The Ethics of Hebrew Narrative: A Typology of Modes for Moral Analysis with a Case Study (Gen 19:30–38)

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Abstract

This article establishes a novel typology of approaches to the moral analysis of biblical narrative based upon a single case study: the story of Lot and his daughters in Gen 19:30–38. By analyzing how interpreters throughout time have made and justified ethical evaluations of Gen 19:30–38, I identify nine distinct methods for interpreting biblical narratives from an ethical angle and arrive at several conclusions: (1) there are distinct modes by which interpreters ethically evaluate biblical narratives; (2) certain modes are used in combination; (3) different modes can reach the same conclusion, while the same mode can bring interpreters to different conclusions; (4) the proposed typology should reorient certain methodological priorities in biblical ethics. The significance of additional factors for the ethics of biblical narrative are also explored, including the role of certain historical-critical approaches and the nature of intertextuality, while several constructive suggestions are offered for work in the field.

1. Introduction

There is no consensus on method for the moral evaluation of biblical narrative. Nor is there a study that has comprehensively classified the methods in use. For scholars who read narrative from an ethical angle approaches are notably eclectic, and even in works of Hebrew Bible (HB) ethics that contain extended discussions of methodology, a full exposition remains lacking.[1]

[1] While broader than the ethics of biblical narrative, the most extensive analyses of research on biblical ethics include CHRISTOPHER J. H. WRIGHT, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), and VOLKER RABENS, JACQUELINE N. GREY, and MARIAM KAMELL KOVALISHYN, eds., *Key Approaches to Biblical Ethics: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue*, BIS 189 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2021). For reflections on the methodology of OT ethics, including approaches to "problematic" passages of the Bible, see among others,

Add to this the insistent query about "how to read narrative as moral literature,"[2] and it would appear that a methodological assessment of such efforts is both absent and urgent. This article provides an exposition and analysis of the methods used for interpreting Hebrew narrative from an ethical angle, covering current approaches while accounting for the history of interpretation. I classify these interpretive methods as distinct "modes," extrapolating nine of them from a single case study: the story of Lot and his daughters in Gen 19:30–38, with additional textual examples supplied throughout.[3] These modes of analysis form a novel typology of approaches to the ethics of biblical narrative and lead to several conclusions: (1) there are distinct modes by which interpreters ethically evaluate biblical narratives; (2) certain modes are used in combination; (3) different modes can reach the same conclusion, while the same mode can bring interpreters to different conclusions; (4) the proposed typology should reorient certain methodological priorities in biblical ethics. The significance of additional factors for such research are also explored, including the role of certain historical-critical approaches and the nature of intertextuality, while several concluding, constructive suggestions are offered for work in the field. In this, the article provides a comprehensive contribution to the study of biblical ethics.

These four theses are, in part, a response to the ways in which interpreters have classified research in HB ethics. A bifurcation between "descriptive" and "normative" aims has become a customary means of categorization, while a diachronic-synchronic partition is also not uncommon. John Barton, for instance, introduces his *Ethics in Ancient Israel* with the following remarks:

> "The task I am undertaking here is purely descriptive, and is not meant to convince anyone that they should become a Christian, a Jew, or indeed a 'Yahwist'. There is a sizeable group among my fellow Old Testament specialists who will dislike this deliberately non-confessional stance from the beginning, since 'canonical' approaches, in which the scholar expounds these texts only from within a Christian framework of thought ('theological interpretation') are now widespread."[4]

He goes on to admit that "there are insights in the Hebrew Bible that still 'speak' today, even if in a strange voice" and recognizes the challenge of certain interpretive commitments with appropriate nuance, especially any attempt at a chronological approach to ancient Israelite

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ERYL W. DAVIES, *The Immoral Bible: Approaches to Biblical Ethics* (London: T&T Clark, 2010); HENRY MCKEATING, "Sanctions Against Adultery in Ancient Israelite Society, with some Reflections on Methodology in the Study of Old Testament Ethics," *JSOT* 11 (1979): 57–72.

[2] See WALDEMAR JANZEN, *Old Testament Ethics: A Paradigmatic Approach* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994); BRUCE C. BIRCH, *Let Justice Roll Down: The Old Testament, Ethics, and Christian Life* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991); MARY E. MILLS, *Biblical Morality: Moral Perspectives in Old Testament Narratives*, Heythrop Studies in Contemporary Philosophy, Religion and Theology (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001); GORDAN J. WENHAM, *Story as Torah: Reading Old Testament Narrative Ethically* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000). For recent proposals see, e.g., S. MIN CHUN, *Ethics and Biblical Narrative: A Literary and Discourse-analytical Approach to the Story of Josiah*, Oxford Theology and Religion Monographs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); SHIRA WEISS, *Ethical Ambiguity in the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 4.

[3] Similarly, robust case studies would include the story of Shechem and Dinah in Genesis 34, David's treatment of Mephibosheth in 2 Samuel 9, Michal's deception of Saul in 1 Sam 19:11–17, and the battle between Israel and Midian in Num 31:1–12. The most extensive account of scholarship on Gen 19:30–38, with decent attention given to ethics, is found in JOHANNA STIEBERT'S, *Father's and Daughters in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 130–144. See below for a further justification of my selection of Gen 19:30–38.

[4] JOHN BARTON, *Ethics in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 4–5.

ethical thought.[5] But there seems to be no escaping the categories. Descriptive, prescriptive, normative, confessional, historical – such language is used by scholars to characterize their own work and that of others in the field.[6] While there is some value in such distinctions, as well as a necessity at times, it can also be advantageous to suspend this language in favor of alternative organizing principles.[7] The advantages become evident when analyzing a single case study (Gen 19:30–38), as it provides an inductive approach to the argumentation involved and discloses several assumptions and overlooked nuances of interpreting Hebrew narrative. Other matters of prefatory relevance for biblical ethics include interpretive presuppositions, some of which are captured above (e.g. "confessional" or "historical"), and the treatment of various literary "contexts," such as a passage's chapter, book, and canonical subsections, all of which are informed by the present study.

1.1 Ethical Evaluation and Justification

My theses emerge through an analysis of how interpreters have made and justified ethical evaluations of Gen 19:30–38. The vast majority of interpreters wish to discern the narrator's point of view as can be determined from the text, which seems to be true of scholars regardless of whether their work has been classified, by themselves or others, as descriptive, prescriptive, confessional, or historical. For aside from any such commitments, most biblical scholars interested in the ethics of Gen 19:30–38 seek to determine the moral status of its characters and actions as portrayed by the narrator. Are Lot's daughter's, for instance, portrayed in a way that conveys moral approval, disapproval, or some sense of ambiguity? The first issue at stake for the moral analysis of Hebrew narrative, then, is determining an ethical standpoint in a given episode.[8]

The second is a defense of that determination, and scholars use a variety of strategies to do so. For example, some support their claims about the narrative's moral viewpoint with traditional theories of moral philosophy, while others appeal to lexical details within the narrative itself, or to intertextual connections, or to one's own moral intuition. In cases when the episode is determined to be morally ambiguous, to which an entire category is reserved in this article, the interpreter's reasoning is no less present. In all cases, it remains a matter of the resources that interpreters use to formulate their arguments regarding a certain moral viewpoint within the narrative.

