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## HISTORIOGRAPHY: CREATING UNDERSTANDING

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“The past is never dead. It isn’t even past” (William Faulkner)

“Memory is the space in which a thing happens for the second time” (Paul Auster)

“Historical descriptions themselves remain to a high degree symbolical. This is what makes them so vivid, which cannot be achieved by copying reality or untwisting it into single causal connections” (Ernst Troeltsch)

Every history of Israel is the enactment or performance of the critical imagination, arranging the available sources of information according to the questions it pursues, the way the data are prioritized and interconnected, and the concepts employed to interpret the history. How do I as a historian go about the work of critically imaginative historiography?

### Historical-literary and Social-Scientific Criticisms

In the first place, I make use of all the available methods in historical-literary criticism, such as one finds described and illustrated in any handbook on exegesis or hermeneutics. I state this explicitly because there are those who believe social critics disdain or dismiss the older methods. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Without a sound description of the historical data studied according to the principles and methods of historical-literary criticism, social criticism would have little to work with beyond a surface reading of biblical texts.

In addition, I espouse social or social-scientific criticism. Unlike historical-literary criticism’s reliance on the humanities, social-scientific criticism draws on methods and insights from the social sciences (sociology, social psychology, social history, economics, political science, cultural and political anthropology, and including social archaeology). I have made use of resources drawn from all these disciplines plus philosophy of history and ideological criticism which often border on the social sciences as well as philosophy and literary criticism. In recent years, political anthropology and social history have been especially important for my work.

It is important to understand the theoretical and operational relationship between historical-literary criticism and social-scientific criticism. I have already emphasized that the latter does not replace the former. The two types of criticism are so intimately intertwined that I normally make use of both as I study historical phenomena. It is not as though social questions are simply “tacked on” to textual questions. The complementarity of the two forms of criticism allows many ways to organize and present historical inquiry. Sometimes I begin with a text/s studied with historical-

literary methods and then go on to pursue social critical issues that arise out of the text. Or, I may begin with an era or topic in Israel's history, attending to relevant texts and social critical concepts and hypotheses, and organizing the presentation in the manner of a social history. Or I may start with a social critical method or model and use its analytic framework to study a larger or smaller textual unit or a topic/period in Israel's history. And on occasion I study a particular society or culture that seems comparable to ancient Israel in some respect/s and, comparing the two in their contexts, assess how helpful the comparisons are in strengthening existing understandings of ancient Israel, favoring one or another disputed point, or introducing possible new understandings. I will give some examples of these procedures in what follows.

One reason I call historiography a work of the critical imagination is because there are manifold ways of bringing the two forms of criticism together. Nor should it be overlooked that both types of criticism are composed of several disciplines and methods, each with its own aims and rules. It is, therefore, not at all surprising that historians using similar or closely related methods come to different conclusions. In other words, the search for the one proper reading of history, or even for the superior reading, is a vain one. We can assess how well a historian employs and combines the results of particular methodologies, but the plausibility or probability and the superficiality or richness of alternative historical narratives is not decidable to the satisfaction of all knowledgeable observers.

While I do not pretend that social criticism is more accurate or effective than historical-literary criticism, I do believe that a historiographic project of any scope that uses both types of criticism will be "richer" in the sense that it is likely to open up more potentially fruitful lines of inquiry and interpretation than a project adhering solely to historical-critical methods.

Reflecting on what is most distinctive about my use of the twin sets of methodologies, I will now explore some characteristic features of my historiographic strategies. I shall discuss them under the following rubrics: interactive power networks; comparative social studies; and ideological/hermeneutical keys...

### Interactive Power Networks

Probably the fundamental feature of my historiography is the theoretical grid through which I perceive, organize, and interpret the data. This grid is highly "social," but it is not so in the amorphous sense of terms like "social surround" and "social world studies." Conceiving "society" as the most comprehensive term for human community in all its aspects, it is then necessary to identify the most crucial public power networks that are both cooperative (structural-functional models) and oppositional (conflict models) in changing patterns over the course of time. I have presented this inclusive grid of the motor forces of society in a number of ways in my writings. In recent years I have been indebted to the model of public power networks as developed by Michael Mann, a historian who uses political anthropology and social history to offer a compelling reading of the sources and growth of public power in the ancient Near East. These power networks can be conceived in a number of ways, provided that their interconnection is preserved. In The Politics of Ancient Israel, I chose to distinguish five such networks: economic (including technology), sociocultural; political; military; and ideological (including religion). This multiple network model

has similarities to Arjun Appadurai's concept of "power flows" in history and culture. This model attempts to overcome the splintering effect of carving up historical wholes into discrete phenomena which are processed according to the canons of traditional academic disciplines but are not convincingly reintegrated in more comprehensive historical re-enactments or explanations.

It is not in my interest to caricature the work of other historians of ancient Israel. Certainly the best histories have made efforts to include some data from the public power networks. However, their attempts have been deficient in pursuing a self-aware methodology for tracing the networks systematically. Moreover, the religious and political networks have been their primary concern, paying less attention to the social network, and still less to the economic and military networks. Valuable micro-histories of the various types or phases of public power have usually proceeded without a clear network grid to collect data and to theorize the overall course of historical structures and events.

