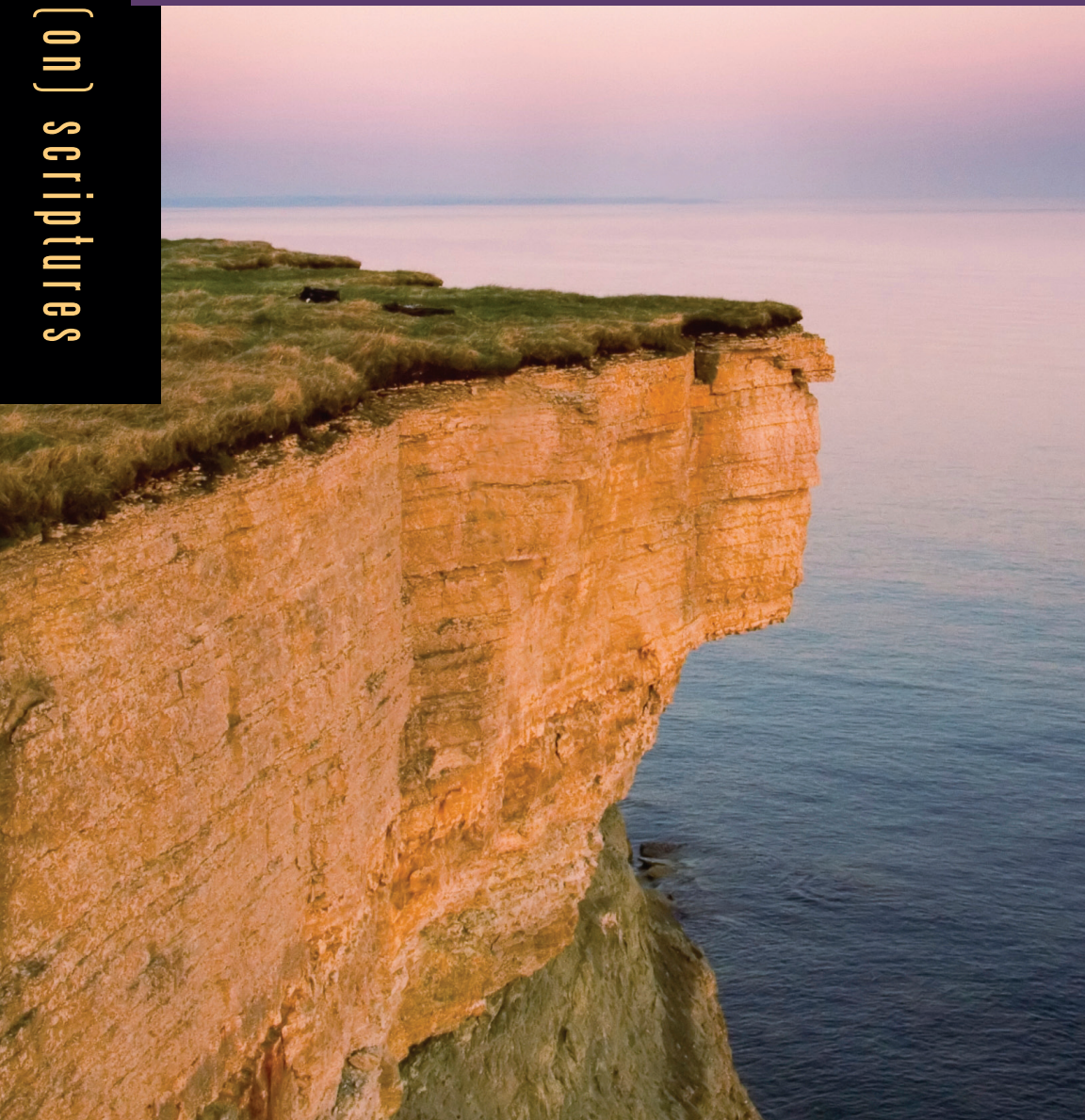
signifying (on) scriptures

Borderline Exegesis

LEIF E. VAAGE



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LEIF E. VAAGE

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For HALVOR MOXNES

Han, den galningen, trudde livet sitt
til vatnet og aeva.

—O. H. Hauge, "Yver hengjemyri"

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As this book goes to press, I realize that I now have no idea how to acknowledge everyone who has been a part of its multistage and sometimes haphazard development. It simply has taken too long for the book to arrive at the brink of publication—with too many "original ideas," false starts, constructive interruptions, and instructive refusals along the way—to reconstruct at this point an itinerary of indebtedness. Orbis Press has kindly granted permission to reprint whatever remains intact from an earlier version of chapter 2, which first appeared in English as "The Sermon on the Mount: An Economic Proposal," in *God's Economy: Biblical Studies from Latin America,* edited by Ross Kinsler and Gloria Kinsler (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Press, 2005), 127–51. Victoria University, through its Senate Research Grants, underwrote the cost of indexing the book for the benefit of those who choose to read the work backward. It is my pleasure also to thank the editor of the Signifying (on) Scriptures series, Vincent L. Wimbush, as well as acquisition editor Kathryn Yahner at Penn State University Press for their timely aid in giving the work a viable life-form. For Halvor Moxnes, to whom I have dedicated the book for reasons that have nothing to do with the tale of its production but are deeply associated with its other aspirations, who read through one of the pre-ante-penultimate editions of the manuscript while reputedly on summer vacation among the Aesene in Jotunheimen and sent me an apt but also enthusiastic response, once again *tusen takk*. I should now begin to recite the roll of many other friends and colleagues who also read or heard this or that section of the book as it evolved through one age and another. I trust that they know me still well enough to accept that my current inability to remember them does not mean what it must suggest. John S. Kloppenborg wrote a note with words of praise for an earlier introduction to the book that I presented at a Toronto School of Theology Biblical Department Seminar. I hope he finds no reason here to retract them. Judith Newman will still find cause for some concern and, perhaps, also delight. My children and my parents may yet wonder

what it is I do for a living. And my spouse, Susan M. Slater, whose interest in the book has been, let us say, genuine if guarded, will be as glad as I am to see the thing finally gone into other hands, so that we now can get on to "important things." *Y por supuesto, ¡gracias a la vida—peruana y latinoamericana—que me ha dado tanto!*

NOTE ON THE TEXT

Quotations from the book of Job are taken from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, though I have occasionally modified the pattern of indentation, reflecting my own understanding of the *parallelismus membrorum* in the text in accordance with the conventional understanding of Hebrew poetry. Quotations from the New Testament are my own translation of the most recent critical edition of the Greek text.

INTRODUCTION

ANOTHER BIBLE THAT IS BORDERLINE

To all that is brief and fragile,	Por todo lo breve y frágil,
superficial, unstable,	superficial, fugitivo,
to all that lacks foundation,	por lo que no tiene bases,
argument or principles;	argumentos ni principios;
to all that is light,	por todo lo que es liviano,
fleeting, changing, finite;	veloz, mudable y finito;
to smoke spirals,	por las volutes del humo,
wand roses,	por las rosas de los tirsos,
to sea foam	por la espuma de las olas
and mists of oblivion . . .	y las brumas del olvido . . .
to all that is light in weight	por lo que les carga poco
for itinerants	a los pobres peregrinos
on this transient earth	de esta trashumante tierra
sombre, raving,	grave y lunática, brindo
with transitory words	con palabras transitorias
and vaporous bubbly wines	y con vaporosos vinos
I toast	de burbujas centelleantes
in breakable glasses . . .	en cristales quebradizos . . .

—María Eugenia Vaz Ferreira, "Vaso furtivo"

Borderline exegesis is such a toast, "with transitory words . . . in breakable glasses," to everything that still might augur goodness of life—"light, fleeting, changing, finite"—in the Christian Bible and in us. Borderline exegesis offers homage and encouragement to the yearning that yet lingers there for full existence, however "brief and fragile" this may be, providing succor, if you will, "for itinerants on this transient earth, sombre, raving."[1] Borderline exegesis thereby seeks to underwrite whatever remains—both in the reader and in the biblical text—"unfinished and alive."[2]

Not surprisingly, this kind of reading is often called forth and takes place in social contexts where too much already has been declared over and done, or where too many things routinely and prematurely are cut off from

thriving. Borderline exegesis seeks to answer some of those hard questions that the ongoing struggle to know a good life frequently poses, often with bitterness and with blood. I remember, for example, a brief conversation that I had more than twenty years ago on a Sunday afternoon with a bone-weary householder in a shantytown north of the international airport in Lima, Peru. Seldom at home, the man typically left his house very early in the morning to travel to his first job, only to return very late every night after his second one, six days a week, fifty-two weeks a year, year after year. He did this in order to earn too little to feed his family, let alone finish the roof, install a toilet, get rid of the rats. At one point in our conversation, the man suddenly asked me, "¿Por qué a mí me ha tocado vivir esto?" In other words: Why do I have to live this kind of life? I had no answer for him at the time. And, unfortunately, I am still without one. Explicitly in chapter 1 of this book, which is a reading of the book of Job, and implicitly in the other chapters, which provide readings of the gospel of Matthew, the letter of James, and the apocalypse of John, I remain haunted by that man's question with its corollaries. These issues underwrite the intellectual work of a borderline exegesis as practiced in this book. Thus the following essays all aim to enact a peripheral biblical scholarship—one written at the edge of the dominant social body, in the margins of its well-being, toward a horizon of hope, in the still fantastical realm of what yet could be.[3] Through a divergent reading of four well-known biblical works, the book seeks to articulate that still unvanquished desire to know in, with, and under such corpora a more fulsome measure of that which Czeslaw Milosz has described as "that delicious and dangerous thing that has no name, though people call it *life*."[4]

Must I comment further on this category of life? Perhaps it will be necessary for those of us whose sense of our own immediate situation does not (yet) include any serious threat to its enduring bodily presence or general well-being. Otherwise I suggest that the reasons are basically self-evident for why another kind of reader might understand a word such as "life" to be a significant point of reference for the work of thinking through the often intractable problems that routinely afflict not a few people on the planet.[5] It is only if and when the reader has been fortunate(?) enough to take his or her own life for granted—as though this were a statement of the obvious and not somehow already a fact seriously in question—that the category of "life" might seem to be a concept too vague to be meaningful.[6] Or is it that the concept is all too clear? Overwhelmingly so? According to Robinson Jeffers, the person who dwells "in pleasant peace and security" may need to seek "a stone / to bruise himself [or herself] on" in order to counteract the

death of "the soul in a man [or a woman]," for the soul, he writes, "begins to die" through too much assurance.[7]

In Latin America, where I first published the initial versions of the four main essays in this book, the Christian Bible has always been a site of partisan debate about the legitimacy of prevailing social practices and—even more importantly—a locus of utopian demand for another possible world. The Christian Bible, in other words, has often been taken to signify that "another world is possible" (*otro mundo es posible*).[8] The four main chapters of the book belong to that tradition of critical-historical conversation "around" the biblical text for the sake of knowing a better life.[9] The rigor of a properly scientific, historical, critical exegesis thereby becomes a mode of social, critical, historical struggle toward an alternative collective reality.[10]

This is not just or even especially a matter of ideology. Rather, at stake in this practice is a vocational question: What exactly does it mean, precisely as a form of social activity, to do biblical scholarship at this time? Or, if you will, more broadly stated: What exactly does it mean to be an intellectual of the humanist variety, reading texts such as the Christian Bible, in transnational, late capitalist, North Atlantic postmodernity?

In contrast to the narrowly professional model of North Atlantic academic (biblical) scholarship that Edward Said has described so well,[11] the style of biblical interpretation developed in this book ideally would register a mode of "organic" intellection, as this kind of activity was first described by the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci in 1931, writing from prison to his sister-in-law Tatiana Schucht. Gramsci wrote, "I greatly extend the notion of intellectuals and I do not restrict myself to the current notion which refers [only] to great intellectuals."[12]

More specifically, Gramsci sought to include within the sacred precinct of intellectual labor other social and technical forms of critical analysis and creative invention as well. At the same time, he made a distinction between what he called the traditional and the organic intellectual. Roughly speaking, the former is equivalent to Said's postmodern academic professional, while the latter is precisely and properly defined by the attention that such an intellectual pays to matters of public concern and public discourse. "Public," however, hardly eschews a decidedly partisan commitment to one or another mode of active participation in concrete social struggle, since these social interests and aspirations, with their corresponding "sciences," necessarily belong to very particular political processes. Thus an organic intellectual would know himself or herself to be embedded in a given social situation and simultaneously trying to think through it "out of" a specific

effort to move it "over there" instead of merely continuing to stay "already here," and this sooner rather than later. Such a mode of intellection thus tends to favor whatever can be gained by the pursuit of analytical leverage and discursive slippage instead of aiming to consolidate knowledge with heightened definition or a more fulsome taxonomy. For the primary purpose of such labor is to enable ongoing "forward" motion by the social body. This could also be stated as a certain collective aperture in the direction of greater corporate vitality, in contrast to more refined "theories" of the status quo or whatever once was.

In this book I therefore generally refuse to become entangled in any number of "theoretical" discussions about the different issues that my borderline exegesis of the Christian Bible obviously presupposes and raises. This is so, however, not because I am in any way opposed to the exercise of "theory" and, more specifically, the task of clarifying how exactly the language that we use to say whatever it is that we think we have to communicate could and should be understood to operate as a system of signifiers. I take such a task to be a permanent obligation of all critical scholarship and, like every other form of good housekeeping, never able to be carried out completely. The relevant question thus becomes: When has enough of this been done? And, sometimes, what does doing this sort of theoretical housekeeping impede? Life being what it is, one simply cannot do everything at the same time. It is impossible, for example, to clean the house and at the same time oneself, or to garden and simultaneously host a dinner party. Similarly it is difficult to think about thinking, which is to say about speech and the language system or language-like regime of which a given utterance or performance is a particular instantiation, which I take to be the work of "theory," and at the same time to learn how to live well by thinking through and beyond the ruses of such language or discourse, thought, and culture, especially as these are enshrined in a biblical text, which I take to be the work of a borderline exegesis. And since the latter effort is the specific concern of this book, it has seemed to me to be at least a distraction and conceivably a source of considerable confusion to conjoin with its interruptive and inventive practice the metacritical reflexivity that often characterizes an intentionally "theoretical" self-consciousness.

In fact, one of the reasons for pursuing a borderline exegesis is to contest the ostensible virtue of this kind of endless self-reflexivity. A borderline exegesis aims to underwrite instead the possibility of its transcendence—or transgression—through the disclosure of another possible world that lurks within the interstices of whatever we may think we already know about

reality, of which the enterprise of "theory" could be the quintessential expression, especially when it aims to argue on behalf of its own inherent impossibility. By contrast, a borderline exegesis anticipates touching a more tangible truth with material meaning as the outcome of a progressive unknowing, however ineffable the ensuing effervescence may become.[13]

At the beginning of the tradition of modern literary criticism, Matthew Arnold claimed that the purpose of such writing about writing ought to be to encourage readers to read once again the original "classic" texts for themselves. Borderline exegesis could be thought to continue such a practice of "classical" exhortation, urging us to read again the biblical text with accompanying commentary, insofar as borderline exegesis hardly claims to replace or even to displace the biblical text as such. Instead, borderline exegesis invites the reader to encounter the Christian Bible anew, helping this reader discern an enduring social significance for the text that otherwise may have become flat or obscure.

For the practitioner of a borderline exegesis, however, the biblical text is never a disembodied, free-floating, purely literary, or even primarily discursive word, as though such a human artifact somehow were able to constitute an intellectual and moral free-trade zone in which the reader could play and "make of it whatever you will." Instead, the biblical text is taken by the borderline exegete to be, first of all, a singular form of concrete testimony.[14] In other words, it is a vital trace.[15] Attested by a (biblical) text is, minimally, some body's (or bodies') erstwhile effort to exist and desire to be explicitly alive.[16] The text is what remains of the life (or lives) that first produced it. The text is, as it were, the bones that endure after the flesh has disappeared—skeletal testimony to the fact that where now the text is, there was once a face (or faces) with lips and voice(s). Taking up the text in order to read it is thus not unlike the practice of secondary burial. The reader gathers together the hard bits left behind by the "dead" and "de-composing" author in order to re-place them within the context of another life that includes this work of rearrangement. This is what it means to claim for the text a voice (or voices). Of course, the text as such is literally mute. It makes no sense without a reader. But the reader acknowledges through the work of interpretation that these signs of an erstwhile striving or longing to exist are not dissimilar to those that now bring the reader to that text.[17]

Thus the biblical text is taken up in the practice of borderline exegesis as a partner in conversation about those things that would be of common concern to both text and reader. Note that the biblical text is taken up here as *a* partner in a conversation in which the borderline exegete also participates.

The biblical text is thus not the only voice that speaks, nor will it always or inevitably be deemed to have the final word. At the same time, as a partner in this conversation, the biblical text will also be given a hearing. And its contribution to the debates that still rage among and within us may yet have a point to make.[18]

Borderline exegesis is "exegesis" as Jonathan Z. Smith describes this kind of intellectual activity: namely, as the reciprocal act of canonical closure.[19] According to Smith, the work of exegesis is the inevitable "flip side" of that frequent and perhaps ubiquitous phenomenon in human cultures which is a socially defined corpus of telling signs, one that is both limited in content and generally held to be authoritative. There is, for example, the African diviner's customary "set" of auguring elements; or the Jewish tradition of a circumscribed Torah, which was given to Moses once upon a time and subsequently transmitted both in writing and orally across ensuing generations; or the Christian Bible of "holy scripture." In each case, according to Smith, canonical closure is accompanied by a corresponding set of exegetical practices that enable the culturally inscribed practitioner to continue using the defined "tool kit" under constantly changing circumstances.

Were it not so, such limited sets of cultural instruments necessarily would become swiftly superannuated. Exegesis is the means by which the constrained "text" continues to function as a means for thinking through the multiple quandaries besetting and bemusing us along life's way, and not infrequently without precedent. In other words, exegesis is the technical term for the mundane and common struggle to "make do" with the social technology at hand—in this case, with the Christian Bible—under prevailing conditions.

Of course, such activity remains compelling, at least as intellection, only if the reader still continues to inhabit the cultural framework responsible for the canonical focus that the work of exegesis presupposes and implies. In modern literary criticism, to inhabit this framework has been called the "suspension of disbelief," which describes the mode of trust required in order to follow a given story. In the realm of politics, the same practice of consent registers the commitment of citizenship. In love, it denotes a certain willful blindness, or generosity of spirit, without which no relationship endures. In the case of biblical interpretation, however, such a condition of the possibility of exegesis may now stretch modern incredulity beyond its imaginative range. In any case, I am well aware that not everyone will want to do what a borderline exegesis necessarily entails when reading

the Christian Bible. And I am not suggesting that everyone must do so—although I will admit that I am somewhat less sanguine about the usual reasons that are given for this refusal.

At least with regard to the persons for whom the essays in this book originally were written, the putative option to refuse the canonical closure of the Christian Bible is tantamount to suggesting that the poor should begin the work of social transformation by no longer considering themselves to be poor—as though this kind of "reframing" were possible or would make any significant difference to their present situation. In fact, the Christian Bible precisely as a canonical text belongs in Latin America to the historical predicament of the bodily poor and socially disenfranchised. It is one of the traditional sources of the organized affliction they have known. For this very reason, an alternative reading of that text provides both a useful and accessible resource in contesting one or another aspect of this harsh reality.

Even so, one may still want to insist on the question: Why continue to read the Christian Bible? Is it ultimately worth the multiple complications and endless entanglements that such a textual practice apparently requires—especially if one no longer wishes to argue for the Christian Bible as the only source of divine wisdom or telling truth, significant knowledge, or any other form of *sola scriptura*? There is no a priori answer to this question. Obviously, one could choose not to have anything more to do with the Christian Bible. And this could simply be due to a lack of interest in the work, or in order to consider other texts, other voices, other modes of discerning a solution to our evident malaise. Those who choose to do so, however, are unlikely to be reading this book. Nonetheless, their question also haunts these essays. Why bother to read the Christian Bible anymore? For the moment, I can only answer that it may be as good as anything else to think with. And you have to think with something.[20]

Borderline exegesis reads the biblical text historically—although the history that it aims to discover in, with, and under the text is not primarily what was once upon a time somewhere else, but rather what now is, unfolding with the reader before the text, or in front of both the text and the reader(s). In other words, history is for this practice of interpretation, first of all, the presently existing or subsisting reality that encompasses both text and reader always, necessarily, only at this time and place in "the one day" that recurs.[21] This is not to deny, of course, that there ever was another time or place than here and now. At the same time, it is to insist that the history that defines the work of biblical interpretation, at least as borderline exegesis, is principally the history that currently conjoins text and reader within a

present.[22] One might wish to call this understanding of history the work of memory, or tradition, or contextualization. None of these terms, however, is adequate to the claim that I am making if and when the use of any one of them aims to keep in play the notion of a past with methodological, epistemological, or ontological priority over the truth of the passing moment.

In order to be as clear as possible, let me therefore repeat that, in a borderline exegesis of a biblical text, the truth of the past is not forgotten or denied. But that past only lives, still, because someone today endures and recalls it—through memory, through imagination, through decipherment and extrapolation—back into the world that we the living currently embody and which embodies us. Thus there is no history that exists "out there" apart from us. There is only the history that we continue to create, which passes through us and which we produce or, if you will, which we reproduce, since we never create this history ex nihilo.

Thus, in this book, I use a number of the conventional methods of modern academic historical criticism without hesitation or qualification and at the same time always with decided partiality. I do so not because I think that these methods somehow are essential to or foundational in establishing the meaning of the biblical text, but mainly because of their "alienation" effect. They are, once again, helpful and convenient ways to recall that the biblical text is what remains from a life project or projects that did not begin with us or even include us within the horizon of their erstwhile imaginary.

I also use the methods of historical criticism because I think that "history" continues to be the dominant lingua franca of "our" time. Anyone who reads a biblical text in ancient Greek or ancient Hebrew, using a lexicon to do so, participates in a historical culture that has been shaped by these discursive methods together with their ontological or spatial and temporal assumptions about the nature of (human) reality. The use of historical criticism in this book thus registers the effort made by a borderline exegesis to engage the still dominant world of North Atlantic (post)modernity in a conversation about other possible worlds yet to be explored within that territory.

Such a practice, however, also includes contesting the sufficiency of these methods to describe what a biblical text ultimately can mean. The alienating effect of conventional historical criticism—with its still pertinent interruption of the narcissistic appropriation of whatever remains of other people's lives—thereby becomes, in a borderline exegesis, a certain social space for asking what else might lurk there, as it were, in abeyance. The

methods of historical criticism thereby produce a certain kind of critical history, in which the purpose of recalling the past in its deep difference is to enable an alternate future in the present, or a history that could still be an open question.

For the interpretative practice that is borderline exegesis, the pressing question is, again, how to know a life worth living: a fulsome life that is not merely the living death of every human body whose possibility of thriving has been perpetually truncated or programmatically foreshortened. Rather, it is a life that ultimately merits the effort it requires because it satisfies sufficiently, however much it may also be marked by everything else that happens under the sun. This is a life shaped not only by senseless sorrow and the dangers of existence but also by the strange deliciousness of sensing oneself wholly alive.

Borderline exegesis is biblical scholarship in the service of such a quest.[23] Or as Nati—the leader of a local group of *lectura popular de la Biblia* in a ravine on the outskirts of Cuernavaca, Mexico—once explained to me and others sitting in her living room, "We look for the promises."[24] Thus the borderline exegesis of biblical texts is not without a certain theological interest. It might even be said to have an eschatological edge.[25] Borderline exegesis tracks the fault lines of this alternate truth within the canonical space of the Christian Bible. It seeks there whatever cracks and fissures yet may run over the textual surface, fracturing the "prison-house of language." It looks to expand there every aperture it finds in the hope that some light yet might shine through these openings. At least, the air always tends to be sweeter there.[26]

As Durs Grünbein writes about "the poem and its secret" without intending his description to be exclusive to that art (in fact, he well describes under the aegis of poetry the very kind of divination that I, too, aim to practice in this book through a borderline exegesis),

> Imagine a thinking that could penetrate into certain otherwise hard-to-reach places, like dental floss between the wisdom teeth or an endoscope into the stomach. It will make certain places visible for the very first time—individual branches of the otherwise intractable psychic cave system that runs through the bodies of all humans and can be discovered only by a resourceful imagination audaciously pushing forward into still unsecured galleries. This thinking is poetic thinking, and it is not the exclusive domain of poets and literati; rather,

> it is a method used by many small search parties that have started out from several directions unbeknownst to one another, an army of phenomenologists working on expanding the confines of our shared imaginaries.[27]

Thus the essays to follow are neither especially theoretical nor wholly historical if by "theoretical" we were to mean the abstract isolation and clarification of some problem of understanding that otherwise would remain implicit or unknown, and by "historical" the examination typically of someone else's life, usually in another time and place. Instead, these essays seek to disclose what the practice of textual interpretation known as exegesis might become if and when the conventional distance separating the academic disciplinary practices of theory and history—including the field of biblical studies—from the encompassing swirl of life writ large purposefully is refused.

At the same time, it is clear that the borderline exegesis in this book does aim to engage so-called mainstream "historical-critical" biblical scholarship. The word "exegesis" is, again, deliberately used for this purpose as well as for the attention paid here to the context of the ancient Mediterranean world enshrined in each of the biblical texts under review. Insofar as this book succeeds, however, in demonstrating a borderline practice of the same "historical science," it would take this scholarship over an edge that no longer remains within it. What conceivably makes the book's focalized "re-significations" of a number of biblical texts collectively instructive to a North American and European academic readership is precisely the redeployment of industry-standard habits of literary and historical interpretation. Thus underscored is how these analytical practices typically have served to impede or to avoid other kinds of social inquiry. In my opinion, not the least of these excluded possibilities is the ongoing development of the utopian imagination. In fact, what is now still frequently done as "history" generally helps shut down any such disclosure as, in any way, belonging properly, scientifically, really to that which the biblical text as such might attest.

In *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis,* Renato Rosaldo has argued that social anthropologists and their academic kin need to learn to heed the truth of cultural borderlands. In Rosaldo's opinion, to focus exclusively or even especially on the dominant institutions and official codes of a given society does not permit the cultural analyst to discern how, in fact, human beings reconstitute themselves under changing circumstances. It is

more instructive, writes Rosaldo, to pay attention to social experiences such as anger in mourning or indeterminate forms of expression such as wit and other instances of hybrid speech, which first of all destabilize whatever we might think we know about a given subject. Only so, claims Rosaldo, will the anthropological practice of social analysis be able to do more than merely replicate—by imposing anew—a hegemonic understanding of the people it presumes to describe.

Borderline exegesis is like borderland anthropology. It analyzes the meaning of biblical texts from the perspective of a wider set of social concerns and with other interlocutors in mind than only those of the dominant institutions and official codes of academic (biblical) scholarship. More narrowly, the practice of borderline exegesis means learning to heed the truth of discursive borderlands. Where the discursive borderlands of a biblical text are to be found is, to be sure, as uncertain or as shifting as the cultural borderlands that are their anthropological counterpart.[28] Whatever once was marginal or peculiar swiftly becomes less so whenever it is made the focus of scholarly attention. In political life, this is called co-optation.

For this reason, it is best to define the discursive borderlands of the biblical text, like those of a culture, less as a matter of perception and more as a question of power and social influence. Thus whatever is deemed to be a discursive borderland is so, in the first instance, because, to date, this feature has not been allowed to shape in any significant manner interpretation of the biblical text. Features that previous scholarly description has routinely failed to consider or to include as telling for interpretation, including notions of authorial intent and original audience, therefore could represent a borderland. Learning as a biblical scholar to take seriously those aspects of the text that poor and disenfranchised readers of it find interesting or disturbing would also be a way to identify the same kind of textual region, insofar as scholarly exclusions and restrictions typically reflect the social interests of their scribal class.

The language of borderland and borderline is spatial terminology. I do not mean to use it here merely metaphorically. At least, I would like to understand it as concretely as possible and not simply as a rhetorical figure since I take the biblical text to constitute a certain kind of social space and thus to be inherently mute. This spatial nature derives from the fact that the text is (or at least until very recently always was) a patently material object—unnatural in its formation but obviously composed of earthly elements—around which different human groups habitually gather. When reading a text, the eye of the beholder moves among its demarcated interstices,

attributing a specific significance to the perceived arrangement. This significance is entirely the work of the reader. Nothing here literally speaks; it only artificially presents.

The biblical text is therefore not a message. It does not represent an experience of communication. It is not really language (yet). Instead, it is, first, a particular kind of public place. It invites inhabitation before it registers reception. In this regard, the biblical text is more akin to the mute magnificence of an ancient temple than it is to the evanescent pronouncements of an oracle. From this perspective, the discursive borderlands of a biblical text are its diverse nooks and crannies, foundation walls, and ceiling vaults, or, if you prefer, some neglected detail or unacknowledged or under-explored fact or overarching conclusion, which prevailing usage of the space variously has ignored, covered up, not fully or all too forcibly exploited. Sometimes, therefore, the borderland of a biblical text will be, again, one or another neglected detail in the history of interpretation. Sometimes, it may amount to a statement of the obvious: something in the text akin to what the little boy in Hans Christian Andersen's tale "The Emperor's New Clothes" recognizes when he blurts out that which others had already seen many times before but no one acknowledged. The borderland of a text could also be a function of evaluation: the final sum of the parts, yet to be drawn. In every one of these instances, the effect of tracing such a borderland will be to disclose a different "bottom line" or telling difference in the text.

In this book, the practice of a borderline exegesis expounds an experience of human life in extremis. This took place in Lima, Peru, in, with, and under the most violent civil war in national memory. In this regard, the book also registers the fruit of a profound displacement—certainly my own, both professionally and personally, but perhaps not just my own—occasioned by that experience. I will say a little more about it in the biographical interlude of this book, which not only joins the work's two halves together but also tries to explain why such questions cannot be "left out" of the kind of interpretative practice on display here.

Briefly stated, this hermeneutical dishevelment occurred as follows. After completing my doctoral dissertation at the Claremont Graduate School in Claremont, California, where I studied the social group that was originally responsible for the development and transmission of the early Christian document known as "Q," I left the United States in order to work in the theological education of Lutheran pastoral leaders in different shantytowns on the outskirts of Lima, Peru, as well as in a slum near the center

of the city. I also began to teach at a local, ecumenical Protestant (Methodist) seminary still under construction. Almost immediately, I found myself, together with everyone else in the country, enfolded within an escalating war between the Maoist insurrectionary group known as Sendero Luminoso, or "The Shining Path," and an increasingly arbitrary and repressive military apparatus. The situation deteriorated daily. Electrical blackouts, water shortages, an imploding national economy, and evaporating political options routinely punctuated the facade of business as usual. It was in this situation that I had cause to ask myself repeatedly what it was exactly that I was doing as a certified biblical scholar—or, rather, what I could and should be doing with this knowledge in the midst of the maelstrom swirling ever more vertiginously around us. Did it actually make any sense to practice here the "historical science" of academic biblical interpretation? Was this an intelligible or even appropriate thing to do under the circumstances? Could it be confessed in public places?

At some point in this process, I started to think of myself as a borderline exegete—which is to say as someone who read biblical texts in extremis—and to explore the possibility of a borderline exegesis. After a few years, I then returned to North America: Toronto, Ontario, Canada, where I had been appointed as an assistant professor of New Testament literature and exegesis at Emmanuel College of Victoria University (and the Toronto School of Theology) in the University of Toronto. My reasons for returning to Canada were not professional. Needless to say, this new context of a Canadian academic environment was different than the one in which I had originally conceived the practice of a borderline exegesis.[29] At the same time, it was not unlike the one in which I had received my Ph.D. in religion / Christian Bible / New Testament / Q. Putatively, therefore, I should have known what was now required of me. Nonetheless, I remained unsettled by my experience in Peru—specifically as a biblical scholar—a situation that was made only worse (or better) by my return to Lima every year for different periods of time.

One could choose to call this merely another instance of cross-cultural or intercultural biblical interpretation. But I know it as a defining feature of the practice of a borderline exegesis insofar as this shuffling around has left me feeling neither here nor there as an academic reader of biblical texts—which is to say in a kind of no-man's-land or cultural borderland. At the same time, this uncertain state has seemed to be closer to a promised land than either of my designated destinations alone, at least when these are taken to determine an intellectual identity.

For roughly twenty-five years now I have been a member of the group of *biblistas* who collectively produce the *Revista de Interpretación Biblica Latinoamericana* (*RIBLA;* Journal of Latin American biblical interpretation). Versions of the four main chapters in this book were all initially written as discrete contributions to that journal and its larger effort to underwrite a regionally inclusive *relectura bíblica*.[30] These essays were much easier to write in Spanish than their later renditions in English proved to be. I am still trying to understand why this would be so. But it evidently involved more than the usual problems of linguistic translation, if only because the most significant impediments to readily intelligible utterance have occurred not in the language that I first began to speak when I was already an adult, but in the one that I grew up speaking—namely, in English. Could it be, I sometimes wondered, that the main problem is what English now (as the other lingua franca of late capitalist postmodernity, including the academy of humanities and social sciences) will yet allow to be said?

What "changed" in the transition from Spanish to English? Once again, I am uncertain how best to answer this question. I certainly felt a strong need in English to explain more—which is to say defend—why I was interested in the different topics under discussion in the book's four main chapters. In part, this may be due to the different political and economic contexts implied by the likely audience for each edition of the essays. In the sector of Spanish-speaking Latin America for which I initially wrote these essays, certain questions were self-evident because they are pervasive. For example: Why must we suffer as we do? And why is there never enough of virtually everything? Is this the only possible way for the world to be? As good as it gets? What hope is there? By contrast, my sense of the English-speaking public likely to read this book did not include such desperation or flat clarity about the multiple ways in which the presently dominant economic and political order of the day does not work well for most people, failing as it does to create a satisfactory life for the vast majority of human beings.

Hence there is a greater need for some kind of an explanatory framework in English to articulate more fully and explicitly the rhetorical situation that went without saying in Latin America. Additionally, I found that certain terms that still seem to speak directly and concretely in Spanish, such as *la vida* (life) or *la felicidad* (contentment) or *los sueños* (dreams), are difficult to use with comparable directness or concreteness in English-speaking North America. It is as though such language as well as the experiences or lived

realities to which these terms refer have withered on the vine in English, their substance internally eroded or denatured. In any case, the difficulty I encountered when I tried to name such horizons of desire in English often seemed to require, on the one hand, a more detailed and undoubtedly prolix analysis, including a discussion of why it is both possible and necessary to maintain these notions, spelling out, as it were, more explicitly the "so what" implications in conclusion. On the other hand, it also seemed to invite or demand an extension of the discursive field of scholarship into the realm of poetry (about which I will say a little more below).

Brazilian Old Testament scholar Milton Schwantes was the general editor of *RIBLA* from its inception in 1986 until his recent death in 2012. In a statement printed on the cover of every volume, he wrote that the journal, like other projects of Latin American *lectura popular de la Biblia,*

> situates itself within the experiences of faith and struggle of different local communities and churches. The Bible is being recovered by the people. The pain, utopian vision, and poetry of the poor have become, through the life of the communities, decisive hermeneutical mediations for the reading of the Bible in Latin America and the Caribbean. This journal has as its context of origin the afflicted life of our peoples and their tenacious resistance for the sake of an existence characterized by dignity and justice. The communities of the poor located there thus become leaven for biblical interpretation in general.[31]

Presupposed in this re-placement of biblical scholarship are questions such as:

- How must one learn to read the Christian Bible if the truth that is derived from the text no longer is to serve as an instrument of oppression and exclusion for the vast majority of people?
- How do the concrete concerns and experiences of displaced persons and communities expose the lingering legacy of European colonialism and North American imperialism in traditional scientific constructions of the historical meaning of biblical texts?
- Is it possible to read the Christian Bible in contexts of poverty and social discrimination without experiencing the traditional claims made for the text as yet another pretext to endure another round of sorrow and dissatisfaction?

Thus the different topics addressed in this book's four main chapters all involve or invoke quotidian concerns and desires, problems and perceptions, that the poor and other socially disenfranchised persons throughout Latin America have routinely claimed to be their own. These concerns and desires, problems and perceptions, are not uniquely theirs, of course, but certainly the poor and socially disenfranchised tend to experience them with greater frequency and urgency. These topics include:

- the experience of unwarranted suffering (chapter 1)
- the possibility of a political economy capable of sustaining life—not least because it, too, would have become sustainable (chapter 2)
- how one might become "someone else" instead of just remaining another servile subject of "this" world "as it is" (chapter 3)
- the perils of change—or hope as interruption—in the face of a future that looks to be increasingly a nightmare (chapter 4)

Again, the reasons why these topics would be compelling will be obvious to anyone whose life has known the ravages of systemic sorrow, routine violence, willful ignorance, prolonged illness, fruitless toil, social treatment as a nobody, the terror of the status quo, and/or the quicksilver of social revolution. Nonetheless, I will now briefly try to clarify the original motivation for each of the four essays.

In chapter 1, I pursue the suspicion that Job's erstwhile wealth and privileged social status are actually responsible for the problems that he later comes to experience. Thus God's answer to Job "out of the whirlwind" correctly exposes this fact. This, then, is the main reason why the patriarch finally repents. It is also the main reason why so many modern European and North American readers of the biblical book have not been able to accept God's answer to Job—and especially not Job's repentance in response to the divine speech—as a "satisfying" conclusion.

What happens to our reading of the book of Job, however, if we no longer continue to think of the patriarch as a symbol of innocent suffering but, rather, take him as a sign of the limitations of the conventional (ancient/scribal) model of a successful life? In other words, what happens if wealth and power ultimately prove to be the main problem in need of address—first, in order to understand Job's own experience of life, and then in order to satisfy subsequent and especially modern readers of the work?

Can one, however, really live without wealth and social power? In chapter 2, this possibility is considered under the aegis of the Kingdom of

Heaven, about which Jesus speaks so frequently in the Gospel of Matthew. Obviously, such a topic will have little or no appeal—if it makes any sense at all—to those who now enjoy these putative goods. And understandably enough, the same might also hold true for those who have never known wealth and power. Nonetheless, those without wealth and power also know that the political economy currently in place is hardly working in their favor. Thus to speak about another kingdom that is more "divine"—a Kingdom of Heaven—would be a way to describe the possibility of a different kind of political economy: one that might function a little more in their favor. In any case, how could it function less beneficially for them than the present regime?

This is not, of course, how most modern North Atlantic biblical scholars have understood the teachings of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew. The main reason for this consensus, however, has little to do with whatever the biblical text actually attests. Rather, the general exclusion of such a reading from the academic field of biblical scholarship reflects, in my opinion, a widespread unwillingness or inability on the part of its practitioners to include within the parameters of their professional expertise an explicit participation in contemporary debates about this kind of question.

Such questions are admittedly always awkward debates, but also equally vital ones—and with regard to the topic of "the economy," now urgently so.[32] At the same time, as important as the topic may be, does it ultimately represent the only key or even the lynchpin for what we may loosely call necessary social change or liberation or some other kind of "new world" order? This question obviously takes for granted—with many of those whose lives continue to unfold in extremis—that the current arrangement of reality is a problem; that social change indeed is necessary; and that words such as "liberation" or "some other kind of 'new world' order" describe the only possible horizon of hope.

The reader for whom these claims are not a statement of the obvious may wish to return to chapter 1 in order to rehearse once again with God and Job why it is that the prevailing model(s) of the good life—with wealth and social power as constitutive goods—ultimately fail(s) to represent an economy of satisfaction, the fullness of life, or what Paul Ricoeur more narrowly has called a capable life. Even so, it remains unclear what role, if any, the work of individual subject formation, or personal ethics, or the shaping of another kind of social "self" could and should play in the construction of another possible world. In chapter 3, I try therefore to address this question. The essay originally was written in response to a particular problem

I first experienced when I was still living in Lima at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s in the maelstrom of more than one ongoing revolutionary project. Briefly stated, the problem was correlating the means with the end. The recurring failure to practice, here and now, some form of the promised change to come within each of these projects as an integral aspect of the political struggle for power routinely seemed to lead to the distressingly familiar scene of the "new boss, same as the old boss." At least, there was a disturbing tendency to reiterate existing patterns of discrimination and other forms of social dysfunction.

In chapter 3, therefore, the discussion in the Epistle of James about the meaning of friendship with God and its correlative tussle with the tongue is examined as one way of pursuing what might be called the liberation of little things. Such a construction of an alternate subjectivity would also be necessary, in my opinion, in order for larger projects of social transformation to be carried out effectively. This is a wager, to be sure, but a wager whose time perhaps is at hand, since the other common scenario for imagining how revolutionary social change should happen has yet to demonstrate success. This other scenario is, first, to seize power over the whole society and, then, from a position of superior force or "revolutionary vanguard" to begin to change the general structure of things in a trickle-down fashion or through some other form of collective osmosis. Lamentably, the result typically has been: *plus ça change, plus c'est la meme chose*.

What would happen, however, if and when we get what we have said we want? In one sense, this is just another version of the same kind of problem that chapter 3 addresses. In chapter 4, however, the issue is no longer one of correlating the means with the end but, rather, a question of the end to be pursued. In this regard, chapter 4 takes up the same kind of problem under discussion in chapter 1, where, through an analysis of Job's complaint and God's response, the issue of the shape of a successful life is posed, tested, and ultimately reframed.

In chapter 4, the peril of successful resistance to a real and present danger is posed, first, through a critical assessment of the cosmic dream of complete vindication as this unfolds in the book of Revelation. This cosmic dream, which constitutes the bulk of the book of Revelation, obviously expresses the sense of distress that is suffered by those who find themselves socially suppressed (on the assumption that the book of Revelation originally was written for such a readership). Such a dream then projects a coming day of inversion, when everything that currently presses down will be turned belly-up. The result of such a thoroughgoing structural adjustment,

however, even if it is deemed to be a just response to earlier injustice, ultimately proves to be as distressing as the evil antecedent. Indeed, I would say that it is even more distressing since it replicates the very nightmare that it otherwise sought to annul in the name of all that is good and right. For this reason, I suggest, the most promising sign of hope in the book of Revelation is those segments of the apocalypse in which a certain interruption of the usual story of redemption takes place—not unlike God's answer to Job "out of the whirlwind."

Overall, the present book could be called an exercise in the vital—though now frequently disparaged—work of the utopian imagination.[33] Indeed, it continues to amaze me how forcefully and with ever greater stridency this kind of thinking is routinely dismissed and discounted by North Atlantic academic scholars in the name of a more responsible, more realistic, or more revolutionary mode of intellection. This stands in striking contrast, for example, to a statement once made to me by a Peruvian Pentecostal pastor, who, despite his own extremely fragile economic condition, was hardly inclined to make strong political pronouncements. Nonetheless, he stated as though it were the most obvious truth in the world, "Sin utopia no vivimos." Without utopia we have no life. By contrast, north of the equator it is reciprocally easy to find statements made by a full range of scholars who believe without any discernable trace of doubt that in the name of utopia only stupidity, or worse, is given voice.[34]

I do not understand or accept such a willful submission to the present state of things, especially since no one appears to believe any longer with Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz that the world as it actually is necessarily represents the best of all possible worlds. Borderline exegesis is therefore the utopian imagination in play with biblical texts. It arises out of the conviction that the world as it actually is cannot and should not be said to be as good as it gets. The existing arrangement of reality is not the only one to be known, however much the same arrangement tries to block all other views to the contrary.[35]

In chapter 1 of this book, the first step is therefore to reconsider the nature of the world in which a better life might take place. (Here begins a second round of introduction to the governing logic of the book.) The figure of Job represents a limit case. Given that Job does everything correctly as defined by the reigning wisdom of his day, it is already clear at the beginning of the book of Job that this script hardly will suffice. Things have happened that were not supposed to happen. And now no one really knows what to do. Job's friends swiftly make him responsible for his situation—thus blaming

the victim—while Job intractably insists that he is innocent and therefore deserves nothing of what is happening. God's response to Job "out of the whirlwind" provides a different perspective on the patriarch's predicament, but only after Job and his friends have exhausted themselves in an increasingly sterile debate about the righteousness of their respective positions and the errors of the other.

God's response to Job's complaint is a borderland text vis-à-vis the reigning wisdom shared by both Job and his friends. The same work is also a borderland text vis-à-vis the Christian Bible as a whole, in which such a survey of the natural or extrahuman world is exceedingly rare. God's reply aptly articulates a different view of how things really are, or life writ large. A revision of the governing concept of the good life is thus enabled. When Job repents in response to God's reply to him, he has begun to rethink what he formerly took to be the nature of things.

In chapter 2, a jump is made from Job to Jesus, but the same line of utopian inquiry continues to be pursued. At issue remains the concrete shape of a life that is good. In chapter 2, however, instead of a panoramic survey of the natural or extrahuman world, the teaching of Jesus on the Kingdom of Heaven in the Gospel of Matthew heralds a different model of political economy. This other possible world, although it is said to be a heavenly realm, would be every bit as much an earthly reality as the one that God reviews in his response to Job "out of the whirlwind." Thus chapter 2 underscores how thoroughly economic—albeit differently so—the Kingdom of Heaven is in the Gospel of Matthew. As Jesus describes this other possible world, his teaching amounts to the outline of a different model of what we now typically call political economy. The term "political economy" is, of course, a decidedly modern expression. But what it describes is not a uniquely modern concern.

Contested by the teaching of Jesus "the economist" in the Gospel of Matthew is any idea of such an arrangement that allows for only one frame of reference to govern the daily business of human life. The further idea that an independent law called "the market" alone should determine all matters related to material production, consumption, and exchange—apart from consideration of any other "external" questions such as human welfare or bodily satisfaction—is also put in question. Instead, the teaching of Jesus "the economist" in the Gospel of Matthew insists that enough is enough, aiming thereby to underwrite the possibility of enjoying a heavenly life on earth. This is because the experience of happiness or well-being is the defining feature of its constitutive equations.

In chapter 3, the operative question then becomes how to enact such a proposal in the midst of the world as it actually is. The social situation that represents business as usual in the Epistle of James remains, sadly, a familiar one. It is a world in which the rich are given pride of place and where they assume the right to occupy it with reciprocal discrimination against the poor. Once more, the social backdrop of this practice is a false trust in the power and significance of wealth. In the Epistle of James, such a false trust corresponds to a smug faith.

Especially notable in the Epistle of James, however, is its insistence on the role of certain "smaller" or "personal" ethical factors. These must be addressed as well, claims the letter, in addition to other obviously important issues such as wealth and power, in order to achieve the kind of social "salvation" that the modern notion of "liberation" would describe. In other words, it will not be enough only to consider how to construct the social body as a whole. While general problems of economic imbalance and other modes of social discrimination will necessarily be of concern to any political project dedicated to social change or "liberation," these alone will never suffice, claims the Epistle of James, to carry out such a work to completion. Alone, they will fall short of what they intend to achieve. In order to achieve the goal of collective transformation, something else is needed in addition. Each of us must learn to enact—in a habitual manner—another social self.

