Cataldo, Jeremiah W. "Introduction." *Biblical Terror: Why Law and Restoration in the Bible Depend Upon Fear*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2017. 1–50. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9780567670847.ch-001>>.

Downloaded from Bloomsbury Collections, www.bloomsburycollections.com, 26 April 2023, 12:43 UTC.

Copyright © Jeremiah W. Cataldo 2017. Released under a CC BY-NC-ND licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>). You may share this work for non-commercial purposes only, provided you give attribution to the copyright holder and the publisher, and provide a link to the Creative Commons licence.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

[T]he difference between Good and Evil is not that of content, but that of form—but, again, not in the sense that Good is the form of unconditional commitment to a Cause, and Evil the betrayal of this commitment. It is, on the contrary, the very unconditional “fanatical” commitment to a Cause which is the “death drive” at its purest and, as such, the primordial form of Evil: it introduces into the flow of (social) life a violent cut that throws it out of joint. The Good comes afterwards, it is an attempt to “gentrify,” to domesticate, the traumatic impact of the Evil Thing. In short, the Good is the screened/domesticated Evil.¹

In beginning, let us propose this: fear and anxiety are the beating heart of the Bible. Fear of death. Fear of irrelevance. Fear of the loss of difference. These statements are broad, even greedily so, and must for the sake of clarity be narrowed. Therefore, we will restrict our primary discussion then to two fundamental, biblical concepts: law and restoration, the assumed centrality of which are ideological tools of the monotheistic pioneer, the settler, the one who establishes defenses against perceived threats to his desired world. Such threats he views as the dangerous incursion of anomy. *“By all means, keep your vows and make your libations... Lo, I swear by my great name, says the LORD, that my name shall no longer be pronounced on the lips of any of the people of Judah in all the land of Egypt, saying, ‘As the Lord God lives.’ I am going to watch over them for harm and not good...” (Jer 44:26–27).*

Within both popular and academic hermeneutics, the biblical centrality of law and restoration has been largely misunderstood. Many view the Bible as a product written under the presupposition that law and restoration were already reified and central concepts, and that the texts were written on the presumed centrality of those ideas. Consequently, biblical interpretation is often an exercise in determining how a biblical author’s understanding of a dominant religious law shaped the message of his text.

1. Slavoj Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, Kindle (London: Verso, 2008), 345.

Yet when properly analyzed, neither law nor restoration were immediately central to Israelite or Judean identity. Deuteronomist ideal aside, neither concept was central *before* the biblical text was written or before the period of the exile(s). In fact, as this work will argue, both concepts became central as their authoring biblical communities struggled to hold on to the certainty of their identities.

To get at that fact, a primary question must be: How are the biblical concepts of law and restoration dependent upon anxiety? Our hypothesis is that anxiety over lawlessness and disorder—over “death” in a general sense—created the foundation for the monotheistic concepts law and restoration. The sense of this can be seen in Jeremiah, for example, “The LORD could no longer bear the sight of your evil doings, the abominations you committed; therefore your land became a desolation and a waste and a curse, without inhabitant, as it is to this day” (Jer 44:22). And so we must bear in mind that we moderns are the beneficiaries of a monotheistic, biblical law and concept of restoration *not* because of any positivistic or altruistic desires of the biblical authors. Theirs was a focus more selfish: *I want land. I want authority over it.* Such desires were strategies of self-preservation, as we will argue. Conceptually, the origin of monotheism and its common, fundamental, ideological pillars (revelation, law, and restoration) was not the happy wellbeing of all humankind. It was dirty, prejudiced, frightened, and consumed primarily with self. Even in its later developments, in its “becoming more normative,” in, for Christian example, its growing centralization of “loving one’s neighbor,” it cannot shake the shackles of its heritage. *In Heaven we, the members of the body of Christ, will sing of God’s love while sinners who threatened our way of life burn in the fiery pits of hell!* This work explores that historical heritage. Our focus will be upon why law and restoration are given a central value within the biblical texts—one, subsequently, that is adopted by later Jewish and Christian monotheisms. To understand their “dirty” origins is to better understand the ideological forces and traumas behind the centralization of these concepts for the early community, and to do so in stark contrast to the more theological nuances modern readers tend to attribute with these terms. But it also means that we, as modern readers, may come face to face with how we ourselves tyrannize these concepts within our own individual or collective agendas of happy reunion following apocalyptic eschatology and the absolute “one way” toward that reunion. That absoluteness, for example, is the sense with which Thomas Oden understood Christian restoration as an absolute object of grace:

The One who meets us on the Last Day is quietly present already in the death of cultures as the judge of sin both corporately and individually chosen. Life lived in Jesus Christ does not waste time resenting the inexorable fact that each culture like each person eventually dies. Sanctifying grace offers beleaguered cultural pilgrims the power and means of trusting fundamentally in the One who proffers us this ever-changing, forever-dying historical process.²

A judge that stands at the apex of decaying historical time and in the gateway between restoration and a “repeat loop” of “forever dying”? Is that not the Hail Mary of the monotheistic world? *My anxieties are overwhelming me. Death is upon me. Ave Maria! But wait! There lies the restoration of my world, the climax of my desire!*

What Oden describes is belief that demands response—a type of “all in” strategy without the benefit of prior proof, but which belief as conviction and motivation demands. Such beliefs are not the sole property of monotheism or religions generally. No, they are common human expressions. That such beliefs exist even in religion or its central or dependent symbols, such as the Bible, is fairly mundane. What interests us more, especially in the objectivation³ that has been attributed to such religious symbols, is *why* (1) beliefs in a divine law and in divine restoration came to exist, and (2) how those beliefs shaped social-political action within, for our purpose, the province of Yehud wherein strict monotheism of the Jewish variety emerged. This starting point will perhaps be more difficult for the conservative reader than for the more liberal one; though what the discriminating reader may find is that there is still room for divine influence even in my own more social-scientific argument that rejects out of necessity any presupposition of divine influence.

If the biblical concepts of law and restoration are responses to anxieties, we must take then as a given that no behavior is performed without political, historically contingent, motivation and rationale. *Anxieties stem from the places we live!* In that regard, religious behavior is not wholly distinct from political behavior. *All* social behavior that impacts to varying

2. Thomas C. Oden, “So What Happens After Modernity? A Postmodern Agenda for Evangelical Theology,” in *The Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*, ed. David S. Dockery (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 397.

3. By “objectivation” we mean the transformation of socially produced ideas, behaviors, and values into objective facts. In that we are following the definition of the term offered by P. Berger (cf. *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* [New York: Anchor Books, 1990], 4).

degrees the distribution of power is political behavior.⁴ Can we not say then that political behavior is *motivated* behavior, the desired or pursued object of which is the preservation of a normative order, including its hierarchies of power and the general stability of the cultural world? If we can accept that as a starting premise, then we may hypothesize, and let the selfless heavenly choir be silent now, that the biblical texts are not the results of any real divine–human relationship. They are in their collective entirety products of political behavior—human responses to anxieties generated in relationship with the surrounding world.

We will argue in this work that the core motivation behind the biblical use and development of the themes of law and restoration is found in the fear of social-political irrelevance; they were articulated under the duress of the anxieties produced by that fear. Because it is reactionary, the law's call to a moral life in the Persian and later period texts is not a purely altruistic one. It emphasizes instead an ideal normative order under which the (*golah*, remnant, or whatever other similar term or concept) community's anxieties are best alleviated. And moreover, the strict monotheistic ideology, one expressed predominantly in the recorded descriptions of the *golah* community, that developed during this time was a product of the same social-political forces that forced the hand of the evolving concepts of law and restoration.

This work investigates the ideological forces that drove the reification of law and restoration as ideas central to biblical identity. It assumes that neither concept, both of which have also become foundational pillars in monotheism, was central to Judean identity before the exile. It argues that these concepts became central precisely because of the growing emphasis upon strict monotheistic identity that began in the Persian period and continued throughout the Hasmonean one. What this means for the modern reader is that the importance of law and restoration that scholars have attributed to the biblical texts is the product not of any theological concern to be right with God but survival strategies that emerged in response to the exile. Put in balder terms, the biblical centralization of law and restoration, this work argues, was a ritualized response to fear.

At this point, perhaps a clarification of my intent is necessary because it helps explain my methodological approach. A more conservatively oriented reader will interpret my comments as a criticism of the universalism of grace. While on a personal level I am hesitant to adopt such a Christocentric view, especially in studies of Judean texts, my challenge is not directed at the belief itself. Instead, it reflects an attempt to expose

4. For a broad understanding of political behavior, see the work of Claude Ake, "A Definition of Political Stability," *Comparative Politics* 7, no. 2 (1975): 271–83.

underlying ideological assumptions that bolster such beliefs. My critical approach stems out of a desire to understand. Throughout this work it will tend to look at whole systems to study their function. It will study the pieces of the whole and how they function within the whole. And then it will attempt to rebuild the whole with an awareness of how it functions, and with loyalty only to the social-scientific pursuit of understanding ideological systems and their functions. To be effective, such pursuits must tread equally in sacred and profane spaces and expose both to the same level of scrutiny, criticism, and doubt.

Premise, Authorial Perspective, and Understood Audience

Sometimes the best way to understand ossified presuppositions upon which academic arguments depend is to tear down the house and reanalyze the base. I'm not the first to say this, nor to attempt to do so. But all too often a handsaw is brought to a job where a wrecking ball is needed. I have a wrecking ball in my combined use of Žižek, Deleuze, and Foucault. Of the three, Žižek is more the bull in the china shop. I chose to use him not because I think he's right or even a perfect lens through which to interpret the Bible. In fact, it is nearly impossible to identify a clearly articulated, uniform theory from Žižek. Any attempt to do so is likely to leave one "bonkers." However, he has done a lot to return scholarly awareness to the role of contradiction in the formation of ideological position. In that, there is overlap between his work and that of Deleuze. Despite scholarly resistance to him, Žižek has been effective in his sometimes belligerent analyses of contradiction, synthesis, and causes behind material forces of production. He has been effective in that his analyses have exposed real issues and concerns that must be accounted for in any study of social-political behavior. But in many ways, where Žižek has exposed such issues, he has not offered a way around the broken shards; it is there that scholarly criticisms of his theories have substantial merit.

My employment of fairly controversial theorists attempts to do what analogies between modern social ills and the biblical text attempt but often fail to do. Such comparisons, such as comparisons of Ezra–Nehemiah to ethnic cleansing, are often shocking but fail in their attempts to decenter conventional scholarly assumptions. They often never get past the awe of the analogy itself. Such analogies should be accompanied by a sympathetic attention to where the comparison breaks down. To avoid the snares of that my intent is to use theorists to serve a decentering and deconstructive purpose. In many ways, that is where the influences of Žižek, of Deleuze, and of Foucault stop. It is also there that this work shifts its methodological focus onto rebuilding the social-political context in order

to understand more intimately the forces that shaped cultural emphases upon law and restoration as central pillars in the developing monotheistic identity in Yehud. In all cases, I use the three theorists as talking points and as points of departure. Their works are ignorant of biblical matters and so can't be applied directly. But scholarship that pushes boundaries within the discipline finds creative use for seemingly disparate ideas and theories. And sometimes the best way to come to a better understanding within the problematically archaizing tendencies of any academic discipline is to do something new, to rattle the bars of its gilded cage.

In addition, scholars of ancient history often demand that if many people say something then we would do well to pay attention. Like him or not, many people are talking about Žižek. He, in fact, is one of the few living scholars to have a journal dedicated to the study of his work.⁵ That scholarly expectation led me to consider Žižek. What do so many people see in him? Certainly not clear accessibility. And if the job of the biblical scholar is to make the Bible more understandable, can someone like Žižek expose new areas of interdisciplinary dialogue with the text in ways that might connect the ancient author to the modern reader? So I have chosen to use Žižek as a bull in the china shop of academic convention on law and restoration. Far too long has scholarship depended on law (*torah*) as a productive and shaping force in Israel, as if one entered into relationship with the law to find identity. Analyses of biblical texts ranging from the Pentateuch to the prophets have largely wrestled with how society was defined in relation to an existing and codified law. But the law as we know its form in the biblical texts was the product of a minority group under the stress of exile—we will argue from that position in this work. The law was not the guiding paradigm of group behavior but a blueprint for a restored Israel, or restoration in a more general term. Additionally, restoration was not any return in the sense that the biblical texts describe. It was more a utopianism that idealized the past, the idea of the kingdom of Judah. To arrive at a better understanding of the forces that drove the production of the biblical texts we must come to view the texts not as producer but as product. In the absent reality of material power, biblical authors turned toward the ideological construction of a desired reality. That not all authors (compare for instance Isaiah, Malachi, and Ezra–Nehemiah) from the relevant periods had the same visions speaks only to the lack of any central, dominant ideology and confirms our position that the authors originally wrote from the margins of social-political power.

5. See the *International Journal of Žižek Studies*, <http://zizekstudies.org/index.php/ijzs/index>.

Given the difficulties in finding any coherence in Žižek, I have chosen not to use his work as a dominant theory, in the same way one might use Marx or Hegel. Yet he is certainly having a very real impact on readers, carnivalesque and otherwise, but still exposing real meanings and understandings. Therefore, I have chosen a strategy more along the lines of what Derrida practiced, namely, to apply one idea against another and see where they overlap and where they differ and allow their differences to open up new lines of dialogue. But where Derrida got caught up in the the broken remains of his deconstructed house, I work within the larger confines of a materialist framework to provide a blueprint for a new, updated house consistent with a materialist viewpoint. If they are veritable, new lines of dialogue must provide a new way of seeing a cohesive whole. This is why I have chosen to pull from three theorists whose works supplement but also correct each other. Neither one alone is sufficient.

