not apply with a primal population mass. In the latter case, the misdeeds of individuals would not necessarily entail the alienation of the general populace. On the other hand, in talking of the creation of a primal couple, and by implying that they had no offspring until after their expulsion—albeit Cain is already in a position to build a city for his son in 4:17—the biblical narrative sets up the possibility of a rejection of the primal pair that has consequences for all their descendants.

Thereafter, the universality of sin, and of sin as the underlying cause of death, is a theme widely represented in the Old Testament. It is true that, in the Psalter and Job especially, some Israelites are confident

14. Other readings of the verse may be possible, such as that it is stating that, despite the sentences of judgment immediately preceding, there will be a human family.

15. See Kutsch 1977, 20. Walton (2006, 205) mentions the "idiosyncratic" text *KAR* 4 ("[t]he only extant text that has been suspected of depicting an original human pair"), which has featured in discussion of Genesis-like monogenesis, though the significance of the text remains unclear.

enough about their integrity to declare it before God in their prayers and laments (Barr 1988, 67–68). However, the significance of such passages can easily be overstated, if only because they tend to appear in the context of the righteous–wicked dichotomy, and are therefore not best texts whence to deduce their authors' hamartiology. The consciousness of sin in its multiple forms is very evident elsewhere in the Old Testament—for example, in the Priestly writings, in which sin and its removal play a central role. Again, the Deuteronomistic Solomon—whose colleagues are held to have colonized so much of the Old Testament—declares that "there is no one who does not sin" (1 Kgs 8:46). The absence of back-reference in the Old Testament to the sin of Adam and Eve is admittedly striking, but this would be more significant if Gen 3 were actually rivalled by another text purporting to explain the origins of human sinfulness. This, however, is not the case. It is no solution to cite Gen 6 as a more probable starting point for humanity's alienation from God simply because of the scale of the wrongdoing described there.[16] A greatly increased population will naturally be capable of committing evil in proportionately greater terms. Moreover, while other Near Eastern traditions agree with Genesis in having flood accounts, they have nothing equivalent to the motif of sin and the "loss of Eden." From this perspective, Gen 3, with its focus on the origination of sin and suffering within the human family, could even be seen as overwriting alternative origin traditions: Genesis is saying something deliberate about the point of entry of sin into the world. As for the connection between sin and death, the existential association of the two throughout the Old Testament would, if there were no other reason, easily make for an understanding of the relation between them such as is reflected in Gen 2–3.

Beyond the Old Testament

Although there is no harking back to Genesis in the remainder of the Old Testament in order to explain human sinfulness or to link sin with death, the Genesis narrative itself appears to root humanity's woes in the defection in the garden. The sentences of judgment in 3:14–19 are forward looking, most obviously in the statement in 3:15 about enmity between the offspring of the serpent and the offspring of the woman. Nonetheless, it is in post-biblical writing that the link between these first humans and the moral and physical plight of their descendants becomes fully and

16. As does Barr (1992, 75, 87).

theologically explicit. The large part that Gen 3 plays in Paul's exposition of his "federal theology" in Rom 5 has already been noted. He was not the first to apply Gen 3 in this way. Ben Sira declares that "[f]rom a woman sin had its beginning, and because of her we all die" (25:24). This comes in a deeply misogynistic paragraph and has usually been understood to refer to Eve. However, Levison has made a strong case for limiting the statement to the negative effects of a bad wife upon her husband (Levison 1985). There are less controversial parallels that can be cited. Wisdom 2:24 attributes the intrusion of death upon the human scene to "envy of the devil," *2 Bar* 23:4 more generally to Adam's sin.[17] 4 Ezra 7:48[118] is more concerned with the moral consequences of Adam's transgression: "O Adam, what have you done? For though it was you who sinned, the fall was not yours alone, but ours also who are your descendants."[18] In these texts the originist significance of Gen 2–3 is taken up and developed. That this is also so in the New Testament should not surprise us, since scholars are well attuned nowadays to the phenomenon of the "interpreted Bible," by which is meant in this context the New Testament writers' use of the Old Testament in awareness of its interpretation as this had already developed in the "intertestamental" period. Now, for all their differences, Barr and Moberly are agreed in interpreting Gen 2–3 in a non-originist way, as will have been evident in the foregoing discussion. On the other hand, whatever fails to happen elsewhere in the Old Testament, there are good reasons for seeing Gen 2–3 itself as originist rather than paradigmatic. The correspondence between Adam and Eve and their descendants is not that their experience is recapitulated in every human life—as if that could be so—but that every human who follows them inherits conditions of living that are determinative for his or her own experience of life in this world. The writer of 4 Ezra 7 (for example) was not working against the grain of Genesis in this regard, but was drawing out its implications.

It is with this kind of situation in mind that Walter Brueggemann speaks of the Old Testament text "presenting itself" for interpretation in later contexts, and notably within the New Testament, since he is principally concerned with the relationship between the two Testaments and with the legitimacy of New Testament interpretations that appear to

17. See also *2 Bar* 48:42–43; 56:5–6. As is well known, *2 Bar* 54:15–19 also makes individuals responsible for their moral condition before God: "each of us has become our own Adam" (v. 19).

18. Translation by Metzger (1983, 541). Cf. 4 Ezra 4:30–31 (ungodliness stems from Adam); 7:11–12 (on the negative effect of Adam's transgression).

differ from the primary, or natural, or historico-grammatical, sense of their Old Testament source texts (Brueggemann 1997, 732). Brueggemann argues on the assumption that the Old Testament text is polyphonic, capable of multiple meanings because of the richness of sense and allusion that characterize it. So, a New Testament interpretation, for example, that "differs" may be accepted, provided that it is not regarded as the sole interpretative legatee of its Old Testament original. Whether the bulk of the Old Testament is quite so ambiguous or as polyphonic as current writing often assumes may well be questioned, but one may even so conclude that Gen 2–3, without the polyphony, "presents itself" for interpretation in the later way of Rom 5 and 4 Ezra 7. Such availability of meaning is not dependent upon the existence of other Old Testament texts that echo the Eden chapters and so function as piers on the way to the later interpretation; it simply reflects the tendency and dynamic of the original narrative itself.

Who Spoke the Truth?

God may be speaking metaphorically in Gen 2:17, or he may subsequently have mitigated his original threat. This essay favours the first of these two possibilities. If the serpent speaks the truth, it is only in a highly qualified sense. The mere statement of the woman, that the serpent deceived her, shows her awareness that, whatever is obtained through eating, it is not what she has expected. The man has, in God's own words, "become like one of us, knowing good and evil" (3:22), yet even this is not necessarily the same as "being like God" (3:5); the partitive "one of us," while suggestive of a heavenly court setting, may also represent a playing down of what the humans have achieved.[19] The wise woman of Tekoa fawns on King David in 2 Sam 14 with "my lord the king is like the angel of God, discerning good and evil" (v. 17), capping this a few verses later with "my lord has wisdom like the wisdom of the angel of God to know everything that is on the earth" (v. 20; cf. 1 Sam 29:9; 2 Sam 19:28[27]). In Gen 3 it is what the knowledge of good and evil brings to the humans that shows who speaks truly, and the way in which the question is explored in the text involves some reconfiguration of two motifs associated with the gods of the non-Israelite Near East that calls for attention.

19. So also Barr 2006, 13.

One has only to consult J. B. Pritchard's *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (*ANET*) to see how the two named trees in the Genesis paradise—the tree of knowledge and the tree of life—represent two common characteristics or attributes of Near Eastern deities. To the gods belong wisdom and eternal life. So, in the already-cited lines from *Gilgamesh*, "life" is the preserve of the creator deities, and it is not for humanity: "When the gods created mankind they assigned death to mankind, but life in their own hands they retained" (X III 3–5 [cf. *ANET*, 90][20]). According to E. A. Speiser, the translator of *Gilgamesh* in *ANET*, the harlot with whom Enkidu consorted associates wisdom with the gods: "You are [wi]se, Enkidu, you have become like a god!" (I IV 34 [cf. *ANET*, 75]). This reconstructed reading, however, is not highly favoured.[21] The two attributes of life and wisdom appear together in *Adapa*, where the eponymous hero is endowed with one but not the other: "To him he (Ea) had given wisdom; eternal life he had not given him" (A 4 [cf. *ANET*, 101][22]).

On these two characteristics, wisdom and (eternal) life, the whole paradise narrative in Gen 2–3 may be said to turn. However, in contrast with the extrabiblical texts just quoted, it appears that life, even if only contingently perdurable, is available in the garden, and that "wisdom" initially lies beyond the experience of the first humans and proves to be a fateful acquisition when they obtain it. The precautionary "lest he stretch forth his hand…and eat and live forever" in 3:22 is widely understood to imply that, despite the access implied in 2:16, Adam and Eve have not availed themselves of the tree of life during their stay in the garden. This may be so, though 3:22 might just conceivably be saying that, in the new circumstances of exclusion and estrangement, what was formerly permissible would now count as a further act of disobedience. In other words, Adam and Eve may be "immortal" for as long as they remain in the garden and have access to the tree of life, enjoying a kind of "contingent immortality" that falls short of immortality in the proper sense of

20. See also George 2003, 279.

21. Speiser mainly follows the text of R. Campbell Thompson (1930), but at this point he prefers to read [en-]qa-ta (see *ANET*, 75 n. 29) where Thompson (1930, 14) has [dam]-ka-ta. This is the reading, translated by "you are handsome," accepted by George (2003, 551 [l. 207]).

22. Cf. Izre'el 2001, 10. See also text B: "You shall not have (eternal) life! Ah, (perverse?) mankind!" (*ANET*, 102), for which Izre'el (2001, 21 [B r. 67–68]) has "Hence you shall not live! Alas for inferior humanity!" For an Old Testament association of wisdom with deity, see Ezek 28:2 ("though you think that you are as wise as a god").

the term.[23] Otherwise, one might conclude that mortality is simply not an issue while they live within the ambit of the divine presence, enjoying what is still, in effect, “contingent immortality.”[24]

In Gen 2–3 the issue once Adam and Eve have transgressed is whether they will experience “death,” and not whether this “death” will be instantaneously administered.[25] This focus on dying or not dying is expressed in the grammatical nicety observed above, when the serpent does the equivalent of putting God’s words in quotation marks so that he can contradict them: “You will not ‘surely die’!” (3:4). Basically, God says that they will die, and the serpent assures them that, far from dying, they will have their eyes opened, and God-like knowledge will be theirs. The point of the narrative is not that God’s announcement or purpose is thwarted and the humans are enabled somehow to continue living. He himself provides them with animal skins in addition to the fig-leaf “aprons” that they have made for themselves (see 3:7, 21). If the latter deal with their newly discovered nakedness, the former are provided in order to help them survive in a hostile environment.

The expulsion of Adam and Eve sees them excluded from the pleasures and the security of the garden, but the context and the stated purpose of the expulsion indicate that more is involved. The context is that of punishment and restriction imposed in the sentences of judgment (vv. 17–19), and the stated purpose is to deny the humans any possibility of living forever (v. 22). Cherubim and a flaming sword are positioned east of the garden so as to “guard the way to the tree of life” (v. 24). Now Adam’s “earthy” origin is invoked in order to emphasize his mortality. He is to return to the ground “since you were taken from it; for dust you are, and to dust you will return” (v. 19), and in the meantime he has to “work the ground from which he had been taken” (v. 23). It is not

23. So Lambert (1980, 58), commenting on the state of humans in Genesis and in *Atrahasis*, suggests: “In each case man was first created without any limit being fixed on his life-span. As a result of misdemeanour death was laid upon him.”

24. Thus Martin-Achard (1960, 19): “Before the Fall, between Adam and death, which is part of his natural lot as an element in his human heritage, there stands the Living God; His presence is sufficient to ward death off, to conceal it; Adam, standing before God, is able to ignore it, it is nothing to him, it does not exist.” This, for all Martin-Achard’s insistence that, in Gen 2–3 and in the Old Testament generally, humans are born mortal and death is entirely natural, seems to imply something describable as “contingent immortality.”

25. Eve quotes God as saying simply “you must not eat of it…or you will die” (Gen 3:3), though the serpent uses ביום: “God knows that on the day when you eat of it your eyes will be opened…” (v. 5).

because the humans will be a threat to God that they must be banished from the garden. In 3:22 a sense of urgency is indeed suggested by the aposiopetic "And now, lest he stretch out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat and live for ever…,"[26] but this is not panicky haste, as if God is feeling alarmed and threatened. The anthropomorphizing of God in the Old Testament often sees him speak in the way of humans even while acting sovereignly in ways not possible for humans, and Gen 3:22–24 gives an example of this. God's provision of clothing for Adam and Eve does not suggest that he feels under threat; nor does the fact that he has power to banish them from their Edenic idyll suggest weakness or impotence. This is also the case in Gen 11 when "the Lord came down" to see the city and the tower under construction by the Babel-builders (v. 5). He is concerned lest their newfound solidarity leads to other ambitious undertakings—"nothing that they plan to do will be impossible for them" (v. 6)—yet the story is nothing if not a sardonic account of God's condescension to inspect and to thwart the vertical aspirations of the men of Babel.

Mettinger and the Testing of Adam

"Wisdom and immortality take on new functions in the Eden narrative. Here the human part is much more active, because man is confronted with a radical choice" (Mettinger 2007, 129). Mettinger's is one of the most recent discussions of these chapters, published soon after the present study was read to the Cambridge Old Testament Seminar in May 2007. Mettinger's superb study offers a masterclass in literary and comparative method. His basic thesis is that God sets Adam a test in the garden: if Adam passes the test he will be rewarded with immortality. For Mettinger, therefore, both the tree of knowledge and the tree of life are original in the story;[27] moreover, God keeps to himself his intention of rewarding Adam if he proves obedient. Adam does not know of the existence of a "tree of life" in the garden and is therefore ignorant of its significance in the working out of his destiny (2007, 55). In this matter of testing, the Genesis narrative, which is dated to the late postexilic period by Mettinger (2007, 50, 134), is thought to reflect Deuteronomistic

26. Cf. White (1991, 145): "A spirit of haste prevails here, suggesting that the extraordinary breaking off of this divine discussion in mid-sentence is an aposiopesis rather than textual corruption."

27. Mettinger 2007, 124: "The idea of a one-tree narrative that was subsequently enriched to include the other tree as well is no longer tenable."

influence (2007, 49–55). Adam's failure consists in listening to his wife's voice rather than God's, and as a result he acquires wisdom but forfeits the chance of immortality. Until the test, mortality or immortality remains an open issue (2007, 59). When Mettinger turns to the Mesopotamian texts he finds wisdom and immortality featuring strongly as divine prerogatives in *Adapa*, though he doubts that *Adapa* "served as a pattern for the narration in Genesis 2–3" (2007, 108). In *Gilgamesh* he notes the divine gifting of wisdom to Gilgamesh, and he defines the main theme of the story as immortality. This, however, proves unattainable for Gilgamesh, and the idea of immortality is transfigured so that it is the poem itself that achieves immortality as "an immortal piece of art" bequeathed to the rest of humanity (2007, 121).

The idea that Adam is being tested through the prohibition in 2:17 has much to be said for it, though Mettinger has been able to find surprisingly few explicit references to testing in previous writing on Gen 2–3.[28] Perhaps Moberly's 1988 study and especially its citing of Deut 30, effectively aligning the Genesis narrative with Deuteronomistic theology, deserved greater recognition at least for its highlighting of Deuteronomistic "choice."[29] That the testing of Adam has immortality as the intended reward for obedience admittedly gives the idea of testing a still more directive role in the story than has previously been recognized. It also prompts questions, yet it may be in the nature of the narrative that even the perfect solution will be found not to cover every last point. Since, for example, the tree of life appears to be accessible throughout Adam's time in the garden, the matter of eating or not eating from it seems to be left to happenstance. Again, and rather as in the discussion of intercession and mitigation above, some indication in the text might have been expected of God's intention to reward as well as punish. It is one thing for Adam to remain unaware of the positive outcome that is open to him and another for the reader to be sharing his ignorance.[30] Mettinger's citing of the testing of Abraham and Job provides parallels to Adam in his ignorance, but in these other instances the reader is in the know (Gen 22:1; Job 1:1–12). Moreover, it is a feature of the sections on

28. The present writer's reference to 1 Sam 10:8 as setting up "a tree of knowledge in Saul's Eden (*cf.* Gn. 2:16f.)" (Gordon 1986/2000, 118) assumes the idea of "test" in both Gen 2–3 and 1 Sam 10, though plainly Mettinger takes the idea further than any writer before him.

29. Admittedly, Mettinger (2007, 53) also highlights, in addition to "choice" (so Deut 30), the theme of testing in Deut 8.

30. Mettinger (2007, 55) thinks that it should be clear to the reader that "some reward is presupposed if they pass the test."

"test" and "choice" in Deut 8 and 30 that they set out both the positive and the negative outcomes of obedience or disobedience.

The role of the serpent also deserves comment. In Mettinger's reading the serpent becomes the agent of God in testing[31]—a role more associated biblically with the Satan than the serpent (cf. Job 1–2)—though there is no suggestion of this in the narrative. At the same time, he is cursed for his part in the proceedings. This, admittedly, may involve no greater degree of paradox in the presentation of the serpent than is assumed in other readings of the Eden narrative.

Conclusion

The "simplicity of the highest cunning" that Thomas Hardy detected in biblical story-writing (Gordon 2006, 22) is already at work in Gen 2–3 even as a series of major issues is being addressed. Among these the threat of death and humanity's forfeiture through its first parents of the chance of immortality rank high. However, it is not required that the references to death in 2:17 and 3:3–4 be confined to instantaneous or imminent physical death. The concept of death was previously unknown to Adam, and, whether intended as literal or metaphorical, would have to be explained to him. Arguments based upon "what he would have understood" involve large and unwarranted assumptions by moving outside the narrative world of Gen 2–3. It is also apparent that the sin–death nexus starts here in the Eden narrative, and that those who made the connection in antiquity were going with the grain of the narrative. Finally, I have observed the extent to which Gen 2–3 reworks the themes of wisdom and life/immortality as they feature in prior Mesopotamian tradition. The exploration of these and other motifs makes for a narrative sufficiently complex as to discourage simplistic attempts to turn expectation on its head and proclaim the serpent the truth-teller in the story.

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31. Mettinger (2007, 80) says simply that the serpent "acts as the agent that instigated the human insurgence against God. There is thus, at a deeper level, a conflict between the serpent and YHWH Elohim."

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Desire for Ethics or the Ethics of Desire?*

Diana Lipton

Churches, synagogues, mosques, and comparable religious institutions seek to shape and influence their members, individually and collectively, and see themselves as having a formative role in the education of children. Sacred texts are inevitably central to this endeavour. This is the moment to mention that I spent fourteen years as Head Teacher of my synagogue's *cheder* (Sunday School), and thus have a special interest in the use of biblical texts to generate ethical and moral teachings for children. Some may take what follows as evidence of my supreme unsuitability for this role; others may wonder if it explains the growth of the *cheder* during my tenure from 12 to 80 pupils. In this study I shall explore the idea that, while our desire to use sacred texts to generate clear ethical principles is natural and commendable, we must "handle with care" when it comes to the Hebrew Bible. My case study will be Gen 39, and my task is to show that, ethically speaking, this chapter is both far more complex than it seems, and, for that very reason, an excellent source of material. My focus on the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife (I shall call her Mrs. Potiphar) means that I am calculating the costs of ethics in relation to biblical narrative, as opposed to other genres of biblical literature, such as law or prophecy. This reflects the constraints of space, rather than a considered judgment about where and how ethical principles may be best derived. Yet in light of my stated interest in the ordinary members of faith communities, especially their junior members, biblical narrative indeed may be the best place to start.[1]

* I thank Katharine Dell for inviting me to deliver an earlier version of this paper at the Old Testament Seminar, Cambridge University, in Michaelmas Term 2005.

1. Some of the material used here appears, in a slightly different form, in my 2008 book.

Reading Ethically

When dealing with biblical ethics, it is crucial to distinguish between scholarship dealing with ethical issues explored by the authors of the Hebrew Bible (Mein 2001), and the use of the Hebrew Bible to address present-day ethical questions (Visotsky 1997). The former tends to be undertaken by Hebrew Bible scholars and the latter by scholars in other (sometimes related) fields, by professional ethicists in search of source material, and by members of faith communities. John Barton (Barton 2003) comes closest to bridging the gap by supplying a theoretical framework. Surely "professional" Bible scholars in larger numbers can and should contribute to this project, but how?

A standard approach to biblical ethics requires a focus on positive and negative role models. Traditionally, characters and situations have functioned in this capacity, but attention has shifted recently from content to context. Richard Bowman (Bowman 2002) charts this shift well in an analysis of the David narratives in Samuel and Kings that "reveal[s] the limits of a traditional, normative character ethics approach." Bowman concludes that:

> …what emerges from biblical character ethics is not a catalogue of virtues and vices, but a consideration of what it means to be human *coram deo*. What emerges is not so much a recommendation for constructive community action as a reconsideration of how to live within the ambiguity of human community. What emerges is not an admonition against destructive behavior but an affirmation of the equivocal nature of human beings. A biblical character ethics provides us neither with dogmatic assurance not with problematic skepticism but with an enhanced understanding of the flaws and fecundities, the problems and possibilities, of human character. (Bowman 2002, 97)

Yet although Bowman rejects the reduction of biblical characters to a set of virtues and vices, he effectively shifts the assessment from the characters themselves to the narratives that describe them. King David is neither good nor bad, but a complex figure who manifests the assorted strengths and weaknesses associated with middle-aged men in powerful positions (the Bill Clinton syndrome). The story in which David appears, on the other hand, is cast by Bowman as a "counter narrative":

> These complexities [in the portrayal of David] and apparent contradictions [the narrators' positive assessments of David vs. his actions] make it difficult to construe the David story as a typical "normative" story that is used to shape the ethical character of a community and it leaders. This challenging story dramatizes the seven deadly sins more than the four cardinal virtues. Thus it is more a counter-story than a normative, confessing one…

> This encompassing of counter-stories within the confessing story is perhaps the genius of the biblical witness. The "shadow" side of character is acknowledged, and an overall acceptance of complexity is accepted. Counter-narratives thus offer a confessing community not so much ideals to emulate as complexities to ponder. They present a mirror of ourselves. (Bowman 2002, 74)

Although Bowman works hard to find a constructive role for biblical narratives that are not exemplary, he nevertheless distinguishes clearly those stories that are exemplary from those that are not: "instead of neglecting or even suppressing counter-stories, these perceptive chroniclers include them within the confessing story" (Bowman 2002, 74). This attempt to distinguish exemplary from confessing narratives seems to me to be at odds with the Hebrew Bible. Indeed, at the risk of revealing more about myself than the biblical narrators, I confess that I cannot think of a single exemplary, or even normative, story in the Hebrew Bible. In what follows, I shall try to back up that sweeping claim, starting with an overview of the dominant features of biblical narrative and turning to what I see as two of its central aims.

Biblical Narrative vs. Ethics

Biblical narrative, by virtue of its characteristic styles and techniques, is unlikely to produce characters or situations that serve as role models, or even to produce exemplary or counter-exemplary texts, as Bowman suggests. This conclusion is at the very least implicit in the countless literary-aesthetic analyses of biblical narrative that have appeared over the past twenty-five years,[2] but we must go back forty years before that for its most succinct, and arguably most powerful, explication. The presentation of character lies at the heart of Erich Auerbach's magisterial treatment of reality in Homer and the Hebrew Bible (Auerbach 1953). Two crucial contrasts emerge in "Odysseus' Scar." First, Homer reveals where the Bible conceals. In Homer, "nothing must remain hidden or unexpressed. With the utmost fullness, with an orderliness that even passion does not disturb, Homer's personages vent their inmost hearts in speech; what they do not say to others, they speak in their own minds, so that the reader is informed of it" (Auerbach 1953, 6). In the Hebrew Bible, on the other hand, speech does not serve "to manifest, to externalise thoughts—on the contrary it serves to indicate thoughts that remain

2. Robert Alter identifies the hallmarks of biblical narrative as verbal ambiguity, indeterminacy of meaning, repetition, multivalence, gaps and terse, laconic style (Alter 1981).

unexpressed" (Auerbach 1953, 11). The Hebrew Bible simply withholds the evidence—memories, desires, associations, motivations—required to sum up its characters. Second, Homeric characters, fixed from birth, are contrasted with Hebrew Bible characters who develop:

> Herein lies the reason why the great figures of the Old Testament are so much more fully developed, so much more fraught with their biographical past, so much more distinct as individuals than the Homeric heroes. Achilles and Odysseus are splendidly described in many well-ordered words, epithets cling to them, their emotions are constantly displayed in their words and deeds—but they have no development and their life-histories are clearly set forth once and for all… But what a road, what a fate, lie between the Jacob who cheated his father and the old man whose favorite son has been torn to pieces by a wild beast! (Auerbach 1953, 17)

The narrator's determination to withhold from readers all but a tantalizing hint of the internal lives of his characters, while at the same time urging them to accompany his characters on each step of their tortuous life journeys, discourages objective assessment. We do not know enough to "sum up" a biblical character, any more than we ever know enough about flesh and blood humans to sum them up, and nor do we feel sufficiently detached to do so.[3]

Inner-Biblical Typology vs. Ethics

While Hebrew Bible narratives are rarely, if ever, exemplary or normative, they are often heavily typological. Here I have in mind Michael Fishbane's definition of typology as the identification of certain "persons, events, or places the prototype, pattern or figure of historical persons, events or places that follow it in time" (Fishbane 1989, 350). While acknowledging that typology is associated primarily with post-biblical exegesis, Jewish and Christian, Fishbane makes a convincing case for inner-biblical typology. Especially pertinent is his discussion of the use in some prophetic texts of the figure of Jacob. Thus in Hos 12, "the sibling rivalry between Jacob and Esau, as well as other instances of Jacob's deceptions and deeds, form the basis of a trenchant diatribe against latter-day Israel" (Fishbane 1989, 376). Similarly, Jer 9:3–5 adapts key terms from the Jacob cycle (Gen 25:11–35:22) to "stress that the new Israel is like the old—filled with mendacity and duplicity in interpersonal

3. This discourages reductive "typing," "summing up" and focus on "character" over actions; cf. Cahill (2002, 4), who writes: "For many ethicists…an ethics of character holds up the basic moral dispositions of the agent as more important than individual acts."

relationships… For him [Jeremiah], the misdeeds and deceptions of the past are renewed in the misdeeds of Jacob's descendants" (Fishbane 1989, 378–79). As Fishbane makes clear, we are dealing not merely with a rhetorical trope, but with an attempt to understand the very nature of Israel. "The nation is not just like its ancestor, says Hosea, but is its ancestor in fact—in name and in deed" (Fishbane 1989, 378). This being the case, it is easy to see why the figures from which typologies are drawn cannot be simple "types." To be sure, the examples cited here use Jacob to explain Israel's faults, but a convincing typological identification of Israel the nation with Jacob/Israel the patriarch would require the inclusion of positive as well as negative elements. This is, indeed, what we find. In an example that, for our purposes, speaks for itself, Malachi explains how God manifests his love for post-exilic Israel: "'Is not Esau Jacob's brother?' declares the LORD. 'Yet I have loved Jacob and hated Esau'" (Mal 1:2). Though less explicit than Malachi, Deutero-Isaiah likewise uses the figure of Jacob positively in his prophecies to the Babylonian exiles. Meira Polliack offers a detailed analysis of this theme in her article "Deutero-Isaiah's Typological Use of Jacob in the Portrayal of Israel's National Renewal" (Polliack 2002). Working from the other end, I have explored in my own work (Lipton 1999) the extent to which Jacob's dreams in Genesis may have functioned to enrich the Jacob typology, offering a model of hope and validation for the exiles in Babylon. Thus the patriarch banished from home (with cause!) and condemned to servitude under a non-Israelite nevertheless returns to supplant the (innocent but not straightforwardly deserving) brother who stayed at home. Likewise the Babylonian exiles, whose theological understanding of the exile required a measure of self-blame, were banished and condemned to servitude, but would nonetheless return to reclaim their rightful superiority over their Jewish siblings (about 90% of the pre-exilic population, hence the need for validation!) who had remained in Judah. For this inner-biblical typology, not to mention post-biblical Jewish typology, to function effectively, Jacob cannot be reduced to a two-dimensional "type." Rather, his character, and the narratives that reveal it, must be sufficiently complex to reflect the self-image of Jews, whether in Babylon or in Roman Palestine, who look to Jacob both for an explanation for what went wrong in the past and for an indication that the future will be better. Judaism's commitment to Jacob's significance beyond himself precludes a narrow character assessment, let alone a final judgment. And although I have focused here on the character of Jacob, of course I intend my comments to apply more generally.

Biblical Law vs. Ethics

A third factor, in addition to the distinctive qualities of biblical narrative and the biblical and post-biblical Jewish use of typology, helps explain why characters and narratives in the Hebrew Bible should be regarded as complex and ambiguous, not exemplary. Any society whose legal code applies simultaneously to its own society, the world at large, and the cosmos is bound to face significant challenges in relation to law. In particular, how can the legal code in question be prioritized and enforced without alienating or, worse, decimating the people it binds? Surely a society in which the law reigns supreme over almost every aspect of waking life, and in which death or some form of exclusion feature heavily among penalties incurred for infractions, would quickly find itself with few surviving members! Two obvious options present themselves. The first is to diminish the significance of the law, or even dispense with it, focusing instead on the values and ideals it was intended to promote. The second option is to maintain the laws in their pure form while demonstrating flexibility in their application. Paradoxically (as well as counter-intuitively to some), biblical accounts of humans who break laws and yet retain their proximity to God may be seen as indispensable in helping to keep law viable. Without a means of demonstrating the limitations of application that does not compromise the law itself, the law would ultimately be rejected or downgraded. Narrative accounts of realistically drawn characters (not positive or negative role models) were thus indispensable to the project of maintaining law as central. This understanding of the relationship between law and narrative is diametrically opposed to what I take to be Martha Nussbaum's view of philosophy and tragedy in *The Fragility of Goodness* (Nussbaum 1986).[4] Nussbaum sees tragedy as demonstrating the limitations of philosophy as a universal moral system by showcasing situations it cannot address. Far from undermining law, biblical narratives use complex characters who commit infractions yet stay within the system to make the essential point that biblical law can survive application.

Case Studies

One way of deriving ethical teachings from biblical narratives involves mining them for role models (characters or situations), or seeing the narratives themselves as exemplary or non-exemplary. I have explained

4. For a discussion of Nussbaum on this point, see Barton 1989.

above what I take to be the pitfalls and limitations of these approaches. Alternatively, stories may be treated as case studies, valuable precisely because they raise difficult issues—sibling rivalry, parental bias, infertility, adultery, the right to inherit, to name a few—in relation to characters and situations that are never black and white. A good example of this approach is *The Genesis of Ethics*, a popular book by rabbinics scholar Burton Visotsky (1997). Visotsky charts the progress of a study group consisting of high-powered lawyers and business executives who set out to examine the book of Genesis. It emerges that the text mirrors the lives of its exegetes, providing material that rivals in complexity anything they encounter in the courtroom or board room. Far from focusing on positive and negative role models, their ethically driven close readings highlight ambiguity in biblical characters even where it is not self-evident. In one memorable example, a high-powered criminal lawyer sees Abraham's negotiation at Sodom and Gomorrah as an example of successful plea-bargaining; Abraham never expected to save the entire city, but hoped that by starting with a big demand he would end up with what he really wanted, the lives of Lot and family. Genesis 39, though far from ideal as a source for simple role models, functions perfectly as a case study, raising complex questions about gender, offspring, fertility, religion, race, ethnicity, employer/employee relationships, and sexual etiquette. It goes without saying that I believe the role model and case study approaches are ultimately incompatible; none of this is possible if the characters of Joseph and Mrs. Potiphar are stripped of ambiguity, or, indeed, if their story is reduced to a normative or counter-normative narrative.

Joseph and Potiphar's Wife: A Case Study

As well as providing a sophisticated case study of yet-to-be resolved ethical questions, Gen 39 enables me to test a reading that emerged during a paper on feminist biblical exegesis delivered at a meeting of the Society for Biblical Literature (Cambridge, July 2003). Yael Shemesh of Bar Ilan University made the important observation that being a card-carrying feminist should not entail condoning the behaviour of all women, no matter how egregious. Potiphar's wife, she said, was a woman whose immoral actions could not be excused. Conforming to the "don't touch the wet paint" principle, I took Yael's eminently reasonable warning as a challenge to defend Mrs. Potiphar, and I did so by developing the reading I shall now expound. Shortly before giving the Cambridge seminar paper on which this essay is based, I discovered that Ron Pirson, then teaching at the University of Tilburg, had drawn almost

the same conclusions, though differing on points of detail, in a then about-to-be-published issue of the *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* (Pirson 2004). I took Ron's article as evidence that I was not quite beyond the pale of traditional biblical scholarship! More importantly, the exchange between us that commenced when I sent him my own work led to a significant and, I hope, enduring scholarly interaction in the months leading up to Ron's untimely death in 2005.[5]

Adultery vs. Fertility?

The ethical issues raised by the standard reading of Gen 39 concern marital fidelity. In biblical terms, three possible crimes put Mrs. Potiphar beyond the pale. Either she tempts Joseph to commit adultery (Gen 39:7, 10, 12; cf. Exod 20:13); or she herself is a would-be adulteress, not because the man she hopes to sleep with is married to someone else, but because she wants to sleep with a man who would become an adulterer by virtue of sleeping with her (Lev 20:10); or she was guilty of causing her husband to be jealous by attempting to seduce Joseph (Num 5:11–31). On the standard reading of the chapter, Mrs. Potiphar is guilty on all three counts, but I shall try to show that only the first of these three accusations can plausibly be brought to bear, and that even this may be unreasonable in the circumstances. I hope to demonstrate that Mrs. Potiphar was acting according to both cultural and narrative expectations when she asked Joseph to sleep with her. Far from making her husband jealous, she may have been following his unreported instructions in an attempt to secure the continuity of his line. The ethical issues raised by the text concern not sexual morality, but something closer to what in our own times emerges in relation to sperm donation and surrogate parenthood.

Several factors justify the suggestion that Gen 39 is concerned with the continuity of Potiphar's line. The continuity of a man's line, and his wife's determined efforts to secure it, are explicit themes of Gen 38. Many theories have been generated to explain the inclusion of the story of Judah and Tamar in what is otherwise an unusually holistic piece of biblical narrative (in my opinion, not unreasonably labelled the "Joseph novella"), and to those I wish to add the possibility that a redactor had in mind an explicit parallel between Potiphar and Er and Mrs Potiphar and Tamar when he interjected this story between the introduction of Potiphar in Gen 37:36 ("The Midianites, meanwhile, sold him in Egypt

5. Ron and I collaborated on a three-year International Society for Biblical Literature session on Gen 18–19, the proceedings of which will, I hope, be published in Ron's memory.

to Potiphar, a courtier of Pharaoh and his chief steward') and the continuation of the story in 39:1 ("When Joseph was taken down to Egypt; a certain Egyptian, Potiphar, a courtier of Pharaoh and his chief steward, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him there"). Had the redactor perceived no link between Er and Potiphar, an interjection between 37:35 ("…And his [Joseph's] father wept for him") and 37:36 ("The Midianites, meanwhile…") would have been smoother. This connection does not, of course, exclude other explanations for the inclusion of the story of Judah and Tamar in the Joseph narrative. It merely offers a justification for the exact placement of the contents of Gen 38 (the thematic and structural parallels created the peg upon which the redactor could hang Judah and Tamar), and suggests that, given this placement, it is appropriate to read ch. 39 through the lens of the chapter that precedes it. Both chapters open with a verse recording that the main male protagonist (Judah and Joseph, respectively) went down. Numerous similarities and differences between these two figures have been sketched on the basis of this structural parallel, and to these I add that both men are seduced (successfully in Judah's case and unsuccessfully in Joseph's) by a woman for the purpose of continuing her husband's line (or, to put it another way, in order to have a child). Moreover, in both cases, the woman appears at first glance to be acting in a sexually inappropriate way—Tamar by disguising herself as a prostitute and Mrs. Potiphar by giving the appearance of being driven solely by lust. In Tamar's case, that impression is false—she is not acting inappropriately, but getting her due and guaranteeing her husband's continuity. It does not follow that the same will be true of Mrs. Potiphar, but the possibility should not be ruled out.

Another indication that fertility is a theme here is the structural parallel between Potiphar and Abraham. Just as Sarah hoped to be built up through her maidservant, Abraham may have contemplated using his slave Eliezer as a surrogate father. Genesis 15:2–4 reports an exchange between God and Abram about childlessness: "And Abram said, 'O LORD God, what can You give me, seeing that I shall die childless, and the one in charge of my household [lit., son of my house] is Dammesek Eliezer!' Abram said further, 'Since You have granted me no offspring, my steward will be my heir.' The word of the LORD came to him in reply, 'That one shall not be your heir; none but your very own issue shall be your heir (ירשׁך).'" The standard reading of this text posits a structural equivalence between Eliezer and the son Abram hopes to have. Yet what is at issue here is not so much inheritance as possession. Abram fears that, because he has no offspring (זרע, "seed," not בן, "son"), the

son of his house, his “house boy,” will possess his house, thus usurping him as the link with future inhabitants of the land he will possess (ירשׁ, v. 7). When God assures Abraham that the product of his own loins will take possession, he confirms not just that he will have a son, but that a surrogate father will not be required (as Hagar was required in the first instance as a surrogate mother for Sarah). Both Gen 15 and 39 may be read as the attempts (quickly arrested in Abram’s case and aborted in Potiphar’s) of two men to continue their lines.

The theme of continuity of line is highlighted by the semantics of Gen 39. Although סְרִיס פַּרְעֹה is conventionally rendered as “Pharaoh’s courtier,” “eunuch” is the primary definition, and may, at the very least, be read as a secondary meaning in this text (i.e. readers were expected to take the hint, even if “courtier” was intended as the plain sense meaning). The unusual number of designations attached to Potiphar (in addition to his name he is referred to as סְרִיס פַּרְעֹה, “courtier and/or eunuch,” שַׂר הַטַּבָּחִים, “chief steward,” and אִישׁ מִצְרִי, “Egyptian man”) may also argue for a more loaded reading of this designation than would have been justified had it been his only label. Although it does not settle the matter, the Septuagint’s choice of the unambiguous *eunochos* is also worth noting. Finally, if pressed for a rationale for selecting between “courtier” and “eunuch” or “courtier” and “courtier/eunuch,” context might count as a determining factor. I hope to show that the context does indeed justify the more complex meaning.

Barren Biblical Men?

Conditional on rejection of Canaanite worship, God promises Israel in Exod 23:26 that “No woman in your land shall miscarry or be barren.” Israel must have failed to keep the bargain; there were barren women in the land. But why are women specified? Were there no impotent or infertile men in ancient Israel? There were men who had daughters, but failed to produce a male heir. Thus the daughters of Zelophehad, lacking brothers, negotiated a hereditary holding among their father’s kinsmen (Num 27:7), while Sheshan gave his daughter to his Egyptian slave, Jarha, and her son Attai continued Sheshan’s family line (1 Chr 2:34–35). And there were men who died childless, perhaps infertile, but perhaps not. Ideally, their brothers married their wives, and their first son was accounted to the dead brother’s name (Deut 26:5–6). And when Levirate marriages such as these failed, women took more extreme measures to secure descendants for their dead, childless husbands (Gen 38:12–19, Ruth 4:7–10). But where are the men who were childless not simply because they died before conceiving? I think they can be identified, not by hints of the problem, but by examples of a solution. Exodus 21:4

contains such a hint: “If a master gave him [his Hebrew slave] a wife, and she has borne him children, the wife and the children shall belong to the master, and he shall leave alone.” If a man gives a wife to his single, Hebrew slave, and the slave decides to leave his master in the seventh year, as he entitled to do, the slave’s wife, and any children she had with him, must stay with their master. Slaves who come with wives may take their wives when they leave, but wives provided by the master effectively produce children for the master (see Jackson 2007). No explanation is offered, but one comes to mind. This was a brilliant and highly diplomatic strategy for dealing with the little-discussed problem—presumably then as well as now—of male infertility in ancient Israel. A Hebrew slave could function for his infertile master as a surrogate father. I suggest that Potiphar purchased Joseph with a scenario much like this one in mind. If I am correct, the ethical issues that emerge from Gen 39 are less matters of marital infidelity than solutions for infertility.

Genesis 37 contains a convoluted account of the selling of Joseph into servitude in Egypt. His brothers sell him to the Ishmaelites, who sell him to the Midianites, who sell him to Potiphar. Significantly, Joseph is sold (מכר) three times in ch. 37 (vv. 27, 28, 36), but not once bought! The first reference to a purchase comes in 39:1: “When Joseph was taken down to Egypt, a certain Egyptian, Potiphar, a courtier of Pharaoh and his chief steward, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him there.” The shift from sale to purchase may reflect in part the narrator’s shifting attention; for the time being, at least, Potiphar is the end of the chain. But the new verb also provides an opportunity to introduce a central theme of this text. קנה (“to purchase) resonates both with קנה (“to create”) and קנא (“jealousy,” associated both with infidelity and with Joseph). Through this triple word-play the narrator offers a *précis* of the plot: Potiphar buys (קנה) Joseph, already an object of jealousy (קנא) who will procreate (קנה) with his wife, thus arousing his jealousy (קנא). That Potiphar engineered this himself is no protection against jealousy, as is evident in the similar case of Sarah and Hagar.

One of the three labels attached to Potiphar in addition to his name is “Egyptian man” (אִישׁ מִצְרִי). In v. 2, Joseph is described as a “successful man” (אִישׁ מַצְלִיחַ) in the house of his master “the Egyptian” (הַמִּצְרִי) not “the Egyptian man” (אִישׁ מִצְרִי) this time. In other words, once Potiphar has purchased Joseph, he ceases to be the man of the house, and Joseph takes on that role. While אִישׁ מִצְרִי may be rendered “a certain Egyptian” (as NJPS does here), the two-fold use of “man”—once in relation to someone called a “eunuch,” even if he is not actually castrated, and once in relation to a beautiful boy with whom the eunuch’s wife wants to

sleep—must surely be read as a *double-entrendre*. This reading is reinforced by one of several differences between the report of her encounter with Joseph that Mrs. Potiphar delivers to her servants, and her account to her husband. To her servants, she says “Look, he had to bring us a Hebrew [man] (אִישׁ עִבְרִי) to dally with us” (v. 14). When speaking to her husband, however, she calls Joseph a “Hebrew slave” (הָעֶבֶד הָעִבְרִי, v. 17). Was she protecting her husband’s dignity by designating Joseph according to his role, not his gender? Or was she already beginning the process that would end with Joseph’s expulsion from her house?

A second *double-entendre* may be intended in relation to בַּיִת (“house”), which occurs elsewhere as a euphemism for “wife.”[6] With Joseph around, Potiphar is neither master over his house or his wife. The particular language used to describe the way in which Potiphar’s household flourishes once he has put Joseph in charge is non-specific, but evokes a general sense of increase that would usually include fertility. The possibly euphemistic use of “house” in v. 2 suggests that it may be used euphemistically (though ironically) again in v. 5: “the LORD blessed his house for Joseph’s sake…so that the blessing of the LORD was on everything he owned, in the house and outside.” If God has blessed Potiphar’s “house” through Joseph (in a structural reversal of Gen 20:18, where God curses Abimelech’s house by closing the wombs of all the women therein), where are the many offspring we might expected to hear mentioned?

Verse 6 opens with the unexpected verb וַיַּעֲזֹב (“abandoned”). As the story develops, both the chief steward (39:22; 40:4) and Pharaoh (41:41) give (נתן) authority and responsibility to Joseph, but Potiphar “abandons” into Joseph’s hands “everything he has.” Possible explanations for the choice of this verb come in the continuation of v. 6, and later in the chapter. In 37:6b we learn that, with Joseph in charge, Potiphar “did not know anything except the bread he ate.” I suggest that know (יָדַע) is used in 39:6 for its sexual associations (cf. “Adam knew his wife,” Gen 4:1). This reading is supported by the narrator’s choice of the one area over which Potiphar retains control: his food. Food (לחם) too has the potential for *double-entendre* in Biblical Hebrew (cf. Prov 9:17) and, needless to say, the confusion between different types of appetites occurs in many cultures. Indeed, Joseph seems to recognize the inherent ambiguity when he misrepresents Potiphar to his wife. As Joseph tells it, the domain in which Potiphar continues to exercise control is not his food, but his wife (v. 9). Final support from v. 6 for a sexual reading of Potiphar’s

6. See BDB *ad loc.*

abdication from responsibility comes from the grammatically seamless, yet otherwise thematically jarring, shift from the food that Potiphar continues to eat to Joseph: “he [Potiphar] paid attention to nothing save the food that he ate. Now Joseph was well-built and handsome.”

Employment Ethics

No wonder, then, that Potiphar’s wife raises her eyes and sets her sights on Joseph: וַתִּשָּׂא אֵשֶׁת־אֲדֹנָיו אֶת־עֵינֶיהָ אֶל־יוֹסֵף (v. 7). Elsewhere, this idiom draws attention to an object that is already present, but whose significance has not hitherto been clear (see Reif 1985). When he has Mrs. Potiphar raise her eyes immediately following a reference to Joseph’s beauty, the narrator implies that her interest in Joseph was inevitable—the Titanic on collision course with her ice-berg. Is the sheer inevitability of it all (indifferent husband, bored wife stuck at home, ancient equivalent of the drop-dead gorgeous tennis coach) intended to disarm Mrs. Potiphar’s critics? I used the word “seduce” in relation to Mrs. Potiphar’s verbal encounter with Joseph, but it is hardly apt; this is no sultry *voulez vous coucher*![7] The brisk imperative שִׁכְבָה עִמִּי (lit., “lie with me,” but I prefer the more idiomatic “sleep with me”) can be read several ways. First, it could reflect her position of authority; the mistress of the house can expect her servants to satisfy her desires. Second, she is not playing with Joseph, but putting her cards on the table. She wants to sleep with him and tells him that in no uncertain terms. But should either of these factors make her look better in our eyes? On one contemporary (to us) reading, the first could make her seem far worse; not only is this sexual harassment (boss oppresses worker with implied threat of job loss), but it also raises racial and political issues (member of elite ruling majority oppresses ethnic minority refugee). Clothing imagery (cf. וַיַּעֲזֹב כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ בְּיַד־יוֹסֵף, v. 6, and וַיַּעֲזֹב בִּגְדוֹ בְּיָדָהּ, v. 12) highlights power and the transfer of responsibility as key themes (cf. King Lear). If Potiphar hired Joseph for duties that included continuing his line, was Joseph right to refuse? Was Joseph harassed by Mrs. Potiphar—וַיְהִי כְּדַבְּרָהּ אֶל־יוֹסֵף יוֹם יוֹם (v. 10)? Was he unfairly dismissed—וַיִּקַּח אֲדֹנֵי יוֹסֵף אֹתוֹ וַיִּתְּנֵהוּ אֶל־בֵּית הַסֹּהַר (v. 20)? Was he not dismissed at all, but simply moved to another site (Pirson 2004, 258)? Or, following McKay (1990), who envisages a small hotel with Mrs. Potiphar as its side-lined middle-manager, should we focus not on Joseph, but on Mrs. Potiphar herself?

7. I do not see the imperative שִׁכְבָה עִמִּי (“lie with me”) as obviously seductive; for another opinion, see McKay 1999: 218.

Seductive Ethics

Having just turned over the coin to look at the other side, we can ask about Joseph's role in this affair. His beauty made him an object of temptation,[8] and he can hardly be blamed for that, but the surrounding narrative indicates that Joseph was not only beautiful—he was vain (that special coat, Gen 37:3) and arrogant (he assumed that it was fine to vaunt his superiority to his brothers, Gen 42:7–17). He deflects Mrs. Potiphar with external obstacles to their liaison—(slightly misrepresented) loyalty to his master and to God—rather than telling her openly that he is not interested. He may even lead her on ("there is no-one in this house as 'great' as me," אֵינֶנּוּ גָדוֹל בַּבַּיִת הַזֶּה מִמֶּנִּי, v. 9), and makes no apparent effort to avoid her, even once he knows that she longs to sleep with him. Is the abandoned wife of a eunuch (or at least of a figure of fun), infatuated with her husband's charismatic young right-hand man, really in a stronger position than the right-hand man himself? At first glance, the outcome suggests that she is. Joseph loses his job and gets thrown into jail on her say so. But what of Mrs. Potiphar? Did she spend the rest of her life in the prison of a childless, sexless, perhaps even loveless, marriage, doomed to regret the rash words that removed the object of her affection? As with Sarah, the loved but barren Israelite wife, compared with Hagar, the fertile Egyptian concubine, it is not easy to decide who has the upper hand, or with whom the power lies.

This reference to Sarah and Hagar lead us to an obvious but important point. The Bible, especially Genesis, is replete with men and women trading partners and hopping beds. Men sleep with their wives' servants (Abraham with Hagar, Jacob with Bilhah and Zilpah) without apparent narrative condemnation, and they put their wives at the disposal of other men for material gain (Abraham makes Sarah available to Pharaoh [Gen 12:12–13] and to Abimelech [Gen 20:2], and Isaac does the same with Rebekah [Gen 26:6]). Women share their husbands with their sisters (Rachel and Leah), manoeuvre men into their beds (Tamar with Judah,

8. For a meditation on Joseph's irresistibility, see Kugel 1994. See also *Midrash Tanḥuma VaYeshev* 5 (cf. the near-identical text in Qu'ran, *Surah Yusuf* 31): "Said the rabbis of blessed memory: On one occasion the Egyptian women gathered and went to behold Joseph's beauty. What did Potiphar's wife do? She took citrons [Heb. *etrogim*] and gave them to each of them and gave each a knife and then called to Joseph and stood him before them. When they beheld how handsome Joseph was, they cut their hands. She said to them: If you do thus after one moment, I who see him every moment, am I not all the more so [justified in being smitten]? And day after day she sought to entice him with words, but he overcame his desires. How do we know this? 'And after these things, the wife of his master set her eyes upon Joseph' (Gen 39:7)."

and perhaps Dinah with Shechem), and show no signs of resistance when they are manoeuvred into the beds of other men (Sarah with Pharaoh and Abimelech). Where does Potiphar's wife fit into this complex picture? Should we classify her alongside Abraham, a married man sleeping with a servant for the sake of getting a child? Or is she more like Sarah, a married woman sleeping with a foreign king (perhaps also to get a child—she is still childless at this stage of the story)? Or is she like Tamar, tricking Judah into sex? Or is she more like Judah, looking for casual sex in the absence of a long-term partner (no longer of this world in the case of Judah's wife, and out of action in Potiphar's case)? Or must we look further afield, narratively speaking? Is Mrs. Potiphar an equivalent of David, bored on a free afternoon and pursuing the first warm body that catches his eye? Or does she rather belong with Bathsheba, apparently unable to resist temptation when it arises? Thus is the complexity of sexual ethics in the Hebrew Bible. The search for appropriate precedents and role models is muddled by the vast and complex range of available options.

Relatively Ethical—Cross-cultural Ethics

Those who scan the Hebrew Bible for ethical role models are usually concerned either with the Bible's internal codes of conduct (legal material) or with ethical principles (often in prophetic material) that they believe to have emerged from those ancient codes. Yet can we be sure that the narrator judges Potiphar's wife according to Israel's standards and not Egypt's?[9] References to Egypt elsewhere (Lev 18:3; Ezek 23:19–21) imply that the authors of those texts envisaged different codes of sexual conduct there. Is Mrs. Potiphar simply conforming to their expectations by seducing Joseph, and thus not to be condemned at all? Or does reading this smack of twenty-first-century liberal relativism? For reasons other than my liberalism, I believe that the author of Gen 39 was evaluating Potiphar's wife on her own terms. An important underlying theme of the Joseph narrative is the clash of cultures; we watch Joseph not just survive, but thrive in an alien land. But at what cost? As we know from many (perhaps even most) other biblical texts, co-existence carries with it the threat of assimilation and loss of identity, and this anxiety—a central preoccupation of the Hebrew Bible—is crystallized in the encounter between Israelite and non-Israelite sexual partners.[10] Genesis 39 contributes to the biblical exploration of the risks (e.g. Deuteronomy) and rewards (e.g. Esther) of assimilation precisely because

9. For the Egyptian background, see Goldman 1995.

10. The so-called wife–sister texts in Gen 12, 20 and 26 are parade examples.

Mrs. Potiphar's values are *not* the same as Joseph's. The narrative simply fails if she is governed by the laws that govern him.

An important factor in our assessment of Mrs. Potiphar's character is her response to Joseph's claim that he cannot sin against God (v. 9). Far from backing off politely (no political correctness here), she pursues him with even more intensity (יוֹם יוֹם, v. 10) But is this really so reprehensible? We cannot be sure that Joseph was sincere. The justification he offers alongside sin for rejecting Mrs. Potiphar's advances—your husband withheld you from me (v. 9)—is not technically true; Potiphar withheld only the bread that he ate (v. 6). Does this discrepancy call into question the sincerity of Joseph's appeal to God? And even if Joseph is sincere, what should we make of it as far as Mrs. Potiphar is concerned? Her indifference to Joseph's religious commitment—וְאֵיךְ אֶעֱשֶׂה הָרָעָה הַגְּדֹלָה הַזֹּאת וְחָטָאתִי לֵאלֹהִים (v. 9)—seems reprehensible, but typifies attitudes to minority religions. The narrator is holding a mirror to diaspora life, not prescribing how it should be lived. Anglo-Jewish schoolchildren in non-Jewish schools must sing hymns in assembly or learn to live with teachers who regard their refusal as a rejection of English values and culture. Anglo-Jewish parents must learn to choose between asking their children to stand out (not an insignificant request, as all parents know) and allowing them to compromise their religious identities. Did the narrator recognize the "When in Rome" syndrome? Did he refrain from judging or condemning either side because his real interest was in representing what happens (or might happen) when cultures meet? And if he was judging anyone, is it not more likely to have been Joseph than Potiphar's wife? The particular kind of success Joseph has with his masters (and their wives) requires a dangerous willingness to mix with mainstream culture. Was the narrator using Joseph as a parade example of the risks of getting on in the world?

The "seduction" scene reinforces this reading. Joseph enters Mrs. Potiphar's house (not her husband's!) to do his work when no-one else is around: וַיְהִי כְּהַיּוֹם הַזֶּה וַיָּבֹא הַבַּיְתָה לַעֲשׂוֹת מְלַאכְתּוֹ וְאֵין אִישׁ מֵאַנְשֵׁי הַבַּיִת ("And thus it was on this day when he came to her house to do his work, and there was no man [present] among the men of the house," v. 11). The comparative preposition (כְּהַיּוֹם) links this with the preceding verse: וַיְהִי כְּדַבְּרָהּ אֶל־יוֹסֵף יוֹם יוֹם וְלֹא־שָׁמַע אֵלֶיהָ לִשְׁכַּב אֶצְלָהּ לִהְיוֹת עִמָּהּ ("Every day, she pressed him to sleep with her, but he did not listen to her [demand] to lie with her, to be with her…and thus it was on this day," v. 10). In other words, Joseph had no reason to be taken off-guard. Indeed, the double meanings we have already observed for "house" and for the verb to "come" raises a question about what kind of work he

came to do when he came to her house (וַיָּבֹא הַבַּיְתָה). Had Mrs. Potiphar arranged that the house would be empty? And why did Joseph put himself in temptation's way once he saw that there were no other men in evidence? Verse 12 opens "She caught hold of him by his garment and said, 'Lie with me.' But he left his garment in her hand and got away and fled outside (וַיַּעֲזֹב בִּגְדוֹ בְּיָדָהּ וַיָּנָס וַיֵּצֵא הַחוּצָה)." Had Joseph been unprepared for Mrs. Potiphar, we might envisage a forceful physical encounter; he enters the house, she grabs his coat, he breaks away and flees. Since, however, he almost certainly is prepared (forewarned), and may even have decided that this is the day he will give in (the climax of her nagging, comparable to Samson's revelation of the secret of his strength when Delilah has finally worn him down with her words in Judg 16:16), we might better see here an interrupted embrace. Joseph voluntarily falls into the arms of Mrs. Potiphar, she removes his jacket, but he comes to his senses, pulls away (leaving his jacket in her hands) and flees. Pirson makes a clever connection with Onan's *coitus interruptus* in Gen 38:9 (Pirson 2004, 259). He seems to think, though, that Joseph was frightened off by Mrs. Potiphar's ecstatic cry (Pirson 2004, 254–55), forgetting, perhaps, that the cry is a later interjection by Mrs. Potiphar. The narrator, usually the most reliable witness (especially where a woman's honour is at stake), reports only that she called out (and not even in a loud voice) to her servants.

The attention paid to the garment that Joseph leaves with Mrs. Potiphar highlights the choice that Joseph makes between old world and new. The Joseph novella is full of mirror images and repetitions and, although the Hebrew noun is different (בגד vs. כתנת), it is hard to avoid connecting the garment that Joseph abandons in the hands of Mrs. Potiphar with the special coat his father gave him (37:3). Both get him into trouble (the coat provoked the jealousy of his brothers, while the abandoned garment seems to provoke Mrs. Potiphar's summons to her servants) and both are used as evidence against him (the brothers' claim that Joseph is dead, and Mrs. Potiphar's accusation). The verb עזב ("abandoned") suggests a further parallel, this time within the chapter. Potiphar abandons his house (including his wife) in Joseph's hands, expecting Joseph to take full responsibility for them, and now Joseph has abandoned his coat in Mrs. Potiphar's hands. Surely status is at issue here. Clothing features prominently in this narrative, usually to indicate status (the special coat distinguishes Joseph from his brothers, Joseph changes clothes when he is rushed from the prison to Pharaoh's palace, and Pharaoh dresses Joseph in robes of fine linen when he appoints him as viceroy of all Egypt). The coat indicates Joseph's role in the household, as conferred upon him (lit., abandoned in his hands) by Potiphar.

When Joseph abandons his coat in the hands of Mrs. Potiphar, he abandons his responsibilities. This is what she is telling her husband when she shows him the coat: “Honey, the maid has quit”! Far from running away because he fears discovery, he flees because he has finally reached the point where he cannot be a loyal servant to two masters. And here again Joseph exemplifies the dilemma of diaspora existence. Whose laws should he follow, God’s or the laws of the land? Which authority should he recognize, the human king or the divine king of kings? How far will God support his endeavours in a strange land?