In The Politics of Ancient Israel, I attempted to keep the extra-political power networks in play, noting the ways that economy, society and culture, the military, and ideology enhanced or eroded political power. To get at these complicated interactions among the power networks, I distinguished foreign and domestic fields of power. My analysis of foreign fields of power followed three sets of relationships:

- relations between Israel and Judah
- relations of Israel and Judah with neighboring states
- relations of Israel and Judah with the great powers.

My analysis of domestic fields of power also traced three concentric circles of power under the rubrics

- relations within the political center
- relations between the political center and its primary beneficiaries
- relations between the political center and the general populace.

One aspect of this analysis was to trace the most evident interconnections within and between these concentric circles of power relationships in foreign and domestic affairs. It becomes clear that at various times the interactions within and among these power spheres led to a definite reinforcement or expansion of political power and at other times profoundly weakened the authority and institutional strength of the states of Israel and Judah.

In thinking about how this sort of parsing of power networks would apply in detail to tribal and colonial Israel, I realize some major obstacles. In pre-state Israel, politics were "embedded" and decentralized, not forming an autonomous network but operative as a type of activity spread variously throughout the other networks. In colonial Israel, on the other hand, politics were split and displaced into a commanding imperial center beyond Israel's control and a subservient colonial periphery where political activity was circumscribed but nonetheless real. What strikes me about the colonial or second temple period is the surprising sparseness of sources concerning the politics of the Persian province of Judah (Yehud) coupled with the virtual absence of direct information about Ptolemaic

Judah preceding to the outburst of historiography in the Maccabean-Hasmonean era. This is particularly unnerving since almost all scholars posit the final compilation of the Hebrew Bible in this period accompanied by a gradual move toward canonization of Torah and Prophets. It seems to me that our confidence in understanding the basic dynamics of colonial Israel is based as much or more on what we know about the Persian and Hellenistic imperial policies in general terms than on internal evidence about Judah. Although I could be wrong about this, it appears that the pre-state and post-state fortunes of Israel are remarkably similar in the relative dearth of biblical information about them. If the colonial period is better illuminated than the tribal period, when we take all sources of information into account, it is because we know more about public power networks in Judah and Judahite colonies in Egypt and Mesopotamia than we know about the networks in prestate Canaan. Nevertheless, compared to majority scholarly opinion, it appears that I am somewhat less confident about “re-constructing” colonial Israel and considerably more confident that we possess enough information to “re-construct” a viable tribal social history. Still the biblical sources are so meager that we could not present much of a history of tribal or colonial Israel were it not for archaeology, extrabiblical historical or quasi-historical texts, and the insights of comparative social studies. This inevitably means that any adequate history of tribal or colonial Israel, as also of monarchic Israel, will read in ways that depart radically from many of the biblical accounts and their underlying assumptions.

### Comparative Social Studies

The impetus to compare social entities follows logically on the application of the grid of public power networks to any single society such as ancient Israel. How does the constellation of public power in Israel compare with the configuration of power networks in other societies at a similar stage of complexity? In truth, the analytic grid can be applied to all societies that provide sufficient information. It is only a short step to specifying in particulars how similar and how different are the power configurations in compared societies. Moreover, can comparisons with other societies help to fill gaps in our sources about ancient Israel by proposing possible hypotheses based on analogy? In the absence of information on the society under study, I believe that heuristically oriented comparisons, when used with caution, shed definite light on Israelite history.

Admittedly, the legitimacy of comparing societies at all is much disputed. “Comparativism”, sometimes derided as “parallelomania,” is dismissed on principle by many historians. To be sure comparison of societies in historical and regional proximity, such as between ancient Israel and ancient Near Eastern states, is generally considered appropriate, but of course with marked differences of judgment as to the value of the comparisons. In fact, these comparative studies frequently take the form of emphatic claims for the superiority of Israel’s versions of what appear to be quite similar practices and institutions. The comparisons often become virtual apologies for ancient Israel and polemics against other peoples for the manner in which they mishandle the shared topic or image, e.g. forms of governance (thought to be more benign in Israel than elsewhere in antiquity) and the religious grounding of kingship (said to bring the king under sharper religious restraints in Israel than elsewhere in the region).

When comparisons are proposed between societies situated in widely separated stretches of space and time, there is far less agreement as to the pertinence and cogency of the comparisons. A

major deterrent to controlled comparative analysis is the host of truly superficial comparisons that have ignored the different ways that similar appearing social institutions and practices functioned from society to society. The fascinating compilation of worldwide comparisons with ancient Israel gathered by John Frazer is unfortunately nearly useless, except to the degree that certain of his comparisons may stimulate further study. The fundamental weakness of Frazer, as of Gaster's similar work, is the habit of comparing isolated social phenomena instead of social phenomena in their respective contexts. Some of the Frazer-Gaster observations seem on target, but most are not clearly so because they do not spring from a consistent comparative methodology.

A premise of comparative study as I practice it is that societies with similar forms of sociopolitical organization facing similar challenges are likely to develop similar responses provided that all other things are equal. Obviously, however, all other things are never entirely equal in disparate social systems. The force of that dictum needs qualification so that it is understood that what we are weighing as comparable in the compared societies are elements that function in approximately the same manner at the juncture of the public power systems and/or that appear to foster or reflect social change in both societies.. To be sure what is commensurable and what is incommensurable is always a judgment call of comparativist historians informed by social history and political anthropology. Personally, I find the comparative method highly successful in casting light on ancient Israel, both in its best documented features and in those more obscure or problematic aspects, e.g., under what conditions do prestate societies arise and under what conditions do tribal societies prosper and under what conditions do they decline or expire? Or a topic not much discussed these days, was magic at all recognized in Israelite circles and, if so, did it enter into the repertory of biblical narrators?