Any endeavor such as this will inevitably invoke an impassioned response. Scholarship needs a little rabble-raising every now and then lest it content itself with restating the same ideas on an endless loop, or become antiquated. But I need to be clear. My intent as an author is to wrestle with new ways of having the conversation. I am not out to debunk. I am not out to refute the importance of the Bible. It was important. It is important. In fact, it is central in many ways and to many cultures. That central importance is precisely the reason I want to better understand the material and ideological forces that shaped it. In that regard, my focus on contradictions is twofold: contradictions provide the best point of contact for understanding central concerns and ideologies, and this focus is motivated by my own relationship with the Bible, which can be summed up in the words of the iconic poster in Fox Mulder's office on the TV show the X-Files: *I want to believe*.

A further word on strategy: the discriminating reader will notice textual insertions in the style of a Greek chorus throughout the text, namely in the form of italicized sentences. These insertions are meant to reinforce important points, to criticize the problematic primacy of others, and to expose new approaches for understanding difficult points or to identify multiple meanings of important ideas, a multiplicity that should not be suppressed beneath the lofty championing by author or reader of a singular understanding.

Caveats: What Must Be Said Before What Can Be Said

La pigrizia degli storici è grande, e quando essi trovano per un determinato periodo una presentazione continua degli avvenimenti già in qualche fonte “antica” (non necessariamente contemporanea agli avvenimenti stessi) sono ben lieti di adottarla limitandosi a parafrasarla o magari a razionalizzarla. È un procedimento che nessuno sosterrebbe sul piano teorico, ma che pure di fatto continua a trovare applicazione, specie in settori in cui la consapevolezza dei metodi e dei fini non sia sufficientemente desta.⁶

With Mario Liverani’s concern in mind, let us take as a given that the Bible is not a book of unbiased historiography. It has an obvious intent: articulating its own myopic understanding of a world it deigns to convince its readers was real.⁷ Neither is it a book of positive theology. And even though it has become a “living document”⁸ within the monotheistic tradition, its initial concern lays not with providing a theological grounding for future monotheistic communities. Its driving concern is more imminent, more desperate even. It is a constructivist, utopian text, in which a minority community detailed its aspirations for a new social-political order. “But as for you, have no fear, my servant Jacob, and do not be dismayed, O Israel; for I am going to save you from far away, and your offspring from the land of their captivity” (Jer 46:27). In other words, there is, to borrow from Žižek’s discussion of revolution, a radical element within the texts. Restoration demands a breaking down of the extant social-political structures and a glorious building of new ones. “Israel” expects that the remnant community would become the social, political, and religious authority within the province, and that any imperial power relinquish any sway it might have; and that it do so in psalmic

6. Mario Liverani, “Storiografia politica hittita II: Telipino, ovvero: della solidariet,” *OA* 16 (1977): 105.

7. Cf. N. P. Lemche, who argues that it is impossible to consider the Hebrew Bible as a historical source in the classical sense of the word. At the same time, he warns against readings that are far removed from the realities of the ancient world (cf. *The Israelites in History and Tradition* [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1998], 1). This means, in short, one must be aware of the limitations of one’s study.

8. Cf. Jonathan Magonet, *A Rabbi’s Bible* (London: SCM, 1991); K. Stone, “Bibles That Matter: Biblical Theology and Queer Performativity,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 38, no. 1 (2008): 14–25. Both scholars tend toward a more postmodern, and so inclusive, reading of the Bible as a living document. Yet even more conservative views of the Bible consider it to be an object with which one must enter into a formative relationship (cf. Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* [Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997], 193).

celebration of the awesome power and authority of Yahweh. The conflicts described in the texts, we will argue, are still consistent with the utopian view of restoration that drives their focus. There resides in them, to pilfer again from Žižek, a “utopian hope which sustains the specter of ‘infinite justice,’ forever postponed, always to come, but nevertheless here as the ultimate horizon of [their] activity.”⁹

Even if we accept a Hellenistic or Hasmonean-period dating for the final form(s) of texts such as Ezra–Nehemiah traditionally associated with the Persian Period and assumed to be historiographic in focus,¹⁰ the ideological attitudes and motivated behaviors of the remnant community can be traced to the Persian period.¹¹ It was there that internal social-political conflict (*but did not this conflict exist only in the mind of the golah community?!)* in Yehud was at its peak—an environment that gave birth to the early form of the ideological and religious traditions that shaped the final form of the Hebrew Bible.¹² The biblical texts were products of the anxieties and conflicts that occupied the collective mind of the communities to which their authors belonged. While scholarship has addressed conflicts that faced the remnant community in Yehud, it has often failed to address adequately the deep-rooted level at which such conflicts shaped the biblical texts. There is still, after all, a prevailing tendency to rely upon happy positivism when it comes to the Bible. Take as an example the statement from Klaas Smelik: “The historicity of... stories in Genesis, Daniel, and Esther is debated. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah, however, are considered to be based on historically reliable documents. In these books, we encounter two servants of the Persian king: Ezra and Nehemiah, who play a decisive role in reorganizing the

9. Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, 225.

10. Cf. Mark A. Throntveit, *Ezra–Nehemiah*, Kindle (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1992), 11; H. G. M. Williamson, “The Composition of Ezra I–VI,” *JTS* 34 (1983): 1–30.

11. J. Blenkinsopp builds his work on a similar proposal (see *Judaism, the First Phase: The Place of Ezra and Nehemiah in the Origins of Judaism* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009]).

12. Blenkinsopp rightly identifies the Persian period as the “decisive” period in the emergence of Judaism and, we would add correspondingly, biblical monotheistic identity (see *ibid.*, 6). And P. R. Ackroyd writes, “As a general principle of working here, it seems best to make an assumption—and to abandon it only when the evidence is clearly opposed to it. This assumption is that modification and addition made to the work [Ezra–Nehemiah] after its main stage of composition are not to be regarded as totally contrary to its purpose” (*I & II Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah* [London: SCM, 1973], 20).

Jerusalem community after the return from the Babylonian Exile.”¹³ But where is the wellspring of aggressive, uncompromising critical analyses of the biblical texts as products of tortured psyches, anxious authors, myopic scribes, or those exposing times in which the biblical texts were written under social and political duress—the same type through which one might approach the works of, say, Franz Kafka? Phyllis Tribble did this, and she did it well in her dismantling of some of the extrinsic motivations supporting authorial emphasis upon “woman” as an object.¹⁴ Thomas Thompson, with a fair amount of rabble-rousing, also wrote poignantly about what modern readers can even hope for in their readings of the texts: “The world-view of the Old Testament belongs to a different age from ours. We are not, cannot be and should hardly look to become—even in indignant imagination—Hellenistic Jews, that the text might speak to us. The text doesn’t speak to us, nor was it addressed to us. To pretend that it does and was, is among theology’s least critical and most self-serving lies.”¹⁵ Our purpose in better understanding the ideological forces behind the production of the Bible is more effective if we set aside consideration of what it has become, a central and absolute symbol within monotheism. The history of the Bible’s reception, which already presumes the “Bible” as a codified thing, is not equal to the processes of its formation or production—its *Ursprung und Prozess*, so to speak. This work contributes to that minority in biblical scholarship by beginning here: the ideological forces that shaped the Bible and its centralization of law and restoration, which are core ideas for the Bible and later monotheism, were given life in the tortured midst of anxiety. *Circle the wagons! Confirm our resolve! We’re under threat!*

With the contours of a rather larger problem before us, this work will argue for a fundamental reevaluation of social-political ideologies behind the centralization of law and restoration within the biblical texts from the sixth–fourth centuries BCE. To arrive at this better understanding means that we must also assess how law and restoration became central to the emerging monotheistic identity in Yehud. Since struggle seems to be a shared characteristic of all Neo-Babylonian and Persian-period biblical

13. Klaas A. D. Smelik, “Nehemiah as a ‘Court Jew,’” in *New Perspectives on Ezra–Nehemiah: History and Historiography, Text, Literature, and Interpretation*, ed. Isaac Kalimi (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012), 63.

14. See Phyllis Tribble, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984).

15. Thomas L. Thompson, *The Mythic Past: Biblical Archaeology and the Myth of Israel* (New York: Basic, 1999), 387.

literatures we will begin with an assessment of how those concepts were defensive. This work argues that within the framework of the Bible, law and restoration are defensive concepts developed in response to increasing anxieties over the threatened loss of group identity within a seemingly unsupportive political environment. What this looked like in specific, we will discuss throughout this work. We should also point out that such fears may have been less physical than imagined in that individual lives may not have been under physical threat. Rather, what was likely at stake was the loss of any external recognition of the group as socially relevant. (Did, after all, the *am ha'aretz* really view itself as the *am ha'aretz* in relation to the *golah* community?) As driving forces of group behavior—“*O LORD, God of Israel...we have escaped as a remnant...we are before you in our guilt...*” (*Ezra 9:15*)—law and restoration were also, we will show, reflective of revolutionary acts and attitudes, critical to the monotheistic identity that emerged during this time. A more well-rounded and sophisticated understanding of the collective identity of the “remnant” than what currently prevails in scholarship¹⁶ demands a rigorous analysis of these “concepts.” They reflect attitudinal positions and related actions developed in response to an already dominant social-political normative in which the marginal position of the *golah* community was anxiety producing. “*Here we are, slaves to this day...*” (*Neh 9:36*). They are, in other words, mechanisms through which the community sought to respond to and alleviate the anxieties of its own socially marginal position—the community was, for all intents and purposes, composed of immigrants. That reality *must* be considered! What this means in bald terms is that the concepts of law and restoration were concepts developed out of overwhelming anxieties, or fear.¹⁷ And because law and restoration are two of monotheism’s fundamental pillars, the echoes of the ideological forces that shaped them continue to be heard within monotheism. *But does that mean that fear is a productive force in monotheism?* Maybe.

16. As though a seed from which a complexity in life sprung, the remnant has been credited with the Bible, building the Jerusalem temple, and setting the infrastructure for later Judaism and even Christianity.

17. I am building on the project laid out in *Breaking Monotheism: Yehud and the Material Formation of Monotheistic Identity*, LHBOTS 565 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2012). There I identified the three pillars of monotheism as revelation, law, and restoration.

One might describe these concepts—and one could even say “ideological positions”¹⁸ in that they identify a baseline for behavior—as utopian strategies that defensively respond to the present by directing one’s gaze toward a desired future. *While tough now, it’ll be better, as long as you observe the law.* Doing that would be appropriate, but one should not read into these positions and their co-existent ideology conformation that the “returnees” enjoyed dominance over the major social-political institutions in Yehud.¹⁹ As such, these “positions” partly constitute a blueprint for a new social-political order by providing mechanisms through which patterns, ideas, and meanings critical for a collective identity may be legitimated. That is one reason why they are consumed with the boundary between member and nonmember. Perhaps to better identify their function as *mechanisms* one should describe them as actions whose intent is to challenge and interrupt already legitimated agreements on given cultural taxonomic systems and their dependent social-political hierarchy.

For a modern albeit rough parallel, one might understand the September 11, 2001 attacks against symbolic representations of “the American way of life” (economic and military symbols) as attempts, though largely misguided, at undermining the foundation of the social-political world in the United States. To strike at the heart, or core, is an attempt to bring the

18. Note the definition of “ideology” offered by Howell and Prevenir: “ideology is almost unconscious, very difficult—perhaps impossible—to retrieve. It is a system of values which inform action, or which are thought to inform action—ideas about good and bad, about right and wrong, about what is ‘natural’ and what is ‘given’ and what, in contrast, is ‘changeable’ or ‘man-made.’ In this sense, ideology is a product of culture—learned, to be sure, but learned at so deep a level that it is not easily distanced” (*From Reliable Sources: An Introduction to Historical Methods* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001], 147).

19. As proposed by J. Kessler, for example, in “Persia’s Loyal Yahwists: Power, Identity, and Ethnicity in Achaemenid Yehud,” in *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period*, ed. Oded Lipschits and Manfred Oeming (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 104. In contrast to him, one should also note G. Ahlström, who posited that the class distinction between the *golah* and the *am ha’aretz* was not merely religious. “It was very much a sociological problem and a problem of property rights. The nonexiled people [who] claimed ownership of the land at first considered the returnees as foreigners. They maintained that the returnees had no right to the land” (*The History of Ancient Palestine* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993], 846). See also Philip R. Davies, “Urban Religion and Rural Religion,” in *Religious Diversity in Ancient Israel and Judah*, ed. Francesca Stavrakopoulou and John Barton (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 104–17.

entire institution crashing down. For the terrorists, even if through twisted logic, these offensive acts were defensive in that they were preemptive attempts to remove external road blocks from the creation of an Islamic State, or political reality, a utopian world in which peace and stability, though of a particular genre, might reign. In the case of the returnees in Yehud, the intended purpose of their utopian strategies was to take aim at the dominant social-political order, to bring it crumbling down and rebuild it on the strength of divine favor. In that sense, they are revolutionary.²⁰

Most scholarly works dealing with Yehud don't embrace that angle, which makes a better understanding of the central importance of law and restoration, but arrived at through social-scientific methods, all the more valuable. Instead, those scholars proposing the existence of a theocracy in Yehud have depended entirely upon the prescriptive and taxonomic effectiveness of the social-political actions taken by Nehemiah, that the religious implications of his actions (such as the whole-scale reception of the temple as a central symbol and the effectiveness of the cult influencing politics) were supported by the (legitimated) political hierarchy. They often ignore any real discussion of relations of production, material and ideological—a neglect that does nothing more than leave the political hierarchy resting on a fragile edifice of religious (*and utopian!*) ideology.²¹ But even the main face of religious ideology emphasized the distinction between insider and outsider as the foundation for a restored state and the power relations that shaped it.²² And even the idea of covenant—a

20. By “revolutionary” we mean that their successful reception required a radical change in social-political relations and institutions, which must include unavoidably the legitimated and effective relations of force. To clarify such relations of force, note Pierre Bourdieu writes, “[T]he structure of the relations between claimants occupying different positions in the relations of production, reproduction, and distribution of religious goods tends to reproduce the structure of relations of force between groups or classes, but under the transfigured and disguised form of a field of relations of force between claimants struggling for the conservation or subversion of the symbolic order” (“Genesis and Structure of the Religious Field,” ed. Craig Calhoun, *Comparative Social Research* 13 [1991]: 31).