Joseph’s choice between cultures may also be reflected in the two verbs used to describe his exit from Mrs. Potiphar’s house: וַיָּנָס וַיֵּצֵא (“and he fled and went out,” v. 12). Sarna sees these words to be reflecting the two stages of Joseph’s escape; he rushes abruptly וַיָּנָס from the room but resumes a normal gait (וַיֵּצֵא) once outside “in order not to attract attention.”[11] Alternatively, וַיָּנָס (“flee”) may apply to Joseph’s abdication of office, while וַיֵּצֵא (“went out”) may allude to the event to which this narrative serves as a literary prelude, the Exodus from Egypt (יציאת מצרים). In another of those not-quite-repetitions that characterize this narrative, the narrator interprets the episode from Mrs. Potiphar’s point of view: “When she saw that he had left it in her hand and fled outside…” (וַיְהִי כִּרְאוֹתָהּ כִּי־עָזַב בִּגְדוֹ בְּיָדָהּ וַיָּנָס הַחוּצָה, v. 13). She sees Joseph give up his job (abandon his garment of office and flee), but she does not at this point see (the significance of) his metaphorical flight from Egypt, or at least from those aspects of Egypt evoked by this encounter.[12]

Criminal Charges?

Several factors explain Potiphar’s decision to throw Joseph into prison, albeit one under his own jurisdiction (40:3). As traditionally construed, he was responding to what he took to be his wife’s accusation of rape, but this seems unlikely, not least because the punishment does not match the crime (according to Egyptian or Israelite law). Alternatively, he could

11. Sarna 1989, 274.

12. It is hard not to think here of the moment in Mann’s *Joseph and His Brothers* when Joseph reveals his identity to his brothers: “As Joseph? He had got up from his seat and glittering tears ran down his cheeks. For it happened that the shaft of light which had been falling aslant upon the group of brothers had now moved round and was coming through an opening at the end of the hall. It fell directly on Joseph’s face and in it his tears glittered like jewels. ‘All that is Egyptian go out from me!’ said he, ‘Out with you, go! For I invited God and the world to this play, but now shall God alone be witness.’ ” Is Thomas Mann’s Joseph thinking of Mrs. Potiphar when he utters the ambiguous command, “All that is Egyptian go out from me”?

have been defending his wife's honour, or at least saving her feelings, by removing the offending servant from her sight. More likely, though, his response was as emotionally complex as his wife's. First, Joseph's presence in the house is no longer required; he had failed in an area of particular concern to Potiphar (the generation of an heir). Second, the arrangement Potiphar had intended to make was surely not without delicacy for him, publicly recognized eunuch or not. In rejecting his wife, Joseph had rejected and humiliated Potiphar (who would now have to go to the trouble of finding another suitable man to sire his child). Third, it seems likely that Potiphar himself had formed an attachment to Joseph; he had entrusted his immediate household and, as I read it, his future house (cf. בית דוד, House of David) in Joseph's hands, and felt let down. Finally, Joseph had rejected Potiphar's authority. The final cut occurred when he abandoned his coat in the hands of Mrs. Potiphar, but, if the clash of cultures and the difficulties inherent in trying to serve two masters are, indeed, prevailing themes of this text, Potiphar must have sensed the conflict from the outset. Expelling Joseph to the "Round House" was Potiphar's attempt to mark his own boundaries, just as Joseph had drawn his when he refused to sleep with Mrs. Potiphar.[13]

Gender Ethics?

And what of Mrs Potiphar's feelings? Her report to her servants is revealing: "Look, he had to bring us a Hebrew to dally with us!" The word for dally (מצחק) is polysemic even by Hebrew standards. Although it can mean "mock" (Gen 21:9), "laugh" (Gen 21:6), or "dance" (Judg 16:25), it has sexual overtones (e.g. it describes what Isaac is doing to Rebekah when Abimelech realizes they cannot be brother and sister, Gen 26:8). For what precise purpose was Mrs. Potiphar claiming (or implying) that her husband had purchased Joseph? She seems to be saying that he had been brought to the house to have sex, a reading borne out by the continuation of the verse: "This one came to lie with me; but I screamed out loud." Commentators other than Pirson, who reads it as I do, see this as Mrs Potiphar's false accusation against Joseph, but this entails separating "lie with me" from "dally." The most natural reading of her statement (all one sentence, not two, as NJPS makes it) is that Joseph was purchased to have sex (רְאוּ הֵבִיא לָנוּ אִישׁ עִבְרִי לְצַחֶק בָּנוּ, "Look, he brought us a Hebrew slave to dally with us," v. 14) and came to her

13. Mrs. Potiphar does not make it as far as adultery, even if that was her intention, and even if her loud cry was ecstasy (Pirson 2004: 257), which seems unlikely. Had Potiphar believed that adultery or attempted adultery had occurred, Joseph could have expected a harsher punishment (2004: 250).

house for that very purpose (בָּא אֵלַי לִשְׁכַּב עִמִּי, “He came to me to lie with me,” v. 14). And it is at this point that Mrs. Potiphar does something that seems wrong by any standards—she lies, not about what happened, but about the order in which events occurred: “But I screamed loud. And when he heard me screaming at the top of my voice, he left his garment with me and got away and fled outside” (v. 18). What accounts for this inconsistency? One explanation is that she is accusing Joseph of rape; “the scream was regarded as evidence of resistance to attempted rape and, hence, was a sign of innocence.”[14] Alternatively, when she claims to have cried out loud, she refers not to her summons to her servants but to her cry of ecstasy. This reading is supported by her subsequent words to her husband. As Pirson (2004, 257) points out, the Hebrew כִּי־הֲרִימֹתִי קוֹלִי (“And I raised up my voice”) may have joyful connotations, and could imply orgasm or its anticipation. But this cry of ecstasy was not reported by the narrator (v. 12), and it seems more likely that Mrs. Potiphar has conflated a (perhaps exaggerated) sense of her response to Joseph’s embrace with a cry to her servants in order to cover her own embarrassment. On the one hand, she had been rejected and her impulse was to share her outrage. The slight differences between her report to her servants and the account she gives her husband might be read as a sign of her insincerity. More plausibly, they show a woman attempting to enlist support. She addresses the men of the house as if she were one of them, while at the same time distancing herself from her husband (“Look, he had to bring us a Hebrew to dally with us”), a common enemy strategy for winning friends. Not surprisingly, though, she stops short of a public admission that, so unattractive was she to Joseph, he was willing to destroy his career to avoid sleeping with her. Her cry is thus intentionally ambiguous, hovering uncertainly—perhaps in her own mind as well as her public presentation—between agony and ecstasy. Mrs. Potiphar is only human.

But is Mrs. Potiphar *only* human? Or is she just like a (biblical) woman? Many recent studies have read Gen 39 from feminist and gender perspectives, pointing out, for example, that Mrs. Potiphar is nameless;[15] that the narrator does not explicitly offer her perspective (but how often are male perspectives offered?); and that although she has a lot of air space (Pirson 2004, 253), the differences between her two accounts turn out to be the noose that hangs her. But is she simply preserving her

14. Sarna 1989, *ad loc*, alluding to Deut 22:24, 27.

15. See Brenner and van Henten 1998. She is often given a name—Rahpitop (McKay 1999), Mutem-Emet (Bach 1993 [following Thomas Mann]), and Zuleika (Muslim tradition).

dignity? Although the events that concern her are markedly similar to those described in Gen 16 and 21, the texts about Sarah and Hagar elicit a very different response. Are sexually demanding women problematic for the biblical authors?[16] Or is it simply that readers of the Hebrew Bible have been conditioned to resist any reading that might lead them to empathize with the wife of an Egyptian slave-owner over and above an Israelite slave, regardless of how complex these characters and the situations in which they find themselves turn out to be?

As to the bigger question of whether my reading of Gen 39 constitutes a good basis for ethical teaching, particularly of children, I must leave that for others to decide. I can only cite my strong impression that I never raised an issue with my twelve-year-old Bar and Bat Mitzvah pupils that they had not previously encountered on television, from friends, or in their homes, and my sense is that my pupils were invariably impressed by how closely their sacred texts mirrored movies and, often less happily, life.

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16. Cf. Delilah, who is immortalized as a seductress (Clanton 2005) despite the fact that she does not seduce Samson and achieves success by a stereotypically wifely method—nagging.

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Psalm 101 and the Ethics of Kingship

Andrew Mein

Kings are a source of perpetual moral interest in the Hebrew Bible. Their virtues and vices take up great swathes of the narrative books. They are frequently on the receiving end of prophetic invective and (less frequently) the subject of hopeful prediction. They are representative figures onto whom Israel's hopes and fears are regularly projected. Kingship itself is both a foreign import which opens the door to exploitation and idolatry, and a divinely ordained route to piety, justice, and prosperity. In this context, the royal psalms are of particular interest, not only because they represent the most unequivocally positive evaluation of kingship in the Hebrew Bible, but also because they go a considerable way to set up a gold standard for kingship, especially in the two which deal most obviously with ethical issues, Pss 72 and 101. Of the two, Ps 72 has received rather more attention (see, e.g., Jobling 1992; Houston 1999). Psalm 101, the closest biblical antecedent to the medieval and early modern "mirror of princes," is also well worth considering. In admittedly brief span it sets out the moral responsibilities of Israel's king, and offers a window on to Israel's ethics of kingship.

Over the past twenty or thirty years the ethics of the Psalms have been a relative backwater (cf. Wenham 2005), but trends within both Psalms scholarship and biblical ethics have recently brought them closer to centre stage. There has been an increasing tendency to read the Psalter as a book of instruction rather than a collection of worship songs. At the same time, biblical ethicists have become more interested in the concept of character, and the Psalms are rightly seen as a rich resource for such inquiry.[1] Indeed, Karl Möller (2007) has recently published an interpretation of Ps 101 which analyses its potential to form the character of those

1. Much of this has come about through the work of the SBL section on "Character Ethics and Biblical Interpretation." See the essays appearing in Brown 2002 and Carroll R. and Lapsley 2007.

who read, sing or pray it. He downplays didactic readings, and instead uses speech-act theory to make a compelling case that "in rehearsing the king's self-involving language we too are committing ourselves to the ethical values promoted in this psalm" (Möller 2007, 113).

Möller's proposal, like most current work in Old Testament ethics, is driven by the desire to bridge the gap between academic scholarship and the experience of church and community. It has an "appropriative" aim, seeking to use the biblical text as an authoritative resource for contemporary Church and world.[2] However, an equally important trend in biblical ethics is rather more reticent in making connections. For such scholars as Eckart Otto (1994), Cyril Rodd (2001) and John Barton (2003), the task of Old Testament ethics is primarily a descriptive one, which seeks to uncover the moral norms and principles in biblical texts and their relationship to the culture of ancient Israel and Judah. In what follows I will limit myself to this latter aim, seeking to give an account of the ethics of this psalm within its ancient biblical horizon, and to explore something of its contribution to the Hebrew Bible's broader ideal of kingship.

What, Why and Who: Biblical Texts and Moral Worlds

How should we approach a text like Ps 101 or a group of texts like the royal psalms? I have for some time been drawn to the work of Wayne Meeks, who has emphasized the notion of a "moral world" in New Testament ethics (Meeks 1986; cf. Mein 2001, 10–39). For Meeks, to understand the moral formation of a group, we must first understand something of their physical, social and symbolic world. He therefore broadens the scope of ethical inquiry by not only asking *what* is right or wrong and *why* it is so, but also *who* are the moral actors involved. It seems to me that these three questions, "what," "why" and "who," roughly correspond to three stages of the task facing us as we attempt to understand the ethics of any biblical text. Put slightly differently, we want to uncover the explicit norms and values expressed in the text, the basis or rationale for those, and the underlying social values or ideology that the text promotes. In order to do this, we will need to draw on a range of literary, historical and sociological tools. If we can attend to the

2. The category is drawn from Douglas Knight, who describes four "constructs" within which practitioners of Old Testament/Hebrew Bible ethics tend to operate: the referential, appropriative, socio-historical, and literary (Knight 1994; cf. Davies 2000, 19–27).

"what," "why" and "who" of biblical ethics, we will end up with something approximating the "moral world" that the text both reflects and constructs.

The "what" question begins with identifying the explicit norms and values present in the text. At its most basic, it is the question "What do the texts have to say about right and wrong behaviour?" However, we will not get very far by attending only to what is explicitly labelled "right" or "wrong" in biblical texts, not least because so much of the biblical literature is rather opaque and allusive. But what precisely are we looking for? John Barton makes a helpful suggestion in his essay "Ethics in Isaiah of Jerusalem." He points to three different levels or orders of ethical reflection identifiable in the text. First, there are "specific crimes, sins, and culpable errors," such as oppression, theft and murder (Barton 2003, 134). Second, there are "passages where Isaiah denounces attitudes and states of mind which are in themselves culpable but the chief evidence for which is precisely those sins which have just been listed" (134). Third, and at a yet further level of abstraction, there are "attempts to encapsulate, either by explicit formulation or (more commonly) by metaphors and analogies, what is the essence of both sinful actions and wrong attitudes" (135). Barton focuses on sin because of the predominance of judgment oracles in Isaiah, but his three orders of ethical reflection could be present in more positive material. Put slightly differently, we might describe them as:

- specific moral or immoral actions,
- underlying moral attitudes,
- fundamental principles or symbolizations of an ethical system.

With the second and especially the third levels that Barton describes we are moving away from a notion of ethics as a set of explicit norms and values, and beginning to shift towards a fuller analysis of the components of a moral world, both explicit and implicit. An important aspect of this second stage of inquiry is another area to which Barton has paid substantial attention, the basis or rationale of ethics. For Barton, this term combines two related issues. The first is the question *why* ethical norms were considered binding, and the second, *what kind* of moral system is in operation: does it, for example, stress duty or goals or virtue? His three main suggestions for possible rationales have been "obedience to the revealed will of God," natural law and the imitation of God (Barton 2003, 29, 45–54).

Cheryl Anderson has recently criticized Barton's approach to the basis of ethics as insufficiently liberating. Obedience, natural law and imitation tend to reinforce traditional power structures. Barton's "articulation

of the basis of Old Testament ethics continues the marginalization of females, the poor, and those who are presumably ethnic outsiders" and fails to contest their silence (Anderson 2007, 46). At one level I think the critique is misconceived, since Barton is not attempting to draw out ethical principles for contemporary communities, but only to outline aspects of the ancient moral world. For example, it is hard to deny that the framers of Deuteronomic law and many of its early readers saw obedience as fundamental to the moral life, and it is not surprising that ancient texts reflect the patriarchal assumptions of their era. Nevertheless, Anderson's argument forcefully reminds us of the need to ask "who benefits?," even if our primary interest is in the moral worlds of ancient texts and communities.

Barton himself has drawn attention to the importance of social group for ethics (Barton 2003, 23), and a final set of questions revolves around the "who" of the moral world. What are the social values embedded in the texts and whose interests do they serve? Where might we locate the text's moral horizons in the complex web of social relationships that existed in ancient Israel? Do they belong to particular economic classes, status or professional groups, or political movements? Do they marginalize women, the poor or ethnic outsiders? This is where the study of particular texts inevitably intersects with a slightly different project, which Douglas Knight has called the "socio-historical construct" of ethics. Here the focus of attention is not the text or its interpreters, but the moral life of the historical community that we now know as ancient Israel:

> The focus falls on the morality not merely of texts but of the people's lives as they might have been played out in the real world. And significantly, the result amounts to a description of Israel's multiple moralities—not just a single unified orthodox or dominant moral world but the full range of moral values evident in the people's behavior and in the economic and political systems throughout society. (Knight 1994, 5)

My proposal, then, is to turn to Ps 101 and to ask three basic questions:

1. What are the explicit ethical norms to be found?
2. What is the basis or rationale for those norms?
3. What are the social values the text promotes?

Psalm 101: The King as Guardian of Integrity

Psalm 101 is of all the royal psalms the most consistently focused on moral questions. It sets standards of behaviour for those who would rule, as a kind of agenda for good government. The one who sings it seems to

have judicial authority in Jerusalem, "the city of the Lord" (v. 8), as the kings of Judah would have done. For Sigmund Mowinckel it is the king's "religious 'charter'," a promise made on the day of his enthronement and repeated annually as part of the New Year Festival (Mowinckel 1962: 1:67). While his specific suggestions about the role of the king in the autumn festival are no longer in favour, the majority of modern commentators continue to share Mowinckel's view that the psalm is a royal vow which belongs to the world of Judah's royal ceremonial (e.g. Anderson 1981, 700; Day 1992, 95–96; Kraus 1993, 277–78; Mays 1994, 321; Goldingay 2006, 3:139).

The psalm opens with a general commitment: "I will sing of חסד and of משׁפט" (v. 1). The Hebrew word חסד, often translated as "kindness," "loyalty" or "steadfast love," is a word belonging to Israel's patronage system and to relationships of power. It normally reflects the voluntary action "of the more powerful partner for the benefit of the less powerful" (Houston 2006, 42). The word משׁפט (regularly "justice") is also part of the vocabulary of power, and its usage stretches well beyond judicial contexts. As Goldingay puts it, משׁפט and שׁפט "denote the exercise of authority or governance and the making of decisions for people" (2006, 3:752). Taken together, חסד and משׁפט are best understood as qualities of the divine majesty that ought to be mirrored by human rulers.

If v. 1 provides an introduction, the rest of the psalm works through both the moral qualities to which the king aspires, and his expectations of those who will serve him. Verse 2 is clearly focused on the king himself: he will attend to or study דרך תמים (v. 2a), and this "way of the blameless" seems to be a summary statement of the moral life, which is repeated again towards the end of the psalm (v. 6). In very similar language the king will walk with תם־לבב ("integrity of heart/mind," v. 2b), and Mays finds in תם/תמים the psalm's "organizing moral term" (Mays 1994, 321). The Hebrew of v. 3 is difficult, but it seems to follow much the same theme. The king will not put before his eyes a דבר־בליעל ("wicked/useless thing") and he hates עשׂה־סטים. סטים here is a *hapax legomenon*, which must mean either things or people that go astray (cf. שׂוט, "to fall away": LXX translates παραβάσεις, "transgressions"). So, among recent commentators Allen translates the phrase "devious actions," while Alter offers "committing transgressions" (Allen 1983, 1; Alter 2007, 351). Alternatively, Goldingay has "the actions of deviant people," arguing that "the m. noun would most likely refer to people," and that "most of vv. 4–8 refers to people" (Goldingay 2006, 3:138; cf. also NRSV).

Verse 4 might still be part of the king's aspirations for himself (which look rather like a kind of negative confession), but it is equally possible that it begins his statement of what he will and will not tolerate at his court. Again, the moral content is very general: "a perverse heart will turn away from me; I will not know evil." The לבב עקשׁ ("perverse heart") appears to be the opposite of the "blameless heart" of v. 2. Helen Kenik and Walter Brueggemann have argued that תמים and עקשׁ together form a "sapiential word pair," one which addresses "the contrast between those in the community who act for its well-being and those who act against it to the disruption of community" (Kenik 1976, 402; cf. Brueggemann 1977).

With v. 5 we finally reach a specific wrong action. The king will destroy "those who slander their neighbour in secret," which may go beyond mere court gossip into the realms of false witness (Anderson 1981, 702). Then we are back to attitudes again: the king will not tolerate the גבה־עינים ("haughty of eye") or the רחב לבב ("proud of heart"). Verses 6 and 7 contrast those the king will have at his side with those he will not, and again the emphasis is on honesty and integrity. He wants the "trustworthy" and those who follow him along the "way of the blameless." He rejects those who act deceitfully and tell lies. Throughout vv. 4–7 there is a remarkable stress on interior attitudes and dispositions: as Kraus puts it, "the way in which the ruler here functions as the judge of thoughts and inclinations is striking" (Kraus 1993, 279).

The final verse of Ps 101 (v. 8) makes two significant moves. First, it seems to return to the theme of justice with which the psalm began, as the king claims that each morning he will destroy all the wicked of the land, and cut off all evildoers from the city of the Lord. And, second, in doing this, the focus finally moves beyond the king's own household and into the wider public sphere.

It is clear from this brief summary that the psalm is deeply concerned with ethics. What more can we say about its explicit content? The first thing that strikes me is the generality of much of the moral language: the "way of the blameless," the "perverse heart" and so on. What comes across as important is the character of the whole person, and there are very few specific actions that are recommended or condemned. This makes for a striking contrast with some of the negative confessions we find elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. For example, Samuel asks, as he hands over Israel's leadership to Saul: "Whose ox have I taken? Or whose donkey have I taken? Or whom have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed? Or from whose hand have I taken a bribe to blind my eyes with it?" (1 Sam 12:3 NRSV). And although in some ways the context is

similar—the ethics of ruling—unlike Samuel, Ps 101 seems little concerned with social justice. Rather, issues of integrity and honesty are to the fore. The sins named are talking behind people's backs and deceit, and these sins are characteristic of the opposition the psalm draws between different moral attitudes or types of person who might be present in the court. The slanderer, deceiver and liar are not welcome, the trustworthy are.

So, Ps 101 emphasizes virtue and character, and especially the virtues of honesty and integrity. These are to characterize both the king and his court. What can be said about the basis of this ethic? What is it that forms character according to the psalm? Are any of Barton's three possibilities—obedience to the revealed will of God, natural law, or imitation of God—present in the background?

Some commentators see this psalm as primarily about the king's commitment to *torah*. For Konrad Schaefer, the psalm's opening statement makes it clear:

> God's loyalty (*hesed*) and justice (*mispat*) are the foundation and model of human virtue (v. 1a), and these standards of the Mosaic covenant are confided to the interested party. The "way" is the revelation of the law (v. 2a): it is "perfect"…because God designed it. (2001, 248–49)

Möller also understands it, at least in part, as "a reading of, or a reflection upon, the Torah, which after all contains an elucidation of the ethical standards of the covenant" (2007, 112). On these grounds we might well consider the basis of the psalm's ethic to be obedience to the divine will. However, it is not clear to me that this *torah* is so prominent. In the first place, Yhwh's חסד and מִשְׁפָּט are at least as likely to refer to the Davidic covenant as to the Mosaic one (Kraus 1993, 278; Anderson 1981, 701), which would move the king's response away from obedience to specific commands and towards a more general sense of loyalty and commitment. Goldingay points out that the only other pairing of חסד and מִשְׁפָּט in the Hebrew Bible (Hos 12:7 [EVV 6]) refers to human obligations rather than divine virtues (2006, 3:141), and we might read their appearance in Ps 101:1 as implying obligations in response to *torah*. But he also admits a degree of ambiguity as the psalm progresses, and the roles of God and king blur. It seems to me more likely that חסד and מִשְׁפָּט reflect divine attributes which are transferred to the king as Yhwh's representative.[3]

3. Goldingay might also have noted that חסד and מִשְׁפָּט do appear together as divine attributes (along with צדקה) in Jer 9:23 (EVV 24); cf. also Ps 89:15 (EVV 14); Hos 2:21 (EVV 20).

There is an interesting contrast to be drawn here with Ps 18, which offers in many respects the closest parallel to our psalm. While Ps 18 is for the most part taken up with a royal thanksgiving for the defeat of enemies, vv. 21–25 (EVV 20–24) form a kind of moral interlude, where the king justifies his success by reference to his virtue. This takes the form of a negative confession, in which the king claims that his success is due to his righteousness and the cleanness of his hands. He goes on:

> For I have kept the ways of the LORD,
> and have not wickedly departed from my God.
> For all his ordinances were before me,
> and his statutes I did not put away from me.
> I was blameless before him, and I kept myself from guilt. (Ps 18:21–23 NRSV)

The basic thrust matches Ps 101, with its emphasis on the good character of the king, but there is one very striking difference. In Ps 18 the king's virtue is directly connected to his obedience to משפטים and חקות. Such *explicit* legal responsibility seems wholly absent from Ps 101. It would therefore appear that beyond the possible evocation of a "covenantal atmosphere" in the psalm's opening verse, it is hard to detect any substantial appeal to "obedience to the revealed will of God." As James Mays puts it: "the psalm teaches that it is not enough for those who lead to live by the legalities and govern by codes. It is the character of the Governor and the character of those in his government that really determine what the effect of their governing is on the government" (Mays 1994, 232).

But, as we asked before, where does this character come from, and how is it formed? Kraus makes less of the connection with Ps 18 and more of that with Pss 15 and 24. These "liturgies of the gate" also contain a negative confession and a strong emphasis on internal attitudes. Certainly there is some commonality of language and theme. Kraus goes on to argue that the king is here understood as a "guardian of the Torah gate" and that his aim is to exclude sinners from the sphere of the sanctuary. Following Gunkel, he finds that the king here "sets up an 'ideal' of correct administration in the state sanctuary" (Kraus 1993, 279). This is possible, but I think it rather unlikely that the king in the psalm is regulating access to the temple itself. Rather, he is setting up his court on analogy with the sanctuary. And indeed, it seems to me worth developing Gordon Wenham's proposal that the real basis of ethics in this psalm is the king's imitation of God (Wenham 2005, 192–93; cf. Möller 2007, 112–13). The praise of divine חסד and משפט in the first verse sets the tone, and begins an alignment between royal and divine

roles that carries on as the psalm progresses. The psalm's emphasis on the "way of the blameless" is reminiscent of Barton's discussion of "the path, leading to the place where it will converge with the highway of God" (2003, 53), or Christopher Wright's emphasis on "walking in the way of the Lord" (2004, 39–40).

The Hebrew root תמם, with its implication of integrity or blamelessness, is certainly prominent in our short psalm (vv. 2, 6). While words based on תמם more often apply to humans than to God (and most often to sacrificial animals!), nevertheless integrity or blamelessness is also a divine characteristic. For example, Deut 32 praises God using a number of terms also reflected in our psalm, and prominent among these is תמים:

> The Rock, his work is perfect (תמים), and all his ways are just (משׁפט). A faithful God, without deceit, just (צדיק) and upright (ישׁר) is he. (Deut 32:4 NRSV)

And Ps 18 makes a yet more explicit alignment between the perfection of God and that of the king. In 18:26 (EVV 25) the psalmist connects divine and human integrity: עם־חסיד תתחסד עם־גבר תמים תתמם ("to the loyal you are loyal, to the blameless man you are blameless"). In v. 30 (EVV 31) he emphasizes the blameless way of God: האל תמים דרכו ("God, his way is perfect/blameless"). Finally that "way" is now transferred to the king: האל המאזרני חיל ויתן תמים דרכי ("God, who girds me with strength and made my way perfect/blameless," 18:33 [EVV 32]). It seems likely that a similar alignment between God and king is taking place in our psalm. Kraus himself argues that the king of Ps 101 "transcends human possibilities and capabilities" (1993, 279). He represents God's system of justice. Like God he watches over the faithful in the land, and like God he intervenes in the morning to execute judgment.[4]

Wenham also emphasizes the king's identification with God "by promoting the righteous and demoting the wicked"; he goes on to claim that "this identification with the divine standpoint extends to everyone who prays the psalms" (2005, 193). However, in this move towards the contemporary reader I think he misses something of the moral complexity of the psalm. If its basis of ethics is some sort of imitation of God, God is not just described in order to be imitated *directly*. The presence of intermediaries is fundamental. The king is himself a moral exemplar, who models the divine virtues to his courtiers, and they in turn reflect the

4. In a slightly different vein, John Kselman (1985) has argued that vv. 6–7 should not be read as the words of the king, but as a divine oracle. His suggestion has not been widely accepted, but its plausibility does provide further evidence of how easy the psalm makes it to elide God and the king.

royal reflection of the divine character. The close alignment of king and God makes for a clearly hierarchical moral order, where virtue passes from God to king to courtier, and perhaps by extension to the land and city more widely.

This recognition leads us towards the final area I set up for examination: that of the social values that the psalm encodes. What can we say here? To begin with the obvious, the explicit setting of the psalm is the royal household. At face value it appears to represent the ideals of Judah's elite. And the moral horizons of the psalm do not extend far beyond the royal court. The king is addressing those closest to him, presumably his relatives, other members of the governing class, and his retainers. The virtues of honesty and trustworthiness which the psalm elaborates are crucial to the smooth functioning of the royal bureaucracy. By contrast with many of the royal psalms the virtues are rather less martial. Here the king seems to be modelling what is required of his class of administrators. Helen Kenik (1976) has described the close parallel between this psalm and the book of Proverbs, especially Prov 1–9. She notes a number of passages which share the psalm's concern for honesty and integrity, and especially the language of pride, arrogance, and perverted speech. She comments (1976, 400): "The most serious threat to the establishment of a peaceful kingdom is disharmony among men created by devious members who act and speak in ways that disrupt the total well-being." The parallel with Ps 101 is clear. Kenik's assumption here is that the book is largely the product of scribal circles around the royal court. If Proverbs does reflect the ethic of the court, both the ruling class and its scribal retainers, so too must Ps 101.[5]

It is also noteworthy that other classes of person are more or less absent from the psalm. Unusually for a biblical text so concerned with ethics, the poor are nowhere to be seen. Walter Houston (2006) does manage to find a clear commitment to social justice in the psalm, which parallels that found in Ps 72. He emphasizes the presence of מִשְׁפָּט in v. 1 and argues that the רִשְׁעֵי־אָרֶץ of v. 8 should be understood as the "unjust." Thus he concludes: "The King's action against oppression is presented as a reason for his continuance in office" (Houston 2006, 150). I think that this is to push the evidence further than it can go, since it is likely that both מִשְׁפָּט and רָשָׁע in this psalm have a rather broader sense than

5. The social location of Proverbs has been a matter of some debate since Kenik published her article. Recent defenders of Proverbs' elite status include Fox (1996), Pleins (2001), and Houston (2006). Dell (2007) finds the book, and especially its sentence literature, too diverse to fit only one of the court or folk origins that have been proposed, but certainly leaves room for an elite contribution.

Houston allows. Especially given the "wisdom" tone of the psalm, and its emphasis on wrong attitudes and dispositions, then both the רשעי־ארץ and the פעלי־עון of v. 8 are those who exemplify such wrong attitudes. Oppression of the poor may certainly be part of their wrongdoing, but it is hardly the whole story. Thus we must conclude that social justice is a rather minor theme in the psalm, if it is present at all. The psalm's real emphasis is on the royal character: it is this which guarantees the king's rule more than his action in judgment, and it is this which is described entirely without reference to the problems of poverty or oppression.

Within the hierarchical world of the psalm the king presents himself as the ideal retainer of Yahweh, and in doing this he becomes a model of servanthood for his own retainers. The king stands at the symbolic centre of the psalm, between the divine and human realms. I suggested earlier that the model reflects onwards: God is model for the king, who is model for the courtiers, who are models for the ordinary Israelite. But it is also possible that the aim of the psalm is to construct a barrier between the royal court and the outside world. Those who serve the king are defined as moral, as blameless. Those outside the sphere of the king's house are immoral, wicked. Certainly v. 8, which is the only point at which the psalm looks beyond the royal court, populates the outside world exclusively with the wicked and evildoers. Furthermore, looked at with a deconstructive eye, there appears to be a logical contradiction in the king spending his mornings destroying all the evildoers in the land. Yes, he is executing justice, but if there are fresh evildoers every morning, it does not say much for the moral life of the land as a whole.

Despite the apparent ordered calm of the social hierarchy in the psalm, then, there are some deep currents of anxiety under the surface. If I try to dig behind the rhetoric of the psalm, I am struck by its sheer repetitiveness, which cuts two ways. On the one hand, the repeated assertions of the king's blamelessness and refusal to deal with evildoers strengthen the reader's confidence in his virtue and that of his court. On the other hand, perhaps he protests too much. The very listing of so many forms of deceit and wickedness has a rather relentless quality to it. The king wishes to surround himself with integrity, but the psalm is overflowing with its opposite, and this makes one wonder if the king has a hard time finding the right quality of retainer!

Stuart Lasine (2001) has addressed a number of paradoxes in the Bible's portrayal of kingship. I cannot now engage with the full complexity of his presentation, but I should like to pick up one or two things which are relevant to the moral world of our psalm, and especially to the

"who?" of the royal court. For Lasine, one of the fundamental paradoxes of kingship is that the king is both *always* alone and *never* alone. The king may be a uniquely powerful individual, but he can only exercise that power through other people, and in the first instance through those closest to him—the members of his court. And this is unquestionably a source of anxiety: "the very fact of the leader's being surrounded by servants suggests that he could become totally dominated, even as he is lauded for being totally dominant" (Lasine 2001, 3). The king's servants are both the source of his power and the most potent threat. That is one reason why a psalm like this is so necessary for the proper functioning of Judah's kingship: it is a way of teaching and encouraging loyalty to the sovereign. And its concentration on speech and on trustworthiness is very much part of this, not least because a successful king must be a successful information manager. He must know everything that is going on in his court, in his kingdom, in the world. Only then can he be secure in his kingship. Lasine quotes the memoirs of Louis XIV:

> [The function of kings] consists in keeping an eye on the whole earth, of constantly learning the news of all the provinces and the nations, the secrets of all the courts…of being informed of an infinite number of things that we are presumed to ignore, of seeing around us what is hidden with the greatest of care, of discovering the most remote ideas and the most hidden interests of our courtiers. (Lasine 2001, 9)

And here it is intriguing that the intimate knowledge of his courtiers stands in parallel to his knowledge of the wider world. But that should not surprise us, since it is through these courtiers that the wider world is refracted to the king. Psalm 101 makes no explicit claim for the king's universal knowledge, but I think it does imply a relationship between the world of the court and the outside world in the same way as Louis' memoir. On the external front, it is implicit in the rhetoric of v. 8 that the king knows where to find the wicked and the evildoer in the city and the land, and on the internal front, I have already noted his quasi-divine access to the internal attitudes and dispositions of his courtiers. The psalm emphasizes three things that are all crucial for the king's control of information: honesty, reliability, and transparency. The first two are obvious in the psalm. The third, transparency, I see in v. 3, and the phrase מלושני בסתר רעהו. This is normally translated "one who slanders his neighbour in secret," and most commentators emphasize slander as the significant fault. But I wonder if, from the king's perspective, it is actually the *secrecy* of his courtier's act which is the real problem.

Concluding Remarks

How might we summarize the moral world of Ps 101? It is a world in which character matters and the cardinal virtues are honesty and integrity. The driving force behind its ethic seems less one of obedience to commandment than the imitation of God. At the same time, it is a hierarchical world at whose centre stands the king, both as a reflection of the divine perfection and an exemplar for those around him. It sets up a code of conduct for the king's courtiers which will ensure that they serve his interests and not their own, but as it does this it also reveals some of the monarch's paradoxical dependence on others and his need to be an effective manager of information. It reflects the relatively enclosed social network of king and court, and looks beyond it to a threatening external world.

My aim in this essay has been to describe the moral world of Ps 101 rather than to appropriate it as an ethical resource for contemporary readers or worshippers, but one comment or caveat is in order here. I think Wenham and Möller are very probably right in their emphasis on the self-involving power of the text. As Möller puts it, "in singing or praying this psalm, we, its modern readers, are committing ourselves to the behaviour the ancient psalmist thought appropriate for a king" (2007, 135–36). Contemporary readers may well be inspired by the standards of integrity and honesty the psalm articulates. But this tendency to democratize is in danger of overlooking the royal context, and with it the hierarchical worldview and anxiety about outsiders that the psalm also expresses. Sometimes to explore the "what," "why" and "who" of the ethics of a biblical text may also be to distance it from contemporary concerns, to evoke the "strange land" of which Cyril Rodd writes (2001).

Psalm 101 has a rather narrower moral scope than most of the royal psalms. Its focus on court and household could be contrasted with other emphases on military virtue (Pss 18, 20, 144) or social justice (Ps 72) Nevertheless, it holds a place in that rich complex of discourse and ceremonial that served to establish the power and legitimacy of the Davidic house. It encourages loyalty by presenting the king as a mirror of divine perfection and a model to his subjects. Yet it would be a mistake to read the power of this symbolism as mere propaganda, just as it would be a mistake to take it at face value. Houston has effectively shown how the king's commitment to social justice in Ps 72 might become a standard by which royal injustice could be judged (Houston 1999, 2006). The logic of Ps 101 allows a similar potential critique: if the king fails to maintain his integrity (or indeed his place within the

divinely ordained hierarchy) his capacity to rule is undermined. Indeed, the psalm would make a highly suitable epigram to those narratives in Samuel which trace both Saul's and David's moral failures in household and court.

Psalm 101 is a rather brief poem. It lacks the dramatic sweep of the historical books, the programmatic thrust of Deut 17, and even the range and breadth of Ps 72. Despite this, it offers a vision of the role and responsibility of the Davidic monarch in which "ethical and unethical" questions are central. To explore its moral world not only underlines the importance of character and integrity within the royal ideology, but also uncovers some of the anxieties and moral contradictions that are part and parcel of royal rule. If Ps 101 is only a snapshot, it is a revealing one, and one which makes a distinctive contribution to the Hebrew Bible's complex and contested ethics of kingship.

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The Ethics of Warfare and the Holy War Tradition in the Book of Judges

Janet Tollington

Since von Rad's seminal work on Holy War (von Rad 1958) there has been a tendency to view the deliverer stories in the book of Judges as examples of this tradition. This is not surprising since the text makes frequent reference to the idea that "The Lord raised up a deliverer for Israel…who went to war…and the Lord gave his enemies into his hand…so Israel subdued X…and the land had rest for forty years" (Judg 3:9–11 *et al.*). However scholars have not always acknowledged that von Rad derived his thesis, in part, from a study of the book of Judges, alongside Joshua, with the outcome that some discussions of this topic fall foul to the snare of circularity. Von Rad's argument was presented in the context of ancient Israel being understood as a sociological institution that he identified as a cultic amphictyony, and on the basis of certain regular features: the participants being summoned by trumpet blast, certain taboos being observed, sacrifice being offered, the use of formulaic language, and YHWH's active involvement by spreading panic among the enemy and bringing about the victory. Even a casual reading of the text of Judges reveals that von Rad's pattern for a Holy War cannot actually be found in any of the deliverer stories, since it is rare to find more than one or two of his required elements coinciding in the presentation of each incident. Later work by R. Smend (1970), F. Stolz (1972) and G. H. Jones (1975, 1989) has recognized this lack of correlation and suggested that von Rad's theory belongs within Deuteronomic theology, which has then been erroneously understood as revealing a legitimate model for the conduct of Israel's ancient wars. Consequently, it is now more frequent to refer to the Holy War tradition in Judges solely in relation to the schematic presentation of the deliverer stories expressed in the framework, which in turn is attributed to the Deuteronomic school. The wars themselves are then described as YHWH Wars.

In such readings of the book of Judges YHWH is perceived as a warrior God, an image drawn from texts such as Exod 15:3, where YHWH is

described as “a man of war” (מלחמה); or Deut 9:3, where the picture is of YHWH as “a devouring fire,” subduing and destroying Israel’s enemies; or 1 Sam 17:45, where it is stated that YHWH is the “Lord of Hosts, the God of the armies of (מערכות) Israel.” Hence YHWH is seen as the initiator of war, the advocate of it, the chief protagonist, the one who determines warfare as the method of dealing with Israel’s enemies in order to bring about *shalom*. The theological problem of reconciling this image of God with that of a God who is “merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love” (Exod 34:6 *et al.*) is normally answered with reference to the polytheistic setting of these ancient stories. It is no problem, it is claimed, for YHWH to act with violence against Israel’s enemies in a polytheistic age as this demonstrates the supremacy of Israel’s God over the gods of the nations; it demonstrates YHWH’s covenant commitment towards the chosen people. It is not clear to me, though, that such inconsistency in divine character can be easily reconciled, when it is considered from an ethical dimension.

Susan Niditch (1993, 134–49) and M. C. Lind (1980) have explored the issues relating to this idea of YHWH as Warrior God and as the absolute victor. They argue that this demonstrates no actual need for Israel’s army to participate in the messiness of war, since YHWH uses cosmic weapons to overcome the enemy in miraculous ways. The Israelites can remain passive (e.g. Exod 14:13–14; 1 Kgs 17; 2 Chr 20) and, so to speak, do not have blood on their hands. But does this absolve them from a share in moral responsibility for the consequences of the war? It certainly emphasizes the moral responsibility of YHWH; and the whole concept of YHWH as Warrior God also raises questions about war itself. Is war a divinely approved method of establishing justice, of settling territorial claims, of resolving power struggles? Is war divinely instigated and part of the overarching order between the nations? Is war an inescapable fact of life and therefore understood as inevitable within Hebrew Bible traditions? This view, proposed by T. R. Hobbs (1989, 17), is one I wish to challenge on the basis of a close reading of the text of Judges.

In other examples of wars in the biblical texts, ones in which Israel’s armies participate in the violence and mayhem, the conduct of the war is frequently considered in the light of the rules given in Deut 20. These rules relate to wars which fall into four categories depending on the nature of the threat or enemy, and include the theology of the “ban” (חרם, Lev 27:28–29). They authorize genocide as a realistic response to the problems of idolatry. It is clear that the ethical conduct of war is acknowledged as a real issue in the Deuteronomy text; that distinctions between religious and secular legitimation for war are discerned; that

gratuitous violence, ecological devastation ("you must not destroy its trees," 20:19) and motives of personal gain are decried. However a significant occurrence of warfare, that of civil war between two groups of Israelites, neither of whom are being accused of apostasy, is not addressed. This is a situation which arises twice in Judges, between Jephthah and the tribe of Ephraim in 12:1–6, and between all Israel and the tribe of Benjamin in 20:14–48. The occurrence of diverse types of war in the book of Judges makes it an ideal text for study in relation to all aspects of the ethics of warfare.

My argument is based on the final form of the text, for that is what biblical authors, compilers, editors and redactors have handed down to us. I subscribe to the view that Judges has undergone a long and complex process of transmission; and am persuaded by aspects of recent scholarship (e.g. Guillaume 2004) suggesting that questions about the origins of the book of Judges and the whole theory of a Deuteronomistic History need reconsideration. This has direct bearing on anything that can be said about the theological presentation of the framework to the deliverer stories and on the perceived context out of which the texts have arisen. Nonetheless, it remains true that the text has gone through a final stage of editing, which *de facto* can be attributed to an individual, or group, for whom theological issues were of at least some interest, since these texts have been preserved within the scriptures of a faith community. I intend to adopt a theological close reading of the text and will argue that a consideration of the ethics of warfare is at least an element of the editorial purposes inherent to the final shaping of the text. In this regard I agree with B. Webb that any "identifiable point of view…on any…moral issue…emerges through the internal dynamics of the story and is not stated directly" (Webb 1987, 36). However, I will argue that in Judges there is a careful presentation of all issues relating to war, of the parties involved and of the outcome in each instance, of YHWH's role in the whole process, and in the use of language. It may be true that "biblical narrators often hide their own ethical opinions and expect readers to draw their own conclusions" (Jenson 2002, 10; cf. Bar-Efrat 1989), but I suggest that this may not be the case in the book of Judges.

The presentation of the narrative within the book unfolds before the reader the idea of the degeneration of society, the moral decline of individuals as well as groups, and increasing loss of life as a consequence of war. The epilogue contains a duplicate telling of the same events of war between Benjamin and the other eleven tribes in which the number of dead varies between 25,100 (Judg 20:35) and 25,000 with just 600 fugitives surviving the otherwise total annihilation of Benjamin (20:46–48).

These large numbers reflect a reality that negative and far-reaching consequences escalate when war is conducted. However, R. Boling's suggestion that the word אלפים ("thousands") may mean "contingents," each consisting of about a dozen men (Boling 1975, 17), raises the possibility that the large numbers of casualties implied throughout the book of Judges should be interpreted on a much smaller scale. We may not be dealing with a tendency to exaggerate by biblical writers, but with our own presumptions as readers and translators that ancient wars were always bloody massacres.

As a final introductory note I question any suggestion that the biblical texts absolve women from active participation in war. Deborah (Judg 4:9, 14), Jael (Judg 4:17–22; 5:26–27), Sisera's mother (Judg 5:28–30), and the women of both Jabesh-Gilead (Judg 21:1–15) and Shiloh (Judg 21:16–24) cannot be described as non-participants, even if one wants to attempt an argument that they are non-combatants; an argument hardly applicable to Jael! However, gender issues are not of particular concern in this study.

The prologue introduces the concept of war at the very beginning. In Judg 1:1 Israel asks of YHWH, "Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites, to fight (להלחם) against them?" It is a human decision to pursue this course of action; the issue set before YHWH is that of the priority among the tribes, not whether or not warfare is the appropriate course of action in the specific circumstances. Therefore, the answer given is Judah, since the whole tone of the book reflects Judaean supremacy as being divinely decreed. In 1:4 YHWH gives the Canaanites and the Perizzites into Judah's hand without any mention of fighting, bloodshed or death; and the text states that they "defeated" (נכה) 10,000 of them at Bezek. The implication seems to be that a small number of God's chosen people doing YHWH's will can overwhelm a large number of opponents. Belief in divine might and a show of power, not specifically weaponry, is sufficient. The text continues by relating the amputation of Adonibezek's toes and thumbs to incapacitate him. This may seem a barbaric response by a victor, but it is an effective way of preventing a resurgent attack without any loss of human life. This action is presented in the text as justified and in accord with divine law—an eye for an eye—and is thus moral behaviour. In 1:8–15 the capture of various cities by Judah is recorded, again with no mention of any killing. Likewise in 1:17–21 the destruction of property is related, but not any loss of life. Thus in this narrative war is presented as being conducted in accordance with ethical principles; the issue remains as to whether it was ethical to engage in warfare at all.

The remainder of the prologue, 1:22–36, describes the limited success of the Northern tribes in gaining possession of their territories. It includes no direct mention of any fighting between them and the inhabitants of the land. This is followed by a short section, 2:1–6, outlining the problem of idolatry, and another brief section, 2:7–10, that links back to the end of the book of Joshua. This is generally regarded as a second introduction. The following passage, 2:11–23, develops a theme that will occupy much of the central chapters of the book. There is a pattern: Israel falls into idolatry and under the power of foreign nations, YHWH raises up judges who save them but without bringing about their transformation, or their adherence to the covenant, and so the benefit is short lived, and the sorry cycle repeats itself. In consequence, YHWH loses patience and Israel lives in the land among peoples and nations who are a constant threat—to their security, their moral character, and their faith.

Judges 3:2 presents the concept of war (מלחמה) as a means of teaching Israel, in the context of Israel among the nations. War is used by YHWH in order to test Israel, as to whether or not they would obey the commandments, and not for any other purpose. I suggest that it is significant that the root verb underlying the noun מלחמה, "to fight," is used virtually always in the Niphal, a conjugation that primarily conveys reflexive or reciprocal connotations. This verb expresses a truth that fighting is never something that is simply done to another; it is different from an assault or an attack, for which different vocabulary exists. A fight always involves the aggressor and frequently results in both parties suffering similar consequences in terms of wounds or mortalities. With this understanding of מלחמה in mind, Judg 3:2 does not advocate that successive generations need to learn how to wage war; rather, it suggests the opposite—that they need to learn the futility of war as a means of resolving conflict. The ethical issue is whether Israel will follow the ways of God or act in contrary ways and pursue war. Sadly, the passage seems to imply that humanity rarely learns from the mistakes of the past and that each generation has to confront this ethical issue for itself.

Following this section, the paradigm deliverer story is presented in 3:7–11. Israel sins through idolatry; YHWH sells the people into the oppressor's hand, which implies a transfer of power and ownership and that God's people must suffer the natural consequences of their sins; Israel cries out to YHWH, who raises up a deliverer who delivers them. The deliverer acts as judge, goes out to war (מלחמה), and YHWH immediately gives Israel back to Othniel, the deliverer. There is no description of any conflict taking place, of any fighting, of any bloodshed, or any loss of life; divine will and power affect the whole event. The implication is

that when Israel responds correctly towards YHWH, right relationships are restored. Then the land, not specifically the people, has "rest" (שׁקט) for forty years. It is interesting to note the verb used here for "rest" signifies that the land was undisturbed, or quiet; the verb does not indicate the existence of *shalom* or the sign of God's blessing.

In Judg 3:12–30 Ammon and Amalek, as allies of Moab, invade and seize Jericho (v. 13) without causing any loss of life, according to the text; and oppression begins again. The deliverer in this story, Ehud, makes a sword "for himself," with no suggestion that this was at divine command, and pursues a course of action, graphically described, by which he kills Eglon, Moab's king, with the sword. After this crucial action, and after his escape to safety in 3:27, Ehud sounds the trumpet, apparently as a summons to battle, and Ephraim, the lead Northern tribe, becomes involved. In 3:28 Ehud says that YHWH "has given" Moab "into your hand," implying that the decisive act had already taken place; but after this Israel, under Ephraim's leadership, "killed" (נכה) about 10,000 Moabites without stated justification, or any loss to themselves. The text makes no mention of YHWH's involvement in this, nor of anyone seeking divine guidance before embarking on this massacre. The implication of the NRSV text, and most English versions, appears to be that once freed by YHWH from servitude to an oppressor, Israel inflicted murderous revenge on those who had oppressed them. However, I question the NRSV translator's choice of the English verb "kill" for the Hebrew נכה, which is more frequently understood as "strike" or "defeat." Could it be that the Hebrew expresses Israel's power being demonstrated to subdue a large number of Moabites and that it is translators who have interpreted this in the language of killing, in accordance with their own worldview? Unusually, this narrative leads to eighty years of rest for the land but the significance of this extended period is not explained.

The brief account of Shamgar that follows in Judg 3:31 has no context, though we read that he "killed" (נכה again) 600 Philistines with an oxgoad. The story bears similarities to the Samson narratives in Judg 14–16.

In Judg 4:1–3 Israel is sold to Jabin, the king of Canaan; there is oppression, but no fighting. Deborah the prophet is introduced and in v. 7 her prophetic word declares that YHWH will give the Canaanites into Barak's hand if he obeys the divine will. He starts bargaining—with Deborah, or with YHWH?—which leads to a declaration that the enemy forces will be sold into a woman's hand instead. The story continues by relating the show of force by both sides' troops, and in 4:14 Deborah cries "Up! For this is the day on which the LORD has given Sisera into your hand. The LORD is indeed going out before you." YHWH causes

panic among the enemy and the sword is wielded; but the text does not make clear whether this is by Sisera's own forces or Barak's, and no bloodshed is mentioned. The verb המם ("confuse") is used, not a destructive, life ending, concept. A show of power has been sufficient to defeat the מחנה, a word regularly translated as "army," though perhaps "encampment" conveys more accurately a body of troops gathered together but not arrayed and ready for a fight. Sisera, the Canaanite commander, then flees on foot and Barak pursues the fleeing troops as they head homewards. Mass slaughter ensues, in 4:16, as Canaanites fall by the sword, although again the text does not make clear whose swords inflict the fatal blows. Jael kills Sisera by hammering a tent peg into his skull, in 4:21, as he hides from those he presumes are in pursuit of him (v. 20), perhaps an act of self-preservation by her in the context of the story, but one that severs relationships between Canaanites and Kenites as a consequence. When Barak reaches the tent he finds that the job of vanquishing the leader of the enemy army has been completed by a woman. It is interesting to note that God, not YHWH, is attested in 4:23 as the one who subdued Canaan. Is the narrator asking us to reflect whether such behaviour can ever be considered justifiable among people who claim to be YHWH's chosen? The outcome of the whole saga is that the people of Israel become the oppressors.

In the poetic version of the same story in Judg 5 the battle is described in vv. 19–21 as between the Canaanite kings and cosmic forces under the control of YHWH. Various tribes of Israel have been presented as going down after YHWH to the place of encounter, but no participation by them, or any fighting, is described in the text. The enemy are swept away by torrents of water, but it does not say that any were killed. The only killing recorded is that of Sisera by Jael, which is then followed by a description of human barbarism that is expected following a victory in war—the rape of the local women by the victorious troops (5:30, lit. "a womb or two for every man"). This is put in the mouth of a Canaanite—Sisera's mother. This serves to make the story more horrific to a reader because, unbeknown to Sisera's mother, it is her own people that has been defeated and therefore, if human rules apply, she can expect this treatment for herself. The implication of 5:31 is that such behaviour reflects base human instincts, but this does not indicate that it accords with YHWH's ways. This outcome is not recorded in either version of the story, though. The reference to the land having rest for forty years comes at this point in the text, not at the end of the prose version, and it serves to tie the two accounts together. Might this be an ironic statement by the narrator? There is no mention of YHWH at this point.

Judges 6 relates how YHWH gives Israel into Midian's hand and this enemy keeps making incursions into Israel's territory. A prophetic insertion to the story shows that Israel deserves this situation because of idolatry. Gideon is identified as YHWH's agent and he is described, somewhat ironically as the rest of the story will show, as a mighty man (גבר) of valour, whose first action is to destroy the altar to Baal. After another incursion by the enemy, in 6:34, the spirit of YHWH possesses Gideon, who sounds a trumpet call to summon the Abiezrites to follow him; others also respond. The huge numbers of these followers are reduced by YHWH so that any subsequent success cannot be attributed by Gideon and his men to their own power, but rather emphasizes their total dependence upon YHWH. In Judg 7:7, the text states that YHWH will deliver Israel with just 300 men and give Midian into Gideon's hand. The story continues by relating a dream of the enemy foretelling their defeat by God, and the discovery of this encourages Gideon to engage with them. The text actually speaks of Gideon and his men armed with torches and trumpets, but not swords; and they are instructed to shout "For the LORD and for Gideon" (7:18) as they advance. However, in 7:20 the men claim also to have swords according to their amplified shout, or battle cry, which causes the Midianites to cry out and flee. I believe that 7:22 suggests that in confusion the enemy army (מחנה) wound or kill each other, rather than this being the action of Gideon and his men. The scenario is similar to the events described in 4:15, which I interpreted in a like manner. I acknowledge that in this narrative, the outcome whereby some of the enemy may have been killed by their own side is attributed to the will of YHWH, though it is not depicted as YHWH's plan. Moreover, despite this victory, Israel, having summoned reinforcements, pursues the fleeing Midianites—aggression which was solely a human decision. The men of Ephraim then kill (הרג) Oreb and Zeeb, who are described as princes of Midian. This leads in ch. 8 to conflict between Ephraim and Gideon over the issue of supremacy, in which Gideon submits, because it was to Ephraim that God had given the leaders of the enemy. This is all presented from a human perspective, relating to what equates to success and power. Gideon and his troops pursue two men described as kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, who are of higher status than the princes, and capture them. This success accords Gideon supremacy over Ephraim and he tries to avoid having blood on his hands by getting someone else to kill (הרג) the kings. However, in the end he is taunted by the kings into doing it himself in order to show his manhood (8:21). I note the claim of Niditch (2008, 105) that this passage reflects bardic traditions in which enemies respect one another and negotiate a

heroic death for themselves. If this is correct, it reflects human ideas about status and honour, and there is no sense of a specifically religious ethic being adopted here. The consequence of Gideon's victory is that he is offered dynastic kingship, which he apparently declines, although the name given to his son, Abimelech (meaning "my father is king"), may suggest otherwise. All of this leads only to apostasy; but the land does again have rest for forty years.

In ch. 9 Abimelech slaughters (הרג) his own kin in order to gain personal power. A rival claim to power arises and ambushes take place, and many are wounded (נכה) and killed (הרג). In 9:45 Abimelech destroys a city in ways that affect both immediate and future habitation of the place. Then he moves on to Thebez, in aggressive mood again, where a woman with a millstone brings him to a sudden halt by crushing his skull. The text states that he gets a young armour-bearer to end his life (9:54) in order to save his "honour" from being killed by a woman. God is mentioned as repaying Abimelech for his earlier crimes and as invoking retribution on his opponents for their wickedness; but the narrator makes it clear that no-one is acting in accord with a knowledge of YHWH in this story.

The passages relating the stories of the so-called minor judges contain no reference to war or oppression, or to YHWH, neither in 10:1–5 nor in 12:8–15.

Judges 10:6–9 is an introduction relating the selling of Israel into the hand of the Philistines, which anticipates the stories of Samson in Judg 13–16, and into the hand of the Ammonites, who are the foe depicted in 10:17–11:33. Judges 10:10–16 represent a dialogue between Israel and YHWH about which god was being served that concludes with Israel returning to YHWH; but in 10:18 Gilead takes the initiative without recourse to God, seeking a man to fight (להלחם) against Ammon and offering him headship over the community.

Jephthah is the man identified as suitable and, like Gideon, he is described as a mighty warrior (גבר), although in this case he is presented as an outcast and a marauder who raided his own people (11:1). Despite having previously rejected him, the elders of Gilead invite Jephthah to lead them in the fight against the Ammonites and make the offer of headship. Jephthah agrees to return to fight (להלחם), but declares that he will only be their head if YHWH gives him the victory. The men of Gilead swear an oath in the name of YHWH to confirm this agreement, although no-one has sought God's will in this matter. This is akin to taking YHWH's name in vain, a clear breach of one of the commandments. However, Gilead immediately acts counter to the agreement and pre-empts the

outcome of the conflict by making Jephthah their head at once. Jephthah, contrary to expectations, attempts to negotiate a peaceful resolution of the territorial dispute between Israel and Ammon by reference to their respective land having been divinely bestowed on each people. He calls on YHWH to act as judge in the dispute; but this effort does not achieve its aim and the Ammonites reject his diplomacy. At this point, 11:29, Jephthah is endowed with the spirit of YHWH. Is this as a result of his behaviour thus far, which has been an attempt to act in accord with the will of YHWH and bring reconciliation? Or is it a sign of divine equipping for whatever lies ahead? The text indicates that he then makes a one-sided bargain with God to offer up a sacrifice if YHWH gives him victory, a vow that reiterates the original response he had given to the elders of Gilead.

There is no mention of Jephthah gathering any troops around him, nor of him calling Gilead to battle. The text simply states that he crossed over towards the Ammonites to fight (להלחם), which can be construed as an act of aggression. However, this is followed by the statement that YHWH gives them into Jephthah's hand without any military engagement being necessary—resolution achieved! It is after this that Jephthah is depicted using his power to defeat (נכה) twenty towns of Ammon and to subdue the region; but no loss of life is recorded. The language used implies that Ammon is humbled (כנע) by YHWH through the divine power that is displayed in the person of Jephthah, by his presence in their midst. In this whole narrative the only death referred to is that of Jephthah's daughter, whom he is eventually obliged to sacrifice, by her own volition (11:39), in fulfilment of his ill-considered and unnecessary vow. So, the story ends with Jephthah bringing himself to a position whereby he has no descendants, a situation that is even more stark than the denial of any inheritance imposed on him by Gilead at the beginning.

It is questionable as to whether the language of war is appropriate to describe the events in this narrative since neither side actually musters an army. There is dispute between neighbouring peoples, confrontation, threat and moves indicative of individuals vying for power, but the outcome emphasizes the supremacy of YHWH's power and the humbling of humanity. The implication of this story seems to be that anyone who embarks on war needlessly may discover that the personal and lasting costs of so doing outweigh any perceived gain. Peaceful efforts towards reconciliation seem to be encouraged; but when they fail the narrator suggests that YHWH might intervene in human affairs before any bloodshed is inflicted.