The scholarship surrounding Gen 19:30–38 includes self-identified works of "biblical ethics" but also work with other interests in the passage. What is, again, noteworthy about the

[5] BARTON, *Ethics*, 7–11.
[6] See C. L. CROUCH, "Introduction," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Hebrew Bible and Ethics*, ed. C. L. Crouch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 1–5; CHRISTIAN FREVEL, "More than Worthwhile to Consider? Old Testament Ethics between Description and Prescription," in *Key Approaches*, 131; JAQUELINE E. LAPSLEY, "Ethics: I. Hebrew Bible/Old Testament," *EBR* 8:98.
[7] MARK G. BRETT (*Political Trauma and Healing: Biblical Ethics for a Postcolonial World* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016], esp. 55–72) has opted for particular senses of "meaning" and "significance" and attempts to reveal the problematic nature of certain hermeneutical approaches to biblical ethics, while Crouch's Cambridge Companion ("Introduction," 1) works within the dichotomies mentioned above in order to "bring these two scholarly enterprises into conversation."
[8] The terms "MORAL" and "ETHICAL" are used interchangeably for the purposes of this article.

vast majority is their concern with an ethical evaluation of the episode in accordance with its shape in the narrative, rather than voicing their own claims about its normativity for contemporary audiences. While such "normative" trajectories may be the end goal for some, it is an unproductive starting point for characterizing their interpretation and is, in many senses, an inaccurate description. Overall, interpreters of Gen 19:30–38 seek to determine whether the narrator intended to portray the episode with ethical approval or disapproval and then use various strategies to defend that decision. This is, in other words, a matter evaluation and justification: is something right, wrong, or in-between, and why so?[9] These two priorities will be the primary criteria used to expound a novel typology of moral analysis and, I will argue, provide a valuable set of criteria for assessing approaches to the ethics of biblical narrative more broadly.

It is particularly the second issue – strategies that interpreters have used to defend a particular conclusion about the ethics of Gen 19:30–38 – that will be my focus in what follows. So while the ethical judgments that have been directed at Lot and his daughters, whether the daughters acted rightly or wrongly according to the narrative, for instance, are an important prerequisite for my argument, I am most interested in the reasons given for these judgements and the sources upon which they depend. It is the reasoning and resources used to defend and explain the moral evaluation of Hebrew narrative that I call "modes of moral analysis." I argue that there are nine such modes for interpreting biblical narratives from an ethical standpoint, which draw, respectively, on the following:

1. Explicit narrator comment
2. Immediate narrative elements: lexemes, connotations and inferences
3. Intertextual connections
4. Ancient Mediterranean sources
5. Ambiguity
6. Theological premises
7. Traditional moral theories
8. Postmodern criticisms
9. Moral intuition

This typology, in other words, captures the distinctive ways that interpreters justify their conclusions about Lot and his daughters.

I should respond to one objection immediately, namely, that these categories are not distinct but rather depend upon each other in many instances, even necessarily so. For example, theological premises (#6) may be derived from intertextual connections (#3), and elements within the immediate narrative (#2) may mirror a traditional moral theory (#7). I do not refute this objection; for these modes can be used interdependently and do, at times, overlap, a reality accounted for in my conclusions. Furthermore, interpreters often use multiple modes of

[9] This distinction between evaluation and justification is somewhat contained in the concepts of "Ethos" and "Ethik" in German scholarship (see ECKART OTTO, "Narrative Begründungen von Ethos in der Ethik des Alten und Neuen Testaments," in *Jenseits von Indikativ und Imperativ*, ed. FRIEDRICH WILHELM HORN UND RUBEN ZIMMERMANN, WUNT 238 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009], 77).

analysis to assess a single passage, appealing to lexemes, intertextual connections, and theological premises all at once, for example. However, despite such overlap and combination, these modes are used in ways that warrant distinction and can be plausibly presented as such. As a final point, I have arranged these modes, broadly, based upon their proximity to the biblical text itself, as the first is most immediate and explicit (the biblical narrator expresses a moral judgment), followed by less-direct evaluative markers within the narrative, then textual connections found elsewhere in the Bible, and onto resources more external to the biblical text, such as general theological premises and gender-based ideologies. In what follows, I briefly introduce Gen 19:30–38 and then expound each mode of analysis in relation to that passage.

1.2 Genesis 19:30–38

Genesis 19:30–38 recounts the story of a father (Lot) becoming intoxicated at the behest of his daughters, who then proceed to have sex with him in an effort to reproduce. This scene occurs after the decimation of Sodom, when Lot's two daughters seem to believe, or at least say they believe, that they and their father are the only people left living in the area; however, they may simply be expressing the impossibility of being able to procreate in the current circumstances, rather than claiming that Lot is the only man alive.[10] With no apparent hope of finding men with which to reproduce, the elder daughter concocts a plan to bear children – she and then her younger sister will sleep with their father, without him knowing – and the plan succeeds.

This narrative has attracted all manner of moral analysis and, given its relatively straightforward sequence of events and concise telling, offers a neat example that will disclose all nine modes of moral analysis. Before moving on to these modes, a few prefatory comments about the passage are in order. First, the most common object of moral analysis has been the action of the daughters and whether or not it was justified.[11] While an ethical appreciation of this narrative indeed remains inseparable from all of its characters, my focus shall remain upon the plans and actions of the daughters, since this has attracted most of the recent interpretive attention and demonstrates the gamut of interpretive approaches. Second, while interpreters have often dealt with the daughters as a single unit, as if they compose and execute the same plan in equal measure, Jonathan Grossman has rightly argued for a distinction in agency between the two, with the elder taking initiative and the younger acting with some hesitation.[12] We should not, then, express a view of "the daughters" in every respect but rather treat them as separate agents where relevant. Third, interpreters have expressed both

[10] The nature of their comment in 19:31 has long been debated (e.g., Calvin; Abarbanel in *The Commentators' Bible: Genesis. The Rubin JPS Miqra'ot Gedolot*, ed., trans., and annotated by Michael Carasik [Lincoln: JPS, 2018], 175; MATTHEW J. KORPMAN, "Can anything good come from Sodom? A feminist and narrative critique of Lot's daughters in Gen. 19.30–38," *JSOT* 43 [2019]: 334–342).

[11] Some interpreters have approached the matter via the character of Lot, noting his passivity and drunkenness, for instance. See GERHARD VON RAD, *Genesis: A Commentary*, OTL, trans. John H. Marks, rev. ed. (London: SCM, 1972), 224. Many rabbinic interpreters, such as Nahmanides on 19:32, and ancient interpreters in general seem most interested in Lot.

