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# The Selfish Law: A Memetic Study Of The Transition From Generational Morality To Individual Morality In Deuteronomy 24:16, Ezekiel 18, And Jeremiah 31:27-30

Jonathan Michael Gracza

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MORALITY TO INDIVIDUAL MORALITY IN DEUTERONOMY 24:16,  
EZEKIEL 18, AND JEREMIAH 31:27-30**

A Masters Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of

Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts, Religious Studies

By

Jonathan Michael Gracza

July 2016

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**ABSTRACT**

The transition from generational morality to individual moral responsibility in Judah during King Josiah's time is present in Deuteronomy, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah. However, the fact that such an approach to morality would survive a period in which Assyrian, Babylonian, and Hittite cultures exerted cultural pressure on the Israelites to conform is rather astonishing. This thesis applies memetics – a theory that applies evolutionary models to cultural development – to the topic in order to gain a more in-depth understanding of the transition from generational morality to individual moral responsibility. I argue, based on the insights that an evolutionary understanding of culture offers, that there were inherent aspects of the new approach to morality that gave individual moral responsibility a high fitness value, which allowed it to not only survive external pressures, but to survive into later rabbinic literature as the dominant form of morality. Primarily, this thesis posits that the survival of individual morality was dependent on the fact that the new morality affirmed cultural identity in contrast and opposition to Assyrian and Babylonian cultural dominance; it promotes an exclusivist mentality; and finally, it enabled Israelites to move away from the theological nihilism of generational morality.

**KEYWORDS:** meme, memetics, ethics, morality, Hebrew Bible, Josiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel

This abstract is approved as to form and content

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Victor H. Matthews  
Chairperson, Advisory Committee  
Missouri State University

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Victor H. Matthews

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I would also like to thank my wife, Katie Gracza, for all her support during this project. Not only did she encourage me throughout the writing process, but she also acted as my primary sounding board. I would not have been able to complete this thesis without her. Additionally, I would like to thank the rest of my family for listening to me go on and on about memetics and its significance to the transition from generational morality to individual responsibility in most of our conversations while I was working on my thesis.

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## INTRODUCTION

I sat in Dr. Richard Hammar's astronomy class in the spring of 2013. As I was in need of another science elective, the class seemed like it would be an interesting addition to my undergraduate experience. Not only did the course make good on that expectation, but it also started me on the path that led to this study.

One ordinary night, Dr. Hammar paused in his main lecture to better explain to students what he described as the scientific prerequisites to life: adaptation, reproduction, and metabolism. Later that semester, I wrote the following in a journal assignment that responded to the aforementioned prerequisites:

Ideas have proven over and over again that they can adapt to accommodate new information, and continuously grow. Ideas reproduce themselves by being shared by one person to another, and then that person tells another, who in turn tells another, and so on. Ideas also metabolize, as they consume immeasurable amounts of human energy every day across the globe.

One could even apply evolutionary theory to ideas, the "survival of the fittest" mentality. Weak ideas fall prey to the stronger ones, and the stronger ideas thus gain the right to "reproduce" by impregnating the minds of an audience it has convinced of its dominance.

I would put this theory out of mind for a while until I encountered the theory sketched out in the journal entry during my research of a seemingly unrelated topic. I looked into the definition of "meme" because I was curious about the specifics of the Internet<sup>1</sup> phenomenon known by the same name as the technical term in memetics that

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<sup>1</sup> These most often include a recurring picture or gif – low quality, short repeating video – with a recurring phraseology and sentence structure in the same font at the top and bottom of the picture. People will often tweak the wording slightly to fit their specific situation, but the picture used determines the specific phrasing of the point. Much like the limerick is a standardized form of communication in which certain elements can be personalized but others are integral for such a categorization, each meme has a corresponding set of as of yet undocumented – or poorly documented at the very least – unspoken guidelines.

refers to recurring cultural archetypes. This in turn led me to Richard Dawkins's theory of memetics – to which my initial hypothesis is quite similar – and the rest is research. Though the journal entry is obviously underdeveloped, it would lay the foundation for this study.

The theory was particularly intriguing to me because of a very specific potential I saw in it: the ability to appease both evolutionary scientists and social scientists. There has long been tension between the “hard” sciences – fields like biology, chemistry, and physics – and “soft” sciences – which usually refers to the social sciences. Because hard science has generally received more validation as a lens through which to understand reality,<sup>2</sup> defined as the most accurate representation of the “real” world, people often turn to biological evolution as an explanation for culture. A recent article about possible religious rituals performed by chimpanzees went so far as to say, the “evolutionary origin of religion is profoundly important to understanding human culture,”<sup>3</sup> with internally linked articles describing a general scholarly consensus about culture as an emergent property of evolution that is meant to increase the survivability of the biological unit.<sup>4</sup> This sense of the hard sciences providing a more stable foundation for true knowledge than all other approaches has bred what appears to be a type of anxiety in certain social science circles. In one response, the sociologist of religion Robert Bellah sought

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<sup>2</sup> Timothy Wilson, "Stop bullying the 'soft' sciences," *Los Angeles Times*, July 12, 2012, <http://articles.latimes.com/2012/jul/12/opinion/la-oe-wilson-social-sciences-20120712>.

<sup>3</sup> Rowan Hooper, “What do chimp ‘temples’ tell us about the evolution of religion?” *New Scientist*, March 4, 2016, <https://www.newscientist.com/article/2079630-what-do-chimp-temples-tell-us-about-the-evolution-of-religion/>.

<sup>4</sup> Rowan Hooper, “Born believers: How your brain creates God,” *New Scientist*, February 4, 2009, <https://www.newscientist.com/article/mg20126941-700-born-believers-how-your-brain-creates-god/>.

evolutionary explanations for religion, trying to justify such studies through a connection with the hard sciences.<sup>5</sup>

Explanations like Bellah's have never satisfied me. If the purpose of religion is to increase survivability, then religion is a deleterious evolutionary mutation indeed. Religion has appeared to stunt survivability time and time again. Religion did not increase the survivability of the Christian martyrs who threw themselves before beasts, nor did it affect survival positively for the Tibetan monks who immolated themselves to prove a point. Religion does not necessarily lead to increased offspring, as the Jonestown mass-murder-suicide can attest. It seems absolutely ridiculous to try to take things so complex and nuanced as culture and religion<sup>6</sup> and reduce them to simply serving biological survival, especially when they are clearly contradicted by countless instances of acting directly against biological survival. However, actions like martyrdom often serve as a way to further a religion in powerful ways.

Yet the tension between hard sciences and religion continues because scholars like Dawkins insist on seeking an exclusively biological explanation for religion, despite significant evidence pointing towards other alternatives, such as the ones this study posits. As biological evolutionary theory gains overwhelming scholarly traction, academicians seem to feel increasing pressures to make their theoretical frameworks conform to evolutionary theory in some form or other. The recent increase in material culture studies, especially the approaches to embodiment such studies explore, shows

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<sup>5</sup> Robert Bellah, "Introduction," in *The Axial Age and its Consequences*, ed. Robert Bellah and Hans Joas (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 1.

<sup>6</sup> The definition of the terms culture and religion are quite contested, but that discussion is beyond the scope of this study. My use of the terms corresponds with the general understandings of these terms.

strides in the attempt to root cultural studies in their physical and biological realities;<sup>7</sup> there are now neuroscientific studies of various religious phenomenon;<sup>8</sup> and evolutionary psychology has a larger stage. As evolutionary theory continues to become the standard in hard science fields, it is inevitable that justifications involving the emergent property of culture will also increase, despite the gross reduction of complex systems involved in such conformity.

Memetics offers an alternative. It offers a frame that understands culture as a system that follows evolutionary patterns with memes – recurring cultural archetypes – instead of genes acting as replicators. A meme can be a variety of things: a song, a certain fashion trend, or an idea. These memes spread and survive following the same principles as found in biological evolution, meaning that the fittest ideas survive. This in itself seems reflexively accurate, especially in academia. Ideas that do not bear much weight are slowly phased out in favor of new ideas. It is important to point out that memetics does not argue that “good” memes are more fit, or that “true” memes spread. Such attributes are factors, but how many ideas have persisted to hold sway over large portions of the population even after being debunked or disproved? Memetics looks at memes in a way that studies the spread of these cultural archetypes and the survivability inherently part of them. Memetics treats memes like biological units, asking such questions as: What is the meme’s cultural environment? How effectively does it reproduce, or how effectively is it dispersed in a given culture? How does it adapt to its environment? What

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<sup>7</sup> See Manuel Vasquez, *More than Belief: A Materialist Theory of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> See Dimitrios Kapogiannis, Aron K Barbey, Michael Sua, Giovanna Zambonia, Frank Kruegera, and Jordan Grafman, “Cognitive and Neural Foundations of Religious Belief,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 106 (2009): 4876–4881.

is its developmental genealogy? Memetics also helps combat the idea that there are sharp lines to be drawn between hard sciences and social sciences.

Memetics is not dualistic and fully incorporates an embodied understanding of culture. There is no separation of culture from biological actors in the sense that cultural units act on their own, but the relation of culture to people is a bit more nuanced than how this relation is often presented by the hard sciences. It allows for the incorporation of evolutionary models into the social sciences without sacrificing the complexity of the subject matter. While it is true that humans create culture, the current actors on culture have inherited an already established framework. We do not create culture *ex nihilo* on an individual level. We affect culture, but we are formed by a preexisting culture before we in turn affect it. We inherit our ideas from some other source. It is this genealogy that memetics observes and analyzes.

The “so what” of memetics then becomes analogous to the “so what” of genetic studies. Why do certain genes affect the body a certain way (why do certain cultural units, or memes, affect an ideological pool a certain way)? What are the genetic differences between two biological entities, and how is that significant (what is the difference between two trending fashion styles, and how does that significantly affect identity formation within a group of people)? From a practical perspective, how do we “genetically engineer” a cultural unit so that it is more viable, meaning that it spreads more effectively and has a higher rate of survival? How do environmental factors affect its spread, and how can we make a meme more adaptable to a target audience?

Perhaps other theoretical and methodological frameworks cover these questions, but memetics offers a generalization of these theories into a framework that offers a

particularly strong synergy with biological processes. While it is true that in several cases memetics simply renames already established concepts – such as “culture” being exchanged for “memplex,” “cultural unit” for “meme”– the true innovation is not so much in vocabulary, but in the accompanying paradigm shift. Observing culture through the lens of memetics allows scholars to resolve the tension between the impetus to conform to evolutionary studies and the desire to maintain the significance and irreducibility of their subject matter. Memetics acknowledges the models of fitness-based evolution espoused by the hard sciences by saying that memes spread in a similar fashion, but by arguing that the replicators that define cultures are non-biological cultural units, memetics relies on already established social scientific methodologies to interpret and understand cultural information. Memetics accepts that biological factors affect social and cultural events, and vice versa, but treats the two as separate systems. However, it is the acknowledgment of the evolutionary framework that sets memetics apart from other cultural studies approaches. By focusing on the fitness and adaptability of a meme, memetics goes beyond a cultural studies’ approach to simply document cultural development and provide an explanation that excludes the traits inherent in the idea. Memetics offers the potential to explore which inherent characteristic in recurring cultural archetypes leads to its cultural spread and historical survival.

The specific subject of this study developed alongside my understanding of memetics. Bellah’s work on the evolution of religion informed my studies, and he was particularly fascinated by what Karl Jaspers described as the “Axial Age.”<sup>9</sup> The Axial Age demarcates a time between the sixth century BCE and the fourth century BCE during

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<sup>9</sup> See Karl Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History* (London: Routledge, 1953).

which seemingly geographically separate cultures all experienced ideological upheavals. This time includes Plato's teachings, the religious innovation of the Israelite prophets, Confucius's teachings, and those of Siddhartha Gautama. Such an explosive simultaneous development immediately piqued my interest. As my undergraduate background had a Hebrew Bible focus, I was already familiar with the prophet Jeremiah's teachings (which spanned from approximately 624 BCE to 587 BCE), and so I first looked there for ways to apply memetics to such an ideologically significant era. I stumbled across Jeremiah 31:29,<sup>10</sup> which I then connected to Ezekiel 18:2, the teachings of an Israelite prophet who was active from approximately 592 BCE.<sup>11</sup> The repetition of the phrase "the parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" combined with the differing sources piqued my interest. What first appeared to be a minor theological statement turned out to be a significant shift in understanding of a fundamental belief: who exactly is responsible for the morality of one's actions. The proverb that both Ezekiel and Jeremiah refute indicates that the moral culpability rests on Israel's ancestors, or the fathers who ate the sour grapes. This theological reformation that both Jeremiah and Ezekiel called for was made possible in part due to the activities of King Josiah, who ruled Judah from 638 BCE to 609 BCE, as Josiah enacted a centralization of Yahweh worship that included the destruction of competing cults. Josiah did this primarily because of his rediscovery of the Book of the Law, what is now referred to as Deuteronomy in the Hebrew Bible. These three actors, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Josiah, began what would eventually lead to the transition from generational retribution – the

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<sup>10</sup> See chapter 2 for the pericope.

<sup>11</sup> See chapter 2 for the pericope.

practice of also punishing the relatives of the one who broke a law and the greater theological view that the Israelites were being punished for the transgressions of their ancestors – to individual moral responsibility.

The fact that this shift in Israel’s understanding of morality – for which Deuteronomy 26:16 seems to set the precedent – took place is evident through the many studies of these pericopes. However, while such studies often highlight that this shift took place and even look at why such a shift was made, they do not explore why this new ideology was successful. They often discuss that it was in direct contrast to “Assyrian Imperialism,” but give no meaningful explanation of why Israel’s culture and views on morality would have been able to survive overwhelming social and cultural pressures or that a new, non-dominant Israelite ideology would eventually overthrow the status quo. These pericopes represent the beginning of this significant cultural and ethical shift and, as such, offer valuable insights into its development. This is where the usefulness of memetics becomes apparent for this study. By offering a framework that looks at the emergence and survivability of an ideology, this study seeks to explore *why* the new paradigm of individual moral responsibility arose and was able to overcome both internal and external cultural pressures to become the dominant ideology within the Israelite tradition.

This thesis will explore the dynamics of why individual moral responsibility survived despite what appears to have been overwhelming cultural and social pressures by applying a revitalized version of memetics to ideas found in Deuteronomy 24:16, Ezekiel 18, and Jeremiah 31:27-30. Chapter 1 will focus on the theory of memetics. The first part of the chapter will chart the theory’s history and progression, from its first

appearance in Richard Dawkins's genetic studies, to the more recent scholarship on the theory. Following that, the chapter will provide a defense of the theory, focusing on both the rhetoric that has gone hand in hand with the theory as well as a more technical defense of the scholarly merit of the theory. In particular, the rhetorical defense in this thesis arose as a response to the emerging trend of dismissing memetics's applicability solely on the basis of the rhetoric and goals of its early developers. Such critiques are primarily pushback against Dawkins's and Daniel Dennett's – another major contributor to early memetics – agendas with the theory due to their close ties to the New Atheist movement. It is unfortunate that a theory's merit would be based on its rhetoric, but this chapter aims to ease those tensions in addition to its more important role of revitalizing a flagging theory. The final portion of Chapter 1 will nuance the theory in a way so as to better highlight its usefulness in studying the Hebrew Bible.

Chapter 2 will focus on contextualizing the pericopes of this thesis. The section on Deuteronomy will go into greater detail about the nuances of the Israelite legal tradition, its influences, and the subtle redaction found in it that contradicts the previous canon. The section on Ezekiel will explore the specific context of Ezekiel, the particulars of the proverb “the parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge,” and the social dynamics of power inherent in the position of prophet. The final section of Chapter 2 will focus on Jeremiah and the specifics of his context, particularly interplay between the new ideas he was preaching about and how they affected his personal survival.

Chapter 3 will bring the topics of Chapters 1 and 2 together to establish some possible reasons for the survival of individual moral responsibility. By applying

memetics to the context explored in Chapter 2, Chapter 3 will look at the cultural environmental factors that allowed for the rise of the new meme, as well as establishing the qualities inherent to the meme itself that made it more adaptable to the Israelite context than was generational retribution. Additionally, Chapter 3 will look at how the meme of individual moral responsibility survived in later Israelite traditions.

## CHAPTER 1: MEMES, MEMES, MEMES

Though the vocabulary of memetics is in common usage now due to the explosive popularity of Internet memes like the ALS ice-bucket challenge or recurring visual images, the theory itself has been neglected in academic circles. This chapter will attempt to provide a cohesive and comprehensive introduction to the theory, as well as address several of the issues associated with it. Because there are several different conceptualizations of the theory, I will first describe how I will be using the theory, and provide supporting arguments for it later in the chapter. Additionally, because this study focuses on a contest of ideas, I will be using the term “idea” in a way that denotes it as a subcategory of memes, taking on all the properties that such a categorization would entail based on the definition found in the introduction and that will be expounded on in this chapter. I will also be using the term “ideology” in this thesis to refer to a group of interconnected ideas that form a more cohesive system of thought.

Memetics is essentially an expansion of the applicability of evolutionary models to include recurring cultural archetypes: memes. Though there has been a tendency to try to explain culture<sup>12</sup> as an emergent property of evolution, such attempts seem to fall short of the standards set by both evolutionary studies and studies of culture. Understanding of the “evolutionary algorithm”<sup>13</sup> is an ever-progressing field, and it is important to ensure that the analogy between memetics and biological evolution does not become outdated so as to better reflect the new developments in the field. To satisfy such criteria, my use of

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<sup>12</sup> Hooper, “What do Chimp ‘Temples’ Tell us About the Evolution of Religion?”

<sup>13</sup> See page 16 for further discussion of Daniel Dennette’s understanding of the evolutionary algorithm.

memetics will align with Richard Dawkins's early conceptualization of memes in general, and I will use it analogously with his "selfish gene" theories and their later development. Though Dawkins's conceptualization of memes is extremely underdeveloped and acts as more of an appendix to his argument of the gene being the central component to evolution, his study demonstrates an important shift from the tribal-focused evolutionary models espoused by biologists like Konrad Lorenz.<sup>14</sup> Through this analogy, my understanding of memetics is that cultural archetypes – and their random<sup>15</sup> mutations – are the driving forces of cultural change.

