

# Interpretation

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3	<i>Hannes Kerber</i>	Leo Strauss on Exoteric Writing
27	<i>Marco Menon</i>	An Interpretation of Machiavelli's <i>Favola</i>
45	<i>Lloyd Robertson</i>	<b>Review Essays</b> <i>Ezekiel 38–48: A New Translation, with Introduction and Commentary</i> by Stephen L. Cook
61	<i>David Lewis Schaefer</i>	<i>Political Philosophy and the Republican Future: Rediscovering Cicero</i> by Gregory Bruce Smith
87	<i>Matthew Berry</i>	<b>Book Reviews</b> <i>The Alt-Right: What Everyone Needs to Know</i> by George Hawley
93	<i>Marco Menon</i>	<i>All'alba di un mondo nuovo</i> by Angelo Panebianco and Sergio Belardinelli
99	<i>Will Morrisey</i>	<i>The Kingdom of Man: Genesis and Failure of the Modern Project</i> by Rémi Brague
107	<i>Mary P. Nichols</i>	<i>Aristotle: Democracy and Political Science</i> by Delba P. Winthrop
119	<i>David A. Nordquest</i>	<i>Educating Liberty: Democracy and Aristocracy in J. S. Mill's Political Thought</i> by Christopher Barker
125	<i>Wendell O'Brien</i>	<i>Tractatus Politico-Philosophicus</i> by W. Julian Korab-Karpowicz
131	<i>Alexander Orwin</i>	<i>Glaucon's Fate: History, Myth, and Character in Plato's "Republic"</i> by Jacob Howland
137	<i>Joshua Parens</i>	<i>Leo Strauss and His Catholic Readers</i> by Geoffrey M. Vaughn
141	<i>John Ray</i>	<i>Nourishment: A Philosophy of the Political Body</i> by Corine Pelluchon
145	<i>David Lewis Schaefer</i>	<i>Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad</i> by Michael Walzer
155	<i>Georg Simmerl</i>	<i>Von Carl Schmitt zu Hannah Arendt?</i> by Sebastian Huhnholz

# Interpretation

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## Review Essay

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Stephen L. Cook, *Ezekiel 38–48: A New Translation, with Introduction and Commentary*. The Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018, 368 pp., \$65 (hardcover).

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LLOYD ROBERTSON

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I am not a scholar of the Bible, so I must apologize in advance to Stephen L. Cook, as well as to readers who are able to learn more from his erudite study than I can. My goal is to help readers of this journal understand what they can expect to find in Professor Cook's book, and how it relates to, or overlaps with, political philosophy.

It may be well to begin by putting Ezekiel into historical context. David died in 970 BC; Solomon in 931. Ezekiel was born about 622, and his years of biblical prophecy began about thirty years later, in 593. Jeremiah's prophecies date from an overlapping period beginning only a few years earlier (627–594); Isaiah's date from a hundred years earlier (742–701), but with what are held by scholars to be substantial passages from much later.<sup>1</sup> The kingdom of the Israelites, with a capital at Samaria, was destroyed in 722 by the neo-Assyrian empire, "the first real empire in history"; the kingdom of Judah, with a capital at Jerusalem, remained independent for about another hundred and fifty years. The Bible says that the first Temple in Jerusalem was built by Solomon—probably in 966. This temple was sacked by the pharaoh

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<sup>1</sup> Deutero-Isaiah or Second Isaiah (chaps. 40–55) is regarded as dating from the Babylonian exile (sixth century); Cook says Third Isaiah (56–66) is "almost certainly from the Persian-era restoration" in the latter half of the sixth century (539 being a key date), two hundred years after the early books of Isaiah.

of Egypt a few decades later, fully reconstructed by Jehoash, king of Judah, in 835, stripped again by the king of Assyria in about 700, and totally destroyed by the Babylonians in 586, perhaps seven years after Ezekiel's first prophecy. The first deportation of Judahites to Babylon took place in 597. There was a competition between Egypt and the Babylonian empire for control of Judah from 597 to 582; Ezekiel was among the Judahites who were exiled from their home in Judah to Babylon.<sup>2</sup>

Cook's book is the third and final volume in the series of Anchor Yale Bible commentaries on Ezekiel. The first two volumes were authored by Moshe Greenberg, a mentor of Cook's. Cook tells us that he differs from Greenberg first in the good fortune of being in a position to present "three-dimensional, virtual models of the utopian temple" in Ezekiel 40–48, but also in some matters of interpretation. Cook's identification of the authors—Ezekiel and his school, or a group of authors sharing a common purpose—guides him in his interpretation of the text.

