UNTTO THY CHILDREN’S CHILDREN:
LOCKEAN FREEDOM AND THE HEBRAIC HORIZONS OF SOCIETY AND SELF

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The signature forms of modern constitutional politics include such features as egalitarianism and equality before the law; the separation of constitutionally limited powers; the ability for each citizen, regardless of social standing, to appeal to impartial arbiters who will judge each case on the basis of publicly known and clearly documented laws; a diffusion of power amongst multiple aggregated nodes of power within the greater community, each tasked with some degree of local government while maintaining final allegiance to the state, or federalism; and all this sanctioned as legitimate on the basis of an open and public statement of the basic laws to which each individual must freely consent. The fact that each of these features is systematically developed in the ancient Israelite regime of the Hebrew Bible, and the fact that early modern constitutional thinkers frequently quoted the Hebrew Bible in their political writing, has led a burgeoning subfield in the history of political thought to conclude that the Hebrew Bible has served an underappreciated causal role in the intellectual development of modern constitutionalism.

This dissertation endorses the integration of the Hebrew Bible into the canonical study of the history of political thought. But by analyzing the deeper foundations of
Lockean and Hebraic thought, this dissertation concludes that, whatever their institutional similarities, the Lockean doctrine opposes the Hebraic worldview on matters such as human nature and human excellence, freedom and tradition, reason and memory, and consent and inheritance. Locke’s normative political vision is designed for individuals who bear no inherent obligations to the past, have little responsibility for the future, and relate to society only so long as it serves their interest. Locke’s political doctrine is brought into comparison with the Hebraic anthropology of heart and soul, and a Hebraic social teaching whose fundamental axes, husband/wife and parent/child, acknowledge the inescapably social character of creation, celebrate the cultivation of national memory from generation to generation, and propose the presence of an intergenerational morality in which the deeds of the parents redound unto their children’s children.
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1. Introduction

Let me begin with a metaphor about Thucydides. During the Cold War, Western readers of Thucydides looked to the historian to ground their political realism in an ancient intellectual figure. They found it, and Thucydides was dubbed, in Introduction to International Relations courses ever since, “the father of realism.” In the aftermath of the Cold War, scholars returned to the text and discovered that Thucydides is a tremendous educator in strategy because he is capacious – he acknowledges and explores the realist paradigm, yes, but as one paradigm among several. The realism is there. But so are very different ways of understanding statecraft and foreign policy. Foreign policy realists claimed Thucydides as their patron saint by reading accurately but selectively out of him.¹

Now, I’ll get back to Thucydides in a moment. In the last five years, Oxford, Harvard, Yale, and Cambridge university presses have all published monographs on a topic of renewed energy in political science – the social and political thought of the Hebrew Bible.² In addition to the books, there are conferences, articles, research agendas

¹ “Thucydides really came to [Washington, D.C.] when Henry Kissinger joined President Nixon in the White House. Kissinger had taught Thucydides in GOV 800 at Harvard, and soon National Security Council staffers and Foreign Service officers who never had read the work were quoting the Athenians in ‘The Melian Dialogue’: ‘The strong exact what they can; the weak concede what they must,’ the motto of Cold War realists… [But] there was more to Thucydides than the crude doctrine of realism and Kissinger knew this perfectly well. Thucydides is more astutely read as a critique of Realpolitik. As a manual of statecraft, the work takes the reader across the entire range of factors, none of which the statesman can risk neglecting: the economic base of the state, the legal framework, diplomacy, national character, leadership and its flaws, rhetoric and language, the public and private tension, the certainty of the unexpected blow. All these are treated in Athens’s rise and reprised in Athens’s momentous fall.” Charles Hill, Grand Strategies: Literature, Statecraft, and World Order, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 21.

and post-docs. Political scientists are reading the Bible again.

These treatments tend to emphasize specific political characteristics: equality, rule of law and republicanism, constitutional pluralism, and personal freedom. Studying them carefully has opened up a whole world of the Hebrew Bible and it has had a profound effect on my understanding of politics and society. But as I read them, I took note of how modern the Bible seemed in their hands. I remembered Thucydides. Just as Cold War strategists once remade Thucydides in their image, I wondered if these exciting new studies of biblical political thought did something similar.

And, just as Thucydides is larger, deeper, bigger than any realist/non-realist debate, I wondered how much bigger Hebrew Scripture is.

This dissertation is the result of that wonder. I found that there is good textual evidence of a highly individualist mindset in the Bible, the kind of worldview that is highly compatible with Lockean modernity.

Genesis, for instance, lays out man’s reformed relationship to nature after exile from Eden. It is an agricultural vision.

“Cursed be the soil for your sake, with pangs shall you eat from it all the days of your life. Thorn and thistle shall it sprout for you and you shall eat the plans of the field. By the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread till you return to the soil, for from there were you taken, for dust you are and to dust shall you return” (Gen. 3:17-19). “And the Lord God sent [Adam] from the garden of Eden to till the soil from which he had been taken” (Gen. 3:23).

The earth has become man’s master, “dictat[ing] to him the course of his life every day from morning until night, always in the shadow of the fact that it will eventually reclaim

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him for itself.”

When Cain and Abel offer their sacrifices to God – sacrifices unbidden and instinctively offered – God rejects Cain’s agricultural offering, the product of precisely the sorrow, sweat, frustration and constraint through which Cain nobly accommodated himself in obedience to God’s curse of his father. Cain submitted to the law of nature, described by God, and his submission was not respected. Meanwhile, Abel, who rejected the way of his father, who made the Bible’s first “lifestyle choice,” who took to the shepherding of livestock rather than the tilling of soil, the offering of this radical upstart is accepted.

And that is why this story is strange. Cain is pious and lives in accord with God’s prescription for how man is to live – a prescription, moreover, he cannot have heard from God but which he by necessity must have heard from his father. The crude agricultural methods and tools, too, must be the result of cumulative, paternal wisdom and invention. Cain, the first to voluntarily offer divine sacrifice, would seem to embody tradition. Abel, who only thinks to offer his sacrifice after his brother, who circumvents the accursed ground, and who has the strange idea of profiting from the death of another animal that he has raised, violates nature and rejects tradition. For Abel, the fact that God decreed the life of agriculture, and the fact that his father and older brother had submitted

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3 Yoram Hazony, The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 107. Hazony’s rich interpretation, pp. 103-139, is the background of my own. His interpretation, in turn, is really a commentary on and debate with that of the medieval exegete, Don Isaac Abravanel, found in translation in Ralph Lerner and Mushin Mahdi, ed., Medieval Political Philosophy: A Sourcebook, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1972), pp. 254-270. For Abravanel, the problem with farming is not its conventionalism and passive acceptance of nature’s tyranny, but instead the introduction of techne into the natural order. The virtue of shepherds, for Abravanel, is not their self-affirming individuality. Rather, it lies in their “governing [the flock] according to the way of nature” (p. 256). Hazony’s axis is liberal: tyranny of the past and constraints of nature vs. freedom and self-command. Abravanel’s axis is ancient: the integrity of nature vs. the hubris of reforming nature in man’s image. That is why Abravanel’s agriculture reaches its height in Babel, and its great sin, hubris, whereas Hazony’s agriculture reaches its height in Egypt, and its great sin, slavery. To be fair, Hazony, too, sees the crimes of Babel (see p. 110).
to that decree, do not affirm that life as good. The fact that here Abel shows himself to be capable of such dissent means he is capable of ingenuity, of progress, of seeing over the hill, raising his sight beyond the horizons of the past and achieving something new.

“Here, as elsewhere in Scripture,” Yoram Hazony observes, “it transpires that God is not particularly impressed with piety, with sacrifices, with doing what you are told to do and what your fathers did before you.”

Only one thing is known about Abel, the shepherd radical who offered the favored sacrifice: his rejection of his father’s way of life. Abel sets the pattern for a biblical tradition of individualist shepherding, of being a wandering nomad, of civil disobedience; these are all biblical markers of frustration with organized human authority, and conventional dogma. Like the realist reader of Thucydides, those who look in Scripture for individualist modernity will find a warrant and an example.

But that is not what I found. The Hebrew Bible is a chorus of many voices, and the Abel’s break from inheritance establishes one of them. But it is the contrapuntal voice. The main melody sings of relationship, of membership and belonging, of collective memory. Freedom and tradition, reason and memory, consent and inheritance, these are the notes that chime in Hebraic harmony.

Chapter Two, “The Doctrine of John Locke and Political Hebraism” surveys and evaluates the literature on John Locke’s political Hebraism. I conclude that, although there are some conceptual affinities, the purpose and principles of Lockean thought – freedom – stand in opposition to the social teaching of the Hebrew Bible. But what is the social teaching of the Hebrew Bible, and how does it stand in opposition to Lockean doctrine?

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Chapter Three, “Anthropology of the Hebrew Bible,” offers an original thesis concerning Hebraic anthropology. For, without an understanding of who man is, how can you understand how men relate? The method is philological. I isolate words pertaining to the biblical portrait of the human soul and elaborate meaning from context. In so doing, I uncover the human essence. According to the biblical view, man, like other animals, is composed of the fundamental elements of creation, is made to live in and thrive as a part of nature. However, compared to each the soul-word employed in the biblical text, the Hebrew word lev refers to man more than any other anthropological term. What is the lev? The lev reveals something unique about man that is not shared by the other animals: memory and the historical capacity. Anthropology is not quite enough for self-understanding; for the historical consciousness that the lev allows also gives man access to the divine disclosure in time. Man’s historical consciousness meets God’s revelation in history. Only men say, with Abraham, hineni.

Chapter Four, “Social Teaching of the Hebrew Bible,” takes up the social thought that is suggested by the anthropology of Chapter Three. The creation of man suggests two axes of social relationship: husband-wife and parent-child. These two sets of relationships are explored, no longer philologically but as they emerge in the textual narrative.

In the Conclusion, I offer speculation about the political consequences of reading the ancient Hebrew Bible as either a predecessor for Lockean modernity, or as a challenge to Lockean modernity.
2. The Doctrine of John Locke and Political Hebraism

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a study of the political thought of John Locke. Locke is indicative of modern political thinking at its most systematic, most comprehensive, and in the case of the United States, most influential.

In studies of the history of political thought, Locke is a disputed figure. He is, at once, an apologist for capitalism, an apprentice and apologist for Hobbes, a libertarian founder of the doctrine of property rights, an architect of liberal constitutionalism. Locke is the founder of liberalism, the standard bearer of the high republicans, a Whig, a Socinian.

The extent of Locke’s political Hebraism is again in question. I summarize the best arguments for the view that Locke’s political doctrine is essentially inspired by, if not demonstrably an adaption of, the political teaching of the Hebrew Bible. After

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presenting the case for Locke’s political Hebraism, I make the case against Locke’s political Hebraism through a larger survey of Locke’s political theory. Following from this larger survey, I highlight three related points that are central pillars of Lockean political thought that oppose the Hebrew Bible, leading me to conclude that the arguments marshaled to advance John Locke as a political Hebraist do not bear the weight of evidence.

This chapter does not praise Locke, criticize Locke, or evaluate his thought. Neither is this chapter interested in Locke’s treatment of Christianity, or the extent to which he personally is a believing Christian. My purpose is to lay out the arguments surrounding the use of the Hebrew Bible in his writing, and to demonstrate that Locke’s political doctrine and the political teaching of the Hebrew Bible have different premises and goals.

2.2. John Locke’s Political Hebraism

2.2.1. Intellectual Background

In the summer of 2002, in the pages of Azure, Professor Fania Oz-Salzberger wrote what would become a landmark statement in the attempt to revisit and revise the political and intellectual history of early modernity. “The Jewish Roots of Western Freedom” revitalized the question over religion and politics in early modern political thought, implying that intellectual history over the last generation had been distilled into a more secular and secularizing narrative than the evidence supports. In conceiving a modern constitutional tradition infused with reference to scripture and religious ideas, Professor Oz-Salzberger’s proposal broke with the two dominant approaches to the
history of political thought, both the more philosophical and theoretical approach of Leo Strauss, and the more historically grounded, contextually rich approach of the Cambridge school. Her proposal recalled a previous generation of scholars, men such as Russell Kirk and Eric Voegelin, but she offered a provocative new angle on the political thought of, among others, John Selden, Thomas Hobbes, Hugo Grotius, and John Locke. Whereas Kirk and Voegelin had previously elaborated an intellectual history in which the religious and political ideas of the Bible stood as the immediate source of the Western political imagination, and whereas Sheldon Wolin’s *Politics and Vision* had included long descriptive analyses of the role of Reformation thinkers in European political history, Oz-Salzberger put forward an historical reading that put specifically Jewish texts – both biblical and rabbinic – at the very root and core of western notions of political freedom.

In doing so, she parted company with her predecessors. For Kirk and Voegelin, the political wisdom and inspiration of Old Testament models was part and parcel of the spiritual and theological world of Christianity. Wolin emphasized the political theology of Christian theologians such as Luther and Calvin. Oz-Salzberger parted ways, too, with Jewish political theorists in the United States. Michael Walzer had creatively studied the

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Exodus narrative and demonstrated its imaginative influence over subsequent revolutionary movements. Aaron Wildavsky, the brilliant scholar of American government and public policy, laid aside his penetrating studies of budgeting and the presidency in order to tease out the political theories of Moses and Joseph. She parted ways too with Israeli political theorists of the so-called Bar-Ilan School, of whom Daniel Elazar was the most distinguished. Walzer, Wildavsky, and Elazar all turned to the Hebrew Bible as a text of political theory, seeking to draw out its own understanding of politics rather than contextualizing it as a source of later western intellectual history.

In parting company not only with the dominant Straussian and neo-republican narratives, but also with those who appreciated the religious sensibility and root of modernity, Professor Oz-Salzberger invited a great debate. For, she proposed the specifically legal and institutional character of the Hebrew Bible and rabbinic writings as a substantial and dominant influence in the history of modern politics. Like Kirk and Voegelin, and unlike Walzer and Wildavsky, hers was a case of historical causation, not conceptual affinity. Like Walzer and Wildavsky, and unlike Kirk and Voegelin, the object of her study was the Hebrew Bible and the tradition of scriptural commentary and jurisprudence that flows from it.

For Leo Strauss and his students, this was the period of proto-liberalism. Thomas Hobbes and John Locke were carrying forward a mission founded in the political sphere by Machiavelli to wrest influence from ancient authorities, classical political rationalism, and traditional, revealed religion, and to remove from politics the idealistic, unreachable, and dangerous dreams of pure justice and virtue. New modes and orders were needed to address new discoveries in human nature and a more realistic estimation of the human
promise. This was an age in which Aristotelian science and biblical morality were replaced by newer, secular authorities. The Straussian understanding is the Nietzschean understanding: modern and enlightenment thinkers planned to ever more completely liberate man from past tyrannies, to liberate man from the authorities to which they did not and could not consent, to liberate man from the old moral repressions; this is the age that saw the death of God. Meanwhile, for the Cambridge School of political theory, this was an age of neo-republican fervor. Rather than tiptoeing on the intellectual peaks, J.G.A. Pocock and Quentin Skinner led the Cambridge School as its scholars trudged through the valleys and low places of historical context. They were historians, not philosophers, and they say that instead of jettisoning antiquity, this was an age of recovery and renaissance, breathing new life into the political models and political wisdom of Aristotelian and Roman republicanism.

Both paths lead back to Machiavelli, and either a rejection or embrace of classical politics and philosophy. Neither of these dominant schools preoccupied themselves with or attended with care to the religious dimensions of the age. Both schools contented themselves with attributing the abundance of scriptural references in the political theory of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to the conventions of the age; indeed, the biblical imagery and vocabularies of the age would become evidence for the Straussian school of the abiding need for esoteric writing. In any event, Oz-Salzberger rejected the secularizing narrative of Strauss, and the neo-republican narrative of the very Cambridge school in which she was educated. ¹⁷ For her, the biblical themes that permeated and even saturated the political theory in early modernity were not epiphenomenal, but indeed,

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¹⁷ For her evaluation of the Cambridge school as it relates to the study of political Hebraism, see Fania Oz-Salzberger, “The Political Thought of John Locke and the Significance of Political Hebraism” in Hebraic Political Studies, Fall 2006, vol. 1, no. 5, p. 570.
supplied the core moral and political teaching through which early modernity discovered its true self. Modern political thought is born of the Bible, specifically the politics of the Hebrew Bible, and more, its traditional Jewish exegesis, philosophy, and jurisprudential framework.

2.2.2. The Case for John Locke’s Political Hebraism

What is the argument to which Professor Oz-Salzberger invites us? In her telling, and hers is the best and most refined example of the Hebraist approach, influential writers and intellectuals learned Hebrew, studied the Talmud, and gave birth to an inspired political ideal, the resurrected Hebrew Republic as the model regime. They were inspired by Jewish sources – but most of all, by the political wisdom of the Hebrew Bible. “For three hundred years, political thinkers mined the Hebrew Bible, the Talmud, and rabbinic literature for ideas, examples, and full-fledged political systems, with the aim of applying them to contemporary Europe.”

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20 Fania Oz-Salzberger, “The Jewish Roots of Western Freedom” in Azure, Summer 2002, vol. 13, p. 88. She later cuts this period of time in half, writing that “political Hebraism flourished in European thought for about a century and a half, roughly between Bodin and Locke, with Machiavelli as a significant predecessor.” Fania Oz-Salzberger, “The Political Thought of John Locke and the Significance of Political Hebraism,” p. 569. It is reported that John Locke, the focus of this section, had scholarly Jewish books, including texts in Hebrew, in his personal library. See John Harrison and Peter Laslett, ed., The Library of John Locke, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), pp. 293, 298, 300. Later readers, both religious and secular, had developed an interpretation of the Bible that is compatible with Locke. For context and details, see
The fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries were not, to say the least, a period of religious and political calm on the European continent or in Britain. Political thought during that time was not an expression of intellectual agreement but was instead the very site of pressing, sometimes fierce, debates and argument. Hebraism, in Oz-Salzberger’s view, pervaded each of the contending sides. Her claim is not that political Hebraism belonged exclusively to any of the rival positions. “There were biblical royalists, biblical republicans, biblical regicides, biblical patriarchalists and defenders of the old order, biblical economic revolutionaries and deniers of private property, biblical French imperialists, biblical English patriots, and their biblical Scottish counterparts.”

Eric Nelson, too, notes that Hebraist sources were employed for different purposes in early modern political thought. For, “the vast majority of Hebraists who deployed the Israelite example […] regarded the Hebrew republic as an authoritative expression of God’s constitutional preferences and fervently believed that, in asserting the religious supremacy of the civil magistrate and in arguing for the limits on the scope of religious legislation, they were doing His will. Machiavelli’s Israel may have inspired Spinoza, but it was the Israel of Grotius, Cunaeus, Selden, and Harrington that more profoundly shaped the development of what would emerge as liberal political thought in the modern West.”

Hermeneutic diversity produced arguments in which the very same biblical imagery was employed by different advocates for opposing purposes. The case of Robert

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Frank E. Manuel, *The Broken Staff: Judaism Through Christian Eyes*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 124. This is different than Oz-Salzberger’s claim, which is not that they are conceivably compatible, but that biblical texts influenced and to some extent were responsible for shaping Locke’s thought.

21 Fania Oz-Salzberger, “The Jewish Roots of Western Freedom,” p. 93.

Filmer’s *Patriarcha* and John Locke’s *First Treatise* is among the most prominent examples of this. Nevertheless, despite the wide range of uses to which the biblical sources were put, Oz-Salzberger’s focus is on the republican tradition of modern constitutionalism, “the interrelations among active bearers of civic virtue, their dealings with their government and laws, and their commitment to what seventeenth century thinkers still recognized – up to and including Locke – as the image of God within them.”

To demonstrate Hebraism’s influence over modern constitutionalism, Oz-Salzberger specifies three core contributions. The first was a “concept of international borders, non-feudal demarcations of sovereign states, which underpinned a novel, natural-law based theory of the state, law, and rights.” The second was what she calls a “moral economy,” which entails “mutual social responsibility” and imposes “limits on property rights.” And, the third idea is that of a “federal republic as modeled on the twelve tribes of Israel: An ancient decentralized government and a multi-centered society that allowed the Israelites to maintain, for a significant period of time, an extraordinary political system that combined a seemingly deterministic divine plan with an abundance of very human personalities and desires.” Borders, a moral economy, and the idea of a

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23 Fania Oz-Salzberger, “The Jewish Roots of Western Freedom”, p. 94. In focusing on the republican, rather than revolutionary or monarchic aspects of biblical political thought, she points to James Harrington, John Milton, Algernon Sidney and Marchamont Nedham, and remarks that “these thinkers all repeat, with individual variations, the same basic theme: The people of Israel had a republic, a nearly perfect republic, form the time of the Exodus until at least the coronation of Saul.” p. 103. Professor Oz-Salzberger’s colleague, Yoram Hazony, points out in *The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture*, pp. 140-160, that this period includes anarchy, instability, and is among the worst political periods for the Israelites.

federal republic, collectively comprise the Hebraic seed from which modern Europe grew.\textsuperscript{25}

In a passage quoted just above, Oz-Salzberger names John Locke as one of the seventeenth century representatives, indeed, as the consummate representative of the Hebraist school.\textsuperscript{26} She dedicates a section of this article to his political thought, and some years later expanded her thoughts on Locke’s political Hebraism into a freestanding article that develops themes already stirring here.

In that later article, she acknowledges uncertainties in disclosing a causal relationship between political Hebraism and Locke’s ideas.

Whether Locke’s copious biblical references testify to a deeper dimension in his political theory, especially in the \textit{Second Treatise}, is debatable. Whether Locke’s Biblicism is essential rather than ornamental is an open question in current Locke scholarship. Was Locke a political Hebraist, in the sense that reading and using the Hebrew Bible were conceptually germane to his (distinctly modern) political thought? This essay will assess the evidence for responding in the affirmative. I will suggest that Locke’s engagement with the Hebrew Bible was more than rhetorical, more than decorative, and extended beyond contemporary Protestant \textit{bon ton}.\textsuperscript{27}

Oz-Salzberger defends the claim that biblical ideas about politics and persons are “conceptually germane” to the political doctrine of John Locke, meaning that Locke’s doctrine is inspired by his exposure to Hebraic ideas.\textsuperscript{28} Oz-Salzberger’s provocative

\begin{footnotesize}
26 See also George M. Gross, “Notes for Reading the Bible with John Locke,” in \textit{Jewish Political Studies Review}, Fall 1997, vol. 9, no. 3-4, pp. 5-18.
27 Fania Oz-Salzberger, “The Political Thought of John Locke and the Significance of Political Hebraism”, p. 572.
\end{footnotesize}
suggestion stands or falls, according to her own criteria, with her ability to demonstrate that Lockean thought is in some significant sense caused by Hebraic and biblical ideas, proving that the citations from scripture are more than rhetorical decoration.

She argues that “the key to the link between Locke’s theory of political obligation and his idea of social obligation lay in the Hebrew Bible.” From Hebrew sources, and in particular from the biblical period of the Judges, Locke learns that necessity forces man out of the state of nature and into civil society, and ultimately, into political state empowered to adjudicate disputes.29 Locke is taught, contra Filmer, that legitimate politics is not identical with paternal domination. And, because “no ruler can arrogantly assume absolute dominion while at the same time relying on God’s grace,” citizens maintain a right to rebellion against tyranny.30

Moreover, Locke learns from the Bible that the world is originally given to all equally, and this insight from Genesis 2-3, sets the stage for the original condition of common ownership of nature, and hence for Locke’s doctrine of property, “a cornerstone of Locke’s political philosophy.”31 Locke learns from Hebrew sources not only of the possibility for man to remove property from the commons and make it his own, but Locke also learns of a moral limitation on the right to acquisition. For this, Oz-Salzberger retroactively reads § 42 of the First Treatise as a limit on the accumulation of


29 Fania Oz-Salzberger, “The Political Thought of John Locke and the Significance of Political Hebraism”, pp. 572-573 and Fania Oz-Salzberger, “The Jewish Roots of Western Freedom”, p. 106. To support this claim, she cites Second Treatise, § 89, p. 325, which does not refer to the Bible, Israel, or God.
property described in the Second Treatise. “God the Lord and Father of all, has given no
one of his children such a property, in his peculiar portion of the things of this world, but
that he has given his needy brother a right to the surplusage of his goods, so that it cannot
justly be denied him, when his pressing wants call for it.”\(^{32}\)

The main evidence that Oz-Salzberger brings to demonstrate that Locke is
grounded in the Hebrew Bible is, first, that the “God of the Two Treatises is God the
Lawmaker, and as such he is theologically grounded in the Old Testament, and almost
solely there,” and second, for Locke “the Hebrew Bible was a freestanding history book,
enriched by deeply inspiring political materials.”\(^{33}\) In Oz-Salzberger’s view, Locke’s
theology is a theology of legislation, and the history of that legislation contains a reliable
record the human past.

Oz-Salzberger’s first claim is that Locke’s God is a lawgiving God. Although she
does not cite specific evidence for this claim, she does refer the reader to Knud
Haakonsen’s interpretation of Locke’s Essay Concerning Human Understanding, and
concludes that the Hebrew Bible occupies an “irreplaceable role” in Locke’s mature
political philosophy because “it provided the prototype for a law-based culture, rather
than for a legal corpus in the abstract.”\(^{34}\) Because Christian liberty, for Locke, is “not to
submit to legal injunctions,”\(^{35}\) it is natural that the Second Treatise, which makes the case
for legitimate obedience to laws on the basis of consent, could not ground itself in the

\(^{32}\) Locke, First Treatise, § 42, p. 170. Locke does not provide a scriptural reference in this section. See
Fania Oz-Salzberger, “The Political Thought of John Locke and the Significance of Political Hebraism”,
pp. 588-589.

\(^{33}\) Fania Oz-Salzberger, “The Political Thought of John Locke and the Significance of Political Hebraism”,
p. 580.

\(^{34}\) Fania Oz-Salzberger, “The Political Thought of John Locke and the Significance of Political Hebraism”,
p. 590.

\(^{35}\) Locke, “First Tract on Government,” in John Locke, Political Essays, ed. Mark Goldie, (New York:
Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 27; see too, in the same volume, “Second Tract on Government,”
p. 72.
scripture of the New Testament. Although she does not offer specific citations, her claim is supported by Locke’s precept that “where there is no Law, there is no freedom,” and the state of nature is “a state of perfect freedom.” So, it must be governed by law.

What law? The state of nature is governed by the law of nature. The law of nature, in turn, is an expression of God’s will, or the voice of God in man. God’s will and God’s voice are reason. Reason is the natural law, and it has a divine origin. God is a lawgiver in this deep sense.

Oz-Salzberger’s second claim is that, for Locke, the Bible presents a reliable and useful account of political history. Oz-Salzberger notes Locke’s tendency to identify the natural world, that is, the world before social contract and civil society, with the early chapters of Genesis. Thus, Locke’s statement that “in the beginning all the World was America” recalls the first line of Genesis. “[A]lmost every appearance of America in the Two Treatises dovetails with a similar, often more detailed account from the early chapters of the Hebrew Bible.” And indeed, Oz-Salzberger is able to conclude that for Locke, the story of mankind as depicted in Genesis before the tower of Babel “provides a universal concept of primeval human society.” As such, Genesis in particular remains

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36 Locke, Second Treatise, § 57, p. 306.
37 Locke, Second Treatise, § 4, p. 269.
38 Locke, Second Treatise, § 6, p. 271.
39 Locke, First Treatise, § 86, p. 205, and § 101, p. 215; but cf. Second Treatise, § 56, p. 305, where “the world is peopled with [Adam’s] descendants, who are all born infants, weak and helpless, without knowledge or understanding.” Thus follows the limited obligation for parents to educate their children into reason and sound judgment.
42 Fania Oz-Salzberger, “The Political Thought of John Locke and the Significance of Political Hebraism”, p. 581; cf. Ibid., pp. 582-583.
“a viable account of the first phase of political history,”[44] but even beyond Genesis,
“anyone looking for a theory of government rooted in a historical conception of early polities need look no further than the historical books of the Hebrew Bible up until I Samuel 8 and the establishment of the Israelite monarchy.”[45] In his *First Tract on Government*, Locke writes that

the Scripture speaks very little of polities anywhere (except only the government of the Jews constituted by God himself over which he had a particular care) and God doth nowhere by distinct and particular prescriptions set down rules of governments and bounds to the magistrate’s authority […][46]

Scripture is largely silent about political affairs, and many have understood the New Testament and Christian teaching on politics according to Jesus’s remark to “render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:21). So, according to this interpretation, when the Bible does see fit to describe a constitution and the affairs of state, then this special case of the Mosaic constitution deserves special attention as an abiding model. The attention it was given by Locke and the tradition that precedes him, at any rate, gave to Western politics its most distinctive modern characteristics.

2.3. **Freedom and The Case Against John Locke’s Political Hebraism**

Three pieces of evidence Oz-Salzberger uses to support the case for Locke’s political Hebraism do not stand under fuller scrutiny. The three specific cases that invite further thinking, are, first, Locke’s association of the wilds of America with the state of

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nature and Genesis; second, the biblical inspiration for Locke’s limits on the accumulation of property; and third, Locke’s general understanding that the biblical polity is an exemplary model. Each moment of the Lockean narrative is purportedly inspired by the Hebrew Bible: the state of nature in America and Genesis, perhaps most significant natural right, and the architecture of the state. But the link between Locke and the biblical text is not entirely sound.

First, take the example of Locke’s association of America, his portrait of the state of nature, with Genesis. Granting that Locke consistently associates the state of nature with the Bible would not make Locke a political Hebraist. For, inasmuch as Locke’s theory is designed to take men away from the dangers and privations of nature, Locke’s theory by extension would be designed to take men away from the dangers and privations of the biblical world that describes the state of nature. Uncivilized America, the land of Genesis, is rejected as civil society and the constitutional state are formed. If “Genesis lays down the principles of every primitive polity,”47 then Lockean politics, opposed to the morality and culture of primitivism, would stand in opposition to rather than receive sanction from Genesis.

Second is the claim that Locke limits the property that an individual can justly accumulate, and that this limit is drawn from the Bible. This is, for Oz-Salzberger, one of Hebraism’s most important contributions to modern political theory. Here, the problem is not so much with Oz-Salzberger’s recalling of the biblical sources as it is with her reading of Locke. Her interpretation of Locke’s doctrine of property goes against the grain of most readers’, who see in the introduction of nonperishable coins in § 37 of the

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Second Treatise a limitless warrant for the “industrious and rational” to acquire as they see fit. She provocatively suggests a link between the federalist character of the Israelite regime and the federal republic modeled on Israel’s twelve tribes. But the twelve tribes of Israel – their very names – are bound up with and recall the family relations that in the Bible’s view are inescapable, whereas, as I will demonstrate below, the Lockean family is authorized by consent for free entry and exit.

Finally, inseparable from the case for Locke’s political Hebraism is his reliance on the Bible as a historical record. Recall Oz-Salzberger’s quote from the First Tract, where Locke writes that “the Scripture speaks very little of polities anywhere (except only the government of the Jews constituted by God himself over which he had a particular care) and God doth nowhere by distinct and particular prescriptions set down rules of governments and bounds to the magistrate’s authority […].” Now, let us continue the passage:

[…] since one form of government was not like to fit all people, and mankind was by the light of nature and their own conveniences sufficiently instructed in the necessity of laws and government and magistrate with power over them, who is no more to expect a commission from Scripture which shall be the foundation and bounds of his authority in every particular and beyond which he shall have none at all, than a master is to examine by Scripture what power he hath over a servant, the light of reason and nature of government itself making evident that in all societies it is unavoidably necessary that the supreme power (wherever seated in one or more) must be still supreme, i.e. have a full and unlimited power over all indifferent things and actions within the bounds of that society. Whatever our author saith there ‘tis certain there be many particular things necessary and fit now, that are yet omitted in Scripture and are left to be determined by more general rules.  

The fuller quote illustrates something different altogether. The passage does not mean that Scripture is a model that can profitably be replicated. Instead, it says that the ancient

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48 John Locke, First Tract on Government, p. 51.
polity is unique to the Israelites in God’s own care, and that it would be as absurd to take political advice or accept political precedent from Scripture as it would for a slave owner to consult Leviticus regarding the treatment of his slaves. Even if natural law is God’s revelation, which is reason, reason now teaches that “there be many particular things necessary and fit now, that are yet omitted in Scripture and are left to be determined by more general rules.”

These are serious challenges to the argument for Locke’s political Hebraism. But they emerge out of a deeper and more thoroughgoing set of objections. After a remark about methodology, a larger discussion of Locke’s political thought follows, highlighting fundamental precepts of Locke’s doctrine that, together, comprise the case against Locke’s political Hebraism.

2.3.1. A Question of Methodology

The case for Locke’s political Hebraism rests on methodology that equates citation with influence: “Locke’s greatest contribution to political philosophy, Two Treatises of Government (1690) is saturated with biblical references.”49 That Locke cites scripture often is undoubtedly true. Moreover, of Locke’s many scriptural references, the majority of them indeed do cite the Hebrew Bible rather than the Gospels or Paul’s Letters.50


50 On this latter point which is central to the Hebraist interpretation of Locke, there is no evidence to suggest that Locke would have seen the Hebrew Bible as a discrete text rather than as the Old Testament, in other words, as the first – and superseded – part of the Christian Bible that includes – and is consummated
It is the former methodological assumption, namely that causal influence can be determined by the number of citations, which cannot bear the burden of philosophical evidence in Locke’s text. Yechezl Leiter writes that “there are times when plentiful also means meaningful, instances when quantitative usage is also indicative of qualitative intent. Locke was not required to use the Hebrew Bible as extensively as he did if his intent was duplicitous, if, as the school founded by Leo Strauss would have us believe, he really meant to negate Biblical authority in order to present a radically secular philosophy […] There are simply too many Biblical references in Locke’s Treatises to argue that Locke meant to undermine the Bible’s legitimacy.”51 Dr. Leiter is correct that Locke did not need to cite Scripture, and the fact that Locke chose to suffuse his political writings with religious text is significant, and does need to be taken into account by any full, complete interpretation of Locke’s thought. But it simply does not follow that Locke’s many biblical references necessitate any similarity – or causal influence – between the teachings of the Bible and Locke’s views any more than Plato’s many references necessity a similarity between his philosophy and the epics of Homer.52

It is fallacious to assert that the Bible inspired Locke solely on the basis of the biblical citations, images, and references that can be found his political writings. Noting Locke’s references is not the end of an interpretation, it is the grounds for beginning one.


This section will step beyond noting Locke’s references, and seek to interpret them within a fuller scope of Locke’s doctrine.

2.3.2. Freedom: The Origins and Ends of Locke’s Political Thought

Locke is early modernity’s philosopher of freedom. Freedom lies both at the origin and the end of Locke’s political thought. Individuals are naturally free, and the purpose of Locke’s political doctrine is to secure and enhance that freedom.

“All men are naturally” in “a state of perfect freedom” to do as the think fit without the permission of any other person, “without asking leave, or depending upon the will of any other man.”\(^{53}\) Moreover, all men are equal in their possession of these, and other rights including life, liberty, health, limb and goods.\(^{54}\) The state of nature, simply, is a state without natural hierarchy, in which there is neither superior nor inferior. All men enjoy an equal, individual endowment of freedom and rights, “life, liberty and estate.”\(^{55}\)

Hobbes too described a state of nature characterized by universal equality. But there, the primal drive of each individual was the fear of death. Death came, for the most part, from nature’s stinginess or from another man’s blade. All were equal in Hobbes’ conception because each individual was equally powerful to kill, and equally vulnerable to be killed by, everyone else. Why would anyone want to kill, or fear being killed? The main reason is that men are prideful, and have a heightened sensitivity to offenses against honor. Absent a sovereign with the power to adjudicate, all are always engaged in rivalry

\(^{53}\) Locke, Second Treatise, § 4, p. 269.
\(^{54}\) Locke, Second Treatise, § 4, p. 269 and § 6, p. 271.
\(^{55}\) Locke, Second Treatise, § 87, p. 323.
over goods and rivalry over honor.\textsuperscript{56} Thus, the two main sources of Hobbesian equality are the two causes of violent death. Hobbesian equality is the equality of potential death.

But note that a natural, universal rivalry over honor presumes human contact, and a modicum of natural sociality. If men are alone, if they do not regard the cock-eyed gaze nor hear the insulting speech of their adversaries – they have no adversaries. Hobbes’ state of nature, it is true, is a war of all against all,\textsuperscript{57} but it follows from that very fact that in Hobbes’ conception men are together.

It is necessary to take that detour into Hobbes’ conception in order for Locke’s departure from Hobbes to emerge with all its revolutionary force. For, “Locke, by an elegant simplification, will simply erase rivalry, or at least its original character. In the beginning, there were no relationships among men, not even hostile ones.”\textsuperscript{58} Locke differs from Hobbes in that he removes rivalry over honor and the social quarrels that come from it. The only rivalry left is rivalry over goods, the natural material needed for sustenance of which there is an abundant natural supply. Therefore, in practice, the state of nature is not quarrelsome, is not a battleground of petty rivalries, it is not the arena of aristocratic strife between honor and shame that occupies such a fraught center in the Hobbesian state. In removing the antagonism that Hobbes sees as natural, Locke has made man solitary, and because solitary, he is the bearer of individual rights.\textsuperscript{59} In the Hobbesian commonwealth, individual rights are not really rights. The citizen never


\textsuperscript{57} Hobbes, \textit{Leviathan}, ch. 13, p. 88.


\textsuperscript{59} Pierre Manent, \textit{An Intellectual History of Liberalism}, p. 42. See Leo Strauss, \textit{Natural Right and History}, p. 233.
retains the right to rebellion, and once elevated to his place, the sovereign is infallible.\textsuperscript{60}

Not so with Locke. Rights are absolute. If the government fails to protect individual rights,\textsuperscript{61} it is the government that will be overthrown and replaced.\textsuperscript{62}

Absent the competition over honor that Hobbes saw in natural society, Locke focuses on man’s relationship to nature and the accumulation of goods, developing the concept of ownership and property. Quoting scripture, Locke notes that God “has given the Earth to the Children of Men” that is to say, “given it to Mankind in common.”\textsuperscript{63}

Nature is originally a common good, but it is susceptible to private ownership through labor. “Whatsoever then [an individual] removes out of the State that Nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his \textit{Labour} with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his \textit{Property},” so that “\textit{labour} put a distinction between them and the common.”\textsuperscript{64} The provision of nourishment is warranted by the fact that man owns his own self,\textsuperscript{65} and by extension the labor he produces, and by extension the property he accumulates. Because it is the external expression of self-possession, property, the accumulation of natural material – and eventually even inorganic representations of natural material, metal coin, – is the consummation and highest expression of individual natural right.\textsuperscript{66} Because property is individuated and no longer held in common, it, unlike the wild fruits of the earth, must be protected from unwarranted seizure. Private property might be seized because, although all men are

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{60} Hobbes, \textit{Leviathan}, ch. 18, pp. 121-129.
\end{thebibliography}
born with access to reason which is the law of nature, all men are not equally endowed with reason. Men are driven to irrational acts, resulting in all manner of “inconveniences” for property owners. A third party, an impartial judge, an elected government must protect property rights. The protection of this and other rights is the problem to which Locke’s system of legitimate government provides a solution. Government exists to secure private wealth created by self-possessed and free individuals. It is “the great and chief end” of government.

Since individuals in the state of nature are not subject to legitimate, exogenous political authority, government must, in order to be legitimate, emerge from individual consent and dedicate itself to preserve natural rights. Legitimate government, then, is less essentially a form of rule than a process that honors the dignity of each individual by preserving his right to self-rule. Only through a social contract can individuals conditionally transfer some of their rights to the government in order to more efficiently preserve the rights they maintain. “All men are naturally in that state, and remain so, till by their own consents they make themselves members of some politic society.” In other words, because government is born through the calculation of rational self-interest

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68 On Locke’s “growing skepticism about the ability of the great majority of men to arrive at an understanding of natural law,” see Sheldon S. Wolin, Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought, pp. 299-300.
70 Locke, Second Treatise, § 124, pp. 350-351.
71 Locke, Second Treatise, § 122, p. 349; but see § 120, p. 348 for Locke’s allowance for tacit consent. Dunn takes the broadest and least stringent view of Locke’s consent, allowing for consent to be given so long as a citizen be “not unwilling.” See John Dunn, The Political Thought of John Locke: An Historical Account of the Argument of the ‘Two Treatises of Government’, pp. 120-147.
73 Locke, Second Treatise, § 132, p. 354.
75 Because the passions could not be trusted, Locke elsewhere denies that “each person is at liberty to do what he himself, according to circumstances, judges to be of advantage to him.” “Essays on the Law of
and the preservation of individual right, it succeeds in honoring the more fundamental
dignity of the individual endowed with rights. The purpose of government is the
protection of individual rights in accord with the founding contract, and if the
government fails to abide by the terms of this contract, the people maintain a right to
resist, a right to terminate the contract through rebellion and revolution. Thus
government is provisional, i.e. contingent on protecting the permanent rights of its
citizens.

In order to protect rights, a regime tends to work best when it diffuses power by
separating legislative and executive functions into different governmental bodies. Moreover, citizens are to be immune from coercion to believe in the religious orthodoxies of the regime. Though Locke specifies a certain politically motivated limits to toleration, nevertheless toleration for most Protestants and Jews is to be fundamental. Churches will not be deputized by the state with coercive power. This is the core of John Locke’s political teaching.

Because freedom is at the core of Locke’s political theory, demonstrating that
Lockean freedom is influenced by biblical sources would be necessary for attributing, in
Oz-Salzberger’s phrase, “germane” influence. Neither Fania Oz-Salzberger, nor Eric Nelson, nor anyone else, so far as I know, makes a compelling case for the biblical character of the Lockean notion of freedom.

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76 Locke, Second Treatise, § 131, p. 353.


78 Locke, Second Treatise, § 143, p. 364.

79 Locke, Letter Concerning Toleration; see also Second Letter Concerning Toleration and Third Letter Concerning Toleration. These and other writings are compiled in Locke on Toleration, ed. Richard Vernon, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
The pages that remain make three related points about Locke’s ideas about freedom, all of which are not only incompatible with, but actively oppose the biblical teaching about what is good and important in a human life. First, Lockean freedom is essentially individual freedom. Second, and related to this, Locke’s doctrine of individual freedom not only seeks to liberate man from human tyranny, but alongside the tyranny of men, he seeks to liberate men from the tyranny of time. For Locke, the past exercises its own special kind of oppression: though natural to all but Adam, ancestral knowledge and traditional behaviors, like political oppression, are unchosen and illegitimate. Third, because biological family is the carrier of memories and of the living past, Lockean freedom requires that the family be recast and retooled, producing a vision of marriage and generations that replaces hierarchy with equality, and permanent bonds with consensual relationships.

2.3.3. Individual Freedom

Whereas in the classical conception, freedom was to be found in the right ordering and harmony of the soul, and then in the civic and political sphere of ruling and being ruled in turn, Locke’s freedom has a more decidedly individual character. Locke’s individual does not achieve liberty through self-government or exercising his political

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nature, instead he is born in a natural state of “perfect freedom,”\textsuperscript{81} with “uncontrollable liberty to dispose of his person or possessions.”\textsuperscript{82} This means that “naturally there is no superiority or jurisdiction of one, over another.”\textsuperscript{83} Man is free inasmuch as he is the “proprietor of his own person;”\textsuperscript{84} he is the “absolute lord of his own person and possessions, equal to the greatest, and subject to no body.”\textsuperscript{85} The rights with which man is born are his alone, they are individual rights that must be protected from other individuals and communal threats.

This is Locke’s language of autonomous self-ownership and self-making. In the phrase of C.B. Macpherson, the most enthusiastic student of Locke’s individualism, “the core of Locke’s individualism is the assertion that every man is naturally the sole proprietor of his own person and capacities – the absolute proprietor in the sense that he owes nothing to society for them – and especially the absolute proprietor of his capacity to labour.”\textsuperscript{86}

So profound is Locke’s devotion to natural solitude that relations are, if not unnatural then at least unusual. This is one of the effects of Locke’s disagreement with Hobbes over mankind’s most fundamental threat, and hence mankind’s most fundamental drive. Man’s first worry is not death at the point of the sword but hunger, starvation, and nature’s improvidence. Even human fears are solitary. “If man fundamentally is hungry

\textsuperscript{81} Locke, \textit{Second Treatise}, § 4, p. 269; see also § 87, p. 323.
\textsuperscript{82} Locke, \textit{Second Treatise}, § 6, pp. 270-271.
\textsuperscript{83} Locke, \textit{Second Treatise}, § 7, p. 272.
man, he is radically separated from his fellow man; his only relationships are with his body and with nature.” 87

Men may come into contact in the state of nature, therefore, in order to trade, offering “promises and bargains for truck.” 88 But the accumulation of property itself reinforces man’s individualism 89 and relations of this kind are, by necessity, conducted according to self-interest, for the purposes of self-aggrandizement. Even in those few passing relations that occur in the state of nature, the human horizon does not really extend beyond the self. Wolin writes that, in such conditions, “man becomes conscious

87 Pierre Manent, An Intellectual History of Liberalism, p. 42. On the same page, Manent goes on to say that “Locke establishes two important propositions. The right of property is essentially prior to the institution of society, independent of others’ consent or political law; in other words, the right to property is a right belonging to the lone individual and closely linked to the urgent necessity of nourishing oneself. Property is natural and not conventional. The second proposition is this: the relationship of man to nature is defined by labor. Man is not naturally a political animal; he is an owning and laboring animal, owning because he is laboring, laboring in order to own.” Also consider, “[…] the relations of labor and appropriation considered in the Second Treatise come to pass in a pre-social state, where the individual’s concerns and actions create relations between self and self, and self and world, that do not depend on socially instituted values, rewards, or punishments.” Jerrold Seigel, The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe since the Seventeenth Century, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 106. Regarding Locke’s dispute with Hobbes, the two states of nature are actually closer than is sometimes recognized. Even in Locke’s attempt at a relatively gentler presentation, the natural law of reason must be understood in the context of his demonstration that the natural law is “force and determination.” According to Wilson Carey McWilliams, “the evidence suggests that Locke thought the original condition of humanity to be closer to Hobbes’s description, and the first societies to be a common subordination imposed by leaders preeminent in force and will – consider only Locke’s repeated appeals to the example of Jephtha (Judg. 11, 12), which suggest that the real law of nature’s God and natural reason is force and the determination to prevail whatever the cost.” The Democratic Soul: A Wilson Carey McWilliams Reader, ed. Patrick J. Deneen and Susan J. McWilliams, (The University Press of Kentucky, 2011), p. 210. Here, McWilliams refers to the Second Treatise, §§ 109, 176, 241, as well as the “Essays on the Laws of Nature.” On the biblical context of Jephtha compared with Locke’s reference, see Leo Strauss, Natural Right and History, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1965), pp. 214-215, and in greater detail still, Ross J. Corbett, “Locke’s Biblical Critique” in Review of Politics, Winter 2012, vol. 74, no. 1, pp. 27-51.

88 Locke, Second Treatise, § 14, p. 277, where Locke also writes that “truth and keeping of faith belong to men, as men, and not as members of society.”

89 “Locke’s teaching on property, and therewith his whole political philosophy, are revolutionary not only with regard to the biblical tradition but with regard to the philosophic tradition as well. Through the shift of emphasis from natural duties or obligations to natural rights, the individual, the ego, had become the center and origin of the moral world, since man – as distinguished from man’s end – had become that center or origin… Man is effectively emancipated from the bonds of nature, and therewith the individual is emancipated from those social bonds which antedate all consent or compact, by the emancipation of his productive acquisitiveness, which his necessarily, if accidentally, beneficent and hence susceptible of becoming the strongest social bond: restraint of the appetites is replaced by a mechanism whose effect is humane.” Leo Strauss, Natural Right and History, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1965), p. 248.
of his fellows only when he and they collide; conflict and friction are thus the sources of man’s awareness of man.”