21. Alt's work was among those that led the way in this now egregious scholarly position (cf. “Die Landnahme der Israeliten in Palästina,” in *Kleine Schriften zur Geschichte des Volkes Israel* [Munich: Beck, 1953], 89–125; “Die Rolle Samarias bei der Entstehung des Judentums,” in *Kleine Schriften zur Geschichte des Volkes Israel* [Munich: C. H. Beck, 1953], 316–37).

22. Cf. Daniel L. Smith, “The Politics of Ezra: Sociological Indicators of Postexilic Judaeon Society,” in *Second Temple Studies, 1: Persian Period*, ed. Philip R. Davies (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1991), 72–97; Joel Weinberg and Daniel L.

legal agreement that depends entirely upon collective agreement that the divine (1) exists and (2) requires authorship over cultural taxonomy and social-political hierarchy—emphasizes an idealized pattern of division of labor.²³ What this means is that the Bible, in its, *and* those of scholars who are likewise guilty, tendencies to overlook social, economic, and political realities is more characteristic of a revolutionary text written on the margins of power. It is best read not primarily as an objectively historiographic project, nor a theological one, but as a radical attempt to institutionalize utopian ideals within the collective memory of a minority. Oh, what that would mean for modern monotheistic thought! Theologies based on the biblical texts must then confess to their dependence not on revelation but on revolution.

*I Did It My Way: How Visions of a Restored World
Reflect the Subject's Desire*

Within the biblical texts, law and restoration, as concepts foundational to group identity, represent the attitudinal position of a minority group and its expressed desire for change. *Our restored world, our "heaven," is a world in which our anxieties are alleviated. Our law is the blueprint for that world.*²⁴ They reflect utopian hopes directed at or emphasizing a society

Smith-Christopher, *The Citizen-Temple Community*, JSOTSup 151 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1992); Sigmund Mowinckel, *Studien zu dem Buche Ezra-Nehemiah*, I–III (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1964).

23. J. Assmann was, in that regard, correct about the role of the Mosaic Covenant (cf. *The Price of Monotheism* [Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010], 37–38). Note also S. Greengus, who argues that priests took on positions of authority because the religious law (of the remnant community) was given central place and legitimated as such by the imperial king (cf. "Biblical and ANE Law," *ABD* 4:242–52). One should also consult the classical work of J. Wellhausen in which he argues that the *golah* community *constructed* a theocracy based on the Mosaic archetype (cf. *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*, Scholars Press Reprints and Translations [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994], 425). Both of these scholarly proposals assume as affectively real in a social-political sense the desired object—restoration through obedience to the law—of the returnee community.

24. Of course, later Christian theologies tend to absolutize the relative. For instance, modern, evangelical examples of this tend to emphasize the absolute natures and distinctions of heaven and hell. In his defense of the existence of hell, for example, Albert Mohler writes, "Can a truth clearly revealed in the Bible be anything less than good for us? The Bible presents the knowledge of hell just as it presents the knowledge of sin and judgment: these are things we had better know. God reveals these things to us for our good and for our redemption. In this light, the knowledge

restructured in support of the “righteous” community as the paradigm for social-political membership. Given their focus on unfulfilled desire they are best read as describing relational strategies, those conveying the formation of new social-political, intersubjective realities. In other words, law and restoration as relational strategies—*defining who I am in distinction from you*—reflect an underlying utopian interpretation of the “real” world. These strategies fit very well with Fernando Ainsa and Jeanne Ferguson’s definition of the utopian position:

The territory of the Utopia that “is not here” supposes then the courage to create “another world,” as it should be in the future, as we imagine it in the past or that we presume exists in “another place.” A determined construction of a counter-image of our immediate reality is necessary for this representation in time and space. That “other world,” since it is Utopian, must be “critical” of this world, must correct it and imposes modifications on the injustices of its structure.²⁵

To be clear, this does not mean that they are utopian strategies incapable of influencing social-political behavior, as if they were irrelevant to the real desires of the utopian-minded community. There is a real-world practicality to them that makes even the faintest whisper of hope a deeply motivating ideal in the “real” world. For these strategies in particular it was the religious world being constructed that made them suitable for the everyday life. They became the banners behind which the footsteps of believing monotheists set the dust of history into a suffocating tizzy.

Certainly these terms have been given great theological meaning reflecting a near, or sometimes overt, supernatural presence behind the formation of an “elect” community. Take, for instance, something sometimes heard in conservative, Christian communities: *God blessed me, one of his children, by giving me X dollars*. But such emphases typically overlook reality in favor of the utopian ideal, an ideal that is itself the driving ideological basis behind monotheistic concepts of restoration. Never does one hear the more realistic, non-quasi-solipsistic version: *What really happened was that someone fretfully dropped the only money they had to buy much needed milk for her own hungry children. And I took it for myself*. Rather than some big Other who actively confirms the best perceptions of ourselves,

of these things is grace to us” (“Air Conditioning Hell: How Liberalism Happens” [Albertmohler.com, 2010], n.p. Online: <http://www.albertmohler.com/2010/01/26/air-conditioning-hell-how-liberalism-happens/>). Maybe.

25. Fernando Ainsa and Jeanne Ferguson, “Utopia, Promised Lands, Immigration and Exile,” *Diogenes* 30, no. 119 (1982): 50.

we should instead be referring to attitudes and corresponding actions whose purpose is to interrupt surrounding cultural conventions.²⁶ *What my God wants may be a futile conversation. But what my community wants... now you and I are approaching a more accessible ground for dialogue.* To avoid possibly ensnaring theological interpretations, we should begin by reading references to “God” within the Bible and its interpretation not as biographical statements of an absolute reality but as projections of an idealized sense of collective self.²⁷ Within all monotheistic traditions, the

26. U. Eco’s distinction may be helpful here: “When we say that, in order to decide whether an animal is a MAMMAL or not, we have to fall back on a system of cultural conventions (or...reconstruct one), while, in order to decide if something is an egg, we intuitively put our faith in perception and an elementary knowledge of the language being used, we are saying something that goes beyond intuitive obviousness. Of course if someone has not been trained to apply the word *egg* to a certain CT [= Context Term] (which already considers the form, the presence of yolk and albumen, the presupposition that if this object is sat on for the right amount of time, then a living creature might be hatched from it), there will be no agreement on the recognition of an egg. Therefore perceptual consensus too always springs from a prior cultural agreement, no matter how vague or folk it might be. And this confirms what I was trying to say shortly before, that in the process of understanding, the structural moment and the interpretative moment alternate and complement each other step by step. Nevertheless it cannot be denied that, in defining an egg as such, the testimony of the senses prevails, while in order to define a mammal as such, what prevails is a knowledge of classifications and our agreement on a given taxonomic system” (Umberto Eco and Alastair McEwen, *Kant and the Platypus: Essays on Language and Cognition* [New York: Harcourt, 1999], 253). Each taxonomic category that helps constitute and legitimate social-political order takes for granted presupposed meanings, ideas, or realities that are both critical to its importance and part of the fabric of social-political order. Our intent in this project is to expose some of those presuppositions.

27. Wrestling with the nature of God in relation to group identity can be found to a limited extent even within monotheistic traditions. Is not process theology within the Christian tradition close to this more sociologically aware understanding? “Process theologians make a place for Jesus, but basically he is seen not as the Word made flesh but instead as the universal center of psychic convergence, the model of self-realization. Sharply breaking with Christian tradition, they deny that there was just one incomparable incarnation in history—when God became man in Jesus Christ. In its place they argue for a universal cosmic incarnation of which Jesus is a supreme manifestation. While some hail Jesus as the perfect embodiment of the ideals of goodness, truth and beauty, others see him as only one step, albeit a crucial one, in the upward surge of creative evolution” (Donald Bloesch, “Process Theology and Reformed Theology,” in *Process Theology*, ed. Ronald H. Nash [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987], 43).

celebrated attributes of God reflect the projected ideals of the community. Our discerning reader will again note that this position is more difficult to maintain for the conservative than for the liberal. Yet it is a social-scientific position whose purpose is to understand how concepts and categories of knowledge and experience develop within the realm of the social world, and to do so without appealing to an unverifiable source outside that world, which then prioritizes theology over the social-sciences.

*Defining Revelation, Law, and Restoration
as Pillars of Monotheism Within the Context of This Study*

Since we will discuss these concepts in more detail below and throughout this project, a brief introductory summary will suffice here. We presuppose in this work the following definitions: in sociological terms, “revelation” refers to an interruption of a dominant normative order that necessitates change in response. “Law” denotes the standard through which intersubjective activities are regulated within the dominant social-political order. And “restoration” denotes a stabilized normative order consistent with the collective identity of the group desiring a restored state. Restoration refers, in other words, to a world that is itself a product of the expressed desire of a distinctly self-aware community. While these terms are often used and understood with deep theological nuances, as sociological terms they are foremost terms that reveal qualities of intra- and inter-group (relational) behaviors.

But let’s draw the distinction out further. As a theological term revelation is God’s exposure of the divine self in such a way that the created world must respond. Rudolph Otto, for example, referred to the consequence of this as the *mysterium tremendum*—that mysterious force that filled the individual with awe and compelled her to act. And Alistair McGrath defines “revelation” in a Christian sense as “the personal self-disclosure of God within history. God has taken the initiative through a process of self-disclosure, which reaches its climax and fulfillment in the history of Jews of Nazareth... In Christ may be seen the personal self-disclosure of God. Believers are ‘God’s dialogue partners in history.’”²⁸

Theological emphases upon law—and this can be said for monotheism generally—refer to a divine law perceived to be an absolute regulation of behavior consistent with the Divine’s intent or plan for the world. Ruhollah Khomeini, from a slightly different angle, supported the view that the

28. McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 183.

government was a necessary tool advocated for in the *shari'a*: “The *shari'a*, for its part, instructs us to be constantly ready to defend ourselves against those who wish to attack us. Government, with its judicial and executive organs, is also necessary to prevent individuals from encroaching on each other’s rights. None of these purposes can be fulfilled by themselves; it is necessary for a government to be established.”²⁹ Similar ethical responsibility, but without emphasis upon physical defense, is true for Judaism, according to Eugene Borowitz, who writes that Jews have a religious basis for civil responsibility: “According to Jewish law, the son of Noah (that is, all men) are commanded by God to be just to one another.” But, he adds, existence under a non-Jewish ruler does not hold the same quality of life as under a Jewish one, a ruler observant of the greater Jewish law, which is beyond political law.³⁰ Law is the blueprint and mechanism through which the believer acts out his belief and membership within the community—a membership critical for participation within the “restored” world.

Restoration refers to the culmination of the Divine’s plan for the world, a heaven (utopia) on earth—a culmination that includes the centrality of the “righteous” or “faithful” community. Given the various possible nuances—theological, sociological, or otherwise—of these terms, one obligation for our project will be to decenter the theological nuance of these terms in favor of the sociological one. The former creates an unavoidable prescriptive reading strategy shaped by perceptions, *often modern*, of divine intent. *The way to Heaven is unequivocally this way...* The latter focuses more on the social and historical circumstances of this production found in the cultural formation of the Persian-period and later biblical literature and the ideas that are central to that literature. This social-scientific focus within biblical studies should demonstrate a clear understanding of social-scientific ideas before applying them haphazardly to an ancient context or text. This is critical now more than ever with the growing interest in the cruciality of social-political events from the Persian and later periods and in the biblical literature deriving from those times. And the more that the social-sciences are invoked for methods of interpretation—and this is desperately true for biblical studies—the more Pierpaolo Donati’s call for proper sociological analysis should be heeded, calls such as,

29. Ruhollah Khomeini and Hamid Algar, *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini* (Berkeley, CA: Mizan, 1981), 61.