In the Epistle of James, this other self or discrepant social ethos that must be enacted within the daily practice of ordinary life derives from the knowledge of divine wisdom or friendship with God, which then is said to manifest itself especially through the exercise of good speech. No doubt it will surprise some of us that such importance would be attributed to how we speak. Nonetheless, it is interesting and remains a challenge to many forms of the utopian imagination to consider the possibility that, in order for social "liberation" to become effective, it must include—with equal priority—such small-scale matters as changing the practice of communication among individual citizens. Precisely for this reason, the Epistle of James speaks at some length about the need to train that little thing that is the tongue.

Let me hasten immediately to clarify a possible misunderstanding. There is no doubt that the Epistle of James also contains a pointed critique of social power and the privileges associated with possession of material wealth. In this regard, both the Epistle of James and the speeches of Jesus "the economist" in the Gospel of Matthew make the same argument, insofar as each speaks against the production of greater wealth and its better

management as key to the realization of social well-being. Instead, both voices insist that the political economy fit for a fulsome life—whether individual or collective—must be configured differently.

For this reason, however, I shall not rehearse a second time in chapter 3 the basic discrepancy with the dominant perspective that the Epistle of James shares with Jesus "the economist" in the Gospel of Matthew. Instead, on the basis of the argument already advanced in chapter 2, which, mutatis mutandis, also holds true for the Epistle of James, I shall proceed in chapter 3 to focus on another aspect of their common proposal of a different model of political economy, which has often been overlooked or neglected by scholarship on the Epistle of James (not to mention the political praxis of more than one political revolution). Again, this additional element is the role of the formation of an alternate subjectivity as a necessary component of any process that would lead to the creation of another possible world.

What does one do, however, when the effort to live otherwise in a world that evidently is not working well for most of us ends up being fully foiled and flummoxed? When the world as it now is relentlessly insists on conformity to the dominant order with all of the attendant obligations? When such an insistence is imposed, willy-nilly, through economic sanction, military force, or just the usual legalities? Then what? In chapter 4, the book of Revelation provides a focus for discussion of this question, in part because the social situation that originally gave rise to the work still seems to be lamentably with us—although exactly who is who in the same nightmare of clashing worldviews and fierce resistance to accommodation certainly has changed over the centuries. At issue nonetheless remains what to do when even hope itself is finally threatened with extinction.[36]

A greater sense of what life writ large entails; the proposal of a more sustaining and sustainable political economy; the deliberate formation of a smarter social self—all of these efforts to enable good life and to construct, here and now, a better world in which to live more happily eventually encounter opposition. This happens because these ideas do not simply fall from the sky or grow in unfettered air, as though they could be created ex nihilo, germinating apart from other social interests. Instead, they inevitably run headlong into opposing deep and powerful investments—the so-called cornerstones of civilization—that are dedicated to the maintenance and expansion of business as usual. This is the world as it actually is—a world of accelerating markets, manifest destinies, ecological disasters, pandemic illness, and unrelieved exploitation. I have in mind with this summary the early Roman Empire, in which the book of Revelation originally

was written. But, of course, if and when the shoe should fit another foot . . . In any case, the book of Revelation presents itself in such a social context as a kind of dream work, struggling to keep alive in the belly of a belligerent beast some borderline of hope.[37] It is as though—once more in the words of Czeslaw Milosz—"we lived under the Judgment, unaware," and therefore could not imagine another scenario in which "the form of every single grain will be restored in glory."[38]

I have also wanted to imagine that the order in which this book's four main chapters are presented has not only a linear but also a circular logic. There is certainly something to be learned by reading these four chapters in sequence, as I have suggested in the two preceding summaries. In other words, the discussion begun in chapter 1 with the book of Job logically leads into a consideration in chapter 2 of the economic teaching of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew, and then proceeds with chapter 3 toward the idea of an alternate social subjectivity in the Epistle of James before, finally, issuing in chapter 4 into the question of what constitutes a healthy hope in the book of Revelation. At the same time, I have correlated the four chapters concentrically, so that the first chapter on Job finds a certain *inclusio* or response in the fourth chapter on the book of Revelation; and the second chapter on the Gospel of Matthew can be read together with the third chapter on the Epistle of James. From this point of view, the biographical interlude inserted between chapter 2 and chapter 3 represents the structural heart of the work.

In the first scenario, whereby the book's line of reasoning would proceed straightforwardly step by step, the biographical interlude either breaks the chain of this progression or forms the bridge that holds the macro-meditations of the first two chapters together with the micro-musings of the final two. Of course, it could always be the case that what "breaks" and what "bridges" are simply two modes of the same construction. In any case, I have wanted to imagine that the introduction, the biographical interlude, and the conclusion represent together a certain meta-reflection on the intervening exegetical practice that underwrites the four main chapters of the book.

I also understand these additional sections of the book to be a consequence of the difficulty, already described above, that I experienced in producing the book in English due to the transition from one kind of intellectual environment to another. In other words, I knew what I was doing as a form of social practice in Spanish, but the need or desire to explain this practice to others in English—including my own North Atlantic self, or

who it is that I am in such a work and how it is that I came to be so—has required a surround with a different kind of writing as well as a certain biographical "halfway house" in the middle of the book. Thus the introduction, biographical interlude, and conclusion are meant to speak concertedly, providing a kind of framework for the different topical discussions that appear between these lines of demarcation.

The same introduction, biographical interlude, and conclusion, however, can also be read separately, since each of these units registers, in fact, a distinct effort to account for the exegetical practice that underwrites the four main chapters of the book. The three efforts are distinct because the book has taken much longer to finish than I had imagined that it would, and my own thinking about it has refused to stay put. Or, rather, I have been unable to achieve a lasting contentment with any of the explanations given for the social practice in Spanish that I call in English a borderline exegesis, including the reason why I continue to find it a compelling practice. Thus it seems both necessary and appropriate to keep intact the fragmentary nature of the different explanations. At the same time, they appear to me to build, one upon the other, in the direction of a more comprehensive statement of both my own intellectual predicament and the general purpose of this book.

As part of the variable logics that link together the four main chapters of the book, there are also a number of thetic wagers or vague ideas that serve to define the analytical center of gravity in each reading of a biblical text. These ideas include, in chapter 1, the concept of a larger "extrahuman" life, or life writ large; the notion, in chapter 2, of a sufficient (because satisfying) "political economy"; the practice of "asceticism," in chapter 3, with its correlative production of an "alternate subjectivity"; and, in chapter 4, the possibility of "collective dream work." When taken together, these ideas articulate something like the nodal joints of a different model of the body politic. Despite their importance to the book's overall argument, such notions nonetheless will remain here only suggestive possibilities. In each case, I have tried to provide some clarification or additional explanation for how I am using the term. I am well aware, however, that every one of them begs for a fuller treatment. But to do so would distend the book beyond its presentation of a borderline exegesis in the direction of one or another kind of cultural theory. Perhaps I should say that a borderline exegesis thus becomes a source for thinking differently about these things, even as it plainly is not a substitute for that kind of critical thinking.

Even so, I should probably say a little more about the same "nodal joints," since they are not merely an extension of whatever a borderline exegesis might disclose. Thus the notion of a larger "extrahuman" life, for example, or life writ large in chapter 1, to which God directs Job's attention, obviously takes for granted that there really is something "out there" beyond and beneath all the social formations of a distinctly human world, in which these formations remain embedded in order to exist at all. It is, however, hardly self-evident that we could ever know anything about that extrahuman world apart from the social formations in which alone we experience it. And, therefore, the notion of such an extrahuman reality could be thought to be, at best, an empty one. But, as Teresa Brennan has written near the beginning of her book *History After Lacan,* in a statement that may stand here also in defense of my own conviction,

> One perspicacious critic of an early draft of this book asked me how I could write about a natural reality as if its character was unproblematic. The answer is: I cannot; I assume that a living natural reality exists, and that knowledge of it is confused by the fantasmatic material overlay, just as the living reality itself becomes confused. I also assume that one result of the social coverage is to make one doubt the existence of an unchanging reality, precisely because connections with that reality are severed and reality is changed. But even if the world becomes an "as if" fantasmatic world, it does not follow that this is the only possible world. The fact that an "as if" world is constructed, a world which accords with the "at-one-remove" style of thought embodied in abstraction, does not mean that the constructed world of fantasies cannot be differentiated in principle from a living reality. The constructions might make metaphors more substantial, but they do not make metaphors the only reality, although they may aim to do so. I am tempted to say the matter is undecidable, except for this: what follows depends on its explanatory force, its applicability, and on how far it brings together some otherwise competing insights which are split and scattered amongst alternative cultures and the academy.[39]

The only difference between what Brennan writes regarding the ontological horizon of her work and my own practice of a borderline exegesis is the latter's lack of pretension to entail explanatory force. A borderline

exegesis will not "explain" the nature of things, or will not do so with any notable force. Instead, a borderline exegesis works to expand the apertures or aporiae in a given configuration of knowledge—in this book, the field of modern academic biblical studies—in the direction of what Brennan calls "the living reality." A borderline exegesis does this, moreover, without always being able to articulate each of the operative mechanisms that make such an undertaking possible. In this regard, once again, borderline exegesis is a critical practice more than it is a critical theory. It invites the reader, as God speaks to Job "out of the whirlwind," to contemplate a shifting horizon, reframing what we already know, first, by knowing less than before, through the dawning disclosure of another possibility.

Likewise, in chapter 2, I take up the notion of a "political economy" as the commonplace that it has become in contemporary speech about the modern world—as part of a vocabulary routinely employed, for example, by newspapers and other modes of reportage as though its meaning were self-evident. There is, of course, a vast literature that exposes how problematical the same abstraction is as a description of embodied economic activity, and, furthermore, how even on its own terms it fails to describe accurately what "the" economy actually does, especially when it is not working as it should be.

Indeed, one of the main reasons why "the" economy never seems to run as smoothly as a given theory about it has contended is the constant intervention of other factors that ultimately cannot be excluded from consideration as if they were so many "externals" in living practice—for example, the strange unwillingness of so-called citizens to accept imposed austerity measures as obviously necessary to restore health to "the" economy. Is it because these people do not understand—I am speaking facetiously here—that "the" economy is the lifeblood of the nation? Or is it, rather, that they still have some expectations that are not "purely" economic?

In chapter 2, under the aegis of "political economy" and without further ado, I bring the teaching of Jesus "the economist" in the Gospel of Matthew into this debate. The point is obviously not to contribute anything to modern economic theory but, instead, to question the sufficiency of such a discourse in which, for example, the wealth of nations and other corporations is taken to be a self-evident good and the necessary means by which to create a good life. Is this true? The prospect of a sustainable and sustaining economy, whose fundamental purpose would be to generate not wealth but well-being, appears to point elsewhere.

The categories of "asceticism" and "collective dream work," which are used respectively in chapter 3 and chapter 4, will receive there a sufficient clarification, I trust, at least with regard to their use in this book. Both of these categories as well as the correlative notion of an "alternate subjectivity" in chapter 3 serve to specify how the notions of a larger life and a satisfactory economy might be embodied, both individually and conjointly, and especially in the face of an inhospitable social environment. All three ideas are supposed to define, as it were, "next steps," here and now, "in the flesh," in the direction of another possible world.

Parenthetically, I might also note a couple of other, more narrowly exegetical reasons why the four biblical books that are the focus of the four main chapters were chosen. Within the epistemological regime that is modern North Atlantic academic scholarship on the Christian Bible, it is imagined that a rereading of these texts would be especially propitious for the development of a borderline exegesis. To be sure, these exegetical reasons are hardly universal or even necessarily profound. But they do have something to do with cultural power or the way in which the field of scriptural inquiry has been arraigned in North America and Europe. Insofar as a borderline exegesis dissents from the scholarly consensus regarding the so-called reality of history for the sake of knowing another possible world, some texts prove to be more apt than others for the inaugural task of "prying open" and "cracking apart" this snugly self-referential body of professionally authorized "peer-reviewed" knowledge.

Both the book of Job and the book of Revelation are "loose electrons" in the canonical "molecule" that is the Christian Bible. Neither work "fits" comfortably within the dominant frames of reference that define works of "wisdom" in the Old Testament or the horizon of "eschatology" in the New Testament. (I use the language of the Old and New Testament because, in this book, my focus is the Christian Bible.) Every biblical scholar knows, for example, that the book of Job—no matter how you choose to parse or explain it—represents a "limit case" for the rhetoric of righteousness that otherwise prevails in the scriptures of Israel, promising manifold benefits for compliance with these strictures, with dire consequences for the failure to do so. Job, however, did precisely the former (*pace* the constant carping of his friends), only to reap the latter.

Similarly, the book of Revelation represents a "limit case" for early Christian expectations of an end-time intervention by the Lord Jesus into the current state of the world. The marginal status of the work, however, is due

not to its evident contradiction of what normally is said in other writings of the New Testament, but rather to its extreme extrapolation of the specific implications of such statements. In other words, the explicit enthusiasm the book of Revelation displays for the prospect of ultimate vindication with the total triumph of "our" side exposes more about the vengeful nature of early Christian hope than many people—whether orthodox churchmen or feminist and postcolonial critics—have found profitable or desirable for general dissemination.

Moreover, both the book of Job and the book of Revelation are difficult to locate with historical precision. The language of the book of Job, for example, has seemed to be either archaic or full of neologisms. The figure of Job is decidedly patriarchal and thus akin to other ancestral personae depicted in the book of Genesis, which might seem to make him or someone like him a long-standing element of Israelite lore, except for the fact that there is virtually no other evidence for such a tradition (about Job) in ancient Israel. Moreover, Job is clearly defined in the book that bears his name by a "law-abiding" mentality, which suggests a later date for the work in the tradition history of Israel—although, again, legal debate as such is essentially absent from its discourse.

In contrast, the book of Revelation can be situated more clearly in a specific time and place. For example, the book of Revelation tells us that its seer, "John," was on the island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea and that the intended audience of the work was originally a group of seven churches, each identified with a specific city in western Asia Minor. Even so, it has proven almost impossible to "pin down" the book of Revelation within a single political crisis of the early Roman Empire or to connect the occasion of the work with a concrete local problem—hence the proliferation of scholarly proposals regarding how to read the book of Revelation "as such."

Thus both the book of Job and the book of Revelation are "quirky"—or is it "quark-y"?—zones of canonical Christian scripture. They are familiar texts, at least in name, yet highly problematical works when considered more closely, at least for the official truths once derived from biblical texts. By "official truths" I mean the dogmatic traditions of orthodox Latin Christianity as well as the historical narratives produced by modern academic biblical scholarship. It is this programmatic uncertainty, conceptual instability, ideological volatility, and wavering moral character that especially make both the book of Job and the book of Revelation apt sites for a borderline exegesis.

Something similar also holds true for the Gospel of Matthew and the Epistle of James, but in a very different manner, since, on the one hand, the Gospel of Matthew has been the most widely read of the four canonical gospels throughout most of Christian history, while the Epistle of James has been, at least from the sixteenth century until recently, among the least read of the apostolic letters, basically due to its reputedly all too conventional nature. Thus neither the Gospel of Matthew nor the Epistle of James can be said to be anomalous in their canonical or ideological character, as the book of Job and the book of Revelation obviously have been. Again, however, this means, in the case of the Gospel of Matthew, general acceptance as a quintessentially Christian writing but, in the case of the Epistle of James, precisely the opposite: namely, general rejection (in exegetical practice) as a less than truly Christian text. In both cases, nonetheless, these opposite evaluations and corresponding reception history are derived from a common feature of both biblical books, which many modern scholars describe as "Jewish Christianity," or its equivalent. Both the Gospel of Matthew and the Epistle of James are examples of "that other" kind of early Christianity, whose main distinguishing feature is explicit criticism of the apparently antinomian (or legally "weak" because "ecumenically" wide) legacy of "Paulinism." The erstwhile popularity of the Gospel of Matthew as a quintessentially Christian text thus includes a basic denial of its inherently "Jewish" nature, while the early modern demotion of the Epistle of James essentially rides on the recognition of this feature in the work. Once again, therefore, it is such a mixed-up muddle of motives that makes both the Gospel of Matthew and the Epistle of James promising sites for the kind of redescription that is borderline exegesis.

Finally, I should say a word about the repeated use of poetry in this book, both as an external frame for the exegetical analyses in each chapter and as a mode of their extension. I do not understand this use of poetry to be merely rhetorical adornment or some other sort of superfluous flourish. Instead, I take the poetry to provide alternative points of entry into the textual labyrinth that is the scriptural field where a borderline exegesis takes place. At the same time, the poetry helps identify alternative gateways of departure or modes of transcendence from the canonical confines of such a work. This enables the exegetical enterprise to issue ultimately into something more than just a further round of the biblical discourse alone.

Such a practice obviously contests the sufficiency of any notion of *sola scriptura,* with its derivative devices of disciplinary integrity and academic

autonomy. It also enacts the possibility of linkage between such an arcane fussing with a fossilized artifact and other living voices of the present (or not too distant) past. Indeed, such a possibility implies that the work of exegesis—whether borderline or otherwise—is itself an act of *poiesis*. That is to say, it is a style of writing for which the rigidity of the literary form (which is, of course, never simply rigid, except when rigor mortis has set in, and even then this could be but the prelude to another kind of performance) is the vehicle whereby one finds and frees one's own voice.

Nonetheless, I have not been able to include as part of the texture of this book most of the poems to which a passing reference is made or which have been cited only to the extent that limits determined by international copyright law will allow. As the book was originally conceived in my illegitimate heart and soul and mind and would have appeared in a state of *samizdat* freedom of press, each poem was fully cited as an integral part of the present book's discursive landscape.[40]

1

INTO THE WHIRLWIND

GOD'S ANSWER TO JOB'S COMPLAINT

In this chapter I read the book of Job and, specifically, God's answer to Job's complaint in Job 38:1–41:34, with Job's response in 42:1–6. I did this initially as part of an effort to incorporate a growing ecological consciousness into the practice of Latin American biblical interpretation. Here, however, it seems to me to register a form of inquiry into the nature of the world in which we live and where life as we know it still unfolds. It is here that we hope for a better life to come. That world, as Robert Hass entitles one of his poems, is "the world as will and representation," where we get "our first moral idea" about the shape of reality—"about justice and power, / Gender and the order of things." As Hass describes his own childhood, it included "a drug called antabuse," which was designed to make a person sick if and when he or she drank alcohol. The drug was administered daily by Hass's father to the poet's alcoholic mother who, "penitent and biddable," took it every morning; then, seated at the kitchen table, she "gagged and drank, / Drank and gagged."[1] Clearly, something is wrong here. But it is not equally clear whom or what to blame for it.

The figure of Job represents a limit case for this kind of "normalcy." Given that Job has done everything "right" as defined by the reigning wisdom of his day, it is already clear at the beginning of the book of Job that the dominant script will prove to be deficient. Things have happened that were not supposed to happen, and no one now is sure what to do next.[2]

Job's friends swiftly make him the author of his own suffering—blaming the victim—while Job intractably insists that he is innocent and deserves none of what is happening to him. God's answer to Job's complaint "out of the whirlwind" provides a different perspective on Job's situation—but only after both the patriarch and his friends have exhausted themselves in an increasingly sterile debate about the righteousness of their respective positions and the errors of the other.

God's answer to Job in Job 38:2–41:34 has usually struck modern readers of the book as an inadequate response to Job's prolonged cry of incomprehensible—because undeserved—suffering. This dissatisfaction derives partly from the not incorrect assumption that Job indeed was innocent of all the usual grounds for experiencing such sorrow in both ancient and modern moral reasoning. At this point, the modern reader nonetheless usually sets out to justify God's way with Job—despite unvanquished reservations about its impropriety. Or the same reader autonomously declares the biblical text as it stands to be dissatisfying, in order then either to abandon the writing as an inadequate framework for ongoing moral reflection or—essentially the same maneuver—to elaborate that part of the text—usually some aspect of the figure of Job—most congenial to the reader's own sensibility.

I propose a different reading. God's answer to Job's complaint, in my opinion, is a pointed response "out of the whirlwind" to the patriarch's hurt lament in the first part of the book. In fact, the text makes it very clear that in his speech God addresses only Job. Neither his friends nor the heavenly court, including the *satan,* are ever said to be involved in the concluding exchange between Job and God. In what follows, I focus therefore on the correlation between God's answer to Job and Job's earlier lamentation—especially Job's initial lament in chapter 3 and his final complaint in chapters 29–31.[3] This may seem to be an obvious thing to do. But not a few of the important consequences of stating the obvious do not appear to have occurred to most interpreters. To be sure, such a focus fails to discuss many significant aspects of the book of Job as a whole. Nonetheless, it seems to me that the work's dramatic heart—if such language may be used—is defined by the protracted effort at exchange between the always unhappy and increasingly antagonistic figure of Job, on the one hand, and, on the other, the initially distant but eventually all too present figure of God.

Consider, additionally, the opposite scenario. What would happen if we were to remove from the biblical book as it presently stands both Job's escalating lamentation and God's eventual response to Job? The other parts

of the text—the encompassing fable in chapters 1–2 and chapter 42, the multiple "friendly" retorts to Job by his colleagues, and Elihu's uninvited lecture in chapters 32–37—would have no obvious coherence with one another beyond the fact that they all express, in one form or another, the conventional wisdom of Levantine antiquity. In contrast, what if we remove from the book *everything but* Job's laments and God's reply to Job? It is still possible to discern—indeed, because of the resulting compression and stark juxtaposition of the relevant units of speech, the result is a heightened sense of—the basic argument of the work as a whole.[4] I conclude therefore that the two components minimally represent the "mainspring" of the work, whatever other rhetorical movements also might be present.

What is at stake in this reappraisal of the significance of God's reply to Job's outrage at unjustifiable distress? Once again, it could be simply a certain curiosity about the vehemence of scholarly impatience with the ending to the book. Why do critics so often praise the consummate art in the first part of the work, only to find it so deficient in its conclusion, even though the specifically literary indicators of such a putative fall from compositional grace seldom, if ever, are identified? For some reason, the book is found satisfactory until the patriarch ceases complaining at the end of chapter 31. But then, especially after God's appearance leading to Job's retraction, the text would disappoint, or worse. Evidently, the modern reader did not get whatever he or she imagined that the text should deliver. Is the problem, however, the text? Or, better stated, could it be that something is in play other than merely the writer's failure to follow through with Job's critique?

The change of register that occurs with God's reply to Job has often been cited as one of the main reasons why the text would disappoint, since it so obviously fails to take up what the modern reader has understood Job's series of laments rightly to announce. The shift from Job's repeated rehearsal of full compliance with all the demands of customary duty or the standard codes of righteousness to God's panoramic invocation of a world beyond these parameters apparently has no interest for such a reader. Or perhaps such a possibility simply cannot be understood any longer.

The book of Job thus becomes an interesting challenge to reconsider what actually constitutes a good life, since Job's complaint is precisely that his life no longer was such an existence. God's response to Job somehow persuades him that, in fact, he was mistaken in this conclusion, since Job promptly repents for having previously uttered "things I did not understand" (42:3). At the same time, beyond this general change in register, there is the disturbing element of violence in God's response to Job. Or,

rather, there is the elementary violence that almost casually seems to be a part of the larger life God's reply brings to Job's attention. How can such violence also be an aspect of the "wonderful things" that Job earlier failed to consider?[5]

If God's answer to Job amounts to a reminder or a revelation of a larger encompassing reality that Job had either forgotten or, perhaps, never known—and Job's subsequent repentance is then the sign of his recollection or discovery of this world—in this case learning such a lesson about what Lucretius calls "the nature of things" would ultimately be the purpose of reading the work. In the guise of divine instruction, the book of Job poses the question: What is the nature of life as such? Or life writ large? That is, the life that would be larger than the living death too many of us, including Job, still find ourselves within. To pose this question, of course, is already to insist that the official, governing, scientific definition of reality cannot be the whole story.

Not Innocent Suffering

In my opinion, it is important *not* to take Job as a figure of innocent suffering.[6] This does not mean, however, that Job was actually guilty and therefore deserved to suffer. Rather, it is to underscore the fact that such a frame of reference—innocent or guilty—makes it impossible to understand God's response to Job's complaint as in any way an adequate reply.[7] However tempting a refusal of the adequacy of God's reply may be for a modern reader, I suggest that it is ultimately counterproductive, when interpreting the book of Job as a whole, to make the protagonist of the work into a symbol of the downtrodden and oppressed or some other victim of undeserved misfortune, including institutionalized injustice. As Job recounts his past, the patriarch had hardly been one of the poor and the lowly. Moreover, were the contrast between the shape of Job's previous existence and his current debacle to be made less stark and profound, his sudden fall from grace and social status—the precise reason for which is the main issue under debate between Job and his friends—would not be sufficient to sustain the prolonged reflection it elicits in the work.

At the same time, to be sure, it is important to remember that when Job finally does open his mouth with explicit lamentation in chapter 3, he is now a poor and humiliated man, and everything that he has to say about his former life—a life that Job describes as having been as good as any ancient

human life could be—represents the sort of utterance people are inclined to make in the throes of serious distress. Thus one could imagine that whoever Job used to be ultimately matters less than the fact that at the time of his inexplicable affliction and sincere lament, Job embodies the widespread experience of deep and unwarranted human misery. Hence Job should be taken to speak for everyone who has ever had to suffer too much.[8]

Perhaps this is so; but still unexplained and, in my opinion, inexplicable from such a perspective is Job's final act of repentance at the end of the book (42:1–6).[9] How are we to understand the claim of the work as it stands that the painful period of bodily illness, social marginality, and personal confusion suffered by Job has been sufficiently answered by God's panoramic survey of the surrounding natural world?[10] The immediate result of God's reply to Job is well known. Without further ado, the erstwhile patriarch abandons his case against the Almighty and confesses, "I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know" (42:3). Interpretation of the book of Job unable to account for Job's eventual and abrupt volte-face—without suggesting that he really did deserve to suffer everything that happened to him—fails, presumably, to capture something basic to the argument of the work as a whole.

Once rich and socially respected, Job suddenly finds himself at the beginning of the book transformed against his will into a poor and humiliated "non-person." Then, at the end of the story, Job experiences another kind of conversion, which enables him to discover the world anew.[11] Somehow God's answer to Job "out of the whirlwind" is the cause of this final rethinking of the nature of things. In the debate between Job and his friends, all parties involved assume a standard perspective of ancient (biblical) wisdom. Moreover, they never question it. This perspective is the conviction that the possession of wealth and social power are the result of living a life that is pleasing to God and in accordance with God's will. Wealth and its benefits thus serve as a signal of God's favor and blessing.

The disagreement between Job and his friends centers on the issue of whether and, if so, exactly how Job did something wrong that caused him to suffer as he did. Job insists that he has done nothing of the sort. His friends are sure that he must have done so, albeit without knowing it, since otherwise there would be no way to explain the sudden occurrence of so many problems in his life. Job's predicament is that he knows he has done nothing to deserve such "punishment," and yet he has no other vision or explanation for his situation than the one he shares with his friends. Thus the debate between Job and his friends can only become ever sharper and

more sterile, and the ideological position taken up by each more and more extreme.

Job had been a rich and powerful man. This is made clear and presumably it is important to know, even if we do not understand at the beginning of the book the precise significance of that fact for the overall argument of the work. At no point, however, is Job criticized for having known and enjoyed the fruits of the earth and of his own labor (whatever this may have been). In his reply to Job, God makes no effort to unseat or to diminish the validity of Job's desire for such material goods and the social prestige he once enjoyed—even if these belong to a social order we might now view as being fundamentally flawed in one regard or another. Certainly, no effort is made by God to suggest that the created world with its many pleasures is anything but a good thing. At no point, therefore, does God exhort Job to become a poor man rather than a rich one. God thus makes no attempt to convert physical pain and bodily dissatisfaction into a spiritual virtue. The problem with wealth is not that it allowed Job to delight in a fully carnal existence.

Nonetheless, even though Job did nothing wrong—not even as a rich and powerful man—he still apparently failed to grasp something that is important to know about the world in which he was otherwise so successful. And, in fact, it may also be the case that his wealth and social status were responsible in some way for this limitation—namely, for Job's lack of a more comprehensive and insightful vision regarding the nature of things. Be that as it may, the focus of God's reply to Job is ultimately to rehearse a certain fullness of life that, despite the abundance Job earlier enjoyed, he finally claims not to have understood.

In other words, there is one concept of justice—the one that Job and his friends share throughout their long and sterile debate about Job's present plight—according to which Job would remain innocent of all responsibility for his fate, while nonetheless still staying stuck in it. And there is another concept of justice, represented by God's answer to Job, whereby Job recognizes that, in fact, he was liable to correction and therefore repents of what he previously said, in order to enter into this new understanding.

This second understanding of justice, which corresponds to the God of *all* creation, is distinguished by its expansive inclusiveness. Not merely a question of the recognition and defense of the rights and privileges of only certain (human) creatures, it also takes into account elements and processes that may be unknown or ignored by the civilized (humane) world. This other concept of justice begins with a heightened sense of life's

integrity, including and simultaneously surpassing the concerns of human beings alone. It is within this larger understanding of the divine order that the merits of Job's case are finally reviewed.

Again, at no point in God's reply to Job does God cast doubt on Job's innocence. At the same time, God's reply questions the sufficiency of the concept of innocence and its dependent categories in order to effect what Job himself is seeking: namely, a world in which no one dies meaninglessly or suffers excessively as the victim of some destiny manufactured by an alien hand. Of course, if one assumes that the issue of innocence can never be rendered problematical in this manner, because the question of who is guilty may never be decentered or displaced, God's reply to Job must ultimately remain inscrutable. Either it is possible to challenge the truth of innocence, and God's reply to Job would have something to do with such a challenge, or it is not possible to do this, and everything said after Job's concluding complaint in chapters 29–31 must be, at best, anticlimactic or, worse, repressive and obscurantist.

Obviously it is both legitimate and necessary to ask who is responsible for the continuing sorrow and undeserved suffering of many innocent victims who continue to die a false death, not infrequently as a predictable "side effect" of someone else's plan for progress and development, or the desire for hegemony and wealth. It is also evident that such sorrow and suffering are the direct and indirect consequence of specifically human practices, both political and economic. In questioning the truth of innocence, it is not my intention to diminish or to distract in any way from the urgency of seeking the cause of such a situation and insisting upon its immediate rectification.

In Job's case, however, it is important to remember that his use of the category of innocence was juridical in nature. It indicates that Job *had* fulfilled all the requirements on the basis of which the cultural configuration to which this category belonged promised him social success, including bodily well-being. In this case, the truth of innocence was rendered problematical. It did not work as advertised. Thus the book of Job ultimately questions the capacity of such a system, with its promises and punishments, to deliver and to safeguard the abundant life it projected.

In any case, at issue in God's reply to Job is not Job's innocence. As already discussed, the social codes governing this question all concur that, in Job, there was neither fault nor guile. The reiterated moral reading of the book of Job actually continues the line of attack first undertaken by Job's friends, who fruitlessly sought to find in Job's condition another instance

of a more familiar problem. In fact, the issue between Job and God is not ultimately a moral one at all. The category of innocence is not only beside the point but also fundamentally misleading.[12]

What, then, is at stake? For want of a better expression, I will say both the possibility and the necessity of displacing from the center stage of human consciousness its own excessive self-interest.[13] This conceivably also includes so-called enlightened self-interest. God's answer to Job's complaint ultimately represents a thoroughgoing critique of the pretension of the civilized "humane" world—so flawlessly embodied by Job—to take into account all that a creaturely life actually is, including human life. The reason why Job's self-description in his final complaint in chapters 29–31 is so significant is precisely because its recollection of the patriarch's erstwhile social status registers Job's ultimate refuge—which is to say the primary reason for his continuing dissatisfaction—in the face of his enduring malaise. God's answer to Job "out of the whirlwind" aims to reorient this paralyzing fixation.

God's Answer to Job

God's answer to Job—here including Job's response to it—has a relatively simple literary structure:

A. 1. God appears (38:1–3)
B. 1. In a cosmological context (38:4–38)
  1.a. Foundations of the earth (38:4–7)
  2.a. Enclosure of the sea (38:8–11)
  3.a. Dawn (38:12–15)
  2.b. Depths of the sea and other extremities (38:16–18)
  3.b. Light and darkness (38:19–21)
  4.a. Snow, hail, rain, and dew (38:22–30)
  3.c. Stars (38:31–33)
  4.b. Rain (38:34–38)
B. 2. With an array of animals (38:39–39:30)
  1. Lionesses and ravens (38:39–41)
  2. Mountain goats and does (39:1–4)
  3. Wild ass (39:5–8)
  4. Wild bull (39:9–12)
  5. Ostrich (39:13–18)

6. Warhorse (39:19–25)
7. Eagle (39:26–30)

A.2. God interrogates (40:1–14)
1.a. God (40:1–2)
2.a. Job (40:3–5)
1.b. God (40:6–14)

B.3. With monsters (40:15–41:34)
1. Behemoth (40:15–24)
2. Leviathan (41:1–34)

A.3. Job responds (42:1–6)

Again, the structure of the text is not complex. What motivates Job's eventual repentance or conversion to God's point of view in 42:1–6 is the preceding triad of examples in Job 38:3–38, 38:39–39:30, and 40:15–41:34. All of these examples that God trots out in response to Job's increasingly accusatory complaint are taken from what we may call the realm of nature. And all of them, moreover, with a few exceptions, tend to be effectively exotic, or ex-centric, in nature.

The content of God's reply to Job is atypical of biblical poetry, which otherwise does not appear to have been interested in the so-called natural world. As Robert Alter writes,

> There is . . . little descriptive nature poetry in the Bible: the natural world is of scant interest in itself; it engages a poet's imagination only insofar as it reflects man's place in the scheme of things or serves his purposes. But in the uniquely vivid descriptive poetry of Job 38–41, the natural world is valuable for itself, and man, far from standing at its center, is present only by implication, peripherally and impotently, in this welter of fathomless forces and untamable beasts.[14]

In God's reply to Job, it is therefore precisely this uncivilized, inhuman, or extrahuman world of "savage" nature that constitutes the specific focus of the text. And this, in turn, is supposed to have enabled Job's improved understanding of his otherwise unaltered misfortune.

Job's Initial Lament: Job 3:3–26

In Job 42:1–6, with Job's response to God's preceding speech(es), we complete the circle of Job's growing complaint and ever more insistent demand

for divine acknowledgement that began with his initial lament in 3:3–26. For the purposes of this chapter, it is especially important to notice how God's reply to Job in 38:1–41:34 recalls many of the elements present in Job's first cry against unexpected misfortune. In Job's later laments, it is also possible to find the same correspondence between their specific content and God's eventual reply to Job. Nonetheless, as Job becomes increasingly frustrated with his friends' conventional interpretation of his situation and therefore emphasizes more and more his own innocence in the face of their ever more aggressive interventions, Job's own discourse becomes less of a lamentation and more of an effort to demonstrate his basic inculpability.[15] Job's later laments thus become part of the ancient (academic) debate about the relationship between act and consequence, or the experience of misfortune and personal behavior. This is the background of the prolonged exchange between Job and friends—a debate that seems to know no end!

God's reply to Job "resolves" the widening discrepancy between Job and his friends by taking the debate back to its beginning—namely, to Job's initial lament and its language about birth and death, being and nonbeing, and the elemental coordinates of existence. Through this return to "basics," the question of Job's innocence or guilt is reconfigured.

In his initial lament (3:2–26) Job regretted the day that he was born. It is the weary and despairing groan of someone seriously depressed and forlorn: "I am not at ease, nor am I quiet; I have no rest; but trouble comes" (3:26). The lament begins with the moment Job's life began. He says it would have been better never to exist at all than to endure what he is now suffering—better to choose no life at all than the living death that has become his destiny. Thus he "long[s] for death, but it comes not." He is like those who "dig for it more than for hid treasures; who rejoice exceedingly, and are glad, when they find the grave" (3:21–22). Thus Job cries,

> Let the day perish wherein I was born,
> and the night which said, "A man-child is conceived."
> Let that day be darkness! . . .
> because it did not shut the doors of my mother's womb,
> nor hide trouble from my eyes.
> Why did I not die at birth,
> come forth from the womb and expire?
> Why did the knees receive me?
> Or why the breasts, that I should suck? . . .

Or why was I not as a hidden untimely birth,
as infants that never see the light?
(Job 3:3–4a, 10–12, 16)

One is always well advised not to argue with someone in the grip of such emotions. Perhaps that is why God keeps his distance from Job as long as he does. It is clear that Job's friends would have benefited from further training in this regard—even though they are not wholly mindless of the extreme soreness of Job's situation.[16]

Nonetheless, when the time finally does come for God to respond to Job, the first order of business is a series of questions about the foundations of life as such. In fact, I take the opening series of questions by God to be a direct reply to Job's initial lament about the day(s) in which his own life was established. When God finally answers Job's complaint, there is no mincing of words:

Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
Tell me, if you have understanding.
Who determined its measurements—surely you know!
Or who stretched the line upon it?
On what were its bases sunk,
or who laid its cornerstone,
when the morning stars sang together,
and all the sons of God shouted for joy?
(Job 38:4–7)

In his first lament, Job had cursed the day of his birth:

Let that day be darkness!
May God above not seek it,
nor light shine upon it.
Let gloom and deep darkness claim it.
Let clouds dwell upon it;
Let the blackness of the day terrify it.
(Job 3:4–5)

In God's reply to Job, the cosmological convulsions Job invoked are not taken casually. In this regard, God takes more seriously than Job did the specific nature of Job's lamentation. Where Job would have "the blackness

of the day terrify" the occasion of his birth, God remembers "when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy" at the foundation of the earth. Where Job longed for "gloom and deep darkness [to] claim" his erstwhile coming forth and "clouds [to] dwell upon it" (3:5) and, even more absolutely, wondered why he did not just "come forth from the womb and expire" (3:11), God speaks of the time when the sea first "burst forth from the womb" and God "made clouds its garment, and thick darkness its swaddling band" (38:8b–9).

Even though the sea is acknowledged to be a threatening force in this world—God asks, "Who shut in the sea with doors . . . and prescribed bounds for it, and set bars and doors, and said, 'Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed'?" (38:8a, 10–11)—God uses the very same language Job employed to damn his birth in order to describe how, as a midwife cares for a newborn baby, God gave the sea, too, its own garment of "clouds" and a swaddling band of "thick darkness." What Job took to be the investiture of nothingness becomes, in God's answer to Job's complaint, the first outfit of an infant creation.

In his initial lament, Job wished that his birthday would be removed from the calendar: "That night—let thick darkness seize it! let it not rejoice among the days of the year, let it not come into the number of the months" (3:6). In God's reply to Job, such a stellar realignment, with its desire for cosmic control, which Job's wish for self-erasure would require in order to be realized, is sharply questioned. Did Job really understand what he had said?

> Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades,
> or loose the cords of Orion?
> Can you lead forth the Mazzaroth in their season,
> or can you guide the Bear with its children?
> Do you know the ordinances of the heavens?
> Can you establish their rule on the earth?
> (Job 38:31–33)

In his first lament—we are still occupied only with the first strophe—Job had proposed with respect to the day of his birth, "Let those curse it who curse the day, who are skilled to rouse up Leviathan" (3:8). Every reader of the book of Job knows that the last and most elaborate of all the examples taken from nature, with which God replies to Job, is indeed Leviathan. And

God makes it clear that no one has sufficient skill or strength to manage Leviathan—except, of course, for the one who speaks from the whirlwind:

> Can you draw out Leviathan with a fishhook,
> or press down his tongue with a cord?
> Can you put a rope in his nose,
> or pierce his jaw with a hook?
> Will he make many supplications to you?
> Will he speak to you soft words?
> Will he make a covenant with you
> to take him for your servant forever?
> Will you play with him as with a bird,
> or will you put him on a leash for your maidens?
> Will traders bargain over him?
> Will they divide him up among the merchants?
> Can you fill his skin with harpoons,
> or his head with fishing spears?
> Lay hands on him;
> think of the battle; you will not do it again! . . .
> No one is so fierce that he dares to stir him up. . . .
> Upon earth there is not his like,
> a creature without fear.
> He beholds everything that is high;
> he is king over all the sons of pride.
> (Job 41:1–10a, 33–34)

Again, God's response to Job takes more seriously than Job did what it means to "rouse up" such a creature as Leviathan. While there is certainly burlesque and sarcasm in God's evocation of the different methods one might employ in vain for this purpose—trying to make Leviathan behave in accordance with human design—the same list of futile techniques also underscores how foolish is the very notion that anyone could be "skilled to rouse up Leviathan," let alone be able to do anything with him afterward.

Finally, in the penultimate verse of the first strophe of his first lament, Job wishes that there were no light to mark the day of his birth: "Let the stars of its dawn be dark; let it hope for light, but have none, nor see the eyelids of the morning" (3:9). Thus Job hopes to annul God's opening act in creating the world. God's reply counterpoises such a wish by describing

how "the morning stars sang together" at the foundation of the earth (38:7). Then God asks Job,

> Have you commanded the morning since your days began,
> and caused the dawn to know its place,
> that it might take hold of the skirts of the earth
> and the wicked be shaken out of it? . . .
> Where is the way to the dwelling of light,
> and where is the place of darkness,
> that you may take it to its territory
> and that you may discern the paths to its home?
> You know, for you were born then,
> and the number of your days is great!
>
> (Job 38:12–13, 19–21)

In the second strophe of his first lament, Job went on to bemoan the fact that he was born at all instead of enjoying immediately the tranquility and rest of death. In his response to Job, God underscores how adventuresome indeed the event of birth is, and how little life's subsequent perils render it futile. In other words, God simply does not accept the harshness of life as a reason not to live. Thus, for example, God refers to "the appetite of the young lions, when they crouch in their dens, or lie in wait in their covert," and then the raven, "when its young ones cry to God, and wander about for lack of food" (38:39–41). There are also the mountain goats and hinds, which "crouch, bring forth their offspring, and are delivered of their young. Their young ones become strong, they grow up in the open; they go forth, and do not return to them" (39:3–4). Finally, of course, there is the ostrich,

> [who] leaves her eggs to the earth,
> and lets them be warmed on the ground,
> forgetting that a foot may crush them,
> and that the wild beast may trample them.
> She deals cruelly with her young,
> as if they were not hers;
> though her labour be in vain,
> yet she has no fear.
>
> (Job 39:14–16)

It is certainly not a nice or easy world that God depicts in his reply to Job. But it is equally full of vitality, whereas Job's initial lament presumed to exclude, a priori, any value in giving "light . . . to him that is in misery, and life to the bitter in soul . . . to a man whose way is hid, whom God has hedged in" (3:20, 23)—as though death were better than a life with sorrow. In the second strophe of his first lament, Job is prepared to neglect or disregard all larger questions of the disposition of the world for the sake of securing a guaranteed measure of personal comfort or lack of pain. Thus Job imagines the pleasure of having died at birth:

> For then I should have lain down and been quiet;
> I should have slept;
> then I should have been at rest,
> with kings and counsellors of the earth
> who rebuilt ruins for themselves
> or with princes who had gold,
> who filled their houses with silver. . . .
> There the wicked cease from troubling,
> and there the weary are at rest.
> There the prisoners are at ease together;
> they hear not the voices of the taskmaster.
> The small and the great are there,
> and the slave is free of his master.
>
> (Job 3:13–15, 17–19)

Striking in this sketch of death's delights is how Job's desire to be done with it all—before anything had ever happened—flattens out the specific struggles that make up daily life. As Job depicts the space of death's repose, there would recline side by side, all strangely oblivious to one another's character and even more disturbingly to their own past, a full array of human actors: kings and counselors, princes and the wicked, the weary, prisoners, the small and great, slave (and master). In this bleak democracy, equanimity would reign not only through the loss of all historical memory—whatever once was deemed to be significant, including power, wisdom, wealth, wickedness, imprisonment, and slavery, would no longer matter anymore—but also through a total loss of blood and bone and all the appetites that feed and foster mortal flesh.

In wanting never to feel what he shortly lists in the third and final strophe of his initial lament—namely, misery and bitterness of soul, confusion and constriction, sighing and groaning, fear and dread—Job entertains the possibility of the world as such never having existed at all. Ironically (or worse) this perspective effectively undercuts any further will to question the voice of the taskmaster or to seek freedom from the slave master here and now. By contrast, God in his reply to Job speaks of the fierce unwillingness of other creatures God has made ever to submit to such domestication. Thus God queries,

> Who has let the wild ass go free?
> Who has loosed the bonds of the swift ass,
> to whom I have given the steppe for his home,
> and the salt land for his dwelling place?
> He scorns the tumult of the city;
> he hears not the shouts of the driver. . . .
> Is the wild ox willing to serve you?
> Will he spend the night at your crib?
> Can you bind him in the furrow with ropes,
> or will he harrow the valleys after you?
> Will you depend on him because his strength is great,
> and will you leave to him your labour?
> Do you have faith in him that he will return,
> and bring your grain to your threshing floor?
>
> (Job 39:5–7, 9–12)

Job's initial lament ultimately degenerates into a plea for pity:

> For my sighing comes as my bread,
> and my groanings are poured out like water.
> For the thing that I fear comes upon me,
> and what I dread befalls me.
> I am not at ease, nor am I quiet;
> I have no rest; but trouble comes.
>
> (Job 3:24–26)

God's reply to Job makes it clear that these feelings do not possess universal or automatic validity. Not all of God's creatures tremble as Job does in

the face of life's adversities. For example, the horse "exults in his strength; he goes out to meet the weapons. He laughs at fear, and is not dismayed; he does not turn back from the sword" (39:21–22). Similarly the ostrich: "When she rouses herself to flee, she laughs at the horse and his rider" (39:18). In the same manner, "behold [Behemoth], if the river is turbulent he is not frightened; he is confident though Jordan rushes against his mouth" (40:23). Leviathan is simply "a creature without fear" (41:33).

If Job perceives himself to be a man "whom God has hedged in" (3:23), this is not the experience or perspective of all living creatures. The offspring of the mountain goats and hinds "grow up in the open; they go forth, and do not return to them" (39:4). The wild ass ranges free over the open steppe (39:5–6). The hawk "soars, and spreads his wings toward the south" (39:26). The eagle "mounts up and makes his nest on high . . . in the fastness of the rocky crag" (39:27–28). Behemoth finds his food "where all the wild beasts play" (40:20). And as for Leviathan, "lay hands on him; think of the battle; you will not do it again!" (41:8).

To be sure, God's reply to Job does not proceed as I have done, verse by verse, strophe by strophe, in rebuttal of Job's opening lament. The biblical text is poetry, and not exegetical analysis. Nonetheless, God's answer to Job contests with remarkable thoroughness the full range of Job's initial rant and desperate fantasy. In fact, God's reply refutes Job's first lament quite precisely—and certainly much more than the not uncommon description of the text as being basically so much daunting bluster and dazzling display would imply.[17]

Even so, the question remains why and how such a "tit-for-tat" response by God to Job's earliest lament is finally sufficient to persuade Job to let his former sadness and outraged grief become, in retrospect, a discourse he acknowledges to have been inadequate and misguided. In order to answer this question, we must turn to Job's concluding complaint and the patriarch's final challenge to the Almighty One (31:35).