First, I offer two examples from the colonial era.. In a paper on Nehemiah 5, I compared Nehemiah's debt reforms. with the reforms that Solon of Athens introduced approximately 150 years before Nehemiah. Not only do I not claim that the former influenced the latter, I also recognize that the matrix of reforms did not operate in the same way in Greece and in Israel. We are, however, fortunate to have fuller information about Solon's reforms, on the basis of which I conclude that both reformers were operating primarily out of calculating political strategy rather than purely altruistic motives. Solon and Nehemiah wished to quell popular unrest by granting specific economic concessions that did not correct the fundamental inequities of the sociopolitical system. If the analogy is relevant, it also suggests that both Solon and Nehemiah were in uncomfortable leadership positions caught between preserving a status quo that mainly benefitted those with the most socioeconomic advantages, on the one hand, while acceding to alleviation of the debt burden that fell onerously on the socially and economically weakest members of society. Their fundamental impetus to reform was to retain leadership by pleasing those with social and political power while earning the gratitude and support of the hard-pressed peasantry who benefitted from the reforms, at least for a time. Their precarious balancing act between the upper and lower classes may also explain why both Solon's and Nehemiah's reforms lapsed within a century or so. The same may be said of the debt reforms introduced by the Gracchi brothers in republican Rome.

In another instance I made use of the literary and ideological concepts and analytic tools of the literary critic Terry Eagleton to analyze Isaiah 40-55. I was seeking to uncover unstated

sociopolitical assumptions in Isaiah 40-55., so I made particular use of Eagleton's notion of "absences," namely, things that we expect to find in a text that do not appear, generally leaving a text that struggles to hide or to overcome sociopolitical contradictions.. My conclusions were two-fold. Although the book advocates and expects the return of the deportees in Babylon to the homeland of Judah, (1) the text contains virtually no reference to the Judahites who had remained in and around Jerusalem, other than to allude to their welcoming home the returnees, and (2) the text also posits that the reconstitution of governance in Judah will be accomplished by the returned exiles who form the poet prophet's audience, for it is they who will be leaders in an oligarchy replacing the Davidic monarchy and their political program will be acceptable to all Judahites. This obliviousness to the long resident population of Judah, and omission of any role for them in the restoration, appears to indicate a claim to superiority on the part of the returnees who, having suffered deportation, now felt uniquely qualified to lead the restoration in Judah. This ignores the reality that these deported elites were only two generations removed from their ancestors whose default as leaders precipitated the fall of Jerusalem. Everything that we know about uprooted groups of people who eventually return to their original home could have predicted that the religious and political privileges claimed by the Judahite returnees might easily cause dissension in restored Judah..

Here are two examples from tribal Israel, although they have an important bearing on the monarchic and colonial culture, literature, and religion. In exploring the hypothesis that early Israel was composed of Canaanites who "converted" to the cult of Yahweh, I drew on studies of African conversions to Islam and Christianity, particularly noting the conditions under which Africans were most disposed to abandon their polytheistic religions and join an alien monotheizing religion. It appears that African conversions to Islam and Christianity were most frequent and abiding when the sociopolitical situation had already prompted a shift in the focus of native religions from worship of the lesser gods, who dealt with immediate details of life, to worship of high gods, who dealt with the larger problems of the society that emerge in times of crisis and social change. This supports the possibility that some Canaanites turned from their lesser gods to the more potent high god Yahweh when socioeconomic crisis plagued Canaan in the Late Bronze age and early Iron I. The big difference of course is that the Africans were affiliating with already well-formed religions whereas, on my view, Canaanites were participating in the formation of a new religion. Nonetheless, the critical role of major crisis as a stimulant to shifts in religious identity is arguable in both the African and early Israelite contexts. Moreover, that early Israel was composed of diverse marginated peoples, driven by economic and political hardship, who freely consented to come together to create a socioeconomic and religious movement may help to explain the resiliency of later Israelites in facing and overcoming threats to their survival in monarchic and colonial times, especially with the fall of Jerusalem and their ensuing domination by imperial powers. This may be a partial answer to Max Weber's famous question, "Hence we ask, how did Jewry develop into a pariah people?"

The Icelanders who migrated from Norway beginning in 870 C.E. provide some interesting comparisons with early Israel. These migrants formed a confederation of peoples organized by families, lineages and regions. Lacking a centralized polity, they settled major disputes in an annual gathering where the law was recited from memory and communal decisions were reached and justice meted out. The Icelandic form of stateless social organization teaches us, along with many other prestate societies, that there are numerous ways in which prestate societies can form viable

confederations that not only thrive on their home ground but sometimes enable these communities to resist intrusion by conquering powers for a longer time than one might expect from the power imbalance between conquerors and conquered, e.g, the Pueblo peoples of New Mexico (against the Spanish); the Iroquois of upstate New York and Canada (against French, British, and American colonials); and the Sioux of the upper midwest plains (against the westward expansion of the United States).