That is still not the end of the story, however, for Judg 12:1–6 describes how Ephraim reacts to Jephthah's victory over Ammon by calling up an army against him. The issue is once again one of supremacy, and Ephraim accuses Jephthah of failing to enlist their help in this matter—although why he should have done is not made clear in the narrative. In response, he makes a counter-accusation and suggests that he did call on them but they refused to help, and so he had to act alone. He emphasizes his own valour and that his initiative was confirmed through YHWH giving him victory. The armed aggression displayed by Ephraim prompts Jephthah to gather the men of Gilead, and civil conflict with Ephraim erupts. Here the language of fighting (לחם) and defeat (נכה) is used and the skirmishes lead to 42,000 deaths among Ephraim, although not in the heat of battle. The text states that Gilead slaughters (שׁחט, a verb generally used in the context of ritual sacrifice) each individual fugitive attempting to cross the Jordan, once their tribal identity has been established by a pronunciation test. There are some difficulties in discerning the precise meaning of details in this text, but one thing is very evident: YHWH is not involved in this butchery at all. No rest for anyone ensues, let alone the land!

In Judg 13–16 the Philistines have dominance over Israel, and Samson is destined to begin to deliver Israel. Most of the narratives, however, focus primarily on Samson and his desires in relation to women, desires which bring him into conflict with Philistines, rather than on any national or political interests. His first aggressive act is against the men of Ashkelon who have solved his riddle. The text indicates that Samson is empowered by the spirit of YHWH, but also that it is in anger that he defeats (נכה is the verb used here so "kill" as in NRSV is perhaps not justified) thirty men of the town. The events involving foxes, torches and the burning of the Philistines' crops in 15:1–8 are all described in terms of this being a personal vendetta by Samson against them. When this prompts the burning of a woman and her Timnite father by the Philistines, who perceive them as the cause of Samson's anger and thus of their problems, Samson uses physical violence and inflicts a heavy defeat on them. Again, it should be noted that the verb נכה is used, not the emotive words "kill" or "slaughter" found in many translations. Here again, as in the discussion of Judg 3, I question whether this verb really expresses the taking of human life. Is there is a tendency for translators to use such language because violence and death are so frequently the consequences of human conflict? Should we note more carefully the vocabulary chosen by the narrator, rather than inferring deaths which are not explicit in the text?

Samson's actions cause the Philistines to attack Judah and we see the escalation of conflict; violence begets violence and draws others into its destructive web. In response Judah turns against Samson because they believe that he is the one causing chaos for them, and they bind him to hand him over to the Philistines, explicitly promising not to kill him. Thus far no one has sought the will of YHWH and no divine involvement in events has been indicated. In 15:14, however, YHWH's spirit again bestows physical power on Samson and he strikes or defeats (נכה again) 1000 men in what appears to be a violent frenzy using a jawbone as a weapon. At this point, for the first time in the narrative, Samson calls on YHWH and demands a drink to quench his thirst. He behaves as though God is there to serve him, while claiming that his victory has been achieved through his being a servant of YHWH. The irony in this section of text is obvious and perhaps it is emphasized by the narrator indicating that God, rather than the deity YHWH as known to faithful members of Israel's covenant, provides the water for Samson to drink. The chapter ends by declaring that he judged Israel for twenty years, not that he delivered them from the Philistines; and there is no mention of rest.

In ch. 16 the Philistines of Gaza plan to ambush and kill (הרג) Samson while he is visiting a prostitute. Physical strength again enables him to escape. The following narrative about his relationship with Delilah is primarily about his physical strength and how this is linked to his hair and his status as a nazirite from birth (Judg 13:5). When his hair is cut and the vow breached, YHWH leaves Samson and he is captured, blinded and cruelly mocked by the Philistines. Eventually, as his hair regrows, Samson calls on YHWH once more, this time asking for strength so that he can take vengeance on the Philistines for what they have done to him. His request is all about himself—there is nothing about Israel or God's purposes—and in the end, as he brings down the building on himself by an act of physical strength, Samson kills himself and a large number of Philistines who were revelling in his humiliation. There is no resolution of the situation between Israel and the Philistines, and the whole saga has resulted in nothing more than misery and loss of life. Ethically, it is evident that Samson is not an example for God's people to emulate; thus these narratives do not contribute anything to the more specific debate about the ethics of warfare.

Judges 17 tells of the establishment of a corrupt sanctuary by Micah, which then figures in the story of the migration of the tribe of Dan in Judg 18. The Danites send out spies to look for a suitable land where they can settle. The spies visit Micah's house on their way to Laish and through Micah enquire of God about the success of their mission. He

tells them to "Go in peace" (18:6) and indicates that YHWH is watching over them. There is an ambiguity here as this verse can be interpreted as a simple affirmation of their mission and assurance of divine protection. Alternatively, it may be an instruction that the mission should be peaceful and a warning that God would be overseeing what happened. The spies continue on their way, then return to report back to Dan about the suitability of the territory and the ease with which they should be able to possess it. Dan sends the spies out again, with 600 men appointed with weapons of war (מלחמה). Once more they call at Micah's house on their journey, and the spies suggest that they take his sanctuary and priest with them to serve their own people when they settle in the new territory. They accomplish this through coercion of the priest, a show of force and subsequent threats of violence towards Micah. When they reach Laish they receive no opposition from the people, who are entirely peaceful and unsuspecting and unable to call on any neighbouring people to help them. Dan takes the city by violence (נכה again, although the use of swords is explicitly mentioned here) and destroys it by fire. Unusually, no number is given for those who were eradicated by this action. There is no mention of YHWH in the entire narrative relating to this second mission, nor any indication of divine action. The narrator stresses the absence of YHWH, for the chapter ends by reasserting that worship offered by Dan in this new territory was idolatrous in contrast to that offered at the house of God in Shiloh. Seizure of another community's city cannot be regarded as ethical on any criteria, but the peculiar circumstances of this account are perhaps better described as genocide, rather than warfare, since there was no initial conflict between the two groups requiring resolution.

Judges 19 records the story of the Levite's concubine. The narrative focuses on the lack of hospitality being offered by Benjamin to the travellers and then on the breach of hospitality provided by the Ephraimite, with the end result that she is killed through gang rape. No-one is portrayed with much honour in this narrative and there is no mention of God. However, the atrocity leads to a tribal congregation being gathered before YHWH, involving all the tribes except Benjamin, to take counsel together (Judg 20:1). They number 400,000 men armed with swords. Evidence is presented by the Levite about the murder (רצח) of the concubine to establish the case against Benjamin. The assembly agrees on a course of action whereby a tenth of their number will confront Benjamin and ask for the offenders to be handed over, so that they alone can be put to death. This represents judgment exercised in accord with standard legal traditions, an ethical response to the problem. However, Benjamin

refuses to comply and prepares for battle (מלחמה) on a grand scale, mustering 26,000 armed men including 700 specialist warriors against the larger number of Israelites.

In Judg 20:18 Israel inquires of God, not YHWH as in 1:1, who "shall go up first to battle (מלחמה)" against Benjamin. Aggression may be understandable as the human reaction towards threatened violence but history shows that it only escalates conflict without resolving its cause. Webb has argued that Judah had the responsibility to lead in this matter since the concubine was a Judahite (Webb 1987, 193, 263). This view, however, renders the initial question superfluous. I suggest therefore that the narrator includes it to raise ethical considerations about whether fighting is an appropriate response, especially as this is an inter-tribal conflict. As in Judg 1, the focus of the question is that of tribal primacy, not whether there should be a battle, and again YHWH answers "Judah." The initial outcome is that 22,000 men of Israel are overcome (שׁחת). Israel regroups in readiness for a repeat encounter and then they go to weep before YHWH before asking if they should again "draw near to battle" (מלחמה) with Benjamin their brother. YHWH's answer affirms the intention that Israel appeared to have reached prior to asking. I note that the editors of *BHS* suggest that 20:22 and 20:23 should be transposed, an idea that has been adopted in the NRSV translation, which conveys the contrary impression that Israel sought YHWH's will before preparing for battle again. I maintain that this editorial decision misses the ethical point being made by the original writer. Israel is intent on civil war and a negative divine response would imply favour towards Benjamin. It would be interpreted to affirm Benjamin's righteousness before God in relation to the initial killing of the concubine, in their refusal to co-operate with the process of justice, and in their decision to respond with aggression towards the other Israelite tribes; but this runs counter to all known ways of divine justice as expressed in biblical law codes. Consequently, to remain faithful to the covenant with Israel, YHWH permits a second armed encounter and again 18,000 armed Israelites are overcome (שׁחת) by Benjamin. This second setback prompts Israel to engage in a fast and lament before YHWH, to offer sacrifices and once more to enquire if they should engage in battle. This time, however, they add the option "or shall we desist?" (20:28). The futility of civil war as an effective way to resolve injustice is recognized and Israel asks, even if a little obliquely, whether there is an alternative. YHWH responds, "Go up, for tomorrow I will give them into your hand"—a promise to conclude the war in Israel's favour.

A decision by YHWH to end the matter while Benjamin was ascendant is still not acceptable for the reasons mentioned above, but Israel is offered hope that a satisfactory outcome can be reached. The narrative reminds readers that if humans initiate armed engagement, consequences follow that can neither be ignored nor simply reversed by YHWH; we have to bear them and move forward in the light of them. However, if we seek God's ways of dealing with them and with the original issue, then different possibilities arise.

This time, although Benjamin prevails again (20:30), only about thirty of Israel's people are overcome (נכה). Israel then adopts different tactics and pretends to flee, to lure Benjamin into a more vulnerable position. The strategy is successful, enabling Israel to gain the upper hand in a show of strength, and there is heavy fighting (מלחמה), although no indication is given of any deaths. Then YHWH defeats (נגף) Benjamin before Israel (20:35); the matter is resolved and justice is done. This is the only place in Judges that the decisive end of a conflict is attributed directly to YHWH, a point that is signified by the narrator's use of this distinct verb, נגף, to express the divine action. This verbal root only occurs in the accounts of civil war here and in Judg 20:32, 36, and 39 (twice), where Benjamin's perspective as to which side in the conflict was being defeated is expressed. Webb has argued that the defeat of Benjamin "is made the occasion for the whole of Israel to be chastised by Yahweh" (Webb 1987, 194), and I suggest that נגף is used to convey a clear connotation of judgment. However, YHWH's action is not the end: the text states (20:35b) that Israel immediately destroys (שׁחת) 25,100 armed men of Benjamin, an act which is unnecessary and thus one of vengeance. Israel has learned nothing.

Judges 20:36b–48 is widely accepted as a duplicate account of the final battle between Israel and Benjamin. It is a longer, more detailed, narrative describing three stages in the fighting in which 18,000, 5000, then 2000, Benjaminites fall. Six hundred flee into the wilderness for four months, during which time Israel wipes out all that remains of Benjamin, its people, animals and towns, by the sword and with fire. In this account there is no reference to YHWH defeating Benjamin; in fact, there is no mention of God at all. This narrative is a stark portrayal of the consequences of unfettered human aggression and positioned at this point in the text it serves to accentuate the state of amorality into which Israel's tribes have degenerated.

Judges 21 focuses on the negative outcomes of the civil war. Israel turns to YHWH (21:3) to ask why there is now one tribe missing from their proper number, as though oblivious of their own responsibility for

this situation. There is no response from God. Much religious ritual is conducted in an assembly and Israel keeps referring to YHWH as they discuss what to do; but there is no engagement with God. The decision to take action to restore the tribe of Benjamin is made without recourse to YHWH and the process to accomplish this is determined without divine consultation or sanction. It decrees the annihilation of the inhabitants of Jabesh-Gilead, apart from any virgins of marriageable age, who will be given to the remnant of Benjamin as wives. This massacre is justified solely on the basis that Jabesh-Gilead failed to participate in the assembly, which is then construed as disloyalty not just to Israel but to the covenant. The condemned populace have no chance to explain, or defend themselves, and Israel completely disregards the sanctity of human life as this plan is put into effect. The result is an inadequate numbers of virgins, which emphasizes the narrator's intention to present the entire scheme as unethical.

In 21:15 Israel's unexplained, newfound compassion towards Benjamin is contrasted with accusations that YHWH had caused its near disappearance. They collude in another plan to obtain wives for the men of Benjamin through the abduction and rape of young women from Shiloh during the annual YHWH festival (21:16–22). No-one seeks the will of God, or considers that it is an affront to YHWH to misuse a religious festival in a self-serving manner. The action is justified by claiming that it neither breaches any oath, nor involves any battle (מלחמה); yet, the text emphasizes humanity's tendency to find a technicality to excuse an action that is blatantly unethical. The plan is carried out and all Israel gets on with its life. There is no mention of God and, ominously, the book of Judges ends with the statement "all the people did what was right in their own eyes" (21:25), a statement that suggests general amorality and a society without agreed ethical norms.

I concluded this study on the day that Harry Patch, the last surviving British veteran of World War I, was buried. In his latter years he had proclaimed the futility of war and worked with people in many situations to advocate ways of peace and reconciliation in response to conflict. I accept that the approach to war in the Hebrew Bible "is deliberately *complex, ambivalent, conditional* and *incomplete*" (Jenson 2002, 5 [emphasis original]), but I maintain that those responsible for the final form of Judges share the views of Patch and produced a text proclaiming God neither advocating, nor supporting, warfare. In the text, divine power overrules situations of conflict and transforms the balance of human powers with minimal injury or death being caused. The accounts of mayhem and massacre present humans time and again seeking revenge,

or displaying gratuitous violence in war to advance their own status, with little regard to ethics. Finally, biblical translators have enhanced the violent descriptions of war in these narratives based on ethical presumptions of their own about the rightness or inevitability of war in human situations. I suggest that a close reading of Judges challenges us to reflect more carefully on our own ethical response to conflict and war.

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Prophecy, Ethics and the Divine Anger

Ronald E. Clements

In a familiar passage from Isaiah a theme is expressed which could readily be multiplied extensively from other sections of the Old Testament prophets:

> Therefore the anger of the Lord was kindled against his people,
> And he stretched out his hand and struck them;
> The mountains quaked,
> And their corpses were like refuse in the streets. For all this his anger has not turned away,
> And his hand is stretched out still. (Isa 5:25)

The unit continues further in Isa 9:8–21.

The question of how the divine anger will take effect is explained in Isa 5:26–30 and points to the arrival of Assyrian forces into the territories of Israel and Judah. Assyria is then described by God through the prophet in another, presumably later, saying as "the rod of my anger" (Isa 10:5). The general technique of portraying military hostility towards Israel as a consequence of divine anger is a widely attested and familiar feature of biblical prophecy. Consequently there is little need at this point to substantiate it with further examples.

Prophecy and the Divine Anger

Prophecy is replete throughout with threats and warnings of various kinds, originating for the most part in periods when a specific political or military threat was anticipated or actually experienced. The complex editorial patterns which have woven these individual threats into larger collections have then generally set them within the literary boundaries of a more reassuring framework of hope. Ultimately the divine purpose for Israel and the nations of the world is perceived to be gracious and compassionate. Nevertheless, in the meanwhile, both ancient Israel and its Jewish heirs, in company with most of the nations of the world, are

deemed to be suffering the consequences of violence, injustice and the wanton killing that warfare entails. This is interpreted as an expression of divine anger and the causes that have provoked this anger are sought in human behaviour. Occasionally, as in some of the "foreign nation" prophecies, the particular reasons for this divine anger are not spelt out, but, more often, the adducing of such reasons for God's wrath provides prophecy with a direct and immediate message, which calls for a response.

Among scholars who have addressed the issue of the presuppositions that explain this divine anger, John Barton (Barton 1980/2003, 77–129) postulates a basic concept of international order, or natural law, which served as a forerunner of modern notions of "human rights." How, why and for how long these outpourings of divine wrath would continue then becomes a feature introduced into the larger structures of the prophetic writings which gives them a more lasting, and less time-bound, significance. They present a message which has a longer-term historical perspective.

In the setting of the Hebrew canon the concern to present answers to these questions has generated the complex literary form of the Prophets as its second division (Chapman 2000, 188–240).

The explanations as to why God had become angry are various and many-sided. Sometimes they highlight specific injustices and crimes within Israel; sometimes they accuse Israel of a general neglect of justice and religious commitment, and sometimes, as in Isaiah, they accuse the oppressing nation, or nations, of *hubris* in usurping the authority of God (Miggelbrink 2002). Overall, however, although the reasons given for the divine anger generally presuppose belief in the absolute and universal moral authority of Israel's God, they seldom offer more than fairly general basic insights into humankind's moral obligations (Elmslie 1948; Davies 1981; Birch 1991; Dempsey 2000; Mein 2001). In the case of the Book of Jonah, the narrative concludes with considerable irony that there exists a kindly forbearance on God's part towards human ignorance and folly (Jonah 4:11).

Not surprisingly, on the basis of these strictures, there was at one time on the part of some scholars a widespread temptation to paint a picture of the world which the prophets addressed as a moral wilderness. In this context their polemic about the reasons for God's anger is given a substantial justification. True religion is seen as a major moralizing influence in human society (cf. Knust 2006). Consequently one of the key interpretive themes governing the understanding of Old Testament prophecy during the late nineteenth century was the claim that the great prophets were responsible for a unique and innovative emphasis on major ethical issues affecting human society. Religion itself was seen as

an activity transformed by the downgrading of ritual and taboo-laden activities with their replacement by a strong concern with the moral well-being of society, both at a regional, and ultimately an international level (Stein 2007, 99–126).

However, as the social world of the ancient Near East has become more fully known the more evident it has become that the problems which drew the prophets' invective concerning social and personal conduct are, for the most part, the common burden of human civilization (cf. Breasted 1934). The appeal to religious sanctions as a way of dealing with these problems is also a widely attested feature. Because violence, social corruption and the inadequacies of systems of legal administration are familiar features that reach back to the very dawn of human civilization, it comes as no surprise that these deficiencies have been regarded as a cause of divine anger. Belief in divine wrath as a cause of human misfortune is found far back in antiquity in ancient oracular utterances of various kinds, in much the same way as it is in the biblical prophetic books (Miller 1994; cf. Flaceliere 1965). Nor is it necessary to suppose that the prophets had encountered some unique level of social change or of a newly experienced economic difficulty to account for their resort to such invective as a means of reinforcing their messages of impending woe.

Nonetheless, concern about appealing to ideas of divine anger as an explanation for human misfortune has more recently aroused criticism and adverse comment, partly as a result of the prominence given to such belief in Old Testament prophecies and in the history of Joshua–2 Kings (the "Deuteronomistic History"; cf. Pakkala 1999). When set against a background of appeals to divine grace and goodness as the surest and strongest ground for human hope, this belief inevitably arouses tension and disquiet. From early Christian times it has been objected that to portray God as subject to powerful emotional feelings and mood-swings contradicts Hellenistic (Platonic) ideas of divine immutability and impartiality. Furthermore, the broader interest in biblical narrative structures shows that these varying divine moods often appear to be arbitrary and inconsistent, in spite of affirmations regarding God's consistency and gracious forbearance. As a result, explanations appealing to an outburst of anger on God's part forfeit credibility. They present God in far too human a guise.

A third objection is that the causes of anger in God often appear self-interested (especially when God acts for the sake of his "name"; e.g. Ezek 36:22–23), or simply out of concern for the wellbeing and honour of God's people Israel (e.g. Ezek 39:25–29). Such a view could be tolerated in an intellectual context where nations worshipped their own

national or local deities, but became unconvincing in a monotheistic setting (cf. Rösel 2000; Lemaire 2003; Petry 2007). God cannot remain the sole Creator of all nations and have favourites! At best the ascriptions of anger suggest a Creator who punishes idolatry and religious indifference with merciless ferocity, but who may allow others, less worthy, to go free. In this regard the emergence of a genuine monotheism in which Yahweh, God of Jerusalem, is worshipped as the LORD God of all nations poses important questions about the kind of ethical "protectionism" which many prophetic pronouncements presuppose. Sometimes the punishment for offending God is inadequately explained, or is excessive, or punishes innocent victims. In many respects the fundamental ideological structure that pervades the historical chronicles of the books of Samuel and Kings is that the national leader, in the person of the king, is primarily to blame for national defeat. Moreover, it is religious offences—disloyalty and idolatry—that take the brunt of blame, and moral shortcomings are ignored. Commentators have then to face the task of arguing that such religious disloyalty brought ethical consequences. Ultimately the portrayal of God in this fashion appears forbidding, unconvincing and inappropriate for the Creator of the universe. Why should the Creator be hostile towards his handiwork and single out some offences so vehemently? The story of a universally consequential moral failure on the part of the first human beings—the "Fall"—then becomes indispensable as an explanation for the divine propensity to anger (Knierim 1995).

Why God Becomes Angry

Nevertheless, in spite of general unease about the portrait of a deity who is presented as irascible and prone to anger in this fashion, the reasons given to account for it have, in the past two centuries, provided scholars with several of the features which make the prophets worth studying. They provide a perspective from within a given historical context of society's tensions and stress-points. Their claims to foretell the outcome of current and future events may be regarded as secondary, or even mistaken, but their reasons for rebuking their audience for contemporary ills and injustices are treated as perceptive critiques of their contemporary ethical scene. Walter Moberly has defended this claim as expressive of prophetic insight into the wider needs and problems of human society (Moberly 2006, esp. 1–40). The argument is that prophetic reproof of misconduct demonstrates insight into the problems that threaten the quality of human existence, and even the very possibility of human survival. This puts ethical issues at the centre of religion by the insistence

that only a deep and lasting commitment to God can ensure the wellbeing of society. In general, little attempt is made to connect the experience of moral shortcomings with national collapse, or military defeat. Recent interpretation of biblical prophecy has focused more directly on the broader political background of the world of the prophets, with a corresponding loss of interest in their ethical significance.

Modern readers readily recognize the prevalence of a deep-rooted human concern to link the experience of personal misfortune and illness with moral obtuseness or negligence. The popularity of forms of divination, dream interpretation and the almost irresistible resort to prayer in periods of distress are testimony to this. In this context the prophets are presented as ethical and religious reformers—a theme which encouraged many scholars to see them as pioneers of ethical monotheism.

In this way warnings about divine anger, directed first against Israel and subsequently against the family of nations more generally, is interpreted as a prophetic means of giving ethical priority to religion and a move towards reforming society (Redditt 2003, 547–49; Brueggemann 1997, 373–99). This is regarded as discerning and authoritative, even though the imagery employed of divine anger depends on the limitations of the analogy between human and divine conduct. In a related, but less publicized, fashion the authors of Proverbs condemn certain forms of human wrongdoing as constituting an "abomination to God" where feelings of outrage and repugnance which are properly human emotional responses are ascribed to God (Clements 1996). Human attitudes are held to represent a valid perception of a reality, which is assumed also to be felt in the divine realm, even though this is achieved at the cost of ascribing feelings to God which a larger theological context may find difficult.

Divine Anger as Ethical Critique

Even with these cautionary remarks, the fact is disconcerting that the LORD God of Israel often appears as an irascible and vengeful deity who has the power and the will to inflict great harm on human beings. Nonetheless, for all the theological difficulties that this raises, the portrayals of deity as susceptible to feelings of deep outrage and wrath provide the prophetic literature with several of its most memorable and incisive poems. The satirical lament for the decease of the Ruler of Babylon in Isa 14:4–21 is an example which appears as a paradigmatic satire on the death of a tyrant applicable to any number of such hated figures (cf. also Ezek 28:2–10). Even at the risk of over-indulging a form of *Schadenfreude*, it is recognizable that poetry of this kind fulfils an important social function and enervates a literature which upholds the importance

of justice and compassion in human affairs. It provides a platform for hope and resolve in the face of disturbing experience of oppressive violence. Contrasts between the power and might of God who is awesome in majesty similarly provide an effective counterbalance to the pretentious claims of human potentates and emperors. In this vein the theme in the Magnificat of the unexpected reversal of personal fortune for the wicked (cf. Luke 1:52–53) provides a powerful motif which warns against abuses of power and unrestrained arrogance. Human excesses and political oppression are set in a larger perspective by relating them to similar past abuses and contrasting them with the majesty of God. The theme itself becomes an admonitory paradigm. By setting the portrait of an angry God in the larger framework of divine mercy and grace important truths are expressed about the responsibilities of power and the central roles of justice and compassion.

To some extent this is what the literary framework of the various prophetic writings aims to do by setting all such warnings and threats in a wider context that affirms an over-riding divine grace and mercy. Hermann Spieckermann (Spieckermann 2001, esp. 197–223 “Die Liebeserklärung Gottes. Entwurf einer Theologie des Alten Testaments”) elevates the concept of God’s love towards Israel as the predominant message of Old Testament theology. Yet, in order to do this, it is necessary to over-ride the more emotive and unpleasant aspects portrayed in the divine nature, expressed in the concepts of vengeance and jealousy. Most readers of the Old Testament would almost certainly admit that it is the portrayal of an angry and irascible deity which most offends. Furthermore, it is not always evident that the reasons adduced for God’s anger are appropriate from an ethical perspective (cf. 2 Kgs 2:23–24 where 42 boys are killed by two bears for insulting the prophet Elisha); nor do the offences listed necessarily warrant social disapproval, as modern attempts at deconstruction have shown. Partisan nationalistic and ethnic motives are too evident for this to be the case. Only with their elimination can a truly universal ethical standard be upheld. All too frequently the prophets are themselves strongly nationalistic, or self-interested critics. Similarly, individual kings receive most blame in the Old Testament narrative histories, but their subjects pay the price.

Throughout the Bible, in both Testaments, commentators encounter difficulty in explaining the severity of punishment for idolatry. The issue is primarily a theological one, and the history of interpretation shows how eagerly commentators have sought to link theological disloyalty with moral obtuseness. God’s anger against the use of images as a representation of divinity appears to be extreme, but its ethical justification is obscure and confused. A similar problem faced medieval Christian artists

and sculptors in defining approved and legitimate forms of representation of a divine presence or divine activity over against those that were unacceptable (cf. Camille 1989). Most historians and commentators have found it necessary to account for this intensity of opposition by interpreting the use of images as resort to false, dangerous, or unworthy images, or as a fundamental denial of true religion in any form since God cannot be seen by human eyes. It can be construed as a feature of religion devoid of ethical commitment of any kind, or as an association with types of religious observance which encourage this. In this way important ethical implications are drawn into the prohibition. Overall, Spieckermann is not alone in seeking to defend an approach to the Old Testament which strongly subordinates portrayals of divine anger to contrasting assertions regarding divine grace and goodness. Such an approach is echoed in several recent attempts to present a theological interpretation of Old Testament literature (cf. Schwager 2000).

Imagination, Theodicy and the Nature of Deity

A primary objection to prophetic appeals to divine anger against human wrongdoing as an explanation of human misfortune is that they present God in an inappropriately anthropomorphic fashion. In consequence, one of the first things the serious student of the Old Testament is encouraged to learn is that language of this kind needs to be seen as historically relative and read as part of an outmoded and obsolete frame of reference. In this respect ideas of humankind's progressive ethical growth to maturity have served as a reason for regarding the biblical language as archaic and provisional. It can accordingly be set aside.

Similarly, in the history of exegesis, the division of the Christian Bible into "Old" and "New" Testaments has proved useful by interposing a degree of distance between the two; this can be, and has been, applied to several major themes of the Old Testament, not least the focus on militaristic violence and prowess. At one period a hermeneutic of typology provided a way of bridging the gap between the Old Testament and the New. In the early twentieth century this was replaced by ideas of a progressive movement of divine revelation which made it possible to regard a central core element as the truth that is revealed, while its historical context retained outmoded features. This "progressive" approach (cf. Carpenter 1903) could then be continued further by extending it to the gap between the Bible and the modern world. In this approach all anthropomorphic descriptions of God are taken to be no more than provisional ways of describing the Supreme Creator. They offer a kind of biblical "shorthand" which the modern scholar must translate; doing so

becomes one of the major responsibilities of a theologically informed exegesis in contrast to a literal, or historical, one. Overall, the use of language about divine anger may be freely admitted as inadequate, but the evils and wrongs that are held to provoke this anger may nevertheless be regarded as important issues that continue to arouse justifiable ethical concern.

This feature introduces a further issue in regard to popular criticism of divine anger as an explanation of human misfortune. Ascriptions of love and kindness to God are also analogies drawn from human emotions and it is hard to see that the ascription of friendly emotions to God can be justified while, at the same time, denying any place to hostile feelings and attitudes. The problem, as the Early Church Fathers quite freely recognized, is that all such convenient and popular ways of portraying the Creator of the Universe are limited analogies that become necessary ways of speaking about realities which are otherwise impossible to grasp. Their limitations are evident as soon as they are placed under critical scrutiny. In an opposite direction evangelical Protestantism has found the language of divine anger more or less indispensable in presenting an interpretation of the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth as constituting an act of atonement. Without God's anger against human sinfulness the death of an innocent victim appears arbitrary and unnecessary.

On this front the language about divine anger in biblical prophecy has more recently brought it back into the forefront of discussion in relation to the theme of theodicy (cf. Crenshaw 1992, 2005; cf. Laato and de Moor 2003). The broad experience of human suffering fits badly with simplistic notions of a unique Creator's goodness and raises questions about ascribing the reason for this suffering to the direct action of God. In any case, we do not need the biblical prophets to tell us about divine anger, since life confronts us with sufficient painful experiences to raise questions about the kindness and justice of the Creator. Experience of the injustices and undeserved pain that pervade the entire created world compels us to question notions of the beneficence of its Author.

A consequence of modern difficulty in coming to terms with the Bible's presentation of God's relationship to the world as direct and immediate was the introduction in the nineteenth century of the term "Providence" into popular accounts of biblical history. This, along with such concepts as "nature" and "natural order," seemed to provide a convenient mediating factor for the actions of God.

Yet, in reality, this does little to remove the difficulty since it simply pushes the problem one stage further back. Much the same holds true in respect of attempts to make a distinction between "natural evil" and evil caused by misguided or ill-intended human actions (cf. Midgely 1984,

esp. 1–16). We still have to face the reality of human acts of injustice, alongside unexplained tragedies and catastrophes which challenge belief in the ultimate goodness of the Creator. All too readily a simplistic type of "pick and mix" interpretation is applied to the categorization of events in which their consequences for human society are assessed in different ways with no regard for the seamless nature of history. On any reckoning, a Creator God who has made the conditions in which great misfortunes are possible must take responsibility for them. Ascribing some evils to human causes and blaming others on God still leaves us with a surplus of innocent victims. If ideas of divine anger are outmoded, it is hard to see that using the term "Providence" moves the discussion very far along. At best, all of these objections and questions regarding concepts of divine anger highlight the point that the relationship between God and the world is not a simple and direct one.

Several years ago Klaus Koch (Koch 1983; cf. Crenshaw 2005) carried the debate into a more amenable frame of reference by examining concepts of retribution and the belief that a circle of cause and effect operated throughout the natural order and human society. In this retributive framework bad deeds bring evil consequences which cannot be averted, but must, in some way, bring about harmful effects. By this means some of the personal and emotional aspects of the vocabulary of anger are taken out of the equation while retaining awareness of the disastrous consequences of particular attitudes and activities. It may be that such belief in an inherent order in the created world helps to soften the unwelcome images of an angry God that have become a prime target of popular objections to religion and religious language; nevertheless, the advantages of this approach appear to be seriously limited for two reasons.

First, and most strikingly, the idea of retribution highlights more sharply than ever the facts of injustice and undeserved suffering. Social penal systems wrestle with the need to find appropriate ways of justifying all aspects of punitive treatment of offenders. The desire for retribution may all too readily become counter-productive. Many victims of evil actions become caught up in a cycle of retributive justice, but cannot readily be thought to belong there. The apportionment of blame and responsibility becomes impossible to assess. Even within the biblical era this point was strongly felt with regard to the ties and responsibilities between generations (cf. Deut 24:16).

A second, and equally serious objection, is that this approach fails to provide any effective explanation for the sense of the irrationality and purposelessness of much human misfortune. Too often the pain of misfortune lies not simply in its undeserved nature, but in the destructive

uselessness it displays. At best, proponents of the concept of a circle of retribution shift the notion of divine anger by giving it a more impersonal setting. However, this is at the cost of the poetic intensity and urgency that the biblical language frequently introduces concerning wrongdoing and violence. In this respect reliance on the inevitability of punishment would appear to rob the prophets of much of the emotional impact of their language. Part of the richness of the poetic imagery concerning the anger of God rests on its ability to inject into threats and warnings a strong note of value and obligation. In this regard the much more comfortable declarations of the Wisdom tradition appear often to overstate the case for an inherent self-adjustment in human society. All too often the wicked prosper and go unpunished (contra Prov 10:24 etc.).

In a small number of passages prophecy affirms a concept of "natural evil" by abandoning the present world order, which is seen as corrupted. Instead, it looks for a new world order when "the wolf will lie down with the lamb" (cf. Clements 1999). Certainly such passages as Isa 11:5–9 and 65:17–25 look forward to a refashioned world when "the lion shall eat straw like the ox" (Isa 11:9; 63:25). However, these passages stand at the periphery of biblical prophecy and the hope for such a recreated world order has forsaken the more commonplace portrayal of providential beneficence set out in Ps 104:21, where God feeds the lions with their prey. Evidently the Old Testament does not present a consistent understanding of "Providence" in regard to experience of the natural world. At best, by drawing attention to the disturbing presence of violence throughout the natural order, these late prophetic passages reflect a consciousness of the threat it poses to human survival. They look for a transformation of the world as it is experienced out of awareness that the universal prevalence of violent conduct and sudden death threatens the future of humankind.

History as Divine Revelation

Two factors appear to have contributed significantly to making acceptance of language regarding the anger of God particularly difficult for the modern reader. The first relates to the emphasis in the 1950s and 60s on "The God Who Acts in History." This certainly encouraged an undue focus on the presentation of a biblical theology around ideas of a *Heilsgeschichte*—a "Salvation History." In this process certain events are interpreted as unique acts of divine intervention to uphold, or destroy, favoured people or communities.

In itself it is not without significance that this theological interpretation of history arose after a period of prolonged scholarly research to discover, as far as possible, the actual events that underlie the Old Testament. Recent study of the prophetic literature has re-asserted the importance of theological issues after historical questions attracted most attention. Similarly, several of the most recent introductions to the prophetic writings have placed the major emphasis on the political context in which the prophets operated. This has increased awareness of the different theological and political ideologies that have shaped the various prophetic books. A more neutral classification of the many narrative sequences, such as "story," became necessary (cf. Barr 1980). When this strongly historical approach began at the end of the eighteenth century there existed an unduly confident belief that the biblical story had transpired much in the way that the Old Testament narratives report it. Throughout much of the nineteenth century the claim that the biblical reporting of events was reliable and factual became a kind of theological principle in itself related to notions of inspiration which reflected directly on the Bible's claim to express theological truth. In this fashion prophecy and historical narratives could share the spoils of claiming to present a "theological history."

Prophetic interpretations of particular events as "acts of God," however, generate problems more than answers. Events in themselves are theologically neutral, yet debates about the biblical reporting and interpretation have, at times, become remarkably intense; formulations which claim to present a kind of "historical orthodoxy" have tended to emerge, and popular attempts to present archaeological evidence as a form of "theological verification" reflect this approach. Claims that events reveal a divine plan, or intention, and by implication are the result of some mode of divine causality, inevitably reflect directly the interests of parties reporting those events—a feature which recent "anti-histories" have highlighted.

In showing how the divine action is manifested in events the Hebrew Bible does not present a consistent picture. Sometimes what happens is reported as following a strictly human and natural course, while at other times angels intervene to protect, to announce forthcoming events, to confuse the enemy, or to disrupt in some way the normal balance of human forces. In some instances such intervention brings panic to the enemy; in one extreme case the "Angel of Yahweh" acts directly to slaughter 185,000 of those threatening Jerusalem (as Isa 37:36). It is noticeable that modern interpreters have consistently sought to find some natural or military explanation for this account of an event that is reported to have taken place in 701 B.C.E. (cf. Aubin 2002; Grabbe 2003). In this

way the reasons given for such an unusual intervention by "the Angel of Yahweh" are discounted (Isa 37:36//2 Kgs 19:34) although these reasons are more political than ethical.

The point that emerges is that Old Testament prophecy is not consistent in the way in which it portrays divine intervention in human affairs. Usually human forces act alone, but sometimes supernatural forces join them. In some instances a variety of means by which the divine intervention was accomplished are suggested. To ascribe such actions to divine "Providence" both stretches and confuses these biblical claims by subsuming them under a single abstract concept which introduces a gap between the cause and the effect, but fails to explain either. It is noteworthy that the Old Testament has no real equivalents for modern concepts of "history" or "nature," in which "natural causes" form part of the equation. In modern times, military commentators and historians readily blame natural events for the fact that campaign plans go awry so that even a favourable wind or a calm sea may come to the rescue of an endangered fleet! Almost inevitably, if the outcome is favourable for those under threat, the fact is ascribed to God. It is arguable that modern historiography has frequently left biblical scholarship uncomfortably stretched between defending the essential historicity of the Bible and an inability to explain how divine and human actions interact. On this front therefore the concern to see a particular period of history as a unique theatre of divine revelation leaves the ascription of the negative aspects of that history to divine anger as devoid of convincing explanation. Objective history is necessarily secularized and theologically neutral.

However, if the notion of "The God Who Acts in History" is an overdrawn description of the biblical portrayal of God, the actual presentation of that history in the Old Testament as *a Heilsgeschichte*—a "History of God's saving action"—also demands closer analysis. Such a label certainly does not fit the present Former Prophets at all well, although suggestions regarding some of its earlier component texts have looked for units that may have done so. However, to engage with this question at all is to enter into an ongoing debate about the value, purpose, and theological implications of the task of writing a "History of Israel." It also becomes deeply engaged with reconstructions of the actual literary history of the narrative sections of the Hebrew Bible. On this front fuller understanding is needed of the expectations and goals sought by the many historians who embarked on this task in the nineteenth century. Not only have their conclusions ultimately proved to be diverse, but their assumptions, motivations and expectations can also be seen to have varied from the outset (cf. Clements 1995).

From the perspective of seeking a balanced appraisal of the Old Testament literature, a case can be made for arguing that, so far as the main body of the Former and the Latter Prophets is concerned, the tale that is told could more appropriately be described as one of *Unheilsgeschichte*—a "History of Failure." It now appears as a story of disaster in which the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.E. holds a central place. It makes this event a kind of paradigm of human history more widely. Moreover, the present edited form of the prophetic literature is firmly focused on a future "Day of the LORD." This is presented as the forthcoming climax to the entire story of humankind (cf. Beck 2005; Postma, Spronk, and Talstra 2002).

In line with this eschatological perspective the element of hope in the prophetic books is focused on an appeal for penitence and "return" addressed to those caught up in the consequences of present and forthcoming divine judgment. The idea prevails of a "Remnant"—a number of separated, but religiously focused, communities who are eventually defined as a "Congregation," or "Church." The reader is assumed still to be living in what is essentially an "age of wrath," with a more reassuring future hope not yet realized. The prophetic message about divine anger proved useful for explaining the misfortunes and calamities that overtook the survivors of the failed kingdoms of Israel and Judah. The edited form of the canonical prophetic literature is focused on "exile" as the condition in which the readers are placed and from which they, or at least their children, hope eventually to be rescued. The distant past is recalled in order to establish a foundation for hope of a better future, while the present in which the Hebrew Bible's first readers were living is interpreted as an "interim" period which will eventually be swept away. To address this situation is the contribution that *torah* makes and it is in this that the real ethic of the Prophets is to be found. Without *torah* as a basis, the message of divine anger lapses into one of irrationality and despair.

On this front the point to which Ralf Miggelbrink (Miggelbrink 2002) draws most attention—that divine anger is a disturbing and forbidding context for understanding human history—may be upheld, but requires more extended reflection. This is the point that Walter Moberly addresses in urging the importance of prophetic "discernment." Broad ascriptions to God of intentions and emotions analogous to the human emotions of anger cannot be anything more than provisional guides to the nature of the relationship between the world and God. In its biblical setting, without the prior gift of *torah*, the prophetic hope ultimately runs out into the sands of apocalyptic despair.

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Justice for Whom? Social and Environmental Ethics and the Hebrew Prophets

Hilary Marlow

Introduction

Over the past few decades, scientists and ecologists have become increasingly concerned about the future sustainability of our planet. Environmental issues have also prompted theological and philosophical debate about the way the earth and its resources are treated.[1] Increasingly, such interests have become the concern of biblical scholars and have resulted in a variety of ecological readings of the biblical texts. These range from the ecological hermeneutics developed by the Earth Bible Project,[2] to the agrarian readings of the Hebrew Bible presented by Ellen Davis (2009).

To what extent the biblical text can serve as a source for ethical or moral decision-making in contemporary environmental matters is also subject to debate, in particular in the works of Cyril Rodd (2001) and C. J. W. Wright (2004). If, as Rodd suggests, attempts to use the Hebrew Bible as a basis for contemporary morality are "fraught with risk and uncertainty" (Rodd 2001, 326), attempts to find an explicitly "green" message in the text will inevitably be anachronistic and misguided (Rodd 2001, 239–49). The opposite view is presented by Wright, who suggests that the theological and ethical principles concerning creation articulated by the ancient Israelites "have a far-reaching impact on how biblically

1. See, e.g., Hessel and Radford Ruether 2000; Lodge and Hamlin 2006; McFague 2008; Nash 1991; Northcott 1996 and 2007.

2. The Earth Bible Project (EBP) has developed a set of eco-justice principles to guide its study of the texts and also draws on feminist biblical hermeneutics, in particular the criteria of suspicion, identification, and retrieval. Its agenda and methods are outlined in first volume in the series (Habel 2000) and amplified in subsequent publications of the project: Habel and Wurst 2000; Habel 2001; Habel and Wurst 2001; Habel and Balabanski 2002. For discussion of the EBP approach, see Marlow 2009, 84–94.

sensitive Christians will want to frame their ecological ethics today" (Wright 2004, 144).[3]

The present study is also concerned with exploring the biblical text in the light of contemporary environmental issues and with the ethical implications that arise from such a perspective. It presents an ecological reading of the concern for justice expressed by some of the biblical prophets (Amos, First Isaiah and Micah) and offers some points of dialogue between the ancient world and our modern one. The focal point of the exegesis is the notion of interconnection—a fundamental premise of the science of ecology. Unlike ecology, which is concerned with the two-way interrelationships between living species, including human beings, and their habitats, these biblical texts present a three-way model of relationships—between God, human beings and the natural world. The theocentric framework of these prophets means that their concern is with Israel's troubled relationship to YHWH, as well as with social and political matters. But they also clearly portray the profound and complex interrelationship between God's people and the rest of his creation, a relationship that is inextricably linked to their devotion to YHWH. The exegesis that follows looks at a range of texts that use shared imagery, vocabulary and themes to articulate such relationships, and that suggest a fundamental connection between culture and nature, between wellbeing in society and the wellbeing of the earth. These texts all have as their starting point the prophets' concern for justice and righteousness—in society and in Israel's religious life.

The Language of Justice and Righteousness

Moshe Weinfeld suggests that the concept of social justice in ancient Israel is represented primarily by the phrase "justice and righteousness," which occurs some 30 times in the Hebrew Bible, usually in the form משפט וצדקה, or a variation thereof (Weinfeld 1992, 228–29).[4] Besides this, there are numerous other occasions in which these two words, "justice" and "righteousness," occur in parallelism, as well as texts in which one or other word features, perhaps in conjunction with other terms (such as מישׁור, "equity," in Isa 11:4).[5]

3. As Wright himself points out, it is often differing ideological perspectives that determine whether a descriptive or normative approach is taken to ethics of the Hebrew Bible (2004, 446). See the discussion in Marlow 2009, 249–52.

4. See also Houston 2006; Miranda 1997. Weinfeld notes that similar word pairs are found in Ugarit and other ancient Near Eastern literature.

5. Although the individual words "justice" and "righteousness" frequently occur in parallelism in the so-called pre-exilic prophets, such as Amos, Micah and First

The meaning of each phrase, parallelism or single usage of these terms can only be determined in context, since a range of understandings is possible, from the correctness of legal decisions or governance to practical expressions of wellbeing in society, particularly for the marginalized (e.g. widows/orphans).[6] The corollary is also true, since clear articulations of social justice can occur without mention of either term. So, the field of study concerning justice in the Hebrew Bible is rather wide and this discussion of it will, of necessity, be selective.

Justice and Righteousness and the Ideal Ruler

The primary focus in the rest of the present study is with certain biblical texts where the concept of social justice is linked with the natural world, in both negative and positive contexts. Although the discussion will centre on some of the Hebrew prophets, it begins with another text of relevance, namely Ps 72, widely recognized to be of pre-exilic origin (Kraus 1989, 77; Tate 1990, 222), which provides a paradigm for the ethical concerns of the prophets. In this prayer for the long life of the king, perhaps, according to Kraus, recited at an enthronement or royal festival, the request for justice and righteousness features at the start as the overarching theme and a summary of the whole prayer, "Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king's son" (v. 1). The psalmist elaborates his request in the verses that follow as a series of attributes of the ideal monarch, each of which flows from the outpouring of God's justice and righteousness upon his human representative.[7]

Isaiah, the actual word pair "justice and righteousness" is infrequent. This is in contrast to Jeremiah and Ezekiel who rather favour it. The parallelism with "observing statutes" in Ezek 18:19 may suggest a shift towards more legalistic connotations for the phrase in later traditions. This is borne out by the NRSV which renders משפט וצדקה as "what is lawful and right" throughout Ezekiel.

6. For some scholars, the juridical sense of these concepts is the primary one (e.g. with regard to the book of Amos, Köhler 1956; Paul 1991; see also Schmid 1968). Knierim (1995, 87) questions whether the word-field of justice, righteousness, and associated terms points to "an all-inclusive homogenous worldview…[or] to heterogeneous preunderstandings or concepts which conflict in their canonical juxtaposition."

7. The idea that the king as representative of the deity is responsible for justice in the world is not unique to Israel and has parallels in a number of other ancient Near Eastern contexts, including the *Code of Hammurabi* (*ANET*, 164) and Lipit-Ishtar Lawcode (*ANET*, 159) (both Mesopotamia). According to Whitelam, these two documents are the most significant resource for understanding the ideal conception of monarchical judicial functions in the ancient world (Whitelam 1979, 19).

Verses 2–4 of the psalm detail the outworking of this in society and encompass everything from correct legal governance to practical care for the poor. The equitable judicial decisions of v. 2 and the relief of oppression in v. 4 frame a reference to the fertility and fecundity of the natural world in v. 3. Under the rule of a just king, peace (שׁלום) and righteousness will flow from the mountains and hills onto the people of his kingdom.[8] Both the position of this verse in the psalm and its use of the vocabulary of justice and righteousness suggest a connection between the maintenance of divinely instituted order in society and the well-being of the wider creation.[9]

These ideas are repeated later in the psalm, where the king is portrayed as the one who delivers the poor and has pity on the weak—the anticipated actions of a just king (vv. 12–14). Alongside this is the expectation that his land should flourish and blossom with abundance (v. 16). This idyllic picture depicts a fundamental connection between human and non-human creation; justice and righteousness are assumed in the arena of the natural world as well as in human society.[10] There is an element of conditionality here—such that the fruitfulness of the land is dependent upon the just rule of the king. However, this is implicit rather than explicit (and perhaps clearer in the latter section of the psalm). The idea of direct cause and effect, in which what happens in society has an impact on the natural world, is more apparent in a number of prophetic texts.

Justice and Righteousness in the Prophets

If justice and righteousness are the characteristics of the ideal Israelite king, and by implication, of Israelite society, the reality seems to be very different, at least from the perspective of some of the prophets. Micah, Amos and First Isaiah offer a social critique which roundly condemns the excesses of the rich and the exploitation of the poor and weak.

This is exemplified in Mic 6:8, which reads:

8. A development of this theme is found in the Mosaic blessing on the tribe of Joseph in Deut 33:13–17, which similarly links together the two terms "mountains" and "hills." In this text the blessing is almost entirely concerned with the fruitfulness and flourishing of the land, including "the finest produce of the ancient mountains, and the abundance of the everlasting hills."

9. For a wide-ranging discussion of divine world order, see Murray 1992.

10. Note the exhortation to praise at the end of the Psalm, which encompasses all of creation: "Let his glory fill the whole earth" (וימלא כבדו את כל הארץ).

> He has declared to you, O human, what is good,
> and what the Lord requires from you.
> It is to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God.[11]

The context is the prophet's reflection on the acceptable means of entry into God's presence.[12] His rejection of a multiplicity of ritual sacrifices in favour of moral integrity towards others and towards God is, at very least, a repudiation of religious hypocrisy if not of the sacrificial system itself.[13] The somewhat unspecific stipulation in v. 8 to "do justice and love kindness" (אם־עשׂות משפט ואהבת חסד) is clarified in vv. 11–12, where the voice of YHWH speaks out against dishonest weights, ill-gotten gains, violence and deception, all wrongs perpetrated by the wealthy against the weak (v. 12a). God's response to such violent and deceptive behaviour is to allow sickness (חלה) and desolation (שׁמם) to afflict those who have presumed upon their wealth and status (vv. 13–15). The consequences of injustice manifest themselves in people as moral and physical sickness, and in the land as destruction and loss of fertility. The punishment is not abstract; it is physical, affecting not just the people but the well-being of their land, and is a direct reversal of the hopes and desires expressed in Ps 72.

In Isa 1 there is a similar pattern. The prophet uses the strongest of language to condemn religious sacrifices in vv. 11–14, and then suggests that acceptable behaviour before God consists of repentance ("wash and cleanse yourselves") followed by actions that demonstrate a complete change of heart ("cease to do evil, learn to do good," vv. 16b–17a). This is elaborated in the rest of v. 17 as a series of specific attitudes and actions towards the marginalized. In the earlier part of the chapter, God's punishment is depicted in terms similar to those used in Mic 6; the result of Israel's rebellion is described as sickness of the body (Isa 1:5–6) and as the desolation and depopulation of the land (v. 7), in both cases using the same terminology as Micah, חלה and שׁמם. The prophet then likens Israel to Sodom and Gomorrah in vv. 9 and 10 (a motif to which we shall return). The devastation of the land is not so clearly presented as the consequence of social injustice as was the case in Mic 6; it follows the more general charge of Israel's failure to follow her God (v. 3). Nevertheless, the idea of cause and effect, of connection between human

11. Author's own translation.

12. The phrase "to do justice" (עשׂות משפט) is perhaps a contraction of the more usual "to do justice and righteousness" found in a number of other texts (e.g. 2 Sam 8:15//1 Chr 18:14 [of David]; Prov 21:3; Jer 23:5 [of the Davidic line]).

13. An issue much debated by scholars; for example, see discussion and bibliography in Clements 1965, 93–102 and Williamson 2006, 88.

actions and the wellbeing of the land, is picked up in vv. 19–20, where obedience to YHWH is prerequisite for "eating the good of the land."

A few chapters further on, in Isa 5, again a connection is made between wellbeing in society and in the land. In this instance the failure of justice results in a failure of the harvest and of expectations of wealth. The indictment of Isa 5:7 forms the climax of the beautiful and enigmatic vineyard parable (vv. 1–6):

> For the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the house of Israel,
> the man of Judah is the planting of his delight.
> He waited for justice, and instead bloodshed,
> for righteousness and instead outcry.

The justice and righteousness expected by YHWH from his people have been replaced by violence. The following verses (vv. 8–10) condemn the selfish accumulation of wealth and property by the ruling minority (the same group is also indicted in 3:14–15 for robbing the poor of their vineyards).[14] The prophet then draws on the motif of the failed vineyard in the parable to prophesy actual fruitlessness for their immorally acquired vineyards in v. 9 (see also Mic 2:2). As in Mic 6, the consequences of injustice and oppression towards the marginalized in society are expressed in terms of the failure of the land to produce the expected return.

The themes of these three texts (Mic 6; Isa 1 and 5) are echoed in several places in the book of Amos. Amos 4 begins with the prophet's indictment of the rich women of Bashan for their oppression of the poor and needy and their lives of opulent luxury (v. 1).[15] This is followed in v. 4 by his sarcastic denunciation of the people's love of religious observance at their beloved shrines.[16] The prophet lists a series of calamities (vv. 6–11), the content of which bears resemblance to the covenant curses enumerated in Lev 26 and Deut 28.[17] Each successive calamity is,

14. The accusation is addressed to the "house of Israel, man of Judah" in the singular form, and a good case has been made by Chaney that these, together with the similar addresses in v. 3, denote the ruling elite and dynastic powers of both kingdoms (Chaney 1999).

15. This is not a sarcastic condemnation as Hubbard suggests (1989, 155), since the cattle of Bashan were well regarded and the allusion denotes opulence and beauty. Rather, suggests Hammershaimb, these women are guilty of putting unreasonable demands upon their husbands to "keep them in the lifestyle to which they were accustomed," resulting in inadequate resources being directed towards the poor (1970, 65).

16. Whether on account of the hypocrisy of their worship, or as a diatribe against the sacred places of the Northern Kingdom by the prophet from Tekoa is open to question.

17. See also Solomon's temple dedication prayer in 1 Kgs 8 (2 Chr 6).

suggests the prophet, an opportunity to repent; on each occasion, Israel has failed to heed the warning: "And yet you did not return to me." Some of these disasters concern the dependence of Israel upon agricultural productivity as crops have been afflicted by drought, blight and pests (vv. 6–9), while others directly affect the human population—death by plague and injury (v. 10), and a final mighty upheaval, which is likened to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (v. 11). The consequences of Israel's rejection of God are felt in the cycle of harvest and fertility, but also expressed in terms of cataclysmic devastation.

In Amos 5 the message is repeated. Devastation in the natural world—both the failure of the harvest and wider cosmic disruption—are the result of the people's shortcomings (5:4–15). Here too their transgressions are concerned both with a human approach to God, "Seek me and live, but do not seek Bethel" (5:4–5), and with the overturning of YHWH's standards of justice and righteousness (5:7). The specific nature of the wrongs against the poor and needy are elaborated further in 5:10 and 12, and the call to re-establish justice in v. 15 rounds off the section. Both the sequence of cause and effect, "You have planted vineyards but shall not live in them" (v. 11), and the direct action of God upon the earth in the cosmic hymn of 5:8–9, represent the overturning of security and wellbeing for those who presumed upon YHWH's provision. The same themes of hypocritical religious observance and unjust and oppressive behaviour on the part of the people followed by devastating consequences for the land also play out in Amos 8:4–12. Like Micah and Isaiah, Amos draws a close link not only between worship of God and social structures, but also between the way society operates and the fruitfulness of the land.

Social Injustice in Sodom and Gomorrah

On a number of occasions, including Isa 1 and Amos 4, the biblical prophets draw an analogy with the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Gen 19. These are not incidental or casual references; rather, they are self-conscious attempts to strengthen the prophetic message that violation of the practice of justice and righteousness is regarded as the most serious of offences against YHWH, punishable by utter destruction.

The first reference to the word pair "justice and righteousness" in the canonical Hebrew Bible is in the patriarchal traditions of Genesis where Abraham and his descendants are charged with "doing righteousness and justice" (Gen 18:19). The immediate context is the judgment against Sodom and Gomorrah and the following verse speaks of the outcry against these two cities and the gravity of their sin—yet without going

into more detail. The nature of their transgressions is generally assumed to be explained by the incident which follows in Gen 19—as either a breach of hospitality or a case of attempted homosexual rape, or both. But an alternate possibility is suggested if Gen 18 is read alongside Ezek 16, where, in the hyperbolic and potentially difficult description of Judah's sin, that nation is likened unfavourably to Sodom.[18] The specific charges against Sodom are not, as the context might suggest, sexual, but that "she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy" (Ezek 16:49).[19] This could suggest the presence of a different Sodom and Gomorrah tradition from that in the patriarchal narratives (Williamson 2006, 87–88), but alternatively may indicate that too narrow a focus has been placed by exegetes on the misdemeanours for which Sodom is condemned in Genesis. These are not exclusively or even primarily of a sexual nature, but encompass behaviour characterized by arrogance, excessive luxury and oppression of the marginalized—in other words, a failure of justice and righteousness.

Further support for this possibility is found in the ensuing verses of Gen 18, which speaks of the "outcry" (צעקה) which has reached YHWH's ears (vv. 20–21), the same word as is used of Israel's cry against her oppression by the Egyptians in Exod 3 and, as already noted, in Isa 5:7.[20] In Gen 18 Abraham is held up as a model of justice and righteousness, while Sodom is condemned for the opposite—oppressive and violent behaviour towards those powerless to withstand, and not primarily for unlawful sexual practices (Loader 1990, 37). In the story which follows, this manifests itself as uncontrolled and lawless mob violence.

The Nature of Justice

What is the significance of this for the concept of justice found in the Hebrew prophets? First, as already noted, the clear connection between the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and the crimes of injustice and

18. It is evident that by this stage in Israelite traditions the story of Sodom and Gomorrah is metonymic for evil.

19. Although Ezekiel's reference to "abominable things" in the following verse (v. 50) may possibly include sexual practices regarded as sinful, the more usual sense of תועבה in the prophets denotes idolatry or empty religion. Elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible it concerns issues concerning ritual purity (Leviticus, Deuteronomy), pagan practices such as child sacrifice (Deuteronomy), or lack of moral uprightness (Proverbs).

20. Ps 9:7–12 and Job 19:7 also juxtapose "outcry" and "justice." See the discussion in Miranda 1997, 95.

oppression condemned by these judgment oracles serves to heighten the seriousness of the offences and to justify the gravest of consequences. Secondly, the physicality of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is reflected in the prophetic texts which allude to it. The devastation of the land portrayed in these texts is undoubtedly catastrophic for the entire human population, not just the wealthy elite; from an ecological perspective, it could also be said to affect adversely wider habitats and biotic communities. This has important ethical implications concerning the nature of justice, both for the marginalized people who are ostensibly the recipients of the justice and righteousness advocated by the prophets, and for the whole of the natural world. In both social and ecological spheres this raises concerns that it is divine wrath rather than justice that triumphs—in human society and in the natural world. In the following section I shall address this issue with respect to each of these areas in turn—social and ecological.

Social Aspect: Justice for Whom?

Although the prophetic denunciation described in texts such as Amos 4 and Isa 5 are ostensibly directed at political leaders or the wealthy elite, the effects of the divine judgment surely impact on the whole population. Famine, drought and disease affect all levels of society, with the poorest arguably suffering the most. In the turbulent aftermath of natural disaster or war, it is the weak and vulnerable who are likely to get pushed to one side. The prophetic indictments of the rich and powerful for their exploitation of the vulnerable in society and the call for the restoration of justice and righteousness seem at variance with the comprehensive disasters which the texts depict.[21] Is this really justice for the poor? Can this apparent moral inconsistency be explained?

Some scholars have attempted to account for the anomaly in terms of theodicy: the need to justify God’s actions in the world. According to Barton, this concern may represent the central concern of the classical prophets (1990, 52; see also Koch 1983). Barton suggests that the prophets employ rhetorical techniques to intimate that the predicted judgment is only what could have been expected in the light of the whole nation’s sins against God (1990, 61). In Amos 4, the inferred abuse of the cult is imprecise enough to implicate not just the rich, but all levels of

21. A similar problem is evident in Isa 1:12–17 and 5:7–10. In both cases an indictment of the rich or powerful for exploitation of the poor is followed by warning of disaster which will impact all levels of society: destruction by sword in 1:20, and exile and abasement in 5:13, 25.

society in transgression against YHWH. As Kapelrud notes, this chapter counters any misplaced ideas that the Israelites' relationship with their God is unshaken and unshakeable so long as they adhere to their sacrificial observance (1956, 47). The poor are not exempt from being called to account on such matters.