Though some believe that there is an inherent irony in applying memetics to biblical studies due to the anti-religious polemic of Dawkins,<sup>16</sup> I have found memetics to be a useful tool when used to compare conflicting ideologies. The flaws its naysayers address are very real and require better explanation; however, despite the many critiques, memetics offers new and valuable insights into a text that has had many theoretical models forced upon it. Not only does it provide a fresh paradigm, but it also creates an avenue for cross-disciplinary discourse.<sup>17</sup> Due to the probability that scholars on both sides of the spectrum – those who would disregard religious studies in favor of natural scientific explanations and those who would disregard natural scientific explanations in favor of social scientific ones – would take issue with my topic, I will present a defense of my use of the theory in accordance with my topic in this first chapter.

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<sup>14</sup> See Konrad Lorenz, *On Aggression* (London: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>15</sup> Daniel Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1995), 48.

<sup>16</sup> As Joseph Poulshock writes that the theory is anti-theistic and anti-theology. Joseph Poulshock, "The Problems and Potential of Memetics," *Journal of Psychology and Theology Society* 30 (2001): 69.

<sup>17</sup> Maria Kronfeldner agrees that it is a useful aspect of the theory, though she does argue that it is the *only* useful aspect of the theory. I will go into a more detailed response to her critique later in the paper.

There are several facets of memetics that scholars often critique. First, there is the critique of the rhetoric involved, whose strongest voice is Joseph Poulshock. Second, many critique the validity of analogizing biological processes to cultural/social processes. Third, memetics is often critiqued as bringing nothing new to the table. This chapter will explain in detail what memetics is (theory) and how it can serve as a useful approach to understanding biblical texts and the events they record (method), address the concerns of critics of memetics, and clarify how I will apply the theory to the transition from generational morality to individual moral responsibility during the transitional period of King Josiah's reign.

### **The Origin Of Memetics**

Memetics is a theoretical framework prominently promoted by the evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins in his 1976 book *The Selfish Gene*.<sup>18</sup> His theory is based on the notion that all of reality – which he reduces to a purely materialist reality – progresses according to evolutionary/natural selection principles,<sup>19</sup> specifically drawing on an analogy based on his view of genes acting as *active replicators*. He moves beyond the inherently tribal-survivability-focused views of his contemporaries – who understand evolution as individuals working towards the survival of their tribe – and argues that genes are the basis of evolution and that they inherently replicate – or reproduce – themselves. The “active” aspect of the replication refers to a replicator that not only recreates itself, but also continuously creates an environment that further engenders its

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<sup>18</sup> Dawkins is the scholar who coined the term “memetics.”

<sup>19</sup> Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 189 and 192.

own replication. Dawkins proposes that memes – “tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes, fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches” – “should be regarded as living structures, not just metaphorically, but technically.”<sup>20</sup> He argues that when one “plants a fertile meme in your mind you literally parasitize your brain.” Essentially, the meme acts as a parasite that repurposes the “genetic mechanism” of the host.<sup>21</sup> A song that is particularly difficult to get out of one’s head is a perfect example of this type of phenomenon. He also argues that these memes have a real and measurable effect on the physical world. Dawkins uses the “god meme”<sup>22</sup> as an example, arguing that its survival value is tied to its psychological appeal and that this is the criterion that defines how successful a particular meme – and idea, as a subcategory of memes – will be. Though this may seem like a compelling argument on the surface, it becomes woefully inadequate and overly simplistic in light of the demonizers of memetics.<sup>23</sup>

The next stage of memetics was pioneered by the philosopher and cognitive scientist Daniel Dennett in his book *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea* (1995). Dennett expounds on Dawkins’s idea in *The Selfish Gene*, though Dennett seems to be drawing more heavily on Darwin’s original writings.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps the most significant contribution Dennett makes to the discussion of memetics is his reevaluation of evolutionary models as algorithmic in nature. He describes an algorithm as satisfying three criteria: substrate neutrality – meaning that the medium is irrelevant for the equation, and only the logical

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 194.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> See Maria Kronfeldner, *Darwinian Creativity and Memetics* (Durham, UK: Acumen Publishing, 2011) and Poulshock, “The Problems and Potential of Memetics.”

<sup>24</sup> Dennett, *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea*, 62.

structure matters; underlying mindlessness – meaning that each step in the process is “simple enough for a dutiful idiot to perform”;<sup>25</sup> and finally, guaranteed results.<sup>26</sup> In particular, his criterion of “underlying mindlessness” is the most abrasive and least well explained. Further reading of his book leads one to understand underlying mindlessness in a way that represents it more as a mechanical gear that simply performs a pre-established action and is best understood in light of his criteria of guaranteed, constant, and reproducible results. He then applies this understanding to evolutionary models, saying that Darwin did not discover “one algorithm, but, rather, a large class of related algorithms that he had no clear way to distinguish.”<sup>27</sup>

Additionally, Dennett clarifies what he means by the term “meme.” He labels memes as ideas, though “not the simple ideas of Locke and Hume (the idea of red, or the idea of round or hot or cold), but the sort of complex ideas that form themselves into *distinct memorable units*.”<sup>28</sup> Though this criterion is somewhat vague concerning what constitutes a “distinct memorable unit,” it does take steps towards better defining the meme. Additionally, Dennett argues that the connection between biological evolution and memetic evolution is not metaphorical, but that memetics is a “phenomenon that obeys the laws of natural selection quite exactly.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, 51.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, 52.

<sup>28</sup> Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, 336.

<sup>29</sup> Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, 345

Psychologist Susan Blackmore has also made significant contributions to the field of memetics. Directly inspired by Dennett's book,<sup>30</sup> Blackmore tackles a few of her predecessor's assumptions. She seems to argue that though there is an algorithmic nature to natural selection processes, the chaotic nature of variables make prediction quite difficult. Perhaps her greatest contribution to this study is her argument that social biologists miss an important factor:

Their [social biologists'] achievement is to explain much of human behavior in terms of the past selection of genes; to apply Darwin's great theory to psychology. But in concentrating on genes alone, they miss out on the importance and power of the social world. To stick to their Darwinian framework they have to treat all of culture as part of the environment of genetic selection, and so they fail to see that it has its own evolutionary processes and its own power to effect change.<sup>31</sup>

By reducing all of culture to gene-based determinism, Dawkins and scholars like him ignore all the research that has been done in other fields concerning culture. It is irresponsible of scholars to ignore compelling research simply because they want to stick with oversimplified explanations within their own discipline. Blackmore makes an important point by showcasing this weakness, and thus opened the possibility for scholars such as myself to use memetics to explain culture in a way that does not reduce it to genetic programming and maintain culture's integrity as a complex social – not exclusively biological – system.

There are of course other scholars who have contributed to memetic scholarship, and there was even a *Journal of Memetics* for two issues from May to December in 1997. However, interest in the theory flagged, and its most prominent scholars have turned to

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<sup>30</sup> Susan Blackmore, *The Meme Machine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), xix.

<sup>31</sup> This is a point with which I enthusiastically agree, as indicated in the introduction of this thesis. Blackmore, *The Meme Machine*, 235.

other interests in the last decade to the point that there are essentially no applications of the theory to cultural studies. This study will not only use the theories of previous memeticists, but will also attempt to modernize the theory in light of more recent research, as well as respond to the critiques that seem to have led to the theory's loss of popularity.

### **The Importance Of Being Polite**

It is unfortunate that the rhetoric surrounding the study of memetics has turned off several scholars from its pursuit. As rhetoric strongly influences the survivability of an idea – a notion I will expand on later in the thesis – it seems only fitting to deal with the theory's rhetorical issues, especially since I am trying to help it gain exposure through my study.

Emotions seem to run high when it comes to memetics. Joseph Poulshock, applied linguistics professor, indicates that while there is a political isolationism in other fields, there is a particularly strong attack on theology and people within a religiously affirming system of belief. He argues that memeticists seem to be interested in deconstructing religion a bit too much by presenting religion as disingenuous or as a fulfillment of some base need. This notion is reinforced by philosopher Daniel Gers's article "Memes vs. God: Dennett and Dawkins Take on Religion," in which Gers shows that both Dawkins and Dennett attempt to use memetics to deconstruct religion.<sup>32</sup> In light of this, I must agree with Poulshock's argument that the *rhetoric* involved in memetics tends to isolate and reduce. The scholarship can attack religion aggressively and unprofessionally to a

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<sup>32</sup> Matt Gers, "Memes vs. God: Dennett and Dawkins Take on Religion," *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature, and Culture* 2/4 (2008): 508-520.

point that people with religious beliefs would feel insulted. However, I do not see the theory in its basic form as inherently anti-theological.<sup>33</sup> Even within the plethora of religious beliefs having to do with the origin and development – or lack thereof – of biological entities, evolutionary theism has gained momentum.<sup>34</sup> In fact, Andre Lascaris, theologian and linguist, uses *mimetic* theory – not to be confused with memetic theory, though the two are closely related – to try to provide an answer to the theodicy problem. Mimetics is not precisely the same theory as memetics, though they are very similar and possibly even observe the same phenomena. Mimetics was developed by the philosopher? Rene Girard, and it observes mimicry, rivalry born from mimicry, and scapegoat religious dynamics. Mark Heim, professor of religion and science, describes the theory as having “to do with the source of human desires.”<sup>35</sup> In comparison with our close primate relatives, humans are born with a relatively thin instinctual repertoire and a long period of plastic development. We fix on certain key models in our environment and “update our software” by imitating them, by building an internal life that is an inference drawn from our construal of the inner lives of certain others. Not only is the idea of evolution considered feasible within a theological framework by many self-described religious individuals, but Lascaris uses mimetics to provide a fairly compelling foundational argument within Christian theology/philosophy of religion.

It seems as though when an observant intelligence becomes aware of the effect of procreation, then procreation often becomes more guided and artificial. For example,

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<sup>33</sup> Though I suppose that would depend on one’s personal view of theology.

<sup>34</sup> Evolutionary theism is a kind of divinely guided evolutionary development. See Steve Badger, *Christian Perspectives on Origin* (Springfield, MO: Evangel University Press, 2011).

<sup>35</sup> Mark Heim, “A cross-section of sin: the mimetic character of human nature in biological and theological perspective,” in *Evolution and Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004): Kindle location 3576.

humans have selectively bred livestock and crops to achieve certain goals. With this analogy in mind, it seems that although the rhetoric of memetics can be reductive to the point of rejection by religious believers, the theory itself allows for – though does not necessitate – a higher intelligence involved in the evolutionary process.<sup>36</sup>

Theologian Mark Heim offers an alternative view to evolutionary psychology and theology in which he proposes that evolutionary psychology actually provides a plausible positivist framework for religious ethics in conjunction with mimetics.<sup>37</sup> Additionally, he also provides an excellent example of the cross-theoretical work that can be done with memetics and mimetics. Heim provides an alternate view to genetics-based behavioral understanding by arguing that social interactions are too complex to be completely programmed by genes, opting instead for a more nuanced explanation. Genes simply provide the *type* of response – like hostility or friendliness – but the interaction is then influenced by social cues.<sup>38</sup> However, because humans have an inherent programmable quality and an openness to incorporate data, this leads to the ability to pick up on social cues - as well as having a certain level of choice in which cues to pick up on and which to ignore or avoid – and incorporate them into more complex interactions.<sup>39</sup>

Heim simply takes for granted that memes exist and that their spread is mediated through Girard's mimetic theory. While looking at religion with a specific focus on

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<sup>36</sup> I would add that this holds, regardless of the theory's originator's, to Richard Dawkins's personally held convictions.

<sup>37</sup> Mark Heim, "A Cross-Section of Sin: the Mimetic Character of Human Nature in Biological and Theological Perspective," *Evolution and Ethics*, ed. Phillip Clayton and Jeffrey Schloss (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 255

<sup>38</sup> Heim, "A cross-section of sin: the mimetic character of human nature in biological and theological perspective," Kindle location 3514.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

Christianity, Heim argues that sin “deforms the medium of mimetic communion that turns this powerful emergent human dynamic [mimetics] to destructive and conflictive results rather than those that build up human community.”<sup>40</sup> He defines these deformations as actions that are inherently detrimental to the community and to individual well-being – though he does not limit this well-being to just the physical. The spread of memes which have a negative effect on society, which is achieved through sin – which Heim equates with negative mimetic processes – has a detrimental effect on society. Heim then goes on to explain that religions are particularly effective at curbing such negative mimetic interactions.<sup>41</sup>

In light of these examples, scholars have used evolutionary reasoning within religiously affirming contexts for some time, which is at the heart of memetics. This would seem to indicate that Poulshock’s comments about memetics’ inherent anti-religious nature seem to be based on somewhat incomplete data. To be sure, there are those who would use memetics to discredit and attack religion, but there is the possibility of effectively applying it within religiously affirming systems of belief. Such an understanding of memetics moves beyond Dawkins’s and Dennett’s moralizing and vilification of religion as a whole and allows for a broader audience to see the usefulness of memetics. Instead of using memetics to further Dawkins’s own agenda of establishing an overly simplistic and generalized understanding of religion as a “bad” meme, this conception of memetics allows for the study to reach a greater potential. The theory no longer says that a certain meme should be eradicated simply because the scholar

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<sup>40</sup> Heim, “A cross-section of sin: the mimetic character of human nature in biological and theological perspective,” Kindle location 3662.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

disagrees with it; instead, it provides an avenue to observe and understand why certain memes survive while others do not.

### **And Yet The Bumblebee Flies**

Although rhetoric and professional courtesy are of course important aspects of academic pursuits, questioning its logical consistency and scholarly merit are perhaps its most significant areas of critique for memetics. Maria Kronfeldner, philosopher of science, sets out to prove the triviality of memetics in *Darwinian Creativity and Memetics*, arguing instead for what seems to be some form of rational choice theory. She takes issue with memetics based on the strength of the analogy with biological evolution, and she perceives a problem specifically with three comparisons. First, the origination analogy, which looks at the validity of an analogy, with origination within biological systems as the source and cultural systems as the target of the analogy. Secondly, the ontological analogy, which looks at the validity of comparing biological and cultural units, or *entities* as Kronfeldner calls them; and, finally, the egoism analogy, which looks at “the *causal role* certain entities play.”<sup>42</sup> To analyze these three analogies, she asks if there are sufficient similarities between biology and culture to make these assumptions. Furthermore, she asks whether the theory has explanatory force and whether it has heuristic value. She ultimately comes to the conclusion that not only can one not prove that physical memes exist, but that any contribution memetics could make is trivial, arguing instead that “[a]lthough we do not have God-like creativity, we are nonetheless the authors of culture: creating, transmitting and selecting ideational units that are not

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<sup>42</sup> Maria Kronfeldner, *Darwinian Creativity and Memetics* (Durham, UK: Acumen Publishing, 2011), 11-12.

replicators in the narrow sense and have no existence or causal force that is independent from their authors.”<sup>43</sup>

I take issue with Kronfeldner’s conclusions on several of these points. First, although she is not the only one to argue that the existence of memes is questionable, there are a few things to consider. Derek Gatherer, bioinformatics researcher, voices similar concerns about the theory in “Reply to commentaries by Derek Gatherer.” His argument boils down to the statement “there are no such things as . . . memes.”<sup>44</sup> Essentially, he argues that no one has found any physical evidence of the existence of memes, and that unlike other “HYPERs”<sup>45</sup> – theories that are later substantiated – there are no set rigorous criteria for analysis.

Gatherer makes these comments in response to the introduction in the second edition of *The Selfish Gene* (1989), where Dawkins tells the reader that he had failed to make clear that there *is* a physical manifestation of the meme in the brain that is yet undiscovered. However, I find several flaws in Gatherer’s arguments. Though he says that memes do not have physical manifestation,<sup>46</sup> I would posit that memes necessarily have physical manifestations in a hard materialist worldview. Even Gatherer admits that it is difficult to disprove the existence of the incorporeal meme at the very least.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Kronfeldner, *Darwinian Creativity and Memetics*, 135

<sup>44</sup> Derek Gatherer, “Reply to commentaries by Derek Gatherer,” *Journal of Mimetics* 3 (1999): 30.

<sup>45</sup> Gatherer defines HYPERs as theories that are later substantiated. He uses the example that researchers had theorized the existence of genes before such a claim could be substantiated, but that such substantiation had clear criteria. See Gatherer, “Reply to commentaries by Derek Gatherer.”

<sup>46</sup> Gatherer posits that Dawkins talks about two different memes: Dawkins A and Dawkins B. Dawkins A is the incorporeal, phenotypical meme, whereas Dawkins B is the physical manifestation of the meme in the host’s brain. *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Though Gatherer’s phrasing is a bit more pejorative and implies a non-falsifiability to the meme, he essentially admits that he cannot disprove their existence.

However, unless Gatherer is comfortable with the concept of a non-material substance, one must accept that there is an underlying, physical substance that creates the observable effects of memes: the physical meme. Whether this physical meme is a grouping of neurons or a specific chemical reaction in the brain is beyond the scope of this project. However, acknowledging that immaterial memes exist necessitates such a corresponding physiological component for these archetypes to exist.

Even Kronfeldner concedes the point that to argue that cultural archetypes or unique cultural units do not exist is problematic, since the social sciences have based their study on this very fact.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, if cultural archetypes exist, then they necessarily have corresponding manifestations in the physical brain. What these manifestations look like or are would fall more under the purview of neuroscience, but genes themselves were not discovered until after Darwin's natural selection theory was proposed. And the human genome project was not finished until 2003, significantly later than when the theory involving natural selection was developed.