Job's Final Complaint: Job 29:1–31:40

In the final section (31:1–40) of his concluding complaint (29:1–31:40) Job rehearses every conceivable charge that might be brought against him; he does so completely confident that none of them will stick.[18] And, indeed, God's reply to Job never questions this assumption. In fact, Job had never "walked with falsehood" or attempted to deceive anyone (31:5). He did not

allow his eye to wander or let himself be seduced by another woman who was not his wife (31:1, 9). He always paid attention to the complaints of his servants (31:13). On and on it goes:

> If I have withheld anything that the poor desired,
> or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail,
> or have eaten my morsel alone,
> and the fatherless has not eaten of it
> (for from his youth I reared him as a father,
> and from his mother's womb I guided him);
> if I have seen any one perish for lack of clothing,
> or a poor man without covering;
> if his loins have not blessed me,
> and if he was not warmed with the fleece of my sheep;
> if I have raised my hand against the fatherless,
> because I saw help in the gate. . . .
> If I have made gold my trust,
> or called fine gold my confidence;
> if I have rejoiced because my wealth was great,
> or because my hand had gotten too much. . . .
> If I have rejoiced at the ruin of him that hated me,
> or exulted when evil overtook him . . .
> if the men of my tent have not said,
> "Who is there that has not been filled with his meat?"
> (the sojourner has not lodged in the street;
> I have opened my doors to the wayfarer). . . .
> If my land has cried out against me,
> and its furrows have wept together;
> if I have eaten its yield without payment,
> and caused the death of its owners . . .
> (Job 31:16–21, 24–25, 29, 31–32, 38–39)

Okay, okay. Job was a good and decent man. God does not remove this final refuge from him. At the same time, it is important to recall what Job himself had said at the beginning of his final complaint, when he reviewed the social habits of his former life:

> When my steps were washed with milk,
> and the rock poured out for me streams of oil!

When I went out to the gate of the city,
  when I prepared my seat in the square,
the young men saw me and withdrew,
  and the aged rose and stood;
the princes refrained from talking,
  and laid their hand on their mouth;
the voice of the nobles was hushed,
  and their tongue cleaved to the roof of their mouth.
When the ear heard, it called me blessed,
  and when the eye saw, it approved. . . .
Then, I thought, "I shall die in my nest,
  and I shall multiply my days as the sand,
my roots spread out to the waters,
  with the dew all night on my branches,
my glory fresh with me,
  and my bow ever new in my hand."
Men listened to me, and waited,
  and kept silence for my counsel.
After I spoke they did not speak again,
  and my word dropped upon them.
They waited for me as for the rain;
  and they opened their mouths as for the spring rain.
I smiled on them when they had no confidence;
  and the light of my countenance they did not cast down.
I chose their way, and sat as chief,
  and I dwelt like a king among his troops,
like one who comforts mourners.

(Job 29:6–11, 18–25)

There is no contradiction between what Job said at the beginning and now at the end of his final complaint (29:1–25 and 31:1–40). Both texts make it plain that Job truly was an exemplary citizen. Furthermore, he was acknowledged to be so by his own people. In the best possible sense of the word, Job had been an authority: "like a king among his troops" (29:25). Nonetheless, everything that Job remembers about his former situation puts the source of his well-being at the center of this society: "when I went out to the gate of the city, when I prepared my seat in the square" (29:7). This is where all the important collective decisions were made and, as Job describes it, his own voice held forth unchallenged: "Men listened to me,

and waited, and kept silence for my counsel. After I spoke they did not speak again, and my word dropped upon them. They waited for me as for the rain; and they opened their mouths as for the spring rain" (29:21–23).

The metaphor of the (spring) rain is important.[19] In his reply to Job, God also uses the image of rain, but to decidedly different effect as part of a strikingly distinct vision of life in abundance. In God's description of the larger world, the rain and other forms of water similarly signify that which is life giving and sustaining. Notably, God does not locate this source of life at the center of any human society or suggest that it exists somehow especially for the sake of human beings. Instead, God points to the margins of the known "civilized" world—which is to say precisely where the cultural environment that Job recalled with such fondness and longing neither dominated nor always was even present. Here it is that God would now direct Job's attention.

Job is challenged and encouraged by God to embrace another, unfamiliar, enlarged reality. This is the primordial world of natural processes and undomesticated animals, the realm of Behemoth and Leviathan. In my opinion, it is significant that nearly all of the examples that God presents in his reply to Job are taken from this realm of life at the edge of the ancient "humane" world. God thus confronts Job with everything that Job's earlier complaints failed to consider, as correct as these complaints may have been within the cultural frame of reference that Job, understandably enough, took for granted.

God does not do this, in my opinion, in order to intimidate or diminish Job, but rather to underscore that it is only within such a larger horizon that Job's immediate experience of unforeseen sorrow could become comprehensible, which is to say not just a sign of injustice.[20] Thus, whereas Job recalled that his speech once fell as droplets of rain, as though his words were succor for children at play—"My word dropped upon them. They waited for me as for the rain; and they opened their mouths as for the spring rain" (29:22b–23)—God refers, first, to "the storehouses of the snow" and "the storehouses of the hail" (38:22) and, then, to the "channel" that is "cleft" for "the torrents of rain" and the "way for the thunderbolt, to bring rain on a land where no man is, on the desert in which there is no man, to satisfy the waste and desolate land, and to make the ground put forth grass" (38:25–27). And lest the contrast drawn here between Job's earlier reference to his own speech as rain and the rain that God enables somehow be missed, God proceeds to inquire,

Has the rain a father,
or who has begotten the drops of dew?
From whose womb did the ice come forth,
and who has given birth to the hoarfrost of heaven?
The waters become hard like stone,
and the face of the deep is frozen. . . .
Can you lift up your voice to the clouds,
that a flood of waters may cover you?
Can you send forth lightnings that they may go
and say to you, "Here we are"?
Who has put wisdom in the clouds,
or given understanding to the mists?
Who can number the clouds by wisdom?
Or who can tilt the waterskins of the heavens
when the dust runs into a mass
and the clods cleave fast together?
(Job 38:28–30, 34–38)

Even if only at the level of metaphor, Job obviously spoke of "what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know" (42:3).[21] The vision of life—including human life—within whose purview Job and his friends disagreed so vehemently among themselves about Job's innocence and the nature of God's justice is shown in God's reply to Job "out of the whirlwind" to be simply too restricted a frame of reference to encompass such a theme. The life over which God rules and for which God is responsible is shown in God's response to Job to be a much larger world than "the gate of the city" with "my seat in the square," where Job, the decent, rich, and inclusive benefactor of everyone who heeded and respected him, could be greeted by all and sundry and feel himself to have been heard and successful. This eminently human world, however, turns out not to be the whole order of reality, including human life.

Conclusion

More than once in his reply to Job, God explicitly refers not only to the rain and its relatives but also to other equally extrahuman phenomena appearing predominantly in the marginal regions of the ancient Mediterranean

world. God speaks of "the torrents of rain" that God causes to fall "on a land where no man is, on the desert in which there is no man, to satisfy the waste and desolate land, and to make the ground put forth grass" (38:25–27). God also describes the offspring of the mountain goats and hinds that come into being at a time and in a place that Job plainly does not know, which then "become strong, they grow up in the open; they go forth, and do not return" to their mothers (39:4). Similarly, the wild ass (39:6–8) and the wild ox (39:9–12) live beyond the realm of human interest and control. Even more inhumanly, once again, the ostrich

> leaves her eggs to the earth,
> and lets them be warmed on the ground,
> forgetting that a foot may crush them,
> and that the wild beast may trample them.
> She deals cruelly with her young, as if they were not hers;
> though her labour be in vain, yet she has no fear;
> because God has made her forget wisdom,
> and given her no share in understanding.
> When she rouses herself to flee,
> she laughs at the horse and his rider.
>
> (Job 39:14–18)

And regarding the eagle:

> Is it at your command that the eagle mounts up
> and makes his nest on high?
> On the rock he dwells and makes his home
> in the fastness of the rocky crag.
> Thence he spies out the prey;
> his eyes behold it far off.
> His young ones suck up blood;
> and where the slain are, there is he.
>
> (Job 39:27–30)

Except for the horse in Job 40:19–25—though even here it is not just any horse, but specifically a warhorse—all of the animals to which God refers in 38:39–39:30 lived at the edge of social business as usual in the ancient Mediterranean world. Only within that frame of reference did the wisdom represented by Job and his friends preside. Only there did the social values

have "currency" on whose basis Job rightly had been seen and respected as an exemplary man of his people, as someone who was both honorable and just. In God's reply to Job, who represents everything that was good in this region of reality, the patriarch's own sense of himself is redirected away from the uniquely human sense of things toward another world that stood "without" it, thriving apart from it while also encompassing it.

This other world at the edge of human society, which we otherwise call nature or more traditionally "creation," remained basically unknown or disregarded by Job and the (biblical) wisdom that the patriarch embodied so well. At the same time, it did not require special Babylonian training in cosmology and mathematics to recognize that the human order embodied by Job and his friends actually depended on this other world for its own sustenance. Once again, for example, consider the cosmological phenomena detailed in Job 38:3–48. In fact, with regard to the rain mentioned at the end of this passage (38:34–38) along with other kinds of precipitation (38:22–30), this other world was obviously the basis on which every other form of life was dependent, especially human life.

Thus it becomes evident that so-called normal life in human society has no necessary priority or even obviously compelling character vis-à-vis the larger reality that God articulates in his reply to Job. The patriarch's immediate conversion to God's own point of view is therefore simply the responsible act of a still-thinking and honest man who knows when to admit that he has made a mistake and to acknowledge that he previously did not recognize what now, in retrospect, has become clear to him. In other words, Job learned something. Indeed, it is a mark of his renowned integrity that he was still willing to learn something and, furthermore, to acknowledge that this learning had taken place.[22] The suffering Job endured is not thereby forgotten or diminished. But it is displaced from center stage. And this, in my opinion, is what finally makes it possible for Job to "discover" the larger world around him—one that is both bracing and embracing—in which Job then begins to live, once again, as never before.

Perhaps, then, it is this Job—the one who ultimately dissented from his prior practice of relentless self-reference—who, after the biblical text was inscribed, "went on" to compose another poem: "Vulture," conventionally ascribed to the Californian poet Robinson Jeffers. In this poem, Jeffers describes how he came to understand that the eponymous bird circling overhead was actually watching him where he rested "on a bare hillside / Above the ocean" as a possible source of avian nutrition. The poet says he was "sorry to have disappointed him" by remaining yet intact, if only for a

while, wistfully noting that "these old bones will still work; they are not for you." Even so, Jeffers imagines that such a fate would be "a sublime end of one's body," a glorious mode of transcendence, which he finally calls "enskyment," whereby his own death would mean incorporation into that life that continues after the poet has ceased to be in the picture any longer.[23]

This is a theme of obvious importance as the ecological perils of the distinctly modern habit of making "man" the measure of all things—at least since the European Renaissance—have become ever more apparent. The earth ultimately does not belong to human beings alone to do with as we will, not least because we remain inherently a part of it.[24] Thus God's reply "out of the whirlwind" to Job's "anthropocene" indignation, whereby God urges Job to reconsider the nature of the world in which Job yet would live, if live he will, strikes me as still a necessary lesson. The contrast drawn here is one of register. Job is indubitably correct about his innocence as long as he remains within the "civilized" frame of reference that heretofore has governed his moral imagination. Job is indubitably wrong, however, once this imagination is exposed to its own "uncivilized" underpinning. This is the realm of vital connections that alone make every kind of earthly life possible, the extrahuman world in which all things "humane" must be embedded if their "humanity" is to endure as a lively project, and not merely for the sake of its own sense of right.[25]

2

THE ECONOMY, STUPID!

THE TEACHING OF JESUS IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Not everyone, of course, agrees with Robinson Jeffers's vision of "enskyment" or self-conscious entrance into the violent beauty of an extrahuman world within which, for example, a noble spirit might aspire to be eaten by a vulture's beak and thus to "become part of him." For Czeslaw Milosz, such a prospect means merely to bow "without grace or hope, / before God the Terrible, body of the world." It would be better, writes Milosz, "to carve suns and moons on the joints of crosses" and thereby to "implore protection" against all that is "mute and treacherous might."[1] In other words, it may be instructive—and I have obviously thought that it is so—to reconsider under divine address, together with Job as a quintessentially human being, the nature of the world in which we live together with other creatures. Nonetheless, and indeed precisely as Job recalled upon concluding his protracted lamentation—erroneously, perhaps, but not incorrectly as far as it went—most of human life does unfold within a social matrix. And this social matrix is essentially a human creation.[2]

Whatever our relationship to nature may be, we are equally embedded within human culture. And whatever else human culture may be, it certainly includes some mode of economy. To be sure, the aspect of human life that is "economic"—which is to say some mode of household management (*oikonomia*) writ either small or large—has seldom if ever before North Atlantic modernity been as distinguished as it now is from every

other aspect of human existence. At the same time, it is also clear that some such concern has always been a part of the human endeavor to live collectively in a given place, at least since the inception of agriculture, with all of its attendant implications.[3] Thus the question of which economy ultimately best sustains human life—not to mention the question of such an economy's own sustainability—can hardly be avoided. In fact, it must belong to any discourse about collective human existence, especially when such a discourse claims to determine the matrix of a "good" life. Even high-minded speech about a Heavenly Kingdom, insofar as it does not merely describe some sort of "Cloud-cuckoo-land" (Aristophanes) or life on another planet beyond the clouds (cf. Acts 1:9, 11), must entail a certain economic proposal. It hardly surprises, therefore, that the teaching of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew also pays attention to this question. What is surprising is how little attention modern biblical scholarship has paid to the economic aspects of the text.

For most of (Western Latin) Christian history, the Gospel of Matthew has been the preferred one among the four canonical gospels. At least it seems to be the one that was most widely and most often read. For this reason, the depiction of Jesus in that text has been very influential in shaping popular Christian conviction and orthodox scholarly thinking about "Christianity," including the nature and work of Jesus as the Christ and the figure of the historical Jesus. Indeed, the Gospel of Matthew still tends to constitute "our" default memory (at least in the case of modern academic biblical scholarship) whenever we revert to whatever we think we already (should) know about "Jesus." This is also true with respect to why and how we judge that memory to be significant.

The representation of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew obviously has a number of telling aspects. For example, one significant feature of the narrative is the putative fulfillment of (selected passages of) Jewish Scripture in the different details of the life of Jesus. Another important feature concerns Jesus's interpretation of the Jewish Law, which also entails a strong polemic against other purveyors of this code, to wit, the scribes and Pharisees. The Gospel of Matthew is furthermore plainly interested in Jesus as someone like the apocalyptic Son of Man. Finally, in accordance with the Gospel of Mark, which the Gospel of Matthew probably used as a literary source, the latter tale about Jesus is told from the perspective of his eventual death on a cross. All of these aspects—and undoubtedly others as well—would require discussion if my intention here were to explore the complex image of Jesus that the Gospel of Matthew as a whole develops.[4] My interest in this

chapter, however, is not Christological. How best to characterize the figure of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew is not my present concern. Instead, I wish to determine in the following analysis to what extent and how the Gospel of Matthew—in the name of Jesus—can be said to promote a different kind of thinking about "the economy, stupid!"[5]

Must I confess immediately that I am not a professional economist, and also acknowledge that I do not intend to become one any time soon? Why, moreover, would I need to be(come) one in order to discuss a topic of obvious interest to us all? In any case, I doubt that the Gospel of Matthew has much to contribute to the conversation of such people at this time.[6] If, however, it is still possible to imagine even the possibility of another kind of political economy than "the" currently dominant order, I would suggest that—perhaps surprisingly—the Gospel of Matthew does have something to contribute to that conversation. And to receive that contribution under the aegis of the Gospel of Matthew should give it a peculiar force, at least insofar as the usual understanding of this text has tended to regard the work mainly as a discourse about "religious" matters, where "religious" is supposed to signal something other than "economic."

In one sense, I am proposing for scholarly interpretation of the teaching of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew a borderline of inquiry not unlike the suggestion made by John Lewis with regard to the political thought of the sixth-century B.C.E. Athenian lawmaker Solon on the basis of the extant fragments of Solon's poetry.[7] Rather than simply rehearsing how Greek and Roman authors later came to recall him as a lawmaker, with a tendency to recast him as a paradigmatic politician in accordance with their own needs, Lewis "proposes an approach that looks to his [Solon's] verses neither to reconstruct Athenian history, nor to relate him to a poetic tradition, but rather to discern the remains of early sixth-century [B.C.E] Athenian political ideas. To do so, we must take a deceptively simple approach, but one that is surprisingly controversial: we must look at everything Solon says about these ideas, in all of his fragments."[8] Solon's own political thought includes, obviously, an economic perspective. The specific contours of this perspective, however, are less clear and thus require a more extended discussion than one might have imagined on the basis of previous scholarly pronouncements, such as the one by H. D. F. Kitto: "Solon, though he has been called the greatest economist of antiquity, did not really know much about Political Economy, for to his simple mind it seemed that the source of the trouble was not the System, but Greed and Injustice. He said so, very eloquently, in his poems."[9] In contrast, Lewis finds in the extant fragments

a more complex or open-ended discourse on wealth and its attendant complications.[10] Lewis writes, commenting on the discourse of the poems,

> But is wealth *necessarily* corrupting? Can wealth cause the *noos* to become empty, which allows *atê* to bloom? To this, Solon seems to be saying yes, at least, to the audiences of poem 13, and possibly to the crowd in fragment 11. What is common to both contexts—the immoderate pursuit of wealth and the illegitimate pursuit of public honours—is a dependent standard of evaluation, the desire for social status gained through loot or power, and motivated by the presence of others. Ultimately this desire is under the control of his audience, if the *noos* is corrected, but to do so is difficult; Solon is not hopeful that this will happen soon.[11]

In the face of a lingering and ultimately irresolvable ambiguity vis-à-vis this issue in the extant statements by Solon, however, one could always proceed to consider once more the concrete legal legacy attributed to the lawmaker in antiquity—as, in fact, Kitto has done in summarizing the record:

> He [Solon] put an end, once and for all, to enslavement for debt: he reduced debts, put a limit on the size of estates, restored lands that had been lost by the debtors, and restored to Attica those who had been sold abroad. But his great service to the economy of Attica was to put her agriculture on a new foundation. Part of the trouble had been purely economic, a result of the introduction of coinage, but the major cause was that Attica was not by nature self-sufficient: most of her soil was too thin to bear corn. On the other hand, it was well suited to the olive and the vine. Solon therefore encouraged specialization.[12]

Be this as it may, the point of the preceding discussion is to underscore the similarity between recent scholarly efforts to read the elegies and other poems by Solon as a source of ancient Athenian political and economic thought and the effort of this chapter to discern a different model of political economy in the teaching of Jesus as we find it articulated "in his own words" in the Gospel of Matthew. Exactly like Solon in Kitto's description of him, Jesus, too, obviously "did not really know much about Political Economy." But just as the figure of Solon in the ancient memory of Athens had something to say about such matters—and, moreover, was recalled to have enacted this wisdom with favorable results—so also the teaching of Jesus

"the economist" in the Gospel of Matthew registers a comparable point of view. The only difference between Solon and Jesus might be that the proposals made by Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew have never been tried, in part because they have not been thought to exist.

In the Gospel of Matthew, the economic proposals made by Jesus appear in his five big speeches in 5:3–7:27; 10:5b–42; 13:1–52; 18:1–35 (and 20:1–16); and 23:1–25:46—especially in the first of these, or the so-called Sermon on the Mount (hereafter abbreviated SM).[13] In this chapter, I assume the common scholarly understanding of the literary structure of the Gospel of Matthew, which sees in these five discourses by Jesus one of the work's distinguishing features. In fact, the five big speeches effectively orchestrate how Jesus is otherwise represented in the Gospel of Matthew. Whatever else Jesus may be said to be and do in the text, he definitely talks a lot! And in the five big speeches with an occasional aside elsewhere, Jesus is someone who repeatedly takes up in his teaching the mundane matters of financial need and indebtedness as well as other day-to-day worries such as how to get enough to eat or a salary sufficient to pay all the bills. Outlined in the same pronouncements is also a "theoretical" stance in explicit disagreement with any economic model that would have such activity operating independently of the desire to know a good life.

The Sermon on the Mount: Matt 5:3–7:29

Jesus's first big speech in the Gospel of Matthew (5:3–7:29) is the SM. It touches on a number of different topics.[14] The prologue in 5:3–16, for example, aims to define those who are most favored by God and their specific qualities. The final section in 7:13–27 reminds the reader that not all roads lead to the same destination, underscoring the need to choose the one that leads to life, even though this way may be twisting and hard to follow. After the prologue, the so-called antitheses in 5:17–48 endeavor to delineate that greater form of righteousness or justice that exceeds the mere performance of duty. Even so, the main topic under discussion at the heart of the SM in 6:1–7:12 has never been very clear to scholars.[15] To my mind, nonetheless, the most striking aspect of this section of the SM is its blatant economic horizon or underlying concern. After defining in 5:3–48 the salient social ethics of the early Christian community and before concluding in 7:13–27 with an exhortation to continue in this way, Jesus undertakes, in 6:1–7:12, to discuss mostly economic matters.[16]

The basic framework of the SM comes from the first major discourse of the Synoptic Sayings Source, otherwise known as "Q," which is the second literary source used in the composition of both the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Luke, in addition to the Gospel of Mark. A comparison of the SM in the Gospel of Matthew (5:3–7:29) with the parallel Sermon on the Plain (hereafter abbreviated SP) in the Gospel of Luke (6:20b–49) quickly attests to this fact. The beatitudes at the beginning of the SM (5:3–12), its final two antitheses (5:38–42, 43–48), the instructions about not judging others (7:1–5), and the last three units of the SM (7:15–20, 21–23, 24–27) all have parallels in the SP in the very same order.[17]

Regarding the specific literary structure of the SM,[18] all scholars basically agree that the beatitudes in Matt 5:3–12 constitute a certain introduction or prologue to the SM as a whole. Scholars also agree that the "two-ways" discourse in 7:13–27 forms its final section. Finally, most scholars would agree in seeing the series of antitheses in 5:21–48 as a discrete literary unit. Disagreement exists, therefore, only with regard to the proper placement of the sayings in 5:13–20 (or in 5:13–16, 17–20) and the logic that governs the arrangement of the sayings in 6:1–7:12. Again, however, many scholars recognize the presence of another discrete subunit in 6:1–18 (excluding the Lord's Prayer in 6:9–13 and the commentary on this text in 6:14–15, since both texts appear to have been secondarily inserted between the similarly constructed statements in 6:2–4, 5–8, and in 6:16–18). Thus the only unresolved difficulty—apart from the question of the proper placement of 5:13–16, 17–20—has to do with the role of the different sayings in 6:19–7:12.[19]

The Prologue: Matt 5:3–12, 13–16

The beatitudes, which form the prologue to the SM, have often been declared to be more spiritual—because they are supposed to be less concrete—than the parallel sayings in the SP (Luke 6:20b–23, 24–26).[20] This frequent disparagement of the different sayings in Matt 5:3–12 derives especially from the evangelist's use of the expression "poor in spirit" in 5:3 and the phrase "those who hunger and thirst for justice" in 5:6. The simpler and more direct vocabulary of the SP (namely, "the poor" in Luke 6:20 and "those who are hungry" in 6:21a) is supposed to represent the more original wording in Q, which would have had a more radical perspective and therefore also would represent what the historical Jesus most likely uttered. In contrast, the Gospel of Matthew is supposed to have amplified

and thus redirected the earlier claim about the poor in the direction of a pronouncement that is concerned "not only" about financial solvency.

In my opinion, part of this is true. It was, indeed, the Gospel of Matthew that likely changed the original wording of "the poor" and "those who are hungry" in Q / Luke 6:20b–21, introducing the expression "the poor in spirit" and the phrase "those who hunger and thirst for justice" (again, in Matt 5:3 and 5:6). The Gospel of Matthew is also likely responsible for the fact that the first four beatitudes in 5:3–6 recall as explicitly as they do the book of Isaiah (61:1–2), creating, moreover, the *pi* alliteration in these verses.[21] We do not hear, therefore, the voice of the historical Jesus in these aspects of the beatitudes in 5:3–12.[22] At the same time, however, it is not so clear that these changes register a striking departure from the earlier, "more radical" effort of Q and the historical Jesus to redescribe the nature of economic reality. The beatitudes of the SM may register less of a change in direction and more of an effort to render anew the same economic proposal first made in the opening beatitudes of the Synoptic Sayings Source.[23] The more original version of the text is preserved in the SP (Luke 6:20b–21), but the basic proposal is essentially reiterated in the SM with additional language in order to advance a continuing challenge.[24]

The beatitudes in Matt 5:3–12 seek to answer the question: Who is truly "successful" in life? Their investigation asks: Who really is "happy" (*makarios*)? Who is accomplished as a human being? Who is least disappointed in life? This is an inquiry into the nature of the good life. What makes for a complete life? Who truly lives well? It is a question that the dominant economic order today still presumes to answer definitively—even as it also refuses to take the question seriously.

According to the SM, the truly happy (*makarioi*)—those who know how to live well, possessing the requisite conditions for enjoyment of a full life and thus entering into the Kingdom of Heaven—are the poor in spirit (5:3), those who mourn (5:4), the meek (5:5), those who hunger and thirst for justice (5:6), those who practice mercy (5:7), those who work transparently because they are "pure of heart" (5:8), the peacemakers (5:9), and those who suffer for the sake of justice (5:10). Obviously, this is not the usual model of a successful life, in antiquity or today. The exemplars of such a life are instead usually those who are rich, who are insulated from death, who give orders, who live undisturbed, who are able to defend themselves, who always manage to escape, who do not suffer sorrow.

The beatitudes of the SM announce a different model of the good life, another form in which to know complete satisfaction, a divergent kind of

happiness. This other reality receives a number of different names: to have the Kingdom of Heaven (5:3, 10), to know consolation (5:4), to inherit the earth (5:5), to get stuffed (5:6), to receive mercy (5:7), to see God (5:8), and to be acknowledged as a son or daughter of God (5:9). Each of these promises has a particular nuance that merits its own consideration. Taken together, however, they represent the same conviction: namely, that it will not be through so-called common sense (7:13–14) that we come to know, here and now, what well-being and contentment are.[25]

Not surprisingly, a certain experience of conflict is anticipated in Matt 5:11–12, 13–16, for those who identify themselves with this proposal and seek to put it into practice. Nonetheless, we read, "You who embody this kind of economy are, in fact, the salt of the earth" (5:13). "You are the light of the world" (5:14). Without "you" earthly life would lose its flavor. Without "you" the possibility of being more than just a useful, available, disposable cog in the wheel of a given industry would be forgotten. Without "you" the world becomes a dark place within the unresting night of a blind extraction and vacuous display.[26]

The Antitheses: Matt 5:17–20, 21–48

In the first section of the SM following the prologue, we are given an interpretation of "the law and the prophets." Jesus says that he has not come to annul their teaching but to fulfill or complete it—in other words, to carry it out (*plêrôsai*). We are told that in order to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, it will be necessary to practice a form of justice (*dikaiôsynê*)—living rightly—that exceeds the rectitude of the scribes and Pharisees. The scribes and Pharisees are mentioned here not because they did not teach correctly but precisely because they were perceived to be the most concerned with such a topic.[27] The antitheses in Matt 5:21–48 then give some examples of the greater justice that is required.[28] The individual topics are as follows (the numbers identify the six antitheses):

1. Killing (5:21)
   Anger and insult (5:22)
   Sacrifice and reconciliation (5:23–24)
   Trial and judgment (5:25–26)
2. Adultery (5:27)
   Desire (5:28)
   Some drastic responses (5:29–30)

3. Divorce (5:31)
   Adultery again (5:32)
4. Oaths (5:33)
   No oaths (5:34–37)
5. Revenge (5:38)
   Nonresistance to (the) evil (one) (5:39a)
   Assault (5:39b)
   Litigation (5:40)
   Conscription (5:41)
   Begging and lending (5:42)
6. Enemies and love (5:43–44)
   Equal treatment for all (5:45)
   Unrequited reciprocity (5:46–47)
   Maturity (5:48)

Since Jesus refers to the law and the prophets in Matt 5:17 and because of the biblical citations in 5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43, at the beginning of each antithesis, it has become common for scholars to suppose that this section of the SM is essentially a reinterpretation of Jewish scripture (or early Jewish identity). This perspective fails to explain, however, why the biblical citations in question were deemed to be exemplary, since not all have been taken from a single book or even from a single kind of writing. Nor has anyone been able to explain how, when taken together, the various citations together would obviously represent the law and the prophets, or Jewish scripture.

To what, then, do the different antitheses of the SM as a whole respond? The concrete issues that constitute, as it were, the social backbone of the six antitheses are all well-known "pressure points" of daily life in the ancient Mediterranean world (although not all of them occurred every day everywhere for everyone). Thus, despite the biblical language employed in the antitheses, they are not primarily a scholastic debate about textual interpretation. Instead, the antitheses treat concerns of a much more practical or cultural nature. Like every other human collectivity, the ancient Mediterranean world or its multiple subcultures had some peculiar features, a number of which contemporary biblical scholarship, under instruction from a certain social anthropology, now typically calls honor-shame codes.[29] These codes describe not only ancient social values but a cultural system. In the ancient Mediterranean world, the basis of this cultural system was the patriarchal household. Honor-shame codes determined how one behaved

within this system and also served to solve a number of other problems. The whole setup could be summarized in the following phrase: everyone—who was a free adult male and the head of a household—on his own, with his own under his control, for his own greater glory.[30]

The first antithesis in Matt 5:21–26 underscores the inefficacy of the so-called legal system, or institutionalized (in)justice, including the courts of religion, to resolve situations of conflict between "brothers" (5:22, 23–24). In this case, the term "brothers" seems to refer not only to the other legitimate offspring of a given household but also to other members of the same social group.

The first antithesis does not seek to spiritualize an ethic opposed to killing. Such an ethic is plainly affirmed as behavior that would continue to be self-evidently appropriate. Nor does the first antithesis promote a higher "inner" life. The driving concern here is not a question of ethical motivation or moral purity. Instead, attempted is the reformulation of existing social relations among "brothers." Through reiterated use of the category of "brother" in the first antithesis, the prevailing "agonistic" model of these social relations is questioned. This model had as a defining feature a perennial striving to become "greater" than everyone else; those with "more" inevitably ended up in charge of everyone else, including in charge of the so-called justice system (Matt 5:25–26).[31]

According to the first antithesis of the SM, you must not forget that the person who lives next door to you, as well as the one whom you just met walking down the street, is, first of all, a "brother" and not a potential enemy. To "get angry" at such a person (5:22) and to call him "stupid" (*rhaka*) or an "idiot" (*môre*), when his status as a brother warrants better treatment, reflects a mentality that—instead of establishing relations of solidarity—seeks to create difference, to discover weakness and other errors that will be punished. In this mentality, it is always only I who would know the truth, who should possess power, whose job it is to put everything in order and everyone else in their place.

It is notable that, in Matt 5:23, there occurs a problem at the altar when "you remember that your brother has something against you." The problem does not exist because you happen to discover that you are thinking bad thoughts about your brother, as though it were necessary for you first to become inwardly pure before entering into contact with God. Rather, the problem exists when your piety, your offering (of yourself) to God, your payment of a divine debt, becomes a way of "covering up" the obligation that the well-being of your brother ought to hold for you. Again,

what matters before God, according to the first antithesis of the SM, is not how you feel about your brother but, rather, exactly the opposite: namely, how your brother feels about you and, specifically, the possibility that your brother might hold something against you. Before God, it is your brother's possible complaint against you that would matter more.

Obviously, such a perspective admits and even invites abuse. At least in the history of Christianity, this has not infrequently been the reason why many people resent and critique what others have said and done without becoming accountable for their own action and inaction—as though what I now feel and experience were always somehow someone else's fault. But I doubt that this was the problem that initially prompted the first antithesis of the SM. Neither do I think that what is said in Matt 5:23–24 originally had everyone in mind, which is to say all people everywhere. At least, this does not seem to be the case if one reads these verses together with the preceding pronouncement in 5:22, which speaks of the one who gets angry at his brother and calls him stupid or an idiot, or with the subsequent statements in 5:25–26, which indicate how and why one should try to avoid being taken to court. Not everyone in antiquity was able *both* to treat others abusively and to be treated so.

In fact, it was only the middling *paterfamilias*—which is to say the head of a relatively minor household—who might find himself in the ambiguous predicament that the saying in Matt 5:23–24 implies. The individual in question had sufficient social power to demean a brother and yet could be exposed to the threat of a foregone conclusion by the judicial system through the superior influence of someone else (since the judicial system always resided in the hands of the powerful few).

Thus the social values underlying the first antithesis of the SM seem to be rather clearly those of an honor-shame society and include such practices as

- Killing because one is offended or threatened
- Getting angry because one feels abused, unheeded, disrespected, insulted
- Insulting in order to make oneself "greater" than the one who is insulted, in order to feel like "someone" oneself
- Paying respect by rendering homage (an offering) to those who are socially superior (God), since that is how the world is: the strong take advantage of the weak, the crafty live off the foolish, the old command the young, the mighty have their minions to support them

- Threatening judgment since retreat is not an option, cannot be imagined, should not be proposed

Through the practice of such social values in Mediterranean antiquity and also elsewhere in the world today, an economic model was developed and yet endures that we might call the regime of "constant gain," or "always winning."[32] This economic model takes for granted the production of wealth at the expense of others, since its underlying aim is to come out on top of everyone else. It is the economic model of imperial domination. The first antithesis of the SM (together with the other antitheses) opposes this model of well-being based on the subjugation and exploitation of others. Wealth and the imposition of oneself or the defense and increase of honor by taking it away from someone else through shaming and humiliation, obliging her to render service, are two sides of the same coin. In the first antithesis, Jesus insists that this way of thinking will not allow that greater justice to be achieved that fulfills "the law and the prophets." It will not deliver fullness of life, peace as *shalom,* or righteousness as a life of openness to the appeal of the other. Instead, it can only produce the shrine of one's own hard-won security.

For this reason, it is not enough merely to refrain from killing. It is not acceptable merely to give to God whatever is deemed to be the divine due without first resolving whatever disagreements and inequalities continue to exist among brothers. Invalid, therefore, is the standard reasoning of the patriarchal household that pitted "my household" against every other household, since this cultural system with its social values ultimately cannot create a good life even for the ordinary *paterfamilias,* who sooner or later ends up also consumed—"until you spend your last cent"—by the constant demands and voracious imbalance of this arrangement. For this reason, it is said to be better to abstain from any further involvement in it, and best to find a different way to live.

Thus, in the second, third, and fourth antitheses of the SM (Matt 5:27–30, 31–32, 33–37), we find reformulated once again how a person—namely, an independent adult male—should behave. The counsel given here explicitly contradicts standard social practice throughout the ancient Mediterranean world. Under review is, specifically, the relationship between men and women (5:27–32) as well as the possibility of frankness or transparency in other social relations (5:33–37).[33] Unlike not a little modern economic theory, which does not want to confuse what is properly economic with so-called externals or whatever would not be a function of the marketplace, the

SM includes a number of other social considerations, such as the question of gender and the tenor of public discourse, as part of its alternative economy. The concept of economic value is thus not restricted to the creation and proper management of wealth but, rather, belongs to an assessment of the social relations among different human bodies and how these might be improved.

The fifth and sixth antitheses of the SM in Matt 5:38–48 then broach the social problem of violence and other forms of social uncertainty. The biblical text invokes the specter of evil (or the evil one) as well as enmity. Once again, these are social problems with an economic backdrop. Their solution requires, therefore, an economic response. In the fifth antithesis in 5:38–42, explicit reference is repeatedly made to different kinds of economic conflict. The first two verses (5:38–39) might appear simply to discuss the problem of physical assault for whatever reason. However, just as the first antithesis begins with a general exhortation not to kill and then proceeds to counsel a more specific avoidance of the predictably worse losses to be suffered in a court case, the fifth antithesis goes on after the initial two verses to focus explicitly and exclusively on economic questions. These are the possibility of being sued (5:40), the problem of forced labor (5:41), and the question of donations and loans (5:42). From the perspective of the fifth antithesis, the problem of physical assault is part of the same economic bramble.

In Matt 5:41, which counsels going two miles when forced to go one, it becomes clear that the defining social context for the fifth antithesis is the early Roman Empire. The main verb used here, *aggareuein* (originally from Persian), refers to service that the "state" could require to be rendered. In 5:41, the logistical aid demanded by an occupying military force was likely intended. The proposed response to such a situation will not appeal to most Latin American readers and perhaps not to other readers as well, since we are told here not only to collaborate with the enemy but to give him twice as much as he demands.

The point, however, may have been, by acting in this manner, to convert a mandatory service into an exaggerated servility through a kind of mimetic excess. The oppressive nature of the obligation would be made visible, thus becoming unmasked and underscored. To go the extra mile beyond the obligatory one highlights a flagrant abuse, while reclaiming for the obliged some sense of enduring personal agency.[34]

Clearly, however, the fifth antithesis pays little attention to the notion of property, including one's own few possessions. Not even a possible link

between such things and one's own sense of self is acknowledged here. For this reason, even the most intimate garment one might wear—the *chitôn* (Matt 5:40), or ancient underwear—is not thought to be worthy of defense. Instead, anyone who seeks to acquire such a thing through a lawsuit is ridiculed. This is done by also offering that person the thick outer garment (*himation*) as well. According to the fifth antithesis, neither the one nor the other will ever be worth the fight to keep it. Neither is there any point in pondering the cost of a loan or other donations: "If anyone asks you for something, give it to him (or her)" (Matt 5:42). Why complicate your life by always seeking some sort of advantage? As the SM shortly asks, "Is not your life [*psychê*] more than food and the body more than clothing?" (6:25).[35]

Predictably, therefore, the ancient Mediterranean social values of honor and shame are hardly affirmed in the fifth antithesis of the SM. For this reason, nothing is deemed to be at stake in losing a lawsuit (Matt 5:40). And it is not the end of the world to be insulted, not even by a slap on the right cheek, not even when this happens repeatedly (5:39). This is not because the recipient is a coward or masochist. Indeed, it is a risky and even daring way to demonstrate in the face of the customary and contrary point of view that one is frankly neither diminished nor defeated by whatever might be done "from above" in order to dishonor and to crush the "poor in spirit." The usual signs of honor and shame, which include wealth and superior status, are thus declared not to constitute the substance of one's social existence. The sustenance needed to live—the *misthos* to which reference is repeatedly made in Matt 5:12, 46; 6:1, 2, 5, 16—can be drawn from another source.[36] For this reason, it is possible to abandon the habits and demands of a cultural system maintained through codes that require "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth" (5:38). And for the same reason, it is no longer necessary always to be on one's guard, since the compulsion to pursue honor and thereby to suffer the threat of injury has been overcome. This is what it means to say, "Do not resist evil" (5:39; or the evil one: *mê antistênai tô ponêrô*).

Discussed in the sixth antithesis of the SM are the social fact of enmity and the reciprocal prospect of practicing a divine maturity or "perfection."[37] In Matt 5:43–48, the existence of enemies is hardly denied. No doubt is entertained that there really are "those who oppress (or persecute) you" (5:44). Not admitted, however, is the truth of enmity, as though it were a self-evident or natural part of the "real" world. Moreover, the sixth antithesis rejects any dehumanization of those who are indubitably bad and unjust. Again, the existence of these persons is not disputed, nor are they excused

for the wickedness and injustice they commit (see 7:13–27; also 13:24–30, 36–43; 25:31–46). Nonetheless, they are not to be dehumanized, since the same God "makes his sun shine on the bad and the good, and the rain fall on the just and the unjust" (5:45).

The serious social problem of what to do with bad and unjust people is not—perhaps lamentably—the focus of the sixth antithesis.[38] At stake here is, rather, a better vision of who the good and the just are.[39] Once again, an effort is made to elaborate the specific content of the greater justice invoked at the beginning of the SM, in Matt 5:20, as a prerequisite for entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven. Even so, what is chosen for analysis and critique in 5:46–47 may still surprise us, since under scrutiny are the practices of social reciprocity—in themselves hardly evil and, indeed, quite necessary for human social life from the usual anthropological point of view, since social reciprocity is basically the principle of fair exchange. Specifically, it seeks a just exchange: what is given (in return) should be equivalent to what was (first) received. A kind of "zero-sum" equilibrium is thereby maintained against the prospect of progressive indebtedness.[40]

According to the sixth antithesis, the problem with this practice is the way in which it becomes the mechanism of an exclusive social identity. It often undercuts the equally important social practices of solidarity and compassion. For example, the ancient(?) mafia of tax collectors took care of one another, helping the others out, working together as the best of friends, without showing the slightest concern for the rest of the population that they systematically fleeced (5:46). For this reason, the principle of social reciprocity, also known as enlightened self-interest, is deemed to be an inadequate basis on which collectively to construct a good life.

In the final sentence of the sixth antithesis, which logically is also the last statement of the six antitheses of the SM as a group, we read, "You, then, shall be mature [*teleioi;* or perfect] as your heavenly father is mature [*teleios;* or perfect]" (Matt 5:48). Once again, it is underscored that something other than mere compliance with whatever is normally done is required to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. This is because it is still possible and therefore necessary to imagine something more than just a better round of business as usual. In fact, it is imperative to seek something else—another reign, a greater justice, a better life—and not merely to imagine that we somehow already have arrived at the end of human history, as though what now is were essentially reality as it always was and ever shall be, one world without end, and therefore that the only viable economic model were the currently dominant system. In order to fulfill the project announced by the

law and the prophets, claims Jesus in the antitheses, it is not enough only to do whatever we find to be convenient or feel comfortable with. Instead, we must desire more than this. One must resist "the temptation of defeat," which finally settles for a meager goodness, as though its pleasure were as good as it might get.[41]

The Central Section: Matt 6:1–7:12

The first subgroup of sayings in Matt 6:1–18 is often read as though these sayings primarily focus on religious matters, or cultic piety.[42] At one level of analysis, this is obviously correct: almsgiving (or doing mercy) as well as prayer and fasting were practices of ancient (Jewish) religious life, or customary Israelite social practices.[43] But why, then, does the putative focus on piety in 6:1–18 suddenly "shift" in 6:19 to an extended discussion of lasting treasure, God and Mammon, food and clothing (6:19–34)? This has been difficult for scholars to explain. Indeed, the precise relationship between the two literary units in 6:1–18 and 6:19–34 has never been determined, as far as I can tell, in the history of interpretation. Does the focus on piety in 6:1–18 mean, for example, that the sayings in 6:19–34 about treasure and so on also represent spiritual counsel and are therefore effectively metaphorical statements? Or could it be the other way around—namely, that the sayings in 6:19–34 help clarify the concrete concern of the preceding statements in 6:1–18 about improper ritual practice?

Hans-Dieter Betz has argued that the materials in Matt 6:1–18 represent "an identifiable, self-contained whole which Matthew took over from the tradition, probably together with the Sermon on the Mount."[44] Specifically, Betz suggests that the sayings in 6:1–6, 16–18, should be read, at least with regard to their formal features, as having once been a discrete discourse. Into this group of materials was subsequently inserted an enlarged version of the so-called Lord's Prayer—taken over, in my opinion, from Q (Luke 11:2–4 = Matt 6:9–13)—with additional commentary (Matt 6:14–15).[45] If Betz is correct in this suggestion, why was the Lord's Prayer (with commentary) later inserted into the original unit in 6:1–6, 16–18? Is the Lord's Prayer at its present location merely a secondary elaboration of the middle section of the earlier *Kult-Didache,* as Betz proposes?[46] Or does the fact that the Lord's Prayer now sits near the beginning of the central section of the SM, while the other half of the originally two-part composition in Q (which combined the Lord's Prayer in Luke 11:2–4 with a series of statements about asking in Luke 11:9–13) stands near its end (Matt 7:7–11), help clarify the organizational logic?[47]

In its present form, the first half of the central section of the SM predominantly discusses prayer (Matt 6:5–15). Otherwise, as already noted, in 6:2–4 the focus is on almsgiving, and in 6:16–18 on fasting. In both cases, the social face of a perennial poverty is in question. In the first instance (6:2–4), the poor who beg are the implied subject of the saying, which discusses how one should "do mercy" to those who ask for aid. The instructions in 6:2–4 make it clear that public displays of charity—the type of aid called *asistencialismo* in Latin America—are not the way to go, if only because this practice mainly serves the interests of the giver: "in order that they [who give alms] might be honoured by others. Truly I tell you, they already have their compensation" (6:2). In the second instance (6:16–18), the topic of discussion is how properly to fast. Here the problem is a false identification with the usual signs of poverty through an ostentatious self-humiliation. The practice of fasting is not itself under review. Obviously, other goals besides just "looking poor" could be pursued with such an activity. The specific problem addressed in 6:16–18 is fasting for the sake of seeming sorry or in a sorry state: "they disfigure their faces" without the ragged appearance actually attesting abnegation or misfortune. In other words, it is a kind of theater, or self-display, in the key of "woe is me."

Both in Matt 6:2–4 regarding almsgiving and in 6:16–18 regarding fasting, a promise is made that "your father who sees in secret will repay you" (6:4, 18).[48] This stands in marked contrast to those who "already have their compensation" (6:2, 16) when they make a public event out of acts of charity and self-humiliation. In both situations, at stake is due compensation. In fact, this concern provides the basic frame of reference for the section as a whole.[49] No such thing as a disinterested piety is imagined here, as though such a religious practice essentially had nothing to do with the need to earn a living or the desire to enjoy a better quality of life. The greater justice promoted by the SM includes the hope, so often denied or frustrated, that some enduring benefit will be gained, eventually, by the toil and effort involved in such a striving.

The longer passage on prayer in Matt 6:5–15 pursues a comparable line of reasoning.[50] At the beginning of the text (6:5–6) the same point is made as in the other statements about almsgiving (6:2–4) and fasting (6:16–18) in more or less the same terms. In the case of prayer, however, apart from the affirmation that "your father . . . will repay you" (6:6), the activity under review is plainly the work of petition. Prayer is performed here expressly for the sake of receiving an economic benefit. Unlike almsgiving and fasting, prayer is explicitly described as part of the business of daily life: a mode of negotiating and renewing the divine-human service-compensation

agreement. That prayer is understood as an economic transaction is made clear in 6:7–8. Here it becomes evident that prayer is supposed to be practiced for the sake of getting "what you need" (6:8). The debate at this point is *not* whether such an overt economic interest properly belongs to prayer. At issue is rather *how* such an economic interest best—most profitably—should be pursued in prayer.

Contrary to those who pray "in the synagogues and at the street-corners in order to be seen by others" and "with many words just like the Gentiles" (*hôsper hoi ethnikoi*), as though the practice of prayer thus becomes more effective, the SM proposes in Matt 6:8 that a different approach be taken *to the same end:* namely, prayer should be performed away from the public eye in the awareness that persuasion or the provision of adequate information and the use of rhetorical force are not the principal requirements. At the same time, one is encouraged to pray in accordance with the prayer provided as a model in 6:9–13 (again, in my opinion, originally derived from Q / Luke 11:2–4). The form of this prayer is entirely petitionary with very specific economic interests at its core. Although an enormous amount of commentary exists on the opening invocation of the prayer in 6:9b–10—which comprises the initial address "Our Father" as well as the three subsequent "you" petitions that elaborate it—all four of these clauses have essentially the same rhetorical function, which is to characterize the recipient of the requests made in the prayer. All four of the "you" clauses basically serve to indicate why those who pray the prayer expect the one to whom the prayer is directed to be in a position to meet their demands.