These collisions, conflicts, and frictions are the source of man’s need to compact into community and form government. Without natural order in the state of nature, each has what Locke calls the “executive power” to punish transgressions against the natural law of reason. But the human capacity for reason is unequal and imperfect, and it is “unreasonable for men to be judges in their own case.” To this problem, civil government is the solution because it takes the capacity to punish out of each individual’s hands. Having relinquished the executive power, man is no less free. “Freedom of men under government” Locke writes, is “a liberty to follow my own will in all things, where the rule prescribes not; and not to be subject to the inconstant, uncertain, unknown, arbitrary will of another man.” In particular, “the great and chief end, therefore, of men uniting into commonwealths, and putting themselves under government, is the preservation of their property,” that is to say, the preservation of their own labor, their own industry, their own possessions. Citizenship itself fails to substantially expand the

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90 Sheldon S. Wolin, Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought, p. 305. Regarding the absence of “affective attachment in the Second Treatise, McWilliams aptly observes that “the Second Treatise lacks even Hobbes’s passing reference to erotic bonds, and more importantly, Locke aims to lessen the confining power of affective attachment in favor of an ‘education for liberty’ which emphasizes independence and interest.” Wilson Carey McWilliams, The Democratic Soul: A Wilson Carey McWilliams Reader, p. 209.

91 Locke, Second Treatise, § 13, p. 275.

92 Locke, Second Treatise, §§ 13-14, pp. 276-277.

93 Locke, Second Treatise, § 22, p. 284. Note too that, for Locke, “the end of law is not to abolish or restrain, but to preserve and enlarge freedom: for in all the states of created beings capable of laws, where there is no law, there is no freedom. For liberty is to be free from restraint and violence from others which cannot be, where there is no law: but freedom is not, as we are told, a liberty for every man to do what he lists: (for who could be free, when every other man’s humour might domineer over him?) But a liberty to dispose, and order, as he lists, his person, allowance of those laws under which he is; and therein not to be subject to the arbitrary will of another, but freely to follow his own.” Locke, Second Treatise, § 57, p. 306. This passage introduces Hayek’s discussion of the rule of law. See F. A. Hayek, The Constitution of Liberty, ed. Ronald Hamowy, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), p. 232.

94 Locke, Second Treatise, § 124, pp. 350-351; see also §§ 94, 134, 138, 222.
horizons of Locke’s private man. For “property” often means lands and goods, as it does throughout chapter 5 of the Second Treatise, but it can also mean life, liberty, and estate; even, at times, one’s own person.95

That being said, how can man be born alone, trade alone, then somehow enter into community and civil life and yet still remain alone? How are all these things possible when, to begin with, the sexual union of man and woman is the only natural way to bring humans into the world? Are the biological and pragmatic requirements for the conception, birth, and rearing of the young unnatural according to Locke’s account? All men, save Adam,96 are born into families. That is simply a fact. And Locke is not blind to this. To the contrary, “the first society was between man and wife, which gave beginning to that between parents and children.”97 Not only is paternal power legitimate, to a degree, but Locke’s descriptions of distant tribes that remain in the state of nature are all places in which the structures and hierarchies of the family thrive. “[I]n a pre-political condition, [men] will naturally remain within the affective warmth of the family even after adulthood and will tend to accept the authority of their father to act as an appropriate leader in any relations with other men outside the family unit.”98

Locke acknowledges their existence, but he does not necessarily like the persistence of traditional, hierarchical, family roles in pre-civil society. His harshest evaluation comes from the example he chooses to illustrate the evils of unbounded

95 Locke, Second Treatise, §§ 87, 123, 173.
96 Locke, Second Treatise, § 56, p. 305.
97 John Locke, Second Treatise, § 77, p. 319; see too, throughout the Second Treatise, § 74, pp. 316-317; § 105, pp. 336-337; § 107, pp. 338-339. In a slightly different key, Locke writes, quoting Hooker, that “to supply those defects and imperfections which are in us, as living singly and solely by our selves, we are naturally induced to seek communion and fellowship with others, this was the cause of men uniting themselves, at first in political societies,” but then Locke immediately says that such union is born of consent, and not necessity. See John Locke, Second Treatise, § 15, p. 278.
98 John Dunn, The Political Thought of John Locke, p. 115.
patriarchy. It comes from a travelogue to Peru from which Locke provides an extensive quotation. The Commentarios Reales of Garcilaso de la Vega was a favorite of Locke. The passage Locke cites describes, in ugly detail, the cannibalism of a Peruvian tribe. The warriors of this tribe were known to rape the female survivors of their vanquished enemy, and raise the children of this forced sexual violation for food. When the women were too old to produce more “roasters,” they too were to be eaten. “Reason” is man’s “only star and compass,” according to Locke, because the real state of nature shows us one revolting and brutal example after another of the tyranny of traditional custom. “When fashion hath once established” some monstrous violation of the law of nature, “custom makes it sacred, and ‘twill be thought impudence or madness, to contradict or question it.”

This shocking example is among Locke’s clearest acknowledgments that family relations not only exist, but indeed are the norm, and further, that they carry custom and inherited folkways in his pre-civil world. Even less gruesome, natural family relations are “traditionalist, authoritarian, paternalistic societies,” writes Ruth Grant. But, in her study of Locke’s anthropological passages, Grant demonstrates that the “anthropological evidence and the historical record are irrelevant” for both Locke’s political and intellectual argument. “The premise of Locke’s political argument – that men are born free – is not a sociological claim, but a moral one,” meaning that even if it is the case that men are not born as sole proprietors of their full rights, each a whole complete unto

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99 See Peter Laslett’s note on p. 182, n. 1, § 57, 18.
101 Locke, First Treatise, § 58, pp. 182-183; see also Second Treatise, § 94, pp. 329-330.
103 Ruth W. Grant, “Locke’s Anthropology and Lockean Individualism,” p. 43.
himself, and even if Locke himself acknowledges as much, nevertheless, it is Locke’s intention to hold that distinctly individualized conception of human nature as the aspirational standard. Even as he acknowledges the lower, historical and descriptive realities of the human condition, Locke writes in the high normative and theoretical frame; his individualism “is a political individualism at the level of normative theory” rather than at the level of historical fact. 104 “Theoretically, it appears that dissociated free individuals consent to form a society to protect themselves from each other. Historically, government develops out of a pre-existing social situation primarily to deal with foreign threats.” 105

Actually, contained within the purview of Locke’s admonition to citizens that they guard their liberty and cast a skeptical eye toward government encroachment on their rights, he acknowledges the persistence of habit, custom, and path dependency even in civil society. For “the people are not so easily got out of their old forms, as some are apt to suggest.” 106 “They seem to share,” Grant explains, “the conservative disposition of their tribal forebears.” 107

Locke’s acknowledgment that human nature is social, historical and mimetic, and that human bonds emerge from both necessity and affection, highlights just how very striking it is that he hopes for a freer, more rational life that leaves all that heteronomy behind. For, it is precisely because, empirically, custom leads men to irrationality by making sacred what fashion hath established and began that Locke sets up the individual

104 Ruth W. Grant, “Locke’s Anthropology and Lockean Individualism,” p. 50.
105 Ruth W. Grant, “Locke’s Anthropology and Lockean Individualism,” p. 45.
106 Locke, Second Treatise, § 223, p. 414; See also Some Thoughts Concerning Education, §§ 18, 66.
107 Ruth W. Grant, “Locke’s Anthropology and Lockean Individualism,” p. 57
who calculates the balance of pleasures and pains with rational interest.\textsuperscript{108} In general, “Locke gives full recognition to the power of the traditional, the habitual, the customary, and the social” Grant writes, and with all of his judiciousness, “he seeks to liberate men from their influence.”\textsuperscript{109}

Locke does not view human nature or human society as socially atomistic, but holds that for the purpose of preserving natural law and natural right, it should be socially atomistic. Man, in Locke’s telling as in the Bible’s, is naturally embedded in a web of social relations throughout life, but Locke parts ways with the biblical account by asserting that he ought not be. Locke will easily concede that men are not pure rational maximizers of utility, but he wants them to be. Though Locke admits that life is not governed by the independent calculation of individual interest, he maintains that it ought to be.\textsuperscript{110} The individualism that characterizes Locke’s mind is his standard according to which reality should be evaluated, it is his norm, his ought, his vision and his dream.\textsuperscript{111}

Dunn writes that “to understand the state of nature correctly it is necessary to think history away; but to apply it in discussing any concrete human issue, it is necessary to allow the return of history in the simple delineation of the issue to be discussed […]” so that “the ascription of the state of nature is always merely the identification of a jural structure, never a moral inventory of an existing historical situation.”\textsuperscript{112}

\textsuperscript{108} Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, II.21.31, 34; II.7.3-4; II.21.42


\textsuperscript{110} Ruth W. Grant, “Locke’s Anthropology and Lockean Individualism,” p. 60.


\textsuperscript{112} John Dunn, The Political Thought of John Locke, pp. 112-113. preceded by Ibid., pp. 97, 103. Dunn remarks, too, that When Locke “came to write the Two Treatises the doctrine which emerged was notably
2.3.4. Liberation from the Past

Sections 57-59 of the *First Treatise*, during which Locke relays the example of Peruvian cannibalism, articulates his famous line that reason is man’s star and only compass as he steers through his restless imagination. Therein, Locke lays out his understanding of the dangers of custom, which amounts to this: tradition is opposed to reason. “Tradition without reason,” in Pangle’s phrase, “is the most ghastly and inhuman offense against humanity.”

In sum, “societies and individuals are not simply deficient in their capacity to make sense of their moral inheritance. They also vary greatly in their good fortune as to its content. It is not merely the language of morals that history has infected, it is also the set of moral concepts. In order to rectify these defects it is necessary to find some criterion for human morality which is outside of history. Hence the necessity for a law of nature.”

Though it is the source of political society inasmuch as reason shows men the need for compact, the law of nature in the state of nature is easily overwhelmed and

more individualist than can be explained simply by adherence to the Exclusion programme [of Shaftesbury],” p. 50, meaning that, in Dunn’s view, even the political prescriptions contained in his doctrine are more individual than what was needed for his own historical moment. This is truly Locke’s wish, not his urgent need. Herzog, on the other hand, argues that Locke “simultaneously develops three different social contract arguments: the contract is a historical event that establishes a state, an ongoing silent event that adds the consent of individuals as they reach the age of majority, and a hypothetical choice that rules out political arrangements rational agents wouldn’t agree to.” Don Herzog, *Happy Slaves: A Critique of Consent Theory*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 34-35, preceded by *Without Foundations: Justification in Political Theory*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985). See also Jeremy Waldron, “John Locke: Social Contract versus Political Anthropology” in *The Review of Politics*, Winter, 1989, vol. 51, no. 1, pp. 3-28.

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corrupted. There, subrational custom and tradition reign, and as a number scholars from different methodological backgrounds have pointed out, Locke’s political doctrine aims to liberate mankind from this disagreeable, irrational, and humiliating past.

Referring to precepts that have been irrationally accepted, Locke writes that “fashion and the common opinion having settled wrong notions, and education and custom ill habits, the just values of things are misplaced, and the palates of men corrupted.”¹¹⁵ A decent life requires that men “learn to talk coherently about such values or laws and how they can escape the bewitchments of history, that fetishism of the existing moral vocabulary which is the moral consciousness of most men.”¹¹⁶ For Locke, the bewitchments of history form of a kind of mental oppression that shackles men to error, “wrong notions.” But even when a person holds right notions, and even if those right notions are not antiquated, but emerge from the best contemporary thinking, Locke believes that these ideas too are harmful if each person’s individual reason does not assent to them.

For I think we may as rationally hope to see with other men’s eyes, as to know by other men’s understandings. So much as we ourselves consider and comprehend of truth and reason, so much we possess of real and true knowledge. The floating of other men’s opinions in our brains makes us not one jot the more knowing, though they happen to be true. What in them was science, is in us but opiniatrety; whilst we give up our assent only to reverend names, and do not, as they did, employ our own reason to understand those truths which gave them reputation. Aristotle was certainly a knowing man, but nobody ever thought him so because he blindly embraced, or confidently vented, the opinions of another. And if the


¹¹⁶ John Dunn, The Political Thought of John Locke, p. 96. Dunn also notes that “any stage of social development which was part of the historical story at all, any period within history, could not in itself be normative for any other period.” John Dunn, The Political Thought of John Locke, p. 102.
taking up another’s principles, without examining them, made not him a
philosopher, I suppose it will hardly make any body else so.117

As in politics, so too in understanding, consent, rational consent, is the authorizing
mechanism. If a man has some opinion – from the past or present, but especially from
the past – and accepts it without rational consent, it is invalid knowledge and even
morally and politically pernicious. Why politically pernicious? Relying on received
opinions habituates people to deference and hence to quietism. Each individual needs to
actively, vigorously safeguard their liberties and rights, to remain skeptical of authority
and power, and accepting the dogmas of intellectual and moral authorities counters and
undermines the human virtues that, for Locke, are necessary to sustain a healthy society.
The skeptical, questioning spirit is necessary, for “without such questioning,” Peter
Berkowitz writes, “the weight of custom and the tyranny of tradition […] will obscure the
conduct God truly commands and the virtues actually required for the preservation of
society.”118 This is the connection between Locke’s mistrust of the past and
delegitimization of heterogeneity on the one hand, and his political doctrine on the other.

To be free is to be self-reliant, to follow one’s own individual star and compass.

“[T]hose who fail to do so, those ordinary, insouciant creatures who get carried along
with the current, are under subjection.”119 Individual freedom requires the liberation

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Volumes, (London: Rivington, 1824), vol. 1. This passage is from book 1, ch. 4, § 23 of the Essay; where
Locke also writes that philosophy is not to be done subject “to any authority.” See Charles Taylor, Sources
of the Self: The Marking of the Modern Identity, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press,
118 Peter Berkowitz, Virtue and the Making of Modern Liberalism, p. 83. Berkowitz’s immediate context is
Locke’s attack on innate ideas, for which, among other sources, one can read John Locke, “Essays on the
96, as well as book II of the Essay Concerning Human Understanding. See also the discussion in Sheldon
S. Wolin, Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought, pp. 265-266.
from the undeserving authority – even in some cases, tyranny – of past traditions and customs.\textsuperscript{120} A healthy amnesia is needed to start fresh.

2.3.5. The Lockean Family

The family, more than any other institution, carries memories of the past, inherited ways of life, ancestral stories and dreams\textsuperscript{121}. Probably more clearly than any other modern thinker, Locke saw this, and understood its power. To Locke, this was not a source of cultural, civilizational, or political strength; the family was the source of continued patriarchy and oppression, the enemy of liberty, robbing each son and daughter molded in its repressive image of independent judgment, and of the confidence in individual rationality needed to protect rights. The family instills habits of deference to hierarchy rather than nourishing the confidence necessary for individual equality. It cultivates acquiescence to authority and thus develops qualities of servitude rather than citizenship.

And yet, for all his recognition of the family’s insalubrious effects on each of its members, the family nevertheless plays an important role in Locke’s own political doctrine. For, Locke recognizes that the regime he prescribes rests on moral structures that are exogenous to it. The virtues that support a political society that respects freedom and equality must be fostered, and he clearly specifies the source of those virtues that foster such respect. That source is, in his view, the very family that breeds


\textsuperscript{121} An outstanding description of the role of the family in the transmission of the past is found in Edward Shils, \textit{Tradition}, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 169-175.
counterproductive habits of mind. In ch. 6 of *The Second Treatise*, entitled “On Paternal Power,” Locke describes the authority and obligations that parents – equally mothers and fathers – have for the for the raising of the young.\textsuperscript{122} The family occupies a paradoxical role in Locke’s thought: a danger and an opportunity, it can be the instrument that takes men out of their natural state and elevates them their best and most rational selves, but it can also permanently maim their minds by instilling the prejudices of the patriarchal past.

To see this paradox, one must see together the *First Treatise* and “On Parental Power” in the *Second Treatise*. The bedrock of Locke’s political doctrine is the natural equality of all, and the argument of his *First Treatise* is directed against the unnatural, unjustifiable, and illegitimate overstepping of authority by the patriarchal monarch. The patriarchal monarch embodies the worst offense of institutionalized hierarchy against enlightened thought: power without consent. This above all Locke seeks to extirpate from legitimate politics.\textsuperscript{123} But it is this very thing, power without consent, that lives on in the family; it is the one traditional, pre-political form of social relationship that is everywhere hierarchical, the one natural form that stands as counterevidence against Locke’s normative vision of universal equality. The relation of the old to the young, the dependence of children on parents, is a stinging reminder that the state of nature is not egalitarian. Reflecting on the tradition of social contract theory of which Locke is the best representative, Bertrand de Jouvenel once wrote that it expresses “views of childless

\textsuperscript{122} See especially John Locke, *Second Treatise*, §§ 54-63, pp. 304-309.

\textsuperscript{123} Locke “aimed to rule out the family, an institution that appears to include natural hierarchy, as a model for politics (although he concedes that the transition from paternal to political power is ‘easy’ and even ‘natural’)”. Wilson Carey McWilliams, *The Democratic Soul: A Wilson Carey McWilliams Reader*, p. 209. Here, McWilliams refers especially to *First Treatise*, §§ 75, 76, and 105. See also Paul A. Rahe, *Republics Ancient & Modern, vol. 2: New Modes & Orders in Early Modern Political Thought*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994), p. 252.
men who must have forgotten their own childhood.” The inescapable presence of parents is both necessary for and inimical to Locke’s constitutionalism.

Yet in *The Second Treatise*, Locke describes the natural authority of parents over children as perfectly compatible with his theory. For children are “not born in this full state of equality, though they are born to it.” Adam, the first man, the motherless child, was a miraculous exception. Yet all other children are born “weak and helpless, without knowledge or understanding. In order to “supply the defects of this imperfect state, till the improvement of growth and age hath removed them, Adam and Eve, and after them all parents were, by the Law of Nature, under an obligation to preserve, nourish, and educate the children, they had begotten.” Natural equality is potentially present from creation, but not fully present until children develop into it, that is, until they develop the capacity for reason. Then, they are equal to all in their freedom. “Thus,” Locke explains, “we are born free, as we are born rational; not that we have actually the exercise of either: age that brings one, brings with it the other too. And thus we see how natural freedom and subjection to parents may consist together.”

Because they create – not potentially but actually – free and equal persons, parents and families are not the enemy of Locke’s egalitarian politics. Rather, parents

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124 Bertrand de Jouvenel, *The Pure Theory of Politics*, (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1963), p. 60. Dunn replies: “the fact that [the state of nature] is an ahistorical concept does not mean that it denies the reality of history or altogether subsumes this. The set of moral obligations owed by an individual at any point in time is a function of his own particular life-history.” John Dunn, *The Political Thought of John Locke*, p. 112. This response, an accurate defense of Locke’s view, serves to underscore rather than refute de Jouvenel’s remark, for it simply amounts to the fact that there is no inherent, essential meaning to the family relationship. It, like other relationships, is the function of one’s own “life-history.”

and the structures of family are the necessary preconditions of Lockean politics.\(^\text{129}\) For the family is the school of equality, where the immature and as yet unreasonable develop the capacities for reason and autonomy. The significance of the family is that it leads the way to the family’s insignificance.

Thus, to understand the centrality of the family in a well-ordered regime is to accept an invitation deeper into the mysteries of Lockean thought. For, at the same time that the family is central to the formation of individuals, Lockean doctrine also seeks to liberate individuals from the oppression of the family.\(^\text{130}\)

To achieve this, Locke keeps the family around, but reconceives its character. The family abides, but with an internal dynamic that is revamped for the new world. Here is but one description of the proper relation between parent and child.

The subjection of a minor places in the father a temporary government, which terminates with the minority of the child, and the *honour due from a child*, places in the parents a perpetual right to respect, reverence, support and compliance too, more or less, as the father’s care, cost and kindness in his education, has been more or less.\(^\text{131}\)

The traditional family is characterized by two facts of a child’s birth. The first is that a child is not asked to be born into the family, or at all, and therefore that the primary and fundamental condition of the child’s life is not of its own choosing but is given. An eternal bond unites parents and children. This givenness of life and this bond give rise to the second fact, which is that the child owes an inexhaustible debt of gratitude to the

\(^{129}\) Peter Berkowitz, *Virtue and the Making of Modern Liberalism*, pp. 96-97.

\(^{130}\) John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, §§ 40-41.

parents for the gift of life.\textsuperscript{132} In refounding the dynamics of the family, Locke temporizes and hence potentially severs the eternal bond between parent and child, and rewrites gratitude as just repayment for services rendered.\textsuperscript{133}

The time during which parents rule, or in Locke’s phrase, “subject” their children is a function of the child’s reason. Before the child can fully live according to natural law, they are to be governed. “After that, the father and son are equally free as much as tutor and pupil after nonage; equally subjects of the same law together, without dominion left in the father over the life, liberty, or estate of his son, whether they be only in the state and under the law of nature, or under the positive laws of an established government.”\textsuperscript{134} The relation of father to son is equalized, neither having any special role in relation to the other once the son matures into reason. At that point, they may choose to maintain relations, or not, but it is a decision that must be made. Consent must be given.\textsuperscript{135}

Regarding the second fundamental change, in which Locke replaces the gratitude a child owes his parent with the repayment of calculated expense, Locke notes that a father can purchase more earnest affection, or at least obedience, from his son through the allure of substantial inheritance, “the power men generally have to bestow their estates on those, who please them best. The possession of the father being the expectation and inheritance of the children [...]” is, Locke says with admirable restraint, “no small tie on

\textsuperscript{132}Maimonides, \textit{Mishneh Torah: Mamrim}, ch. 6, § 7.
\textsuperscript{133}Thomas Pangle argues that, in his criticism of Filmer, Locke actually rids the father of any legitimate right over his offspring of any age whatsoever – even during the “minority of the child.” Thomas L. Pangle, \textit{The Spirit of Republicanism: The Moral Vision of the American Founders and the Philosophy of Locke}, p. 174.
\textsuperscript{134}John Locke, \textit{Second Treatise}, § 59, p. 307; see also § 65, pp. 310-311. See John Dunn, \textit{The Political Thought of John Locke}, p. 115.
the obedience of children."\(\textsuperscript{136}\) But, Locke goes on, such a transfer must be given and it must be received; it is chosen at the points of transmission and acceptance, in other words, it is “no natural tie or engagement, but a voluntary submission.”\(\textsuperscript{137}\) Even with financial or material incentives, there is no natural or necessary obligation toward one’s parents.\(\textsuperscript{138}\) The egocentric stance that defines a child’s attitude toward their parents – and their past – means that the calculations of self-interest have penetrated into the core of family life.\(\textsuperscript{139}\) “It follows from this that if the father’s care, cost, and kindness have been zero, his right to honour will become zero too. The categoric [sic.] imperative ‘Honour thy father and thy mother’ becomes the hypothetical imperative ‘Honour thy father and thy mother if they have deserved it of you.’”\(\textsuperscript{140}\)

Locke’s family is characterized by consent and calculation, a contingent group threatened at each moment by each individual’s choice, anyone with the mind to do so can exit for any reason.\(\textsuperscript{141}\) It is “a world where the conflictual possibilities of group membership give way to lower expectations about the possibility of humans arriving at a single, uniform end. Like political life, even the most intimate group affiliations –

\(\textsuperscript{136}\) John Locke, \textit{Second Treatise}, §§ 72-73, p. 315. Locke’s teaching [is] that property is teleologically prior to the family: the perfection of individuals’ fundamental personhood, or property in themselves, is the end for the sake of which the family is properly ordered. This insistence upon the priority of personal property to familial authority represents, of course, the heart of Locke’s critique of Filmer’s patriarchal authoritarianism.” Peter C. Myers, \textit{Our Only Star and Compass: Locke and the Struggle for Political Rationality}, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1998), pp. 196-197.

\(\textsuperscript{137}\) John Locke, \textit{Second Treatise}, § 73, p. 315.

\(\textsuperscript{138}\) Locke gives a dramatic illustration of a father “who perhaps might have forfeited his right to much of that duty comprehended in the command \textit{honour your parents}” in \textit{First Treatise}, § 100, p. 214.


family, marriage, or church – come to represent a temporary convergence of interest, rather than the permanent and binding unification of separate wills.”142

Having seen the sources within the text, it is possible to again restate the paradox and Locke’s solution to it. The traditional family is really an extension, more invidious because more common and less immediately threatening, of patriarchy. The unchosen bonds that unite an individual to his ancestors and heirs in eternity is, for Locke, one step down from monarchy, tyranny, the divine right of kings, and all that threatens human freedom. But the family is also indispensable because it brings new people into the world and provides them with an early education. It is both harmful and unavoidable, so Locke reforms it. Paternal authority survives as a temporary imposition on each parent’s interest, and filial respect survives as calculated reimbursement; the unit can dissolve at the slightest inconvenience. “Locke’s family, depending on the confident exercise of parental authority, is weakened by the liberal antipathy, which Locke’s philosophy encourages, to traditional authority; by individuals’ tendency to make private conscience and subjective desire authoritative for their conduct; and indeed by Locke’s own reinterpretation of children’s duties to parents in terms of a calculation of costs and benefits.”143

3. Anthropology of the Hebrew Bible

3.1. Introduction

“If we ask ourselves on what causes and conditions good government in all its senses, from the humblest to the most exalted, depends, we find that the principal of them, the one which transcends all others, is the qualities of the human beings composing the society over which the government is exercised.”

3.1.1. Anthropology and the Study of Politics

The study of politics involves the study of men; or more precisely, the relation among men and matter, and more precisely still, the relation of men and matter to forms and sources of rule. Teachers of politics always assume or posit a view of man and his environment before they analyze how men relate, or how they ought to relate to one another.

Hobbes devotes all of Part I, sixteen chapters of *Leviathan*, to an analysis of human nature and the human condition. Only in Part II can Hobbes discuss the arrangement of the commonwealth that resolves the human problems he set out in Part I. *Leviathan* is organized axiomatically, like a geometric proof. If the reader accepts the axioms of metaphysical materialism, the state of nature, and human psychology, then the

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146 “[O]ur anthropological view molds our relationship – not to God, but to ourselves. Our self-appraisal and self-evaluation depend upon our self-interpretation. If man is a natural being, the axiological emphasis is placed upon his biological integrity and welfare. If, however, man is in his essence a spiritual personality, a bearer of transcendental charisma, be it a universal logos, a free will or a heroic *modus existentiae*, our value judgments revolve about the mysterious ultimate self-reality.” Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *The Emergence of Ethical Man*, (Jersey City, New Jersey: Ktuv Publishing House, Inc., 2005), pp. 5-6. See too Pierre Manent, *The City of Man*, pp. 5-8.
political argument logically follows. Disagreement with Hobbes’s premises about human nature leads to a rejection of his politics. Or, such might be the case, at least, for Adam Smith, who opens his book length account of human nature with the words, “However selfish soever man may be supposed,” that is to say, whatever Thomas Hobbes may have thought, “there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others [...]”147 And indeed, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, setting out Smith’s account of human nature, is followed by and sets the ground for his account of human organization in The Wealth of Nations.148 The very different vision of human nature in Smith’s Theory of Moral Sentiments issues in a large scale society very different from that envisaged by Hobbes.

Jefferson, declaring America’s independence, first lists a number of “self-evident truths” or again, axioms, that must be accepted prior to his argument that British rule violates the purposes of legitimate government.149 Even Plato must describe human nature, the essences of the soul, and how the soul must be educated to justice before consummating the Socratic city with the institution of philosophic rule in Book VI of the Republic. Indeed, so central is the establishment of anthroplogy to Socratic political thought that at the end of Book IX, Socrates will even admit to Glaucon that the structures of government elaborated in the Republic are really structures for government of the self rather than government of a polis.150

148 For the relation between the two works, see James R. Otteson, Adam Smith’s Marketplace of Life, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
150 Plato, Republic, 592b.
The first question for classical Greek political philosophy is “who rules?” or “what is best type of regime?” But this question already presupposes a notion of who, or more accurately for the Greeks, what, men are. Subjects and citizens, aristocrats and democrats, slaves and tyrants, monarchs and demagogues can only be ordered wisely according to the human nature that makes these different political roles members of the same species. That is why the questions of man’s nature and origin, of his capacities and essential characteristics, of how he relates as a consequence of these to the world and his fellowmen, are more fundamental than the question of the best political regime. Political orders can set the stage for us to flourish, they can protect us from harm, but to do either of those things well, they must have understood who we are. The science of man, Hume tells us, is the only solid foundation for the other sciences.

A logical account of man’s essential qualities must precede and ground subsequent thinking about stable order and good government. Anthropology must precede political science.

### 3.1.2. Hebraic Anthropology

If anthropology precedes political science, then a study of the political thought of the Hebrew Bible must be preceded by a study of its anthropology. The purpose of this

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152 David Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature*, ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 4. Also note “as it is usual, in forming a notion of our species, to compare it with the other species above or below it, or to compare the individuals of the species among themselves; so we often compare together the different motives or actuating principles of human nature, in order to regulate our judgment concerning it. And, indeed, this is the only kind of comparison, which his worth our attention, or decides anything in the present question.” David Hume, “Dignity or Meanness of Human Nature” in *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller, (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1985), p. 84.
section is to outline the anthropology – the coherent account of man – that emerges from the Hebrew Bible.

Two specifications about the Hebrew Bible are necessary. What is it and what is in it? The Hebrew Bible includes the Pentateuch, the historical books chronicling the rise and fall of the Israelite kingdom, the orations of the prophets, and the moral poetry and aphorisms of Psalms and Proverbs. In taking the Hebraic corpus as my library of resources, I do not enter into the writings of the rabbis or the New Testament, or the Church Fathers, or the medieval heritages of Judaism and Christianity. From the perspectives of both Judaism and Christianity, isolating the Hebrew Bible from the rabbinic corpus and the New Testament is, to say the least, heterodox. But I do not aspire to put forward a religious – be it Jewish or Christian – reading of the Hebrew Bible. A Jewish interpretation of the Jewish Bible cannot be isolated from the Oral Law, nor separated from traditions of Jewish exegesis and commentary, just as a Christian reading could not be separated from the New Testament and patristic theology.

The scope of this study is the Hebrew Bible. But how should it be read? In this study, I seek to navigate away from two extremes. One extreme is that of literalist fundamentalism, which, in its attempt to square textual circles, undertakes hermeneutic feats that one could only call acrobatic. The fact is that the vision of politics that infuses the Book of Daniel, reliant as it is on divine intervention, and the vision of politics that infuses the Book of Esther, in which God is not mentioned at all, cannot be more dissimilar. I do not think it is necessary to presume a unified philosophical or political view across the many books of the Hebrew Bible. It is wiser and more prudent to think of Hebrew Scripture not as a book, but as a library of books. Yoram Hazony calls it “an
anthology” of works, an assembly “of different lengths and genres – some of which (such as Isaiah or Job) are large and self-sufficient enough to be considered books in their own right; some of which (such as Genesis or Judges) are so dependent on what comes before or after them that they more closely resemble chapters in a larger literary work [...]”.

The narrative sequence of the text, on its own account, begins at the creation of the universe, before humanity exists, and takes place over a span of more than a millennium of human history. Biblicists tell us that the text was written, edited, and redacted over a similar timespan. The first extreme I wish to avoid is the assumption that it is written as a treatise, with the seamless consistency of analytic philosophy. It simply isn’t. And yet, to say that the text was edited over so many long years is to reaffirm that it was, indeed, edited. While there may be multiple authors, strands, and sources, these were ultimately put together into a coherent whole that, we must assume, was designed to be read as a whole.

To say that the Hebrew Bible is not a work of analytic philosophy does not therefore mean that it is an unintelligible pastiche.

Having specified what the Hebrew Bible is, and what is in it, let me lay out the core argument of this section. The anthropological claim this section advances is that, in the account of the Hebrew Bible, man is the consummation of creation, embodying the expanses and possibilities of nature, but he is also by his very constitution an inescapably historical being, in whom traditional wisdom is received and from whom it is passed.

153 Yoram Hazony, The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture, p. 32.

154 The scholarship of source criticism has given rise to passionate debate, and serves as a cleavage separating the “scientific” and “religious” studies of the text. It is a debate that finds a kind of correspondence in the twentieth century classicist Milman Parry’s thesis according to which Homer’s descriptions of his characters were determined by the meter of the poem rather than by the meaning of the words. In each case, philologists and technicians contend with philosophic and religious readers over the existence or non-existence of purpose in the text. My rudimentary knowledge of the biblical debate – tangential to the purposes of this study – comes from Umberto Cassuto, The Documentary Hypothesis and the Composition of the Pentateuch, trans. Israel Abrahams, (Jerusalem: Shalem Press, 2006).
on. In his body and soul, together, man mirrors nature and creation. Through his lev – as we will see, “heart” is not quite an accurate translation – man is endowed with distinct capacities for moral action and intergenerational memory, capacities to govern the actions of body and soul.

To begin to elaborate this, there are three main Hebrew terms for soul in the Bible. These, along with man’s physical dimension, all correspond with the cosmological building blocks of creation. Man has a body of earth, a soul of water, a soul of wind, and a soul of fire. The elements of nature are the elements of humankind. But that is not all, for if it were, then one might conclude, with Hobbes, that man is an expression of nature, that he is literally matter in motion, and that he can be subsumed under the rules of nature. In that case, anthropology would be physics.

But that is not all. For, although the soul terms are critical to understanding what man is, the term for the human heart, lev, is more commonly applied to man than any of the soul terms. They describe what man is; the lev describes who he is. The lev is not an expression of nature, it transcends nature through time. Man’s heart actualizes him through memory, reverence for the past, and hope for the future. The lev allows for human freedom and human responsibility. The lev, the commonest of all anthropological terms, elevates man above matter in motion.

3.2. The Hebrew Soul

Throughout political history, the human soul has been reimagined and recast. Classical Greek, Christian, and various versions of European Enlightenment doctrines of the soul are well known to students of philosophy and political thought. But, as Hebraic
political thought matures as a field, one must ask if there is a doctrine or even description of the soul as the authors of the Bible understood it. By tracing key terms throughout the text, this study aims to disclose the Bible’s anthropology, which is centered on the soul, but crucially encompasses the body and heart as well. Cataloguing the meanings of key terms is necessary because the Bible is not a work of discursive philosophy. There is no “doctrine of the soul” section, no biblical equivalent of Aristotle’s *De Anima*. The Hebrew Bible presents general ideas through narrative history, poetry, and rhetoric. By carefully attending to patterns of usage and contextual meaning, the grammar of biblical thought emerges.

There really is not a single encompassing term for “soul” in Hebrew. That might seem like a surprising statement, since so many famous and pivotal moments in the biblical narrative turn on the soul. The second account of human creation in Genesis highlights it as the key to human life. “And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (Gen. 2:7). The word here for “soul” is *nefesh*. Soul, a reader might think, is the English term for the Hebrew *nefesh*. But in Exodus, God instructs Moses to

> [...] gather for Me seventy men of the elders of Israel of whom you know that they are the elders of the people and its overseers, and you shall take them to the Tent of Meeting, and they shall station themselves with you. And I shall come down and speak with you there and I shall hold back some of the spirit that is

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upon you and place it upon them, and they will bear with you the burden of the people and you yourself will not bear it alone (Num. 11:16-17, cf. v.25).

Following the King James Version, the word that Alter renders here as “spirit,” is ruah. Fine, nefesh is soul and ruah is spirit. But elsewhere “spirit” translates yet another word, neshama, as in, “the spirit of man is the candle of the Lord” (Prov. 20:27).

In the King James Version, nefesh is most often expressed as “soul,” but occasionally as “breath,” “self,” “mind,” “heart,” “will,” “desire,” and “appetite.” Ruah is “wind,” “spirit,” and “breath.” And neshama, used less frequently than nefesh and ruah, is “breath,” “spirit,” and “soul.” Readers encountering the word “breath,” for instance, have no way of knowing which of these three terms they are reading. “Spirit” might mean neshama or ruah, or another word altogether. Inexact translations have led to inexact thinking, and since a Hebraic political science must be based on a Hebraic anthropology, let me try to lay out the biblical vision of man.156


157 Among biblicalists, the author most interested in attending to each of these soul terms is a twentieth century German Protestant scholar named Hans Walter Wolff. His Anthropology of the Old Testament proved to be an invaluable launching pad for this research. Writing in 1989, Biblicist John W. Cooper remarks that “Although a great deal of literature is available, the state of the art can be found in Hans Walter Wolff’s Anthropology of the Old Testament. What he presents is virtually undisputed among scholars of various theological persuasions, and I will rely on it here.” Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989, p. 42). On the other hand, Silvia Schroer and Thomas Staubli, Body Symbolism in the Bible, trans. Linda M. Maloney, (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2001), pp. 14-16, provide critical assessment of Wolff. Schroer and Staubli believe that Wolff is a “prisoner of systematic prejudices” related to his “Protestant-professorial view of human reality.” They criticize Wolff for ignoring the ways in which a woman’s body differs from a man’s, and come to the conclusion that Wolff’s “anthropology” is really only an “andrology”.

53
3.2.1. Creation and Cosmos in Man

3.2.1.1. The Elements of Creation

Ecclesiastes begins on a defeatist note, sighing “merest breath, said Qohelet, merest breath. All is mere breath” (Eccles. 1:2). Kol, the “all” of this verse, has given rise to exciting textual interpretation. A number of scholars observe that in Ecclesiastes (or the Hebrew title it is sometimes called in the secondary literature, Qohelet), the Bible articulates a metaphysical understanding of creation that anticipates the Stoic cosmology. Specifically, Fox concludes that the text “apparently considers the four elements,” that is, fire, air, water, and earth, “as comprising the totality of the physical world, because he mentions them in 1:4-7 to demonstrate that everything is hevel (‘absurd’; 1:2).” This plausible interpretation requires the hermeneutic assumption that vv. 4-7 elaborate and specify v. 2, in which “everything” is said to be, in Alter’s rendering, “breath.” The verses that fix the substance of creation are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Element of Creation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eccles. 1:4</td>
<td>A generation goes and a generation comes, but the earth endures forever.</td>
<td>Earth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eccles. 1:5</td>
<td>The sun rises and the sun sets, and to its place it glides, and there it rises.</td>
<td>Fire</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eccles. 1:6</th>
<th>It goes to the south and wings round to the north, round and round goes the wind, and on its rounds the wind returns.</th>
<th>Wind (Ruah)&lt;sup&gt;160&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eccles. 1:7</td>
<td>All the rivers go to the sea, and the sea is not full. To the place that the rivers go, there they return to go.</td>
<td>Water</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To accept the view that these verses do in fact specify the “all” or “everything” of v. 2 is to accept the view that earth, wind, and water are primal elements of creation.

Technically, v. 5 refers to the sun and not to fire, but Dor-Shav convincingly argues that the sun in v. 5 symbolizes and encompasses fire as a primal element. He adduces proof-texts that demonstrate the biblical identification of the heavens, fire and the sun. “Let there be lights in the vault of the heavens” God says at the creation of “two great lights, the great light for dominion of the day and the small light for dominion of the night” (Gen. 1:14-18). The sky houses the sun, the moon, the stars; the heavens are the source of lightning. Jeremiah complains when the heavens conceal their light (Jer. 4:23), and in Ezekiel’s vision, “the heavens were opened,” and he saw “a fire flaring up, and a brightness was about it, and out of the midst of it, as it were the color of amber, out of the midst of the fire” (Ezek. 1:1, 4). In this fiery light he saw figures whose appearance “was like coals of fire, burning like the appearance of torches. It flashed up and down among the living creatures, and the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning. And the living creatures ran and returned like the appearance of a flash of lightning” (Ezek. 13-14, cf. vv. 27-28). “Today we know that outer space is dark and frigid. But in biblical times, the heavens were considered solid, translucent, and fully radiant – a dome of solidified energy,” Dor-Shav summarizes. “When our forefathers looked up into the

<sup>160</sup> In this context, *ruah* means “wind,” but the Hebrew is flagged here for reasons that become clear in the following section dedicated to it.
sky, this is what they envisioned. Day or night, the sky-dome was ablaze.”\textsuperscript{161} These proof-texts permit Fox, Dor-Shav and others to associate the sun and the heavens with fire.

The Hebrew Bible’s elemental cosmology is a major issue. But before elaborating its fuller meaning, there is an additional implication that emerges from using vv. 4-7 to interpret v. 2. The whole elemental cosmology flows from focusing on the “all” of v. 2 and seeing that “everything” is composed of the elements in vv. 4-7. But focusing instead for a moment on the “breath” of v. 2, a term that Alter chose to indicate “something utterly insubstantial and transient” and reflecting on the motion of the elements described in vv. 4-7, the text leads the reader to understand that these latter verses comment on and even complicate the nihilist character of Ecclesiastes’ opening.\textsuperscript{162}

According to v. 2, everything is ephemeral, fleeting, passing. And yet, each of the primal elements that give substance to creation is described as following a regular, repeating, predictable cycle. In v. 4, the earth endures; and in vv. 5-7, the sun, winds and water all follow prescribed and determined paths.\textsuperscript{163} Even if the elements move in such a way that makes them unstable, as the water in the stream constantly flows and changes, the movement of that stream is stable. While it may be impossible to depend on the reliability of each element qua element, the movement of each element evokes not the fleeting vanity of existence, but the order of creation.

Reflecting on Qohelet’s evocation of east and west for the sun, and north and south for the wind, Rudman remarks that the text “has now covered the four main points

of the compass. This reinforces the use in the passage of a whole of the four elements – the building blocks of the cosmos according to the ancient philosophers – to demonstrate the truth of Qoheleth’s assertion that everything is in constant motion and that this activity takes place within certain narrow limits defined by the deity.”

The view that the elements of creation follow predictable and stable paths is largely, but not wholly, consistent with other biblical descriptions of creation. For example, according to a passage in Genesis already cited in this section, the sun has dominion over the day (Gen. 1:14-18), meaning that it follows the predictable course of appearing in the sky at regular intervals. But God also “bids the sun not to rise, and the stars He seals up tight” (Job 9:7), commands the sun to stand still (Josh. 10:12), and even orders it to move backwards (II Kings 20:11). Another fire element, the lesser light of creation, the moon, is similarly subject to God’s will though it too generally follows a predictable course. Likewise water is given through rain or withheld through drought, causing crops to flourish or fail. The waters of the deep can be held back upon the seashore, or they can flood the earth. Winds (ruhot), too, are subject to God’s control.

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165 For similar conclusions about the sun, see also Jer. 31:34; Ps. 74:16; 136:7-8.
166 Also see Isa. 38:8; Ezek. 32:7; Joel 2:10; 3:4; 4:15; Hab. 3:11.
167 On God changing the normal course of the moon, see Josh. 10:12-13; Isa. 13:10; Ezek. 32:7-8; Joel 2:10; 3:4; 4:15; Hab. 3:11; Job 25:5.
168 On the normal course of the moon, see in addition to Gen. 1:14-18; Jer. 31:34; Ps. 8:4; 104:19; 136:7, 9.
169 On the giving of rain, see I Kings 17:14; Job 37:6; Jer. 5:24; Ezek. 34:26. On the withholding of rain, see Amos 4:7; Zech. 14:7. On the flourishing of crops, see Lev. 26:4; Hos. 2:10; Joel 2:19. On the failure of crops, see Hos. 2:11; Joel 1:10.
170 On God’s restraining the waters of the sea, see Ps. 33:7; Isa. 51:10.
171 On the flooding of the earth, see Gen. 7:11-8:3; Ezek. 26:19.
172 On God’s control of the winds, see Ex. 10:13, 19; Jer. 49:36; 51:1; Hos. 13:15; Ps. 135:7, and commentary below. These examples are drawn from Rudman, *Determinism in the Book of Ecclesiastes*, pp. 70-71.
Interpreting the ephemerality of v.2 through the implied determinism of vv. 4-7 suggests that creation is less given to chaos and volatility than might be thought when reading the opening verses of Ecclesiastes in isolation. Creation is in fact laden with recurring patterns. It is true that the Hebrew Bible records instances in which these patterns do not hold, when the Creator asserts control over creation. The biblical God is not a demiurge who sets the laws of nature before retreating into passivity, though later Jewish and Christian traditions have, at times, recast God into that role. However, the fact that the patterns of creation are not absolute does not mean they are not patterns. The existence of these patterns, and their recognition as patterns by the biblical authors, make it possible for humans to study and understand the elements of creation. It is not too much of a leap to say that these verses in Ecclesiastes and others establish the possibility of a basic physics because, though there are exceptions, by and large creation can be studied and the movement of its elements can be predicted.\(^\text{173}\)

The possibility of, if not the science of physics, then at least the observation of general tendencies latent in the structure of creation, will have a tremendous impact on the study of man in the Hebrew Bible. How so?

It is now time to explain the fuller impact of the elemental cosmology embedded in the structure of creation. But perhaps these verses in Ecclesiastes, which some scholars believe was composed or redacted after ancient Israel’s encounter with Persian

culture,\textsuperscript{174} is a unique and exceptional aside in the biblical corpus. Perhaps the elements articulated in Ecclesiastes are inconsistent with other depictions in the Hebrew Bible.\textsuperscript{175} What other evidence is there in the biblical sources that these four elements are the four primal elements?

It turns out that these four elements reappear together a number of times in the Hebrew Bible, each time describing the components of creation.\textsuperscript{176}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Element of Creation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Isa. 40:12</td>
<td>Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand,</td>
<td>Water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isa. 40:12</td>
<td>and meted out heaven with the span,</td>
<td>Fire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isa. 40:12</td>
<td>and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed</td>
<td>Earth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the mountains in scales, and hills in a balance?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isa. 40:13</td>
<td>Who has directed the wind of the Lord?</td>
<td>Wind (Ruah)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because it was established above that the heavens refer to fire, these verses from Isaiah corroborate the cosmological scheme of Ecclesiastes.\textsuperscript{177} Structured much like the verses from Isaiah as rhetorical questions, one evocative verse from Proverbs supports the same cosmological view.

\textsuperscript{174} In \textit{The Wisdom Books}, p. 338, Robert Alter observes that Ecclesiastes has two Persian loan-words “and certain turns of phrase that belong to the late Persian period.” Alter endorses the linguistic analyses in Choon-Leong Seow, \textit{Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary}, (New York: Doubleday, 1997). Compare to Fisch, “Those who have argued for or against a Greek influence in the verses above have, it seems, missed the point. It matters little whether he drew the image of such a cosmos from Hellenic or pre-Hellenic sources; what matters is the implicit recoil from such a world view...[In the Hellenic view, the] ever-returning spring consoles us for death itself. But Qohelet knows of no such consolation: ‘all things are full of weariness, man cannot utter it.’ That is not borrowing from Greek, or Egyptian, or Babylonian wisdom, but a judgment on it.” Harold Fisch, \textit{Poetry with a Purpose}, p. 167.

\textsuperscript{175} Harold Fisch compares the “ceaseless monotonous round” cosmology of Ecclesiastes to Psalms 19, 98, and 148, “which joyfully respond[s] to the word of its Creator.” Harold Fisch, \textit{Poetry with a Purpose}, p. 166.

\textsuperscript{176} Maimonides also mentions these elements in \textit{Mishneh Torah: Hilchot De’ot}, ch. 4, § 2.

\textsuperscript{177} Consider also the echoes reverberating in Isa. 40:15-17.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Element of Creation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prov. 30:4</td>
<td>Who has gone up to the heavens and come down,</td>
<td>Fire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prov. 30:4</td>
<td>who has scooped up the wind in his palms?</td>
<td>Wind (Ruah)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prov. 30:4</td>
<td>Who has wrapped up the winds in a cloak?</td>
<td>Wind (Ruah)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prov. 30:4</td>
<td>Who has raised up all ends of the earth?</td>
<td>Earth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Jeremiah too describes God’s creation by recalling the elemental components of existence. In addition, following the verses from Jeremiah are four verses from the Psalms that, in their way, confirm the biblical components of creation.178

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Element of Creation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jer. 10:12</td>
<td>He has made the earth by his power, he established the world by his wisdom,</td>
<td>Earth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer. 10:12</td>
<td>and has stretched out the heavens by his understanding.</td>
<td>Fire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer. 10:13</td>
<td>When his voice resounds with the great mass of water in the heavens, and he raises vapors from the ends of the earth; when he makes lightning flashes among the rain,</td>
<td>Water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer. 10:13</td>
<td>and brings forth the wind out of his storehouses [...]</td>
<td>Wind (Ruah)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Element of Creation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ps. 18:9</td>
<td>The earth heaved and shuddered, the mountains’ foundations were shaken.</td>
<td>Earth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ps. 18:9-10</td>
<td>They heaved, for smoke rose from His nostrils and fire from His mouth consumed, coals blazed up around Him. He tilted the heavens, came down, dense mist beneath His feet.</td>
<td>Fire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ps. 18:11</td>
<td>He mounted a cherub and flew, and He soared on the wings of the wind.</td>
<td>Wind (Ruah)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ps. 18:12</td>
<td>He set darkness His hiding-place round Him, His abode water-massing, the clouds of the skies.</td>
<td>Water</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Indeed, the four elements of creation are present in the original and essential account of creation in that first magisterial set of dependent clauses that open the whole of the Bible.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Element of Creation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gen. 1:1</td>
<td>When God began to create heaven</td>
<td>Fire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen. 1:1</td>
<td>and earth, and the earth then was weter and waste</td>
<td>Earth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

178 For similar grouping also in the Psalms, see Ps. 104:2-5.
and darkness over the deep
Gen. 1:2 and God’s breath (ruaḥ) hovering Wind (Ruah)
Gen. 1:2 over the waters [...] Water

Kass is partially correct when he says that “the primordial earth was, to begin with, watery, formless, chaotic, mobile but lifeless, undifferentiated stuff; out of this, everything (or nearly everything) else will come to be, through a process of demarcation, distinction, separation…The origin of the primordial chaos is absolutely unclear.”