This is an important point because, with the decline of Martin Noth's analogy between Israel and Graeco-Roman amphictyonies, there has been a tendency to assume that early Israel could not have formed a confederation or league of any sort. Even though it is hard to see from the biblical texts how such a linking of the tribes might have been worked out, given the clearly observed spectrum of confederate arrangements among stateless societies past and present, the door should be left open to the possibility that early Israel was knit together by some form of confederation. Also, a frequently cited objection to the existence of an Israelite confederacy is voiced on the grounds that the tribes are shown in frequent disputes and on occasion violent conflicts. Again Iceland is instructive. Feuding among Icelanders was a constant feature of their society, but the feuds were kept within bounds by the confederate organization quite effectively until violence resulting from the abuse of lopsided concentrations of wealth and power prompted Iceland to cede its sovereignty to Denmark in the late thirteenth century, in a manner not unlike Israel's move to monarchy.

Another feature of Icelandic society is that it sustained an oral culture for more than two centuries until conversion to Christianity introduced literacy. Surprisingly, the form of Christianity that converted Iceland was less imperialistic than was the case over much of Europe. The Christian literati made a point of preserving the oral traditions that included Nordic religious beliefs and practices, detailed accounts of the migrations, and descriptions of the workings of the commonwealth. From a previous tendency to dismiss the orally derived historical accounts as unreliable, there is now a widespread conviction that the pre-Christian oral traditions, eventually put into writing, preserve many valid memories of sociopolitical processes, persons and events, held together within a rough chronology.

Does this Icelandic process have any bearing on the transmission and preservation of Israel's traditions? Perhaps it does. At the very least it provides us with a set of lenses for looking into the movement from oral to written culture in ancient Israel. An immediate connection appears in the two hundred years of oral culture in Iceland and approximately the same length of time in early Israel. But the relation between the oral traditions of Iceland and Israel are significantly different in at least one respect.. The oral traditions in Iceland were committed to writing in a brief span of time and at a moment when the commonwealth was still the instrument of rule in Icelandic society. In other words, the rich body of chronicles, histories and sagas in Iceland were written down at a time when the conditions that had produced the oral traditions were still operative. For a close analogy Israel's oral traditions would need to have been committed to writing in the united monarchy without editing or recasting them. This was certainly not the case. Regrettably, earliest Israel's traditions have been so drastically reworked in monarchic and colonial times that it is problematic whether they can be isolated from all the additions. In Iceland, however, there seems to have been no major editing of the old traditions, probably due to the fact that no significant political or cultural change accompanied their

literary preservation. What was different was the introduction of a version of Christianity that chose to honor rather than to obliterate the Nordic past. In short, a spirit of tolerance and intellectual curiosity moved the Icelandic scribes to preserve traditions with a faithfulness that cannot be determined for the corpus of Israelite “historical” narratives.

Possibly on three points we can see some connection between the Icelandic and Israelite tradition building processes. One shared dynamic is that both cultures emerged under preliterate conditions that encouraged and required a lively oral tradition on which the very cohesion of society and religion depended. A second shared dynamic is that in both cases writing down of oral traditions seems to have coincided with dramatic changes in the society, for Iceland the coming of Christianity and for Israel certainly the collapse of the Judahite monarchy, and possibly also the rise of the monarchy and the fall of the northern kingdom. A third shared feature is the presence in both bodies of literature of prose and poetry, with loose genre parallels such as the sagas and the rosters both of the founding immigrants and the succession of the “law-speakers” (loosely comparable to Joshua-Judges and to Samuel-Kings in the Hebrew Bible).

The initial result of the comparison suggests that a fruitful area of research would be to focus on the known and hypothesized motives and contexts of the traditionists who first put the oral legacy into writing. What exactly, or even proximately, can be known about these Icelandic and Israelite literati? Certainly that issue pursued solely from within the Israelite traditions has not secured any broadly accepted view. The emerging canonicity of Israelite writings is thought to have been a major force in preserving certain traditions and excluding others, but the steps and the timing in this process remain frustratingly murky. The category of canon would be strictly inapplicable to the Nordic literature of Iceland, since the Christian writers who set down the Nordic legacy already had a Christian canon. Rather we might seek out the assumptions or conventions that conferred enough honor on the Nordic traditions to bother preserving them. Perhaps a more thorough comparative inquiry could serve to lend credibility to existing theories about Israelite literary history or even to propose new factors or constructs for interpreting that history.

Provided we do not overly press them, or confuse heuristic probes with conclusive proofs, the comparisons of preliterate societies with preliterate Israel are provocative of many queries and insights that do not arise simply from reading exclusively biblical and ancient Near Eastern sources..

#### Hermeneutical/Ideological Keys

So far I have characterized my working methodology as employing both historical-literary criticism and social-scientific criticism to delineate the web of interacting power networks that can be best understood by invoking comparison of Israel with relevant societies. Such methodological moves taken one by one, however, are far from explaining the perspective I tend to adopt in doing history.

It is necessary to move to the register of presuppositions, whether they be viewed as hermeneutical (in line with literary criticism) or as ideological (in line with critical sociology). What I want to identify at the moment are presumably more encompassing presuppositions of the sort that guide particular methodological procedures. For the moment, I focus on three orientations that



provide context for my overall reading of history. One is the notion of ideology as widely shared meanings that sustain public power in all its economic, sociocultural, military, and political manifestations, or as widely shared meanings held by those seeking to alter or subvert the prevailing forms of public power. The second notion is of historical description as representational and symbolic. The third notion is a non-triumphal interpretation of events, ideas, and institutions in ancient Israel that are cherished as foundational in the interpreting community to which I belong..