[12] JONATHAN GROSSMAN, "'Associative Meanings' in the Character Evaluation of Lot's Daughters," *CBQ* 76 (2014): 40–57; so RASHI on 19:33 and Calvin.

overall approval and disapproval of the narrative, while some have suspended judgment; there is no real consensus for the moral evaluation of the passage.[13]

2. Modes of Moral Analysis

2.1 Explicit narrator comment

That a biblical narrator will make explicit moral judgments about a scene or person is familiar, even if it is not commonplace.[14] "Noah was a righteous man; he was blameless in his generation" (Gen 6:9); "the people of Israel did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord" (Judges *passim*); "Hezekiah did what was right in the eyes of the Lord" (2 Kgs 18:3).[15] While these are notably terse and largely confined to approval and disapproval, the narrator's opinion of Eli's sons in 1 Sam 2:12-17 addresses both of our ethical questions in some detail: the disapproval of their action and character, as well as the reasons for such disapproval. We are told that these sons were "worthless sons" (v. 12), a clear assertion of disapproval, along with the fact that they committed great "sin" (v. 17). However, the narrator goes on to explain the reason for such lowly moral status: "for [כי] the men spurned the offering of the Lord" (v. 17). As these uncontentious examples indicate, biblical narrators were quite capable of levelling first- and second-order moral judgments about characters and actions.

There are no comments by the narrator so glaring in Gen 19:30–38. The story is told without a plain, narrated remark regarding approval or disapproval, and, as we shall see, some interpreters think this justifies entire moral ambiguity. Lacking also is a more subtle version of evaluation found in HB narrative, proclaimed by other characters rather than the narrator's voice itself.[16] In Genesis 38, for example, Judah seems to approve of Tamar's deceptive efforts when he calls her "more righteous [צדק] than I" (Gen 38:26); Boaz also approves when he responds to Ruth's late night approach with a divine blessing and calls it a great "kindness [חסד]" (Ruth 3:10); lastly, the sons of Jacob condemn Shechem's treatment of their sister when the narrator tells us that they were "very angry," since such a "disgrace [נבלה]" occurred in Israel that "must not be done" (Gen 34:7). In Gen 19:30–38, such express evaluation comes from neither the narrator nor any character, and yet interpreters have nonetheless appealed to elements within this passage which, to them, suggest the narrator's explicit evaluation of Lot and his daughters. For my purposes, the absence of those two features, which are otherwise quite typical of biblical narrative, further justifies the use of Gen 19:30–38 as a case study for cataloguing modes of moral analysis. Without an explicit evaluative comment from the narrator or character, this passage invites interpreters to look elsewhere in their moral analysis and exhibit a larger range of ethical-interpretive modes.

As mentioned, several interpreters argue that the narrator nonetheless expresses a discernable moral judgment here. According to David Carr, "the grouping of incest and drunkenness

[13] Aside from brief additions in LXX Gen 19:37–38, the LXX and Vulgate reflect the MT with accuracy and offer little interpretive value for my purposes.
[14] McKeating, "Sanctions," 66.
[15] All translations are my own unless otherwise stated.
[16] This is not to say that a character's moral judgment reflects the narrator's. See, e.g., Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 153–185.

at the close of Genesis 19 make it absolutely clear that [Lot] fathering children through incest with his own daughters is not being presented neutrally."[17] Talia Sutskover likewise argues that the elder daughter is morally open to question, because she voices the plan, a narrative technique found elsewhere in the HB.[18] Sutskover also points to the widespread use of possessive suffixes, which the daughters use to refer to Lot ("our father") and with which the narrator "conveys the sense that the daughters own and control their father," thereby violating family relationships.[19] This thematic grouping of incest and drunkenness, along with a narrative technique of putting plans on the mouth of the morally suspect and having characters express familial violation, are thought to be clear comments from the narrator that the activity in this passage is, to some degree, wrong.

For Megan Warner, the evidence points in the opposite direction. Genesis 19:15 refers to Lot's daughters as "the ones found" (הנמצאת), using a root that appears in Genesis 18 in association with the righteous that might be "found" (מצא) in Sodom (18:26, 28–32). "The description of Lot's daughters as 'the ones found' in those circumstances," she concludes, "must constitute an implicit narratorial pointer to the righteousness of the girls."[20] Warner seems to take the lexical link as evidence for the narrator's approval of Lot's daughters. Despite an absence of the most explicit narratorial comment, each of these interpreters finds transparent evidence for the narrator's moral (dis)approval.

This example discloses one of my primary theses: that the same mode of moral evaluation can bring interpreters to different conclusions. Warner appeals to the lexical item הנמצאת and its association with righteous Sodomites to conclude that the narrator approves of the daughters' action. In contrast, Carr appeals to the topical grouping of incest and drunkenness at the passage's conclusion to underscore the negative portrayal of all involved. Similarly, Sutskover points to the widespread use of possessive suffixes and the narrative technique of the plotter's guilt. The key here is that interpreters understand these pieces of evidence to be direct moral judgments from the narrator. Such judgments may be "implicit" but, for these interpreters, they seem to function like the explicit narrator comments used elsewhere in Hebrew narrative and are expressly linked to the narrator's moral appraisal.

2.2 Immediate narrative elements: lexemes, connotations and inferences

Moral evaluation also occurs based upon elements present within the narrative itself other than the narrator's direct evaluation. These often include linguistic details that connote certain positive or negative qualities of a character, or inferences based upon certain activities. The former tend to overlap with the first category above, depending on how deliberate the interpreter takes them to be, while the second warrants a category of its own. Several interpreters, such as Gordon Wenham, have suggested that the narrative proximity of this episode to the evil of Sodom has ethical significance. For Wenham, the daughters' sexual activity echoes

[17] DAVID M. CARR, *Reading the Fractures of Genesis: Historical and Literary Approaches* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 191 n. 27.
[18] TALIA SUTSKOVER, "Lot and his Daughters (Gen 19:30–38). Further Literary and Stylistic Examinations," *JHS* 11 (2011): 10.
[19] SUTSKOVER, "Lot," 8.
[20] MEGAN WARNER, "Finding Lot's Daughters," in *Gendered Historiography: Theoretical Considerations and Case Studies*, ed. Shawna Dolansky and Sarah Shectman, *JHS* 19 (2019): 57.

the depravity of Sodom and suggests that "they shared the warped morality of the city from which they had all escaped."[21] Grossman distinguishes between the moral statuses of the two daughters.[22] The elder takes initiative while the younger appears somewhat passive, even hesitant, when invited to procreate with her father. He concludes that such hesitation is "commended in the narrative" and discloses the ethical significance of intentions despite identical actions. Nahum Sarna, also inferring but towards an alternative conclusion, claims that "[the sister's] anonymity implies censure."[23]

This mode and the previous appear very similar in the case of Gen 19:30–38, and it is admittedly a shortcoming of choosing this otherwise exemplary passage. But it is actually a necessary, and understandable, cost, since passages with the narrator's explicit moral evaluation lack the full variety of interpretation found among those without it. If this passage, for instance, concluded with, "And the daughters did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, but Lot was in his favor," then there would arguably be far less debate about the narrator's moral evaluation and thus far less opportunity to extrapolate a typology representative of Hebrew narrative interpretation, as mentioned above; hence my attempt to draw out how these first two modes differ. Interpreters of the current mode draw on immediate narrative elements, including lexemes, thematic connections, and contrast in character actions, and yet one gets the sense that these arguments rely on more inference and connotation than the first mode does. The conclusions, while plausible, are more suggestive and are not positioned as direct ethical appraisals from the narrator like those of Carr and others above. When one accounts for the fact that the narrator may make a blatant remark about the ethical status of a character or have characters themselves express such an evaluation, as is well-attested elsewhere in biblical narrative, this distinctiveness emerges with all clarity.