An alternative possibility is predicated upon the nature of the social exploitation condemned by the texts. Gossai suggests that it is the dispossession of the poor from their lands that these prophets denounce (in particular Amos 5, see also Isa 5:8; Mic 2:2).[22] Gossai says with regard to Amos:

> Now, the "fruitful earth" is no longer providing for the poor, the "people of the land," but is taken over by the powerful… The land, as a gift from Yahweh and as an element which is the right of every Israelite, now becomes the exclusive property of the rich. (1993, 249)

The failure of crops and devastation of the land in Amos 5 are thus forms of judgment intended specifically to reduce the rich and powerful to the level of the poor whom they have dispossessed by removing their means of economic support.[23] This is also explicit in Mic 6:11–15, which, as we have seen, cites failure of crops and the attendant hunger and poverty as YHWH's punishment for what Allen calls "commercial trickery" (1976, 378). The prophets employ the rhetorical tool of hyperbole to make their point, contrasting wealth and poverty, gain and loss, in indictments addressed to those who have illegitimately acquired land and who will be deprived of it.

Closely linked to the preceding point is the understanding of the land as a sacred gift from God. The biblical authors articulate a reciprocity in the relationship between YHWH, human beings and the earth, which for them predates even the entry into Canaan in Israelite traditions. In the primeval traditions of the Yahwist, this is couched in terms of the cursing of the land as a result of Adam's transgression against God (Gen 3:17), and then of Cain being cursed from the ground on account of his violence against his brother (Gen 4:11). The Deuteronomist picks up this language in the blessings and cursings pronounced by Moses in connection with the possession of the land of Canaan (Deut 28). The sense of conditionality in these texts and others is encapsulated in the message of

22. The story of Naboth's vineyard in 1 Kgs 21 also reflects this tradition—where enforced annexation of land has serious consequences for King Ahab.

23. Whether this also includes returning the land to its original owners is not explicit in these texts. Interestingly, a reversal of this kind does apparently take place when Judah's elite are exiled (2 Kgs 25:12).

the prophets who call the people to recognize the obligations on them which result from God's goodness and gift. Israel has failed in these responsibilities; therefore, in the words of the prophet Hosea, "the land will mourn."[24]

Justice for the Land?

The hermeneutic of suspicion advocated by the Earth Bible Project would at this point ask questions about the fate of the earth itself, and this is the second charge that might be levelled at the text. Not only does disruption of crops or devastation of the land demonstrate injustice rather than justice for the poor, the outpouring of God's judgment causes havoc to the natural world and raises the question whether the earth itself is being treated unjustly (Habel 2000, 34). Such questioning reflects the Project's ecojustice principles, which speak of the earth as "subject" and as "resisting injustice." The personification of the earth in these statements is rather problematic since it introduces ideas of the subjectivity and agency of the earth that are, in Heather Eaton's words, "an intellectual minefield" (2000, 66). Having said this, the principles highlight a more fundamental critique that can be addressed to the biblical texts: that they are intrinsically anthropocentric, that is, concerned exclusively with the human story. Hence the non-human natural world has only instrumental value and is used or abused merely to further the human narrative. If this is so, it calls into question the capacity of the biblical text to have anything to contribute to contemporary environmental ethics.

There are good reasons for supposing that this is not entirely the case—at least in the prophetic texts of the Hebrew Bible. The prophets' perspectives on the natural world do not always centre on its potential usefulness to human beings. The created order reveals God's name (Amos 4:13; 5:8–9; 9:5–6), and mourns as a response to human sin and God's judgment of the world (Hos 4:3; Amos 1:2; Jer 12:10–11). Perhaps the clearest presentation of this alternative perspective is found in Isa 34. In what follows we shall examine in some detail the effect of divine judgment in this text from an ecological perspective—exploring the interaction between human and non-human communities, and between urban and rural ecologies.[25] The motif of Sodom and Gomorrah connects

24. The concept of the land or earth mourning features in a number of prophetic texts. See Hayes 2002; Marlow 2008 and 2009, 133–36, 190–94.

25. Isa 34:9–17 has numerous features in common with Isa 13, and also finds echoes in Jer 50:38–40, which, like Isa 13, prophesies the downfall of Babylon. Reference will be made to these other two texts where appropriate.

this judgment oracle with some of the prophetic material already explored in this study. However, here YHWH's indictment is not directed at exploitative practices within Israelite society but is judgment on foreign nations for the oppression Israel receives at the hands of her enemies.[26]

Ecology in Isaiah 34

Isaiah 34:9–17 presents a scenario which is not unfamiliar in contemporary ecology. Although there is little in the text itself to suggest a clear chronological progression, the description in these verses encompasses a series of stages which reflect ecologists' observation of environmental disturbance and habitat degradation.[27]

The judgment begins by describing the physical deterioration of the landscape. The streams and soil are described as being turned into "pitch" (זפת) and "brimstone" (גפרית) in vv. 9–10.[28] Unlike the similar texts in Isa 13 and Jer 50 that feature the destruction of people or cities, here it is devastation in the natural environment, including degradation of the soil (v. 9), that is being described. However, fresh water and fertile soil are, of course, prerequisite for agriculture and the survival of human populations.

The burning of the land and degradation of the soil result in desertification and depopulation of rural areas (v. 10). The desolate nature of

26. The chapter describes the effect of YHWH's judgment on both an international scale (vv. 1–3) and a cosmic one (v. 4), and against an individual nation or nations (vv. 5–17), with the identity of the addressees in vv. 8–17 being much debated by commentators. See the discussion in Wildberger 2002, 322–39; also Jeppesen 1985; Kissane 1960, 369; Young 1969, 433. Lust (1989, 281) suggests that the bulk of the oracle is directed at Judah. However, it is unnecessary and perhaps unhelpful to stipulate a specific nation, since the recurrence of the themes and vocabulary of vv. 8–17 in a range of other prophetic texts, addressed to both the people of God and a variety of foreign nations, suggest a common pool of ideas and language of judgment upon which prophetic authors were able to draw. In addition to Isaiah texts, see Jer 10:22; 49:33; 50:39; 51:37; Mic 3:12; Zeph 2:14, 15. Although the vocabulary is different, Isa 1:7; 5:8–9, and 6:11–12 also speak of the threat of desolation of the land and depopulation of cities as part of YHWH's judgment against Judah. See the discussion concerning re-use of these themes in Second Isaiah in Williamson 1994, 51–53 and Clements 1985, 95–113.

27. Not all of which is necessarily ecologically damaging (White 2006).

28. This is undoubtedly an allusion to the Sodom and Gomorrah tradition, which is clarified by the specific references to these cities in both Isa 13:19 and Jer 50:40, albeit without use of the exact terms "pitch" and "brimstone."

the landscape, devoid of pasture, agriculture, domestic animals and people, is emphasized in v. 11b by the use of תהו ("formlessness") and the rare בהו ("emptiness"). These two words are also found together in Gen 1:2 where they describe the pre-creation state, which may at first suggest that in Isa 34 it is the unmaking of the created order that is being described.[29] However, here the devastation is not that of the whole created order, but only a subsection—namely, human civilization and society. Alongside, and implicitly a consequence of, the degradation of the soil and destruction of the physical landscape is the destabilization of society and depopulation of human settlements (vv. 11b–13).[30] The abandoning of city and countryside by their human inhabitants provides scope for the development of an alternative ecology as wild animals and birds take up residence (vv. 11a and 13b–15).[31]

It is clear from v. 10a that this change in landscape is a long-term, permanent one: the fire will burn "night and day" and smoulder "forever" (לעולם). The second half of the verse parallels the first:

> From generation to generation (מדור לדור) it will be dried up,
> There will be no-one passing through it forever (לנצח).

Yet this is only a serious and catastrophic outcome when viewed from the perspective of the human population.[32] A few verses later, such seemingly negative phraseology takes on a more positive slant, at least for the wildlife who have begun to inhabit the ruined buildings:

> They will take possession of it forever (עד־עולם),
> From generation to generation (לדור ודור) they will settle down in it.

The power of the description lies in the contrast between human and animal populations, set at variance with one another. Here, as elsewhere in First Isaiah, the boundary between human beings and animals, always a place of tension, has been breached; wild animals are invading human space and wild plants—"thorns, thistles and brambles"—are overgrowing

29. Apart from Gen 1, the only other occurrence of בהו is in Jer 4:23, where it is used in conjunction with תהו to describe a similar desolation and "unmaking." תהו on its own is found frequently in a variety of contexts.

30. See Jer 50:40; Isa 13:20b, and also Isa 24:10.

31. Five of the species named in these verses are also found in Isa 13:21–22 (שׂעיר, תנים, ציים, איים and בנות יענה) and three in Jer 50:39 (איים, איים and בנות יענה). The exact meaning of some of these Hebrew terms remains a matter for debate.

32. The same parallel terminology is also used in Isa 13:20 and Jer 50:29 (לנצח and עד־דור לדור in both verses). Joel 4:20 makes use of לדור ודור with לעולם to describe the restoration and repopulation of Judah and Jerusalem.

their walls and buildings. From the perspective of the human population, such disruption of the order upon which their society is predicated is catastrophic.

But this is not something arbitrary or unexpected. Verses 16b–17a suggest that this is YHWH's deliberate provision for these animals:

> Seek and read from the book of the Lord…
> for the mouth of the Lord has commanded,
> his spirit has gathered them.

From a wider ecological perspective, the desolation and depopulation of the urban landscape has allowed another part of the created order to flourish. YHWH's outpouring of vengeance against humanity shifts the ecological balance in favour of the non-human natural world. The explicit sense of divine purpose and plan cautions against the anthropocentric assumption that human wellbeing is the only thing that matters. The power of the natural world, whereby settled land reverts to wilderness and is colonized by wild animals, is a reminder, then as now, that human settlement and cultivation is not the default mode of the natural environment.

Restoration of Justice

No discussion of justice and righteousness in the prophets would be complete without consideration of some of the oracles of restoration in which this concept features. Of particular note are a number of prophetic texts, particularly in First Isaiah, in which the prophetic vision of justice and righteousness encompasses restoration of the natural world as well as human society, and which provide an interesting and positive counterbalance to the oracles of judgment. In Isa 29:17–21 the restoration of the non-human creation is depicted as a return to fruitfulness—of both field and forest (v. 17)—and this is coupled with the end of injustice in society (vv. 20–21). In vv. 18–19 the "sickness" noted in Mic 6 and Isa 1 is reversed, as physical healing figures alongside the coming of joy. Similarly, in Isa 30 YHWH's coming as the God of justice (30:18) ensures the restoration of the natural pattern of rainfall, which in turn results in abundance of crops in the fields, and restoration of his people (vv. 23–26). Isaiah 32 depicts the outpouring of a "spirit from on high" (רוח ממרום, v. 15) that leads to the flourishing and fruitfulness of the wilderness (v. 16) as well as justice, righteousness and peace for the human population (vv. 17–18).

Such themes are portrayed more dramatically in Isa 35, which features healing of the blind, deaf and lame (vv. 5–6), as well as restoration and

flourishing in the natural world, with a focus on the wilderness rather than on the farmed land (vv. 1–2). Although there is no specific reference to justice, and righteousness is merely implicit in the description of healing, in ancient society, as today, those with physical disability are very likely to experience abuse and injustice. The text presents an exuberant and dramatic picture of the restoration of barren and potentially hostile environments, as well as the remaking of human society, and of human relationship with God. In this passage, as in the other restoration texts, the renewal of society and of the natural world, of human and non-human creation, are inextricably linked.

Nowhere is this expressed more clearly than in the final text to be considered—the promise of the ideal monarch in Isa 11:1–10, which complements Ps 72, with which this study began.[33] Here is an idyllic picture in two parts of a Davidic ruler ushering in a reign of justice and righteousness for the poor and judgment for the wicked (vv. 1–5), and establishing peace and harmony between predatory and poisonous animals and their prey (vv. 6–8).[34] The ideal king is characterized, among other qualities, by his own "knowledge of YHWH" (v. 2), and such a knowledge of God will spread far and wide as a result of the king's rule (v. 9). Under his reign of justice and righteousness, not only will the wrongs in society be righted, but harmony will be restored between wild and domestic animals, and between animals and human beings.[35] Just as the consequences of YHWH's judgment often include disruption of the natural world, affecting the fertility of the soil and the boundaries between human and animal populations, so here the restoration of divine order under the banner of justice and righteousness represents a reversal of this process.

33. These verses demonstrate a chiastic structure around the *inclusio* formed by שׁרשׁ ישׁי ("root of Jesse") in v. 1 and v. 10. Verse 10 itself acts as a bridge between the idyllic description of harmony in vv. 2–9 and the historically specific oracle of vv. 11–18. The chiasm is developed around the theme of the knowledge of YHWH in vv. 2 and 9b. The middle section comprises a twofold description of the ideal age and its impact in society and in the natural world (vv. 3–9a).

34. Whether this is to be taken literally or metaphorically is discussed by a number of commentators, including Clements 1999; Houston 2006, 154–55; Marlow 2009, 238–42.

35. A restoration which is unique to Isa 11 and its reuse in Isa 65:25, apart from the elusive and much-debated reference in Job to "the wild animals at peace with you" (Job 5:23). For the relationship between Isa 11 and Isa 65, see Van Ruiten 1992.

Conclusion

These prophetic texts exhibit a tremendous interplay of vocabulary, themes and metaphors, which suggests that they draw on a shared understanding of the relationship between social and natural spheres. Just as in many of the judgment oracles the fate of the earth is inextricably linked with the punishment of human transgressions, so too the coming of justice and righteousness clearly encompasses more than human and social wellbeing.

The prophets' account of the relationship between justice in society and fruitfulness and stability in the natural world points to their fundamental belief in a divinely instituted order. This order does not absolve people of their responsibilities. Rather, human beings, particularly those in positions of power or influence, are held accountable for both social and environmental breakdown. The wellbeing of the poor, but also of the earth itself, would appear to lie in their hands.

Despite the 2,500 years that separate these prophetic texts from our current situation of global environmental crisis, their words demonstrate an understanding of the world that has considerable relevance today. Their message reminds us:

- of the capacity of human beings to affect the well-being of their own environment and that of others, whether urban or natural;
- of the reality of cause and effect, whereby actions by one group of people produce consequences that affect others, often detrimentally;
- more specifically, that the actions and lifestyles of the rich and powerful have serious negative effects on the poor and marginalized, while overconsumption and greed threaten the long-term well-being and fruitfulness of the earth;
- that it is presumptuous to suppose that the world should revolve around the needs of human beings;
- that, for those who claim allegiance to God, true worship is more than observance of rituals. It is characterized by just and righteous attitudes and behaviour—especially towards those who suffer poverty and deprivation.

The prophets' perspective differs from the current one in this significant way: it demonstrates a different understanding of the sequence of cause and effect. In the prophetic texts, it is neglect of justice and righteousness for the poor which results in the desolation of the land. By contrast, in today's situation neglect of the well-being of the earth (by overuse, exploitation and climate change) has a serious and negative effect on

justice for the world's poor. But perhaps these are just two ways of saying the same thing: that the world is an interconnected whole and we ignore this at our peril. The prophets' call for social justice, although it arises from different experiences, ecologies and expectations, nevertheless calls us to account more seriously for the impact our own actions have not just on other human beings, but on the whole of the natural world as well.

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The Dark Side of God in the Old Testament

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The problem that God in the Old Testament has a dark side, a tendency to do and even to be things that are difficult for Christians or Jews or indeed anyone to accept as compatible with divinity, is well known. For many people today, indeed, the Old Testament is seen as preaching a God who is pretty well entirely dark, and they cannot understand why Jews and Christians continue to be attached to this (as they see it) barbaric document. God's dark side has however been the subject of a full-length, two-volume study by an Old Testament specialist Walter Dietrich, and a systematic theologian, Christian Link, called *Die dunklen Seiten Gottes* (Dietrich and Link 1997, 2000). Volume 1 was published in 1995 (with a second edition in 1997) and volume 2 in 2000, but it does not seem to have received much notice in the English-speaking world. It is an important study, both exegetically and theologically, however; and in this essay I shall introduce it at some length (I), before going on to make some observations of my own (II).

I

The first volume of *Die dunklen Seiten Gottes* is called *Willkür und Gewalt*, "arbitrariness and power" (or "force" or "violence"—*Gewalt* can mean all of those things). Dietrich and Link (1997) set up the problem that God in the Old Testament (indeed perhaps in the New Testament as well) acts just as he pleases, implying that events are determined by his arbitrary will, so that human life does not manifest justice or fairness in the unfolding of events, at either the individual or the corporate level. The motto for this discussion is Mal 1:2–3, "Jacob I love, but Esau I hate." The problem arises at the very beginning of Genesis with God's unmotivated preference for Abel over Cain. There is no arguing with God's decisions, but from our perspective they often appear unjust. Luther is quoted:

> Why did God allow Adam to fall? Why does he infect us all with the same guilt? He is God, and for his will there is no valid cause or reason that could be prescribed as his rule or measure, for nothing is equal to or above him, but his will is the rule for everything.[1]

Or again, more sharply:

> See, God directs the outward events of this world in such a way that if one consults the judgment of human reason and follows it, one is obliged to say, either there is no God, or God is unjust.[2]

It is not surprising that there are characters in the Old Testament who feel free to blame God for how he acts, as Moses blames him in Exod 5, tellingly in much the same language as the overseers blame Pharaoh for acting unjustly towards the Hebrew slaves: "Why do you act in an evil way with your servants?"

This is the problem of *Willkür*, arbitrariness. But as Paul makes clear in Romans, arbitrariness has a positive as well as a negative side: it is seen in God's free choice of the undeserving as the beneficiaries of divine salvation, not only in the apparently wanton disposition of human life in unjust ways. So Dietrich and Link begin their discussion not with a philosophical analysis of the problems of theodicy, but with a detailed treatment of the idea of election in the Old Testament—probably not an idea that would occur first to most scholars interested in theodicy in the English-speaking world, where exegetes and systematic theologians talk to each other less than in Germany and Switzerland (*Die dunklen Seiten Gottes* was written in Bochum and Berne). The biblical starting-point for any consideration of divine arbitrariness, Dietrich and Link (1997) propose, is the recurrent theme of the choice of the more unlikely candidate: the trickster Jacob instead of the righteous Esau, the insignificant shepherd-boy David, above all Israel rather than the mighty nations that surrounded it, a theme which is not merely latent in the Old Testament but to which the text calls overt attention, in Deuteronomy for example: "It was not because you were more numerous than any other nation that

1. "Warum hat Gott den Adam fallen lassen? Warum schafft er uns alle mit derselben Sünde befleckt?… Er ist Gott, für dessen Willen weder Ursache noch Grund Geltung haben, die ihm als Regel oder Maß vorgeschrieben werden könnten, da ihm nichts gleich oder über ihm ist, sondern eben sein Wille ist die Regel für alles"; *Weimarer Ausgabe* 18:712 (cited in Dietrich and Link 1997, 19). All translations from the German are my own.

2. "Siehe, so leitet Gott diese Welt in äußerlichen Dingen, daß, wenn man das Urteil der menschlichen Vernunft ansieht und ihm flogt, man gezwungen ist zu sagen: Entweder es gibt keinen Gott, oder Gott is ungerecht"; *Weimarer Ausgabe* 18:784 (cited in Dietrich and Link 1997, 20).

the LORD cared for you and chose you, for you were the smallest of all nations; it was because the LORD loved you" (Deut 7:7–8).

Following F.-W. Marquardt (1996), Dietrich and Link (1997) argue that divine election has three characteristics in the Bible. It is focused on Israel, and the choice of Israel, as Paul says, is irrevocable—the extension of the covenant to include Gentile Christians fulfils the role of Israel as a light to the nations and is in no way to be seen as replacing the election of the Jews in a supersessionist way. It is also focused on the poor, as liberation theologians have shown: Israel is a kind of symbol of the poor and needy to whom God relates preferentially. And it is concerned with humanity as a whole, in the sense that in the end everyone is actually special, a paradox that the Bible is quite at ease with. If this is arbitrary, it is very positively so from a human perspective.

On the other hand, some of what appears arbitrary in the Old Testament is not really so. Take for example, the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, or Isaiah's commission to make the hearts of the people of Judah heavy and unresponsive: in such cases it is not a matter of God's punishing at random, but of shutting up in their sin people who are *already* sinners, it is *die Verstockung des Böswilligen*. The rejection of those who have been elected, as in Amos, follows the same logic; the original election is not being negated, but shown to have a shadow-side if those who have been chosen prove unworthy.

Finally, in the section on *Willkür*, Dietrich and Link (1997) consider how adequate is Luther's concept of God as the *deus absconditus* as an account of the theological teaching of the Bible, and especially of the Old Testament. They conclude that much of what Luther and Calvin packed into their understanding of divine election—with a fate decreed for each person before the beginning of history—is a travesty of the Bible. The Old Testament speaks of God as one who has a history *with* his people, not one who decides on it as a being outside time. God's love, anger, *and punishment alike* are part of the way he puts himself at risk by his engagement with the people he chooses. There is no predestination to damnation in the Old Testament, and even in the New Testament Judas, for example, is never said to be outside the saving purposes of God however much he is destined to death for his sin. Dietrich and Link (1997) argue that what is said about God's election, far from being a theory about human predestination as it is in the great Reformers, is a deduction from experience—the experience of knowing God as a companion on the way, who like human companions may react to one with a range of emotions, but who never simply abandons the people to whom he is committed, and certainly never damns them in advance. Thus the concept of election in the Old Testament shows that some of what Christian

theologians have perceived as a very dark side in God is being read into, rather than out of, the Old Testament record. This may strike many people as quite a surprising conclusion, given the negative image that the Old Testament so often has in today's society. Much of the negativity, if Dietrich and Link (1997) are correct, is a matter of how the text has been received, especially by those influenced by late medieval notions, rather than being true to the text itself.

The second, and longer part of volume 1 is devoted to the power of God in action, and especially, again, to its darker and more apparently negative side. As Dietrich and Link (1997) point out, *Gewalt* in German is ambiguous as between the more neutral meaning "power" and the more challenging "violence," and it is the more violent side of the God of Israel that is the problematic element here. They have in mind such things as "holy war" and the annihilation of the Canaanites, which (whether or not it actually happened) is certainly commanded in texts such as Deuteronomy. It may be, as von Rad (1951) argued, that this is essentially part of the emphasis on the exclusivity of Yahweh, but that hardly makes it any better if one happens to be a Canaanite. Again, the reception of this teaching has been worse than any Old Testament examples of its implementation—Dietrich and Link (1997) are thinking of the conquistadors—but no-one can deny that it is really present in the Old Testament, and the average person regards this as a good reason to abandon the Old Testament altogether.

Once again, the approach, while not exactly apologetic, is certainly concerned to point out the more positive aspects of the darker side of the violent God. It is stressed that God's jealousy, for example, which leads him to insist that Israel be utterly loyal and "have no other gods before me," is correlated with his jealousy for Israel, his chosen people, and indeed for humanity in general. If he is subject to the kind of emotional states that a more philosophical theology would deny him, such as jealous anger, then that has its other side in his love and care for people, which is not a detached, "philosopher-king" attitude, but a deep personal involvement. Dietrich and Link (1997) deal in a rather similar way with the idea of Yahweh as a God of vengeance, arguing that the cry for revenge in the Old Testament, which God is expected to hear, is not a vindictive desire for others' harm but a plea for justice uttered by those who are being oppressed. Even the conclusion of Ps 137 (vv. 7–9) can be understood in these terms, as the cry of people whose own babies have been mercilessly slaughtered. Revenge in the Old Testament is not a dish eaten cold, but God's own hot-tempered reaction to injustices that cry out for immediate recompense. In these ways Dietrich and Link (1997) seek to show that what strikes us, from a more philosophically reflective

tradition, as the "dark side" of God, is in fact the correlate of the fact that he is conceived as a being with emotions like our own, who lives with and suffers with his people and reacts to their suffering as a human being would do. We cannot have it both ways: if we want to believe in a God who is emotionally engaged, then we have to accept that this will mean a God who knows anger and vengeance as well as forgiveness and love. And, as they rightly point out, the Old Testament and the New both recognize both sides of God's character. Unlike the divine powers of Greece, God is not an impersonal force policing cosmic order, but an interventionist God who has a highly personal concern with what happens to people.

Similar considerations are brought into play in dealing with the warlike character of the God of Israel, and particularly his activities in "holy war." The argument runs: holy war, which was mostly a theoretical idea seldom put into practice, was modelled on the victory over the Egyptians at the Red Sea, and hence presupposes that the Israelites are underdogs striving against oppressors. In such circumstances war is justified—Dietrich and Link are no pacifists—and that is how the Old Testament writers understood the issue. Certainly to say with Ps 136 that God smote Egypt because "his mercy endures for ever" would not have commended itself to Egyptians, as Leszek Kolakowski sarcastically remarked (Kolakowski 1965, 36).[3] But—and here Dietrich and Link (1997) are not afraid to mention "The War"—who could have blamed one of the Allies if they had proclaimed in 1945 that German cities lay in ruins because God's mercy endures for ever, when the end of the Third Reich was the precondition for the peace Western Europe has enjoyed ever since? That God should be on the side of the victors in any war certainly indicates that he has a dark side: but is it not the flip side of his concern for justice, and his election of Israel to be a light to the nations? In the last resort, if there is blame in the winning of a just war, then God takes the blame on himself as he suffers with those who suffer. This answer to the question of the dark side of God is now becoming familiar. It clearly owes a good deal to Jürgen Moltmann (e.g. Moltmann 1974), and I will come back to it.

In volume 2 Dietrich and Link (2000) deal with the issue of *Allmacht und Ohnmacht*, omnipotence and powerlessness in God. For modern thinking, including modern philosophical thinking, it is a given that if there is a God, then God is all-powerful, omnipotent. Hence the dilemmas that the discussion of theodicy regularly deals with: how can an all

3. Kolakowski 1965 (cited in Dietrich and Link 1997, 217).

powerful God also be an all-good God, given the suffering and disasters in the world that God is supposed to have made and to govern? For the Old Testament, however, the idea of omnipotence is not strictly speaking a central concept. There is no Hebrew equivalent: El Shaddai is regularly rendered *theos pantokrator* in the LXX, but the reason lies in Hellenistic philosophy rather than in the Old Testament itself, despite later rabbinic speculation that *shaddai* means *she-dai*, the one "who is sufficient." God is all-powerful in the sense that, as Job puts it, he can do all things (Job 42:2), or as we read in Ps 135:6, "Whatever Yahweh pleases, that he does." But this is not conceived philosophically as meaning that God is capable of everything that is not a self-contradiction, but rather that there are no external constraints on his action: God is, as Dietrich and Link (2000) put it, powerful *enough*. Above all, in polemical literature such as Deutero-Isaiah and some of the kingship Psalms Yahweh is more powerful than other gods, which is quite a different notion of powerfulness than in a philosophical analysis of divine omnipotence.

The emphasis in Old Testament accounts of the power of Yahweh, as Dietrich and Link (2000) argue, lies mostly on the idea that God can do as he likes—his powerfulness is in a sense the correlate of his *Willkür*, self-determination, the ability not to be dictated to by any other power. This is especially striking when it is affirmed during periods in which Israel was actually powerless itself, which means for most of its history. God is not a projection of the power of the nation, but is affirmed as powerful even when the nation offers no proof of this. There is thus something counter-intuitive in Old Testament's assertions of Yahweh's power.

In the Old Testament monotheism is both the problem with the power of Yahweh—since there are no convenient other gods to whom one could appeal as having thwarted his plans and so as explaining evil in the world—yet, Dietrich and Link (2000) argue, also the reason why God inevitably has a dark side. Because everything that happens must in the end be attributed to his causation, he appears as a more arbitrary figure than if he were a good god surrounded by the opposing force of evil ones. God both kills and brings to life, as we read in the Song of Hannah (1 Sam 2:6), since there is no "god of death" to whom killing can be ascribed; one may think of the classic text for the dark side of God, Isa 45:6–7, where Yahweh creates both light and darkness and works both good and ill. This element is also present in the passages where God is simultaneously the helper and the opponent of Israel—pre-eminently in the story of Jacob wrestling at the Jabbok, but also in the choice followed by the rejection of Saul, where God seems even somewhat perplexed by the turn events have taken, and in 1 Kgs 22, where it is Yahweh himself

who incites Ahab, through the lying spirit, to go up and fall at Ramoth-Gilead, an action which is presented as sinful. It is the monotheistic portrayal of Yahweh that produces these paradoxes: it would be much easier if the downside of them could be attributed to an evil god. But even in these chapters, which strike the average reader as in some ways quite primitive, we nonetheless see the drive towards monotheism that is such an important part of the Hebrew Bible. Similarly, in Job the sufferings of which Job himself complains in the dialogue do not come from a hostile force, but from God himself, and even in the prose framework the Satan can afflict him only because God authorizes it. In the divine speeches God stresses that even hostile forces such as Behemoth and Leviathan were created by him in the first place: they are not anti-God beings like the animal deities whom Marduk conquers in *Enuma elish*. God as creator is a central theme in the Old Testament and it rules out any proto-Marcionite theory of two gods, an evil creator and a good redeemer.

This emphasis on the indivisibility of God means that it is impossible to defend him against the charge of being responsible for evil in the world. A theodicy becomes very difficult to construct, and one is led to desperate measures such as Luther's (probably effectively Marcionite) distinction between God's right and left hand, between his *opus proprium* and his *opus alienum*. With Luther, however, one is almost bound to say that we simply cannot hope to understand the ways of God, who is inscrutable to us. That is what the voice from the whirlwind tells us: you simply cannot grasp the ways of God. However, the Old Testament is not fully content with that solution either, since in most examples of human suffering it proposes that God in the end proves gracious: in the final form of the stories in question both Abraham (Gen 22) and Job pass the test God has posed for them, and are rewarded. It is really only in Qoheleth that inscrutability is the final word; and even there it is said that at least for some people God makes available the possibility of a happy life before death supervenes and ends it all, and that such people should enjoy what they can while they can. The overall impression the Old Testament makes is that God does not generally use his power to torment the human race, though when he does, he cannot be made accountable for it. The wisdom literature is generally optimistic and thinks in terms of God's power as a beneficent force in the world. Overall God does not exercise the kind of power that a theory of divine omnipotence ascribes to him, but works to promote human good without being able to prevent the path to that good from passing through suffering and disaster.

Thus *omnipotence* turns out not to be an adequate term to describe the God of the Old Testament, who is not conceived philosophically but in much more human terms as a being whose power is seen in unpredictable

ways, sometimes in ways that seem incompatible with being *all*-powerful. Indeed, the Bible, write Dietrich and Link, often "speaks of a God whom human beings experience as limited, inactive, and powerless"[4] (Dietrich and Link 2000, 135). They accordingly go on in the second part of this second volume to examine the idea of divine powerlessness, and are able to show that this too is part of the Old Testament picture of the living God. God is often perceived as absent: Elijah mocks the prophets of Baal by telling them that if Baal is a god he might be too busy to notice them, so they should shout louder, but the same reproach can easily be applied to Yahweh too (cf. Ps 22, where the sufferer is mocked for trusting in God, who is apparently paying him no attention, and he has to draw this problem to God's notice). Zephaniah reports people as saying that the Lord does nothing either good or bad (Zeph 1:12): even evil actions would prove that he at least exists, but he seems altogether absent, just as Job complains that he is unavailable: "If I go to the east, he is not there; if west, I cannot find him; when I turn north, I do not descry him; I face south, but he is not to be seen" (Job 23:8–9 REB). If there is a problem for Job in the overwhelming presence of God, who will not leave him alone, there is an equal and opposite problem in God's persistent absence, which suggests a lack of power to engage with human beings.

On the whole, say Dietrich and Link (2000), the Old Testament thinks that the power of God has to be positively provoked if he is to act for those who need him. Hence the preponderance of laments in the Psalter, which are quite content to complain that God has abandoned the sufferer, and which call on him to intervene, to affirm a power which he seems to have mislaid. And of course in many places in the Old Testament Yahweh's power is assumed to be limited to the land of Israel, though this is set aside in later, more clearly monotheistic texts such as Ezekiel and Deutero-Isaiah. But the idea that there are limits to Yahweh's power of some sort is not a strange idea in the Hebrew Bible, where anthropomorphism tends to imply that God like human beings exists within certain bounds, and therefore that he may not be able to control all dark forces as he would like to do. Dietrich and Link sum up their points about power and powerlessness like this:

> Belief in YHWH, we may state in the light of our survey, is essentially not belief in omnipotence, but trust in a God who turns towards those he chooses in concrete contexts in their lives. Faith in him was not shaken because his sphere of action—like that of all other gods—was at first seen

4. "Sie [sc. the Bible] spricht von einem Gott, den Menschen auch als begrenzt, als untätig und machtlos erleben" (Dietrich and Link 2000, 135).

> as limited. But then Israel received experiences of his action—by no means all pleasant!—that transcended these limits, and time and again was surprised to find that he was capable of acting even beyond what had seemed to be the limits set to his power. (Dietrich and Link 2000: 159)[5]

The God of the Old Testament is not an abstract deity ruling everything by immutable decree, but lives alongside his people. One sees this in the repeated theme of God's "repentance": like us, God can change his mind and make new plans. This is philosophically scandalous, yet is essential to the character of the biblical God, and is one of the ways in which (to use Pascal's contrast) the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is genuinely not the God of the philosophers.

Indeed, contrary to a strong tradition in both Western philosophy and Christian theology, God is capable of suffering—a theme we have already noted in Dietrich and Link's work. I say "capable of suffering" rather than "subject to suffering" because for them it is a highly positive factor in the Old Testament's picture of God that he can be affected by what affects the people on whom he sets his heart: they call it *Leid-freiheit*, *freedom* to suffer, and see it as one of the features that connects Yahweh with the gods of the ancient Near East, by contrast with the Greek philosophical tradition from the pre-Socratics onwards. In the laments in Jeremiah God himself weeps for the suffering of "the daughter of my people" (Jer 14:17–18)—they interpret the weeping here as Yahweh's rather than Jeremiah's.

II

So much for a summary of *Die dunklen Seiten Gottes*. There is much more in it than I have been able to bring out, including a great deal about the New Testament and about modern systematic theology and modern Jewish thought that is fascinating, but not apposite in the context of a book on God in the Old Testament. Its contribution is to highlight in a way I have not encountered elsewhere just how dark the picture of God in the Old Testament can be, and yet to suggest ways in which it was

5. "Der JHWH-Glaube, so können wir rückblickend feststellen, ist im Kern nicht Allmachtsglaube, sondern Vertrauen zu einem Gott, der sich den Seinen in konkreten Lebenszusammenhängen zuwendet. Der Glaube an ihn wurde dadurch nicht erschüttet, daß sein Aktionsradius, wie der aller anderen Götter, zunächst als begrenzt schien. Dann aber machte Israel mit ihm immer mehr grenzüberschreitende Erfahrungen (keineswegs nur angenehme!) und wurde immer wieder dadurch überrascht, daß er auch jenseits von Grenzen wirksame werden konnte, die ihm zuvor gesetzt schienen" (Dietrich and Link 2000, 159).

actually tolerable in ancient Israel, and to show how it can contribute to our own theological understanding of the world in which we live. I would draw out just three things for further comment.

First, there is no doubt that there is something of an apologetic motive behind Dietrich and Link's work (Dietrich and Link 1997, 2000), a desire to show that even the dark side of God in the Old Testament is not as dark as all that, and that there are compensating advantages. I see this above all in their idea of the suffering of God with his people, in which they explicitly acknowledge a debt to Jürgen Moltmann (e.g. Moltmann 1974). Because God suffers with his chosen ones (who, they remind us, potentially include all human beings), the fact that what he does to them and with them is sometimes apparently dark and forbidding from a human perspective is mitigated. There are certainly places in the Old Testament where God does seem to suffer in his people's sufferings: one thinks of Hosea and Jeremiah, and of course of the traditional translation of Isa 63:8 as "in all their afflictions he was afflicted," though this is rather unlikely to be the correct reading. But overall they seem to me to exaggerate the extent to which the Old Testament God is a Moltmannian God. The emphasis, it seems to me, more often falls on God's detachment from his people than on the kind of self-identification with them that the idea of a suffering God implies. On the other hand, they are surely right to emphasize one factor that can give rise to the theme of divine empathy, and that is that the Old Testament God is subject to human emotions, including therefore pity and sympathetic suffering. He is, we might say, the kind of God who certainly *could* suffer with his people; he is not the impassible God of much philosophical and theological tradition. The dark side of the kind of God Dietrich and Link (1997, 2000) find in the Old Testament is not the dark side of an impassible tyrant, but the dark side of a being with warm human emotions, which include outrage at the exploitation of the weak, anger at flagrant wrongdoing, and pity for the sorrows and sufferings of humankind. It is easier to accept pain as the outpouring of the righteous anger of someone who shares our own passionate feelings about injustice than as the punishment imposed by a cold and unconcerned dictator. Yahweh in the Hebrew Bible is often an offended deity who lashes out in understandable outrage. We might well prefer that, even at the cost of possible personal suffering, than to live under the icy decrees of an Unmoved Mover. This does not, however, remove some features that strike us as somewhat demonic, such as the cruel testing of Abraham or Job, and there my own feeling is that Dietrich and Link protest too much, and fail to recognize an irreducible core of inexplicable darkness in the Old Testament God.

Secondly, they emphasize throughout their work that the Old Testament presents human beings as subject to certain limits, both in action and in understanding, and they argue that in this it judges rightly. Such limits, which are made explicit above all in the divine speeches at the end of Job, mean that human beings can know less of God than they would like to, and sometimes see as dark what might well not be so if human understanding had a greater reach. Their motto might be Ps 131:1: "I do not busy myself…with things too marvellous for me." The Old Testament teaches us to be properly humble in the presence of God's decrees, and not to expect that we can always tell what he is up to in the world. Human beings do not have a bird's-eye view of the created order. Consequently they need to be humble when confronted with what seems to them to call in question God's justice or mercy. Qoheleth is the obvious place where this is stressed: "God is in heaven, and you are on earth; therefore let your words be few" (Eccl 5:2). There is a certain *via negativa* in the Old Testament, according to which our best knowledge of God is ignorance—enlightened ignorance, perhaps, but ignorance all the same.

Against this emphasis it is possible to expostulate, with Job, that God may be mysterious but he ought not to be immoral, and that he cannot escape responsibility for the injustice that is done in the world, which must ultimately derive from him since there is no one else it can derive from; "if it is not he, who then is it?" as Job asks pointedly in 9:24 (the REB actually deletes this additional comment, presumably because it disturbs the metre). In the end the Old Testament does not answer the challenge of Ivan Karamazov, laying the blame for terrible sufferings and injustices at the door of God the supposedly all-powerful, and Dietrich and Link (1997, 2000) do not to my mind succeed in showing that it does. But they do show how differently the problem appears in the world of ancient Israel than in a culture that has inherited centuries of attempts at theodicy. They are right to say that Old Testament writers in general acknowledge the limits of human understanding, and do not push their luck when it comes to explaining suffering. There are crass examples, such as the psalmist who says "I have been young and now have grown old, but never have I seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread" (Ps 37:25)—surely someone who should have got out more. But many of the Old Testament's discussions of the darker sides of human experience recognize that we are simply not going to understand, and refer the matter to God in humility. The darkness may attach to God himself, but this is not a question that the human mind is capable of resolving.

Thirdly, there is a strong awareness in the Old Testament—and this I think Dietrich and Link (1997, 2000) do not do full justice to—that God may be neither moral nor immoral but amoral. To the question posed by the present volume—"ethical or unethical?"—the answer may sometimes be "neither; simply inscrutable." A place where this is strongly apparent, which Dietrich and Link do discuss (Dietrich and Link 2000, 155) but not at any length, is 1 Sam 26:19. Here we have David's answer to Saul when he has spared Saul's life, despite Abishai's offer to spear him, when they have infiltrated Saul's camp by night. David says to Saul, "If it is the LORD who has set you against me, may an offering be acceptable to him; but if it is mortals, a curse on them in the LORD's name!" It is quite clear that David regards Saul's pursuit of him as grossly unjust, a proper reason to curse whoever advised it. But if it comes about through the prompting of Yahweh, then there is no arguing with it, and the best one can hope for is that Yahweh will accept a sacrifice and, as a result, cease to incite David's destruction. There is no thought of saying, in a Job-like way, that Yahweh is to blame if he is behind Saul's wrong action; if it is Yahweh, then, as Eli had said on an earlier occasion, "It is the LORD; he must do what is good in his own eyes" (1 Sam 3:18). God is not susceptible to human judgment on his actions, and they cannot be classified as moral or immoral: they are simply God's actions. I find in general that Dietrich and Link (1997, 2000) are not too open to the whole issue of the essential inscrutability of God in the Old Testament, which I believe is a major factor in understanding how he acts, or rather in confessing oneself unable to understand it.

In some other ancient Near Eastern religions the gods often act arbitrarily, as indeed they sometimes do in Greek mythology. However, very often, on the contrary, they have transparent motives for their actions, and this is because the conception of them is frequently highly anthropomorphic. We can understand their devices and desires because they are so like our own. With Yahweh it is sometimes different, and I think—as indeed do Dietrich and Link—that the very monotheist idea that assures us of the existence of a powerful and invincible God also at times makes that God harder to understand than the gods of other nations. The dark side cannot be externalized in the form of malign deities; it has to be seen as internal to God himself. Even when Judaism developed the character of Satan sufficiently to put the blame on him for at least some human suffering, the asymmetry between him and Yahweh meant that this problem remained essentially intact. For us today it throws up the following problem: "What are we to think of a Bible that hopes for deliverance from the very same Lord who allowed his human creatures to fall into misery in the first place (from the first original sin all the way

to Auschwitz)? Can we still today accept a picture of God which is bound to be so morally dichotomized as the monotheistic picture is?"[6] This is a question asked, Dietrich and Link tell us (1997, 235 in their Nachwort zur zweiten Auflage), by one of the readers of the first edition of their first volume, who thought them too apologetic in their aims. It is a question I would want to repeat today. Is monotheism really coherent as an account of the world we see around us? I hope the answer is yes, but the Old Testament does not make it an easy question to answer; and it gives us plenty of ammunition if we want to fight on the other side.

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6. "Was sollen wir von der Bibel halten, 'die von demselben Herrn Rettung erhofft, der seine Menschen allererst in Unglück hat fallen lassen (von der Erbsünde angefangen bis hin zu Auschwitz)?' Können wir 'heute noch ein Gottesbild akzeptieren, das in sich *moralisch* so gespalten sein muß wie das montheistische?'" (Dietrich and Link 1997, 238). This passage occurs in the Afterword to the second edition, and the words in single inverted commas are excerpts from responses the authors had received to the first edition.

The Ethics of Friendship in Wisdom Literature

Graham Davies

Friendship is a subject which is generally passed over in standard books on Old Testament ethics.[1] One's responsibility to one's family or to any fellow-Israelite is generally what is in view in these books, and indeed in large swathes of the Old Testament itself, rather than what one recent writer has described as:

> …a mutually intimate, loyal and loving bond between two or a few persons that is understood not to derive primarily from membership in a group normally marked by native solidarity, such as family, tribe, or other such ties. Friendship is thus what anthropologists call an achieved rather than an ascribed relationship, the latter being based on status whereas the former is in principle independent of a prior formal connection such as kinship or ethnicity. (Konstan 1997, 1)

But friendship is a topic which has been much studied by classical scholars, philosophers, spiritual writers and theologians, and so it is worth asking what, if anything, the Old Testament and the literature of the ancient Near East might have to contribute on this significant theme.[2] The results are in fact far from negligible.

1. *Terminology*

A first step is to identify Hebrew words that can or might be translated "friend." Caution is needed here, both because of particular difficulties with the words in question, which we shall soon encounter, and for more general reasons. We must, first, not assume that it is only where these

1. Such as Wright 1983, 1990, 2004; Otto 1994; Rodd 2001; but see the brief comments in Wolff (1974, 185, 189–90 [German ed. 270, 276–77]), and also Clements (1992, esp. 14–27).
2. Much of the wider literature has recently been surveyed in Carmichael 2004; see also, for example, Konstan 1997 and Soskice 2005.

words occur that statements about friendship are made—for example, there may be stories about “friends” which do not use these specific words—and secondly, we must not assume in advance that the concept or definition of friendship conveyed by these words is exactly the same as those which have become conventional in the modern, especially Western, societies with which we are most familiar. There may be important differences in what a “friend” is or does in the Old Testament, which it should be our aim to discover. But with those provisos we may proceed to an initial study of the terminology before looking at a variety of statements about friendship.

The most common Hebrew words which come close to the meaning of “friend” (and they are often so translated in English versions of the Bible) are אֹהֵב and רֵעַ.[3]

(i) אֹהֵב is a nominalized participle of the verb אָהֵב, related in meaning to other words from the same root, especially the noun אַהֲבָה. The problem is that these words have to cover a wide range of senses of “love,” including family affection and sexual love, and it is necessary to identify the occurrences which apply to friendship. This is actually more of an issue with אָהֵב in its verbal uses and with the noun אַהֲבָה than it is with אֹהֵב itself,[4] because nearly all the nominalized examples do turn out to refer to friendship rather than something else, though in some of them the friendship is political (1 Kgs 5:15; Lam 1:2; also perhaps Est 5:10, 14; 6:13; Jer 20:4, 6) or religious (2 Chr 20:7; Isa 41:8).[5] It remains to be clarified whether the underlying meaning of this group of words is purely emotional (“like, delight in”) or if it includes the idea of “beneficial action” (more like “care for” in English).[6] For the moment, two further preliminary observations must suffice. First, אֹהֵב appears only to be used as a masculine form, that is, of men. Secondly, it is an active form, so it

3. Other, less common, words will be mentioned later. Hebrew חָבֵר and its cognates seem only occasionally to bear such a sense (perhaps most likely in Prov 28:24; Eccl 4:10; Song 1:7; 8:13; Isa 1:23), which is surprising in view of the regular use of its Akkadian equivalent *ibru* for “friend” (see below, n. 39). חָבֵר seems generally to be closer to “(professional) colleague.”

4. Just as φιλία has a wider range than φίλος (Konstan 1997, 9).

5. BDB, 12–13, generally provides a good guide to the distinctions, but its one example of אֹהֵב = “lover,” Lam 1:2, should probably be rendered “friend” (in a political sense): cf. the parallel רעיה and the antonym איבים. It is the Piel participle which generally has a sexual connotation (in prophetic metaphor), but Zech 13:6 is an exception to this and Jer 22:20, 22; 30:14 and Lam 1:19 could be too.

6. *TDOT*, 1:105–7 (= *ThWAT*, 1:112–15), probably correctly, favours the latter view, *THAT*, 1:62 the former.

ought to denote in the first place someone who likes or cares for another, rather than someone who "is liked (or cared for)" by someone else. If so, this might imply a concept of friendship which is different from others, or at least with a different emphasis. The Greek word for "friend" is φίλος, which means "dear, beloved," and when I say in English that someone is "my friend" I mean first of all that I like (or care for) them, rather than the inverse. The Hebrew for that is perhaps דּוֹד, though that is almost always used in a sexual context: the most likely exception is the "dear friend" in Isa 5:1 about whose vineyard the prophet proposes to sing a song.[7] It remains to be seen whether these linguistic observations are supported by the social realities and ethical maxims regarding friendship in particular texts: James Barr's writings are a warning not to assume in advance that they will!

(ii) The term רֵעַ (occasionally רֵעֶה or מֵרֵעַ) is also associated with a verb, though a much less common one, רָעָה II, with the sense apparently of "associate with," without any necessary implication of intimacy or affection.[8] In the case of רֵעַ, there is a feminine equivalent; in fact, there are three, רֵעָה, רַעְיָה and רְעוּת. With רֵעַ too there are differences of usage to be observed, so that instances where "friend" is appropriate need to be identified and perhaps some provisional conclusions drawn from the other uses of the word. There are some sexual uses of רֵעַ, but this does not seem to be a prominent use of it (Song 5:16; Jer 3:1, 20; Hos 3:1). Much more common, and accounting for the majority of cases, is the idiom in which רֵעַ simply represents another person involved in an activity, usually with a pronoun suffix referring to the subject of the verb. The clearest cases of this weakened use are those where it is combined with אִישׁ in the sense of "each," as in Gen 11:3: ויאמרו איש אל־רעהו, "and they (the inhabitants of the land of Shinar) said to *one another*." But there are many more instances where the weakened sense is likely to be involved, even without a preceding איש; so, for example, in the tenth commandment, "You shall not covet…" בית רעך, אשת רעך and so on (Exod 20:17). Traditionally these are translated "your neighbour's house" and so on, but it is clear that "neighbour" in our normal sense is

7. Song 5:1 might be another exception. The Niphal of אָהֵב is used once for "beloved" (2 Sam 1:23), but apparently adjectivally.

8. Cf. especially the use with זונות in Job 29:3. In Judg 14:20 a distinct, denominative homonym (רָעָה III) may be involved. Prov 18:24 might provide a very clear basis for such a distinction from אֹהֵב, if התרעות be read for התרעע, with LXX and NRSV, but there are at least two alternatives to this based on MT itself (see McKane 1970, 24), so it is not a secure basis for argument. But see below on the usage of רֵעַ itself, which seems to confirm such a difference.

not meant and the reference is presumably to “anyone else” or at least “anyone else in the community.”[9] This has a bearing on the translation of another verse in Exodus: 33:11, “God spoke to Moses face to face,” כאשׁר ידבר אישׁ אל־רעהו, which the NRSV (over)translates “as one speaks to a friend” (hence also Soskice 2005, 173). It is much more likely, given the idiom, that it simply means “as one human being speaks to another.”

For the feminine forms the vocabulary is fortunately very sharply defined and organized, with distinct words for each of these uses: רֵעָה for a female friend or attendant in general, רַעְיָה for the sexual use in Song of Songs (Judg 11:37 Kethib is an outlier), and רְעוּת for the weakened idiomatic use. But רֵעַ performs *all* those functions for the masculine and it is necessary to decide from the context which is meant.[10] Deciding what רֵעַ means in particular cases can therefore be tricky: in this essay I have taken a “minimalist” position and assumed that most cases where רֵעַ has a suffix are quite general and do not refer to a “friend” as such.[11] One further preliminary suggestion might be that, if the sense of רֵעַ could be so weakened as to be equivalent to no more than “anyone else,” that may indicate (as other evidence would support) that it has a weaker or at least different kind of relationship in view from אֹהֵב, one which perhaps has more to do with social structures than personal choice and closer to “associate” than “friend” in the modern sense.[12]

It is clear that both these (groups of) words would benefit from closer semantic analysis, but in this respect as well as others the present essay is essentially an initial exploration of some little known ground.[13]

9. It is interesting to observe how a very famous instance could be “reinvigorated” with the stronger sense of “friend”: Matt 5:43 cites Lev 19:18b in the form “You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy,” where presumably the addition of “and hate your enemy” is based on taking לרעך to mean “(only) your friend.”

10. There is some specialization in the other masculine terms: רֵעֶה is almost exclusively used technically of the political office of “the king’s friend,” with only Prov 27:10 (Kethib) as an exception (it is notable that the Qere readings seem to “tidy up” the language), while מֵרֵעַ is used only of “friend” in the strong but non-sexual sense, except for the (perhaps) specialized use for “best man” in Judg 14–15.

11. This is not to imply that the “general” instances have no ethical interest: Clements (1993) has shown that in many cases they serve to foster a strong community ethic. But our interest here is in close non-family relationships and their ethical principles.

12. This seems to be close to Clements’s conclusion (1993).

13. The substantial articles on both words in *TDOT/ThWAT* and *THAT* contain much valuable material.

2. *Biblical Wisdom*

The majority of the Old Testament texts that deal with friendship seem to be in the wisdom literature, and for present purposes I shall adopt a broad definition of the Old Testament, so as to be able to include Ben Sira.[14]

Proverbs

In Proverbs the following verses offer teaching about friendship: 10:12; 14:20; 15:17; 16:28; 17:9, 17; 18:24; 19:4, 6–7; 22:11, 24–25; 27:5–6, 9–10. I include 22:25, although it contains no word for "friend," because of its link to v. 24. I have omitted a number of verses where אֹהֵב is used in a different way, and those where רֵעַ seems to have its weakened general sense. The verses cited include four instances of אַהֲבָה, three of אֹהֵב, seven of רֵעַ, one of the verb רָעָה II (22:24) and possibly another (18:24), one of the noun מֵרֵעַ in 19:7 (note the *shewa* under the *mem*: presumably the form, though singular, is collective in meaning in view of the plural verb), and two of אַלּוּף, which is used as occasionally elsewhere for a close friend (16:28; 17:9).

Some of these verses involve textual problems which must be briefly noted if not finally solved before proceeding further.

18:24.[15] The first two words of the MT should mean "a man of friends," that is, presumably a person with (many?) friends, but this does not produce good sense and most commentators emend איש to יש with versional support (cf. *BHS*), making a parallel with the second half of the verse as in Eccl 7:15 and 8:14. There is possibly no need to emend the text, as אשׁ twice occurs (without the *yodh* admittedly) as a rare equivalent to יש in 2 Sam 14:19 and Mic 6:10 (cf. BDB, 78). Either way, the meaning would then be "There are friends…" The meaning of the next word is much more of a problem: the MT itself would most naturally be taken as "to break oneself" or "to do oneself harm," so as a warning of the possible bad consequences of friendship, but NRSV's "play at friendship" and NEB's "are good only for idle talk" (following G. R. Driver) identify specific poor qualities in some friends on the basis of emendation or comparative philology.

14. Though, for reasons of space, no specific treatment of Ecclesiastes is included here, Eccl 4:7–12 at least should be noted as further illustration of a pragmatic attitude to friendship. In addition, I have dealt with friendship in the story of Jonathan and David and comparable ancient narratives elsewhere (Davies forthcoming).

15. See McKane 1970, 518–19, and the article by G. R. Driver cited there.

27:6. The rendering "profuse" in NRSV is based on the view that there was a second root עתר = "be rich" in Biblical Hebrew (BH), as in Aramaic (the normal BH form being עשׁר), which also seems to be attested in Ezek 35:13 (so BDB, tentatively). This does not provide a perfect parallel with v. 6a, and attempts have been made to do better by conjectural emendation (cf. *BHS*). But a warning that excessive signs of affection may be insincere is sufficiently appropriate for MT to be retained (so McKane 1970, 610–11).

27:9b. The NRSV here follows the LXX καταρρήγνυται δὲ ὑπὸ συμπτωμάτων ψυχή, which produces a direct antithesis to v. 9a, if a rather bland one (NEB and REB render similarly). The MT literally means "The sweetness of one's friend is from (i.e. probably 'better than') the counsel of a self" (so perhaps "one's own counsel"). W. McKane gives a full discussion of alternatives and the problems of the MT (1970, 612–13). He prefers an emendation which keeps close to the sense of the MT and sees the verse as a comparison between things that have a sweet smell and the delight of friendship: ומתק רעוה מאמץ נפשׁ, "and the sweetness of friendship strengthens the spirit." This makes a good proverb, but is too adventurous to build upon. Of course, if the recent translations (and LXX) are correct, this verse contributes nothing to our topic.

27:10. It is, first, probably best to regard the second part of the verse as a separate maxim, like the rest in this section of Proverbs. Secondly, the instruction *not* to go to one's brother in a time of trouble seems very odd—one would expect the opposite. Is it perhaps possible that the second אל is a mistake, due to the very similar sequence of letters in the first half-line, or alternatively that it means "surely," as in Ugaritic? If it is omitted, the sense would be "You shall go to your brother's house on your day of calamity." However, this may not be necessary: there is evidence both from Greece and from the ancient Near East of friends being more highly regarded than relatives.[16]

How then may we sum up the observations about friendship found in Proverbs?[17] First, they are just that to a large extent, "observations": direct advice is rare (22:24–25; 27:10). The approach is generally the pragmatism that seeks the way to a happy and successful life which is typical of Proverbs and the genre to which it belongs. Friends are viewed

16. See Konstan 1997, 42–43 (Hesiod), and below, pp. 145–49, on evidence from the ancient Near East. *BHS* and McKane (1970, 614) recognize the problem but solve it in a different way.

17. See further Kidner 1964, 44–46.

as a benefit to be sought and if possible retained, but there is not much here about one's duties to one's friends. Friendship, according to 15:17, is certainly a good thing and one to be preferred to its opposite, "hatred," even if one's resources (or the friend's?) are limited. Yet, typically (and perhaps patronisingly), the view of these proverbs seems to be that wealth does make a difference: several times the fact that the poor do not have many friends is noted (14:20; 19:4, 7), and 19:6 seems to provide the explanation for this, that deep down self-interest is what draws people to be "friends."[18] The wider context suggests that this is disapproved of, or at least contrasted with a better kind of friend, who sticks by you at all times, even when things go badly (17:17; 18:24b). Apart from the implication of 19:6 that giving people presents is a good way to make friends, the only advice on this comes in ch. 22. First, that if you want to be the friend of the king, honesty and eloquence (both!) are required (v. 11).[19] An explicitly moral element for once appears here. Secondly, there is in vv. 24–25 a warning against friends with a bad temper, interestingly not because they are bad company but because such behaviour is catching and it may get you into trouble! On the conduct of friendship, 27:10 makes explicit the importance of maintaining friendships, even those with friends of one's father, who is perhaps understood to be dead. The remainder of the sayings all seem to be about events that may threaten the continuation of a friendship. Proverbs 16:28 warns about third parties who may disrupt a friendship by what they say: the others give sometimes conflicting advice about handling problems between friends. The implication of 10:12 and 17:9 seems to be that it is better to forgive and forget, in case one loses a friend. But 27:6 envisages that it may sometimes be necessary and beneficial for a friend to behave in a way that seems unkind, and probably 27:5 is making the same point: the friend who is silent on such an occasion is "hiding" his friendship. A lot is left unsaid, for example, about the circumstances in which friends met and what they did together. There is no evident religious dimension to the presentation of friendship, though presumably like other matters it would come under the aegis of the general religious ideas that appear from time to time in Proverbs. Finally, the evidence of Proverbs suggests that no sharp distinction should be made between the usage of אֹהֵב and רֵעַ: the

18. This element of calculation would fit in well with what Konstan calls the "anthropological" approach to friendship in the classical world (1997, 1–6), though his argument is that its validity has been exaggerated there.

19. The difficulties in this verse discussed by McKane (1970, 567–68) do not seem very great, though NRSV's "a pure heart" is a rather free rendering of טהור לב.

latter is used of the most devoted friends as much as the former (cf. 17:17 with 18:24). Rather, do the two words recall two different *aspects* of friendship (affection and companionship).