Although Greenberg (and, indeed, premodern Jewish scholars) were familiar with Ezekiel's dependence on the Holiness Code in Leviticus, his commentaries do not reflect more recent understandings of an entire source running through the Pentateuch known as the "H" source, or what Israel Knohl calls "HS," the Holiness School. Neither does he elaborate on the common Zadokite authorship of HS and Ezekiel.... [Greenberg's friend Jacob Milgrom, in more recent work] lumps Zadokite and Aaronide priests together! It is in the opposite move of striving toward social-scientific precision in understanding the Israelite priesthood that the present commentary gains new traction in illuminating Ezekiel's prophecy. (xii)

Cook builds on findings or claims about "the two component strands of the priestly writings of the Pentateuch, HS and PT"; he wants to link these strands "respectively with the Zadokite circle and a differing, more generally Aaronide circle," the Zadokites being understood as "a dominating Aaronide family, an inner-Aaronide lineage" (16). "The dialog [for example, between Ezekiel 44 and Isaiah 55 and 66] is between two clerical factions, neither of which are Levites" (17).<sup>3</sup> Cook says: "Ezekiel's written prophecy brims with

<sup>2</sup> On a point of terminology: insofar as the kingdom of Judah survived, while the kingdom of the Israelites did not, it is not correct to refer to the Judahites as Israelites; the term "Hebrews" is correct, reaching back to the time of Abraham and forward to the times when first Latin (from "Judeans," people from the province of Judea where the Temple was located), then languages including French and English, yielded the term "Jews." We will try to follow biblical usage for "the people of Israel," and "Jews" for the period from Roman times onward. "Hebrews" may be used to cover various different periods.

<sup>3</sup> "HS shares the idea of two separate central clerical houses in Israel, both separate from the Levites.

sophisticated intertextual echoes of preceding scriptural material.” Ezekiel 38–48 “specifically draws on earlier prophetic literature and on priestly Holiness School (HS) Scriptures.” Examples of “inner-biblical interpretation” include comments on various passages in Isaiah.

Cook has no doubt that different passages were written or added at different times; some Gog and Magog passages in 38–39 “originate” at different times than other passages in Ezekiel. Does this mean that later passages are interpolations, or that they do not belong?

Tensions and seams within the text indicate that an original core authentic to Ezekiel and his earliest editors was later expanded by the Ezekiel school. . . . The growth, however, shows every sign of being “organic.” That is, it represents a deepening of motifs and themes native to Ezekiel and was carried out in a manner displaying a distinct family resemblance to other editorial work within the book. (8–9)

It is a false choice or dilemma, if we follow Cook’s approach, to think there was either one author working over a period of time, or multiple authors who may have had different agendas, and therefore produced a “pastiche.” Ezekiel 38–48, in particular, “is not an artificial and anthological in-grafting.” The best understanding of the text is that there is apparently not one author, but a group of authors, to some extent not actually meeting or directly collaborating, working on a common project together. The “pastiche” theory has been a distraction; without it, “we would hardly attribute the Gog oracles to anyone but Ezekiel and his disciples” (9). There are many textual references “back” to earlier passages in Ezekiel; there is the literary technique of “halving”; and there are familiar markers of style. Above all, perhaps, there is “clear evidence of Ezekiel’s priestly frame of mind, indeed of a Zadokite orientation.” Certain passages in Ezekiel draw directly from HS texts in Leviticus. Attempts to place all of Ezekiel 38–48 at some significantly later time must fail, as we can see from references “back” to key passages in Ezekiel that appear in Zechariah and Joel (9–10).

Even with new findings about the consistency of Ezekiel with other biblical texts, chapters 38–48 present difficulties. The notes on the dust jacket from Yale University Press describe these final sections of Ezekiel as “the

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It understands the priests of both houses to descend from Aaron [brother of Moses], one set through Eleazar and the other through Ithamar. . . . HS places Ithamar in charge of Levites with lesser duties, while it has Eleazar direct the Levites responsible for the most important items of the tabernacle (Numbers 3–4). . . . The line of Eleazar and [his son] Phinehas produced Zadok, a chief priest of King David’s time and the eponymous ancestor of the Zadokites” (17). With some qualifications, Cook takes the term “Zadokite” to fit well the upper-echelon priests that HS wants to elevate.” See generally 16–18.

most challenging texts of scripture.” There are differences between Ezekiel 38–39, on one hand (with the “Gog and Magog” predictions of God destroying enemies of Israel, and giving the land of Israel to the Hebrews), and 40–48, on the other. To the former passages Cook applies the admittedly awkward term “proto-apocalyptic,” partly because of similarities between these passages and later passages in Daniel and Revelations. The genre here can also be described as “eschatological prophecy.” As to chapters 40–48:

The second section in chapters 40–48 is an archetypal vision of a temple-centered world. It squarely fits the technical genre known as utopian literature. Ezekiel and his inner circle, over time, composed texts in both genres. There is, in my view, no need to posit different authorial circles behind Ezekiel 38–39 and Ezekiel 40–48. (3–4)