Other textual examples disclose additional "immediate narrative elements" that interpreters appeal to in order to justify an ethical evaluation. For one, the consequences of an action within the narrative may serve as the litmus test of a narrator's (dis)approval. That Rahab, for instance, lies in order to help the Israelite spies escape (Josh 2:4–6) is arguably viewed positively within the course of that story: she was spared from the destruction of Jericho and incorporated into Israel with her family (Josh 6:25).[24] This would constitute one of many narrative techniques used to express moral (dis)approval. One might also consider the development of character across a narrative, as Theo Hettema does by deeming Joseph a moral model in Genesis. Significant here is "the development of Joseph in the whole narrative."[25]

[21] GORDON J. WENHAM, *Genesis 16–50*, WBC 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 64; see also *Story as Torah*, 95. RONALD HENDEL, CHANA KRONFELD, and ILANA PARDES ("Gender and Sexuality," in Hendel, *Reading Genesis*, 90–91) argue that Sodom casts a shadow of sexual deviance across Israel's history, of which Lot's daughters are an example.
[22] GROSSMANN, "Associative Meanings."
[23] NAHUM SARNA, *The JPS Commentary on Genesis* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 140.
[24] For another example, see JOHN VAN SETERS' remark about Gen 12:17: "In Gen 12:17 the seriousness of the sin involved is implied in God's judgment of a plague on Pharaoh's house" (*Abraham in History and Tradition* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975], 76).
[25] THEO L. HETTEMA, *Reading for Good: Narrative Theology and Ethics in the Joseph Story from the Perspective of Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutics*, Studies in Philosophical Theology 18 (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1996), 247.

2.3 Intertextual connections

While links have already been made between Lot's daughters and what we, as readers, know of Sodom earlier in Genesis 18–19, another mode of moral evaluation makes textual connections even further afield. In this case, interpreters make an inference about the moral status of someone or something within the passage based upon intertextual connections.[26] The resemblance of Lot's daughters to the episode of Tamar deceiving Judah (Genesis 38) has served as a basis for approving of the former. In the wake of her deceptive efforts, Judah calls Tamar "more righteous [צדק] than I" (Gen 38:26), which has been widely noted as an approval of Tamar's tactics. With this textual link, Matthew J. Korpman has deemed Lot's daughters "heroic Hebrew matriarchs" of the same order, while Megan Warner uses such intertextual evidence to supplement her argument for moral approval, noted above.[27] Wenham, however, makes a different intertextual connection and thereby draws a different conclusion. He compares Lot's daughters to Ham, who, he claims, failed at his familial duty because "he broadcast his father's folly" and is cursed for it (Gen 9:20–27). "The parallel with Noah and Ham [and Lot's daughters]," he writes, "is obvious, so that if Ham was cursed for his indiscretion, how much more blameworthy is the behaviour of Lot's daughters."[28]

Two different texts from Genesis are linked to 19:30–38, and their clearer moral appraisals, namely of Tamar and Ham, are then applied to this episode. Drawing ethical conclusions from intertextual connections relies on a great deal of inference and thus the plausibility of these arguments varies. This mode also adds another layer of evaluation, since one's assessment of the related scene (in this case Tamar or Ham) can determine one's conclusion about the narrative under consideration. For, where Ham is condemned, then Lot's daughters are too, and where Tamar is praised, then so are the daughters. Perhaps the critical question, then, is this: do Lot's daughters resemble heroic Tamar or disgraced Ham? To adjudicate between such a contest, one would need to probe the strength of the intertextual link and the plausibility of the inference made, while also raising the possibility that the narrator may have intended more than one intertextual relationship, or none at all. These matters have arisen in broader discussions of intertextuality and how to prioritize certain connections over others, all of which clearly has significance for ethics.[29] Despite this ponderous exegetical dependency, intertextual connection remains a popular mode of ethical evaluation and again sup-

[26] I am not strictly referring to "inner-biblical allusion" here, which connotes some deliberateness on behalf of the biblical author and often diachronic direction. I rather refer to the practice of relating biblical texts to each other, often regardless of direction, in order to draw an interpretive conclusion about the passage in focus. For a discussion of the various terminology used in this regard, see RUSSELL L. MEEK, "Intertextuality, Inner-Biblical Exegesis, and Inner-Biblical Allusion: The Ethics of a Methodology," *Biblica* 95 (2014): 280–291. Cf. the narrative technique of "narrative analogy" proposed by ROBERT ALTER (*The Art of Biblical Narrative* [New York: Basic Books, 2011], 22).

[27] KORPMAN, "Can anything good come from Sodom?," 340; WARNER, "Finding Lot's Daughters," 57.

[28] WENHAM, *Story as Torah*, 95. For the disapproval of Lot based on intertextual connections, see VON RAD, *Genesis*, 224; CARR, Reading *the Fractures of Genesis*, 191 n. 27; and more holistically GUILHEN ANTIER, "L'alliance, la migration et leur envers: l'inceste. Lecture psycho-anthropologique du cycle de Loth," *Revue Théologique de Louvain* 47 (2016): 1–29.

[29] See GEOFFREY D. MILLER, "Intertextuality in Old Testament Research," *CBR* 9 (2010): 283–309.

ports, with full force, the conclusion that disparate ethical evaluations can result from the same mode of interpretation.

As a final remark, I would argue that diachronic methods often resemble this mode of interpretation in the context of biblical ethics. Genesis 19:30–38 has traditionally been attributed to the Yahwist and yet, argues Warner, its interpretation has been influenced by views of "D-like editing in Genesis."[30] Warner notes the two competing imperatives at work in the passage – the command to procreate and the prohibition of incest – and frames these in terms of redaction criticism. "The two imperatives brought into tension in the story are reflective of two competing world-views, one that is essentially Priestly . . . and one that is essentially Deuteronomistic." She identifies respective P and D passages to bolster the tension, concluding that Deuteronomy's negativity towards Ammon and Moab has influenced interpreters to evaluate Lot and his daughters in like manner. Warner herself, however, suggests that the story may have been "written *against* the grain of Deuteronomistic ideology."[31] Warner's redaction-critical perspective, importantly, reveals that the Pentateuchal sources can function as bodies of textual material containing characteristic ethical viewpoints to be called upon as such by interpreters. They function like collective intertexts with which to evaluate biblical narratives.