At the beginning of the Lord's Prayer in Matt 6:9b, God is cast in the role of the supreme "heavenly" benefactor. Due respect for his name (or reputation and honor) is desirable (6:9c) because such regard alone guarantees the "credit rating" required to provide the benefits about to be requested. The subjunctive urging that "your kingdom come" and "your will be done" (6:10) reiterates the same desire that God, as the potential patron to whom the prayer is directed, soon will be or shall continue to remain in the ruling position that alone allows for such benefaction to be granted.

Most interesting, therefore, at least for the present argument, are the three subsequent "we" petitions in Matt 6:11–13. Notably, the first two could hardly be more explicitly economic when they state, "Give us today our daily bread" and "cancel our debts" (6:11). In the second case, it is noteworthy that divine debt relief is contingent on comparable human behavior: "just as we have cancelled the debts of those who owe us" something. The threat of insufficient food and the burden of enduring financial obligation

or economic dependency—these, then, are the concrete problems to which the Lord's Prayer matter-of-factly seeks a remedy in the SM.[51]

The instructions in Matt 6:1–18 regarding proper worship practice thus do not address only the question of how properly to conduct religious ritual, at least not if this kind of activity is supposed to exist apart from the other preoccupations of a material existence. The very opposite is true. Indeed, it is striking how thoroughly permeated by economic interest is the so-called *Kult-Didache* in 6:1–18. Its discourse about true piety articulates a distinctive stance vis-à-vis the enduring social problems of inadequate daily bread and excessive debt. In fact, the link between early Christian faith and economic interest is made clear in the very first verse of the unit (6:1). Here we read, as though it could hardly be more self-evident, that the business of doing right (*dikaiosynê*) has as its primary motivation the prospect of getting paid (*misthos*) by "your father who is in heaven." What the model prayer in 6:11–12 then helps clarify—and the following texts (beginning in 6:19) firmly establish—is the fact that this celestial paycheck, whatever else it may entail, should first provide enough food for today and the enjoyment of relief from crippling money problems.

Again, the series of sayings in Matt 6:19–7:12 were all once part of the Synoptic Sayings Source (or Q, except for Matt 7:6). Only the sayings in 7:1–5, however, originally formed part of the earlier document's initial discourse (Q / Luke 6:20b–49). Everything else in Matt 6:19–7:12 was first found elsewhere in Q.

Just as the sayings in Matt 6:9–13 and 7:7–11, which originally formed a single literary unit in Q / Luke 11:2–4, 9–13, are separated from one another in the SM, functioning together there as a kind of frame for its central section, so also the sayings in Matt 6:19–21 and 6:25–34 were originally joined together in Q (albeit in reverse order: Q / Luke 12:22–32 = Matt 6:25–34 and Q / Luke 12:33–34 = Matt 6:19–21). In the SM, however, these sayings, too, have been separated from one another; their respective order of appearance is inverted, and two other sayings originally found elsewhere in Q (Matt 6:22–23 = Q / Luke 11:34–36 and Matt 6:24 = Q / Luke 16:13) stand between them.

Most notably resignified—given greater prominence—by this transposition of materials from Q is the saying in Matt 6:22–23. Its meaning in the SM now belongs to the explication of enduring treasure that begins with the statement in 6:19: "Do not store up treasures for your selves on earth." This statement, in one sense, is the prescriptive side of the same moral coinage that earlier in the central section of the SM criticized those who

"already have their recompense" by seeking, here and now, "on earth . . . before others to be seen by them" (6:1; see also 6:5 and 6:16), "so that they might be honored by others" (6:2). The implicit contrast in 6:1–2 is then made explicit in 6:16–19 through the juxtaposition—by catchword connection—of those long-faced hypocrites who "disfigure" (*aphanizousin*) their faces (6:16) and the inevitable fate of treasure stored on earth "where moth and rust corrode" (*aphanizei*) (6:19).

The political economy promoted by a certain public piety (6:1–18) that also underlies the other civilized habit of storing goods behind closed doors (to keep out thieves as well as to save for a rainy day) is flatly opposed in Matt 6:19. Instead, one should "store up treasures for your selves in heaven" (6:20). Heaven is precisely where the problems otherwise associated with amassing "treasure on earth" are absent. Such a polarization is extremely dangerous—or daring—to draw. It is most dangerous when taken to imply a complete spiritualization or evaporation of all evangelical concern for the needs of an earthly or material existence. This is the legacy of the saying in the history of interpretation, turning the economy of the Kingdom of Heaven into a transcendental opiate for the poor and socially oppressed. Whatever one might think the SM intends by setting the two kinds of treasure in opposition to each other, it is important to acknowledge without further ado the harmful history already enacted by a facile misreading of the statement.

In my opinion, the final verse of the saying is the key to its interpretation: "For where your treasure is, there will your heart also be" (Matt 6:21). This does not mean the inverse: "Where your heart is, there will your treasure also be," as if the topic under discussion here were the need to establish sentimental priorities. At issue is rather the question of sustaining treasure. Which economic model is ultimately life giving? "For where your treasure is, there will your heart also be." A false economy—one that fails to satisfy—must be avoided at all costs because its consequence can only be a broken heart, or certain death.[52]

The question of the heart in Matt 6:19–21 becomes in 6:22–23 a discussion about the eye. The basic issue, however, remains the same: namely, the type of economic vision able to ensure a good life for everyone. The destruction and loss caused by moth and rust and thief in 6:19–20 are described in 6:23 as the state of darkness created by an evil eye. Like the heart elsewhere in the Bible, the eye in antiquity was one of the organs of the human body supposed to be directly involved in the definition and implementation of volition.[53] Unlike the heart, however, whose frame of reference remained

broad and general, the eye—especially when it was deemed to be evil—was associated more narrowly with the pervasive social problem of envy and greed.[54]

An evil eye is here the predictable side effect of the economic practice of storing up treasure on earth.[55] An evil eye, like moth and rust and thief, desires to consume that which someone else possesses. In the case of the saying in Matt 6:22–23, however, such an eye is said to harm not only or even primarily the other person who is the object of its gaze but, rather, the one who has the evil eye, since his or her whole self is thereby "darkened." Envy, that green-eyed monster, ultimately proves hardest on its host. The evil eye that seeks to amass someone else's treasure and thereby constantly displaces its own heart is soon emptied of whatever inner light it might once have had, becoming swiftly overshadowed by its avarice.

This critique of the perils of envy and greed—the salient features of an economy exclusively devoted to constant gain or "storing up treasure on earth"—is recast yet again in Matt 6:24 as a question of competing servitudes. Having unthreatened treasure in heaven and an enlightened body is now made equivalent to service in God's household, whereas the contrasting effort to store up treasure on earth and the body suffused with darkness are declared to be characteristics of the minions of Mammon.

Two things must be said immediately. First, human beings are obviously not imagined in this saying to be inherently free agents. As Martin Luther later opined in his treatise "On the Bondage of the Will" and Bob Dylan sang in "Gotta Serve Somebody" (*Slow Train Coming*), every human being is basically a slave in the service of one master or another. In the Gospel of Matthew, these are said to be either God or Mammon. Or, with Sigmund Freud, Eros and Thanatos. Second, this understanding of the human condition belonged, for Luther, to his Augustinian intellectual heritage and an enduring identification with the thoroughly hierarchical (feudal) construction of late medieval European society. With Dylan, it appears to be a reflection of illiberal democracy sponsored by modern American evangelical Christianity.

Another interpretation of the saying in Matt 6:24 might begin with the observation that slavery in the ancient Mediterranean world was neither uniform nor inevitably humiliating. Depending on whose slave one was, it has been claimed that sometimes slavery could actually be a means of upward social mobility.[56] This, however, seems to me an unlikely assumption unless it were a function of desperation. If slavery in antiquity was an economic institution roughly comparable to the modern mechanism of

wage labor (which I suggest that it is, at least with regard to the proper characterization of wage labor), then the operative assumption in 6:24 would be that we all have to "work for" someone, and, furthermore, that it makes a great deal of difference for whom you work. It is not possible to promote the economic interests of the World Bank and at the same time to advocate cancellation of all foreign debt. The one line of work simply does not produce the same results as the other.

Yet another approach to the saying in Matt 6:24 is to read it as rejecting any view of *homo oeconomicus* as ever being free of other "external" claims. These claims would be, specifically, those represented in the SM through reference to God. Thus the issue of "the" economy would be declared always to be a moral, political, religious question and never just about the supposedly autonomous law of supply and demand. Certainly the opposition drawn between God and Mammon in 6:24 does not imply any need to choose between spirit and matter, or religion and mundane life, but rather would contrast two competing economic visions, both of which require "employees" and entail specific labor practices for the elaboration of a particular "product"—just as in 6:19–21 the question was not whether but which kind of treasure one ought to store up, and in 6:22–23 which kind of eye it is best to have.[57]

In Matt 6:25–34, the SM takes up—again from Q (see Luke 12:22–31) without substantial alteration—a more detailed description of the social practices in accordance with the "divine" economy. Here we learn what it means concretely—that is, how—to store up treasure in heaven, to keep one's eye healthy, and to serve God instead of Mammon. In 6:25–34, we learn that such language is not code for wise wealth management or the ultimate tax haven but rather describes the satisfaction of basic bodily needs. The economic perspective articulated in the saying could be characterized as "less is more" or "small is beautiful." But an even better description is, I think, "enough is enough." The social practice outlined here entails, on the one hand, abandoning the economic projects of "development" identified in the text with the activities of ancient agriculture and the celebrity splendor of Israel's "darling king" Solomon. On the other hand, "enough is enough" means learning how what suffices for today really is everything needed to enjoy a complete life.

Thus the stunning suggestion made in Matt 6:25–34 in order to solve the crucial problems of adequate food and clothing is to "just say no" to the increased production values of modern agribusiness, with advanced technologies of sowing and reaping and storing in barns. At the same time,

the saying disparages the dazzling refinements—or mirage—of imperial civilization by seeing through them. The solution to widespread hunger and the threat of exposure is *not* to be found, therefore, by pursuing more efficient means of material manufacture and better distribution. Neither should one simply trust the Solomonic virtues of exceeding wealth and advanced knowledge, which is to say the free flow of international exchange with expert advice.[58] Instead, we are told to imitate the birds of the air and the flowers in the field.

What kind of a proposal is this?[59] It is summarized in Matt 6:33: "But seek first the kingdom [of God] and its [or his] justice [*dikaiosynê*] and all these [other] things will be given to you as well." This other kingdom is a world in which "your heavenly father knows that you need all these things" (6:32)—namely, food and drink and clothing (6:31)—where, like the birds of the air that "neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns and [yet] your heavenly father feeds them" (6:26) and like the common grass of the field clothed with lilies of unsurpassed beauty (6:28–30), the audience of the SM is urged to anticipate the same sort of nurture. Human existence is not to be imagined as enduring despite nature but, rather, as sustained within its larger beneficence.

Again, this might seem to be merely babble. Anyone who has spent his or her childhood truly dependent on the bounty of the land or a night without food and shelter in the wilderness knows that nature is neither always nor directly maternal in supporting human life. This harsh truth is not forgotten in the SM. In Matt 6:30, for example, the saying simply takes for granted that the grass that displays God's spectacular provision is here today and gone tomorrow—indeed, not just gone but "thrown into the [fiery] oven." Less dramatic but equally clear-eyed is the question posed in 6:26: "Are you not worth more than [the birds of the air]?"[60] These creatures that God freely and regularly feeds also perish very easily.[61] The SM is thus aware of the peril and violence of "normal" life. Nonetheless, a different path to bodily satisfaction—food and clothing—precisely under these conditions is proposed. In 6:25–32, how to increase food and textile production with a better, more equitable distribution network is therefore not discussed.

Under consideration is, instead, the social infrastructure of worry and anxiety that these problems—or, rather, their problematization—take to be self-evident. For it is precisely the assumption that security and prestige are intrinsic to human well-being that the SM aims to reconfigure. The final verse in Matt 6:34 makes very clear in conclusion what is fundamentally

misconstrued. Refused at this point are the fearmongering and profiteering now practiced under the aegis of financial planning and complete insurance coverage—in other words, the worship or service of Mammon, the evil eye of envy and greed, the effort to store up treasure on the earth. Instead, we read in 6:34, "Do not be anxious, therefore, about tomorrow, for tomorrow will take care of itself." If you have enough food and clothing for today (see 6:11), what is lacking that you should not be content?

Unless, of course, your level of fear and anxiety is so high that you are unable to trust that an equally sufficient supply will be yours again tomorrow. Or is it because you are dissatisfied with "just" daily bread and clothing? Proposed in Matt 6:25–34 is a "divine" vision of the human (political) economy based explicitly on self-conscious confidence and trust in the provident nature of things, opposing the suspicion that tomorrow could be worse and, therefore, the best security and overriding concern of everyone should be to try and make sure that at least "I" have more than enough.

In the face of this familiar logic, the SM asks, "Is not your life [*psyche*] more than food and the body more than clothing?" (6:25). Such a question does not dispute the biological need for these things. For this reason, the saying goes on to discuss exactly how birds get their daily nourishment and the grass of the field its stunning adornment. Questioned instead is the economic reasoning that makes such need the overwhelming focus of human existence, as though the purpose of one's life, whose length is obviously limited (6:27) and ultimately unknown, were to dwell obsessively on such matters.[62]

To Conclude: Matt 7:13–27

In the end, it is necessary to choose. The final section of the SM in Matt 7:13–27 discusses this necessity; even nonresistance to the reigning economy is actually a choice to enter "the gate [that] is wide and the way [that] is easy, which leads to destruction," and "those who enter by it are many" (7:13). The fact that everyone else is doing this, because one model has triumphed for the time being over all other possibilities and still remains afloat, in no way guarantees that everything is going to be all right in the end. The great ship supposed to carry us all across the stormy seas of uncertainty to the promised land of economic security could always turn out to be another Titanic.

According to Jesus "the economist" in Matt 7:13–27, it is not difficult to know the way that leads to life and the gate that opens onto it. By its fruits,

he says, you shall know it (7:16). An economy that produces mostly poverty and death cannot finally deliver life in abundance—even though it promises greater wealth—because of what it costs. From the thorns of inequality and discrimination—another mode of honor and shame—not to mention the thistles of scarcity and other countless dead ends, it is not possible to harvest grapes of satisfaction and figs of well-being (cf. 7:16). Those who make the contrary claim are obviously "false prophets" who "come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves" (7:15), because everyone knows that "a bad tree cannot bear good fruit" (7:18).

Again, a piety inattentive to this principle has no value. The first antithesis of the SM already made it clear, in Matt 5:23–24, that every offering made to God without first resolving every outstanding disparity among "brothers" is disqualified. Likewise, to piously invoke Jesus as "Lord, Lord" without doing "the will of my Father who is in heaven"—that is, without practicing the greater justice declared to be the general purpose of Jesus's teaching in the Gospel of Matthew (5:20)—will not be able to save anyone (7:21–23). Good works done "in my name"—be they prophecy and other high-sounding words of comfort and consciousness raising, or the exorcism of social demons in projects of education and aid, or the economic miracles of development and extended credit (cf. 7:22)—are all beside the point if such works do not cultivate the good and sound tree of a satisfactory economy, instead of the rotten one that now possesses us. There will be no entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven without a tree of life firmly planted on the earth. Only a house, in other words, founded on the rock that "hears these words of mine and does them" (7:24) by "seeking first [such a] kingdom and its justice" (6:33) has a future. Only this house will avoid the destruction that comes with predictable—if always unexpected—calamity (7:25). At the same time, in this house everything you need "will be yours as well" (6:33).

After the SM: Matt 10:5b–42; 13:1–52; 18:1–35 and 20:1–16; 23:1–25:46

The economic proposal of the SM is reiterated and extended in the other four big speeches by Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew (10:5b–42; 13:1–52; 18:1–35; 23:1–25:46) as well as in a telling aside elsewhere (20:1–16). It is not possible to discuss here the content of these other speeches and aside to the same extent as the SM. Otherwise, a long chapter would become another book within a book—or worse! Hence I shall only suggest in what

follows how such a reading might be continued. I will focus especially on some key parables.

An Independent Life: Matt 10:5b–42

In Matt 10:1–4, Jesus chooses his twelve disciples, giving them the same power that he possesses in 9:35 to cast out demons and to heal every kind of sickness and suffering. In 10:5–42, Jesus then gives these disciples further instructions regarding how to behave and specifically how to respond to the predictable difficulties they will encounter in the future. It is within this set of additional instructions that, once again, Jesus "the economist" speaks.

At this point in the Gospel of Matthew, the twelve disciples are sent only "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (10:6); they are to focus on the local context. The here and now is where and when "the Kingdom of Heaven has come near" (10:7). Everything else will be a consequence of that claim. The Kingdom of Heaven becomes manifest in 10:8a through four types of action:[63] healing the sick, raising the dead, cleansing the lepers, and casting out demons. These activities instantiate the Kingdom of Heaven. It is not possible to speak of God's reign without attending to the most mundane of human problems.

Thus the work of the disciples is clarified. But what is the value of that work? What is it worth? And how will it be remunerated? Jesus's answer is unequivocal: "Freely you received, freely give" (Matt 10:8b). Note the sequence of phrases making up this verse. First, one receives. Then, one is supposed to share with the same generosity. There is no suggestion to give freely *before* having received. Thus there is no command to toil "for nothing" in order to fulfill some sort of religious or social obligation while the lord of the harvest or owner of the shop or factory reaps the rewards of this labor. Rather, those who already received and have enjoyed a good measure of well-being are now obliged to make this opportunity available to others. The logic is one of inverse reciprocity: first, the right to receive before the requirement to give, but then, upon receiving, the obligation to share without reserve.[64] Neither slave labor nor a guaranteed bank account but unfettered exchange is the formula!

In Matt 10:9–10a, the budget for such a life is reviewed. It is not a big budget. Indeed, the bottom line is next to nothing. The list of prohibited articles goes beyond or beneath the bare minimum, excluding as it does so-called essential items—for example, a bag (*pêra*) in which to carry daily bread and a change of clothing; even shoes (*hypodêmata*) for rocky roads

and a stick (*rhabdon*) to defend oneself against snakes and thieves are not allowed. A program of total poverty seems to be enjoined—both self-imposed and thoroughly unbalanced!

The original meaning of the various statements in Matt 10:9–10a has been the subject of scholarly debate for some time and continues to be so. No consensus has been reached to date. Why this would be so is not difficult to discern. Scholarly interpretation of the statements, which are extremely straightforward and even banal, throws into stark relief—and not infrequently on the defensive—the underlying economic interests or concerns of those who interpret them. Even today, it seems, we cannot read this text without feeling somehow challenged by it. Most often, therefore, what is said is declared to be inherently impossible and promptly ignored—just as the injunction to imitate the birds of the air and the lilies of the field in 6:25–34 seldom has been tried.

The Economic Kingdom of Heaven: Matt 13:1–52

Jesus's third big speech in the Gospel of Matthew (13:1–52) is a collection of parables. Almost all of them aim to clarify what the Kingdom of Heaven is. Many of these parables originally come from the Gospel of Mark or from Q. The final three parables in Matt 13:44–50, however, are unique to the Gospel of Matthew; they serve as a concluding summary for the collection of parables as a whole. Not surprisingly, these three parables consistently describe the Kingdom of Heaven as an economic question.[65]

In Matt 13:44, the Kingdom of Heaven is compared to "a treasure hidden in a field."[66] The protagonist of the parable hides the treasure that he has just found in someone else's field and, then, "with great joy" (*apo tês charas autou*) does whatever is necessary to acquire that field. The moral of the story might seem to be the same as in the next parable in 13:45–46, where, for the sake of such a treasure—in the second parable, an extraordinary pearl—the exemplary entrepreneur is willing, against all customary business sense, to sell everything he owns in order to make the singular investment. Instead of holding a diversified portfolio, he opts to put all his eggs in one basket. The point of both parables thus would be the absolutely superior value of the Kingdom of Heaven and the concomitant need to act with complete commitment in order to take possession of it.[67]

This does not explain, however, the fact that in the first parable (Matt 13:44) the joyful discovery of a treasure hidden "in the earth" and subsequent purchase of the field where it was found is basically a work of

subterfuge. The one who discovers the treasure does not reveal to the current owner of the field what he found there but, rather, "hides" the treasure where it was before and then begins to negotiate with the current owner for purchase of the land. Something less than "full disclosure" is obviously practiced here—not exactly a transparent transaction![68]

The putative right of the present owner of the field to enjoy all the benefits deriving from his property is plainly not respected by the first parable in Matt 13:44.[69] If the treasure in question were modern stock options, the method by means of which the protagonist of the parable acquired them would be judged to be a form of "insider trading" and roundly condemned in a court of law. Even if we were to assume that the owner of the field happily accepted the price offered by the unexpected and strangely eager buyer, it would remain the case that the buyer knew full well that the land was worth much more than the price he paid for it by virtue of the treasure he first found there and then hid again until completing the purchase. Even if this behavior is thoroughly consistent with Jesus's earlier command that his disciples become "astute as serpents" (10:16), it is difficult to find in 13:44 any evidence of dove-like innocence.

Not by accident, however, is it said in Matt 13:44 that the treasure was hidden "in the field" (*en tô agrô*). Throughout Jesus's third big speech, this figure of "the field" and, specifically, the phrase "in the field" (*en tô agrô*) is used repeatedly (see 13:24, 27, 31, 44; also 13:36, 38). In the opening parable of the sower (13:3b–9), originally from the Gospel of Mark (4:3–9), the description of the different kinds of soil and what the good earth finally produces also belong to the same semantic domain.

The image of the field is an economic symbol. In the agricultural empires of the ancient Mediterranean world, land was also the basis of political power. Inevitably, therefore, repeated reference to "the field" would imply the dominant order. It is in such a field that the parable in Matt 13:44 speaks of finding hidden treasure.

When the protagonist of the parable hides again the treasure he found there, he refuses to disclose or delays revealing the clandestine existence of the treasure. No doubt he does this in order to enable the field to pass as swiftly and as surely as possible into his own hands—although we may also surmise that it is because he knows that the current owner of the field will see in it merely one more opportunity to derive the usual profit-taking from the property. The parable gives us no reason to think that the present owner would view the treasure as enabling another kind of economy, which the Gospel of Matthew calls the Kingdom of Heaven. The man who found the

treasure in the field therefore hides it so that this possibility will remain a viable option, even though the prevailing "objective" conditions do not favor it. Indeed, that is why the treasure goes underground for yet a little while!

An Alternative Household: Matt 18:1–35

In Matt 18:12–14, another economic parable is told, exemplifying once more the "abnormal" values that govern life in the Kingdom of Heaven: "What do you think? If someone had 100 sheep and lost one of them, will he not leave the 99 in the hills and go and look for the one that has become lost?" (18:12). The protagonist of the parable is a peasant suddenly threatened with the loss of 1 percent of his total "capital." It is a level of loss he cannot afford, a prospect he will not accept. Obviously it is not the perspective of a great householder or major commercial establishment, which takes for granted as part of the cost of doing business a certain inevitable waste and depreciation; the parable instead reflects the precarious situation of those who are economically among the "least," who manage to survive but with no margin for error or failure. This is why the shepherd of the parable immediately sets off to search for the missing sheep: "And if he finds it, truly I tell you that he rejoices more over that one sheep than over the 99 that were not lost" (18:13). Expressed here is not an absolute preference on the part of the shepherd for that one lost sheep. There is no indication that the shepherd abandons or forgets the other 99 sheep.[70] He is simply glad to have recovered that which threatened to become sheer loss.

The more common interpretation of the parable is therefore wrong when it suggests that the shepherd left the other 99 sheep alone and unprotected in "the hills"—supposedly a dangerous region, where the shepherd had been keeping them—in order to search for the sheep that had wandered off.[71] For there is no doubt in the text that the other 99 sheep were never lost (18:13), which means that they were never left on their own with no one else to care for them. The fact that the shepherd leaves the 99 sheep in the very place he had taken them means rather that the 99 sheep remained as they always were: namely, in a good place. Nothing in the text requires or even encourages us to think that the shepherd was either bad or stupid, which he would have been if he had taken his 100 sheep to an area that he knew to be dangerous and then forsook the vast majority of them (99) in order to hunt for a single stray.

Why, then, does the shepherd rejoice so greatly when he finally finds the one sheep that went missing? Because his flock is now once again

complete. The integrity of his economic unit—the flock that would sustain his household—has been restored. For this reason, the shepherd rejoices when the missing sheep is found. The one sheep's reincorporation into the flock means that, once again, the economic entity of which that one sheep was an integral part is intact, as it must be in order for everyone and everything associated with the enterprise to thrive. By contrast, when the one sheep went missing, the well-being of all those who belong to the shepherd's household was also threatened. Hence, "it is not the will of [your] heavenly father that one of these little ones be lost" (Matt 18:14).

The economic perspective informing the parable of the lost sheep, including the image of the frantic shepherd, is not difficult to define. The claim is made that no one—no matter how small and socially insignificant he or she may be—can be allowed to "slip through the cracks" without that person's absence from the larger social body—for whatever cause, whether confusion, illness, exclusion, or marginalization—becoming a matter of great concern, at least to the good and smart shepherd. From this perspective, one simply cannot speak about the inevitable loss of life or necessary costs of structural adjustment. In the economy of the parable, nothing is inherently disposable.

In Matt 18:21–35, the economics of forgiveness is discussed. The parable considers the case of a deeply indentured middle manager who could never get out from under the debt load he had acquired. For some reason, he is mercifully pardoned by his creditor. But then, not unlike the banks after their recent mortgage crisis was resolved, the middle manager did not want to pardon those who owed him a lot less than he was earlier liable to repay. In the parable, the man is severely punished for his failure to show the same mercy he enjoyed. Again, the logic is ruthlessly direct.[72] Those whose debts have been forgiven must in turn forgive their debtors.[73] The implications of the parable, if they ever were to become public policy, truly are mind-boggling.

A Telling Aside: Matt 20:1–16

Apparently, Jesus was not content in the Gospel of Matthew to limit his economic instruction only to formal speeches. The fourth speech officially is over in Matt 19:1, which contains the usual formula for this purpose. At this point, the evangelist takes up again the Gospel of Mark, repeating a number of episodes from that work in the very same sequence (Matt 19:1–12, 13–15, 16–30 = Mark 10:1–12, 13–16, 17–31; cf. Matt 18:1–5, 6–9 =

Mark 9:33–37, 42–48). Within this sequence of texts, however, as soon as Jesus has explained to Peter and the other disciples in the group of twelve the nature of the relationship between wealth and entrance into the Kingdom of God, concluding that "many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first" (Matt 19:30 = Mark 10:31), Jesus then proceeds to tell an additional parable in Matt 20:1–16, as though further elaboration were required. Or is it rather that the opportunity for economic commentary simply could not be resisted, however much it plainly scrambles the general literary design of the evangelist's work?

The parable in Matt 20:1–16 is an editorial aside by the evangelist within the storyline that comes from the Gospel of Mark, since immediately after the parable has been delivered, the evangelist returns to the text of his literary source at the very point where he first interrupted it, beginning again with Jesus's third prediction of his coming passion (Matt 20:17–19, 20–28, 29–34 = Mark 10:32–34, 33–45, 46–52). The parable in Matt 20:1–16 is thus a telling aside because it states in encapsulated form and, as it were, under narrative pressure, against the discursive grain of the Gospel of Mark, the driving concern of Jesus "the economist" in this work.

In Matt 20:1–16, the Kingdom of Heaven is compared to the labor practices of a certain householder (*oikodespotês*) who left his estate early in the morning in order to hire workers for his vineyard. Everything the householder does is in complete compliance with the law or prevailing social custom. Even more importantly, it conforms to the workers' own expectations, since there is no indication that any of them thought to complain about the terms and conditions of their employment at any point during the day. Nonetheless, when the time came to be paid at the end of the day, suddenly there was a problem. To those contracted first, the salary that earlier seemed appropriate (see Matt 20:2, *synfônêsas de meta tôn ergatôn*) no longer proved to be so, once the householder began to pay the same wage to those unemployed throughout most of the day.

To those who only recently started to work after standing "idle" until late in the afternoon, the householder promised to give "whatever is just" (20:4–5). As it turns out, "whatever is just" in the eyes of the householder is the very same salary that the workers who toiled from dawn to dusk also were promised.

The reason for the sudden disagreement between the householder and these workers is given in Matt 20:13–14. The problem does not derive from a failure of the householder to comply with the original terms of the contract. As the householder observes, "Did you not agree with me that this

would be [your] pay?" (20:13). Rather, the problem arises from the desire of the householder to "give to this last one the same as to you" who were employed throughout the day. Is this not, however, an excessively equal treatment of everyone involved—if it is actually equal treatment? Is it really a gesture of kindness (see Matt 20:15b: namely, "because I am good" [*hoti egô agathos eimi*])? Does it not matter that not everyone did the same amount of work? How we choose to respond to the questions the parable provokes will depend very much on our perception of the rules by which economic life is to be governed and should be evaluated.

In my opinion, the question asked by the householder—"Am I not permitted to do what I want with my own?" (Matt 20:15a)—does *not* represent the economic perspective of the parable.[74] The parable is not an apology for the right of the property owner to do with his (or her) possessions whatever he (or she) sees fit. Neither does the parable urge the practice of a generous patronage. Rather, it raises and responds to an issue of economic justice. This issue has to do with the fact that those who only began to work late in the day would still have to pay the same price for food and the other necessities of life as those employed since daybreak.[75] Moreover, every worker should be able to live—"eat"—on the basis of his (or her) labor (see 10:10).

If the reigning economic system does not know how to employ its designated—indispensable—labor pool fully, the parable insists through the figure of the householder and his concept of "whatever is just" that the burden of such unemployment and underemployment should not fall on those without work. Their "idleness" is not their fault. At least in Matt 20:1–16, the workers in question had stood all day in the marketplace—precisely where they were supposed to congregate—in order to be employed (20:3). They are not the reason why work only became available for them late in the day. For this reason, the householder does not respond to the plight of these workers on the basis of their level of production or hours of employment, but rather on the basis of obvious need, which is essentially the same for all.

The exchange in Matt 20:6–7 is instructive. First, the householder questions those who, late in the day, were still standing in the marketplace. The householder effectively insults them with his inquiry: "Why have you been standing here the whole day like a bunch of bums?" (*argoi,* 20:6; see also 20:3). The unemployed workers state the obvious: "Because no one has contracted us" (20:7). Unemployment cannot be "fixed" without jobs. The response of the workers is effective. Apparently, it succeeds in illuminating the householder on the labor situation, because without further ado and

despite the lateness of the hour, the householder offers them employment as well, sending them off into his vineyard.

Furthermore, when it comes time to pay everyone at the end of the day, the householder tells his foreman to "call the workers and pay them their salary, beginning with those who were hired last until those who were hired first" (Matt 20:8). Albeit late in the day, something had dawned on the householder. Those who were earlier excluded from the workplace and its benefits are now slated to receive first the salary they need to live. Then those who had had a job from the beginning of the day will receive the same salary they likewise require. But, as if to add insult to injury, although those who were hired first have endured the heat of the sun for the entire day, they will have to wait a little longer than the others to enjoy such equal treatment.

It is certainly understandable, or at least predictable, why those hired first complained. In doing so, however, they replicate the conventional understanding of economic fairness based on levels of production and hours of work that the householder of the parable finally unsettles together with Jesus "the economist" in the Gospel of Matthew. Those whose economic outlook was already secure may well feel slighted by the "undeserved" good fortune of those previously excluded (Matt 20:15b). But the new economic policy pursued by the householder of the parable no longer acknowledges the right of having arrived first. Rather, there is an insistence on the need to "right" accounts, beginning with those whose lives were least secure.

A Time for Judgment: Matt 23:1–25:46

The last section of Jesus's final speech in the Gospel of Matthew (either 23:1–25:46 or 24:3–25:46) consists of four more parables (24:25–25:46). The first (24:45–51) is about a trustworthy and astute household slave who would be a disciple of Jesus (24:45; cf. 6:23; 10:16). This slave gives to the other members of the household what they need to eat when they need it (24:45), since every worker deserves to receive compensation for their labor (cf. 10:10). The trustworthy and astute slave does not take advantage of the other members of the household by eating and drinking with those who have already had too much while the other members of the household go hungry and thirsty. The trustworthy and astute slave knows how to encourage and develop practices of solidarity despite the situation of institutionalized inequality within which everyone still toils. Such solidarity is practiced especially by attending to the "little ones" and those who are "last."

This conduct is not optional behavior, at least not for the trustworthy and astute slave in Matt 24:45–51. There will be consequences for failing to heed such a vocation with its attendant responsibilities. Should one disregard or misconstrue this economic duty, "that bad slave" will pay for neglect with his or her own life: the lord of the manor will "cut him (or her) in two" (24:51). On the other hand, if one proves to be trustworthy and astute, he (or she) will receive in due course a corresponding compensation: "The lord will put him (or her) in charge of all his goods" (24:47). At stake here are plainly life and death. Those who think they can live well at others' expense will soon learn the truth of their condition, according to the parable.

The third parable in Matt 25:14–30 appears to involve a very different kind of thinking. Its logic seems to reflect the more common economic conviction that rewards those with money for good investment strategies while leaving aside, if not severely punishing, whoever does not assume such a risk (often because they cannot). Does not the parable end, in fact, by affirming, as though it were God's will, that "to those who have, will more be given, and they will have more than enough; but to those who do not have, even the little that they have will be taken away from them" (25:29)?

When read in light of the fourth and final parable in Matt 25:31–46, however, the previous parable in 25:14–30 takes on a different meaning. The businessman of the third parable, who is presented in 25:14 simply as a human being (*anthrôpos*), is opposed to the glorious Son of Man (*ho huios tou anthrôpou*), also a figure of authority, in the fourth parable (25:31ff). Both the businessman of the third parable and the Son of Man in the fourth come to judge (25:19, 32). But in the fourth parable (25:31–46) those who will enjoy the approbation of the Son of Man are not those who have made more money but, rather, those who did not neglect "the smallest of these my brothers [and sisters]." To them it is said, "Come, those of you blessed by my Father; receive the kingdom which has been prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (25:34). From the perspective of the fourth parable, the (in)action by the third slave in the third parable, who "went and hid his master's money in a hole that he dug in the ground" (25:18), represents neither moral failure nor a lack of economic intelligence but an instance of decided resistance to the master's regime of exploitation.[76]

The third slave in the third parable refuses to cooperate with business as usual, even though the same slave knows full well what this refusal likely will entail. The third slave finally and flatly declares to the master, "I knew that you are a hard man, who reaps where you did not sow and gathers where you did not scatter. For this reason I was afraid, and I went and hid

your money in the ground. But here you have [again] what is yours" (Matt 25:24). The master gets his piece of money back—and nothing more. The third slave thereby declines to practice a form of economic life that only produces greater and greater wealth for fewer and fewer people and thus necessarily increases the experience of hunger, homelessness, debility, disease, and imprisonment for everyone else. By refusing to participate in this system, the third slave demonstrates solidarity with those who are called, in the fourth parable, "the smallest of these my brothers [and sisters]."[77]

The third slave understandably was afraid—not, however, because of market uncertainties, but because of the accurately perceived unjust nature of the master. Even though the master is still capable of chastising the slave, we should not confuse such a judgment, according to the Gospel of Matthew, with the final verdict of history. The last word shall be spoken, claims the final parable, "when the Son of Man comes in his glory" (Matt 25:31). There will be a day, in other words, when the prevailing policies of harsh treatment and lack of consideration for the smallest and the weakest will be subject to an "eternal punishment" while "the just [enjoy] eternal life" (25:46).

Conclusion

When Jesus speaks in the Gospel of Matthew, it is striking how consistently he demonstrates a strong interest in economic matters. In question are not only those sayings scattered throughout the work that have explicit economic content. Rather, it becomes clear that, especially in the SM but also in the other four big speeches by Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew (with a telling aside elsewhere), Jesus consistently articulates a decidedly different model of political economy.

What is this stance? Obviously, it is not one that would conform to normal economic wisdom, whether in antiquity or today. According to Jesus "the economist" in the Gospel of Matthew, the final solution to what ails most of us—the key to a more satisfying life—lies neither in the creation of greater wealth nor even in its better distribution (although the latter would certainly help alleviate some pressing problems). Instead, two other issues are deemed to be even more basic. These are, if you will, two sides of the same coin. On the one hand, there is the problem of desire with its offspring: ostentation and self-serving ambition, worry, mistrust, anxiety, and desperation. How best to address these problems is discussed in the SM

and in Jesus's second big speech. In both cases, an alternate way of living is proposed, which registers the social shape of early Christian discipleship as the evangelist conceived it. This alternate way of living knows how to be content with whatever "today" affords. It can do this because it continues to be confident that the order of "creation" or the encompassing world is inherently good and will provide. Moreover, it trusts that God who "sees in secret" also "knows what you need."

Presupposed in this stance without naïveté—that is, with full knowledge of everything else that can and will happen under the sun—is a social habitus of solidarity derived from the right of each "worker" to "eat" in exchange for his or her toil.[78] At the same time, a different model of what we now call "political economy" is proposed. This other mode of productive organization is discussed under the aegis of the Kingdom of Heaven. Congruent with early Christian discipleship's alternate way of living, the economic proposals made by Jesus in the other three big speeches and a notable aside in the Gospel of Matthew engage the issues of material development, commerce or business as usual, contracts, debt, and even administrative structures. In this realm of reflection, the focus is on the problem of the "little ones" or those who always seem to come "last" in the usual accounting schemes. According to the Gospel of Matthew, it makes no economic sense to lose or to exclude any of these people from the benefits of so-called social progress. In this regard, the vision of Jesus "the economist" in the Gospel of Matthew is a highly conservative one!

For this model of political economy, there can be no inevitable costs. Neither accepted nor admitted is the concept of a necessary sacrifice, let alone the notion of a disposable life. Instead, the purpose of a "good" economy is precisely to enable every life to flourish. As the Polish poet and Nobel laureate Wisława Szymborska has written, "sitting under a tree / on a river bank / on a sunny morning" and watching a white butterfly above her as it "flits about in the air," casting its shadow through her hands, it is not clear in the face of such a delicate truth "that the important / is more important than the unimportant."[79] Every life counts! This includes those deemed to be only a "little" thing that "flits about," whose trace on the surface of a world in which "the important" conventionally reign is as "a shadow flies." It all comes down to that! Yet that ultimately makes all the difference between an existence that would be, essentially, a living "hell on earth," with its infinite gnashing of teeth, and one that might be called a "wonderful life" in a "heavenly kingdom."

In writing this, of course, I know full well—just as Szymborska was also left "uncertain" about the import of making such distinctions—that the economic proposals outlined by Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew are unlikely any time soon to be enacted as budget policy in a modern nation-state, let alone to meet the requirements for postmodern military-corporate "reality." The teaching of Jesus "the economist" likely will not even help you retire comfortably. The point is, however, that these proposals do not wish to serve in any such capacity because they do not see that kind of economic activity as ever able to provide what is most desirable and necessary. The economic proposals made by Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew beg to differ—no, they refuse precisely to beg in order to disagree—with the reigning abuse of good economic sense.

Instead, the proposals made by Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew seek to return the conversation about fullness of life and its goodness back to more basic considerations. Thus the question is raised: Why take for granted that the greater production of wealth somehow is the key to solving every other problem that afflicts us? Is it not rather the unlimited pursuit of wealth that is the most serious problem to be addressed? Is this not why we are afraid of everything that "tomorrow" might bring? Why there never seems to be enough "today"? Why enough is never enough?

INTERLUDE

DISPLACED EXEGETE: A SCRIPTURAL BIOGRAPHY

Hay golpes en la vida, tan fuertes . . . Yo no sé!
—César Vallejo, "Los heraldos negros"

In the introduction to this book I described briefly how it was that I came to write these essays and therewith to develop a sense of myself as a borderline exegete. I have been encouraged to say a little more about that process, which, for some reason, I still remain reluctant to do. At the same time, despite the lingering uncertainty about its wisdom, it does seem that it would be helpful to "dig deeper" into the biographical aspect of this book, especially in anticipation of chapter 3, where I go on to describe the possibility of developing an alternate subjectivity in the Epistle of James.

Why call this interlude a scriptural biography and not some kind of autobiography?[1] The main reason has to do with its analytical nature.[2] I do not intend to rehearse here any uniquely personal experience with the Christian Bible. Instead, I want to consider a changing series of enactments vis-à-vis that body of texts with various disruptions, negotiations, experiments, appropriations, and avoidances as part of the process that now issues in a borderline exegesis. The narrative of this process has no greater claim to the intimacy of an autobiography than any another account of such a life would have, were it to be written by someone else.[3]

No matter how I try to construe an answer to the question of who I am as a biblical scholar, even before I became one, it seems that the Christian Bible has always been a part of the social texture of this person; and that is so in a decidedly Lutheran manner, at least initially, even though there was obviously a time—an infancy—when such a claim could not be true.

Unlike Vincent L. Wimbush, who posits for himself an ancestral identity in which the Christian Bible can be shown to have entered the historical field of his subjectivity at a specific time and under particular cultural conditions, it is not clear to me that I can do the same.[4]

It is extremely difficult to separate the scholarly body that I am now from the legacy of Christian Europe, including Britain and Scandinavia, even though I know that there, too, once upon a time the fusion of Christianity and local culture was not so inextricable. Without a set of traces, however, like those that Wimbush analyzes for the Black Atlantic, there is really no way—at least not historically, at least not as history conventionally has been written—to speak about my own ancestral self without the Christian Bible somehow always woven into its discursive texture. In this regard, I simply cannot claim to know a self apart from a scriptural one (whatever that might mean concretely vis-à-vis a given issue).

Even if I were to claim—quite partially and now purely for the sake of the argument to come—an ancestral identity that originated, say, in pre-Christian Norway during the Norrøne period, there would be no discursive access to that extrascriptural past apart from its subsequent inscription by late medieval Christian writers.[5] This is true, of course, not only for those who would be antique "Norwegians" but also for the many other peoples whose ancestral memories were similarly overtaken by European expansionism, beginning in the late Middle Ages. Virtually all of their social memory of themselves soon ceased to exist independently of the constructions imposed about them by the occupying power; what we now know of this past, we know only through the surviving expression of these cultures in the secondary scrim of Western European representation, including the so-called humanities and social sciences.[6]

Something similar also obtains for the indigenous cultures of Peru before the European conquest.[7] Once again, I invoke Peru because this is where most of my life as a certified biblical scholar has been enacted, either on a daily basis or intermittently. In the introduction to this book, I discussed the internal displacement occasioned by my initial arrival in Peru. Elsewhere I have published a series of essays in which I try to explain why (as I describe it there) a cultural history of the Christian Bible in Latin America could provide a singular opportunity to track concretely—historically, anthropologically, politically—how this social artifact actually "works" over time in a cultural environment where it had no native resonance. I have argued that, in this case, scholarship would be able to begin its analytical work, as it were, from the "ground zero" of sheer alienage.[8]

And although I would still propose such a study, it would now be with an even stronger awareness of just how difficult and perhaps impossible it ultimately is to recover any evidence of those inaugural moments of first contact.[9]

In a certain sense, both of these less than pristine efforts to recall what once was, before the Christian Bible and European Christianity became the dominant culture in late medieval Scandinavia and early modern Peru, are simply two ethnological versions of what Paul Ricoeur describes in his own intellectual autobiography as the erosion of any lingering notion of the *cogito* à la Descartes (or Kant or Husserl). This is the idealist claim by the thinking subject to have immediate access to itself. In line with this experience of the dissolution of any form of direct self-possession, it thus becomes necessary to acknowledge that, in fact, we only come to know ourselves, concretely and precisely as a self, in the aftermath of one or another kind of "middle passage." In the case of Ricoeur and, mutatis mutandis, also in the two ethnologies, this "middle passage" amounts to the disclosure of "some other way through" the labyrinthine textual world in which we find ourselves already positioned and there ascribed a particular meaning or identity.[10]

I could just as easily have described this labyrinthine textual world as a certain scriptural field in which the ball of an apparently innate desire or will to know more of that-dark-and-delicious-thing-some-call-life is thrown back and forth continuously—but to whom? with whom?—creating thereby the elusive but palpable texture of signification that we otherwise claim to be our human (or inhumane) reality. The image of a ball being thrown back and forth comes from the well-known poem by Rainer Maria Rilke, whose first part was used by Hans-Georg Gadamer as the epigraph to his influential book of hermeneutical philosophy *Truth and Method*.[11] I am not persuaded, however, that the poem by Rilke describes the sort of hermeneutical enterprise that Gadamer implies for its interpretation in his partial use of it.[12] In fact, the poem as a whole seems to me precisely not to project any sort of human "world construction," let alone a "fusion of (cultural) horizons." Instead, the poem as I read it would propose a more radically uninhibited consent to the "meteoric" game of recurring dissolution that is the constant to-and-fro movement of life writ large occasioned, in Rilke's language, by "eine ewige Mit-Spielerin."[13]

In any case, to say that I do not know myself apart from the textual world constituted by the Christian Bible would be merely to acknowledge with Ricoeur and, perhaps, also with Rilke that I cannot exceed—at least

through any kind of memory—the semantic zone in which I first emerged as a listening, speaking, reading, and writing subject. And yet I am aware—or now wish to imagine—that this biblical world or scriptural texture, apart from which I cannot claim to know myself, not even in an ancestral key, is nonetheless not the only landscape that has shaped me. At least with regard to myself and specifically as a borderline exegete, I find it instructive—in order to explain myself to myself—to recall what I will call my own "deep geography."[14] At this point, however, I can no longer maintain the neat separation that I previously proposed between personal experience and scholarly analysis. I will now have to argue that there is a pertinent connection between them, at least with respect to my identity as a borderline exegete, since the cardinal points of my own embodied world have been effectively "off the map" of mainstream North Atlantic civilization—or enough off the map to allow for a strong sense of something else that might exist beyond this world.[15]

In writing this, I know full well that I am not simply describing a cultural condition that is factual. It is plainly a construction that I have elaborated, once again, in order to explain myself to myself, specifically as a certain kind of biblical scholar. But it is neither merely nor wholly a construction. It also has something to do with the socially marginal locations of my multiply displaced or re-placed body. It is a construction rooted in the different places on the planet where my active, learning, reflective flesh—otherwise as opaque to me as it is to anyone else—has known, albeit often unknowingly, its greatest measures of well-being. And as it turns out—at least as I now describe these places—every one of them is marginal vis-à-vis the dominant zones and cultures of the North Atlantic, even if their marginality has not always been of the same kind and even though I cannot say that I was ever an especially marginalized person within them.

I must confess that I am tempted now to indulge in a detailed reminiscence, evoking the four places in question. I recognize, however, that such a description will not impress anyone else as much as each place impressed me. Therefore, briefly stated and if only for the record, the four places are

- The small town of Williams Lake in the Cariboo region of central British Columbia, Canada: I lived there during the 1960s between the ages of eight and thirteen, and imagined that my destiny was to become either a Lutheran pastor or a rancher.
- The village of Sandshamn on the island of Sandsøy on the west coast of Norway at the edge of the Norwegian Sea, where my father was

born: Roughly every two weeks for about forty years, letters from my grandmother on this island would arrive at our home. In my childhood, these were always read aloud after supper, to be marked, learned, and inwardly digested. Like Odysseus, I have repeatedly returned to the island in dream and also in person, unlike Odysseus, since late adolescence. The reasons for this are profoundly mythical.