The two groups of passages are complementary, as opposed to being so different as to indicate a splicing together of things that do not belong together. The Ezekiel 38–39 passages focus on time, especially the end times resembling the beginning time at Creation; the battle between order and chaos, culminating in the defeat of chaos, actually happens as a sequence of events. At Ezekiel 40–48, on the other hand, there is an emphasis on space, order, and geometry; “how things should be” in the material surroundings of God’s people, as a reflection of “how they should be” among the people themselves. The focus is more a matter of how one imagines oneself in the present than of what is likely to happen in the future (4–5). Cook elaborates his understanding of More’s *Utopia* in order to clarify what he means. Ezekiel’s ideal temple and land are not “finished” in the sense of supplying detailed plans that could actually be put into effect. Horizontal dimensions and barriers are described in detail, but not vertical ones. What is crucial “for now” is that movement of people, access to the divine, can be controlled while being shared. Leaving vertical dimensions and perspectives blank is a way of allowing for the intervention of what must be largely unknown; what exactly will God require? “The architectural zones of the utopia of chapters 40–48 await a filling in as God takes up bodily residence.” The utopia is also imperfect in important ways. There is still sin, the need to frighten would-be trespassers, and the need for atonement. The “new heart” that has been promised for Israel has not yet arrived in utopia. Many essential details for an actual city are missing; those that are present are fantastic, suggesting an ongoing need for miracles (5–12).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> English translations of 43:11 have tended to say that the House of Israel is ordered by God to “follow the entire plan” of the temple Ezekiel has seen (NRSV), or “carry it out” (NJB). Cook renders “‘They must come to terms with them,’ that is, with the temple’s design and regulations” (191–92).

The third difference Cook notes between Greenberg’s work and his own is that Greenberg’s commentaries “did not develop the significance” of “Ezekiel’s anthropomorphic mode of speaking about God” in connection with “the anthropomorphic theology of HS...and the Zadokite idea of a terrestrial ‘body’ of God.” “The present commentary works hard to connect these dots and in so doing pushes to clarify a great deal of Ezekiel’s text” (xii). God’s literal presence is a major theme both at the beginning and the end of the book of Ezekiel. The utopia is “God’s garden of creation, containing both profound danger and intense blessing. Those who enter to be blessed must do so reverently, discerning god’s bodily Presence” (12). Cook says: “Just as some core of the Gog text was an early part of Ezekiel, so some core of Ezekiel must have been part of the earliest outline of the book. Without this text, the book’s central crisis of the absence of the divine Presence from God’s temple is left unresolved.”

The *kābôd* [or Presence] is central in the three main vision accounts of Ezekiel 1–3, 8–11, and 40–48....From chapter 11 on, the Presence has been anomalously absent from Israel and the land’s central shrine. Here, the book raises a profound literary and theological tension, which begs for resolution. The Presence *must* once more indwell the temple and sanctify Israel....Since, within Ezekiel’s book, the return of the Presence occurs only in chapters 40–48, at least a core of these chapters is integral to Ezekiel’s thought. A vision of a new temple *belongs* in Ezekiel. (10–11)

The Presence for Ezekiel is more than the “radiance” or “splendor” which seems to be the understanding of *kābôd* in Isaiah, Habakkuk, and the Psalms; “a diffuse and undifferentiated sort of holiness would appear to lack transformative, sanctifying power....The incarnate God that Ezekiel envisions cannot be identified with this sort of aura” (11).<sup>5</sup> The utopian vision of chapters 40–48 is needed not only to “wrap up the crisis of the *kābôd*’s absence,” but to “resolve the promises of preceding oracles in the book.” The “ideals” in question trace back to various Zadokite, HS texts earlier in the Bible. “If there was clear evidence of Ezekiel’s priestly frame of mind, of his Zadokite orientation, in Ezekiel 38–39, this is even more the case in Ezekiel 40–48, which exhibits dependence on HS throughout” (11).

<sup>5</sup> Cook cites Isa. 6:3, Hab. 3:3 and Ps. 57:11 as passages where *kābôd* means “radiance” or “splendor”; the KJV and NIV translate as “glory” in these books and in Ezekiel; NAS has “splendor” at Hab. 3:3. Passages outside Ezekiel saying God dwells or will dwell among his people are Exod. 25:8, 29:45, 46; Num. 5:3, 35:34. The KJV, NAS, and NIV also translate *kābôd* as “glory” at Exod. 33:17–23, where God explains to Moses that He will be very much present.

In the utopian temple described in the last passages of Ezekiel, God is not only present in the inner sanctum, but both holy and alive in such a way that his Presence cannot be contained. God does not simply make Israelites aware of His presence, so that when they are away from the inner sanctum they have a “potential” holiness “predicated on obedience to commandments.” Rather, in the Ezekielian view, “the *holiness* of the indwelling Presence actually extends beyond the sanctuary to affect Israel for the good.” The good news, one might say, is that Israelites can continue to gain in sanctity by virtue of direct spreading and intervention in their lives of the holy God; the very land of Israel is so to speak filled with God’s presence. Cook cites Knohl: “In PT holiness is ritual and restricted to the Temple and the priesthood. Although all Israelites are commanded to be ritually pure, their observance of purity does not endow them with the qualities of holiness [whereas in HS, holiness *is* the aspiration of all Israel].” The news that, while not exactly bad, requires caution, is that “the dazzling holiness of deity” must be respected; an improper approach to the real, living deity, reaching out throughout Israel, can be “lethal.” Precautions are needed so that the people can grow in sanctity “safely” (20–22).