2.4 Ancient Mediterranean Sources

The next mode makes similar inferences based not upon biblical texts but upon other ancient Mediterranean literature and conventions. Hermann Gunkel appealed to a Greek myth about the procreation of Adonis, who was conceived by Zeus and his daughter Myrrha.[32] Myrrha, due to a punishment from Aphrodite, lusted for her father and resultantly bore his child. Gunkel considers Gen 19:30–38 a story of similar genre and, due to the Greek assessment of Myrrha, concludes that Lot's daughters acted heroically.[33] With less specificity, Hinckley Mitchell concluded that the daughters were fulfilling their duty and were thus honored, as seen through a contrast with the conventions of wider ancient culture.[34] More recently, notions of myth and comedic trickster folklore have functioned similarly: comparative, non-biblical sources used to evaluate characters of biblical narrative.[35]

This mode of argument has also been applied to Hebrew phraseology. In contentious debates about the execution of genocide in the HB and *herem*, scholars have pointed to the rhetorical conventions of ancient Near Eastern warfare language. That "all were utterly destroyed" and "no one left breathing" among the Canaanites according to the book of Joshua (11:12–20) is tempered by evidence of similar language in Egyptian, Assyrian, and Semitic

[30] WARNER, "Finding Lot's Daughters," 51.
[31] WARNER, "Finding Lot's Daughters," 57 (emphasis original).
[32] GUNKEL, *Genesis: Translated and Interpreted*, trans. Mark E. Biddle; Mercer Library of Biblical Studies (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997), 217.
[33] See a fair critique of this view in GROSSMAN, "Associative Meanings," 43 n. 11.
[34] HINCKLEY G. MITCHELL, *The Ethics of the Old Testament*, Handbooks of Ethics and Religion (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1912), 33–34.
[35] JULIAN PITT-RIVERS, *The Fate of Shechem or the Politics of Sex: Essays in the Anthropology of the Mediterranean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 140–145; MELISSA JACKSON, "Lot's Daughters and Tamar as Tricksters and the Patriarchal Narratives as Feminist Theology," *JSOT* 98 (2002): 29–46.

accounts of warfare, which were "typically exaggerated and full of bravado."[36] In this case, ancient Near Eastern sources inform the connotations of Hebrew expressions and have potentially profound implications for the ethical interpretation of Hebrew narrative.

This process of situating a biblical narrative within some aspect of its ancient Mediterranean context mirrors of the method of biblical intertextuality. It makes some connection with the Bible's ancient intellectual and cultural contexts in order to reach a moral evaluation of biblical narrative, and is therefore subject to an assessment similar to the preceding.

2.5 Ambiguity

The foregoing modes of ethical evaluation – explicit narrator comment, immediate narrative elements, intertextual connections, and ancient Mediterranean sources – all draw upon evidence with the expectation of offering a clear moral appraisal of the passage under scrutiny. However, there has been an increasingly popular approach to biblical ethics that counters the foregoing claims of moral evaluation. Narratives, it is held, contain elements of moral ambiguity and, more than that, deliberately lack moral evaluation, being intended rather for the reader's moral reflection. In a provocative study of 1 and 2 Samuel, Eryl W. Davies argues for just such a thesis, which comes through with particular clarity in his treatment of human deception.[37] In 1 Sam 19:11–17 and 20:1–34, Michal and Jonathan both tell lies and "betray" their father, and yet the respective narratives level no explicit condemnation. Such "reticence to pass judgment," writes Davies, "is probably due to their realization that moral issues can seldom be seen in black and white terms." Rather, these narratives raise moral questions that "invite us to identify with the moral dilemmas of the characters, and in the process our own moral faculties are sharpened and refined."[38]

Although increasingly evident in scholarship on biblical ethics, the view that biblical narratives entailed a great deal of ethical ambiguity and serve to prompt moral reflection from their readers has a distinguished pedigree. Augustine asserted that Genesis, including 19:30–38, often recounts but does not commend, and that the mystery rightly prompts us to think and so improves our minds.[39] Origen too thought that biblical narrative could label certain actions good, bad, or "indifferent," the last of which applies to 19:30–38.[40] Recently, Westermann also shies away from applying rigid moral categories – whether right or wrong – and focuses instead on the (non-moral) connection with the primeval history. The daughters' action becomes the only way to preserve their family and perhaps the reason for which their lives had been preserved.[41] When interpreters refrain from attributing the narrator with ap-

[36] PAUL COPAN, *Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 171. See pp. 169–185.

[37] DAVIES, *Narrative Ethics in the Hebrew Bible: Moral Dilemmas in the Story of King David*, LHBOTS 715 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2022). More generally, see ALTER, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, e.g., 12–13; BARTON, *Ethics*, 171–172; WEISS, *Ethical Ambiguity*; MITCHELL, *Ethics*, 30.

[38] DAVIES, *Narrative Ethics*, 38.

[39] *Contra Faustum* 22.45.

[40] *Contra Celsum* 4.45. Origen does indicate that the daughters' action is defensible due to their motive.

[41] CLAUS WESTERMANN, *Genesis 12–36: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (London: SPCK, 1985), 313. Similarly NAOMI A. STEINBERG, *Kinship and Marriage in Genesis: A Household Economics Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 72. See also ROBERT ALTER, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1996), 90.

proval or disapproval of a certain story, they often do so because the narrator has, in their eyes, left no sufficient marker, and yet they may also reach this conclusion because of the complexity of evaluative markers left. Mary Mills, for example, observes the complexity of David's character across Samuel, which receives clear condemnation and approbation at various moments in the narrative.[42] For her, "Despite all, defects David remains a fascinating source of reflection on human behaviour."[43]

Those who arrive at the terminal conclusion that a narrative contains no moral evaluation and is therefore deliberately ambiguous seem to require an explicit comment from the narrator for any confidence that such evaluation could otherwise occur within the narrative. When the narrative does include a clear moral assessment, though, it is the complexity and inconclusive nature of that assessment which lead to the same conclusion about ambiguity. Connotations, intertextual links, and possible interferences point in various directions and open up possibilities of moral evaluation, at times contrary possibilities. Thus, according to this mode, we as readers are prompted to moral reflection, which is perhaps what the narrator intended after all.