Ideology. I take ideology to be any widely shared /meaning or interpretation that establishes and sustains public power, either an existing form of power or an aspiring form of power. A society's ideology itself forms one of its networks of public power. It is advisable to single out ideology for closer examination because it is the form of public power that shapes how a people understand themselves and how they view their past, both considerations being central to historiography. When ideology is thought of as ideas serving power, in the instance of ancient Israel it is not difficult to see some of the ways specific instantiations of power are validated or subverted by the ideas advanced in the biblical literature on which we greatly depend for writing ancient Israel's history. For Israel, as for the ancient Near East at large, the most explicitly developed form of ideology was religious. However, not all of Israel's ideology was specifically religious nor was it overtly articulated in every case. For instance, we may speak of a Deuteronomistic or Priestly ideology/theology. But many taken-for-granted assumptions provided a preparatory matrix for the more explicit religious ideas. Thus, one of the elements of Deuteronomistic ideology is that the welfare of the community rests on the faithful religious leadership of the king. This bit of ideology relies nonetheless on more general assumptions that are not religious as such. Thus, the great importance of the religious fidelity of the king, lest the whole people suffer, rests on the assumption that it is the king as highest power in community is responsible for upholding accepted values and practices to insure the welfare of the body politic. Israelite royal theology celebrates the entitlements of the king to tax and to enlist his subjects in war, but this claim rests on the larger assumption that kings are entitled to place claims on their subjects in the name of state sovereignty because their rule benefits the people at large. Consequently, as is well known, the ideological currents in ancient Israelite literature are far from harmonious. Consequently, there are plentiful expressions in the prophets and in wisdom literature that call into question the legitimacy of autocratic rule with its arrogant equation of royal behavior with righteous behavior. Yet these strong counter-ideologies rest on a general concurrence that kings should enhance the welfare of the people by overseeing economic prosperity and a just social order both by correct ritual and by actions of state that serve the people..So, the surface consensus about ideology of the state splits apart over the issue of whether correct religious practice or just sociopolitical practice takes ideological priority.

Furthermore, not only is ideology operative in the past; it is likewise actively present in the work of contemporary historians. We select, arrange, prioritize, and interpret the past in keeping with our judgments as to which of the meanings we derive from the past are worth prizing or emulating in the present. To be sure, many argue that to admit ideology in the person of the historian is the death of honest historiography. To this I can only say that, acknowledged or not, the ideological factor in historiography is ineradicable. The only hope for "honest" historiography (not "objective" in the positivist sense) is that we historians come clean on our ideology, insofar as we know it or are willing to discover it. Only as we explore why it is that we rate some aspects of the past as more significant

than other aspects, will we be able to present the past as fully and fairly as we possibly can. I have for example in The Politics of Ancient Israel expressed what I believe to be my major ideological commitments that are likely to influence how I treat that topic of politics in general and the politics of Israel in particular. I identify myself as a critic of centralized public power, indebted to Marxist social and literary theory, a democratic socialist, a free church christian, culturally and religiously anti-authoritarian, skeptical of religious nationalism, and truly uncertain whether Christianity, Judaism, Islam and Hinduism have been more of a bane than blessing to the world, since all the good works they have prompted. – and they are indeed considerable – are fully matched by gross distortions of religious ideology that motivate fanatical devotees of all four of these faiths to discredit and to oppress, even to kill followers of other religions or adherents of other versions of their own religion..

I made this ideological “confession” because I wanted readers to be able to compare what I say about my ideological orientation with the way I re-enact or perform the ancient history. Here is an example. Recently I reviewed a good book on ideologies of state politics in Greece, the ancient Near East, and Israel. The author maintained a strong belief in the largely positive and benign functions of the state vis-a-vis society, culture and religion. By contrast, my own assessment of the ancient Near Eastern and Israelite states is that they were more of a burden and exploiter of society, culture and religion than they were a benefactor. These two assessments of more or less the same data are illuminated by the respective life experiences of the authors. The mentioned author who looks on the state as a largely benign institution reports in his preface that, as a Benedictine monk, he enjoyed an extremely positive relationship with religious authority figures who have taken his needs and interests into account. By contrast, my own experience with power is to be up against a state that has engaged in aggressive wars, allowed millions of its citizens to live in poverty, and, for the most part only granted benefits to its citizens at large - in contrast to the favored rich - only when it has been pressed to do so. Further, my experience with academic politics has been marked by some bruising experiences of administrations, faculty, and scholars using what power they have to undercut, discredit, and even to expel from community, people serving with them and under them. Much the same can be said of my experience with church politics. What I believe this illustration shows is that ideology is driven not only by ideas but also by life experiences.

All that being said, the historian must be other than a recorder of ideological preferences. The historian must strive to re-enact the past “a second time” by being as close as possible to the way it was “the first time.” Of course our re-telling can never be definitive in the way positivist thought claimed, but we can at least struggle not to distort the past either innocently or knowingly. This means that everything pertinent to the story of the past that offends the values and sensibilities of the historian must be as fully reported and assessed as all those features that are perceived to be close to the historian’s values and sensibilities. So, I conclude that all historiography is ideological, as all history has been ideological and continues to be, but it is only dangerously ideological when historians fail to identify and admit to their participation in the summoning of meanings and interpretations of the past in order to consciously or unconsciously legitimate or overturn present ideas, practices, and institutions..