Job

If we turn to Job, we find there are no occurrences of אָהֵב there, but there are eleven relevant ones of רֵעַ, with some other words with related meanings occurring in 19:13–19. The three famous "friends" of Job are of course a major component in the story and the dialogue and five occurrences of רֵעַ (in 2:11; 32:3; 35:4; 42:7, 10) refer to them. They begin well by coming, perhaps from a distance, to comfort Job in his troubles (2:11); yet, to judge both from Job's complaints about their disloyalty and Yahweh's rebuke for their bad theology (42:7; cf. 32:3; 35:4), they do not do this very well and they become counter-examples of true friendship in a time of trouble. Job in his turn, nevertheless, prays for them (42:10) and that, we are told, is when his fortunes are restored: this seems to imply a commendation of such intercessory prayer. In the dialogue section of the book the occurrences of words for "friend" seem all to be in Job's speeches and concerning the failure of friendship in this particular crisis. They therefore relate to a topic which is touched on in Proverbs but not particularly emphasized (17:17a; 19:7): in fact, Proverbs generally expects that it is to one's family that one will turn in time of trouble (17:17b; 27:10). Job's complaints about his friends focus on four aspects of their behaviour and it may be presumed that, in his view at least, the opposite of what they do would constitute appropriate behaviour by friends. Exactly what the standard is by which they have failed is not made clear, but there does seem to be some kind of moral element in Job's expectations of them.

First, 6:27 and 17:5 complain about the *mercenary attitude* of the friends. In 6:27 Job complains that their reproof (v. 25) is like people who cast lots over an orphan or bargain over a friend (whether a bribe or sale into slavery is in view is not clear): they are heartless, and he is just a means to their profit. Job 17:5 is formally a general statement about those who betray their friends for profit, but it is evidently meant to apply to Job's own friends. One is reminded of the self-interest which seems to play a part in relationships in Proverbs, though only as one side of the picture. Job's second complaint is about *mockery* by his friends (12:4; 16:20). In both cases their mistreatment of him is worsened, it seems, by the religious dimension of the crisis—here as elsewhere religion is much more prominent in Job than it is in Proverbs. In 12:4 N. C. Habel suggests that the words "called on God and he answered

him" and "a just and blameless man" are the mocking cries which Job attributes to his friends rather than his own claims for himself (1985, 213). At any rate, Job's point seems to be that one who is engaged in a struggle with so mighty an adversary as God deserves his friends' support rather than their ironic insults. In 16:20 the point may be the same, or it may be that from this awful betrayal he turns in hope to God. The repetition of similar language in 17:2 suggests that betrayal by his friends has become a further part of the troubles from which he wants to be set free. Thirdly, Job's friends and acquaintances have *abandoned* him. This presumably refers to others, not the friends whose rebukes he finds so painful. The longer complaint about this comes in 19:13–19, where family members as well as friends are mentioned: for the latter, expressions formed from the verb ידע and the phrase "men of my company" (סוד) are used. The same point is made more briefly and more starkly in 30:29, where Job laments that his only companions are now desert animals.[20] Finally, Job appeals for "pity" (חנן) from his friends in 19:21, again in the light of the religiously understood trials that he is undergoing, in contrast to the *pitiless attitude* which they are showing towards him.[21]

This is Job's side of the argument at any rate, and he clearly has some (disappointed) expectations of what friends should do in times of crisis: it is he who uses the relevant words several times. There is, of course, another side to the argument, and in the dialogue at least (which I take to be an originally separate composition from the prose framework) it is not clear that Job's complaints are always vindicated. We are used to recognizing this in relation to God (cf. 42:1–6), but does it also imply that the words spoken by Job's friends are to be regarded more positively than Job does? Although there seem to be no occurrences of the "friend' vocabulary in their speeches, one might reasonably examine that large body of material to see what it suggests about what a friend might properly say to someone in trouble, in the spirit of Prov 27:6a: "Well meant are the wounds a friend inflicts." It might just lead to a fresh look at the book of Job as "a dispute about the nature of true friendship"!

Ben Sira

Ben Sira is the biblical book where friendship is dealt with most fully. As well as incidental references, there are a series of passages in which Ben Sira, in his preferred style, dwells on the topic at some length,

20. The same motif appears in individual laments in the Psalter: Pss 38:12; 88:19.
21. A very similar passage occurs in *Ludlul* 1.84–92 (see Lambert 1960, 34–35).

sufficient for two books about his view of friendship to have appeared in recent years.[22] There are, of course, special problems in studying Ben Sira, which arise from the fact that we have (something like) the Hebrew original for only about two-thirds of the book, and there are some complex textual problems both where the Hebrew survives and where it does not, involving the comparison and evaluation of the Greek, Latin and Syriac versions. The Hebrew Ben Sira uses both אֹהֵב and רֵעַ, and also sometimes חָבֵר. In the Greek φίλος is generally used and comparisons show that it may represent any one of these three words, so where the Hebrew does not survive precise retroversion is impossible. In what follows, I shall refer to 6:5–17 for purposes of illustration wherever possible.

Many of the themes of the teaching of Proverbs on friendship reappear in Ben Sira, in a fuller and clearer exposition.[23] Nothing in Proverbs seems to have been discarded, in line with Ben Sira's high regard for Solomon's wisdom in 47:14–17. One might consider seeing the book of Job as the background for some passages which speak of dealing with alleged faults in a friend and how to be a friend in times of trouble. Even though the LXX text and so most English translations do not mention Job, MS B at 49:9 does so in a positive way (cf. NRSV) and this seems more appropriate to the context than the similar אויב which must lie behind LXX's τῶν ἐχθρῶν. J. Corley lists the main characteristics of friendship in Ben Sira as its desirability, the need for caution, faithfulness (cf. 6:14–16) and the fear of God (2002, 213–18). The first and third of these are quite traditional motifs, but the second and fourth deserve a closer look. Caution in friendship actually forms part of a larger concern of Ben Sira, which is to provide more advice on how one should treat friends and deal with them, what one might call "the rules of friendship." It is emphasized that one should tread carefully: there is a need to be "on guard" with one's friends as well as one's enemies. This is at least in part because of anxiety about who one's friends really are, as 6:8–12 spells out at some length. This makes it necessary to "test" friends before admitting them to intimacy (v. 7) and to pick and choose (v. 6). The stress on faithfulness fits in with this. There are also warnings elsewhere against retaliation as well as guidance on how to deal with faults without fomenting strife.

22. Reiterer 1996; Corley 2002. While both scholars deal in turn with the longer passages mentioned, Corley has an introduction and conclusion which gives more coherence to his study. See also Corley 2005.

23. See Corley 2005, 173–75, where dependence on Prov 3:29; 11:13; 14:20; 18:24; 20:6, 19, and 25:9 is identified in Ben Sira's teaching on friendship.

There seems to be an anxiety here about the fragility of friendship and more concern than in Proverbs with the way (not) to lose friends, a sign of insecurity as well as appreciation. This strand in Ben Sira might be connected with social changes arising from the shift from Persian to Hellenistic rule (or more recently from Ptolemaic to Seleucid rule) and indeed with economic developments resulting from (or even preceding) that (cf. Corley 2002, 15–16). The other new characteristic is the fear of God, which appears in 6:16–17, first as something that is rewarded by the acquisition of good friends, and then as the guiding principle of a proper friendship, on the assumption that the other party (רעהו) will be likeminded.[24] Another passage which associates friendship with the fear of God is 40:18–27.[25] The latter is, of course, a major theme of Ben Sira in general, closely linked with the law as well as with wisdom, and it is a common theme of Proverbs as well (cf. 1:7). But Ben Sira is the first to integrate friendship with it in this way, and in so doing he laid the foundation for the idea of a spiritual friendship which came to be so important in the later Christian tradition.

A final observation may be made on the wider influences on Ben Sira's ideas about friendship. Close parallels have been noted between his teaching and not only the Old Testament but also Greek and Egyptian wisdom: so particularly with the early Greek poet Theognis and the later Egyptian writings of Anksheshonq and Papyrus Insinger (for details see Corley 2002, 8, 10–11 and passim). Given what Ben Sira says about the value of travel and so presumably also the thought of other peoples (34:9–12; 39:1–4), this should not surprise us.

3. *Ancient Near Eastern Wisdom Literature*

There seem to be no comprehensive studies of friendship in the ancient Near East (or even Egypt and Mesopotamia separately) comparable to D. Konstan's valuable and in-depth review of friendship in the classical world (1997). Consequently, it will be worthwhile to cite the material collected at length: even though it is based only on what is available in standard collections of texts in translation, it will provide a basis for future, more detailed examination of the subject. Here we shall confine ourselves to material of a broadly "wisdom" type. In general, the teachings about friendship are of a similar character in both Mesopotamia and

24. LXX ὁ πλησίον αὐτοῦ, NRSV "neighbour," is perhaps too weak in this case.

25. On the other hand, 25:7–11 probably does not do so, as it is better in v. 9 to follow LXX φρόνησιν, "prudence," than to read "friend" with the Syriac and Vulgate (and NRSV).

Egypt, so to save repetition they will be treated together and the material will be divided up thematically.[26]

The value of friendship is widely recognized:

> A good word is a friend to numerous men. (Sumerian Proverbs 159)
>
> As long as he is alive, he is his friend. When he is dying, he is his netherworld deputy. (Sumerian Proverbs 16)
>
> Cling to the silent, then you find life. (Amenemopet vii.9)
>
> Better is praise with the love of men
> than wealth in the storehouse. (Amenemopet xvi.11–12)
>
> He who loves his neighbour finds family around him. (P.Insinger xvi.8)

26. The material is insufficient, for the most part, to permit the perception of any clear patterns of development at present, but for completeness the customary dates for the writings referred to are given below, along with the editions and translations that have been used (it should, however, be borne in mind that many of these writings were copied and used for centuries after their original composition). Egypt: Merikare (*ANET*, 414–18, and *COS*, 1:61–66 [First Intermediate Period]); Ptahhotep (*ANET*, 412–14 [Middle Kingdom]); Amenemhet (*COS*, 1:66–68 [Middle Kingdom]); Ani (*COS*, 1:110–15 [New Kingdom]); Amenemopet (*COS*, 1:115–22 [New Kingdom, Ramesside]); Ankhsheshonq (Lichtheim 1980, 159–84 [second half of first millennium B.C.E.]); P.Insinger (Lichtheim 1980, 184–217 [Ptolemaic(?)]). Mesopotamia: Sumerian Proverbs (*COS*, 1:563–67 [early second millennium B.C.E.]); Bilingual and Babylonian Proverbs (Lambert 1960, 222–82 [second millennium B.C.E.]); Counsels of Wisdom (Lambert 1960, 96–107 [second millennium (Kassite)]); Ahiqar (Charlesworth 1985, 479–507 [seventh–sixth century B.C.E.]). Further study of the meaning(s) of the Egyptian, Babylonian, and Aramaic words used in the texts cited is clearly needed, to specify more closely what is involved in each case. In Akkadian, *ibru* (*ibrūtu*) and *ruʾu* seem to correspond to "companion" and "partner" as well as "friend," while *tappu* (a loan-word from Sumerian) is confined to the former senses (*AHw*, 363–64, 998, 1321). In all phases of Aramaic רחם (as in Ahiqar 176, and probably 141) is used for "friend" (cf. *DNWSI*, 1069–70; Jastrow 1903, 1467; Payne Smith 1903, 537). It is generally understood to be in origin an active participle, a view which is supported by associated phrases such as בעלי טבתך, "well-wishers," in Cowley 30:24 = 31:23 (see also *DNWSI*, loc. cit.). Some of the Egyptian texts have *ʾry* (Anksheshonq, Insinger), for which *WÄS*, 1:105, gives "der Zugehörige, der Genosse," which seems closer to "companion" than "friend": cf. its use in an idiom comparable to Heb. איש + רעהו. But the occurrence of "love" in several of the passages cited suggests that they may refer to a more intimate relationship. Elsewhere *ḫnmś* is used (Ptahhotep, Amenemhet), a term which, according to *WÄS*, 3:294–95, is a general word for "friend," but which also covers political and sexual relations. It appears to be related to a verb *ḫnm* meaning "be glad, enjoy" (*WÄS*, 3:292). If this is the case, this might indicate an aspect of friendship in Egypt.

It is especially known in a time of trouble:

> When you are humiliated, let (your) friend act. (Bilingual Proverbs, "Assyrian Collection" ii.33–34)

> One does not discover the heart of a friend if one has not consulted him in anxiety. (P.Insinger xii.18)

But there was also a contrary, sceptical view:

> Friendship lasts only one day, but the relations of colleagues are eternal. (Sumerian Proverbs 17)[27]

> Trust not a brother, know not a friend,
> Make no intimates, it is worthless. (Amenemhet i.4–5 [*COS*, 1:67])

Solidarity between work-mates, specifically scribes, is mentioned elsewhere (Merikare 148; Ankhsheshonq iii.17–18). More generally it is held:

> The mother makes a child, the way makes a companion. (Ankhsheshonq xiii.8)

There are numerous statements about who make good and bad friends:

> A man should not take a merchant for his friend. (Sumerian Proverbs 64)

> Do not have a merchant for a friend; [he] lives for taking a slice. (Ankhsheshonq xxviii.4)

> Seeing you have done evil to your friend, what will you do to your enemy? (Bilingual Proverbs, "Assyrian Collection" ii.35–37)

> Keep away from a hostile man, do not let him be your comrade;
> Befriend one who is straight and true, one whose actions you have seen.
> If your rightness matches his, the friendship will be balanced. (Ani v.7–8)

> Don't let yourself be sent on a mischievous errand,
> Nor be friends with him who does it. (Amenemopet iv.8–9)

> Do not befriend the heated man,
> Nor approach him for conversation. (Amenemopet xi.13–14)

> Do not converse with a heated man,
> So as to befriend a hostile man. (Amenemopet xv.13–14)

27. Lambert 1960, 259 (cf. ll. 9–11 of the bilingual version), renders *kinatutu* as "business connexions" rather than "colleagues." *ANET*, 425, following an older view, mistakenly has "slavery" in place of this expression. For a further Babylonian text on the theme, see n. 21 above.

> Broadcast not your word to others,
> Nor join with one who bares his heart. (Amenemopet xxii.13–14)

> Do not sit down in the beer-house[28]
> In order to join one greater than you,
> Be he a youth greater through his office
> Or be he an elder through birth. (Amenemopet xxiv.22–xxv.3)

> Do not converse [with a tale]bearer,
> Do not consult [with a…] … who is an idler. (Counsels of Wisdom 21–22)

> Do not tie yourself to one who is [greater] than you, for then your life will be ruined.
> Do not go about much with the fiend[29] because of his name. (P.Insinger iii.14–15)

> Do not trust one whom you do not know in your heart, lest he cheat you with cunning. (P.Insinger xi.23)[30]

> The friend of a fool sleeps bound to him. (P.Insinger xiii.13)

> Do not be close to one in whose heart there is hatred. (P.Insinger xxvi.12)

Finally, advice is given on how to make (and keep) friends:

> If thou desirest to make friendship last in a house to which thou hast access as master [or "son"], as a brother, or as a friend, into any place where thou mightest enter, beware of approaching the women. It does not go well with the place where that is done. (Ptahhotep 277–82)

> If thou art seeking out the nature of a friend, one whom thou questionest, draw near to him and deal with him alone, until thou art no (longer) troubled about his condition. Reason with him after a while. *Test* his heart with a bit of talk. If what he may have seen should come out of him or he should do something with which thou art displeased, behold, he is still a friend… (Ptahhotep 463–73)

> It is useful to help one whom one loves,
> So as to cleanse him from his faults… (Ani ix.1–2)

> Guard your tongue from harmful speech,
> Then you will be loved by others (Amenemopet x.21–xi.1)

> With a friend or comrade do not speak…,
> Do not speak hypocrisy, [utter] what is decent.
> If you have promised, give…,

28. This provides a rare (if not surprising) indication of what friends might do together! Cf. perhaps בית היין in Song 2:4.
29. Or "rogue": cf. Lexa 1926, text: 8, "coquin."
30. Cf. xii.4–12; ll. 14–24 provide ways of testing potential friends.

> If you have created trust, you must…
> [And perform] the wish of a comrade.
> [If] you have created trust in a friend…,
> [In] your wisdom study the tablet. (Counsels of Wisdom 148–54)

> …I provided for you there, as a man would care for his own brother. (Ahiqar 49)[31]

> Do not reveal your [secr]ets before your [frien]ds, lest your reputation with them be ruined. (Ahiqar 141)

> I left you in the shadow of the cedar, and…
> You have abandoned your friends and have ho[no]red… (Ahiqar 175–76)

The teaching on friendship in ancient Near Eastern wisdom corresponds broadly to the range of themes found in the biblical books. But there is more guidance on who make good (and bad) friends and on how one should treat one's friends. There is no parallel to Ben Sira's emphasis on the fear of God, in contrast to the closeness of other aspects of his teaching, such as the need for caution, to wider parallels which has already been noted.

4. *Conclusion*

To summarize, in wisdom literature generally friendship is presented as a desirable feature of life for all, and it is often stated, and elsewhere assumed, that an individual may have several friends. This contrasts in two ways with the well-known ancient narratives about friendship, such as the story of Jonathan and David, which focus on "special friends" in elite levels of society. But even there many of the same principles are kept in view.

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31. Note also the restoration in l. 72, envisaging kindness in return.

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What Makes the Strange Woman of Proverbs 1–9 Strange?

Daniel J. Estes

1. *Introduction*

a. *Background to the Topic*

Even a cursory reading of Prov 1–9 reveals that the initial section of the book of Proverbs is marked by the contrasting figures of two women. Wisdom personified as a woman speaks in 1:22–33; 8:4–36, and 9:4–6. In each instance, Wisdom calls out to young men who clearly seem to be the primary intended original audience of Proverbs. The second woman is described variously as the אשׁה זרה (2:16; 5:3, 20; 7:5), the נכריה (2:16; 5:20; 6:24; 7:5), the אשׁת רע (6:24), and the אשׁת כסילות (9:13). She also speaks to the young men as she appeals for their attention. As Murphy (1988, 600) observes, this Strange Woman speaks for 65 verses, even more than does Woman Wisdom. In light of these two competing figures, it would not be too far off the mark to describe Prov 1–9 as "A Tale of Two Women."

Biblical scholarship has long focused on Woman Wisdom and the Strange Woman, and useful compilations and evaluations can be found in Boström (1935, 15–41), Lang (1986, 87–99), and Camp (1985, 21–68). Maier (1995) has devoted an entire monograph to *Die Fremde Frau* in Prov 1–9, and recent articles on the Strange Woman have been written by Blenkinsopp (1991), Camp (1988, 1991, 1997a, 1997b, 2000), Heijerman (1994), Washington (1994), and Yee (1989).

b. *Point of Departure*

In his 2000 commentary on Prov 1–9, Michael Fox (2000) discusses the identity and interpretations of the Strange Woman in two useful excursi that will serve as the point of departure for this study. In his first excursus, Fox presents and critiques six views of who the Strange Woman is, and concludes that the Strange Woman is another man's wife. In his second excursus, Fox discusses and rejects several allegorical-symbolic interpretations of the Strange Woman, as well as three representative feminist readings.

c. *Plan for this Study*

In endeavouring to answer the question "What Makes the Strange Woman of Proverbs 1–9 Strange?," and before critiquing Fox's alternatives, the present study will scrutinize the language of Prov 1–9. It will review briefly the key terms זרה and נכריה to determine the range of their possible meanings. It will then analyze the portrayal of the Strange Woman in Prov 1–9—in particular, how she is described, her speech, her actions, her attitudes, and the consequences to which she leads. It will discuss how the Strange Woman is compared and contrasted to Wisdom in Prov 1–9, and it will consider how the Strange Woman is contrasted to Yahweh in this section. In light of those data, it will evaluate the essence of her strangeness to determine what makes the Strange Woman strange in terms of the options presented by Fox before proposing another alternative for construing this figure.

2. *Lexical Parameters*

Translations and commentaries speak of this woman in various ways. Some refer to her as a loose woman (Fontaine 2002; Dell 2005), thus regarding her as morally unchaste. Others regard her as a foreign woman (Blenkinsopp 1991; Washington 1994), indicating that in ethnic terms she is not an Israelite. Many call her an adulteress (Fox 2000) who has been unfaithful to her marital vows. The present study, following a number of interpreters, will use the unspecified term "Strange Woman" as it endeavours to identify who this woman is and what it is that makes her strange. To do that, it is necessary at the outset to examine the semantic ranges of the key terms that are used for her in Prov 1–9.

a. זרה

Snijders, in a *TDOT* entry (*TDOT* 4:52–58) that summarizes the content of his earlier monograph on the use of זר in the Old Testament (Snijders 1953), defines the root meaning of the verb as "to turn aside, deviate, go away." In the prophetic literature, זרה is used for an enemy, an aggressor, an occupying power (cf. Isa 1:7), or for foreign gods who threaten and corrupt the faith of Israel (cf. Jer 5:19; cf. Ps 44:20 [21]). In a cultic sense, it speaks of that which does not belong, an unauthorized person, or what departs from the way of Yahweh (Num 18:22). In wisdom, it refers to an unchaste woman. Snijders concludes: "The term *zār*, 'outsider,' is fluid. Crucial for its more precise definition is the question of the immediate context in which its user is thinking and speaking. Is the milieu in question the family, the nation, the company of priests, the circle of the

devout?" (p. 57). Similarly, Washington (1994, 229) sees otherness as the fundamental sense of the term as it speaks of something or someone that is "outside a field of recognition or legitimacy."

b. נכריה

The term נכריה similarly has a broad range of meaning that overlaps to a large degree with the semantic range of זרה. Lang (*TDOT* 9:423–32) points to its use to refer to another, or someone distinct from the subject (cf. Prov 27:2), to someone outside of the family (Gen 31:15), or to a foreigner (Deut 17:15; 1 Kgs 8:41). Citing Plöger (1984, 56), he states that the term in Proverbs may be deliberately ambiguous so as to apply to a neighbour's wife, a foreign woman, and a prostitute.

c. *Conclusion of the Lexical Data*

This brief review of the semantic ranges of זרה and נכריה suggests that both terms denote what is different from or outside a boundary. That boundary could be ethnic, familial, cultic, marital, or moral, but in a specific case the precise description must be determined by the context in which the term is used. The range of meaning of both terms is broad enough that they do not inherently define who the Strange Woman is and what it is that makes her strange. That must be determined by investigating how the terms are used in their context in Prov 1–9.

3. *Portrayal of the Strange Woman in Proverbs 1–9*

a. *Description*

The Strange Woman is specifically described as a זרה and נכריה in 2:16–19; 5:1–23; 6:24–35, and 7:1–27. A fifth passage in 9:13–18 uses a different expression, אשׁת כסילות, but the language that is used for this figure shares many features with the language that depicts the זרה and the נכריה. In 6:24 she is also described as אשׁת רע, "the evil woman," and in 6:26 she is referred to as אשׁה זונה, "a wife of adultery."

The use of זרה and נכריה in parallel lines in 2:16; 5:20, and 7:5 suggests that the terms are used in overlapping ways rather than being contrasted categories. In 6:24 אשׁת רע is parallel to נכריה, which supports the conclusion that Prov 1–9 is using an assortment of similar expressions to describe a single literary image. It could well be that the final mention of the Strange Woman in 9:13–18, where she is called the אשׁת כסילות and is juxtaposed with the depiction of Woman Wisdom in 9:1–6, is intended to serve as an interpretive key to the reader as to the dénouement of the identity of the woman who is portrayed as the foil to

Woman Wisdom. Against those who would try to make distinctions between the various terms employed for the Strange Woman, Yee (1989, 54) argues persuasively that there is just one woman in view in these passages, basing her assessment on their shared descriptions, their contrasts to Wisdom, and the macrostructure of Prov 1–9 (cf. Clifford 1999, 104).

b. *Speech*

The speech of the Strange Woman is portrayed in terms of flattery (2:16; 7:5, 21), smoothness (5:3; 6:24), and seduction (7:21) as she takes the initiative to appeal to the naïve (7:15; 9:16–17). In 7:4–20 she parodies the erotic language used in the Song of Songs (Grossberg 1994, 24) as she endeavours to lead the impressionable young man into intimacy with her. Similarly, in 9:13–18 her offer of stolen water and bread eaten in secret is an inversion of the offer made by Woman Wisdom in 9:1–6.

c. *Actions*

The actions taken by the Strange Woman all have connotations that are considered sinful throughout the Old Testament. She leaves the companion of her youth (2:17), she is seductive in her appearance (6:25; 7:10), and she takes the initiative to entice those who are young (6:26; 7:12–16; 9:14). It may be significant that the verb חזק, which is used in 7:13 to describe her seduction, is also employed in the rapes of Dinah (Gen 34:2) and Tamar (2 Sam 13:14). In addition, her words of enticement echo several themes and motifs in the Song of Songs. Dell (2005, 20) notes: “The chief difference between this picture and that of the Song is the moral perception that this behaviour is wrong and is the path to death.”

d. *Attitudes*

In her attitudes, the Strange Woman is boisterous (7:11; 9:13), cunning (7:10), and brazen (7:13). She rejects the moral boundaries of personal property (9:17), marital commitment (7:11, 19–20), and divine covenant (2:17), even to the point of using her recent peace offerings as part of her allurement to immorality (7:14–18).

e. *Consequences*

The Strange Woman echoes the violent young men in 1:11–14 by promising pleasure without problems or detection, but in reality the consequences to which she leads are dire. The one who follows her way will experience loss of strength (5:9), finances (5:10), health (5:11), and

reputation (5:14; 6:33). Her path leads to death (2:18; 5:5; 7:22–23, 27; 9:18). This bitter end cannot be escaped (2:19; 6:29, 35), as her numerous victims can attest (7:26).

4. *The Strange Woman Contrasted to Wisdom in Proverbs 1–9*

In Prov 1–9 the Strange Woman is not an isolated figure, but she is set in juxtaposition to the words of the teacher of wisdom, and more particularly to the image of Woman Wisdom. In several respects the two woman figures are interlocked with similarities, but they are also clearly distinguished by their contrasts (Murphy 1988, 603; Camp 1997b, 92). As Stallman (2000, 123) observes, they share similarities of style, but also profound contrasts of substance. This combination of traits serves to maximize the power of the paired images, for both women seek to elicit the love and loyalty of the same young man (Yee 1989, 55).

a. *Contrasts to the Wisdom Teacher*

In her speech, the Strange Woman uses flattery, but the wise teacher states that perverse speech is wicked (6:12–15). In contrast to her seductive speech, the sage exhorts to turn away from evil (3:7) and to put devious speech away (4:24). He parallels the Strange Woman in employing erotic language, but he applies it to the wholehearted search for wisdom (2:1–5; 7:4).

The wisdom teacher urges his student to be generous toward those in need (3:27–28), instead of acting with the boisterous, cunning, and brazen attitude of the Strange Woman. In contrast to her rejection of moral boundaries, the sage is committed to righteousness, justice, and equity (1:3; 2:8–9), and he celebrates the fulfillment of sexual pleasure within the bond of marriage (5:15–20).

The consequences to which the Strange Woman and the wisdom teacher lead could not be more different. Following wisdom produces life in the land (2:21–22) and profit better than material wealth (3:14–16), instead of loss of finances. Wisdom provides physical health and refreshment (3:8; 4:22), instead of loss of health. Wisdom brings honor with God and humans (3:4, 35), instead of loss of reputation. The Strange Woman leads to death and a bitter end, but the wise teacher points to a path that leads to life (3:2, 18; 9:11) and stability (4:6, 12, 27). On three occasions, the wisdom teacher specifically informs the youth of what the Strange Woman in her enticement fails to disclose to him, that she leads to poverty (5:1–14), shame (6:26–35), and death (7:22–25).

b. *Contrasts to Woman Wisdom*

Woman Wisdom, like her counterpart, appeals to the naïve (1:22), but her speech is marked by what is noble, right, and true (8:6–7), as she utters words of reproof and counsel (1:23, 25, 30) rather than the flattery of the Strange Woman. Instead of seducing the youth, she presents him a clear challenge to forsake folly and live (9:6). She offers meat and wine that she has prepared (9:5), rather than stolen water and bread that must be eaten in secret.

Although Woman Wisdom takes a similar stance in the centre of the city (1:20; 8:1–3; 9:3–4) as she takes the initiative to call out to the young, her intent is different from that of the Strange Woman. Instead of enticing them to sin, Woman Wisdom calls them away from sin (1:22) and to understand wisdom (8:5). In her attitude, Woman Wisdom is committed to righteousness and justice (8:20), in contrast to the Strange Woman who rejects moral boundaries.

Instead of leading to financial loss, Woman Wisdom provides that which is better than the best material wealth (8:10–11, 19, 21). Following her way leads to finding life that is secure (1:33; 8:35).

5. *The Strange Woman contrasted to Yahweh in Proverbs 1–9*

In Prov 1–9 the name of Yahweh is used nineteen times, and in many of these cases there are clear contrasts to features of the Strange Woman. The description אשׁת כסילות in 9:13 is comparable to the fools (אוילים) in 1:7 who despise wisdom and instruction, terms that are paralleled to the fear of Yahweh which is the beginning of knowledge. Proverbs also asserts that Yahweh gives wisdom (2:6), that by wisdom he founded the earth (3:19), and that the fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom (9:10). In contrast to the אשׁת רע in 6:24, the youth is exhorted to fear Yahweh and turn away from רע in 3:7, and Woman Wisdom states in 8:13 that the fear of Yahweh is to hate רע. In 3:33 the close synonym רשׁע is used to describe the curse of Yahweh that is on the house of the wicked.

The speech of the Strange Woman employs flattery, but 3:32 states that the devious are an abomination to Yahweh. In stark contrast to her seduction, Yahweh speaks with fatherly reproof (3:11–12), and he hates a lying tongue (6:17) and a perverted mouth (8:13).

In her actions, the Strange Woman leaves the companion of her youth, but Yahweh blesses the dwelling of the righteous (3:33). Instead of her enticement of the young to their destruction, Yahweh invites to a path that leads to knowledge, wisdom, and understanding (1:7, 29; 2:6; 9:10).

Her autonomous attitude that rejects moral boundaries is considered an abomination by Yahweh in 6:17–19, because she refuses to orient her life in a way that corresponds to his values.

The profound difference between the Strange Woman and Yahweh is also demonstrated by the consequences to which they lead. Whereas the Strange Woman depletes one's finances, Yahweh prospers those who honor him (3:9–10, 33). She leads her prey to death, but the one who finds wisdom finds life and obtains favor from Yahweh (8:35). She allures the youth by claiming that sin can proceed undetected, but 5:21 affirms that the ways of a man are before the eyes of Yahweh and he watches all his paths (cf. Chisholm 2000, 407). Aitken (1986, 66) notes well: "While the foolish man may take steps to hide his sordid affair from the eyes of others (7:9; cf. Job 24:15) and may put all thought of God out of his mind, God's all-seeing eye is upon him, watching and observing, weighing and judging."

6. *The Essence of Strangeness in Proverbs 1–9*

a. *Evaluation of Fox's Options*

The various interpretative options concerning the identity of the Strange Woman each imply a standard by which she is regarded as being outside of a boundary. The first alternative discussed by Fox is that the Strange Woman is a foreign woman who is either a secular harlot, a non-conformist, or, as in several recent studies, an exogamous wife during the post-exilic period. For example, Washington (1994, 230) asserts that the polemics against the Strange Woman in Prov 1–9 "correspond in terminology and in substance to the post-exilic campaign against exogamous marriages described in Ezra 9–10; Neh 10:20; 13:23–27; and Mal 2:10–16" (cf. also Blenkinsopp 1991; Maier 1996). This view considers the woman strange because she is of a different, non-Israelite, ethnicity. Brenner (in Brenner and van Dijk-Hemmes 1993, 123), however, notes that although נכריה is used in 1 Kgs 11, Ezra 10, and Neh 13 to refer to foreign wives, זרה is never used for that purpose, so "this linguistic difference should conclusively preclude the identification of the *ʾiššāh zārâh* in Proverbs with the ethnically foreign women of the alleged historical circumstances of the mid-fifth century BCE community." Even more to the point, foreign ethnicity does not in itself explain the language of flattery and seduction that typifies the Strange Woman, her antithesis to Wisdom, or her contrasts to Yahweh.

Fox's second option is Clifford's suggestion that the Strange Woman is a human seductress based on a foreign goddess, such as Ishtar in the

Epic of Gilgamesh, Anat in Aqhat, and Calypso in the Odyssey (Clifford 1999, 27). Clifford concludes that "Proverbs seems to have transposed the epic type-scene to its own metaphorical context and dramatized the age-old warning against unsuitable marriage partners." In this viewpoint, she is strange because she invites the youth to pleasure and insight, only to lead him into destruction. Fox, however, demonstrates that Clifford's proposed parallels present more differences than similarities to Prov 1–9 (Fox 2000, 136).

The longstanding proposal by Boström (1935), and more recently supported by Perdue (1977, 151), that the Strange Woman is a foreign cult prostitute devoted to the fertility goddess Astarte, considers her strangeness to be rooted in her participation in non-Israelite religious worship. This position has been critiqued and rejected by Humbert (1939) and Camp (1997a), and Fox's evaluation of it is incisive. He says: "Nothing in the Strange Woman's words associate her with a cult or devotion to a love goddess… Moreover, the Strange Woman's actions entail abandoning the 'covenant of her God' (2:17), whereas a cult prostitute would be fulfilling her god's demands" (Fox 2000, 137).

The fourth view cited by Fox is that the Strange Woman is a social outsider, that is, an uninhibited woman who lives in a manner separate from piety and uprightness. As Snijders (*TDOT* 4:56) observes, she is strange or loose because she deserts social or divine conventions. Fox does not specifically critique this position, although he includes it in his group of deficient understandings of the Strange Woman. It may well be that this position, although incomplete, is pointing in the general direction of the essence of her strangeness.

Van der Toorn (1989), supported in part by Heijerman (1994), proposes that the Strange Woman is a prostitute who is not necessarily foreign in her ethnicity, so her strangeness is caused by her illicit sexual activity. Both Washington (1994, 226) and Fox (2000, 138–39), however, point out that in Prov 1–9 the major issue is not prostitution but adultery, as it is clearly stated especially in 6:26, 32. In addition, this position fails to consider the role that the Strange Woman plays as the foil to the way of wisdom.

Fox rejects a variety of interpretations that he terms allegorical-symbolic, including those views that consider the Strange Woman as an image for folly and wicked counsels generally, for Christian heresy, for foreign wisdom, for the material pleasures of the body, and for the radical other or the marginalized. While he allows that "the allegorical hermeneutic is legitimate as a homiletic strategy," he maintains that "it reuses biblical material in creating a new and distinct text with its

own values" (Fox 2000, 262). In arguing for a precise understanding of the textual meaning, he cautions: "The Strange Woman can easily be expanded into a symbol of any evil one may wish. Nothing in the text controls the direction of expansion, which shows that the expansion is not continuous with the author's intention" (Fox 2000, 255). An alternative that Fox does not entertain is that the author's intention could have been to use the language of the Strange Woman as a literary personification of folly. In this case, the allegory would be an integral part of the author's meaning rather than being the reader's allegorical imposition upon the text.

Fox's own position is that the Strange Woman is someone else's wife, and she is strange because she violates her marital relationship through adultery. This view can find a parallel in the use of similar language in the Egyptian Instruction of Any (Lichtheim 1976, 137). Fox points out that she is described as married in 2:17; 6:26, 29, 34; 7:19, and possibly 5:10, so "every wife is an *ʾiššah zarah* to all men but her husband" (Fox 2000, 140). However, Washington (1994, 227) observes that the reference to adultery does not fit all of the passages that feature the Strange Woman, and that the legal penalties for adultery (cf. Lev 20:10; Deut 22:22) are not exacted in the Proverbs texts. In addition, Fox fails to discuss the textual links between the Strange Woman and wisdom and folly, which are especially evident in the framing sections in ch. 5 (Murphy 1988, 602–3; Goldingay 1977, 85–86) and ch. 7, and in the paired scenes of wisdom and folly in ch. 9. In particular, he does not account for the אשת כסילות in 9:13–18, in which the Strange Woman is revealed for who she truly is, the personification of folly in antithesis to Woman Wisdom. Consequently, he focuses exclusively on the vehicle of the Strange Woman, but he fails to recognize the tenor of this image as it is employed by the wisdom teacher in Prov 1–9 to impress on the learner the seductive danger of folly (Jones 2003, 67).

b. *Evaluation of Recent Feminist Options*

Fox devotes several pages to a description and critique of some leading feminist readings of the Strange Woman, focusing especially on their interpretations of Prov 7. Because feminist scholars have worked so assiduously on this theme in recent years, his analysis deserves particular comment and expansion.

Brenner and van Dijk-Hemmes (1993), drawing on the motif in Judg 5:28; 2 Sam 6:16, and 2 Kgs 9:30 of a woman looking out the window, assert that the speaker in Prov 7 is a woman who has either accepted patriarchal values or has become a negative voice. Fox discounts their

claim of a feminine voice in Prov 7, saying that their position represents a stereotype of male and female behavior. He points out rightly that aside from 31:1–9 there is no explicit reference in Proverbs to a solely female voice, and that aversion to immorality is not peculiar to a male viewpoint, but it is shared by women as well.

Newsom (1997) says that woman is the quintessential other, a symbol of marginal discourses, but she also grants that the Strange Woman has symbolic significance as an allegory of folly. Fox (2000, 259) counters by saying, "In Proverbs, there is indeed an essential other: evildoers…of both sexes."

By far the most prolific writer on the subject of the Strange Woman has been Claudia Camp, beginning in her doctoral dissertation published in 1985, and continuing in publications spanning from 1987 to 2000 in which she has revised and altered some of her earlier positions. In the present study, only some of her key points can be mentioned. In Camp's 1988 article, she uses the image of the trickster from folklore as she coalesces the Strange Woman and personified Wisdom into a literary unity that embraces their duality. She says that the trickster paradigm presents "a positive valuation of women's power as anti-structural, regenerative because of its liminality" (Camp 1988, 33), and that this way of reading the text invites the interpreter to view how the Strange Woman and Wisdom are alike rather than too quickly thinking in terms of good and evil. In the 1991 article that Fox discusses, she asserts: "Although, in the biblical laws, defilement can come in many forms, from both men and women, here Woman—particularly in her sexual nature—becomes the embodiment of defilement. The metaphor has now been fully realized, but also reified: Woman is Strange" (Camp 1991, 29). She claims that because women act in ways that are alien to the family status, especially by prostitution and adultery, the aim of Proverbs is to control their sexual behavior. Writing again in 1997, Camp develops the Strange Woman as a multilayered image of idealized evil in its various dimensions (Camp 1997b, 93). In her most recent publication, she concludes that in Proverbs "the idea of strangeness plays out in largely symbolic ways: real ethnic foreign women and their gods are less a concern than all the metaphoric implications associated with them" as in the postexilic period the world is divided into clearly defined existential categories (Camp 2000, 29).

Taking Camp's writings together, she seems to say in terms of gender ideology that it is the liminality of woman that makes her inherently strange, and therefore evil, to the patriarchal way of thinking. Fox (2000, 260) rightly points out that in Proverbs adultery is condemned for both

men and women, so the book cannot be construed as a singular attempt to control female sexuality. Instead, "the Strange Woman represents the class of women who behave like her, and nothing indicates that she is a trope for some other disruptive and chaotic force or for all such forces" (Fox 2000, 261).

c. *The Strange Woman as a Literary Image*

In his assessment of the interpretative alternatives for the Strange Woman, Fox states: "One ancient hermeneutic still in vogue treats the Strange Woman as a cipher for other, more abstract dangers" (Fox 2000, 254). With scarcely any discussion, he dismisses this option as he asserts instead that "the Strange Woman is the negative counterpart of the human wife, not of personified Lady Wisdom" (Fox 2000, 262). Fox claims that reading more than this into the Strange Woman is overreading, and thus misreading, the text. Nevertheless, in light of the evidence in Prov 1–9 one wonders if in this case Fox may be under-reading, and thus misreading, the references to the Strange Woman.

Each of the options that Fox examines in detail focuses on a specific kind of boundary that the Strange Woman has violated, but what is conspicuously absent is the recognition that in Prov 1–9 the Strange Woman functions as a foil to Woman Wisdom. In addition, Fox's assessment does not explain the many ways in which she is contrasted to the instruction given by the wisdom teacher and to the speech, actions and consequences attributed to Yahweh in this section. Furthermore, the traits of the Strange Woman bear striking parallels to those of the violent youths in 1:11–14 and the wicked men in 4:14–19. In 2:12–19, the אשה זרה is juxtaposed not with the human wife, as Fox maintains, but with the evil man, and the language used for the two individuals is so similar that it argues for their ethical identification with each other (Yee 1989, 57; Harris 1995, 166).

A close reading of the language of Prov 1–9, then, seems to support the conclusion that the Strange Woman is a literary image used as a foil to the personification of Woman Wisdom. This is not an allegorical addition to the text, as Fox supposes, nor a mere stylistic flourish, but it is an intentional element of the author's persuasive strategy. By using a pair of metaphors that "have the power to call readers into active participation" (Stallman 2000, 119), the wisdom teacher appeals in an especially potent way to his primary recipients, young men in the sexually volatile period of adolescence and early manhood (Van Leeuwen 1990, 113). Employing erotically charged language that has numerous parallels to the Song of Songs (Dell 2005; Grossberg 1994), the teacher endeavours

to convince the young to be drawn wholeheartedly into the embrace of wisdom and to flee the seductive enticements of folly. Crenshaw (1998, 118) notes: “Because students almost without exception were males, wisdom was described as a beautiful bride, and folly was depicted as a harlot enticing young men to destruction. In this way language became highly explosive, and the quest for wisdom suddenly took on erotic dimensions…”

7. *The Strange Woman and Old Testament Ethics*

By using the paired images of Woman Wisdom and the Strange Woman, the sage in Prov 1–9 establishes a concrete polarity that enables him to communicate his message with incisive force. Both of these women, however, are metaphors that represent sets of abstractions that are also counterpoised against each other. These sets of abstractions constitute rival ethical systems that compete for the allegiance not just of the young, but of all humans. As Perdue (1994, 59) observes, “With the ability to imagine and to think rationally and conceptually, and with the capacity to express images and thoughts in words, humans have the singular ability to construct meaning systems that define and interpret their world in all of its aspects. And at the heart of this world-building capacity is metaphor.”

At the first level, Woman Wisdom incarnates the ethical path of wisdom that is set against the path of folly pictured by the Strange Woman. These two disparate paths are introduced in 1:7, and they are illustrated numerous times in the antithetical parallelisms that typify much of the book of Proverbs. A succinct example of the antithesis between wisdom and folly is seen in 3:35: “The wise will inherit honor, but stubborn fools, disgrace” (NRSV).

The ethical paths of wisdom and folly are expressed by practices that are respectively righteous or wicked. Van Leeuwen (Van Leeuwen 1990, 116) observes well: “The images of Prov 1–9 thus create a symbolic world of good and evil where good means staying within prescribed religio-moral boundaries and evil means the trespassing of these limits.” From the prologue of Proverbs onwards, wisdom and righteousness are bound together, for part of the book’s agenda is “gaining instruction in wise dealing, righteousness, justice, and equity” (1:3, NRSV). Similarly, in 2:9, when Yahweh gives wisdom, “then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path” (NRSV). In contrast to the ethical practice of righteousness that wisdom produces is the wickedness that is the manifestation of folly. Thus, the specific behaviors

of the Strange Woman, such as adultery and prostitution, are examples of the kinds of evil that folly produces in contrast to the righteous actions and attitudes that are the fruit of wisdom. It is this sense of antithetical ethical practices that is in view in 4:18–19: "But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day. The way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know what they stumble over" (NRSV). Birch (1991, 333) observes well: "The virtues and vices that must be recognized and espoused or avoided in order to become wise are given moral valuations. To be wise is to be righteous; to be foolish is to be wicked."

Righteousness and wickedness are behavioral practices that are prompted by an underlying ethical principle. A reading of Prov 1–9 cannot fail to note the prominent place given to the fear of Yahweh. This motif frames the section in 1:7 and 9:10 by asserting that the יראת יהוה, is the principle of wisdom. In addition, the phrase appears in 1:29; 2:5 and 8:13, and the exhortation "fear Yahweh" is given in 3:7. It is evident, then, that "the significance of the term is indicated both by its frequency and by its positioning in the section" (Estes 1997, 35).

The concept of the fear of Yahweh seems to have emerged out of the human response to the numinous, as Plath (1962), Becker (1965), and Derousseaux (1970) have detailed, and in its subsequent developments it appears to retain a sense of reverence or respect for the deity. Clements (1992, 62) observes: "It represents a desire to please the God Yahweh in all things and to give respect to the divine order of social and moral life, according this the highest possible priority. It establishes the ground in which the virtuous life may grow." The fear of Yahweh, then, is more than just an intellectual category, for it functions as the ethical standard for life. It represents reverence for the Lord who structured the world with moral order, and that reverence is evidenced by the kind of righteous practice demonstrated by Woman Wisdom. By contrast, irreverence for Yahweh yields the kind of evil behavior that characterizes the path of folly and is embodied by the image of the Strange Woman.

Although the fear of Yahweh is stated as the principle of wisdom, it may well be possible to take one additional step in probing the contrasting ethical systems in Prov 1–9. Every ethical system must ask what is the ultimate basis for good. In recent years, increasing attention has been focused on the basis for ethics in the Old Testament. In other words, what is the foundational ethical paradigm by which behavior is exhorted and examined, rewarded or condemned? Many older studies claimed that the basis for ethics is obedience to Yahweh's stated stipulations. Compared with the legal, narrative, and prophetic literature of the Old

Testament, in the wisdom literature there is relatively little explicit reference to the Mosaic law, although there are evident similarities between Prov 6:21–23 and Deut 6:4–9; 11:18–20 (Clifford 1999, 129), and there does seem to be a general compatibility with the central commands of the law. Another proposed basis for ethics is the pattern of natural order (Barton 2003, 29), which has common ground with wisdom's use of the physical world to demonstrate features of the imbedded moral order in Yahweh's world.

The language of Prov 1–9, however, seems to fit best with recent discussions on the imitation of God as the paradigm for ethics in the Old Testament. Barton (1994, 19) reasons that because humans are made in the image of God, "Yahweh and humanity share a common ethical perception, so that God is not only the commander but also the paradigm of all moral conduct." Ethical behavior, therefore, encompasses both obedience to the stated commands of Yahweh and imitation of the character of Yahweh, as Davies (1999, 114) observes well: "The moral norms encountered in the Old Testament arise out of imitation of God's character as well as out of obedience to God's will, for he is presented not only as the source of ethical commands, but as the pattern of ethical behavior." In this light, wisdom is a path of behavior that is righteous because it reflects the intrinsic character of Yahweh (Wright 2004, 38). The basis for ethics, then, is rooted in the fixed point of Yahweh's character. Folly, on the other hand, is marked by behavior that is wicked because it fails to act or value as Yahweh does. Folly at its heart is the arrogant pursuit of autonomy (3:5b; cf. 12:15; 14:12; 16:25; 26:5, 12) that scoffs at Yahweh (1:22, 29–30; 3:11; 9:7–8) instead of humbly accepting the imitation of Yahweh as the basic ethical paradigm for life. Its ethical basis is relativism, for instead of imitating Yahweh it chooses, according to the memorable *leitmotif* of Judges, to do what is right in its own eyes. The literary pictures of the Strange Woman and Woman Wisdom are potent personifications of the contrasting ethical paradigms in terms calculated to communicate especially to young men.

Who, then, is the Strange Woman in Prov 1–9, and what is it that makes the Strange Woman strange? As the present study has demonstrated, the Strange Woman must be viewed in terms of the rival ethical systems that are implicit in this section.

Literary Picture	Woman Wisdom	Strange Woman
Ethical Path	Wisdom	Folly
Ethical Practice	Righteousness	Wickedness
Ethical Principle	Reverence for Yahweh	Disrespect for Yahweh
Ethical Paradigm	Imitation of Yahweh	Autonomy

At the level of the literary picture, the Strange Woman is a foil to Woman Wisdom. Both female figures seek to elicit the love and allegiance of the young man who is the primary intended reader. By her seductive speech and sensual allurements, this woman endeavours to bring the young man into intimacy with her. In some cases, this illegal liaison is described in the specific terms of adultery (6:29–35; 7:19–20), but in other passages the precise form of the illegitimacy of the temptation is not specified. As a literary image, therefore, it is her invitation to sexual intimacy outside the boundary of marriage that makes her strange.

This, however, does not exhaust the significance of the Strange Woman in Prov 1–9. As the present study has argued, Prov 1–9 is not just a tale of two women. Rather, it is a tale of two ethical systems which are pictured by the Strange Woman and Woman Wisdom. From this perspective, the Strange Woman is the poetic embodiment of the path of folly which is characterized by wickedness that demonstrates disrespect for Yahweh. In contrast to the ethical paradigm that is incarnated in Woman Wisdom, the Strange Woman pictures in an arresting and compelling fashion the siren song of autonomy. Her appealing lyric celebrates the way that seems right to humans, but alas its end is the way of death. In the final analysis, it is her allegiance to autonomy that rejects Yahweh as the ethical basis for life that makes the Strange Woman strange.

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Does God Behave Unethically in the Book of Job?

Katharine J. Dell

> With the Job drama…Yahweh comes up against a man who stands firm, who clings to his rights until he is compelled to give way to brute force. He has seen God's face and the unconscious split in his nature. God was now known… (Jung 1979, 54)

The book of Job raises in a particularly acute way the problem of "acceptable behaviour" in relation to God. One might quickly retort "acceptable to whom?" If to human beings how can we presume to judge God? However, one might also argue that human beings have some right to expect God to behave in some manner towards them that might be deemed "ethical" given certain parameters in the relationship that are already presupposed.

There are two parameters here which one might term "natural law" and "revealed law." Natural law expects there to be some order to the universe and God as creator both instigated and preserves in an ongoing way that order. This is very much the wisdom worldview at its most basic—that there is an order in the world, found in creation, in God's sustaining of the world and ultimately in human society and behaviour.[1] This is where the idea of "relationship" comes in. This order needs to have some meaning for human beings. God's sustaining of the order in the world prevents a descent into its opposite—chaos—which is random and meaningless. Order gives meaning to creation, to God's role in creating the world in the first place and to his sustenance of it. From the human side, order gives a shape to both society and individual lives. Order gives stability but does not necessarily lead to happiness; however,

1. J. L. Crenshaw argues that this order has to have an ultimate goal—"Order implies a goal whereas chaos lacks movement towards some final meaningful destination. Incursions of anomy can at best momentarily divert the march towards a distant goal, but in the last resort such disturbances only hasten progress in the direction of the desired end. They do so by sharpening one's resolve and by shaping character…" (Crenshaw 1983, 4).

evil and suffering could be seen to belong to the disorder side of the two poles.[2] This is most starkly seen when natural disasters occur and cause innocent suffering—these are moments of disorder in an otherwise regular pattern. It could be argued that such episodes are in fact an inevitable part of the order of creation given, for example, that earthquakes are needed from time to time to maintain the equilibrium of the earth. It is not hard to see, however, how in the ancient world the suffering caused by natural disaster became regarded as divine punishment for sin. Job's children are wiped out in the prologue by four episodes, two of which are natural disasters (Job 1:16, 19)—fire from heaven which burned up his sheep and their attendants and a great desert wind which caused their house to fall on Job's children. Job sees this as a punishment when he rends his clothes and supplicates himself to God (Job 1:20).

The essential connection that has been made here is between order and justice—justice both in the human and divine spheres. Hence, within the order of human society, justice and equity become the goals that give meaning to life, that enable society to function and individuals to feel secure. From the divine angle, divine maintenance of the order of creation and the human world only has a deeper meaning if it relates to good and evil. Thus, the creation is essentially "good" (Gen 1) and that which threatens the natural order—such as the Flood, sent by God in punishment of sin, showing God capable of effecting disorder for his purposes—is evil, even if at the end of the day it has a happy ending. In relation to human society, if God is ensuring order and looking for just behaviour, then the duty of human beings wanting to be in relationship with him is to behave according to certain principles of justice. The assessment of what constitutes good or bad behaviour may vary from one society to another, depending upon customs, legal codes and so on, but there are basic types of behaviour that are universally acceptable or not, hence "ethical" or "unethical," such as murdering a fellow human being.[3] It is perhaps a natural step, then, to expect of God similar norms of justice and good behaviour that human beings subject themselves to in order to maintain ostensibly "God's order." After all, God set up the world, so should he not also be seen to have set up a cosmic order that is best understood in terms of justice, that keynote of civilized human society?

2. Crenshaw (1983) includes death on the disorder side, but that seems to me to be part of the order, unless it is an untimely death (cf. Eccl 6:3–6).

3. Sometimes regarded as ethical in a situation of war, but generally totally unacceptable for the maintenance of a stable, just and ordered society (cf. Exod 20:13/Deut 5:17—"Thou shalt not kill").

These presuppositions lie behind much of the Old Testament, particularly the wisdom literature, notably Proverbs, but also in the book of Job. However, there is another type of presupposition that needs consideration—that of revealed law. The Old Testament contains much material that is a history of a small nation with a special relationship with God. God wants, at the most basic level, a meaningful relationship with humankind and the story goes that when such a relationship with the entire race was not looking promising he turned to certain individuals who were the founders of the nation Israel. God revealed himself in a particular way to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses and made his "nature" and aspects of his character known to them—for example his compassionate nature (Pss 78:38; 86:15) and his pathos at his people's misfortune (Hos 11:8–9; Jer 8:18–9:3). There is an unfolding aspect to this presentation—God reacts differently in ever evolving situations.[4] A definitive moment is when God enters into a covenant relationship with his people (Exod 19–20/Deut 5), which could be seen to place certain boundaries on his own behaviour as well as that of his chosen people, Israel. On this model it was deeply problematic for Israel when God did not appear to be acting "justly" or "ethically," when he appeared to be absent or malevolent. As Crenshaw (1983, 5) writes, "In a word, the covenant relationship exacerbated the problem of theodicy, for the Lord confessed a personal interest in Israel's destiny… The violence which stilled Josiah forever made mockery of God's assurances that success would attend faithful conduct" (see 2 Kgs 23:29). The human tendency was to take the blame, to decide that it must be human beings who have sinned for God to behave in this manner. As Crenshaw comments, "The resulting tension between divine and human culpability was nearly always eased by stressing the latter's sinfulness. In short, defense of God occurred at human expense" (Crenshaw 1983, 5). This can be seen in Job in the conclusion mutually held by all the friends, including Elihu, albeit with various nuances, that Job must have sinned in order to have been punished in this way, with loss of family, status and health. While the book of Job notoriously contains little that relates to the Israelite covenant or people *per se*, and seems more closely aligned to the "natural law" presupposition that I have described, some scholars have made links with the Deuteronomic worldview (e.g. Ticciati 2005), with its strong view of retributive justice, and I would argue that the "revealed law" model is certainly relevant here. Job poses an equal challenge to such presuppositions if taken in the context of the Old Testament as a whole.

4. Brueggemann (2000) uses the unfolding nature of God's character to exonerate him from some of the unethical actions he performs.

The corollary of human beings "taking the blame" or giving God the benefit of the doubt in the interest of good relationships, on the one hand, and an unknown quantity to this powerful, awe-inspiring God, on the other, is a lessening of human integrity. Job's capitulation at the end of the book might be because God convinced him by good argument, but that is perhaps unlikely. It might be that he "repents," aware ultimately of his own sinfulness, or more probably it may well be because he recognizes the awesome power of the Almighty as stressed in those speeches. In either case, his capitulation loses him some integrity certainly from the human side—Crenshaw puts it in terms of "salvaging of God's honor at the expense of human integrity" (Crenshaw 1983, 7). Crenshaw argues that "An innocent Job smarts from God's challenge 'Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be justified?' (Job 40:8), and proceeds to reverse the offense by putting himself in the wrong" (Crenshaw 1983, 9). However, other scholars would disagree that Job puts himself in the wrong, and argue that Job does not fully capitulate but rather recognizes God's limitations at this point (e.g. Miles 1995).

On the divine side, the expectation that justice will accompany order and that God's revealed nature as judge and lawgiver will lead him to behave "ethically" can be seen to put God into a straight-jacket and restrict his freedom. Psalm 37 (a wisdom psalm closely related to the proverbial worldview of just deserts) is a good example of the human desire to see God behaving justly towards good and wicked in relation to meting out appropriate punishments. Other psalms (e.g. Ps. 89:46) at times stress the hiddenness or unknowability of God in order to explain his inaction, on the one hand, and increase the sense of his mysterious otherness, on the other. However, this too is a thinly veiled attempt to exonerate God from behaving unethically. As Crenshaw comments, "Admittedly, withholding of essential nature protects the deity's sovereignty, but why must the mystery begin when injustice raises its ugly head?" (Crenshaw 1983, 11). Crenshaw argues insightfully that the basic theme of Job is "Is…God…free or not[?]. Are human notions of justice the ultimate arbiter of God's actions?" (Crenshaw 1983, 10). Once again, one is back to the link between justice and order. Does God's control of the order of the world mean that he is obliged to act justly? Arguably, on a natural law argument, just behaviour from God does not necessarily follow and maybe this is where the book of Job is coming from. On a revealed law model, God's behaviour is certainly more problematic given the expectations of the chosen covenant people. Job is, however, from the land of Uz (Job 1:1) and so arguably the debate takes place outside this specific context.

With this discussion in mind I turn to the book of Job. The main sections of Job relevant to the question of God's ethical or unethical behaviour are (1) the Prologue, notably the scenes that take place in heaven, and (2) the God speeches. Job's own reactions are also of interest in the prologue, in the body of the dialogue and in his response to God's words (3).

1. *The Prologue*

> God's decision to test Job could be for any number of reasons; to gain the information about Job's character that he lacked; to salvage his dignity and reputation for omniscience, or for idle entertainment. In any case, the picture presented of God in these chapters is hardly a flattering one. (Whybray 2000, 15)

Job's integrity is established right at the beginning of the book and there is never any question as to his uprightness. The opening verse states that Job is "blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil" (Job 1:1). Indeed, it is this aspect of his character that leads God to use him as his test case in a wager with "the Satan." In fact, it is deeply ironic that Job is subjected to this test just because he is God's best example of faithfulness.[5] Jung sees the real reason for God allowing Satan to inflict this suffering as a feeling of threat from Satan. He writes, "It is amazing to see how easily Yahweh, quite without reason, had let himself be influenced by one of his sons, by a *doubting thought*, and made unsure of Job's faithfulness" (Jung 1979, 19–20). He goes on, "This 'doubting thought' is Satan, who after completing his evil handiwork has returned to the paternal bosom in order to continue his subversive activity there" (Jung 1979, 26). This viewpoint, however, has the effect of somewhat exonerating God because he felt "under pressure" and it also elevates the role of Satan, who is simply "the Satan/the adversary" (השׂטן) at this point.[6]

5. Job is often likened to Abraham, who also is subjected to an unreasonable test in Gen 22; see the discussion in Boström 2000. One interesting difference is in their reactions—while Abraham is submissive, Job, at least in the dialogue, is non-accepting and so challenges the divine rule itself.