In Ezekiel there is not only light and holiness and goodness, leading to salvation, but also something like the opposite: murk or filth, associated with sin, death, and disobedience. Impurity and desecration, like their opposites, have a “preternatural character”; “what drives God’s Presence from Israel is not mere human impropriety and immorality” (22–23). The “spatial polarity” between holy and unholy, pure and impure, is clear above all in the opposition between the sanctuary and every other space, including in the land of Israel. (“The territorial antithesis at play in Ezekiel is not an example of ethnic chauvinism.”)

Ritual impurities within Israel, such as corpse contagion, skin disease, and menstrual blood, oppose and impede the divine life emanating from God. God’s land is particularly defiled by *gillûlîm*, “idols.”... These *gillûlîm* crowd out the living God, are themselves devoid of life, and etymologically, bear associations of filth, waste, and degradation. Thus, even with regard to idols, Wenham...is correct that “the quintessence of uncleanness is death.” (23)

Somewhat paradoxically, bloodshed is an intense source of pollution, but of course sacrificial blood is essential to the rites that are performed in the sanctuary. Cook claims to be restoring some of the complexity to the biblical view of sacrificial blood. Such blood is not simply a “detergent” or decontaminating agent; it is at least as much about “restoring relationship with YHWH.” There is a battle of death with life, and “blood, as life” wins the battle. “The



sacrificial blood gains holiness from the altar...but at the same time it gains defilement from the offerer....It is understood to remove impurity or evil from the worshiper” (24).

Perhaps Cook’s most distinctive argument is that YHWH, according to Ezekiel and others in his school, can be understood in an anthropomorphic sense, and not only metaphorically (see 186ff., commenting on 43:1–12). YHWH is present in a material sense, in body, in the idealized temple.<sup>6</sup> It may be a sign of how desperately human beings need salvation from the filth and degradation that constantly threaten us, owing (apparently) to our being mortal, that only the actual presence of God on earth among us can save us.

Ezekiel’s God is a starkly emotional deity (anthropopathism). God is intensively “patriotic” about the Judean homeland, which the Lord refers to with “hot jealousy” as “my land” (Ezek 36:5)... Does [Ezekiel’s] God have a *body*?... The Presence remains substantively and singularly interconnected with the shrine on an ongoing basis.... Settling within a unique dwelling, the divine *kābôd* commits itself to dwell... amid the tribes of Israel alone.... God has a “body”; it occupies one place at one time. (24–25)

God Himself seems to state very literally that he will be present in body—including his feet. “And [the voice] said to me: Human One, this is the place of my throne and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell among the children of Israel continually” (182). On the other hand, by becoming present in a bodily sense, YHWH risks being infected in some of the ways to which human beings are subject.

Texts such as Ezek 43:9 directly attest to the tension between God’s residence on earth and Israel’s contact with pollution. The dreadful tension helps explain the detailed concern about the architectural elements of the utopian temple in Ezekiel 40–48. There is a windowless and sealed inner sanctum in the temple, for example, to safeguard the Presence from the threat of death. (24)

Of course, God remains a mystery, indeed unknowable despite some essential and tantalizing details. “In Ezekiel 40–48, God has not assumed a biological form, but rather, God here commits to a scandalously particular, tangible indwelling of terrestrial Israel.” God’s body is presented as material, but presumably not like “our bodies,” but of a “matter” that is “yet unheard of” (25).

<sup>6</sup> Of course it seems necessary that God, “while remaining indivisibly one, is somehow able to occupy both heaven and earth”; for God a kind of bilocation must be possible, and indeed it must be that time is meaningful to us but not, or not in the same way, to God (189).

God is present in the temple, with His “holiness [radiating] out to the city,” but the sanctuary must be apart from the city.

If God were to directly contact the pilgrim city, it would cease to exist, since direct contact with the Holy is lethal....Here in a nutshell is the compelling paradox of Zadokite theology, of God touching yet not touching God’s creation. There must be a delicate balance between revelation and withdrawal, between immanence and transcendence. (206–7)

The material God belongs and resides, materially, in the same city as “Israel”—in His city as well as theirs—yet He remains mysterious.