Expecting a theory that has largely been ignored to have as complete a set of data as a project that has received a wide audience and an abundance of research is simply unreasonable. David Hull, philosopher of biology, points out that memetics seems to be judged rather harshly when compared to other developing theories, going so far as to say that scholars should not yet worry about defining memetics.<sup>49</sup> That being said, since it seems extremely difficult to argue that cultural archetypes do not exist in some form – be it simply as groupings of information or in physical form, as memetics argues – without

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<sup>48</sup> Kronfeldner, *Darwinian Creativity and Memetics*, 76.

<sup>49</sup> David Hull "Taking memetics seriously: Memetics will be what we make it," *Darwinizing Culture: The Status of Memetics as a Science*, ed. R. Aunger (New York: Oxford University Press. 2001), 65.

completely deconstructing modern academia as Kronfeldner indicates, and since many of the critics previously cited in this paper seem to be uncomfortable with the concept of free-floating ideas, cultural archetypes must necessarily have physical manifestations in the brain in some form.

I must also disagree with Kronfeldner's view that humans are the "end all creators of ideas."<sup>50</sup> She seems to be positing a rational choice theory approach by arguing that "we are nonetheless the authors of culture: creating, transmitting and selecting ideational units that are not replicators in the narrow sense and have no existence or causal force that is independent from their authors."<sup>51</sup> Rational choice theory has always seemed far too generous regarding human capacity and is not particularly well founded. Not only are thought processes energy, i.e., nutrition, dependent,<sup>52</sup> but authority structures and social institutions also heavily influence decision-making. It seems rather idealistic to claim that human creativity is based solely within the individual. Such approaches portray social networks as far too atomistic.

The sociologist Bruno Latour's redefining of the social is particularly helpful in understanding memetics in contrast to Kronfeldner. Latour presents an object-oriented ontology that actually allows for objects, such as the physical manifestation memes, to exert agency in some form. He uses the example of a television remote control. Such an object exerts its agency either to enable or to restrict human agency, as Latour argues that the device does not require one to stand up to change the channel, which has a

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<sup>50</sup> Kronfeldner, *Darwinian Creativity and Memetics*, 135.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid

<sup>52</sup> See Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking: Fast & Slow* (New York: Straus and Giroux, 2011).

measurable effect on human behavior.<sup>53</sup> Latour actually extends this and goes so far as to allow for the existence of supernatural beings, or non-human “entities,” as real agents due to their effects on human individuals and collectives.<sup>54</sup> Regardless of how one defines supernatural being, his work in redefining agency allows for a weakening of Kronfeldner’s position. If such agents, whether material or immaterial, affect the agency and behavior of humans as Latour posits, ascribing sole creative responsibility to individual humans seems even more untenable, and perhaps even a completely uncontextualized understanding of human cultural creativity.

I do agree with Kronfeldner to the extent that preliminary memeticists went too far in claiming that creativity and meme generation are completely random and that people are little more than ideological hosts whose agency is usurped by the meme.<sup>55</sup> Yet that is not how I interpret memetics. Even within biological evolution, there is such a thing as artificial selection, as mentioned earlier in the chapter. As soon as consciousness enters the equation, there is much less “randomness.” Humanity breeds cows for various traits, dogs for various purposes, and crops for better harvests. If minds have that kind of effect on the world through enacting physical changes to reality, then how is it a stretch to assume that the mind can analogously affect memes by selectively *breeding* them? We pick and choose the types of memes we want to replicate: every day we choose our outfits and the ideologies we espouse and talk about with others. Although non-human objects and entities are agents exerting effects on the world, an individual also has a choice, although delimited by the non-human agent, regarding to what extent the agent

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<sup>53</sup> Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 85-86.

<sup>54</sup> Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 57.

<sup>55</sup> Kronfeldner, *Darwinian Creativity and Memetics*, 130.

will provoke or constrain one's behavior. (E.g., a person with a remote control in hand could still stand up and walk to the TV to change the channel with it.) These activities can be viewed analogously to selective breeding.

Kronfeldner seems to be committing an additional fallacy: assuming that biological natural selection and memetic natural selection are at the same stage of development. Biological evolution happened much more randomly than it does now that humans have taken measures to control the breeding practices of certain species. As a comparison, consider this: the human genome project did not fully map the human genetic structure until 2003, but there have been written accounts mapping out the history and details of ideas and memes for thousands of years. The Rig Veda espouses a particular meme on the creation of reality, the code of Hammurabi codifies memes having to do with social hierarchies and property laws, and the works of Homer attempt to map out history.

Of course there seems to be more intentionality in how memes are spread than in biological systems, but it is simply due to the fact that cultural and historical studies are better developed fields and have been around for much longer than genetic studies. People became aware of the effect they were able to exert on memes much earlier than they had a precise understanding of genetics. If we stay true to the analogy that biological replicators and memes follow similar procreative evolutionary algorithms, then we must fully embrace the realities of both biological and cultural evolution, not simply work with idealized concepts of fully randomized biological evolution and fully controlled cultural evolution. Intentional genetic alteration and selection is a possibility within biological evolutionary systems. Adding self-awareness – or simply contextual awareness,

depending on one's stance on consciousness – to the equation seems to make artificial selection dominant or quicker at the very least over natural selection, thus creating more controlled and intentional procreative products. Understanding artificial selection as part of the evolutionary process allows for a more fully realized understanding of memetics and biological processes.

### **A Meme, By Any Other Name**

Another common critique is questioning what, if any, new contributions memetics offers. There are already theoretical frameworks that analyze many of the same things that memetics looks at: the previously mentioned mimetic theory observes how social realities are transferred through mimicry; rhetorical studies look at power dynamics inherent in the text; and rational choice theory offers a paradigm with which to interpret individuals' choices. However, memetics offers explanations for a wider array of phenomena than these individual theories.

Though it is true that all-encompassing theories have become much less favored in the social sciences, memetics offers the chance to account for more variables than these isolated theories by taking biological factors, power and domination, and communications studies into account, to name just a few areas. Memetics, at least in the way that I am using the theory and method, would be able to incorporate both intentional memetic spread by cognizant participants, as well as non-intentional spread by hosts that are not actively trying to spread a meme. It could account for the heavily edited and thoroughly intentional public address of a politician, as well as the unwitting racist comment made by a careless person, both of which could spread the meme of racism. It

could potentially allow for factors like how the mental capacity of the audience affects how effectively a meme spreads or how other biological limits affect memes to be taken into account, as well as other factors like non-human material objects and immaterial entities. It would also open up the pathway to broaden the conversation with disciplines outside of religious studies by providing a crossover between evolutionary studies and cultural studies methodologies. Kronfeldner trivializes the significance of this aspect when she says it seems to be the only merit.<sup>56</sup> Though this can hardly be considered a small achievement, memetics offers even more than that.

While several academicians argue that memetics has no predictive power<sup>57</sup> – a stance that many marketing/advertising, theoretical computational studies, and geneticists would disagree with<sup>58</sup> – there is a particularly useful application, which is determining why certain ideas seem to have survived overpowering odds, of which this study is an example. These instances provide problems for the other theories. The survival of obscure ideas – like individual morality in the face of overwhelming cultural and legal precedent for generational morality – does not seem rational when held onto in the face of physical extermination or even cultural pressure. King Josiah’s presentation of Deuteronomy and the new approach to morality inherent therein provide just such an example: a dominated culture survives despite overpowering odds.

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<sup>56</sup> Kronfeldner, *Darwinian Creativity and Memetics*, 132.

<sup>57</sup> See Gatherer, “Reply to commentaries by Derek Gatherer.”

<sup>58</sup> See Jianyong Sun, Jonathan M. Garibaldi, Yongquan Zhang, and Abdallah Al-Shawabkeh, “A Multi-Cycled Sequential Memetic Computing Approach for Constrained Optimization,” *Information Sciences* 340 (2016): 175-190; and Ning Dong and Yuping Wang, “A Memetic Differential Evolution Algorithm Based on Dynamic Preference for Constrained Optimization Problems,” *Journal of Applied Mathematics* 2014 (2014): 1-15.

If fully embraced, Girard's mimetic theory would argue that the already dominant ideology should eventually come to be the only ideology due to its larger pool of hosts, which did not happen in the case of this study. In fact, Girard's theory would eventually lead to a homogenized pool of ideas, which is not only not the case at present or any time in the past – ancient Israel included – but does not seem likely to come about. Girard's mimetics simply does not have the ability to explain ideological diversity the way memetics does.

Additionally, rhetorical studies tend to focus on analyzing the medium more than the content, and therefore would be ill-fit to fully answer why a certain idea survived as opposed to another. Instead, rhetorical studies primarily give insight into power dynamics. And yet despite well- established power hierarchies, certain ideologies survive though they should not have according to various theories. It would seem that the difference must then lie with the memes, unless one wants to argue that there is something ontologically superior about a given ideological group. It is possible to isolate what attributes may have contributed to the survivability of one meme compared to another by placing the focus of study on the memes themselves, all the while taking the effect of human will and artificial selection into account.

Poulshock argues that memetics, as it currently stands, depends on circular reasoning due to the fact that there are no set parameters of what might be the ideological equivalent of evolutionary fitness, thus creating a tautological system. However, it seems to be an unfair expectation of memetics to demand that it have a complete set of criteria without any trial and error. Just as evolutionary fitness is established through observation

and speculation about which biological traits help an organism survive,<sup>59</sup> so too must ideological evolutionary fitness be established through observation and augmented with speculation. By observing the aspects of an ideology that survived versus those that did not, it is possible to come to certain conclusions about what makes an ideology, especially one that seems unlikely to survive given the social and cultural pressures against it, more viable than those it is in conflict with. The fitness parameters of ideological survivability have simply not yet been absolutely established, just as was the case with the fledgling evolutionary theory.

### **Difficulties with the text**

Another issue that could arise in this study is the difficulty in ascertaining any empirical<sup>60</sup> cultural data from when Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel were written in the seventh and sixth centuries. This difficulty is further highlighted by the already difficult task of providing empirical, neurological evidence of memes.<sup>61</sup> Mark Brett, Hebrew Bible scholar, says that “Deuteronomy is a tissue of quotations drawn from numerous locations of culture, reflecting a series of adaptations in response to political, economic[,] and cultural challenges,” which would thus make identifying the exact cultural data needed a practically impossible task.”<sup>62</sup> I see no difference between this

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<sup>59</sup> See Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (Irvine, CA: Xist Publishing, 2014).

<sup>60</sup> Memetics stresses the absolute need for empirical data. See Poulshock, “The Problems and Potential of Memetics,” 69.

<sup>61</sup> Indeed, there are even disagreements about when Deuteronomy was written, let alone being able to have accurate memetic data.

<sup>62</sup> Mark Brett, “Genocide in Deuteronomy: postcolonial variations on mimetic desire,” in *Seeing Signals and Reading Signs: The Art of Exegesis: Studies in Honour of Antony F. Campbell, SJ for his Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Mark A. O'Brien and Howard N. Wallace (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 76.

difficulty and issues with other exegetical approaches, though memetics admittedly gains most of its relevance from the analysis of empirical data.<sup>63</sup> These issues are further exacerbated by the fact that the pericopes in the study are edited works that do not necessarily represent the dominant ideologies of the time. However, I view the editing of these works as analogous to selective breeding.

An individual with power over a system – be it biological or ideological dominance over a system – establishes what traits are desirable and culls the traits that are undesirable. King Josiah – the cultural and ideological equivalent of an apex predator within his “ecosystem”/kingdom – would have been in the best position to propagate cultural and ideological “breeding.” Lauren Monroe, Hebrew Bible scholar, describes King Josiah’s activities, saying, “Josiah’s destruction of sanctuaries, altars, and divine representations quite literally cleaved the space in which the Mosaic distinction could be drawn. Like the Taliban’s destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas in March 2001, Josiah’s rites of violence served to rid the land of what Mullah Mohammad Omar referred to as ‘the gods of the infidels’.”<sup>64</sup>

This “cleaving” can be interpreted as intentional ideological editing, or artificial selection of memes. Even in this thesis, portions have been edited out through deletion because they did not add to the value of the project I have been working to create. King Josiah was simply deleting the replicators of memes he saw as being in conflict with those he favored. There does seem to be a much greater amount of intentional memetic selection in King Josiah’s aggressive attack on the material representations of an

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<sup>63</sup> Poulshock, “The Problems and Potential of Memetics,” 70.

<sup>64</sup> Lauren Monroe, *Josiah's Reform and the Dynamics of Defilement*. (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 4.

alternative ideology than what can be found in the biological world; however, this fact is simply another variable that must be kept in mind when applying memetics and does not necessarily invalidate the theory. Though it is true that it is difficult to establish absolute and quantitative evidence of the ideological ecosystem of King Josiah's time both before and after his reforms, there is the simple fact that the ideologies concerning individual moral responsibility presented in the pericopes have survived since King Josiah's time.<sup>65</sup> The continued existence of these ideologies indicates that though it is possible that other ideologies could have been dominant in the culture,<sup>66</sup> such as polytheism and generational morality, they were eventually superseded by the ideology created by King Josiah: specifically, King Josiah's call to centralized worship and individual moral responsibility.<sup>67</sup>

This is the reason that I chose to analyze the aftermath of the struggle for dominance between ideas during the reign of King Josiah, since it is clear that individual morality was the victor.<sup>68</sup> The idea of individual morality has survived in better condition

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<sup>65</sup> Depending on where one stands on the spectrum of biblical scholarship, the dating of the deuteronomic texts differs. This paper will assume that the pericopes used in this study were written – or heavily edited at the very least – during King Josiah's reign. Though I have come to this conclusion based on my research, it does not mean that people who disagree with this dating of the text could not apply my memetics approach to their scholarly work. The simple point is that the ideology of individual moral responsibility survived via King Josiah's transmission (be it through original creation or rediscovery), despite the possible overwhelming cultural dominance of Assyria, as well as other factors.

<sup>66</sup> For which I will present textually internal evidence later in the paper.

<sup>67</sup> I will also address the significance of King Josiah's power and the effect it had on the cultural ecosystem of the time.

<sup>68</sup> Poulshock indicates that there is an inherent anthropomorphization of the memetic process which lends itself to an approach of viewing humans exclusively as hosts for ideas which he calls a "meme as a germ" factor?. It seems to me that people within this faction? fail to recognize that even within the natural equivalent of the possibility of ideas acting as germs within human ideologies, there is a mutual affection going on between the germ and the host organism, which can lead to the evolution of the germ or the extinction of the germ. This process seems to be analogous to how ideologies function and would render Poulshock's critique that the meme as a germ approach completely reduces the effect that humans have on culture invalid, as either he or the scholars of memetics he critiques – or both – have ignored the

and was more widespread than that of generational punishment, both within contemporary culture and in the internal ideologies found within the continuing traditions of Judaism. This does not, however, change the fact that the ideology of individual morality did indeed survive what might be considered to be overwhelming pressures. It is acceptable to deduce that the ideology must therefore have at least one attribute that would make survival possible. And because it survived while others did not, such an attribute(s) would be found amongst the variables that differed between the two ideologies of generational morality and individual morality. It is for precisely this reason that I use a comparative approach to establish the traits in which the deuteronomic texts differed from other contemporary texts, which represent former incarnations of the nation's ideologies, and the available observable memetic data about the effects of the cultural shift towards individual moral responsibility.

## **Conclusion**

Memetics is an underdeveloped theoretical framework, but even in this raw form it has much to offer. This chapter explored the development and various incarnations of the theory for two reasons: to clarify how I will be using the theory in this study, as well as to justify my use of the theory in conjunction with textual studies. By using Dawkins's development of his selfish gene theory as a starting point, I defined a *meme* to be a

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aforementioned attribute of germ-host relationship. Though the language used in the footnoted sentence—"which ideology was victorious"—would indicate an anthropomorphization of ideas, it is simply worded in this way because it is unclear exactly who the propagators of the ideology were precisely and would imply an intentional ideological cohesion that cannot be proven. However, the germ-host argument does seem to present a system that is inherently non-materialist. By distinguishing between the germ idea and the human host, scholars of this faction are propagating an inherently dualist theory, unless they would want to argue that ideas have their own physical, material existence. See Poulshock, "The Problems and Potential of Memetics," 70.

culturally recurring archetype such as a tune, a fashion, or an ideology. By incorporating Dennett's broadening of the applicability of evolutionary models to incorporate non-biological systems, I draw an analogy between biological procreation and memetic procreation in order to demonstrate that both artificial selection and natural selection take place in memetic systems. By justifying this analogy, the study opens up the possibility of exploring the transition from generational morality to individual moral responsibility during King Josiah's reign, and how a memetic framework of interpretation better explains the survival of the latter meme. It is important to keep the topics discussed in this chapter in mind when moving on to chapter two, as it provides the lens through which I will be interpreting the pericopes in Deuteronomy, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah.

## CHAPTER 2: SURVEYING THE TEXTUAL ENVIRONMENT

As mentioned in the previous chapter on memetics, the theory's strengths and benefits are best observed in instances of memetic clash. As such, it seems appropriate to apply the theory to biblical passages that reflect a time of ideological upheaval. The theme, and thus the pericopes, chosen for this thesis was selected to provide an example of a widespread meme that is in direct conflict with a competing ideology. However, instead of focusing on the flashier, highly politicized discussion of the development of monotheism or some other grandiose theme, this chapter will instead look at a more subtle, legally and culturally nuanced issue: the transition from generational morality to individual moral responsibility. Specifically, this study will look at Deuteronomy 24:16, Ezekiel 18, and Jeremiah 31:27-30, and how these passages indicate a clear departure from the cultural status quo.