6. D. Geeraerts (2003, 53) argues that what we have in Job is "the theology of God's embarrassment." For Geeraerts, God felt embarrassed about his behaviour in the wager, and so spends the rest of the book trying to make up for it, as, for example, in Job 42:7, where he puts Job in the right and then overcompensates in his restoration.

However, the very fact of a wager immediately raises a problem: What kind of God uses human beings in a wager, to prove a point at the expense of their sanity, family and livelihood? Job does not know of this wager and so is kept in the dark on the issue of the reason for his suffering. It may be presented as a test of Job's virtue by God, which in itself could be seen as a worthy activity—but the devastating consequences for the individual and those around him to which it leads makes one question its validity. The worthiness of the activity does not lessen Job's pain. The question is raised, "Is God justified in torturing a perfectly good and innocent person, merely to prove that he *is* good and innocent?" (Oesterley and Robinson 1934, 176). Moreover, there is a sense of letting God off the hook in the prologue of Job when the Satan is the one doing the actual inflicting of disaster. This has the effect of distancing God from the less savoury action, relieving him of the onus of having originated the plan of bringing misfortune upon Job. Yet it is clear that God allowed such testing to take place—he says to the Satan in Job 1:12, "Very well, all that he has is in your power," and in Job 2:6, "Very well, he is in your power"—hence, handing over power temporarily without threatening his ultimate control[7] and so he cannot escape responsibility. Indeed, Job and the friends all assume it is God that has inflicted the calamity and the Satan quickly disappears from view after the Prologue. Job's children are, in all this, innocent bystanders. The text tells us that Job was so concerned about the possibility of their sinning that he would regularly pray for them (Job 1:5). This is usually thought to indicate Job's over-zealousness rather than the possibility that they were sinners, although that possibility is also hinted at and indeed taken up in the friends' speeches at Job 5:4; 8:4, and 20:10. Nevertheless, a certain injustice seems to have been done by God to Job's children, whom Crenshaw describes as "no more than extras in a biography of God's favorite" (Crenshaw 1984, 58).

The Satan picks up the idea of "for nothing." He says in Job 1:9, "Does Job fear God for nothing?," and he accuses God of protection and blessing such that he has a vested interest in righteous behaviour in order to perpetuate his good fortune. The Satan's question is whether human beings serve God for nothing or for what they can get out of it. He is probing the hidden motive behind human piety. Take the retributive framework away and would human beings be so interested in a relationship with God? He is thus responsible for setting the agenda of the issue

7. This can be likened to the Ugaritic parallel of a high god getting lesser gods to do his work but not being exonerated from responsibility by such action. See Handy 1993.

of disinterested righteousness, the instigator of the entire situation in many ways. However, again, this does not exonerate God from responsibility.

Y. Hoffman (1981) notes that the God of the prologue and the God of the God speeches are very different. The first, rather on the model of the Greek gods, takes part in a gamble as a result of being tempted by the Satan. God here is "anthropomorphic, popular, earthly," while in the God speeches he is "transcendental, glorious, abstract" (Hoffman 1981, 164). He writes, "There seems to be no connection between the simple, vulgar curiosity about who will win the contest, the Lord or Satan…and the most cardinal problem about the management of the world by its Creator" (Hoffman 1981, 164). This is interesting as another comment upon the disjunction between the prologue and dialogue—however, for the purposes of the present study I wish to regard the book in a unified manner and read it synchronically. Hoffman points out the same disjunction between Job's reactions in prologue and dialogue. Of his reaction in the prologue he writes that it "clearly illuminates his view that God owes him nothing, and does not even need to justify his deeds, since he only took away what he had previously voluntarily given" (Hoffman 1981, 163). In the dialogue, on the other hand, "Job attacks God bluntly accusing him of perverting justice by neglecting the righteous and preferring the strong" (Hoffman 1981, 163). This point leads us to consider Job's reactions, notably in the Prologue. His first reaction after the calamities that have befallen his children is to adopt mourning rituals and accept that he came into the world with nothing, as he will go out of it, acknowledging God's right to give and to take away without that observation detracting from his faith in God. His second reaction, after being afflicted with disease, is to rebuke his wife and reaffirm his acceptance that good and bad come from God. In both instances, then, he is accepting of good and evil alike meted out by God, as if he does not expect any strict principle of justice to be working, and as if he regards all that he has been given as a matter of grace. As Crenshaw puts it, in the wider context of talking about creation itself, "As recipients of the supreme gift of life, humans would do well to relinquish the notion that the deity owes them anything more than has been freely bestowed, irrespective of desert" (Crenshaw 2005, 190). This seems to sum up Job's responses to his personal suffering here. It might be seen as a licence to arbitrariness for God since he owes Job nothing—this comes out most strongly in the speeches of God to which I now turn.

2. *The Speeches of God*

> [The divine speeches] seem to imply that God plays by different rules from those projected on the deity by human rationality. God does not always reward goodness and punish wickedness. (Crenshaw 2005, 189)

The response of God[8] from the whirlwind represents a display of his power in the creation and sustenance of his world, with an emphasis on the non-human creation, notably, wild animals and sea monsters. The emphasis thus falls on the order that is found in natural law through the processes of creation. It is interesting that the emphasis falls upon the non-human—Crenshaw sees this as a deliberate "corrective for the self-imposed poverty of anthropocentricity" (Crenshaw 2005, 178). He argues that assuming that God has to conform to human concepts of justice is the conclusion of a "shallow, self-serving piety that cannot be sustained" (Crenshaw 2005, 178), a conclusion close to idolatry. He writes, "The author of the book of Job excels as an iconoclast, removing human beings from center stage and rejecting all forms of idolatry. His God refuses to appear in the palace of justice, choosing instead the arena of creation" (Crenshaw 2005, 178). This is an interesting point suggesting that human beings are not so central in God's concern as they would like to think they are, but it does not get to the nub of the issues about power and justice raised by these speeches.

M. Tsevat (1976) cites Buber's view that the problem of the God speeches concerns justice. God's answer is to teach Job that divine justice is greater than that of human beings. He sees God's display of his power in nature as representative of the divine justice—"it is not retributory and egalitarian but allotting, spending, freely flowing" (Tsevat 1976, 362). God gives each creature what is appropriate to it. Tsevat dislikes the confusion here of God's allotment of fates and justice—God could on this scheme just as easily allot suffering to the righteous, but that would not be justice in human terms. Job has never questioned that God has power and that he created and sustains the world—the issue is why God does not run the world according to standards that he himself has apparently set and revealed to humanity. It seems that Buber is confusing the difference between power and justice. Power need not have any relation to human standards of justice, but justice is different.

8. Use of the divine name, Yahweh, suggests the same God whose name was revealed to Israel in Exod 3. It is interesting that there is a wider variation in names for God in the dialogue.

The speeches of God are arguably primarily about power, and justice is subsumed to God's power here. As Miles puts it, "The Lord presents himself, with withering sarcasm and towering bravado, as an amoral, irresistible force. But Job has never called the Lord's power into question. It is his justice of which Job has demanded an accounting" (Miles 1995, 315). This brings out the sense of disjunction between the end of the dialogue and the God speeches—while Job uses legal language to force God into the dock, God appears to be addressing a rather different issue to that of Job, what Geeraerts calls an "indirect speech act" (Geeraerts 2003, 45). Miles argues that God "changes the subject," carefully leaving out the issue of his justice because "he has no choice—he has just subjected a just man to torture on a whim" (Miles 1995, 315).[9]

Miles sees Job as having the upper hand in the end, his responses being ironic. He writes, "He [Job] concludes that he spoke a truth beyond what he could have guessed at the time" (Miles 1995, 321). He notes the brevity of Job's responses in comparison to his "passionate fluency," some might call it verbosity, in the dialogue, indicating a physical defeat but not a moral one—there Job gains the moral high ground. He writes, "Ultimately Job wins: The Lord bows, in a way, to Job's characterization of God, abandons his wager with the devil and after a vain attempt to shout Job down, atones for his wrongdoing by doubling Job's initial fortune" (Miles 1995, 327). The overriding conclusion, then, for Miles is that good and evil are to be found simultaneously in the godhead—he writes, "After Job, God knows his own ambiguity as he has never known it before" (Miles 1995, 328).[10] This view is shared by a number of modern scholars who see Job as gaining the upper hand over God. However, I wonder whether that is indeed the most satisfactory interpretation of the events and of the issues raised.

Tsevat (1976) takes a rather different line, arguing that what is conveyed by the God speeches is the awareness that retributive justice should be abandoned. It is Job's assumption that the world runs on justice that actually reflects his lack of "knowledge" (e.g. in Job 38:2 where God accuses Job of darkening counsel "by words without knowledge"). Tsevat argues that the gist of what God says is that "no retribution is

9. Crenshaw (2005) similarly argues that in answering a different question there is no endorsement from the author of either criticism of the deity for failing to implement justice by human standards or defence of divine conduct—the issues are left open. This links up with ideas about the deliberately veiled manner of the author who is in fact saying radical things, but in a less than obvious way (cf. Tsevat 1976).

10. This comment is made in the context of the unfolding view of God that Miles (1995) finds in Tanak.

provided for in the blueprint of the world, nor does it exist anywhere on it. None is planned for the non-human world and none for the human world" (Tsevat 1976, 368). He cites examples such as Job 38:25, 27 where rain falls in the desert, an observation that is of no use to humans but simply part of God's own scheme. Thus the godhead is denying that divine justice is real—it is a figment of human imagination. This leads Tsevat to conclude that the book of Job "de-moralizes the world" (Tsevat 1976, 370). He sees a link up with Job's initial response in the prologue—"The prologue says that one ought not to, the divine address says that one cannot, expect anything for one's behaviour" (Tsevat 1976, 371). So we are left with an amoral universe, except that Tsevat adds that this does not exonerate human beings from living according to just principles on earth as an ideal of a just society. He simply sees God as transcending all forms of justice—"He Who speaks to man in the Book of Job is neither a just nor an unjust God but God" (Tsevat 1976, 105).

Both Miles and Tsevat show some real insight here, and yet both views fall slightly short of a full explanation, in my view. The insight that the speeches are essentially about God's power and not his justice seems to me to be true. However, this does not add up to God being, as Robertson terms it, "a charlatan God, one who has the power and skill of a god but is a fake at the truly divine task of governing with justice and love" (Robertson 1973, 464). Rather, the speeches are a celebration of God's creation of a strange world of wild animals about which human beings know very little and of which they only have a glimpse. The speeches are about power—particularly the second speech with its emphasis on the conquering of the great monsters, Behemoth and Leviathan. But they are also about the sheer wonder, beauty, and non-conformity of the created world.[11] The order that God has set up does not after all correspond exactly to human ideas of order, in just the same way that his justice, his wisdom and his behaviour cannot be contained by human expectations. There is an element of whim and caprice in God's delighting in what he has made. J. W. Whedbee terms it "a playful, festive note in the portrayal of creation" (Whedbee 1977, 24). There is a sense that God's whole world has dimensions of which human beings can only scratch the surface. The otherness of God is stressed here—a point that neither Miles nor Tsevat make. In Tsevat's analysis, his conclusion that retributive justice has to be abandoned in order to understand these speeches is insightful. The speeches do not talk about retributive

11. Gordis (1965) argues that, in the God speeches, beauty is an anodyne to man's suffering and the key to truth.

justice at all, that key issue of the dialogue that has just ensued; rather, they by-pass the issue and do not suggest that it has a role in the wider picture of the world that is being presented here. It seems, however, one-sided to suggest that while God is beyond any notion of justice, human beings should feel bound by it. In my view, while justice is not the main point of concern in these speeches, the nature of knowledge and understanding is of concern as keys to the natural order that underpins the wisdom worldview, and this concern, unlike that for justice, forms a bridge between human attempts to understand, as expressed by both Job and the friends in the dialogue, and God's reply.[12] In the context of God's creative power an interesting distinction is made between knowledge in the first speech and brute power, over chaotic forces in the second (as Geeraerts [2003] points out[13]). The emphasis on knowledge is of particular interest in the bridge it builds with human reflections on knowledge, wisdom and insight in the dialogue,[14] and in the nuance it gives to the issue of God's power, which nonetheless rests on the foundation of wisdom.

In the dialogue in Zophar's speech in ch. 11, he wishes that God would "tell you the secrets of wisdom (חכמה), for wisdom is many-sided" (v. 6). God is seen to hold the key to all knowledge and there is an acknowledgment that there may be wisdom outside human comprehension. In 15:8–9, Job is rebuked by Eliphaz for thinking he knows all the answers: "do you limit wisdom (חכמה) to yourself? What do you know (ידע) that we do not know? What do you understand (בין) that is not clear to us." This issue of who holds knowledge is at stake here, as is the human arrogance of thinking it knows all the answers. In 26:3, Job sarcastically thanks Bildad for his counsel to one lacking wisdom (חכמה)

12. Arguably, justice is not totally absent from the heavenly realm, as demonstrated in the prologue in the selection of Job in the first place for his piety. Nor is it absent from the epilogue in the restoration of human notions of divine justice, which may take away from the profundity of what has just gone before but nevertheless leads to a contented conclusion that somehow the equilibrium of the world has been restored after all.

13. Geeraerts (2003), however, sees the first God speech as being a response to Job's lack of reference to a hierarchy of wisdom and knowledge which is associated with age (as indicated by the friends in the dialogue); the second speech addresses the hierarchy of power flaunted by Job when he ignores established principles of conversational politeness.

14. This poses a challenge to the idea (see Williams 1978, 65) that although there are some interesting connections between dialogue and God speeches, the main issues of each seem to bypass each other.

with the presentation of 'good advice'" (עצה) and goes on to a hymn glorifying God's power and understanding within the creative act. In Elihu's speech in 32:8 all human understanding (בין) is attributed to God, and later in 34:35 he accuses Job of speaking "without knowledge" (דעת) and "insight." This theme, then, is already present in the dialogue, the tension being between God's ultimate knowledge and human attempts to appropriate it through wisdom. It is then taken up by God in the God speeches. The first sentence God speaks to Job in 38:2 asks who darkens counsel (עצה) by "words without knowledge" (דעת) and in v. 4 challenges Job to have "understanding" (בין) of the setting up of the world. This echoes divine wisdom's watching role in Prov 8, which is beyond the grasp of human wisdom. God mockingly challenges Job in 38:5—"Surely you know!" (ידע). Similar challenges are posed by God to Job in vv. 18, 21 and 33. In 38:35, the rhetorical question is asked "Who has put wisdom (חכמה) in the inward parts, or given understanding (בין) to the mind?," presenting wisdom in human bodily terms but still suggesting that only God does so as he will it. Verse 37 suggests that only God can "number the clouds by wisdom (חכמה)," taking the rhetorical question in its positive sense, God therefore possessing superior wisdom to human beings.

In ch. 39, in a slight shift from a description of the creation and the early created world, we move to the cycles of life, birth and death (cf. Eccl 1:4–9). The inference is that only God "knows" (ידע) the time at which animals give birth (v. 1). An interesting example of the way God metes out wisdom—or not, as he wills—is the behaviour of the ostrich, whom "God has made…forget wisdom (חכמה) and given it no share in understanding (בין)" (39:17). Having said that, her behaviour has a certain wildness and freedom—she neglects her eggs, "forgetting that a foot may crush them" (v. 15), and "deals cruelly with its young, as if they were not its own" (v. 16). And yet she waves her wings proudly and "laughs at the horse and his rider" (v. 18) as she outstrips them in her running. There is here the acknowledgment that not all creatures behave according to human ideas of wisdom, that they have a freedom that lies outside such attempts to control their behaviour. In 39:26, moreover, God asks mockingly, "Is it by your wisdom (בין) that the hawk soars?" The inference is that it is God's wisdom alone that enables such things to happen and that his wisdom is not necessarily of the same order as human wisdom. God's wisdom establishes the order in the world that is natural order, but this does not necessarily correspond to human ideas about that order or about justice or reward for good behaviour.

This issue of knowledge, then, shows the limitations of the human perspective, although at times, as we have seen, notably in Job 11:6, there is acknowledgment of God's superior knowledge. This indicates shared ground even if the God speeches take the points further to stress the otherness of God's wisdom and human inability to pin God down to a known set of rules.

So where does that leave us with the God speeches? Perhaps the inference of this glimpse into the far more complex and wonderful nature of God's realm is to suggest that God's power, and his wisdom as demonstrated through the order of his created world, is beyond human comprehension. There appear to be different "rules" for different occasions. Where does that leave God's justice or in other words his responsibility to behave ethically? We have seen how this issue is not spelt out in the God speeches in terms of justice; rather, the reference is to God's knowledge as reflective of his superior power and ultimately (in the second speech) to his brute force in overcoming large sea creatures. One might object that there is little use expecting any kind of justice from God that at times seems arbitrary (what Miles 1995 terms God's "cruel streak") and hence cannot be comprehended by humans anyway. But, in a sense, that is precisely what God is saying in his vision of the created world—that there is a seeming arbitrariness to wild animals and to gratuitous rain that is nonetheless a part of the diversity and wonder of the great spread of creation. That puts the notion of human society and attempts to run it according to rules of justice in proportion. However one-sided it may be, all human beings can do is live with the paradox of hoping for ethical treatment by God but without the expectation of it. The speeches of God show that there are no guarantees and indeed that to expect such guarantees is to seek to control and belittle God in his infinite greatness and wisdom. They raise the issue of divine freedom—it is simply because God does not react automatically to human conduct that God is free, and he is free not just to act unjustly if he so wishes, but also to have compassion (a point made by Murphy 1981). This perhaps brings us closer to the God of revealed law who enters into relationship and so might be expected to behave in compassionate ways towards his loved ones, but without denying his right to behave capriciously if he so desires.

So, to return to the issue of whether God behaves unethically in the book of Job, the answer is really yes, at least by human standards. This is made clear in the sentiments of Job in the dialogue and in his final responses, which I will now go on to discuss.

3. *Job's Responses in the Dialogue and Epilogue*

> Job had noticed during this harangue [the God speeches] that everything else had been mentioned except his right. He has understood that it is at present impossible to argue the question of right, as it is only too obvious that Yahweh has no interest whatever in Job's cause but is far more preoccupied with his own affairs. (Jung 1979, 26)

In Frost's *A Masque of Reason*, God calls Job, "the Emancipator of your God" and thanks him for helping "To stultify the Deuteronomist and change the tenor of religious thought" (cited by Miles 1995, 303). There is, in Job's protests, a resistance to traditional views that speaks of the anguish of Job's experience that is at odds with all that he believed before about retributive justice and all that the friends represent. Job believes that God has betrayed his trust. This is reflected in his accusations against God, for example in 13:24–28; 16:9–14; 19:5–12, 22. He displays alternating views of God as both absent (e.g. 19:7) and oppressively near (e.g. 19:12). Clearly, Job expects more from his God and he does not give up the fight. He believes that God has behaved unethically towards him and he is determined to hold him to account. As M. Weiss writes, "[Job] refuses to accept what he sees and he cannot accept what his friends say. He therefore searches and beseeches God, demanding to be shown the whole truth, the world's eternal truth. In order to settle the controversy on earth, God will appear to Job and will show him the world in all its stark reality" (Weiss 1983, 82).

Tsevat (1976) makes the point that Job does not deny absolutely that he has sinned. Job raises the possibility of minor transgressions, for example in 7:21 and 13:26, but denies sins of sufficient weight to lead to the punishments he is experiencing. Tsevat writes, "He is compelled to affirm that the cause of the terrible atrocities that God has unleashed against him lies not in him but in God. God wants to torment him, torment him without reason, because God is cruel… In ever-repeated and diverse ways Job accuses God of wanton cruelty" (Tsevat 1976, 345). Tsevat goes on to see Job's gradual coming to deeper understanding as a result of God's words, becoming wiser in the process—"God made and is upholding the world according to His plan, but Job misinterpreted it in his words, i.e. according to the light of his own conceptions. Now Job has become wiser. He sees that nothing God purposes is impossible" (Tsevat 1976, 359). It is clear that Job does reach a higher level of understanding—although whether he finds that a satisfactory answer or not is at issue.

Some scholars still see the divine speeches as some kind of corrective to Job's sentiments in the dialogue. Peake sees the tone of the God speeches as a kind of punishment for the self-centredness of the sufferer. He writes,

> All those glorious pictures of the animal creation that God flashes before his eyes, are meant to show him that man's denizens of the wilderness, who live their life wholly independent of man. There, too, God sends the fertilizing shower, causing it "to rain on a land where no man is" [Job 38:26]. (Peake 1904, 99)

Kraeling, on the other hand, sees the corrective being a move away from the intellectual towards the emotional, when he writes, "Such an experience deters from one-sided emphasis on the intellectual, and gives importance also to the realms of feeling and of the will" (Kraeling 1938, 253). This shift of emphasis makes Job appreciate the boundaries of his knowledge and realize that he is prepared to believe despite these boundaries.

However, in general, modern scholarly opinion is on the side of justifying Job's laments and outcries in the face of the injustice, in human terms, shown by God. Ultimately, however, are human standards of justice enough? At the end of the book Job humbles himself—he first acknowledges God's greatness and vows to be quiet (40:3–5), but then in a fuller submission in 42:1–5 he acknowledges God's superior power and knowledge, uttering his confidence that he can challenge God (in v. 4 the confidence to challenge is an important aspect of trust) and the difference between hearsay of God and actual experience of him. Whether he actually repents is much debated among scholars, but he certainly abases himself before his God.

The scholarly emphasis has sometimes fallen on the experiential aspect of God's reply as an answer to Job—the fact that God appears to him is seen as the key (e.g. Rowley 1970). Job 42:6 would seem to confirm that the presence of God has made a difference to Job and that somehow through the indirectness and overwhelming nature of God's appearance he has received an answer. This may suggest that religious experience outweighs ethical concerns when it comes to understanding God. Is this a satisfactory answer to the question of God's behaviour and its ethical or unethical nature? Probably not. But it relates to that otherness of the divine realm, as expressed even in the most traditional retributive book of Proverbs—"For the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov 1:7). There will always be unknown depths to the divine realm that human beings will struggle to understand. Hence the mediation of the divine aspect of Wisdom.

Perhaps the ultimate question is whether one can accept that God can behave unethically towards human beings and at the same time be exonerated. H. Greenberg argues that it is only by a strange logic, that is really no kind of logic at all, that the believer can retain faith in God in the light of terrible suffering. There is an equal argument on the side of the absurd that states that no kind of suffering is acceptable in the light of belief in God. He writes, "Rationally, Ivan Karamazoff will always be right: 'There is no justification for the tear of even a single suffering child.' Believing man must cease to look for confirmations which he can grasp with his reason and touch with his hands" (Greenberg 1953–64, 192). He concludes, "The true believer practices the most heroic defiance in the world. His logic may be most strange and paradoxical, as in the case of Job who declared, "Even though He slay me will I believe in Him" (13:15). Those who regard such an attitude as absurd cannot be proved wrong, but people who reason thus have nothing to do with religion" (Greenberg 1964, 192). Greenberg may be right that ultimately it comes down to a choice between what one regards as "acceptable" or "unacceptable" behaviour and whether we, as individuals, can live with the paradox. As I said at the beginning of this essay, this raises the question "acceptable to whom?," a query which raises the further question, "who are we, as human beings, to judge the acceptability of God's behaviour?" As God says in the speeches in Job, "Who is this that darkens counsel by words, without knowledge?" (38:2). Are we guilty of the same accusation if we seek to judge God according to ethical categories?

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Snakes and Ladders: Levels of Biblical Law

Philip Jenson

Introduction

The game of Snakes and Ladders may appear a strange or trivial entrée to a discussion of biblical law, but it introduces some of the key ideas that I would like to explore. It was originally based on the ancient Hindu game of Moksha-Patamu (salvation and sins).[1] Children were introduced to the notion that good deeds would eventually enable them to ascend through various levels to Nirvana, while bad behaviour would plunge them down to lower strata. The game reflects the Hindu belief in the cycle of birth, death and reincarnation. The Victorian Raj broke the link to Hindu theology, but readily co-opted the game to its grand moral project of teaching vice and virtue. However, the moral dimension was soon abandoned, resulting in the bland game familiar to us today—the theological reduced to the ethical, and then again to the a-ethical.

Yet the idea of different levels, higher and lower, with links between them, is important in the discussion of ethics and law. Recent discussion about the relative weighting of British civil law in relation to the laws of religious communities has raised the issue sharply. It was an issue at the centre of a dialogue that Jesus had with a questioner in the Synoptic Gospels. In Mark 12:28 a scribe asks Jesus, "Which commandment is the first of all?" Jesus responds by citing a combination of Deut 6:4–5 ("You shall love the Lord your God…"), and Lev 19:18 ("You shall love your neighbour as yourself"). He goes on to state "There is no other commandment greater than these" (12:31). In Matthew's version (22:40) Jesus adds, "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

These texts point to three universal metaphors of hierarchy:

1. Height. As in the original Snakes and Ladders, less important laws are below higher, superior ones. Jesus argues that the body of commandments are at a lower level, hanging on the coat tails (so to speak) of these two. Philo described the Ten Command-

1. Topsfield 1985.

ments as "heads" (*kephalaia*) for the other laws.[2] Yet something high can also be unstable or dependent, in which case it is best to be low to the ground. From this point of view it is good to base oneself on a more fundamental or foundational law, the *Grundgesetz* (Hossfeld 2000, 46).

2. Number. The squares on Snakes and Ladders are numbered, often with 100 as the highest. However, any number of contemporary lists illustrate that it is usually the lowest numbers that have priority, above all the first. Jesus highlights two, implying a radical difference between them and all the others. Human numbers are graded in importance in a non-linear way, not merely counted.
3. Size. The greater is deserving of more attention than the lesser. Size matters. We may be forced to choose the lesser of two evils, while Jesus urges us to pay heed to the greatest of all the commandments.

   This kind of analysis is not necessarily an innovation by Jesus. In Luke's version (Luke 10:25–28) it is a lawyer who answers Jesus by citing the commandments, implying that this twofold summary of the law was already known.[3] Rabbinic tradition, while happy to count the 613 commandments of the Torah, is reluctant to prioritize them numerically, perhaps in reaction to Christian teaching. Instead, there is greater stress on a fourth metaphor:
4. Weight. In *Aboth* 2.1 we read, "And be heedful of a light precept (מצוה קלה) as of a heavy one (מצוה חמורה) for thou knowest not the recompense of reward of each precept."[4]

The common element in all these metaphors is the abstract schema of hierarchy. This is why Jesus can refer to three of them without confusion, and freer translations regularly switch one metaphor for another.

Two other distinctions are significant, distinctions that have less of a hierarchical emphasis, but which are closely related and, naturally, further complicate matters. The first is that there are more general laws, and more specific ones.[5] The Talmud (*b. Mak.* 24) lists a well-known series of suggestions about how the 613 commandments can be reduced

2. Philo, *Dec* 19. On Philo and the Decalogue, see Amir 1992.
3. On this and the Decalogue in the New Testament, see Flusser 1992; Luz 2007, 84–85.
4. Danby 1933, 447; cf. *Aboth* 4.2.
5. Other terms indicating different kinds of laws could also be discussed, for example, "principle," "norm," "essence," "summary," "epitome," "précis," "centre."

to or summed up by a smaller number. Eleven may be found in Ps 15, six in Isa 33:15–16, three in Mic 6:8, two in Isa 56:1 and one in Amos 5:4 and Hab 2:4. However, precisely what these "principles" are to be called is not defined,[6] nor is this kind of procedure made the basis for any systematic theory of levels of law. A second further category is that of universality. Some laws appear to be common to all cultures, whereas others seem to be specific to certain cultures.[7]

Deuteronomy and the Law

Reflection upon different levels and kinds of law appears to be much later than the Old Testament. This is not surprising, since abstract reflection generally belongs to a later stage of development of law (Jackson 2000, 93). There is, however, one key text where these later ideas may be present, at least potentially or implicitly, and that is in the book of Deuteronomy, the source of the Shema, the first commandment of the Gospels. In relation to the other law codes of the Pentateuch, Deuteronomy represents a relatively late text both on historical and canonical grounds. Historical-critical scholars see it as a late redaction and reformulation of earlier laws (particularly those in the Covenant Code of Exod 21–23). From a canonical perspective Moses sets out in Deuteronomy a fresh exposition of the law forty years after Sinai, at a momentous point in his own life and the life of the people. He is about to die, and the people are on the verge of the Promised Land. It is thus the occasion for a final considered exposition of the law in the light of the new challenges and demands that the people will face as they go on to possess the land. According to the final form of the Pentateuch Deuteronomy is therefore a second-order reflection upon earlier laws (McBride 1973, 287).

An intriguing starting point for a closer look is the translation of Deut 6:1, where REB (following several of the versions) has[8] "These are the commandments, statutes, and laws which the Lord your God commanded me to teach you." However, NRSV accurately translates the Hebrew for first term by the singular:[9] "Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the ordinances—that the LORD your God charged me to teach you."

6. Lazarus (1935, 169) tries out "[principles]" in the text, and in his note suggests "leading virtues." Most translators sidestep the issue by following the Hebrew, which has the number without further qualification.

7. Kraft (1979, 366) contrasts "supracultural" and "specific cultural form"; Webb (2001, 24) has "transcultural" against "culturally relative" or "culturally bound."

8. Similarly AV, NIV, NJB, NLT. However, NRSV translates in the plural in 5:31.

9. Singular ×14, plural ×32.

Through the employment of a collective singular the verse seems to reflect a consciousness that it is possible to regard the entire Torah as a unified whole. Patrick Miller,[10] indeed, goes one stage further and suggests that this singular commandment can be identified with the Shema, which comes just four verses later. The language of the Shema pervades Deut 5–11, and at end of this section we come across a clear allusion to the Shema: “If you will diligently observe this entire commandment that I am commanding you, loving the LORD your God, walking in all his ways, and holding fast to him” (11:22). What then are the “the statutes and ordinances” (החקים והמשׁפטים) with which the commandment is equated? We find this phrase at the beginning of the next main section, the detailed stipulations of Deut 12–26, “These are the statutes and ordinances that you must diligently observe” (12:1). The one great commandment is thus worked out in more detail in the many commandments of Deut 12–26.

Others, admittedly, do not make such a close identification with the Shema. In Deut 4:8 the statutes and ordinances are summed up as “the entire law” (כל התורה). Lohfink argues that “commandment” (מצוה) both in the singular and the plural may indicate the wholeness of the law, while the combination of “statutes and ordinances” can be a structural signal rather than a technical term for the detailed laws of chs. 12–26.[11] Pinning down the meaning of the different words for law in Deuteronomy is by no means easy (Braulik 1970). Yet Lohfink is happy to write of the relationship between the major sections, chs. 5–11 and 12–26, as between *Hauptgebot* (chief commandment) and *Einzelgebote* (individual commandments). Although Deuteronomy does not explicitly identify the Shema and the detailed stipulations, the texts seem open to pursuing the idea of general and specific laws, perhaps even higher and lower.

The Triangle of Generality

My proposal is that it is helpful to understand the laws in Deuteronomy as representing (consciously or not) three levels. At the highest level is “the commandment,” the Shema. It is at home in the general stipulations of Deut 5–11, which seek to address the underlying attitude of those who are being called to confirm the covenant that is being renewed. It is to be

10. Miller 1990. Cf. Driver 1901, 88, who speaks of it as denoting “the Deut. legislation generally (especially on its moral and religious side), viewed as the expression of a single principle, the fundamental duty of 6:5.”

11. Lohfink 1963, 56. The pair appear at 5:1; 11:32; 12:1; 26:16. See, for a more nuanced view, Braulik 1993, 314–15.

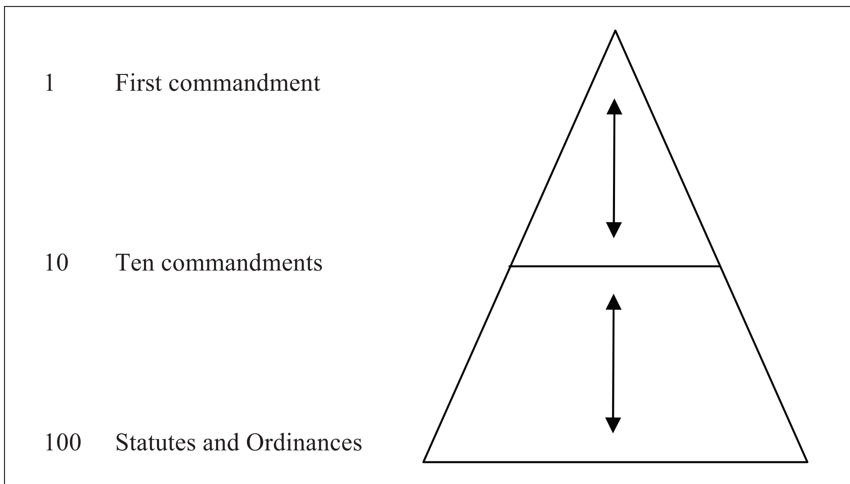
distinguished from the multitude of commandments in chs. 12–26, which deal with more specific cases and circumstances. These are at the lowest level, and often address very specific situations.

There is, however, another set of commandments that sits between the one and the many. Deuteronomy gives the Ten Commandments, or more accurately the ten words (Exod 34:28; Deut 4:13; 10:4) a special role. Their distinctive character is evident in both Exodus and Deuteronomy. Alt (1966) sharply distinguished these apodictic laws from the casuistic laws prominent in the detailed regulations. They are negative in formulation, terse, inclusive, foundational, and found in list form. They are also the only words spoken by God directly to the people from Mount Sinai, whereas it is Moses who mediates the other laws (5:24–27). According to Deut 4:13–14 Moses makes a significant distinction between the Decalogue and the statutes and ordinances:

> He declared to *you* his covenant, which he charged you to observe, that is, the ten commandments; and he wrote them on two stone tablets. And the LORD charged *me* at that time to teach you statutes and ordinances for you to observe in the land that you are about to cross into and occupy.[12]

The Decalogue given on Mount Sinai is given here a more abiding authority and scope, while the statutes and ordinances are associated more directly with the land in which they will become relevant and active.

I find it helpful to imagine the one, the ten and the many as comprising three levels in a triangle of generality.



12. Italics mine.

Perhaps even better would be a cone, where each level is a circle rather than an undifferentiated line. Such a representation would indicate a further proposal I would like to make: that each level of law comprises in principle a complete moral-religious field.[13] They differ not so much in content or even scope as in their generality. The negative commandments provide boundary markers setting out the limits of behaviour and attitude (Wright 2004, 284). The positive commandments encourage the exploration of the life that is safely lived within the "fence of Torah" (*Aboth* 1.1), but there is no need to spell these out fully. It is vital not to transgress the boundary, for this invokes the covenant curses and ultimately death (Deut 28:15–68). Conversely, remaining within the boundaries allows life to flourish under the blessing of God (Deut 28:1–14).

Reviewing the temptation narrative from this perspective is intriguing, as is co-opting the most famous snake of all for my argument. In Gen 2–3 the ultimate test of obedience to God (the highest level) is actualized through a low-level commandment, a prohibition about eating the fruit of a tree (Gen 2:17). The serpent ensures that the discussion remains at a low level (eating, 3:1), and Eve interprets the commandment even more specifically with a reference to not touching (3:3). The serpent's promise that she will be like God and know good and evil carefully sidesteps the highest level, which concerns what it means in practice to love and obey God. Eve's further reflections neglect the issue of fundamental attitude and remain at the mundane level of bodily satisfaction ("good to eat"), surface attractiveness ("a delight [תאוה] to the eyes"), and selfish desire ("to be coveted [נחמד] to make one wise") (3:3). The Deuteronomic form of the Ten Commandments contains both the delight and covet verbs. The devastating consequences confirm that the higher and lower levels are not to be set against each other, but regarded as in some sense one and the same. A positive example of the opposite movement, the ability to relate specific temptations to the higher levels, is found in the narratives of the temptation of Jesus (Matt 4:1–11; Luke 4:1–13), who significantly cites from Deut 5–11.

Let me set out in more detail the evidence for the claim that each level is intended to be comprehensive in a way appropriate to its degree of generality.

13. For similar reflections on the appropriate ordering of the moral field under different levels of complexity, see O'Donovan 1986, 197–203.

The Shema

The beginning of the Shema (Deut 6:4) is more identification than command: "Hear O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD One." The starting point is the nature of Israel's God. This is the first thing that Israel needs to hear in order to understand its own being and calling. The precise meaning of "one" has been endlessly debated, but at the very least the context strongly suggests an exclusive relationship that involves just one God, the LORD, and just one nation, Israel, which is understood both as a corporate entity and as a plurality of individuals. The implications are a comprehensive prohibition of any form of idolatry. The section demonstrates the typical Deuteronomic interchange between the singular ("and you [sing.] shall love") and plural ("and you [plur.] shall bind them…and you [plur.] shall write them," 6:8–9). The meaning of "love" (אהב) cannot be reduced to mere external compliance by analogy with similar expressions in covenant treaties.[14] The personal encounter with the Lord requires a hearing that entails not just obedience, but also emotional commitment. Love for the Lord is meant to motivate and be worked out in every area of life, by each individual and by the nation as a whole.

This comprehensive claim is reinforced by the triple sequence of heart/soul/might. This has often been interpreted as three different aspects of human being, implying the whole. The expansion to four terms in Mark and Luke suggests that this was an early understanding.[15] An alternative proposal is as a progression of intensification, a climactic parallelism in accord with the principle of poetic seconding (McBride 1973, 304; Kugel 1981). Heart and soul are both representations of the whole person, with the "muchness" accentuating the point with the equivalent of a telescope multiplier lens. Whichever interpretation is adopted, the whole of the person is to be directed to the fulfilment of the command to love God.

Inclusiveness and completeness continue to be striking features of the following verses, which refers to "these words," but subordinates them to the love command. A double merismus encompasses both space ("talk about them when you are at home and when you are away," 6:7) and time ("when you lie down and when you rise," 6:7). The next verses manifest a powerful social and spatial progression from the individual

14. Contrast McKay 1972 and Lapsley 2003.

15. All have "heart" (καρδία) and "soul" (ψυχή) as the first two terms. Then Mark has "mind" (διανοία), "strength" (ἰσχούς); Luke "strength, mind"; Matthew "mind."

("bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead," 6:8), to the household ("write them on the doorposts of your house" 6:9), to the city ("and on your gates," 6:9).

The Ten Commandments

At the middle level, the definitive and complete character of the Decalogue is communicated in various ways. Their delivery by God is followed by the significant comment in Deuteronomy that he "added no more" (5:22). Various explanations of the number ten have been given, but a persuasive proposal is that ten is a larger round number, indicating completeness (Jenson 1997). They are meant to cover the entire field of behaviour in outline. Alt observed that the lists of apodictic laws were intended to cover the "entire field of specific Israelite law" (Alt 1966, 120). The difficulty of identifying which ten only reinforces this proposal.

Completeness is also implied by the different analyses of the structure of the ten. The standard twofold distinction is between the vertical dimension (relationship with the Lord) and the horizontal (relationships with neighbours). These correspond to the traditional, though uncertain division of the commandments into two tablets (Kline 1975, 113–30). At the same time, these two divisions are closely related to one another, with the Sabbath and parents commandments as the hinge. If we imagine the commandments as a circle defining (mainly negatively) the field of acceptable behaviour, then the tenth commandment fittingly closes the circle and points on to the first. It is the rhetorical climax of the ten, pointing to the underlying issue of intentionality that implicitly underlies all of the others (Chaney 2004, 306–7). In its limitless scope it echoes the first, with the warning about succumbing to inward human desires being the negative mirror image of the proper concern to acknowledge the Lord's supremacy over everything.[16]

It remains the case that the ten do not cover the ethical field in an even manner. We can easily find other commandments that have a good case for inclusion. Janzen (1994, 95) suggests that "the Decalogue was a careful and comprehensive characterization, by way of selective sampling, of the new life within the covenant." He considers that Israelites were well aware of a detailed paradigm of the good life. The handful of commands in the Decalogue thus "evoked for Israel a positive ideal that was well known in its fuller shape" (1994, 96). While this may be true,

16. Cf. Eph 5:5; Col 3:5.

another way of looking at the selectivity is through the metaphor of a field of ethics marked out by a series of fenceposts. As von Rad puts it, "[The Decalogue] confines itself to a few basic negations; that is, it is content with, as it were, signposts on the margins of a wide sphere of life to which he who belongs to Jahweh has to give heed."[17] These posts do not need to be evenly distributed, for no set of commandments is ever going to be comprehensive. Where necessary, the boundary can be further defined through wise reflection on specific cases. Pointing out omissions (e.g. caring for the poor), while technically correct, misses the spirit of this summary of the law as a sufficient but not exhaustive statement at an intermediate level of generality.

The Statutes and Ordinances

The sheer quantity and range of the laws in Deut 12–26 suggest that they are meant to cover the entire range of life. As in any law code, there are gaps and omissions, and some areas are covered more fully than others. As with the Ten Commandments, this selectivity is an inevitable consequence of the finite concerns of the authors and their intended audience. In principle, there is no aspect of the religious or moral life that is out of bounds.

It is this section that contains what the Mishnah discusses as a pre-eminently light commandment (*Hul*. 12.5): "Let the mother go, taking only the young for yourself, in order that it may go well with you and you may live long" (Deut 22:7). The paradox is that obedience to this law is tied to the foundational motivation that comes in the fifth commandment, the honouring of parents. From at least one perspective, there is no substantive difference between observing different levels of commandment—this is because they all reflect the same ultimate commitment and attitude.

Relating the Three Levels

We thus have three levels of law that are all intended to be comprehensive. But how are they related to each other? Merrill (1994, 164) argues that this is the case in a striking analogical formulation: "the Shema is to the Decalogue what the Decalogue is to the full corpus of covenant stipulations." How might this be so?

17. Von Rad 1962, 194; cf. Nelson 2002, 78–79.

a. *Covenantal Structure*

First, the commandments all reflect a similar covenantal structure. In Deut 4:13 we read "He declared to you his covenant, which he charged you to observe, that is, the ten commandments; and he wrote them on two stone tablets." Janzen (1987) has proposed that both the Shema and the Ten Commandments reflect a threefold covenantal pattern:

	Shema	*Ten Commandments*
Preamble	The Lord our God	I am the Lord your God
Historical prologue	The Lord is one	Who brought you out …
Stipulations	And you shall love the Lord	You shall have no other gods

Interpreting the "one" of the Shema in this way may be stretching the case, although the repetition of the divine name may well be sufficient to evoke the God of the Exodus. Whether this is the case or not, there is a significant parallel between an initial and primary affirmation of who the covenant God is, followed by a statement of what that means for the covenant people.

Deuteronomy 12–26 has no need of emphasizing the covenantal character explicitly, since this has been sufficiently set out by the narrative reprise of chs. 1–4 and the general discussion of chs. 5–11. It is, however, implied if Deuteronomy reflects in some sense a Near Eastern treaty, where a historical prologue and the general stipulations precede the detailed laws. Although the laws are clearly oriented towards the future occupation of the land, this is grounded in continuity with God's past covenants. Thus, at the beginning of the section, there is reference to the patriarchs: "These are the statutes and ordinances that you must diligently observe in the land that the LORD, the God of your ancestors, has given you to occupy all the days that you live on the earth" (Deut 12:1). Elsewhere the motive clauses refer back to the Exodus. For example, in 16:1 we read, "Observe the month of Abib by keeping the passover for the LORD your God, for in the month of Abib the LORD your God brought you out of Egypt by night" (cf. Deut 13:5, 10).

b. *Content*

There are even closer connections between the three levels when we look at the content of the law. The Shema can be described as a positive formulation of or commentary on the first of the Ten Commandments, "You shall have no other gods before me" (Deut 5:7). To deny all other gods is to love the Lord God with all of heart, soul and might. There are no third ways, such as agnosticism or atheism. Israel is presented with a stark choice: either to follow other gods, or to attend to all that the Lord commands in obedience and love.

The content of the statutes and ordinances of chs. 12–26 can also be related to the Ten Commandments. Kaufman has suggested that they have been loosely organized according to the main heads of the Decalogue.[18] There is first of all a general division reflecting the traditional understanding of the two tablets of the Ten Commandments: the God-oriented ones (chs. 12–14) and those oriented to relations between neighbours (chs. 15–25). Within this it is possible to draw up an even more detailed set of correspondences:

1.	No other gods	12:1–28
2.	God's name	13:1–14:21
3.	Sabbath	14:22–16:17
4.	Parents and authority	16:18–18:22
5.	Murder and homicide	19:1–22:8
6.	Adultery	22:9–23:18
7.	Stealing	23:19[H20]–24:7
8.	False Witness	24:8–25:4
9.	Coveting neighbour's wife	25:5–12
10.	Coveting	25:13–26:15

Admittedly, this scheme requires a number of imaginative leaps. Deriving the discussion of the authorities of Israel from the fifth commandment has attracted particular suspicion. Yet there is no need to require such a correspondence to be precise, the only structuring principle, or even fully worked out. Later systematizers (such as Calvin) can happily work the basic concept out more fully. The Deuteronomic lawcode of chs. 12–26 does not set out a different or even a complementary set of laws, but rather explores the potential scope indicated by the ten and included in their remit.

c. *Hierarchy and Priority*

The three levels of law represent a radical difference of kind. This does not exclude there being different weightings within the levels. Some commandments reflect higher ethical priorities, often indicated by the more serious sanctions set out in the detailed laws. Thus, both halves of the ten commandments can be understood to reflect a sequence of priority: from honour of God to worshipping idols to swearing falsely in his name (word rather than action) to violating the Sabbath. Honouring parents is the most direct measure of honouring of God, followed by the decreasingly serious sins of murder, adultery, stealing (a shift to crimes against property), false witness (from action to word), and finally coveting (from external action to internal attitude). The Shema and the

18. Kaufman 1979. See also Braulik 1993.

Decalogue leave the punishment for breaking the commands open and undefined. It is left to the lawcodes to nuance the degree to which the boundary has been transgressed, because any graded set of sanctions is culturally specific and often contextually contingent. Themes of justice and proportionality are illustrated by several laws, for example "If the one in the wrong deserves to be flogged, the judge shall make that person lie down and be beaten in his presence with the number of lashes proportionate to the offence" (Deut 25:2)

d. *Inward Attitude*

The Shema makes the importance of inward assent a key feature. The striking rhetorical character of the Decalogue makes it far more than a dry list, and the tenth commandment makes it explicit that heeding these commandments should affect more than mere outward behaviour. The motive clauses in both the Decalogue and the detailed laws further emphasize that they were not only to obey the law but also to understand it and value it (von Rad 1962, 198). Only through doing this could Israel boast of its possession of a uniquely wise law (Deut 4:6).

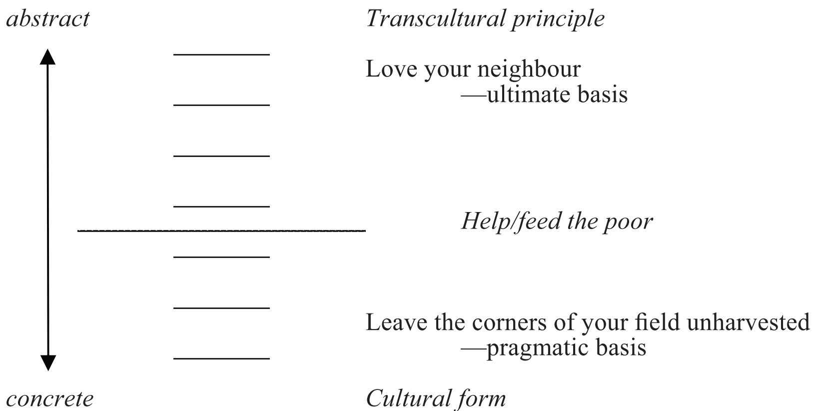
All this is a reflection of God's own passionate love for his people. Throughout Deuteronomy there is an emphasis on the grace of the God who chose, loved and saved Israel. The command to love in the Shema implies a logic of superabundance that reflects the Lord's spectacular and unexpected love for Israel (Deut 7:7–8; see Ricoeur 1990). The prologue to the Decalogue reinforces God's gracious action in the Exodus, which is also echoed in some of the motive clauses. The primacy of gift over command excludes any kind of legalism or mere external obedience. The ethics of Deuteronomy is framed and motivated by a strong theology of grace.

e. *Divine Authority*

Finally, all levels of law come with a divine authority. Although God speaks the Decalogue, while Moses mediates the rest of the laws, this is a distinction of mode of delivery, not ultimate authority. In Deut 26:16, it is the Lord who commands the statutes and ordinances.

The Ladder of Abstraction (William Webb)

At this point I take the opportunity to bring in a ladder, albeit of a highly metaphorical character. Rather than a triangle, William Webb (2001, 210) has proposed that these different levels reflect a ladder of abstraction.



At the top of the ladder are abstract principles that refer to the ultimate basis for ethical behaviour, the character and will of God, and the value of people created in God's image. These are relatively stable across time, space, and culture. Webb calls these transcultural principles. At the bottom of the ladder are highly specific laws that are embedded within a particular culture. They are pragmatic responses to that context and may not transfer to another social context.

Webb's ladder of abstraction is probably derived from the writings of the linguist S. I. Hayakawa (1978, 152–70; see his diagram on p. 155). Communication depends on the ability to move up and down the ladder in a way that is appropriate to context. The close relationship in Deuteronomy between "the commandment" and the statutes and ordinances suggests that keeping these levels in dialogue with each other was a vital task for the reader or hearer of the book. Individuals or people can only demonstrate their love for the Lord by keeping the commands in their detailed specificity. Conversely, the meaning and significance of the statutes and ordinances are only discerned as they are related to the master command of love. Wise travellers need to observe both wood and trees.

The ladder can have in principle any number of levels. In a discussion of the ten commandments John Walton (1987) suggests that the two tables of the law can be aligned and address issues of authority (commandments 1, 5), dignity (2, 6–8), commitment (3, 9), and rights and privileges (4, 10). However, the cultural anthropologist Charles Kraft works with the same three levels of abstraction proposed here: the basic ideal level, the general principle level, and the specific cultural form/symbol level.[19] Thus, he suggests (1) love the Lord your God with all

19. Kraft 1979. Cf. Stassen and Gushee 2003, 99–124.

your heart; (2) worship no God but me; (3) do not bow down to any idol or worship it. Of particular importance though is the careful way in which Kraft relates these levels to culture. He emphasizes that there is no level of universal symbol or language that floats free from culture and language. Unless higher commandments are applied in culturally specific ways, they remain incomprehensible. The universal must be apprehended through the particular (see Bauckham 2003).

In Kraft's example we can see this worked out. The Shema is so familiar that many consider its interpretation self-evident and straightforward. Far from it! The scholarly debate about the meaning of "One" and the strangeness to us of commanding love emphasizes that this commandment is inseparable from its cultural matrix. The exposition of the Shema conjures up typical encounters of teaching and remembering within a rural or semi-urban Israelite community. This is even clearer when we come to the Decalogue. It is hard to understand the first commandment without some awareness of the role of cult statues within a sanctuary.

Indeed, we need to be clear that the levels I have carefully distinguished are by no means pure. Although distinct when analyzed as a whole, there is a dynamic interaction between them that means that elements of lower levels are already present in the higher ones. The search for a purer form of the Ten Commandments is of course known from the endeavours of source critics to come up with an original, shorter form of the ten.[20] But there is good reason why such a version was found to be inadequate. Their present form already contains the beginning of an exposition of their significance in terms of a lower level. Kraft suggests that the second commandment was a culturally specific exposition of the first, and, indeed, in some numberings they are regarded as the same commandment. The two different rationales for the Sabbath commandment given in Exodus and Deuteronomy again suggest an awareness that the commandments could and should be worked out in forms appropriate to a specific context. Law in the Old Testament is not static, but consciously dynamic with an invitation to develop fresh interpretations when the context changes (Fretheim 2003).

This mixing of levels avoids two potential ethical dead-ends. Janzen points out the danger of reducing Old Testament ethics to abstract principles such as "selflessness, humility, truthfulness, liberality, or compassion," and above all "love" (Janzen 1994, 29). He points to law's embeddedness in the Old Testament narrative as that which prevents

20. E.g. Patrick 1986, 39.

them as being "understood as universally available and more or less self-interpreting truths" (Janzen 1994, 55). Of the Decalogue, he writes:

> In such series, the accent is shifted from the single commandment to the total impact of all the commandments in the series. Each individual commandment contributes a stroke of the brush toward the painting of a person or people. As we read such commandments or laws together, there emerges before our inner eye a picture or paradigm that possesses a certain wholeness not unlike that of the paradigms. (Janzen 1994, 62)

I find this very attractive, but the model I am suggesting emphasizes more the dynamic relationship between the abstract highest level, the middle level, and the specific lowest level. "Paradigm" may suggest more consistency and stability than was the case. There needs to be a ready and regular interaction between the higher and more general laws, and those that incarnate them in a culturally specific form.

A second way in which the ethical significance of the law can be blunted is by conflating or confusing the levels. This is the weakness in David Clines's notorious treatment of the Ten Commandments. He notes the specific targets of the commandments that have been expanded and expounded, and asks, "Who is the narratee supposed by the narrator?… [I]t is an individual, a male, an Israelite, employed, a house-owner, married, old enough to have working children but young enough to have living parents, living in a 'city,' wealthy enough… [I]n short, one might say, a balding Israelite urban male with a mid-life crisis and a weight problem in danger of losing his faith" (Clines 1995, 34). Yet, by focusing on the more specific application of the commandments to those particularly affected by them, the clan elders and leaders, Clines neutralizes any abiding or transcultural authority. It is also significant that he cuts the text off from its narrative moorings in the Exodus story, since there it is quite clear that the commandments are at the heart of the covenant that the Lord is making with the whole people. The specific form may well be directed particularly to the groups most at risk by a commandment, but an exclusive application is by no means required. The novelty of such restricted interpretations of the Decalogue implies that traditional interpreters have more accurately understood the comprehensive intentions of the text.

The distinction between the three levels is not watertight. The canonical form of several of the ten already reflects a degree of cultural exposition. The ancient Near Eastern context of idolatry is evident in the expanded exposition in the second commandment. The two rationales for the Sabbath commandment in the Exodus and Deuteronomy versions again reflect different contexts, identified by source critics as those of the

Priestly and the Deuteronomic traditions respectively. Neither expansion compromises the overall intention of the commandment, but rather interprets it with an additional level of precision.

The greater level of detail found in the lawcode of chs. 12–26 is generally associated with casuistry, the consideration of hard cases. The disputed translation of 5:17 (לא תרצח) illustrates this well. Is it the comprehensive "do not kill," or a more restricted "do not murder," for it is evident that the commandment was not intended to inhibit behaviour in war (where הרג, "slay," is generally used). Most cases will be black and white, but grey ones will appear from time to time and must be adjudicated. Deuteronomy 19 exemplifies this process in a more detailed discussion of the sixth commandment. In 19:4, someone who kills (הרצח) another person unintentionally or accidentally (בלי־דעת) and without any evidence of previous enmity (והוא לא־שׂנא לו מתמל שׁלשׁם), can flee to one of the cities of refuge. Even this is somewhat unspecific, so the chapter goes on to illustrate what is meant by the case of a person swinging an axe and killing someone when the handle accidentally flies off. On the other hand, 19:11 describes a clear case of pre-meditated murder: "But if someone at enmity with another lies in wait and attacks and takes the life of that person…" In such a case there is no escape from suffering the due penalty of death. Today we would distinguish between justifiable, excusable and felonious homicide.[21]

At the same time, there is reference to higher levels of law, particularly in the motive clauses, as in 19:13: "Show no pity; you shall purge the guilt of innocent blood from Israel, so that it may go well with you." There are limits to human behaviour, and even the practice of mercy, and these are set by the priority of ensuring a right relationship between the Lord and the covenant community that allows love for God to flourish.

Levels of Law Outside Deuteronomy

To what extent is the model developed here applicable outside Deuteronomy? There is only space here to make a few superficial comments. The same distinction between the Decalogue and other laws is evident in Exodus. There is no direct equivalent to the Shema, but in Exod 19:5 there is a general and overall requirement for the people to "obey my

21. One challenge that translators have is the extent to which they make use of later technical legal vocabulary in such texts. The NRSV translates the commandment "do not murder," AV, RSV, NAB, NJB have "kill" instead. At 19:4 the NRSV translates the same word as "the homicide."

voice and keep my covenant." The implication is that this is a matter of an overall attitude and commitment, not unlike that sketched out by the Deuteronomic Shema.

There are a number of other law codes that Alt also regarded as apodictic, such as the curses of Deut 27. It also appears that none appear to have the same level of generality as the Decalogue. They are, in terms of the ladder of abstraction, on a somewhat lower rung. The other great commandment identified by Jesus is found in Lev 19:18. As with the Shema, it is not to be isolated from its context among the variegated laws of the chapter. Its priority is suggested by double repetition (19:18, 34), and each occurrence represents the climax of a number of more detailed laws, which can alone define what "love" might mean (Allbee 2006). As is the case in the Decalogue, the content of the laws reflects both moral and religious priorities, and the repeated "I am the Lord" emphasizes the starting point of these laws in God's character. The importance of the Exodus for the identity of both people and God is emphasized by the repeated reference to this in the last two laws (19:34, 26). Indeed, the second reference is a clear allusion to the prologue of the Decalogue:

> You shall have honest balances, honest weights, an honest ephah, and an honest hin: I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt. You shall keep all my statutes and all my ordinances, and observe them: I am the LORD. (19:36–37)

When we turn to the prophets we find an occasional reference to some of the Ten Commandments (Hos 4:2; Jer 7:9). The likeliest explanation, it seems to me, is that we have here a deliberately chosen extract, highlighting those commandments that are particularly relevant, but indicating by implication the whole of God's requirements. The two chief objects of prophetic criticism, idolatry or lack of trust in the Lord, and social injustice, reflect the ultimate requirements at a high level. But the prophets have no difficulty in being very specific in how they apply in a particular context.

A final brief comment may be ventured about the wisdom literature. In Deuteronomy, fear is often very closely linked to love. Is it significant that in Prov 1:7, the climax of the introduction to the book, we have "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction" (Prov 1:7; cf. 9:10; 15:33; Job 28:28; Ps 111:10). This may be a late redactional attempt to sum up what is at the heart of the wisdom tradition, in a way not dissimilar to how the Shema sums up the Deuteronomic tradition.