The primordial mass of imminent creation may have been watery, but it was not totally undifferentiated, for it also had fire, wind and earth.

3.2.1.2. Man’s Correspondence to Creation

Here is one final grouping of the four elements of creation, this time from the last chapter of the book of Ecclesiastes, where this investigation began.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Element of Creation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eccles. 12:6</td>
<td>Until the silver cord is snapped, and the golden bowl is smashed,</td>
<td>Fire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eccles. 12:6</td>
<td>and the pitcher is broken against the well, and the jug smashed at the pit.</td>
<td>Water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eccles. 12:7</td>
<td>And dust returns to the earth as it was,</td>
<td>Earth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eccles. 12:7</td>
<td>and the ruah returns to God Who gave it.</td>
<td>Wind</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What sets this grouping apart from previous examples is that these lines do not refer to creation, but to man himself. The wider context of these verses is about the death and

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179 Leon R. Kass, *The Beginning of Wisdom: Reading Genesis*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 28. Though Kass emphasizes the watery dimension of the primordial stuff of creation here, on p. 44 he also acknowledges the component of light, which, above, is established as fire. In this last section of his remarkable book, Kass’ main point is that “The ultimate beginnings – and even the status quo ante, before God’s creative acts – are shrouded in mystery. And well they should be, for neither of the two options – ‘came from nothing’ and ‘it was there always’ – can we human beings picture to ourselves” (pp. 28-29). Though this chapter has demonstrated that throughout the Hebrew Bible four main components of creation can be known, this does not deny the abiding truth that the reader of Genesis is still left without an answer to the antinomy between creation *ex nihilo* or the eternity of the universe.
decay of an individual; they are preceded by the statement “for man is going to his everlasting house, and the mourners turn round in the market” (Eccles. 12:5). It is well known that man, after all, is made from the dust of the earth, or, as Alter brilliantly puts it, observing the word play between *adam*, “human,” and *adamah*, “soil,” “the Lord God fashioned the human, humus from the soil” (Gen. 2:7). Each one of the primordial elements of creation finds a correspondence within each individual. Man is not earth, or body, alone; but fire, water and wind as well. Each individual is an entire microcosm of creation, possessing within the self each of the four elemental building blocks from which everything in the world is constructed. And, because it was established above that the elements usually move in a predictable way, giving rise to the possibility of a general physics, so by parallel does the regularity of the elements in microcosm give rise to the possibility of a rough anthropology. Though each gust of wind and each eddy of water may seem random, the Bible appreciates the regularity and pattern of currents and streams. So too with man, each may be unique and surprising, mysterious unto the self, but en masse, man may be studied; there can be a human science. Each of the sections that follow explicates one dimension of being as it corresponds with one of the primordial elements of creation.

3.2.2. *Basar*: The Human Body’s Correspondence to Earth

3.2.2.1. *The Soft-Tissue of the Body*

As an element of creation, earth corresponds with *basar*, the body or flesh of humans and animals. Because it has hair, skin, organs, orifices, genitals, eyes, a circulatory system, and a respiratory system, it might be thought to encompass all of the
soft-tissue of the body.\textsuperscript{180} The term occurs 273 times in the Hebrew Bible, and of those, 104 instances – more than one third – refer to the basar of animals.\textsuperscript{181} Basar does not refer to God once.\textsuperscript{182}

When it does refer to man, basar is the flesh of the human body. In the Hebrew Scriptures, if basar is not quite a dimension of soul, neither does it stand for the sōma’s entombment of the psychē, as it does for Plato; nor as matter waiting to be animated by form as it does for Aristotle; nor again does basar primarily stand for the frailty and lust of our earthly pilgrimage, as it does in Pauline thought, though it does at times acquire to this latter meaning.\textsuperscript{183} Moreover, most commentators believe that, unlike the psychology of Plato, Aristotle and Paul, the Hebrew Bible does not uphold a dichotomy of body and soul. As one of the most perceptive Catholic commentators on Hebrew thought puts it, “[W]e should not say that man has a soul, but that he is a soul; nor consequently that he has a body, but that he is a body.”\textsuperscript{184}

\textsuperscript{180} For hair, see Job 4:15; skin, Lev. 13:3; organs, Lev. 4:11; orifices, Lev. 15:2; genitals, Ezek. 23:20; 16:26; eyes, Job 4:15; circulatory system, Gen. 9:4; respiratory system, Gen. 6:17. Ethan Dor-Shav, \url{http://dorshav.typepad.com/hebrewwisdom/page/2/}, accessed January 9, 2012.


\textsuperscript{182} But the seraphim of Ezekial do have basar. See Ezek. 10:12.


\textsuperscript{184} Tresmontant, \textit{A Study of Hebrew Thought}, p. 94. Tresmontant goes on to argue, incorrectly, that nefesh and basar are actually synonymous, as are the phrases “all basar” and “all nefesh.” “Both of these point to one reality: earth-bound, living man” (p. 94). He adduces evidence, for “all basar” from, Gen. 6:13, 17; 7:15, 21; Ps. 136:25; for “all nefesh” from Josh. 10:28, 30, 32,35, 37. Also see John W. Cooper, \textit{Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate}, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans, 1989). Those who believe that the Hebrew Bible does recognize a mind or soul/body duality refer to Ezek. 44:7; Ps. 16:9; Ps. 63:2, cf. Isa. 10:18; Isa. 31:3 et al.
When basar refers to animals, it is often the meat eaten by carnivores. The famous Egyptian cuisine about which the Israelites murmur in the wilderness is a pot of basar (Ex. 16:3). When the Israelites build a temple, priests are responsible for overseeing the sacrifice of animal basar. The folds of the Leviathan’s basar cling together to form an impenetrable shield (Job 41:15). The Pharaoh who makes Joseph his vizier dreams of “seven cows, fair to look at and fat in basar…another seven cows came up after them out of the Nile, foul to look at and meager in basar” (Gen. 41:2-5). One of the most monstrous and inhuman images in all of the Bible is that of the cannibalism that can befall man at his grisliest, expressed here in chilling chiasmus, “And you shall eat the basar of your sons, and the basar of your daughters you shall eat” (Lev. 26:29).

The term can refer to the living body of man as well. Levite priests must have expiation water sprinkled upon them, and a razor must pass over all their basar (Num. 8:7). As in the Greek aesthetic, there is a Hebrew sensibility, not widely expressed perhaps, but on occasion implied, that prefers the beauty of the young and pure basar over the basar marked by age and frailty. When a breeze passes over the face, it makes “the hair on my basar stand on end” (Job 4:15). Ahab hears words of sorrow, and “he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his basar, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth

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186 See Ex. 12:45-46; Lev. 4:11; 7:15-21; Num. 19:5; and Ezek. 40:43 for representative examples.
187 See Deut. 28:53-57 and Isa. 49:26 for similar, ghastly, usage. Only slightly less disturbing is Joseph’s interpretation of the baker’s dream, in which birds eat the baker’s basar from upon him (Gen. 40:19).
188 For similar usage see Lev. 13:2.
189 See II Kings 5:14; Job 33:25; Ex. 4:7.

3.2.2.2. The Partiality of Basar: Relationship and Weakness

This last usage introduces the idea that basar can specify a relationship among members of family and clan. Reuben speaks in favor of selling Joseph to a band of traders rather than killing him outright, since, after all, “he is our brother, our own basar” (Gen. 37:27).\footnote{See Neh. 5:5 for similar usage.} “Indeed,” Laban had said to Joseph’s father, Jacob, “you are my bone and my basar (Gen. 29:14). The use of the phrase is even older, it is what the original human said of his yet unnamed partner in Eden, “this one at last, bone of my bones and basar of my basar” (Gen. 2:23). During the monarchic period, tribal leaders come to David in Hebron and announce themselves, “here we are, your bone and your basar are we”’ (II Sam. 5:1).\footnote{For similar usage, see Jud. 9:2 and II Sam. 19:13-14. The usage at Lev. 25:49 sets the terms of clan and familial relation.} These usages identify a particular relationship, but basar can also be used to denote humanity as a whole. “And God saw the earth and, look, it was corrupt, for all basar had corrupted its ways on the earth” (Gen. 6:12).\footnote{For similar usage, see Gen. 6:17; 9:15-16; Isa. 40:5; Ps. 145:21.}

At times, especially when used to contrast humans to God, basar does indicate the human weakness that becomes its primary meaning in the New Testament. Contrast with trust and reliance on God, the Psalmist wonders, “what can basar do to me?” (Ps.
“Cursed be the man who trusts in man, and makes basar his arm,” Jeremiah proclaims, and “blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is” (Jer. 17:5,7). At Sinai, the Israelites cannot endure the voice of God, a power so overwhelming that they plead for Moses to represent them in their stead, “for who of all basar that has heard the voice of the living God speaking form the midst of the fire as we did and has lived?” (Deut. 5:23). Basar itself senses fear and awe in God’s presence, “my basar shudders from the fear of You, and of Your laws I am in awe” (Ps. 119:120).

3.2.2.3 Basar and the Earth

These examples demonstrate the range of meanings basar has in the Hebrew Bible. It is the physical and organic aspect of life that men share in essential respects with the rest of the animals. As with the animals, the basar of man is made of the earth. Generally, God will make Abraham’s seed “like the dust of the earth” (Gen. 13:16), and Abraham himself dares to challenge God’s judgment of Sodom, though he is “but dust and ashes” (Gen. 18:27). In referring to himself this way, Abraham merely recalls the judgment cast on Adam upon his expulsion from Eden, “for dust you are and to dust you shall return” (Gen. 3:19).

“Everything,” that is, not just man, “was from the dust, and everything goes back to the dust” (Eccles. 3:20). “Recall,” Job says to God, “pray, that like clay You worked me, and to dust You will make me return” (Job 10:9). And it is specifically the basar that is rooted in, literally, the primal element of the earth. If God were to will it, says Job’s companion Elihu, “all basar would expire together, man to the dust would return” (Job

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194 For similar usage, see Ps. 78:39; Job 10:4.
34:15). “All basar is grass, and all its grace is as the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades” (Isa. 40:6-7).

3.2.3. **Nefesh: The Soul’s Correspondence to Water**

3.2.3.1 **Bodily Analogies**

The element of water corresponds with nefesh (pl. nafshot), one of the terms that translators have rendered as “soul” or “spirit.” The term occurs roughly 755 times in the Hebrew Bible; 21 of those instances refer to God’s nefesh.

Because it corresponds with water, nefesh is often described alongside, or even as, the throat and the mouth. “Therefore Sheol has enlarged her nefesh, and opened her mouth without measure” (Isa. 5:14). The reference to the opening of the mouth helps to identify nefesh with a throat opened in preparation for imbibing a large quantity of liquid. But translators simply do not know what to do with this verse. The King James Version and the Koren Bible both render it as “the self;” both the Jewish Publication Society and the Revised Standard Version translations write “desire” and “appetite,” respectively; and

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195 The images of earth, clay, and dust in particular recall the “vegetative soul” in Aristotelian psychology. See Aristotle, *De Anima* 412a-b.
the New Jerusalem Bible has it as “throat.” These translations approach different aspects of the meaning of *nefesh*. “All a man’s toil is for his own mouth, yet his *nefesh* will not be filled” (Eccl. 6:7). This is another usage that highlights the connection of the *nefesh* with the throat, but connotes the aspect of desire that some translators emphasize. Or again, the *nefesh* plays a role in the famous murmuring of the Israelites once they find themselves parched in the desert. “Why did you bring us up from Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no bread and there is no water, and our *nefesh* loathes the wretched bread” (Num. 21:5). The Israelites felt the sun of the Sinai heavily on their shoulders. For only so long could they endure the dry, austere flatbread they hurriedly prepared as they hastened out of Egypt. This is the sense in which *nefesh*, the throat that imbibes water, “loathes the wretched bread.” There are also instances in which the *nefesh* is described, rather than the inner throat through which water passes, but the outer neck which can be “put into iron” (Ps. 105:18), or cut with a sword to end life (Jer. 4:10). “Prudence and cunning,” it says in Proverbs, “will be life to your *nefesh* and grace to your throat” (Prov. 3:21-22).

### 3.2.3.2 Desire and Emotion

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201 For similar usage in which *nefesh* is represented by the throat, see Ex. 23:12; 31:17; II Sam. 16:14; Hab. 2:5; Prov. 10:3; 16:24, 26; 27:7 Jer. 15:9; 31:13, 24; Job 11:20; 41:13. Compare Aristotle’s comment on the gullet of the crane in *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1118a; *Eudemian Ethics*, 1231a; and Aristophanes, *The Frogs*, 934.


203 For similar usage, see Ps. 119:25.

204 Alter tries to explain that “because of the poetic parallelism, the probable sense of the multivalent *nefesh* here, as frequently in Psalms (see, for example, Psalm 69:2), is ‘neck.’ The idea of wisdom as an ornament around the neck (compare verse 3) is common in Proverbs, but ‘life to your neck’ sounds odd. The reference might conceivably be to the life-protecting amulet, warn around the neck.” Robert Alter, *The Wisdom Books*, p. 206, n. 22.
“Desire” and “appetite” were used by two of the translators above for *nefesh*.

This understanding reasonably follows from the primal, bodily metaphor that associates the *nefesh* with the neck and throat. For whereas the throat is the channel through which refreshing water enters the body, it is also the site of asphyxiation and drowning; though the neck holds the head atop the shoulders, it is also the site of decapitation. To the biblical authors, it naturally followed that the *nefesh* should desire food and drink, striving to preserve the life that the neck both enables and endangers.\(^{205}\) The *nefesh* desires fruit, “I am like the last of the summer fruits, like the grape gleanings of the vintage, there is no cluster to eat, no first ripe fruit that my *nefesh* desires” (Micah 7:1). The *nefesh* desires meat: “Only wherever your *nefesh*’s craving may be you shall slaughter and eat meat [...]” (Deut. 12:15).\(^{206}\) The *nefesh* desires wine, “And you may give the silver for whatever your *nefesh* craves – cattle and sheep and wine and strong drink and whatever your *nefesh* may prompt you to ask [...]” (Deut. 14:26). These and other examples explain how the association of the *nefesh* moves from the throat and neck to a desire for nourishment.

But from there, the *nefesh* comes to desire many other things. The *nefesh* can sometimes be the source of romantic love, “Tell me, O thou whom my *nefesh* loves” (S. of S. 1:7, cf. 3:1-4), or the location of friendship, “...Jonathan’s *nefesh* became bound up with David’s *nefesh*, and Jonathan loved him as his own *nefesh*” (I Sam. 18:1).\(^{207}\)

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\(^{207}\) Interpreting the phrase “Jonathan loved [David] as himself,” Alter speculates that, because no reason is given, “Jonathan was smitten by David’s personal charm and perhaps by the sheer glamour of his victory, which exceeded even Jonathan’s own military exploits. It is noteworthy that, throughout this narrative, David is repeatedly the object of the verb ‘to love’ – in this chapter, Jonathan, the people, and Michal are all said to love David.” Robert Alter, *The David Story*, p. 112, n. 1b.
Hebrew Bible’s moments of spiritual attunement, man’s *nefesh* can desire God.208 “Let the disaster come upon him unwitting and the net that he set entrap him. May he fall into it in disaster. But my *nefesh* shall exult in the Lord” (Ps. 35:8-9).209 But the *nefesh* can also long for evil, “the *nefesh* of the wicked longs for evil, his fellow man gets no pity from him” (Prov. 21:10) and it can long for iniquity, “they feed on the sin of my people. And they set their *nefesh* on their iniquity” (Hos. 4:8). The *nefesh* longs for political sovereignty, as when Abner tells David “let me rise and go and gather to my lord the king all Israel, that they may make a pact with you, and you shall reign over all your *nefesh* desires” (II. Sam. 3:21),210 and as a close corollary, it can desire the borders of a homeland, “but to the land to which their *nefesh* desires to return, to it shall they not return” (Jer. 22:27). The *nefesh* can desire vanity (Ps. 24:4), sons and daughters (Ezek. 24:25) and parenthood in general (I Sam. 1:15), sexual love (Gen. 34:2), and parental love (Gen. 44:30). Some instances, such as “for He sated the thirsting *nefesh* and the hungry *nefesh* He filled with good” (Ps. 107:9), do not specify the object of thirst and hunger, suggesting that the *nefesh* can long for satisfaction without specifying what will slake its thirst.211

*Nefesh* can also refer to a range of emotions. When Sarah dies, Abraham must make burial arrangements near Hebron, and seeks permission from the local authorities. When they give their consent, Abraham responds “If you have it in your *nefesh* that I should bury my dead now before me, hear me, entreat for me Ephron son of Zohar, and

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208 For similar usage, see Ps. 84:3.
209 For similar usage, see Deut. 6:5; Isa. 26:9 and Jer. 12:7.
210 For similar usage, see I Kings 11:37.
let him grant me the cave […]” (Gen. 23:8). “To have it in your nefesh” here means “resolve.” Nefesh can be the site of frustration (Job 19:2), sympathy for the poor (Job 30:25), fear (Ps. 6:5), hopelessness (Jonah 2:8), impotence (Jer. 4:31), feelings of affliction and distress (Ps. 31:8 and Gen. 42:21), the suffering of misery (Isa. 53:11), bitterness (I Sam. 1:10), rage (Jud. 18:25), hatred (II Sam. 5:8, hatred of God’s deeds at Isa. 1:14), and that unmistakable sensation of disappointment and despondency that can only be remedied with a stiff drink (Prov. 31:6).

3.2.3.3 Life and Death

Beyond the usages associated with desire, the nefesh can sometimes stand for the condition of life. “And should a man be a foe to his fellow man and lie in wait for him and rise against him and strike down his nefesh and he die, and that man flee to one of these towns […]” (Deut. 19:11). Here “strike down his nefesh” means “he dies.”

Mothers name most of the characters in the Hebrew Bible, but Benjamin, named by his father Jacob, is an exception. As Rachel dies in childbirth, she calls the boy “Son of my Pain,” which Jacob changes to “Son of my Right.” “And it happened, as her nefesh ran out, for she was dying, that she called his name Ben-Oni, but his father called him Benjamin” (Gen. 35:18). The phrase “her nefesh ran out” means “she was dying.”

So closely can nefesh be associated with death that it sometimes means corpse, as when the Israelites are commanded to exile from their number anyone “infected with skin blanch and everyone suffering from genital flux and everyone defiled by an impure nefesh”

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212 For similar usage, see II Kings 9:15.
213 For similar usage, see II Kings 4:27.
214 For similar usage, see II Sam. 17:8.
215 For similar usage, see Deut. 19:6.
216 For similar usage, see Deut. 24:6; Prov. 7:23; 8:35-36; I Sam 2:33; 28:9; Ps. 30:4; 124:7.
(Num. 5:2).\textsuperscript{217} The famous \textit{lex talonis} employs the \textit{nefesh} to stand in for the whole of life. “And if there is a mishap, you shall pay a \textit{nefesh} for a \textit{nefesh}, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth [...]” (Ex. 21:23).\textsuperscript{218}

Understanding \textit{nefesh} in the context of life puts the second creation of the human in context, for the man fashioned from the soil “became a living \textit{nefesh}” (Gen. 2:7, cf. v. 19) as distinguished from the dead \textit{nefesh} that figures in Numbers. “All the days of his setting apart for the Lord, he shall not come to a dead \textit{nefesh}” (Num. 6:6).

The Biblical authors put \textit{nefesh} into the mouths of those pleading for their lives. “And the captain of fifty went up, and came and fell on his knees before Elijah, and pleaded with him, and said to him, ‘O man of God, I pray thee, let my \textit{nefesh} and the \textit{nefesh} of these fifty thy servants, be previous in thy sight’” (II Kings 1:13).\textsuperscript{219} And they put it in the desperate mouths of those pleading for their death. “Therefore now, O Lord, take my \textit{nefesh} from me, I pray thee, for it is better for me to die than to live” (Jonah 4:3).\textsuperscript{220}

\textit{Nefesh} is used in a number of other phrases that support the view that it stands for life. To seek someone’s life is to seek their \textit{nefesh} (Ex. 4:19).\textsuperscript{221} To save someone’s life is to save their \textit{nefesh} (II Sam. 19:6).\textsuperscript{222} To escape with one’s life is to escape with the \textit{nefesh} (Jer. 21:9).\textsuperscript{223} When trading possessions for life, it is the \textit{nefesh} that is traded (Job

\textsuperscript{217} In this passage Alter translates \textit{nefesh} as “corpse,” see Robert Alter, \textit{The Five Books of Moses}, p. 703, n. 2c. For similar usage, see Num. 6:6, 11; 19:11, 13.
\textsuperscript{218} For similar usage see Lev. 24:17-18 and I Kings 20:39, 42; Robert Alter, \textit{The Five Books of Moses}, p. 440, n. 23 and p. 652, n. 18.
\textsuperscript{219} For similar usage, see I Kings 3:11 and Esther 7:3.
\textsuperscript{220} For similar usage, see I Kings 19:4.
\textsuperscript{221} For similar usage, see I Sam. 16:11; 20:1; 22:23; 25:29; II Sam. 4:8; I Kings 19:10, 14; Jer. 4:30; 11:21; 38:16; and finally, the hopeful petition, “may they be shamed and abased one and all, who seek my \textit{nefesh} to destroy it, may they fall back and be disgraced, who desire my harm” (Ps. 40:15).
\textsuperscript{222} For similar usage, see Gen. 19:17; 32:31; I Kings 1:12.
\textsuperscript{223} For similar usage, see Jer. 39:18; 45:5.
When taking life into one’s own hands, it is the nefesh that stands for life (Jud. 12:3). The nefesh is the part of man that is thought to experience the power of death by exposure to the watery underworld. “For You will not forsake my nefesh to Sheol, You won’t let Your faithful one see the Pit” (Ps. 16:10).

This is why, afraid for his life, Abraham pleads with Sarai “Say, please, that you are my sister, so that it will go well with me on your count and my nefesh shall stay alive because of you” (Gen. 12:13). Wolff explains that “where the word ‘life’ occurs, nefesh is used as pronoun. Even a far-off echo of the throat, thirsty for life, cannot be entirely ignored. It is not by chance that the plea ‘let me live!’ is in Hebrew ‘Let my nefesh life!’ (I Kings 20:32).” When confronting death, it is the nefesh that is at stake, so Balaam asks in his prophecy “Who has numbered the dust of Jacob, who counted the issue of Israel? Let my nefesh but die the death of the upright, and may my aftertime be like his” (Num. 23:10).

Incidentally, the usage of nefesh to express life per se is so firmly entrenched in the minds of the biblical authors that it can also refer to nonhuman life. When they are created, aquatic creatures are called “living nefesh” that swarm (Gen. 1:20); land animals are “living nefesh” that crawl (Gen. 1:24). Animals in general are nefesh, as in the discussion of those that Noah salvages from drowning. “I am about to establish My covenant with you and with your seed after you, and with every living nefesh that is with

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224 For similar usage, see I Sam. 19:5; 28:21; Job 13:14; Ps. 119:109.  
225 For similar usage, see Ps. 30:3; 49:16; 86:13; Isa. 3:9. Wolff ventures that, when God returns the nefesh from the underworld, the text expresses “the return to healthy life of the whole man who has through his illness, already been exposed to the power of death.” Wolff, Anthropology of the Old Testament, p. 20.  
226 For similar usage, see Gen. 19:19-21.  
228 For similar usage, see Jud. 16:30; Ps. 54:4 and Prov. 18:7.  
229 For similar usage, see Lev. 11:10, 46; Ezek. 47:9.
you, the fowl and the cattle and every beast of the earth with you, all that have come out of the ark, every beast of the earth” (Gen. 9:10, cf. also vv. 12 and 15-16).  

**3.2.3.4 Synecdoche for the Whole Person**

Though *nephesh* can be used to refer to non-human animals, its primary usage is so emphatically human that it alone can stand for the whole person.  

Indeed, Gelin suggests translating *nephesh* as “being” or “self.”

“I shall set My face” says the Lord, “against the *nephesh* who consumes blood and cut him off from the midst of his people” (Lev. 17:10).  The consumption of blood again associates the *nephesh* with the throat, but in this prohibition the *nephesh* stands for the whole person who transgresses the commandment.  

In the same way, God turns his face against the *nephesh* that turns to ghosts and spirits, who goes “whoring after them” as idols (Lev. 20:6).  The *nephesh* that fails to observe the Day of Atonement, shall perish from the midst of his people, especially the *nephesh* that desecrates the day with labor (Lev. 23:29-30).  *Nefesh* is used to refer to the person who transgresses any of the commandments in general, “should man

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230 As it is here connected to the water of the flood, so the *nephesh* is sometimes connected with another liquid, the liquid of life, i.e. blood. For three especially indicative examples thereof, see Gen. 9:4; Lev. 17:11 and Deut. 12:23.  See Dor-Shav, “A Soul of Fire: A Theory of Biblical Man,” pp. 89, 106-107, n. 59.

231 On Gen. 2:7, Gelin comments “When the sacred writer wishes to say ‘a living person,’ he simply said ‘a nephesh’; thus, when in Genesis 12:5 Abraham is shown journeying from the region of the East to Canaan, he is said to have with him some ‘nephesh,’ i.e., some people, some persons.” Albert Gelin, *The Concept of Man in the Bible*, p. 14.


234 “It is not by chance that the Israelite would have seen *nephesh* – as the throat which by eating and breathing satisfies the vital needs of every individual – as being simply the appropriate term for the individual person as well.” Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, p. 21.
or woman commit any of the human offenses, to betray the trust of the Lord, that nefesh shall bear guilt” (Num. 5:6). 235

The singular nefesh can refer to a collective group, as in “And Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his nephew and all the goods they had gotten and the nefesh they had bought in Haran, and they set out on the way to the land of Canaan” (Gen. 12:5). 236 And the plural nafshot can carry the same meaning. “For whosoever does any of these abhorrences, the nafshot who does it shall be cut off from the midst of his people” (Lev. 18:29). 237 Nefesh is the term employed when Genesis recounts genealogy, “these are the sons of Lea whom she bore to Jacob in Paddan-Aram, and also Dinah his daughter, every nefesh of his sons and daughters, thirty-three” (Gen. 46:15). 238

Throughout the tale of Jacob’s stealing Esau’s birthright, nefesh is used to refer to the whole person. The ailing Isaac asks for his son’s game, “…bring it to me that I may eat, so that my nefesh may solemnly bless you before I die” (Gen. 27:4). 239 And at the moment of deceit, Jacob says “I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you have spoken to me. Rise, pray, sit up, and eat of my game so that your nefesh may solemnly bless me” (Gen. 27:19). Isaac responds by saying “Serve me, that I may eat of the game of my son, so that my nefesh may solemnly bless you” (Gen. 27:25). Finally, Isaac and Esau discover they have both been deceived when Esau asks “Let my father rise and eat of the game his son so that your nefesh may solemnly bless me” (Gen. 27:31). Wolff does not think that anything “in the whole range of nefesh’s meaning for which we have found evidence justifies us in thinking here of a particular power and endowment of soul, in

235 For similar usage see Lev. 19:8; 22:3-4 and Num. 9:13, 18.
236 For similar usage see Jer. 43:6.
237 For similar usage see Ezek. 13:19.
238 For similar usage see Gen. 46:18, 22, 25-27.
239 Robert Alter, Five Books of Moses, p. 139, n. 4.
connection with which magic ideas are supposed to have been preserved.” Instead, “we ought much rather to think here of the simple pronominal use; the context gives it sufficient content; in all four passages there has been talk immediately beforehand about the eating of the desired venison – and on the first occasion Isaac’s death is mentioned immediately afterwards. Isaac’s ‘I’ that blesses is as nefesh the desirous and satisfied person, who is still alive but who is already facing death.” Wolff is correct that, at times nefesh is used as a pronoun. But he derives this interpretation by observing that in each case someone wants to eat. Wolff fails to note the consistent usage here of nefesh as the site and source of blessing. Read in the wider context of usages of this kind, such as “bless, O my nefesh, the Lord, and everything in me, His holy name” (Ps. 103:1, cf. 104:1), there is reason to understand nefesh as an aspect of the soul that yearns for praise and pride of place, that seeks to assert the continued integrity and dignity of the whole self.

3.2.3.5 Nefesh and Water

The four general categories above represent the range of meaning that nefesh takes in the Hebrew Bible. Throughout, there exists a thoroughgoing correlation between nefesh and liquid, specifically the cosmological element of water.

Parched land thirsting for water describes by analogy the desire of the nefesh. An expression of the Psalmist’s longing for proximity to God reads “I stretched out my hands

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241 “The speaker’s exhortation to his inner self or essential being (nefesh) to bless the Lord is an unusual rhetorical move in Psalms...This exhortation imparts a sense of exaltation to this psalm of thanksgiving, the occasion for which may be the recovery from a grave illness, as verses 3 and 4 suggest.” Robert Alter, Psalms, p. 358, n. 1. “Thus, before Yahweh, man in the Old Testament does not only recognize himself as nefesh in his neediness; he also leads his self on to hope and to praise” Wolff, Anthropology of the Old Testament, p. 25.
to You – my *nefesh* like thirsty land to You” (Ps. 143:6). The same usage is applied in
the corporate sense, when the nation of Israel returns from her exile, her *nefesh* “shall be
as a watered garden, and they shall not pine any more at all” (Jer. 31:11). The
experience of hearing good news from a distant land calms the anxious desires as “cool
water to a famished *nefesh*” (Prov. 25:25). In another context, Isaiah compares the
ephemerality of military prowess to “when a thirsty man dreams, and, behold he drinks;
but he awakes, and, behold, he is faint, and his *nefesh* longs for water” (Isa. 29:8). “We
remember,” the Israelite slaves murmur as they wander the scorched wilderness of the
Sinai, “the fish we used to eat in Egypt for free, the cucumbers and the melons and the
leeks and the onions and the garlic. And now our *nefesh* is dry.” (Num. 11:5-6).

No text in the Hebrew Bible quite suggests the correspondence of *nefesh* and
water as powerfully or as clearly as Psalm 42.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Text of Psalm 42</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>As a deer yearns for streams of water, so my <em>nefesh</em> yearns for You, O God.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>My whole <em>nefesh</em> thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and see the presence of God?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>My tears become my bread day and night as they said to me all day long, “Where is your God?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>These do I recall and pour out of my <em>nefesh</em>: when I would step in the procession, when I would march to the house of God with the sound of glad song of the celebrant throng.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Why are you cast down, my <em>nefesh</em>? And how you moan for me! Hope in God, for yet will I acclaim Him for His rescuing presence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>My God, my <em>nefesh</em> is cast down within me. Therefore do I recall You from Jordan land, from the Hermans of Mount Mizar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Deep unto deep calls out at the sound of Your channels. All your breakers and</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

242 For similar usage see Ps. 107:4-5, 9 and Ps. 63:2. On this last instance, Alter notes that “the multivalent *nefesh* could conceivably mean ‘being’ (King James Version, ‘soul’), but the parallelism with ‘flesh’ suggests the anatomical sense of the term. The speaker’s longing for God is so overwhelmingly intense that he feels it as a somatic experience, like the thirsty throat of a man in the desert, like yearning flesh.” Robert Alter, *The Book of Psalms*, p. 216, n. 2.

243 For similar usage, see Isa. 58:11.

244 Actually the slaves only think they remember these luxuries. The imagined past is more pleasant than the discomforts of the present. See Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, (New York: Basic Books, 1985), pp. 50-53.
waves have surged over me.

9 By day the Lord ordains His kindness and by night His song is with me - prayer to the God of my life.

10 I would say to the God my Rock, “Why have You forgotten me? Why in gloom do I go, hard pressed by the foe?”

11 With murder in my bones, my enemies revile me when they say to me all day long, “Where is your God?”

12 Why are you cast down, my nefesh? And how you moan for me! Hope in God, for yet will I acclaim Him, His rescuing presence and my God.

Nefesh appears in six of the Psalm’s twelve verses. First the yearning of the nefesh is compared to an animal thirsting for water (v. 1), then the nefesh itself “thirsts” (v. 2). Memories of past glories move the psalmist to “pour out” his nefesh (v. 5). The imagery of liquid and water permeate the author’s language, including references to excessive crying (v. 4), and God’s power and presence is compared with the ebb and crack of the ocean’s impenetrable mysteries (v. 8).

The conception of the nefesh as a substance that can be poured as liquid is found elsewhere in Hebrew Scripture. It is expressed, for instance, in one of the examples used above to demonstrate that the nefesh is the site of desire, when Hannah rebukes Eli and says that she “poured out my nefesh to the Lord” (I Sam. 1:15). In the book of Lamentations’ dark depiction of Jerusalem, besieged and starving, the children ask their mothers for food, and “they swoon like wounded men in the broad places of the city, when their nefesh is poured out into their mother’s bosom” (Lam. 2:12). At the onset of his affliction, Job’s nefesh “spills out” (Job 30:16), and the psalmist pleads with God “pour not out my nefesh” (Ps. 141:8). Though it is not the case for Job, Isaiah demonstrates that at least one meaning of pouring out the nefesh is death (Isa. 53:12).

245 For similar usage, see Num. 11:6.
The usage of *nefesh* in Ps. 42 that is associated with weeping also recurs in the Hebrew Bible. It appears again in the following psalm, where the *nefesh* is again laid low and moans for God’s deliverance (Ps. 43:5). And, if Israel refuses to hear Jeremiah’s warnings, the prophet’s “*nefesh* will weep in secret” (Jer. 13:17). But the correspondence between *nefesh* and water is not limited to thirst, pouring and weeping. In straights the *nefesh* is also associated with drowning. Jonah, the prophet from Mediterranean coast whose calling brings him into the depths of the sea, prays to God out of distress, “the waters compassed about my *nefesh*, to the point of death. The depths closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head.” (Jonah 2:6).246 This usage of *nefesh* captures a multivalence from above, connoting both the neck drowning in “all thy billows and thy waves” and the psychic experience of being overwhelmed.

3.2.4. **Ruah**: The Soul’s Correspondence to Wind

Whereas *basar* corresponds to earth and *nefesh* corresponds to water, *ruah* (pl., *ruḥot*) literally means wind. It also has a literal psychic meaning. Unlike the other terms, it is not by analogy or correspondence that *ruah* refers to a building block of creation and a dimension of the human soul. In the case of *ruah*, the same word literally and directly refers to both as a homonym. Of the 389 instances (378 Hebrew and 11 Aramaic), over one hundred instances apply to the *ruaḥ* of God,247 another hundred or so refer to wind, and about a dozen are characteristics of animals and even idols. Just over one quarter of

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246 For similar usage, see Ps. 69:2 and 124:4.
total instances refer to the human *ruah*. The fact that animals are also possessed of *ruah* is but another suggestion that, in the biblical view, man is ontologically embedded within and a part of creation rather than over and above it. While it may be the case that man is charged with “conquering” the earth (Gen. 1:28), it is also the case that “the fate of the sons of man and the fate of the beast is a single fate. As one dies so dies the other, and all have a single *ruah*, and man’s advantage over the beast is naught, for everything is mere breath” (Eccles. 3:19).

3.2.4.1. **Meteorological Meaning and Beyond**

It would not be quite right to say that in Hebraic thought *ruah* is analogous to the Greek *aether*. For one thing, *ruah* is not a substance but substance in motion; not air, but moving air or wind. In the opening verses of Genesis, it is the *ruah* that “hovers” over the waters (Gen. 1:2). The first man and the first woman hear “the sound of the Lord God walking about in the garden in the evening *ruah*” (Gen. 3:8), referring to the twilight breeze that is refreshment from the midday sun. Isaiah refers to trees of the forest that are moved by *ruah* (Isa. 7:2). *Ruah* can blow the wheat from the chaff (Isa 41:16), and is associated with rain (II Kings 3:17), and with storms and clouds (I Kings 18:45).

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248 For the *ruah* of animals, see Gen. 6:7; 7:15, 22; Ezek. 1:12, 20; 10:17, Eccles. 3:21; Isa. 31:3. For the *ruah* of idols, see Jer. 10:14; 51:17; Hab. 2:19 and Isa. 41:29. See Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, p. 234, n. 5.

249 An additional piece of evidence that all living things share a shared *ruah* is contained in the statement “by the word of God the heavens are made, and all their hosts by the *ruah* of his mouth” (Ps. 33:6). For the general common fate of man and beast, see Ps. 36:7; 49:14; Hab. 1:14; Soloveitchik, *Emergence of Ethical Man*, pp. 65-66.

The movement of *ruaḥ* brings in and takes away the locusts in Egypt. “And Moses stretched out his hand over the land of Egypt, and the Lord drove an east *ruaḥ* into the land all that day and all that night. When it was morning, the east *ruaḥ* bore the locust” (Ex. 10:13). “And the Lord turned round a very strong west *ruaḥ*, and it bore off the locust and thrust it into the Sea of Reeds, not a locust remained in all the territory of Egypt” (Ex. 10:19). Here lies the crucial dimension and key to the distinctiveness of *ruaḥ*. It is not merely air, nor finally is it merely air in motion. *Ruah* is air that is put in motion by God for a purpose. *Ruah* is directed movement for divine ends.

Those ends are, at times, difficult for man to discern. Job speaks of the unpredictability of *ruaḥ* when he remarks that his “days are swifter than the weaver’s shuttle.” Life is brief, its hours and days “snap off without any hope. Recall that my life is a *ruaḥ*” (Job 7:6-7), meaning that his life is ephemeral, elusive, here and then gone again. It is as unpredictable as the currents of breeze that twirl the falling leaf and that swirl the winter’s snow. Job does not believe that the movement of *ruaḥ*, and perhaps creation generally, can be precisely known. The view that *ruaḥ*, even a divinely directed *ruaḥ*, is ultimately mysterious from a human vantage does not therefore vitiate the fact that it is directed.

Some examples of this kind of directed *ruaḥ*, a divine wind, are as follows. God directs *ruaḥ* to dry the seabed, allowing Israel to cross out of Egyptian bondage into the wilderness. “And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the Lord led the sea with a mighty east *ruaḥ* all night, and He made the sea dry ground, and the waters were

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split apart” (Ex. 14:21). Once in the wilderness, God charges a *ruah* to bring quails to the Israelites to satisfy their craving to eat meat (Num. 11:31). On at least one occasion, a divine *ruah* geographically moves a prophet from one location to another (Ezek. 3:12-14). In Ezekiel, a tempestuous *ruah* is an expression of divine anger, “I will cause a stormy *ruah* in my fury; and there shall be a deluge of rain in my anger, and great hailstones in my fury to consume it” (Ezek. 13:13).

### 3.2.4.2. Breath and Vitality

The movement of *ruah* relates its meteorological usage to another common meaning in Hebrew Scripture. *Ruah* means breath, the air moves through the lungs; and by extension it comes to mean vitality.

Even in English, “breath” means both the air that circulates through the body and the offending smell of halitosis. Of all biblical figures, it is characteristic of Job to show awareness of this latter sense, “my *ruah* has become strange to my wife, I repelled my very own children” (Job 19:17). But generally, when the biblical authors employ the term to refer to breath, it is the former meaning they have in mind. When Samson’s feats of strength exhaust him he became “very thirsty, and he called on the Lord, and said, ‘Thou hast given this great deliverance into the hand of thy servant, and now shall I die of thirst?’” Echoing the provision of water to the exhausted Israelites in the scorched deserts of Sinai, God now too causes water to spring from a rock. When Samson drinks it, “his *ruah* was restored and he revived” (Jud. 15:18-19), meaning that his breath returned to him. Similarly, when David finds a starving Egyptian in the wilderness “And

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252 For similar usage, see Gen. 8:1; Ex. 15:8.
they gave him a slice of pressed figs and two raisin cakes. And he ate, and his *ruaḥ* revived, for he had eaten no bread and drunk no water three days and three nights” (I Sam. 30:12).

The living animals that are threatened by the water of the Flood are *basar* vitalized by *ruaḥ*. “I am about to bring the Flood, water upon the earth, to destroy all *basar* that has within it the *ruaḥ* of life from under the heavens, everything on the earth shall perish” (Gen. 6:17), then onto Noah’s ark the animals came “two by two of all *basar* that has the *ruaḥ* of life within it” (Gen. 7:15). The description preempts the terrifying conclusion, in which “all *basar* that stirs on the earth perished” (Gen. 7:21), *ruaḥ* smothered out of existence.

So it is that the usage of *ruaḥ* as breath and vitality is confirmed in cases where the *ruaḥ* departs and men die. In fact, the first time that the Bible gives voice to the idea of death, it does so by specifying the *ruaḥ* that departs the lifeless flesh. “My *ruaḥ* shall not abide in the human forever, for he is but *basar*” (Gen. 6:3); “his *ruaḥ* departs, he returns to dust” (Ps. 146:4). As the verse from Genesis suggests, when *ruaḥ* leaves the human body, the *basar* of dust and earth, it returns to God. “And dust returns to the earth as it was, and the *ruaḥ* returns to God Who gave it” (Eccles. 12:7).

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253 Fish and bugs, animals not drowned in the flood, do not have *ruaḥ*.  
254 For similar usage, see Ps. 104:29-30. A variation on this usage sometimes holds, in a larger sense, the divine quality of *ruaḥ* in opposition to *basar*, the location of human weakness. “Now Egypt is man, and not God; and their horses flesh, and not *ruaḥ*” (Isa. 31:3).  
255 This usage of *ruaḥ* is often paired with other terms for “soul”. For pairings of *ruaḥ* and *neshama*, see Isa. 42:5; 57:16; Job 34:14-15; Gen 7:22, with comment in Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses*, p. 45, n. 22. For pairings of *ruaḥ* and *nefesh*, see Job 12:10; 34:14-15 and general commentary in Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, p. 33, who writes that “We can see here the stereometry of synthetic thinking, which approaches a phenomenon from different sides. In *nefesh* the organ of breathing and the process of breathing itself are seen together. In *ruaḥ*, however, it is the ‘wind’ which proceeds from Yahweh and returns to him that also constitutes the breath of man’s life.”
It is clear from these examples that “breath” does not fully capture this usage of ruah. Breath, in this sense, concretizes the larger phenomenon of vitality as such. So it is not merely to breathe, but to fully animate and give life to man in a wider sense that God infuses breath into bones and sinews, infuses ruah into basar. \(^{256}\) “Behold, I will cause ruah to enter into you, and you shall live: and I will lay sinews upon you, and I will bring up basar upon you, and cover you with skin, and put ruah in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the Lord” (Ezek. 37:5-6). \(^{257}\) Some of the biblical authors write of resurrection from the dead, and this takes place through the reinfusion of ruah. “And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and have brought you up out of your graves, and I shall put my ruah in you, and you shall live” (Ezek. 37:14).

Idols, by contrast, lack the vital power of ruah. “Woe to him that says to the wood, ‘Awake!,’ to the dumb stone, ‘Arise!’ Can it teach? Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, and there is no ruah at all in it” (Hab. 2:19). And “every goldsmith is put to shame by his carved idol,” Jeremiah intones. “For his molten image is false, and there is no ruah in them. They are vanity, the work of delusion” (Jer. 10:14). \(^{258}\)

### 3.2.4.3. **Between Inspiration and Enthusiasm**

A bolder, extraordinary ruah comes to men in much the same way that nourishment brought ruah to a weary Samson. Scripture records instances of God acting in human affairs by temporarily endowing individuals with apparently superhuman qualities. Indeed, in the verses that immediately precede Samson’s exhaustion and

\(^{256}\) Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, p. 33

\(^{257}\) For similar usage, see Ezek. 37:8-10 and Zech. 12:1.

\(^{258}\) For similar usage, see Jer. 51:17.
refreshment, we learn that “the ruah of the Lord came upon him” and the ropes that bound him “became as flax that was burnt with fire, and his bands melted from off his hands.” He takes the jawbone from the skeleton of a donkey and kills “a thousand men” (Jud. 15: 14-17). God’s ruah supercharges Samson, accentuating his already prodigious strength.

“Inspire” means to blow or breath into; in this context, an inspired person is one who has been endowed with ruah. I do not know the history of the word, but the Latin derivation only partially captures the Hebrew idea, for ruah in this case is not simply the breath blown into the inspired. It is a specifically divine quality. The biblical ruah that goes from God into man lies somewhere between the meteorological overtones of the Latin “inspiration” and the theological overtones of the Greek “enthusiasm.”

Above and beyond the meteorological ruah that God can at times direct, it is through this sharper ruah that the biblical God acts in history. When God’s ruah inspires and enthuses, biblical figures go out to battle and save Israel (Jud. 3:10); tear a lion to pieces (Jud. 14:6),\(^{259}\) reconstruct the Temple (Ezra 1:5); it even transforms Saul into another man (I Sam. 10:6). Through the strategic inspiration/enthusiasm, God can cause men to be dishonest, the Bible speaks of numerous occasions of a “lying ruah” (I Kings 22:21-23).\(^{260}\) Ruah allows Caleb to trust in God and embolden the Israelites enough to enter the land of Israel (Num. 14:24). Ezekiel contends that God must restore Israel’s ruah in order to return to the law and His judgments (Ezek. 36:26).\(^{261}\)

And with regard to Israel’s return to the law, the language of ruah is evoked to describe how prophecy works. Again, it is Ezekiel who says that “the ruah of the Lord

\(^{259}\) For similar usage, see Jud. 13:25.

\(^{260}\) For similar usage, see II Kings 19:7.

\(^{261}\) With regards to this verse in particular, see the treatment of lev in Ezek. 19.
fell upon me” (Ezek. 11:5). In the wilderness of Sinai, Moses wishes aloud that the whole nation of Israel would share in the ruah that enables prophecy, “would that all the Lord’s people were prophets, that the Lord would place His ruah upon them” (Num. 11:28-29). In at least one eschatological vision, ruah will come “upon all basar” and allow for universal prophecy (Joel 3:1).

Philosophic readers of these passages have long struggled to make sense of them. On its face, a divine superpower that, of a sudden, transforms men does not comport with normal experience of the world or sound deductions of reason. It would go too far to say that the prophetic capacities enabled by ruah are tongue in cheek; and in point of fact, many readers of the Bible will have themselves witnessed ordinary individuals who at moments of consequence acquire – seemingly from outside of their skills or experiences – a special genius. They seem literally, and sometimes for just a moment, to breathe a new air. Still, at least some biblical verses are aware of the mythological quality to enthusiasm and inspiration. Claiming possession of ruah in this context, for instance, is enough for a man to be ridiculed (Hos. 9:7). Moreover, in some instances, God’s ruah enters into individuals or even nations who for divine purposes without themselves being

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262 For similar usage, see Num. 11:17, 25; 24:2; Isa. 42:1; 11:2.
aware of it. “The Lord has raised up the ruah of the kings of the Medes, for his purpose against Babel is to destroy it” (Jer. 51:11).  

*Ruah* can move man to artistic achievement. When the artisan Bezalel is called upon to implement the design of the Tabernacle, he is said to be filled with “the ruah of God in wisdom and in understanding and in knowledge and in every task” so that he can “work in gold and in silver and in bronze, and in stonecutting for settings and in wood carving, to do every task” (Ex. 31:3). The text seems to go out of its way to emphasize that, in this conception, artistry is a form of intelligence, “wisdom, understanding and knowledge.” And in fact there are other instances in which ruah brings about a heightened consciousness, not in terms of prophecy but human wisdom. In looking for a high level economic advisor to implement a budgeting cycle dependent on harvest bounty and drought predictions, Pharaoh looks for a man in whom the ruah of God resides, “Could we find a man like him, in whom is the ruah of God?” (Gen. 41:38). This man turns out to be Joseph, and vv. 33 and 39 fix Pharaoh’s understanding of “the ruah of God” as discerning and wise.