Though this subject does draw on the differences between monotheistic and polytheistic religions and their authority structures – and I will incorporate these discussions when appropriate – the stark legal differences between Assyrian law and Deuteronomic law and that found in its contemporary prophetic literature make the topic of this thesis particularly enlightening. For though the content of the law is different, the style in which it was written draws heavily on already established legal styles. Deuteronomy presents an interesting juxtaposition, demonstrating its obvious cultural influences in the style of writing, reinforcing the notion that the dominant cultures of Assyria had strong influence on Judah during King Josiah's reign in the seventh century BCE, while highlighting the unique code of Deuteronomy. That being said, the development of individual responsibility does not seem to

be fully achieved yet, as will be discussed later in the chapter. There is a tension within the passages themselves that indicate that the clash of ideologies is ongoing while these texts were being written. Though these tensions may be construed as the text contradicting itself, a better interpretation would simply be that individual moral responsibility has not been fully incorporated into the memplex of Israelite ideologies, and the text simply reflects the memetic struggle. To elaborate on and explore these areas, this chapter will go into greater detail about the general context of the passages, as well as addressing the information relevant to a memetic study of the material.

### **Deuteronomy 24:16**

*“Parents shall not be put to death for their children, nor shall children be put to death for their parents; only for their own crimes may persons be put to death.”*

On the surface, Deuteronomy 24:16 is a fairly straightforward pronouncement against generational retribution. The issues that the passage must deal with are instead focused on the general context of the entirety of the book. The questions of authorship, internal consistency, and the role of the “discovered” book as a whole are what grant the passage authority and relevance beyond the simple content of the book. So while this section may only touch on the specific passage itself briefly, it is the function of the passage as part of the greater whole that is most important to this study.

Though it may not be necessary to establish authorship for the larger narrative of the memetic clash, the inherent stylistic comparisons that take place in such studies do lend credence to several points that support the argument. Specifically, the discussion of authorship is most useful in determining memetic influences. The authorship of

Deuteronomy is hardly agreed upon. J. A. Thompson gives four views on the authorship of the texts. The first is the view that the majority of the content is Mosaic “with a certain amount of post-Mosaic material.”<sup>69</sup> The second promotes the view that the laws were compiled during the Samuel-Solomon era, with substantive contributions from Mosaic ideologies. The third promotes that the book was compiled during the Hezekiah-Josiah period at the time of great national apostasy in which the compilation of the divine laws lent authority to Josiah’s reforms. The fourth proposes a post-exilic date of compilation as “not a programme but the wishful thinking of unrealistic post-exilic dreamers.”<sup>70</sup>

These four categories find a bit more nuance in application, though Thompson’s categories do provide an initial introduction to the main interpretations. Lauren Monroe rejects the notion that the “Book of Law” mentioned in 2 Kings 22-23 in conjunction with King Josiah’s reforms is not actually Deuteronomy, arguing instead that Deuteronomy was edited after King Josiah’s reign to usurp the original Book of Law’s cultural position. On the other hand, Bernard Levinson seems to take for granted the fact that Josiah’s Book of Law is Deuteronomy, compiled by priestly scribes to reinterpret and exegetically subvert the Levitical laws.

Perhaps one of the easiest pitfalls to stumble into while working through the dating of these texts is the assumption that Deuteronomy – or even Jeremiah and Ezekiel by extension – reaches its final form all at once. Recent scholarship on the text indicates several redactions

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<sup>69</sup> J. A. Thompson “Deuteronomy, Book of,” *New Bible Dictionary* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 964.

<sup>70</sup> Raymond Person seems to reinforce these as the major views on authorship, as he selected four speakers, each aligning himself/herself with one of the four views, for a panel discussion at an SBL conference in 2008. Richard Nelson, “A response to Thomas Römer, The so-called Deuteronomist history,” *Journal of Hebrew Studies* 9 (2009): 1.

done by different factions, some of which were used to undermine an opposing faction. Mark Leuchter demonstrates this interplay between Deuteronomy, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah:

- 1 Jeremiah's pre-exilic oracles are redacted (between 597-587 B.C.E.).
- 2 Ezekiel's oracles are formed (between ca. 592-572 B.C.E.) as an attempt to appropriate both Jeremiah's rhetoric and the language of Deuteronomy for the Zadokite<sup>71</sup> circles.
- 3 The Shaphanide-Deuteronomistic scribes construct Jeremiah 26–45 as a counter-measure to the influence of the Ezekiel tradition (ca. 570 B.C.E.).
- 4 The Holiness Code is redacted as a Zadokite response to Jeremiah 26–45 (though not as a rebuke of that work).
- 5 Amel-Marduk's pardon of Jehoiachin prompts the exilic redaction of the Deuteronomistic History (between 562-560 B.C.E.), which relies upon and reinforces Jeremiah 26–45.
- 6 The Zadokite Pentateuch (or the core of this work) is redacted as an alternate or competing historiography to the Deuteronomistic History.<sup>72</sup>

Leuchter's proposition necessitates the dating of some version of Deuteronomy before 570 BCE, but the final text does not reach its complete form until later.

Studies that draw comparisons between the styles of Deuteronomy and its alleged contemporaries during King Josiah's time are implicitly describing memetic similarities between the two cultures. These stylistic similarities not only lend credence to a later dating of authorship, they also reinforce the fact that Josiah's Judah was heavily influenced by dominant cultures, both internally and externally. As indicated in the introduction of this

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<sup>71</sup> The Zadokites were descendants of Zadok and the priestly order in charge of the altar during the period of King Solomon's Temple. Ezekiel supports them over the Levitical priestly order, as he says that they were the only priestly order that did not endorse paganism. Essentially, the Zadokites were a faction within the Israelite priestly orders that consistently held high positions. See George Ramsey "Zadok," *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1035-1036.

<sup>72</sup> Mark Leuchter, "Zadokites, Deuteronomists, and the Exilic Debate over Scribal Authority," *The Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 7 (2007), <http://www.jhsonline.org/cocoon/JHS/a071.html#footnote4>.

chapter, this simply highlights the oddity that a document that is so obviously influenced by outside sources would propose a new type of morality.

When it comes to dating the Deuteronomic text, scholars do not turn to chapter 24, but instead tend to look at the similarities between the apostasy laws found in chapter 13 and the Esarhaddon Vassal Treaty (EVT).<sup>73</sup> The EVT was a treaty drafted by Esarhaddon – ruler of Assyria during the early seventh century BCE – that bound at least nine vassal nations to Assyria and was to remain in effect even after Esarhaddon’s death.<sup>74</sup> These loyalty oaths were extracted in an attempt to ensure that Esarhaddon’s son Assurbanipal would inherit the throne, and that he would be guaranteed the vassals’ loyalty.<sup>75</sup>

Rentja Frankena has written an article that goes into an extensive parallel study of the treaty and the Hebrew Bible (HB) in order to determine what significance the EVT would have on HB studies. Franken cites the disobedience-curse format, as well as the exclusivity of serving only Esarhaddon as literary similarities. Additionally, the EVT has been dated to 672 BCE with great confidence.<sup>76</sup> JoAnn Scurlock further reinforces the similarities between the EVT and the HB by drawing specific parallels between the types of curses and the dynamics of such curses found in the two texts. In particular, Scurlock focuses on how the Medes tried to negate the supernatural repercussions of destroying the tablets by various

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<sup>73</sup> Bernard Levinson, “Esarhaddon's Succession Treaty as the Source for the Canon Formula in Deuteronomy 13:1,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 130 (2010): 337.

<sup>74</sup> R. Frankena, “The Vassal-Treaties of Esarhaddon and the Dating of Deuteronomy,” in *Oudtestamentisch Werkgezelschap in Nederland* (Leiden: Brill, 1965): 124.

<sup>75</sup> JoAnn Scurlock, “Getting Smashed at the Victory Celebration, or What Happened to Esarhaddon's So-called Vassal Treaties and Why,” in *Iconoclasm and Text Destruction in the Ancient Near East and Beyond*, ed. Natalie Naomi May (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2012), 176.

<sup>76</sup> Levinson, “Esarhaddon's Succession Treaty,” 337.

counter-spells.<sup>77</sup> Frankena does note though that such counter-spells were forbidden in Deuteronomy. This ritual similarity, combined with Assyrian records of the vassal status of Manasseh during Esarhaddon's reign, would indicate a contemporary authorship of at least some parts of Deuteronomy. Levinson also draws on the similarities between the two texts when discussing the canon formula of chapter 13:

The canon formula, in form-critical terms, represents part of the adjuration to loyalty found in the literary model of the adè [the Assyrian term for "treaty" or "covenant"]. Its origins in literary history emerge as consistent with other key elements of chapter 13. This approach provides a more economical explanation than viewing it simply as a scribal colophon, since, by definition, one would expect to find the colophon at the end of a literary unit or at the conclusion of the legal corpus, not at the juncture between units (as is here the case, where it stands between chapters 12 and 13).<sup>78</sup>

Hans Sleymans concludes at the end of his comparison of Deuteronomy 28 and the EVT that "it is safe to argue that copies of the EST [Esarhaddon Succession Treaty, which is another commonly used reference to the EVT] were on display in [the Philistine city of] Ekron, as well as in Jerusalem, both being vassal states of Esarhaddon's empire. The Jerusalem copy roused the curiosity of Judean scribes and their ambition to create a similar Hebrew oath."<sup>79</sup>

With so many studies of Deuteronomy featuring the EVT, it may seem like an undisputed fact. Still, some like Joshua Berman ultimately disagree with the conclusion concerning the dating. Even so, he still describes what he sees as the general scholarly consensus: "Assyrian domination, it is suggested [by Levinson], engendered a gradual socioreligious acculturation in which Judean scribes assimilated and modified the structures

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<sup>77</sup> Scurlock, "Getting Smashed," 179.

<sup>78</sup> Levinson, "Esarhaddon's Succession Treaty," 346.

<sup>79</sup> Hans U. Steymans, "Deuteronomy 28 and Tell Tayinat," *Verbum Et Ecclesia* 34 (May 2013): 12.

of Assyrian ideology within the framework of their own tradition” in regards to the influences of the treaty on chapter 13.<sup>80</sup> Noel Weeks takes this notion one step further, arguing that the scribes of Judea were hijacking the formatting and style of the Assyrian vassal treatise as a polemic device to reinforce absolute dedication to Yahweh as opposed by Assyrian imperialism.<sup>81</sup>

Both these interpretations of the style of the apostasy laws – and by extension, the style of the rest of Deuteronomy – lend themselves to the interpretation that these ideologies were in competition with each other, with the Assyrian meme holding greater dominance and the meme of Deuteronomy challenging it. Berman’s assertion that the style is actually based on earlier Hittite laws<sup>82</sup> does seem to problematize this view somewhat. He argues that “the very fact that two bodies of material share a common element is insufficient to warrant claims of a hereditary connection between them or that they are the product of a shared milieu and a common period.”<sup>83</sup> Instead of focusing on the idea that familial and national ties often superseded loyalty to a dominating power as the underlying theme, Berman seeks to identify unique elements that coincide in each document. Ultimately, he comes to the conclusion that Deuteronomy presents Yahweh as acting more in accordance with the way Hittite rulers treated their vassals than the way Assyrian rulers did. This earlier dating is also

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<sup>80</sup> That being said, Beerman does propose that the more dominant influences are that of the Late Bronze Age Hittite law.

<sup>81</sup> Noel Weeks, “The Ambiguity of Biblical ‘Background’,” *The Westminster Theological Journal* 72 (2010): 236.

<sup>82</sup> Joshua Berman, “CTH 133 and the Hittite Provenance of Deuteronomy 13,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 130 (2011): 26.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

strengthened by another study by Berman in which he asserts that Deuteronomy 1-3 is fashioned after Hittite treaty prologue traditions.<sup>84</sup>

Though Berman makes a good case for Late Bronze Era influence, there are several factors that I find make a later dating more compelling. First, Berman fails to answer convincingly how this Hittite influence would have entered Judean culture. With the destruction of the Hittites in 1200 BCE, Berman does not adequately explain why such an influence would not appear in other contemporary Israelite texts, or how such an influence would have been able to resurface after 600 years. The linguistic similarities between the EVT and Deuteronomy 13 are difficult to negate, and Berman's argument that the way Yahweh is presented better reflects a Hittite ruler seems to simply reinforce the polemic contrast that scholars like Levinson and Weeks draw on to argue as evidence of defiance against Assyrian imperialism. While it is possible that a conceptualization of preferred ruler vassal relationship was based on Hittite origins, the linguistic phrasing and use of documents to establish contrasting identities with Assyrian ideologies point towards the later dating. To use Berman's own premise, documents having similar content elements do not necessarily indicate a hereditary connection, despite how nuanced or unique those elements may seem. And even if such an ideological heredity were established, that would still not necessitate a significantly earlier authorship.

Markus Zehnder further problematizes the dependence on the EVT by presenting an argument that the evidence of possible missing texts and the difficulty with transferring such ideas across history creates a network of influence that is too complicated to be reduced to a

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<sup>84</sup> Joshua Berman, "Histories Twice Told: Deuteronomy 1-3 and the Hittite Treaty Prologue Tradition," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 132 (2013): 250.

singular inspiration from the EVT.<sup>85</sup> Zehnder's protest is a valuable addition to the discussion. Not only are monocausal influences extremely unlikely – if not outright impossible – but monocausal explanations undersell the complexity of ideological development. Leuchter's conception of the dialogue nature of authorship of Deuteronomy clearly shows that there are a myriad of influences at any given time. That being said, though it is important to acknowledge the likely diversity of influences, cataloging all these variables is impossible, especially so far removed historically from the process. Thus, through the tools and information available to us, concluding that the EVT was probably the dominant influence – all the while allowing for a more nuanced network of influence – is acceptable and conducive to understanding the text.

Additionally, the fact that Ezekiel 18 and Jeremiah 31, whose authorship is much less questioned, address the issue of generational punishment lends credence to the view that Josiah presented the new laws to the Israelites at the very least, and it is probable that he was given the text by priestly orders in Jerusalem. Had there not been the Book of Laws, there would not have been any previously set precedent to call upon for authority. In fact, such practices were not uncommon in King Josiah's contemporary Egypt. Nadav Na'man draws a parallel between scrolls found in Egyptian temples – whose authority was confirmed through prophets – and the presentation of the Deuteronomistic scrolls.<sup>86</sup> In addition to this, Mol Jurrien makes the connection between Deuteronomy 24 and Ezekiel 18, saying that the newly developed individualism found in Ezekiel 18 – and in the New Covenant narrative in

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<sup>85</sup> Markus Zehnder, "Building on Stone?: Deuteronomy and Esarhaddon's Loyalty Oaths (Part 1): Some Preliminary Observations," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 19/3 (2009): 374; and "Building on stone?: Deuteronomy and Esarhaddon's Loyalty Oaths (Part 2): Some Additional Observations," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 19 (2009): 535.

<sup>86</sup>Nadav Na'aman, "The "Discovered Book" and the Legitimation of Josiah's Reform," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 130 (2011): 47.

Jeremiah – is supported and grounded in Deuteronomy 24.<sup>87</sup> In any case, whether the book of laws was written before Josiah’s reign or compiled by the king’s advisers, its memetic efficacy does not suffer. The later authorship date proposed would embellish the narrative of the domineering memetic structure being overcome by the seemingly less viable ideology, but the argument of this thesis does not rest on it.

As the passage itself is part of a greater legal document, there are some factors that must be considered. Assnat Bartor provides an intriguing approach to interpreting legal texts in the Bible, arguing that there is a narrative behind the laws and that such pericopes must be interpreted in light of this.<sup>88</sup> The proverbesque nature of the ideology that both Ezekiel and Jeremiah refute indicates a widespread acceptance of the truism, and the wording itself indicates a more narrative nature through the use of the metaphor of sour grapes. This was, in fact, the manner in which kings of Israel dealt with rebels, though the practice was outlawed in the passage in Deuteronomy.<sup>89</sup> Contemporary Hittite law also reinforces the same notion of extreme, generational retribution:

...if a slave causes his master’s anger, they either kill him or they will injure him... or they will seize him, his wife, his children, his brother, his sister, his in-laws, his kin... If ever he is to die, he will not die alone; his kin will accompany him. If then... anyone arouses the anger of a god, does the god take revenge on him alone? Does he not take revenge on his wife, his children, his descendants, his kin, his slaves, and slave-girls, his cattle (and) sheep together with his crop, and will utterly destroy him?<sup>90</sup>

Not only do external sources reinforce this generational punishment ideal, but Joshua

7:22-26 provide the Israelite equivalent. In retribution for taking forbidden spoils, Achan and

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<sup>87</sup> Mol Jurrien, *Collective and Individual Responsibility: A Description of Corporate Personality in Ezekiel 18 and 20* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 218.

<sup>88</sup> For a full exploration of this methodology, see Assnat Bartor, *Reading Biblical Law as Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).

<sup>89</sup> Moshe Greenberg. *Ezekiel 1-20* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1983), 340.

<sup>90</sup> Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 340.

his whole family were executed. This narrative, along with the Hittite law and the EVT serve to show that generational morality was very much the norm before the shift in Deuteronomy. It is important to keep these underlying narrative components in mind when using this pericope. By Josiah promoting this ideology, he is essentially diminishing the terror factor of retribitional punishment.

Levinson addresses Deuteronomy in a way that is particularly conducive to the memetic interpretation, saying “Deuteronomy is, on the one hand, among the most radically innovative literary units in the Hebrew Bible and, on the other, among those that most loudly silence the suggestion of innovation.”<sup>91</sup> He argues that the authors of the text repurpose the previously established authoritative laws in a way that best promotes their own ideological leanings. Levinson also argues that the purpose of the authors was centralization, which necessitated the ideological upheaval: “The Deuteronomic proscription of local cultic activity and restriction of cultic action to the central sphere entailed the obligation to revise essentially the entire apparatus of cultic rituals and institutions that governed local cultic activity.”<sup>92</sup> This idea was somewhat challenged by Frederick Greenspahn’s linguistics-based disagreement. Greenspahn concludes that “Deuteronomy's contrastive tone plainly intends to circumscribe the number of places where sacrifices could be offered, but neither that nor its

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<sup>91</sup> Bernard Levinson, *Deuteronomy and the Hermeneutics of Legal Innovation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 4.