30. Eugene B. Borowitz, “Judaism and the Secular State,” *Journal of Religion* 48, no. 1 (1968): 28–29.

If the social sciences genuinely wish to understand the human within the social, they must give rise to new *relational models* of social reality, in which the social is not something deterministic, mechanical or auto-poetic that is “animated” from outside (by psychological or symbolic elements), but is seen as *the place of emergence of the referential and connective elements proper to the human being*.³¹

The Ascendency of Law and Restoration Within the Biblical Texts Was Encouraged by Conflict

In both positive and negative aspects of distinction, these pillars (revelation, law, and restoration, but we’ll focus in this work on the latter two) operate at an intersection of “referential and connective” relations between the immigrating community (returnee, *golah*, other) and the people already in the land. This means that law and restoration as biblical concepts are both consequences of *and* shape the nature of the intergroup conflict between the immigrating community and the people already in the land. This does not mean that the general terms law and restoration were created out of this conflict but that the unique meaning and value attributed to them was a product of that conflict, whether real or perceived as real by the immigrating community. From a social-scientific position, we are not looking at these “pillars” as absolutes, which modern forms of monotheistic thinking tend to do in the form of: God revealed God’s self; there exists a universal, absolute law; and the created world will one day be in sync with the desire of its creator. They have structural qualities and as such they can be observed in terms of their genus in any monotheistic culture or religious community, but they are not absolute. They are more imminent than absolute. They are products of a particular, historical set of social relations. They are, and this is a primary argument in this work, the ideational products of a community on the margins of power, which because of its position was consumed with the nature of its own relevance. Moreover, they are—and this is why these concepts function so well in modern forms of monotheistic thinking—aspects of a constructivism in which the prevailing social-political order is interrupted, changed, and regulated according to a different set of legal guidelines. And in this

31. Pierpaolo Donati, *Relational Sociology: A New Paradigm for the Social Sciences* (London: Routledge, 2011), 35, italics in original. Note that he is also criticizing still current tendencies within sociological theory to “endorse the idea that the *purely social is mechanical in nature* and that, as such, it acquires a human sense only when it is animated by motivational features of people (generally, psychological factors of personality) and symbolic aspects (generally, the factors of the cultural system)” (ibid., italics in original).

sense they are also political concepts: *the driving motivation behind these pillars was the desire for authority over the social-political order.*

Our concern over maintaining a distinction between theological and historical sociological interpretation is not without merit. Manfred Oeming's interpretation of the theological importance of the walls of Jerusalem in Nehemiah, for near paradigmatic example, emphasizes an idealistic and theological vision of the *golah* community rather than a sociological one. Let's leave his statement in his own words:

If we want to understand fully the historical reality behind the rebuilding of the wall, then we cannot claim the absolute importance of the political, national, economic, and military aspects. In the heads and hearts of those who built the wall, there existed a multifaceted complex of theological ideas: for them, the wall was a highly symbolic sign of the activity and the presence of God in history, for the end of God's judgment, for the return of God's name to his chosen dwelling place, for the beginning of the return of the Diaspora, for the holy space where the Torah was reigning. Israel regained its identity only within this wall.³²

Oeming's comments reflect precisely what biblical scholars should labor to avoid. Prioritizing a unifying theological belief or agenda as the motivation behind the actions of the *golah* community, as though theology had an overpowering influence over the quiddities of intergroup sociology, is highly problematic. It rejects out of hand adequately expressed sociological awareness of what it meant in this case for the *golah* community to be an *active* social-political group, all while presupposing a complete separation of the community from the people of the land.³³ Scholarly positions such as the one expressed ignore the strategic, and sometimes selfish, use of theological ideologies and traditions by the biblical authors pursuing a more practical social-political reality.

32. Manfred Oeming, "The Real History: The Theological Ideas Behind Nehemiah's Wall," in Kalimi, ed., *New Perspectives on Ezra–Nehemiah*, 149.

33. While he is still ultimately caught in this quagmire, J. Blenkinsopp (*Judaism: The First Phase*, cf. 1–10) rightly attempts to address this neglectful tendency in scholarship while maintaining the centrality of religion in the identity formation of the *golah* community, which he argues sets the stage for a type for religious colonization. Since we will discuss Blenkinsopp's argument in greater detail in the final chapter suffice it to say here that one should find many points of agreement with his sociological argument but disagree with the functional centrality of religion as the primary productive force of identity formation.

In addition, scholarly emphasis upon the central, productive importance of theology overlooks the likelihood that authors of the Persian period biblical literature were not uniquely driven to create religion.³⁴ Instead, such ideas have a “dirtier” origin in the social-political struggles of the Persian period. They are responses to the anxieties brought on by an environment that did not support the “right to rule” by members of the *golah* community. In inviting debate in this area, we are also disagreeing slightly with, for example, Joseph Blenkinsopp’s position (but agreeing on some points!) on Ezra–Nehemiah, which argues that the text reflects “a religious colonization with a strongly sectarian character, a distant analogy to the Pilgrim Fathers.”³⁵ The text *is* a product of social conflict, but where Blenkinsopp seems to accept religious organization as an end goal, a view that reflects a sociology of religion centralized around the “church”—in the sense of a religiously oriented collective—as a “historically relative institution of religion,”³⁶ we propose instead that it was a means to a more passionate end: the projection, including through the attainment social-political authority, of order upon the social world to conceive of it as historically significant for the remnant community.

Identifying the Parameters of That Ascendancy With Social-Scientific Theory

This work will show how anxiety over a perceived social-political irrelevance, or “death” in the sense of the dissolution of the social group, shaped the biblical concepts of law and restoration.³⁷ For reasons that will be made clear, we are resisting the tendency to assume any univocity of meaning for the term restoration. Historical contingencies that do not jump with ease from one social-political context to another nor from a social form to a theological one drive the biblical understanding of restoration. The community’s anxiety over irrelevance, we will argue,

34. The same could also be said for the founders Islam and Christianity. Both Muhammad’s and Jesus’ primary motivations were to bring transformation or reformation to prevailing social, economic, and political contexts. Islam and Christianity as religious systems were more secondary, and more “after the fact,” to the more pressing concerns of their days.

35. *Ibid.*, 9.

36. This discussion of the “church” is taken in part from Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 177. See also Émile Durkheim and Karen E. Fields, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (New York: Free Press, 1995), 44.

37. For an important argument on the powerful motivation that anxiety plays in identity formation, see Melanie Klein, *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works 1946–1963*, ed. M. Masud and R. Khan (New York: Free Press, Vintage Digital, 1975).

was a direct consequence of the *golah* community's marginal position in the social-political hierarchy within Yehud. From the margins of that hierarchical authority, the biblical texts expressed hope in preserving the returnee community's collective identity. It was this biblical emphasis that led Finkelstein and Silberman to write:

[T]he priesthood, which rose to a position of leadership in exile, and which also played an important role among those who remained in Yehud, maintained its prominence because of its ability to preserve group identity. So in the following decades the people of Yehud were led by a dual system: politically, by governors who were appointed by the Persian authority and who had no connection to the Davidic royal family; religiously, by priests. Lacking the institution of kingship, the Temple now became the center of identity [*sic*] of the people of Yehud. This was one of the most crucial turning points in Jewish history.³⁸

The importance of the priesthood in the daily social-political routine and hierarchy is often overstated due to an uncritical reliance upon the biblical use of utopian ideal in lieu of social reality.³⁹ What the biblical texts tend to denote as the “remnant community,” and what scholarship has often taken for *the* community, was an *immigrating* community. That the community was not welcomed with open arms as the new aristocracy seems clear in the antagonistic or despairing tone that the biblical texts take when they describe the community's unique, imminent circumstances. Note, for example, Nehemiah: “Here we are, slaves to this day—slaves in the land that you gave to our ancestors to eat [‘enjoy,’ NRSV] its fruit and its good things [‘gifts,’ NRSV]” (9:36, translation mine). This passage emphasizes a driving concern over a lack of economic stability and power, and it is precisely a lack in those areas that threatens the perceived stability of the *golah* collective identity. *If we're the remnant, how can restoration happen if we don't have authority over the land and economic product?* This fear of social irrelevance so well portrayed in the marginal social-political position, the correction of which seems to necessitate divine intervention, is also expressed in Ezra's denunciation of mixed marriages:

38. Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts* (New York: Free Press, 2001), 310.

39. Cf. the larger work of Jeremiah W. Cataldo, *A Theocratic Yehud? Issues of Government in Yehud*, LHBOTS 498 (London: T&T Clark, 2009).

[S]hall we break your commandments again and intermarry [חֲתָן, which often denotes to become a son-in-law through a marriage alliance] with the peoples who practice these abominations? Would you not be angry with us until you destroy us without remnant or survivor? O Lord, God of Israel, you are just, but we have escaped as a remnant, as is now the case. Here we are before you in our guilt, though no one can face you because of this. (9:14–15)

Both passages express concerns over the loss of the productive forces that identify the *golah* community as something necessarily unique within the social-context of Yehud. Where the passage from Ezra emphasized law as the regulating principle, Nehemiah's concern in the previous passage was economic and over the distributed hierarchy of power; the author idealized the collective identity of the *golah* community as the remnant through which a nation would be restored (and so therefore *required* a materially and politically dominant position for the community). Along these lines, perhaps, Erhard Gerstenberger correctly classifies Neh 9:5–15 as part of an ancient Near Eastern corporate confession genre.⁴⁰ When national, confessions of this genre are rarely, if ever, selfless; they tend to reflect a desire for some material or political benefit for the nation; in this case, the remnant viewed itself as the seed of a new (restored) nation. Can we not assume that confessions are typically brought on by a feared loss of something important to the individual or community?

Ezra–Nehemiah emphasizes the benefit of physical separation between the *golah* community and the *am ha'aretz*. As such, Ezra's concern, which one should consider to be ideologically consistent with the passage from Nehemiah, emphasized a rigid isolation of the community, rejecting the possibilities of any intergroup alliance or exchange. In that, Ezra emphasizes the creation and preservation of a unique collective identity through acts of segregation, where segregation can be considered a constructive act. And so that we are clear about what we mean here, Gordon Allport, whose definition has become one de facto in prejudice studies, defined "segregation" as "a form of discrimination that sets up spatial boundaries of some sort to accentuate the disadvantage of members of an out-group."⁴¹ One can see this poignantly in Ezra's call that foreign women be divorced (Ezra 10:10–15), or even in Nehemiah's rejection of the aid offered by

40. Erhard Gerstenberger, *Israel in the Persian Period: The Fifth and Fourth Centuries B.C.E.*, trans. Siegfried S. Schatzmann, Biblical Encyclopedia 8 (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 16.

41. Gordon W. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1958), 52.

Sanballat and others (Neh 2:19–20) to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, which for the author symbolized a restored social-political identity (and related nation). But let's save that issue for the following discussion.

*Understanding the Role of Conflict and Anxiety
in the Centralizing of Law and Restoration in the Bible*

In support of its own larger argument exposing the formation of law and restoration as an anxiety-ridden project, this work assumes—and we will clarify the reason for this assumption in the following chapters—the premise offered by Deleuze: “In its essence, difference is the object of affirmation or affirmation itself. In its essence, affirmation is itself difference.”⁴² Difference is both an act and a product of affirmation, which entails a recognition of someone *not me* and a subsequent acceptance of this “other” as someone capable of interpersonal relations. I see you as something embodying the essence of “not me.” I engage you interpersonally, and thereby affirm your position vis-à-vis myself, when I acknowledge you by shaking your hand (a polite act, an act of alliance) or punching you in the face (not a polite act, an act of conflict). Within that sense, difference and its affirmation are political behaviors.⁴³ The codification within the biblical texts of that behaviour and the perpetual legitimation of intergroup boundaries as an effect of a divinely *expected* difference is the purpose, for but one example, of the importance of the so-called Mosaic law. This expectation lays behind the narrative importance with which Ezra is attributed: “All the people gathered together into the square before the Water Gate. They told the scribe Ezra to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had given to Israel. Accordingly, the priest [note the switch from scribe to priest!⁴⁴] Ezra brought the law before the assembly, both men and women and *all who could hear with understanding...*” (Neh 8:1–2, emphasis mine). As to who in the author's opinion constituted this assembly, one need only consult the list of “returned exiles” that immediately precedes the reading of the law (Neh 7:5–73; see also Ezra 2:1–70).

42. Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 52.

43. As C. Ake defines “political behavior” (“A Definition of Political Stability,” 272).

44. Presumably, this switch follows what was expected of Ezra's actions. Ezra brings the law, he must write it down. He must educate the people in matters pertaining to the law, he must be a priest.

With their emphases upon distinction, it is not hard to see that biblical law and restoration are reactions to the threat of an alternative social-political order, one that competes for the focus of the community. “Look, I am offering you today a blessing and a curse. Regarding the blessing, it’s yours if you follow the commands that the LORD your God has commanded you. And regarding the curse, this is yours if you don’t obey the commandments that the LORD your God has commanded you, and you turn away from the directed path and follow after other gods [who represent alternative cultural and political ideals], ones in fact that you do not know” (Deut 11:26–28, translation mine). Reaction to difference, in fact, seems to be a dominant theme at large within the biblical texts. Anxiety over the loss of distinction, so that the “righteous community” is subsumed by the larger polytheistic community, may be at its highest in Deuteronomy: “You shall exterminate them—the Hittites and the Ammonites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites—according to what the Lord your God commanded you to do. This do so that they will not teach you to do all the abhorrent things that they do for their gods and that you do not sin against the Lord your God” (Deut 20:18, translation mine).

The Deuteronomic sentiment may tell us something about the struggle of Ezra–Nehemiah’s *golah* community within Yehud. Upon its return, the community came face to face with a “foreign” social-political world. One cannot avoid that fact. The land was not empty, and we must assume that social and political forces and institutions were at work, and continued to be so over a period of at least seventy years. “*Society*” did not stop with the departure of the (previous) aristocracy! By introducing religious law and their hopes in the restoration of Israel, the biblical authors sought to rewrite the ideological criteria whose acceptance were a prerequisite for acceptance within that society (largely, it seems, through exclusion). Perhaps then we are not far here from what Daniel Smith correctly advocated: “If, as we have suggested, ‘ethnic identity’ is preserved by conscious choice in circumstances of intercultural contact...then an analysis of the social mechanisms of the Judean exiles in Babylon ought to reveal creatively structured identities in order to be ‘the people of God’ in a foreign land.”⁴⁵ The “people of God,” let the weight of this fall upon us, was a *creatively structured* identity—an act of creation that perpetuated difference! An act of segregation!