2.6 Theological Premises

None of the preceding modes of evaluation have been overtly theological. But there are a slew of interpreters who appeal to God's activity within and without the narrative as authoritative for ethical conclusions. This theological explanation, however, relies upon premises not necessarily identifiable within the narrative itself, and so I label it "Theological Premises" to capture the wide-ranging nature of the approach. It is for that reason also distinct from the theological remarks incorporated into the preceding modes of evaluation. This mode is most prominent among ancient interpreters, who saw the preservation of progeny, cited by the elder daughter, as God's doing and thereby excused or even sanctioned the daughters' actions. Irenaeus, for example, contended that the scenario in Gen 19:30–38 was divinely arranged, that it involved no lustful pleasure, and was the only way to reproduce.[44] Lot's daughters were innocent, then, and excused due to their intent to preserve the human race. Midrash *Mekhilta d'Rabbi Yishmael* 15:1:6 appeals to similar divine involvement, as God "readied" the wine for them in the cave, while Talmud *Horayot* 10b:9 holds that the daughters "intended their action for the sake of a *mitzva*" and they thus walked in the paths of righteousness. Less approvingly, Calvin argued that the daughters "violate the holy law of nature," do not flee to God with worry, and prioritize earthly rather than heavenly life, as he forwards a wholesale theological argument for moral disapproval.[45] Philo too reasons that the daughters depended upon their own rationality rather than entrusting their desire for children to God, while Ambrose and Augustine could be added to the list of interpreters who draw on theological premises for moral evaluation.[46]

[42] MILLS, *Biblical Morality*, 49–72.
[43] MILLS, *Biblical Morality*, 71.
[44] *Against Heresies* 4.31.
[45] *Commentary on Genesis* (19:31).
[46] *Post.* LI.175. See AMBROSE, *Concerning Virginity* 1.9; AUGUSTINE, *Contra Faustum*, 22.42.

Notice, first of all, the dramatic change of focus when comparing ancient and modern interpretations. The interpreters cited here make categorical claims about the passage based upon all variety of theological arguments, while current interpreters rarely seem interested in the theological particularities of the passage and focus rather on the desires of the daughter(s) or the necessity out of which they act to achieve desirable ends. One might generalize about a broad distinction between ancient moral theology and modern moral anthropology. Second, this discussion reiterates my most fundamental thesis: that there are distinct modes by which interpreters ethically evaluate biblical narratives. Discussing the ethics of the passage at length, Calvin appeals to no intertext when condemning the daughters but rather to a suite of theological premises.[47] Moreover, once we observe that Irenaeus reasons similarly and yet, unlike Calvin, goes on to support his interpretation intertextually, my second thesis materializes: that these otherwise distinct modes of evaluating biblical narrative can be used in combination.

2.7 Traditional Moral Theories

By "traditional moral theories" I am referring to the normative ethical theories associated with deontology, consequentialism, and virtue. Included here would be more specific theories also, such as theological voluntarism (Divine Command Theory), and moral instruments like the Doctrine of Double Effect. While studies of the HB have used these theories as an analytical resource, especially for the books of Job and Proverbs, their presence also appears in approaches to the ethics of narrative.[48] Davies engages several moral philosophers in his assessment of deception in Samuel, while Walter C. Kaiser has argued that a deontological approach provides "a lodestone or a stance from which we can view the whole testament."[49] While traditional moral theories are finding an increasing welcome among biblical ethicists, the Genesis narratives have not reaped the benefits of a systematic approach.[50] That said, several landmark studies in biblical ethics have taken aim at law-centric interpretations of narrative, as exemplified in Wenham's claim that "obedience to the rules is not a sufficient definition of Old Testament ethics."[51]

Most common for Gen 19:30–38 is a presumption of deontology, as interpreters appeal to biblical law or frame the passage's moral dilemma in terms of competing imperatives. For example, there are those who conduct a swift denunciation of Lot's daughters based upon

[47] CALVIN does refer to Rom 2:5 when discussing Gen 19:37 to explain the moral insensitivity of the daughters.
[48] See, e.g., ARTHUR J. KEEFER, The Book of Proverbs and Virtue Ethics: Integrating the Biblical and Philosophical Traditions (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021); PATRICIA VESELY, Friendship and Virtue Ethics in the Book of Job (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).
[49] DAVIES, *Narrative Ethics*, 42–45; WALTER C. KAISER Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 42. A distinction could be draw between the application of normative ethical frameworks to the biblical text and the deduction of ethical ideas from the text that can then be put into contact with traditional moral theories (for the latter see, e.g., Barton, *Ethics*, 171). Many of the works cited here move in both directions.
[50] See ELEONORE STUMP, *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); CHARLOTTE KATZOFF, *Human Agency and Divine Will: The Book of Genesis*, Routledge Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Biblical Criticism (London: Routledge, 2020); cf. WENHAM, *Story as Torah*. The creation account had, of course, long been compared with Greek cosmology, and portions of Genesis sourced for discussions of the Euthyphro dilemma, but the moral interpretation of the narratives has most recently been related to discourse analysis, literary theory, and rabbinic interpretation.
[51] WENHAM, *Story as Torah*, 79. See several works noted in the introduction of this article.

certain biblical laws, such as James E. Miller, who sees a clear prohibition of the incest in this passage based on laws of Leviticus 18 and 20.[52] This argument is also, in a way, a version of "Intertextual Connections." The ethics of the episode has also been framed in terms of competing imperatives, which is characteristic of deontological theory.[53] According to Warner: "in a situation of crisis, which imperative is stronger—the imperative to be fruitful or the imperative to avoid incestuous relations?"[54] The narrow appeal to legal material and especially the framing of a narrative's ethic in terms of competing imperatives operate with a deontological basis, broadly understood.

Moral theories other than deontology are also employed. The 13th century *Glossa Ordinaria*, along with Jerome, emphasized the resultant creation of Moab and Ammon in order to cast the daughters in a negative light, while Wenham, who does appeal to law, also notes the habitual failure of filial duty in Genesis as grounds for classing the daughters' action as a vice rather than a virtue.[55] One can see consequentialist and virtue-oriented theories at work here, respectively. Bringing multiple theories together, Shira Weiss argues that Gen 19:30–38 entails the "problem of dirty hands," whereby one imperative (the command to procreate) overrides another (prohibition of incest) because it avoids a greater evil.[56] According to her, these well-intended daughters perceived the situation to be dire and so they "may have been motivated to produce the future savior of the messianic redemption."[57] That this case of incest led to the Davidic line means that the daughters are "excused and even praised" for their decision.[58] While Weiss frames the scenario in deontological terms, she resolves it with consequential moral reasoning.

Weiss' discussion also reintroduces the significance of diachronic approaches to the ethics of HB narrative. Whereas some scholars have cited Leviticus as the moral authority for Genesis narratives, other scholars demote the evaluative status of Leviticus given their belief that it was not yet in existence.[59] In their view, the episode in Genesis 19 cannot be regulated by laws that were created later, which, for the methodology of HB ethics, shows that diachronic decisions can have bearing for the moral evaluation of biblical narrative. Overall, the use of traditional moral theories, even if implicit, has been a dynamic mode of moral evaluation for biblical narrative and gives rise to several observations made elsewhere: that interpreters can use the same mode to arrive at disparate conclusions, and that questions of how to adjudicate between rival interpretations come to the fore.

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[52] MILLER, *Biblical Morality*, 42–43. See also AUGUSTINE, *Exposition on Psalm 60*, §10; WENHAM, *Genesis 16–50*, 61–62.

[53] See BERNARD WILLIAMS, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (1985; repr., London: Routledge, 2011).

[54] WARNER, "Finding Lot's Daughters," 52. See a similar contest of values in HENDEL, KRONFELD, AND PARDES, "Gender and Sexuality," in HENDEL, *Reading Genesis*, 88. The methodological point has been made by MCKEATING, "Sanctions," 67.