- The megalopolis of Lima, Peru, on the west coast of South America in the world's driest desert: As already noted, I went to live there immediately upon finishing my Ph.D. dissertation. This was during a period of high-intensity civil war. I had no native reason to be there, was stripped through the experience of many things, and strangely came to feel more alive in that place than anywhere else before. While living in Lima, I would return each year on a confused pilgrimage to the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, where I was often greeted as though I had just returned from the antipodes of the earth, even though it took less time for me to travel by airplane to the meeting than it frequently did for most European and other international visitors.
- Finally, the village of Guysborough, Nova Scotia, at the western end of the Chedabucto Bay, which issues at the other end into the open Atlantic Ocean: I live here now whenever I can, just off the edge of the map that most tourists and not a few provincial residents regularly travel, enjoying something that immediately begins to recede upon return to Toronto, Canada's largest metropolitan region, where I continue to be employed as an academic biblical scholar in the country's largest university.

The point of this brief detour through the deep geography of my soul has been merely to underscore the likely link between such latent geographical coordinates and the practice of textual interpretation presented in this book as borderline exegesis. In my case, that studied practice inhabits a mobile body for which the dominant culture of post–World War II North America and Europe—increasingly urban, commercially determined, aggressively democratic—neither uniquely nor especially represents the nature of reality, certainly not the good life, or even life as good as it gets. The practice of a borderline exegesis now appears to me to be an almost predictable consequence of this social imagination nurtured, if you will, "off the grid" of the growing network of manufactured consent and compulsory consumption that is North American modernity.

Upon reflection, I now appear to myself to have wandered frequently in other possible worlds, which are decidedly peripheral to the dominant arrangement of reality and not infrequently uncivil by comparison. In 1938, Robinson Jeffers described his own experience of another geography with similar effects:

> A second piece of pure accident brought us to the Monterey coast mountains, where for the first time in my life I could see people living—amid magnificent unspoiled scenery—essentially as they did in the Idyls or the Sagas, or in Homer's Ithaca. Here was life purged of its ephemeral accretions. Men were riding after cattle, or plowing the headland, hovered by white sea-gulls, as they have done for thousands of years, and will for thousands of years to come. Here was contemporary life that was also permanent life; and not shut from the modern world but conscious of it and related to it; capable of expressing its spirit, but unencumbered by the mass of poetically irrelevant details and complexities that make a civilization.[16]

As Jeffers describes his own "deep geography," it did not exist apart from "contemporary life," as though it were somehow "shut from the modern world." Insofar, however, as it represented "also permanent life," which for Jeffers means life "unencumbered by the mass" of distractions currently and increasingly holding the dominant "civilization" in its thrall, the same location enabled Jeffers to become "conscious of it and related to it."

Thus, I, too, specifically as a borderline exegete, yet continue to earn my daily bread within an academic world that I otherwise aim to displace here or at least to render more off balance, less poised, ideally pitched toward a different kind of truth telling.[17] Again, the point is not to posit a privileged perspective that somehow could claim to be "beyond" whatever is typically the case but, rather, only to explain why and how it is that I have become—despite a thoroughly conventional point of departure—someone who, with Herman Melville's "Bartleby, the Scrivener," increasingly says that "I prefer not to" practice professional business as usual any longer.[18]

How, then, should I describe the evolution of this sensibility I am calling borderline exegesis? How did it happen—at the level of mundane existence—that someone whose discursive world was always biblically textured nonetheless came to find this world most happily instructive and, indeed, still capable of vital invention precisely when it is cracked open, as though its skin were bursting? Why would I now typically seek disruption rather

than coherence in this fashion, tension and conflict rather than integration, discrepancy instead of harmony, a split or multiple identity—call it, if you will, a borderline personality—rather than a single self? Why learn to read now for complexity rather than for confirmation? Why seek bewilderment before assurance, welcome challenge rather than comfort, desire to know what yet could be rather than what must have been?

I was not born or raised to be such an exegete. It cannot be said that my upbringing and sentimental education, including professional training as a certified biblical scholar, was designed to lead to this result, even if the same practice obviously did not impede it and, indeed, must have contributed to it, albeit in a certain "renegade" fashion.[19] My father, for example, remains interested in what I do but professes not to understand what exactly it is I produce. In his words, the biblical interpretation I have shown him appears "not to have been written for everyone" to understand—which I take to mean that it does not reflect what my father imagines that a reading of the Christian Bible properly underwrites. In a similar vein, one of my father's cousins in Norway, after once inquiring what it was that I was doing as a biblical scholar at the University of Oslo, then immediately queried, "But is it actually possible to do research" as a biblical scholar? Could one really discover anything new, something else, another truth with the Christian Bible? Or, as yet another Norwegian (nurse) from the west coast once explained to me, "We don't interpret the Bible, we just read it." And on the basis of that kind of "reading without interpretation," one would draw, of course, the obvious conclusion (whatever it may be).

While there is much in these vignettes that is specifically Norwegian, I would argue that there is no great difference, mutatis mutandis, between such notions about how the Christian Bible properly would mean and many works of modern academic biblical scholarship. In each case, the activity of reading the Christian Bible appears to be governed by a "zero-sum" game conducted in the key of a correct or more probable understanding, for which the horizon of possible meaning would always be a derivative of a single order of reality, to which ultimately all true and pertinent statements must refer. For my Norwegians, who reveal a strongly traditional sense of the world in which they live, the order of reality is patently not in question. Thus the meaning of the meaning of the biblical text can appear to be basically obvious, and therefore beyond or beneath any need for further comment. In the case of modern academic biblical interpretation, there is undoubtedly more that should be said. Most scholarly readers will acknowledge, for example, the partiality of every effort at understanding, hesitating

to invoke the self-evidence of the facts and, perhaps, even admitting to a lingering uncertainty about some of the constitutive elements in the (ancient) world to be recounted. But seldom do the same scholars think to question, for example, the text's original existence in the past, as though this were a fundamental fact. For it is precisely their sense of the "reality" of "history" that ultimately grounds the claim to professional knowledge about whatever else such an artifact might also be taken to attest. This divinely secular history, which can be known also through the biblical text and through which the truth of the biblical text must be reciprocally refracted, was as self-evidently real and as compulsory in my professional school as is the biblical text's significance for the cited Norwegians. No wonder, then, that the road from my precocious internalization of the Christian Bible in the Canadian hinterland to a Ph.D. in religion / Christian Bible / New Testament / Q, viz. Historical Jesus, at the Claremont Graduate School in Claremont, California, now seems to be, in retrospect, a very direct one. One could even say that it was prescripted.

Indeed, why did I choose to pursue an advanced university degree in this area? As I now recall that choice, it was for the sake of a certain increase in some sort of power on the basis of my perception of the way in which all of the arguments with which I was then involved or understood as part of my identity seemed to entail a configuration of the biblical text as a crucial cornerstone of their discursive home. I did not want to have to depend on anyone else's opinion in order to configure this obviously important bit of ideological bedrock. And so, I thought, if I could learn to determine that part of the puzzle with autonomy, I would know with greater certainty on what basis I was building exactly what I could not now say: most likely, it was another royal sanctuary, or doctrinal edifice, or provisional fishing hut.

In any case, I still think that the biblical text as a nexus of discursive power is not an inaccurate perception of how the Christian Bible actually means in the context of North Atlantic modernity, even though this nexus is obviously no longer as primary as it used to be and its manipulation therefore no longer reverberates as directly—politically, ethically, imaginatively—as it once did. Nonetheless, the same perception of the biblical text as a nexus of discursive power implies—both then and now—an understanding of this text as being, first, a means for construing the world in which we presently live. Reading or the practice of interpretation would therefore be the mechanism by which such a construal is achieved. The desire to learn how to read "better"—which is to say more adroitly, more accountably, more arguably—must thus imply some erstwhile hope on my

part to acquire through this training an increased measure of discursive power. The recurrent anxiety among academic biblical scholars to maintain and develop the wider relevance of their field of study is also a function of the same conviction. Unconsidered in this preoccupation, however, is the possibility that the biblical text itself actually has no power. Once again, it would be merely a means—call it a means of grace, if you will, or a means of oppression, but either affirmation logically requires that the biblical text be understood to be essentially a means—whereby a power resident elsewhere is disseminated, articulated, reconfigured.

In a moment of hesitation, or slippage, or exhaustion, I must then have asked: Where does that power lie, and why does it typically hide or register and deploy itself this way? In any case, I always knew, I think, that I never aspired to be an ancient or biblical or modern "historian," although I am not sure I always would have been able to make such a statement so matter-of-factly. Moreover, this does not mean that I learned to read the Christian Bible "historically" without interest. But I also noticed—more than I explicitly proposed it to myself—that I never quite had the requisite zeal or disciplinary disinterest needed to amass the body of comprehensive and detailed knowledge that is the signature of a true "historian." (Or is it "true" historian?) I guess I was never able to persuade myself that I should become more interested in someone else's world—another time and place—than my own.

Even so, only recently did it occur to me to consider why it is that I have spent as much time and energy as I have investigating, for example, the local history of the lake region of Galilee in the first two centuries C.E., instead of any number of other equally provincial sites, including those in which my own life has been rooted. Again, this is not meant to be a polemic against the pursuit of historical knowledge, including that of the lake region of Galilee in the first two centuries C.E. But it would contest any suggestion of the self-evident priority of such knowledge. At least, it would serve to explain why it is that I have always stumbled and then stopped, and always sooner rather than later, whenever I found myself walking down this path of "history."

Nonetheless, the question of historical interpretation and of history as such continues to haunt me as a borderline exegete. There is no doubt that I have welcomed historical knowledge about the ancient Mediterranean world that was new to me. And I still do. Why would this be so? For many years, I did not know. Now I would say, in retrospect, that it was basically because this kind of knowledge allowed me to interrupt the dominant

discourses that have plagued me—or which I wanted to plague—in the name of the Christian Bible. In other words, historical knowledge was frequently useful to me to explain why "it ain't necessarily so."[20]

At the same time, what has struck me as less and less useful and, indeed, more and more pernicious is an understanding of historical knowledge as somehow inherently a statement about "reality," as though "history" were now effectively the proper name for that which really is. In fact, I do not see how one can ultimately separate historical knowledge from historical narrative, and then historical narrative from other kinds of (fictional) narrative—except, perhaps, as a distinction in types of narrative or literary genre. In any case, I would argue against any form of history-as-reality in favor of an understanding of this kind of knowledge as simply "our" sort of "scientific" mythology.[21]

Nonetheless, I am increasingly reluctant to leave it there, although it is also difficult to say exactly why. Perhaps it is my experience over the last twenty years of teaching at the University of Toronto that has made me worry about the ease with which not a few of our students as well as other academic colleagues dispose of whatever might have been once upon a time, as though we were now the rightful arbiters of all that could be real and relevant. What, though, is the significance of the dead—of that which once was but now no longer is? Is the absence of the obsolete merely the sign of its inherent disposability and actual worthlessness? I hesitate to agree with such a stance in the face of its obvious alliance with (post)modern North Atlantic commodity capitalism.

To be sure, as stated in the introduction to this book,

> borderline exegesis reads the biblical text historically—although the history that it aims to discover in, with, and under the text is not primarily what was once upon a time somewhere else, but rather what now is, unfolding with the reader before the text, or in front of both the text and the reader(s). In other words, history is for this practice of interpretation, first of all, the presently existing or subsisting reality that encompasses both text and reader always, necessarily, only at this time and place in "the one day" that recurs. . . . Let me therefore repeat that, in a borderline exegesis of a biblical text, the truth of the past is not forgotten or denied. But that past only lives, still, because someone today endures and recalls it—through memory, through imagination, through decipherment and extrapolation—back into the world that we the living currently embody and which embodies us.

Even so, as already noted, something here still haunts me. Is it the lingering conviction that the "death" of the author in the production of a literary work, including the biblical writings, does not simply obliterate or annul the debt of this work's existence to a human life, which first brought it into being, and to the other lives that subsequently continued to reproduce it? In this case, the question of how to re-member the enduring link between the existence of a biblical text and the embodied lives that ultimately are not just or even especially the condition of the possibility of that text would be the historical preoccupation of a borderline exegesis.

Again, in the introduction to this book, I gave a brief description of the institutional circumstances—both vocational and national—under which I first came to think of myself as a borderline exegete. At a pivotal point in this development of a biblical interpretation situated "betwixt and between" discrepant social contexts, I began to compose what I initially imagined would be a primer in Bible study, but to which I subsequently gave the title "Work the Text."[22] A compendium of hermeneutical reflections—which is to say a reading guide for the professionally perplexed—the first draft of the book was handwritten, day to day, in a school notebook in an outlying *urbanización* of Lima, Peru, during the winter months of June–August 1992, when Sendero Luminoso—and Peruvian television—finally brought the millennial war to the streets of the capital city. I had just finished my first year as an assistant professor teaching New Testament literature and exegesis at Emmanuel College in the University of Toronto. I should have been busy writing the kind of book that a tenure committee shortly would demand of me for a positive recommendation. Instead, I gave myself over, yet again, to the recurring effort to clarify what it is that I am doing, both in Lima and in Toronto, as a certified biblical scholar.

Although I did not know the work of Robinson Jeffers at the time, there is a comment that he made in 1938 about himself as a poet that would have been an apt characterization of my own intention with this still unfinished hermeneutical theory. Jeffers wrote,

> Another formative principle came to me from a phrase of Nietzsche's: "The poets? The poets lie too much." I was nineteen when the phrase stuck in my mind; a dozen years passed before it worked effectively, and I decided not to tell lies in verse. Not to feign any emotion that I did not feel; not to pretend to believe in "optimism" or "pessimism," or unreversible [*sic*] "progress"; not to say anything because it was

> popular, or generally accepted, or fashionable in intellectual circles, unless I myself believed it; and not to believe easily. These negatives limit the field; I am not recommending them but for my own occasions.[23]

One section of the proposed primer yet remains vividly present in my memory. Or, rather, it is the scene of its initial composition, which took place a few years earlier when I was still living year-round in Lima just down the street from the house where we were staying in 1992. Having returned from an evening meeting in one of the shantytowns where I was working, it was relatively late. There must have been an *apagon* (power outage), which the bombing of electrical towers by Sendero Luminoso or some other insurrectionary group routinely brought about, since the light in the house as I recall it seems to be candlelight. Too tired or too agitated to sleep and yet quite at the end of my work-a-day self, I wrote in a dimly illuminated fever,

> We have a text-fetish in Western culture. Perhaps, I should just speak about Protestants and, even more specifically, about Lutherans. By fetish, I mean that we have taken an inanimate object, a thing, a writing, and treated it as though it were alive, as though it were Life Itself, like the heart or the brain of the cosmos. We've done to a book what the prophet Isaiah (44:9–20) describes of a tree. We've made a god, an idol, a divine presence out of something that is otherwise just paper and ink, processed wood chips across which lines have been scored and marks made with a printer's typesetting machine (cf. Isa 23:13). We have all committed—yes, I'm going to say it—Bibliodolatry, even those of us who should know better, doing "historical criticism" and preaching "practical" sermons.
>
> It's our anxiety about being faithful to the text that makes the fetish clear. So long as we begin and end with the text, we are bound to it and it binds us. Far from saving or liberating us, our concern for faithfulness to the Bible can only make it more and more a precious ball and chain, whose constant drag on our every movement and inquiry will only bring us back to it, a sacred anchor in a spiritual desert. We become functions of the text. It writes the scripts of our lives. We remain mere deductions of "biblical principles," whose reason for being is, then, to ratify the codes that made us, instances of a history that can never be properly our own.

In fact, the biblical text is always weak—entirely powerless, even as there are extremely powerful readings of it, although these always remain incomplete renditions of the text, however insistent they might be. Though ideologically dominant, these strong readings do not undo the biblical text, even as the text remains thoroughly impotent in the face of their performative rewriting of it. Thus the biblical text can be said to abide as a lurking trace: a kind of subaltern "culturally unconscious" site, to which one may always return in search of what was thus far unconsidered. This would be done for the sake of reinstating that which never was simply lost or disappeared, but certainly neglected or sidelined and hence unrealized to date.

If I began to write this interlude with some hesitation, I now come to the end of its composition with a growing conviction that such an effort—and it was, initially, quite an effort—is worthwhile: namely, to make explicit the connections between a certain style of scholarship and the rest of one's life. In fact, I have found it to be not only revealing but also instructive. I hope that the reader also finds it to be so. Somehow, the exercise has helped me continue to learn what exactly it is that I have been doing in this book and why.[24] If there is a moral to this story or a principle of interpretation to be derived from its history of learning how to read otherwise, an ethos of inquiry that would follow from its memory of disjuncture and disclosure, it might be stated most effectively—at least, for me—by yet another Norwegian, albeit now of quite another ilk. In the words of Olav H. Hauge, the moral is: "Kom ikkje med heile sanningi . . . men kom med ein glimt, ei dogg, eit fjom / som fuglane ber med seg vassdropar frå lauget / og vinden eit korn av salt." In other words: "Don't come with the whole truth . . . but come with a hint, some dew, a wee bit / as birds take with them drops of water from the sea / and the wind a speck of salt."[25]

3

SUCH A LITTLE THING!

THE TONGUE AND ALTERNATE SUBJECTIVITY IN THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

In this chapter I turn from the "larger" questions that were the focus of discussion in chapter 1 and chapter 2—namely, the nature of the world in which we live and the political economy that would favor a more satisfying life in this world—to address a couple of other "smaller" issues. The first of these has to do with the formation of an alternate subjectivity. I shall explain shortly below what I mean by the phrase "alternate subjectivity" and why it is that I do not say "alternative."

At stake in this chapter is the question of how to nurture an alternate or dissident subjectivity. When I first began to consider the concern addressed in this chapter, I had been struck by the evident gap between the alternative social world projected (in Peru at that time) as the goal of present-day political struggle, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the unchanged social habitus of not a few of those who were otherwise plainly committed to that goal—and often at great personal risk. This prompted the question: Could one really hope to change the social system without also working on the formation of the individual subject? Did not the emergence and recognition of other social agents in the construction of a more inclusive, less abusive society also require the development of some other kind of personal agency or socially constructive ethos? Hence the interest of this chapter in the role of the tongue or how we ordinarily speak with one another as a necessary element in what used to be called a revolutionary praxis.

Thus I understand the figure of the tongue in the Epistle of James to be a trope for human communication, which is to say the discursive construction of social reality. Speech is a significant factor in the formation of one or another kind of collective human existence. What we say and how we say it helps us create the world that we think we know in order to dispose of it as we please or determine. Or, perhaps, this should be stated differently since, at some point, it becomes clear—at least to me—that the world is not merely a function of whatever we might choose to say that it is. For this reason, the question of how to speak the world that obviously exceeds "me" or "us" and even "all of us" would necessarily become a part of the political imaginary of another possible world. The issue still strikes me as a pressing problem.

But how does one actually cultivate a dissident social ethos? How would one nurture an alternate subjectivity as part of ordinary social practice?[1] How does one learn to embody under current conditions, which are hardly favorable to a different construal of reality, the utopian desire for another kind of arrangement? Could it be by becoming someone else—at least as a point of departure?[2]

In her poem "Ad castitatem," Louise Bogan invokes for herself such an "infertile, / Beautiful futility" whose counterfactual "offerings" she would hold "against this blackened heart." In doing so, she knows full well that "I call upon you, / Who have not known you; / I invoke you, / Stranger though I be."[3] In other words, Bogan insists under the sign of "chastity" on her enduring freedom to invent another order of existence, despite the obvious impossibility of "retrofitting" this into her own past. Nonetheless, that other self would be this history redirected toward a different kind of "water, and a stone," which is "beautiful" in, with, and under its evident failure to reproduce the reality that otherwise is true for both the fruitful and the barren.[4]

An Ascetical Work

After a prolonged period of scholarly neglect and frequent dismissal as—in Martin Luther's influential words—an "epistle of straw," the Epistle of James more recently has come to be read as a theologically challenging and socially critical early Christian writing.[5] Neither surprisingly nor incorrectly has a considerable swath of this scholarship tended to focus on the issue of the rich and poor in the letter, including the topic of patronage and friendship.[6] Scholars have also sometimes paid attention to the question of

wisdom and, even more narrowly, to the topic of speech in the Epistle of James.[7]

As far as I know, only Alicia Batten, however, has thus far undertaken to read the Epistle of James as an instance of ancient asceticism. She regards the letter as "a text that evinces a new subjectivity, particularly evident in the hostile attitude toward 'the world' and wealth."[8] In this chapter, I shall join Batten in her effort to read the Epistle of James as an "ascetical" work. I, too, shall stress the "new subjectivity" under construction here in opposition to "the world." Going beyond Batten, however, I shall focus especially on the role of the tongue in the creation of this alternate (early Christian) self.

Batten's understanding of asceticism is heavily indebted to Richard Valantasis's efforts to develop a general (social) theory of asceticism.[9] I would agree with Batten and Valantasis that the ascetical wager is not primarily a list of behavioral prohibitions and prescriptions but, instead, an embodied struggle to live "against the grain" of a dominant "normal" world in a given cultural setting. The purpose of this countercultural ethos, moreover, is not merely to "drop out" of the dominant society but also to enable the experience of a larger (fuller) life, here and now, in the singular body of the ascetic.[10] Thus I also think that it is important not to reduce the notion of asceticism, for example, to specific practices of sexual renunciation or fasting or any other kind of self-denial.

The term "asceticism" comes from the Greek verb *askein,* which originally described different types of physical and, then, moral or personal training.[11] I will suggest that in the Epistle of James this kind of training is especially focused on the tongue. In this letter, learning how to speak properly is the way in which one ceases to be "two-souled" or psychically split (*dipsychos*).[12]

In his much-lauded work *The Body and Society,* Peter Brown shows that such a concern about the "divided heart" and the correlative effort to achieve singleness of heart were constitutive aspects of early Christian asceticism—a concern already known at Qumran.[13] Brown traces the topic through a number of early Christian writings, including *The Shepherd* of Hermas, the *Pedagogue* by Clement of Alexandria, and the sayings of the Desert Fathers.[14] Clement of Alexandria, for example, yearned for "virgin speech, tender and free of fraud," to be in evidence among those whom he addressed. In the same way, the Epistle of James makes the perennial tussle with the tongue a first step in progress toward an alternate subjectivity (as well as the quintessential sign of its realization), which the letter elsewhere describes as possession of a wisdom from above and as friendship with God, or perfection, or maturity.[15]

At the heart of the Epistle of James, a stark contrast is drawn between those who are wise and have understanding on the basis of God's superior wisdom coming down "from above" (3:17) and those who remain "friend[s] of the world" (4:4) through the "desires that are at war in your members" (4:1). This opposition between what is "from above" and what is "earthly, psychic, daemonic" (3:15),[16] or what is "of God" and what is "of the world" (4:4), to name but a couple of expressions, appears to require us to assume some kind of underlying ontological dualism on the part of the writer of the letter. It is important to notice, however, how the use of this language in the Epistle of James actually aims to articulate a different way of being in this world.[17] Thus there is a prolonged discussion of appropriate and inappropriate uses of the tongue circumscribing the cosmological contrast at the heart of the letter. This is also why proper speech is taken by the Epistle of James to be a direct sign of friendship with God and the clearest evidence of one's heavenly schooling, whereas the use of improper speech conversely betrays an opposite allegiance.[18]

In other words, friendship with God in the Epistle of James describes as social practice the enactment of an alternate subjectivity—just as the Kingdom of Heaven in the Gospel of Matthew describes as economic practice the enactment of a different understanding of sufficient and sustainable human life. In both instances, a certain deliberate "training" is demanded in order, first, to "unlearn" putatively normal assumptions, both social and economic, and, then, to explore another mode or style of being in the world.

Alternate Subjectivity

I mean to say "alternate" and not "alternative" subjectivity. The main reason for this distinction is as follows. The term "alternative" implies a clear choice between this and that. In contrast, while the meaning of "alternate" depends upon such a distinction—at least, it includes the perception of a significant difference between two discrete possibilities—it also allows for oscillation between them as part of the nature of the relationship in question. In brief, it implies both this and—sometimes, lamentably, inevitably, ambiguously—that.

I do not think, however, that "alternate," used this way, is merely another word for "hybrid" or "ambivalent" or some other mix of this and that, because the salient feature in question is not the inherent confusion of

two opposing states but, rather, a reciprocating oscillation between decidedly different wagers. In other words, an alternate subjectivity would be the concrete shape of an ongoing struggle to free oneself from putatively normal or dominant modes of human being, as though it truly were possible to become someone else and thus to inhabit another possible world. Such a wager stands in contrast to—what may be a caricature but nonetheless apropos—the quite distinct and more common modern practice of resigned resistance or permanent disagreement with prevailing power as a posture of de facto impotence.

The distinction I am drawing here is not primarily a question of agency. In both cases, that is affirmed and limited. Instead, at stake is destination. To speak of an alternate subjectivity is to signal the conviction of doing something else beyond the present configuration of reality. In other words, a truly postcolonial world is possible, in which the "post" indicates a definite departure from the current regime(s). Nonetheless, to speak of this kind of possibility, including that of becoming someone else, as the construction of an alternative subjectivity is, as it were, a priori to plague it with its own inherent impossibility—unless one were to declare that such a self is schizophrenic by nature—since what the term "alternative" describes, at least to my dictionary-enhanced ear, is an identity wholly other than the one to which it is opposed. Such a wholly other identity may be logically possible and, indeed, even desirable for clarity and easy intelligibility, but it is difficult to conceive of how this self could ever be concretely constructed, since the body in question would essentially have to die in order to realize it. By contrast, an alternate subjectivity, while it might seem to be less radically distinct, implies a decidedly practicable difference. The term "alternate" describes a sufficiently different manner of being in the world at the same time that the subject in question continues to share the world, if only for the present moment, with a full range of other beings.

An alternate subjectivity is plainly unlike the normal or dominant habitus of its neighbors and yet also concretely viable in the midst of a continuing common life. The expression "alternate subjectivity" thus allows for the recurring presence within itself of precisely that social identity that it otherwise stands to refuse. In other words, the term names the dissident subject as a specific site of social struggle. Again, an alternate subjectivity can hardly be said to celebrate the colonial condition. Rather, it aims to overcome this condition since such a state is hardly as good as so-called reality can get—at least not from the perspective of the utopian imagination. But an alternate subjectivity also indicates the present possibility of

already embodying the greater utopian good, if only for a limited time, under certain circumstances, in a given regard. For this reason, the possibility of enacting an alternate subjectivity is not belied or undone by the fact that the subject in question yet remains within the social arrangement that he or she seeks to contest. Rather, the relevant question is: What has actually changed and is now different?

In the Epistle of James, the telling difference is made manifest—not exclusively but especially—in the early Christian use of the tongue. Speaking differently with one another would be the immediate sign of the larger social transformation promoted by the letter.[19] The discussion of speech is given pride of place because how we use our tongue either helps sustain or is decisive in undoing the construction of a common life together. This does not mean, of course, that speech alone makes or breaks community. The Epistle of James is also attentive, once again, to the dynamics of wealth and social prestige in the construction and destruction of early Christian social life. Nonetheless, and in accordance with the literary structure of the letter (to which we shortly shall come), it is speech—not uniquely but par excellence—that would either reinscribe or critically undermine the raw realities of wealth and prestige.

Undoubtedly, the concept of an alternate subjectivity, as well as the role of a certain kind of speech in its development and effective realization, could be more fully elaborated and would have to be explained in greater detail if I were here trying to make of these ideas something beyond an open question or a line of inquiry.[20] In many ways, what I am calling an alternate subjectivity is simply a version of Hegel's well-known master-slave dialectic. Specifically, it is a name for the split consciousness of the slave, which recognizes the dominant reality that the master represents and simultaneously nurtures within itself the awareness of another possible truth—namely, the slave as someone who is not only or inherently a slave. The important difference between what I am calling here an alternate subjectivity and Hegel's description of the master-slave dialectic is my evaluation of the slave's split consciousness as a promising paradigm for the purpose of enacting social change—and this precisely as a function of its bicameral nature.

In other words, to make of the slave's split consciousness merely the evolutionary advantage that, in the course of time, permits the slave to become the next master, the bourgeoisie to replace the feudal aristocracy, the socialist state cum dictatorship of the proletariat to take over the reigning capitalist state, hardly changes anything at all. The underlying social

imaginary remains essentially the same, however much it obviously makes a difference to the one who was a slave "in the flesh" not to continue in that subject position any longer. An alternate subjectivity, however, is specifically that "bicameral" capability which, in Hegel's description of the slave's split consciousness, provides the leverage required for the learning process to take place whereby one might imagine a different arrangement of the existing world. The condition of the possibility of this change is the formation of an alter ego able to enact an informed discrepancy with the prevailing order, even as it cannot yet fully know exactly where the "abnormal" deviation will take it. Nonetheless, the first step is to contest that construal of reality which does not recognize anything but itself.

Once again, there is undoubtedly much more to be said. Nonetheless, it is not necessary to know everything ahead of time that the concept of an alternate subjectivity and its bicameral capability might entail—at least not if one claims, as I am doing in this book, that a borderline exegesis is practically one way to discover some of the specific contours and colors of such an extramural reality. Thus, without further ado, we now turn to the Epistle of James in order to read the signs posted there in that direction.

Literary Structure of the Epistle of James

I assume in what follows a specific view of the literary structure of the Epistle of James. Such a view is, of course, hardly self-evident, if only because not a few biblical scholars over the centuries have thought that the letter actually has no literary structure at all. The Epistle of James, as they see it, is only a loose assortment of different sayings.[21] But, again, this is not my own perspective, nor does it represent the point of view of most recent scholarship.[22] In fact, it has become increasingly common for scholars to propose that the opening chapter (or most of the first chapter) of the Epistle of James functions as a kind of introduction, or table of contents with initial summary or epitome, vis-à-vis the rest of the writing. What follows in the Epistle of James then revisits, more or less in the same order, each of the aforementioned themes in the initial section.[23] Thus, for example, Luke Timothy Johnson claims the following correspondences.[24]

1:1	5:19–20
1:2–4 and 1:12	5:7–11
1:5–7	5:13–18

1:9–10	2:1–7 and 4:13–5:6
1:12–18	3:13–4:10
1:19–20	3:1–12
1:22–27	2:14–26

Nonetheless, Johnson claims not to want to force the Epistle of James "into a structural procrustean bed that predetermines every reading."[25] On this pretext, he therefore swiftly abandons all further analysis of the kind. In my opinion, however, more can and should be said about the literary structure of the letter as a whole.[26]

Noteworthy, for example, in my opinion, is not only the fact that the indicated themes are discussed more than once in the body of the Epistle of James but also that this repetition seems to occur in a roughly reciprocal manner. These different blocks of material, which Johnson prefers to describe as discrete "essays," are basically arranged concentrically, especially in 2:1–5:6.[27] Whether this is an extension of the use of the ancient rhetorical technique of *inclusio* in the Epistle of James makes no difference to my argument here.[28]

The following divisions represent the basic literary structure of the letter.[29]

1:1–27			Introduction
2:1–26			Regarding the wealthy (I)
	3:1–12		About speech (I)
		3:13–4:10	Divine wisdom and friendship with God[30]
	4:11–17		About speech (II)
5:1–6			Regarding the wealthy (II)
5:7–20			Conclusion

Again, I would not argue that this concentric arrangement of materials in the Epistle of James is especially tight or thoroughgoing. Each of the indicated blocks of materials (with the possible exception of the introduction in 1:1–27) develops with relative independence a more or less self-contained discussion of its topic. None of these discussions, moreover, is rigorously logical in its development. Thus I do not think that the Epistle of James is finely woven rhetorically.[31] The weave is decidedly coarse, in fact, and the rhetorical pattern swiftly dissolves if and when one looks too closely at the discursive tapestry. Nonetheless, the coarse arrangement is there.[32]

At the same time, it is very important, in my opinion, not to lose sight of the basic literary structure of the letter as a whole when interpreting an individual section. The underlying social situation of the Epistle of James thus remains in view, to which all parts of the letter register a response and from which the alternate subjectivity described in Jas 3:1–4:17 specifically marks an exit. The concrete problem for whose solution good speech and divine wisdom are deemed to be crucial was, again, the privileged status of the wealthy with its correlative discrimination against the poor. Good speech and divine wisdom are under discussion at the heart of the Epistle of James not only because these issues were standard topics in antiquity, but also and principally because their neglect and mismanagement by those to whom the letter is directed were thought by the writer to catalyze such an unjust arrangement.

At the same time, the basic literary structure of the letter makes it clear that the asceticism of the Epistle of James is first focused on training the tongue. In other words, a wager is made here that by training the tongue one would create a first ring or hedge around the new mode of human being that the early Christian community was supposed to display. Those who have received wisdom from above, who are friends of God and are no longer supposed to be "two-souled" citizens of the encompassing world, who find themselves on the path to perfection or maturity and therefore should know what is wrong with the usual valuations of wealth and poverty, both demonstrate and develop this alternate subjectivity, first, by speaking differently.

For the Epistle of James, the larger realignment of the social (cosmic) order in the direction of a more divine life thus begins with a certain regional speech therapy. This is why faith without works is dead: it cannot exist apart from proper expression. Thus, for example, when a brother or sister is naked and bereft of daily nourishment, the problem of dead faith is made evident first through the practice of improper speech—namely, whenever "someone of you says to them, 'Depart in peace, be warm and fully fed'" (2:15–16). What makes this utterance an instance of improper speech is ultimately the failure to give them what they need. But even before this occurs, the utterance itself—what was actually said with obvious cynicism in the light of the following inaction—is equally part of the problem.

Indeed, this kind of speech for the Epistle of James is a sign of an enduring split between reality and appearance in the social construction of early Christian subjectivity. For this reason, the letter states emphatically at the

end of its prologue, "If anyone appears to be pious [*thrêskos*] without reining in his tongue but letting his heart wander, the piety [*thrêskeia*] of this man is useless [*mataios*]" (1:26).

The Tongue and Friendship with God: James 3:1–4:17

That the Epistle of James is concerned about proper speech and sees in the tongue an instrument of social power with great potential for causing harm hardly distinguishes the letter from any number of other writings in the ancient Mediterranean world, including the scriptures of Israel.[33] In every instance, speech sensitivity was high. People believed that words must be treated carefully, if only in order to be able to wield them more effectively as weapons of woe. Eloquence, including self-control in speech, was considered a sine qua non for the well-bred, powerful man. At the same time, boasting or the ability to declaim one's own accomplishments was not only a right and something to which such a person was entitled but also an imperative in order to render socially effective whatever one purported to be or to be able to do.

In Jas 3:1–12, immediately after the well-known discussion of the necessary relationship between faith and deeds in 2:14–26, the Epistle of James directs attention to the issue of proper speech or appropriate use of the tongue, taking as a point of departure the unenviable task of instruction.[34] The main problem is the tongue's essential unruliness. Though just a little thing, the tongue nonetheless "boasts greatly" (3:5a).

Johnson contends that "James does not denounce such boasting [in 3:5a] for, in fact, the tongue's claims are correct."[35] But exactly the opposite is true. Unlike the horse and the boat, which receive a conventional discussion in 3:3–4,[36] the tongue's *megala* as described in 3:5a immediately overwhelm the tongue—which is to say the person to whom the tongue belongs—and swiftly create a situation beyond anyone's control. For this reason, the Epistle of James warns the reader not to become a teacher, or a designated speech professional (3:1), for the choice of this occupation almost certainly will entail failure, for which one nonetheless will be held responsible (3:2).

This scenario, if I may use a more recent example, was and may still be all too familiar to bus drivers in Peru. Not only were the roads routinely rough and often perilous due to banditry by thieves, paramilitary groups, the police, and other insurrectionary forces, but the passengers were

frequently discontented and demanding. The hours were long, and the pay irregular and poor. In addition, the bus itself was often undependable, not least of all when it had to respond in an emergency. The tongue, says the Epistle of James, is like the steering wheel of such a bus. Once the thing starts rolling, although initially it may seem to be under the driver's direction, it soon becomes clear that no one actually has anything under control. Therefore, says the letter, "Do not become many of you teachers [or bus drivers of the word], my brothers [and sisters], knowing that we [who drive the instructional vehicle] shall receive a severer verdict. For we all [end up] go[ing] off the road many times [or in many ways]" (3:1–2; translation mine, with vehicular modifications). Theoretically, a perfect driver could be imagined.[37] Indeed, one reason why traffic accidents frequently occur is that a given driver has imagined (typically) himself to be that perfect driver. In other words, even if it were possible that someone might learn to speak without error and thus be able "to rein in the whole body" (3:2), the first mistake is already made—implicitly, ironically, or metaphorically, but culpably in any case—as soon as the tongue starts to "boast greatly" (3:5a; *megala auchei*). At this point, the putatively perfect man has already stumbled into improper speech, doing precisely what conditionally was held in suspense in 3:3 (*ei tis en logo ou ptaiei*).

In Jas 3:5b–12, the tongue's congenitally unruly nature is underscored. When it comes to the tongue, according to the Epistle of James, one is literally playing with fire—we might now say with a nuclear reaction or with a viral infection—and therefore only stands to get burned.[38] A key statement in this regard occurs in 3:6—and not merely because this verse makes clear how thoroughly unmanageable the tongue ultimately is. A certain logical confusion or excess in expression also becomes apparent. Earlier, in 3:3–5a, the tongue was compared to a horse's bit and to a ship's rudder and thus could still be imagined, though small in size, as properly able to steer the body. In 3:5b–6, however, the tongue suddenly becomes impossible to hold fast, let alone to control, since it is now said to be as ungovernable as fire and thus equivalent to the world of iniquity ignited by Gehenna—even as the tongue's continuing ability to stain the whole body and to inflame the wheel or cycle of existence recalls its strategic influence in the earlier description.

Even more significant than this inability to control the tongue, however, is the way in which the statement in Jas 3:6 anticipates the cosmological division drawn in 3:15 between the wisdom "from above" and that which is "earthly, psychic, daemonic," as well as the language in 4:1–3 regarding

the war of desire under way "in your members."[39] It is precisely because of the tongue's wayward and virulent propensities that it then becomes the site in the Epistle of James where the competing social identities or social projects described in 3:13–4:10 are deemed to be concretely negotiated.[40] In fact, the letter insists that some ingrained habits of speech simply must be changed—for example, how "with [the tongue] we bless the lord and father, and with [the same tongue] we curse humans who have been made in God's likeness; out of the same mouth comes forth blessing and curse" (3:9–10). This is a sterling example of what it means to be "two-souled" (*dipsychos*; see 1:8 and 4:8). The letter's polemic against this fundamental flaw underscores that the contrast drawn between the wisdom from above and that which is "earthly, psychic, daemonic" does not imply any sort of cosmological or ontological dualism but, rather, competing possibilities for a given social identity.

If such speech practices are not changed, the construction of a socially distinctive group such as the one that the Epistle of James envisages for its early Christian readership will be doomed to failure: "For where there is jealousy [*zêlos*] and self-serving ambition [*eritheia*], there is upheaval [*akatastasia*] and every awful action [*phaulon pragma*]" (3:16). The various "wars" and "fights," dissatisfaction, "murder," and other strife that currently exist "among you" do so, according to the Epistle of James, because "you do not ask" properly, which is to say because "you ask badly" (4:2d–3). This inability to ask well is, then, what provides "your desires" (4:1, 3) with the battleground they need in order to impose their reign of discontent and discord.

The struggle for good speech in Jas 3:1–12 thus becomes a front line in the struggle against habitual social discrimination in 2:1–13 and against inactive faith in 2:14–26. The preceding problems of improper partiality and of words without deeds are immediately addressed by considering the intransigent tongue. One reason for this emphasis is the fact that habitual social discrimination and pious complacency are always (though not uniquely) expressed in duplicitous speech, which renders these practices both effective and diffuse (see, further, 2:3, 7, 12, 14–16, 18). By correcting such speech, the Epistle of James hopes to articulate an alternate social subjectivity. While the letter is obviously more concerned with "orthopraxis" than with "orthodoxy," which is to say the kind of "hygienic" teaching that so preoccupies the pastoral epistles, the orthopraxis of the letter nonetheless includes and actually focuses on learning how to speak properly.

For all these reasons, therefore, it seems to me to be impossible to state as Johnson does that "James does not denounce such boasting" as the

tongue is said to perform in Jas 3:5a.[41] In fact, it is the penchant of the tongue to boast that lies precisely at the heart of all that is wrong with the usual order of things, according to the Epistle of James, since, once again, boasting in the ancient Mediterranean world was exactly how one normally would mark and defend and, whenever possible, try to elevate one's own social status. Thus, for example, in 4:7–10, as the clearest sign of opposition to such a friendship with "the world," the reader is advised to "submit to God." This exhortation is reiterated through a series of additional imperatives: "oppose the devil . . . draw near to God . . . cleanse [your] hands . . . lament . . . humble yourselves before [the] Lord." If the imperatives are read independently of the initial exhortation to "submit to God," such statements—especially those in 4:9—become expressions of the worst sort of pious self-denial. None of them, however, ultimately means anything other than "submit to God," which, in turn, basically means "be[come] friends [and not enemies] of God" (4:4).[42] Being a friend of God implies thinking and acting in accordance with the divine wisdom "from above," whose salient features were already noted in 3:17.[43] In fact, a certain *inclusio* is created by the discussion of submission to God in 4:7–10 and the description in 3:13–18 of the person who is truly "wise and understanding among you."[44] At stake in the central section of the Epistle of James is thus the alternate social subjectivity of its (implied/ideal) audience.

Before going on to examine in greater detail the central section of the Epistle of James (3:13–4:10), it is worth noting that subsequently, in 4:11–12, 13–17, the first practical sign or consequence of submission to God is said to be, once more, a change in mode of speech. Exemplifying how the social identity outlined in 3:13–4:10 would be embodied and activated, the letter returns immediately in 4:11–17 to the question of how to speak, picking up where it left off in 3:1–12. Submission to God means here, first, ceasing to incriminate, denounce, or otherwise "talk down" (*katalaleîn*) other members of the early Christian community, since "talking down" is but the flipside of the usual boasting in favor of one's own social status—something that was already critiqued (see, further, 2:13; 3:14). Second, submission to God means refusing to speak as though one were the author of one's own destiny and therefore able to determine the future, but, rather, always recalling the maxim "if the Lord wills" (4:15)—the ancient commonplace subsequently known as the *conditio Jacobaea;* it is evidently understood by the Epistle of James to be a peculiar expression of early Christian identity.[45]

The connection between the two sets of statements in Jas 4:11–12 and 4:13–17 has often not been recognized, even though no strong link has been

proposed to bind the two verses in 4:11–12 with the preceding text in 4:7–10[46] or to explain the occurrence of the putatively separate statements in 4:11–12 and 4:13–17 here in the letter (since the two verses in 4:11–12 could just as easily have come after what is said in 1:26–27 or 2:12–13 or 3:1–12).[47] The fact that the utterances in both 4:13–17 and 5:1–6 discuss aspects of the ancient economy, or the wealthy, is, apparently, the main reason why most scholars have assumed that 4:13–17 and 5:1–6 constitute a single literary unit into which (rationale) the statements in 4:11–12 plainly do not fit.[48]

Yet, as Christoph Burchard writes, "why he [James] here [in 4:13–17] refers to what his audience says or thinks and what they plan to do, and not what they have done, differently than in 5:1–6, is hardly ever asked."[49] Even so, Burchard himself appears to accept the reigning consensus. Interrogatively, he first poses a long list of possible explanations for the sequence of texts in question, but apparently he does not find any of these to be compelling, since he is finally willing to leave the matter unresolved. Nonetheless, in exegetical practice Burchard describes implicitly the principal interest of the text in 4:13–17 to be precisely one of speech. Thus the line of reasoning that begins in 4:13 with the phrase "now, then, you who say" (*age nyn hoi legontes*) is extended in 4:14 through the initial use of the relative pronoun. In Burchard's own words, "The antecedent of [*hoitines*] . . . is [*hoi legontes*] in v. 13, not the first-person plural subjects of the verbs in their statements."[50] In 4:15, which begins with the phrase "instead of saying" (*anti tou legein hymas*), the ensuing statement "names the correct alternative to v. 13."[51] Finally, in 4:16, which similarly starts by referring to a mode of speech—namely, "but now you boast" (*nyn de kauchasthe*)—"James either makes an additional accusation or he thereby qualifies retroactively what was said in v. 13—likely the latter, since there is no other point of connection."[52]

In other words, what joins the various statements made in Jas 4:13–17 together as a literary unit and, then, this unit together with the other pronouncements in 4:11–12 is precisely the problem of appropriate speech. To be sure, the example in 4:13 of ancient entrepreneurs developing business plans also anticipates the warning to the wealthy in 5:1–6 (which, in turn, recalls the discussion of improper partiality in 2:1–13, 15–16, as well as the contrast between poor and rich in 1:9–11).[53] Nonetheless, habits of speech remain the focus of attention in 4:13–17, since the businessmen under review here do precisely what the tongue was said to do in 3:5a: namely, they "boast greatly." Thus the argument in 3:1–12 is resumed, though now with a specific set of social actors in view.

What is wrong with the entrepreneurial speech cited in Jas 4:13–17 is its presumption that the future will be business as usual: "Today or tomorrow we shall go to such and such a city, and we shall work there a year, and we shall conduct our business, and we shall make a profit" (4:13). The economic arrogance of such people is revealed for the Epistle of James most patently in their short-sighted or myopic speech. They speak as though one could know "what sort of life you will have tomorrow" (4:14; cf. Luke 12:16–21). In response, the letter flatly states, "You are mist, visible for a time, then out of sight" (4:14).

Like the fog of boasting, such a presumption is unsustainable. According to the Epistle of James, it will not endure the penetrating examination of a divine wisdom, which, like the rays of the sun, "comes down from above" to burn away all "mist."[54] The reference in 4:11 to denouncing and judging a brother also recalls the exhortation in 3:1 that not many should become teachers, since "we" who do teach shall receive a sharper judgment.[55] This is, of course, not the usual perception by those who control the word—or by those who do not control it—both in the classroom and elsewhere in (ancient) society. Therefore the letter insists, "[Only] one [God] is lawgiver and judge, the one who is able to save and to destroy" (4:12; cf. Matt 23:8–10). The point is simply that no one should presume, on whatever basis, to be in a position or entitled to pronounce judgment on a "brother" or on a "neighbor."[56]

In Jas 3:13, the claim that the person who is truly wise and understanding will demonstrate this status through "good behavior" marked by "gentle wisdom" recalls the discussion in 2:14–26 that faith requires deeds in order to be known (see 2:18). The same verse (3:13) also extends the discussion of the tongue in 3:1–12.[57] In both cases, a higher wisdom is expressed not through the exercise of an impressive (imposing) or facile (contentious) speech, but through a different kind of social demeanor (3:17–18). According to the Epistle of James, it is not always by having the right answer or by stating things better than anyone else that one's own superior knowledge will finally be demonstrated. Rather, this is shown by behaving in such a way that others also get a chance to come to speech and thereby find a place among the friends of God. This is what it means to say that "the wisdom from above is first holy, then peaceable, gentle, able to be persuaded, full of mercy and good fruits, without prejudice, honest and sincere" (3:17).