Historical description as representational and symbolic. This is one of Ernst Troeltsch’s lesser known dicta about history, but which is essential to his understanding of analogy and correlation in

historiography I understand Troeltsch to mean that we select certain data from the past to form the heart of our historical account because we believe that those data are not random or idiosyncratic but faithfully represent many other phenomena which we do not have time or space to enumerate or which we do not know about because of limited sources. In other words, the events and developments we describe are representative “stand-ins” for many other known or supposed events and developments which, according to our best judgment, were very similar. Although the incidents and scenarios we describe are idiographic (attending to individual persons, events and institutions), we also imbue them with a measure of nomothetic weight (regarding the idiographic features as falling into typical patterns or observing general laws).. In my case, I use symbolizing terms such as “tribal,” “monarchic” and “colonial” to characterize three eras in Israelite history. The terms not only depend on definition but also on the historical details that I have grouped together under the symbolizing term

For example, when I recount the prophets’ condemnations of social wrongdoing, I may use the generalizing/ representational/symbolic term “social injustice” to gather up the many different sorts of wrongdoing cited by prophets. The manner in which I employ the representative term “social injustice” will indicate how widespread these wrongdoings were and what effect that had on society. But I also have the option of starting my inquiry by examining the features of agrarian societies at large in order to see what sorts of inequities tend to occur and to what effect.. This will give me some sense of the likely extent and depth of effect of the specific sociopolitical wrongdoings excoriated by the prophets. The development of representative or symbolic labels, correctly or incorrectly informed by a wealth of historical details, is essential to the discourse of the historian who needs to be able “to back up” his generalizing representations with supportive details. It goes without saying that we cannot escape the thorny issue of how appropriate our representation or symbolization of the phenomena we cite actually are. We do our best to cross-examine the evidence we cite but have no way of “proving” our generalizations in the sense that they alone is the demonstrated and unquestioned generalization. Of course some generalizations about particular historical phenomena are better grounded in evidence than others, but we never achieve satisfying closure on many generalizations, even some that are very convincing, pending further evidence. I am convinced that the representation “tribal” gives an accurate picture of Israel before the monarchy. But some observers doubt the accuracy of the representation, in part because the term itself is subject to debate and in part because evidence to support the representation is incomplete and just ambiguous enough to allow other representations such as “anarchic Israel” or “era of the judges,” In fact, many representative generalizations are fiercely contested. For example, there are those who believe that the overwrought language of the prophets greatly exaggerates the victimization of the peasantry to the extent that “social injustice” is a misleading representation of Israelite society. Indeed, I once heard a prominent anthropologist declare that “poor peasants don’t really mind their poverty.” I seriously doubt that his remark was “representative” of many or most peasants, but obviously he meant it as a valid generalization.

Here is another example from second temple times. Take the debt waiver described in Nehemiah 5 cited above. I take up this incident of release from debt as “representative” of debt releases that are mandated in biblical legal texts (even if not conforming to one another in all details) and of debt relief known to have been practiced by Mesopotamian kings in their first year of rule, as well as debt releases instituted by Solon in Athens and the Gracchi brothers in Rome. Likewise, I take as “representative” the heavy burden of debt and taxation described in the passage insofar as I link it

with descriptions of similar conditions in the prophets, psalms, and wisdom literature. As noted above, I have viewed this incident as “representative” both of the constant plight of peasants and of the difficult position of the native colonial administrator caught between his imperial overlord and his own people who sometimes gain popular support by lifting the economic burden on the populace if only for a period of time...

Note two other features of Troeltsch’s dictum, namely, the superiority of conceiving historical description as representational rather than as a copy of actual events a copy of actual events or as an effort to determine single-stranded hypotheses about “the cause” of the described historical developments. I do not, for instance, insist that Nehemiah 5 is a copy of what may have happened.

For my part, I accept that Nehemiah granted debt release in a manner close to what is described. However, the precise space-time “historicity” of the event is not essential for my historiography. Even if I were to conclude that Nehemiah offered no such debt relief, or even that Nehemiah never existed, I would still treat this passage as representative of agrarian debt servitude in the colonial period and representative of the position of a native administrator who tried to please his overlord while placating his fellow Judahites.

The other strand in Troeltsch’s dictum about representative/symbolic historical description is that it is preferable to misguided attempts to find single-strand causation of events. Even though many of my interpreters, noting that I have a fondness for Marxist theory and methodology, have insisted that I attribute all change in history to economic factors., a careful reading of The Tribes of Yahweh, as well as books and articles that followed, should be sufficient to show that I consistently take into account the interplay of many factors in “explaining” historical change. My frequent highlighting of the economic factor in terms of mode of production may very well seem dogmatically restrictive to historians of ancient Israel who have so often ignored substantive treatment of Israel’s economy. Actually, I would say that all those hypotheses that overstate the religious causation of events in Israel’s history are examples of single-strand causation theories. For one thing, much of this religious causation is removed from the actual realm of history by being located in the realm of transcendent theological truth that is inaccessible to historical methods. .As for institutional religion in ancient Israel, the prevailing biblical view that the corruption of religious belief and practice is what caused the fall of both kingdoms is at least arguable on historical grounds, but in my view falls short of convincing demonstration. What is left out of simplistic religious causation is the ambitious military and economic policies of Israelite and Judahite kings, helped along no doubt by landowners and merchants, who sapped the physical strength and the morale of the majority of peasants, rendering them fragile supporters of the monarchy when it came under Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian attack. To be sure, n religion was an active force in the sociopolitical collapse of the states of Israel and Judah, but not as a singular prime mover of the course of events..