<sup>92</sup> Levinson, *Deuteronomy and Hermeneutics*, 5. For transparency’s sake, I must add that Levinson also argues that the deuteronomic laws subverted the king’s authority, saying, “In this case centralization ironically led to the decrease in royal power, as the Temple eclipsed the king’s authority.” I disagree with Levinson on this point. While it certainly gave the Temple greater influence over the nation, any increase in influence would have inevitably bled over to the king promoting the ideologies. The more people accepted the ideologies of the Temple, so too would more people have been forced to recognize the authority of King Josiah as the rightful/righteous ruler, as he was the one to implement the renewal. The king could have suppressed the rediscovery, if it was a rediscovery, or the compilation. Any power or authority the Temple had was a direct result of Josiah’s choices as informational gatekeeper and was thus subject to the king’s power.

use of the definite article requires us to conclude that only one site was acceptable, in other words, that it meant to centralize the cult, much less that it had Jerusalem in mind.”<sup>93</sup>

However, Bill Arnold directly critiques Greenspahn’s study, arguing that Greenspahn is both misinterpreting the definite article he uses to indicate that a wider range of worship possibilities, as well as ignoring internal and external evidence that support a more exclusivist worship interpretation. Arnold aptly says that “the most economical theory, the one that answers more questions than it raises, is the long-standing interpretation of this chapter as establishing cult centralization as part of a larger reform of Israelite worship.”<sup>94</sup>

A passage that could also cause interpretational issues is Deuteronomy 5. Seemingly in direct contrast with the abolishment of generational punishment, Deuteronomy 5:9-10 says, “**9** You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and fourth generation of those who reject me, **10** but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.”

This seems to be undeniably in direct contradiction of the passages presented in Deuteronomy 24. While discussing Deuteronomy 5:9 – in addition to Deuteronomy 7:9-10,<sup>95</sup> Exodus 34:6-7,<sup>96</sup> Numbers 14:18,<sup>97</sup> and Jeremiah 32:18, all of which contain the retributinal

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<sup>93</sup> Frederick E. Greenspahn, “Deuteronomy and Centralization,” *Vetus Testamentum* 64 (2014): 234.

<sup>94</sup> Bill T. Arnold, “Deuteronomy 12 and the Law of the Central Sanctuary *noch einmal*,” *Vetus Testamentum* 64 (2014): 248.

<sup>95</sup> Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who maintains covenant loyalty with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations, and who repays in their own person those who reject him. He does not delay but repays in their own person those who reject him.

<sup>96</sup> The Lord passed before him, and proclaimed,

“The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and

formula– Jozse Krasovec concludes “no attempt to explain this section [referring to the curse section of the retribitional formula in the above passages] can escape the conclusion that collective retribution or inherited punishment is at least partially presupposed: the children suffer as much for their own iniquity as for that of their fathers”.<sup>98</sup> This principle is further supported by the fact that both Ezekiel and Jeremiah redact retribitional punishment, as there would conceivably be no need for that if it were not the general cultural consensus.

Despite the retribitional punishment inherent earlier in Deuteronomy, closer inspection of the passages does still allow for Deuteronomy to be viewed as a step away from generational punishment. First, the passage indicates that it is God who metes out punishment on the third and fourth generation, not humans. This allows for the precedent that Deuteronomy 24 establishes to still stand. There is also an “othering” that takes place here, by differentiating between those who reject Yahweh and those who accept him. As such, this reinforces the centralized cultic identity that the rest of Deuteronomy creates. Levinson also argues based on Deuteronomy 7 that because of the fact that in verse 10 it says, “He does not delay but repays in their own person those who reject him,” the Deuteronomist fully rejects generational retribution. Specifically, Levinson says,

The Mosaic speaker purports to provide a homiletic paraphrase of the formula for divine justice in the Decalogue. In fact, the homily so fundamentally transforms the original as to revoke it. The speaker strategically deletes references to the transgenerational consequences of sin and instead asserts the immediate punishment of the sinner. By implication divine punishment for sin is restricted to the sinner

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sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.”

<sup>97</sup> “The Lord is slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children to the third and the fourth generation.”

<sup>98</sup> Jozse Krasovec, “Is There a Doctrine of ‘Collective Retribution’ in the Hebrew Bible?” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 65 (1994): 54.

alone. In contrast to the Decalogue, the progeny, here strikingly unmentioned, are not explicitly visited with divine punishment. The doctrine of individual retribution is not presented as a departure from the status quo, as in the case of Ezekiel. Instead, the new teaching is presented as consistent with the very doctrine that it rejects: as an authoritatively taught “re-citation” of the original theologoumenon.<sup>99</sup>

This interpretation of the passage, which is strongly supported, would reframe Deuteronomy as a clear departure from the previous legal and theological precedent of Yahweh’s generational punishment.

Though Deuteronomy 5 clearly indicates that there is still a general mindset of generational punishment in the greater legal corpora of Israel – limited to acts of Yahweh – Deuteronomy as a whole takes a step away from its contemporaries regarding such punishments, as is evident in its diverging from the legal precedent set by both the Assyrian and Hittite law of the time and its internal redaction. Such internal tension progresses in Ezekiel and Jeremiah, with Ezekiel teaching that Yahweh *no longer* punishes generationally, and Jeremiah awaiting a future in which God no longer punishes generationally.

### **Ezekiel 18**

*The word of the Lord came to me: 2 What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, “The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge”? 3 As I live, says the Lord God, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel. 4 Know that all lives are mine; the life of the parent as well as the life of the child is mine: it is only the person who sins that shall die.*

*5 If a man is righteous and does what is lawful and right— 6 if he does not eat upon the mountains or lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, does not defile his neighbor’s wife or approach a woman during her menstrual period, 7 does not oppress anyone, but restores to the debtor his pledge, commits no robbery, gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with a garment, 8 does not take advance or accrued interest, withholds his hand from iniquity, executes true justice between contending parties, 9 follows my statutes, and is careful to observe my ordinances, acting faithfully—such a one is righteous; he shall surely live, says the Lord God.*

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<sup>99</sup> Levinson, “You Must Not Add Anything to What I Command You,” *Numen* 50 (2003): 37-39.

**10** If he has a son who is violent, a shedder of blood, **11** who does any of these things (though his father does none of them), who eats upon the mountains, defiles his neighbor's wife, **12** oppresses the poor and needy, commits robbery, does not restore the pledge, lifts up his eyes to the idols, commits abomination, **13** takes advance or accrued interest; shall he then live? He shall not. He has done all these abominable things; he shall surely die; his blood shall be upon himself.

**14** But if this man has a son who sees all the sins that his father has done, considers, and does not do likewise, **15** who does not eat upon the mountains or lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, does not defile his neighbor's wife, **16** does not wrong anyone, exacts no pledge, commits no robbery, but gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with a garment, **17** withholds his hand from iniquity, takes no advance or accrued interest, observes my ordinances, and follows my statutes; he shall not die for his father's iniquity; he shall surely live. **18** As for his father, because he practiced extortion, robbed his brother, and did what is not good among his people, he dies for his iniquity.

**19** Yet you say, "Why should not the son suffer for the iniquity of the father?" When the son has done what is lawful and right, and has been careful to observe all my statutes, he shall surely live. **20** The person who sins shall die. A child shall not suffer for the iniquity of a parent, nor a parent suffer for the iniquity of a child; the righteousness of the righteous shall be his own, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be his own.

**21** But if the wicked turn away from all their sins that they have committed and keep all my statutes and do what is lawful and right, they shall surely live; they shall not die. **22** None of the transgressions that they have committed shall be remembered against them; for the righteousness that they have done they shall live. **23** Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, says the Lord God, and not rather that they should turn from their ways and live? **24** But when the righteous turn away from their righteousness and commit iniquity and do the same abominable things that the wicked do, shall they live? None of the righteous deeds that they have done shall be remembered; for the treachery of which they are guilty and the sin they have committed, they shall die.

**25** Yet you say, "The way of the Lord is unfair." Hear now, O house of Israel: Is my way unfair? Is it not your ways that are unfair? **26** When the righteous turn away from their righteousness and commit iniquity, they shall die for it; for the iniquity that they have committed they shall die. **27** Again, when the wicked turn away from the wickedness they have committed and do what is lawful and right, they shall save their life. **28** Because they considered and turned away from all the transgressions that they had committed, they shall surely live; they shall not die. **29** Yet the house of Israel says, "The way of the Lord is unfair." O house of Israel, are my ways unfair? Is it not your ways that are unfair?

**30** Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, all of you according to your ways, says the Lord God. Repent and turn from all your transgressions; otherwise iniquity will be your ruin. **31** Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? **32** For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord God. Turn, then, and live.

Though the authorship and compilation date of Deuteronomy are widely contested, there seems to be much less debate about Ezekiel. H. L. Ellison says that the book appears

unquestionably in Ben Sira's canonical list in the second century BCE,<sup>100</sup> and there seems to be a general consensus amongst scholars that even if the date of authorship is a bit later, it was still written by an Israelite in exile in the sixth century BCE. Another key to understanding the pericope is to explore both its literary and cultural context. Margaret Odell writes about how it is extremely suspect that there is so little mention of Assyrian rule in 2 Kings and Josiah's narrative when there are Babylonian annals that still claim Assyrian dominance over Judah: "Given the long dominance of Assyria in the west, it should not be surprising to find evidence of Assyrian cultural and literary influence in the book of Ezekiel."<sup>101</sup>

She provides two factors that at least partially contribute to why Ezekiel would have used such devices. First, the influence would have been derived from participating in the larger cultural expanse that spanned from Egypt to Anatolia. Odell says that "it may be more appropriate to think of Assyrian culture as a penetrating stain than as a thin veneer to be peeled off once Assyria lost political control of its vassals."<sup>102</sup> The second reason it is likely that Ezekiel displays more Assyrian influence would be because he would have had access to Assyrian material during his exile in Babylonia. Nadav Na'aman goes a step further in placing significance on Assyria's dominance, arguing that Assyria continued to have some control over Judah into the late 620s and early 630s. However, Assyria had to cede lands to Egypt for aid in battling revolts. There was not a slow deterioration of Assyrian rule, as is

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<sup>100</sup> H. L. Ellison, "Ezekiel, Book of," *New Bible Dictionary*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., ed. Wood, D.R.W. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 354.

<sup>101</sup> Margaret Odell. *Ezekiel*. (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2005), 7.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

often suggested, and this sudden power vacuum left gave rise to Josiah's strength as a king.<sup>103</sup>

As alluded to in the Deuteronomy section of this chapter, Mark Leuchter presents an interesting perspective on the interplay between Deuteronomy, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah. Of particular interest in this section is the dialogue nature of the relationship between Ezekiel's formation and Jeremiah's. Though this study is using the two texts in conjunction and even support of a shared theme, Leuchter says, "Few scholars, however, would look to the book of Jeremiah and the book of Ezekiel and see works that complement and support each other."<sup>104</sup> This is mostly due to the fact that general scholarship on the two texts indicate very different ideological strains within Israelite culture. Whereas Leuchter identifies Jeremiah as clearly progressing the Deuteronomist author(s)' agenda, he roots Ezekiel in the Zadokite camp.<sup>105</sup> "These groups [Deuteronomists and Zadokites] were responsive, feeding off of each other's earlier accomplishments for the sake of advancing their specific ideologies to the exclusion of the other, often making overt references to each other's written texts, but primarily for the purposes of subordination or condemnation."<sup>106</sup>

With such disparate ideologies and inherent antagonisms, it is rather surprising to find a topic that both texts agree on. Though there are several differences in presentation – mainly that Ezekiel is less redactive concerning canon – the need to contradict Assyria outweighs the intertextual conflicts between the two Israelite schools of thought. Leuchter's dialogue

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<sup>103</sup> Nadav Na'man, "The Kingdom of Judah under Josiah," *Tel Aviv* 18 (1991): 35.

<sup>104</sup> Mark Leuchter, "Zadokites, Deuteronomists, and the Exilic Debate over Scribal Authority," *The Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 7 (2007), <http://jhsonline.org/>.

<sup>105</sup> Leuchter "Zadokites, Deuteronomists."

<sup>106</sup> Leuchter "Zadokites, Deuteronomists."

approach does serve as a significant piece of evidence to prove that the authors and/or editors of the texts were familiar with each other's writings, which in turn serves to strengthen the developmental stages of individual moral responsibility presented later in the thesis. There is a clearly established intellectual network among Deuteronomy, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah, a network that allows for the communication and cross-pollination of ideas in direct opposition to Assyrian imperialism

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the author, and thus the pericope, is his role as a prophet. J. A. Motyer presents the prophet as a pseudo-statesman; they act somewhat outside the established social hierarchies.<sup>107</sup> In certain specialized cases, they even have authority over the ruler.<sup>108</sup> In Ezekiel's case – which, by extension, can be generalized to some extent about the hierarchical status of other prophets as well – Corrine Patton argues that when it comes to the moral hierarchy of the Israelites, Ezekiel places himself above every other social status. Though he is confined in one sense by his material and familial status, the role of a prophet bypasses the regular social hierarchies and elevates him even above the priests in questions of morality.<sup>109</sup> For the purpose of this study, the most significant aspect of Ezekiel is his role as an authoritative figure, and as a frame-buster.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup>J. A. Motyer, "Prophet, Prophecy," *New Bible Dictionary*, 965.

<sup>108</sup> Motyer, "Prophet, Prophecy," 965.

<sup>109</sup> Corrine Patton, *Ezekiel's Hierarchical World: Wrestling with a tiered reality* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 81-82.

<sup>110</sup> Matthews describes frame analysis theory as an approach that observes the projected mental framework of a situation's effect on the observer. Essentially, people create expectations of a situation "that are shaped by a person's understanding of the world and those things that inhabit or structure it. Cognitively, primary frames consist of idealized impressions, supplied by previously learned data, of an immediate situation." See Victor H. Matthews *More than Meets the Ear: Discovering the Hidden Contexts of Old Testament Conversations* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008): Kindle Location 850.

Ezekiel's authority and power is drawn from his role as an authoritative spokesman for Yahweh. Though Levinson is referring to the habit of using pseudonyms or writing anonymously within scribal positions, his statement that "there is a clear relationship between textual voice and textual authority, so that attributing a legal text to God literally gives that text ultimate authority" can be applied equally to the habit of prophets attributing their spoken messages to Yahweh. Though the medium is different, the authority structures inherent to such dynamics transcend just a single form of communication.

Additionally, Motyer notes that "almost every prophet first appears as a foreteller," and it would follow that their authority as a prophet of Yahweh would indeed be derived from whether their prophecies came true or not.<sup>111</sup> Motyer does say, however, that the differentiation between a false prophet and a true prophet is based on whether a prophet leads the nation to other gods, or remains true to Yahweh's teachings.<sup>112</sup> However, the cited law for this precedent is in Deuteronomy 13 and 18:15-22. As the authorship of the book is in question, it seems unlikely that such a precedent would have been the sole criteria for distinguishing between false and true prophets, especially since there would have been prophets in the interim sans deuteronomic law.

There is an additional variable in play here. In the case of two prophets clashing, as would be the case in determining true and false prophets, there is a cognitive dissonance at play. The two contradictory sources of information are drawing on the same source of power – Yahweh's authority – and would necessarily create ideological and internal tension. Victor

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<sup>111</sup> Deut 18:15-22.

<sup>112</sup> Motyer, "Prophet, Prophecy," 966.

H. Matthews cites a similar event where King Ahab is confronted by two opposing prophecies and is forced to deal with this dissonance (1 Kgs 22).<sup>113</sup>

Seemingly in response to these types of tensions, a response emerges. There seems to be a better reliability in looking at the instances in which the authority of two prophets clashed. Motyer cites several instances: Micaiah confronting Zedekiah,<sup>114</sup> and Jeremiah versus Hananiah.<sup>115</sup> In both instances, the results of the accuracy of the foretelling established which prophet was actually in the right. It would therefore seem to follow that the authority of the prophet would be directly tied to the accuracy of the proclaimed prophecy. Motyer offers an alternative explanation in his essay, stating, “Prediction arises from the fact that the prophet speaks in the name of the holy Ruler of history.”<sup>116</sup> It would therefore follow, based on this assumption, that should there be a disconnect between the prediction and the reality, people would assume a disconnect between the prophet’s authority and the authority granted by calling on Yahweh’s name.

The second significant role Ezekiel embodies is that of the frame-buster, and the genre that Ezekiel chooses to frame his argument in is essential in understanding this effect. Katheryn Pfeister Darr views the dynamics of the proverb genre in Ezekiel 18 and argues that “a saying’s ‘aura of authority’ derives from various factors, including (1) form; (2) theme; (3) contextualized meaning; and (4) the speaker’s reliability.”<sup>117</sup> The poignancy of proverbs

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<sup>113</sup> Matthews, *More than Meets the Ear*, Kindle location 1368.

<sup>114</sup> 2 Chronicles 18:23

<sup>115</sup> Jeremiah 28

<sup>116</sup> Motyer, “Prophet, Prophecy,” 966.

<sup>117</sup> Katheryn Pfisterer Darr, “Proverb Performance and Transgenerational Retribution in Ezekiel 18,” in *Ezekiel's Hierarchical World*, ed. Stephen L. Cook and Corrine L. Patton (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 208.

is also derived from what Darr essentially describes as condensed universal wisdom with a bit of zing to it and is most often rooted in tradition. “For good reason, then, persons in conflict tap traditional sayings to imbue their arguments with proverbial gravitas and to reveal the folly of opposing views. Little wonder that Israel’s prophets, seeking to convince audiences of the authority of the oracles they proclaim in God’s name, resort to proverbs and proverbial phrases, as well as other strategic resources.”<sup>118</sup>

Essentially, Ezekiel’s use of the proverb acts as a *reductio ad absurdum* in opposition to those espousing generational retribution in the spirit of post-Assyrian and Babylonian ideology. Complementary to this genre-induced frame-busting is Ezekiel’s place in the social hierarchy, as well as his stylistic appropriations from Assyrian traditions. As he is outside the regular authority hierarchical system, there is significance to how he chooses to use that power. As Odell establishes the Assyrian influence inherent in Ezekiel, the prophets’ use of those established cultural cues is essential. By using a similar literary style, the prophet offers a message that is in a familiar, digestible form. The content of the prophecies is, however, in direct contrast with the content associated with the given style. Imagine the President of the United States standing up to deliver the State of the Union Address, but instead of a message that citizens are familiar with – if not necessarily in agreement with – the president began quoting *Mein Kampf*. All the cultural cues are there to set a certain expectation, but the message is in direct contrast to that expectation. Though an extreme example, Ezekiel’s frame-busting is analogous, if on an admittedly smaller scale.