Lastly, the Hebrew Bible understands that inspiration and enthusiasm, *ruah* of this kind, plays a role in political leadership. Those tasked with the exercise of high responsibility have a way about them that is not born of them alone, but seems to transcend themselves. Channeling greater powers through an individual is fraught with potential vulnerabilities; for the Bible knows well the dangers of worshipping men as if they were God. This it calls “idolatry.” Nevertheless, if political leaders are to have a chance at discharging their responsibilities well, they are going to need wisdom and

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264 For similar usage, see Deut. 2:30.
265 For similar usage, see Ex. 28:3; 35:31.
266 For similar usage, see Neh. 9:20.
confidence from the highest orders. When transfers of authority occur in the biblical texts, leaders of this kind take a deep breath, straighten their backs, and literally inhale a new *ruah*. “And Joshua son of Nun was filled with the *ruah* of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands upon him, and the Israelites heeded him and did as the Lord had charged Moses” (Deut. 34:9).267

David is introduced in a similar manner. After Samuel anoints him with oil, “the *ruah* of the Lord gripped David from that day onward” (I Sam. 16:13).268 Later, Elisha asks of Eliyahu that “a double portion of thy *ruah* be upon me” (II Kings 2:9), and indeed it is said that “the *ruah* of Eliyahu rests on Elisha” (II Kings 2:15).

3.2.4.4. **Feelings and Will**

The transfer of political authority is but one dimension of the Bible’s use of the term *ruah* as it stands between inspiration and enthusiasm. *Ruah* boosts the confidence of political leaders and endows them with enlarged capacities of rule. But just as the newly anointed breathe a new air, they can steal the breath away from astonished onlookers. Solomon had this effect. “When the Queen of Sheba saw the wisdom of Solomon, the house that he had built, and the food of his table, and the sitting of his servants, and the attendance of his ministers, and their apparel, and his cupbearers, and his burnt-offerings…there was no more *ruah* in her” (I Kings 10:5-6). This statement describes more than breathlessness, it is the emotional sensation of looking upon a

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267 Compare with Num. 27:16, anticipated by a similar phrase at Num. 16:22.
268 See also 1 Sam. 16:14, where the *ruah* of the Lord is removed from Saul. Alter comments that “In the transfer of election of monarchs, one gets the picture of a kind of spiritual seesaw. As the spirit of the Lord descends on, seizes, David, it departs from Saul…In the theopsychology of ancient Israel, extraordinary states were explained as investments by a divine spirit. The charisma of leadership, not passed to David, was a descent of the spirit.” Robert Alter, *The David Story*, p. 98, n. 14.
breathtaking scene. In the same way, Jacob’s *ruah* returns to him, recovering from the breathtaking news that his son, his favorite son, whom he had long thought dead, has survived and flourished in Egypt. “And they spoke to him all the words of Joseph that he had spoken to them, and he saw the wagons that Joseph sent to convey him, and the *ruah* of Jacob their father was revived” (Gen. 45:27). When biblical figures experience the sensation of their breath being taken away, or, at long last, being able to breathe easily once again, it is the *ruah* that they are experiencing. In the context of marital infidelity, the Pentateuch speaks of a “*ruah* of jealousy” that plagues the betrayed spouse (Num. 5:14, 30). From taking in a breathtaking sight, to returning to one’s senses after hearing shocking news, to the emotional travail that comes to the partner of an adulterer, *ruah* takes on a range of emotional meanings.

One of the emotional meanings is sorrow and frustration. After a real estate deal goes awry, Ahab has a temper tantrum that leads his wife to ask “why is your *ruah* so sad, that you eat no bread?” (I Kings 21:5). The frustration of Ahab’s *ruah* can grow into anger when, for instance, a military commander’s orders are imperfectly followed. Although his junior officers were insubordinate, upon learning that his objectives were nevertheless met his “*ruah* was abated,” meaning that his anger subsided (Jud. 8:3).

At times *ruah* is described in terms of duration. Proverbs speaks of *ruah* being short or long, musing on the fact that “patience means great discernment, but shortness of *ruah* multiplies folly” (Prov. 14:29). Alter renders “shortness of *ruah*” as “impatience,” a translation that is supported by other examples such as “a man of short *ruah* commits

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269 For similar usage, see Isa. 54:6 and Malachi 2:16.
270 For similar usage, see Gen. 26:35 and Job 7:11.
folly, but a cunning man will be raised high” (Prov. 14:17). Further, length of ruah would mean patience or endurance. The ruah can serve to keep a man hopeful in his affliction, serving as a source of endurance. “A man’s ruah sustains him in his illness, but a lamed ruah who can bear?” (Prov. 18:14). Moreover, “better is duration of ruah than haughtiness of ruah” (Eccles. 7:8), meaning, better is patience than pride. The same idea is expressed still in Proverbs, “pride before a breakdown, and before stumbling, haughty ruah” (Prov. 16:18). Egypt, often a symbol of imperial pride, is thought to be drunk on its own inebriated ruah. “The Lord has mingled a ruah of confusion in the midst of her, and they have caused Egypt to err in all its works, as a drunken man staggers in his vomit” (Isa. 19:14).

The trouble with simply translating these terms as “impatience,” “patience” or “endurance” is that readers of the Bible will miss the deeper connection between these and other uses of the term. For the authors of the Bible, the same inner capacity that allows for endurance and patience also experiences breathlessness in awe, as well as the confidence of soul that allows for sound political rule. One specific example of translators losing the multivalence of ruah is when, in Egypt, Israel is said to be of short ruah. “And Moses spoke thus to the Israelites, but they did not heed Moses out of shortness of ruah and hard bondage” (Ex. 6:9). Alter, following Rashi, translates ruah as “breath” here. Other translations, such as the King James Version and the Jewish Publication Society put it as “spirit.” Ruah captures both of them: the Israelite laborers

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271 For similar usage, see Job 21:4 and Micah 2:7.
272 For similar usage, see Prov. 16:32, cf. Pirkei Avot, 4:1.
273 For similar usage, see Isa. 66:2.
274 The authors of the Bible and Homer conceive of patience in a similar way. One of Odysseus’s epithets is “polutlas,” long suffering or much enduring. This epithet comes from klaō, which unlike fērō, never refers to the body. Ruah and cognates of klaō both describe inner or psychic rather than physical endurance.
were both in the most literal sense out of breath, and they were downcast and despondent, impatient with the drudgery and humiliation of an existence of bondage. In the Bible’s psychology, these two sensations are related because they spring from the very same part of us.

Finally, at times ruah refers to a quality of firmness, steadiness, and endurance. It would not be wrong to think of this in terms of what later thinkers call “will.” When the Psalmist hopes for a firm ruah (Ps. 51:12), he hopes to acquire steadfastness. Or when he asks for sustenance from God, “give me back the gladness of Your rescue and with a noble ruah sustain me” (Ps. 51:14), he directs himself to the aspect of God that carries out decisions.

It sometimes means will in another sense, that of stubbornness and error. “My people ask counsel of a piece of wood, and their staff declares to them! For the ruah of harlotry has caused them to err, and they have gone astray lewdly from under their God” (Hos. 4:12). Here ruah refers to the seductions of idolatry, an impulse that turns man from God. Further, “their doings will not allow them to return to their God, for the ruah of harlotry is in the midst of them, and they have not known the Lord” (Hos. 5:4)

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276 Commenting on Gen. 2:7, Gelin remarks that “this ruah gives consistency to the man who has become a living nephesh, a living being made of molded clay.” Albert Gelin, The Concept of Man in the Bible, p. 17.

277 “Just as in Ps. 51:10 where the prayer for the clean heart precedes the prayer for the firm will, so in Ezek. 11:19; 36:26 the gift of the new heart and the new will are linked together; cf. also 18:31. If in the case of the new heart the point is the pure guidance of the conscience, in the case of the ruah it is the steadfast power of the will to act accordingly.” Wolff, Anthropology of the Old Testament, p. 38.

278 For similar usage, see Prov. 11:13.

279 Commenting on Isa. 19:3, Van Pelt, et al. write that God “is literally going to empty or demoralize the Egyptian ruah. As a result, the Egyptians will lose heart and try to regain it by resorting to spiritism in all its aspects. Hence the Egyptians are subsequently characterized as those who possess a ‘spirit of idolatry,’ that is, a ruah inclined by nature towards such.” M. V. Van Pelt, W. C. Kaiser, Jr., and D. I. Block, “8120, רוחו” in Willem A. VanGemeren, ed., New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis, vol. 3, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), p.1074. For similar usage, see Isa. 29:24.
refers to the a stubborn characteristic that, once man is turned away from God, keeps him away.

3.2.4.5. Social Self

Earlier there was occasion to note that Scripture employs ruah to describe the sentiment of jealousy that is suffered by a betrayed spouse (Num. 5:14). In addition, it was shown that the transfer of political authority is described as a transfer of ruah; the moment a new ruler is recognized by the authority of the regime, his predecessor, resplendent and formidable not a minute before, instantly loses – and his successor instantly acquires – the shine of command (Num. 11:25 and II Kings 2:9, et al.). What unites these two examples is the final characteristic usage of ruah, and that is its role in social relations. As typified by the ruah between husband and wife, and the ruah passed from political predecessor to successor, in this this social understanding, ruah may reside not in but between persons. Ruah, Dor-Shav writes, grants “each individual a social persona, on top of his or her organic and animal selves.”

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280 Dor-Shav, “Soul of Fire: A Theory of Biblical Man,” p. 92. As will be shown below, Dor-Shav’s contention that ruah can exist interstitially is born out in some cases, but overstated. The social dimension of ruah may operate between rather than in individuals, but even in the social sphere, prophecy, which would seem to be among the highest of all social roles, occurs when ruah is put into man by God. Nevertheless, Dor-Shav’s insight does accurately describe one of the Bible’s conceptions of ruah, and it provokes further reflection. In a somewhat different vein, the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas seizes on the idea of what exists between rather than inside of us to describe his ethical, rather than ontological, theology. In Levinas’ view, God Himself is more ethical than ontological, more relational than existential, residing in the actions of history between us rather than the faith that lives inside of us. Interpreting the passage in which the Psalmist says to God that it is “in justice that I behold Your face,” (Ps. 17:15), Levinas writes that “The moral relation therefore reunites both self-consciousness and consciousness of God. Ethics is not the corollary of the vision of God, it is that very vision. Ethics is an optic, such that everything I know of God and everything I can hear of His word and reasonably say to Him must find an ethical expression. In the Holy Ark from which the voice of God is heard by Moses, there are only the tablets of the Law. The knowledge of God which we can have and which is expressed, according to Maimonides, in the form of negative attributes, receives a positive meaning from the moral ‘God is merciful,’ which means: ‘Be merciful like Him.’ The attributes of God are given not in the indicative, but in the imperative. The knowledge of God comes to us like a commandment, like a Mitzvah. To know God
To return to the first example of marriage, *ruaḥ* lies at the very origins of the institution, for in early days of humanity, after declaring that “it is not good for man to be alone” (Gen. 2:18) and Adam and Eve become the first social unit, God appears “amidst the *ruaḥ* of the day” (Gen. 3:8). Still within the context of the family, but beyond the relation of husband and wife, *ruaḥ* describes the tension between spouses and in-laws. For Esau “was forty years old and took as wife Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite. And they were a defiant *ruaḥ* to Isaac and to Rebekah” (Gen. 26:35).²⁸¹

Wider still, *ruaḥ* is present in political relations of a larger scale. In one case, *ruaḥ* is the term used to describe the gradual loss of confidence, then outright animosity that characterizes a citizenry’s disillusionment toward their ruler. For instance, though the people of Shechem had been warned that Gideon’s son Abimelech would be an unworthy and even mendacious ruler (Jud. 9:7-20), they went ahead to vest him with power anyway. After Abimelech “had reigned for three years over Israel, then God sent an evil *ruaḥ* between Abimelech and the men of Shechem, and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech” (Jud. 9:23).

The second case in which *ruaḥ* appears in connection with large-scale political life is in the case of prophecy. Above, numerous citations were brought to describe the

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²⁸¹ An analogous observation, still within the family realm, but in the animal kingdom, begins with the story of the flood from Genesis 6-7. Above, there was occasion to note that fish and bugs, animals that do not have *ruaḥ*, did not drown in the flood. Dor-Shav argues that the presence of *ruaḥ* in species affected by the deluge, explains why the Bible appreciates the mother-child empathy of those species, land animals and birds, prohibiting the slaughter of mother and young in the same day (Lev. 22:28) and forbidding the capture of both mother and chick from the same nest (Deut. 22:6). No comparable prohibitions relate to fish and bugs. See Dor-Shav, “Soul of Fire: A Theory of Biblical Man,” p. 91. When identifying those animals that experience the society of friends, Aristotle too specifies birds and animals but not fish or insects, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1155a.
Bible’s presentation of *ruah* as it encompasses both inspiration and enthusiasm. Prophecy is the apex of that experience, and indeed perhaps the most elevated experience to which man can aspire in the Bible’s portrayal. The prophet is moved by “the *ruah* of the Lord,” “the *ruah* of wisdom and understanding,” “the *ruah* of counsel and might,” “the *ruah* of knowledge and the fear of the Lord,” all in order to “decide with equity for the meek of the earth (Isa. 11:2-4). These *ruhot* enable the prophet to exercise judgment in accordance with justice. Because *ruah* enables prophecy, and prophecy is always put in service of social and political ends,\(^\text{282}\) therefore it may be said that, in the biblical view, *ruah* is directed toward and indispensable to the ongoing functioning of society.

### 3.2.5. *Neshama*: The Soul’s Correspondence to Fire

#### 3.2.5.1. **Breath?**

As with *nefesh* and *ruah*, the Hebrew term *neshama* is translated in English language Bibles as “spirit” or “soul,” or else sometimes as “breath.” But Dor-Shav’s analysis and argument against scholarly consensus,\(^\text{283}\) that “breath” is misleading, is compelling. *Neshama*’s semantic field is fire rather than air or wind, and indeed, throughout the Bible *neshama* corresponds to and recalls fire. The term occurs 24 times


in Hebrew, and once in Aramaic, making it the rarest – and least well understood – of all terms related to the human soul in the Bible.

Of the first five sources listed in the standard biblical lexicon for neshama, each of them might mean breath, but not one of them necessarily does. For example, the lexicon cites the following line from Job. “By God, Who denied me justice and by Shaddai Who embittered my nefesh, as long as neshama is within me, and God’s ruah in my nostrils, my lips will never speak evil; nor my tongue ever utter deceit.” (Job 27:2-4). There is no textual indication that neshama is breath, only that it resides within Job. Indeed, it is the ruah rather than the neshama that is specifically said to be in Job’s nostrils, though as we will see, that too is not dispositive.

Another sentence that serves as a touchstone source for scholars and translators to associate neshama with breath occurs in Genesis, where it is written that “all that had the quickening nishmat-ruaḥ of life in its nostrils, of all that was on dry land, died” (Gen. 7:22). Here, neshama and ruaḥ are nouns grammatically linked as a compound word. Alter, who is a good deal better than most translators, understands each term to intensify the other, finally construing the combination of neshama and ruaḥ as “the breath of the breath of life.” And there is an intuitive logic to such an association, for it is not difficult to conceive of an elemental opposition between air and water, so that the waters of the flood drown those that need oxygen to survive. Water drowns out breath.

And in fact, that is precisely the breath described earlier by ruaḥ in Gen. 7:15, marching into the ark “two by two of all basar that has the ruaḥ of life within it.” But

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precisely because Gen. 7:15 establishes ruah as the breath that lies in opposition to and is threatened to be drowned out by water, and precisely because ruah appears again in the compound nishmat-ruah here in v. 22, it is all the more unlikely that neshama means the same thing as ruah. The very fact that the text brings neshama to complement ruah signals that it is not coterminous with it. Or, to think about this from the other direction, if neshama simply means breath, why does the text feel compelled to establish ruah as breath in v. 15, and to bring it again here in v. 22? Given that ruah clearly is linked to breath, this suggests that neshama is connected to another element that water negates.

Water drowns out breath just as well as it extinguishes fire. That is only suggestive, and it is not my argument for neshama’s association with fire. That argument will emerge from the textual sources below. But I do want to take the occasion of lingering over this verse to highlight what is to come.

For generations, the association of neshama to breath has been assumed rather than substantiated. Below, I argue for alternative understandings based on the context of the biblical passages in which the term appears.

3.2.5.2. Life

Assuming its identification with breath, Wolff writes that it is a “more precise way of referring to life,” and concludes that “living creatures are in this way exactly defined in Hebrew as creatures that breathe.” Even if the evidence for neshama as breath is not conclusive, Wolff and others are correct that neshama does often mean life.

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286 For similar usage, in which ruah and neshama are used together apparently to signify different vital aspects of the man’s vitality, see Job 34:14-15.
The phrase “though the neshama be in his nostrils” (Isa. 2:22) means, “though man yet lives.”

The most vivid illustrations of this meaning of neshama are described in the context of death. Ordering utter destruction of the enemy, the Bible says “only of the towns of these people that the Lord your God is about to give you in estate, you shall let live no neshama” (Deut. 20:16). When Joshua conquers the Negev desert, “he left none remaining, but utterly destroyed every neshama” (Josh. 10:40).\(^\text{288}\) The absence of neshama means the absence of life. This is the case not only in the context of death in battle, but also in the case of death by disease. “And it came to pass after these things, that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, fell sick; and his sickness was so severe, that there was no neshama left in him.” (I Kings 17:17). In all these cases, neshama is used synonymously with life itself.

The difference between death at the hands of the enemy and death by pestilence points toward another, related sense in which neshama is used. When one man kills another, the causal link is easy for all to see. But when a man is infected with sickness, the cause and mechanics of his new condition are imperceptible to the unaided eye. What is said about the end of life can also be said about the life’s beginning. For God “gives neshama to the people,” life, expressed as neshama is a divine gift (Isa. 42:5).\(^\text{289}\)

3.2.5.3. Language

When Job asks “To whom have you told words, and whose neshama has come out of you?” (Job 26:4), he expresses a revealing parallelism between man’s capacity for

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\(^{288}\) For similar usage, see Josh. 11:11, 14; I Kings 15:29.

\(^{289}\) For similar usage of neshama as a divine gift that animates human life, see Job 4:9; 33:4; Ps. 18:16; Isa. 57:16.
language and speech and the *neshama*. For, in biblical parlance, speech can be expressed in terms of the “*neshama* [that] has come out of you.” Daniel can speak no further, but manages to say that “there remains now no strength in me, nor is there *neshama* left in me” (Dan. 10:17).

Alter translates *neshama* as “breath” in the verse “from God’s breath the ice is made, and wide waters turn solid,” (Job 37:10) imagining that God blows his artic breath onto the water to freeze it. That is plausible, but like the rest of the *neshama* as breath interpretations, this fails to account for more than it explains. Near the beginning of ch. 37, Job says “Hear, O hear His voice raging and the murmur that comes from His mouth” (Job 37:2), then “After it roars a voice, He thunders in the voice of His grandeur, and He does not hold them back as His voice is heard. God thunders wondrously with his voice, doing great things that we cannot know” (Job 37:4-5). Specifically, “to the snow He says ‘Be on earth’” (Job 37:6). These verses that lead up to and provide the context for v. 10 are all infused with speech. This use of speech recalls the creative principle in Genesis, where “God said,” and it was. It is the voice, the power of language, the ability to communicate and command, this, and not respiration, is the source of creativity. In ch. 37, Job hears God’s voice raging, and murmuring, he hears God roar in grandeur. God’s voice thunders. It is God’s *voice* that is the source of creativity, his *neshama*, not his breath.

Similarly, as God’s power of speech can build up and create, so can it take down and rebuke. God’s *neshama* chastens the sea and the waters, and even man himself.

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290 For similar usage of God’s voice, see Ps. 29.
291 In Job, God’s *neshama* is also said to be the source of insight and knowledge, see Job 32:8.
292 See II Sam. 22:16 and the nearly identical formulation at Ps. 18:16.
293 See Job 34:14.
In addition to creation and rebuke, the neshama is a source of praise and worship. The final verse of the final joyous psalm exhorts “every neshama” to praise God (Ps. 150:6).

3.2.5.4. Neshama and Fire

As other dimensions of man correspond to the elements of creation, neshama corresponds to fire. “Behold,” proclaims Isaiah, “the name of the Lord comes from far; burning with his anger and in a thick column of smoke.” Anger and smoke are the first insinuations of fire in his passage, with a good many more to follow.

His lips are full of indignation, and his tongue as a devouring fire…and with the flame of a devouring fire, with cloudburst, and tempest, and hailstones. For through the voice of the Lord shall Assyria be beaten down…For his hearth is ordained of old; yes, for the king it is prepared. He has made it deep and large, its bonfire is of much fire and wood. The neshama of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, kindles it (Isa. 30:27-33).

In this passage, which speaks of the lips, the tongue, the voice, the neshama is compared to a stream of kindling brimstone in the context of flames and fire. The neshama kindles a bonfire of fire and wood.

Further, there is a verse in Proverbs that calls the neshama God’s lamp or candle. “The Lord’s lamp is the neshama of man, laying bare all the inward chambers” (Prov. 20:27). The human neshama is man’s soul of fire, a divine spark that lives inside of man, is a source of vitality and creative power.294 It is “a spark of this fiery heaven embedded in man, and the nature of this component is our own ability to create with words, as the sole possessors of language in the animal kingdom.”295

It is against this background that the first and most famous occurrence of *neshama*
can be understood. “[T]hen the Lord God fashioned the humans,” Genesis reports,“humus from the soil, and blew into his nostrils the *neshama* of life, and the human beingbecame a living *nefesh*” (Gen. 2:7). The common reading of the verse is that “Godblew into his nostrils the breath of life,” translating *yiphach* as “blew,” and *neshama* as“breath.” Dor-Shav argues that *yiphach* is better understood as “kindled” on the basis ofphilological research and other occasions in which the term is used. Rather thansending divine breath into man’s lifeless *basar*, the scene looks rather more like the oneimagined by the Israeli painter Abel Pann.

296 The story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11 recalls the creation of man. “All the earth was one
language, one set of words” and “they said to each other, ‘Come, let us bake bricks and burn them hard’”
(Gen. 11:1-3). As God had called forth the elements of creation, so too man here calls forth his building
block creation: bricks. In particular, note that man is created of earth (*basar*) and fire (*nefesh*), and man’s
creation, bricks, are made of earth and fire (“burn them hard”).297 “The common reading of this verse – ‘God breathed into man’s nostrils a breath of life’ – is misleading,
since neither breath nor nostrils are involved. Rather, God *kindled* in man a living, speaking soul.” Dor-
personal correspondence, Dr. Joshua Weinstein of the Shalem Academic Center, writes that a whole set of
biblical terms, including the soul terms here, have been “systematically warped” by Indo-European
expectations. “There is so much immediate assimilation of Biblical terms (and more generally, Semitic
terms) to Indo-European pre-expectations that even the possibility of [a] big mistake is rarely considered
seriously […].” 298

296 Abel Pann, “The Creation of Man.” This image is taken from
http://library.duke.edu/exhibits/hebrewbible/abelpann.html, accessed February 14, 2013. The
chromolithograph was taken from *Genesis: From the Creation until the Deluge*, illustrated by Abel Pann,
The lexicon entry for *puah*, the root of the verb translated as “to blow,” is predominated by words connected with breath and breathing, but it does admit to a number of cases in which it is more explicitly connected with fire and light than it is with breath. The clearest example of this verb is in Ezekiel, where we read of God punishing Israel by melting them, as a metalworker melts his scraps. “Because you are all become dross, behold, therefore I will gather you into the midst of Jerusalem. As they gather silver, and brass, and iron, and lead, and tin, into the midst of the furnace, to blow (lephachat) the fire upon it, to melt it, so will I gather you in my anger and in my fury,

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299 Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, n.d.), p. 806. Examples include: “And I will pour out my indignation upon thee, I will blow against thee with the fire of my wrath, and deliver thee into the hand of brutish men, skillful to destroy. Thou shalt be for fuel to the fire […]” (Ezek. 21:36-37), and “scoffing men fan the flames of a city, but the wise will turn back wrath” (Prov. 29:8).
and I will leave you there, and melt you” (Ezek. 22:19-22). This is blow, indeed, but blow in the sense of kindle, enflame, set ablaze. Or, depicting a scene of hot anger, David describes “smoke” coming out of God’s “nostrils, consuming fire from His mouth, coals before Him blazed…From the radiance before Him, fiery coals blazed” (II. Sam. 22:9-13).

There is an additional level of circumstantial evidence for neshama, fire, and the power of speech. Though neshama does not always appear in these passages, fire and speech are used consistently together. “[I]n ancient Israelite metaphysics, the fire of supreme divination and the light of Godly knowledge both infuse the fire-nature of heaven. This is, on the deepest level, the ‘fire’ of God’s word: out of the midst of fire God speaks to Moses in the bush, and out of the midst of fire God delivers his commandments at Sinai.”

It is through the burning bush that God reveals himself to Moses (Ex. 3). It is also through fire that God gives Moses the Israelite constitution, “And Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the Lord had come down on it in fire, and its smoke went up like the smoke from a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly…Moses would speak, and God would answer him with voice” (Ex. 19:19; 20:18). Psalm 19 speaks of the heavens, the fire realm, “telling,” “declaring,” “uttering,” “pronouncing,” because it is the home of the sun (Ps. 19:2-7). Finally, “Because you speak this word,” God promises to Jeremiah, “I will make my words in thy mouth fire, and this people wood, and it shall devour them” (Jer. 5:14). Rabbi Soloveitchik writes that “fire and flame always accompany the revelation of God, whether at the burning

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bush, at the Sinaitic revelation, or the future Day of the Lord. All are fire-apocalypses.

‘For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God’ (Deut. 2:26).

3.2.6. **Conclusion: A Microcosm of Creation**

According to the cosmology of the Hebrew Bible, there are four elemental building blocks of creation. Did God create those building blocks, or do they antedate creation? Does this cosmology sit in tension with the great rabbinic, patristic, and medieval struggles over creation *ex nihilo* and the eternity of the universe? The Bible does not say. But it does consistently regard water, wind, fire, and earth as fundamental to everything.

The human body and soul correspond to these building blocks, such that man – each individual human person – is physically and psychically a microcosm of creation. Within each person lie watery, earthly, fiery, and windy foundations. With this in mind, it is now possible to return to the original lines of Ecclesiastes that named the primordial elements of creation in man, this time adding dimensions of soul to their corresponding elements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Element of Creation</th>
<th>Element of Soul</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eccles.</td>
<td>Until the silver cord is snapped, and the golden bowl is</td>
<td>Fire</td>
<td><em>Neshama</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>12:6</td>
<td>snapped,</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the golden bowl is smashed,</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eccles.</td>
<td>and the pitcher is broken against the well, and the jug</td>
<td>Water</td>
<td><em>Nefesh</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:6</td>
<td>smashed against the well,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and the jug smashed at the pit.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eccles.</td>
<td>And dust returns to the earth as it was,</td>
<td>Earth</td>
<td><em>Basar</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>12:7</td>
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</tbody>
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The fact that man is a microcosm of creation has far reaching consequences. According to the biblical understanding, human flourishing – man’s purpose and destiny, whatever that is for each of us – cannot be fully understood or attained independent of the purpose and destiny of creation as a whole. They are profoundly inseparable. Therefore, any worldview, any religion, any political creed or persuasion, any social theory, or any scientistic ideology, that regards human achievement in terms of the conquest of nature, is self-contradictory. Such a view would promote the destruction of the very matter out of which man is made, and whose continued health and flourishing man requires for his own. “Man in the story of creation does not occupy a unique ontic position. He is, rather, a drop in the cosmos that fits into the schemata of naturalness and concreteness.” The being created in the image of God remains in and a part of, rather than over and against, the natural order. The material and even spiritual foundations of man are bound up with the created world of flora and fauna.

An additional feature of the biblical account of the body and soul is that it allows for the specification of qualities that humans share with animals, and qualities humans share with God. Aristotle’s political anthropology serves as a useful contrast. Aristotle develops a schema in the beginning of his Politics that places man on the spectrum of beast and god. Man, Aristotle says, shares with animals both the reproductive and the hierarchical instincts, creating the first partnerships out of necessity.

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There must of necessity be a conjunction of persons who cannot exist without one another: on the one hand, male and female, for the sake of reproduction (which occurs not from intentional choice but – as is also the case with the other animals and plants – form a natural striving to leave behind another that is like oneself); on the other, the naturally ruling and ruled, on account of preservation.  

As the “conjunction of persons” grows from partnership to household and village to city, the human kind goes in a different, higher direction than animal society. For the city, “while coming into being for the sake of living,” that is, its genetic basis, “exists for the sake of living well,” that is, its teleological purpose. On the Aristotelian account, man differs from animals because he can form communities that do not merely subsist, but flourish according to the justice and right. “Man alone among the animals has speech, logos, the capacity for rational thought, enabling the very civic debate about public policy and just rule that man to not just live but live well.

Although the city holds out the promise for human excellence, Aristotle will not let his readers forget that it is born out of need and the lack of self-sufficiency among solitary individuals. And, “one who is incapable of participating or who is in need of nothing through being self-sufficient,” Aristotle goes on to argue, “is no part of a city, and so is either a beast or a god.” On this spectrum, man shares with animals the natural need for sociality and communal life, both to propagate and for security from external threats. But man also shares with the Aristotelian god, the unmoved mover, the capacities of the higher intellect, the use of reason and mind. When in the political context of the

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305 Aristotle, Politics, 1252b.
306 Aristotle, Politics, 1253a.
307 Aristotle, Politics, 1253a.
308 Aristotle, Metaphysics, Α (XII); De Anima 3.5; Maimonides, The Guide of the Perplexed, I.69. For an overview of the medieval legacy of this theology, see Shlomo Pines, “The Limits of Human Knowledge
city, man is “the best of animals,” when in solitude, “the worst of all.” “Without virtue,” the virtue that really can only be cultivated in the city, man is “the most unholy and the most savage [of the animals], and the worst with regard to sex and food.”

Were it not for his ability to reason his way out of brutality, man would remain an animal capable of savagery. With animals man share physical necessity; with the gods he shares logos. Man is the in-between animal, neither fully one nor the other, inseparable from each. This is how the political man, neither beast nor god, looks according to the analysis of Aristotle’s *Politics.*

The Aristotelian Spectrum of Animal, Man, and the Gods

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This analysis and graphic representation follow Patrick Deneen’s (as yet) unpublished lectures.
The biblical vision shares a number of important features with the Aristotelian understanding. It too articulates characteristics that man shares with animals and that man shares with God, though it perhaps surprisingly parts ways with the Aristotelian account by specifying a number of characteristics that God also shares with animals. Like the Aristotelian account both man and animal are relational through necessity (basar) and they are both social (ruaḥ); also like the Aristotelian account, man is in possession of a higher capacity for speech and meaning that he alone shares with God (neshama). In both, man is by nature or by creation, political. The statement that “it is not good for the human to be alone” (Gen. 2:18) is actually born out throughout the narrative. But the biblical descriptions of qualities of body and soul allow for greater precision than the Aristotelian account, which groups procreation and hierarchical sociality under the same rubric. The Hebrew Bible specifies that, though both qualities are present in us and are kindred to one another, each can be understood in its own integrity. That man is not only in need of human society, but that he is morally improved by it, is a theme that bears significantly more reflection, but suffice it to say here that such is the case for the Hebrew Bible at the level of the human body and soul.

One cannot help but notice that in the Hebrew Bible’s account of the soul, nefesh, neshama, and ruaḥ appear to do similar things: ruaḥ and nefesh both feel, both animate life. But that is not so unusual; for even in English we speak of “feeling” in a similar way. The same word, “feeling” refers to putting luxurious silk between the fingers or sand and surf between the toes, it refers to bourbon dancing on the tongue, it refers to anger and joy and the whole range of emotional life. We “feel” with different parts of our body and, one could say, different parts of our soul. This is not redundancy, but the
intricate and overlapping experience of the world. Hebraic man feels elation (ruaḥ) and he feels the sword at the neck (nefesh). Here is how, in the view of the Hebrew Bible, man stands in compositional relation to animals and to God.

The Hebraic Spectrum of Animal, Man, and God

The concluding observation of this section focuses not on what the elements of soul are, but on what they are not. In their correspondence with the elements of creation, each of the elements of body and soul are presented in descriptive terms. Not one of the descriptions or presentations in the text is normative or prescriptive. There does not seem to be any inherent moral status accorded to the neshama or the rest of these terms. These are qualities and capacities that can be steered in different directions and toward different ends. They describe what is, not how man ought to act. They describe what we are, but not who we are or the ends toward which we dedicate ourselves. What is man? He is a microcosm of creation. Who is he? Nothing here can fully give an answer to that.
question. To find out, it will be necessary to attend to one final anthropological term, the
lev.

3.3. The Hebrew Heart
3.3.1. Anatomy

*Lev*, most often translated as “heart,” is one of the most common anthropological
terms in the Hebrew Bible. When biblical authors describe the human *lev*, what do
they mean? Although there is relatively little concern for the organ that causes the pulse
to beat, the Israelite did recognize the *lev* as a physical organ.

Its anatomy is fixed in descriptions of warfare. When a man is shot through
between his arms, “the arrows went out at his *lev*, and he sank down in his chariot (II
Kings 9:24), just as a spear is thrust into Absalom’s *lev* (II Sam 18:14). Descriptions of
priestly vestments also locate the *lev* between the arms, as when Aaron’s carries “the
names of Israel’s sons in the breastplate of judgment over his *lev*” (Ex. 28:29).

As a physical organ, the *lev* is felt most vividly when it is troubled or aggravated,
“every head is sick, and every *lev* faint” (Isa. 1:5, cf. Jer. 8:18). In wartime the battle
trumpets cause fear that reverberates through the soldier’s body. “My bowels, my
bowels! I am shaken in the chambers of my *lev*; my *lev* moans within me […]” (Jer.

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311 Cooper summarizes that the *lev* “experiences emotions and moods, it has personality and character
traits, it is the locus of thought and deliberation, choice and action, and it is above all the source of love or
hate of God and neighbor. It may be hidden from other people and perhaps even from oneself. But God
searches its depths and knows it altogether.” John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting*, p. 46; cf. a
similar summary in Nahum H. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus: The Heritage of Biblical Israel*, (New York:
Schocken Books, 1986), p. 64. Michael Carasik sets the instances of *lev* at 858, in *Theologies of the Mind
in Biblical Israel*, (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2006), p. 105; Wolff arrives at the same count,
but specifies that only 814 instances refer exclusively to the human *lev*. See Wolff, *Anthropology of the

312 Carasik disputes this, arguing that “there is no unambiguous example” of the *lev* only as an organ of

Elsewhere it is the physical experience of prophecy that breaks the lev, leaving the prophet with as much self-control as a drunkard. “My lev within me is broken because of the prophets; all my bones shake; I am like a drunken man, and like a man whom wine has overcome, because of the Lord, and because of his holy words” (Jer. 23:9).

The psalmist seeks God’s mercy in acute awareness of his transgressions. “I grow numb and am utterly crushed. I roar from the churning of my lev…My lev spins around, my strength forsakes me, and the light of my eyes, too, is gone from me” (Ps. 38:9, 11).

The word that Alter renders as “spinning” (seḥarḥar) can in fact mean “palpitate” (elsewhere, as in Gen. 34:10, it can mean “roam”); this in fact does imply an awareness that the lev is connected to the beating of the pulse, but this connection only emerges to the Hebrew mind when the lev is subject to irregular, unpredictable movement, rather than its normal beating.

During a feast the rural landowner Nabal enjoys his wine, his “lev was of good cheer,” and he became “exceedingly drunk.” The next morning “when the wine was gone out…his lev died within him and he became like a stone. And it happened after about ten days that the Lord smote Nabal and he died” (I Sam. 25:36-38). Nabal’s death does not occur until ten days after his lev died and he became like a stone. A man cannot live for ten days without the muscle that pumps his blood. So, though lev in this case must refer to a vital organ, it cannot mean “heart.” Wolff suggests that in this passage lev corresponds to parts of the brain, because after a stroke that debilitates certain brain functions, a man can easily live for another ten days.314 Other usages of lev lend weight

to the view that it connotes aspects of mental and emotional capacity that are associated with the mind.

3.3.2. **Emotion and Desire**

Abraham welcomes three mysterious visitors at his tent by saying “let a little water be fetched and bathe your feet and stretch out under the tree, and let me fetch a morsel of bread, and refresh your lev” (Gen 18:4-5). Refreshment of the lev, in this case as in the section above, is physical. It is reprieve from overexertion. But it also suggests the prospect of inner repose. This latter aspect comes out more clearly when the psalmist says “He makes the hay sprout for cattle, grass for the labor of humankind to bring forth bread from the earth, and wine that gladdens the lev of man to make face shine brighter than oil, and bread that sustains the lev of man” (Ps. 104:14-15). Through the lev man experiences gladness and refreshment; it attunes him to sensations such as pleasure and joy.

As with Abraham, the customs and ceremonies of hospitality again provide the context for the experience of joy. “And they sat down, and did eat and drink both of them together, for the girl’s father had said to the man ‘Be content, I pray thee, and tarry all night, and let thy lev be merry’” (Jud. 19:6, cf. v. 9). In this as in the following example, from Hosea, the nourishment of the body implies loftier feelings. “I did know thee in the wilderness, in the land of great drought. When they were fed, they became as a mighty man, and their lev shall rejoice as through wine. And their children shall see it, and be glad; their lev shall rejoice in the Lord” (Zech. 10:7).

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315 Bread refreshes the lev several times. “They arose early in the morning, and he rose up to depart. And the girl’s father said to his son in law, ‘Refresh thy lev with a morsel of bread, and afterwards go your way’” (Jud. 19:5), and “Arise, and eat bread, and let thy lev be merry” (I Kings 21:7). As noted above, although wine can obscure the cognitive function of the lev, it can also gladden it. “And they of Ephraim shall be like a mighty man, and their lev shall rejoice as through wine. And their children shall see it, and be glad; their lev shall rejoice in the Lord” (Zech. 10:7).
full; they were filled, and their lev was exalted” (Hos. 13:5-6). For a man, the wedding day is a day of “the gladness of the lev” (S. of S. 3:11); the lev experiences delight (Eccles. 5:19), and it is “merry in the days of your prime” (Eccles. 11:9). Providence moves the lev to rejoice such that man cannot help but praise God with song (Ps. 28:7), and exultation (Ps. 13:6).

In addition to experiencing joy, ranging from the satisfaction of a full belly to spiritual ecstasy, the lev knows the corresponding sentiments of despair and anguish. The story of Hannah captures a full emotional spectrum. Suffering from infertility, her husband Elkanah asks “why do you weep and why do you not eat and why is your lev afflicted?” (I Sam. 1:8). Again, note that affliction of lev is coincident with hunger, just as in the examples above happiness of the lev was coincident with nourishment. Later, when Hannah finally does give birth to her son, Samuel, she exclaims, “my lev rejoiced through the Lord” (I Sam. 2.1). The lev is a fulcrum that pivots Hannah from despair to joy.

But it can experience emotion beyond the polarities of joy and despair. When Joseph’s brothers tell Jacob that his favorite son is dead, his lev becomes limp or powerless (Gen. 45:26), Alter says it just stops. In this instance the lev encompasses the whole inner life of the man in its sensitivity to loss. In Egypt, when Joseph forgives his brothers and promises to care for them, he “spoke to their lev” (Gen. 50:21), which expresses a movement from fear to security, a release from anxiety, consolation.

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316 “Translations like ‘his heart fainted’ (King James Version), ‘his heart was numb’ (Speiser and New Jewish Publication Society), and ‘he was stunned’ (Revised English Bible) blunt the force of the original. The Hebrew verb plainly means to stop, or more precisely, to intermit.” Robert Alter, The Five Books of Moses, pp. 264-265, n. 26.
From these examples it is clear that at least a fraction of instances of lev refer to emotion and desire. “His lev’s desire You gave to him, and his lip’s entreaty You did not withhold” (Ps. 21:3). This function of lev approaches our understanding of how the romantic, passionate, sentimental “heart” is typically understood. However, while it recognizes desire as a possibility, the Hebrew Bible consistently inveighs against the excesses of a desiring lev.

In a typical example, when Job argues his innocence, he denies that his “lev [has] gone after [his] eyes” or that his “lev was seduced by a woman” (Job 31:7, 9). Or again, the reader is told “do not covet her beauty in your lev, and let her not take you with her eyelids” (Prov. 6:25), and “drawn-out longing sickens the lev” (Prov. 13:12). The sexualized frame of reference bespeaks an anxiety over the lev of longing and desire or lust.

The biblical preoccupation with the lev that lusts is itself rooted in a deeper preoccupation with the communal and legal consequences of the loss of judgment and control. When God describes the commandment to don a “fringe on the skirts of their garments,” it is explained that “you shall see it and be mindful of all the Lord’s commandments and you shall do them. And you shall not stray after your lev and after your eyes, after which you go whoring. So that you will be mindful and do My commandments, and you shall be holy to your God” (Num. 15:39-40). Lest the Israelite forgets God’s commandments and loses himself in vulgar pleasures, “stray after your lev and your eyes, after which you go whoring,” a physical sign helps to remind him of his special relationship with God. In the biblical view, yielding to vulgar pleasures is a prime obstacle to man’s consent to divine commandments, the great voluntary bondage.

317 For instance, see S. of S. 4:9.
necessary for the higher freedoms of existence. Though Hebrew Scriptures recognize that the lev is the part of man that can give rise to license, it is also where discipline and the self-government necessary for liberty occur.

3.3.3. **Fear and Courage**

Fear is a subspecies of feeling that deserves special comment. The Israelite army had a practice of exempting four categories of men from military service. Men who have built a new house but have not dedicated it were exempt (Deut. 20:5). Men who have planted a vineyard but have not yet enjoyed its fruit were exempt (Deut. 20:6). Men who have become engaged but not yet married were exempt (Deut. 20:7), and this exemption is then carried over to apply to men during their first year of marriage (Deut. 24:5). Finally, cowards should be relieved from duty and sent home. “Whatever man is afraid and faint of lev, let him go and return to his house, that he not shake the lev of his brothers like his own lev.” (Deut. 20:8). When Israelite forces later face “all the children of the east, [who] lay in the valley like locusts for multitude, and their camels were without number, as the sand which is upon the seashore for multitude” (Jud. 7:12), a full two thirds of the Israelite force is sent home on the grounds of fear (Jud. 7:3). Though this exemption seems excessively sensitive to the coward’s “faintness of lev,” sensitive to the point of military and hence national suicide, it is not rooted in sympathy or pity.

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319 At another point in Israelite military history, a speech is made to the lev of the armed forces, acknowledging the army’s quantitative disadvantage, but hoping that this disadvantage will be supplemented by divine favor. “And he set captains of war over the people, and gathered them together in the road place at the gate of the city, and spoke to their lev, saying, ‘Be strong and courageous, be not afraid or dismayed on account of the king of Assyria, or on account of the multitude that is with him, for there are more with us than with him; with him is an arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God to help us, and to fight our battles’” (II Chron. 32:6).
Instead, it is born of the recognition that cowardice is infectious. The fear of one coward can spread and take route in an entire battalion. Removing all men who will be thinking of their new business, their new home, their new wife, all men who have reason to lose focus in battle, or removing men who by virtue of a “faint lev” are constitutionally squeamish, the Israelite army may be small, but it will be pure, full of fighters.

The biblical turn of phrase to express the fear of the squeamish is “faint of lev.” Isaiah warns against it, “take heed, and be quiet; fear not, neither be of faint-lev […]” (Isa. 7:4). Lev in this meaning signifies the capacity to overcome fear. Biblical figures meet circumstances of foreboding and terror with a softening lev, or with a diminished capacity to overcome fear. To signify “becoming overwhelmed with fear,” the lev can melt, “and as soon as we heard these things, our livot melted” (Josh. 2:11), or “when all the kings of [the Amorites and the Canaanites] who were by the sea, heard that the Lord had dried up the waters of the Jordan from before the children of Israel […] their lev melted” (Josh. 5:1). When Absalom seeks the counsel of Hushai the Archite concerning his plan to ambush and murder his father, Hushai reminds him of the effect that a failed attempt will have on the troops: if they do not in fact find and kill David in their first strike, the idea of a vengeful and suspicious king will paralyze the rebellious troops with terror. “And though he [Absalom’s soldier] be a valiant fellow whose lev is like the lev of a lion, it will surely melt, for all Israel knows that your father [David] is a warrior and valiant men are those who are with him” (II Sam. 17:10). Isaiah, describing his vision of the end of time, says that “all hands will be slack, and every man’s lev shall melt. And all shall be afraid, pangs and sorrows shall take hold of them” (Isa. 13:6-8).

The psalmist confronts his enemies who “gaped with their mouths against me – a

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ravening roaring lion. Like water I spilled out, all my limbs fell apart. My lev was like wax, melting within my chest” (Ps. 22:14). As the example from Joshua suggests, the lev can be applied to a corporate body as well as an individual. “And the idols of Egypt shall be moved at [the Lord’s] presence, and the lev of Egypt shall melt in the midst of it” (Isa. 19:1).

In addition to melting as wax melts, the lev can melt as ice turns to water. “And the men of Ai smote of them about thirty six men, for they chased them from before the gate as far as Shebarim, and smote them at the descent. And the lev of the people melted, and became like water” (Josh. 7:5). It can temporarily vacate, as when Joseph uncovers the gold he had suck into his brother’s satchel. “And their lev went out and they trembled each before his brother” (Gen. 42:28). It can forsake, “for evils drew round me beyond count. My crimes overtook me and I could not see – more numerous than the hairs of my head – and my lev forsook me” (Ps. 40:13). It can fail, “and David said to Saul, ‘Let no man’s lev fail him! Your servant will go and do battle with this Philistine.’” (I Sam. 17:32).

And, when it does fail, when fear does overwhelm an individual and a people, the lev is moved as the wind moves the branches of trees, “…And his lev was moved, and the lev of his people, as the trees of the forest are moved with the ruah” (Isa. 7:2).

There is a closely related variant usage of lev, in which it means “resolve.” This usage can be illustrated with the lazy gardener who lacks determination and follow through. “I passed by the field of the lazy man and by the vineyard of one without lev, and, look, it had all sprouted thorns, its surface was covered with thistles, and its stone

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321 Literally, “falling.” On this point, there is a manuscript dispute between the Septuagint and the Masoretic text. See Robert Alter, *The David Story*, p. 106, n. 32.
wall was in ruins” (Prov. 24:30-31). This meaning of resolve suggests abilities of discipline needed for communal and individual self-government, as we will see shortly.

3.3.4. Cognition

Nearly half of all instances of lev in the Hebrew Bible refer to reasoning capacity and the acquisition of knowledge. Its cognitive function is made clear through parallels with other parts of the body and their tasks. “[T]he Lord has not given you a lev to know and eyes to see and ears to hear until this day” (Deut. 29:3). “Hear indeed, but understand not; and see indeed, but perceive not. Make the lev of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and smear over their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their lev” (Isa. 6:10). Just as the eyes see and the ears hear, the lev knows and understands.

Prudence and discernment in particular aid the lev in the acquisition of knowledge and understanding. So a “discerning lev seeks knowledge, but the mouths of dullards chases folly” (Prov. 15:14). And prudence is understood through the lev, as in “understand prudence…make your lev understand” (Prov. 8:5). A “discerning lev” gains knowledge (Prov. 18:15), just as “a wise man’s lev teaches his mouth intelligence, and adds learning to his lips” (Prov. 16:23).

324 For similar usage, see Ezek. 44:5 and Isa. 44:18.
325 For a lev inclined to discernment, see also Prov. 2:2.
The preacher of Ecclesiastes “set [his] lev to inquire and seek through wisdom of all that is done under the sun” (Eccles. 1:13). Through the lev, man is capable of wide learning, as is shown in the description of Solomon’s wisdom. “And God gave Solomon very much wisdom and understanding, and largeness of lev, like the sand that is on the sea shore. And Solomon’s wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men […]” (I Kings 5:9-11). Largeness of lev, in this case, is synonymous with wisdom and understanding, and in this passage the phrase emphasizes the breadth of Solomon’s learning. Through the largeness of lev, not only does Solomon learn “three thousand proverbs, and his poems were a thousand and five,” but also “he spoke of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon to the hyssop that comes out of the wall. He spoke also of beasts, and of birds, and of creeping things, and of fishes. And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, who had heard of his wisdom” (I Kings 5:12-14). The lev is where man learns poetry and meter, but also zoology, ornithology, entomology, marine biology, and political science, the wisdom of the kings of the earth. More generally, when the psalmist petitions for something to come to pass in the future, he prays “may He grant you what your lev would want, and all your counsels may He fulfill” (Ps. 20:5), equaling the lev with “counsels,” the term could also be translated as “advice” or in another context, “suggestions.”