45. Daniel L. Smith, *The Religion of the Landless: A Sociology of the Babylonian Exile* (Bloomington: Meyer-Stone, 1989), 63.

With the clarifying echo of Smith in our ears, what Deuteronomy describes as a strategy for identity preservation was employed by the “returnee” community in Yehud: after a period of about seventy years the Judeans who lived in Babylon and surrounding cities (e.g., al-Yehuda⁴⁶) developed unique cultural identities. They continued to be Judeans, so much as one can talk about a nationality without a nation, but they were Judeans with different sets of shared experiences—experiences that were not linked to the social-political context in Yehud. And in the contest for authority, the lack of any material roots, despite Jeremiah’s overly eager proposition for perpetual land deeds (Jer 32:14), necessitated a more ideological justification of new hierarchical systems of economic and political power. Immigrants—and that is what the so-called “returnees” would have looked like to the land’s inhabitants—do not typically integrate into a new society without a few scrapes and bruises. We might note the example of the exiled Lithuanian refugees who fled to the United States to avoid Soviet rule. When they returned to visit or make contact with friends and family they were shocked to find out that they were not recognized by those who remained as culturally Lithuanian.⁴⁷ Similarly, the *golah* community could not fully integrate the provincial systems of identity into itself while maintaining its own distinctiveness, which scholars sometimes seem wont to believe. And one cannot lazily default to a position that the community was a pioneering group of settlers in an uninhabited area. Even Ezra–Nehemiah, which would have had a good reason for an empty land, admits to the presence of people already in the land.⁴⁸ And we should avoid assuming that the people left behind were incapable of society and governance simply because the Bible describes

46. Cf. F. Joannès and André Lemaire, “Trois tablettes cunéiformes à l’onomastique ouest-sémitique,” *Transeuphratene* 17 (1999): 17–33; Laurie Pearce, “New Evidence for Jews in Babylonia,” in *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period* (ed. Oded Lipschits and Manfred Oeming; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 399–411.

47. Liucija Baskauskas, “The Lithuanian Refugee Experience and Grief,” *International Migration Review* 15 (1981): 276–91.

48. See also the larger discussion regarding the “empty land” hypothesis in Hans M. Barstad, “After the ‘Myth of the Empty Land’: Major Challenges in the Study of Neo-Babylonian Judah,” in Lipschits and Blenkinsopp, eds., *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period*, 3–20; Robert P. Carroll, “Exile! What Exile? Deportation and the Discourse of Diaspora,” in *Leading Captivity Captive: The “Exile” as History and Ideology*, ed. Lester L. Grabbe (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 62–79; Philip R. Davies, “Exile! What Exile? Whose Exile?” in Grabbe, ed., *Leading Captivity Captive*, 128–38; Lisbeth S. Fried, “The Land Lay Desolate: Conquest and Restoration in the Ancient Near East,” in Lipschits and Blenkinsopp, eds., *Judah and*

them as the “poor of the land” (cf. 2 Kgs 25:12; Jer 39:10; 52:16). In short, unless we approve of an imperialist position before the “other”—*the poor are philistines and incapable of self-governance or civilized life*—we must begin with the supposition that life in Judah did not stop with the exile⁴⁹ and that the vacancies left by an absent aristocracy were indeed quite fillable.

*Understanding the Importance of Revelation
for Law and Restoration Within the Biblical Texts*

Within the biblical texts divine law and restoration depend upon the radical event of revelation. This last, which is much more than an act of association, interrupts the dominant normative order and introduces a new framework (law) for a new, usually utopian, order (restoration). This emphasis is there in Deuteronomy, for example:

See, I am teaching you the statutes and ordinances as the Lord my God commanded me. Do these things when you draw near the land [meant for you] and enter it to take possession of it. Do these things; doing so will show your wisdom and understanding to the people so that they hear all these statutes and say, “Only a wise and understanding people is this great nation”... For what great nation is characterized by [literally, “has to it”] statutes and righteous ordinances as these that comprise the whole of this law I have given to you today? (Deut 4:5–6, 8, translation mine)

The sense of this is that revelation, which imparted the divine law, expects that things will be done differently than from before. External observers will see a difference between their own social and political behaviors (recall that religious behavior was not distinguishable from these) and those of the “righteous community” and will legitimate the distinction between themselves and it by confirming themselves as different and so inferior. This same expectation can be found throughout texts, to name but a few, such as Ezra–Nehemiah (passim; identified in the two groups as the *golah* community and the *am ha'aretz*), Jeremiah (good figs versus bad figs [24:1–8], the poor of the land in contrast to the “citizen” [cf. 52:15; the prejudice is also implied in 5:4]), and Haggai (expressed in the glory of the temple [cf. the implications of 2:1–9]).

the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period, 21–54; B. Oded, “Where Is the ‘Myth of the Empty Land’ to Be Found? History Versus Myth,” in Lipschits and Blenkinsopp, eds., *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period*, 55–74.

49. Contra Oded, “Where Is the ‘Myth’,” 67–68.

From a more modern vantage point, Paul Tillich, to give a theological example that still supports a sociological understanding, echoes this biblical concept of revelation:

Revelation is first of all the experience in which an ultimate concern grasps the human mind and creates a community in which this concern expresses itself in symbols of action, imagination and thought. Wherever such a revelatory experience occurs, both faith and reason are renewed. Their internal and mutual conflicts are conquered, and estrangement is replaced by reconciliation.⁵⁰

To grasp fully Tillich's point we should recognize that for him religion, within which revelation is defined, is an aspect of "the human spirit."⁵¹ Thus, it is originally a product of a *yearning* for what Tillich identifies as "reconciliation" but which really points to the ultimate goal of restoration: the complete restructuring of social-political order into a state consistent with the divine intent first portrayed in the Garden of Eden. Revelation is knowable by what it does: it creates a community that is uniquely identifiable through its productive actions directed toward the realization of a restored world. As in the words of Zechariah, "In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah son of Berechiah son of Iddo, saying... Return to me, says the Lord of hosts, and I will return to you [2mp]..." (1:1–3): productive action (*return to me*) that results in structural change and a restored world (*and I will return to you*).

In other words, revelation's purpose—and we will argue that this is a response to anxiety—is to inaugurate the process toward restoration. In this process external (divine) authority is established over any prevailing social-political ones so to overturn the dominant productive order of the world and insert a radical dependence upon what Žižek, following Lacan, refers to as "the big Other."⁵² Its power derives from its ability or effectiveness at cutting off or redirecting the more "natural" processes that define the dominant normative order and its corresponding power hierarchy. Or in more theologically sensitive terms, "The created order is a 'theater' or a 'mirror' for the displaying of the divine presence, nature, and

50. Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: HarperOne, 2009), 90.

51. Paul Tillich and Robert C. Kimball, *Theology of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 5.

52. Cf. Žižek's description of Lacanian theory in *In Defense of Lost Causes*, 113, 152.

attributes.”⁵³ The expectation of this is that in reflecting the divine aspects, the prevailing social-political order itself is changed. Does this (including Tillich’s understanding) reflect strictly a more modern understanding? No, the fundamental attributes of revelation as a pillar of monotheism find a strong degree of correlation between ancient and modern contexts. Nehemiah’s emphasis upon the rejection of intermarriage or of other member–nonmember social engagements (cf. Neh 13:1–3, 23–31) fulfills the same purpose of reflecting the Divine through physical acts (*consistent with the divine law!*) of categorization and exclusion. Where one might consider the natures of power and authority as dependent strictly upon social bodies in relation,⁵⁴ the biblical text emphasizes the centrality of exclusion in its utopian restoration: “our God will grant us success, but you have no share or right” (Neh 2:28). This point clarifies the expectation in passages such as Neh 1:9: “[B]ut if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are under the farthest skies, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place at which I have chosen to establish my name.”

Again, a similar same emphasis upon the critical role of revelation can be found in more recent theological works. For example, Avery Dulles wrote,

In setting forth the generic features of revelation, Latourelle rightly makes much of salvation history. The great acts of God are, so to speak, the material component of the revealed object. But it would be of interest to inquire just what is needed to make an event pertain to *Heilsgeschichte*. Latourelle holds that the history of revelation is not simply coincident with universal history; it depends upon God’s free interventions. Yet these interventions, he remarks, need not be strictly miraculous; they would include God’s special providence over the formation and fortunes of Israel, as attested by biblical history.⁵⁵

Our point, which we’ve verified by approaching it through historical and modern vantage points, is this: even within the careful language of theology revelation is fundamentally a phallic interruption. It forcibly

53. A. McGrath summarizes Calvin’s position, summarized in the quotation, in *Christian Theology*, 190.

54. Foucault argues this point at length in *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, Kindle (New York: Pantheon, 1978). But see, for example, locations 651–663, 1063–1118.

55. Avery Dulles, “The Theology of Revelation,” *Theological Studies* 25, no. 1 (1964): 53.

injects an external desire—the desire for a restored state that is itself an ideological (utopian) idea, which is typically the projected wish fulfillment of a community—into the productive flows that define both the social world and history.⁵⁶ It interrupts and its corresponding law legitimates within the social-political world the altered reality that is revelation's *intended* consequence, restoration. Revelation is always a transitive act; it presupposes a desired object in the form of a restored state. Divine law marks the path from revelation to restoration.

Law legitimates through regulated behavior by symbolizing, as Mendenhall describes, “the coercive power of the community.”⁵⁷ He was certainly correct. Political scientist Claude Ake, for example, put it this way:

The main reason for using law and custom as the arbiters of role expectations is that the two constitute the system of sanctions that gives political structure its political character. Once the group evolves a customary or legitimate way of doing things, this way tends to persist because of the inconvenience or the cost to the individual of going against it. To say that custom exists is to say that behavior is “structured,” that there are sanctions against some patterns of behavior. In other words, they are role expectations. The legal system or the institution for binding arbitration of the group or society has the same effect as custom. It limits the variability of behavior in given situations by authoritatively defining what we ought to do (obligations), what we may do (rights), and what we can do (powers).⁵⁸

Law imposes—and this is especially true for constructivist laws such as biblical law—expectations of behavior that must be incorporated into the normative culture of the group. “*Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the ordinances that I have spoken in your hearing today. Learn them. Keep them. Do them*” (Deut 5:1, translation mine).⁵⁹ Law serves, for the

56. I am following Deleuze’s model for analyzing the productive nature of cruelty (cf. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005], 145). The comparison being made here is that both cruelty and revelation impose themselves upon social bodies already in relation and subsequently alter their systems of engagement.

57. George Mendenhall, “Ancient Oriental and Biblical Law,” in *The Biblical Archaeologist Reader*, Vol. 3, ed. Edward F. Campbell and David N. Freedman (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1970), 3.

58. Ake, “A Definition of Political Stability,” 274.

59. The Hebrew text uses the grammatical pattern of Qal perfect (*wlmdtm*), Qal perfect (*wshmrmtm*) + infinitive construct (*l’stm*). I have used the imperative sense of the verbs based on the possible use of the Qal as an imperative, the grammatical pattern, and the overall context of the passage.

monotheistic community, the connection between revelation, as an introduction of divine power, and restoration, as the radical restructuring of the social world in the pursuit of social-political stability through divine action.⁶⁰

Within the context of the biblical texts, articulating a concept of restoration is the ideological response of a community in a socially disadvantaged position.⁶¹ It is the righting of an “inverted” relationship, the qualities of which provide an inspiration for the law, through the process of *perceived* structural change. But this change can only come about through a radical revision of the social-political world—the divine defeat of imperial power, or in the case of Christ, the destruction of the created order to create space for a new one—the *very goal of the eschaton*! What it proposes, in short, is an external imposition of a new, otherworldly order. “The most helpful way of considering it,” writes theologian Alister McGrath, “is to regard it as a consummation of the Christian doctrine of salvation, in which the presence, penalty, and power of sin have finally been eliminated, and the total presence of God in individuals and the community of faith has been achieved.”⁶² While restoration narratives typically describe a reality in which external oppression of the community has been defeated, so as to never arise again and shackle the righteous community on the margins of society (and its distributed relations of power), their central foci tend to remain upon articulating a social-political stability supportive of the ascendancy of the restored community. Restoration is the culmination of world-building activities that reflects, in terms more familiar to Deleuze, the “primary desire,” a return to the first repetition of the primordial difference: the original divine–human dichotomy, the Garden of Eden in which God walked and humanity listened.⁶³ It is the Davidic monarchy

60. P. E. Dion, for example, describes this purpose for law in his analysis of the Elephantine community (cf. “La religion des papyrus d’Éléphantine: un reflet du Juda d’avant l’exil,” in *Kein Land für Sich Allein: Studien zum Kulturkontakt in Kanaan, Israel/Palästina und Ebirnâri für Manfred Weippert zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Ulrich Hübner and Ernst Axel Knauf, OBO 186 [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002], 243–54).

61. Galambush writes of Ezekiel, for example, “The restoration of the community in Ezekiel entails the elimination of ‘wild animals’ from within and round the community/land” (*This Land Is My Land: On Nature as Property in the Book of Ezekiel*, ed. Lester L. Grabbe and Robert D. Haak [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001], 75).

62. McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 556–57.

63. Deleuze argues that all reality is based on production and its interruption within the framework of repetition and difference (cf. *Difference and Repetition*, 1–27).

for Jews and the New Jerusalem for Christians. This historical Utopia, for example, is the basic sense that drives Haggai: “Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now?... Once again, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land; and I will shake all the nations, so that the treasure of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with splendor, says the Lord of hosts” (Hag 2:3–7).

How the Theories of Foucault, Deleuze, and Žižek Are Helpful

Theories from Slavoj Žižek, Michel Foucault, and Gilles Deleuze will be helpful in identifying the characteristics of the (structural) relationships and discourses characteristic to the Bible itself and to interpretation of it that are (1) necessary for uncovering the social forces related to power that shape the plausibility structure upon which revelation, law, and revelation as sociological concepts are legitimated within the biblical texts, and that reveal (2) the inherent anxiety over irrelevance—the quality of being in a socially disadvantaged position—that affects the processes of cohesion within social groups, with a particular focus on that between the “returnee” community and the people already in the land. The discussion of the theorists here is intended only as an introduction since their theories will be developed throughout this work in relation to its primary argument. It also should be noted that this work will not treat these theorists in isolation; there is a great deal of overlap or even synthesis shared in their theories. Each of these theorists addresses, we will show, from complementary (but also sometimes resistant!) angles, the fundamental pursuit of human collectives for stability in social order and so also, inversely, the productive role that anxiety plays in identity. Employment of the works of these theorists will reveal, in short, the persecutory anxiety over irrelevance that frames biblical interpretation as well as the authorial and editorial production of the biblical texts. The ways in which these theorists similarly identify the processes of meaning between a subject and the greater symbolic whole of which the subject is a part are useful for uncovering the anxieties that reside at the heart of the biblical text and its interpretation. Understanding this is critical to a better understanding of the early monotheistic community of which it is largely a product. The following sections will introduce points of conversation between the theorists and the biblical texts that will occupy the remainder of this work.

Žižek and Universality, and Revelation

Slavoj Žižek believes that all humanity is alike at a deep-structural level of the unconscious, “the level of the universal.”⁶⁴ Problems—social, political, and other—therefore, are addressable or solvable only when human beings recognize within themselves this fundamental commonness. This commonness isn’t necessarily love or good will but can be hatred (usually directed at an other); it is the primary recognition and attraction that is inherent within group cohesion. Failure to recognize this commonness among all groups, to recognize that you and I both define ourselves in relation to difference—*this collection of individuals that includes us constitutes a group because we are not those other people*—destroys any way around the snare of prejudices that shapes the contours of collective and individual identities. There is much similarity between Gordon Allport’s assessment of prejudice with the emphasis in Žižek’s warning. “To surrender universality out of an empiricist embarrassment at invoking the nonverifiable or a multiculturalist suspicion of overarching principles of commonality is to neutralize oneself and empower evil.”⁶⁵ Tolerance does not alleviate problems but obscures them below the surface where they fester and grow. *I’ll tolerate your presence in my city but only as long as you keep to the ghetto.* But as Žižek put it, with the example of multiculturalism, “If all sides do not share or respect the same civility, then multiculturalism turns into legally regulated mutual ignorance or hatred.”⁶⁶ Political problems—and let us assume that behavior that affects the distribution of power is political behavior⁶⁷—are not solved by direct tolerance and respect directed toward hatred. Hatred, Žižek maintains, is alleviated by applying “even more hatred, but proper political hatred: hatred directed at the common political enemy.”⁶⁸ It is hatred redirected in order to reinforce or redefine the proper boundary between insider and outsider. That is it takes the form of action given to collective prejudices for the purpose of establishing and maintaining stability.⁶⁹ It is, for popular example, the

64. Cf. Slavoj Žižek, “A Plea for a Return to Différance (with a Minor Pro Domo Sua),” *Critical Inquiry* 32, no. 2 (2006): 243–44. See also the point as summarized in Geophrey Galt Harpham, “Doing the Impossible: Slavoj Žižek and the End of Knowledge,” *Critical Inquiry* 29, no. 3 (2003): 474.

65. As summarized in *ibid.*, 474–75.

66. Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, 22.

67. Cf. Ake, “A Definition of Political Stability,” 271.

68. Slavoj Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute, or, Why Is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting for* (London: Verso, 2000), 11.

69. Crandall and Eshleman make a similar point but with less aggression (cf. “A Justification-Suppression Model of the Expression and Experience of Prejudice,” *Psychological Bulletin* 129, no. 3 [2003]: 414–15).

turbaned Arab holding a machine gun displayed across U.S. media outlets as a way of rousing collective, popular support among blacks, whites, liberals, and conservatives for further military action in the Middle East. *We're all members of the same community when we mark that one as an outsider.*

This, of course, begs the question of ethical behavior, since such principles govern, together with law, group behavior. The solving of political problems coincides with the production of ethical norms. "In order for an act to be truly ethical, [Žižek] says, it *must* transgress the norm, for only such a transgression can reveal the compensatory nature of norms themselves and bring into the open the incomplete, yet-to-be-fashioned character of reality."⁷⁰ Harpham summarizes further, "Žižek has arrived at the conclusion that no ethical act can be strictly warranted by existing fact and indeed that an ethical act must involve a shattering of existing fact."⁷¹ The solution to a problem must, in other words, reveal the deficiencies and weaknesses that empowered the problem in the first place. But this revelation must involve a self-destructive act that breaks down previously accepted conventional norms, values, ethics, morals, and attitudes. It involves a subject's destroying the very thing undergirding her own identity. But it is in that moment of seeming chaos or nothingness that absolute universality, the commonness of all humanity, is revealed. It is, for Žižek, in the moment of "death," which is itself a category that is a product of binarily opposed categories within social and political knowledge, that true being, universality, as existence without categories is revealed. Death is the final threshold between being with categories and Being without universality. Problems are a consequence of being unable to see beyond the oppressive restrictions of categories. *There* is the point where biblical revelation obscures its own uncertainty, which is itself a product of its anxiety. Because it too cannot see the very things that restrict it, and because it fears internal collapse due to its own limitations, it presents itself as an overcoming of the normative order by interrupting its social and political processes and imposing a new, absolute, universal authority. To note, "[S]o the anger of the LORD was kindled against that land, bringing on it every curse written in this book. The LORD uprooted them from their land in anger, fury, and great wrath, and cast them into another land, as is now the case. The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the revealed things belong to us and to our children forever, to observe all the words of this law" (Deut 29:27–29). Yet it also betrays a conservatism by

70. Harpham, "Doing the Impossible," 477.

71. Ibid., 482.

manifesting itself within conventional bodies and categories of knowledge. Biblical revelation, in this sense, is a retreat from truly ethical values, as Žižek identifies them, in favor of conservative, traditional values. To put this in the context of our discussion of Žižek, revelation does not create a new conversation, it does not “shatter” existing social and political facts, it appropriates the already dominant discourses and meanings. That is, the impact, force, and meaning of revelation depends upon the culturally normative values and norms it pretends to explosively undermine. And it does so fearing its own incapability of success.

That is why Žižek points out that the empiricizing of a position of universality—the very premise of the monotheistic concept of revelation—must always occur from a “partial, engaged, subjective position.”⁷² Revelation can never be a true universal absolute. The proposed totality of law, of revelation, and even of restoration, is accessible, articulate-able, only from the subjective experience of anxiety, which generates an emphasis upon difference. The irresolvability of difference makes necessary the monotheistic emphasis upon universality as the ideal form of a stabilized order. But claims of universality—the very thing that revelation claims for itself—necessarily resist the conditions and limits that restrict a given subject. It is impossible, according to Žižek, to claim some totality or universality without identifying “the point of exception functioning as its internal negation.”⁷³ For Deleuze, discussed below, this constitutes the original difference. The critical basis of biblical, monotheistic revelation necessitates the gaping negative of its reception, this last which is presupposed in any act of revelation. Revealed law must always be viewed as an attempt to articulate the subjective experience and perspective as more broadly binding—so that experience of the group becomes the binding regulation for the social-political whole. It would be as though the experiences and ideologies of the late Jerry Falwell’s Moral Majority became the binding legal and moral framework for the whole of the United States. Within the context of monotheism, moral principles are transplanted from the religious group and imposed upon the more diverse whole. It is this that explains, for additional modern example, the bitter outcry of the Christian Right in the United States against same-sex marriages. But a strangely similar motivation, as we will show, lurks behind Ezra–Nehemiah’s rejection of the Ammonites and the Moabites (cf. Neh 13:1).

72. Žižek, “A Plea for a Return to Différance (with a Minor Pro Domo Sua),” 242.

73. As cited in Erik Vogt, “Exception in Žižek’s Thought,” *Diacritics* 37, no. 2–3 (2007): 61.

An additional area we will investigate is that revelation corresponds with Žižek's understanding of fantasy in that it "conceals irreducible antagonism and inconsistency" by appealing to the meaning or value of a transcendent reality, or "Other."⁷⁴ In that sense, revelation is an attempt to interrupt, or even break through, the dominant symbolic order at its perceived point of fundamental weakness: its problematic dependence upon internal coherence to effectively mediate and categorize the indeterminate causalities of difference. Revelation intends to shatter this weakness by imposing a universal, absolute order that restricts difference and its corresponding antagonism, best symbolized in a collective's death instinct. This restriction subordinates all existence as something created, and therefore subject to a Creator, or absolute order. Yet revelation, we will argue, is also concealing in that it is internally naïve: the order it proposes as absolute is nevertheless something symbolized within its own assumed epistemological system. Thus, it obscures its own inconsistencies within the ideology—the "sublime object of ideology"⁷⁵—of a "divine" law, which it assumes to be near synonymous with harmony, or absolute stability. Moreover, the potency of revelation is preserved through repetition, through *ritualization*. For Žižek, repetition involves not simply repeating or restating any positive content, but repeating, re-actualizing a subject's struggle within the dominant symbolic order.⁷⁶ The internal, fundamental struggle that frames the essential nature of revelation is its intended dominance over the symbolic order it interrupts—the very one of which it is a product. That is why divine revelation, which promises a successful struggle against worldly powers, always makes sense according to the epistemological and cultural heritage of an interpreting community. But because it is categorized as "absolute," the faithful community internalizes it as the *original* struggle, as an extension of creation, that preserves the distinction or difference between member and nonmember. Thus, for example, the so-called Mosaic Law is preserved without alteration (post canonization) and the crucifixion of Christ symbolically reenacted through dramatization or ritual. Both are the legitimated symbols of the gap between the member and the "other."

Žižek will help us expose revelation as the ultimate form of an act of self-preservation. While religious communities typically express revelation as an unadulterated expression of the divine, it is, in fact, its opposite, a

74. As Wood summarizes in *Žižek: A Reader's Guide* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 46. But see Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, 126–27; idem, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 2008), 23–30.

75. Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 24–30. See also Wood, *Žižek*, 48.

76. As described in *ibid.*, 50.

closing of the canon on social-political identity formation. And it does so from the ideological position of a single community substituting itself as a suitable representation for the universal whole. It is as though the lyrics of Frank Sinatra exposed the dirty underside of revelation, “[Y]ou, my son, you are what God really looks like to me.”⁷⁷

Foucault, Power, and Law

Michel Foucault investigates various structural forms and expressions of power within collective structures, institutions, and other collective and individual systems of relation. In particular, we will focus on his proposal that at the heart of the intersection between law and power there exists two fundamental things: (1) a dominant set of strategies of knowledge; and (2) a social, intersubjective engagement set up as a defensive mechanism alleviating intense anxieties over the possible social-political irrelevance of the group—a type of ideological death in which the group ceases to be recognized internally and externally as a group (or its expressed identity).⁷⁸

But we must be clear: we are employing Foucault’s theory on law as a tool to investigate the function of law in the Persian period and later biblical texts, in which the attitude toward law was as a fixed institution of regulation and control. Law, for Foucault, was neither a condition for liberation of the individual nor solely the result of class domination.⁷⁹ As an element in the expansion of power, which was itself decentralized and multiple, law, and the sense of legality it imposed, was part of other “discourses” that formed overarching networks of control.⁸⁰ Law is an instrument whose eventual demise would be realized when all forms of discourse have been brought into balance.⁸¹ Discourses, according to Foucault, refer to the sum total of forces and structures of production,

77. Frank Sinatra, Billy May, Don Costa, Gordon Jenkins, and Eileen Farrell. “That’s What God Looks Like to Me,” in *Trilogy Past, Present, Future*. Reprise Records, 1980.

78. These two “fundamental ideas” represent a summary of Foucault’s argument throughout *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1995).

79. Cf. Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, locations 1078–1156. See also Gerald Turkel’s description in “Michel Foucault: Law, Power, and Knowledge,” *Journal of Law and Society* 17, no. 2 (1990): 170.

80. See, for instance, Foucault’s discussion of sexuality and law in *History of Sexuality*, location 671. For further discussion, see Turkel, “Michel Foucault,” 170.

81. Foucault tends to imply this theme throughout his works, namely *Discipline and Punish* and *History of Sexuality*. See also Golder’s summary in Ben Golder and Peter Fitzpatrick, *Foucault’s Law* (Milton Park, TN: Routledge, 2009), 2.

including legitimated knowledges and social relations, that constitute the nature of the body and its regulation.⁸² They are constructive systems of representation and practice.⁸³ Monotheistic, biblical law imposes itself as central and absolute, in direct contrast with other discourses, with their inherent multiplicity of power and power relations and decentralized natures of social-political power. Our intent, then, is to use Foucault's theory as a contrasting heuristic for exposing utopian, or ideological, dependencies within biblical law. Foucault's flexibility will be directed against biblical rigidity to expose underlying paranoias and agendas, especially those that also shape the attitudes toward and attributes of restoration.