We may think of the prophets in the Hebrew Bible as looking forward to a messiah in the sense of a military conqueror who will destroy the enemies of Israel and establish a line of kings.<sup>7</sup> The kings may be in a Davidic line; more remarkably, the succession may begin with someone like Cyrus the Great of Persia.<sup>8</sup> Cook presents Ezekiel as a corrective to such expectations. Here God is, so to speak, antimonarchy, opposed to the notion of Hebrews being ruled by kings, even their own kings. Here is God Himself again at Ezekiel 43:7–11 (Cook’s translation):

The House of Israel will not again defile my holy name, neither they nor their kings, by their adulterous worship and by rites venerating their kings when they die. When they placed their threshold by my threshold, and their doorpost beside my doorpost, with only a wall between us, they defiled my holy name by their abominations that they committed. So I consumed them in my anger. Now, let them remove their adultery and their rites and pillars venerating their dead kings from me, and I will dwell in their midst continually. (182)

<sup>7</sup> 1 Sam. 10:1–2; 1 Kings 1:39; Lev. 4:3; Exod. 40:9–11; Num. 6:15; Isa. 45:1. Wikipedia: “The literal translation of the Hebrew word *mashiach* (messiah) is ‘anointed,’ which refers to a ritual of consecrating someone or something by putting holy oil upon it. It is used throughout the Hebrew Bible in reference to a wide variety of individuals and objects; for example, kings, priests and prophets, the altar in the Temple, vessels, unleavened bread, and even a non-Jewish king (Cyrus the Great).” See 1 Kings 19:15–16. “In Jewish eschatology, the term came to refer to a future Jewish king from the Davidic line, who will be ‘anointed’ with holy anointing oil, to be king of God’s kingdom, and rule the Jewish people during the Messianic Age. In Judaism, the Messiah is not considered to be God or a pre-existent divine Son of God. He is considered to be a great political leader that has descended from King David. That is why he is referred to as Messiah ben David, which means ‘Messiah, son of David.’”

<sup>8</sup> “The Persian emperor Cyrus is the only foreigner in the Bible to be identified as the messiah or anointed one of Yahweh, the Israelite God. Isaiah tells us that Yahweh spoke ‘to his messiah, to Cyrus, whom I [Yahweh] took by his right hand to subdue nations before him’ (Isa 45:1). The other people called *messiah* or *anointed one* in the Bible aren’t designated *Yahweh’s messiah*, as Cyrus is” (Lisbeth S. Fried, “Cyrus the Messiah,” *Bible Odyssey*, <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/people/related-articles/cyrus-the-messiah>).

The specific design of the utopian temple is inseparable from God's plan to remain physically present in His land, among His people, and maintain their faith or purity in a way that kings have failed to do; and this in turn requires a complete overturning of the traditional ways of the Hebrew kings. Cook elaborates some themes here; first, the physical layout of the land in traditional, nonmonarchical and even antimonarchical terms.

Completely absent in Ezekiel 48 is any acceptance of the monarchic-era division of Israel into two separate kingdoms. Ezekiel's utopian allotment envisions the reunited kin of Israel organized genealogically as extended families, kin groups, and tribes. So too, there is nothing here of a central royal city of Zion engulfing the temple...or the monarchy's system of administrative districts.... As an additional move tempering the Judean monarchy, vv. 7–8 move the entire tribe of Judah north of the former location.... The new tribe-based, acephalous allocation of the land is "a deliberate attempt to recreate the archaic period in Israel's history." It wipes away all memory of royal chauvinism, of the monarchic state's blurring of tribal divisions and powers. Zechariah 12:7 will later echo the theme that Jerusalem and David's dynasty must never again overshadow the countryside. (288; cf. 278–79)

The city, Jerusalem, is not referred to by this name (which had come to be identified with "City of David") in Ezekiel; it is separate from the Temple, rather than surrounding and dominating it, and its rule is drastically diminished in comparison to its peak. Ezekiel, rather than looking forward to a Cyrus-type conqueror and political/military ruler, looks backward to a time when the tribes had considerable autonomy, and even some "kingly" powers, while necessary chores in utopia are carried out by a "chieftain" (229–30; cf. 189–90).<sup>9</sup> "Ezekiel's vision specifically lacks a standard monarch and describes a massive temple built solely by God, who thereby claims sovereign cosmic rule" (113).

The physical layout is inextricably tied to God's presence, and the need to maintain a kind of community and purity.

Respect and empowerment do not easily flow down to the outer layers of society in a centralized monarchic state. Monarchic systems tend to

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<sup>9</sup> Elevated roles for a monarch, especially "temple builder," are repudiated, but the chieftain as the highest civil authority still has some significance. One "privileged zone of authority" for this person is the east gate tower, "a powerful zone of civil authority with traditional roots in old, village-era Israel"; lineage heads met and rendered judgment "in the gate." As Israeli society centralized, monarchs "appropriated jurisdiction at the gateway, co-opting its symbolism"; Ezekiel seeks to reverse this development, and ceding the gate to the chieftain as a "power location" "is a helpful corrective to the claim...that Ezekiel's *Nasi* [chieftain] is a weak, 'mock king'" (205).

contradict the idea of an entirely *hallowed land*, where the humanity and value of every sector, even those at the periphery, are upheld. They tend instead to divest the land of its sacral character, focusing on militarizing state capitals and fortifying royal cities. In Israel, monarchic power seems inevitably to have worked against the HS ideal of permanent land tenure for each family on its ancestral homestead. (229)

The ruler of Tyre in Ezekiel 28 is a prime instance of violent unchecked crown power in the Zadokites' view....Unsatisfied with Eden's natural bounty..., [a cherubic king] perverts paradise through *trade* . . . , which is here synonymous with extortion, the ruin of freeholders, and the decay of community....Monarchic power, vested in crown land, perverted the greater good of an entirely holy land, by dissolving the tenure of lineages on their homesteads....Because the kings evicted and scattered families, God scattered Israel among the nations.