One of the verses quoted above, Prov. 18:15, is a good example of the tendency to describe man’s lev in the context of his visual and especially aural abilities of perception. Isaiah writes that “the eyes of them that see shall not be blind, and the ears of them that hear shall hearken. The lev also of the rash shall understand knowledge, and the tongue of
the stammerers shall be ready to speak plainly” (Isa. 32:3-4). Ezekiel is instructed to “behold with thy eyes, and hear with thy ears, and put thy lev to all that I shall show thee […]” (Ezek. 40:4), and then again to “direct your lev, and behold with thy eyes, and hear with thy ears all that I say to thee concerning all the ordinances of the houses of the Lord, and all its teachings; and direct your lev to the entrance of the house, with all the exits of the sanctuary” (Ezek. 44:5). The authoritative Mentor of Proverbs tells his disciple to “take up my sayings, and my commands you store within you, to make your ear hearken to wisdom, and incline your lev to discernment” (Prov. 2:1-2), later echoed with the injunctions to “[b]end your ear and hear the words of the wise, and set your lev on my knowledge” (Prov. 22:17) and “[b]ring your lev to reproof, and your ear to the sayings of truth” (Prov. 23:12).326 Perhaps the most powerful statement to this effect comes from Proverbs.

My son, listen to my words, to my sayings bend your ear. Let them not slip away from your eyes, guard them within your lev. For they are life to those who find them, and healing to all their flesh. More than anything watched guard your lev, for from it are the ways out to life. Put away from you twisted speech and lips’ contortion keep far from you. Let your eyes look in front, and your gaze straight before you. Level the pathway of your foot, and all your ways will be sound. Do not veer to the right or the left. Keep your foot away from evil (Prov. 4:20-27).

Why does the text tend to group seeing and hearing with the lev as the organ of conscious intellection?327 Learning is what occurs when the lev guards words heard by the ear. If the ears do not hear, the lev does not guard. An English usage is born of a similar understanding, for when one finally comes to understand something, one “grasps” it. The

326 Isa. 6:10, quoted above; 32:3-4; Jer. 11:8; Ezek. 3:10 also typify the Hebrew Bible’s tendency to pair visual and aural perception with the lev.
327 “The heart is the seat of understanding or, as we might say, the center of conscious intellection, and so it becomes the repository of wisdom the young person will imbibire, and it needs to be zealously guarded.” Robert Alter, The Wisdom Books, p. 211, n. 23.
ears and eyes are the gateways to knowledge, and to fortify those faculties that the *lev* enables in man, it must be guarded from “twisted speech and lips’ contortion,” specious reasoning and casuistry. The desirability of shielding the *lev* from continued exposure to bad models is much like Aristotle’s understanding that the continued experience of falsehood and vice habituates the mind to reason poorly by reinforcing false categories and spurious patterns of thought. Yet, whereas the field of political science has come to terms with the importance of *nous* and *éthos, mind* and *character*, when readers of the Hebrew Bible encounter the term “heart” for *lev*, they are led to believe that the poetry of Psalms or the allegories of the prophets romanticize the human condition. “Heart” cannot but conjure notions of feeling, emotion, and sentiment.

Thus, in one of the most famous passages from the book of Deuteronomy, a passage that to this day forms the core of Judaism’s holiest prayer, a passage that voices the very essence of monotheism, the reader is led astray. “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your *lev* and with all your *nefesh* and with all your might” (Deut. 6:5). Based on the commonest of all meanings of *lev* as the locus of cognition and perception, the text may well be instructing its reader to “love God with all your *mind*.”

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328 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1103a-b; 1112a-1113b.
329 “We must guard against the false impression that biblical man is determined more by feeling than by reason. This mistaken anthropological direction is all too easily derived from an undifferentiated rendering of *lev*. The Bible sets before men clear alternatives, which have to be recognized. It is highly significant that *lev* occurs by far the most frequently in the wisdom literature – 99 times in Proverbs alone, 42 times in Ecclesiastes, and in the strongly didactic Deuteronomy, 51 times.” Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, p. 47; John W. Cooper quotes and affirms this view at *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting*, p. 47. Joel M. Hoffman has a perceptive section on the mistranslations of *lev* in English translations of the Bible in *And God Said: How Translations Conceal the Bible’s Original Meaning*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2010), pp. 106-112. The misunderstanding of *lev* as the locus of “mystical identification” causes Israel Efros to misunderstand, in turn, the foundations of and possibilities for biblical ethics. He wrongly picks a fight with Plato and Aristotle, and turns biblical ethics into spiritual self-creation at Israel I. Efros, *Ancient Jewish Philosophy: A Study in Metaphysics and Ethics*, (New York: Bloch Publishing Company, Inc., 1964), pp. 88-90.
we read in Deuteronomy that “you shall search for the Lord your God from there, and you shall find Him when you seek Him with all your lev and with all your nefesh” (Deut. 4:29). There is a secure basis to interpret this as “you shall find Him when you seek Him with all your mind” instead of with longing and passion. This reading, of the lev as “mind,” is required to make the discussion between Jonathan and his aide de guerre intelligible. In response to Jonathan proposing a maneuver, “his armor bearer said to him, ‘Do whatever your lev inclines – here I am with you, my lev as yours’ (I Sam. 14:7). This simply means “do what is on your mind, for my thoughts are your thoughts.” Or, later, when Nathan says to David “whatever is in your lev, go, do, for the Lord is with you” (II Sam. 7:3), it means “do whatever is on your mind,” “do what you think is best.”

Hosea remarks that “harlotry and wine and new wine take away the lev” (Hos. 4:11). This warning suggests the lev often does not refer to the passions we associated with heart. If anything, sexual appetite and intoxication invigorate, not reduce, the human passions. But sexual appetite and intoxication do deprive man of his powers of judgment and discernment. Because wine does not make man unemotional, Hosea’s warning only makes sense if it refers to the human faculties of perception and cognition that are lost in the state of intoxication. That is why it is said “[d]o not regard wine in its redness, when it shows its hue in the cup, going down smoothly. In the end it bites like a snake, and like a viper spews its poison. Your eyes will see strange things, and your lev

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translation on the grounds that lev is “thought to be the seat of understanding.” He chooses not to use the word “heart” because “the context puts an emphasis on cognition, not feeling.” Robert Alter, The Wisdom Books, p. 381, n.2.

331 “[Lev] includes everything that we ascribe to the head and the brain – power of perception, reason, understanding, insight, consciousness, memory, knowledge, reflection, judgment, sense of direction, discernment. These things circumscribe the real core meaning of the word lev.” Wolff, Anthropology of the Old Testament, p. 51.
will speak perverseness, and you will be like one who beds in the sea, who beds on the top of the rigging” (Prov. 23:31-33).332

Two examples of the lev failing to grasp information support the point. Isaiah says that God “has poured upon [Israel] the fury of His anger, and the strength of battle, and it has set him on fire round about, yet he knew not. And it burned him, yet he laid it not to lev” (Isa. 42:25). “Yet he knew not” is parallel to, and in this case means “yet he laid it not to lev.” In Genesis, when Jacob sneaks away from his father in law with Leah and Rachel, he literally “stole the lev of Laban the Aramean, in not telling him he was fleeing” (Gen. 31:20).333 This means he deceived or outwitted him at least as much as it might mean that he sent Laban into emotional depression.

This meaning of lev is held consistently even and especially in its absence. For example, the wise, discerning man is set in opposition to the man without lev. “On the discerning man’s lips wisdom is found, but a rod for the back of the lev-less” (Prov. 10:13). Failure to keep God’s commandments, the terms of the covenant at Sinai, will lead to “confounding of the lev.” “The Lord will strike you with madness and with blindness and with confounding of the lev. And you will grope at noon as the blind man gropes in darkness, and you will not make your ways prosper, and you will be only exploited and robbed always with no rescuer” (Deut. 28:28). Just as the blind man is unable to see, so the man of confounded lev is susceptible to exploitation and theft and lacks the self-awareness necessary for prosperity in the world. When Abigail says to David of Nabal “pray, let not my lord direct his lev to this scoundrel of a man […]” (I Sam. 25:25), she means “think not of him.” With amazing obstinacy,

332 Eccles. 2:3 also opposes wine to the wise lev.
333 Alter too notes that in this context the heart is “the organ of attentiveness or understanding.” Robert Alter, The Five Books of Moses, p. 169, n. 20.
Pharaoh sees the Nile turn to blood, “turned and came into his house, and this, too, he did not take to lev” (Ex. 7:23), meaning, this too he refuses to acknowledge.

Hosea employs lev in one revealing instance in the corporate sense, speaking not of an individual but the reasoning of the nation.

Ephraim has mingled himself with other peoples…Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knows it not. Yea, grey hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knows not. And the pride of Israel testified to his face, and they do not return to the Lord their God, nor seek him for all this. Ephraim is like a silly dove without lev, they call to Egypt, they go to Assyria. (Hos. 7:11)

In an hour of stress and peril, the Israelites turn to become the client states of their geopolitically powerful neighbors, forsaking their distinctive, inherited way of life, and becoming “mingled with other peoples.” Seeking to imitate their values, and enjoy their protection, Israel does not return to the source of her beliefs and laws, but to Egypt and Assyria. In comparing the nation to a “silly dove without lev,” Hosea criticizes the nation’s misguided grand strategy. Lev in this context would mean something like “sound policy.”

Some instances of lev refer to the human capacity to be persuaded. This can be as simple as processing new information, such as when “it was told to the king of Egypt that the people had fled, and Pharaoh and his servants had a change of lev about the people […]” (Ex. 14:5). Or, in a more subtle form, when God says that he will “allure [Israel], and bring her into the wilderness, and speak to her lev” (Hos. 2:16), the prophet is not describing romantic enticement but the ability to change course, revise former commitments, or as we say, “change one’s mind.” In the prelude to one of the most chilling stories in all of biblical literature, the story of the concubine in Giva (Jud. 19:15-
28), we find a similar use of lev as the place of reconsideration. When a woman leaves her husband to return to her father’s house, he “arose and went after her, to speak to her lev, and to bring her back […]” (Jud. 19:3). The context makes it clear that livestock dowry requiring mental calculation, not the affectionate flattery of the bosom, was necessary for the reunion of the happy couple. In a more political context, persuasion can bleed into demagogy, and that seems to be what is described when, of Absalom, it is written that he “stole the lev of the men of Israel” by promising a leaner, more responsive judicial bureaucracy (II Sam. 15:6). As a sitting king, Jeroboam too understands the potential for the people to be led astray, “then the lev of this people turn again to their lord, namely to Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me” (I Kings 12:27). In these passages, the scope of lev ranges from a firmly rooted, sound national policy to its opposite, a weakness in resolve that subjects a people to sway or caprice. The lev is the arena where these antinomies are alive.

Recognizing that lev often refers to the human capacities for thought sheds new light on the chapters in Exodus that describe Pharaoh’s famous “hardness of lev.” When Moses returns to Egypt, he repeatedly asks Pharaoh to release the Israelites. Time and again, Pharaoh refuses. With each plague menacing the Egyptians, “an immense drama is taking place” in which “all the power of imperial Egypt is powerless against the God of creation and redemption.” The ten plagues, and the response of Pharaoh’s lev are presented below.

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334 For commentary, see Yoram Hazony, The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture, pp. 144-151.
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<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Plague</th>
<th>Pharaoh’s Lev</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Nile turns to Blood (Ex. 7:14-25)</td>
<td>“And Pharaoh’s lev toughened, and he did not heed them [...] And the Lord said to Moses, ‘Pharaoh’s lev is hard’” (Ex. 7:13-14; cf. Ex. 7:22-23).</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Frogs (Ex. 7:26-8:11)</td>
<td>“And Pharaoh saw that there was relief [from the previous plague] and he hardened his lev and he did not heed them [...]” (Ex. 8:11).</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Lice (Ex. 8:12-15)</td>
<td>“And Pharaoh’s lev toughened, and he did not heed them [...]” (Ex. 8:15).</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Horde of Insects (8:16-28)</td>
<td>“And Pharaoh hardened his lev this time, too, and he did not send off the people” (Ex. 8:28).</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Diseased Livestock (Ex. 9:1-7)</td>
<td>“And Pharaoh sent and, look, not a single one had died of the livestock of Israel, And Pharaoh’s lev hardened, and he did not send off the people” (Ex. 9:7).</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Boils (Ex. 9:8-12)</td>
<td>“And the Lord toughened Pharaoh’s lev, and he did not heed them [...]” (Ex. 9:12).</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Hail (Ex. 9:13-35)</td>
<td>“And Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had stopped, and he continued to offend, and he hardened his lev, both he and his servants. And Pharaoh’s lev toughened, and he did not send off the Israelites [...]” (Ex. 9:34-35).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Locusts (Ex. 10:1-20)</td>
<td>“Come into Pharaoh, for I Myself have hardened his lev and the lev of his servants [...]” (Ex. 10:1). “And the Lord toughened Pharaoh’s lev, and he did not send off the Israelites off” (Ex. 10:20).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Darkness (Ex. 10:21-29)</td>
<td>“And the Lord toughened Pharaoh’s lev and he did not want to send them off” (Ex. 10:27).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Death of the Firstborn (Ex. 11-12)</td>
<td>“[...] and the Lord toughened Pharaoh’s lev and he did not send off the Israelites from his land” (Ex. 11:10).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It might only seem that Pharaoh is the true ruler of Egypt from an external point of view, because from his own mouth comes the decision to resist the God of Israel, keeping the Israelites in captivity. But by revealing that God hardens Pharaoh’s lev, the text explicitly tells us that God deprives Pharaoh of freedom to rule, and that it is really God’s actions, not man’s decisions, that influence history.\footnote{Before the plagues, God promises to “harden Pharaoh’s lev,” (Ex. 7:3), but does not specify when. After the plagues culminating in the death of his son, and when Pharaoh learns that the Israelites have in fact left Egypt, he has a “change of lev” (Ex. 9:5) before God toughens it again (Ex. 9:8; 14:4, 8). The phrase “toughened his lev” is echoed at Deut. 2:30 (on the connection between the two passages, see Cassuto, A Commentary on the Book of Exodus, p. 57, § c). Alter remarks that “the verb rendered here as ‘toughen’ (King James Version, ‘harden’) has the primary meaning of ‘strengthen,’ and the most frequent...} It is understandable that this
story should sometimes be used to demonstrate how precious little the Hebrew God, the
God of vengeance and justice, allows for human liberty; or, by extension, that the highest
value of the Hebrew Bible is obedience. After all, what conception of free will is there
when it is not man but God who sets the lev of Pharaoh and therewith sets Egyptian
public policy?

A close examination of each plague and the response of Pharaoh’s lev show that,
in fact, God only begins to toughen Pharaoh’s lev after the fifth plague, and throughout
the first five plagues, Pharaoh hardens his own lev. Overall, Pharaoh is given
responsibility for hardening his own lev 10 times (Ex. 7:13, 14, 22; 8:11, 15, 28; 9:7, 34,
35; 13:15), and God hardens or says he will harden it 10 times (Ex. 4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1,
20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17).\textsuperscript{341} Twice, after the second (frogs) and fifth (diseased livestock) plagues, Pharaoh seeks and obtains external evidence that leads him to deduce that the threat to his people has passed and that he has no reason to accede to what could have only seemed to him like Moses’s magical terrorism. These first five responses of Pharaoh’s lev are not irrational when viewed from his perspective. He is, after all, the regional hegemon who, for all he knows, has just been threatened by a Midianite shepherd and his ragtag slaves. It is only from the rather more well-informed view of the text that the reader recognizes Pharaoh’s utterly futile hubris.\textsuperscript{342}

And yet, Pharaoh does come to lapse in judgment from any rational vantage. His servants, without the responsibility for empire, realize that Moses represents a power much greater than himself. When they ask Pharaoh “how long will this fellow be a snare to us? Send off the men, that they may worship the Lord their god. Do you not yet know that Egypt is lost?” (Ex. 10:7), the answer is that he does not recognize what is obvious to his servants. Pharaoh does not know what it would seem every other Egyptian knew, that Egypt is lost. Pharaoh is one of the few tragic figures in the Bible, “trapped in an obsession which may have had rational beginnings, right or wrong, but which has taken hold of him, bringing not only him but those around him to his ruin…[By the time his


\textsuperscript{342} One counterintuitive interpretation holds that, in the second five plagues, it was necessary for God to harden Pharaoh’s lev not to abolish but to restore the ruler’s free will. “After the succession of plagues that had devastated the land, Pharaoh was under overwhelming pressure to let the Israelites go. Had he done so, it would not have been out of free choice, but rather under force majeure.” Jonathan Sacks, Exodus: The Book of Redemption, p. 49, citing the interpretations of Albo and Sforno. In Mittleman’s formulation, “Pharaoh’s heart is not a prelude to his punishment, it is his punishment. He is the author of his own hopeless situation.” Alan Mittleman, “Ethics in an Axial Age,” p. 35.
servants advocate the release of Israel,] Pharaoh has left rationality behind. He can no longer hear them."

This last phrase about losing the ability to hear contains an important and overlooked insight. Pharaoh’s increasingly stubborn lev is paralleled by his persistent deafness. There has already been occasion to note that the Israelite mind associates the lev with hearing. Pharaoh’s first words voice a refusal to hear. “Who is God that I should hear His voice to send off Israel?” (Ex. 5:2), and this refusal causes Moses’s concern that Pharaoh will not listen to him when speaking for God (Ex 6:12, 30). God himself acknowledges that Pharaoh will not listen to Moses (Ex. 7:4). During the narrative description of the first plague, there are no fewer than three separate occasions that emphasize Pharaoh’s willful deafness (Ex. 7:13, 16, 22). More than once, the verse in which Pharaoh hardens his lev is the same verse that he fails to hear (Ex. 8:11, 15; 9:12). In the final, terrifying plague, God tells Moses that “Pharaoh will not hear you, so that My portents may be multiplied in the land of Egypt” (Ex. 11:9), and then “the Lord toughened Pharaoh’s heart” (Ex. 11:10).

The verses from Prov. 4, above, was a representative example of the relation of lev to hearing. The failure to hear wisdom and truth makes it ever more difficult to condition the lev to understand wisdom and know truth. In biblical psychology, hearing is a form of habituation. Pharaoh’s conscious refusal to hear explains his own culpability in hardening his lev, each time abating the lev’s power to grasp the realities of creation.

“More than anything watched guard your lev, for from it are the ways out to life” (Prov. 4:23). “Ways”, not “way”. The lev leads in multiple ways, down multiple paths.

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Just as the lev can understand wisdom and know truth, it can make man deaf to wisdom and make him blind to truth. Pharaoh would not listen to Moses, would not listen to his Egyptian advisors and servants, he would not direct his lev to acknowledge the reality outside of the one he created for himself.

3.3.5. Fear of Solipsism

The fear of solipsism sheds a special light on the cognitive powers of the lev because a self-fashioned reality is a hazard especially for those endowed with powerful intellect. “Hearken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you,” Jeremiah warns, for “they lead you unto vanity; they speak a vision of their own lev, and not out of the mouth of the Lord” (Jer. 23:16). In addition to this astounding phrase from Jeremiah, the 21 verses of Psalm 77 demonstrate the extent to which the Hebrew Bible knows solipsism as a danger for man’s lev. For the first 10 verses, the psalmist supplicates, moans, cries, suffers. “In the days of my straits I sought the Master. My eye flows at night, it will not stop. I refuse to be consoled” (Ps. 77:3). He asks God to “lend an ear to me” (Ps. 77:2), and everything else is in vv. 2-8 is utterly directed toward the self. “You held open my eyelids. I throbbed and could not speak,” (Ps. 77:5) the psalmist whispers in the distressed tones of an insomniac.345 The psalmist is conscious of his pain and anguish, thinking back on perhaps an imagined past of comfort, and wondering why God does not balm over suffering with grace and compassion. “I remember my song in the night, to my own lev I speak and my ruah inquires. Will the Master forever abandon me, and never again look with favor? Is His kindness gone for all time, His word done for

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time without end? Has God forgotten to show grace, has He closed off in wrath His compassion?” (Ps. 77:7-10). When man speaks to his own lev, he withdraws into himself and forgets the world around him. When man speaks to his own lev and focuses his attention on himself in his narrowness, his own concerns and struggles, his own pain forms the horizon of consciousness. To speak to one’s own lev is to meditate on the self, as the villain Haman does when he “says in his lev” that because the King of Persia wants to honor someone, it must be him (Esther 6:6). From this self-circumscribed frame of reference the psalmist asks if God has disappeared from history.

In v. 11, the psalm shifts. “It is my weakness, that the right hand of Most High has changed” (Ps. 77:11). The psalmist experiences epiphany; it is not God’s abandonment, but his own failing that has causes agony. What is the failing? Attending to vv. 12-21, the contrast with the first half of the psalm becomes clear, specifying the psalmist’s “weakness” in relief. Rather than “speaking to his own lev,” withdrawing into himself, he thinks beyond himself of God’s actions in history. “Your wonders of old. I recite all your works, Your acts I rehearse…You redeemed with Your arm your people, the children of Jacob and Joseph” (Ps. 77:12-16). More than the self exists. To achieve awareness of existence beyond the horizons of the self, to seek an understanding of our situatedness within the world, we must not see God exclusively through our privations but try to see ourselves as God sees us. The psalmist of a sudden remembers God’s deeds in history, the sorrows and anguish of men and nations, and God’s redemption.

Historical consciousness tempers the lev’s fall into solipsism.

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The phrase “speaking to my lev” sometimes has a softer connotation that simply means interior monologue, as in Gen. 24:45; 27:41. The usage above illustrates its excess.
But the psalm goes on to an additional corrective. “The waters saw You, O God, the waters saw You, they trembled, the depths themselves shuddered” (Ps. 77:17). This is a reference to God’s parting of the sea to allow the Israelites to escape Egypt. The departure from Egypt, wandering in the desert, the establishment of covenant and constitution, inhabiting the land, these are the achievements of political life, and they are all imbedded in this oracular verse. But none of them would be possible without God’s intervention in his creation.

The clouds streamed water. The skies sounded with thunder. Your bolts, too, flew about. Your thunder’s sound under the wheel – lightning lit up the world. The earth shuddered and shook. In the sea was Your way, and Your path in the mighty waters, and Your footsteps left no traces. You led Your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron (Ps. 77:18-21).

The God of man is also the God of creation. Man comes to appreciate the smallness of his sorrows in the scope of the history of nations; this, in turn, is itself small when compared to the titanic shifts and motion of the created world. The shaking of the earth, the clearing of the sea, the violence of thunder and lightning, all cause the psalmist to remember the reality and power of the world about him. In concentric circles emanating out from the individual and his pain is, first, the history of men and the community of nations in which the individual is located and in which he plays a small part; beyond that, there is the motion of creation in which mankind itself plays a small part. Here is a table to clarify the development of the psalm. Note that from v. 14 on, nothing is in the first person.

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348 For the metaphysical overtones of the shaking earth, the melting mountains, the general fragility of creation, see Yoram Hazony, *The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture*, pp. 193-218.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Text of Psalm 77</th>
<th>Horizon of Perception</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>My voice to God - let me cry out. My voice to God - hearken to me.</td>
<td>The Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>In the day of my straits I sought the Master. My eye flows at night, it will not stop. I refuse to be consoled.</td>
<td>The Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I remember God and I moan. I speak and my ruah faints.</td>
<td>The Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>You held open my eyelids. I throbbed and could not speak.</td>
<td>The Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I ponder the days of yore, the years long gone.</td>
<td>The Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I remember my song in the night. To my own lev I speak, and my nefesh inquires.</td>
<td>The Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Will the Master forever abandon me, and never again look with favor?</td>
<td>The Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Is His kindness gone for all time, His word done for time without end?</td>
<td>The Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Has God forgotten to show grace, has He closed off in wrath His compassion?</td>
<td>The Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>And I said, it is my weakness, that the right hand of Most High has changed.</td>
<td>(Transition)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>I remember the acts of the Lord when I remember Your wonders of old.</td>
<td>History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>I recite all your works, Your acts I rehearse.</td>
<td>History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>God, Your way is in holiness. Who is a great god like God?</td>
<td>History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>You are the god working wonders. You made known among peoples Your strength.</td>
<td>History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>You redeemed with Your arm Your people, the children of Jacob and Joseph.</td>
<td>History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>The waters saw You, O God, the waters saw You, they trembled, the depths themselves shuddered.</td>
<td>(Transition)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>The clouds streamed water. The skies sounded with thunder. Your bolts, too, flew about.</td>
<td>Creation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Your thunder’s sound under the wheel - lightning lit up the world. The earth shuddered and shook.</td>
<td>Creation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>In the sea was Your way, and Your path in the mighty waters, and Your footsteps left no traces.</td>
<td>Creation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>You led Your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.</td>
<td>History in Creation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Standing at the center of it all is a man speaking to his own lev, with the “weakness” of believing that he is alone, and that his lev is the highest authority.\(^{349}\) But the psalm goes on to underscore both the lev’s limits and its place in creation. It counsels memory, historical consciousness, and even an awareness of the vastness and violence of creation as antidotes to the mistaken and even idolatrous belief that the human lev can replace God.\(^{350}\) For it is “the scoundrel” that “has said in his lev, ‘There is no God’” (Ps. 14:1), and he “who trusts in his own lev, he is a fool, but who walks in wisdom, he will escape” (Prov. 28:26).\(^{351}\) One prophet describes a furious God coming upon Israel “as a bear that is bereaved of her whelps” who will “rend [Israel’s] closed up lev” (Hos. 13:8). A lev that is closed up is a lev that is alienated from creation and its Creator.\(^{352}\)

How to avoid the desperation of being shut up in the prison of the self? If the lev can lead down multiple paths, how can it lead man to wisdom rather than despair? It is

\(^{349}\) “For, lo, I have made thee small among the nations, despised among men. Thy terribleness has deceived thee, and the pride of thy lev, O thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, that holdest the height of the hill, though thou shouldest make thy nest as high as the eagle, I will bring thee down from there, says the Lord” (Jer. 49:16). Wolff notes that describing arrogance and presumptuousness in terms of the enlargement of the heart is the necessary background to the sole statement in the New Testament about the heart of Jesus, that he is “meek and lowly in heart” (“πραος ειµι και ταπεινος τη καρδια,” Matthew 11:29). Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, p. 46.

\(^{350}\) Man speaks to his own lev also at Gen. 17:17; 24:45; Daniel 7:28; I Sam. 27:1; I Kings 12:26; and Eccles. 1:16; 2:1.

\(^{351}\) “Hearken not to the words of the prophets that prophesy to you. They lead you into vanity, they speak a vision of their own lev, and not out of the mouth of the Lord [...] they say to everyone that walks after the stubbornness of his own lev, ‘No evil shall come upon you’” (Jer. 23:16-17). Compare this with Moses, who also equates false prophecy with “the vision of their own lev.” He tells the Israelites “By this shall you know that the Lord has sent me to do all these deeds, that it is not from my own lev” (Num. 16:28).

\(^{352}\) “Yet even now, says the Lord, turn to me with all your lev, and with fasting and with weeping, and with mourning, and rend your lev, and not your garments, and turn to the Lord your God [...]” (Joel 2:12). When the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr recognizes “the essential homelessness of the human spirit” he shares the psalmist’s misgivings about an overconfidence in the self. “[...]F(or the self which stands outside itself and the world cannot find the meaning of life in itself or the world.” Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation, vol. I: Human Nature*, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), p. 14. However the psalmist’s suggestion that history and creation are both dimensions of value that contextualize the self is missing from this particular section of Niebuhr’s writing.
an unavoidable fact that “we consume our years like a sigh. The days of our years are but seventy years, and if in great strength, eighty years. And their pride is trouble and grief, for swiftly cut down, we fly off” (Ps. 90:9-11). Human life is ephemeral, like a sigh, and in its brevity it can bring trouble and grief. But “to count our days rightly, instruct, that we may get a lev of wisdom” (Ps. 90:12). A wise lev counts the days, is aware of past and future. Opposed to the lev of solipsism and misery, the wise lev is the lev of memory. In addition to cognition and perception, the lev is the seat of traditional inheritance.

3.3.6 Memory and Imitation

Before the Israelites reach the promised land, Moses implores them to pass on to their children their own experiences and resolutions in the desert, as well as the experiences of their fathers in Egypt. “And you shall set these words on your lev and in your nefesh …And you shall teach them to your sons, to speak of them, when you sit in your house and when you walk on the way and when you lie down and when you arise” (Deut. 11:18).

“To defend a land, you need an army,” writes Rabbi Sacks. “But to defend freedom, you need education. You need families and schools to ensure that your ideals are passed on to the next generation and never lost, or despaired of, or obscured. The

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353 Alter summarizes, “in effect, this is precisely what the poem as a whole – with its powerful images for representing the limitations of human existence over against God’s eternal being – has achieved for its audience.” Robert Alter, The Book of Psalms, p. 319, n. 12.

354 In order to avoid the Lord’s smite and curse, man must learn to “turn the lev of the fathers to the children, and the lev of the children to their fathers” (Malachi 3:24 or, for translations based on the Latin Vulgate, including King James, Malachi 4:6).

355 For similar usage, see “And these words that I charge upon you today shall be upon your lev. And you shall rehearse them to your sons and speak of them when you sit in your house and when you go on the way and when you lie down and when your rise” (Deut. 6:6-7).
citadels of liberty are houses of study…Moses realized that a people achieves immortality not by building temples or mausoleums, but by engraving their values on the hearts of their children, and they on theirs, and so on until the end of time.”

The word “heart” here is apt. For, words that are set upon the *lev* are meant to be passed on and recorded in the *lev* of others. *Lev* in the Hebrew Bible can also refer to historical or mimetic consciousness, the reception of inheritance, memory, and the imitation of patterns.

This cluster of meanings is a variation, or better yet, a specification of the perceptive qualities of *lev* described above.

A *lev* can “become haughty” when it forgets God and the way of life He presents for Israel (Deut. 8:11-15). One of Job’s friends comes to tell him that the suffering of his children is just, and that if Job himself would only show honest contrition to God, He would show mercy. He goes on to express the traditional morality of inheritance, for which the *lev* serves as a repository, saying “ask, pray, generations of old, take in what their fathers found out. For we are but yesterday, unknowing, for our days are a shadow on earth. Will they not teach you and say to you, and from their *lev* bring out words.” (Job 8:8-10).

This usage suggests that the *lev* is a trove of inherited wisdom. Verses from Proverbs reveal a similar usage. “My son, keep my sayings, and store up my

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357 Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, p. 49. Michael Carasik, *Theologies of the Mind in Biblical Israel*, (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2006) has an excellent discussion of “The Retentive Mind,” pp. 55-92. His rigorous and instructive investigation is not centered on the *lev*, as this one is, but proceeds by comparing writing to memory and awareness. Indeed, in his investigation of the *lev*, Carasik describes it as “receptive to outside stimuli and…may actively create the thoughts and impulses that move us, but it is not a passive receptacle for a remembered reality” p. 106. One instance of *lev* seems to be cast in opposition to memory. “For not much will he recall the days of his life, for God makes him busy with the delight of his *lev*” (Eccles. 5:19). On the contrary, this opposition only reinforces the view that *lev* is the site of memory. The *lev*’s preoccupation with ephemeral pleasure only succeeds in blocking memory because that is where memory lives. The *lev* is the battleground for man’s mimetic capacity, and if it, and it alone, is occupied with something else, than man becomes amnesic.
358 The phrase recalls Deut. 32:7.
commands within you. Keep my commands and live, my teachings like the apple of your eye. Bind them on your fingers, write them on the tablet of your lev” (Prov. 7:1-3). To “write [my sayings, my commands, my teachings] on the tablet of your lev” means to keep them firmly affixed in your memory, a meaning that illuminates the verse “Pay lev, my son, to me, and let your eyes keep my ways” (Prov. 23:26).

In the verse above, as in several of the verses quoted to support the meaning of lev as the repository of past wisdom, the text employs the language of family, and particularly the language of sons inheriting wisdom from their fathers. Even when acknowledging the value of motherhood, as this next verse does, the lev holds onto the words of the father. “For I was a son to my father, a tender only child for my mother. And he taught me and said to me: ‘Let your lev hold on to my words. Keep my commands and live.’” (Prov. 4:3-4). In any case, the lev that holds the words is memory.

When God announces “[f]or, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered, nor come to lev” (Isa. 65:17), “shall not be remembered” means “not come to lev.”

The sons of David are judged according to whether their lev is with God, as David’s was. “The Lord our God be with us, as he was with our fathers,” says Solomon. “Let him not leave us, nor forsake us, that we may incline our lev to him, to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, and his statutes, and his judgments, which he commanded to our fathers…Let your lev therefore be perfect with the Lord our God, to walk in his statutes, and to keep his commandments, as at this day” (I Kings 8:57-58,
In this communal blessing, Solomon understands a *lev* that is “perfect with the Lord” to be a *lev* that walks in God’s ways, the *lev of imitatio Dei*. As the *lev* receives the wisdom of the past it allows man to imitate divine and human exemplars.\(^{360}\)

Following this blessing, there are two examples from I Kings that show a *lev* departed from God and the example of David’s *lev*. “For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his *lev* after other gods, and his *lev* was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the *lev* of David his father” (I Kings 11:4). In this case, Solomon imitates the wrong paradigms, walking in the ways of false gods, and in so doing, betrays the inheritance of his father. Now Solomon’s successors compound the error because, in imitating their father, they inherit his shortcomings. “Now in the eighteenth year of king Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, did Abijam reign over Judah. Three years he reigned in Jerusalem… And he walked in all the sins of his father, which he had done before him. And his *lev* was not perfect with the Lord his God, as the *lev* of David his father” (I Kings 15:1-3, 14). This sequence tracing the *lev* of imitation and memory over multiple generations suggests that the *lev* is the source of man’s path dependency.

In a cryptic psalm of praise, it is written “of You, my *lev* said: ‘Seek My face.’ Your face, Lord, do I seek” (Ps. 27:8). The desire to see the Lord’s face is a reference to Moses’s encounter with God, in which God says “You shall not be able to see My face, for no human can see Me and live” (Ex. 33:20, see through v.23, but cf. Ex. 33:11). The expression is thus of a desire held fast by a people since the intimacy was first denied to

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\(^{359}\) The psalmist acknowledges elsewhere that previous generations were soft of *lev*, “that they be not like their fathers, a wayward, rebellious generation, a generation that was not firm of *lev*, and its ruah not faithful to God” (Ps. 78:8).

\(^{360}\) And in so doing, it demands that those who are in a position to bring the wisdom of the past into the future do so. After warning the later generation of Israelites against following alien gods and rejecting the God of their fathers (Deut. 32:17), Moses entreats the nation of Israel to “set your *lev* upon all these words with which I bear witness against you today, that you charge your sons with them to keep to do all the words of this teaching” (Deut. 32:46).
Moses, their founder. It is a desire to achieve knowledge of God, an always approachable and yet never fully attainable aspiration. This is one of the animating desires of the nation of Israel, what the people have always yearned for. It is at once a core memory and formative event that lives in man’s lev.

Jeremiah also refers to the lev of collective memory. He describes Judah’s inheritance, “surely our fathers have inherited lies, vain idols and things in which there is no profit” and renders judgment. “Therefore, behold, I will make known to them this once, I will cause them to know my hand and my might, and they shall know that my name is the Lord. The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond, it is graven upon the tablet of their lev, and upon the horns of your altars.” (Jer. 16:19-17:2).

Like the lev of perception and cognition, the lev of memory thus has good and evil potentials, and this is one reason why it is not possible for the Hebrew Bible to be simply absorbed into an ethical framework of traditionalism. The wickedness of the fathers described by Isaiah can be passed along just as well as the edifying wisdom of the fathers described in the proverbs and elsewhere. It is necessary to inquire further and see if the term lev regularly assumes moral content.

3.3.7. Integrity of Lev: The Moral Dimension

Note in the following passage how David’s behavior sets the pattern for his successors to follow. “And if thou wilt walk before me, as David thy father walked, in integrity of lev, and in uprightness, to do according to all that I have commanded thee,

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and wilt keep my statutes and judgments, then I will establish the throne of thy kingdom upon Israel for ever, as I promised to David thy father” (I Kings 9:4-5, cf. II Chron. 7:16-18). The section above argues that the lev is what allows man to comprehend these patterns, or that the lev is the part of man that receives and holds on to the wisdom of the past. In this passage from I Kings, the wisdom of the past is specified as moral wisdom. “Integrity of lev” refers to “uprightness,” compliance with God’s law, acting morally in the world.

Another example is when the prophet Haggai pleads with Israel to rebuild a temple in Jerusalem, he pleads on the simple but powerful grounds of fairness. “Is it time for you, yourselves, to dwell in your well timbered houses, while this house,” that is, the Temple, “lies waste?” What greater illustration of man in his small selfishness to house himself and leave homeless the Creator of life? This bothered the prophet, and he urges the people of the nation to “direct your lev to your ways.” (Hag. 1:5). An additional meaning of lev is introduced: the term sometimes refers to humanity’s aptitude to judge right from wrong, fair from unfair, just from unjust, good from wicked. In this meaning, the lev serves as a treasury of moral judgment, the spring of moral action, and in a number of cases, the quality of inner conscience.

Hezekiah illustrates the moral quality of the lev, beseeching God to “remember now how I have walked before you in truth and with a perfect lev, and have done that which is good in your eyes” (II Kings 20:3). Having a “perfect lev” means doing “that which is good in God’s eyes”, or what is good “in truth.” On one occasion, the King James translation has Solomon praying for an “understanding heart,” but the text literally says “Give therefore thy servant a hearing lev to judge thy people, that I may discern
between good and evil. For who is able to judge this thy so great a people?” (I Kings 3:9, cf. v. 11). Then there is the psalmist, who defines a person “who has given no oath in a lie and has sworn not in deceit” as “the clean of hands and the pure of lev” (Ps. 24:4), so that a pure lev resides in a man who has neither done wrong nor intends to do wrong. God hates “a lev plotting wicked designs” (Prov. 6:18).  

That the lev plots wicked designs shows that, just as a perfect or pure lev can mean true goodness or good intention, so can the lev be implicated in evil. Moses knows that the Israelites, like all men, will be given to ungenerous and unfeeling attitudes toward their brothers. “Watch yourself, lest there be in your lev a base thing,” he instructs as the seventh year, the year of agricultural fallowness and debt remission draws near,

and you look meanly at your brother the pauper and you do not give to him and he call to the Lord against you and it be an offense in you. You shall surely give to him, and your lev shall not be evil, for by virtue of this thing the Lord your God will bless you in all your doings and in all that your hand reaches. For the pauper will not cease from the midst of the land (Deut. 15:9-11).

Whether the “base thing” that enters into the lev, making the lev itself evil, is the Israelite’s failure to meet the needs of his brothers, or it is his obstinate refusal to fulfill the communal laws and obligations to which he consented, or both, the lev is the site of evil as it can be the site of goodness.

Thus, the lev’s moral dimension does not mean that man is necessarily given to humane and moral actions. The capacity for morality does not guarantee morality in fact. And it is precisely the moral capacity of the lev that permits man to be obstinate and stubborn, as the Israelites so often are. “For I earnestly forewarned your fathers,” recalls

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362 For similar usage, see Gen. 20:11-14.
363 For similar usage, see Eccles. 8:11; cf. Ibid. 9:3.
Jeremiah, “on the day that I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, to this day, forwarning them from morning till night, saying, ‘Obey my voice.’ Yet they obeyed not, nor inclined their ear, but walked ever one in the stubbornness of their evil lev” (Jer. 11:7-8). In resisting God’s voice, the evil lev demonstrates rigidity and strength – perhaps for unworthy ends – but strength nonetheless. The moral quality of the lev is also the source of its fortitude, and resolution.

This meaning explains with greater precision why it is the lev upon which or in which man receives and keeps God’s commandments. “And you shall remember all the way on which the Lord your God led you these forty years in the wilderness, in order to afflict you, to test you, to know what was in your lev, whether you would keep His commandments or not” (Deut. 8:2). Here, God knowing man’s lev means testing his resolve.

Related to the moral qualities of lev is what would best be described as conscience, or the inner judgment of the self. This differs from the solipsism of which the lev is capable because it is evaluative and critical rather than amnesiac and limiting. One lev forgets history and creation and holds the self up as the solus ipse of existence; the other lev casts the self down, subjecting it to scrutiny.

Imagine an awful moral challenge, such as genocide. When a people is being sent to march off to its extermination, do not pretend that you have no awareness of what is happening. “Save those who are taken to death, and from those stumbling to slaughter do not hold back. Should you say, ‘Why, we did not know of this.’ Will not the Weigher of

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364 “The reason given for the ‘beating’ of the heart in the respective contexts shows that the writer does not mean the beating of the heart, either in the physiological sense, or in the sense of excited emotions; what is being described is the reaction of ethical judgment formed by the conscience.” Wolff, Anthropology of the Old Testament, p. 51.
livot discern, and the Watcher of your life not know, and pay back a man by his deeds?” (Prov. 24:11-12). A feigned ignorance would be truly known in the conscience, or in the lev.

When, in the desert, Moses needs the nation of Israel to come together to contribute material for a common purpose, the lev of conscience can be seen on a corporate scale. “All the community of Israelites went out from before Moses. And every man whose lev moved him and everyone whose ruah urged him came, they brought a donation of the Lord for the task of the Tent of Meeting and for all the work and for the sacred garments” (Ex. 35:21). An inner sense of obligation and duty moves Israelites to give of their own to the community and to God. Another example occurs after David cuts the corners of Saul’s royal cloak in the caves of Ein Gedi, his “lev smote him” (I Sam. 24:6), the biblical formulation for remorse.365 “Who commits adultery with a woman is lev-less, ruining his life” (Prov. 6:32), meaning that the adulterer lacks moral judgment or conscience. Hosea gives an example of a present but inoperative lev, “they consider not in their lev that I remember all their wickedness [...]” (Hosea 7:2).

These examples demonstrate that in the biblical view, a distinctly moral quality is laden within each person’s lev. Highlighting the biblical references to this moral quality suggests what exactly it is that the lev of memory inherits from the past. Finally,

365 Robert Alter, The David Story, p. 148, n. 6. After God “incites” the people against their king by forcing him to undertake a census, “David’s lev” again “smote him” (II Sam. 24:10). Why is a census wrong? Two reasons predominate. First, according to Ex. 30:12, every counted Israelite owes half a shekel as “ransom” for his life. “Since such a payment could not be realistically expected in a total census of the nation, masses of people would be put in a condition of violation of ritual.” In addition, there is latent anxiety about the political effects of the military conscription that follows a census. “[T]he census served as the basis for conscription (compare the notation in verse 9 of those counted as ‘sword-wielding men’), and thus imposing the census might conceivably have provoked opposition to the threatened conscription and to the king who was behind it. It is noteworthy that the census is carried out by army officers.” Robert Alter, The David Story, p. 354, n. 3; cf. Alter, The Five Books of Moses, p. 486, n. 12.
Hebrew Scriptures indicate that the *lev’s* moral inheritance allows for the human capacity for self-government.

In controlling even and especially righteous anger, God himself sets the standard for governing the self. The first verses of Hosea 11 summarize the history of Israel’s faults and transgressions, justifying the nation’s disarray and its vulnerability to the Assyrian empire. Yet for all of Israel’s sins and shortcomings, God proclaims “my *lev* is turned against me, all my tenderness is stirred. I will not execute the fierceness of my anger, I will not turn to destroy Ephraim, for I am God, and not man” (Hos. 11:8-9).366

The last part of the verse expresses an elemental difference between God and man. God’s *lev* turns against him, it restricts his fierceness and it prevents him from breaking the covenant with Israel that binds him.367 But God is God and man is man. And the human *lev* is not powerful enough to perfectly control human actions, to keep man faithful and live in truth to his own commitments.

Nevertheless, the *lev* remains the fount of self-control and resolve. “And you shall remember all the way on which the Lord your God led you these forty years in the wilderness,” Moses explains, “in order to afflict you, to test you, to know what was in your *lev*, whether you would keep His commandments or not” (Deut. 8:2). The suffering in the desert, the crises and strains of political life at the birth of national consciousness, all exercise and test the power to keep the divine law that the Israelites had voluntarily chosen. The *lev* here stands for that power of resolve and discipline.

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367 For similar usage, see Num. 23:19; although I Sam. 15:29 does not mention God’s *lev*, it too describes a similar concept.
That the *lev* is the necessary base for resolve and discipline is also articulated in Ezekiel. God says he “will take the stony *lev* out of their flesh, and will give them a *lev* of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes, and keep my ordinances, and do them” (Ezek. 11:19-20). Here too the *lev* is needed specifically in order to keep and do ordinances. What is more interesting is that it must be a supple *lev*, not a *lev* not of stone (as that of Nabal, I Sam. 25:36-38, above). To keep and do commandments, man needs a *lev* that is alive to creation and the past, alive to existence outside the self.

3.3.8. **Inner Depths and Nebulous Heights**

When Samuel comes to look upon the sons of Jesse in search of a king for Israel, he is drawn to the eldest, tallest, best looking son, following criteria he previously used in electing Saul, “a fine and goodly young fellow, and no man of the Israelites was goodlier than he, head and shoulders taller than all the people,” (I Sam. 9:2). Samuel identifies leadership potential with physical characteristics, and it is easy to understand why.\(^{368}\)

The Israelites saw themselves as a small people not only in number but in physical size as well, as David’s confrontation with the giant Goliath, told in next chapter in I Samuel, visualizes so clearly.\(^{369}\) In the ancient world of battle and bloodshed, there is good sense in seeking a man of physical prowess to lead the nation and its armed forces.

But the eyes only survey the surface and cannot detect a man’s inner qualities. God’s rebuke of Samuel establishes an additional usage of *lev* in the Hebrew Bible.

When God says “look not to his appearance and to his lofty stature, for these I have cast

\(^{368}\) Robert Alter, *The David Story*, p. 96, n. 6.

\(^{369}\) The Israelite spies worry that the inhabitants of Canaan are “greater and loftier” (Deut. 1:28) than they are because they will need to “dispossess nations greater and mightier than [themselves], great towns, and fortified to the heavens, a great and lofty people, the sons of giants,” (Deut. 9:1-2, cf. 11:23). Ludwig Köhler, *Hebrew Man*, trans. Peter R. Ackroyd, (London: SCM Press LTD, 1956), p. 24.
aside. For not as man sees does God see. For man sees with the eyes and the Lord sees with his lev” (I Sam. 16:7),\(^{370}\) the lev is introduced as a place of mystery beyond human knowledge. Much like Hermes’ special knowledge of nature,\(^{371}\) God’s lev penetrates beyond human ken.

So perhaps this passage only suggests that God’s lev is beyond human comprehension, but it turns out that there are occasions when man’s lev too is unknowable. At a moment when his own thoughts are opaque even to himself, the psalmist implores, “search me, God, and know my lev, probe me and know my thoughts” (Ps. 139:23). Elsewhere it is said that “a man’s whole way is straight in his eyes, but the Lord takes the measure of livot” (Prov. 21:2), or again, “a man’s lev may reckon his way, but the Lord will make his step firm” (Prov. 16:9). It is natural for a man, particularly a young man, to think of the future, how his life will unfurl through time. The boy imagines his higher schooling, his career, the moments of weight and rites of passage that initiate him into maturity and responsibility. He thinks of his children, of his children’s children, and wonders how they will look back upon his example of effort and manhood, how they will receive and how they will pass on what he will labor his whole life to provide. But, though he thinks this way, there are a whole range of deeper thoughts and passions, dreams and memories that fill the reservoir of his subconscious. His actions in life will take him off the path that is straight before his eyes. Man’s deepest, most inward

\(^{370}\) For similar usage, see I Sam. 13:14, in which the lev of the Lord is also responsible for appointing the political ruler. Shepherds are the template for political rule in the Hebrew Bible, and they too are chosen by God’s lev. “I will give you shepherds according to my lev, who shall feed you with knowledge and understanding” (Jer. 3:15).

convictions are mysterious even unto himself. “If man were wholly ignorant of himself,”
Tocqueville writes,

he would have no poetry in him, for one cannot describe what one does not conceive. If he saw himself clearly, his imagination would remain idle and would have nothing to add to the picture. But the nature of man is sufficiently revealed for him to know something of himself and veiled to leave much in impenetrable darkness, a darkness in which he ever gropes, forever in vain, trying to understand himself.372

And so, while a good many usages of lev imply meanings that clarify human potential and suggest categories of human possibility, a fraction of usages make it clear that complete, precise knowledge of the human lev is inaccessible, hidden, strange, unknowable.