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<sup>118</sup> Darr, “Proverb Performance,” 209.

### **Jeremiah 31:27-30**

*27 The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of humans and the seed of animals. 28 And just as I have watched over them to pluck up and break down, to overthrow, destroy, and bring evil, so I will watch over them to build and to plant, says the Lord. 29 In those days they shall no longer say:*

*“The parents have eaten sour grapes,  
and the children’s teeth are set on edge.”*

*30 But all shall die for their own sins; the teeth of everyone who eats sour grapes shall be set on edge.*

There are several previously mentioned aspects that have bearing on understanding Jeremiah’s pericope. First, though there is significantly more agreement concerning authorship of Jeremiah than there is for Deuteronomy, there are still dissenting voices. While the previously mentioned Deuteronomist leanings of Jeremiah are obviously inherent in the text to Leuchter, H. D. Potter has a very different take on Jeremiah’s relation to Deuteronomy. Potter argues that more often than not, Jeremiah is actually critiquing Deuteronomy, especially when discussing the passages in Jeremiah addressing the circumcision of the heart in Jeremiah 31:31-34. In particular, he looks at the “and no longer shall each man teach his neighbor” (Jeremiah 31:34) portion as a complete rejection of interference from scribes.

Faced with the deep-seated problem of human evil, by its occurrence especially in the institutions of power, and by its corrupting and debilitating effect on others when laws and society itself were mishandled, corrupted, and falsified, Jeremiah saw that only by the removal of all the apparatus of secular mediation of divine truth could God speak to men, and men respond to him.<sup>119</sup>

Though this may seem to problematize aspects of the connection between Jeremiah and Deuteronomy, as a whole, Jeremiah seems to align himself – or is edited to align at a

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<sup>119</sup> Harry D. Potter, “The New Covenant in Jeremiah 31:31-34,” *Vetus testamentum* 33 (1983): 355.

later point – with Deuteronomy. Leuchter argues that the portion of Jeremiah often considered to be a composite supplement (Jeremiah 24-45) denotes a strong support for the scribal tradition, and the Deuteronomist’s agenda by extension.<sup>120</sup> The transmission of Jeremiah’s prophecies via Baruch, the scribe; the interpretation of other prophets as being opposed to the priestly – Zadokite – positions; his critique of the royal and priestly casts; and his entrustment of his prophecies to the deuteronomic scribes all seem to point towards a more favorable association between Jeremiah and Deuteronomy. It stands to reason that Jeremiah, as a Levite, would advance the Levitical agenda found in Deuteronomy, and this is particularly important for memetics:

The emphasis on Jeremiah and the scribes’ Levitical status must have affected other Levites in exile, which would in turn affect the exilic population that looked to these Levites for leadership and religious stability. Indeed, through the Supplement, the Deuteronomists may have secured a coalition of sorts with exilic Levites, whose interests and authority were well represented therein.<sup>121</sup>

Perhaps one of the most discussed aspects of these passages in Jeremiah centers around the discussion of the New Covenant.<sup>122</sup> Though the Hebrews connection is not particularly important to this study, the article does emphasize the shift that takes place in Jeremiah concerning punishment. Willis argues that the pre-Jeremiah conception of punishment was that God simply withheld punishment, but did not forget it. This would inevitably lead to an accumulation of communal sins until Yahweh had no choice but to extend the punishment to the current generation. Opposed to this is the conceptualization of

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<sup>120</sup> Leuchter “Zadokites, Deuteronomists.”

<sup>121</sup> Leuchter “Zadokites, Deuteronomists.”

<sup>122</sup> Timothy Willis explores how the New Covenant pericope in Jeremiah has been appropriated by most Stone-Campbell Movement scholars in a way that ties it to the New Covenant mentioned in Hebrews 8. See Timothy M. Willis, “‘I will remember their sins no more’: Jeremiah 31, the New Covenant, and the Forgiveness of Sins,” *Restoration Quarterly* 53 (2011): 14.

punishment by Jeremiah: God no longer withholds punishment; he simply forgets and forgives after repentance. This is a very significant shift, as it is an underlying premise within the argument for the redaction of generational punishment. It indicates a strong dissent from the previously established precedent.

Another aspect of the New Covenant that is significant in understanding the pericope is that there is a shift from the external, sacrifice-based form of repentance to an internal law written on the hearts of the Israelites.<sup>123</sup> This change is an absolute paradigm shift and would require a complete renegotiation of cultic and theological understanding of the Israelites. Thus, calling it the “New Covenant” is indeed appropriate. With Jeremiah, we see a clear and utter break from the former canon, as he is proclaiming the old covenant void in exchange for the new, internalized covenant. This new covenant provides a way to have the accrued moral debt simply erased; all it requires is a new conceptualization of how Yahweh interacts with humanity.

However, this new reality is not yet present. By using the future tense in saying, “The days are surely coming” (Jeremiah 31:27), Jeremiah is indicating that there must be a renewal of the nation before the debt is forgiven. Levinson says, “In Jeremiah’s version of the oracle, the principle of individual responsibility will take effect only with the advent of a new moral and religious economy, sometime in an unspecified future (Jer.31:27, 31, 33). Jeremiah thus concedes that the proverb continues to be valid for the present and immediate future.”<sup>124</sup> This is somewhat in contrast to Ezekiel’s proclamation, in which the New

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<sup>123</sup> Jeremiah 31:31

<sup>124</sup> Levinson, “You Must Not Add Anything to What I Command You,” 32.

Covenant takes effect immediately with the pronouncement from Yahweh for which Ezekiel is the medium.

Jeremiah's role as a prophet is much the same as Ezekiel's for the purpose of this study, so much of the same features and descriptions apply. Jeremiah is somewhat removed from the established social hierarchies – though this in no way entails that he does not suffer for his breaches of the status quo, as will be discussed a bit later. Inherent in Jeremiah's critique of the establishment<sup>125</sup> is the same dynamic of placing one's self above other social entities, as is inherent in Ezekiel. Additionally, Jeremiah must also prove his authoritativeness by calling on an authority greater than himself: Yahweh. Also like Ezekiel, this authority is proven and mediated via oracles that come true.

It does seem as though Jeremiah was met with significant social pressures to allow the status quo to continue. Additionally, Jeremiah also acts as a frame-buster, using many of the same tools Ezekiel does. He uses strong polemics, proverbs/*masal* wisdom literature, and shocking rhetoric – both in the content of speech and written texts and in media used. In fact, the proto-performance art media used by both Jeremiah – such as his donning of an ox's yoke – and that of Ezekiel's street theater in chapters 4 and 5 heavily influence and augment the frame-busting content.

Due to the similarities between the roles played by both Jeremiah and Ezekiel, the most significant difference, therefore, concerns Jeremiah's particular context since he prophesied in Jerusalem during its period of siege, while Ezekiel was living in exile. Motyer notes that what sets Jeremiah apart from his contemporaries is that the "prophet could not carry the contest [between him and Hananiah] with the robust assurance which seemed so

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<sup>125</sup> See Jeremiah 36.

natural to Isaiah and Amos.”<sup>126</sup> Though any intonation and any other rhetorical devices besides the exact contextual written words are lost to us, there does seem to be an effect of rhetoric on authority.<sup>127</sup> A better speaker tends to command more power. Though internal evidence within Jeremiah points to a possibly more timid rhetorician,<sup>128</sup> it is difficult to see what effect this had on Jeremiah’s perceived power. The fact remains, however, that Jeremiah had to deal with quite a bit of contestation of his power, especially since he was advocating surrender during the siege of the city in Jeremiah 27:8; a direct slap in the face of the defenders. It does seem curious, though, that Jeremiah would have had greater difficulty with his message in Jerusalem, the somewhat newly central location of Yahweh worship. Though there is much contesting, the authority of the accurate prophesies of Jeremiah in light of his naysayers does seem to overcome any possible rhetorical shortcomings or contextual ideological counter-arguments.

The location of Jeremiah’s activity is also curious. Acting in Jerusalem, one would think that a prophet calling for a return to deuteronomic morality would have been more heeded. The pericope in Jeremiah 36 sheds some interesting light on the topic. The narrative

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<sup>126</sup> Motyer, “Prophet, Prophecy,” 969. Though Jeremiah may have been vocally more timid, Bob Becking points towards the richness of the metaphors involved in the pericope as being the main source for rhetorical efficacy. In either case, it would be difficult to establish how technically better or worse rhetoric would have affected the reception of Jeremiah’s message. See Bob Becking, “Sour Fruit and Blunt Teeth: the Metaphorical Meaning of the MĀŠĀL in Jeremiah 31,29,” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 17 (2003): 10.

<sup>127</sup> Matthews argues that “[c]onversation creates and re-creates a people’s social world. The basic components that comprise personal identity, status, and power are continually being defined and redefined in every dialogue.” He refers to this phenomenon as positioning theory. For the purpose of the thesis, his statement, “Contributing to this process is the manner in which the participants ‘act out’ their positions (professor, lawyer, or mother) so that the combined weight of their arguments and social status may cause others to accept or validate their position,” is of most interest to this thesis. I would augment this statement with the addition of rhetorical abilities to the combination, though it could be argued that it would be somewhat tied to social status. This cumulative weight grants the communicator authority. Matthews *More than Meets the Ear*, Kindle location 1120.

<sup>128</sup> Motyer, “Prophet, Prophecy,” 968.

of the reading of Jeremiah's scroll indicates that King Jehoiakim is acting as an informational gatekeeper. Due to the circumstances of his rule, as well as the fact the scroll was read in an inner room in Jehoiakim's palace, it would be safe to assume that there were foreign officials in attendance during the reading.<sup>129</sup> As a show of devotion to the foreign ideology, Jehoiakim destroys the physical manifestation of the idea when he destroys the scroll, thus showing which ideology he prefers in much the same way Josiah destroyed the cultic sites outside of Jerusalem. In essence, Jeremiah's authority comes into conflict with Jehoiakim's authority. As Jehoiakim, the king and primary authority in the country, aligns himself with foreign ideologies, it seems reasonable that he would have publicly espoused those ideas as well, generating a greater following amongst the citizens.

## **Conclusion**

The three passages selected provide a wide variety of information on the meme of individual moral responsibility. Not only do they track the progressive evolution and development of the idea, they demonstrate how the meme survived in various distinct forms. Deuteronomy simply rejects and redacts the generational retribution idea through subtle citation and linguistic manipulation; Jeremiah awaits the religious renewal of the nation to usher in a new paradigm; and Ezekiel espouses the new view of morality without going so far as to redact the previous canon. Each of these iterations shows a development of individual moral responsibility that makes progress possible because "any step forward – whether toward personal renewal or national reconstruction – would be pointless [under the old covenant]. For both theological and existential-historical reasons, therefore, we can expect

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<sup>129</sup> Victor Matthews, "Jeremiah's Scroll and Linked Zones of Communication," *BTB* 39/3 (2009): 116.

biblical authors to struggle relentlessly against the injustice of the Decalogue's doctrine."<sup>130</sup> By exploring the context and underlying authorial and theological politics inherent in the text, this chapter has presented the material necessary to explore the environmental factors – such as cultural influences, political nuances of the time, and the dynamics of authority and power – and inherent memetic traits that the individual moral responsibility meme possessed and adapted to. Additionally, this chapter emphasized the uniqueness of the transition within Israelite understanding of morality in contrast to its contemporaries, thus justifying it as a worthy research topic and subject matter for a memetic application. Though these pericopes simply demonstrate the budding nature, their subsequent incorporation into the established canon and greater ideological understanding within Israelite thought show that not only did this meme survive extreme environmental pressures, it became the dominant meme within its field of competition.

The contextual information in this chapter will provide the foundation upon which Chapter 3 is explored. By applying memetics as described in Chapter 1 to the material covered in this chapter, Chapter 3 will synthesize the content to provide new insights into the dynamics of development of individual moral responsibility.

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<sup>130</sup> Levinson, "You Must Not Add Anything," 31.

### CHAPTER 3: CREATING THE FITNESS LANDSCAPE

This chapter is the culmination of the previous two. Chapter 1 introduced the reader to the theory of memetics and demonstrated how I would be applying evolutionary models to interpret ideological development; Chapter 2 explored the historical, cultural, and legal context of Deuteronomy 24:16, Ezekiel 18, and Jeremiah 31:27-30 and how they contributed to the development of individual moral responsibility. Chapter 3 will in turn apply the memetic framework to the texts described in the hope of providing possible answers for why an ideology that seemingly should have been eradicated by its contemporaries not only survived but became the dominant ideology. Specifically, this study is looking for the attributes that gave individual morality a higher memetic fitness value than that of generational retribution. As mentioned in chapter one, according to Richard Dawkins the criterion for memetic fitness is that a meme's attributes simply be "psychologically appealing."<sup>131</sup> This study will move away from so broad a definition to identify specific traits that seem to have made the difference. Additionally, the chapter will incorporate authority structures inherent in the three pericopes into the evolutionary models. Overall, the goal of this chapter is both to provide an evolutionary explanation for the development of individual morality as well as to determine the attributes that best helped this development. Finally, the chapter will also explore how the meme of individual moral responsibility held up to the test of time by considering how it survived in later Israelite texts.

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<sup>131</sup> Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 194.

## **Evolution Of Morality**

Though chapter 2 touched somewhat on the stages of development of individual morality evident in the various Deuteronomy, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah pericopes, this chapter will spell out these stages more clearly, while also dealing with the memetic nature of the development of individual moral responsibility. There are several things to consider before beginning such an undertaking. First, the heredity of the individual morality meme should be established. Though the clash between generational retribution and individual moral responsibility seems fairly obvious, the progression evident in the pericopes presents an interesting possibility: What if individual moral responsibility is not analogous to a foreign biological unit entering a new ecosystem, but is simply a mutation of generational morality? There is still an assertion that there are right and wrong actions, there is still a sense that someone needs to be held responsible for transgressions. The only change in the system is the individual held responsible. The fact that generational morality was established before individual morality allows for a hereditary connection, and the change is only to one aspect of the meme. Understanding the new meme of individual moral responsibility as a mutation of generational morality simply fits the available data.

Dawkins addresses memetic mutation in *The Selfish Gene*, giving the example of birdsong. A species of bird had a very specific song associated with its mating rituals. A researcher observed that this song was repeated by the older generation, then learned by the next one. However, a bird sang the song incorrectly, introducing a random mutation in the song, which was then replicated by the younger birds, demonstrating the influence

of the new-song-singing bird.<sup>132</sup> This mutation was not a deleterious mutation, as the bird was able to mate, and instead served as a new template for future generations. Since the change in the song was rather minor and not observably noticed by the other birds, one cannot extrapolate that there will be no consequences to a new mutation that is more drastic. It is plausible that had the change in song been different enough to make the song unrecognizable, the bird in question would not have been able to mate. This example will serve as a parallel when discussing Deuteronomy later in this chapter.

Like a seemingly minor change in birdsong, framing the new moral ideology as a mutation of an already established morality seems to fit particularly well with this specific narrative. Given the evolutionary model, individual moral responsibility is a random mutation of generational morality, and then environmental factors allow for a more viable meme to spread. Though I use the term “random” to describe the mutation of the meme, this word is somewhat imprecise and I simply use it to reflect the language used for its biological counterpart. As was discussed in chapter 1, there seems to be significantly more conscious artificial selection within the evolution of memes than in biological systems. The following section will clarify this explanation.

That being said – and this is admittedly speculative on my part – I propose that the individual focus of the new meme as presented in Deuteronomy 7 and 24, Ezekiel 18, and Jeremiah 31 was originally more random than conscious. This gets into highly theoretical work on creativity and inventiveness, but Beck and Cowan’s work in *Spiral Dynamics* gives some possible explanations for creativity. Essentially, creativity is defined as the ability to make unexpected and new associations through a semi-random

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<sup>132</sup> Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 194.

process.<sup>133</sup> I say “semi-random” because the extent to which such processes are random is up for debate. These processes may not inherently be truly random, but simply have too many subconscious psychological and cultural variables to properly quantify. Therefore, the “random” mutation King Josiah – or some other author of Deuteronomy – introduces to the system of morality is based on a semi-random new association he makes concerning moral responsibility. As mentioned before, this is highly speculative on the origination of the mutation, but it seems that regardless of whether such a mutation was introduced through King Josiah, or if King Josiah inherited an already mutated form of the moral system from an outside source, such a random new association would have to happen at some point. However, given the fact that all other recorded contemporaneous legal systems still had very strong generational morality memes in them, ascribing the mutation to the author(s) of Deuteronomy does not seem that outlandish because this is the document in which the meme first appears.

In connection to this development, an important ideological environmental change took place. The death of the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal in 627 BCE destabilized the empire enough that Josiah would have had significantly more freedom in initiating his reforms. Assyria broke out into civil war in 623, which Victor Matthews takes as

the prelude to Josiah’s reforms and any attempts on his part to expand Judah’s territory and influence. It is only after the Assyrians had withdrawn an active presence from Syro-Palestine and could no longer send punitive military expeditions against the area that such an attempt at restoring Judah’s autonomy and territory [and, by extension, religious/cultural reform] could have been undertaken with a likelihood of success.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Don Beck and Christopher Cowan, *Spiral Dynamics: Mastering Values, Leadership and Change: Exploring the New Science of Memetics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 36.

<sup>134</sup> Victor Matthews, *A Brief History of Ancient Israel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2002), 89.