Ezekiel's utopia seeks to undo and reverse the pre-exilic monarchy's rending apart of the communal solidarity of the HS covenant. For the Zadokites behind HS, Israel's traditional kinship bonds and practice of local land tenure formed crucial material supports of covenantal ethics. Such traditions protected and nurtured bonds of mutuality that joined Israelites together as interdependent vassals. (253)

Kings are seen to lead to corruption and decline for a community—perhaps precisely because of the great hopes that are placed with them. People might be tempted to abandon certain kinds of self-government in order to be (somewhat reliably) governed. There are also fears that any king, even a Hebrew one, will be subject to the temptations of all kings, and this might cause the nation and leaders of Israel to be led astray.

Cook touches on another political theme in Ezekiel's "utopia": what might be called the potential cosmopolitanism, or openness to non-Hebrew people, when Hebrews live in the proper relationship with God. We have already mentioned that Cook corrects the notion that Ezekiel and his school, or their "religion," are necessarily ethnocentric. (Sin is at least as much of a problem within Israel as outside it.) Cook corrects translations in order to clarify that when "outsiders" are banned from the inner sanctum of the utopian temple, the meaning is not "foreigners" or non-Hebrews, but everyone other than true Aaronide priests (with whom "the Zadokites self-identify"). The ones who need to be specifically excluded from the inner sanctum are the Levites, who are allowed to perform certain ritual tasks that do not ascend to the highest; from the point of view of the Aaronides they are "outsiders," lesser priests or acolytes—nonsacrificing as opposed to sacrificing priests (214–17). The mistranslation of "outsiders," especially in English translations, has left

the impression that all non-Hebrews are unwelcome anywhere in the temple, including in the outermost or so to speak most profane precincts. Cook says there is no support for this interpretation, and he points to various biblical texts indicating that non-Hebrews are welcome to take part in various ceremonies, and even to become priests. Only if they become priests, needless to say, can they lead the highest ceremonies, but it is striking that such an honor may be available to some of the *goyim* or gentiles (217–18).

The Zadokites, according to Lev 22:19 (HS), had no issue with resident aliens entering outer temple areas with offerings.<sup>10</sup> Given the inclusiveness with which the utopian vision elsewhere treats foreigners, their exclusion from Israel's worship...in Ezekiel 44 seems most improbable. Specifically, Ezek 47:22–23 insists that Israel treat as native-born all “resident aliens who are living among you and who have had descendants born here.” (217)

Ezekiel seems to contemplate a kind of permanent or legal resident alien status, along with something like anchor babies, for non-Hebrews living in “Israel.” It probably goes without saying that non-Hebrews are welcome insofar as, and probably to the extent that, they accept the distinctive Hebrew ways of doing things. An Israel that is based on kinship and tradition, and something like common law based to a large extent on precedent, “free” from kings, may not be notably xenophobic or ethnically exclusive, but it would probably not be particularly cosmopolitan. Kings may contribute to a decline of ethics in one way; in another, cosmopolitanism might support a move to a lowest common denominator. Kings might even use cosmopolitanism or “diversity” as a tool to serve their own purposes, as Cyrus might seem to have done.

The profound difference between Israelite “kingship” and reliance on God that Cook uncovers in Ezekiel is one that Thomas Pangle and Timothy Burns have likewise highlighted in their brief introduction to Hebrew scripture. Their argument begins with the observation that there is no political philosophy in the Bible, but there is some substantial consideration of what might be called different political regimes. God of course is always “in charge,” but he allows and even approves human experiments—always somewhat grudgingly, in an acknowledgment that human sin requires what would otherwise be an unfortunate failure. The “political” orientation of the Hebrew Bible is never toward “achieving the best,” but rather “avoiding the worst”—and the worst comes to sight as the pharaonic despotism in Egypt,

<sup>10</sup> Cook also includes references to Isa. 66:21 and Gen. 28:3 and 35:11.