“For He knows the secrets of the lev” (Ps. 44:22). As a place of secrets, in his lev, man can harbor ill will, malevolence and guile. “[The people of Israel’s] tongue is a sharpened arrow, it speaks deceit. One speaks peaceably to his neighbor with his mouth, but in lev he lies in wait for him” (Jer. 9:7)373 Speaking peaceably to one’s neighbor is opposed to concealed machinations, secrets undisclosed by the lev.374

This meaning of lev emerges with particular clarity in descriptions of physical settings. “And he took three sticks in his palm and he thrust them into Absalom’s lev, still alive in the lev of the terebinth” (II Sam. 18:14-15). The first instance of lev refers to the physical organ that beats in the chest, but “lev of the terebinth” means the innermost thicket of the forest, where light cannot penetrate through the canopy or bramble. The lev

373 For similar usage, see Jer. 17:9.
374 The contrast between nature, which “exhausts itself in its functions,” and hence discloses its essence by its activity, and that part of man, the homo absconditus, whom no one knows, who hardly knows himself, is laid out in Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Family Redeemed: Essays on Family Relationships, p. 21.
of the tree is a place of obscurity and shadow. As is Sheol, the Bible’s afterlife underworld. “Sheol and Perdition are before the Lord, how much more so the livot of men” (Prov. 15:11). Comparing the livot of men to Sheol is to locate it on a scale of unfathomability and incomprehension.

Just as the lev is compared to these unknowable depths, so do the heavens above have a lev. “And you came forward and stood at the bottom of the mountain, and the mountain was burning with fire to the lev of the heavens – darkness, cloud, and dense fog” (Deut. 4:11). The fire burned to the lev of the heavens, the flames disappeared up into the heights that cannot be seen or attained by man.

Beyond the afterworld, the bramble of the forest, and the heights of the heavens, the commonest physical setting that equates the lev with the limits of human knowledge is the sea. When Jonah says “for thou didst cast me into the deep, into the lev of the seas; and the floods compassed me about. All thy billows and thy waves passed over me” (Jonah 2:4), the “lev of the seas” describes “the deep.” The depths are also associated with the lev of the sea in the famous and stirring Song of the Sea (Ex. 15:1-18), which the Israelites sing after their deliverance from Pharaoh’s army at the Sea of Reeds. “And with the ruah of your nostrils waters heaped up, streams stood up like a mount, the depths congealed in the lev of the sea” (Ex. 15:8). The depths themselves now disappear into the lev of the sea, an unknowable and infinite vacuum. The lev of the sea swallowed up the depths as well as crumbling masses of land. “Therefore we fear not when the earth

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375 “The vast depths of the realm of death (Sheol and Perdition are synonyms, not distinct entities) lie transparently exposed to the Lord’s scrutiny, which therefore can penetrate the human heart with incomparably greater ease. [The verse] is a powerful statement of how completely God knows all our most innermost thoughts.” Robert Alter, The Wisdom Books, p. 259. n. 11. For an exploration of Sheol in relation to other conceptions of the afterlife, see Alan E. Bernstein, The Formation of Hell: Death and Retribution in the Ancient and Early Christian Worlds, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 140-146.
brakes apart, when mountains collapse in the lev of the seas” (Ps. 46:3). The seas were so deep, so vast, that they could consume endlessly, devouring whatever was set into them. Where did all this stuff go? It defied the Hebrew mind, which named this immeasurable and inscrutable quality of the ocean “lev.”

Pretending to have knowledge of the unknowable, professing understanding of the lev of the sea, was tantamount to hubris. “Thus says the lord God, ‘Because thy lev is lifted up, and thou hast said, I am God, I sit in the seat of God, in the lev of the seas, yet thou art a man, and not God, though thou hast set they lev as the lev of God […]” (Ezek. 28:1-2). This meaning of lev is one of the perennial wonders and it establishes a conscious limit to human knowledge. “Three things are there too wondrous for me, and four I cannot know,” says the author of Proverbs, “the eagle’s way in the heavens, the way of the snake on a rock, the ship’s way in the lev of the sea, and the way of a man in a young woman” (Prov. 30:18-29).

One final cryptic passage from Proverbs illustrates the essential mystery of the lev. “Like water face to face thus the lev of man to man” (Prov. 27:15). To gaze upon the reflection of one’s own face in water is to see an imperfect image. Undulation and current distort vision, obscuring the rippled likeness. So is man’s understanding of his own lev, distorted, and unknowable.\(^{376}\)

3.3.9. Conclusion: Cognition, Memory, and Morality

This last section acknowledges the limits of man’s understanding of the essence of lev. And though it may be ultimately mysterious, as the sections prior to this last one have shown, it is not wholly beyond human knowledge either.

The important things we do know about lev are its uses in human cognition, memory, and the moral life. With the lev comes learning. Man can both deduce from experience in and observations from the created world, and man can learn from past generations and traditions. In the biblical view, employing these powers to their fullest extent is praiseworthy and failing to develop them is worthy of blame.

Along with this capacity for learning come the moral standards of right and wrong action. In his lev, man is free to choose between these alternatives, and he is responsible for his free choice. The moral realm of good and evil is not derived from popular consent or artifice, nor is it an illusory superstructure veiling the true nature of coercive threat. Through the lev, man’s powers of cognition, memory, and morality are natural to him. They are present in his essence.

3.4. Conclusion

This is the anthropology of the Hebrew Bible: the basar-nefesh-ruah-neshama account tells us what man is; the lev tells us who man is. Man is a part of the natural world, and must seek to flourish in harmony with it. But he is also capable of thought, learning from the world and learning from generations of ancestral inheritance. He is free to act morally or immorally, to govern himself or to give way to evil. “At the tent flap sin crouches and for you is its longing but you will rule over it” (Gen. 4:7).
That is one reason why so many of the soul terms mean “will” or “desire.” In the biblical view, the will is everywhere; choice is everywhere. In his soul, man is free, and the Bible never tires of showing man’s choosing – often making the wrong choice – but nevertheless, choosing from the deep within. Far from an anthropological worldview of determinism or obedience, the Bible constantly affirms liberty and choice, and through God’s punishment and the narrative history that flows from that choice, responsibility. That is where the lev comes in, governing the human soul through its higher powers.

The soul equips man to act, the heart tells him how to act. The soul can be understood scientifically, it is component parts; the heart is mysterious unto itself in its unity, it is the moral core of an integrated whole. The body and soul sums up the parts of existence; the lev makes man responsible and free.

This is the grammar of man, his core, his essences, his potential and promise. Rabbi Sacks observes that in terms of the narrative in Genesis, the Bible does not long dwell on the creation of the universe. There are relatively few verses dedicated to such an important event. Why? “More than the Bible is interested in the home God made for man,” he speculates, “it is concerned with the home man makes for God. Fundamental to it is not the natural world God created but the social world we create. That is the significance of the book we call Genesis,” and it is the direction we now turn. If this is man, let us see him in relation with others. What is the Hebrew Bible’s social teaching?

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4. Social Theory of the Hebrew Bible

4.1. Introduction: Descent as the Ground of Consent

One apparent tension that develops throughout the Hebrew Bible concerns the authority of the family and the role of personal autonomy. Those standing at the foot of Sinai affirmed or rejected the covenant in an act of free choice. “And Moses came and recounted to the people all the Lord’s words and all the laws, and the people answered with a single voice and said, ‘All the words that the Lord has spoken we will do,’” (Ex. 19:8; 24:3, 8). Consent, freely given, is the threshold of legitimate citizenship. This concept – rooted in individual autonomy – that so inspired the architects of modern constitutionalism is the defining characteristic of the Sinaitic covenant.

But the individual consent that is necessary for joining the Israelite nation is not the source of the Israelite nation. Consent does not bring the nation into being, consent sanctions what already exists. Consent, in other words, is not fundamental but rests on something prior. But what?

The people of Israel, or in the Bible’s literal – and telling – phrase, the “children of Israel” existed as a people before their constitution is ratified. The phrase “children of Israel” implies the nation’s true origin: more than an ethnic group, the children of Israel are an extended family claiming shared ancestry in the blood and bone of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They all look back at common heritage, shared collective memories, and they look forward, hopefully, toward a promise of national redemption.

At Sinai, the individuals who are asked to consent all already bear attachments to a people and an extended family. These prior attachments, given from birth, are not chosen, and hence, are not themselves legitimized by consent. Underlying freely given consent is unchosen constraint. Each Israeliite may opt into the covenant at Sinai, but no Israeliite opted into the family of his parents and grandparents, and through them, the family of Abraham, with all its expectations, blessings, and duties. The givenness of being born into a family that you did not choose, whose name you forever bear, and to whose actions and obligations you yourself must answer, this experience of faithfulness and loyalty coexists with a national experience that relies on assent and hence the possibility of rejection. The chosen people are chosen first, only then can they exercise the power of choice.

The covenant at Sinai suggests a paradigm of autonomy and choice, of national self-making. God offers Israel a choice, and it is up to Israel to choose: affirm or deny. Prior to that, there is the patriarchal family, which revolves around the axes of givenness, gratitude, responsibility, and obligation.

If Sinai is kindled by the human potential for responsibility over the self; its patriarchal origins accentuate the inheritance over which no one person is fully responsible and on the basis of which we can have responsibility at all. Therefore, it would be incorrect to suggest, as Walzer does, that these are two coequal paradigms that wrestle with one another for the soul of Israel.\textsuperscript{380} The Sinaitic and the patriarchal paradigms are not coequal. They are presented in a scale of priority.

But which is more fundamental? One might say that the higher consciousness and chronological advance of Sinai supersedes and transcends the basic and merely instrumental training offered by the patriarchal paradigm. According to this interpretation, the argument for autonomous choice is the achievement Hebraic social thought. That is a serious view with textual support.

There is also textual evidence to support the view that the paradigm of the patriarchs is the fundamental social theory of the Hebrew Bible, which confidently acknowledges alternative, and in some ways complementary, approaches. Scripture acknowledges and to an extent celebrates the human capacity to choose, but it does so on the basis of and against the background of the more fundamental capacity to respect the unchosen birthright into which each child of Israel is born.

In the context of early modern constitutionalism, the two capacities – the ability to choose and the ability to respect what has been chosen – are bifurcated and set against one another. Agency and consent are Locke’s theoretical weapons in his battle against unchosen obligation. But in the biblical text, and the portrait of human life it so vividly presents, these capacities exist together in ordered priority. If it is a tension, it is a

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381 “The Hebrew Bible for the first time envisaged a God who was radically alone, and thus allowed man to see himself as radically alone, which is to say, conscious of his solitude. So, within the briefest possible span, the Bible sets out the twin poles of human existence – the dignity of man as the image of God, and the incompleteness of man, the relationship-seeking animal.” Jonathan Sacks, Radical Then, Radical Now, p. 75.

382 Rabbi Sacks also observes how the modern contract theorists build a state on the back of the Bible’s concepts, but in the process hollows them out. See Jonathan Sacks, Radical Then, Radical Now, pp. 122-123.

383 “The Sinai covenant…transformed the Jewish people from a family of tribes into a body politic which could then proceed to develop its constitution and regime…[The biblical description of Sinai] provides us with a clear picture of this process. On the one hand, it describes the covenant that institutionalizes the fundamental relationship between God and Israel, which is necessary to actually create the new body politic in which God assumed direct rule over Israel. On the other hand, the actual institutions of the regime are portrayed as coming from distinctly non-Divine, even non-Jewish, sources, partly from the inherited tradition of tribal government and partly from Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, who suggests the way to structure one branch of the national government.” Daniel J. Elazar, ed., Kinship & Consent: The Jewish
healthy and vital one that does not indicate confusion, inconsistency, or incoherence, but an awareness of the range of human capabilities and a true rendering of the complexity of the human condition.

Choice and chosenness are encapsulated in two covenants: the covenant of Sinai and God’s covenant with Abraham. These covenants serve as concrete entrées into the differences between the two ways of looking at the Bible’s social teaching. They are preceded, it is true, by God’s covenant with mankind through Noah. But this is universal, unconditional, and involves no limiting principle. It is with “every living creature” for “everlasting generations” (Gen. 9:12-13). The latter two covenants are limited, so they, and not Noah’s, instruct by their principles of limitation.

The covenant with Abraham promises to make his “seed like the dust of the earth” (Gen. 13:16). His “seed,” Abraham’s own progeny, will carry a covenantal birthright from one generation to the next. Now, compare this to main human figure in the national ratification at Sinai: Moses is an intermediary (Ex. 19:9), a framer but not a founding father. In contrast to Abraham’s descendants, in whom alone the promise of the covenant lives, the text records little of Moses’s inglorious children. His son Gershom is born (Ex. 2:22), and brought back with him to Egypt from Midian (Ex. 4:20) before the national exodus. A second son, Eliezer, is named much later (Ex. 18:4), but biblical history does not record anything of their life, their pursuits, or their role in the people their father governed and led. Nothing. The Sinaitic covenant is not bequeathed

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See also Gen. 15:5, 13, 18; 17:10-14, et al.

Michael Walzer, *In God’s Shadow: Politics in the Hebrew Bible*, pp. 1-2. Num. 3 begins by saying it is about to list “the generations of Aaron and Moses” (Num. 3:1). After the genealogy of Aaron, the text moves on without listing Moses’ children.

Well, almost nothing. Their genealogies are recorded in 1 Chronicles 23-24. 

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through ancestry but lives or dies with personal and individual commitment to a consecrated way of life, guided by laws freely accepted and commandments freely observed.\textsuperscript{387}

We can learn from concerns expressed over inclusion to and exclusion from the different covenants. The Abrahamic covenant delineates a family, so behavior that adulterates the family, that corrupts the purity of line, behaviors such as intermarriage and wanton intercourse with women of other nations or other tribes, such behaviors are to be zealously guarded against. The legal infrastructure that governs Israelite marriage (Lev. 18:6-23; 20:10-21) ratifies some old taboos, and serve to correct some of the patriarchal shortcomings; but they serve fundamentally to consecrate the prohibitions against familial degeneracy. When Abraham was “old, advanced in years” he made his servant, “the elder of his household,” pledge an oath that Isaac would marry a woman from Ur, the city of Abraham’s birth. “Put your hand, pray, under my thigh, that I may make you swear by the Lord, God of the heavens and God of the earth, that you shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanite in whose midst I dwell. But to my land and to my birthplace you shall go, and you shall take a wife for my son, for Isaac” (Gen 24:3-4). A generation later, Isaac repeats his father’s sentiment, commanding Jacob to “not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan. Rise, go to Paddan-Aram to the house of Bethuel your mother’s father, and take you from there a wife from the daughters of Laban, your mother’s brother” (Gen. 28:1-2). Michael Walzer

\textsuperscript{387} That being said, one must acknowledge that, even in the national context, the familial origins of the nation make themselves felt. Moses sets out the covenant at Sinai to “the house of Jacob” and the “children of Israel” (Ex. 19:3). And so, while there is no special promise to Moses and his line, as there was to Abraham and his line, the nation of Israel is still based on the children of Israel.
observes, uncharitably but accurately, that this conception “favors a politics of nativism and exclusion.”

Unlike the Abrahamic covenant, the national covenant includes the “motley throng” that left Egypt with the Israelites (Ex. 12:38), who are more than once reminded that “one law shall there be for the native and for the sojourner who sojourns in your midst” (Ex. 12:49). The provisions that allow for joining the covenant through consent and choice favor a politics of welcoming openness, even, at times, expansion. In this covenant, the purity of the family is still central – a whole legal infrastructure governs the prohibition against adultery and incest, but worry over such things as well as intermarriage is eclipsed on this larger scale by anxiety over communal idolatry and national assimilation.

In the later historical narrative, both inclinations remain present. Ruth echoes the Sinaitic covenant: a former Moabite, Ruth chooses to reject the gods of her people, cleave unto Naomi, and, exercising autonomy and choice to her full potential, join the destiny of Israel (Ruth 1:15-18). Nehemia echoes God’s covenant with Abraham. It is a book of exile, of national insecurity, in which the extinction of Israel is easy to imagine; it recalls the oldest stratum of Abraham’s chosenness, and resolves not to “give our daughters unto the peoples of the land, nor take their daughters for our sons” (Neh. 10:31, see through v. 32).

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388 Michael Walzer, In God’s Shadow: Politics in the Hebrew Bible, p. 3. See Ex. 34:14-16 for a grounding of this view in the text.
390 Michael Walzer, In God’s Shadow: Politics in the Hebrew Bible, p. 3.
But again, though both strains linger throughout, these are not equal binaries in the biblical text. Even in the context of the national covenant, in the heart of the Sinaitic paradigm, the familial origins of the covenant appear in new institutionalized settings. The priestly covenant with Aaron (Ex. 29:44-46) and the monarchic covenant with David (2 Sam. 7, but also see Jer. 33:17-21) are both covenants, in Walzer’s phrase, of “flesh, seed, and generational succession.”

In the sections that follow, I focus on the more fundamental aspect of the two – not at the exclusion of consent and choice, but in an earnest effort to understand and describe the logic of what is most fundamental in the Hebrew Bible’s social teaching. The focus is on the family, described, if you like, in horizontal and vertical axes, according to the husband/wife and the parent/child relationships. Attending to the family in Hebrew Scripture is the most precise way of elucidating the elements of descent, origins, and unchosen moral inheritance.

Rabbi Sacks writes that

the book of Exodus will tell the story of the birth of Israel as a nation. By prefacing it with the stories of the patriarchs and matriarchs, the Bible is making a fundamental assertion: that nations are born of individuals, not individuals of nations. The way we order our private lives determines the order we are eventually able to make of society as a whole.

The social thought of the Bible simply does not support such a view. Rabbi Sacks, who is usually so consciously attuned to such things,

392 The phrase is from Michael Walzer, *In God’s Shadow: Politics in the Hebrew Bible*, p. 4. But then again, though the monarchy is passed through seed, it is David’s seed and not Jonathan’s; and moreover, David, Ruth’s great-grandson (Ruth 4:17), is himself the descendant of one who chose to join the Israelites.


394 He himself writes elsewhere, and truer to the Bible’s own frames of reference, that “from Abraham onwards, the Hebrew Bible begins to tell a story about one family, and eventually one nation, who will become an example to all humanity of what it is to live under the sovereignty of God. ‘Through you,’ says
liberal order to obscure his judgment and analysis. We, who live in the theological-political world that Locke helped design, are given to believe that the antinomies are “nation/individual,” and “public/private.” We need to step back into the biblical text to see that, on its own account, the nation is born of a family – not an individual at a static moment, but a chain of related individuals, linked by birth and memory, that stretch on through history.

4.2. Husband and Wife in the Hebrew Bible

4.2.1. The Challenge of Human Association

The social theory of the Hebrew Bible necessarily begins not with the creation of man, but with the creation of woman. No social teaching is drawn from the experience of the primordial and solitary Adam because he has no society. Biblical social thought is based on – and at all levels never disconnected from – the society of man and woman.

In the telling of Genesis, creation is evolutionary, with more advanced forms of life following lower forms. The great difference between the biblical and secular accounts is not time – “days” precede the creation of the sun so the most literal reading of

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395 Many brilliant works of commentary and philosophy have been written to reconcile the two creation stories of Adam, one found in Gen. 1:26-30, and the other at Gen. 2:7-8. The most influential and most impressive of these is the elaborate essay by Rabbi Soloveitchik. “The Lonely Man of Faith” was first issued in the journal Tradition, subsequently issued as a monograph, Joseph B. Soloveitchik, The Lonely Man of Faith, (New York: Doubleday, 2006). In The Lonely Man of Faith, Rabbi Soloveitchik describes the two Adams as two “typological categories”; not two descriptions of an historical man, but two vistas into the human personality of all men. Adam the first, created whole, together with the woman, is created to “have dominion” or “hold sway over” the animal kingdom and the earth. This is majestic man, who pursues interests, develops technology, who lives in the world of power and whose relationships are those of utility. Majestic man is the creative man, as God is a creative God. Adam the second, described in the second chapter of Genesis, is shaped from the dust of the earth, and created not to have dominion but to “keep and preserve” the Garden. Made solitary, incomplete, this is the lonely man of solitude and yearning for relationship, a covenantal man who needs a covenantal community for redemption.
“yom,” day, cannot be assumed to be one revolution of the earth around the sun. The great difference, rather, is the moral dimension that is sown into the fabric of creation. In prominent secular accounts of evolution, nature is blind, set in motion and carried by its own momentum, a perfectly engineered machine of balance and counterbalance, propelled by chaotic forces, but morally neutral. In the account of Genesis, by contrast, each stage of creation is crowned with God’s moral judgment: “and God saw that it was good” (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25); and later, when “God saw all that He had done, and, look, it was very good” (Gen. 1:31). Seven times elements of creation are called good, and once, as a whole, very good.³⁹⁶ This is a good world, a world of joy and glory, a world given to human prosperity and happiness.

Because it is a good world, the first appearance of the phrase “not good,” the first morally bad judgment, takes on a special meaning. The first thing called “not good” is solitude. “It is not good for the human to be alone” (Gen. 2:18).³⁹⁷ The beginning of the Bible’s social wisdom is that the life of solitude, into which the first man was born and from which some never escape, is a life of moral impoverishment.

With the birth of the individual in Genesis, in other words, something else is born: loneliness and the necessity of relationship.³⁹⁸ In the biblical telling, as in the Lockean telling, man is born alone and seeks out others. The difference is the normative evaluation of such a seeking. Locke’s discussion of the family makes it clear that man’s

³⁹⁶ For the exceptions and discussion, see Leon Kass, The Beginning of Wisdom, p. 39 and ff.
³⁹⁸ Jonathan Sacks, Radical Then, Radical Now, p. 75. Rabbi Soloveitchik disagrees, bringing a similar critique that Rousseau brought to Hobbes: an individual who is lonely and yearns for community is already social. See The Emergence of Ethical Man, pp. 88-91.
natural coupling and natural sociality is a fact, is natural, but is a natural activity that compromises the human potential for a life of consented freedom. In the biblical view, the search for relationship is the normative standard, it is the Bible’s ought, to invert the phrase from Genesis, it is preeminently good for man to be with others.

What is the nature of this normative standard, and what is the reasoning behind it? Outlined below, there are four possible options, each with some textual support.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Normative Prescription of Human Sociality</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Man is naturally weak. He needs the community of others to supply his deficiencies, including the protection of body and the provision of food. Due to human weakness, human survival requires cooperation. “It is not good for the human to live alone” really means man cannot live alone. Necessity and moral improvement are conflated.³⁹⁹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 “It is not good for the human to live alone.” Man can naturally survive on his own, but such survival is not good. Primitive food, shelter, and protection – crude survival – is possible, but not civilized living, not the “good life.”⁴⁰⁰ In particular, without the partnership of man and woman, the goods of life cannot be passed on to the next generation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Man is lonely. He is designed to interact with others. His cries become song with the harmony of another.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Man, made in God’s image, is prone to believe he is God. Because he will be prone to imagine himself as too strong, as hubristic, he needs another to ground him, to chasten him,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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⁴⁰⁰ Compare the transition in the first book of Aristotle’s *Politics* from the descriptive to the teleological and normative frames of reference, where he notes that the polis “comes into being for the sake of living, [but] exists for the sake of living well.” See Aristotle, *Politics* 1252b.
not to supply his lacks but to remind him that he has lacks.\textsuperscript{401}

All of these possible explanations have support in the biblical text, and for present purposes there is no reason to prefer one over the others. These justifications all support the view that, if man is to fully live in the good world that God created, if he is to live the moral life and the good life, he is to do so with others.

After pronouncing that man’s goodness is bound up with his sociality, God makes woman. “I shall make him a sustainer beside him” (Gen. 2:18). It is necessary to delve into the Hebrew phrase that Alter renders “sustainer” to fully bring out the social dynamic that is being born. Woman is “ezer-k’negdo,” ezer, “a help,” and k’negdo, “as against him,” (or “over and against him”). As Rabbi Sacks reads it, the fact that the woman is potentially both with and against man, it is clear that she is “a separate self, a person, an equal, not subordinate to the male.” The fact that woman is born of man and able to complement him, but also born of man and able to oppose him, proves that she has her own will, her own choices to make, her own integrity and responsibility.

The woman’s autonomy is evinced in her subsequent actions in Eden; for, however one evaluates them, they are born of her choice and her will, and they demonstrate a person equal to, if not in some ways superior to, the man. The fact of her freedom, then, forces the reader to confront the most fundamental question of all social life. If, to live well, human kind requires community; and if, each individual person, created in the image of God, is endowed with freedom, then the question is: How can there be a stable and ordered relationship between two free individuals? Rabbi Sacks observes that, in the Bible’s ideal,

\textsuperscript{401} Kass, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 72-73.
relationships lie not in power but in the bond of mutuality made possible by language. A relationship that depends on dominance – physical, economic, or political – is not one between free agents. If I have power over you, my will prevails at the expense of yours. You are a means to my end. This fails the biblical test of treating each person as an image of God. It also fails to redeem solitude, for if I regard you as an extension of me, not a person in your own right, I am still alone.402

The fact of freedom is now complicated by the fact of power. Men are generally stronger than women, and can force them into submission. How can the bond between these two – free and equal in some ways but unequal in others – achieve the society that they each require to live well?

4.2.2. Sex and Society

The Hebrew Bible’s analysis of the relationship between man and woman can be seen as a proxy for its analysis of the proper relationship between all individuals or groups with agency and unequal power. Throughout Genesis, the Bible patiently and systematically presents the reader with competing visions of this relationship and the cultures that grow out of it.

It is shown through sex. Sexual dynamics inside the family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the patriarchal family, are opposed by the sexual dynamics of their neighbors. The patriarchal family’s encounters with foreigner sexual practices sets before the reader competing social theories about the right relationship of men and women, one to another.

There is a type-scene, repeated three times in Genesis (12; 20; 26:1-12), in which famine forces the patriarchal family to look for sustenance outside of Canaan.403 Each

402 Jonathan Sacks, Radical Then, Radical Now, pp. 79-80.
403 For an analysis of the economic necessity and political consequences of going to Egypt, see Yoram Hazony, Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture, pp. 121 and 143.
time, the patriarchal family encounters outsiders, members of other tribes, other regimes. Each time, a patriarch is forced to ask his wife to lie and say that she is his sister. “And it happened as he drew near to the border of Egypt that he said to Sarai his wife, ‘Look, I know you are a beautiful woman, and so when the Egyptians see you and say, ‘She is his wife,’ they will kill me while you they will let live’” (Gen. 12:11-12). In the next generation, when Isaac is forced to rely on the Philistines in Gerar, he said that Rebekah was his sister, “fearing to say, ‘my wife’ – ‘lest the men of the place kill me over Rebekah, for she is comely to look at’” (Gen. 26:7). The sexual enticement of a beautiful woman is powerful enough to kill for, lust moves men to murder. The sexual drive unleashes death rather than life. In Egypt and Gerar, women – and all those with less power than the monarch – are his commodities. They serve at the pleasure of power. By treating all others as his subordinates and servants, the monarch remains without an equal partner with whom he can enjoy the bond that vanquishes solitude. Neither the subjects, nor the tyrants, nor in turn the societies of which they are a part, know the companionship that alone can redeem solitude.404

In Abraham’s generation, Lot offers his virgin daughters to the would-be rapists in Sodom as a substitute for raping guests in his home. After their miraculous salvation, the daughters, knowing how their father values their lives, seduce and fornicate with him in an ugly episode of incestuous justice (Gen. 19:8, 30-38). Three generations later, one of the pivotal moments of the Joseph story occurs when, working for Potiphar, his master’s wife beckons him to “lie with me” (Gen. 39:7-11). In encounter after encounter, the sexual morality outside the patriarchal family is anarchic, and associated in the

404 Plato also understood the loneliness of the tyrant governed by unrestrained eros. See Republic 575e-576a.
biblical text with murder, abduction, incest, rape, and other depravities. In each case, the sexual relationship indicates deeper attitudes that govern all human relationship. When the strong prey on the weak, as the lusty mob of Sodom sought to prey on Lot’s daughters, or as the wife of Potiphar sought to prey on Joseph, they see their target as an instrument of their own passions, as a means to their own ends, as an object of use, rather than a person with equal dignity. The sexual encounter contains within it the seed of other social relationships. If not immediately then eventually, the bounds of what is proper in the sexual relationship will affect all social relationships.\footnote{Jonathan Sacks, \textit{Radical Then, Radical Now}, pp. 78-79.}

Sex must be moralized into marriage. And marriage is the answer to the question that the creation of Eve forces us to confront. How do free persons of unequal power take it upon themselves to form the reliable and stable associations that, while preserving the dignity of each, also transform them into something more? The covenantal bond reconciles freedom and association.

Now this is not marriage in the modern sense. Husbands and wives in the Hebrew Bible were not always – nor, in fact, were they often – akin to the nuclear family of our day. This is worth dwelling on because of the diversity of family arrangements portrayed in the Bible. Men such as Abraham, Gideon, Nahor, Jacob, Eliphaz, Caleb, Manassah, and Solomon all had at least one and sometimes multiple concubines in addition to a wife. Lamech, Esau, Jacob, Ashur, Gideon, Elkanah, David, Solomon, Rehoboam, and others, had multiple wives. Slave owners could give female slaves to male slaves, and then maintain as property the wife and children when the term of the male slave’s service expired (Ex. 21:4). Israelite soldiers took tribeswomen of defeated clans (Num. 31:1-18; Deut. 11-14). A rapist could acquire his victim as a wife (Deut. 22:28-29). And, perhaps
what is most unusual to modern ears is the practice of levirate marriage, whereby one
brother is legally bound to marry a deceased brother’s wife in order to “raise up seed” in
his name (Gen. 38:6-10; Deut. 25:5-10).

This is an opportunity to make a broader methodological point that is worth
keeping in mind. The existence of these family arrangements in the Bible – about which
there is no dispute – does not mean that the biblical authors advocate or defend them. Or,
as in the case of the obligation that a rapist bears to offer a marriage contract to his
victim, the biblical avocation is clearly in service of a larger moral teaching regarding
personal responsibility and the wellbeing of the victim. The violation having taken place,
the man must provide for the victim and their child. The law has an educative function,
and is designed to act as a deterrent. To mistake this for the Hebrew Bible’s vision of a
healthy family is to mistake a law that attempts to provide for the victim of a crime for
the active partnership of loyalty and trust; it is to mistake what is a practical legal strategy
to make the best of the worst for the normative standard.

One instructive exception is the practice of levirate marriage. This seems most
strange to modern sensibilities. But uncovering its logic, and the reason why it seems so
strange – even cruel – focuses on the underlying significance of the biblical family. As
Leon Kass puts it,

The heart of marriage, especially but not only biblically speaking, is not primarily
a matter of the heart; rather, it is primarily about procreation and, even more,
about transmission of a way of life. Husband and wife, whether they know it or
not, are incipiently father and mother, parents of children for whose moral and
spiritual education they bear a sacred obligation…in levirate marriage, all these
crucial principles are defended. A man serves, literally, as his brother’s keeper: he
refuses to allow his brother to die without a trace. Also, he refuses to nullify his
sister-in-law’s marriage, vindicating her claim to motherly fulfillment within her
marriage. Taking seriously the commandment “be fruitful and multiply,” levirate
marriage elevates the importance of progeny above personal gratification, and hence, the importance of lineage and community above the individual.\textsuperscript{406}

The Hebrew Bible recommends – and even commands – levirate marriage for the sake of perpetuating covenantal morality. About the matter of perpetuation, there will be occasion in the next section to return to this high priority of biblical social thought.\textsuperscript{407}

But even the levirate marriage is also to be understood as a practical response to a practical problem – indicative of deeply held convictions, yes, but not the aspirational standard of human association. One can, in fact, point to a description of the family very much like the kind we now call “nuclear.” Such a description emerges indirectly from priestly laws. Priests may not defile themselves through coming into contact with a corpse. However mourning for one’s immediate family takes precedence over even these attempts to keep the person of the priest pure. Leviticus 21:2-3 delineates exceptions whose burial the priest may attend: his mother, father, son, daughter, brother, or sister; in other words, the immediate family that we would easily recognize as the modern family.\textsuperscript{408} But, categorization aside, what is the positive vision and positive teaching about the bond between husband and wife?

\section*{4.2.3. The Covenantal Bond: Human Identity and the Generations}


\textsuperscript{407} Later Jewish jurisprudence does not do away with the sanctity and enforceable legal status of levirate marriage (\textit{yibbum}). But, at the same time, later rabbinic authorities did develop a normalized procedure for freeing the brother and the widow from such an unwanted marriage without shame or stigma.

Let us pick up where we left the first man and woman in Eden. The body of woman is brought out from the body man of man. As Leon Kass notes, recalling Rousseau, it is man’s sight of woman that first elicits poetry into the world:

This one at last, bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh,
This one shall be called Woman,
For from man was this one taken (Gen. 2:23).

The woman delivers man – “at last” – from a longing and a need. She is like him, of his kind, a counterpart.409

And then we read “therefore does a man leave his father and his mother and cling to his wife (isha’to, lit: his woman) and they become one basar” (Gen. 2:24). The sentence contains multitudes. Let us go through the questions it raises. The sentence is said not by the man or the woman, nor presumably, by God. The word “therefore,” the word that begins this oracular passage, al-ken, is etiological. What is the argument or explanation that this sentence resolves? What is to be made of the mention of “father and mother,” an anachronism given that, as yet, the world knows not fathers or mothers? What is implied and what does it mean for a man to leave his parents? What does it mean to become one basar?

Who articulates this profound statement of identity, purpose, and social thought? Evidently, it is reported by an omniscient narrative voice. This is rare in Genesis. Human figures who act in the narrative say and do things that are later reconsidered, revised, rejected through time. The family relations of the patriarchs are one example of this: the biblical text helps the reader learn from the travails of their experiences, and articulates a legal infrastructure that governs sexual relationships as a reaction to them.

409 For similar usage, see Gen. 39:14; Jud. 9:2; II Sam. 5:1; 19:12-13, and discussion at Umberto Cassuto, A Commentary on the Book of Genesis, Part I: From Adam to Noah, Genesis I – VI:8, pp. 135-136.
But the voice of the narrator gives this a seal of considered permanence. But if it is authoritative, what does it say and what does it mean?

First, the man here described is known through his relationships. Our relationships and our ongoing connections with others comprise our identity. Each person is a node of associations, and is inescapably informed and molded by the totality of these associations. Even the man’s departure from his parents, described later in this sentence, is not a departure into solitude, but from one relationship to another. The relationship that originally defines man is the one into which he is literally born. The introduction of the relation between parent and child at this point in the biblical text—before the advent of motherhood and fatherhood in the biblical narrative, before the birth of any children—is suggestive. Parenthood had been implied—even commanded—immediately following the first creation of man and woman, “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (Gen. 1:28). But here there is the introduction of something beyond procreation and reproduction. “Father and mother” is a unit, a family that has nurtured and claimed the primary attachment of the child. This means that father and mother are partners beyond the sexual encounter in roles that persist through time.

Second, marriage and parenthood as relationships are conceived before Adam ever knows Eve (Gen. 4:1). The placement of parenthood, “father and mother,” before the sexual encounter, “cling to his wife,” and before the act occurs in the narrative, is not only a chronological description, but a teleological prescription. It is a chronological truth in that a child must be born and raised before he can enter into sexual relationship. Experientially, that is simply a banal truth. But it serves here as a teleological statement, signaling the purpose of the sexual encounter. By framing the sexual encounter in the

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410 See also Gen. 32:33.
context of the family, the biblical author is introducing something that is to be sustained throughout the rest of the biblical text. In the Hebrew Bible, sex has not yet become the carnal sin it is later thought to be. Pope John Paul II noted that, in the Hebrew Bible, “marriage, as a source of fruitfulness and of procreation in regard to descendants, was a *religiously privileged state:* and privileged by revelation itself.”

Yet, as we will see below in some detail, although the sexual relationship is not in itself bad, and although it enables man to fulfill the first commandment to “be fruitful and multiply,” nevertheless Scripture is careful to praise and condemn specific kinds of sexual relationships. At the most fundamental level, the sexual activity motivated primarily by the hedonic impulse is a degradation, and requires the redemption through building and raising up a family.

In this verse, the establishment of parenthood prior to the sexual act prescribes the purpose and end of the sexual act.

Third, the child – grown unto a man – leaves his parents. Rashi, a French scholar from the 11th century who remains traditional Judaism’s most authoritative exegete, interprets this phrase legally. This phrase warns mankind – well before God does explicitly says anything about the matter – of the dangers and immorality of incestuous copulation. Rashi’s interpretation has the benefit of anticipating the intricate jurisprudence that will soon be offered in the pages of Leviticus and Deuteronomy. But

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412 This is a core argument, patiently sustained throughout Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Family Redeemed: Essays on Family Relationships.*

from a narrative point of view, it makes little sense for the reason stipulated above: it is not said aloud to anyone. It is, rather, for us, for the reader.

I think a psychological interpretation is more compelling. As Cassuto notes, the tense of the verb yatziṣ suggests not a single point in time, but “constant and continuing action.” The departure here described did not happen once, it is always happening.

Man’s departure from mother and father suggests a refinement and deepening of the observation offered above, that our identity is the product of our relationships, our past, and our history; that we are inescapably “encumbered.” At its most basic level, the departure from mother and father suggests that, prior to that departure, man was attached to them. This departure, then, documents a titanic shift in human consciousness and one of the most consequential inflection points in each human life. And the shift introduces a lifecycle propelled the tensions between choice and chosenness that remains an inescapable fact of human life. A man is born into a family that he does not choose. The original condition of each and every person born of woman is unavoidable, given, fated. But when the child replaces his primary attachment to his parent with attachment to his spouse, he replaces givenness with choice. “The marital community replaces the parental community. Until one’s marriage, the young man or woman belonged to a parental community consisting of three personae: the husband, the wife, and child. On the day of their marriage they leave the community into which they were cast by the Almighty and substitute for it a marital community which they enter voluntarily, by free

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Each individual was shaped and educated from child to adult in a way that he did not choose. With the onset of sexual maturity, and marriage, he chooses his adult partner.

Having chosen each other, the man and woman cling together and become one. One might read the phrase “one basar” not as the man and woman coming together in intercourse, but as child itself, the integrated embodiment of the parents. But however one reads it, as the act of or the result of intercourse, man and woman become one in the rearing of the child, the commitment to the child’s well-being, education, moral cultivation. It is through mutual commitment to the common project of forming a new life, that they become one. The unity of the parents, based on their choice and their achievement, is the next generation’s unchosen original condition.

And that brings us back to the first word, “therefore.” To what question does this sentence offer a response, an answer, to what tension does this verse offer resolution? The poem of Gen. 2:23 celebrates the shared origins of man and woman. When man’s drive to unite with another in intimacy, or sexual passion, or both, is directed solely at his partner, their bond is incomplete. Without the children of v. 24, the poetry and romance of v. 23 is a more sterile pleasure. Without the projection of children into the future, the momentary bond is at risk. Without the calling to perpetuate the story of one’s family, the past is in vain. Reliability over time is the truth of the covenantal bond. Verse 23 paints a picture of deep natural passion consummated. Verse 24 moralizes sex into marriage, creating husband and wife from man and woman, and holding forth the promise of creating father and mother from husband and wife.

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4.2.4. Husband and Wife in Patriarchal History

Such is the blueprint of biblical marriage. Two individuals, equal in freedom and dignity, come together – not for the self-interest of either or both – but to create something that neither could create alone. That prototype is never perfectly enacted in the biblical history of the patriarchal family, starting with Terah and his son Abraham. To study the actual betrothals and marriages through the generations of the patriarchal family is to reflect on the extent to which the Hebrew Bible acknowledges that imperfections and approximations are sewn into the fabric life. Perfection in form is never fully realized, and the impressive achievements of the patriarchal family are had not because of

The first human act outside of Eden is when “the human knew Eve his woman and she conceived and bore Cain…And she bore as well his brother Abel […]” (Gen. 4:1-2). After Cain’s fratricide, and his ostracization and curse, “Cain knew his wife and she conceived and bore Enoch” (Gen. 4:17). Then, the lineage of Enoch is reported: “And Irad was born to Enoch, and Irad begot Mehujael and Mehujael begot Methusael and Methusael begot Lamech” (Gen. 4:18). Following this, there is the story of Lamech’s children and their inventions, including music and metallurgy (Gen. 4:19-22), and the birth of Noah (Gen. 5:28-29). Returning again to Adam and Eve, the birth of Seth is reported (Gen. 4:25), and then the lineage of Seth (Gen. 4:26). Chapter 5 of Genesis is a long and stylized description of the ensuing toledot, “generations” of mankind. What is being unfurled, unmistakably but without extravagant fanfare, is the argument that the cycle of generations, of betrothal and birth, of bond and bearing, the human project of heeding God’s command “to be fruitful and multiply” is the quintessential driver of
human history. In the Bible’s telling, the story of man is one of family life, of generations begat. Most readers of the Bible tend to pass quickly over these genealogies, and I too decline to venture an analysis of their composition and narrative structure. But it is worth simply underscoring that the passage of time is measured in terms of human generation, that the great and central theme of “fathers and sons” is the background against which the heroic accomplishments and divine miracles of Genesis and the rest of biblical history is set.

We know little of Noah’s wife (Gen. 7:7 13; 8:18); she is never named, and Noah’s solitude is emphasized throughout his time on history’s stage (Gen. 6:8-9; 7:23). We learn extensively about the Noah’s children and their lineage (Gen. 10), for the children of Noah must repopulate the world after the flood. It is from the line of Noah’s son Shem that Abram is born. At first, we learn little of Abram and the wife he took (Gen. 11:29). Beyond her name, Sarai, we learn only of her barrenness (11:30). Infertility is a major theme, and there will be occasion to reflect on it in a systematic way below.

Of the courtship and marriage of Abram and Sara, little is said. The great theme of their lives together is the hope, the frustration, the desperation for children. Tormented by childlessness, it is Sarai that first suggests that Abram and Hagar conceive Ishmael (Gen. 16: 2); it is Sarai that is moved by some combination of jealousy, inadequacy,

417 “The Hebrew Bible is above all a book about the family. It begins with one: Adam and Eve and the command to bring the next generation into being. And from then the book of Genesis never relaxes its grip on the subject. It endlessly turns to some new variation in the relationship between husbands and wives, parents and children. Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekkah (sic) Jacob, Rachel, Leah: these are not miracle workers or agents of salvation. The heroes and heroines of Genesis are simply people living out their lives in the presence of God and the context of their families.” Jonathan Sacks, The Persistence of Faith: Religion, Morality & Society in a Secular Age, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1991), p. 54.
418 For discussion, see Robert Alter, The Five Books of Moses, p. 34, n.
419 For discussion of Noah’s family, see Kass, pp. 204-216.
shame, pride – natural feelings given the circumstances – that harasses Hagar and causes her to flee from Abram (Gen. 16:6), and later, as Sarah, forces Abraham to drive Hagar and Ishmael away so as not to divide Isaac’s inheritance (Gen. 21:10). Through this, Abraham must navigate between solidarity with Sarah and the gift of Ishmael.

This family’s struggles with infertility has made each of them especially sensitive to the unmerited gift of children – unmerited because it seems that moral monsters can easily propagate. In the case of Abraham and Sarah, as, in some ways, it is for all potential parents, longing for children is connected with the longing to transcend the few winters and springs we have in life. The biblical design of the family as the incubator of the future is expressed in indirect way. For, the strongest teaching about family from the marriage of Abraham and Sarah only fully emerges after Sarah’s death.

It takes the form of an elaborate real-estate negotiation that Abraham takes up with the Hittites among whom he lives. Abraham’s relationship with Isaac, his child with Sarah and sole heir, is the necessary background and context. And, while wadis of ink have been spilt to analyze chapter 22 of Genesis, known in Hebrew simply as the Akedah, “The Binding,” I only want to make one observation from that episode, and show how it reveals a profound challenge to the covenantal morality that is slowly being developed over the course of the book. Verses 7-8 report a tense conversation between Abraham and Isaac. Isaac asks, worriedly, about the sheep for the offering for which he had carried the supplies for sacrifice. Abraham replies that God will see to it.

Not only is that the first time that Abraham and Isaac speak to each other, more than that, it is the first time that *any* conversation is reported between father and son.

420 After Sarah’s death, Abraham marries another woman, Keturah, and has six children with her. He seems to have treated them well, but isolated them from Isaac and, emphatically, does not divide Isaac’s inheritance among them (Gen. 25:1-6).
Adam does not speak with Cain, Abel, or Seth. Noah does not speak with his sons.\(^{421}\) Terah says nothing to Abram, nor does Abram say anything to Ishmael. In the first reported conversation between father and son in the Hebrew Bible, Abraham is preparing to slaughter Isaac.\(^{422}\)

Not only is this the first conversation between Abraham and Isaac, it is also the last conversation between the two. The two of them went up the mountain together (Gen. 22:6, 8); but Abraham descends the mountain alone (Gen. 22:19). Never again will Isaac speak to his father. Never again will Isaac cast his gaze upon his father while Abraham lives. The next time Isaac sees his father is to bury him, years later, reunited with his half-brother Ishmael. “And Isaac and Ishmael his sons buried him in the Machpelah cave in the field of Ephron son of Zohar the Hittite which faces Mamre, the field that Abraham had brought from the Hittites, there was Abraham buried, and Sarah his wife” (Gen. 25:9).

That brings us back to Abraham’s final efforts to purchase the Machpelah cave, where Abraham buried his wife, whom he mourned and for whom he keened (Gen. 23:2). After Sarah dies (Gen. 23:1-2), Abraham approaches the Hittite landowners and asks them to “grant me a burial-holding with you, and let me bury my dead now before me” (Gen. 23:4). What does it mean to bury the dead, to consecrate a grave? What should readers learn from Abraham’s insistent negotiations to secure this burial ground? And how does this relate to the marriage of Abraham and Sarah?

\(^{421}\) Noah curses Ham (Canaan) and blesses Shem and Japheth, but it is unclear if he does this in their presence or directs it to their hearing (Gen. 9:25-27).

\(^{422}\) Theodor Reik, a student of Freud, understands Abraham and Isaac as the “primordial conflict between father and son.” See Theodor Reik, *The Temptation*, (New York: George Braziller, 1961).
Abel is the first person to die in the Bible. From that death to this, many have breathed the last breath – including all of those people who perished in the flood. It is only now that Abraham is moved to perform the first burial depicted in Scripture. Burial is a form of honor and consecration, and it helps the mourners to accept the death of their beloved while being reminded of their own mortality. According to biblical anthropology, there is a native wisdom in returning the lifeless basar into the ground, back to the earth from which it was made. In contrast to the Egyptian practice of embalming, which is performed on Abraham’s grandson (Jacob, Gen. 50:2) and great-grandson (Joseph, 50:26), and which is designed to overcome the natural decay of death and indeed, to master nature, the practice of burial is a profound homecoming.

But burial, in this elevated sense, is also connected to a specific place. Abraham could have buried Sarah’s body anywhere. But he somehow understands that the memories of Sarah live on beyond her life; and for them to have power, those memories need to be focused someplace specific, a sacred ground where they mourn her life and are spurred by her example. Those who are overcome with grief must know where to go. Abraham must secure a place, moreover, in the land that is promised to him and his generations but which his not yet his own. Let us see how he brings that about.

Following Robert Sacks, Leon Kass offers an interpretation of Abraham’s negotiation with the Hittites that brings to the fore the difficulty Abraham faces in trying to secure Machpelah, and his negotiating strategy that, in the end, brings him success.423 Although the land of Canaan has been promised to Abraham, he is currently a “sojourning settler” there. As such, he does not have legal burial rights. He needs the

legal permission of the local community, and he needs to acquire the land in perpetuity.