This dramatic environmental shift, from Assyrian control to Judaic autonomy, would provide the perfect breeding ground for new ideas and cultural shifts to take place. The most prominent cultural gatekeeper, Ashurbanipal, has fallen, giving rise in Judah to the previously dominated King Josiah and allowing him to exert greater influence over his territory.

However, simply describing the new form of morality, this new meme, as a random mutated form does not inherently mean that the new form was most adaptable to the new environment or even that the meme was adopted by the majority of the population at the time. In fact, as mentioned in chapter two, the proverbial nature of “the parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge” in both Ezekiel and Jeremiah indicates that generational retribution was the dominant meme. However, individual moral responsibility does seem better suited to the new ideological environment in Judah as well as that of Israelites in exile, as will be further discussed later in the chapter. For now, suffice it to say that the individual morality meme was better suited for the given circumstances. Its survival traits better accommodated the moral, cultural, and historical variables that were most influential at the time, which gave the meme a better chance to spread.

Keeping these evolutionary elements – ideologically significant memetic environmental change and semi-random mutation – in mind, the progress and development of the meme of individual moral responsibility can be tracked quite thoroughly through the pericopes discussed in this thesis. In Deuteronomy, vestiges of the old meme are still present, as Yahweh is still represented as punishing generationally, although the first evidence of mutation is observable in the non-familial-retribution laws

concerning rebellious entities in Deuteronomy 24:16. Additionally, Levinson's interpretation of Deuteronomy 7, examined later in this chapter, presents a wonderful parallel to the bird study Dawkins mentions. In the study, the bird changes but a single note and does not seem to suffer rejection.<sup>135</sup> This is conceivably due to the fact that the change is subtle enough that other birds do not notice the change. Through repetition of the new meme, not realizing it is a new meme, the revolutionary song is able to survive.

Deuteronomy 7 acts in much the same way. By affirming the previous canon in Deuteronomy 5, Deuteronomy draws on the previous precedent but introduces a subtle – yet significant – change. In Deuteronomy 7, generational retribution is omitted, which Levinson argues is a redaction on the previous canon.<sup>136</sup> The change is subtle enough not to overtly redact previously established canon, but its effects are significant in the long term as it spreads throughout the population.

Another observable stage of the meme's development can be found in Ezekiel, where the prophet does not wish to be viewed as a critic of the canonically interpreted material, opting instead for a type of rebranding of Yahweh. With Ezekiel, the prophet still acknowledges the previously set precedent and does not critique it, yet he introduces the new paradigm as the new norm by saying, "The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge. As I live, says the Lord God, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel" (Ezekiel 18:2-3). As mentioned in chapter 2, Ezekiel's wording indicates an immediate change in moral responsibility based on divine decree.

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<sup>135</sup> Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 194.

<sup>136</sup> Levinson, "You Must Not Add Anything," 30-31.

Contrasted to this, Jeremiah represents a somewhat confusing adaptation of the new meme. Whereas Deuteronomy and Ezekiel constitute a change, Jeremiah treats the meme as a future possibility, all the while assuming that generational retribution is the norm for the time being. This version of the meme indicates an acknowledgment of the new meme and even presents it as being a superior form of morality than generational morality. However, Jeremiah is waiting for the religious landscape to change before this new morality can take effect sometime in the future: “**In those days** they shall **no longer** say: ‘The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge’” (Jeremiah 31:29).

It is interesting to note the environmental factors that Jeremiah dealt with as well. As discussed in Chapter 2, Jeremiah experienced very strong and widespread pushback on his ideas. Whereas Deuteronomy is subtle in its redaction, Jeremiah is brash and extremely countercultural in his presentation of his prophecies. By donning the ox’s yoke during the siege of Jerusalem, he essentially turned the city against himself. In his case, his more obvious call to cultural change was challenged more directly by political factions that opposed his new teachings. It would seem that the survival of individual morality was due to both the meme’s resilience as well as Jeremiah’s own resilience.

Framing the memetic transition from generational morality to individual moral responsibility in this fashion has some subtle but significant consequences. By describing the new meme as a mutation rather than a different meme altogether, the struggle between the two ideologies is more akin to the struggle between the *Homo Sapiens* and the *Neanderthal* as opposed to, say, the clash of two predators of very different species vying for ecological dominance. This interpretation of events also sidesteps any problems

that could arise assuming an *ex nihilo* appearance of individual morality, instead providing a hereditary and developmental map. With such a framework in mind, the memetic interpretation of the material does seem to align well with traditional interpretations (Table 1), while giving a more in-depth view that synergizes with hard scientific methodologies and understandings.

Table 1. Comparison of interpretations

Memetics	Textual Studies
Change in environment allows for new mutations to develop.	Death of Ashurbanipal is the catalyst for Josiah's reform
Subtle genetic mutations are not as noticeable and do not affect survival as drastically as those sudden and drastic mutations.	Deuteronomy's subtlety in redacting the old norm was small enough to escape general notice.
Sudden and extreme mutations have a more difficult time adjusting to an already established ecosystem.	Jeremiah's brash changes led to him being rejected at first and even threatened his life.

Despite this cross-pollination, the methodology has not reduced the uniqueness of cultural change to purely biological and genetic factors, and allows for the affirmation of the value of the social sciences. However, though the framework may have strong explanatory abilities, it is still necessary to explain what makes individual moral responsibility more viable than its multi-generational counterpart.

## **Tricks Of The Trait**

Several factors play into analyzing the survivability of the individual morality meme during King Josiah's time. When taking a memetic approach to the system, certain aspects of Josiah's rule stand out more than others. First, Josiah's elimination of competing ideologies through the destruction of other worshipping places and a reinforcement of a centralized religion is of particular significance. A similar destruction of cultic sites had taken place under Hezekiah's rule (726 BCE to 697 BCE). Whereas Josiah's reform took hold among the population – despite some returning to the old paradigm during Jehoiakim's rule – Hezekiah's reform and memes were destroyed by environmental factors. The difference is that in Hezekiah's case it was Assyrian soldiers laying siege to Samaria and later to Jerusalem instead of a drought that affected the memetic ecology. Josiah's role as the informational gatekeeper of the deuteronomic texts, mediated through the prophetess Huldah as the certifier of these texts, was thus subsidized by his role as overseer of the nation's ideological reservoir. Had a person of negligible station attempted to destroy sanctuaries, it is probable that the attempt would have been much less successful. It would seem, therefore, that an idea's inherent nature to elicit a response that leads to the elimination of competing ideas – which is often achieved through its biological hosts destroying replicators like shrines or other prophets that repeat and spread memes – promotes a more exclusive development and spread.

Based on the discussion above, the survivability of an idea seems to be at least partially affected by its originator's and transmitter's dominance of the ideological

ecosystem – read cultural memetic landscape.<sup>137</sup> This is significant for the individual morality meme, as it is inextricably tied to the monotheistic messages inherent in Deuteronomy, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah because the authority for the scriptures and prophecy depend on the divine revelation Yahweh grants. Thus the inherent exclusivity of Yahweh worship, and the subsequent attempt to aggressively force extinction of other memes, supports the active replicator role in which the deuteronomic texts serve.

Eliminating competition is a common method of guaranteeing survival, on a microevolutionary level at the very least. Elimination of the competition, however, is still just a phenotype of the underlying meme. The meme itself, in this instance, is that Yahweh is the only god that is to be worshipped,<sup>138</sup> or by extension, that people are not to suffer idols. This general meme of monotheism is often tied to Isaiah 2, particularly verses 17-18: “The haughtiness of people shall be humbled, and the pride of everyone shall be brought low; and the Lord alone will be exalted on that day. The idols shall utterly pass away.” In practice, this “passing away” of idols was assisted and sped along by the destruction of idols or the destruction of other active replicators such as false prophets. This environmental effect seems to reinforce the notion of individual moral responsibility as an active replicator, meaning that this meme actively affects its environment to modify it in a way that increases its own survivability.

This approach seems to also be supported by the fact that after Josiah’s death, foreign political hegemony and religious influence did regain prominence – thus

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<sup>137</sup> Bruce Lincoln provides multiple examples of calculated ideological control through authoritative dominance, strengthening this stance. See Bruce Lincoln, *Authority: Construction and Corrosion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 46.

<sup>138</sup> Though whether that is to mean that Yahweh is the only existing god or that there are others but they are not to be worshipped depends on the interpreter.

requiring prophetic correction. In contrast, Josiah's son Jehoiakim espoused those foreign ideologies and used his ideologically dominant role to diminish the spread of deuteronomic practices and Jeremiah's influence (Jeremiah 36). Gary Yates points out a significant connection between Jeremiah 26-45 and Jehoiakim's rule. He argues that by framing this portion of Jeremiah with the repetition of "the fourth year of Jehoiakim's rule" indicates an important shift in Israelite history and that much of the later parts of Jeremiah were written to deal with this new environment.<sup>139</sup> It is obvious that the way Jehoiakim treated Jeremiah is thus significant in understanding the environmental pressures Jeremiah experienced. Yates argues,

The preaching of Jeremiah offers Judah an opportunity to turn from their sinful ways and avoid destruction, but Jehoiakim's rejection of the prophetic word brings Judah under a sentence of irrevocable judgment. The "fourth year of Jehoiakim" (605 BC) is a critical moment in Judah's history where the fate of the nation is sealed and Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar emerges as the human instrument of divine judgment.<sup>140</sup>

In fact, Nadav Na'aman posits that as a general rule, rulers who willingly submitted the nation to vassalage were treated much less kindly than those who expanded autonomy.<sup>141</sup> Though this is hardly surprising, it does explain why Josiah would be held in such high regard in cultural memory and why Jehoiakim would be cast in such an unpleasant light.

By distancing the meme of individual morality from the beliefs of the past, there is yet again exclusivity inherent in the rhetoric. By establishing what the new, correct ideology is, the old, wrong ideology is necessarily attacked and weakened. As Ezekiel is

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<sup>139</sup> Gary E. Yates, "Narrative Parallelism and the 'Jehoiakim Frame': a Reading Strategy for Jeremiah 26-45," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48 (2005): 281.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Nadav Na'aman, "The Deuteronomist and Voluntary Servitude to Foreign Powers," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 65 (1995): 51.

one of the strongest and most outspoken proponents of the meme of individual morality, it is essential to look more closely at his contribution to its survival. In Ezekiel 18, the prophet lays out a proclamation designed to set aside the old paradigm.

The pericope starts off with an assertion of authority: “The word of the Lord came to me”<sup>142</sup> Inherent in this statement is a claim to a previously proven and acknowledged authority, the Lord. As discussed in Chapter 2, a prophet’s role in the hierarchy of authority had long been accepted as unique,<sup>143</sup> especially after he had been accepted as a true prophet. The distinction of being a true prophet as opposed to a false prophet was made through evaluating the veracity of the prophet’s oracles and whether the prophet led the nation back to Yahweh or away from him. By saying “the word of the Lord came to me,” Ezekiel is essentially drawing on divine authority, or the highest authority, thus also connecting his next statement to the authority of the monotheism meme. This authority or power over divine revelation and theology is different from Josiah’s, whose station gives him an almost all-encompassing authority in political matters. Josiah would not necessarily need to establish divine inspiration as the basis of his authority.<sup>144</sup> However, there is a very delicate power struggle inherent within the pericope. The acceptance of Ezekiel’s words hinges on the acceptance of his authority, which in turn depends on the acceptance of that which authorizes his word, the power of Yahweh.

However, Ezekiel presents the exclusive worship of Yahweh as an example or a necessary aspect of individual morality and of adherence to the covenant, saying, “He

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<sup>142</sup> Ezekiel 18:1 (NRSV)

<sup>143</sup> Motyer, “Prophet, Prophecy,” 966.

<sup>144</sup> Though he does seem to call on such authority when presenting the deuteronomic texts.

[the righteous man] does not eat at the mountain shrine or look to the idols of Israel.”<sup>145</sup> It would seem that in this pericope, the acceptance, and thus survival, of individual morality depends on the audience’s complete acceptance of Yahweh’s authority, as demonstrated through their acknowledging the validity of Ezekiel’s prophecies. Once again, the survival of the ideology depends on the authority of the host of the idea. The exclusivist worship Josiah promoted and the authoritative pronouncement from Ezekiel reinforcing the individual morality meme are connected; the one idea is an extension of the other. Though these ideas work together, it is important to note the difference between the two iterations. While Josiah’s reform rests on the authentication of a written account of the word of Yahweh, Ezekiel provides a new, spoken revelation for which he himself is the medium. In addition to the synergy between Ezekiel’s new revelation and Josiah’s legal reform concerning culpability, Josiah’s actions in destroying idols reduce the effect other ideologies can have on the populace through their extermination of symbolic and visual images and the limitation placed on their replicative abilities, and Ezekiel’s authoritative statements offer a credible intellectual alternative that relies on exclusivism but also promotes it, further spreading the meme of individual responsibility. The two memes – exclusive Yahweh worship and individual moral responsibility – form a symbiotic relationship.

In much the same way as Ezekiel, Jeremiah must prove the worthiness of his memes for these memes to survive. However, instead of roaring the loudest or putting on a vibrant, feathered display as would be the case in the animal world, Jeremiah proves his dominance primarily through the accuracy of his oracles. There is an interesting twist

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<sup>145</sup> Ezekiel 18:6

concerning survivability when it comes to Jeremiah, and it demonstrates the uniqueness of the memetic approach. Evolutionary studies that do not account for a separate, non-gene-based development of memes often portray religion in a way that assumes that people hold religious views for some biological survivability reason.<sup>146</sup> However, as mentioned in the introduction, this view does not account for the fact that religious views often lead to an endangerment of an individual's biological survival. In Jeremiah's case, it led him into multiple situations in which his survival was threatened as a direct result of his statements. Being thrown in the cistern (Jeremiah 37:16), accosted by friends (Jeremiah 20), and challenged by the king (Jeremiah 36) all increased the likelihood of his physical demise. Despite all of this, Jeremiah continued to spread his memes. In this instance at least, it would seem that the drive to ensure the spread and survival of the meme superseded the biological imperative to survive. Not only did Jeremiah not take biological survival into account, the memes he espoused directly and causatively affected his survival negatively

In reviewing Josiah's reforms, Ezekiel's prophecy, and Jeremiah's prophecy and their effects on the transmission of individual morality, the survivability of the meme seems to have been heavily influenced by, if not rooted in, the authority of the meme's hosts. However, this on its own does not provide an explanation of survival of the meme. This is further complicated by the discussion of whether Josiah is actually the one responsible for the reform movement described in 2 Kings. Niels Lemche argues that the reformation has been misattributed to Josiah, saying that Hezekiah was instead

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<sup>146</sup> It is peculiar that such views often mention religious beliefs exclusively, but shy away from saying that a particular taste in art or political views are held for some manner of survivability, focusing solely on reducing only religious views.

responsible for the actual reforms, with Josiah added to the concept later as a cultural memory.<sup>147</sup> However, both Matthews<sup>148</sup> and Na'aman<sup>149</sup> reject this, opting for a Josianic revival instead of one led by Hezekiah. While Lemche looks at internal evidence in 2 Kings and describes the Chronicler as not particularly fond of the Josiah narrative, Na'aman argues that the story has simply been edited to better fit the general narrative in 2 Kings.<sup>150</sup>

Despite the assumption that this narrative is not simply cultural memory – though keeping such dynamics in mind is important – the approach explored so far in this chapter is limited to offering an explanation only for the survival of the meme after it has bonded to a dominant host. As previously discussed, such a host would be of cultural significance, who can influence its ideological reservoir. To truly understand the attributes that affect the survivability of the meme, it is necessary to examine which attributes of a meme make it beneficial to the host's authority.

For Josiah, there are several clear benefits to adopting the deuteronomic laws. First, centralizing worship acts as an organizational method that allows for greater social control.<sup>151</sup> In much the same way, a unified code of laws helps to standardize procedure and thus allows for greater social organization. In the specific example of the law of

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<sup>147</sup> Niels Peter Lemche, "Did a Reform Like Josiah's Happen?" in *The Historian and the Bible: Essays in Honour of Lester L. Grabbe*, ed. Philip R. Davies and Diana V. Edelman (New York, London: T & T Clark, 2010), 19.

<sup>148</sup> Matthews, *Brief History*, 88-89.

<sup>149</sup> Na'aman, "The 'Discovered Book' and the Legitimation of Josiah's Reform," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 130 (2011): 62.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>151</sup> Dale Patrick, "The Rhetoric of Collective Responsibility in Deuteronomic Law," in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom*, ed. David P. Wright (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 435.

individual morality, this law creates a system in which people can be held accountable for their own actions without blame being placed on another party. This shows a significant shift in thought and practice of law. Additionally, individual moral responsibility provides the nation with a new theodicy with which to reinforce its identity, a new way to deal with the theological problems that arise from the destruction of the exile. With Josiah, it seems that individual morality's survivability was aided by the positive effects it had on the king's rule and, by extension, Josiah's own survivability, creating a symbiotic "germ-host" relation. The centralization of power that the new meme provides helps Josiah, who attempts, briefly, to restore the old Davidic Kingdom. His survival was only temporary for Josiah, though, due to outside sources that could not be overcome, such as the limitations on his military strength and eventually his death at the Battle of Megiddo in 609 BCE.

The problem, however, arises when one tries to apply the "beneficial to the host" approach to the prophets. Indeed, it often seems that a particular idea or meme tends to do the exact opposite of ensuring one's survival. Jeremiah is an excellent example of a host promoting an idea that had a negative effect on the host's survivability. In the instance of the prophets, assuming they genuinely accepted the authority of a higher being, the prophets hold the belief that the meme is divinely inspired and thus dependent on divine authority. This notion is augmented by Jeremiah's reliance on divine authority to give him prophetic immunity as seen in Jeremiah 26: "At the beginning of the reign of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah, this word came from the Lord: Thus says the Lord: Stand in the court of the Lord's house, and speak to all the cities of Judah that come to

worship in the house of the Lord; speak to them all the words that I command you; do not hold back a word.”