Such qualities are contrasted in Jas 4:1–6 with another kind of situation that appears to have been prevalent or at least all too present in the early

Christian group(s) to which the Epistle of James originally was addressed. Here it was not peace and gentleness and the other habits of wisdom "from above" but rather "wars" and "fights" and other conflicts typical of daily life in "the world" that apparently defined the usual state of affairs. At the root of these problems is said to be unfocused or ineffective desire: "Do [these conflicts] not derive from your desires [*hêdonôn*] at war in your members? You desire [*epithymeite*], but you do not get" (4:1b–2a). Once again, the most telling symptom as well as the instrumental cause of this condition is said to be a speech problem: "You do not get [what you desire], because you do not ask. [Or, rather:] You ask and you do not receive, wherefore [*dioti*] you ask badly, in order that you might be profligate [*dapanêsête*] in your desires [*hêdonais*]" (4:2d–3).

The problem is not that one needs or wants something but, rather, how these desires are satisfied. The issue is precisely not one's motive.[58] Instead, at stake is the manner in which the inchoate and divergent impulses of "the desires . . . in your members" (4:1), like the fire that is the tongue (3:5), find expression and solution. For this reason, "asking badly" means, effectively, choosing to remain "profligate in your desires" (4:3) and thus still a friend of "the world" (4:4).

Hermeneutical Aside

One of the latent dangers in the practice of any kind of exegesis, including a borderline exegesis, is the possibility of an eventually inextricable entanglement with the text that is being read. By this point in the chapter, the reader might think that I have once again regressed to the usual sort of Christian-speak, in which a critical facade functions mainly to mask the reiteration of a traditional discourse. This could always be true, of course, even though it is not my own sense of the analytical work done thus far in the chapter. Nonetheless, I am aware that the language through which the Epistle of James develops an alternate subjectivity according to my reading of the text nonetheless tends—through the work of exegetical elaboration—to become less and less discrepant with familiar forms of understanding. Or is it rather that this alternate subjectivity, whenever the effort is made to articulate it as fully as possible, thereby becomes once again increasingly embedded within the dominant discourses that otherwise govern the labor of utterance? And is it, perhaps, the case that one can—and must—clarify this question only

through a hermeneutical aside, by stepping laterally, as it were, outside the exegetical frame into some kind of epexegetical metastasis?

Such a problem in the Epistle of James ultimately revolves, I think, around its description of an alternate subjectivity as the work of a "wisdom from above," versus the normal or more conventional subjectivity that would belong to an "earthly, psychical, daemonic" wisdom (3:15). This lower wisdom is then supposed to register a friendship with "the world." A concrete implication of that friendship was denounced in the second chapter of the Epistle of James, where the letter criticizes a standard social practice in Mediterranean antiquity, which was honoring the rich man who wears fine clothing and a gold ring on his finger when he enters into the assembly of the addressees, while disparaging the poor man in rags (2:2–3). In opposing this conventional behavior, the Epistle of James appears to challenge the customary hierarchy of social values by inverting it. Again, the reason for such an inversion is supposed to be in order to enact that "wisdom from above" that bespeaks a friendship with God and that therefore does (or is urged to do) what God did when God "chose the worldly poor to be rich in faith and inheritors of the kingdom that he promised to those who love him" (2:5). The early Christian reader is also told twice in the Epistle of James (1:8; 4:8) not to be "two-souled" (*dipsychos*) either in this or in any other regard. Instead, one should be wholly given over to the divine possibility (see, for example, 1:5–8; 4:7–8). For this reason, faith without works is effectively no faith at all, or "dead" (2:17).

The problem at this point is twofold. First, there is a striking contradiction between, on the one hand, the proposed inversion in the usual hierarchy of social values and the social behavior that embodies these with respect to the rich and the poor in Jas 2:1–13 and 5:1–6, and, on the other hand, the same letter's reiteration of a thoroughly conventional cosmological hierarchy regarding what is good and desirable in its subsequent rationale for this inversion (see 3:13–4:10). The contradiction resides specifically in the fact that the earthly hierarchy of rich and poor is said to be undone by reinstating its heavenly counterpart. The latter has God and the best wisdom positioned "above" and "coming down" like the rich man, while the daemonic and lesser wisdom would be "below" in the same position as the poor man underfoot. Through friendship with God and a higher mode of understanding, one undertakes to rearrange "the world" as the lower order of reality, including how the rich and poor are to be treated. Nonetheless, in the upper echelons of reality, things continue to be exactly as they always

have been (imagined to be). No wonder, therefore, that yet again: *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*.

Second, insofar as the Epistle of James actually urges the reader to learn another kind of wisdom, to cultivate another form of friendship, to practice an alternate subjectivity by training the tongue to speak a different kind of truth, the letter necessarily promotes a "two-souled" existence as the "middle passage" from an imperfect or immature life to one that is the opposite. The letter does this, however, in violation of its own hortatory discourse. For, as already noted, the reader is explicitly warned on two separate occasions not to be "two-souled" (*dipsychos*). By implication, one should try to have only one soul—in other words, to be singularly *psychikos*. But, in this case, the lesser "earthly" wisdom that one should forsake is said to be precisely that by nature: namely, *psychikê*.

In fact, there can be no movement toward the indicated state of perfection, maturity, or full friendship with God without first entering into the prohibited zone of a "two-souled" existence, since there is no indication in the Epistle of James that the desired shift in subjectivity could take place via the instantaneous translation of the cooperating reader from one condition to the other. Nonetheless, the letter ultimately has no better language for this process of transition than its description of the ongoing tussle with the tongue. But is that not precisely what the present hermeneutical aside, as well as the concern for greater conceptual clarity to which it would respond, also are?

Conclusion

The ideological opposition drawn in the Epistle of James between friendship with the "world" and friendship with "God" (4:4), or between wisdom that is "earthly, psychic, daemonic" and wisdom "from above" (3:15), is not meant to encourage any sort of otherworldly existence. Instead this dualistic language functions to demarcate two contrasting ways of inhabiting a shared reality: namely, two distinct forms of subjectivity.[59] The persons who identify themselves with God and the wisdom from above refuse to admit or to accept as a simple matter of fact the prevailing configuration of "reality." Those who embody this alternate subjectivity do not merely seek a situation, moreover, in which this or that would be more widely or more readily available, although the need to receive enough of some things, such as food and clothing, is obvious and hardly opposed. This is so, however,

because such a solution to the social problems of economic imbalance and discrimination, which responds to the demands of human desire basically by putting more and more of whatever is desired into its maw, only fuels the flames of a perpetual dissatisfaction, at least in the eyes of the Epistle of James.

By not addressing the root cause of the problem, which is the unfocused nature of "the desires at war in your members" (4:1), the plight of the beleaguered inevitably worsens. The band-aid solution of adding only more and more is said in 3:14–16 to produce what an "earthly, psychic, daemonic" wisdom fosters: namely, bitter jealousy, self-serving ambition, upheaval, and every kind of awful action. To become permanently mired in such programmatic discontent is what it ultimately means to be "a friend of the world." The lasting or sustainable satisfaction of human desire must partake of another kind of wisdom. It must pursue another friendship, which is to say an alternate social subjectivity. For the Epistle of James, the creation of such a self is the specific work and raison d'être of early Christian association.

Johnson has claimed that envy is the root problem under discussion in Jas 3:13–4:10.[60] My treatment of this passage as basically a question of mismanaged desire essentially agrees with Johnson's interpretation, although Johnson does not discuss the solution that the Epistle of James proposes to the problem of envy (except for the "two major exceptions" to its otherwise conventional treatment of the ancient *topos*).[61] Broadly speaking, the alternate subjectivity that the early Christian community should promote and embody would be created, following the imperatives in 4:7–10, through submission to God. A primary expression of this submission is learning how to speak—ask—properly. Asking properly does not mean, however, to do so subserviently or even politely, as though this were the self-evident meaning of the adverb. Nonetheless, we are not told anything else about its concrete meaning in 4:2d–3 beyond the statement that those to whom the letter is addressed have been asking "badly" (*kakôs*).

In Jas 4:6, however, citing Prov 3:34 (LXX), it is said that "God opposes the arrogant but gives [his] favour [benefaction] to the humble [*tapeinois*]." This is then elaborated in 4:7–10 as a matter of submission to God, issuing finally in the imperative to "humble yourselves [*tapeinôthête*] before the Lord and he will raise you up." In contrast to the presumptuous speech of arrogant entrepreneurs as described in 4:11–12, 13–17, who simply imagine that the future will be business as usual, the "humble" are told that they will get what they desire because they have learned to ask rightly for

satisfaction. How, then, properly to ask—or pray—is discussed in 5:13–18 (cf. 1:5–8), although it should be noted that in 4:2d–3 asking properly is not necessarily or exclusively a matter of prayer to God.

It may surprise some readers that the Epistle of James in the letter's central section (3:1–4:17) would give such importance to an ongoing tussle with the tongue. Proper speech may seem to many of us to be an unlikely front line in the struggle against the prevailing unjust practices of this world, among which James especially denounces, again, the showing of partiality to the rich and discrimination against the poor (2:1–13) as well as the practice of speaking piously but acting cynically (2:14–26). Why pay so much attention to the tongue? The letter obviously supports the struggle of the poor for social recognition and opposes any understanding of Christian faith that would exclude or demote such concerns, which belong to all human life with a body (see, for example, 2:15–16). The Epistle of James, moreover, plainly assumes that some sort of structural adjustment or systemic change is fostered by the kind of instruction it provides. This is the significance of the cosmological language used, for example, in 3:15, 17, and 4:4, at the very heart of the writing. The same letter, however, also implies—and, indeed, it insists—in the repeated grappling with the problem of how properly to speak that the formation of an alternate social subjectivity is also crucial to the concrete realization of lasting social change. To neglect or undervalue this component of social world revision inevitably erodes and ultimately threatens to annul other efforts at comprehensive "revolutionary" transformation.[62]

In other words, a living faith necessarily includes the mundane details of daily life.[63] For this reason, the Epistle of James (3:1–4:17) takes as seriously as it does that little thing that is the tongue. Indeed, as if to extend this line of reasoning yet another step, the Alexandrian poet C. P. Cavafy once wrote that even if it were not possible to speak about the forbidden love one might yet harbor for another form of existence—its hair, lips, eyes—one still could keep its face, its voice, its season "within my heart . . . within my mind . . . in my dreams," and thus begin (again) to enact what otherwise endures as a distant and distinct reality, giving "shape and color" to "whatever then I touch, whatever thought I utter."[64]

4

INTERRUPTING HOPE

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

What does one do when the effort to live otherwise, as someone else, in a world that is not working well for most of us (and ultimately not well for any of us) finds itself fully foiled and flummoxed? When the world as it is, as we have known it, relentlessly continues to unfold as ever, insisting with growing vehemence on total conformity to the current order of things, with "zero tolerance" for all exceptions to this rule? What does one do when the insistence is imposed globally, multiculturally, willy-nilly, sometimes through economic sanction, sometimes through military force, by rule of law, in the name of national security, for the sake of business as usual, under the aegis of human reason, that is, human rights? What does one do when hope itself seems to be threatened with extinction, as though all further resistance—as the Klingons on *Star Trek* used to say—now were futile? Or, as Donald Hall has put it in a cheeky little poem that bristles with justified anger, it is as though democracy at last is brought to the fish to "liberate them / into fishfarms," where their final purpose shall be enacted upon maturity.[1]

For the Canadian literary critic Northrop Frye, the book of Revelation was the biblical text in which all the other writings of the Christian Bible finally "came together" in a concluding paroxysm of symbolic surcharge.[2] For less enthusiastic readers—often representing some version of mainline liberal Protestantism (as Frye)—the same work instead seems to be a site

of serious confusion. Always prone to excessive interpretation, the book of Revelation in their estimation might better be described as a loose cannon. At the same time, for other readers, the text represents a discourse of "die-hard" resistance to the reigning superpower of the day, which was the Roman Empire, and thus is still able to provide inspiration for similar strife today.[3] Yet another group of especially Anglophone and frequently Evangelical readers of the book of Revelation continue to consult the work as though it were a weather forecast for the future, using it to debate exactly where the world now stands in a cosmic countdown to the end of history.[4]

One might imagine that a borderline exegesis of the book of Revelation, whose meaning already has become overdetermined through this history of interpretation, would first attempt to "turn the volume down." Instead of rendering the dominant diversity of appropriations even more acute through the proposal of yet another framework for investigation, would not the road less traveled by (as Robert Frost once said) first entail abstaining from this flurry of divergence, seeking instead the center of the storm?[5] Under the aegis of a promising interruption, this is what I shall ultimately argue for the book of Revelation in this chapter.

Nonetheless, the first step will be to join the busy crowd of critics, expanding even further the number of possible frameworks for interpretation of the work. In this regard, the practice of borderline exegesis is akin to karate, which uses the opponent's force against itself by following it first wherever it wants to go. Again, I shall do this by proposing yet another framework for scholarly interpretation of the book of Revelation. My proposal will be to read the work not primarily as an instance of biblical—Second Temple Jewish—apocalyptic "literature," nor as a sort of symbolist "fantasy" (mass hysteria) or social-class "ideology" or divine "prophecy" of future events, but, rather, as a case of collective dream work.

The category of collective dream work encompasses a number of the same discursive elements that the other categories—apocalyptic literature, symbolist fantasy, social-class ideology, divine prophecy—also underscore, just as each of these must take up some of the same discursive elements that the others emphasize too. Nonetheless, each term, including "collective dream work," aims to shape the task of interpretation by pitching the discourse of the book of Revelation in a distinctive key. Thus it orients a reading of the work in a specific direction. The result is an interpretation inclined to develop some features of the text more than others. Regarding the category of collective dream work, I will shortly say a little more about its specific emphases below.

The borderline nature of dreams and also of their interpretation is obviously one of the reasons why I have chosen here the category of collective dream work as a basic framework for reading the book of Revelation. As so-called ordinary dreams are supposed to mark (or re-mark) the shifting interface between consciousness and the sub- or unconscious aspects of individual human beings (at least since the psychoanalytical theories and therapeutic practices affiliated with Sigmund Freud have become a sort of cultural common sense), so also the book of Revelation (with other comparable cases of the utopian imagination) can be understood to articulate the outer edge of a social experience that has been shaped by enduring dissatisfaction, organized suppression, fearful anxiety, and hopelessness—even as the same discourse simultaneously gives a certain voice to a still unvanquished desire to be and ongoing effort to exist.[6]

This stuttering desire with its fractious force discloses and rehearses those possibilities that yet remain unerased by the enforced oblivion of social normalcy, or the conventional constraints of so-called civilization. Against the false totality of such a world, which claims to be the proper order of things, such desire signals the lingering "discontents" of this world. The borderline of official speak that is the realm of the "wild" imagination, that twilight zone of irresponsible "daydreamers," thereby becomes the region of enduring hope.

As such a dream work, the principal aim of the book of Revelation is basically to project a future for the unlost lust to flourish despite every indication to the contrary, even as a history of trauma is replayed here and, indeed, threatens to repeat itself in the form of ultimate vindication. Fundamentally at stake in the book of Revelation—or, at least, in this reading of the work—is therefore the question of the nature of hope itself. How, specifically, can that "thing with feathers / That perches in the soul," as Emily Dickinson once described it, finally become something more or other than the eternal recurrence of the repressor, whether this is deemed to take place immediately or eventually? And how does it happen concretely, especially under the most unpromising of circumstances?

In fact, this question can be stated even more pointedly. What does one do when hope as such appears to be thwarted? When, as Dickinson goes on, "the little Bird / That kept so many warm" now sits, despite the poet's claim, thoroughly abashed? When the effort to live otherwise—within a larger understanding of earthly, creaturely, bodily existence; in the direction of a different kind of political economy; as someone who no longer would be merely another servile subject of "this" world—runs headlong

into the decided opposition of business as usual with its deep and powerful investments?

The book of Revelation is a response to such a question. Through its collective dream work, the book of Revelation struggles to keep alive, in the belly of a desperate beast, some borderline of hope.[7] It is this emphasis on a borderline of hope as the focal point of analysis that ultimately distinguishes a borderline exegesis of the book of Revelation from other postcolonial interpretations of it, such as the one by Stephen D. Moore in *Empire and Apocalypse*.[8] I do not make this distinction, however, because I think that there is a significant conflict between the two modes of interpretation, even though each of them does entail a distinct strategic choice. (Or are these only tactical wagers? But are tactical wagers—and strategic choices—ever only just so?) Postcolonial interpretation as Moore describes and practices it, especially under the tutelage of Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, underscores the thoroughgoing ambivalence of the colonial "text" with a deep and mutual entanglement by both colonizer and colonized in the production of their otherwise quite different discourses. Both the colonizer and the colonized are thus equally complicit, albeit in obviously opposing ways, in the complex elaboration of colonial culture. The colonial condition and its discursive manifestations thus become a volatile mixture of direct imposition and savvy accommodation, of explicit resistance and implicit influence, of saying one thing and meaning another, of intending this and articulating that. For this reason, there is, in Moore's postcolonial interpretation of the book of Revelation, ultimately no escaping from or no obvious end to the imperial infection that inhabits the work's original author and audience so adversely, although there may be a continuing refusal to assent to the appropriateness of such an accommodation.[9] By contrast, a borderline exegesis of the book of Revelation is looking for a way out of this ailment that still plagues us, although it, too, must recognize the same ambiguities, duplicities, and compromising entanglements that a postcolonial interpretation underscores in the biblical text. This insistence on a "way out"—however enclosed and slippery the discursive terrain to be traversed may be—derives from the utopian imaginary governing a borderline exegesis.

It would likely be an error simply to ascribe to postcolonial interpretation a decided rejection of the utopian imagination. Nonetheless, postcolonial interpretation in exegetical practice displays a clear reluctance, if you will, to get ahead of the historical process to date. This is, of course, entirely to its scientific credit. But it also betrays a less than desperate social situation insofar as such epistemological modesty articulates the ability of

its practitioners to wait still a little longer for the resolution of those stark antagonisms responsible for colonial culture's constitutive ambivalence. In other words, they are able to postpone the concrete need to act now in favor of "a next step" that might get us "out of here" as soon as possible.

This is, of course, precisely not the prerogative of those who find themselves standing at the end of the road called hope. And it is precisely this situation that I am proposing that the book of Revelation addresses or, more precisely, that a borderline exegesis of the book of Revelation seeks to develop. For this reason, I will press whatever the present chapter may share with a postcolonial reading of the book of Revelation beyond the evidently multivalent truth of the work toward a hopefully less indeterminate destiny, however fragile and occasional and even inchoate that other possible world yet must appear, for the sake of its prompt arrival.[10]

Collective Dream Work

Yo siento a Dios de otro modo.
— José María Arguedas, *Todas las sangres*

What does it mean, exactly, to speak of the book of Revelation as collective dream work? This is a question I obviously cannot presume to answer fully here since even to define what a so-called ordinary dream is and how its fleeting phenomena should be understood is a topic to which more than one book has been wholly dedicated.[11] In fact, as with the categories of time and space—of which Augustine, regarding time, wrote in Book 11 of his *Confessions* that "I know what it is until I have to explain it"—so also do we already know more or less what a dream is, at least until required to state that understanding explicitly. In this chapter, I shall therefore use the term "collective dream work" with a certain deliberate vagueness (just as I used the notion of "asceticism" in chapter 3). The primary purpose of its use here is to sponsor a certain line of inquiry; thus it makes no claim to taxonomic definition. Instead, the aim is precisely the opposite: namely, to open up a different conceptual field within which to see a particular phenomenon anew. In this case, the phenomenon is the book of Revelation—and with it, the work of hope. The distinct framework will be as oneiric knowledge.[12]

This reading of the book of Revelation as collective dream work was first suggested by a chapter in the award-winning book *Buscando un inca: Identidad y utopia en los Andes,* by the Peruvian Marxist social historian Alberto

Flores Galindo.[13] In that essay, Flores Galindo analyzes the case of one otherwise unknown Gabriel Aguilar (not unlike the otherwise unknown early Christian seer "John" on the island of Patmos), who, according to the court records related to his eventual trial for sedition, was born in the provincial town of Huánuco and eventually hanged by Spanish colonial authorities on 5 December 1805 in the regional capital of Cuzco. There Aguilar was said to have tried "to organize a conspiracy to attack the military post, to take possession of the city, and to initiate a process that would culminate in the expulsion of the Spanish" from the viceroyalty of Peru.[14] The events in question all took place on the eve of the so-called War of Independence, which led to the establishment of the modern Republic of Peru. Flores Galindo states that the case of Aguilar interests him because it provides the historian with an opportunity "to understand a period in its subjective dimension, through the inner world or the peculiar manner in which an event is experienced by its protagonists."[15] In other words, the dreams of Aguilar offer access to the unstable social substructure of "prerevolutionary" Peru, including the inner world of popular resistance to the Spanish crown with its vague projections of another order to come.

The same holds true, in my opinion, for the book of Revelation. In any case, this is what I would argue that it means to describe the literary genre of the book of Revelation as (mainly) an apocalypse. Just as the court records of the visions of Aguilar unveil the inner world or subjective side of fledgling political struggle against the Spanish crown in colonial Peru at the beginning of the nineteenth century, so do the different ancient writings that biblical scholars call an "apocalypse" display a similar sort of collective dream work. This assumes, of course, that such texts are not merely "literature," or that "literature" is not merely writing, and therefore that an ancient "apocalypse" originally was written not simply to rehearse a specific set of literary genre conventions or even primarily to be a text—as though somehow the author of an apocalypse, in choosing to compose such a work, aimed principally to express himself or herself, doing so through a kind of surrealistic free verse instead of, say, in sonnet form or simple prose. I assume that the literary style of an apocalypse—even as such a work, like every other form of writing, obviously includes or implies a certain cultural tradition—is a function of the social situation in which the text first came to be. In other words, no one writes "just to write," and no form of writing is simply "literature."

Most scholars now appear to agree that, in Mediterranean antiquity, the social situation that typically gave rise to apocalyptic writing was one of

perceived crisis or a similar distress.[16] The author of an apocalypse usually wrote in the grip of some sense of peril, under significant pressure, being socially repressed, oppressed, persecuted, or perhaps "only" harried to the point of exhaustion, becoming weary through the day-to-day burden of satisfying the imperial master, regional power, or local big man.[17] For this reason, I suggest that, in the case of the book of Revelation, we will learn more about the political *imaginaire* that its diverse phantasmagoria represent if we begin our analysis with the question of its "underside" of hope.[18] This is the "shadow side" of the text, where the sometimes frantic or inchoate, but always insistent, struggle for a better life drives the discourse.[19]

And for the same reason, there will be no need to be surprised or distracted by the fact that the book of Revelation is hardly a homogeneous literary text.[20] As collective dream work, the mixing of materials in the work would almost be predictable. Precisely because the impulse that first gave rise to the writing was not an ideal truth but, rather, some "wild" desire no longer to be a subservient cog in an imperial machine—because the apocalypse registers an endangered effort to dissent by resisting integration into an alien rule—the resulting script of another possible world in the book of Revelation manifests, inter alia, the same sort of bricolage—or, if you will, hybridity—that often characterizes the subaltern struggle to persevere.[21] Creative use has been made of whatever materials were at hand.

Literary Structure of the Book of Revelation

The bricolage of the book of Revelation at the level of literary genre does not mean that the work has no literary structure, although it does mean that this structure is unlikely to be as finely articulated or rigidly maintained as a "purely literary" work often is. Nonetheless, most scholars, I think, would agree with the following basic divisions.[22]

A. Beginnings		
1. Prologue	1:1–20	John
2. Seven letters	2:1–3:22	The seven churches
3. Celestial vision	4:1–11	God
B. Middles (conflictive)		
4. Seven seals	5:1–8:1	
5. Seven trumpets	8:2–14:20	
6. Seven bowls	15:1–19:10	

C. Endings		
7. Triumph and judgment	19:11–20:15	The Lamb
8. New earth	21:1–22:5	The New Jerusalem
9. Epilogue	22:6–21	The Reader

The three middle narratives are all defined by a series of seven. In the third of these (15:1–19:10) the emptying of the seventh bowl inaugurates a series of extraordinary events: an earthquake that is greater than any other in human memory (16:18), the disappearance of every island and mountain (16:20), and a plague of hail that falls from heaven as though it were raining "cannonballs" (16:21). In the midst of this tremendous upheaval, it is noted that "the great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell and God remembered great Babylon, to make her drain the cup of the fury of his wrath" (16:19). The fall of Babylon is then described in 17:1–19:10 in much greater detail. The narrative zone of the seventh bowl thus extends from 16:17 to 19:10.

Similarly, when the seventh trumpet sounds, the first thing that occurs is "loud voices in heaven," which announce that "the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever" (11:15). The twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before the divine presence praise the "Lord God Almighty" and give him thanks for finally having taken over the reins of universal government (11:16–18). The temple of God in heaven is then opened, the ark of his covenant is seen (*he kibôtos tês diathêkes autou*), and a series of other signs that refer to ongoing earthly struggle ensues. These signs continue until 14:20.[23]

The narrative of the seven bowls of God's wrath unfolds without pause or interruption; one bowl follows immediately upon another. This, however, is not the case for the narrative of the seven seals in 5:1–8:1, nor for the narrative of seven trumpets in 8:2–14:20. In both sequences, between the sixth and seventh seal and between the sixth and seventh trumpet, something else is interposed, which "interrupts" the narrative of ever-worsening disaster.[24] Just before things grind, or gallop, to a climax, the logic of doom is broken, and a different discourse emerges in the gap.

Here it is, I will suggest—in the penultimate gaps within the first two sevenfold narratives of doom—that the book of Revelation displays most clearly what I am calling its borderline of hope.[25] We shall therefore shortly return to retrace this dreamy zone of interruption and suspended anticipation. Before doing so, however, we must become mindful of the perilous

ambiguity that otherwise attends the rhetoric of resistance in the work as a whole. Much here that initially tastes sweet in the mouth turns bitter once digested.

The Return of the Repressor

Much has recently been written about the Roman imperial context of the book of Revelation: how the work presupposes, contests, and—now increasingly—mimics this specific sociopolitical environment.[26] With respect to its mimicry, the text's evident opposition to one or another aspect of the Roman Empire has the effect—however unintended it may be—of elaborating and thereby prolonging the very power whose proximate fall it otherwise celebrates. I take this point of view for granted in what follows. The Roman Empire, specifically in eastern Asia Minor, was the cultural crucible in which the book of Revelation was originally forged and also the principal ideological target of its polemic. The work is a Roman imperial text, and it strongly disagrees with Roman imperial rule.[27]

The overall shape of the putatively "un–Roman imperial" salvation that the book of Revelation heralds is not an unfamiliar dream. It is understandable as such and not a bad dream as far as it goes, since it responds to real problems and appropriate anxieties under the hostile circumstances of its initial composition with the promise of better days ahead. Nonetheless, it is not difficult to identify and certainly correct to criticize elements in the dream that betray the limited cultural horizon within which the book of Revelation was first written. Take, for example, the self-evidence with which the violence of change is depicted or the traditional misogyny that the work continues (if it does not actually exaggerate it).[28] However, even more troubling than these "retrograde" aspects of the book of Revelation are its more "progressive" features: for example, the happy ending that this work of the utopian political imagination would finally procure for its socially marginalized readership. Precisely where the book has seemed to be most promising, it turns out to be most pernicious, or, at least, deeply disappointing in the end.[29]

The book of Revelation as a whole reflects the early Christian dream of the proximate triumph of the project of God, which would be the establishment of a kingdom of the Lamb in the face of all the other kingdoms of this world. The book of Revelation reflects the beleaguered and not infrequently contentious experience of seven fledgling Christian communities at the

western end of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) around the turn of the first century C.E. It also anticipates with remarkable verve and self-confidence the complete dismantling of the Roman Empire. Again, this would take place through the advent of the kingdom of "the Lamb as if slain."[30] Thus the seer of the work repeatedly affirms the coming destruction of Babylon the Great and its prompt replacement by a New Jerusalem, where no evil of any sort may reside. Imagined is a time and place in which only good things shall be the order of the day:

> Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth . . . and the sea [that is, chaos or uncontrollable menace] was no more. . . . [God] will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away. . . . "Behold, I make all things new." . . . And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light shall the nations walk; and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it, and its gates shall never be shut by day—and there shall be no night there; they shall bring into it the glory and the honour of the nations. But nothing unclean shall enter, nor any one who practices abomination or falsehood. (Rev 21:1, 4–5, 22–27)

Accommodation is hardly the key in which the book of Revelation energetically sings its hymn of "die-hard" resistance to Roman imperial rule. The fierce polemic of the work obviously and explicitly opposes the Roman Empire as the quintessential embodiment of everything that the visionary of the apocalypse considers to be evil in his (now ancient) world. In celebrating the imminent fall of the Roman Empire and the correlative marriage feast of the Lamb in 17:1–19:10, it could not be more evident how thoroughly the author of the work desired that regime's full destruction.[31] For this reason, it is therefore striking—as other scholars have also observed—that such opposition to the Roman Empire finds expression in the book of Revelation in Rome's own language of imperial rule.[32] If only at this level, the repressor has already returned.

Take, for example, the repeated invocation of God or Lord God (*kyrios ho theos*) as the Almighty (*pantokratôr*). Except for 2 Cor 6:18, the use of *pantokratôr* to refer to God occurs in the New Testament only in the book of Revelation—but here very often indeed (see Rev 1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7,

14; 19:6, 15; 21:22).[33] Similarly in Rev 19:16, immediately after the fall of Babylon and the ensuing marriage feast of the Lamb, the rider on the white horse, whose appearance marks the beginning of the end of the present age, appears as an explicitly imperial figure. Written on his cloak (as the hippest label) and on his thigh (as the sexiest tattoo) is the title "King of kings and Lord of lords."[34] Previously, in 17:14, this same title—"Lord of lords and King of kings"—belonged to the Lamb, who fights the ten kings who are the horns of the beast that carries the Great Whore that is Babylon or Rome. This Lamb is the same one who in 5:8–14 was acclaimed and invested from on high with all the attributes of full power. The horizon of redemption in the book of Revelation is thus a coup d'etat: one emperor replaces another.[35]

Unlike other writings in the New Testament, whose reference to a kingdom of God is typically metaphorical in nature, the book of Revelation treats this characteristic discourse of earliest Christianity quite literally. This, too, is noteworthy insofar as the book of Revelation otherwise is hardly shy with symbolic discourse. The term "king," for example, is most often used in the book of Revelation to describe "the kings of the earth" or those who actually governed in antiquity.[36] When other creatures are called "king," it denotes that they, too, possess such a power. Thus, for example, the locusts, "like horses prepared for war," have as their king the angel of the abyss (9:11). For this reason, the Lamb is called, once again, "Lord of lords and King of kings" (17:14) in order to explain why and how the Lamb will defeat and conquer the ten kings whose power has just been described (17:12–13). Likewise in 19:16, the triumph of the rider on the white horse concludes with the description "And he has on his cloak and on his thigh the name inscribed: 'King of kings and Lord of lords.'" Thus, the reference at the very beginning of the book of Revelation to Jesus Christ as "the ruler [*archôn*] of the kings of the earth" (1:5) should be understood as a statement of fact.[37] The face of supreme power is projected to change, but not the nature of this power.[38]

In this light, the description of the Lamb—that is, Jesus—in Rev 5:5–7 is exceedingly apt.[39] Whatever the connotations might be that the image of a lamb would "naturally" evoke in a reader, the figure of the Lamb in the book of Revelation is neither meek nor mild. Indeed, it hardly looks like a lamb at all, "having seven horns and seven eyes" (5:6). Rather, the Lamb in Revelation is plainly a figure of imperial power who alone is declared worthy to receive and to open the seals of the heavenly book (5:8) as well as to hold "power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and blessing" (5:12). This claim is immediately reiterated by "all creation in

heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea and everything in them," with the notable addition of "power forever and ever" (5:13). In 6:16, everyone therefore cowers before "the wrath of the Lamb."

In Rev 14:1–4, the same Lamb is surrounded by the 144,000 who had its name and that of its father stamped upon their foreheads and who kept themselves virginal, which is to say their virile strength intact. They follow the Lamb wherever it goes. In 14:10, anyone who has had their forehead or hand marked by the beast will be tortured before the Lamb and the holy angels. In 17:14, the Lamb is expected to do battle with the ten kings of the beast and to conquer them because, once more, the Lamb is "Lord of lords and King of kings." In 19:7, as part of the pageantry of triumph, a royal wedding is announced for the Lamb (see, further, 19:9; 21:9; cf. 14:4). In 21:22, the Lamb, together with the Lord God Almighty, is said to constitute the temple of the new Jerusalem as well as the city's unfailing light source (21:23). In 22:1, 3, the Lamb finally sits on a throne with God.

This is not a figure of innocence and meekness. Indeed, although he is typically called a lamb, the introductory and contradictory description of him as also "the lion of Judah" (5:5) is, again, quite apropos (cf. 22:16). This is true not only because of the latent violence of the figure of the Lamb in Revelation but also because of the lymphoid nature of dreams. For the same reason, it requires no mental effort to make the shift in 19:11–21 from the prevailing description of Jesus as the (slain) Lamb to his representation as the (slaying) rider on the white horse.

Lest we fail to notice that the rider and the Lamb are one and the same person, in Rev 19:16 it is stated explicitly that the rider has written on his cloak and on his thigh the same title that earlier (in 17:14) was given exclusively to the Lamb—namely, "King of kings and Lord of lords." Thus the Lamb in the book of Revelation finally becomes a warrior. And what a warrior he proves to be, providing all the birds that fly in middle heaven (19:17) with a field of endless carnage on which to "stuff" themselves (19:21; *echortasthêsan*). (Compare this description with the well-known beatitude about the hungry in Matt 5:6 and Luke 6:21a.) The Great War to end all wars—the paradigmatic underclass revolution—is ultimately just the latest slaughterhouse.

Most telling, however, for the return of the repressor in the book of Revelation is, I think, the literary style of the seven letters addressed to the seven churches in Rev 2:1–3:22. At least, it captures my attention by virtue of its apparent innocuousness. For the voice that speaks here is explicitly one of imperial authority. Already in 1911, Gunnar Rudberg explored the formal

similarity between these celestial communiqués and "the well-known stone copy of a letter or rescript of King Darius I to his Asia Minor official [governor] Gadatas."[40] Especially significant, according to Rudberg, is the use in both types of text of the opening formula "The words of . . . ," that is, "Thus says . . ." (*tade legei*), with a description of the imperial person who speaks here and a specified reference to the intended recipient. Rudberg also noted a comparable juxtaposition of praise and censure in the same writings.[41] Finally, after reviewing both biblical and other ancient evidence for such phraseology, he concluded that it was specifically the language of high political authority.[42]

More recently, David E. Aune has affirmed and amplified Rudberg's earlier argument. Aune proposes that the seven proclamations to the seven churches reflect the form and content of ancient imperial edicts.[43] Using especially the work of Margareta Benner,[44] Aune makes the following comparisons:

> The *praescriptio,* with the verb of declaration [i.e., the title(s) and name(s) of the issuing magistrate(s) or emperor plus *dicit/dicunt* or *legei/legousi*], is the only formal characteristic consistently recurring in imperial edicts. Each of the seven proclamations [in Revelation] begins with a *praescriptio* similar to those found in imperial edicts, except that in them the verb of declaration *precedes* the christological predications, while in imperial edicts it *follows* the name(s) and title(s) of the issuing magistrate(s) or emperor. . . .
>
> While no counterpart to the *prooemium* [i.e., the preface, which was supposed to produce benevolence and interest on the part of the addresses] is found in the seven proclamations, its absence is appropriate in eastern provinces where the traditions of absolute sovereignty, first of the Persian monarchs and then of the Hellenistic kings, were predominant.
>
> The *narratio,* which occurs with some frequency in Roman edicts, often has the character of reported information (*renuntiatum est nobis*). The *narratio* has a functional counterpart in the [*oida*] clauses in each of the proclamations. . . .
>
> The *dispositio* [expressing decisions] occurs in each proclamation, except that it is not introduced with the usual ordaining verb meaning "I command," but is influenced by the conditional style of prophetic speech consisting of ethical exhortations usually matched by conditional threats. . . .

> Finally, statements with a function similar to the *sanctio* or *corroboratio* of Roman edicts [intended to bring about obedience to the enactment] are regularly found at the close of each proclamation in the conditional promise of victory.[45]

On the basis of these similarities, Aune concludes, "The author's use of the royal/imperial edict form is part of his strategy to polarize God/Jesus and the Roman emperor, who is but a pale and diabolical imitation of God. In his role as the eternal sovereign and king of kings, Jesus is presented as issuing solemn and authoritative edicts befitting his status."[46] One could just as easily conclude, however, on the basis of the very same comparison that God and Jesus in the book of Revelation are but mirror imitations of the Roman emperor. For this reason and to repeat the previous citation, "in his role as the eternal sovereign and king of kings, Jesus is presented [in Rev 2:1–3:22] as issuing solemn and authoritative edicts befitting his status."[47] Such language, which originally signaled resistance, soon would serve equally well as the discourse of succession.

Thus, the early Christian dream that unfolds in the book of Revelation, heralding the proximate triumph of the project of God as the kingdom of the Almighty Lamb—a dream generated in the throes of desperate dissent from determined domination—ultimately repeats in its strategy of struggle as well as in its anticipated spectacles of success the very thing that the work and its erstwhile sympathizers so rightly had opposed: namely, the false hope of imperial peace and security. In the end, the abused become the abusers.[48] Lamentably, there is nothing remarkable about this conclusion. It is what tends to happen all too often. The promise of the book of Revelation—its halting hope, if there is any that remains—must lie elsewhere.[49]

We Interrupt This Nightmare

Hoy es siempre todavía.
—Antonio Machado

When reading the book of Revelation, the kind of dreamscape inhabited by the extra-textual reader would seem to make all the difference.[50] In the midst of the world as nightmare, which is essentially how the book of Revelation recounts the course of history as it knows it until the present moment, the prospect of another possible world is necessarily the perspective of

promise. To be sure, this can always become just another escapist fantasy. But so-called realism is itself only a viable option for those whose lives are not now seriously distressed by the present state of the world.[51] As things turn out, this still tends to be, statistically, a small minority of the planet's population.

I have already suggested above that the desire for a different kind of life is the fundamental framework within which every section of the book of Revelation should be read. This therefore includes the texts in 7:1–17 and 10:1–11:14, which interrupt the cataclysmic scenarios that are their immediate context. Scholars typically have described these interruptions in the series of seven seals and seven trumpets as "interludes" or with some other such word, as though these texts represent a visionary intermission in the nocturnal programme of life—a kind of weekend away from the hectic office of history.[52] In my opinion, such descriptions fail to appreciate the crucial role that an "interruption" plays in keeping alive and strengthening the will to resist. It does so by keeping in sight another possible horizon—some other reality—toward whose eventual enjoyment the ongoing struggle to differ is directed.

Once the seven letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2–3 have each been deposited in their angelic mailbox, the dream about another possible world begins, in Rev 4:1, when the seer passes through a heavenly door into a vision of the throne room of God with its divine majesty (4:2–11). This clear perception of the possibility of a different "sphere of influence" with a different truth is a basic presupposition of the nightmarish tale that ensues. It is as though the point were to insist that the multiple convulsions to come must be understood as obvious signs of a world not yet become everything that it could be: to wit, a good and promising one. This perception of another possible world is, then, the point of departure for a rehearsal of the agony that is the present world. This rehearsal begins in 5:1, where a book with seven seals is placed "at the right hand of the one who is seated on the throne." There then appears the Lamb who is able to open the seals, who stands "in the midst of the throne and the four animals" (5:4). In 6:1–17, the Lamb proceeds to open each of the seals, and the result is a series of extremely, well, serious events.[53]

First, there is the experience of conquest: a white horse with a rider who has a bow (and, presumably, also arrows) as well as a crown comes forth "conquering and in order to conquer" (6:2). Second, there is the end of peace: the killing fields are sown (6:3–4). A red horse of fire then appears, its rider carrying a large sword to begin the process of mutual annihilation

(*hina allêlous sfaxousin*). Third, the economic fruit of the reigning world order is harvested: the price of basic commodities dramatically rises (see 6:5–6: *choinix sitou dênariou kai treis choinikes krithôn denariou*).[54] Fourth, the reign of death, which appears mounted on a green horse, extends itself (6:7–8).[55] Hades follows death, and these two forces of destruction take over a quarter of the earth, having authority to kill by whatever means: "with the sword, with hunger, with deadly disease, and with the beasts of the earth" (6:8). Fifth, the experience of martyrdom is accompanied by a complete lack of justice (6:9–11). Although the souls of the martyrs go directly into the heavenly temple to reside beneath its altar (6:9) and their white robes make plain their innocence (6:11), their oppressors continue as before; they will not come to trial before the full number of martyrs has been achieved. When the sixth seal is opened, it hardly surprises the reader that the next step is a general "ecological" collapse (6:12–17). The world has fallen into escalating chaos. Everything stands in extremis. The Day of Judgment must be at hand, and no one will escape untouched (6:17).

Nonetheless, when the last of the seven seals is finally broken, the immediate effect is a surprising silence lasting "for about half an hour" (8:1). Nothing happens. Or, rather, the brief moment of calm is but the eye of the storm since, almost immediately, another round of disasters gets under way with the second series of seven trumpets (8:2). Thus the seventh seal does not mark the end of the agony or even another step in the process of escalating doom, as the previous six seals did, so much as it renders all of these even more acute by creating an opportunity for the recurrence of the same.

The interruption of this progressive demise actually already took place between the sixth and seventh seals. Here a distinct reality was depicted in which a plan of action was put into effect to rescue every single one (144,000) of the oppressed.[56] The efficacy of this plan is confirmed by another seal stamped upon the foreheads of those whose lives have been taken. This alternative seal (7:3) underwrites the project of resistance. It is both a personal and a collective sign and contradicts the destructive logic of the other seven seals—even as, of course, it shares with them the same symbolic code.

Revealed at the nadir of the cataclysm is, as it were, the other side of the seal. The eschatological mechanism for counting down—or accounting for—the end of history legalized by the seven seals that no one was supposed to be able to touch or to change (5:4) is interrupted by the appearance of a different practice in 7:1–17, which includes another kind of seal. The

twelve tribes of Israel, each with twelve thousand members, represent the whole people of God (7:4–8).[57] Lest this symbol of collective completeness not be understood, it is immediately made clear that the "militant" group has as its counterpart another "triumphant" host, without number, "of all the peoples, tribes, groups and tongues" (7:9; *ek pantos ethnous kai fylôn kai laôn kai glôssôn*). Dreamed forth in the midst of programmed obsolescence is thus neither the inverted success of an exclusive tribalism, which ultimately only replaces one empire with another, nor the equally false hope of a universal brotherhood, whose globalization erases all forms of particularity. Rather, one begins here to imagine the possibility of a social space whose defining features are the concrete ability to resolve fundamental problems, such as those of food and water, as well as to practice an effective mode of compassion (7:15–17).

The cultic language of this section (7:1–17) is noteworthy. Within the escalating horror that the seven seals articulate, the specific contribution that early Christian ritual was imagined to make to the social resistance sponsored by the book of Revelation becomes apparent. This role of ritual should not surprise us, however, since a significant "function" of popular prayer and other, related modes of unauthorized religion, with their song and dance about another time and place, has often been precisely to undo—through a certain scrambling or "signifying" on the dominant code of the encompassing culture—the truth that otherwise would be already signed, sealed, and delivered in the reigning order of the day.

Hence the seer hears, in the concluding refrain of this section of the book of Revelation, that the earthly damned "no longer shall suffer hunger nor shall they thirst" in the company of the one who sits upon the throne. "Nor shall the sun burn them, nor any heat afflict them," the text continues, "because the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall shepherd them and shall lead them to springs of living water, and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes" (7:16–17). The social space created by the cultic practice of refused annihilation already constitutes the first experience of another possible world. The purpose of such ritual activity would be not merely to daydream about how things might be different but rather to insist fiercely that it is yet possible, beginning here and now, in the singing bodies of the dispossessed and the ecstatic vision of the downtrodden, to define a different destiny.[58]

The second series of seven trumpets in Rev 8:2, 6–11:19 can be additionally divided into two subseries. The first subseries includes the first four trumpets, while the second subseries contains the final three. The first

group of trumpets announces the destruction of a third of everything that exists: a third of the earth and of the trees and of all green grass (8:7); a third of the sea and everything that lives (with a soul) in the sea, plus a third of the ships (8:9); a third of the rivers and other waters, resulting in the death of many people (8:10–11); as well as a third of the sun, of the moon, and of the stars, which is to say a third of the light as such (8:12). In this way, the theme of a general "ecological" collapse, which earlier was the consequence of opening the sixth seal, is taken up again. In the second group of the final three trumpets, each heralds a separate event more complex than any of those associated with the first four trumpets (and with the seven seals).[59]

The first of the second group of trumpets (which is the fifth of the seven) causes the gate of the abyss to be opened, whence issues forth a cloud of smoke with a host of migratory locusts. This cloud is characterized as being "like the smoke of a great oven" (9:2). Once more, the comparison invokes perhaps the ancient imperial economy (just as, in 6:5–6, the rising prices that follow the opening of the third seal would refer to the generalized problem of inflation and, in 18:1–24, the fall of Babylon would imply the ruin of "globalized" commerce).[60] If this interpretation is correct, the general "ecological" collapse occasioned by the opening of the sixth seal in 6:12–17 and then reiterated with the sounding of the first four trumpets in 8:7–12 and represented by the plague of migratory locusts would be rooted in the mode of production symbolized by the oven.[61]

The result of the reign of the locusts is a fate worse than death.[62] These locusts do not devour any of the plants that typically are their food. Their sole purpose is to harm those who do not have on their forehead the alternative seal that, in Rev 7:3, is the sign of one's commitment to another possible world.[63] The locusts do not kill those who lack this seal. Instead, they torment them during the five months that are the locusts' lifespan. This torment, however, is "like that of a scorpion . . . and in those days people will seek death and will not find it, and they will want to die and death will flee from them" (9:5–6).

The sixth trumpet then takes up again from the first subseries of trumpets the theme of destruction by thirds. This time, a third of all human beings are destroyed. Nonetheless, despite so many deaths, there is still no repentance. Everything remains the same. The world carries on as it always has in the midst of plagues that steadily grow worse and worse. What kills is also threefold: "fire and smoke and sulphur" (9:17–18).

Once more, smoke produces death together with fire and especially sulphur. The latter are, perhaps, the source (fire) and consequence (sulphur)

of the economic activity signaled by the smoke. In any case, the sixth trumpet heralds the imminent collapse of human civilization as it has existed to this point, although the rhythm of its daily life continues unabated, without the slightest variation, ceasing "neither to kill nor to poison nor to practice sexual immorality nor to rob" (9:21).

It is, then, at this point between the sixth (penultimate) and seventh (ultimate) trumpet that once more a scenario is interposed, in Rev 10:1–11:14, that stands in contrast to the surrounding disaster. This time, the intercalated interruption underscores the voice of prophecy during periods of crisis.[64] Despite the fact that the surrounding world is completely convulsed by every kind of plague, on display in 10:1–11:14 is a will not to forget other possibilities. To be sure, this prophetic vision unfolds still within the ongoing struggle with disaster and does not escape the pain of the present moment. Thus the little book that the seer eats is said to have a sweet savor in his mouth but to turn bitter in the stomach (10:10). There are no free lunches—not even and, perhaps, especially not for prophecy.