This permission, as will be seen, they are reluctant to give.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Subtext and Commentary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>And Abraham rose from before his dead and he spoke to the Hittites, saying “I am a sojourning settler with you. Grant me a burial-holding with you, and let me bury my dead now before me.”</td>
<td>Abraham approaches with deference, acknowledging that he is a resident alien, reliant on the gracious leave of the Hittites, requesting their permission to bury Sarah.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>And the Hittites answered Abraham, saying</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>“Pray, hear us, my lord. You are a prince of God among us! In the pick of our graves bury your dead.” No man among us will deny you his grave for burying your dead.”</td>
<td>The Hittites flatter Abraham. “You are our honored guest and you may choose any of our graves; no man will deny us of his land.” We grant you burial privileges, but not the ownership required for burial rights. The land is ours.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>And Abraham rose and bowed to the folk of the land, to the Hittites.</td>
<td>Deference, again.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>And he spoke with them, saying, “If you have it in your hearts that I should bury my dead now before me, hear me, entreat me Ephron son of Zohar,</td>
<td>Abraham seizes onto the aspect of the Hittite reply that advances his goals, and treating their response as</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>and let him grant me the cave of Machpelah that belongs to him, which is at the far end of his field. At the full price let him grant it to me in your midst as a burial holding.”</td>
<td>“You are most gracious to cede my request for burial ground. How about the Machpelah cave, currently owned by Ephron? Name your price, and I will acquire it for myself as property.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>And Ephron was sitting in the midst of the Hittites, and Ehron the Hittite answered Abraham in the hearing of the Hittites, all the assembled in the gate of this town, saying,</td>
<td>Ephron rises in front of the community and repeats the Hittite offer of burial privilege: “Abraham, I agree” (that is, with the Hittite position), “I permit you to bury Sarah in my cave.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>“Pray, my lord, hear me. The field I grant you and the cave that is in it. I grant it to you in full view of my kinfolk. I grant it to you. Bury your dead.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>And Abraham bowed down before</td>
<td>Deference, again.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abraham recognizes that, if he is to succeed in getting ownership of the land, he will have to exploit the fiction of mutual gift-giving, according to which Ephron does not sell the land and Abraham does not buy it; instead, he must make Ephron freely give Abraham the land on the understanding that Abraham will freely give Ephron the money. He must invite Ephron to name his price.

And Ephron answered Abraham, saying:

And Abraham heeded Ephron and Abraham weighed out to Ephron the silver that he spoke of in the hearing of the Hittites, four hundred silver shekels at the merchants’ tried weight.

Abraham succeeds, and the transaction is legally sanctioned in full sight of the people.

“And Ephron’s field at Machpelah by Mamre, the field and the cave that was in it and every tree in the field, within its boundaries all around, passed over to Abraham as a possession, in the full view of the Hittites, all the assembled in the gate of his town” (Gen. 23:17).

How does this relate to Abraham’s marriage to Sarah? As it was conceived in Eden, the purpose of the family bond is not only to redeem the lonely man from solitude, but to moralize sex by connecting it to childrearing and the propagation of the next generation. In describing Sarah, Kass puts it as follows: a wife is “one’s chosen and committed equal partner in generation and transmission, providing for one’s own
replacement by making a home that will rear well the next generation.”

In death, Sarah allows for Abraham to imbue Isaac with an important lesson – a lesson that must be taught in spite of the estrangement between father and son. In addition to providing to Isaac and his descendants a family grave where the dead can remain with the living,

Abraham is arranging his own place of interment and safeguarding it in advance through purchase so that his son will have a secure place to bury him, side by side with Sarah, his wife and Isaac’s mother. Isaac will not need to go begging for burial in Hittite sepulchers; Isaac will not need to bargain as Abraham had done; Isaac will know where his loss should lead him: back to his ancestral roots. Even without further instruction, Isaac at the time of his father’s death will be directed to reunite his father with his mother and to recognize in their union the wondrous source of his being. He will be compelled to think of himself as standing in their lineage. He will be moved to recall their deeds. He will be encouraged to try to walk thereafter in their ways.

Without Sarah, Abraham could do none of this. In life, as in death, Abraham and Sarah dedicated themselves to being Isaac’s father and mother. Abraham’s final act to and for Sarah is simultaneously an act to and for Isaac. Marriage and parenthood merge.

But while this was Abraham’s final act to and for Sarah, it was his penultimate act for Isaac. Abraham’s final act for him will be to arrange for him to have a bride, for his son to have a partner as he had Sarah. To do this, Abraham employs one of his trusted servants to return to “my land and to my birthplace” (Gen. 24:4) and find a suitable wife for his son. What follows is an introduction to Rebekah, her virtues, her active character. The servant is to test her hospitality – one of Abraham and Sarah’s trademark virtues (Gen. 18) – by asking the potential member of the covenantal family to let him drink from the well water that she has drawn. The young woman will pass the test if, in addition to providing for Abraham’s traveling servant, she also supplies water for his

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camels (Gen. 24:13-14). Not only does she do so, but she also offers greater hospitality to the servant and his animals than he had initially requested (Gen. 24:23-25).

Thus begins “the first occurrence of the betrothal type-scene. The conventionally fixed sequence of motifs of this type-scene is: travel to a foreign land, encounter there with the future bride…at a well, drawing water, ‘hurrying’ or ‘running’ to bring the news of the stranger’s arrival, a feast at which a betrothal agreement is concluded.” Each of these betrothal scenes brings significant details about the characters that appear in them. It is through the repetition of the form that their individuality emerges.426 From this one, occupying the longest chapter of the book of Genesis, we get our first glimpse of Laban’s avaricious character (Gen. 24:30), and several important features of Rebekah’s character. In addition to her proven hospitality, her activity and vivaciousness, Rebekah demonstrates her habituation, and preparation, to run a household around the authority of the wife and mother rather than husband and father. After Abraham’s servant gives her gifts, and asks to meet her family, “The young woman ran and told her mother’s household about these things” (Gen. 24:28). This is a woman of strong personality, from a family of women with strong personalities.

Rebekah’s native characteristics chime with the way she is treated by other figures in this story. After the servant, Rebekah, and her family reach the betrothal agreement, the servant is eager to return to and introduce Isaac to his new wife. Her family wishes her to remain for ten days. Rebekah, who has not been present for these departure negotiations, is called in to state her preference: stay or go (Gen. 24:54-59)? Whatever she decided would have obtained (Gen. 24:57), and it is not only a

confirmation of her capacities for command and independence, but a demonstration that she has been raised in an atmosphere of freedom. She has learned that life is choice and action.

Before he was dispatched on this mission, the servant employed by Abraham asked about precisely this. What if the woman will not come back with me? What if no suitable wife is to be found? Shall coercion be used? Abraham replies in the negative: “And if the woman should not want to go after you, you shall be clear of this vow of mine” (Gen. 24:8, 41). Stipulating the woman’s freedom to decline marriage ensures that, if there is to be a wife and a marriage for Isaac, she will possess the inner qualities that typified the first woman, she will be an ezer k’nedgo for Isaac, a free partner, a true companion, consciously committed.

The very act of arranging the marriage for Isaac, combined with the criteria that Abraham specified for an acceptable bride for him, suggests a quality of complementarity that is developed more deeply in the relationship of Isaac and Rebekah than anywhere else. Let us first take note of Isaac’s role in the scene of his betrothal and the consummation of his marriage. He is, in Alter’s words,

“[… conspicuous by his absence from the scene: this is in fact the only instance where a surrogate rather than the man himself meets the girl at the well. That substitution nicely accords with the entire career of Isaac, for he is manifestly the most passive of the patriarchs. We have already seen him as a bound victim for whose life a ram is substituted; later, as a father, he will prefer the son who can go out to the field and bring him back provender, and his one extended scene will be lying in bed, weak and blind, while others act on him.

As a complement to this absence of the bridegroom, it is only in this betrothal scene that the girl, not the stranger, draws water form the well. Indeed, the narrator goes out of his way to give weight to this act by presenting Rebekah as a continuous whirl of purposeful activity… Rebekah is to become the shrewdest
and most potent of the matriarchs, and so it is entirely appropriate that she should dominate her betrothal scene."^{427}

At the end of his life,^{428} Abraham makes sure that his estranged son has a complementary partner. For Rebekah is abundant precisely where Isaac lacks. She is bold, he is cautious; she is active, he is reserved. The task of perpetuation thus extends beyond the material and physical birth of offspring. The threshold of success for the marriage of Sarah and Abraham is the successful marriage of Rebekah and Isaac.

And, with these standards of judgment, and an eye trained on the perpetuation of the past, the marriage of Isaac and Rebekah is a stunning success. And its success, it must be said, is a merit to Rebekah’s judgment, shrewdness, and wisdom. Near the end of Isaac’s life, his powers weakened by age, as he lay in his bed, it is Rebekah that engineers Isaac’s blessing for Jacob rather than Esau. The deception and trompe-l’œil, is merely an extension of her personality within the marriage. Like Rousseau’s Sophie, Rebekah is responsible, quietly and indirectly, for the perpetuation of the line.^{429}

Isaac never had great eyesight. When they first met, Isaac “went out on a stroll in the field toward evening, and he raised his eyes and saw and, look, camels were coming” (Gen. 24:63). Meanwhile, “Rebekah raised her eyes and saw Isaac, and she alighted from the camel” (Gen. 24:64). Isaac saw only movement of the caravan, but Rebekah saw him, saw the man himself; she has the gift of sight and insight, and the power to carry the nation forward.

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^{428} Abraham does not die until the next chapter, in which he remarries a woman named Keturah and has six children with her (Gen. 25).
“And it happened when Isaac was old, that his eyes grew too bleary to see, and he called to Esau his elder son and said to him… ‘Look, I have grown old, I know not how soon I shall die. So now, take up, pray, your gear, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field, and hunt me some game, and make me a dish of the kind that I love and bring it to me that I may eat, so that I may solemnly bless you before I die’ (Gen. 27:2-4). The firstborn of Isaac’s twin sons, Esau was a hunter (Gen. 25:27), and “Isaac loved Esau for the game that he brought him” (Gen. 25:28). The relationship between Esau and his father is that of an appetitive son who, when hungry, trades his birthright for a meal of stew (Gen. 25:29-34), and an appetitive father, who prefers the son who can feed his appetites. Following this course of action, Isaac’s blessing of Esau would put the fate of the family on unreliable shoulders.

“But Rebekah loved Jacob” (Gen. 25:28), Jacob, “a simple man, a dweller in tents” (Gen. 25:28). Jacob, Esau’s younger twin, had inherited from his mother her cleverness of mind. It was he who sized up his older brother’s appetitive nature and hence the vulnerability of his character; it was he who bought the famished Esau’s birthright with simple stew – probably even without meat.430 Having grown up in a home of feminine authority, and having heard Isaac’s instructions to Esau, Rebekah springs into commanding action (Gen. 27:6-11). Anticipating exactly where Isaac’s senses are strong, and where they are weak, Rebekah orchestrates the blessing to successfully redound onto Jacob, the son capable of sustaining the family into the future. This, the purpose of biblical marriage, has only taken place because of Rebekah’s exquisitely inhabiting the role of ezer k’negdo; by opposing his wishes, being Isaac’s greatest help.

Jacob’s marriage is at least an order of magnitude more complicated than that of his parents and grandparents. As he deceived his blind father and took the blessing of the firstborn for himself; so his uncle and father-in-law, exploiting the blindness of nightfall, deceived Jacob, replacing the firstborn daughter for the second.\(^\text{431}\) Jacob, who loved Rachel and had concluded an agreement to marry her (Gen. 29:19-20), was deceived and married her older sister Leah instead. Then he married Rachel anyway (Gen. 29:23-30). Unlike Abraham, who acceded to Sarah’s wishes and sent Hagar away, and then only married Keturah after Sarah’s death, and unlike Isaac, who shared his whole life as a husband with Rebekah, Jacob fathers thirteen children with four women, the two sisters Leah and Rachel, and each of their handmaidens, all at once. This mega-marriage provides a series of negative examples and warnings that help to build out the Hebraic teaching about the husband-wife bond by highlighting Jacob’s perils.

The rivalry of Cain and Abel, the primordial pattern of fraternal envy and resentment, is here transposed into the context of marriage. Born from the same womb, and raised on the same hearth, the younger Rachel was “comely in features and comely to look at,” whereas “Leah’s eyes were tender” (Gen. 29:17). The elder was less naturally gifted than the younger, and knew – she knew as Jacob, Laban, and Rachel all knew – that she was not accepted in marriage for her own qualities, but as a cost to be incurred in order for her husband to marry Rachel. Leah, bitter Leah, was set out on a life of humiliation and anguish, to be permanently bound to a husband that loved another woman; and not just any other woman, but the very younger sister who had always been “comelier” than she.

\(^{431}\) Yoram Hazony, *The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture*, pp. 79-80.
But Leah was determined to triumph over Rachel, and God was merciful to her. “And the Lord saw that Leah was despised and He opened her womb, but Rachel was barren” (Gen. 29:28). The stage is set for an extended drama, a contest of womanhood in the quintessential calling of wife and mother. Leah flaunts her fertility to the barren Rachel. With the birth of each child, she hopes Jacob will reward her with affection and the pride of conjugal place. After Leah brings Jacob four sons, Rachel can no longer bear it. “And Rachel saw that she had borne no children to Jacob, and Rachel was jealous of her sister, and she said to Jacob, ‘Give me sons, for if you don’t, I’m a dead woman!’” (Gen. 30:1). Now it is her turn for anguish and frustration. Her exterior beauty taunts her inner longings for children. Finally, she adopts the strategy of her husband’s grandmother, Sarah, whom neither Rachel nor indeed Jacob had ever met. She gives her handmaiden, Bilhah, to Jacob as a proxy for herself. “Here is my slave-girl, Hilhah. Come to bed with her, that she may give birth on my knees, so that I, too, shall be built up through her” (Gen. 30:3).

After Jacob sires two children with Bilhah, Leah responds by offering her own handmaiden, Zilpah. “And Leah saw that she had ceased bearing children, and she took Ziplah, her slave-girl, and gave her to Jacob as a wife” (Gen. 30:9). Then Leah herself actually has three more children – including the first family daughter, Dina. Finally, at long last, after many years, “God remembered Rachel and God heard her and He opened her womb, and she conceived and bore a son” (Gen. 30:22). In all, Rachel herself has two sons.

Leah and Rachel, sisters and co-wives, speak to each other in only one instance of reported dialogue throughout this extended ordeal. Inside the household, the older
children align with their maternal “team” against the other woman. So, to run up the score after Zilpah’s children had been born, her eldest son Reuben brings her a special aphrodisiac from the field. Rachel, distressed, aggrieved, simply cannot believe that Leah will take additional measures to humiliate her. She asks for the mandrakes for herself; Leah agrees, in exchange for the unchallenged right to the connubial bed. The conversation lacks even a touch of affection, and is characterized by bitterness and mutual disdain (Gen. 30:14-15).  

But their sole conversation reported between them is indicative of their relationship overall. Each of the mothers communicates their sentiments and hopes in the very names of the children they bear. The story of the names of Jacob’s sons is an even more pronounced indication of the tensions and miseries of Jacob’s mega-marriage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Son</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Mother</th>
<th>Meaning of Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>29:32</td>
<td>Reuben</td>
<td>Leah</td>
<td>“Re’u? Ben!” “See? A son!” Now you will love me, for I have given you a son! Jealously, loneliness, despair. Why does Jacob love Rachel more than he loves me?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>29:33</td>
<td>Simeon</td>
<td>Leah</td>
<td>Shim’on is a play on “shama,” “has heard.” God has heard that I am unloved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>29:34</td>
<td>Levi</td>
<td>Leah</td>
<td>This is an aspirational name. Levi comes from “yilaveh,” “he will join,” hoping that, after long last and the birth of a third boy, Jacob will join Leah.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>29:35</td>
<td>Judah</td>
<td>Leah</td>
<td>The name is a portmanteau, meaning “praise God.” Jacob will never love me. But at least God has given me another son.</td>
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</tbody>
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433 Robert Alter’s explanations, noted after each biblical verse, are invaluable. See the notes in *The Five Books of Moses*, pp. 156-197.  
What conclusion may be drawn from this complicated and ugly set of relationships? The narrative is focused almost entirely on Leah and Rachel. Jacob, who enjoys physical intimacy with four women, rarely interacts with them outside of the bedchamber. Existentially, Jacob remains alone. Leah, who is desperate for Jacob’s love, but whose energy is directed at the humiliation of her sister, remains alone. Rachel, who is desperate for children, cannot receive the love her husband feels for her; she remains alone. Although, by any measure, Jacob and his wives bring new lives into the world, this marriage, mixed at best, has got to stand as a warning.

The first thing that can be observed from Leah and Rachel, is the extent to which their energies and lives are absorbed by the longing for maternity. In this case, fertility is
weaponized and used as a tool in sororal rivalry. But this heightened circumstance notwithstanding, the arena of competition was not random. Leah and Rachel did not try to dominate the other in combat, as dueling male suitors may have done. The fact that fertility was Leah’s mark of divine superiority over Rachel simply underscores the extent to which parenthood is a major biblical purpose of marriage.

The centrality of parenthood in biblical social thought casts light on the recurrence of barrenness in biblical matriarchy. As noted above, Sarah struggled with infertility (Gen. 18:9-15; 21:1-7); as did Rebekah (Gen. 25:19-25), and now Rachel (Gen. 30:1-8, 22-24). Hannah, the author of the world’s first spontaneous prayer, prays for the ability to bear a child after many years of an infertile marriage (I. Sam 1:1-28). The ability to bring new life into the world is a gift and a blessing; the biblical refrain of the barren woman serves to underscore, with emotional power, just how deep the longing for fertility is. Childlessness can serve as the source of psychic fracture, undoing the marriage bond (as it nearly does in the cases of Jacob and Elkanah), just as having children can draw the husband and wife closer together. Though childrearing is the natural end of marriage, the biblical presentation of the patriarchal family is hard-bitten, acknowledging the many degrees of despair that stand between promise and fulfillment, and it does so in a way that reinforces the ultimate goodness of parenthood.

The second thing that readers learn from the relationship of Leah, Rachel, and Jacob, is that, the characteristics of the fathers foreshadow those of the children. Back when Rebekah and Laban still lived under the same roof, we saw a glimpse into Laban’s worldview and priorities. Recall that he was keen to allow Abraham’s servant into the

home in his pursuit of Rebekah on Isaac’s behalf only after discovering Abraham’s wealth (Gen. 24:30). Laban’s deception of Jacob – a capacity, mind, which Rebekah also developed from being raised in the same household – gave him a huge financial gain.

One commentator suggested that, when Laban “embraced” Jacob upon the latter’s arrival (Gen. 29:13), he was checking him for the golden bracelets and gifts that Abraham’s servant had brought a generation earlier. But whereas Rebekah had turned that capacity – what Aristotle calls cleverness – to the profit of her family and the fulfillment of God’s promise, her brother Laban turned it to the profit of himself time and again. Is it any wonder that his children, who learned by his example, sought the selfish exploitation of each other throughout their co-marriage to Jacob? In this case, the ways of self-interested chicanery were an inheritance.

Closely related to that, readers can learn from the ways in which this marriage was fatally compromised by the previous family history of each sister. The natural bonds of one’s birth family and the covenantal bonds of husband and wife should not be overlaid onto the same hybrid relationship. This is the stuff of Greek tragedy, and Sophocles and Scripture are of a singe mind when it comes to the impossible confusion of roles. This is another layer of meaning in the verse “Therefore does a man leave his father and mother and cling to his wife and they come one flesh” (Gen. 2:24), unless the separation from the natural family is complete, it will not be possible to fully inhabit the marriage.

The patriarchal marriages flesh out the prescriptions that were presented in generation of Adam and Eve. But these marriages – as a whole and that of Jacob and the

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437 Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, 1144a.
sisters in particular – leave troubling counter-examples and raise problems for the covenantal family not in theory but in action.

4.2.5. Leviticus: The Legal Redemption of Patriarchal History

In the social thought of the Bible, sex is the entrée into the core of other social relationship. Because the sexual relationship is so fundamental to both axes of biblical society – husband/wife and parent/child – it serves as a token of how men and women relate to one another in other spheres of life as well. The maxim is: know the bedroom, and you shall know the commerce, the scales of political hierarchy, and the honor of personhood throughout the land.

The marriages of the patriarchal family culminate in Jacob, Leah, and Rachel. And that marriage is not only unhealthy for any one of the spouses, but, as we will see in greater detail below, it is also deeply unhealthy for the children. But it is more than unhealthy. For, by allowing the sexual relationship itself to be the source of distrust rather than trust, suspicion and envy rather than loyalty, and the occasion to reenact past injustices rather than actively secure a righteous future, in short, by standing for the very opposite of everything that marriage is, the culminating marriage of the patriarchal family has fundamentally perverted the very thing it was meant to model.

In other words, it sets out less an example to be imitated than a problem to be avoided. But how? The Hebraic answer is law. Communal standards, God given, and accepted by the nation, set the terms of what is acceptable and what is unacceptable in the bedroom. The clearest statement of this legal infrastructure is in the book of Leviticus, and as I will show, the very structure and presentation of the law reinforces the insight
first elaborated in the narrative history of Israel, that the sexual relationship defines all others.

Leviticus 18 is divided by internal logic into three main sections. The first subsection, vv. 1-5, authorizes the divine source of the text, and prevents the Israelites from imitating the sexual practices of other nations. The second and longest section, vv. 6-23, specifies prohibitions on sexual relationships. The final section, vv. 24-30, concludes the chapter by stating the troubles that may befall Israel should they transgress the taboos in the previous section.

The first verses provide the theoretical framework for the prohibitions that follow.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>“Speak to the Israelites, and you shall say to them: ‘I am the Lord your God.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Not like the deeds of the land of Egypt in which you dwelt shall you do, and not like the deeds of the land of Canaan into which I am about to bring you shall you do, and according to their statutes you shall not walk.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>My statutes you shall keep to walk by them. I am the Lord your God.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>And you shall keep My statutes and My laws which a person shall do and live through them. I am the Lord.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Israel is no longer to be left to its own, uninstructed instincts or conventions when it comes to the sexual relationship. What follows is authorized by God and is presented in the grammar of commandment.

The first major prohibition is against the imitation of the sexual practice of the surrounding nations, especially Egypt. This follows and supports the claim – illustrated dramatically throughout the history of the patriarchal family – that outside of Israel’s borders is a world of sexual chaos. When Abraham went to Egypt, the ruler nearly purloined his wife. Joseph was imprisoned in a bedroom scandal that resulted from the
unsolicited advances of his employer’s wife. As for Canaan, Hosea records the cultic ritual, and the promiscuity to which it leads, as follows. “They sacrifice upon the tops of the mountains, and burn incense upon the hills, under oaks and poplars and terebinths, because the shadow thereof is good. Therefore your daughters commit harlotry, and your daughters-in-law commit adultery” (Hosea 4:13-14). To walk in the ways of the Canaanite or the Egyptian means to use others as an end to your happiness.\footnote{An additional and explicit prohibition against intermarriage concerns not the social but the theological ramifications, for marrying another “will make your son swerve from following Me, and they will worship other gods,” see Deut. 7:1-6; 27:20-23.}

That is not to say that violations of sexual morality and rape will not occur in Israel. They will, as they will occur everywhere.\footnote{Rapists will be subject to punishment; victims are to be provided for. See Deut. 22 for the various scenarios.} For, legislation of this kind acknowledges with clear-eyed sobriety that “every scheme of [man’s] lev was only perpetually evil” (Gen. 6:5), but it also holds forth the hope that, although “at the tent flat sin crouches and for you is its longing but you will rule over it” (Gen. 4:7). Law, in other words, is not blind to the human inclination to crime and disgrace; on the contrary, its very existence is testament to the expectation that such inclinations are abiding and in need of communal standards to be restrained. The sexual taboos described here may – and will – persist, but they are now acknowledged by all Israel as taboos.

The next section identifies the specific prohibitions. It can be further divided into two smaller subsections. Prohibitions against incest of various kinds are enumerated in vv. 6-18. Specifically prohibited are sexual relations with parents (vv. 7-8), brothers and sisters, including half-brothers and half-sisters (vv. 9-11), aunts and uncles (vv. 12-14), those related by marriage (vv. 15-16), and, in poignant response to the bitterness of Jacob’s household, those related to one another (vv. 17-18).
**Leviticus 18**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>No man of you shall come near any of his own <em>basar</em> to lay bare nakedness. I am the Lord.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Your father’s nakedness, which is your mother’s nakedness, you shall not lay bare. She is your mother; you shall not lay bare her nakedness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>The nakedness of your father’s wife you shall not lay bare. It is your father’s nakedness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>The nakedness of your sister, your father’s daughter or your mother’s daughter, born in the household or born outside – you shall not lay bare her nakedness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>The nakedness of your son’s daughter or of your daughter’s daughter – you shall not lay bare her nakedness, for it is your nakedness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>The nakedness of the daughter of your father’s wife, born in your father’s household – she is your sister; you shall not lay bare her nakedness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>The nakedness of your father’s sister you shall not lay bare. It is your father’s <em>basar</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>The nakedness of your mother’s sister you shall not lay bare, for it is your mother’s <em>basar</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>The nakedness of your father’s brother you shall not lay bare, and you shall not come near his wife. She is your aunt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Your daughter-in-law’s nakedness you shall not lay bare. She is your son’s wife; you shall not lay bare her nakedness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>The nakedness of your brother’s wife you shall not lay bare. It is your brother’s nakedness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>The nakedness of a woman and her daughter you shall not lay bare. Her son’s daughter or daughter’s daughter you shall not lay bare her nakedness. They are kin-flesh, it is depravity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>And a woman with her sister you shall not take to become rivals, to lay bare her nakedness while her sister is still alive.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These laws unequivocally prohibit the very set of relations that causes the suffering of Jacob, Leah, and Rachel. They set the boundaries of the family, inside which there is to be no sexual relation.\(^440\)

The following laws, vv. 19-23, have a different set of reasons and goals. They too prohibit sexual relations, but are motivated by another prong of the argument for the marriage bond.

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\(^{440}\) Baruch A. Levine, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Leviticus*, p. 117.
Leviticus 18

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>And you shall not come near a woman in her menstrual uncleanness to lay bare her nakedness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>And you shall not put your member into your fellow man’s wife to spill seed, to be defiled through her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>And you shall not dedicate any of your seed to pass over to Molech, and you shall not profane the name of your God. I am the Lord.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>And with a male you shall not lie as one lies with a woman. It is an abhorrence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>And you shall not put your member into any beast to be defiled through it. And a woman shall not present herself to a beast to couple with it. It is a perversion.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Whereas vv. 6-18 limited familial sexual relationships because of the awful tragedies to which they inevitably lead, vv. 19-23 are concerned with the impregnation and children. They reinforce the obligation to have children and grow the family through the rearing of the young. Standing in opposition to that obligation are inherently sterile sexual couplings, and they are outlawed in vv. 19-20 and 22-23. Molech was a Canaanite god known for requiring child sacrifice.

441 “Menstruation, in particular, as well as the processes relevant to childbirth, were conditions that imposed restrictions on sexual intercourse between husband and wife and also required purification...These concerns are addressed in Leviticus 12 and 15. General prohibitions against having intercourse with a menstruating woman appear as well in Leviticus 18:19 and 20:18, in the context of family law.” Baruch A. Levine, The JPS Torah Commentary: Leviticus, p. 222.

442 “The underlying concern of its laws is the continuity of the Israelite family over successive generations. The immediate family was formed by a man who married one or more wives, thereby initiating the process of procreation. This conception of the family explains why the regulations governing sexual behavior were addressed to the male as the head of the family.” Baruch A. Levine, The JPS Torah Commentary: Leviticus, p. 117.

443 Regarding cultic bestiality, Herodotus writes that “the Mendesians regard as holy all goats, but the males more than the females, and the herdsmen that tend these he-goats have more honor than those that tend the others. Of the he-goats there is one in especial, and, when he dies, great mourning is instituted in all the Mendesian province. The he-goat and Pan are both called Mendes in the Egyptian language. In this province, in my time, a monstrosity took place: a he-goat coupled with a woman, plain, for all to see. This was done in the nature of a public exhibition.” Herodotus, The History, trans. David Grene, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 2.46, p. 151.

444 On Molech and child sacrifice, see Jon D. Levenson, The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 18-24; and Baruch A. Levine, The JPS Torah Commentary: Leviticus, pp. 258-260. Biale writes that “the priests saw a close connection between proper sexual behavior and fertility; in their view violations of the law led to childlessness. Most of the laws of Leviticus 18 and 20 concern sexual deviance such as incest, adultery, bestiality, and homosexuality, but they also include sacrificing one’s children to Molech and insulting one’s father and mother. What unifies all these acts is that they are considered affronts to procreation, either because they are sterile (homosexuality and bestiality), produce illegitimate progeny (adultery, incest), destroy progeny (sacrifice to Molech), or represent rebellion against the source
Fertility remained a central component of biblical religion and culture. When Hosea tries to think of the worst curse he can come up with, he hesitates, but this is it: “Give them, O Lord: what wilt thou give? Give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts” (Hosea 9:14). When the Psalmist repeats the patriarchal promise, he recalls that the Israelites “were a handful of men, but a few, and sojourners there” (Ps. 105:12). That is a quotation from what Jacob himself says to his sons Simeon and Levi, scolding them for their violence in Shechem (Gen. 34:30). Israel is constantly haunted by an awareness of existential precariousness, relative weakness, by the fragility of the whole nation and therewith God’s promise and His indwelling on earth. “Look, the estate of the Lord is sons, reward is the fruit of the womb. Like arrows in the warrior’s hand, thus are the sons born in youth. Happy the man who fills his quiver with them” (Ps. 127:3-5).

When struggling to conceive, the Israelite directs prayers to God for fertility. For he promises to “make you fruitful and multiply you and fulfill My covenant with you” (Lev. 26:9). God “seats the barren woman in her home a happy mother of sons” (Ps. 113:9). And adultery and fidelity were common metaphors for Israel’s relationship with God and an indication of national identity. In one representative passage, Ezekiel accuses Israel, “thou hast also played the harlot with the children of Egypt, thy neighbors of large basar, and hast multiplied thy harlotry, to provoke me in anger” (Ezek. 16:26).

david biale, eros and the jews: from biblical israel to contemporary america, p. 29. 445

446 Or, “their glory shall fly away like a bird; no birth, and no pregnancy, and no conception. Though they bring up their children, yet I will bereave them, that there shall not be a man left” (Hosea 9:11-12).
And it is with the provocation of anger that this chapter closes. The final verses, vv. 24-30, relate consequences of violating the prohibitions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Do not be defiled through all of these, for through all of these were the nations that I am about to send away before you defiled.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>And the land was defiled, and I made a reckoning with it for its iniquity, and the land spewed out its inhabitants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>And you on your part shall keep My statutes and My laws, and you shall not do any of these abhorrences, neither the native nor the sojourner who sojourns in your midst.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>For all these abhorrences did the men of the land who were before you do, and the land was defiled.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>And the land will not spew you out in your defiling it as it spewed out the nation that was before you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>For whosoever does any of these abhorrences, the person who does it shall be cut off from the midst of his people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>And you shall keep My watch not to do any of the abhorrent practices that were done before you, and you shall not be defiled through them. I am the Lord your God.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is precisely the marriage of Jacob to Leah and Rachel, and the highly dysfunctional family that it produced, that brought Israel out of Canaan and into Egypt, where it briefly flourished, only to be enslaved some four centuries.

Scholars have noted that Leviticus 20 repeats the prohibitions of Leviticus 18. But subtle differences in organization and content contribute to subtle differences in emphasis.

Chapter 18 is written apodictically, as a series of imperatives (“thou shalt not […]”). A penalty does not generally follow each prohibition, and instead, there is the general – and collective – warning of being thrown out of the land at the end. Chapter 20 is constructed conditionally, as case law (“If you do this, then […]”, “When this occurs,
then [...]). That is why after each offense there is a specific penalty.\textsuperscript{449} This difference in tone and structure leads to a difference in organization. The organization of Lev. 20 reflects legal distinctions and groups violations according to the punishment they merit. That is why vv. 1-16 deal with capital offenses, while vv. 17-21 speak of violations for which the penalty is to be “cut off from the midst of your people.”

The introductory verses, vv. 1-6, warn against foreign cultic rituals. This time, rather than focusing on the sexual practices of Egypt and Canaan, the focus is on the child sacrifice of Molech.\textsuperscript{450}

\begin{table}[ht]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|l|p{7cm}|}
\hline
\textbf{Verse} & \textbf{Text} \\
\hline
1 & And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, \\
\hline
2 & “And to the Israelites you shall say: ‘Every man of the Israelites and the sojourners who sojourn in Israel who gives of his seed to Molech is doomed to die. The people of the land shall stone him. \\
\hline
3 & And as for Me, I shall set My face against that man and cut him off from the midst of his people, for he has given of his seed to Molech so as to defile My sanctuary and to profane my sacred name. \\
\hline
4 & And if the people of the land actually avert their eyes from that man when he gives of his seed to Molech, not putting to death, \\
\hline
5 & I Myself shall turn My face against that man and his clan, and I shall cut him off and all who go whoring after him to whore after Molech, from the midst of their people. \\
\hline
6 & And to the person who turns to the ghosts and to the familiar spirits to go whoring after them, I shall set My face against that person and cut him off from midst of his people. \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{449} See Deut. 27:20-23, and Baruch A. Levine, \textit{The JPS Torah Commentary: Leviticus}, pp. 118, 135. \\
\textsuperscript{450} “Chapter 18 speaks out, in verses 1-3, against the ways of the Canaanites and Egyptians, a theme referred to only briefly in chapter 20, in verse 26. Chapter 20 opens with a major statement against the cult of Molech (vv. 1-5), a subject that had been only mentioned once before, in 18:21. The introductory statement is followed in verse 6 by a prohibition against necromancy, a theme addressed again in verse 27. The chapters’ distinctive perspective must surely reflect their different historical background. What is common to both chapters is the assumed connection between pagan worship and sexual degeneracy – both are regarded as causes of exile.” Baruch A. Levine, \textit{The JPS Torah Commentary: Leviticus}, p. 135.
Following this emphasis on value of nascent and young life, the chapter turns to sexual prohibitions, including adultery (vv. 9-12), homosexuality (v. 13), sexual relations with kin (v. 14), bestiality (v. 15-16), and the like.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>And you shall sanctify yourselves and become holy, for I am the Lord your God.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>And you shall keep My statutes and do them. I am the Lord Who makes you holy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>For every man who vilifies his father and his mother is doomed to die. He has vilified his father and his mother – his bloodguilt is upon him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>And a man who commits adultery with a married woman, who commits adultery with his fellow man’s wife, the adulterer and the adulteress are doomed to die.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>And a man who lies with his father’s wife, his father’s nakedness he has laid bare. The two of them are doomed to die. Their bloodguilt is upon them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>And a man who lies with his daughter-in-law, the two of them are doomed to die. They have done a perversion. Their bloodguilt is on them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>And a man who lies with a male as one lies with a woman, the two of them have done an abhorrent thing. They are doomed to die. Their bloodguilt is upon them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>And a man who takes a woman and her mother, it is depravity. In fire shall he and they be burned, so that there be no depravity in your midst.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>And a man who puts his member into a beast is doomed to die, and the beast you shall kill.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>And a woman who approaches any beast to couple with it, you shall kill the woman and the beast. They are doomed to die. Their bloodguilt is on them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>And a man who takes his sister, his father’s daughter or his mother’s daughter, and sees her nakedness and she sees his nakedness, it is vileness, and they shall be cut off before the eyes of their kinfolk. His sister’s nakedness he has laid bare. He shall bear his punishment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>And a man who lies with a woman while she is unwell and lays bare her nakedness, he has exposed her flow and she has laid bare the flow of her blood, and the two of them shall be cut off from the midst of their people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>And the nakedness of your mother’s sister or your father’s sister you shall not lay bare, for his own flesh he has exposed. Their punishment they shall bear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>And the man who lies with his aunt, his uncle’s nakedness he has laid bare. Their guilt they shall bear, barren they shall die.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>And the man who takes his brother’s wife, it is a repulsive thing. His brother’s nakedness he has laid bare. Barren they shall die.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>And you shall keep all My statutes and My laws and do them, lest the land to which I bring you to dwell there spew you out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>And you shall not go by the statutes of the nation which I am about to send away before you, for all these things they have done, and I loathed them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>And I said to you, it is you who will take hold of their soil, and as for Me, I shall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>verse</td>
<td>text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>give it to you to take hold of it, a land flowing with milk and honey. I am the Lord your God Who set you apart from all the peoples.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>And you shall set apart the clean from the unclean beast, and the unclean bird from the clean, and you shall not make yourselves despicable through beast and bird and all that crawls on the ground, which I set apart for you as unclean.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>And you shall be holy to Me, for I the Lord am holy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>And any man or woman who has a ghost or familiar spirit is doomed to die. They shall be stoned, their bloodguilt is upon them.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Together, the logic of both chapters is to encourage the injunction to productivity and perpetuation as these are connected with the family and nation. Boundaries of appropriate and inappropriate sexual relationships are established to focus and reinforce that goal. But the chapters also reform the biblical family as it had existed. Abram married Sarai, his half-sister, (Gen. 20:12) in what is now a prohibited marriage (Lev. 18:9; 20:17; Deut. 27:22). The parents of Moses and Aaron, Amram marries his aunt Yocheved, in what is now a prohibited marriage (Lev. 18:12-14 and 20:19-20). And again, Lev. 18:18 forbids marriage to the sister of one’s wife while that wife is still alive, the precise arrangement of Jacob, Lean and Rachel (Gen. 29:21-30).  

Leviticus 18-20 frame Leviticus 19. What is in Leviticus 19, and why are these three chapters organized as they are? Early on, the dramatic setting of the history of the patriarchal family suggested that the ethic of the sexual relationship was a path into the central moral understandings of human personhood. That proposition was repeated, again, in the structure of sexual legislation. Now, at another level of textual organization, that message is reinforced yet again. For Leviticus 19, surrounded on both sides by largely but not wholly repetitive tables of sexual prohibition, is itself a recapitulation of the Decalogue.

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### Parallel between Leviticus 19 and the Decalogue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leviticus 19</th>
<th>Decalogue</th>
<th>no.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>v. 3 (a) Reverence for parents</td>
<td>Honoring parents</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v. 3 (b) Sabbath</td>
<td>The Sabbath</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v. 4 Idolatry</td>
<td>Idolatry, worship of other Gods</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vv. 11a, 13, 15, 35 Stealing and deceitful conduct</td>
<td>Stealing</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v. 12 False oaths</td>
<td>False oaths</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v. 36 I am the Lord your God who freed you from the land of Egypt</td>
<td>“I am the Lord [...]”</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Leviticus 19 is a major biblical statement of collective national duties. The law here addresses the entire people in the plural, and all of them are answerable to its command.  

At this compositional level, the sexual relationship provides the border around the most cherished and deeply held national commitments. Mary Douglas has brilliantly argued for the pedimental composition of the Lev. 18-20 triptych. And yet, the internal symmetry of the Leviticus 18 and 20 lead me to conceive of it more in terms of “inner and outer,” whereby the innermost or central core of biblical social life is guarded by sexual legislation calibrated to the deepest ambitions of Israelite existence, which themselves are guarded by warnings against imitating neighboring cultures.

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453 For a portrait of the violation of these particular commandments, see Ezek. 22:6-12. For commentary, on Lev. 19, see Baruch A. Levine, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Leviticus*, p. 125.
4.2.6. **Conclusion**

Marriage is the solution to the problem of human association, of uniting free individuals with a bond of loyalty that redeems each from existential and practical solitude. Ludwig Köhler remarks

The Arabs still call the bachelor ‘azab, ‘forsaken, lonely.’ The Old Testament has no word for this at all, so unusual is the idea. Nor is there known the woman who remains single, or more correctly, the woman who is left single, since the step to marriage always comes from the man. Were there then no unmarried people? We do not know. It is only concerning Jeremiah that the word of God is preserved: ‘Thou shalt not take thee a wife, neither shalt thou have sons or daughters in this place’ (16:2). I sat alone because of thy hand’ (15:7) is the complaint of this, the most isolated of men (1:5).455

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In the history of the patriarchal family, Abraham and Sarah dedicate their marriage to perpetuating the story of their family in Isaac. The marriage of Isaac and Rebekah shows the necessity of complementarity and mutual reliance. And the disastrous mega-marriage of Jacob, Leah, and Rachel articulates problems that the legislation of Leviticus comes to address in the later history of the Israelite nation.

In all, the biblical portrait of society is the outworking of sexual relationship, moralized through marriage. The history of Israeli begins with the patriarchal family, and is told through betrothals, annunciations, and fraternal dramas. But precisely because it is a reification of the sexual relationship, its natural end is not only the horizontal relationship of husband and wife, but the vertical relationship of parent and child. It is to a more systematic examination of that axis that we now turn.

4.3. Parent and Child in the Hebrew Bible

4.3.1. Introduction

“Political thought is as old as the human race,” writes Leo Strauss. “The first man who uttered a word like ‘father’ or an expression like ‘thou shalt not…’ was the first political thinker [...]”. The social thought of the Hebrew Bible is unthinkable without the parent/child relationship that naturally grows from the husband/wife relationship. The one breeds the other.

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Parenthood, in the biblical as in the Lockean understanding, is the most effective transmitter of inherited culture. Edward Shils writes that “the first link in the chain which binds past and present and future into the structure of a society is reforged every time an infant is born and survives. The survival of a child as a biological organism is simultaneously its formation as a carrier of beliefs and patterns which obtained in the past into the present and form there into the future.”

The anxieties about time that lurk just beneath the surface throughout the text emerge with particular clarity in Ecclesiastes, who asks “Who knows what is good for man in life, in his days of mere hevel, for he spends them like a shadow? Who can tell man what will be after him under the sun?” (Eccles. 6:12). For, “the living know that they will die, and the dead know nothing, and they no longer have recompense, for their memory is forgotten” (Eccles. 9:5). Mortality is the boundary of human knowledge, and the insecurity of death is a heavy burden, not least because, starting with Abraham and Sarah, biblical figures believe that they are living out a divine mission that outlasts any single generation. Transcendence is earned through a righteous life that serves to inspire heirs to righteous lives of their own. It is to this problem – despair over presentism, terror at the prospect of an ahistorical world with neither past nor future,

459 Commenting on hevel, Fisch remarks that “Qohelet turns again and again to this emptiness of a world without history, a world in which a man cannot tell what shall be after him under the sun (6:12), in which the dead are forgotten and have no continuance (9:5) in which there is no memory even of the exploit of a wise man who through his wisdom had saved a city from destruction (9:15). Human effort that exhausts itself in the realm of man is blighted. It yields a moment of significance, of celebration; there is a report in the daily paper and then all things return to the darkness from which they had emerged.” Harold Fisch, *Poetry With a Purpose: Biblical Poetics and Interpretation*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 160.
460 On this point, Yerushalmi offers a word of warning. The term “history” is used in a specific sense. “The biblical appeal to remember thus has little to do with curiosity about the past…Burckhardt’s dictum that all ages are equally close to God may please us, but such a notion remains alien to biblical thought. There the fact that history has meaning does not mean that everything that happened in history is meaningful or worthy of recollection. Of Manasseh of Judah, a powerful king who reigned for fifty-five
terror, that is to say, in Locke’s constitutional republic, that biblical parenthood is the solution.

4.3.2. Obligation to Have Children

The first description of man and woman referred to the potential, inherent in every husband and wife, to become father and mother. The command to have children is the very first one given to mankind by God in Scripture (Gen. 1:28; 9:1). If they are able, man and woman are obliged to have children. In a thousand ways, subtle and explicit, the husband-wife relationship points beyond itself. Husband and wife consummate their relationship in physical space, but becoming parents, they create new life in time.

Isaac and Jacob each confer blessings on their sons.\(^{461}\) These blessings articulate the mature wisdom of long and weathered lives. The blessings encapsulate the most ardently felt wishes for their children, and serve the educative function of presenting their sons with a final aspiration. Isaac actually blesses Jacob twice, and comparing the two blessings sheds light on the seriousness with which biblical fathers sought sons for their sons.

\(^{461}\) Abraham does not exactly bless Ishmael, but he does make it clear to God that he wants Ishmael’s line to prosper. “And Abraham said to God, ‘Would that Ishmael might live in Your favor!’ And God said…” ‘Look, I will bless him and make him fruitful and will multiply him most abundantly, twelve chieftans he shall beget, and I will make him a great nation” (Gen. 17:18-20). Neither can Abraham directly bless his estranged son, Isaac. But he does carefully orchestrate Isaac’s betrothal, and, as forewarned at Gen. 17:19-21, even after siring six additional children, “Abraham gave everything he had to Isaac” (Gen. 25:5). It was God Himself who blessed Isaac after Abraham’s death, “And it happened after Abraham’s death that God blessed Isaac his son” (Gen. 25:11). In addition, Laban offers his sister Rebekah a fertility blessing when she leaves to join Isaac, (Gen. 24:60).
At first, Jacob deceives his elderly father, and steals the blessing meant for Esau, Isaac’s firstborn. Isaac, his senses failing him, and believing that he is speaking to Esau, blesses Jacob by asking that God grant him

…from the dew of the heavens and the fat of the earth, and abundance of grain and drink. May peoples serve you, and nations bow before you. Be overlord to your brothers, may your mother’s sons bow before you. Those who curse you be cursed, and those who bless you, blessed.” (Gen. 27:28-29).

Isaac had favored Esau over Jacob. His eldest son was stronger, more vigorous, brought Isaac choice game from the field. As is often the case with men of great physical prowess, Esau’s character and consciousness accentuated his strengths. Powerful enough to get what he wanted, Esau was not given to patience; so reliant on quick bursts of energy and strength, on the need sublime rational processes and act on instinct and, to “lose himself” in the moment, Esau was intensely oriented toward the present, not the future. That is why he is willing to sell his birthright – a claim to future place – to his craftier, ever so slightly effeminate, younger brother to satisfy a present, and passing craving (Gen. 25:29-34).

Isaac’s blessing enhances Essau’s way of life. It voices a hope that Esau – though again, it is bestowed unknowingly on Jacob – will continue to reap the best of food to fill the belly. “The dew of the heavens and the fat of the earth,” Isaac’s hope for Esau is for plentiful grain and a rewarding hunt. “May peoples serve you…be overlord to your brothers […]”. This is a hope for political prowess. Isaac’s first blessing, in short, is about power – for the use of the earth and preeminence among men.

462 Devora Steinmetz beautifully observes that “characters can change and grow, shedding bad qualities such as deceitfulness, but they must begin with a sense of the future; if they are imbedded in the present – like Lot, Hagar, Ishmael, and Esau – no matter what other positive traits they may possess, they can never become part of the covenantal nation.” Devora Steinmetz, From Father to Son: Kinship, Conflict, and Continuity in Genesis, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), p. 135.
After the hoax has been revealed, and Jacob is set to flee his wrathful brother for commandeering Esau’s birthright, Isaac blesses him a second time. This time, fully awake and his senses fully alive to Jacob’s true identity, Isaac offers a blessing of a very different kind.

You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan. Rise, go to Paddan-Aram to the house of Bethuel your mother’s father, and take you from there a wife from the daughters of Laban, your mother’s brother. And may El Shaddai bless you and make you fruitful and multiply, so you become an assembly of peoples. And may He grant you the blessing of Abraham, to you and your seed as well, that you may take hold of the land of your sojournings, which God granted to Abraham (Gen. 28:1-5).

This is a blessing for a suitable partner, and children. It brings to Jacob’s mind his grandfather – whom he never knew – Abraham; and it brings to mind – and even names – his grandfather’s God. It brings to Jacob’s mind, in other words, the extraordinary family which it is now his responsibility to carry forward. It is little wonder that this second, proper blessing was prompted, at least in part, by Rebekah (Gen. 27:46). Isaac’s first blessing was for power in time; his second blessing, for prosperity through time.

The blessings for children are sometimes frustrated by natural causes. But despite the challenges of infertility, which feature prominently, all of the major figures of biblical history become parents eventually. The struggle with infertility, suffered by a matriarch in each generation, moves Hannah, in anguish, to offer the first private prayer (I Sam. 1:10-13). Later, God will promise that once the Israelites arrive in the land that is promised to them, “there shall be no woman miscarrying or barren in your land” (Ex. 23:26). But even before this, many, Israelites saw their children’s children. Numbers 14:29 and 32:11 assume that an average Israelite of twenty has children. Ludwig Köhler works through the living generations at any one moment as follows.
A Hebrew – we may call him Joel – marries at the age of eighteen, and when he is nineteen, he has a son called Abner. This Abner, like his father, also marries at eighteen and has his first son at nineteen, whom we may call Eli. Thus Joel is a father at nineteen, and a grandfather at thirty-eight. If Eli does the same as his father and grandfather, and his first son is called Machir, then, when Machir is one year old, his father Eli is twenty, his grandfather Abner is thirty-nine, and his great-grandfather Joel is fifty-eight.\(^{463}\)

When we read in Ex. 20:5 of “the third and fourth generation,” the Bible is likely describing a situation in which everyone is still alive. “And Joseph saw the third generation of sons from Ephraim, and the sons, as well, of Machir son of Menashe were born on Joseph’s knees” (Gen. 50:23).

Everyone tries to heed the command to “be fruitful and multiply,” and the arrival of children, the flowering of the generations, is a blessing. “May you see children of your children” (Ps. 128:6).