In response to this, there are then two options available: in a system that precludes divine authority, the host might rely on his own authority, be it conscious or based on a delusion of divine inspiration; in a system that includes divine authority, the host relies on that divine authority. Based on these findings, promoting authority or being connected to a meme that promotes authority is essential to the survivability of a meme. In the instance of individual morality, it is heavily connected to the exclusive worship of Yahweh, which promotes authority and eliminates competing memes of foreign gods and polytheism, all the while providing an alternative theological pathway in which Yahweh is not defeated by the gods of Babylon.

The connection to authority does explain the survival of the meme as the dominant ideology within the internal collection of memes of Israel’s culture, but it does not explain survival in opposition to Assyrian or Babylonian ideologies, whose cultural dominance should have quelled the new individual morality through the standardization of legal precedents. Odell argues that “one alternative explanation is that the nature and frequency of these motifs [in reference to the Assyrian stylistic influence in Ezekiel] reflects Assyria’s centuries-long dominance that had established a common cultural matrix in which at least the elite populations of vassal kingdoms sought to participate,” reinforcing that Assyria did indeed exert cultural dominance to the extent that it had become internalized within Israelite culture.<sup>152</sup> Also, in light of the Hittite law explained

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<sup>152</sup> Margaret Odell, “Ezekiel, Book of,” in *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* 2 (2006): 389.

in Chapter 2,<sup>153</sup> it is unsurprising that the exiles, far removed from Yahweh's center of power in Jerusalem, surrounded by foreign law and culture, and thus far from the influences of deuteronomic values, would have deferred to the local customs. While this did indeed seem to take place on occasion, the new meme of individual responsibility allowed for at least a portion of the exilic population to create a new identity via the new covenant, with which they could battle the imperial culture that threatened to assimilate them. However, this proverb of sour grapes was not exclusive to the exiles. It could be found in Jerusalem as well.<sup>154</sup>

It is possible that these observed Assyrian influences are a resurgence of pre-deuteronomic ideology. In fact, based on the memetic attributes of fitness proposed earlier in the thesis – reinforcement of exclusivist identity and easing of existential and spiritual fatalism – the authority that Assyrian ideology had would probably have been the catalyst of the resurgence. When the authority of Josiah waned after his death, the dominant ideology (now Babylonian) moved in and began to take over again. And yet, it is the ideology of Ezekiel and Jeremiah that survives long-term. Thus, in order to overcome the authority and power struggle, there must be another attribute that enabled the individual morality meme to outlive its progenitors: Josiah and his Deuteronomistic scribes, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah. Essentially, the authority of prophetic speech overcomes transitory political ambitions and entities.

Once again, the exclusivity of Yahweh worship has some bearing on the topic. The organization and cohesion that Josiah's extermination of competing ideologies

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<sup>153</sup> Greenberg, "Ezekiel 1-20," 343.

<sup>154</sup> Odell, "Ezekiel, Book of," 391.

created undoubtedly helped the survival of the Israelite culture – and thus their collection of memes – as a whole in the long term. By anchoring national identity in Yahwistic worship and through the identity affirmation found in deuteronomic law and the covenantal teachings of the prophets, self-value – which includes an exclusivist mentality of being divinely chosen – promotes itself. In essence, the community is special because the sacred texts of the community say it is exclusive, based on either divine authority or ancestral authority. However, that authority only exists as long as the community acknowledges that authority.<sup>155</sup> It is arguable that it is this elitist sense of community that acts as a cohesive element, which by definition creates an us-versus-them dichotomy. The elitism is self-reinforcing and is only strengthened by outside pressures; there is no us-versus-them mentality without a “them”.

However, *prima facie*, the pericope in Ezekiel would seem to actually weaken internal community ties because there is a disassociation from the ancestors on moral issues. There is a lessening of communal responsibility by removing the responsibility of parents for the moral consequences of their children’s actions, and vice versa. In essence, families are disassociating their identities from the actions of their ancestors, which goes against the overwhelming sense of communal responsibility that is inherent in the collectivist honor-shame society.<sup>156</sup> Ezekiel is, in essence, acting as a paradigm buster by reformulating the communal honor-shame system that dictated social interaction between parent and child by releasing the current generation from the accrued moral debt of its ancestors. Not only is Ezekiel changing these relationships, but he places the blame back

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<sup>155</sup> Lincoln, “Authority,” 46.

<sup>156</sup> Patrick, “The Rhetoric of Collective Responsibility,” 435.

on the current generation,<sup>157</sup> by saying, “The person who sins shall die. A child shall not suffer for the iniquity of a parent, nor a parent suffer for the iniquity of a child” (Ezekiel 18:20) – but “the explicit rejection of transgenerational punishment would require Ezekiel to repudiate an authoritative teaching attributed to Yahweh.”<sup>158</sup> This further strengthens Ezekiel’s role as a paradigm buster, though it greatly magnifies the significance of such an attempt. Both memes, generational retribution and individual moral responsibility, draw on Yahweh’s authority, yet Ezekiel’s interpretation of Yahweh’s authority is the one that comes out on top. This could either be due to the additional authority attached to Ezekiel’s statements as well as the efficacy of his prophecies or simply be due to individual morality being a non-fatalistic system, since the old system could no longer be sustained in the face of exile.

Though there is a potential weakening of the individual relationships between generations due to the paradigm shift, the deconstruction of the commonly held belief in generational morality turns the individual reader towards Yahweh: the unifying force within the nation thanks to the efforts of Josiah’s reforms as well as the eventual destruction of Jerusalem. This deconstruction would unravel the communal identity unless an alternative relational connection was provided. Instead of tying one’s identity to heritage – that is, creating identity cohesion within family clans, though not necessarily within the nation – each individual is tied morally directly to Yahweh and thus to each other.

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<sup>157</sup> Daniel Block says that Ezekiel’s contemporaries were beginning to complain about divine injustice over being punished for their ancestors’ sins. To correct this, he places the blame back on the contemporary generation, thus removing the bond to previous generations. See Dan Block, *The Book of Ezekiel* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1997): Kindle Location 9965.

<sup>158</sup> Odell, “Ezekiel, Book of,” 390.

Dale Patrick describes the role and effect of Deuteronomy: “People are being unified around one God, one place of sacrifice, one law and judicial system,”<sup>159</sup> and it seems that this unification is more effective than the scattered cultic practices of the pre-Josiah era. Individual morality reinforces personal value through personal moral contact with the deity, while relinquishing responsibility for past wrongs. The New Covenant presented by both Ezekiel and Jeremiah points towards a move away from the external expression of religious identity to an internal, more intimate relationship with the deity. The individual moral responsibility meme generates a greater sense of individual value and meaning than its counterpart, generational retribution, and moves further away from the fatalism of generational retribution.

Both Ezekiel and Jeremiah present the proverb of sour grapes in a negative light: “It expressed resentment against the notion that a man’s family might be punished for his misdeeds, as though they were extensions of him, and mortgaged for his good behavior.”<sup>160</sup> It would follow that freedom from the curse of responsibility for one’s family’s morality would be desirable. To put it into memetic terms, there was no room for redemption due to the accumulated errors of the past because the ideology of generational morality would inevitably lead to an understanding that included the personal and ideological extinction of the current Israelite generation.

Daniel Block describes the mentality of generational morality as “reflect[ing] a materialistic fatalism, a resignation to the immutable cosmic rules of cause and effect, an

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<sup>159</sup> Patrick, “The Rhetoric of Collective Responsibility,” 436.

<sup>160</sup> Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 343.

embittered paralysis of the soul, that has left the exiles without hope and without God.”<sup>161</sup> Additionally, Becking describes the situation in this way: “Tragic fatalism is only looking at the position of the offspring. Their fate is destined by the acts of a former generation and their position is tragic when they hide themselves behind their fate saying: ‘It is not my fault, I can blame my ancestors. They provoked my ruination by their deeds and doings.’”<sup>162</sup> The new, alternative, system offers an “expungeability of a wicked past and the assurance of life to the penitent better answers to the despair expressed in [Ezekiel] 33:10.”<sup>163</sup> Thus, it would be possible to establish that another attribute of memetic fitness is being essentially more promoting the survivability of existential and spiritual identity.

### **Survival of the Fittest**

Though the internal evidence found in Deuteronomy, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah certainly indicates that the idea survived, the simple fact that the pericopes themselves exist to this day and are part of the official canon of both the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Bible demonstrate the survivability of individual moral responsibility. Yet a more thorough exploration of the meme’s survival and influence is certainly in order.

While the terms “generational punishment” and “individual moral responsibility” do not make for particularly effective search terms, the underlying principle of the individual being held responsible for actions, as well as the significance of the scriptural texts and authors explored in this thesis, have survived in a demonstrable way. In the *Pirke Avot* (sometimes also *Pirkei Avot*), a collection of ethical teachings that is part of the Mishnah that

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<sup>161</sup> Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, Kindle location 10714.

<sup>162</sup> Becking, “Sour fruit and Blunt Teeth,” 12.

<sup>163</sup> Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 340.

draws heavily on Deuteronomy, there is one passage in particular that demonstrates individual moral responsibility particularly vividly: “Hillel saw a skull floating on the water. He said to it, ‘Because you drowned others, you have drowned; and those who drowned you will themselves drown.’”<sup>164</sup> Rabbi Rami Shapiro, translator and annotator of the Pirke Avot interprets the passage as meaning “How you act in this moment sets the conditions for what you will encounter in the next moment. Your behavior is yours to control; the results of your behavior are outside your control. Influence conditions by aligning your actions with justice and compassion. Deeds fashion destiny. The heaven you desire and the hell you fear are both in your hands.”<sup>165</sup> This passage and its interpretation actually both serve to demonstrate the survival of individual moral responsibility within Judaism. The inclusion of the meme of individual moral responsibility in the Mishnah demonstrates that it survived into the first and second century CE, when the Mishnah was compiled, and Shapiro’s interpretation of the passage shows that the meme of individual moral responsibility has survived in current interpretations within Judaism. The significance of the inclusion of the meme in this text within Judaism cannot be overstated, as Shapiro says that “without Pirke Avot, Judaism disappears.”<sup>166</sup> The meme’s inclusion in the Pirke Avot has seemingly ensured a more long-term and solidified survival.

Additionally, the influences of the prophets Ezekiel and Jeremiah permeate both Mishnaic and modern Judaism. Ezekiel’s discussion of the New Covenant, the greater rhetorical work within Ezekiel in which individual morality plays an essential role, had

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<sup>164</sup> Rami Shappiro, trans., *Ethics of the Sages* (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2006), Kindle location 823.

<sup>165</sup> Shapiro, *Ethics of the Sages*, Kindle location 2170.

<sup>166</sup> Shapiro, *Ethics of the Sages*, Kindle location 147.

profound influences on the Qumran community and the Dead Sea Scrolls literature. Gary Manning, New Testament Scholar, says that “Ezekiel predicted that God would give his Spirit and a new heart of flesh to his people; the Community [of Qumran] celebrated that giving of the Spirit in their ceremonial baptisms, although they were still awaiting the heart of flesh.”<sup>167</sup> Manning also records allusions and use of Ezekiel’s teachings in Enoch, Lives of the Prophets, and Maccabees. Additionally, Manning shows that Ezekiel influenced the Gospel of John in several rather major ways, showing that John draws heavily on both the imagery and theology that Ezekiel espouses.<sup>168</sup>

In addition to this, Jeremiah’s message of the New Covenant is present in the Midrash.<sup>169</sup> The use of Jeremiah here is particularly interesting, as the rabbinic commentators in the Midrash indicate that this new covenant supersedes and replaces the covenant in Leviticus, essentially placing Jeremiah’s prophecy above that of Moses, saying,

“As it is said ‘[Behold the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah] not like the covenant I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord’ (Jeremiah 31:32)”<sup>170</sup>

As the Midrash is a central text in Judaism and is still used to this day, the incorporation of Jeremiah’s New Covenant demonstrates both the authoritative status Jeremiah enjoyed, but more importantly, it shows that Jeremiah’s New Covenant theology was well received long-term and survives to this day.

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<sup>167</sup> Gary T. Manning, *Echoes of a Prophet* (New York: T&T International, 2004), 75.

<sup>168</sup> Manning, *Echoes of a Prophet*, 149.

<sup>169</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Jeremiah in Talmud and Midrash: A Source Book* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2006), 14.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid

## **Conclusion**

Looking at the passages in Deuteronomy, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah as reflecting the evolutionary development of individual moral responsibility has allowed for an approach that explains the environmental and memetic influences that affected the development of individual responsibility rather well. Memetics does not threaten to supersede already established methodologies, but instead incorporates them into a frame that helps explain why certain ideas come out on top after a clash. By first framing the new paradigm as a mutation of the previously dominant one – which was achieved by showing that such a view better explains heredity – the chapter provides an argument that fully embraces evolutionary theory in a way that does not impose overly reductionist approaches to religious studies. This thesis does not present culture as an emergent property of biological evolution; it is instead a system that develops on its own, albeit according to similar principles. It is obvious that, although biological factors do indeed affect cultural development, cultural development has an equally tangible effect on the material world. This interpretation allows for an understanding of the two systems as creating an interaction effect, as opposed to one causing the other. Memes can affect an individual's biological survivability, as seen in the instances where Jeremiah's proclamations endangered his life, just as biological elements can affect the spread of a meme, such as the effects the violent death of Josiah had on the eventual resurgence of Assyrian and Babylonian ideologies.

After framing the material in this manner, this chapter has described the specific traits of the meme of individual moral responsibility that gave rise to its cultural dominance, focusing on traits like the meme's ability to create an elitist mentality for greater in-group

cohesion and identity affirmation and to move away from the fatalist generational retribution. By reviewing how authority structures – which are created, maintained, and progressed through the symbiotic relationship of meme and host – affect the survivability of a meme, this study establishes that these hierarchies are important environmental factors that need to be taken into account. People with greater dominance over the cultural environment have a correlating greater effect on memes in a given system. This chapter also establishes that the destruction of replicators such as shrines, scrolls, or people spreading a meme decreased the efficacy of that meme, allowing for individual moral responsibility to gain dominance. This, in conjunction with reinforcing a unique and elitist status through differentiation, created an ideology that only grew more resilient as more cultural pressure was placed on it.

Additionally, this chapter shows that although elemental factors like authority figures and prevalence of the meme affected its survivability, there were traits inherent in the individual morality meme that overcame any environmental factors: encouraging cultural exclusivity and easing existential nihilism. By offering an alternative possibility to the nihilistic generational punishment, individual morality offered hope and a way out of exile, which seems to have greatly increased its ability to survive the domineering imperialism and legal pressure of Assyrian and later Babylonian vassal status.

Finally, this chapter recorded later iterations of individual moral responsibility in the Mishnah, Intertestamental scriptures, and Midrash, demonstrating that not only did the meme of individual moral responsibility survive, but the teachings of Ezekiel and Jeremiah superseded the previously established covenant and defined the relationship Israelites had with God even through modern times.

## CONCLUSION

This study was born from a desire to reconcile social sciences and some of the more prevalent theories in the hard sciences. The complexities and nuances found in the biblical passages explored in this work simply seem beyond the scope of reductive, genetics-based, evolutionary concepts. There is value and even beauty in the methodologies that the social sciences pursue, develop, and employ. The push towards reduction of such traditions by scholars like Dawkins is not only arrogant, but also misguided. By applying memetic theory to the transition from generational retribution to individual moral responsibility beginning during King Josiah's reign, this study moves beyond the reduction of traditional evolutionary biblical interpretations and shows that memetics provides a new perspective on the passages.

Chapter 1 demonstrates that memetics offers a way to ease the tension between the hard sciences and cultural studies and acts as a mediator by applying evolutionary models to the spread of cultural units. It acts as a tool of reframing and has its value rooted in its ability to provide a system of thought that acknowledges the developments in evolutionary biblical studies while ensuring that the social sciences are not brushed off as secondary. By using memetics, this study problematizes reductionist theories by showcasing complexity that is better described as a process beyond genetics. For the social sciences, memetics provides a framework that is more compatible with evolutionary theory because it espouses the same methodologies. Though social science methodologies often record facts and perspectives on the development of ideas, even

going so far as to explain how ideas spread, they have yet to provide a coherent system of *why* ideas spread the way they do. Why does one idea outlast another? Why is there such diversity in ideas? Why do some ideas that have no factual foundation survive? There are still people who believe that the world is flat, despite the exhaustive research to the contrary. Memetics allows for an explanation for the survival of such memes. For these fields, memetics offers a frame of understanding that allows for conscious decisions by agents in culture, while acknowledging that not all such influences are conscious or the even the decision of the agent at all. By my defense of theory and explanation of the afore-mentioned dynamics, memetics allowed for an understanding of the pericopes as analogous to evolutionary processes.

Chapter 2 looked at the specific context of Deuteronomy 24:16, Ezekiel 18, and Jeremiah 31:27-30. By establishing the legal and linguistic nuances, authority hierarchies, and specific environmental factors inherent in the pericopes, Chapter 2 concludes that Deuteronomy served as a document to centralize control and provide a strong refutation of generational retribution. Ezekiel demonstrates a call to immediately transition to the new paradigm of morality while not redacting previous canon, and Jeremiah's narrative provides strong examples of how specific environmental factors significantly influenced the development and spread of individual moral responsibility.

Chapter 3 moves beyond previous interpretations of the biblical texts to apply memetic theory to the material explored in Chapter 2. Specifically, Chapter 3 looks for specific environmental factors that allowed for the spread of individual morality – such as the death of Ashurbanipal and the destruction of conflicting cultic sites and false prophets – as well as the specific traits that individual morality possessed that enabled it to better

adapt and flourish in the environment. This study identifies these traits to be the following: affirming cultural identity in contrast and opposition to Assyrian and Babylonian cultural dominance; promoting an elitist mentality born from the connection between individual moral responsibility and monotheism; and finally, moving away from the fatalistic view of generational morality which had prompted hopeless theological nihilism.

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