[55] *Bibliorum Sacrorum cum Glossa Ordinaria*, 6 vols. (Venice, 1603), 1:248–249; JEROME, *Letter to Eustochium*; WENHAM, *Story as Torah*, 95. Origen draws on Greek moral concepts to discuss the importance of intentions and forms of moral evaluation in *Contra Celsum* 4.45.

[56] WEISS, "Biblical Seductresses," 176–180.

[57] WEISS, "Biblical Seductresses," 179.

[58] WEISS, "Biblical Seductresses," 180.

[59] E.g., WEISS, "Biblical Seductresses," 182.

2.8 Postmodern Criticisms

Three of the preceding modes – ancient Mediterranean sources, theological premises, and traditional moral theories – can be classified as "external" modes of evaluation, in that they draw upon resources external to biblical literature and use those resources to guide their moral determinations. The next mode is similarly external, namely, types of postmodern criticism. I have in mind the many forms of social criticism that have proliferated as independent disciplines in recent decades, such as feminist and gender studies, deconstructionist readings, and postcolonial discourse.[60] Genesis 19:30–38 has attracted substantial feminist interpretation and even the application of clinical research on father-daughter incest. In this case, interpreters often underscore the pro-female message of the passage, especially as it frames the daughters having power and control over an agent now void of such privileges.[61] While gender criticism identifies gendered dynamics within the Bible, and in that obtains illuminating insights about the text, it can also put these dynamics into the service of moral evaluation.

Peter J. Sabo argues that "Lot is feminized, while his daughters are masculinized," since the former is reduced to a passive vehicle of procreation.[62] He attributes pertinent biblical prohibitions to the male fear of women and to their fear of being unmanly, especially in terms of losing control. Given Lot's feminized role, concludes Sabo, the HB would seem to disapprove of this scenario and certainly remains anxious about it, given the "common patriarchal ideology" and "patriarchal authority" esteemed therein.[63] Conversely, with an admittedly feminist lens and support from current research on incest, Elke Seifert denies that the daughters desired sex with their father and argues that they have, rather, been subject to abuse.[64] Lastly, some interpreters use this feminist framework to laud the daughters, seeing their unconventional gender roles as grounds for heroism,[65] and deeming this a case of revenge taken by rape victims who must now protect themselves.[66]

Johanna Stiebert accuses such approaches of being clear cases of "feminist advocacy, consciously seeking strong and active female figures to provide positive role models and counter-examples to females oppressed by patriarchal structures."[67] In Stiebert's judgment, "there is little in the biblical text to suggest either celebration or condemnation of the daughters or of

[60] For an orientation to some of these, see JOHN J. COLLINS, *The Bible After Babel: Historical Criticism in a Postmodern Age* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), esp. 11–25.
[61] Cf. JACKSON ("Lot's Daughters," 41) who pits feminism against fundamentalism, where the latter "has a vested interest in maintaining the patriarchy . . . Feminism, to varying degrees, rejects or explains away these passages, categorizing them as culture-bound, time-bound, superseded by the teachings of Jesus, for example."
[62] PETER J. SABO, "Moabite women, Transjordan women, and incest and exogamy: The gendered dimensions of boundaries in the Hebrew Bible," *JSOT* 45 (2020): 95.
[63] SABO, "Moabite women," 97, 109–110. Similarly KATHERINE B. LOW, "The Sexual Abuse of Lot's Daughters: Reconceptualizing Kinship for the Sake of Our Daughters," *JFSR* 26 (2010): 37–54; HENDEL, KRONFELD, and PARDES, "Gender and Sexuality," in HENDEL, *Reading Genesis*, 88–91.
[64] ELKE SEIFERT, "Lot und seine Töchter: Eine Hermeneutik des Verdachts," in ELKE SEIFERT, ULRIKE BAIL, AND HEDWIG JAHNOW, eds., *Feministische Hermeneutik und Erstes Testament: Analysen und Interpretationen* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1994), 48–65.
[65] WEISS, "Biblical Sedctresses," 194–195; WALTER BRUEGGEMANN, *Genesis*, Interpretation (Atlanta: Westminster John Knox, 1982), 176.
[66] KORPMAN, "Can anything good come from Sodom?"
[67] STIEBERT, *Father's and Daughters*, 134. She particularly refers to the positions of Rainer Kessler and Hildegunde Wöller.

Lot."[68] The use of postmodern critical theories for evaluating the ethics of biblical narrative are proliferating and meanwhile attracting contentious responses. While they illuminate the narrative in insightful, even subtle, and sometimes provocative ways, what I wish to show here is that they can also function as a resource for ethical evaluation.

2.9 Moral Intuition

The final mode of moral evaluation for biblical narrative is one that, by comparison, does not appear all that often. It is an appeal to the audience's moral intuition.[69] According to Victor Hamilton:

> "The daughters simply want to reproduce. Of course, this motivation does not make their behavior any less objectionable. In one sense both Lot and his daughters act out of noble motivation: he to save his guests, they to secure progeny. Both parties face dilemmas that require drastic (and to the reader, highly dubious) actions."[70]

Hamilton makes a distinction that, for moral philosophers, is highly significant – namely, the distinction between motivation and action – and yet his evaluation of both seems rooted in a kind of common sense morality, whereby securing one's family line is "noble" and yet sleeping with one's father to do so is "objectionable" and "highly dubious." Similar remarks appear throughout Kirsi Cobb's insightful reading of the passage from the standpoint of trauma theory. She probes the roles of revenge and trauma re-enactment among the daughters, and yet remains matter of fact about how "these anxieties lead to the horrifying end to produce children through incest."[71] Most candid is Kaiser, who implies that the narrator does not explicitly condemn such action since it would be "insulting to the reader's intelligence."[72] While the daughters' motivations may be morally salvageable, these interpretations condemn their actions based upon consensus morality and everyday ethical judgment.[73]

This discussion brings us back around to the thesis about a single mode resulting in different conclusions. At this point, I would suggest that the thesis can take another form: namely, that a single piece of evidence within a passage can be used by different modes of moral evaluation to reach contrasting conclusions. In this case, note the disparate interpretations of the narrator's silence in Gen 19:30–38. For several interpreters of the "Ambiguity" mode, the narrator's lack of clear evaluative comment indicates a deliberate moral ambiguity in the passage. However, for Kaiser's moral intuition, that same silence occurs because the situation is self-evidently damning; any additional clarity would be an "insult to the reader's intelligence." This expands my prior conclusion even further. For it should be clear by now that the same mode of evaluation can lead interpreters to different conclusions, but we can

[68] STIEBERT, *Father's and Daughters*, 134.
[69] Moral intuition has a long pedigree in moral philosophy but is not identifiable with the broader categorization of traditional moral theories.
[70] VICTOR P. HAMILTON, *Genesis: Chapters 18–50*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 51.
[71] KIRSI COBB, "Did Lot Get His Just Desserts? Trauma, Revenge, and Re-enactment in Genesis 19:30–38," *JSOT* 47 (2022): 193.
[72] KAISER, *Toward Old Testament Ethics*, 282. Interestingly, Kimhi's comment could be an appeal to the intuition of the characters, perhaps natural law: "this story teaches us that even those who did not have the Torah would distance themselves from this kind of behavior" (CARASIK, *The Commentators' Bible*, 175; see also his comment on 20:6).
[73] For examples elsewhere, see BARTON, *Ethics*, 170; DAVIES, *Narrative Ethics*, 37, 153.

also see that the same evidence within the passage can be used to warrant two very different conclusions about it.