One should also note that Foucault's theory, as generally interpreted, expels law,⁸⁴ which he defines as a "law of limited possibility" between contingency and liability.⁸⁵ It falls victim to more emergent forms of power. Or, as Ben Golder and Peter Fitzpatrick summarize a generally held interpretation, "Foucault identifies law and sovereignty with a pre-modern form of negative, repressive power which is progressively overtaken by a new mode of operation, or technology, of power, namely disciplinary power."⁸⁶ There is, for Foucault, an inherent instability within law. It is a result of power as a relational project and of a functional system of ethics

82. As summarized by Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (New York: Blackwell, 1987), 108. Foucault never states this directly but his arguments are in fact based on this fundamental premise.

83. As summarized by Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage in association with the Open University, 1997), 44.

84. But note, this is especially true of his earlier work, see Golder and Fitzpatrick, *Foucault's Law*, 29. But compare *ibid.*, 34–35, in which Golder and Fitzpatrick state that Foucault's later work only seems to make law a pliant instrument of disciplinary power (see also p. 39). Yet, does Foucault ever fully get back to permitting the continued existence of law (cf. the larger work of Alan Hunt and Gary Wickham, *Foucault and Law: Towards a Sociology of Law as Governance* [London: Pluto, 1994])?

85. As described in Golder and Fitzpatrick, *Foucault's Law*, 2–3. Golder and Fitzpatrick describe the thesis offered by Hunt and Wickham in their book *Foucault and Law*, that "Foucault 'expelled' law from his analysis of power relations in modernity by marginalizing it and subordinating it to other modalities of power" (*ibid.*, 11). Note also that Golder and Fitzpatrick offer a revisionist reading of Foucault that redeems his concept of law from expulsion: "In our reading, Foucault's law is a vacuous law which in its very penetration by powers outside or beyond it nevertheless holds itself ultimately resistant to, and uncontainable by, those same powers" (*ibid.*, 100).

86. *Ibid.*, 13.

as an ongoing process of collective self-formation.⁸⁷ We must seek out the possibility of this instability and the consequences it manifests within the biblical concept of law to expose problematic areas that must be addressed before one can accept that religion was the dominant social-political law. Law represents symbolically the *process* of society, its “discourse,” but inasmuch as this process is that which reflects fundamentally the dominant order of production. In contrast, biblical portrayals of law (such as in Ezra–Nehemiah) are less discourse and more dependent upon a premeditated paradigm that must be internalized by individual and collective. It is, in other words, despotically constructivist. This poignant difference betrays idealistic and utopian aspirations on the part of the interpreting community for a “restored” social-political reality.

Traditional views of law, according to Foucault, assume a negative view of power when its exercise expects repressive or oppressive consequences. Such assumptions betray an inadequate understanding of power and its related institutions.⁸⁸ Power is not primarily repressive or negative but productive.⁸⁹ The codification of law, however, knows not the productive capacity of law but its capability of repression.⁹⁰ Because power as a productive force is institutionalized in discourses, law operates as a symbol of historical and ritual power.⁹¹ That is, by repressing desire, law operates under taboos constructed and ritualized within a regulated code of cultural norms. There comes a point, however, when taboos are outpaced by the production of desire—a point that is ever-evolving in different networks of discourses.⁹² And in modernity, institutions such as prisons, schools, and asylums enculturate subjects within a new economy of power through repetition of behavioral norms, resulting in internalization of these norms and inserting them into alternative modes of production.⁹³ Or, as he insists,

87. Ibid., 3.

88. Ibid., 84.

89. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 194.

90. Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 84.

91. Note further, “One must suppose rather that the manifold relationships of force that take shape and come into play in the machinery of production, in families, limited groups, and institutions, are the basis for wide-ranging effects of cleavage that run through the social body as a whole. These then form a general line of force that traverses the local oppositions and links them together; to be sure, they also bring about redistributions, realignments, homogenizations, serial arrangements, and convergences of the force relations” (ibid., 94).

92. Cf. ibid., 85.

93. See also the description of Foucault’s thought on this matter in Golder and Fitzpatrick, *Foucault’s Law*, 19.

society enters into a “phase of juridical regression” in which “the growing importance assumed by the action of the norm [comes] at the expense of the juridical system of the law.”⁹⁴ Techniques of normalization develop from below in contrast to any monarchical power, which exercises power primarily through law.⁹⁵

What is more, “Disciplines will define not a code of law, but a code of normalization, and they will necessarily refer to a theoretical horizon that is not the edifice of law, but the field of the human sciences.”⁹⁶ And further, “The things government must be concerned about...are men in their relationships, bonds, and complex involvements with things like wealth, resources, means of subsistence, and, of course, the territory with its border, qualities, climate, dryness, fertility, and so on.”⁹⁷ Thus, his concepts of bio-power and governmentality, as Golder and Fitzpatrick explain, refer to power as a means of maximizing a population’s potential and optimizing its capacities.⁹⁸ Law, and here is where his theory will prove helpful for our discussion of the biblical texts, does not. That is because “resistance comes first.”⁹⁹ And “where there is power, there is resistance,”¹⁰⁰ precisely because the existence of power relations “depends upon a multiplicity of points of resistance.”¹⁰¹ If the biblical law was an effective mechanism of or for power it must be capable of functioning effectively at the axis of multiple points of resistance. It must discipline but be flexible within limits of difference. Without such room for tolerance—if the “Canaanites” must really be completely wiped out—it fails to respond to the iterative changes and sways in social, economic, and political productive processes.

94. Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 144.

95. See Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 222; idem, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–78*, ed. Michel Senellart, François Ewald, and Alessandro Fontana (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan/République Française, 2007), 56.

96. Michel Foucault and Mauro Bertani, “Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–76” (New York: Picador, 2003), 35, n.p. Online: https://pdflibrary.files.wordpress.com/2008/02/foucault_soc_defended.pdf.

97. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 96. Foucault cites Guillaume de La Perrière to support his thesis.

98. Golder and Fitzpatrick, *Foucault’s Law*, 32.

99. Michel Foucault, Paul Rabinow, and James D. Faubion, “Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity,” in *The Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984* (New York: New Press, 1997), 167. See also Gilles Deleuze and Séan Hand, *Foucault* (London: Continuum, 1999), 74.

100. Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 95.

101. Ibid., 95.

At first blush, it might seem counterintuitive to apply Foucault's theory to the biblical expression of law. Yet biblical law, we will show, is constructed precisely with the premise of its eventual fulfillment (a sense that Matthew, to give a New Testament-related example, emphasizes in 5:17–20). In the restored world, the rigid structure of law gives way to the more flexible system of role and obligation (of the believer to God) that characterizes the original intent of the divine–human relation. It is in that predetermined goal that the prescriptive nature of biblical law takes on force. *[U]nless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt 5:20)!* Revelation interrupts the dominant social-political discourses. Law constructs the restored social-political world. In a restored society, the social forces and discourses that fashioned the attributes, whether through reaction to or in embrace of, religious law cease to be relevant. Better said, they become a “past event.” The three pillars (revelation, law, and restoration) are *responses* to the very “discourses of power,” to use Foucault's phrase, of the social-political world into which they were introduced. In short, it resists the conservative position in which the full extent of their purposes has already been determined.

One important distinction of religious law is its resistance. Its resistance is to any acceptance that the productive forces or processes of social-political realities separate from itself have a *positive* impact upon its development. Religious laws are almost always inherently “OK” with society providing *negative* influences as things against which to react—where reaction distinguishes the community from the broader context. Thus, in circular fashion, law reflects the processes of society that are themselves definitive of religious law, which results in its attempt to ontologically absolutize its regulative patterns, institutions, and values. This tension between the ideal of a static and imprint-able nature and the reality of, as Foucault describes, the permeability and instability of law and power results, as we will show, in the heightened anxiety over irrelevance that characterizes the concepts law and restoration as well as monotheistic identities based upon them.

While some bemoan, and perhaps rightfully so, the impossibility of interpreting Foucault, our aim here is not to provide the definitive guide to Foucault but to use elements of his theory.¹⁰² (And, in truth, the same should be said of all of our theorists employed here.) In other words, his emphasis upon law as a mechanism within discourses of power permits

102. Cf. W. T. Murphy, Review of *Foucault and Law: Towards a Sociology of Law as Governance*, ed. Alan Hunt and Gary Wickham, *BJS*, no. 1 (1996): 191.

discussion of the biblical theme of law, a *religious* law, not as a static object, or even an imprint, but as a symbol of a defined set of restrictive, or disciplinary, processes that shape the dominant forces of social cohesion.¹⁰³

Deleuze, Desire, and Restoration

Within the sometimes elusive parameters of his theoretical framework, Deleuze argues that meaning and being are defined productively through repetitions of difference and sameness—such as the qualities that encourage group cohesion—that has been marked off by a recognition of difference from an “other.” *I continue to do these particular actions because they are what I have done. But I recognize these same patterns as distinct to me and not the actions of someone else.* The death instinct, through which the fundamental, akin to Žižek’s “universal,” difference is recognized motivates the repetition of those things (actions, ideas, etc.) that support the distinction of being alive. One is reminded of the famous quote from Monty Python’s *Holy Grail*, “I am not dead yet,” as a fundamental expression of consciousness. For Deleuze, the alternative, “I am alive,” problematically assumes that self-awareness can exist without difference.¹⁰⁴ *Cogito ergo wrong! Can I really know myself without awareness of something outside myself?* Thus, repetition is given the quality of “an original, positive principle” because it masquerades, or disguises the terrors that our death instincts invoke.¹⁰⁵ We repeat the differences that separate us from death, chaos, or lawlessness. Conscious identity, in broad terms, is fashioned through repetition, and repetition alleviates the anxieties that erupt when we recognize the fragility of our own relative positions. This is what Deleuze meant when he wrote, “Difference is the state when we can speak of determination *as such*. The difference ‘between’ two things is only empirical, and the corresponding determinations are only extrinsic.”¹⁰⁶ Difference always requires an external recognition of it as such—no idea contains the essential qualities of difference within itself. Difference must be actively repeated. But for our focus in this work this last point is really only important as it relates to the repetition of identity. A fairly clear and well-accepted example is this: the difference between the *am ha’aretz* and the *golah* community in Ezra–Nehemiah was an extrinsic projection of difference: *We, the immigrating golah, have determined our collective*

103. Cf. Golder and Fitzpatrick, *Foucault’s Law*, 2.

104. Cf. his discussion in *Difference and Repetition*, 35–42.

105. *Ibid.*, 17–19.

106. *Ibid.*, 28.

identity as one that does not include the people in the land, who we view as destabilizing (“Exterminate them!” Dtr. instructed) of our identity. It is in this spirit that restoration radicalizes difference with its demand for repetition of the law, which, according to Ezra–Nehemiah, was carried in by the learned hands of Ezra. It is repetition in this form that distinguishes member from nonmember.

One should understand restoration, consequently, to be the goal of the (divine) law. Law maps out the network of relations and corresponding distribution of power consistent with an ideological (and characteristically utopian) social-political reality. Likewise, in that sense, if “desire,” as the fundamental drive behind social activity and organization, is “becoming,”¹⁰⁷ restoration is the univocal state in which desire is no longer *becoming* but has *become*. The individual or collective expresses its own identity by pursuing its desire. The biblical concept of restoration expresses the desired object in its entirety. In a restored state, desire itself does not cease to exist; instead, it becomes stabilized within the univocity of an ordered world and its productive forces that have reached a permanent stasis. It is, in the greatest claim of utopian theory, a world unassailable by change. This emphasis upon stability betrays restoration to be a response to increased anxiety over irrelevance. It is a process of perception, in the Deleuzian sense, that we perceive of things by slowing down the generation of difference.¹⁰⁸ Restoration within the biblical view necessitates absolute control over difference.

Stability, as a perceived control over the consequences of difference, is the first expression of desire. The objectified state of restoration is the final response to the “problem” of anxiety over irrelevance brought on by disruption to stability. On a fundamental level, this anxiety is the consequence of difference—which is the “relation between already identifiable things”¹⁰⁹—that cannot be controlled. It reflects a fear of variation, change, and further creation—a process characteristic to the normal ebb and flow and iterative processes of the social world. It is the consequence of an *alternative* experience, thus, a competing differentiation and order

107. See Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 269, as well as Claire Colebrook’s discussion of this point in *Understanding Deleuze* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2002), location 612 (Introduction in Kindle Edition). On Deleuze’s perception of difference, cf. *ibid.*, 34.

108. Cf. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 70–82, 96–97, 185–86, 286–87. See also the discussion in Colebrook, *Understanding Deleuze*, 35. As Colebrook points out, Deleuze uses the word “contraction” to refer to this process of perception.