Implications

If this approach to law is plausible, there are a number of potentially significant implications:

(1) There has been a great deal of debate about the meaning of key terms such as “law” and “commandment,” or (more abstractly) principles and ethics. To what extent is law static or absolute?[22] Von Rad contrasts an understanding of law intimately related to history and event (such as Deuteronomy represents), over against the “normal sense of the term,” which is as an “absolute” set of demands. Westermann takes up the issue in terms of a contrast between the law and the commandments.[23] The commandments (identified with the Decalogue) cannot be subsumed under law. The model I have developed suggests that the lawcodes and the commandments of the Decalogue need to be seen as complementary and not competitive. Alt (1966, 122) remarked that the Decalogue “refrains from naming actual individual cases, but tends rather to lay down principles, without getting lost, however, in abstractions.” I would prefer to emphasize the importance of a lively interaction between the ultimate commitment, the middle-level principles, and the concrete individual laws.

(2) It seems to me that contemporary debate about the relevance of Old Testament law is often hampered by a confusion of levels. While the Ten Commandments (or at least the last five) are often highly regarded, the lawcodes generally have a less favourable press. In the sometimes heated debate it is, I believe, vital to take heed of the basic distinctions between higher and lower laws, and the corresponding extent to which they are embedded within a particular cultural context. Contemporary interpreters can all too easily condemn a low-level cultural expression of a law, without asking how it relates to a higher level. For example, the death penalty may no longer be culturally appropriate for certain offences, but its presence generally indicates an area of the moral or religious life that is close to the core of Israel’s identity. This remains significant for a Jewish or Christian ethic, even if we live in a different context where those values are not shared and cannot or should not be sanctioned by law.

(3) There is an ongoing tension about how the higher laws are related to the lower. One approach to the prioritizing of the two commandments by Jesus is to see “love” as a key hermeneutical instrument for the setting

22. Von Rad (1962, 201) speaks of an absolute quality as “‘law’ in the normal sense of the term.”

23. Westermann 1982, 175–87. See the discussion in Lohfink 2005.

aside or acceptance of lower level laws. Other abstract principles or virtues have also been chosen as criteria for evaluating which laws may or may not be acknowledged (e.g. justice, mercy, human dignity). But neither the rabbis nor Jesus take this path. According to Matthew, Jesus states: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished" (Matt 5:17–18). Rabbinic texts similarly stress that every single law remains valid, at least in some sense. The approach of the present study is to emphasize the coherence and authority of the law, but to distinguish different levels of generality. The love commandment is not contradicted but illuminated by the detailed outworking of the law in the statutes and commandments in a particular cultural context. More work may be necessary in making sense of the culturally specific legal texts, but they remain an expression of God's will with an abiding value. Virtue ethics and deontological ethics are complementary.

Summary

To sum up, I have attempted to set out a way of relating the various demands in Deuteronomy. Based on a number of indications in the text there appear to be three significant kinds of law. These can all be regarded as covering in principle the whole of life, but with different levels of specificity. The most comprehensive, and the one that most stresses inward assent, is the Shema. However, its openness, brevity, and generality makes supplementary guidance necessary, and in Deuteronomy it is closely related to the Decalogue. The Decalogue does not exclude the importance of inward assent, but primarily indicates the outer limits of allowed moral and religious behaviour. Again, this middle level of law does not address examples of hard cases and how the commands apply to specific cultural contexts. This is the role of the detailed law code of Deut 12–26, which works out the implications of the revealed law in a reasonable range of contexts. Refusing to acknowledge the differences between levels of law will lead to perspectives that are foolish, absurd, or even dangerously unethical. Interpreters wishing to use Old Testament law for ethical reflection will search for ways to relate the different levels with subtlety and wisdom in both the past and the present.

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Part II

Post-biblical Perspectives

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Family Values in the Second Temple Period*

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1. *Introduction*

It seems to me that in any society, ancient or modern, the family is essential in preserving, handing on, and adapting the ethical values of the larger society. This central place of the family is eloquently summarized by Carol Meyers in her essay on "The Family in Ancient Israel":

> Virtually all considerations of human behavior operate under the assumption that there is such a thing as a family in every society. Indeed, the family is empirically ubiquitous. In every corner of the globe and as far back in time as our lenses of historical and anthropological research can peer, a small, kinship-structured unit is visible on the broad landscape of human existence. (Meyers 1997, 1)

Because of this central role of the household and family in laying the ethical foundations of society, a number of political systems have "infiltrated," so to speak, the family in an attempt to undermine its sphere of influence. I am thinking, for instance, of the Nazi regime in which parents needed to be wary about talking freely in front of Hitler youth activists in the home, as well as communist rule in the former GDR where the *Stasi* encouraged children to inform on their families. Much more extreme is the example of child soldiers in Africa who are led to slay members of their own families. Closer to home, I can think of numerous examples that were reported in the British press within the last few years that may be cited as examples of a blurring of the borders between the family and the state:

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- There was the extraordinary story of mothers selling junk food through the school fence during a healthy school meals drive in the UK. In an interview with the supplier, the local fish and chip shop owner, he complained that the parents, and not the state, should be in charge of what their children eat.
- Then we had a former Home Secretary, John Reed, telling Muslim parents to keep an eye on their teenage children and to inform the authorities of anything suspicious.
- And finally, at the other end of the spectrum, we learn about parents of children as young as ten asking the authorities to place an ASBO (Anti-Social Behaviour Order) on their offspring who have grown out of control.

Whatever we may make of these individual examples, they do seem to illustrate rather well that the interface of individual households and wider society is a crucial place where the norms and values of society are being thrashed out. This is of course why the issue of marriage is such an important one in either maintaining or challenging allegiances in the course of moving on from the family of one's birth.

It must also be borne in mind, however, that the term "family" refers to much more complex phenomena and interrelationships than at first appears, as has been noted by Miriam Peskowitz (Peskowitz 1993). The texts referred to in this chapter, both from Qumran and the Hebrew Bible, offer much scope for further research, and what follows is still mapping the territory especially with regard to the more recently published Qumran texts.[1]

As will become apparent, many of these larger issues are also touched upon in a number of Second Temple Jewish sources, both in the Hebrew Bible and in the Dead Sea Scrolls. The material, both primary and secondary, that might be brought into this discussion is extensive. I will focus in particular on two primary texts: Ezra–Nehemiah and the Damascus Document. In what follows I will first outline a number of areas where correlations between Ezra and Nehemiah and the Damascus Document have been identified as well as add some of my own examples. In a second section, I will focus on the work of Alexei Sivertsev, who has made a good case in a recent article as well as a monograph demonstrating the centrality of the household in Second Temple Judaism, including in particular Ezra–Nehemiah and the Damascus Document (Sivertsev 2005a, 2005b).

1. See, for instance, the nuanced discussion in Williamson 2003.

2. *Ezra–Nehemiah and the Damascus Document: Some Common Ground*

A number of scholars have suggested at one time or another that the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the Damascus Document in particular, share a great deal with the social realities portrayed in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.[2] Looking more widely at the Second Temple period, there has been a significant amount of scholarly investigation in recent years of the role and importance of the family and the household in Second Temple Judaism.[3] Most recently, the work of Alexei Sivertsev (Sivertsev 2005a, 2005b) is particularly interesting because of the way in which he argues for a great deal of continuity between the social realities behind Ezra Nehemiah and the Damascus Document. Finally, Cecilia Wassen's recent book *Women in the Damascus Document*, which is based on her doctoral work (supervised by Eileen Schuller), has a great deal of important and relevant discussion on the question of the family in the Damascus Document (Wassen 2005).[4]

Let me try to sum up some key areas that point to a relationship between both Ezra–Nehemiah and the Damascus Document under the following three headings: Location—Community—Issues.

a. *Location*

Both Ezra–Nehemiah and the Damascus Document are dealing with a Palestinian background with roots, either historical or theological/ideological, in the exile.[5] More particularly in Ezra–Nehemiah there are *towns*, on the one hand (cf. Ezra 2:1, 70; 3:1; Neh 7:6, 72; 11:1–3), while, on the other hand, there is a focus on the city of *Jerusalem* in particular (cf. Neh 11 and 3:1). I note Blenkinsopp's description of the geographical perspective in Ezra–Nehemiah, "Geographically the field of vision is restricted almost exclusively to Jerusalem and the surrounding region…" (Blenkinsopp 1989, 60). The focus on Jerusalem needs to be put in perspective, though, if we bear in mind John Collins' observation, "For much of this period, Jerusalem was the only significant Jewish city" (Collins 1997, 104).

In the Damascus Document there are some rather enigmatic references to towns, although the camp structure is clearly the dominant one. A good many references to one's town in the Laws are based on scripture;

2. Cf., e.g., Blenkinsopp 1981; 2005; 2007; Collins 2007, 38–39; Davies 2007; 2008; Hayes 2002; Hultgren 2007; Smith 1960; Talmon 1986.

3. See, e.g., Perdue et al. 1997; Weinberg 1992: 49–61.

4. Most recently see also Jokiranta and Wassen 2009.

5. See Blenkinsopp 2005, 19–20; and Davies 2008, 34.

for example, the limits laid down for walking about on the sabbath are based on the boundaries of levitical cities in Num 35:4f.[6] It is therefore not certain that such references to one's town refer to the actual arrangements reflected in the Damascus Document. There are a few references to cities (cf. CD 12.19–20) and those are overshadowed by a dominant camp structure behind the document.[7] The Damascus Document also mentions Jerusalem occasionally and includes a prohibition of intercourse in the "city of the sanctuary" (cf. CD 12.1–2 // 4QD[f] 5 i 17–18).

b. *Community*

We are dealing in both sets of texts with *households led by priests and levites as well as lay leadership* such as the Mebaqqer / overseer in the Damascus Document and Nehemiah.[8] Both texts further share an awareness that priests are not perfect and that others may be superior in skill and ability. Thus, according to CD 13.2–7 // 4QD[a] 9 ii first one of the levites and then the overseer are singled out as instrumental in helping the inferior priest do his job.[9] We may compare to this the episode recorded in Neh 13 where Nehemiah corrects the priest Eliaship who had misused a large room in the Temple by making it available to Tobiah and Neh 13:28–29 where Nehemiah deals decisively with the issue of a mixed marriage in a priestly family by chasing the perpetrator away.

Both groups see themselves as the *representatives of the people* (עם), whereas others are misled particularly relating to a number of halakhic practices.

Both those addressed in the Damascus Document and the people behind Ezra–Nehemiah are well to do with a *social conscience* to help the less fortunate in the in-group. Thus, in Neh 5:10, 14–18 generosity is recommended within the community, and Nehemiah by his own example tried to encourage "a greater sense of social responsibility among the more wealthy residents of Judah" (Williamson 1985, 242 [see also 241]). Similarly the Damascus Document includes a prescription for a collection of two days' wages to support the vulnerable (cf. CD 14.13–18 // 4QD[a] 10 i). 4QD[a] seems to refer to a one-off collection as there does not seem to be sufficient space for the words "every month" (לכל חדש).[10]

6. See Rubinstein 1952; and Hempel 1998, 9–12.

7. CD 12.19–20 seems to identify the preceding material as a Serekh/Rule for all the towns of Israel, but cf. Hempel 1998, 160–61.

8. CD 13.5–6 refers to a scenario where the overseer is to instruct a priest who is out of his depth. This would indicate that the overseer is not a priest himself.

9. See Hempel 1998, 107–14.

10. For the text of 4QD[a], see J. Baumgarten 1996, 72–74; also Hempel 1998, 131–40.

Oaths are sworn as a means of holding the in-group together according to Neh 10[11] and CD 15.8, 12 // 4QD. A difference is that CD 15 seems to envisage a more rigorous assessment of the members of households on their individual merits than in Nehemiah where we frequently have rather all-inclusive frames of reference, cf. Neh 8:2–3.[12]

Both groups have *a penchant for genealogical lists* (cf. CD 4.4–6, where a list of names and generations and other details is announced but now lost, and Ezra 2 and Neh 7)[13] as well as dividing the community into priests, levites and other groups.[14] CD 14 divides the members of all the camps who are to be mustered and written down by name into "the priests first, the levites second, the sons of Israel third and the proselytes fourth" (cf. CD 14.3–6 // 4QD[b] 9 v 6–10 // 4QD[c] 2).[15] Ezra–Nehemiah allows for a much larger spectrum of cultic specialists (such as gate-keepers and temple-servants). Nevertheless a genealogical ranking system is evident in both texts.

Both texts further refer to the *disqualification of some priests*. Thus, Ezra 2:61–63 and Neh 7:63–65 refer to priests unable to establish their pedigree who are therefore barred from service and partaking of the sacred food because of possible uncleanness,[16] and Neh 13:28–29 describes how Nehemiah drove away the son of the high priest Eliaship because of his marriage to a foreigner. The Cave 4 fragments of the Damascus Document also deal with the disqualification of certain priests, including priests who had been captive in Gentile lands, at some length.[17] If the late Joseph Baumgarten is correct and the subsequent reference to the curtain in 4QD[a] 5 ii refers to the inner sanctum, this text would ban priests from captivity from becoming high priests. Baumgarten

11. See Smith 1960, 356 and Wassen, 2005, 138. On the admission into the community by swearing an oath, see also Hempel 1999a and Metso 2006.

12. Wassen 2005 aptly describes the ceremony in Neh 10 as "inclusive"—a long list intent on including everyone.

13. See Davies 2008, 34, and, regarding the biblical witnesses, Williamson 2003, 471–72, who writes with reference to the early Persian period, "…the position of many individuals in the community was defined by their genealogical affiliation" (Williamson 2003, 471).

14. Cf. the references to written records of priests and levites in Neh 12:22–23 and the registration in writing of priests, levites, Israelites and proselytes in CD 14.4–6, for instance. Noteworthy also is the reference to the offence of speaking angrily against one of the priests written in the book in 1QS 7.2.

15. Only the second of the two references to the proselytes found in CD is preserved in 4QD[b] 9 v, cf. J. Baumgarten 1996, 109–10 and Hempel 1998, 132.

16. See Williamson 1985, 37.

17. See Hempel 1998, 38–43 and 2009.

notes the exclusion of certain priests from the consumption of sacred offerings both in the Damascus Document and in Ezra 2:63 (J. Baumgarten 1996, 51). Despite the overlapping concerns expressed in both texts, the restrictions laid down in the Damascus Document are certainly stricter and more elaborate.

Mass public gatherings play an important part in both texts, as rightly noted by Sivertsev, who states that "large public assemblies…play a crucial role in controlling and directing activities of individual families within the movement" (Sivertsev 2005a, 131). In this context he refers to Neh 9–10 and the meeting of all the camps in the Damascus Document (cf. CD 14.3–18a and 4QD[a] 11.17–21 // 4QD[e] 7 ii).

Finally, the fate of *excommunication* was one that threatened community members or families who stepped out of line (cf. Ezra 7:25–26; 10:8; Neh 5:13, see also Neh 13:28–29).[18] Banishment and excommunication is also an important disciplinary threat in the Damascus Document, both in the penal code as well as the expulsion ceremony at end of document (cf., e.g., 4QD[a] 10 ii 1–2 and 4QD[a]11:14–16 respectively).

c. *Issues*

Here I am going to be brief although the shared concerns seem to me very significant indeed. I already mentioned some shared economic issues and charity giving in the previous section. Other major issues that crop up in both bodies of literature are sabbath observance,[19] restrictions on relations with Gentiles of one sort and another,[20] and tithing.[21]

3. *Family and Household Structures in Ezra/Nehemiah and D*

As far as the scrolls are concerned, the role of the family in the corpus of non-biblical texts seems to be gaining in importance in the scholarly assessment of this material. A number of factors play a role in this shift in perception. The powerful—and, one might even say, overpowering—influence of the evidence of Josephus and Philo on the Essenes has for a long time made the material on families in the scrolls seem somewhat peripheral. A common reading of the texts was that the purest and highest level of attainment in the group was achieved by the celibate

18. See Blenkinsopp 1981, 300 n. 11.

19. Cf. Neh 13:15–22 and CD 10.14–11.18b, and see Schiffman 1975, 124–25, and Sivertsev 2005a, 117.

20. Cf., for example, the issue of mixed marriages elaborated in Ezra 9–10 and the restrictions laid down on dealings with Gentiles in CD 12.6b–11a.

21. Cf., for example, the agricultural laws in 4QD[a] 6 iii // 4QD[b] 6 // 4QD[e] 3 iii and Neh 10:36–40 (in the Hebrew numeration, English vv. 35–39).

members. This understanding of a two-tier system of life forms in the scrolls was argued for, moreover, on the basis of a passage in the Admonition of the Damascus Document (CD 7.4–10 // 4QD[a] 3 iii 6) that is often taken to refer to two groups: those who walk in perfect holiness, on the one hand, and those who live in camps and marry and have children, on the other hand. These two groups are commonly understood to refer to the superior celibate lifestyle and the somewhat inferior family life in camps respectively.[22] However, a minority of scholars—most recently Cecilia Wassen—have convincingly shown that a close reading of the passage reveals a contrast between those who walk in perfect holiness (of which the camp residents are a sub-group) with all those who despise (Wassen 2005, 122–28).[23] Whereas the former are promised life for a thousand generations, the latter are threatened with the fate of the wicked at the time of the visitation. Moreover, in general, the texts from Cave 4 that were the last to be published do contain a substantial amount of new material that refers to women and family life (cf. especially the wisdom text 4QInstruction[24] and the new legal portions of the Damascus Document attested in the Cave 4 manuscripts[25]). Another text that assigns a prominent position to family structures, the Rule of the Congregation, is customarily taken to refer to the *eschaton*, a time when, so the argument goes, the celibate community expected to be living in family units again.[26] This view has recently been challenged by the late Professor Stegemann and me. Stegemann proposed that all of the so-called Messianic Rule refers to the present and that even the so-called messianic banquet with which the document ends is to be understood as an ordinary meal.[27] I have argued for a less radical re-interpretation of this text by emphasizing the lack of eschatological features in the central part of this document, which comprises instead communal rules very similar to the lifestyle in families attested in the Damascus Document (Hempel 1996). In other words, here we have a text that, although well

22. See, for example, Qimron 1992, 286–94, and more recently Schofield 2009, 163–73. Though Collins appears sympathetic to this view, he cautiously notes, “We are given a hint that some members pursue an ideal of perfect holiness, but the document does not describe their way of life or make clear whether it is any different from that of those who live in camps” (Collins 2007, 39).

23. Cf. also A.-M. Denis 1967, 135–38. For another recent endorsement of Wassen’s 2005 reading of the CD passage, see now Regev 2008, 255–59.

24. For a recent discussion of women in 4QInstruction, see Goff 2007, 49–53.

25. For an overview of the contents of the Damascus Document from Cairo and the more recently published Qumran Cave 4 manuscripts, see Hempel 2000a, 34–36, 41. For a monograph dealing specifically with this material, see Wassen 2005.

26. Cf., for example, Schiffman 1989.

27. Cf. Stegemann 1996.

known for decades, seems to tell us a great deal more about the communities' present arrangements, which included families, than was previously thought.[28] Finally, Eileen Schuller has argued in a seminal study that numerous texts from the scrolls which employ the third masculine person do in fact include females without explicitly mentioning them (Schuller 1999). In short, the study of the non-biblical scrolls has witnessed a growing recognition of the importance and centrality of the household and the family

Looking more widely at the Second Temple period, I have mentioned already the volume by Perdue and others on *The Family in Ancient Israel* (Perdue et al. 1997) and two publications by Alexei Sivertsev (2005a, 2005b).[29] Mention should also be made of the work of Joel Weinberg, who identified the house of the fathers in Ezra–Nehemiah as a "social institution in the postexilic period" (Weinberg 1992, 49–61 [50]) and already referred to the links with some of the Qumran texts available when his studies first appeared (such as 1QM and 1QSa). Sivertsev's recent work (2005a) is interesting because of the way in which he argues, at much greater length, for continuity between the social realities behind Ezra–Nehemiah and the Damascus Document.[30] In a nutshell, Sivertsev argues that the household and "traditional kinship groups" (2005a, 17) were the bearers of holiness and key elements in the structure of Second Temple Jewish society. He sees a shift toward a more individualized disciple model only from the period of Roman rule in the latter half of the first century B.C.E.[31] In other words, Sivertsev distinguishes two stages in the development of Jewish life:

- A first phase extends from the Return in 538 B.C.E. to 63 B.C.E., a phase that is is family-focused with patriarchal structures: "The Second Temple Jewish Sects that emerged during this time were essentially alliances of individual families bound together by their common understanding of Torah" (Sivertsev 2005a, 20).
- A second phase extends from ca. 63 B.C.E. to the second and third centuries C.E., a phase during which the family remained important but gradually became overshadowed by the growing importance of disciple groups.[32]

28. See also Davies and Taylor 1996.

29. Further, see Cohen 1993. See also Sivertsev 2002.

30. Note Sivertsev's description of the social building blocks of the community behind both Ezra–Nehemiah and the Damascus Document as "halakhically determined alliances of families" (Sivertsev 2005a, 103).

31. On this issue, see also Wenthe, 2006.

32. Sivertsev writes, "At the same time I shall argue that the Second Temple period witnessed the gradual emergence of new forms of Jewish sectarianism. This

According to Sivertsev, this essential shift is particularly well attested in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Thus, he maintains,

> The first clear example of such a group within Judaism comes from the Dead Sea sect. In fact, the Dead Sea sect may serve as a litmus test for my entire theory since it reflects both stages in the development of Jewish sectarianism… (Sivertsev 2005a, 22)

Quite apart from the particular topic I am addressing here, Sivertsev's analysis of the Dead Sea Scrolls ties in extremely well with some of my own research. On the one hand, Sivertsev's recognition of the existence of family-based life in some texts as opposed to others where family life plays no or only a peripheral role is extremely welcome. On the other hand, I entirely disagree with his persistent use, even in the title of his *CBQ* article, of the singular "Dead Sea sect" in the light of such complex developments reflected in the sources. With others, I have tried to make a case for the presence of texts that speak of a parent movement alongside other texts that speak of a more tightly organized *yaḥad*.[33] And it is exactly at this point where Sivertsev's interests in the gradual weaning of the importance of households in the scrolls may enter into meaningful dialogue with some of my work and of that of others on the parent movement. Sivertsev refers to this in a single and significant footnote and seems sympathetic. Thus Sivertsev engages with the pioneering work by Philip Davies on the parent movement as reflected in the Admonition of the Damascus Document and observes, "If we accept this…as a working hypothesis, we can talk about the household-based organization of the parent community and its similarity to the organization of the 'Congregation of the Exile' in Ezra–Nehemiah" (Sivertsev 2005a, 130 n. 115). Given that on my reading of a number of texts, especially the Damascus Document and 1QSa, the family setting is one of the characteristics of this parent movement as opposed to texts that reflect the *yaḥad*, especially as described in the Community Rule manuscripts, the work on the importance of the household in Second Temple sources can fruitfully be related to these developments in Qumran studies.

new type of movement encompassed adult male individuals rather than families. It produced a new type of community that tried to surpass and very often replaced natural kinship ties with a new sense of common identity based on the common quest for salvation and commonly recognized unique interpretation of sacred texts" (Sivertsev 2005a, 22–23).

33. Cf., for instance, García Martínez 1988. For a recent evaluation of this hypothesis, see Boccaccini 2005, especially the eleven contributions devoted to the "Groningen Hypothesis." For a brief summary of my own position, see Hempel 2005; 1999b, 315–19 and further literature referred to there; and 2000b.

There is a slight inconsistency in Sivertsev's approach which I have just noted: he recognizes complexity and development in the Dead Sea Scrolls (perhaps in the latter stages of the process of writing his book?) but nevertheless talks of a Dead Sea Sect in the singular. A similar inconsistency also characterizes his chronological scheme. On the one hand, he is very clear about the gradual developments attested in the sources.[34] Yet, on the other hand, he is stunningly rigid and firm on identifying a particular year, 63 B.C.E.—the arrival of the Romans on the scene—as a major turning point. Thus, he argues forcefully that, "true internalization of Hellenism by Jewish society began only then [i.e. the time of the arrival of Roman rule in Palestine]. Prior to that time Jewish Palestine had continued to follow basic social patterns and conventions going all the way back to Achaemenid times" (Sivertsev 2005a, 8). As far as the Scrolls are concerned he specifies an even later date ("by the first century C.E.") as the backdrop to huge changes in the social make-up of the group (Sivertsev 2005a, 22). Quite apart from the intrinsic unlikelihood of being able to pin down a single year, event, even decade in a process such as the one he describes, there are some factual problems from the Dead Sea Scrolls side. Although Sivertsev may well be right that the Community Rule reflects a community of like-minded individuals—his post-63 B.C.E. model—he does not deal with the simple fact that three copies of this text were copied before 63 B.C.E., including the most complete copy from Cave 1 which is dated to 100–75 B.C.E.[35] Given that the Cave 1 copy describes an extremely complex community that has clearly undergone a great deal of challenges already—note the provision for someone who turns his back on the community after having been a member for several years in 1QS 7.22–24—the 1QS copy almost certainly originated quite some time after its composition.[36] It is quite clear that although the overall development outlined by Sivertsev has much to commend it, he overstates his case on the chronological front.

In the remainder of this study I would like to focus on the role of the family and the household in the Damascus Document and Ezra–Nehemiah, paying particular attention to a certain amount of erosion of

34. Thus, he acknowledges that the lifestyle envisaged in the Damascus Document may well have continued, as the sustained copying of the manuscripts of this text indicates (Sivertsev 2005a, 140).

35. Cf. Metso 2007, 2–3. The oldest manuscript of the Damascus Document (4QD[a]) also goes back to the first half of the first century B.C.E., in other words very close to the date of the oldest manuscript of the Community Rule; cf. Yardeni in Baumgarten 1996, 26–30.

36. See also Collins 2006, 214.

its powerbase in these sources. As we will see, there is a case to be made that in the Laws of the Damascus Document we can see the household gradually being taken over by the overseer. More interestingly still, these laws preserve for us legislation on the arrangement of marriages in two quite different contexts. Whereas one passage still has the father of the bride in charge, the other passage allots a key role to the overseer.[37] Sivertsev is inclined to liken the overseer's role to that of Nehemiah (Sivertsev 2005a, 131). Although it is quite true that both Nehemiah and the overseer have a say in matters of trade and marriage in their respective communities, there does seem to me an important difference. On my reading of the texts it is important to stress that Nehemiah does not lay claim to being consulted in everyday arrangements of marriages, but addresses a particular crisis or a sequence of crises.[38] In the Damascus Document, on the other hand, the overseer demands to be consulted on every act of trade and in every marriage arrangement. There is a significant difference of degree here. Whereas both texts still have their members arranged by family, in the Damascus Document we see a system evolving where someone else is calling the shots in everyday life—not just in extraordinary cases. Another extreme example of the way in which the authorities are almost literally entering the marital bedroom in the Damascus Document community is the law stipulating expulsion from the community for a man who fornicates with his wife contrary to the law (4QD^{b} 9 vi 4–5 // 4QD^{e} 7 ii 12–13). Perhaps the most likely explanation of this statement is intercourse with one's wife that is not for the purposes of procreation, although a number of interpretations have been proposed.[39] Whatever it may mean, it is clear the community behind the Damascus Document eventually wanted to control the most intimate parts of family life.[40] The level of control we witness in Ezra–Nehemiah is a soft option by comparison.

37. For some discussion, see Sivertsev 2005a, 110–11. See also Schuller 2006, 94–95.

38. In this context note the pertinent observation by Hugh Williamson, "…in some matters central to the consideration of family law in this period the texts speak not of the norm, but rather of particular and extraordinary events" (Williamson 2003, 471).

39. Cf. J. Baumgarten 1996, 162–66. Sivertsev's very broad interpretation of this infringement as a reference to any family who does not accept the sectarian interpretation of the law and would thus automatically fall foul of *zenut* does not convince (Sivertsev 2005a, 112).

40. Note Cecilia Wassen's observation that, "In many ways, the D [i.e. Damascus Document] community has become the extended family of its members, replacing

Let us look more closely at the two passages from the Laws of the Damascus Document that deal with the arrangement of marriages. These examples are particularly interesting because a strong case can be made to suggest that the Laws preserve traditional arrangements where the father, the head of the household, is in charge, alongside a slightly more developed state of affairs where the overseer is usurping some of the father's responsibilities.[41]

We begin with a text, preserved in four manuscripts of the Damascus Document from Cave 4 (4QD[b] 7 // 4QD[d] 9 // 4QD[e] 5 // 4QD[f] 3), that firmly places the father in charge of arranging a suitable marriage for his daughter.

a. *Text 1—Authority: The Father*[42]

4Q271 [4QD[f]] 3:7b–15 with parallels in 4Q267 [4QD[b]] 7:13–14 double underlined // 4Q269 [4QD[d]] 9:1–8 outlined // 4Q270 [4QD[e]] 5:14–21; 10:14–15[43] underlined

7b ואם
8 [את בתו יתן איש לאי]שׁ את כול מומיה יספר לו למה יביא עליו את משפט
9 [הארׄרׄה אשר אמ]רׄ משגהׄ עור בדרך וגם אל יתנהׄ לאשר לוא הוכן לה כי
10 [הוא כלאים ש]ור וחמור ולבוש צמר (ו)ופׄשתים יחדיו *vac* אל יבא איש

the biological one" (Wassen 2005, 204). The passage on illicit intercourse with one's wife adds an interesting nuance to the helpful critical discussion of the categories of private and public space in Peskowitz 1993, 26–28. Note also Al Baumgarten's recourse to Lewis Coser's notion of "greedy institutions" with reference to the Damascus Document; cf. A. I. Baumgarten 2000, 6–7. See further the stimulating discussion in Jokiranta (2007, 285) on the ongoing and complex process of creating social identity. We appear to be witnessing some of the on-going processes of identity formation in the different pieces of regulation on the arrangement of marriages in the Damascus Document. On the overseer's high level of control, see also Regev 2007, 301–33, especially the section aptly entitled "Controlling Marriage and Sexuality" (Regev 2007, 304–13)

41. Cf. Schuller 2006, 94–95.

42. For the Hebrew text, see J. M. Baumgarten 2006, with some adjustments; cf. Hempel 1998, 65–66, and Tigchelaar 1999, 68. For an analysis of this material, see Hempel 1998, 65–70; Shemesh 1998; Sivertsev 2005a 112–14; and Wassen 2005, 72–89.

43. Here I accept the placement and line numbers for 4QD[e] proposed by Tigchelaar 1999, 68. For the publication of this initially unidentified fragment, see J. Baumgarten 1996, 167. Tigchelaar's proposal provides support for Baumgarten's restoration of the opening words of 4QD[f] 3:7, but in the absence of any overlap the placement remains somewhat hypothetical, as he himself pointed out to me in a personal communication in the autumn of 2008. I am grateful to Professor Tigchelaar for consulting the fragment in question again in the wake of my reference to it for this piece of research.

11 [אשה בברית(?) הקו]דש אשר ידעה לעשות מעשה מדבר ואשר ידעה
12 [מעשה בבית] אביה או אלמנה אשר נשכבה מאשר התארמלה וכול
13 [אשר עליה ש]ם רע בבתוליה בבית אביה אל יקחה איש כי אם
14 [בראות נשים] נאמנות וידעות ברורות ממאמר המבקר אשר על
15 [המחנה ואח]ר יקחנה ובלוקחו אותה יעשה כמ[ש]פט [ולוא] יגיד על[יה]

Translation[44]

7b And if
8 [a man gives his daughter (in marriage) to ano]ther, he shall report to him all her shortcomings lest he bring upon himself the judgment of
9 [the curse as He has sai]d, The one who leads astray the blind from the path. And also he shall not give her to one who is not suitable for her for
10 [that is two kinds (like ploughing with) an o]x and a donkey and to wear wool and linen together. *Vacat*. No one shall bring
11 [a woman into the covenant of holi]ness who has had sexual encounters
12 [while (still living) in the house of] her father or a widow who has had sexual relations since she has been widowed or any (woman)
13 [who had a] bad [repu]tation in her youth in her father's house. No one shall take her unless
14 [on examination by] trustworthy [women] who are knowledgeable and chosen at the word of the overseer who is over
15 [the camp. And afterwar]ds he may take her, and when he takes her he shall act according to the l[a]w [and not] report on [her].

In contrast to the scenario described in Text 1, another passage in the same document (CD 13.15–19 // 4QD[a] 9 iii) preserves a strikingly similar piece of legislation that has the overseer in charge rather than the head of the household.

b. *Text 2—Authority: The Overseer*[45]
CD 14.7b, 15b–19 with parallels in 4Q266 [4QD[a]] 9 iii underlined

7b (.....) וזה סרך המבקר למחנה

15b ואל יעש איש דבר למקח ולממכר כי אם הודיע
16 למבקר אשר במחנה ועשה בעצה ולא יש[גו וכן] ל[כ]ל ל[וק]ח אש[ה]
17 וה[ ]°°°[ב]עצה וכן למגרש והוא ייס[ר את בניהם ובנותיהם]
18 [וטפם ברוח]ענוה ובאהבת חסד אל יטור להם[באף ועברה]
19 [פ]שעיהם ואת אשר איננו נקשר בש[ ]

44. The English translation is my own.
45. For the Hebrew text, see M. Abegg (CD) (Abegg 2006) and J. M. Baumgarten (4QD) (Baumgarten 2006).

Translation[46]

7b And this is the rule for the overseer over the camp (…)

15 No one shall perform an act of trade unless he has informed
16 the overseer of the camp and acted on the advice, and they shall not sin inadvertently. And thus shall be the case for everyone who takes a wife
17 and [ ] [with] counsel. And thus {4QD[a]: he shall instruct} shall be the case for one who divorces. And he shall discipl[ine their sons and their daughters]
18 [and their small children in a spirit of] humility and with kind love. He shall not bear a grudge towards them [in anger and rage]
19 [ ]their [s]ins and that there may not be any one bound in [

Analysis

The recent examination of CD 13 / 4QD[a] by Cecilia Wassen correctly sums up the ways in which this text "highlights the authority of the examiner over the personal lives of the community members, both men and women. The major decisions of individual members, such as marriage and divorce, were not personal issues any longer, but belonged to the communal realm" (Wassen 2005, 167).[47] Elsewhere she writes, "These laws show the extraordinary authority the Examiner had over the lives of the members in the community behind D" (Wassen 2005, 164).

Note the role the overseer is given also in the education and raising of members' children.[48] The interesting thing to my mind is that we have both of these stipulations in the same document—only one could have applied at any given time. Sivertsev quotes both passages without being either troubled or excited by the extent of contradiction this presents. Wassen (2005), on the other hand, does try to make sense of this double attestation of marriage arrangement. She broadly adopts my argument that the Laws of the Damascus Document contain communal rules on the one hand and general halakhah on the other. In my source-critical analysis of the Laws I assigned the first passage to general halakhah, cherished more broadly, and the latter to the communal rules laying down the constitution of the camp movement. Wassen assigns the former to the "early law code," as she prefers to call it, and the latter to the communal laws.[49]

46. The English translation is again my own.

47. See also Wassen 2005, 158–59.

48. See Collins 2003, 100–101, where he speaks of the "intrusive" role of the overseer.

49. Wassen 2005, 71–89, 156–67; further Jokiranta and Wassen 2007, 217–18. I have argued elsewhere, moreover, that the reference to the involvement of the overseer in the selection of qualified women at the very the end of Text 1 (cf. 4QD[f]

It seems to me that this clear evidence of development within the Damascus Document is significant and must not be downplayed. We are indeed in the realm of a social make-up similar to Ezra–Nehemiah, but we have also moved beyond it in one and the same text.

Another intriguing question is the relationship of the overseer to the fathers of the congregation and the mothers of the congregation in the Damascus Document's penal code (4QD[e] 7 i 13–15). In this text there is an offence of murmuring against the fathers of the congregation which is severely punished by expulsion. Then the text goes on to refer to the offence of murmuring against the mothers of the congregation—we almost achieve gender equality until we read on and note the punishment for the latter offence, 10 days' punishment. Quite apart from the difficulty of knowing exactly who these individuals were and what their roles were, it is interesting to ask how this system of prominent members who were clearly figures of authority of some kind, relates to the overseer's role.[50] Did both authority models exist side by side or did one come to replace or dominate the other? On Sivertsev's reading the mothers and fathers of the congregation were members of leading families in the groups, "perhaps founding families related to the priesthood" (Sivertsev 2005a, 107). We might equally be dealing with a phenomenon which Joseph Blenkinsopp has referred to as "fictive extended kinship groups." Blenkinsopp draws on more recent examples, such as the Franciscans' use of fictive kinship language, such as "brother" and "father."[51] Finally, Jokiranta and Wassen most recently offered the appealing, though somewhat speculative, suggestion that the use of parental language to refer to communal leaders may have been a deliberate mechanism to address some of the tensions resulting from the group's leadership intruding into members' families.[52]

In sum, Sivertsev and others have rightly emphasized important elements of continuity between social developments in the early Second Temple period and the literature of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The part where I disagree with Sivertsev in particular, or am inclined to suggest

3.14–15) is a secondary development. This suggestion is supported by the evidence of 4QOrdinances[a] where we have, in fact, a version of a comparable examination by experienced women where the overseer is strikingly absent (cf. 4Q159 2–4, 8–10, and see Hempel 1998, 65–70, esp. p. 69, and Tigay 1993, 129–34). See also Shemesh 1998, 253–55.

50. Cf. Jokiranta and Wassen 2009, 185.

51. This point is made by Joseph Blenkinsopp 1997, 91–92, and further developed in Jokiranta and Wassen 2009.

52. Jokiranta and Wassen 2009, 202.

refinements, is the gradual points in a sliding scale away from the family towards an individual-based membership. Sivertsev concludes his chapter on the Scrolls by emphasizing the value of these texts as providing "the earliest unambiguous example of gradual transition from the household-based matrix of Jewish sectarianism to a community that encompassed adult male individuals" (Sivertsev 2005a, 142). The question of whether the Scrolls testify to an exclusively adult male environment at any time is hotly debated, and I will not go into this here. In general, I agree with the starting point and the end point outlined by Sivertsev, but have more to say on the important period in the middle. On my reading of the evidence, the Damascus Document reveals a series of stages in the development of social organization starting with the household, or more precisely, a community of like-minded families in the plural, familiar from Ezra–Nehemiah. The text further witnesses to the increasing importance of the overseer who usurps some of the roles of the traditional *pater familias* in a much more comprehensive way than is evident in Ezra–Nehemiah. Sivertsev himself appears not unaware of the important role played by the overseer in the Damascus Document, but he plays it down when he writes, "The hands-on involvement of the sectarian official (*mevaqqer*) in what appears to us as private family business indicates the importance of the individual household within the sectarian system of values. The involvement appears to closely resemble the policy pursued by the leaders of the 'congregation of the exiles' in the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah…" (Sivertsev 2005a, 118).[53] It also indicates, I would stress, the importance of the overseer in overriding some family business and thus a partial erosion of the importance of the individual household.

Recent research on the household as an important link between early and later Second Temple sources, including the Dead Sea Scrolls, opens up a fruitful avenue for further work. It provides additional grist to the mill that is pointing towards the growing importance of the Scrolls for the wider picture of Second Temple Judaism. I hope to have shown that the multifaceted evidence of the Laws of the Damascus Document dealing with the arrangement of marriages takes us to the nub of some of these extremely important developments.

53. Similarly, "Far from denying the religious value of traditional households, supra-familial structures of early Second Temple movements treated families as central for their religious discourse" (Sivertsev 2005a, 132).

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Ethical Stance as an Authorial Issue in the Targums

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The various ethical concerns that are immediately obvious on looking at the Targums will be considered here. Should a person creating a version of the Bible in another language have the freedom to stray from the original text? In general, in Targum every word of every verse is dealt with in the order in which it occurs in the original. However, there are also a great number of divergences from the text. It is necessary to explore the relationship of the biblical text and Targum to see how the two sit together. What is apparent is that, although greatly esteemed, Targum is not equated with the word of God and so there seems to be freedom in the making of this version. However, there is a tension in the Targums between making a strict rendering of the Hebrew text and adjusting it to suit the translators' purpose. It is a fact that communities interpret the bible for their own use and this is very clearly apparent in Targum. There are many instances where authorial liberty is evident in the Targums. It is part and parcel of the Targumists' characteristic translation approach.

When producing a new version is it permissible to adjust the original text without giving the audience notice of this? The Targumists are subtle both in their way of adjusting the original text, even when direct translation equivalents exist, and in introducing material that is not in the Hebrew text. Never do they openly declare what they are doing. As Samely (1992, 156–57) has demonstrated, the Targumists themselves do not address the people directly. They put words containing their own ideas into the mouth of God, or of other biblical speakers, thus acknowledging in their own way the sanctity of the text.

A comparison may be made with, among others, the book of Enoch, which gains authority from being pseudonymous, but attributed to a great figure in the Hebrew Bible. Similarly, the Targums have no declared authors, but present themselves as the word of God.

Another ethical concern in creating a new biblical version is whether or not it is appropriate or permissible to adjust the circumstances of the

text and the behaviour of individuals to conform to the contemporary situation of the translator. This may be acceptable if the audience is fully conversant with the original and, therefore, knows when the new version deviates. In the case of Targum its apparent didactic purpose in the vernacular presupposes that many of the audience would not have been well acquainted with the original.

Whether the original function of Targum was for liturgical use or for study, its closeness to Scripture provided an opportunity for the Targumists to put their own interpretation on the Hebrew text.

Arising from their approach, the Targumists appear not to have had any problems with these ethical issues and so produced a version that was close enough to the original for it to be highly regarded. Their didactic intention allowed them freedom to make the new version applicable to their own times.

The Relationship of Targum to the Biblical Text

The rabbis saw Targum as the *re*-presentation of the Law to Israel by Ezra (and others) in the square before the Water Gate. The biblical text of Neh 8:8 says, "So they read from the book, from the law of God, with interpretation. They gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading." In the Jerusalem Talmud this is given as the occasion of the presentation of the Targum:

> What is the Scriptural justification for the Targum? R. Zeirah said in the name of Rav Hananel: *And they read from the book, from the Law of God*—this refers to Scripture; *clearly*—this refers to Targum; *and they gave the sense so that the people understood the reading*—this refers to the traditional text. (*y. Meg.* 74d)

Targum not only makes the text "clear"; it also makes for understanding. This suggests that both translation and explanation of the text were envisaged and thus authorial licence employed.

Rabbinic texts demonstrate the esteem in which Targum was held. The majority of these texts refer to the primary setting of Targum as the synagogue.

When Targum was used in the synagogue it was important to ensure that there was no confusion between the actual biblical text and the Aramaic version. To demonstrate this difference clearly there was a reader of the biblical text and a *meturgeman* who gave the Targum. The man delivering the biblical text had to be seen to be reading the text from a scroll. By contrast, the *meturgeman* was not permitted to use a written text, but had to be seen to be reciting the Targum from memory:

> R. Samuel bar R. Isaac entered the synagogue [and] saw a certain teacher interpreting the Targum from the book. He said to him, "It is forbidden to you! Matters which are [transmitted] orally [should remain] oral; matters which are [transmitted] in writing [should remain] in writing." (*y. Meg.* 74d)

It may be deduced that the two men must have stood close to each other from the proscription that the *meturgeman* was not allowed to glance at the written scroll of the biblical text in case anyone might think that he was looking for the Aramaic text there. This distinction of the two persons is made clear:

> R. Haggai said R. Samuel bar R. Isaac went to a synagogue. He saw Ḥunah standing and serving as a translator, and he had not set anyone else up in his stead. He said to him, "It is forbidden to you, for just as it was given through an intermediary [i.e. Moses] so we have to follow the custom of having an intermediary." (*y. Meg.* 74d)

Another rabbinic statement shows that the text of the Targum was not written down beside the biblical text:

> Ulla said: Why did they lay down that he who reads from the Torah should not prompt the translator? So that people should not say that the translation is written in the Torah. (*b. Meg.* 32a)

Thus Targum is not seen to be the word of God; nor must it detract from its unique status.

It is obvious that the rules for the use of Targum make a clear distinction between it and the original text. While, at the same time, Scripture and Targum were brought together, the reading of the biblical text and the giving of the Targum were not allowed to overlap. However, the ideal was that there should be no pause between the two. Thus they became a seamless unit and the Targum achieved very high status.

A further *Sitz im Leben* of Targum was private study where the Hebrew text and the Targum are juxtaposed. Although Targum was held in awe through its close association with the biblical text, it was not envisaged as an independent unit and should always have been set in the presence of Scripture. It was not to have a life of its own, and possibly replace Scripture, but it was the means of understanding it:

> R. Huna b. Judah says in the name of R. Ammi: A man should always complete his *parashiyyot*/weekly portions together with the congregation, [reading] twice the Hebrew text and once the [Aramaic] Targum. (*b. Ber.* 8a)

The idea was that a man should have prepared himself in his own home to hear the public reading of Scripture in the synagogue. He should

have accomplished this by going through the Hebrew text and then the Aramaic text and finally going back to the Hebrew text. The assumption appears to be that on reading the Hebrew text for the second time the person would have had a better understanding of it. It is notable that the Targum does not stand alone; it is Scripture that is given supreme importance on account of its being read twice.

Although the biblical text is paramount, the respect to be given to the Targum is further demonstrated in rabbinic literature in the proscription of unacceptable behaviour by the *meturgeman*:

> R. Samuel bar R. Isaac entered a synagogue [and] saw a certain man translating while leaning against a pillar. He said to him, "It is forbidden to you! Just as it was given in awe and reverence, thus we have to treat it with awe and reverence. (*y. Meg.* 74d)

Thus it is demonstrated that the Targum also deserves esteem. Not only is the physical stance of the *meturgeman* important, but also his recitation must not be louder than that of the reader of the biblical text. Thus the pre-eminence of Scripture is shown:

> Whence do we learn that the one who translates is not permitted to raise his voice above that of the reader? Because it says, Moses spoke and God answered him by a voice.[1] The words "by a voice" need not have been inserted. What then does "by a voice" mean? [It means], by the voice of Moses.[2] It has been taught similarly: The translator is not permitted to raise his voice above that of the reader. If the translator is unable to speak as loud as the reader, the reader should moderate his voice and read. (*b. Ber.* 45a)

Circumstances of Authorial Licence in the Targum

The main areas in which the Targums are seen to adjust the biblical text are the depiction of heroes and villains and the portrayal of God's actions. There are numerous examples of authorial licence throughout the Targums. An exploration will be made of just some of these to demonstrate the tendencies.

The Depiction of "Ethical/Unethical" Behaviour of Characters

Modifications to the biblical text appear to be made when the actions of figures who are generally perceived as God's favoured are involved. In the case of those who are not seen as being as good as they should have

1. Exod 19:19. Moses is here compared to a reader and God to a translator.
2. That is, a voice not raised above that of Moses.

been, "whitewashing"[3] is a technique sometimes employed. Attention here will be focussed mainly upon the patriarchs, matriarchs, monarchs and those who might be perceived as model figures. As will also be shown, the Targumists, on occasions, go so far as to judge the actions of those not seen in a favourable light by adding condemnatory expressions.

The Targums display a tendency to polarize good and bad. Biblical heroes are made exemplary figures,[4] while villains are denigrated. It is not, therefore, unusual to find that the behaviour of many characters is revised and enhanced so as to conform to the Targumists' expected standards of godly living. For example, Hezekiah no longer just "turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord" (2 Kgs 20:2), but in TJ,[5] "he turned his face to the wall of the Temple and he prayed before the Lord."[6] This idea of prayer directed to the Temple/Jerusalem is found in other books in the Hebrew Bible: Jonah believes that his prayer went to the Temple (Jon 2:8); Daniel prays towards Jerusalem (Dan 6:11). The Targums retroject into the earlier biblical age a custom that began in the biblical period, but that is well attested in rabbinic times.[7] Thus, the targumic rendering is seen to make Hezekiah, a good king, act in accordance with *halakah*. Likewise, in an *halakic* context Samuel is not seen lying down to sleep by the ark in the "temple" at Shiloh (1 Sam 3:3), but "he was lying down in the court of the Levites." This change is made because only the priests and kings of the Davidic dynasty were allowed to sleep in the Temple (cf. *b. Qid.* 78b). Samuel, a Levite, is thus exonerated from unseemly behaviour.

The Targums do not openly present or define a desirable code of behaviour, but such a code is implicit in their modifications of the biblical text. What they stress is adherence to the Law and the value of prayer. For example, Azariah adheres to the law of purification when the location of his dwelling is clearly defined in the Targum as "outside Jerusalem" (2 Kgs 15:5); Boaz is "a mighty man strong in the Law"

3. The term "whitewash" is used frequently, for example, by Gooding (1964, 279; 1969, 21).

4. Cf. Heb 11 where the biblical heroes are shown as faith examples.

5. The following abbreviations will be used for the Targums: Tg = Targum; TO = Targum Onqelos; TN = Targum Neofiti; TPs-J = Targum Pseudo-Jonathan; FT = Fragmentary Targum; CG = Cairo Geniza Fragments of the Targums to the Pentateuch; TJ = Targum Jonathan to the Prophets.

6. The same rendering is found in the parallel verse TJ Isa 38:2. See also the sections on *halakah* and theological concepts in Smolar and Aberbach 1983, 1–61 and 129–227.

7. E.g. *m. Ber.* 4.5–6; *Suk.* 5.4; *b. Ber.* 30a; *Cant. R.* 4.12.

(Ruth 2:1); the expression “entreat the face” is commonly rendered in TJ as “pray” (1 Kgs 13:6; 2 Kgs 13:4); and to the MT phrase “stretching out the hands” TJ adds “in prayer” (1 Kgs 8:22, 38, 54).

The Dignity of the Ancestors. The desire to preserve the dignity of the ancestors is a commonly observed feature of the Targums. This results in modifications to the biblical text to adjust what appears to be seen as questionable behaviour.

Drunkenness. Drunkenness is a state not condoned in the Hebrew Bible; for example, a rebellious drunken son is to be stoned to death (Deut 21:18–21); and Eli rebukes Hannah for her apparent drunkenness (1 Sam 1:14). In rabbinic literature drunkenness is also seen as a problem: drunkenness is bad for the whole body (*b. Ber.* 51a); when drunk a man cannot pray (*b. Ber.* 31a); the rabbis even go so far as to say that wine in the middle of the day is one of the things that drives a man from this world (*m. Abot* 3.10); and R. Meir says that it is wine that brings the greatest calamity upon man (*b. Sanh.* 70a–70b).

It is made clear in TPs-J that drunkenness can bring about problems. In the account of Aaron’s sons, Nadab and Abihu, it is made explicit that the two died because they were intoxicated (Lev 10:9).[8] Condemnation of such behaviour is not expressed in a forthright way, but a mitigating explanation may be given in the case of a figure who is otherwise virtuous. In the case of characters who are not well regarded there is no comment made, for example the daughters of Lot who cause their father to be inebriated.

The situation with regard to Noah is very different, since God regarded him as righteous (Gen 6:9; 7:1). TN emphasizes Noah’s virtue by adding to the biblical text at Gen 9:20: “And Noah, a *just* man, began to *till* the earth, and he planted a vineyard.”[9] It may be that this addition is made in an attempt to compensate for the drunken incident that is to occur.[10] In TPs-J an explanation of how Noah came to have the wine is supplied:

8. The same reason, which contradicts the biblical text where their deaths are said to be occasioned by the offering of forbidden fire, is also found in other rabbinic literature, for example *Lev R.* 12.5; 20.9; *Est. R.* 5.1.

9. In English translations of the Targums divergences from the Hebrew are indicated in italics. English translations of TN Genesis are taken from McNamara 1992.

10. The same addition of צדיק is also found in CG ms e; FT Mss p and v.

> And Noah began *to be a man tilling* the earth. *And he found a vine which the river had brought from the garden of Eden*'[11] and he planted *it in order (to have)* a vineyard. *That same day it sprouted and ripened grapes, and he pressed them.* (TPs-J Gen 9:20[12])

It is not that Noah brought a supply of wine with him on the ark, for he was not commanded to do this. There is surely a tacit implication that he became drunk because he was unused to the wine after his time in the ark.[13]

A marginal gloss in TN substitutes ורווח, "and he was relaxed," for "and he became drunk" (Gen 9:21). It is notable, but not unexpected given its more usual manner of making fewer additions to the biblical text, that TO does not amend the episode of drunkenness.

One Targumist sees the misfortune that resulted from Noah's drunkenness in his having only three sons. The school of Shammai suggested that a man might only cease from procreation when he had produced two sons, but the school of Hillel suggested after a son and a daughter, on account of the biblical statement "male and female he created them" (Gen 5:2; *m. Yeb*. 7.6). TPs-J attempts to exonerate Noah for not having more than three sons. The explanation given is that it was on account of his drunkenness that he was incapable of controlling what happened to him at the hands of his son Ham.

> When Noah woke from his wine, he knew, by *being told in a dream*, what had been done to him by *Ham* his son, *who was* slight *in merit*[14] *because he was the cause of his not producing a fourth son.* (TPs-J Gen 9:24)

11. Cf. *b. Sanh*. 70a–70b, "R. Emir said: That [forbidden] tree from which Adam ate was a vine, for nothing else but wine brings woe to man."

12. English translations of TPs-J Genesis are taken from Maher 1992.

13. It is this that the Syriac father Ephrem in his Genesis Commentary expands further: "However, [Noah's] drunkenness was not from an excess of wine, but because it had been a long time since he had drunk [any wine]. For in the ark he had drunk no wine because the day of the destruction of all flesh had not allowed him to take wine into the ark. Because indeed, during the year of the flood, he did not drink [any wine]. And because in the year when he left the ark, he did not plant a vineyard, for it was on the twenty-seventh of Iyor that he came out [of the ark], the time of unripe fruit—it was not the time for planting a vineyard. Therefore, indeed it was in the third year that he planted the vineyard from the grape pips that he brought with him from the ark, and it was three or even four years until it became a vineyard. There were in the middle six years during which the righteous one had not tasted wine" (6:1).

14. "Slight in merit" comes from a play on the biblical words "his youngest/ smallest son."

Here the concern is not with the gender of children, but with the number, perhaps in view of the biblical commandment to be "fruitful and multiply" (Gen 1:28). The implication that Ham castrated his father is unique in TPs-J among the Targums, but it does appear elsewhere in rabbinic literature.[15] TO, TN, TPs-J and CG ms e all render the biblical בחוץ, "outside" (Gen 9:22), as בשׁוקא, "in the street/market place."[16] This is an obvious anachronism, but intended to emphasize that it was the public nature of Ham's deed that brought humiliation to Noah. Thus the Targums have attempted to preserve the dignity of the man with whom God had made an everlasting covenant.

There is similar concern in one Targum for the fathers of the tribes of Israel when Joseph and his brothers come together for a meal. The biblical text says that "they drank and were merry with him" (Gen 43:34). It is only TPs-J that appears to find discomfort in this conviviality. An expansion is made to the text in order to exonerate them:

> And they drank and got drunk with him *because from the day they were separated from him they had not drunk wine, neither he nor they, until that day*.

Telling Lies. For the most part, the Targums adhere to the biblical text. It is, therefore, not surprising that what may be seen as the "unethical" behaviour of Abraham in telling the lie that Sarah was his sister, not his wife (Gen 12; 20), is not amended. However, in TPs-J a statement is introduced concerning the motive. This addition may be intended to ameliorate Abraham's action:

> When he [Abram] was about to enter *the territory of* Egypt, *they came to the river and uncovered their bodies to cross over. Abram* said to Sarai his wife, "Behold, *until now I have not looked at your body; but now* I know that you are a woman of beautiful appearance." (TPs-J Gen 12:11)[17]

It is not the usual targumic practice to introduce erotic elements;[18] indeed, any such possibilities are generally avoided. However, here it appears to

15. E.g. *b. Sanh.* 70a; *Gen.* R. 36.7.

16. Ephrem also uses this rendering in his Genesis commentary (Gen 6:1).

17. Sarah's beauty being appreciated by Abraham when they are going to Egypt is noted elsewhere (e.g. *Gen. R.* 40.4). In *Tanh. Lek Leka* 5 it is through seeing Sarah's reflection in the river that Abraham becomes aware of her beauty. In *1QapGen* (1Q20) 20.2–8 Sarah's beauty is mentioned at length, but there is no mention of Abraham becoming aware of this at the river. It is only in TPs-J that the revelation came to Abraham when crossing the river when they uncovered their bodies.

18. See also Sysling 1999.

be considered appropriate to exonerate the patriarch. Since it is only at this actual moment that Abraham realizes how beautiful his wife is, the implication is that he is so overwhelmed that he resorts to a lie. Thus the patriarch's behaviour may be seen to be understandable. Indeed, this must be the light in which it is viewed by some Targumists who make a modification in the text when, following this event, the Hebrew Bible says that Abraham was "sent away," וישׁלחו, by Pharaoh (Gen 12:20). TO and TPs-J appear to regard this as an unpleasant form of dismissal for someone so great. An adjustment is made so that Abraham is "escorted," ואלויאו. Thus they construct a more dignified exit for the patriarch.

In order to preserve Abraham's dignity with regard to his wife Sarah, TPs-J makes it clear that she did not suffer at the hands of anyone in the house of Pharaoh:

> Why did you say, "She is my sister," so that I [Pharaoh] took her as wife? *But immediately a plague was unleashed against me, and I did not approach her*. (TPs-J Gen 12:19)[19]

In the parallel story in Gen 20, when King Abimelech is attempting to placate Abraham, the biblical text implies some bribery. This would not enhance Sarah's reputation. Adjustments are found in the Targums in v. 16 for the biblical "covering of the eyes," כסות עינים. In TO this phrase becomes "a garment of honour," כסות דיקר.[20] This would appear to be recompense for the humiliation she has undergone. In addition, it would seem that a second rendering of "eyes," עינים, is present in "in exchange for having seen you," חלף ד־...וחזית יתיך. The situation is similar in TPs-J, where the Targumist also provides a doublet:

> And to Sarah he said, "Behold I have given a thousand silver *selas* to your brother; behold they will serve as a veil for your eyes *in exchange for your having been hidden from your husband for one night, while I saw your body. Even if I were to give you all that I have, I would not be worthy." Thus matters were clarified, and Abraham knew that Abimelech had not approached his wife.* (TPs-J Gen 20:16)

The first rendering, a veil for your eyes, תחמרא דעיינין,[21] appears to be an attempt at a literal rendering of the biblical "covering of the eyes," כסות עינים. The second rendering, "*in exchange for your having been hidden* (כסות)…*while I saw* (עינים)," seems to be an interpretative expansion upon the same phrase.

19. The same idea is also found in Friedlander 1916: Chapter 26, 189–90; *1QapGen* (1Q20) 20.16–17; Josephus, *Ant*. 1.164.

20. כסות דיקר עינים is found in Sperber's *ms* k; see Sperber 1959, 1:29.

21. For the meaning of the difficult term תחמרא, see Sysling 1999, 156 n. 37.

In TN a slightly different rendering is made, but with the same intention of removing the dishonour from Sarah:

> *… that silver is given to you as a gift on account of your having been hidden* (כסות) *even one night from the eyes of* (עינים) *the just one …*[22]

The renderings in FT mss p and v show Sarah to have been hidden from the eyes of her husband. In *Gen. R.* 52.12 there is discussion of the biblical phrase. The same intention as in the Targums is also found here with Sarah's honour seen as being protected.