Likewise, in Rev 11:3–13, the two witnesses to whom power has been given to defend themselves against their enemies and to accompany their prophecy with marvelous acts (11:5–6) succumb in the end to the beast that emerges from the abyss and finally kills them both (11:7). Indeed, adding insult to injury, those "from every people and tribe and group and tongue" who observe the demise of these two witnesses prevent their corpses from being buried. Instead, they celebrate the elimination of these voices "because these two prophets tormented those who occupy the earth" (11:9–10). "Those who occupy the earth" and celebrate the death of the two prophets then express their happiness with this outcome through a mutual exchange of gifts (11:10): they take the suppression of the two prophets as a fitting occasion to renew the economic system that makes them owners of the world. The principal purpose of this exchange is to reinforce through the customary bonds of friendship or alliance the network of power and influence that apparently had been disturbed by the testimony of the two prophets.

The text does not tell us in detail exactly how the two prophets "tormented" those who occupy the earth. It is clear, however, that both their practice of prophecy or frank speech (*profêteia*) and the content of their witness (*martyria*) were among the principal irritants (see 11:6; also 11:3). This insistence on "speaking up" or "out"—the refusal to be silent—is often a sufficient cause to annoy and upset those who feel at home in the world as it is, especially when what is said flatly contradicts the evident truth of the

dominant order and its so-called normalcy.[65] For this reason, it is enough—especially when this is all that can effectively be done at the moment—to continue speaking, singing, and dancing dreamily in another key, especially when this discrepant discourse intones the new song of a different day. Such speech by its mere utterance often is sufficient to destabilize the pretended self-evidence of whatever else is pervasive and intractable. For this reason, to keep talking back to the world as it is and thus to keep in sight the horizon of what yet could be, however distant the prospect of its arrival may have become, "always still" (*siempre todavía*) constitutes a cry of liberation.[66]

Conclusion

In her book *History After Lacan,* Teresa Brennan endeavors to work out some of the socioeconomic implications of Jacques Lacan's theory of the "ego." Lacan's theory includes a discussion of the "social psychosis" currently on full display in "the ego's era," or the present period of hegemony enjoyed by North Atlantic late capitalist liberal democratic modernity. At the end of her book, Brennan makes the following claim: "Struggle on the inside must deal with the same conflicts as struggle on the outside. Resisting the acting out of a foundational fantasy on ever larger scales is one arena for action; dealing with the fantasy in personal psychical life is the other."[67]

In other words, the collective dream work represented by the book of Revelation both in its resistance to acting out the Roman imperial fantasy of complete domination and in the replication of this fantasy under the aegis of the kingdom of the Almighty Lamb is the other (cosmological) side of the construction of an alternate subjectivity with its conflicted oscillation between opposing "subject positions," as already discussed in chapter 3 vis-à-vis the Epistle of James. Brennan's work underscores the fact that these two struggles really are one and the same or, at least, two sides of a single coin.

Brennan then goes on to discuss what she calls "the structural question" or how effective social and political resistance to the reigning world disorder might actually be put into practice without thereby inaugurating, yet again, a return of the "objectifying" repressor. In other words, is there a way for the book of Revelation when read as an explicitly anti-imperial text

not finally to reiterate in triumph the imperial paradigm of "objectifying" domination?

In imagining such a possibility, Brennan underscores the possible role of a properly utopian "conviction" in producing "huge social changes" before concluding with a discussion of the need for an economic "alteration in scale." Brennan invokes as examples of this possibility not only "the small-scale businesses in the advanced heartlands" but also "the subsistence or 'sustenance' economy (as Shiva renames it) that is daily eroded in the third world."[68] Such an economic "alteration in scale" is, again, precisely what the alternate subjectivity of the Epistle of James demands on behalf of the poor, together with Jesus "the economist" in the Gospel of Matthew.

Thus, although Brennan, in *History After Lacan,* obviously pursues a very different kind of "feminist" exegesis on the basis of a different set of "canonical" writings, she articulates remarkably well what I would understand myself also to have argued, not only in this chapter's reading of the book of Revelation but also in the rest of this book. In fact, the final pages of *History After Lacan* become a speech not unlike God's reply to Job "out of the whirlwind," as I have interpreted it in chapter 1. These pages could also be taken to extend the rhetoric of interruption as I have described it above.

In a statement meant to be a pointed summary of her earlier critique of multinational commodity capitalism, Brennan opposes the habit of mind that continually "splits" up the living world into an objectified—and only thus into an objective—reality. This splitting includes, for example, the kind of sharp distinction Job and his friends assume between the order of the just and the experience of suffering. It also includes the standard division the book of Revelation lamentably replays between winners and losers. Instead of continuing to engage in this kind of endless—but mortiferous—"splitting," Brennan proposes what she describes, in language taken from Lacan, as "symbolizing the maternal living force." She thus places the critical-historical intellect in alliance with "the living spirit, for it is the intellect's task to labour against the fixed points that block thought and the resurrection of the body."[69]

In the face of a "dead-end" world in which the conventional habits of hope have shown themselves to be just another round of the colonial disease that still plagues us, the work of a borderline exegesis, as Brennan puts it, is "to labour against the fixed points that block thought." This means, in effect, to welcome a periodic interruption of ourselves for the sake of learning something else, which Brennan densely calls "the resurrection of the

body." We might equally well call it the project of another possible world or, with Czeslaw Milosz, "that dark and delicious thing called *life*." Or, in the (slightly modified) words of the ancient prayer, "Amen, come, Queen Jesus" (Rev 22:20).

The first lines of Olav H. Hauge's poem "Yver hengjemyri"—whose last two lines are the epithet accompanying the dedication to this book—speak of the roots of trees that have died. These roots are said by the poet to remain submerged within the bog, under the moss, still firm, even after hundreds of years, as "a dark remnant" (*eit morke skrimsel*). Such roots are a version of what I am calling here an "interruption" in the chronicle of decay. They are what make it possible to walk "confidently across the sump" (*trygt yver myri*), sustaining the wanderer "till you come safely over" (*so du kjem frelst yver*).[70]

CONCLUSION

AFTER THE BIBLE: LIFE'S LARGESSE

The four main chapters in this book all end up pointing past the biblical text on which they comment to a larger life that I am calling "after the Bible." The phrase "after the Bible" is meant to be ambivalent.[1] One could even say constitutively ambiguous.[2] It obviously could mean "in accordance with the Bible," imitating the book or following its lead, as though the text were a kind of signpost indicating where and how to enter into life itself, life writ large, the state of being fully alive (or, in Augustine's words, "godliness"). At the same time, the phrase "after the Bible" could also mean a place "beyond the Bible," once the text has been set aside or put behind you, after one has lifted nose from page to notice whatever else there is going on "out there," which has not yet been written up (or down). In either case, the goal is strikingly similar: namely, to disclose the largesse of life. In both cases, the Christian Bible would be a sort of two-edged sword. On the one hand, it still might serve as a useful aide-mémoire or traditional tool apt for cutting through the distinctly modern fog of amnesia about the question of a good or more fulsome life. On the other hand, it may be the very thing that has been plaguing us, or a key component of it, a kind of wonder-working drug whose side effects have proven to be more pernicious than the disease it was purported to cure.

Borderline exegesis is a mode of reading the Christian Bible that deliberately walks this line of divergent destinies, seeking a pathway through tricky textual terrain, in the direction of another possible world. Of course,

one needs to "walk the walk" and not just "talk the talk" in order to learn the truth of any of the maps sketched here. Even so, it is always appropriate to inquire about the making of the map before setting out on such a trek. The question of the cartographer, however, no longer matters. What matters is the map—and whither one is walking.

At the end of the first book of his twelve-volume work *The Literal Meaning of Genesis,* Augustine of Hippo already knows that not everyone will be satisfied by what he has written:

> Someone is going to say, "What about you, with all this rubbing of corn in this essay, how much grain have you extracted? What have you winnowed? Why is practically everything hidden still in a heap of questions? Affirm some of the many meanings you have argued can be understood."

In reply, Augustine writes,

> And when we read in the divine books such a vast array of true meanings, which can be extracted from a few words, and which are backed by sound Catholic faith, we should pick above all the one which can certainly be shown to have been held by the author we are reading; which if this is hidden from us, then surely one which the scriptural context does not rule out and which is agreeable to sound faith; but if even the scriptural context cannot be worked out and assessed, then at least only one which sound faith prescribes. It is one thing, after all, not to be able to work out what the writer is most likely to have meant, quite another to stray from the road sign-posted by godliness. Should each defect be avoided, the reader's work has won its complete reward, while if each cannot be avoided, even though the writer's intention should remain in doubt, it will not be without value to have extracted a sense that accords with sound faith.[3]

The confidence displayed by Augustine in the orthodox tradition of "sound Catholic faith" to provide the default touchstone to secure the dubious results of biblical interpretation, when all else fails, is now unlikely to persuade many of us. In fact, the fruits of a borderline exegesis grow best in that uncertain terrain where Augustine's imagined interlocutor, or alter ego, becomes increasingly nervous. Nonetheless, we might agree with Augustine that it is, indeed, "one thing, after all, not to be able to work out

what the writer is most likely to have meant, quite another to stray from the road sign-posted by godliness," taking "godliness" here to be another way of saying the goodness of being fully alive.[4]

The four main chapters in this book all register an effort to practice a mode of biblical interpretation that recalls the reader and the writer to a road signposted by life's largesse. Through an alternate reading of selected texts from the Christian Bible, the present work of borderline exegesis has sought to provide some sustenance for hope and joy along the path that yet lies before us—however short it may be. These are the kernels of grain that I have dared to hope a hungry reader might winnow from so much rubbing of corn.

When I first was finishing the book—it has been born many times—I was also reading Jared Diamond's *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*.[5] In that book, Diamond explores the history of eventual self-destruction by a number of diverse societies—Easter Island, Pitcairn and Henderson Islands, the Anasazi in the southwestern United States, the Maya in Central America, and the medieval Norse settlements in Greenland—as well as a few contemporary examples (especially Rwanda and Haiti) before finally attempting to derive some practical lessons for the contemporary United States (and perhaps also other North Atlantic nations such as Canada). In his book, Diamond finds that there are always four factors that have been significant to varying degrees in these histories of cultural collapse. The four factors are (1) environmental degradation, most often due to deforestation; (2) climate change; (3) hostile neighbors; and (4) friendly trading partners. In addition, there is a fifth factor, which is also crucial, though Diamond only describes it in very general terms as a society's response to its environmental problems: in other words, its cultural attitudes. Diamond writes, "A society's responses depend on its political, economic, and social institutions and on its cultural values. Those institutions and values affect whether the society solves (or even tries to solve) its problems."[6]

The tales that Diamond tells are daunting. It is not his intention, however, merely to depress the reader. On the contrary, he hopes that his work will help encourage more timely intervention and concerted action, although the cumulative effect of his work, at least in this reader, did not lead to confidence in the likelihood of that possibility.[7] Once more, I found myself wondering what exactly it is that biblical scholarship might contribute in such a situation, if it has anything at all to offer. The work of rereading ancient (scriptural) texts will obviously not provide the technical knowledge

required to undo the material damage that our species has already caused and continues to wreak upon the biosphere that sustains us all. It does seem to me, however, that a different understanding of the shape of a good life—the kind of rethinking that a borderline exegesis of the Christian Bible aims to promote—conceivably could help reformulate some of the cultural attitudes and social values that are responsible for the modern malaise, if only because so many of these attitudes and values appear to derive from modes of biblical interpretation.

Time and again in the cultural histories that Diamond rehearses, but especially in his opening account of the state of Montana and the Bitterroot Valley as well as in the two chapters that discuss the medieval Norse in Greenland, it is striking how certain conventional understandings of the Christian legacy have strongly impeded the ability to take seriously the signs and circumstances of imminent demise and thus the possibility of doing something else in response. A borderline exegesis of this legacy points in the opposite direction.

In the introduction to this book, I outlined the two different kinds of "logic" holding its four main chapters together in a single argument. In the first of these, the line of reasoning was a constellation of key "pressure points" in the social struggle for survival by the poor and other socially disenfranchised people in modern-day Latin America. The terms of reference for this reading were the widespread experience of unwarranted suffering (chapter 1); the search for a satisfactory economy, which would be both sustaining and sustainable (chapter 2); the possibility of becoming someone else and thus ceasing to be merely another servile subject of the prevailing world (chapter 3); and, last but not least, the challenge of hope or the imperative of change with its correlative perils (chapter 4).

In the second instance, under the aegis of the utopian imagination, the logic linking the four main chapters together was defined by the step-by-step analysis of the change in worldview or basic orientation that is required in order to create a different social order. Thus at issue with Job was the nature of the world in which we live; with Jesus in Matthew, the social shape or political economy of a good life in this world; with James, the embodiment or enactment of an alternate reality under prevailing conditions; and with the seer of the book of Revelation, the maintenance of hope or the political will to pursue the project of another possible world in the face of evident hostility, including the need for self-criticism along the way and a certain in-course correction.

These two logics are not opposed to each other, but neither are they identical with each other. Instead, they name two distinctive ways in which the book's four main chapters could be said to cohere together. In other words, they describe how the exegetical conversation conducted in a given dialect—say, the book of Job—can be connected with the other discussions conducted in three different dialects: to wit, the Gospel of Matthew, the Epistle of James, and the book of Revelation. Why one would choose to speak in more than one textual dialect is a question, I suggest, reserved for the discursively monolingual. Not everything of relevance to the task of living well can be said in one language alone.

A third possible logic linking the four main chapters of the book could be summarized as follows: violence, satisfaction, dissociation, and interruption. Again, this logic is not meant to contest the other two. At the same time, it plainly seeks to expand these frames of reference. The terms of the third logic are not especially Latin American. They are also, perhaps, less pointedly utopian in their political valence. They might appear to entail more questions of "social psychology" and "personal identity." In any case, they, too, describe (as do the other two logics) a learning curve, whereby a lousy life might come to know the possibility of a better one.

For many modern readers of the book of Job, the scandal of God's reply to Job "out of the whirlwind" is its evident failure to explain why this blameless man should have suffered the violence that came upon him. The experience of violence not only receives no compelling clarification in the concluding statement from the desert storm but, worse, actually seems to be reiterated with a certain relish in the divine rant—hence the frequent charge that God ends up "bullying" Job, overwhelming him with a kind of "shock and awe." However one resolves the question of the relationship between Job's repeated lamentation and God's eventual reply to it, there is an experience, which I am calling "violence," that plainly joins the two figures together in a single conversation. Job has suffered it, and God points to it as an integral feature of the world God recounts in meeting Job's challenge to undo his claim to innocence. Moreover, it is precisely in suffering this violence that Job has seemed to most modern commentators to be essentially a victim, whereas God's seemingly casual acceptance of the same would render God effectively a chump, or worse.

In this regard, the book of Job, including the divine speech, can be read as a concerted effort to think through the meaning of "violence" as a constitutive feature of human life, both socially and otherwise. It simply cannot

be neatly separated out from the experience of living as such, even if everyone agrees that it is certainly painful and generally unwelcome. How, then, are we to understand and integrate this aspect of human existence, especially when it continues to happen in defiance of all the usual assurances of protection against it?

Strangely, the same sort of conundrum appears to exist regarding the opposite experience, which is not violence but satisfaction. If violence is painful and yet somehow integral to life writ large, satisfaction obviously includes pleasure and yet cannot be said to be simply equivalent to the experience of pleasure. At least, the experience of pleasure alone, not to mention more and more of it, will not inevitably produce or always enhance the enjoyment of satisfaction. Indeed, a surfeit of pleasure tends to become eventually, well, painful, or another kind of "violence," inducing discomfort, or worse.

This is the reason, therefore, why the inquiry regarding "violence" in chapter 1 leads in chapter 2 into the question of a "satisfactory" life, for which the teaching of Jesus "the economist" in the Gospel of Matthew provides an unexpected, or under-utilized, site for investigation. The results of this inquiry may appear to be mundane or banal, but the prospect of their actual implementation—to carry out what is said by Jesus as social policy or even as "best practices"—remains remarkably difficult to imagine: namely, to construct a collective form of human life in which "enough is enough" and no one needs to be "without," no matter how "little" they might be. The fact that such ideas will likely strike many of us as unrealistic because they are inherently unnatural or excessively optimistic about the possibility of changing such long-established habits as greed and social privilege is a sign of how little our thinking about ourselves has "developed" since antiquity. In other words, it is a function of the very problem under discussion: namely, our ability to be "satisfied."

The final two terms, "dissociation" and "interruption," describing respectively chapter 3 and chapter 4, then name a couple of other aspects of the same learning process described in chapter 1 and in chapter 2. This process, again, involves both a larger and a more limited conception of the good life. Both the term "dissociation," which characterizes the experience of "friendship with God" in the Epistle of James, and the term "interruption," which denotes how hope endures in the recurring nightmare of the book of Revelation, represent further "fronts" of such a possibility. Both are counterintuitive. Both critique from within—as a friendly

amendment—the tendency in so-called "progressive" politics "on the left" to develop scenarios of another possible world that nonetheless maintain problematical forms of social (class, race, gender) "identity," including the prospect of eventual "victory" or triumph, as though these concepts were a necessary part of any effective mode of the utopian imagination. By contrast, I have wanted to suggest that these efforts first need to undergo a kind of programmatic unlearning, whereby one ceases to be, on the one hand, identifiably someone "of this world" and thereby becomes, on the other hand, more receptive to the interpellation of a different logic of existence.

If the exegetical essays in this book are haunted by such questions, I keep returning in conclusion to a sense of modern North Atlantic academic biblical scholarship as a profoundly colonial science. It is a form of knowing whose inherent or de facto purpose has been to articulate the mythological backdrop or canopy for the nation-states whose social institutions—the churches and the universities—have usually housed and sponsored this sort of inquiry. Indeed, precisely when this scholarship has been most "historical" it seems to me that it has been most patently in the service of one or another (multi)national interest. The same is also true when such inquiry has imagined itself as doing exactly the opposite—namely, as being somehow "anti-imperial" in its purpose. Instead, in my opinion, it has served, in this guise, essentially as an instrument of co-optation. At least, it does so whenever it insists, often in the name of "community," on only imagining social alternatives that would be putatively "realistic."[8]

The question acknowledged in the introduction to this book, but whose answer I have put off until now, becomes at this point more pressing and perhaps unavoidable in the face of so many unhappy memories associated with the biblical text. The question is this: Why continue to read the Christian Bible at all? Moreover, if I think—as I do—that the institution of the (nation-)state is neither a necessary nor a useful component of a promising political future, why do I nonetheless imagine that the Christian Bible yet might be?

Perhaps I do so because, precisely as a text, the Christian Bible is, as it were, by definition inherently weak. In this regard, it is decidedly a different kind of social institution than the state, which only exists as such insofar as it exercises a certain regimen of power. By contrast, the Christian Bible can only be redeployed on the basis of a certain constitutive proneness, whereby it is let go once more into the deep play of an unconstrained and ideally unconstraining signification.

It is with such a text that a borderline exegesis enacts what Elizabeth Bishop has described in "The Fish," a poem that is precisely not a program to "bring democracy to the fish."[9] I read the poem allegorically, which is to say literarily, as also the tale of this book, which now comes to an end. Bishop writes that she "caught a tremendous fish" that "didn't fight. / He hadn't fought at all." When she looks into the fish's eyes, they "shifted a little, but not / to return my stare." She sees that the fish has been snagged a number of times before and that it still holds in its lower lip, "grim, wet, and weaponlike," the lures that were supposed to claim it, now "grown firmly in his mouth," dangling there as "a five-haired beard of wisdom / trailing from his aching jaw." At this point, a change in perspective takes place: "and victory filled up / the little rented boat . . . until everything / was rainbow, rainbow, rainbow! / And I let the fish go."[10] Into life's largesse!

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. Vaz Ferreira, "Vaso furtivo," in *Poesías completas,* 105. For the English translation, see Wieser, *Open to the Sun,* 19; also Roberts and Amidon, *Earth Prayers,* 187.

2. Cf. Reibetanz, "Tarpaper," in *Mining for Sun,* 41–42. "Unfinished and alive" are the last words in this poem.

3. Cf. Bateson, *Peripheral Visions.*

4. Milosz, "The Separate Notebooks: A Mirrored Gallery (Page 25)," in *New and Collected Poems,* 375. A complete citation would attribute the practice of borderline exegesis to a "dark Academy" whose members include "instructresses in corsets, grammarians of petticoats, poets of unmentionables with lace." Its curriculum would be decidedly sensual, or materialistic, since "everything is only make-believe." Thus "in reality there is only a sensation of warmth and gluiness inside, also a sober watchfulness when one advances to meet that delicious and dangerous thing that has no name, though people call it *life.*"

5. Cf. Naess, *Livsfilosofi.*

6. Nonetheless, see, for example, C. Taylor, *Sources of the Self,* 13–14, 20–23, 66, 76–90, 93, 122, 125, 211–15, 307, on the notion of "the good life"; Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting,* 37, 77, 98–100, 143–44, 391, 412–13, 429, 459, 494–97, 503–5, on the question of "happy memory"; and Nearing and Nearing, *Living the Good Life.* Of course, the dismissal of the significance of the question of "life" could also reveal the very narrow or myopically thick lens through which the arbitration of proper (academic) knowledge has been focused.

7. Jeffers, "The Cruel Falcon," in *Selected Poetry,* 501.

8. See Vaage, "Introduction," in *Subversive Scriptures,* 1–23, esp. 1–5; the same essay appears in Vaage, *Columbus, Q, and Rome,* 29–43 (see esp. 29–33). The following three paragraphs have been taken mostly from this essay. It also contains a discussion of the practice of "revolutionary reading," which anticipates what I here call a "borderline exegesis," although I do not discuss in that essay my own situation as a biblical scholar.

9. Cf. J. Boyarin, "Voices Around the Text."

10. Cf. Frye, *Words with Power,* xx: "So while my critical approach has been said to be deficient in rigor, this does not matter so much to me as long as it is also deficient in rigor mortis."

11. See Said, *Culture and Imperialism,* 303, 321.

12. Gramsci, *Lettere dal carcere,* 481. For the English translation, see Gramsci, *Antonio Gramsci Reader,* 300.

13. Cf. Wimbush, *White Men's Magic,* 228: "So ex-centric knowing means reading the center reading itself. Since centers always contain scriptures and some centers frame scriptures by scripturalization, such knowing requires attempts to engage not merely in historical criticism but critical history. Through such history it can reconnect with things

that are basic, things forgotten, things hidden and submerged. . . . And it means coming to terms with the self-authorization to pursue a system of knowing that excavates hidden meanings, unveils truths, and remembers where and how waters of refreshment flow." In the present book, which articulates the practice of a borderline exegesis, I am suspicious of the lurking entanglements involved in "reading the center reading itself." At the same time, it is clear that the kind of "ex-centric knowing" that Wimbush describes aims at the same destination as the one that I have invoked for borderline exegesis: namely, a more tangible truth—"waters of refreshment"—or a more materialized meaning than endless reflexivity, to wit, "things that are basic, things forgotten, things hidden and submerged."

14. Cf. Ricoeur, "Hermeneutics of Testimony."

15. For the notion of "trace," see Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*.

16. Since the advent of machine-generated writing, I recognize that this does not suffice as a comprehensive definition of what a text may be. But I trust that it will describe well enough the textual field in which the exegetical work of this book takes place.

17. Similar does not mean identical. I know that there are significant differences among human beings. Nonetheless, I would contend that we remain joined to our scribbling ancestors in an ongoing struggle to learn how to live together on the same earth. The biblical text not only betrays the social texture of its origin but also—and more importantly—only has meaning within such a vital framework of existential inquiry and erotic struggle. The work of interpretation is thus a mode of dialogue—even though, once again, only one of the conversation partners now literally speaks.

18. Such attentiveness to the biblical text, as though it still could reveal another horizon of effort and expectation after two millennia of cultural construction and devastation in its name, must sound strange to the wizened ear attuned to all that we already know about both the text and the world. Also for this reason, therefore, such a practice of interpretation will be a mode of borderline inquiry.

19. See Smith, "Sacred Persistence."

20. See, in this volume, the interlude and conclusion. By the expression "to think with something"—in this book, with texts of the Christian Bible—I do not mean "thinking biblically," at least not as LaCocque and Ricoeur have used this phrase in their book, *Thinking Biblically,* where the point is to juxtapose historical-critical and philosophical appropriations of the biblical text and then to correlate them with one another in an open-ended dialogue.

21. Cf. Hall, *One Day,* esp. 54, 56, 57, 61, 63.

22. Cf. Vaage, *Galilean Upstarts,* 3–6; Vaage, "The Excluded One," 135–36 (or Vaage, *Columbus, Q, and Rome,* 77–79); and, further, Bach, "Slipping Across Borders."

23. Cf. Vaage, "Text, Context, Conquest, Quest" (or Vaage, *Columbus, Q, and Rome,* 18–28).

24. See Vaage, "Biblical Reflection," 84.

25. In his best-selling book *Guns, Germs, and Steel,* Jared Diamond speaks frequently of the search for "ultimate explanations" in order to account for why some peoples have thrived and dominated while others have done this less so or not at all. Borderline exegesis would not be an example of what Diamond means by "ultimate explanation"; it similarly trades in "ultimate" scenarios but not in the key of originating or determining factors. Instead, borderline exegesis looks for those alternatives yet unincorporated within a so-called normal reality.

26. Cf. Jameson, *Prison-House of Language*.

27. Grünbein, "The Poem and Its Secret," in *Bars of Atlantis,* 90–91.

28. Cf. D. Boyarin, *Border Lines,* esp. 1–2. Boyarin uses the notion of "border" to refer to the zone that lies *between* putatively discrete identities, whereas I am using the notion of "borderline" in this book, following Rosaldo, to denote the region where a given identity of whatever kind essentially exhausts itself, as it were, running out of itself into something else that yet remains essentially unknown. In other words, as I use the term in this

book, a "borderline" is the edge that opens onto a yet undefined and thus unbounded possibility. At issue here are not the vagaries of sibling rivalry, with its shifting practices of mutual self-definition, but, rather, finding an exit from the thin constraints of tight definition into the thicker flexibility or more substantial free flow of whatever it is that makes human life, together with extrahuman life, both lively and enlivening.

29. Cf. Crüsemann, "Befreiungstheologische Hermeneutik."

30. See Vaage, "Desde la tormenta" (chapter 1); "Todavía" (chapter 4); "Jesús-economista" (chapter 2); "El Sermón del Monte" (chapter 2); "Cuídate la boca" (chapter 3).

31. "Se sitúa dentro de las experiencias de fe y de lucha de las comunidades y de las iglesias. La Biblia esta siendo rescatada por el pueblo. Los dolores, utopías y poesías de los pobres se tornaron, a través de las comunidades, mediaciones hermenéuticas decisivas para la lectura bíblica en América Latina y en el Caribe. Esta Revista tiene como cuna la vida sufrida de nuestros pueblos y su tenaz resistencia en dirección de una existencia digna y justa. Las comunidades de los pobres, ahí insertadas, se constituyeron en fermento para el conjunto de la hermenéutica bíblica."

32. Cf. Atwood, *Payback,* 180: "The rationality you cite dates back a mere two centuries, when people began substituting something called 'the Market' for God, attributing the same characteristics to it: all-knowingness, always-rightness, and the ability to make something called 'corrections,' which, like the divine punishments of old, had the effect of wiping out a great many people."

33. See Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia,* esp. 254–314.

34. See, for example, Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*. Rowland ("Interdisciplinary Colloquium," 301) writes, "I think that Fredric Jameson [*Political Unconscious*] was right to omit it [Revelation] from his consideration of the history of utopianism. The Apocalypse is not a utopian text. It does not allow that kind of flight of fancy from the reality of struggle by allowing people to dream (at least for more than a few moments) about another world."

35. See Wagamese, "Runaway Dreams," in *Runaway Dreams,* 26.

36. Cf. the popular Latin American proverb "Hope is the last thing to die."

37. Like all troubled texts, the book of Revelation is a mixed bag. For example, its scenario of salvation tends to entail—in a kind of reaction formation—the very violence it claims to have suffered and to oppose. At the same time, the book of Revelation occasionally discloses a contrary wish for something else: the interruption of this recurring cycle of release and repression through the insertion of a fragile glory within it, a tender strength, the triumph of rest and praise.

38. Milosz, "Bells in Winter," in *New and Collected Poems,* 331.

39. Brennan, *History After Lacan,* 21.

40. In other words, the biblical texts would have been positioned within an encompassing *poiesis* that the Christian Bible does not define, but which nonetheless would provide another pathway into the biblical terrain as well as an extended exit from it. By "extended exit" I mean that while clearly signaling a greater or excessive or additional and alternate realm of invention beyond every rehearsal and repetition of the biblical text, the same poetry would also suggest how such an ancestral legacy might be re-placed within an alien(ated) progeny. In this regard, the poetry would represent a prolongation of that which it simultaneously supersedes.

CHAPTER 1

1. Hass, "The World as Will and Representation," in *Time and Materials,* 18–19.

2. One could just as easily consider the recent British Petroleum oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, or the ongoing problem of climate change, or deforestation, or the imminent death of the oceans due to the unchecked human waste flowing into it.

3. Cf. Snaith (*Book of Job,* 34–44), who also includes Job 1:1–2:10 and 42:10–16 in his discussion of "the original Hebrew Job, the first edition"; see, further, Storøy, "Jobs Bok," 102–3.

4. Cf. Schökel, "Towards a Dramatic Reading." The literary structure of the book of Job as a whole is otherwise quite clear.

5. Cf. Dillard, *For the Time Being.* The book is a sustained but fragmentary meditation on this very kind of question. For example, Dillard writes, "I could take the red dory, row out to the guy, and say: Sir. You have found a place where the sky dips close. May I borrow your maul? Your maul and your wedge? Because, I thought, I too could hammer the sky—crack it at one blow, split it at the next—and inquire, hollering at God the compassionate, the all-merciful, WHAT'S with the bird-headed dwarfs?" (53).

6. Nor is the primary purpose of the book of Job, therefore, to address the abstract problem of "evil." *Pace* Macleish, *J.B.;* Good, "Problem of Evil."

7. Cf. Girard, "Job as Failed Scapegoat," 204, although Girard finds that God's reply to Job is not "at the same high level of these texts where Job affirms that he has a defender" (203).

8. Cf. Gutiérrez, *Hablar de Dios.*

9. Regarding Job's eventual volte-face, see Kuyper, "Repentance of Job"; Robertson, "Book of Job"; Good, "Job and the Literary Task"; Patrick, "Translation of Job XLII.6."

10. Cf. McKenzie, "Purpose of the Yahweh Speeches"; Tsevat, "Meaning of the Book of Job"; Terrien, "Yahweh Speeches"; Kubina, *Gottesreden;* Preuss, "Jahwes Antwort an Hiob"; Keel, *Jahwes Entgegnung an Ijob;* Brenner, "God's Answer to Job."

11. Cf. Pixley, *Libro de Job,* 212–13: "Podemos hablar de una pérdida de inocencia."

12. In this regard, in contrast to its many other virtues, I find the interpretation by Newsom in *Book of Job* to be basically off course or falsely focused.

13. Cf. Girard, "Job as Failed Scapegoat," 206: "This self-concern is rather what I would call the metaphysics of the tourist, who conceives that his or her presence in this world is essentially like a deluxe voyage." The whole description is worth reading.

14. Alter, *Art of Biblical Poetry,* 104. The final sentence in the quote reflects Alter's understanding of the basic thrust of God's reply to Job.

15. That is, until Job's final complaint in chapters 29–31, where once again—although with notable variations—Job speaks more purely in the key of lamentation. See Westermann, *Structure of the Book of Job,* 12. Newsom (*Book of Job,* 183–99) disagrees with this form-critical assessment of Job's final complaint, claiming that readers "intuitively recognize the difference between chapters 29–31 and Job's speeches in the wisdom dialogue," although she shortly must acknowledge that "Job's speech in chapters 29–31 does not appear to be cast as a recognizable [distinct] genre" (183–84). In fact, Newsom's argument rests essentially on her perception of a changed "tonality" or "relation to language in these chapters" (184), which, however, could just as easily be understood as due to the dramatic movement of the work.

16. See, for example, the first words spoken by Eliphaz the Temanite in Job 4:2–5.

17. Cf. Kapelrud, *Job og hans problem,* 64–65: "Job fikk ikke noe direkte svar paa sine spørsmaal men han fikk et indirekte svar som overbeviste ham."

18. Cf. Skehan, "Job's Final Plea."

19. See also Job 29:6 (milk and streams of oil) and 29:19 ("my roots spread out to the waters, with the dew all night on my branches").

20. Of course, if we refuse to consider or allow the possibility that the human sorrow embodied by Job admits of understanding, then the line of interpretation that I am pursuing here will hardly be persuasive. At the same time, I am not suggesting the traditional (eighteenth-century) sense of providence as the underlying question, which itself was neither uncontested nor a unified perspective. See Lamb, *Rhetoric of Suffering.*

21. Cf. Dailey, *Repentant Job,* 146–53.

22. Cf. Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed,* 3.22–23; also Laks, "Enigma of Job." Yaffe ("Providence in Medieval Aristotelianism," 112) writes, "Whereas Maimonides argues that God's answer to Job's question about divine providence implies that Job himself though perfectly just remains unwise, Aquinas argues on the contrary that Job though perfectly wise is nevertheless blameworthy."

23. Jeffers, "Vulture," in *Selected Poetry,* 697.

24. Although there are those who would imagine a human future free of this lingering attachment to the planet that is our biosphere through the body as an organism, I am not among them.

25. At the same time, I recognize that these remarks hardly suffice to resolve the issues that they raise, just as God's answer to Job has hardly been the final pronouncement on the problem that the biblical work so successfully poses. Like the divine discourse in the book of Job, my own conclusion best serves as an announcement of a different line of inquiry that one might choose to follow in the wake of the preceding analysis. On the other side of that horizon, it is implied, there lurks a more promising prospect. Then, just as in the book of Job, this chapter must promptly draw to a close since it, too, ultimately cannot "draw out Leviathan," no matter how many discursive fishhooks it may employ, nor "press down his tongue" with the encompassing cord of a firm finale. One stands here at the edge of a sea—with Jeffers, as it were, "on a bare hillside / Above the ocean"—in which there are "things too wonderful for me" to know directly except by diving in and swimming out to join them. Cf. Grünbein, "Bars of Atlantis." And that undertaking by definition exceeds the shoreline that a borderline exegesis may only track and trace.

CHAPTER 2

1. Milosz, "To Robinson Jeffers," in *New and Collected Poems,* 252–53.

2. Cf. the well-known dictum by Aristotle that human beings are a "political animal" (*politikon zoon*—although the adjective *politikon* in this dictum has a more culturally specific connotation than its usual English translation would suggest). See, further, Mulgan, "Aristotle's Doctrine."

3. Cf., for example, Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel;* J. C. Scott, *Art of Not Being Governed*.

4. Cf. Richard, "Evangelio de Mateo," 7.

5. For my earlier studies on this theme, see Vaage, "Morality of Money"; Vaage, "Economic Proposal."

6. With this statement I obviously assume that being a "professional" economist and believing in "the economy" are two sides of a single coin.

7. For the extant fragments of Solon's poetry, see West, *Iambi et elegi Graeci,* 2:119–45.

8. Lewis, *Solon the Thinker,* 1–2.

9. Kitto, *The Greeks,* 100.

10. See Lewis, *Solon the Thinker,* 96–107.

11. Ibid., 105.

12. Kitto, *The Greeks,* 100. Cf. Lewis, *Solon the Thinker,* 105: "The key here is limits—setting a *terma* for pursuit of an enemy that precludes the kind of revenge actions that wracked the *polis* of *Dusnomiê,* and maintaining laws against land redistribution for the farmer who works his *oikos*." See, further, Ruschenbusch, *ΣΟΛΩΝΟΣ NOMOI,* esp. 93–95.

13. Augustine of Hippo appears to have been the first to refer to Matthew 5–7 as the Sermon on the Mount. See Migne, *Patrologia Latina,* 1229–308; also Augustine, *Il discorso della montagna;* Augustine, *The Lord's Sermon on the Mount*. For the history of

interpretation after Augustine, see McArthur, *Understanding the Sermon on the Mount;* Kissinger, *Sermon on the Mount;* Berner, *Bergpredigt;* Bauman, *Sermon on the Mount;* Stoll, *De virtute in virtutem;* also Guelich, "Interpreting the Sermon on the Mount"; Dibelius, "Bergpredigt."

14. Some scholarly debate exists regarding the role of the SM within the larger narrative of the Gospel of Matthew. See Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom,* 1–7; Kingsbury, "Place, Structure, and Meaning." According to Hans-Dieter Betz, the SM in terms of ancient (Greco-Roman) rhetoric is an epitome and thus its principal purpose is to present in summary form the entire philosophical and ethical program of Jesus as a renowned teacher. See Betz, "Literary Genre and Function"; Betz, *Essays,* 1–16. This description cannot be used to characterize Betz's own commentary on the text, which is 640 pages in length—roughly 635 pages longer than the SM itself! See Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*.

15. The confusion is revealed in ongoing debate about the literary structure of this section of the SM. See Bornkamm, "Aufbau der Bergpredigt"; Allison, "Structure of the Sermon on the Mount"; Luz, *Evangelium nach Matthäus,* 185–86; Betz, *Sermon on the Mount,* 44–66, esp. 62–65.

16. This includes the problem of money. Thereby addressed is what the Brazilian Roman Catholic theologian Jung Mo Sung has called "the [heretofore] absent theme in liberation theology." See Sung, *Economía;* further, Sung, *Neoliberalismo y pobreza;* Sung, *La idolatria del capital*.

17. Cf. the very different and decidedly dubious hypothesis regarding the composition history of the SM in Betz, *Essays,* 89–90; also 38–39, 103, 132–33. See, further, Betz, "Eschatology," esp. 343; Betz, "Sermon on the Mount and Q." Cf. Carlston, "Betz on the Sermon on the Mount"; Vaage, "Composite Texts and Oral Mythology."

18. Cf. Richard, "Evangelio de Mateo," 12–13.

19. If the materials gathered together in Matt 5:21–48 and 6:1–18 generally display a certain independent internal organization in a form that is easy to recognize, it remains reciprocally unclear how the various sayings in 6:19–7:12 would cohere as a unit. Most vexing is the rationale that would account for the present location of the sayings in 7:1–12 and, specifically, their relation both to the immediately preceding group of materials in 6:1–34 and to the earlier set of sayings in 5:13–20. The two sayings in 5:17 and in 7:12 have often been thought to form an *inclusio* with each other. At the same time, the sayings in 7:7–11 are frequently associated with the Lord's Prayer in 6:9–13. Typically, this association is not due to any particular perception of the structure of the SM but rather recalls the close and likely original connection between the sayings in Q / Luke 11:2–4, 9–13.

20. The bibliography on the beatitudes is enormous. In Latin America, these sayings have been discussed far more than any other text in the SM. By including them in the prologue to the SM, I want to insist that they primarily serve to introduce the following groups of pronouncements and therefore logically would *depend* on these in order to determine what their own precise or concrete meaning is. In other words, there is no point in dwelling on the beatitudes in great detail—they are simply hors d'oeuvres to whet the appetite—without proceeding to digest the fuller discussion that they set up, which is the main course of the SM.

21. Cf. Michaelis, "[*P*]-Alliteration."

22. Cf. Frankenmölle, "Makarismen"; Strecker, "Makarismen"; McEleney, "Beatitudes"; Brooke, "Wisdom of Matthew's Beatitudes"; Puech, "4Q525."

23. Cf. Pixley and Vaage, "El evangelio radical de Galilea"; also Vaage, "El cristianismo galileo."

24. Great debates have been waged regarding the best translation of the phrase "the poor in spirit" (*hoi ptôchoi tô pneumati*) in Matt 5:3, including whether the phrase really means anything other than "the poor" (*hoi ptôchoi*). Neither of the two possibilities

proposed by Richard ("Evangelio de Mateo," 15) strikes me as persuasive. It is clear that the meaning of the phrase "the poor in spirit" must belong to the same semantic field as that of the other people named in the following beatitudes: namely, "those who mourn" (*hoi penthountes*) in 5:4, "the meek" (*hoi praeis*) in 5:5, and "those who hunger and thirst for justice" in 5:6. In this light, therefore, it seems obvious that in 5:3 a form of poverty without economic "bite" could not be intended, since the experiences of mourning, of meekness, and of the desire for justice hardly lack a concrete economic aspect.

25. Cf. Nogueira, "Absurdos do evangelho."

26. Cf. Hall, "Without," in *Without,* 46–47; also Hall, *White Apples,* 335–37.

27. See, further, Matt 23:2–3. In other words, it will be necessary to practice a form of (economic) justice greater than that of the state and of the church.

28. In the antitheses of the SM, it is not only or not always the economic question that comes to the fore. Nonetheless, all of the antitheses have an economic component and clearly sketch an alternate economic horizon.

29. In fact, these social values still exist in Latin America, at least as moral categories. Thus, for example, one yet gives a "word of honor" (*palabra de honor*) or may be chastised for being simply "shameless" (*sinvergüenza*).

30. Though this is a gross generalization to which more than one exception can be found, every concrete problem addressed by the antitheses of the SM registers a common practice or widespread concern in the ancient Mediterranean world. Thus, determinative for the selection of themes and biblical texts discussed in Matt 5:21–48 are the political and economic rules of play in that world, which is to say the so-called codes of honor and shame, even if the SM aims to promote another way of being in that world. Cf. Kloppenborg, "Alms, Debt, and Divorce."

31. In this regard, the pursuit of a righteousness that would be greater than the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees continues to participate in the very same system of values that it otherwise opposes.

32. I do not mean to suggest that the ancient economy was essentially the same as the modern one. There is an obvious difference not only between their respective means of production but also between their diverse habits of consumption and expenditure. For example, there is no evidence of any programmatic interest in the ancient Mediterranean world to improve the efficiency of production or to conserve surplus value, at least not in the form of so-called capital investment. What was produced through the labor of many was swiftly spent for the greater glory of a few. Nonetheless, it still seems to me that in both cases there is a comparable logic or horizon of expectation that governed what we would now call economic activity. This is the notion that economic well-being was the fruit of a successful control—read, exploitation—of natural and especially social forces, for which wealth is the primary means of domination, and for this reason—and only for this reason—the production of wealth is the obvious way to achieve so-called peace and security.

33. Cf. Lockmann, "Una lectura del Sermón del Monte," 53–54. Lockmann does not adequately represent the social-religious project of the scribes and Pharisees in antiquity.

34. Cf. J. C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak;* also Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity.* What was supposed to humiliate is taken up in Matt 5:41 as though it were a matter of one's own choosing, challenging the ability of the oppressor to impose an alien will. In this case, the advice of the saying would be simply a tactic—neither the only nor always the best way to respond to such a situation, although it never ceases to be a possibility, especially when nothing else can be done.

35. Such an attitude is presumably what it means to be "poor in spirit" (Matt 5:3). But what does any of this have to do with the world as we know it? Once again, in view appears to be, at best, a tactical position—hardly a principle to be applied in every time and circumstance. Obviously, no one who always allows whatever he or she possesses to

be taken away by someone else will survive very long—unless, of course, it is precisely this economic "common sense" that the SM aims to query most profoundly. Is it indeed the case that the only way to make life viable and good is by hoarding all that can be gotten while sharing as little as necessary with anyone else?

36. Cf. Gutiérrez, *Beber en su propio pozo*. One would learn to "drink from one's own well."

37. Again, this is not obviously an economic theme—although, at least today, a close correlation typically would exist between one's (national) enemies and the ongoing pursuit of (national) economic self-interest. Likewise, in antiquity, within the social field of honor and shame one had to have enemies. Without them, for example, it was not possible to conquer greater glory. Without enemies, it would be difficult to know whom to rob and enslave. Without enemies, opportunities would not exist—at least, not so readily—for additional enrichment.

38. This problem is addressed elsewhere in the Gospel of Matthew. See, for example, Matt 13:24–30, 36–43; 25:31–46.

39. Cf. Ricoeur, *The Just;* Ricoeur, *Reflections on the Just*.

40. One of the most socially destructive aspects of the present global economy is how it prevents this equilibrium from ever being achieved, both financially and politically. See, again, Atwood, *Payback*.

41. I take the phrase "the temptation of defeat" from the Peruvian writer Julio Ramón Ribeyro's *La tentación del fracaso*.

42. Unlike, for example, the antitheses in the SM: except for Matt 5:24, these obviously discuss issues of daily life in antiquity.

43. In the ancient Mediterranean world, of course, there was no "religion" that was not already a part of regular social life. To be sure, there were separate social spaces reserved especially for cultic activity, just as the use of other social spaces was limited to certain groups or designated purposes, such as the women's quarters in a typical Greek house. But this notion of discrete social spaces should not be confused with the distinctly modern concept of different dimensions of human life, including the distinction between a private and a public sphere.

44. Betz, *Essays,* 56.

45. Betz waffles on the relation of this material in the SM to the Synoptic Sayings Source, "Q." See ibid.

46. Cf. Betz, *Sermon on the Mount,* 350–51: "The author/redactor of the SM found himself in the possession of two sources (*Vorlagen*) . . . that he wanted to keep and to integrate in his work. . . . 6:1–6, 16–18 alone appeared theologically insufficient because it did not show any connection with Jesus. . . . The interpolation of 6:7–15, therefore, made the section 6:1–6, 16–18 'Jesuanic.'"

47. It is noteworthy that the instructions regarding prayer, which originally came from Q (11:2–4, 9–13), function in the Gospel of Matthew as the framework of the central section of the SM. This suggests to me that the compiler of the SM had some integrating vision for this section.

48. It remains unclear to me what exactly is the purpose of the emphasis on the secret life of those who follow the counsel of the SM. Betz offers no real explanation. See Betz, *Sermon on the Mount,* 360. Reference is made to the unconvincing theory of Vermes (*Jesus the Jew,* 78), who argued that the "Chamber of Secrets" in the Temple was meant (see *m. Seqal*. 5.6).

49. See Matt 6:1, 2, 5, 16. The concern for fitting compensation (*misthos*) is a theme found almost exclusively in the Gospel of Matthew among the canonical gospels. See Matt 5:12 (= Luke 6:23); 5:46 (cf. Luke 6:35); 10:41–42; 20:8 (and the verb *misthoomai* in 20:1, 7). At the same time, it is also likely that it was the same evangelist who changed an original reference to *misthos* in Matt 10:10 (cf. Luke 10:7).

50. Again, the extended discussion of prayer in Matt 6:5–15 and 7:7–11 forms another "theoretical" framework around the central section of the SM. If Betz is correct that the different sayings in 6:1–6, 16–18, originally constituted a discrete unit of tradition that subsequently was incorporated into the SM, the discussion of prayer—although it may be of primary importance to the central section—is nonetheless secondary in sequence due to this underlying literary source.

51. Interestingly, these problems are precisely the opposite of those mentioned at the beginning and end of the encompassing *Kult-Didache:* namely, the problem of ostentatious almsgiving or financial handouts in Matt 6:2–4, and the practice of fashionable fasting or conspicuous dieting in 6:16–18.