109. *Ibid.*, 5.

for the world.¹¹⁰ But difference, according to Deleuze, is what reveals the *real* Idea behind the essence of things.¹¹¹

Difference is not primarily negative, although laws often make that assumption. It is, when it motivates desire or its fulfillment, productive and positive.¹¹² Differentiation, together with the repetition of difference above sameness, is a process through which one creates the social world.¹¹³ Identity expresses itself in distinction from something other. Or, as Pierpaola Donati puts it, in quite similar terms, “[T]he identity of a person lies in distinguishing himself/herself by reference to others (who are different from the self). That is, not only in seeing this difference but also in the fact that the difference is established through a reciprocal reference that requires recognition and exchange of some kind.”¹¹⁴ Yet, those things, or qualities, that mark something as different are always themselves changing. Identity and difference are always in motion, but the basis of perception is a frozen moment from the past. What we perceive as different is something that has already been identified and categorized.¹¹⁵ Or to put it in different terms, what we see is not what something truly *is* but what it *was* just moments before our perceiving it, which necessitated our freezing of its possibilities within our own epistemological categories. Difference in itself, Deleuze would remind us, is not categorizable, but its perceived manifestations or expressions are. Thus, stability, in the sense of permanence, is an idealized, created state impervious to change, in which categories and differences are fixed.¹¹⁶ The biblical concept of restoration necessitates a concomitant perception (and belief!) that a tendency toward difference and death is the natural order of things and that stability and life, both of which constitute a particular view of an ordered world, must be imposed supernaturally.¹¹⁷ But more importantly,

110. Colebrook writes of Hegel, “Experience is mediated, differentiated and ordered through concepts” (ibid., 8).

111. Cf. ibid., 2. In fact, difference is the fundamental essence of a univocal being (see Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 36–37).

112. Cf. Colebrook, *Understanding Deleuze*, 24. A negative view of difference, for contrast, makes difference secondary. That is, it makes difference dependent upon the relation between things that are already present or, in the Structuralist sense, dependent upon a structure that differentiates (see 28–29).

113. Cf. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 28–69.

114. Donati, *Relational Sociology*, 70.

115. Colebrook, *Understanding Deleuze*, 28.

116. In that sense, it would be, for Deleuze, a world of representation characterized by “its inability to conceive of difference in itself” (*Difference and Repetition*, 138).

117. The Christian doctrine of original sin is a good example of this.

restoration is the articulation of a frozen moment. It owes its attributes to the utopian past no longer assailable by or victim to the forces of change.

It is through, on account of, and because difference exists that human agents think, act, and produce. “A pure and positive difference,” according to Deleuze, is a “differential power” that represents for him life itself.¹¹⁸ Is there not a strong similarity here to Foucault’s understanding of power? That power arrived at through difference is really a power that is produced as a consequence of people being in relation to each other? In more philistine terms, real power is not the biggest cock, even if fully virile and destructive. (For Deleuze, and Foucault, the physical ability to assert dominion and to destroy are expressions of power but they are not the essence of power.) It is the ability to regulate the manner in which differences are expressed and recognized.¹¹⁹ It is through such acts that systems of relation, of distribution, of resistance, representation, etc., are built through processes of synthesis and repression.¹²⁰ Disruptions, or interruptions, to categories and systems through which differences may be recognized are therefore what create “problems.” Colebrook reminds us that “[f]or Deleuze a ‘problem’ is not a simple question that needs to find an answer; a problem is something that disrupts life and thinking, producing movements and responses.”¹²¹ Problems interrupt perceptions of stability, and this event generates difference, intersubjective engagement, and continual self-expression—the last meaning such as what Ezra–Nehemiah might hypothetically say, “*the am ha’aretz are presenting a roadblock to restoration. They are threatening us. I am not one of them.*” In that sense, the “chaotic and active becoming” not “order and sameness” are the “pulse of life.”¹²²

118. A point summarized in Colebrook, *Understanding Deleuze*, xliii; see also 623–34.

119. For instance, Colebrook describes Deleuze’s understanding of evolution as a “virtual power,” as “a capacity or potential for change and becoming which passes through organisms” (*ibid.*, 1). In that sense, having power over something is having the ability to regulate its capacity.

120. Deleuze’s use of “contraction” denotes this process (cf. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 70–82, 96–97, 286–87). Colebrook makes a similar observation regarding Deleuze’s argument in *Understanding Deleuze*, 37–38.

121. Colebrook, *Understanding Deleuze*, xxxiv.

122. As interpreted by *ibid.*, xxxv. What then, as Claire Colebrook offers for Deleuze, “are the forces, differences, processes or (to use his term) ‘syntheses’ which produce recognisable entities such as human beings or political classes” (*ibid.*, x1)? This question asks about not only the attributes of the forces etc. themselves but of their sources—that is, what are they, and what motivates them?

The problem to which restoration is a response is twofold: on the one hand, it can be interpreted as the problem of the non-permanence of stability and order, as they relate directly to identity and its expression; on the other hand, it is a response to the fragility of authority and a corresponding discursive nature of power, as something always subject to a constant interpreting and reinterpreting. It signals an attempt to change prevailing modes of thought and social-political intersubjective engagement. That is, its emphasis upon a utopian form of stability expects the destabilizing of prevailing but incompatible forms. But while it presents itself as forward-looking, restoration is always dependent upon traditional systems of meaning and relation.

Or to put it differently, the biblical theme of restoration emphasizes the stabilization of difference. It reflects a perception of the world that assumes only two fundamental, binarily opposed categories, insider and outsider. And in vocabulary reminiscent of Deleuze, this is the original expression of difference as well as a territorialising act.¹²³ Restoration, in other words, necessitates (1) the identity of the other as an isolatable subject, and (2) that this identity remains static, unaffected by social and historical processes and forces or interaction with an “other.” It necessitates the possibility that orders of alliance can be fixed, permanent, and made absolute and impervious to difference. *Heaven, the New Israel, Paradise is and will always be X*. The victory of restoration will be the defeat of difference and the muzzling of change.

Žižek, Foucault, and Deleuze help clarify how anxiety, conflict, and disadvantaged relations of social-political power frame constructed values and meanings. And by doing that, they also reveal the anxieties that reside at the core of biblical monotheism. Understanding these anxieties will allow us to understand better the Bible’s dogged obsession with exclusion and authority.

As stated above, the intent here is not to treat the three different theorists in isolation but to use components of their theories as contributions to a larger “dialogue.” And this seems to be consistent with each theorist’s view of not only the applicability of their own theories but also their views on the practice of theory itself. Our use of Žižek uncovers the self-preservationist tendencies in revelation which give way to the need for a divine law as an absolute order. Our use of Foucault reveals divine law as a process of restriction upon processes of social cohesion. Its intent is to preserve traditional modes of power and identity (thus retaining the Utopia of the past). Our use of Deleuze’s emphasis upon difference

123. “In territorialisation we go from a flow of genetic differences to the organisation of those differences into a recognisable group of similar bodies” (ibid., 37).

reveals how the intent of divine law, being restoration, is a legitimization of control over difference, thus stability. The internal and external frustrations of monotheism can be attributed in part to its simultaneous appeal to constructivism, through law and restoration, and its dogged preservation of traditional, being of a utopian past, mores and values.

Description of Chapters

The following chapters do not represent autonomous units, as though a collection of essays linked together, sometimes loosely, as has become a trend in academic publishing. Rather, in an attempt to be true to the complexity one must navigate in order to understand ideological motivations, each chapter is iterative; each builds on arguments made in previous chapters while also offering new points of discussion and analysis. This means that some arguments or discussions will traverse the length of several chapters. This also means that the larger dialogue produced in this work can be carried throughout its length while its supporting arguments are refined through the dialectical process.

Chapter 2, “The Problems of Revelation, Ritualization, Contradiction, and Law’s Dependence Upon Them,” applies Žižek’s theory on the productive aspect of contradiction to critical fault lines within the social-political milieu of Persian-period Yehud.¹²⁴ Within this chapter, these “fault lines” will center specifically on intermarriage and the ritualistic obedience of separation as interruptive acts (cf. Ezra 6:19–22). The discussion here maintains that revelation is an act of social-political interruption given religious plausibility or legitimization. It will seek to expose how the Persian-period biblical literature’s emphasis upon “ethical” behavior entails fundamentally a conscious reaction to prevailing social-political norms. Ezra–Nehemiah’s emphasis, we will show, is upon contradiction as a structurally altering act. The text’s rejection of intermarriage is a clear example of this as a productive act *for the benefit of the community itself*. Žižek describes the productive nature of contradiction, as a general concept, as the “dialectics of contradiction.” In that light, what this discussion hopes to expose is that the biblical emphasis upon revelation as an act of interruption necessitates the threat of contradiction as a catalyst for group consolidation. Even more specifically, it hopes to clarify, with respect to Yehud, that the biblical emphasis upon a divine alteration of prevailing social-political norms, which comes through interruption, is primarily the ideological project of a group on the margins of power.

124. Cf. Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, 223.

Chapter 3, “Restoration in Haggai–Zechariah as Dependent Upon Difference,” looks specifically at Haggai–Zechariah’s construction of the shared symbols of Jerusalem temple and gold and silver crown(s), central to the collective identity of the returnees. This construction revises the symbols from being internal symbols (i.e. to the group) to being external symbols (i.e. symbols that must be accepted by all groups and not just the authoring community). Using Žižek’s emphasis upon the “disintegration of authority” as simultaneously an interruption and revision of the identity of the “other,”¹²⁵ which in our case is the people already in the land, this chapter will argue that the biblical emphasis is motivated by a desire to restructure social-political order (*nomos*) into a pattern based on the centrality of the collective identity of the remnant community. Manifestation of this desire necessitates, we will show, that the “other” be radically marginalized. (This sentiment is similar to that found in Ezra: “The people of Israel... have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands... I tore my garment and my mantle” [Ezra 9:1–3].) This desire can be seen, we will argue here, in Haggai’s emphasis upon the restored Jerusalem temple as a shared object that is central to the collective identity of the “remnant” community.¹²⁶ It can also be seen in Zechariah’s revisionary emphasis—this chapter will describe how it is revisionary—upon the symbolism of the crown(s) in Zech 6:9–15.

Chapter 4, “The Role of Exclusion in Monotheistic Law,” employs Foucault’s emphasis upon the “relational” composition of power as the basis for clarifying the exclusionary attitude toward religious law within Ezra–Nehemiah and Ezekiel.¹²⁷ What this chapter seeks to reveal are the utopian aspirations regarding power and its relations behind the creative use of law and legal traditions in select Neo-Babylonian (those that may have influenced the thinking of Persian-period and later biblical authors) and Persian biblical texts. Where these aspirations will be sought out primarily is in the biblical inscription of the law upon the “body” of the nonmember, or “other,” as an inverted symbol for the member and as an element in the law’s prescribed blueprint for restoration.

125. Cf. *ibid.*, 20–36.

126. While these issues will be discussed in greater detail in the second chapter, see, for example Jeremiah Cataldo, “Yahweh’s Breast: Klein’s Projective Identification Theory as an Understanding for Monotheistic Identity in Haggai,” *JHS* 13 (2013), for a discussion of the Jerusalem temple as a shared object as the basis for collective identity in the book of Haggai.

127. While Ezekiel is more often designated as a Neo-Babylonian text, we will argue that understanding the social-political aspirations of Ezekiel helps clarify the social-political context of Yehud described in Ezra–Nehemiah.

Chapter 5, “Constructivism as a Consequence of Exile,” focuses on the theocratic emphasis, as a utopian reaction to the “remnant community’s” marginal social-political position, in Ezra–Nehemiah and Haggai–Zechariah. These texts emphasize a revolutionary attitude before prevailing legal norms—thus, a constructive legalism is contrasted with the “law of the land.” For them, the anxieties brought on by the tradition of the exiles necessitated a codification, in a legal sense (note, for example, Ezra’s emphasis upon the law in Ezra 7:6–26), of religious ritual and behavior. We do not intend here to focus on the letter of the law as much as on the use of legal traditions, which we will identify, by Ezra–Nehemiah and Haggai–Zechariah, to establish codified social-political taxonomies and corresponding regulated behaviors. In this regard, we will use a combination of Foucault’s relational theory on law and power and Deleuze’s emphasis upon difference as the foundational drive behind social-political categories and structures. Where Deleuze is relevant here is in his theoretical focus on the codification of difference, and this includes but is not limited to law, as a productive act of identity formation.

Chapter 6, “Differentiating Exiles” will explore the ways in which the biblical theme of restoration necessitates a “disorderly” world as a foil against which to distinguish itself. Put simply, within Ezra–Nehemiah, Haggai–Zechariah, and Ezekiel, restoration is meaningless without the presumed facticity of an Exile as *a univocal event*. For the authors of the Persian-period biblical literature, the Exile takes on an objective facticity as a symbol of difference. It became, to use the vocabulary of Deleuze, the “symbol of difference” upon which a shared value system was built¹²⁸—a value system that emphasizes difference not as negation but as the exposure of the centrality of *the* Exile to the collective identities of both member and nonmember. By employing Deleuze’s emphasis upon the productive determination of difference within the virtual world, what this chapter hopes to unveil is the utopian foundation of the biblical understanding of Exile in distinct contrast to the historical and material realities of exiles, plural.

Chapter 7, “Returning to the Centrality of Religion,” will utilize in a comprehensive fashion the material from the previous chapters for an analysis on the role that religious themes played in the social-political context of Yehud. Joseph Blenkinsopp, whose argument will provide a starting point of discussion for this chapter, proposed that the Persian-period biblical literature reflects religious colonization.¹²⁹ We will argue

128. Cf. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 55.

129. Cf. his work in Blenkinsopp, *Judaism: The First Phase*.

that he, and arguments similar to his, is right *to an extent* but that his argument has incorrectly inverted the social-religious relationship and has elevated too much the importance of the religious institution in itself. Using the theoretical framework developed from Žižek, Foucault, and Deleuze in the previous chapters, we will argue here that scholarly emphasis upon the centrality of religion (and the religious importance of the Jerusalem temple) in Yehud ignores the more likely role that religion played in Yehud during the Persian period and later: a profoundly paranoid mechanism of self-preservation.