3. Conclusion

I have argued that there are at least nine discernable modes of moral evaluation among interpreters of biblical narrative. These modes draw upon distinct resources in order to explain why the biblical narrator (dis)approves of something in the narrative, or intends deliberate moral ambiguity. These modes may be broadly divided into "internal" and "external," as the former appeal to evidence within the narrative itself while the latter argue from sources external to the narrative. The following theses have been defended throughout this article: there are distinct modes by which interpreters ethically evaluate biblical narratives; certain modes are used in combination; different modes can reach the same conclusion, while the same mode can bring interpreters to different conclusions. Although I have used Gen 19:30–38 as a case study, I would submit that this same typology exhausts the approaches taken to the contentious matter of warfare in the HB,[74] and I hope that it will aid biblical ethicists with their interpretation of narrative and assessment of scholarship.

An immediate extension of the present study would be to establish a catalogue of evaluative conventions. Are there any repeated, discernable, and plausible patterns of evaluation used by biblical narrators?[75] I would suggest explicit narrator comment and character remarks as two identified so far, while I suspect many other patterns would fall within the second mode of analysis ("Immediate narrative elements"), such as linguistic connotations or the activity and passivity of certain characters, as has been explored by Meir Sternberg.[76] This is an area well worth pursuing.

Finally, I would suggest that the proposed typology reorient certain methodological priorities in biblical ethics. In the first place, when appealing to any one "context" for the interpretation of biblical narratives, such as a single chapter, book or broader textual grouping, interpreters should not underestimate the differences in argument that may result from choosing one of those literary units instead of another; nor should they assume that a singular moral evaluation will result. For when it comes to Gen 19:30–38, interpreting the passage within the context of Genesis itself produces disparate interpretations of the passage, as do the contexts of the Pentateuch or the ancient Near East. A single context may indeed produce a consistent, singular ethical viewpoint on a given matter, but most of the contexts appealed to in this study, when shared by interpreters, have produced inconsistent conclusions.

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[74] See, e.g., the discussion and references in EVAN FALES, "Satanic Verses: Moral Chaos in Holy Writ," in *Divine Evil? The Moral Character of the God of Abraham*, ed. MICHAEL BERGMANN, MICHAEL J. MURRAY, AND MICHAEL C. RAE (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 98–100; Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster?*, 158–197.

[75] Certain conventions for aspects of biblical ethics have been proposed, but with less concentration and systematization than desired. WENHAM, *Story as Torah*, 73–107; RUBEN ZIMMERMANN, "How to Read the Biblical Texts Ethically: The New Method of 'Implicit Ethics' for Analyzing Biblical Ethics," in RABENS, GREY, AND KOVALISHYN, *Key Approaches to Biblical Ethics*, 15–49; Alter (*The Art of Biblical Narrative*) suggests but rarely demonstrates how the literary conventions used across biblical narratives serve the text's "moral vision" (pp. 78–79, 109–110, 146, 196).

[76] STERNBERG, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, *passim*. While Sternberg is concerned with normative elements of narrative, he engages "doctrine" more than ethics in his presentation of narrative art.

Second, when adjudicating between rival interpretations, I suggest focusing on the means of evaluation rather than the interpreter's worldview presuppositions. Wenham has discussed the interpretation of Genesis 34 in detail and reveals just how much disparity can result when reading biblical narrative from an ethical angle.[77] He gives close attention to the "gaps" in a character's motivation or presumed knowledge, and the disparate contents with which interpreters might fill those gaps. Weighing up two possible, even plausible, ways of filling them in, Wenham ultimately determines that rival conclusions about Genesis 34 arise because the interpreters read the text with rival presuppositions:

> "There are too many gaps in the story to be sure how they ought to be filled: the presuppositions of the interpreter are liable to have a large effect on how these uncertainties are tackled. Fewell and Gunn appeal to a feminist worldview to substantiate their position, while Sternberg is adamant that a competent reader must only understand the nuances of biblical Hebrew, but also understand the theology and ethics that inform the writers of the Old Testament."[78]

Wenham frames the difference here in terms of presupposition and worldview, which certainly play a role in one's interpretation of a text.[79] However, in this case, the more measurable presupposition seems to be not the "worldview" of the interpreter so much as the authority granted to certain "modes" of interpretation, that is, to certain types of evidence and argumentation: philological data, inferences about narrative description and silence, other biblical texts (especially laws), and theology. In terms of my typology one can spot no less than four modes of moral analysis at work within Wenham's discussion. One is not necessarily guilty of *ad hominem* by accounting for an interpreter's presuppositions, and it is often helpful to disclose one's own. However, I would identify the modes of moral evaluation employed by interpreters as a more methodologically productive project and reorient attention toward it.

Third, the descriptive-normative dichotomy should be supplemented by, if not exchanged for, several programmatic ethical questions. As noted at the beginning of this article, several dichotomies have become the organizing divisions of research in biblical ethics, including descriptive and normative aims, or the pursuit of "historical investigations" versus "contemporary concerns."[80] This distinction is not unhelpful, but it is sometimes overplayed and can, I think, distract interpreters from more exegetically determinative practices. A more appropriate starting point is to distinguish the ethical subject and ask, "Whose moral viewpoint am I concerned with?" The narrator's, my own, or a particular (contemporary or ancient) community? Consider one interesting example from the discussion of "Moral Intuition." When queried as a matter of moral viewpoints and their relationship rather than how confessional/historical or normative/descriptive the interpreter aims to be, it becomes clear that the reader's moral viewpoint (i.e. that incest is obviously wrong) has been amalgamated with the narrator's (i.e. that since incest was so self-evidently immoral there was no need to indicate it). It has also proven quite productive for the methodology of biblical ethics to focus upon two programmatic moral questions: what is the moral status of a character, act or decision

[77] WENHAM, *Story as Torah*, 110–117.
[78] WENHAM, *Story as Torah*, 116–117.
[79] DAVID J. A. CLINES, *Interested Parties: The Ideology of the Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible*, JSOTSup 205 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995); CYNTHIA EDENBURG, "Falsifiable Hypotheses, Alternate Hypotheses and the Methodological Conundrum of Biblical Exegesis," *ZAW* 132 (2020): esp. 387–389.
[80] CROUCH, "Introduction," 4.

(i.e. evaluation), and on what grounds can that status be attributed (i.e. justification)? Those two questions account for a good amount of what interpreters attempt to address when they read biblical narratives from an ethical angle, and I would therefore proffer the typology of approaches outlined here for ongoing methodological reflection in the field as well as exegetical work itself.

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