with which the Hebrews of course eventually have direct experience. The choice of “the chosen people”—initially Abraham and his offspring—has political implications. The idea seems to be that human beings in general have been proved failures from the beginning. God will experiment with choosing one people, and subjecting them to both more difficult tests and more direct intervention to help them, in the hope that they can be an example for all of humanity.<sup>11</sup> To some extent “regimes” appear in chronological order. “First, and in an important sense, perduring, is patriarchy—epitomized above all in the story of Abraham. The monogamous family, headed by the father but with a place of high honor assigned to the mother, is a cornerstone of any and every society favored by the Bible.” Next comes the rule of emphatically divine law, the necessity for which reflects the almost fathomless evil of which human beings are capable. At the time of Cain’s murder of his brother Abel, for example, God seems to acknowledge that there is not yet a law against murder; Cain might actually suffer from a kind of honest ignorance of the horror of what he has done.<sup>12</sup> The ultimate demonstration of the evils of lawlessness—of pure human arbitrariness when we live without law—is probably not this or that individual criminal or gang, but the pharaonic despotism in Egypt, which Joseph enables as, so to speak, the pharaoh’s most senior slave.<sup>13</sup> The divine law which the Israelites are commanded to obey, delivered initially by Moses, is neither the result of, nor subject to the examination of, human reason. It commands obedience without any consistent test of reason, and in fact with no calculation of the benefits that might be enjoyed by those who follow the law. Human beings have demonstrated repeatedly that they will abuse freedom when it is granted. God wants the chosen people to choose between good and evil, and to choose what is good freely, but he now recognizes that enormous pressure must be exerted in order to achieve consensus and conformity; indeed the oppressive methods of Moses in transforming “a mass of demoralized slaves into a ‘kingdom of priests and a holy nation’ (Exod. 19:6)” bear some similarity to the methods of the pharaohs. The difference, of course, is that the Israelites will serve God as opposed to any merely human ambitions.<sup>14</sup> God eventually makes “covenants” with the chosen people. “God, however mysterious He may be, is a moral ruler: He rules, not with a view to some contingent self-interest or need or whim, but in

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<sup>11</sup> Thomas L. Pangle and Timothy W. Burns, *The Key Texts of Political Philosophy: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 129–30.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 121–22.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 130–31.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 131–32.

accordance with solemn, unfailing promises based on immutable principles of lawful justice.”<sup>15</sup> He offers, and encourages, both purity and love among human beings.

Many details of the divine law—on matters economic and sexual, for example—become quite clear, and help to illuminate God’s intentions. On the other hand, just as it takes some time for law and the covenant(s) to “arrive,” so there is a considerable period when there seems to be little clarity as to “the organization of human rule or administration under God’s law.” “Instead of a governing assembly or an aristocracy or a monarchy, we are confronted with a number of appointed or anointed rulerships, whose lines of jurisdiction and authority overlap in what one is tempted to characterize as a maze.”<sup>16</sup> Partly because of the external pressure of constant war with enemies, the “potential for turbulence” of these arrangements did not become clear during the “fourth regime,” during which Joshua carried out the conquest of the promised land. It was the following regime, the fifth, the rule of the Judges, which became somewhat chaotic and then gave way to the sixth.

The apparently obvious solution [to the near-anarchy] is the institution of a divinely anointed monarchy, the sixth and final form of biblical regime. Monarchy is repeatedly foreshadowed in the book of Judges, and earlier in the Deuteronomic prophecies of Moses himself (Deut. 17:14ff.). Yet the advent of monarchy is condemned by the prophet Samuel, apparently speaking for God as well as for himself (1 Sam. 8). Through this condemnation, Scripture compels us to wonder whether the Divinity does not look with considerable favor upon something like the regime and the world described in the book of Judges.<sup>17</sup>

There are powerful indications that God opposes any monarchical regime. Even if such a regime solves human problems, by this very fact it may encourage human pride. The failure of “politics” under Judges may have at least some tendency to keep reminding the chosen people of their need for God.

God, one is tempted to conclude, wants humans to remain unsettled, challenged by fearful enemies, by the threat of slavery, by the high incidence of crime. The Bible would appear to prefer a society under pressure, its members tested constantly in their faith and lawfulness, feeling acutely the need for Divine assistance, and experiencing such assistance in brief, shattering moments of salvation and exaltation.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 132–33.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 134–35.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 136–37.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas L. Pangle, “The Hebrew Bible’s Challenge to Political Philosophy: Some Preliminary

The Ezekiel passages do not promise that God's people can achieve both freedom from monarchy and freedom from obvious evils such as slavery and crime; it suggests that holiness, involving constant and direct rather than sporadic contact with God, is by far the most important thing.

On the other hand, monarchy at its best achieves real human greatness, even if this is always in the shadow of a realization that this may all be contrary to God's plan.