**4.3.3. God’s Promise**

In the case of Israel, the human obligation to propagate is mirrored by God’s promise to sustain – nay, to grow Abraham’s heirs.

This promise is indispensable to all else in God’s covenant with Abraham and his children after him. In their first meeting, God tells Abram to “look up to the heavens and count the stars, if you can count them…So shall be your seed” (Gen. 15:5). “I will grant My covenant between Me and you,” God later says, “and I will multiply you greatly.”

You [Abram] shall be father to a multitude of nations. And no longer shall your name be called Abram but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you father to a multitude of nations. And I will make you most abundantly fruitful and turn you into nations, and kings shall come forth from you. And I will

\(^{463}\) Ludwig Köhler, *Hebrew Man*, p. 61.
establish My covenant between Me and you and your seed after you through their
generations as an everlasting covenant to be God to you and to your seed after
you. (Gen. 17:1-7)\textsuperscript{464}

The imagery of the stars in the heavens and the sand on the seashore is an abiding one
(Gen. 22:16-18). God repeats this promise, using this metaphor, to Isaac (Gen. 26:4) and
to Jacob (Gen. 28:14), and the powerful image remains throughout the prophetic writing,
many centuries later.\textsuperscript{465}

If the greatest blessing that the Heavenly Father and human fathers can bestow on
their sons is that they, too, become fathers, then the greatest curse is that a person be
forgotten. The Psalmist speaks of destroying the seed of the enemy (Ps. 21:11), and
expresses a curse by saying “may his offspring be cut off, in the next generation his name
wiped out” (Ps. 109:13).\textsuperscript{466} Bildad the Shuhite notes that the wicked man’s
“remembrance is lost from the earth, no name has he abroad…no son nor grandson in his
kinfolk, and no remnant where he sojourned” (Job 18:17-19). Human happiness and
human purpose is bound up with passing on the good things of life to the next generation.
“The memory of the righteous is for a blessing, but the name of the wicked will rot”
(Prov. 10:7). So, sin and transgression are met with the damning punishment of \textit{not} being
able to perpetuation, and \textit{not} having your name known. The “ultimate curse in the
biblical world,”\textsuperscript{467} as Alter puts it, is that “no more of thy name be sown. Out of the
house of thy gods will I cut off the carved idol and the molten image. I will make thy
grave, for thou art vile” (Nahum 1:14).

\textsuperscript{464} See, further, Genesis 17:12-13; 20; 22:16-18.
\textsuperscript{465} See, for instance, Deut. 28:62; Jer. 33:22; Neh. 9:23.
\textsuperscript{466} See Isa. 14:22.
\textsuperscript{467} Robert Alter, \textit{The Wisdom Books}, p. 80, n. 19.
The perspective of Ecclesiastes, characteristically, casts aspersions on even the hope for future generations’ memory of their family past. Even “if a man begot a hundred children and lived many years, and many were the days of his life,” still, “he might yet not be sated with good things, and even a burial he might not have” (Eccles. 6:3). But this is an unusual and exceptional view in the text. More representative is the fact that the worst and most spectacular atrocity that even God can think of, the thing that will tip even Pharaoh’s hardened lev, the greatest of the plagues, is the death of the firstborn (Ex. 12:12).

4.3.4. Memory and Education: Divine and Human

One of the purposes of marriage is to bring new life into the world; and one of the purposes of bringing new life into the world is to educate a new generation that carries with it the covenantal morality. Physically having children is not enough; biological propagation must be complemented with education. God provides a universal, physical token, the rainbow, to reawaken the memory of the covenant (Gen. 9:12-17).468

Actually, God goes well beyond this. When God encourages Moses to return to Pharaoh and, again, demand Israelite freedom, note the explanation that God gives for why He has adopted the method of plagues and human drama. “Come into Pharaoh, for I Myself have hardened his lev and the lev of his servants, so that I may set these signs of

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468 Covenants “require a sign since all covenants must be remembered. Their being is in their being remembered because they lack sufficient natural foundation. Memory is such an integral part of a covenant that even God must have a sign, because without a sign there is no covenant.” Robert Sacks, “The Lion and the Ass: A Commentary on the Book of Genesis (Chapters 1-10),” in Interpretation: A Journal of Political Philosophy, 1980, vol. 8, nos. 2-3, p. 97. Leon Kass notes that “God does indeed say that the rainbow will remind Him of His everlasting promise; this memory will keep God from sending another Flood, even though it might be warranted.” Leon R. Kass, The Beginning of Wisdom: Reading Genesis, p. 190.
Mine in his midst, and so that you may tell in the hearing of your son and your son’s son how I toyed with Egypt, and My signs that I set upon them and you shall know that I am the Lord” (Ex. 10:1-2).

This statement signals a profound insight into human learning and awareness. The people, en masse, cannot simply be told a story which it will be their responsibility to repeat. Man just cannot retain the words alone. Spectacle is needed. Nietzsche, who truly understood this biblical insight as well as anyone, wrote that “man could never do without blood, torture, and sacrifices when he felt the need to create a memory for himself; the most dreadful sacrifices and pledges (sacrifices of the first-born among them),” as indeed is the case of the death of the firstborn Egyptian sons. For the memory to truly become embedded in the consciousness of the people, more than treatise or command, more even than story was needed. To the extent that there is a biblical epistemology, it is framed by what God said in the passage above. Conscious knowledge of the world is not itself born if disembodied thought but of a gradual disclosure of the world itself. When accepting the law from God at Sinai, the Israelites proclaim, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do and we will heed” (Ex. 24:7). Doing precedes heeding. Being precedes consciousness.

So the mnemotechnic strategy combine acts, rituals, deeds, with stories and pronouncements. Both are needed. The famous proverb “who spares his rod hates his son, but who loves him seeks him out for reproof’ (Prov. 13:24), is simply an acknowledgment of the fact that language, even imaginative language, even legend and

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lore, will not always be enough. Threats and, at times, actual force will be necessary. And sometimes, there will be people who simply cannot learn, for even parents have limited powers when it comes to a “wayward and rebellious son” (Deut. 21:18-21).

At any rate, the Israelites, in future times, do indeed recall God’s spectacles in Egypt. “Has God tried to come to take Him a nation from within a nation in trials and signs and portents and in battle and with a strong hand and an outstretched arm and with great terrors, like all that the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes?” (Deut. 4:34, see also 6:20; 11:2-3). Armed with miraculous breaks in the structure of nature, spectacles that cannot be repeated or reproduced by human hands, Israel is equipped with the responsibility to repeat and recall the story of their deliverance, and in so doing, in so shaping the memory of their children, Israel is equipped to sustain its collective existence into the future.

Worship is one method of remembrance and education. Requesting leave from Pharaoh, Moses specifies that it is “with our lads and with our old men we will go. With our sons and with our daughters [...]” (Ex. 10:9). But many years before, God seems to have chosen Abraham for his willingness to “charge his sons and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord to do righteousness and justice [...]” (Gen. 18:19). Another method is for the nation to institute holidays, which regularly recur to remind celebrants of their history. “And this day shall be a remembrance for you, and you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord through your generations, an everlasting statute you

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471 See also Ps. 105:4-5; Neh. 9:10; I Chron. 16:12, et al.
472 The function of Pharaoh’s “sages and sorcerers” (Ex. 7:11 et al) is to show miracles beyond human ken and ability.
473 See also Prov. 22:6.
shall celebrate it” (Ex. 12:14, see also v. 42; 13:3). On holidays and the formation of collective identity, see more below.

But the main method of rehearsing the past will not be in worship or celebration. The main method will be when children ask questions of their elders, in the course of daily family life, around the table, in a thousand interactions and discussions. The text, displaying a high degree of self-awareness, preempts such conversations with explicit instructions for parents. “Your son may ask you about such and such. On that day, you shall say so and so.” “Should your children ask you tomorrow, saying ‘What are these stones to you?’ you shall say, ‘That he waters of the Jordan were cut off before the Ark of the Lord’s Covenant, when it was crossing over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off, and these stones become a memorial for the Israelites forever’” (Joshua 4:6-7).

Alongside this formula lies a variation that indicates a pervasive anxiety in Israelite culture. Rather than educate the young in the ways of the old, the old themselves may forget. Amnesia is the fear and anxiety. And the text most fears amnesia that comes from assimilation into non-Israelite culture, a culture with different gods, with different understandings and different commitments.

Watch yourself, lest you forget the Lord your God and not keep His commands and His laws and His statutes that I charge you today. Lest you eat and be sated and build goodly houses and dwell in them. And your cattle and sheep multiply, and silver and gold multiply for you, and all that you have multiply. And your lev become haughty and you forget the Lord your God who brings you out of the land of Egypt form the house of slaves, Who leads you through the great and terrible wilderness – viper-serpent and scorpions, and thirst, where there is no water – Who brings water out for you from flintstone. Who feeds you manna in the wilderness, which your fathers did not know, in order to afflict you and in order to try you, to make it go well with you in your later time. And you will say in your lev, ‘My power and the might of my hand made me this wealth.’ And you will

474 “Not the stone, but the memory transmitted by the fathers, is decisive if the memory embedded in the stone is to be conjured out of it to live again for subsequent generations.” Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, p. 10. For an additional example, see also Ex. 13:8-16.
remember the Lord your God, for He it is Who gives you power to make wealth, in order to fulfill His covenant that He swore to your fathers as on this day. And it will be, if you indeed forget the Lord your God and go after other gods and worship them and bow to them, I bear witness against you today that you shall surely perish (Deut. 8:11-19).

Throughout, forgetfulness is contrasted with the wisdom of the fathers. The fear that alien culture will effect forgetfulness of the Israelite deliverance and covenantal regime is simply another way of expressing how bound up that regime is with the memory and constant rehearsal of its past.

The clearest example of such assimilation occurs with Joseph in Egypt. Joseph’s rise to vice-regency makes him the assimilated Israelite par excellence. “And to Joseph two sons were born before the coming of the year of famine, whom Asenath daughter of Potiphera priest of On bore him. And Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh, meaning, God has released me from all the debt of my hardship, and of all my father’s house” (Gen. 41:51).\(^{475}\) Joseph, along with his wife, the daughter of an Egyptian priest, named their eldest son exactly as Locke might have wanted him to – forget about the burdens of history, your life is for you yourself to make as you see fit. To undo this, it will take the reunification of Jacob and Joseph, father and son, and Jacob’s legal adoption of Joseph’s sons as his own. “Remember the days of old, give thought to the years of times past. Ask your father, that he may tell you, your elders, that they may say to you” (Deut. 32:7)\(^{476}\)

4.3.5. Memory and Identity


\(^{476}\) See also Deut. 4:31-32.
For each Israelite, personal identity comes from parents and past. Identity formation through the cultivation of memory aims to achieve equanimity of character. The proudest Israelite knows that, like his parents, and grandparents and theirs before them, he descends from a nation of Egyptian slaves. He is humbled. And even the lowliest knows that he is a member of this chosen people, a nation of priests.

The ritual prayer of the first fruits was begun with this bit of capsule history.

My father was an Aramean about to perish, and he went down to Egypt, and he sojourned there with a few people, and he became there a great and mighty and multitudinous nation. And the Egyptians did evil to us and abused us and set upon us hard labor. And we cried out to the Lord God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our voice and saw our abuse and our trouble and our oppression. And the Lord brought us out from Egypt with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm and with great terror and with signs and with portents. And He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey” (Deut. 26:5-9).

This is a ritual description, rather more literal than an American schoolboy singing of the United States as the “land where my fathers died, land of the Pilgrim’s pride,” but on a similar scale. The very language of fatherhood, taught from father to son by an unbroken chain of fathers, so suffuses this self-description, that it to have received this shared past from your father is to be an Israelite. The identity comes from the transmission and the acceptance.

To facilitate and support this system, Biblical culture threatens those who are disobedient and disrespectful. “Honor your father and mother, so that your days may be

477 Phrases that recall Israelite ancestry in Egyptian bondage include Ex: 13:3; 20:2; Deut. 5:6, 15; 6:12; 8:14; 10:19; 13:5, 10; 15:15; 16:3, 12; 24:18, 22; Josh. 24:17, et al.
478 “This is capsule history at its best. The essentials to be remembered are all here, in a ritualized formula. Compressed within it are what we might paraphrase as the patriarchal origins in Mesopotamia, the emergence of the Hebrew nation in the midst of history rather than in mythic pre-history, slavery in Egypt and liberation therefrom, the climactic acquisition of the Land of Israel, and throughout – the acknowledgment of God as lord of history.” Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory, pp. 12.
long on the soil that the Lord your God has given you” (Ex. 20:12).\textsuperscript{479} Or again, “he who vilifies his father or his mother is doomed to die” (Ex. 21:17). This one does not mandate death, but shame and dishonor: “Cursed be he who treats his father or his mother with contempt” (Deut. 27:16).

There are also signs that the nation, as a nation, receives its identity through the continuing language of paternity and parenthood. There are other sources of national identity, such as war and its commemoration,\textsuperscript{480} and the cohesion that comes from facing external threats (and memories of external threats).\textsuperscript{481} However mortality, the human reaction to death, provides another source of national identity.

One of Abraham’s finest moments as a father of Isaac was the complex negotiations he undertook for the Machpelah cave. The reasons and significance of this acquisition are outlined above. It is not time to see the legacy of this remarkable plot of earth. When Isaac dies, he too is buried in the Machpelah cave, alongside his wives (Gen. 49:31), alongside is mother, and alongside the plot where he and his brother Ishmael buried their father. “And Jacob came to Isaac his father in Mambre, at Kiriath-Arba, that is, Hebron, where Abraham, and Isaac, had sojourned. And Isaac’s days were a hundred and eighty years. And Isaac breathed his last, and died, and was gathered to his kin, old and sated with years, and Esau and Jacob his sons buried him” (Gen. 35:27-29). Jacob sees this. He imagines his body resting there after death. Where lie his fathers is a kind of ultimate home for him.

\textsuperscript{479} See also Lev. 19:3.
\textsuperscript{481} Amalek is the classic biblical example. See Ex. 17:14 and Deut. 25:17.
Even when he lives in Egypt, as he does in his old age. The fathers, the past, memory rather than location grips his allegiance and forms his identity. “Pray,” Jacob pleads, “do not bury me in Egypt. When I lie down with my fathers, carry me from Egypt and bury me in the burial place.” (Gen. 47:29-30; also see 48:21; 49:29-33; 50:5-6). They do. Joseph and his brothers leave Goshen and bring Jacob’s body to “the cave of the Machpelah field, the field Abraham had bought as a burial holding rom Ephron the Hittite, facing Mamre” (Gen. 50:13).482

“I am about to die,” Joseph says shortly thereafter,

and God will surely single you out and take you up from this land to the land He promised to Isaac and to Jacob.’ And Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, ‘When God indeed singles you out, you shall take up my bones from this place.’ And Joseph died, a hundred and ten years old, and they embalmed him and he was put in a coffin in Egypt” (Gen. 50:24-26).483

Mortality and death mark the passage of human time. Holidays are yet another way that parents oversee the cultivation of memory in their children. As Israel grows from a family to a nation, specific days are to be set aside and marked each year. Some commemorate the passing of time, such as festivals to mark the new lunar month, the harvest, or other occasions of collective life.485 These play important roles in establishing the rhythm of national life, they focus the nation’s attention on gratitude for the bounty of creation or institute a period of communal reflection and atonement.

483 Moses, unbidden, takes the bones of Joseph with him (Ex.13:19). On the significance of embalming vs. burial, see Kass, pp. 364-365, 626, 639, 650, 652-659.
485 See Ex. 23:16; 34:22; Lev. 23:15-22; Num. 28:26-30; Deut. 16:10-12.
486 There is the “day of trumpeting,” perhaps a reformed rehearsal of a coronation ceremony (Num. 29:1; Lev. 23:23). There is the day of atonement, a day of high religious and spiritual significance, Lev. 23:26; Num. 29:7-11.
While most of the biblical holidays mark the new return of the season’s cycle, three holidays stand out, for they are not about welcoming something new but about remembering the past. The first, and most important holiday is also the most frequent, occurring once per week.\footnote{487} The weekly Sabbath, the cessation from labor, is mentioned in the Decalogue, where the text commands that Israel “remember the sabbath day to hallow it…For six days did the Lord make the heavens and the earth, and the sea and all that is in it, and He rested on the seventh day. Therefore did the Lord bless the sabbath day and hallow it” (Ex. 20:10-11). So what is the reason for the sabbath? Because God rested on the seventh day, therefore man should rest once every seven days. It is a commemoration of God’s rest, it asks Israel to remember the miracles of creation, to renew their gratitude for the unearned goodness of their world. In medieval philosophy, the central cosmological controversy concerned the need to reconcile Aristotle’s teaching on the eternity of the universe and the biblical position of a world created \textit{ex nihilo}. In this biblical view, there was a discernable beginning, a point at which the world as we know it took shape. Shabbat, as it is described in the Decalogue, is an institution consciously designed for recalling that moment, God’s seventh day.

In another telling, the Sabbath is an occasion to remember not only creation but also deliverance from Egypt. “And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord brought you out from there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore did the Lord charge you to make the sabbath day” (Deut. 5:15).\footnote{488}

\footnote{487} Heschel’s great image is apt. Unlike the pyramid or obelisk, unlike the temple or cathedral, the Sabbath is a “sanctuary in time,” a temporal rather than spatial construction. See Abraham J. Heschel, \textit{The Sabbath}, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979).
\footnote{488} For further discussion of the Sabbath, see Amos 8:5; Hosea 2:13; Isa. 1:13; 66:23; Ezek. 46:4.}
“Yet My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you for your
generations to know that I am the Lord Who hallows you…And the Israelites
shall keep the shabbath to do the sabbath for their generations, a perpetual
covenant. Between Me and the Israelites it is a sign for all time […]” (Ex. 31:13-
17).

God’s deliverance from Egypt is so momentous and formative event in the history
if Israel that it is accorded its own, separate festival. God explains to Moses that “this
day shall be a remembrance for you, and you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord
through your generations, an everlasting statute you shall celebrate it” (Ex. 12:14). When
Moses comes to explain this to the Israelites, note what he adds. “And you shall keep
this thing as a statute for you and your sons, everlasting.” He begins by underscoring the
perpetual scope and in so doing, suggests that the commemoration itself is the purpose of
the statute. “And so when you come into the land that the Lord will give you as He has
spoken, you shall keep this service. And so should your sons ask you, ‘What is this
service to you?’ you shall say, ‘A Passover sacrifice to the Lord, who passed
over the
houses of the Israelites in Egypt when he scourged Egypt and our households he rescued’”
(Ex. 12:24-27).489 Moses elaborates and clarifies the divine injunction, pressing the
Israelites to imagine the future for the sake of reinforcing the memory of the past. It is as
if to say to the Israelites that, many generations hence, when none now living walk the
earth, then, at that point, your unborn descendants will ask about the wonders you
yourselves have seen with your own eyes. Every generation from this day to that and
beyond, will remember God’s deliverance. And not only his deliverance, but there is
another holiday, Sukkot, the festival of tabernacles, in which the Israelites will need to
leave their permanent dwellings and rehearse their ancestors temporary life in huts and
booths. “All natives in Israel shall dwell in huts, so that your generations will know that I

489 See also Ex. 23:14; Lev. 23:4-8; Num. 9:1-14; 28:16-25; Deut. 16:1-8.
made the Israelites dwell in huts when I brought them out of the land of Egypt” (Lev. 23:43). They will do this to remember that God brought them out of Egypt, and sustained them in the dessert, that human life is the product of so much unmerited beneficence. But it is, above all, to designed as an institution in mnemotechnics.

4.4. The Intransigencies of Character Through the Generations

4.4.1. Introduction

God describes himself as “a jealous god, reckoning the crime of the fathers with sons, with the third generation and with the fourth, for My foes, and doing kindness to the thousandth generation for My friends and for those who keep My commands” (Ex. 20:5-6; see also vv. 34:6-8). Elsewhere, we read that “fathers shall not be put to death over sons, and sons shall not be put to death over fathers. Each man shall be put to death for his own offense” (Deut. 24:16). Later, in two sequential chapters in Jeremiah, Scripture reports that “days are coming,” and “in those days, they shall say no more, ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge. But everyone shall die for his own iniquity every man that eats sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge” (Jer. 31:26-29). But then this is followed by Jeremiah’s statement, “I prayed to the Lord, saying…Thou showst loyal love to thousands, and dost recompense the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children after them” (Jer. 32:18).

490 See also Ex. 23:16; Lev. 23:40; Num. 29:13, 35; Deut. 16:13.
492 For similar formulation, see Num. 14:18; Deut. 5:9-10; 7:9; 23:3; II Kings 10:30-31; Lam. 5:7.
494 See Ezek. 18:2:3.
We are witnessing here a debate about intergenerational morality. Do the actions of the present bear on subsequent generations? Do foul seeds flourish as ugly and noisome blossoms over time? Or, is each moment a chance to wipe clean the slate of past debts, every moment superseding the last? To what extent are future generations influenced by, or culpable to, their ancestors?

Tocqueville offers a parable that can help shed light on this question. I quote at some length:

When a child is born, his first years pass unnoticed in the joys and activities of infancy. As he grows older and begins to become a man, then the doors of the world open and he comes into touch with his fellows. For the first time notice is taken of him, and people think they can see the germs of the virtues and vices of his maturity taking shape.

That, if I am not mistaken, is a great error.

Go back; look at the baby in his mother’s arms; see how the outside world is reflected in the still hazy mirror of his mind; consider the first examples that strike his attention; listen to the first words which awaken his dormant powers of thought; and finally take notice of the first struggles he has to endure. Only then will you understand the origin of his prejudices, habits, and passions which are to dominate his life. The whole man is there, if one may put it so, in the cradle.

Something analogous happens with nations. People always bear some marks of their origin. Circumstances of birth and growth affect all the rest of their careers.  

The claim is that history is an unfolding, not a creation. The past carries a decisive influence over the future, so that unchosen and ancient factors determine the present and future course.  

This is a view of history that recognizes the sins of the fathers in the troubles of the sons.

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495 Tocqueville, op. cit., I.1.2, p. 31.
496 But Tocqueville is not Hegel. See the “Author’s Introduction,” pp. 12-13; history “is not yet so swift that we must despair of directing it; our fate is [still, for the moment] in our hands.”
As a concrete and quotidian example, take spousal infidelity. A sin of the father: a lapse of judgment or self-control brings his marriage to a passionate and bitter end. His daughter cannot help but see her mother’s pain. The young woman feels deeply. She will never completely overcome this pain. And as she grows, and marries, she brings it into her marriage. Even if this is a healthy marriage to a faithful man, a part of herself remains closed, guarded for the moment when she least expects but somehow knows that her husband, like her father, will wound her. Her faithful husband suffers patiently through the mistrust and skepticism. Their child – the original man’s grandson – sees this. He breathes in the lingering insecurities of his mother; the one whom he most loves and instinctively trusts does not fully trust his father. And so on, the original moan echoing through the generations.

This is a profoundly un-Lockean understanding of history and reality. And, despite the acknowledgement of alternative voices, it is the Hebraic view of history and reality. In this section, I’d like to demonstrate the existence of the intransigencies of character through the generations through a case study of Levi.

4.4.2. Levi and the Levites Through Time

Who is Levi and what do we know about him? Levi is the third son of Jacob and Leah (Gen. 29:34). While Jacob and his sons – and, crucially, his daughter Dina – were living in a place called Shechem, Dina is raped by a local man. His father approaches Jacob, and offers the best form of restitution he can, he offers his son as Dina’s lawful

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497 A similar family dynamic is described – for a different purpose and with different conclusions – in Bk. VIII of Plato’s Republic, the story of a family in decline over several generations.
498 Many of the ideas in this section were born in conversation with Dr. Aryeh Tepper; I am grateful for his insights, and for sharpening mine.
husband. With the seething vengeance that can only come from a terrible injustice, the sons of Jacob hatch a plan. They tell Shechem that he and his townsmen must circumcise themselves, “then we can give our daughters to you and your daughters we can take for ourselves, and we can settle among you and become one folk. But if you will not listen to us, to be circumcised, we will take our daughter and go” (Gen. 43:16-17). The men of Shechem are anxious to wed the Israelite women, and do as they are asked.

“And it happened on the third day, while they were hurting, that Jacob’s two sons, Simeon and Levi, Dinah’s brothers, took each his sword, and came upon the city unopposed, and they killed every male” (Gen. 34:25). In a rage, Simeon and Levi exploit the suffering of the Shechemites, and murder them. This is the only unique thing that is reported about Levi himself in the Bible. He goes along with the rest of his brothers, it is true, in selling Joseph into slavery. But he is one of a pack then; the only unique thing we know about him is his act. It is as if the text wants Levi to be remembered by this one act of brutality.

It is, at any rate, how his father remembers him. On his deathbed, blessing (or cursing, as the case may be) his children, Jacob says this about Simeon and Levi.

“Simeon and Levi, the brothers – weapons of outrage their trade. In their council let me never set foot, their assembly my presence shun. For in their fury they slaughtered men, at their pleasure they tore down ramparts. Cursed be their fury so fierce, and their wrath so remorseless!” (Gen. 49:5-7). Levi’s one signature act that biblical history records is the savage massacre of a whole city. His father’s lasting thought about him is his wrath and remorselessness.
Maybe he is one angry man. He certainly was raised in a household of strife. Maybe the rape of Dina, the physical abuse of a woman, triggered in him the years and years of psychological abuse through which Leah, his mother, suffered. Maybe.

The next time specific actions of his ancestors are recorded indicate that something has been unleashed into biblical history that does not pass away with the death of Levi. In the biblical narrative, it is hundreds and hundreds of years later when “a man form the house of Levi went and took a Levite daughter, and the woman conceived and bore a son, and she saw that he was goodly, and she hid him three months” (Ex. 2:1-2). This, of course, is Moses; and Jocheved had to hide him for three months because of the Pharaoh’s recent decree of Hebrew infanticide. The text seems to be looking to emphasize Moses’s Levite ancestry. In fact, Jochebed and Amram are not even named here; they identified by their tribe alone. Because they are not named, they stand for Levites as such. Their son, the son of pure Levite blood, is the most Levite of all.

After zooming over Moses’s youth and development into a man, we meet him as a mature man. The first thing he does – the first act ascribed to Moses in all of Scripture – is his murder of the Egyptian taskmaster. “And it happened at that time that Moses grew and went out to his brothers and saw their burdens. And he saw an Egyptian man striking a Hebrew man of his brothers. And he turned this way and that and saw that there was no man about, and he struck down the Egyptian and buried him in the sand” (Ex. 2:11-12). Next, fleeing death threats from Pharaoh’s court, Moses arrives in Midian to see shepherds bullying women at the well. “And the shepherds came and drove them off, and Moses rose and saved them and watered their flocks” (Ex. 2:17). This is the second conscious action that Moses, the Levite’s Levite, undertakes. Outnumbered, as

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499 They are named – and their Levite ancestry reemphasized – in Num. 26:59.
his ancestor Levi was outnumbered in Shechem, Moses relies on force and violence to defend women.

It may be that God chose Moses for his Levite personality, to stomach the violence, terror, and even death that are brought about by the plagues. Without knowing that, there is some reason to suspect that this aspect of the Levite personality is why Moses chooses the Levites as his enforcers in the aftermath of the Golden Calf.

Not long after the Israelites depart Egypt, they begin to worship an idol of their own making. The scene is disappointing and ugly (Ex. 32). What I want to focus on is the aftermath. As we have seen -- as the text has explicitly been constructed to help us see -- Moses is a man of passion and given to righteous fury. At this moment, he is more furious than he has ever been. “Whoever is for the Lord, to me!” he exclaims in economically clipped ire (Ex. 32:26). Who joins him, but those whose righteous fury matches his own? “And the Levites gathered round him. And he said to them… ‘Put every man his sword on his thigh, and cross over and back from gate to gate in the camp, and each man kill his brother and each man his fellow and each man his kin.’ And the Levites did according to the word of Moses (Ex. 32:27-28).”

Commentators struggle with the passage, and for obvious reasons. For the prospect of an internal bloodletting is disturbing, especially with Moses’s insistence that brother slaughter brother. Alter, representative of many commentators, believes that Moses calls the Levites because they are his family, like Mafiosi goons that are called in by their capofamiglia to knock off some of the other families. And while I think there is evidence to support that plausible interpretation, it does not sufficiently attend to the fact that the Levites respond to Moses’s righteous fury rather than tribal allegiance. And,

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it fails to appreciate the extent to which this act is a part of an unmistakable pattern of violence and bloodshed; it is simply the Levite way.

For their purity of conviction (or is it precisely to tame and moderate their purity of conviction?), the Levites become the priestly tribe (Num. 18:2). Like the Guardians in Plato’s *Republic*, they are to have no land, no personal possessions (Num. 18:20), they are specially trained to enforce the purity and regulate the moral conduct of the regime. The final example I want to bring is that of one such priest, Phinehas son of Eleazar son of Aaron, a Levite.

In the continued wandering in the desert, on layover in Shittim, “the people began to go whoring with the daughters of Moab. And they called the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods” (Num. 25:1-2). In this context, an Israelite struts through the camp, “before the eyes of Moses,” with a foreign woman on his arm (Num. 25:6). Phinehas, in the flash of an eye, springs into action. “He rose form the midst of the community and took a spear in his hand. And he came after the man of Israel into the alcove and stabbed the two of them, the man of Israel and the woman, in her alcove (Num. 25:7-8). This is quintessential Levite behavior: ruthless, gruesome, spectacular, moved by high feelings, overcome by rage.

These are the great examples of Levites in the Hebrew Bible. These cases span — in the Bible’s telling — many hundreds of years. They typify a personality type, a configuration of traits that remain relatively stable over time. Could anyone, reading this retelling of Phinehas and the Moabite woman be surprised that he Phenhas is a descendent of Levi? In the Hebrew Bible’s deliberate presentation, the Levites provide an example of the intransigencies of character that endure from generation to generation.
4.3. Intergenerational theology

So much of biblical social thought relates to history and time. The relationship of husband to wife contains within itself the potential for parenthood, which gives rise to a family that persists through time. The persistence through time is extended when you look at the intransigencies of specific character traits – the propensity to righteous fury in the case of the Levites – over generations. Every biblical moment is embedded in a historical continuum.

Greek political thinkers employed a logic of correspondence and mirroring. Just as the cosmos is made up of unequal forces, and the pantheon is made up of unequal gods, so the natural inequality that we observe among men is to be respected and put to the common good. The divine warrant of human politics leads Socrates to try his hand at religious reforms in the Republic. For men, Socrates understood, learn by imitating patterns and models, and the gods are the most powerful models of all. He sought men of honesty and courage in his city in speech; and for that, the Homeric gods had to go.

Something similar was true of the ancient near eastern cultures that found a model for their highly hierarchical regimes in the divine hierarchies above them.

In this section, I want to make the case that the same is true of biblical social thought. At the theological level, God himself warrants the biblical preoccupation with history, moving through time, recalling back in time, projecting into a promised future, this central motif of biblical social thought. There is a current of intergenerational theology that can be traced through biblical history.

God is described in the imagery of both father and mother.\footnote{Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Family Redeemed: Essays on Family Relationships*, pp. 166-167. Elsewhere “father” and “king” are the contrasted divine images. For this latter comparison, see Eliezer Berkovits, *God, Man and History*, ed. David Hazony, (Jerusalem: Shalem Press, 2004), pp. 38-39.} “As a man chastises his son the Lord your God chastises you” (Deut. 8:5). “As one whom his mother comforts, so will I comfort you, and you shall be comforted in Jerusalem” (Isa. 66:13).\footnote{For similar usage, see Ps. 131:2-3.} And while the intergenerational potential of all parents is important to the biblical conception, the intergenerational theology is conceived more broadly. The following two parts demonstrate the presence of two lines of sight onto the same phenomenon.

### 4.3.1. Human Perception

Men perceive God historically. Here, in a passage we have already seen, Isaac blesses Jacob. He wishes for his son the blessings of his father “And may He grant you the blessings of Abraham, to you and your seed as well, that you may take hold of the land of your sojournings, which God granted to Abraham” (Gen. 28:4). Isaac says, in other words, “What God did for our family in the past, to Abraham your grandfather, that is what I hope God will do for you, in the future.” Fast forward a generation. Jacob has grown. He has grown a family with four women, and the family has become a veritable tribe. Through the twists of providence, the tribe is in Egypt, where Jacob’s eldest son of his beloved Rachel has become a man of power and prestige. A lifetime later, Jacob formally adopts his son’s sons, and repeats a version of what his father said to him. “The God in whose presence my fathers walked, Abraham and Isaac, the God who has looked after me all my life till this day, the messenger rescuing me from all evil, may He bless the lads, let my name be called in them and the name of my fathers, Abraham and Isaac,
let them teem multitudinous in the midst of the earth” (Gen. 48:15-16). God established Abraham and Isaac, “let my name” Jacob prays, “and the name of my fathers” be established through my grandchildren. Jacob’s blessing serves to reinforce the idea that the God you seek is to be found in your family’s past, and the way of life it has kept alive for you “till this day.”

God, at various times, is known through the tradition of fathers and sons. Jacob, invoking God’s providence as he plans to leave Laban with his wives, refers to “the God of my father” (Gen. 31:5); later when Laban catches up with Jacob he too speaks of “the god of your father” (Gen. 31:29; see also vv. 42 and 50). Or again, when Jacob, afraid of approach of his brother Esau, nervously asks God to protect him and honor their covenant, he refers to “God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac!” (Gen. 32:10, 13). Joseph tells his brothers “all is well with you, do not fear. Your God and the God of your father has placed treasure for you in your bags” (Gen. 43:23). When the Israelites, having fled Egypt through the parted sea, turn back and discover their new safety and new freedom, they rejoice in “God of my fathers – I exalt him” (Ex. 15:2).505

4.3.2. Divine Disclosure

Not only do men know God through historical tradition – as “the God of my fathers,” but God makes Himself known through historical tradition – as “the God of thy fathers.”506 In the Bible, God is the Creator of creation, the God of nature. But He is also – and more prominently – the God of History. He identifies Himself as “the God of

505 See Dan. 2:23.
506 “God is known only insofar as he reveals himself ‘historically.’ Sent to bring tidings of deliverance to the Hebrew slaves, Moses does not come in the name of the Creator of Heaven and Earth, but of the ‘God of the fathers,’ that is to say, of the God of history.” Yerushalmi, Zakhor, p. 9.
Abraham your father and the God of Isaac” (Gen. 28: 13-14). Or later, God introduced Himself to Jacob, one of these ancestors, in a similar way. When Jacob arrived to Beersheba in the Negev, he offered sacrifices “to the God of his father Isaac,” who said in a dream, “I am the god, God of your father” (Gen. 46:1-3).

Later yet, God characterizes Himself as follows. “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (Ex. 3:6, see too vv. 13, 15-16; 4:5). This he says to Moses in their very first encounter at the burning bush; that is to say, centuries after the lives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Long after a political class rises in Egypt that had forgotten about Joseph (Ex. 1:8), God expects Moses to remember his ancient ancestors. In that same episode, after being charged with the responsibilities of national leadership, Moses asks God what he shall say when the people ask him who sent him. God’s response is one of the most cryptic, strange, and mistranslated verses in all of the Hebrew Bible. “'Ehteh-‘Asher-‘Ehyeh” became ego eimi ho on in the Septuagint’s Greek, and ego sum qui sum in the Latin of St. Jerome. In these European languages, the translation is simple: I am He Who Is, I am Being itself. In fact, though, the Hebrew says something else entirely. It is strange, perhaps, to the ear accustomed to Greek inflected theology, that God says most literally “I will be what I will be.” God is, most literally, the future tense.507 The movement from the Hebrew to the Greek and Latin is to transpose the God of history into the key of nature.

But God not only presents Himself historically, He presents Himself as a historical actor. The covenant he seals with Noah is “for everlasting generations” (Gen. 9:12). And his promise to Jacob is premised, at least in some measure, on the promise he

gave to Jacob’s fathers. “The land that I gave to Abraham and to Isaac, to you will I give it, and to your seed after you I will give the land” (Gen. 35:11-12).

In this set of verses from Deuteronomy, note how God’s past authorizes the future.

He will be your God as He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. And not with you alone do I seal this covenant and this oath but with him who is here standing with us this day before the Lord our God and with him who is not here with us this day. For you yourselves know how we dwelled in the land of Egypt and how we passed through in the midst of the nations through which you passed. And you saw their abominations and their foulnesses, wood and stone, silver and gold, that were with them (Deut. 29:12-16).

It is clarifying to work out the different time frames here. God “swore to your fathers” in the past, and because of that commitment, obliges all children of this covenant into the future. That is a good thing, Moses goes on to say, because Israel suffered for a long time in the past, in Egypt, and as part of its national experience of liberation observed many other regimes and their idolatrous practices. Past, present, future: this is a divine disclosure that takes place, not in space, but in time.

Perhaps the most emotionally charged statement of such a disclosure is when God outlines the precepts that will later be called the Decalogue. “I am the Lord your God” he tells the Israelites, “Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slaves” (Ex. 20:2). This is how God presents himself to the people at large: not the God of being, not the Creator of the heavens and the earth, not the unmoved mover of Aristotle, but the God who acts in history, who redeemed a particular people at a particular moment in time.508

This God who discloses Himself in time, and who acts in time, also remembers time. God remembers Noah and the beasts in the ark (Gen. 8:1). God remembers

508 See Deut. 5:6; Yerushalmi, Zakhor, p. 9.
Abraham after the destruction of Sodom (Gen. 19:29). God remembers Rachel, and opens her womb (Gen. 30:22), and when his people were oppressed in Egypt, God “heard their moaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob” (Ex. 2:24). God, the future tense, enters into history through remembrance. He remembers Israel with mercy and faithfulness (Ps. 98:3).

Much of the movement of Exodus is presented as acts of divine memory. It was because “I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob” that God now appears to Moses to deliver Israel to the nation He promised their ancestors (Ex. 6:2-8). Later, while God is leading the Israelites through the wilderness, and the Israelites rebel and worship the Golden Calf, God has had enough and simply wants to kill them. Moses needs to talk him down, and he does so by calling God to memory: “Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel your servants, to whom You swore by Yourself and spoke to them, ‘I will multiply your seed like the stars of the heavens, and all this land that I said I will give to your seed, and they will hold it in estate forever.’” (Ex. 32:13).509

The men and the women in the Hebrew Bible exist in time, and much of the history of the Israelite nation documents the growth, flourishing, decline and death of subsequent generations. All of Hebraic social thought exists to sustain a people through time, and in this way, Hebraic social thought corresponds with the most fundamental substratum Hebraic theology. For the God who is the future tense, the God who remembers and who acts through commemorations, this God who is known by tradition and known by his past actions, this God can only be imitated by those with a keen awareness of the past, and a consciousness that their present actions will echo long into the future.

509 Also see Ex. 33:1; Isa. 44:21-22.
5. Conclusion

This dissertation began with a study of John Locke. John Locke’s political thought is not democratic radicalism, nor is it a full-blown libertarian atomism. Nevertheless, for Locke, freedom is both the natural condition of mankind, and the highest achievement of politics. Endowed with inviolable rights, all human obligations – including those of family and citizenship – are the product of choice, and can be freely entered and freely left behind. And, while freedom is also a central theme of the historical narrative of the Israelite nation, the harsh liberty of the Sinai wilderness disdains individual natural right.

The natural condition of mankind – after Adam – is as a son, a daughter, a brother, a sister, the natural condition of mankind is to be born into a family to which each person is eternally connected and from which unbreakable obligations are to be

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510 “[C]ritics have lumped together two distinct traditions of political thought: democratic radicalism and liberalism.” Unlike democratic radicalism, “liberalism was a philosophy of sobriety, born in fear, nourished by disenchantment, and prone to believe that the human condition was and was likely to remain one of pain and anxiety.” Sheldon S. Wolin, Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 263; see also p. 266. “Lockean liberalism,” Wolin notes, “was fully as much a defense against radical democracy as an attack on traditionalism.”

511 “The liberal project,” of which, in McWilliams’ usage, Locke is the chief figure, “took it as a goal to limit the encumbrances of the self, helping to give the name of liberation to the isolating logic of individualism.” Wilson Carey McWilliams, The Democratic Soul: A Wilson Carey McWilliams Reader, ed. Patrick J. Deneen and Susan J. McWilliams, (The University Press of Kentucky, 2011), p. 209.

512 “The men who were termed equal by Thomas Hobbes and John Locke were conceived of as individuals, living in independence of one another before they ever entered association for common purposes. If the Pentateuch asserted the equality of all Israelites by virtue of the fact that all of them were liberated from bondage and all entered into covenant with the Almighty, these writers evoked a different source – scriptural, to be sure, but one that reflected new sensitivities concerning equality. Rather than finding the scriptural source for equality in the liberation and covenant passages of Exodus, they found it in Genesis – in the account of creation. All men were equal because they were created so by their Creator (with a capital C). […] Men, thus conceived, were equal not as they became formed into community but prior to entering the community, as individuals.” Joshua Berman, Created Equal: How the Bible Broke with Ancient Political Thought, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 174.
The biblical teaching on freedom is rooted in human history, not human nature. Neither, in the biblical context, is the freedom in the highest sense individual.\textsuperscript{513}

The difference between the natural condition of mankind in Locke and the Hebrew Bible can be clearly derived in two ways. The first is the question of natural sociality. Is man fundamentally alone in his solitude, or not? Is he designed to live his life, and even flourish, with others, or not? Are human relationships driven by an embarrassing necessity, a concession to our physical deficiencies, or do these relationships themselves have a normative and even majestic purpose, good unto themselves? In Locke’s view, man is naturally social but for political purposes, he should be considered an asocial individual. In the biblical view, “it is not good for man to be alone” (Gen. 2:18). Locke actually cites this verse approvingly,\textsuperscript{514} but such a citation cannot overwhelm the movement of his thought and weight of evidence that leads in the other direction. In Locke’s view, man is not alone, but it would be better if he were.

The second angle of vision that allows us to most clearly see where Locke and biblical social thought part ways concerns time. In Locke’s understanding, human life does not fully begin until after adolescence, when the child has matured into a reason. And by the same logic, a full human life ends when the lights of reason begin to dim—many years, perhaps, before death. You have a few decades, no more. You are destined, given such a horizon, to focus on the present, the incentives of the moment. The biblical


sources, by contrast, teach that what imbues your life with meaning and many of its
determining factors preceded your birth, and your actions, choices, behaviors, and
struggles extend far beyond your rational decades, into the future of your children and
theirs. Given such horizons, self-satisfaction is replaced with gratitude; self-interest with
self-government called to righteous hope. The aperture includes past and future, giving
rise to a social world that connects relations in space with relations in time.

In addition to these two, the Second Treatise opens with a robust distinction
between two separate and sovereign realms: the private realm of family relations and the
public and political realm of the constitution and state.\(^{515}\) The biblical polity emerges
from, and cannot easily be disentangled from the Israelite nation that aspires not to
chosen freedom but to the propagation and flourishing of generations. Its tribal structure
bears the names and the characteristics of Jacob’s sons. These are simply different
visions of the respective purview of public and private, and of the relations of family to
nation. These are among the reasons why Pangle writes that Locke’s “principal purpose
proves to be the refutation of traditional patriarchy (the belief that the key to satisfying
humanity’s basic needs is to be found in family life under the natural, divinely anointed,
and therefore unquestionable, rule of fathers). With a view to this chief purpose, the Old,
not the New, Testament is the authoritative text that must be dealt with.”\(^{516}\) It is also
why, “when [Locke] comes to articulate his own views, the reliance on the Bible drops
away and for long stretches is absent entirely. His tale of government is not spun entirely

\(^{515}\) Locke, Second Treatise, § 2, p. 268.

\(^{516}\) Thomas L. Pangle, The Spirit of Republicanism: The Moral Vision of the American Founders and the
Philosophy of Locke, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 139. See also Michael P.
Zuckert, Launching Liberalism: On Lockean Political Philosophy, (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of
from whole cloth, but Holy Writ is not one of its more important sources. Christianity is never denied, but perhaps it is set aside where it does not speak to matters at hand (which it only does within a narrow compass of theological questions. None of the foregoing is meant to dispute Locke’s deep personal faith, which I believe John Dunn and others have shown beyond all doubt to be genuine. My argument is simply that Locke takes his faith to tell him little or nothing about society and politics.”

At any rate, this dissertation was prompted by the question of Locke’s political Hebraism. I find that despite surface similarities between certain constitutional features, Lockean freedom stands opposed to the Hebraic horizons of society and self.

Let me close with a suggestion about why this matters. The attempt to link Locke and the Bible can be seen as part of the larger attempt, prompted by modernity’s friends and defenders, to ground modern constitutional regimes in older political and social forms. In the case of biblical religion, such arguments seek a vindication of modernity in the eyes of the religious, and to vindicate religion in the eyes of the modern secularist.

The problem is that, as is so plainly evident with the rise of the Nones in the United States, if the Bible and modernity are identical, and everyone is already modern, then there is no reason for the Bible. Scholars who overstate the similarities between the Hebrew Bible and modernity are counter-intuitively working, against their will and their wish, not for greater exposure to the religious and moral resources in the Bible, but to evermore marginalize them. If the Bible and our regime are the same, and

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we already have our regime, why do we need the Bible? It is precisely through their desire to raise the exposure of the Bible in political science that they rob the Bible of what it can most offer us. By associating modernity too closely with the Bible, the field is in danger of being crystalized as proto-Spinozist despite itself.

What is needed, in my judgment, is a recovery of the Hebrew Bible’s social teaching that does not vindicate America, but that serves to inspire and improve America. And the core social teaching of the Hebrew Bible – the moral goodness of association combined with a profound historical awareness, is the message that modern America most needs to hear if it is to release itself from the grips of individualist madness. When “all a man’s interests are limited to those near himself,”519 as Locke’s doctrine teaches, then “men forget their ancestors.” Such a teaching “clouds their view of their descendants and isolates them from their contemporaries. Each man is forever thrown back on himself alone, and there is danger that he may be shut up in the solitude of his own heart.”520

Locke taught us that we are free and rational, that reason is “our only star and compass.” To exercise our freedom, each must follow their own start and compass, each must offer individual consent. We do that in the political sphere and make regimes legitimate. But not only in politics, we also stand in relations of consent to parents, and when they are old enough, children. As soon as the child reaches the “age of nonage,” the bonds of family, both husband and wife and parent and child, are voluntary. The family, like the state, is made up of individuals who bear no inherent obligations to the past, have no responsibility to the future, and are only attached to each other as long as it

519 Tocqueville, op. cit., 2.2.2, p. 507.
520 Tocqueville, op. cit., 2.2.2, p. 508.
serves their pleasure. This is Lockean freedom, not carried to its extreme conclusions, but patiently and systematically laid out by Locke in his work.

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“The essence of the lawgiver’s art,” Tocqueville writes, “is by anticipation to appreciate these natural bents of human societies in order to know where the citizens’ efforts need support and where there is more need to hold them back. For different times make different demands.” Past ages needed Locke’s genius, and repressive regimes need it now. But, in America, the demands of our age require us to rediscover tradition’s majesty. We, who live in the world of Locke’s imagining, are prone to presentist self-regard; and we must see ourselves, anew, as part of our own intergenerational families with temporal obligations beyond ourselves.

The analysis and exegesis of this dissertation is an effort to aid in that rediscovery. Biblical anthropology roots man in rather than above the boundaries of creation. Biblical man is, at his best, a mimetic being, one who harkens to God’s command to zakhor, one who learns not by etching onto his tabula rasa but by imitating exemplars and avoiding the perilous mistakes of the past. The main axes of biblical social thought are husband-wife and parent-child, relationships that can redeem our solitude, and repay what we owe to the past by providing for the future.

We are in danger of living in an age that is permanently in the present tense. The Hebraic response is the call of the past through family and memory. Not because it is antiquarian, not because the past is an enchanted fiction of purity, but because only by remembering the oppression of slavery can man cherish freedom; only by remembering

521 Tocqueville, op. cit., 2.2.15, p. 543.
the sacrifices and achievements of his ancestors can man avoid their sins and aspire to their example; only by remembering the bond of loyalty that makes man and woman into husband and wife can children grow in nourishing homes. It is only by remembering the inheritance into which he was born that man can realize the truth that his own deeds redound unto his children’s children.

That Hebraic call to responsibility through time is countercultural in Lockean America, which clamors so incessantly for self-reliance, self-sufficiency, self-making. But in all of creation, the human lev alone bears the burdens and blessings of memory. The biblical inheritance will not be lost forever, even if the cost of Lockean freedom is forgetfulness.
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