### Reading Israel's History Teleologically

From several directions - be they deconstruction, cultural studies, ideological criticism or new historicism - the fragility and "impertinent subjectivity" of all historiography precisely as has been foregrounded. In The Politics of Ancient Israel I call these creative historical re-enactments or performances the offspring of the critical imagination. I put it this way, "Historical imagination differs from historical fantasy and from historical fiction by closely following available sources and taking no liberties with known data without explaining the reasons for doing so. Historical imagination shares with fantasy and fiction in the conjuring of a rounded, intuitive, and meaning-laden reading of the subject" (p. 12),

The critical imagination focused on ancient Israel involves three human agencies in the task of historical re-enactment: one is the activity of we historians who interrogate the past, including researchers in historical geography, archaeology,, etc.; a second is the work of the traditionists, authors and compilers, through whom we receive much of our data;; and the third is the actions and effects of the historical actors or agents, be they particular persons or larger or smaller groups, as best they can be retrieved. . These three parties in historical recovery may be conceived operationally as three

concentric circles, the largest circle being the investigators; the middle-sized circle being the traditionists; and the smallest circle being the historical agents. This way of visualizing historiography puts the contemporary investigator in the commanding position of launching an interrogation of the traditionists concerning their understanding of the historical agents and scenarios they report on and evaluating their testimony in the light of the historiographic principles. A well-known formulation of these principles is that of Ernst Troeltsch who specified criticism of sources to determine probabilities, employing analogies from known experience to evoke the past; and developing correlations to trace connections among all relevant historical phenomena beginning with the immediate object of study and extending indefinitely to all known time and space. Viewed in this way historians are at the mercy of what the traditionists tell us and traditionists and historical actors alike are dependent on historians to tell/perform their story “for the second time.”..

One way to think about the traditionists and the historians is to conceptualize them as teleological readers of history (from Greek *telos*, i.e., “end” or “goal”). Teleological readings are not identical with theological readings. To be sure religion may figure prominently in certain readings, but many other factors are likely to guide teleological reading.. As I conceive it, every reading of history that is more than a chronicle is teleological because every reader of history stands at a particular point in time and space. These particular standing points are “end times” from the perspective of the reader who discerns certain “ends” or “goals” that are both defined by the past and invoked to explain the past. These readings may be clear or confused, strong or weak, open or concealed, celebrative or ominous, confident or anxious. This teleological reading in some respects overlaps with ideological reading, but whereas ideology has a host of meanings attached to it, most of them entailing some conscious stance toward history or society, teleology is more a matter of the theory and strategy of reading, of what happens when readings are viewed as time-bound. Any particular teleology may be highly ideological, but not every teleological reading is coherent and self-aware in the way that most ideology attempts to be.

In recent years, we have become acutely aware of the teleological stance of biblical writers and compilers throughout the course of tradition formation, especially in the case of the proximate and final compilations of biblical books. Many biblical texts simply do not divulge the time or place of their composition, further complicated by the redaction of books that involves editing and adding materials from the perspective of a later time intended to “update” the older versions. This leaves us in considerable uncertainty as to precisely what the end-time orientation of many books actually is. Nor, in the absence of firmly dated texts, is it evident what some teleological readings are saying beyond the obvious, “I have come to the end of my story.” For example, the teleological thrust of Kings or Chronicles is far easier to discern, let us say, than the teleological drift of Psalms or Job. We can, I believe, safely posit that these various “end meanings” were construed in communal contexts whose unfolding history-in-the-making they were reflecting and in many cases seeking to influence.

The awareness that we historians are also teleological readers has been slow in gaining recognition. Granted that histories of biblical interpretation have often called attention to extrinsic influences on the work of biblical interpreters, though chiefly the religious and philosophical factors. Movements and schools of thought such as Neo-Platonism, Aristotelianism, Renaissance, Reformation, Pietism, changing scientific world views, Enlightenment and Romanticism have been featured to the

downplay of sociopolitical factors that accompanied and were intertwined with the philosophical and religious factors. . Ironically, this identification of context as the determinant of teleological reading, limited as it has been, appears to be much sharper in hindsight than in present reading practices. From our present “end-time” vantage points we, like our forebearers, construe Israel’s history as having a bearing on our present situations, both personally and communally. These teleological construals, .more or less conscious and explicit, are multiple and often in tension and contradiction, not only between historians but often within the single historian, since teleological readings are likely to be fluid, eclectic, and prone to incompleteness and inconsistencies.

What are some of these teleological outlooks in the present pursuit of historical investigation into ancient Israel? Is the focus to perfect the instruments and insights of biblical scholarship? Is it to educate the secular or ecclesial public? Is it to legitimate a method of criticism. Or to privilege one method over others? Is it to foreground marginal or liberationist readings of the Bible or to correct or invalidate such readings? Is it to lend force to particular understandings of Western civilization, American society, or Israeli and Palestinian culture and politics? Is it to validate one or another form of Jewish or Christian identity and its institutional embodiments? These instances of some current teleological motivations and stances that affect historical re-enactments are scarcely exhaustive or mutually exclusive. By and large, the teleological aspect of biblical interpretation is little taken into account in large part because the teleological aspect of biblical interpretation is so little taken into account by contemporary scholars today. The one place where we sometimes see an explicit teleological statement is in prefaces to published works Also, because of the time-bound nature of teleological readings, it must be admitted that identifying operative teleologies in the here-and-now is likely to be more difficult than when viewing them from the perspective of decades or centuries later or seen across a geographical or cultural divide.