Still, when all this has been said, it remains difficult to avoid the conclusion that monarchy at its best is depicted as the real peak of Israel's historical existence. For monarchy brings an unprecedented grandeur of biblical virtue, both intellectual and moral, even as it also brings, in the persons of the best as well as the worst kings, an enormity of biblical vice approaching at times the monstrosity of the Pharaoh. The peak that monarchy reaches in the Bible can be summed up in one name: David.<sup>19</sup>

It is part of the greatness of the Bible that it shows extremes—human peaks as well as failures and evils—and forces us to think about how to weigh the good with the bad. Without engaging in any of the discussion of the regime of the judges as opposed to various monarchies, we can suggest that with Ezekiel, the Bible, inspired by God, once again becomes antimonarchical as it had been in the years before there was a Hebrew monarchy. Given the ever-present and therefore predictable failures of human beings to live in righteousness, it is unlikely that any mere political regime—any human contrivance—can provide a definitive solution to the deepest or most decisive human problems. This helps us to understand why the Bible is wholly lacking in anything that might be called political philosophy, which generally seems to assume that human wisdom is adequate to solve human problems.<sup>20</sup>

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Reflections," in *Political Philosophy and the Human Soul: Essays in Memory of Allan Bloom*, ed. Michael Palmer and Thomas L. Pangle (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1995), 80.

<sup>19</sup> Pangle and Burns, *Key Texts of Political Philosophy*, 136–37. Subsequent pages go into considerable detail about the lives of various kings, especially David.

<sup>20</sup> Of course exceptions spring to mind. Socrates says in the pages of Plato that he has been guided by a "daimonic voice," and he even claims that his characteristic activity of "political philosophy"—cross-examining those who claim to be wise about politics—was inspired by none other than the oracle at Delphi. Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Politics* can both be said to begin with a hope that there is no need to seek guidance from Olympian gods, or from any gods who closely resemble those gods; by the end of these books there seems to be some reluctant concession to a religion that bears at least some resemblance to an old or known one. See *Republic* 575d. Plato's *Laws* begins with an emphatic reminder that the most widely praised Greek regimes are said to have been directly inspired by Zeus; there is a gradual development in favor of Socratic rationalism. There is a tendency for modern political philosophers to say political philosophy must draw support from biblical revelation as well as reason, and then to provide an "enlightened" understanding of scripture that tends, for



The Jews have lived within, and often had little control over, many different political arrangements. If we can depart from anything Ezekiel knew, there was a period from the time of Cyrus to 167 BC, almost four hundred years later, when Jews lacked political sovereignty, but had access to their temple, lived in a kind of diaspora in the Near East rather than primarily in proximity to the Temple, and were largely free to proselytize, something they were known for doing. Cook points out that some commentators have argued that as a prediction of the future of Israel, Ezekiel's utopia is a failure. This is true only if the vision is taken too literally. Cook quotes Stevenson:

Those who argue that the Book of Ezekiel had no effect in postexilic Israel, because the future temple did not get built according to this “plan,” have missed the fact that postexilic Israel was a society organized around a temple without a human king. . . . The radical change in social structure imagined by this vision [of Ezekiel] actually occurred. There was a new Israel, a new temple, and no king. (6)

Of course, there were many differences between the postexilic life of Israel and Ezekiel's utopia. Synagogues “attracted around them large numbers of semi-detached and uncircumcised, but extremely enthusiastic, non-Jewish ‘God-fearers.’” There was both peaceful accommodation between Jews and non-Jews and a diversity of Jewish practices. In 167 the Temple was desecrated on the orders of Antiochus III, who had become king of “the Syrian segment of Alexander's empire.” Within a few years Judas Maccabee led a successful rebellion, which led to a succession of increasingly worldly and probably impious Jewish kings. The Pharisees, Jewish teachers and leaders, ultimately asked the Romans to depose the corrupt royal family, and end the political independence of Israel.<sup>21</sup> The accommodation with Rome did not last long.

The Jews have thought about, and experimented with, an amazing range of alternative “ways of life.” Perhaps their identity, somehow understood, and survival are the most consistent or predictable themes. All of this is to say that at any given point in Jewish history, there is more than one fork in the road, and divinely inspired prophecies provide clarity only in a certain way, or up to a point. There are utopian yet possibly realistic hopes that Israel will return from exile, reunited, with Jerusalem as the capital and the Temple

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example, to undermine the belief in miracles.

<sup>21</sup> Paul Kriwaczek, *In Search of Zarathustra: The First Prophet and the Ideas that Changed the World* (London: Phoenix Books, 2003), 155–60, explaining the circumstances that gave rise to the book of Daniel.

securely in place. In the meantime, perhaps a long time in human terms, there may be life in exile, keeping up faith and traditions, setting an example for the world, and hoping. It would not be surprising, on the whole, if there is a great deal of suffering and sadness in store. There is hope for utopia, but also resignation to exile. Professor Cook has done a great deal to remind us that according to Ezekiel, there may really be two stark choices: living in proximity to a temple in which God is literally present, his holiness radiating out into the community; or living at some further remove from God, even if there are many elements of a thriving Jewish community. In the former, utopian and perhaps impossible situation, one can expect “political” arrangements to be made around kinship or clan ties, with a great deal of informality or even somewhat ad hoc decision-making; in the latter situation, further from God, Jews may be forced to accommodate themselves to a variety of different arrangements. Political arrangements themselves can never be the most important thing; that thing would be God’s presence or absence, and the indications He has given as to what He wants from us.