When Isaac uses the same explanation as his father about his wife, Rebecca, being his sister (Gen 26:7), there is a small attempt in TPs-J to improve his reputation. After Abimelech has rebuked him for his deceitful behaviour, Isaac is said to have "sowed in the land *for the sake of almsgiving* (TPs-J Gen 26:12).[23]

Contending with the Almighty. It appears impossible to the Targumists that a human being should contend physically with God (Gen 32:25). In the biblical text Jacob "wrestled" (ויאבק), but in TO the verb used (שדל in the Hithpael) commonly means to "insinuate oneself/win favour." This implies that there was a verbal contention rather than a physical one. In this way the Targumist minimizes the physical action and makes a more acceptable rendering. This idea of Jacob engaged in a verbal contest is also found in rabbinic literature (e.g. *Gen. R.* 77.2; *Cant. R.* 3.9). In TPs-J the modification is "an *angel in the form of* a man wrestled with him."[24] In an expansion to the verse this angel is identified as Michael,[25] and there is verbal exchange. There is a similar modification in TN, but the angel is identified uniquely in the Targums as Sariel: "*the angel Sariel* wrestled with him *in the appearance* of a man." However, in this Targum there is no verbal discussion. The idea of Jacob wrestling with an angel is also found in rabbinic literature (e.g. *b. Ḥul.* 91a, 92a). In *PRE* 37 there is both physical and verbal encounter with an unnamed angel.

Divination. The Israelites were prohibited from using divination (נחש) (Lev 19:26; Deut 18:10). This is so obvious to all that in his blessing Balaam says, "There is no divining in Jacob" (Num 23:23). However, Joseph openly admits to divination (Gen 44:5, 15). Some Targumists

22. See also Levy 1986, 158–59.
23. The same idea is also found in *PRE* 33.239.
24. Similarly in CG ms c, "*an angel* wrestled with him *in the form of* a man."
25. In *Gen. R.* 78.1 the angel is identified as either Michael or Gabriel.

make literal renderings of the biblical, “does he [Joseph] not indeed use it [his cup] for divination?,” using the root קסם, “divine” (TN, CG ms d). Other Targumists (TPs-J and FT ms v) use the root טרי, “shake, throw.” This rendering still maintains the idea of divination. In TO the Targumist’s rendering is “he carefully tests with it,” והוא בדקא מבדיק ביה (Gen 44:5). This might imply a harmless experiment as to whether or not anyone might steal his cup, and so softens the text in order to improve Joseph’s reputation.

The Targumists even show sensitivity when dealing with a character such as Laban. Laban does not emerge from the biblical text in a good light, having tricked his son-in-law. However, in TO and TN he is exonerated from using divination in Gen 30:27. The biblical root נחש, “divine,” is replaced by the inoffensive נסי, “try, test, examine.”[26] The reason for this would appear to be to preserve the reputation of two of the matriarchs of Israel. Several other Targums use the root טרי, “shake, throw” (TPs-J, FT mss p, v, CG ms e, and a marginal variant in TN). The fact that the Targumist in the book of Kings (2 Kgs 17:17) does not amend the text concerning Manasseh may be on account of this king being evil.

Sacrificing on High Places. In the MT “high places” were associated with idol worship and it was incumbent upon Israel to destroy the “high places” of its enemies (Deut 33:29). A Targumist takes care to acquit Samuel of lack of adherence to *halakah* by replacing “high place,” במה (1 Sam 9:12–14, 19, 25; 10:5, 13), with “house of feasting,” בית אסחרתא.

The Targums are discriminating and do not change all references to Israelites worshipping at high places. Where such occurrences are part and parcel of the “bad behaviour” of a person they are maintained. Solomon is portrayed with all his faults and the term “high place” is preserved (1 Kgs 3:3; 11:7). It may be that the Targumists did not consider it possible to adjust this behaviour because they were caught between faithfulness to the biblical text and any desire to “whitewash” Solomon.

The law of central sanctuary (Deut 12:5–7) allows sacrifice to be made only in the place where the Lord would make his name to dwell. After the building of the Temple, this came to mean Jerusalem (*m*. *Meg*. 1.11). In the Targum there is generally concern that this practice should be seen to be observed.[27] In the MT Elisha slaughtered, ויזבחהו, a yoke of oxen for

26. The same amendment is also found in most manuscripts of the Samaritan Targum and is also used in Gen 44:5, 15. See Tal 2003, 114.

27. Gordon 1982, 120–24.

sacrifice (1 Kgs 19:21). However, a Targumist renders this “and he cut it up,” והדמיה. Here the subtle change shows Elisha acting in accordance with *halakah* and not making a sacrifice outside Jerusalem. It is not always the case that the Targum makes such an alteration. There are occasions of extempore sacrifices elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, in 1 Sam 6:14 and 2 Sam 24:25. In neither of these is there any modification of the biblical text in TJ.

Enhancing Characters

It is instructive to explore the way the Targums deal with issues and traits in the lives of key characters.

Jacob

Gullibility. When Jacob marries Leah and not Rachel, the reader surely wonders why he did not recognize the woman. The biblical text merely says, “And it came to pass, that in the morning, behold, it was Leah” (Gen 29:25). Most of the Targums (TO, TN, CG) render the biblical text faithfully. However, in TPs-J the Targumist appears keen to remove the impression that the patriarch was gullible. How could Jacob have spent the night with Leah and not recognized that she was not Rachel? An explanatory expansion is made, presumably with the intention of improving Jacob’s reputation:

> At morning *time he looked at her*, and behold it was Leah! *During the whole night he had thought that she was Rachel, because Rachel had entrusted to her all the things that Jacob had entrusted to her*.

A similar explanation is found in the Talmud (*b. B. Bat.* 123a; *Meg.* 13b).

Fleeing. When apparently intending to improve a patriarchal reputation the targumic rendering is not always as obvious as in the examples above. When Jacob flees from Laban (Gen 31:20, 21, 22) it may be considered that he is acting in a cowardly way. The Targumists in TO and TPs-J seem concerned with the patriarch’s reputation here and amend the text subtly, thus producing something more appropriate for the preservation of the dignity of the patriarch. Jacob no longer “flees,” ברח, but merely “goes,” אזל. However, not all Targumists adopt the same rendering; in TN and CG they are content to make a literal rendering (ערק) of the biblical text. Similarly at Gen 31:22 in TO and in a marginal variation in TN “go” is used. However, TN and FT mss p and v have “flee.” The rendering in TPs-J is more subtle and there is a doublet:

> *When Jacob had gone* (אזל),...Laban was told…Jacob had fled (ערק).

Later, at v. 27, TO, TPs-J and TN all have “go,” with only CG retaining “flee.”

It might be thought that אזל, “go,” was the standard rendering for the biblical ברח, “flee.” This is not so. When Rebecca tells Jacob to flee to Laban in order to escape Esau’s anger (Gen 27:43), it may be considered that the fleeing is not cowardly, because it was rather prudent that the son, the patriarch, should save his skin. Again in TPs-J there is a double rendering, “Arise, flee *for your life, and go*.” However, TO and TN use “go,” though a marginal reading in TN has “flee.” Similarly, when Jacob flees from his brother (Gen 35:1, 7), ערק is used in TO, TPs-J and TN.

It must be borne in mind that TO was the “official” Targum in Babylon. It is, therefore, worth reflecting on the occasions when TO renders the biblical ברח, “flee,” as אזל. It would appear that the Targumist’s motivation in using אזל is concerned with the preservation of dignity—of Jacob (Gen 27:43; 31:20, 21, 22, 27), of the people of Israel (Exod 14:5), and of Balaam, when he is praising Israel (Num 24:11).

An examination of the use of Aramaic equivalents for Hebrew roots with the meaning “flee” in the “official” Targums (TO and TJ) was undertaken by Bernard Grossfeld in 1979 (Grossfeld 1979). He acknowledged that it was difficult to come to any sound conclusions for the use of the Aramaic roots ערק, אפך and אזל in the context of fleeing. His suggestion was that the use of these different roots pointed to various “strata” in the Targums originating from different times of composition. Where אזל is used for the biblical ברח it appears that the Targumist was concerned with the dignity of the characters. This is not only true for the Pentateuch, but is also apparent in the Prophets (concerning Amos [Amos 7:12]; Jacob [Hos 12. 13]; and David [1 Sam 27:4 only in a variant reading]).

Vigilance. Again in the Targums Jacob’s standing is enhanced at Gen 31:39, where the biblical text reads:

> That which was torn by wild beasts I did not bring to you; I bore the loss of it myself; of my hand you required it, whether stolen (גנבתי) by day or stolen by night.

The rendering in TO is:

> That which had been *wounded* I did not bring to you; *what was deficient in number* [from the flock]—from me you sought [compensation for] it. *I was on guard* by day, *and I was on guard* by night.

The reason for this rendering probably comes from the unusual ending on the biblical גנבתי. This old case ending, an emphatic form of the con-

struct (GK 90*l*), was probably regarded as a first person singular possessive suffix. Thus, it might be taken to mean that Jacob had admitted to theft. This was certainly not something that would improve his reputation and so a Targumist emphasizes just how vigilant a shepherd he was. Similarly in TN and TPs-J the Targumists adjust the text so that Jacob is seen to be making good what was missing and thus behaving honourably:

> What *was killed* I did not bring to you. *Every one of them that fled from the numbers I made good.* From me you demanded it. What *the thieves* stole in the daytime, what *the wild beasts killed* during the night, *I made good.* (TN Gen 31:39)

> What was torn *by the beasts of the field* I did not bring to you; *for if I had sinned in this*, you would have demanded it of me. What was stolen in the daytime *by men I had to make good*; and what was stolen at night *by the beasts of the field I had to make good*. (TPs-J Gen 31:39)

Deceit. In Gen 25:27 Jacob is defined as איש תם. This description may be taken to mean that he was an ordinary, quiet sort of person in contrast to Esau, a crafty hunter, but it also has the implication that he had integrity. The Targums depict him as a perfect (שלם) man who spent time studying:[28]

> Jacob was a perfect man *who ministered at the house of study.* (TO)

> Jacob was a man perfect *in good work,* he dwelt *in the schoolhouses*. (TN)

> Jacob was a man perfect in *good work*, seated *and serving at the school of Shem and Eber, seeking instruction from before the Lord.* (TN marginal reading)

> Jacob became a man [*who was*] *perfect in his works, ministering in the schoolhouse of Eber*. (TPs-J)

From this it would appear that the Targums find it appropriate to fill out the MT in order to expound Jacob's merits in terms more appropriate to post-biblical times.

On account of Jacob's deceit (מרמה, Gen 27:35), his brother Esau loses his father's blessing and expresses his anger and despair about this. There is a consensus in the targumic renderings to soften the language used by Isaac against Jacob. Generally renderings in the Targums are subtle. However, in this verse TO, TPs-J and TN all make a "converse

28. Cf. *Gen. R.* 63.10 where Jacob also goes to the house of study of both Shem and Eber.

translation"[29] and substitute "wisdom" (חכמתא/חוכמה) for "deceit."[30] It would appear that Jacob, the figure who came to represent the Jewish nation in the Talmudic era, could not be seen in so poor a light. The same modification is found in *Gen. R.* 67.4:

> R. Johanan said: He came with the wisdom of his Torah.

Likewise at Gen 34:13 in TO, TN and TPs-J Jacob's sons no longer act with deceit (במרמה), but with "wisdom."

It is not only Jacob's reputation that Targums may be observed to "improve" with regard to cunning. A similar modification is found in TJ 2 Kgs 10:19 where a Targumist shows Jehu in a more positive light concerning his plan to assemble the worshippers of Baal and then have them killed. The motivation for this would appear to come from the fact that Jehu had been anointed by God's command. Jehu no longer acts "with cunning," בעקבה, but "with wisdom," בחכמה.

One Targumist is so concerned to continue this presenting of Jacob in a good light that he contributes an expansion to the biblical text at the very end of the patriarch's life:

> *"Come, let us weep over Jacob the righteous, for whose merit the famine passed from the land of Egypt." For it had been decreed that there would be a famine for forty-two years. But for the merit of Jacob forty years were withheld from Egypt, and there was famine for two years only.* (TPs-J Gen 50:3)[31]

For the Targumist it does not appear to be significant that Joseph had predicted seven years of famine (Gen 41:27, 30); rather, he takes the occasion as an opportunity to enhance Jacob's reputation further.

Matriarchs. The Targums feel free to edit the reputations of matriarchs as well as patriarchs.

Sarah. As has been noted previously, it must not be thought that Targums always regard the more doubtful behaviour of worthy figures as unethical and so needing "correction." A case in point is that of Sarah who in the biblical text "denied," ותכחש, that she laughed about the prospect of bearing a child (Gen 18:15). In TPs-J there is a literal rendering

29. See Klein 1976, 532–35, for further examination of this practice.

30. In the Targum to the Samaritan Pentateuch, apart from ms a, there is a faithful rendering of the biblical term. See Tal 2003, 113.

31. Cf. *Gen. R.* 89.9: "The Rabbis said: Forty-two years were intended, since Pharaoh dreamed, recounted his dreams to Joseph, and Joseph repeated them to Pharaoh. R. Jose b. R. Hanina said: The famine lasted two years, for as soon as Jacob went down thither it came to an end."

"she denied," וכפרת. The Targumists in TO and TN use the verb כדב, "lie." This harsh description in the biblical and targumic texts does not seek to "improve" Sarah's behaviour. It may be that the fact of her laughter has already been stated and so cannot be withdrawn. It is noteworthy, however, that in the Samaritan Targum ms a Sarah "acted like a stranger," ואתנכרת. Tal suggests the reason for this softening might be "to prevent the understanding that Sarah could act immorally."[32]

Rebecca. The reputation of the matriarch Rebecca is adjusted by some Targumists in their rendering of Gen 26:10. The biblical text states merely that "one of the people might easily have lain with her." This appears to have been regarded as a somewhat vulgar suggestion. Surely it could not just have been anyone who might have lain with the matriarch. Thus in TO it is rendered, "*the one who is unique among* the people (דמיחד בעם...)." That this is a reference to the king himself is made absolutely clear in TPs-J in the rendering, "*the king, who is distinguished among* the people."[33] TN and FT ms v keep much closer to the biblical text with their modification "one *of the young men*." It appears to have been considered beneath the dignity of Rebecca that a mere commoner should have lain with her, and so by upgrading to the king himself in TO and TPs-J, her reputation is enhanced.

Rachel. In an apparent attempt to improve the behaviour of the matriarch Rachel, the Targumist in TO Gen 31:19 softens her theft of her father's household gods. She no longer "stole," ותגנב, them, but merely "took," ונסבת, them. Other Targumists (TN, TPs-J, and CG ms e) use a literal rendering of this action. It is noteworthy that all the targumic versions render תרפים by the term צלם, "image."[34] In TPs-J there is an expansion that describes what these idols can do.[35] The implication, but it is only that, is that the reason for Rachel's removal of these noxious idols

32. Tal 2003, 114.

33. Cf. *Num R.* 3.6; 10.5; 14.5, where the assumption is made that "one" in the biblical text refers to the king, Abimelech.

34. צלם is the most frequently occurring rendering of התרפים in the Targums (e.g. Judg 18:14; 1 Sam 19:13; Ezek 21:26). It is noteworthy that at TJ Hos 3:4 the rendering is מחוי, "interpreters"/"idolatrous oracles" (so Jastrow 1903, 758), with the implication of telling as implied in the Genesis passage.

35. "When Laban had gone to shear his flock, Rachel stole the *images. For they would slay a man a first-born, cut off his head and sprinkle it with salt and spices. They would write magical formulas on a plate of gold and put it under its tongue. Then they would set it up on the wall and it would speak to them. And it was to these (idols) that* her father *bent down*" (TPs-J Gen 31:19).

is so that they might not inform her father of Isaac's fleeing and also that she should prevent her father from continuing idolatrous worship. This interpretation is also found in *PRE*[36] where it is made clear that these were Rachel's motives.

Other Notable Figures.

Joseph. The consensus of targumic renderings of Joseph's action in fleeing from Potiphar's wife demonstrates the desire to emphasize Joseph's uprightness. The modification of the biblical "outside," חוץ, to "the market place," שׁוקא, although anachronistic, shows that Joseph does not merely flee anywhere outside the building, but goes to the public place. By going right out to the market place Joseph moves as far away from the presence of the seductress as possible.[37]

As has been demonstrated above, this same rendering is used in Gen 9:22 where the setting of Ham's deed is emphasized by placing it in a public situation. From these instances it might be conjectured that "the market place," שׁוקא, is the usual Aramaic rendering for "outside," חוץ. This is not the case, for example at Gen 15:5; 19:16; 24:31, where the rendering in all the targumic versions is "outside," ברא.

One Targumist goes to greater lengths to show Joseph's innocence of the claimed rape. In TPs-J Gen 39:14 when Joseph fled from Potiphar's wife, "*she threw the white of an egg on the bed*," וחא ורמת חלבונא דביעתא בדרגשא, and she then called the household to witness this pseudo-semen as evidence.[38] This fabrication shows Potiphar's wife in a worse light than in the biblical text. The targumic text continues at v. 20: "Joseph's master took *counsel from the [pagan] priests who discovered that it was the white (of an egg)*. So *he did not put him to death*." While exposing Potiphar's wife as a liar, the Targumist exonerates Joseph.

Aaron. The incident of the golden calf produces another biblical event that does not show a notable figure, Aaron, in a good light. The Hebrew Bible does not have as much detail as do some of the Targums. It merely says,

36. *PRE* 36.273–74.

37. For further examples of targumic renderings of the biblical text that enhance Joseph's reputation by demonstrating how he did not succumb to various temptations, see Sysling 1998, 158–59.

38. Cf. *b. Giṭ*. 57, referring to divorce evidence where the white of an egg is also used as a substitute for semen.

> When Aaron saw this [the golden calf], he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation and said, "Tomorrow shall be a festival to the Lord." (Exod 32:5)

In two of the pentateuchal Targums the prophet Hur is introduced:

> Aaron saw Hur slain before him; and he was afraid; and he built an altar before it. And Aaron cried out in an anguished voice and said, "Tomorrow (shall be) a festival before the Lord for the slaughtering to death of his enemies, those who denied their Lord and exchanged the glory of his Shekinah for this calf." (TPs-J Exod 32:5)[39]

The fact that Aaron is shown to be afraid, together with his pious utterance, indicates a Targumist's desire to demonstrate his remorse for the action that transgressed the Law. In TN another Targumist also introduces Hur.

> And Aaron saw Hur the prophet before it; and was afraid. (TN Exod 32:5)[40]

The modification of the text by these Targumists appears to be an attempt to exonerate Aaron from making the golden calf. Tradition has it that Hur was killed by the people because he had objected to the making of the idol.[41] There is the assumption that had Aaron agreed to make the image, he too would have been killed by the people.

This softening of the portrayal of a character is similarly seen in the way in which TPs-J deals with Pharaoh at Exod 12:31. There is a long expansion here which includes "*Pharaoh was supplicating in an anguished voice*."[42] The implication is that Pharaoh was aware that he should not have kept the Israelites captive in Egypt. At v. 33 the Targumist says that "*Moses and Aaron and the children of Israel heard Pharaoh's mournful voice* [literally 'the sound of Pharaoh's weeping']."

39. English translations of TPs-J Exodus are taken from Maher 1994.

40. English translations of TN Exodus are taken from McNamara 1994.

41. E.g. *b. Sanh.* 7a; *Exod. R.* 41.7; 48.3; 51.8; *Lev. R.* 10.3; *Num. R.* 15.21; *PRE* 45.353.

42. "*Now the territory of Egypt extended for a distance of four hundred parasangs, and the land of Goshen, where Moses and the children of Israel were, was in the middle of the land of Egypt, and Pharaoh's royal palace was at the beginning of the land of Egypt. But when* he summoned Moses and Aaron *on the night of Passover, his voice was heard as far as the land of Goshen. Pharaoh was supplicating in an anguished voice,* and he said *thus:* 'Arise, go forth from among my people, both you and the children of Israel. Go, worship *before* the Lord as you said'" (TPs-J Exod 12:31).

Does this imply that Pharaoh was showing remorse? It is noteworthy that it is not only the "goodies" whose behaviour some Targumists modify, but sometimes a "baddy" too.

Jehu. The picture of Jehu in the MT is of a king who destroys Ahab's relatives and the worship of Baal, thus doing what God required of him. In this respect he is a good king, but he is not wholly good because he did not serve God completely (2 Kgs 10:31). The Targumist renders some of the descriptions of his actions in such a way as to make him appear in a more positive light.

In his quest to destroy Joram, Jehu's action is described bluntly in the MT: "he drives with madness," בשגעון ינהג (2 Kgs 9:20). The targumic rendering of this is "he drives with gentleness," בניח מדבר. It may be that the Targumist is wanting to clarify what he sees as hyperbole in the biblical text. He therefore uses this "converse" translation to improve the standing of a king who was anointed by divine command. A "white-wash" is the solution adopted. It appears that faithfulness to the biblical text is less important than the correct portrayal of the way God's will should be done.[43]

As has been noted above, the Targumist also modified further the behaviour of Jehu when he planned to have the assembly of the worshippers of Baal killed (2 Kgs 10:19).

God's Actions

It is not only the descriptions of the actions of human beings that the Targums adjust, but also those of God himself. It is noteworthy that the Targums never question God's motives. On occasions, however, they modify subtly the way in which God's actions are depicted.

The question as to whether or not it was proper for God to ask Abraham to offer up his son is not discussed in the Targums, nor is the fact that if he had actually done so the promise of innumerable ancestors would not have been fulfilled through the "promised son." However, one Targumist appears to be dealing to some extent with this matter. In a long addition, which is unique in the Targums, there is an explanation at Gen 22:1 as to why God should have tested Abraham:

43. It is noteworthy that in LXX, P and V there are literal renderings of this text. However, Josephus's description bears great similarity to that of the Targum, "leisurely and with discipline" (*Ant*. 9.117).

> After these events, *after Isaac and Ishmael had quarrelled, Ishmael said, "It is right that I should be my father's heir, since I am his first-born son." But Isaac said, "It is right that I should be my father's heir, because I am the son of Sarah his wife, while you are only the son of Hagar, my mother's maidservant." Ishmael answered and said, "I am more worthy than you, because I was circumcised at the age of thirteen. And if I had wished to refuse, I would not have handed myself over to be circumcised. But you were circumcised at the age of eight days. If you had been aware, perhaps you would not have handed yourself over to be circumcised." Isaac answered and said, "Behold, today I am thirty seven years old, and if the Holy One, blessed be he, were to ask for all my members, I would not refuse." These words were immediately heard before the Lord of the world, and at once the Memra of the Lord tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said to him,* "Here I am." (TPs-J Gen 22:1)

It is Isaac's declaration of his willingness to offer his whole body to God that led to the command that Abraham should offer him as the sacrifice. The onus is removed from God and put on Isaac. Indeed, it is the portrayal of Isaac to which the Targumist gives added emphasis. Isaac is given a speech that is additional to the biblical text:

> Abraham put forth his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. Isaac spoke up and said to his father: *"Tie me well lest I struggle because of the anguish of my soul, with the result that a blemish will be found in your offering, and I will be thrust into the pit of destruction. The eyes of Abraham were looking at the eyes of Isaac, and the eyes of Isaac were looking at the angels on high. Isaac saw them but Abraham did not see them. The angels on high exclaimed: "Come, see two unique* (יחיד) *ones who are in the world: one is slaughtering, and one is being slaughtered; the one who slaughters does not hesitate, and the one who is being slaughtered stretches forth his neck.* (TPs-J Gen 22:10)

It appears to have been particularly important that Isaac was fully aware of the situation and was a willing victim and so perfect and acceptable. Therefore, it is he who asks that his father should bind him. Abraham is shown acting as a priest. The use of "unique," יחיד,[44] as a title of honour for Abraham and Isaac shows that they are completely dedicated to performing the will of God. This title and the importance of the spotless sacrifice are also found in TN. The emphasis on Isaac is seen clearly in the fact that it is he alone who sees the angels. The incident thus becomes a story of self-sacrifice with Isaac as the hero and the attention of the

44. It is also given elsewhere to Abraham alone (TJ Isa 51:2; Ezek 33:24), and to Israel (TPs-J Num 23:24; Deut 26:18).

audience is diverted from God's request for human sacrifice. This is a subtle transformation of the text without the omission of the divine command. A similar, but less detailed, account is found in TN.[45]

In order to explain Isaac's absence from the biblical text for some time after his binding, in one Targum alone, TPs-J, he is seen to spend three years in a school. This tradition is also found in *Gen. R.* 56:11. Given the fact that great importance is paid to teaching in the Targums (e.g. TPs-J Gen 9:27; TO Gen 25:27; TN and TPs-J Num 24:5; TN and TPs-J Deut 28:6; TJ 1 Sam 19:18, 19, 22, 23; 20:1; Codex Reuchlinianus 1 Sam 10:22;[46] Codex Reuchlinianus 1 Kgs 2:8, 36;[47] 2 Kgs 22:14), no doubt because of the use of the Targums in the school,[48] this enhances Isaac's reputation:

> *The angels on high took Isaac and brought him to the schoolhouse of Shem the Great, and he was there three years. On that day* Abraham returned to his servants, and they arose and went together to Beer-sheba. And Abraham dwelt in Beer-sheba. (TPs-J Gen 22:19)

Another action of God that is modified by a Targumist is deception. God cannot be seen to mislead his people as in Jer 4:10. Accordingly the Targumist introduces "*prophets of falsehood*" as the agent of deception. It is common in the Targums for a distinction to be made between various types of prophet. A prophet who does not serve the God of Israel cannot convey truth and so is a "*lying prophet*." The means of recognition of true prophets is specified in *b. Sanh.* 90a. The requirement is that the words of a prophet should conform to the commands of the Law. Whereas in the MT there is no special term for a false prophet,[49] the term

45. Cf. TN Gen 22:10: "And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son *Isaac. Isaac answered and said to his father Abraham: 'Father tie me well lest I kick you and your offering be rendered unfit and we be thrust down into the pit of destruction in the world to come.' The eyes of Abraham were on the eyes of Isaac and the eyes of Isaac were scanning the angels on high. Abraham did not see them. In that hour a Bath Qol came forth from the heavens and said: 'Come, see two singular persons who are in my world; one slaughters and the other is being slaughtered. The one who slaughters does not hesitate and he who is being slaughtered stretches out his neck.'*"

46. Sperber's *siglum* f_6; see Sperber 1959, 2:113.

47. Sperber's *sigla* f, f_6; see Sperber 1959, 2:215, 218.

48. See York 1979.

49. The term "false prophet" is introduced in LXX (Jer 6:13; 26:7, 8, 11, 16; 27:9; 28:1; 29:1, 8; Zech 13:2). Josephus also uses the same term concerning the prophets of Baal (*Ant.* 8:318), those associated with the cult centre of Bethel (*Ant.* 8.236), and the 400 prophets who promised victory to Ahab (*Ant.* 8.402).

used in the Targum "*lying/false prophet*," נבי שקרא,[50] is also found in the Mishnah, Talmud[51] and Midrash Rabbah.[52]

God is perfect and hence the Targums cannot envisage that he would give his people anything that was not right for them. Thus a modification is made at Ezek 20:25, "Moreover, I gave them statutes that were not good and ordinances by which they could not live." This becomes,

So, too, *since they had rebelled against My Memra, and did not wish to listen to My prophets, I removed them and delivered them into the hand of their enemies; they followed their stupid inclination and they obeyed religious decrees which were not proper and laws by which they could not survive*.[53]

The Targumist did not consider this biblical text to be theologically acceptable. Surely God cannot have given statutes that were not good. The text is adjusted so that it is the laws of their enemies, which they had to obey, that were unworthy.

A similar situation obtains at Jer 4:10: "Then I said, 'Ah, Lord God, how utterly you have deceived this people and Jerusalem, saying, "It shall be well with you," even while the sword is at the throat!'" The Targumist adjusts the text to read:

> Then I said: "*Receive my petition*, O Lord *God*!" *Therefore, behold: the prophets of falsehood* have led this people and *the inhabitants of* Jerusalem astray, saying: "You shall have peace!" But *now,* behold: the sword *slaughters among the people*.[54]

The Targumist has not allowed Jeremiah to suggest that God actually deceived the people of Israel, but has allowed them to be deceived by false prophets and so suffer the consequences. It is an ingenious way of ensuring that God is portrayed as perfect.

Similarly, the Targumist cannot contemplate God giving unjust commands at Ezek 18:25: "Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is unfair.' Hear now, O house of Israel: Is my way unfair? Is it not your ways that are unfair?" By a resourceful change in the language the Targumist creates a situation that is tolerable:

50. E.g. 1 Kgs 13:11, 25, 29; 18:20; 19:1; 22:6, 10, 12, 13; 2 Kgs 23:18; Jer 2:8; 5:31; Hos 4:5; 9:7; Zech 13:2. In addition "seers," חזים, becomes "false prophets" in Micah (e.g. 3:7).

51. *M. Sanh*. 1.5; 11.1, 5; *b. Ber*. 24b; *Sanh*. 16a; 18b; 90a.

52. *Num. R*. 10:5; *Lam. R*. Prologue 34; 2.13.

53. English translations of the Targum of Ezekiel are taken from Levey 1987.

54. English translations of the Targum of Jeremiah are taken from Hayward 1987.

> Yet you have said, "The *good* ways of the Lord *have not been declared to us*." Now listen, O House of Israel, *Have not* My *good* ways *been declared to you?* Is it not your ways, surely yours, which are not right?

Conclusion

From the relatively small number of examples that have been examined it may be seen that the Targumists have no qualms in adjusting the biblical text to suit their own purposes. Unlike modern translators who generally keep as close to the original text as possible, they feel free to use their own discretion as to when they should modify the text so that their audience is given what they consider to be the "correct" interpretation. Most modern translators would produce notes to explain what they were doing should such a case arise. However, ancient translators did not operate in this way. Expectation that the audience would be completely familiar with the biblical text may also have been a factor. It would appear that in their concern to produce a text that applied ethical standards to what it described and commended, the Targumists were not so exercised by the kind of "translational ethics" that usually is the concern of modern Bible translators.

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Death and Justice: Shifting paradigms in the Hebrew Bible and Early Judaism*

Ed Noort

For a long time, the relationship between Israel, its official deity and death was unambiguous and clear. According to scholarly opinion, there was no connection between YHWH and the dead. With Qoheleth as its last representative, Israel resisted all forms of post-mortem existence as were so abundantly present in the world surrounding it. It was especially this alleged resistance against the idea of an "otherworld of the dead" which established Israel's presumed uniqueness and particularity. The topic of post-mortem existence was only in the margins of the Hebrew Bible. It then fully unfolded in the New Testament, with Paul and the Gospels as crown witnesses. The background of this scheme was the study of death with a focus on future life, driven by the problem of post-mortem existence.

Times have changed, however, and now death is on the move! In recent time, however, a revival of analyses relating to death has taken place, with scholars addressing texts from Mesopotamia, Syria, especially Ugarit (Lewis 1989; Schmidt 1994; Eberhardt 2007). At the same time, archaeology has firmly established a voice for itself in these discussions. Because of the number of cemeteries, the numerous graves, bodies and artefacts being found, archaeologists, historians and exegetes have been increasingly successful in mapping life and death in ancient times. With the distance between material and interpretation proving to be much smaller than is usually the case between archaeological findings and their historical interpretation, concepts of ancestor cult, necromancy and mortuary practices have been applied to Israel and its religion (Tropper 1989). Of course, disputes between minimalists and maximalists

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have arisen here too, but the final conclusion must be that there certainly was a great deal of an awareness of death in the daily life of Ancient Israel.

Old Testament exegesis came to the same conclusion after the influential study of Christoph Barth (Barth 1947 [rev. ed. 1997]). Barth demonstrated that according to the psalms of lament, the power and the threat of death are felt in the midst of life. Real "life" in the Hebrew Bible includes freedom, health, social bounds; while "death" means the negation of that life *coram deo*: imprisonment, oppression, sickness. So, the living have already experienced something of what it is to be under the power of death (Barth 1997, 18–41, 42–53).

In Israel's everyday life, the distinction between the dead and the living seemed to be less absolute. But what competence does YHWH have here? Gönke Eberhardt has addressed these questions in her recent (2007) Tübingen dissertation. In her study, Eberhardt is less interested in the post-mortem existence that preoccupied former exegetes, choosing instead to address YHWH's apparent control over the underworld without his becoming a chthonic deity. Her study carefully interprets all relevant texts, yet without losing sight of religious-historical developments. According to Eberhardt, this theological portrait of YHWH is established through four parallel developments. First, שׁאול seems to be a separate space in which YHWH can act only in exceptional cases. An example is Ps 139:8: "If I ascend to heaven, you are there, if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there" (Eberhardt 2007, 103–57). Secondly, from the eighth century onward YHWH is portrayed more and more as a solar appearance, almost a solar deity. As a result of this development YHWH's function as a judge is established, an occurrence which serves to make the underworld visible to him. It is for that reason that the רפאים, the dead spirits, shudder (Eberhardt 2007, 213–18). Thirdly, Eberhardt finds that the notion of the compassionate God is extended towards the underworld. If YHWH can be beseeched to bring back people with a diminishing quality of life in cases of threatening disease, or to guide someone out of the isolation a person might feel within society, then it is not a huge leap for YHWH to be associated with death, and with that the hoped-for care that comes after physical demise. A fourth development is the transference of competencies from the sphere of tutelary gods and goddesses. Now YHWH's protection is extended beyond life into the grave. In other words, the blessing from everyday life is continued beyond physical death (Eberhardt 2007, 388–92). These four lines of development, which both took place simultaneously and in succession, break open an evolutionary explanation of several stages (Lang 1995)

relating to death beliefs in Ancient Israel.[1] Eberhardt's work opens new dimensions. At the same time, because of her strong interest in theological explanation, the interpretations focussing on YHWH's control of power, as well as the conclusions, are rather narrowly grounded within anthropology. Eberhardt herself mentions the narrow scope of her work as a *desideratum* awaiting further study, especially because ancestor cult, necromancy and mortuary practices played no part in her research. In addition, Eberhardt's research ends at the turning point of the second century B.C.E., a period when several forms of post-mortem existence began to be witnessed.

Against this background I engage with only one of the aspects raised by Eberhardt's research. My central question is: *Why was an extension towards post-mortem existence necessary and what impulses played a part in this process?* In an effort to deal with the anthropological aspect of this question, I wish to mix fact and fiction through role-playing. In order to do this I introduce to you two dead figures, one from the end of the eighth century B.C.E., from the Silwan necropolis near Jerusalem, and another from the first century B.C.E. at Qumran. I will compare the ways both men possibly looked upon and rationalized death and life, as well as their supposed relationship with the deity. Special attention will be given to the supposed shifts in worldview. The role-plays offered here are indeed a mixture of fact and fiction: the graves are facts, the figures within them, as well as the reconstruction of their beliefs in the contextuality of their times and social environment, are fiction. These reconstructions are, in short, factually based fiction.

Role Play One

At the end of the eighth and the beginning of the seventh century B.C.E. the enormous demographic, political and economical changes brought about by the fall of the northern state became clearly visible in Judah (see, e.g., Zwickel 1994, 1999). The construction of new city quarters in Jerusalem, new settlements and villages in the hills and mountains, the building of terraces in order to maximize the agricultural output of the hill country, as well as shifting political and economical structures in the shadow of Assyria can all be noted. As Assyria expanded its military, political, economical, cultural and religious hold after each blaze of rebellion, so Judah started catching up with the north, which had flourished already under the Omrides. The administration was enhanced, and

1. For an insightful overview, see the essay by Eberhardt's supervisor, B. Janowski (2008).

international trade flourished, not least because the incense route passed through the southern part of Judah. To the cities these developments turned out to be beneficial. Personal gain founded on corruption flourished, as did the power of high-ranking officers within as well as outside of Jerusalem. Prophetic voices criticize this development (Isa 1:21–26; Mic 3:9–12).

One such prosperous character enters the stage: a high-ranking official living in Jerusalem, whom we shall call Shebnayahu.[2] In our construction, Shebnayahu belongs to the city's elite and acts accordingly. When political circumstances require it, he is involved in the national cult, which in Shebnayahu's day was a rather open affair (2 Kgs 16:10–16). Already, during his life, Shebnayahu has ordered the construction of a monumental grave, an action that brings down on him a prophetic rebuke worded as a divine speech: "What right do you have here? Who are your relatives here, that you have cut out a tomb for yourself, cutting a tomb on the height, and carving a habitation for yourself in the rock?" (Isa 22:16). Shebnayahu chooses a classical site for his intended final resting place, the necropolis of Jerusalem opposite the south-eastern hill at the other side of the Kidron Valley (Küchler 2007, 738–42; Ussishkin 1975, 63–65; 1993, 43–62). The monolith is intended for Shebnayahu and his concubine (אמה), while in a second chamber there will be room for other family members. With such a monument Shebnayahu's name will live on after his death. He will have a place among Jerusalem's elite even in death.

In life, however, someone in Shebnayahu's position, in the upper echelons of the state apparatus, is likely to have had enemies as well as friends, and there would have been those who depended and lived by Shebnayahu's decisions. When a serious disease finally besieges him, he prays to be saved from death in the form of a lamentation:

> Turn, YHWH, rescue my life (נפש)
> Deliver me for the sake of your steadfast love (חסד)
> For in death there is no remembrance of you,
> In Sheol who can give you praise? (Ps 6:5–6 MT)

Such an urgent plea establishes the trust that YHWH will indeed intervene, and so the song continues:

2. This is a role play, not a historical identification of the royal steward Shebna (Isa 22:15) with [XY]yahu of the funeral inscription known as Jerusalem (7):2 (Renz and Röllig 1995, 264 n. 1). This proposal (Deutsch 2009, 45–49, 67) is based on an unprovenanced bulla, but it is a possibility nonetheless.

> Depart from me, all you workers of evil,
> for YHWH has heard the sound of my weeping,
> YHWH has heard my supplication:
> YHWH accepts my prayer! (Ps 6:9–10 MT)

Despite his displays of trust, Shebnayahu dies. It falls to his eldest son to close his father's eyes (Gen 46:4). Following Shebnayahu's death the (male) family members tear their clothing (2 Sam 1:11), put on sackcloth (שׂק + חגר, 2 Sam 3:31), loosen their turbans and let their hair blow (Ezek 24:17), cover their heads with dust/ashes (1 Sam 4:12) or shave off their hair (Isa 22:12). The shrill song of lamentation (קינה) commences with the jolting rhythm and the "Alas" (הוי + PN, 1 Kgs 13:30, Jer 22:18). Alongside the lamentations on Saul and Jonathan (2 Sam 1:19–27), one can expect that Shebnayahu's important position in life and the significance of his deeds were recorded in song. The lamentation is directed solely towards the dead person. In the texts available to us no religious colouring can be observed. On the very same day as Shebnayahu's death, the women wash and clothe the body, which is carried on a bier (2 Sam 3:31) to the pre-prepared grave. The family clears the burial bench of the remains of the previous occupant, the bones being collected in a repository. Rituals and rites are not known from the texts. In this case, however, a smoothed hollow for receiving liquids is carved in a raised horizontal surface (an offering table?) just in front of the tomb. It might have been be used not only when the tomb was opened for burial, but at any given cultic ceremony.

The grave goods found in the tomb are mostly unpretentious: pottery, some jewellery, stamps and seals, arrowheads, lamps, dishes and juglets for water and food. The quantity of offerings seems to indicate the (great) age of the deceased, while the quality points to the position he held in society (Bloch-Smith 1992, 140–41). In Judah, pillar figurines are found in such large numbers that we must grant them a presence in Shebnayahu's grave. The figurines most probably function as tutelary deities (Dever 2008, 432; Kletter 1996; Schmitt 2001, 161–91; Vriezen 1998, 43).

Resting in peace, however, was not something everyone enjoyed. At the grave of Shebnayahu, an inscription warns:

> [He]re is no silver nor gold. [On]ly [his bones] and the bones of his אמה are with him. Cursed is the man who opens this! (Renz and Röllig 1995, 264–65)

Obviously these words were needed to protect the deceased against grave robbers.

Up to this point death and burial rites have been drawn from Old Testament textual witnesses, without taking into consideration the dissonant voices of material data obtained from archaeology. So how are we to proceed? Indeed, evaluations offered in previous research stopped here. YHWH's world is the land of the living, not of the dead. In Ps 88:11–13 (MT) we read:

> Do you work wonders for the dead?
> Do shades (רפאים) rise up to praise you?
> Is your steadfast love (חסד) declared in the grave?
> Or your faithfulness (אמונה) in Abaddon?
> Are your wonders known in the darkness
> Or your saving help (צדקה) in the land of forgetfulness?

Here, the only appropriate answer to all these rhetorical questions seems to be "no." Comparable texts, such as Pss 6:6 (MT); 115:17, and Isa 38:11, 18, support this view. The concepts related to death and Sheol (dead, shades, grave, Abaddon, darkness, land of forgetfulness) are sharply divided from the concepts that are connected to a life *coram Deo*: wonders, praise, steadfast love, righteousness. The relationship between God and human beings ends with death. This line of reasoning can be accounted for by such texts as Job 17:13–14:

> If I look for Sheol as my house
> If I spread my couch in darkness,
> If I say to the Pit "You are My father"
> And to the worm "my mother" or "My sister"
> Where then is my hope?

When on top of this one considers that in the third century B.C.E. Qoheleth polemically states that there is no post-mortem existence for the רוח, it becomes clear why scholars thought that no such view arose earlier than in Hellenistic times.

This would mean that when Shebnayahu was laid down in his grave, his family would mourn for him, but that ultimately he himself was cut off from both his God and the world of the living.

Following the lead of Schmidt (Schmidt 1994, 132–200), let us take a closer look.

One secondary Isaiah text, 8:19–20, states: "Consult (דרשׁ) the ghosts (אבות) and the familiar spirits (ידענים) that chirp and mutter, should not a people consult their gods, the dead on behalf of the living for teaching (תורה) and for instruction?" Contextually, it is clear that the question "should not a people…" demands to be answered negatively. Nevertheless, necromancy is seen as a possible path through which the living

can receive help in their everyday lives. For, indeed, while to ask for help from the spirits of the dead and to receive counselling is a bad thing in the eyes of the author, it is an available option. This very same idea comes across clearly from another text (Isa 19:3), which deals with the catastrophe that the Egyptians will encounter: "they will consult the underworld gods (אליל), and the spirits of the dead (אטים *hapax*) and the ghosts (אבות) and the familiar spirits (ידענים)." These latter "beings with special knowledge" always go hand in hand with the אבות, who have special knowledge relevant to the living. The condemnation of consulting the dead in these texts may be a reflection of its praxis.

In Deut 18:10–12 the קסם appears alongside all sorts of soothsayers and sorcerers, who are תועבה in YHWH's eyes. Nevertheless, the קסם appears to rank alongside political and religious leaders, reflecting a situation in which he had a respectable position within the Judean/Israelite society (Schmidt 1994, 147–58). Furthermore, in 1 Sam 28, a desperate Saul visits a "woman, who is a medium' (v. 7 NRSV; MT בעלת־אוב), who invokes an אלהים from Sheol who turns out to be Samuel's spirit (1 Sam 28:14). Now, we have a national leader associate with those who communicate with the dead. This story clearly went through Deuteronomistic reworking, and therefore evoking a spirit does not have a good press in the final version. There is no doubt, however, that—forbidden or not—the deceased Samuel *could* indeed be evoked in order to pass judgment on the desperate king's fate. Here the worlds of the dead and the living coincide.

The same is the case with the declaration of innocence at the offering of a tithe (Schmidt 1994, 191–201): "I have not eaten of it while in mourning…and I have not offered any of it to the dead" (Deut 26:14). Although forbidden, the text at least presupposes an offering of food to the dead.

If these texts play a part in our role-play concerning Shebnayahu's death, another scenario might be established. As far as I can see, we do not have enough evidence to presuppose an unambiguous "cult of the dead," while on the other hand the prohibitions of necromancy do reflect a reality in the religious praxis of Ancient Israel. The אבות and the ידענים, hidden by negative associations in the final text of the Hebrew Bible, are the mediums through whom the living keep in contact with the dead, and through whom they receive counsel and support. Within this context Shebnayahu's grave is not merely the place where he is reunited with his ancestors. His family will regularly visit his grave; they will bring offerings beyond the usual funeral gifts. In this special case, the grave in Silwan, cultic establishments for libation offerings are present in

front of the entrance of the grave. Whenever important family matters arise the new head of the family clan will consult the dead *pater familias*. He will also be consulted when important decisions need to be made. In short, the deceased still belongs to the circle of the living.

To summarize, the following might be stated: necromantic practices have certainly played a part in pre-exilic Judah. This may have been expressed through the counselling of the dead concerning important family matters and in taking care of regular (libation) offerings. The deity and the dead spirits may have had many faces and names. They may have acted within and outside Yahwism. Although from the viewpoint of the dead YHWH seemed unreachable and inaccessible for praise and glory of the dead, in reverse this did not necessarily mean that YHWH was unable to reach the deceased. YHWH's pre-exilic entrance into the sphere of Sheol is feasible, as texts from Hosea (Hos 6:1–3; 13:14) and the Psalms (Ps 68:21) seem to indicate (Noort 2001, 7–16; Janowski 2008). This may well have been local and group-restricted, rather than an official doctrine.

If Shebnayahu belonged to a group that held that YHWH's power reached beyond the grave, then his family must have buried him with the hope that YHWH, his protective deity, would grant him protection and blessing even after his death, without having clear images of post-mortem existence in mind. Even though Shebnayahu is not capable of active relations with his deity, YHWH's protection and blessing can nevertheless reach him.[3] Of course, one needs to ask whether these three possibilities we established with regard to Shebnayahu's fate ought to be defined with such sharp distinction.

We noted earlier that in the history of research a combination of later polemics against all forms of death cult and necromancy on the one hand and the theological statement that YHWH is the God of the living on the other caused an overall contrast between YHWH and the world of the dead. And yet, the texts that state YHWH's abstinence in the realm of death mainly give a voice to the powerlessness of humanity, not of God. According to Pss 6:6; 88:11b, 12, 13; 115:17, and Isa 38:11, 18, humans bound by death cannot praise or glorify YHWH. But does this really mean that in reverse YHWH is unable to save from the underworld?

3. For example, the funeral inscription III from Khirbet el Qom reads: "(1) Uriyahu, the rich (עשׁר), has written it (2) Blessed be/was Uriyahu by YHWH (3) From his enemies he has saved him by/because of his Asherah" (Renz and Röllig 1995, 199–210). The text does not prove YHWH's ability to save from death, but merely addresses the expectations of YHWH's blessing beyond the physical limitations of death.

This field is not a place for either-or constructions. Either-or is the strategy of several Deuteronomistic hands, which blacken everything and everyone involved in contact with the dead. They condemn it totally and relate it to Canaanite practices. However, if one looks at textual witnesses as well as archaeological findings, a more complex, more varied picture appears. As such, in the first of our role-plays, a combination of all possibilities is left open. Even if Shebnayahu, as a Jerusalemite and civil servant, believed and acted along the lines laid down by the state's religion, and if in his days YHWH already played a more powerful role in the grave and in Sheol, it is still possible that necromantic rituals were played out by his family. That his eldest son consulted with him after his death, that (libation) offerings were brought, that rituals were performed—all of these are possibilities. In biblical studies we are still too used to monocausal schemes, to religious black-and-white developments. Life, however, was and is different.

Role-Play Two

Our second dead person does not even have a name. Because we need to be able to address him somehow, we shall call him Q20 and date him somewhere in the first century B.C.E. He is an adult male. Unlike Shebnayahu, we at least possess his skull, which after some wanderings can finally be studied in the Kurth collection in Eichstätt (Zangenberg 2000, 51–76). For reasons of suitability, we wish to localize his grave in the main cemetery (Zangenberg 1999, 213–18; Hachlili 2000, 661–72; Schultz 2006, 194–228), some forty metres east of Qumran's main buildings (Humbert and Chambon 1994), on the plateau, just before the hill steps down to the Dead Sea.[4]

His burial place was a north–south oriented shaft tomb with a stone covering. Though it was excavated at the end of the 1950s, serious anthropological and osteological research into Roland de Vaux's excavated materials has been carried only recently (Röhrer-Ertl 1999, 3–46; Röhrer-Ertl and Rohrhirsch 2001, 164–70). Due to the fact that no systematic sampling took place, only a few things can be said about Q20's ecological background. Hydrochemical analysis has demonstrated that in the Hellenistic and Roman periods the underground water level of the region was much higher than it is today. The economic existence of Qumran was based on regulated irrigation and on the cultivation of fields. There was date palm cultivation and daily irrigation. Q20 had

4. Once again, I want to emphasize that this is a role-play, one that makes use of evidence that likely spans several centuries. It is *not* a historical reconstruction.

constitutional typological signs of weak musculature. Accordingly, it is likely that he did not earn his living through hard physical labour, and so he must be considered a member of the upper stratum of the local society (Röhrer-Ertl 2001, 166). As a "date-eater," Q20 had a low degree of tooth abrasion, in contrast to the "bread eaters," who consumed baked flour products and whose teeth showed distinctive signs of wear.

So much for the material facts. Some of Q20's colleagues were buried on a north–south orientation, with their heads to the south side, meaning that their faces were directed northwards. The thesis has been defended that this orientation had the deceased facing towards Jerusalem, expressing a hope for resurrection. This is not impossible, but it is not determinative for the entire group. Graves were found in which people were buried in an east–west orientation. Possibly these burials should be identified as later ones, dating from the final few centuries of Qumran's habitation (Eshel et al. 2002, 140).

Now we turn from fact to fiction. We clothe our dead with flesh, skin and sinews. Let his body be overblown with spirit and we can construct a character! We assume that the caves, the settlements on the plateau and the cemetery on the same plateau are interrelated. The settlement's character seems to refer to a religious community without the need to accept de Vaux's reconstruction of Qumran as a monastery (Popović 2003, 72–76). As a community, Qumran was more involved in regional trade and agriculture than usually assumed. Q20 was an educated man. His reading and knowledge were wider than the strictly "sectarian" texts. The idea of post-mortem existence was not strange to him. The distinctions and contradistinctions with regard to the dwelling of the soul, the fate of the wicked, the relation between an immortal soul and a physical resurrection may have played a minor role in his religious life. With what texts might Q20 have been familiar?[5]

One of the most eye-catching texts is 4Q521, a compilation in which Ps 146, Isa 61 and an allusion to 1 Sam 2:6 are combined with an encouragement concerning God's mighty acts in messianic times. In a mixture of proclamations, fragment 2 col ii 12 of 4Q521 reads: "for he will heal the badly wounded and will make the dead live (ומתים יהיה), he will proclaim good news to the poor." The resurrection from the dead is an expansion of Isa 61:1, which is not directly enclosed in the citation of Luke 4:18, but which underlies its parallels in Matt 11:4–5 and Luke 7:22–23. Further frag. 7 +5 states: מקלל[ים] ולמות יה[יו…]. (col ii Z:5), "the accursed and [they] shall be for death […]." The next line, l. 6 reads

5. In most cases, the readings and translations are taken from Garciá Martínez and Tigchelaar 1997–98.

המחיה את מתי עמו, "He, who gives life to the dead of his people." The contradiction might be understood as follows: the cursed will remain dead, while the blessed will await resurrection. This idea of salvation is probably meant in the expression [... גשר [ומות, "the bridge of the abyss" (García Martínez and Tigchelaar 1998, 1044–47). The text wants to encourage people to live righteously according to the covenant.

A connection between a person's behaviour and post-mortem existence answers the question of Pseudo-Ezekiel. In a modification of Ezek 37, Pseudo-Ezekiel asks (García Martínez and Tigchelaar 1998, 767–79) "[YHWH, I have seen many in Israel who lo]ve (אהב, 4Q385c 2/388 Frag 8, Z:4) your name 2. [and walk on the paths of justice. When will these things happen ? And] how will they be rewarded for their loyalty (חסד)?" Hereafter, the command from Ezek 37:4–9 is used as YHWH's answer: "And again he said: '[Prophesy] over the four winds (9) [of the sky and the winds of the sky will blow upon them and they will live, and] a large [cro]wd of men [will rise] (10) [and bless YHWH Sebaoth who caused them to live" (4Q386 Frag 1, col 1 8b–10).

The reward for being faithful to YHWH is resurrection from the dead. Similar to Ezek 37, resurrection from death is YHWH's decision alone. When asked whether these withered bones will ever again be brought back to life, the prophet Ezekiel answers: "Oh Lord YHWH (only) you know" (37:3). In Pseudo-Ezekiel it is much the same, but here resurrection will be granted as a reward for having lived a righteous life and is no longer connected to the people's return from exile. The metaphor used in Ezekiel, a return from the dead, is now transformed into an actual resurrection from death.

More difficult is the case of the 4QInstruction (4Q418 69 ii + 60, ll. 4–15), a text reworked by E. J. C. Tigchelaar. There are clearly two distinct groups in view here: on the one hand the wicked (of heart), who dwell in the eternal grave (l. 7), and on the other hand those who live forever (ll. 12–14), and who walk in the spirit of truth (Tigchelaar 2001, 210–11). Frequently the text's terminology is vague. Just as in the psalms, where "the enemy" cannot be identified with certainty, these catalogues are similarly indefinable. Nevertheless, the motivation behind these differential distinctions and descriptions of fate is much the same as we saw in both other texts mentioned above. The wicked will be punished, while righteousness, observance of the Torah and faithfulness will be rewarded (Tigchelaar 2001, 213–17).

This text does not address these themes systematically, and we possibly do not have enough proof for a coherent picture. But there is more. *1 Enoch* 22, which is fragmentarily found at Qumran, describes

the fate of the dead in detail, as well as the dwelling in which they reside in anticipation of the great judgment (דינא רבא). Here a prerequisite selection already seems to have taken place. An Angel of the Lord explains to Enoch that the bright place with the water spring belongs to the righteous, while the dark place is appointed to the wicked, who during their lives were already subjected to a judgment, but who now, after death, await their final judgment. An intermediate position is reserved for those who were killed by others. They will not be punished at the last judgment. However, an amelioration of their fate cannot be expected.

In the *Book of Watchers*, the post-mortem is focused on the final judgment. Life after death is presented as the means of correcting of the things that went wrong in life on earth. Here a completely different vision of post-mortem existence from the one we encountered in the case of Shebnayahu appears. It contrasts too with those texts that speak of a beatific afterlife, including the great myths of Gen 3, Gilgamesh and Adapa.

A second issue is even more important. This has to do with the dating of *1 Enoch*, and especially the *Book of Watchers* (chs. 1–36). One manuscript from Qumran is dated at the beginning of the second century B.C.E., and points to the work's origin in the third century B.C.E. This would lead to the conclusion that the popular explanation that otherworldly expectations were the fruits of Hellenization, the consequences of the Maccabean revolt and a theology of martyrdom, only partly reflect the truth. This apocalypse is older and reaches further back into Persian times. The problem of justice is the underlying motivation for the rise of post-mortem fates. Canonical and extra-biblical traditions overlap in this respect, and therefore we need to return to the Hebrew Bible. The best known example is Dan 12:2, a much later text than *1 Enoch*, in which we also encounter an awakening from death and the possibility of a dual result: "many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt." The texts of Enoch and Daniel are supported by a much wider background than can be evoked by the term "apocalyptic." The real background should be found in the "Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang" (the concept of mechanical retribution), not as a stringent order, but as a certain inner dynamic of human conduct. I mention only three Psalms as examples here. Psalm 37 ceaselessly asks why the righteous suffer and the wicked seem to have a good life. However, the Psalm also states that YHWH will see to it that the wicked will receive their punishment, even within their earthly lives: "Transgressors shall be altogether destroyed;

the posterity of the wicked shall be cut off" (Ps 37:38). The same issue also governs Ps 73, which transfers true communion with God until after death: "Afterwards (ואחר) you will take me (לקח) in glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire other than you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the rock of my heart and my portion (חלק) forever" (Ps 73:24b–26). Final justice will be post-mortem. Psalm 49 takes it a step even further. Here the contradiction between the righteous and the wicked is not central; instead, the focus is on the question whether riches can contribute to or even influence post-mortem fate. The answer equals that offered by Qoheleth (Delkurt 2005, 102): death equalizes everything and everyone, wealth provides no protection. According to Ps 49:21 (MT), "Mortals cannot abide in their pomp; they are like the animals that perish." And yet, distinctly different from Qoheleth, the intercessor is convinced that God will save him from the powers of Sheol: "But God will ransom (פדה) my soul from the power of Sheol. For he will take (לקח) me!" (v. 15). In these psalms a shift is visible—from an inner worldly justice and the question of righteousness, to a post-mortem solution, and back again to the practical and social questions connected to it.

After death Shebnayahu was to be found in a wealthy rock-cut tomb in the hills of Jerusalem. Perhaps he had been educated in the belief that YHWH was a god of the living, not of the dead. This might well have been the reason for his huge monument—to secure his name in the generations to come. By his day, however, theological insights had changed. YHWH was more and more portrayed as a solar deity. His function as a judge brought Sheol into the realm of YHWH, and trust in YHWH's power to extend his blessing into the grave grew. This does not mean that a blissful existence awaited the deceased. As far as we know now, blessing and protection were his only until the body had disintegrated. At the same time, his family kept in contact with the deceased. Offerings were brought. Consultations were held. He still had his place in the *bet-ab*.

Our second dead man, Q20, lived in other surroundings and in another context. If the texts found at Qumran represented his own belief in eternal life, he may have expected that, after his death, he would enter a place where the righteous are held until the final judgment. He may have expected the righteous to be rewarded and the wicked to be punished. Furthermore he may possibly have perceived God as the final judge of this world and the living. A post-mortem existence probably belonged to his belief. The shift towards a post-mortem fate is on the one hand made possible because of the increasing power of YHWH that already started in pre-exilic Judah. On the other hand, since monolatrism changed to

monotheism and an expansion of YHWH's power over death took place, the problem of YHWH's righteousness grew. Therefore the imbalance in the fate of the wicked and the fate of the righteous was more than a theoretical problem of wisdom literature. The solution that final justice will occur post-mortem realizes a real *Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang*. The post-mortem existence solved the problem of divine justice.

A final remark on our two dead characters, Shebnayahu and Q20. Why is it necessary to play such games? I have created a mixture of facts and fiction. The fiction is text- or material-based, but their combination is and must be fiction. In the field of the archaeology of death we have good (and bad) data collections, but the translation to historical, sociological and cultural backgrounds is much more difficult and the results are often uncertain. The next step of connecting the material sources with literary ones is still a shibboleth. In such cases a role-play can help. If we want to know how daily life and belief systems intertwined, we have to imagine figures such as Shebnayahu and Q20. They teach us all the things we still do not know, and encourage us to say "maybe," or "it just might be." May they rest in peace.

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