Rather more subtle are teleological factors in disputes over the believability of the history-like traditions of the Hebrew Bible. At present there is a polarization of views between so-called maximalists and minimalists on the extent to which biblical accounts of Israel’s past are trustworthy. Meantime, a majority of scholars are apparently unconvinced by either extreme position, in part because of the partisan accusations of “fundamentalism” and “nihilism” thrown at one another by the two “camps.” Is there any resolution to this vituperative split that tends to overshadow the historical work of those who renounce either of the two polarized options?.

My hunch is that the only way to “break the deadlock” in this unproductive polarization is to zero in on the likely source of the emotional uproar over a seemingly rational academic matter.. My suggestion is that when scholars are called “fundamentalists” it is not really because they are biblical literalists but rather because they see an unbroken line of development from ancient Israel to Judaism and Christianity and , in doing so, choose to emphasize the reliability of traditions in the Hebrew Bible that seem preparatory to later Judaism and Christianity. In other words, these maximalists are more interested in the events and themes that point toward later religious development than in all the twists and turns of the actual course of the history. It is not to be denied that they have a valid perspective. I also propose that when scholars are called “nihilists” it is not because they deny any historical value to the Hebrew Bible but rather because they do not see a continuous ascending line of development from Israel to the religions that issued from it. Instead, they discern a zigzag course in which ancient Israel

developed many cultural and religious beliefs and practices that proved tangential to the move toward Judaism and Christianity.. The minimalists believe it is necessary to acknowledge fully these “lost” or “sublimated” aspects of the Israelite past, such as the recognition of competing forms of Yahwistic and non-Yahwistic cults that rendered the religiocultural renewal of Israel problematic and, in effect, contributed to renewed Israel various “Judah-isms” that were only resolved by the Rabbinic consensus in the late first century C.E.. According to the results of historical-literary criticism and social criticism, this line of argument has decided merit.

The split in historical temperament that is dubbed maximalist vs. minimalist (in disregard of the rejection of both labels by the parties involved) is better characterized as the difference between a triumphalist and an anti-triumphalist view of ancient Israelite history, the former stressing the inevitability of nascent Israel culminating in Judaism and/or Christianity, the latter stressing the contingency of the course of events that cannot be certainly predicted, that even exhibits an element of chance, and that resists overly confident philosophical, moral, or religious explanations. Triumphalists proceed as though ancient Israel could not have developed in any other way than it did; while anti-triumphalists insist that emergent Israel was a genuine historical surprise that was neither predictable by imminent historical factors nor assured by transcendent theological claims. The difference here, I suspect, amounts to different hermeneutics and different philosophies of history, the pertinence of which for biblical studies is unfortunately dismissed as irrelevant by historians who claim an objectivity that does not rest on theory of any sort. The reality remains that all historians wrestle with these issues of interpretation. Little is gained by vilifying either of these positions. Far preferable would be to clarify the actual differences in teleologies, i.e., how various interpreters see the past impinging on the present and why they do so. No easy task, but more promising than continuing to lambaste one another in a dead end strategy that leads nowhere..

My own hermeneutic tends to be anti-triumphalist, yet I also have considerable confidence in the historical usefulness of the sources, a position that is generally associated with a triumphalist teleology. However, my confidence in the sources is not so much that they deliver indisputable facts but that they permit imaginative access into the social, cultural and religious worlds of ancient Israel.

In short, the current attitudes and practices regarding teleological orientations among historians of ancient Israel are depressingly dismal. On the one hand, some investigators deny that teleological considerations are in any way operative in their work, since - insofar as they admit to entertaining them - they insist that such biases and commitments have been “bracketed out” of their work as historians. They may have an eye for distorting biases in the work of other scholars, and those biases may be ascribed to “overt intrusion” of politics or taken as “category confusions,” unprofessional at least and deplorable in the extreme. Certain of these rejecters of teleology in their scholarly work do, however, offer useful “applications” of their findings to current problems, on the apparent assumption that the influence from scholar to commentator is one-directional, without any recognition that the present stance of the historian may significantly influence the reading of past events. On the other hand, among those historians who acknowledge teleological dimensions in their work, there is sometimes a contemptuous dismissal of rival teleologies, to the extent of claiming; that there is simply one - and only one - way to read the past. If there were only one way to read the past, there would also be only one way to read the present - a



manifest impossibility.

At present, charges and counter-charges of contamination of historical evidence fly back and forth, with regrettably insufficient attention to the substance and texture of historical claims. Too often the assumption behind historical discourse is that there is one single way of interpreting history, as if there is one single way of interpreting what is “under our noses”. Is it too much to hope that historians will acknowledge the presence of teleology in all readings, even if they have trouble seeing their own, and - granted that admission - go on to describe and evaluate how various teleological readings may highlight or overlook facets of the history under study. It is my sense, compared with the discourse among scholars in many other fields that there is a grave lack of meta-reflection among historians of ancient Israel on the actual connection between particular teleological options and the historical re-enactments they evoke.