52. In a sense, everything discussed in Matt 6:19–34 could be understood to be a question of where your heart is, or what type of economic behavior indeed supports a good life. Obviously, the speaker of the SM presumes to know something about that life which other existing social practices would work against, since these are said to display false assumptions and deceptive expectations. The specific terms of this conviction are revealed in 6:22–34.

53. See Betz, *Sermon on the Mount,* 437–49.

54. See Elliott, "Fear of the Leer"; Elliott, "Evil Eye in the First Testament"; Elliott, "Evil Eye and the Sermon on the Mount." Martin Luther also understood the saying in Matt 6:22–23 to be basically about avarice. See Luther, *Sermon on the Mount,* 177–86.

55. Cf. Taussig, *Shamanism,* esp. 393–412.

56. See, for example, Martin, *Slavery as Salvation.*

57. It is noteworthy in the context of the SM that in Matt 6:24 the text refers to Mammon and not to money or any of the other usual instruments of economic exchange. This use of "Mammon" to name what is opposed to "God" recalls the mythic opposition that was already drawn in 6:19–21 between life "on earth" and life "in heaven," and in 6:22–23 between "light" and "darkness."

58. For a similar critique of the figure of Solomon, see Dreher, "Salomón y los trabajadores" (or Dreher, "Solomon and the Workers").

59. It is plainly arrogance to assume that existing economic practices, just because they are now prevalent, represent so-called reality. All proposals to the contrary are then automatically—uncritically—deemed to be unrealistic. In Matt 6:25–34, however, this is the very question at stake.

60. Cf. Cardenas Pallares, "Ser libres como pájaros," 117.

61. Cf. Q / Luke 12:4–7; also Job 39:1–33.

62. It is well known that the social health of all non-European countries targeted for development after WWII (excluding Japan) has declined steadily under the unbearable weight of such economic restructuring. Far from creating a Kingdom of God within our lifetime, this brave new world has generated instead only higher levels of extreme poverty and social instability, precisely because it assumes that wealth (Mammon) must be created (served) before anything else can be done, and therefore constantly postpones until tomorrow any real solution to the ills that inevitably seem to accompany the prolonged (forced) march of progress. It is against such disastrous pretensions that the SM would assert, "One day's evil is enough" (Matt 6:34).

63. The use of the indicative mood (*êggiken*) in Matt 10:7 is thus completed by a series of imperatives.

64. See the preceding discussion of the sixth antithesis in the SM.

65. Although the initial parable of the sower in Matt 13:3–8 (cf. Mark 4:3–9) is subsequently explained by the evangelist in other terms (see Matt 13:18–23; cf. Mark 4:13–20), it remains notable that the parable itself addresses the question of levels of production. Seed is sown, after all, in order to grow. All seed requires good soil in which to flower and thus reproduce. If the parable of the sower surveys the different types of soil in which the

scattered seed sprouts with variable results, the conclusion reached by that survey, like most annual reports, is ultimately a matter of the bottom line: to wit, a possible increase of 100, 60, or 30 percent (see Matt 13:8). Thus Jesus's third big speech in the Gospel of Matthew is explicitly framed by economic analogies.

66. This comparison flatly contradicts, of course, the advice given in Matt 6:19–21. There we were told precisely not to "store up treasures for your selves on the earth . . . for where your treasure is, there will your heart also be." By contrast, in 13:44, it is in order to acquire treasure in the earth that the exemplary human being of the parable "sells everything that he has and buys that field." Obviously, no doctrinaire orthodoxy on the lips of Jesus!

67. Cf. the typical interpretation by Kingsbury in *Parables of Jesus,* 110–17.

68. The term "full disclosure" is typically used, of course, to describe the obligations of the seller.

69. The attempt made by Derrett ("Law in the New Testament") to exculpate the protagonist of the parable in accordance with the legislation of the Mishnah, while ripe with ingenuity, is fraught with methodological difficulties and other suspect reasoning.

70. In Matt 18:12, use of the verb *aphêken* (*aphiêmi*) indicates simply that the shepherd did not take the other sheep with him and thus left them behind only in this sense. In other words, he did not abandon them. Likewise the verb *planêthê,* which is used to describe the missing sheep, merely means that the animal had ended up somewhere else and not that this sheep somehow deliberately or perversely sought to go the wrong way.

71. See, for example, B. B. Scott, *Hear Then the Parable,* 415.

72. According to B. B. Scott ("The King's Accounting," esp. 440–41), the logic of the parable is not so simple. See also B. B. Scott, *Hear Then the Parable,* 267–80, esp. 277–79. But the supposed complexity of the text seems to me to be the consequence of Scott's excessively aesthetic understanding of the Kingdom of God, which he ascribes to the expectations of the reader.

73. It is the same logic that was seen in the second "we" petition of the Lord's Prayer: "Forgive us our debts, *as we* have forgiven our own debtors" (Matt 6:12). It also recalls the counsel in the fifth antithesis of the SM: "Give to the one who asks you for something, and do not ask back from the one who wishes to borrow from you" (5:42).

74. More to the point is the following and equally rhetorical question: "Or is your eye evil because I am good?" (Matt 20:15b). Once again, as in 6:22–23, the problem of envy is a key aspect of misdirected economic dreams and squabbles. On this aspect of the parable, see Elliott, "Matthew 20:1–15"; also Overman, *Church and Community in Crisis,* 286. Even so, it is not ultimately because of anyone's evil eye or the problem of envy that the householder in the parable opts for a new labor policy. Indeed, his new labor policy only seems to make matters worse in this regard.

75. In his interpretation of the text, Overman (*Church and Community in Crisis,* 286–87) emphasizes the sociological question of the longevity of membership in a group and the formation of a certain hierarchy. Perhaps for this reason, Overman never gets around to treating the economic issue that the parable itself puts front and center.

76. The fact that one often hid money in the earth for safekeeping in antiquity does not diminish the resisting nature of the third slave's response to the obligation imposed on him by his master.

77. According to Overman (*Church and Community in Crisis,* 347–52) "the smallest of these my brothers [and sisters]" originally referred only to the impoverished members of the Jewish-Christian community of the evangelist. This conclusion finds support in the history of interpretation of the parable. See Gray, *Least of My Brothers.* But this understanding of the envisioned community strikes me as excessively sectarian. Where is such a restriction indicated in the parable itself? On the importance of this parable in the theology of Gustavo Gutiérrez, see Siker, "Uses of the Bible."

78. This is subsequently clarified to include those who have become "lost" for whatever reason (see Matt 18:12–14) or are unable to find work (20:1–16).

79. Szymborska, "No Title Required," in *Miracle Fair,* 93–94.

INTERLUDE

1. Cf. Dodds, *Missing Persons,* esp. 192: "In this book I have tried by an effort of empathy to place myself inside the skin of my earlier self or selves, seeing the world so far as memory served through their eyes and using wherever possible contemporary documents to supplement and control the forgetfulness of old age. . . . I have called up these rapidly fading ghosts, not for their own sakes or because I desired their company (which was at times most unwelcome), but as a sample of some of the way in which public history impinged on the personal lives of twentieth-century men. Under 'public history' I include not only the two great wars with their antecedents and consequences but also such things as the conflict over Irish independence and even the changing fortunes and purposes of the University of Oxford."

2. Cf. Lee, *Body Parts;* Walton, *Skaff deg eit liv! Om biografi.*

3. The only difference might be that the documentation required for this task when undertaken by myself is both literal and neurological. Cf. Ricoeur, *Réflexion faite,* 12: "Conscient de ces limites, j'admets bien volontiers que la reconstruction que j'entreprends de mon développement intellectual n'a pas plus d'autorité que telle autre effectuée par un biographe autre que moi-même."

4. See Wimbush, *White Men's Magic,* 8–9.

5. Take, for example, the figure of Snorri Sturlason and specifically his four-part *Edda* written to preserve a pre-Christian culture that was threatened with extinction at the beginning of the thirteenth century. A few centuries before, this culture had taken refuge in Iceland, seeking to escape the same European Christianity that once again threatened to erase it. The prologue to the *Edda* nonetheless begins by invoking the Almighty God who created heaven and earth with Adam and Eve, and then goes on to describe Noah and the flood.

6. For two important examples in the history of religion, see Smith, "Unknown God"; Smith, "Pearl of Great Price."

7. At least, this is true for both the highlands and the coastal regions. But I am unsure about the peoples of the Amazon basin. Aptly ambiguous in this regard is the short novel *El hablador* by Vargas Llosa.

8. See Vaage, *Columbus, Q, and Rome,* 18–86, esp. 44–66.

9. For some of the earliest examples of the cultural *desencuentro* that took place in colonial Peru, see Garcilasco de la Vega, *Primera parte;* Garcilasco de la Vega, *Historia general; Dios y hombres de Haurochiri;* Guamán Poma de Ayala, *Nueva crónica;* also Reyna, *Encuentro de Cajamarca.*

10. Sometimes, it is possible to rearrange this configuration, at least in a certain regard, and thereby to recompose oneself, albeit only partially, as someone else. In chapter 3, I will examine this possibility as the construction of an alternate social subjectivity.

11. See Gadamer, *Truth and Method;* further, Rilke, "Nike," in *Gedichte 1906 bis 1926,* 274. In *Aus der Frühzeit R. M. Rilkes,* the poem was printed with the inscription "Für Nanny Wunderly-Volkart."

12. Cf. Wimbush, *White Men's Magic,* 5, 237n12.

13. In the conclusion to chapter 4 of this book, under the aegis of a promising interruption (instead of a fusion of horizons) in the traditional script of hope and in pursuit

of a "history after Lacan" (following Teresa Brennan), I return to the question of play with such a "ewige Mit-Spielerin."

14. With the term "deep geography" I obviously mean to recall the notion of "deep play" as developed by Clifford Geertz in *Interpretation of Cultures*.

15. Cf. Droge ("Ghostlier Demarcations," 354), who would see such thinking as the work of a phantasmal imagination.

16. Jeffers, "Foreword," in *Selected Poetry,* 715.

17. Cf. Jeffers, "Flight of Swans," in *Selected Poetry,* 505.

18. See Melville, "Bartleby, the Scrivener"; further, Inge, *Bartleby the Inscrutable;* McCall, *Silence of Bartleby.*

19. Cf. Wimbush, "Interpreters," esp. 20–24.

20. Hence the initial appeal of the question of Q for me and also of its possible comparison with ancient Cynicism. See Vaage, *Galilean Upstarts;* Vaage, *Columbus, Q, and Rome,* 87–245.

21. See Vaage, *Galilean Upstarts,* 3–6.

22. Initially, I had intended an allusion to Deissmann, *Bibelstudien.*

23. Jeffers, "Foreword," in *Selected Poetry,* 714–15.

24. This includes an appreciation "after the fact" of the epistemological advantage of a deep displacement from one's inaugural self. At least in my case, this was enormously salutary for thinking about any number of things, including biblical texts. To have one's world—its social culture, material substance, identity—unravel both around and within oneself, and then to follow a given "loose end" or thread of this fraying fabric out beyond what obviously is, teaches another kind of intellection.

25. See Hauge, *Dikt i samling,* 153. The English translation is mine. Cf. Hauge, *Trusting Your Life,* 11.

CHAPTER 3

1. Cf. Chomsky, *Problems of Knowledge and Freedom;* Chomsky, "Responsibility of Intellectuals"; Chomsky, "Objectivity and Liberal Scholarship"; Chomsky, "Manufacture of Consent"; Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent.* The language of "manufacturing consent" or "the engineering of consent" is taken from the works of Walter Lippmann and Edward Bernays at the beginning of the twentieth century. These heralded the advent of the public relations industry. See Chomsky, "Containing the Threat of Democracy," 167–69; also Bernays, *Propaganda;* Lippmann, *Public Opinion.*

2. With these questions, I assume that one is never "oneself" alone.

3. Bogan, "Ad castitatem," in *Body of This Death,* 12.

4. Ibid. The poem is also printed in Bogan, *The Blue Estuaries,* 8.

5. See Luther, "Preface to the New Testament," 362; further, Luther, "Preface to the Epistles of St. James and St. Jude."

6. See, for example, Ward, "Partiality"; Maynard-Reid, *Poverty and Wealth;* Tamez, *Scandalous Message;* Batten, "Unworldly Friendship"; Kloppenborg Verbin, "Status und Wohltätigkeit"; Kloppenborg Verbin, "Patronage Avoidance"; Wachob, *Voice of Jesus,* 157–70, 177–88; also Johnson, "Social World."

7. See Baker, *Personal Speech-Ethics.*

8. Batten, "Asceticism of Resistance," 366. See, further, Peterson, "Einige Beobachtungen," 213.

9. See Valantasis, "Theory"; Valantasis, "Constructions of Power"; further, Valantasis, *Making of the Self.*

10. For a more detailed discussion of my own definition of asceticism, see Vaage, "An Other Home"; Vaage, "Earliest Christian Asceticism." Cf. Martin, introduction to *The Cultural Turn,* 13–16.

11. See Foucault, *Use of Pleasure,* 72–77; Pinsent, "Ascetic Moods."

12. See Jas 1:8; 4:8. Note that 1:5–8 as a whole is concerned with how properly to ask for (heavenly) wisdom.

13. For this concern at Qumran, see Brown, *Body and Society,* 35, 36–38, 40. Cf. Seitz, "Relationship"; Seitz, "Antecedents and Signification."

14. See Brown, *Body and Society,* 69–71, 127–28, 226–27.

15. See Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus* 1.5.19.3.

16. The word "daemonic" stems from the ancient Greek word *daimôn*, which meant neither divine (God) nor demonic (devil) but was the term for a power that existed between these two (Christian) extremes.

17. Cf. Dawson, *Allegorical Readers.*

18. See also Jas 1:26; Johnson, "Taciturnity."

19. Cf. Vaage, "Why Christianity Succeeded," esp. 254–57.

20. I trust that it is clear that I do not intend to describe with the notion of an alternate subjectivity what the American historian Henry Adams in his autobiography summarized as the principal disclosure of modern psychology: "He gathered from the books that the psychologists had, in a few cases, distinguished several personalities in the same mind, each conscious and constant, individual and exclusive. The fact seemed hardly surprising, since it had been a habit of mind from earliest recorded time, and equally familiar to the last acquaintance who had taken a drug or caught a fever, or eaten a Welsh rarebit before bed; for surely no one could follow the action of a vivid dream, and still need to be told that the actors evoked by his mind were not himself, but quite unknown to all he had ever recognized as self. The new psychology went further, and seemed convinced that it had actually split personality not only into dualism, but also into complex groups, like telephonic centres and systems, that might be isolated and called up at will, and whose physical action might be occult in the sense of strangeness to any known form of force. Dualism seemed to have become as common as binary stars. Alternating personalities turned up constantly, even among one's friends." Adams, *Education of Henry Adams,* 433. Neither do I mean to suggest under the aegis of alternate subjectivity the altered state(s) of consciousness that E. R. Dodds, for example, described with similar language in his autobiography regarding so-called passive mediums. What is "alternate" about the subjectivity I am seeking to describe with this term has nothing to do with the unconscious or subconscious or extraordinary or supernatural—although, in a different sense than the term had in Dodds's own lifelong extracurricular pursuit of "psychical research," an alternate subjectivity would be precisely "paranormal."

21. See, for example, Luther, "Preface to the Epistles of St. James and St. Jude," 397; Dibelius, *James,* 1–11; further, Wachob, *Voice of Jesus,* 32–36.

22. I would not argue, however, that the Epistle of James is as tightly organized as some have recently suggested. See, for example, Cargal, *Restoring the Diaspora;* Cheung, *Genre, Composition, and Hermeneutics;* M. E. Taylor, "Recent Scholarship"; M. E. Taylor, *Text-Linguistic Investigation.* Cf. Bauckham, *James,* 61–73; Moo, *Letter of James,* 43–46. In the next section of this chapter, I shall try to show how the overall shape of the Epistle of James underwrites the crucial role that the tongue is supposed to play in the construction of an alternate social subjectivity.

23. See Hartin, *James and the Q Sayings,* 26–28; M. E. Taylor, *Text-Linguistic Investigation;* M. E. Taylor and Guthrie, "Structure."

24. Johnson, *Letter of James,* 14–15.

25. Ibid., 15.

26. Cf. Forbes, "Structure"; Fry, "Testing of Faith"; Camp, "Another View."

27. See Hartin, *James and the Q Sayings,* 29–32.

28. See M. E. Taylor, *Text-Linguistic Investigation,* 59–71; M. E. Taylor and Guthrie, "Structure," 683–86.

29. To be sure, a number of these divisions admit of further subdivision. For other views of the basic literary structure of the Epistle of James, see Francis, "Form and Function," 118–21; Davids, *Epistle of James,* 23–28; Reese, "Exegete as Sage"; Crotty, "Literary Structure"; M. E. Taylor and Guthrie, "Structure," 693, 703–4.

30. For Jas 3:13–4:10 as a single literary unit, see Johnson, "James 3:13–4:10"; Johnson, *Letter of James,* 268–69; Batten, "Unworldly Friendship," 167–200; also Hartin, *James,* 28, 203–16. Cf. Hartin, *James and the Q Sayings,* 30; Hartin, *Spirituality of Perfection,* 106–7; also Dibelius, *James,* 207–8; Laws, *Commentary,* 167. I take the entire unit in Jas 3:13–4:10—not only the verses in 3:13–18—to be the heart (of the body) of the Epistle of James. See M. E. Taylor and Guthrie, "Structure," 696–98.

31. Cf. Wuellner, "Jakobusbrief"; Baasland, "Jakobusbrief"; Baasland, "Literarische Form, Thematik und geschichtliche Einordnung"; Frankenmölle, "Das semantische Netz"; Watson, "James 2"; Watson, "Rhetoric of James 3.1–12"; Thurén, "Risky Rhetoric"; Wachob, *Voice of Jesus,* esp. 54–57.

32. Cf. Hartin, *Spirituality of Perfection.*

33. Cf. Johnson, "Taciturnity." See also Johnson, *Letter of James,* 256: "There was widespread agreement in Hellenistic moral teaching that speech was dangerous and, in order to avoid error, either silence or brevity was best (see Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* VII, 26; Apollonius of Tyana, *Letters* 81–82; Plutarch, *On the Education of Children* 14 [*Mor* 10F]; *On Hearing Lectures* 4 [*Mor* 39C]; *On Garrulousness* 23 [*Mor* 515A]), a bias that was shared as well by Jewish wisdom (Prov 12:13; 13:3; 21:23; Sir 14:1; 19:6; 20:18; 22:27; 25:8; 28:12–16; Philo, *On Flight and Finding* 136)." See also Baker, *Personal Speech-Ethics.*

34. Cf. Mayor, *Epistle of St. James,* 107; Dibelius, *James,* 181–82.

35. Johnson, *Letter of James,* 258. Johnson refers to (but misrepresents) Mayor, *Epistle of James,* 112: "There is no idea of vain boasting: the whole argument turns upon the reality [but not the correctness] of the power which the tongue possesses." See, further, Hort, *Epistle of St. James,* 70.

36. See Burchard, *Jakobusbrief,* 138–39.

37. Cf. Philo, *De posteritate Caini* 24.88; also Philo, *De migratione Abrahami* 13.73.

38. The actual metaphor refers to a brushfire or some other kind of conflagration of this sort. See Elliott-Binns, "Meaning of [*hylê*]"; Burchard, *Jakobusbrief,* 142–43.

39. See also Jas 1:27; 2:5; 4:4; and Hartin, *James,* 177.

40. See Hartin, *Spirituality of Perfection,* 105. Hence the statement "My brothers [and sisters], these things—which the undisciplined tongue unleashes—should not be so!" (3:10b).

41. Johnson, *Letter of James,* 258. Cf. Johnson, *Brother of Jesus,* 164–65: "In contrast, James denies that anyone can truly control speech (Jas 3:8). He also heightens the tongue's potential for evil. He personifies the tongue as though it were indeed completely independent: 'It boasts of great things' (3:5). He also makes the tongue a cosmic force. It is a 'world of wickedness,' a fire that is 'lit from Gehenna' (3:6)."

42. See Batten, "Unworldly Friendship," 198–200; Hartin, *James,* 215–16.

43. See Hartin, *James,* 212–13.

44. See Batten, "Unworldly Friendship," 199.

45. See Backhaus, "Conditio Jacobaea"; Burchard, *Jakobusbrief,* 187.

46. Indeed, exactly the opposite: see Hartin, *James,* 219.

47. See Burchard, *Jakobusbrief,* 178.

48. Johnson (*Letter of James,* 292) proposes "arrogance" as the theme that threads the passage in Jas 4:11–5:6 together. Cf. Hartin, *James,* 220.

49. Burchard, *Jakobusbrief,* 183: "Warum er [Jakobus] hier [in 4:13–17] anders als in 5,1–6 die Angeredeten sprechen oder denken und Vorhaben, nicht Taten nennen lässt, wird kaum gefragt."

50. Ibid., 185: "Bezugswort von [*hoitines*] . . . ist [*hoi legontes*] V.13, nicht die 1. Pl. in ihren Aussagen."

51. Ibid., 187: "nennt die korrekte Alternative zu V. 13."

52. Ibid., 188: "Entweder macht Jak einen zusätzlichen Vorwurf oder er qualifiziert damit die Rede V.13 nachträglich; eher dies, da er keinen anderen Anhalt hat."

53. Cf. Walker and Konzen, "'A vossa riqueza apodreceu'"; Nogueira, "O grito do salário"; Gameleira Soares, *Indignar-se,* 28–30.

54. Not to be forgotten is the enduring conviction of a pending divine judgment in the Epistle of James (5:7–9).

55. See Johnson, "James 3:13–4:10," 334n32.

56. Cf. Matt 5:21–26; Johnson, *Brother of Jesus,* 128, with reference to Lev 19:16.

57. See Dibelius, *James,* 208–9, regarding "the catenae and scholia" and "some interpreters"; Mussner, *Jacobusbrief,* 168–69; Johnson, "James 3:13–4:10," 334n32.

58. Cf. Mayor, *Epistle of James,* 138 (*kakôs* = "wrongly"), versus Dibelius, *James,* 218–19; Johnson, *Letter of James,* 278 (*kakôs* = "wickedly" or "evilly"); Batten, "Unworldly Friendship," 185.

59. See Johnson, "Friendship with the World"; Batten, "Unworldly Friendship."

60. See Johnson, "James 3:13–4:10."

61. See ibid., 347. More dubious are Johnson's assertions about the "rhetorical intent" of the passage and about what the "whole exposition comes down to." See ibid., 333.

62. Cf. Navia Velasco, *La carta de Santiago,* 54–56.

63. Cf. Walker and Konzen, "'A vossa riqueza apodreceu,'" 111; Fernández, "Santiago."

64. Cavafy, "December 1903," in *Collected Poems,* 312.

CHAPTER 4

1. Hall, "We Bring Democracy to the Fish," in *White Apples,* 413.

2. See Frye, *Great Code,* 135–38, 199–200; Frye, *Words with Power,* 102–3; Frye, "Bible and English Literature," 147–48.

3. See, for example, A. Y. Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis;* Boesak, *Comfort and Protest;* Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation;* Richard, *Apocalypse.*

4. See Lindsey, *Late, Great Planet Earth;* LaHaye and Jenkins, *Living in the End-Times?*

5. Cf. Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then.*

6. I take the expressions "desire to be" and "effort to exist" from the writings of Paul Ricoeur, who, in turn, takes them from the work of Jean Nabert.

7. Like all troubled texts, the book of Revelation certainly is a mixed bag. Its scenario of salvation both reflects and extends the very violence from which it suffers and that it would oppose. At the same time, the book discloses another wish for something quite different. This is the interruption of all that is already known by a divergent reality that shimmers, however fragilely, at the edge of our exhaustion and of our despair, on the other side of fear and horror. Cf. Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse,* 120–21.

8. See ibid., 97–121.

9. Cf. Frilingos, *Spectacles of Empire,* 13: "To conclude, this is not a book about critical theory [including postcolonial interpretation] but one about the pulsing rhythms of Roman culture at play in the book of Revelation. This study in no way means to

avoid the obvious, that the Apocalypse repeatedly positions itself and its audience over against the monstrous Roman Empire. But the strategies that were employed to make this point were strictly bound to a cultural context and a historical moment. By relating the appeal of Revelation to the spectacles of Rome, I intend to surround this revelation of a new world with the cultural framework that made the 'old' world of the Roman Empire *almost* inescapably real, even to John of Patmos" (emphasis added). I would like to know what is meant here by "almost," or why Frilingos would thus hesitate to declare what his book otherwise appears to argue: namely, that the book of Revelation is essentially a work within the world of Roman imperial culture. Thus Frilingos writes in conclusion, "Far from spinning an original yarn, Revelation tells a version of an already popular tale about spectacle and spectators. And this was a story that subjects of the Roman Empire loved, for they knew it well" (120). Even the ambivalence in dominant gender codes created by the figure of the powerfully passive Lamb with its "arrested masculinity," as Frilingos describes it, finally belongs to the same all-encompassing culture, being but another instance of the ongoing "test" of masculinity that the Roman arena created for its committed and self-conscious viewers. And yet Frilingos, at the end of his introduction to this argument, writes about the "almost inescapably real" world of the Roman Empire. A borderline exegesis of the book of Revelation seeks to probe and expand precisely what the qualification "almost" would entail, searching out those portals of escape that yet remain open or lurking within the indubitably pervasive confines of the "old" normalcy, or everything that is thus "strictly bound to a cultural context and a historical moment."

10. See Vaage, "Earliest Christian Asceticism," esp. 325–27.

11. The interpretation of dreams has enjoyed a long and checkered history. Sometimes dreams have been taken very seriously, including as a means of divine communication, and sometimes not very seriously at all, as though they were merely so much flotsam and jetsam tossed up on the shore of consciousness. See, for example, Parsifal-Charles, *The Dream;* Price, "Future of Dreams."

12. Instead of "collective dream work" I could just as easily have said the "utopian political imagination." But, again, it is my impression that the word "utopia" now typically evokes an even greater muddle of refusal than the notion of dream work. Once more, by the "utopian political imagination" I mean neither exclusively nor even especially the tradition of political theory or models of the state or social engineering for which the sixteenth-century treatise by Thomas More, *Utopia,* often serves as a fountainhead—though see equally well Plato's *Republic*.

13. Cf. Gutiérrez, *Entre las calandrias.*

14. Flores Galindo, *Buscando un inca,* 176–242, esp. 177–78.

15. Ibid., 176.

16. Cf. Frilingos, *Spectacles of Empire,* 2–5.

17. Cf. Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse,* 114: "This observation smacks of the obvious, and as such falls short of profundity. Yet the 'obvious' does not always command acknowledgement." Moore is remarking with this comment on the difficulty of "effectively exiting empire by attempting to turn imperial ideology against itself." I am suggesting that one does not write an apocalypse like the book of Revelation without some social pressure underwriting its discursive performance.

18. Cf. Maier ("Staging the Gaze"), who argues that the book of Revelation does not formulate a "theology of hope." See, further, Frilingos, *Spectacles of Empire,* 40–41.

19. This would be the basis, then, on which to undertake any number of other possible topics of investigation. These topics include, for example, the discursive mechanisms at work in the production of the book of Revelation as a piece of ancient "literature" in accordance with a given regime of writing. See, for example, J. J. Collins, *Apocalypse;*

Rowland, *Open Heaven;* Hellholm, "Problem of Apocalyptic Genre"; Arens and Díaz Mateos, *Apocalipsis,* 67–86, 153–85. For other topics, see Hellholm, *Apocalypticism;* J. J. Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*.

20. After the first chapter, for example, which is a narrative prologue to the book of Revelation, there are the seven letters to the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3, which are written in a very different, formulaic style. Within the larger and looser narrative of the work as a whole, a number of diverse visions and prophetic oracles (cf. Rev 22:18–19) have been inserted. This heterogeneity can be explained in a number of different ways. See, for example, Charles, *Revelation of St. John;* Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation;* Arens and Díaz Mateos, *Apocalipsis,* 187–212; also Linton, "Reading the Apocalypse"; Barr, "Beyond Genre."

21. For the concept of bricolage, see Lévi-Strauss, *Savage Mind,* 16–22.

22. Significant discrepancy arises only when the middle section of this schema is further subdivided. For example, Pablo Richard, in his commentary on the book of Revelation, proposes a literary structure in which there are seven main divisions plus a prologue and an epilogue. See Richard, *Apocalypse,* 33 (or Richard, *Apocalipsis,* 50). The result is the following chiasm:

Prologue and greeting (present period): 1:1–8
A. 1:9–3:22: apocalyptic vision of the church
B. 4:1–8:1: prophetic vision of history
C. 8:2–11:19: the seven trumpets (rereading of Exodus)
Center: 12:1–15:4: the Christian community among the beasts
C'. 15:5–16:21: the seven bowls (rereading of Exodus)
B'. 17:1–19:10: prophetic vision of history
A'. 19:11–22:5: apocalyptic vision of the future
Epilogue (present period): 22:6–21

Richard basically agrees with my proposal regarding the beginning and the end of the book of Revelation. Regarding the prologue, we disagree only in the placement of 1:9–20, which in my arrangement becomes the second part of the prologue. For Richard, this text serves to introduce the apocalyptic vision of the church in 1:9–3:22. Nonetheless, we still both agree that the first three chapters of Revelation (1:1–3:22) are introductory and, furthermore, that this section is made up of two parts: for me, they are 1:1–20 and 2:1–3:22; for Richard, 1:1–8 and 1:9–3:22. We also agree that the epilogue is found in 22:6–21. Richard and I concur in addition that what is recounted in 19:11–22:5 represents the concluding narrative section of the book of Revelation. I make a distinction, however, between the penultimate moment of triumph and judgment in 19:11–20:15 and the ultimate arrival of a new heaven and earth in 21:1–22:5, whereas these are taken together by Richard to represent a single vision of the future. This is hardly a serious discrepancy. Thus both Richard and I essentially use the same two doors to enter and to exit the literary edifice of the book of Revelation. It is only with regard to the literary structure of the materials in Rev 4:1–19:10 that we do not see eye to eye. Once more, however, the discrepancy proves not to be as serious as it might initially appear. To be sure, I take the text in 4:1–11 to be the final introductory chapter: for me, it both anticipates and thus provides an architectural counterweight to the culminating vision of triumph and judgment in 19:11–20:15. By contrast, Richard regards the text in 4:1–11 as part of the first prophetic vision of history, as he describes it (4:1–8:1). Nonetheless, this first prophetic vision is equivalent (minus 4:1–11) to the first of my middle narratives of conflict (5:1–8:1). Likewise, the second of my middle narratives of conflict (8:2–14:20) is virtually identical to the combination of the next two units in Richard's series of divisions: namely, C. 8:2–11:19 (the seven trumpets) and Center: 12:1–15:4. The third of my middle narratives

of conflict (15:1–19:10) is, then, virtually identical to Richard's subsequent two blocks: C'. 15:5–16:21 (the seven bowls) and B'. 17:1–19:10 (the second prophetic vision of history). For Richard, the subdivision of each of my second and third narratives of conflict is necessary in order to be able to identify a center for the book of Revelation in 12:1–15:4, which Richard's type of structural analysis requires. Less important—though also worth mentioning—is the placement of 15:1–4. For me, these verses mark the beginning of the narrative of the seven bowls. For Richard, they bring to a close his core discussion of Christian community among the beasts.

23. The text of Rev 11:15–14:20, which is the region of the seventh trumpet, deserves a more complete analysis. Note the link that joins the extensive description in 13:1–18 of the two beasts that arise from the sea (13:1–10) and from the earth (13:11–18) with the first brief mention in 11:7 of the beast that arises from the abyss. See below for the seventh seal as an occasion for the reiteration of the previous six seals.

24. For a survey of the different names with which this "interruption" has been described, see Perry, *Rhetoric of Digressions,* 39–50.

25. According to Talbert's *Apocalypse,* apart from the seven letters to the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3 of the book of Revelation, there are, in 4:1–22:5, seven discrete visions regarding the end of the age. These are found in 4:1–8:1; 8:2–11:18; 11:19–13:18; 14:1–20; 15:1–16:21; 17:1–19:5; and 19:6–22:5. Also according to Talbert, there are "interludes" not only in 7:1–17 and 10:1–11:14 but also in 14:13 and 15:5–7—with nothing of the sort, however, in 11:19–13:18; 17:1–19:5; or 19:6–22:5.

26. See, for example, Perry, "Critiquing the Excess."

27. The precise nature of these "historical facts" is, of course, debatable and always susceptible to further elaboration. Exactly which aspect of the Roman Empire is reflected in a given statement of the book of Revelation, as well as the actual foci of its sweeping critique, are topics that continue to be explored. But none of these studies will change in any way the basic affirmation that the book of Revelation is a Roman imperial text that strongly disagrees with Roman imperial rule. Thus, at least for a borderline exegesis of the text, it swiftly makes little difference to pursue the detail of this kind of history.

28. Cf. Pippin, *Death and Desire.*

29. This includes the image of Jesus as "the lamb who was slain."

30. This new arrangement would be as terrestrial as any other human state. Its envisioned descent from heaven underscores its novelty and enduring benevolence.

31. In this regard or, rather, thus far in my argument, I would not disagree with those scholars who argue that the book of Revelation articulates decided opposition to Roman imperial rule. The problem begins with what comes next (after the Roman Empire has ceased to be), which is to say with the proposed solution to the presenting problem.

32. See, for example, Moore, "Metonymies of Empire"; Marshall, "Gender and Empire"; Stratton, "Eschatological Arena." Cf. Barr, "John's Ironic Empire."

33. The statement in 2 Cor 6:18 is part of the peculiar fragment that is 2 Cor 6:14–7:1. See Fitzmyer, "Qumran and the Interpolated Paragraph"; Gnilka, "2 Cor 6:14–7:1"; Betz, "2 Cor 6:14–7:1."

34. For "king of kings" as part of ancient imperial rhetoric, see Rudberg, "Sendschreiben."

35. In this regard, it is notable that the New Jerusalem literally replaces the hated imperial city of Babylon or Rome. Though certainly different from the latter in many respects, the heavenly city nonetheless comes to occupy the very same place that the great wickedness once filled. Also revealing for the same reason are the textual variants in the final phrase of Rev 5:10. While a good number of manuscripts state that those whom the Lamb has made a "kingdom [*basileian*] and priests [*hiereis*] for our God . . . shall rule [*basileusousin*] [while still] on earth," a second group of manuscripts asserts that it is more precisely "we" who shall do so (*basileusomen*), and a third set of variants

claims that the former are already ruling, in the present tense (*basileuousin*). Obviously, some interest was aroused regarding the precise timing and projected leadership of the proposed coup d'état.

36. See Rev 6:15; 9:11; 16:12, 14; 17:2, 10, 12, 18; 18:3, 9; 19:18, 19; 21:24.

37. Except for the oblique references in Rev 17:14 and 19:16, this is the only place (1:5) where Jesus is explicitly called "king" in the book of Revelation. Similarly in 22:20, 21, Jesus is uniquely (albeit twice) but aptly invoked as *Kyrios Iêsous*. (Otherwise *kyrios* is typically used in the book of Revelation as simply another name for God with no obvious or necessary reference to Jesus.) The first and final chapters of the book of Revelation not only make it a work about Jesus but also designate him as its putative author or encompassing voice. Thus the book is said in 1:1 to be a "revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to him [i.e., Jesus Christ] to show his servants," beginning with the prophet John. And in 22:16 (cf. 22:6) we read, "I, Jesus, sent my angel to witness about these things to you on account of the churches" (see, further, 22:18, 20). This framework, however, does not reappear anywhere else in the book of Revelation. In the body of this work, the name "Jesus" is almost always identified with a certain witness or testimony (*martyria*). Thus Jesus would be the exemplary *martyr*. And that which should be imitated is this witness (or faith). Nothing else explicitly happens or is done by or for Jesus in the book of Revelation. In fact, in chapters 1–11 no obvious reference of any kind is made to him (i.e., *Iêsous, Christos, Kyrios*). And afterward, any such reference never becomes more than minimal. One might think, therefore, that the book of Revelation had little to do with the figure of Jesus.

38. The claim in Rev 1:6 that "he made us a kingdom, priests to God and his father" might seem to be a more metaphorical statement. Also, the self-description of the seer in 1:9 as "your brother and fellow participant in the distress [*thlipsis*] and kingdom and endurance in Jesus" is not simply a statement of fact. In 5:10, however, at the beginning of the first cycle of calamities defined by the opening of the seven seals and as part of the general praise to the Lamb, who alone is declared to be worthy to break open these seals, the claim is made—in a context not unlike the framework of the statement in 1:6—that "you made them [from every tribe and tongue and people and nation] a kingdom and priests to our God." Only in 5:10, however, is it also said "and they will reign on earth." Nonetheless, it remains unclear how "we" who have been made to be such a kingdom, or priests, would enact this identity. But in 11:15, now at the end of the second cycle of calamities defined by the seven trumpets, when the seventh of these has been sounded, great voices in heaven proclaim, "The kingdom of the world of our Lord and of his Christ has come into being, and he will rule for ever and ever." Then, in 12:10, a similar proclamation is made: "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come into being, because the accuser of our brothers has been thrown [down], the one who accuses them before our God day and night." Finally, in 17:12, 17, 18, the term *basileia* is used precisely to complement a literal understanding of the reference to kings.

39. The figure of the Lamb is clearly marked for the early Christian reader as a representation of Jesus by the initial description of the Lamb "as if one who had been slain" (Rev 5:6). To this Lamb the first hymn of praise intones, "You are worthy to take the book and to open its seals, because you were slain and purchased in redemption for God with your blood from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and made them a kingdom and priests for our God, and they will reign on earth" (5:9–10). And, in 21:14, the same Lamb is said to have had "twelve apostles."

40. Rudberg, "Sendschreiben," 171–72. The inscription was found in 1886 in a village of Magnesia on the Maeander.

41. Ibid., 172–73. For the *tade legei* formula, see also Stauffer, *Christ and the Caesars,* 181; Lähnemann, "Die sieben Sendschreiben."

42. Rudberg, "Sendschreiben," 173–78. Rudberg also tried to explain some of the internal differences between the two traditions. After briefly discussing a few other inscriptions, he speculates in conclusion, "In the home region of the apocalyptic seer [of Revelation] there were probably Persian inscriptions, perhaps partly of the same sort as the letter of Darius in Magnesia. He also appears to have had ample opportunity to become familiar with them, since some of them were refurbished in the first century A.D." (179).

43. See Aune, *Revelation 1–5,* 117–32, esp. 126–29. Aune thinks that these proclamations can also be identified with a "paraenetic salvation-judgment oracle"—a proposal that I find much less compelling. See ibid., 126.

44. See Benner, *The Emperor Says.* See also Winterbottom, review of *The Emperor Says*; Fridh, *Terminologie et Formules.*

45. Aune, *Revelation 1–5,* 128–29.

46. Ibid., 129.

47. Ibid.

48. Postcolonial interpretation of the book of Revelation appears to be fascinated by this painful feature of the work. Obviously, I agree with this approach regarding the deep complicity of the book of Revelation with Roman imperial culture, or the work's embedment within it, and the recurring failure to escape its entangling tissue. But I am suspicious of the way in which such scholarship seems unable, or unwilling, to keep inquiring about what might yet exceed this evident limitation, as though we were hopelessly enthralled by such a disheartening predicament.

49. Tina Pippin, for one, claims to have given up this expectation: "I no longer see how we can carry the text [of the book of Revelation] around as we do, lending it any measure of authority in the Christian canon. Tim LaHaye has hijacked the text, but I'm not willing to negotiate for its return to biblical scholars and mainstream Christianity." At the same time, Pippin seems unsure of what, then, to do: "It's not enough to say no to the Apocalypse, to refuse its signs, resist its totalizing vision. It's not enough to say no to its imagined heavenly Empire. . . . Saying no to this Apocalypse, this godly Empire, does it lead only to an empty 'end'? Does the End have no meaning? . . . So what are our options?" Pippen, "Signs of Empire," 124, 131. After the final question in this quotation, there follows as the final paragraph of the article a series of ever more sarcastic questions. Or are they signs of desperation?

50. Alan S. Trueblood translates the phrase "Hoy es siempre todavía" as "Today always is still."

51. Part of the promise of the book of Revelation is ultimately to name the nature of the world in which we presently live as a nightmare. One way to understand the plethora of violent imagery, carnage, gore, and pestilence in the work—which for some readers either borders on or passes over into the pornographic—is as a kind of catharsis or externalization of all the "shit" that the author and his audience had already suffered. Such things could not simply be forgotten and let go without undergoing some process of acknowledgement and rearticulation, even though there immediately arises the danger of becoming excessively fascinated with the horror and the pain, and thereby of a fixated repetition of it all again.

52. Once more, see Perry, *Rhetoric of Digressions,* 39–50.

53. The trajectory of these events corresponds to the pattern of imperial conquest. Contrast the innocuous comment on this sequence by Talbert in *Apocalypse,* 34–35.

54. Why are olive oil and wine exempt? According to Boring, it is because these were the privilege of the rich. See Boring, *Revelation,* 122. Cf. Massyngberde Ford (*Revelation,* 98–99, 107–8), who gives other reasons that are both political and cultic.

55. Green is here not the color of life but of gangrene and other putrefaction.

56. "Every single one" is, I suggest, the significance of the number 144,000, which equals 12 × 12 × 1,000, on the assumption that the numbers 12 and 1,000 were both commonly used to represent a complete set. Thus, a large number that is a multiple of both of them together—including a double dose of 12—would signal total completeness or "every single one."

57. The tribes of Dan and Ephraim are not mentioned.

58. I recognize that this is hardly a complete discussion of everything said in Rev 7:1–17.

59. Additionally, the fifth and sixth seals receive a more detailed explanation than did the previous four. Perhaps for this reason, the final three trumpets with their respective "woes" are given another brief introduction in Rev 8:13. Note also the threefold *ouai ouai ouai* in this verse. Subsequently, in 9:12, reference is made to the fact that the first of these has taken place, and in 11:14 that the second has occurred. What, then, does it mean that no such reference is made with respect to the third "woe"?

60. Cf. Ramírez Fernández, "El juicio de Dios."

61. Cf. Joel 2:4–11. The leader of the locusts, who is "the angel of the abyss," has the name *Apollyôn*. Some scholars think that there is an allusion here to the Greek god Apollo.

62. Perhaps in view are metallurgy and the arms industry. Note that the migratory locusts are said in Rev 9:7–9 to appear "as horses prepared for war." The locusts reign for five months (9:5). According to Talbert (*Apocalypse,* 42) this corresponds to the normal lifespan of a locust.

63. Again, this assurance of "immunity" would not be simply a good thing insofar as it would reiterate the typical imbalance of predictable weal and woe making up the colonial situation.

64. According to Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, this section has six segments: namely, Rev 10:1–4; 10:5–7; 10:8–10; 10:11–11:2; 11:3–12; and 11:13–14. See Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation,* 74–79.

65. This reflects my understanding of the curious phrase *hoi katoikountes epi tês gês,* as it appears in Rev 11:10. Namely, *katoikountes* translates to "at home," and *epi tês gês* to "the world as it is."

66. For this reason, the dismal demise of the two witnesses in Rev 11:7–10 is followed in 11:11–13 by the scene of their entrance into the heavenly realm, whose truth they spoke without visible success on earth. Otherwise, the same scene is charged with all the problems discussed in the preceding section of this chapter.

67. Brennan, *History After Lacan,* 188.

68. Ibid., 190.

69. Ibid., 194–95. In practical terms, this means, according to Brennan, that "the stress on loving one's neighbour as oneself is aligned here with the opposition to sexism, racism, and to other projective fantasies that seize on sexual orientation as an excuse for offloading aggression. These things are allied with the opposition to any economic system that degrades human creative potentials, and takes more from than it gives back to nature. The counter-cultural stress on spiritual connection is aligned here with the union movements which struggle for rights for migrant workers, for different ethnic groups, and the welfare state politics of single mothers. Acknowledging one's indebtedness to and dependence on the extraordinary creativity of the 'God as Nature' is aligned here with the opposition to power over others in any form; the feminist concern with symbolizing divinity in maternal terms becomes an imperative, but it is an imperative that is aligned with the advocacy of tolerance that lends liberal vocabularies their good sense as distinct from their egoism" (194). Similarly, though in a very different key, see Hewitt, *Town that Food Saved,* 187.

70. Hauge, *Trusting Your Life,* 24.

CONCLUSION

1. Cf. Sebald, *After Nature;* Grünbein, *Nach den Satiren.*

2. See Vaage, "Violence as Religious Experience," 132–35.

3. Augustine, *On Genesis,* 188–89.

4. Cf. Jeffers, "Sign-Post," in *Selected Poetry,* 504.

5. See Diamond, *Collapse;* also Diamond, *Rise and Fall,* and—oh, why not?—Diamond, *Why Is Sex Fun?*

6. Diamond, *Collapse,* 14–15.

7. See Weisman, *World Without Us.*

8. See, further, Vaage, *Columbus, Q, and Rome.*

9. This phrase, again, is taken from the poem "We Bring Democracy to the Fish" by Donald Hall.

10. Bishop, *Complete Poems, 1927–1979,* 42–44.

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"Leif Vaage's 'borderline exegesis' works on the edges and in the crevices of biblical texts and biblical scholarship to engage 'life questions' that are particularly urgent for those who are living on the edge or on the margins. This edgy and yet balanced book does not assume the Christian triumphalism that has plagued many 'liberational' readings of the Bible. I find it accessible and admirable."

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"With his proposal of a 'borderline exegesis,' Leif Vaage challenges traditional biblical scholarship, opening the possibility of reading the Bible with a utopian imagination. Such a reading is a conversation with the biblical texts that takes place in the margins of well-being, where the 'good life' cannot be taken for granted and life itself is often threatened. Stimulated by his long-term contact with borderline experiences of life in the outskirts of Lima, Peru, Vaage's reading of various biblical texts shows how this kind of exegesis can help imagine a better world."

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In *Borderline Exegesis*, Leif Vaage presents an alternative approach to biblical interpretation, or exegesis—an approach that bends the boundaries of the traditional North American methodology to analyze the meaning of biblical texts for a wider audience. To accomplish this, Vaage engages in a practice he calls "borderline exegesis." Adapting anthropological notions of borderlands, borderline exegesis writes biblical scholarship peripherally, unearthing the Bible's textual and discursive borderlands and allowing biblical texts to be at play with the utopian imagination.

The book's main chapters comprise four case studies that engage in a "divergent reading" of the book of Job, the Gospel of Matthew, the Epistle of James, and the book of Revelation. Informed by the author's time in war-torn Peru, these chapters take on themes that the poor and disenfranchised have historically claimed—themes of social justice, the legitimacy (or lack thereof) of prevailing social practices, and, most importantly, utopian demand for another possible world. The chapters are held together by the presentation of a greater theoretical framework that provides reflection on the exegetical practices within and confronts biblical scholars with important questions about the aims of the work they do. Taken as a whole, *Borderline Exegesis* seeks to disclose what the professional practice of textual interpretation might become if we refuse the conventional distances between academic practice and lived experience.

Leif E. Vaage is Associate Professor of the New Testament at Emmanuel College of Victoria University in the University of Toronto.

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